

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The role and function of education in a society comprises of socialization in the society and conservation and advancement of knowledge in that society. Education is, thus, the determinant of tradition, change and stability in a society. However, education that is formally imparted may or may not fulfil all these functions. Formal education is often oriented towards acquiring new skills and knowledge. In such cases it acts as the vehicle of social change.

In India traditionally the Brahmins had the monopoly of learning. Education was not meant for the women or those men belonging to lower castes. Whatever privilege of receiving education from family elders the Brahmin girls had in the early Vedic period was gradually curtailed with changing social scenario. During the Muslim period girls had still less opportunity of learning. It is only during the British rule in India the need for female education started being considered again.

In the Post-independence period the opportunities for education have gained a wide base. All the citizens of India are now entitled to be educated and upliftment of the lower sections of the population is advocated strongly. In spite of that it has been pointed out by many that the lower castes and the women in general are unable to achieve the social and economic mobility although many special provisions have been made for them.

Need of education for the scheduled castes and the women figure prominently in the governmental policy in India. It is imperative to understand the extent of social change achieved through this. The present study is an attempt to assess the social change vis-a-vis the educational achievements of a group of scheduled caste people in a rural area of West Bengal. Special emphasis to depict the gender differential in educational opportunities forms a part of this study.

In this introductory chapter it is proposed to examine the two basic concepts education and scheduled castes at first. This shall be followed by a review of literature and the detailed statement of the problem.

THE CONCEPTS

Education:

The root meaning of the word "Education" in Latin is "to draw out" the latent powers of the child. Conforming to the meaning Durkheim defined education as "the action exercised by the older generations upon those who are not yet ready for social life. Its object is to awaken and develop in the child those physical, intellectual and

moral states which are required of him both by his society as a whole and by the milieu for which he is specially destined. Education is the social process by which man can be socialized".

Education is primarily provided by the family and then by the society. In Vedic system of education the children used to learn his lesson from GURUGRIHA. In Hindu schools tols were the most ancient. In this educational system the children learnt Gurumukhi-Vidya. In Theory this system was open to all the "twice" born castes. But, in practice, the access to this by Kshatriyas and Vaishyas was limited. It also expressed their inferior caste ranking relative to the Brahmins through variations in the age for Upanayana, material for students' "Uniform", teacher's invocation while receiving the students, course of study, and so on. The Shudras and the castes below them were excluded from it by the prohibition on its transmission to anyone who had not experienced the "sacredbirth", and by punishments for any attempt at receiving it.¹

Indigenous education was already in the hands of the priestly class and Brahmins were the only literate. In pre-Buddhist period there was no educational right among the Sudras. In Buddhist period education was open to all. At that time primary schools were established for the people and in the middle age these primary schools came to be known as Pathsala.

During the 19th century British administration introduced modern education in order to use English educated indigenous elites as instrument of their administrative and indirect rule. But this new variety of Indian colonial culture was almost wholly confined to men of upper and middle castes and classes. The new culture and education could cover very few men from lower castes and still fewer women irrespective of their economic class. The three important developments in this context are Wood Despatch², Radhakrishnan Commission,³ and Mudhalior Commission⁴. In these Commissions

1. Radhakrishnan, "Indigenous education in British India-a Profile" in contributions to Indian Sociology, 24 (1), Jan- June 1990, p.6.

2. The Wood Despatch: The Wood Despatch of 1854 on education is one of the most significant features in the history of Indian education, since it accepted the responsibility of the government to promote primary education in general and that of the girls in particular.

3 Radha Krishnan Commission: The Radhakrishnan Commission of 1949 asserted that the Indian Universities should have a wider conception of their duties and responsibilities.

4 Mudhalior Commission: The Mudhalior Commission on Secondary Education, 1953 recommended the starting of multipurpose schools as well as separate technical schools.

different measures were taken, such as, establishment of rural University, expansion of women's education, reforms of examination system and equalization of educational opportunity to all backward classes. These commissions proposed to have a comprehensive review of the entire educational system. But in this educational system the stress on examinations, the methods of teaching and lack of proper material amenities tended to make education a burden rather than a joyous experience to the youthful mind⁵.

India in recent years experienced a phenomenal increase in the field of education. Number of schools has increased and so has involvements – percentage in the school going age group. But sex differential is pronounced there, although rural -urban differential is not so much. Some demographic data will be useful to present the situation of literacy in India.

Table 1.1
Literacy Rate, India, 1951-1991

Year	Persons (Per cent)	Males (Per cent)	Females (Per cent)
1951	18.33	27.16	8.86
1961	28.31	40.40	15.34
1971	34.45	45.95	21.97
1981	43.56 (41.42)	56.37 (53.45)	29.75 (28.46)
1994	52.11	63.86	39.42

Notes: 1. Literacy rates for 1951-71 relate to population aged five years and above. The rates for 1981 and 1991 relate to the population aged seven years and above. The literacy rates for the population aged five years and above in 1981 have been shown in brackets.

2. 1981 rates exclude assam and 1991 rates exclude J & K.

3. 1991 figures are provisional

Source: Table 4 of demographic Diversity of India by Ashish Bose, 1991

This table reveals that although literacy rate has increased during the decades but gender differential persists. The situation is slightly better in the state of West Bengal. From 1991 census data we find that in West Bengal male literacy rate to be 67.24 percent and female literacy rate 47.15 percent.

5. Kuppaswamy. B., Social Change in India. Vikas Publishing House. 1972, p. 280.

Our study has been conducted in a rural area of the state of West Bengal. For the purpose of this study we limit the concept education to the formal learning only.

Scheduled Castes:

Two thirds or more of the population of India are very backward, being illiterate and living in utter poverty. Their disadvantages derive from the fact that their status is ascribed to them by birth in certain castes, creeds and tribal groups. The backward classes in India form an aggregate of closed status groups; they belong to these groups by birth, not because of their individual economic characteristics.

There are three broad divisions among the backward classes: (a) The Scheduled Tribes (Girijans), (b) the Scheduled Castes (Harijans) and (c) the Other Backward Class. The first two groups are listed in the constitution while the third group is unlisted and loosely defined: it is the least homogeneous. As a result, the problem of the other backward classes is very complicated and very difficult to deal with. While it is possible to have an all India list of the Scheduled Castes on the basis of untouchability and the Scheduled Tribes on the basis of their way of life, it is impossible to have any such list for the other backward class.

A large section of the "backward classes" in our society has been categorised because of their patent backwardness and social disabilities as Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes under the presidential order, later mandated by the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Orders (Amendment) Act, 1956.

Of the total population the country about 14.7%(i.e. 90 millions) are Scheduled Castes people. Persons classified as Scheduled Castes who form the lowest layers of the caste-ridden Hindu society were subject to social disabilities based on untouchability. They were segregated by the Hindu society as untouchables. They were the untouchables the "Avarnas" or outcastes of Hindus. They had to live in the outskirts of the village. They constitute the majority of India's dispossessed and dehumanized population⁶.

The Government of India and state governments have adopted various measures to handle the Scheduled caste's problems. Yet these people have not yet been able to emancipate themselves from the socio-economic disabilities. Realising the vital importance of the emancipation of these backward classes, the founding fathers of the Constitution of India made provisions for protection of Scheduled Castes with the object of promoting their educational augmentation and removing the social disabilities which they were subjected to. Under the Sixth Five Year Plan period approximately Rs.341

6. Chitnis, S., 1974. Ibid, p. 167.

crores have been spent for the development of the Scheduled Castes. But the progress made by them in socio-economic sphere is not at all satisfactory. The main emphasis was given for educational advancement. Unorganized nature of the Scheduled Caste communities and lack of leadership among them are mainly responsible for their backwardness.

In response to organised attempts by groups of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes to improve their socio-economic conditions state action which began in pre-independence India has become a basic governmental policy after independence. Chief among the Constitutional safeguards and governmental protective measures are: (1) the abolition of untouchability and the forbidding of its practice in any form; (2) special representation in the parliament; in State Legislative Assemblies and local bodies; (3) special provisions for social, educational and economic advancement such as special privileges in the form of reservation of a certain percentage of posts in the government services and seats in the educational institutions, (4) banning of traffic in human being and forced labour; (5) Creation of Scheduled Tribal areas for their intensive development; (6) establishment of the special office of the commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes for safeguarding their interests (7) special welfare schemes exclusively for the Scheduled Castes and Tribes having as its object the bringing of these people at par with the rest of the Indian people. State action has undoubtedly brought about changes among Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

Article 17 of the constitution abolished untouchability. As a result the Harijan enjoys the same legal rights as any other citizen. Further, article 338 of the Constitution empowers the president of India to appoint a commission to study the condition of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled tribes and submit an annual report to the President⁷.

According to the census of India there has been a great increase in the total Scheduled Caste population. In India the Scheduled Caste population was 104,755 thousands and in West Bengal the total Scheduled Caste population was 12,001 thousands in 1981. Among them males were 54,211 thousands in India and 6,232 thousands in a West Bengal. Generally, it may be said that the females show relatively lower literacy rate than that of the males.

7. Constitution of India, Quoted in Kuppuswamy, B., Social change in India. Vikas publishing House, Delhi, 1972, p.217.

Table 1.2
Percentage of Scheduled Castes to total population
according to 1971,1981 and 1991 census.

Year	<u>Total S.C. population</u>			<u>Percentage of S.C. to total Population</u>		
	Persons	Males	Females	Person	Males	Females
I N D I A 1971	79,092,841	40,867,044	38,225,797	14.82	14.79	14.86
1981	104,754,623	54,210,594	50,544,029	15.75	15.76	15.73
1991	138,223,277	71,928,960	66,294,317	16.73	-	-
W. B E N G A L 1971	8,816,028	4,575,335	4,240,693	19.90	19.52	20.31
1981	12,000,768	6,231,795	5,768,973	21.99	21.82	22.17
1991	16,080,611	8,326,832	7,753,779	23.62	-	-

The above table shows the increasing population of scheduled castes in the total population specially in the state of West Bengal. Majority of the Scheduled Caste population live in rural areas as is revealed in the following table.(Table 3)

Table 1.3
Percentage distribution of members of Scheduled castes in rural and urban areas
to the total population of scheduled Castes in India and West Bengal according
to 1981 and 1991 Censuses.

India/State	Year	Percentage of Scheduled Castes		
		Rural	Urban	Total
India	1981	84.00	16.00	100.00
	1991	81.28	18.72	100.00
West Bengal	1981	87.59	12.41	100.00
	1991	84.61	15.39	100.00

The predominantly rural residence of the Scheduled Caste population is revealed in the table 1.3 but an increase in the percentage of urban population is also seen, indicating a trend of migration towards urban areas.

Table 1.4
**Percentage distribution of Scheduled Caste population by residence,
sex and literacy in India ,1981**

Criteria	Residence	Percentage of Scheduled Castes		
		Male	Female	Total
Total S.C. Population	T	51.75	48.25	100.00
	R	51.55	48.45	100.00
	U	52.85	47.15	100.00
Literate Population	T	75.33	24.67	100.00
	R	77.85	22.15	100.00
	U	95.62	4.38	100.00

Of the total S.C. population 87,997 thousands live in rural areas and only 16,758 thousands live in urban areas. Table 1.4 reveals that the proportion of female S.c population in urban areas is not much below than that of the rural areas. However, among the literate S.C. population proportion of females is abnormally low, 22.15% in rural areas and 4.38% in urban areas, although sex ratios do not reveal that high a discrepancy.

Table 1.5
Sex ratio among S.C. population by residence in India,1981

Residence	India	West Bengal
Total	932	925
Rural	940	937
Urban	892	850

From Table 1.5 it is seen that in 1981 sex ratio among the S.C population was not much lower than that among the total population of India (934) and was higher than that among the total population of West Bengal (911). But female literacy rates among the total population of India and West Bengal was much higher in comparison to that among the S.C. population.

Table 1.6

Literacy rates among total population and Scheduled Castes in India and West Bengal, 1981 and 1991.

India/State	1981			1991		
	Person	Male	Female	Person	Male	Female
<u>India</u>						
Total population	43.56	56.37	29.95	52.11	63.86	39.42
S.C.	21.38	31.12	10.93			
<u>West Bengal</u>						
Total population	48.64	59.93	36.07	57.72	67.24	47.15
S.C.	24.37	34.26	13.69			

Source: Table 13(p.61) of Demographic Diversity of India, 1991 Census by Ashish Bose,1991

Table 1.6 shows that the literacy rate of the Scheduled Castes is much lower than that of the total population . It also reveals the gender differential in literacy rates in India and west Bengal. The disparity in female literacy rates among the Scheduled Castes is glaringly evident from the above Table.

A REVIEW OF LITERATURE

After examining the situation of literacy among the S.C. a researcher must feel a desire to look at the context of such disparity even so, many decades after independence of India. Hence the urge is articulated by Chitnis that in the "post independence period , the sociologists have to examine the social and educational philosophy underlying the official plans and programmes for educational development . Other specific foci for study would be such problems as the criteria governing the establishment of new schools, colleges and other educational institutions ,the extent of their utilization of other education facilities , lapse into illiteracy , the impact of formal education on rural and urban areas ,and the extent to which formal education is rejected or accepted by different segments of Indian society , to whom it was formerly not available (such as women, backward classes etc)".

In the report of the education Commission of 1964 the National constitution promised free and compulsory education to all children upto the age of fourteen. It also

S. Suma Chitnis. 1974. Ibid. p.167.

undertook "to provide special facilities for the education of the Scheduled Castes, the sectors of the society which have been identified as being particularly disadvantaged in the matter of social, economic and political status and rights and as being backward in education".

In 1986 "National policy on education" was formulated for the development of education. Different measures were adopted in this policy. But this new policy emphasised on equal educational opportunity for women and Schedules Castes ¹⁰.

"The Indian constitution provides for the procedure of making notification of lists of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes as per Article 341 and 342 respectively of the constitution, Sociologists and Anthropologists alike are concerned with the problem of development of these Scheduled communities. N.K. Bose suggested to all those who were engaged in the welfare work of the Scheduled communities to try through education to change these communities"¹¹.

The need for sociological Research on education in India has been pointed out by Suma Chitnis¹². Studies in this new field have been undertaken by several social scientists. Some of these works have helped this researcher to have some understanding of the pioneer attempts in the field of sociology of education.

The areas covered by these studies are varied, such as education and socialization; the expansion and growth of education in society; education and politics; education system and the stratificatory system; education a system of goals practices and procedure, education as a system of roles and basic data on social backgrounds etc.

In the traditional Hindu society the caste system and the occupational system were closely interrelated with one another. The occupation to be followed by an individual was determined according to the caste in which he was born. But the situation is undergoing change due to the operation of several factors like urbanization, industrialization and spread of education.

In the study of education and social change Gurnam Saran Bhatnagar (1972) has analysed that education is an important factor in bringing about social change. He observed

9. Nayar, P.K.B., "Sociology in India", 1982, pp. 155-156.

10. National Policy of Education, 1986.

11. Shyam Chowdhury, S., Education and Social Change Among the Scheduled Tribes of North Bengal, Ph. D. Thesis N.B.U. 1984.

12. Chitnis, Sume, "Sociology of education in India : Emerging Trends and Needed Research" in P.K.B. Nayar (ed.) Sociology in India, B.R. Publishing Corporation, Delhi, 1982, p. 169.

that the role of education is very important to bring about a change in the attitudes of rural people. He also said that education helps in the development of rational powers of man as he can understand the physical and the social environment in a scientific sense¹³.

Scheduled Castes have been socially, politically and economically backward and neglected. A.K. Das (1966) emphasizes the need to study the psychology, behaviour, culture, socio-economic conditions etc of the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe communities in order to introduce any welfare measures among them. He has presented valuable introductory notes on the Caste, kinship and community structure of the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes of West Bengal¹⁴. "The Scheduled castes in different parts of India do not form any solid mass. They are split of into hundreds of Castes and sub-castes. There are about eleven hundred such groups spread all over India. In different regions of India some of the retain and share a common identity and sometimes a common home. Each group in this Scheduled Caste population has a name, a separate occupation, its own set of rules and, more often than not, its own mechanism for social control. These groups are no equal in social status. They are arranged in strictly hierarchical order as caste sub units and they practise untouchability among themselves. Endogamy is widely practised among them"¹⁵.

G. Nanchariah (1989) emphasized on the effect of "poverty" which is one of the special disability of Scheduled Castes. He analysed that Scheduled Castes are agricultural workers and most of them are landless labourers. He also said that most of the Scheduled caste agricultural labourers are engaged as "cow boys" and "farm servants"¹⁶.

Ashok. K. Singh (1989) while analysing the socio- cultural life of Dusadhs, a Scheduled caste community in Bihar, stated that the scheduled castes were totally dependent on the traditional methods of agriculture. He also said that illiteracy is very common among the Scheduled Castes and they lived below the poverty line¹⁷.

The growth and expansion of formal education in India in terms of historical growth through post independence period and the formal educational growth in terms of

13. Bhatnagar Gurnam Saran, Education and Social Change. The Minerva Associates. Cal. 1972. pp. 37-38, 70.

14. Das, A.K., Hand book of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes of West Bengal. Tribal Welfare Dept., Govt. of West Bengal. Calcutta, 1966.

15. Sachchidananda, "The Harijan Elite". Delhi, 1977. p. 4.

16. Nanchariah, G. "Scheduled castes as agricultural labourers". Social Change, 1989, Vol. 19, No. 3, pp. 31-32.

17. Singh, Ashok K., "Socio-cultural characteristics of Dusadhs". Social Change, Sept. 1989, Vol. 19, No. 3, pp. 59-60.

expansion through the different states and regions in the country and expansion to cover the educationally backward groups like women, the scheduled and backwards castes and tribes have also been discussed by Chitnis. She has emphasized on the most important theme such as social backgrounds, attitudes, values, achievements, aspirations and patterns of behaviour of students and of teachers for empirical research¹⁸.

M. Showeb in his study education and mobility among Harijans has analysed that during the 19th and 20th century many social religious reform movements were held to change the social and economic conditions of the untouchables. Some of these were directed to abolish caste inequalities and the ritualistic subjugation of the untouchables. He also said that under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi different attempts were made to improve the conditions of Harijans. For this purpose different schemes of Harijans are being made to change the socio-economic conditions of the untouchables. Showeb emphasised on education as the most influential agent of social change. He said that education helps to acquire a high social status and also play an important role in the context of scheduled caste community to gain better economic opportunities. He also observed that female literacy in India has generally been extremely low. Among the Scheduled Castes it has been much poorer¹⁹.

Sociologically the main features of the growth of education in scheduled castes communities in India have been studied by Suma Chitnis. In her study she emphasized on education which have contributed to the social changes in recent years. She also pointed out the effect of education on the occupational pattern in the village²⁰.

Narendra K. Singh analysed from his study of education and social change that the traditional status of the scheduled caste people has been low in the hierarchical Indian social system. He also said that a large number of scheduled caste students feel that their status is backward and this feeling influences their pattern of interaction with other castes. He also said that the background of the scheduled caste students is basically rurals. A large number of scheduled castes regard their financial position as not satisfactory. In the context of education he has opined that a large number of scheduled caste and scheduled tribe students are poorer in intelligence²¹.

18. Chitnis, Suma. "Sociology of Education in India". Emerging Trends and Needed Research in P.K.B. Nayar (ed) Sociology in India B.R. Publishing Corporation Delhi 1982 pp. 168-169.

19. Showeb, M. Education and Mobility among harijans. Allahabad, 1986, p.38.

20. Chitnis, Suma "Sociology of Education in India" in ICSSR. Sociology of Education. A survey of Research in Sociology and Social Anthropology. Vol. II, Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1974, pp. 178-79.

21. Singhi Narendra K., Education and Social Change: Rawat Publications, Jaipur, 1979, pp. 82-83 and 144.

Sachchidananda while analysing the effect of education among the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes in "structural constraints in the education of scheduled tribes and scheduled castes" suggested that education promotes social mobility and increases consciousness of one's rights. He also suggested that for achievement of education among the scheduled caste and Scheduled Tribe it is imperative that their cultural background be taken into consideration²².

In a separate study "educational and economic achievements and trend — there of among the Scheduled Tribes of West Bengal" in Tribal development in India". Amal Kumar Das has analysed that education and occupation for livelihood among the Scheduled Tribes are very poor as compared to the other communities²³.

A.K. Das , M.K. Chowdhury and S. Basu emphasized on the problems of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in India. To certain extent these are uniform through out India though there are differences in different parts of the country due to varied ecological and demographic situations and historical traditions. In the case of the Scheduled Castes they almost follow a uniform pattern through out the area of their dominance²⁴.

Syam Choudhury's observations on education and social change among the Scheduled Tribes of North Bengal throws interesting light on the changing occupational and political structure. The status of women was found to be higher among the educated tribal tea garden workers. It is not so in the traditional agrarian community nearby. Thus he concluded that education has affected two types of tribal communities in two different ways²⁵.

G.S. Mehta has analysed that unemployment rate among women is higher than that of themen. He also siad that the earnings of women at different levels of education are lower than that of the men as the impact of education is different among men and women which placed the women in a secondary position in the society²⁶.

22. Sachchidananda. "Structural constraints in the Education of Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes" in B.Choudhury (ed) Tribal Development in India, Inter India Publication, Delhi, 1982, pp 403.

23. Das, Amal Kumar. "Educational and Economic achievements and trend thereof among the Scheduled Tribes of West Bengal" in B. Choudhuri (ed.) Tribal development in India, p. 396.

24. Das, A.K.Choudhury, M.K., Basu, Sa., "Anthropology of Development : Socio-Economic conditions of the Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes of Eastern India" in B. Chaudhury (ed.) Tribal Development in India, Inter India Publication, Delhi, 1982, pp. 353.

25. Shyam Choudhury S., Education and Social Change Among the Scheduled Tribes of North Bengal, Ph. D. Thesis, N.B.U. 1984.

26. Mehta, G.S., "Education, Employment and Earnings, the extent of disadvantages against Women" in Man and development, June 1989, Vol. XI, No. 2, p. 32.

Puspa Asthana deals with the need to reformulate rational plans and policies in order to incorporate women into our country's developmental process. She discusses about the regional disparities of women's literacy and education. Rural-urban difference, class difference values about "status" and "modernity", have been examined by her. Urbanisation can be considered a unique opportunity for the women to change their traditional life ways ²⁷.

According to the census data, 1991 in India the total number of girl children between 0 to 19 years of age are 190.8 million. The girl children include women, as numerous girls even today in India get married before 19 years of age and become wives, mothers and even widows by that age. As such the violations of human rights of women of this age-group have also been taken into account. Today there is universal recognition of the fact that child abuse constitutes gross violation of the rights of the child ²⁸.

Girl child's rights to life and development are violated by abusing, exploiting and discriminating against her. The discriminatory treatment is manifested in various ways including depriving her of equal opportunities to have education as mentioned above ²⁹.

According to the 1991 census the literacy rate among women is 39.42 compared to 63.86 for men.

Education seems to be the key, as the aforesaid data has amply shown. There is a great deal of emphasis now on education and hopefully it will give dividends in the not too distant future, delay the age at marriage, enhance the self image and self esteem of the girl child and involve young girls and women in decision making in whatever affects their lives. There is a difficult road ahead, but a dim light can be seen at the other end of the tunnel ³⁰.

On the other hand Gangrade says that survival of girl child and change in the status of women are highly dependent on education of both. The primacy of education of all the factors of social development is singularly significant as without it all round development is not possible.

The right to education has followed directly from the right to life as per Article 21 of the Indian constitution. Viewed in the light of Articles 41 and 45, this right meant that every child has the right to full education until he/she reaches the age of 14.

27. Asthana, Puspa "Women, Urbanization and development" in Man & Development, June, 1989, Vol. XI, No. 2, pp. 13-19.

28. Kapur, 1994.

29. Social Change Vol. 25, No. 2 & 3 June, Sept. 1995, pp. 4-7

30. Social Change, Vol 25, No. 2 & 3 1995 (pp. 45 & 54).

In another study on women's education and social change Jyoti Verma has analysed that illiteracy among the Indian women are greater than that of the men. She has also observed that in the present day the Indian women want to play an important role in social, cultural and political activities of life.³¹

According to Shanti Ghosh, Illiteracy is high among women and in about 100 districts of India, the level is less than 10 percent. As such a third of the girls 6-11 years have not been enrolled. The enrolment for age 11-14 is 29 per cent for girls as against 54 per cent for boys and the figure drops to 14 per cent for girls of 15-17 years as against 28.6 per cent for boys. The drop out rate is very high among the girls and many of them relapse into illiteracy. In absolute terms, the number of illiterate females is increasing with time and faster than the male illiterates³².

According to S.D. Gokhale's opinion legally the girl child has an equal right for education, the law of compulsory primary education applies to girls as well as boys. In practice, however, fewer girls than boys enrol in primary schools. In secondary schools the proportion of girl students is reduced further.

The enforcement of compulsory primary education should be more vigorous in respect of girls. This is especially necessary in respect of girls born in poor families in which they have a double disadvantage of very poor and female³³.

According to Ranjana Kumari's opinion, educational backwardness of girl children is the result of the general low status, discrimination and subjugation of women in the society. The age old traditional taboos and beliefs about women's education or women's role that still exist in the society make girl children lag behind boys despite all developmental efforts and constitutional and legal guarantees. Education is the key to the overall development of a person and human progress. Therefore, education for girls has an important role in the development of their personality and in recognizing her identity aspirations, potentials and rights.

According to Kiran Devendra, it is difficult to believe and accept that this overburdened rural girl child is a burden or a liability on her family. She works at home, takes care of the siblings, collects fuel, fodder, water, takes care of the cattle, looks for the family and even looks after guests. She is both directly and indirectly contributing to the household economy. Though she herself is discriminated against, she is continuously

31. Verma, Jyoti "Women's Education - a media of Social Change" in Social Change. Vol. 19, No. 2, June 1989, pp. 19-20.

32. Shanti Ghosh, Social Change. Vol. 25, No. 2 & 3, 1995, pp. 45-54.

33. Social Change. Vol. 25, No. 2 & 3, June - Sept 1995, p. 116

struggling either to earn wages or helping her parents by freeing them from the responsibilities of home. In the rural India , it is the girl child who sees to the smooth functioning of a household.

The drop out rate and stagnation among girls is twice as that among boys. Needless to repeat that the girl child is disadvantaged in rural India due to her responsibilities of running her home and contributing to it economically. Parents are indifferent towards her educational needs. Even if they wish to send her to school they have anxiety if there are no women teachers. There is no demand for her education from the rural community/ society . Poverty does affect her education negatively. Gender disparities are conspicuous in regard to enrolment and retention . Girls enrolment has definitely improved it has been higher than boys. The disparities are there because girls drop out in large numbers both at primary and upper primary levels. These are still higher in rural India³⁴.

E. V. Rathnaiah in "structural" constraints in Tribal Education" says that the fact that lack of communication facilities constrain educability was further confirmed in the study. Enrolment of school-going age(6-11 years) in the road -side villages (50%) was found to be more than the interior villages (25%) . Statistically also it was found that there was positive association between the road side situation of the village and the enrolment of children. This conclusion should not ,however, be accepted purely because of its face value, provision of communication facilities carry with them certain other facilitators. One of such facilitators is the exposure of the community to the outside forces which would have their impact on the attitudes and habits of the people in the communities.

In the road-side village schools the attendance of teachers was also found to be more regular than in the interior villages. The continuous presence of the teacher has its own impact on the children in terms of their attendance in the school ³⁵.

He also said that it was found that the tribals were going to a distant secondary school, where free boarding and lodging facilities were available than to a school near their villages. It was also found that there has been rapid growth in enrolment of tribal students in high schools during the fourth plan period consequent on the increase in the number of scheduled tribes hostels in the district. About 83 percent of the tribal students in secondary schools were the residents of the hostels. Among the secondary school

34. *Social Change*, Vol. 25, No. 2 & 3, June-Sept. 1995, pp. 191-193.

35. *Structural Constraints in Tribal Education* by E. V. Rathnaiah, pp. 174 - 175.

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tribal students 43 percent have had their primary education in ashram schools. Thus the provision of hostels with free boarding³⁶ has been facilitating the educability of the tribals. By implication, this means that in a backward region, where the students find it difficult to cross the various geographical barriers everyday by commuting between the school and the residence, provision of hostel facilities would make them reside at a particular place and carry on their education.³⁶

While the cultivators as a whole generally suffer from constraints both at the primary and secondary education level, the medium cultivators suffer more than others at the secondary school level. This would mean that when compared to the employees and petty businessmen the cultivators and labourers have smaller means to send their children to school. But once the labourers put their children in the school at the primary level, they are more likely to send them to secondary school also, because of the availability of free boarding and lodging and other facilities. Unlike others the medium cultivator suffers greatly from peculiar constraint at the secondary level. For him, sending a child to secondary school means not only loss of a working person but also expenditure on the employment of an outside labour to assist him during the season of agricultural operations³⁷.

In complete school was found to be the most important reason for this phenomenon. In the area under study, 90 percent of the primary schools were single teacher schools, where education was imparted for the first one or two grades only. The restricted instruction provided for in these schools leads to educational wastage, in the sense that the children after completing their education in their village school do not go to another village for continuing their education. But the lack of adaptation of the single teacher schools and not finding effective solutions to its administrative and pedagogic problems like the leave and transfer of teachers, methods and techniques of plural -class teaching etc. result in the phenomenal wastage in education.

A review of researches in women's education (Desai, 1991) shows that problems related to women's education could be grouped mainly in the categories of (I) employment of educated women (II) institutional (III) dropping out of the educational system and education of scheduled caste and Scheduled Tribe female students. It has been observed that researches on women education must take into consideration varieties of perspectives and methods in the socio-cultural context prevailing in different parts of

36. Structural Constraints in Tribal Education, p. 175.

37. Structural Constraints in Tribal Education, pp. 178-179.

the country. In a similar review of researches pertaining to education of the disadvantaged sections, Sachchidananda (1991) identified four major areas, namely, the Scheduled Tribes, the Scheduled castes, other backward communities and economically backward individuals and the physically handicapped and the mentally retarded. He has observed that tribal education cannot achieve its objectives unless it is based on the identification of educational needs and problems of tribal communities.³⁸

The education of scheduled castes (SCs) and scheduled tribes (STs) has been a major area of concern for the educational planners and policy makers since independence, various constitutional provisions were made to give these deprived groups all possible opportunity and help to improve their educational status. However their development varies across the country. There are inter group differences as well. According to the 1981 census, the SC and ST groups constitute 15.5 and 8 per cent of the total population in the country.

The government took some major steps after the independence of the country to improve the educational status of the SC and ST students, such as granting scholarships, stipend, exemption of school fees and free supply of books etc which attracted these children to the school and enrolment of these students during 1947-48.

Though there has been a rapid growth in the education of SC and ST population in general and girls in particular since independence, still they lagged behind the general literacy rate. Though the government had made special efforts to improve the educational status of these two deprived groups yet there seemed to be a lack of proper coordination and also lack of strong commitment to implement the policies properly to improve the status of SC and ST girls. Lack of literacy among parents, ignorance, lack of motivation, social stigma attached to girls, hence for improving the educational levels of the SC and ST population in general and girls in particular, it was necessary to review the programmes in the light of physical, sociological, cultural, economical, and religious factors which were impeding the progress of education.

The studies reviewed here are mostly descriptive and only a few of them have some empirical basis. The major focuses of the literature reviewed however, are the problems of illiteracy, poverty, educational achievements of Scheduled Castes and Women's education.

The present study has been undertaken with a special emphasis on the education of the Scheduled Castes women. This has been done by examining the problems, achievements, social change, etc. of the girl students vis-a-vis those of the boys.

38. Social Change, Dec 1993 Vol. 23. "Educational Status of tribal women in India" - Kulwinder Singh : Renu Ohri.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The sociology of Education is concerned with the analysis and understanding of formal education as a social institution. Formal education is not universal; and in many simple societies, the process of socializing the young is carried out informally through other institutions such as the family and kin-group, or the occupational group. We are, however, concerned here only with education as a formal specialized agency for the socialization of the younger generation of a special group-the Scheduled Caste.

Before independence, there were hardly a few thousand Scheduled Caste students in the primary stage of education in this state. The aim of different educational and welfare programmes to bring the Scheduled Castes nearer to the standard of the general mass within a reasonable period still remains to be fulfilled.

The objective of the present study is to identify the problems of educational development of Scheduled Caste students with emphasis on girl students. The people studied belong to the Rajbansi Caste. In social status, the Rajbansis belong to the category of Scheduled Castes in West Bengal. In terms of proportion about 19 percent people of North Bengal are Rajbansis by caste. However, the more significant fact is -that among the Scheduled Castes of North Bengal, numerically, the Rajbansi is a dominant community. Even when the Rajbansis is a dominant Scheduled Caste of North Bengal, there are little studies on this community (Mukhopadhyay, 1990:3).

The distribution of the Rajbansis vary in the five districts of North Bengal. The highest concentration of the Rajbansis is found in the district of Cooch Behar (46.84%) according to 1971 census. Although it is only 3.06% in Darjeeling district, the concentration is much higher in the plain areas of the district. For the purpose of this study a rural area in the plains of Darjeeling district has been chosen.

Darjeeling district has become educationally very advanced during the last few decades. Considering the non -Scheduled Castes population the district was almost at par with the district of Jalpaiguri. But when we look at the Scheduled Caste population the picture undergoes a considerable change. In the whole of North Bengal the highest literacy rate is found among the Rajbansis of Darjeeling district (24.66% and 22.18% in 1961 and 1971 respectively (Census of India, 1961 and 1971).

Another significant picture emerges from the census data. In comparison to the other Scheduled Castes and non Scheduled-castes the discrepancy in the literacy rates between the sexes is highest among the Rajbansis (40.05% among males and 5.59% among females in 1961; 37.84% among males and 6.06% among females in 1971).

It is important for a researcher to diagnose the underlying socio-economic and cultural factors responsible for such glaring discrepancy and to find out what changes, if any, are taking place in this area.

Thus the basic research questions that underly this study are as follows:

1. The discrimination between a boy and a girl is found in almost all spheres of life. What are the areas of discrimination in the sphere of education in terms of monetary, temporal and coaching facilities.

2. It is expected that the educated girls will show some manifestations of change in their values, attitudes, knowledges and skills and aspirations in life. The extent of change among the educated boys and the girls may differ. What are these changes and how, if they differ among the boys and the girls.

3. Utilization of the formal education in some sort of occupation is expected. What are the patterns of such utilization among the men and women in the area?

The specific objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To know the educational facilities available in the area.

2. To study the social and economic background of the students enrolled in two selected schools.

3. To know the physical facilities for study in the home environment.

4. To assess the drop-out rates and associated causes.

5. To identify the constraints of studies including the discrimination between sexes in providing the facilities for study.

6. To identify the problems of education from the students and their guardians as well as from the school authorities and the teachers.

7. To find the areas of changes from the present students, ex students and guardians, such as beliefs and values, attitudes and aspirations.

8. To look into the extent of utilization of the formal learnings in pursuance of occupations by educated men and women.

9. To enquire about the extent of political awareness and participation of the educated women.

The assessment of the impact of education on Scheduled castes at different levels may be illuminating. It will give an idea whether process of socio-economic development of Scheduled Caste population has been facilitated by the spread of education.

In order to understand the educational achievement of Scheduled Caste students two rural schools in North Bengal have been selected, namely, Phansidewa, Higher Secondary School and Phansidewa Government sponsored Ashram Type Junior High School for girls of Darjeeling District, for detailed case studies.

Relevance of the study

Education is a comparatively new field for research for the Sociologists and the basic sociological data necessary for the formulation of specific problems and the articulation of definite hypotheses for research are not easily available. The result is that

most of the initial efforts at empirical research have been in the nature of broad exploratory studies that cover a number of sociologically relevant aspects of education in order to obtain basic data. This also explains the overwhelming concern of the Indian sociologist for studies into the social backgrounds, attitudes, values, habits and behaviour of students and of teachers. In fact, the pattern of these studies confirms the feeling that the dearth of basic data seems to have been a very real constraint upon research in the sociology of education in India³⁹.

This study based on empirical data is expected to add to the body of basic data available to the sociologists. Moreover, the research is proposed to be focussed upon the achievements of Scheduled caste students with emphasis on the girl students. Thus it may serve two-fold purposes.

The introduction of the Constitution of India in 1950 which pledges equality of status and opportunity to men and women equally, the passage of several Acts by the Parliament (e.g. the Hindu code Bill, the Special Marriage Act) and the process of social change brought about by industrialization and urbanization during the last two decades have done much for women's emancipation both legally, politically and socially. Educationally, women now enjoy similar opportunities with men yet, women's equality in terms of education, employment and power is still an individual, rather than a universal, achievement and the majority of our women still remain content to accept an inferior status.

In the rural areas of North Bengal we do not expect any deviation from this picture. Yet I propose to search for any change that may have taken place among the Scheduled Caste women due to their relatively recent educational opportunities.

Sociological studies in this particular area has not been done. Although studies on education and social change among Scheduled Tribes of North Bengal⁴⁰ and that among sikkim elites⁴¹ have been done, but those hardly cover the need to study the opportunities of education and social change for the Scheduled Caste girl children and women. Thus, obviously, the present study is expected to be a very relevant one.

39. Chitnis, 1974, p. 182.

40. Syam Chowdhury, S., 1984. Ibid

41. Dutta, A., Sikkim since independence, Mittal publications, New Delhi, 1991