

Gender Disparity in the Educational Opportunities provided to Girls of The Devanga Community in Urban Bangalore, India.

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ABSTRACT

The education of women is a topic which continues to be debated and remains an area of some contention (Dean, 2017). In some situations advantages provided to sons which are not necessarily available to daughters results in discriminatory practices in education, nutrition, and healthcare (Bose, 2012). Previous research has demonstrated that girls are less likely to go to school than boys and when enrolled are more likely be withdrawn from education at a young age to enter adult life as a care giver and nurturer. In some societies female children are prepared for their adult roles from a very young age with an emphasis upon assuming domestic roles and taking care of the family. They are often influenced by a patriarchal, joint family system in which the father is viewed as the bread winner and is portrayed as a stern figure, and the mother is the primary care giver and nurturer, as reported by Tseng and Chao (2002). Even where have been significant advances made by women in their participation in economic activities this has not reduced their “disadvantaged” status in society. In some communities in India, including the Devanga community who are the focus of this paper, marginalization remains an issue.

A small weaving community spread across various states in India, the Devanga community is founded upon patriarchal norms and stereotyped beliefs. Little prior research conducted into the lives of women in this community.

This chapter draws upon research to report the barriers girls face with respect to educational opportunities; gender discrimination being one of the most important deterrents to education (Dreze and Kingdon, 2001). The aim of this chapter is to be able to generate data which can be used to improve the lives of women and empower them to gain better access to educational opportunities.

The reported research was conducted with a purposive sample of 120 women of the Devanga community. A feminist, ethnographic, mixed method approach was adopted with data collected through survey methods and semi-structured interviews.

Data analysis indicated that the male members of the Devanga community considered the birth of a girl as a disadvantage resulting in a restricting of finances for their education and a focus upon establishing them in nurturing and care-giver roles rather than supporting the development of independent, empowered individuals. The data indicated that since girls are required to abide by the orthodox and traditional ideas laid down by the community members they tend to feel “lesser and incapable” when compared to their male counterparts.

Key Words: Gender discrimination, education of women, India

INTRODUCTION

The education of women continues to be debated and remains an area of some contention (Dean, 2017). It is reported (Madigan 2009, p.13) that though girls in many communities have been raised to assume certain limited roles in society, as a result of the “enforcement of equal access legislation, options for them have increased tremendously.” In many parts of the world, it has been argued that there are gaps between where women’s education is and where it should be (Tembon and Fort 2008).

The importance of girls’ education is understood and interpreted in several different ways and this chapter investigates and interprets the barriers to girls’ education within a small community in India, the Devanga Community. Devanga community members, who are to be found in states across India, continue to be known as Prakrut Brahmins or Brahmins by birth and according to several ancient texts, Devanga community members hold significant authority over religious practices and traditions. The Caste system is a crucial aspect of Hindu tradition and finds its origin somewhere in 1200 B.C. E. There are approximately 3,000 castes and 25,000 sub castes in India, with each caste being related to a specific occupation. Hindu society has been divided into four hierarchical groups, known as varnas. The topmost in the hierarchy are Brahmins (scholars and leaders), followed by Kshatriyas (rulers or warriors), Vaishyas (merchants or traders) and lastly Shudras (artisans and labourers) (Rao and Ban 2007). The Devanga community, being weavers primarily fall into the Vaishya bracket of the caste system.

Evidence of restrictive practices that limit the opportunities of women have been recorded in many communities and religious groups and often include preferential treatment of male children (Mukherjee,2013). Sons have often been privileged as a way of continuing male parental lineage and performing ancestral rites and this practice continues to be followed within the Devanga community. According to the study conducted by Mukherjee (2013), women's literacy and employment rates are better in South India compared to North India, however there are significant differences seen within the Devanga community across the country.

In the research reported in this chapter, women experienced difficulties with respect to their daughters' education and expressed frustration and helplessness with not being able to provide them with equal opportunities to those provided to their male siblings. Data collected, confirmed that providing equal educational opportunities to girls of the Devanga community continues to be an issue similar to that experienced by some tribal communities in India. (Kotwal., Kotwal and Rani 2007; Malkani 2017; Bhat and Sharma,2006 and Chanana,2006).

Anand (2009) suggests that contemporary India with its unique heritage and cultural history continues to remain a patriarchal society where predominantly women carry the burden of family-responsibility. The Devanga community is no different from most Indian communities which follow a patriarchal system. Gender can be defined as a common term that refers to "the socially constructed roles, behaviour, activities and attributes that a particular society considers appropriate for men and women." (Shastri, 2014, p.27). According to Nagar and Jha (2015, p.46), Gender Inequality means "*disparity between men and women in different social, economic and political, cultural and legal aspects.*"

Several debates are ongoing about the situation of women in India and because of this, gender inequality has now become one of the most widely discussed subjects in Government and Non-Government organisations with a stated intention to eliminate all forms of inequality against women (Nagar and Jha, 2015).

Indian women's gender roles have traditionally been studied under the two headings of marriage and motherhood (Lau,2010), and these have defined women's role and identities. When viewed from a cultural perspective, motherhood is seen as an essence of womanhood and though these are considered normal and important aspects, in some ways they tend to restrict and regulate a woman's life (Puri, 1999). Armstrong (2003) describes what is sometime referred to as an unspoken and unheard voice especially of

those people whose lives have been affected the most in situations of marginalisation. This notion can be contextualized to this study where the unspoken and unheard voices are those of the women in the community under investigation.

Earlier British rule in India brought about significant changes to the conditions of Hindu women. Roy (2010), reported a debate amongst men of various classes and sects in Indian society about issues related to women's rights, including the education of girls, dowry and widow remarriage. The education of women was generally restricted to those belonging to the families of zamindars, traditionally recognized as landowners (Thakur 2017). Hence, in order to address the reforms that were being demanded, educating women became a priority for social workers and teachers who started many educational institutions. By 1907, British women doctors formed the Association of Medical Women in India, which provided impetus for women to organize themselves to fight for social emancipation (Misra,1966).

Thapar (2014), proposes that a lack of inclusivity is not only a challenge in India or indeed in an Asian context. She states that *"Inclusiveness is problematic since every society since early times has overlooked the need for equality and has registered the dominance of some and the subordination of others"* (Thapar, 2014 p.43). However, she emphasizes that as a means of control, discrimination against sections of society as perpetuated during colonial rule continues to be used to the advantage of those who have gained authority in society. This accords with the suggestion from Beard (2017) who believes that the voices of women who wish to assert their rights has been perceived as "problematic" by those predominantly male members of a powerful elite. Contemporary feminist writers (Dworkin 2007; Noddings 2010) have continued to highlight the inequalities that exist in modern society and the need to challenge the notions of male superiority and the traditional interpretation of the roles of women. These writers suggest that a continuing analysis of the situation for women in all societies is important in order to gain insights into their lives and to challenge current orthodoxies and prejudices. Successive governments at national and state levels have implemented strategies for the empowerment of women. Unfortunately, problems originate at the familial level and hence it is important to initiate gender equality and justice at the household level (Velan, Tripathy, Bhaskaran,2012). Ramachandran (2019) has considered the intentions of the National Policy on Education (Government of India 1986) that emphasized the transformative potential of education and its ability to raise the status of women but suggests that progress has been hindered by continuing discrimination against those from traditionally disadvantaged groups. She believes that women from scheduled tribes and Dalit communities and others from the Muslim sectors of Indian

society continue to struggle to attain their most basic rights to good quality education. Section 3.6 of the National Policy stated that to promote equality, it will be necessary to provide equal opportunity to all not only in access, but also in the conditions for success. Besides, awareness of the inherent equality of all will be created through the core curriculum. In the view of Ramachandran, despite more than thirty years of debates around this legislation, many women remain marginalized in education by their communities.

Though there are reasons to be critical, India has made progress in terms of positive developments for women such as closing of gender gaps in primary and secondary schooling, the presence of women in the labour force, and violence against women and voices have also been raised on issues such as the sexual and reproductive health of women. But despite all these developments, gender discrimination and patriarchy has not decreased (Segran, INSEAD,2010). Advances have been made, but the position of women has worsened considerably in many respects and women are continuing to face constraints.

As a member of the Devanga community, the first author of this chapter emphasizes that women within this small community are treated in complete accordance with the “stereotyped” roles laid down in our ancient texts in the belief that the woman’s duty is in the house, and men are required to be the bread winners in the family. Some of the women in this community still believe that they are accepted in society only when they are defined by the husband and live within the parameters drawn up and demanded by the social order. A small section of these women would like to stand up for their rights but lack the required emotional support and have a fear of being discarded or abused by the male members of the family. Their intellect identifies the problem, but they have no solution because of the fear of being objectified and portrayed as the “uneducated, weaker sex”. Lack of educational opportunities, poverty, caste, customs and beliefs, religious practices, personal and societal attitudes have been found to be contributory to this phenomenon in India as witnessed within the Devanga community (Sivakumar, 2008).

A discussion of gender stereotypes is critical to this chapter and hence it becomes imperative to define it within this context. Banaji and Greenwald (2013, p.55) described stereotypes as “*the unconscious or conscious application of (accurate or inaccurate) knowledge of a group in judging a member of that group.*” Several complexities arise while describing the nature of stereotypes which may be classified as individual or cultural, with reference from Eagly and Mladinic (1989). They indicate that individual stereotypes are the beliefs held by an individual whereas those beliefs that are shared with other

members of a group are known as “social” or “cultural” stereotypes. Working closely with the members of the Devanga community, the concept of cultural stereotypes can be meaningfully related to this group because this represents a social agreement rather than individual beliefs. Stereotypes are often not imposed consciously, and research has indicated that the application of stereotypes is generally not intentional. Within the community in question, women are found to abide by the stereotyped roles laid down by their ancestors and male members of the community which indicates that it is associated with detrimental judgement characterized by irrational and stiff generalizations about a community (Hussain *et al.*, 2015).

It is important to note that in India, though gender bias has been debated and understood in some contexts, there is a lack of literature or empirical evidence in respect of the impact of parental expectations in relation to education. Research has been conducted on aspects of gender discrimination such as parental investments and differential treatment of boys and girls, but there is little written on parental aspirations and expectations. This is an issue that affects a significant portion of the Indian population. Young Lives (Himaz 2009), an international study funded by the UK to understand childhood poverty by following the lives of 12,000 children in 4 countries, including India over 15 years revealed parents’ preference for providing better quality education for the boys rather than the girls, in turn leading to gender disparity in allocation of finances for their children. Her study revealed that in households with children around the age group of 12-13 years, more money is spent on boys rather than on girls owing to higher academic fees. A significant bias was seen against girls’ education in the age group of 15-18 years. When caregivers of boys were questioned, most of them said they would like the boys to take up professions related to engineering (15%) or teaching (33%). Whereas the caregivers of girls said they wanted them to either become full time homemakers (26%) or teachers (39%). Similarly, when caregivers were asked about the expectations they had from their children, they said they wanted the girls to get married soon and have children at the earliest. These caregivers had no expectations of the girls being financially independent.

Though several members of the Devanga community agree that women’s education is important, as is apparent from the data presented below, there are various ways in which this may be interpreted. Whilst the Government of India has made the Right to Education a fundamental priority for every citizen, its focus has remained only at the primary level (Right to Education Act, 2009; Husain,2010). Poor literacy levels in India impacts girls and women, as is evidenced by the fact that the male literacy rate is 75.3%

whereas the female literacy rate is 53.7%. (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2001). In order to address the declining sex ratio as well the discrimination and disempowerment of the girl child, the Government of India launched a scheme known as “Beti Bachao Beti Padhao” in 2015 under the ministries of Women and Child Development, Human Resource Development and Health and Family Welfare (Government of India,2019). The overall goal of this scheme is to ensure the survival of the girl child along with ensuring her education as well as preventing sex-based elimination. It consists of two components which are:

- A) Mass Communication Campaign: Aims to ensure girls are born and taken care of and educated without any gender discrimination
- B) Multi-sectorial action in 100 selected districts: Works in coordination with Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and Ministry of Human Resource Department to ensure the protection and survival of the girl child. The role of the Ministry of the Health and Family Welfare is to ensure the implementation of Pre-Natal Diagnostic Tests, register all the births and set up monitoring committees, whereas the role of the Ministry of Human Resource Department is to ensure enrolment of girls in schools, make the schools girl-friendly and ensure strict implementation of the Right to Education Act.

This scheme was launched across the nation to celebrate the Girl Child and her empowerment by ensuring her education. Its impact to date has received little analysis.

METHODS AND METHODOLOGY:

Adopting a feminist stance and an emancipatory approach involved and alignment with the ideas expressed by Blakeley (2007) who suggested that emotional engagement with the subjects of research is a common and necessary aspect of investigating situations of oppression or disadvantage. This form of emotionally engaged research is guided and motivated by an ethic of care through which the researcher establishes an emotional connection and concern for an issue and for those who are most impacted by this issue.

Winters (2011, p.668) states that “feminism focuses on injustices as they have historically developed and currently exist in our society.” Flax (1979;1996, cited in Winters, 2011) also presents a definition which substantiated the basis of the reported research by describing these injustices in the following terms:

“women’s oppression is not a subset of some other social relationship; the oppression of women is part of the way the structure of the world is organized; and one task of feminist theory is to explain how and why this structure evolved.” (p. 18–19). Feminism can take different forms in enabling our understanding of the world and seeking change. Winters (2011) posed a 3-point definition to understand this. Firstly, feminism emphasizes that all women have something valuable to contribute to the world. Secondly, because of the oppression women face, they have been unable to develop their full potential of participation in society and have to wear “masks in society” to function and third, all feminists iterate that this situation needs to change across all spheres of society.

With feminism at the core, a mixed methods approach was adopted to obtain information from a purposive sample of participants, 120 women from the Devanga community. In defining the sample, each woman was required to have 2 or more children (comprising both boys and girls). Having identified these women from community databases and familiar contacts, each one was contacted personally to identify their family structure as well as their willingness to participate in the study.

Semi-structured questionnaires were distributed to 120 women, with 96 being returned. The questionnaire served as an exploratory instrument and comprised a combination of open and close ended questions aimed at understanding these women’s’ family structures, their childhood experiences as well as their marital life and expectations of their children.

Of the 96 respondents , 75 consented to participate in the next phase of data collection through a semi structured interview. 63 women were finally interviewed, some telephonically while others were interviewed face to face. The use of a flexible format of a semi structured interview gave participants the freedom to steer the discussion to issues that were of relevance to them within the scope of the research (Vincent and Warren,2001). The interview began with a broad question which gave a general flavour of the subject being considered and then questions were narrowed. The interviewer ensured sufficient time for the interviewees to build a level of trust. 42 interviews were conducted face to face while 21 were conducted telephonically.

The women of the Devanga community, as mentioned, abide strictly to rules and norms laid down by the men of their families and participating in research of this nature without informing the male members

might not be taken well. Hence many were not comfortable being interviewed face to face and the decision to offer telephone interviews.

Though the aim of this research was to understand the barriers faced by the girls of the Devanga community with respect to educational opportunities, some of the questions revolved around sensitive information and it was important to allow the flow and order of the interviews to be guided by the interviewees to enable their personal experiences to be articulated comfortably. Interviewing these women via telephone instilled a certain level of confidence which encouraged them to divulge personal and sensitive information with ease.

Challenges faced during this process included a reluctance by participants to sign Informed Consent forms and difficulties caused by low literacy levels in English. This latter issue was overcome by translation of all documentation into the local language (Kannada). Data was collected after having overcome all these challenges and ensuring adherence to all ethical procedures. The participants were assured of privacy and confidentiality and were also assured that their participation was voluntary and they were free to withdraw at any point from the study if they wished.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

Thematic analysis and interpretation of the data revealed that poverty along with gender discrimination were found to be major deterrents to providing educational opportunities to girls of the Devanga community. Of the 63 women interviewed, 12 identified poverty as one of the major factors which resulted in opportunities for education having been denied to them in their childhood. While 12 is a small number in relation to the population studied, it is important to be considered because of its emphasis by respondents as a major inhibitory factor. There may have been instances where parents would have sent girls to school had the fees been lower, however they chose to cite poverty as a reason for keeping them girls. It is possible to attribute this to the fact that lower economic conditions lead to a greater degree of competition for resources and thus lesser scope for gender equality (Seguino,2007). It has also been recognized by The World Bank (1994, p.9) that “ Poverty is not only a problem of low incomes; rather it is a multi-dimensional problem that includes low access to opportunities for developing human capital and to education.” In the framework of Indian development planning, education is considered to be one of

the “basic needs” or “minimum needs” (Tilak, 2002) and hence of meaning is attached to this reason though only 19% of the population cited it explicitly.

Within India poverty has been seen to impact the lives of girls in a number of ways. Girls belonging to poor families tend to be married earlier when compared to those from richer households, in part because the demand for dowry is lower for younger girls (Singh and Vennam, 2016). Paul (2019) identified a correlation between early marriage and educational attainment, suggesting that poverty, educational attainment and socio-economic opportunity are intrinsically interwoven, each impacting negatively upon the other. Getting girls married at an early age could also mean cutting down the educational cost for girls. This indicates that simplistic approaches that attempt to tackle only one of the factors may be unlikely to break this chain of disadvantage.

Gender oriented attitudes and behaviours are set in childhood an important consideration in conducting this research. Girls are conditioned from childhood into believing they are supposed to be modest and develop proficiency in household chores as well as childcare in their natal homes until they get married and leave (Srivastava and Srivastava 2010). Women in this research have not just stated instances from their childhood of extreme poor conditions where they had to work as daily laborers to earn two square meals a day but have also mentioned that due to poverty, their parents were capable of only educating one child in the family and inevitably this would be the son. It is possible to interpret this situation as an indication that a failure to send a child to school need not necessarily mean gender bias or that families are against sending their children to school. It is possibly more realistic to educate one child in order to balance the family’s financial conditions. Instead, it would be honest to indicate that their financial and economic conditions failed to support the education of their children. Gaining first-hand information on how much money is allocated for each child in a family might give a better understanding of this situation, though sensitivities about disclosure of family finances are notoriously difficult to overcome (Preece., Murray., Rose., Zhao, and Garner, 2020). Stromquist (1989) and Filmer (1999) say that a combination of poverty and traditional values are a deterrent to the investment of finances for a girl’s education. Members of the Devanga community would rather invest their finances on a girls’ marriage as opposed to her education. In addition, the Devanga community has always abided by orthodox ideas and traditional norms of society and this amalgamation of poverty and tradition is an inhibitory factor to the growth and development of Devanga women as it has been in other similar Indian communities (Dreze and Kingdon, 2001). This has in turn contributed to “education poverty”, the features of which can be classified

as low levels of education of the population, wide-spread illiteracy, low rate of continuation in schools, high rates of dropouts and failures, low rates of achievement and above all- exclusion of the poor from education (Tilak, 2009).

Closely overlapping with the above finding was an indication that being born as a girl is often seen by families as a reason to restrict allocating finances for education. Stereotyping and conditioning young girls into believing they are meant to be inside the house was apparent from the interviews conducted. In India, a large segment of the female population still suffers from discriminatory approaches and deprivation (Esteve-Volart 2004; Kingdon 2002; Garg, 2018). Patriarchy rules Indian society with such intensity that it is difficult to resist and overcome this deep-seated factor (Kohli 2017; Bhopal 2019). Owing to this, when a girl child is born, many families do not welcome her with happiness because raising a girl is considered an expensive affair. Reasons for this are attributed to expensive marriages, dowry system (in some communities in India), and additional religious rituals during puberty attainment. Most families within the Devanga community believe that education is only required for girls to be able to help their children with academic study in the future. Though several women in this study confessed to disagreeing with stereotyped norms, they lack the courage to stand up for their beliefs.

Families play a key role in developing these gender stereotypes, as indicated by Jacobs (1992) a view supported by the data obtained in this study. Different role models are assigned to men and women depending on what the tradition is, and this conveys deep rooted messages to the future generation who thereby become conditioned into believing that women are incapable of anything other than being a mother and a wife. Adding further complexity to the situation is the aspect of getting girls married at a young age, which is closely followed by looking for a suitable groom for the girls even before they are legally old enough to marry. Despite the progress India has made as a global power, there is evidence of girls getting married early because of social and religious beliefs (Mather, Greene and Malhotra 2003; Maheswari and Rajeswari, 2018). In this research, the questionnaire data indicated that 32 women out of the 96, were married before they attained 18 years of age and 47 were married between the age of 18 and 21 years. This constituted 82% of the sample. As defined in the Handbook on the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act of 2006 (UNICEF 2006), the legal age for marriage in India is 18 years of age but because girls are perceived to be an economic burden in their families, this law is often ignored (Raj,2010). Societal and cultural beliefs impose the view that girls must not be permitted to go to school once they attain puberty and this contributes to a significant percentage being forced to discontinue schooling at a young age.

Reasons for this are generally attributed to the risk of girls' minds being corrupted by external influences. Often, in such situations, girls have little or no say in choosing their partners or deciding the age at which they should marry because the marriages are orchestrated by the families (Thornton and Jensen, 2003). Thornton and Jensen (2003) conducted a study in four countries (Benin, Columbia, India and Turkey) to show the correlation between marriage and educational attainment and their results indicated that across all 4 countries early marriage was associated with little or no educational attainment. This has an indirect effect on the woman's power and autonomy within the family.

Observations from the data collected for this study have indicated that parents are usually happy to send their children to school in the primary years but as the number of children in the family increases, and they feel the increased need for help with domestic chores this could have a serious impact on the education of the girl child, in turn affecting parents' decision to withdraw her from school. On an average, each family has 2 to 3 children within the Devanga community. For girls, acquiring domestic skills and know how along with learning the intricacies of weaving enables them to contribute to their families' immediate needs which is perceived to be the most important activity. This interpretation is further supported by Saha (2013) who states that gender discrimination in household expenditure on education has led to a disappointing progress in girls' education. Observations across different states in India have revealed that many households prefer incurring expenses for male members of the family rather than females (Gupta and Yesudian, 2006; Azam and Kingdon, 2013) and the Devanga community follows this tradition closely. Educational opportunities are provided to girls and women but on the condition that if a proposal for marriage is made, education has to be abandoned. This could be interpreted as a situation where getting girls married early and not allowing them to attend school after puberty are all means of ensuring that it is right that a girl's sexuality will be maintained along with continuing patriarchal control in the society. The intention was to ensure boys get a good quality "English medium" education while the girls were expected to settle for education in the local language which would render them unfit to pursue higher education.

In the data obtained, women have expressed an opinion, either directly or indirectly, that though they would like to invest in their daughter's education they cannot see how will she be able to make use of that opportunity when the family decides to get her married?

Having had ambitions neglected in their childhood, most of the participants in this research condemned the patriarchal and stereotyped rules of society and suggested that they would like to see all their ambitions being fulfilled by their children. Unfortunately, the ways in which these aspirations are embedded within family contexts and governed by other factors are neglected (Froerer, 2012). Indian women represent an interesting paradox. India is known for its representation of women in politics (Clots-Figueras 2011; Ghose 2018), yet, most are unaware of their basic rights when it comes to domestic issues (Jha., Ghatak., Menon., Dutta, and Mahendiran 2019; Calman 2019). While looking at the questionnaire data, out of the 96 women interviewed, only 4 women were married after the age of 25 years. Could these women be considered as having brought dishonour to their families because they got married “late”? Unfortunately, out of these women only 2 were permitted to put their education to use and be financially independent. This raises questions about the importance of education when women are not allowed to use it to be financially and emotionally independent and self-sufficient?

While trying to understand the relationship between modernization and education, it is necessary to consider linking factors between education and other social institutions (Chanana,1990). “progression” and “modernization” may not have the same meaning to the Devanga community as that which I have attributed to these terms. Similarly, the interpretation of education and ambitions varies from one family to another within the Devanga community itself. One of the reasons attributed to these women’s’ childhood ambitions having remained unfulfilled could be poverty (as discussed above) or the lack of understanding of the importance of education and of being an independent individual. An added disadvantage to women is their gender, because of which they are kept at home to supplement family welfare and take care of their siblings. Previous studies have indicated that for girls to continue their schooling they need to show more promise than boys. Scholars such as Cohen (1998), Epstein (1998), Mac and Ghail (1994) and Power *et al.*(1998) argued that based on stereotypical identities, which falsely propose that girls have to work hard to learn while boys are naturally gifted and these kind of beliefs reflect in the casual attitude boys show towards schooling (Legewie and DiPrete,2012). In addition to this, the kind of school girls attend based on their class and ethnic groups also plays an important role. Middle class families may choose a school depending on their “educational capital” or the amount of money they can afford to invest on education. Also, for girls, with an increase in their domestic roles they may or may not be able to live up to the parents’ expectations and that can then be considered as an excuse to make them drop out of school. Over and above all this, girls are also under immense pressure to be an “acceptable girl” which is usually not in synchrony with an academic achiever. An acceptable girl requires

her to be accommodative, passive and expressing feminine desirability whereas to be an academic achiever she needs to be committed and determined towards her goals. Evidence from the Davenga community indicates that within a patriarchal, male dominated systems, being an academic achiever may not be as easy as it seems.

It cannot be ignored that in some instances, a mother's educational qualifications and attainment also decides her daughter's school persistence. The data obtained in this research indicated 10 women who had completed graduation and are supportive and encouraging of their daughters' schooling and continuation in higher education. These women had an egalitarian approach to parenting which meant they followed the principle that everyone in society has equal rights. But they were also aware of being bound by certain traditions and facing the reality of the family's economic situation which they cannot move away from and that may eventually detract from their daughters' schooling and educational attainment.

Gupta and Sharma (2003) have indicated specifically that parents' approval and support of daughters' ambitions and aspirations contribute to the girls' sense of significance which in turn serves as a catalyst for her to have positive self-respect and self-fulfillment. Formal education is also important for the improvement of the situation they are in. When girls are subjected to a positive nurturing, they pass the same to their children thus creating a better sense of self-worth and satisfaction. With respect to this, discussing the encouragement of girls completing graduation and not beyond that seems relevant because transition into a higher education program would mean delayed marriage, which is not well accepted in the Devanga community. However, mothers who have had encouragement in their childhood have a more positive outlook towards their children when compared to women who were not encouraged to pursue their academic and non-academic dreams. This could be attributed to the fact that education would benefit them in aspects of family decisions, fighting against violence as well as in becoming strong individuals and being aware of their basic rights as an individual. Several women in this study attested to understanding the importance of education but they were unaware of how to provide equal educational opportunities for their children. They seem grateful to their families for having supported them and encouraged them to at least complete schooling till tenth or twelfth grade after which they were asked to get married. Gupta and Sharma (2003) also mentioned in their study that parents did not have any specific career path for their daughters and whatever they achieved was good enough as long as they could be self-sufficient and independent in the future. This has been substantiated in this research

wherein mothers mentioned that they wanted their daughters to opt for higher education only to render them independent. The positive nurturing they received in their childhood has led them to be more positive and supportive of their children's education.

Early marriage and domestic responsibilities have proven to be a major hindrance in allowing women to realize their dreams irrespective of the support and encouragement they received in their childhood. Adversely affecting their encouragement in childhood is women's social perception of themselves which further inhibits them from participating in activities other than their domestic roles. This has also been evidenced by some participants in the study who stated that though they are educated they are not supported by their families to be independent and working.

CONCLUSION

Due to the lack of educational opportunities, women of the Devanga community expressed a sense of dissatisfaction attributed to low self-esteem and the inability to take family related decisions. Oppressive structures such as early marriage and confining women to domestic roles are only a means of restricting their mobility and independence (Karlekar,1995).

Empowerment may be defined as *"the process of gaining freedom and power to do what you want or to control what happens to you"* according to the Cambridge Dictionary. It enables women to become more aware, active, be capable of making intelligent decisions and productive. However, all this comes with education and some exposure to the outside world. Unfortunately, women within the Devanga community have been, and in some cases are still refrained from interacting with people and get restricted within the four walls of the house thus shutting off any opportunities that might occur. A lack of opportunities makes them incapable of taking decisions. If in a situation they feel capable of decision making, the stereotyped norms pull them down and render them incapable of anything else but taking care of the family and children. The Devanga community members have a fair understanding of their problems but the women lack the confidence to stand together and voice their dissatisfaction. In order to establish the value of a female child requires a holistic and integrated approach is needed for which the first step is gender balanced environment at home and the society. A supportive spouse can be the initial step in crossing this hurdle who encourages the education of the girl child as well as insists on them getting respect and equal opportunities after they get married.

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