

CASTE-DIFFERENTIALS IN FEMALE WORK-PARTICIPATION: A DISTRICT-LEVEL ANALYSIS FOR RURAL WEST BENGAL

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Abstract: *Women's participation in economic activities not only determines the women's autonomy and empowerment but also helps them to be exposed to the outside world. Meanwhile, the nature and type of work for women in today's worlds are changing and vary across regions. Using data from 2011 census of India, this paper assessed the caste-differentials in female work-participation in districts of rural West Bengal, India. Specifically, this paper aimed at assessing the differentials in female work participation among scheduled castes (SC), scheduled tribes (ST) and other castes population and, understanding the sex-differentials in work participation within different caste categories at the district level in rural West Bengal. Results showed that the female work participation was found to vary across all castes and all districts. It was relatively higher for ST, compared to SC and other caste categories in almost all the districts under consideration, indicating the fact that ST women are in more advanced position in terms of decision-making and autonomy. Moreover, female work participation among ST was found to be higher in the districts of Hoogli, Bardhaman and Puruliya, compared to other districts. The higher work participation of ST women in these districts was, possibly, due to availability and accessibility of work opportunity in agriculture and different public sector projects and due to migration in these districts.*

Key words: *Female Work-Participation, Castes, Differentials, Districts, West Bengal*

INTRODUCTION

Participation of women in work or economic activity is one of the important factors determining women's autonomy and empowerment in any setting. It not only helps women to be economically independent but also helps in improving women's individual level of well-being. Women's work participation is directly associated with household as well as social



development. Participation in any economic activity may also help women to be exposed to the outside world which may, in turn, help them to have access to the knowledge and thereby improve their status in the society. However, some of the major reasons of gender inequalities in many developing countries are the poor status of women and their less access to education and employment opportunities (Mahato *et. al*, 2017). Due to this reason, possibly, the Millennium Development Goals (UN, 2000) put emphasis on reducing the gender inequality and improving the women's empowerment. Over the decades, across countries, many conferences such as -“Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (CEDAW)”, 1975 and the UN Women's conference, 1975 were held and many forums and organisations such as- “Women's international democratic federation (WIDF), 1945 and “Commission on the status of women (CSW), 1946” were constituted to address the issues regarding discriminations against women and their rights.

In India, the workforce participation rates vary with levels of economic development, across regions, socio-cultural groups, age groups, and between sexes (Bhagat and Das, 2008). With the progress in socio-economic development in the country, the nature of work, particularly, for women has changed. With the process of modernization, rapid growth of urbanization and industrialization, and introduction of advanced technologies in agriculture and industry, the scope of job opportunities for women has reduced (Sundaram, 2001; Chadha and Sahu, 2002; Dubey *et. al.*, 2004; Papola, 2004). However, it is now well accepted by different state governments that no region or state can progress unless its women are given equal access to opportunities and adequate safety and security.

The purpose of this paper was to assess the caste-differentials in female work- participation in districts of rural West Bengal, India. Specifically, this paper aimed at assessing the differentials in female work participation among SC, ST and other castes population and understanding the sex-differentials in work participation within different caste categories at the district level in rural West Bengal. The state of West Bengal has very diversified culture of various social (such as Scheduled caste (SC) and Scheduled tribe (ST)) and religious (such as Hindu, Muslims and Christian) groups. The cultural norms and practices are different for different social and religious groups in the state. Women from different social and religious groups are likely to face a range of structural and social barriers, which has significant effect on women's participation in economic activities, leading to the differences in women work participation across social and religious group in the state.

The preliminary analysis of 2011 census data of India shows that, the percentage ST population to India's total population is closed to 9% and 90% of total ST population lives in rural India. The share of ST population of west Bengal to India's total ST population is 5%, of which more than 90% lives in rural West Bengal. On the other hand, the share of India's total SC population to total population is close to 17% of which more three-fourth belongs to rural India. The share of total SC population of West Bengal to India's total SC population is little over 10% of which near about 80% belongs to rural West Bengal. Thus, this indicates that there are large concentration of both SC and ST population in rural areas of West Bengal.

DATA AND METHODS

Data from 2011 census of India have been used for the analysis of this paper. Specifically, the district-level age data by sex and place of residence as well as data on main and marginal workers provided for overall population and provided separately for scheduled caste (SC) and Scheduled tribes (ST), by age, sex and place of residence, have been used. The 2011 census of India provides data on working population for the ages 5 years and above. However, the analysis of this paper has been restricted to the female workers aged 15-59 years. The female workers under 14 years of age are usually child labourers whose contribution to economy can be considered to be marginal, though not be avoided. Thus, from the economic point of view, it would be relevant to restrict the analysis to the female workers aged 15-59 years.

In order to fulfil the objectives, the female work participation rate (FWPR) in rural areas has been estimated separately for SC, ST and other caste population for all districts (except the district of Kolkata) of West Bengal. For the purpose of comparison, male work participation rate (MWPR) has also been calculated separately for these caste categories for the districts under consideration. Male and female work participation rates have been derived using the following methods:

$$\text{FWPR} = \text{Female workers (15-59)}/\text{Female population (15-59)}*100$$

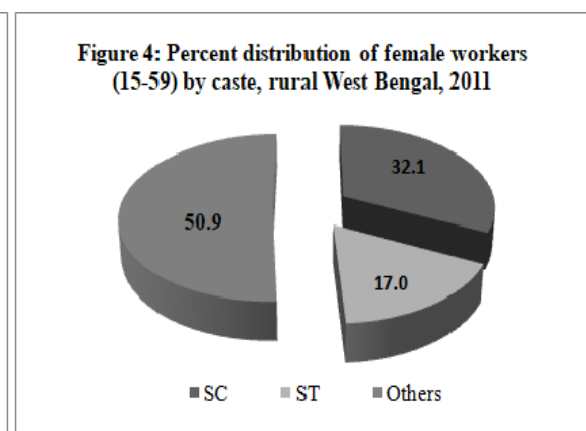
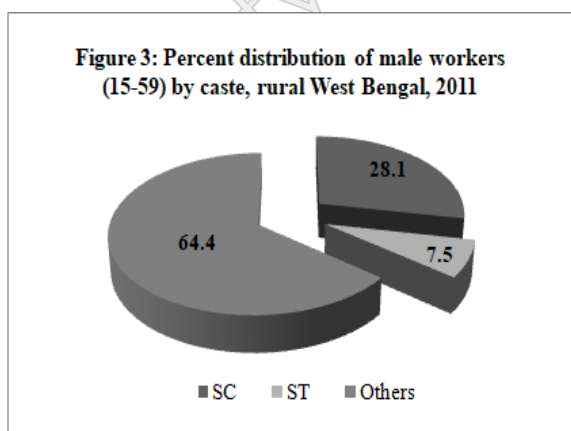
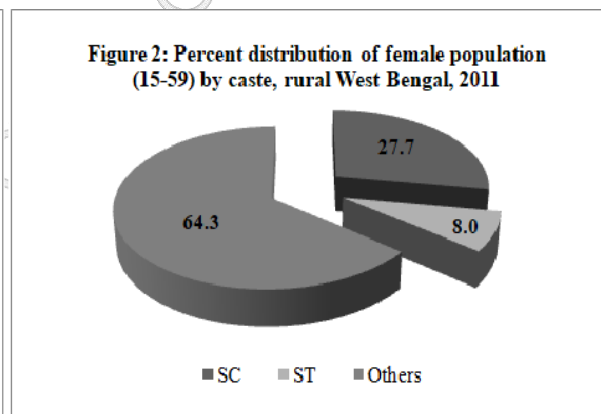
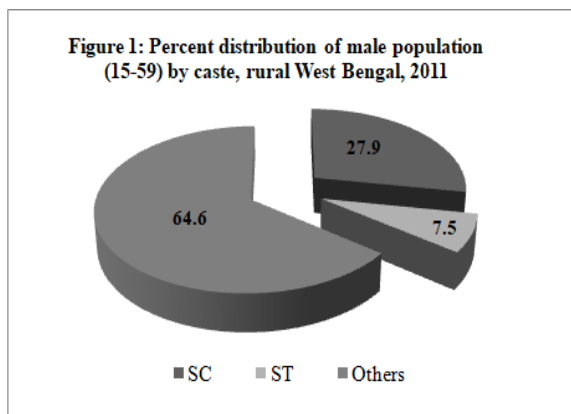
$$\text{MWPR} = \text{Male workers (15-59)}/\text{Male population}*100$$

Here, the sizes of both male and female workers have been obtained by adding main and marginal workers.

FINDINGS

Distribution of population and workers by sex and castes

Before analyzing differentials in female work participation by castes and comparison between male and female work participation within different caste categories at the district level in rural West Bengal, it is necessary to understand the nature of distribution of both male and female population as well as both male and female workers by castes in rural West Bengal. Figures 1 and 2 presents the percent distribution of male population aged 15-59 years and percent distribution of female population aged 15-59 years, by castes, respectively. It is observed that, out of total male population aged 15-59 years in rural West Bengal, more than three-fifth (64.6%) belongs to other caste, compared to 28% in SC and 8% in ST. The distribution of female population aged 15-59 by caste is almost similar to that of male. The proportion of female population aged 15-59 years was higher in other caste (64%), compared to SC (28%) and ST (8%).



The pattern of distribution of male and female workers aged 15-59 years in rural West Bengal was similar to the distribution of male and female population by castes (Figures 3 and 4). It is

observed that, more than three-fifth (64%) of the total male workers aged 15-59 years in rural West Bengal belongs to other caste, compared to 28% in SC and 7.5% in ST. with respect to female workers, more than 50% belongs to other caste category, compared to 32% in SC and 17% in ST.

Caste-differentials in female work participation

In order to understand the caste-differentials in female work participation at the district level in rural West Bengal, the female work participation rates (FWPRs), as of 2011, were calculated separately for SC, ST and other caste categories for each district. Table1 presents the estimated FWPRs by caste for rural parts of the districts (except for Kolkata) of West Bengal. It is observed that, there was considerable variation in female work participation among SC, ST and other caste categories.

Table 1: Estimated female work participation rates by caste, districts, rural West Bengal, 2011

State/Districts	SC	ST	Others	Number of female workers (15-59)
West Bengal	33.1	61.0	22.6	5401513
Darjiling	31.0	47.1	34.0	134576
Jalpaiguri*	32.4	50.7	30.6	322140
Koch Bihar	33.2	36.8	28.0	236991
Uttar Dinajpur	39.6	59.6	26.6	230783
Dakshin Dinajpur	40.3	66.7	25.6	166685
Maldah	43.3	57.8	33.4	366091
Murshidabad	23.8	59.4	20.7	358691
Birbhum	37.7	67.8	16.0	245803
Barddhaman	38.9	70.9	14.7	401039
Nadia	16.6	42.0	10.6	155170
North Twenty Four Parganas	20.2	40.3	15.7	242134
Hugli	34.7	72.6	15.2	273846
Bankura	53.3	66.7	19.7	363713
Puruliya	48.4	68.5	48.1	388626
Haora	22.7	53.1	18.4	108094
South Twenty Four Parganas	23.9	42.1	21.9	417949
Paschim Medinipur	45.2	68.4	31.1	646689
Purba Medinipur	26.7	60.8	24.1	342493

*Undivided Jalpaiguri. Note: the district of Kolkata is not included as it is fully urbanised district.

The female work participation was relatively higher for ST, compared to SC and other caste categories in all the districts under consideration. For example, in the district of Darjiling, female work participation rate for ST, as of 2011, was 47 percent, compared to only 31 percent for SC and 34 percent for other castes. Similarly, in the district of Uttar Dinajpur, it was 60 percent for ST, compared to 40 percent for SC and 27 percent for other caste. The scenario in rural West Bengal was also similar to that at the district level. The female work participation rate for ST in rural West Bengal was 61 percent, compared to 33 percent for SC and 27 percent for other caste.

Sex differentials in work participation rates by caste

An attempt was also made to understand the sex differentials in work participation within each caste category in rural parts of the districts of West Bengal. It is observed that, the differences between male and female work participation rates were relatively lower for ST than that for SC and other caste categories.

Table 2: Estimated male and female work participation rates for SC, ST and Other caste, districts, rural West Bengal, 2011

State/Districts	SC		ST		Others	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
West Bengal	82.8	33.1	82.3	61.0	81.8	22.6
Darjiling	77.0	31.0	71.3	47.1	69.8	34.0
Jalpaiguri	79.7	32.4	72.3	50.7	77.3	30.6
Koch Bihar	82.1	33.2	78.9	36.8	82.4	28.0
Uttar Dinajpur	82.4	39.6	87.0	59.6	81.6	26.6
Dakshin Dinajpur	82.8	40.3	86.1	66.7	80.6	25.6
Maldah	81.9	43.3	84.9	57.8	81.9	33.4
Murshidabad	83.5	23.8	85.4	59.4	82.3	20.7
Birbhum	85.8	37.7	88.9	67.8	82.0	16.0
Bardhaman	86.0	38.9	86.3	70.9	82.0	14.7
Nadia	79.6	16.6	84.6	42.0	81.2	10.6
North Twenty Four Parganas	80.2	20.2	83.6	40.3	82.1	15.7
Hugli	86.6	34.7	86.0	72.6	83.8	15.2
Bankura	85.2	53.3	82.3	66.7	79.6	19.7
Puruliya	82.0	48.4	83.4	68.5	80.3	48.1
Haora	86.3	22.7	87.9	53.1	84.3	18.4
South Twenty Four Parganas	81.0	23.9	84.1	42.1	82.0	21.9
Paschim Medinipur	84.4	45.2	85.5	68.4	82.5	31.1
Purba Medinipur	82.5	26.7	87.1	60.8	82.7	24.1

In other words, male work participation rates (MWPRs) were higher than that of female in both SC and other caste, while FWPRs were very close to MWPRs for ST in almost all the

districts under consideration. For example, in the district of Darjiling, among ST the FWPR was 24 percentage point lower than MWPR, while the FWPR was 46 percentage point lower than MWPR in SC and almost 36 percentage point lower than MWPR in other caste. The pattern of differences between male and female work participation were also similar in rural West Bengal. For ST, the FWPR was 21 percentage points lower than MWPR, while the FWPR was almost 50 percentage point lower than MWPR in SC and was about 60 percentage point lower than MWPR in other caste category.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this seminar paper was to examine the differentials in female work participation among SC, ST and other caste in rural setting of the districts in West Bengal. Over the decades, there has been considerable improvement in socio-economic development in India and in its states. Many states of the country have shown substantial progress in economic growth, health and education and reduction in the poverty level. The state of West Bengal has also experienced considerable improvements in these dimensions. However, with the progress in the socio-economic dimensions in the state, the type of work has also changed and, the scope of work, particularly, for women has reduced. It is evident that the work participation by female, particularly, in the rural area of the state largely varies across different castes and religious groups. The cultural norms and practices are different for different caste and religious groups. It is also evident that the women belonging to ST community enjoy more autonomy in decision-making and work participation compared to women of other caste groups. In this regard, an attempt was also made to understand the differentials in female work participation among SC, ST and other castes at the district level in rural West Bengal, by using 2011 census data. In order to understand the women's autonomy, sex differentials in work participation within different caste categories were also analyzed.

Results showed that, the female work participation was relatively higher for ST, compared to SC and other caste categories in all the districts under consideration. With respect to ST, the female work participation was highest in the district of Hugli (73 percent), preceded by Bardhaman (71 percent) and Puruliya (69 percent) and lowest in the districts of Koch Bihar (37 percent), followed by North 24-Parganas (40 percent) and Nadia (42 percent). The higher work participation by female from ST community in the districts of Hugli, Bardhaman and Puruliya is, possibly, due to availability and accessibility of work opportunity in agriculture



and different public sector projects. There may be some individual, social-economic and cultural factors and, particularly, migration responsible for district-level variations in female work participation in the state. The sex-differentials in work participation within different caste categories suggest that differences between male and female work participation were found to be large in SC and other caste groups, compared to that in ST community in most of the districts under consideration. This may indicate the fact that female workers from ST community are in more advanced position in terms of liberty and autonomy in decision-making and participation in work, compared to female workers from SC and other caste category.

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