

# 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 major contribution to economic progress [1]. Previously they were low-skill and poorly paid. But today we see that the creativity and the talents of all women are an invaluable resource, which can and should be developed both for their own self-realization and for the benefit of society. Women have traditionally played an important role in the small and medium scale enterprise sector. Improving their efficiency and introducing new techniques can therefore yield large returns to women in terms of income and job creation. Women empowerment also helps to reduce poverty in our country by making women economically independent. Women empowerment thus helps in national development. The researcher expects that the findings of the study would shed light on the scenario of women 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 context. Empowerment is a process of making women self dependent socially and economically. Works of ancient Indian grammarians such as Patanjali and Katyayana suggest that women were educated in the early Vedic period. Scriptures such as Rig Veda and Upanishads mention several women sages and seers, notably Gargi and Maitreyi. But in the medieval period the position of women deteriorated. The Muslim conquest in the Indian subcontinent brought the parda practice in the Indian society. Jauhar was practice among the Rajput in Rajasthan [2][10]. Educating and empowering women was not easy in a male dominated society. The contribution of Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar and Raja Rammohun Roy are memorable in educating women. According to Swami Vivekananda "Religion, Arts, Science, Housekeeping, Cooking, Sewing, Hygiene are essential point in this subject ought to 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 inspire to more their own life in the light of these" [3]. Women are being provided with access to know-how, technologies and credit. United Nations Industrial Development Organization is committed to sustainable industrial development as a means of achieving economic prosperity, a healthy environment, and integration of all groups in society. Small and medium enterprise (SMEs) play a vital role in industrial development [6]. They have the flexibility to respond quickly to market changes and opportunities to develop specialized products and to rapidly absorb technological innovations [7]. Women have traditionally played an important role in the small and medium scale enterprise sector, as owners', managers and workers. These small and medium enterprises dominate three important subsectors, 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 [8]. They also perform most agricultural work in rural areas. Women play an important role in the government industry of most countries. Food processing is a popular occupation obtained from working on a part time basis at home. producing children's and ladies dresses for friends, neighbors and other customers. In Lenya, this informed sector is known as Iva Kali-Swahili for 'hot sun' which refers 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 [9]. In 1991, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization launched the first six-month training program in Nairobi. Beurre de Karite (shea Butter) 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 popular occupation for women in small scale enterprises. The United Nations Industrial Development Organization has developed a training program in cooperation with the Tanzanian small industries Development Organization, 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 up to empower the women of all sectors of the society [1]. Hence this study was an attempt to analyze the empowerment status of rural and urban women in the district

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of Birbhum, West Bengal.

## II. RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

Development of a country depends on the involvement of its women folk in all the activities. For years women have been suppressed socio-economically in our patriarchal society. Empowerment is the only way to increase their degree of autonomy and self-determination in society. Women are still thought to be a weaker section in society. They always remain backward in education and socio-economic status especially in rural areas. Women participation in the process of socio – political development has become necessary in the country. Women empowerment means empowering women socially, economically, educationally and politically to break the male domination society and establish their rights in the society. Women's empowerment is closely connected with women's education because education is the only weapon to empower a woman in the society. Education is the only powerful vehicle for bringing about change within women and making them empowered. The Central and State Governments have taken many efforts for improving the empowerment status of women in the society Therefore, it is very much pertinent to know the status of rural and urban women empowerment in West Bengal. Keeping the above in view this case study was conducted in the district of Birbhum to estimate the scenario of empowerment of women in rural and urban areas in the district, here lies the rationale of the study.

## III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

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

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

## IV. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

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

## V. DEFINITION OF TERMS

### A. Women Empowerment

Women's empowerment is very essential for sustainable development. Without women's participation, development of a nation can never be possible. National Mission for Empowerment of Women (2010) aims at implementing the women oriented programmes to gain better condition of the women in the society. The mission is known as, 'Mission Poorna Shakti' for holistic empowerment of women. Empowerment means giving power to individuals in all spheres of life for their survival in the society and their full-fledged 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 for successful implementation of the programme of women empowerment. A range of economic and social options along with necessary support measures were given to the women to enhance their capabilities and empowerment.

### C. Social Empowerment

Gender equality is one of the best ways to empower a woman socially in our nation. Gender equality means women and men will get the same rights and opportunities in all spheres of their life. They will enjoy the same facilities in our society. Social empowerment means to strengthen women's social relations and also to strengthen her position and status in a 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 to all children irrespective of their sex, gender empowerment is impossible. There is one maxim – if one male child is literate personally he alone becomes educated but if one girl child is educated the whole family becomes benefited. The maxim has been accepted by all policy makers, various bureaucrats and educators in our country. It is true that education is the strong weapon to empower women in our patriarchal society. Educational empowerment means empowering women with proper knowledge and skills so that she can participate in the development of our nation. An educated mother or a woman is thousand times superior to a mere lecturer. So, educational empowerment of women is very vital in a society.

### E. Political Empowerment

Political empowerment means participation of women in the political decision-making process of our country. All women have rights to vote 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. By active participation of women in politics, a woman can become politically empowered. It means decentralisation of power to the powerless and deprived women who have not participate in any political process. Women political empowerment is closely related with a nation's welfare and development. Thus, women empowerment means to increase the social, economic, political and educational strength of the women in all spheres of life.

## VI. CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS AND WOMEN 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 Hindu Marriage Act 1955 and Hindu Marriage and Divorce Act 1955. The Constitution of India prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex, religion,

caste or race.

Article 15(1) and Article 15(2) permit states to make special provision for women and children 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> constitution Acts have made provisions for reserving 1/3 seats for women in elections in 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. 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 samples.

### Distribution of Sample :

#### 1.1 Sample distribution

Location	Birbhum, Number of Women
Rural	100
Urban	100

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

### Tools used in the Study:

In this study Empowerment Scale with 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 of saving money for my future.
8.	I agree that every woman should have economic independence.
9.	I help my family financially with my own 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 take decisions regarding treatment when she gets ill.
2.	My husband or family members take my suggestion for getting my personal material needs met.
3.	I take 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, cinema, relative house or visit a friend.
5.	I get social freedom and enable social justice at my home.
6.	I get a chance to join social service in our community.
7.	I agree that every woman should have social independence from their family.
8.	My husband or family member took my suggestion while purchasing any household materials and other daily requirements.
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 get formal education from their childhood.
2.	'The Human Right 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 join hands with any scientific innovations and technological advancements.
6.	Women hardly get any chance to participate in a developmental project of government or non-government agencies.
7.	Every woman in our country should get higher education.
8.	I think women are educationally backward due to cultural and social barriers of our society.
9.	Girls should be given 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 stand in elections as a participant.
3.	Women must vote every time.
4.	Women must get a fair chance to become members of some organizations like cooperative banks, NGO, cooperative society or any Mahila mandal.
5.	I agree that women should take active participation in community or public life.
6.	Women hardly get any chance to attend rallies to spread health messages or against any 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 special advantage from the government.
10.	Women should enjoy all human rights of our constitution in full freedom.

The tool consisted of four dimensions such as Economic Empowerment, Social Empowerment, Educational Empowerment and Political Empowerment. For each dimension ten items were finalized as per suggestions of the experts. Accordingly, there are forty items in the finalized tool.

### Administration of Tool:

The tool was administered on the selected sample in the study area, as per predetermined plan. Investigator herself conducted the village survey for collection of data from rural and urban women. The tool was administered very successfully in both urban and rural areas of the district without any kind of hazards.

### Analysis of Data:

#### Analysis of Data for Objective - 1

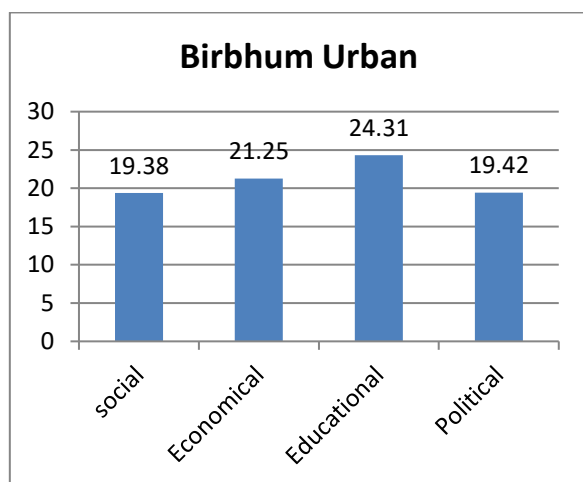
#### 1.31 Empowerment of Women in Birbhum District Urban Area

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





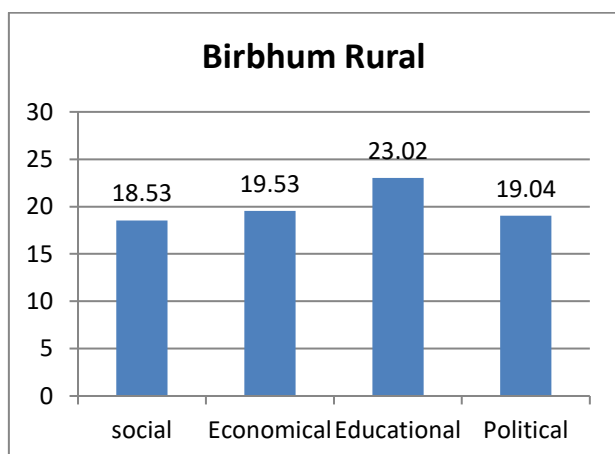
## 1.32 Empowerment of Women in Birbhum District Urban Area



## 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 of Birbhum district have shown poorer empowerment than 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 that of 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, 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 plant, etc. so as 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 with reference to their rural and urban location. In this connection 100 women from rural and 100 women from urban areas in Birbhum district were selected. A case study was conducted with different issues in relation to empowerment. The significance of the study may be described in the following lines:

The involvement of women at all levels-since beginning of civilization making of families, initiation of cultural growth and rise of economic material is an established fact. The sangam literature describes roles and activities of women in 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 fact that they need to upgrade their skills and knowledge. At contemporary times women are frequently professionally qualified as men and the income they earn are equally substantial.

- The study may be helpful to take necessary measures for improvement of educational levels among Rural and Urban women.
- The study enlightens about the conditions of empowerment of Rural and Urban women. Therefore, necessary steps could be taken up to develop 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 up to improve their working conditions and empowerment.

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