

THE EFFECTS OF CASTE SYSTEM ON THE EDUCATION OF WOMEN: A CASE STUDY OF RANAGHAT II C.D. BLOCK IN NADIA DISTRICT, WEST BENGAL

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ABSTRACT

Jawaharlal Nehru said "If you educate a man you educate an individual, however, if you educate a woman you educate a whole family". Education is the powerful tool for reducing discrimination and inequality. Education will also determine the prosperity, success and security in life. So, Education is in fact, an input not only for economic development but also for inner strength of the tribal communities which helps them in meeting the new challenges of life. In this study an attempt has been made to gauge the effects of caste system on the education of women of Ranaghat in Nadia District, West Bengal.

Keywords: Caste system, Education, Inequality.

INTRODUCTION:

In India there are four specific castes: Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra. One's caste is therefore set in place at birth. The so-called 'untouchables', or the Dalits, exist below the caste system. Ritually and religiously, they are still considered impure and despite legal protection, they are generally not allowed to enter temples or use public places (Ram, 1998). They make up around 16% of India's population. The caste system continues to determine political, social and economic life of the people in Hindu societies. They face multiple forms of discrimination, violence and exclusion from the rest of society. The caste system very much impacted the education of children specially girl children in the Indian village. Current statistics on school enrolment place Indian girls' school participation at 44.1 percent (primary), 41.8 percent (middle), and 39.5 percent (secondary). School participation rates for girls are considerably lower in many rural areas. Forty-five districts in India report female literacy rates of below 30 percent (Mohanty & Nandakumar, 2005). Kerala, for example, boasts an almost 90 percent literacy rate while rural areas with high populations of Scheduled Castes or Tribes report literacy rates below 45 percent. In addition, the Civil Rights Act of 1955 and the Scheduled Castes and Tribes Act of 1989 have created job and education quotas for lower castes. "In man dominated society, male members are not willing to give equal position to women" (Gangrade and Gathia, 1983). The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) report (2012) shows that a crime is committed against a Dalit in every 18 minutes in India; every day three Dalit women are raped; two Dalits are murdered and two Dalits' houses are burnt; and every week: 13 Dalits are murdered; and six Dalits are kidnapped or abducted.

OBJECTIVES:

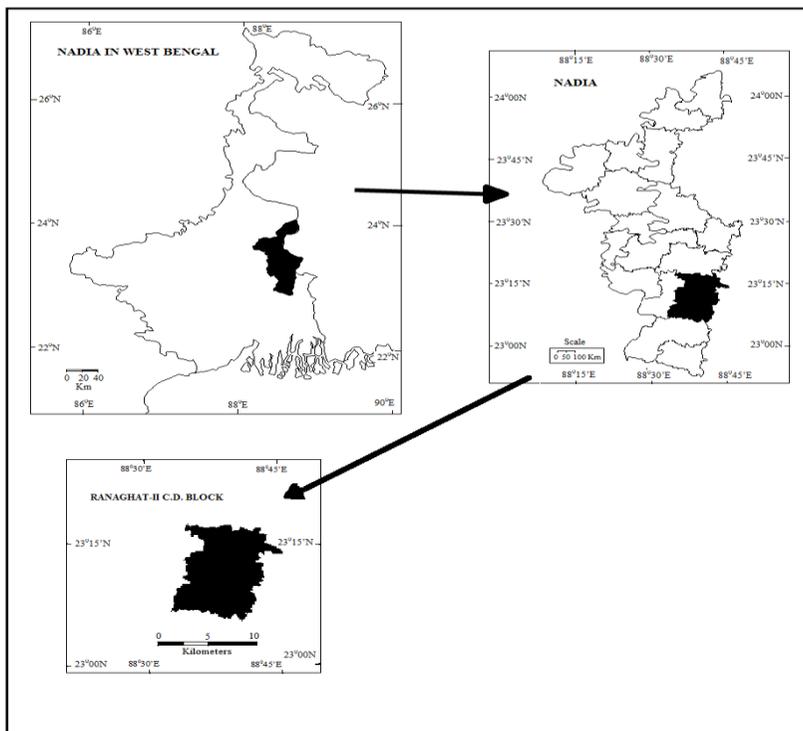
The objectives of the present study are as follows:

- To study the problems of lower caste girl.
- To know the everyday experiences of Dalit women with regard to their school participation.
- To find out suggestive measures to overcome these problems.

STUDY AREA:

Ranaghat II is a community development block in Ranaghat subdivision of Nadia district in the Indian state of West Bengal. The total area of Ranaghat II is 279.03 km² and has 1 panchayat samity, 14 gram panchayats, 285 gram sansads (village councils), 113 mouzas and 108 inhabited villages. It is surrounded by Hanskhali in the north, Jhikargachha Upazila in Jessore District, Bangladesh and Bagdah CD Block in North 24 Parganas in the east, Chakdaha CD Block in the south and Ranaghat I CD Block in the west. Total population of this block is 368,681 as per 2011 Census of India. Total literacy rate of Ranaghat II CD Block is 79.38% (264,947) out of which male literacy rate is 83.66% (143,773) and female literacy rate in 74.85% (121,174).

Figure: 1 Location map of the study area



METHODOLOGY:

Any research work is based on certain methodologies that are to be followed in order to make a thorough investigation and detailed analysis and to arrive at some definite and final conclusion regarding the specific problems related to research work. The present research work titled “**The effects of caste system on the education of women: A case study of Ranaghat II C.D. Block in Nadia District, West Bengal**” has been based on primary and secondary sources of data. Primary data/information has been collected through interview with 230 women of the study area using a mixed-methods approach that included face to face interviews, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and questionnaire survey containing both open and close ended questions. Secondary data sets have also been collected from the Block Development Office, Panchayat Offices, District Census handbook. These apart, related books, journals, newspapers, Report of Brick Association and also different websites have been consulted to make the study an effective one. Data collected were summarized and stored in statistical tables, graphs and maps. Other data have been analyzed and compiled by necessary Statistical and Mapping Methods along with GIS Techniques. Those data have been compiled and analyzed. Explanations of the analyses were done qualitatively and quantitatively.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

- Age Structure:** There are positive relation between the occupation of the parents and the age structure. Because of their low social status and very low economic return children are considered as economic assets. They think that more children mean more working hands. The Sample Population (women) studied during the sample survey is 230. Here 45% of women who are in the age group of 20-30 years, 25% of women workers are less than 20 years and 30% women are more than 30 years.

Table: 1 Personal History of the Respondents

Characteristics	Group	Number of respondents (N=230)	Percentage
Age	<20	57	24.78
	20-30	102	44.35
	>30	71	30.87
Marital status	Married	126	55
	Unmarried	57	25
	Widow	47	20

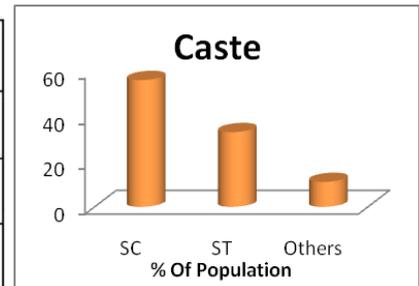
Source: Field Survey, January, 2018.

Table 1 reveals that 55% women are married, 25% are unmarried and 20% are widow. Most of the women responded that they got married at the age of 15 years or before. An overwhelming majority of the women workers and their children are illiterate.

- Caste :** From the field study it is found that 55% from scheduled caste, 35% from Scheduled tribes category and 10% is Others like general and OBC (Table 2).

Table: 2

Caste	No of respondents	Percentage
SC	128	56
ST	76	33
Others	26	11



Source: Field Survey, January,2018

Figure: 2

- Income of Family:** Table 3 manifests that their monthly income is very low (less than 5000). In my study area most of the people are Agricultural labours. Their earning is insufficient for their survival. Many lower caste women are engaged in domestic work, bidi making etc. Because of the poor family background, SC/ST students stop their studies in the middle.

They being economically dependent on the higher castes, have to survive a hand to moath existence. Their level of self-preception is low and life is mainly reduced to a struggle for survival (Wankhede, 1999). A large number of them continue to live below poverty line. Due to their poor economic condition, they can not afford adequate and good quality food and basic amenities of life for themselves.

Table: 3 Income of Family

	<3000	3000-6000	6000-9000	>9000
No of respondents	55	108	44	23
Percentage	24	47	19	10

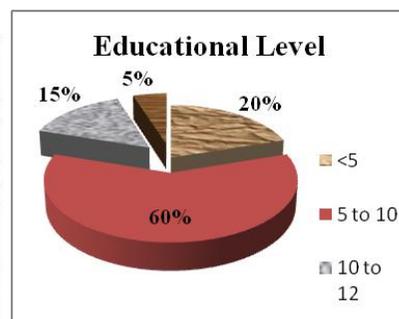
Source: Field Survey, January,2018.

- Education level:** They do not access to primary education both physically and socially. For them it was not only the physical distance of the primary school but also the social distance. The primary school is dominated by high caste students and the high caste teachers were reported to ill-treat the low caste children. People from lower caste are angry with teachers because they complained that their children were being neglected and the teacher paid attention only to the upper caste children. They are not even contacted for meeting.

Table 4 reveals that 20% of women are educated upto class five, 60% class five to ten, 15% class ten to twelve and only 5% are educated more than twelve. Many of the female respondents reported that women are not allowed to attend the existing school and village education committees meeting.

Table: 4

	No of respondents	%
<5	46	20
5-10	138	60
10-12	34	15
>12	12	5
As fer as possible (only for girls)	72	31
As long as daughter is not marriage	158	69



Source: Field Survey, January,2018.

Figure: 3

Although, due to reservation in employment, there has been an increase in the representation of the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes in various government/semi-government services, but their number is very less. Even in government services also, there is a significant backlog of the posts to be filled up on the basis of reservation. Many of the reserved seats and posts remain vacant on the pretext of 'not finding suitable candidates' though many lower caste candidates with adequate qualifications and experience are hunting for employment. Almost all the respondents said that the practice of untouchability still exists in their society in different ways.

According to India's Ministry of Labour, 85% of the Dalit women have the most formidable occupations and work as agricultural laborers, scavengers, sweepers, and disposers of human waste. Many of these women work for very low wages under the upper caste landlords, since it is proposed that by the National Commission for SC/ST that 85% of the Dalits are landless.

5. **DROP OUT:** The dropout rates at the primary school level are very high for the Scheduled Castes (Pande, 1986). Some reasons for Scheduled Castes students to drop-out of school are : a) when a child is born, the mother puts it in the charge of its elder brother or sister since the mother is employed; b) schooling expenditure increases more rapidly than the income of the parents; c) financial liabilities of Scheduled Castes parents are rising; and d) in rural and interior areas, teachers are not serious about their teaching as they are engaged in other work (Khan, 1980). According to the National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes' 1996-1997 and 1997-1998 Report, the national drop-out rate for Dalit children-who often sit in the back of classrooms-was a staggering 49.35 percent at the primary level, 67.77 percent for middle school, and 77.65 percent for secondary school. According to the government's own fourteenth periodic report under ICERD, "The lowest literacy is among the occupational castes. Women constitute more than two thirds of the illiterates."

Table: 5 Age Group for Drop Out

	No of respondents	%
5-10	115	50
10-15	81	35
15-20	34	15

Source: Field Survey, January,2018

A report published in the Anandabazar Patrica (25march, 2001: henceforth ABP) quoting a District Primary Education Project (DPEP) report states that 80% of school children have to go in for private tuition and 44% of the total cost of education per children goes on private tuition.

The distance between the school and the house and lack of free transport facilities also discourage the parents to send their girls to schools.

The responsibility of looking after the young ones at home compel them to attend the child care work as the parents have to go for their daily works to earn their livelihood. It is the girls responsibility of looking after their younger sister or brother.

While the financial handicap of the family is the main reason behind dropping out. In that case girls are very much neglected. They also engaged in domestic and bidi making work. Most of them are married before the age of 14 years. The majority of the parents send their daughters to school in order to ensure better marriage prospects, lower dowry demands and the ability to teach their own children at home. Table 4 manifests that 69% of the responds said that their daughters to continue studying until they are married off.

6. **TEACHER AND CLASSMATE TREATMENT:** The caste discrimination practiced by some primary school teachers has created a deep and painful sense of deprivation among the parents of the lower caste children. The role of the teachers and the parents is very important in motivating the young girls for pursuing their education. The motivation from the school they are studying plays a very important role than any other factor. It was heartrending to listen to a mother relate how her daughter was beaten up by higher caste children in a primary school and how she herself was simply driven out when she went to the teachers to seek justice. Teachers usually think that "the SC and ST children are less motivated than the others, more timid, and finally less intelligent than the general caste students". Table no 6 reveals that 65% responds yes and only 25% responds no when I asked 'do you feel the teacher discriminate the lower caste more than the upper caste students?'. They said that the teacher makes them sit separately in both the classroom and the mid-day meal. They sit in the back. Separation based on caste was also highlighted in comments regarding play time. It also observed much greater teacher absenteeism in schools with a majority of children from

SC and ST, compared with other schools. Furthermore, rural teachers (both dalit and nondalit) brought up the issue of caste discrimination in the course of cooking and eating practices by non-SC/ST children, their parents and teachers.

Do you feel the teacher discriminate the lower caste more than the upper caste student? (Table: 6 & Figure: 4)

	Yes	No	No response
Number of respondents	149	58	23
Percentage	65	25	10

Table: 6

Source: Field Survey, January,2018.

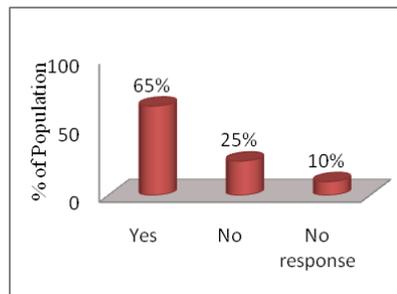


Figure: 4

7. **Mid Day Meal Scheme:** The Mid Day Meal Scheme (MMS) was originally conceived as a means of attracting children from lower income groups to school by reducing the cost of schooling and improve performance of students. But they replied that the quality of food is very poor. The most overt discrimination manifests in separate seating and serving of food, designed to preserve untouchability. The lower caste children seat separately because upper caste parents believed that they are impure, untouchable. They also said that sometime when a lower caste woman cooked for Mid day meal then many children from upper caste didn't eat that food.

8. **Kanyashree and incentive schemes:** Kanyashree Prakalpa is a Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) Scheme that concentrates on girls currently most at-risk for dropping out of school and for child marriage: adolescents between the ages of 13 and 18. The scheme has two benefit components. The first is a cash benefit to be paid annually to the girls in the target age group for every year that they remain in education, provided they are unmarried at the time. The second benefit is a one-time grant to be paid to a girl between the age of 18 and 19, provided that she is enrolled in an educational institution and is unmarried at that time. It has also been observed that most of the girls either use the money from the scheme for higher education or save it, instead of using it for marriage purposes, putting to rest the concern that this scheme would encourage the practice of dowry. Table 6 manifests that more than 65% of women feel that this money is used for marriage or dowry purposes and only 30% used that money for higher education. None of the parents or the children reported their children as having got any type of benefit. About 90% of the parents of school children reported that they had not received the free textbooks.

Table:7 Use of Kanyashree Prakalpa Money

	No of Respondents	Percentage
Higher education	71	31
Marriage	103	45
Dowry	47	20
Other	9	4

Source: Field Survey, January,2018.

CONCLUSION & SUGGESTIVE MEASURES:

Education is the primary agents of development. In India almost two-thirds of the Dalit population as compared to about one-half of the general population. The literacy gap between Dalits and the rest of the population fell a scant 0.39 percent between 1961 and 1991. Most of the government schools in which Dalit students are enrolled are deficient in basic infrastructure, classrooms, teachers, and teaching aids. A woman with education is a powerful person, she has the power to educate the children in her family, guide them in taking decisions, contribute economically and offer valuable inputs for improvement on home and social front.

Government as well as NGO should make an awareness programme for all women because education is important for each and everyone. The government must make an exhaustive and comprehensive

legislation, which could streamline the employment procedures for the working women, better school environment for lower caste children, working conditions, formulate awareness camp and other welfare facilities.

The reduction in social distance between the higher castes and lower castes is an important indicator of social mobility. Educational advancement, employment opportunities, participation in social and religious ceremonies, participation in socio-cultural activities, inter-personal interactions, inter-caste marriages, etc. play a significant role in reducing the social distance and bridging the gap between the higher and lower castes.

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