

# 1 Rajbanshi Women and Empowerment: Through the Lens of 2 Gender and Development Rubric

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## 7 **Abstract**

8 ?Empowerment is the process by which the powerless gain greater control over the  
9 circumstances of their lives. It includes both control over resources (physical, human,  
10 intellectual, financial) and over ideology (beliefs values and attitudes)?<sup>1</sup> The status of  
11 women in a society is measured in terms of educational level, income level, employment,  
12 health status, decision making right autonomy as well as the various roles played by them in  
13 the family, society and the community. Indian women?s status, role and their problems are  
14 linked to the history and traditional social system of the country. Women constitute half of  
15 the population, yet they are not treated on par with men in many aspects of life. In our  
16 country (and world wide), women usually have been linked to home and hearth. This has  
17 usually resulted in their economic dependence, social neglect and political ignorance which in  
18 their turn have prevented women from empowering themselves.

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20 **Index terms**— Empowerment, physical, human, intellectual, financial.

21 The status of women in a society is measured in terms of educational level, income level, employment, health  
22 status, decision making right/ autonomy as well as the various roles played by them in the family, society and  
23 the community. Indian women's status, role and their problems are linked to the history and traditional social  
24 system of the country. Women constitute half of the population, yet they are not treated on par with men in  
25 many aspects of life. In our country (and world wide), women usually have been linked to home and hearth.  
26 This has usually resulted in their economic dependence, social neglect and political ignorance which in their turn  
27 have prevented women from empowering themselves.

28 This paper is based on an empirical study of the 776 female heads of the respective households of two selected  
29 mouzas under two respective blocks of Jalpaiguri district namely Gartali Jalpesh mouza under Maynaguri block  
30 and Chauhaddi mouza under Dhupguri block. The study was undertaken to measure the access towards the  
31 rights and empowerment issues of Rajbanshi women at various societal dimensions leading to the development  
32 processes (if any).

33 The U.N. General Assembly declared 1975 as the International Women's Year and 1975-1985 as the  
34 International Decade for Women, which led to a mounting awareness of women's issues and an acceptance of their  
35 demands as genuine issues for policy making, both at the national and international levels. The major themes of  
36 the International Women's Year and Conference were-Equality, Development and Peace. However, Equality, had  
37 been a dominant issue for the U.N. Commission on the Status of Women and it came chiefly from the feminist  
38 movement of the Western industrialized nations. Peace was gradually more considered to be a women's issue by  
39 the countries of the Eastern block. Development, on the other hand, was a recent issue put further mainly by  
40 the newly independent "Third World" nations as a key to civilizing women's lives. 2 The women's conferences  
41 held during the Decade also underlined the importance of changing the sexual division of labour and the need  
42 to properly value women's unpaid labour. 3 By highlighting women's participation in production, researchers  
43 have provided a timely challenge both to the definition of 'work' (and 'active labour') and to the methods of  
44 data collection used for generating official statistics. 4 An important component of this endeavor has been the

45 attempt to deal with the much-talked about category of 'family labour' -which is rendered culturally invisible  
 46 by falling under the category of 'housework'. At the household level the gendered division of labor traditionally  
 47 defines women's role primarily as family maintenance. This work is unpaid, taken for granted and indiscernible  
 48 in economic terms, but has significant impact on the quality of women's lives and well-being. For example, when  
 49 women assume paid work, they also assume the "double work day," paid and unpaid. The invisibility of women's  
 50 unpaid work remains a critical issue in national and international macro policy. 5 The Rajbanshi women 6 has  
 51 to work more than their men folk. They not only manage household chores, but also assist their men in fields  
 52 regarding transplanting irrigational crops or reaping it. They collect dry woods for cooking and sell agricultural  
 53 products in the nearby markets. Thus the contributions of the women in the Rajbanshi families are significant  
 54 and results in encouragement of the men folk to tie the knot with more than one wife. 7 Below are the statistics  
 55 of the work pattern of the Rajbanshi men and women of the study areas. Here primary occupation signifies the  
 56 full time engagement of the person at the primary level (it may not be income generating).

57 According to the above Table, major portion of the Rajbanshi male population at Chauhaddi Mouza is  
 58 agricultural laborer, which is 23.10 percent and 4.96 percent is female agricultural laborer. 22.34 percent  
 59 male population is day laborer, in case of female it is 5.95 percent. 1.82 percent Rajbanshi male are involved  
 60 in agriculture. 7.45 percent male population is involved in business as primary occupation. 0.61 percent male  
 61 population and 0.66 percent female population is service holder. 9.26 percent female population is bidi binders.  
 62 1.16 percent female population is maid servants. Very few percentage of male and female population is pension  
 63 holders. Most of the female members' primary occupation is housework. 38.84 percent female population's  
 64 primary occupation is housework and also they have to work outside the home occasionally when work is available.  
 65 Also those who have to work outside the home to earn wage as primary occupation (day labourer or agricultural  
 66 labourer) they too have to do all the household chores as secondary occupation. Here primary occupation signifies  
 67 the full time engagement of the person at the primary level (it may not be income generating).

68 According to the above Table, major portion of the Rajbanshi male population at Gartali Jalpesh Mouza is  
 69 service holder, which is 19.19 percent and in case of female population it is 4.24 percent. 1.50 percent male are  
 70 involved in agriculture. 4.35 percent male population is agricultural laborer. 15.89 percent male population and  
 71 2.37 percent female population is day laborer. 0.85 percent female population is maid servants. 13.79 percent  
 72 male population and 0.34 percent female population is involved in business as primary occupation. Very few  
 73 percentage of male and female population is pension holders. Most of the female members' primary occupation  
 74 is housework. Here in this mouza 56.10 percent female's primary occupation is housework and rest of the female  
 75 population do it as secondary work. From both the tables it is significant that the percentage of women involved  
 76 in housework at the primary level is high at Gartali Jalpesh mouza. Because the socio-economic position of the  
 77 mouza is much better than Chauhaddi mouza and most of the women need not work outside the house. Whereas  
 78 in Chauhaddi mouza the economic situation is very grim and the women of the mouza has to work as agricultural  
 79 labourer or day labourer at the primary level to earn a living for their family. Before leaving house for the days  
 80 work they have to finish cooking food for the rest of the family and at the evening after retuning home from  
 81 work, they again have to cook night's meal and finish the rest of the household chores. Thus housework which is  
 82 generally females part of work does not even gets acknowledged as labour and goes unnoticed.

83 A number of feminist scholars (Okin 1989, Bubeck 1995, Fraser 1996) has regarded the so-called conventional  
 84 gendered division of labor -prescribing a specialization in paid productive work for men and unpaid "reproductive"  
 85 work for women, as the primary cause of women's social and economic inequality. Urged by much exposed ethics  
 86 of femininity and masculinity, and enforced by many social and legal norms, the gendered division of labor gets  
 87 to mold actual people's lives and thought process. According to Okin the family "is the place where we become  
 88 our gendered selves;" and, "the division of labor within the gendered-structure family raises both practical and  
 89 2012( D D D D ) E Year

90 psychological barriers against women in all other spheres of life." 8 And this is so even today, when so many  
 91 women have entered the labor market, for the recommendation still holds that these women may choose to have  
 92 a job, but familial responsibilities are still all theirs, a "second shift" for them to perform (Hochschild 1989).  
 93 In The Second Shift, sociologist Arlie Hochschild demonstrates how so many working women today have two  
 94 work shifts: their paid job outside and their unpaid job at home doing housework and child care. She calculates  
 95 that, because of these two shifts, "women worked roughly fifteen hours longer each week than men. Over a year,  
 96 they worked an extra month of twenty-four-hour days a year." 9 She concludes 10 Therefore, be it as full time  
 97 homemakers or double shifters, household and care work is still overwhelmingly women's work, which in turn is  
 98 not without consequence as to the modalities of women's labor market participation, women being more likely to  
 99 work part-time and to withdraw temporarily from the work force to accommodate family responsibilities, leading  
 100 to a less stable and profitable working life. The fact that women effectively bear exclusive (or main) responsibility  
 101 for socially useful yet unpaid and undervalued household and caring work has several adverse consequences for  
 102 women. The most immediate and apparent is deprivation of a (sufficient and reliable) independent income, which  
 103 leads to domination while living with a (male) partner, and grave risk of poverty after a breakup or death of  
 104 partner, especially when children are involved.

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105 **1 :**

106 Most women without children spend much more time than men on housework; with children, they devote more  
107 time to both housework and child care. Just as there is a wage gap between men and women in the workplace,  
108 there is a "leisure gap" between them at home. Most women work one shift at the office or factory and a  
109 "second shift" at home. 11 Ester Boserup's (1970) ground breaking work on the negative impact of colonial and  
110 ensuing postcolonial industrial development strategies on women threw open avenues of research consciousness  
111 and action associated to, and appropriate for, women in the Third World. Till the mid-sixties, modernization  
112 theories were used to understand post-colonial societies. Through an evolutionary process of change that would  
113 transform traditional society, through various stages to a state of modernity. It involved a total transformation  
114 of traditional societies, their institutions, cultures and behaviour. On the whole, modernization theories argued  
115 that capitalism played a progressive role in the development of traditional and underdeveloped societies.

116 According to Boserup, unlike African countries where female farming and shifting agriculture is predominant  
117 and plough is not used, in Asian countries like India, the agricultural work through plough cultivation is  
118 distributed between the two sexes in a very different way. The main farming instrument in this region, the  
119 plough, is used by men helped by draught animals, and only the hand operations-or some of them are left for  
120 women to perform. The above Table shows the regions of India where plough cultivation is predominant. The  
121 samples from regions of plough cultivation in India show a predominantly male family labour force, because a  
122 large proportion of women in cultivator families are completely exempted from work in the fields. The land is  
123 prepared for sowing by men using draught animals, and this thorough land preparation leaves need for weeding  
124 the crop, which is usually the women's task. Therefore, women contribute mainly to harvest work and to the  
125 care of domestic animals and household chores. Women's labour goes unpaid and unnoticed. Here, she argued  
126 that in changing industrial societies, women faced further marginalization rather than increased freedom. The  
127 introduction of new agricultural technologies in developing countries leads to greater yields, shifting agriculture  
128 from the subsistence level to market production. Labor specialization became inevitable in order to maximize  
129 efficiency of production. If specialization is decided upon comparative advantage, those who have greater decision  
130 making power, autonomy and higher levels of education will assume authority over market activities. In most  
131 societies around the world, culture and tradition dictate that these individuals are men. Thus, Boserup writes,  
132 "The process of increasing specialization of labor is accompanied by an increasing hierarchization of the labor  
133 force and a gradual adaptation of the sex distribution of work". ??3 Gradually there was a growing disillusionment  
134 with modernization theories by the late 1960s and early 1970s. Its inability to explain the failure of capitalist  
135 development in Latin America, led to the rise of an alternative theory, or theory. The theorists Andre Gunder  
136 Frank and Immanuel Wallerstein have contributed immensely to the to the development and popularization of  
137 Dependency Theory.

138 Most dependency theorists regard international capitalism as the motive force behind dependency relationships.  
139 Andre Gunder Frank, is quite clear on this point: 14 ??3 Boserup, ??ster. 1970: Women's Role in Economic  
140 Development.

141 New York: St. Martin's Press. p. 9. 14 The underdevelopment Theories/ Dependency Theories, have been  
142 completely blind to the question of gender and the contribution of women to economic development. It was at  
143 this time that the contribution of Ester Boserup in her book "Women's Role in Economic Development" (1970)  
144 was recognized and widely quoted. Scholars like Ester Boserup, Elise Boulding and others, have noted that  
145 time and again, economic development in the underdeveloped countries leads to structural changes that dislocate  
146 women from income generating occupations. This, on the other hand imposes a greater load on women who  
147 continue with subsistence agriculture, while men move into mechanized agriculture, grow cash crops or migrate  
148 to the cities.

149 By the mid-1970s an increasing number of women and men concerned with global equity had become aware that  
150 both planned and unplanned development of the world has had inimical effect on women (Tinker and Bramson,  
151 1976). Simultaneously, the Indian women's movement developed along lines quite autonomous of the Western  
152 paradigm and the participation of a cross-section of women lent it a depth and perspective that worked in turn  
153 to implant insight in the rising Indian academic contribution to Women's studies. Thus the field of Women and  
154 Development emerged. 15 I.

155 **2 Chronologically How the Approaches Evolved**

156 The truth that women had not benefited from the new creative opportunities, new technology and market forces,  
157 resulted in doubts over the alleged objectivity of the development agencies. This led to the emergence of the  
158 WID (Women In Development) approach. The term "women in development" was coined in the early 1970s by a  
159 Washington-based network of female development professionals. 16 The WID approach was adopted focusing on  
160 the fact that women's contribution for development is not recognized by the policy makers. Women are treated  
161 as 'beneficiaries' of development, not as active agents of development. 17

162 **3 Year**

163 problem was how to integrate women into development process (McFarland, 1988). The WID position legitimized  
164 research focusing specifically on women's experiences and perceptions (Rathgeber, 1990). WID was characterized

165 by the Welfare approach. The critiques of WID argued that women would never get their equal share of  
166 development benefits unless patriarchy and global inequality are addressed. At this early stage, the emphasis  
167 was on equal rights for women rather than on economic development.

168 Then came into existence WAD (Women and Development) Approach. This approach argued that women are  
169 already integrated into the development process in an exploitative way. Under the WAD rubric, poor men in  
170 the third world faced as much of disadvantage as women as a result of the exploitative nature of international  
171 capitalism (Rathgeber, 1990). Therefore the WAD view does not satisfy the gender relations within caste/ class  
172 structure of society. Nor does it focus extensively on class and gender linkage and structures of patriarchy.

173 The female sphere theorists argue that the demand for equality of work for a just and egalitarian society may  
174 be disadvantageous for women. In a society where women enjoyed autonomy in the private sphere, for the sake of  
175 family however, they are withdrawn from the visible public labour force and are made economically dependent.  
176 However, many women have chosen to retain their economic independence. 18 different parts of the world,  
177 particularly namely underdevelopment theory dependency ...historical research demonstrates that contemporary  
178 underdevelopment is in large part the historical product of past and continuing economic and other relations  
179 between the satellite underdeveloped and the now developed metropolitan countries. Furthermore, these relations  
180 are an essential part of the capitalist system on a world scale as a whole.

181 Like Frank, for Wallerstein too, unequal exchange between the core and the periphery led to the development of  
182 the former and underdevelopment of the latter Some radical female sphere theorists noticed that class revolutions  
183 and class struggles do not ensure the end of discrimination (Parpart, 1989). For them women's subordination  
184 is rooted upon 'male control of women's sexuality, procreative capacity and ideology'. Thus the only chances of  
185 redistribution of resources lie in the recognition of a 'female sphere' where women are agents in, and of themselves.  
186 This perspective, however, detracts from an analysis of economic structures and class/ caste differences and is  
187 often ahistorical in its neglect of social reality. 19 Under the Gender and Development approach or GAD, both  
188 gender and caste/ class are considered in explaining women's development problems (Sen and Grown).

189 This has led to a rethinking of the WID approach and resulted in the emergence of the Gender and Development  
190 approach or GAD.

191 The GAD approach focuses on the socially constructed basis of differences between men and women and  
192 emphasizes the need to challenge existing gender roles and relations. GAD points to the importance of  
193 understanding the relationship between women and men and how society influences their respective roles.  
194 The GAD approach uses gender, rather than women, as an analytical category to understand how economic,  
195 political, social and cultural systems affect women and men differently. Gender is understood as the social roles,  
196 expectations and responsibilities assigned to women and men because of their biological differences. It is an  
197 ideological and cultural construct that shapes women's and men's realities. ??1 II.

## 198 4 Women and Empowerment

199 Finally, under GAD approach women are seen as agents of change rather than passive recipients of development  
200 (McGreevy, 1983).

201 The Cairo conference in 1994 organized by UN on Population and Development called attention to women's  
202 empowerment as a central focus and UNDP developed the Gender Empowerment measure (GEM) which focused  
203 on the three variables that reflect women's participation in society -political power or decision-making, education  
204 and health.

205 Empowerment is the process by which the powerless gain greater control over the circumstances of their lives.  
206 It includes both control over resources (physical, human, intellectual, financial) and over ideology (believes values  
207 and attitudes)? ??2 the necessary resources to achieve their aspirations; (3) 'Power with', which enables women  
208 to examine and articulate their collective interests, to organize, to achieve them and to link with other women  
209 and men's organizations for change; and (4) 'Power over', to change the underlying inequalities in power and  
210 resources that constrain women's aspirations and their ability to achieve them. These power relations operate in  
211 different spheres of life like economic, social, political spheres and at different levels such as individual, household,  
212 community, market, institutional, etc. Mayoux's (2000) definition of empowerment is related directly with power,  
213 as "a multidimensional and interlinked process of change in power relations". It consists of:

214 (1) 'Power within' which enables women to articulate their own aspirations and strategies for change; (2)'Power  
215 to', which enables women to develop the necessary skills and access There is a logical association between poverty  
216 and disempowerment because an insufficiency of the means for meeting one's basic needs often rules out the ability  
217 to exercise meaningful choice. The ability to exercise choice can be thought of in terms of three inter-related  
218 dimensions: Resources, Agency and Achievements. Resources define pre-conditions; which include not only  
219 material resources but also human and social resources which serve to enhance the ability to exercise choice. The  
220 second dimension of power relates to Agency-the ability to define one's goals and act upon them. Resources and  
221 agency together constitute what Sen refers to as capabilities: the potential that people have for living the lives  
222 they want, of achieving valued ways of 'being and doing' which are valued by people in a given context. 24 The  
223 third is Achievements: The wellbeing outcomes that women experience as a result of access to resources and  
224 agency.

225 Gender division in access to resources such as land, technology and education, or discrimination in wages  
226 paid to women and men, have an effect on women's capabilities. Policy makers should think about both the

227 actuality of women's lives and the manner in which institutions and ideas (social, political, cultural, economic, 228 and religious) locate them. Gendertransformative policies can grant women the resources which will allow them 229 to take better control of their lives, to determine what kinds of gender relations they want to live with, and to 230 devise strategies and alliances to help them get there 25 The overall lower socio-economic position of the scheduled 231 castes in general and Rajbanshis . An examination of women's roles, division of labour based on gender, decision- 232 making and control over resources may help in avoiding slipups which may eventually cause a sabotage of the 233 aims of the program. 26 24 Bhattacharyya, Joysankar and Sarmila Banerjee. 2012: Women Empowerment 234 as Multidimensional Capability Enhancement: An Application of Structural -Equation-Modelling. Occational 235 Paper 36. Kolkata: IDSK. pp. 2-3. 25 in particular, made the framers of the Constitution, to realize that special 236 attention is urgently required for their development. As a result, some specific provisions have been incorporated 237 in the Constitution to provide social justice to the members of these castes through the policy of protective 238 discrimination. The basic purpose of incorporating these developmental provisions was to change the traditional 239 social structure of our society, which is based upon socio-economic and political inequalities. These special 240 provisions have played an important role in improving the socio-economic conditions and achieving a respectful 241 position to the members of the scheduled caste communities in the society. Rural development has been given top 242 priority during the successive five year plans by the government of India. Various rural development programmes 243 have been initiated from time to time for the upliftment of the rural poor. These programmes benefited the 244 rural people and bring qualitative change in their lives, but not as desired or expected by the planners. This 245 may be because of poor implementation of the various schemes, corruption and inadequate people's participation 246 specifically of the beneficiaries in the process of development. The socio-economic development of the scheduled 247 castes is a continuous process and the government is constantly making efforts to improve the lot of poor people. 248 Distribution of surplus land to the members of the scheduled caste categories is one of the important steps towards 249 their economic empowerment. The government has also initiated many programmes to improve the quality of 250 life of the rural poor specially the scheduled castes by making special provisions for them.

251 One of the important programmes is the 'Sampoorna Grameen Rozgar Yojana' which was launched to safeguard 252 the interest of the weaker sections and women by providing them wage employment. Under this scheme around 253 22.5 per cent of the annual allocations (first stream) have been earmarked for individual beneficiary schemes of 254 SCs/STs. Similarly, a minimum of 50 per cent of the allocation has been earmarked to the village panchayat 255 for creation of need based village infrastructure in SC/ST habitations under the second stream of SGRY. The 256 Swarnjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana, another rural development scheme also aims at bringing poor families 257 above the poverty line by providing them income generating assets through a mix of credit and subsidy. The 258 SGSY has also made an explicit provision that 50 per cent of the swarozgaris assisted should be from SCs/STs. 259 Under the SGSY scheme, around 1.10 lakh SHGs have been formed and a total of 4.56 lakh swarozgaris have 260 been assisted during the year 2008-09 (up to August). Among the total swarozgaris assisted, 2.11 lakh were from 261 SC/ST category and 2.78 lakh women swarozgaris, which constitute 46.29 and 60.96 per cent, respectively of 262 the total swarozgaris (GoI, 2008-09) 27 27 Under this scheme in Gartali Jalpesh mouza 388 families were issued 263 job cards, each card for a family. Henceforth, it is the only operational wage employment programme in the 264 country and all other public wage programmes including Sampoorna Grameen Rozgar Yojana (SGRY) have been 265 merged with it. It provides huge possibilities of making difference to the lives of 45 million rural households of 266 the country over the period of two years of its existence.

267 In Rajbansi society, women enjoy rights to make decisions regarding household foods and cooking materials, 268 child education, and societal norms like attending any ceremonial activities, selecting gifts, participating in any 269 political activities, taking part in Self Help Group etc. There are good numbers of female artisans in Chauhaddi 270 mouza, like, biri binders. Though these women exercise some rights at the familial or societal level, they are 271 mostly deprived from their parental inheritance. In majority of the cases, they do not enjoy rights to spend 272 household earnings. In case of their own earnings, they enjoy some freedom. 28 In case Through the light of 273 education, gradually these Rajbansi women like many other backward class women, having gained self confidence 274 to a certain level, begun to realize their own rights at familial and societal of wages, females are less paid than 275 male laborer. Regarding discrimination in wage labour, my observation is slightly different. For instance, during 276 the season of jute growing and processing, female laborer are hired at the rate of 100-120 Rupees per day. For the 277 same cause male laborers are paid 140-150 Rupees per day. Thus, apparently it seems that the female agricultural 278 laborers are paid less than their male counterparts. But my intensive field visits and observations reveal that 279 the female laborers are unable to bear the heavy loaded bundles of jute from cultivation field to the place where 280 they are supposed to be carried out and stored, where male co-operation becomes obvious and also on various 281 other occasions when needed during the process. The situation is different when a male laborer is hired for the 282 same work. They can carry out the whole thing without any help from others. Therefore, heavy goods bearing 283 from field to other decided area is part of the same job which a female laborer cannot perform and male labor 284 becomes mandatory. Thus, it has become obvious, that female laborers are paid less than their male counter 285 parts (though these are some particular cases). 28 I have discussed on this topic elaborately in Bhattacharyya, 286 Moumita G. 2012: Mapping Disparity: Rajbansi Women and Literacy' in Global Journals of Human Social 287 Sciences-E Linguistics and Education, Vol. 12 (9) June. levels. 29 They have become capable of giving required 288 arguments (in family matters, at the party level regarding politics, etc). 30 Though attainments in terms of 289 health, education and earnings are crucial for a dignified life, the ability to take charge of one's own destiny

290 requires something more than that. Emphasizing the significance of agency, Sen has argued: 'Persons must enter  
291 the moral counting by others not only as people whose wellbeing demands concern, but also as people whose  
292 responsible agency must be recognized'.

293 Most of the female members of one of the study area, namely, Chauhaddi mouza, are active participants of  
294 Mahila Samity and are also involved with Self Help Groups. They are also active party workers and most of  
295 them have read till the middle school or secondary level.

296 In Gartali Jalpesh mouza, the female members are more educated and conscious about their rights. Here the  
297 economy is much better and educational attainment is also high. They actively participate in Self Help Groups  
298 and at the panchayat levels (local political bodies) they carry out party works very efficiently. They conduct  
299 meetings, take required decisions and give fruitful efforts to bring forward expected results. The mouza has good  
300 communication, the location of the primary, secondary and higher secondary schools are apt which has high  
301 attendance rate of students, and the village economy is far better than the Chauhaddi mouza. This results in  
302 better socio-economic conditions of the village people. Through Self Help Groups, the women of this mouzas  
303 have gained some sort of economic independence and mental stamina. I have met women who have learned  
304 to read and write only to become active members in SHG and panchayat activities. Thus, the implication of  
305 educational attainment is understandable, considering the family and social background they belong to. It is  
306 education and literacy which can turn life of individuals for betterment, regarding familial and social adjustment  
307 and management. 31 29 Bhattacharyya, Moumita G. 2012: Mapping Disparity: Rajbanshi Women and Literacy'  
308 in Global Journals of Human Social Sciences-E Linguistics and education, USA. CAMBDIDGE: Massachusetts.  
309 Vol. 12 (9) June. 30 In one of the study areas, namely, Chauhaddi mouza, I met with the 'Pradhan' (female) of  
310 Jharaltagram gram panchayat. She has read up to the higher secondary level. She has a one year old boy child.  
311 She has to manage her party activities and familial duties with equal efficiency. It is on her part to balance both  
312 duties by paying equal attention. 31 Sen, A. 1985: 'Well-being, agency and freedom'. Journal of Philosophy. Vol.  
313 82 (4). p.204.

314 Though the women's movement has moved ahead from the initial 'welfarist' concerns about women's well-  
315 being to the question of women's agency. In such a framework, women are no longer seen as passive recipients  
316 of welfare-enhancing assistance, but are seen as active 32 Although termed as 'decision making' in the social  
317 science literature, 'agency is about more than observable action; it also encompasses the meaning, motivation  
318 and purpose which individuals bring to their activity, their sense of agency, or 'the power within'. 33 III.

## 319 5 Conclusion

320 Gender relations in Rajbanshi community, within and outside the households, are generally perceived to be more  
321 equitable than in many other parts of the country. 34 In societies facing the challenges of modernization and  
322 possible integration into other dominant cultures (in this case caste Hindu Bengali culture), there is generally a  
323 strong emphasis on preserving a real or imagined 'pure', 'indigenous' culture. In such sharply polarized discourses  
324 on identity and culture women's rights and concerns are often relegated to the background. 35 Disintegration  
325 of traditional family systems of the SCs in general and Rajbanshi community in particular, formalization of  
326 indigenous cultural and religious practices, migrations from different parts of the country, education, mass  
327 entertainment, media exposure and external cultural influences have been influencing gender relations in the  
328 areas under study. 36 As far as gender differences in intra-family decision making is concerned, it is important  
329 to note that within the Rajbanshi community where women enjoy some control over decision making in the  
330 households, this participation is almost always enjoyed within well-defined and differentiated spheres of action  
331 and socially sanctioned parameters. Second, there has been a clear tendency towards imitation of the 'other'  
332 cultures, particularly among the better-off and educated groups (caste Hindu Bengalis) living in urban areas, in  
333 terms of moving closer to the male centered, patriarchal nuclear family system. Autonomy, which is viewed as  
334 the decision making power of a woman within the family, has been looked upon as one of the important factors  
335 which can influence the life of the woman herself as well as others (Safilios-Rothschild, 1983). Decision making in  
336 a family/ society is by and large affected by various factors to mention a few among others, the level of education,  
337 husband's education, occupation, the 32 Sen, A. 1995: 'Agency and well-being: the development agenda'. In  
338 N. Heyzar, S. Kapoor & J. Sadler (Eds), A Commitment to the World's Women. Washington, DC: Unifem.  
339 p. 193. 33 Kabeer, N. 1999: Resources, agency, achievements: Reflections on the measurement of Women's  
340 Empowerment. Development and Change. ??ol. 30 (3). p. 348. 34 Although, recent scholarship has cast doubts  
341 on such generalizations (Xaxa, 2004). 35 Conversation with Dr. Deepak Kumar Roy availed me with the related  
342 informations. 36 In my published paper Bhattacharyya, G. Moumita. 2011: 'Gender and Discrimination: The  
343 Case of the Rajbanshi Women'. Voice of Dalit.

344 Vol. 4 (2). I have deliberately dealt with the issue. habitat, age, etc. As well as social setting, a woman's life  
345 cycle plays an important role in the dynamics of decision making and it is right that when a woman becomes  
346 older, she has more power and control over situations than when she was young (Cain et al. 1979; Das Gupta  
347 1996). Jejeebhoy (1995) argues that the degree of gender stratification in the society acts to condition the  
348 impact of other factors. In extreme patriarchal setting, where the seclusion of women or their withdrawal  
349 from outside activities is considered as high prestige, even better educated women may experience less decision  
350 making autonomy than uneducated women of less stratified setting. Dyson and Moore's (1983) observation also  
351 corroborates that in the less gender stratified society of south Indian women enjoy more autonomy than their

352 counterparts of the north. There is a strong relationship between the benefits for education to women and the  
353 goals of empowerment. Education and empowerment can be linked through the psychological and behavioural  
354 changes and each component is expected to affect: increased sense of control, confidence, competence, changed  
355 behaviours, increased access to resources, and an ability to get around in modern society. They are also linked  
356 through larger societal effects on women's status and roles. Most often in developing countries, women are  
357 oppressed because they are illiterate and do not have access to knowledge capability. Attainment of knowledge  
358 competence plays an important role to promote the process of empowerment through a proper understanding of  
359 both the structures of power within families as well as citizens of a civil society. 37 The emergence of grassroots-  
360 level women's leadership may play a catalytic role in gradually eliminating gender bias in sharing of political  
361 power. However, even today at the grassroots level, the traditional village chief and the village councils play  
362 a crucial role in conflict resolution and administration of justice. In this transitional phase, as the 'traditional'  
363 community institutions and the formal institutions of grassroots democracy coexist and share an ambiguous  
364 common space of governance with vague and approximate boundaries, women's issues do not. Women are hardly  
365 allowed to play any role in traditional institutions either, although in recent years, there have been some attempts  
366 to provide some space for them. However, after the introduction of the three-tier Panchayati Raj system along  
367 with 33 percent reservations for women. The level of participation of women at the Gram Panchayat level, Anchal  
368 Samiti level and district or Zilla Panchayat levels has risen. 37 Bhattacharya, Joysankar and Sarmila Banerjee. E  
369 Year necessarily get adequate attention, even though their representation has been ensured through legislation.  
370 38 Feminist critique of development, starting from Boserup (1970, [2007]), have argued that the outcomes of  
371 economic development, far from being gender neutral, are embedded in existing and emerging gender relations.  
372 The initial misconception that women's subordination is primarily the result of their 'lack of participation in  
373 productive work' has gradually been replaced by a more contextual and nuanced understanding of the conditions  
374 under which women participate in, or are incorporated into, the economy (Beneria and Sen, 1981; Kabeer,  
375 1994 [1998]; Rai, 2002) 39 . The nature of the development process, particularly in terms of its distributional  
376 outcomes, not only influences emerging gender relations but is also itself influenced by the nature and extent of  
377 gender inequality in the society. It is important to note that 'economic processes sometimes modify and sometimes  
378 reinforce pre-existing gender norms and unequal gender relations' (Beneria, Floro, Grown and McDonald, 2000)  
379 40 . The rapid transformation of the agricultural economy to cash crop economy poses serious challenges before  
380 women, particularly because, on the one hand, there is an increasing attack on the 'traditional' egalitarian values  
381 and practices, 41 The various dimensions of gender equality are not only interconnected, but impediments to  
382 any of them impede other dimensions as well (Nussbaum, 2000) and on the other hand, economic transformation  
383 itself has generated gendered processes of exclusion and impoverishment. 42 38 Mishra, D., Upadhyay, Vandana.  
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385 Journal of Gender Studies. Vol 19 (1). pp. 93-126. 39 Beneria, L., & Sen, G. 1981: 'Accumulation, reproduction  
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389 Polity press. 40 Beneria, L., Floro, M., Grown, C., & McDonald, M. 2000: 'Globalization and Gender' in  
390 Feminist Economics. ??ol 6(3), pp. 7-18. 41 To what extent traditional values, institutions and practices are  
391 egalitarian or gender neutral is itself a contested question (Elwin, 1957[1999]); Furer-Haimendorf, 1939, p. 101).  
392 . While spread of education and exposure to mass media has helped women to expand their capabilities, unequal  
393 opportunities and subtle discriminations tend to limit the scope for gender equality. The predominance of the  
394 politics of ethnicity and identity over a period of time has generated a political discourse where questions of  
395 gender equality are generally seen as undermining the legitimacy of community institutions, collective solidarity  
396 and identity. As the interest of the local Rajbanshi elites is significantly anchored in the politics of identity,  
397 questions regarding intra-community distribution of assets, income and opportunities have been pushed to the  
398 back. In this transition to capitalism, the 'traditional/old/indigenous' institutions are not simply being replaced  
399 by 'modern/ new/ alien' institutions; institutional diversity, adaptability and hybridity provide the broader  
400 context in which traditional identities are being reworked, adapted and selectively appropriated in response to  
401 the emerging challenges and opportunities. ??3 As Harriss-White et al. (2009) ??4 Education is considered a  
402 significant medium for human resource development; therefore the need for qualitative education starting with  
403 elementary education up to higher level can serve as sound base for up gradation and empowerment of these  
404 people in general and women in particular. It is only in the recent past that the learned persons of the Rajbanshi  
405 society has realized the importance, necessity and relevance of girls' education in particular and over all progress of  
406 education in general. It is education and only education which can develop a person's personality, make him/her  
407 socially adjustable, financially sound, and useful for the society-an all round development. A major portion of  
408 the Rajbanshi women are active members in Self Help Groups (SHGs) have argued, this has also provided the  
409 context for the emergence of an ethnicized discourse of development and governance. ??5 , which is a project  
410 under government sponsored Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY) ??6 . This has encouraged women  
411 to take decisions inside out the households, handle micro credits, work in groups and enhance their self esteem.  
412 A literate mother will always try and make sure that her children, especially the girl child gets educated. Though  
413 there are various socio-economic factors influencing simultaneously, it is only through education that ignorance  
414 can be destroyed and sincere awareness may be obtained. Finally, the probability of a literate woman to have

## 5 CONCLUSION

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415 more autonomy than an illiterate woman, is a convincing fact irrespective of any social setting. ??3 Ibid. ??4  
416 Harriss-White, B., Mishra, D. K., & Upadhyaya, V. 2009: 'Institutional diversity and capitalist transition: The  
417 political economy of agrarian change in Arunachal Pradesh, India'. *Journal of Agrarian Change*. Vol 9(4). pp.  
418 512-547. 45 SHG: It is a voluntary association of 10-15 members predominantly from the same socio-economic  
419 background. Initially each member has to contribute an amount to their respective group corpus regularly. After  
420 at least six months from the formation of the group, each SHG has to appear in a gradation test. After passing  
421 the test, the group becomes eligible for the revolving fund. 46 SGSSY: It is a government-sponsored micro-finance  
422 programme, is perhaps the largest of its kind in the world. The scheme aims at the formation of a large number  
423 of microenterprises in rural areas through the intervention of Gram Panchayats by establishing a large number  
of Self help groups (SHGs). <sup>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</sup>



Figure 1:

424

<sup>1</sup>© 2012 Global Journals Inc. (US)

<sup>2</sup>© 2012 Global Journals Inc. (US)

<sup>3</sup>Ibid. p. 111.9 Hochschild, Arlie. 1989: *The Second Shift*. New York: Avon Books. p.3. 10 Ibid. p. 4. 11 Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>© 2012 Global Journals Inc. (US)

<sup>5</sup>Ray, Bharati. 1994: Detecting Disadvantages-A Pilot Study of Scheduled Caste Women in Two Districts of West Bengal. University of Calcutta: Women's Studies Department. 16 Tinker, I. (ed.) 1990: Persistent Inequalities. Oxford: Oxford University Press. p. 30. However, the WID scholars, retained the fundamental premise of the liberal world view. The 17 Available at the site [www.egyankosh.ac.in/bitstream/123456789/36007/1/Unit%206.pdf](http://www.egyankosh.ac.in/bitstream/123456789/36007/1/Unit%206.pdf). 6.7.2 The Indian Context ... 6.9 Gender and Development (GAD) Approach ... Commission on the Status of Women and it came primarily from the feminist ...

<sup>6</sup>© 2012 Global Journals Inc. (US)

<sup>7</sup>18 Ibid. 19 Ray, Bharati. 1994: Detecting Disadvantages-A Pilot Study of Scheduled Caste Women in Two Districts of West Bengal. University of Calcutta: Women's Studies Department. 20 Sen, G and C. Grown. 1988: Development, Crises and Alternative Visions. London: Earthscan Publications.

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<sup>9</sup>© 2012 Global Journals Inc. (US)

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**1****Primary Occupation of  
Rajbanshi Population in**

Chauhaddi Mouza	Male	Percent	Female	Percent	Total	Percent
Agriculture	12	1.82	0	0.00		0.95
agricultural labour	152	23.10	30	4.96		14.41
Day labourer	147	22.34	36	5.95		14.49
Forest	2	0.30	0	0.00		0.16
Business	49	7.45	0	0.00		3.88
Housework	8	1.22	235	38.84		19.24
Sevice	4	0.61	4	0.66		0.63
Student	232	35.26	234	38.68		36.90
Maid	0	0.00	7	1.16		0.55
Other	49	7.45	2	0.33		4.04
Pension	3	0.46	1	0.17		0.32
Biri binding	0	0.00	56	9.26		4.43
Total	658		605			

Source: Field Survey, 2009-2010.

Figure 2: Table 1 :

**2****Primary Occupation  
of**

Rajbanshi	Male	Percent	Female	Percent	Total	Percent
Population in Gartali						
Jalpesh Mouza						
Agriculture	10	1.50	0	0.00	10	0.80
agricultural labor	29	4.35	0	0.00	29	2.31
day laborer	106	15.89	14	2.37	120	9.55
Business	92	13.79	2	0.34	94	7.48
Housework	5	0.75	331	56.10	336	26.73
Service	128	19.19	25	4.24	153	12.17
Students	270	40.48	213	36.10	483	38.42
Maid	0	0.00	5	0.85	5	0.40
Other	24	3.60	0	0.00	24	1.91
Pension	3	0.45	0	0.00	3	0.24
Total	667		590		1257	

Source: Field Survey, 2009-2010.

Figure 3: Table 2 :

## 5 CONCLUSION

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Country (where sample villages are located)	Percentage omen in family labour force in agriculture		Average hours worked per week on own farm		Percentage of work in farm performed by	
	by active female family members	by active male family members	female hours as percent of male hours	by active female family members	by active hired labour of both sexes	
	female	male	family percent of male hours	female	male	
Western India {A}						
	{B} 32 39	16 19	33 48	14 20	57 56	29
	{C}		35 54			24
Central India	{A} 21 27	15 20	27 64	6 7	21 20	73
	{B}		29 52			74
Southern India	40	20	30 67	25	37	38
Delhi territory		31				
Malaya {A}	7		17 45			
	{B}	9	14 68			
Philippines	21	30	43 70	13	69	18
Chinab, average	30		50	13	72	
Northern China	27		41	9	75	
Southern China	31		58	16	69	
Of which: sub- region with multi- cropping of paddy	42		76	30	62	9

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[Note: a The A sample refers to a village with one annual crop of paddy; the B sample refers to three villages with multi-cropping of paddy. The farm families were smallholders and both men and women had much wage labour in addition to their work in own farm. b The figures refer to the period 1929-33. \* Western India: Sample A, Dandekar, 82-9, sample of 2,379 households in the old Bombay Deccan, 1949-50. Sample B and C, Farm Survey Bombay, 14, 87, 117, 344-50, sample of 158 farms in Ahmednagar and Nasik districts (1956-57). Central India: Sample A and B, Farm Survey Madhya Pradesh, 126-7, 143-4, 149, 152, sample of 160 farms in Akola and Amraoti districts, 1956-7. Southern India: Farm survey Madras 16-7, 39-43, sample of 199 farms in Salem and Coimbatore districts, 1956-7. Delhi territory: Chaudhuri 647, sample of twenty-seven families in village close to Delhi. Malaya: Sample A and B, Wharton, 5-6, sample of fifty families in Province Wellesley in 1962-3. Philippines: Survey of Households, 25, a representative sample of 5, 123 households, October 1960. China: Buck, 290 -3, sample of 15,316 farms, 1929 -33. 15 16 15]

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**5**

		Mouza.	
		Buy and Sell	
Rights to Property of Female		Chauhaddi	Gartali
		Mouza	Jalpesh
			Mouza
Yes		22	10
No		421	318
Partial		3	0
Total		446	328

Source: Field Survey, 2009-2010.

Total number of female heads interviewed during the study

Chauhaddi Mouza-446

Gartali Jalpesh Mouza-328

Figure 5: Table 5 :

**6**

Decision making right of Female

		Chauhaddi	Gartali	Jalpesh	Mouza
		Mouza			
Yes		60	70		
No		36	4		
Partial		350	254		
Total		446	328		

Source: Field Survey, 2009-2010.

Total number of female heads interviewed during the study Chauhaddi Mouza-446 Gartali Jalpesh Mouza-328  
D D D D )

(

		Chauhaddi	Gartali
		Mouza	Mouza
Family		4	8
Heritance		440	320
Yes		2	0
No		446	328
Partial			
Total			

Source: Field Survey, 2009-2010.

Total number of female heads interviewed during the study

Chauhaddi Mouza-446

Gartali Jalpesh Mouza-328

[Note: EYear]

Figure 6: Table 6 :

## 5 CONCLUSION

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7

HH income spend	Chauhaddi Mouza	Gartali Mouza	Jalpesh Mouza.
Yes	84	100	
No	359	228	
Partial	3	0	
Total	446	328	

Source: Field Survey, 2009-2010.

Total number of female heads interviewed during the study

Chauhaddi Mouza-446

Gartali Jalpesh Mouza-328

Figure 7: Table 7 :

8

Own earning spend	Chauhaddi Mouza	Gartali Mouza	Jalpesh Mouza	2012
Full independence	133	100		
No	11	20		
Total Population who earns	144		120	
Total Female Heads		446	328	

Source: Field Survey, 2009-2010.

Total number of female heads interviewed during the study

Chauhaddi Mouza-446 Gartali Jalpesh Mouza-328 ( D D D D )

[Note: EYear]

Figure 8: Table 8 :

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