

Vocational training for women

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Objective: To understand the current situation of women in rural areas and recommend skill development programs and other initiatives to improve the current scenario, after factoring in cultural, education and family related factors.

Scope:

- Analyse current situation of rural women to determine overall ability and willingness to work.
 - Evaluate condition on the basis of multiple factors - assessment of level of Education, current skill set and willingness to learn, Family responsibilities etc.
 - Gather a deeper understanding of reasons for discontinuance of education (*if any*) and presence of others factors (*e.g. family pressures*) that influence decision to work.
- Utilize and scrutinize this data to make suitable recommendations
 - Factor in their socio-cultural context, current skill set, willingness to learn new skills, demographic preferences etc.
- Recommend vocational training programs and other initiatives to improve their skill set/income

Methodology:

- **Mode of data collection:** Primarily rely on onsite primary data collection techniques to ensure complete understanding at the grass root level. Supplement with secondary research to build a more holistic view.
 - Onsite:
 - Trust building measures and rapport formation prior to data collection
 - Verbally administered questionnaires in vernacular language (*with the help of translator*) to gather data
 - Offsite: Secondary research to supplement developed perspective from fieldwork
- **Area:** Guwahati and Kerala
 - Guwahati (3 villages) Two different villages near Rangia to ensure adequate representation of single and married women. Also, included one Muslim only village (*Muslim population in Assam is ~34%; Assam has second largest Muslim population in India, lagging only J&K*)¹
 - Kerala – Kurichithanam village in Kottayam (*First town to achieve 100% literacy in India*)²
- **Target group:** Group of 30 women (*in the age bracket of 15-45 years*) from each state, amounting to a total of approximately 60 women.

Background

India witnesses an entrenched gender divide wherein the patriarchal prevalence often subsumes and even neglects the interests of its female population. Despite our struggle to modernise mind-sets and ameliorate the position of women in our country, they continue to be deprived of rudimentary amenities like education, sanitation, safety and most pertinently: a sustainable income. Nearly 70% of India's population qualifies as rural, amongst whom this patriarchal mind-set is all the more prevalent. Though measures like reservations in local governments and SHGs have gone a long way

towards the cause of rural women, we are still a long way from equity especially in the economic and employment sphere. According to the 2011 Census of India, the workforce participation rate for females was 25.51% as opposed to the 53.26% for males;³ hence validating the existence of a lopsided ratio of women who are perhaps bound by household duties and tradition. Given the burgeoning gender disparity and alarming decline in female workforce participation rate, this study focuses on understanding rural women's current education/employment situation, identifying skill development opportunities and suggesting implementable solutions, given the education, cultural and social constraints.

Today, it is shocking that the problem of unemployment exists amongst the uneducated populace almost as much as it does amongst the educated. 'Disguised unemployment' and 'educated underemployment' are fast-prevailing terms that help us realise that formal education may be a well-suited mission for a younger female demographic, however older women need employment more than they need a degree. Conventionally, education is viewed as a means to achieve employment, but in the current context the means does not necessarily guarantee the end. Ergo at this point, it is fundamental to transcend beyond conventional education into the realm of vocational education in order to empower these women. Furthermore, vocational training acts as an answer to the problems of the educated as well as the uneducated female population. A rural woman's most urgent requirement is to earn a livelihood substantive enough to meet household needs. Learning an income-enhancing/income-generating skill will financially ameliorate these women more effectively and expeditiously than earning a degree. Therefore, vocational education emerges as a highly pragmatic approach to tackling the problem of unemployment and underemployment amongst our chosen demographic.

Assam and Kerala: Two interesting case studies

The purview of this study extends to the two specific yet pertinent cases of Kerala and Assam.

The reasons for choosing Assam are two-fold. Foremost, the North East has perpetually upheld a projection of fostering a matriarchal society. However, the actual scenario is significantly if not starkly different. Supposed matriarchy does not translate to women having political, cultural or economic control of the region, as is clear in even the mere 14 out of 126 seats occupied by women in the Assam Legislative Assembly⁴. Assam is thus an interesting case of a contradiction of projection and reality. Moreover, Assam is also part of the North Eastern belt, which till date remains a sensitive and segregated region. In the spirit of rapid integration of the North East, it arises as a case integral to the study.

Kerala also stands as a stark and elusive incongruence of a state with the highest literacy rate (93.91%)⁵ and highest sex ratio (1084 women for every 1000 men)⁶ while simultaneously harbouring a highest rate of unemployment in the country in the category of large states (7.4% - three times the all India average)⁷. Infact, unemployment rate is much higher among females as compared to males despite remarkable women empowerment and poverty alleviation initiatives⁸. Kerala is thus another intriguing case wherein the women seem sufficiently empowered yet are

lacking employment prospects despite adequate formal education. This issue of 'educated underemployment' again has the same central answer of vocational education in order to produce job-ready individuals and not a herd of the statistically literate/educated individuals.

Assam (Guwahati) case study - Insights

Figure 1

Age profile of surveyed respondents

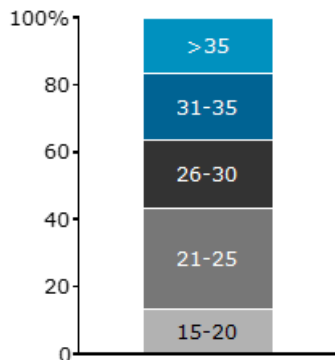


Figure 2

Marital status of surveyed respondents

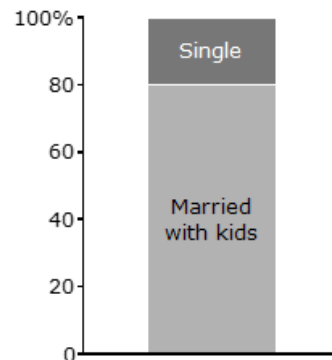
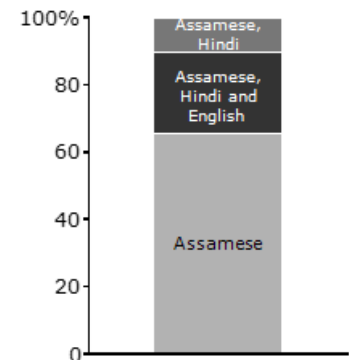


Figure 3

Languages spoken by respondents



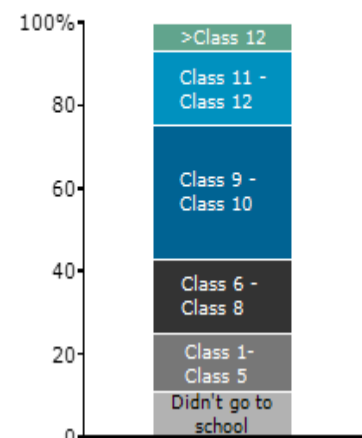
a. Current situation

Language: (Figure 3) There did exist a notable language barrier as ~65% women were only familiar with their own vernacular form of Assamese and the questionnaires had to be administered with the help of a translator. An additional 35% knew Hindi while ~25% knew English. All the women who knew English belonged to the slightly more progressive village of Balisatra. The communicational gap can potentially hamper their employment prospects in other states but might not be of much consequence when looking at region-exclusive job opportunities.

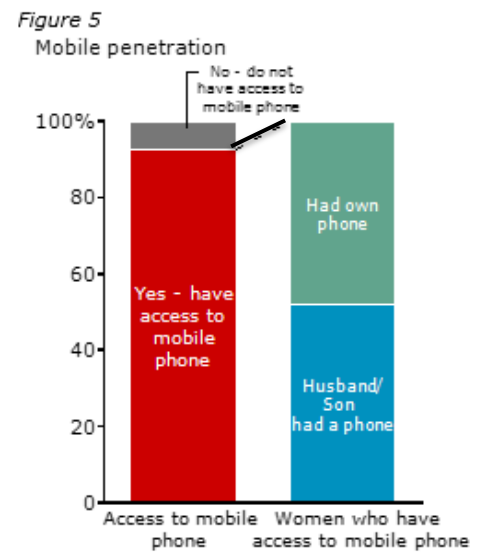
Education: (Figure 4) The data also indicates that ~70% of women had studied till only class 10 or below. The two strongest reasons for discontinuing education were affordability (~60%) and marriage (~40%). It was shocking to see that ~80% those who cited marriage as a reason, were married off in class 9/10. This also throws light upon the very extant practice of child marriage in rural areas till as recently as a decade ago. The youngest case of child marriage was Anjurah Begum's matrimony at the tender age of 13. Anjurah was however, one of the few Muslim women who cited marriage as a reason for dropping out of school. 80% of Muslim women from Kayan cited affordability as a major deterrent to the continuance of their education. It is also particularly noteworthy that ~60% of the women who dropped out in junior school were in fact Muslim, showing a possibility of systematic avoidance of educating the girl child in the Muslim community of the region.

Figure 4

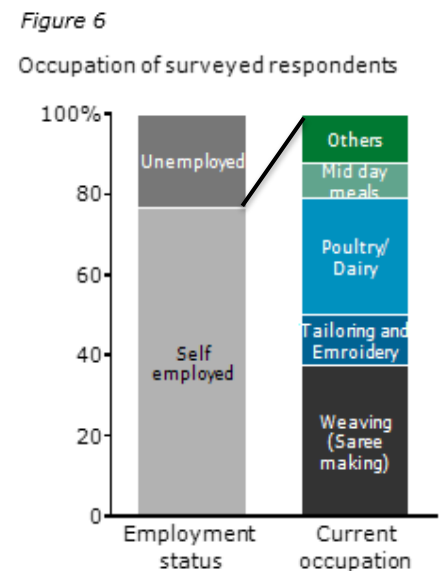
Schooling of surveyed respondents



Mobile phone penetration: (Figure 5) It was pleasantly surprising to witness how well mobile phones have penetrated even into the rural regions, as ~95% woman either possessed a mobile phone or had access to her son's/husband's phone. Of these women, ~50% women did not independently own a mobile phone, but had access to her son's or husband's mobile sets.



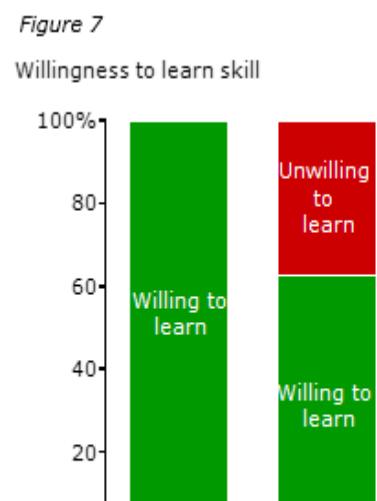
Occupation: (Figure 6) Choice of occupation and aspirations emerged as a “group” concept, where most individuals were involved in a similar/related activity in a particular area/village. For instance, Weaver’s village near Rangiya comprised almost entirely of households engaged in weaving saris; husbands working with their wives on their personally owned looms to manufacture the traditional Assamese sari consisting of Mekela (*lower part*) and Chaddar (*upper part*). The combined final product can be priced anywhere between 500 and 3000 depending on quality of fabric, intricacy of design and so on. The monthly income varied anywhere between Rs 600 till 20,000 on a monthly basis. These couples made the designs themselves and sell the final product either to wholesalers or directly to retail markets on their own accord. As of now, the households operate individually and do not leverage upon any union or collective entity of sari producers to sell their saris and their income varied from 200 to 20000. This village had households where women are working, albeit in a traditional occupation with scope to earn more from the same art. On a further end of the spectrum was the Muslim dominated village of Kayan, where most of the women were married and well-settled in their lives, with handling poultry and cattle from within the household. Few women were also engaged in preparing food for the Midday Meal Programs in the nearby school.



Skill set: (Figure 6): Of the women surveyed, ~20% women did not possess any skill, ~70% possessed skills requiring handwork such as weaving, embroidery, stitching, bag making, while the rest ~10% knew how to cook and prepared mid-day meals for nearby schools

b. Future prospects

Willingness to learn skill: (Figure 7) In terms of significance of demographics, marriage was observed to be critical factor influencing women’s willingness to learn a new skill. It is interesting to note that all the women who were unwilling to learn a new skill were married i.e. all single women were at least interested in learning a new skill. Responsibility of children/household and overall



sense of complacency with pursuing family tradition of weaving were key reasons for their unwillingness.

Infact, marriage emerged more critical as compared to age in determining women's overall willingness to learn a new skill or even her willingness to work at all.

For instance, it was surprising to see that Ruksaar and Tazmeena, two women as young as 22, were unwilling to even learn a new skill, given the responsibility to look after their children. On the other hand, a 25 year old Kanaklata who lived away from her husband was more than willing to learn something new. Just as the absence of a husband in her vicinity facilitated Kanaklata, the presence of the husband and the submissive disposition of their wives also often inhibited them from pursuing a job or learning a new skill. More stand-out examples that corroborate the correlation include Komala Bis who was an LIC agent till 28 years of age but subsequently left her job after marriage and Anamika, who used to give tuitions till she was married off at 24. It was almost like marriage served as the pivotal point, post which, a woman decided to give up her individual aspirations, and every decision thereafter was centred on the responsibility of running a household.

Marital status also emerged as a strong determinant of overall willingness to venture into a new occupation. The women from the weaving community and the Muslim village, most of whom were married, were not very significant risk takers, preferring to stick to their professional heirlooms. Even the few those were willing to venture out into something different were not willing to work on average of more than ~4 hours to the work. Due to an emotional and cultural attachment to their job, they are not likely to deviate from it even with the incentive of enhancing their income. These women are well settled and complacent with their lifestyle and instead choose to be more pragmatic and conform to the expectations of taking care of their children as well as the home.

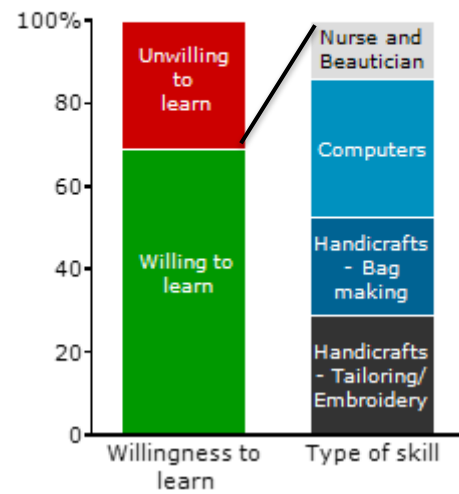
However, it was interesting to see that the case of in the village of Balisatra was starkly different. The younger single women were significantly more enterprising and willing to learn technology and computer-based skills, teaching, nursing and beauty parlour servicing. For instance, Jyoti had secured a degree in Philosophy and was currently running her own Art School in the village. She knew several skills such as Doll making and glass painting and at the young age of 21 managed to earn Rs. 10,000 every month on her own accord. She had accumulated enough money from her savings to buy herself a smartphone. Jyoti was not a one-off example. The enterprising zeal was almost "infectious" in the entire village. The younger demographic of Balisatra were more enthusiastic to learn new skills and to venture outside the home to work. They had some awareness and exposure to vocational training initiatives such as the MSME (*Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises*) schemes, initiatives by NGOs to teach glass painting, doll making etc., English speaking courses and so on. They elucidated upon how the banks were more willing to give loans to women investing in certain skills such as doll making, causing doll making to become a skill that even the women more interested in, due to the added ease in securing a loan.

Family support: In a supposed Matriarchal society, ~40% women said that their families were not supportive of them working outside their homes with all of them citing responsibility to look after their children as the key reason.

Interested skill set: (Figure 8) In terms of skills that the women were interested in learning, while ~55% were interested in learning handwork related activities such as tailoring, embroidery, bag making, the rest were interested in learning computers or skills requiring more qualification such as nurses, beautician. Of the women who exhibited interest in learning handwork related activities, ~45% were specifically interested in bag making while ~55% were interested in tailoring and embroidery. Enterprising women were interested in value adding to their existent skill of sari weaving by learning embroidery and tailoring blouses. It is interesting to note all married women preferred handwork while single young girls were interested in computers. Also, other than the choice of skills, the time that they could take out to learn a skill also varied for married and single women. While married women could more readily make time before 2 pm as their children would be at school during that period, the unmarried ones were either flexible or showed interest in evening hours as they were in a school/college during the day. As far as ability and willingness to travel distance was concerned, married women were better settled travelling 5-10 kms or maximum to the nearest city of Rangiya for training and work. At the same time, they were more apprehensive about travelling for work than they were for training, owing to the time-bound nature of the latter.

Figure 8

Willingness to learn skill



Assam (Guwahati) case study - Recommendations

a) Develop solutions, sensitive to demographic and cultural needs

Before administering the questionnaire and interviewing the women, it seemed that a standardised blanket solution would be most economically and practically feasible. However, the stark cultural variations and other subtle nuanced differences call for subjective solution formation not just regionally, but at an even more micro level. Some demographics integral to these recommendations include age group and marital status. Other equally imperative qualitative aspects are their cultural contexts and aspirations. Thus, the vocational training modules also must be 'demographic dependent', concentrating resources on women who are willing and possessing the potential to acquire the skill. Each demographic has different requirements that need to be catered to.

- i. Younger unmarried women in Balisatra were the most eager and responsive segment. These women were up to the ages of 25, having completed their education at least till matriculation. They were the most willing to expend their resources and step out of their comfort zone to learn technology and software based skills. Since they were also the most aware, the ability, and willingness and mitigated family responsibility can be leveraged upon to design computer-training programs for them.

- ii. Another segment of women were the married women in weaver's village who worked with their husbands to weave the mekhala-chadar saris and were too rooted in their traditional art to want to deviate at all. They were only interested in slight variations of their current skill set, wanting to learn skills involving hand work such as bag making. Thus, in their case it is possible to make best use of their extant art instead of trying to impose a skill that is culturally and contextually incongruent. Their training can be focussed more on skills that help their product move up the value chain. For example, since majority of them are currently involved in only designing and weaving the Assamese saris, value addition to the product can enhance their margins. These value adding skills include but are not limited to tailoring (*sari, blouse et cetera*) and embroidery. In this manner, they can remain in the same business but simultaneously better their financial prospects.
- iii. The Muslim married women were both more orthodox in their mind sets and lacking the awareness required before they can be guided towards a suitable vocation. 60% of these women's husbands/families were reluctant or outright disapproving of their working outside the home. Moreover, the women themselves were also content with handling their poultry and crops. Hence, the foremost step in their case would be awareness measures that help them understand that the costs of working outside the home are outweighed by the benefits. Though training can always be a step in the longer run, currently it is more pragmatic to lay emphasis on creating the right mind set amongst these women.

b) Factor in finer aspects such as time and language, to design training program

While designing the program, finer aspects also need to be taken into account like creating comprehensive modules in the vernacular language of the region. At the same time, English in itself is a marketable skill that facilitates communication and can thus be taught to the younger and linguistically receptive group.

Time is extremely fundamental in strategizing when these women should be taught the skills. Through primary research, it was evident that while some of the women knew of existing programs, time of the program was a deterrent in pursuing these programs. On a given day, mornings and afternoons (*till 2 pm*) were better suited to teach married women whereas younger girls who are still studying can be taught after 4 pm but before dark (to ensure safety) to accommodate their schedule. In this manner, the same infrastructure can be utilised to teach different groups in installments on a given day. In a given year, timing also comes into play. For instance, the interim vacations after matriculation or grade XII examinations can be productively used to teach the girls vocational skills. From interviews, it appeared that young

c) Change current mind set to ensure that marriage is not a point of "occupational surrender"

Vocational training in itself can only be effective if the context corroborates these programs. The observations regarding marriage being a pivotal point obviate the need to ensure that marriage does not act as an arena of de facto 'occupational surrender'. Tighter legislative and executive measures need to guarantee that women are only married post 18 years of age. In terms of awareness, it is important that the women are well settled in their occupation prior to their marriage to ensure

continuance of the former and circumvent the problem of women dropping out of school and/or their jobs.

Since a substantive number of women were intent on continuing to work with their husband, another proposition could be to train married couples in a skill instead of just one of the two spouses.

d) Harness traditional art and occupation, instead of forcefully imposing a shift

Since the sari-weaving community share an emotional and cultural bond with the mekhala-chadar weaving, it is more practical to develop the art and not kill it.

Therefore, the individual sari designer-weavers who are currently selling their product to wholesalers can increase their earnings by organising themselves into a cooperative and selling directly to the market in order to eliminate the middleman and negotiate for the best prices. The skills that can be taught in order to facilitate the aforementioned include communications and marketing of the product. For instance, the women of Berhampur now sell their unique patta saris with the help of e-commerce through weavercoop.com. In this case, their skill was successfully harnessed, fostered and marketed to enhance their dignity and standard of living.⁹

e) Collaborate with other stakeholders, to ensure environment conducive to skill development

Another salient step is to enable coordination with banks to ensure a mutual understanding in selective provision of credit based on skill. For instance, from primary research, it seemed that banks in Balisatra were more willing to give loans to women adept at the art of doll making, due to the presence of a huge market for the same. Thus, women can either be taught skills that ensure them secure credit on good interest rates. On the other hand, banks can also be persuaded to take into consideration a wider variety of skills while considering providing a loan.

Kerala case study – Insights

a. Current situation

Figure 9

Age group of surveyed respondents

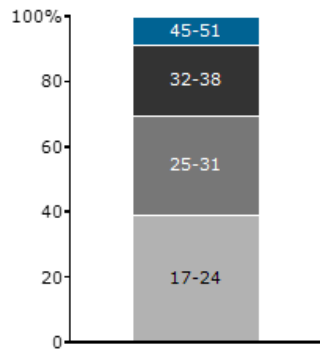


Figure 10

Marital status of surveyed respondents

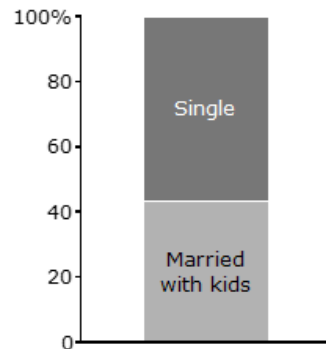
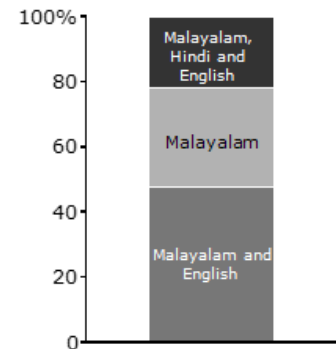


Figure 11

Languages spoken by respondents

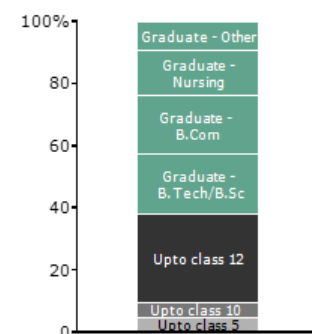


Language: 30% of surveyed women spoke only Malayalam. While 48% spoke Malayalam and English and the remaining 22% spoke Malayalam, English and Hindi. Even though ~50% said that they understood English, spoken English is a deep rooted problem in Kerala. Underdeveloped communication skills and low confidence in spoken English, affects students immensely during job interviews and selections. Additionally, despite books being in English, students are often taught in vernacular language in colleges, which doesn't help the case of poor communication skills.

Education: (Figure 12) Kuruchithanam village is quite reflective of Kerala's soaring literacy rates. It is part of the Kottayam district, which was the first in India to achieve 100% literacy². In 2015, 98.57% students passed the senior school leaving certificate exam In Kerala, setting new records.¹⁰ This is in line with the results from the survey. Of the surveyed respondents, 91% of the women had completed class 12th and ~60% has an undergraduate degree such as B. Com, B. Tech or B. Sc (Nursing).

Figure 12

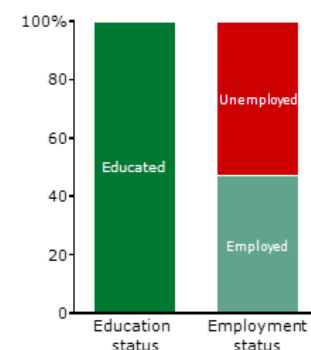
Schooling of surveyed respondents



High unemployment: (Figure 13) Despite Kerala easily being the most progressive state in terms of conventional education, it also harbours the highest rate of unemployment in the category of larger states – unemployment in Kerala is thrice the national average⁷. The case is distinct because of the high literacy level in the state - dire emphasis is thus drawn to the issue of ironically high unemployment. Even the survey shows that even 100% of the surveyed women were educated only 47% were employed. Most common reason for unemployment was responsibility of household/children. Few women also cited inability to find a job and family support as reasons.

Figure 13

Employment status of surveyed respondents



Reasons for unemployment: Most of these degrees act as mere statistics since neither the means nor the end justify the degrees. In Kerala, majority students are passed till grade 10 in an attempt to maintain the low failure rate at higher secondary level. As a result of this attempt to inflate education related statistics, the quality of education has suffered. It is not wrong to say that both the quality of “education” and the “educated” is questionable in Kerala. Recent studies have raised questions on the quality of education at both lower grades (*as low as class 4*) and higher levels (*like engineering courses*).¹¹ Compromise in quality of education and ergo pass-out students has negatively impacted the ability to get jobs. The situation is only worsened by the dearth of employment opportunities in the state.

State planning board vice chairman said that of ~51,000 students occupying seats at engineering colleges, 70 per cent students fail in attaining degrees. Out of the 30 per cent who manage to pass, nearly 50 per cent are not eligible for jobs.¹² Sanctioning of increasing number of private engineering colleges which lack adequate academic standard is a key factor contributing to growing flock of unemployable educated youth. These individuals are only qualified on paper and unable to perform well enough to find placements after college.

Their self-worth also comes into play as the qualified population values itself too highly to go for blue-collar jobs like construction work (*mostly carried out by immigrants from Bengal, Assam etc.*), while it cannot get employed as white-collar professionals due to the two-fold problem of lack of jobs from the companies’ behalf and lack of job readiness from the citizens’ behalf.

Mobile phone penetration: Mobile penetration was strong for the surveyed respondents. 87% respondents had access to mobile and 43% had access to internet.

Skill set: (Figure 14) In contrast to Assam, increasing number of women are digitally literate. 63% of respondents possessed basic working knowledge of computer, while a few others had trained in nursing courses.

Occupation: (Figure 15)

Of the surveyed respondents, 47% were employed and rest 53% were unemployed.

From the surveyed respondents, ~50% were employed and engaged in menial underpaid jobs as bank clerks or accountants. Even for women with engineering degrees, aspirations ended at clerical bank jobs or the Public Services Commission. These mind sets reflect a saddening waste of talent and resource

Most job seekers are keen on government jobs as they provide stability of income and security. In May 2015, 5.18 lakh applicants appeared for a Public Service Commission test for 1,500 positions of assistants in the state secretariat, comprising of a large pool of overqualified applicants.¹³ The lure for government jobs is explained by two factors -

Figure 14

Current skill set of surveyed respondents

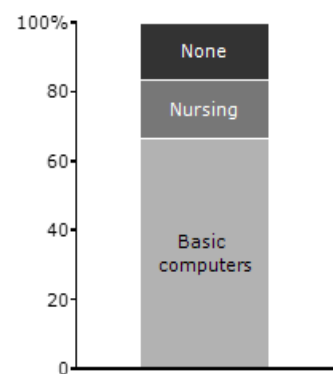
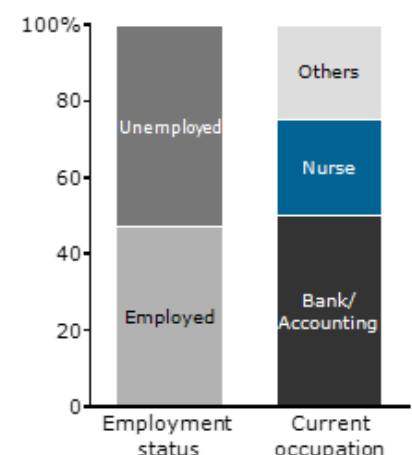


Figure 15

Occupation of surveyed respondents



security/stability and higher pay. Government jobs pay much higher than private jobs. For instance, Bobu an MBA graduate working as a private bank clerk earns Rs. 8,000 per month whereas Dhaniya a B. Com graduate works for a government bank and earns Rs. 20,000. It is also interesting to note, there were no instances of self-employment in the surveyed respondents. The lack of appetite for risk is clearly reflected in the occupational preferences by the women in Kerala.

b. Future potential

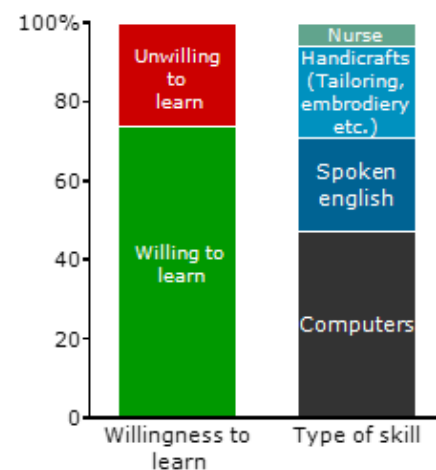
Family support: Families do not discriminate between daughters and sons when it comes to education support the families provide in educating their sons and daughters with the same zeal. Unlike Assam, there also exists no taboo of child marriage, allowing women to settle into their careers before rushing into marriage. The survey results show that 90% families are willing to let their daughters/wives work outside the home. Furthermore, the government is also supportive of the cause of educating their female populace through initiatives such as providing free uniforms for school going girls, under Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan.¹⁴

Willingness to learn new skill/interested skill set (Figure 16)

In terms of willingness, 70% are eager to learn a new skill. Those who are not interested, cite household responsibility or complacency with current skill set as key reasons for unwillingness. In learning a skill, 50% are interested in intermediate or advanced computer courses, followed by a nearly equal inclination to handicrafts and spoken English.

Figure 16

Willingness to learn skill



Kerala case study - Recommendations

a) Focus on “quality” of education, and not merely quantity

Education for the sake of education can improve the statistics for the state, but is not helping the unemployment problem in Kerala. From a long term perspective, purposeful intervention in the curriculum and the overall education system is required. Quantity might have to be sacrificed to ensure quality. More emphasis on “practical” education needs to be ensured such that the colleges are not churning out mere certificate holders, but individuals who are employable and job ready. Also, in case of private colleges providing professional courses, government needs to exercise greater degree of control to ensure that the colleges meet the academic standards.

b) Create white collar jobs/skills focusing on the average educated Malayali

One of the biggest challenges which is fuelling the unemployment in the state is that people are unwilling to opt for blue collar jobs, given their high qualifications and number of white collar jobs are not growing in line with number of job seekers. Most

of those performing blue collar jobs are in fact performed by migrants from different cities. Estimates show that ~25 lakh migrant labours are engaged in manual work in various sectors including construction.¹⁵ It is ironical to note that the largest exporter of both skilled and unskilled manpower to the oil rich Gulf Arab states, is now the equivalent of the “Gulf” state in the south, given the huge inflow of migrants from distant states. Jobs have not grown in line with the increase in total number of qualified job seekers. There is a need to increase total number of white collar jobs to absorb this population.

c) Develop and implement courses focused on spoken English

In terms of vocational training focus for women, “Spoken English” seems to be a big pain point for even the most educated and qualified girls. Conversations with several educated girls revealed that most of them sweat at even the thought of job interviews because of their poor communication skills and broken English. They are comfortable in reading, writing and even understanding English – however, it speaking in English which has rendered a complex in their minds and personalities. Vocational training courses focusing on spoken English, can help not only to make them more employable in a market where English has paramount importance, but will also help to boost their overall self-confidence.

d) Channelize interest in computer related skills for vocational training

Since women’s interest are not confined to the traditionally women dominated occupations such as handicrafts, embroidery etc., it is important to channelize and support their progressive incline towards computers and technology. Majority of them exhibited direct inclination to learn computers, in some cases expressing desire to learn advanced computers as they had basic knowledge. Targeted computer programs focusing for women, with different levels of complexity ranging from basic to advanced, can not only serve to add the current skill set but also overcome the absence of focus on “practical” knowledge, in the education system. Existing Akshaya centres have done a great deal in spreading ‘digital literacy’ in the state. Started out with the aim of providing computer education to at least one member of 6.4 million families in the state, they later redesigned themselves as common service centres rendering a host of e-governance services such as e-payment of bills. They also continue to engage in e-literacy through educational programmes such as Intel learn programs, Malayalam computing etc. Existing Aksheye centres offer an opportunity to utilise existing infrastructure to deliver advanced computer based vocational training, especially targeting women.

e) Harness older demographic, instead of neglecting completely

Additionally, even though the emphasis of the vocational programs should be on the younger demographic i.e. 18-35, the older demographic should not be ignored. The older demographic should be harnessed as well. The older demographic is still a little more sceptical about computer and technology and more interested in the traditional occupations such as handicrafts and embroidery. Vocational training courses should be designed accordingly.

Conclusion

To conclude, there is tremendous potential to improve the current scenario of women through vocational training in India. The challenge lies in developing tailored region specific solutions which take into consideration various demographic and cultural factors. It is also important to concentrate efforts and resources on the most “willing segment”. For example, in Guwahati, women belonging to the Muslim village of Kayan, were more subdued and were themselves not willing to learn a new skill/occupation. While the younger demographic, from village Balisatra, were much more enthusiastic and receptive to any vocational training that they might receive. It is also important to factor in the finer nuances such as time they can afford, languages spoken, distance they are willing to travel, skill preferences etc. to ensure effectiveness of vocational training programs.

Also, moving away from traditional to technologically advanced occupations, might not always be the correct answer. It is important to harness a traditional art, rather than killing it, like we saw in the case of women involved in making traditional Assamese saree.

Lastly, mere implementation of vocational training programs cannot ensure increased employment opportunities and employability. It is equally imperative to understand the root causes for the need of such training programs in the first place. In Kerala, for instance, the absence of practical knowledge, poor quality of education, preference for white collared jobs only and limited growth in job opportunities have fuelled “educated unemployment”. Thus, there is a need to strengthen existing system to ensure effectiveness of any skill development program.

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Appendix

Questionnaire - Vocational Training

Basic Demographics

- 1) Name
 - 2) Age
 - 3) Marital status
 - Single
 - Married with kids
 - Married without kids
 - Divorced
 - Widow
 - 4) Languages spoken
 - 5) Access to phone/internet
-
-

Situation

A) Education

- 6) What is the current level of education?
 - Junior school i.e. upto class 5
 - Middle school i.e. upto class 8
 - Senior school i.e. upto class 12
 - Undergraduate
 - Post-graduate
 - Diploma/Certificate
 - Other (text)_____
- 7) What is the key reason for discontinuing education?
 - Take care of the family/Family responsibility
 - Convenience (e.g. school far away)
 - Affordability (fees very high)
 - Poor quality of education/Lack of interest in studies
 - Failure in examinations
 - Physical disorders/ Mental retardation
 - Child labour
 - Safety
 - Infrastructure barriers (lack of toilets)
 - Others (text)_____

B) Employment

- 8) What is your Employment status?
 - Employed

- Unemployed
- Self employed

If employed, ask these set of questions.

9) What is the current work? (*keep in mind skilled and unskilled*)

10) What is monthly salary?

11) Does the income meet the household needs?

12) How much income would meet your monthly requirement?

If unemployed, ask these set of questions.

13) Were you employed before?

14) If yes, what was the work and why did you leave it?

15) If no, what are the reasons for unemployment?

C) Family

16) How many members in the household?

17) How many of the members are working? Who work in the family? (e.g. Husband, Daughter etc)

18) What is the total income of the other members of the household?

Ability to work

19) Is your family supportive of you working outside homes?

- a. Yes
- b. No

20) If no, why are they not supportive?

21) Skill: Do you have any skill currently? If yes, what kind of skill do you have?

22) How much time can you take out to do additional/new work?

Willingness to learn a skill

23) Are you willing to learn a skill?

- Yes
- No

24) If no, why not?

25) How much time will you be able to take out to learn the new skill?

26) How far are you willing to travel to learn the new skill?

27) How much are you willing to pay to learn the new skill?

Awareness about vocational training

28) Are you aware about any vocational skill courses that might be helpful? (*e.g. polytechnic, ITI etc.)*

29) What kind of vocational skill course would you be interested in?

- Agro based (spice and masala making, mushroom farming)
- Computer related (typing, data processing)
- Handicrafts (dress designing, art and craft works, zari zardogi, bag making, mehendi, tailoring, embroidery, wood art, glass painting, pottery, diya and matka)
- Entrepreneurial skills (Kirana shops, Papad manufacturing, self-help group)
- Qualified (Health assistants, school teacher, nurses)
- Technical (Plumbing, electrification, driving, welding, mechanic, solar engineer)

30) Why have you not pursued the chosen skill till now?

31) Why did you choose what you chose?

Appendix - Visit

