



Women's Empowerment In Kharagpur Subdivision Of Paschim Medinipur District, West Bengal: Issues And Challenges

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Abstract:

Women's Empowerment is now an important issue in India. In the western countries, the women have got equal right and status with men in all the cases. But in India they are not treated as equal to men in all the places. They had faced some difficulty from earliest to till now. Though the role of women has changed at present. Now women is leading in every field and society like sports, education, commerce, industry, politics, technology, army ,agriculture, But yet, they not absolutely free till now, some discrimination and harassment are also seen in the society. In Paschim Medinipur district, West Bengal is not exception in this context. So this paper studied issues and challenges of Women's empowerment in Kharagpur subdivision, Paschim medinipur. For economic development of any society or country social and economic development of women is necessary.

Keywords: women Empowerment ,Education ,Discrimination , Issues, challenges.

Introduction:

The concept of women's empowerment was introduced at the International women's conference1 held at Nairobi in 1985. Actually empowerment refers to a situation where the powerless gain greater control over resources and ideologies. Women's Empowerment is a multifaceted concept helps women to have the power, able to make decisions in their life (Alemu, Van & Ruben, 2018; Varsha et al; 2019). Today, the rapid growth of globalization, industrialization and change in social legislation have contributed to the transformation of status or visibility and position of women across the globe (Huis et al, 2019). In the majority of the developed countries, women have successfully attained equality with men at the workplace in the organization (Nandy & Kumar, 2014).

In India, women's empowerment faces several challenges and obstacles that hinder their progress towards equality and full participation in society. Women's empowerment in Kharagpur subdivision which is part of Paschim Medinipur District, West Bengal presents a multifaceted picture characterized by notable progress in economic participation and political representation, yet persistent challenges in educational and decision-making power within certain sectors.

Literature review:

1. Duflo E. (2011) Women's Advancement and Sustainable Growth of at the Cambridge National office of Economic Research. The study argues that Empowerment and Development's Interrelationships are potentially too fragile to be self-supporting and that it might be necessary for continuous political commitment to equity for its own sake to bring about equality between men and women.

2. Desai and Thakkar (2007) in their work discussed women's political participation, legal rights and education as tools for their empowerment.

3. Malik and Courtney (2011) stated in their study that higher education helps in empowerment to women. It also gives the economic independence and enough confidence to stand with the family.

UNDP(1995). The Report noted that without empowering women overall development of human beings is not possible. Empowerment of the women would automatically bring empowerment of everyone.

Statement of the problem:

From early times to till now, women has been restricted to take part in any social activities and not given roles in decision making in her family. The situation is very worsening in rural and remote areas of Kharagpur subdivision. In this division, there are 2486 inhabited villages, 10 police stations, 10 community development blocks, 99 gram panchayats, 2679 mouzas, 1 municipality and 5 census towns. But now the situation has been quite changed. She is given freedom to do what she wishes in all the cases like in the field of education, economy, society, commerce, sports and also in her family.

Objectives:

1. To know the need of women empowerment in this area.
2. To analyze the issues and challenges of women in this subdivision.

Research Methodology:

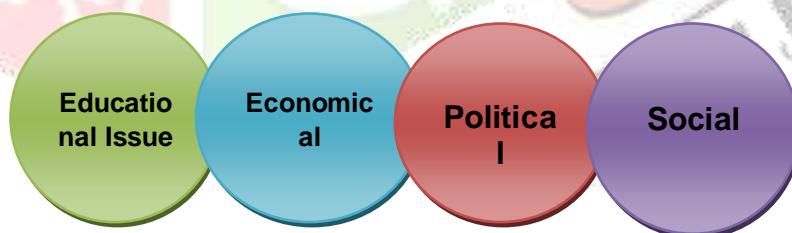
This paper is basically descriptive and analytical in nature. Both primary and secondary data has been collected. Secondary data collected from census of India 2011, website of Paschim Medinipur Zilla Parishad. For necessary information primary data has also been collected by questionnaire and interviews. Statistical data represented simply in percentage.

Study Area:

Kharagpur sub-division is an administrative sub-division of Paschim Medinipur District in West Bengal. It has ten community development blocks. These are Pingla, Sabang, Debra, Narayangarh, Kharagpur 1&ll, Dantan-1&ll, Keshiary and Mohanpur. Population density was 2913.17 per Km square (229493903). The literacy rate in this division was 80.51 percent (2011 census). Sex ratio was 966. Debra block has the highest sex ratio (983) and Mohanpur block has the lowest sex ratio (944). The maximum gap for male-female literacy is estimated 17.20 in Dantan-1 block and minimum gap for male-female literacy is estimated at Sabang block (13.06).

Discussion:

The issues affecting women's empowerment in Kharagpur subdivision largely stem from socioeconomic and educational disparities, limited decision-making power and gender bias in workplace, particularly in impacting women in rural areas. Women also face significant challenges. Now several issues and challenges are discussed in given below.



Key Issues and Challenges of Women's Empowerment in Kharagpur Sub Division

Educational Issues:

1. Low female literacy rates and Gender Gaps:

women's empowerment in education in Kharagpur sub-division is analyzed by female literacy rate.

Table-1: Literacy Rate in the Kharagpur sub-division

Name of the Block	% of Literacy	% of Male Literacy	% of Female Literacy
Debra	82.03	88.78	75.16
Pingla	83.57	90.22	76.57
Keshiari	76.78	84.39	68.98
Dantan I	70.93	79.13	62.43
Dantan II	82.45	89.07	75.48
Narayangarh	77.81	85.54	69.92
Mohanpur	80.51	87.65	72.95
Sabang	86.84	93.16	80.15
Kharagpur I	74.24	82.51	65.65
Kharagpur II	76.08	84.10	67.92

Source: Census of India, 2011

Table-1 shows larger gender gaps and as well as male literacy is higher than female in all the cases. Female literacy is lowest in Dantan-I (62.43%), followed by Kharagpur-I (65.65%) and Kharagpur-II (67.92) blocks. Female literacy is increasing through government initiatives that enhance their self-confidence, reducing dependency and raising their status in family and society.

2. Traditional Beliefs and Societal Norms that house work and marriage are more important than education for girls act as significant barriers, women also face issues with limited decision-making power within their families and communities.

Challenges:

1. Traditional gender roles and societal expectations often prioritize male education over female education.
2. Early marriage in rural areas remains a significant barrier to girls pursuing higher education.
3. Poverty and financial difficulties often force families to withdraw girls.

Initiatives:

The West Bengal Government has launched several schemes to promote girls' education and women's empowerment.

1. Kanyashree Prakalpa provides conditional cash transfers to incentivize girls to stay in school and delay marriage until at least age 18.
2. Aikyashree and Medhashree offer scholarships for minority and other backward classes (OBC) students, including girls, to support higher studies.
3. Saboosathi distributes free bicycles to students (classes IX-X).

4. Lakshmir Bhander provides monthly financial assistance to female heads of households which can indirectly support girls education by providing family finance.

B. Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) is national Initiative, that focuses on addressing the declining of the girl child.

Economical issues:

- 1. low work participation rate:** Economic empowerment of women in this division is analyzed by female low work participation rates.

Table-2: Workforce Participation Rate (Main and Marginal) in sub-division

Name of the Block	Main worker	Main Worker Male	Main Worker Female	Marginal Worker	Marginal Worker Male	Marginal Worker Female	No of Women SHGs or med
Debra	60.46	70.268	40.81	65.39	58.49	89.2	1275
Pingla	55.35	70.268	30.04	80.68	76.49	97.3	911
Keshiari	48.77	58.36	30.61	44.07	32.46	86.10	931
Dantan I	51.81	56.56	35.23	93.00	95.33	79.90	796
Dantan II	65.64	71.33	37.60	52.35	49.25	81.40	689
Narayangarh	56.14	67.75	32.61	78.13	75.48	89.30	1267
Mohanpur	70.23	74.20	41.32	42.39	38.78	89.70	479
Sabang	44.58	63.02	20.48	43.09	32.46	85.90	1597
Kharagpur I	74.21	82.21	53.57	34.75	21.63	86.7	822
Kharagpur II	54.14	64.02	33.07	84.72	85.04	83.40	751

Table-2 shows that male main worker is higher than female which suggest strongly linked decision-making power of men. On the other hand female marginal worker is higher than male indicated less stable and low-quality jobs of women.

Self- Help Groups (SHGs)and Progress:

The formation of SHGs has helped empower women economically and socially. Table-2 also shows no of SHGs of every block in this division. This subdivision has excelled in the formation and loan distribution to women's SHGs,which are crucial for promoting income generating activities and financial independence. Micro- finance assistance is a key driver enabling rural women to leverage loans and improve their financial conditions and decision making power regarding household expenses.

2. Gender Bias and Decision making power: Women often have low mobility and are deprived of decision- making power within their families and communities.

3.Family Responsibility: Traditional family responsibilities often contain women's time and ability to seek formal employment or participate in training programs.

Challenges:

1. Low work participation rate.
2. Skill Gaps and Lack of Technological knowledge.
3. Limited Access to Resources.

Political issues:

In Kharagpur sub-division women's empowerment is a complex issue which exhibit significant political participation, particularly in grassroots level in Panchayati Raj Institution (PRIs) as 73rd Amendment to the Indian Constitution mandates 33% reservations of seats for women in Prison. About 1562 women representatives actively involved in local politics as well as women are also act in district level, representatives from different blocks in Kharagpur sub-division which suggests that women are willing to influence decision-making, planning and evaluation processes that affect their livelihood and communities.

Table-3: Women's Participation of Kharagpur sub-division in district level (Paschim Medinipur), 2024

Sl no.	Block Name	Contituency Name & Number ZP-Zillaparishad	Member
1	Keshiary	ZP-11	Woman
2	Keshiary	ZP-9	Woman
3	Keshiary	ZP-10	Woman
4	Kharagpur-I	ZP-29	Woman
5	Kharagpur-II	ZP-22	Woman
6	Kharagpur-II	ZP-21	Woman
7	Narayangarh	ZP-12	Woman
8	Pingla	ZP-19	Woman
9	Sabang	ZP-15	Woman
10	Sabang	ZP-17	Woman

Source: website Paschim Medinipur Zilaparisad

Table-3 shows women participation of Kharagpur subdivision in district level. All these members was elected in the 2024 general election. Therefore Kharagpur sub-division, has become more effective with women's participation in administrative level.

Challenges:

Though women have achieved greater political empowerment through their various activities but they still face challenges like limited access to resources and inadequate infrastructure etc. The government has provided financial assistance and training to address these issues.

Social Issues:

1. Child Marriage: It is a notable issue in this division, driven primarily by poverty. West Bengal has one of the highest rates of child marriage in India (6.3%). In the Kharagpur-1 block, community-led movements involving panchayat leaders, ASHA, and Anganwadi workers have seen some success, with reports of six child marriage stopped recently and a decline in teenage pregnancies in specific areas. In Narayangarh block one child marriage also stopped recently by understanding teachers with her family.

2. Sexual Harassment: It is a serious offense, and several support systems and legal mechanisms are available for victims in the Kharagpur sub-division. Local news has mentioned some cases of crimes against women in the broader Paschim Medinipur district and Kharagpur areas.

3. Status of widows: Widows are considered as worthless in the society specially rural areas of this division. They are treated poorly and forced to wear white clothes.

Implementation of Schemes:

1. Widow Pension Schemes: A State Government initiative to provide a monthly pension via direct Benefit Transfer (DBT).

2. Social security schemes: Inclusion in broader social security programs like Lakshmir Bhander and Manabik Pension.

Other issues and challenges:

1. Domestic Violence: It is mainly performed by the husband, relatives or other family members. **2. Dowry and Bride burning:** This problem generally faced by women or low or middle class families in rural areas of this division during or after the marriage, parents of boys demand a lot of money from the bride's family.

3. Inadequate Nutrition: Inadequate nutrition in the childhood affects women in their later life especially women belonging to the lower middle class and poor families of this division.

4. Selective Abortion and female infanticide: Abortion of female fetus is performed in the womb of mother after the fetal sex determination and sex selective abortion by the medical professionals.

Suggestions:

1. Awareness programmes need to be organised at various levels for creating awareness among women of this division.

2. The first and foremost priority should be given to the education of women specially those belonging to lower economic classes of this division.

3. Women should be allowed to work and should be provided enough safety and support to work. They should be provided with proper wages and work at par with men so that their status can be elevated in the

4. Strict implementation of programmes and acts should be there to curb the mal practices prevalent in the society.

Findings of the study:

1. Educational empowerment of women in this division increasing gradually by Government initiatives (Kanyashree, Aikayshree, Sobujshree, BBBP).
2. Poverty, Illiteracy, Traditional gender biased etc, are key obstacles for empowering women in this area.
3. Advancing political empowerment, as 73 Amendment of Indian constitution mandates 33% reservation of seats for women in PRIs.
4. The formation of numerous SHGs has helped women economically and socially.

Conclusion:

Women's Empowerment is an ongoing journey that requires a multifaceted approach. In Kharagpur sub-division Women's Empowerment is a gradual, ongoing process with visible progress in economic participation and social recognition which primarily driven by initiatives like Self Help Groups (SHGs) and engagement of local industries. Female literacy is gradually increasing, simultaneously they are actively involved in local politics by which women of this division are willing to influence decision-making, planning and evaluation process.

Lastly it may say that empowering women is vital for overall development. Until women are given the same opportunities that men are, entire societies will be destined to perform below their true potentials. When women are empowered they can make significant contributions to their communities. Therefore, women should be given equal rights like men to actually empower them. They need to be strong, aware and alert every time for their growth and development.

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