

Women, Education and the Society: Exploring Myths in the perspective of Educational Hopes and Discouragement Effect

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ABSTRACT

The twentieth century can be recognized as an expansion of public education systems worldwide particularly in the context of developing economies like India. From 1947 to recent times, state plays a very fundamental role in developing national education system and society acts in response. The performance of national education system falls in question considering low literacy rate, high drop-out and low human capital index relative to other developing countries. There are various types of prevalent myths which justify the national education system and for the above indicators that society is responsible for it. Some of these are: people have a little interest and parental indifference plays a negative role in education attainment. Poor and illiterate parents don't know the importance of education, as a corollary, students don't pay attention in schools, colleges and university level education. According to Dreze and Sen(2002), these myths take the form of oversimplified, single-focus 'explanations' of the problem of educational deprivation in India. We tried to explore this in a different way by conducting interviews with women of various age groups with respect to their social and economic class in the village system. This study is micro empirical and qualitative in nature and tries to understand myths through interviews with women across economic and social class. Information is collected from hundred women and twenty young girls across ten villages of two districts Mansa and Bathinda. The ides of this paper is to understand predominantly how women think about these prevailing myths about education. Because, we understand that in a patriarchal society, women act as subordinate to men who decide and organize household decisions. There is no say of women in the decision making about the education of her children in the family. The main finding of the paper is that women and girls are very much conscious about the meaning of education which helps to dispel the myths about education.

Keywords: Economies, young girls, Bathinda, economic and social class

The twentieth century can be recognized as an expansion of public education systems worldwide particularly in the context of developing economies like India. However, education deprivation has been a burning topic across the globe. Developing countries have high proportions of their illiterate populations across class, caste, religion and even gender. Since 1947, Indian state has been playing a very principal role in the development of national education system and at the same time, society acts in the response. The performance of Indian national education system falls in question because of low literacy rate, high drop-out and low human

capital index in comparison to other developing countries. In this context, some myths in education have been prevailing which justify the performance of national education system and try to conceive as nothing wrong in policy manufacturing but people are responsible for education deprivation in India. Some of these are: people have little interest in education and parental indifference plays a negative role in poor education attainment. Poor and illiterate parents don't know the importance of education as corollary students don't pay attention in the schools, colleges and university level education. Their attitude towards education is not encouraging.

People are not interested in education because they feel that there is no hope for the betterment of their lives and they are discouraged because they could not find employment after completing school or college education. Most of the teachers at each level from primary to higher education have a broad understanding that students have very little interest in education. Besides low employment opportunities are the reason for little interest of the students and parents. According to Dreze and Sen (2002), these myths take the form of oversimplified, single-focus 'explanations' of the problem of educational deprivation in India. Mani (2014) stands out in a different context that the myth of merit and social mobility hide the truth that without equality of conditions and opportunity, right to equality amounts to nothing. Genuine equality of opportunity requires equality of conditions which can only be ensured through social transformation and a shift in mindset. Mass poverty, suffering, and violence flow from an unjust system cannot be set right by individual effort.

In the opening section, we focused on what does myth mean and what types of myths are prevalent in the stratified and hierarchical societies like India? In the context of myths, Combs (1982) argues that when human beliefs are accurate and positive, great progress can often be made in human affairs, whereas when such beliefs they are false or negative, progress is hampered, and human life itself may be jeopardized. Myths may continue for generations simply because they are never seriously challenged. This results in what Chales Subernan, a noted educational critic, calls mindlessness, a state in which people do things simply because "it has always been so" (cited in Combs, 1982). Whatever the sources of myths and whatever be the reasons for their continued existence, the destructive effects they wield upon our society are immense. Mani (2014) critically argues that closed societies –of which pre-modern and caste dominated India is a prototype- tend to represent individuals symbolically, identifying persons through the symbols of their caste or rank rather than depicting their individual characteristics. The objective of the ruling castes in closed societies is to perpetuate illusions and mystification about society and culture, thus keeping people away from reality of historical truth. For this reason, closed

societies like India have traditionally elevated myths and legends over historical facts, hagiography over biography, iconography and symbolism over realism, education of the few over education of the many. In the same vein, Tudor (1972) clearly indicates that the view of the world that we find in a myth is always a practical view. Its aim is either to advocate a certain course of action or to justify acceptance of an existing state of affairs.

Every generation has been victim of its own myths. Some myths are transferred from one generation to another generation, sometimes in the old form or old myth in the new form. Our old generations had victim of many education myths for instance if someone studies he would be mentally ill or he/she would be blind if study. At the cultural level, people who belong to scheduled castes or backward castes, they don't require education because they are supposed to do menial and despised occupations in the hierarchal society. Only upper caste communities have dire need of education because they are supposed to carry out coveted professions. And people who belong to the lower strata of the society have low Intelligent Quotient (IQ) and low mental state as compared to rich people they have sharp minds and high Intelligent Quotient for example a well-known adage, *jehdi kothi daane ohde kamle vi sayane (Money makes the mare go)*. In recent political and social environment, we are also the victims of our own myths as our ancestors have been the victims of theirs. In the contemporary times, some education myths are very common among the school, college and university teachers, policy makers and other professionals.

This paper is divided into five sections including introduction as a section one. Section two is based on the focus of the study. Section third is based on methodology and basic information about the respondents. Section four traces empirical evidence based on field survey and findings are presented in section five.

The Focus of the Paper

Understanding of the myths in education is very significant to analyze the situation of education attainment in India. As economic survey (2013-14) reports that while declining levels of education achievements are a cause of concern, it is unclear how much of the decline is because of lower levels

of learning, and how much is because schools are reaching out to enroll students with lower preparation than they did earlier. In the same vein, it is noted that in India's highly stratified society, government data itself reveals that 78 percent of the people live on less than twenty rupee a day (GOI, 2007). Do the people have the affordability and accessibility of education with this income? According to Kumar (2014), with the price of education going up and the purchasing power, by even the most conservative estimates, not going up sufficiently higher education would remain inaccessible as a commodity to most of citizenry. In other paper, Kumar (2014) critically analyzes the neoliberal policies of education and argues that where private capital has a decisive role (as it has now) nurtures only undemocratic and authoritarian ethos that has no space for the poor, dalits and women in their imagination.

We try to argue that some education myths prevailed in the academia and policy circles with special reference to rural poor and illiterate. Our notion regarding myths in education is based on two sources of information. Firstly, two published work; one is the probe team report on basic education. Second, a paper by Jean Dreaze and Amartya Sen titled, "Basic Education as a Political Issue" is being taken into consideration. In this paper, they explored some education myths and tried to dispel these myths. Secondly, our conception is based on our discussions with our colleagues. We both teach in the rural college which belongs to Punjabi University, Patiala (Punjab) which broadly established for the rural students. Students approach this college from nearby villages of Bathinda and Mansa districts of Punjab. Majority of the students of the college belong to landless, small and marginal farmer and low income families. Mostly they are the first generation in their families who reached college to get higher education. The discussions with our colleagues are based on some academic issues e.g. how we can improve our education achievements? How we can improve attendance in the classrooms? How we can improve reading habits of the undergraduate students? How we can increase the capabilities/capacities of the students regarding languages, historical and contemporary political, economic and social issues? These are some fundamental issues which need attention

of the academia to examine education system in a coherent manner. Majority of the teachers have the similar opinion that students and their parents don't have any interest in education. They are here in the college for three year just for entrainment; they will finally get involved in their parental occupational activities. If they are not interested, Why students and parents show little or no interest and dishearten regarding to their education? The fundamental question arises who don't have interest in education? In the same manner to understand regarding rural poor, how much we know about these people: their life dynamics, their income and consumption requirements and many more things which are associated with their daily life. As a whole, we are not fully aware of their everyday realities. It may be helpful to debunk a few myths that have clouded clear thinking on this subject. Each of these myths contains a grain of truth has often been bloated out of proportions in public debates, leading to much confusions (Dreaze and Sen, 2002).

Keeping these annotations in view, this paper is an attempt to understand about myths in education with special reference to the underprivileged section of the society. We focused on Dalit women who live in rural areas of the Bathinda and Mansa districts. The scheduled castes are among the socially and educationally utter disadvantaged groups and women in the same section are highly disadvantaged in Punjabi society. We have tried to comprehend the issues that what they think about education system, education attainment and interest in education. This is an attempt to understand above questions as the background of paper with interactions to the respondents.

Methodology and Basic Information Regarding Respondents

To understand myths in education, we have followed case study approach. With the help of case studies, we tried to explore myths which are prevailing in recent times, particularly in the context of rural illiterate poor. We interviewed one hundred illiterate women and twenty students who dropped their college studies across twenty villages from Mansa and Bathinda Districts of Punjab. The age group which we considered was between thirty five to fifty years old, keeping in

mind that their children were getting education in schools and colleges. Twenty students who left their college studies in between, they were eighteen to twenty year range. All respondents belong to rural landless households who are working as attached/casual labour in agriculture and nonfarm activities. We select respondents randomly from the twenty villages as we went dalit colonies in the respective villages. The average earnings of the households were sixty four thousand nine hundred and ninety (Rs.64990) and range between thirty five thousand to eighty five thousand. This paper builds an argument with the help of presenting few accounts while we interviewed one hundred women and twenty students.

Empirical Evidence

Myth 1-Education Efforts: Poor, Illiterate and Rural Parents are not interested in Education Attainment

One of the major myths in education is that poor, illiterate and rural parents show a little interest in their children's education. Second, they usually are not in the favour of girl education. Third, there are high dropouts and low literacy because of the economic dependence of the poor families on their children. This myth of parental indifference is astonishingly widespread especially in official circles, where it provides a convenient rationalization for India's low schooling levels (Probe team, 1999). That is why, rural literacy is relatively lower than urban literacy.

In contrast to this supposed indifference, we find that most parents and even their elder siblings attach importance to the education of their children and sibling. To explore this myth in the context of two propositions: one, if literacy is low, then finally parents are responsible. If yes, this myth pertain truth.

A dalit woman who has widowed at the age of 19, now at the age of 40 tells that I am only bread earner for the family and have three college going children but I have never thought to drop even one child from school or college, whether we eat two meals a day with chutni or dal. And in our community, girls are married off at a very young age. These are very terrible times when girls are out of home. We are fed up to listen news on television, radio or conversations with our community people about rape of girls and teasing in the buses, on

the way from bus stand to college and other places. And sometimes we feel apprehensions to send girls outside (Sarabjit Kaur).

As Dreaze and Sen (2002) argued that this is not to deny that parental indifference does exist in specific cases—this is the “grain of truth” or “contain a germ of truth” in the myth of parental indifference. Parental indifference could be traced. A lady asserts:

They are not getting 'real education'. After completing their education, boys don't work with their father and girls don't have interest to do household chores. If we ask for work they argued we are literate, we will not work (Aaki, 42).

To analyse that students in the schools and at college level, they are not interested in education, either they drop out or they get admissions in educational institutions but fail to attend the classes. To explore this issue, this account reflects the situation as:

We are working on the fields during peak seasons. Our children, one is in 9th class, other is a college going, in these days they both work with us. We could able to earn some money by which we can buy wheat for the whole year and some cloths for the family (Rani Kaur, 42).

Again the myth in question contains an element of truth, which must not be overlooked. If young adults are engaged in agricultural activities as labourers, it is not compatible with schooling and college times. A student of B.A. first year, studying economics could not sit in internal examination and wrote an application for requesting to the teacher to hold examination on new date.

..... I cannot sit in the examination because this is the time of harvesting wheat crop. We are seven members including young and adult. From 5am to 11 pm, we are busy in fields. If we did not work, we could not pay for wheat flour at market rate when it reached twenty to thirty rupee per kilogram. I wish to study and wish to come regularly but my family circumstances don't set aside me to do that (Manpreet Kaur, 18).

Sometimes teacher feel that children are not much involved in household chores and agriculture activities, even then they don't not come to the college. It can be traced this issue with this story:

When we work in the fields collectively with the fellow labourers, we need to work from 5am to 6pm for the

whole day. Either we drop for an hour, it would be difficult to distribute money equally which we earn over the season. It is not any hard rule but people generally practicing it. When we do labour, then our children stayed back in the (at) homes, they do household chores and care animals and they study at home. Any we don't involve our children into the labour because they are studying in the schools and colleges. During this period, they could not go to the schools and colleges (Shinder Kaur, 41)

There are enough evidences to support the female literacy has been relatively low as compared to male literacy across Indian states. It has been a social norm in patriarchic and hierarchal society but attitude of the parents and the society have been also changing regarding girl child education. If this is fact about female literacy, it demands to explore this issue and need to understand what actually rural women and society think? All the respondents were in favour of girl child education one or the other reasons except only 2 percent of the women. They were not in the favour of college education but they were in favour of school education. When we talked about education of children irrespective of gender, all respondents accepted that there should be no difference of education among siblings whether it is male or female. We were astonished to know that this is in a state where high female feticides, gender discrimination at inter and intra household level, no right of property and social environment which act as against girl/woman. To explore this issue, we came to know that they differentiate the purpose of education among siblings. One version by Karmjit kaur, 47 asserts in the context of gender:

.....education should be equal for both sexes because a girl has an equal right to get education.

When the parents feel that girl's education is important for the betterment of the family as a whole, in this context, Harpreet kaur, 49, primary passed tells:

This is an era of education. You can easily find a school even in a corner. Nobody cares illiterate woman. Education is compulsory to get minimum employment and to do any other work.

According to Balwant Kaur, aged 45, girl education is relatively important because she can stand by her own. And can 'care' her family.

Kulwinder kaur, aged 45, illiterate woman argues that child can only get knowledge if he/she study and can know about real society after getting education.

Basanti kaur, 53, illiterate woman points out that life is incomplete without education. Education is must for all children in the society. Education is not only to get job (nokri) but it is also significant for live a good quality life.

I have two daughters and a son. My all three siblings are studying. They are getting some scholarships and which is a definite support for their studies. If scholarships are not available, it is very difficult to even think about education. My both girls are working at home and works in agricultural activities. We think that girls should study till they got scholarships from the government. If they don't get, it would be difficult for us for spending money on their education and on their marriages because they are in the age of marriage. We don't have any other source of income except physical labour (Gurmeet Kaur, 42)

These are some accounts which explore how rural poor women and students who study or dropped out, from the colleges are interested in education attainment. And, these accounts hint that what are the reasons which affect their interest in education.

Myth 2 Discouragement Effect

The context of the myth is that the attitude of the parents and students regarding education is not encouraging and unenthusiastic. Discouragement effect could be seen in the village society with popular saying has been in the air of village; '*ghahyia de put ne tan gha he khotna*' (social upward mobility is not possible). For the investigation of the myth, we focused on women and young girls, who dropped out from college. According to Dreaze and Sen (2002), the discouragement effect applies not only to parents but also to children. In this case, we collected information about the girls, who belong to lower castes and are currently studying in the colleges of both districts and. It would be a mistake to consider that parents care only for the economic benefits of education. Moreover, it is also a mistaken belief that unemployment rate has been rising over time, so people are discouraged for getting education to their wards.

But our field survey found that illiterate parents belong to poor strata of the society perceive

education for the non economic benefits as well. There are some common expressions used to convey this sentiment.

One common sentiment is that we are illiterate but we could not bear that our children would be illiterate like us. Our fate is dreadful due to poverty and illiteracy, but we feel that our coming generation will not share similar fate.

It is common among the rural poor families that from the age of 7-8 years, child whether male or female starts helping to their parents, sibling and community members. We can easily testify how all family members of labouring poor are engaged in cotton picking. They wake up at four, make meals and start work at sharp 5am to 8pm and go to bed at approximately 11pm after finishing household chores. This is the schedule of working hours of each family member in a day during peak seasons of farming activities. This is the answer why some students drop college education in between?

A girl named Sabjeet Kaur aged, 18, studying in B.A. second year as a private candidate, said that I did First year as a regular student in the college. I dropped out from the college because there is only one bus service from our village to city. College opens at 9.30am and bus reaches to city at 10am. So, I could not attend first period throughout the year and I failed in the subject.

Another girl, who failed in two papers in B.A. first year, told that most of our teachers are coming from cities and belong to high class. They do not understand our problems. Sometimes I feel I must talk to my teacher, then after thinking much, dropped idea to talk about..... They generally talked in the class, you, coming from villages cannot learn English, computer and other subjects. I feel alienated because I am only girl studying from my village. I cannot share my problems with any one, my parents are illiterate and I decide to leave my studies after B.A. and wish to learn something about beauty parlour to earn money (Sukhpal Kaur, 19)

Veerpal Kaur, aged twenty replies in this context:

My mother died last year. I am only sister of two brothers. All they include my father work as casual workers. Earlier, I studied up to B.A. second year. I could not complete my study due to the death of my mother. My mother supported a lot when she alive. After the death of my mother, I make food for all the

members, clean the house and supposed to do other related works.

Sometimes the economic and social environment of the family decides their attitude regarding education even they feel it is benefitted a lot. We met a lady named Rajjo, aged 32, sit outside of an unremarkable poor house, talks as:

We both are partly educated; trying to stay alive, bringing up two children, live in a one-room home, without kitchen, bathroom and toilet. My husband is suffering from T.B. Would you expect us to think about education? We live like animals. We don't have proper clothes, now winter is approaching, we don't have even a single quilt, nor shoes. Please tell us how we can educate our children in these circumstances? We wish that our children would go to school. Can you suggest the way.....

Similarly, a woman, named Nashib Kaur, aged fifty, illiterate affirmed that,

Education attainment depends on the condition of the house and income level. If income increases, we can send our children to schools. It is no doubt that education is necessary and it is the era of literate people. If children get education, they will get some work in the cities and they can buy each quality commodity at a fair price from the market.

Karmjit Kaur, 47, an illiterate asserts that if our children will get education, they will free from slave life as we are living in the village. I do extra labour to meet the payments of fees and other rising expenditure.

Pooja, aged 36, primary level educated woman, if I studied, I could get small job as aanganwari worker or asha worker which would be better than labour (majdoori). Why I did this routine works in the houses and dung cleaning and other menial work in the villages, then, there would have been no need to do. And I might help study my children in their studies as well.

Woman named Angrej Kaur, aged 40, primary passed tells:

We could also care our children as the literate people care their children. We have to know about our children's performance in the schools from others as we don't know because we are illiterate. Teachers are like our God. Whatever they say, we follow their instructions. The teacher of my daughter asked me to send my daughter in the college for higher education,

but there is no bus service which directly goes to the city. It is very hard to think to send my girl to the city.

Seeto Kaur, turned 41, an illiterate woman asserts that the difference between literate and illiterate is as between earth and sky. When an illiterate person talks with literate, feels inferiority. An illiterate person's life is hardly better than animals.

How we and our children discouraged from education attainment a vivid account by Gurmail kaur, aged 39, middle passed tells that,

....when parents could not bear their expenditures and young boys tried to find some works and get money in order to help their parents. They left their education. Because at this very time, they get some money in their hands and free to spend but it runs for very short period and indulge in daily routine works and family expenditure. Then they felt that earned money was relatively low from their routine expenditures.

The mother of college dropped student stated that my son, Wakeel Singh had dropped out of college, because he did Elementary Teacher Training and got eligible for primary level school teaching. Since he passed ETT, he had engaged with the struggles of unemployed B.Ed and ETT teachers, and doesn't have any hope of job. He dropped from college and started work as internship at a scooter workshop to get training as a scooter mechanic. Second, there is no bread earner in this house except him after the death of his father due to cancer (Bhajan Kaur, 45).

In the late 19th century, John Dewey also emphasized the importance of learning through experience. Rousseau thought that the child "should be taught by experience alone"; the phrase most commonly associated with Dewey is "learning by doing" (Christodoulou, 2014). The vivid account could be seen as:

.... there is no doubt that literate parents can teach their children well. But it is not like that children of illiterate parents can educate their children besides they have full facilities. The main problem is poor economy of the household. And our children also live in society like other children who are literate. We learn from the village community. We learn from school teacher who is coming from city. We, illiterate women meet the college going girl of our community to learn many issues which ultimately help us how to respond various social issues. And moreover, we learn each other's experience (Murti Devi, 45).

From the above accounts, it can be analyzed that even though unfavourable social environment, existence of social barriers, inadequate transport facilities, living hand to mouth, no employment or underemployment conditions, parent's attitude towards education is quite encouraging. On the other, they are sending their wards to school or college for study even knowing high opportunity cost, social barriers and social discouragement, anti-women social environment especially against girls among lower strata in the village time and again.

From the above discussion about the myths in education, we easily understand that poor parents and young generation don't feel at all that education is not important for them or they don't have any meaning of education, they are much aware about the meaning, significance and strength of education. Given the circumstances, they are discouraged by. On the contrary, the sarkari propaganda is on the rise that after affirmative action, positive discriminations, giving stipend to the students, parents and students are not interested in education. Seats are vacant in the colleges and the universities. According to the information in the daily newspapers (June, 2014), some seats remained vacant for M.B.B.S course. It would be a myth in the future that either students are not interested in study M.B.B.S course or the study is so poor in the schools/colleges and other academic institutions, students cannot qualifying the entrance examination. But the reason is fees of the courses have been toiling over the years. That is why; maximum students and parents don't have courage to get admissions in premedical classes. They choose the courses which meet up with low fee structure and suit to their income.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

As Mani (2014) observes that it is common understanding that the differentials of property, power and education are located not in the structure of society but in individuality (personal achievement or failure). Reflecting this attitude, the media, the school, and sarkari propaganda give the impression that educational and economic success is a function of personal achievement and worth, not the hierarchies of caste, class, and gender.

By filling the public space by blurring the difference between myth and reality, the ruling class/caste deliberately demolish the very possibility of any

meaningful discussion about society and its actual functioning. The privileged class/castes safeguard their entitlements to status, property, gender, and education by making them hereditary, biological and psychological indifferences. So, myths allow us to conceal whatever we like to conceal. But if a society is left only with myths, it will be well nigh impossible to understand society in the present and past context and future would be blurred. That is the precise purpose of the state and upper class/ caste to hide actual life histories of the masses and destroy as far as possible the evidence of real events so that the reality could not be reconstructed. As Mani argued that increasing knowledge does not often lead to a more inclusive world, but to a more cunning, covert, and compelling defense of the established power. Public awareness of global inequality has been heightened by outraged by academia, politicians, journalists and civil society groups and non government and super national institutions. There is general understanding about poor who are living below poverty line. But, we don't know about their lives and what they think about their needs?

Lastly, given this gap in our knowledge and prevailing myths regarding poor, we tried to shed light on the real issues that how labouring poor live on so little and think about education. As we watched all this unfold, we were struck by two thoughts that changed our perceptions about their education. First, children's education depends on two broader lines of variables, endogenous variables and exogenous variables. Endogenous variables that effects child's education: parents' education and occupation, income of the households. Exogenous variable that influence the attainment of education: social environment, social barriers, social discouragement, question of affordability, opportunity cost, teacher's behaviour, distance and transportation facilities, institutional environment, facilities in the institutions. Second thought is regarding what is exactly provided by our national education system in the stratified Indian society.

This is a dire need of the time to refute and abandon these myths that deter the progress and trapped the policy implications and does not leave space for debate/ discussions to change attitudes of the policy makers, teachers and reflective organizations. Therefore, radical changes in national education

system are necessary for the survival of rural poor with distinction in the society.

End Notes

The villages of Mansa and Bathinda district are: Laleana, Natt, Burj, Malkana, Teauna, Fatehgarh Nauabad, Saema, Bhagibander, Jeevan Singh Wala, Kamalu, Banawala, Behniwal, Jajjal, Gurusar, Nateha, Dhinger, Singo, Makha, Bangi and Sekhupura.

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