

Report

The Educational Status of Women in Bali Island, Sundarbans, India



-A Krishna Trust Initiative

2018

A Report on the Educational Status of Women in Bali Island, Sundarbans, India

In memory of educationist Late Krishna Bhattacharya, Krishna Trust was built to serve the needy and marginalized women and children of the society. For the last five years, Krishna Trust has been working towards the socio-economic upliftment of socially disadvantageous women who strive for education. It also provides funds and recognition to female educationists who serve the backward classes of society by giving them educational and health-care benefits. Recently, a two month-long survey has been conducted by Krishna Trust to study the livelihood and educational status of women on Bali Island in Sundarbans, India. The findings of this survey have been brought out in this report.

The survey would have been impossible to carry out, without the help of Mrs. Juthika Gharami Biswas. Mr. Piyush Gharami and Anil Mistry have significantly contributed to the collection of data from the interiors of Sundarbans. Mr. Atul Pandey, I.R.S Deputy Commissioner, Income Tax Department, Kolkata has helped enormously in the project. Calcutta Research Group and all its employees has provided equal support to this project.

This report has been compiled and prepared by Ms. Ankita Manna, who has also worked on conversion of the collected data into charts and theories through statistical and econometric techniques.

Introduction-

Sundarbans is situated within the interiors of South 24 Parganas, world's largest delta and home to widespread mangrove forests. The total area of the Sundarbans reserved for mangrove forests includes 10,000 square km, of which Bangladesh has 6000 square km and India has the rest. Sundarbans forest lies in the vast delta on the Bay of Bengal formed by the super confluence of the Ganges, Brahmaputra and Meghna rivers. The area is intersected by a complex network of tidal waterways, mudflats and small islands of mangrove forests. The largest mangrove forest island is named Sundarbans by the name of a tree "Sundari", which means beautiful and this place is also a perfect epitome of beautiful enchanting forest land. Sundarbans is popularly known for eponymous Royal Bengal Tiger, as well as numerous fauna including species of birds, spotted deer, crocodiles and the Indian Python. The forest treasures 330 plant species, 35 reptiles, 400 types of fishes, 270 species of birds and 42 species of mammals. This deltaic coastal region comprises wildlife sanctuary, bio-sphere reserve and world's largest mangrove forest. It has been declared as UNESCO World Heritage Site in the year 1987. The life the people residing here is extremely risky. They largely depend on rivers and forest for life sustenance. Their only mean of communication between the islands is through rivers. Interposed between the sea, rivers, canals and creeks, Sundarbans is inundated twice a day by sea water. A large number of population in this area depend on the forest for food and income. They ply the coastal lines for crabs and fishes or go deeper into the forest for woods and honey. Risking their life to such extent can make their life vulnerable to tigers. According to NPR report, on an average 25 people on the Indian side of Sundarbans are attacked every year by tigers. Majority of the people live far below poverty line. Subsequently their literacy rate is also very poor. Most of the people residing in this coastal region are illiterate. Health care system of this area is also very poor, people have to go miles by boat in order to avail basic treatment from the primary healthcare center. The life at Sundarbans is risky, exotic and completely depending on the nature.

Of the more than 100 deltas and islands that together comprise Bali delta region covers some 2000 hectares of area. Bali is a lesser known island, more prone to neglect. The island has a population count of 17,000 inhabitants. Even after 70 years of independence, Bali has

not witnessed much development. The survey on women's and children's education in Bali Island conducted at the behest of Krishna Trust over the last two months has revealed that majority of the families inhabiting the island live below the poverty line. The team of Krishna Memorial Trust has visited 3,000 households and has reviewed the female members of the family in order to get an idea of the education system in Bali Island. Our focus is to explore the relationship between social, economical, and educational variables to determine the illiteracy rate and school dropout rate in primary and secondary schools. Early marriage, financial drawback, high degrees of social tension in the society are the key reasons responsible for dropouts. The culture of child labour and illiteracy are at the root of their social vulnerability. In our statistical findings, education level differs depending on region, rural urban divide, distance to school and job-related migration. The study helps us to determine why the rate of early marriage of girls is so high! It's because educating a girl child does not benefit the parental household. The institution of early marriage is viewed as an escape route of poverty, stands on the basis that marrying off a girl child can result as one less person to feed, some less amount of money to spend.

Women perform as workers in agricultural land, riverside forest area, and also go to the deepest jungle in search of food and fuel, risking their lives. The woman plays a dual role of a mother and a family earner. Ultimately, in this way women end up with nothing but severe health disorders. The number of physically handicapped members in the family is increasing day by day. And the main reason behind this is malnutrition and illiteracy. Though they pass their life through this immense struggle, they never lack the motive to work harder. Data shows that they regret dropping out of school without completing primary and secondary education and they are also thankful for the education that they have got in their early childhood. They want their children to complete their school education, and want their daughters to get married off, after age 18. Many of them want to be self-dependent and support their family financially. Our focus is to mitigate their difficult survival issues by identifying their needs statistically and scientifically. A little help to these women can change their life immensely.

Objective of the study-

A survey on 3000 women residing in the remote corner of the Sundarban, Bali Island for more than two months has revealed that significant numbers of women from this region

have had very little education. There are many who join the men in the forests or the fields for securing sustenance, as a result of which, their children are excluded from maternal care and often grow up without a guardian. Numerous children of this region have to contend with malnutrition, poor health and lack of education. The number of physically challenged candidates is increasing day by day. In such a remote interiors of Sundarban, where most government physicians are reluctant to go, if someone falls ill suddenly and requires medical attention, he/she has to travel several kilometres to reach the Block Hospital. There are just two ambulances available, and they refuse to undertake night trips.

Women with little or no education have no self-confidence and are always underestimated by the society. In this patriarchal society, they are bound with the social prejudices, customs, superstitions and religious fundamentalism which restricts their mind and thought process. It is important to give education both the elderly and younger women for the overall upliftment of the society. The focus of the paper is to highlight the issues of illiteracy and dropout from school education as a specific case study on the district of Sundarbans, Bali Island.

Differently abled people are generally treated as a curse or a burden both by their families, and society. They are often subjected to physical and mental abuse, resulting in their gradual withdrawal from society and complete isolation. But differently abled persons are just as much a part of society as we are. Our motive is to provide them proper healthcare facilities, educational benefit and some financial aid.

Presently, the societal structure of Bali falls far short of modern, progressive, developed social systems. A study of the survey identifies the following issues as deserving of our attention:

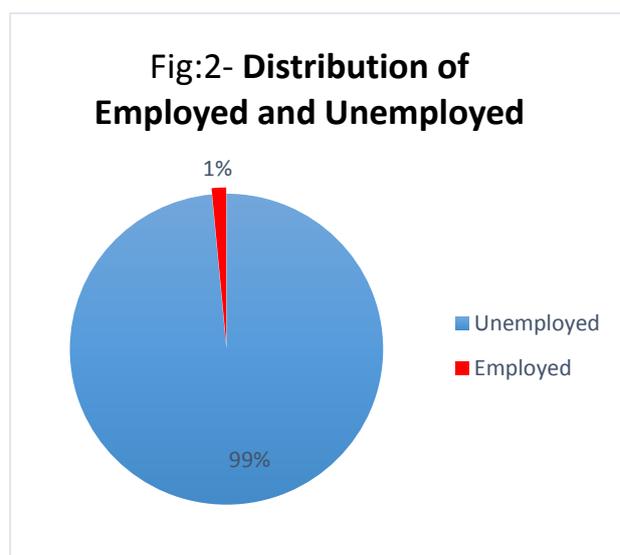
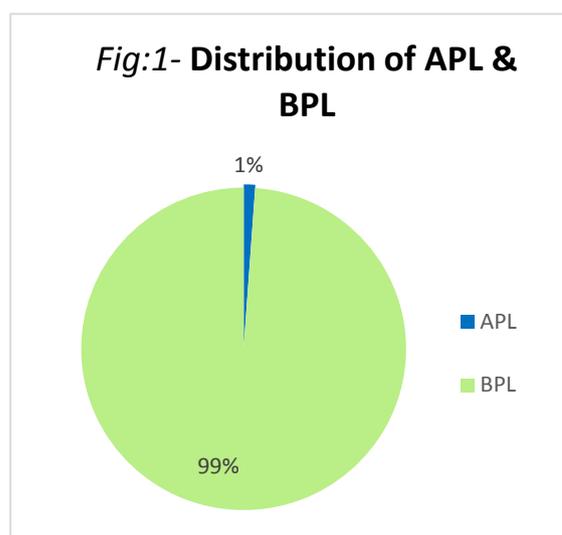
1. Self-dependence for women with little or no education
2. Children's nutrition and education
3. Education and financial aid for the differently abled
4. Education for elderly women

Report from the study-

The survey on women's and children's education in Sundarban, Bali Island has revealed that 99% of the families inhabiting the island live below the poverty line. Their median family income is 3000 INR, and mean of their income is 3278. The majority of the people living below poverty line are mainly engaged in agricultural work. They are often compelled to depend on the forests and rivers for fuel and foods. Only 32 families live above poverty level. Mean of their income is 3188 INR. Therefore, the income disparity is very high in this area.

With the very low employment rate, 99% women are unemployed. But there are many who join the men in the fields and the forests

for life sustenance. Women work both the domestic chore and the field but always unrecognized as a working community. Many of them want to support their family income but with little knowledge and educational qualification they hardly can do anything. The lack of job opportunity is another reason for not continuing their study and getting married early. Bali counts 134 highly schooled women and 104 of them are unemployed and want



to be self-dependent. 19 women have completed Bachelor's degree and facing the same employment crisis. High rate of unemployment and underemployment discourages education and adversely affects their livelihood. Many people consider education unnecessary because all the educated and uneducated lie in the same sphere of unemployment. 1997 women want to do 'nothing' in their life. According to these women, they are

born to serve the family in domestic chores, and to take care of other members of the family. There is also another 819 women who wants to be self-dependent. 67(9.01%) of them want to do handicrafts work. Quite a few of them wants to be teacher and nurse.

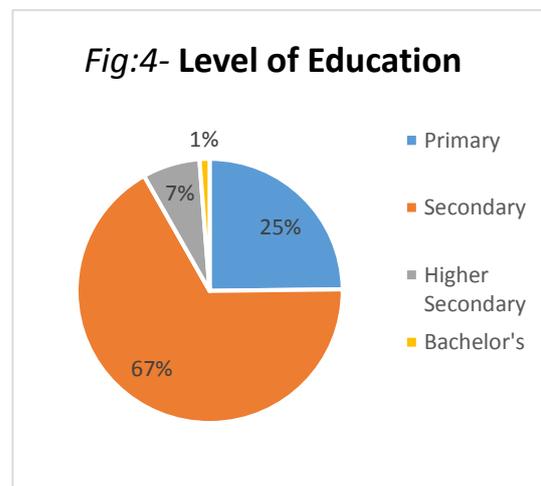
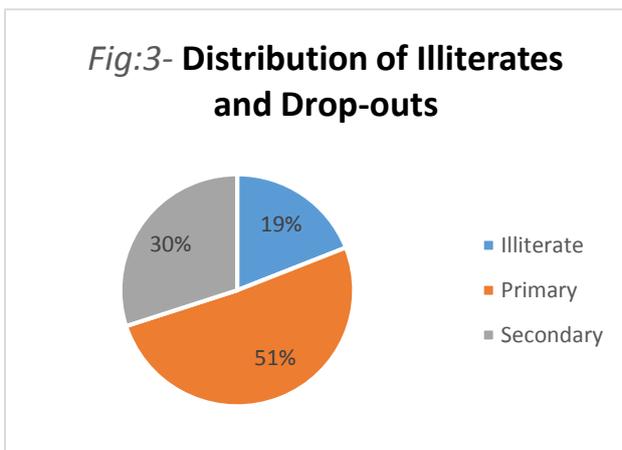
The table below shows their career wishes-

Career Choices of the villagers							
Villages	Handicraft	Higher Study	Nothing	Nursing	Self-dependent	Teacher	Grand Total
Bali Prubapara	2		68		54	1	125
Bali-5			59		19		78
Bali-6	1		99		41		141
Bali-7	10		225	1	95	1	332
Bali-8			165		69		234
Bali-9			76		43		119
Bijaynagar	34	2	338		107	2	483
Bijaynagar-3	2		258		52		312
Bijaynagar-5			80		31		111
Bijaynagar-6	1		42		21		64
Bijaynagar-8	17		110		48	2	177
Birajnagar			286		93		379
Satyanarayanpur			191		70		261
Grand Total	67	2	1997	1	743	6	2816

Table-1: Career Choices of the villagers

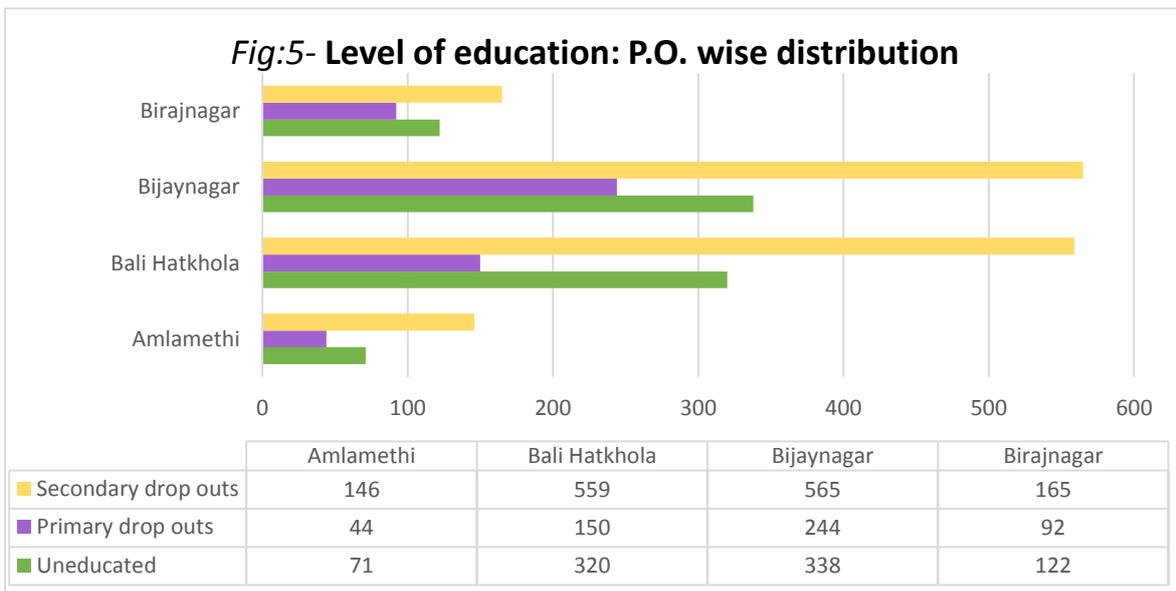
According to these chart Bijaynagar and Bijayangar-8 women are most interested in handicraft industry. Bali-purbapara, bali-7, bijaynagr-5 and Satyanaranyanpur shows much interest in self-dependency. While Birajnagar and Bijaynagar-3 has much prone to neglect education and women as a working community.

With little or no education one cannot be Self-dependent. Women have to be adequately educated to do handicrafts. The report survey states that 19% of the unemployed women are illiterate. 51% are primarily educated and only 30% has seen high school. 7% has reached to higher secondary and only 1% has gone to college. The following two charts show the distribution of illiterate & school dropouts and level of education-

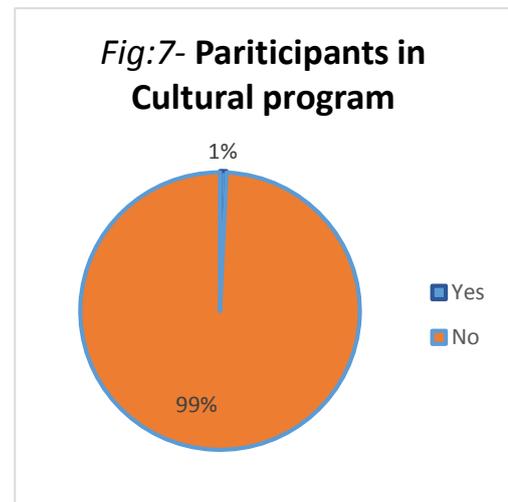


Bijaynagar and Balihatkhola has most the secondary dropouts. The highest primary dropout has come from Birajnagar. Bijaynagar shows the maximum level of illiteracy.

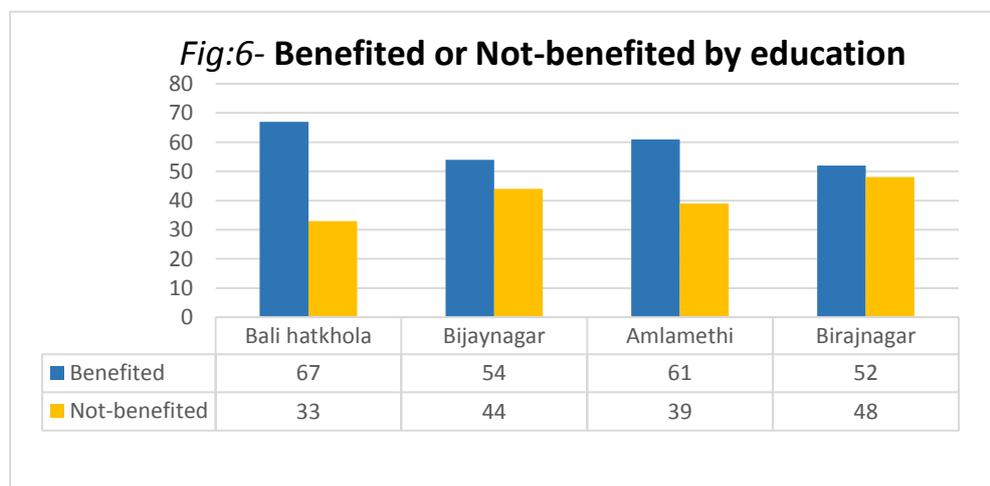
The following chart shows the P.O wise distribution of their education level-



It is clearly shown that major illiteracy resides in Bali Hatkhola and Bijaynagar. Bijaynagar-3 has highest number of illiterate villagers. Birajnagar and Bijaynagar has significant number of primary dropouts and again Bali Hatkhola and Bijaynagar shows a large number of secondary dropouts. The report of the survey shows that women with little or no education lacks the true knowledge of understanding. They fall far behind the modernization, and enlightenment of new technologies. No acquisition of real knowledge and belief in old prejudices, customs and superstitious fundamentalism permeate their minds and lives. 835 illiterate women has nothing to do with their life, only 20 of them wants to be self-dependent. 530 primarily educated women also falls under 'nothing to do' category. Only a high percentage (53% approx.) of secondarily educated women has showed interest to be something in life. 67 women regrets for dropping out of school without completing the basic education. Majority of them resides in Bijaynagar-8 and Bali Purvapara. Early dropout of school for financial or family reason made their life even more difficult cause they cannot fit into the labour market in later part of their life for poor educational qualification. It is clearly shown that education can be a help to those who are unvoluntarily unemployed for poor academic qualification. It also helps to eradicate superstitious believes, negative prejudices from the society and helps to build up a good self-esteem for the women who are in domination by gender, race and culture.



1188 women have stated that they are not benefited by the education system. 79%



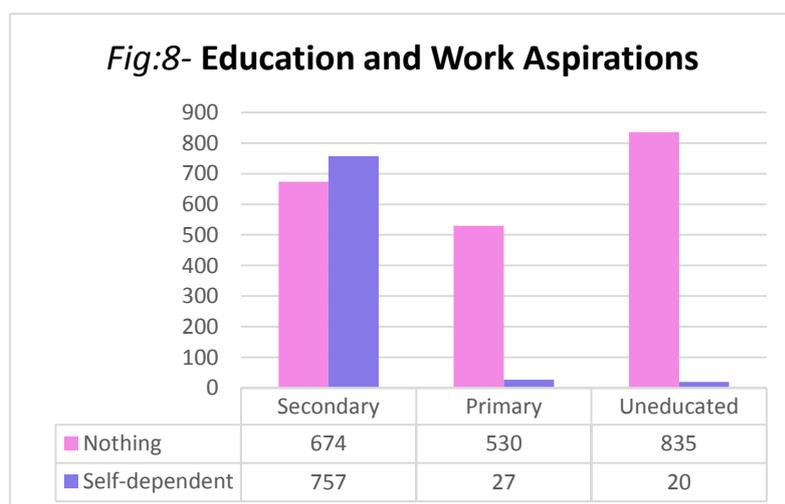
(approx.) of them are either primarily drop-out or non-attendees of school. Most of them are indifferent to studies and

only a few are there who regrets for not attending school. 28% (approx.) of primarily and secondarily educated women are also non-beneficiaries of education. Their less gratitude for education, not only demotivate others to continue in academics but indirectly encourages the culture of child labour and early marriage. Bali-9, Bali-5, Bali-8, Bijaynagar and Birajnagar have significant number of educated people who did not get any benefit from their education. High unemployment and underemployment is the main reason for such grief. People with no or little education can opt for any and every kind of lower paid, less prestigious job. But educated women are restricted to do so by their own self-esteem. Lastly, they find themselves standing in the same line of unemployment with poorly educated women. According to them, education hardly made any impact on their livelihood.

Only 21 women out of 2816 participate in cultural program. There is huge cultural gap in the society so in their cultural mindset. For the overall development of the society one needs to know the ethics and real culture of India what lacks Sundarban behind the veil of superstitious prejudices.

The factors responsible for Illiteracy and School Drop-outs-

The reasons for illiteracy and school dropout may vary. Some may consider education

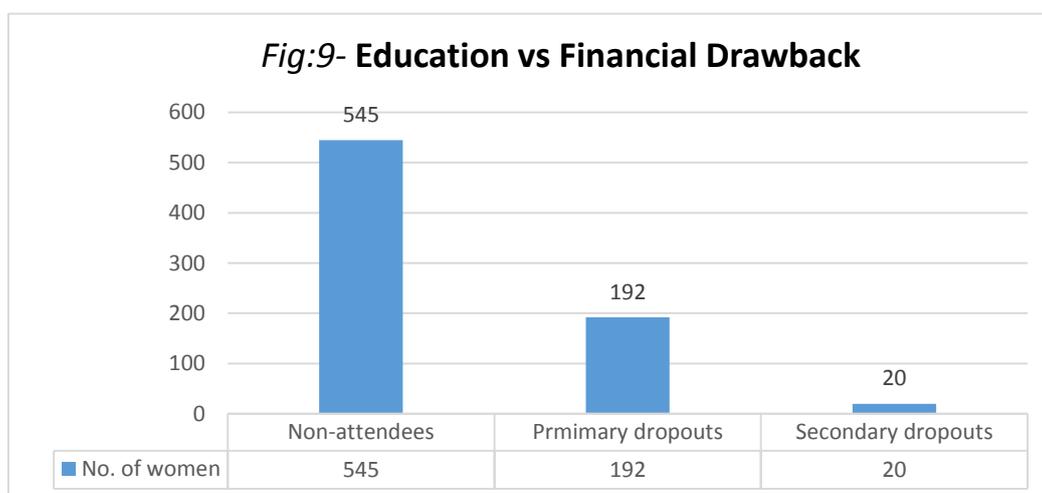


unnecessary and dropout from school voluntarily while others are forced to do so under terrible circumstances. Whatever be the reason, the mere fact that a child is not completing her/his school education is not virtuous. Many students are deprived from compulsory education because

of socio-economic reasons. Such children, many a times fail to be an asset for the nation given their inability to contribute anyway. No reason can big enough and act as a replacement for school education. It forms the base of a person's life making them efficient in all disciplines.

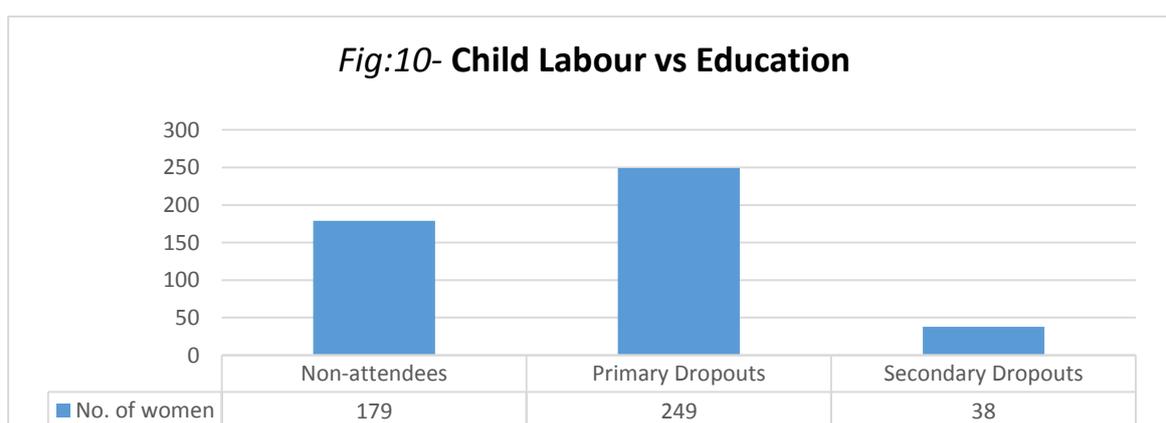
Financial Constraint-

It is unfortunate that students have to give up their education in the face of economic reasons. When a family is not financially secure, prioritizing child's education takes a backseat. Several adolescent children are asked to quit their school education and looked upon the family as a helping hand. 542 women had remained illiterate and 212 dropped out of school without completing their prior education because of financial drawbacks. 192 out of these 212 women are primary school dropouts. 99% of the population falls under Below Poverty Level. The median income of the family is 3000 INR and the mean income is 3150 INR. Majority of them who left education because of financial constraint lives in Bali-7, Bijaynagar and Birajnagar. In the logistic regression model, null hypothesis can be rejected at 1% level of significance for the dependent variable literacy and primary school dropouts, but for secondary school dropout rate the result is insignificant. The log odd ratio of remaining uneducated for financial reason is 0.719 i.e. the probability of being illiterate when the family suffers from poverty. Therefore, poverty, availability and accessibility are three big reasons of poor educational condition.



Child Labour-

Child labour is the most expected consequence of extreme poverty. Here people live their life by risking the same. Women go to the deepest forest, riverside area for the food and fuel and expects their children to become a helping hand and a financial support as early as possible. These children are emotionally led into abandoning their academic life and focus their attention to the family crisis. Illiteracy or School dropout is the most common phenomena in this scenario. 179 women remained uneducated because they had to join the labour force in a very early age of their life. 249 primarily educated and 38 secondarily educated women also dropped out of school and worked as child labour. Most of them resides in Bijaynagar and Bali-7. According to our statistical findings students mostly dropout just after their primary education because this is the stage when children reaches the age 10-11 years which is the most suitable time for induction into Child Labour.

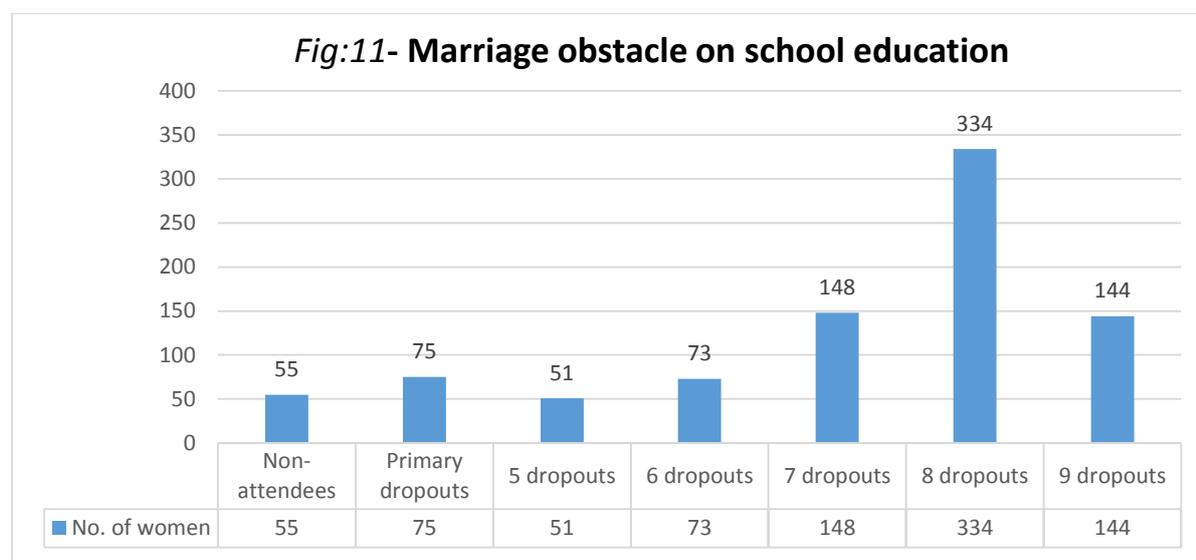


Statistical report shows Child labour is one of the main reason for low literacy and high primary and secondary dropouts with 1% level of significance. The odd ratio of drooping out from primary school and joining the labour force is 0.598.

Early Marriage-

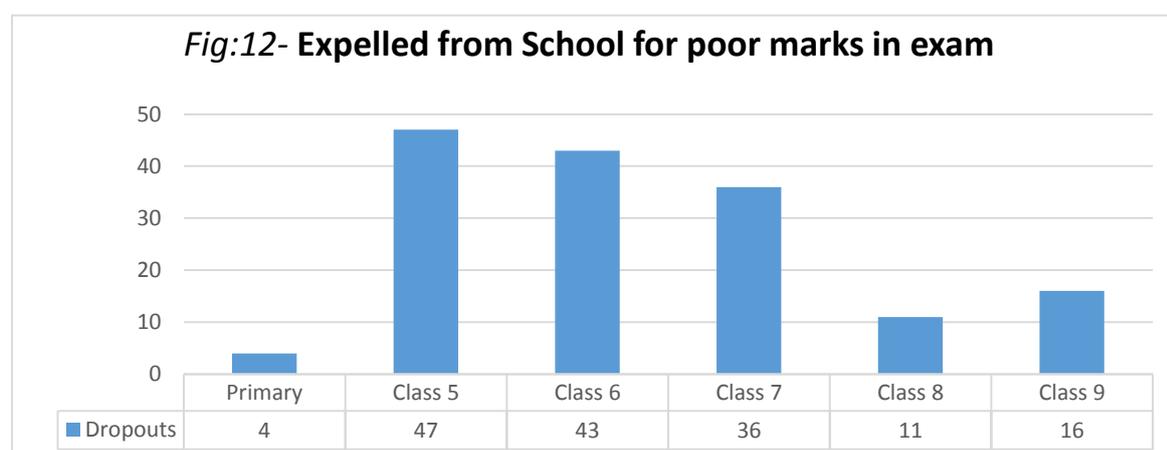
Mostly women are the victim of this societal norm. Though there are many causes of Child marriage and multiple barriers to its elimination. Poverty, weak enforcement of law and patriarchal society are enough to ensure girls to get married off while still a child. People see this as a solution to reduce their family size and eliminate poverty. Moreover, investing on girl's education is not accrue to her parental household, so educating a girl is considered to be complete waste of the money. Here girls are born to serve the family in domestic chores and to take care of other members of the family. Our study shows the median

education girls needed to get married off is class 8. But the report states 55 women never attended school because they got married in their childhood. 75 women primarily dropped out of school because of early marriage. In this classification 984 women are secondarily dropout when were in class 5, 6, 7 and 8 respectively. Class 8 has been a benchmark for girls to complete their study and get married off. 334 girls dropped out of school in class 8 only because of marriage. Our statistical study shows student's dropout is affected by marriage is true at 99% of point interval for all the three cases. The odd ratio of drop-out in class 8 for early marriage is 0.379.



Poor Grade-

Following the 86th amendment, this provision has been made into a law, which states that every child between 6 and 14 years of age has the right to compulsory primary education and government schools must accommodate all children who seek education. Additionally, no child can be failed, or expelled before the completion of primary education. But our



study finds that, 168 number of students are expelled from school for getting lower than the qualifying marks in school examination. The maximum failing percentage is high in class 5, 6 and 7 which is the most appropriate age for students to get into child labour force. It shows high level of significance for dropping out of school. Living under below poverty level where girl child education has always considered to be less important, if one fails it is almost impossible to bring her back to the school for completing the prior education.

Distance Factor-

Eighth and Ninth Five Year plan puts much emphasis on the primary and secondary education system. According to the new revised policy, a primary school would be opened in an area with a population of 100, and where no schooling facility existed within a radius of 1km, in hilly and inaccessible areas. But our report shows 17 women dropped out of school due to long distance from home to school. 151 pupil walked 2-4km long to reach school. None of these school girls have the accessibility of cycle or any other transport. They walk 2-3 km to reach school. And after a certain age, this distance become a big issue to continue education. Most of the parents are unwilling to send their daughter to school by travelling such long. Hence they prepare them to learn domestic chore activity which is very essential for marriage.

Family constraint-

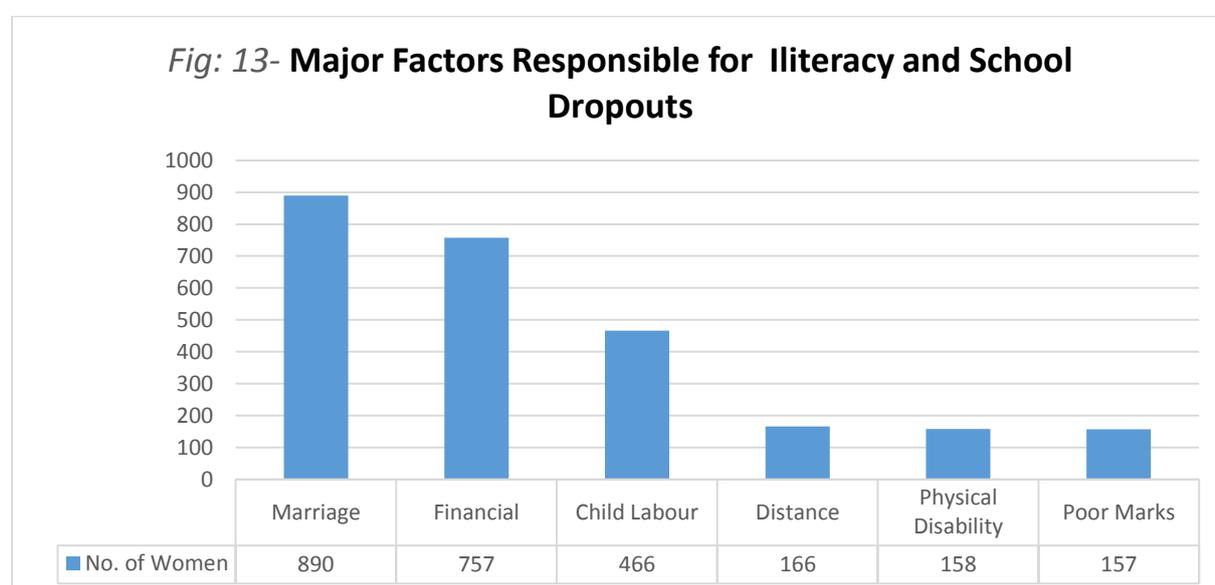
The predominant reason for girls dropping out is family constraint. Students coming from poorer section of the society lacks the cultural and institutional value. Economic inefficiency, financial constraint, and lack of job opportunities made their parents to think that education is unnecessary and often luxurious. Parents who themselves are dropout from school never understand the need of education. Single parent household faces more difficulty to pursue their child's schooling. Consequently, they get absorbed into child labour force or in domestic chores. Low aspiration to girls by their family forcefully leads them into child marriage and early pregnancy. 29 women are restricted by their family members for school education.

Physical Disability-

Bali Island does not accrue the financial and health related facilities to facilitate differently abled persons. Neither this place has special school and trained teacher nor proper food

and hospitality for these people. Lack of opportunity make them to drop out from school. The number of physically and mentally disabled candidates are increasing day by day. Few areas of the island, such as Bali-7, Bali-6 and Bijaynagar-3 has large number of these people. Those who are disabled are not only the victim of the society but their family members also faces the extra pressure of financial crisis and girls are often forced to quit her education for caressing the disabled family member. These villages lacks infrastructural facilities to back up their education and health. 158 differently abled persons are currently staying in this region and most of them quit education for their physical disability.21 of them requests to give educational subsidies.

The following chart shows overall impact of these factors on education-



From the diagram it can be easily depicted that marriage is the major constraint of girl child education followed by financial drawbacks and child labour. The probabilities that one drops out of school for marriage, financial drawbacks and child labour issues are 0.343, 0.292 and 0.179 respectively. Poverty eradication program will not be the ultimate help to the society but spreading education and awareness program is equally needed for the overall development of these villages.

Table-2: The factors responsible for school drop-outs: P.O wise distribution-

P.O	Marriage	Financial	Child Labour	Poor Grade	Look after family	Nobody asked	Physically Challenged
Bijaynagar	291	31	52	32	3	1	6
Amlamethi	121	0	41	17	0	1	0
Bali Hatkhola	376	59	76	57	3	0	8
Birajnagar	101	17	56	45	1	2	6
total	1180	138	217	183	10	5	20

Table-3: The factors responsible for literacy: P.O wise distribution-

P.O	Financial	Child Labour	Marriage	Look after family	Nobody asked	Physically Challenged
Bijaynagar	173	83	37	1	4	1
Birajnagar	89	39	2	0	3	0
Amlamethi	42	19	0	0	0	1
Bali Hatkhola	164	58	3	0	4	4
Total	502	222	48	4	11	6

This area study reveals that 99% population living below poverty level in need of a job for basic sustenance. Illiteracy, school dropouts and physically disable candidates are increasing exponentially. The only way out for escaping poverty and illiteracy is creation of new job along with adult literacy. Education is very important to upgrade the mentality

of this society and adult literacy become the key to unlock their closed mind through educational and other awareness programs. Educating the women member of the family not only benefits her child's education but the society at large.

Poverty leads to early marriage and early pregnancy- In our survey, we could trace out 110 adolescent girls (below 18) living in Bali Island are victim of child marriage. Girls are married off in their childhood as they are considered to be burdensome to the parental household. Parents often marries their daughter at an early age to reduce their expenses on her.

According to the prohibition of child marriage act, 2006, girls and boys should not get married before the age of 18 and 21 respectively. Any male who enters into a marriage with a minor can be punished for the two years of imprisonment or fine. But in real scenario, girls themselves often opt for early marriage because it brings financial security and protection in their life. A girl, who have worked as a child labour and suffered through the distress of poverty; food, shelter and protection gives her much reason to get married early. Girls often get married to a much elderly person or a physically disabled person in exchange of money. In the short run they might feel blessed to have a family but eventually early marriage leads to early pregnancy and again they fall in the trap of vicious cycle of poverty. Early pregnancy also gives birth to malnourished baby, which can be a reason for disability. Currently, there is 181 young mothers who are below age 20 and 89 mothers are below the age 19.

Educating adult women in the family is necessary to prevent child marriage and early pregnancy of their young daughters. It can also be a help to educate the young mother who had left education because of child marriage. Mothers' often lack awareness of what is good for their baby's health. Educating them can constitute a healthy family in terms of diet, education and future planning.

Some self-development activities can be a great help for these women who lacks self-confidence and living under the domination of the societal norms and customs. Education to the elderly women is also another need for the overall development of the society.

The following table shows age group classification of the women and their educational standard-

Table: 4- Group wise division of women according to the age and educational standard

<i>Age Group Classifications</i>	<i>Uneducated</i>	<i>Primarily educated</i>	<i>Secondarily educated</i>	<i>Total</i>
15-24 (Young Adults)	34	88	500	622
25-59 (Adults)	728	427	915	2070
60-80 (Senior Citizens)	93	15	16	124
Total	855	530	1431	2816

The need for adult literacy program can clearly be depicted from the above table. 728 (35.16%) adult women falls under the uneducated category. Without education and skill it is difficult for one to get hired by a good organization. An uneducated person who is also unaware of minimum wage and labour laws can easily be deprived by the upper class people of the society. They will be paid less and labored more and will remain poor for the rest of their life. Their children will be mal nutrient, will also work as child labours and their future will be a replication to their parents' life. Education is needed for the betterment of their life. With a good education, one can earn well, can live a good quality life and a spread positive externality to the society. There should also be a need for self-dependent initiatives that will allow the women to earn a living while staying at home. They will have to be adequately educated to pick up jobs like handicraft making or stitch work. Giving them training in the production of food items like jams and pickles, without the aid of machine technology, can help them to earn some money while staying at home. Additionally, some training on to make incense sticks, soaps, candles and in food processing techniques, can be a great help to earn for themselves and supplement the family income.

Physical disability along with poverty is a curse and disabled people also get the same hatred from the society. A good health care system for these differently abled men and women is another need of this place. Few steps need to be taken for the betterment of their lives are as follows-

- a) Provisions for transport should be made for al differently abled students.
- b) Educational opportunities must be created for blind students using the Braille system.

c) Parents should take responsibility for encouraging differently abled children to attend school.

d) Differently abled students who live below the poverty line should be provided with financial assistance.

e) Loan facilities should be made available to such students – particularly those concessions that the government arranges for them. Banks should be persuaded to provide them with loans at lowered rates of interests.

As previously mentioned, even after 70 years of independence, Bali Island is yet to partake in the process of progress and development that has begun and is well on its way in other parts of our nation. There are several meritorious students in Bali who wish to be educated, and deserve higher education, but their desires are thwarted by poverty as well as lack of resources. The health and education sectors are neglected, while the transport sector is increasingly deteriorating. However, the people of Bali Island are yet to give up on their dreams of advancement, of progress.