

IS THERE A CORRELATION BETWEEN FINANCIAL INDEPENDENCE AND EMPOWERMENT IN THE LIVES OF WOMEN?

Radhika Sethi

University of Delhi

DOI: 10.46609/IJSSER.2022.v07i01.011 URL: <https://doi.org/10.46609/IJSSER.2022.v07i01.011>

Received: 15 Jan. 2022 / Accepted: 25 Jan. 2022 / Published: 31 Jan. 2022

ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to examine the correlation between financial independence and empowerment in the lives of women. In doing so, it measures the qualitative and the quantitative aspects of the correlation through secondary sources. The facts and the figures illuminate the interrelation among three major components of the paper ie. education, financial independence and women empowerment. The paper also introduces the readers to the present condition of women in India and examines how far it has improved, if at all. Finally, it explores the changes needed for their betterment and recommends measures which can empower the lives of women in India.

Keywords: Patriarchy, women empowerment, education, financial literacy, financial independence, feminism.

Introduction

The issue of gender equality and women empowerment is not a contemporary one. Though progress has been made in the condition of women, the gender norms and roles prevail. Women are still viewed as homemakers and men as breadwinners, this division further divides the way in which each perceives their role and the way in which they proceed with their lives. The stereotypical division of labour has not yet ended. Even today, it is rare to find men contributing in household work or being comfortable with the idea of their wives earning more than them etc. It is a question of pride and self worth for a man to be “less” than his wife.

The gendered division of labour within the home ensures that the women are expected to find themselves tasked with routine unpaid labour in the domestic setting. They are expected to

perform a set of roles that are different from those performed by men. Women, as homemakers, are required to perform household chores, take care of the family, raise children and other domestic labour that is not even counted as labour. Yet, they are required to complete these services. On the contrary, men move outside of home to earn. Their role and duties thus performed are given more importance and seen as worthy of praise because they facilitate sustenance of the family. This role, because of its association with money, gives men importance in society and respect. The interpretation of these roles places women at a social disadvantage, in terms of their worth as per tasks performed.

Furthermore, the financial security granted by men and residing with them places them at a superior position in society. This structure places women at an autonomic disadvantage and makes them dependent on men. This scenario exploits women and does not allow them to be masters of their lives. The social system driven by men is responsible for infantilization of women and economic disparity furthers this phenomenon. Economic equality between men and women will reduce this disparity. It will allow women to circumvent the cycle of exploitation that they face, because of their dependence on the men in their life for access to basic resources gained through finances like housing & shelter, food, clothing etc.

Census of India indicates, 21% of women are deemed financially independent. This has grave repercussions on women, not just psychologically and to their self confidence but also in terms of their inability to escape relationships and marriages that turn abusive, for the lack of secure alternatives. Education remains a fundamental base towards securing financial independence and stability. Educating women will allow them to make themselves financially stronger and self-sufficient. A cyclical process will be initiated where educated women will have access to well paying jobs and further be able to move across decisions in their life that are right for them - including leaving abusive marriages, but also in a day to day manner that involves exercising their choice.

While the democratic system does give women equal rights on paper and allows them to vote, stand for office, participate in polity and civil society, disallows anyone to discriminate against them in hirings - the problem in implementing these ideas is with the mentality of the civic body. A holistic change would involve both top-down level implementations like change in laws, like changing marriageable age of girls to 21 from 18 and bottom-up level impact by ensuring that a mindset change is initiated which ensures that child marriage is not viewed as a lucrative option for the girl child.

The Supreme Court of India, on 17th February 2020 passed a ruling enabling women to serve as

commanders in the Indian army. Prior to this the general trend reported by higher ups in the army was situated around an inherently sexist logic wherein women leaders were deemed incapable of leading and having juniors follow their orders. This understanding was justified on the basis of the argument that women were not as fit as men and could not gain the same respect in the forces as their male counterparts. The armed forces are a government institution, despite this there was an inherent patriarchy at play. This shows how ingrained patriarchy, gender norms and opportunities are to the way women can proceed with their lives in society.

Background

The sexist division of labour in the contemporary world has its roots ingrained in the past. Even at the present time an evident difference can't be seen in the state of women in India. Till date women are responsible for the upbringing of children and running household errands. Apparently, the chores performed by women are not of greater economic significance. The biased culture in India has always given women a disadvantaged edge and machismo has denied women the freedom to work and be breadwinners for themselves.

The unjust biases prevailing in order are due to the false beliefs and notions set by the society. The cultural norms are set in an inequitable way. The choices are distinguished between the sexes from the very birth of the child. From splitting of colours to splitting of the ideal manner of behaviour, our society has divided everything between men and women. Girls in our culture are brought up to be humble, kind and trained to be good mothers and good wives. On the contrary, boys are brought up to be carefree, controlling and aggressive in front of their wives. The culture driven society has taught women to be submissive and men to be dominant. The cyclic inheritance of dogma has accounted for exploitation of women in India.

According to 2011 census, the sex ratio of India is 943 females per 1000 males. In some parts of our country, people are involved in unfair practises like female foeticide. The United Nations estimates 2,000 unborn girls are illegally aborted in India everyday. Ostensibly, people of India still prefer to have a boy child over a girl child, considering them a liability.

Statistics determine, greater negligence is seen when it comes to girl child's education. People belonging to lower- middle class income groups prioritise male child's education. The literacy rate of India in 2018 shows 82.37% for men and 65.79% for women which indicates a wide contrast. The Gross Enrollment Ratio has improved for women. GER for males is 26.9 and for females is 27.3. State of women is stepping ahead with the growing educated population in India. Government is putting forward various schemes to sensitise masses about the significance of girl child education. Beti Bachao Beti Padhao has drastically improved GER from 77.95 in 2014-15

to 81.32 2019-20. Gradually people are understanding the significance of educating a girl child but still wide-reaching awareness is much needed.

In comparison to men, women account for only 19.9% of the total labour force in India. Women tend to quit their jobs due to the baggage of responsibilities. It has been observed that women give up their jobs during their child bearing years. Societal pressure and uneven distribution of their responsibilities compel them to be the home makers. Most of the women prefer to take up traditional jobs to balance out between their career and their family. That is why the teaching profession in India is highly occupied by women as it offers flexible working hours. Women in India are equipped with rights and free to opt for the profession of their choice but the expectations of our culture doesn't allow women to fully devote themselves in their career. Opportunities laid by the Constitution of India are similar for men and women but they are left utilised by women in India.

Discussion

It has been observed, financial dependency and exploitation is directly correlated to each other. This has led to a monotonic atmosphere for women in India. The working sector in India is male dominated, giving them the vantage to over power the society. Equity in financial independence will greatly contribute towards ending the cycle of exploitation. The ability to sustain themselves will empower women. It will enable them to put forward their school of thought and boldly represent themselves.

Infantilization of women in families has denied women to be the part of any monumental decisions. Dependency for self sustenance forces women to go through sufferings in marital affairs. Statistics show 16% of women have reported cases of domestic violence in India. Cases have been reported regarding physical abuse, sexual abuse, and mental abuse. Women are forced to stay in toxic marriages because they have no other means to support themselves. Bihar has reported maximum no. of cases under Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act 2016 (as per NCRB report) i.e. 171 cases out of 437 cases. Bihar also has the lowest female literacy rates in the country. A wide gap is seen in the literacy rates for females in comparison to their male counterparts. Overall Male and Female literacy rate is 70.32% and 53.57% in Bihar respectively.

Education can be the foundation of independence. It gives voices to people and makes them capable of putting forward their opinion. Education aids people to use the given rights effectively and confidently move in the society. Patriarchal circle has turned toxic to women in the society. This has snatched away the sense of belief from themselves. Most of the women in

India are leading an approval-seeking hesitant life. When a woman is unmarried, she lives a life laid by her father. After she's married, husbands take over this authority. Education becomes obligatory when one wishes to lead a life on their own terms. It will help women be stronger mentally and financially. Education will help them to be capable of putting forward their valid opinions. Education and financial stability will empower women to stand for their rights and confront the unjust behaviour of the society wisely.

The government can play a significant role in advancing equality in education. Government can launch different schemes and policies promoting girl child education. It is the role of the government to spread awareness to the masses about the importance of educating a girl child. Government has initiated various schemes such as Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, Sukanya Samaridhi Yojna, Dhanlaxmi scheme etc. but the illiterate population is unable to avail the benefits of the scheme due to lack of knowledge. Government should work effectively on promoting its schemes and policies so that every section of the society can benefit from it. Government can also reserve seats for women in educational institutions, parliamentary bodies, government jobs etc. to empower them. Government can introduce women entrepreneurship programs and grant them loans at a low rate of interest for their start ups to help them to be self employed. The Government of India can work upon skill development to enhance earning potential. Through the efforts of the government, the condition of women can be improved.

Public policies introduced by the government can only be fruitful when people of India avail the opportunities provided by the government. People of India need to broaden their horizons and let women live their lives on their own terms. India is a democratic country and it advances equality in every sphere without any biases but it is the choice of the people to treat women as equals or inferiors. Parents should educate their children irrespective of their gender. Every woman has a right to work and sustain herself. The Government of India has introduced various policies to empower women but the cultural gender biases and societal pressure doesn't let women take advantage of the lying opportunities. Government and the people need to walk hand in hand for the desired change in our country.

Conclusion

Educating the woman will not only make her self sufficient and independent but also it is the basis of the country's development. A nation with an illiterate population can never be developed. While the GDP should not be the contributing factor to advance the cause of educating the girl child, the impact of female population in joining the workforce is directly proportional to a positive growth in the country's GDP.

The core of financial independence lies in the imparting of proper education and financial independence will have a direct impact on the lives of women. They will have access to more equal treatment and life when they can sustain themselves and do not seek sustenance from men. Financial independence is also directly linked to the freedom of choice and will ensure liberty and freedom to women.

To conclude, the interconnectedness of financial liberty, education and freedom are as common sensical in their appearance as they are backed by data both on economic growth and lower crimes against women. In this manner, they display the positive trademarks of growth for women in a country, and women globally.

References

1. Dixon, A. *Women in India's Economic Growth*, The World Bank, March 16, 2018. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/speech/2018/03/17/women-indias-economic-growth>
2. Suen, S. *The education of women as a tool in development: challenging the African maxim*, Hydra Journal, 2013. <http://journals.ed.ac.uk/hydra/article/view/720#:~:text=The%20old%20African%20proverb%20E2%80%9CIf,when%20men%20predominated%20education%20opportunities>
3. Business Section, *Time to talk about a financially independent woman*, Hindustan Times, August 2021. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/business/time-to-talk-about-financial-independence-woman-101629714957276.html>
4. UN Women Report '*Rural Women and the Millennium Development Goals*', UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Rural Women, 2012. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/commission-on-the-status-of-women-2012/facts-and-figures>
5. *India: Literacy rate in 2011, 2015 and 2018*, by Gender, Compiled by Statista. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/271335/literacy-rate-in-india/>
6. Ministry of Women and Child Development, *Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Scheme Impact*, Press Release, January 2021. <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=1691725>
7. Khandelwal, T. *Violence Against Women: A State Level Analysis in India*, Ministry of

Women and Child Development.

<https://ssi.edu.in/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Internship-Report-by-Ms.-Tanisha-Khandelwal.pdf>

8. *Accelerating progress and opportunities across India for every girl and every boy*, UNICEF Report.

<https://www.unicef.org/india/what-we-do/gender-equality>

9. *Enrolment of girls up, gender gap in higher education down*, The New IndianExpress, June 2021. <https://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/2021/jun/11/enrolment-of-girls-up-gender-gap-in-higher-education-down-2314544.html#:~:text=The%20gross%20enrolment%20ratio%20>