



Women's Empowerment of rural West Bengal : A Case Study of Jalpaiguri District

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Abstract

Women's empowerment is the procedure of flowing women's life, making it easy to control their own lives, achieve their efficient confidence, exercise rights, and observe self ability; equality in social, economical, legal, political and institutional atmosphere. Women empowerment focuses on removing inequality and violence. It ensures opportunities for education, decision-making power and political participation. The study observes and superintends social, cultural, economic, educational and institutional challenges, and reconciliation of government policies and schemes. Focused on the rural area of Jalpaiguri district, specially on women, it used both primary and secondary data for research. For the research design, mixed method research was used, both qualitative and quantitative approaches; three villages of three blocks of Jalpaiguri district were selected. It reviews how government policies work and gives chances to women for empowerment, and it investigates barriers of women's empowerment socially, economically, educationally and institutionally. After analysis of women's working condition, various government schemes and programs launched by the State Government and Central Government were studied. In Jalpaiguri District, women's empowerment is progressing and being neglected in both in a manner. For social justice and social change, women's empowerment is most important and a valuable plantation.

Keywords: *Women Empowerment, Rural Area, Education, Socio Economy, Jalpaiguri District*

Introduction

In rural India, women's empowerment is frequently measured by access to education, economic opportunities and political participation. The Jalpaiguri district of West Bengal is diverse, featuring tea gardens, forest and multiple communities; it is home to Bengali-speaking people, Adivasis, Nepali and Rajbanshi. With district culture, practices and a history of marginalization, most people depend on agriculture and forest-based livelihoods, and women contribute significantly by working to support their families. The reality of Jalpaiguri district reveals a complex interplay of economic factors, social norms and geography. Women's lives are shaped by patriarchal customs and are economically dependent on men. Self-help groups have become vital, where members save for financial inclusion and empowerment. According to the Census of 2011, the literacy rate of women in Jalpaiguri district is 66.23%.

Historical Background

Historically, women in Jalpaiguri district played a significant role in the Tebhaga Movement (1946–47). During this time, women organised under the Naribahini to support landless and poor peasant women. Their participation challenged patriarchal norms and contributed to the struggle for peasants' rights and gender equality. Adivasi and Rajbanshi women also played pivotal roles in preserving cultural identity and asserting their rights.

The Constitution of India guarantees equal participation for all (Guru Bha, 2003). The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act of 1992 significantly advanced women's rights by reserving at least one-third of seats in local government for women.

Current situation

Presently, women in Jalpaiguri district are facing various challenges, including early marriage, illiteracy, digital illiteracy, limited access to digital technology, pressure to get married at a particular age, lack of education with right guidance.

Literature review

Nirmal Chandra Roy (2016) highlighted the role of SHGs in financial inclusion, measured as one aspect of financial inclusion and women empowerment, and this study observed the impact of SHGs on financial inclusion and empowerment of rural women and finalised that women are financially, if you will, and socially empowered.

Sangeeta Chakraborty (2024) constructed a Women Empowerment Index (WEI) in rural West Bengal, comprised of three domains: decision-making power, attitude towards gender-based violence and social independence.

Suman Kumar Kundu, Ananya Chakraborty (2012) conducted an empirical analysis of women empowerment, specifically within the Muslim community in Murshidabad district, measured women's empowerment using a multidimensional approach, and formulated effective action plans and policy recommendations.

Runa Das (2023) constructed the contribution of women's mobility, self-efficiency, mobility income on women's empowerment in the Himalayan region of West Bengal; results of the study in developing countries in the worldwide context show effects on tourism empowerment.

Sanchita Gorai, et al. (2012) emphasized the importance in Nadia district of West Bengal of the role of the self-help group approach.

Haimanti Mukhopadhyay (2008) proved that in Malda district, women's condition is of lower rank than men. Women face several discriminations within their own family and outside also.

Sarkar (2017) pointed out that, despite statistical growth in participation rates of women at work, it does not confirm women's power status; women's education and employment are key components of their economic environment.

Objectives of the study

1. To investigate social, cultural, economic, educational and institutional challenges confronting women in Jalpaiguri district.
2. To review the government schemes, policies and programs designed for women's empowerment.

Limitation of the study

In this study, measure the different aspects of women empowerment in Jalpaiguri district. The study is limited within Jalpaiguri district, particularly rural area. The study analyses in the Jalpaiguri district which type of barriers women are facing and how much impactful government schemes, policies and programs are in rural area.

About the study area

In the Jalpaiguri district, it is one of the districts of West Bengal state, located in the northern part, 26°16' and 27°0' North latitude and 88°4' and 89°53' East latitude. Jalpaiguri district shares an international border with Bhutan, which is located in the northeast, and Bangladesh in the south; the remaining part is surrounded by the

district Cooch Behar in the east and Darjeeling district in the west and north-east. The area covered by Jalpaiguri district is 6,227 square km; 9 blocks, 733 is the total number of villages.

Methods

Data source

In this study, for conducting research, primary data and secondary data have been used both in like manner.

Primary data: For primary data, derived from the field, selected 3 blocks, namely Kranti block, Mal block and Maynaguri block, randomly chosen for cooperating in field survey. For conducting questionnaire survey, 3 villages have been randomly chosen from the included blocks: Apalchand, 10 No. Gazoldoba and Changmari Gram.

Secondary data: In the study, for the exact data, secondary data has been used from several government websites, books, previous articles and research papers.

Research design

In this study, applies mixed method research design that makes use of both qualitative approach and quantitative approach to take a comprehensive understanding of women empowerment of Jalpaiguri district in rural area. Collection of numerical data to measure empowerment index and socio-economic indicators is used as the quantitative components, even through to explore the lived challenge, experience and women deliberation, in-depth interview method and group discussions are used.

Techniques of sampling

Purposive sampling: To confirm participation of women from various groups and community (Namashudra women, Rajbongshi women, tribal women, tea garden women workers and other field women workers), used qualitative data collection.

Stratified random sampling: used for qualitative service to include women from several socio-economic and cultural background.

Government and local initiative

For the empowerment of women in West Bengal, the central government and state government have launched various schemes and initiatives

The general data table, represents for better understanding of government schemes

Name of Schemes	Objectives	Eligibility	Facilities
Kanyashree Prkalpa	For confronting education of girls.	13–18 year girls	25,000/- rupees
Rupashree Prkalpa	For marriage of girls, one-time financial grants.	Must be 18+ age	25,000/- rupees
Lakshmir Bhandar	For economic emancipation of women.	25–60 year age	1500/- rupees for general and 1700/- rupees for SC/ST
Sabuj Sathi Prkalpa	Reduce school dropout, encourage for higher education, empower students.	Class 9 to 12 students	Providing free bicycle to students
Swasthya Sathi Prkalpa	For health care.	Each member of every family	25,00,000/- per annum per family

Taruner Swapno Prakalpa	To pursue technology for education, provide financial assistance.	Class 12 students in government school or madrasa	Provide 10,000/- rupees
Muktir Alo Prakalpa	Reset sex workers, trafficking victims and socially vulnerable women.	Designed for women and girls	Vocational training, skill development, business training, block printing
Anandadhara Prakalpa	To reduce rural poverty.	Rural women	Provide financial inclusion, skill development training

Findings

An investigation in the working condition of women in Jalpaiguri district revealed that, despite several government schemes and programs, the goal of women empowerment has not achieved its desired impact. Both Central Government and State Government have introduced various schemes to enhance women's skills and economic independence; however, women are not getting equal payment for equal activity compared to males, and it is not properly followed according to Article 39(d) of the Indian Constitution. In many fields, women empowerment still faces many barriers (lack of proper education, proper training and ability to take decisions in family and for own life), superficial caste, community and gender discrimination.

Discussion

For women empowerment, need to increase social awareness and consciousness about environment, side by side of educational, socio-economic and institutional facilities; increment of women participation in political participation, communication system and conduction system, where full impact to reconciliation about women's education, culture, decision-making power, socio-economic and institutional components.

Suggestions

- Improve in Vikshit Bharat GRAM G act 2025 implementation, skill development and family payment.
- Improve the communication system to reach from one place to another.
- Contact training about digital literacy.
- Increase educational awareness.

Conclusion

Importance of women in rural West Bengal, specially Jalpaiguri district, where replace both progress and neglects the journey of women towards empowerment in Jalpaiguri reflects resilience and the transformative power of opportunity through various schemes and initiatives. Women are gaining new skills and becoming active agents of social change. Empowering women is not only shaping their future, but also contributing significantly to the progress of society.

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