

# Impact of Family Patterns on Education and Gender in South-Asia: The Case for an Expanded Analytical Perspective

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## Abstract

*The link between national poverty level, demographic factors and progress in basic education, as reflected in literacy and primary education enrolment rates, is appropriately emphasized in development discourse. There is room for probing deeper the policy and operational implications of these relationships. Usually neglected, however, are the deep-running social values and norms, expressed in traditional behaviour systems, contributing to social exclusion, especially in terms of gender, which impede change in women's position and gender relations in spite of progress in gender parity in education emphasized in EFA and MDG reports.*

*This paper presents some pertinent data concerning change in income poverty, demography, and literacy and primary level enrolment from South Asian countries, suggesting an interactive relationship. It then argues the case for attention to the often neglected socio-anthropological factors including family and marriage pattern that impact status of women and gender relations.*

**Key Words:** Family pattern and primary education, gender and primary education, Gender and development, Social Anthropology, South Asia.

Recent editions of the Human Development Report (UNDP 2013), the 2012 World Development Report on gender equality and development (World Bank 2011) and the 2011 EFA Global Monitoring Report (UNESCO 2011) provide a range of relevant data pertaining to the multi-dimensional aspects of poverty, Education for All (EFA), and gender in the development process. These data pertaining to progress or stagnation reflect certain characteristics of social anthropology in the South Asia region and their interaction with basic education development.

The gender and demographic changes, products of social attitudes and policies, influence the outcome of economic and other developmental programmes, including that for education. At the same time, progress in poverty alleviation, women's status, life expectancy and child and maternal mortality reflect the impact of education and adult literacy, especially for women. Esther Duflo and Abhijit Banerjee in their insightful analysis of "poor economics" have

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underscored this interaction. (Dufflo and Banerjee 2011). Marlene Lockheed identifies social exclusion as a major factor contributing to exclusion of girls and women from education (Lockheed 2010).

## I. Macro socio-economic indicators and literacy and primary education enrolment

GMR reports have stressed that the impact of education is strongly conditioned by other factors, from macroeconomic and labour market conditions to the state of public health provision and demography. All these point to the need to enlarge the scope of analysis about educational performances

### Income poverty and progress in basic education

Data for income poverty level and literacy and primary enrolment rates for South Asian countries are presented in Tables 1, 2, and 3 which show a positive correlation between basic education indicators and income poverty.

**Table 1: National poverty levels, (urban, rural and national), as defined by governments:**

	survey year	%rural	% urban	% national	survey year	%rural	% urban	% national
Afghanista	--	--			2008	7.5	29.0	<b>36.0</b>
Pakistan	2005	28.1	14.9	23.9	2006	27.0	13.1	<b>22.3</b>
India	1994	37.3	32.4	36.0	2005	28.3	25.7	<b>27.5</b>
Nepal	1996	43.3	21.6	41.8	2004	34.6	9.6	<b>30.9</b>
Bangladesh	2000	52.3	35.2	48.9	2005	43.8	28.4	<b>40.0</b>

*Source: World Bank: WDI 2011, p. 60*

**Table 2: Adult literacy (15+ %)**

	1985-1995			2005-2011			projected 2015
	total	m	f	total	m	f	total
Afghanistan	×						
Pakistan	×			55	69	40	60
India	48	62	34	63	75	51	72
Nepal	33	49	17	60	73	48	66
Bangladesh	35	44	26	57	61	52	61

*Source: UIS 2013*

**Table 3: Youth literacy (15-24 %)**

	1985-1995			2005-2011			projected 2015
	total	m	f	total	m	f	total
Pakistan				71	79	61	77
India	62	74	49	81	88	74	90
Nepal	50	68	33	83	88	78	88
Bangladesh	45	52	38	77	75	78	83

*Source: UIS 2013*

**Table 4: Net enrolment rate in primary education (%)**

	school year ending in					
	1999			2010/11		
	total	m	f	total	m	f
Afghanistan	106	127	84	×		
Pakistan	×			72	77	66
India	×			93	93	92
Nepal	65	73	57	(2012) 97	97	98
Bangladesh	×			(2010) 96	94	98

*Source: GMR 2012/UIS 2013*

The data about poverty level and literacy show that a relatively high poverty level is correlated, as expected, with high adult illiteracy. However, primary enrolment rates have increased significantly, despite poverty, because of the national priority and emphasis on primary education as part of the global EFA effort and increased national commitment in developing countries to compulsory education, often recognising it as a constitutional obligation and as a human rights question. Expansion of primary education has also resulted in increased youth literacy rates for the 15-24 age-group, but the effect on total adult illiteracy for the 15+ population takes longer to become evident.

## II. Demography, child mortality and gender status

Data on literacy and primary education enrolment suggest that these must be seen in the larger context of population growth, poverty and health, urban/rural divide and the rural disadvantage of many of these countries.

Data on demographic factors, fertility, child malnutrition and mortality, and maternal mortality are presented in Tables 5 to 9.

**Table 5: Population Growth Rate in South Asian Countries**

	Population (millions)		Annual growth (%)	
	1990	2012	90-09	2010-15
Afghanistan	18.6	34	2.5	3.1
Pakistan	108.0	180	2.4	1.8
India	849.5	1258	1.6	1.3
Nepal	19.1	31	2.3	1.7
Bangladesh	115.6	152	1.8	1.3

*Source: HDR 2013, p.196*

**Table 6: Fertility and contraception**

	total fertility		adolescent. fertility.rate	contracep. prevalence rate
	birth/woman		birth/1000 girls	any method, % of married women
	1990	2012	2004-12	2004-09
Iran	4.8	1.6	25	79
Afghanistan	8.0	6.0	99	15
Pakistan	6.1	3.2	28	30
India	4.0	2.6	74	54
Nepal	5.2	2.6	86	48
Bangladesh	4.4	2.2	68	53
Myanmar	3.4	2.0	12	41

*Source: HDR 2013, p 158, and 196*

The tables above show that fertility and population growth have declined in all South Asian countries and there is a positive correlation with literacy and primary education expansion reflected in relatively better performance in Bangladesh and Nepal, compared to Afghanistan and Pakistan, and a middle position of India in this respect.

The World Bank report on gender equality says, “contraception uptake is higher when husbands are included in family planning as is the case in BD...fewer children are born as a result.” (World Bank 2011, p.314) It further observes:

In the four decades since Bangladesh gained independence, the average number of children a woman will have during her lifetime, fell from almost 7 to just over 2. School enrolment among girls rose from a third to 56% in 2005. And just in the latter part of the 1990s, labour force participation for young women more than doubled (World Bank 2011, p. 12).

**Table 7: Life expectancy at birth**

	years		M	F
	1990	2012	2009	
Afghanistan	41	60	44	44
Pakistan	61	66.3	67	67
India	58	66	63	66
Nepal	54	67.5	66	68
Bangladesh	54	70	66	68

*Source: HDR 2013, p 146*

**Table 8: Prevalence of child malnutrition and infant mortality**

	% of children under age 5 underweight	infant mortality rate per 1000 live births
	2004-2009	2010
Afghanistan	32.9	71
Pakistan	×	69
India	43.5	43
Nepal	38.8	33
Bangladesh	41.3	33

*Source: HDR 2013, p 168*

**Table 9: Maternal mortality rate**

	per 100,000 live births	
	national. estimates	modeled estimates
	2010	1990
Afghanistan	460	1700
Pakistan	260	490
India	200	570
Nepal	170	870
Bangladesh	240	870

*Source: HDR 2013, p 158*

The maternal mortality rates in Bangladesh and India in 2010 are comparable to Sweden's around 1900 (World Bank 2011, p.78).

The World Bank gender report analysing women's work and property rights states that "a household survey in rural Bangladesh found that 78% of women said they had at some point been forced to cede money to their husbands, and 56% said their husbands had forced them not to work outside the home" (World Bank 2011, p.338). But change of attitude seems to be on the way, as "a recent survey in Bangladesh suggests that 2/3 of household heads (mostly men), believe that their daughters and sons should have similar rights to inherit property, despite existing legal provisions (customary law) that daughters inherit half as much as sons (Ibid., p.353).

Women's control over resources is another critical issue. It is reported that "18% of married women in India and 14% in Nepal are largely silent on how their earned money is spent" (Ibid., 2011, p. 82).

Recent developments in the labour market and education indicate that social norms and employment conditions are slowly changing:

Access to economic opportunities has also brought change in the public sphere. In Bangladesh, the employment of hundreds of thousands of women in the textile industry feminized the urban public

space, creating more gender-equitable norms for women's public mobility and access to public institutions. In the process, Bangladesh women had to redefine and negotiate the terms of purdah, typically reinterpreting it as a state of mind in contrast to its customary expression as physical absence from the public space, modest clothing and quiet demeanor (World Bank 2011, p.268).

The statistical data presented show, as noted, a relationship between literacy and primary school enrolment, on the one hand, and income poverty, on the other, as well as non-income indicators such as life expectancy, child nutrition and mortality, fertility, contraceptive prevalence and maternal mortality. It is clearly a two-way cause and effect relationship re-enforcing each other. It is not a direct linear correlation between income poverty and basic education progress, though Human Development Index (HDI) ranking gives a greater weight to per capita national income. Bangladesh and Nepal have recorded greater progress compared to India and Pakistan in spite of a lag in per capita national income (Table 10). Policy emphasis and implementation strategies, especially in respect of girl's education, make the difference.

**Table :10 Per Capita GNI, HDI and net primary education enrolment**

Country	HDI rank	Per capita GNI 2005 ppp \$	Non-income HDI	Net pry. school enrolment rate 2010-11
Afghanistan	175	1,000	0.353	--
Bangladesh	146	1,785	0.567	96 (98)
India	136	2,435	0.597	93 (92)
Nepal	157	1,137	0.526	97 (98)
Pakistan	146	2,566	0.534	72 (66)

(Enrolment rate in parentheses is for girls. *Source:* UIS 2014)

*Other source:* HDR 2013, pp. 146 and 203

### III. Importance of a socio-anthropological view

The discussion about the interaction of a range of socio-economic indicators and educational development cannot be fully understood if certain socio-anthropological and historical perspectives are neglected, such as the role of the prevailing family patterns in South Asia. It is obvious that traditional complex kinship/family structures (patrilinear and patrilocal families, endogamy, exogamy, cross-cousin marriages, etc.) continue to dominate social behaviour patterns. But in recent years these structures are increasingly coming under pressure from the evolving role models of gender, the influence of education and the enduring impact of poverty and consequent social exclusion.

Family systems or kinship structures cannot be understood as a separate social phenomenon, but as a key element for a better understanding of the relevance of the social/cultural background, the conditions governing the rural/urban divide, the role of gender in development, and the consequences of an increased focus on education and literacy. The analysis of family systems needs to be integrated into current educational thoughts and

policies. As social anthropologist Emmanuel Todd put it: “family is an explicit and very powerful variable in the analysis of social history” (Todd 2011, p. 15) and consequently in the development of education and literacy.

In South Asia, taking a historical view, Todd argues that:

The patrilinear/joint family model, apparently introduced by invading people (from the West and Northwest), had in reality destroyed an on-going process of development, and then in its final phase produced a decline of the status of women which in turn reduced the educational potential of the concerned populations” (Todd 2011, p. 38).

Todd and other researchers are convinced, by looking at South Asia and West Asia, of the influence exercised by elements of the family structure (parental authority, status of women) on the process of literacy and educational development. Literacy of women is seen here as the principal cause of modernity; in other words, modernity occurs when literacy prevails, as it entails a better and equal status for women, as well as a wider educational potential for society.

In terms of family pattern and education, the example of South India is telling. There we note that according to levels of education, *endogamous cross-cousin* marriages, in otherwise largely exogamous Hindu societies, are more widely practiced in the strata of society with lower educational levels (Table 11).

**Table 11. Marriages among cousins according to education level 1992-93, % of total**

	<b>Maharashtra</b>	<b>Andhra</b>	<b>Karnataka</b>	<b>Tamil Nadu</b>
Illiterate	24.6	26.3	30.0	27.7
Primary ed.	19.4	25.9	25.9	23.1
Lower sec. ed.	16.9	22.4	27.8	24.4
Second ed.	10.4	17.3	15.3	14.4

*Source:* Todd, 2011; p 245

A low educational level (illiteracy) is linked to high levels of cross-cousin marriages. With higher educational levels the tradition of endogamy (cousin–marriages) tends to disappear.

Exogamy is the general pattern among Hindu communities in North India; but much less so in Pakistan. It has been observed in Pakistan: 50% first cousin marriages at national level, 49% in Sindh, but 63% in Baluchistan. Baluchistan is also the province with the lowest school enrolments for girls, matched by high rates of illiteracy among women. (Todd, 2011, p 244; Karve 1965, p 174-191)

Exogamy dominates in the North Indian states of Haryana, UP, Punjab, Rajasthan and Bihar among the Hindu communities. Conversely in those same states, endogamy (cousin marriages) among Muslim minorities is high -- 28% in UP, 24% in Bihar and 36% in Jammu and Kashmir (Todd, 2011, p 251).

#### **IV. Conclusion**

The social research issues and data presented in this paper are intended to enlarge the scope of critical thinking as far as educational performance and development are concerned. The arguments, it is hoped, will provoke researchers and policy makers to re-visit established and traditional constructions about education development.

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