



Assessing Gender Equality in Education: Reviewing Status and Issues in Slums of Hooghly Industrial Belt, West Bengal

KEYWORDS

Gender equality, Slum Girls, Education, Government Schemes, and Empowerment.

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ABSTRACT *The present study is based on status and opportunity of education obtained by girls residing in slums. Although the focus point is slum girls but the present paper also highlights regional and national scenario of girl's education. This paper highlights issues like how girls under study area living within very poor conditions like small rooms and lack of proper sanitation, low economic profile obtain education. Education and Health always occupy secondary importance, and girl's education is neglected. In spite of the adverse conditions slum girls under Hooghly Industrial Belt try hard to get better education. Various schemes of Government at local and state level (e.g. Kanyashree Scheme) also help them to carry out their study at some extent but it is not sufficient. Lack of family support and adverse social condition sometimes compel them to quit their study in the middle.*

Introduction:

When we talk of Gender development we generally think of a society where women are economically empowered and self dependent. Economic empowerment is the most powerful tool to change the conditions of women in society but for that also women need a good education to secure a job. In Indian society majority of economically independent women are engaged in unorganized sector like factory worker, construction laborer, domestic help etc. On the other hand a very small percentage of women are engaged in organized sector as teachers and administrative jobs. The main reason behind the small percentage of engagement of women in organized sector besides other factors is lack of education. Educating poor girls is a major tool for their empowerment and social justice. The National Policy on Education (NPE), 1986 and subsequently Programme of Action, 1992, laid stress on 'Education for Women Equality'. Poor girls those who are deprived of proper education, to educate them is a big challenge for our society as well as administration. Present study is reviewing the status and issues of Gender Equality in case of education. The main target groups are the girls live under various slums of Hooghly Industrial Belt.

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Study Area:

The study area is the slums and labor lanes developed near the Jute Mills. Major municipalities/ corporations covered under the study area are Chandannagar, Bhadreswar, Champdany, Bidyabati, Srerampur, Rishra, Uttarpara-Kotrang, Bally, Howrah, Konnagar, Kamarhati, Panihati, Khardah, Titagarh, Barrackpore, Garulia, Bhatpara, Naihati, and Kanchrapara. Geographical extension of study area is within 22° 58' 12" N 88.43 E and 22° 35' 24" N and 88° 18' 36" E.

Methodology, Sampling Data Collection and analysis of Data:

Present study is a case study and is based on the method of "Individual-or Group -to- standard comparisons. A mixed methodology both qualitative and quantitative has been adopted. The methods of sampling used in this study are deliberate sampling or Purposive sampling. Due to vastness of the study area first the area is divided into

smaller administrative unit viz., municipality. From each municipality ward representing the homogeneity is selected. The age of respondent is in between 12 years to 30 years. Data is collected on the basis of questionnaire schedule incorporating Demography, Educational status, Income and Expenditure, Socio-economic aspect, Nutrition, Health, Personality Development, Institutional Details.etc. Total and Average of each municipality are calculated and finally data are analyzed with statistical techniques.

Major Objectives:

The paper is based on following objectives:

1. To analyze the level of education of slum girls under study area.
2. To analyze the various factors which affect the girl's education in these slums.
3. To examine the role of state government, central government, NGOs in the improvement of girl's education under study area.

Status of Education of Girls Under slums of Hooghly:

Data obtained from the field reveal that about 5.79 percent girls are post graduate, 7.63 percent girls are Graduate, 18 percent girls are H.S pass, and 30 percent girls are Metric pass while 28.94 percent girls are just class VIII pass. The figure shows that as a whole for the Hooghly Industrial Belt number of Under Graduate and Post Graduate girls are nearly six times less than metric passed. So we can say that the still slum girls are deprived of Higher Education.

In case of Higher Education Barackpore Municipality occupy top position under the study area followed by Howrah, Bhatpara and Srirampur. Availability of Colleges and less distance from Kolkata is the main reason behind this. In case of secondary education Bhatpara tops among the municipalities under study area followed by Howrah, Panihati and Kamarhati. Under Bhatpara Municipality number of Girl's Schools are maximum than others. In case of primary education the Chandannagar Municipal Corporation occupies the crest position. If we analyze the data for technical education for girls under study area we will find that out of the total respondents 36.84 percent girls have knowledge of computers of different levels, 8.42 percent girls have the knowledge of Handicraft while only 1.05 percent girls completed different Vocational courses. Reasons

for low percentages of registration under these courses are lack of proper infrastructure in schools and secondly students are not willing to build their carrier in related subjects. However, with the effort of state government computer education is being made compulsory in the schools. From the survey it is also found that even at the college level majority of students do not have the knowledge of computer. Anita Nuna (Bhaswati Das and Vimal Khawas (et.al, 2009) has mentioned the educational situations with special emphasis on higher and technical and professional education. Nuna found that Central Government sponsored schemes fail to achieve its goal in case of higher education. Regarding the educational status as a whole we can say that although there is good participation of girls at elementary level is observed but this rate is drastically decreasing in case of higher education. On the other hand a poor rate of participation in case of technical education is observed which a matter of concern because to get more and more opportunity of job and economic empowerment technical education is important. With the growth of economy in India demand of skilled labor is increasing and this is the time when girls equipped themselves with technical education to avail these opportunity.

Elementary Education:

West Bengal State Development Report, 2007 shows a mixed result of enrolment for various districts at elementary level under Hooghly Industrial Belt. According to WB-SDR, 2007 the district of Nadia has the highest number of enrolment for girls at primary level followed by Hooghly (99.5%), North 24 Parganas (98.9%) and Howrah (96.9%) respectively. At upper primary level North 24 Parganas hold first position with a total enrolment of 95.1% followed by Nadia (90.5 percent), Hooghly (89.6%) and Howrah (69.2%) respectively.

Although the average enrolment rate of girls is more than 90 percent but there is lack of quality education. Low incomes of family, Lack of space, location of schools near dirty places, unavailability of play ground are the problems of primary Education. In some cases even mid day meal are fail to attract the children to the schools. Lack of teachers and teachers training also responsible for poor teaching in schools. The ultimate results are monotony and dropouts.

Secondary Education: The budgetary allocation of the state domestic product (SDP) in West Bengal was higher than that allocated by the central government as a proportion of GDP in the 1980s and 1990s. But after 2001 it gradually get declined. Girls residing in slum area generally study in schools located just within 1 to 2 km distance from their houses. Girls residing in slums under municipalities of Srerampore, Kamarahati and Garulia have to travel a distance of more than 3 kms for their schools and colleges. Majority of girl's Schools may be divided into government aided and Private. These schools are mainly managed by either local committee or an administrator. In case of girls residing in slums due to their socio-economic conditions they choose government aided schools. Girls belong to Bally, Khardah, Titagarh, Uttarpara municipalities enjoy sufficient schools but girls residing in slums of municipalities of Chandannagar, Bhadreswar, Kanchrapara and Champdany have to travel a long distance for their school and college. So they travel either by bus or train. Majority of institutions are recognized by West Bengal Board of Secondary Education (WBBSE) and West Bengal Council of Higher Secondary Education (WBCHSE). In schools for girls basic facilities like toilets, safe drinking water are available.

Another factor which causes the drop out of girls at secondary or upper secondary level is the orthodox thought of the family. Parent think that the duty of a girl child is to learn the household work and to serve a family before and after her marriage. Girl is not recognized equal to the boy. Family generally thinks that to educate a girl is the wastage of money because ultimately they will have to leave their family after marriage. So they believe in minimum education of their daughter. Regarding the status of secondary education a mixed result is found during the survey in these slums. The enrolment of girls at secondary and higher secondary level is variable. At an average the rate of enrollment at secondary level for girls living in slums under study area is 30.04 percent.

Higher Education: In West Bengal out of 1000 person age of 15 years and above 565 are literate up to the secondary level. In West Bengal higher education is no longer choice for most of the students. Generally students choose jobs immediately after passing out secondary examination. Girls under Hooghly industrial belt particularly those belong to slums have to travel far distance for their higher education. As stated earlier the socio-economic condition of the inhabitants of slums under study area is not good. The educational background and financial position of a labor working in a jute mill or pulling a rickshaw cannot afford the expenses of higher education. They manage to educate them up to secondary or Higher Secondary level.

The status of higher education in slums under different municipalities is not good. Only the girls under municipalities of Howrah, Bhadreswar, Titagarh, Khardah, Bally, Kamarhati and Uttarpara- Kotrang have completed their Post Graduation.

Government Schemes:

In West Bengal as per government order in 2008, girls from class ix to xii are entitled to get incentives schemes for education. This benefit is limited to the girls who domiciled in West Bengal and fall under the category of below poverty line (BPL) family. Girls residing in slums under Hooghly Industrial Belt are benefited by the scheme. For girls the West Bengal Government has announced to distribute bi-cycles during the year 2012-13 to curb the dropout rates and increase the enrolment. This scheme is limited to the students who study at Secondary Level. "Kanyashree Prakalpa" is the most optimistic and successful scheme launched by the West Bengal Government to curb Child Marriage and School dropouts.

Findings:

Major findings are as follows findings are as follows:

1. Girls residing in slums under municipalities of Hooghly Industrial Belt mainly belong to lower income group. In many cases there is only one earning member with an average family size of six persons.
2. Majority of girls residing in slums suffering from the lack of facilities of basic infrastructure for their education. Lacks of space, electricity facility, safe drinking water, sanitation are major issues which indirectly affect their study.
3. Majority of girls have to join maximum household work which affect their study.
4. Girls under study area obtaining formal education and technical education like application of computer, Handicraft etc.
5. In majority of schools computer classes are held. In many schools the scheme of mid day meal is not

- found. Extra classes and coaching classes are arranged by many schools.
- Students of schools and colleges are getting benefit from the state government scholarship scheme of "Kanyashree", but majority of girls deprived of it due to complicated rule of age.
 - Almost every school has the facility toilet.

Recommendations:

- As schools in slums generally face the problem of space, school must arrange outdoor games with the help of other school where sports ground is available so that these girls can be benefited.
- The education should be made entertaining rather than boring by the means of introducing new Teaching-learning method, use of maps, projectors, documentary films etc.
- Arrangement for training of self defense should be made in every school to handle the problem of eve teasing and for mental strength.
- Government should make plan to provide school uniforms at least to those who are economically backward.
- As the financial crisis is one of the major reasons for their drop outs, financial support is necessary.
- There should be some more schemes for scholarships for girls other than Kanyasree Prakapla so that maximum girls can be benefited. The age bar of Kanyasree should be relaxed.
- As the majority of girls under slums of Hooghly Industrial Belt belong to Hindi medium and Urdu medium language. Some colleges should be opened to give opportunity to study in these languages.
- Besides the support of parent, local people and community support is also necessary for overall development of girls.

Conclusion:

Although in this paper the center of study is slum girls, but we cannot deny the facts that there are lots of situation faced by girls who generally do not live in slum. So, although the focus point is slum girls but the present paper also highlights regional and national scenario of girls in our society. A number of schemes for the improvement of educational status of girls are launched by Government at local, state and local level but majority of schemes are either not available or available in limit. Majority of students claim that they do not get benefit of scholarship under "Kanyasree Parkalpa" due to complexity of age criteria. There is absence of any kind of direct investment by any Non Government Agency to promote girls education in slums under study area. Girls of Hooghly Industrial Belt are deprived of many facilities required for their overall development but even though they are very much enthusiastic about their education and carrier.

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