

SOCIO –ECONOMIC INFLUENCES IN DIFFERENT FACETS OF FARMING: A GENDER STUDY OF HOOGHLY DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT

One can assess a nation's increase by investigating its behaviour of women in terms of occupation and social status. Gender equality in a society confirms that women and men have identical access to capitals, occasions, rights, and errands. Women are still awkwardly affected by poverty and lack of education compared to men, despite notable advancements in these areas. Farming is the principal economic activity and primary source of maintenance in the rural parts of the district. Gender-based judgment negatively impacts various aspects of individuals' health and well-being. An assessment is required to determine the prevalence of chauvinism and other types of human vulnerability in the economic and social sectors of the Hooghly area. The study was conducted in six villages within the district, where women participants from various socio-economic situations and different castes were selected. The survey found that women are actively involved in several aspects of agriculture in addition to domestic tasks. Their participation in animal husbandry is an underpaid and unacknowledged venture. The increasing population and male migration to urban areas for employment are leading to a growing involvement of women in agriculture and related tasks.

Keywords: Gender equality, agriculture, animal husbandry, socio-economic

1. INTRODUCTION

Like men, women have been instrumental in human history's advancements. Looking at how a country treats its women in terms of employment and social standing may really be a measure of its growth. It is impossible for a country's social, economic, and political progress to be made without women's active engagement. The hands that rock the cradle might not have controlled the planet quite yet, despite what the myth says. Aside from their typical house tasks, the majority of women also participate in economic activities. They utilize their skills and labour to earn extra money, which may frequently mean the difference between a decent quality of living and complete poverty for their families. The international development community has recognized agriculture as a critical engine of economic growth and poverty reduction in nations where farming is the main means of subsistence for the impoverished. In many developing nations, the agricultural sector suffers from underperformance because women, in spite of their vital roles as farmers, labourers, and entrepreneurs, encounter more severe limitations than men when it comes to accessing productive resources. International and national efforts to achieve agricultural development, economic growth, and food security will be accelerated and strengthened if these obstacles are removed and women's contributions are built upon. Smallholding peasant farming has always been an integral part of West Bengali agricultural practises. The typical size of a holding decreased during the land reforms of the 1980s. Although many women still work in agriculture, the number of women leaving West Bengal in quest of jobs is far lower than the number of men doing the same. Small, family-run farms, with the majority of farm labour coming from women, make up the majority of West Bengali agriculture. The informal sector employs a large number of women, many of whom work from home as manufacturers or retailers. Official statistics may not include women who work on small family farms in the state since they are unlikely to get remuneration or have legal ownership of the land they farm. Areas with lower levels of education, media exposure, and urban influence are associated with lower rates of technology adoption. Drought-prone regions of West Bengal, including districts Purulia, Bankura, Birbhum, etc., are also part of this trend. Out of India's fifteen biggest states, West Bengal has the second-lowest percentage of working women in rural areas. Because it is considered a non-economic activity in India, the main data-generating systems in the nation have traditionally disregarded household chores.

There is usually no way to separate paid work outside the home from unpaid housework. Although they are not legally permitted to labour in the fields, women in India play an integral role in the preparation for and cleaning up after harvest. On top of that, low-income rural women often assist their male relatives with agricultural work. Manual labour is largely reserved for men in the upper classes. Cultural prejudice against women's paid outside labour is supposedly particularly common in West Bengal, but this helps to explain why women are underrepresented in the workforce generally in India. The underlying assumption of the research is that the gender gap in farming is due to more than just economic and material factors; it is also impacted by social and cultural factors. The present study tries to analyse how factors such as education, caste, and economic status influence involvement of women in agricultural activities in the districts of Hooghly in West Bengal.

2. STUDY AREA AND METHODOLOGY

The primary goals of this study necessitated the selection of West Bengal's most agriculturally productive area, Hooghly, for examination. With 18 CDBs spread out across 3,149 square kilometers, the Hooghly district is huge. Because of their distinct socio-demographic and vocational features, the Khanakul I and II CD Blocks were hand-picked. Research Study Table 1 shows the details of crop production in Hooghly district according to agricultural harvesting seasons, as disclosed through discussions with farmers in the study's covered villages. Rice is the primary harvest. The district's main cash crop, the potato, is grown extensively. Mustard and sesame get a smaller percentage than potato.

All year round, high-value veggies are grown. Jute is not as popular as it was a decade ago.

The settlements have exploited both surface and underground water sources for irrigation. In a small number of communities, individual landowners use submersible pumps to irrigate their crops at varied rates based on their specific needs. These two towns are characterized by an abundance of shallow and deep tube wells. The government's deep tube wells are operational in just a few of localities. Private companies employ kerosene-powered little shallow tube wells.

Table 1: Prevalence of Crops Grown in Hooghly District in Different Seasons

Zaid (July 1 to Oct. 15)	Winter (Oct 16 to Jan 15)	Rabi (Jan 16 to Mar 31)	Summer (Apr 1 to Jun 30)
Jute	Aman Rice	Potato	Groundnut
	Groundnut	Mustard	Boro Rice
Chilli	Pointed Gourd	Aman Rice	Sesame
Ladies Finger	Tomato	Pointed Gourd	Pumpkin
Cow Pea	Chilli	Chilli	Chilli
French Beans	Cauliflower	Tomato	Eggplant
	Cabbage	Cauliflower	Potato
Snake Gourd	Cucumber	Cabbage	
Pointed Gourd		Eggplant	
Cucumber		Peas	
		Bittergourd	

As a feasibility study, the pilot project set out to determine the potential results of conducting in-depth interviews and to assess elements including the most appropriate time, place, and logistical modalities. In order to ensure that samples were representative of various socio-religious groups, land ownership types, etc., we only considered villages with well specified features. The interview schedules were piloted to see how different question types and modifications might affect the data collected.

There was no evidence that the communities surveyed might have benefited from the purposefully designed Likert scale measuring empowerment and gender dynamics in regard to decision making. Results improved in subsequent focus groups that used leading and introducing questions.

The study issue was addressed using a mixed methods approach. Careful outreach to village women was undertaken in order to validate women's knowledge. District Rural Development Cell Hooghly, the nodal body at the district level, offered assistance. Block development officers and women's development officers worked together to build relationships with rural women in the selected block villages.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Sadar, Chandannagar, Serampur, and Arambag are the four subdivisions that make up the Hooghly district. The most urbanized of these is Serampur, according to primary and secondary sources. While 89.46% of working males in the Hooghly district are major earners, just 55.27 % of working women are in this role, according to the 2010 Human Development Report. Of the sub-divisions Khanakul I and Khanakul II in Arambagh, only 30.33% of working women and 24.01% of working males are primary workers, respectively. Two Gram Panchayats were chosen at random from each block. Three revenue villages, or mauzas, were selected at random from each Gram Panchayat, and no replacement was made.

Table 2: The Samples and Focus Group Discussions'

Villages	Village Land Owners (% of Households)	Landless (% of Households)
Khanakul Block I (SC)		
Arunda	75.27	24.73
Ganesh Bazar	70.97	29.03
Khamargor	66.67	33.33
Khanakul Block II		
Banhijli	79.99	20.01
Jayrampur	83.81	16.19
Palashpai	80.96	19.04

The study found that variations among socio-religious groups are a crucial aspect to consider when analysing social behaviour. Task divisions occur at several levels in rural settings, such as within households based on gender and age, and within groups based on caste or religion. Data indicated that, with the exception of Jayrampur, women in villages from Scheduled Caste households work for shorter durations in agriculture compared to men. In all the villages it was observed that Scheduled Caste women dedicate over one hour daily to livestock care, whereas men spend less than an hour on this task. The gender disparity in labour hours is most pronounced in Jayrampur among all the villages under this caste group. In Arunda, men labour for less than 3 hours while women work over 11 hours. Men at Palashpai contribute the most work (Figure 1). Under MGNREGA, both men and women work the same number of hours.

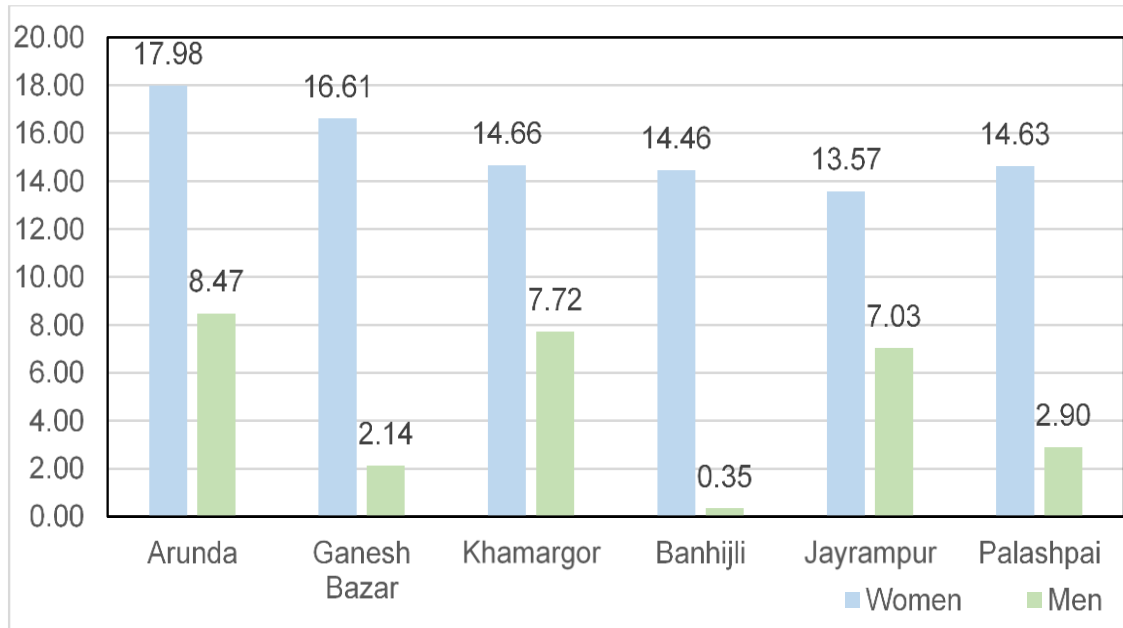


Figure 1: Total Work based on gender for Schedule Caste Population in hours per day

Women in the Scheduled Tribe community of Khamargor are more involved in agricultural activity than men. Men and women in Ganesh Bazar village provide a similar amount of effort in terms of hours. In Banhijli, a significant number of men are involved in the process of tying and carrying paddy for a portion of the time. Scheduled Tribe women dedicate significantly more time to livestock care compared to their husbands and sons. In Banhijli, this occupation is exclusively carried out by women.

Men in the villages of Ganesh Bazar, Khamargor, and Palashpai spend less than an hour on cattle keeping. Women belonging to Scheduled Tribes dedicate a significantly greater amount of time to livestock care compared to their husbands and sons. In Banhijli, this occupation is exclusively carried out by women. Men in the villages of Ganesh Bazar, Khamargor, and Palashpai spend less than an hour on cattle keeping. Women at Ganesh Bazar often work for approximately 9 hours every day. The village where men work the longest is Palashpai, followed by Banhijli, Ganesh Bazar, and Khamargor. The gender disparity in total work, excluding MGNREGA, is most pronounced in Khamargor among Tribal households (Figure 2).

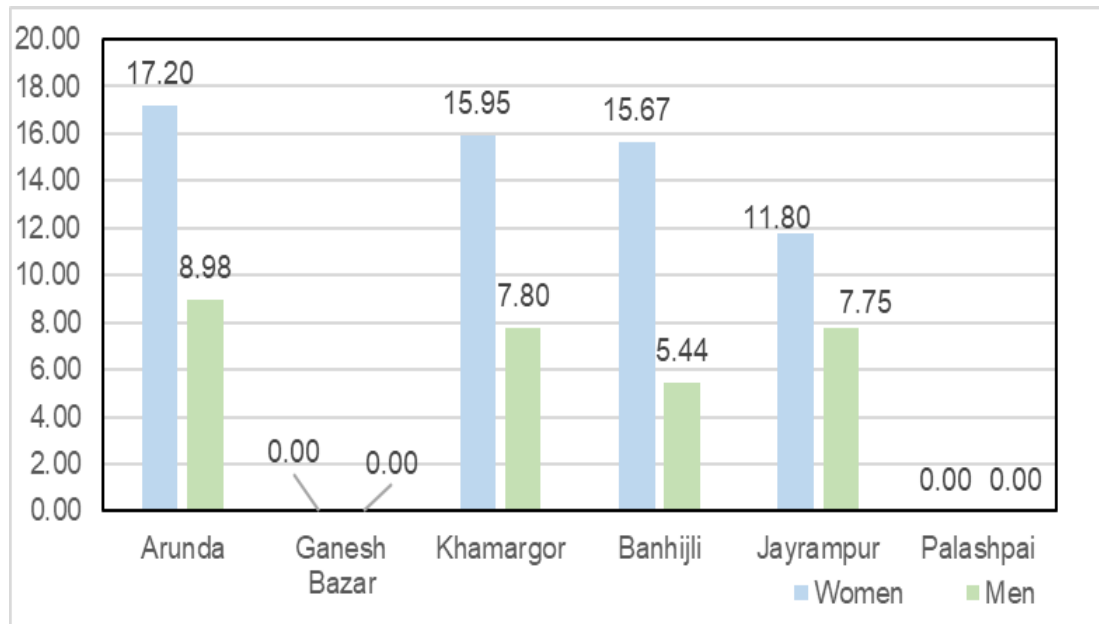


Figure 2: Gender based of Work for Schedule Tribe Population in hours per day

Women in villages for OBC households spend less time on agricultural activities compared to men. Women primarily engage in home-based activities such as processing paddy and preparing for potato production. Women in these villages dedicate more time to livestock than men. It was also observed that men in Banhijli do not care for livestock at all. Women engage in greater work than males when removing MGNREGA from the total workload. The gender disparity is particularly pronounced among OBC households in Banhijli. Women in Ganesh Bazar and Banhijli villages labor over 10 hours in total. The smallest disparity in labour hours between men and women is observed in Khamargor compared to the other two villages (Figure 3).

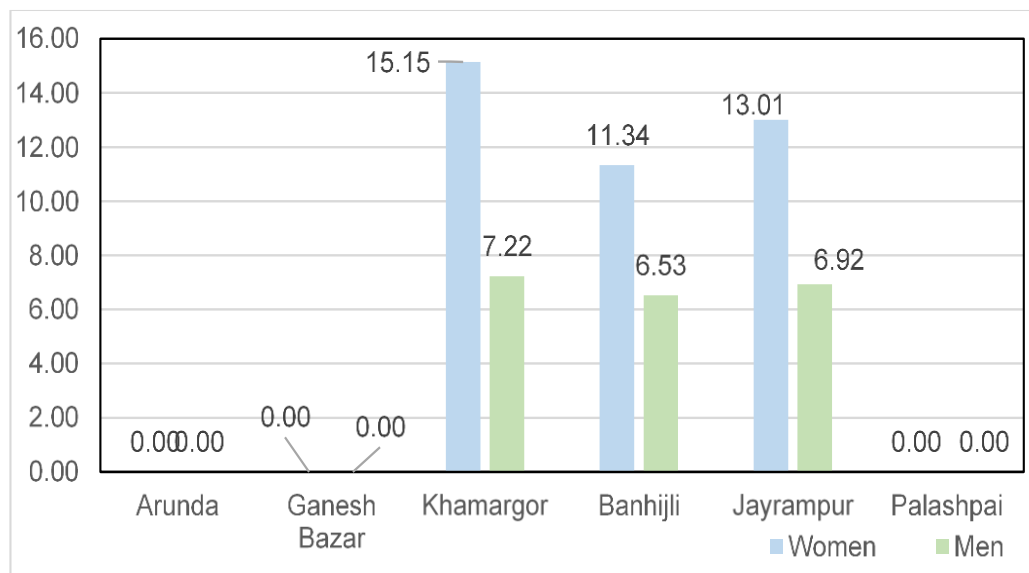


Figure 3: Gender based division of Total Work for Other Backward Caste Population in hours per day

Data showed that men and women from General Caste households in Arunda village spend less than an hour on agricultural activities. In Jayrampur, there is a significant contrast in the division of labor between men and women, particularly among general caste males who primarily work as occasional farmers. The women there dedicate almost five hours to agricultural work. Men of the General caste in Palashpai make significant contributions to crop cultivation for an extended period. In Arunda, the disparity between men and women in cattle work is particularly pronounced. Women of the General caste in the villages of Khamargor and Jayrampur spend approximately two hours caring for cattle. Livestock keeping in Jayrampur and Banhijli is solely carried out by women in General caste homes. Women in general caste households work over 10 hours in all the villages. The most significant disparity between the work done by men and women is located in Jayrampur village. Men in villages Ganesh Bazar, Khamargor, Banhijli, and Palashpai work for over five hours a day (Figure 4).

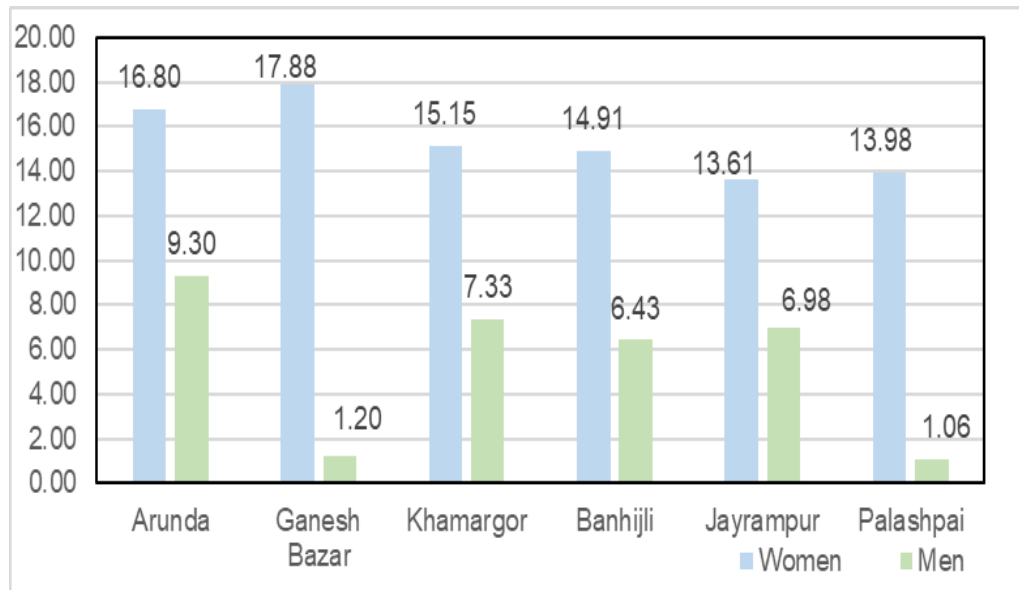


Figure 4: Gender based division of Work for General Population in hours per day

4. CONCLUSIONS

The current research aimed to explore the concept of intersectionality in socio-material geographies of gender, emphasizing that women and men are not seen as uniform categories. Gender separation of tasks in agriculture undeniably exists. Men and women's roles in agriculture align with the social and cultural norms of the communities. Society has specific expectations regarding how a woman should conduct herself while working and earning a living. These beliefs influence the socialization of girls from a young age to adolescence, and the same is true for boys. It was noted that women are responsible for making decisions regarding agriculture, watering, and fertilizing in all the villages. In some communities, a significant issue is the departure of young adult males from farm homes to pursue more profitable urban occupations. This procedure hinders the continuation of their customary livelihoods.

5. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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