The Role of Adult Literacy in Transforming the Lives of Women in Rural India: Overcoming Gender Inequalities
Comparative case studies in Bhilwara District Rajasthan & Howrah District West Bengal India
Khaleda Gani Dutt

Academic dissertation for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in International and Comparative Education at Stockholm University to be publicly defended on Tuesday 4 April 2017 at 13.00 in Lilla Hörsalen, Naturhistoriska riksmuseet, Frescativägen 40.

Abstract
The Indian diaspora is woven around castes, languages, dialects, religions- a young nation boasting of an ancient civilization in which inequalities are deeply ingrained in its culture and traditions. Although vital government interventions have succeeded in increasing the literacy rate of women in both urban and rural areas general household characteristics such as income, caste, occupation and education attainments of parents still continue to determine access, attendance, completion and learning outcomes of girls and women from severely disadvantaged communities. The critical issue investigated in the comparative case study is why and how established hegemonic roles changed because of the catalytic role of adult literacy. The research was conducted in Bhilwara District, Rajasthan and Howrah District, West Bengal, India where literacy has played an intrinsic role in transforming the lives of the rural and marginalized women. In Indian society social norms often prevent women from exercising their free choice and from taking full and equal advantage of opportunities for individual development, contribution and reward. So assessing empowerment/transformation would mean identifying the constraints to empowerment, how women’s agency has developed and finally looking if ‘agency’ was able to address the constraints to women’s access to adult literacy. This would also entail seeking answers to questions such as ‘How is transformation represented in their narratives? What was the impact of literacy upon their lives?’

Keywords: adult literacy, empowerment, transformation, rural women, caste, marginalized.

Stockholm 2017
http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:diva-139791

Department of Education
Stockholm University, 106 91 Stockholm

ISBN 978-91-7649-677-0
ISSN 0348-9523
Studies in Comparative and International Education 80
Doctoral Thesis in International and Comparative Education
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Comparative case studies in Bhilwara District Rajasthan & Howrah District West Bengal India

Khaleda Gani Dutt
Nadine and Shlok

The wind beneath my wings
# Table of Contents

Abstract ................................................................................................................................. x

Svensk sammanfattning av avhandling................................................................. xi

Acknowledgements ........................................................................................................... xvi

1. Introduction ..................................................................................................................... 1
   1.1 Background of the Study ......................................................................................... 1
      1.1.1 The Case of India .......................................................................................... 6
   1.2 Aim and Objectives ............................................................................................... 9
   1.3 Significance of the Study ....................................................................................... 10
   1.4 Limitations of the Study ....................................................................................... 10
   1.5 Organization of the Study: A Roadmap ............................................................. 10

2. The Literature Review ................................................................................................... 13
   2.1 The Need for Literacy ........................................................................................... 13
   2.2 Literature Review .................................................................................................. 14
   2.3 Learning from Good Practices ............................................................................ 18
   2.4 Conclusion ............................................................................................................ 35

3. The Theoretical Discourse ............................................................................................ 38
   3.1 Introduction ............................................................................................................ 38
   3.2 Gender and Development (GAD) ......................................................................... 39
   3.3 Theory of Representation .................................................................................... 41
   3.4 Intersectionality .................................................................................................... 42
   3.5 Transformative Learning Theory in Adult Education .............................................. 46
   3.6 The Conceptual Framework ................................................................................ 49
      3.6.1 On Power ......................................................................................................... 50
      3.6.2 The Capability Approach ............................................................................. 55
   3.7 Conclusion ............................................................................................................ 58

4. Methodology .................................................................................................................. 59
   4.1 Introduction ............................................................................................................ 59
   4.2 A Qualitative Research .......................................................................................... 60
   4.3 Ontological, Epistemological and Methodological Positioning.............................. 60
   4.4 Comparative Case Study ...................................................................................... 62
   4.5 The Pilot Study ...................................................................................................... 64
   4.6 Rationale for Choosing Rajasthan and West Bengal .............................................. 66
   4.7 The Researcher and the Subject .......................................................................... 67
   4.8 Selection of the Cases ........................................................................................... 67
   4.9 Crafting the Research Instruments ........................................................................ 69
      4.9.1 The Interview Guide ..................................................................................... 70
      4.9.2 Semi-structured Interviews ......................................................................... 71
8.2.1 Child Marriage ................................................................. 123
8.2.2 Widows ........................................................................ 125
8.2.3 Domestic Violence ................................................. 128
8.3 Factors Contributing to Literacy ........................................ 129
8.4 Linkages between Literacy, Empowerment and Transformation ...... 133
8.5 The Civil Society and Stakeholders Perspectives ................. 136
8.6 The Major Lessons Learned from the Narratives ................. 140
8.7 Triangulation ................................................................... 140
8.8 The Major Trends Observed from the Interviews .................. 141

9. Comparative Analysis and Discussions .................................. 142
9.1 Introduction ...................................................................... 142
9.2 On the Role of Education and Transformation ..................... 143
  9.2.1 The Comparative Analysis ........................................ 147
  9.2.2 The Role of the Civil Society and the Stakeholders ....... 150
9.3 The Theoretical Implications ........................................... 151
  9.3.1 Gender, Women and the Social Setting ..................... 151
  9.3.2 Education and Transformation .................................. 153
9.4. The Application and Use of Triangulation ......................... 153
9.5 Conclusion ........................................................................ 157

10. Conclusions and Further Research ........................................ 158
10.1 Conclusions of this Study .................................................. 158
10.2 Key Findings from this Study ............................................ 158
  10.2.1 The Similarities and Differences in the Socio-Economic Context of
         the Rural Women in Bhilwara District Rajasthan and West Bengal India ...
         159
  10.2.2 Sustaining Women’s Access to Adult Literacy ............... 159
  10.2.3 The Linkages between Literacy, Empowerment and
         Transformation .............................................................. 160
  10.2.4 Strategic Partnerships are Vital for Women Empowerment ... 160
10.3 Suggestions for Further Research ...................................... 162

References ........................................................................... 168
List of Tables

Table 1.1 Urban/rural division of countries for the years 2015 and 2025 (in millions) .........................................................3
Table 1.2 Literacy Rate in India Male/Female (%).............................................8
Table 4.1 The Total Number of Respondents Interviewed in Bhilwara District Rajasthan and Howrah District West Bengal India.......................................................................................69
Table 4.2 A Brief Profile of the Respondents..................................................72
Table 5.1 Provisions in the Constitution of India for Socio-economic Development of Women.........................................................92
Table 5.2 Literacy Rate (%) in India.................................................................95
Table 6.1 A Brief Profile of Rajasthan.............................................................102
Table 6.2 A Brief Profile of Bhilwara District and Rajasthan (%).................107
Table 7.1 A Brief Profile of West Bengal........................................................114
Table 7.2 A Brief Profile of Howrah District and West Bengal...............119
Table 9.1 A Critical View of the Influencing Factors that Hinder Women Empowerment.........................................................149

List of Figures

Figure 3.1 Intersection of Diversity Variables Source: Adapted from Banks (2013).................................................................46
Figure 3.2 Mezirow’s Learning Cycle..........................................................49
Figure 3.3 The 'Power Cube': Power in Spaces and Places of Participation........................................................................54
Figure 3.4 Analysis of power: The Three Dimensions (adapted from Kabeer, 1999).................................................................56
Figure 3.5 The Capability Approach................................................................57
Figure 4.1 A Framework for Comparative Education Analyses...............63
Figure 9.1 A Triangulated Enquiry.................................................................156
Abstract

The Indian diaspora is woven around castes, languages, dialects, religions- a young nation boasting of an ancient civilization in which inequalities are deeply ingrained in its culture and traditions. Although vital government interventions have succeeded in increasing the literacy rate of women in both urban and rural areas general household characteristics such as income, caste, occupation and education attainments of parents still continue to determine access, attendance, completion and learning outcomes of girls and women from severely disadvantaged communities. The critical issue investigated in the comparative case study is why and how established hegemonic roles changed because of the catalytic role of adult literacy. The research was conducted in Bhilwara District, Rajasthan and Howrah District, West Bengal, India where literacy has played an intrinsic role in transforming the lives of the rural and marginalized women. In Indian society social norms often prevent women from exercising their free choice and from taking full and equal advantage of opportunities for individual development, contribution and reward. So assessing empowerment/transformation would mean identifying the constraints to empowerment, how women’s agency has developed and finally looking if ‘agency’ was able to address the constraints to women’s access to adult literacy. This would also entail seeking answers to questions such as ‘How is transformation represented in their narratives? What was the impact of literacy upon their lives?

Key words: adult literacy, empowerment, transformation, rural women, caste, marginalized
Svensk sammanfattning av avhandling


Studiens syfte

Det överbryggande syftet med denna forskning är att undersöka vuxenutbildningens och läs-och skrivkunnighetens roll när det gäller förändringar av livet för marginaliserade kvinnor på landsbygden i Rajasthan och Västbengalen i Indien.

De specifika målen är att spåra likheter och skillnader i det socioekonomiska sammanhang som kvinnor på landsbygden (Bhilwara District Rajasthan och Howrah District West Bengal) har. Detta görs att identifiera och analysera några av de nyckelfaktorer som bidrar till och upprätthåller kvinnors tillträde till vuxenutbildning.

Betydelsen av studien

Inom Indien finns en stor variation när det gäller olika indikatorer, som till exempel inkomst, fattigdom, läs- och skrivkunnighet, spädbarndödlighet, könsfördelning och många fler. Medan andelen läs- och skrivkunniga i Västbengalen är 76,04 procent så föll den angivna nivån i Rajasthan på 66,11 procent i alla kategorier, (totalt, män och kvinnor), under landets genomsnittliga procent nivå på 74,04 procent. Genom att jämföra de två fallna i Howrah District i West Bengal och Bhiwara District i Rajasthan så visar studien att det är betydelsefullt att förstå de sociala och kulturella
traditioner som ofta hindrar kvinnor från att bli läs- och skrivkunniga. Större delen av forskningen inom detta område fokuserar på utvärdering av vuxenutbildning. Denna studie analyserar och förklarar några skäl till kvinnors vilja att utbilda sig, samt de utmaningar kvinnor står inför då de försöker öka sin status, inte bara i samhället utan också inom familjen.

Begränsningar


Teoretiskt ramverk


Metod

Studien utforskar relationen mellan sociala normer, samhällsstruktur, sociala organisationer, policy lagstiftning och vuxenutbildningens roll för att empower glesbygdens marginaliserade kvinnor. Denna kvalitativa studie vill belysa att det rika och skiftande indiska samhället baserat på generationer av historisk och kulturell tradition spelar en stor roll i skapandet av livet för

Resultat

synliggör bevis på empowerment, källor för transformering och förde fram det kontextuella sammanhanget som ett sätt att förklara köns roller.

**Analys och diskussion**


**Sammanfattning och förslag/råd**

eftersom de är viktiga för utvecklingen av glesbygdsområden och för att stärka den nationella ekonomin.

**Betydelse för framtida forskning**

Acknowledgements

They say it is the journey that is the most memorable than the outcome and it is so true. Reminiscing about my sojourn as a doctoral student stirs up moments in time and space of an amazing, soul-searching path traversed.

I gratefully acknowledge and thank my main supervisor Professor Vinayagum Chinapah for inspiring and encouraging me to apply for a doctoral position at the Institute of International Education, Department of Education in which I was fortunate to be accepted. His vision, foresight and guidance have enhanced my skills as a researcher.

I would also like to express my gratitude to my second supervisor Dr. Ulf Fredriksson for his continued guidance and support. His careful reading of my draft chapters and practical advice were invaluable during the writing up of the manuscript.

The Department of Education for the unparalleled support every step of the way from the commencement of an incredible journey to its culmination. My sincere gratitude for all the help in making the journey a smooth one. Professor Jon Ohlson, Professor Tore West, Associate Professor Annika Ullman, Dr. Anne-Lena Kempe, Katrin Lindroth, Christina Edelbring and Eva Ohlsson. A special note of gratitude to Professor Klass Roth for motivating me through words of encouragement and making the time to share his critical and constructive insights. Thanks are also due to Dr. Lena Gejjer for reading my manuscript and giving valuable comments.

I wish also to thank Professor Emeritus Birgitta Qvarsell, Professor Holger Daun, Professor Emeritus Arvid Löfberg, Dr. Gunilla Höjlund and Dr. Paula Mühlick for their intellectual generosity.

My sincere acknowledgements for the amazing support given to doctoral students by Stockholm University Library- thank you Anna Stigell, Cilla Öhnfeldt, Inga Nyman Ambrosiani, Ingela Tång and Grant McWilliams for his technical wizardry.

The pilot study unfolded a series of adventurous escapades in the heartland of rural Andhra Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh. My heartfelt gratitude to Professor V. Subramanyam Department of Anthropology at Andhra University for offering his language skills for a part of the pilot study. To Srinivas, Prakash Babu and Ussen for all their help. The memories of pillion riding on Ussen’s motorbike on the dirt tracks that without warning gave way to pot holes resembling mini-gorges are unforgettable. The generosity
of CARE India for providing me with the opportunity to visit their Udaan Camp at Hardoi Uttar Pradesh will be forever etched in my mind. The magnanimity of the staff and the children for sharing their stories and accepting me within a short span of time warms my heart.

The fieldwork in India was not only an educational inquiry but a spiritual journey as well. I rediscovered my country by travelling off the beaten tracks. It was a fieldwork that one hopes and dreams off as a student. I am greatly indebted to Professor Marmar Mukhopadhyay for giving me the opportunity to visit Udang and the rest was history. The generosity, kindness and the warmth of the Udang family shall always be cherished. To Kakoli Hazra for taking on the task of becoming my support system and lending a helping hand whenever needed. To Mrs. Madhuri Ghosh the founder of Mahila Bikash Cooperative Credit Society and Mr. Gopal Ghosh for sharing their incredible journey my heartfelt gratitude.

The Shahpura Family for taking me into their home, organizing my fieldwork and giving me access to one of the most backward districts in Rajasthan. Being stopped by a disgruntled village chief whilst taking pictures only added to the excitement. I take this opportunity to thank Maharaja Dhiraj Indrajeet Rao, Mrs. Mahendra Kumari, Mrs. Mridul Kumari, Mr. Jai Singh Rathore, Mr. Shatrujeet Singh Rathore, Mrs. Mandvi Singh Rathore and Mrs. Maya Singh Rathore. From our time spent at Loreto College to undertake research at Bhilwara-what were the odds Mandvi? Thank you once again for being such an amazing friend. To Jai for chalking out the logistics and taking such great interest in my work for which you were dubbed ‘Professori’ the title is so apt-thank you so much.

I have been fortunate to meet stalwarts in the field of education and development who have inspired, guided and motivated me by sharing their knowledge, insights experience and wisdom in the field of international and comparative education. To Professor Emeritus H.S. Bhola at Indiana University USA and Professor Emeritus Manzoor Ahmed Senior Advisor at the BRAC University Institute of Educational Development I cherish your words of encouragement that brings out the best in me.

A note of gratitude to the Former Ambassador of India to Sweden and Latvia H.E. Mr Ashok Sajjanhar and his gracious wife Mrs. Madhu Sajjanhar for their belief in my work and their support. I hope that I can live up to your expectations.

To Dr. Anne-Kristin Boström who made sure that I made the time to write and was always there as a friend and mentor. Once again thank you for just
being there. Marianne Lundin and Susanna Lindberg for their words of encouragement and their belief in me.

The Nordic Institute of Asian Studies for the scholarship that helped me write up the final chapters of my thesis in Copenhagen Denmark. The Swedish South Asian Research Network at Lund University and the Forum for Asian Studies for taking interest in my work which inspires me to continue writing and contributing to academic enquiries.

For helping me to wrap my head around epistemology and ontology engulfing scientific research; I am truly grateful to Dr. Mikiko Cars. She was most determined and would not rest until the annals of scientific research were embedded in my mind.

To all my friends in the throes of their doctoral studies and those that have emerged victorious—we are but kindred spirits tirelessly pursuing our passion and hoping to leave our impression amongst the stalwarts. The times spent laughing over cups of coffee or simply the endless discussions of life after conquering the title lightened our days. So thank you for the laughter - Ali Mohammed, Dr. Anki Bengston, Claudia Schaumann, Corrado Matta, Christine Bendixen, Caroline Ingell, Ennie Paul, Dr. Elisabeth Adams Lyngbäck, Jared Odero, Kristina Börebäck, Megha Khattar, Yaka Matsuda, Dr. Marie Hållander, Natalie Nielsen, Dr. Åsa Sundelin and Dr. Rebecca Adami.

To Talia Adamsson for meticulously pouring over my ponderous text which I was only happy to hand over for the much needed editing that was beyond my ken.

For the brilliant artwork I thank Valentina Negut, it was very kind and generous of you to do so.

Above all I would like to thank Anna Toropova and Maria Tzhouvara for seeing me through all the chaos, excitement, despair that characterizes the life of a doctoral student. Thank you for the support and your words of encouragement. My friends across the seven seas thank you for being there in spirit and in the virtual space Prarthita Biswas, Ruma Mitra, Dhriti Chanda, Chandrima Dutta Gupta, Sharminin Devi, Marlene Gras, Pragna Khastagir Johar, Sahana Majumdar Agarwal, Husnara Salim, Arpita Bhawal, Rachel Daniel, Ipsita Bose, Bithika Ravidas, Sangeetha Chakraborty, Sejal Dave, Fayann Balsara, Christopher Balsara and Veronica Ekblom.
To Dr. Anne Kristin Boström, Christine Bendixen, Shubhajit Dutt and Sujay Dutt for becoming a part of the process and helping out in summarizing the thesis in Swedish a language still beyond my reach.

Dr. (late) Mrs. Sarala Birla for sharing her wisdom, knowledge and never failing to lift my spirits. You are deeply missed.

With a deep sense of gratitude I acknowledge all the beautiful people that I met during my field studies. Thank you for your time and contribution that has enriched my dissertation.

And finally the most important people in my life that have played such a pivotal role in shaping my destiny. I begin with the architect of my transmigration into Sweden my sister in law Mrs. Sangeeta Datta. Had it not been for her I would have always associated Sweden with my history lessons in school on the Vikings. It is an amazing feeling when a friend becomes a family member and I am truly blessed to have you as one Amrita Chakraborty.

Perhaps, the only person who understood my passion for research my father (late) Mr. Osman Gani. I am sure he would be the happiest in learning about my achievements. Our household never reflected a gender imbalance as the scales were almost always tilted in my favor to the woes of my brothers Ahmed Gani and Hassan Gani and still nothing has changed. To my mother Mrs. Roshan Ara Gani for lifting my spirits in the darkest days and keeping the beacon of hope shining brightly. For the endless cups of coffee and tea that came my way when holidays were spent in writing up course papers I thank you from the bottom of my heart Moulishree Gani and Mehnaz Gani. My adorable nephews Saahil Gani and Ashar Gani for the lovely memories.

I would like to conclude the acknowledgements by thanking Shubhajit Dutt for putting up with my idiosyncrasies, for the endless support and ironing out the problems with a smile. I would never have made it without you. Nadine and Shlok for being so cooperative and at times wise beyond their years. Those moments though rare will go down in history.

Khaleda Gani Dutt
Sollentuna, March 2017

xix
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviations</th>
<th>Full Form/Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABET</td>
<td>Adult Basic Education and Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFFLP</td>
<td>Adult Female Functional Literacy Programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIB</td>
<td>Ibn Al Baytar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALTA</td>
<td>Adult Literacy Tutors Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMJUPRE</td>
<td>Asociación de Mujeres de Juntas Parroquiales Rurales del Ecuador</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASPBAE</td>
<td>Asia South Pacific Bureau of Adult Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATEK</td>
<td>Asociación Tawantinsuyuman Evangeliqo K’ancharinanpaq</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BMBCSSL</td>
<td>Mahila Bikash Cooperative Credit Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRAC</td>
<td>Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CABE</td>
<td>Central Advisory Board of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAMFED</td>
<td>Campaign for Female Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCC</td>
<td>Course on Computer Concepts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCCD</td>
<td>Child-centred Community Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEDAW</td>
<td>Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEDAWI</td>
<td>Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women in India</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEOSS</td>
<td>Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMC</td>
<td>Community Management Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSW</td>
<td>Commission on the Status of Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSWI</td>
<td>Commission on the Status of Women in India</td>
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<tr>
<td>DESD</td>
<td>Decade of Education for Sustainable Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DPI</td>
<td>Department for the Prevention of Illiteracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIT</td>
<td>Department of Information Technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DOEACC</td>
<td>Department of Electronics Accreditation for Computer Courses (India)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DWCRA</td>
<td>Development of Women and Child in Rural Areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EFA</td>
<td>Education For All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ERT</td>
<td>Education for Rural Transformation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESD</td>
<td>Education for Sustainable Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FAO</td>
<td>Food and Agriculture Organization (UN)</td>
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<tr>
<td>FMC</td>
<td>Federation of Cuban Women</td>
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<tr>
<td>GAD</td>
<td>Gender and Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>GEM</td>
<td>Global Education Monitoring Report</td>
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<td>GKY</td>
<td>Ganga Kalyan Yojana</td>
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<td>GMR</td>
<td>Global Monitoring Report</td>
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<tr>
<td>GOI</td>
<td>Government of India</td>
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<td>GOs</td>
<td>Government Organisations</td>
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xx
HDI
IAY
IFAD
IFES
IHDI
IFES
IHDR
ICT
INRULED
IPCL
IRDP
IT
LIFE
MCC
MCO
MDGs
MHRD
MKSP
MoU
MS
MWS
NABARD
NCAER
NGOs
NLM
NLMNA
NPE
NSDP
NREGA
NRLM
OBCs
PHCs
PL&CE
PLCs
POA
PRA
PPP
PRIs
RAEA
REFLECT

Human Development Index
Indira Awas Yojana
International Fund for Agricultural Development
International Foundation for Election System
India Human Development Index
India Human Development Report
Information and Communications Technology
International Research and Training Centre for Rural Education (UNESCO)
Improved Pace and Content Learning
Integrated Rural Development Programme
Information Technology
Literacy Initiative for Empowerment
The Millennium Challenge
Multi-Country Office
Millennium Development Goals
Ministry of Human Resource Development
Mahila Kisan Sahakatikaran
Memorandum of Understanding
Mahila Samakhyा
Million Wells Scheme
National Bank for Agriculture & Rural Development
National Council of Applied Economic Research
Non-Governmental Organizations
National Literacy Mission
National Literacy Mission Authority
National Policy on Education
National Skill Development Programme
National Rural Employment Guarantees Act
National Rural Livelihoods Mission
Other Backward Castes
Primary Health Centres
Post-Literacy and Continuing Education
Post Literacy Campaigns
Programme of Action
Participatory Rural Appraisal
Public Private Partnership
Panchayati Raj Institutions
Rajasthan Adult Education Association
Regenerated Freirean Literacy through Empowering Community
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
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<tr>
<td>RGSEAG</td>
<td>Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls</td>
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<td>RMoL</td>
<td>Rajasthan Mission on Livelihoods</td>
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<tr>
<td>RTE</td>
<td>Right to Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>SAPO</td>
<td>South African Post Office</td>
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<td>SAMCO</td>
<td>South Africa Multi-Country Office</td>
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<tr>
<td>SC</td>
<td>Scheduled Caste</td>
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<td>SDGs</td>
<td>Sustainable Development Goals</td>
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<tr>
<td>SHGs</td>
<td>Self Help Groups</td>
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<tr>
<td>SGSY</td>
<td>Swarnjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana</td>
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<tr>
<td>SITRA</td>
<td>Supply of Improved Toolkits to Rural Artisans</td>
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<tr>
<td>SRC</td>
<td>State Resource Centre</td>
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<td>ST</td>
<td>Scheduled Tribe</td>
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<tr>
<td>STEP</td>
<td>Support to Training and Employment</td>
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<tr>
<td>SMILE</td>
<td>The Supporting Maternal and Child Health</td>
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<td>SMLA</td>
<td>Improvement and Building Literate Environments</td>
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<td>SMLS</td>
<td>State Literacy Mission Authority</td>
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<td>SMLA</td>
<td>Program for Women</td>
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<td>SSA</td>
<td>Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan</td>
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<td>SSK</td>
<td>Sahjani Shiksha Kendra</td>
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<td>SWDC</td>
<td>The Stung Treng Women’s Development Centre</td>
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<td>STEP</td>
<td>Strengthening Women’s Empowerment in Electoral Processes</td>
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<td>SWEEP</td>
<td>Support to Training and Employment Program for Women</td>
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<td>TFL</td>
<td>Total Fertility Rate</td>
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<td>TLC</td>
<td>Total Literacy Campaign</td>
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<td>T&amp;T</td>
<td>Trinidad and Tobago</td>
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<td>TRYSEM</td>
<td>Training of Rural Youth for Self-Employment</td>
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<td>University Grants Commission</td>
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<td>UIL</td>
<td>UNESCO Institute of Lifelong Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UIS</td>
<td>UNESCO Institute of Statistics</td>
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<tr>
<td>ULBs</td>
<td>Urban Local Bodies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNDESD</td>
<td>United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNFPA</td>
<td>United Nations Population Fund</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNESCO</td>
<td>United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNLD</td>
<td>United Nations Literacy Decade</td>
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<tr>
<td>UPE</td>
<td>Universal Primary Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Full Form</td>
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<tr>
<td>UT</td>
<td>Union Territories</td>
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<tr>
<td>VDC</td>
<td>Village Development Centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VLE</td>
<td>Virtual Learning Environment</td>
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<tr>
<td>VWS</td>
<td>Village Welfare Society</td>
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<tr>
<td>WAD</td>
<td>Women and Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>WEEP</td>
<td>Women’s Empowerment Entrepreneurship Project</td>
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<tr>
<td>W4</td>
<td>Women’s World Wide Web</td>
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<td>ZSS</td>
<td>Zila Saksharta Samiti</td>
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1. Introduction

“One of the best investments that any country can make is to educate girls and women- so they can earn more income, improve their family’s well-being, and show their daughters, in turn, what is possible once you can read and write”.

(Message of UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon on 25 September 2008)

1.1 Background of the Study

The correlation between literacy learning, women empowerment and development of greater equality has been articulated in policy documents and evidenced in studies carried out by international organizations. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognized literacy as the core component of the right to education because it supports the pursuit of other human rights and among principles of inclusion for human development (UNESCO, 2006, 2016a; UIL, 2013). Hence, literacy has the potential to enhance people’s ability to act in the pursuit of freedom and increase their capability (Amartya Sen, 1999a) and plays a significant role to empower and transform their lives (Paulo Freire, 1985). The important question raised then is not so much what literacy can do for people but rather what people can do with literacy (UIL, 2013).

For active participation in the society, the abilities to read, write and operate with numbers have become an essential requirement. Research carried out by the World Bank (2012a) underpin that poor reading and writing skills make people vulnerable to poverty, social exclusion, attain fundamental needs, uphold basic human rights and advance a better quality of life. International and national commitments such as the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the essence of the Education for All (EFA) Goals 4 (achieving fifty percent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015) and 5 (eliminating gender disparities and achieving gender equality in education by 2015), UNESCO’S Literacy Initiative for Empowerment (LIFE, 2006-2015), and Belém Framework for Action; reaffirm the need for educating women, specifically highlighting the benefits of adult literacy (UIL, 2014a).
Over the past twenty years, the percentage of women within the illiterate population has remained steady at 63-64 percent, even as the overall number of illiterates decreased. In the data submitted to UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS, 2013) there were more women than men unable to read and write in 77 countries. The literacy challenge is most pronounced in rural communities and opportunities for acquiring literacy are especially limited amongst elderly in rural communities and socially excluded groups such as the indigenous, nomadic, the migrant, the internally displaced and people with disabilities. To work towards rural transformation is to eliminate poverty, advance education for sustainable development, promote human rights and gender equality (UNESCO, 2006).

The Rural Poverty Report released by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) stressed upon the vulnerability of the rural people. The second report stated that at least 70 percent of the world’s very poor are rural with South Asia having the greatest number of poor rural people and Sub-Saharan Africa with the highest incidence of rural poverty. The report noted that:

“...Robust action is required now to address the many factors that perpetuate the marginalization of rural economies. It needs to enable rural women, men and youth to harness new opportunities to participate in economic growth and develop ways for them to better deal with this risk. Above all, this action needs to turn rural areas, from backwaters into places where the youth of today will want to live and will be able to fulfill their aspirations...” (IFAD, 2011, p. 22).

According to the report published by Open Society Foundations in 2015, the wealthiest one percent of the world’s population will have a greater share of the global wealth than the remaining 99 percent by 2016. The report points out that the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were unable to reach the poorest of the poor and the most excluded people. It stresses upon the need to realign efforts at both local and global levels of the society (Wilkinson et al, 2015).
Table 1.1 Urban/rural division of countries for the years 2015 and 2025 (in millions)

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>694,636,991</td>
<td>471,602,315</td>
<td>356,483,116</td>
<td>658,813,697</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>2,271,706,727</td>
<td>2,113,137,370</td>
<td>2,187,506,127</td>
<td>2,561,408,668</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>196,057,113</td>
<td>547,065,703</td>
<td>179,448,588</td>
<td>561,571,444</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Americas</td>
<td>193,589,721</td>
<td>797,627,015</td>
<td>188,582,960</td>
<td>892,188,846</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central America</td>
<td>45,080,027</td>
<td>126,854,204</td>
<td>45,301,335</td>
<td>147,690,335</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South America</td>
<td>69,442,142</td>
<td>345,611,127</td>
<td>66,901,243</td>
<td>385,366,270</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division 2014a

The UN report illustrates a gradual decline in the world rural population (Table 1.1) after 2020 and is expected to reach 3.1 billion by 2050. In spite of rapid urbanization in Asia and Africa the regions are still home to 90 percent of the world’s rural population. The largest rural population is found in India with 857 million, followed by China at 635 million (UN, 2014a). However, an increase in urban population does not imply a reduction in rural poverty. Despite, the historic shift towards urbanization poverty will continue to remain a rural problem and the great majority of the poor are mostly women (IFAD, 2011).
The Global Education Monitoring Report (2016) cited the global adult illiteracy rate in 2014 to be 15 percent, which was equivalent to 758 million adults. Out of which 63 percent of adults unable to read and write are women. In both Southern Asia and sub-Saharan Africa around one in three adults are illiterate whereas in Northern Africa and Western Asia the proportion is nearly one in five. Figures in Afghanistan show that literacy rates for males are more than twice than those of women. In Yemen 47 percent of adult women compared to 16 percent of men are illiterate (UNGEI, 2016). The High Level Panel on Global Sustainability (2012) argued the need to encourage local communities to participate actively and consistently in conceptualizing, planning and executing sustainability policies to reduce poverty, promote gender equality and make growth more inclusive. One of the dominant themes in the recommendations was ensuring women’s access to land and resources, improving access to markets through trade and technical assistance programs and microfinance. Under education and skills for sustainable development the sixth recommendation called upon governments, private sectors, civil society and relevant international development partners to work together to provide vocational training, retraining and professional development within the context of lifelong learning prioritizing women, young people and the vulnerable groups (UN, 2015a).

The recent Outcome Document from the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) emphasizes the use of enabling technologies particularly Information and Communications Technology (ICT) to promote women’s empowerment. Goals 2 (Zero Hunger), 4 (Quality Education) and 5 (Gender Equality) recognize women’s major role as small scale farmers, ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning for all stressing on gender equality and empower all women and girls. Adult literacy is envisaged as a powerful vehicle to empower people and help them acquire the adequate life skills and entrepreneurship capacities to overcome and tackle contemporary challenges (UN, 2014b). The Global Monitoring Report (GMR) 2015 stresses that most of the reductions on adult illiteracy rates reflect the entry of younger, more educated cohorts into adulthood rather than improvement within cohorts of adults who were past school age. The target was to halve the adult illiteracy rate between 2000 and 2015 (UNESCO, 2015). The International Literacy Data (2015) released by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) enumerate that even though literacy rates have improved the goals will not be met. The UIS fact sheet released in 2015 to mark International Literacy Day shows that out of the 757 million adults, two-thirds of whom are women still
lack basic reading and writing skills. The data showed that global adult literacy rate was 85 percent with the male literacy rate being higher compared to the female literacy rate. It also cited that women comprised 63 percent of the global illiterate population. South and West Asia is home to more than one-half of the global illiterate population i.e. 51 percent. In addition, sub Saharan Africa to 25 percent of all illiterate adults, 12 percent in East Asia and the Pacific, 7 percent in the Arab States and 4 percent in Latin America and the Caribbean. With countries failing to reach the EFA goals the UIS projections stresses on the need for the new literacy target which is even more ambitiously couched within the framework of the SDGs.

Female literacy continues to be a serious problem in the Asia Pacific region and it is within this context that the Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE) embarked on a two year action project called “Innovating Advocacy Approaches in Promoting Adult Female Literacy” with partners in India, the Philippines, Indonesia and Papua New Guinea. In the countries covered in the project ASPBAE found that less than one percent of national education budgets were spent on adult education and literacy, far below the recommended global benchmark of at least three percent of the education budget. Except for the Philippines the three other countries included in the project is said to have female illiteracy levels that rank among the highest in the world. Therefore these countries were targeted by UNESCO’s literacy Initiative for Empowerment (LIFE) program which identifies countries where adult literacy is at least 50 percent or more (ASPBAE, 2012).

The 60th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW60) demonstrated the interlinkages between the Beijing Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In the Opening Speech Lakshmi Puri, Assistant Secretary-General and Deputy Executive Director, UN-Women iterated that sustainable development goals will not be realized if one half of the community continues to be denied its full human rights and opportunities. She emphasized that gender equality is a crosscutting theme across 11 other SDGs including poverty, hunger, health, education, water and sanitation, employment, just and peaceful societies, sustainable cities, and economic growth (Puri, 2016). Feminization of poverty in rural areas is a critical issue because in most of the developing world the majority of women in rural areas remain poor, hungry and powerless. Speaking on the feminization of poverty John Hendra (2014) had commented earlier that the new post
2015 agenda must build on the lessons learned from the MDGs to tackle structural inequalities that hinder progress and must have an agenda in which development works for rural women.

1.1.1 The Case of India

The Socioeconomic and Caste Census painted a stark picture of India’s poverty and deprivation predominant in rural areas. A survey that included 300 million households highlighted an overwhelming majority i.e. 73 percent reside in the villages living below the poverty line (Katyal, 2015). The survey indicated that less than 5 percent of the rural population earn enough to pay taxes and less than 10 percent have salaried jobs. In the report released by the Indian Government Planning Commission it was estimated that out of the 260.5 million individuals in rural India, 30.9 percent were living below the poverty line. The report also mentioned a decline in the poverty ratio from 39.6 percent in 2009-10 to 30.9 percent in 2011-12 in rural India and from 35.1 percent to 26.4 percent in urban India. During this period the all-India poverty ratio fell from 38.2 percent to 29.5 percent and lifted 91.6 million individuals out of poverty (Government of India, 2014). The India Human Development Report (IHDR) released in 2011 had showcased that in rural areas an average 28.3 percent of the population lives below the poverty line out of which 36.8 percent belong to the Scheduled Caste1 (SC) compared to 39.8 percent in urban areas. Poverty continues to remain a chronic condition for almost 30 percent of India’s rural population and is deepest among members of SC and Scheduled Tribes2 (STs) in the country’s rural areas.

The Primary Census Abstract in 2011 pens the population of SC at 16.6 percent and ST at 8.6 percent, together forming a quarter of the total

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1“Scheduled Castes” means such castes, races or tribes or parts of or groups within such castes, races or tribes as are deemed under article 341 to be Scheduled Castes for the purposes of the Constitution of India  
2 Scheduled Tribes” follow the criterion of a specific community of primitive traits, distinctive culture, geographical isolation, shyness of contact with the community at large and backwardness. This criterion is not spelled out in the community but is well established. It subsumes the definition contained in 1931 Census, the reports of the first Backward Class Commissions 1955, the Advisory Committee (Karlckar), on Revision of SC/ST lists (Lokur Committee), 1965 and the Joint Committee of Parliament on the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes orders (Amendment) Bill 1967 (Chanda Committee), 1969 http://tribal.nic.in/Content/DefinitionpRrofiles.aspx.
population. The Census of India 2011 further elaborated that 27 million households, constituting 11 percent of the households in the country were headed by women. The responsibility of these households rests on the shoulders of women-widows, single unmarried women, deserted or divorced women. These women come from the poorest of the poor households, socially excluded and are the most vulnerable. Poverty among female-headed households are attributed to intra-household discrimination against girls in education, which leaves them with fewer skills than boys, contributes to fewer economic opportunities for women, and consequently higher poverty rates among female-headed households. Studies show that nearly 40 percent of women-headed households do not possess permanent shelter, around 45 percent of women-headed households live in one-room premises, and 29 percent of women-headed households do not possess any assets such as a radio/TV/telephone/bicycle/scOOTer (Patel, 2009). The Policy Research Note prepared by the World Bank quoted the Indian subcontinent as being home to the largest number of poor in 2012 with its poverty rate as one of the lowest among those countries (Cruz et al, 2015).

Female literacy is a human right and a necessity for India’s growth. Understanding this strong correlation the former Prime Minister Mr. Singh launched “Saakshar Bharat” (Literacy India) on International Literacy Day on September 8 2009. The long-term goal is to take national literacy to 80 percent by 2017 and reduce the gender gap from 21 percent to 10 percent (Bhende, 2009). The literacy rate in India has shown an improvement from 64.8 percent in 2001 to 74 percent in 2011. However, the female literacy rate is still lower as many parents do not allow their daughters to attend school and they get them married off at a young age. The Census of India 2011a penned the female literacy rate to 65.5 percent with the male literacy rate being 82.14 percent. The census\(^1\) also showed an increase in the female literacy rate in rural India 58.8 percent in 2011 compared to 46.1 percent in 2001.

\(^{3}\)The census provides information on size, distribution and socio-economic, demographic and other characteristics of the country's population. A systematic and modern population census, in its present form was conducted non synchronously between 1865 and 1872 in different parts of the country. This effort culminating in 1872 has been popularly labeled as the first population census of India However, the first synchronous census in India was held in 1881. Since then, censuses have been undertaken uninterruptedly once every ten years (Ministry of Home Affairs, GOI; ND).

http://censusindia.gov.in/Census_And_You/about_census.aspx
Table 1.2. Literacy Rate in India Male/Female (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>75.3</td>
<td>82.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>70.7</td>
<td>78.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>86.3</td>
<td>89.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>53.7</td>
<td>65.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>46.1</td>
<td>58.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>72.9</td>
<td>79.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census of India 2011, Chandramouli; Ministry of Home Affairs

A three-day International Conference titled "Achieving Literacy for All: Effective, innovative approaches to scale up literacy, reduce gender disparities and create a literate world" was organized by the National Literacy Mission, (NLMA, India) in cooperation with UNESCO Headquarters (HQs, Paris), UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL, Hamburg) and UNESCO Cluster Office in New Delhi from 18-20 July 2013. The priorities and key strategies that emerged in the conference for the post 2015 Agenda were: the need for recognizing literacy as an indispensable foundation of lifelong learning, to reduce gender bias and to promote South-South cooperation to strengthen commitment and mutual support to literacy.

Some of the key messages generated from the conference urged national governments and the international community:

- to develop policies and strategies to empower women, their families and communities by listening to women and their stories;
• advocate the importance of collective groups for women empowerment and mobilize women self-help groups and activists;
• organize women to sustain empowerment through self-help groups (SHGs);
• integration of ICT and research to generate knowledge for upscaling; need to integrate literacy with life skills;
• to change the mindset of men by involving them in the process of intervention through local government; using literacy as an effective approach to eradicate social evils (MHRD, 2013).

The global community views India critical for the success of the SDGs for the given fact that improving the lives of 1.4 billion Indians would make a major dent in improving the lives of all humanity (The Hindu, 2016). At the UN Summit for the adoption of the Post 2015 development agenda the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi accentuated the vital necessity for ensuring a peaceful, sustainable and just world by working towards a sustainable path to prosperity (NITI Aayog, 2015).

1.2 Aim and Objectives

The overall aim of this research is to examine the role of adult literacy in changing the lives of marginalized women in Bhilwara District Rajasthan and Howrah District West Bengal in India.

The specific objectives are:

1) to examine similarities and differences in the socio-economic context of the rural women in Bhilwara District Rajasthan and Howrah District West Bengal India
2) to identify and analyze some of the key factors that contribute to and sustain women’s access to adult literacy in Bhilwara District Rajasthan and Howrah District West Bengal India.
3) to study the linkages between adult literacy, empowerment and transformation in Bhilwara District Rajasthan and Howrah District West Bengal
4) to examine the role of stakeholders and the civil society in sustaining women empowerment and transformation in Bhilwara District and Howrah District
1.3 Significance of the Study

Within India there are wide inter-state variations regarding different indicators, such as income poverty, total literacy rate, infant mortality rate, sex ratio, and many more. Unlike West Bengal with a literacy rate of 76.26 percent, the literacy rate in Rajasthan cited at 66.11 percent in all the three categories (total, male and female) fell below the national average of 74.04 percent (Census of India 2011c; d).

The comparative study aspires to be an important source of information about the transformative role of education on the lives of women. By comparing the two cases, i.e. Howrah District in West Bengal and Bhilwara District in Rajasthan the study demonstrates that it is important to understand the social and cultural traditions that often hinder women from becoming literate. Most research focuses on program evaluation of adult education but this comparative study analyses and draws attention to the inter-regional cultural diversity prevailing in India focusing on the similarities and the differences.

1.4 Limitations of the Study

The Indian subcontinent is a land of cultural and geographical diversities, which is reflected in the number of languages spoken across the country. The states of India not only have their own regional language but incorporate numerous dialects spoken by the rural, indigenous and the tribal population.

The selection of informants based on the interviews are not representative in a statistical sense. Since, it is a comparative case study general conclusions about the entire population cannot be drawn from this study. However, it identifies tendencies that can be generalized to people living in the same situation (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). A conscious effort has been made to forge a conceptual link between the macro and micro levels throughout the study by using the concept of ‘gender’, which by itself embodies both societal and personal dimensions.

1.5 Organization of the Study: A Roadmap

The present study has ten chapters.

Chapter 1: The introductory chapter sketches the global dilemma that in spite of development investment and global commitments to universalize education through the Education for All and the Millennium
Development Goals inequalities still exist. Adult literacy is envisaged as a critical transformative tool that empowers women with improved outcomes for the next generation.

Chapter 2: Studies conducted by bilateral agencies, national research teams, multi-nationals on the impact of adult education in transforming the lives of rural and marginalized women around the world is contained in this chapter. It sheds light on the interlinkages between literacy and empowerment and the ways in which women have carved out a niche for themselves that has enabled them to determine their lives and destiny.

Chapter 3: The theoretical discussions and the conceptual construct are encased in the third chapter. It provides the base to discuss and analyze the transformative role of education. The theoretical underpinning on gender and development examines the conditions that shape women’s identity in conjunction with the roles allocated to them. It then juxtaposes the influence of adult literacy on the assigned roles and theoretically articulates how and why these roles underwent transition.

Chapter 4: The methodological framework and the rationale for adopting a qualitative case study research methodology is explained. The ontological and epistemological positioning adopted aspires to analyze representations of social reality constructed through social negotiation to understand the social processes deeply embedded in the culture.

Chapters 5, 6 & 7: Chapter 5 gives a detailed description of the country profile and describes the multicultural and multilingual backdrop that make up the fabric of the Indian society. It sheds light on the difficulties encountered by the Government of India to overcome the inequalities imposed by the caste system on the marginalized poor particularly in the rural areas with specific focus on women. Chapters 6 and 7 illustrate the regional setting Rajasthan and West Bengal including the research setting i.e. Bhilwara District and Howrah District. The chapters give the contextual backdrop of the districts in this study required to comprehend the heterogeneous dimension to demonstrate the inter-regional diversity. This comparison is made to tease out important elements that shape and influence women’s access to education.

Chapters 8, 9 & 10: The chapters present the findings and analysis with conclusions and discussions of the dissertation. The concluding chapters strengthen the argument that literacy plays a significant role in improving
the lives of women by equipping them with the tools to transform their lives. At the country level it brings to the foreground to undertake similar research to facilitate policy makers to bring about the transformative change. This would entail involving all learners irrespective of age are enabled to acquire knowledge and the required skill sets to create a sustainable society aligned to the SDGs.
2. The Literature Review

Literacy provides a solid foundation for poverty reduction and sustainable development in pursuit of a democratic and stable society. It provides a basis for the respect of human rights, the universalization of basic education, conflict resolution, nutritional sufficiency, and for an all improved quality of life. It is through literacy that HIV/AIDS and other diseases may be prevented and that gender equality may be achieved. Literate mothers tend to make responsible decisions on matters affecting their families, children and themselves such as health practices, home income, education and welfare of their children… (LIFE, UNESCO, p. 15, 2006).

2.1 The Need for Literacy

According to earlier research literacy is an indispensable tool for alleviating poverty, contributing to human development and for effective social and economic participation. Literacy is a fundamental human right and the foundation for lifelong learning and has the ability to transform human lives. In the case of mothers, literacy plays an important role in enhancing the quality of lives for their family and children. The lack of literacy is correlated to poverty and the lack of human and social development (UNESCO, 2006; ASPBAE, 2012). Since 1949, five international conferences have established adult education and literacy as essential elements of the right to education. These conferences formed a part of the human rights discourse recognizing the fundamental role of education in the realization of human development goals. The Education for All proclaimed in Jomtien in 1990 followed by the Dakar Framework adopted in 2000, have influenced policy making and program strategies in developing countries. However, the right to literacy still remains a dream for about 781 million adults. Out of which two-thirds are women still lack basic reading and writing skills (UNESCO, 2015).

The United Nations advanced thinking about literacy with the declaration of the UN Literacy Decade (UNLD) 2003-2012. When it became apparent that existing efforts would be insufficient to achieve the targets by 2015 UNESCO created the Literacy Initiative for Empowerment (LIFE) in 2006. LIFE provided a broader concept of literacy and focused on 35 countries in which 85 percent of the world’s non-literate adults resided. In 2006 the global coordination of LIFE was transferred from UNESCO Headquarters to the UNESCO Institute for
Lifelong Learning. LIFE will target those unable to access education, particularly out-of-school children, as well as adolescents, youth and adults with insufficient or no literacy skills. The focus will be on mothers and their children-girls and boys-living below the poverty line, especially those in rural areas. LIFE will operate in the thirty-five countries with a literacy rate below 50 percent or a population of over 10 million persons with inadequate literacy (UNESCO, 2006). The SDG4 reaffirms the need to focus on universal access to education and promote lifelong learning. If the world fails to focus and reach the disadvantaged approximately 750 million women will have been married as children by 2030. This would be a strong driver in continuing the intergenerational cycle of poverty, which the SDGs targets to eliminate by 2030 (UNICEF, 2016).

In the 2009 Bele’m Framework for Action (CONFINTEA VI) literacy was seen as a continuum of skills that enables individuals to achieve their goals in life and work (ASPBAE, 2012). The integrated approach adopted in Agenda 2030 builds on the MDGs and seeks to complete what these were unable to achieve, particularly in reaching the most marginalized and the vulnerable. The new Agenda realizes that gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls will make a crucial contribution to progress across all the goals and targets. The 2030 Agenda for the SDG 5 explicitly states that it is difficult to realize human potential if one-half of humanity continues to be denied its full human rights and opportunities. It stressed upon the need to engage both men and boys to eliminate discrimination and violence against women and girls. The SDG 5 is to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls (UN, 2015b).

2.2 Literature Review

In the SIDA commissioned study on ‘Adult Literacy in the Third World (1989) Lind and Johnston presented their ideological filters which regarded adult literacy and all education

‘as performing both reproductive and innovative functions in society, with a constant potential for conflict between the two functions....We think that the learning of literacy can be important for the fight of the exploited classes against oppression, but are also sure that it can be used as a form of social control to undermine this struggle...” (p. 18).
They pointed out that literacy needs to be integrated into the general processes of social change or into a social movement dedicated to creating social change This aspect of literacy is cardinal to the objectives of this study which investigates the wellbeing of marginalized women in rural areas. Literacy is seen as a ‘collective good’ of all and is not limited to the individual.

Oxenham (2008) asserted that:

- Literacy education contributes to the reduction of poverty and hunger the focus of the first MDG (the target was to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger by 2015)
- A high proportion of literate mothers tend to put their children in schools than illiterate mothers not enrolled in literacy classes. This is an important inference for both the first and the second MDG that parental literacy greatly helps school attainment
- Literacy education enables many women to develop more confidence and take on assertive roles in their families and communities. Thus they tend to contribute to the third MDG that aims to promote gender equality and empower women
- Knowledge conveyed through literacy education does tend to contribute to the MDGs for health
- Organized and suitably implemented literacy programs promote stronger and more confident women actively participating both socially and politically especially vulnerable and marginalized women.

Stromquist (2005) and Ahmed (2009) draw our attention to the limited number of studies done on adult literacy. Literacy gave women the ability to influence family members, engage in decision making, attain greater self-confidence and hitherto improved relationships with family members, parents and children (Prins, 2008). The social benefits of literacy have also been researched by Robinson-Pant (2005) in her evaluation of literacy programs in Nepal. Focusing on adult literacy programs and their benefits Robinson- Pant comments, ‘Literacy has come to mean much more to individuals and communities than just reading and writing.’ (p.2). Similarly, writing about the benefits of literacy education on women based on Nigeria, Oyitso & Olomukoro (2012) argue that the empowering potential of literacy gets translated into social benefits that result when women are literate. It gives women a voice in the family and in society. Literacy gives women personal
freedom to become agents of change paving the way for economic and political freedom required for the development of the country.

Longitudinal studies done by Burchfield et al (2002) in Nepal investigated the impact of women's integrated literacy programs in the country's development by examining measures of socio-economic status, as well as indicators of women's social and economic development, including (1) literacy and education; (2) children's education; (3) family and reproductive health; (4) participation in income-earning activities; (5) community participation; and (6) political participation. The findings revealed that women participating in the programs were more inclined to play larger roles in decision making at home, engaged in income generation activities, reproductive and overall health practice, community involvement and political participation. Women participating in the program became aware of family planning and the prevention of HIV/AIDS. Infante (2000) cited in Stromquist 2009 p.3 coordinated a seven country study in Latin America compared social competencies by level of functional literacy proficiency. The study found that self-esteem; autonomy and communicative competence were found linked to performance in reading, writing and mathematics. The Latin American Study illustrates that communicative competence which is seen as the ability to persuade others a trait commonly associated with literacy was detected mostly among persons with high levels of literacy.

OXFAM International launched the paper on West Africa’s literacy challenge focusing on the theme - ‘Youth and Adult Literacy and Lifelong Learning’ (2009). Using the theme “Open Books Open Doors” the paper is a clarion call urging governments to tackle the education crisis in West Africa and take effective action on education, literacy and lifelong learning. It cites research from West Africa and other African regions showing that higher education levels breed greater respect for democracy, enables individuals to engage meaningfully in the political process, claiming their rights and holding governments to account (Pearce, 2009). Longitudinal research carried out in developed countries found that literacy increased self-confidence, self-esteem and women were less dependent on others for several tasks. Learners reported increased contact with local people and engaged in community activities to increase awareness about the benefits of literacy (McDonald & Scollay, 2009; Metcalf & Meadows, 2009).
The tracer study carried out by the World Bank in 2008 (cited in ASPBAE, 2012) in Bangladesh indicated the gains achieved by neo-
literate women empowered them to broaden their livelihood options that
facilitated employment and increased involvement in family decision-
making particularly for household budgeting, family hygiene, children’s
education and participation in community activities. Lind (2008) notes
that literacy is a continuous process and there is no single beginning or
end point. The effects of literacy are not automatic, yet it is a necessary
factor for active citizenship, healthy and prosperous lives, gender
equality, peace and overall human development. Ahmed (2009) stressed
that unlike the general formal education system adult learning policies
and purposes cut across agriculture, industrial development, health,
environment, criminal justice, governance and good citizenship. “The
broad arena of adult education and learning and its pertinence for the
varied needs of the lives and livelihoods of people make it essential to
adopt a multi-sectoral approach, more so than in other spheres of
education” (p.11).

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) 2013a reports that
educated mothers recognize the importance of health care and generate a
greater influence on their educational attainment than their mothers. The
report further indicates that educated women have more control over
household negotiations, are likely to be more economically active and
contribute to the costs of schooling. Similarly, UNICEF (2013) elicits
that the educational impacts upon infant and mortality rate reduces the
risk for HIV/AIDS infection, eradicates poverty and contributes to
improved education for the next generation.

The social dimension of literacy breaks the isolation, which is socially
structured into women’s lives and provides opportunities to meet, discuss
and share individual experiences. Dighe’s study (1995) on the Total
Literacy Campaign by the Delhi Saksharata Samiti in Ambedkharnagar,
in South Delhi, demonstrated the strong social and personal reasons for
participating in the literacy campaign. The study revealed that literacy
classes provided women learners with a social space away from home
and offered them an opportunity to meet in groups and share their
experiences. The learning process encouraged and gave them strength to
take collective action for ameliorating their present conditions.

Bhola (2008) writes about the ‘necessary link’ between literacy and
sustainable development. The study addresses the task for developing a
Knowledge-Based Discourse for Action within the domain of adult education and sustainable development. The linkages have been re-affirmed by the United Nations Literacy Decade (2003-2012) and United Nations Decade for Education for Sustainable Development (UNDESD 2005-2014) to realize the dreams of sustainable development and poverty alleviation. Furthermore, by failing to provide literacy people are unable to utilize their cognitive skills and take control of their lives.

The social benefits of literacy are even more enhanced when programs are integrated and linked to the broader movement for social change. Literacy programs must be a part of broader initiatives and should be participatory, culturally-sensitive and empowering because they work best when embedded with social and political reform programs (Robinson-Pant, 2005; Oxenham, 2008; Dighe, 1995). The literature review reaffirms the invaluable role of literacy for creating a just and sustainable society. It shows a positive association between adult education programs and increased levels of self-esteem and higher levels of knowledge and skills, which thereby encourage positive and active engagement of people especially women (Ahmed, 2009). To illustrate the benefits of adult education and literacy evidence based studies from different regions of the world has been selected to affirm all these findings. When knowledge exchange within and across countries are followed up with financial support to pilot innovative and locally driven programs that use collective action, norms and behavioral shift they enable women to become empowered. They also stand testimony to the fact that “to work” literacy programs must be participatory, gender sensitive and relate to the needs of the rural, marginalized women.

Around the world, various projects and initiatives are being launched to address the challenges of women’s literacy learning. The following section based on ‘good practices’ demonstrate the importance of women’s literacy and learning. The cases drawn from research and reports offer a snapshot of the diverse countries, contexts and the approaches to learning.

2.3 Learning from Good Practices

The dissemination of ‘good practices’ is key to learning from others ‘mistakes’/challenges and gaining from others successes. Although, there is no single definition of good practices the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO) characterizes it as:
“A good practice is not only a practice that is good, but a practice that has been proven to work well and produce good results, and is therefore recommended as a model. It is a successful experience, which has been tested and validated, in the broad sense, which has been repeated and deserves to be shared so that a greater number of people can adopt it” (p.1, 2013).

‘Good practices’ are more than contextual descriptions and the selection of practices without identifying or describing the underlying theoretical framework. Within the context of Education for Rural Transformation (ERT) it stands for communities recognizing the value of learning from others mistakes/challenges and gaining from others successes. To truly learn from ‘others’ good practices should be contextually sensitive because there is no ‘one size fit’ solution to all situational contexts (Chinapah & Blom, 2012). The evidenced-based studies presented in this section from Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and the Arab States reiterate that transformation and empowerment are interwoven. Studies undertaken by development agencies such as the World Bank, UNESCO, IFAD, national and local organizations play a pivotal role in building the necessary momentum and consensus for progressive policy and legal reform needed to transform and empower lives (World Bank, 2014).

Africa

UNIDO (2013) provides technological assistance to rural women cooperatives involved in shea butter production in Mali. The total sales of the groups doubled and women’s income increased significantly. At least 1200 women have received training in 160 women’s cooperatives involved in shea butter production. In addition, UNIDO Women’s Entrepreneurship Development program helped over 6,000 women set up new enterprises with 680 women turning ‘master trainers’ who continue to deliver the programs training courses. Whereas, in Morocco the UNIDO Entrepreneurship Programme assisted over 400 women by improving the competitiveness of small-scale olive production, textile and food and vegetable dying production, which are all managed and owned by women. All women entrepreneurs were trained in business management, good manufacturing, traceability systems that resulted in a 40 percent increase in productivity and a 50 percent increase in income.
The study conducted by Olufunke (2011) examined the issue of literacy as a potent tool for empowering women in the Nigerian communities. Literacy is a tool that enables citizens to take their rightful position in the community. Therefore, women must be encouraged as it helps and equips her to face challenges without excluding any group of people in the society. This study revealed that there is a significant correlation between literacy and women empowerment. Therefore, women should be empowered through literacy education as they form an important part of the society worldwide. Literacy helped them to be aware of new productive opportunities in the areas of entrepreneurship skills acquisition, greater income generation and better opportunities in the world of employment greater income opportunities to better their lot in the worldwide communities.

A qualitative study captured the politics of education in Nigeria, which has shifted from urban to rural literacy, leading to the development of the nomadic women’s adult education program. One of the primary considerations was the cultural interactive patterns and gender socialization process of the women’s ethnic group (Usman, 2009). Five pastoral villages with functional women adult education programs were the research sites. The purposefully selected sample population was drawn from the migrant pastoral Fulani women that included the Bororo’en and Woodabe groups from five states of northern Nigeria. They consisted of 30 women aged between 13–40 years. The choice of age range considered variables such as marital status, family units and peak of reproductive stage, and nursing mothers who either attended or were still attending the adult education programs. Selecting these specific women enabled a broader observation of their domestic healthcare practices in the family and the entire household. The study revealed that women’s empowerment in relation to personal and independent health decisions concerning their children facilitated them in exercising their parental rights by advocating, protecting and promoting quality of health and living for their children, which is a major breakaway from the orthodox family practices.

Women’s education occupies a unique place in demographic discourse and policy because a large amount of empirical research has revealed that educated women delay marriage, use contraceptives, reduce fertility and produce many other beneficial reproductive and child health outcomes (World Bank, 2012a). By using the survey data collected in rural Ghana during the 1980s, the study undertaken by Benefo (2006) reveals that a woman’s interest in limiting fertility and using modern
contraception increases with the percentage of women with education in her community. The finding suggests that female education has a greater capacity to introduce novel reproductive ideas and behaviors into rural areas of Africa and thereby have the power to transform the demographic landscape in the region than is currently believed. The other community characteristics that increase women’s interest in regulating fertility and contraceptive use in this setting include access to transportation and proximity to urban areas. However, none of these are as powerful as women’s education in transforming reproductive behavior.

Literacy programs empowered rural women in two rural areas of Mopani District Municipality, in Greater Giyani, South Africa to become involved with community development programs. All participants shared a similar demographic profile originating from poverty-stricken villages. The study conducted in two Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) learning centers in the Mopani district (Nsami circuit) indicated that attendance in literacy programs has changed their mindset and now that their eyes are opened, they can see that they are living below the poverty line. They are therefore developing a strategy of changing the situation for the better (Shilubane, 2007).

Using data collected in Lassa, located in Mali Konaté, (2010) shows that the effect of literacy programs is helping participants to develop critical thinking. By sharing experiences, actions are taken for positive changes about their lives and the community. It further suggests that when literacy programs and education are built on the experiences, skills, and rich knowledge of people and communities, they can be powerful tools to provide people ways and strategies to break out of illiteracy, poverty, and powerlessness. Poverty had been identified as one of the main factors for joining the literacy program. Most women believed that illiteracy was the cause of their lack of financial resources and they thought that by learning how to read and write, they could gain rich knowledge and skills, which could open doors for them. Similarly, Raditloaneng & Mulenga’s (2003) findings also state poverty is associated with illiteracy and gender inequalities. Therefore, women’s low levels of functional literacy and lack of appropriate training inhibit their ability to contribute meaningfully to reap economic gain from their labor and to access leadership positions and take part in decision making in their families and their communities.
Studies carried out by CAMFED International (Campaign for Female Education) observe that girls who complete primary and secondary education tend to marry later, have smaller families and earn significantly higher wages. Girls' education has been posited as a "vaccine" against HIV/AIDS, with comparative analysis of data from Zambia, for example, of non-educated and educated women show a substantial difference in infection rates. Educating a girl changes her destiny, as well as those of her future children, and ensures that she can contribute to the economic life of her community. The direct and indirect benefits of educating girls and young women has been demonstrated in the reduction of rural poverty which is reflected in the MDG 1 to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, improved maternal health in MDG 5 and lower incidences of HIV/AIDS MDG 6 being some of the positive outcomes when a girl is educated (UN Chronicle, 2007).

In an attempt to revitalize adult literacy ACTION AID launched an explore research project to explore the uses of Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) within adult literacy classes. The outcome was the Regenerated Freirean Literacy through Empowering Community Techniques (Reflect). The innovative project was started at Bundibugyo, a remote region in Uganda in which 86 percent of women are illiterate compared to 65 percent nationally. The Reflect Program has led to many community developments such as women being given their voices in households; classes promoted discussions around deforestation and family spacing and got their husbands to participate in them as well. Not surprisingly Reflect Literacy has won UN Literacy prizes in 2003, 2005, 2007, 2008 and 2010 (Reflect Action, 2009; UIL, 2015).

Tostan, established in 1991 and headquartered in Dakar, Senegal, works to empower rural and remote African communities to bring about positive social transformation and sustainable development through a holistic non formal education program based on human rights. The origins of Tostan date back to 1982 when its founder and executive director, Molly Melching, initiated non-formal education programs in Senegal, which built on participants' existing cultural practices and local knowledge. The three-year participatory education program, facilitated by local staff offered to adults and adolescents in their own language, modules on human rights and democracy, problem solving, hygiene, health, literacy and project management. Since 1991, Tostan programs have been implemented in 22 national languages in 10 countries and have had a positive impact on the lives of hundreds of thousands of
people. The Tostan approach inspires positive social change in five impact areas: governance, education, health, environment and economic growth; as well as addresses the cross-cutting issues of child protection, early childhood development, female genital cutting, child/forced marriage and the empowerment of women and girls.

By actively participating in class sessions on financial management members of the communities of Pellelmodiyadhé in central Guinea were able to expand their economic activities and significantly increase profits. They in turn deposited their profits in the community microcredit fund managed by the Community Management Committee (CMC) in the village. Through the initial loan, community members also started making soap and used a portion of the initial fund to purchase oil, perfume, and other materials, and the products were sold to their community at the weekly market nearby. The profits earned encouraged them to supplement their soap making business with bread making. Eventually, community members began growing different products including onions, rice, and tomatoes (during the dry season) and potatoes and beans (during the rainy season). Between 2005 and 2014 the largest projects resulting from the funds generated from these activities include: the repair and maintenance of the Tostan center as well as the construction of a primary school, a French/Arabic school, a bread stove, and a water pump. All of these projects were spearheaded by the CMC, a fully functional governing body originally put in place as part of the Tostan program over ten years ago and led by elected village members.

The women further expressed their desire to receive project management training to enable them to better lead and manage their resources. In addition, they planned on applying for local and national funding to expand their activities and to write to the regional government requesting more land to expand their agricultural output (Tostan, 2014).

Women’s World Wide Web (W4) is an online crowd-funding platform aiming to promote girls’ and women’s empowerment worldwide, in cities and in rural areas, in both developing and developed countries. W4’s field partner the Alpha Ujuvi Collective stepped in to offer functional literacy courses on literacy and numeracy within a professional framework to 450 women. The women were between 18 to 40 years old in the town of Bukavu and in the territory of Fizi. Located in South Kivu, it is one of the poorest provinces of the Democratic Republic of Congo, with over 84 percent of the population living in poverty. The collective builds classrooms, provides learning kits, and
trains and employs teachers specialized in psychosocial support and literacy for adults, as well as peace education, so that the women are provided with a holistic education tailored to their needs. These literacy courses not only allow women to learn to read, write, and calculate, but they also, and most importantly, help them to find qualified work. Women who have benefited from these courses will therefore be able to sustain their families’ needs and participate in the development of the local economy, thus earning the respect of their communities and creating a way out of the otherwise often inevitable cycle of poverty (W4, 2014).

Women’s Action for Development (WAD) has been operational in Namibia since 1994 and follows a two-pronged process targeting the socio-economic and socio-political empowerment of both rural men and women. They believed that to fast track advancement in the society citizens needed to be developed in both socio-economic and the socio-political field and began establishing various training centers. As a result it is attracting young men and women into the program and has a membership of 50,000 men and women. The key donors presently working with WAD on the empowerment of rural communities include the European Union, the Spanish Government, the American Ambassador’s Self-Help Program; as well as the organization’s Black Economic Empowerment partners, Old Mutual Namibia; Nedbank Namibia; Mutual and Federal Namibia; and Bidvest Namibia (WAD, 2012).

The UN Women Country Programme works in South Africa to promote policy framework for gender equality and women’s empowerment. The Multi-Country Office (MCO) based in Pretoria includes Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia and Swaziland. The South Africa MCO has forged global partnerships with the Coca Cola Company and Intel to train and support women micro-entrepreneurs. The former trains and supports business skills development and the latter seeks to improve the digital literacy of women. The South Africa MCO addresses violence against women and works with various partners including Governments, civil society and men’s networks to promote gender equality and women’s empowerment. The UN Women South Africa Multi-Country Office (SAMCO) and South African Post Office (SAPO) signed the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on June 3rd 2016. The MoU would turn post office buildings across the country into enterprises hubs. These hubs will offer digital literacy skills training to women and targets
entrepreneurs in rural areas. This would enable rural women entrepreneurs a platform to connect to financial information and services. Ten thousand women are expected to be trained by the program (UN Women Africa, 2016).

Arab States

Innovative approaches or projects which ‘think out of the box’ tapping into the digital revolution play a key role in minimizing the gender gap in women. The Vodafone Foundation based its project on a salient theme emerging from the global discourse on education—the need to access to education, to resources and capital and to the larger community. The pilot project, Knowledge is Power, supported by Vodafone Egypt Foundation in partnership with Egypt’s General Authority for Literacy and Adult Education and NGOs was launched in 2011. So far 12,000 youth worker volunteers have been recruited to provide literacy education in rural communities. By the end of 2013 around 187,000 people had enrolled in the Knowledge is Power classes and over 94,000 people had successfully completed the literacy program, of which over 60 percent were women. Four million people found out about the program via the Vodafone Egypt Facebook Page. The classes are now being rolled out to an additional 120,000 people by the end of 2014.

Although the project is open to all it is particularly focused on solutions that help women overcome some of the barriers they face to improving their literacy skill. The Knowledge is Power project is implemented by three Egyptian NGOs, the Life Makers Foundation, the Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Services (CEOSS) and Rotary Egypt. Their strong local presence enables them to connect with and enroll harder to reach women including those in remote rural communities. The NGOs also recruited the teaching volunteers many of whom are recent university graduates. They ran training workshops to build the skills of facilitators and supervisors in the literacy curriculum and one week camps to train the volunteers in literacy education techniques. The Vodafone Foundation is also planning to announce a partnership with the Malala Fund, the organization led by Malala Yousafzai to help girls go to school, tomorrow. A report published also stated that mobile-based alert systems could reduce the number of domestic violence incidents by 80,000 within 2020 if they were made available by local police services (Vodafone Report, 2014).
Created in 1999 the association Ibn Al Baytar (AIB) is registered as a national NGO in Morocco is composed of 30 members and an Administration Council made up of 9 people. The focus was to encourage autonomy of women in rural areas and coordinate the literacy classes with income generating activities for women working in the Argan sector in Morocco. It began with the Amal cooperative in 1996 employing 16 divorced or widowed women most of whom had never acquired any literacy skills. From 2003 the association also started to include literacy training as part of their training which benefited over 3,000 women in the Argan trade. In 2006 a diagnostic study found that the need to consolidate literacy skills was being overlooked due to language since most women spoke Amazigh and very little Arabic. Therefore, in December 2008 a new literacy program was designed to address these needs and implemented in five provinces of the region Souss, Massa Draa in central Morocco. Every year 240 women and girls participate in the program and has a total of 480 rural women benefiting from it since its inception (UIL, 2015).

The aforementioned case studies showcase the increase of women participants in the literacy drive organized by NGOs, multinationals and international organizations. However, Yousif (2009) points out that obstacles such as cultural tradition, poverty, distance to school and an insecure school environment continue to hinder women’s access to and participation in education. The GMR in 2009 noted the increase in the average literacy rate from 58 percent to 72 percent in the Arab states. The rise was more pronounced among women. Despite this increase literacy rates in the region continues to remain below the developing country with the number expected to remain as high as 55 million by 2015 (UNESCO, 2009a).

Latin America and the Caribbean

The Bolsa Escola Programme in Brazil is best known for its objective of providing families with income subsidies and is conditional on maintaining their children in school. However, a second objective of the program, currently being implemented by Oxfam GB and the NGO Missao Crianca with funding by the European Union is to empower women within the family. A mother’s level of education, her ethnicity and her level of income are all factors that correlate strongly with the educational achievement of children in Brazil. The program entitled ‘Education to confront Poverty’, provides adult education for mothers
and other members of their family by creating incentives for mothers to participate directly in school meetings and local education councils. The potential for women’s participation already exists in some contexts, but there are no real incentives for them to get involved and take ownership. So, by putting women in charge of receiving and allocating the benefits of the program, their self-esteem is boosted and their decision making influence within the family is promoted. The Bolsa Escola funds help them to become agents of change within their families, communities and to develop skills that can transform their lives (Oxfam, 2005). The Bolsa Familia Program has also been provided technical support by the World Bank (2015) and is stated to be one of the key factors behind the positive social outcomes in the recent years. An initiative of the Brazilian Government it reaches 11 million families and more than 46 million people which is a major portion of the country’s low-income population. For keeping their children in school poor families receive of R$ 70.00 (about US$ 35) in direct transfers. The two important results are keeping children in school by investing in their families and indirectly reducing the cycle of poverty.

The national policy in Peru guarantees free and compulsory pre-primary, primary and secondary education for all children up to the age of 16 but unfortunately the rural population’s access to education remains extremely limited. This affects the indigenous people that constitute 45 percent of the country’s population. Majority of them are the Quechua residing in remote and inaccessible villages in the Andean highlands. To address this situation a community based organization called the Asociación Tawantinsuyumana Evangelioq K’ancharinanpaq (ATEK) initiated the Reading Comprehension Literacy Programme. The program endeavors to empower them with literacy skills training and is intended to serve as a model of bilingual literacy and education programs for indigenous people in Peru. According to UNESCO (2011) this program has transformed the lives of the community and is reported to have an enrollment between 900-1000 monolingual and bilingual Cusco Quechua learners every year. An important outcome has been the engagement of women to play an important role in the civic life in their communities.

In Bolivia, MurilloVera the co-founder of United 4 Change, Center for International Development & Global Citizenship aims to empower impoverished women in the mining communities through education, information and training. The project targeted one of the most important
global challenges namely poverty alleviation. Their mission is create ‘Community Centers’ for women of the mining communities so that they can have a place where they can learn to read and write, receive information and develop their skills as entrepreneurs. Some of the impoverished communities targeted are: Caracoles Mine, Viloco Mine, Llallagua, Uncia, Coriri, Uyuni, Caquena, Caluyo, Janko Kota. The program has received CGIU i.e. Outstanding Commitment Award a grant supported by Pat Tillman Foundation in 2009 for her design of the new initiative to support her community in Bolivia (Humanitarian, 2012).

The GMR 2010 identified Haiti as having the lowest literacy rate compared to any country in the world. With over 57 percent of its population aged 13 and above unable to read or write created the basis for interventions. It targeted the Sud-Est department that reported 62 percent of people aged over 14 as illiterate and within the 14-30 bracket more than 30 percent being unable to read or write. The project on Basic Literacy and Vocational Training for Young Adults was designed to raise literacy rate in the Sud-Est département and help young people to find work. By customizing training to the needs of the community in the development of the literacy curriculum helped to forge a link between technical skills and the implementation of productive activities within the communities. The training consists of two stages a) running of the literacy sessions and 2) building the capacities of the neo-literates through capacity building. These courses have been attended by 6,500 people with 70 percent being women and 500 young people in vocational training (UIL, 2015)

Trinidad and Tobago (T&T) is a fast developing country in the southern Caribbean primarily having an industrial-based economy with an emphasis on petroleum and agriculture. The Adult Literacy Tutors Association (ALTA) founded in 1992 has an annual total of approximately 1500 students. Out of these roughly 900 are new students with 600 either repeating a course or moving up to a higher level. The program is extremely popular not only in the country but the entire region. For the first time in t 2012 literacy awareness campaigns were led by the students (UIL, 2015; ALTA, 2014).

The Cuban constitution grants women equal economic, political, cultural, social and familial rights with men and prohibits discrimination based on race, skin color, sex, national origin, and religious belief. These rights are further supported by provisions in various laws, including the
Family Code (1975), which requires men to participate equally in domestic labor, guarantees equal rights to women and men in marriage and divorce, and equal parental rights; and 1979 and 1984 revisions to the Penal Code, which provide additional penalties for violations of sexual equality. The women’s movement has been important in furthering women’s gains. The Federation of Cuban Women (FMC), a non-governmental organization with close ties to the government, is the national agency responsible for the advancement of women and is involved in every facet of society in promoting equality. Even though it is recognized as a national mechanism championing gender equality it is not financed by the government. Crimes of violence against women, especially rape and sexual assault, are severely punished in Cuba. The FMC also travels the country to find out if there is hidden violence and to set up mechanisms for reporting and for community intervention (UIL, 2015; CDA, 2013).

Asia and the Pacific

From the very inception of BRAC (Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee) in the early 70’s the organization has placed emphasis on education initially for adults in the poorer communities and later for children. Moving away from conventional adult literacy approach, BRAC looks at education and empowerment from a broader perspective. BRAC’s social development program focuses on legal and human rights, raising awareness on legal rights and support. It was observed that the poor in the village faced many social and legal problems, including those related to marriage, divorce, land ownership and inheritance. In the “Para (Neighbourhood) Legal programme”, a woman in the village was trained on the legal issues regarding laws on the above issues. She would then train a class of twenty village women on the legal provisions and remedies on these vital social issues. There is now one BRAC-trained woman serving as a paralegal teacher in almost every village in Bangladesh. In addition to this program, BRAC also established linkages with supportive lawyers at the rural level to give pro-bono support to the poor villagers should the need arise. By acquainting women with their legal rights is another step towards empowerment (UNDP, 2009). This gives women the self-confidence, awareness to demand and strengthen their place within households building community ties. The study undertaken by Parveen & Chaudhury (2009) states that education serves as a catalyst to promote socio-economic upliftment of rural women in the villages where the organization has played an empowering role.
The Stung Treng Women’s Development Centre (SWDC) in Stung Treng province of Cambodia is one of the few NGOs to concentrate its efforts in this remote and acutely under-developed area of Cambodia. Its work in women’s literacy and healthcare through training cycles, providing women with skills and employment in this impoverished region, where several unemployed or underpaid young women often turn to prostitution and other dangerous occupations for an income. The impact of SWDC’s efforts in employment creation, social protection, and also on the lives of local women in Stung Treng has proved to be both meaningful and sustainable. In the sparsely populated villages of Stung Treng where the main occupation is rice farming, the SWDC has not only revived the ancient tradition of silk handicrafts but has also trained and employed 70 women to be the highest paid silk weavers in Cambodia. They are often the primary bread-winners. The success of SWDC in ensuring training and good, sustainable livelihoods for women and men in the Stung Treng province, while consistently producing innovative high-quality, rare silk products, demonstrates the value of the organization’s balanced approach combining social development and competitive business, and its role as a catalyst of rural transformation. The Public Private Partnership (PPP) is another essential component to promote women’s economic empowerment. Using literacy as a tool encouraged women to step out of their traditional roles as child bearers, mothers and wives (2011).

Women in the Philippines are an increasing significant entrepreneurial force but still remain the largest under-represented group in terms of visibility as entrepreneurs and micro-enterprises owners. The Visayas Region the entrepreneurial process still mirrors several constraints and vulnerabilities that might confine to traditional patterns people willing to take the risk and invest on their own. To empower rural women to realize their full potential as independent economic actors, the rural library stepped in to facilitate and to address the struggles faced by rural women. The research conducted by Cabanilla (2014), in Barugo, Leyte, Philippines assessed the ways in which rural library and female entrepreneurship contributes to women economic empowerment. The host library at Barangay Reading Centers and American Shelf in Visayas Region addresses community development with children as their main focus and economic security to poor women. In Barugo district the program began in 2012 and is presently working across 17 VDCs of northern, central and mid-southern part of the district. The library is
engaged in the economic development of a large number of VDCs by supporting female involvement in income generating activities in order to ensure greater economic security to poor households. Through two development initiatives namely Women’s Empowerment Entrepreneurship Project (WEEP) and the Girl Empowerment Entrepreneurship Project the Barugo PU has been actively involved in contributing to achieve the general development goals of Barugo District. The activities aim at strengthening young women’s organization in self-reliant groups (under the cooperatives umbrella) providing life skills education to participants and at promoting enterprise related training to disadvantaged women.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, agriculture changed from a state-owned enterprise to private ownership. In Kyrgyzstan, rural people who had been engaged in agriculture generally had experience in very specialized areas of production. With the change to a market economy rural people had to take on the role of independent farmers, responsible for all aspects of working the land and marketing their produce. Since 2001, HELVETAS, a non-profit private development has been working with other partners to develop advisory services for farmers. The project created a new form of vocational agricultural education for men and women farmers in seven pilot partner schools. The learning is based on the situation and conditions associated with farming in this region of Kyrgyzstan. The curriculum was developed using a participatory approach involving farmers, students, parents, teachers, school administrators as well as local and national agricultural specialists. Initially students, as part of an apprenticeship system, spend one third of their education time working on host farms. The training involves both theory and practical experience on the school farms. Students are encouraged throughout the training to acquire a business-oriented and problem-solving approach, which is new for many teachers. Teachers also have to learn new roles as fellow learners, coaches and facilitators of the learning process. School managers learn to administer the new educational system and continually look for ways to strengthen and improve existing systems and structures within their institutions (2014).

Vietnam has made considerable progress in achieving the MDGs particularly in eradicating extreme hunger and poverty and in securing gender equality in educational enrolment. Despite female participants making up 50 percent of enrolments in both primary and secondary
education gender inequality remains a major concern. According to the World Bank (2011) ethnic minority women living in the rural communities are over-represented among the poor, female workers are likely to receive less wage than men, women in Vietnam also have poorer access to health services compared to men and continue to be the victims of gender-based violence. To alleviate poverty among the rural poor and to promote gender equality community learning centres called An Active Tool in National Literacy and Post-Literacy was launched in 2009 by the Vietnamese Continuing Education Department. Currently, the program is being implemented in nationwide in 10,815 communities in 63 provinces. Annually, the program reaches around 26,500 participants in literacy classes and some 21,300 participants in post-literacy classes. Between, 2009-2013 238,942 learners have participated in the program (UIL, 2015).

Indonesia has made great progress in improving access and equity because of its increased spending on education, following the constitutional amendment. The Indonesian government allocated at least 20 percent of its annual budget towards education. However, challenges in education still remain with regards to equity. The primary reason behind the vulnerability is Indonesia’s exposure to natural disaster experienced over the past thirty years with an average of 289 natural disasters annually with the death toll of around 8,000 people. Literacy for the 21st Century: Promoting Innovative Literacy Education in Coping with Natural Disasters has been introduced to enhance resilience against natural disasters and to improve education supporting this goal. According to the World Bank (2012b) this step not only increases access to education but also builds risk management capacities at the community level. The Centre for the Development of Early Childhood, Non-Formal and Informal Education in cooperation with the Directorate of Community Education Development are responsible for implementation and are part of the Ministry of Education. An important aspect of this program is to promote women’s empowerment and poverty alleviation and increase coverage of early childhood education. Since its inception it has reached 44,000 learners in Central Java, Jogjakarta and Lampung provinces all of which are prone to natural disasters (UIL, 2015).

In Pakistan the BUNYAD NGO works with a wide range of organizations to address the difficulties faced by people with no or low levels of literacy. The NGO focuses on those people who are most marginalized. To empower rural and marginalized women the
organization launched the Adult Female Functional Literacy Programme (AFFLP) in an area including 12 Union Councils where literacy rates amongst women are particularly low. Keeping in mind the cultural context materials developed by BUNYAD were distributed to families before being used to reassure them that traditional religious values were not being undermined through participation. Moreover, the learning centers were set up close to the homes of the young women for easy access. Apart from 5,600 learners that participated in the programme some gained skills which enabled them to contribute to their family’s economic activities. The participants reported the beginning of intergenerational learning with mothers passing on their new literacy skills to their children. Community support helped immensely to mobilize young women to participate in literacy learning (UIL, 2013).

In India, a literacy program developed as part of the three-year Bill & Melinda Gates-funded Sunhara India project grew out of the program’s ongoing agricultural development and women’s empowerment work. It adopted a two-pronged strategy to develop women’s functional literacy skills: building agricultural capacity (seed packet reading, understanding and use of measurements and weights, etc.) and supporting empowerment initiatives so that women were better placed to take advantage of agricultural economic opportunities in the broader program. The results of the 18 months’ initiative showed improvements in their agricultural productivity and incomes. Women who participated in the literacy training adopted almost all the agricultural practices taught through the project. Several also became lead farmers, teaching good agricultural practices to others. Moreover, many of the women also said in ex-post interviews that they now want their daughters to attend school and become literate (Deo, 2012).

The Indian state of Andhra Pradesh, one of India’s poorest, has used development self-help groups (SHGs) extensively as a primary tool of poverty alleviation and empowerment. Self-help also empowers women, more than 4.8 million of whom are mobilized into SHGs. Early programs sought to provide self-employment, empower and incorporate rural poor women into the development process. Homogenous groups of women would choose and collectively undertake an economic activity suited to their skills and resources, supplemented by state matching grants. The state has promoted significant increases in SHGs using a social mobilization approach. The state program Velugu program working in over 860 mandals (sub-district geographical unit) in 22 districts, aims to reach 2.9 million of the poorest of rural poor. A number of social issues
including gender and family, child labor, disability and health related to poverty alleviation were addressed in the context of SHGs. SHG formations largely take place around women since women are seen more credit worthy than men, but the process of empowerment and poverty alleviation can be more sustainable when all the members of the family are involved. The linkages between education, information and empowerment became overtly visible in the way awareness through the literacy campaign snowballed into the anti-arak movement in Andhra Pradesh. Through the literacy campaign, people realized that the consumption of arak drained family resources and also led to domestic violence. Hence, women who were already organized around literacy decided to fight the sale of arak which quickly spread to other parts of the state. SHGs became the channel to carry forward the voice that literacy and information gave to women. The documents on the Government of India’s website recognizes domestic violence as a serious offence punishable by law. Most women refrain from lodging complaints because it would bring shame to the families and the social stigma attached with it. The top ten states reported to have the highest percentage of domestic violence are: Assam, Tripura, West Bengal, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Haryana, Gujarat, Delhi and Rajasthan (UIL, 2009-2016).

Since its inception in 1993 NIRANTAR has been actively involved with the women’s movement and other democratic rights. By promoting transformative formal and non-formal learning processes Nirantar works towards enabling empowerment through education specifically targeting women and girls from marginalized communities. The organization works at the community level and focuses strongly on social dimensions particularly those of caste, sexuality and religion. Sahajani Shiksha Kendra (SSK) a program aimed at empowering women and adolescent girls was initiated in the state of Uttar Pradesh in 2002. The program links their lived realities to adult education initiatives with an emphasis on vocational training. So far 2145 women and adolescent girls in 112 villages have undergone an intensive program of literacy, continuing education, awareness and empowerment. The sustainability of the program is addressed through its outreach to many women across the northern belt of the country indirectly institutionalizing their learnings, documenting them, providing trainings to others and supporting similar pilots in other regions (UIL, 2009-2016).
To translate the goals of the National Policy of Education (NPE, 1986) and the Program of Action (POA, 1991) the Mahila Samakhya Programme (MS) was initiated in 1989. The groups that are most alienated from education and other Government programs and processes become the predominant composition of the MS. They are SC/ST women, women belonging to land-less and marginalized families, who are engaged in wage labor. A National Review undertaken in 2014 illustrates that MS covers 130 districts and 679 blocks/mandals in the country and has successfully mobilized marginalized women. Nearly, 62 percent of the sanghas receive capacity building support. MS has expanded from 83 districts in nine states at the beginning of the XI Plan period to 130 districts in 11 states (counting Telangana and Andhra Pradesh as separate states). While this number is marginally short of the 132 (excluding Madhya Pradesh) expected by the end of 2012, the number of sanghas and the membership have shown a steady and significant increase. The National Review cites with examples drawn in from the fieldwork that gender-based empowerment has gone on to challenge other forms of subjugation and discrimination (IIM Ahmedabad, 2014).

2.4 Conclusion

The studies carried out across the globe are an important source of information about the role of adult literacy as the vehicle of transformation amongst rural and marginalized women. The social dimension of adult literacy classes became a platform for women to meet, share, discuss and find solutions to better their lives and empower themselves. The anti-arak movement in Andhra Pradesh is an instance when women united against the abusive use of liquor. The evidence-based research in Africa, South America, Asia and the Pacific postulates that women were enabled to make strategic life choices, control resources and make decisions that affect important life outcomes for their family. Literacy is crucial for making women understand their legal rights and increases their self-confidence. The social, political and economic dimension of literacy is invaluable and is deeply connected with the progress of the country as well. The enumerated cases argue that qualitative research can be generalized provided the socio-cultural, economic of the contexts under observation are the similar.

A foundation for empowerment at the grassroots level with the organisation of cohesive mahila sanghas (women's collectives), though different in form and size, but which are committed to collective action to address their own issues (GOI, 1997) http://www.teindia.nic.in/mhrd/50yrsedu/home.htm
The selected successful case studies tell a shared story about the benefits of adult literacy as a key contribution to increasing women’s awareness about themselves, their immediate surroundings, their communities and societies at large. Thereby, enabling them in different degrees to negotiate and even widen their range of choices in these spaces, which are often severely constricted by historical structures of oppression and deeply embedded systems of discrimination (ASPBAE, 2012). Effective literacy program ushers in a broader movement for social change as elicited in the literature review. The success factors cover all the elements of a good practice as defined earlier i.e. it has been proven to work well and produce good results. To achieve transformation education needs to be intertwined with development programs which result in immediate economic benefits (Sujatha, 2010).

The key success factors were:

- Relating literacy programs to income generation activities provided women opportunities to ameliorate their lives
- Increased community participation encouraged women to become agents of change
- Literate mothers were able to influence their children’s education, participate in decision making at home and promoted inter-generational learning needed for creating a sustainable society
- Literacy increased levels of self-esteem, encouraged positive and active engagement of people especially women to advocate the benefits of education

The advancement of women has been an area of concern for the global community taken up by international organizations, national organizations and non-governmental organizations working at the grass roots. Undoubtedly, literacy is the pathway to success as has been demonstrated in the documented cases. The projects and the initiatives are launched keeping in mind the contextual history of the region, which accounts for its success. However, what studies often fail to point out are the intangible power relations existing within households and in the society. In her work on Gender and Development (GAD), Kabeer (2005) points out that the positive attributes to education as empowerment is likely to be conditioned by the society it represents and the social relationship it embodies. The intangible power relationships are often
missing from these studies-negotiations which women have to make within their private sphere to have access to education and be empowered. This study takes up these sensitive issues through the interviews, collates the information and depicts the multi-dimensional nature of inequalities. It looks at the conditions needed to bring about the transformative change in the lives of women and their agencies that allow them to become the change agents.
3. The Theoretical Discourse

“There is nothing so practical as a good theory”
Kurt Lewin (quoted in Marrow, 1969)

3.1 Introduction

Paulo Freire (1970) placed literacy development in the context of personal empowerment. When education and training not only provide people with the necessary knowledge and skills for development of the people but also empower people with knowledge and skills they need in order to take charge of their lives and bring about changes in the society in which they live, it takes on a new and powerful meaning. In this new paradigm, people can take control of their lives rather than just respond to the things imposed on them.

The Indian diaspora is woven around castes, languages, religions—a young nation boasting of an ancient civilization in which inequalities are deeply ingrained in its culture and traditions. Although critical government interventions have succeeded in increasing the literacy rate of women in both urban and rural areas, general household characteristics such as income, caste, occupation and education attainments of parents still continue to determine access, attendance, completion and learning outcomes (Ramachandran, 2009) of girls and women from severely disadvantaged communities.

To illustrate the dynamism between education and empowerment and understand the socio-cultural complexity synonymous with the Indian society, the handpicked theories attempt to connect concepts and principles to empirical observations (Greenwald, 2012). The critical issue here is the gender roles ascribed to women from marginalized groups within a particular contextualized setting. The study aspires to

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5 In India the caste system is historically one of the main dimensions where the people are socially differentiated through class, religion, region, tribe, gender, and language. The Indian Caste System is considered a closed system of stratification, which means that a person’s social status is obligated to which caste they were born into. There are limits on interaction and behavior with people from another social status. The caste system is a classification of people into four hierarchically ranked castes called varnas—brahmans, Kshatriyas, vaishyas and shudras

http://digitalcommons.calpoly.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1043&context=socssp.
understand why and how established hegemonic roles changed because of the catalytic role of education as portrayed by the women. The term ‘gender’ refers to the economic, social, political and cultural attributes and opportunities, associated with being male and female. In most societies, men and women differ in the activities they undertake, in access to and control of resources, and participation in decision-making and women as groups have less access than men to resources, opportunities and decision making (Desprez-Bouanchaud et al., 1987).

3.2 Gender and Development (GAD)

The GAD approach emphasized the significance of inequality in a range of contexts focusing on the sexual division of labor inside and outside the households, on forms of political mobilization, and changing gendered structures of power. Moreover, the use of gender relations as a category of analysis also shifts the focus away from the earlier one on women. A critical aspect of this approach was the focus on social relations extending the analysis between men and women to the broader interconnecting relationships which position women as a subordinate group in the division of resources, responsibilities, attributes, capabilities, power and privilege. The approach further stresses that gender is always interwoven with other social inequalities such as class and race and needs to be analyzed through a holistic framework in order to understand the reasons behind disempowerment (Unterhalter, 2005).

The ground-breaking work by Ester Boserup in the 1970s drew on the experiences of developed and developing countries and argued that gender roles in agriculture are principally determined by the system of production, the economic status of the household and the level of technology. The economic status of the household determines the gender division of labor. Some of the factors behind women’s subordination have been attributed to gender. In relation to men of their class for poorer women the results might be overwork and undernourishment. For wealthier women concentration on reproductive work may free them from direct class-based exploitation, subjecting them to greater economic dependence on men (Boserup, 2007). In GAD the focus is on women and men and not on women alone. Gender relations are seen as key determinants of women’s position in society, not as the natural order of things but as socially constructed patterns of behavior-the social construction of gender which can be changed if desired. The GAD approach stresses on the interconnection of gender, class and race and the social construction of their defining characteristics (Kabeer, 1994),
It highlights that women experience oppression differently according to their race, class, colonial history, culture and position in the international economic order (Moser, 1993).

GAD theorists made a distinction between practical gender needs and strategic gender needs (Molyneux, 1985). Unfortunately, policy makers were too often concerned with the practical gender needs or the basic requirements i.e. food, shelter and water. The strategic gender needs are usually underplayed because they challenge the deeply entrenched forms of gender discrimination in the legal system, sexual violence in the family, the lack of political representation and discrimination in the workplace. The strategic gender needs also enables one to look at the possibilities of an alternative more satisfactory set of arrangements than the one in existence. If change is to be brought about then it is imperative that development programs operate at both levels (Unterhalter, 2005; Kabeer, 1994). The need to do so is pointed out by Moser (1993) signaling a broader transformatory agenda to planners that recognizes some of the constraints different planners may face in implementing such an agenda. GAD urges policy makers to look beyond policy reforms. It urges governments to shift focus to work onto the socially constructed gender roles that is reinforced through social interactions originating from households.

Kabeer (2015) argues that the persistence of absolute deprivation in the world becomes glaring when one compares the share of the world’s income and wealth that goes to its richest citizens with the share that goes to its poorest. The gender gap is often found to be larger at the poorer end of the economic spectrum and official figures tend to underestimate this gap since they tend to focus on formal work. Data on informal middle and lower income countries document the greater concentration of women in unpaid family labor, in other words, in work that does not provide them with any purchasing power. Some of the most important reasons cited are women’s greater responsibility for care of household members and the lesser ability of poorer households to hire others to do this work or to access technology that will reduce it. The gendered dimensions of poverty is acute in households in which women are the primary, often sole, breadwinners for themselves and their children tend to be poorer than the rest.
3.3 Theory of Representation

The theory of representation advocated by Hall (2013) lays emphasis on the usage of language to convey the word meaningfully to other people or the world. Representation is an essential part of the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged between members of a similar culture involving the use of language. In this particular context representation means to make sense of the world, of people, of culture and to be able to express them or to communicate these thoughts in a language which other people are able to comprehend. The constructionist approach is applied in the present study because it is through language meaning is constructed to understand the social actors studied and to communicate the conceptual systems of their culture meaningfully to others. Therefore, language is the privileged medium in which one makes sense of things, in which meaning is produced and exchanged because different people, groups or cultures might exist in different worlds (Law, 2004).

To contextualize Hall's statement Indian society is elicited as one of the world’s most iniquitous societies. In the words of Ahmad (2003) analyses of Indian society has portrayed that the existing inequities is closely defined by the social communities whose boundaries are clearly defined and fixed. The Brahmins are recognized to be an extremely advantaged group by virtue of their caste standing, hold over land and access to higher education and administration. The next caste is the Kshatriya; within this classification are the warriors and secular leaders. The Vaishya, whose members are merchants, traders, and agriculturalists, follows them. Finally, on the lowest rung of the caste ladder are the Shudra, or workers of the caste organization.

As one goes down the hierarchy, spiritual pollution (i.e. low status) is increased; a lower-ranked caste is considered less pure than a caste that is ranked higher. The caste system has a considerable effect on Indian life, especially where such views were shaped by contributions from Indians themselves (Bayly, 1999). The caste system is followed by the section of the Indian population practicing Hinduism. In modern times, as in the past, it is virtually impossible for an individual to raise his own status by falsely claiming to be a member of a higher-ranked caste. But increased 'economic prosperity' for much of a caste greatly aids in the process of improving rank. Unfortunately, the rural poor often fall within the lower rungs of the caste system creating a more consistent pattern.
In this particular context meaning is constructed and culture is conceptualized as a primary or constitutive process as important as the economic or the material base in shaping social subjects and the historical events (Hall, 2013). Language plays a critical role to convey the voices, thoughts, reflections of the subjects represented i.e. the women interviewed in the study and how they are deployed at particular times, in particular places and within spaces. Furthermore, the interviews have been conducted in the regional languages spoken in Rajasthan and West Bengal i.e. Hindi and Bengali respectively, which has been translated into English for comprehension further accentuating the representational essence of the language.

The study represents the social demography of the women interviewed, their community affiliations and aspires to unpack the idea that in order to explore and clarify complexities language plays an invaluable role. In spite of belonging to the lower rungs of the constructed social groups there are differences in their economic make up arising out of the regional historical background. Thereby language adds greater depth for understanding ‘what is normal’ and therefore who is excluded. Hence, it signifies that socially constructed roles are deeply inscribed in relations of power. The theory of representation accentuates the dialogic model in which the speaker i.e. the informants in the study and the writer are both active participants. This presence is sustained due to shared cultural codes as elicited in the ongoing discussions. Language emerges as a fundamental element to convey thoughts and understand the world lived in by the informants. This theory is essential because it represents the context and connects meanings to language in order to understand issues related to culture, which is conveyed to the world.

3.4 Intersectionality

“Intersectionality\(^6\) is a feminist theory, a methodology for research, and a springboard for a social justice action agenda. It starts from the premise

\(^6\) Kimberly Crenshaw coined the term “intersectionality” in her insightful 1989 essay, “De-marginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics.”\(^3\) The concept of intersectionality is not an abstract notion but a description of the way multiple oppressions are experienced. Like Crenshaw, Patricia H. Collins uses the concept of intersectionality to analyze how “oppressions [such as ‘race and gender’ or ‘sexuality and nation’] work together in producing injustice.” But Collins adds the concept “matrix of dominations” to this formulation: “In contrast, the matrix of dominations refers to how these
that people live multiple, layered identities derived from social relations, history and the operation of structures of power” (Symington, 2004, p.1). It takes into account historical, social and political contexts and aims to address socio-cultural power differences in which racism, patriarchy, class oppression and other systems of discrimination create inequalities that structure the relative positions of women. The Indian subcontinent with its patriarchal orientation is known for widespread violence and discriminatory practices against women resulting in low literacy rates, high female mortality rates, deaths resulting from domestic abuse, high female malnutrition, dowry deaths etc. While some customs affect women particularly from the lower castes others affect women in general irrespective of their social status. Intersectionality underpins the multiple identities which not only segregate women but make them extremely vulnerable to discrimination in terms of access to basic human rights, opportunities, resources and so on. Intersectionality helps us to gain deeper insights into the lives of women (refer to chapter 7). Symington (2004) further states that the main focus is to advocate for the rights of the minorities such as ethnic groups, disabled, coloured and indigenous individuals.

Pandya (2008) has voiced that in India caste and gender are the major forms of discrimination. The condition further worsens in the rural areas where the literacy levels are lower than 55 percent for individuals stemming from the lower castes. Deep-rooted social customs like dowry7, devadasi8, purdah9 make violence against women more intersecting oppressions are actually organized. Regardless of the particular intersections involved, structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal domains of power reappear across quite different forms of oppression.” http://isreview.org/issue/91/black-feminism-and-intersectionality.

7 Dowry: is the presentation of gifts to a groom by the bride’s family. This marital tradition dates back centuries and often has severe consequences if the bride is unable to live up to the expectations of the groom’s family. Dowry places financial constraints on the bride’s family. The government has stepped in to regulate the practice (Rees, A, 2016) https://en.reset.org/knowledge/dowry-system
8 Devdasi is an ancient system where young girls are dedicated to local temples and are servants of the goddess. In spite of being made illegal in the year 1982 this practice still continues in some parts of the southern state of Karnataka in India (The Wall Street Journal, 2014) http://blogs.wsj.com/indiarealtime/2014/02/24/becoming-a-devadasi/
9 Purdah system was initiated by the Muslims in India and later adopted by the Hindus. The purdah system involves the seclusion of women from the public by concealing their faces by a concealing cloth, including veils. This is also practiced at homes where women are not allowed to make an appearance in front of any male members (strangers). Some
prevalent. Apart from the social practices controlling women is conceived as a birth right for men in the patriarchal Indian society which is also the main reason for violence against women (Heise, 1989). It becomes essential to point out that the study reflects the subordination women incur due to their geopolitical positioning, class structures, ethnicised and racialised mechanisms of exclusions, oppressions (Mohanty, 2002) which they have overcome to find a place in the sun.

The central issue under discussion for intersectional theory is that women experience oppression in varying and in varying degrees of intensity. The explanation for this variation is elicited as while all women face oppression on the basis of gender, women are nevertheless differentially oppressed by the varied intersections of other arrangements such as race and class. An example of this kind of discrimination would be the Dalits (untouchables) and the STs in India. The women from these groups encounter various forms of harassment including rape but will seldom report their experiences to the police because of their dependency to the economic dependency on the higher groups. The Indian State has over 160 million people who suffer discrimination on the basis of caste. Another 40 million suffer the same despite conversion from Hinduism to other non-caste based faiths (Navsarjan Trust, 2011).

Intersectional theory is particularly concerned with the formation of social identities and argues that most sociological theory makes the mistake of examining one variable at a time. It lays emphasis on the basic premise that all variables work in groups. Although Black women have been leaders in this field of sociology the intersectional theory is applicable to any identity. According to Collins (1990) inequality and oppression are the result of several forces working hand in hand in the matrix of domination. The Matrix of Domination cites that inequality functions at three levels personal/individual, groups and institutions/societies. At all three levels one must not only look at the domination that is occurring but also the ways adopted by people to resist and fight back. Resistance can only succeed when it sets its own terms. Similarly, in the Indian context the significance of seeing race, class and gender as interlocking systems of oppression is that it fosters a paradigmatic shift of thinking inclusively about other oppressions such as age, sexual orientation, religion and ethnicity. Race, class and gender

homes include high-walled enclosures, screens and curtains (Encyclopaedia Britannica, n.d.) https://global.britannica.com/topic/purdah

44
represent the three systems of oppression that are magnified in the rural and marginalized women of India.

Although ‘intersectionality’ has originated from a Black Feminist perspective, it has been applied in the Indian context to emphasize the interconnectedness of gender, race and caste discrimination. It is imperative to examine the interlinkages between gender, caste, ethnic background and sexual orientation to understand the functioning of the society. Gender disparities are pronounced within the economically poor section of the population and tend to be exacerbated by the intersection of gender with other forms of group-based inequality (Kabeer, 2015). Intersectionality accords policy makers to understand the uniqueness of cultural characteristics to reduce discrimination that some groups suffer by chalking out policies addressed to their needs and requirements. Ethnic identity is complex, rich and unique and often lead to marginalization of certain groups. The interplay of culture, ethnicity, social class, gender, language and religion most times create unequal societies with ethnic group members experiencing marginalization. Intersectionality enables us to appreciate the richness of home and community cultures to reduce discrimination (Banks, 2013).
3.5 Transformative Learning Theory in Adult Education

"…Why should we become literate?
Can literacy help us live a little better?
Starve a little less?
Would it guarantee that the mother and the daughter do not have to share
the same sari between them?
Would it fetch us a newly thatched roof over our heads?
    Satyen Moitra (quoted by Bhola, 1994)

Understanding the relationship between practice and theory in adult
literacy also requires seeing the connection between social theory and
practice in a given society. While empowerment is the main focus of all
literacy programs with regard to women and girls one needs to recognize that it is a complex set of socio-economic and cultural factors which restrain poor rural women and keep them out of the educational fold. Literacy is the critical factor that can help women to break out of their predicament (Dighe, 2013). The study attempts to answer questions that keep on resonating in the mind such as 1) is adult education transformative? and 2) what are the relations between literacy, women and rural transformation?

Literacy for rural and marginalized women implies that rural women are supported to develop critical thinking skills about complex societal and global problems (ASPBAE, 2012). In the ‘Pedagogy of Hope’ Paulo Freire elicits that when working with peasants on the fundamental problem of the reading of the word always preceded reading of the world. “The reading and writing of the word would always imply a more critical rereading of the world as a route to the rewriting and the transformation of that world” (p.84, 1994). An important task of the progressive educator is to unveil opportunities for hope no matter what the obstacles may be. Literacy represents both a struggle for meaning and a struggle over power relations. Since education is that terrain where power and struggle are given a fundamental expression because it is where meaning, desire, language and values engage and respond to the deeper beliefs about the very nature of what it means to dream and struggle for a particular future and a better way of life. "Functionality is economic skills, but awareness is wider. It can cover participation in community affairs, exercise of civil rights and democratization" (Bhola, 1994, p.48). Awareness may also cover social responsibilities such as sanitation and public health, population, pollution and environment.

Inspired by Paulo Friere and Jurgen Habermas among others Jack Mezirow launched the concept of ‘transformative learning’ in 1977. He defined transformative learning as the process by which problematic frames of reference such as mindsets, habits of mind are transformed. The frames of reference are the structures of culture and language through which meaning is construed by attributing coherence and significance to one’s experience. He stresses on critical reflections or critical self-reflections on assumptions, critical assessment of the sources, nature and consequences of one’s habits of minds and secondly participating fully and freely in dialectical discourse to validate a best reflective judgement. He regards the freedom from a more psychological perspective. The implications for education are enormous because
transformative learning tends to result in learners being motivated to take collective social action to change social practices, institutions or systems. For both Friere and Mezirow, reflection and dialogue are key elements of the learning process but the latter goes further in attempting to articulate the psychological and cognitive characteristics of this process. Both critical consciousness and the subsequent social reaction within the marginalized women are crucial aspects of the cases under investigation.

Literacy develops a set of life skills by which women gain an understanding and control over social, economic and political force in order to improve their standing in society. Literacy symbolizes women's empowerment because it enables them to respond to opportunities to challenge their traditional roles and change their lives. The ripple effects of literacy are visible within the family and across generations. Undeniably, literate women recognise the importance of health care and know how to seek it for themselves and their children. A literate mother's greater influence in household negotiation may allow her to secure more resources for her children. Finally, women empowerment is the most vital component for sustainable development. Literacy is the most powerful tool because it involves intellectual enlightenment, economical enrichment and social emancipation for women empowerment (Mumtas, 2008).

The Mezirow learning cycle illustrates that a learning sequence is established because of a discordant experience depicted in the form of a learning cycle (3.2). The cycle shows that literacy gives individuals the tool to critically examine their constructed realities and experiences urging them to explore options for new ways of acting and doing, acquiring self-confidence, knowledge to implement plans, planning a course of action and reintegrating into the society. Thus, education can become a liberating force, which emancipates individuals to create a better life for themselves.
Transformative learning theory is a process by which adults learn how to think critically for themselves rather than take assumptions or support a point of view for granted and help them to transform their frames of reference through critical reflections on assumptions and dialogic reasoning by questioning as well and understand the meaning of what is communicated to them by taking into account the assumptions and authenticity of what is being communicated. When applied to the study transformative learning theory also looks at the socio-economic and political conditions that facilitates or impedes learning from taking place.

3.6 The Conceptual Framework

Power and the Capability Approach has been used as key conceptual constructs because it draws our attention to the socially prescribed ideas and practices which ascribe appropriate roles to men and women. It throws up discussions around women’s access and control of resources
that often leads to gendered discrimination. Along with the concept of power the capability approach focuses on the quality of life that a person is actually able to achieve based on their ability to choose a life which she or he prefers. The capability approach examines whether an individual is able to cultivate their capabilities if circumstances are changed and in this particular case through education.

3.6.1 On Power

“Around the world, new spaces and opportunities are emerging for citizen engagement in policy processes, from local to global levels, yet despite the widespread, rhetorical acceptance, it is also becoming clear that simply creating new institutional arrangements will not necessarily result in greater inclusion or pro-poor policy change” (Gaventa, 2006, p. 23). On the contrary such spaces are dependent on the nature of power relations which surround and imbue these new, potentially more democratic spaces. In spite of gender awareness in meting out policy, decision making powers largely remain gender-blind and male-dominated. Moreover, the audience of pure research still remains essentially other academics. Hence, the failure to translate the research into practice means that many of those committed to integrating gender into their work at policy, program or project levels still lack the necessary planning principles and methodological tools. “This issue is critical; planners require simplified tools which allow them to feed the particular complexities of specific contexts into the planning process” (Moser, 1993, p.5).

The MDGs greatly increased the involvement of international organizations in gender education policy making (UN, 2015a). “As women reclaim their voices and rights, it becomes increasingly clear that policies facilitate massive social change, that policies demand power, and that state power must be used to secure the redress of women’s rights” (Stromquist, 1995, p. 423). The process is accelerated if policy makers also recognize the cultural content of educating “boys” and “girls”. This necessitates the awareness of the historical interplay, which has created the present circumstances in which intangible “power relations” are transversal struggles across countries (Foucault, 1982).

In the Indian subcontinent the aspects of tradition and culture are often taken for granted and therefore have become naturalized. Bourdieu (1978) conceptualizes this deeper reality in his idea of ‘doxa’. He suggests that as long as the subjective assessments of social actors are
largely congruent with the objectively organized possibilities available to them, the world of doxa remains intact. A transition is possible only when critical consciousness is planted in the minds of women empowering them to lose their ‘naturalized’ character, revealing the underlying arbitrariness of the existing social order. In the theory of social reproduction, cultural capital reference is made to the transmission of cultural codes possessed by the family and embodies the sum total of investments in aesthetic codes, practices and disposition also termed ‘habitus’. Habitus is an important feature of cultural inheritance, which reflects class position and is geared to the perpetuation of structures of dominance. In family habitus only the middle class or elite cultural resources can accrue cultural capital. Along with social, economic and human capitals such cultural capital actively reproduces social inequalities (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). Bourdieu’s habitus is reflected in the caste system still firmly entrenched in the Indian society. The social reproduction of the caste system helps to maintain the inequities associated with it thereby limiting women from exercising their fundamental rights. Those children that are exposed to elite culture at home have an advantage in schools; teachers recognize and reward this advantage thereby excluding those that lack similar cultural capital. (Bourdieu, 1986).

Michel Foucault’s (1994) critical inquiry focuses on the concept of “power” in which human beings are subjects placed in complex power relations. Foucauldian views on the concept of power is an insight into the complex web of the cultural heritage which legitimizes men’s ‘power over’ women as a natural system from the later Vedic times in ancient India. The historical context relates to the concept of ‘subject’ as subject to someone else by control and dependence and tied to his or her own identity consciously. Both meanings convey a form of power that subjugates a person or makes subject to. Therefore, to understand the forces which, have shaped the Indian societal structure it is imperative to delve deeper into the historical conditions. Foucault suggested that instead of trying to understand power from its internal rationality the need arises to comprehend what power relations are about. This intangible form of power is visible in three types of struggles against forms of domination namely ethnic, social and religious. However, in this study the focus is on rural rather than religious intersecting with ethnic and social. Stephen Lukes (1974) emphasizes equally on several important points which became landmarks in subsequent discussions on the social reality of power. Stating that power is multidimensional; social
factor, power and democracy are paradoxically related and that there are very important non-coercive forms of power in modern society. In his three-dimensional theory he refers to power as domination. Domination can occur both through explicit coercive means and through unconscious mechanisms.

When power relations are naturalized within a society it tends to ensure that certain outcomes are reproduced without any protest (Kabeer, 1999) unless such authority is questioned (Lukes, 1974). One could juxtapose Foucault’s concept of power with that of Luke who also visualized power as the imposition of internal constraints and human beings became subject to it acquire beliefs consenting to it through coercive or non-coercive means. With reference to Bourdieu, Foucault and Lukes the present study explores the intangible power relations which is embodied in the Indian social system. The social stratification contrasts two meanings of hegemony-the first being an unconscious psychological process that is cultural and internalized and the second a more conscious, willful and coordinated strategy of domination. The former is more palpable since it is more nuanced in the study. Although literacy is perceived as transformative its outreach can be limited to the elite possessing more cultural capital and contributing to the social reproduction of class. Gaventa further elaborates that diversity and comprehension of power are often contentious. Although a range of government programs have been launched to increase economic opportunity for women, there appears to be no existing programs to address the cultural and traditional discrimination against women that leads to her abject conditions (Coonrood, 1998). Gaventa’s Power Cube (2006) emphasises and presents that different types of power are at a continuum, rather than an oppositional way that is often conceptualised (the powerful versus the powerless; the included versus the excluded, hegemony versus resistance). It also stresses the importance of the ability to exercise power rather than merely its possession. The cube highlights the spaces, places and power around which empowerment/disempowerment may revolve around. Resembling a ‘Rubrik’s Cube’, the blocks within the cube can be rotated and any of the sides may be used as the first point of analysis. The form of invisible power as denoted in the power cube voices conflict which is internalised and can be seen as self-reproduction of social processes in which the thinking of both the powerless and the powerful alike are conditioned by pervasive norms (refer to figure 3.3).
By raising the strong linkages between ‘spaces’ and ‘power’ the study critically examines power relations. As such, spaces i.e. closed, invited, created/claimed tend to change or get defined depending on the power relations. Lefebvre (1991) defines space as a social product, which is not simply a neutral container waiting to be filled but is a dynamic, humanly constructed means of control, and therefore a domination of power. The obstacles to gender transformation in society is that important material problems such as the feminization of poverty, inadequate protection of women’s rights, and the inequality of women’s access to economic life dominate the agenda for the vindication of women’s rights (Stromquist, 1995). The power cube used as an analytical device, which reflects and analyses how strategies for transformation in turn change power relations (Gaventa, 2006). If one has to understand the catalytic power of education the way forward lies in understanding that men’s and women’s work are constructed within the household and strongly directed by local social norms (Fennel & Arnot, 2008). As such the success of girls’ education is intricately related to the economic demands on their labour and their contributions to the livelihood opportunities of the family.

In developing countries like India power is dichotomized into social and economic status with a strong interplay of gendered roles. Understanding the world of poor children especially girls is extremely critical. This is significantly important when mothers are burdened with household work and a range of farm and non-farm work in rural areas (Ramachandran, 2009). The figure outlines the intangibility of power relations which can either work in favor or worsen the condition of women.
In order to see and understand the inequalities one needs to examine various domains of life, question them against the roles allocated to women. “Values, norms, and practices enshrined in domains of social interaction may contribute to fostering inequalities, reinforce gender related power differentials or increase violence against women” (Njogu & Mazrui, p. 2, 2014). Cultural practices offset customs such as child marriage, restrict or deny girls access to education and limit their opportunities in life. Therefore, both political and economic interventions to address the inequalities must take into consideration the cultural context as well. Njogu & Mazrui, 2014 further point out that violence against women is generally caused by economic inequality, the acceptance of physical violence to resolve conflicts, low female autonomy and control of decision making in household affairs. Domestic violence is also a symbol of power, demonstrating the superiority of the male over the female. Peterson and Runyan (1993) state that the social construction of gender is actually a system of power that divides men and women as masculine and feminine. In doing so it places men and masculinity above women and femininity and operates to value more highly those institutions and practices that are male dominated or representative of masculine traits and styles.
3.6.2 The Capability Approach

The Capability Approach postulates that when making normative evaluations the primary focus should be on the ability of what people are able to be and can do, and not only on their incomes or what they consume. In other words evaluations and judgments should center on things that are intrinsically connected to a person that is a person’s capabilities (Robeyns, 2003). It considers that the evaluation of equality for example in education provision needs to be based on an understanding of human capabilities, that is what each individual has reason to value doing or being (Unterhalter, 2005). By focusing on women’s agency Sen (1985) elucidates that it can play an intrinsic role in removing the inequities that depress the well-being of women. Sen’s book ‘Development and Freedom’ outlines that empirical work in recent years has clearly identified the linkages between that women’s well-being is strongly influenced by variables such as women’s ability to earn an independent income, to find employment outside the home, to have ownership rights, to be literate and be involved in decisions within and outside the family. The variables make positive contribution in adding force to women’s voice and agency through independence and empowerment. Sen elicits that ‘literacy’ is a basic element for enabling women to make educated decision making within and outside the family, declining fertility rate and reducing the mortality rates of children. These and other connections between basic education of women and the power of women's agency (and its extensive reach) indicate why the gender gap in education produces heavy social penalties for women members. He states that in traditional societies women’s identities are intrinsically connected to the interests of the household and this overlaps between personal and household interests preserves intra-household inequality. Hence, it necessitates a close examination of the prevalence of types of power within the realm of the household (Sen, 1999b).

It is useful to highlight that although the word “power” is absent from his writings, the concept itself is embedded in all his writings on gender, including his assessment of gender inequality in terms of real capabilities; his work on cooperative conflict which shows how one form of power asymmetry can lead to other forms of power asymmetries; including his discussions on women’s agency, empowerment and freedom. The capability approach has been criticized for its inability to provide “a fully fleshed out theory” (Robeyns, 2006) and for not answering as to which capabilities are relevant for assessing gender inequality.
To be made relevant to the analysis of power another way of thinking about it would be the ‘ability to make ‘choices’. Kabeer (1999) talks about three choices in terms of three inter-related dimensions.

Resources include not only material resources but also the various human and social resources, which enable the ability to exercise choice acquired through a multiplicity of social relationships such as family, market and community. The second dimension of power relates to ‘agency’ that is the ability to define their life choices and the ability to act upon. Agency also encompasses the meaning, motivation and purpose, which individuals bring to their activity and enhancing ‘the power within’. It connotes the positive meaning in relation to power and refers to ‘power to’ and in the negative sense it is ‘power over’ which is to override or even suppress the agency of others. In this study ‘agency’ is correlated with partaking in decision making related to the children’s future, and the capacity to define their own life rather than be a victim of coercion and threat. A problem often identified in the South Asian context are existing of social norms and practices associated with discrimination against daughters, son preference, the oppressive exercise of authority by mothers-in-laws are predominant examples of the negative connotation of power. Therefore, “power relations are expressed not only through the exercise of agency and choice but, also the kinds of choices people make” (Kabeer, 1999, p. 441).

Together resources and agency constitute capabilities as advocated by Sen (1985) which is the potential that people have for living the lives they want, of achieving valued ways of being and doing. “He uses the idea of functionings to refer to all possible ways of being and doing, which are valued by people in a given context and of functioning achievements to refer to that particular ways of being and doing which
are realized by different individuals” (Kabeer, 1999, p. 438). Sen (1999a) recognizes that there is a relation between individual freedom and social development. As studies have shown (refer to chapter 4) that when women are able to assert their agency, choices it impacts the entire family resulting in poverty alleviation and social development.

Iversen (2003) argues that in Sen’s framework it is equally necessary to recognize that capabilities often have distinctly interdependent dimensions which are particularly pronounced within the realms of households. Domestic power often generates inequalities and mediates opportunities to achieve well-being among household.

The capability approach signifies the choices women make to better their lives. Sen referred to as valuable functioning combinations which individuals can choose to improve their immediate condition in order to lead a better quality life. It is the choices which people make to actually achieve the kind of life individual want. The approach demonstrates the need to look beyond the economic metrics and delve deeper into the sensitivity of the context and prevalent social circumstances.

**Figure 3.5. The Capability Approach**  
Source: IEP (ND)

The enumerated theories and the conceptual constructs engages with gender relations as a category and accentuates the need to focus on social relations. This shifts the lens from studying ‘women’ only to understand how ‘women’ are placed in their status within households and the community.
3.7 Conclusion

The theories and the conceptual constructs draw attention to the way gender inequalities are embedded in the society. The social constructs of aligned roles delegated to women and men are elaborated in the theories. These roles are often the centers of 'power' that can be both negative and positive. The negative show of power creates inequalities over women and the positive is when women take charge and control of their lives. The transformative role of literacy is invaluable for women to become change agents.
4. Methodology

"Not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted”
(Albert Einstein cited in Patton, 2002)

4.1 Introduction

The study explores the role of adult education in empowering rural and marginalized women. The comparative study is interested in illuminating the role of adult literacy in transforming the lives of marginalized women in Bhilwara District Rajasthan and Howrah District West Bengal. The field work undertaken in Bhilwara District Rajasthan and Howrah District West Bengal aspires to compare and contrast the socio-economic settings of both regions and analyzes the key aspects that contribute to sustain women’s determination to access literacy. The fifty-two interviewed informants debated about the catalytic role of adult literacy and empowerment. In the semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions questions were raised around socially constructed roles and power relations to provide valuable insights into the key issues to be discussed.

The chapter details the research methodology adopted in the explorative qualitative study, the epistemological and ontological positioning, rationale for choosing the cases, a description of the methods and analysis. It concludes with discussions on ethical issues, validity and reliability. The pilot study briefly summarized provide insights into social constructs, interpreting the norms and identified language\textsuperscript{10} that could pose as a practical problem for interpretation which nuances the arguments.

\textsuperscript{10} India is considered to be home to 461 languages, out of which 14 have been reported to be extinct. For the convenience of people, the Constitution of India has recognized 22 languages as the official languages of India. These are known as Scheduled Languages and constitute the major languages of the country. India Language Map provides detailed information about these languages listed in Schedule VIII of the Constitution and spoken in different parts of the country. But still there is not a single Indian language that is spoken across its length and breadth http://www.mapsofindia.com/culture/indian-languages.html.
4.2 A Qualitative Research

A Qualitative approach is selected because the cases were special and the attempt is to expose the inter-regional similarities and differences existing in India. To do so one needs to take into consideration both the historical dimension of human action and the subjective aspects of human experience. Most importantly the social scientist can ‘get inside’ the subject matter unlike the natural scientist. Miller (1997) described qualitative research as an analytical enterprise because it offers distinctive opportunities to develop analytical perspectives that speak directly to the practical circumstances and processes of everyday life. When carrying out research social scientists have demonstrated the ability to research within a socio-cultural system to able to study social action which explains certain social processes or relationships in a given context (Sjoberg & Nett, 1968). A qualitative inquiry offers special insight into the importance of attention to audience thereby bringing out the special characteristics of the case under observation. This increases the depth of understanding of the cases studied and provides insights into the lived experiences of the researched informants (Patton, 2002)

4.3 Ontological, Epistemological and Methodological Positioning

A qualitative inquiry drawing on constructive-interpretive approach could perhaps make us understand the tensions, complexities present and help in the attempt to interpret the socio-structural world (Law, 2004). Sjoberg and Nett (1968) refers to this social setting as the ‘matrix’ in which individuals and their experiences are constructed. In this study the ‘matrix’ surrounds ‘rural women’, ‘caste’, ‘tribe’ and ‘marginalized’ within a particular social setting.

Social Construction and Constructivism: The ontological position adopted in this study focuses on the social constructions in which race, ethnicity, religion, nationality play a significant role in the life of the informants. Social constructivism argues that the external reality embodied in ethnicity, race, religion are social constructs in which language reflects the reality. Social constructivism considers that language is an important tool in creating multiple realities when people communicate or interact with each other. This not only influences but also limits the responses of others. This approach focuses not on the individuals but on the network of interactions between individuals analyzing the ways in which realities are created within the society as a result of interactions between individuals. Social constructivism begins
from the assumption that the language people use to comprehend the world is a social artifact and the historical product of exchanges between people (Gergen, 1985). The constructive ontology points out the unique experience of the researcher to understand the lived in world of the informants shaped by culture and language constructs (Crotty, 1998; Patton, 2002).

Since the interviews were conducted in the regional languages i.e. Hindi and Bengali; language plays a predominant role to construct and convey the realities of the interviewed informants. The interviews were transcribed from the regional languages and translated into English. By paying attention to language the researcher ensured that the essence and the richness of the data were not lost in the translation process.

Subjectivist Epistemology: This position adopts a stance that there are multiple realities that can be explored through human interactions and meaningful actions. This study projects how ‘women’ make sense of their social worlds in the natural setting by means of daily routines, conversations and writings while interacting with others around them. It further illustrates that social realities exist due to varying human experience, including people’s knowledge, views, interpretations and experiences (Thomas, 2010). It gives an insight to how entities such as class, race and gender intertwine, interact or intersect, ways in which certain gendering institutions, language and race effect women thereby determining their experiences of self (Sjoberg & Nett, 1968). The cases selected illustrates that human lives are complex and multidimensional and cannot be explained by taking into account single categories such as gender, ethnicity and socio/economic status. It looks at processes that facilitate one to overcome oppressive power relations towards transformation.

Interpretive Methodology: In interpretive research social constructions are a process and the society is a lived experience since multiple realities are constructed socially by individuals (Merriam, 1997). The interpretive position is through a study of the social world and its interpretation by the informants. Marshall and Young (2006) elicit that focusing on gender provides more visibility and power to what is essentially a social construction. By getting into the worlds lived by the informants it gives the researcher an understanding of their lives and throws light on the social processes. The interviews carried out in the natural settings of the informants made it possible for the researcher to understand the context.
from their viewpoint. This represents the social roles of the informants capturing their personal experiences and perspectives.

4.4 Comparative Case Study

Comparative case studies involve collecting and analyzing data from several cases and are a common strategy for enhancing the external validity and or generalisability of the findings. Case studies, offer a mean of investigating complex social units, offer insights and illuminates meanings that expand its readers’ experiences (Merriam, 1997). Field studies offer insights into the social world lived by the respondents and is an useful tool for policy analysis. Collins and Nobbit (1978) articulate that they reveal not static attributes but understanding of humans as they engage in action and interaction within the contexts of situations and settings. They emphasize that field studies are better to assess social change, and change is often what policy is addressing. For the researcher fieldwork presents a huge opportunity to come into closer contact with the social setting and to discover whether or not her findings reflect certain social processes or patterns in similar settings not only within the context but cross-culturally. The proximity of the case studies to real-life situations and its multiple wealth of details are important not only for the development of a nuanced view of reality but equally imperative for the researchers’ own learning processes in developing the skills needed to do good research (Flyvberg, 2006).

The main purpose of the comparative case study is to illustrate the uniqueness of the regional location studied simultaneously pointing out their similarities and differences. The locational comparisons draws out the diversity of the regions, socio-economic context, impact of adult literacy on rural women and the emerging opportunities. The comparative case study allows those features which are amenable to comparison to be brought to the foreground and relegates other features to the background (Stake, 2000). A key assumption underlying this inter-regional analysis is to consider salient differences among states, districts, individuals, cultural idiosyncrasies and individuals. Bray and Thomas (1995) argue that the addition of state/provincial, national and world-region comparisons would enhance understanding in some comparative studies. Figure 4.1 presents a three-dimensional way of classifying comparative studies. The first dimension classified by Bray and Thomas is geographical/ locational and seven levels have been identified: i.e. world regions/continents, countries, states/provinces, districts, schools, classrooms and finally individuals. A second dimension represents non-locational and demographic groupings that include ethnicity, gender,
religion, age as well as an entire population. The third dimension embraces aspects of education and of society such as curriculum, teaching methods, finance, management structures, political change and labor markets.

According to them every comparative study involves all three dimensions and can be located in one or more cells in the diagram. The shaded part in the cube reflects that education systems are shaped by patterns from higher orders and lower orders or vice versa. The highlighted area indicates the points of intersection to compare and contrast cultures and the importance of context in comparative research. A cardinal aim of comparative education is to encourage discussions possibly identifying a new basis for cross-cultural interactions. The Bray and Thomas Cube framework (Figure 4.1) for comparative education analyses will be referred to and adapted in the study.

Figure 4.1 A Framework for Comparative Education Analyses
Source: Mark and Bray, 1995
This qualitative case study in comparative education deals with the consequences of literacy and interprets outcomes from literacy based on a holistic picture of the contexts surrounding the use of literacy. It also deals with comparisons along various dimensions at the levels of culture, gender and individuals, which included the various meanings of, uses of, values attached to and outcomes of literacy (Fairbrother, 2007).

The diversity inherent in the Indian subcontinent prompted the selection of the cases to bring out certain characteristics that reflects its uniqueness. Although case studies have been criticized for its inability to generalize these specific selected cases are the contrary. The issues of generalizability in these cases arise because of the specific contextual issues that shape and condition women’s access to education. Both regions in Rajasthan and West Bengal indicate similar characteristics which are important because of the ‘lessons’ one can draw from it. The typicality of these cases and its generalizability of the results can be established when it is compared not only within these specific regions but established with other or new cases. According to Ruzzene (2012) comparability is essentially the epistemic requirement imposed on the design of the study in such a way that when its results are contrasted with what is observed in other situations the results obtained are generalizable to similar cases. Therefore, drawing the right lessons from the contexts form a part and parcel of planning effective interventions and policy making.

4.5 The Pilot Study

A pilot case study was undertaken as a formal ‘dress rehearsal’ to try different approaches on a trial basis. The importance of the pilot study cannot be undermined because it exposed the researcher to the challenges one may encounter during fieldwork such as accessibility/convenience of the site, language constraints and access to the informants. The study provided insights into the basic issues being studied and assisted in conceptual clarification for the research design (Yin, 2009a).

The pilot study conducted in rural Andhra Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh posits that in the rural context household decisions made by male members of the family play a significant role in determining the fate of girls. The study investigates and sheds light that specific gender mainstreaming policy interventions are not determinants to educate women and girls. Parameters such as household income, caste/religious
membership, household dependency, parental literacy play a pivotal role in shaping the lives of girls and women.

The study carried out in the villages of Chompi, Chinalabadu and Hattaguda in Andhra Pradesh and Hardoi District in Uttar Pradesh focuses on ‘what works’ rather than riveting on ‘what is wrong’. In both cases education was perceived as an interlocutor for transforming the lives of rural, marginalized women and girls. Andhra Pradesh is the fifth largest state in India and ranked 10 among the 15 major states in India (HDR, 2007). The regional language being Telegu the researcher had to rely on the translator during the interviews and the translation process. The questions were translated into the regional language i.e. Telegu and the responses were noted in English. It was felt that prior to beginning the interview process it was important to talk to the translator about his views on the issues being discussed to clear any misunderstandings or differences in words, concepts and worldviews across languages (Temple, 1997). The pilot study indicated that specifically in Andhra Pradesh it was impossible to reproduce the aspects of a language that the researcher was unable to understand due to complete dependence on the translator. Although the researcher constantly debated and discussed conceptual issues with the translator it was felt that there were moments when the perspectives conveyed were not those of the informants. Moreover, the informants being women were at times hesitant to voice their opinions or speak up freely in the presence of the translator; being a male.

Whereas, in Uttar Pradesh often described as the “Hindi-speaking heartland of India, the researcher possessed the linguistic skills which showed significant advantages. In-depth interviews were carried out with 25 women from the villages in Andhra Pradesh and 15 girls in Hardoi, Uttar Pradesh, 5 educators and two focus groups of 15 participants each (women and girls). The informants spoke freely about their difficulties, challenges and hurdles they had to overcome to exercise their agencies. Keeping this in mind the final field study was carried out in regions within India where the researcher possessed the language skills and could work independently. This gave the informants the opportunity to debate on sensitive and personal issues or topics without any inhibitions. The study demonstrated the invaluable role of education as a vehicle for rural transformation. It also drew attention to the necessity for a multi-pronged strategy of a public-private partnership being the cornerstone for policies and programs to be successful.
For the informants adult literacy was defined as:

- the ability to take control of their lives
- the gateway to improved livelihoods, gaining respect, moving up the social ladder, independence and an opportunity to open up career prospects

Irrespective of age, education was perceived not only as giving them the power to change to their lives but also in giving back to the community. The study pointed out that the critical need for sustainable human involvement is to ensure that resources reach the poorest of the poor and is within the reach of marginalized women and girls.

At the outset of the pilot study the researcher found it essential to examine the role of education that recognizes the special nature of the rural environment. Therefore, both women and girls were interviewed to understand the importance of education in their lives. However, towards the end of the study the researcher noticed that resources were factored into ‘educating the girl child’ rather than ‘women’. The interviews disclosed that girls with literate mothers were far more confident, independent and determined than those coming from illiterate families. This indicated the need to interview mothers, women and if possible members of the households to observe and study the role of literacy in their lives.

4.6 Rationale for Choosing Rajasthan and West Bengal

The *India Human Development Report (IHDR) 2011* quoted that both states fell within the category of Low Human Development Index ranking 17 and 13 respectively out of the 29 states. However, unlike West Bengal, the caste system in Rajasthan is very rigid and upward mobility is restricted. It also means that there is little occupational mobility for Muslims as well, who are stuck in their traditional roles. The Census of India (2011a) shows that the female literacy rate in West Bengal with 70.54 percent fared better than their counterparts Rajasthan having 52.12 percent in literacy. The fundamental reason behind the difference between the two states in terms of literacy was that the state government prioritized the opening of new colleges in rural West Bengal. This catered to the SCs, STs and minorities residing in these areas. The accessibility to higher education enabled women to perform better than the national average for their groups.
The primary reason for choosing multiple regional settings is to reflect the diversity of the Indian subcontinent. The language skill of the researcher was critical to be able to communicate with the participants in their regional languages i.e. Hindi and Bengali having a direct impact on the quality of the findings in the study.

4.7 The Researcher and the Subject

For a researcher in social sciences subjectivity when confronting human relations is inevitable so long as it does not interfere with the actual findings. Being a quasi-member of the society under study it becomes infinitely easier to become accepted and interpret experiences as an insider would. Subsequently, maintaining the ability to analyze social processes as an external observer avoids complete conversion (Burrell, 2009). As such it facilitates the research and not the other way round. Therefore it is important for me as a researcher to maintain a neutral stand and be balanced in reporting the complexities and multiple perspectives experienced by the informants. Being a qualitative researcher enhances my direct experiences in the contextual world and gives insights about those experiences. As Patton (2002) states that qualitative research also includes learning through ‘empathy’.

4.8 Selection of the Cases

During the pilot study carried out in October 2012 the researcher had visited Rajasthan and West Bengal to build and strengthen networks for the concluding field work planned in the following year and carried out for three weeks in September 2013. The time allocated was equally divided between the two regions. Since the initial groundwork had been covered in the earlier visits the respondents had been duly informed. The researcher also involved the key stakeholders in the community to gain access to the informants. It must be kept in mind that villages in India are very close communities and accessible if members of the civil society are equally involved in the process.

By identifying the regional locations of the study the researcher selects the ‘special universe’ or the ‘working universe’. The selection of the cases reinforce that the investigator wants to discover, understand and gain insight into the reasons and implications of what occurs and the relationships linking occurrence (Merriam, 1997). The sample drawn from the identified ‘special universe’ is purposefully chosen to discover certain common patterns atypical in similar cultural settings. Thus the most appropriate sampling strategy in this research study is non-
probabilistic or purposeful sampling since one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research (Patton, 1990). The sampling strategy adopted guided by the research questions was network sampling. This strategy involves identifying participants or the cases of interest from people who know people who know what cases are information-rich, and are good examples for study, good interview subjects. In this study it is important to demonstrate the comparative perspective of the social construction of rural, marginalized women by exploring different social settings. This highlights the cultural and regional diversity of each setting encapsulating both the similarities and differences. The participants were selected in a strategic way to ensure that there is a good deal of variety in the resulting sample, so that sample members differ from each other in terms of key characteristics relevant to the research questions (Bryman, 2012).

The regions selected were picked because they were rich in their diversity at the same time have distinct similarities. To make effective use of time purposeful sampling was adopted as a strategy (Patton, 2002). The fieldwork was designed keeping in mind the convenience of the respondents as most worked at constructions sites, in the fields or were engaged in their day to day activities. In Bhilwara District the local school served as the interview site. The principal and the teachers were facilitators and had easy accessibility. The respondents felt comfortable in their familiar setting since their children attended the same school. Whereas, in Howrah District the micro-credit organization was the focal point for the interviews. Fifty-two women informants were interviewed between the ages of thirty and fifty-five years in Bhilwara District, Rajasthan and Howrah District West Bengal (twenty-seven and twenty-five respectively). Although the targeted respondents were from the rural and marginalized communities they varied in aspects related to caste, class, socio-cultural setting and rural setting. Since the researcher had a first-hand experience of the setting there was less reliance on prior conceptualizations from written or from verbal reports. Table 4.1 captures the profile of the respondents interviewed in this study.
Table 4.1 The Total Number of Respondents Interviewed in Bhilwara District Rajasthan and Howrah District West Bengal India

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Bhilwara District</th>
<th>Howrah District</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total number of respondents: 52</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single/Separated</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widow (s)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>Hinduism, Islam</td>
<td>Hinduism, Islam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scheduled Caste (SC)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scheduled Tribe (ST)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Backward Castes (OBC)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Caste</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.9 Crafting the Research Instruments

The fieldwork is a critical component for qualitative researchers since the inquirer is able to understand and capture the context within which people interact. Understanding the context is essential and by being on the site there is less need to rely on prior conceptualizations of the setting, irrespective if they are from written documents or verbal reports. Fieldwork is not a single method or technique. Multiple sources of information are sought and used because no single source of information can be trusted to provide a comprehensive perspective on the program (Patton, 1990; 2002). By using a combination of semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and studying national documents (refer to Appendix A) the fieldworker is able to use different data sources to validate and crosscheck findings. Each type and source of data has strengths and weaknesses. Using a combination of data types increases
the validity as the strengths of one approach can compensate for the weaknesses of another approach (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). The direct and personal contact with the informants made it easier for the researcher to capture and understand the context and to look at it holistically.

The main instrument in qualitative research is the researcher him/herself. It is the researcher that observes, interacts, listens and enters into another’s experience, applies previous knowledge and learns to deal with bias (Patton, 2002; Bryman, 2012). The selected cases determined the instruments in the study (the interview guide, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions) to draw out from the informants those particular details which cannot be directly observed their lived in worlds and personal experiences.

4.9.1 The Interview Guide

The interview guide plays an important role to ensure that the same basic lines of inquiry are pursued with each person interviewed. It provides the base for the subject areas within which the interviewer is free to explore, probe and ask questions that will elucidate and illuminate particular issues being discussed. Thus, enabling the interviewer to build a conversation within a particular issue or topic, to word questions spontaneously, and to establish a conversational style but with the focus on a particular subject that has been predetermined. The advantage of an interview guide is that it makes sure that the limited time is utilized succinctly thereby making interviewing systematic and comprehensive by delimiting in advance the topics to be explored. It also enables the researcher to word questions that are related to the theme so as to limit the chances of deviation and confusing the informant. The guide is an important tool in conducting focus group interviews for it keeps the interactions between the researcher and the informants focused while allowing individual perspectives and experiences to emerge (Patton, 2002).

Since the study has a gender focus and centers on marginalized women and girls belonging to the rural community the interview guide is designed to cover three aspects: Gender Relations, Non-Formal Education/Learning and Transformation/Empowerment (refer to Appendix B).
4.9.2 Semi-structured Interviews

One of the most important sources of case study information is the interviews as the essential sources (Yin, 2009b). Interviews are an essential source of case study evidence because most case studies are about human affairs or behavioral events. The interviewees play an invaluable role and can provide shortcuts and perspective to the prior history of situations of the context under study which helps the researcher in identifying other relevant sources of evidence. Semi-structured interviews allow room for the researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent and to the new ideas generated during the interview (Merriam, 1997). In this study the respondents were selected based on their socio-economic status that reflected the diversity of the regions.

4.9.3 Audio-Recording and Transcription

The interviews were conducted in the languages spoken in the states i.e. Hindi and Bengali. The researcher has the language skills to communicate and permission was also sought from each individual to record the interviews. This facilitated the researcher to revisit and analyze the interviews after the fieldwork, allowed more thorough examinations of what the respondents said. Repeated examinations of the interviewees’ answers helps to counter accusation that an analysis might have been influenced by a researcher’s values or biases and allows the data to be reused in other ways from those intended by the original researcher- for example in the light of new theoretical ideas or analytical strategies (Bryman, 2012).“ Audiotapes certainly provide a more accurate rendition of any interview than any other method” (Yin, 2009b, p. 109).

The interviews were directly transcribed and translated into English from the regional languages i.e. Hindi and Bengali. Interviewing was supplemented by taking notes to showcase the critical issues under study as indicated in the interview guide. The duration of the interviews varied between forty minutes to an hour and a half approximately. During transcribing attention was given to language differences cross-nationally so that the translation of responses was verbatim as possible and unadulterated. The tapes and notes are in the custody of the researcher.
and inaccessible to others to keep the confidentiality and anonymity as promised to the informants.

4.9.4 Focus Group Discussions

Focus group discussions are used for generating information on collective views to gain insights and to bring forth the rich experiences of the participants. The technique allows the researcher to develop an understanding about why people feel the way they do and simultaneously offers the interviewees to probe each other’s reasons for holding a certain view about major issues that affect them. The advantage of focus group discussions is that it enhances the data quality, is cost effective, and the shared or diversity of views can be quickly assessed amongst the respondents. Some of the limitations cited are that if not planned meticulously there might be insufficient time for all questions, difficult to assure confidentiality, not so much beneficial for micro-analysis and those who realize that their perspective could be a minority may not be inclined to speak up and risk negative views or comments (Patton 2002).

The researcher felt that the group discussions helped in throwing up significant patterns about the social systems experienced by the informants. This would have not emerged if each individual had been interviewed in isolation. The researcher ensured that all group members actively participated in the discussions and those that hesitated to speak up were interviewed individually later on. The focus group was based on similar characteristics (socio-economic) to be studied. The respondents knew each other so they felt comfortable discussing sensitive issues based on culture and economic background. The group composition varied between 10-12 participants to be effective. In each district there were two focus groups based on the homogeneity of the respondents that rested on class, socio-economic statues and their access to adult literacy. A brief profile of the respondents is enumerated in table 4.2.

Table 4.2 A Brief Profile of the Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
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<th>Marital status</th>
<th>Household Type</th>
<th>District</th>
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4.9.5 Triangulation

To strengthen the qualitative case studies triangulation is used to enhance the validity of the research findings. This strategy is used to eliminate the presence of bias and to corroborate to the findings. Three forms of triangulation are used

1) Data Triangulation: is integral to the research study and is an invaluable part of triangulation. The official documents both national and international were read as subjective statement of facts to be linked with other sources including interviews and focus group discussions. Documents such as international and national reports, newspaper articles, survey data, manuals, background papers and previous studies have been used to develop empirical knowledge in the issues to be studied. The information provided gives historical insights to understand specific issues and can indicate the conditions that impinge or influence the literacy achievement of women. As Bowen (2009) stated that by examining information collected through different methods, the researcher can corroborate findings across data sets thereby reducing the impact of potential biases that can exist in a single study. Multiple data sources helped the researcher to compare and contrast the uniqueness of the regional settings.

2) Theoretical Triangulation: allows the researcher that the empirical findings could actually confirm or doubt the theoretical propositions applied in the case studies. The strategy makes the investigator aware of the total significance of her empirical
findings and encouraged the systematic continuity in theory. The theoretical alignment chosen in this study would further explain the findings from a theoretical standpoint and to unambiguously support or refute a set of propositions (Denzin, 1978).

3) Methodological triangulation: allows for diverse sources of information gathered from interviews and focus group discussions that gives a complete picture of the socio-cultural context under observation. The different kinds of data offered opportunities for deeper insight into the study. Thereby illustrating that different types of inquiry are sensitive to different real-world nuances. Methodological triangulation helped the researcher to test for consistencies if the different data sources yields the same result and to analyze the differences (Patton, 2002).

Triangulation is employed in this study to make it rich, robust and comprehensive. It would also raise sociologists above the personalist biases that stem from single methodologies Triangulation looks for convergence when trying to comprehend the social issues studied under the microscope and helps sociologists to overcome the intrinsic bias that comes from single-method, single-observer, single-theory studies (Denzin, 1978; Patton, 2002).

4.10 Case Studies: Analysis and Interpretation

The data collected were sorted out on categories or themes which reflect the purpose of the research and answers the research questions (Merriam, 1997). In this comparative case studies there are two stages of analysis – the within case analysis and the cross case analysis. The researcher attempts to study the processes and outcomes that occur across the cases to understand how they are qualified by local conditions thereby developing more sophisticated descriptions and more powerful explanations (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The case studies were context sensitive and purposeful sampling was undertaken to give a holistic picture of the phenomenon under study. The case study takes the reader into the case situation i.e. a person’s life, the role of literacy and thoughts generated during the focus group discussions. The selected cases highlighted the pluralistic and multilingual features of the Indian subcontinent. The interpretation of the data would bring out the significant aspects of the cases under investigation. This study aspires to 1) confirm what we know that is supported by data 2) disabuse use of
misconceptions and 3) illuminate the critical elements of the case that is often overlooked by policy makers and stakeholders (Patton, 2002).

Along with the complex data the researcher brings with it her personal experience and knowledge related to the cases during the field work. These experiential data not only give added theoretical sensitivity but provide a wealth of provisional suggestions for making comparisons, finding variations and sampling widely on theoretical grounds. Thus, it helps the researcher to formulate a conceptually dense and carefully ordered theory that allows its own further elaboration and verification. To analyze the data the codes were on sociological constructs based on a combination of the researcher’s scholarly knowledge and knowledge of the substantive field under study; “They add scope by going beyond local meanings to broader social science concerns” (Strauss, 1987, p.34). The interpretative method deployed in the study is needed to reveal the multiple realities of rural women interviewed and shed light on the social setting or practice.

4.10.1 Inductive Thematic Analysis

The documents studied, the pilot study and the field work in the final data collection generated emergent themes which were then categorized. This analysis was chosen to give prominence to the richness of the data collected and helped in identifying both implicit and explicit ideas embedded within it. The inductive analyses define key phrases, terms and practices that are special to the people in the selected contextual setting. What are the roles of women in their households? Has education played an intrinsic role to dilute gendered roles? What are the patterns emerging in the case studies showing that literacy education is transformative for women?

The interview guide helped in constructing the themes and sub themes to analyze the interviews. The themes relate to the research focus (section 4.9.1) built on codes identified in the transcripts. Based on the data the researcher was able to generate the theoretical understanding relating to the research focus which is on gender, literacy and transformation/empowerment. In this study one of the main themes that was identified was 1) ideological critique, 2) the role of adult literacy and literacy and 3) transformation which lead to further subthemes such as gender, class, rural, women, literacy, social, political and economic impact, empowerment. Narratives have also been included in the findings to illustrate the cases under scrutiny and an attempt is made to
keep the language of the respondents as far as possible in the narratives cited (refer to Chapter 7).

4.11 Validity, Reliability and Ethical considerations

**Validity:** Qualitative research is fluid because reality is multidimensional, holistic and constantly changing. Therefore unlike quantitative research it is difficult to measure since there is no single fixed objective phenomenon to be discovered (Merriam, 1997). However, the cases revealed homogeneity in the conceptual system and the social system studied asserting validity in qualitative research (Sjoberg & Nett, 1968). The triangulated strategy adopted to analyze the findings brings together multiple perspectives to give a comprehensive perspective of the socio-cultural and economic contexts and increases the validity of the study. Although qualitative research is often criticized for its inability to generalize across social settings, this study is a departure. The literature review and the collection of good practices assimilated from across the globe shall be juxtaposed with the findings from this study (refer to Chapter 2). This shall demonstrate that qualitative studies can be generalized provided the social settings and the criteria for the units of analysis remain the same.

**Reliability:** The study emphasizes that human behavior is never static. In qualitative research methodology researchers seek and aspire to describe and explain the world as those in the world experience it as depicted in the case studies. It also illustrates how their world has undergone transformation when their subjective reality was questioned. Examples drawn in from across the world elicits that adult literacy plays a catalytic role in increasing gender equality and makes women become the ‘change agents’. One can draw inference from the examples that in the likelihood of congruent circumstances one can expect similar outcomes. The consistency and interpretation of the data collected corroborate to understanding a situation that would otherwise have been too complex or enigmatic. The homogeneity and stable categories selected can be related to similar socio-cultural settings not only within India but globally (refer to chapter 2). The trustworthiness of this study is structured around validation by using triangulation to corroborate to the findings and enrich understanding through different perspectives.

**Ethical Considerations:** It is important to give attention to social, cultural and religious sensitivity throughout the research process. The field research and writing up the report should consider and respect the
differences and the interests of the individuals or groups. Qualitative researchers are guests in the private spaces of the world and as such their manners should be good and follow a strict code of conduct (Stake, 2010). Most of the interviews were arranged and organized by the responsible community member or stake holders. In Bhilwara District some of the interviews along with the focus group interview were held in the local school since it was easier for parents to converge. Twenty-seven women between the age group of thirty and fifty-five years were interviewed along with key stakeholders in the respective states. The focus group consisted of 10 participants. The Rajadhiraj Sudarshan Deo Trust managed by the royal family at Shahpurabagh along with the social activist Mr. R.S. Kabra helped to create that entry point making it easier for the researcher to reach the unreached. Some interviews were also conducted in the homes of the respondents where they felt more secure. A prerequisite for the interviews carried out in Bhilwara District, Rajasthan was to respect the anonymity of the informants. Keeping this in mind the researcher has kept the identity of the informants anonymous. This trust has been kept throughout in the study and names have been changed to maintain anonymity. The acquired information would be used to deepen the research study and not for any political or other purposes. The candid interviews revealed their trust in me as a researcher which has been upheld in the narratives transcribed by me from Hindi and Bengali into English for comprehension and for a wider outreach.

In Howrah District, West Bengal the interviews were held at Mahila Bikash Cooperative Credit Society (BMBCCSL) a micro credit initiative that began from scratch over a decade ago. All interviews including the focus group was conducted at the venue. Two rooms were allocated for the interviews. The founders of the organization were also interviewed to give insights into the transforming lives of the women in rural Bengal. The facilitators have played an invaluable role during the group interviews including contacting and informing the respondents.

The ethical issues have been presented in this section and addressed in this study by preserving the anonymity of the informants. The results of this study will be checked and reported accordingly so that similar studies can be carried out in the future. The respondents were informed about their right to withdraw from the interviews and assured that the assimilated data will only be used for this comparative study.
4.12 Conclusions

The chapter draws the methodological route traversed during the field study. It familiarizes readers with the research setting, sampling and further detailing of the research instruments adopted in the qualitative case study. In every research, validity, reliability and ethics are major concerns. This section indicates that the researcher has followed the guidelines and regulations for help in dealing with ethical concerns that are likely to emerge in research. Unfortunately, there are no dictates to warn a researcher when questioning a respondent becomes coercive, or how to ensure that the findings will not be detrimental to others (Patton, 2002). The best a researcher can do is to be conscious of the ethical issues that emerge during the course of the investigation and ensure that information is not misused.
Source: Maps of India, N.D.
5. The National Setting

5.1 Introduction

The Indian subcontinent is a mosaic of linguistic communities, heterogeneous society and diverse with hundreds of spoken languages and dialects belonging to four linguistics families (Indo-European language, with its Sanskrit roots, which has shaped Hindi - the official language mostly spoken in Northern India, Dravidian languages, such as Tamil, which predominate in the southern States, as well as pockets of Austro-Asiatic and Tibeto-Burman languages). The three most populous countries, namely, China, India and USA, together account for four of every ten persons of the world. At present, a little more than one out of every six persons in the world is from India. The census further revealed that 17 percent of the world is Indian (The Guardian, 2011).

According to Census 2011 women (586.46 million) comprise 48.48 percent of the country's population. Most women workers are employed in the rural areas, primarily as labourers. While in the urban areas, women workers are mainly employed in the unorganised sector comprising household industries, petty trades, manual services, building and construction (Pandya, 2008). The Constitutional commitments to women find reflections in the planning process, legislation, policies and programmes of the Central and the State Governments.

5.2 The Practice

Adult literacy has been articulated as a corner stone of women's empowerment because it enables them to respond to opportunities, to challenge their traditional roles and to change their lives. An empowered

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11In India rural sector means any place which meets the following criteria i) A population of less than 5,000 ii) density of population less than 400 sq.km and iii) more than 25 percent of the male working population is engaged in agricultural pursuits (Government of India Census 2011).

12The National Commission of Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector defines as consisting of all unincorporated private enterprises owned by individuals or households engaged in the sale or production of goods and services operated on a proprietary or partnership basis and with less than ten total (workers Government of India 2011) http://msme.gov.in/Chapter%208-Eng_200708.pdf.
woman takes her own decisions and controls her own destiny. Empowerment has been comprehended as a process of awareness and capacity building leading to greater participation, to greater decision-making power and control, and to transformative action. Thangamani & Muthuselvi (2013) cites, that women empowerment is the most vital component for sustainable development.

In post-independent India the Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) at its meeting in January 1948 articulated that the organization of adult education in India was imperative. During the period 1949-52, the aim of adult education was to enable the members of their communities to work for achieving their social, economic and political development. After 1952, adult education programme became an integral part of the planned programmers. Social education organizing centers were set up in various parts of the country, and public library movement was given a boost. The use of radio as a medium of education began to be recognized and the Ministry of Information produced a number of educational documentaries.

In 1956, at the national level an important step in the field of adult education was the establishment of the National Fundamental Education Centre, whose functions included training and orientation of key personnel, experimentation in preparation of materials, conducting research and evaluation in the field of adult education. The other milestone was launched in 1967-68 which was the three dimensional integrated programme of farmer's training and functional literacy. This was also the first time that the three central ministries, Agriculture, Information Broadcasting and Education coordinated for imparting functional literacy to the farmers in the high yielding variety programme areas.

However, Non Formal Adult Education Programmes were only launched during 1975-76 in the country for out of school youth and adults. A significant step in the field of adult education in the country was the launching of the National Adult Education Literacy Programme on October 2, 1978 with an uphill task of covering ten crores\(^\text{13}\) illiterates in the age group of 15-35. The universities became involved in the concerted effort of the national adult education programme of the Government of India.

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\(^{13}\) Crore is a unit of value equal to 10 million rupees or 100 lakhs. It is used in India
http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/crore
The University Grants Commission (UGC) formed in 1952 was formally established in 1956 as the statutory body of the government of India through an Act of Parliament for the coordination, determination and the maintenance of standards of university education in India. In order to ensure effective region-wise coverage throughout the country the UGC has decentralized its operations by setting up six regional centers at Pune, Hyderabad, Kolkata, Bhopal, Guwahati and Bangalore with its head office in New Delhi (UGC, 2015).

The first breakthrough towards a national initiative for adult education occurred in 1986 with the National Policy on Education (NPE) under the auspices of the Rajiv Gandhi Government. Unlike the earlier efforts, the NPE, 1986 was a turning point, as became evident from the subsequent initiatives to translate its intents into a strategy document National Literacy Mission (NLM) setting forth the vision, the mission and the measures to overhauls the design, methodology and agencies of implementation, as attempted by NLM. The NPE’s Programme of Action (POA), 1986 spelt out the operational strategy of covering the (what at that time was reckoned to be total) 100 million non-literates which was 40 million by 1990 and another 60 million by 1995. After trying out different models, the NLM came to adopt the mass campaign approach, known as the Total Literacy Campaign (TLC), as the dominant strategy for adult literacy. A combined Post-Literacy and Continuing Education programme (PL & CE) was conceived in the beginning, as per the revised NPE’s POA (1992), as a single unit in terms of a programme format, to consolidate literacy and improve the neo-literates’ functional (literacy application) ability, keeping pace with changing requirements, to solve day-to-day problems and improve their wellbeing.

The Post-Literacy Campaigns (PLCs) had three specific learning objectives to address, viz., remediation, continuation and application. The PLC was also expected to address the skill development of neo-literates – skills relating to life, survival, communication and occupation. Skill development for women became the major agenda of PLCs. The community was to be fully involved in planning implementation of the PL programmes. This decade also witnessed the creation of the Department of Women and Child Development (1985) as a part of the Ministry of Human Resource Development to give the much needed impetus to the holistic development of women and children. With effect from January 30th, 2006 the Department has been upgraded to a Ministry. As a nodal Ministry for the advancement of women and children, the Ministry formulates plans, policies and programmes; enacts/ amends
legislation, guides and coordinates the efforts of both governmental and non-governmental organizations working in the field of Women and Child Development. Besides, playing its nodal role, the Ministry implements certain innovative programmes for women and children. These programmes cover welfare and support services, training for employment and income generation, awareness generation and gender sensitization. They play a supplementary and complementary role to the other general developmental programmes in the sectors of health, education, rural development etc. All these efforts are directed to ensure that women are empowered both economically and socially and thus become equal partners in national development along with men (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2013).

In the same decade the Government of India (GOI) launched the Development of Women and Child in Rural Areas (DWCRA) under the Integrated Rural Development Program (IRDP). The Scheme launched in September 1982 targeted districts with low female literacy and high infant mortality rates. It was proposed to cover all the districts in the country under the scheme by the end of Seventh Five Year Plan. The main objective of DWCRA is to improve the socio-economic, health, and educational status of rural women by providing financial assistance and creating employment opportunities for them to become self-reliant and to raise their standard of living. The target group of DWCRA is the same as that under IRDP, i.e. families living below the poverty line. However, the basic difference with IRDP lies in that under DWCRA, it is not an individual family which receives assistance, but a group of families. The scheme envisages the formation of groups each consisting of 15 to 20 women (WCD, 2015).

The Ministry of Rural Development, GOI works towards rural poverty alleviation through programs directly targeted at the rural poor households. To promote sustainable income generation, the schemes of Training of Rural Youth for Self-Employment (TRYSEM), Supply of Improved Toolkits to Rural Artisans (SITRA), Ganga Kalyan Yojana (GKY), DWCRA and the Million Wells Scheme (MWS) were merged into a single self-employment programme namely Swarnjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY), to be implemented by the States, with effect from April, 1999. The performance of SGSY was also assessed through studies and reports and based largely on the recommendations of the Radhakrishna Committee. SGSY has been restructured as National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM), subsequently renamed as "Aajeevika", to
be implemented in a mission mode across the country and was formally launched on June 3, 2011 (Ministry of Rural Development, 2016).

India Awas Yojana (IAY) is the flagship rural housing scheme which is being implemented by the GOI with an aim of providing shelter to the poor below poverty line. The GOI has decided that allocation of funds under IAY will be on the basis of poverty ratio and housing shortage. The objective of IAY is primarily to help construction of new dwelling units (puccha houses) as well as conversion of unserviceable kutchha houses into puccha, semi-puccha by members of SC/STs, freed bonded laborers and also non-SC/ST rural poor below the poverty line by extending them grant-in-aid. IAY is a beneficiary-oriented program aimed at providing houses for SC/ST households who are victims of atrocities, households headed by widows/unmarried women and SC/ST

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14 Kutchha House: The walls and/or roof of which are made of material other than those mentioned above, such as unburnt bricks, bamboo, mud, grass, reeds, thatch, loosely packed stones, etc. are treated as kutchha house.
15 Pucca House: A pucca house is one, which has walls and roof made of the following material. Wall material: Burnt bricks, stones (packed with lime or cement); cement concrete, timber, eka etc.
16 Semi-Pucca house: A house that has fixed walls made up of pucca material but roof is made up of the material other than those used for pucca house (Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, 2011 http://mospi.nic.in/Mospi_New/upload/statistical_year_book_2011/SECTOR-4-SERVICE%20SECTOR/CH-28-HOUSING/HOUSING-WRITEUP.pdf).
17 Widows in India have a proud tradition. The estimated 40 million women widows in the country go from being called “she” to “it” when they lose their husbands. They become “de-sexed” creatures. Widows seem to follow rules based on tradition because they have internalized them. For India as a whole, mortality rates are 85 percent higher among widows than among married women, according to research by the Guild for Service. India has the largest recorded number of widows in the world—33 million (10% of the female population, compared to only 3% of men), and the number is growing because of HIV/AIDS and civil conflicts. Fifty-four percent of women aged 60 and over are widows, as are 12 percent of women aged 35-39. Widows’ deprivation and stigmatization are exacerbated by ritual and religious symbolism. Indian society, similar to all patriarchal societies, confers social status on a woman through a man (UN Division for the Advancement of Women, 2000). Only 28 percent of the widows in India are eligible for pensions and out of those only 11 percent actually receive their entitled payments. A recent report conducted by the national commission of women stated that 74 percent of destitute women lived in West Bengal (Basu, 2015).
households who are below the poverty line. This scheme has been in effect from April 1, 1999. IAY is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme funded on cost sharing basis between the Government of India and the States in the ratio of 75:25 respectively. The person concerned should contact the Village Panchayat or Village Level Worker or the Block Development Officer or District Rural Development Agency (Ministry of Rural Development, 2010).

To combat social exclusion, the Indian Parliament passed The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Prevention of Atrocities Act in 1989. It was a bold attempt to guarantee basic human rights to the most vulnerable in Indian society. Subsequently, the Ministry of Tribal Affairs was constituted in October 1999 with the objective of providing more focused attention on the integrated socio-economic development of the most under-privileged sections of the Indian society namely, the STs, in a coordinated and planned manner. The Ministry of Tribal Affairs is the nodal Ministry for the overall policy, planning and coordination of programs for development of STs. To this end, the Ministry of Tribal Affairs undertakes activities that flow from the subjects allocated under the Government of India (Allocation of Business Rules, 1961) which includes social security and social insurance to the Scheduled Tribes, Tribal Welfare, scholarships to students from Scheduled Tribes, Development of Scheduled Tribes, Promotion and development of voluntary effort on tribal welfare and all matters including legislation relating to the rights of forest dwelling Scheduled Tribes on forest lands (Ministry of Tribal Affairs, 2012).

Despite all the reservation, legislations and coordinated efforts of the Central Government gender and caste still continue to be a major hurdle to overcome for many individuals and the society as a whole. In a society dominated by patriarchal ideologies women in India struggle to create a space for themselves. In a report on untouchability conducted in 565 villages in 11 States in India, the public health workers were not willing to enter the houses of the Dalit’s in 33 percent of the villages. It has also been reported that in 37.8 percent of the government schools, Dalit children had to sit separately while eating, 27.8 percent of the villages had police stations where Dalit’s were restricted entry, 23.5 percent of the villages do not deliver mail to a Dalit’s home and 48.4 percent of the villages Dalit’s did not have any access to drinking water (Razvi & Roth, 2010).
The Five Year Plans of India are central and nationally integrated plans to promote a standard of living and efficient exploitation of the national resources available to the Indian Government. The Five Year Plans initiated in 1952 are important to trace the development of the Indian subcontinent. This section gives a brief synopsis of the Five Year Plans. Initially Education for women and their developments began as welfare oriented programme in the First Five Year Plan (1951-56). The Second Five Year Plan (1956-61) organized women into Mahila Mandal\textsuperscript{18} to act as focal points at the grass root levels for development of women. It emphasized on the need to provide greater opportunities to girls and the efforts needed to educate parents on the importance of girls' education. The Third Five Year Plan (1961-66) recognized the greater importance of education for women, which has been a major welfare strategy for women. This plan allocated the largest share for expanding social welfare services and condensed courses of education. As regards wealth, maternal and child welfare programmes were proclaimed in terms of maternal and child welfare, health education, nutrition and family planning.

The outlay on family planning in the Fourth Five Year Plan was stepped up to reduce the birth rate through education. The need for training women in respect of income generating activities and their protection was stressed in the Fifth Five Year Plan. Further, the Fifth Year Plan also recommended a strategic programme of functional literacy to equip women with skills and knowledge to perform the functions as a good housewife. Under the health programmes, the primary objective was to provide minimum public health facilities integrated with family planning and nutrition for vulnerable groups, children, pregnant and lactating mothers. The Fifth Five Year Plan (1975-79) also coincided with the decade of International Women’s decade and the submission of the Report of the Committee on the status of women in India (CSWI) “Towards Equality”. The CSWI had comprehensively examined the rights and status of women in the context of changing social and economic conditions and the problems relating to

\textsuperscript{18} Mahila Mandal is a village level forum for women to discuss their personal, social, political, spiritual and economic concerns. The Mahila Mandal continues to be the hub around which the integrated programme has been designed http://www.cord.org.in/grfx/programmes/DetailMahila%20Mandal%20_Women%20Group_%20programme.pdf.
the advancement of women. The CSWI reported that the dynamics of social change and development had adversely affected a large section of women creating new imbalances and disparities.

It was realized that constitutional guarantees of equality would be meaningless and unrealistic unless women’s right to economic independence was acknowledged and their training in skills as contributors to the family and the national economy was improved. Hence, the National Plan of Action (1976) providing the guidelines based on ‘United Nations’ World Plan of Action for women’ came into force. The women’s welfare as development bureau was setup in 1976 to act as a nodal point within the Government of India to coordinate policies and programmes and initiate measures for women’s development.

During the Seventh Plan period (1985-1990), the Indian Parliament adopted a National Policy on Education 1986 included a chapter on Education for women’s equality. It was not until the Eighth Plan (1992-97) that one could see a definite shift from development to empowerment of women. The outlay of Rs. 4 crores in the First Five Year Plan (1951 – 56) had gone up to Rs. 2000 Crores in the Eighth Five Year Plan. The National Commission for Women was set up by Parliament by an Act of 1990 to safeguard the rights and legal entitlements of women. The 73rd and the 74th Amendments (1993) to the Constitution of India have provided for reservation of seats in the local bodies of panchayats and municipalities for women laying a strong foundation for their participation for decision making at the local levels. Subsequently, the Ninth Five Year Plan (1997-02) focused on growth with social justice and equality. Attention was given to the empowerment of women and socially disadvantaged groups. This plan ensured food and nutritional security for the vulnerable sections of the society. This was to be complemented by a strengthened and expanded system of primary health care and measures for women and child development.

The Tenth Five Year Plans (2002-7) stressed that maternal mortality rate to be reduced from 4% to (1999-00) to 2% in 2007 and reduce gender gaps in literacy and wage rates by 50% by 2007. The Eleventh Five Year Plans (2007-12) has a special focus on SCs, STs, minorities and rural women. The focus was also on low literacy States, tribal areas, other disadvantaged groups and adolescents. The focus areas would be included in the restructured NLM programmes. In the Twelfth Five Year
Plan (2012-17) the Planning Commission is pushing for special allocation for single women particularly those that are single by choice under various government schemes. In addition to reserve a certain percentage of jobs for single women under centrally sponsored schemes, the plan has proposed promoting and strengthening federations of single women at the block and district level.

Keeping the needs of the rural women in mind the Mahila Kisan Sahakatikaran Pariyojana (MKSP) which is a sub component of the National Rural Health Mission aims to increase their potential of in the farming sector, non-farming sector. The year 2005 witnessed a landmark event in the history of poverty reduction strategies in India with the initiation of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA). The scheme intends to provide employment to the rural poor during the lean agricultural season. In addition to providing income when no work is available, the program aims to create village assets and bring about inclusive and sustainable development. Further, the attempt is to provide adequate employment to women at equal wages. The program therefore requires that one third of all workers are women. This is seen as the legal enforcement of the Right to Work by providing at least 100 days of wage employment in a financial year to every poor rural household. The auxiliary objectives are to regenerate the natural resource base and create productive assets in rural areas as well as to strengthen grass roots democracy by infusing transparency and accountability in governance. Gram Sabhas\(^{19}\) (village councils) conducts social audits taken up within Gram Panchayat (village government). The daily wages under the scheme, as per revision in April 2012, was between Rs 122-189 per day. In addition, the earlier UPA government further increased wages in states like Bihar, Jharkhand, Andhra Pradesh, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura. In contrast, the wages for casual laborers across sectors varies

\(^{19}\)The Gram Sabha (GS) is the cornerstone of the entire scheme of democratic decentralisation in India initiated through the 73rd Amendment to the Constitution. Article 243(B) of the Constitution defines the GS as a body consisting of persons registered in the electoral rolls relating to a village comprised within the area of the Panchayat at the village level. With regard to its powers and authority, Article 243 (A) of the Constitution says that the GS may exercise such powers and perform such functions of the village level as the legislature of a state may, by law, provide. It is in the light of this that state legislatures have endowed certain powers to this corporate body relating to the development of the village (GOI, 2012).
between Rs. 80-220 per day, with agriculture sector accounting for one of the lowest wages (Government of India, 2012).

The Constitution of India also includes a number of articles to give directions to the state policy. Article 14 lays down the equality before law of all citizens in the country, and Article 15 prohibits discrimination on the grounds of sex, religion, race etc. Article 15 (3) empowers the state to make special provisions for women and children within the framework of the fundamental rights. Article 16 (1) and (2) emphasizes equal opportunities for all in the matter of employment and prohibits discrimination in employment. Articles 39 and 42 specially refer to women and children and direct the State to secure health and strength of all workers, men, women and children and not to abuse children for economic gains. Humane and just conditions of work and maternity benefit are assured to women by Article 42. A brief description of the provisions in the Constitution of India for the socio-economic development of women is enclosed in Table 5.1.
### Table 5.1 Provisions in the Constitution of India for Socio-economic Development of Women

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Article</th>
<th>Brief Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Article 14</td>
<td>Men and women have equal rights and opportunities in the political, economic and social spheres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Article 15 (1)</td>
<td>Prohibits discrimination against any citizen on the grounds of religion, race, sex, caste etc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Article 15 (3)</td>
<td>Special provision enabling the State to make affirmative discriminations in favour of women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Article 16</td>
<td>Equality of opportunities in matter of public appointments for all citizens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Article 39 (a)</td>
<td>State shall direct its policy towards securing all citizens men and women, equally, the right to livelihood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Article 39 (d)</td>
<td>Equal pay for equal work for both men and women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Article 42</td>
<td>State to make provision for ensuring just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Article 51 (A) (e)</td>
<td>To renounce the practices derogatory to the dignity of women</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Bhatnagar 2011

India has been deeply committed to secure equal rights for women and has ratified various international conventions and human rights instruments. The Government of India has ratified the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1993 with two declaratory statements and one reservation. The Mexico Plan of Action (1975), the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies (1985), the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action (1995) and the Outcome Document adopted by the UNGA Session on Gender Equality and Development & Peace for the 21st century, titled “Further Actions and initiatives to implement the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action” have been unreservedly endorsed by India for appropriate follow up. The commitments made in the international conventions are as far as possible reflected in the Five Year Plan.
Documents and the National Policy for the Empowerment of Women (Bhatnagar, 2011).

In 2005 the Indian Government adopted the Gender Budgeting as a tool for achieving gender mainstreaming. The Union Minister for Women and Child Development affirmed that India is updating the National Policy for Women to establish a solid foundation to accelerate the commitment made in the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. She further added at the roundtable on 60th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) that many of the SDGs which form the core of the 2030 Agenda for SDGs were already being implemented through flagship programs of the government such as 'Swachh Bharat Abhiyaan', 'Make in India', 'Digital India', 'Skill India', 'Smart Cities' and 'Jan Dhan Yojana'. This was the first session of the Commission since the adoption of the Education 2030 Agenda in September 2015 (The Economic Times, 2016).

However, the recently elected Central Government in India has reduced fund allocations substantially under the NREGA. According to the proposals by the Central government, it plans to link the scheme to agricultural linkages. According to a Government Note, if at least 60 percent of the works to be taken up in a district in terms of cost shall be for the creation of productive assets linked to agriculture and allied activities through development of land, water and trees, it will bring at least Rs. 25,000 crore of investment into agriculture. This apart from other changes would lead to deploying of an approximate Rs 8,000 crore for creating infrastructure like minor irrigation structures, according to the note. The Central government has also been considering an amendment aimed at restricting the NREGA to the country's poorest 200 districts (Business Standard, 2014).

5.4 The Rhetoric

The Indian Human Development Report 2011, (IHDR) elicits that among all the parameters of educational attainment, literacy is the most fundamental one as it paves the way for further learning and training in the formal sector. An analysis of literacy among social groups and religious communities in rural and urban areas across states reveals that despite considerable improvements in the literacy rate, illiteracy remains a major problem, particularly in rural India. In other words, precisely half of the nation’s population whose literacy matters more to society was
found to be more deprived and resided in the rural areas. In rural India gender disparity in terms of literacy existed in all the states and Union Territories and was highest in Rajasthan followed by Jharkhand and Bihar. Across social groups STs had the lowest literacy rate in rural India while SCs had the lowest literacy rate in urban India 2007-8. South Asia is stated to have the worst adult literacy rate (67.2 percent) in the world, which is higher than Sub-Saharan Africa (63.9 percent).

The Government of India has mainly followed the welfare route with schemes and special programmes for anemia, maternal mortality, pregnant and lactating women, and credit, all reinforcing the women’s primary role as mothers. According to the Global Gender Gap Report in 2014 India is the worst performer among the BRICS countries consisting of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa in removing gender based disparities. India ranked 114 out of 142 countries in World Economic Forum’s 2014 gender gap index, scoring below average on parameters like economic participation, educational attainment and health and survival. In the sub-index of Health and Survival India and China are among the lowest ranking countries. India ranked 141 just ahead of Armenia. On the other hand India ranked an impressive 15 and is the highest ranked country on the years with female head of state (over the past 50 years) indicator (The BRICS Post, 2014).

The Census Report 2011 also cites that there are some states and Union Territories (UTs) like Kerala (93.91%) and Lakshadweep (92.28%) which have done extremely well in 2011 with respect to overall literacy rate. However, there are certain states like Rajasthan (67.06%) and Bihar (63.82%) which are still lagging behind. Dr. D.B. Gupta, senior consultant at National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER), said it was not difficult to explain the relatively low literacy rates in states like Rajasthan and Bihar. He said that there were many areas in Rajasthan which are sparsely populated; which results in people not being aware of many government schemes related to education. Moreover, the social attitude of people in Rajasthan towards female child is not enlightened. As far as Bihar is concerned poverty continues to remain a chronic problem with male and female children being still forced to work in the fields (Z News, 2011).

To combat poverty and illiteracy the Government of India has instituted some educational programs such as the National Literacy Mission (NLM, 1988) and the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA, 2001).
which resulted in the rising rate of literacy from about 18% in the 1950’s to about 52% in 1991 and then to about 65% as of 2000 – 2006 (refer to Table 5.2). Unfortunately, in spite of this notable achievement about one-third of India’s population is functionally illiterate and about 50 percent of the entire adult female population is unable to read and write (ENVIS, Centre on Population and Environment, 2016).

**Table 5.2 Literacy Rate (%) in India**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Census Year</th>
<th>Persons (Male &amp; Female)</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>18.33</td>
<td>27.16</td>
<td>8.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>28.30</td>
<td>40.40</td>
<td>15.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>34.45</td>
<td>45.96</td>
<td>21.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>43.57</td>
<td>56.38</td>
<td>29.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>52.21</td>
<td>64.13</td>
<td>39.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>64.83</td>
<td>75.26</td>
<td>63.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>74.04</td>
<td>82.14</td>
<td>65.46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ENVIS, Centre on Population and Environment, 2016
In 2009, the Indian parliament passed the historic Right to Education (RTE) Act, which provides the framework for policy in the years to come. The budget for the fiscal year 2011–12 was also the last budget for the 11th Plan, and the latest (2012–13) is the first one for the 12th Plan. The education budget of the government can be disaggregated into five broad components: (a) elementary; (b) secondary; (c) university, higher and distance learning; (d) technical education; and (e) others, which includes adult education, promotion of language, etc. The government has increased proposed spending in education sector in Union Budget 2012–13. The spending has been increased by 18%, from INR52,057 crore in 2011–12 to proposed INR61,427 crore in 2012–13. Approximately 75 percent (INR45,969 crore) of the total spending will go to school education and literacy, while the remaining 25% (INR15,478 crore) will be allocated to higher education. A total financial outlay for “Saakshar Bharat” during the last 3 years of XI Plan period is Rs. 6502.70 crores, out of which the Central share will be Rs. 4993.02 crore. The share of funding between Central and State Government is in the ratio of 75:25 and in the case of North-Eastern States including Sikkim in the ratio of 90:10, respectively. The allocation of funds to the States will be based on adult female illiterate population in the districts covered under the programme in various States. As the Mission progresses, the expenditure pattern will follow the overall distribution (Government of India, 2012).

The existing gap between the goals enunciated in the Constitution has been analyzed extensively in the Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India, "Towards Equality", 1974 and highlighted in the National Perspective Plan for Women, 1988-2000, the Shramshakti Report, 1988 and the Platform for Action, Five Years After-An

Saakshar Bharat has been formulated in 2009 with the objective of achieving 80% literacy level by 2012 at national level, by focusing on adult women literacy seeking to reduce the gap between male and female literacy to not more than 10 percent. The mission has four broader objectives, namely imparting functional literacy and numeracy to non-literates; acquiring equivalency to formal educational system; imparting relevant skill development programme; and promote a leaning society by providing opportunities for continuing education. The principal target of the mission is to impart functional literacy to 70 million non-literate adults in the age group of 15 years and beyond. The mission will cover 14 million SCs, 8 million STs, 12 million minorities & 36 million others. The overall coverage of women will be 60 million. 410 districts belonging to 26 States/UTs of the country have been identified to be covered under Saakshar Bharat (MHRD, 2016) http://mhrd.gov.in/saakshar_bharat.
assessment”. Moreover, the access of women particularly those belonging to weaker sections including SCs/STs/ Other backward Classes and minorities, majority of whom are in the rural areas and in the informal, unorganized sector – to education, health and productive resources, among others, is inadequate. Therefore, they remain largely marginalized, poor and socially excluded (NIC, 2001). Lack of quantitative data also makes it difficult to trace the impact of Adult Education policies and programmes on women and girls in rural India.

A study was undertaken by Sudarshan (2011) in selected areas of three states, Kerala, Himachal and Rajasthan to show inter-state variation. The NREGA scheme registered very low participation by women in Kerala and Himachal while Rajasthan which is among the poorest states in India had the highest. The author noted that inter-state participation in NREGA work is conditioned by many factors. In Rajasthan the availability of work coupled with the convenience of finding one near home are important factors in attracting women to NREGA work. In the case of Kerala, the high gender disparity in market wages as well as the high level of education among the population influence women’s participation in two ways. Firstly, given the high level of literacy men prefer not to take up unskilled manual work provided under NREGA and secondly the wages paid in NREGA being higher than the prevailing market wages for women act as an additional factor behind women’s high participation. Whereas, in Himachal Pradesh women are required to spend a large amount of their time on household responsibilities which does not give them enough time to participate in wage works like that provided under NREGA. The author concludes her findings by stating that in several cases NREGA has improved rural household income and savings, increased rural women’s participation in paid work, led to useful assets being created.
Bhilwara District

Source: Maps of India, N.D.
6. The Case Study Setting: Rajasthan

6.1 Introduction

Rajasthan is among the more backward states of India. Most social indicators show better values in the north which is arid and has a harsh climate. The reason is that historically, most of Northern Rajasthan has witnessed out-migration of the Marwaris, who owing to their thrift and skills have become an important business community in the country and abroad. They have regularly invested back in in the state and in education and this is visible. In these areas the Total Fertility Rate (TFL) is also low. However, the southern regions where the rainfall is higher and the soil is better have among the worst social and economic indicators in the state and country. Dungarpur (deep south) is perhaps the most underdeveloped district in India. These southern districts are forested and inhabited by people belonging to the ST Bhil community. The STs as a proportion of the population are the highest in Rajasthan (13 percent of the state’s population, which accounts for 8.7% of the total population of STs in India (IHDR, 2011).

The IHDR 2011, illustrates that the state falls within the category of Low Human Development Index ranking 17 out of 23 states. The population of the tribes in Rajasthan is nearly a double of the national average, with original inhabitants Bhils21 and the Meenas22 forming the largest group. The present sex ratio of 926 females for 1000 males is less as compared to other states in India like Kerala and Karnataka. The report articulates that there are only 10 districts in Rajasthan where the sex ratio exceeds 900. In fact Rajasthan's sex ratio has declined in the

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21The Bhils are India’s second largest tribal community and live in Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Rajasthan and Maharashtra. There is much speculation about the term ‘bhil’. Some scholars think it is the Dravidian word for ‘bow’ while others say it is derived from the Tamil word bhilawar or “bowman” (IGNCA, 2009) Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts http://ignca.nic.in/tribal_art_intro_bhills.htm.

22 Meena also spelt as Mina is a tribal community principally found in Rajasthan. The name of this community has been derived from the word ‘Meen’, which means fish in Sanskrit (indianetzone, 2008) language http://www.indianetzone.com/9/mina_tribe.htm.
last two decades which causes a serious concern for Government and Agencies.

The caste system in Rajasthan is rigid and upward mobility is restricted which also means that there is little occupational mobility for Muslims as well, who are stuck in their traditional roles.

6.2 Economy and Production

Rajasthan is one of the least densely populated states and one of the poorest states in India with low per capita income and low literacy level especially in women. The economy of Rajasthan is agricultural or pastoral. Apart from this the state has good mineral resources, industries and an expanding tourism industry. Due to less rainfall farmers in Rajasthan have to depend on other sources of irrigation. There are two main crop seasons – Rabi and Kharif season. The Rabi crops i.e. wheat, barley, pulses, gram and oil seeds are sown in October and November and harvested in March and April. While the Kharif crops i.e. bajra, jowar, pulses, maize and ground nut are sown in June and July and harvested in September and October. The state is the largest producer of bajra, rapeseed and mustard. Cotton is an important cash crop which is grown in the northern and southern parts of the state.

The industrial development in Rajasthan commenced between 1950 and 1960. The main industries are based on textiles, rugs, woollen goods, vegetable oils and dyes. Various cotton and textile industries have also been set up in various places within the state. The other private sector industries include steel, cement, ball bearings, sugar, tourism and other chemical industries. It is the largest producer of cement, the second-largest producer of milk and the largest producer of wool in India. Tourism makes a large contribution to its economy and is a vital source of income to the state. The tourist arrivals in the state reached 34.59 million in 2014-15. Moreover, Rajasthan has reserves of numerous precious and semi-precious stones and is the largest manufacturer of cut and polished diamonds in the country. The capital, Jaipur is the world’s largest center for gemstone cutting and polishing. According to a study by World Bank and KPMG Rajasthan stands sixth among Indian states in rankings based on ease of doing business and reforms implementation (IBEF, 2016a).

The first state in India to establish the Mission on Rural Livelihoods (RMoL) was Rajasthan. The main objective of RMoL was to formulate appropriate and innovative strategies to promote and facilitate large scale
livelihoods for the poor and vulnerable people. In 2009-10 RMoL was renamed as Rajasthan Mission on Skill and Livelihoods by adding the word Skill to provide further impetus to the Skill Trainings (RSLDC, 2016).

6.3 People of Rajasthan

Rajasthan has a large indigenous populace with the Meo and Minas (Minawati) in Alwar, Jaipur, Bharatpur, and Dholpur areas. The Banjara are travelling tradesmen and artisans. The Gadia Lohar is the ironsmith (lohar) who travels in bullock carts (Gadia), who generally make and repair agricultural and household implements. The Bhils are one of the oldest peoples in India, and inhabit the districts of Bhilwara, Chittaurgarh, Dungarpur, Banswara, Udaipur and Sirohi and are famous for their skill in archery. The Grasia and nomadic Kathodi live in the Mewar region. Sahariyas are found in the Kota district, and the Rabaris of the Marwar region are cattle breeders. The Oswals hailing from Osiyan near Jodhpur, are successful traders and are predominately Jains. While the Mahajan or the trading class is subdivided into a large number of groups, some of these groups are Jain, while others are Hindu (Rajasthan Direct, 2016)

The Jat and the Gujar are the largest agricultural communities in the north and the west. The Muslims form less than 10 percent of the population and most of them are Sunnis. There is also a small but affluent community of Shiaite Muslims known as Bhoras in south-eastern Rajasthan. Although the Rajputs represent a small percentage of the populace, they are the most influential section of the people in Rajasthan. They are proud of their martial reputation and their ancestry (IHDR, 2011).

6.4 Literacy

Census of India 2011b records that the literacy rate of Rajasthan has shown an upward trend at 66.11 percent. The male literacy rate was cited as 79.19 percent and the female literacy rate is at 52.12 percent. In spite of the increase the female literacy rate of the state is far below the national average of 74.04 percent. The urban-rural literacy rate in Rajasthan was 79.68 percent and 61.44 percent respectively.
In spite of the general tendency witnessing an increase, the literacy levels of women continues to remain far below the national average. In rural Rajasthan the literacy rate of women is 42.20 percent when compared to their urban counterpart which is 63.81 percent. Some of the reasons behind the low literacy rate can be attributed to the existing diversity within the region and gendered roles ascribed to women and girls in the society.

To regulate family size and promote the ‘small family’ mode Rajasthan introduced the two-child norm in 1992. The policy bars people with more than two children from standing for elections or holding any position in PRIs and Urban Local Bodies (ULBs). The government initiated the plan based on the idea that elected representatives should ‘lead by example’ was that panchayat representatives should be role models and set an example for the rest of the population. Rajasthan’s

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### Table 6.1 Brief Profile of Rajasthan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>India</th>
<th>Rajasthan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Census 2011 (%)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy</td>
<td>74.04</td>
<td>66.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>82.1</td>
<td>79.19</td>
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<tr>
<td>Female</td>
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<td>52.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Literacy</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
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<tr>
<td>Male</td>
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<td>Female</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Sex Ratio (1000)</strong></td>
<td>943</td>
<td>928</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Scheduled Caste (%)</strong></td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>17.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Scheduled Tribe (%)</strong></td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>13.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census of India 2011a;b
example was soon followed by other states such as Haryana (1993), Madhya Pradesh (2000), Orissa (1993), Andhra Pradesh (1993), Maharashtra (2003) and, recently, Gujarat. A study, supported by IFES (International Foundation for Election Systems) and USAID, attempted to find out whether the two-child norm has had any influence on sex-selective abortions in Rajasthan. Research was carried out in rural areas, with a special focus on Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), in the six districts of Jaisalmer, Barmer, Pali, Chittorgarh, Ganganagar and Jhunjhunu. The study found that in a society with a strong son-preference and certain socio-cultural and economic factors, the policy had actually worsened the already skewed child sex ratio in Rajasthan. It unearthed other data as well on the prevailing adverse social and economic conditions of women in the state. For example, while 82.3 percent of women could decide what food is cooked in their homes, only 40.5 percent had a say in health issues. Almost 50 percent of women face spousal violence, and only 27.4 percent of female work participation was reported, compared with 49.31 percent for males.

On the positive side the study pointed out that the lowering of the minimum age for contesting elections, from 26 to 21 years, has had an immediate effect on the number of young men and women within the reproductive age-group aspiring to political participation. In the following years the two-child norm was proving to be more divisive than productive forcing women to step down from their posts despite having little say in the number of children they want to have. This has had the most adverse effect in the panchayat seats of which 33 percent are reserved for women. The 73rd constitutional amendment mandated quotas for socially marginalized sections including dalits and those belonging to scheduled castes and scheduled tribes (SC/STs). Due to the two-child policy approximately 412 panchayat members in Rajasthan have been removed from their posts because they failed to comply with the two-child norm. Due to the son preference it is women who are most affected since with the preference for male child continuing families have no objection for the women stepping down from their elected role as a panchayat member (UNFPA, 2013b).

A similar study was conducted by ICWR (2011) in collaboration with UNFPA, 2011 in seven states across India i.e. Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Punjab and Haryana (counted as one, since they are contiguous states with cultural overlap), Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, and Maharashtra to understand the intrinsic relationship with son preference.
and partner violence. The key findings of the study puts a spotlight on the high prevalence domestic violence in India. Around 52 percent of the women surveyed reported that they had experienced some form of violence during their lifetime; and 60 percent of the men said that they had acted violently against their partner in some point in their lives. The study also indicated that an overwhelming majority of both men and women considered it very important to have at least one son in their family. The men and women that wanted sons were those that were older, less literate, poorer and more likely to live in a rural setting. Recognizing the need to empower women and the influential role of digital literacy the Prime Minister of India launched the ‘Digital India’ initiative in July 1 2015. The project exclusively caters to promoting education through digital literacy, empowering women and takes measures for reducing inequalities faced by socially and economically backward people (ICT POST, 2015).

6.5 Adult Education in Rajasthan

The Rajasthan Adult Education Association (RAEA) set up in 1973 is a nodal agency of NGOs involved in literacy and rural development. The main aim of the RAEA is to synergize the efforts support and provide academic input to the activities of NGOs and GOs for adult literacy, women empowerment and overall human resource development. Eminent educationists, professionals, bureaucrats and social workers are actively associated with RAEA. Since, then it has established linkages with local, national, sub-regional and regional organizations. The State Resource Centre for Adult Education (SRC) is the major project of RAEA being run with the support and financial assistance of the Ministry of human Resource Development Government of India. The State Literacy Mission Authority23 (SLMA) in Rajasthan is financially supported by the State Government launched an innovative program called ‘Ashikshit Mahila Shikshan Shivirs’ for imparting literacy to women through camp based approach. Camps were organized in the 32 districts of the state for three weeks inducting 15-25 non-literate women. In addition to teaching there were talks and discussions on issues

23 The State Literacy Mission is constituted to carry out the mandate of the National Literacy Mission to cover and monitor the various district level Total Literacy/Post Literacy/Continuing Education Projects. In the districts the literacy programs are being implemented through voluntary agencies known as the Zila Saksharta Samiti (nic.in) http://www.nlm.nic.in/plc.htm.
affecting the quality of life of women. Between 2006-7 22,063 such camps were organized 5,51,858 women (UNESCO, 2008).

In June 2010 the Department of Information Technology (DIT) approved the Department of Electronics Accreditation for Computer Courses (DOEACC Society) to train and certify one lakh CSC Operators/VLEs in DOEACC’s ‘Course on Computer Concepts (CCC) during 2010-2011. Once certified, the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) is expected to provide the CCC course training to citizens in villages. It is felt that the CCC course can enable women in rural India to build the required digital skills ICT driven services. It is expected that this scheme will enable every rural household will have at least one digitally literate woman, who has acquired basic ICT skills to actively participate in knowledge-based activities, advance her education, gain employment, manage her health as well as access financial and government services. Both Rajasthan and West Bengal are in the ten states chosen wherein the scheme will be initially operated and approximately 2500 women will be trained in each of the ten states (CSC, 2011).

The Education Status Report, 2013 points out that the dropout rates for girls in the higher grades are also very high. The primary reasons being older girls are more likely to be sent to work and the prevalence of child marriage. Parents are unlikely to spend their resources on educating girls as after marriage the benefits of education is enjoyed by the spouse and his family (Gupta, 2013).

6.6 The Research Setting: Bhilwara District

6.6.1 Introduction

Bhilwara is one of the thirty-three districts of Rajasthan. It was formed as a separate district in 1949 with the merger of the princely state of Mewar and Shahpura Thikana in Rajasthan. The district has 1,834 villages, out of which only 44 villages are uninhabited24. In Bhilwara district 84 new villages and 1 new census town have created as compared to 2001 Census. Bhilwara district consists of 78.7 percent rural and 21.3 percent urban population whereas the State percent of rural and urban population

24 The lack of infrastructure and facilities such as roads, electricity, housing, hospitals etc makes some villages uninhabited https://www.quora.com/What-are-uninhabited-villages-in-India-How-could-there-be-uninhabited-villages-in-India-given-its-high-growth-rates
is 75.1 and 24.9 respectively. The district is adorned with a rich cultural legacy with old temples from the 9th-12th century AD and the medieval temples at Bijoliya, Tilaswan, Dhor, Menal & Mandalgarh etc are example to exquisite art and architecture. The district is known as the textile city of the country.

6.6.2 Economy and Production

The economy of Bhilwara district is mainly dependent on agriculture which is the main occupation of a majority of the population. Of the total work force in the district, more than 80 percent of the workers are engaged in agricultural activities. Bhilwara district has made an important place for itself in the industrial map of the state. During the last decade the district has developed into a leading place in the textile industry within the country. The major agro-based industries here are oil mills, flour mills, ice candy manufacturing units, dal mills and units producing biscuits, confectionary items, Khandari, masala and cattle feed. Cotton based industries also feature in a big way in the economy of Bhilwara district (Rajasthan District Census Handbook Bhilwara, 2011).

6.6.3 People of Bhilwara

The name Bhilwara was ascribed to it because it had been inhabited mostly by Bhils the largest tribal group in Rajasthan. In spite of educational campaigns, 61.5 percent of girls marry before the legal age of 18 years in the district. As per Census 2011, 78.72 percent population of Bhilwara district lives in rural areas. The percentage of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe population in Bhilwara district is 16.9 percent and 9.5 percent respectively (Census of India, 2011c).

6.6.4 Literacy

The literacy rate in Bhilwara District is 61.4 percent which is lower than the State Average (66.1 percent) and it ranks 26th among the other districts of the state. Literacy rate in rural areas of Bhilwara District is 56 percent as per census data 2011 (c) The average male and female literacy stood at 75.27 and 47.21 percent respectively. The sex ratio is a matter of concern both at the district and the state and it stood at 973 to 1000 male. While, providing a brief profile of the district Table 6.2 gives us a clue about the low status of women indicated in their low literacy rate and the
sex ratio which still lags behind the average percentage and ratio of the country (Census of India, 2011c;d).

Table 6.2 A Brief Profile of Bhilwara District and Rajasthan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Bhilwara District</th>
<th>Rajasthan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rural population</td>
<td>78.7</td>
<td>75.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban population</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>24.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy Rate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>61.4</td>
<td>66.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>75.27</td>
<td>79.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>47.21</td>
<td>52.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scheduled Caste</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>17.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scheduled Tribe</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>13.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex Ratio (1000)</td>
<td>973</td>
<td>928</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census of India 2011b;c

6.4.5 Adult Education in Bhilwara

The state wide financial literacy campaign organized by the National Bank of Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) set up village level awareness camps, road shows and quiz programs which culminated in the enrolment of the rural with the formal financial system. In Bhilwara district the blocks chosen were Raipur, Shahpura, Sahara and Mandal Suvarna (NABARD, 2011). Besides, government intervention the efforts of NGO like, Jatan Sansthan is playing a key role in increasing the role of women and youth in governance. The Hunger Project conducts a pre-election awareness campaign called ‘Strengthening Women’s Empowerment in Electoral Process’ (SWEEP) with an objective of encouraging women to participate in the electoral process, as voters, election/polling/counting agents, and as candidates (Jatan Sansthan, 2013). During 2004-2009 a
study was undertaken in Bhilwara District to find out the major issues to empower rural women through capacity building and engaging them in entrepreneurship development activities through self-help groups (SHGS). The study carried out in Bhilwara District found that education plays an important role in empowering women. It made women more self-confident and increased mobility through their participation in SHGs. The SHGs were a powerful instrument in spreading literacy as evidenced in the study because it not only empowered women economically but gave them courage, will power and determination (Panwar et al, 2011).
West Bengal

Howrah District

Source: Maps of India, N.D.
7. The Case Study Setting: West Bengal

7.1 Introduction

West Bengal is one of the most populous states and historically it has been among the more industrialized states in the country. Although in the recent decades, the state had suffered degrees of de-industrialization owing to the then existing political climate. A considerable part of the state is economically underdeveloped, notably large parts of the northern districts and a few western districts. The IHDR 2011 observes that the state has been home to one of the largest population of SCs (9.2 percent of total SCs in India) and Muslims (14.8 percent of total Muslims in India) in the country. These groups have also been observed to be the poorer. The majority of SCs and STs live in rural areas though the population growth rate is the highest in urban areas with 41.3 percent for SCs and 49.7 percent for STs. Out of the ST communities of the State 3 communities namely Lodha, Birhor and Toto have been declared as Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (earlier called Primitive 25 Tribes) by the Government of India. The total population of these three communities is 58,534 as per 2001 Census. The population of Lodha community is 57,028. There are 279 Birhors while the Toto has a population of 1227 persons. The Lodhas are mainly distributed in Medinipur and Bankura districts, the Birhors are found in Puruliya and the Totos are the inhabitants of Totopara of Jalpaiguri.

Urban areas have seen the highest increase in SC and ST population, and a major factor responsible for this is migration. In the state the sex ratio has witnessed a decrease from 957 to 947 females for 1000 males as per the 2011 census. In the IHDR (2011) West Bengal ranked thirteen out of the twenty-three states in India. Apart from Bangladesh, West Bengal also received migrants from Bihar, Orissa and Uttar Pradesh. The SC population in India (Census of 2011a) is highest in Punjab (31.9 percent) Himachal Pradesh (25.2 percent), West Bengal (23.5 percent),

Note: The criterion followed by the Ministry of Home Affairs for identifying particularly vulnerable tribal group are 1) population growth rate is very low compared to the rest of the country. Therefore they exist as small communities 2) the level of technological advancement is still in pre-agricultural stage and 3) The level of literacy is extremely low and lagging far behind the average tribal. There is practically little or no progress of literacy among such groups. Source: Ministry of Tribal Affairs India.(Ministry of Tribal Affairs, 2016 http://tribal.nic.in/Content/IntegratedTribalDevelopmentITDPsITDA.aspx)
Uttar Pradesh (20.7 percent) and Haryana (20.2 percent). The languages spoken in the West Bengal state includes Bengali and English. In total West Bengal (WB) state comprises of 19 districts.

7.2 Economy and Production

In the state, more than 60 percent of total land area has been used in agriculture and the share of land use in non-agricultural sector accounts to 20 percent; the other 20 percent is either fallow or barren or forested. The high degree of occupational dependence on agriculture, especially in terms of agricultural labor, and its rapidly declining income share is an indication of a higher incidence of poverty in the countryside. Most of the districts in West Bengal are rice producing and Aman has been the leading variety. Howrah, Medinipur (East), Bardhaman, 24 Parganas (North) and Hooghly are the major Boro producing districts in the state. Murshidabad, Malda and Nadia lead in wheat and pulses production. Production of oilseeds is concentrated mainly in Nadia, 24 Parganas (North), Murshidabad and Malda. Jute, on the other hand, is cultivated intensely in Nadia, Cooch Behar, Murshidabad, Dinajpur (North) and 24 Parganas (North). Hooghly has led in potato production.

Agriculture in West Bengal has been diversifying gradually towards high value crops of fruits, vegetables and flowers. West Bengal is one of the leading producers of fruits and vegetables contributing nearly 16 percent to the country’s total production in 2005-06, but the contribution of floriculture was less than 3 percent to the national production of flower during this period. The value of total fruits and vegetables produced in the state increased by more than double and that of flowers by nearly three times during 1990-91 to 2005-06. The state contributed to 7.4 percent of the country’s total food grain output and ranked 4th among the major states in India in 2006-07. In industrial development the western region states have continued to dominate the eastern states in terms of their shares of value added and employment in the factory sector of the country (Government of India, 2010).

West Bengal is the largest rice and fish and the second largest tea producing state in the country. During 2014-15 the state accounted for 79.6 percent of India’s total jute production and also a leading exporter of leather, having around 500 tanneries accounting for 55 percent of India’s leather goods exports. The state has initiated work in information technology sector (IT) and eight IT parks are expected to start operating in the state by 2014-15 (IBEF, 2016b).
One of the key focus of the West Bengal Government has been to empower women through its various social welfare schemes launched by the Maa, Mati, Manush Government in the last 1000 days of being in power. The Kanyashree Scheme inaugurated on October 1, 2013 aimed to stop child marriages and dropouts from schools. The government has formed a state level enquiry and management committee to look into the management of the state Welfare Homes for elderly persons, children and women. Amongst other initiative a 3 year working plan has been compiled for building Centre of Anganwadi\(^{26}\) and arrangements have been made for the women and children in Anganwadi Centres to receive nutritious food such as egg, soyabean, seasonal vegetables, rice and dal instead of Khichdi\(^{27}\) (AITE, 2014).

7.3 People of West Bengal

The third largest community of tribals known as the ‘Santhals’ live in the states of West Bengal, Orissa, Tripura and Bihar. The Santhals have their own language called Al-Chiki which is their mother tongue but can converse in Bengali as well (Guha & Ismail, 2015). Majority of the people speak Bengali, the languages of the people of Darjeeling District are Nepali and Bhotiya. Kolkata has a large number of immigrants, so they use different types of languages like Hindi, Oriya, English, Santhali, Burmese, Chinese and other languages. Bengali as a distinct language was evolved probably between the ninth and the twelfth centuries, out of the old Austro-Dravidian dialects, the Prakrit dialects which carried the message of Buddhism, Sanskrit and an eastern variant called Magadhi of the Northern Indian dialect belonging to the Sauraseni or western family (Indhiyan.in, 2009).

7.4. Literacy

In West Bengal too, the literacy rate has steadily gone up to 76.26 percent in 2011 over the past decade. The male literacy rate was 81.69 percent and the female literacy rate was 70.54 percent. In rural areas the

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\(^{26}\) Anganwadi centre provides basic health care in Indian villages and is a part f the Indian public health-care system. Basic health-care activities include contraceptive counseling and supply, nutrition education and supplementation, as well as pre-school activities. Source: data.gov.in (https://data.gov.in/dataset-group-name/anganwadi-centers).

\(^{27}\) The term Khichdi is derived from Sanskrit khiccā, a dish of rice and legumes (Wikipedia, 2017) https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Khichdi#Bengal
literacy rate for males and female stood at 78.44 percent and 61.98 percent respectively with the average at 72.13 percent (Census of India 2011d). Table 7.1 showcases that the average literacy rates of both males and female are above that of the country. The comparison between the average female literacy rates in rural areas also indicate that West Bengal is doing well in terms of literacy. Although the average literacy level has shown an improvement (Table 7.1) the literacy rate of SCs is low when compared to the Non-SC population. This was pointed out in the district wise study carried out by Rukshana & Alam, 2014. The main reasons behind the low literacy level have been attributed to socio-economic and political backwardness of the SCs. They argue that government policies are not sufficient to eradicate the problem but require interventions that are able to overcome the cultural barriers which often prevent women from participating in literacy drives. Census 2011 revealed an interesting development in terms of literacy level amongst the Muslim community. The Muslim literacy rate in the State has risen to 68.74 percent from 57.47 percent recorded earlier in the 2001 census and is marginally ahead of the national rate at 68.53 percent (The Times of India, 2015).
Table 7.1 A Brief Profile of West Bengal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>India</th>
<th>West Bengal</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Literacy (%)</td>
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<td>Rural</td>
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<td>Sex Ratio (1000)</td>
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<td>950</td>
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<td>10.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scheduled Tribe</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census of India 2011d
7.5 Adult Education in West Bengal

The Government of West Bengal runs a number of schemes for the development of women. These schemes relate to education and to the economic rehabilitation of women, and also to women with physical disabilities. One of the most ambitious schemes for women in India was recently started by the government of West Bengal. It is called Kanyashree Prakalpa or Kanyashree Scheme, and is aimed at enabling education of the girl child and thus preventing child marriage\(^{28}\) (Economic Times, 2016). Some of the central-government sponsored schemes targeted especially towards women and implemented by the Government of West Bengal are: 1) Support to Training and Employment Program for Women (STEP): Increases self-reliance and autonomy of women by enhancing their productivity through training for skill upgradation, to enable them to take up employment-cum-income generation programs. It also provides support services 2) Swayamsidha: Develops empowered women who will demand their rights from family, community and government, have increased access to, and control over, material, social and political resources, have enhanced awareness and improved skills, and be able to raise issues of common concern through mobilisation and networking 3) Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls (RGSEAG) Sabla: Provides health check-up, nutrition and health education, counseling/guidance on family welfare and childcare, vocational training under National Skill Development programme (NSDP), life skill education, accessing public services, etc and 4) Swabalamban: Trains poor and needy women of urban slums and rural areas from weaker sections like SCs, STs, etc., preferably in non-traditional areas, to ensure their employment (M3, 2016).

\(^{28}\) *The Child Marriage Restraint Act’ passed in 1929 was repealed in 2006 and ceded by *The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act.’ The act restricted the minimum legal marriage age at 18 years for females and 21 years for males and extends to the whole of India except the State of Jammu and Kashmir; and it applies also to all citizens of India. India has the highest number of child brides in the world. It is estimated that 47 percent of girls in India are married before their 18\(^{th}\) birthday. The rates of child marriage vary between states and are as high as 69 percent and 65 percent in Bihar and Rajasthan. Major factors influencing child marriage are economic considerations (poverty, marriage related economic expenses/dowry), gender norms and expectations, concerns about girls’ safety and family honour and lack of educational opportunities for girls. Child marriage is more common in rural areas (56%) than urban areas (29%) http://www.girlsnobrides.org/child-marriage/india/
An important reason for the better performance of the state as compared to the national average was that the per capita real expenditure on general education more than doubled during the period 1980-81 to 1997-98. The state government has introduced an alternate school education system (Sishu Shiksha Karmasuchi) with the objective of providing basic education to children aged 5-9 who were unable to get enrolled in formal primary schools. To increase the involvement of the local government and community in public health services, it was proposed that one-third of the PHCs be upgraded to referral units. A new scheme called ‘Ayusmati’ Scheme has been designed, which aims at augmenting the availability of institutions for safe delivery by partnering with private sector facilities. The scheme has already been launched in 11 districts. Similarly, another scheme called the ‘School Health Programme’ has been launched in 147 blocks selected on the basis of low female literacy rate. It aims to improve the health of school going children (Health and Welfare Department, Government of West Bengal). Another interesting feature which surfaces in the state is that although religious communities such as Muslims lag behind in the state average in literacy but they are performing better when compared to the national average. Under the auspices of the National Literacy Mission Authority (NLMA) the West Bengal SRC for Adult Education provides guidance to the districts to take measures for the residual non-literate and neo-literates. Accordingly the Zila Saksharta Samiti (ZSS) has been given considerable freedom to develop programs depending on the socio-economic conditions, needs of neo-literates and available resources (SRCWB, 2009).

7.6 The Research Setting: Howrah District

7.6.1 Introduction

Howrah District is one of the smaller districts of the state of West Bengal. The district is a triangular tract of the country with the apex being situated at the southern end. In Howrah, there are 14 blocks. Officially there are 727 inhabited villages and the district is surrounded by two rivers - the Ganges and the Rupnarayana in the East and West respectively. Out of the total population 36.62 percent lives in rural areas of villages and 63.38 percent lives in urban regions of district. Howrah City is the second largest city of West Bengal and the name is said to have been derived from a village named Harirah which was located in or about the site of modern day Howrah City. The district is named after its headquarters i.e. Howrah City.
7.6.2 Economy and Production

Howrah is the abode of the ship making industry in India. Hooghly Docking and Engineering Works (Salkia), Shalimar Works (Shibpur), Port Engineering Works (near to the Botanical Garden) etc are the traditional industries in the districts, established in the British regime. These industries support the domestic economy and at the same time accounts for the large quantity of export while enhancing the overall economy of Howrah. Presently, there are around twenty jute mills here providing an ample scope of employment, thereby supporting the local economy of Howrah to a large extent. The first cotton mill of India had been established in Howrah in 1817, which is still in operation. Agriculture also contributes to the economy of the district. Almost 75 percent of the land is cultivated with rice being the principal meeting local demands. The main crops cultivated are pulses, potato and oilseeds which are exported to the neighboring areas to support the economy (Indianetzone, 2008).

7.6.3 People of Howrah

Muslims make up a large percentage of the people living in Howrah District approximately twenty-seven percent. After 1971 the independence of East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) the district received a huge refugee population along with Kolkata, Hooghly and North 24 district in the province. Census of India 2011d shows that 63.38 percent of the population in Howrah lives in urban regions of the district and 36.62 percent in the rural areas.

7.6.4 Literacy

Census of India 2011d states that Howrah has an average literacy rate of 83.31 percent, higher than the national average of 74.04 percent: male literacy is 86.95 percent, and female literacy is 79.43 percent. Males constitute 52.28 percent of the population and females 47.72 percent. As indicated earlier social activism is a legacy of West Bengal and this reflects in the high literacy rate among women in the district. Unlike Bhilwara District child marriage is not that visible in Howrah. However, early marriage i.e. below the age of 18 is higher in Muslims than Hindus (Haldar et al, 2013). The literacy rate in Howrah District (Table 7.2) reveals that both male and female literacy levels are above that of the
Another interesting fact is that more than 50 percent of the district is urbanized which could explain the prevalence of higher literacy attainment between men and women with the latter still being lower but comparatively higher compared against the state average.

### 7.6.5 Adult Education

In Howrah District the Village Welfare Society (VWS) started functioning in the aftermath of a natural disaster in 1978. It was acting as a people forum in providing a series of informal education and training, based on adult learning principles. The Village Welfare Society (VWS) was recognized as a registered NGO in the beginning of 1982. The entire development drives predominantly depended on the grant based supports from various sources including Government. The organization has now been focusing in the areas of education for the children of working mothers, engaged in the agriculture and allied activities, following low cost healthcare for the community women and children, awareness generation and women access to health savings, health education and professional health linkages by developing health protection SHGs, piloting to a few villages of Udaynarayanpur and Khanakul blocks of Howrah and Hooghly districts in the state of West Bengal (VWS, NA).
Table 7.2 A Brief Profile of Howrah District and West Bengal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Howrah District</th>
<th>West Bengal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rural population (%)</td>
<td>36.62%</td>
<td>68.13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban population (%)</td>
<td>63.38%</td>
<td>31.87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy Rate (%)</td>
<td>83.31%</td>
<td>77.08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>86.95%</td>
<td>81.69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>79.43%</td>
<td>70.54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scheduled Caste (%)</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scheduled Tribe</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex Ratio (1000)</td>
<td>939</td>
<td>950</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census of India 2011d
8. Findings from the Study

A father asks his daughter: Study?
Why should you study?
I have sons aplenty who can study
Girl, why should you study?
For my dreams to take flight, I must study
Knowledge brings new light, so I must study
For the battles I must fight, I must study
Because I am a girl, I must study
To fight men’s violence, I must study
To end my silence, I must study
To challenge patriarchy, I must study
To demolish all hierarchy, I must study
Because I am a girl, I must study
(Kamla Bhasin, 2012)

8.1 Introduction

The theoretical discussions in this study reflect that cultural practices and traditions deeply influence the roles that women play in societies (Kabeer, 1999). In rural areas the gendered roles allocated to women are more pronounced in relation to urban areas. The majority of Indian people live in villages, where most of the domestic roles are consciously or subconsciously assumed by women. The potential of women’s active economic role through engagement in, for example, the entrepreneurial or formal sector is grossly undermined. Educating a girl especially in a poor family is often referred to as “watering a neighbor’s tree” (Raynor, 2005) since the economic gains would be automatically transferred to the spouse’s family. Moreover, the dowry for an educated girl would be more expensive since the likelihood of finding a groom with the same educational qualifications would be less and would be unthinkable for a poverty stricken family (Dreze & Sen, 2002). The cultural ideologies, norms and practices embodied in the implicit contracts of household and kinship relations usually interlock to produce a situation where women’s control over material assets, labor and power including their ability to mobilize resources in the household are severely curtailed (Kabeer, 1994).
The findings in this section illuminate the norms of a patriarchal society which leave women marginalized, discriminated and subjugated. The two regions selected for the study reflect the cultural diversity that characterizes India. Within, the Indian subcontinent inter-regional variations invariably contribute to disempower women from reaching their full potential. While acknowledging the socially constructed roles that define women’s position in the society the study looks at the transformative role of adult education and literacy which has made the impossible possible-empowering women to act on their agencies. The interviews conducted describes the challenges and difficulties the women faced in order to realize their dreams. In their own words this section portrays their determination and catches glimpses of their journey towards transformation.

This chapter summarizes the narratives of all the informants i.e. fifty-two resourceful, marginalized women in rural Rajasthan and West-Bengal. It portrays familial ties/resources within the personal sphere and tries to gauge whether their tryst with education enabled them to find their own space, become agents of transformation by becoming self-reliant, being able to determine choices in life and to influence the direction of change through the ability to gain control over crucial material and non-material resources (Moser, 1993). This chapter also accentuates the complexity of women’s subordination in the Indian subcontinent.

8.2 Comparing the Similarities and Differences in the Socio-Economic Context of the Rural Women in Bhilwara District Rajasthan and Howrah District West Bengal

An individual’s position in the household is determined by the intersecting hierarchies of age, gender and kinship status which characterize household relations. The narratives elicit the difficulties, hardships that these women are facing to carve a better future for the next generation.

Most of the informants were below the age of forty from families with minimum four to six members. The respondents in this study acquired literacy through adult education (e.g. such as income generation training, life skill training) organized by their group leaders. In Bhilwara district most of the the informants worked at construction sites or were part time...
laborers. In West Bengal a large number of the informants were members of a micro-credit organization. In spite of variations in terms of caste, age, educational status of the informants most of them shared similar backgrounds, challenges and experiences.

Questions in this section uncover the reasons behind most unable to attend schools and digs deeper into the social customs observed in this part of India. Many respondents spoke about their compulsions and obligations to their family which often resulted in decisions that worked against their wishes. To maintain confidentiality the true identity of the informants have not been revealed for e.g. name, village. For instance, Devi reflecting on her life said:

“I couldn’t study because my parents worked in another district, so I lived with my maternal grandparents. I was forced to get married at the age of 15”.

Echoing a similar thought Puri commented,

“My parents never sent me to school, they got me married when I was very young. I don’t remember when but I want my children to go to school and stand on their feet. We, don’t want them to work in the fields, it’s a hard job, so they should study and make a better life.”

8.2.1 Child Marriage

During the interviews I discovered that the tribal women interviewed in Bhilwara District had their daughters married off at the age of four. When asked they spoke very honestly that ‘it was a custom which they could not break’. Child Marriage was found to be observed in Bhilwara District, Rajasthan which is predominantly tribal dominated. However, existence of this custom did not prevent them from sending their daughters to school till they reached puberty after which they went to live with their spouses. The struggles highlighted in the interviews are similar to all respondents sharing the same socio-economic and ethnic demography. Poverty and the dowry system are strong components for the sustenance of this system. Unlike the informants in Howrah District West Bengal members of the interviewed tribal community in Bhilwara District had their daughters married off at the age of five. The dowry amount ranged between INR 20,000 to INR 30,000 and becomes
nominal if the girl is older i.e. 12 years and above. So, a young bride would fetch more dowry than an adolescent.

The single most important reason arose out of social customs, traditions, habits and monetary benefits received by the bride’s parents. These were the main catalysts behind ‘child marriage’. The informants threw up pertinent social issues (child marriages, widowhood), importance of literacy and the meaning of transformation in their lives for discussion. Hence, it felt necessary to encapsulate the interviews illuminating traditional practice which cuts across countries, culture, ethnicities and religions.

The linkage between child marriage and poverty was voiced by Kalli who had all four daughters married at a very tender age. Another aspect raised by most respondents in Bhilwara was the economic returns to the bride’s family as iterated:

“I got all my four daughters married because it is our custom. It becomes cheaper for us so they get married together. My youngest was five years old but they live with us until they finish school. I have never been to school and my husband has studied till Grade 3 and it is our dream that they study”.

Agreeing with her friend Roshni responded,

“I agree with Kalli, you must understand that we follow these customs out of societal pressure. If we don’t then our neighbors will not mix with us. We too are against getting our daughters married so young, but what can we do, we have so many mouths to feed. The money we receive in exchange helps us in difficult times”.

The parents especially the ‘mothers’ had been married off at the age of four years revealing that the custom had social and cultural roots. Child marriage was considered very natural and it was taken for granted for marriages to be fixed on the birth of a ‘girl child’. A strong son preference was also noted in the interviews when the respondents spoke about being mentally pressurized by their family members for the need of an ‘heir’. 
“As a mother all my children are important to me. I have four daughters and did not want any more children but at that time what I wanted was unimportant. There was a huge family pressure for a ‘son’ so we had to listen to the elders of the family. My son is the youngest in the family”.

In spite of their low socio-economic background families had an average of five children with the youngest being a boy. The reason stated was:

“We need a son to carry on the family name. So we kept trying until we had one”. It is more a social obligation and our views are not considered”.

On the other hand, some prefer a large family so that children can work in the farms.

“I got married at the age of 5, and I have 5 children. The eldest is the girl. My mother-in-law lives with us she listens to me. I work in the fields with my husband, live together in one room in our kaccha (mud house). My daughter does all the housework and the sons sometimes help out in the field but I make sure that she attends school. We have enough help at home and it makes us easier to do all the housework”.

The national documents also reaffirm that child marriage has been an issue in the subcontinent for a long time because of its roots in traditional, cultural and religious practices. This practice has been voiced in the interviews collated by me pointing out that it is still a hard battle to fight. Child marriages in the narratives have been associated with religious practices, cultural traditions and poverty. The main reason behind it being still widely practiced specially in the tribal areas visited is the economic gains received by the bride’s family. This was proclaimed to be the fundamental reason that has sustained the practice.

8.2.2 Widows

Widowhood is known as one of the reasons behind discrimination against women especially in rural areas. Widows in India lose their identity and widowhood is a state of social death. Widows are subjected to a life of discrimination and in many families across the country
perceived as a burden. Remarriage is more an exception rather than a rule and only about ten percent of the widows remarry. India is perhaps the only country where widowhood, in addition to being a personal status, exists as a social institution (Basu, 2015). A veteran activist Mohini Giri (2012) says that, widowhood is a state of social death, even among the higher castes. Child marriage compounded with widowhood presents a myriad of social, economic and psychological problems as disclosed to me during the focus group discussions. The narratives enumerated below articulate the hardships, helplessness that faced by widows.

In the study undertaken in Hooghly District Madhuma reflects, “life had been difficult for me when my husband passed away leaving behind two children. A young bride, married at the age of 14, I had no idea that life could get so tough without a man”. One of those few lucky ones that had the support of both families; refuses to ask for monetary help- “I do not want to beg for money from them”, she says. After joining the organization, she participated in literacy classes and started her own business enabling her gradually to build her own house. Prior to becoming a member Madhuma, “would walk miles to sell bidi” (local cigarettes) which she would bind at home.

Others were less fortunate. The social stigma attached to widowhood was vivid in Neetal’s narration:

“I live with my mother-in-law from the time I was married at 16 years old. My husband was 30 years old and already married which my parents did not know and passed away two years later after marriage. Everyone stopped talking to me after my husband passed away excepting my mother in law she began supporting me when I began working at the Aaganwadi (day care) in the village”.

Shamim was asked to leave her home after she lost her husband. She was completely dependent on her husband’s earnings and after his death, life became unbearable. The initial years were full of hardships but her condition changed once she joined the women’s micro-credit organization in Howrah District. Recalling those days fills Shamim with grief and she breaks her silence,
“My in-laws ill-treated me (especially my father-in-law). I was thrown out of the house. Being married at 16 and having two children by 20 was not easy and it became worse after my husband passed away”.

Speaking about the hardships of widowhood Murshida says,

“I had to sell my land to send my daughters to school and to make ends meet. My husband passed away so life is very tough but they (girls) must go to school to change their life and status. We live in a kuccha one-roomed house; nowadays they cycle to school from the time they received bicycles from the government”.

Interestingly, the respondents also spoke about a better life for their children- a life out of poverty and to achieve this they acknowledged the role of education. They wanted to educate their children and would sacrifice everything for them. In their words the interviewed widows talk about life after the death of their husbands and shared their experiences. Often abused by family members, ostracized from society they have no place to seek refuge. Some could come out of their struggles because of their earning power. The most common reason being widowed in this study arose from being married to older men and poverty. The women interviewed were hesitant and reluctant to re-marry since they ‘would not find suitable grooms. Only old men would approach them and they refused to repeat their traumatic experience all over again. They spoke frankly about the ordeals suffered at the hands of household members who often mistreated them and took away the little possessions (jewellery, money) that they had received as gifts from relatives.

“When I was thrown out of the house I was scared, did not have any place to go with my two children. My neighbor took me the microcredit organization, which was a blessing for us. Gradually I started working, learned to read and write and now I have managed to save enough money to have a roof over our heads” (Madhuma).
8.2.3 Domestic Violence

The informants spoke frankly about their personal lives. They revealed their unhappiness, frustration about the presence of domestic violence in their families. They said that the display of power was the way in which husbands asserted superiority over them and maintained their status of being the ultimate authority within the family. The interviews revealed the intangible role of power relations associated with patriarchal societies and magnified in rural settings.

Latifa talks about her relationship with her husband,

“*My husband would get drunk and often beat me up. I was helpless, no one came to support me. So I took matters into my hand. With the support from other women I learned to read and write and decided to stitch labels on jute bags to make a living. When my husband saw that I was contributing and no longer dependent on him the beatings slowly stopped. I became mentally stronger and stood up against the abuses. I decided also to sell the land to send my daughter to school. It would have been difficult to do so if I hadn’t become financially independent*”.

The reported incidents of domestic violence were far more pronounced in Bhilwara District than Howrah District West Bengal. As conveyed to me when women refused to listen to their husbands or agree with them they were subjected to severe beating to demonstrate the superiority of men.

“The minute I refused to give my earnings to my husband he would beat me up. He would spend it all by drinking and gambling with his friends. So, one day I gathered the courage to report the incidents to the organization. A group of 15 women came and spoke to my husband, and after that day he never raised his hand on me (Aliya).

Another aspect of domestic violence arose because of household politics. When women refused to abide with the rules set by the ‘matriarch’ – the mother in law then leverages of ‘control’ and inter- personal dynamics of power within the household were applied.
“My husband tried to set me on fire because I wanted my daughter to study. So I took my ten year old daughter and six year old son and took shelter with my brother and his family. I push a vegetable cart to make a living. Now we live by ourselves The Raj Parivar (royal family) helped us a lot to fund my daughter’s education” (Anulekha).

When questioned the reason behind them not registering a complaint at the local police station both Ina and Nurat said, “It will bring shame to the reputation of our family if we went and filed complaints at the police station. Women from good families do not go to the police station, we try and solve our problems at home”. In both districts alchoholism was cited as a ‘social evil’.

8.3 Factors Contributing to Literacy

The narratives from Bhilwara District and Howrah District made a direct connection between literacy and transformation. For them the outcomes of literacy were not restricted to knowledge, financial literacy and skill sets required for business ventures but a lifelong process towards sustainable development. The interviews exemplify the ways in which women were able to renegotiate the positions of power which was previously controlled by men. With these narratives I demonstrate women’s agency, their capabilities and their social mobilization which was only possible because of adult literacy.

“Exposure to literacy classes, sharing my problems with friends increased my self-confidence. I learned to use my skills and make a living out of it. This changed the way things used to be at home and I began to believe in myself” (Rita).

Another critical development to sustain the progress was the involvement of men. The new attitude towards the importance of educating girls has made it a responsibility of both parents to educate the girl child. This change became possible when women used their knowledge from their literacy classes to improve the economic conditions of the household. There was a positive shift in the balance of power and it was felt even after daughters were married and traditionally no longer the parents’ responsibility.
The changed attitude was visible in Lali,

“I got my daughter married at 18, she is still studying and attends college. Although our means are limited we send her money so that she finishes college. Her in-laws cannot say anything because we support her in kind and they know that once she gets a job it will help them also. And we will do the same with our other three daughters and our son- for us there is no difference between boys and girls”.

By bringing men into the picture women felt motivated, inspired and their self-worth increased. To quote Akansha:

“My husband literally pushed me to do something-to study and work. Because he supports me no one objects to my working. Amar gurutto barbe which means that her importance increases both within the family and in the society. So I do not worry what other people think of me. Want my daughter to be very educated and rebel against violence. Everyone wants to have their own destiny”.

Her comment indicates that with the increased support at home the ascribed ‘gendered roles’ were weakening giving women the opportunity to step out of their earlier confined spaces. Neela asserts,

“I am so happy that I no longer need to rely on my husband for financial support. It’s important to be able to earn, support your family so that children can attend school. For people like us it is crucial to be able to use our neo-literate skills to ameliorate our conditions”.

To hear the collective voices of women I organized two focus group, comprising of fourteen women each in Bhilwara district and in West Bengal. The group chosen was homogenous in terms of socio-economic status, ethnicity to facilitate open discussion. The focus group discussions articulated the hardships they had to face, obstacles they had to overcome to ensure transformational change. The shared experiences were not uncommon and crossed transnational borders. By listening to them one could relate to similar issues in countries having similar socio-economic climate. It was noted that these women spoke positively not
only about the future but the present. Even though one could visualize a promising future it is equally important to note that it is context-specific. There is no one-size fits all solution.

The benefits of literacy signal a change in the mind set of family members indirectly leading to social benefits such as education of children, poverty reduction and in softening of traditional roles. The attitudinal change is succinctly captured in Dolly’s words:

“We are everything now! Before, we were asked to take off our necklace, bangles to meet financial needs. Now our status in the house has increased because of our earning capacity. Empowerment and transformation is a process through work. We must be capable”.

As members of the microcredit organization in Howrah and SHGs in Bhilwara women were able to share their personal experiences and formed strong collegial bonds. In Bhilwara the SHG was initiated by women residing in the same colony and what started out as a support system gradually became a platform to give voice to the downtrodden and the marginalized. It became a small community for the tribal women to help each other and become lifelong friends. Most women worked at construction sites and kept one another informed about job opportunities. In the evenings the SHG would meet for their literacy classes organized on a voluntary basis by local stakeholders to inform women about their political rights and create awareness on the need to educate daughters. The various Government initiatives strengthened by the RTE Act made it compulsory for children to attend schools and this was upheld by all respondents. They shared their joys and sorrows and when one child received a token of appreciation from the school it was celebrated by each member of the SHG. In Janvi’s words:

“Living in the same colony, we know each other well. In case of trouble we help one another and are each other’s support system and do not hide anything from each other. We keep an eye out for each other’s children. One of our friend’s daughter got a laptop for coming first in class, it is a great inspiration and motivation for us”.

Women realized that poverty and illiteracy made them victims of discrimination. Reshma noted:
“Poverty and illiteracy are the main reasons why women are vulnerable in the society.”

Another important detail indicated by Reshma was the need to combine literacy with financial independence.

“...education by itself would not bring about transformation; it has to be linked to financial independence. When we bring in money and help out in household expenses we become important. This gives us authority and power to make decisions for the betterment of our children. This is the reason I can send my daughter to school along with my son. It was not possible to do so earlier”.

The narratives signal that literacy must be linked to livelihoods to influence the balance of power, or become empowered. In the narratives any one factor could act as the catalyst for change. For example changes in marital and family conditions create opportunities for some women “when husband supports his wife” or if there is an additional source of income” and “the mother can pool her resources to send daughters to school”. For some it could also be “divorce” to escape domestic violence from their husbands, and if she is a widow having access to the various support mechanisms available from a public-private partnership (PPP) and a stepping stone to pathways of empowerment. By amplifying their voices and increasing their ability to make choices are yielding broad transformative dividends for them and their families, communities and societies. A broad consensus among the informants revealed that both men and women chose to gain from the literacy. Achieving literacy would secure a better future for their children, access to livelihoods opportunities and ameliorate their living conditions. The wheels of change had already set in Anita words:

“because of our access to literacy I am able to be in charge of my economic resources, save money and can send my children to school. Think if we had been given the same opportunity by my parents at least we would have had a better life”.

Many also pointed out that it is imperative that both men and women together need to make decisions regarding their children and it is not the lone responsibility of the mother. Women having husbands with basic adult education were more involved in decision making surrounding their children’s education and encouraged to work. I noted that in these cases
there was a unanimous consent that children should complete their education prior to getting married. The thought was succinctly captured by Radha:

“Our parents never sent us to school but we want to because we cannot see them suffer like us. So we work hard so that they get a good education, their lives will be comfortable, can stand on their feet and then we will feel that our lives have meaning.”

Having supportive life partners also lessened the power of other household members especially the dominant mother-in-law. As communicated in the focus group discussions by Meeli and Rajni:

“I don’t get along with my in-laws, they live with us but it doesn’t matter. Since I earn they cannot object about sending my daughter to school. She cycles 3 kms to school every day and takes an hour to get here excepting in the monsoons because the roads get very bad.”

Both understood the necessity to have a common consensus for educating children by both parents. The thought resonated in the narratives:

“We will try and make sure they study as much as they can and then marry them. Children especially girls should not be dependent on anyone. It is a must that husband and wife agree because the responsibility lies with both of us to create a better future for our children.”

8.4 Linkages between Literacy, Empowerment and Transformation

In this study the narratives throw light on the interlinkages between literacy and transformation. In the examples women shared, discussed and argued the need for educating girls. By interacting with their peer group they could share their problems and find solutions for them. Following this trajectory, I focus on the links between adult literacy and women empowerment that equips women with the knowledge, skills, agencies fostering them to not only expand their choices but to exercise them. The narratives exemplify that transformation and adult literacy is the critical pathway out of poverty only when linked to livelihoods opportunities. This interdependence between literacy and economic
opportunities enabled marginalized rural women to acquire for themselves and their children a better future.

The shared experiences of the informants found that literacy helped them to challenge the status quo and raise their voices to speak for gender equality within their communities. In the focus group discussions their voices resonated with a conviction:

“Along with our familial obligations there is also the need to make a stand and speak for the suppressed to the village Panchayat (heads). By acting together, we can overcome constraints facing individuals”.

Economic independence provided women with mechanisms to reduce the control of their peers and families. They reached out to those otherwise unreached. While in one case adopting a girl was considered to be equally rewarding which contested the ‘son’ preference. These efforts in themselves can be defined as transformative for they challenge social consensus or social norms as encapsulated below.

Prema decided to adopt a child when medical results confirmed she would never be able to become a mother. Instead of admonishing her, the entire family encouraged her and were happy with her decision of adopting a girl. In her words:

“I adopted a little girl within the family, when her father passed away and her mother re-married. There was no one to look after her. I wanted a girl and hope that she wants to study. Even though it is the custom within our community (Bhils) to have child marriage. My husband agrees with me. No one objected in my husband’s family that we adopted a girl”.

For others like Meera gaining visibility and identity in the local community gave them a platform to advocate the benefits of education. Meera says:

“In my village I have stopped parents from stopping their daughter’s education. They tell me but “they have failed so what is the point? But I say, they must continue and become something and if you don’t have money I will help you but they must study”. And I have helped three or four girls like this. I tell parents that now even
the government helps you do not have to pay for her schooling so why are you not sending them (girls) to school”.

The attitudinal shift increased Meera’ self-confidence and reflecting on it she speaks aloud:

*While working at the Aaganwadi, (day care) I would talk to young girls about the need for education. And if there were any problems, or if I heard that children were kept at home to work in the fields and girls to do household work I would inform the Gram Panchayat. They would listen to me and question the parents”.*

The women felt that they had gained new ‘status’ within the community and they valued the new social space giving them the opportunity to interact with members of differing castes or tribes. Literacy and economic empowerment were viewed as liberating. Educational awareness campaigns carried out by the government revitalized the community participation and created awareness about their rights. They wanted to hold on to the source of their well-being and make their children a part of it. In Laila’s words:

“I tell my daughter to study and become something in life. To learn from my experience and the hardships that we face. I always tell her that I do not want a life like me for you and she listens to me and is doing well in school”.

Whereas, Ila prefers to take loans to meet her daughter’s educational expenses.

“I pay Rs. 4000 per month for the house and for taking loans to make sure she studies. My daughter is 21 and doing teacher training. Both of us are sharecroppers and we work very hard so that she has a better life”.

The focus group discussions in both regions of the country underlined that literacy is intrinsic to change and a pathway out of poverty. They encouraged their daughters to study and most would not get their daughters married until they were financially independent. The voices resonated with determination,
“We will not get her married till she can stand on her own feet, her life should be better than mine”.

Masuma went against her family to stand up for her daughter’s education because,

“..she should make something of her life. When we have discussions in our literacy groups we talk, share and discuss our problems. And we feel that it is most important to educate a girl, it is her right. Educating a girl is good for the entire family”.

Widow re-marriage is a sensitive topic for discussion but the respondents had no objections when questioned if they would consider it. However, they would not consider the idea. Mastani and Kasturi felt,

“My girls would be without a mother. Lots of men asked me to remarry but I said no. I prefer to live alone with them. I have good support from my group members, I am independent. Getting married again will lead to a lot of complications and I just want my daughters to study and make a good life for themselves”.

The critical points in the narratives viewed transformation as control over resources, ability to take decisions and act in their own interests. The results show that literacy, empowerment and transformation are symbiotic and would also be associated with positive achievements in terms of the health and survival of their children. The stimulated discussions amongst the informants in the group discussions and individual interviews highlighted similar perspectives on the linkages between literacy and transformation.

8.5 The Civil Society and Stakeholders Perspectives

Society’s actors are in a position to create political space for reform by building coalitions to increase the demand for change. Social mobilization can widen the platform of support and reach the unreached. Social coalitions are fruitful pacts that enable policy to reach the marginalized women whom they were designed for. In Bhilwara District Rajasthan and Howrah District West Bengal the invaluable social alliances continue to lift women and children out of poverty.

In Bhilwara District, Rajasthan private organizations such as the Sudarshan Deo Trust named after Rajadhiraj Nahar Singh (1870-1930)
work in close coordination with the local municipality and Government Schools. The Trust targets the ‘girl child’ and personal initiatives are taken to talk to the village community for sending their daughters to school. Interviews with the members of the royal family revealed that scholarships were also given to encourage talented rural women and men to pursue their career, often on recommendations by members of the community. The Shahpura Family contributes two percent of their turnover to this charity and encourages clients to support and become involved with their philanthropic works. Tourism is used as a tool to foster social and economic development in this underdeveloped area. Sustainable Development is another invaluable initiative which the Shahpura family strongly believes in and has implemented several environmental and economic initiatives to boost the subsistence based agrarian economy. Social activism and philanthropy has been inherited as an integral component of the Shahpura Family legacy.

In response to the discussions around child marriage and government interventions promoting education the Shahpura Family felt that,

“…it is difficult to arrest it unless, one talks on a personal level to the village head and facilitates as an educator. Although the Government is allocating resources for educating girls, the rural poor but we feel the huge gap between theory and implementation. It should reach them especially girls as they are the one ones who can lift their families out of cyclical poverty. And if girls are to be retained in schools better teachers are required, innovative methods of teaching and certainly more commitment”.

Working with the Shahpura Trust is R.S. Kabra, social activist, philanthropist who returned to Shahpura after carving out a niche for himself in Mumbai. He established a hostel for women/girls and simultaneously became a resource person for the Shahpura Family. Discussions would often take place amongst them to identify those that needed help the most. The hostel aptly named ‘Matashray’ (Shelter for Mothers) accommodates 22 girls out which three require special assistance. The girls have access to a fully equipped kitchen. A regularly supply of ration (food grains) is supplied by the government and the owners have also shoudered the responsibility of looking for a suitable boy for those intending to settle down. The girls are allowed to avail of the facility until completion of their studies i.e. two and a half years. After which they are also given the option to do courses in ‘Special
Education’ if they so desired and widows have the choice to be absorbed by the hostel as a warden. A very young organization (fifth year) it has set an example. Some of the student’s interviewed came from remote corners of the region and have become ‘change agents and talk to community members in their villages the importance and the need to get girls educated.

Speaking on the importance of educating girls Kabra says,

“I did not support the ‘female’ because she is the weaker sex but for the fact that she has a lot of ability. What women need is our support that whatever they have should come out. This was the reason why I started the hostel for only women”.

In Howrah District lies the BMBCCSL, a micro-credit initiative that began from scratch over a decade ago and has savings over 11 crores today. Madhuri Ghosh the founder of the organization says,

‘My purpose in life is to help my girls to be empowered and live a life of dignity. I want them to be independent and believe in themselves’.

She remarks proudly, “I have two sons and 26,800 daughters”. It was her stint as a primary teacher that made her decide what she wanted to do for the rest of life which was to educate and empower women in villages. From very humble beginnings in a dilapidated school room in Bangalpur with aid from UNICEF it now operates from a three storied building and comprises of 1,103 Self Help Groups (SHGs). Its members include widows, vegetable vendors, rag pickers and rape victims. The society run entirely by women has a fully computerized bank. Loans are given to members either for expanding their business or household needs. A monthly interest of one percent is charged and for long term interests. There is also a reward scheme in place for those who repay on time, which ensures that there are minimal defaulters.

Madhuri is aware of the alchohol problem that has destroyed many homes in the villages. This is still one of the vices in the district and it becomes necessary to control the money otherwise misused by putting it away in the bank. The literacy drive in Howrah has also helped in creating awareness on the rights of women and this in turn played a significant role in hastening the process of transformation.
To quote Madhuri,

“Mixing with other women, stepping out of their homes, and earning for their family, has brought in self-worth among these girls. Transformation takes place within 3-6 months after joining the organization, I have seen that. They have learned the value of a good life. But one thing is very clear literacy and economic empowerment must go hand in hand to alleviate the life of the poor. Both have to join forces to bring about transformation and empowerment”.

Madhuri is determined to cleanse the place of alcohol and will continue to help women and girls to build secure lives and hold their head high in society. In this venture she is encouraged by her husband Gopal Ghosh one of the few men working in the organization.

Ghosh feels that, “one of the challenges faced by the organization was to get the poor women to save. The money would eventually be spent or taken away by their husbands before it reached the secured corner of the house or the earthen pots where it was stowed away. But now it has become like an addiction and women come to the organization to deposit even a minimal sum of INR 10 and get angry when the field workers do not show up to collect their dues”.

With loans taken from the cooperative the members carry out their own business such as making, jam, jelly, pickle making and papad which they make at home but sell in the shop at the cooperative. Almost 1100 houses in nearby villages are involved with organic farming. Social and sustainable activities undertaken by the organization are literacy drives, building toilets, arresting drop outs by talking to parents advising them about the benefits of education, organizing cancer detection camps once a month with Chittaranjan Hospital (Kolkata) and acupuncture camps are also held every month. The green sari worn by the members of the organization is a symbol of courage, resilience and perseverance; respected by all in the surrounding villages. It stands for unity against discrimination against women and a refuge for the poor, marginalized and the unreached. The organization also works in close conjunction with the Howrah Rural Teachers’ Forum in promoting literacy and organizing health camps.
8.6 The Major Lessons Learned from the Narratives

The results strongly signal that interventions at grass roots are critical for strengthening the voice of women, creating an awareness of their rights and duties and working towards their emancipation and liberation. From the vices encapsulated in this section one can infer the vital role of the civil society. The informants were able to overcome their hurdles due to helping hands that guided them towards a better and brighter future one that they were fully in charge of and were in control of their destiny. The findings generate the belief that the benefits of adult literacy promoted the transformation of values in other areas as well. These were observed in the attitudes towards ‘daughters’ education, economic benefits and improving their capabilities.

8.7 Triangulation

The international documents, newspaper articles, reports and national documents are used in this study as an invaluable part of triangulation. The evidenced based studies highlighted (refer to chapter 2) emphasize the urban-rural disparity and the need to address the gaps. The Millennium Development Goals and the Education For All goals raises the global debate and concerns for women and girls limited access to education which is a human right. The post 2015 discussions and the Sustainable DG 2030 Goals called upon the global community to build on the achievements of the MDGs and to ensure that there is an end to discrimination against women and girls in the planet. The selected case studies underscore the success stories being a combined effort of international aid, ownership by the civil society and women’s resilience to overcome economic hardships.

The national documents, newspaper articles and reports studied shed light on the provisions made by the Government of India for gender equality and women empowerment. The generated data also corroborates to the instances of child brides, domestic violence and discrimination of widows by their households. The results emanating from the documents indicate that there is a strong need to bring about improvements in socio-economic conditions in rural areas to put a stop to practices that are detrimental to the health and wellbeing of women. Inter-regional disparities are also indicated in the documents examined, which are a precursor to the existing issues engulfing women’s inequality in the Indian subcontinent.
8.8 The Major Trends Observed from the Interviews

The narratives disclose that with exposure to literacy classes women are gradually stepping out of their allocated boundaries and subscribed gendered roles. When opportunities are given to women they can do wonders with their resources and their determination. With multiple tools of knowledge women shape the future of their families, their children contributing to the creation of a literate and sustainable society. Discussions revolving around the role of education reiterate the need to educate both boys and girls, there was no preference voiced between them. The interviews cited the need to educate girls for a better future and the respondents hoped that the lives of their children would be better than that lived by them. The interviews pointed out the collaborative relationship between literacy and economic independence paving the way for empowerment. This was relevant in the decisions of mothers to educate their daughters, standing up for their children’s education and against early marriage. Education was a key driver of change that was heard in the way women stood united against domestic violence and spoke their mind on the topic of widow remarriage and converged to form SHGs to support one another.

In conclusion the transformative role of literacy identified by the respondents are:

- exposure to literacy classes gave women an opportunity to share, discuss and take control of their lives
- literacy lead to economic empowerment by which mothers were able to take decisions for their children, educate their daughters, participate in household decision making. It increased their status among family members
- women were able to influence the community by speaking up against domestic violence, early marriage and the benefits of literacy

Although literacy is noted as the vehicle of transformation it has yet to eradicate customs and traditions that are regressive and disempower women. Customs such as child marriage is still prevalent in rural areas as cited in the interviews. Ending child marriage requires work not only against all sections of the community but also concerted effort towards improving the socio-economic conditions of rural and marginalized women.
9. Comparative Analysis and Discussions

To all the girls who have faced injustice and been silenced. Together we will be heard”.
(Malala Yousafzai, 2013)

9.1 Introduction

The Indian subcontinent is a cultural mosaic and is defined by its linguistic and regional affiliations, which is anything but homogenous. The concentration of socially and economically deprived groups i.e. the SCs and STs also indicates the varying magnitude and breadth of socio-economic exploitation in the different regions of India. In this study, I have tried to depict this inter-regional diversity through the contextual setting which gives us a glimpse of the multicultural and pluralistic society of the country. Therefore, qualitative comparative analysis is vital to elucidate cross case patterns to steer policy focus on socio-economic contexts to have a sustainable impact.

The findings showcase that the patriarchal settings in the districts of Bhilwara and Howrah influences, justify and normalize women's role in society. However it varies between contexts and locations and is significantly mediated by additional social markers such as race, ethnicity, socio-economic positions, caste and religion (Kabeer, 1994; Stromquist, 2015). In this particular study the socio-economic conditions of the rural women were the common denominators, as such caste, ethnicity was not stressed upon in the interviews. To understand the complexity of the gendered relations questions were asked about their status at home, their role as mothers and daughters and their family. The interview guide was constructed around three key areas namely gendered relations, their views on the role of education/learning and transformation. Some of the key questions asked were:

1. Describe your household-your role, number of family members, your responsibilities and duties, number of dependents (if any)
2. Has being exposed to adult literacy classes changed the way you think? If yes elaborate
3. Define transformation in your own words

Research carried out by the World Bank, United Nations, OXFAM, IFAD and others as elucidated in the study articulate that education is
synergetic to release women from their traditional roles as carers. Education empowers women to reflect, analyze and assess gendered roles that had been normalized in their daily activities. I analyze the linkages between literacy and empowerment and investigate the reasons behind 'what works' and the circumstances behind 'why it works'.

9.2 On the Role of Education and Transformation

The critical points articulated by the informants revealed transformation as control over resources, ability to take decisions and act in their own interests. The analysis manifests that empowerment and transformation are intrinsic and is also associated with positive achievements in terms of the health and survival of their children. The interviews and the prevailing focus group discussions intimated to me that literacy and employment had not only increased the bargaining power of the women within the households but also the ability to control their children’s future. However it was based on the condition of employment that brought economic benefits to the household. Nonetheless, adult literacy opened up reflections of personal experience and awareness of oneself as a victim of oppression in the personal interaction within the private spaces. It had instilled in them the confidence to exercise their agencies and be recognized as an individual. Understanding oneself as a victim is the first step towards redressing the inequity of social and economic treatment.

The narratives presented an awakening of minds illustrated in the interviews when the informants spoke about taking a stand against domestic violence.

“Education gave me the strength to stand against domestic violence. In a Muslim community it was a strict taboo to take the step which I had taken. Initially everyone protested but now when they see me earning, contributing, no one says anything anymore. Literacy is a must to progress in life”. (Murshida)

To me the narratives elucidate the coping mechanisms of women’s ability ‘to bounce back in life’. Despite hardships these women have conquered their fate by turning around their lives. Education has given them the tools to realize their dreams for their children and family. This is visible in the plans they have for their children, savings, and reconstructing their future. Resilience in this case is viewed by me as the
ability to overcome the odds in their life, face challenges and give their life a new direction and a better future for the next generation.

The changes in the power relations is the impact of literacy which reconstructs households, community and societal relations. When women are empowered their opinions are valued by members of the society and in this case the Panchayat (village head). By learning to think radically some have approached the Panchayat to speak about problems that women face, spread awareness and necessity of getting girls into schools by talking to parents convincing them to send their daughters to school, standing up against early marriage and taking up arms against personal violence in unison. These occur through actual engagement with change as showcased in the study (refer to Chapter 8).

The focus group discussions in both regions emphasizes the need to educate girls,

“When we see anyone not sending their daughter to school in our colony we talk to them. We tell them that education is the only way that she can escape poverty, and create a better life for herself and family in the future”.

When women are exposed to the benefits of literacy it enables them to exercise their agencies. They are empowered to take decisions without fear and hesitance. This thought resonates in Banno’s words,

“My in-laws don’t listen to me but just because I work and earn they do not object my daughter attending school. I will continue to support her and want her to progress in life. This would have been impossible if it hadn’t been for the literacy classes”.

Access to adult literacy provided women the knowledge and skills to procure better lives and to be able to reach out to other women sharing similar lives to develop collective identity. Literacy and economic independence gave them the strength to act autonomously and challenge the status quo. As is evident in the narratives the economic dimension of empowerment provides women with the material resources (credit, food) in addition to the cognitive resources (education, information, and training) to bring about transformation. Households often being the center of power relations play an invaluable role in structuring the chain of power relations i.e. the way women should be treated and the
delegation of household chores based on seniority and hierarchical relations.

Functional literacy raises women’s status at home and gives her the self-confidence to voice her thoughts and stand by her decisions. As Paro says,

“I was only 5 years old when I was married off and became the mother of 4 children at the age of 25. I learned basic math like counting so that no one can cheat me in my business. I run a tailoring shop. I have four daughters and I will not get them married until they are on their feet. We want them to progress in life and secure a better life”.

On a similar note Lajja interjects,

"By working I have managed to take a loan of Rs.50,000 so that my daughter can get admitted to a teaching course. This was possible because I can read and write and nobody can fool me. I want her to become something so that she is not dependent on anyone”.

The groups organized by women both in their locality (Rajasthan) and in the micro-credit organization (West Bengal) provide them with informal spaces. These spaces are vital for removing the barriers preventing women from exerting decision-making power in the formal arena. One could perceive in these discussions that informal associations enabled a more flexible environment, provided a less threatening space offering a more practical solution to specific issues that are less likely to cut along party or ethnic lines. The information provided by the narratives gives us an insight into this study and complement the documents studied (both national and international) which evidences that education is the vehicle of transformation. The focus group interviews in both regions of the country accompanied by semi-structured interviews also yield the same results articulating the intrinsic role of literacy to promote women empowerment for a better future. The theoretical alignment (refer to Chapter 2) emphasizes that adult literacy is critical for women to respond to their socio-economic needs so that they can lift themselves out of poverty. It equips them to contribute and participate in their communities and social settings.
The analysis also indicates the role of mobile phones that increased access to employment opportunities. An interesting development mentioned in the narratives was the reliance on mobile phones. The outreach of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) was visible because all respondents possessed cellular phones. According to Lalita,

“*The first time I saw a school was when I was 15 years old and already married. The literacy classes gave me a basic understanding and taught me how to use a mobile which is why I am able to get a job at construction sites. Whenever, they need people a call comes. This has helped me to provide food and shelter to my children after I lost my husband*”.

The possession of cellular phones made it easier for women to stay connected with each other; report to the organization (Howrah) and step up the possibility of being reachable for manual work in Bhilwara District. Mobile phones also contributed to the transformative impact. The informants declared that owning a mobile phone had increased their income and their access to economic opportunity. The resources reallocated to pay for a phone subscription were from other personal items. It was interesting to note that the mobile phone was invaluable for a better tomorrow. The usage of mobile phones is a life line for poor women because it directly links them to the market and opens up a vista of opportunities to alleviate poverty.

The direct access to the labor market is stressed upon in the focus group discussion in Bhilwara District,

“*For us the mobile phone is necessary not only to keep in touch with each other but also to receive information about work. Since most of us work at construction sites we get calls the minute there is work. This has given us direct access to the labor market*”.

The analyses draw out deeper issues related to globalization that pointed out the necessity of integrating technology to improve the quality of lives in rural areas. Mobile phones also contributed to the transformative impact.
9.2.1 The Comparative Analysis

Rural India is steeped in poverty and inter-regional diversity often magnifies the difference. The narratives encased intensified the belief that adult literacy accompanied with economic independence is a critical weapon for empowerment. However, investigations revealed that the socio-cultural fabric played a determining role with respect to achieving empowerment or transformation. The district level comparisons reveal the intra-provincial variations to unpack existing cultural norms and traditions which often hinder most rural women gaining access to education. In a country as diverse as India it is vital to consider the implications of heterogeneity in the educational process.

The comparative case analysis of the two districts revealed similarities and differences in the external factors influencing the role of literacy and women empowerment. Although, child marriage is still prevalent in Rajasthan the informants made sure that their daughters continued schooling. This was possible because they stayed with their parents until adolescence. This demonstrated the importance of education so that their children especially ‘daughters’ could improve their status in both in their personal space and in their community. This is taken as a step forward or a slight weakening of traditional roles because in past instances ‘daughters’ were mostly kept at home and groomed for their roles as wives. The instances of ‘child marriage was missing in the narratives of the informants in West Bengal.

Unlike Rajasthan, the state of West Bengal has always been prone to social activism. The narratives do bring to our attention the incidence of early marriage (15-17) but also marks the absence of child marriage. Perhaps this could be attributed to the prevalent social customs among the SCs and the Other Backward Castes (OBCs) when compared to the STs. The selected districts denoted the inter-regional disparity that the subcontinent is often identified with. Howrah District is predominantly urban and Bhilwara is rural. The women interviewed in Howrah District had easier access to the market because of the microcredit organization which was lacking in Bhilwara District. The absence of a large scale organization to promote women was not seen in Bhilwara.

In both settings the marital status changed dramatically when women exercised their economic power. Literacy did serve as the catalyst but all were unanimous that in the absence of employment and the purchasing
power the benefits of literacy would be minimal. Literacy and economic independence increased the bargaining power of the women within the households and ability to control their children’s future. In other words the exogenous increases in female share of income provides them with more power or say in household decision making leading to a betterment of their status. It often leads to greater investment in education, housing and nutrition for their children.

Women in Howrah district were actively involved with the microcredit organization that gave them the political space to express themselves, receive help and support and share their troubles or joys. This outreach gave them the edge to form strong bonds and take a united stand against discrimination and violence. ‘United we stand’ was one of the cornerstone of the micro credit organization when an entire group of women would join hands if there were incidents of domestic violence. If the matter was not resolved at their level then it reached the local Panchayat (village committee) or the police. Hence the area has also witnessed a gradual decline of reports on domestic violence.

The narratives in this study emphasize the need for educating the poor marginalized women in rural India. It also shares but does not generalize some of the common issues such as child marriage, dowry, domestic violence, poverty found in the subcontinent that are responsible for women disempowerment. The analysis elucidates and relate to the common concerns which the Government of India faces in terms of caste, class, poverty, inter-regional disparity, diversity and outreach. Some of the critical factors that constraint women from exercising their agencies are enumerated below (table 9.1).
### Table 9.1 A Critical View of the Influencing Factors that Hinder Women's Empowerment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Influencing factors</th>
<th>Constraints</th>
<th>Opportunities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Socio-economic</td>
<td>Early marriage/widows</td>
<td>Awareness raising by community members, civil society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male exploitation (by husbands, members of the family)</td>
<td>Government provisions to help the rural and marginalized women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gender specific roles: women spent more time on household tasks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political/Power</td>
<td>Men block women’s access to control their lives/power</td>
<td>Women’s advocacy organizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Limited participation of women in decision-making hierarchy</td>
<td>Government legislations, provisions to combat poverty, discrimination faced by rural and marginalized women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural</td>
<td>Women’s place is at home</td>
<td>NGO involvement to raise awareness about the importance of educating girls and NFE for women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Early marriage</td>
<td>Greater acceptance of women in economic role</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women as mothers and carers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Religious beliefs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Leach, 2003
9.2.2 The Role of the Civil Society and the Stakeholders

The role of the civil society in Howrah District West Bengal and Bhilwara District Rajasthan was closely examined towards increasing public awareness, of the rights of women and promoting self-sufficiency of women through economic opportunities. It was necessary to do so because they have given voice to the marginalized and the downtrodden and in their own way strengthened the rights of rural women within the area. The civil society and the stakeholders play a vital role in reinforcing democratic rights to women and girls within backward rural communities.

The Shahpura Family aims at supporting rural children in Dhikola village and Shahpura. The Family gives monetary support to educate children living below the poverty line, educational scholarships to gifted children and donations of computers and other educational aids to improve the quality of education imparted. They feel that if families are assured of a subsistence it can arrest child marriage.

In the words of the Shahpura Family,

“Even though poverty is a paramount reason it can be resolved if the family is assured of a daily source of income. And that we can ensure in our humble way by making sure that they receive provisions in terms food and allowance which would be stopped if the child is married before the lawful age”. To arrest child marriage the family has adopted a girls’ school in the district because “Education is the key to a sustainable future. It changes the lives of both boys and girls as well of the next generation”.

R. S. Kabra’s organization has set an example in Bhilwara district for opening its doors to widows and helping them to find their identity and an alternative path out of poverty. Some of the student’s interviewed came from remote corners of the region and have become ‘change agents and talk to community members in their villages the importance and the need to get girls educated.
Kabra firmly says,

“Will not accept government help! What we are aiming for is beyond their books. The secular atmosphere is healthy for all and teaches us to respect one another. I shy away from politics and god has blessed me with enough resources to continue my work. Our aim is develop their skills, aptitude for latest technology-computers and I will do it on my own”.

By working closely with the Udang Forum the microcredit organization has helped to negate the role of the money lenders. Women no longer have to sell their ornaments and borrow money from them. They can directly approach the bank and take a loan for personal purposes i.e. to build a house or for their children’s education. With the interest rates being low there is very minimal risk for default. Madhuri reflects,

“Increases the self-confidence and the enthusiasm of the women members. They take great pride in their work and if by chance they do default in the payment, others help them out. For me it is personally gratifying to see such teamwork and consideration for each other”.

9.3 The Theoretical Implications

The qualitative data analyzed indicates that transformation was promoted by the impact of adult education and literacy which challenged patriarchal ideologies. The inductive method applied (refer to Chapter 4) helped me to understand, and bring forth the complex social relations that is naturalized. The exploratory design of the study and the interviews fleshed out the patterns and regularities that ended up generating the relevant theories (refer to Chapter 3). In this section the theoretical implications are discussed in their relationship to the qualitative data assimilated and analyzed.

9.3.1 Gender, Women and the Social Setting

Kabeer (1994) uses the term social relations that largely determine the roles that women have to follow defining their responsibilities and the control over their lives. She strongly argues that these social relations reproduce inequalities. Gender is one type of inequality which is further
magnified with the intersections of class, caste, ethnicity and the rural setting. It intimately juxtaposes the relationships between people and their contextual setting (refer to Chapter 3). By looking at women's position in the family I argue that households are not only familial settings but a place of negotiation, where the division of labor takes place drawn on gendered lines (Stromquist, 2009; Kabeer, 1999; Moser, 1993). The theories on Gender and Development, Intersectionality and Representation point out that women's acceptance of their secondary claims on household resources, acquiescence to violence at the hands of their husbands, dowry and child marriage are examples of power wielded in households involving pre-defined social customs. This adherence to social norms and practices associated with son preference, discrimination against women as evidenced in the study internalize women's subordinate position in the rural society. These aspects of traditions and culture are taken for granted and thus become naturalized in the society and is referred to by Bourdieu as 'doxa' (1978).

The interviews showcases that the gendered relations in a patriarchal society are negotiated by power relations. The dominant male in the households, peer relations are built on power relations. However, the dynamics of power experienced by the women are not static but change when power relations are renegotiated. As Lukes (1974) points out that social life can be understood in the interplay of power which expands and contracts over time (refer to Chapter 3). The social relationships divulged in this study shows the shift of power relation from negative to positively increasing the well-being of women's lives. In this case 'adult literacy' in conjunction with 'livelihoods opportunities' played an indomitable role in realigning the previously defined power relations. Foucault (1994) connotes the relational aspect of power which is visible in household dynamics being constantly produced and reproduced in the rural places and within households. The life course paved for rural women in the identified contextual setting is further pronounced by their socio-economic setting where caste and class did not play a significant role. Early marriage is widely practiced by the STs and is not visible within the SCs. They both adhere to social practices that subordinate and discriminate women undermine their agencies. The rural settings highlight the diversity of the locations expounded in the earlier sections and varies within regions. The study recognizes the diversity of the rural women interviewed indicative in their social customs and practices which construct their identities closely knitted to the socio-economic settings. The narratives in the study reflect their identities as mothers,
daughters, wives and daughters in law that is constructed through ascribed gendered roles shaped by power. The narratives reflect their life-worlds and this makes it important for me as a researcher to engage with them and see their world and their perspectives. These identities get reconstructed when they are exposed to a different contextual setting that empowers them (Dutt, 2017).

The transition of ascribed gendered roles giving way to empowerment resonates in the words of Geeta,

“Education is essential for girls to become aware of their rights and make a better future for themselves and their family. In today’s world women must be strong both mentally, physically, be bold so she can do her work herself. We worship goddesses’ so why should we be weak and suppressed. If our country is independent so are we. I want my daughter to complete her schooling and do what I was unable to do”.

9.3.2 Education and Transformation

Motivated by Sen’s (1985) capability approach I look at the role of education in improving the lives of women in rural villages in Bhilwara District and Howrah District in West Bengal. The capability approach focuses on the abilities of humans to pursue a better life for their personal wellbeing. Education provided the channel to exercise the women’s agencies and utilize their capabilities. Literacy ingrained in women a critical consciousness that made them step out of their traditional moulds that are influenced by gender ideology. Literacy gave them the power to renegotiate their gendered roles and collectively speak up against customs which disempowered them and were detrimental to their mental and physical wellbeing. The results of the study shows us that capabilities and agency is a people-centered approach that focuses on human agency. It emphasizes that the options present to a person is greatly dependent on the relationship with others (Dreze & Sen, 2002). The women recognized that literacy and employment is imperative to change attitudes that will usher in prestige and income.

9.4. The Application and Use of Triangulation

The study indicates that transformation was promoted by the impact of adult literacy which challenged patriarchal ideologies. Women spoke out boldly on the transformative role of adult literacy in their lives. They
voiced that ‘literacy made us aware of our rights, made us reflect critically on our present circumstances and paved the way for new possibilities’. Empowerment enabled women to create more effective social skills which in turn support the empowerment of more women. It is a proactive process and must operate simultaneously on the two fronts (Stromquist, 2002). Adult literacy challenged women to empower themselves for social change either through collective action or as an individual (refer to Chapter 8). Literacy makes people aware of their position in society or their situation that makes them exercise their agency towards changing the situation for their betterment. Friere (1970) states, that literacy facilitates both men and women to deal with their realities and discover how to participate in the transformation of their own worlds. Mezirow (1994) also stressed on critical thinking and selfreflection to develop more autonomy inducing far reaching positive change in the person.

To strengthen the study, ‘triangulation’ was used in this qualitative study (Chapter 4). Three approaches were adopted in this study 1) Data Triangulation 2) Methodological Triangulation and 3) Theory Triangulation (Figure 9.1.). The results are illustrated below:

1) Data Triangulation:

The comparative case studies from across the world (refer to Chapter 2) in the present study showcases the transformative role of literacy towards women empowerment. Documents published by UNESCO, UNICEF, LIFE, ASPBAE, IFAD used in this study evidences the synergy between literacy and empowerment. The studies point out that learning has to be correlated to livelihoods by which women gain self-confidence, influence their family and direct the intangible power relations in their favor.

Provisions made by the Government of India specified in the Five Year Plans (Chapter 5) works towards gender equality. Articles, reports published by NGOs stress upon the necessity of working together to overcome barriers that prevent girls from attending schools and women from realizing their dreams and positions in the households. The newspaper articles and journal reports accentuate households as being the dominant areas that shape power relations often working against women and girls.
Both international and national data cite that in spite of progress made towards literacy there is still a long way to go. This has been specified in the Education 2030 Agenda and emphasis has been laid on women’s equality and access to education for creating sustainable societies.

2) Methodological Triangulation

The narratives used in this study disclose that literacy and economic independence initiate women empowerment and are interdependent. Women overcome the obstacles when presented with opportunities through cooperatives, organizations and provisions allocated by the government. In the interviews women freely discussed the need to educate girls, the ways in which exposure to literacy classes had made them financially independent enabling them to change the balance of power relations to their advantage. They also spoke about customs that were detrimental to the girl child such as early marriage that was still followed. It marked traditions that were difficult to arrest because of economic constraints (Chapter 7). The interviews disclosed how power relationships underwent a change once women were linked to the market, had earning capacity and contributed to their family expenses. The methodological convergence reinstated that the way women used the power of literacy was intrinsic to their wellbeing.

3) Theoretical Triangulation

Gendered relations indicated the roles that were given to men and women signifying the sexual division of labor both inside and outside the households (Chapter 3). These prescribed roles often influence social relations relegating women to injustice and a discriminatory position.

However, the theories elucidate that when women are exposed to literacy classes there is a change in the mindset. They question and examine their reality, thus breaking out of the set roles ingrained by society. These changes are brought about when women begin to exercise their rights and their agencies. The change is brought about by the transformative role of learning
which makes women, question, reason, think and bring about change in their lives for a better future.

Figure 9.1. A Triangulated Enquiry

The triangulated enquiry identifies:

- some of the key factors that contribute and sustains women’s involvement and enthusiasm to partake in literacy classes
- the linkages between education, empowerment and transformation showcased in the methodological, data and theory triangulation
- the invaluable role played by the civil society and the stakeholders in sustaining women’s empowerment in the selected districts and working towards a sustainable society

The triangulated enquiry-data analysis, the theoretical alignment and methodological triangulation are indicative of the socially transformative
and catalytic aspects of education. This signifies the intrinsic value of the educational process that enhances an individual’s sets of negotiation skills and sets of choices within a contested site (Sen 1999; Robeyns, 2006) such as households. The value of triangulation is that it discloses issues found not only in India but in similar contextual settings found across the world. It gives us a holistic understanding and explanations of a specific problem that can be tackled or overcome through education.

Using multiple strategies in triangulating my research I found that it contributed to the validity and the reliability of my research findings. Triangulation deepens one’s understanding of the context under study and helped me to narrate the complexity and richness of the cases under observation which could be related to similar cultural milieu. The Triangulated Inquiry increased the validity and credibility of the study and facilitated to establish a holistic and contextual portrayal of this study which could be captured by increasing the understanding of the social complexity prevalent in the Indian subcontinent.

9.5 Conclusion

What the analysis attempts to reveal is that caste and class affiliation did not play a vital role in the social groups. Women identified themselves and bonded together on the basis of their socio-economic background. The common denominator that created the groups was that they were the poorest of the poor and often the unreached. The social groups gave them a platform to voice their difficulties and work together for a better future.
10. Conclusions and Further Research

“…for we women are not only the deities of the household fire, but the flame of the soul itself.”
(Rabindranath Tagore, 1919)

10.1 Conclusions of this Study

Adult literacy is the vehicle for transformation and an essential component to eradicate hunger, foster women empowerment and reduce food insecurity for the most vulnerable population. For the rural poor, knowledge and capacity building offers them a life out of poverty, builds women’s identity enabling them to participate fully in social and political life. Research indicates linkages between adult literacy and economic independence have impacted fertility rates, improved health and sanitation practices and weakened traditions that disempower women (FAO, 2013; World Bank, 2014). Rural transformation is a cornerstone to a sustainable future. In this transformation 'women' play a pivotal role (FAO, 2012) as they are central to the development of rural areas and bolster national economies.

The measures taken by the organizations and individual initiatives provided opportunities for women to discuss their problems with others and exchange viewpoints in their meetings (Stromquist, 2002). The evidences or ‘successful cases’ reveal that women empowerment is not reliant on one single factor. But it is a combination of the global with the local or glocalisation that has borne fruits. International decrees, legislations, laws safeguarding women’ rights will be difficult to implement unless there is accountability both at the national level and at the grassroots. The appropriate role for development agencies is not always clear; however, these evidences suggest that such processes are far more effective when they develop organically rather than as the result of top-down support (World Bank, 2014).

10.2 Key Findings from this Study

The selected case studies exemplify that national governments should understand the contextual needs to deploy resources available effectively, efficiently and scale up policies to provide inclusive learning. The key findings are summarized below:
10.2.1 The Similarities and Differences in the Socio-Economic Context of the Rural Women in Bhilwara District Rajasthan and West Bengal India

- In West Bengal stakeholders give women a neutral space to discuss their concerns, issues and together find solution to change their lives.

- Whereas, in Rajasthan concerted efforts of individuals enabled resources to equip the women to get back into education, and helped families to carve out a better future for their daughters. It signals the need to synchronize grass roots organizations with the ‘well laid plans’ of the governmental machinery and the international agenda to combat gender inequality.

- In spite of leading separate lives the women in Rajasthan and West Bengal shared a lot of similarity visible in their socio-economic background and their greater tendency to devote their incomes to family rather than personal welfare. It becomes evident in the study that personal income was intrinsic to their well-being-mental, social and political. In both districts the most critical need was economic and adult literacy was the catalyst or the agent for change as elicited by the women.

- The socio-economic setting accentuates the diversity of India which adds on to women disempowerment. The theory on Gender and Development emphasizes the interconnectedness of gender, class and ethnicity that are key contributors and determinants of women’s subordinations in the society.

10.2.2 Sustaining Women’s Access to Adult Literacy

- It was interesting to note that majority of women acquired functional, sustainable literacy and numeracy skills and acknowledged the need for mobile phones to be able to reach out to others for secure livelihoods. This emphasized the impact of telecommunications as an effective tool for overcoming physical barriers. Digital learning neutralizes the socio-economic divide and breaks down cultural barriers. In an increasingly interconnected global economy the participation of the poor is crucial for eliminating poverty (Norwegian Ministry of Foreign
Affairs, 2015). This stresses that the language of literacy programs, interventions must be contextualized to meet and address the challenges caused by social inflexibility and customs especially in India. As argued in the UNESCO report (2006) that nations can only progress if good governance is juxtaposed with strong leadership, efficient leadership and adequate financing. The empowerment skills women gain enable them to create more effective social skills which in turn support the empowerment of more women. It is a proactive process and must operate simultaneously on the two fronts (Stromquist, 2002).

- This study showcases that literacy is the critical factor which can initiate a chain of advantages to women. It is the one single most important variable which has the capacity to transform lives and create a sustainable future by breaking intergenerational poverty.
- The transformative learning gave women the skills to women to critically examine their constructed realities and experiences and reverse their realities towards a better quality of life.

### 10.2.3 The Linkages between Literacy, Empowerment and Transformation

- The linkages between literacy, empowerment and transformation in both Bhilwara District and Howrah District demonstrated the ways by which women turned their lives around through literacy. Literacy became an important tool to ameliorate their conditions and break out of a viscous circle of intergenerational poverty and degradation.

### 10.2.4 Strategic Partnerships are Vital for Women Empowerment

- The case studies equally highlight that strategic partnerships are vital for rural transformation. Brokering, international, national and local partnerships to promote sustainable development impacting lives, breaking out of intergenerational poverty cycle make literacy a potent weapon for change. The comparative case studies from across the world underline the burning desire of women to work towards empowerment and transformation. This study also concludes that it is intrinsic to encourage civil society, local stakeholders, parents and communities to ensure that girls receive the same opportunities as boys. Literacy enables women to partake as key players in the promotion of human rights,
create sustainable communities and work in unison towards a more just, peaceful and tolerant world.

The Government of India has made commitments to improve the literacy level of its citizens and especially marginalized women. Gathering from the narratives the props in place have facilitated the organizations, individual enterprises to add on to their experiences, resources to empower women in the rural areas and create sustainable livelihoods. However there are the missing links between policy and practice which make efforts at the local level difficult to reach their goals. Awareness, education campaigns over the last decades has also shown a decline in population growth. Infrastructural support and access to basic services (water, roads etc.) is significant for encouraging women getting involved in literacy classes. UNICEF (2016) highlights that in rural areas the supply of clean water is a necessity; women and girls spend a minimum 200 million hours collecting this valuable resource. The UN agency noted that it was usually women and girls who devoted most of their time in such activities. Therefore, it is imperative to effectively implement bold plans to tackle the shortcomings and make it easier for women and girls to have access to the basic necessities of life. Only then can women be motivated to break through their daily activities to carve out a better future for themselves. This study indicates that strategic partnerships are necessary to make education a potent weapon for change.

Policies need to be gender sensitized by creating opportunities which release women from household duties. One such area could be the delivery of basic services in rural areas. In most places in rural India anganwadis (child care facilities) release women to pursue economic activities increasing their capacity for productive roles which will have future implications. To facilitate women empowerment men and boys should engage men in the process because women do not lead isolated lives—they live in families. This in turn will improve the economic status of men and boys. Lastly, investment in literacy measures is often skewed and the government needs to step up efforts on inclusion. Investment in ICT can open up a vista of opportunity for rural women. As most women shared mobile phones, it helped to open up livelihoods opportunity.

It has been pointed out that the Indian society has been facing major challenges not only from the caste-based inequalities, but also from religion and regional disparities (Rajalakshmi, 2013). A system of privileges and deprivation has been created when certain diversities by
passing through the process of differentiation have become hierarchical with the passage of time. Language, caste, region, religion, and physical space could be considered important elements when chalking out gender smart policies effecting rural and marginalized women in the Indian subcontinent.

10.3 Suggestions for Further Research

For the very first time in India Census 2011 indicates that the gap in literacy rate between urban and rural areas and between males and females has also declined. The India Country Report 2014 on the progress towards the MDG Goals also lay emphasis that Goal 3 which is to promote gender equality and empowerment of women is on track (GOI, 2014). The primary focus of the MDG report is on reducing gender gap in education by monitoring girls’ enrolment on primary, secondary and tertiary levels of education.

This comparative study could deepen our insights about the diversities that exists in the Indian subcontinent.

- Case studies would deepen our insights about the cultural context of the states to gain better insights into the problems faced by rural and marginalized women.

- Qualitative studies need to be carried out amongst the communities of the target groups to enhance knowledge and to make policies more context specific and effective. This would enable policy makers to align interventions both vertically and horizontally. If achieved adult literacy will be instrumental in alleviating poverty, improving maternal health, reducing child mortality and creating an environment for sustainable development.

- The broader implications of carrying out the study spells out the goals indicated in the SDG 2030 Agenda that has been proclaimed by world leaders in September 2015. It expounds that economically sustainable poverty reduction requires a process of poverty oriented structural transformation to reach the unreached. In rural areas possible reforms undertaken can examine women’s equal rights to economic resources as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of
property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources in conjunction with national laws (Ahmed, 2016).

- In implementing the agenda, the vision is to transform lives through education and recognizes the important role of education as a main driver of development and in achieving the other proposed SDGs. Literacy practices should develop and shift over the lifecycle. To achieve positive and sustained change for women and girls one needs to focus on girls and women as active agents of change (Wetheridge, 2016).

- The need to examine the use of technology could be vital to reduce the gender gap and realize the full potential of ICT. A renewed vow to converge development efforts by including women as key actors in a society increasingly dependent on technology. If rural and marginalized women do not receive adequate training their access to employment opportunities is limited which in turn has severe ramifications for their social, political and economic inclusions.

- This study evidenced the strong linkages between literacy learning and wider outcomes. If women are to enjoy the benefits of literacy, then it is imperative that gender planners need to take into consideration the institutionalization of gender roles which begin in household rules and practices that appear to be non-negotiable. This private domain is the space where gender inequality resonates. Women must be motivated to step out of this boundary to embrace literacy as the vehicle of transformation.

The SDGs have raised hopes of real change for women and gender equality. The Leave No-One Behind Agenda of the SDGs opens the door to an intersectional analysis of power that brings forth the economic, political and social marginalization. These aspects are associated to the experience ‘of being left behind’. The Leave No-One Behind showcases the issues faced by women in poverty in the global South that stems from not only poverty but being caught at the intersection of different dimensions of inequality including class and socio-economic settings adding further to their misery (Esquivel & Sweetman, 2016). To achieve sustainable development it is imperative that resources reach the poorest
of the poor (Dutt, 2012). In her article Razavi (2016) articulates that the inclusion of gender inequalities in the division of ‘unpaid care and domestic work’ as one of the hard-one targets in the 2030 Agenda. Its inclusion draws attention to the inequalities lived by women and the need to restructure public policies to provide infrastructural support, thereby endorsing the imperative need to redistribute responsibility between families and society. Adult literacy is a tool by which women empowerment and equality can be advanced, it is a critical component to build a just and fair society for future generations in which both men and women can actively contribute to promote sustainable communities.
APPENDIX A

List of Documents Analysed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sources: Multi/bilateral agencies/national government</th>
<th>International/National Documents/Reports</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>The Millennium Development Goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNESCO INRULED (200)</td>
<td>Education for Rural Transformation: Towards a Policy Framework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNESCO (2012)</td>
<td>From Access to Equality Empowering Women and Girls through Literacy and Secondary Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India Human Development Report (2011)</td>
<td>India Human Development Index. Towards Social Exclusion</td>
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</table>
APPENDIX B

The Interview Guide

Gender Relations: (structure, resources within the personal sphere)
Household demography—includes the contextual setting—background information such as age, sex, type of household i.e. male household head with spouse, nuclear, extended, polygamous, single-female headed/single male headed
Reasons for single-headed households: single mother, widow/widower, spouse migrated permanently, spouse migrated temporarily, separated/divorced, wife within a polygamous family, education, livelihood activities, expenditures, relationships within the family before and after marriage i.e. with children, husband, in-laws, parents

Education/Leaning (non-formal education/non-formal education)
Define learning in the contextual setting. What is important for their children to learn? How much has learning influenced their lives? Is it useful? Elaborate in either case. (for e.g. Financial independence, partake in decision making at home or children’s education)

C. Transformation/Empowerment
Financial autonomy: currently controls her earnings, shares her earnings in household income
Education: belief in daughter’s education, freedom of movement
Participation in government/community based intervention programs, providing a platform for disadvantaged women to alleviate their status
Access and participation in community/organizations related activities, participation in political meetings at the community level, women’s capacity to define their own life choices
Interview Guide for the Focus Group

- Has non-formal /informal education benefitted you and your family? How? Elaborate
- What kind of empowerment have you achieved within your family and the society? When did you notice or become aware of this transformation?
- What does it mean to you? Elaborate
- Define transformation in your words
- What are your recommendations/ future plans?

Interview Guide for Civil Society/Stakeholders

- Background-previous experience
- Years /months engaged in the present organization
- Program, vision of the organization, thoughts, personal experience in the field
- Has there been a change in improving livelihoods/difference made by the organization-how is it reflected/visible (standard of living, children going to school especially girls, delay in girls getting married, self-help groups, community building)?
- Would you call it transformation-elaborate?
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List of Publications (Studies in Comparative and International Education
ISSN 0348-9523)
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