

GENDER DISCRIMINATION IN AGRICULTURAL SECTOR: A STUDY ON MURSHIDABAD DISTRICT, WEST BENGAL, INDIA

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DOI: 10.46609/IJSSER.2020.v05i08.018 URL: <https://doi.org/10.46609/IJSSER.2020.v05i08.018>

ABSTRACT

Gender discrimination means ‘male-female differences’ that arise from various factors like biological, psychological and cultural norms. It is the process by which people are treated differently only for their gender at home, school or working sector. It also creates a major problem in agricultural sector especially in developing countries like India. Murshidabad district is one of the favourable agricultural regions in West Bengal. Agricultural sector offers many jobs for both male and female but difference in wages earned by them persists and it determines the male-female work participation in agriculture in this area. Many obstacles such as high illiteracy rate among women, lack of consciousness about their legal right, religious obstacles and limited access to resources like land, credit, inputs, transport, storage and technical assistance acts as main barriers on their working environment. The study is based on secondary data collected from Census of India, 2011. This paper reveals the gender disparity by showing the male-female work participation rate of cultivators and agricultural labourers engaged in agricultural sector in Murshidabad district. An attempt has also been taken to provide suggestive measures to uproot this discrimination.

Keywords: Agricultural labourers, agricultural sector, cultivators, gender discrimination; work participation

INTRODUCTION

Male and female participation in agricultural sector have for decades affected by gender discrimination that creates gender gap in agricultural sector. According to Giddens, A. (2009), “Gender, by contrast concerns the psychological, social and cultural differences between males and females. It means the socialization into male or a female role according to socio-cultural norms for one’s sex”. Gender discrimination in Agricultural sector is a pervasive phenomenon in most countries especially the developing nations. Agricultural policymakers, in many times think

the agricultural labourers as men and thus deny women participation in agricultural sector. Thus women are lagged behind men. It directly affects their lives. Murshidabad district is an agriculture based district. Economic level of this district is fluctuated by any aspect of these agricultural activities. There is a clear difference in working hours and daily wage paid to men and women in this district. Among the total workers of this district only 23% are women workers (District Census Handbook, Murshidabad district, 2011). However, male-female participation in agricultural sector varies from region to region in this district.

LITERATURE REVIEW

- Behera and Behera (2013) stated that despite their importance to agricultural production, women face various problems. Agricultural programmes are usually planned by men and women are lagged visibly behind men. This paper shows gender discrimination in India by focusing on the role played by women and constraints faced by them in this sector.
- Chakraborty and Chakraborty (2010) asserted that female work participation is varies inversely with female literacy and percentage of Muslim population. Women were found to be engaged in activities in these areas which are generally low-paying. This paper concludes that moderate discrimination prevails in agricultural sector in West Bengal.
- Gulistan (2014) stated that women play a vital role in Balochistan wool industry. But they cannot join in service as men do for religious factors. Women are found to work in the agricultural subsectors, but they are absent in discussion making process. It is also said that due to religious constraint, women are lagged behind men in this area. However, Balochistan Agriculture Project aims at improving the status of women in the study area.
- Kaaria et al. (2016) mentioned that gender gap determines women's participation and reduces their contributions to the agricultural sector and thereby to the achievement of broader economic and social development goals. Major strategies have been taken for strengthening women's participation in producer organizations.
- Lal and Khurana (2011) said that the amount of wages earned by the male and female labourers in the same work vary in different places. Women have lower education level too. As a result, they have the tendency to remain in subsistence agriculture. This paper reveals the role of women in different activities and average wage earning per day by them in India. Suggestive measures are also given to reduce gender discrimination in agricultural sector and thereby developing their social condition.
- Mtsor and Idisi (2014) said that in Nigeria, women are contributor of 60-80% labourers

in agricultural food production. But many factors like lack of credit facilities, land ownership, educational status, technical ownership etc. are the main constraints to women in agricultural sector. This paper aims to discover how gender inequality can diminish women involvement in agricultural development in Nigeria.

- Salunke (2014) asserted that globalization has widened the agricultural market but it failed to eradicate the gap between male and female work participation. Modern technology has taken the place of women in agricultural sector. Women have no job there. Women have no space for standing from the agricultural field to agricultural market as it dominated by male workers.
- Twyman et al. (2015) stated that women's participation in agricultural activities is underestimated in the fact that they are considered as the family labour and they have also domestic responsibilities. Even it is also thought that women are unskilled about production activities. Primary survey has been done to know the contribution of women in agricultural production and barriers faced by them in this sector.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

For decades, gender discrimination is an important problem prevails in agricultural sector. A woman's work has no time limit. They undertake the domestic chores and the chief economic provider of their family. Rural women performs numerous labor intensive jobs such as sowing, weeding, hoeing, grass cutting, picking, separation of seeds from fiber etc. Women are also expected to collect wood from fields. Women are forced to accept work in agriculture in their own village under any condition because they cannot migrate as easily as men. They are counted as unskilled labour and paid fewer amounts of wages too. They practiced cattle rearing and poultry farming too, but at that time also, due to poverty and down economic condition, they suffer from malnutrition.

OBJECTIVES

The main objectives of this study are:

- To find out the role of women work participation in agricultural and allied activities in Murshidabad district, West Bengal.
- To know about the impact of gender discrimination on agricultural working environment of this area.
- To find out the main obstacles of women work participation in agricultural sector of this area.
- To suggest various ways to reduce the gender gap and thereby the improvement of

women's role in agricultural sector.

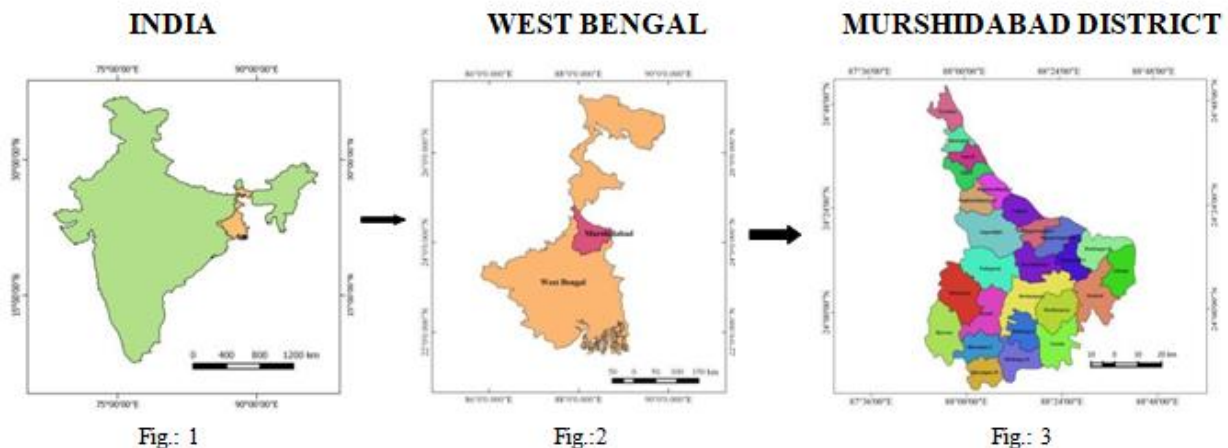
DATABASE AND METHODOLOGY

This paper is purely based on secondary data. To fulfill the study, descriptive data and statistical data has been used which has been collected from different web journals, online journals, published reports, e-books as well. Cartographic representation of data has been done with the help of QGIS software.

STUDY AREA

Murshidabad district lies between 23°43'30" North to 24°50'20" North latitude and 87°49'17" East to 88°44'00" East longitude. It is bounded by Bangladesh in the East, Jharkhand and Birbhum district in West, Malda district in North and Bardhaman and Nadia district in South. The total area of this district is 5316.11 square kilometers and it is the part of lower Ganges river basin. The district is divided into 5 subdivisions namely Sadar, Jangipur, Domkal, Kandi and Lalbag Subdivisions. It has 26 C.D. Blocks, 2166 villages, 7 statutory towns and 65 census towns (District Census Handbook: Murshidabad District; 2011). Bhagirathi River, distributaries of Ganges divides the district into two parts; western part is called "Rarh" region and eastern part of this river is called "Bagri" region (Comprehensive District Agriculture Plan, Murshidabad District, 2011- 2012).

LOCATION MAP



Source: An Atlas of India (2010). Oxford University Press.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Agricultural Land Use of Murshidabad District: Murshidabad district was emarked as the „Major Agricultural District“ since pre independence. The economy of this district is primarily related to agriculture. The agriculture of this district depends on alluvial soil (Pal and Let, 2012). For this reason, Murshidabad district is called “**crop museum**”.

Table-1: Agricultural Land Use of Murshidabad District:

Agricultural Land Use	Area („000 hectares)	Cropping Intensity (%)
Net sown area	398.7	245
Area sown more than once	577.5	
Gross cropped area	976.2	

Source: Agricultural Contingency Plan for District: Murshidabad; West Bengal; 2007-2008.

Role of Women in agriculture and allied activities: A large portion of women population of Murshidabad district is involved in agriculture. They play a major role in this sector along with their household chores. Rural women perform numerous labour intensive agricultural activities such as sowing, weeding, irrigation, hoeing, fertilizer application, plant protection, harvesting and storing of crops. They have to do the household chores like cooking, child rearing, water collection, fuel wood gathering, household maintenance etc. They are also engaged in livestock and poultry farming and many associated activities like milking, milk processing, and preparation of ghee are also carried out by the women.

Male-female wage difference: Male and female workers are engaged in the same field for the same time but wage got by them varies. Women are granted as unskilled labourers than male labourers. Women are forced to accept work in agriculture in their own village under very bad conditions because they cannot migrate as easily as men. The dependence of women’s labour on family farms, especially during the peak periods of sowing and harvesting has become very common. Farmers, on the other hand, also seem to prefer women as agricultural workers because they save money by using lower-paid women workers. Similarly, the work of women within family-based agriculture is preferred because it is cheaper than men labour (Behera and Behera, 2013). Women agricultural workers, although represent a big proportion of all workers, continue to receive lower wages than men. Main causes of this disparity are women’s absence in decision making process, unconscious about their legal right, religious obstacles, dropout and illiteracy etc.

Engagement of male and female population in agricultural sector, Murshidabad District, 2011: The development of a particular region is dependent upon the working population

including both male and female population of that region. According to Census of India- 2011, in Murshidabad district, the percentage of male and female cultivators engaged in agriculture is 87.9 per cent and 12.1 per cent respectively. Same way, the percentage of male and female agricultural labourers engaged in agriculture in this area is 73.15 per cent and 26.85 per cent respectively.

Table-2: Engagement of male and female population in agricultural sector, Murshidabad District, 2011:

	Cultivators	Agricultural Labourers
Total	5116688	10188842
Male	4500041	7452814
Female	616647	2736028

Source: District Census Handbook, Murshidabad District, 2011.

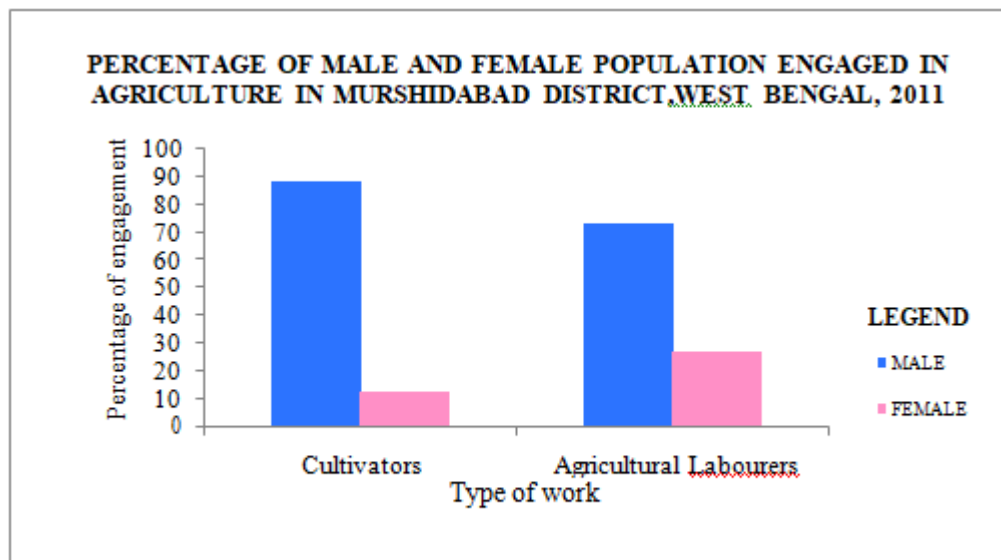


Fig.:4

In this bar graph, male-female engagement in agriculture of Murshidabad is clearly visible. In comparison to male agricultural workers, female agricultural workers are much more less. Women’s unwillingness and religious factors probably acts as main barrier in this activity.

Male and Female Population Distribution of Cultivators in Agricultural Sector, Murshidabad District, 2011:

Cultivators are those people who engaged in agriculture and allied activities for 180 days or

more. Cultivators are categorized into two groups, main workers and marginal workers. Farmers who engaged in this sector for six months or more are called main workers and who engaged for less than six months are called marginal workers. Male and female work participation of main and marginal cultivators of Murshidabad district has been given in this table below:

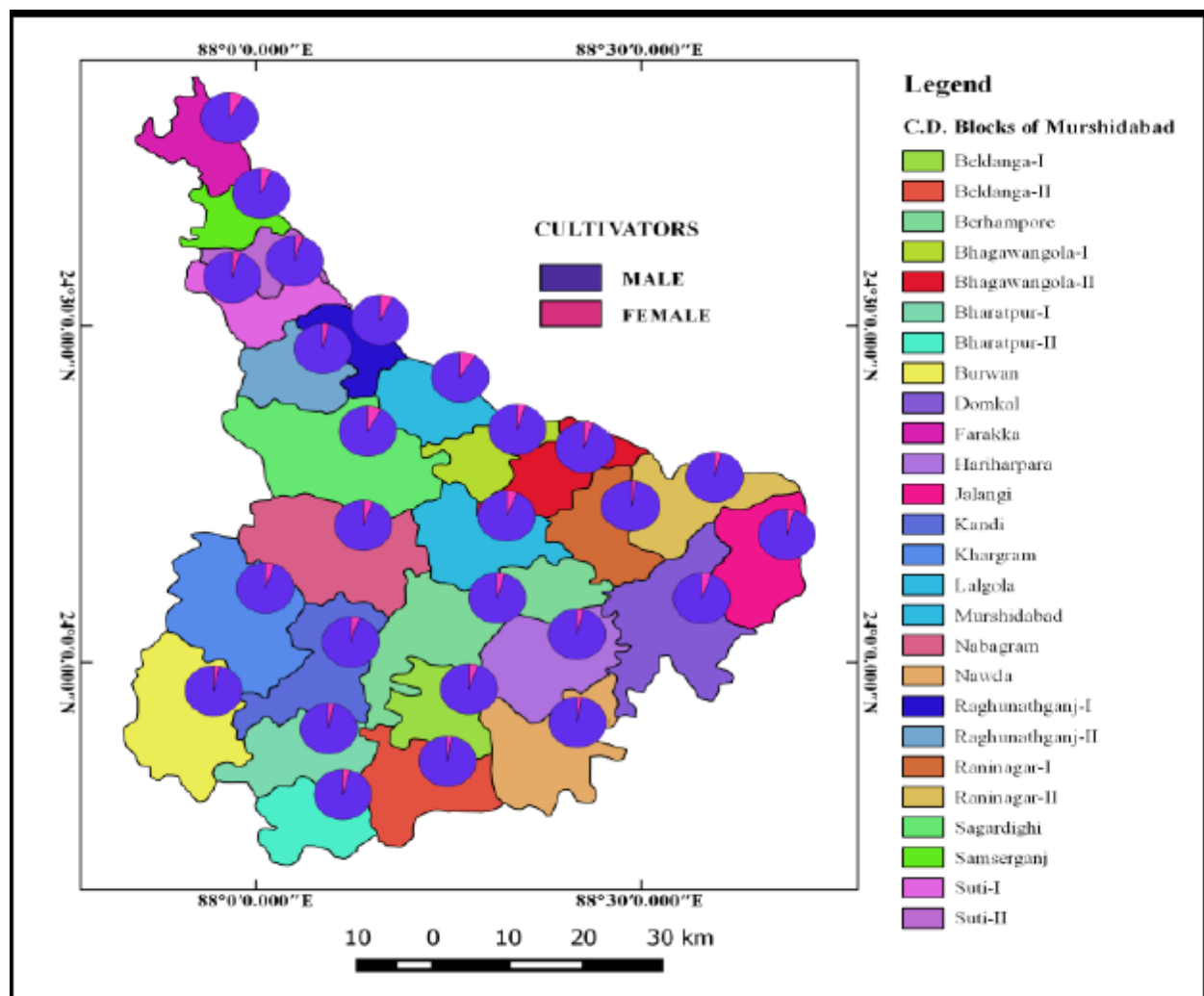
Table -3: Male and Female Population Distribution of Cultivators in Agricultural Sector, Murshidabad District, 2011:

C.D. Blocks	Cultivators					
	Main Workers			Marginal Workers		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
Farakka	4363	4103	260	719	551	168
Samserganj	2841	2730	111	356	274	82
Suti-I	4973	4875	98	567	423	144
Suti-II	4059	3927	132	328	279	49
Raghunathganj-I	5428	5227	201	570	349	221
Raghunathganj-II	4277	4172	105	264	216	48
Lalgola	9144	8678	466	1602	1115	487
Sagardihi	16103	15364	739	2005	1277	728
Bhagwangola-I	7699	7493	206	677	482	195
Bhagwangola-II	7351	7195	156	457	229	228
Raninagar-II	16283	15913	370	1029	780	249
Jalangi	17329	16914	415	1497	1108	389
Domkal	26870	26205	665	2145	1338	807
Raninagar-I	11311	11121	190	857	698	159
Murshidabad-Jiaganj	14497	13906	591	953	613	340
Nabagram	16998	16048	650	1720	1339	381
Khargram	16105	15663	442	2522	2009	513
Kandi	21391	20737	654	2086	1687	399
Berhumpore	23959	23376	583	2301	1757	544
Hariharpara	22077	21622	455	2468	2058	410
Nowda	17694	17442	252	944	862	132
Beldanga-I	15908	15348	560	1225	903	322
Beldanga-II	17102	16859	243	1235	1084	151
Bharatpur-II	8867	8647	220	981	880	101
Bharatpur-I	12336	12077	259	864	672	192
Burwan	17575	17240	335	3669	3307	362
Total	342540	332882	9358	34041	26290	7801

Source: District Census Handbook, Murshidabad District (2011).

From this table it has been found that 95.37% are men and 4.63% are women cultivators in Murshidabad district. In the form of cultivators, 97% are male main workers and only 3% are female main workers which is much more less. But in the form of marginal workers, 77% are occupied by men and 23% are occupied by women farmers. That is why men are all in all in agricultural sector in this district.

MALE AND FEMALE POPULATION DISTRIBUTION OF CULTIVATORS IN MURSHIDABAD DISTRICT, 2011 (MAIN AND MARGINAL WORKERS)



By this map it is clear that women participation in agricultural sector as cultivators is much more less in each and every C.D. Blocks of the study area. A clear gap between male-female engagement in this particular sector is found here.

Male and Female Population Distribution of Agricultural Labourers in Murshidabad District, 2011:

Agricultural labourers are those people who are engaged as labourers in the field of another person and only wages are given to them. They do not have their own land to cultivate. Male and female population distribution of agricultural labourers of this district is given below:

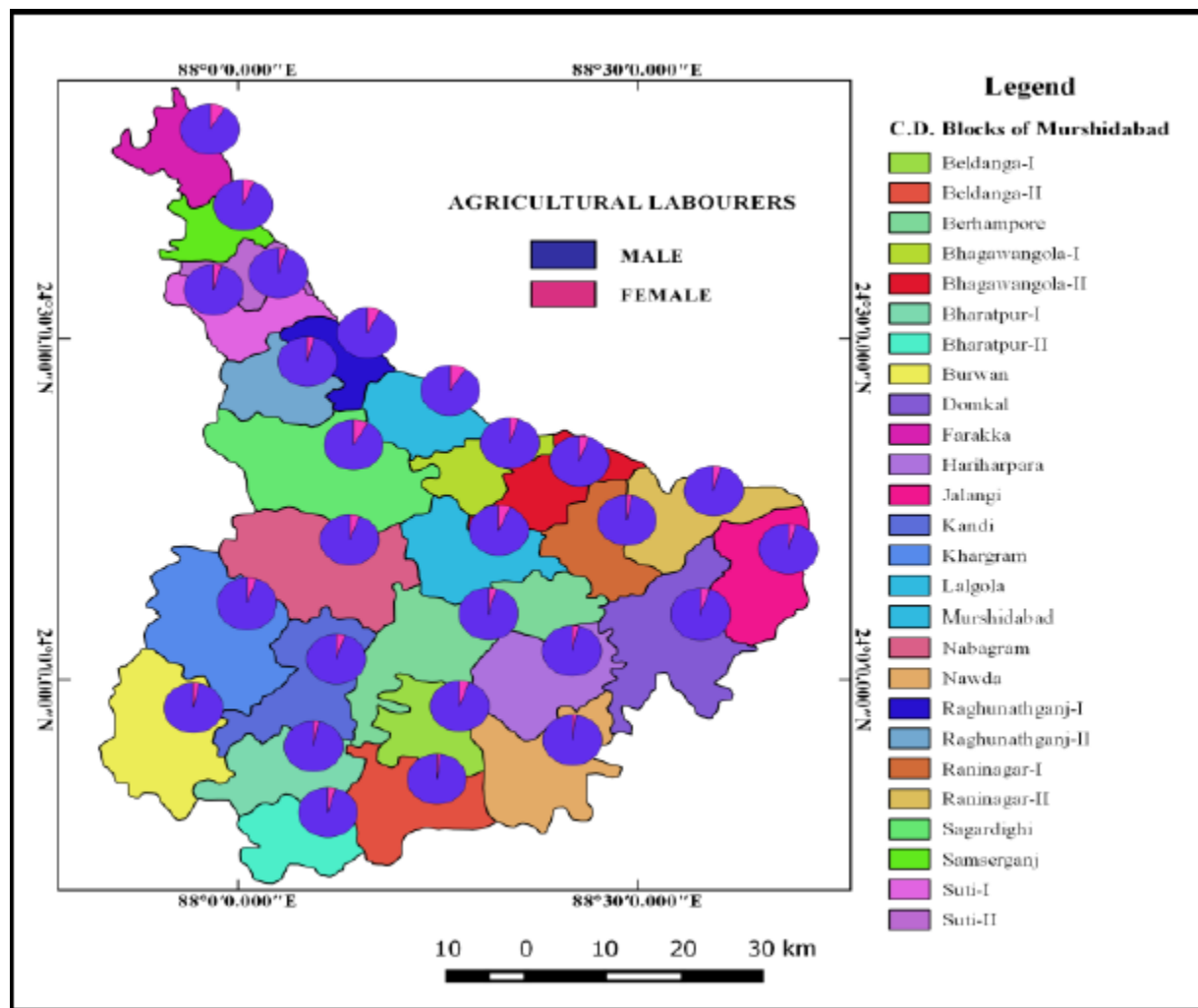
Table -4: Male and Female Population Distribution of Agricultural Labourers in Murshidabad District, 2011:

C.D. Blocks	Agricultural Labourers					
	Main Workers			Marginal Workers		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
Farakka	9743	9241	502	5121	4213	908
Samserganj	9859	9589	270	2350	2127	223
Suti-I	15935	15473	462	4333	3890	443
Suti-II	12345	12066	279	3732	3501	231
Raghunathganj-I	10275	9520	755	3968	2746	1222
Raghunathganj-II	6611	6488	123	1827	1685	142
Lalgola	22684	21795	889	9884	9002	882
Sagardighi	39235	34619	4616	16178	9777	6401
Bhagwangola-I	19477	18996	481	6509	5626	883
Bhagwangola-II	22667	22201	466	5589	4853	736
Raninagar-II	24764	23689	1015	7880	6662	1218
Jalangi	34558	33238	1320	7873	6754	1119
Domkal	41880	40845	1035	12210	10714	1496
Raninagar-I	23359	22270	639	7167	6527	640
Murshidabad-Jiaganj	29172	26242	2930	7657	5647	2010
Nabagram	32122	28502	3620	10426	7941	2485
Khargram	33140	31980	1160	15209	12997	1212
Kandi	20624	19241	1383	9172	7876	1296
Berhumpore	41394	38433	2961	12820	11023	1797
Hariharpara	28098	27317	781	11302	10403	899
Nowda	28657	28204	453	8263	7915	348
Beldanga-I	26110	25417	693	6306	5800	506
Beldanga-II	22466	21863	603	6905	6236	669
Bharatpur-II	19306	18801	505	6092	5138	954
Bharatpur-I	21573	21081	492	5447	4640	807
Burwan	26278	25495	792	16828	15060	1768
Total	622322	592606	29225	211048	178753	31295

Source: District Census Handbook, Murshidabad District (2011).

From the following table it is clear that 92.56% are male agricultural labourers and only 7.44% are female agricultural labourers in Murshidabad district. Men farmers determine the whole process as they have occupied 95% in main workers and women occupied only 5% in this district. In the same way 85% occupied by men marginal workers and 15% occupied by women workers.

MALE AND FEMALE POPULATION DISTRIBUTION OF AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS IN MURSHIDABAD DISTRICT, 2011 (MAIN AND MARGINAL WORKERS)



Here we can see that in the form of both main and marginal workers, men agricultural labourers plays significant role. Very few women are engaged in these sectors in each C.D. Blocks of

Murshidabad district.

SUGGESTIVE MEASURES: Necessary steps should be taken to remove this type of problem, such as:

- More facilities should be provided to poor rural women for land, seed, agricultural and livestock extension services.
- Priority must be given to women in accessing credit on soft terms from banks and from other non- government organizations for setting up their business.
- Measures should be taken to enhance women's literacy rate.
- Women must be involved in decision-making process to introduce developmental changes.
- Women must be aware regarding their existing rights.
- Government should provide necessary aids and skill development training to women agricultural workers.

CONCLUSION

In summary, we can observe that women in this district often face many constraints in the field of agricultural activities. As mentioned above, women engagement in agricultural sector, population distribution of female workers as both cultivators and agricultural labourers in the form of main and marginal type are too less. Women are the major contributors in agriculture and its allied fields. Their work ranges from crop production, livestock production to cottage industry. Finally it can be said that the rural women are treated as sub- servant or personal property. In this regard government should encourage and enhance their skills and their work and thereby making them economically independent.

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