

Obstacles to Girl's Education and Strategies to overcome: a study of Slum Girls of Hooghly Industrial Belt, West Bengal, India

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Abstract

Girls' education is important for the development of society as well as the nation. India is a country of diversity and this diversity can be observed in its physical, cultural, social, and political features. Diversity is also seen in the level and quality of education. This diversity is found on the basis of gender, societies based on income level as well caste and religion. The present study is based on the status of girls' education in slums and various obstacles responsible for poor enrolment and relatively poor status of the level of education they attend. To analyse the role of obstacles to education, some major slums based on the density of the slum population have been selected from the geographical realm of the Hooghly Industrial Belt.

Keywords: *Economic Constraints, Parent Education, Government Scholarship, Distance*

I. Introduction:

Education is an essential activity and part of human society. The process of education to a very extent depends on the societal structure and socioeconomic condition of the individual. The purpose of education varies according to society. Data obtained from various reasonable sources show that the selection of institution, stream, and discipline is part of the socio-economic status of the pupil. In India, from the ancient period till independence women were deprived of education. Both formal and informal education was restricted to only members of the highly positioned society economically or socially. Even after seventy-five years of independence, in India, we still find a gap between male and female literacy. Besides some common factors, there are some other factors that play a role in obstacles to a girl's education. Social structure, economic status, availability of schools, etc. are common factors that generally affect the education of both males and females. On the other hand factors like social pattern, family structure and size, caste, availability of girls' schools, age, etc. play a key role in the education of girls. According to Mary E John (2008) in 1950, the ratification of the Constitution of India made equality between men and women a fundamental right. She found that education was not a priority in the 1980s and this was true for the women's movement. By the end of the 19th century, education was limited to women of the elite class. Though there was a large entry of women seen in the late 80s from the middle class. The National Education Policy (1986) played important role in the advancement of women's education and equality. One of the major problems with women's education was the orthodox thinking of Indian society which believed that women are incapable of learning, though they were not given the opportunity to prove themselves. Raja Ram Mohan Roy the great reformer of Bengal advocated women's education and raised his voice in favour of giving opportunities to women to prove themselves in the field of education. Women's development in the field of education has a history of slow development. The first Women's University was founded in 1916 by the social reformer Hondo Keshav Karve with just five students. The present paper is based on the study of the status of girls' education in the Hooghly Industrial Belt, West Bengal. This paper analyses the various obstacles to girls' education that play important role in the educational status of girls.

Objectives: Present paper incorporates the following objectives:

1. To find out the factors responsible for the poor enrolment of economically weaker sections of girls in an educational institution.
2. To transact the status of girls' education in socio-economically underdeveloped societies.

Study Area: The present study is an effort to transact the overall scenario of girls' education in socio-economically underdeveloped societies. Slums of the Hooghly Industrial Region are selected as the study area to fulfil the objectives of the present study. The Hooghly Industrial Region is located on the bank of river Hugli

and stretched along both sides of river Hugli from Bansberia in the North to Budgebudge in the south as a belt estimated in length about 97 km.

Data and Methodology: This paper is based on primary data obtained from a field survey. Both Primary and Secondary data have been used for the present study. Secondary data from the Census of India and AISHE have been used to depict the national scenario of girls' education. Two districts, North 24 Parganas and Hooghly, situated on the eastern and western banks of river Hugli respectively have been selected for the study. Girls under the age group 14-29 have been selected on the basis of purposive sampling.

Current Scenario of Women's Education in India and State:

In India during the last twenty years, large developments have been observed in the field of education. The major concern is girls' education which is still not improved up to the level which is satisfactory. The history of the development of education in India dates back to the ancient period followed by the medieval, pre-independence or British period, and post-independence period. If we analyse the present status of girls' education we found that in 2001 the overall literacy rate was 64.83% which increased to 70.04 per cent in 2011. An increase of 9.21 per cent was achieved in a single decade but the main thing which attracts is the huge gap between male and female literacy rates. The male literacy rate was 82.14 percent in comparison to the female literacy rate of 65.46 per cent. So, the difference is 16.68 per cent. However, the female literacy rate also increased by 11.8 per cent. According to statistics in 2001, the female literacy rate for general education in India is just 53.7 per cent in comparison to 75.3 per cent for males. Not only literacy but also regional, social, gender and caste-based inequality in literacy are found. If we look at the ground realities, we will find that majority of girls still don't get the chance to go to school. Gender inequality, poverty lack of social awareness, lack of infrastructure etc. are major factors that are barriers to the development of girls' education.

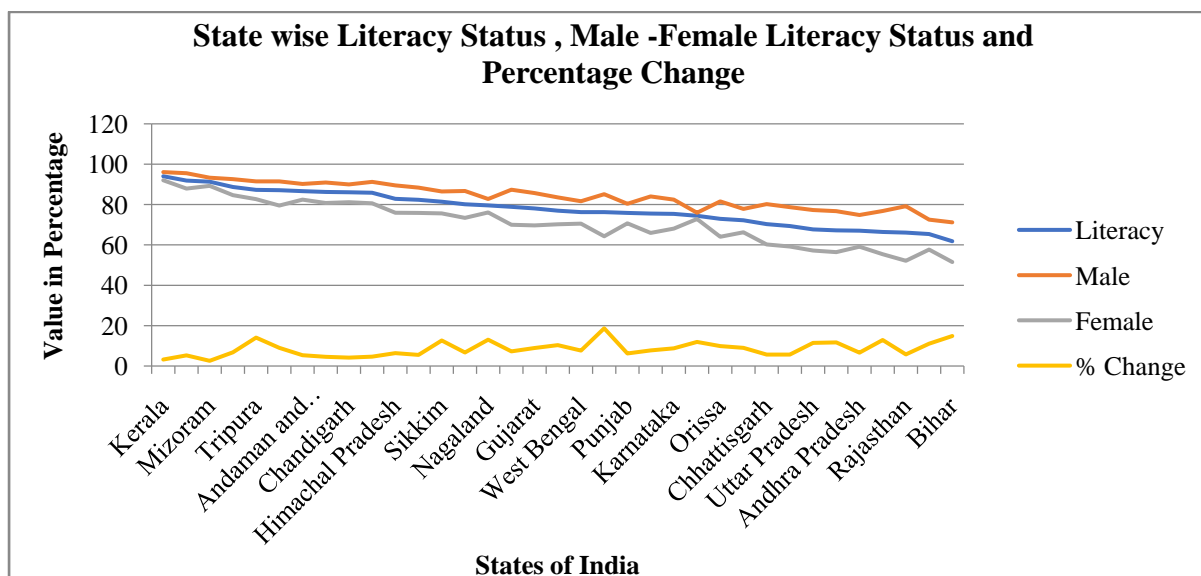
Table 1: Scenario of Girls' Education in India during different NSSO Rounds

NSSO Round	year	All India			
		Rural (per thousand)		Urban (per thousand)	
		Male	Female	Male	Female
66th	2009-2010	706	533	836	736
61st	2004-2005	636	450	805	693
55th	1999-2000	588	385	784	657
50th	1993-1994	545	321	759	616
43rd	1987-1988	484	260	719	556
38th	1983	449	219	693	515

Source: status of education and vocational training, NSS 66th Round (2009-10) and

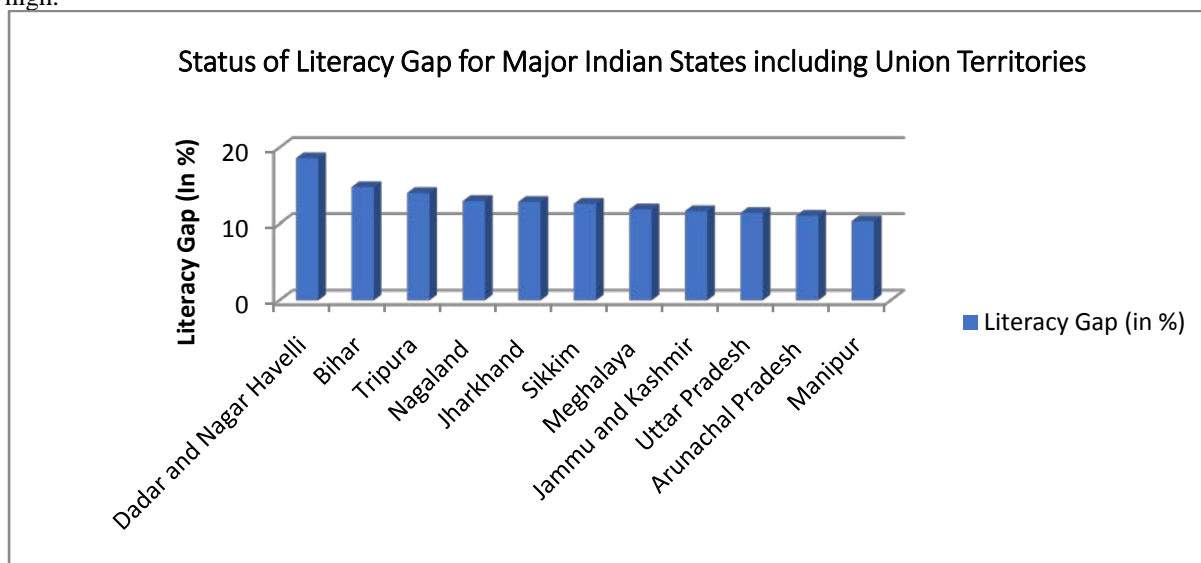
Obstacles to Women's Education:

Social Constraints: Social conditions and patterns have a significant role in education particularly for girls. In India, still in many societies, female education is not given priority as compared to male. The following figure shows the status of male and female literacy in India:



Data Source: Census of India, 2011

From the above table, we can see that in the majority of states of North-East, Northern and Eastern regions of India gap between male and female literacy is higher than in the rest part of India. These states include Tripura (14.03%), Sikkim(12.61%), Nagaland(12.96%), Manipur(10.33%), Arunachal Pradesh(11.04%), Meghalaya(11.87%),Jammu-Kashmir(11.64%),Uttar Pradesh(11.41%), Jharkhand(12.85%) and Bihar(14.80%). However, the maximum gap between female and male literacy is found in the Union Territory of Dadar and Nagar Haveli (18.61%). If we look at the Sex Ratio of the states above, we find that there is a low sex ratio found in the case of those states where the gap between male and female literacy rates is high.



Data Source: Census of India 2011

Dadar and Nagar Haveli has the highest literacy gap between male and female (18.61%) and a very poor sex ratio of 775. A similar condition is observed in the case of the states of Bihar (916), Uttar Pradesh (908), Jammu and Kashmir (883), Sikkim (889), Arunachal Pradesh (920) and Nagaland (931). This is an indicator that in these states male gets priority over female. In these states, rigid social norms are major factors in the poor literacy rate of females. Girl education is fewer carriers oriented and marriage is given priority over education and career.

As girls included in the study belong to migrant labourers from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, therefore, a reflection of social rigidity to some extent is observed here too. On the other hand side of the family is another reason why girls are deprived of education.

Economic Constraints: Economic constraint is a big obstacle in the way of education. Education is not limited to admission, fee and uniform. There is recurring expenditure to meet the daily, weekly, monthly and annual

demands of students of the major causes of dropout is economic constraint particularly, in the case of pupils from poor economic backgrounds. Education is an investment and when it is the turn to select children for education, a parent from poor economic backgrounds give priority to males over females.

In the study area families of girls belonging to the lower-income majority of them are engaged as labourers in Jute Mills. Other professions include small shopkeepers, vendors, Rickshaw pullers and daily wage pullers.

The average monthly family income under the study area is rupees 6000 and varies from rupees 4000 per month to rupees 20,000. In the majority, there is only one earning member in the family for a family size ranging from 4-8 members. Generally, in the majority male members are the bread earner of the family but in countable numbers, females are also engaged in various economic activities. Women are generally engaged in Jute mills and also work as shopkeepers, vegetable vendors, and small vendors based on economic activities as well as domestic help.

The expenditure pattern of families of respondent girls shows that a very thin share is used as expenditure for education. Girls under study area study in schools located near their homes. But for higher education, they have to travel far distances. As per government provisions free education is, available for girls up to class XII but for other expenses like stationeries, fare, books and uniforms they need money which for many families it is hard to manage. The economic constraint is an obstacle to the way of education of girls as most families do not give priority to the education of girls due to poor economic conditions.

Distance of Educational Institution from Home: Distance of institution from home sometimes becomes an obstacle to education and function as both economic and social. The economic impact of distance is observed in the form of transportation costs. In the situation of a larger distance between the institution and home, the transportation cost increases. Due to poor economic background parents are not able to pay fares regularly to their children. This causes a break in regular attendance at institutions and the performance of students decline. Many parents do not agree to send their daughters to schools or colleges located at a far distance from home. This happens mostly in the case of higher education because a higher educational institution serves a larger geographical area. The majority of girls residing in slums under study areas leave their higher studies as in the majority of cases colleges are located far from home.

Parent's Educational Status: Parents' educational qualifications play important role in the education of children, particularly for girl children. In India status of women's education is not very well. In rural areas, women do not get proper education due to the orthodox thinking of society and the lack of infrastructure. During rural-urban migration poor sections of society migrate to urban areas and settled in slums. In spite of migration in urban areas, rural migrants hold their attitude of orthodox thinking in most cases. As a result low or no education of parent affect the education of children, particularly the education of the girl. The majority of migrants in slums of the Hooghly Industrial Belt belong to rural areas of the states of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Jharkhand and their parents are either low educated or illiterate.

Availability of Girls' School: The availability of girls' schools is another factor which decides the enrolment of girls particularly at the secondary and senior secondary levels. Some parents do not want to send their daughter to co-ed schools and prefer girls' schools for their daughters. In case of the non-availability of girls' schools of secondary and senior secondary level in nearby localities girls have to leave their studies in the middle. Non-availability of girls' schools is another reason for the dropout of girls at the secondary and senior secondary levels.

Lack of proper infrastructure: The majority of government educational institutions have no infrastructure required. Particularly unavailability of girls' toilets is one of the reasons for the dropout of girls at the secondary and senior secondary levels. However, government schools located in or near slums are not up to the mark in terms of their infrastructure but with the effort of the government, this scenario is changing. Due to poor infrastructure girls' rate of presence in schools declined which ultimately affects their performance. The consistent poor performance brings a neutral attitude towards study and at a point, they leave their study.

Choice of the subject: The option to choose a discipline or subject is another factor which encourages students to study. Various reports and studies suggest that majority of girls, particularly in rural areas and economically deprived societies forced to choose humanities for higher education. This is both for economic and social reasons. As discussed earlier, in India marriage is an inevitable part of society and the career of girls is given less priority. The main aim of parents behind better education of girls is better married life. On the other hand, still in the majority of Indian societies, non-working women with high degrees are given preference.

Table-2: Enrolment in various programmes of study (India)

Percentage Enrolment in various Programmes in Higher Education 2014-15			
Programme	Male	Female	Total

B.A.-Bachelor of Arts	24.60	32.96	28.44
B.Sc.-Bachelor of Science	11.44	12.22	11.80
B.Com.-Bachelor of Commerce	10.96	10.77	10.87
Batch.-Bachelor of Technology	8.68	3.78	6.43
B.E.-Bachelor of Engineering	7.61	3.57	5.75
M.A.-Master of Arts	3.27	5.36	4.23
B.A.(Hons)-Bachelor of Arts (Honours)	3.31	4.23	3.73
B.Ed.-Bachelor of Education	1.37	2.85	2.05
M.Sc.-Master of Science	1.33	2.15	1.70
M.B.A.- Master of Business Administration	1.89	1.28	1.61
B.C.A.-Bachelor of Computer Applications	1.53	1.25	1.40
B.Sc.(Hons)-Bachelor of Science (Honours)	1.37	1.25	1.32
B.B.A.-Bachelor of Business Administration	1.28	0.91	1.11
M.Com.-Master of Commerce	0.84	1.33	1.07
L.L.B.-Bachelor of Law or Laws	1.05	0.54	0.82
Others	19.47	15.55	17.67

Source: AISHE 2014-15

From the above table, we can observe that the enrolment rate of girls in humanities like Arts and Education is much higher than the Science, Commerce, Technology, Engineering, Law etc. This is clearly indicating that girls are less inclined to job-oriented disciplines which is also one of the major causes of the low rate of employment for girls.

Major Findings: The major findings of the present study are as follows:

1. Social constraints like early marriage, restriction on the movement of girls, and priority of males over females are responsible for poor rates of enrolment at higher levels of education.
2. The majority of girls in the study area belong to families with low incomes. As a result, girls are not able to continue their higher studies. Males are given priority over a female when the matter of choice comes.
3. Distance plays a crucial role in the enrolment of slum girls, particularly at higher levels of education.
4. Parents' educational qualifications and the availability of girls' schools also affect the education of girls.
5. Sometimes girls leave their studies due to the unavailability of subjects of their choice.
6. As the majority of girls' mother tongue is Hindi and the medium of instruction for their education up to the school level is Hindi too. Certain changes in the medium of instruction from Hindi to English force them to leave their higher studies.

Recommendations/Suggestions: On the basis of the above discussions following suggestions have been recommended for the better status of girls' education in the study area:

1. Opening of new girls' schools up to Higher Secondary level within 1 km of the slum and a minimum of one college within 5 km.
2. Improvement of the infrastructure in schools. Proper arrangements for drinking water and toilets for girls should be done.
3. A monthly scholarship on the basis of the income of the family should be arranged to meet various educational expenditures.

II. Conclusion:

Girls in study area are very much interested to continue their studies and want to become a successful women but social and economic constraints force them to leave their studies in the middle. Poor social

environment, lack of proper infrastructure, the distance of school and college from home, availability of girls' school, lack of availability of subject of choice and medium of instruction at a higher level of education are some major obstacles in the path of education of girls those who live in slums. With the proper arrangement of infrastructure, planning and privilege the status of girls' education living in slums can be improved.

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