



Rural Scheduled Caste Women's Autonomy in Household Decision making: A study of Dinhata sub-division of Koch Bihar District of West Bengal

BISWAJIT DAS

Research Scholar (UGC-SRF), Department of Geography and Applied Geography, University of North Bengal

PROF. SUSHMA ROHATGI

Professor, Department of Geography and Applied Geography, University of North Bengal

Abstract:

Autonomy is the capacity to make an uncoerced decision and women's autonomy means the freedom of the women of making any decision. Gender disparity in household decision making is a common phenomenon in developing countries like India. In the 21st century, women could not take a decision freely by their own in most of the household in India. The main focus of the study is to observed the participation of the rural scheduled caste women in household decision making process and discuss the factors that affects the decision-making process of the women. The study is based on the primary survey in the Dinhata Sub-division of Koch Bihar District. Stratified random sampling technique has been adopted for collecting the data through a scheduled questionnaire and 5 percent village and 2 percent household from each selected village have been surveyed. The study indicts that the household decision making is depends on the age, level of educational attainment and income level of the women although long run decision is taken by their husband or male member of the family.

Keywords: *Autonomy, Decision Making, Long Run Decision, Short Run Decision*

1. Introduction

Autonomy is the ability to obtain information and make decisions about one's own concerns. It facilitates access to material resources such as food, land, income and other forms of wealth, and social resources such as knowledge, power, prestige within the family and community (Acharya et al., 2010). Female autonomy in simple terms indicates the decision-making power of the women within the household relative to their husbands' (Banerjee and Roy, 2015). Women's autonomy in household decision making is extremely important as an indicator of women's empowerment. In developing countries women are looked upon as the potential mothers and homemakers. A woman plays a vital role on the well being of a family. A decision-making power of women is the most important factor for the welfare of their family (Safilios, 1983). The evidences from other developing countries show that women's age and family structure are the strongest determinants of women's authority in decision making (Sathar, 2000). The socio-cultural context conditions the relationship of women's individual-level characteristics to decision making, and autonomy is a key intervening mediator between women's status and reproductive outcomes. Autonomy also affects women's decision-making processes. Population and development programmes are most effective when steps have simultaneously been taken to improve the status of women in the decision-making process (Dyson, 1983). Women often have unequal access to food, education, and health care, limited opportunities to earn incomes, restricted access to, and control over, productive resources, and very few effective legal rights (Empowerment for Nepal's Most Disadvantaged Women, 2004).

The household is a crucial unit for consumption and labour supply decisions in the rural environment. Rural household decisions are made in the light of social and economic changes and are normally

guided by the family's well-being and economic status. Women decision making power is limited to the patriarchal ideology especially in rural societies (Sultana, 2011). The Dinhata sub-division is also not exceptional here the decisions are also dependent on the characteristics of the household, for example, age and gender, educational attainment, income level and farming experience, knowledge and skills. Decision-making processes involve household members through negotiation, and balancing decisions between work for income and self-consumption (Acharya et al., 2010).

2. Statement of the Problem

In the most parts of India, women commonly have less power and autonomy than men in making decisions about their own health care and various social and economic matter of their household. Women in the Dinhata are not exceptional. They are illiterate and less educated than male, female literacy rate of the Sub-division is 70.23 percent. Female work participation rate of is only 8.57 percent. As women's autonomy in decision making is mainly associated with her age, education and income level, so their decision-making power obviously affected. The study has attempted to see the present condition of scheduled caste women in terms of decision making.

3. Objectives

1. To study the impact of education on household decision making of the rural scheduled caste women.
2. To study the impact of income and age on household decision making.

4. Location of the study area

The location of the study is Dinhata Sub-division of Koch Bihar District of west Bengal. It is one of the five sub-division of the district. The Sub-division Dinhata-II block is located in the south eastern part of Koch Bihar District. The sub-division has three blocks namely Dinhata I, Dinhata II and Sitai block. The sub-division surrounded by Bangladesh from two sides southern and eastern, Cooch Behar Sadar sub-division and Alipurduar district in the north. The latitudinal extension of the sub-division is 25°58' north to 26°13' north and longitudinal extension of the block is 89°16' east to 89°40' east.

5. Methodology

In this study, household decision-making processes are examined with a primary focus on gender roles in the context which is based on the socio-economic characteristics of the people. In the study emphasis has given to Age, Educational attainment, Income level and Occupation of the respondents among the various socio-economic characteristics as independent variables and 18 other variables has been selected as a household decision making indicators as dependent variable. Total 18 indicators are divided in to two category, 9 indicators are for Short Run Decision and another 9 indicators for Long Run Decision. **Short Run Decision** means that the impact of the household decision is for a short period of time. **Long Run Decision** means that the impact of the decision if working and beneficiary for the family in long run means future. The data has been collected from field by a scheduled questionnaire. The stratified random sampling has been used, firstly 5 percent villages have been selected then 2 percent scheduled caste household has been surveyed from each selected villages. The total sample size is 136.

Sl. No	Indicator's for household decision making	Category
1	Making monthly budget	Short Run Decision (SRD)
2	Expenditure in food items	
3	Purchases of clothes	
4	Expenditure in entertainment	
5	Making everyday meal	
6	Selection of crops for cultivation	
7	Fertilizers used	

8	Crops storage	Long Run Decision (LRD)
9	Expenditure in children's education	
10	Investment in real estate	
11	Decision on saving money	
12	Selection of school for children's	
13	Children occupation	
14	Buying and selling of livestock	
15	Decision about children's marriage	
16	Debt and repayment	
17	No. of child birth	
18	Regarding to vote cast	

6. Statistical Analysis

The present study is carried out percentage analysis and the Multinomial logistic regression analysis by using SPSS version 20. showing the odds ratio for overall Decision Making uses by the background variable various decision making indicators demarcated as the respondent variable and the other variables are as follows- age, educational attainment, monthly income level and occupation of the respondents. The dependent variable Short Run Decision (SRD) and Long Run Decision (LRD) using recorded in dichotomous in nature (1 & 2), '1' means Male and '2' means Female of making decision in the household. All the short run and long run decision making indicator are combined together to find out the overall decision making. Then the overall decision-making indicators are compared with the four independents variable like education, occupation, income and age. The reference categories were chosen the first level of each independent variable and significance level to consider in 2 levels like 99%, and 95%.

7. Result and Discussion:

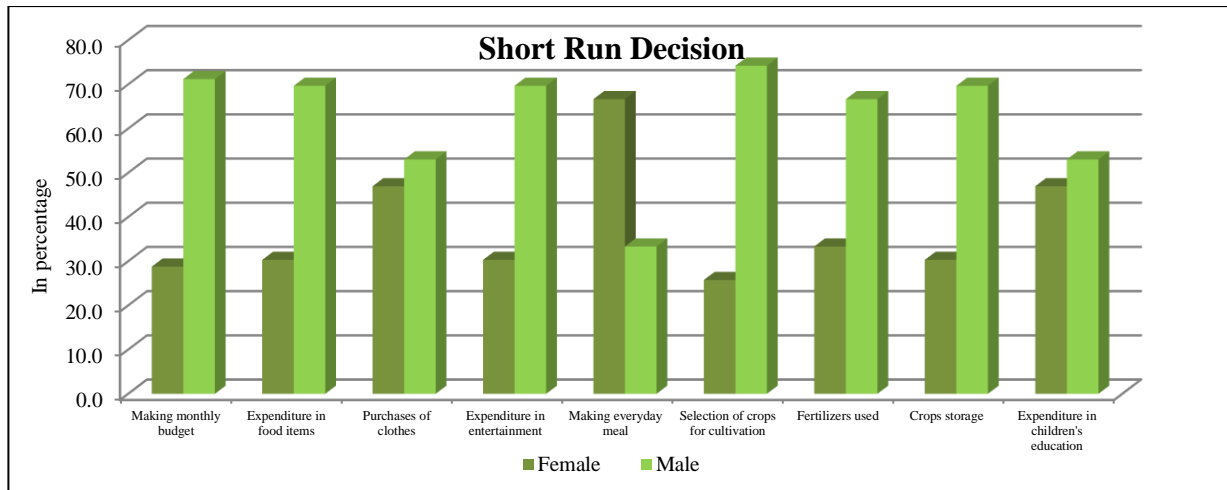


Figure 1: Short Run Decision of the respondents

From the figure 1 it is observed that except making every day meal in all the other decision male participation are more than the female in the household. The women are involved in every decision making process of their household but their participation and final outcome of the decision are less. In case of making monthly budget only 28.80 percent women decision has been granted on the other hand 71.20 percent cases men take the decision. Similarly in every case of the short run decision making process the male members are take decision more without any concern of the female member of the household. The female participation is high in making every day meal (66.70 percent) followed by purchasing clothes (47.00 percent), expenditure in children's education (47.00 percent) and lowest female participation observed in selection of crop for cultivation (25.80 percent) although most of the agricultural works are done by the females. After observing the overall short run decision making

(figure 4) it is found that the female participation in short run decision making is less than the male. Where male participation is 62.29 percent and female participation is only 37.71 percent.

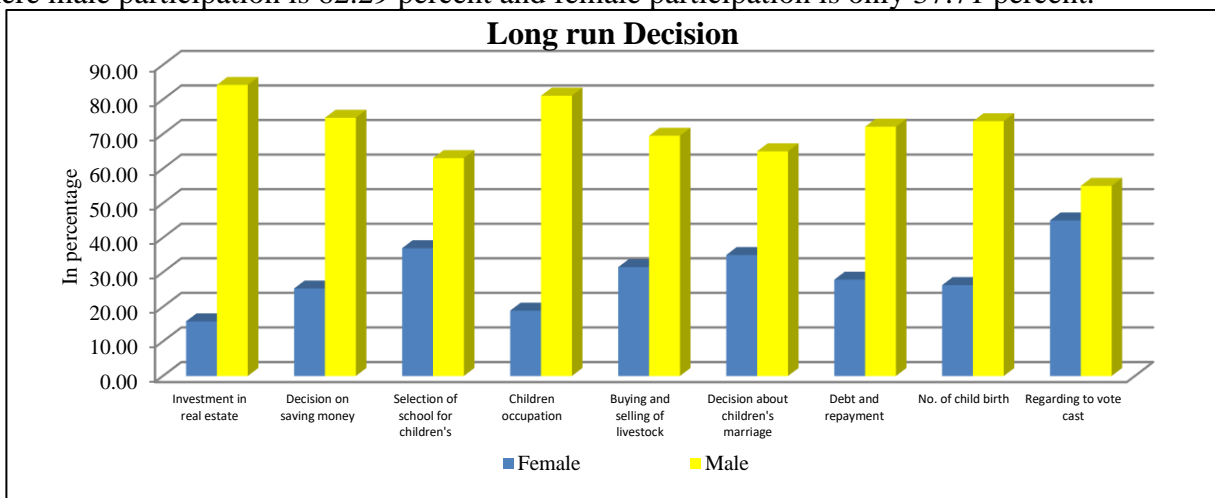


Figure 2: Long Run Decision of the respondents.

From the diagram (figure 2) it reveals that in long run decision the condition of the women is worse than the short run decision. In every long run decision, the male participation is far more than the female participation. In long run decision only in case of child marriage the female participation (35.00 percent) is high among all the other long run decision making process when women concern and decision has been taken and in rest of the long run decision has been taken by the male member of the family without concern of the female member. In case of the investing in real estate only 15.80 percent women take their decision, like wise in monthly saving (25.30 percent), decision about the family debt and repayment (27.88 percent) and even in case of the child birth the female participation rate is only 26.30 percent which clearly shows that even women have no control over their body how much child she give birth this decision also depend on her husband decision. In case of overall long run decision making only 29.18 percent women take participation in the decision making process and rest 70.82 percent long run decision has been taken by the men (figure 4).

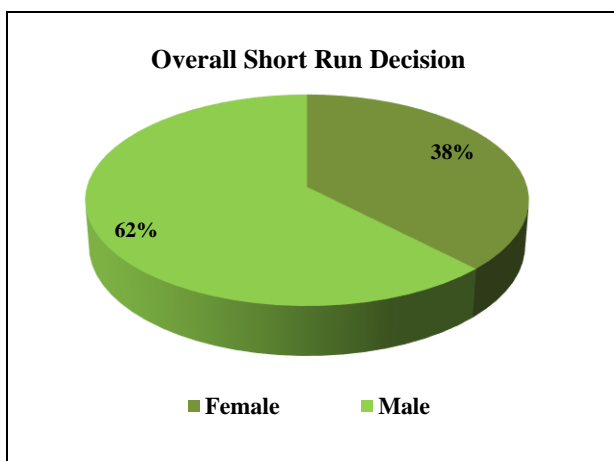


Figure 3: Overall Short Run Decision of the respondents

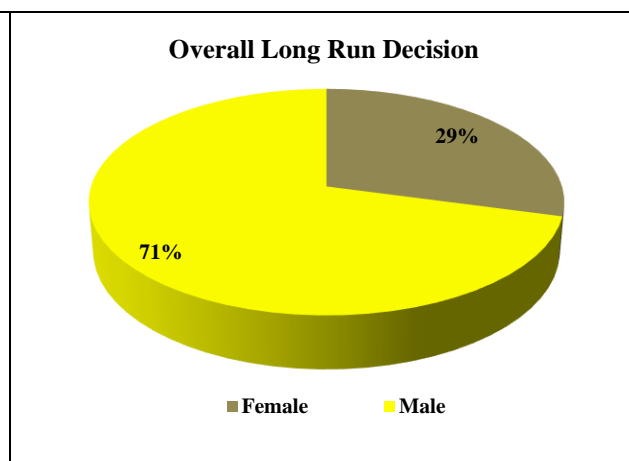


Figure 4: Overall Long Run Decision of the respondents

Table 1: Socio-economic characteristics of the Respondent and overall decision making

Overall Decision		Age Group			Total
		<25 years	25-44 years	45-59 years	
Taken by Male	Count	10	50	23	83
	%	45.4%	64.1%	63.9%	61.0%
Taken by Female	Count	12	28	13	53
	%	54.6%	35.9%	36.1 %	39.0%
Total	Count	22	78	36	136
	%	100.0%	100%	100.0%	100.0%

Overall Decision		Occupation			Total
		Housewife	Cultivator and Agricultural Labour	Business and service	
Taken by Male	Count	34	39	10	83
	%	63.0%	78.0%	31.3%	61.0%
Taken by Female	Count	20	11	22	53
	%	37.0%	22.0%	68.7%	39.0%
Total	Count	54	50	32	136
	%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Overall Decision		Education				Total
		Illiterate	Primary	Secondary	H.S and above	
Taken by Male	Count	10	61	7	5	83
	%	83.3%	83.6%	53.9%	13.2%	61.0%
Taken by Female	Count	2	13	6	33	53
	%	16.7%	16.4%	46.1%	86.8%	39.0%
Total	Count	12	73	13	38	136
	%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Overall Decision		Monthly Income				Total
		No Income	Less than Rs.3000	Rs.3000-6000	Above Rs. 6000	
Taken by Male	Count	45	32	5	1	83
	%	69.2%	78.1%	26.3%	9.1%	61.0%
Taken by Female	Count	20	9	14	10	53
	%	30.8%	21.9%	73.7%	90.9%	39.0%
Total	Count	65	41	19	11	136
	%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: Field Survey, 2019

Table 2: Multinomial Logistic Regression of socio-economic characteristics and overall decision making of the Respondent

Socio-Economic Characteristics	Overall Decision Making	95% CI	
		Upper Bound	Lower Bound
Age in years	OR		
<25®			
25-44	2.120	.721	6.253
45-59	.991	.435	2.255
Education			
Illiterate®			
Primary	0.012***	.002	.097
Secondary	0.011***	.002	.054
Higher Secondary and above	0.052***	.009	.313
Income			
No income®			
Less than Rs.3000	0.045**	.005	.371
Rs.3000-Rs.6000	0.038***	.003	.250
More than Rs.6000	0.30**	.028	2.780
Occupation			
Housewife®			
Cultivator and Agricultural Labour	0.109**	.106	.677
Business and service	0.268***	.047	.350

Note: OR = odds ratio; 95% CI = 99% confidence interval; **p < 0.05; ***p < 0.01 and ® the reference category.

The participation of women in the decision making is depend on the various socio-economic characteristics like, age, level of education, occupation and income of the respondents.

Age: From the age group of the respondents it is observed that out of the 136 respondents 83 respondents said that the decision was taken by the male member and 53 respondents said that the decision was taken by the female member of the family that is 61 percent for 39 percent respectively for the overall decision making of the household. Here the age group of the female respondents are divided in three categories; these are young age group (below 25 years) lower middle age (25-44 years) and middle age (45-59 years). There is no old age respondent found in the study. From the data it is observed that except less than 25 years age group in every age group male takes more decision than female. From the table 2 it is observed that the 25-44 years age group women are more prominent (2.120) in decision making than the Below 25 years age group but the odd ratio is not significant. Again the odd ratio is high in the 45-59 years age group but here also the value is not significant which indicates that there is no significant relation of the age and decision making power of the women of the sub division.

Employment: Women's employment or occupation shows a significant relationship with the decision-making process. Mainly most of the scheduled caste women are housewife. Those who works most of them are work in agricultural sector. Women who work for cash are more likely to participate in the decision making from those who are not employed and those who do not work for cash (housewife). From the data (table 1) it is observed that the women who are housewife (37 percent female take

decision) and those who are engaged in cultivation and agricultural labour (22 percent female take decision) in both the cases the male take more decision than the female. But the respondents who engaged in business and service among them 68.7 percent take decision or involve in the decision-making process. The cultivator and agricultural labour participated in decision making 10 percent more than the house wife in the decision making at 95 percent significant level and the women engaged in business and service are participated 26 percent (0.268) more than the housewife at 99 percent significant level which indicates that there is a significant relation between the occupation and the decision-making power of the women.

Education: The literacy rate of the sub division is around 70 percent and scheduled caste female literacy rate of the sub division is 63.93 percent (Census, 2011). The education has a greater impact on the decision-making process for the women. In case of education it is observed that the illiterate women (16.7 percent female take decision) and the women with primary (16.4 percent take decision) and secondary (46.1 percent take decision) level of educational level have taken less decision compare to male. On the other hand 86.8 percent of the female take participation in decision making those who have higher secondary and above level of educational qualification. The odd ration of the data also shows that the value is higher in the primary level (0.012), secondary (0.011) and higher education level (0.52) than the illiterate female which indicates the higher educated women are more likely to participate in the decision-making process than the non educated women which is significant at 99 percent level. So it is very clear that there is a significant relation between educational qualification and decision making power.

Income: The income of the respondent is one of the most important components to determine the decision-making power of the female not only within the household but outside the household too. From the table 1 it reveals that among the no income group respondents only 30.8 percent of the women participated in family decision making process, not only that even in low income group women's (< Rs.3000) participation in family decision making is less (21.9) than the male but those women who earn more than Rs. 3000 to Rs. 600 and above Rs.6000 their participation in decision making is 73.7 percent and 90.0 percent respectively. From the (table 2) income level of the respondents it is observed that the women whose income is in between Rs. 3000 to Rs. 6000 they take participation in decision making 0.038 unit more than the women who have no income. The women who earn monthly more than Rs. 6000 are more likely to participate in the decision-making process than the low-income groups women (less than Rs.3000) at 95 percent significant levels. The table shows that an increase in the income level is directly associated to an increase in odds ratios (ORs), which examine the likelihood of women's participation in decision making has been significant.

8. Major Findings

Increased age, paid employment and having higher education positively associated with women's autonomy in decision making.

- Out of the 9th Short Run Decision Making variable only making everyday meal is the one where majority of female take decision over male which is 66.7 percent.
- In case of overall short run decision only 38 percent of the female take decision in the household decision making on the other hand in overall long run 29.18 percent female take decision which is less than the short run decision.
- In both the cases women of the young age group (25 years) women are more active in decision making than the middle age group women (25 to 59) but statistically not significant which show that there is no significant relation with the age group and the decision making process in the study area.
- The women who engaged in business and service had more power in decision making than cultivator and agricultural labour and housewife in decision making process although that

housewife who have better educational qualification take prominent role in the household decision making.

- High income group and highly educated women are more actively participated in the household decision making than the low- or no-income group women and uneducated women.

9. Suggestion and Conclusion

Many factors affect the ability of women to take part in the decision-making process in the household. Some of these factors relate to the type of decision that is taken and some to the background of the women. Women from middle- and higher-income groups have the high decision-making power, which suggests involving them in education and decent employment to lessen their dependency on the family members and husband. Women are excluded from decision making by more than just lack of education. Employment and education have always empowered women and brought a positive impact on decision making. So finally we can say that if the women get involve in income generation activities by entrepreneurship through proper training and improvement of their skill. Provide them equal opportunity and access to property and economic assets and financial assistance like subsidiary loan or low interest rate of the loan of the loaning amount then only the women become self reliance and they took more part in the decision making not only in the family but outside the family. Discussing above all the fact it is clear that women's autonomy should enhance with the education and employment.

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