ASSESSING THE LEVEL OF WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN SOCIO-ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES: A GEOGRAPHICAL ANALYSIS IN UNDIVIDED MEDINIPUR DISTRICT, WEST BENGAL, INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Women's participation in socio-economic activities is very crucial for their improvement in level of living as well as their empowerment, which leads to the development of the society, region and nation also. The participation of women from different society, more remarkably from the very backward sections of the society including the Schedule Caste and Schedule Tribe community is very worth mentioning for assessing the level of women empowerment. The present study has tried to focus on the level of women's participation in various socio-economic activities among fifty-four blocks in undivided Medinipur district of the state of West Bengal, with comparison to the national, state-level and district-level scenario. The study is based on selected thirteen variables collected from Census of India 2011. Women's Participation Index were prepared by aggregation of the relative score of all the selected thirteen indicators using Z score techniques for Schedule Caste, Schedule Tribe and all women categories to analyse the level of women participation. The study observed that the women from Schedule Caste and Schedule Tribe communities were mainly engaged in primary activities including cultivators and agricultural labourers, while very slight improvement is observed in their increasing participation in secondary, tertiary and quaternary activities.

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***Keywords:** Women's Participation, Women Empowerment, Block Level Disparity, Women's Participation Index.*

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Introduction

In modern world, the participation of women in various social and economic activities have been considered as an important dimension of human development (Mutsuddi, 2015), as balanced regional growth in any region is ensured by the maximum participation of the female population in various productive activities (Chaurasia, 2018; Das, 2018). As women's participation is very crucial for their personal advancement and improving their status in society (Sinha, 1987), their empowerment through improvements in their level of living has been considered as a prerequisite for sustainable development and to continue the achievement of millennium development goals. The factors like female literacy rate, sex ratio, percentage of female engaged in different economic activities, female work participation rate etc. can be considered as the major indicators of women empowerment in any society, region and national level too. It is also important to note how many numbers of women from the very backward sections of society including the Schedule Caste and Schedule Tribe population participated in different socio-economic activities and whether their participation rates have been improving or not over time on the same activities.

As we know that women's empowerment is rather a complex phenomenon, it depends on the combined effects of women's participation in education, employment, social activities, politics, administration, policy making etc. These factors can be varied spatially and temporally among different regions. Furthermore, their participation can be varied according to different communities, castes and

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religions from where they belong in the society. But it can be said that the continuous improvements in participation of women in various types of socio-economic activities by all women communities, is considered as the most important criterion for their empowerment and also for the balanced regional growth and development.

Keeping in mind the above facts, the present study has tried to focus on the level of women's participation in various socio-economic activities among fifty-four blocks in undivided Medinipur district of the state of West Bengal, with comparison to the national, state-level and district-level scenarios. The main objectives of the study is to assess the regional variation in the level of women's participation among different blocks of the Undivided Medinipur district and to find out the more vulnerable region under the study area to attract the government and policymakers for the betterment of the situation. This study also focuses on the variation of women's participation among Schedule Caste, Schedule Tribe and all women populations in the respective study area.

Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of the study are as follows:

- To assess block-wise regional disparities in the level of women's participation among fifty-four blocks of the Undivided Medinipur district, West Bengal.

- To analyse the variation of women's participation among Schedule Caste, Schedule Tribe and all women population in the respective study area.

- To find out the more vulnerable region regarding women's participation under the study area for attracting the governments and policymakers for the betterment of the situation.

Methodology

The present study focuses on the fifty-four blocks under undivided Medinipur District (presently divided into three districts i.e. Paschim Medinipur, Purba Mdeinipur and Jhargram district) of the state of West Bengal, and also tries to compare their level of women's participation with National, State and district level condition.

For analysing the level of Women's Participation, total of thirteen variables have been selected based on the data collected from the census of India 2011. The selected indicators and their relationship with women's empowerment have been shown in Table 1. For assessing the level of women's participation, all the data have been standardized and aggregated by giving them equal weightage to get a Composite Index of Women's Participation for the national level, state level, district level and block level regional dimensions, based on aggregation of relative scores using Z score techniques. For assessing the block-level spatial disparities, all the index values are classified into five development categories i.e. Very High, High, Medium, Low and Very Low. The highest value shows very high level of women's participation and lowest value indicates very low level of Women's participation.

The Composite indices have been calculated for three categories i.e. for All Women, Schedule Caste Women and Schedule Tribe Women to understand their variation in level of women's participation among fifty-four blocks. All the index values have been ranked in descending order and block-wise level of development have been marked. It also tried to find out the number of blocks included in five different classes of development categories among all women, SC women and ST women categories to find out the best and worst blocks regarding the level of Women's Participation. Pearson's Correlation Coefficient matrix also has been calculated to show the interrelationship among the selected variables incorporated in the study.

Table 1: Selection of Indicators Related to Women's Participation

SI. No.	Variable ID	Variables	Relationship with development and women's empowerment
1	WP1	Percentage of female population	Positive
2	WP2	Sex Ratio	Positive
3	WP3	Child sex ratio (0-6 years)	Positive
4	WP4	Percentage of Female literacy	Positive
5	WP5	Gap in Male-Female literacy	Negative
6	WP6	Percentage of female main worker to total female population	Positive
7	WP7	Percentage of female marginal worker to total female population	Positive

8	WP8	Percentage of female cultivators to total female worker	Positive
9	WP9	Percentage of female Agricultural labourers to total female worker	Positive
10	WP10	Percentage of female Household Industry workers to total female worker	Positive
11	WP11	Percentage of female other workers to total female worker	Positive
12	WP12	Female work participation rate	Positive
13	WP13	Gap in Males-Female Work Participation Rate	Negative

Results and Discussion

- **Level of Women's Participation in National, State and District Level**

The study shows a remarkable insight regarding the women's participation among all women, Schedule Caste and Schedule Tribe women communities at the national level, state level, district level and among different blocks under undivided Medinipur district. The calculated Women's Participation Index based on thirteen selected indicators has revealed a clear picture about the level of women's participation. The table 2 shows that in respect to India, participation of Scheduled Tribe Women is relatively higher (0.05) in comparison to SC women (-0.36) and all women (-0.05) categories. The state of West Bengal follows the same condition as national scenario, though the state level women's participation is relatively less than national average. In respect to Undivided Medinipur district it is seen that Scheduled Caste women's participation (0.32) is relatively high than national and state level condition. In district level, Scheduled Tribe women's participation (-0.02) is relatively very low in respect to other communities and also from national and state values.

Table 2: Calculated Composite Index for Level of Women's Participation

	India	West Bengal	Undivided Medinipur District
All Women	-0.05	-0.1	0.07
Scheduled Caste Women	-0.36	-0.28	0.32
Scheduled Tribe Women	0.05	-0.01	-0.02

Source: Calculated by researcher

The study found that though it can be seemed that the participation of SC and ST women is relatively high, but the study identified that the maximum level of participation of SC and ST women is as agricultural labourers, whereas in respect to all women category, their relative participation of work is higher in household industry or other activities except cultivators and agricultural labourers, in respect to national, state and even district level scenario.

Level of Women's Participation in Block Level

The study of block-level scenarios regarding the level of women's participation among all women, SC women and ST women shows a remarkable regional variation. The calculated Women's Participation Index shown in Table 3 reveals that the highest index values are 0.77, 0.92, and 0.59 respectively regarding all women, SC women and ST women categories, whereas the lowest values are -0.53, -0.66 and -0.64 respectively for the same categories. The study found that the participation of women is higher in a few blocks in comparison to national, state and even district-level values whereas few blocks also score below the national, state and district average.

Table 3: Block-wise Level of Women's Participation in Undivided Medinipur District

Sl. No.	C.D. Block	All Women			Scheduled Caste Women			Scheduled Caste Women		
		Women's Participation Index	Rank	Level of women's participation	Women's Participation Index	Rank	Level of women's participation	Women's Participation Index	Rank	Level of women's participation
1	Jhargram	0.4	9	High	0.29	10	High	0.13	16	Medium
2	Binpur-I	0.19	17	High	0.16	19	High	0.28	7	High
3	Binpur-II	0.4	7	High	0.31	7	High	0.19	13	High
4	Jamboni	0.1	19	Medium	0.09	23	Medium	0.06	27	Medium

5	Nayagram	0.44	5	High	0.49	4	Very High	0.21	12	High
6	Sankrail	0.41	6	High	0.21	16	High	0.12	19	Medium
7	Gopiballavpur-I	-0.23	40	Low	-0.1	32	Medium	-0.02	33	Medium
8	Gopiballavpur-II	-0.1	29	Medium	0.06	26	Medium	0.11	21	Medium
9	Salbani	0.54	4	Very High	0.38	5	High	0.23	9	High
10	Keshpur	-0.06	24	Medium	-0.06	30	Medium	0.09	22	Medium
11	Garbeta-I	-0.12	31	Medium	0.14	21	Medium	0.07	26	Medium
12	Garbeta-II	0.35	11	High	0.52	3	Very High	0.44	4	Very High
13	Garbeta-III	0.4	8	High	0.29	8	High	0.18	15	High
14	Mednapore	0.57	3	Very High	0.27	12	High	0.05	28	Medium
15	Debra	0.6	2	Very High	0.69	2	Very High	0.23	10	High
16	Pingla	0.36	10	High	0.29	9	High	0.19	14	High
17	Keshiary	0.23	13	High	0.28	11	High	0.12	18	Medium
18	Dantan-I	-0.24	42	Low	-0.18	37	Medium	-0.1	38	Medium
19	Dantan-II	-0.3	47	Low	-0.66	54	Medium	0.01	30	Medium
20	Narayangarh	0.19	15	High	0.21	15	High	0.11	20	Medium
21	Mohanpur	-0.53	54	Very Low	-0.51	52	Medium	-0.31	45	Low
22	Sabang	0.77	1	Very High	0.92	1	Very High	0.34	5	High
23	Kharagpur-I	0.01	22	Medium	0.11	22	Medium	-0.14	39	Medium
24	Kharagpur-II	0.26	12	High	0.38	6	High	0.08	25	Medium
25	Chandrakona-I	-0.2	37	Low	-0.27	45	Medium	-0.2	43	Low
26	Chandrakona-II	-0.09	28	Medium	-0.04	28	Medium	0	32	Medium
27	Ghatal	-0.29	46	Low	-0.23	39	Medium	0.08	24	Medium
28	Daspur-I	0.23	14	High	0.18	17	High	0.12	17	Medium
29	Daspur-II	-0.04	23	Medium	-0.08	31	Medium	-0.03	34	Medium
30	Tamluk	0.02	21	Medium	0.16	18	High	-0.21	44	Low
31	Sahid Matangini	-0.35	51	Low	0.09	24	Medium	-0.39	48	Low
32	Panskura	0.19	16	High	0.26	14	High	0.09	23	Medium
33	Kolaghat	-0.33	48	Low	-0.11	33	Medium	0	31	Medium
34	Moyna	-0.34	50	Low	-0.38	47	Medium	-0.42	50	Low
35	Nandakumar	-0.08	27	Medium	-0.17	36	Medium	0.29	6	High
36	Chandipur	-0.21	39	Low	-0.12	34	Medium	-0.56	52	Very Low
37	Mahisadal	-0.27	45	Low	-0.23	38	Medium	-0.35	46	Low
38	Nandigram-I	-0.33	49	Low	-0.46	49	Medium	0.59	1	Very High
39	Nandigram-II	-0.15	34	Medium	-0.33	46	Medium	-0.46	51	Very Low
40	Sutahata	-0.13	32	Medium	-0.51	53	Medium	0.51	2	Very High
41	Haldia	-0.38	53	Low	-0.48	51	Medium	0.24	8	High
42	Potashpur-I	-0.08	25	Medium	0.14	20	Medium	-0.19	42	Low
43	Potashpur-II	-0.24	43	Low	-0.23	40	Medium	-0.06	35	Medium
44	Bhagwanpur-I	-0.26	44	Low	-0.23	42	Medium	0.49	3	Very High
45	Egra-I	-0.24	41	Low	-0.15	35	Medium	-0.07	36	Medium
46	Egra-II	-0.36	52	Low	-0.25	43	Medium	-0.15	41	Low
47	Khejuri-I	-0.17	35	Low	0.06	25	Medium	0.04	29	Medium
48	Khejuri-II	0.03	20	Medium	-0.01	27	Medium	-0.14	40	Medium
49	Bhagwanpur-II	-0.08	26	Medium	-0.26	44	Medium	-0.4	49	Low
50	Ramnagar-I	-0.2	38	Low	-0.23	41	Medium	-0.08	37	Medium
51	Ramnagar-II	-0.14	33	Medium	-0.46	50	Medium	-0.64	54	Very Low
52	Contai-I	-0.19	36	Low	-0.44	48	Medium	-0.61	53	Very Low
53	Deshopran	-0.11	30	Medium	-0.05	29	Medium	-0.39	47	Low
54	Contai-III	0.13	18	Medium	0.27	13	High	0.23	11	High

Source: Calculated by Authors

If we considered block-wise level of women's participation and compare their condition in respect to three newly divided districts (i.e. Paschim Medinipur, Purba Medinipur and Jhargram) under undivided Medinipur district, it shows a remarkable reality regarding women's participation. In concerning the newly formed Jhargram district including first eight blocks in the table 3 (Serial no. 1 to 8) shows an average condition of medium to high level of women's participation. But their concentration in work participation mainly as agricultural labourers, as the blocks are mainly covered by maximum numbers of Scheduled Tribe population. They have less percentage of literacy rates and highly marginalized, though their sex ratio and child sex ratio are maximum, even higher in comparison to state and national average. In regarding Paschim Medinipur district including twenty-one blocks (serial No. 9 to 29 in the table 3) also shows in an average of medium to high, even very high level of women's participation where percentage

of SC communities people are also maximum in numbers. In respect to remaining twenty-five blocks (serial no. 30 to 54 in the table 3) under Purba Medinipur district shows relatively very low to medium level of women's participation in general consideration, whereas SC women community shows medium level of participation in maximum number of blocks and ST women have shown low to very low participation comparison to other levels among the blocks.

In respect to number of blocks included in different level of women's participation, only four blocks have been seen in the very high level for all the three women categories, whereas only one and four blocks have been seen in respect to very low level of participation for all women and ST women categories respectively. The maximum blocks (19) for all women categories have seen in low level of women's participation class, whereas maximum of 35 and 25 blocks are situated in the medium level of women's participation for the SC and ST women categories respectively. It is also very noteworthy that no blocks have seen in low to very low class for the SC women categories, whereas 15 blocks are seen in high categories which is also relatively high in comparison to all women (13) and ST women (11) categories (see Table 4).

Table 4: Number of Blocks Included in different Level of Women's Participation

Level of Women's Participation		All Women's Participation	SC Women's Participation	ST Women's Participation
> (Mean + 1.5 Standard Deviation)	Very High	4	4	4
(Mean + 0.5 SD) - (Mean + 1.5 SD)	High	13	15	11
(Mean - 0.5 SD) - (Mean + 0.5 SD)	Medium	17	35	25
(Mean - 1.5 SD) - (Mean - 0.5 SD)	Low	19	0	10
< (Mean - 1.5 Standard Deviation)	Very Low	1	0	4

Source: Calculated by Authors

The table 5 shows top five best and worst blocks regarding the level of women participation in respective to all women, SC women and ST women categories. It shows that Sabang and Debra blocks under Paschim Medinipur district shows the heighest level of participation in respect to both the all women and SC women categories, whereas Nandigram-I and Sutahata block shows the same condition for the level of ST women participation. In respective to worst blocks in level of women's participation, Mohanpur, Dantan-II, and Ramnagar-II represents the following condition regarding all women, SC women and ST women categories.

It has been seen that the women are highly engaged in agricultural and household industrial activities in comparison to secondary, tertiary and quaternary activities in all the blocks. The situation of SC and ST women is very much positive regarding the above arguments. It is also seen that the less educational attainment and high gap in male-female literacy are very common and higher among SC and ST Communities, which is responsible for their less participation in secondary, tertiary and higher economic activities. Therefore, it is very necessary to improve the level of educational condition of women among more vulnerable groups under different underdeveloped blocks and support them to participate in higher education through which they can be able to get higher job opportunities except cultivators and agricultural labourers.

Table 5: Top 5 Best and Worst Blocks Regarding Level of Women's Participation

	All Women's Participation	SC Women's Participation	ST Women's Participation
Top 5 blocks in high level of Women's Participation	Sabang	Sabang	Nandigram-I
	Debra	Debra	Sutahata
	Midnapore	Garbeta-II	Bhagwanpur-I
	Salbani	Nayagram	Garbeta-II
	Nayagram	Salbani	Sabang
Top 5 blocks in Low level of Women's Participation	Mohanpur	Dantan-II	Ramnagar-II
	Haldia	Sutahata	Contai-I
	Egra-II	Mohanpur	Chandipur
	Sahid Matangini	Haldia	Nandigram-II
	Moyna	Ramnagar-II	Moyna

Inter-Relationship among different dimensions of Women's Participation

For the balanced empowerment of women in a region, it is obvious and essential to improve their participation in all socio-economic activities together. Therefore, it is necessary to analyze whether all the individual dimensions of socio-economic activities are interrelated and correlated with the level of overall development or not. Therefore, an attempt has been taken to identify the correlation between individual factors and the overall level of women participation by using the Pearson correlation coefficient technique. Table 6, 7 and 8 shows a detailed correlation matrix for all women, SC women and ST women categories. The overall observation on the matrix of all three categories depicts that except the dimension WP4, WP11 and WP13 all other indicators are positively correlated with the women's participation index (WPI). Further, in Table 6 WP8 and Table 8 WP9 are also negatively correlated with WPI. In another side, the dimensions like WP1, WP2, WP6, WP7 and WP12 are highly correlated with the women participation index (WPI) for all the categories of women. It implies that the level of women's participation is more or less linked with the selected thirteen indicators chosen in this study.

Table 6: Pearson Correlations Coefficient of selected indicators (For All Women)

	WP1	WP2	WP3	WP4	WP5	WP6	WP7	WP8	WP9	WP10	WP11	WP12	WP13	WPI
WP1	1													
WP2	1	1												
WP3	0.52	0.52	1											
WP4	-0.7	-0.7	-0.4	1										
WP5	0.69	0.69	0.35	-0.9	1									
WP6	0.41	0.41	0.29	-0.5	0.4	1								
WP7	0.5	0.5	0.19	-0.5	0.59	0.28	1							
WP8	-0.2	-0.2	-0.2	0.3	-0.2	-0.2	-0	1						
WP9	0.57	0.57	0.19	-0.6	0.65	0.04	0.46	-0	1					
WP10	-0.3	-0.3	-0.1	0.22	-0.2	-0.1	0.19	-0.1	-0.5	1				
WP11	-0.5	-0.5	-0.2	0.61	-0.7	-0.5	-0.7	-0.2	-0.7	0.04	1			
WP12	0.58	0.58	0.29	-0.6	0.63	0.76	0.84	-0.1	0.34	0.07	-0.72	1		
WP13	-0.6	-0.6	-0.3	0.67	-0.7	-0.8	-0.8	0.27	-0.4	-0.01	0.66	-0.98	1	
WPI	**0.72**	**0.72**	**0.55**	**-0.4**	**0.44**	**0.59**	**0.76**	**-0**	**0.26**	**0.05**	**-0.55**	**0.85**	**-0.83**	**1**

Table 7: Pearson Correlations Coefficient of selected indicators (For SC Women)

	WP1	WP2	WP3	WP4	WP5	WP6	WP7	WP8	WP9	WP10	WP11	WP12	WP13	WPI
WP1	1													
WP2	1	1												
WP3	0.34	0.34	1											
WP4	-0.6	-0.64	-0.3	1										
WP5	0.53	0.53	0.49	-0.83	1									
WP6	0.67	0.67	0.11	-0.65	0.49	1								
WP7	0.4	0.4	0.15	-0.48	0.5	0.52	1							
WP8	-0.3	-0.28	-0.3	0.36	-0.2	-0.2	0.08	1						
WP9	0.56	0.57	0.3	-0.68	0.65	0.54	0.52	-0.3	1					
WP10	-0.2	-0.17	-0.1	0.13	-0.15	-0.1	0.12	0.08	-0.5	1				
WP11	-0.5	-0.49	-0.2	0.62	-0.63	-0.5	-0.7	-0.1	-0.84	0.04	1			
WP12	0.56	0.56	0.15	-0.61	0.56	0.78	0.94	0	0.59	0.04	-0.73	1		
WP13	-0.6	-0.55	-0.2	0.63	-0.54	-0.8	-0.9	0.11	-0.61	0.01	0.69	-0.98	1	
WPI	**0.71**	**0.71**	**0.27**	**-0.42**	**0.35**	**0.74**	**0.8**	**0.07**	**0.42**	**0.12**	**-0.58**	**0.88**	**-0.85**	**1**

Table 8: Pearson Correlations Coefficient of Selected Indicators (For ST Women)

	WP1	WP2	WP3	WP4	WP5	WP6	WP7	WP8	WP9	WP10	WP11	WP12	WP13	WPI
WP1	1													
WP2	0.99	1												
WP3	0.31	0.28	1											
WP4	-0.07	0.04	-0.28	1										
WP5	0.15	0.07	0.53	-0.7	1									
WP6	-0.03	-0.07	-0.12	-0.26	0.08	1								
WP7	0.06	0.01	0.26	-0.5	0.57	-0.2	1							
WP8	0.19	0.16	0.1	-0.22	0.32	-0.03	0.35	1						
WP9	-0.23	-0.27	0.03	-0.52	0.58	0.22	0.43	0.28	1					
WP10	0.22	0.2	0.22	0.08	-0.01	-0.38	0.17	0.02	-0.54	1				
WP11	0.1	-0.18	0.57	0.57	-0.69	-0.01	-0.63	-0.46	-0.84	0.01	1			
WP12	0.03	-0.04	0.15	-0.62	0.56	0.48	0.76	0.29	0.52	-0.1	-0.57	1		
WP13	0.04	0.1	-0.06	0.48	-0.48	-0.38	-0.72	-0.2	-0.44	0.05	0.49	-0.9	1	
WPI	**0.66**	**0.63**	**0.36**	**-0.15**	**0.26**	**0.25**	**0.51**	**0.42**	**-0.02**	**0.24**	**-0.18**	**0.62**	**-0.56**	**1**

Conclusion

Participation of women in various socio-economic activities is very important for empowering women in any region across different communities. Though disparities are very common for the participation of women in different blocks or region, but their participation is very worth mentioning for different communities, more remarkable for marginal class of women like SC women and ST women population. One another consideration is that backward-class women are mainly engaged as wage labourers and household industrial workers due to their lack of skill, literacy, and lack of job opportunities. But for balanced growth and development, women should be encouraged to participate in secondary, tertiary, quaternary and quinary activities from different communities of the society. Therefore, it should be very inevitable to take the necessary steps to formulate suitable strategies with the help of local government and NGOs for improvements of women's education and skill for their increasing participation in different socio-economic activities, to improve their empowerment in society.

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