



GENDER GAP IN EDUCATION AND WORK PARTICIPATION- A CASE STUDY OF PARARPAR VILLAGE, ALIPURDUAR, WEST BENGAL

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Abstract

Indian history has witnessed several ups and downs in the status of women in the country as a whole. Education leads to participation in the labour force which is a strong indicator of women empowerment. However, India presents a very gloomy picture of reality. This paper highlights the gap between male –female education and a strong division in labour between the genders leading to a poor empowerment scenario in Pararpar village of Alipurduar. The study shows a decreasing trend of female participation in the formal sector and an increasing involvement in the informal sector leading to an unproductive ratio with the males. Female force of the village is also characterised by dismal level of schooling and technical training. With no means of obtaining remunerated employment a vast number of women resign themselves to unremunerated and minimally productive forms of labour. Apart from education and training, the work participation of women is also hindered by several factors of safety issues, distance to work, responsibility of family ties and lack of access to basic amenities. Although the study shows that the female population in the village is more or less equal to the male population, but the human resource potentials in women goes unnoticed. Equipping and making women aware of taking life determining decisions is the actual definition of empowerment. It is now the turn of the women to feel it and take the stride.

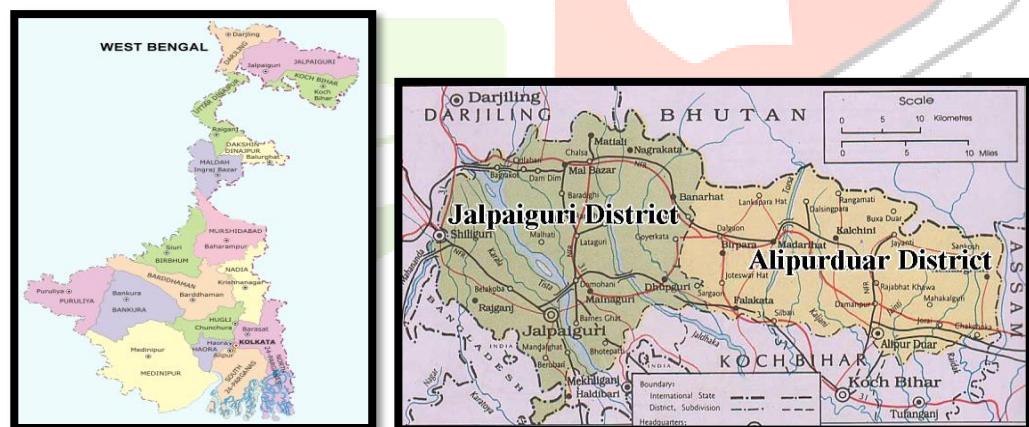
Keywords: education, work participation, gap, below potential, life-determining decisions.

Introduction

The stability, progress and long-term development of nations have always been awarded by the central role it gives to women. Indian history has witnessed several ups and downs in the status of women in the country as a whole. Women's position in a given society is closely linked with its prevalent demographic trends. The demographic attributes like early marriage, early motherhood, high morbidity and low literacy severely affects the progress towards empowerment of women in a society. On the other hand, education and empowerment can have an everlasting effect on demographic attributes like fertility rate, infant mortality rates and child sex ratio. This bestows the essence of self-confidence and boosts up the self-esteem of the neglected half of the society to contribute towards the community's benefit. Positive results are only expected when women would be included in the mainstream working community. Most women work in the unorganised sector and are not covered by protective laws and policies. They possess poor skills, get low wages, face job insecurity, and are subjected to different types of exploitation, making them more vulnerable. In the highly competitive market, educated women find it hard to get a job, so uneducated masses are over exploited. Women education, work participation and empowerment are very closely related facets of development. In rural India, parents are unwilling to send their daughters to schools and engage them to household chores. This develops from the age-old idea of the patriarchal society that women and girls are to serve the households. They should be engaged in household activities as they are married early. This increases the school dropout rates of the girls in most villages. The participation of women in economic activities also follows a similar trend. The discrepancy is also seen between male and female workers and their education level following the Census years 2001 and 2011. Similar trends are observed in the study area, the paper evaluates. Sustainability of economic development of the country will depend on the fact that how this resource of the society is utilised.

Study Area

The area of study for the paper is Pararpar village of Alipurduar I Block of Alipurduar District of West Bengal. Alipurduar is a northern district of the state of West Bengal. The village, Pararpar, covers an area of 564.5 hectares of land. The total population of the village is 4384 of which 2271 are males and 2113 are females. The total number of households in the village is 1023. The nearest town is Alipurduar which is only 5 kms away.



Objective

The objective of this study is to show the literacy rate and employment status of women in Pararpar village of Alipurduar district of West Bengal as major indicators of women empowerment and to establish a positive correlation between the two. The major objectives of the study are-

- To show the gender gap in education
- To highlight the percentage of work participation of women
- To find out the probable causes by primary surveyed data
- To suggest measures to enhance the domains of empowerment of women

Methodology:

The study relies on mixed method- both qualitative and quantitative. This consisted of collection of both primary and secondary information on physical and socio-economic aspect from Pararpar village. The primary data was collected between October and December, 2019 by the method of random sampling. Secondary data was also collected from Census and other books and journals relating to the area under study. The data gathered has been analysed with the help of representative maps and various cartographic techniques. The perception studies were carried on by a door-to-door survey done between the stipulated time period by means of a questionnaire. Thus, both charts, graphs and the lifestyle stories form the inherent method of the study.

Analysis of Data

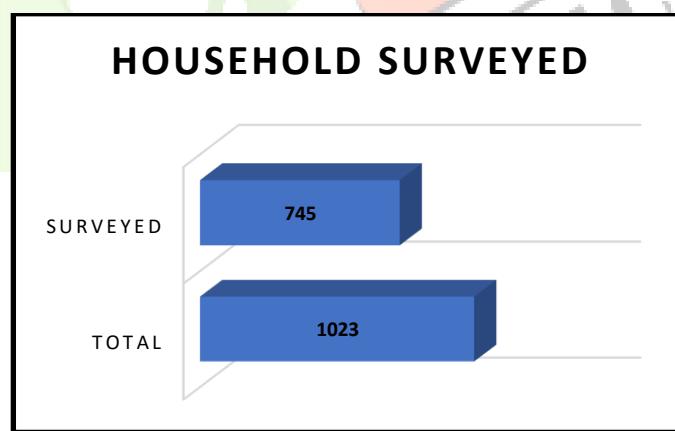
According to the Census 2011, Alipurduar has a total population of 3,872,846 of which male and female were 1,983,064 and 1,889,782 respectively. The study area, Pararpar has a total population of 4384, of which 2271 are males and 2113 are females. There are a total of 1023 households in the village. A primary survey was done between October and December, 2019 and a total of 745 households were surveyed by door-to- door survey method. Thus, nearly 73% of the households were surveyed which gives a very clear picture of the village as a whole and reduces the possibilities of generalisations.

Table 1: Surveyed Households

Number of Households in Total	1023
Number of Surveyed Households	745

Source: Primary Data collected at site

Fig 1



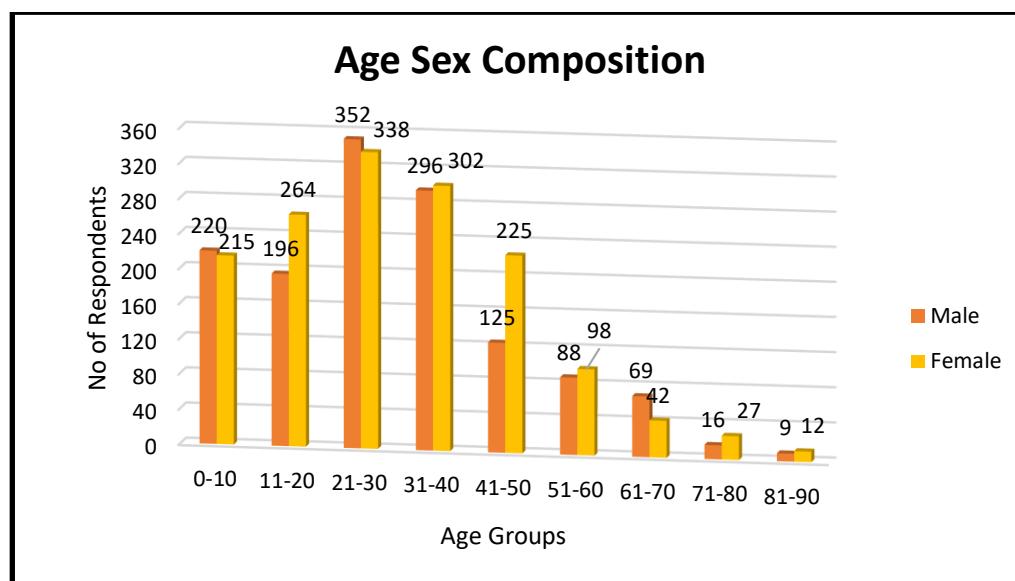
Source: Primary Data collected at site

Out of the total number of males found in the village (2271), 1371 males were surveyed which covered nearly 60% of the male population. In case of females, 1523 out of 2113 females have been questioned which covers nearly 72% of the female population. The main aim of the paper is to show the gender gap; thus, importance has been placed on women. An age-sex composition table has also been prepared based on the data collected.

Table 2: Age Sex Composition

Age Group	Male	Female
0 to 10	220	215
11-20	196	264
21-30	352	338
31-40	296	302
41-50	125	225
51-60	88	98
61-70	69	42
71-80	16	27
81-90	9	12

Source: Primary Data collected at site

Fig 2

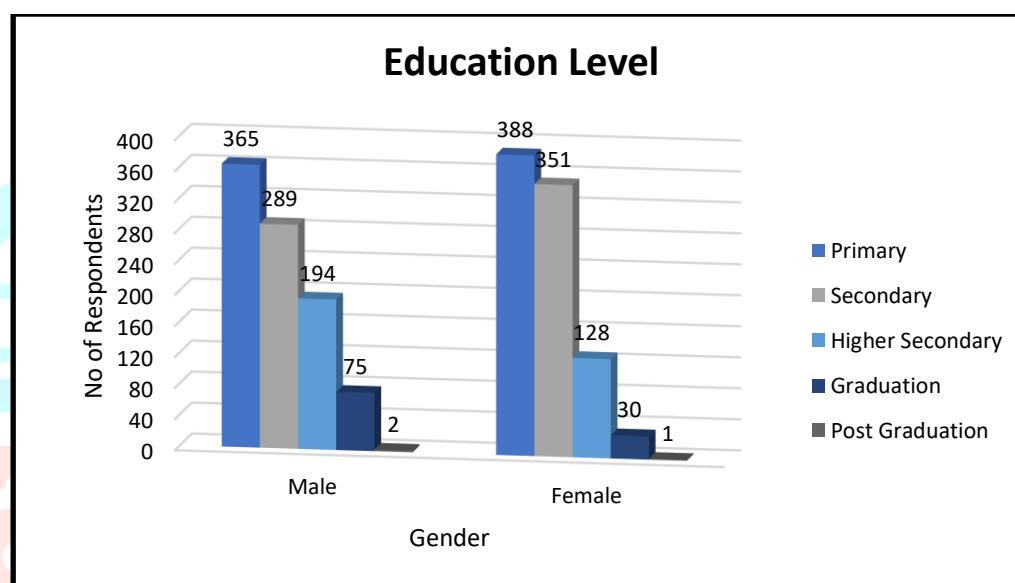
Source: Primary Data collected at site

The age sex composition is a very useful indicator of the economic stability of any region. The composition shows that both male and female population are highest in the working age group of 21-31, followed by second highest between 31 and 41. The dependency rate is also quite high in the sample population as number of children, below 10 years, is on the higher side for both the sexes. But this also increases the possibility of a future work force. The working age in India is considered to be up to 60 years. The distribution of male and female population shows a huge potential for work force which is generated in Pararpar village. Maximum population distribution is aligned within this age groups.

Table 3: Level of Education

Education Level	Male	Female
Primary (up to V)	365	388
Secondary (VI TO X)	289	351
HS	194	128
Graduation	75	30
Post-Graduation	2	1
Total	925	898

Source: Primary Data collected at site

Fig 3

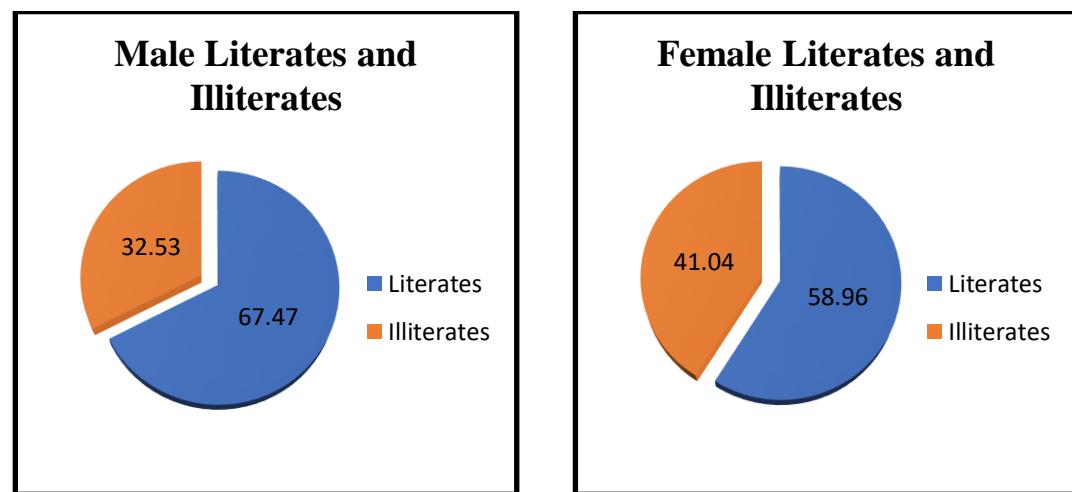
Source: Primary Data collected at site

Table 4: Number of Literates

	Male	Female
Literates	925 (67.47%)	898 (58.96%)
Illiterates	446 (32.53%)	625 (41.04%)
Total	1371	1523

Source: Primary Data collected at site

Fig 4



Source: Primary Data collected at site

Education and empowerment are synonymous when it comes to women. Compared to males, female literacy presents a very gloomy picture of reality. Female literacy is in a staggering condition in this village. Only 58.96% of the women are literate which means that nearly half of women population could not exercise the basic constitutional rights for them. The literacy rate among men is also low, nearly 67.47%. Still, the gender gap prevails when it comes to attainment of education for women. The number of children attending primary and secondary schools is quite high. But graduation and higher education is not very sought for. The number of girls attending colleges decreases sharply after higher secondary education.

There are 3 coeducational primary schools in the village. 2 Secondary schools are also present in the village. The children do not have to travel much to attend primary and secondary education. Thus, enrolment in primary and secondary education is quite high. But colleges are not located near the village- they are far off. The institutions present here does not seem to be sufficient for the population. Women have to move out for higher education. The social and religious taboos are still prevalent in these societies which add up in the low level of higher education in women. Thus, it is difficult for women to move out of the village and go to the city for further education. So, the level of education in the higher levels is really low. On the socio-economic front, the picture the village presents in nearly gloomy. The economic structure and women workforce computations needed to highlight on the work participation and type of occupation of the female residents over there.

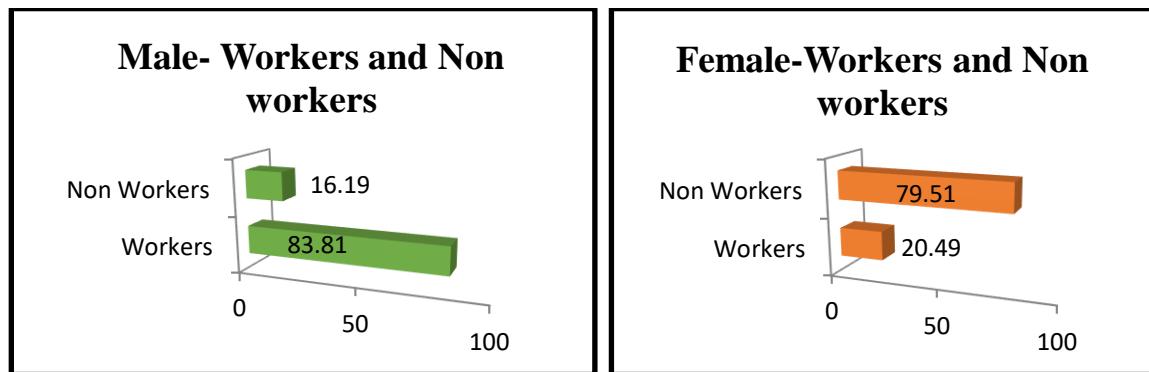
The distribution of working population and the female occupation structure however revealed some gloomy facts of reality.

Table 5 : Distribution of Working Population

	Male	Female
Workers	1149 (83.81%)	312 (20.49%)
Non-Workers	222 (16.19%)	1211(79.51%)

Source: Primary Data collected at site

Fig 5



Source: Primary Data collected at site

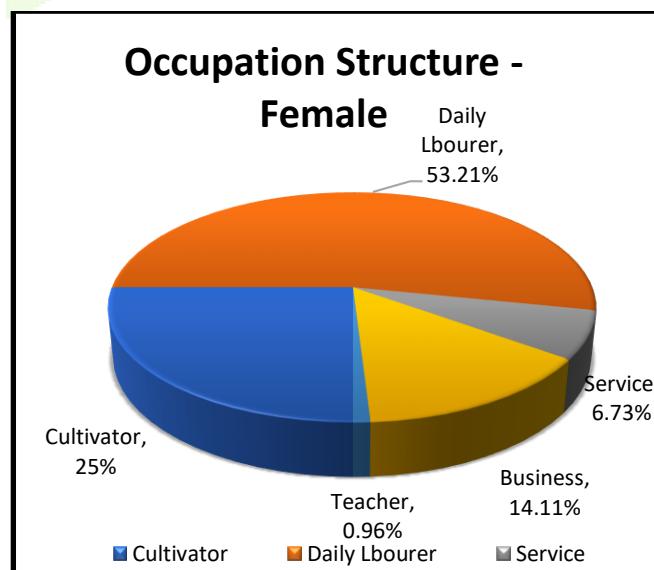
There is a great disparity in the working population of the village. As evident from the table, the percentage of non-worker female is 79.51% which is very high. This signifies that the female population is only confined to household chores. This negligibly contributes to the economic development of the region. The workers are mostly men (83.81%). Thus, the pressure and dependency on male working population increases. Females are mostly engaged in household activities and are absent from the formal sector of employment. Entrenched hierarchical social division, and the lack of correlation between educational attainments and job opportunities are the greatest hindrances which strongly influences the economy of the region.

Table 6: Occupation Structure- Female

Occupation	Female
Cultivator	78(25%)
Daily Labourer	166(53.21%)
Service	21(6.73%)
Business	44(14.11%)
Teacher	3(0.96%)
Total	312

Source: Primary Data collected at site

Fig 6



Source: Primary Data collected at site

Out of the total female working population about 78% are engaged in cultivation including the agricultural labourers, cultivators and marginal workers. This signifies that the economy is mostly agrarian. Other services do not show a prominent site. This suggests the spread of education among the newer generation and a tendency to move out of the eternal occupation has not been the case here. The highest percentage of population is engaged as agricultural labourers which signify that the poor mass does not possess a land of their own. But overall, the participation of women workers is feeble.

Discussion

Indian Constitution has long included gender equality to be enjoyed by the citizens of India. The constitution not only grants equality to women but also empowers the state to adopt positive measures against discrimination of women. However, the data in the above tables show that literacy and school enrolment ratios are divided among the gender lines. Education improves women productivity at home which in turn accelerates positive family health, child survival and investing in children's human capital. The social benefits of women education are manifold, ranging from fostering economic growth to extending life expectancy in the population, to improving the functioning of political processes. The most productive class of human resources are the women in the young age group. Therefore, sustainability of economic development of the country will depend on how this mass of population is being built up and utilised. The village population shows a great disparity in women education and utilisation. Most of the women are engaged in the informal sector and are marginalised from the mainstream economic structure of the society. Women account more for the unpaid work in rural sectors- which is why female participation has remained lower than male participation in the labour force. The proportion of workers self-employed in agricultural work is indirectly proportional to the number of households which do not have operational holding of land. An increase in such proportion of households bring down sharply the proportion of workers. Increasing concentration of land holdings can also directly contribute to decline in overall labour consumption. For a given cropping pattern, land owners tend to deploy labour displacing technology to a large extent. Greater adoption of labour displacing technology, caused by increasing concentration of land holdings and increasing cost advantage of using labour displacing techniques, among other factors, is likely to have been an important factor behind the sharp decline of employment status of rural women in India. Another factor attributed towards the decline in work force is the barrier to mobility. Rural women do have opportunities to serve the service sectors in urban areas. But the lack of decent housing, safety measures, lack of transportation at proper times are some major hindrances that bind them back to their native places. This is the reason why work participation and attainment of higher education is sharply low among rural women. Employment opportunities for skilled work in the organised sector are limited and not grown significantly. Lower levels of education and technical training means women remains marginalised from the employment opportunities that are available. Women get married younger than men do. Safety of women travelling alone is a major concern here – the schools and colleges being located far away from the village. Therefore, the topmost reasons for low education levels are lack of interest in studies, economic condition of the parents, migration of family and to help the family in domestic work. Rural women do have opportunities to serve the service sectors in urban areas. But the lack of decent housing, safety measures, lack of transportation at proper times are some major hindrances that bind them back to their native places. The primary survey showed that a feeling of guilt or selfishness is observed in the attitudes of some women when they put their career interests first. However, while the women tend to be excluded from the village decision-making process by traditional male leaders, there is also inequality among the women themselves. A feeling of guilt or selfishness is observed in the attitudes of some women when they put their career interests first. Because women's work and family demands are simultaneous, these demands have a significant impact on women's careers. Women have less access to information, and are marginalized from decision-making.

Suggested Recommendations

The survey work done in the village of Pararpar and the analysis of the data has shown that there is a huge womanpower lying dormant as the percentage of working females is meagre. There are certain suggested remedies that can bring about a change in the village scenario.

- The lack of access to higher education has put women in the back foot. Though they have secondary education yet they cannot opt for well paid, high collared jobs. Only three primaries and two secondary schools serve the purpose of the whole village which is insufficient. Colleges and other technical institutions are far away which are inaccessible by road. The establishment of proper educational institutes for the villagers to attain higher education is pretty much needed.

- Accessibility is a major constraint here. Not only for the educational institutes, but also for the occupation purpose, transport facilities should be enhanced. Only when there will be a proper flow of transport and communication, women will feel free to leave their domestic chores and go out to work in the cities. The most common form of transport here is cycle owned by each and every family. However, women are debarred from using them in public.
- Community awareness seminar should be launched to develop the interest of the women towards work participation.
- Bridge the cultural gap between men and women through more elaborate forms of participatory programmes to involve both of them.
- West Bengal Government has also come up with the micro and small-scale entrepreneurship for the women of these villages. But to accept it needs a broader mind.
- Proper and regular monitoring of literacy and employment programmes must be done.

Conclusion

Empowerment is a process of creating the perception of powers in individuals to regulate their own lives, society and community. It means not only equipping women to be economically stable and productive but also to be self-reliant, have positive esteem to enable them to face difficult situation and to be able to participate in developmental activities. The Government of India has ratified several international conventions and human rights instruments committing to secure equal rights to women. But in our country women are discriminated and marginalised at every level of society whether it is economic participation, social participation, political participation, access to education and also reproductive healthcare. Women are found to be economically poor all over India. A few women are engaged in the service and other sectors. They need economic power to stand on their own with men. This primarily requires similar education trend with that of men. However, the literacy gap between the genders marks the gap between their empowerment statuses.

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