

Family Related Issues and Decision Making Pattern of the Rural Women in Haora District: Some Observations

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Abstract : *Family is very important for examining the status of women in a society. Traditionally a woman's sphere of operation is the family where she can involve herself and plays most of her roles as mother, as wife and sometimes as a breadwinner and in the decision making process in various household matters. Women are traditionally less involved in decision making at all levels. This paper is an attempt to highlight how much freedom of mobility, freedom of expression, freedom of control over resources and decision making power the rural women are enjoying in the study area. The Relationship between education and these family related issues is analyzed clearly. These indicators have a great significance in influencing the quality of life of the rural women and their status in the society.*

Key words: *Family, Freedom of mobility, Freedom of expression, Decision making pattern*

Introduction

The family can be recognized as social groups whose members live in a common residence, work for economic cooperation and do biological reproduction. Sociologists and anthropologists define it in terms of generations living together under the same roof. Family can also be defined on the basis of the types of relations and saving the income together, Criterion of land holdings have also been mentioned as a basis for family. Technically the family is defined as a group of persons united by the ties of marriage, blood or adoption constituting a single household, interacting with each other in their respective social positions of husbands and wife, mother and father, son and daughter, brother and sister, who share a common culture (Jehangir, 1991, 98).

According to Maciver family is a group defined by a sex relationship which is sufficiently precise and enduring to provide for the procreation and upbringing of children (Sachdeva, 1999, 285).

Family is very important for examining the status of women in a society. Family structure differs from one society to another, from one community to another. Rural–urban differences are also found even within the same country. In every society classification of family is possible in terms of the functions they perform, types of kinship relations and number of generations living

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together. While every family has to do some functions, it is the kinship relations and number of generations living together that determine the type of family structure (Jehangir, 1991, 99–100).

In a family differential roles are specified for men and women. Man is perceived as the main breadwinner whereas the main event in a woman's life is supposed to be marriage. Daughters are differently brought up than sons in a family under the process of socialization (Sengupta, 2000, 69, 79).

Women are traditionally less involved in decision making at all levels. Women should be given equal status and equal power to the major functions of the family so that they can rear up their children in a better way and can run the family smoothly. Low familial decision making power in their families regarding the education and marriage of their children is generally possessed by the women (Jain and Akhtar, 2018, 50).

Mahmood has stated that women's involvement in domestic decision making is recognized as a distinct aspect of their autonomy. Generally women with greater freedom to go outside home alone are also more likely to participate in domestic decisions (Mahmood, 2002, 121).

From the above literature review it can be stated that women are vested with major responsibility of household chores and they are defined in terms of their child bearing and familial responsibilities including agricultural work and livestock maintenance. Women are confined mainly within the households as restraints are imposed upon their visits. Low rate of literacy is regarded as the major cause of their lesser communication with the outside world. Women are prohibited from giving their ideas regarding household matters and they are forced to obey the instructions of their male counterparts. Poverty, lack of financial resources, son preference, unpleasant home and environmental conditions are the main causes of their educational deprivation. Previously many research works have been done by Sociologists, Geographers, Economists and Anthropologists on these issues but this study is entirely based on the primary survey in which the data are collected freshly by the researcher for the first time for the selected sample villages in the Haora district.

The goal of the present paper is to highlight the relation of the selected family related issues of rural women with their level of education and also to evaluate the religion and caste wise differences of their degree of freedom in Haora district.

Study Area

The district Haora has an old settlement in West Bengal and has diversified features of demography, social, cultural and also many other aspects. Heterogeneous groups of women are available here coming from all communities. It is also close to the mega city Kolkata. The present research work is a micro level study. So Haora has been selected here as the study unit. It is located within 22° 122 303 North to 22° 462 553 North of the parallels of latitude and 8°222 103 East to 87° 502 453 East of the longitude. Haora is situated in the southern part of West Bengal.

It has 14 C.D. Blocks among which 13 blocks have been studied. According to the 2011 census, the total rural population of Haora is about 1,775,885 among which male population is 9,09,519 and the female population is 8,66,366. Rural Scheduled Caste female Population is 3,51,898 and rural Scheduled Tribe female population is 7333. Male literacy rate is 86.95% and female literacy rate is 79.43%. in Haora according to 2011 census.

Objectives of the Study

Major objectives of the study are as follows

1. Evaluation of religion and caste wise differences of degree of freedom of the rural women.
2. Assessment of the relationship of freedom of expression, freedom of mobility, economic freedom and decision making pattern with the average years of schooling.

Methodology

The methodology for the present study includes the identification of the focus group i.e. the rural married women and selection of the Sample villages with Multi Stage Random Sampling method for the present study. The district has 14 Community Development Blocks among which 13 rural blocks have been taken into consideration. Two villages have been selected randomly from each block with the help of Random Table. Thus 26 villages have been surveyed and 1984 samples (Table-1 and Fig. 1) have been taken for the study. Then reconnaissance of the villages with the help of pilot survey was carried out. During the pilot survey a representative random sample of about 20% was conducted. From each village 10% of total rural women have been taken into consideration. Sample women were grouped on the basis of various criteria like income, age, education etc. keeping in mind the prevailing socio-economic conditions. Collection of the primary data through the field survey conducted between November 2014 to February 2017 in the selected sample villages. Collection of the data from the rural married women from all caste and religious groups in the Haora district on the basis of standard questionnaire. Focused and in-depth interviews were conducted to generate qualitative data. Both qualitative and quantitative data have been collected. Local governing body i.e. Gram Panchayat and Government officials were also questioned to gather additional data. Group discussion with the focus group to know the details about the selected parameters has been conducted. Collection of the primary data, tabulation and analysis of the data according to research needs has been done. Cartographic and statistical application to represent the data through diagrams has been arranged to get the result. For the analysis of the data. Statistical methods like Pearson's Correlation has also been done for correlating the data This method has been used to correlate bi-variant data. Bi-variant analysis and descriptive statistics have been done by using SPSS software. Location of the villages have been shown within maps with the help of ArcGIS software. Pie diagrams, Bar graphs and have been made in MS Excel. The consistency of the primary data was checked before analysis. These data were processed and tabulated with a personal computer.

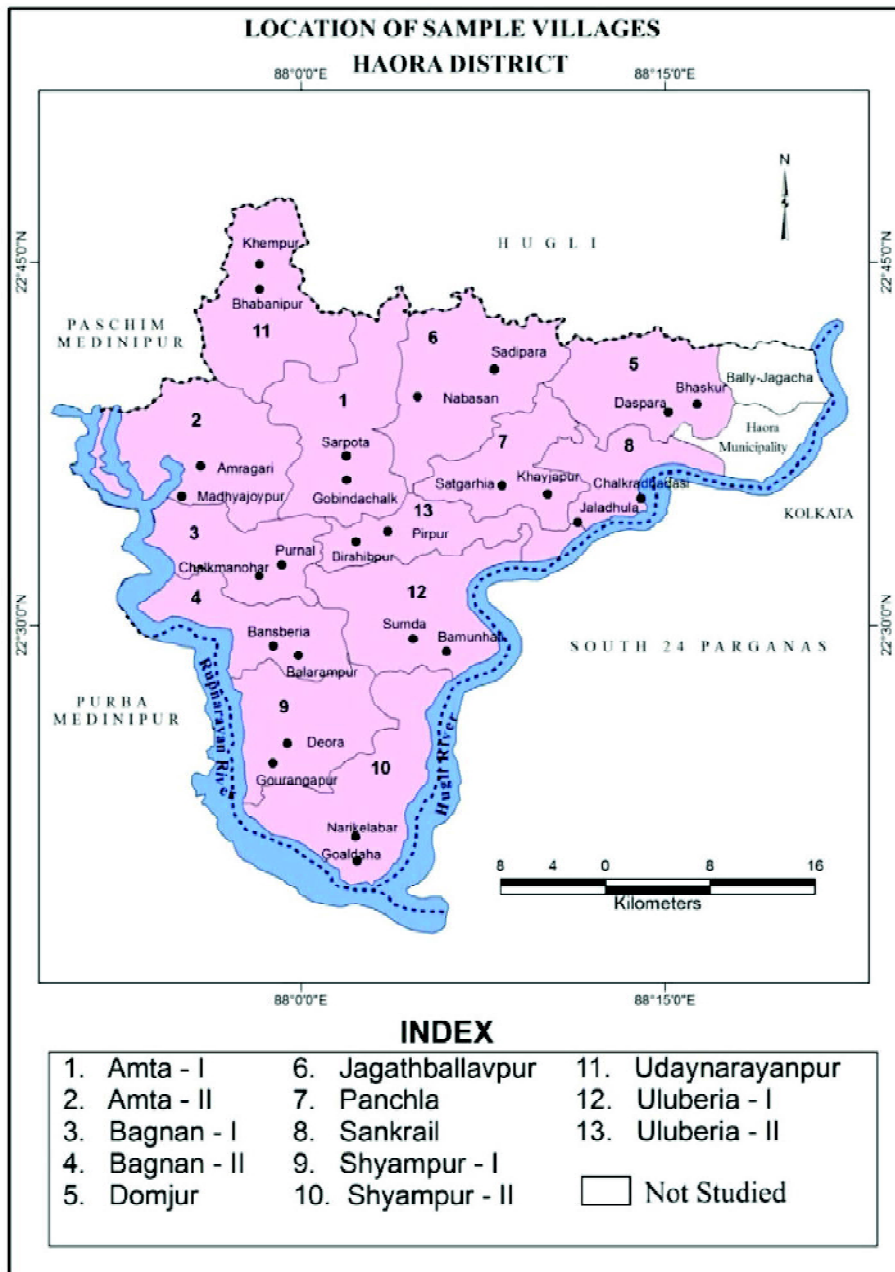


Fig. 1: Location of the Sample Villages

Source: Census of India, 2011, West Bengal, Haora

Table 1: Sample design for the study area

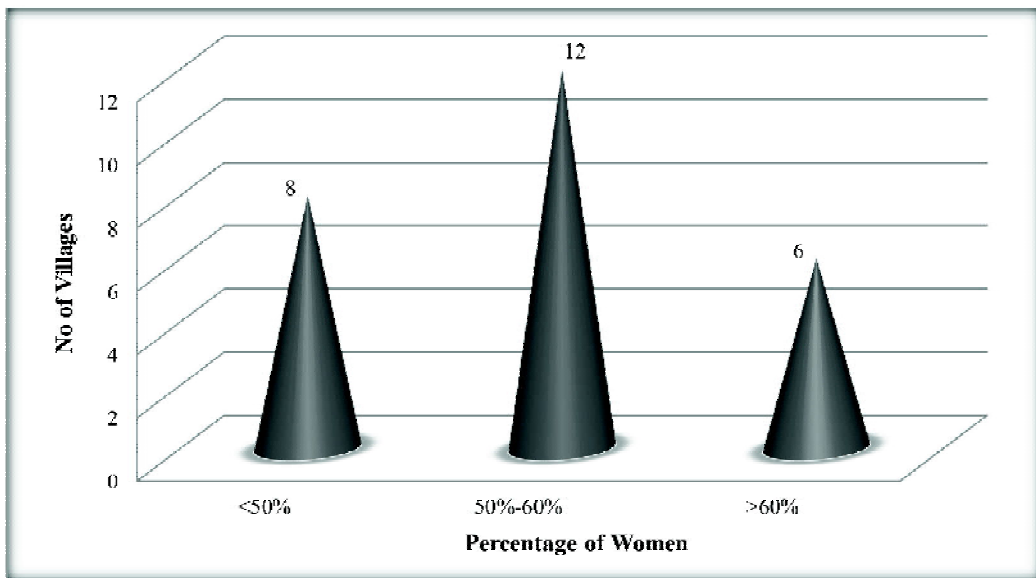
Universe	Sample Unit	Sample Size
Rural Women in Haora	26 Villages	1984 rural women in the selected villages

Differential Role Played by the Women in the Family

Freedom of Mobility

In a family differential roles are specified for men and women. Man is perceived as the main breadwinner whereas the main event in a woman's life is supposed to be marriage. Daughters are differently brought up than sons in a family under the process of socialization (Sengupta, 2000, '69, '79).

Women with greater freedom to go outside home alone or have greater freedom of mobility are also more likely to participate in domestic decisions (Mahmood, 2002, 121). Freedom of mobility can bring better quality of life for rural women. Economic freedom and high level of literacy can bring them freedom of mobility and they can enjoy moving independently to different places without depending on their husbands or sons.

**Fig .2: Freedom of Mobility**

According to Fig. 2 rural women in the study area have limited freedom of mobility. 50%–60% surveyed women in 12 villages have expressed their views that they can travel without any

escort to market, health centre, relatives house, fair and friends home. Whereas $>60\%$ women only in 6 villages and $<50\%$ women in 8 villages enjoy freedom of mobility. So the diagram reflects that low level of literacy and low level of economic freedom are the main causes for the low level of mobility of the rural women in the study area. During the survey they told to the author *"We are not enough literate and we do not earn money so we have to depend on our husbands or sons to go anywhere or to take any decisions."*

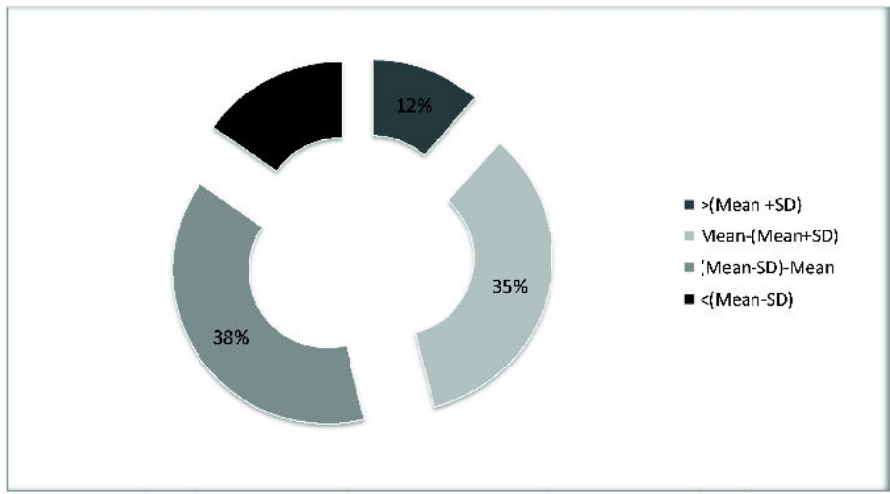


Fig.3

The descriptive statistics (Fig.3) has the minimum value 42.05 and maximum value is 78.79. Mean value is 56.22. Standard Deviation is 9.89. High range of data is showing that disparities prevail regarding freedom of mobility among the sample villages. The level of literacy varies among the villages and among different religions and castes, disparity also prevails among the women. If the majority of the women get opportunities for higher education, most of them will be able to enjoy the freedom of mobility also. High level of literacy and employment facilities can bring them freedom of mobility and they can enjoy a good quality of life. In 12% villages more than 70% women and in 38% villages more than 46% women (Fig. 3) have enjoyed freedom of mobility in the study area.

Freedom of Expression

Freedom of expression can influence the quality of life of rural women. Out of 26 surveyed villages 50% to 70% women in 12 villages and less than 50% women in 11 villages have enjoyed such freedom.(Fig. 4). Most of the women in the study area do not enjoy much freedom of expression due to their lack of economic freedom and thus they are not able to take part in the decision making process in the family matters also. Primary survey shows that $>70\%$ women only in 5 villages enjoy such freedom which reflects poor quality of life of the rural women.

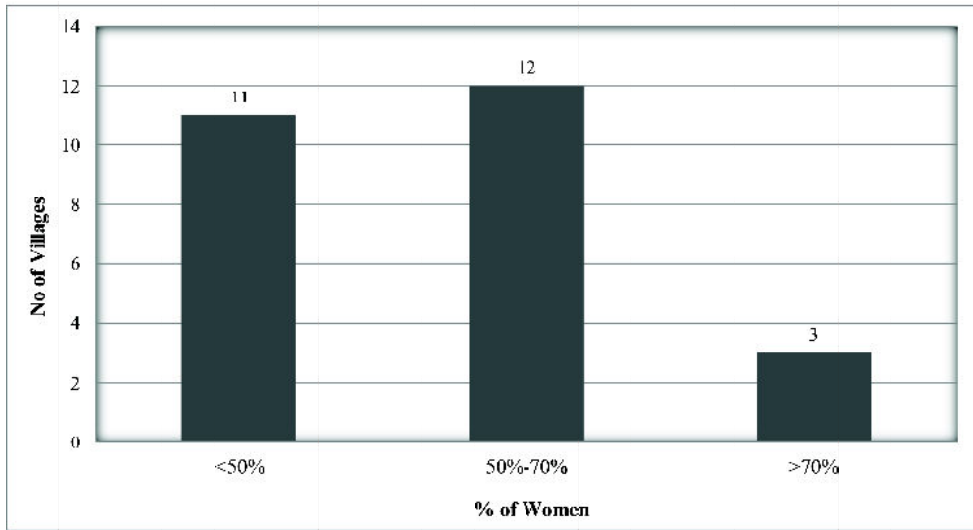


Fig.4: Freedom of Expression

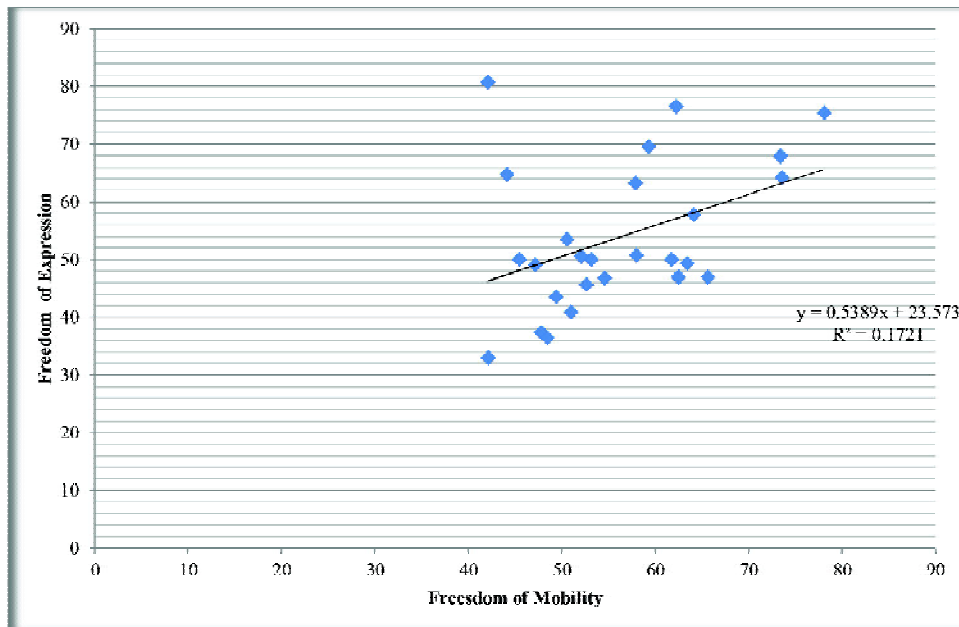


Fig.5: Scatter Diagram

The Scatter Diagram (Fig.5) is showing the correlation between the freedom of expression and freedom of mobility. These two variables are showing positive correlation. Freedom of

expression depends on the freedom of mobility. If a woman has the freedom of mobility she should have freedom of expression which can improve her quality of life. Thus she can participate in the decision making process in the family and in society.

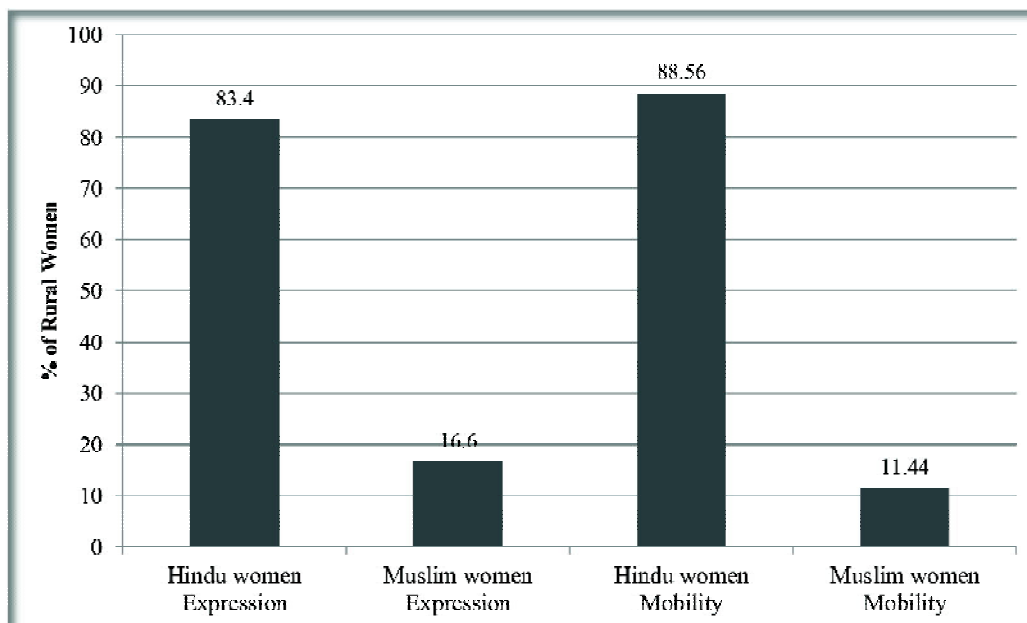


Fig. 6: Freedom of Mobility and Freedom of Expression according to religion

Freedom of Mobility and Freedom of Expression According to Religion

The present study also highlights the religion and caste wise variation of freedom of expression and freedom of mobility with the help of bar diagrams. There is a difference regarding freedom of expression and freedom of mobility among different religions according to Fig.6. Primary survey reveals that in all the villages Hindu women enjoy much freedom of expression and mobility than the Muslim women. The Muslim women are comparatively less educated than the Hindu women in the study area. Thus rural women belonging to the Hindu religion have better quality of life regarding the freedom of expression and mobility. In a group discussion the Muslim women have told to the author *“In our Muslim society most of the girls are not encouraged to go to school and they are forced to marry at younger age, so they have to depend on their husbands or sons for their whole life, they never participate in the decision making process in their family matters.”*

Fig.7 is showing that in the study area 81.38% General caste women and 18.62% women of SC and ST category enjoy such freedom. Regarding freedom of mobility there is not much difference between the General caste women and SC and ST category women.

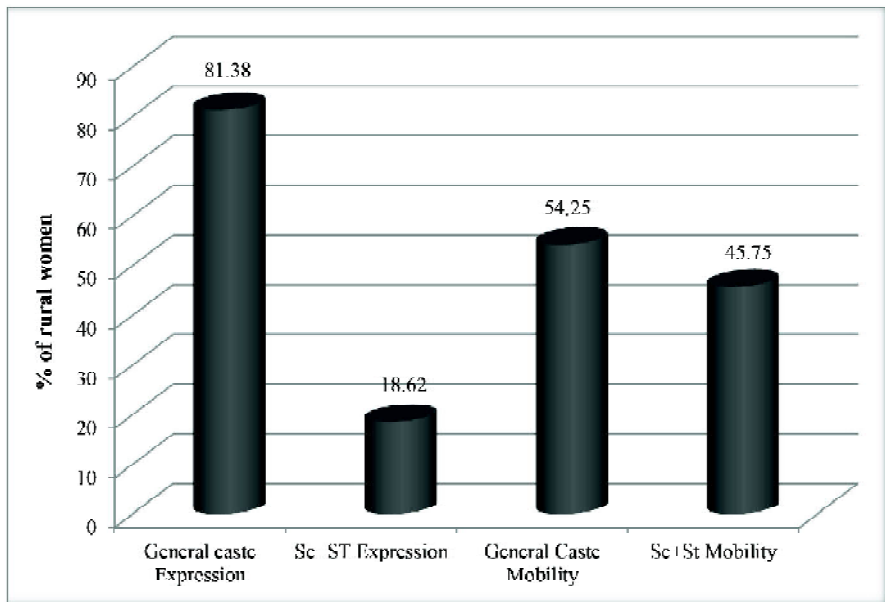


Fig.7: Freedom of Mobility and Freedom of Expression according to caste

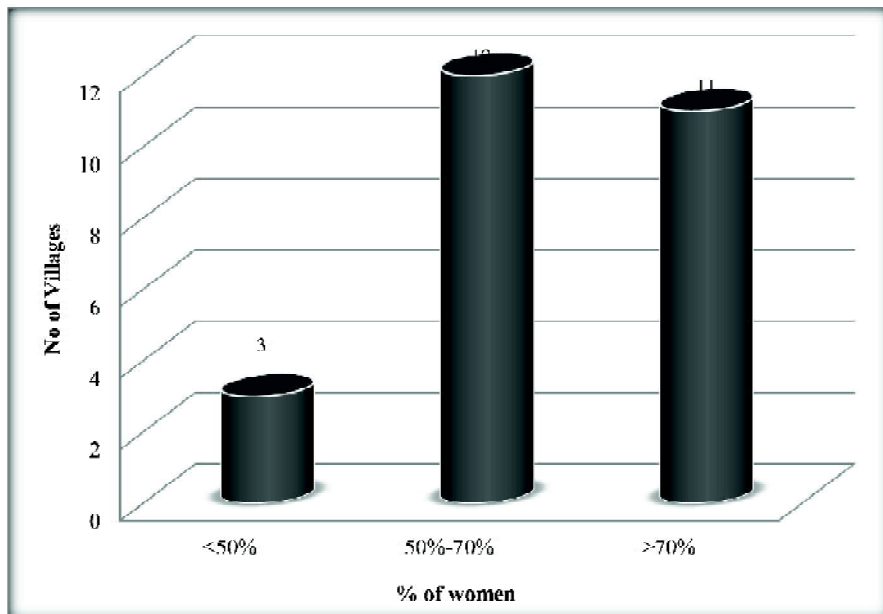


Fig. 8: Preference for Son (% of Rural women)

Preference For Son

In most Indian families girls are not welcome even by their mother when they are born. They lament that a son could have been a real asset for the family. Upbringing of girls is regarded as an expensive affair in Indian families. It is believed that girls get married off and evolve her identity according to the demands of the groom's family and the groom (Bhattacharyya, 2013).

In the study area more than 70% women in 11 villages and 50%–70% women in 12 villages (Fig. 8) have preferences for sons for inheritance, support in old age, and for the financial aspects. The attitude of rural women towards the son preference can be shaped by social, economic and psychological factors.

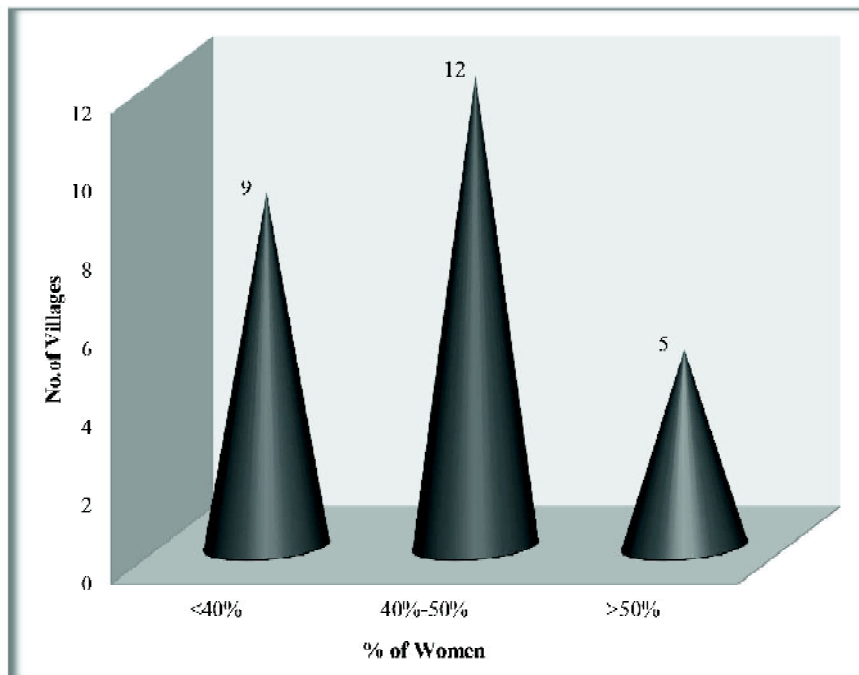


Fig. 9 : Access and Control over resources

Fig. 9 is showing the access and control over economic resources of the rural women including their freedom to use household resources. Only in 5 villages more than 50% women and 40%–50% women in 12 villages have economic freedom in the study area.

Decision Making Pattern

Women are traditionally less involved in decision making at all levels. Their important role is not recognized and therefore their opinions are still not accepted in decision-making (Jain and Akhtar, 2018, 43).

Women should be given equal status and equal power to the major functions of the family so that they can rear up their children in a better way and can run the family smoothly. Low familial decision making power in their families regarding the education and marriage of their children is generally possessed by the women (Jain and Akhtar, 2018, 50).

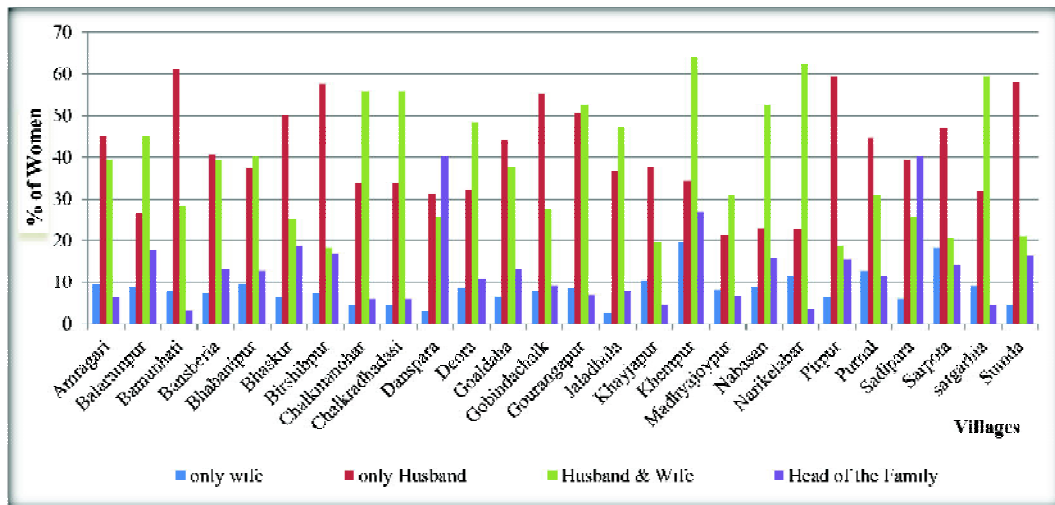


Fig. 10: Decision Making Pattern

According to the Fig. 10 in Madhyajoypur village about 72.13% women have decision making authority whereas in Pirpur the percentage falls to 25%. More than 50% women only in 9 villages

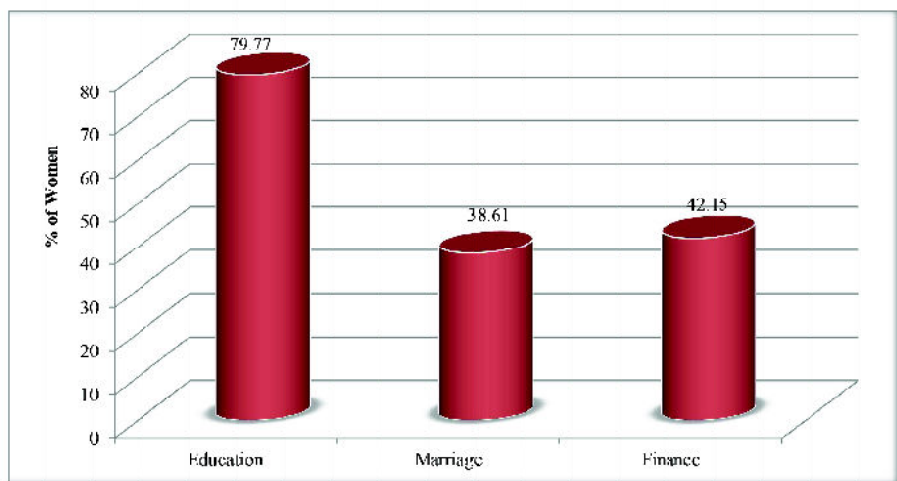


Fig. 11: Nature of decision taken by Women

have decision making power in the family. In fewer cases women are the sole authority of taking familial decisions whose husbands stay out of their home. But in most of the families husbands are the sole authority of taking decisions in the study area.

Fig. 11 is showing a definite pattern regarding decision making by the rural women. Most of the rural women (79.77%) are involved in taking decisions of the education of their children. 38.01% women can take decisions regarding marriage and 42.15% women can involve in taking decisions regarding financial matter.

Mahmood has stated that women's involvement in domestic decision making is recognized as a distinct aspect of their autonomy. Generally women with greater freedom to go outside home alone are also more likely to participate in domestic decisions (Mahmood, 2002, 121).

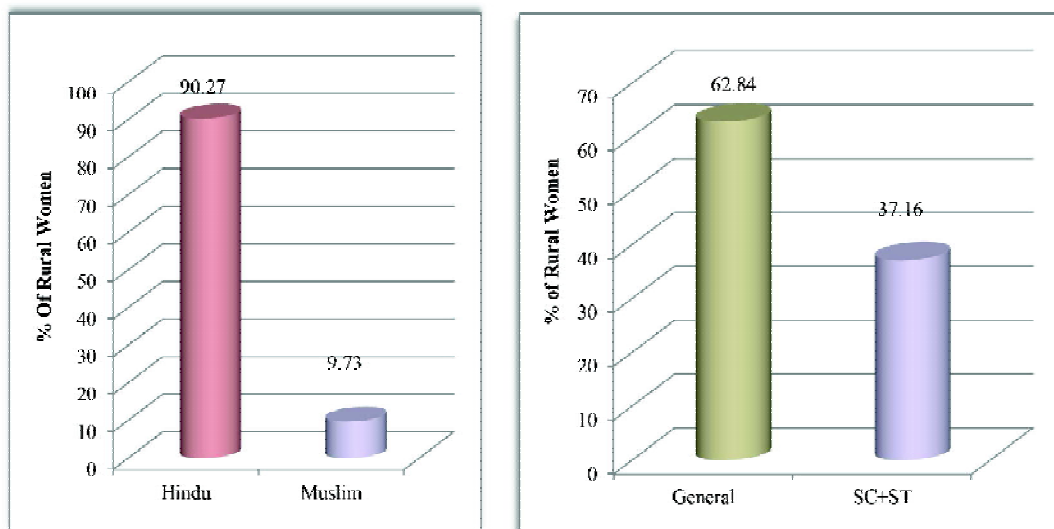


Fig.12: Decision Making among Religious Communities and Castes

Fig. 12 is showing that regarding decision making authority, Hindu women are at an advantageous position than the Muslim women. Similarly women belonging to the general caste have much more power of taking decisions than the women belonging to the lower caste. Among the respondents 90.27% Hindu women have such authority whereas only 9.73% Muslim women can take part in the decision making process. 62.84% Hindu women and 37.16% SC and ST women have such decision making authority in the study area.

It is being reflected from Table - 5 that there is a positive relationship between education and freedom of mobility, Freedom of Expression, Economic freedom and Participation in decision making process. Such a relation has been justified by Pearson's Correlation Coefficients. Generally

women with higher levels of education have more freedom of action in the family that can improve their quality of life.

Table 5 : Pearson's Correlation

	Freedom of Mobility	Freedom of Expression	Economic Freedom	Participation in Decision Making Process
Education (Average Years of Schooling)	+0.909	+0.917	+0.857	+0.600

Source: Compiled by the Author

Significant at 0.01 level

Major Findings

Son preference by the rural women is governed by social and psychological factors. Freedom of mobility, freedom of expression, economic freedom and decision making power depend on education of the rural women. In most of the families husbands or head of the family are the sole decision making authority. Women are not allowed to be involved in taking decisions for major purchases for the family. In all the villages Hindu Women are enjoying more freedom of speech, freedom of mobility and have more control over economic resources than the Muslim women. Similarly in all the villages, General Caste women are enjoying better quality of life regarding family related issues and decision making patterns than the SC and ST women in the study area.

Conclusions

The present paper is an attempt to examine the family related issues like freedom of mobility , freedom of expression, economic freedom, son preference, nature and decision making pattern of the rural women in Haora district. Lack of freedom of mobility, lack of expression, lack of right to give opinion in domestic matters and lack of decision making power have brought poor quality of life and poor social status for the rural women. As the vulnerable part of the Indian population, women empowerment should be prioritized to achieve sustainable development in the society. Women are the potential source for developing the rural economy and play an important role in economic and social development.

Suggestions

Rural women folk are an integral and valuable part of the population in India. So a few visions can be set up for 2030 for their development. Gender equality should be ensured with regard to access over basic resources. Rate of literacy and average years of schooling for the women should be increased to improve their quality of life. Freedom of mobility, freedom of expression should be enhanced by ensuring economic empowerment of women by 2030. Safe ,secure and positive environment for women inside and outside their family should be ensured.

Gender based violence and discrimination within the family should be eliminated. Religion wise and caste wise discrimination regarding the freedom of rural women should be minimized. Above all social and economic inclusion of rural women should be ensured for promoting gender equality and for sustainable development.

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