

Educational Attainment and Women Empowerment among Schedule Caste Communities in West Bengal: A Comparative Study of Cooch Behar and Murshidabad Districts

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Abstract: *The present study investigates the nexus between educational attainment and women empowerment among Scheduled Caste (SC) communities in West Bengal, with a specific focus on two contrasting districts—Cooch Behar (Koch Bihar) and Murshidabad. Employing a descriptive-analytical survey design with a multi-stage stratified random sampling technique, the study collected primary data from 200 SC women (100 from each district) through a structured interview schedule and a validated empowerment index. The study examined women's empowerment across four dimensions: social, economic, educational, and political. Statistical analyses, including one-way ANOVA, Pearson correlation, independent samples t-test, and multiple regression, were applied to test three null hypotheses. Results revealed statistically significant differences in empowerment levels across educational attainment groups ($F = 63.29, p < .001$), a strong positive correlation between educational attainment and the composite empowerment index ($r = .693, p < .001$), and a significant predictive influence of educational attainment on decision-making ability ($\beta = .512, t = 7.93, p < .001$). Findings underscore the transformative role of education in dismantling caste-based socio-economic barriers and highlight notable inter-district disparities. The study situates its findings within the framework of constitutional provisions (Articles 14, 15, 17, 21, 46), the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act 1989 (amended 2015, 2018), and state welfare programmes including Kanyashree Prakalpa, Rupashree Prakalpa, and Sabooj Sathi, to recommend context-specific policy interventions for accelerating SC women's empowerment in West Bengal.*

Keywords: Educational attainment; Women empowerment; Scheduled Caste; West Bengal; Cooch Behar; Murshidabad; Decision-making; Social empowerment; Kanyashree; Caste discrimination; Constitutional provisions; SC/ST Act