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Assessment of Welfare Schemes for Educational Development A case study of the SC Population of Birbhum District, West Bengal

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Abstract:

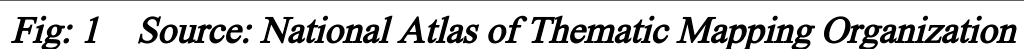
India is a caste-based and caste dominant society. Welfare Schemes, Within the fourfold division of the society, Scheduled Drop out, Kanyashree Castes (SCs) are downtrodden. History is the witness of Prakalpa, Hostel Grant the deprivation of the Scheduled Castes. As a result, the framers of the constitution of India made several provisions for socio-economic development. Some sections are enjoying most of the benefits and others stand deprived as they do not know about the various schemes available to them. Birbhum is one of the educationally backward districts in West Bengal with a high concentration of Scheduled Caste population is not the exception. This paper is an attempt to critically analyze the various educational welfare schemes by central and state governments and assess their effectiveness in the study area.

Keywords:

Welfare Schemes, Scheduled Drop out, Kanyashree Castes (SCs), Prakalpa, Hostel Grant

Introduction: During the pre-independence period the Scheduled Caste communities were most backward and downtrodden, thereby they would compose the weaker section of the country. That is the reason; just after independence, several provisions were included in the constitution for the interest of these backward societies (Singh, 2003). This constitution provides all-around development for the backward people of those societies. The inner significance of this safeguard was actually to develop a well-integrated nation by raising the standard of the living condition of those backward societies at least at par with that of the advanced societies. Apart from these constitutional provisions, the Government of India has taken up various extensive welfare schemes to implement for the development of these deprived people with the collaboration of the different state governments. Out of the various welfare schemes, educational schemes have got prime importance (Kannapam, 2008). From the first five year plan to the present, the allotment and the beneficiaries have increased day by day. Different new schemes have been introduced, various schemes have been merged with the growing demand. The educational schemes come into very effective for these economically poor students during their course of study (Chatterjee, 2011). Apart from this, various educational programmes like Sarva Siksha Aviyan at the elementary level, Rashtriya Madhyamik Siksha Aviyan for Secondary, Saakshar Bharat for adult education level has been introduced to enhance literacy.

Study Area: Birbhum is the northernmost district of the Burdwan division. It extended between 23° 32' 30" north and 24° 35' 0" north latitude and 87° 5' 25" east and 88° 1' 40" east longitude. It extends over 4545 square kilometers. In shape, it looks like an isosceles triangle. Birbhum is bounded on the north and west by the Santal Parganas, on the east by the districts of Murshidabad and Burdwan and on the south by Burdwan from which it is separated by the Ajay river. Birbhum comprises 4.81% Scheduled Caste population of the total Scheduled Caste population of the state. The concentration of the Scheduled Caste population is higher in the district (29.5%) than the state's average (23.5%). Birbhum is one of the backward districts in terms of educational development. Birbhum ranks 15th out of the 19 districts in terms of literacy rate. The literacy rate of the Scheduled Caste population is 58.59% which is lower than the district's total literacy rate (69.10%).



1. To discuss the various central and state-run educational welfare schemes for the Scheduled Caste pupil with special reference to the Birbhum district.
2. To analyze the effectiveness of the various welfare schemes in the Birbhum district
3. To critically examine the various welfare schemes for the educational development of Scheduled Caste pupils.

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random sampling and purposive sampling have been used to collect the primary data. Primary data has been collected in the 9 C.D. Blocks and 3 Municipalities in the district. Three blocks have been selected from each sub-division based on high Scheduled Caste literacy rate, moderate Scheduled Caste literacy rate and low Scheduled Caste literacy rate. Total nine C.D. blocks have been selected from three sub-divisions. Nalhati-I, Bolpur-Sriniketan, and Suri-II blocks have been selected based on the high Scheduled Caste literacy rate. Mayureswar-II, Labpur, and Mohammad Bazar blocks have been selected based on moderate Scheduled Caste literacy rates. Murarai-I, Nanoor and Khoyrasol blocks have been selected based on the low Scheduled Caste literacy rate. A total of 910 Scheduled Caste households have been surveyed out of which 844 are rural and 66 are urban during 2018-19. The secondary data has been collected from the Backward Class Welfare Department of the Birbhum district.

Analysis:

A) Welfare Schemes for Educational Development of Scheduled Caste Population

Schemes by Central Government

- i) **Pre-Matric Scholarship for the Students Studying in Class IX-X:** The scholarship was introduced in 2012-13 to provide financial assistance to the students studying in classes IX-X. The major objective of this scheme is to reduce the dropout rate of SC students at the pre-matric level. The ceiling of annual family income has been fixed to Rs 2.5 lakh. The rate of financial support is different for the day scholar and hosteller. The amount is fixed to Rs 225 for day scholar and 525 for hosteller per month for ten months. Apart from that, there is provision for book and ad hoc grant for Rs 750 for day scholar and Rs 1000 for hosteller.
- ii) **Pre-Matric Scholarship for the Children of Scavengers:** This scheme was initiated in 1977-78. The main purpose of this scheme is to provide financial assistance to the children of the scavenger. This scholarship is available at any stage of the pre-matric level. This is a 100 percent central assistance scholarship. The rate of the scholarship is the same as the pre-matric scholarship for the student of class IX-X.
- iii) **Post-Matric Scholarship:** This is the largest scholarship scheme of the Central Government for the educational empowerment of SC students. This scheme covers from post-matric to Post doctorate level of studies. Census data revealed that the majority of the SC literate belong to the higher secondary level but the rate of enrollment is very poor in higher education.

Financial constraint is one of the main reasons to discontinue higher education. The main aim of this scholarship is to provide financial assistance during higher education so that more SC students can continue further studies. To avail of this scholarship student's annual family income must be within 2.5 lakh.

- iv) **Up-gradation of Merit:** This scheme was first introduced by the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) in 1987-88 and later transferred to the Ministry of Welfare in 1993-94. The objective of this scheme is to upgrade the merit of SC students by providing them with special and remedial coaching in classes IX-XII. Remedial coaching facilitates the students to overcome the deficiency in various subjects whereas special coaching expedites the preparation for various competitive exams like engineering and medical. This scheme is fully funded by the Central Government. Maximum 2050 fresh students per year will be covered in this scheme by providing Rs 25000 per year per student. To avail of this scholarship, the student's annual family income should be within 3 lakh.
- v) **Free Coaching for SC Students:** This scheme was introduced in the 6th five year plan and revised in 2007 and 2012. This scheme intends to provide the best quality coaching to the SC students for the exam like IAS, IPS, State Civil Service, Medical, IIT-JEE, CAT, CLAT. There is a provision of financial assistance of RS 2500 and 5000 per month for the local and outstation students. The ceiling of annual family income is 6 lakh.
- vi) **Baba Jagjiban Ram Chatra Awas Yojana (BJRCY):** Hostel attached to the educational institution enables a better educational environment for the SC students who reside in the rural and remote corners of the country. Hostels for girls and boys were initiated in 1961-66 and 1989-90, later these two were merged and named BJRCY. Central Government sponsored 100% financial assistance to the state for the construction of the girl's hostel whereas 50 percent for the boy's hostel. The state has the right to select the land and the institution where the hostel is to be constructed.
- vii) **National Fellowship Scheme:** The scheme was introduced in 2005-06 to provide fellowship in the form of financial assistance to the SC students to pursue higher studies leading to M.Phil/Ph.D in different streams. The scheme was revised and the total number of fellowships to be awarded per year was fixed to 2000 per year. The scholarship is implemented by University Grant Commission (UGC).

- viii) **Top-class Education for Scheduled Caste:** The scheme was first initiated in 2005 and approved in 2007 and revised subsequently in 2012 and 2016. The sole purpose of this scheme is to provide top-class education to the meritorious SC students who secure admission to the institution notified by the Central Government. This scheme provides 100% financial assistance to the SC students beyond 12th grade which includes tuition fees, books and computers. The maximum number of scholarships is restricted to 1250 per year. The ceiling of annual family income to avail of the scholarship is 6 lakh.
- ix) **National Overseas Scholarship:** The scheme is initiated for providing financial assistance to the selected SC students to pursue their post-graduate and Ph.D. courses abroad in the specified field of study. The scholar must be within the age of 35 and his family income will not be exceeding 6 lakh per annum. Per year 100 students will be sorted out of which 30 percent will be female candidates. There are different sets of the amount specified as financial assistance for different countries for the study.

Educational Welfare Scheme by State Government

- i) **Sikhashree:** Before 2014-15, there are two separate schemes namely book grants and a maintenance grant for the SC student. After 2014-15, two schemes were merged and named Sikhashree. This scheme is purely for the SC students studying in classes V-VIII. The main purpose of this scheme is to give financial support to the SC students and increase the enrollment rate and decrease the dropout rate. This scheme is only for those SC students whose annual family income does not exceed 2.5 lakh. The amount of the stipend is 750 for class V-VII per annum and 800 for class VIII per annum.
- ii) **Hostel Grants for the Students Residing in the School Attached Hostels:** This scheme is both for SC/ST students. There is a 1522 school with an attached hostels facility for SC/ST students in West Bengal. In Birbhum, only 68 schools have attached hostel facilities for the SC/ST students. The hostel has been set up so that students can reside all time in the educational environment. Apart from that many SC students come to the school from far away and it affects their attendance. This scheme allotted 750/per annum for ten months for each student in the hostels. This scheme is not for all the SC students, there is a restriction on the income bar. An annual family income of less than 36000 is the ceiling to avail of this scheme.

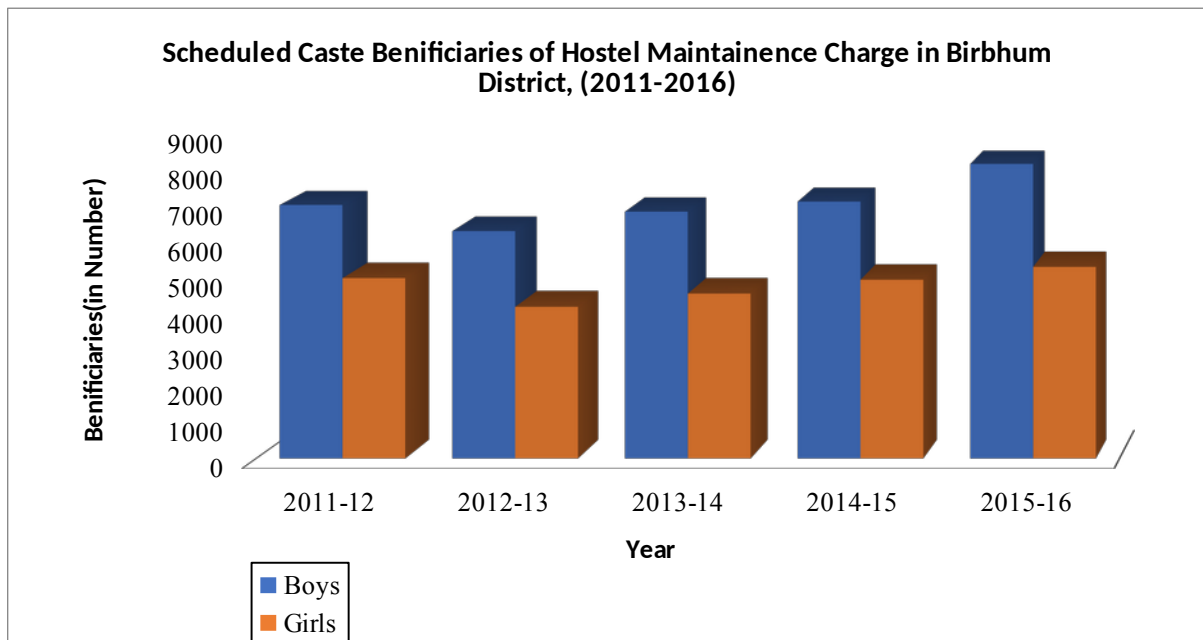


Fig: 2 *Source: Backward Class Welfare Dept., Birbhum District*

The beneficiaries of hostel maintenance have slightly increased both for the boys and girls in the Birbhum district. The number of beneficiaries has increased from 7105 to 8256 for the boys during 2011-2016. The number of beneficiaries of hostel maintenance is much less than the boys but it is encouraging that the number has increased from 5053 to 5367 during 2011-2016 (Fig. 2).

- iii) **Ashram Hostel:** The ashram hostels are set up by the Backward Class Welfare Department both for the Scheduled Caste boys and girls. These hostels are for the students reading in class I-X. Financial assistance is provided for Rs750 per month as maintenance cost and besides this cot, bedrolls, garments soap are given to each SC student. To avail of the hostel facilities, the student's annual family income must be within Rs 36000. At present 98 hostels are running throughout the state with a 3131 seat capacity. In Birbhum there are only 6 hostels for the students.
- iv) **Pre-matric Scholarship for the SC Students Studying in Class IX-X:** Pre-Matric scholarship scheme for the SC student studying in class IX-X was initiated by the Backward Class Welfare Department of the West Bengal

Government.

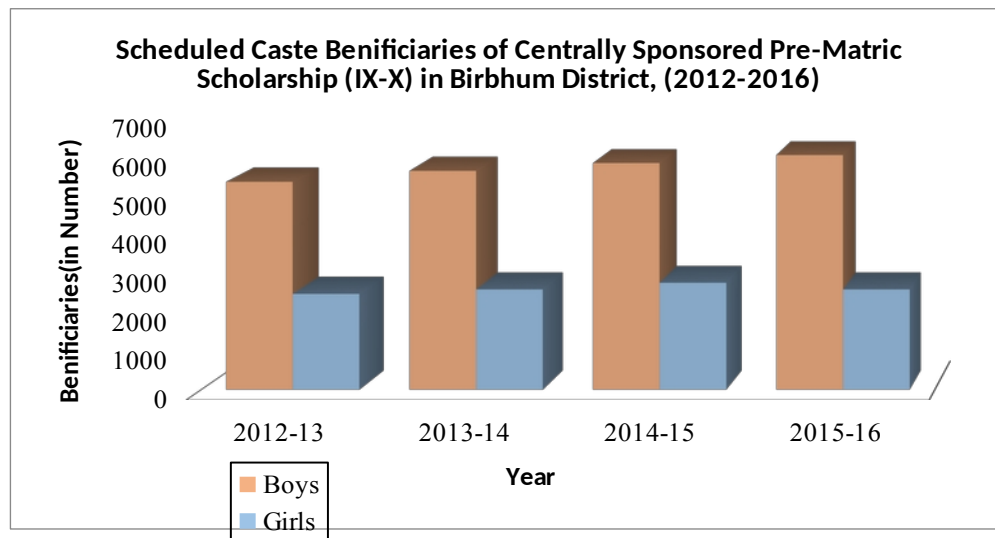


Fig: 3 Source: Backward Class Welfare Dept., Birbhum District

This scheme provides financial assistance as 150 for day scholar and 750 for hosteller per month for ten months, besides that there is the provision of an additional 750 and 1000 per annum for day scholar and hosteller as a book and ad hoc grant. The annual income of the student's family must be within 2 lakh to avail of this scheme. The beneficiaries of the centrally sponsored pre-matric scholarship have increased for boys from 5427 in 2012 to 6124 in 2015. During 2012-16, the number of beneficiaries has remained static for girls in the district of Birbhum.

- v) **Merit Scholarship Scheme for Students Reading in Class V-X and IX-XII:** Merit scholarship for the classes V-X is purely for the SC girls' students. The ceiling of annual family income is restricted to 60920. The rate of scholarship is different for the different classes such as V-VI-100 per month, VII-VIII-125 per month and IX-X-150 per month. Only 1962 girls' students can be selected per year. In Birbhum, the quota for this scholarship is only 138. Meritorious SC student reading in class IX-XII with a family income of Rs 36000 is eligible for the scholarship. Selected students will get RS 400 per month as financial assistance through this scheme. State Govt. has fixed 790 numbers per year and 38 from Birbhum.

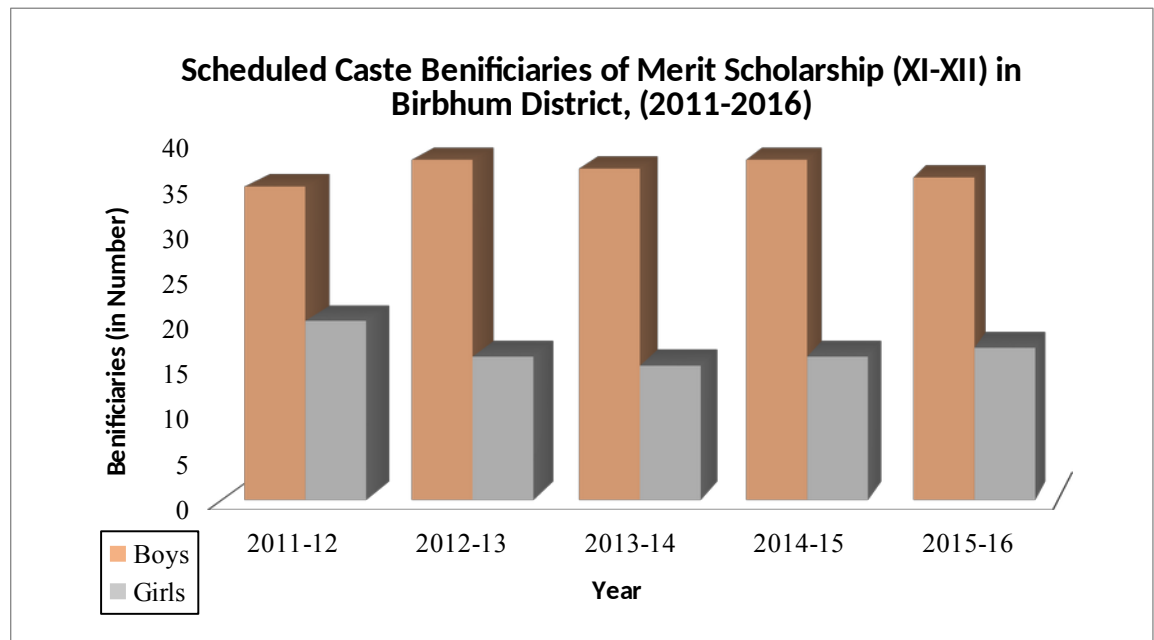


Fig: 4 Source: Backward Class Welfare Dept., Birbhum District

B) Effectiveness of Welfare Schemes in Study Area

i) Awareness of Welfare Schemes

Central and State governments launched various educational schemes to provide financial support during the study. But it is revealed from the fig. 5 that 38% head of the households is not aware, 53% somewhat aware of the various educational schemes. Most of the guardians are not fully aware. Government should widely circulate information brochures and pamphlets and broadcast through television and newspaper.

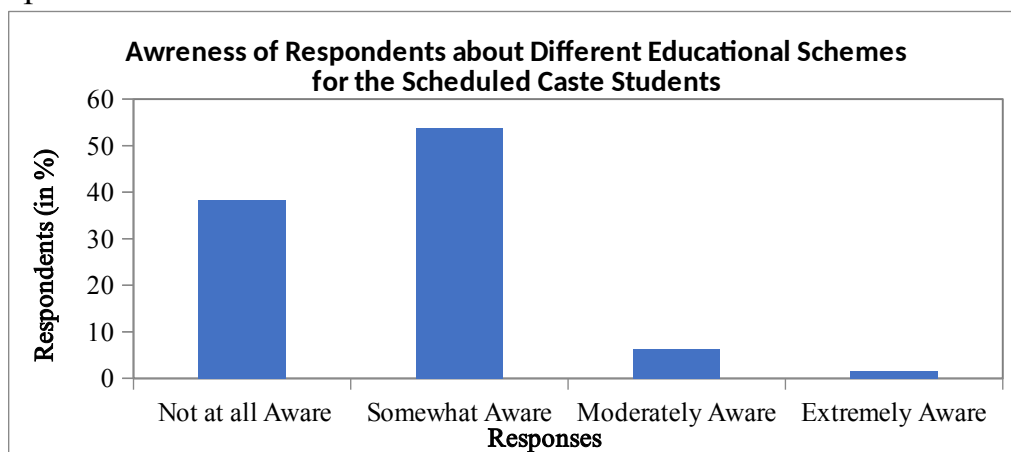


Fig: 5 Source: Field Survey, 2018-19

ii) Beneficiaries of Various Welfare Schemes

Sikhashree is one of the popular schemes for the Scheduled Caste students. The total number of beneficiaries of Sikhashree is 189 (Fig. 6). Kanyashree prakalpa is also

very familiar among the girl students. The total number of Kanyashree beneficiaries in the study area is 176. As the majority of the students and parents know about these two schemes.

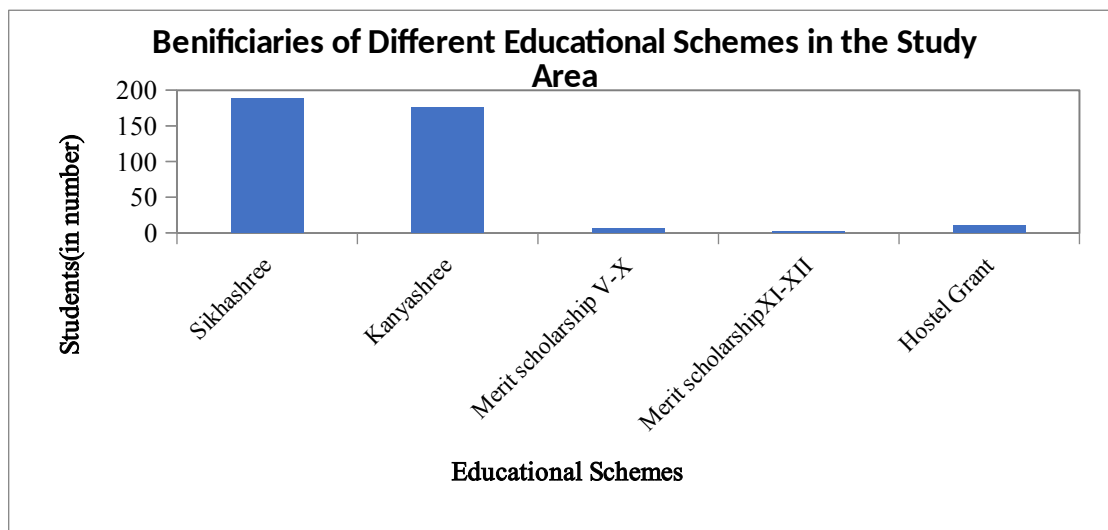


Fig: 6

Source: Field Survey, 2018-19

But merit scholarship at pre-matric and post-matric level, up-gradation of merit is not familiar to the majority of the respondents. It has been stated that schools are also not informed about these scholarships. The beneficiary of a merit scholarship is only 8 in the study area. The paucity of the hostel is reflected in the data of the beneficiary of the hostel grant. Only 11 students get a hostel grant among the surveyed household.

iii) Impact of Kanyashree in Reducing Female Dropout

The study reveals that females are more prone to drop out at secondary and higher secondary levels. Marriage is the major cause of this high dropout level. In the rural area especially among the Scheduled Caste, parents are in hurry for their children's marriage when they reach puberty. In this regard, the Kanyashree scheme has a remarkable impact to retain the girl child on one hand and reducing child marriage on the other. Over 78% of respondents also admitted that the Kanyashree scheme is very impactful in reducing the female dropout rate (Fig. 7).

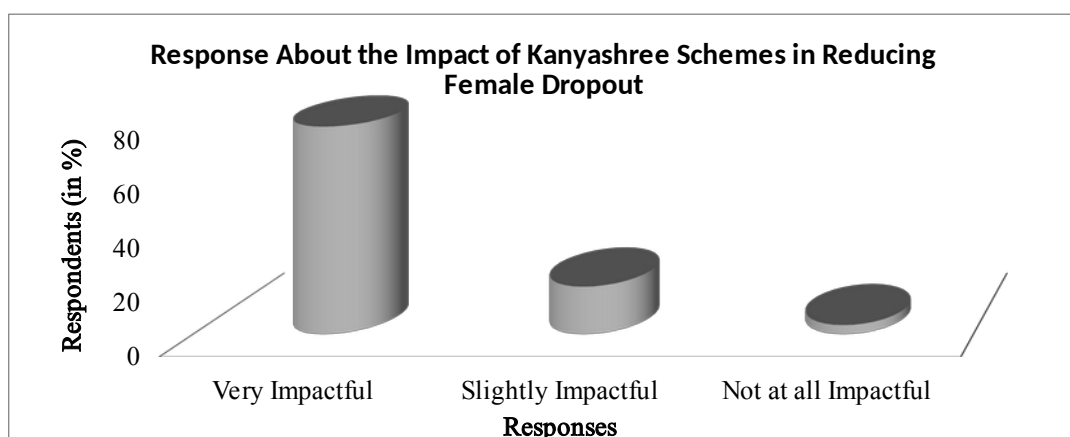


Fig: 7 Source: Field Survey, 2018-19

iv) Satisfaction Level of Scholarship Amount

The scholarship amount of Sikhashree is only Rs 800 per student per year and Rs 500 for Kanyashree. It is revealed from the fig. 8 that over 77% of respondents are not satisfied with the scholarship amount. Most of them stated that educational expenses are not covered by this small amount of scholarship. So government should increase the scholarship amount. Among the satisfied portion, most of them are satisfied with the amount given after passing the higher secondary examination under Kanyashree scheme.

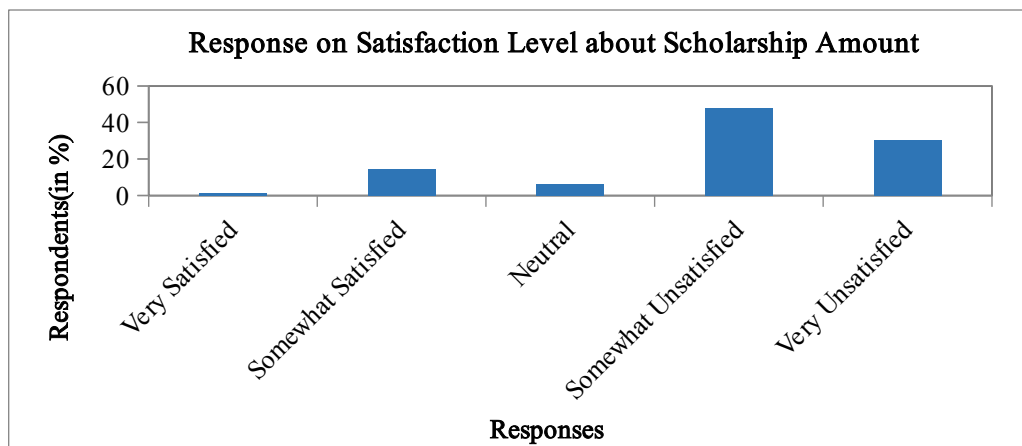


Fig: 8 Source: Field Survey, 2018-19

v) Ways of Spending Scholarship Amount

Indeed, the scholarship amount is not sufficient to meet all educational expenses throughout the year. The scholarship amount is credited amid the study so they cannot use the money to buy books and educational materials.

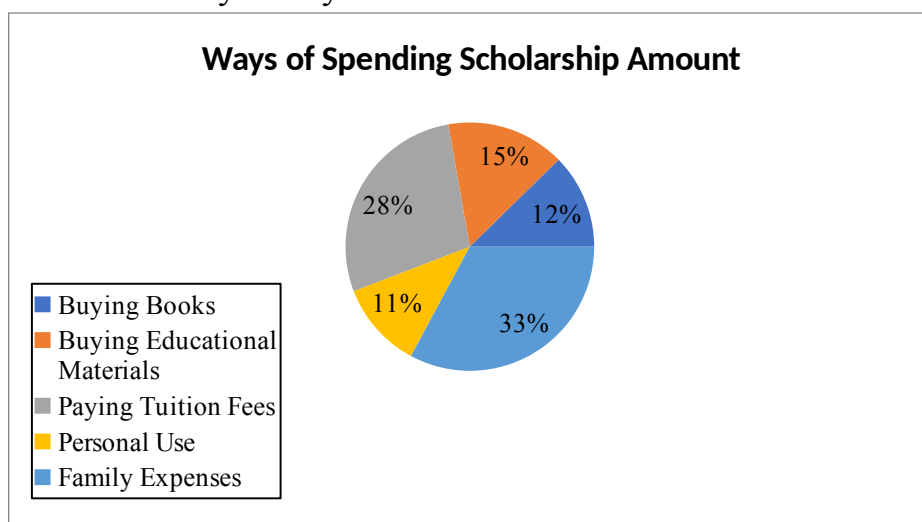


Fig: 9 Source: Field Survey, 2018-19

28% of respondents stated that the scholarship amount is used to pay tuition fees

whereas 33% stated they use it for family expenses. The amount is useful to buy educational materials for the 16% of head of the household (Fig. 9). Government officials should ensure the timely disbursement of scholarship amounts so that the poor Scheduled Caste family can utilize the amount to meet the educational expenses of their children.

C) Drawbacks of the Welfare Schemes

The Central and State Government has initiated various welfare schemes for educational development. There is some loophole in the schemes these are

- a) **The Amount is Insufficient:** Nowadays, educational expenses have increased substantially. The scholarship amount is not sufficient to meet the educational expenses according to the majority of the respondents. Educational expenses are burdensome to most of the poor Scheduled Caste parents. To ensure enrolment and retention Government should increase and modify the rate of the amount of scholarships from time to time.
- b) **Delay in Disbursement of Scholarship Amount:** The scholarship amount is most needed at the start of a new academic year to buy books and educational materials. But most of the respondents stated that they receive the scholarship amount during the mid of the course. It is urgent to accelerate the disbursement process so that the poor students can utilize the amount according to their needs.
- c) **Income Ceiling:** For some scholarships, the annual income ceiling is very low. As a result, most of the Scheduled Caste students can not avail of that scholarship. It is needed to raise the income ceiling so that most of the Scheduled Caste students is benefitted.
- d) **Quota system in Scholarship:** The major drawback of the merit scholarship is a quota system. The quota for a merit scholarship for the student of IX-XII is set to 138 for the Birbhum district for the scheduled Caste student. This is a major loophole in the system. Most of the meritorious Scheduled caste students should be incorporated under this scheme to encourage.
- e) **Lack of Encouragement for Meritorious Students:** There is a lack of scholarship schemes to encourage the extraordinary meritorious Scheduled Caste students. The amount for the meritorious scholarship is fixed for all the students. There should be provisions to incentivize the students who score more marks than the stipulated norms.

Conclusion

Theoretically, it seems that if a Scheduled Caste student wishes to pursue higher studies, can do so without any let or hindrance (Dubey and Mathur, 1972). Seats are reserved for them at all levels of education including technical and professional. A specific number of fellowships are also earmarked for higher studies in a foreign institution. There are provisions for stipends and free special coaching for competitive examinations. But the set-up hostel is inadequate for the Scheduled Caste inhabited areas. The pre-matric scholarship supports to cross the initial hurdle (Santakumari, 1980). But the planners and administrators did not give equal importance and attention to pre-matric scholarship in comparison to post-matric scholarship. It is indeed true that the financial concessions and other facilities have been availed of, more by the privileged groups amongst the Scheduled Caste communities, than the poorer and more deprived sections. Government should pay attention to this issue for the equal distribution of educational facilities.

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