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**GRT** **THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WOMEN  
EMPOWERMENT AND EDUCATIONAL  
ACHIEVEMENT OF GIRLS' IN THE STATE OF WEST BENGAL**

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**Abstract:**-It could be predicted that the higher status of women in the region implies higher schooling performance and lower educational inequality. This paper tries to investigate this perceived interlinkage through different dimensions of girls' education in the state of West Bengal. The findings are based on the secondary data given in various government reports, periodicals etc. The main techniques adopted, here, are tabular representation of the data, dimension index and matrices formulation and some elementary level statistical methods. We do not find any unique relationship between women empowerment and girls' education as specified by earlier research rather a complex heterogeneous relationship has been detected for the state of West Bengal where many underdeveloped districts (interms of women wellbeing index and per capita NDDP) performed at par with their developed counterpart. Therefore, it is very necessary to investigate why, despite their economic and social exclusion in less developed regions, the girls' are induced to continue education.

**Keywords:**Women Empowerment and Educational Achievement , techniques adopted , economic .

**INTRODUCTION**

Education is considered as a 'classic variable' regarding women empowerment. Being a major policy instrument, it has the capacity to affect and interact with other variables that could bring change in women's life and help to construct agency of women. That's why education is included as a major indicator of development status of a country along with her per capita gross national product. The cross country statistics regarding educational attainment of girls reveal that in general, the countries with higher GDI have greater educational attainment than those with lower GDI but amongst developing (poor) countries there are considerable variations. The strive for universalization of education has been started in most of the developing countries through various programmes that may have favorable impact on the status of girls' education.

**PROBLEM OF THE STUDY:**

In economic theory, education is regarded as both production and consumption good. As a capital good, education can be used to develop the human resources necessary for economic and social transformation and as a consumer good it offers increased utility to a consumer in terms of increased income, better job opportunities etc. On the other hand, the cost of education comprises of the direct cost (cost of inputs such as school fees, books, school stationeries etc) and the indirect cost (foregone income of the child if he/she does not attend school, opportunity cost of time). However, the decision to invest depends on the parents who often run a cost benefit analysis before the investment. The investment will continue so long as the marginal rate of return to additional schooling exceeds the prevailing cost of schooling. To the parents, the benefits of education mainly include monetary benefits, while the non monetary gains of education are mostly overlooked. These non monetary gains, as we have said earlier, are namely- improvement in nutrition and health of the family members, decrease in child mortality, decrease in fertility that are more pertinent for the female. Schultz (1995) found that in less developed countries, female gains are more in

terms of non market benefits and due to stringent gender relations in labour market, men gains more in term of market benefit. This may produce gender specific schooling demand functions and in this respect household income plays a critical role, particularly for the girls. Garg and Murdoch (1997), in the context of Ghana, explained that even if parents of a low income household wish to invest a given amount on children's education, they may lack the personal resources to do so. Therefore, the children have to compete with their siblings for the resources currently available to their parents. Boys have an additional advantage in this competition if the parents believe that the monetary return on girls' education is far less than that of the boys for that household. In India also, according to general perception, girls education is taken as "watering someone else plant", the above attitude is very much presents in the rural areas. In the macro level, the income status of a country is reflected by per capita GNP; the above discussion provides why lower GNP status necessarily translates into lower education status and higher educational inequality. Now even if income is a strong determining factor there are other two development indicators-education and health indicated by expectancy of life. Parental education has an extremely strong positive influence on girls' school (Psacharopoulos, Arriagada: 1989). Therefore, it could be predicted that the higher value of human development indices and gender development indices implies higher schooling performance and lower educational inequality. This paper tries to investigate this perceived interlinkage through different dimensions of girls' education on the state of West Bengal.

#### **SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY:**

The earlier researches on girls' education establish that women in India are by and large recognized by her reproductive role and traditionally there are conflicts between these too. The conflicts could be summarized as follows:

- Girls should be married as early as possible after puberty;
- She should begot child (preferably male) as early as possible after marriage;
- Education is optional for girls because it yields cost but have no return (if she would get job, her earning will assist her in-laws otherwise she will be at home where education has no role to play);
- Formal schooling is absolutely unnecessary for girls after marriage;
- Education decreases the marriageability of daughter (educated daughter needs more educated groom that means more dowry).

These perceptions are more applicable in underdeveloped region.

But the recent data shows that in the post Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan period the literacy rate and gross enrolment ratio picked up without excluding the girls. The gender parity index of enrolment is also good which, some cases, reverses the historically lagged position of feamles in education sector. The regional disparity regarding the drop out rate is little differentiated according to sex (DISE, 2009-10, 2010-11). This scenario needs to be explored further. This study is an attempt to that direction.

#### **SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS:**

This paper is intended as an introductory exploration of the subject of recent reserve trend in girls' education. It does not seek to comprehensively catalogue or analyse the full spectrum of issues and data that exist in the field of girls, education as this would be impossible within the scope of the paper. The second limitation is that this analysis is purely based on the state of west Bengal and could not be generalized without further research work. It does seek however to perform an initial sweep of the information regarding the relationship between girls education, and development and empowerment of women. It is anticipated that this overview will encourage and signpost further research and inquiry in specific sub-topics related to girls, education.

#### **METHODOLOGY AND STATISTICS USED:**

In this study, no primary survey is conducted. The whole study is developed on the basis of secondary data culled from various state level sources. The main technique of analysis is tabular representation, multivariate tables, formulation of dimension index in line of UNDP formula and matrix formulation.

#### **EDUCATION AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT: THE DISTRICT SCENARIO OF WEST BENGAL:**

West Bengal is 4th most populated state in India with highest density of population. The National Sample Survey Organization has classified West Bengal into four regions, namely- Himalayan, Eastern, Central Plain and Western Plain. The districts falling within the jurisdiction of the regions are described below (box 1).

**Box 1: Region-wise Distribution of Districts in West Bengal**

<b>Himalayan Region:</b>	Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar;
<b>Central Plain:</b>	Kolkata, South 24 Pgs, North 24 Pgs, Howrah, Hooghly and Burdwan;
<b>Eastern Plain:</b>	North Dinajpur, South Dinajpur, Maldah, Birbhum, Nadia and Murshidabad;
<b>Western Plain:</b>	East Midnapur, West Midnapur, Purulia and Bankura.

A convenient way to present the development status of a district is to show its status in respect of Human Development and Gender Development Indices. The government of West Bengal constructed human development index and gender development index for each of the districts for the year 2004 but after 2004, no such publication from the government have come up yet. So we have to construct an index to locate the socio economic position of a district, since our analysis considers rural area, the district Kolkata has been omitted from the analysis.

Firstly, per capita net domestic product of districts is taken as proxy of the districts income status. Our second task is to construct an index which could reflect the status of women in the respective districts. Four important aspects of development; namely- female literacy (%), girls married after 18 years (%), married women reported less than 3rd order of births (%) and sex ratio are selected for the construction of the index. We name the index as “Women Wellbeing Index” which is an unweighted summation of the dimension indices derived from the above four indicators. The value and ranking of the districts according to their income status and women wellbeing index is represented in table 2.

**Table 1: Selected Indicators- Districts of West Bengal**

Districts	Per Capita Net District Domestic Product	Female literacy (%)	Girls married after 18 (%)	Married women reported less than 3 <sup>rd</sup> order birth (%)	Sex Ratio
Darjeeling	30755.74	73.74	74.9	86.7	971
Jalpaiguri	24353.43	66.65	82.5	76.6	954
Cooch Behar	26897.15	69.08	54.2	78.3	942
North Dinajpur	16457.64	53.15	60.9	59	936
South Dinajpur	20203.06	67.81	51.3	82.9	954
Maldah	21720.57	57.84	43.3	68.1	939
Murshidabad	22661.83	63.88	38.6	71.9	957
Birbhum	21232.34	64.07	41.7	80.1	956
Burdwan	33812.38	70.47	60.6	84.3	943
Nadia	24109.78	71.35	57.1	87.6	947
North 24 Pgs	30068.78	81.05	71.1	85.9	949
Hooghly	29111.19	76.95	73.9	89.8	958
Bankura	22183.83	60.44	50.3	85.6	954
Purulia	19073.13	51.29	45.7	77.2	955
East Midnapur	39745.96	71.11	53.1	84.3	960
West Midnapur	22148.27	81.81	59.6	86.6	936
Howrah	30615.77	79.73	67.8	83.4	935
South 24 Pgs	25607.26	72.09	58.8	76.9	949

1. Source: Census 2011, GoI.

2. RCH and Family Welfare Programme, Health on the March, 2010-11, Department of Health and Family Welfare, Government of West Bengal.

3. Statistical Abstract 2009, BAE&S, GoWB.

The women wellbeing index also observed a much skewed pattern ranging from only 0.150 in North Dinajpur to 0.868 in Darjeeling. Darjeeling and Hooghly registered more than 0.800 figures.

**Table 2: Ranking of the Districts: NDDP and Women Wellbeing Index (2011)**

Districts	D1	D2	D3	D4	Women Well-being Index (WWI)	Rank WW
Darjeeling	0.74	0.83	0.90	1.00	0.868	1
Hooghly	0.84	0.80	1.00	0.64	0.820	2
North 24 pgs	0.98	0.74	0.87	0.39	0.745	3
Jalpaiguri	0.50	1.00	0.57	0.53	0.650	4
East Midnapur	0.65	0.33	0.82	0.69	0.623	5
West Midnapur	1.00	0.48	0.90	0.03	0.603	6
Howrah	0.93	0.67	0.79	0.00	0.598	7
Nadia	0.66	0.42	0.93	0.33	0.585	8
Burdwan	0.63	0.50	0.82	0.22	0.543	9
South Dinajpur	0.54	0.29	0.78	0.53	0.535	10
South 24 Pgs	0.68	0.46	0.58	0.39	0.528	11
Bankura	0.30	0.27	0.86	0.53	0.490	12
Birbhum	0.42	0.07	0.69	0.58	0.440	13
Cooch Behar	0.58	0.36	0.63	0.19	0.440	14
Murshidabad	0.41	0.00	0.42	0.61	0.360	15
Purulia	0.00	0.16	0.59	0.56	0.328	16
Maldah	0.21	0.11	0.30	0.11	0.183	17
North Dinajpur	0.06	0.51	0.00	0.03	0.150	18

Source: Computed on the basis of data presented in table 1.  
Now, we will examine the relation between income status (and WWI) vis-à-vis education status of women.

#### GIRLS IN EDUCATION: A DISTRICT WISE COMPARISON-

There are multiple measures regarding educational development. Among them, the most familiar measure is the adult literacy rate (see table 3). As expected, the adult literacy rate for males is greater than that of the females for all of the districts. The extent of variation in literacy rate across the districts is greater for female as opposed to male counterpart.

**Table 3: Educational Performance of Girls vis-à-vis Boys**

Districts	Literacy Rate (%) (excluding 0-6 yrs. population)			Dropout rate in Pry. education	
	Female	Male	GPI of enrolment	Girls	Boys
Darjeeling	73.74	85.94	1.02	31.73	33.62
Jalpaiguri	66.65	80.61	0.96	9.29	9.07
Cooch behar	69.08	81.52	0.96	3.78	3.36
North Dinajpur	53.15	66.65	0.95	22.35	24.30
South Dinajpur	67.81	79.63	0.96	10.10	10.29
Maldah	57.84	67.27	0.99	12.96	16.96

Murshidabad	63.88	71.02	0.99	3.20	7.29
Birbhum	64.07	77.42	0.95	5.97	6.45
Burdwan	70.47	83.44	0.95	4.61	4.44
Nadia	71.35	79.58	0.96	3.84	4.78
North 24 Pgs	81.05	88.66	0.98	0.63	1.92
Hooghly	76.95	87.93	0.97	3.29	5.01
Bankura	60.44	81.00	0.94	7.01	4.72
Purulia	51.29	78.85	0.96	12.48	10.37
East Midnapore	81.81	93.14	0.97	0.91	0.61
West Midnapore	71.11	86.66	0.96	4.58	3.37
Howrah	79.73	87.69	0.98	1.14	2.64
South 24 Pgs	72.09	84.72	1.00	6.66	8.42
<b>Mean</b>	<b>67.90</b>	<b>80.89</b>	<b>0.97</b>	<b>5.14</b>	<b>5.97</b>
<b>Sd. deviation</b>	<b>8.90</b>	<b>7.24</b>	<b>0.02</b>	<b>7.98</b>	<b>8.45</b>

Source: Provisional Population Totals for India, Census of India 2011.

However, the literacy rate does not necessarily associated with formal schooling. It is the enrolment rate that shows schooling performance at entry level. The position of girls' vis-à-vis boys regarding enrolment is depicted by the gender parity index of enrolment. It is a ratio of girls and boys enrolled in a particular class multiplied by 100. If the value of GPI is less than 1 it reflects reductionist position of girls regarding school enrolment and vice versa.

Table 3 exhibits that except Bankura; the Gender Parity Index (GPI) for enrolment is equal or more than 0.95 which indicated good performance in this field. The gender parity index is exactly 1 in South 24 Pgs which experienced no gender discrimination in enrolment and it is more than 1 in Darjeeling district. Overall it could be said that gender discrimination in enrolment is not prominent in West Bengal that indicates parents in West Bengal are need not to be convinced to send their daughters to schools. However, by enrolling children it does not guarantee that the goal of universalization of education will be achieved. It has been observed that poor children who are enrolled could not attend schools regularly for a host of reasons like assisting household work, caring the siblings, working as family labour in agriculture or in family business etc that leads to dropout. Poverty has adverse effect on schooling opportunities, through these factors for all the children, but it is the girls who bear the most (Sengupta, Guha: 2002). So, the dropout rate is expected to be higher for the girls than the boys.

**Table 4: Enrolment in Sec. education, Dropout of girls' vis-à-vis boys and ratio of girls' vis-à-vis boys in MSK in West Bengal.**

Districts	Enrolment in secondary education (%)		Girls Dropped out per '000 boys in Sec. education	Girls per '000 boys in MSKs
	Girls	Boys		
Darjeeling	59.69	58.43	974	980
Jalpaiguri	66.89	59.91	978	1125
Cooch behar	74.71	65.28	1041	1217
North Dinajpur	53.68	54.53	883	1189
South Dinajpur	65.92	64.71	1047	1170
Maldah	59.52	59.20	1032	1340
Murshidabad	65.41	56.37	1000	1332
Birbhum	55.31	61.26	919	1009
Burdwan	54.59	51.49	1018	1141
Nadia	56.00	52.28	1048	1147
North 24 Pgs	59.09	50.08	1025	1573
Hooghly	61.87	51.48	978	1235
Bankura	54.87	65.16	1105	1019
Purulia	46.68	64.12	835	860
East Midnapore	70.29	63.08	1030	1218
West Midnapore	61.00	62.89	955	1087
Howrah	62.14	48.10	972	1326
South 24 Pgs	55.52	47.92	996	1311

Source: Economic Review, 2008-09, Statistical Appendix, pp-203 as per data furnished in the Paschim Banga Rajya Prarambhik Shiksha Mission, Government of West Bengal. Elementary Education in West Bengal – Current Status and Issues retrieved from [atiwb.gov.in/index\\_htm\\_files/education.pdf](http://atiwb.gov.in/index_htm_files/education.pdf) on 05/04/2013.

From table 3, it has been observed that ten out of eighteen districts of West Bengal observed higher dropout rate for the boys than the girls in primary level. Not only in West Bengal, the lesser dropout rate for the girls is also observed in the less developed northern states like Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, as well as their developed counterparts like Gujarat, Karnataka and Kerala. This is a surprising finding and needs further observation.

Earlier we have mentioned that in India the educational attainment of a girl is closely related to her marital and reproductive role as perceived by her parents. Hence, the secondary school enrolment is expected to be lower for the girls. Again, the data exhibits pro girls' figure. In thirteen districts of West Bengal, the girls enrolment in secondary education outnumber boys but in varying degrees. Maldah, South Dinajpur and Darjeeling experience marginal variations (around 1 p.c.), whereas it is more prominent in Howrah, Hooghly, South 24 Pgs (more than 10 p.c.). In Murshidabad, Cooch Behar and North 24 Pgs it is around 9 p.c. The notion of sex distribution of dropout is catch by the indicator of dropout of girls per thousand boys in secondary level. Nine districts including the backward region (backward district in terms of WWI and also in terms of per capita income) have shown that more boys are dropped out than girls from primary to upper primary. On the other hand, the 'advanced region' like Burdwan registered pro boys' figures. The total number of 'missing students' (both boys and girls) from primary to upper primary is highest in South 24 Pgs. Only two districts- Purulia and South Dinajpur recorded figure less than 900. It may be because the total number of boys and girls in the respective grades is low compared to the other districts (most noticeably, Darjeeling-the least populated district).

It is often predicted that opportunity cost of girls' education rises very high, particularly after primary grade so that she could not continue the formal schooling; hence formal education is too rigid to suit the need of her. Thus, it is easy to apprehend that the informal schooling could assist her to continue her study. In table 4 we have depicted how alternative schooling persuades girls' education after primary level. In the year 2002-03, the alternative system of schooling was constructed in the form of SSK (Sishu Sikhsiya Kendras) in West Bengal. MSK (Madhyamik Sikhsiya Kendras) were set up in lines of SSK. Later these programmes were linked with SSA under EGS component. The data shows that it is the females who are benefitted most from this type of alternative schooling. In all the districts, except in Darjeeling and Purulia, girls outnumber boys in MSK. In North 24 Pgs the figure recorded the highest. Now let us turn to our basic question: does the lower GDI position sufficiently explain girls' schooling performance? The next section takes up the issue.

#### RELATION BETWEEN WWI AND PER CAPITA INCOME AND GIRLS' PERFORMANCE IN EDUCATION- THE SCORE CARD OF THE DISTRICTS.

From the state and district level analysis we have found that in education sector, enrolment status of both boys and girls is considerably good for all regions irrespective of their development status. It is retention which is the major problem in schooling of children at the elementary level. However, one of key aspects of the retention status is that it is little differentiated according to sex and in some cases girls register lower dropout than boys. Thus, we considered two indicators relating dropout: Dropout rate for girls' in the primary level of schooling and FMR of dropout in the secondary education. Because of the non-availability of data variable (ii) has been taken as a proxy of dropout of girls in the secondary level.

After selection of indicators, districts are divided into three groups each containing six districts- the high six, the medium six and the low six for each of the selected indicator. Then we have placed the selected indicators relative to their position in per capita income (PCI) and women well-being Index (WWI). This exercise will help us to locate the performance of the districts relative to their socio-economic status. The matrices are given as follows.

**Table 5.1: Matrix relating Per Capita NDDP and Dropout (Girls-Pry.)**

Per Capita NDDP	Dropout (Girls-Pry.)		
	High 6	Medium 6	Low 6
High 6	Darjeeling, North 24 Pgs	Burdwan	Howrah, Hooghly, East Midnapur
Medium 6	Jalpaiguri	Bankura, South 24 Pgs	Nadia, Cooch Behar, Murshidabad
Low 6	South Dinajpur, Maldah, Purulia, North Dinajpur	West Midnapur, Birbhum	



**Table 5.2: Matrix relating WWI and Dropout (Girls-Pry.)**

WWI	Dropout (Girls-Pry.)		
	High 6	Medium 6	Low 6
High 6	Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri	West Midnapur, North 24 pgs	East Midnapur
Medium 6	South Dinajpur	Bankura, Burdwan, South 24 Pgs	Howrah, Hooghly, Nadia
Low 6	North Dinajpur, Purulia, Maldah	Birbhum	Cooch Behar, Murshidabad

**Table 5.3: Matrix relating Per Capita NDDP and FMR of dropout in sec. education**

Per Capita NDDP	Girls Dropped out per '000 boys in Sec. education		
	High 6	Medium 6	Low 6
High 6	Hooghly, East Midnapur	Darjeeling, North 24 Pgs, Burdwan	Howrah
Medium 6	Bankura, Cooch Behar, Nadia	Jalpaiguri, Murshidabad, South 24 Pgs	
Low 6	South Dinajpur, Maldah		North Dinajpur, Purulia, Birbhum, West Midnapur

**Table 5.4: Matrix relating WWI and FMR of dropout in sec. education**

WWI	Girls Dropped out per '000 boys in Sec. education		
	High 6	Medium 6	Low 6
High 6	Hooghly, East Midnapur	Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, North 24 Pgs	West Midnapur
Medium 6	South Dinajpur, Nadia, Bankura	Burdwan, South 24 Pgs	Howrah
Low 6	Cooch Behar, Maldah	Murshidabad	North Dinajpur, Purulia, Birbhum

The relationship between income status and dropout should be negative. The districts with higher level of income should register lower dropout. Similar expectation is applicable for the relationship between WWI and dropout. But for primary level drop out, there are only 9 and 7 districts as cited in tables 5.1 and 5.2 respectively observing the relationship. Most of the districts experienced either upward or downward movement- the maximum deviation is observed for Darjeeling district which despite its superior position in income and wellbeing status, has registered very high dropout rate. On the contrary, Cooch Behar and Murshidabad- the districts among the bottom six in terms of WWI recorded lower dropout. The districts maintain the same tempo also in the secondary level. Purulia and North Dinajpur recorded very high dropout rate for girls in primary; but in the secondary level they are among the lowest scorers in respect of dropout ratio of girls' vis-à-vis boys. It is very surprising because most of the educationally laggard deprived and educationally dying villages are concentrated in the districts of North Dinajpur and Purulia. The other indicators of literacy deprivation such as school infrastructures, indicators pertaining to quality education socio-economic household related variables etc. are also very stark for those districts till 2001(Census2001). Murshidabad, Maldah and North Dinajpur are the three districts whose rural ranks in the literacy level remain in the bottom stratum during the last 60 years (ibid). As a whole we can say that the relationship between poverty, social development and girls' schooling performance become more complex in recent times and there is a dearth need to investigate the specific variables which counts the change.

**CONCLUSION:**

The overall point that we are making is that the relationship between poverty, empowerment and girls' education in West Bengal is heterogeneous in character and it is very necessary to investigate that why, despite their economic and social exclusion in less developed regions, the girls are induced to continue education. However, it is beyond the scope of the study.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

On the basis of observations in the study we recommend the followings:

- i. Financial assistance to the girls living below the poverty level. Programmes like Kanyasrhee may provide a great

help to the girl students.

ii. Improvement of school quality and accessibility so that it reduces the opportunity cost of education to the girls.

iii. Incentive for rural girls who completed elementary education (standard eight).

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