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Violent extremism and education: A study in a tribal village of Junglemahal in West Bengal

RESEARCH PAPER

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ABSTRACT

Education is one of the vital aspects of every society and it plays a crucial role in human development. It also acts as a tool for the improvement of the standard of living and for attainment of healthy life. As per the 2011 census report, literacy rate in West Bengal is 77.08%, which is above the national figure of 74.04%. The literacy rate of tribal population in India is only 58.96%, which is much lower than the overall literacy rate. The situation is becoming further aggravated with an increasing gap in the event of the left-wing extremism that has been building up across the entire red corridor region of India. In West Bengal the Junglemahal area falls under the region and was under the 'greatest security threats', and shows the similar trend. In this study, we have tried to examine the educational scenario in Junglemahal area during the peak of the extremist movement with a case study on a tribal village in Paschim Medinipur district, from where the Junglemahal movement started in 2008. The village has been severely affected by the Maoist violence. It has been observed that the most of the educational institutions remained closed in Junglemahal during the violent movement particularly during 2008 to 2010. The phase also witnessed the arrest of some students on suspicion that they could be the Maoist supporters or activists. Under this circumstance, most of the school-going children stopped to attend school. In the present study, we have also tried to identify the reason(s) behind the increase of dropout rate in this study area and to substantiate what was actually occurred with the drop-out children under this volatile situation. It is further observed that after the movement became week particularly after the new State Government came into power in 2011 no initiative was taken to bring back the drop-out students into academic institutions. The movement was originated from the Naxalbari movement of 1967. Though the presence of the so-called ultra-left activists was felt in Junglemahal since the end of 1990s, their movement became public in 2008 under the banner of the People's Committee against Police Atrocities (PCPA). It started from a tribal village named Chhotopelia of Binpur-I Block in the erstwhile Pashchim Medinipur (presently Jhargarm) district. During this movement, most of educational institutes in and around Chhotopelia were closed since the most of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) camps were housed in these schools.

Key Words: Extremist violence, Tribe, Junglemahal, Education, Drop-out

INTRODUCTION

Violent extremism is one of the most talked about topics in academia particularly after birth of the ISIS and the incidence of 26/11. Generally it is of political or religious nature. The attack in Paris in recent past, Buddhist attack on the Rohingas (Muslim) in Myanmar, the Maoist attacks

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across the red corridor in India, terrorist attacks in different parts in the world - all are instances of violent extremism. Such extremism involves loss of life and resources. But the most crucial impact of such extremism appears to be on the field of education system of an affected area. This is because education is one of the crucial instruments for imparting development and change in any society. The real meaning of education is nothing less than a total and integrated approach to the life of an individual for pleasant development of his/her whole personality in relation to the community to which he/she belongs (Das Gupta, 1963). It mainly focuses on all round development of man for his/ her physical, mental and moral well-being. Education is also considered to be an important asset that leads to better health and nutrition, improved socio-economic condition, and better environment for all.

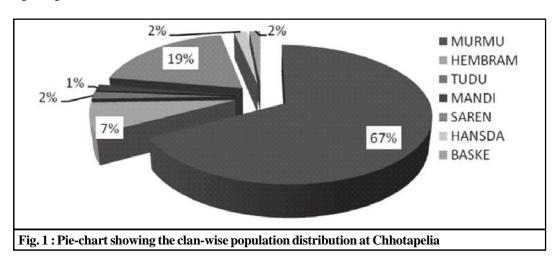
In tribal society in particular education is the one and only tool to improve their society and to have inclusive development. It also helps the socio-economically and educationally backward peoples to enter into the mainstream society. Education is a lifelong process by which an individual acquires and accumulates knowledge, skills, attitudes and insight. Education and economy are always linked to each other not only in tribal society but elsewhere. A large proportion of wastage and drop outs could be explained in terms of the use of children by the parents for economic purposes. In such situation the girl students outnumber the boys in wastage and drop outs. This is because in tribal and other disadvantaged communities girls are preferred to look after the household work in absence of their parents and to earn money by making leaf-plates and other handicrafts.

In India left-wing extremism has been on the rise across the red corridor region particularly since its inception with the Telengana insurgency in 1940s. In West Bengal the Junglemahal area become affected by such extremist activities since 1990s under the leadership of the Maoist activists. The Junglemahal area encompasses the forested area of Paschim Medinipur, Jhargram, Purilia and Bankura districts. Here violent extremism witnessed its peak under the banner of *Pulici Santras* Birodhi Janasadharaner Committee (People's Committee against Police Atrocities) so far during the period from 2008 to 2010. Everything was under the control of the Maoist activists during this phase and the 'counter-insurgency forces' of the government was trying to bring the situation under their control. Both the embattling forces were found not to care about human rights of the people living at Junglemahal, an area mostly populated by the tribal people whose livelihood basically centres round the forest. In the study area during the violent movement many of the educational intuitions were housed by the security forces. And though a few institutions remained open, the teachers and students were absent owing to the bloody movement. Many school-going children were arrested by the police on suspicion that they could be the Maoist supporters or activists. On the fear of preventive action of police most of the children stopped going to their educational institutions. It was also reported that when the movement became week with the coming of the new government into power, no initiative was taken to bring the dropped-out students back to schools or colleges. In light of the above scenario we have attempted to examine the actual situation related to education at Junglemahal area with a case study in a tribal village in Paschim Medinipur district. The study aimed at displaying the scenario of educational institution during Maoist movement in the study area, identifying the reasons behind the increase of dropout rate, and substantiating what actually occurred with the children under this volatile situation.

METHODOLOGY

For the present study we have selected Chhotapelia village in Lalgarh Police Station under

Binpur-I block in the erstwhile Pashchim Medinipur (presently Jhargarm) district. This is a typical tribal village inhabited exclusively by the Santals. The Santals are the largest tribal group in West Bengal and the second largest tribal group in India. The village is located under the Sijua Gram Panchayat. It is a relatively small village comprising 82 Santal families. The total population of the village is 399, with 208 males and 191 females. The village is located approximately 45 km away from Midnapore town, the district headquarter, and about 8km from Lalgarh Police Station. There are seven Santal clans in this village. These are the Murmu, Hembram, Tudu, Mandi, Saren, Hansda and Baske. The Murmu is the largest clan comprises 67 per cent of the total population of the village (Fig. 1).



For the present study both qualitative and quantitative methods were employed. The required data were obtained through the major anthropological methods like interview, case study and observation, and through the techniques like using household survey schedules, questionnaires, mapping, etc. Snowball technique was used to identify the drop-out students. Most of the information was self-declared by the respondents. These are not verified by any official records. For analysis of the data, SPSS 16.0 software and MS-Excel were used.

Genesis of the maoist movement in the study area:

The so-called left-wing extremist movement led by the Maoists has been one of the greatest internal security threats for the Indian State as argued by the former Indian Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh on April 21, 2010 (Indian Express, 2010). This statement was given in the context of the violent incidence occurred at Chintalnar in Dantewara district of Chhattisgarh on 6 April 2010, in which 76 security personnels were killed in a Maoist attack. The Indian State has been facing the problem of left revolutionary violence since more than seven decades back, but in recent past the conflict has attained its new height. Though Indian state has been challenged by several conflicts in terms of violent activities, the Maoist uprise can be regarded as one of the most serious threats (Bendfeldt, 2010). The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), Government of India states that there are 223 districts in 20 states affected by this movement (Sahni and Singh, 2010). Out of these 20 states 16 states are severely affected (Sen, 2009). This particular region is referred to as the red corridor and comprises the most underdeveloped as well as the poorest region of the country. High percentage of tribal population (*adivasis*), untouchables (*dalits*) and other vulnerable groups inhabit

the region. The poor, exploited and excluded people are mobilized by the Maoist activists.

Indian sovereignty has been challenged by the revolutionary groups led by the Maoist ideology. The Maoist movement owes its origin to the Telengana insurgency of 1940s (Sundarayya, 1972; Kennedy and Purushotham, 2012). In West Bengal its root may be traced back to the Naxalbari movement of 1967 (Kujur, 2008). Presence of the left-wing extremists in Junglemahal area of West Bengal was felt since the end of 1990s (Midya, 2014). However, the movement became public in 2008 under the banner of the People's Committee against Police Atrocities (PCPA).

In Junglemahal of West Bengal the extremist movement was initiated from Chhotapelia, a tribal village under Binpur-I block in the erstwhile Pashchim Medinipur (presently Jhargarm) district. The starting point of the movement was the Salboni incidence. On 2nd November, 2008 the convoy of the former Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharya and the Union Minister Mr. Ram Vilas Paswan and Mr. Jitin Prasad, when on their return journey from the programme of inauguration of the Jindal Steel plant at Salboni, came under a land mine attack by the Maoist activists. Though the Minsters were not injured, a police jeep was badly damaged by this explosion and six police personnels were seriously injured. After this incidence the CPI (Maoist) accepted the responsibility of the explosion and they clearly said that they were strongly opposing setting up of the Steel Plant in the tribal land and their main target was the then Chief Minister of West Bengal.

After the incidence the then West Bengal police came out with retaliation measures. They carried out raids across the entire Lalgarh police station area. Polices came out heavily with physical torture over the *adivasi* peoples, including the women and children to find out the activists. Our study area is located in this region where an organization named the Peoples Committee against Police Atrocities (PCPA) came into existence to resist police atrocities. However, during this movement, most of the educational institutions in and around Chhotapelia were closed since the most of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) camps were housed in these schools. The phase also witnessed the arrest of some students on suspicion that they could have been supporters of the Maoists. Under this circumstance, most of the school-going children stopped attending schools.

Access to educational institutions during extremist violence :

There is one Public Literacy Centre (P.L.C.) and an *Anganwadi* (ICDS) centre located at the centre of Chhotapelia village. A Primary school is located in the in the endpoint of the village. For Madhyamik and Higher Secondary levels study many children used to attend school at Kantapahari, which is approximately 2.5 KM away from the village and some children are found to go to Lalgarh and Ramgarh, which are approximately 6 KM away from the village. For higher education they generally used to go to Lalgarh College and Koima College, which are located approximately 8 KM away from Chhotopelia. During the Maoist violence in this study area all the educational institutions remained closed due to housing of CRPF camp and fear of the violence. Therefore, most of the school teachers were absent as they were facing life risk.

Maoists were postering at the every wall of schools. Some teachers received phone calls from the activists, who dictated not to attend schools. Students were also afraid of attending schools because of the police harassment and Maoist violence. Many students in this study area were arrested by the police as suspected Maoist activists or informers of the Maoists or the supporters of this movement (Case I). Some students saw their parents' harassment by police force and ultimately decided to join or support the Maoist for taking revenge against the police (Case II). Most of the girl students under eighteen years became drop-out because of this extremist movement. To protect from police harassment their parents married off them at the areas outside the affected

region (Case III).

Teachers were in dilemma since they were asked by the Maoists to keep schools closed and at the same time, pressurized by the administration to keep schools open. However, most of the schools were used to house the joint forces to counter the Maoists and eventually remained closed (Case IV).

Case I:

Name of the informant: Fulin Murmu (name changed), son of Chhitamoni Murmu Age: 27 Sex: Male

According to him, in 2008 when he was returning from his school (Kantapahari High School), a police jeep stopped in front of him and the personnels asked him about the Maoist. When he told them that he had no idea about them, they did not believe him and put him into their jeep. After reaching Lalgarh police station they took him under their custody. Some days later, when he was released from their custody, there was no environment for study. The schools were closed. Nobody was found going to schools. But on 2011a new Government came into power and the movement was stopped. But there was no initiative to bring them back to schools again. He became a dropped out for ever.

Case II:

Name of the Informant :Paban Hembram (name changed), son of Hiralal Hembram Age: 26 years

Sex: Male

When he was studying in Class IX at Kantapahari High School, polices came to raid his house to find out the weapons and to get his father. They asked his mother about his father who was said to be a Maoist cadre. In the name of searching polices were harassing his mother and him. His father left the house for sometimes. In absence of his father it was not possible for his mother to running their family affairs smoothly. He then decided to go to Gujarat for some work during the movement. But after the movement was over, he returned from Gujarat and tried to get readmission in their school, but eventually failed to do that. Government did not take any initiative for their education again and to improve their economic condition.

Case-III:

Name of the Informant: Mamoni Saren (name changed), wife of Hapan Saren Age: 24 Sex: Female

Mamoni Saren is a housewife at a village under Sarenga police station. When she studied in class X at Kantapahari High School, one day she saw that her neibouring houses were being raided and the women and children of the houses were harassed by the polices. Her family was also afraid of such harassment. When the PCPA came into being they came forward to support the committee. After this support to the Maoists, they were also pressurized to attend their meeting and to obey their decision. It was an intolerable situation for them to keep words of both the police and the Maoists. Under such circumstances, her parents decided to let her married off. At that time she was only at approximately 15 years. After marriage, she discontinued her study.

Case-IV:

Name of the respondent: Shisir Mahato (name changed)

School: Kantapahari High School

Shisir Mahato is a teacher of Kantapahari High School. During movement, the Maoists were postering at his school premises demanding closure of their institution. They had no way to denounce them. But Government ordered them to keep the school open. They were in dilemma. However, after a few months when the CRPF personnels housed at the school, the school was completely closed for long time.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Extremist violence and dropout scenario:

Literacy rates of the Scheduled Tribe and combined populations in Paschim Medinipur district are relatively higher than those in West Bengal as well as in India (Table 1). But literacy rate in comparatively low at Chhotapelia which is a tribal village (Table 2). Furthermore, since the entire region is affected by violent extremism the education system in and around Chhotapelia was badly affected. Age-sex composition of the village shows that the number of girls in the age groups of <5 years to 15-19 years is less than the boys of the same age groups (Table 3, Fig. 2). In addition to

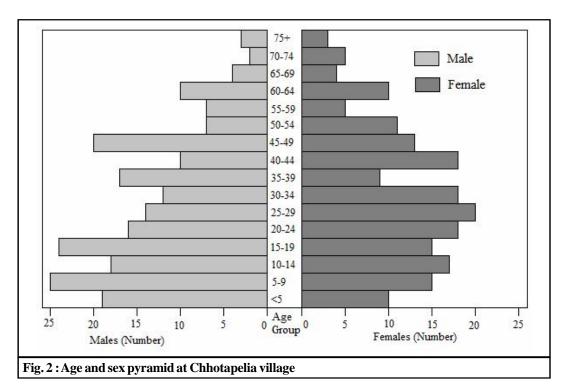
Table 1: Literacy rate in the study area								
India		West Ber	ngal	Paschim Mo	edinipur	Chhota	pelia (ST	village)*
Combined	ST	Combined	ST	Combined	ST	Total	Male	Female
74.04	58.96	76.26	57.92	78.00	62.15	56.89	56.85	43.15

Sources: Census of India 2011 and Fieldwork data, 2015

Table 2 : Percentage distribution of population by Educational status at Chhotapelia (n= 399)																	
Age]	Literate	e						Total
Group	I	lliterat	e	Prin	nary	Jun	ior	Seco	ndary	H.	S.	Grad	luate	P.C	3 &	T	
(in						Hi	gh							oth	ers	_	
yrs.)	M	F	T	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F		
<5	4.76	2.51	7.27	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	7.27
5-9	1.75	0.75	2.50	4.51	2.76	0.00	0.25	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	7.52	10.03
10-14	0.25	0.00	0.25	0.50	0.75	3.01	3.26	0.75	0.25	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	8.52	8.77
15-19	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.75	0.25	1.75	0.25	2.51	2.26	0.75	1.00	0.25	0.00	0.00	0.00	9.78	9.77
20-24	0.50	0.25	0.75	0.75	0.50	1.50	1.50	0.75	1.75	0.25	0.50	0.25	0.00	0.00	0.00	7.77	8.52
25-29	0.50	1.75	2.25	0.25	0.25	1.25	1.25	0.50	1.25	0.75	0.50	0.25	0.00	0.00	0.00	6.27	8.52
30-34	0.25	2.26	2.51	0.75	0.75	1.25	1.00	0.50	0.00	0.25	0.00	0.00	0.50	0.00	0.00	5.01	7.52
35-39	2.01	1.50	3.51	0.50	0.75	0.25	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.25	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.25	0.00	3.01	6.52
40-44	0.75	4.01	4.76	1.00	0.00	0.25	0.50	0.50	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	2.26	7.02
45-49	4.01	2.26	6.27	0.50	0.25	0.50	0.00	0.00	0.75	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	2.00	8.27
50-54	0.75	1.75	2.51	0.50	0.75	0.25	0.25	0.25	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	2.00	4.51
55-59	0.75	1.25	2.01	0.50	0.00	0.50	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	3.01
60-64	1.75	2.26	4.01	0.75	0.25	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	5.01
65-69	1.00	0.75	1.7	0.00	0.25	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.25	2.01
70-74	0.25	1.25	1.50	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.25	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.25	1.75
<u>≥</u> 75	0.50	0.75	1.25	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.25	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.25	1.50
Total	19.77	23.3	43.09	11.28	7.52	10.53	8.27	7.27	6.27	2.26	2.01	0.75	0.50	0.25	0.00	56.89	100.0

this, there are many instances in the village that girls are given marriage at their early age in order to save them from extremist violence.

Age group	M	lale	Fe	male	Total		
(in Yr.)	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
<5	19	4.762	10	2.51	29	7.27	
5-9	25	6.266	15	3.76	40	10.03	
10-14	18	4.511	17	4.26	35	8.77	
15-19	24	6.015	15	3.76	39	9.77	
20-24	16	4.010	18	4.51	34	8.52	
25-29	14	3.509	20	5.01	34	8.52	
30-34	12	3.008	18	4.51	30	7.52	
35-39	17	4.261	09	2.26	26	6.52	
40-44	10	2.506	18	4.51	28	7.02	
45-49	20	5.013	13	3.26	33	8.27	
50-54	07	1.754	11	2.76	18	4.51	
55-59	07	1.754	05	1.25	12	3.01	
60-64	10	2.506	10	2.51	20	5.01	
65-69	04	1.003	04	1.00	08	2.01	
70-74	02	0.501	05	1.25	07	1.75	
<u>≥</u> 75	03	0.752	03	0.75	06	1.50	
Total	208	52.13	191	47.87	399	100.00	



Drop-out rate is comparatively higher among the females here (Table 4, Fig. 3). Drop-out reportedly occurred among the village children due to various reasons such as poverty, family matter, early marriage, lack of infrastructure in educational institution, and violent extremism. Poverty has been the most prominent causal factor for drop-out (50.76%). But the second most prominent cause of drop-out was violent extremism (17.92%) in the region (Table 5, Fig. 4). Another very important reason of drop-out has been marriage at an early age, *i.e.*, before 18 years. Altogether 34.46% persons get married at early age (Table 6). Percentage of marriage at an early age is very high among the girls (32.79%). However, this is only 1.67% for the boys. The drop-out students never came back to educational institutions at Chhotapelia. Thus, extremist violence adds up a considerable number of drop-outs at Chhotapelia. This happened in spite of having a number of welfare schemes introduced by the State Government (Table 7). These schemes are actually meant for attracting children to school and promoting continuance of education.

Table 4: Distribution of dropout cases by age groups						
Age group	Number o	Total				
(in yrs)	Male	Female	No. (%)			
	No. (%)	No. (%)				
5-9	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)			
10-14	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)			
15-19	03 (13.64)	02 (9.09)	05 (22.73)			
20-24	03 (13.64)	09 (40.91)	12 (54.55)			
25-29	03 (13.64)	01 (4.55)	04 (18.18)			
30-34	01 (4.55)	0 (0.00)	01 (4.55)			
Total	10 (45.45)	12 (54.55)	22 (100.00)			

Source: Fieldwork data, 2015

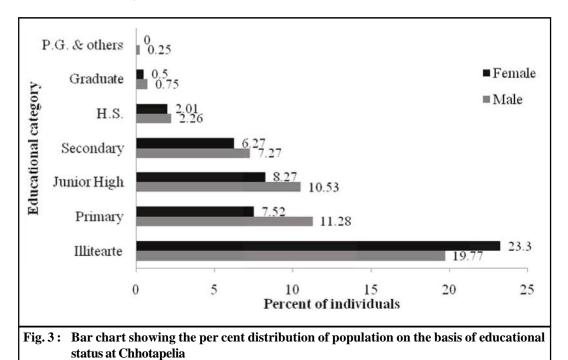


Table 5	Table 5 : Percentage distribution of the drop-outs on the basis of drop-out reasons (n=67)										
Age	Pov	erty	Far	nily	Mar	riage	Lac	k of	Vio	lent	Total
group			ma	tter			infrast	ructure	Extre	mism	
(in yrs)	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	
5-9	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
10-14	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
15-19	8.96	4.48	1.49	1.49	0.00	2.99	1.49	0.00	4.48	0.00	25.37
20-24	5.97	7.46	4.48	2.99	0.00	8.96	1.49	0.00	4.48	2.99	38.81
25-29	4.48	7.46	1.49	1.49	0.00	2.99	0.00	0.00	4.48	0.00	19.40
30-34	5.97	2.99	0.00	1.49	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.49	0.00	11.94
35-39	2.99	0.00	1.49	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	4.48
Total	28.37	22.39	8.95	7.46	0.00	14.94	2.99	0.00	14.93	2.99	100.00

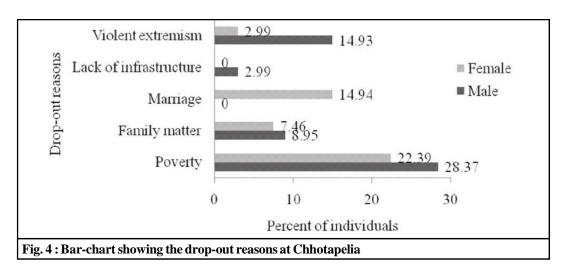


Table 6 : Distribution of married population by the age at first marriage at Chhotapelia								
Age (in year)	Male		Fe	male	Total			
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%		
10	0	0.00	1	0.56	1	0.56		
12	0	0.00	3	1.67	3	1.67		
13	0	0.00	2	1.11	2	1.11		
14	0	0.00	7	3.89	7	3.89		
15	1	0.56	17	9.44	18	10.00		
16	1	0.56	13	7.22	14	7.78		
17	1	0.56	13	7.22	14	7.78		
18	4	2.22	15	8.33	19	10.56		
19	3	1.67	9	5.00	12	6.67		
20	13	7.22	16	8.89	29	16.11		
21	6	3.33	3	1.67	9	5.00		
22	8	4.44	5	2.78	13	7.22		
23	8	4.44	5	2.78	13	7.22		
24	3	1.67	0	0.00	3	1.67		
25	17	9.44	6	3.33	23	12.78		
Total	65	36.11	115	63.89	180	100.00		

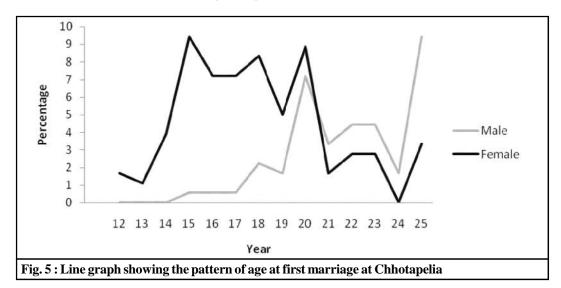


Table 7: Benefit of schemes enjoyed by the students in Chhotapelia						
Name of the schemes	Chhotapelia					
Name of the schemes	No.	%				
Kanyashri	07	14.89				
Yuvasree	02	04.26				
SabujSathi	35	74.47				
Scholarship for hosteller	03	06.38				
Total	47	100.00				

Conclusion:

There are some accounts which argue that status of women in the Dravidian civilization prior to the Aryan invasion in India was quite high (Sinha, 1983; Morgan, 1984; Duley, 1986). But the growth of agrarian economy with an emphasis upon surplus wealth and private property led to subjugation of women in Indian society (O'Kelley and Carney, 1986). In fact, there are many indicators which reflect women's dismal profile compared to that of men's in India. For instance, life expectancy at birth for men is 57 years while it is 52 for women. Literacy of the male is 82.14% as per 2011 census report, whereas it is only 65.46% for females. Daughters are more likely to get malnourished and less likely to get adequate health care (Papanek, 1990; Jain, 1984). Extremist violence appears to be another factor which makes girl students most vulnerable. The present study shows that number of drop-out for the females is higher (54.55%) than that of the males (45.45%). About 32.79% women are married of at an early age outside the violence affected area in order to provide them safe shelter. Thus, violent extremism widens the gap in connection with drop-out rates of the females and males. This pushes women further backward in terms of their educational achievement. This may thus be considered as an important indicator to assess the status of the women in particular. This is also observed that violent extremism increases the rate of early age marriage of girls.

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