

**Why does the Work Participation Rate of
Women Low in the Eastern-India? A case
study of Bengal with reference to Tamil Nadu**

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Work participation rates of rural women in 15 major states of India (per 1000)
(usual status, 2009-10)

States	Gender gap in WPR	WPR of women	WPR of women In agriculture
India	286	261	794
WB	456	152	424
AP	155	443	764
Assam	395	158	862
Bihar	416	65	830
Gujarat	265	320	922
Haryana	272	250	814
Karnataka	254	370	807
Kerala	346	218	428
MP	274	282	878
Maharashtra	180	396	921
Orissa	335	243	762
Punjab	291	240	823
Rajasthan	153	357	728
TN	198	405	724
UP	330	174	854

The question

Historically low work participation rate of women in West Bengal in reported data; more prominent in the rural areas.

Historians' explanation: culture, ideology of domesticity.

Persistence of cultural inhibitions

The objective of this study is to understand whether economic factors help sustain cultural traits such as the land holding pattern and the experience of failed industrialisation.

Types of work performed by rural women

- Wage work, self employment outside the home
- Self employment in cultivation and industries related to the household sector
- Various domestic work in an around the household (HH)
- Domestic work not considered but intertwined with self employment within HH: pre and post-harvest work
- Poor women vs. women from upper echelons
- problem of reporting (Agarwal, 1985)
- Low work participation of women in general

Cultural norms particularly strong in WB ?

- Historians documented exclusion of women from industrial work and paid outside work in general between 1920s and 1930s
- Argued growing social and cultural inhibition in Bengal to women's work outside the home during the closing decades of the 19th century (Sarkar, 1989; Sen 1999b)
- Devaki Jain: time allocation survey- WB , even poverty fails to push women
- Banerjee (2004): cultural inhibition to paid outside work: domestic service, begging and prostitution

Patriarchy percolates

- Duvvuri (1989): increase in WPR with increase in percentage of low caste and tribe: district level census data (India)
- Sinha (2005): 4 districts of WB – strong correlation with tribe
- Agnihotri (1997): Child sex ratio falling among low castes
- Historical roots: Bandyopadhyay (1990); Sarkar (2001)
- Looking beyond the cultural factors: land holding pattern
- Rice cultivation - labour intensive, particularly women- John Mencher
- Level of Technology: reason for choosing TN & AP

Inequality in land holding and women's wpr

- Higher incidence of female agricultural workers likely to be found in those regions of the country where intensive cultivation of commercial crops as well as cereals, in particular, rice developed under favourable climatic conditions
- Composition: whether cultivators or wage labourers tends to be influenced by the structure of land distribution found in these regions
- Two distinct patterns: first, regions with a higher degree of inequality in distribution, with concentration of large sized holdings- prevalence of female agricultural labour
- secondly, regions with more even distribution of relatively small sized holdings- women as cultivators (A.V Jose (1989, 15))

Estimating land holdings

- Ownership holdings from NSS pertain to all types of land including homestead and not merely productive/ agricultural land
- Operational holding not considered
- Problems in estimation of pattern of ownership
- Ownership of homestead has important implications
- Official reporting of landlessness
- Rawal (2008): two more categories from unit level data of 2003-04: HHs owning only homestead and HHs that do not have any land other than homestead nor do they cultivate any part of homestead that they may own

Table 2 Land holding patterns in India

States	Proportion of Households in different land holding category in percent							
	Land less	Less than 0.4ha	0.4 to 1ha	1-2ha	2-3ha	3-5ha	5-10ha	more than 10ha
TN	55.43	21.2	13.65	5.64	2.16	1.3	0.6	0.02
AP	48.75	16.55	17.72	9.09	4.06	2.63	1.04	0.47
Ker	36.74	49.52	9.3	3.33	0.44	0.58	0.1	0
WB	34.69	42.71	15.81	5.4	0.97	0.33	0.09	0
Punjab	29.51	38.66	8.33	9.54	5.79	4.79	2.43	0.95
Haryana	25.96	37.6	13.52	9.85	5.59	4.26	2.8	0.43
UP	16.31	41.98	22.86	12.42	3.43	2.1	0.81	0.09
Bihar	31.01	42.49	16	7	1.98	1.09	0.29	0.15
India	31.12	29.82	18.97	10.68	4.22	3.06	1.6	0.52

Some reflections from data

- Highest level of landlessness in TN Former AP
- Highest inequality TN, Punjab, Haryana and AP (Gini coefficient)
- Close to 65% own some land in WB heavily dominated by small holders
- Less than 45% own some land in TN and 50% in AP considerably less concentration in small holding category
- Possibility of being cultivator in one's own family field is much more in WB; more so for a peasant woman whose domestic chores perennially intertwined with her work in family field
- Agricultural labour? Findings of Ashok Rudra (1992)

Cost of family labour (Rs/ha) for rice cultivation for some selected states in India

States	Total cost of human labour	Percentage of family labour cost	Rural female work participation (usual status, per 1000, 2004-05)
Andhra Pradesh	8587.78	31.91	483
Tamil Nadu	9144.44	30.25	461
Karnataka	9673.93	30.46	459
Kerala	14741.78	14.35	256
West Bengal	9346.30	54.48	178
Orissa	7093.98	49.47	322
Bihar	5429.04	38.08	138
Uttar Pradesh	5912.77	57.29	240

Aspects of inequality of land holding

States	share of land by the top 5 per cent HH	Share of land by bottom 50 Per cent HH	Inequality in land holding (ratio of top 5 per cent to bottom 50 per cent)
AP	29.57	0.24	123.21
TN	48.64	0.00	undefined
Karnataka	35.43	2.47	14.34
Kerala	53.97	0.27	199.89
Bihar	39.16	5.97	6.56
Uttar Pradesh	31.88	8.20	3.89
Orissa	33.33	6.34	5.26
West Bengal	33.15	7.18	4.62

Percentage of tribal population in some selected states of India, 2011

States	Percentage of tribal population	Percentage of SC population
AP	6.6	16.2
TN	1.0	19.0
Karnataka	6.6	16.2
Kerala	1.1	9.8
Orissa	22.1	16.5
Bihar	0.9	15.7
Uttar Pradesh	0.1	21.1
West Bengal	5.5	23.0

Small holding agriculture- family farms- dominated colonial Bengal: Sugata Bose

- Apart from North Bengal and the Sunder Bans area in most of Bengal village controlling land lords or big jotedars hardly seen
- Jotedars of east and west: very different in nature - a large number of peasants Muslims and Namashudras held jotes – cultivable lands, owned the implements, had solid titles to homesteads describing themselves as grihasthi – hardly any landless labour
- West Bengal: Along with small farmers presence of some landlords involved in direct farming of personal land employing land less agricultural labour true rural proletariat of very low caste Hindus and Adivasis

Distribution of areas held by a family

Districts	Proportions (%) of land held by families of different acreage category					
	Less Than 2 acres	2-3 Acres	3-4 Acres	4-5 acres	5-10 acres	Above 10 acres
East Bengal	55.9	11.1	8.5	6.1	11	4.9
West Bengal	37.8	11.0	9.0	8.0	18.7	9.2

Table 1.3 *Proportions of agricultural population: 'Landlord', 'Tenant', 'Labourer' (%)*

	Landlords	Tenants	Labourers
<i>East Bengal districts</i>			
Bakarganj	4.26	87.75	7.99
Bogra	1.99	89.24	8.77
Chittagong	9.55	72.53	17.92
Dacca	5.08	89.24	5.68
Faridpur	6.61	88.84	4.55
Khulna	5.73	85.68	8.59
Mymensingh	2.49	92.12	5.39
Noakhali	3.36	82.50	14.14
Pabna	4.12	88.28	7.60
Rajshahi	4.60	84.18	11.22
Tippera	1.93	93.87	4.20
East Bengal	4.52	86.75	8.73
<i>West and central Bengal districts</i>			
Bankura	4.18	68.39	27.43
Birbhum	2.00	62.38	35.62
Burdwan	4.19	68.42	27.39
Hooghly	4.87	68.57	26.56
Howrah	8.89	61.06	30.05
Jessore	6.94	85.34	7.72
Malda	2.12	75.99	21.89
Midnapur	2.37	80.45	17.18
Murshidabad	4.15	68.99	26.86
Nadia	7.85	70.05	22.10
24-Parganas	4.39	76.19	19.42
West and central Bengal	4.72	71.44	23.84

Source: *Census of India 1921*, Vol.5 Bengal, Pt 2, Tables 2,3,4 and 5.

Possible conjectures

- Small family farm and women's work
- Reverend Lalbehari De
- Relevance of land distribution in determining home boundedness

- Even in early 1970s: Relatively equal distribution of land holding in WB when compared to other Indian states(Sunil Sengupta, Haris Gazdar (1996)
- Agriculture dominated by small holdings
- Large landlords were few and dispersed dominated numerically, area owned by smaller farmers easier to confiscate land

Land holding pattern in pre-independence TN : Dharma Kumar

Pre-independence TN

- » Communal land holding- mainly Brahmans- Mirasdari system
- » By 18th century villages high inequality and Mirasdars referred as lords
- » dominant landlords controlled every aspect of village life- operated together in some cases but cultivation individual.
- » Brahmans and other large owners employed others to cultivate - high prevalence of attached labour
- » different types of labour working other's field- whether a tenant or a labour-semantic difference; attached labour
- » Temple holdings
- » Lorenze ratio however, suggests no increase in land inequality which was to begin with quite high