

HIGHER EDUCATION AS A TOOL FOR WOMAN EMPOWERMENT IN RURAL AREAS: AN ANALYTICAL STUDY WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO KAKOPATHER DEVELOPMENT BLOCK, TINSUKIA

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ABSTRACT

Higher Education as a tool for Woman Empowerment in rural areas: An analytical study with special reference to Kakopather Development Block, Tinsukia.

Woman Empowerment is a global issue. At present, it is not only the most popular slogan of the contemporary age but it is also the need of the hour. Rural Women constitute nearly 77% of total female populations in our country but in this 21st country, rural woman are being denied of their rights in the family, economic world, social activities, political fields etc. In this context, higher education can play an active role. Women empowerment is closely related to higher education as it is the strong instrument for bringing change and development. Hence, in this paper, an attempt has been made to analyze, Higher education as a tool for women empowerment in rural areas. For this study Kakopather Development Block of Tinsukia District is selected.

Objectives of the Paper

The objectives of the paper are to assess –

- The condition of women empowerment in rural area.
- The interrelationship between higher education and women empowerment.
- To provide suggestions for development of women empowerment through higher education in rural areas.

KEYWORDS: Higher Education, Women Empowerment

INTRODUCTION

Woman Empowerment is a global issue at present; it is not only the most popular slogan of the contemporary age but it is also the need of the hour. Empowerment of women means equipping women to be economically independent, self-reliant, with a positive self-esteem to enable them to face any difficult situation. The empowered should be able to participate in decision-making process as well as to contribute in developmental activities of the country.

Stromquist (1995) has identified four clear components of empowerment. They are cognitive psychological, economic and political. According to him _____

- The cognitive component refers to women's understanding of their conditions of subordination and the causes of such conditions at both micro and macro levels of society.
- The psychological component includes the development of findings that women can act at personal and social

levels to improve their condition as well as the formation of the belief that they can succeed in their change efforts.

- The economic component of empowerment requires that women be able to engage in a production activity that will allow them some degree of financial autonomy, no matter how small and hard to obtain at the beginning.
- The political component of empowerment entails the ability to analyze the surrounding environment in political and social terms; it also means the ability to organize and mobilize for social change. ¹

Therefore, women empowerment is a process and it includes the following components:

- Prohibition of gender discrimination thought and practice.
- Equal opportunities for using society's resources.
- Economical independence.
- Participation in decision-making process
- Practical consciousness and participation.

India's heart resides in its villages. About 70% population of India resides in rural areas where rural women constitute nearly 77% of total female population in our country. Women have been neglected throughout the years in every field like social, cultural, economic, political and decision making, and when it comes to rural women, the negligence is in greater quantity,

Higher Education is a milestone for women empowerment. It can grow awareness among rural women folks. Women's backwardness depends mainly on the percentage of illiteracy. Man and women are the two wheels of the cart of society, the cart cannot run properly, if one of the wheels is defective. So, along with men, women should get adequate and equal status in family's decision making process, economical independency, political status, educational provisions etc. In this context of women empowerment, education can play a vital role.

Underlying the importance of women's education, The Indian University Education Commission (1947-1948) said that "There cannot be an educated people without educated women, if general education is to be limited to men or women, the opportunity should be given to women, for them it would most surely be passed on to the next generation". But after the six decades of India's independence the present literacy rate of India is only 74.04%, where 82.14% is male literate and 65.46% is female literate as per the 2011 census. On January 2012, female literacy rate in rural areas is 58.75%, in comparison to 79.92% in urban areas.²

So, it shows the picture of educational backwardness of rural women in comparison to urban women, which acts as an obstacle for women empowerment in rural areas.

The benefits of women education for empowerment in rural area can be broadly categorized as follows:-

- As women rises, there health will improve, like-wise population growth will be controllable.
- Women education will increase women's participation in the labor force and their contributions in the labor force will increase national income.

- Women education will increase the decision making capacity of women in all spheres of their life.
- Women education will make women politically conscious and to participate actively in political affairs.

Keeping in few of the significance of higher education as a tool for women empowerment in rural areas, the rural women of Kakopathar Development Block of Tinsukia District are selected for this study. For assessing the role of higher education as a tool for women empowerment in rural areas, Kashijan and Kherjan villages are selected for study which is within a distance of average 7 to 8 km. from Kakopathar Development Block.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the paper are is to assess –

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- To provide suggestions for development of women empowerment through higher education in rural areas.

METHODOLOGY

- **Method:** - In this study descriptive method has been adopted. This study is based on both primary and secondary data.
- **Population:** - The present study is comprises of the complete target group that is all the rural women of Kakopathar Development Block of Tinsukia District.
- **Sample:** - From the population, the researcher selected 180 respondents representing the population through purposive sampling.

Tools Used for Data Collections

- Interview schedule –In this study, Interview is adopted as a tool for data collection in order to gain depth and details responses of the respondents.
- Personal observation has also been done on rural women of Kakopathar Development Block.
- Different journals, magazines, books and internet is also used to get data on women empowerment and education in rural areas.

RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

After conducting the study on higher education as a tool for women empowerment in rural areas in Kakopathar Development Block, the investigator collect data, analyzed and find out the results of the study like as –

Table 1: Educational Status of the Respondents (Above 18 Years)

Educational Qualification	Respondents
Illiterate	69
Literate up to Class IX	30
H.S.L.C.	38
H.S.S.L.C.	30
Graduate	11

Post-Graduate	02
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Above data given in the table indicates that among the respondents 38.33% are illiterate, 16.67% are Literate up to Class IX, 21.11% are H.S.L.C. passed, 6.11% are Graduate and only 1.11% is Post-graduate rural women in the particular region.

Table 2: Economical Status of the Respondents

Educational Qualification	Occupation			
	Service	Business	SHG Involvement	Daily Wage Earner
Illiterate				20
Literate up to Class IX			10	
H.S.L.C.			19	
H.S.S.L.C.	7	5		
Graduate	4			
Post-Graduate	2			

Table –2 indicates the economical status of women. Among the illiterate women 28.98% are economically independent. They are either involved in daily-wage earner as char women or as labors in MNREGA scheme.

Among the Literate up to Class IX women respondents 33.33% are involved with self-helped groups and 50% of HSLC passed women are involved with self-helped-groups. 40% of HSSLC passed women are involved in service and business, whereas 36.36% of graduate women and 100% Post-graduate women are service-holders. The percentage of women's economic conditions that only higher educated women are more economically empowered in comparison to others because they are service-holders but the daily wage-earners, labors, SHG's members are less economically empowered the main factor behind this is education because it is education that empowers women to get knowledge and utilize it to the optimum level for not only their self-sufficiency but also for the welfare and progress of society and nation too.

Table 3: Political Consciousness of the Respondents

Educational Qualification	Political Consciousness		
	Universal Adult Franchise	Contest in Election	Involvement in Politics Due to Inducement
Illiterate	69	-	69
Literate up to Class IX	30	-	30
H.S.L.C.	38	-	38
H.S.S.L.C.	30	-	15
Graduate	11	2	-
Post-Graduate	2	-	-

Table –3 indicate the political consciousness of women .The table shows that though 100% illiterate and literate up to Class IX and HSLC passed women participate in universal adult franchise process, but they have no political consciousness even they involved in partly politics due to inducement but 50% of HSSLC passed women involved in political activities due to inducement. But the scenario is completely reverse in case of the highly educated women because graduate and post-graduate women are not involved in political affairs due to any inducement they are politically conscious even among the graduate women 18.18% are contested in Panchayatiraj election and one of them is now the member of the Panchayat for two terms also.

Table 4: Involvement of Women in Decision Making Process

Educational Qualification	Participation in Family Decision Making Process
Illiterate	10
Literate up to Class IX	10
H.S.L.C.	15
H.S.S.L.C.	30
Graduate	11
Post-Graduate	2

Table IV indicates the participation of women in their family decision making process. Above table shows that only 14.49% of illiterate, 33.33% of literate up to Class IX, 39.47% of HSLC passed women participate in decision making process of their families where 100% of HSSLC, 100% of graduate and 100% of post-graduate women actively participate in every decision making process of their families. So, this indicates that educated women have the capacity to take decisions.

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- Though this study is a micro level study, but by observing the educational scenario and women empowerment, following suggestions are put forward for strengthening women empowerment in rural areas.
- Women empowerment is closely related to higher education. It can develop self-confidence among women by providing different knowledge and skills regarding concerned fields. So, RTE (Right to Education) Act. should be implemented properly in rural areas. For motivating rural girls for higher education, universities should arrange seminars and extension lectures in girls' schools of such areas.
- Economic empowerment is the key for all kind of empowerment. If a woman is not economically independent, she will have to depend on others. So, for economic empowerment also higher education is needed. Higher Education is the strong instrument for Human resource development. Hence, for economic empowerment, educational programmes in rural areas should be organized and rural women should encourage assessing the interrelationship between higher education and economic empowerment.
- Women empowerment includes political consciousness also. Higher Education acts an important role in awaking women on political consciousness. It provides knowledge to women regarding democracy, State administration, party politics, election, political issues etc. By higher education rural women can also utilize their own judgment is selection of their representatives also.
- Decision making denotes the capacity to show one's judgment in different spheres. In rural areas women get fewer opportunities in decision making process and this is more visible among illiterates and semi-literates so, higher education can help women to get adequate knowledge and participate in decision making process of their families. Hence, in rural areas women's should encourage for higher education to develop their inherent potentialities and talents.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, it can be sum-up that higher education is the key which opens the door of knowledge for the both men and women. Higher Education is the basic need in rural areas where women are lacking behind in educational field

and higher education can be an effective tool for women empowerment to acquire required knowledge of different spheres of life to perform better. So, in rural areas higher education should be given top most priority for achieving women empowerment.

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