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## **Women Work Participation Scenario in North 24-Parganas District, W.B.**

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### **Abstract**

*This paper has been written on the basis of qualitative and quantitative data collected from secondary sources only and has discussed about the scenario of Women work participation in North 24-Parganas district, West Bengal. The objectives of the study are – 1.To understand the level and nature of the female workforce activity in this district, 2. To shed light on the trends of female work participation rate in the years 2001-11, 3.To find the nature of gender inequality (if any) in work participation in different occupational categories, 4.To identify the sectoral shifts of female workers into different occupational categories over time, and lastly 5. To find out the probable causes behind the present scenario. . It has been seen from the study that the work participation rate among males has remained higher than that of the females. A high percentage of the workforce both among male and female is engaged as regular workers in this district. The percentage of female workers engaged in non-agriculture and non-household activities is high which indicates that a high percentage of female workers in the district earn their livelihood from such economic activities which are basically non-rural in nature and no such sectoral shifting of women workers has been found into different occupational categories.*

**Key Words:** *Work Participation, Women work participation, Main worker, Marginal worker, Other Worker, Occupational distribution, Gender inequality.*

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**Introduction:** Women workforce is an essential factor of production which contributes to a country's development. The total number of workers of a country is highly affected by the activity of women who often play the dual role of a home maker and worker. In countries like India, there exist various socio-economic and cultural factors which determine the level of female employment. Women workforce participation rate plays an important role in determining the socio-economic as well as cultural development and growth in a country or in a region. Moreover, women work participation is a key indicator for the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM). Swami Vivekananda said that, "there is no chance for the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved". Various development agencies now realise that the key to long term poverty alleviation in developing countries, is empowerment of poor people especially poor women (Dawson 1998). And for the

empowerment of women it is necessary to first give women proper education and secondly, make them employed in standard economic activities. So, women work participation is an important factor in the development of a nation and also is an indicator of the level of gender inequality, socio-economic development and women empowerment. But, while women's workforce participation tends to increase with economic development, the relationship between them is not the same in all countries. There are variations in the developing countries in workforce participation by women vis-a vis men which are perhaps the outcomes of a wide variety in education, pattern of economic growth, government policies and some socio-cultural factors in different countries.

**Objectives:** The main objectives of the study are:

1. To understand the level and nature of the female workforce activity in the study district;
2. To shed light on the trends of female work participation rate during the period 2001-11;
3. To find out the nature of gender differences (if any) in work participation into different Occupational categories;
4. To identify the Sectoral shifts of female workers into different occupational categories over time.
5. To find out the probable causes behind the present scenario.

**Study Area:** According to 2011 census, the Sex ratio (955 female/1000male) in North 24 - Parganas district is higher than that of the state (950 female /1000male). If we see the rural-urban sex ratio these are respectively 947 and 961 out of 1000 male population. Though, rural sex ratio(947) is little lower than that of the state(953) but urban sex ratio(961) is still much higher than that of west Bengal(944), which would be a good sign for the district in the context of development in education, income etc. It can be guessed that the status of women (literacy status, work culture, empowerment and well-being etc.) is likely to be somewhat better in this district than that in other districts which have lower sex ratios but, is it really true? The present researcher has tried to draw the scenario and depict the trend and pattern of work participation among women in North 24 Parganas district, West Bengal in the years 2001-11 in this context.

**Methodology:** The study is based on both the quantitative and qualitative data. Relevant data on population, occupation and work participation have been collected from various secondary sources including the District Census Handbook 2011, District Human Development Report 2010, of North 24 Parganas and some other internet sources. Data analysis and presentation have been done by statistical and cartographic techniques. Work Participation Rates among various categories of workers are calculated on the basis of the definitions and formula followed by the Census of India.

**Discussion and Analysis:**

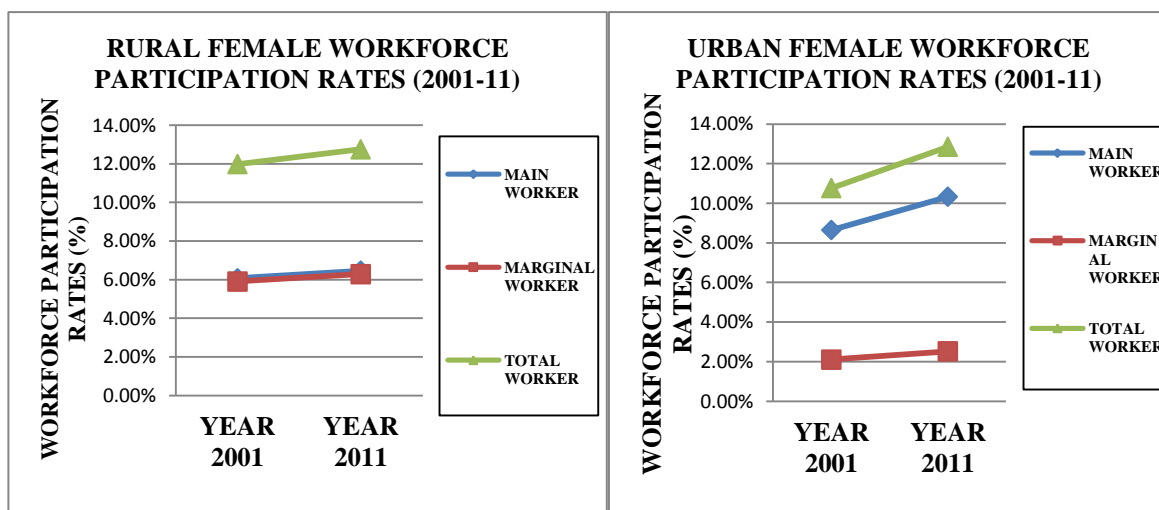
**Level and Trends of female work participation rate during the period 2001-11:** In west Bengal work participation rates among the females at district level are not at all remarkable

and North24-Parganas is not in a good position. Though the rate is on the rise , in 2001 about 11.32% of the total female population was engaged in the workforce and only about 1.47% increase in female workforce has been noticed in ten years from 2001-11. In the case of work participation among the rural women, it has increased very little (.77%) as compared to the workforce participation rate among urban women(2.09) during 2001-11. Percentage increase of main and marginal workers among rural, urban and total female workers are 0.39% and 0.38%, 1.68% and 0.41%, and 1.22% and 0.25% respectively. In all the cases, the increase is very much small. So work participation rate among women in North 24-Parganas district is increasing very slowly and the levels are not at all satisfactory. However, inadequacy of productive employment opportunities or lower percentage of productive population among women could be a main factor behind this.

**Table1. Composition of Rural-Urban Female workforce participation (in %) in North 24 Pgs :**

	2001			2011		
	Main worker	Marginal worker	Total worker	Main worker	Marginal worker	Total worker
<b>Rural</b>	6.07%	5.91%	11.98%	6.46%	6.29%	12.75%
<b>Urban</b>	8.65%	2.11%	10.76%	10.33%	2.52%	12.85%
<b>Total</b>	7.46%	3.87%	11.33%	8.68%	4.12%	12.80%

**Source:** District Census Handbook 2011, North 24 Parganas & District Human Development Report 2010, North 24 Parganas



**Fig-1: Rural-Urban Female Work force Participation Rates (2001-2011)**

**Nature of the female workforce activity and Nature of gender inequality in work participation:** There exists a gender variation in the occupational distribution of workforce.

The percentage of female workers earning livelihood from agriculture was only 10.38 percent in 2001 in this district (while the State average is 32.62 percent) and in 2011 it has increased by only 1.71%. Compared to male, a higher percentage of female workers are engaged in household industry and also in various other non-farm jobs. But the participation rate among the females as main worker in household industry for the state as a whole is much higher than what is observed in North 24 Parganas. The percentage of female workers who are engaged in non-agriculture and non-household activities was as high as 79.03 percent in 2001 which increased a little by only .30% in 2011. It appears from Table 2. that the percentage of 'other workers' among the female workforce of the district is higher than the workforce percentage among the male 'main workers' of North 24 Parganas. It is clear that a high percentage of women workers in this district earn their livelihood from such economic activities which are basically non-farm in nature like trade & commerce, manufacturing, transport and storage, processing, servicing and repairing, other than household industry. According to Census 2001, only 10.59 percent of the female main workers in this district found their livelihood in the Household Industries which has also decreased at 8.57% in the year 2011. However, low work participation rate among the females in this district can be explained partly by the fact that the potentiality of household industrial sector as a source of livelihood remains neglected here. A significant percentage of the female main workers are engaged in other non-agricultural sectors. But in spite of this, the fact is that the work participation rate among the females than among the males remains low because other non-agricultural sectors fail to pull a large percentage of women in the workforce. This may be due to the social beliefs, superstitions and other demographic and socio-cultural causes. In case of marginal workers also, the percentage of female household industrial workers among marginal workers has increased (7.35%) than that of the male marginal workers (2.79%) working in this sector.

**Table 2. Occupational Distribution of the 'Main Workers':**

Occupation	2001			2011		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
<b>Agricultural labour and cultivator</b>	23.9%	10.38%	22.24%	24.50%	12.09%	22.77%
<b>Household industrial worker</b>	2.47%	10.59%	3.46%	2.55%	8.57%	3.39%
<b>Other worker</b>	73.63%	79.03%	74.29%	72.94%	79.33%	73.84%

**Source:** District Census Handbook 2011, North 24 Parganas & District Human Development Report 2010, North 24 Parganas

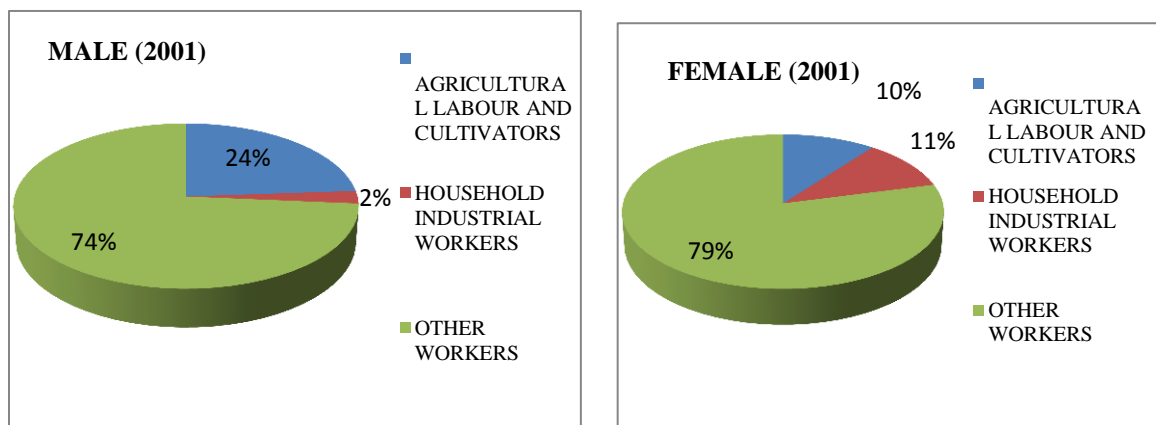
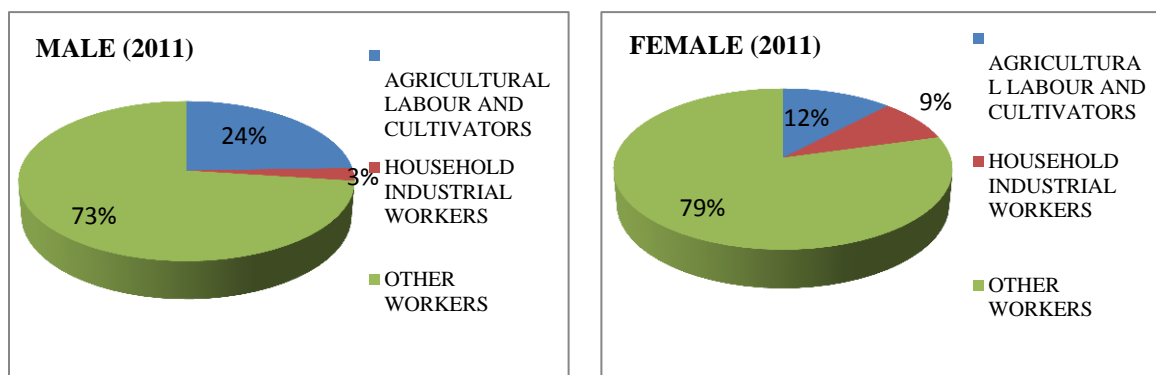


Fig. - 2:- Gender wise Occupational Distribution of the ‘Main Workers’



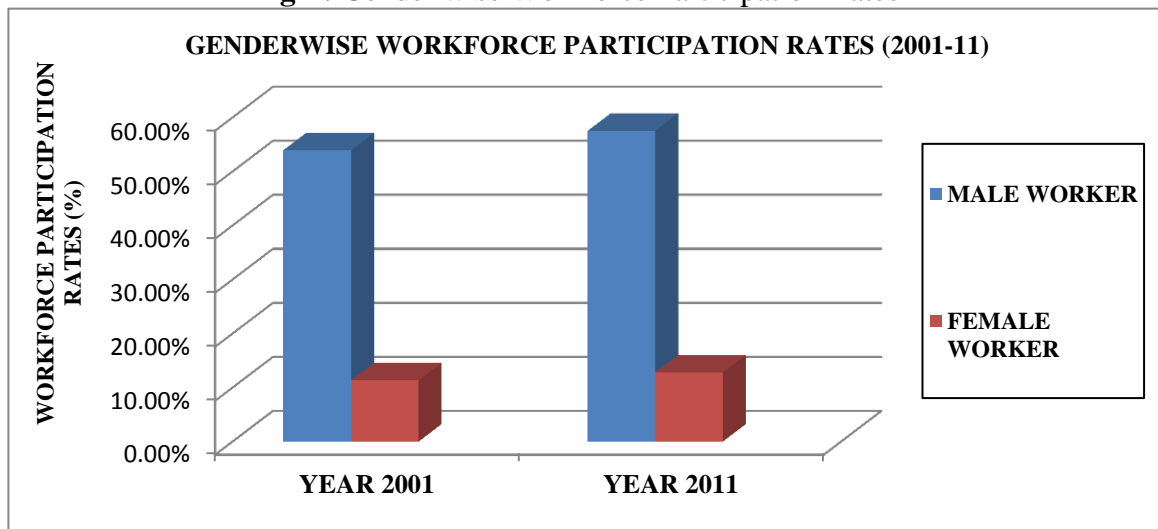
According to 2011 Census, Work Participation Rate in West Bengal is 38.08 percent. In North 24 Parganas, the work participation rate is 35.68 (2011). It has been seen that the overall work participation rate in this district is quite low. Work participation rate among the male population in this district is 57.53 as per 2011 census; it has been increased by 3.6% than that of the rate in 2001, which is almost equal to the average work participation rate among males (57.07% in 2011) in the state. However, the Work Participation Rate among the females is only 12.81 in 2011 which has increased by 1.48% over that in 2001(11.33%) and is much lower than the state average of 18.08% (2011). This is revealing a significant difference in work participation rates between male and female population. However, a high percentage of both in the male and female workforce are engaged as regular workers in this district.

**Table -3: Composition of Male-Female Workforce (in %) in North 24 Parganas**

	2001			2011		
	Main worker	Marginal worker	Total	Main worker	Marginal worker	Total
<b>Male</b>	49.64	4.28	53.93	51.39	6.14	57.53
<b>Female</b>	7.46	3.87	11.33	8.68	4.12	12.81
<b>Total</b>	29.36	4.08	33.45	30.53	5.15	35.68

**Source:** District Census Handbook 2011, North 24 Parganas & District Human Development Report 2010, North 24 Parganas

**Fig-2: Gender wise Workforce Participation Rates**



**Sectoral shifts of female workers into different occupational categories:** If we see table 2 i.e. occupational distribution of main workers we can see that there is 1.71%(2001-2011) rise in agricultural labours and cultivators among the female main workers and in case of household industrial workers the share of main female workers has fallen from 10.59% in 2001 to 8.57% in 2011. But if we look into the ratio of other workers, the ratio of women main workers’ participation as other workers is very higher than the other workers among the male, both in the year 2001 and 2011. Again, while the rate of other workers among male main workers has fallen between the years 2001-11, the ratio of female work participation among other workers has increased. So, as noted earlier, a high percentage of women workers in this district are earning their livelihood from basically non-farm and non-rural economic activities which is very significant for the district’s economy. Otherwise, no such huge and direct sectoral shift into various occupational categories has been noticed from the statistics.

**Finding The Probable Causes Behind The Present Scenario And Conclusion:** The main objectives of the paper were to assess the level of women participation in various works, the pattern of occupational engagement of women workers, depict the trend of women work

participation and delineate whether there exist any gender differences in North 24 Parganas district from 2001-2011. And lastly, in conclusion, the researcher has tried to find out some probable causes behind the present scenario. From the census data it is revealed that though the proportion is very little but the female population share among total population has been increased by only about 1% (from 48.07% in 2001 to 48.85% in 2011) in ten years and the male population share has decreased from 51.93% in 2001 to 51.15% in 2011. So, from the above discussions it is clear that where, in this district, the female population share is almost about 50% of the total population, the picture of women work participation is not at all satisfactory in this respect. Work participation rate among women is much lower than the work participation among male. The increase in women work participation in ten years in total and in various occupational categories like agriculture and cultivation, household industries and other works is also not so encouraging. Not only this, the proportion of working women has been decreasing in household industrial sector. No occupational shift has been found within the various occupational sectors, which is not a welcoming phenomenon. Various causes may lie behind this picture. If the growth pattern, which has been becoming less employment generating due to open trade policy, capital intensiveness of industries etc., in this district can be changed and diversification can be made, away from the sectors having low employment elasticity, the expansion of employment among the women will be possible. The agricultural sector has some increase in number of women labours in ten years. As development of remarkable household industries are not so satisfactory in this district in last few years and the growth in this industries has also taken place very slowly, the employment generation for women in this sector is not adequate in the ten year span. So, attention should be given on the development of small scale and household industries largely based on local level resources. Though it is very significant that the proportion of 'other workers' who are engaged in works other than agriculture, cultivation or household industrial workers, among women workers are consistently higher than the proportion of male other workers during ten years from 2001-11, which indicate a dominance and rise of non agricultural activities of women workforce in this district. But the pattern of their job is more marginal and casual type or in many cases self-employed, so the high statistics of women engagement in other works does not mean, that flourishing of non-agricultural activities pull them in this sector. So, ultimately the conclusion is that the economic activities in this district should be more dynamic, labour intensive and economic growth pattern should be changed.

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