

Status of Female Education among Santal, Kheria Sabar and Birhor Tribal Communities of Puruliya District, West Bengal, India

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Abstract

In a tribal society, the role of women is substantial and important and relatively more crucial and respectful than the so called civil society. Tribal women enjoy and share the economic burden as well as take part in every decision within her family and society. However, from materialistic development point of view, she still suffers disproportionately from education and decent standard of living.

In this context, the present study aims to analyse the levels of tribal female education particularly of three major tribal communities namely Santal, Kheria Sabar and Birhor (Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group of India), living at ten uni-ethnic and ten multi-ethnic villages in Puruliya district of West Bengal. The investigation is purely based on primary data sets obtained from extensive field survey. With the help of these data sets and statistical procedures, the village level and inter-community status of education of the tribal women have been investigated. To understand the status of female education among the tribal communities, a statistical measurement technique is developed known as Female Educational Attainment Index (FEAI) which is comprised of two indices i.e. Combined Enrolment Index (CEI) and Female Literacy Index (FLI).

Keywords: *Birhor, Combined Enrolment Index, Female Educational Attainment Index, Female Literacy Index, Kheria Sabar, Santal*

Introduction

Status of women is one of the significant reflections of the level of advancement of a society. The United Nations (1975) has defined the status of women as – “Conjunction of position a women occupies as a worker, student, wife, mother ... of the power and prestige attached to these positions, and of the right and duties she is expected to exercise” (The United Nations, 1975). Undoubtedly, society cannot flourish without the enrichment of women. The great philosopher, Swami Vivekananda was the

biggest admirer of the development of the whole women society. In this context an oft-quoted quotation of Swami Vivekananda is the most relevant to remind – “There is no chance for the welfare of the world unless the condition of the women is improved. It is not possible for a bird to fly on only one wing.” In reality, the status of women in question of gender equality is far from their legitimate right.

In a tribal society, the role of women is substantial and important and relatively more crucial and respectful than in so called

civil society. Tribal women are better placed and empowered in many concern than their counterpart. However, from materialistic development point of view, tribal women are still deprived from education and decent standard of living. Generally status of women is measured by using four indicators – education, employment status, health status, and inter-household decision making power. Among these indicators, tribal women have been enjoying and sharing the economic burden as well as every decision within her family. Bhasin (2007) in this context wrote – “...in their world women have a freedom, and a self-expression” (Bhasin, 2007). However, the tribal women society suffers disproportionately from mass-illiteracy. In connection with this, Lewis and Lockheed (2007) confirmed the distress situation of tribal female education and wrote – “Among the tribal community, tribal girls form the most neglected group, and are least likely to be educated” (Lewis and Lockheed, 2007). In this context, the paper has taken levels of tribal female education as a parameter to understand inter and intra-community status of tribal women of three major tribal communities namely Santal, Kheira Sabar and Birhor (Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group of India) of a backward scheduled zone of Eastern India, the Puruliya district.

Materials and Methods

A well defined questionnaire has been set to identify the status of female education among the selected tribal communities i.e. Santal, Kheria Sabar and Birbor of the twenty villages under study. The collection of data regarding female education is restricted only up to high standard (Class X) as the enrolment in higher education among the studied population is found very low.

To understand the status of female education among the tribal communities, a statistical measurement technique is developed known as ‘Female Educational Attainment Index’ (FEAI). It is to be informed that to develop this index, the author had taken help from the methodology of conventional ‘Educational Attainment Index’ formulated by United Nations for the computation of classical Human Development Index (HDI) and also from a research paper ‘Status of Human Development in the District of Puruliya’, wrote by Anirban Roy (2008), published in the journal Geographical Review of India, Vol. 70 (1). Here, Female Educational Attainment Index has been computed with the help of following two important indices i.e. Combined Enrolment Index (CEI) and Female Literacy Index (FLI). Further, these indices have given 2/3 and 1/3 weights respectively. The Combined Enrolment Index (CEI) is an arithmetical average of the indices of number of female students in primary, middle, and high standards

1). Hence, the Female Educational Attainment Index (FEAI) has been computed by the following formula –

$$FEAI = \frac{2}{3} (\text{Female Literacy Index}) + \frac{1}{3} (\text{Combined Enrolment Index})$$

Female Literacy Index (FLI): Female Literacy Index (FLI) of the twenty selected villages exhibits its relative accomplishment and unsuccessfulness in overall state of education among females of the selected three tribal communities of Puruliya district. Female Literacy Index (FLI) is computed by the following formula –

$$\text{Actual \%} \div 100 \%$$

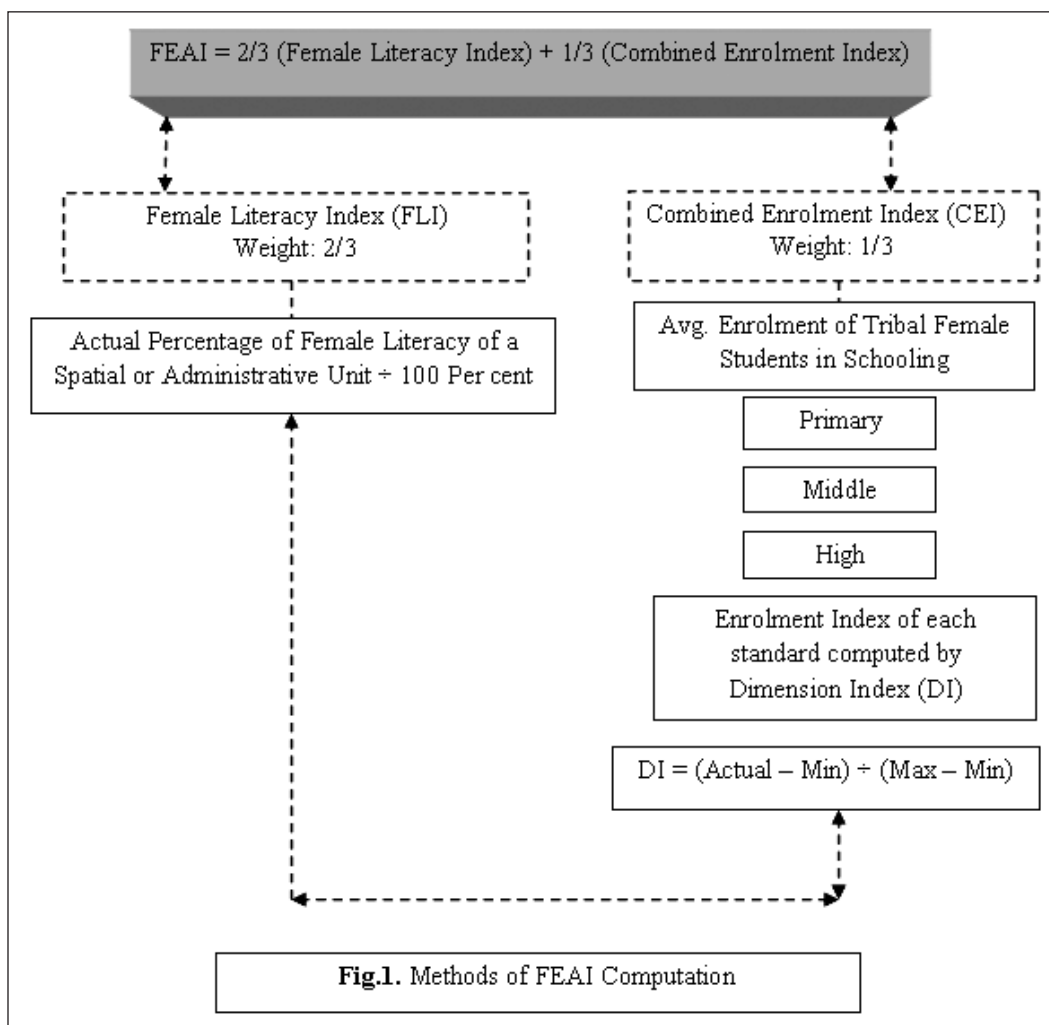


Fig.1. Methods of FEAI Computation

To develop the Literacy Index, actual percentages of tribal female literacy of different villages are divided by 100 per cent. Hypothetically, '0' is taken as lowest and '100' as highest possible percentages.

Combined Enrolment Index (CEI): As mentioned earlier Combined Enrolment Index (CEI) is an arithmetic average of the indices of number of female students enrolled in primary, middle, and high

standards of education. Enrolments of tribal female students of these villages in higher studies are very low in numbers. Besides, Higher Secondary schools are very few in numbers in these villages. So there is a chance that students of adjacent villages enroll their name in those limited institutions. This may adversely affect mess up the scenario by exaggerating the enrolment number in the village where the

institution is situated. Moreover dropout cases are also significantly increased in higher studies. So the higher secondary schools are exempted from this study. Thus Enrolment index of each standard i.e. primary, middle and high are computed by the following formula –

$$\text{Dimension Index} = (\text{Actual} - \text{Minimum}) \div (\text{Maximum} - \text{Minimum})$$

(Human Development Report, 2002)

Further, lowest, and highest values of each standard present are taken as minimum and maximum values for that standard respectively. Thus, Combined Enrolment Index (CEI) is an average of these above mentioned parameters and derived by the following formula –

$$(\text{Primary Index} + \text{Middle Index} + \text{High Index}) \div 3 \quad (\text{Roy, 2008})$$

Hence, with the help of Combined Enrolment Index (CEI) and Female Literacy Index (FLI), Female Educational Attainment Index (FEAI) is computed. Further, the villages are classified into three categories, depicted levels of achievement i.e. ‘Under Developed’, ‘Less Developed’ and ‘Moderately Developed’. Unfortunately, ‘Developed’ category is not included into the list as no village is registered as developed village in case of tribal female education.

Results and Discussion

Sate of Inter-Village and Inter-Tribal Community Female Education

Education is considered as the minimum necessity of life and the most influential agent of development. Further, education is also regarded as “a critical input for economic and social development. This is crucial for building human capabilities

and widening the horizon of opportunities” (Tripathy, 2010). Furthermore, education is also viewed as a prime necessity for the establishment of gender justice for women society. Undoubtedly, elementary education empowers women society by improving their confidence and enlightening the truth. In this context George (2004) in his contribution ‘Modern Education, Empowerment and Tribes Women’ wrote – “...education has come as an enlivening and empowering agent for women and all other weaker sections of the society ...” (George, 2004).

Female Educational Attainment Index (FEAI) with the combination of Combined Enrolment Index (CEI) and Female Literacy Index (FLI) has been developed to understand the condition of female education among the Santal, Kheria Sabar and Birhor tribal communities of the selected uni-ethnic and multi-ethnic villages of Puruliya district. Female Educational Attainment Index (FEAI) shows overall a very poor standard in education among the tribal female population (Table 1). The respective villages have been categorized into three groups, depicting levels of achievement i.e. ‘Under Developed’, ‘Less Developed’ and ‘Moderately Developed’. Unfortunately, No village is reached the satisfactory level of ‘Developed’ category (score ≥ 0.60) in case of enrolment of female tribal population into basic levels of education from primary to high standard (up to 10th standard). Further, Eleven villages (55 per cent to total) among selected twenty villages are identified as Under Developed, eight villages as Less developed and only a single village as Moderately developed (Dimbad with only 0.41 point) in terms of standard of education in tribal female population.

Table 1: Female Educational Attainment Index of Twenty Tribal Villages of Puruliya

Village	Primary	Middle	High	CEI	FLI	FEAI	Category
Gosaindi*	0.67	0.60	0.64	0.64	0.25	0.38	Less Developed
Tilagara*	0.33	0.10	0.82	0.42	0.20	0.27	Under Developed
Tamna	0.14	0.20	0.18	0.17	0.11	0.13	Under Developed
Akarbad	0.48	0.00	0.00	0.16	0.18	0.17	Under Developed
Dimbad*	0.48	0.80	1.00	0.76	0.24	0.41	Moderately Developed
Dhagra*	0.57	0.90	0.45	0.64	0.22	0.36	Less Developed
Kalabani	0.38	0.90	0.55	0.61	0.21	0.34	Less Developed
Bishpuria	0.52	0.60	0.73	0.62	0.26	0.38	Less Developed
Gopinathpur*	0.43	0.90	0.45	0.59	0.24	0.36	Less Developed
Raghunathpur*	0.48	1.00	0.45	0.64	0.27	0.39	Less Developed
Punura	0.57	0.50	0.36	0.48	0.27	0.34	Less Developed
Damodarpur	0.00	0.70	0.00	0.23	0.13	0.16	Under Developed
Matiala*#	0.29	0.10	0.09	0.16	0.11	0.13	Under Developed
Dhaska*	0.43	0.20	0.18	0.27	0.13	0.18	Under Developed
Tikatanr	0.48	0.10	0.27	0.28	0.18	0.21	Under Developed
Ajodhya	0.24	0.20	0.09	0.18	0.10	0.13	Under Developed
Paharpur*	0.29	0.00	0.00	0.10	0.08	0.09	Under Developed
Sarga*	0.52	0.30	0.27	0.36	0.17	0.23	Under Developed
Udalbani	0.33	0.20	0.18	0.24	0.10	0.15	Under Developed
Sirisgora	1.00	0.70	0.45	0.72	0.22	0.39	Less Developed

Source: Compiled by the Scholar from Village Level Primary Data collected from field

Note: No Village is found under the Developed Category

Where, CEI: Combined Enrolment Index, FLI: Female Literacy Index,
FEAI: Female Educational Attainment Index

*Uni-ethnic Village,

A Complete Birhor Village Popularly Known as Bhupatipalli

The categorization of the selected twenty villages is given below in details –

Under Developed Villages

Villages scoring below 0.30 (< 0.30) are considered as Under Developed. There are eleven villages (55 per cent of the total) namely Paharpur (0.09), Matiala (0.13), Ajodhya (0.13), Tamna (0.13), Udalbani

(0.15), Damodarpur (0.16), Akarbad (0.17), Dhaska (0.18), Tikatanr (0.21), Sarga (0.23) and Tilagara (0.27) are found in this category. So, it is evident that economic backwardness leads to poor educational standard, restricts the tribal women society

to be educated, and compels them to be a part of working force (mostly labourer). In this regard, Kheria Sabar, the most poverty stricken tribal community would be a great example who undergone through such severe condition. It is found that no female Kheria Sabar has enrolled in middle and high standards of education at Akarbad village under Purulia-I block. Moreover, both Kheria Sabar villages namely Akarbad and Damodarpur have been registered with only 0.17 and 0.16 scores respectively in terms of Female Educational Attainment Index (FEAI). Field evidences reveal that Kheria Sabars are almost landless. Their economy is purely dependent on multi-functional labourship of whole family. This in turn restricts both the male and female family members to be educated.

Societal status of women has been excellent in tribal way of life. But somewhere different social perception, cultural rites within the society became obstruction of overall development of tribal women society of the East Indian district. Birhor tribal community pays a great respect to their women society. But in case of marriage system, they have a tradition of early marriage of their daughters. These socio-cultural traditions restrict the women society of Birhor to take further education in their lives. Manju Sikari, a Birhor woman of Bhupatipally tanda (tola) is the only woman who was able to pass the secondary examination (10th standard). But she had to stop her higher studies because of her early marriage. Presently she is a 20 years old Birhor mother, engaged in daily casual labourship. Moreover, present enrolment of female students of Birhor community into primary, middle and high standards are only 0.29, 0.10 and 0.09 respectively.

Thus, economic backwardness and social perception are one of the major hindrances which altogether restrict the tribal women to be enriched in education and empowered.

Less Developed Villages

Villages with score 0.30-0.40 are considered as Less Developed. There are eight villages (40 per cent of the total) identified in this category and these are – Punura (0.34), Kalabani (0.34), Dhagra (0.36), Gopinathpur (0.36), Gosaindi (0.38), Bishpuria (0.38), Raghunathpur (0.39), and Sirisgora (0.39). It is evident that seven out of eight above mentioned villages are situated in the developed and less developed blocks in terms of human development. Village Sirisgora, a backward village under Bundwan block, alone is found in this category where the response is quite well in terms of tribal female education. Beside this, Sirisgora has scored the highest value (0.39) among all the total eight villages of this category. Moreover, this multi-ethnic village of Bundwan alone falls in the category of moderately developed village in terms of overall human development.

Moderately Developed Villages

Villages with score above 0.40 (>0.40) fall in the category of ‘moderately developed’. It is found that only a single village Dimbad under Hura block is registered in this category with a score of 0.41. Further, it is revealed that all the villages under Hura block are registered overall a quite satisfactory result in Female Educational Attainment Index (FEAI). It is already mentioned that Hura block is having the highest amount of tribal female literacy (31.2 per cent) among all blocks of Puruliya district. Availability of school within close

proximity with better educational facilities is one of the reasons behind such success.

Concluding Remarks

In tribal world, especially among tribal women, education has always been considered less concern due to excessive pressure of maintaining daily means of subsistence. Beside this, over dependency on some of the superstition and ill cultural beliefs, such as witchcraft further have deteriorated the overall condition of tribal women society. In this study, evidences confirmed that economic backwardness leads to poor educational standard among the tribal women of the selected communities of Puruliya district. In this context, B. D. Dani (1979) wrote – “poverty and lack of education are very closely related ... the social and geographical isolation of the tribal communities is the cardinal factor responsible for the slow progress of education among them” (Dani, 1979).

Availability of cultivable land and other sources of economy such as casual or agricultural labourship bring forth relatively better economic sufficiency among Santals, particularly those who are living in relatively developed blocks or close to township. Further, this facilitates better literacy rate among them. On the contrary, Santals, living in the backward areas such as Bagmundi and Bundwan blocks (two most Maoist affected blocks of West Bengal) have comparatively low literacy rate due to less economic sufficiency.

For Birhors, in spite of provision of beneficial government policies, due to lack of awareness towards girl's education and age-old norms of underage marriage of their girls, large portion of women of Birhor

community has been living with high level of illiteracy.

Severe economic backwardness, unhygienic life style, insufficient and inferior quality of food, lack of safe drinking water, social abuse and so many other reasons naturally deteriorate all forms of life of the Kheria Sabar tribal community. Further, lack of awareness and perception of policy makers and concerned authorities towards socio-cultural norms, customs, traditions, behaviour of Kheria Sabar community even slower the processes of materialistic development to a great extent. Ramachandran (2009) in his contribution ‘Towards Gender Equality in Education’ completely lost his faith on the government policies and wrote – “Notwithstanding good policies, imaginative programmes and promising initiatives, the fact is that they are not sustained and there is little social and political pressure to gear the system to eliminate gender and social differences and ensure all children have access to good quality education” (Ramachandran, 2009). It is found that at Akarbad village under Purulia-I block, Kheria Sabars do not use lavatory provided through government scheme. They rather replace the concrete platform of lavatory under a tree for their sitting purposes. This is a clear indication of failure of government scheme due to lack of knowledge of tribal way of life.

In fine, it is confirmed that unless and until the parallel development of economy and education of the whole tribal society of Puruliya district, the distress condition of the tribal women could not be solved so easily. Economic and educational enrichment, considering tribalism would be a positive and preliminary direction towards minimizing the adversity.

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