

Socio-Economic Determinants of Access to Higher Education in Kashmir: A Sociological Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Education is considered to be a democratic tool to cure and curb social evils and inequalities created on the bases of creed, colour, race and gender. However, the very access to education especially to higher education is determined by a number of such factors. Socio- economic factors are the key and crucial determinants to access higher education. This study on the basis of empirical and theoretical sources and employing quantitative methods found that income of family and gender of a person plays vital role to access education in context of state of Jammu and Kashmir. It further describes the process of feminization of social sciences or academic disciplines wherein either females are in dominant numbers or the courses are wholly opted by females.

1. Introduction

The state of Jammu and Kashmir is a northern state of India located in the Himalayan Mountains. The literacy rate of the state was 67.16 percent as per Census 2011 report, 76.75 percent and 56.43 percent among males and females respectively. The scenario of higher education is grim with Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) of 19.4 percent in 2012. ¹ However, the matter of concern is that access to higher education in context of Jammu and Kashmir is determined by not the capability of a person but by the factors which are beyond the control of an individual. The class of an individual which is decided by income and economic factors determines the access to higher education followed by the gender of a person which is the product of social and cultural construction. There is a trend in the higher education sector in the state wherein some academic disciplines are exclusively dominated by particular group. In light of this, the paper analyzes the role of social and economic background of an individual in access to higher education and the process within the higher education system in Kashmir. On the bases of empirical and theoretical bases paper describes the process within higher education and explores how certain disciplines are feminized.

2. Research Methodology

The reliability and validity of a scientific endeavor lies in the procedures i.e. methods and techniques which are followed and adopted to take the study to logical conclusion. However, methods and techniques are not independent. Methods and techniques largely depend and determined by the nature of the study and the context. Likewise methodology of the present work was determined by the context and nature of the field.

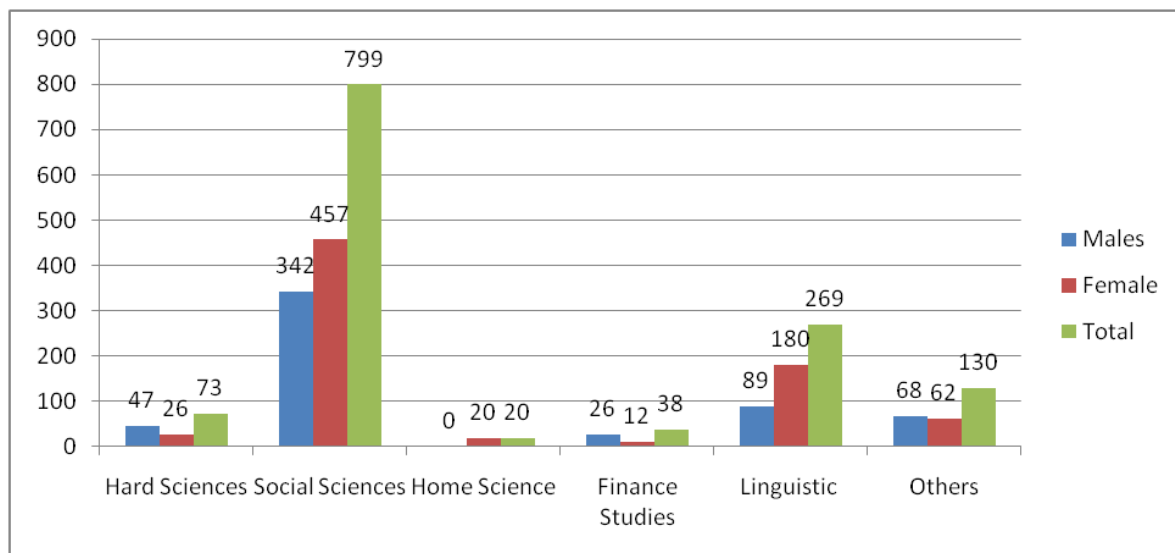
The design of the present study is descriptive research design. The study adopted purposive sampling method wherein respondents were selected from various faculties of University of Kashmir which include both males and females. Respondents were approached on the convenience of the

researchers as randomly selected respondents showed their unwillingness during pilot study.

Students from various faculties and departments who opted for open and generic elective courses from the department of sociology from 2017 to 2019 were taken as sample for the study. The structured questionnaire was administered which was later on coded, tabulated and interpreted from sociological perspective. The total number of respondents selected for the study was 1329 which include 757 females and 572 males. The faculty wise unequal sample distribution in the study is because generally students from humanities, social sciences and linguistics opted elective courses from the department of Sociology. The distribution and structure of the sample structure is tabulated below:

Department	Male	Female	Total
Disasters Managements	30	35	65
Physics	20	2	22
Botany	6	15	21
Zoology	5	4	9
Chemistry	7	3	10
Bio Chemistry	4	2	6
Mathematics	5	0	5
Computer Science	5	1	6
Home Science	0	20	20
Commerce	20	8	28
Management	6	4	10
Law	33	26	59
History	67	60	127
Education*	165	250	415
Women's Studies	10	30	40
Political Science	80	79	159
Arabic	19	61	80
Urdu	70	119	189
Islamic Studies	20	38	58
Total	572	758	1329

¹Jammu and Kashmir Higher Education plan 2016



Hard sciences include Physics, Chemistry, Botany, Zoology, Mathematics & Biochemistry. Social Sciences include, History, Education, Women Studies, Political Science, and Islamic Studies. Finance Studies includes Commerce and Management, Linguistic include Arabic and Urdu and others include Computer Science, Disasters Management and Law.

3. Social Background and Access to Education

A number of studies have pointed out that occupation of father determines the education of children. The learning outcomes and future prospects have been directly related to the occupation of parents (Jencks, 1972; Bouden, 1973; Giddens, 1989; Sexana, 1994; Beverly & Duncan, 1967, Bhat 2009, Bhat 2014, 16). They argue that the education and occupation of the head of family has a profound impact on the future education of an individual. The table number 3.11 throws more light on relation between father's /guardian's occupation and education of respondents and draws the marginal impact of the occupation of parents on the access to higher education.

Occupation	Number	Percentage
Government Employee	651	48.51
Business	398	29.94
Manual Labourer/ Daily Wager	146	10.98
Other	134	10.08
Total	1329	100

The above table shows that most of the students enrolled in the university had their father/ guardian engaged in government sector followed by business. Only 11 percent respondents have their father/ guardians working as Manual Labourer or Daily Wager. The category of others includes peasants, drivers, and private school teachers. Thus it is clear that the very access to higher education is related to occupation of father/ guardian.

On the bases of data it can be argued that access to higher education in context of Kashmir is still determined by the class background and parental occupation of an individual. Thus despite many strides in higher education tradition and age old factors are dominant in access to higher education.

The educational background of father is directly related to education of child. Educated fathers are not only expected to send their children to school but help them at home as well; while as illiterate fathers resist to send their children to school especially a girl child (Baverly & Duncan, 1967; Halsey, 1961; Jencks, 1972; Dabla, 2001, Bhat 2009, Bhat 2014, 2016). There is no denying that literate parents actively participate and engage in the education of their children. They are more conscious to enroll their children in 'good' schools and are active in ensuring better performance of their children as they are willing to bear educational expenses. They regularly visit the schools, help their children at home and even send them to private tuitions. However, it doesn't mean that illiterate parents are not concerned for and engaged in the education of their children. It has been observed that occupation, education and income are proportional to each other. Most illiterate fathers were found engaged in agriculture and other low income generating sectors and their income was low. A father having no educational background, low income, engaged in a sector that requires lot of physical energy, time and strength still enrolls his child in the school. This in itself is participation on his part. Aggarwal and Harding (1995) maintain that poor parents are constrained in providing education to their children due to their economic hardships and struggle for daily survival.

Educational Background of Fathers/Guardians

Qualification	Number	Percentage
Post Graduate and Above	399	30.02
Graduate	585	44.01
Senior Secondary	119	8.95
Secondary/ Matriculate	117	8.80
Middle Pass	94	7.07
No Formal Education	15	1.12
Total	1329	100

The table demonstrates the education background of respondents.

The above table reveals that 30.02 percent respondent father/guardian are post graduate or higher qualification, 44.01 percent have graduate father/ guardian, 8.95 percent have senior secondary, 8.80 percent have Matriculate and 7.07

have middle pass father/ guardian. Only 1.12 respondents have no formal educational background of father/ guardian.

4. Economic Determinants of Access of Education

Socio-economic background of a child like income of family, education level of parents, occupation of parents and gender of a child are main determinants which decide whether a child will have access to school and to what kind of schools he/she may attend. This is one of the important factors which not only decide the access of a child to school but his/her future prospects and likewise the access to higher education.

The socio- economic background of a child is essential in determining what a child will become in future, what kind of role she/he will be assigned in future. Giddens(1989) is of the view that a particular section dominates higher positions in society. These people enjoy such a privilege because of their access to particular type of educational institutions that are largely determined by the social and economic background of children.

Family Monthly Income of Respondents

Monthly Income	Number	Percentage
30000 and Above	520	39.12
20000 to 29999	479	36.04
15000-19999	133	10
10000-14999	125	9.40
Below 10000	72	5.41
Total	1329	100

The above table reveals the monthly family income of respondents. It depicts that 39 percent respondents (students) come from the families which have monthly income 30,000 and above and 36.04 percent respondents come from the families who have monthly income below 30000 but above that 19,999. 9.40 percent respondents come from the families who income range is 10,000-14999 and only 5.41 percent of respondents (students) come from the families who have monthly income below 10,000 per month. The data raises many questions on the progress of higher education in Indian context. It denotes that economy is main determinant to access to higher education.

A number of studies conducted across the globe revealed that monthly income of parents directly govern the education of children (Giddens, 1989; Reid, 1979; Varghese, 1993, Bhat, 2014, 2016). Based on the data on the monthly family income and the percentage of respondents have great prospect in having access to education.

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5. Conclusion

Education is a powerful tool of social mobility and social change. However, education is not a neutral phenomenon and independent of social, economic factors. On the bases of empirical and theoretical evidences it may be concluded that education especially the access and progress of higher education is closely associated with different socio-economic variables. The income of the family has profound influence on access to higher education. The occupation which generally determines the income and class of an individual has a profound bearing on the access to higher education. The occupation generally decides and determines the income of an individual and future of education of a person. In other words Karl Marx has much relevance in context of Kashmir. Occupation of father and income of family are two dominant factors which decides access to higher education. Although in terms of number of respondents' sex wise females are more which gives a superficial impression that females are ahead however, a sociological investigation reveals that females are enrolled and dominant only in selected disciplines like social sciences, humanities and education. Further investigation on the issue revealed that in Home science department there has not been a single male students enrolled in last five years. This can be termed as "*feminization of social sciences or feminization of academic disciplines*" where social sciences and other less "valued" disciplines or disciplines related to home management, care taking are dominated or inclusive for females. In context of Kashmir certain disciplines like social sciences home science, are considered to be requiring less intellect and hence purely regarded as the domain of females and those belonging to socially and economically backward classes and subjects like Zoology, Botany, Physics and Mathematics are considered to require higher intellect and wit and hence less females opt for such subjects as females are still considered to be inferior in intellect than the males.

A person belonging to working class family and not having regular income has very less probability of access to higher education. People having regular income and secure job but belonging to low income families are also at a disadvantage in terms of access to higher education. The present system of higher education in Indian context fortifies what Bourdieu termed "Reproduction of Culture".

In the long run the feminization of academia or social sciences can lead what Bhat (2017) term disappearance of daughters, thus making all slogans of education hollow and narrow.

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