

The Marriage-Education Paradox: Structural and Cultural Limitations on Academic Mobility of Women

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Abstract

Even though women have made great improvements in gaining access to education and their formal equality, marriage remains a central social institution that limits the mobility of women in academic fields. In this paper, we will examine a marriage-education paradox in which the educational access of married women is systematically reduced by highly structured patriarchal values, gender-role expectations, and institutional failures. Using the gender theory, feminist standpoint theory, structural functionalism and conflict theory, the study examines the process of marriage redefining the social roles of women at the expense of intellectual and career development and adopts domestic and care giving roles as their priority.

The paper uses sociological and historical approach to follow the course of development of the status of women in education of the early civilizations to the modern age with references to the persistence of gendered inequalities despite the legal changes and modernization. It is a critical examination of the contributions made by other scholars like Simone de Beauvoir, Arlie Hochschild, Pierre Bourdieu, Amartya Sen, and Betty Friedan on the critical issue of empirical and theoretical research, which collectively prevents married women accessing higher education. The special consideration is given to the phenomenon of the second shift that contributes to time poverty and psychological stress among the women students in a marriage. The paper provides an extensive policy and institutional suggestion, including adaptable academic courses, special financial aid, childcare services, gender-sensitive management, and social awareness programs. Finally, the paper highlights the fact that, allowing women to engage in higher education when they are married is not only necessary in equality between the genders but also in inclusive social development and enhancement of knowledge production.

Keywords: *Academic Mobility, Higher Education, Patriarchy, Gender, Institutional.*

Introduction

Women have variously been influenced by their historical, cultural, and religious backgrounds in the way they have been able to contribute to the household. Women have been required to care about the home, bring up children, and take care of their families in times of need, and their educational opportunities as well as their career advancement have been restricted over the course of history. The position of women in the Indian context has changed drastically from the era of the Rigveda to the era of the Later Vedas, the medieval times, and today in India.

The status of women in the Rigvedic period was quite high, and they were able to receive to formal education. The Vedas, which are among the oldest extant religious books of the Indian subcontinent, contain many references to learned women, including Gargi and Maitreyi, who debated with their male counterparts on serious philosophical issues. History has shown that women were given the right to read and interpret the Vedas, religion ceremonies and agency in marriage through the Swayamvara system. Their decision-making authority was very high, and they were also participatory in the domestic as well as in the societal issues. Learning was promoted, and women were called as Brahmavadinis. Marriage was never viewed as a barrier to education, and women were at liberty to intellectually grow just like men. The involvement of women in spiritual and intellectual debate points out that equality between sexes in terms of education was realized at least to some degree at this time.

The later Vedic period witnessed the decrease in women's status and education. As people were more governed by patriarchal organizations and Brahmanical culture, women were overtaken by a slow system of not receiving Vedic education and being restricted to house chores. Child marriage became more widespread and restrained the freedom of women in their life choices.

The ideology of Stridharma (the responsive role of a woman) gained primacy, and the identity of women was that of a dutiful wife, whose identity was described as a supportive wife and a mother. Women's formal education was much discouraged, and

their participation in intellectual or social spheres became, in effect, restricted. The view that the major role of the woman was to serve her husband and her home was strengthened by the religious treatises that emerged in the period, thus continuing to strip several generations after generations of the educational opportunities open to them.

The opportunities of women with education became even worse by the medieval age. Employment of veiling (purdah), marriage at early ages and restraint of movements significantly limited accessibility of the women to education and involvement in civic activities. Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Jyotirao Phule and Savitribai Phule were some of the reformers who opposed these practices of the time and insisted that women should be educated during the colonial period. Savitribai Phule, who is the first female educator in India, refused to accept the common societal norm by setting up institutions for girls and arguing that education was the strongest tool of female empowerment. However, in the current world, despite the reformist measures and modern laws that support access to education, most women, especially the married ones, are still faced by social and institutional barriers to access higher academic activities. In early civilizations as experienced in Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Greece, women were traditionally assigned to household roles. An example is the Mesopotamian society, where women were mostly restricted to domestic duties, and their legal status was mainly determined by kinship with the male relatives, either as daughter, wife, or mother. Similarly, in classical Greece, though, daughters of the aristocratic families could be taught the bare minimum education; their main responsibility was to stay at home and have children. There was an eminent philosopher, Aristotle, who argued that women were inherently lesser than men and that they should focus on family life, hence, affirming the beliefs of the society that held them back from engaging in any political or intellectual activities. In medieval times, the role of women was usually confined to household roles. The women of feudal societies were responsible for the management of households, cooking, and taking care of children. Even though some women (especially in those families that occupied noble positions) were allowed to receive some kind of education within the convents, it was very rare and was dominated by the religious education, as opposed to the intellectual or professional one. The most common patriarchal structure was such that women were

relegated to the domestic realm, and the men retained the economy as well as education resources.

Industrial Revolution

With the rise of the Industrial Revolution, a conspicuous change in the female involvement in labor can be observed: male workers started to be more mobile, as they had to shift to the new factories and the starting office sector, and the social script of the time required women to be elected within the home sphere to take care of the domestic matters. The cult of domesticity of the nineteenth century only increased the belief that the supreme purpose of a woman was in her service to husband and family; any learning or work done by a woman was often condemned as neglect of the family. Even women who entered work outside the home, in the low-wage and labor-intensive conditions, were still aesthetically and legally strengthened to give domestic life first importance over work. The twentieth century has introduced a host of historic changes in the civil and economic intervention of women, including suffrage, access to university, and developing prevalence of labour. The feminist intellectual trends that cut across the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries were indispensable in questioning and challenging these genderized expectations on the idea that the domestic roles that women had been assigned throughout history were not natural states but sociocultural ideas. Such theorists as Simone de Beauvoir and Betty Friedan declared that the binary segregation between the realms of the public and the realms of the personal was both enforced by the patriarchal systems of power. However, the vestiges of institutional and cultural bias remain, especially in relation to married women wanting to obtain higher education, which explains the need to conduct further pedagogical, legislative, and social interventions.

Women's Role in the Household Today

A married woman is still regarded as the primary caregiver to the family in most parts of the world. She is to cook, clean, raise children, and deal with the well-being of the house in general. These expectations bring about a workload that is invisible and that

is usually not realized yet consumes a lot of time and energy. *Arlie Hochschild* in her book titled *The Second Shift*, which explains the occurrence of the so-called second shift phenomenon, which is the fact that women not only work at their job now but also do most of the household chores. Her Empirical investigation proves that even in the household where both partners are working full-time, females still tend to carry their share of household labour over a disproportionate number of their male colleagues. Such a dual movement makes it extremely hard to give married women time to study higher education since they are always balancing family and academic needs. In most societies, especially South Asian, Middle Eastern, and some African societies, the educational ambitions of a woman are usually put in second position as compared to wifehood and motherhood. As demonstrated even in societies that are more liberal, there exists a subtle discrimination that will only make married women less focused on their education.

Theoretical Framework

The gender and feminist theories explain the socialization of women who spend their major resources on housework instead of self-development as prescribed by the institution. The long, hard battle of married women in higher education is anchored in the traditional gender roles, structural limitations, and power imbalances, and this has been strictly scrutinized from different sociological perspectives. The concept of thorough development of Gender Role Theory by *Talcott Parsons* is an explanation of the influence that societal expectations have on behavior according to gender. According to Parsonian analysis, it assumes that men are mostly considered as primary providers, whereas women are supposed to do caregiving roles and household tasks. This is a socialization that sets boundaries for women who enter marriage and have the desire to further their education since they are continuously reminded that their family comes first before their studies or career. The gender role theory can thus be used to elaborate why married women meet family resistance in trying to go back to school because studies dissuade the gender expectations that a woman is supposed to maintain at the household level. According to this feminist perspective, which is expressed by *Dorothy Smith and*

Patricia Hill Collins, the experience of such marginalized people as married women in higher education has always been overshadowed by the mainstream academic and institutional systems. This position argues that knowledge production and policy studies are normatively driven by hegemonic groups, thus subordinating the voice of women who suffer discrimination and exclusion by the system.

Structural functionalism examines the way various social institutions are working together so that there is stability in society. In this paradigm, even the traditional structure of a family and the institution of education do not necessarily serve women's education, especially among the married women who are expected to attend to their household chores. The structural functionalists say that the workings of social systems are meant to strengthen embedded gender practices thus hindering the ability of women to go beyond their assigned roles. This discussion highlights the impact in which educational institutions fail to offer malleable learning opportunities, financial support and supportive systems to women who are married and as a result contribute to gender inequalities. Without structural changes to accommodate the educational requirements of married women, the latter are most likely to continue to encounter the systemic barriers to higher education. Additionally, one of the theories is the Conflict Theory as formulated by *Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels*, which suggests that the organization in the society are made up of conflicts between the dominant and the subordinate groups, with most of the power and resources being centralized among the privileged population. The patriarchal norms and institutional structures in the context of married women in academia serve as an agent of control and constraint to opportunities, as well as to justify male dominance in the family and in the academic field. The integration of these sociological theories in the paper reveals that gender expectations and institutionalization policies, as well as disparities of power, are the underlying factors that make married women face higher education challenges.

A subtle interpretation of these obstacles, using gender role theory, feminist standpoint theory, structural functionalism, and conflict theory, will help in the deep analysis of the systemic obstacles that limit the academic pursuits of married women. This kind of question at the same time highlights the necessity of making policy

changes, institutional support, and social change to protect the right to education of all women regardless of marital status.

Challenges Associated with Higher Education among Married Women

The access to higher education in any society is shaped by a combination of various factors, including individual motivation, social structure, existing cultural values, and pressures created by the family. In the case of married women, especially, the process of acquiring a higher education is often fraught with challenges caused by the interplay between the responsibilities of being a wife and the gender stereotypes that surround them continuously. Marriage tends to restructure the social status of a woman thus reorganizing her priorities and obligations in ways which may be restrictive on her education as well as her ambitions.

Gender Expectations and Traditional Roles

Perhaps one of the biggest challenges experienced by married women in the world of higher education is the social pressure that requires them to consider the needs of their family first before pursuing intellectual and personal growth. In the conventional view of gender, women should be dedicated to domestic chores, including cooking meals, cleaning the house, and taking care of children but their existence, training to high levels become secondary or even unnecessary. In many cultures, marriage is understood as the start of a woman's major role as a housewife, and any further academic aspiration becomes an unnecessary luxury. *Simone de Beauvoir*, in her masterpiece book the *Second sex (1949)* argued that women are conditioned into these specific roles that restrain independence and intellectual growth; she argued that females are created rather than born to be nurturers and homemakers. The ontological framing is still undeniably applicable because as a married woman, one is often forced into following the traditional norms at the cost of their school attainments.

Lack of Support from Family and Society

The aspirations of married women in terms of education are viewed as secondary or even unnecessary in some cultural milieus, based on the assumption that such activities contrast with their duty of primary importance, which is domestic life. In these settings,

in-laws and husbands can be actively discouraging women to continue learning where higher education is perceived as an intrusion and not an asset. As a result, married women often have to obtain the direct permission or approval of husbands or parents with regard to their further education, thus subjecting their autonomy and power of choice to considerable limitations, consequently reducing their agency as persons. When married women are faced with the lack of emotional and practical assistance of the immediate surrounding social world, they are usually in a disadvantaged position. Education can be discouraged by in-laws and their spouses since it seems like a distraction from the real job at home. Often women are forced to seek authorization from husbands or parents to go on with studies, hence limiting agency. Cultural capital, in the context of *Pierre Bourdieu*, is the reason why some groups of people have more access to the educational resources and opportunities than others; married women in particular are often deprived of the cultural and social capital needed to succeed in academic settings because of the existing cultural discourse, which does not encourage women to value education as much as men should.

Financial Constraints

The financial aspect of higher education, i.e., tuition, textbooks, transportation, and other extra costs, is a significant impediment. Women who are married, not to mention most of their economic reliance on a partner or a larger family, have a great challenge of financing their studies. Without personal income, they will find it hectic to convince husbands or in-laws to channel some resources to their education, which such family members in many cases consider an unnecessary investment. Also, *Amartya Sen* introduced the capability approach, where he was of the view that real freedom exists by the availability of resources and opportunities. Therefore, the educational options of married women do prove to be limited in the case of the two when they are not financially independent. Sen stressed that the increase in accessibility of women to education and economic opportunities is crucial to the development of the country.

Institutional Barriers

The academic institutions have also been found to lack structure that has been designed to accommodate special challenges facing married women. Strict class

timetables leave out many students and at the same time leave them with family duties. Moreover, universities usually have few services like childcare provision on campus, maternity leave, or accommodating flexed course programs to married students. *Betty Friedan* wrote *The Feminine Mystique (1963)*, which criticized institutional architectures that easily marginalize women and help to promote the idea that they belong to the family sphere but not to the business or academic world. These exclusionary designs do still oppress married students in the current higher education establishment.

Psychological and Emotional Stress

The emotional and psychological strain of being a wife, mother, student, and even an employee is tremendous, owing to the cumulative pressures of being a wife, mother, student, and even a worker. Those women who are married are under a lot of guilt as they focus on their educational goals rather than family responsibilities. This inner struggle is enhanced through the social construction of a human framework that makes them belong to the biggest identity as an individual who stays at home instead of in a study setting or in the workplace. One of the most successful feminist psychologists, *Carol Gilligan* believed that caring and responsibility to relations were the most significant influences affecting the moral reasoning of women. This means that most married women experience an emotional drive to chronicle family demands against education, hence the increased feeling of guilt and psychological suffering.

Management of the challenges for married female students

Although married women also face countless issues in modern academia, higher education allows them to acquire a repertoire of coping skills, which help them to juggle between two life tasks successfully. These are the adaptive strategies that enable balancing of academic aspiration and household stewardship, thus guaranteeing further educational advancement despite the existing disciplinary and social barriers in the society.

Effective Time Management

Meticulous time management can easily be considered one of the key coping techniques used by married women. Most of them express their day-to-day plan by using organized schedules that set aside specific times when they can be at home working, taking care of the children, and doing schoolwork. Their ability to maintain focus and momentum is through prioritizing their work, working with planners or electronic calendars, and having realistic goals in their studies. In addition, although a significant percentage of these women work outside or carry on with studies, they still bear the major burden of housework. As a way of alleviating this burden, some will outsource certain activities to their family members or employ outside help despite the fact that such activities in most collectivist societies are still limited by firmly held gender norms.

Online Learning and Flexible Study Options

Education online has become one of the lifelines of many married women willing to pursue their academic qualifications. The digital learning platforms have a level of flexibility that allows women to plan the learning sessions based on the domestic engagements, thus eliminating the need to commute to learning institutions, thus allowing them to manage the domestic obligations at the same time. Alternative modalities like Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), distance-learning courses, and degree programs that allow part-time attendance give such scholars a chance to pursue their studies without having to attend a classroom. Universities that have taped lectures, self-study courses, and weekend seminars enhance this provision even more, providing alternative choices of other learning formats that will meet the needs of married life.

Support Networks

The support networks (both institutional and personal) have a central role in ensuring that married women overcome the challenges of higher learning. Women find it much more manageable to maintain educational trends when their partners, in-laws, and kids encourage them to engage in academic activities. The favorable environment at home

plays a very significant role in the reduction of the isolation that is usually experienced by balancing between academic and household duties.

Building strong study groups and peer networks

The interactions with peer groups and attendance of women-focused support systems in the university environment promote a feeling of solidarity and experience. Between married women who often must face similar challenges connected with housekeeping, raising children, and getting graded, emotional support, motivation, and practical guidance become reciprocal. Through these collegial networks participants act to spread knowledge, share time management strategies, and encourage each other to push through to reach their educational goals. Adding to this peer support, mentorship by experienced faculty or professionals who overcame similar problems gives invaluable guidance, support, and career advice, which improves confidence and a desire to continue higher education despite the complexity of different tasks.

Financial Planning and Scholarships

Money is an important challenge among married women in the quest to seek academic development. To this response, there are numerous proposals to take scholarships, government grants, or cheap education programs. They also supplement their funds by part-time jobs or freelancing online, thus continuing their education. The burden on the finances is alleviated through institutions that come up with special financial aid schemes that apply to women that are married, thus making it easier to remain engaged in their education.

Mental Resilience and Self-Motivation

In addition to external strategies, intrinsic motivation and resilience cannot be left out. Most women can develop positive cognitions and meditation and employ stress-management coping strategies to overcome the psychological pressure of having to multitask. They maintain engagement in their academic studies by setting goals and rewarding themselves with small achievement steps, thus enabling the upholding of their

self-efficacy and motivation to continue with the studying process.

Suggestions and Conclusion

The issues of higher education among married women require an institutional sensitivity, policy-level action, and long-term social investment. Since the underlying factors of these issues are systemic inequalities, gender expectations, and the scarcity of supportive provisions, the answers should not be limited to personal action but rather finding a way to create an educational environment that would be enabling. The universities, the governments, and the private sector should have a significant role to play in ensuring that there is no construction of marriage and motherhood as barriers to the academic progress of women. Universities should introduce part-time classrooms, evening classes, and courses offered on weekends and online platforms so that married women can be able to attend school at a convenient speed. The introduction of maternity leave for students would also serve as a means of protection against the disruptions that may occur due to pregnancy and childbirth and ensure the continuity of their learning process. It becomes the responsibility of the governments as well as educational institutions to formulate and establish specific scholarship programs, financial-aid programs, and low-interest education loans that specifically help married women. Similarly, employers must also establish paid internships and work-study programs, which will allow married female scholars to be economically independent.

Universities ought to have fully equipped childcare services on campus that will allow mothers to concentrate on their studies without the interference of their parents. Institutions should also implement flexible childcare hours that are modified according to the schedule of the women attending schools who have children. Public-awareness campaigns should be initiated to challenge the existing gender norms that discourage educated married women from furthering their education. Anti-discrimination efforts must be introduced at institutions so that the racial discrimination against married students is rooted out and that they enjoy an equal learning atmosphere. Employers should be advised to use education-friendly workplace policies that would enable women to further their studies during working hours. Universities should come up with special support networks and mentoring programs for married women students. Campus

staff ought to undergo gender sensitization that will enhance their perception of the difficulties experienced by women who are married so that they can be able to provide the required academic flexibility.

The shift to the academic world leaves married women with a daunting challenge, as they have continued to struggle against the ingrained social culture, family demands, financial restrictions, and institutional barriers in their pursuit of a post-secondary education. However, an emerging literature demonstrates clearly that married women are extraordinarily resilient, use advanced time-management programs, participate in online learning formats, establish strong support systems, and plan to hire a financial support system that will sustain them academically. Through the deliberate effort to detect and take the initiative to contain such hindrances, the academic fraternity has its standing to establish an independent future where all women, irrespective of marital status, are empowered to accomplish their educational ambitions and give constructive contributions to the society.

In addition to reforms within the institution, there is a dire need to change the society and the culture. Awareness campaigns should be initiated in the society and oppose of the prevailing gender norms that discourage married women in seeking higher education. Such initiatives can change the perception of society by anticipating the long term benefits of female education to families, communities, and national progress. In their turn, universities are to enforce anti-discrimination and inclusive policies to a letter in order to prevent the marginalization of married women in the academic circles and, therefore, provide them with the fair and respectful learning experience. No less important is the gender-sensitization of faculty and administrative staff, which will develop empathy and increase institutional sensitivity to the special needs of married women students. To sum up, the shift into the higher education field introduces married women to complex problems due to social requirements, family responsibilities, financial limitations, and institutional considerations. The current academic sources testify to the outstanding strength of married women students, who tactfully use the efficient time-management strategies, take advantage of online education platforms, create solid support systems, and proactively aim at the achievement of financial

independence to continue their studies. However, participation in education should not be entirely based on resilience. Using intentional, integrated, and participatory interventions, the academic community will have a duty and a possibility to create an educational environment whereby women can be able to achieve their academic dreams and make significant contributions to the society. This transformation is necessary not only to promote gender equality but also to have a deeper social progress and inclusive development.

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