

## Socio-economic status of rural women: selected part of Cooch Behar district, West Bengal, India

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### Abstract

Rural economy of India is characterised by a massive presence of merely paid women workers. Rural women workforce plays a significant role in the economy who participated in large number of economic activity in agriculture and allied sector. Equitable access to more and better jobs in rural areas enable rural women to become effective economic actors and engines of growth. In India female participation in labour market has increased due to increasing rate of employment opportunities. The entry of women in labour market has fundamentally changed the status of women in the family as well as in the society. Today, indigenous women are increasingly entering the formal and informal labour market, as self-employed workers or wage earners. However women are facing new challenges regarding their social status which varies from rural to urban areas and various families in one area. Gender inequality, limited access to credit, health care and education has posed a number of challenges for rural women in all states of India. They also face many domestic and social problems. For the work, primary data was obtaining through field survey. Again, secondary data were collected from various sources and analyzed with suitable statistical and cartographic techniques. Present research study has tried to explore the status of rural working women of Tufanganj Block-I and their distribution in different sector. Most of the women workers of the study area belong to poor economic condition which is the main reason of their work. In conclusion part proper suggestions are incorporated to arrest the problem.

**Keywords:** 1. Engines of growth, 2. Gender inequality, 3. Labour market, 4. Small-scale commodity production.

### Introduction

Rural women play a key role in supporting their households and communities in achieving food and nutrition security, generating income and improving rural livelihoods and overall wellbeing. They contribute to agriculture and rural enterprises and fuel local and global economies. As such they are active players in achieving the Minimum Development Goals (MDGs). Yet everyday around the world rural women's and girls' face persistent structural constrains those prevent them from fully enjoying their human rights and hamper their efforts to improve their lives as well as those of others around them.

In most of the countries work participation rate are lower among women than the men. The activity rates of women differ from country to country and also between the different regions of large countries. The distribution of female workers among different occupations also depending upon the structure of the economy, educational levels, attitude of women to different kinds of jobs and various social factors. The

great majority of women worked either in agriculture or in the traditional rural industries or in service activities.

In the past independent India, women who have been entering salaried remunerative occupations and enjoying professions are increasing substantially. At present women is absorbing themselves in various occupations and enjoying more or less equal status with men. Women are working in almost all types of jobs such as technical, professional and non-professional in both, private and public sectors, residing in rural and urban areas with or without their kith and kin. Now the middle class women take greater interest to do lucrative jobs to cope up with the emerging economic compulsions and to escape the dowry problem. Today many women serve gainful employment not because of they are all educated but they face economic strains and wife's income is considered as essential to the family's standard of living.

Now women have entered into the technical, medical and teaching field. They are working as a pilots, taxi drivers, police women, ministers and head of the nations. In this modern era women are mainly entering into the lucratively paid jobs to enhance the family income and prestige and to utilize the education and the social status, rather than merely due to the economic constraints. Development of science and technology changed in attitudes and aspirations, in social structure and family living patterns have all concurred to relieve the burden of motherhood.

### **Objectives of the study**

The major objectives of the study are-

- 1) To find out distribution of women worker in different sectors.
- 2) To find out the working status of rural women in Tufanganj Block-I.
- 3) To suggest some strategies for their development.

### **Methodology**

The study implemented a case study research design. The data for this study were collected from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were collected from the field survey through the interview with rural working women of the study area. Secondary data were collected from various offices. In pre field stage information collected from various articles and internet. All collected data were classified and tabulated systematically and then these tabulated data have been analysed and interpreted with suitable statistical and cartographic technique. Maps and diagrams are prepared on the basis of collected data.

### **Location of the Study Area**

Tufanganj Block-I is located in Cooch Behar District, West Bengal and lying between latitude 26°12'50"N to 26°20'00"N and longitude 89°33'00"E to 89°37'03"E. It has 77 villages and 59091 rural households and 243256 rural populations. Out of which 125672 are male and 117584 are female. Total no. of rural women workers and non-workers of Tufanganj Block-I are 23735 and 93849.

### **Classification of Workers according to Census of India**

The productive capacity of any area depends on the workers as well as on the proportion of populations in workers to total population. For improved productivity and economic growth the distribution of workers among rural, urban & regional distribution within an area is very important factors to be taken. Many difficulties arise to classify workers in India. Up to 1951 census the classification of workers & non workers was based on the dependency approach.

The 1961 census was first classifying workers on the basis of work in seasonal activities such as cultivation, dairying & household industry. In 1971 the approach was once again changed & the population was classified into two categories. The first category consisted of those whose main activity was work i.e. participation in any economically active work by physical or mental labour. The other category covered mainly the non-working persons. In 1981, 1991 & 2001 census the total population was grouped in three categories namely main workers, marginal workers & non workers.

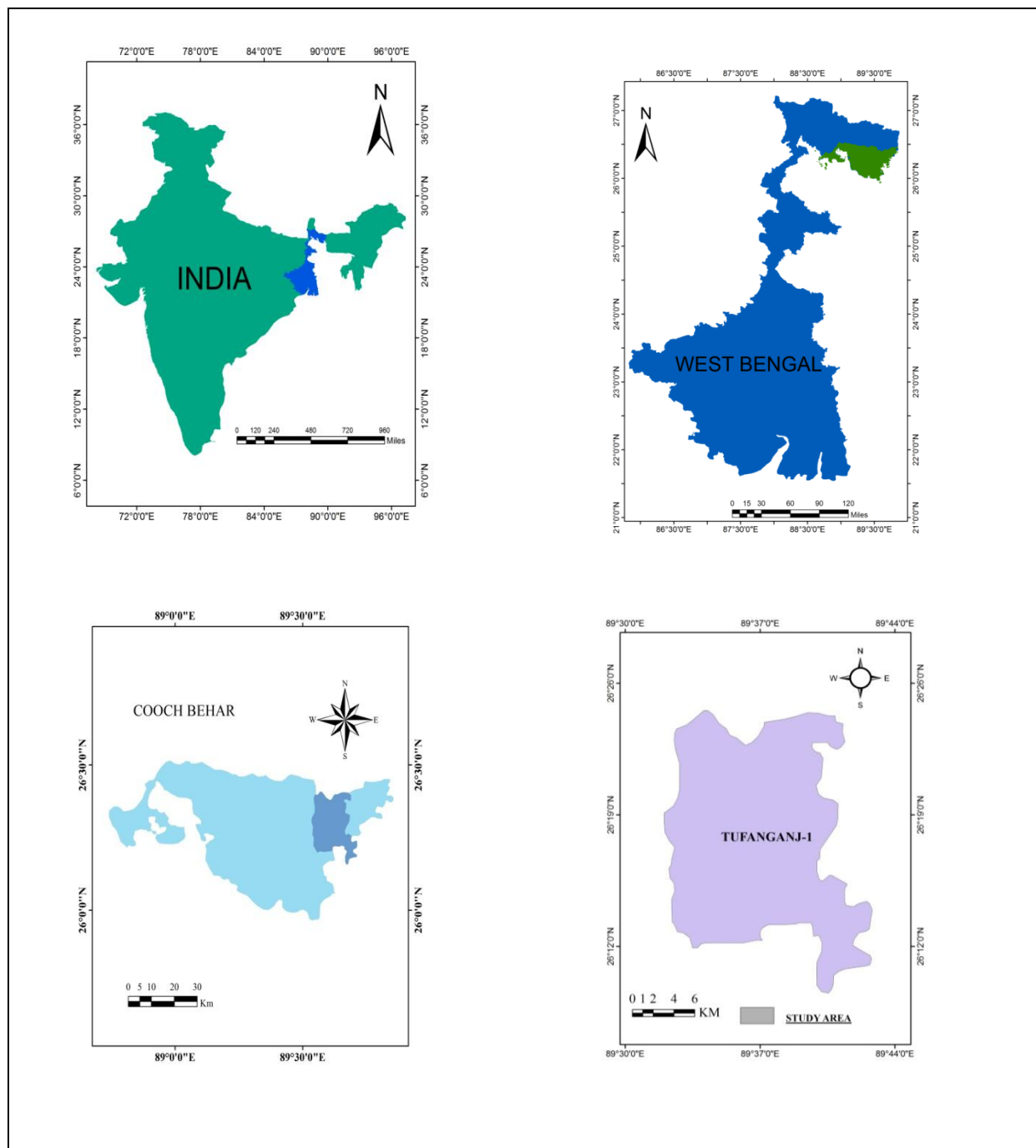


Fig-1: Location Map of the Study Area

**Table-1: Distribution of Workers of Tufanganj Block-I in Different Category**

Category	Main Workers		Marginal Workers		Total Workers (Main +Marginal)		Non Workers	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Rural	64679	11106	10058	12629	74737	23735	50935	93849
Percentage	26.02	4.47	4.05	5.08	30.06	9.55	20.49	37.75
Urban	1453	287	186	259	1639	546	1104	2050
Percentage	0.58	0.11	0.07	0.10	0.66	0.22	0.44	0.83
Total	66132	11393	10244	12888	76376	24281	52039	95899
Percentage	26.60	4.58	4.12	5.18	30.72	9.77	20.93	38.58
Grand Total	77525 (31.18%)		23132 (9.30%)		100657 (40.49%)		147938 (59.51%)	
	248595 (100%)							

**Source:** District Census Handbook (Census- 2011)

**I) Main Workers:**

Those workers who had worked for 6 months or more during the last year are termed as main workers. In Tufanganj Block-I out of 9.55% rural women workers 4.47% are main workers.

**II) Marginal Workers:**

Those workers who had worked for less than 6 months are termed as marginal workers. Out of 9.55% rural women workers Tufanganj Block-I has 5.08% marginal workers.

**III) Non Workers:**

A person who did not at all work during the reference period was treated as non-workers. The non-workers broadly constitute Students who did not participate in any economic activity paid or unpaid. Out of 47.30% rural female populations Tufanganj Block-I has 37.75% non-workers.

**Table-2: Distribution of Workers of Tufanganj Block-I in Different Class**

Class of Workers	Rural			Urban			Grand Total
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	
Cultivators	22027	2771	24798	53	5	58	24856
Percentage	8.86	1.11	9.97	0.02	0.002	0.023	9.99
Agricultural Labourers	26152	8857	35009	136	31	167	35176
Percentage	10.52	3.56	14.08	0.055	0.012	0.067	14.15
Household Industry Workers	4002	5650	9652	247	108	355	10007
Percentage	1.61	2.27	3.88	0.099	0.043	0.143	4.03
Other Workers	22556	6457	29013	1203	402	1605	30618

Percentage	9.07	2.60	11.67	0.48	0.162	0.64	12.32
Total	74737	23735	98472	1639	546	2185	100657
Percentage	30.06	9.55	39.61	0.66	0.22	0.88	40.49

**Source:** District Census Handbook (Census- 2011)

### **I) Cultivators**

According to Census definition, cultivators included persons engaged in cultivation of land owned or held from government or private persons or institutions for payment in money, kind or share of crop. It includes effective supervision or direction in cultivation. Cultivation involved ploughing, sowing, harvesting and production of cereals and millet crops such as wheat, paddy, jowar, bajra, ragi etc. In Tufanganj Block-I out of 9.55%, 1.11% rural women workers engaged in cultivation.

### **II) Agricultural Labourers**

A person who works on another person's land for wages in cash, kind or share is regarded as agricultural labourers. An agricultural labourer had no right of lease or contract on land on which he or she worked. The agricultural labourers are usually more economically and socially vulnerable group in our society. In Tufanganj Block-I out of 9.55% rural women workers 3.56% working as agricultural labourers.

### **III) Household Industry Workers**

A household industry is defined as an industry conducted by one or more members of the household at home or within the village in rural areas and only within the precincts of the house where the household lives in urban areas. The larger proportion of workers in the household industry should consist of household members. The industry should not be run on the scale of a registered factory, which would qualify to be registered under the Indian Factories Act. In Tufanganj Block-I Out of 9.55% rural working women 2.27% are engaged as household industry workers.

### **IV) Other Workers**

All workers, i.e. those who have been engaged in some economic activity during the last one year, but are not cultivators, agricultural labourers or household workers are termed as other workers. It includes all government servants, municipal employees, teachers, factory workers, plantation workers, those engaged in trade, commerce and business, political or social work. Out of 9.55% rural women workers of Tufanganj Block-I 2.60% are engaged as other workers.

### **Working Status of Rural Women of Tufanganj Block-I:**

According to the survey report, women workers of the study area are engaged in following different sectors-

- I) In Brick Field
- II) In Agricultural Sector
- III) In Beedi Industry
- IV) In Cane Industry
- V) As a Weaver

**Table-3: Distribution of Women Workers in Different Sector**

Types of work	No. of Women Workers	Percentage
Brick Labourers	23	20.91
Agricultural Labourers	15	13.64
Beedi Workers	20	18.18
Cane Workers	34	30.91
Weavers	18	16.36
Total	110	100

**Source:** Household Survey (2016)

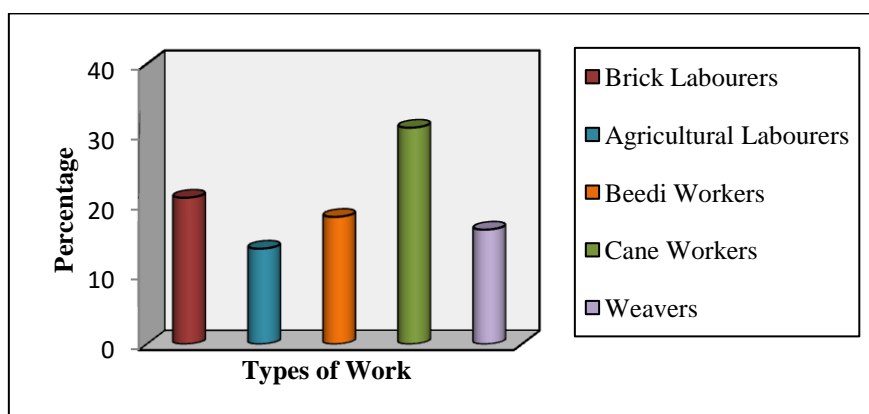


Fig- 2: Distribution of Women Workers in Different Sector

**I) Brick Labourers:**

Brick industry is one of the most important and oldest industries in India. The brick field is found in Deocharai village, adjacent with NH-31. In brick field 20.91% female workers of the study area are engaged. Even they are very much depending on it for their livings in winter season. Large numbers of migrant and local workers are engaged in brick field. In brick field everyday 200-300 workers are worked and among them 70% are male workers and 30% are female workers. Women perform in various unskilled jobs in brick field like cleaning building sites, mixing water clay, its making by particular structure, carrying full making bricks, gravel or carrying broken bricks etc. They worked 3 months that is November, December and January. Those workers are engaged in main processing of brick they get 450 Rs. per day and those are engaged with chimney they get 150 Rs. per day. They get their wages after 6-8hrs work. Too much sunlight is very necessary for brick. As a result, women are physically affected for it. They worked here from long time and local workers are coming here from short distances or from besides villages. The women workers are affected by physical pain everyday due to high intensity of labour.

**II) Agricultural Labourers:**

Rural economy mainly depends on agriculture. In the study area 13.64% women workers are engaged in agricultural sector with various works like ploughing, levelling, sowing, seeding, spraying, harvesting and threshing. In our country agriculture is labour intensive and food grain is the main crop. Main crop of this region is paddy, maize, potato and various vegetables. Some women workers have their own land and some are works in people's land. They worked 6 hrs or greater than it and get wages. They faced various problems like irrigation, flood, drought, soil erosion, lack of marketing and storage facility etc.

**III) Beedi Workers**

Beedi rolling is a traditional agro-forest based industry, spread over almost all major states in India. Beedi is a thin Indian indigenous cigarette made of 0.2-0.3 gram of tobacco flake wrapped in a tendu leaf and

secured with coloured thread at lower end. Over 800 million beedies are sold in India every year (Das-2012). In India about 53% tobacco consumption is in the form of beedies. It is cheap form of tobacco smoking especially for rural people. In Tufanganj Block-I, 18.18% rural working women engaged in beedi rolling. The home based beedi workers are provided with 250-300 grams of tobacco flakes and 500-600 grams of tendu leaves to roll 1000 beedies by the contractors appointed through beedi merchants. Experience beedi workers rolling 1000 beedies per day and get 80 Rs. Wage Per 1000 beedies. The price of beedi is varying with variation of company. The task of beedi rolling is mainly done by the women and children. Continuous beedi rolling by sitting at a same body posture and fumes and dust of tobacco causes severe occupational health hazards to the active beedi workers.

#### **IV) Cane Workers**

Sitalpati, a kind of mat is the most notable and popular product among the handicrafts of Cooch Behar. In Cooch Behar District Barokodali, Mansai, Nakkati, Ghughumari are the most important centres of sitalpati production. In Tufanganj Block-I, 30.91% rural working women engaged in pati making. The word ‘Sital-pati’ means cool-mat. The raw material of sitalpati is the Mutra Cane (Maranta Dichotoma). The green cane is kept soaking in water before it is slashed or sliced in to thin strips for making the pati. Then the fine strips are woven by skilfully joining and interlacing to shape into beautiful mats. The quality of sitalpati is judged by its glossiness, smoothness and fineness of texture. According to survey report experienced women workers can complete a pati within a day. Various size of pati is made by them like single bed pati, double bed pati etc.

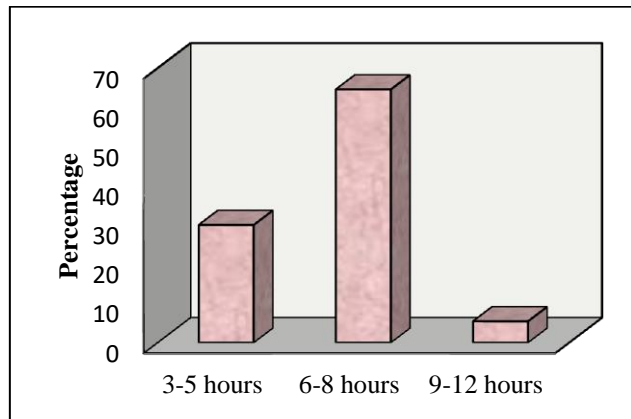
#### **V) Weavers**

16.36% women workers of the study area are working as weaver. Some work in their own tant and some work as labour in any people’s tant. It is one type of their family tradition. In houses both husband and wife engaged in weaving of saree. In such work women buy fiver from mahajan or market. Experienced workers can complete a saree within a day and inexperienced workers take two or three days to complete a saree. Various fiver likes Baine, Pathmoni, Tashar, Pokhayon, Bamper, Design paper, Jori, Tabol etc. are necessary for weaving. 25-30 piece sarees are completed by fiver of 3000 Rs. After completed the huge amount of saree or mekhla they sold it to mahajan or in Guwahati market. Maximum sarees are goes to Guwahati for selling because the rate and demand of tan saree in Guwahati market is higher than the Cooch Behar market.

**Table-4: Duration of Work**

Working Duration	No. of Women Workers	Percentage
3-5 hours	33	30
6-8 hours	71	64.55
9-12 hours	6	5.45
Total	110	100

**Source:** Household Survey (2016)



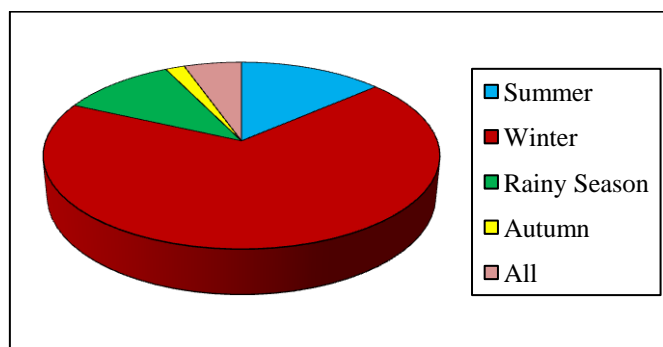
**Fig-3: Working Duration**

From the above figure it is clear that maximum rural women workers of the study area worked 6-8 hrs per day that is 64.55% whereas 30% women workers worked 3-5 hrs per day and only 5.45% workers worked 9-12 hrs per day.

**Table-5: Working Suitable Season**

Working Suitable Season	No. of Women Workers	Percentage
Summer	15	13.64
Winter	75	68.18
Rainy Season	12	10.91
Autumn	2	1.82
All	6	5.45
Total	110	100

**Source:** Household Survey (2016)



**Fig-4: Working Suitable Season**

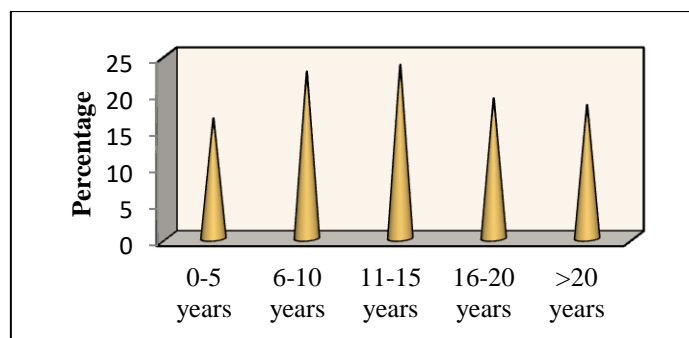
In five types of work various workers are comfortable in various seasons like for brick winter is ideal season, for agriculture rainy season is ideal and pati, weaver and beedi workers can do their job in whole years. But some workers prefer summer, some winter and some preferred autumn season for their works. Above figure shows that maximum rural women workers like winter season for their work that is 68.18% and 13.64% like summer season, 10.91% like rainy season, 1.82% like autumn season and 5.45% like all season for their work.



**Table-6: Working Experience**

Working Experience	No. of Women Workers	Percentage
0-5 years	18	16.36
6-10 years	25	22.73
11-15 years	26	23.64
16-20 years	21	19.09
>20 years	20	18.18
Total	110	100

**Source:** Household Survey (2016)



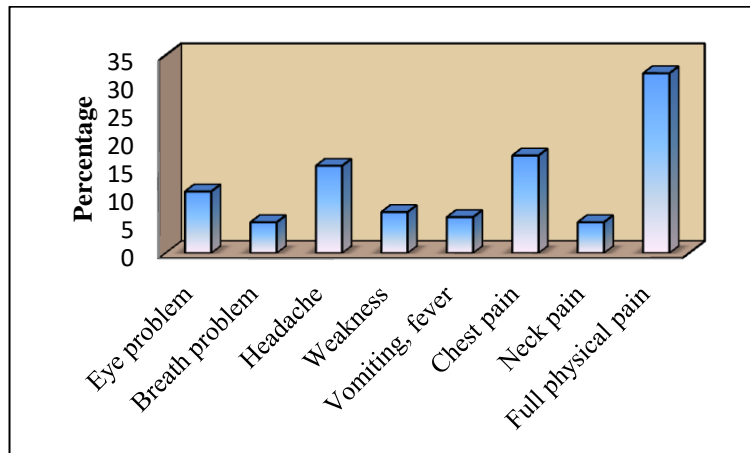
**Fig-5: Working Experience**

Above figure shows highest percentage of rural working women of the study area i.e. 23.64% has 11-15 years working experience and lowest percentage i.e. 16.36% has 0-5 years working experience. 22.73% has 6-10 years, 19.09% has 16-20 years and 18.18% has more than 20 years working experience.

**Table-7: Occupational Health Hazard**

Health Hazard	No. of Women Workers	Percentage
Eye problem	12	10.91
Breath problem	6	5.46
Headache	17	15.45
Weakness	8	7.27
Vomiting, fever	7	6.36
Chest pain	19	17.27
Neck pain	6	5.46
Full physical pain	35	31.82
Total	110	100

**Source:** Household Survey (2016)



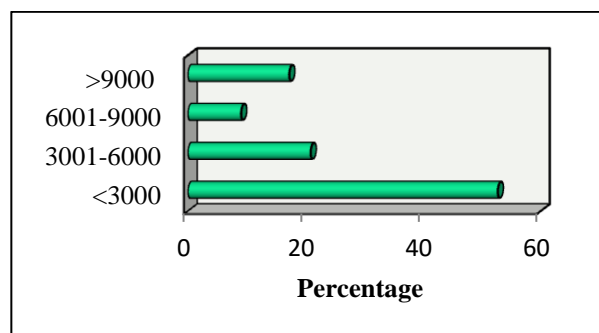
**Fig-6: Occupational Health Hazard**

Beedi workers are mainly face breathing problem, headache for tobacco. Weavers are face neck pain, physical pain. Agricultural labourers faced fever, headache, chest pain for works in sunlight and rain, brick labourers faced physical pain and headache for works in sunlight and high intensity of labour and pati workers faced eye problem, headache, neck pain and weakness. Above figure shows the various occupational health hazards faced by women workers. Highest percentage of women workers i.e. 31.82% face physical pain and lowest percentage of women workers i.e. 5.46% face breath problem and neck pain.

**Table-8: Income of Working Women**

Monthly Income in Rs.	No. of Working Women	Percentage
<3000	58	52.73
3001-6000	23	20.91
6001-9000	10	9.09
>9000	19	17.27
Total	110	100

**Source:** Household Survey (2016)



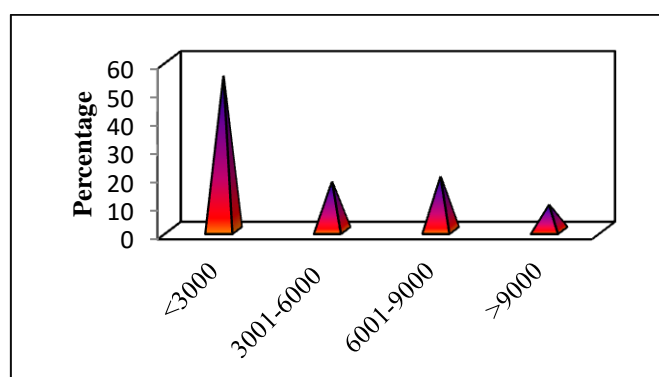
**Fig-7: Income of Working Women**

In the study area most of the women workers work just for poverty and they earned very low wages. 52.73% workers earned less than 3000 Rs., 20.91% workers earned 3001-6000 Rs., 9.09% workers earned 6001-9000 Rs. and 17.27% workers earned more than 9000 Rs. Per month most of them working as a weaver. Lowest income earned by those who engaged in beedi rolling.

**Table-9: Expenditure of Working Women**

Monthly Expenditure in Rs.	No. of Working Women	Percentage
<3000	60	54.55
3001-6000	19	17.27
6001-9000	21	19.09
>9000	10	9.09
Total	110	100

**Source:** Household Survey (2016)



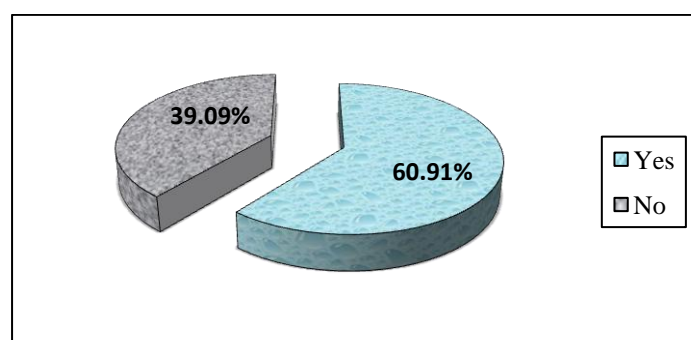
**Fig-8: Expenditure of Working Women**

Monthly expenditure of 54.55% working women of the study area is less than 3000 Rs, 17.27% have 3001-6000 Rs, 19.09% have 6001-9000 Rs, and 9.09% have more than 9000 Rs. expenditure.

**Table-10: Saving of Working Women**

Saving	No. of Working Women	Percentage
Yes	67	60.91
No	43	39.09
Total	110	100

**Source:** Household Survey (2016)



**Fig-9: Saving of Working Women**

In the study area most of the workers are poor. According to survey report 60.91% workers have saving whereas 39.09% workers have no saving. In 60.91%, 39.62% workers preferred bank for saving and 21.29% workers preferred private agency for saving.

### **Findings of the Stud**

- 1) Various sources of works for women are found in the study area. They are forced to do this type of work due to poor economic condition. So poverty plays an important role for women's work.
- 2) Women works generally 8 hour in their working place after completing their domestic work. Duration of work varied in different sector like beedi labour, pati worker, weaver worked irregularly as their wish wise. But brick labour and agricultural labour worked as wage basis per day.
- 3) The highest working women are belongs in 30-40 age category and lowest is 60-70 ages. So their working experience is also different in different sector. Some workers are 15 or some are 20 years old experienced at their work.
- 4) Working suitable season is different for different sector. Agricultural labour obviously preferred rainy season, in brick field it is winter. But pati, beedi, tant in these three sector workers can do their job in whole years and among them someone preferred summer season and some preferred winter season for their comfortness in work.
- 5) Various occupational problems are found in the study area. According to brick labour they have wage problem. Agricultural labour have irrigation problem, loan problem, marketing problem etc. Beedi, pati labour and weaver have the same problem of wage.

### **Recommendations**

It is therefore essential to upgrade the socio-economic status of women by fulfilled their needs. Here are some recommendations that can help in the improvement of their status.

- 1) Health facilities should be made approachable to women at low cost. Health centres should be set up at every possible settlement areas and should be equipped with good supply of medicines, treatment equipment, ambulances and doctors and trained nurses so that they get primary treatment as early as possible.
- 2) Poverty is the main cause or force factor of work besides domestic work for women workers. Education is an important factor to solve this problem. An educated woman can get employed in any field in which they are interested and in this way they can solve the economic problem of family and upgrade their socio economic status.
- 3) Voluntary organizations and NGOs should reach out to these marginalized women so as to understand their problems that they are facing. Intervention of the Government is essential to spread awareness among women to a large extent.
- 4) Awareness should be spread among women so that they identify their legal rights. Information regarding various schemes launched by the governments should be spread to them so that they can benefit from those schemes.
- 5) Ensuring that the women labours are not deceived from getting their correct wage. Wage rate is fixed and maintained by all, but it should be increase year by year.

### **Conclusion**

No economy can sustain itself without participation of all its eligible working members. Government has devised many programmes to empower rural women in various avenues. Empowering women to participate in economic development is not only a challenging task but also paving path for future

sustainable development. However, the village needs infrastructure development as a precondition of diverse economic and cultural development, which would secure a higher living standard for the population. Special attention should be paid to development of the service sector and securing a suitable environment for investment in the development of small enterprises.

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