



DECISION MAKING STATUS OF WOMEN IN TEA GARDENS: A CASE STUDY OF TERAI OF JALPAIGURI DISTRICT OF WEST BENGAL

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ABSTRACT

The paper addresses the decision making status of women in tea gardens where women have a prominent contribution in economy around fifty percent of total work force. Their earning wage actually is so poor to live, though they are involved in economic actability, their socio-economic condition is very bad due their poverty, illiteracy and ignorance which also influence on their decision making in various field. So the aiming of the study to find out their participation in decision making, where 125 sample households have been surveyed from five tea gardens of Terai region of Jalpaiguri district. The findings of the study shows contribution in decision making of women is not so satisfied where the major decisions dominated by males yet they take some decisions related household chores and buying some foods independently. Although there are lot of factors influencing their decision making.



KEYWORDS : Women's autonomy, Decision making.

INTRODUCTION

Men and women are both essential human resource of society where the development of society depends on the contribution of both of them. But in patriarchal society, women continuously deprived due to traditional law, custom and religion. They cannot express their opinion independently for taking decision in households and outer spheres. According to Negulescu & Doval (2013)¹, in male headed family the freedom of women is very limited for taking decision although in all practical field the decision making is key determinant of broad success or failure. But it is true to say that women acted as an instrument for social change because in developing country, women play a vital role for family welfare. She play role of mother as well as homemaker. The author Rezapour & Ansari (2014)² and Pandey (2011)³ pointed out that women's participation in decision making maintains the equality and peace of family and important measures for social development of any community. Although the participation in decision making in political sphere is their fundamental political right after adoption of universal declaration of human right (1948). It is hopeful that if women participate in decision making at various fields, society as well as nation become developed smoothly.

OBJECTIVES:

The major objectives of the study are as follows---

1. The Decision making status of the women in tea gardens of Terai of Jalpaiguri district.
2. The factors affecting the Decision making of women in Tea gardens of Terai of Jalpaiguri District.

STUDY AREA:

The tea gardens in North Bengal are unevenly distributed in three geographical region i.e. Darjeeling hills, Dooars and Terai. Where geographically Terai is located the lower portion of Darjeeling hills and the right bank of river Teesta to the left bank of River Mechi.

But in the district Jalpaiguri, administratively Terai covers two blocks namely Rajganj and Jalpaiguri Sadar. Among five surveyed Tea gardens, two are (namely Saraswatipur Tea garden and Sikarpur Tea garden) located in Rajganj block and rest of three are (namely Denguajhar Tea garden, Joypur Tea gardens and Raipur Tea garden) located in Jalpaiguri Sadar block.

DATA SOURCE AND METHODOLOGY:

To investigate the decision making status of women in tea garden, the primary data have been collected from five tea gardens of Terai of Jalpaiguri district. The data are collected from 25 households from each tea garden and finally 125 households have been surveyed in aggregate.

The primary data have been collected from door to door with the help of self developed scheduled. After collection of data, the data compiled, coded, tabulated and finally analysed with the help of SPSS software version. 20.

The Decision making status of women has been determined with the help of **Decision Making Index (DMI)** which covers sixteen type of activities under different decision making areas like Agriculture, Livestock, Households, Economic, Human capital and Political sphere. In this respect, a score of three is given to women who take decision independently. A Score of two is given to women who participate in decision making jointly with other members in family while a score of one is given to women where decision taken by male/husband entirely. Finally score zero is given to women where women do not participate in decision making.

The Decision Making Index is computed in following ways= Decision making Score obtained by Women/Maximum score obtained by women *100

The score of DMI is categorised into three groups that Low (0-40), Medium (40-70) and High (70-100) which indicates Low level of Decision making (0-40), Medium level of Decision making (40-70) and High level of Decision making(70-100).

Finally multiple regressions model has been fitted to study the factors affecting the women participation in Decision making where fourteen determinants have been selected which influence to the Decision making of women. These are Head of family, Religion, Marital status, Type of family, Family size, Age, Ethnicity, Educational attainment, Occupation, Monthly income of family, Saving, Time spent to households work, Nature of expenditure, Members who handle cash in family.

LITERATURE REVIEWS:

The author Kavita Baliyan (2013)⁴ in her article named “Factors Affecting Participation of Woman in Household Decision Making: Implication for Family Welfare and Agriculture” has pointed out the decision making status of women in cultivating households and the socio-economic factors like Family size, family head, age of women, education of women, migration status of women’ husband, employment of women, caste, farm size and annual family income influencing the women’s decision making in households activities. Where author found age and number of days worked in agricultures have strongly positive impact on decision making status of women.

While the authors Samor and Grady (2016)⁵ found out age and educational attainment are prominent which affecting the decision making women mostly found in among Nepalese. According to the authors Upul Senarath & Gunawardena (2009)⁶, Xiaohui & Ning (2012)⁷ and Lavoori & Paramanik (2014)⁸ women’s age, their education, nature of employment, house wealth and type of residence have significant impact on the participation in decision making.

The author Bano (2014)⁹ in her study tried to assess the socio-economic status of women and their participation in decision making process where reported decision in various fields like purchasing of cloths, saving of money, attending in social ceremonies, decision on expenditure, interest in policies, issues of reproductive and casting of votes, Hindu women are more empowered than Muslim women.

The authors Acharya et al. (2010)¹⁰ in their study have pointed out women age, employment and numbers of living children are strongly related to women's autonomy in decision making field. They also reported the women who are cash paid in work are participate significantly in decision making field of health care, major households purchases, daily households purchases and visit of their parent relatives.

The author Dash (2015)¹¹ reveals in his study, the effective participation in politics is very poor among Kandha women due to lack of knowledge, awareness, education, family restriction. They also reported the family pressure and still male representation create hindrances for effective functioning in Panchayat Raj Institution (PRI).

The authors Jan and Akhtar (2008)¹² conducted a study on Decision-Making Power among Married and Unmarried Women. The study reveals that 96.00 per cent married women possess low level of decision making although 68 per cent married women independently take decision in family planning. On the other hand, 44% married women took decision related to child health taken by jointly while 54% married women and 6% unmarried women replied income generating decision taken by husband and other family members.

A study by Neha Patel et al (2011)¹³ on Empowerment of Women has focused on the decision making status of women in households activities and factors impacted on women's decision making activities. Where they reported 85.91 % women participated for making household decisions and matured age of women (24-35 years), Urban residences, better educational attainment, better employment are essential factors behind this decision. The author also reported that women's participation in financial decision is very poor because of unemployment as well as not having any bank account.

The authors Jaweed et al (2015)¹⁴ in their book highlighted in details about various aspects of tribal women include laws, custom, economic contribution, participation in decision making, gender discrimination and overall status of tribal women in Tripura.

In case health care decision of women, the author Mekonnen & Asrese (2014)¹⁵ identified the factors like educational status of women and their husband, household wealth, birth spacing, frequency of pregnancies, present age of woman, size of family, Occupational structure of husband and woman which impact significantly on their participation in decision making.

Mengesha (1990)¹⁶ in her thesis has highlighted contribution of women in agricultural production, time spent in work, women's participation in decision making and the relationship between women's income and decision making.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

Decision making in Agricultural fields:

In the study the women have a great contribution in participation of Decision making in different field. In case of agriculture decision, women have not so contribution because very few households possess agricultural landholdings. In this case, no participation indicates not having any agricultural lands so they do not take decision in these activities. The survey data reveals that only two households possessing agricultural field. Where the decision related to activities like Planting, weeding, maintenance, Cutting, Storing and finally selling and exchanging etc. are totally taken by male members entirely.

Table No. 1: Participation in Decision making status of women

Agricultural decision	Entirely by Respondents	Entirely by Husband	Jointly with family members	No participation	Total
Planting/Weeding/Maintenances	0(00.00)	2(1.60)	0(00.00)	123(98.40)	125(100.00)
Cutting/Storage	0(00.00)	2(1.60)	0(00.00)	123(98.40)	125(100.00)
Selling/Exchanges	0(00.00)	2(1.60)	0(00.00)	123(98.40)	125(100.00)
Total	0(00.00)	6(1.60)	0(00.00)	369(98.40)	375(100.00)

Source: Field survey, 2017

Decision making in Livestock:

Women play a significant contribution in decision making in livestock. The decision related to livestock purchase and their rearing is mostly taken by husband or male member entirely (37.60 percent) compare to women. Although 19.20 percent women take decision jointly yet decision taken without asking to women is also remarkable (9.60 percent).

In the decision related to consumption and selling of live stocks (like Poultry, Goats, Pig etc) 35.20 percent Respondents took independently where contribution of male member also equal (36.00 percent). Decision in these activities is taken by jointly with family (20.00 percent).

Table No. 2: Participation in Decision making in Livestock

Livestock decision	Entirely by Respondents	Entirely by Husband	Jointly with family members	No participation	Total
Purchase/rearing	42(33.60)	47(37.60)	24(19.20)	12(9.60)	125(100.00)
Consumption/selling	44(35.20)	45(36.00)	25(20.00)	11(8.80)	125(100.00)
Total	86(34.40)	92(36.80)	49(19.60)	23(9.20)	250(100.00)

Source: Field survey, 2017

Participation in decision making in Households:

Although the authors Mekonnen & Asres (2014)¹⁵ highlights determinants like maternal age, education, income which affect the participation of decision making of women in household properly. Yet in the study area, women take a vital role in the decisions related to household chores. In households decision, women take a significant role in Households management or family management because most of the Males of the family are drunk regularly. So the decision related to fooding and food marketing is taken by women independently (20.80 percent) and husband or male independently also take significant decision in these activities (24.00 percent). Moreover, most of the decision is taken by jointly with other members (48.80 percent) while 6.40 percent women do not participate in this decision. On the other way, the decision related to child health, education, marriage mostly contributed by jointly (47.20 percent). But most of the decision related to worship and ceremonies are taken by jointly (45.60 percent) while decisions about these activities are dominated by women (31.20 percent) compare to male (16.80 percent).

Table No. 3: Participation in Decision making in Households

Livestock decision	Entirely by Respondents	Entirely by Husband	Jointly with family members	No participation	Total
Fooding/marketing	26(20.80)	30(24.00)	61(48.80)	8(6.40)	125(100.00)
Child	34(27.20)	28(22.40)	59(47.20)	4(3.20)	125(100.00)

heath/education /marriage					
Worship/Ceremonies	39(31.20)	21(16.80)	57(45.60)	8(6.40)	125(100.00)
Total	98(26.40)	79(21.07)	177(47.20)	20(5.33)	375(100.00)

Source: Field survey, 2017

Decision making in economy:

Economic decision is important for the households' prosperity. In one side it leads status of the family, in this sense who taking decision it is also important. The data reveals that the decision for buying property and selling property is highly dominated by Male member entirely (43.20 percent and 41.60 percent) where decision related to these activities, women play an insignificant role (29.60 percent and 32.00 percent). But decision related to Credit, Saving and investment the contribution of women (31.20 percent) is near closure to male (34.40 percent). Yet, about 25.60 percent women take decision about economic field jointly with their family members.

Table No. 4: Participation in Decision making in Economic spheres

Economic decision	Entirely by Respondents	Entirely by Husband/ Male	Jointly with family members	No participation	Total
Buying property	37(29.60)	54(43.20)	29(23.20)	5(4.00)	125(100.00)
Selling Property	40(32.00)	52(41.60)	30(24.00)	3(2.40)	125(100.00)
Credit/Saving/ Investment	39(31.20)	43(34.40)	37(29.60)	6(4.80)	125(100.00)
Total	116(30.93)	149(39.73)	96(25.60)	14(3.74)	375(100.00)

Source: Field survey, 2017

Decision making in Human Capital:

The decision about human capital is very important because women in tea gardens is not so aware about it although recently women are becoming aware about health, family planning and related issues due to availability of Health sub-Centre and involvement of Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) in each tea gardens. The table indicates the decision related to birth spacing and adaptation of family planning is taken by 41.60 percent and 42.40 percent respondents independently while a significant percentage of women (36.00 percent and 34.40 percent) take their decision related to birth spacing and adaptation of family planning jointly with their husband. It is also noticeable that the contribution in the adaptation of family planning by husband (15.20 percent) is much lower than women them-self (42.40 percent) although decision related to employment of child taken by jointly with family members (43.20 percent).

Table No. 5: Participation in decision making in Human capital

Human capital production Decision	Entirely by Respondents	Entirely by Husband	Jointly with husband	No participation	Total
Birth spacing	52(41.60)	20(16.00)	45(36.00)	8(6.40)	125(100.00)
Adaptation of family planning	53(42.40)	19(15.20)	43(34.40)	10(8.00)	125(100.00)
Employment of children	39(31.20)	24(19.20)	54(43.20)	8(6.40)	125(100.00)
Total	144(38.40)	63(16.80)	142(37.87)	26(6.93)	375(100.00)

Source: Field survey, 2017

Participation in decision making in political area:

In the Tea garden area, the political knowledge of women is very poor. Data reveals that most of the decision related to political meeting and Speech programme of leader as well as Canvassing during votes and decision to Votes casting are taken by male entirely (66.40 percent and 67.20 percent). In this activity the decision taken by Respondents entirely is very low about 14.40 percent and 13.60 percent respectively. Although there are 9.20 percent of respondents who do not participate in decision making in these activities.

Table No. 6: Participation in Decision making in Political area

Political decision	Entirely by Respondents	Entirely by Husband/ Male	Jointly with family members	No participation	Total
Participation in meeting/speech	18(14.40)	83(66.40)	12(9.60)	12(9.60)	125(100.00)
Canvassing /Vote casting	17(13.60)	84(67.20)	13(10.40)	11(8.80)	125(100.00)
Total	35(14.00)	167(66.80)	25(10.00)	23(9.20)	250(100.00)

Source: Field survey, 2017

Decision making Index:

The technique of the decision making index has adopted to study the Decision making status of women in Tea gardens. Where the decision making index covers sixteen type of activities in different fields for making their decisional status. No participation of woman in decision making is given zero and a score of one is given to women when decision is taken by their husband entirely. On the other hand, a score of two is given to women when decision is taken by jointly with family member and finally a score of three is given to women where decision taken by women independently.

The **Decision Making Index (DMI)** is executed as follows: Decision making score obtained by women / maximum score obtained by women *100 (Baliyan, 2014).

Table No. 7: Decision making status of women

Decision Making Status (DMI Score)	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondent
Low (0-40)	14	11.20
Medium (40-70)	80	64.00
High (70-100)	31	24.80
Total	125	100.00

Source: Field survey, 2017

The obtained DMI score is grouped into three categories that are Low (0-40), Medium (40-70) and High (70-100). It is observed that 64.00 percent of women fall in Medium category of decision making where only 24.80 percent of women fall in High category and remaining 11.20 percent of women fall under low category in the participation of decision making in study area.

Factors affecting the Decision making Index:

The result of regression analysis depicts the major findings of the study. The table reflects that among the variables, head of the family, ethnicity, age of respondents, occupation of the respondents, the member of the family who handle the cash in family management, the nature of expenditure are positively related to Decision making of women where religion, total family members, marital status of women, income of the family and saving of the respondents are negatively related to decision. It is expected that education has a positive impact on Decision making but data showing inverse in character. Age and nature of

expenditure are positively impact on DMI but statistically not significant. The value of R square 0.298 which indicate the factors determining the decision making of women is much complex and dynamic and depends on a lot of socio-economic factors which is traditionally important to them.

Table No. 8: Decision Making Index and Socio-economic variables
Dependent variable: Decision Making Index (DMI)

Independent variable	Co efficient	Std. Error	T value	Significant at 0.05 level
Constant	47.735	22.436	2.128	.036
Head of the family	2.451	3.473	.706	.482
Religion	-2.897	4.036	-.718	.474
Ethnicity	7.547	5.917	1.276	.205
Age	.487	.233	2.093*	.039
Type of family	4.095	3.222	1.271	.206
Total family member	-1.893	1.288	-1.469	.145
Marital status	-8.066	4.193	-1.924*	.057
Occupation	.944	1.801	.524	.601
Income of family	-.001	.001	-1.216	.227
Member who handle cash	2.786	3.153	.883	.379
Time spent in household-work	-.022	.992	-.023	.982
Nature of expenditure	8.399	3.869	2.171*	.032
Savings	-7.300	4.030	-1.811*	.073
Education	-1.430	1.898	-.753	.453

No. of observation =125, Adj R square =0.209

MAJOR FINDINGS:

- There are only two families with agricultural lands and the decision related to these activities taken by husband entire of women.
- In the activities of livestock decision, most of the decisions taken by husband entirely (36.80 percent) but in case of respondent, it is less than husband (34.40 percent).
- In the participation of households decision, women take more decision compare to their husband (26.40 percent), although women take decision jointly with their family members (47.20 percent).
- In the participation of economic decision, most are taken by male member (39.73 percent) compare to women (30.93 percent) where about 3.74 percent women remain isolated from these decisions.
- In the participation of human capital decision, the contribution of women is much better (38.40 percent) than male member independently (16.80 percent) besides decision by jointly takes a significant role also (37.87 percent).
- In the field of political decision mostly dominated by male member independently (66.80 percent) where the contribution f women is only 14.00 percent.
- It is observed that most of the respondents (64.00 percent) belong to medium category of Decision making where only 24.80 percent respondent of high category and remaining 11.20 percent belong to low category.
- Among the different factors age and nature of expenditure, marital status and saving show a significant impact in Decision Making Index (MDI).

CONCLUSION:

The study reveals that overall women do not enjoy independently in participation of decision making in various field although they have a significant contribution in economic activities because more than fifty

percent workers are women. It is true that they are economically a little bit empowered yet they cannot express their decisional view in different field of activities. The decision related to participation in political meeting, canvass, buying and selling property enjoy a limited freedom. Yet education and much improvement in their economic independence will must increase the participation in decision making in various activities.

In the study area it is found that if the most incomes dominated by male members of the family and also leading a plentiful consumption of smoking, alcoholism and unplanned expenditure in various field but if female incomes dominated in family it leads to lower fertility, better family health, good nutritional level, well manageable expenditure which is much important in tea gardens area of Terai region. Here women are engaged in tea gardens work but their wage rate and benefit is very limited to improve their socio-economic condition. If comprehensive strategy of education and involvement in income generating activities to women is implemented properly their existing source of income must enriched the reduction of poverty, economic efficiencies and awakening about outer world.

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