

INDIA

ANALYSIS OF DATA

In this article, I analyse 55 in-depth interviews conducted in India to explore the impact of female employment and education on gender relations in the family in India. First I discuss the changes that have happened due to increased education and employment of women and then I look at the barriers and impediments for women to get education and access to employment in India.

I critically discuss the benefits that increased education and employment have brought into women's lives and how both women and men perceive these new changes. Then I analyse narratives of this study highlighting the constraints and impediments for girls and women's education and employment in India. I argue that the gender discrimination throughout women's life cycle, early marriage, conventional norms and practices adversely impact on the women's empowerment, education and employability.

Attitudes about educating women

A majority of participants stressed the importance of education particularly the importance of giving proper education to children. The value of educating women is discussed in many aspects; as a means of living a better family life, providing support for their children's education, as a means of economic independence and empowerment. As one female participant described:

How important do you think is it to educate female children?

W: it is really important. They are the ones who needs to go to another house, there might be chances where they face challenges or been considered lower there. Not only that, if they are educated; when they face any challenges in their life they could stay strong and independent. They will have a job, they will

capable of taking care of their children and live their life. Thus, job and education is important. (Aswini_H10P)

Educating daughter is as important as educating son because son can manage by themselves but if daughter is not educated and she doesn't get good in-laws, she needs to be independent. If no one supports her, she needs to stand on her own. (Manorma_H4P)

Many participants described about practical benefits of educating girls particularly the importance of having a means of earning in order to face the challenges of life with confidence and independence. A female participant (Manorma_H7S1) said that she always advise her daughters to “study more and more and become independent” because with education they would be able to live without being dependent on anyone. Another young woman said:

Interviewer: If you will have a daughter, what advice will you give her regarding education?

Interviewee: She should get education till the level that she can do her own future planning; there should not be any need of seeking support from anyone else, neither from husband nor from family. She should study and earn on her own. It will also be enough if she studies till matric, she can take tuitions and can handle herself, and she can be independent.

Educating women were often associated with educating the future generation. Many said that it is important to educate females as they are as mothers will be able to help the education of their children. As a young female participant who had a BA degree explained:

I think if a person is educated s/he will have better way of thinking, if she is educated than she will be able to give proper education to her children. If we are educated than we will understand our children more and will be able to advise them or guide them. We can also show them the importance of education and to become independent. (Maorama_H5P)

However, although she was educated she added that due the gender disparity exists in the household; she is unable to get a job – “I’m a graduate but still I have to cook and work at home, look after the children, I also had plans to move forward and do something but I was married and got pregnant continuously and our culture doesn’t allow us to go out”. This is a vital aspect of concern that I will discuss in the second part of this paper. Although in the present times education of women have increased, due to lack of change in the conventional norms and existing gender disparity, some women find it difficult to engage in employment.

However, even the parents who were not educated knew the value of having education for the sake of providing a better education for their children. An uneducated woman who were in her 50s said:

[My] Satisfaction is all ruined, this place is a mess. People here are very narrow-minded and helpless. When I see such things happening I wish I would have studied more so that I could support my children’s education. (Manorma_H8S1)

Some young participants said that they are determined to get higher education. Some young female participants in this study had dropped out from education due to early marriages and childbirth. However, many wanted to get back to education because they had a clear view of the benefits that education and employment could bring into women’s life. A female participant, who was 23 years, married and had one child at the time of the interview said:

Want to study more so that I can do something for my kids. I want to improve my future so that they don’t have any difficulty in future. I want to be independent so that they never have the chance to ask us to get out of the house. I want to be strict and tight and show that we can also do something. I am doing future planning, I am thinking in that way (Manorma_H6P)

These narratives show that both males and females in this study generally had a positive attitude towards educating girls. They showed a greater understanding about the benefits that education could bring into the individual’s empowerment as well as the development of the family and the society.

Education as a means of economic independence

Many participants discussed the importance of education for finding a good job and then achieve economic independence. They said that higher education and qualifications help women to find employment:

First of all, in order to get to job, being educated is necessary... until she doesn't get her education; she won't be able to work...ever. Whether the job is small or in big place, for most of them, being literate is very much important. Also, she needs her family support (Shalu_H10S1)

Many women understood the importance of being able to earn an income for the wellbeing of the family as well as for their own empowerment. As one participant explained:

There are benefits in teaching girls. See, nowadays even after marriage, many couples are getting divorced or else leaving or they might widow. So many problems come in the way. Husband's salary might be less, due to which kids wishes are not fulfilled. If women are educated, they can do job, due to which they can run family in better way and can educate their kids. (Manorma_H2P)

Having education and employment were discussed in relation to achieving a quality life. Many said that men's income is not sufficient in the present times to live a comfortable life. Therefore women's contribution to the income was accepted and appreciated for the betterment of the family. Some said that education and employment are important to achieve a relaxed life:

Participant: see, those who are not educated, here there are so many who are not educated, they have nothing to do, what will they do? And those who are educated, they are working in office at good post with good salary. And those who are uneducated, even if they do work for the whole day, they hardly earn good money. And those who have jobs, how much they earn at the end of the month. Life is so relaxing (Manorma_H2P)

If someone has good education plus job, they would have good salary, and then they can live a happy life (Shalu_H6S1)

There are a lot of advantages of educating a woman. If women are educated, wherever she lives, which ever environment she stay, she can differentiate what is right and what if wrong. Also, whichever family she goes to live with, she can tell if somebody is doing anything wrong. She can give education to her future children, family members and a lot of people. She can show the right way to everyone. She can only do these only if she is educated (Shalu_H10S1)

As such many participants were in the agreement that a proper education is vital and should be given to girls because it would pave way for them to find an employment in the future and obtain economic independence in their lives.

Attitudes about expanding opportunities for women in employment

Many participants said that not only women's engagement in employment has been rapidly increased in the present time but women have access to diverse avenues of employment opportunities compared to the past:

There are lot of women who go for work. There are women who do business and make money, there are women who do agriculture and government jobs. In most of the ordinary houses this helps them to live and earn more. It helps for the education of their children. (Shalu_H8S2)

Generally many participants viewed women employment with a positive light.

Interviewer: If your daughter is doing a paid job. How do you feel about it?

Participant: I wish that my daughter should take a job, earn some money, and become independent. I will be very happy. (Manorma_H3P)

However, many had a consensus view that men's employability is far more important than women's. Due to the gender role discrimination which existed in the society, women's main

role was mainly considered taking care of children, family and house chores rather than employment and earning money. A male participant said:

What do you think should women work?

It should be, but it is forbidden in our society. If husband is able to feed the family, raise the family well, there is no need of wife to go and earn. And if the husband is unable, both with their mutual understanding they can decide and work.

These views reinforce the gender role discrimination in the Indian society among Muslim communities. However, in absence of male income earner women's contribution in finance was greatly regarded. As one female participant described about her neighbour who works as a nurse:

It's good. She is supporting her family. There is no problem in it. There is no one in her family who earns, so she is supporting her family. She is not doing it because of her hobby but because of her poverty. Even if she does it for her hobby, it is not wrong. She is going outside to work to support her family. She is doing work. It is different that these days, people's thinking is changing. It depends on the people's mentality. But if a girl is doing job to support his family, so this is not a bad thing...People will be needed to go for work. Today's society has been changed. Everyone has become independent; no one is dependent on others. (Manorma_H2S1)

Another young female participant said:

What do you think should women work?

Interviewee: Yeah, they should work so that they can be independent, maintain house; if husband's salary is less, they can't provide education or else there are 2 or 3 children in the family and income is less, expenditure is more, so if woman is working they can handle it well. She can look after some small household chores like milk, vegetables, she can look after it and the burden will get lesser. They can save some money, their children can get education, and future planning is there. (Manorma_H6P)

As such, increased in women's engagement in employment is mostly discussed with a positive light. Although a majority of women in this sample and their neighbours still engaged mainly in housebound employments such as looming work, tailoring, pickle making and candle making, many believed that women are both capable and should be given freedom to engage in employment outside the home premises. Many said that women are capable of working in any field although various social structural factors impede their engagement. One female participant said:

Women are there in all fields. If you take a small industry woman are there. Not necessarily need to be educated or to be in a profession, if you take any field you can see women. If you look to the labour work itself you can see women even working under road construction.

Q: What do you think about them?

I have a very good opinion about it, because they try to live their life without depending on others. (Aswini_H10S2)

Some participants pointed out that the women should be given freedom to work outside the home as that will allow them to mingle with the wider society and gain experiences and knowledge: "when you work outside, you will get an opportunity to mingle with the society more, inside the home that will be limited" (Aswini_H10S2). These narratives show the increased acceptance of women's engagement in employment by the wider society. This can be mainly due to the observable benefits that working women have brought into the family and the society as a whole.

Independence

Gaining independence and self-reliance is discussed closely linked with educating girls. Many participants said that with education and employment women will be able to become independent and gain control over their lives to some extent as they have economic empowerment:

I think nowadays, no one should be stopped to study no matter how much they want to study, they should get supporter and they should be given permission to study. So that they can do something in future and become self-dependent, they won't be dependent on anyone and earn by themselves (Shalu_H10S1)

I have good opinion about them (women who works). They go for work they earn an income and it is good for themselves and their families. They can be independent as well. (Aswini_H10P)

Some participants discussed the importance of female employment in order for women to be independent in case of being a widower, separation from the husband or in an event of divorce. These views display some progressive ideas which have taken place with the changing circumstance of the marital relationships in the modern times.

Here most of the things are looked by my wife... It is good you know... Because if husband dies or anything happens to husband that woman can live independently. Taking an example, here I told you about my neighbour na... That husband and wife is separated and are living in different places... And that girl is living independently because of the job she has... She has a son and daughter, so she wants to look after both her children... So if she is not going for any job, they can't live... (Aswini_H5)

How important do you think is it to educate female children?

It is really important. They are the ones who needs to go to another house, there might be chances where they face challenges or been considered lower there. Not only that, if they are educated; when they face any challenges in their life they could stay strong and independent. They will have a job, they will capable of taking care of their children and live their life. Thus, job and education is important (Aswini_H10P)

Many discussed the importance to being able to live without depending on others and earning even a small income is considered valuable for women to reserve their dignity. Both young and elderly mothers in this study expressed determination to educate their daughters as they wanted them to gain some independence and life that they themselves are missing due to lack

of education. A young mum who was regretful for not being able to get higher education said with determination:

I would educate my daughters to the level they want to. I want my daughters to study and earn and would not be dependent on anyone. In future, she will also be able to give proper education to anyone. She can stand by herself independent. Wherever she goes, she won't have to depend on anyone. She will be self-dependent (Shalu_H10S1)

These narratives show the participants' awareness about the importance of educating women. This sheds some positive light on the future generation Muslim women in India.

Progressive views

Some participants expressed strong views against the existing unjust against women. Some suggested that individual measures should be taken in order to acquire a quality life for women. A female participant said:

...there is no use of getting married until you are independent. Get married, have kids and then get trapped in the house. If you don't get plan properly and with freedom, she should be allowed to roam because after marriage her freedom is taken away whether it be educated girl, uneducated girl, or homely girl. I have always seen that what happened with me was the thing that happened with many others, cooking, giving birth, you will have one and the other will be in the queue. This is why let her dream, have freedom of eating, drinking, or travelling. Do everything with your family members or friends, there is no problem but not the wrong things. There should not even be restriction on having boyfriend after that she can marry. (Manorma_H6P)

Some participants expressed disappointment over the religious views over women and pointed out the importance of changing them in order for women to gain some freedom and justice in life:

My religion's attitude towards women is very sad. They will not allow on women to be social, to work, even more specially women doing the works which prominently men do. Muslims view that all with a negative attitude. Now even if a woman learns to drive a vehicle they say it is arrogance. Now women drive auto, bus, they become the conductor. It is all good, they are reaching out to all the fields which are men dominated as well. Especially the Muslim community they see things like this with very narrow minded, and it is very difficult for them to accept it. According to their understanding it is all for men and women are not suppose to do that. (Aswini_H10S2).

Being able to question the religious and conventional views and openly express suggestions to address discrimination against women can be considered as an important step towards achieving some equity for women. However, only few participants in this study expressed these progressive views against the existing system of injustice against women.

Impediments

In this section I discuss various factors that impede girls 'education and women's employment in India.

Conventional norms and restrictions on mobility

Even though the access to education has increased in the recent times, there could be seen some social barriers which impact women's workforce participation and economic liberation. The societal views which are formed based on the patriarchal norms that always question girls' freedom of movement can be identified as a main constrain on women's employment. As some participants mentioned, from the birth a girl is considered as a burden to the family and many parents focus on giving them to marriage rather than giving them education and pave way for their own development. Many participants stated it is a constant battle for individuals to acquire their basic rights of getting education and employment. Irrespective of her own wish for education and employment, women mostly have to conform to the decision

of the family members, relatives, neighbours or the wider society. As one female participant said:

For Muslim girl, if she wants to work (job) there can be many problems or barriers because even if her parents are ready with her decision there are other people in the neighbourhood or society who will look down on her. They start asking questions about her character, nature and so on because she goes out to work. (Manorma_H8P)

Unless these deeply rooted conventions are changed both at individual and societal level women's ability of acquiring a successful career would continue to depend highly on individual level of "luck" or having a "supportive family". As one female participant clearly described consent of the family plays a major role in deciding females' employability in the Indian society among Muslim families:

I also want to do some good job but for that the consent of family is very important. Without their consent nothing can happen. If I get married then I have to get the consent of my father in law, mother in law and my husband. If I am in home then, I have to get the consent from brothers and sister, then mother and father (Manorma_H2S2)

Restriction on women's mobility is discussed as a main impediment for their education and employment.

...people should attain education; it benefits them so that they do not have to rely on others in future. But it is hard for women because in our caste especially, we have to study from our home itself. We are not permitted to move out of this area for education (Manorma_H2S2).

The decision of sending girls to schools was mainly dependent on the attitudes and believes of parents, relatives and neighbours. Particularly, there are some Muslim villages where girls are deprived of getting education as a result of conventional believes of women's mobility.

There are districts and state which have very traditional and backward mentality. Even in our society still now there are people who say girls should not go out of the home; especially in Muslim areas districts like Malappuram. Many things have changed now. In places like that girls do not know a world other than where they are now. In case if they are left alone in any situations, they cannot recover from that. If we have education and knowledge about the world, we our self can solve the problems and move forward (Aswini_H10S2)

Not having schools in near proximity and restrictions on women's mobility in Muslim communities were discussed as main challenges of gaining equity in education for girls.

Unequal gender role division

The narratives reveal that it is mostly females who sacrifice their careers, hopes and aspirations for the sake of family. Most of them mentioned that their aspirations and dreams of working in their field of interest had changed after getting married in order to fulfil the family responsibilities. A female respondent who works as an assistant professor said:

After marriage I find some crisis and challenges to managing my kids and... actually I am not interested in my teaching job, before I was interested in industrial job but for managing my married life and my career life I prefer teaching job. (Aswini_H2P)

The family responsibility of a married woman goes beyond taking care of her kids but her husband and in-laws in terms of cooking, domestic chore, washing and ironing clothes and cleaning. As one female respondent described:

... I really wanted to complete my education. I dropped out from school after inter so I couldn't complete my studies and now I am married (laughs) which keeps me engaged at household works. At present, I almost forgot everything that I have studied... (Manorma_H8P)

The unequal division of domestic chores makes it very hard for women to engage in workforce. Some said that only jobs like teaching would fit for women as they have to balance the work and family chores. Both men and women in this study expressed views that reinforce the gender role division in the society where males were mainly seen as the income earner and women as the carer of the family. When asked about women working outside, a young female participant who was educated and unemployed said “earning income is really a good thing, but this can create problems like not having enough time to take care of the family”. This statement highlights the deeply embedded attitude about gender role division in the society.

Some participants said that there is a salary disparity among male and female employees and generally females get a lower salary than males irrespective of the level of education and expertise. An assistant professor said that the female employees in her department get a lesser salary than the male employees and she termed women’s salary as a “supporting income” to the family rather than a “main income”:

Like some problem issues like salary. Some type of employers can give less payment to the woman in compared with male. In my office women’s income is a supporting income. That is constructed by the Indian culture (Aswani_H2P)

It is evident that women’s contribution is just considered as a secondary income to the family reinforcing the prevalent gender role discrimination in the society.

With compared to the studies conducted in other countries, a majority of the participants in this study held views against women’s participation in politics. Many said that they are generally not interested in politics and they also do not agree women’s participation in politics. Some had the view that women are not capable of bearing such responsibility and women’s engagement in politics would drive a country to a failure.

Q: what is your opinion on women getting into the field of politics?

W: Women do not need to get into the field of politics.

Q: Can you please explain why it is so?

W: Politics is something in which, we contact with lots of people.

(MAnorma_H2S2)

Q: What is your opinion on women active in politics?

M: I am against it.

Q: Why?

M: If women plays in politics, the country and the home she run will be ruined.

Was there any success anywhere? [all laughing]. Where ever women rule it will be a failure. Here India was ruled by woman, it was a failure. Pakistan was also ruled by a woman, but for how many days? Then there was one more woman...somewhere in Bhutan another woman rules [laughing]. The country women lead will never be success. Both house and country. Here in our panchayath it is a woman, is here any development happening? Everything is destroyed here. (Aswini_H7S1)

The above views clearly demonstrate the deeply cultivated patriarchal norms in the society. Only few participants agreed and appreciated women's engagement in politics. The majority of both male and female participants expressed views against women's participation in politics, a finding that contrasts from the other three countries where this study was conducted.

Early marriages

Early marriage of girls in the Muslim community was discussed as another impediment for higher education and employment of women in India:

If we look in our area, the poor Muslim girls are married soon. That is a social problem. In middle class, in our society they get married in 10-18; by 19 they will be married (Shalu_H6S1)

Although some parents were aware the negative consequences an early marriage could bring into a girls' life, they found it hard to act against the norms in the society. An assistant

professor said that although that she is well aware about the negative consequences as early marriage could bring into girl's life, she is obliged to marry over her daughter because of the conventional norms in the Muslim society:

Because I think the majority of our area is dominated by Muslims and in my mind I think of the marriage of my daughter. I am so much educated but mind is getting some restrictions belong to my caste or I don't know. I think of marriage of my daughter at the age of 20. I really want that but sometimes I feel ashamed sometimes that getting the outcome is marriage of my daughter at 20 instead of getting education after degree. I think most of the parents think like those because of our Islamic life, principles are like that. (Aswani_H2P)

However, this understanding and openly discussing the issues related to early marriage can be considered as a positive sign or the initial step of change. Few respondents of this study showed better awareness and revolutionary ideas about the cultural, conventional norms and rules in the society.

Caste

One participant pointed out their lower caste as a key impediment for acquiring a job. One female participant said even though her family is educated they find it difficult to find a job due their caste. As a result her brother and brother-in-law work in Saudi. She also had a BA degree but did not work at the time of the interview. As she described:

In my family everybody is educated but it is hard to get proper job. Even if a person is educated job opportunities are very few. Whenever, we go for an interview they will query about our caste, and if we tell them we are Mohammad than that's it. (Manorma_H5P)

The impact on caste on education and employment is another important aspect of inquiry in a future study.

Conclusion

In this paper I discussed the changes that have happened in the society as a result of increased in women's education and employment. It also examined the numerous impediments for women's education and employment in the Indian society among Muslim communities.

The narratives show that the girls' participation in education and women's engagement in employment have increased in the present times. The majority of participants expressed greater degree of awareness about the importance of education. The value of education is discussed in many arenas; as a means of achieving a better life, gaining economic empowerment and obtaining independence and self-reliance for women. Some participants conveyed strong criticisms over existing discrimination against women. Some suggested that individual measures should be taken in order to acquire a quality life for women.

However, the in-depth interviews also indicate persistence of varied barriers for women's education and employment such as conventional norms, restrictions on mobility, early marriages and gender role discrimination in India. This study has implications for social reform, policy and practical initiatives in order to address discrimination and sustain Muslim women's equity and empowerment in India.