



Status of Women in Predominantly Matrilineal and Patriarchal States in India With Respect To Literacy and Employment

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Abstract

Delving into a topic of high social value, this paper attempts to determine the impact of differing gender-based roles and responsibilities of women in different societies. This analysis is arguably the need of the hour to realize how the social norms mold the quality of lives of women. Resources need to be dedicated to gather evidence on the same and pave the way for discussions to implement changes for the betterment of women. The real picture must be brought into the light and acknowledged for society to be able to truly empower women. The focus, here, is on matrilineal and patriarchal forms of society, with vastly differing status, treatment and opportunities for women. The aim of the paper is to draw a comparison between the relative positions of women in these societies, analyse their spillover effects on the literacy and workforce participation of the resident women and highlight the strong interdependence between the disciplines of Economics and Sociology. This study has employed secondary data for its analysis. A sample of states, representing each of the societies, has been selected based on their general observable characteristics in addition to the rankings on the India Patriarchy Index. The 2011 Census data on state-wise literacy and workforce participation rates are used to study the engagement of women in these areas. The results of this examination, for the most part, are consistent with the perceived reality and traits of these societies, with partial inconsistencies in some aspects. While the literacy rates of women are much higher in the matrilineal states, their employment status reveals a different story. The workforce participation of women in the rural areas is greater in the patriarchal states, whereas the matrilineal states witness higher employment of women in the urban areas.

Such unexpected inconsistencies have widened the possibility for detailed exploration in the future.

Keywords: *matrilineal, patriarchal, literacy, workforce participation, women*

Introduction:

Societal influence has a huge bearing on the status of its resident women in any economy. While economic factors contribute significantly, the social structure and norms are responsible for properly defining their status. This is vividly evident in the varying roles, rights and choices that women can exercise in different societies despite the universal laws. This paper attempts to review these differences as a consequence of the existing structure of society and kinship. The focus, here, is on two types of social construct – the matriarchal/matrilineal type and the patriarchal/patrilineal type. In this regard, it is important to first establish the broad differences between them before advancing with their impacts.



Matriarchal societies are characterised by matriarchal families which are 'mother-centred' or 'mother-dominated'. The eldest woman serves as the 'head of household' and all authority resides with her. Property is owned and inherited by women (daughters over sons) with the lineage or descent being matrilineal in nature

i.e. traced through the maternal side. Women, either in consultation with male maternal relations or not, wield the power in terms of governance, economic decision-making, marriage and family structure etc. Furthermore, such families are matrilocal where a woman resides in her mother's home after marriage while the husband stays with his sister and is a 'privileged visitor' at his wife's place. The status of the children, consequently, is determined by that of their mothers.

Conversely, patriarchal societies, characterised by patriarchal families, are 'father-centred' or 'father-dominated'. The descent, inheritance and succession are recognised through the male line, making them patrilineal in nature. The eldest male member is the 'head of household' dictating terms for all other members. He exercises primary authority over any and all matters pertaining to family, property, governance etc. The families are patrilocal wherein sons continue to reside in their fathers' homes after marriage and the wives join them there. Moreover, the sons inherit property, in some cases contingent on the whims and fancies of their fathers. Children, in general, are considered those of the fathers with the mothers being practically ignored.

These differences significantly dictate the role of women and the opportunities available to them. Proceeding forward, this paper explores the impact of these societies on the literacy and employment of the resident women.

Need of the study:

1. To compare the difference between the standing of women in matrilineal vs. patriarchal societies.
2. To analyse the effect of the social system on the literacy and workforce participation of women.
3. To draw a correlation between the disciplines of Economics and Sociology with respect to this.

Review of Literature:

Matrilineal and patrilineal social structures find a greater visibility in the tribal communities of India. Women empowerment greatly vary between them. While women in the latter are empowered with respect to their attitude to violence, those in the former experience a relatively greater freedom of movement, decision-making power and social independence. (*Mal & Saikia, 2024*). The matrilineal tribal women in Meghalaya are seen to be more prone to choosing a competitive environment than men. (*Gneezy, Leonard & List, 2009*). Employment rates there seem to be soaring due to the fewer restrictions on their movement outside home. (*Mukherjee, 1974*).

Studies reveal that land is a major, if not the only, asset that rural women can use as collateral to acquire bank loans. (*Toro, 2016*). This ownership of land is more empowering when it is obtained through lineage as opposed to being given by the village administration as the latter lacks any ownership rights. Furthermore, women acquiring land through lineage are more encouraged to explore the idea of a savings account and also join socio-economic groups that aim to eradicate poverty and empower women economically, socially, physically and mentally. (*Keeni, Takashino, Nongkynrih & Fuyuki, 2018*).



With respect to the domains of educational attainment level, newspaper reading and economic empowerment, though women from both societies fare poorly, matrilineal tribal women are relatively better off. (*Mal & Saikia, 2024*). Patriarchal control on women's education reflects the gender-based inequalities in education. Education of females receives less attention and emphasis than the men. They do not get the same opportunities to acquire marketable skills and knowledge. In fact, they are pushed to the extent that women discriminate against each other, thereby further limiting their opportunities. (*Sultana, 2010*).

The tribal economy is largely dependent on forests and related economic activities like hunting, gathering, agriculture, handicrafts etc. There is an interrelation and interdependence between forest and tribals. The women are responsible for the management of the economy and family. They act as collectors, users and sellers of different forest products to earn wages for supplementing their family's requirements. (*Lama & Bhui, 2018*).

Additionally, women in Meghalaya, particularly Shillong, have always played a vital part in the existence and administration of the state. They attribute their relatively higher status to their innate ability to reason and dispense wisdom, but more importantly, to their matrilineal society. Women are highly influential and powerful outside their homes and enjoy complete security, unlike in most of the Indian states. They manage majority of the small businesses. A successful career woman of the Khasi tribe has credited their 'societal anomaly' as an important determinant of her success. There is ample scope in a society like this to encourage and enable women's participation and empowerment in all areas of development like administration, businesses, marketplaces, politics etc. (*Lyngdoh, 2022*).

Methodology:

For this comparative analysis, certain states exhibiting the requisite social structures have been selected as samples. Meghalaya and Kerala have been chosen as representative of predominantly matrilineal societies, while Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Rajasthan represent predominantly patriarchal societies. The choice of these states is based not just on the predominance mentioned above, but also on their position on the India Patriarchy Index (*Singh, Chokhandre, Singh, Barker Kumar, McDougal, ... & Raj, 2021*). It is a modification of the Patriarchy Index developed in Europe (*Gruber & Szoltysek, 2016*).

Reliant on National Family Health Survey (NFHS) data, it assesses the following five domains to infer the widespread presence of patriarchy in a place.

- Domination of men over women – the variables included are
 - Proportion of female headed households
 - Proportion of young brides
 - Proportion of wives older than their husbands
- Generation domination of the older generation over the younger one – the variables are
 - Proportion of elderly men co-residing with a younger head of household
 - Proportion of neo-local residence among young men
 - Proportion of elderlies living with married sons
- Patrilocality – the variable is
 - Proportion of elderlies living with married daughters



- Son preference – the variables are
 - Proportion of boys among the last birth
 - Sex ratio in the youngest age-group
 - Percentage of women reporting a higher ideal number of son(s) than that of daughter(s)
- Socio-economic domination (imbalance between men and women in households with respect to earning and control over money and education) – the variables included are
 - Proportion of wives more educated than their husbands
 - Proportion of working age women engaged in professional work

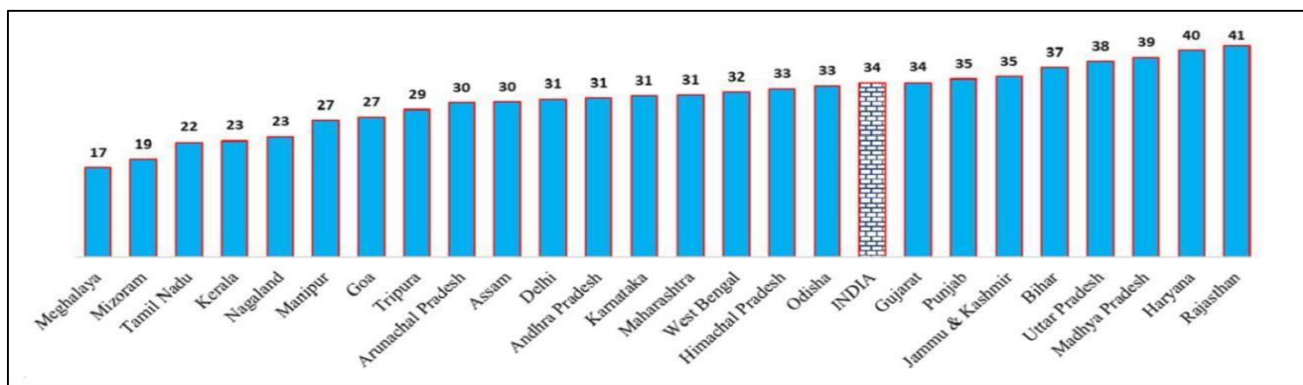
In addition to this index, the 2011 Census (latest) data on the following indicators has been employed.

- State-wise Literacy Rates (for both male and female)
- State-wise Workforce Participation (for male and female in both rural and urban areas)

It must be noted, here, that all data utilised for the study is secondary in nature.

Results and discussion:

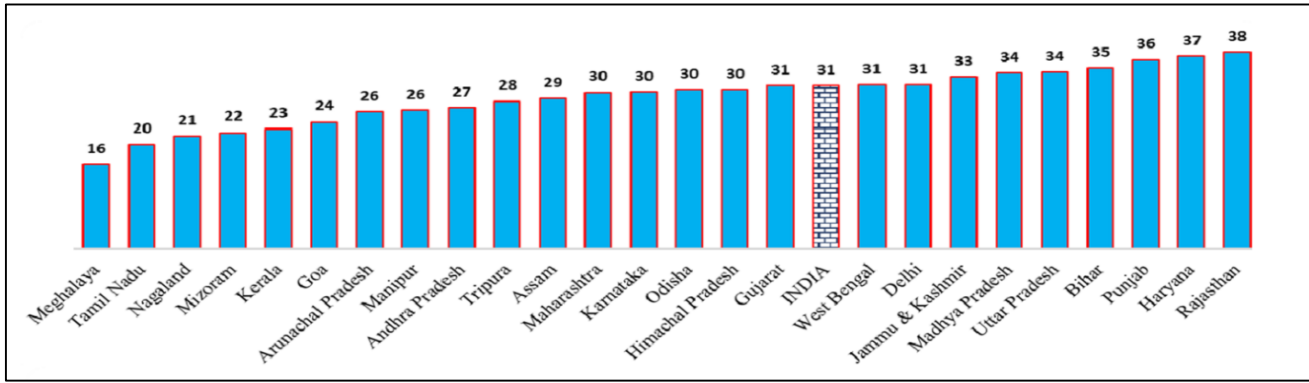
Fig. 1 Ranking of states on India Patriarchy Index for NFHS-1



Source: Singhet al., 2021

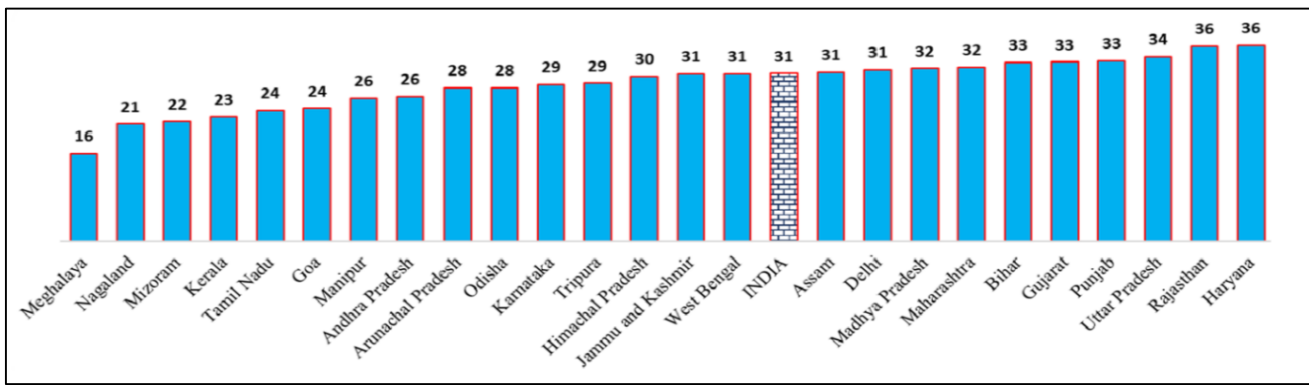
Fig. 2 Ranking of states¹ on India Patriarchy Index for NFHS-3

¹ Note: Bihar and Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand, Madhya Pradesh and Chattisgarh have been combined.



Source: Singhetal., 2021

Fig. 3 Ranking of states² on India Patriarchy Index for NFHS-4



Source: Singhetal., 2021

As is apparent from the three figures given above (Fig. 1, Fig. 2, Fig. 3), Meghalaya and Kerala have consistently ranked on lowest end of the India Patriarchy Index while Bihar, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan have always been on the highest end. This corroborates what is already known about the former states being matrilineal in nature and the latter being patriarchal.

The tables given below provide some evidence of the impact of such positioning on the empowerment of women in these states.

Fig. 4 State-wise female literacy rates as per Census 2011

STATES	FEMALE LITERACY RATE	STATES	FEMALE LITERACY RATE
Kerala	92.1	Manipur	70.3
Mizoram	89.3	Uttarakhand	70
Lakshadweep	87.9	Gujarat	69.7
Goa	84.7	Karnataka	68.1

² Note: Bihar and Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand, Madhya Pradesh and Chattisgarh have been combined.



Tripura	82.7	Assam	66.3
Andaman & Nicobar Islands	82.4	Haryana	65.9
Chandigarh	81.2	Dadra & Nagar Haveli	64.3
Delhi	80.8	Odisha	64
Puducherry	80.7	Chhatisgarh	60.2
Daman & Diu	79.5	Madhya Pradesh	59.2
Nagaland	76.1	Andhra Pradesh	59.1
Himachal Pradesh	75.9	Arunachal Pradesh	57.7
Maharashtra	75.9	Uttar Pradesh	57.2
Sikkim	75.6	Jammu & Kashmir	56.4
Tamil Nadu	73.4	Jharkhand	55.4
Meghalaya	72.9	Rajasthan	52.1
Punjab	70.7	Bihar	51.5
West Bengal	70.5		

Primary Source: Office of Registrar General, India

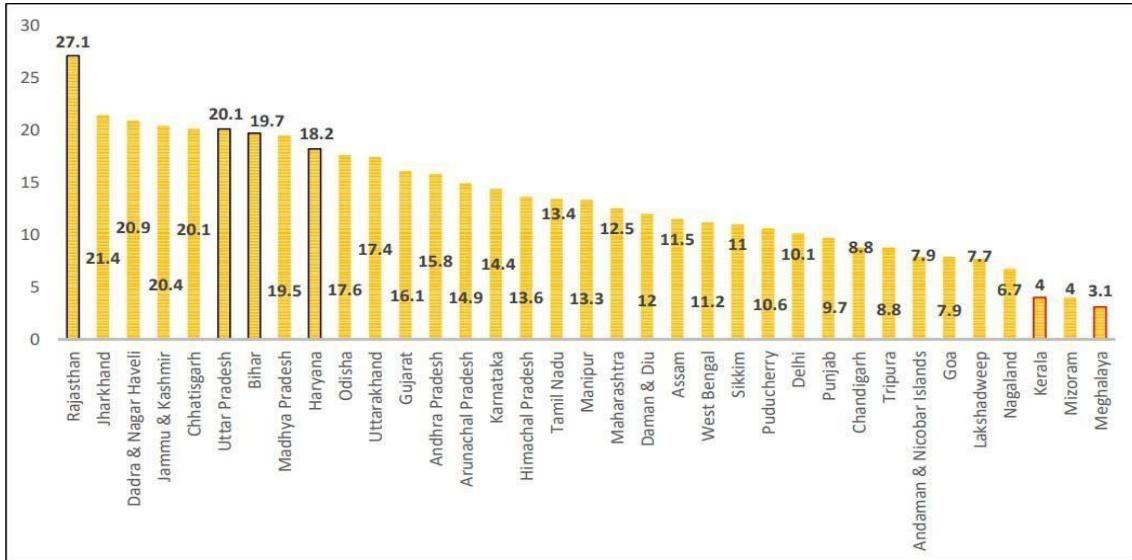
Secondary Source: Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI)

Fig. 4 denotes the female literacy rates of the states and union territories of India according to the 2011 Census. It has been arranged in descending order of literacy from highest to lowest. As can be seen, Kerala ranks on the highest end of the scale with Meghalaya somewhere in the middle and the patriarchal states towards the end. Weightage on education of women in these states seems to be very less.

Fig. 5 shows the differences between the male and female literacy rates. The scenario appears very severe in the predominantly patriarchal states while it is substantially low in the predominantly matriarchal states. Education, here, is equally emphasized upon for both male and female alike.



Fig. 5 Differences in male and female literacy rates (state-wise)



Source: Author's Estimation

Fig. 6 State-wise female workforce participation in rural areas as per Census 2011

STATES	RURAL PARTICIPATION	STATES	RURAL PARTICIPATION
Nagaland	52.3	Odisha	29.7
Himachal Pradesh	47.4	Tripura	26.3
Jharkhand	47.4	Assam	23.7
Chhatisgarh	46.3	Goa	22.6
Andhra Pradesh	44.6	Puducherry	21.1
Sikkim	44.6	Haryana	20.8
Rajasthan	42.7	Jammu & Kashmir	20.8
Maharashtra	42.5	Bihar	20.2
Mizoram	41.9	Kerala	20.2
Manipur	41.2	West Bengal	19.4
Tamil Nadu	41.2	Uttar Pradesh	18.3
Arunachal Pradesh	39.5	Andaman & Nicobar Islands	17.9
Madhya Pradesh	39.3	Daman & Diu	15.9
Karnataka	38.8	Punjab	14.3
Meghalaya	35	Chandigarh	14.2
Dadra & Nagar Haveli	33.4	Lakshadweep	12.6
Uttarakhand	32.9	Delhi	9.7



Gujarat	32		
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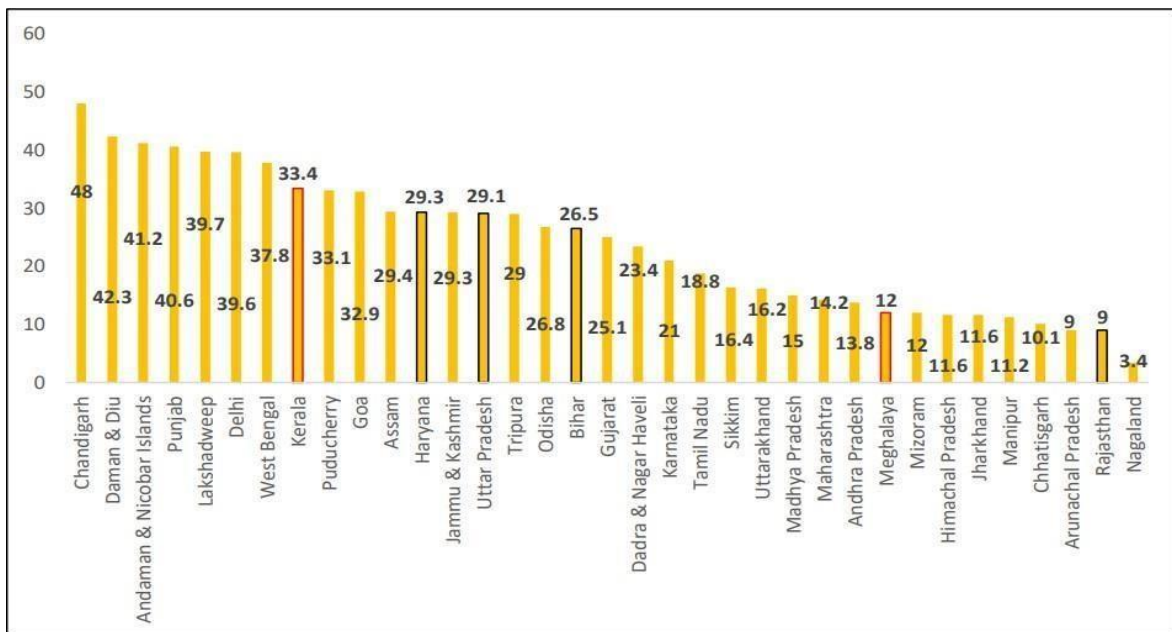
Primary Source: Office of Registrar General, India

Secondary Source: Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI)

Fig. 6 highlights the state-wise participation of females in the workforce in rural areas. As is evident, females in the rural parts of Rajasthan are more engaged in the workforce, followed by Meghalaya and a wide gap later, Haryana, Bihar, Kerala and Uttar Pradesh.

In Fig. 7, the difference in the rural workforce participation of men and women in each state is depicted. It is seen that this difference is majorly present in Kerala followed by Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar and a significant jump later, Meghalaya and Rajasthan.

Fig. 7 Differences in male and female workforce participation in rural areas (state-wise)



Source: Author's Estimation

Fig. 8 State-wise female workforce participation in urban areas as per Census 2011

STATES	URBAN PARTICIPATION	STATES	URBAN PARTICIPATION
Manipur	33.2	West Bengal	15.4
Mizoram	31.1	Madhya Pradesh	15.1
Nagaland	25.9	Assam	14.9
Sikkim	24.8	Dadra & Nagar Haveli	14.7
Meghalaya	23.6	Daman & Diu	14.5
Tamil Nadu	21.8	Jammu & Kashmir	14.5

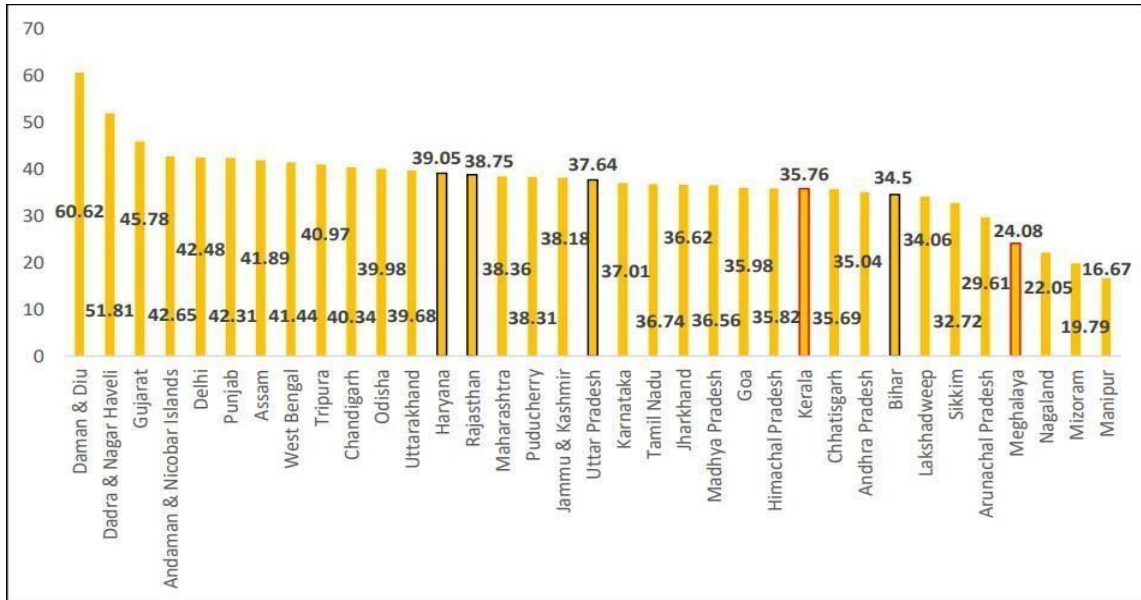


Goa	21.5	Odisha	14.1
Arunachal Pradesh	21.3	Punjab	13.2
Karnataka	20.8	Haryana	12.1
Himachal Pradesh	19.9	Rajasthan	12
Andhra Pradesh	19.1	Gujarat	11.4
Andaman & Nicobar Islands	17.7	Uttar Pradesh	11.3
Chhatisgarh	17.4	Uttarakhand	11.3
Maharashtra	16.8	Delhi	10.6
Puducherry	16.1	Lakshadweep	10.5
Chandigarh	16	Bihar	10.4
Kerala	16	Jharkhand	10.1
Tripura	16		

Primary Source: Office of Registrar General, India

Secondary Source: Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI)

Fig. 9 Differences in male and female workforce participation in urban areas (state-wise)



Source: Author's Estimation

Fig. 8 focuses on the state-wise female workforce participation in the urban areas. Meghalaya is towards the higher end of the scale with the maximum participation. Kerala is somewhere in the middle following which Haryana, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar are situated towards the tail-end.

Fig. 9, the difference in the urban workforce participation of men and women in each state is depicted. Haryana, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh appear to have the maximum difference. Kerala and Bihar are next with Meghalaya nearing the bottom of the scale.



Conclusion:

It is abundantly clear from the findings discussed above that education, both in general and specifically of women, is prioritised more in the predominantly matrilineal states than in the patriarchal ones. The figures reflect that the female literacy rates in the matrilineal states of Kerala and Meghalaya are as high as 92.1 and 72.9 respectively. On the contrary, the rates in the patrilineal states like Rajasthan and Bihar are as low as 52.1 and 51.5 respectively. Another noticeable disparity is that between the differences in the male and female literacy rates of these states. While the gap between the male and female literacy rates revolves around 18.2 to 27.1 in the patrilineal states, the same figures come down to 3 and 4.1 in the matrilineal states. These observations suggest the ranking of the selected states on opposite ends of the equality spectrum and substantiate the low importance given to female education in a largely patriarchal system.

When studying the female workforce participation, however, there arises a contradiction. The matrilineal states observe more women engaged in the workforce in the urban areas - female workforce participation rate of Kerala being around 23.1- while the patrilineal states lag behind with Bihar at just 10.4. Contrarily, in the rural areas, certain patrilineal states come to the forefront and matrilineal ones take a slight backseat. The participation rate in Rajasthan goes up from 12 in the urban areas to 42.7 in the rural areas, while that in Kerala comes down to 20.2, ranking lower than the patrilineal states of Rajasthan and Haryana. This could be due to any number of factors such as social conditioning, economic challenges, geographical factors and more. The reasons behind such contradictions are not delved into in this study, but open up scope for further research.

All in all, the point that is inarguably established is that the flawed structure of patriarchy should be broken down. It is essential to create a society free from the shackles of toxic masculinity or archaic traditional roles. Rather, an interdependency among men and women is required, both in society and their family lives, to ensure healthy and balanced growth of the individuals, society and economy. (*Krishnan, English, Campus & Arjun, 2020*).

Correlation between Disciplines:

From an educational perspective, this study is testament to the interplay between disciplines that students learn on a theoretical level, but rarely witness from a practical viewpoint. The analysis here points to an inter-relationship between the disciplines of Economics and Sociology. A causal interdependence between the two is revealed which makes it rather difficult to completely compartmentalize their study as individual disciplines. The discussion below highlights this conclusion.

One of the main points of commonality between the disciplines of Economics and Sociology is the study of people. Albeit their focus is on separate aspects of human lives, they are not completely impervious to one another. They cannot be compartmentalized as mutually exclusive for several areas of interdependence can be observed.

The disciplines approach similar issues from differing perspectives. For example, where an economist would connect income inequality with areas like redistribution, welfare, government policy or the role of market to determine the causes, a sociologist would dive into a study of class, gender, race, caste or education to study their impact on an individual's access to resources and opportunities.

Economic development enables social mobility by enhancing individual growth in many spheres. Globalization has further led to significant economic and cultural exchange. The consumption preferences of individuals are heavily shaped by the social settings. Social and cultural factors often, if not always, guide



economic choices. Behavioral Economics, actually, acknowledges the influence of socio-cultural norms on individuals' decisions and surrounds its study around them as well.

The significant interrelationship between the two disciplines has been highlighted to a certain extent through the examples cited above. This paper deals with a small part of that by attempting to draw a connection between the social construct of a place and the education, employment and, consequently, economic status of the resident women. This, in turn, leaves scope for in-depth study of the same in future, opening doors for a detailed exploration and solidification of the correlation between the disciplines.

Recommendations:

On the basis of the results of this study, the author has some suggestions with positive social implications. Gender-sensitive skill development programmes that are tailored to local economies and focus on digital literacy, vocational skills and entrepreneurship help in increasing female workforce participation. The PM Kaushal Vikas Yojana, 'Lakshpati Didi' scheme and Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana are working towards skill enhancement and increasing employability. Microfinance and loan schemes such as Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana with strong focus on the women entrepreneurs in rural areas and Self- Help Groups aid in accessing easy credit and help women-owned enterprises flourish and create jobs in rural economies. Improved workplace safety and providing gender-specific benefits like maternity benefits, women's hostels and childcare facilities etc under all rural employment schemes have greater success in sustaining women's workforce engagement.

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