

New Attitudes towards Girl's Education in Rural India? When Fieldwork in Palampur (Himachal Pradesh) Raises Hope for Women's Rights in India

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New Attitudes towards Girls' Education in Rural India? When Fieldwork in Palampur (Himachal Pradesh) Raises Hope for Women's Rights in India,

> Of all the evils for which man has made himself responsible, none is so degrading, so shocking or so brutal as his abuse of the better half of humanity to me, the female sex, not the weaker sex. It is the nobler of the two, for it is even today the embodiment of sacrifice, silent suffering, humility, faith and knowledge. (Gandhi 105)

On Human Rights in India

Mention women's rights in India to Westerners and, almost unavoidably, you will hear about the practice of *Sati*, the *purdah*, the *devadasi* tradition, dowry deaths and female infanticide. Or else, when questioning no such fine connoisseurs of India, you may hear about early or forced marriages, physical violence and rapes or other types of sexual aggressions – as increasingly reported by the media. And of course there is no smoke without fire.

Sati is an old traditional funeral ritual among some Indian communities which requires recently widowed women to join their deceased husbands by immolating themselves on their funeral pyres. The *purdah* is a custom which imposes rules of physical segregation between men and women, prohibits the latter to speak to the former and compels women to dress in such a way as to conceal their skin and forms, that is, to stay away from men's look and possible desire. As for the *devadasi* system, it forces the "servants of gods" into prostitution from puberty, when their virginity is sold to the highest bidder, their sex being thereafter open to use and abuse as their higher religious purpose means they can never marry a mortal anyway.

However, one will be reassured to know that those infamous middle-age practices have been loudly condemned within and without India, resulting in their progressive though incomplete disappearance from the country. *Sati* was abolished by the British in 1829 and has fallen into disuse – only about forty cases having been registered since India became independent in 1947. Likewise, the *devadasi* system was made illegal in some parts of India from 1934 onwards, to eventually be outlawed everywhere in 1988 and to essentially collapse as a consequence, though the practice has admittedly not

been eradicated from the southern States of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Maharashtra. As for the *purdah*, it is nowadays almost exclusively observed by Hindu women in rural north India, and even then, it is usually only abided by around older male in-laws, or in familiar public spaces where they are likely to be met.

Of deeper and wider contemporary concern is the rate of female mortality throughout India as a consequence of widespread gynecide. Girl children are in particular danger already, victims as they are of female foeticide and infanticide despite the long-standing *Infanticide Act* (1870): although the Indian government has been fighting against these practices to redress the national child sex ratio, which indicates an alarming number of "missing" girls, and though the legislators have taken on their responsibility, prohibiting the use of ultrasound machines on pregnant women for sex determination tests for instance (*Preconception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition of Sex Selection) Act* (1994)), sex selection practices have remained so common indeed that there were only 914 girls for 1,000 boys 6 years old or below in 2011 – the lowest ratio since Independence (Thomas). This gender unbalance is due to several reasons which have commonly led Indian families to prefer male children, yet with two exceptions – one being that only boys transmit the family name and the other being that they alone are in charge of the rituals performed for their parents' afterlife – all come down to one, major, economic reason.

Indeed, girls are mostly perceived as a financial burden on the family: not only are they regarded as having a lesser economic utility than boys, providing housework or forms of labor that generally weigh little or less in the economy of their parents' household, but as they are destined to live at their in-laws' after marriage, the long-term economic benefits of their early years' living expenses and education costs will benefit their husbands' families above all. "Having a girl is like hosing the neighbor's garden," goes an Indian saying, shedding light on the high rate of female infanticide in India on the one hand, and on the other also, thereby giving hints as to why about half of the girls are married before they turn 18 (UNICEF, 150, "Statistical Table n°9") though the national law prohibits marriages involving minors. For that much, marriage is yet another major source of spending which many families take into account when deciding on whether their baby girls should live or not, and should their answer be positive, during years, when running their overall budget.

Weddings are costly indeed, but the prime concern of many Indian families is the dowry which they will give the bridegroom's family in the form of

cash, farm animals, furniture, electronics or other household items. Admittedly, the dowry system was made illegal more than half a century ago (*Dowry Prohibition Act (1961)*), yet it is commonly practiced all the same, either for the sake of tradition or simply because parents want to make sure that their daughters will be properly accommodated in their new homes. In spite of legal attempts to suppress one of the major causes of female infanticide, the dowry has remained highly institutionalized. This is unfortunately made obvious through the ever-increasing number of dowry related incidents and "dowry deaths": from 1st January 2001 to 31st December 2012, an estimated 91,202 suicides and murders were reportedly linked to dowry amounts that were deemed insufficient by the groom or his family (Pereira). Plus, considering the number of "accidental" or non-elucidated deaths among the Indian female population (Menon-Sen & Kumar), the odds are that official records largely underestimate the number of dowry victims.

In fact, regardless of its form, violence against women does not seem to be significantly shrinking in India despite rather committed parliamentary laws and governmental actions. On the contrary, available data indicate that instances of abuse, torture, dowry death and "bride burning," kidnapping, sexual harassment, molestation and rape are alarmingly numerous and probably increasingly so (Mangoli & Tarase 296). It may be that statistics reflect the fact that violence is today more commonly reported than before, but still: according to India's National Crime Records Bureau, crimes against women happen every three minutes, rapes of women take place twice per hour and a young married woman is found beaten to death, burnt or driven to suicide every six hours (Pahuja). Furthermore, in spite of the landmark passage of the *Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (2005)* in a context where about 70% of married women between 15 and 49 were victims of beating, rape or forced sex (Chowdhury, quoting the *United Nation Population Fund Report* on the *BBC*), domestic violence remains an endemic problem while ill-treatments, harassment, humiliation and exploitation continue to be the everyday conditions of life for millions of Indian women.

Bearing this in mind, one can only share Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's concern over the "growing phenomenon" of violence against women (NDTV.com). Indeed, one can barely be surprised to read that India ranks fourth among the most dangerous places for women in the world (TrustLaw). And yet, the harsh conditions in which Indian women live go much beyond the different outward forms of physical and psychological violence to which they are exposed, even before they are born and thereafter, inside and outside their homes. To take the full measure of the harshness of these condi-

tions, one should also consider that, with an estimated 117,000 maternal deaths each year, India is home to a quarter of the women who die annually worldwide during pregnancy and childbirth (Centre for Reproductive Rights, 9). As urgently, one should ponder over things much less extraordinary than are the *Sati* or the *devadasi* customs, things that are much more common and not even specific to the Indian sub-continent, all things that the media hardly ever find worth mentioning as they are unfortunately seen as no particular events, just parts of everyday life; of course, reference is made here to those endless discriminations based on basic sexism, and to that pervasive hierarchical relationship between men and women that was supposedly established at the expense of the latter by the dominant faith in India, Hinduism.

Indeed, in spite of Mahatma Gandhi's firm and model commitment to gender equality, women in India still suffer great disadvantage in almost all fields within a patriarchal society that remains profoundly male chauvinist. The domination of men prevails overwhelmingly while women are given unequal opportunities in education, employment and other such basic things as access to food or health, and yet the Constitution of India prohibits any kind of discrimination based on gender. Who or what is to blame, therefore? Successive governments have a responsibility that they have conveniently often evaded but it is equally true that they have worked at recognizing and at protecting greater rights for women ever since the Nehru administration succeeded in passing the *Hindu Marriage Act*, the *Hindu Succession Act*, the *Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act* and the *Hindu Adoptions and Maintenance Act* in 1955-56; because women's rights have been constantly considered to be necessary for India's development since Independence (Williams 108), Indian rulers have indeed tried – and quite successfully so – to improve the legal framework in which they are to be understood and guaranteed. As a result, Indian women are way ahead of other women elsewhere with respect to social legislation, enjoying such rights as the right to divorce, inherit, set up a business, receive family allowances or take part in the political life of the country.

Why, then, is social equality such a long way from being realized in India? In spite of all improvements, why does the country still rank 101 out of 136 countries when measuring inequalities between women and men (World Economic Forum, 10, Table 3a: "The Global Gender Gap Index 2013 rankings")? The implementation of laws granting rights to women has certainly been slow but this is far from sufficient to account for the current gender gap. Other actors and factors come obviously into play, and education is no doubt

a major one, if not the key player; there is indeed plenty of evidence that Indian women's emancipation and India's compliance with human rights with regards women highly depend on their education – hence the Indian government's strong commitment to female education, and hence also this paper's aim to review the situation, starting from a theoretical and statistical approach of where India stands at the moment, and continuing with some case studies extracted from fieldwork notes, both to give a human figure to facts and numbers and to allow for a good understanding of what is, and what could or should be done if the country wants to keep going ahead.

Education in India: Facts and Figures

India has eventually come to align with human rights this past decade or so, at least in legal terms, with regards to elementary education. Indeed, in accordance with the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (art. 26) and the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (art. 13 & 14), the country chose to introduce a new Article 21-A in its core document (*Constitution (Eighty-sixth Amendment) Act (2002)*) to provide for the free and compulsory education of all children from age 6 to age 14, or up to Grade 8, as a Fundamental Right. In addition, legislation was further enacted to comply with that universal entitlement to education endlessly reaffirmed by the UNESCO and the UNICEF: in 2009, the Indian Parliament passed the *Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act* to guarantee a right to education that is, at last, in keeping with international requirements. There should be no more child labor, the legislators reaffirmed in front of a problem that has been persistent though unlawful and even unconstitutional. In fact, no one should be denied education on economic grounds, they insisted, backing the all-important decision that the government had made to provide free-of-cost elementary education in a country where more than 400 million people live below the absolute poverty line (The World Bank, "India Overview"). More encompassing even, the parliamentarians argued in direct line with the *UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education (1960)*, the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979)* and other international treaties that every single child should go to school, whatever their sex, religious belonging, caste of origin or economic background.

The Indian government knows it well: fostering greater levels of education is crucial to sustain the country's economic and social development (Velkoff). Hence their continuous efforts to improve the education system,

and hence the President of India's "unambiguous motto": "all for knowledge, and knowledge for all" (Mukherjee). As a matter of fact, India's commitment to guarantee the right of every child to complete full time, quality elementary education at a neighborhood school has achieved real results: primary school enrollment and attendance rates have remarkably increased since the 1990s, reaching close to universal enrollment in Grade 1 for that matter (UNICEF, "Education"). Still, despite its commendable efforts to universalize primary education, the country suffers from a high dropout rate with an estimated eight million six of 14-year-olds out-of-school in 2009 (*Ibid.*). In addition, because of a shortage of resources mostly, government schools suffer from high pupil to teacher ratios, shortage of infrastructure, wide-spread unsanitary conditions and poor levels of professional qualification or teacher training (*Ibid.*). This is especially the case in rural areas, which non-coincidently also have lower rates of completion than urban settings, but the quality of public education is everywhere so low that 27% of Indian children are educated in private schools in spite of their prohibitive tuition fees (Desai *et al.*).

Most worrying, the quality of public schools has remained so extremely poor in India despite the implementation of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan program that learning outcomes are appallingly low. India has admittedly made great progress in terms of increasing literacy and numeracy, expanding them to three quarters of the population (The World Bank, "India Overview"), but it is still often that the basics are not mastered (UNICEF, "Education"). And again, despite the SSA's stress on equity and absolute necessity to bridge social category gaps in education, this is particularly true among socially disadvantaged groups like females or rural children. Most remarkably indeed, the 2011 Indian census reveals that 82% of adult men are literate, compared to only 65% of adult women (Office of the Registrar General & Census Commission). Reports also show very clearly that rural children have generally much poorer achievements than urban children: one in two 10-year-olds is incapable to read at a basic level, for instance, and six in ten are unable of doing a simple division (*The Economist*). It should be no surprise, therefore, to find rural women at the very bottom of the pyramid: while 79% of urban women are literate, only 58% of rural women can read and write (Office of the Registrar General & Census Commission; Copal Partners).

The generally poor level of literacy and formal education in India is directly linked to the poor quality of its public education, of course, but is evidently also a direct consequence of the children's low retention rate. This is true in upper primary school already, particularly in rural areas where one in

two – among whom a majority of girls (ASER Centre) – drop out before the legal age of 14 (*The Economist*). This is particularly true in secondary education, however, though the number of students enrolled is growing: while it has been accepted by the international community that secondary education should be made free and compulsory, or minimum that States should work at making it universal (UNESCO), only about 69% of the eligible age-group children are enrolled at that level in India. In order to try and comply with international requirements (for instance, the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966)*, art. 5, 13 & 14), or at least in order to align India's Gross Enrollment Ratio for secondary education with emerging market economies like China or Thailand (The World Bank, "School enrollment, secondary"), the government has thus taken many steps to improve secondary education and to make it accessible and affordable to all. For example, the National Means-cum-Merit Scholarship Scheme was launched in 2008 to allow deserving students of poor backgrounds to continue their study at secondary stage. The same year, the National Scheme of Incentives to Girls for Secondary Education was adopted to support unmarried girls aged 16 or below wanting to carry on with their studies at secondary level. However, combined with the "opportunity cost" of secondary education, tuition fees and costs generated by such things as transport, books, uniforms and stationery put such a burden on Indian families' budget (Dwahan) that children from a deprived background will commonly drop out – and girls first (Menon-Sen & Kumar). It is no wonder that higher education enrollments should be low therefore, despite government schemes of financial assistance such as the New Central Sector Scheme of Scholarship for College and University Students, and very logically, one cannot but observe a consequential gender imbalance at tertiary level (Saraswathi & Verma 17).

From Himachal Pradesh: Women Education in Perspective

Knowing that girls in India continued to be far less educated than boys (Velkoff), I decided to do fieldwork there to try and investigate the whys and wherefores of that gender imbalance. To that purpose I eventually chose to head towards Himachal Pradesh in northern India; because it is the least urbanized State in India, with nearly 90% of the population living in rural areas, because it is considered to be a dynamic and educationally developed State – along with Kerala, Goa and Maharashtra –, and because it has had remarkable success in educational development, particularly in terms of liter-

acy and education rates among women. I thought it would be a good place to investigate the situation of rural women with regards to education and women's rights, not only because rural India tends to make drop out and illiteracy more visible but because the changes which the State has prompted have created a dynamic which reveals both what is now and what can be done, or hoped for under certain conditions. I therefore settled down in Lohna, a village neighbor to Palampur in the Kangra Valley, and spent weeks interviewing the local women in their homes as part of a women empowerment program. The five case studies which follow were chosen among dozens, and they were picked out because it seems to me that they together reflect well the different and recurrent elements which must be taken into account to assess how women's right to education, and women's rights generally, have a chance to be implemented in India in a probably near future.

Case study 1: Manisha

Manisha is enrolled in year 9 like most 14-year old girls but she is particularly grateful to her family. Both her parents work hard in labor jobs to pay their house loan, feed the family and offer her a good education, yet they are regularly put off work by bad weather conditions and therefore her two brothers contribute also, with their salaries. Neither of the now 19 and 25 year-old boys has been able to go very far in their studies – one having reached the 8th standard and the other one the 10th –, first because their parents' wages were insufficient to pay for the school fees and other education costs such as uniforms, textbooks and mid-day meals, but above all, perhaps, because they could not really afford not having their boys work for wages. Yet, neither of the two boys is resentful; in fact, the two are quite happy to have left school to complete a driver course, and both are just proud to allow their younger sister to have full access to secondary education. She, in return, is doing very well at school. Later, she would like to do a sewing course, because government subsidies make it cheap and accessible and also because she knows other girls in Lohna who are willing to do the same course in the same nearby city and who are ready to share the cost of a small college room. Furthermore, she likes the idea of making beautiful, colorful clothes, as well as the idea of opening a shop, earning good money and making her future in-laws proud. Above all, however, she is eager to pay tribute to her father, an orphan who has been working since he was 11 to offer his three children a better life than his, without gender discrimination, or else,

to the slight advantage of his darling girl. So long had he prayed in the temple to have a baby girl, he remembers.

Case study 2: Angel

14-year old Angel lives in a small farm with her mother, her little sister, a baby boy and her grandfather who, as the senior male of the family, has full authority over everyone else in the household. She and her grandfather used to get on well but their relationship has become really tense recently, over school problems. Not that Angel is not doing well: she loves school, goes everyday with no exception and has good marks, except in arithmetics. What displeases her grandfather is the attitude that she has had – and that teachers have complained about: she is using her mobile phone though it is prohibited by the school rules, she has been hanging around with boys – maybe even kissing with one in particular –, and she has taken alcohol at least once, when she got caught. In short, she has dishonored the family name. Her grandfather has therefore decided to react with great firmness: either she leaves her "bad ways" and renounces that childhood best friend who has had such an evil influence over her, or she will be prohibited from ever going back to school again. Angel is undecided: she would like to keep on studying but does not quite understand what is so wrong about her behavior. Meanwhile, her grandfather has started to look for a good husband for her. Should she not decide to put things rights, and then the priority for her after she leaves school will be to get married and become a good spouse, a good mother and a good house worker. Should she on the contrary decide to go on with her study and go to the college of nursing she has always coveted, and in that case also, considering the 'new generation ways', it would be safer to marry her first. At the same time, the elder knows that the more education his granddaughter will have before marriage, the more likely it is that she will marry up and her dowry will be all the smaller. Perhaps he will wait therefore, until she turns 18, when the Indian law allows girls to get married, but all depends on the girl's will and ability to go the 'right way' and preserve the reputation of the family.

Case study 3: Premchand and Premidevi

Premchand and Premidevi have five children – three boys and two girls. Their family is quite uncommon for indeed, other Hindu families in the area have rather chosen to have one or maybe two children – the "ideal," "com-

plete" family counting one boy and one girl. The few families around, which also have three or more children, had usually been anxious to have one boy at least, which explains the typical family pattern of a youngest son preceded by a number of girls, but Premchand's offspring goes against that trend: the firstborn is a girl, now 26, but then comes a boy, 24, before another girl, 17, and two other boys, 15 and 9. Premidevi says that she did not know how not to have children at the time but the truth is that she reflects less on the causes than on the consequences of being so numerous at home, the major one being undoubtedly the extreme poverty in which her family has unvaryingly been living. With her head low, she admits that food has been lacking some days, and particularly often so since she and her husband got ill and were forced to quit their respective work as a labourer and an electrician. Today, it is their older son who provides for the basic needs of the family but his unqualified labour job does not pay enough to make ends meet and buy his parents' necessary medicine. Meena, the elder girl, is doing the housework that her unhealthy mother can no longer take on. She was never really interested in studying but still: to help out at home, she had to ignore the law and quit school when she was still in grade 7. Her younger sister Momta has had the chance to stay longer at school but this is the last year she will be able to attend because her family can no longer support the cost of her education now that she is repeating Year 10 with resulting higher fees. She will probably go to work, therefore, and in her turn help pay for her younger brothers' education.

Case study 4: Sunita

Sunita, 34, is mother of a boy, aged 15, and a girl, aged 14. She used to work as a cleaning lady in Palampur but she had to quit a couple of years ago, when her mother-in-law suddenly got very sick. Now, she is taking care of her husband's mother, does some sewing at home and takes upon herself to do all the housework, with almost no help from her daughter Shivanjini; children should be at school, she thinks, and she particularly wants her girl 'to go somewhere,' or at least, to have the same chances as those well-educated girls she met while working in the neighboring town. Her husband is equally supportive of their daughter, but as the mother, she feels responsible, in charge of her children's education, and she takes her role very seriously. While conscientiously putting aside some of the money the girl's father brings back every month as a tailor, to make sure that her daughter will be able to finish high school and attend the course she dreams of to become a

dance teacher, Sunita helps as much as she can with the homework. Now, to better assist her 9th grade daughter, she is even thinking about taking some of those English or computer classes that volunteers are providing in a near-by organization. Shivanjini has a bright future ahead of her, she thinks, and India too – if only parents would send their kids to school rather than have them work on the farms or be in such a hurry to marry them. She understands, of course, that some families are so extremely poor but that their basic survival needs will take precedence over education. But isn't education a basic need also?, she asks herself. And does it really make a significant economic difference to marry the girls when they are only teenagers, before the law allows, but most importantly even, before they even finish school? Everyone knows marriage is highly likely to put an end to the girls' schooling as it marks their entry into the women's world as spouses and mothers. She, at least, swears: whether she likes it or not, Shivanjini will not get married before she has completed her education, made a living and gained some independence.

Case study 5

Three young women are sitting outside a relatively cosy farmhouse, talking cheerfully. Neelam, 23, completed two 6-month higher education courses after high school because she was not sure if she wanted to become a beautician or if she wanted to sew clothes. Eventually she started working as a seller in a shop, got pregnant, and now looks forward to going back to work, even though her husband earns a very reasonable living as a drawing teacher in a private school. Her sister-in-law, Shilpa, was married to her brother two years ago, when she was 23. For financial reasons, she had to quit school when she was 13, after completing grade 8, but now that she lives more comfortably with her in-laws, she would like to resume her studies. Actually she has been talking to her husband lately about her desire to take English classes and eventually become a teacher, and though his income as a carpenter is sufficient for their nuclear family, he has proven very supportive in fact. As to Neha, she is a 21 year-old cousin of the family visiting from Baijnath. She is currently finishing year 12, dreaming of a career in town as a beautician and right now also, thinking about her pending marriage, which her parents have arranged with a hotel manager but only agreed to against his promise that she would go on with her studies after the wedding. Evidently, then, the three young women share the conviction that education for girls is priceless. And when they are asked why exactly they

think that way, answers stream in from every direction: "education enables you to have a job that is of some interest to you, they say, along with some reasonable wages and some independence: it allows you to buy jewelry or clothes for yourself without having to ask your husband for permission, to save for your own children's education, to put money aside for possible health problems, or else." According to them three, education also contributes to guarantee that "you have a good reputation outside your house and that you will be given a good husband. Perhaps you can even marry up, so much education is valued; for indeed, with education, a woman can all partake in the domestic economy of her in-laws' house, through a job of her own or a helpful contribution to the family men's activity, and also be a very good housewife, with greater skills to educate the children and enhanced knowledge on how to manage a household and a budget." Finally, they say, "education will permit you to command greater respect than other women because you are both useful and valued, because you know your rights, because you feel empowered enough to refuse abuse and because you can divorce as a last resort, having the means to be financially independent. For a woman, education is all," they conclude.

Conclusion

The Indian government has made serious efforts to meet international requirements with respect to primary and secondary education this past decade, and in accordance also with core international treaties, it has accepted the principle of a "positive discrimination" to grant special help to disadvantaged groups such as kids of poor socioeconomic backgrounds, girls and rural children. These efforts – all legal, financial, structural and practical – have led to remarkable improvements indeed but the country ranks quite low still, in comparison with developed and developing countries, in terms of literacy. Bad quality education is to blame, on the one hand, which of course points to the necessity of sustained government spending and action to keep on improving the system. However, high dropout rates at all levels, in spite of existing laws and government incentives, remind us if need be that the government is not all-powerful. The broad vision it is having must also be relayed and realized by the population itself, otherwise it is doomed to failure. For this very reason, the Indian government has been launching various awareness campaigns, hoping to universalize education with the additional

challenge of redressing the gender imbalance, and with regards to girls' education more particularly, it has called for a change of mindset.

Cultural sexist beliefs and attitudes certainly need changing in India, both within the male population which imposes its social domination and among the female population which surrenders to it. Indian women need to be empowered and this probably won't happen if the country's traditions are not revised in a way that gives them more worth and more rights. However, if it is right to speak of a conservative male-oriented society which tends to confine women to their roles as reputable spouses, mothers and housekeepers, it is equally true that India has been opening up to new ways in times of globalization and economic changes. Likewise, if it is right to say that illegal child labour and girl child marriages continue to compromise the chances that girls have to benefit from formal education, fieldwork tends to suggest that those practices are nowadays at least as much economically-driven as they are culturally inspired.

On the basis of everyday life experiences as told by women in Lohna, at least, it would seem that girls are taken out of school not so much because they are thought inferior to boys, incapable of learning or not predisposed to working outside the house. Rather, it seems that everyone would agree on the real capacity and benefits of female education – should the latter be formulated in terms of better marriage prospects, lesser dowry, enhanced capacity to educate children and be a good housewife, earning potential, independence, reputation or respect – women, fathers, mothers and husbands alike. Today, the core of the problem which leads to the low female retention rate appears to be economic backwardness above all. The cultural gender bias cannot be completely disregarded of course, but eventually, doesn't poverty everywhere affect women disproportionately? The undesirable consequence of this is that female education is not likely to jump ahead if extreme poverty subsists and keeps girls in dependent and sometimes, dangerous situations – either because they are considered 'financial burdens' and are hastily married, because their education is too expensive to bear, because they are required for housework and sibling care or because their economic input, whatever form it takes, is strictly necessary to their household's economy. The good news is, though, that the current state of affairs may evolve quite rapidly in favor of the women in India: if one considers that fighting present poverty is easier than changing millennium-old traditions and mindsets, or at least that international and national laws and politics have a better grasp on the former than on the latter, then one can nurture some

hope that female education will keep rising in India, along with women's empowerment and knowledge of their rights as both women and human beings.

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