



Differential access to education among children in India

Dr. Savita Rani

Research Scholar, Department of Geography, M.D. University, Rohtak, Haryana, India

Abstract

Education plays an important role in the process of social and economic transformation of a society. Women's education plays a pivotal role in improving living standards not only of the individual families but also of the nation. It is rightly, therefore, remarked that if a boy is provided education only one family benefits whereas if a girl gets education two families benefit. In fact, literacy and education among women improve the quality of life both at home and outside of home, by encouraging and promoting education of children, especially female children, and in reducing the infant mortality rate. But in a patriarchal society girls and boys do not have equal rights for education. Parents think that investment of money on girl's education is wastage because after marriage girls move to their in-law's house and their natal family has no right on their income, if any. On the other hand, boys augment family income when they join workforce. That is why literacy and education among women is far less as compared to their male counterpart in a patriarchal society. The process of development brings about qualitative change in the material conditions of people and makes life easier and more comfortable than before. It is also instrumental in removing inequality between different segments in society. However, so far as gender inequality is concerned, the process of development appears to be nearly inconsequential. Differential treatment of a son and a daughter continues to exist as reflected in select social and demographic indicators. Differential access to education is one such instance which invariably leads to low opportunity for career building of female children as compared to their male counterpart. The discussion in this section is based on the estimates of District Report Card (DRC). DRC is a comprehensive district specific database pertaining to elementary education in India, and is compiled by National University of Educational Planning and Administration as part of District Information system for Education (DISE).

Keywords: patriarchy, differential access to education, transformation, pivotal

Introduction

In simple terminology development is a dynamic process which makes life easier and more comfortable. The process of development leads to empowerment of people, and bring about changes which have bearings of their lives. The process of development is facilitated by literacy and education among the people. Development is rapid when there are skilled and competent people in the society. Seen from this angle, education becomes the most important factor for development as well as for empowering people. Education provides knowledge and information which in turn bring about desirable changes in the way people think, feel and act. Education also builds a sense of self-esteem and self-confidence among the people. It contributes very effectively to the realization of the potential in mankind.

Therefore, education is considered as a social instrument for developing human resources and for human capital formation. It is generally seen in the societies having reasonable literacy and numeracy skills tend to fare better in their economic pursuits, have small size of family and, therefore, enjoy a relatively better quality of life as compared with a society that is by and large illiterate and uneducated. Educated people not only have higher income but also command respect in the society. It is because of its tangible contributions in changing the lives of the people that education becomes an important part of the development policy in every country.

In the contemporary world literacy and education is a necessity. However, in most of the less developed parts of the world including India, there exists a wide range of differentials in literacy levels and educational attainment across regions and across different segments of people. In a caste ridden society this differential is even more conspicuous. Likewise, in a male-dominating society, the gap in the levels of literacy and educational attainment of men and women is very large. In such societies education among women has been neglected for a long time. There are several reasons underlying this situation. They broadly include parental preferences and prevailing social values. Ours is a patriarchal society, and after marriage daughters have to move to their husbands' family. After marriage the relationship with their natal families is almost negligible. Further, in the existing social traditions it is the son who provides security to the parents, and takes care of them in their old age. People, therefore, think that spending money or time on daughters is a sheer wastage of resources as before marriage they have to stay within the four walls of home and, after marriage they have to move to other families while their sons would run their families. But with passage of time particularly since independence a significant transformation on the socio-economic fronts has taken place. People are increasingly realizing the importance of education for their daughters. But this transformation is still very slow in the rural areas. Most of

the villagers want to give education to their daughters but not as much as they want for their sons. If their daughters can read or write their letters or count the money, they think that it is sufficient and they feel proud that they have done their duty very well.

Poverty is another barrier to female education. Lack of affordability among the poor masses, inadequate educational facilities and shortage of female teachers in some areas aggravate the situation. Gender bias in curriculum, Purdah System, low retention rate and high dropout couple with the primary involvement of girls in domestic chores are some of the important obstructions in the path of female education in India.

It is a well-documented fact for at least parts of South Asia, that there is at least selective discrimination against some girls within households through unequal allocation of food and health care resources, compared to boys. Such biases in household resource allocation may act to reinforce any biases in educational expenditure, since undernourished or sick girls are likely to perform less well at school and have more regular absences. Provision of meals and healthcare facilities in the schools may be one approach to addressing this problem, although some analyst would argue that this will simply lead to a re-allocation of resources away from girls within the household.

Although boys also perform some household chores, they are more likely than girls to work in the market, possibly contributing some of their own income to school costs. Girls are more likely to be assigned domestic responsibilities at young age. Sons do fewer chores at home and, do not liberate either of the parents to earn more. The full opportunity cost of educating girls may, thus, be higher than that for boys, especially for poor families. This difference may help explain why poor parents often invest less in their daughters schooling than in their son's. Various household characteristics, such as level of education of parents, occupation of parents, family size and income group, have been put forward to explain variations in female enrolment. Studies show that as parents' level of education increases, so does the likelihood of female enrolment, but there are variation in studies as to whether mother's or father's education has the greatest impact on daughters. Elsewhere, studies have shown that mother's education level has a major effect on attitudes towards daughters' education. Education of mother has a significant impact on education of both sons and daughters. In some cases, mother's education affects daughters but not sons. The literacy rate of the community as a whole, as well as within particular households, has a significant impact on female participation rates in education, suggesting a demonstration effect within communities, even socially very conservative ones. Literacy (especially of women) was also found to be a significant predictor of total enrolment and gender parity, at the national level lending analytical weight to the saying that when a woman is educated the whole nation is educated.

Similarly, parents in white collar occupations are more likely to support daughters' education than those in blue collar occupations. It is not clear how mother's occupation separately, might influence daughters, since most such studies focus on the occupation of head of household (presumed to be male). Where mothers are working, they may be more

motivated to send daughters to school, because they perceive the connection between education and increased earnings and, possibly, because they can financially assist in supporting their daughters' education. On the other hand, female employment, and increased female wages, may increase the likelihood of dropout or non-attendance of girls, due to substitution of labour. The overall impact of mother's occupation depends on the relative strength of substitution and income effects. It may be necessary to combine labour market initiatives with counter measures to offset the increase in opportunity cost of daughters' labour in the home, when mothers engage in market activity. While there is some micro-study evidence that girls in larger families are less likely to go to school and/or perform less well, in aggregate this is not necessarily borne out in all cases. At the micro-level, poverty may be critical in decisions on female education. Income (or other measures of wealth, such as land-holding) has more effects on girls than on boy's education. In higher income strata, girls are considerably more likely to be enrolled in school than in low income groups. This may reflect a strategy favouring boys where parents cannot finance all children to attend school, and also higher opportunity costs of girls labour in poorer households. Opportunity costs of child labour may be particularly hard for low income households to bear - in poorer households girls are less likely to attend school, since their labour is more essential to the household, where mothers are more likely to be working.

Women's education plays a pivotal role in improving living standards not only of the individual families but also of the nation. It is rightly, therefore remarked that if a boy is provided education only one family benefits whereas if a girl gets education two families benefit. In fact, literacy and education among women improve the quality of life both at home and outside of home, by encouraging and promoting education of children, especially female children, and in reducing the infant mortality rate. Several studies have indicated an inverse association between literacy rate among women, on the one hand, and levels of fertility and infant mortality. With lack of literacy and education among female the family is characterised by poorer nutrition, lower earning potential and the lack of an ability to make decisions within a household.

Lack of literacy and education among women adversely affects the health and living conditions of the children. Several empirical studies have established the fact that infant mortality rate is related to female literacy rate and educational level. The studies have also underlined a correlation between education and economic growth (http://infoportal.imsec.ac.in/FacultyApp/SingleAuthor/MyFiles/Ms.%20Pallavi%20Gupta_2s.pdf).

Evidences indicate that the process of social and economic transformation is more efficient in areas where governments have invested sufficient resources in the areas of primary and elementary education. Moreover, elementary education provides foundation on which a strong base for higher education can be developed. Therefore, performance of a society in the areas of elementary education is considered as an imperative for development. Elementary education covers the primary (6-11 years) and upper primary (11-14 years) age group. In our country, elementary education basically refers to

the successful completion of prescribed educational requirements till Class VIII. The basic idea behind the emphasis on elementary education is for every child who is 14-year old to have acquired foundation skills such as the ability to read and write with fluency, numeracy, comprehension, analysis, reasoning and social skills such as teamwork. The importance of elementary education lies in the fact that it installs in children courage, confidence, curiosity, independence, resourcefulness, resilience, patience and understanding. It goes without saying that in Indian society there is an urgent need of confidence, independence, resilience and decision-making power among women, in general, and girls, in particular. It is in this context that the role of elementary education acquires a paramount importance in overall transformation of the society. Education, particularly among women, provides social benefits which are difficult to be captured in economic terms. It is in this context that some people argue for continuation and increasing subsidies to female education, since it is held that social benefits to female education (e.g. reduced fertility, improved health etc.) are greater than those to male education (Barden and Green, 1994).

Data Base and Methodology

The present study is primarily based on secondary sources of data. Data would be drawn mainly from the estimates of District Report Card (DRC). DRC is a comprehensive district specific database pertaining to elementary education in India, and is compiled by National University of Educational Planning and Administration as part of District Information system for Education 2008 (DISE). Table and percentage calculated by researcher.

Analysis and discussion

For a regional dimension we now examine district level estimate from DRC. The estimates pertain to the period 2009-10. In Table -1, distribution of districts from the 18 major states in India by different levels of enrolment ratio for girls in primary and upper primary stage combined is shown. The range of variation in percentage girls' enrolment has been presented in four categories. The size class has been designed in a way that allows us to identify districts where girls fall short of boys in enrolment.

Table 1: Distribution of districts by Girl Enrolment ratio (P+UP) in India (2009-10)

% GER	Total districts	Districts from north-west India	Districts from south India	Remaining districts
Less than 40	45 (8.91)	41 (91.11) (14.74)	0	04 (8.88) (3.14)
40-44.9	126 (24.95)	104 (82.53) (37.41)	0	22 (17.46) (17.32)
45-49.9	293 (58.01)	118 (40.27) (42.44)	89 (30.37) (89)	86 (29.35) (67.71)
More than 50	41 (8.11)	15 (36.58) (5.39)	11 (26.82) (11)	15 (36.58) (11.81)
Total	505*	278	100	127

*Three districts from Madhya Pradesh are excluded because of non-availability of required data.

Source: NUEPA, District Report Card-2008.

Note: percentage in brackets.

North-west states - Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Uttaranchal, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat and Maharashtra.

Southern states - Kerala, Karnataka, Tamilnadu and Andhra Pradesh.

Others states - Bihar, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Odisha and West Bengal.

As seen in the table, barring only 41 districts all the 505 districts for which estimates are available, reveal enrolment rate of girls that is lower than that of boys. In about 9 percent of the districts, the enrolment rate for girls is as low as 40. This would mean that for every 100 students at primary and upper primary combined there are less than 40 girls. Remarkably, of these 45 districts, 41 come from the north and north-western parts. Further, nearly 95 percent of the districts from north and north-western states report smaller enrolment rate for girls as compared to boys. The districts from southern

states and from 'rest of India' fare better than the north and north-western states. From the districts in southern states there is no district with an enrolment rate of less than 45 percent for girls. As against this more than half of the districts from north and north western part come under this category. Even from the 'rest of India' which includes the least developed states of the country only about one-fifth of the districts have such a low level of enrolment for girls. This becomes even more apparent from Table -2 which cross classifies the districts by levels of income of the states.

Table 2: Distribution of districts by Girl Enrolment ratio (P+UP) in India (2009-10)

% GER	Total districts	Districts from high income States	Districts from middle income states	Districts from Low income States
Less than 40	45 (8.91)	12 (26.66) (7.59)	10 (22.22) (8.19)	23 (51.11) (10.22)
40-44.9	126 (24.95)	37 (29.36) (23.41)	27 (21.42) (22.13)	62 (49.20) (27.55)
45-49.9	293 (58.01)	98 (33.44) (62.02)	80 (27.30) (65.57)	115 (39.24) (51.11)
More than 50	41 (8.11)	11 (26.82) (6.96)	05 (12.19) (4.09)	25 (60.97) (11.11)
Total	505	158	122	225

Source: As in Table -1.

Note: percentage in brackets.

High income states – per capita income (19600-26400)

(Haryana, Punjab, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Maharashtra, Tamilnadu and Kerala)

Middle income states - per capita income (12801-19600)

(Uttaranchal, West Bengal, Rajasthan, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh)

Low income states - per capita income (12800-6000)

(Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Orissa)

As already noted above, in 41 districts the enrolment rate for girls is greater than that of boys. In this the ‘low’ and ‘middle income’ states together contribute as many as 30 districts. Moreover, the share of districts with better enrolment for girls in ‘low income’ states is more than twice as that of ‘middle

income’. Thus it is apparent that access to education for girl child reveals an inverse association with prosperity. This inverse association between prosperity and education of girl child becomes further sharper in a perusal of Table -3.

Table 3: Distribution of districts by Girl Enrolment ratio (P+UP) in India (2009-10)

States	Less than 40	40-44.9	45-49.9	More than 50	Total
Andhra Pradesh	0	0	23 (100)	0	23
Bihar	0	03 (8.10)	33 (89.18)	01 (2.70)	37
Chhattisgarh	0	08 (50)	08 (50)	0	16
Gujarat	0	04 (15.38)	22 (84.61)	0	26
Haryana	04 (19.04)	11 (52.38)	05 (23.80)	01 (4.76)	21
Himachal Pradesh	02 (16.66)	10 (83.33)	0	0	12
Jharkhand	0	0	15 (62.5)	09 (37.5)	24
Karnataka	0	0	31 (93.93)	02 (6.06)	33
Kerala	0	0	13 (92.85)	01 (7.14)	14
Madhya Pradesh	15 (31.91)	25 (53.19)	07 (14.89)	0	47
Maharashtra	01 (2.85)	0	33 (94.28)	01 (2.85)	35
Orissa	0	01 (3.33)	26 (86.66)	03 (10)	30
Punjab	05 (25)	12 (60)	03 (15)	0	20
Rajasthan	0	10 (30.30)	22 (66.66)	01 (3.03)	33
Tamilnadu	0	0	22 (73.33)	08 (26.66)	30
Uttar Pradesh	08 (11.26)	25 (35.21)	26 (36.61)	12 (16.90)	71
Uttarakhand	06 (46.15)	07 (53.84)	0	0	13
West Bengal	04 (20)	10 (50)	04 (20)	02 (10)	20
Total	45	126	293	41	505

Source: As in Table -1.

Note: percentage in brackets.

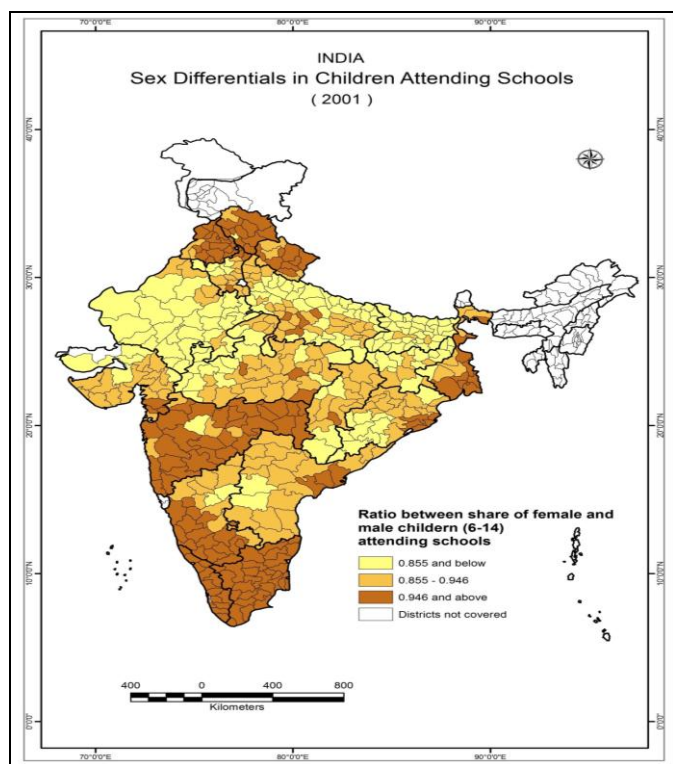


Fig 1

The situation is particularly very imbalanced in the states of Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh and Punjab where in none of the districts girls have an edge over boys so far as enrolment is concerned. In Haryana there is only one district viz. Rohtak where girls’ enrolment rate is higher than that of the boys.

Remarkable, Rohtak has the distinction of reporting the highest rate of enrolment for girls in the country. The status of Rohtak is overshadowed by the presence of as many as 15 districts with girls’ enrolment rate of less than 45 percent. From among the ‘low income’ states 27 districts out of 41 with better enrolment rate for girls come from the poorer states like Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, Orissa, West Bengal and Bihar.

Conclusion

Development does not remove the inequality in the context of gender issues. North and northern-western India report better result in the context of girl education, it does not mean that there is no gender inequality. In this region all girls are ‘Wanted’, they do not allow the ‘Unwanted’ girls to come in this world. In BIMARU states it happened due to poverty. In the lack of resources boys got first opportunity.

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