

Empowerment of Rural and Urban Women in West Bengal A Case Study in Birbhum District

Deboleena Banerjee, Uma Pan



Abstract: Over 200 million women are employed across all industry sectors, with half of this number in developing countries. Their work makes a significant contribution to economic progress [1]. Previously, they were low-skill and poorly paid. However, today we recognise that the creativity and talents of all women are an invaluable resource, which can and should be developed both for their self-realisation and for the benefit of society. Women have traditionally played an essential role in the small and medium-scale enterprise sector. Improving their efficiency and introducing new techniques can therefore yield significant benefits for women, including increased income and job creation. Women's empowerment also helps to reduce poverty in our country by making women economically independent. Women's empowerment thus helps in national development. The researcher expects that the study's findings will shed light on the scenario of women's empowerment in the district of Birbhum, West Bengal.

Keywords: Empowerment, Women empowerment, Social, Political and Economic Empowerment.

I. INTRODUCTION

The concept of empowerment is used in a wide range of contexts. Empowerment is a process that enables women to become self-dependent socially and economically. Works by ancient Indian grammarians, such as Patanjali and Katyayana, suggest that women were educated in the early Vedic period. Scriptures such as the Rig Veda and the Upanishads mention several women sages and seers, notably Gargi and Maitreyi. However, during the medieval period, the position of women deteriorated. The Muslim conquest in the Indian subcontinent introduced the parda practice to Indian society. Jauhar was practice among the Rajput in Rajasthan [2]. Educating and empowering women was not easy in a male-dominated society. The contributions of Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar and Raja Rammohan Roy are memorable in the education of women. According to Swami Vivekananda, "Religion, Arts, Science, Housekeeping, Cooking, Sewing, Hygiene are essential points in this subject ought to be our women... their education will be an eye opener in all matters. Ideal characters must always be presented before the view of the girls to imbue them with a

devotion to lofty principle, selflessness. The Noble example of Sita Savitri, Damayanti, Lilabati, Khana and Mira should be brought to their mind, and they should be inspired to lead their own life in the light of these" [3]. Women are being provided with access to know-how, technologies and credit. The United Nations Industrial Development Organisation is committed to sustainable industrial development as a means of achieving economic prosperity, a healthy environment, and the integration of all groups in society. Small and medium enterprise (SMEs) play a vital role in industrial development. They have the flexibility to respond quickly to market changes and opportunities, and to develop specialised products and rapidly absorb technological innovations. Women have traditionally played a crucial role in the small and medium-scale enterprise sector, serving as owners, managers, and workers. These small and medium enterprises dominate three important subsectors, accounting for over 80 per cent of the employees in textile, clothing, and leather production, 75 per cent in food, beverages, and tobacco production, and over 60 per cent in wood and wood processing. They also perform most agricultural work in rural areas. Women play a crucial role in the government sector of most countries. Food processing is a prevalent occupation that can be pursued on a part-time basis from home. Producing children's and ladies' dresses for friends, neighbours and other customers. In Lenya, this informal sector is known as Iva Kali-Swahili, which translates to 'hot sun,' referring to the open marketplace type of operation. The Kenyan Ministry of Technical Training and Applied Technology requested United Nations Industrial Development Organization help to upgrade the skills of the Iva Kali women. In 1991, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization launched the first six-month training program in Nairobi. Shea butter (Beurre de Karite) is an agricultural product found in many West African countries. It is produced rurally from an almond-like unit and is used locally as a foodstuff. Food processing is a prevalent occupation for women in small-scale enterprises. The United Nations Industrial Development Organisation has developed a training program in cooperation with the Tanzanian Small Industries Development Organisation to provide businesswomen with the entrepreneurial awareness, management skills, and technical knowledge required to run a viable small-scale food processing enterprise. In India, several measures have been taken to empower women across all sectors of society [1]. Hence, this study aimed to analyse the

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empowerment status of rural and urban women in Birbhum District, West Bengal.

II. RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

The development of a country depends on the involvement of its women in all activities. For years, women have been suppressed socio-economically in our patriarchal society. Empowerment is the key to increasing their degree of autonomy and self-determination in society. Women are still thought to be a weaker section in society. They often remain backwards in terms of education and socio-economic status, especially in rural areas. Women's participation in the process of socio-political development has become necessary in the country. Women's empowerment means empowering women socially, economically, educationally, and politically to break the male-dominated society and establish their rights within it. Women's empowerment is closely connected with women's education because education is the only weapon to empower women in society. Education is the most powerful vehicle for bringing about change in women and empowering them. The Central and State Governments have made numerous efforts to improve the empowerment status of women in society. Therefore, it is very pertinent to know the status of rural and urban women's empowerment in West Bengal. Keeping the above in view, this case study was conducted in the district of Birbhum to estimate the scenario of women's empowerment in rural and urban areas within the district, which lies at the heart of the study's rationale.

III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

A. The Following Objectives are Laid Down for the Study.

1. To estimate the status of women's empowerment in rural and urban areas of Birbhum district.
2. To compare women's empowerment between urban and rural areas in Birbhum district.

IV. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What is the status of women's empowerment in rural and urban areas of Birbhum district?
2. What are the differences in women's empowerment between urban and rural areas in the district of Birbhum?

V. DEFINITION OF TERMS

A. Women Empowerment

Women's empowerment is essential for sustainable development. Without women's participation, the development of a nation is never possible. The National Mission for Empowerment of Women (2010) aims to implement women-oriented programmes to improve the condition of women in society. The mission is known as 'Mission Purna Shakti' for the holistic empowerment of women. Empowerment means giving power to individuals in all spheres of life, enabling them to survive in society and achieve their full potential for development.

B. Economic Empowerment

Women have to face situations of extreme poverty, harsh realities of intra-household and social discrimination. Macro-economic policies and poverty eradication programs were adopted to ensure the successful implementation of the women's empowerment program. A range of economic and social options, along with necessary support measures, was provided to women to enhance their capabilities and empowerment.

C. Social Empowerment

Gender equality is one of the most effective ways to empower women socially in our nation. Gender equality means that women and men will have the same rights and opportunities in all spheres of their lives. They will have access to the same facilities in our society. Social empowerment means strengthening women's social relations and enhancing their position and status in society. Social empowerment of a woman will eradicate the social discrimination which exists in the stereotyped society based on caste, sex, race, religion and gender.

D. Educational Empowerment

Without proper knowledge and education for all children irrespective of their sex, gender empowerment is impossible. There is one maxim: if one male child is literate, he alone becomes educated, but if one girl child is educated, the whole family benefits. The maxim has been widely accepted by policymakers, bureaucrats, and educators across our country. Education is indeed a potent weapon for empowering women in our patriarchal society. Educational empowerment means equipping women with the necessary knowledge and skills to contribute to the nation's development. An educated mother or a woman is a thousand times superior to a mere lecturer. Therefore, the educational empowerment of women is vital in any society.

E. Political Empowerment

Political empowerment refers to the participation of women in the country's political decision-making process. All women have the right to vote for their representatives in their states and countries. Women's participation at all levels of governance structure is the highest requirement for women's political empowerment. Through active participation in politics, women can become politically empowered. It means decentralisation of power to the powerless and deprived women who have not participated in any political process. Women's political empowerment is closely related to a nation's welfare and development. Thus, women's empowerment means increasing the social, economic, political, and educational strength of women in all spheres of life.

VI. CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT IN INDIA

Many efforts have been made to improve the status of women and empower them. Various legislations were instituted to meet constitutional commitments, such as the Hindu Marriage Act 1955 and the Hindu Marriage and Divorce Act 1955. The Constitution of

India prohibits discrimination Based on sex, religion, caste or race. Article 15(1) and Article 15(2) permit states to make special provisions for women and children. The 73rd and 74th Constitution Acts have made provisions for reserving one-third seats for women in elections to local self-government. Thus, in 1950, women were formally emancipated, but the goal of tradition still impedes the free movement of women both ideologically, psychologically and physically. To meet the menace of sexual harassment at the work places, Vishaka case (1997) in an important decision. The Equal Remuneration Act 1976 provides for payment of equal remuneration to men and women workers and is meant to prevent discrimination on the ground [4][5].

VII. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The descriptive survey research was adopted to conduct this case study. In this connection, 100 rural and 100 urban women were selected as the sample.

Distribution of Sample :

1.1 Sample distribution

Location	Birbhum, Number of Women
Rural	100
Urban	100

Thus, 200 women were selected equally from the rural and urban areas of Birbhum district in West Bengal.

Tools used in the Study:

In this study, the Empowerment Scale, with its different dimensions, was used.

1.21 Constructed Tool Which was Used for Collection of Data-Economic

S. No.	Statements on Economic Empowerment
1.	Women must have land in their name.
2.	Women must work for themselves.
3.	I am a permanent employee of a firm / company.
4.	I spend the money which I earned independently.
5.	I spend the money which I earned on my family and children only.
6.	I have my personal bank account.
7.	I hardly get any scope for saving money for my future.
8.	I agree that every woman should have economic independence.
9.	I help my family financially with my income.
10.	It is necessary to save money for the future.

1.22 Constructed Tool Which Was Used for Collection of Data-Social

S. No.	Statements on Social Empowerment
1.	Women should make decisions regarding treatment when they get ill.
2.	My husband and family members consider my suggestions for meeting my material needs.
3.	I make decisions regarding the education and healthcare of my children.
4.	I need permission from my husband or any family member to go to the market, the cinema, a relative's house, or visit a friend.
5.	I strive for social freedom and promote social justice at home.
6.	I have the opportunity to participate in community service.
7.	I agree that every woman should have social independence from their family.
8.	My husband or family member took my suggestion when purchasing household materials and other daily necessities.
9.	I support that every working woman should have family cooperation.
10.	I get the opportunity to participate in society cultural programmes.

1.23 Constructed Tool Which was Used for Collection of Data-Educational

S. No.	Statements on Educational Empowerment
1.	Girls should receive formal education from a young age.
2.	'The Human Rights Protection' secures women.
3.	Every woman should achieve the goal of cultural promotion.
4.	Every woman should fight against the oppressive forces in society.
5.	Women must have the opportunity to participate in and benefit from scientific innovations and technological advancements.
6.	Women rarely have the opportunity to participate in developmental projects of government or non-government agencies.
7.	Every woman in our country should have access to higher education.
8.	I think women are educationally backwards due to the cultural and social barriers of our society.
9.	Girls should be given a school education.
10.	Literacy helps women to provide better medical care and nutrition to their children.

1.24 Constructed Tool Which was Used for Collection of Data-Political

S. No.	Statements on Political Empowerment
1.	There are no obligations regarding the joining of women in political parties.
2.	Women should participate in elections.
3.	Women must vote every time.
4.	Women must have a fair chance to become members of organisations such as cooperative banks, NGOs, cooperative societies, or any Mahila mandal.
5.	I agree that women should take active participation in community or public life.
6.	Women rarely have the opportunity to attend rallies to spread health messages or protest against social injustices.
7.	Women must actively participate in many political activities of our society.
8.	Every person should support women's participation in politics.
9.	Women in our society get a special advantage from the government.
10.	Women should enjoy all the human rights guaranteed by our constitution in complete freedom.

The tool consisted of four dimensions: Economic Empowerment, Social Empowerment, Educational Empowerment, and Political Empowerment. For each dimension, ten items were finalised based on the suggestions of the experts. Accordingly, the finalised tool contains forty items.

Administration of Tool:

The tool was administered to the selected sample in the study area according to the predetermined plan. The investigator herself conducted the village survey to collect data from rural and urban women. The tool was administered successfully in both urban and rural areas of the district without any hazards.

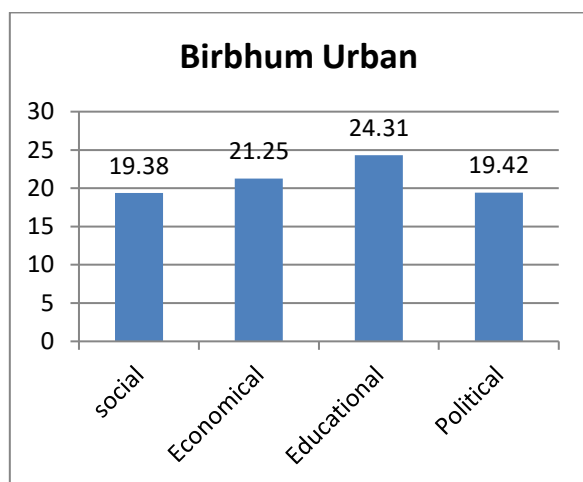
Analysis of Data:

Analysis of Data for Objective - 1

1.31 Empowerment of Women in Birbhum District Urban Area

Empowerment	No. of women	Average empowerment score	Trend
Social	100	19.38	Low Empowered
Economical	100	21.25	Empowered
Educational	100	24.31	Empowered
Political	100	19.42	Low Empowered

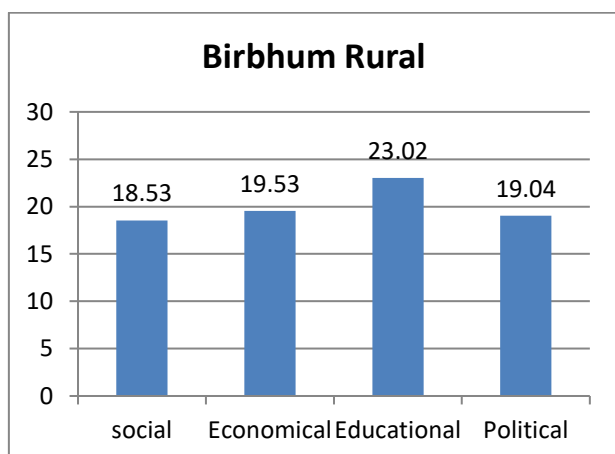
1.32 Empowerment of Women in Birbhum District Urban Area



1.33 Empowerment of Women in Birbhum District Rural Area

Empowerment	No. of women	Average empowerment score	Trend
Social	100	18.53	Low Empowered
Economical	100	19.53	Low Empowered
Educational	100	23.02	Empowered
Political	100	19.04	Low Empowered

1.34 Empowerment of Women in Birbhum District Rural Area



Interpretation:

A separate analysis has also been made for urban and rural areas of Birbhum district. The situation in urban areas is somehow better than the rural areas. Rural women in Birbhum district have shown poorer empowerment compared to urban areas.

1.4 Analysis of Data Objective - 2

Empowerment	No. of Women	Average Empowerment Urban	Average Empowerment Rural	Remarks
Social	100	19.38	18.53	Urban > Rural
Economical	100	21.25	19.53	Urban > Rural
Educational	100	24.31	23.02	Urban > Rural
Political	100	19.42	19.04	Urban > Rural

Urban women have shown better empowerment than rural women.

VIII. EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN RURAL AND URBAN AREAS CAN BE IMPROVED BY ADOPTING THE FOLLOWING MEASURES

- Introducing science and technology in women's programmes through the agency of the Vigyan Ashram (Science Hermitage) and Form for Science and Technology for Rural Education and Development (FOSTERED), which are the other field-based programmes of the institute.
- Conducting innovative vocational education programmes for document girls and older women.
- Conducting health and personality development programmes for women and girls through camps, dramatics, reading cycles, Yoga Asanas, and mental health checkups from medical personnel.
- Nutrition education and education for child development for both male and female parents.
- Investigating women's needs for fuel water supply, sanitation, agricultural activities, horticulture, medicinal plants, etc., to conduct training programmes including promotion of non-conventional energy sources [1].

IX. CONCLUSION

The present study was conducted to examine the levels of empowerment of women in their rural and urban locations. In this connection, 100 women from rural and 100 women from urban areas in Birbhum district were selected. A case study was conducted to explore various issues related to empowerment. The significance of the study may be described in the following lines:

The involvement of women at all levels—since the beginning of civilisation, in the making of families, initiation of cultural growth, and rise of economic material — is a fact. The Sangam literature describes the roles and activities of women in the early South Indian economy. As Women's political representation in the Panchayati Raj grew gradually, they started participating in the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). The women are also becoming aware of the need to upgrade their skills and knowledge. In contemporary times, women are frequently professionally qualified as men, and the income they earn is equally substantial.

- The study may help take necessary measures for the improvement of educational levels among Rural and Urban women.
- The study sheds light on the conditions of empowerment of Rural and urban women. Therefore, necessary steps can be taken to develop the empowerment and social status of women.
- The present study may also be helpful to understand the working conditions of rural and urban women in the selected areas. Therefore, stages could be taken to improve their working conditions and enhance their empowerment.

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Deboleena Banerjee is currently associated with Ayan Arnab Sikshan Sanstha, a B.Ed College under Bardwan University. She has completed her post-graduation in English and B.Ed. from the University of Burdwan in West Bengal. She completed an M.Ed. from Gulbarga University in Karnataka. She has also completed her dissertation and worked as a social worker for the last 10 years in tribal areas. She has also attended various seminars, conferences, and refresher courses. After completing her M.A. in Education from Himalayan University in Arunachal Pradesh, she is now pursuing her Ph.D. as a research scholar at Venkateshwara Open University in Arunachal Pradesh, under the guidance of Prof. Dr. Uma Pan.



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