

# Women's Empowerment through Education: A Study of Raniganj in Paschim Bardhaman District, West Bengal

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## ABSTRACT

Women's empowerment can take place through education, which contributes to the social development, economic independence and gender equality of women. This paper examines the complete condition of women's educational empowerment within the area of Raniganj, located in Paschim Bardhaman District of West Bengal, focusing on the accessibility of education, the level of participation in schooling, literacy and the existence of socio-cultural barriers to women's educational empowerment. This study utilized mixed methods research design comprising quantitative methods to gather survey data from 300 females aged 15 to 45 years, as well as qualitative methods involving interviews ( $n=18$ ) and case studies ( $n=10$ ). My research indicated that although there has been a dramatic increase in female literacy and enrolment rates since my study period, females in my sample continue to be disempowered vis-à-vis males because of the existence of multiple socio-economic factors (e.g., early marriage and traditional gender norms). The Kanyashree Scheme, which aims to support women's education through direct financial assistance, as well as community-based government schemes such as Self-Help Groups (SHGs) that are locally run to empower women, have been successful in many cases in retaining girls in educational institutions and supporting their educational empowerment outcomes. However, providing educational opportunities to women alone will not lead to their empowerment unless it is combined with socio-cultural and institutional factors that provide the necessary enabling environment. Finally, this paper highlights the need for integrated policy measures, community engagement and targeted interventions to achieve sustainable educational empowerment of women living in semi-urban industrial areas.

**Keywords:** Women's empowerment, Education, Literacy, Gender equality, Raniganj, West Bengal

Women's empowerment through education and socio-economic progression, enhanced participation in decision making, is considered the catalyst for social change. As per previous studies (Sen, 1999), confirmed that through education, women can attain access to greater employment and earnings opportunities; and they can also become better equipped to challenge patriarchal practices and to have control over their lives both in their families and within their communities. In India, education has been used as an important element of national development plans to decrease gender inequality. However, the benefits from the increase in education for women have not been evenly

spread across various parts of the country and different communities and regions. The number of women who have become literate and the number of women who are now enrolling in schools are both increasing; however, the gap between men's education and women's education remains high, especially in semi-urban and economically disadvantaged regions in India. According to UNESCO (2015), a variety of structural elements, such as poverty, early marriage, gendered division

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of labour, and limited access to institutional support services, continue to impede the ability of women in education in developing countries (p.37). In India, these structural challenges are compounded by the existence of deeply embedded socio-cultural norms that preferentially support male education over female education, especially in working-class/industrialized communities (Desai & Andrist, 2010, p.124).

Rapid urbanisation, labour migration, and diversified economies have been associated with the Raniganj area of West Bengal—an important urban and semi-urban area—because of the coal mining industry in this region. Additionally, Raniganj provides many educational opportunities for women—this area serves as an illustrative example of the empowerment women receive through education. Over the past several decades, several additional educational institutions were built in Raniganj; however, educational access and retention of females in these educational institutions continue to suffer from inequities. Women's and girls' educational experiences are limited by demands of industrial labour, household responsibilities, and economic insecurity (Government of West Bengal, 2020, p. 56). In the context of Raniganj, the present study investigates the many dimensions of women's empowerment through education by using a mixed methods approach (both quantitative and qualitative). Quantitative indicators like female literacy rates, female enrolments and dropout rates reflect measurable educational outcomes, whereas qualitative indicators (family attitudes toward education, community views on education, and individual women's aspirations) demonstrate how education can contribute to a woman's experience of empowerment (Kabeer 1999, p. 437). Empowerment can be understood as more than the capability to attend school, as it is also the ability for a woman to have an informed choice with respect to her life and to take charge of her life, through social, personal, and economic needs.

Women's empowerment encompasses a multitude of aspects: improving women's ability to make choices, and translating that into action to achieve desired outcomes. Academically, "empowerment" is often characterised by an increase in women's and girls' choices and voice as a result of changing the gender power imbalance, allowing women to gain greater

autonomy over their lives and their futures (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation & van Eerdewijk *et al.* 2018, as cited in Organising Concepts of 'Women's Empowerment'). This definition highlights the relationship between empowerment as a process, and an outcome, being embedded within a socio-cultural and institutional context. According to multiple studies; Education improves women's understanding of their rights, as well as increases confidence and political and economic activity (Mondal, 2023). Additionally, through education, women are provided with tools to overcome the barriers to social inclusion, challenge traditional gender theory, and ultimately reach out and take advantage of opportunities that would have been inaccessible to them otherwise. Educated women often demonstrate elevated levels of decision making power in their homes and engagement in the public sphere; thus, indicating that high educational attainment leads to greater autonomy and socio-economic engagement (Mondal, 2023).

This research article provides an important local look at the issue of women and education in a larger sense, creating a framework that can help scholars analyse and develop educational policy in India. By looking at the experiences of women's education as they relate to their social, economic and cultural environment in Raniganj, the present study will bring to light many of the regional disparities likely overlooked in worldwide studies of female educational attainment. The findings of the current research article provide an empirical basis for identifying barriers and opportunities for empowering women through education, as well as developing strategies to address the particular barriers faced by women in Raniganj. The ultimate goal of this research is to provide insights and recommendations to policymakers, national and local educational planners, and civil society organisations involved in building inclusive and equitable systems of education that are focused on gender-based empowerment of women.

## Literature Review

There have been many various studies on how education has helped empower women in West Bengal. One example is from research in Malda District, West Bengal, which showed that women with education will tend not to conform to abusive

customs such as dowry and will instead oppose these customary practices. Educated and economically empowered women are also more likely to oppose traditional sociocultural customs where a woman's autonomy is restricted (Mukhopadhyay, 2006). According to quantitative data from the Siliguri Municipal Corporation conducted in West Bengal, there is a direct correlation between an individual woman's level of education and the woman's socio-economic liberation, as evidenced by increasing levels of influence and recognition within both their home and community context. The three most significant indicators of women's empowerment in the Siliguri Municipal Corporation were determined to be: (1) Ability to get an education (Educational Freedom); (2) Literacy Profile; and (3) Employment Status (Roy, 2023).

Academic research into Self-Help Groups (SHGs) provides evidence that when combined with community-based collective action, formal education leads to the maximum effect on women's social empowerment. In North 24 Parganas District, a study of members of SHGs showed increased decision-making ability based on education, as well as personal transformation to a greater extent in socio-economic areas (Sardar Roy & Chakraborty, 2024). Likewise, studies performed on individuals participating in an SHG in Barrackpore found that there was a positive correlation between higher educational attainment and self-reliance and increased knowledge of rights (Roy & Chakraborty, 2024). Research from the adjacent Birbhum district of India illustrated that the barriers that many women, particularly women from tribal populations, must face to access education create enormous challenges for those women. This study advocates localized approaches to creating culturally relevant pedagogy, as well as culturally diverse interventions to remove systemic barriers (Pal & Mitra, 2024). Additionally, these findings are consistent with broader findings that provide evidence that education-based empowerment of women is not the same throughout all cultures or socioeconomic groups.

Research emphasizes policy instruments and programs as critical components for creating a pathway for girls' educational empowerment. For example, the Kanyashree Prakalpa (conditional cash transfer) initiative in West Bengal aims to help

girls remain in school and subsequently postpone the age of marriage. Kanyashree evaluation studies demonstrate that the program has created opportunities for girls' continued educational participation and enhanced empowerment, particularly in low and middle income and some rural communities, (Ghosh, Tripathi, and Teckchandani 2025); therefore, these types of programs are particularly valuable when addressing socio-economic barriers that are disproportionately experienced by girls and young women. Further, these types of education-based programs can act as key instruments in creating female empowerment.

## **Theoretical Approaches**

### *Feminist Theory*

Feminist theory primarily analyses gender-based inequities within an educational context, emphasising how relationships of power between genders are socially constructed and result in inequity in access to resources, opportunities, and decision-making authority (Nkansah, 2023). In examining the case of Raniganj, feminist theory allows for a thorough examination of the ways that traditional norms, patriarchal expectations and cultural practices shape women's participation and empowerment in education. Feminist standpoint theory, which is a sub-set of feminist theory, further asserts that women who have been marginalised due to socio-economic and cultural structures possess critical perspectives of structural barriers to education (Harding, 1993). Feminist standpoint theory also ensures that women's voices, which are typically omitted in policy dialogues, will be included in the research study.

### *Capability Approach*

Feminist theory has been enhanced by Amartya Sen's Capability Approach, which shifts the idea of education from simply gaining access to a school to what you are capable of doing because you have been educated (Sen, 1999, p. 87). Thus, the approach argues that the empowerment of women can take place through their being offered the opportunity to pursue such goals as becoming literate, obtaining a degree from a higher education institution, having job opportunities and being active participants in their community. When using the capability

approach in Raniganj, it is possible to assess whether the educational initiatives (government programs such as Kanyashree Prakalpa or other local level NGOs) would serve to expand women's capabilities or only increase the number of women enrolled in school with no increase in their ability to act upon those capabilities. The approach indicates that the empowerment of women is achieved through many different aspects of their lives, including personal and social freedoms as well as economic freedom (Sen, 1999, p. 93).

### ***Social Capital Theory***

According to Putnam's (2000) Social Capital Theory, social networks, trust, and engagement with the community promote empowering individuals and communities. In India, there is evidence that women's involvement in the Self-Help Group (SHG) movement, as well as participation in local governance and community educational programmes, has increased the level of education women achieve and provided them with greater social power than prior to joining these organisations (Sardar Roy and Chakraborty, 2024, p.21). By employing the theory in this study, I will look at how peer support from other women who are members of SHGs, as well as collective actions stemming from SHG membership, translate into educational success for women living in Raniganj, West Bengal, India.

### ***Integration of Theories***

This research used a combination of feminist theory, the capability approach and a social capital theory to develop a multidimensional framework that will help identify the various structural, personal and community-level factors influencing women's educational empowerment. Feminist Theory focuses on identifying barriers to women's empowerment based on social and gender hierarchies, while the capability Theory provides a way of evaluating how much education provides substantive freedom for women. The social capital theory contextualises how important were communal networks and support systems to the educational empowerment of women in Raniganj.

As you can see, by looking together at all three theoretical perspectives, you can see how all three work together to create a broader theoretical

perspective on how public policy, social culture and individual agency all play a role in women's educational empowerment. The development of the theory used to develop the design, collect and analyse data enables a comprehensive analysis of women's educational participation and how the quality, access and impact of the education they receive influences their empowerment. By looking through all three theories, we are able to view the case studies, survey results and qualitative interviews as a combined approach, using the ideas behind each theory as a lens to help explain and interpret findings.

### **Research Gap**

Research on women's empowerment through education at the national and state levels has focused on semi-urban industrial areas such as Raniganj in West Burdwan district. The above studies have often focused on enrolment and literacy outcomes without adequately examining how education is transformed into a tangible empowerment experience shaped by industrial labour, mobility, migration and community structures. The present research article attempts to bridge this gap by integrating quantitative indicators with qualitative insights to provide a local and multidimensional analysis of women's educational empowerment in Raniganj.

### **Objectives of the Study**

This research aims to identify how education empowers women in the areas of Raniganj, Paschim Bardhaman District, West Bengal as well as:

- ❑ To understand the current level of women's education through an analysis of literacy rates, enrolment, retention and dropout rates within Raniganj
- ❑ To determine the socio-cultural, economic and infrastructural barriers impacting women's ability to get an education
- ❑ To examine how the attainment of education affects women's empowerment through their participation in economic activities, personal decision making and social involvement
- ❑ To evaluate the various government initiatives and community-based interventions available to enhance women's educational empowerment

including Kanyashree Prakalpa and Self-Help Groups and how effective they have been to date

- ❑ To create actionable recommendations to provide to policymakers, educators and community-based organizations to increase access to educational resources and greater empowerment of women through education

## Research Questions

Examining the goal of women's empowerment, this research paper is based on the following research questions:

- ❑ What is the current status of women's education in Raniganj, including enrollment and dropout rates, course types and modes of study, and literacy rates?
- ❑ What are the socio-economic and infrastructural issues that limit or encourage women's educational opportunities in the region?
- ❑ How does educational empowerment affect the extent of women's autonomy, economic contribution, and social inclusion in Raniganj?
- ❑ How do government initiatives and community programs increase educational opportunities for women?
- ❑ How can women's education be improved in Raniganj?

## Methodology

### Research Design

This research uses an analytical and descriptive design to analyse the relationship between education and women's empowerment in Raniganj, Paschim Bardhaman District, West Bengal. It used a mixed-methods approach that integrates quantitative survey data with qualitative data to measure experiences and outcomes. The methodology used in this research was the use of mixed-method surveys to examine complex social phenomena such as empowerment of women because of the multidimensional aspects of women's economic, social and decision-making capacity as a result of the different contributors to each of these dimensions.

### Study Area

Raniganj is a semi-urban industrial centre located in Paschim Bardhaman District of West Bengal State in India, and has a unique social and economic character that reflects the influence of coal mining on the community through industrial employment and migrant workers. The contextual characteristics of this area make it an appropriate site for the purpose of investigating the ways in which education contributes to empowering women in industrial semi-urban areas where traditional gender roles are impacted by the presence of economic opportunity or resource limitation.

### Sample

The district of Paschim Bardhaman in West Bengal contains Raniganj, an urban area including a semi-urban area and many factories. Urbanisation and industrialisation in Raniganj have created different social structures, but they have also provided direct opportunities for empowering women through education. This research will highlight the ways in which the interactions that take place in this context have been influenced by the empowerment of women through education.

### Sources of Data

Both types of data (primary and secondary) were used for the study. To gather primary data from participants (individuals), an instrument (structured questionnaire) was used, which assessed: (1) level of education, (2) household financial-related decisions, (3) employment status, (4) community involvement level, and (5) personal perception regarding empowerment. Secondary data concerned women's education and empowerment (e.g. government documents) from sources such as reports published by governments, national census information, policy papers written by academic (individual) authors, books written by authors other than oneself, and other reliable online (web) resources.

### Tools of Data Collection

The instrument designed for use in this research consisted of a combination of two types of questions, closed-ended and open-ended. The closed-ended questions provided quantitative data to address the study objectives, while the open-ended questions

allowed the participants to provide their own descriptions and points of view. To strengthen the validity, reliability and clarity of the foundation of the instrument, a small pilot study was conducted prior to the complete data collection; several changes were made based on the responses from the pilot study participants.

**Variables and Measurement**

The education component of the study was treated as an independent variable, and each was classified as one of the three levels of education (primary, secondary and higher secondary and above). The dependent variable of female empowerment was assessed based on the level of education and was measured by three different criteria: decision-makers in the family, financial decision-makers and income/employment creation decision-makers; each was measured by separate instruments using the nominal and ordinal systems as required by social science methodologies.

**Methods of Data Analysis**

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS version 26.0) was the software utilized to analyse quantitative data in terms of how exposed female participants in developing countries, along with women residing within developed nations, experience the same barriers while attempting to achieve social empowerment through financial independence. Demographic characteristics were summarised by reporting descriptive statistics, using frequency distributions (i.e., counts) and percentage of the female population within each country/region, as well as descriptive statistics related to the degree of empowerment through social support systems (i.e., education, occupation, etc.). To assess any correlations between the level of a participant’s education based on the cross-tabulation technique and chi-square tests were performed. The results generated from these statistical analyses were displayed in tabular and graphical formats for further clarity and easier interpretation of results. Qualitative data were thematically analysed to support quantitative findings and provide context to the overall findings. The combination of quantitative and qualitative data provided greater validity to the findings through the integration between the quantitative findings (i.e., trends) and qualitative findings (i.e., participants’ responses).

**Ethical Considerations**

Ethical standards were strictly adhered to throughout the study. All respondents were informed of the purpose of the research project and their informed consent was obtained before participation. Their personal identities and other information were kept confidential. Respondents participating in the project had the right to withdraw from the research project at any time for any reason.

**Limitations of the Study**

Despite the methodological rigor, there are certainly some limitations to the present research work. The findings of the present study are based on a sample of a semi-urban industrial area which may not be generalizable to other regions. Also, self-reported data may have been influenced by social desirability bias. Nevertheless, the present research article will provide valuable insights into the relationship between education and women’s empowerment in the specific context of a region called Raniganj, West Burdwan.

**RESULTS AND ANALYSIS**

**Demographic Profile of the Respondents**

**Table 1:** Demographic Profile of Respondents (n = 300)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age	15–20 years	60	20.0
	21–30 years	110	36.7
	31–40 years	85	28.3
	41 years & above	45	15.0
Education Level	Primary	100	33.3
	Secondary	110	36.7
	Higher Secondary & Above	90	30.0
Marital Status	Married	210	70.0
	Unmarried	90	30.0

*Source:* Field Survey, 2025.

The demographic profile of the 300 female respondents included in this study is shown in Table 1. Most respondents are in the age range of economically and socially active people, meaning it is possible that they have taken part in training, education, etc. Most of the women who answered

have completed at least primary, secondary, and higher secondary schooling or better, making a comparison of women’s empowerment based on education possible. The diversity in respondents’ marital status and occupational distribution also reflects the broad range of socio-economic backgrounds of women living in the Raniganj area.

### Educational Attainment of Respondents

According to the participants’ educational backgrounds, there is a clear downward trend as education levels rise. Many women receive their primary and secondary education, but many fewer have actually completed higher secondary education or higher qualifications. This trend underscores the structural barriers that many women face, including economically disadvantaged circumstances, being married at an early age, and being responsible for household duties, all of which continue to impede their ability to further their education in these semi-urban industrial areas such as Raniganj.

### Education and Household Decision-making

**Table 2:** Education and Household Decision-making

Education Level	Participation in Household Decision-Making (%)
Primary	35
Secondary	50
Higher Secondary & Above	75

*Source: Field Survey, 2025.*

The data presented in Table 2 indicate that there is a positive association between level of educational attainment (i.e., attainment of higher levels of education) and participation in household decision-making by women. Only 35 per cent of women who have attained only primary level of education stated that they are actively involved in household decision-making, while this figure was 50 per cent for women with secondary education (or “secondary schooling”). The proportion of women participating in household decision-making grows very significantly to 75 per cent among women who have attained higher secondary level of education (i.e., higher secondary school) or above.

Chi-square test results for examining how household decisions are made show that higher educational

attainment (relative to lower levels) is statistically significantly associated with increased autonomy and negotiating power for women in their families ( $p < 0.05$ ). Findings from this analysis are in keeping with Sen’s Capability Approach, which has identified education as critical to enabling individual agency.

### Education and Financial Decision-making

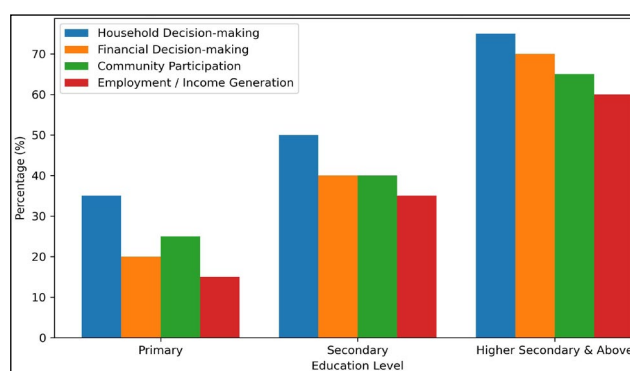
**Table 3:** Education and Financial Decision-making

Education Level	Participation in Financial Decision-making (%)
Primary	20
Secondary	40
Higher Secondary & Above	70

*Source: Field Survey, 2025.*

In examining Table 3 further, data show how educational attainment impacts women’s ability to access and engage with financial decision-making. For example, women with primary level educational attainment approximate 20% of their income from decisions related to finances, whereas women with secondary or higher levels of educational attainment (at least completing High School) estimate their total income from participation in financial decision-making to be close to 40% and 70%, respectively.

From these analyses, chi-square tests confirm that there is a general relationship between educational attainment and women being financially empowered ( $p < 0.01$ ). Consequently, education provides women with greater financial literacy, confidence, and bargaining power so that they can play a larger role in determining how their household spends, saves, and invests.



*Source: Field Survey, 2025.*

**Fig. 1:** Women’s empowerment indicators by education level

As seen in the relationship between women’s level of education and the key indicators of empowerment based on data shown in Fig. 1, the upward trend is consistent across all the dimensions of empowerment as a woman’s educational qualifications increase. The proportions of women participating in household decisions (75%), having financial autonomy (70%), participating in community activities (65%) and being employed or generating income (60%) are much greater for those who have at least completed high school than for those who have only completed primary school. The graphical representation in Fig. 1 supports what we found through the data we analysed; that education significantly increases the power of women in the city of Raniganj.

**Education and Community Participation**

**Table 4:** Education and Community Participation

Education Level	Community Participation (%)
Primary	25
Secondary	40
Higher Secondary & Above	65

*Source:* Field Survey, 2025.

Table 4 analyses the relationship between education and community participation, including involvement in Self-Help Groups, local organisations, and community meetings. The findings reveal that women’s community participation increases with educational attainment. While 25 per cent of women with primary education reported participation in community activities, the proportion rises to 40 per cent among women with secondary education and 65 per cent among those with higher secondary education and above.

There is a statistical significance ( $p < 0.05$ ) between educational attainment and community involvement, meaning higher levels of education provide individuals with greater social consciousness, better communication skills, and increased self-esteem. These results support the notion of social capital theory, which posits that access to education allows for improved collective action and social interaction.

**Education and Employment or Income Generation**

**Table 5:** Education and Employment / Income Generation

Education Level	Employment / Income Generation (%)
Primary	15
Secondary	35
Higher Secondary & Above	60

*Source:* Field Survey, 2025.

Data related to education level and women’s work (or income-producing) status are displayed in Table 5. Among women with a primary level of education, only 15% were working for pay or producing income; among those with a secondary level of education, 35% were working for pay or producing income; and among women who had a higher secondary education or greater, 60% are working for pay or producing income.

Results of the chi-square tests showed that there is a statistically significant association between education level and working for pay or producing income ( $p < 0.01$ ), indicating that (the level of) education increases access to economic opportunities for women. By providing women with greater economic independence, employment increases women’s authority of decision-making and social position within the household and community.

**Overall Impact of Education on Women’s Empowerment**

Through the examination of four indicators of empowerment in Raniganj—household decision-making, financial independence, community participation and working—we can see that education is crucial to women’s ability to be empowered. All the indicators of empowerment show that women who have received an education have greater autonomy, participation and financial independence than those women who were less educated, thus making education an important factor in women’s empowerment in Raniganj. Government-sponsored programs such as Kanyashree Prakalpa, midday meals for school children, free schooling for girls, and scholarships for girls have all helped

women gain greater access to schooling and reduce school drop-out rates. Furthermore, the establishment and support of community-based programs that promote the education of girls such as self-help groups, non-governmental organisations [NGOs] and local awareness campaigns encourages families to keep girls enrolled in school and delay their marriage. However, while numerous programs supporting the education of women exist, many lack sufficient administrative oversight, adequate monitoring and public knowledge of their accessibility and effectiveness, resulting in the need for an improvement in the implementation of these initiatives.

The findings of this research support feminist paradigms, which see education as a means to challenge patriarchal systems, and Sen's Capability Approach to conceptualising empowerment as an increase in substantive freedoms. Further, the results are indicative of the necessity for supportive social and societal contexts to allow women to be able to translate their educational attainment into significant empowerment outcomes.

## DISCUSSION

This study has been able to show through empirical research that there is a strong correlation between the education of women in Raniganj, Paschim Bardhaman District, and their level of empowerment in regards to their social status and economic independence. The study found that women who possess an advanced education, as seen with the various areas of measured empowerment including household decision making, community involvement, and financial autonomy, continue to display a higher level of empowerment than those who do not have advanced education. These findings continue to support the theory presented within the empowerment literature that education serves as a catalyst for women to break down societal and cultural barriers preventing them from achieving their full potential.

From the review of literature related to barriers to girls' education, it is evident that, despite reducing gender disparities in access to educational services, a number of persistent barriers remain that hinder the realisation of 'Education for All'. There are numerous obstacles to education admission and sustainability among women, which include socio-cultural norms,

economic poverty, gender discrimination and lack of institutional backing. For instance, early marriage, household workloads and stereotyped gender roles are factors that prevent girls from accessing and/or maintaining education (Mukhopadhyay, 2006). Besides these, challenges created by poor physical infrastructure and educational approaches that are not contextually specific for these women in tribal/rural settings give rise to additional barriers (Pal & Mitra, 2024). The articles support the argument that to empower women through education, women must be provided with the ability to be able to access education; in addition, supportive social environments and structural policies must be created to ensure ongoing educational empowerment.

The positive relationship between education and bargaining within the household also accords with previous research in West Bengal and elsewhere in India focusing on education as a factor determining intra-household bargaining power (Mukhopadhyay, 2006; Roy, 2023). Educated women are better prepared to express their views, influence family choices and push back against discrimination. This is consistent with feminist sociological theories in which education is considered to challenge patriarchal power relations (within the private sphere).

The research also reveals that education can play an important role in making financial management decisions. Women who have received secondary and higher education are far more engaged with finances and have demonstrated higher levels of confidence, greater financial knowledge, and more independence than those who have not obtained these levels of education. These results are consistent with Sen's Capability Approach, which argues that education can increase women's capabilities by providing them with skills and knowledge to convert into economic and social power (Sen, 1999). However, while these results provide evidence that education is one of several considerations for involvement and participation in the economy, the current policy environment makes it difficult for women to access jobs and have access to inclusive financial systems.

Education plays an important role in enhancing another facet of empowerment, namely community participation. The higher level of community participation enjoyed by women with education

supports social capital theory, which shows that education builds social networks, encourages collective action and facilitates civic engagement (Putnam, 2000). The availability of Self-Help Groups (SHG) and community organisations for women raises the visibility of women in society, while improving their leadership ability and raising their awareness of their rights. There is a clear link between employment, income generation and education, thus demonstrating that women are economically empowered by education. Women with higher education are more likely to be employed in paid jobs, thereby achieving both financial independence and recognition from society. The situation is applicable in Raniganj's semi-urban industrial jurisdiction. While economic opportunities are available to women, their qualification mix, skills gap and gender norms mean many women will not have access to the same economic opportunities available to men.

Women's education in West Bengal has progressed to some extent, however, women continue to fall behind their counterparts throughout India on numerous educational indicators. These findings highlight that while enrolment numbers can demonstrate advancement of women through education, actual employment of women via education depends on their ability to access quality educational institutions, obtaining quality education at those institutions, and receiving socio-cultural acceptance from other family and/or society members.

## CONCLUSION

The research can support three different types of theory, namely feminist theory, the capability approach, and social capital theory; all of which are concerned with the relationship between gender, education, and the empowerment of women). In conclusion, there is a reasonable amount of evidence for the development of women's education in Raniganj; however, the attainment of sustainable empowerment through educational attainment is dependent not only on the removal of sociocultural barriers but also on the removal of economic and institutional barriers. Future research could continue this project by assessing the longitudinal impact of educational initiatives and providing insight into the intersectional effect of education among different

communities within the Paschim Bardhaman District. By focusing on both educational access and the quality of empowerment, policymakers, educators, and community organizations can work together to create a more equitable and inclusive society for women.

Education has greatly enhanced women's ability to exercise authority over members of both their household and their local economy, as noted in the study of Raniganj (Paschim Bardhaman District). Higher levels of education increase the chances that women will engage actively in the family's financial decision-making process, in addition to participating in the community's decision-making process; thus, beyond learning facts through education, education empowers women to put knowledge to good use to have a positive influence on their own lives, their family members, and their community. Education is much more than just information transfer; it also allows women to leverage their knowledge to influence their own lives and those of their families and communities. There are many ways that government agencies and community-based organisations (such as Kanyashree Prakalpa or Self-Help Groups) provide women with access to education, enhance retention of knowledge, and develop skills that would facilitate a woman achieving empowerment through education. It is important to keep in mind that although education is an essential factor in achieving women's empowerment, there are many systemic barriers, such as poverty, early marriage, domestic responsibilities, and lack of employment opportunities, that continue to be a barrier to women fully realising the potential to be equipped with empowering tools through education.

## Recommendations

From the results of this research, here are some recommendations:

1. *Educational measures*: Focus on improving retention and completion rates at the secondary and higher secondary levels of education for girls living in low-income households through policy interventions.
2. *Skill-oriented Programme*: Integration of skill-oriented and vocational education into all educational programmes based on the employment needs of the local industrial

and service sectors to increase women's employment opportunities.

3. *Assistance for Self-Help Groups and Women's Collectives*: The strengthening of self-help groups and community organisations will build social capital and empower educated women to demonstrate their leadership and collective agency.
4. *Integration of Policy and Monitoring*: Government programs like the Kanyashree Prakalpa and *Beti Bachao Beti Padhao* scheme, along with ensuring educational opportunities for women, can accelerate women's empowerment by providing skills and training programs for future employment generation.
5. *Community-Based Awareness Programmes*: Awareness campaigns should be conducted involving important figures in the family and the community to promote the importance of women's education and empowerment.

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