

# **EDUCATIONAL AND ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT OF RURAL SCHEDULED CASTE WOMEN OF KOCH BIHAR DISTRICT OF WEST BENGAL**

## **Abstract**

### **Introduction**

Women consists half of the world population. Two-thirds of the women of the world are illiterate. Nearly 70 percent of the total poor people which 1.3 billion are women (HDR, 1995). Above 75 percent of the world's refugee are women and Children. In all over the world nearly 130 million girls children are not in schools (UNICEF, 2017). In many countries women work approximately twice the unpaid time men do. Rural women produce more than 55 per cent of all food grown in developing countries (HDR, 2019). Although there is a huge gender gap or inequality exists in every aspect like education, occupation, income, health etc. the every society in the World. The inequality and injustices towards women have become a universal problem and to solve the universal problem there is a universal solution which is women empowerment. The word women empowerment is another terms in the area of women development. Women's development has come a long way from the earlier welfare orientation. In the welfare approach, women were taken as vulnerable sections of the population, whose situation could be ameliorated; through the provision of support services like health, nutrition and childcare. The economic self-reliance puts emphasis on income generation projects for women; the equality model put the blame on inequality and promoted affirmative action to promote equal opportunity. The empowerment approach arises from a strong commitment to women's rights and capacity to make their own decisions about development strategies, under the education for empowerment.

Empowerment is based on the idea that gives the people skill, resource, authority, opportunity, motivation and become responsible and accountable for outcomes their actions. Empowerment refers to the spiritual, political, social or economic strength of individuals and communities. Women empowerment refers to increasing and improving the social, economic, political, and legal strength of the women, to ensure equal right to women, and make them confident enough to claim their rights (Mandal, 2013). The

basic objective of the women empowerment is nothing but understanding of one's potential not only for self-development but also for the benefit of the society as a whole. Women empowerment is a process of social transformation where women gain control over resources and benefits and hence its influences on decision making (Parvin, 2005). Women empowerment is needed for giving the employment opportunity to the women who belongs to under employment and unemployment section of the society, give them a chance to compete with the men in any sector of the society equally, uses their intelligence and talent, give them the equal right in economic, social and political participation, encourage and appreciate their work and finally the overall development of our society and our Nation.

The schedule caste is one of the backward classes of India in respect of education, economy, social, cultural and political status. In Koch Bihar district about 50.17 percent (according to census 2011) population belongs to scheduled caste community. Among them 31.51 percent women are illiterate and 68.49 percent women are literate as per census 2011 which is lower than the state average (70.54). District overall literacy rate is 74.78 percent which is equal to the national level. Whereas the female literacy rate of Scheduled Caste is 58.04 percent and Scheduled Caste male literacy rate is 70.96 percent. Status of scheduled caste women of Koch Bihar district is low. Most of the women are illiterate and marginal worker mainly engaged in agriculture sector and household work. Only 16.38 percent of the Scheduled Caste women are engaged as main worker and 62.19 percent work as a marginal worker. So the low level of education and low work participation are the main drawback of this region and to solve the problem education is only the way to make people aware about their rights and help them to develop their skill which make the women self-dependent through employment. Then only the status of the rural scheduled caste women could be improve in the district.

### **Hypothesis**

Hypothesis 1: Literacy rate and level of education is low amongst Scheduled Caste women than Scheduled Caste men.

Hypothesis 2: Scheduled Caste women are engaged in agricultural sector and are marginal workers.

Hypothesis 3: Poverty is negatively associated with educational status of Scheduled Caste women.

Hypothesis 4: Level of education is positively associated with economic empowerment of Scheduled Caste women.

### **Objectives**

- I. To study the demographic profile of Scheduled Caste women of Koch Bihar District.
- II. To analyse the educational status of Scheduled Caste women.
- III. To analyse the economic status of Scheduled Caste women.
- IV. To formulate the strategies for educational empowerment of Scheduled Caste women.
- V. To formulate the strategies for economic empowerment of Scheduled Caste women.

### **Database and Methodology**

Selections of different methodologies for an entire work are the crucial part for the inner base of any research work. To study the status of rural Scheduled Caste women of Koch Bihar district. The study is based on both primary and secondary data. Secondary data has been collected from various department and offices such as Library, District Statistic Office, Block Office, Census Report, District Statistical hand book, District Profile. The primary data has been collected from door to door survey by a scheduled Questionnaire by direct interview method. The multi stage sampling method has been followed here to fulfill the entire work. Koch Bihar district has a total of 12 community developmental blocks which has a different numbers of villages. From each block, 5 percent villages have been taken for this work and the total numbers of villages are 58 which are select for survey. As this work on schedule caste women, so schedule caste households of these sampled villages have been taken. Total numbers of scheduled caste households of these sampled villages has been find out first then 2 percent scheduled caste households from each village has been surveyed for this work and by summing up these households of 12 blocks which has been surveyed is 540 and based on which the entire work has been progressed.

### **Major Findings**

In the study high concentration of Scheduled Caste population has been found in three blocks namely Sitalkuchi, Mekhliganj and Mathabhanga I more than 67.00 percent of Scheduled Caste population and most of them are from Rajbanshi and Namasudra

community as this blocks have high fertile land and the main occupation of Rajbanshi and Namasudra are cultivation. The study shows case of decadal change of Scheduled Caste population the Jaliakaibartta community has increased by 1.15 percent and the Rajbanshi community has decreased by 3.12 percent. This is because of awareness about the family planning and healthcare facility. Decadal growth rate of Scheduled Caste population of Koch Bihar district is highest among Jaliakaibartta community (49.61 percent) followed by Nuniya (48.51 percent), Jhalomalo (19.34 percent) and lowest growth rate has been found in Patani (-35.55 percent). In the sample Scheduled Caste women 66.85 percent are from Rajbanshi community, 21.30 percent from Namasudra, 8.89 percent Jaliakaibartta and rest 3 caste combined 2.96 percent of the respondents. 74.10 percent of the respondents married after legal age (>18 years) and rest 35.90 percent of the respondents married before legal age (<18 years). Marriage below legal age is maximum among Rabidas (40.00 percent) community and minimum among Jaliakaibartta (12.50 percent) community. The marriage before legal age is maximum among those who studied upto primary level (55.90 percent) and among the higher educated respondents there is not a single respondent found who married before legal age which shows that education has a great impact on the age of marriage of the Scheduled Caste women in the district. Family size of the respondents is decreasing with the increasing of the level of education and with their economic status. About 52.60 percent of the respondents have two children and the number of children also varies with the economic status and level of education of the respondents. There is no discrimination found in the district on the basis of caste. 76.30 percent of the respondents aware about the reservation policy and 59.44 percent of the respondents avail the reservation. Enrolment ratio of scheduled caste boys is high in the primary level than the girls but in the upper primary level boys and girls enrollment are almost same. In the secondary level the girl's enrolment is higher than the boys but again in the higher secondary level the number of girls reducing and number of boys is increasing. Out of the 12 blocks Mathabhanga I, Mathabhanga II, and Cooch Behar II these three blocks are fall under the high educational develop region and Sitai and Haldibari these two block is fall under the very low educational development region. In the study 33.50 percent of the respondents have studied up to primary level and only 7.00 percent of the respondents completed their graduation and above level of educational qualification. The maximum percentage of illiterate respondents and maximum percentage of the graduate and above respondents both are found in the Dinhata I block, 17.90 percent and 10.70 percent

respectively out of the 12 blocks of the district. But it is very unfortunate that the illiterate is more than the graduate respondents. Dropout is maximum in Dinjata I block (12.78 percent) and minimum in Sitalkuchi block (3.75 percent). Male dropout is maximum in the Sitalkuchi block and lowest in Tufanganj I block (33.33 percent). The female dropout is maximum in Tufanganj block and minimum in Sitalkuchi and overall the female dropout is minimum than the male dropout as per the surveyed data. Dropout is high among the Rabidas community (60.00) out of the six sub caste community of Koch Bihar district. 68.42 percent of the dropout people left their study in the age group of 15-19 years. The main reason of the dropout is different among male and female, 55.95 percent male left the study as they are not interested and 53.06 percent of the female left their study due to marriage. Male dropout is maximum (51.19 percent) in upper primary level but female dropout is maximum (42.86 percent) in secondary level. The study show that most of the (38.20 percent) illiterate are belongs to very low economic status and maximum (94.70 percent) number of graduate respondents have high economic status which shows that economic status has a positive relation with the level of education. 94.07 percent women support their daughter education which shows that the perception has changing towards girl's education. Although still 10.74 percent women think that investment in girl's education is waste of money. 44.07 percent women admitted that their girls did not get equal opportunity in the home. The study shows that the decision making process depends on the educational qualification, although women participation is high in short run decision than the long run decision. In the study it is observed that the economic status also depend on the educational qualification. 23.50 percent of the illiterate respondents have very low economic status and on the other hand 92.10 percent of the respondents with graduation and above level of qualification have high economic status. The study shows that decision making power is depend on the economic status of the family. 64.50 percent of the respondents have high participation in decision making as their economic status is high. The study also highlights that the income level has a great impact on the overall decision making of the respondents. The decision making power has increased with increasing the level of income. The level of empowerment also highly related to the income level of the respondents. The study reveals that there is a positive relation with level of income and level of empowerment. Level of empowerment is increasing with the income level of the respondents.

## **Conclusion**

So in conclusion it could be said that the education and employment are the most important tools for the women empowerment. The study also reveals that the education and economic condition is depend one another. If education increased it increased the employability which leads to the women towards the improvement of economic condition, on the other hand if the economic condition is low it shows the low educational status of the women and their children. The study showed 40.00 percent of the respondents left their study due to the poor economic condition. So for the overall development or for the overall empowerment of the women in the study area increasing the level of education instead of the increasing only the literacy rate and providing the employment opportunity to feel the economic freedom which give the women self-confidence and control over power then only the empowerment of the rural scheduled caste women could be possible.