

School Level Educational Landscape with respect to Poverty in some Coastal Blocks of South 24 Parganas District: A Synoptic View

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Abstract

Poverty is one of the most important socioeconomic problems in developing and less developed countries. It hinders the progress of a nation. Poverty erodes economic and social rights such as the right to health, adequate housing, food, safe drinking water and right to education. Due to globalisation the demand of higher education is increasing day by day. But for the quantitative and qualitative development of education it requires huge expenditure in the educational field. In such a circumstance - poverty is one of the most vivid problems for the spread of education in poor socioeconomic regions of a country. Better educational infrastructure can support better educational opportunities for the students. The South 24 Parganas district is situated to the extreme southern part of West Bengal. At present there are 29 blocks in this district. The southern part of the district is under the Indian Sundarban region, adjacent to the Bay of Bengal. The coastal blocks of South 24 Parganas district are Basanti-I, Canning-I&II, Gosaba, Jaynagar-I&II, Kakdwip, Sagar, Namkhana, Patharpratima, Kultali, Mathurapur-I&II. The people living here are facing high poverty and natural calamities. These two together causes very poor educational development. More than 33% of population are lying below poverty line. Poor educational infrastructure and high poverty ratio hinders the human development in this area. So the present paper tries to present a synoptic view of poverty and school level educational infrastructure in some of the selected coastal blocks of South 24 Parganas District of West Bengal.

Keywords : Poverty, coastal blocks of South 24 Parganas district, very poor educational development, human development, synoptic view.

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Introduction: -

The coastal part of the South 24 Parganas district consists of 13 blocks namely Canning I & II, Basanti, Gosaba, Jayanagar I & II, Mathurapur I & II, Kultali, Patharpratima, Kakdwip, Namkhana, and Sagar Block. Almost all the blocks of the Indian Sundarbans are detached from the mainland South 24 Parganas except Jayanagar I&II, Mathurapur, Kakdwip and Canning block. This area is very remote from the city of Kolkata. High poverty and lack of education is a part and parcel of the life of the people who are living in this coastal zone. It appears that natural calamities like flood, cyclone, embankment breaching, saline water intrusion and very poor socio-economic background influence the development of the school educational landscape here.

As per 2011 Census, the South 24 Parganas District had a total population of 8161961. Out of this population - 6074188 persons are living in rural areas (i.e., 74.42% of the total population) while 2087773 persons (i.e., 25.58% of the total population) live in urban areas.

The blocks closed to the mainland have high population density whereas the blocks which have very poor transportation accessibility have low population density. Most of the people here are struggling with the nature. Most of the people belong to SC, ST and Minority communities. The total population has been gradually increasing year after year. But the land resource, natural resource, agricultural resource and other resources are limited. Consequently, there is huge population pressure on these coastal low lying blocks like Kakdwip, Sagar, Namkhana, Patharpratima, Gosaba and Basanti. So, people living here are facing with high poverty as well as very poor educational infrastructure and development. More than 33% of the population is living below the poverty line. Due to poor socio-economic background, the people have very little scope to send their children to school for a better and higher level of education. The family income of these areas is very poor.

Objectives: -

The main objectives of this study have been listed below:

- i) To analyse the status of poverty and educational infrastructure in the Coastal areas of South 24 Parganas district.
- ii) To explain the relationship between human poverty and educational development in the Study area.
- iii) How poverty affects the educational development among the coastal communities.
- iv) To suggest proper management options for the coastal villagers.

Materials & Methods Used

For the preparation for the present research paper I have used and consulted census data of South 24 Parganas District, Govt. Of India (2001 & 2011), District Statistical Handbook of South 24 Parganas by Bureau of Applied & Economics and Statistics, Govt. of West Bengal, District Human Development report South 24 Parganas(2009) by the development & Planning department Govt. of West Bengal. Both quantitative and qualitative techniques

applied for data analysis as well as interpretation of the many facts. Interview and field observations also followed. Major research tools are questionnaire survey, interview and field observation. Statistical tools like Pie Graph, Bar Graph have also applied to analyse the statistical data. Spearman's Rank Correlation Coefficient method has been applied to find out the relationship between percentage of BPL household and Educational status of the BPL households.

Results and Discussions:

(A) Poverty Scenario:

Poverty is one of the major indicators of the socio-economic structure of rural households. In the district of South 24 Parganas it was estimated from the rural household survey which reveals that more than 5 lakhs of households had been identified as below poverty line households. The six blocks which are under my study area also facing from poverty. Very high poverty ratio can be seen among these blocks. The poverty rate among all the blocks of the coastal South 24 Parganas district is very high [vide Table 1 below]. From the rural household survey, 2005 it can be seen that more than 50% of the households are living below the poverty line. The poverty ratio and the standard of living index are very closely related in the blocks of Kakdwip, Sagar, Namkhana, Pathrpratima, Gosaba and Basanti. Basanti block is the poorest among all the blocks of the Indian Sundarban. In this block 64.89 % of households are living the below poverty line. Kakdwip is much more developed block among the 6 blocks which are under my study. In these blocks 34.91 % households are living below the poverty line.

Table 1. Poverty Scenario of the blocks of the coastal South 24 Parganas district

Block Name	Standard of Living Index	Poverty Ratio (% of Households)
Kakdwip	.41	34.91
Sagar	.34	44.46
Namkhana	.34	48.17
Patharpratima	.35	49.13
Gosaba	.38	38.03
Basanti	.30	64.89

[Source : District Human Development Report (2009) South 24 Parganas ; Development and Planning Dept. Government of West Bengal]

If we consider the case of standard living we find that highest standard of living index among the six blocks, the Kakdwip block has the highest value (.41) and the lowest value can be found in the block of Basanti (.30).

(B) Food Security:

Poverty level of the households can be assessed by the levels of food security. The three major components of the livelihood system are food, clothing and housing. But, the Food

Security scenario is very poor at the coastal blocks of the South 24 Parganas district [vide Table 2 below]. At the district level, almost 18% of the households suffer from food insecurity. If we consider the block level situation in terms of food security, it reveals that the Sundarban blocks are the worst hit region. More than 10% of the households in the entire Indian Sundarban suffer from food insecurity. It means that they can't even manage one square meal every day year round. Among the studied blocks, Basanti is the worst affected block where 37% of households are suffering from food insecurity. Kakdwip block is comparatively much more developed than other blocks which are under my study. Patharpratima and Sagar block have more than 25% households which are struggling to manage 1 square meal a day.

Table 2. Food Security Scenario of the blocks of the coastal South 24 Parganas district

Block Name	Percentage of Households				
	Less than square meal a day for the major part of a year	Generally one square meal a day, but sometime fails	Generally two square meal a day, but sometime fails	At least two square meal a day during all season	No shortage of food
Kakdwip	4.27	12.08	29.24	36.27	18.15
Sagar	3.82	24.48	40.35	22.38	8.97
Namkhana	5.44	17.11	42.64	24.90	9.91
Patharpratima	7.20	20.17	35.77	25.80	11.06
Gosaba	3.68	11.74	33.15	33.91	17.52
Basanti	11.22	25.71	33.81	22.72	6.54

[Source : Rural household survey 2005.]

(C) Clothing and Housing Condition:

From the rural household survey 2005 it is estimated that 36% of the rural households of South 24 Parganas district cannot effort to wear any winter garments even during cold winter season. The coastal blocks are the most effected blocks in terms of status of clothing. For example more than 57% of the households in Basanti block and 49% in the Patharpratima block do not have winter garments for their own. So most of them lacks in terms of accessibility and affordability of purchasing clothing. They have very poor financial structure. That is why they are not able to make expenditure for winter clothing.

Even after the 70 years of Independence almost 4% of households are house less in the South 24 Parganas district. In Basanti block we find that every 10th household is houseless, where as in Namkhana and Patharpratima blocks more than 6% households do not have own shelter. Most of the families have only single bedroom. In the blocks like Basanti and Gosaba less than 10% households have opportunity of living partially pucca or pucca houses. During floods and cyclones these are easily collapsed by wind, wave and other processes. At present the central and state govt. projects like Indira Abas Yojona and housing project for the poor helped to improve the situation.

(D) Ownership of Consumer Goods:

From the rural household survey 2005 we have got quite disappointing picture in terms of possession of essential consumer goods are concerned. We have found that more than 30% households possess one of the consumer goods like cycle, radio, television, electric fan, pressure cooker. But the amazing fact is that more than 70% have at least one mobile phone. More than 75% households in Basanti, Namkhana, Gosaba and Patharpratima blocks either do not have any of the good or possess only one. Only 5% of the households have all consumer goods or any one of the goods like computer, refrigerator, colour television electrical goods, costly furniture, motor bike, commercial vehicle, tractor, power tiller, cooking gas connection etc.

(E) Employment Trend and Occupational diversifications:

The people of the coastal blocks of the South 24 Parganas district are facing an acute problem of employment opportunities and they have very little access for collecting livelihood options. The constraints of physical and social vulnerabilities decrease the opportunities of livelihood options. Even the local people are forced to migrate from their native lands for earning so that they can run their families well. Very few households have own agricultural land and secured income level. The work participation rate both for male and female are very poor as compared with district and state level scenario.

From the census data employment trend and occupational diversification [vide Table 3 & Table 4 below] can be analysed. While considering the male and female workers it is seen that female work participation rate is very low in comparison with male workers. Only 12% of the female workers are engaged in any kind of economic activity in the district. Only 5% workers are engaged in as men workers as compared to 42% of male workers. There is very little scope of increasing percentage of population in the employment sector. Agricultural activity is the main occupation of the people of the Sundarban region. Most of the people are working as cultivator, agricultural labour, household and industrial workers, and forest, river and sea dependent fishing activities. Monthly family income of most of the households is very poor. At present the dependency on nontechnical activities are gradually increasing. But all such activities are not sufficient to eradicate the poverty of their families.

Table 3. Block wise distribution of workers at the blocks of the coastal South 24 Parganas district

Block Name	Main Worker		Marginal Worker		Non Worker	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Kakdwip	53706	5919	28027	13011	62387	118913
Sagar	38309	6854	23707	16011	47452	79704
Namkhana	37212	4704	15790	8193	40349	76582
Patharpratima	56325	8780	41819	34077	71278	119544
Gosaba	43720	7274	32096	27906	50094	85508

Basanti	59948	10078	34265	27753	77066	127607
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[Source : Census Data 2011, Government of India.]

Table 4. Occupational diversification at the blocks of the coastal South 24 Parganas district

Block Name	Cultivator	Agricultural Labour	Household Industry worker	Other worker
Kakdwip	10440	14625	1761	32799
Sagar	13785	14463	1210	15705
Namkhana	11421	10839	893	18763
Patharpratima	17007	24312	1617	22169
Gosaba	14425	23194	1178	12197
Basanti	18586	27453	4018	19969

[Source : Census Data 2011, Government of India.]

(F) Educational Status:

Insufficient physical infrastructure and lack of other material resources often influence the quality of teaching as well as educational opportunities in the low lying coastal blocks of the Indian Sundarban. The number of primary schools is vast and widespread in the entire region. But there is huge lack of secondary and higher secondary schools in terms of needs of the locality. One secondary and higher secondary school has to feed more than 5 primary schools. It means that one secondary and higher school has to serve a very large population in the block. Similarly one secondary and higher secondary school serve a very large area than primary schools. It indicates that the students incur huge loss in terms of time and travelling cost for attending the school. As a result it can be found that there is irregular attendance and drop out from the schools. Thus it is very necessary to extend the network of secondary and higher secondary schools in the entire locality.

The average population served per secondary and higher secondary school is very high. It ranges between 10,000 – 15,000 in the blocks of the whole Sundarban region. Among the studied blocks Sagar Island serves the least amount while Patharpratima block serves the highest number of students. The inaccessibility is an important determining factor behind poor educational attainment among the blocks of the coastal region of South 24Parganas. At an average a secondary and a higher secondary school serves more than 10 square km area. In Namkhana, Patharpratima and Basanti block it has been found that the values are 16.84, 11.82 and 18.37 sq. kms., respectively. For example the Gosaba and Patharpratima blocks are criss-crossed by so many tidal rivers. The blocks are divided into so many small islands. So the students have to travel from one island to another to attend the schools. It is a huge time and money loss as well as there is possibility of boat capsizing and other accidents on the water and road ways. So the inaccessibility of schools from their residence discourages the parents to send their children to high schools. There are very few schools where hostel facilities are available.

The district level authorities provide some basic amenities like drinking water and sanitation facilities in secondary and higher secondary schools [vide Table 5 & Table 6 below]. There are only 10 percent schools where sanitation and drinking water facilities are absent. For providing safe drinking water special attention needs to be given. At present all schools are not enjoying computer facilities. The computer skill is very much essential for the student.

Table 5. Provisions of Higher Secondary School Level Infrastructure

Block Name	No. of H.S. School	Student	Teacher	Teacher-Student Ratio	Average Area Served in Sq.km.	Number of School Not Having Drinking Water Facility	Number of School Not Having Toilet Facility
Kakdwip	15	19445	287	1: 67	6.48	1	1
Sagar	6	9317	117	1: 80	9.10	1	0
Namkhana	7	11430	165	1: 69	16.84	0	0
Patharpratima	10	14318	182	1: 79	11.82	2	0
Gosaba	10	12527	191	1: 66	7.42	4	2
Basanti	9	16776	172	1: 97	18.37	4	0

Table 6. Spatial distribution of Secondary and Higher Secondary School level Infrastructure at the blocks of the coastal South 24 Parganas district

Block Name	No. of School	No. of School not having Library Facility	No. of School not having Computer Facility	Average no. of Teachers per School
Kakdwip	39	0	30	9.03
Sagar	31	0	27	9.42
Namkhana	22	0	18	8.64
Patharpratima	41	0	38	88
Gosaba	40	1	39	8.28
Basanti	22	0	22	8.91

[Source for both the Tables 5 & 6: District Statistical Handbook 2009, South 24 Parganas, Bureau of Applied Economics and Statistics, Government of West Bengal.]

(G) Relation between Poverty and Education :

The poverty and education are the two important factors of the development of a society. These two are directly and indirectly dependent on one another. The components of poverty like family income and expenditure, housing status, food security, clothing condition, basic facilities of livelihood etc. affect the literacy rate, school enrolment, drop out, educational achievement and employment opportunities in any region. The studied blocks are no exception to this fact.

Among the six studied blocks an attempt (applying the Spearman Correlation method) has been made though this study to find out the relationship between poverty and education [vide

Table 7 below]. Here percentage of BPL household and percentage of households' educational status (educational level from class XI to Graduate) has been taken into account. Spearman's rank correlation coefficient method has been followed here to find out the relationship between the two variables. Here correlation coefficient value is -0.6 . So a negative correlation has been found in between percentage of BPL households and Educational status. It means that if percentage of BPL households increases in these coastal blocks, then educational status of the households there get lowered down.

Table 7. Relationship between poverty and education at the blocks of the coastal South 24 Parganas district

Block Name	Percentage of BPL Household (X)	Rank of X (R _x)	Percentage of Household Educational Status XI To Graduate (Y)	Rank of Y (R _y)	(R _x -R _y) ²
Kakdwip	34.91	6	11.48	4	4
Sagar	44.46	4	13.27	3	1
Namkhana	48.17	3	13.32	2	1
Pathar Pratima	49.13	2	7.70	5	9
Gosaba	38.03	5	16.75	1	16
Basanti	64.89	1	7.02	6	25

(H) Poverty and Drop out status of the Children of the Households at the blocks of the coastal South 24 Parganas district :

Poverty and Drop out status of the children of the surveyed Households at the blocks of the coastal South 24 Parganas district have been represented in the Table 8 below.

Table 8. Poverty and Drop out status of the children of the surveyed Households at the blocks of the coastal South 24 Parganas district

Block Name	Poverty ratio (% of household)	% of dropout children (9 to 14 years age)
Kakdwip	34.91	90.77
Sagar	44.46	88.30
Namkhana	48.17	85.64
Pataharpratima	49.13	85.23
Gosaba	38.03	80.59
Basnti	64.89	83.64

[Source: - District Human Development Report, 2009 (South 24 Parganas) ,Gov. Of West Bengal.]

Major findings:

The major findings from this study have been enlisted below:

- i. Among the studied 6 blocks of the Indian Sundarban region Basanti block is the most affected block in terms of poverty and educational status and Kakdwip block is much more developed than other Bros blocks of the Indian Sundarban.
- ii. In all the blocks poor educational infrastructure has been found in terms of conditional of school building, house condition of the people, poor pupil teacher ratio etc.
- iii. Negative correlation has been found between household poverty and academic status of the household.
- iv. Regional variation has been found among the coastal blocks of South 24 Parganas District on difference component of poverty and educational status of the house hold.

Conclusion:

Both from the government and non-government levels, proper management options have to be taken to eradicate poverty and to improve the qualitative and quantitative aspects of educational development of the coastal communities of the South 24 Parganas District. Human security, employment opportunity, better standard of living and infrastructural development will help to improve the situation of the study area.

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