

Educational Empowerment of Rural Women: A Study of Punjab Village

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ABSTRACT

Equal access to educational opportunity is a basic human right essential to well-being. Educational gap at attainment levels between male and female and further between female of rural and urban have been remained as focus of research. This paper is based upon the study of a Punjab village to assess the educational empowerment of rural women residing in that village. The study has been carried out on a sample of 200 women identified and designed as rural women in the age group of 20 to 50 years. Semis structured interview schedule, field notes along with observation were the techniques used in study. The findings of the study reveal that rural women have very low level of education. Among all social groups, scheduled caste women are at margin level. Poverty in the family and non-availability of the school in village has been emerged as major cause behind educational deprivation of rural women. Empirical finding have shown that increase in educational level among rural women, their family income enhances. It is suggested that education is pertinent domain to make women empowered and self-reliant. Efforts should be made through different ways to make women educated and self-dependent. Ensuring educational opportunity to all is essential for more than one reason.

Keywords: Empowerment, rural, deprivation, opportunity

Empowerment is the process of increasing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes. Central to this process are actions which build both individual and collective assets, and improve the efficiency and fairness of the organizational and institutional context which govern the use of these assets. It is the expansion of assets and capabilities of poor people to participate in negotiate with, influence, control, and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives (World Bank, 2002).

Sengupta, (1998) argued that empowerment goes beyond socio-economic or political attributes and essentially refers to a process of becoming psychologically empowered. Poverty inflicts deep-rooted wounds on the psyche of individuals. If they cease to be oppressed, their first task would be to psychologically empower themselves. In this context, empowerment would mean increasing one's

capacity to define, analyse and act upon one's own problem.

In the per-Independence time, literacy rate for women had a poor spurt in comparison to literacy rate of men. This is witnessed from the fact that literacy rate of women has risen from 0.7 percent to 7.3 percent whereas the literacy rate of men has risen from 9.8 percent to 24.9 percent during these four decades. In the post-independence period, literacy rates have shown a substantial increase in general. However, the literacy rate of male has almost tripled over the period e.g. 25 percent in 1951 and 82.1 percent in 2011. Surprisingly; the female literacy rate has increased at a faster pace than the male literacy during the decade 1981 -2011. The growth is almost 6 times e.g. 7.9 percent in 1951 and 65.4 percent in 2011. Hence, one can infer that still the female literacy rate (only half of the female population are literates) is wadding behind male literacy rate (three fourth of the male population

are literates). This higher rate of illiteracy of women is undoubtedly attributing for women dependence on men and to play a subordinate role. It is the education that can help women to understand Indian constitutional and legislative provisions that are made to strengthen them. Thus promoting education among women is of great importance in empowering them to accomplish their goals in par with men in different spheres of life.

India accounts for 30% of the world's total illiterate population and out of which 70% are women. As per 2011 Census data, women constitute 48% of the total population in India, with a total literacy rate of 53.7% as compared to 75.3% in males. The literacy rate among rural women is 46.1% as compared to 72.9% among urban women; is still lower than literacy rates among than rural and urban men stands at 70.7% and 86.3% respectively.

However, the gaps between men's and women's literacy rate is a rough but informative indicator of the gender difference in many forms of human capital (Schultz, 2002). In spite of the forceful interventions of female privilege, feminist critics, constitutional guarantees, protecting laws and sincere efforts by the state governments and central government through various schemes and programmes over the last 64 years and above all, the United Nation's enormous pressure with regard to the uplift of the plight of women in terms education is still in the state of an enigma in India for several reasons.

Many researchers worked on to evaluate educational status of rural women since long times. Bhandari and Smith (1997) in a study on rural women in Madhya Pradesh district found that education level of women in villages is from 0-9 years, 47 percent of rural women were employed in agriculture and 53 percent women supplement their family income.

Equal opportunities and status are two dimensions of empowerment which define, challenge and overcome barriers of life with which one's ability to shape up life and environment get increases In another study Mazumdar (1987), found that the discrimination in terms of education against women was found maximum among families of low socio-economic conditions than in middle and high socio-economic status families. Whereas Sadgopal (2003), Mukhopadhyaya (2009) and Panda (2010) concluded that empowerment of rural women is meaningless

unless the society and its institutions respond to the discriminatory practices against rural women and women themselves endeavors to transform their life situation. Linguistic reforms are necessary to dislodge the patriarchal mindset and enhance the dignity of rural women but this refers will not be a balanced to the psychological confusion of rural women's secondary position. In another study Padhi (2012) evaluated the impact of agrarian crisis on rural women in Malwa region of Punjab evidently concluded that women bearing the agrarian crisis are surviving with dispossessions and deprivations. The structured oppressions of cast, culture and patriarchy in rural setting is layered and affect women in multiple ways. High dropout rate among the girls in this region has curtailed the educational empowerment of women. Bishaw (2013) on the bases of study conducted on Assami women concluded that as rural women's level of education increases, their involvement in political and economic activities and the possible advantages secured from their participation increases. Education and socio economic development has close relationship.

Rationale

Women's power of expression and capacity to diffuse problem generally come with education that makes them capable of being heard in the society. It is commonly held that education is the main factor that affects the women's autonomy in any social setup. Despite the established importance of female education, women continue to lag very much behind men in educational development in countries like India.

Punjab continues to be predominantly a rural economy as 62.25 percent of its total population and 70 per cent of its total workers live in villages (GOI 2011). Out of the total 17,344,192 rural population 8,250,716 are the females. The average Literacy rate for the rural population is 71.42. Rural male literacy rate is 76.62 whereas rural female literacy rate is 58.9 which is far below the average literacy rate of state and national level. Rural women being born and brought up in the deprived rural setup always lag behind to avail equal opportunities in life and ultimately remain oppressed, suppressed and weak in the society.

Most of the researchers emphasised the importance of education in reducing ignorance and creating

Table 1: Socio-Demographic Profile of the Surveyed Village

Name of the village	District	Block	Population			No. of SC Members	No. of Literates	Literacy rate
			Total	Male	Female			
Burj Ladha Singh	Bathinda	Bhagta Bhai Ka	2179	1140	1039	1396	1169	53%

Source : Census 2011.

empowerment. (Sen 1999) viewed that education has the potential to contribute to alternative socialization, challenging conventional gender ideologies, levelling the playing field between males and females in relation to skills, credentials and qualification, and allowing women the use of knowledge to empower themselves in diverse ways. For example, a study in Calcutta has shown the positive impact that education has on the ability of women to resist and resolve situations of domestic violence.

Rural women residing in the villages in Punjab, their educational status and socio economic conditions in which they live have been scarcely researched so far. Unfortunately there is neither any database nor any report which reflect the exact extent of their educational attainment level at present. It prompts the investigator and makes present study vital in essence and spirit.

Objectives

Present study is based upon the following objectives:

1. to study the extent of educational level among rural women.
2. to acquaint with reasons and constraints faced by the rural women in terms of their educational attainment.
3. to analyze the economic conditions of rural women with respect to their educational level.

METHOD AND PROCEDURE

The study is primarily descriptive in nature and based upon primary survey on rural women residing in village named Burj Ladha Singh Wala of block Bhagta, District Bathinda in Punjab.

Tool: Adequately validated questionnaire was constructed and used as Interview schedule for the data collection. However, field notes and observation techniques were also employed to get in depth relevant information. Also investigator

has made the base of her analysis on the basis of primary data along with available official secondary data figures.

Sampling: A representative sample of 200 rural women was selected by proportionate random sampling technique. The women were identified and designated as rural in the age group of 20 to 50 years. Total sample is further stratified into 65 scheduled cast, 45 backward class and 90 general category women. Rural woman in the study is defined as woman who is residing in a village from last 20 years or more. Village is taken as that which locates away from town/city and main road at least at the distance of 5 kilometers. Data were collected individually and personally in the native language of the respondents. The whole inferences are presented in the form of tables and discussion.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Educational Level in Rural women across different Social Groups

To present the domains of educational level among rural women the figures are classified as percentage of women stand at each level of education across different social groups and are presented in the following tables.

Table 2: Percentage of Rural Women with respect to Educational Level among Different Social Groups

Level of Education	General	BC	SC
Illiterate	12	11	48
Literate only	22	29	18
Primary	24	23	14
Elementary	19	18	13
Matric	16	11	5
10+2	4	3	2
Skill training	2	1	—
Graduate	2	1	—

Source: primary survey

Values present in table 2 reveals that 12 percent of the women belonging to upper casts are illiterate whereas the same Fig. is 11 percent for the backward class and 48 percent for scheduled cast women. It means women illiteracy is much intense in the lower social classes and the marginalized groups. The women who are literate also keep not a comparable higher level of education. 22 percent of general category women, 29 percent of backward class and 18 percent of the scheduled cast women are only literate. They are below primary level and keep drastically low level of education. Almost the similar percentage (24 and 23) of women in upper cast and backward class have the primary level of formal education but this figure is 14 in case of scheduled cast women. Similarly the elementary level of education is found in 19 percent of the general category women but the figure is 18 and 13 for the BC and SC categories. Matric level of education is attained by a small percentage i.e. 16 percent of the upper cast rural women and 11 and 5 percent for the BC and SC groups.

Figures further show that merely a 4 percent of the general category women of the surveyed village could attain secondary level of education and the same figure is again very low in case of SC and BC women. It is evident from the table values that the picture of educational empowerment of the surveyed village is much disturbing and bleak. As the overall literacy rate of the village is 53 percent which is much below the state and national literacy figures the situation of women education lies at bottom. The scenario of the village women educational level presents discouraging results, as a majority of the women have educational level below elementary. Present results are supported by Bhandari and Smith (1997) who in a study of similar kind evidently concluded that access to higher education is very low among rural women. The educational attainment level of women lies at bottom and least in case of women belong to marginalized sections. Hence it is not only the literacy figures, certain level of education counts for enhancing the status of women.

Reasons for dropping out or not enrolled in formal educational system

The rural women were interviewed to get insight into different reasons and causes which have made

them vulnerable to remain illiterate or to remain at the bottom of educational ladder. The causes cited by the respondents are presented in the following table.

Table 3: Causes of School Dropout/Not Enrolled cited by Respondents across social groups

Reasons for Dropout	General	BC (%age)	SC (%age)
Poverty	51	68	78
Illiteracy of Parents	27	34	48
Social cause	36	21	23
Non Availability of School in Parental village	61	52	61
Poor Academic atmosphere	7	21	42
Household Work and care of siblings	5	28	51
Family attitude	31	27	36

Source: primary survey

Table 3 demonstrates the percentage of causes for their early dropout and not enrollment in the formal school education system which became ultimately the reasons for their low educational level. Figures further demonstrate that a very high percentage of women in all the three social groups complained poverty in the family as a major cause behind their educational backwardness and deprivation. 51 percent of the upper cast women, 68 percent of the backward class women and 78 percent of the women told that they could not avail the educational opportunities due to illiteracy in the parental family. Similarly, parental illiteracy was also viewed as hurdle by 34 percent BC, 48 percent SC and 27 percent of the general category women. Many respondents shared that they gave up their study at a very initial stage due to social reasons, and taboos behind girl education. They mentioned that the value of education was not recognized by the society in those times and they were not permitted to study further. Another prominent cause which is emerged from the reasons was the non-availability of school in the parental village and parents did not allow them to go in a school of neighboring village. Similarly, a high percentage of women 51 percent in SC complained that they could not study further due to their failure and poor academic performance in studies and this reason seems more intense in case of SC women. 28 percent of the BC and 51

percent of SC women said that household work and care of siblings were the main reasons responsible to discontinue studies terminated education at very initial stage of schooling.

However family attitude has also been remained as one of the reason for low attainment of education among women belonging to all the three social groups. Hence it is evident from the study that not only a single factor played a role to keep low educational level among rural women but multiple reasons interplayed as constraints and held responsible to keep them away from educational arena in their times. With similar findings Dreze and Kingdon (1999) concluded that educational deprivation in rural India is determined by household resources, parental motivation, education of the parents and overall village development index.

These results are also substantiated by the findings of study conducted by Govinda and Bandyopadhyay (2010) who found that poverty act as a constraint to educational achievement which result into non participation of rural children in the educational process. This lack of education in turn witness as many amongst these children grow up as illiterate or turning out to semi illiterate adults living in poverty. Thus poverty, illiteracy and social factors have bearing on learning achievement.

Educational level of rural women and average age of marriage

It is observed from the qualitative data that rural women had got early marriage as compared to their urban counterparts.

Table 4: Educational level of rural women and Average age of marriage

Level of Education	General N	BC	SC
Illiterate	20	20.6	19
Literate only	20	22	19.6
Primary	21	23	19
Elementary	22	21	20
Matric	23	22	20.5
10+2	23.5	22.5	21
Skill training	23.8	23	—
Graduate	24	1	—

Source: primary survey

To look into relationship between age of marriage and educational level of women the average age of marriage with respect to their educational status was worked out. Table 4 presents the figures related to educational level of the rural women and their average age of marriage.

Data present in table 4 shows that for the illiterate women irrespective of the cast group, the average marriage age is the lowest i.e. 20 years. It is seen that with the increases in the level of education the average age of marriage also increases. For the graduate women in general and BC category, the average age of marriage is maximum i.e. 24 years. However the average age of marriage among women is lowest in case of SC women. It is well acknowledged that early marriage in woman curtails her path of empowerment through different ways. As per these results, it is clear that only educational development can overcome these kinds of barrier. This result is supported by study of Singh and Samra (1996) who concluded that age of marriage among women is determined by socio economic status of the family, educational attainment and labour force participation. Early prevalence of marriage is directly associated with level of socioeconomic status of family.

Educational level in Rural Women and Average Annual Income of Family (in ₹)

In order to get a glance on the economic status of women residing in village their family income was calculated. Table 5 indicates the economic situation of rural women with respect to their level of education.

Table 5: Educational level of Rural Women and Average Annual Income of Family (in ₹)

Level of Education	General	BC	SC
Illiterate	80700	26000	20000
Literate only	83000	22270	22000
Primary	146000	23452	21000
Elementary	164000	25976	22000
Matric	172300	70996	29000
10+2	181000	88968	39000
Skill training	182000	100000	—
Graduate	190700	121000	—

Source: primary survey

Above figures demonstrate the level of education and annual income of the family. It refers that the annual income of the women who have very low level of education is least but the corresponding figure increases with the increase in level of education. The economic condition of women belonging to illiterate and only literate women is weaker as compared to women who keep certain level of education. In case of SC and BC women, the annual income of their family is lowest and trends are similar in all the social groups also. A little glance on figures clarifies the overall economic situation of rural women which is in fact cause and effect of their low educational level.

Undoubtedly low socio economic condition is a hurdle to access education and illiteracy further lead to poor economic conditions. Findings of this study are congruent with (Schultz 1993), Patrions and Psacharopoulos (2007) who in their studies concluded that girls with extra year of schooling are able to earn 10-20 percent of higher income than those with 1 year more schooling. Women receive higher returns to their schooling investment as compared to men. The educational investment in women has direct relationship with the economic and social development of the country. Substantiating these results, Mohanty (2009) also argued that socio economic status is the important correlate of educational attainment and academic performance among rural girls.

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CONCLUSION

The empirical analysis of the above results reveals that situation of rural women on educational empowerment and development is far from satisfactory. The inferences drawn here clearly indicate that educational system and developmental plans have definitely been showing the exclusionary processes in rural areas and that of women in weaker sections of state. The dynamics of educational development among rural women presents not hazy rather a bleak picture of affairs. It is well documented that educational development paves the way towards empowerment and makes person self-reliant, aware and enriched.

Present study indicates that educational empowerment is a distant dream for rural women. Illiterate women or low educational level has bearing on health of the family, her own health, education of children and ultimately the status of the family and society. The constraints faced by the women to attain educational level are multiple and complex. Poverty plays a vital role to make educational deprivation. It is pertinent that non-availability of schools in the neighborhood especially for girls has been remained as strong cause for their denial of education.

Many factors play role in accumulation with each other. Such pattern highlights a sad picture of entitlement failure for rural females, a phenomenon that provokes a deep question about the significance or depth of rural development schemes of the state. Undoubtedly, education is the worst form of exclusion because it excludes from other walks of life and activities also. Findings of the study show that educational status of the rural women by and large is deeply rooted in the socioeconomic structure of the rural economy.

Thus, women's educational backwardness is of concern not only because it is inequitable but also because it is socially and economically inefficient. It is well acknowledged that education for mothers is associated not only with healthier children, but with children's acquisition of knowledge, language, and literacy skills as well. Research by the World Bank indicates that mother's education level, more than the father's education, is positively related to higher aspirations for children and participation in education by their daughters. The interconnectedness of women's literacy with family and society highlights the importance of women's participation in family literacy programs. Equal access to educational opportunity is a basic human right essential to wellbeing. Educational gap at attainment levels between male and female and further between female of rural and urban have been remained as focus of research. Reduction in such gaps is essential for more than one reason. Hence sincere efforts are required to raise the educational level of rural women.

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