Girls more Educated than Boys: A Survey and Review

Dr. Vishwajeet V. Jituri

Abstract

The education is foundation of development of the society. Traditionally, the females were getting less opportunities for education. This was due to various reasons and this resulted in many issues as well. The thinking of people, lack of resources, social customs, lack of awareness etc. are some of the probable causes. This paper looks into female gender bias by way of literature review and survey among the people.

Keywords
Gender bias, education, marriage, family, society

Introduction

Education is a birthright for all, irrespective of the gender. The individuals aim for the ambitions and education is a major step towards achieving them. The education develops our thinking, skill set and personality among so many benefits.

In our real world, the basic or the advanced education opportunities are not available to all the people in equal respects. Many people are deprived of their education needs, for a variety of reasons. These may include monetary issue, family pressure, unwillingness or lack of the opportunity. Some of the issues could be overcome with support given by the government or the society. A greater issue prevails in a social structure, where the boys get more or better opportunities than the girls. This creates an unbalanced level and gender bias. Traditionally, a more educated person is enjoys a dominant position in the society.

India accounts for 30 per cent of the world’s total illiterate population and around 70 per cent of these are women, which is a significant portion (Bandyopadhyay & Subrahmanian, 2008).

Literature Review

In India, it has been a normal tradition to seek a marriage match for a boy with a girl, who is equally or less educated than him.

The perceived gender bias has given way to the following issues in India.

- The child male-female ratio in India dropped to a low of 914 females for every 1,000 males in the year 2010. There is even more imbalance in certain districts in India, like the district of Daman Diu had a count a mere 533.44 females per 1000 males.
- In the families having several sisters and a single brother, the male child is sent to an expensive private school for his studies whereas the female child are sent to an underfunded and overcrowded school.
- Most families force their daughters to drop out of school once they have completed the 10 grade (sometimes even earlier), in order to assume the responsibilities of maintaining the household and caring for siblings, in the hope that this will render the girls eligible for marriage within two or three years of their reaching the maturity age.
- The girls are confined to do the household chores, and not encouraged to pursue an education and to be free to earn a living.

(Saha, 2011)

The most important causes of gender disparity are:
Poverty: In India, of the total 30 percent people who are below the poverty line, 70 percent of them are the women. The women’s poverty in India is directly related to the absence of economic opportunities and autonomy, lack of access to economic resources including credit, land ownership and inheritance, lack of access to education and support services and their minimal participation in the decision making process.

Illiteracy: Despite the notable efforts by the countries around the globe that have expanded for the basic education, there are approximately 960 million illiterate adults of whom two thirds are women. The educational backwardness of the girls has been the resultant cause of their gender discrimination. The progress towards girls’ education is very slow and the gender disparities persist at primary, upper primary and secondary stage of the education. The girls account for only 43.7 per cent of the enrolment at primary level, 40.9 per cent at upper primary level, 38.6 per cent at secondary level and 36.9 per cent at the degree and above level. They are not able to realize full identity and power in all spheres of life due to illiteracy.

Lack of employment facilities: The women are not able to resolve the conflict between new economic and old domestic roles. In both rural and urban India, the women spend a large proportion of time on unpaid home sustaining work. The women are not able to respond to new opportunities and shift to new occupations because their mobility tends to be low due to the intra-household allocation of responsibilities. The rights and obligations within a household are not distributed evenly. The male ownership of assets and conventional division of labour reduce incentives for women to undertake new activities. In addition, the child bearing has clear implications for labour force participation by the women. The time spent in bearing and rearing of children often results in de-skilling, termination of the long term labour contacts. Thus, the women are not being able to become economically self-sufficient due to unemployment and their economic dependence on the male counterpart is itself a cause of gender disparity.

Social customs, beliefs and practices: The women are not free from social customs, beliefs and practices. The traditional patrilineal joint family system confines women’s roles mostly to the domestic sphere, allocating them to a subordinate status, authority and power, compared to the men. The men are perceived as the major providers and protectors of a family while the women are perceived as playing only a supportive role, attending to the hearth. The boys and girls are accordingly groomed for different adult roles, status and authority. Since very early periods in the Indian culture, the men have dominated the women as a group and their status has been low in the family and society. The sons, especially in the business communities are considered to be economic, political and ritual assets whereas the daughters are considered to be liabilities.

Social attitude: Despite pronounced social development and technological advancement, women in our society still continue to be victims of exploitation, superstition, illiteracy and social atrocities. In the health and nutritional field, male members of family are supposed to take fresh and nutritious food in comparison to women because either they are earning members or head of the family or they are supposed to be more important than female members.

Lack of awareness of women: Most of the women are unaware of their basic rights and capabilities. They do not have the understanding, as to how the socioeconomic and political forces affect them. They accept all types of discriminatory practices that persist in our family and society, largely due to their ignorance and unawareness. Article 15 of the Indian Constitution states that the state shall not discriminate any citizen on the grounds of only sex. The irony is that there still is widespread discrimination which is a form of injustice to women.

(Shuani, 2015)
Between some of the reasons mentioned above, the ‘social attitude’ is an important reason for gender bias. In June 2012, an Expert Committee was constituted under Para 8 of the National Commission for Women Act, 1990; comprising of a panel of experts from different disciplines and varied expertise, to deliberate and recommend valuable suggestions for re-orienting/ re-strategizing the education system in India for a multi layered, multi–dimensional transformation in the mindset of the society towards equality and equity viz-a-viz gender. Most importantly, the focus of the committee was not on increasing literacy alone, but on bringing the attitudinal change in all the stakeholders. (Walikhanna, 2013)

There are many reasons that the girls’ education must be supported; some of them are:

- **Future educated generations**: An African proverb says, “If we educate a boy, we educate one person. If we educate a girl, we educate a family and a whole nation.” By sending a girl to school, she is far more likely to ensure that her children also receive an education. As many claim, investing in a girl’s education is investing in a nation.

- **Decrease infant mortality**: The children of educated women are less likely to die before their first birthday. The girls who receive an education are less likely to contact HIV and AIDS, and thus, less likely to pass it onto their children. The primary education alone helps reduce infant mortality significantly, and secondary education helps even more. The ‘Girls Global Education Fund’ reports that when a child is born to a woman in Africa who hasn’t received an education, he or she has a one in five chance of dying before an age of five.

- **Decrease child marriage**: The child marriage often results in the end of the girl’s schooling. The result is illiterate or barely literate young mothers without adequate tools to build healthy, educated families. On an average, for every year a girl stays in school past fifth grade, her marriage is delayed by a year. The educated girls typically marry later, when they are better able to bear and care for their children.

- **Decrease maternal mortality**: The educated women (with greater knowledge of health care and fewer pregnancies) are less likely to die during pregnancy, childbirth, or during the postpartum period. The increased education of girls also leads to more female health care providers to assist with prenatal medical care, labor and delivery, delivery complications and emergencies, and follow-up care.

- **Decrease population explosion**: The educated women tend to have fewer (and healthier) babies. In a study conducted by UNESCO in Brazil in the year 2000, it was found that the literate women had an average of 2.5 children while the illiterate women had an average of six children.

- **Increase involvement in political process**: The educated women are more likely to participate in political discussions, meetings, and decision making, which in turn promotes a more representative, effective government.

- **Decrease domestic and sexual violence**: The educated girls and women are less likely to be victims of domestic and sexual violence or to tolerate it in their families.

- **Decrease support for militancy**: As women become more educated, they are less likely to support militancy and terrorism.

- **Improve socioeconomic growth**: The educated women have a greater chance of escaping poverty, leading healthier and more productive lives, and raising the standard of living for their children, families, and communities.
With increased awareness in the people, more and more girls are getting better education and many-a-times they pursue higher education. They are showing their capabilities at workplace too, and reaching the Management positions. There are situations now that the girl could be more educated than the equal age or elder boy. This may also mean that she is better placed in her professional career in comparison to a boy. This is in a way reverse gender gap. In 1960s in United States, the bachelor’s degrees ratio between men and women was two; that is, the men count was two times that of the women count. In mid-1980s, a reverse pattern was observed. Nearly 57 per cent college students were women, and women earned one-third more bachelor’s degrees than men (Lehigh University, 2016).

The reverse gender gap could cause some of the following issues:

- **Match fixing:** In a traditional Indian culture, where the male members are expected to lead the family, a highly educated girl may face problems during match fixing for her marriage. If she is working and that too at a higher position than the boy, this may add to more problems. Also, the educated girl may not agree to marry to a boy with less education than her.

- **Preference to girls:** Most of the teachers are females. Instinctively, they may promote girls more than the boys. The girls may thereby get better grades in comparison to the boys (Lehigh University, 2016).

- **Discrimination at workplace:** It was reported that ‘Yahoo’ women executives fired a male editorial member to make room for more women in the editorial board (Miller, 2016).

- **Job opportunities:** Some jobs are considered stereotypes for women; for example, teaching field, medical nursing care field etc. Also at times, women may get preference in hiring, promotion and good assignments (Bohnet, et al., n.d.).

- **Reservation:** Some places allow reservation or minimum quota for women. These may amount as special privileges to women.

In Indian urban cities, there is a growing trend of husband and wife, both working. Many families look forward to such arrangements, some of the reasons are mentioned as below:

- **Economic prosperity:** In urban cities, the cost of living is high and the added incomes of husband and wife give faster path to economic prosperity. The family can fulfill many of their wishes and dreams in their younger age.

- **Flexibility in difficult times:** In unforeseen difficult times like lost job, medical issues etc., the working of spouse turns out to be a great help.

- **Sense of independence:** This is a good feeling in the family.

- **Support to family:** Even though there is a trend of satellite family in place of joint family, the economic growth adds and gives leverage to the support within the family circle, making them prosperous and more attached with each other.

The above benefits are possible and dependent on women’s education to a large extent.

**Survey Study**

A survey was conducted in the urban cities to explore and evaluate the women’s education contribution to various aspects to gender bias issues. The sample distribution with respect to their attributes are given in Figure 1.
The survey questions were framed to study some patterns on the gender bias. The generalized questions and their responses are as under.

Q1. Perception that females should be less educated than males; a highly educated girl is less likely to get marriage match in comparison to less educated girl; and there are more problems than benefits in the family, where both husband and wife are working.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perception</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>30.2</td>
<td>30.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>42.9</td>
<td>73.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can’t Say</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>84.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>95.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>63</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The responses show that majority of people agree that female education would not act as hindrance in marriage matching and it would be beneficial for the family as a whole.
Q2. Perception that male members should only have the responsibility to earn and support the family; the educated women should also do the job and financially support the family; and there is more strain and fatigue in working female in comparison to non-working female.

| Table 2 |
|-----------------|-------|--------|-----------------|
|                | Frequency | Percent | Cumulative Percent |
| Strongly Disagree | 11     | 17.5    | 17.5             |
| Disagree         | 15     | 23.8    | 41.3             |
| Can’t Say        | 10     | 15.9    | 57.1             |
| Agree            | 18     | 28.6    | 85.7             |
| Strongly Agree   | 9      | 14.3    | 100.0            |
| Total            | 63     | 100.0   |                  |

The responses show a near balance of opinions. Though female education is preferred, but there is thin line majority that educated women should also do job and financially support the family. There were few descriptive responses also in the questionnaire replies. These opined that it can be a matter of individual priority and/or need regarding women doing the job.

Conclusion

The study gave the findings that women education would result into many gains. By reduction/elimination of female gender bias, the society as a whole will get benefitted. An educated woman understands the importance of education in her life and promotes this culture for betterment of the society. The upfront issues are more of temporary in nature. With time, the education levels of both the genders will stabilize and equalize. This will form uniformity in the society and reduce the gender bias or gap.

Disclaimer: The survey questions were for study purpose only and have no relation with the author’s/editors’ thinking, beliefs or opinions etc.

References

http://www.montana.edu/nsfadvance/documents/PDFs/resources/WhenPerformanceTrumpsGenderBias
Available at: https://coe.lehigh.edu/content/reverse-gender-gap
[Accessed 7 March 2016].

Available at: http://www.voicesofyouth.org/en/posts/why-we-should-support-girls--4
[Accessed 17 February 2016].

Miller, C., 2016. *Yahoo Accused of Reverse Gender Bias by Fired Male*. [Online]
Available at: http://www.therecorder.com/id=1202748545962/Yahoo-Accused-of-Reverse-Gender-Bias-by-Fired-Male-Worker
[Accessed 7 March 2016].

Available at: https://www.w4.org/en/voices/against-gender-discrimination-india-teachers-lead-combat/
[Accessed 17 February 2016].

Available at: http://www.yourarticlelibrary.com/india-2/gender-discrimination-in-india-6-major-causes/47671/
[Accessed 17 February 2016].