

Decision Making Power of Homemakers in a Rural Muslim Community of West Bengal: An Empirical Study

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Abstract

Decision-making power is a vital key for assessing the empowerment of a person. Empowerment increases self-efficacy by which one can control one's mode of life for survival in a better way. It is an established fact that women are the most disempowered section in our society and the rural Muslim women are relatively more oppressed than others as there is the predominance of social-cultural and economic inequality among this minority community. As a result, these women have very limited opportunities to participate in the decision-making process related to their family matters and societal affairs linked with their own lives. Considering this scenario, the present study attempts to examine and analyse the decision-making power of homemakers in rural Muslim communities at micro level, taking Santoshpur village of Murshidabad district, West Bengal, as a case study. The methodology designed for the present study integrates both quantitative and qualitative methods based on field surveys. For this, fifty respondents have been selected using stratified purposive random sampling technique, and data have been acquired through face-to-face interviews through a semi-structured questionnaire. Then, the Cumulative Empowerment Index (CEI) is constructed based on selected eight key indicators to measure respondents' decision-making ability and liberty. Multiple Correlations are also computed, indicating that education and economic dependencies are the most critical determinants influencing women's empowerment and decision-making processes. The study also reveals that the existing rigid cultural system is mainly responsible for the suppression of women's identity as well as their thoughts. But there remains hope for the next-generation girl children as different schemes are being taken up by the Government of West Bengal to promote and popularise women's education at different levels.

Keywords: Decision-Making Power; Muslim Homemakers; Cumulative Empowerment Index; Multiple Correlation; Murshidabad District; West Bengal

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Introduction

Decision-making power is the key that unlocks the empowerment of individuals, especially of the women section in our society. Notably, women's decision-making power is positively correlated with their empowerment level (Yogendrarajah, 2013). Women's empowerment has been the result of the Feminist movement over the past forty years (Cornwall, 2016). At present, it is the most critical issue of gender equality. According to Panigrahy and Bhuyan (2006), empowerment ensures liberty from the socially imposed limitations and duties against the women's freedom (Bukhari and Asim, 2013).

The International Women's Conference (1985) held at Nairobi first upheld the notion of empowerment. The aim was to reduce gender inequality in the distribution of social power and resources. In 2000, the United Nations (UN) framed eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to eradicate poverty. Among these goals, the third MDG was set to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment. Member states of the UN have agreed upon it that gender equality and women's decision-making power are integral parts to the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals (UNDP, 1995; UNDG, 2010). In UN Sustainable Development Summit, 2015, seventeen goals were set as SDG2030. Among these, the 5th goal was focused on gender equality, which aimed to empower women and girls at all levels.

In India, the concept of women's development was first introduced in the sixth five-year plan (1980-85). It got its momentum when empowerment of women women's empowerment was tagged as the main thrust area of the ninth five-year plan (1997-2002), and the year 2001 was observed as the year of women's empowerment at the national level. But the existing deep-rooted traditional and patriarchal social system in developing countries like India curtails the opportunity of women to take part in the decision making process of society, family, or self (Bano, 2014; Malhotra et al., 2002). Very often, rural women have to manage many complex matters related to their

household management and maintain multiple livelihood strategies (Pal and Haldar, 2016) as they are the 'largest marginalized section' in our country (Wahab and Khatun, 2015). The homemakers are the main driving force of the family and society as they maintain the family (Jan and Akhtar, 2008) and engage themselves in different productive activities within the four walls. But more often, the ability of decision making power of rural homemakers are ignored and neglected due to our peculiar orthodox patriarchal family structure where male-headed families are typical in our society (Dutta, 2002; Sinha et al., 2012). On the other hand, the condition of Muslim women is worse than others as they suffer from gender discrimination because of their conservative attitude due to poor educational achievement (Hossain, 2013; Hussain et al., 2018; Kaur and Kaur, 2012). Therefore, it becomes necessary to empower them as they 'continue to be the victims of the traditional social structure of the community' (Saba et al., 2017, p.44). Previous studies have mainly described the educational backwardness and socio-economic condition of Muslim women in India and have identified the key indicators to develop them (Hossain, 2013; Hussain et al., 2018; Sanu, 2018). There are some limited empirical works (Bukhari and Asim, 2013; Kundu and Chakroborty, 2012; Saba et al., 2017; Singh, 2015; Wahab and Khatun, 2015) that have analysed the empowerment of Muslim women. But less attention has been given to women's decision-making power at the grassroots level in general and rural Muslim housewives in particular who have to struggle every day with poverty at one end and gender disparity at the other. Kabeer (2005, p.13) defined empowerment as "the process by which those who have been denied the ability to make choices acquire such ability". Hence it needs a bottom-up approach instead of a top-down approach (Kabeer, 2005). So, the present work has given the emphasis on the empowerment of Muslim women at the grassroots level — rural homemakers. The study examines the ability of these rural homemakers to take decisions in different matters of their families.

It starts with an extensive literature review to have an overview of earlier works on empowerment of women, development of Muslim women, and to find out the research gap and move on to frame the study's specific objectives. The next part describes the sources of data and methodology. After that, an empowerment index is constructed, followed by the analysis of the variables on the decision-making process. Finally, the main findings have been summarised in the concluding section.

Literature Review

There is extensive literature devoted to exploring the concept of 'empowerment' and elaborated on how to measure it rationally in different ways keeping in view gender equality. Rowland (1997) described the process of empowerment from *power over* (controlling power exercised by dominant groups on weaker sections of society) to *power in* (helps to generate new possibilities of someone rather than control over other), *power with* (ability to participate in groups with mutual support and collaboration), and *power from within* (realisation of self-ability and self knowledge), whereas Kabeer (2005) pointed out three elements of empowerment – *agency*, *resource*, and *achievements* that are interrelated.

The studies of Boateng et al. (2012), Gupta and Yesudian (2006), Haque et al. (2011), Kishor and Gupta (2004), Santillàn et al. (2004) have analysed some aspects of economic, socio-cultural and familial or interpersonal domain of empowerment of women at household level. Education has been pointed out as one of the critical factors for the empowerment of these aspects (Gupta and Yesudian, 2006; Lailulo et al. 2015; Malik and Courtney, 2011; Noreen, 2015) on the part of the Muslim women as they lag behind others (Hossain, 2013; Kaur & Kaur, 2012; Siddiqui, 2012; Singh, 2015). On the other hand, Gebru and Demeke (2014), Sharma and Varma (2008), Soetan (1999) have identified that economic stability and economic independence

of women help them to make a decision freely. In this context, micro-credit programmes play an essential role for women who can exercise, though in a limited way, their own choices in family and also in society (Laha and Kuri, 2014; Rathirane and Semasinghee, 2015; Schuler and Hashemi, 1994; Swain and Wallentin, 2011). Some studies (Acharya et al., 2010; Boateng et al., 2012; Mussonera and Heshmati, 2017; Sinha et al., 2012) have identified the women's age as a factor for women's autonomy in developing countries. Their studies have observed the positive relationship between the age of the women and their decision making power. The level of empowerment of women sometimes depends on their ever born child (Mussonera and Heshmati, 2017). This situation narrates the patriarchal structure of the society where women are valued with their reproductive ability in the family and society.

Other studies also found that women's decision-making power not only heightens their status and increases their chances of social inclusion (Cherayi and Jose, 2016) but also help in the sustainable development of society (Bayeh, 2016). In addition, the studies of Crissman et al. (2012), Do and Kurimoto (2012), Lailulo et al. (2015), Phan (2013) and Schuler and Hashemi (1994) have established a positive relationship between women's reproductive health and their level of empowerment.

In India, women have less (23 per cent) freedom to move outside of their home, and only 43 per cent of women have household autonomy (Gupta and Yesudian, 2006). As far as Muslim women are concerned, 17.7 per cent of them had absolutely no freedom to decide regarding their health care, major household purchase, or visit family or relatives (Sanu, 2018). Another study (Hasan and Menon, 2004) revealed that 70 per cent of women of this community have to take permission for the husband's personal, social and familial or health issues. According to Sacher Committee Report (2006),¹ Muslims are a 'double disadvantaged' group than others.

¹Sacher Committee Report—Sacher Committee was formed in 2005 by the then former Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh headed by former Chief Justice of

Delhi High Court Rajinder Sacher to study the socio-economic and educational conditions of Muslims in India. The committee submitted their report on 2006.

According to the Census report of 2011, the literacy rate of the Muslim community is 67.20 per cent which is lower than national average (74.04 per cent). The work participation rate of Muslim women is only 13.99 per cent (mainly engaged in informal system) while that of Christians is 29.2 per cent, followed by Buddhists' 25.8 per cent and Hindus' 19.2 per cent (Hossain, 2013). Poverty among Muslim is 6 per cent higher than the national average (Fazal, 2013). Hence, rural Muslim women have to face economic insecurity and social inequality, making them the most vulnerable section in the country. Therefore, socio-economic analysis of rural housewives belonging to this community is necessary to identify the factors (determinants) that can help them get rid of the 'power over' and shift to 'power to' and 'power from within' among themselves.

Study Area

Murshidabad lies between 23°43'North to 24°52'North latitudes and 87°49'East to 88°44'East latitudes on the left bank of the Ganges River (Figure 1). It comprises 26 Community Development Blocks. The district is characterised by the low level of urbanisation (19.71 per cent urban population, District Statistical Hand Book, 2013). The highest concentration of Muslim people is found in Murshidabad district (63.67 per cent, Census 2011). Murshidabad is ranked 17th out of 19 districts of West Bengal (Human Development Report, Government of West Bengal, 2004).

District Census report of Murshidabad (2011) shows that the decadal increase of female literacy rate is only 6.71 per cent. According to the latest available Human Development Report (2004), the district has a poor value of Gender Development Index, that is, 0.423 (16th rank among the 19 Districts of West Bengal). Many Muslim women in Murshidabad district are unaware of their self-identity and self-esteem due to the immense pressure of family matters (Kundu and Chakraborty, 2012). Considering this scenario, this study attempts to explore and analyse the factors controlling the decision-making power of rural housewives in the Muslim community of Santoshpur village in Sagardighi Block of Murshidabad District on field-based experiences gathered at the micro-level.

After primary investigation based on secondary data sources, Sagardighi C.D. Block is selected as it is commensurate with the district average in case of sex ratio, female literacy, the gender gap in literacy, the female main worker in this C.D Block (Table 1). Here the percentage share of Muslim people (64.68 per cent, 2011) is also similar to the district average. The village Santoshpur is selected for the following reasons:

- The Muslim population is about 90 per cent (from field survey).
- This village is nearer to block headquarter, and it has easy access to different types of services like education, health, banking etc.

Table 1: Brief Description of Sagardighi C.D. Block and Murshidabad District

Component	Murshidabad	Sagardighi
Population Density (per sq km.)	1334	899
Sex Ratio	955	957
Female Literacy (%)	62.03	62.05
Gender Gap in Literacy (%)	6.39	6.29
Female Main Worker (%)	45.46	44.72

Source: Census 2011

Methodology

The study mainly adopts a mixed-method approach. The primary data have been gathered

from a field survey through a semi-structured questionnaire. We translated each of the questionnaire items from English to Bengali and

back to English to check the consistency. Qualitative information was also collected after conducting a focus group discussion (FGD). Some secondary data also have been used here viz. West Bengal Human Development Report (2007), District Primary Census Abstract (2011), and District Statistical Hand Book (2013). Fifty rural housewives from fifty households of the Muslim community (10 per cent of the total households) were purposively selected within

the age group of 18 to 45 years for the personal interview. These interviews were conducted in Bengali, the study participants' vernacular language and then transcribed into English for analysis. A certain age limit is considered to reduce age bias as age is regarded as another crucial factor in determining empowerment in developing countries (Boateng et al., 2012). The survey was conducted between April to June 2019.

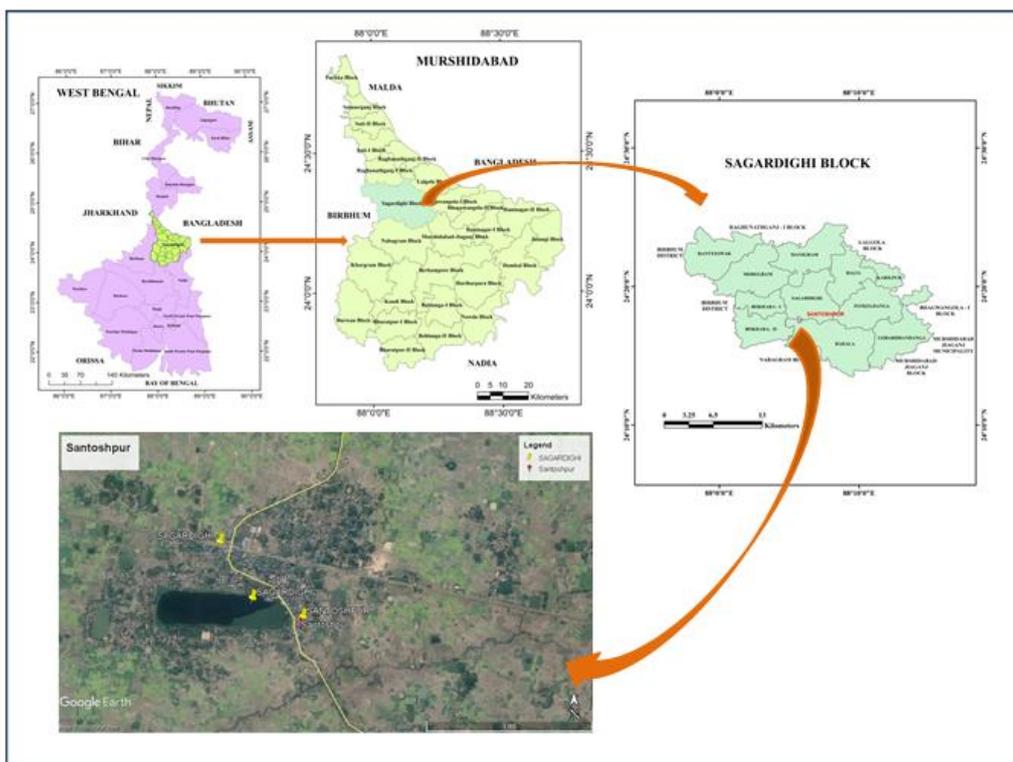


Figure 1: Location of the Study Area

Types of Variables

In India, the rural areas exhibit a peculiar socio-economic setup. Some of the earlier studies show that women's empowerment depends upon several factors like caste, size, type and socio-economic status of the family; educational level and employment status of women (Kaur et al., 2018 and Pal and Haldar, 2016). After an in-depth literature review and primary survey, a list of selected dependent and independent variables has been prepared, and these have been found suitable for the present study. These are listed in Table 2 and Table 3.

Selected Dependent Variable

Empowerment is a multidimensional process (Kabeer, 2005) that can be measured by indicators (Sanu, 2018). Therefore, the Cumulative Empowerment Index (CEI) is constructed to measure their decision making ability and liberty (Parveen and Leonhäuser, 2004). CEI is calculated by combining eight key dependent variables. In their studies, Malhotra et al. (2002) identified different dimensions of empowerment—*economic, socio-cultural, familial or interpersonal, legal, political and psychological*. The variables for the present study are selected to analyse these dimensions of empowerment of rural homemakers (Table 3). The quantitative part of each variable is divided

into four categories ranging from 1 = very low to 4 = high. This value is assigned on the basis of a primary field survey. The qualitative scores are given on the basis of importance opted by the respondents of the field survey and participants of FGD. The qualitative scores range from 1 to 8, where 8 represent 'most important' and 1 represent 'least important' (Table 3). Maxwell (1995) followed this process to measure food insecurity by developing a cumulative food security index. Many research scholars also

follow this process to measure the empowerment level of women (Kundu and Chakrobarty, 2012; Parveen and Leonhäuser, 2004; Sultana and Hossain, 2013). Then the Multiple Correlation Model was applied to see the impact of independent variables on the dependent variable, that is, CEI. ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) test has also been conducted to obtain the significance of the Multiple Correlation Model.

Table 2: Selected Independent Variables

Sl. No.	Variables	Measuring Scale
1	Age of the Respondent	Years
2	Length of Married Life	Years
3	Education of the Respondent	*Dummy Variable; '0'=Illiterate, '1'= Primary, '2'= Secondary, '3'= Higher Secondary, '4'= Graduation and above
4	Education of the Husband	Dummy Variable; '0'=Illiterate, '1'= Primary, '2'= Secondary, '3'= Higher Secondary, '4'= Graduation and above
5	Marital Status	Dummy Variable; '0'=Married women, '1'= Widows
6	Family Type	Dummy Variable; '0'=Joint Family, '1'= Nuclear Family
7	Share in Family Income	Percentage

Source: Compiled by the Authors

Dummy Variable – A numeric variable that represents categorical data. It takes only the value 0 or 1 to indicate the absence or presence of an attribute (Garavaglia et al., 2003).

Table 3: Dependent Variables for CEI

Dimension	Indicators	Quantitative Rank	Qualitative Rank	CEI Range: 36 - 144
Political	Casting of Vote	1 to 4	1	$(1 - 4) \times 1 = 1 - 4$
Socio-cultural	Going to Market	1 to 4	2	$(1 - 4) \times 2 = 2 - 8$
Interpersonal	Adaptation of Family Planning technique	1 to 4	3	$(1 - 4) \times 3 = 3 - 12$
Socio-cultural	Visiting to Relatives' House	1 to 4	4	$(1 - 4) \times 4 = 4 - 16$
Socio-cultural	Education of Children	1 to 4	5	$(1 - 4) \times 5 = 5 - 20$
Economic	Repairing of House	1 to 4	6	$(1 - 4) \times 6 = 6 - 24$
Economic	Purchasing of Household Goods	1 to 4	7	$(1 - 4) \times 7 = 7 - 28$
Economic	Budget Allocation	1 to 4	8	$(1 - 4) \times 8 = 8 - 32$

Source: Compiled by authors based on field survey

Results

CEI is calculated to assess the decision making power of the homemakers. From the analysis, it is found that only 14 per cent of respondents

enjoy high decision making power, having CEI values between 106 – 134. On the other hand, a large number of women (40 per cent) have low to very low decision making power (Table 4).

Table 4: Distribution of the Respondents in Different Category according to CEI value

Category	CEI Value	Respondents (%)
High	>106	14
Medium	78 – 105	46
Low	62 – 77	14
Very Low	<61	26

Source: Computed by authors based on field survey

The level of empowerment as far as the decision making power is concerned depends on different types of socio-economic variables. The effects of each variable on each indicator are elaborated below:

Discussion

Age of the Respondents

In developing countries, the aged women are supposed to be experienced, and so they become somewhat more empowered than the younger ones (Sathar & Kazi, 2000). Available literature supports that women's decision-making power regarding household affairs increases with their age (Islam et al., 2014). The analysis of the correlation between the respondent's age and dependent variables suggests that aged women can freely move outside of their homes and make decisions about the economic matter of the family (Table 5). The result supports the findings of Gupta and Yesudian (2006), Nayak and Mahanta (2008). In their work (Gupta and Yesudian, 2006; Nayak and Mahanta, 2008), they have pointed out that women's decision-making power and freedom of movement increase with their age. One of the respondents of the study area, Fatema Bibi (name changed) aged 25 years, told:

I am the daughter-in-law (*gharer bohu*) of this family. I cannot decide the purchase of expensive household items or the preparation of the household

budget. My mother-in-law and other male members (*purush manush ra*) take any decision regarding economic matters.

But the study reveals that the regression coefficient of the age of respondents is insignificant (Table 6). So it can be said that this particular age group is less effective in the decision-making process when other independent factors are considered in the present study area.

Length of Married Life

After spending a long married life, a woman is allowed to participate in discussions related to decision of family matters and can make decisions for herself (Kundu and Chakraborty, 2012). The analysis found that women's freedom of movement and decision-making power in the household economy are positively correlated with the length of their married life (Table 5). It is further observed that the Cumulative Empowerment Index increases with the increase in the tenure of marriage, the said increase being 3.097 with the rise of every one year in the length of married life ($p < 0.05$ levels) (Table 6). The findings are very similar to Kundu and Chakraborty's (2012) observation, which confirms the positive relationship between marriage tenure and women's household autonomy.

Table 5: Correlations between Dependent and Independent Variables

		Casting of Vote	Going to Market	Family Planning	Going to Relatives' House	Education of the Child	Repairing of House	Purchase of the Household Goods	Allocation of Budget
Age of the Respondent	Pearson Correlation	-.229	.456**	.056	.442**	-.235	.525**	.328*	.385**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.055	.000	.350	.001	.051	.000	.010	.003
	N	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50
Length of Married Life	Pearson Correlation	-.243*	.442**	-.007	.417**	-.339**	.504**	.320*	.340**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.045	.001	.482	.001	.008	.000	.012	.008
	N	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50
Education of the Respondent	Pearson Correlation	.507**	-.137	.431**	-.290*	.437**	-.200	-.131	-.114
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.172	.001	.021	.001	.082	.183	.217
	N	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50
Husband's Education	Pearson Correlation	.366**	-.027	.543**	-.103	.383**	.056	.196	.087
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.005	.427	.000	.238	.003	.350	.086	.275
	N	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50
Marital Status	Pearson Correlation	.292*	.275*	-.096	.312*	.222	.248*	.065	.313*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.020	.027	.254	.014	.061	.041	.326	.014
	N	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50
Family Type	Pearson Correlation	-.112	-.009	-.125	.126	-.036	.235	.210	.167
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.219	.475	.194	.192	.401	.050	.071	.126
	N	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50
Share in Family Income	Pearson Correlation	.243*	.518**	.064	.574**	.519**	.549**	.458**	.609**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.045	.000	.330	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (1-tailed).

Source: Computed by authors using SPSS V. 20Software

Table 6: Regression Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	38.404	14.334		2.679	.010
	Age of the Respondent	-1.129	.932	-.341	-1.212	.232
	Length of Married Life	3.097	.977	.951	3.170	.003
	Education of the Respondent	6.729	3.075	.228	2.188	.034
	Husband's Education	11.203	2.366	.446	4.734	.000
	Marital Status	-.870	6.734	-.011	-.129	.898
	Family Type	-.224	3.802	-.004	-.059	.953
	Share in Family Income	.930	.099	.832	9.363	.000

Dependent Variable: CEI

Source: Computed by authors using SPSS V. 20Software

Education of the Respondents

Several studies adduce that education is one of the prime factors that influence women's ability to make decisions properly, not only for themselves but also for others. Women's education has a significant direct association with their autonomy (Bhandari et al., 2016). Educated women can enjoy higher decision making power in the family and society (Malik and Courtney, 2011). In our study, it is observed that education has a huge impact on CEI as the magnitude of change is 6.729 points from illiterate respondents to literate ones in the regression model ($p < 0.05$) (Table 6). The result is consistent with the findings of Boateng et al. (2012), who have pointed out that 'tertiary education' enhances employment opportunities among married women and boosts their decision-making ability. If individual indicators are analysed, it is found that educated women

can take decisions independently about family planning, children's education, and casting of the vote (Table 5). One of the respondents said that she belonged to an educated family, but her in-law's family was against female education. So she had to leave her study at upper school education. Now her daughter bears the same fate and is going to get married off at a very young age (15 years old). It shows the helpless condition of a minority woman, particularly a mother in a rural space.

It is very interesting to note that these gender-biased attitudes are justified in the light of religion. Amina Bibi (name is changed), one of the respondents, aged 45 years, shared her experience as a woman. She said:

Our society set some restrictions for us. We cannot go outside as we are female (*meyechele*), and we belong to a Muslim family. We have to take permission from

our husband in each matter, whether personal or other. Just after completing thirteen or fourteen years of age, parents want to marry off their daughters.

Education of the Husband

The husband's educational level increases the chances of his wife's participation in the decision-making process. Wiklander (2010) analysed that an educated husband helps his wife express her opinion freely and protects her from any type of 'abuse in household'. Thus, the education of husbands enhances the process of women empowerment. The present study also confirms that with the increasing educational level of the husbands, the Cumulative Empowerment Index of wives is also increased, that is 11.203 ($p < 0.005$) points (Table 6). It is considered a dominant factor in this model as its regression co-efficient is highest than another variable of the model. After analysing each indicator, the woman partner of an educated husband is found more empowered to decide on children's education, casting of vote and family planning process (Table 5). In the present study area, the educated husbands act as 'resources' in the empowerment process of their wives. But negative value is also observed in the case of going to market or relatives' house. Sinha et al. (2012) have also described that the relationship between husbands' education and the mobility of women is complex in nature. It is found that there are several strong intervening factors' which influence the mindset of the husbands not to be a liberal one for their wife's mobility. Again the absence of a husband at home sometimes limits the opportunity for women to develop. For example, one of the respondents, Kobita Khatun (the name is changed), said that her husband, who was educated and worked in Dubai, wanted her to complete the Higher Secondary study. But her parents wanted a baby immediately after their marriage. To them, after marriage, giving birth to a baby is more important than continuing education. So, she had to discontinue her study.

Marital Status

Only two types of samples that is, married and widows are available in this village. So, the

calculation and analysis are done on the basis of these two criteria. Freedom of movement is more common among widows or divorcees (Nayak and Mahanta, 2008). In the study area, it is observed that the widows are more empowered than those still enjoying married life. The mean CEI of a widow is 100.83, and that of a married woman is only 80.32, but the regression coefficient is negative (-.870) and is insignificant (Table 6). So this variable is affected by other variables and has less impact on the model.

Family Type

It is interesting to see that the regression coefficient of family type is insignificant here. Furthermore, the relation between different dependent variables with these independent variables is also negligible (Table 5), indicating that family type has no such impact upon the decision-making power of the rural Muslim homemakers.

Share in Household Income

There is a direct positive link between women's economic participation and the decision making process. Women's active economic participation can upgrade their self-confidence and improve their decision-making power (Kaur et al., 2018; Schuler and Hashemi, 1994). In the study area, most women are engaged in beedi making at home and contribute to household income. The relation between share in household income and the dependent variables is positive; insignificant relation is only found in the case of family planning (Table 5). The magnitude of change is 0.930 points with an increase of 1 per cent share of family income ($p < 0.05$) (Table 6).

Test of Significance

To test the significance of Multiple Correlation Model, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) is used here. It is found that the R-square of this model is 0.802 (Table 7) which indicates that 80.2 percentage of the variation in the predicted variable (dependent variable) is explained by the predictor variables (selected independent factors). F value in Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) is significant (Table 8) which depicts that the present Multiple Regression Model is significant.

Table 6: Regression Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
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	Share in Family Income	.930	.099	.832	9.363	.000

Dependent Variable: CEI

Source: Computed by authors using SPSS V. 20Software

Table 7: Model Summary^b

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.896 ^a	.802	.770	12.004	2.172

a. Predictors: (Constant), Share in Family Income, Age of the Respondent, Family Type, Husbands' Education, Marital Status, Education of the Respondent, Length of Married Life

b. Dependent Variable: CEI

Source: Computed by authors using SPSS V. 20Software

Table 8: ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	24588.425	7	3512.632	24.377	.000 ^b
	Residual	6052.155	42	144.099		
	Total	30640.580	49			

a. Dependent Variable: CEI

b. Predictors: (Constant), Share in Family Income, Age of the Respondent, Family Type, Husbands' Education, Marital Status, Education of the Respondent, Length of Married Life

Source: Computed by authors using SPSS V. 20Software

Conclusion

It is very difficult to identify a particular factor that affects the decision making power of rural homemakers, particularly those belonging to the Muslim community, as it is interlinked with socio-economic and cultural trio factors. Different social aspects and locational or spatial components play a crucial role in determining women’s decision-making abilities. In the study area, a complex relationship is observed where age, marital status and family type are insignificant in the decision-making process. In contrast, women's education, their contribution to family income, and their husband’s education are the primary determinant factors that enhance the women’s decision-making power. Though out-migration of male members is prevalent here, women do not get enough space to take autonomy in decision-making. Aged female members, to some extent, enjoy a more favourable position to control the household related decision-making process and dominate over daughters-in-law. But this autonomy does not increase self capabilities among them; it is nothing but a form of customary practice in this society where women get some ‘power over’ when they become mothers-in-law. Another fact is observed here that most homemakers are not mentally prepared to do something independently. It is also observed that the negative attitude towards female education and their freedom of movement is prevalent here. Most of the parents think that girls’ education is necessary for getting a better groom.

In the rural Muslim community, society's attitude towards nurturing existing orthodox practices further narrows the scope of women’s

participation in the decision-making process. The main challenge is identified here to make people understand the importance of girls’ education. As education enhances the capability of women to participate in the decision-making process related to family planning, education of children, the casting of the vote and so on, it is indeed the sign of women’s progress that can do away with the conventional practices of considering a woman as a property and not an independent entity. However, several significant initiatives were taken by the Central Government and State government of West Bengal after framing the policies following the goals of SGD 2030; drastic steps need to be taken to improve the current scenario at the grassroots level.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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Author Contribution Statement

Mrs. Samsunnehar and Dr. Sumana Sarkar had mutually conceptualized and prepared the methodology for the present work. The first author conducted the primary survey and was engaged in data analysis, preparing maps, tables and charts, and preparing the initial draft of the manuscript. The second author supervised the whole research work and helped shape the manuscript's final draft after editing and reviewing it.