

## DISPARITY OF FEMALE WORK PARTICIPATION IN AGRICULTURE IN RARH BENGAL

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### ABSTRACT

*The study is based on Census information and secondary data to investigate the disparity in female work participation in Rarh Bengal using district level data. Most of the rural women participated in agricultural activities, but their work is still disregarded. A massive number of women have remained as invisible workers. They have to face significant constrained by limited number of resources and gender inequalities. It is in the rural areas where the female work participation is directly linked to agriculture and allied activities and the study confines itself to an understanding of work participation of women only in the rural areas. As per census 2011, the workforce participation rate for females is 25.51 % against 53.26 % for males in India and 28.33 % female workforce participation against the 71.67 % males in Rarh Bengal. The study also highlights that Gender Gap and disparity is high in Rarh Bengal. There is a positive relation between gender gap and disparity i.e. if Gender Gap is increased then Disparity is also increased.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Female Work Participation in Agriculture, Gender Gap, Disparity Index*

### INTRODUCTION

As an economy progresses, agriculture can be an important engine of proliferation and poverty reduction. Agriculture in India defines familial tradition, social relations and gender roles. In many of the developing nations including India, women especially rural women form the important productive work force of the economy. Women comprise to nearly about 43 percent of the agricultural labor force in developing countries. Approximately 78 percent of all economically active women are employed in agriculture as compared to 63 percent of men. It is observed that women play a significant role in agricultural development and allied activities including main crop production, live-stock production, horticulture, post-harvesting operations etc. Agricultural activities including selection, cultivation, preparation, harvest of food crops and breeding are predominantly being done by women today. Regardless of their dominance in the labour force, women in India are still marginalized and face extreme disadvantage in terms of wages, land rights and their representation in local farmer's organizations. Though at times they act as invisible Laborers, women's contribution to the agricultural sector is vast.

Female work participation in economic activity is a vital issue since last five decades. Women Empowerment as an indicator of status of women enhances development of a society may trigger changes in many other socio-economic indicators to reduce the gender gap. Due to the complex social structure, work participation rate of Indian women varies greatly from one region to another. It creates disparity in work participation which is a condition of being unequal and is an observable difference. West Bengal is not differing from that. Due to modernization and technological innovation in working activity, women are increasingly excluded from working force and substituted by men or machine. Only in the

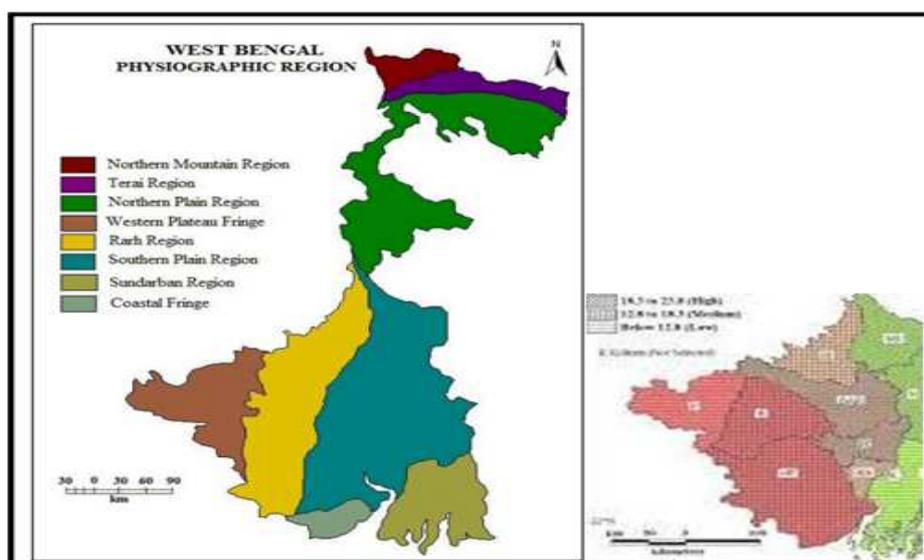
peak working season like weeding and transplanting in paddy cultivation, the rural women are engaged in traditional agricultural activities. Hussain & Siddiqui (2013) argued in their paper that a large majority of women work participation in West Bengal is seen either in agricultural and traditional rural household industries. There exists a wide gender gap in work participation rate and low level of female WPR is significantly determined by large family size, low level of urbanization, low level of literacy and lack of various facilities.

Rarh Bengal is very rich in agriculture sector for its ideal geographical factors. Paddy is the main crop and wheat, master seed, potato, onion; pulses are other major crops which have also been cultivated here. Besides horticulture, floriculture, animal husbandry has also been practiced here. In Rarh Bengal both men and women are engaged in this field. This paper will highlight the trends of female and male participation in agriculture over a period and efforts have been put to explore the disparity in female work participation in this sector.

### Study Area

Rarh region is a toponym for an area in the Indian subcontinent that lies between the Chota Nagpur Plateau on the West and the Ganges Delta on the East. Rarh Bengal consists of following districts: Birbhum, Purba Bardhaman, Paschim Bardhaman, Bankura, Purulia, Howrah, Hooghly, Purba Medinipur and Paschim Medinipur.

Figure 1 shows rural women perform numerous labour intensive jobs in agricultural field. They are directly attached with summer, rainy and winter season agriculture system. Topographically maximum area of this study area has been considered as kharip crop. Rain fed agriculture system is the dominant agricultural practices in this area. A major portion of this study area has also the irrigation facility for summer and winter cultivation. Like collection of wood, collecting water from remote areas is also the duty of women for the some portion of Rurh Bengal. Keeping of livestock and its other associated activities like milking, milk processing and preparation of ghee are also carried out by the women. Mostly women are engaged in cleaning of animals, sheds, watering and milking the animals. Rural women have very hectic life. Her work starts from dawn and ends at night. The daily routine works begins from house cleaning, collection of drinking water, dish washing, laundry, preparing food for farming, care of children. She manages these activities very smartly.



**Figure 1: The Role of Women in Agriculture and Its Allied Fields.**

### **Status of Female Work Participation in Agriculture in Rarh Bengal**

The Census of India data reveal that the rural female work participation rate has declined between 1991 and 2011 in Rarh Bengal. This decline in rural female work participation rate provides a rationale for further investigation to find out the disparity index between male and female participation in agriculture and to correlate between gender gap and disparity index in Rarh Bengal. The heterogeneity in social, demographic, cultural, economic, and ethnographic spheres within the broad geographical area of Rarh Bengal influenced the female work participation in agriculture. As per census 2011, the workforce participation rate for females is 25.51 % against 53.26 % for males in India, 18.08 % female workforce participation against the 57.07 % males in West Bengal. According to 2011 census work participation of women cultivators is 17.66 % against the 82.33 % male and work participation of women agricultural labourer is 31.01 % against the 68.99 % male in West Bengal.

Table 1 shows that work participation of women cultivators there has been 13.37 percentage point decline (i.e. from 25.18 % in 1991 to 11.81 % in 2011, see Table 1). If the changes in work-participation of women cultivators are analyzed district-wise, it is found that percentage share of women cultivators in total rural women workers has decreased in all districts of Rarh Bengal. Increased urbanization may be one of the important reasons behind the decrease in the work participation of women cultivators. It is important to note here that the districts like Purulia, Bankura where high work-participation of women cultivators is found, are known to be agriculturally backward and have quite poor irrigation facilities.

Table 2 shows if the changes in work-participation of women agricultural Laborers district-wise are analyzed in Rarh Bengal then it is observed that percentage share of women agricultural Laborers in total rural women workers has increased in Purulia and Medinipur and decreased in all the other districts (Table 2). It seems from the figures that increased cropping intensity in almost all the districts of West Bengal has not been able to increase employment opportunities for the women agricultural Laborers. According to 2011 census work participation of women agricultural labourer is 31.01 % against the 68.99 % male in West Bengal whereas the census work participation of women agricultural labourer is 38.35 % in Rarh Bengal.

The Table 3 shows the pattern of rural male and female worker to total rural worker in Rarh Bengal. Average participation of male and female are noticed as 71.67 % and 28.33 % respectively. In case of both male and female work participation it has been found that less consistence nature of work participation in both the sexes.

Table 4 shows the Gender Gap and Disparity in work participation of different districts in Rarh Bengal. There is a similar pattern of gender gap and disparity in work participation. Highest gender gap as well as disparity is observed in Howrah district followed by Hooghli and PurbaMednipur. There is a direct relationship between gender gap and disparity in work participation of male and female. Similarly lowest gender gap and disparity in work participation is found in Purulia. It is also concluded from the figure-4 that there is a positive relation between gender gap and disparity i.e. if Gender Gap is increased then Disparity is also increased.

**Table 1: Work-Participation of Women Cultivators in Rarh Bengal**

District	Percentage Share of Women Cultivators in Total Rural Women Workers in 1991	Percentage Share of Women Cultivators in Total Rural Women Workers in 2001	Percentage Share of Women Cultivators in Total Rural Women Workers in 2011
Birbhum	19.07	10.25	9.77
Bardhaman	8.94	5.97	7.89
Bankura	28.73	22.06	16.81
Purulia	49.78	27.21	22.21
Hooghly	6.50	10.86	6.94
Howrah	20.60	3.96	1.31
Medinipur	42.61	22.06	17.74
Rarh Bengal (Avg)	25.18	14.62	11.81

Source: Census of India, 1991, 2001, & 2011 Government of India

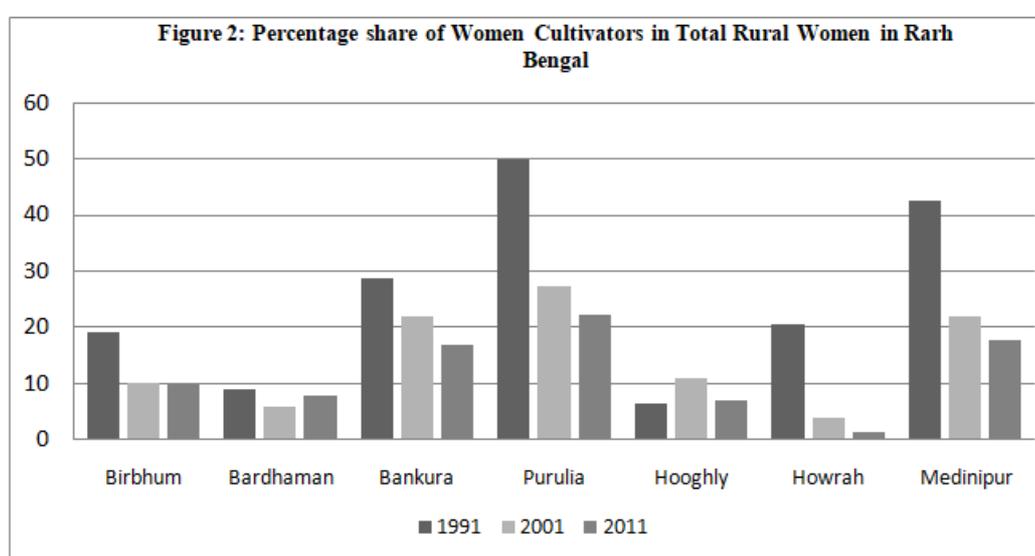


Figure 2: Percentage Share of Women Cultivators in Total Rural Women in Rarh Bengal.

**Table 2: Work-Participation of Women Agricultural Laborers in the State Of West Bengal and its Districts**

District	Percentage share of Women Agricultural Laborers in Total Rural Women Workers in 1991	Percentage share of Women Agricultural Laborers in Total Rural Women Workers in 2001	Percentage share of Women Agricultural Laborers in Total Rural Women Workers in 2011
Birbhum	59.15	49.75	38.27
Bardhaman	69.72	53.58	40.29
Bankura	58.19	50.27	41.16
Purulia	42.76	53.61	54.21
Hooghly	67.42	45.28	40.49
Howrah	26.76	12.93	10.76
PurbaMedinipur	35.88	41.10	38.10
PaschimMedinipur			43.49

Source: Census of India, 1991, 2001, & 2011 Government of India

**Table 3: Average Work Participation Rate, Standard Deviation and Co-Efficient of Variation of Rural Male and Female Worker to Total Rural Worker in Rarh Bengal, 2011**

Sex	Average Participation (in %)	Standard Deviation	Coefficient of Variation
Male	71.67	6.59	9.20
Female	28.33	6.59	23.28

Source: Data compiled by author

**Table 4: Rural Work Participation, Gender Gap and Disparity Index**

Region	District	Rural Work Participation (%)			Gender Gap	Disparity Index
		Total	Male	Female		
Rarh Bengal	Birbhum	38.27	29.52	8.76	20.76	0.64
	Bardhaman	40.29	30.99	9.30	21.68	0.64
	Bankura	41.16	29.29	11.87	17.41	0.49
	Purulia	44.21	27.56	16.65	10.91	0.28
	Hooghly	40.49	31.75	8.74	23.01	0.69
	Howrah	37.76	31.10	6.66	24.44	0.80
	PurbaMedinipur	38.10	29.99	8.11	21.89	0.69
	PaschimMedinipur	43.50	30.01	13.49	16.52	0.44

Source: Data compiled from Census of India

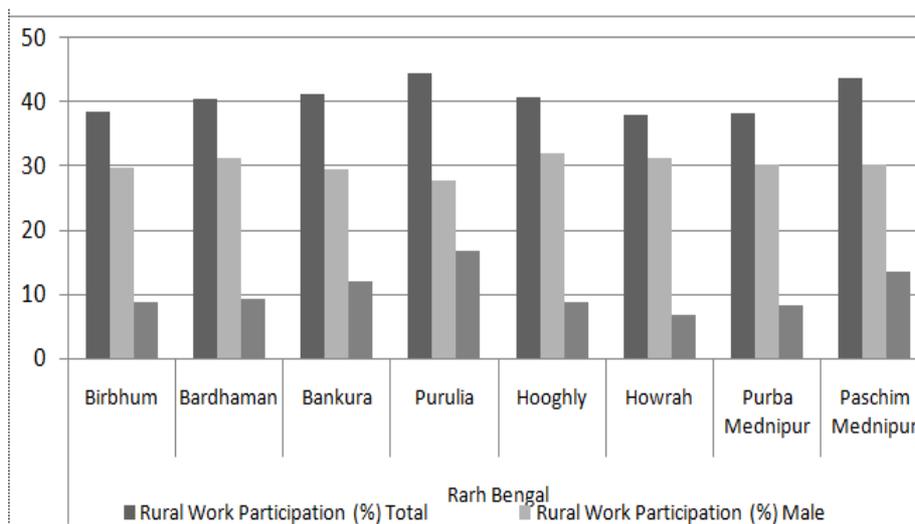


Figure 3: Distribution of Rural Work Participation (%) in Agriculture in Rarh Bengal.

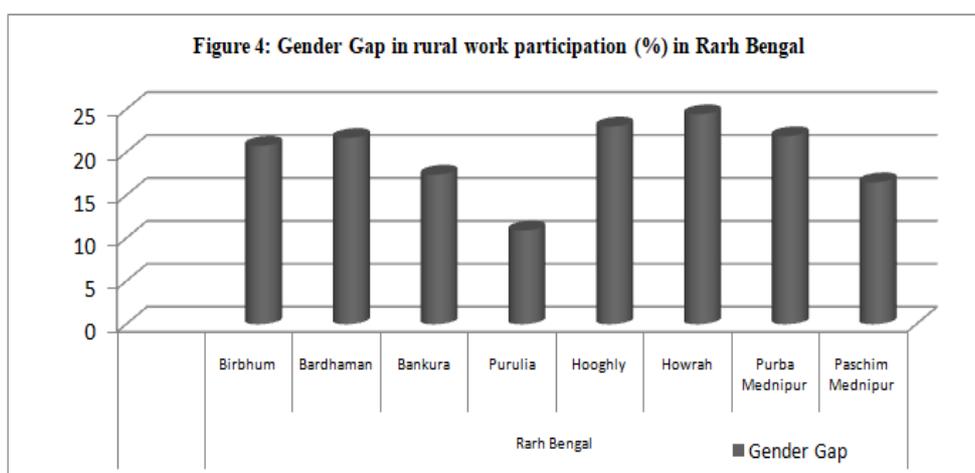


Figure 4: Gender Gap in rural work participation (%) in Rarh Bengal.

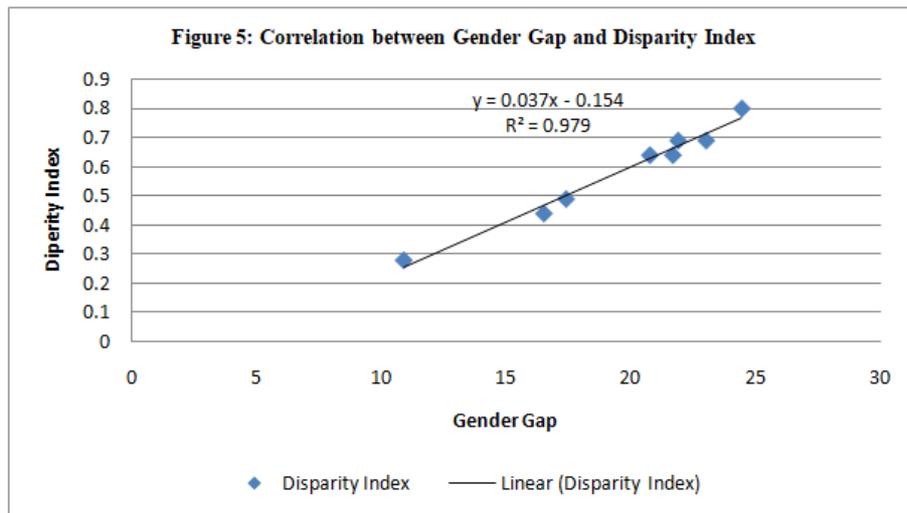


Figure 5: Correlation between Gender Gap and Disparity Index.

## CONCLUSIONS

Disparity is lack of similarity or a noticeable difference that is unfair. The study is concerned about the differences between less work participation and more work participation of both the sexes in an area where they live. The study is based on secondary information to show the regional pattern and disparity in rural female work participation in Rarh Bengal. The study also elaborated the total work participation, and also participation in agricultural sector. Women participation in agricultural sector is comparatively more in the district like Purulia, West Medinipur and Bankura than the other districts in Rarh Bengal. In Rarh Bengal, female work participation is comparatively less than male in all the districts. Because this region is economically and agriculturally much more productive and work opportunity is high that influence male people to participate more. Actually female participated more in those regions where male participated less and nature is more hurdle to do any agricultural practice. The study also highlights that Gender Gap and disparity is also high in Rarh Bengal. Finally we conclude that if Gender Gap is increased then Disparity is also increased.

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