

# Skill Education and Employment Gap Among Tribal Women in Rural Bengal

–Ajanta Sarkar\*

## ABSTRACT

*Skilled-based knowledge and human resources are the key factors for the inclusive growth of a country. In India, both men and women from rural and urban areas are unskilled. In case of women, most of them are working in informal setting with unequal pay structure. Hence, empowerment of the rural women is very much needed not only for the development of the employment status but also for the equal contribution in social, cultural and economic development with decision-making powers. The enrolment rates of tribal women in skill education are still incredibly low in spite of having governmental policies and programmes. Thus, the present study seeks to analyse the obstacles of tribal women in pursuing skill education and creating a gap between skill education and empowerment. It also tries to understand the skill education and employment status of tribal women in the rural Bankura district. On basis of the results it strives to identify ways to facilitate skill education among the tribal women for their better sustainable employment. The study is based on multi stage sampling method with the sample of 90 tribal women (18 to 25 years old) from rural Bankura, West Bengal. The results depicted that enrolment rate in skill education and employment with it is very low among them. Fear of migration, distance from institutions, language barrier, low self-confidence, poor knowledge and misconceptions are creating obstacles for them in skill education and employment. Thus, constant monitoring, need based traditional courses and more employments are needed from the government and NGOs to ensure equal services for tribal women to get a quality life.*

**Keywords:** Skill Education, Employment, Tribal Women, Rural Bengal, Low Enrolment

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## INTRODUCTION

Employment and equal engagement in the workforce are the most important factors for the economic development of a country. Skilled based knowledge and human resource are the key elements for the inclusive growth of a country. In case of India, both men and women from rural and urban areas are unskilled. Even the engagement of women, in organised sector such as industry, services and agricultural sectors are still very limited than men. Hence, in spite of consisting half of the country's population, women are still very much lagging in terms of employment and skills than men in more or less every corner of India. The engagement of women in household work, child rearing and other daily activities though needs equal efforts, skills and knowledge but unfortunately the respect and paid less work cannot improve their employment status. Hence, empowerment of the rural women is very much needed not only for the development of the employment status but also for the equal contribution in social, cultural, and economic development with decision-making powers. In India, around 90% women workers are working in the informal settings where the unequal payment structure, working environment issues and job securities are a common scenario (Harisha, 2020). Along with that NSSO 2011-12 data suggested that, 79% of workers do not have any written contracts and 71% are not allowed to have a paid leave in the informal set up and the main reason of such disparity is the lack of skills and knowledge of women in work. Hence, skill development is prime factor to improve the working condition and economic development of the women in the county. Moreover, in case of tribal women, the difference in education, socio-economic structure and marginalisation plays an extra factor to make the situation more complicated for them. In this case, skill education is one of the important tools to reduce poverty, elevate the job opportunities to improve skills for the betterment of tribal women economically. Though, government of India has already implemented a lot of skill education and vocational education programmes but still the reach of the tribal women to the programmes are still very limited and thus the skilled based knowledge and job opportunities are restricted for them. Indian economy is growing very fast among the other countries in the world, but the economic development of women in the country is still very low. The gender based difference, extreme subjugation and oppression of women, marginalisation, difference in education among men and women both in rural and urban areas and resource unavailability

further make it difficult for the women towards the equal employment progression with men. In this case, skill education increased quality, opportunity, diversity in work, increase outputs, work safety, proper usage of resources, strengthen capital and provides a balance economy for the poor people. Skill education and employment are the main solution for the rural women in small scale to develop their economic situation and sustainable rural development (Ahmed, Sinha & Shastri, 2016). Since, eleventh five-year plan government of India is focusing on the skill development of the people but still the rate of trained people in India is very less (10%) than the other countries in the world (Korea 96%, Japan 80%, Germany 75%, UK at 68%) (Planning Commission Report, 2008). Moreover, it is important to improve the situation, as the major part of country's employment based on rural settings and women are the equal participator of it. Also it is important to bridge the gap between rural and urban employment to reduce the urban migration and improve the per capita income of rural workers.

## SKILL EDUCATION PROGRAMMES IN INDIA

Skill education and vocational educations are one of the major goals for the government of India since long to reduce the disparities and equal employment rate in the working sectors. Every work required a certain type of specialisation, skills, and knowledge to get the maximum outcome and productivity.

- *Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship*

This ministry was created to fulfil the mission of Skill India with the multi skill programmes, where the ministry will form and coordinate the skill based frameworks, demand and supply manpower for skilled workforce, vocational and technical training, critical thinking in existing and newly created job opportunities for all.

- *Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY)*

This is the flagship skill education scheme by the government of India, which mobilises the youths of the country to take up the outcome based skill education courses given by the affiliated trainers. Programmes under this system are executed by the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC), and it is managed by the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE). The main objective is to mobilise a large number of youths to have a skill based certified knowledge and monetary reward of Rs. 8,000/- at

the end of it. It also provides ready industry and job opportunities and links for them to have proper employment at the end of the course. Additionally, the strategy makes a great effort to raise the quality of the skill training programmes while maintaining a rapid development rate for youths in this country.

- *The Rastriya Mahila Kosh (TRMK)*

Rastriya Mahila Kosh is a society and micro finance apex organisation (registered under Society's Registration Act, 1860) which was established in 1993 under Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD). This programme is basically providing micro credit for the marginalised, asset less women through NGOS, voluntary societies, state women development corporations, co-operative banks, etc., to the women SHGs to develop skills, training, and income opportunities to make them economically independent. This programme's primary goal is to assist low-income women in obtaining chances for a living and to encourage collaborative methods for responsible credit resource management that lead to self-reliance.

- *Support to Training and Employment Programme (STEP)*

The STEP programme is being run by the Department of Women and Child Development (WCD) under the Government of India. The primary goal of this curriculum is to give women skill development training so they can become self-employed entrepreneurs and expand their employment options. Various organisations (NGOs) registered under the Indian Trusts Act of 1882 or the Societies Registration Act of 1860 may receive funding from this project to conduct training sessions. This programme for women is mainly provided by the NGOs to the backward asset less poor women, SC/ST women who are below the poverty line in rural and urban areas with the goal of livelihood opportunities, training, skill up gradation, credit access, and providing links to develop employment.

- *Ajeevika Skills*

It is a skill development initiative by Ministry of Rural development launched in June, 2011 to provide regular monthly or at least above minimum wages by promoting rural livelihood which includes, programmes of rural infrastructure (Pradhan Mantra Gram Sadak Yojana), housing (Indira Awas Yojana), employment guarantee (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Livelihood Mission), livelihood promotion programmes etc. It also includes training programmes for

women, such as, small industry service institutions, development of women and children in rural areas, National small industry corporations, etc. By giving impoverished households access to possibilities for skilled wage work and productive self-employment, it seeks to eliminate poverty by giving the poor more stable and varied sources of income. Both Central and state governments jointly provide funds for this programme to be implemented.

- *Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises*

Under these programmes, the government of India has introduced different credit support programmes, Rajiv Gandhi Udyami Mitra Yojana, Prime Minister's employment generation programmes, Workshed schemes for khadi artisans.

Therefore, in spite of having so many government and non-government implementations and programmes, still the rate of skilled women engagement is still very low in the country, and in case of tribal women the situation is constantly low. Thus, this study is trying to understand the skill education and employment status and analyse the obstacles that are creating a gap between skill education and employment among the tribal women of rural Bankura, West Bengal. On the basis of that, the study further tries to identify and suggest ways to facilitate the skill education for tribal women's employment in rural Bankura for equal employment and overall empowerment of tribal women.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

India is one of the fastest growing countries in the world, and skill education is the main element to fasten the economic growth and development of the country. Hence, the government of India, with several skill education and vocational trainings are trying to fulfil the employment gap and skilled human resource for the best productivity and quality work. But female participation and skilled knowledge is still remarkably low than the male counterparts as the enrolment in skill education programmes in the rural areas are extremely neglected. Due to their illiteracy and knowledge of skill education is often considered as waste of the time for them. Moreover, the distance from the institution, female teachers, sanitation issues, extreme poverty, and safety issues also are creating huge hindrances for the rural women to participate in skill education programmes and skill based employment (Verma, 2015). Along with it, women are still considered as the caretaker of the family and the sole responsibility of child rearing and

household works are depending upon them. Hence, vocational training and skill education for their employment are considered negatively as it requires time for the training outside their household. Even the decision of skill education and trainings are completely depend on their fathers and husbands of them. The concept of skill education is still doubtful as it considered only for those who could not enrolled in formal education. The misconceptions and less knowledge regarding skill education are reducing the skilled employment opportunities for women (Kaur et al., 2018). Even after the trainings and skilled based knowledge the extreme competition, limited courses in vocational trainings and early marriages are creating problems for the women specially in rural areas to engage in the employment sectors. The long work hours, dual responsibility in the family and work sectors, poor decision-making powers and harassments in work sectors are creating a constant issue for the women to engage in the formal work settings (Hussain, 2018). Moreover, the poor accounting knowledge, communicating skills, business etiquettes, personality development, leadership and management skills and knowledge regarding entrepreneurship are highly required for the women in rural set up to equally participate in workforce with men as well as women in urban areas (Kushwa & Lal, 2018). The unequal payment and bias in jobs are still persistent problems for the women in both urban and rural settings irrespective of having skill based education and trainings. A large section of women employment are involved in the garment making, printing and beauty parlour oriented jobs with skill education courses which have a restricted a competitive market. Along with that, political influences, preferences and selections are biased and based on political powers. As a result, reaching the training locations, enrolments became highly challenging for the poor people in the rural belts (Kumar, 2019). The indigenous or backward sections of people still have the remarkably low literacy, unemployment and poverty in the country. The high traditional knowledge, culture and less access to the resources further restricted them to participate in the outside work force. Moreover, the constant difference between market demand and traditional knowledge is a key factor for the unemployment. The knowledge regarding skill or vocational education among the indigenous women are also remarkably low in spite of various programmes by government of India. The language difference, attitudes towards skill based learning, gender biasness, and difference between urban and rural culture further making it difficult for them to enrol in these skill based courses. The demand based courses mostly require migration for the best productivity, hence confusion after the course and fear also restricted the indigenous women to enrol in vocational training and

pursuing skill education (Dagar, 2021). Government of India is focusing on the skill development training and employment opportunities in the country for the higher productivity and economic growth since a long time through the various skill development programmes, schemes and policies across the country. But still, the engagement rate of men and women in skill education programmes are drastically low. The labour force participation of women ranges from 18% to 21% from 2017-2021 and in 2021 only 23% skilled women participated in the formal workforce. Besides in skill education programmes, the differences in courses between men and women and engagements rates also vary significantly as only 21 courses are there for women and 153 are for men. Not only that, the knowledge regarding skill education is still limited to a certain part of the country. Hence, women skill development programmes are limited to cosmetology, tailoring, fashion designing by ignoring the other course. Moreover engagement rates of women in household work are 25% whereas for men it is 2.5% which results a prominent difference in the engagement of skill education followed by the stable employment (Jain & Bari, 2022). Skill education for women is not only required for the employment but also it provides certain amount of self-esteem, confidence and performance for the quality of work. Along with the new skill up gradation, expertisation in existing knowledge with more flexible and accommodating processes are required to increase the rate of skilled women in labour force. In India, women has to face lots of complexities in the employment sectors than men which includes, low level of formal education, restrictions, strong values and tradition, discriminations, limited hours for training and knowledge and less exposure to the technologies. Therefore, women are considered as the secondary source of income, thus lower attention are given to the women's training and skills for the employment in the country (Harisha, 2020). Thus, empowerment, personality development, and economic independency are the key components for the women to establish equal engagement in workforce with men. In this regard, skill education and training based knowledge are the main units for the women to bridge the gap in formal work and employment by establishing equal status in work sector and contributing directly to the economic growth of the country.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The present study tries to analyse the obstacles faced by tribal women in pursuing skill education and creating a gap between skill education and

empowerment. While doing that, the study also seeks to understand the status of skill education and employment of tribal women in the rural Bankura district. On the basis of the results, the study finally strives to identify ways to facilitate skill education among the tribal women for their better sustainable employment.

## OBJECTIVES

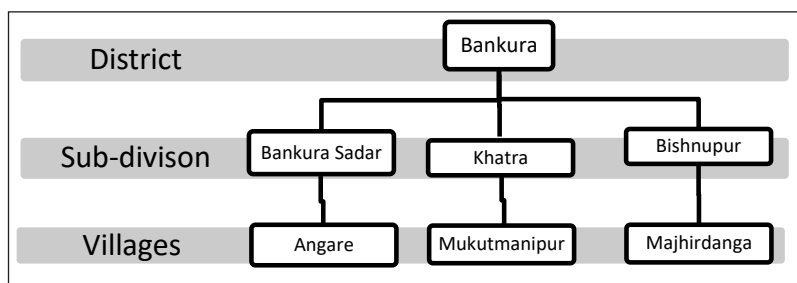
- To understand the skill education and employment status among the tribal women in rural Bengal.
- To analyse the obstacles that are creating gaps between skill education and employment among the tribal women in rural Bengal.
- To identify ways to facilitate the skill education for the women employment among tribal.

### Study Area

The study is based on the rural parts of Bankura district, which is situated in the western part of state West Bengal. The district covers around 6,882 sq.km areas including total 3 sub-divisions and 22 blocks. As per the 2011 census, the Scheduled Tribe (ST) is 10.25% of total population of the district. The whole district is consisted with small hill and dense forests.

### Research Design and Sampling

The study is based on multi stage sampling method by the following steps:

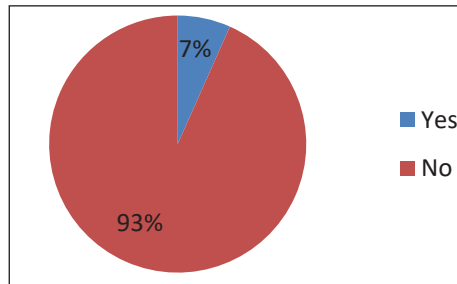


For conducting the study, the samples of 90 women respondents (18 to 25 years) were selected from these three villages. The selection of respondents was based on the tribal population and resource availability for the requirement of the study. Mixed method research design has been adopted to analyse the data. The researcher was unbiased, and proper consent was taken from respondents while conducting the study.

## RESULTS

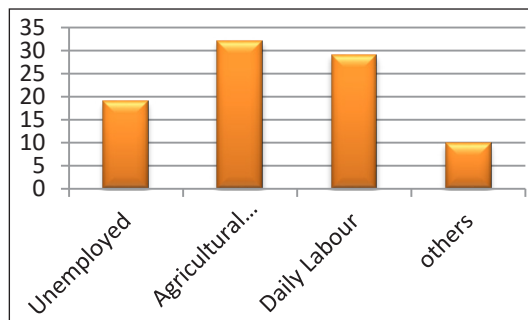
### *Status of Skill Education And Empowerment in the Study Area*

Enrolment in skill education and formal employment rate are still remarkably low among the tribal in the country. In case of women, the gap in literacy rate, knowledge regarding skill education and limited resources further increasing the gap between employment and skill education among them. Government of India with their policies and programmes trying to bridge the gap between the skill education and proper employment facilities for all but apart from involvements in SHGs, other skilled and demand based knowledge are still very low among the tribal women. Fig. 1 shows the enrolment rate of tribal women in skill education programmes



**Fig. 1: Enrolment Rate in Skill Education**

where only 6 out of 90 respondents (6.66%) have enrolled and gotten the skill based education and rests 84 out of 90 are not interested to get enrolled to take the skill based knowledge. Though 24 out of 90 respondents enrolled themselves in vocational education courses in schools but after that they did not implemented those skilled based knowledge for the future employment. Whereas, in case of employment, 78.88% (71 out of 90 respondents) (Fig. 2) are involved in informal workforces for their



**Fig. 2: Employment Status of Tribal Women in the Study Area**

economic needs. In spite of being the indigenous population, the usage of their traditional knowledge in employment is very limited. The traditional skilled knowledge of the tribal women are mostly exercised in their lean period or as a hobby as a side income sources such as plate making, broom, ornaments and other handicrafts making and the need of skilled knowledge for the better productivity and economic growth are not considered by them in those works. As shown in the Fig. 2, around 35.55% respondents are engaged as agricultural labour followed by 32.22% as daily Labour in the study area which shows a huge women engagement in informal set up employment which not only restricts them economically but also minimising the chances of self-development. Hence, due to the low enrolment in skill education, the gap and scope of formal employment remain persistent among the tribal women in the study area.

#### *Obstacles Creating Gap between Skill Education and Employment Among Tribal Women*

The problem of stable employment is an existing problem for the tribal in the society. The resource unavailability, illiteracy, socio economic problems further makes it difficult for the tribal to improve the employment scopes as well as economic situation. Though skill education tries to develop the skills and knowledge of the people with different courses and trainings but still the enrolment rate of tribal especially women are extremely low. As a result the gap between skill education and employment of the tribal women is still persistent. The obstacles and challenges of tribal women in skill education include different social, environmental, and political issues. Such as:

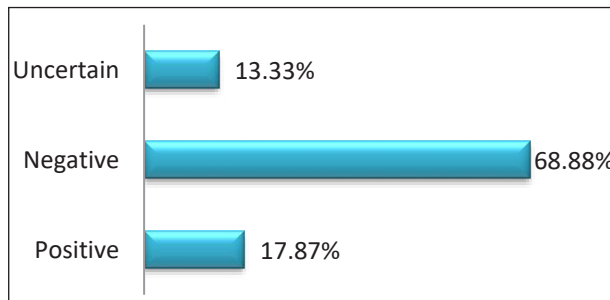
#### *Marriage and Time Management*

One of the major problems for every woman is the time management after marriage. In the study area every respondents are married and the rate of highest educational qualification (higher secondary education) (Table 1) is also very low.

**Table 1: Educational Qualification of Respondents in the Study Area**

<i>Educational Level</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
Primary	15	16.66
Upper Primary	37	41.11
Secondary	29	32.22
Higher Secondary	9	10
Total	90	100

Hence, skill education and trainings are never a matter of consideration for the respondents. Moreover, even those who completed their skill education courses (6 out of 90) expressed extreme time management issues after marriage as the household domestic chores, rearing children and daily needs always comes first for them rather than improving their skills for the future probable employment. Along with that, 68.8% women considered that, enrolment in skill education and training programmes are problematic for them whereas 13.33% are uncertain about the outcome of it (Fig. 3). Most importantly, the anxiety of new course, daily economic needs and awkwardness to ask permission for the new education and time from the husband makes them sceptical of enrolling in skill educational courses.



**Fig. 3: Views of Respondents Regarding Skill Education Programmes**

#### *Distance from the Institution*

The skill educational institutions are mostly situated in the main towns, which are far from the study area. Hence, the distance from the institutions is always a matter of concern for the tribal women. The daily travel cost, hassle and engagement in workforce for daily economic needs makes it more complicated for them to consider the need of the skill education. Along with that, due to the safety issues and sexual harassment in institutes, sanitation problems, poor knowledge and uncertainty of the future of the courses, the tribal women hardly consider the need of skill education and employment related to it in their lives.

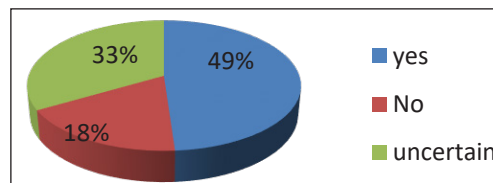
#### *Misconception and Interest Issue*

Vocational training and skill based education are still considered for the secondary option of mainstream academic courses for the tribal women. The attainment rates of tribal women in mainstream academic courses are still low as a result enrolment in skill education is always a matter

of doubt for the tribal families. Along with that, due to the less exposure and technical knowledge, tribal women consider that apart from need based work in informal settings, they are not applicable for stable and formal employment. Thus, the research success rate of skill education and employment are unknown to them; rather, they consider skill education extremely tough and complicated for them who has lack of experience and educational knowledge. The need and demand of market for employment is also unknown to the tribal women due to less exposure and knowledge. Hence the skilled employment and need of trainings are completely ignored by them. As a result, the interest of skill education and the rate of employment through it are prominently low in the study area.

### *Family Support*

Women are bound to adjust their lives as per the needs of their families since the childhood. In case of tribal women, though they are equally involved in the outside workforce with men but still, employment of women are considered secondarily, rather household works always the main priority. Also they have to rely upon their families for decisions such as trainings, skill education for the better opportunity of employment. Though 44 out of 90 respondents expressed that their family is supportive enough for the new courses but, 30 out of 90 are uncertain and 16 out of 90 expressed that their family will not support in the enrolment in new courses and employment with them after marriage (Fig. 4). The financial needs of the houses are fulfilled by their involvement in informal workforce seasonally or continuously. Besides, due to the social and traditional norms, restrictions, gender biasness getting family support in better opportunity in employment is always a question mark. More than the tribal women, skills and opportunity of employment for the men are always preferable for both the families and the respondents themselves.

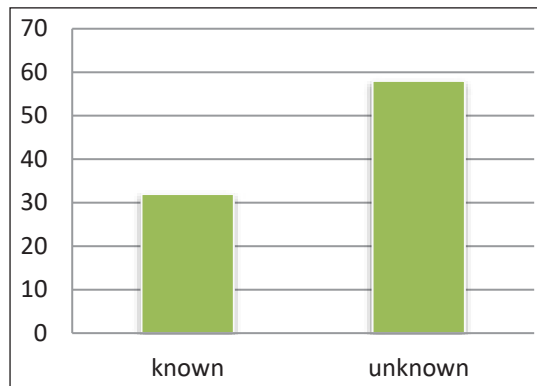


**Fig. 4: Family Support in Enrolment of Skill Education**

### *Knowledge and Biasness*

The gap between skill education and employment among tribal women is mainly causing due to the less knowledge and awareness of it. Moreover,

the low level of education, poor knowledge in technology and governmental schemes, these skill education programmes and need of training based specialised skill for further stable employment scopes are unknown to them. In the study area, around 64.44% (58 out of 90) respondents are unknown about the skill education programmes and need of skill based knowledge for better scopes of employment. Whereas 35.55% (32 out of 90) respondents, in spite of knowing about the courses, still they are very less interested to get enrolled for the other employments apart from the agriculture and daily need based work (Fig. 5). Along with that, local body preferences and biasness are highly attached with the knowledge building and opportunity of skill education to their preferred people rather than the needy one. Due to this, only a certain section of people are getting the opportunity of vocational training and skill development courses and a large section of tribal women in the study area remains unknown and unaffected by the governmental schemes. Thus, the impact of skill education or vocational courses in the lives of tribal women's employment is still remarkably low.



**Fig. 5: Knowledge of Skill Education**

### *Fear of Migration*

The majority of tribal live far from the towns and places which mostly surrounded by forest. Hence, for the demand based skilled employment, migration to the nearby towns is very much needed for the better productivity and profit in the work for several reasons. In case of the tribal women, the dual responsibility in home and economic sector is extremely hectic and in other side migration from home for the employment is extremely doubtful. 67 out of 90 (74.44%) respondents expressed their fear to leave their comfort place and travel to the nearby

town alone for the long run for the sack of employment. Apart from that, prioritising employment over their family is never a matter of choice for them. Thus, in spite of knowing the need of skilled and training based work demand, they are highly sceptical to choose those for the betterment of their employment.

### *Fear of Uncertainty*

One of the major sets back of skill education and employment is the uncertainty and fear of tribal women. In spite of getting vocational courses in schools, employment and interest in demand based skilled work involvements are prominently low among them. Moreover, the constant marginalisation, resource unavailability, fear of getting judged created more uncertainty for them to take a new course or engage in skilled based employment with it. Socio-economic needs and financial issues are always a huge problem for the tribal. Apart from that, women are still considered as secondary source of economy in household. Thus, the uncertainty in productivity, profit and getting money for daily needs apart from the normal informal works are making them extremely fearful to take the skill education courses and jobs as a serious alternative option for their employment. Besides, the extreme awkwardness, language barrier and low qualification further makes them self-conscious and dependent on the families to make decisions about their lives.

**Table 2: Views Regarding the future of Skill Education Courses**

<i>Views</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
Certain	11	12.22
Uncertain	79	87.77
Total	90	100

Around 79 out of 90 (87.77%) respondents expressed their uncertainty about the courses and employment with it in this regard (Table 2). Lastly, poor decision-making powers and dependency accountancy create more problems for the respondents to enrol themselves in training based courses and consider employment with it.

### *Less Option in Traditional Skill Based Courses*

Tribal culture is extremely rich with their traditional knowledge and skills. But in the skill educational courses, the less availability of traditional courses and limited course materials attracts the tribal women very less in order the pursue it and develop their skills for the employments. Along

with that, due to less education and poor resource availability, the technical knowledge, increase productivity rate and marketing related knowledge are very limited. Thus, the fear, interest and attraction towards skill education courses and employment needs of tribal women are remarkably low in the study area. Moreover, 68 out of 90 respondents (75.55%) expressed their interest to learn traditional skill based courses as it will be easy to adapt and gain profit by them. Thus, the limited options in vocational education and skill development courses are not reaching the needs of tribal women.

## CONCLUSION

The demand for trained workers and improvement in skills is the need of the hour for better scope and opportunities and employment. In the case of skill education, the enrolment rates of tribal women are still incredibly low in spite of having governmental policies and programmes. Therefore, knowledge and awareness building are the primary needs to facilitate skill development and training facilities among the tribal women. Along with that, constant monitoring and assessment of skill education programmes and needs of beneficiaries should be taken care of by the government or the NGOs for the unbiased and corruption free opportunities for all. Moreover, it is important to establish training institutes both in urban and rural areas understanding the needs. Also improving the employment facilities are the main factor to develop the interest of tribal women in the training and employment apart from their traditional works. In West Bengal, The Utkatsh Bangla projects needs more traditional and people centric skill development training programmes in the rural parts of the state as the needs are very diverse in the tribal belts of various districts. Moreover, periodic need assessment and strategic employment opportunities should be given utmost priority to attract the tribal women for the successful enrolment and completion of skill educational courses in the rural areas. It is important to aware and showcases the employment opportunities and market needs to the tribal women to lower down their fear of new courses. However, women are still facing subjugation and secondary treatment from the society very often and in case of tribal women, the scenario is more complicated. Hence, the goal of skill education should not only be focused towards the trainings and skill developments rather developing personality, existing knowledge and decision-making should also be an important part of the course. Initially it is important to focus on the small-

scale income generating options, and periodic SHG training for small scale business options, so that they can simultaneously continue their existing need based work and gain profit from the skilled employment for the long run. Lastly, the government and voluntary societies should focus to ensure the equal service for all irrespective of social, political, and traditional stigmas by providing scopes for sustainable employment with skilled knowledge for a better quality of life.

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