Original Research Article

Influence of Socio-Economic Background on Educational Attainment in Rural Rajbanshi Youth

Abstract

Higher levels of educational attainment are associated with better employment prospects, enhanced social mobility, and improved overall quality of life.This study examines the influence of socio-economic background on educational attainment among rural Rajbanshi youth. Data were collected from 200 households across four blocks in the Coochbehar District, focusing on key variables such as age, marital status, family structure, landholding, and income levels. Chi-square tests were applied to assess associations between these socio-economic factors and educational status, categorized as primary, secondary, higher secondary, and graduate and above. The results reveal statistically significant associations between educational attainment and age ($\chi^2 = 18.146$, $p < 0.01$) and marital status ($\chi^2 = 24.387$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that youth in their twenties (20-29 years) and unmarried individuals are more likely to achieve higher education levels. Among the surveyed households, 77% were classified as marginal landholders, reflecting limited resources but high aspirations for education. The findings emphasize the critical role of socio-economic factors in shaping educational outcomes, with implications for targeted interventions in rural development programs. This study highlights the need for policies that address these ~~socio-economic~~ socioeconomic disparities to enhance educational opportunities for marginalized communities like the Rajbanshi.

Keywords: Education, Rajbanshi, Rural Youth, Socio-economic factors.

Introduction

Educational attainment refers to the highest level of education an individual has completed, and it is a critical indicator of both personal and societal development.The educational attainment of most rural Rajbanshi youths ~~are~~ islargely influenced by their socio-~~-~~economic backgrounds as this determines to a large extent both access and overall academic performance (Bagchi, 2020; Das, 2021). The educational differences between children of the rural and urban poor have a lot to do with school funding, infrastructure development as well as ~~low quality~~low-qualityeducation; compounding multiple challenges inherent in poverty that confront~~s~~ most people living away from towns. For instance, in the northern part of West Bengal, the Rajbanshi community is a separate ethnic group and regional socio-economic conditions play~~s~~ vital role ~~for~~ inthe availability of education to children and youth from this society. These income,land possession patterns and occupational status are complex factors combined which may

impinge on the educational pathways of rural youth (Ojha *et al.*, 2017). It is the interplay of these socio-economic determinants with the education structure in rural areas that becomes very significant since they have a role to play when it comes to shaping academic performance, dropout rates, and overall motivation for higher education. Families' priorities prioritizeimmediate financial security over education — leading to high rates of early-school dropout, child labour, and migration for work (Roest, 2016; Deb *et al.*, 2020). Furthermore, the cultural underpinnings of education in a community that possibly sees little or no use for it may have influenced educational aspirations and outcomes within Rajbanshi society. Similarly, rural zones are reeling under a vast gap in the educational infrastructure: Iill-equipped schools, the inadequacy of teaching staff, and the absence of other prerequisites like sufficient extracurricular resources, etc. essential for all-round all-around development; particularly if it theybelongs to marginalized communities. All the more, this hardly leaves any chance for creating a level playing field between rural youth and urban counterparts who have exclusive access to better schools, coaching centres, or learning atmospheres. Another important factor is parental investment in education based on their own educational experience. Children of educated parents are more likely to get encouragement, guidance, and support in their education at home. On the other hand, in Uneducateduneducatedfamily'sfamilies, the youth has havelno proper motivation and there are limited opportunities of forlearning which also affects the performance of students. Similar to being historically oppressed, the gender of Rajbanshi youth is also a significant determinant for oftheir educational outcome. Cultural biases tend to place greater value on girls staying at home and becoming mothers than on a formal education, especially in rural areas where distance further restricts access. The absence of safety, sanitation facilities, and awareness programs in government schools also contributes to such gender disparities leading many girls from the poorer sections not only dropping to dropout sooner but dying dieearlier too (Ramanaik et al., 2018). In addition to this, there is a need for the government policies and measures; social welfare programs, and community-level intervention having profound impacts on these educational inequities. Students who do not have the means can remain in school if they are provided with scholarships, mid-day meals or made to wear uniforms which many public schemes help them avail. Still, the successful distribution of these programs presents significant challenges in several underdeveloped rural communities, creating imbalances among beneficiary regions (Nath & Nath, 2015;- Kaur, 2021). Furthermore, language is one of

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the five core ingredients in the Rajbanshi youth educational recipe. Since Rajbanshi is a linguistically unique community, its children may struggle to adjust with curricula set up in the state language leading them into further complexities of their learning and academic progression. Many Rajbanshi youth thus continue to be mired in low-wage agricultural or menial labour class professions, leaving the enduring impact of poverty and educational insufficiency (Atanasoski & Vora, 2019). Hence, the analysis of how socio-economic background affects the educational attainment among rural Rajbanshi youth needs to be interpreted from a comprehensive perspective that views economic constraints in tandem with social and cultural forces, alongside infrastructural limitations, policy concerns and by virtue of digital era unfolding new dimensions for education. Meeting these multiple challenges would require multi-layered intervention strategies which, in addition to bettering infrastructure and engaging with the local community also includes policies that are inclusive of both boys and girls, provides educational spaces conducive for learning in rural contexts.

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Methodology

The study was conducted in Coochbehar district of West Bengal. Coochbehar was purposively selected due to its predominantly Rajbanshi population. The district is divided into five sub-divisions (Coochbehar Sadar, Mathabhanga, Mekhliganj, Tufanganj, and Dinhata) and twelve blocks (Coochbehar I, Coochbehar II, Haldibari, Mathabhanga I, Mathabhanga II, Dinhata I, Dinhata II, Mekhliganj, Sitai, Sitalkuchi, Tufanganj I, and Tufanganj II). A multistage sampling technique was employed to ensure representativeness across the study area. Using simple random sampling, two sub-divisions (Coochbehar Sadar and Dinhata) were selected, followed by four blocks (Coochbehar I, Coochbehar II, Dinhata I, and Dinhata II) from the selected sub-divisions. A sample of 200 respondents, each deriving at least 50% of their income from dairy farming, was randomly selected from these four blocks, with 50 respondents from each block (see Figure 1).

~~Fig 1: Sampling Plan~~

Data analysis

Hejase et al. (2012) contend that informed objective decisions arebased on facts and numbers, real, realistic, and timely information.Furthermore, according to Hejase and

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Hejase (2013), "descriptivestatistics deals with describing a collection of data by condensingthe amounts of data into simple representative numerical quantitiesor plots that can provide a better understanding of the collecteddata" (p. 272). Therefore, this study analyzed data collected withdescriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages supported with tables forclarity. In addition, inferential statistics were performed using Chi-square analysis.

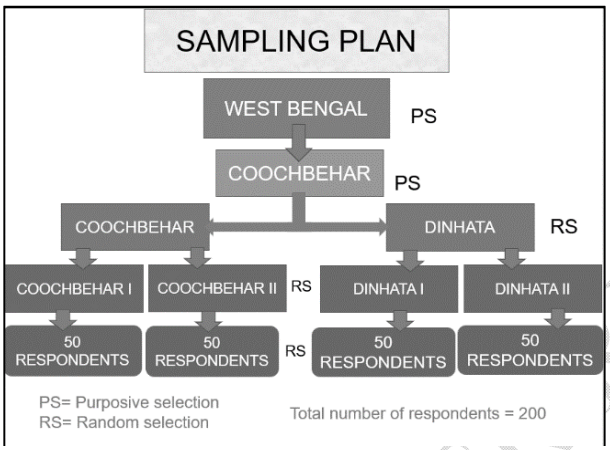

Fig 1. Sampling Plan

Data were collected from rural Rajbanshi households through structured interviews, capturing key socio-economic variables. The relationship between ~~socio-economic~~ socioeconomic variables and educational attainment was analyzed using the chi-square test.

Results and Discussion

Socio-economic variables~~:~~

The respondents in the study were described based on various socio-economic characteristics, including age, marital status, education level, family type, family size, landholding, number of cattle in milk, milk production, milk sales, occupation, annual income from dairy, social participation, extension contact, and mass media exposure.

Age: According to Table 1, 17.50% of the respondents were in their teenage years, while 82.50% were in their twenties, indicating that most participants were young adults in their twenties. This trend aligns with findings by Gora et al. (2022).

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Marital Status: The data showed that 76.50% of the youth from dairy farming families were unmarried. This could be attributed to the fact that young people typically prioritize financial security before considering family settlement. As a result, many youths choose to marry later in life. These findings are consistent with those reported by Gora et al. (2022).

Educational Status: The study revealed that the majority (46.00%) of respondents had attained education up to graduation or higher, followed by 32.00% who completed higher secondary school, 15.00% who had secondary education, and 7.00% who only completed primary education. The large proportion of respondents pursuing higher education suggests aspirations for better career opportunities.

Family Type: The data indicated that 59.00% of the respondents belonged to nuclear families, while 41.00% were part of joint families. This trend reflects the growing prevalence of nuclear families across various social groups, including Rajbanshi farm families, consistent with the findings of Dash and Kumar (2017).

Family Size: The study found that 52.50% of the respondents had small families, 24.00% had large families, and 23.50% had medium-sized families. The increasing prominence of nuclear families among Rajbanshi households has likely contributed to a reduction in family size, a trend supported by Karthik et al. (2017).

Landholding: The majority (77.00%) of the respondents had marginal landholdings, with only 23.00% having small landholdings. These findings align with those of Chandrasekar et al. (2017).

Cattle in Milk: The results revealed that 48.00% of the families had a small number of cattle in milk, 37.00% had a medium number, and 15.00% had a large number. Similar observations were made by Mande and Thombre (2009).

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Milk Production: Table 1 shows that 54.00% of respondents fell into the low milk production category, 29.00% were in the medium category, and 17.00% were in the high category. The low production could be due to a lack of high-yielding breeds, insufficient fodder, and limited knowledge about proper feeding practices. These findings are consistent with those of Satyanarayan and Jagadeeswary (2010) and Mooventhan et al. (2016).

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Milk Sales: The data indicated that 52.50% of respondents had low milk sales, 30.00% had medium sales, and 17.50% had high sales. The predominance of low milk sales

could be due to low production levels or limited market opportunities, similar to the findings of Satyanarayan and Jagadeeswary (2010).

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Occupation of Family: The majority (65.50%) of respondents' families were engaged in both agriculture and dairy farming, while 16.00% combined agriculture, dairy farming, and business, and 14.50% combined agriculture, dairy farming, and labour work. A small percentage (3.00%) were solely focused on dairy farming, and 1.00% combined dairy farming with business. Similar results were reported by Chandrasekar et al. (2017).

Annual Income from Dairy: The data revealed that 51.50% of respondents had low family income from dairy, 32.50% had medium income, and 16.00% had high income. The relatively low income from dairy farming could be attributed to low production levels and the low price of liquid milk in the area. These findings are in line with those of Chandrasekar et al. (2017) and Gora et al. (2022).

Social Participation: The study showed that 65.00% of respondents had low social participation, 29.00% had medium participation, and only 6.00% had high participation. The lack of social participation may be due to either a lack of awareness about its importance or limited opportunities. Similar results were reported by Meena (2010).

Extension Contact: The data indicated that 47.00% of respondents had low extension contact, 44.00% had medium contact, and only 9.00% had high contact. This may be due to a lack of awareness or difficulties faced by farmers in accessing extension personnel.

Mass Media Exposure: The study revealed that 55.50% of respondents had low mass media exposure, 41.00% had medium exposure, and 3.50% had high exposure. The low interest in farming-related information or limited access to mass media could explain this trend, which is similar to the findings of Rahman and Gupta (2015).

Table 1:Distribution of respondents based on different socio-economic variables

Sl. No.	Variables	Categories	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1.	Age (in years)	Teenager youth (<20)	35	17.50
		Youth in their twenties (20 to 29)	165	82.50
2.	Marital status	Married	47	23.50
		Unmarried	153	76.50
3.	Educational status	Illiterate	0	0.00
		Primary	14	7.00
		Secondary	30	15.00
		Higher Secondary	64	32.00
		Graduation and above	92	46.00

Sl. No.	Variables	Categories	Frequency	Percentage (%)
4.	Family type	Nuclear	118	59.00
		Joint	82	41.00
5.	Family size	Small (<4)	105	52.50
		Medium (4 to 5)	47	23.50
		Large (>5)	48	24.00
6.	Landholding	Marginal (<1 ha)	154	77.00
		Small (1 to 2 ha)	46	23.00
7.	Cattle in milk	Small (<5)	96	48.00
		Medium (5 to 8)	74	37.00
		Large (>8)	30	15.00
8.	Milk production (in litre)	Low (<12.02)	108	54.00
		Medium (12.02 to 20.60)	58	29.00
		High (>20.60)	34	17.00
9.	Milk sale (in litre)	Low (<10.07)	105	52.50
		Medium (10.07 to 18.65)	60	30.00
		High (>18.65)	35	17.50
10.	Occupation	Dairy farming	6	3.00
		Agri + Dairy farming	131	65.50
		Agri + Dairy farming + Labour work	29	14.50
		Dairy farming + Business	2	1.00
		Agri + Dairy farming + Business	32	16.00
11.	Annual income from Dairy (in Rs.)	Low (<133521.03)	103	51.50
		Medium (133521.03 to 247779.19)	65	32.50
		High (>247779.19)	32	16.00
12.	Social participation	Low (<6)	130	65.00
		Medium (6 to 9)	58	29.00
		High (>9)	12	6.00
13.	Extension contact	Low (<9)	94	47.00
		Medium (9 to 13)	88	44.00
		High (>13)	18	9.00
14.	Mass media exposure	Low (<8)	111	55.50
		Medium (8 to 10)	82	41.00
		High (>10)	7	3.50

Note: (n=200)

Association ~~Between~~between Educational Status and Socio~~-~~ec~~-E~~conomic Variables

The analysis explores the relationship between respondents' educational status (categorized as Primary, Secondary, Higher Secondary, and Graduate and above) and various socio-economic variables. The significance of these relationships is determined using chi-square tests. Below are the interpretations of the findings:

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1. Age (in years): A statistically significant association was found between the age of respondents and their educational status ($\chi^2 = 18.146$, $p < 0.01$). The majority of respondents (82.50%) were in their twenties (20 to 29 years), with a notable proportion (41.00%) being graduates or holding higher educational qualifications. This suggests that youth in their twenties tend to achieve higher education levels, possibly due to extended years of schooling and opportunities for further studies.

2. Marital Status: Marital status was statistically and significantly associated with educational status ($\chi^2 = 24.387$, $p < 0.01$). The data shows that a larger percentage of unmarried respondents (76.50%) had higher education levels, indicating a trend where individuals delay marriage to pursue education. The findings highlight a potential cultural shift where education is prioritized before settling down.

3. Family Type: The relationship between family type and educational status was not statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 7.611$, NS). However, it was observed that the majority (59.00%) belonged to nuclear families. While the type of family does not directly correlate with education, the trend indicates that nuclear family structures are prevalent across different education levels.

4. Family Size: No statistically significant association was observed between family size and educational status ($\chi^2 = 6.992$, NS). Nevertheless, the data shows that more than half (52.50%) of the respondents had small family sizes (less than four members). This might indicate a preference for smaller family units, regardless of educational attainment, possibly due to economic or lifestyle choices.

5. Landholding (in ha): The association between landholding and educational status was not statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 2.651$, NS). Most respondents (77.00%) were marginal landholders (less than 1 hectare). This indicates that landholding size does not have a strong relationship with educational attainment, reflecting the predominantly small-scale agricultural practices in the area.

6. Cattle in Milk: No statistically significant relationship was found between the number of cattle in milk and educational status ($\chi^2 = 3.370$, NS). The majority (48.00%) of respondents had small herds (fewer than five cattle in milk). This suggests that herd size is more a function of economic capability rather than educational level.

7. Milk Production (in litres): The analysis did not reveal a statistically significant association between milk production and educational status ($\chi^2 = 6.263$, NS). More than half (54.00%) of the respondents were in the low production category (less than 12.02 litres). This implies that milk production levels remain consistent across education groups, possibly due to limited access to resources like feed, technology, or extension services.

8. Milk Sale (in litres): There was no statistically significant association between milk sales and educational status ($\chi^2 = 4.734$, NS). The majority (52.50%) were categorized under low milk sales (less than 10.07 litres). This finding suggests that educational attainment does not heavily influence the volume of milk sales, which may be driven more by production capacity and market demand.

9. Occupation: The relationship between occupation and educational status was statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 15.811$, $p < 0.01$). The majority (65.50%) were engaged in a combination of agriculture and dairy farming. This indicates that diverse livelihood strategies are common across different educational levels, reflecting the mixed farming practices typical in rural settings.

10. Annual Income from Dairy (in Rs.): No statistically significant association was found between annual income from dairy farming and educational status ($\chi^2 = 3.484$, NS). More than half (51.50%) of the respondents had low income (less than ₹ 133,521.03). This indicates that dairy income levels are more dependent on external factors like market prices and herd size than on educational attainment.

11. Social Participation: Social participationshowed a statistically significant association with educational status ($\chi^2 = 7.301$,$p < 0.05$). The majority (65.00%) had low social participation, indicating that community engagement is not strongly influenced by education, perhaps due to time constraints or lack of awareness about opportunities.

12. Mass Media Exposure: The association between mass media exposure and educational status was not statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 5.784$, NS). More than half (55.50%) had low exposure to mass media. Limited media exposure across all education groups could indicate barriers like poor connectivity, lack of relevant content, or other priorities.

Table 2 Socio-economicfactors affecting educational attainment of rural Rajbanshi youths, (n=200)

Sl. No.	Variables		Educational Status				Total	Chi-square value
			Primary	Secondary	Higher Secondary	Graduate and above		
1.	Age (in years)	Teenager youth (<20)	1 (0.50)	12 (6.00)	22 (11.00)	0 (0.00)	35 (17.50)	18.146**
		Youth in their twenties (20 to 29)	13 (6.50)	27 (13.50)	43 (21.50)	82 (41.00)	165 (82.50)	
2.	Marital status	Married	9 (4.50)	12 (6.00)	6 (3.00)	20 (10.00)	47 (23.50)	24.387**
		Unmarried	5 (2.50)	19 (9.50)	59 (29.50)	70 (35.00)	153 (76.50)	
3.	Family type	Nuclear	4 (2.00)	17 (8.50)	44 (22.50)	53 (26.50)	118 (59.00)	7.611NS
		Joint	10 (5.00)	14 (7.00)	21 (10.50)	37 (18.50)	82 (41.00)	
4.	Family size	Small (<4)	5 (2.50)	14 (7.00)	38 (19.00)	48 (24.00)	105 (52.50)	6.992NS
		Medium (4 to 5)	5 (2.50)	10 (5.00)	9 (4.50)	23 (11.50)	47 (23.50)	
		Large (>5)	4 (2.00)	7 (3.50)	18 (9.00)	19 (9.50)	48 (24.00)	
5.	Landholding (in ha.)	Marginal (<1 ha)	9 (4.50)	26 (13.00)	48 (24.00)	71 (35.50)	154 (77.00)	2.651NS
		Small (1 to 2 ha)	5 (2.50)	5 (2.50)	17 (8.50)	19 (9.50)	46 (23.00)	
6.	Cattle in milk	Small (<5)	5 (2.50)	13 (6.50)	31 (15.50)	47 (23.50)	96 (48.00)	3.370NS

Sl. No.	Variables		Educational Status				Total	Chi-square value
			Primary	Secondary	Higher Secondary	Graduate and above		
		Medium (5 to 8)	7 (3.50)	13 (6.50)	26 (13.00)	28 (14.00)	74 (37.00)	
		Large (>8)	2 (1.00)	5 (2.50)	8 (4.00)	15 (7.50)	30 (15.00)	
7.	Milk production (in litre)	Low (<12.02)	8 (4.00)	14 (7.00)	30 (15.00)	56 (28.00)	108 (54.00)	6.263^{NS}
		Medium (12.02 to 20.60)	4 (2.00)	12 (6.00)	20 (10.00)	22 (11.00)	58 (29.00)	
		High (>20.60)	2 (1.00)	5 (2.50)	15 (7.50)	12 (6.00)	34 (17.00)	
8.	Milk sale (in litre)	Low (<10.07)	8 (4.00)	15 (7.50)	28 (14.00)	54 (27.00)	105 (52.50)	4.734^{NS}
		Medium (10.07 to 18.65)	4 (2.00)	10 (5.00)	23 (11.50)	23 (11.50)	60 (30.00)	
		High (>18.65)	2 (1.00)	6 (3.00)	14 (7.00)	13 (6.50)	35 (17.50)	
9.	Occupation	Dairy farmer	2 (1.00)	0 (0.00)	2 (1.00)	2 (1.00)	6 (3.00)	15.811**
		Agri + Dairy farmer	9 (4.50)	16 (8.00)	44 (22.00)	62 (31.00)	131 (65.50)	
		Agri + Dairy farmer + Labour work	2 (1.00)	8 (4.00)	10 (5.00)	9 (4.50)	29 (14.50)	
		Dairy farmer + Business	0 (0.00)	1 (0.50)	0 (0.00)	1 (0.50)	2 (1.00)	
		Agri + Dairy farmer + Business	1 (0.50)	6 (3.00)	9 (4.50)	16 (8.00)	32 (16.00)	

Sl. No.	Variables		Educational Status				Total	Chi-square value
			Primary	Secondary	Higher Secondary	Graduate and above		
10.	Annual income from Dairy (in Rs.)	Low (<133521.03)	8 (4.00)	17 (8.50)	30 (15.00)	48 (24.00)	103 (51.50)	3.484^{NS}
		Medium (133521.03 to 247779.19)	3 (1.50)	11 (5.50)	25 (12.50)	26 (13.00)	65 (32.50)	
		High (>247779.19)	3 (1.50)	3 (1.50)	10 (5.00)	16 (8.00)	32 (16.00)	
11.	Social participation	Low (<6)	8 (4.00)	20 (10.00)	44 (22.00)	58 (29.00)	130 (65.00)	7.301*
		Medium (6 to 9)	6 (3.00)	11 (5.50)	18 (9.00)	23 (11.50)	58 (29.00)	
		High (>9)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	3 (1.50)	9 (4.50)	12 (6.00)	
12.	Mass media exposure	Low (<8)	10 (5.00)	18 (9.00)	39 (19.50)	44 (22.00)	111 (55.50)	5.784^{NS}
		Medium (8 to 10)	3 (1.50)	13 (6.50)	24 (12.00)	42 (21.00)	82 (41.00)	
		High (>10)	1 (0.50)	0 (0.00)	2 (1.00)	4 (2.00)	7 (3.50)	

** Significant at 1 per cent level of significance

* Significant at 5 per cent level of significance

NS Non-significant

(Figures in the parenthesis indicate percentage of total respondents)

Conclusion

The study provides significant insights into the influence of socio-economic factors on educational attainment among rural Rajbanshi youth. The findings demonstrate that variables such as age, marital status, social participation and family occupation are crucial determinants of educational success. Specifically, younger and unmarried individuals, tend to achieve higher levels of education. This underscores the role of familial and personal factors in shaping educational outcomes.The chi-square analysis reveals that socio-economic status, including family income and occupation, influences educational opportunities, stress the disparities faced by those in lower income brackets or with less stable occupations.The research highlights the necessity for targeted interventions to improve educational access and quality in rural areas. Policy measures should focus on enhancing family income, providing support to parents to improve family occupation creating opportunities for youth that bridge socio-economic gaps. Additionally, educational programs and support mechanisms tailored to the unique needs of rural communities can help address existing disparities. Addressing socio-economic barriers is essential for fostering educational attainment in rural Rajbanshi youth.

DISCLAIMER (ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE)

Authors hereby declare~~s~~ that NO generative AI technologies such as Large Language Models (ChatGPT, COPILOT, etc) and text-to-image generators have been used during the writing or editing of manuscripts.

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