

More Educated but Less Employed: The Situation of Women in Case of Employment

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ABSTRACT

The National Family Health Survey (2005–06) shows a striking trend of employment among men and women. Women are found to be enrolled more in traditional, domestic, and low-skilled jobs. Females' less representation in the economic outcomes lead to weakening of their actual potential. Ultimately their participation is assumed to be negligible in the economy. The resulting inequalities tend to restrict women's access to resources, control over decision-making and participation in public life. This paper argues that education, expected as a process of building confidence and decision-making power in individual, has not been able to make any change in the lives of girls. Education is not making any difference to their participation in employment sector. The pattern of division of work among men and women still persists as society accepts patriarchal culture. Actual reality lies in the fact that formulation of policies and educational programmes alone is not enough to bridge this gap; rather, there is a need to recognise women's actual potential through education and employment opportunities which caters to their needs.

Introduction

The expanding opportunity for women in the field of employment does not seem to be a reality. Some recent studies show a completely different picture of the condition of women in the employment sector. According to Mazumdar and Neetha (2011), except one or two, in every major industry women's share of employment had fallen in 2009–10 in comparison with 2004–05 as per the standard measure. It could be seen that, women were found to be more in traditional, domestic, and low-skilled jobs in the employment

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sector. "Engagement with the locale outside their place of residence is losing preference among urban and rural women in the higher income groups. Such cultural preferences of females to remain within their domestic space rather than engaging with activities outside have been argued much earlier" (Abraham, 2013, p.104). Gender-based segregation of the occupations can be seen as a result of discriminatory practices against women which come through prejudices, social beliefs, and stereotypes about women's inability to perform certain tasks. "Certain industries declare them (women) to be unsuitable for technical as well as manual jobs, others declare them to be unsuitable for managerial and administrative jobs as well as unskilled work, yet another group finds them unsuitable for field duties" (Government of India, 1974, p.176).

Gender differences in the occupation lead to different economic outcomes for the sexes in terms of earnings, hours of work, and other standards. Females' less representation in the economic outcomes lead to weakening of their actual potential. Ultimately their participation is assumed to be negligible in the economy. The resulting inequalities tend to restrict women's access to resources, control over decision-making and participation in public life. "In India, the other side of a low female LPR (Labour Participation Rate) is a substantially high proportion of females reporting their activity status as attending to domestic duties. In 2009–10, 34.7 per cent of all rural females and 46.5 per cent of urban females in India were attending to domestic duties" (Thomas, 2012, p.47). It shows a striking difference between the urban and rural divide as it is unexpectedly higher in case of urban. Though the literacy rate and percentage of educated women are relatively higher in urban areas, the level of confinement within the domestic sphere is higher in urban area. It leads to a question that why, despite being educated, women are confining themselves into their homes. There are feminists who emphasise that economic analysis tends to make a large proportion of women's work invisible because income earning activities were considered as work and other activities (services for family) are not counted. Mazumdar and Neetha (2011) emphasises on the system of statistical reporting which plays an important reason for the reportedly low LPR of women. Women's role in reproduction and households activities, such as caring for the young and old, cooking, and household industry do not find recognition in the National Income Accounting or other economic statistics. It is the demand of such feminists to make

this work visible in the statistical estimation. But this demand is problematic in itself as women will remain confined to their homes and will not come out of homes to work independently leading to strengthening of their roles as only home makers. The requirement is not of visibility of household chores in the employment data but of recognition to educate women, keeping in mind the various drawbacks in implementation of educational programmes and of empowering women through employment opportunities.

In this paper, after the introduction, the second part examines the data displaying women's low participation in employment sector. The third part emphasises on primary socialisation of girls which gives them the first experience of gendered roles they play in their lives. The role of school in strengthening the gender stereotypes and further limiting girls' future aspects are discussed in the fourth section. The fifth section explains the combined impact of both, the primary socialisation and school factors on women's limited career options leading to lesser opportunity in the employment market. The last section tries to point out the various reasons which impact women's less representation in the employment sector and hence maintenance of the hegemonic structure of society which leads to subordinate status of women in all spheres of life.

The Status of Women in the Employment Sector

Education is essential for attaining knowledge and skills. It is a means of getting employment to earn and feel empowered. Being employed gives an edge over those who are not employed as employment enables a person to become independent. But in the case of women, education does not necessarily guarantee employment. Out of the few sources of information, the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) is one of the sources which provide data on employment and unemployment. According to NFHS (2005–06), women are much less likely than men to be employed. The results of NFHS (2005–06) are surprising in case of women as their education is in no way helping them to get employment. The data according to NFHS (2005–06) shows that there are 36 and 93 per cent literate women in Rajasthan and Kerala, respectively. On the other hand, the percentage of employed women is 46 and 27.9 per cent for Rajasthan and Kerala, respectively. On comparing both the data, it can be seen that the gap between educated and employed females in Kerala is very large. In Rajasthan, the low literacy rates of women can account for low employment but Kerala

having such a high literacy rate still has very low employment rates, much lower than Rajasthan. It implies that education is not making any difference to women's participation in the employment sector. A case study by Kodoth and Eapen (2005) throws light upon the gender aspect of dimensions like property rights, education, employment, and freedom from violence in Kerala. It is considered as the state of much lower gender gap in education, as well as in political and economic aspects, indicating better conditions of women. However, the study revealed that there are hidden gender inequities in Kerala.

The question arises that what happens in girls' life during this transition period of education and getting ready for a career that restricts their entry into the field of employment. What loopholes does education of girls have which are not enabling them to have autonomy and empowerment and why it has been limited as just a means to reinforce traditional thinking confining them within the interests of family, child care, health and education? What impact does the life cycle of girls leave on their employment opportunities?

The NFHS data throws light on the actual reality and highlights the gendered pattern prevalent in the state despite having attained gender equality in education. "However, it is striking that the proportion of females attending to domestic duties is relatively high in urban areas and among the better educated — the very segments of the female population that are likely to face less social constraints on labour participation" (Thomas, 2012, p.47). There are educated women who can participate and contribute to the Indian economy but find it difficult to come out of their niche and transform their education into productive skills through better employment opportunities. The question arises that what factors can be held responsible for women's inability to exercise her decision making power leading to a life lived for others. The factors responsible for such a condition must be attended to bridge this gap for better utilisation of the skills of women citizen which is otherwise going waste. This paper thus attempts to look at the various reasons which cause hindrance in women's employment opportunities.

With regard to India's employment sector, the recent shifts account for the withdrawal of women from the labour force on a large scale basis. "Across nearly all industries, the impact of technological and other changes is shortening the shelf-life of employees' existing skill sets" (World Economic Forum, 2016, p.3). The slowdown of India's employment structure affects its women

citizen the most leaving them as only a marginal percentage in the working population. As noted by Thomas (2012), the new manufacturing employment created during the first half of the 2000s, have 3.7 million women out of 9.6 million employees. But during the second half of the 2000s, 3.1 million out of the 3.7 million workers who lost jobs in manufacturing in India were females.

Education does not necessarily empower and enhance women's autonomy in India; rather, it helps in modernising and internalising patriarchal norms. "In 2009–10, among urban females with graduate degrees, those who were reported to be attending to domestic duties were close to 60%, which was almost twice the corresponding proportion of rural females with primary or middle-school education. This movement of women back to household work can be attributed to the increased availability of earning opportunities for male members of the family" (Thomas, 2012, p.42).

It is evident from history that girls and boys are always given unequal treatment which is reflected in today's society also. People think that women need not go out of home to earn because they need to be protected from the world outside. Therefore, it is the duty of men to go out and earn for family. It is assumed by policy makers that education may provide a solution to the inequality that girls face in all spheres of life. But the striking results of NFHS (2005–06) shows the reality that even after getting education the employed women are so less. What happens when it comes to their entry into the employment sector?

This paper argues that education, expected as a process of building confidence and decision-making power in individual, has not been able to make any change in the lives of girls. It clearly shows that girls despite having attained basic education are not able to step out of their homes to work. "Aspirations from the process of education per se are generally limited to making girls suitable for matrimony in accordance with the community's values" (Kumar and Gupta, 2008, p.19). The societal norms are so powerful that they do not allow females to be a part of the employment sector.

The Gendered Roles in Family

In pre-industrial societies, different tasks were given to men and women. Women were dependent on men for food and protection which produced a pattern in which female activities (household chores and child care) were given less credit than male activities.

In a book on gender roles, Lindsey (2010) mentions that harmony of family could be maintained when partners assume different roles. If there was any change in the roles then the survival of the family was assumed to be in danger. The pattern of division of work among men and women still persists as society accepts patriarchal culture wherein male has all the power and women have no autonomy. Girls get lesser opportunity in the world outside home as they are seen merely as homemakers who contribute to domestic responsibilities.

From an early age, girls are socialised to see domestic sphere as their only destination where marriage and motherhood are the ultimate destination in a girl's life. According to Dube (2001), in childhood itself, it is made clear to girls through 'indirect messages' (customs and rituals) that she has a specific role in society having boundaries out of which she should not step. In an essay on childhood and education of girls in India in the context of their socialisation in the family, Kumar (2010) also draws attention towards the customs and rituals under which girls are brought up and gendered into womanhood. Such circumstances pressurise girls to live according to the norms of femininity. As noted by Kabeer (1994), household interests and needs motivate individual behaviour. This restricts the freedom of girls to develop their capacities to the fullest.

Girls Empowerment: Through Schools?

After family, it is the school where a child gets the chance to socialise with other children. Schools are expected to help children in getting ready to take part in the society as a responsible citizen. But when it comes to the matter of gender equality, then it plays a key role in strengthening of gender stereotypes. The aspects of the education system at school level that lead to unequal opportunities for girls and boys include policies and resource allocation, quality of facilities and education materials, curriculum, etc. The experiences that girls get in schools give them a feeling of being subordinate to boys. In an article on gender and curriculum, Bhog (2002) observes that women education is not seen as the goal; rather, it is a means to an end, i.e., betterment of the family and the nation. He further observes that, in nearly 50 per cent texts, only men were the actors and women were nowhere in the narratives. In few lessons, women were confined to traditional roles, such as mothers, sisters, etc.

It can be seen that there is recognition to empower girls but a gap exists between recognition and implementation. In an article

on the problems leading to restriction of girls' overall development, Kumar and Gupta (2008) focussed on Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya Scheme, an educational programme set up by the government for empowering girls. It mentions that educational policy makers assume that once girls are given access to schools their life options will expand but the complexity lies in the fact that there is no proper implementation of the programme with many loopholes. The planning of scheme lacks professional understanding of girls as human beings and as learners. The budget sanctioned for the scheme is also very less. Also, there is more focus on the accomplishments of the NGOs working in collaboration with the schools than on the girls' scholastic achievements.

Other factors strengthen the hold of patriarchy like the curricula, content, language, images in texts, and the perceptions of teachers. "In the classroom too, girls are expected to perform tasks like cleaning and sweeping, reinforcing the gendered division of labour" (NCERT, 2006, p.4). Most of the girls' talent remains hidden and covered as they hardly get any chance to show it and that is why they do not feel encouraged. Since girls have always been associated with nurturance and house-keeping, they have limited access to science and technology as it is assumed that these fields are time consuming. Also, it is believed that these fields are meant for only males. Kulkarni and Hatekar (2013) observed that females are stereotypically believed to be inefficient in hands-on mechanical ability. Such stereotypes govern women's access to employment, resulting in those occupations for girls which are not given much importance and represented as low level in employment sector. This segregation begins from the school itself as Kumar and Gupta (2008) throws light upon the girls' choice at school level which is restricted to softer disciplines like humanities, social sciences, home science and languages. Most of the girls' mental world remains far away from engagement with mathematics, physics, chemistry and biology and their laboratories.

Though some shifts can be seen in the choice of subjects among girls. Chanana (2004) noted an upcoming trend in case of girls opting for more professional courses than the conventional ones. Few women students are showing up in technology and engineering specially electronics, electrical and civil. Also, there is increased preference for specialised management courses like human resource management and human resource development. It shows a shift in the disciplinary choices among women. However, the

question is that which girl gets access to these expensive courses? Clearly, it is understood that the mushrooming private universities offering these courses cater to financially sound families. The girls belonging to such families find it easier to get admission there and have a trendy 'modernised degree'. Girls acquire these degrees to improve marital prospects and also it provides a waiting period before marriage. It is just a means of reinforcing tradition through acquisition of modern skills and education.

Review of Policies

Early post-independence policies formulated a curriculum that was thought to be relevant for girls, based on the understanding that education had to address their special needs as future wives and mothers in the modern nation. The committee on differentiation of curricula for boys and girls viewed it as a perpetuation of existing traditions of unequal division of labour and rejected differentiation on the basis of gender difference. A report '*Towards Equality*' by the Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI) (Government of India, 1974) focussed on the slow progress of education in India, attributed to high difference in enrolment rates of boys and girls. It also highlighted the disparity between the education of men and women in spite of the direct actions taken by the states. Along with that the committee also mentioned that educational opportunities did expand in the post-independence period; however, it was relatively slower among women, particularly at the primary and secondary levels. According to the Committee, education does not necessarily lead women to employment. This is because the development of education has been mainly confined to middle class families which display the most restrictive attitude to women's employment outside the home. A combination of factors like educational system, training, job orientation and culture conditioning are responsible for unequal employment status and opportunity for men and women.

Many private concerns do not recruit women into their managerial cadre as prejudices like 'women cannot exercise supervision and control' tend to persist and are difficult to breakdown. The Committee also pointed out to one of the nationalised undertaking policy according to which it was to avoid, as far as possible, appointment of female employees in the organisation. Very few women candidates come forward for job in their organisation due to the terms and conditions. Being a private

business organisation they give due consideration to efficiency, discipline, administrative ability, hardwork and in their opinion women candidates in general were not up to the mark.

It was assumed that women are less efficient than men, one of the reasons due to which they were not able to present themselves in the employment sector despite being educated. In case if women were working then it becomes easy for the recruiters to differentiate between men and women earnings giving excuse of women's less efficiency. This wage differential was then seen as low returns of education in case of girls. Parish and Willis (1993) observed that differences in female and male earnings, presented by statistical data, were seen as proof that returns to education differ by gender. Therefore, the Committee recommended a common course, at all levels, to counter-act the influences of traditional attitudes which regards certain tasks as 'manly' and others as 'womanly'.

Interconnection of Education and Patriarchal Society: Role in Girls' Employment Status

With regard to educating girls, families consider returns in monetary terms and assume it to be lesser than that of boys. Sundaram and Vanneman (2008) emphasises the fact that where girls' labour can contribute to the household's economic, poor parents get tempted to keep their children out of school in order to maximise their immediate economic returns. Alderman and King (1998) explained the gender disparity using a model of parental investment in children. It shows that in low income countries, particularly in south Asia (regional patterns of discrimination especially within India), parents keep in mind the possibility of return from the children while spending on them and gender plays a significant role in doing so. In societies where girls leave the family after marriage, it is expected that sons would provide old age security. But as Chanana (2004) pointed out, some families are letting their daughters to acquire 'modern' education though the reason is that they can afford and also it improves marital prospects.

The division of roles is rooted in the segregation of household chores among boys and girls. To maintain this concept of 'division of labour', girls are directed towards those subjects that help them to become good daughters and good wives. "In spite of a marked change in thinking of many people, the demand for differential curricula comes from parents whose sole object in educating girls is to improve their prospects in the matrimonial market" (Government of India, 1974, p.200).

The other reason due to which parents do not want to spend much on their daughters, education is the dowry driven society and also because the girl's income (if at all she gets the chance to work) goes to her husband and in-laws after marriage. According to Sundaram and Vanneman (2008), cultural practices, such as seclusion of women and prohibitions on girls' free movement directly limit their ability to attend schools and to work outside home. Girls are either not sent to schools or do not receive the same quality and level of education as do boys. Parents tend to train their daughters in such a way that she has to get ready for marriage only and nothing else matters. Also in a patriarchal society, parents' goal is to get their daughter married as soon as possible as it is a burden over them.

After marriage, other problems comes in women's way as they do not get chance to work outside for a longer period of time due to pregnancy, childbirth and child care which are seen as the ultimate responsibilities of women. These factors affect their work experience along with the income and opportunities to have more desirable and better paid jobs, leading to a notion that girls' education can hardly make any impact on their future aspects.

It is like a cycle of processes which keeps on repeating. Firstly, girls are not given appropriate education resulting in few employment options. Even after getting education girls are expected to show more concern over getting ready for marriage. Out of the few options available, girls get lesser opportunities due to fulfilling other duties like playing traditional roles of being a mother, daughter and wife which are very demanding. Dube (2001) has pointed out that a girl has to observe certain rituals before and after marriage, such as fasting for getting a good husband, and then after marriage for the long life of her husband and children, as if matrimony and motherhood are the main purposes of her life. Due to the dual burden of family and work, it becomes difficult for women to give their best leading to many mental, physical and social problems. Then the less representation in the employment sector is taken as an excuse to consider their education as a waste. This cycle of processes goes on and on, resulting in subordination of women.

The government has taken initiatives to educate and empower girls through several policies and programmes like *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan*, *Ladli yojana*, etc. These programmes make the difficult way a little easier for those girls who cannot afford education. Therefore, people from a socially-deprived background are now

encouraging their girls to be educated and become empowered. But actual reality lies in the fact that formulation of policies and educational programmes alone is not enough to bridge this gap; rather, there is a need to recognise women's actual potential through education and employment opportunities which caters to their needs. "Many of the decision-makers are men also constrains their appreciation of these needs" (Medel-Anonuevo, 1995, p.6). As Kumar and Gupta (2008) highlight, it demands overcoming deep mental blocks in the adult minds about girls' efficiency and capacity to participate in the economic workforce as decision makers. According to Medel-Anonuevo (1995), empowerment can have four components—cognitive, psychological, economic and political, the attainment of which requires collective awareness along with the individual awareness. Therefore, it becomes necessary for women to realise their potential and understand various ways of their subordination so that they can take necessary steps to counteract these constraining factors which are so imbedded in our society.

Survival of Women in Employment Market: Overcoming Challenges

The challenges in a girl's life come at the very moment she is born and continues throughout her life in varied forms. Whether it is home or life outside home, she has to face all the odds keeping in mind the interests of society including her natal family and husband's family. Though she comes out as a strong woman but it cannot be denied that it is a struggle for her at every step in all spheres of life, which she has to accept. It becomes necessary to ponder upon the various reasons due to which women are representing less in the economy.

First, there are the patriarchal norms which can be held responsible for over shadowing the education of women and their limited access to employment market. "Most existing education systems at all levels provide and continue a number of 20th century practices that are hindering progress on today's talent and labour market issues" (World Economic Forum, 2016, p.8). The gendered patterns of parental investment can be seen clearly as for girls they like to choose those courses which have lower labour demand and less investment as compared to technical and professional courses which are considered more suitable for boys. This is because women's reproduction capacity may not require technical and professional education and will not be compatible

with their future roles as wife and mother. Coming to the income level of the family, Abraham (2013) highlights the fact that with rising household income and economic development, cultural preferences take priority over education thereby limiting women to domestic area and not feeling the need to work outside.

The second is the social context in which women's job preferences are shaped which play a significant role in reducing women's labour participation in India. These include the restrictions imposed on women's movements outside the household and also discouragement by the husband and in-laws" (Thomas, 2012, p.47). One of the biggest factors for not allowing women to work outside is to maintain their sexual purity. Also, women belonging to upper caste and class get themselves get engaged in status production activities like education of children, health care of family, in rites and rituals, etc. Social status and proximity to the home are the most important factors while making preferences. Commuting from home to workplace leaves less time for family and related matters. As noted by Abraham (2013), shift in location of work place away from home pushes women to withdraw from work as it affects their family.

Thirdly, in India there is much absence of suitable employment opportunities that restricts female LPR the most. As noted by Kodoth and Eapen (2005), nearly three-fourths of the unemployed women reported that they had not been able to find jobs of their preference and keep aspiring for white-collar employment by continuing in the education stream longer due to which they show up in the category of unemployed. There is wide gap between their educational qualification and the type of jobs made available to them. Only low profile jobs are available for highly qualified ones which are discouraging women to step ahead in the employment sector.

Fourth are the powerful economic factors that tend to reduce female LPR. In India, as elsewhere, women face various forms of discrimination at the workplace, particularly in terms of wages. Dube (2001) points out that only less paid jobs are offered to girls as compared to boys to maintain the hierarchy of our social system. Along with that even in same profile jobs women who are equally efficient are paid less than men.

Fifth is the dual burden of family and work due to which women suffer from lot of health issues and find it difficult to handle both family and work simultaneously. "Whatever may be the level of education, the share of household activities (for women)

seems to have increased from 1983 to 2009–10” (Abraham, 2013, p.106). It is again the patriarchal system that does not allow men to contribute in household chores leaving the entire burden on women, no matter she is working or a homemaker.

Lastly, other forms of discrimination include occupational segregation as women are concentrated more in low-skilled jobs which are not given much preference in the employment market. Also, many cases of sexual harassment are there which deter women to step outside their homes for work. Along with that Shiva (2013) reveals another most difficult problem faced by working women who have small children is that they are bound to leave their child in daycare or with maid on whom they have little faith. This can be attributed to the emerging trend of nuclear families leaving no scope for grandparental care of children. Earlier in joint families there were many members in the family who used to take care of children. This creates more tension in women and less concentration on their work. All these factors do not function independently rather they are very much interdependent and can be seen in a holistic manner.

Drawing the attention back to Kerala, the study by Kodoth and Eapen (2005) reveals another interesting finding in urban areas which shows a striking increase in the number of days when women reported ‘not seeking/not available for work’. It is to be noticed that people in Kerala enjoy higher wage rates in both rural and urban areas than in other parts of the country leading to higher annual earnings; though, for women, it is comparatively less than men. It further gets enhanced by increasing male WPR (Work Participation Rate), and higher household earnings due to which women tend to withdraw from work into full-time domesticity for significant parts of the year giving greater time to family. But this choice comes with a risk as it reduces women’s direct access to earned incomes and increasing their dependent status. A much higher proportion of women in Kerala report themselves as housewives by main occupation thus engaging largely in unpaid work on the household compound and are directing their educational skills towards invisible, home-bound unpaid services.

Overall it’s the modernisation of patriarchal norms through education, discouragement at workplace, sexual harassment, gender-biased wage differences, never ending societal expectation and demands from women which provides the ground for women’s withdrawal from labour force participation.

Conclusion

There is inverse correlation between educational gender gap and participation in employment sector. It is required to give a thought to the linkages between the education system and socio-economic processes and their influence on women's lives. Educating girls should be connected with economic opportunities rather than focussing only on improving family health and welfare. Equal access to education can act as an important platform for strengthening women's employment opportunities and participation in decision making. Along with education, other factors which include awareness among women at individual and collective levels should also be considered. The powerful, hard to change societal practices based on orthodox thinking are to be given special attention if women need to be liberated. At last one can say that empowerment of women will be possible only if they are given special attention, keeping in mind the various shortcomings of the patriarchal society. Education system is just a part of this patriarchal structure, which is not helping girls to realise their actual potential. The concern still remains the same, i.e., whether the increased access to education would improve women's status or the strong hold of patriarchal system will never lose its ends?

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