

# Dimension Of Women's Empowerment: Spatio-Environmental Specific Analysis in Paschim Medinipur District Of West Bengal

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## Abstract

*Empowerment is described as an individual's ability to make choices and take decisions in life. This is a crucial component of women's lives, as they are marginalised in multiple dimensions of society. Therefore, empowering women is crucial for achieving gender equality and a decisive position in society, as they are in a better position to contribute to economic and social progress. Paschim Medinipur, a district in West Bengal, has significant diversity in its environment, physiography, socio-economic conditions, and cultural framework. This configuration results in an inconsistent empowerment status for women in the district. The primary aim of the analysis is to illustrate the spatial visualisation and mapping of women's empowerment status utilising GIS techniques for the research area. To ascertain the spatial distribution of women's empowerment status, block-level metrics such as literacy rate, gender ratio, work participation rate, and political participation rate have been selected for investigation. The mapping of diverse spatial information concerning the empowerment status of women will assist administrators and decision-makers in formulating appropriate policies and strategies for the well-being of women.*

**Keywords:** Women empowerment, environment, spatial mapping, socio- economic, development

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## 1. INTRODUCTION:

Empowerment enriches the resources and competencies of various individuals and collectives, enabling them to participate, exert influence, and ensure accountability from the institutions that impact their lives (Bennett, 2002). The empowerment of women fundamentally alters the dynamics of power, advocating for women's rights and fostering greater equality between women and men (Batliwala, 2007). The notion of women's empowerment is intricately linked to development, social justice, and liberation from all forms of oppression. The concept of power serves as a pivotal element in the quest for empowerment, aimed at addressing the disparities and hardships faced by women in society. In the context of western social theory, the concept of power is often associated with the notions of domination or control over others, as articulated by thinkers such as Machiavelli (1961), Weber (1986), Bourdieu (1993), and Batliwala (1994). Power encompasses not merely the ability to exert control over others, but also involves the cultivation of capacity, the enhancement of skills, the art of negotiation, and the making of strategic life decisions. In this context, power refers to the ability to attain desired results in life (Giddens, 1984; Miller, 1976; Nancy Hartsock, 1983). Power resides within the intricate social and cultural frameworks that foster an unequal allocation of resources and opportunities for women. It also imposes certain limitations on participation in the decision-making process and the ability to select the life one wishes to lead. Acquiring influence in life through education, engagement in political processes, and active economic involvement is fundamentally crucial for achieving empowerment. In this regard, the educational achievements of women significantly contribute to the realisation of these qualities in life. The process of empowerment cultivates the intrinsic capabilities of women by facilitating the acquisition of knowledge, information, and life experiences (Hashemi Schuler and Riley, 1996). From this viewpoint, education serves a crucial function in fostering a constructive transformation in the lives of women. Education improves an individual's ability to navigate both physical and socio-cultural contexts (Bourdieu, 1990). Education broadens potential and creates avenues for engagement in diverse economic pursuits in the lives of women. Through engagement in economic endeavours, women asserted their presence and significance. The engagement of women in political participation and decision-making

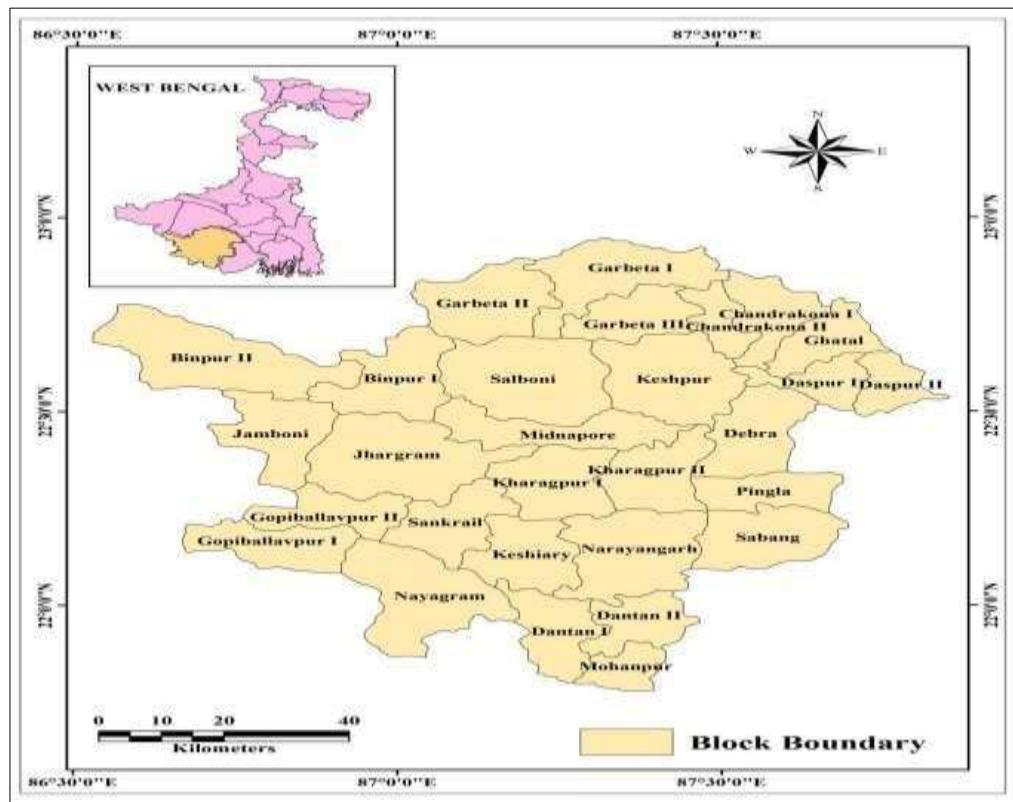


Fig. 1 Paschim Medinipur district

represents a significant dimension of empowerment. The efficacy of democratic systems within any nation is significantly influenced by the involvement of women and their active participation in the electoral process (R. Praveen, 2011). Facilitating women's engagement in political processes cultivates their self-assurance in public interactions and simultaneously alters societal views regarding women's roles and contributions. In order to bolster women's political engagement via public representation, a constitutional amendment was enacted in 1993, guaranteeing one-third representation of women in the Panchayati Raj Institutions. In order to evaluate the current state of women's empowerment within the Paschim Medinipur district of West Bengal, three key dimensions have been identified: educational achievements, economic involvement, and political engagement. The GIS methodology has been utilised to demonstrate the spatial disparities in the status of women's empowerment. Paschim Medinipore is located in the southwestern part of West Bengal. It was established on January 1, 2002, as a new district carved from Medinipore, which was the largest district in India at that time. The coordinates are situated between 22°57'10" to 21°36'35" north latitude and 88°12'40" to 86°33'50" east longitude. Bankura district is situated to the north, while Purba Medinipore lies to the southeast of it. The southern boundary is delineated by the Balasore and Mayurbhanj districts of Odisha, while the western boundary is marked by Singbhum and the eastern district of Jharkhand. This district encompasses an area of approximately 9295.28 square kilometres. The 2011 census of India indicates that the population of this district stands at 5913457. The male constitutes 50.84 percent, while the female demographic accounts for 49.16 percent of the overall population. On 4 April 2017, a new district was delineated from Paschim Medinipur, designated as Jhargram, comprising eight C.D. blocks and one sub-division. The analysis of women's empowerment status has been conducted using the undivided Paschim Medinipur district, drawing upon data from the 2011 census year for this study. The Paschim Medinipur district exemplifies a rich regional diversity, encompassing a variety of physiographic and agro-climatic characteristics, alongside distinct economic development and social composition. The various socio-spatial factors exert both direct and indirect influence on the empowerment status of women within this district. This study is driven by two significant objectives: firstly, to examine the diverse factors influencing the status of women empowerment in Paschim Medinipur, and second, to assess and illustrate the spatial variation of women empowerment status at the block level within the Paschim Medinipur district.

## 2. DATABASE AND METHODOLOGY:

In order to assess the empowerment status of women, pertinent data have been primarily gathered from secondary sources. Secondary data have been sourced from published government reports, various academic journals, and other publications. Data pertaining to the population have been sourced from the primary census abstract of West Bengal, conducted in 2011. The information concerning the political engagement of women has been gathered from the Panchayat and Rural Development Department of the West Bengal government. Data pertaining to education have been gathered from the District Information System for Education (DISE) in Paschim Medinipur. This study aims to assess the status of women's empowerment through three fundamental dimensions: economic participation, political engagement, and educational achievement. An equivalent percentage that is equally distributed has been calculated for each of these three dimensions. The formulation of Equally Distributed Equivalent Percentage (EDEP) is, therefore, as follows

EDEP for work participation

$$[\{\text{female pop. share (female index}^{-1})\} + \{\text{male pop. share (male imdex}^{-1})\}]^{-1} \quad \dots (\text{eq - 1})$$

$$\text{Where, Female population share} = \frac{\text{Female population}}{\text{Total Ppulation}}$$

$$\text{Male population share} = \frac{\text{Male population}}{\text{Total Ppulation}}$$

$$\text{Female index (main workers)} = \frac{\text{female main workers}}{\text{total female population}} * 100$$

$$\text{Female index (marginal workers)} = \frac{\text{female marginal workers}}{\text{total female population}} * 100$$

$$\text{Male index (main workers)} = \frac{\text{male main workers}}{\text{total male population}} * 100$$

$$\text{Female index (marginal workers)} = \frac{\text{female marginal workers}}{\text{total female population}} * 100$$

EDEP for political participation.

$$\{(m*mp \wedge (1 - \text{epsilon}) - f*fp \wedge (1- \text{epsilon})) \wedge \{1/ (1-\text{epsilon})\} \dots \dots \dots (\text{eq - 2})$$

$$\text{Where, Female population share (f)} = \frac{\text{Female population}}{\text{Total Ppulation}}$$

$$\text{Male population share (m)} = \frac{\text{Male population}}{\text{Total Ppulation}}$$

$$\text{Male index (mp)} = \frac{\text{male representative in panchayat samity level}}{\text{total seat in panchayat samity}} * 100$$

$$\text{Female index (fp)} = \frac{\text{female representative in panchayat samity level}}{\text{total seat in panchayat samity}} * 100$$

EDEP for educational attainment

$$[\{\text{female pop. share (female index}^{-1})\} + \{\text{male pop. share (male imdex}^{-1})\}]^{-1} \quad \dots (\text{eq - 3})$$

$$\text{Where, Female index (female literacy)} = \frac{\text{female literate population}}{\text{total female population}} * 100$$

$$\text{Male index (male literacy)} = \frac{\text{male literate population}}{\text{total male population}} * 100$$

To assess political and economic participation and decision-making, the EDEP is subsequently normalised by dividing it by 50. The justification for this indexation lies in the premise that an optimal society would exhibit equal empowerment of the genders (UNDP, 2007-08). The status of women's empowerment is determined through a straightforward average of the three indexed EDEP metrics. GIS mapping techniques have been employed to illustrate the spatial variation of women's empowerment status in the Paschim Medinipur district. Geo-visualization in GIS, as articulated by MacEachren et al. in 1995, represents a significant shift from the conventional paradigms of map communication within the field of cartography.

## 2.1 Methodological flowchart to measure the empowerment status of women:

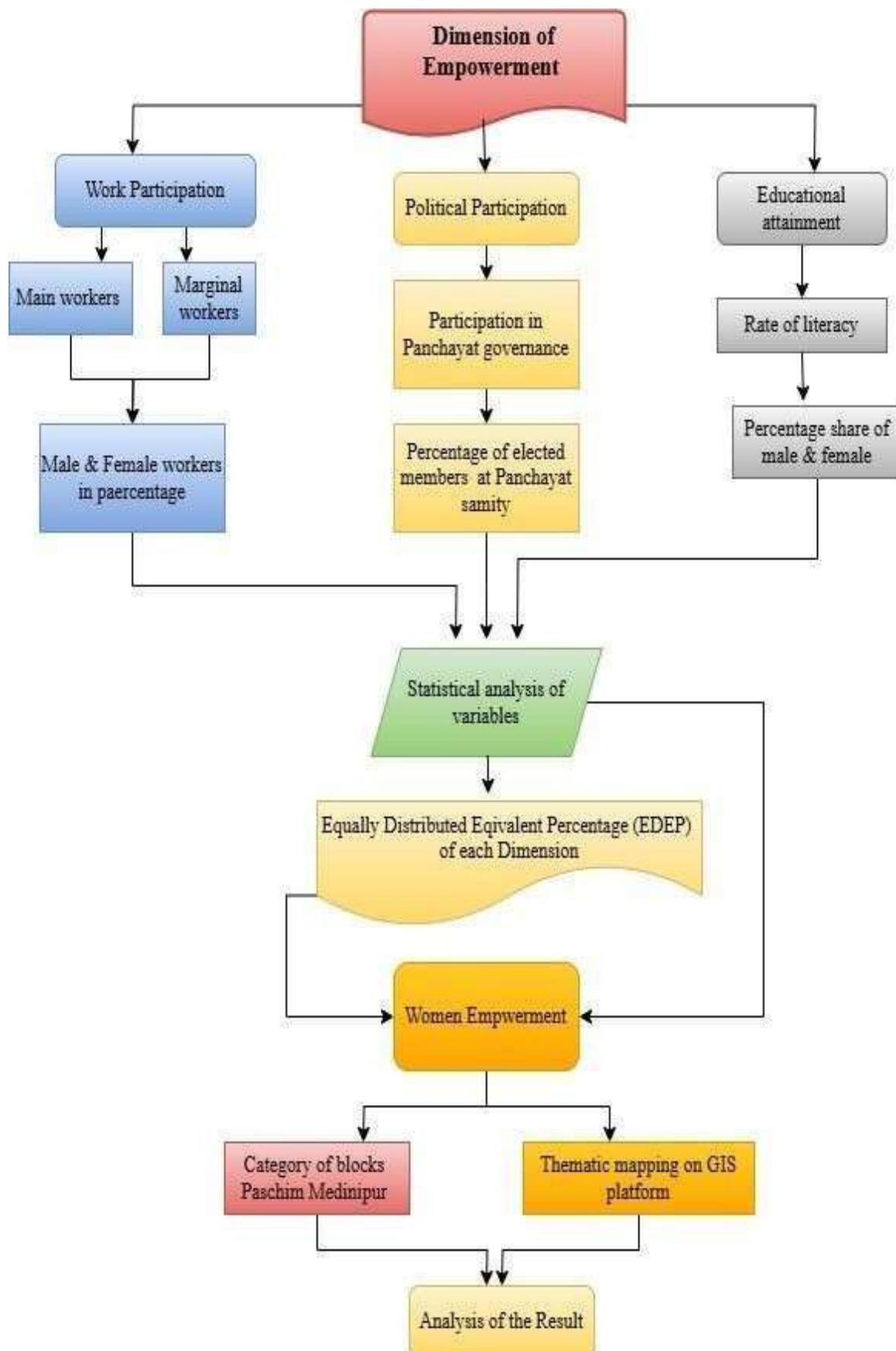


Table 1: Block wise women empowerment status in Paschim Medinipur District.

Population Composition & Share					Work Participation				Political Participation				Education	
Male	Female	Total	Male pop. Share	Female pop. Share	Main worker		Marginal Worker		EDEP	Panchayat Samity level		EDEP	Male literacy	
					Male	Female	Male	Female		Total seat	Seat share male	Seat share female		
9820	66186	136006	0.5133	0.4867	47.04	6.75	14.39	9.72	0.237	17	52.94	47.06	0.998	85.50
3180	60089	123269	0.5125	0.4875	43.48	6.65	15.37	10.40	0.242	16	56.25	43.75	0.987	83.09
4466	81455	165921	0.5091	0.4909	32.19	6.06	24.09	10.75	0.253	26	57.69	42.31	0.979	82.02
9543	75474	155017	0.5131	0.4869	41.68	4.70	16.75	7.80	0.193	21	52.38	47.62	0.998	89.06
03757	100230	203987	0.5086	0.4914	51.20	7.69	10.37	12.26	0.247	30	46.67	53.33	0.994	90.86
21742	116787	238529	0.5104	0.4896	51.83	5.35	9.95	9.17	0.194	39	51.28	48.72	0.999	91.58
38824	136011	274835	0.5051	0.4949	42.47	12.53	17.97	18.17	0.375	42	52.38	47.62	0.998	88.78
11379	106860	218239	0.5104	0.4896	43.71	6.99	14.01	12.92	0.256	35	54.28	45.72	0.994	78.79
5165	73245	148410	0.5065	0.4935	42.73	14.70	14.68	19.77	0.390	25	52.00	48.00	0.998	84.14
5562	73247	148809	0.5078	0.4922	44.79	9.78	13.15	17.49	0.312	21	52.38	47.62	0.998	79.89
13199	106356	219555	0.5156	0.4844	50.87	4.31	11.53	10.67	0.193	35	51.43	48.57	0.983	88.34
5601	73659	149260	0.5065	0.4935	34.00	9.65	24.26	21.88	0.381	25	56.00	44.00	0.987	84.39
73504	165744	339248	0.5114	0.4886	43.53	6.44	13.55	12.91	0.246	45	53.33	46.67	0.997	85.24
4489	81472	165961	0.5091	0.4909	45.80	10.81	9.71	8.98	0.270	20	60.00	40.00	0.963	84.23
2546	90894	183440	0.5045	0.4955	37.46	9.25	21.05	18.71	0.347	26	53.85	46.15	0.994	84.09
7490	94215	191705	0.5085	0.4915	43.64	11.84	13.64	12.81	0.319	25	52.00	48.00	0.998	78.43
7558	54343	111901	0.5144	0.4856	43.44	3.51	15.11	4.99	0.142	15	53.33	46.67	0.997	87.64
48779	144834	293613	0.5067	0.4933	39.94	9.87	19.11	20.17	0.252	47	51.06	48.94	0.999	85.88
9988	94821	194809	0.5133	0.4867	43.89	11.67	18.57	27.18	0.413	30	53.33	46.67	0.997	90.22
38924	131568	270492	0.5136	0.4864	41.17	10.81	24.16	41.96	0.471	39	51.28	48.72	0.997	93.16
5195	93458	188653	0.5046	0.4954	35.48	9.81	22.15	23.60	0.382	30	56.67	43.33	0.983	82.28
5970	84127	170097	0.5054	0.4946	35.32	9.50	22.81	24.25	0.385	30	60.00	40.00	0.962	80.55
7607	55590	113197	0.5089	0.4911	25.44	7.24	30.84	26.48	0.399	20	65.00	35.00	0.915	82.04
3459	51537	104996	0.5092	0.4908	35.71	9.93	20.25	18.42	0.350	17	58.82	41.18	0.972	80.45
5475	52779	108254	0.5125	0.4875	36.09	9.06	19.78	21.25	0.351	17	52.94	47.06	0.998	75.11
1537	70662	142199	0.5031	0.4969	32.63	10.96	24.15	30.69	0.434	27	59.23	40.77	0.967	74.06
8240	57178	115418	0.5046	0.4954	41.98	10.47	16.05	22.08	0.354	21	57.14	42.86	0.980	81.01
2654	81868	164522	0.5024	0.4976	20.16	6.71	36.28	32.54	0.458	25	64.00	36.00	0.923	80.79
8929	77224	156153	0.5055	0.4945	33.16	10.88	22.65	23.52	0.339	29	55.18	44.82	0.990	79.72

uthors from census data of west Bengal, 2011

### 3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION:

Empowerment is a complex and multifaceted journey. Three fundamental aspects—education, political participation, and work participation—play a significant role in empowering women. The interplay of these dimensions fosters expertise, economic influence, and a crucial role in decision-making within both public and familial spheres. The status of women's empowerment in the Paschim Medinipur district can be divided into five distinct classes. A considerable number of blocks in the Paschim Medinipur district exhibit a concerningly low level of women's empowerment. Only the Sabong block shows a significant level of advancement regarding women's empowerment. A correlation matrix (table – 3)

illustrates the interconnections among these three indicators. Women's work participation and empowerment have a profound relationship. Female literacy is also strongly correlated with women's empowerment; however, political participation demonstrates a weak correlation. So far as women empowerment is concerned, every aspect of empowerment has an equal importance. Some blocks are highly concentrated on work participation and some other are in literacy. In case of political participation the variance is very low (table – 3) among the blocks of Paschim Medinipur district. Basically the political participation of women through membership in panchayat samity level determined by reservation of seat for women in three tier panchayat system. So the spontaneous or active participation of women in politics may be increased through this policy. This also ensures or give an opportunity to women in decision making process of local governments. Among three components of empowerment, the work participation holds the maximum variances. Because there are huge gender gaps in main and marginal work participation between male and female population. The female population share 48 to 49 percent to the total population in every blocks of this district. Whereas male population share 50 to 51 percent to the total population. Male literacy is higher than the female literacy in every blocks of this district. It ranges from 75 to 90 percent. Highest percentage of male literacy (93 percent) has been seen in the block of Sabang. It also contains highest female literacy (80 percent) in the district of Paschim Medinipur. On the other hand lowest percentage of female literacy (53 percent) has been seen in the block of Nayagram.

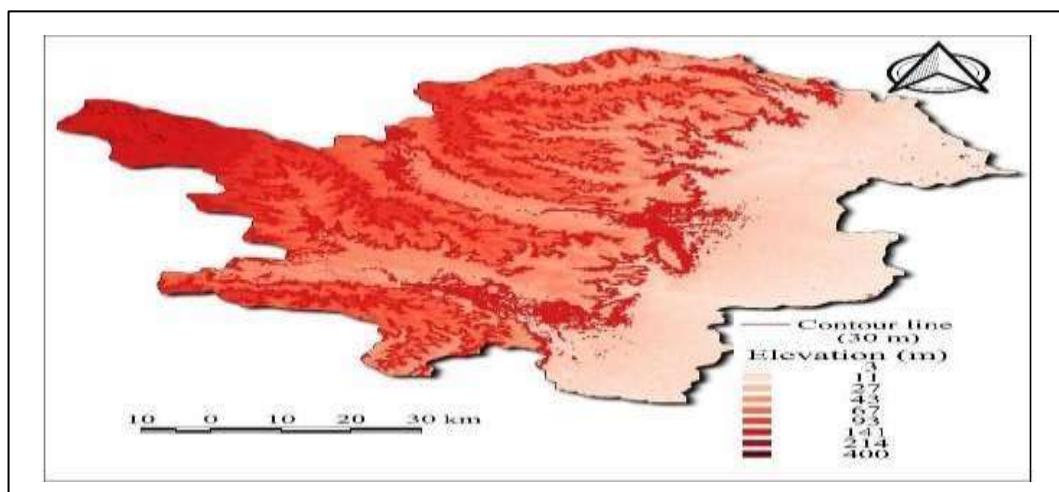


Fig – 2. Physiography of Paschim Medinipur

### 3.1 Spatio-environmental aspects and women empowerment.

The Paschim Medinipur district is physiographically a transitional zone between the western Chhotanagpur plateau region and the Gangetic plain. The western section of this region is characterized by undulating topography, lateritic soil, and dry deciduous forests, whereas the eastern section comprises flat alluvial plains, marshy wetlands, and numerous streams. The western section of this district is designated as a concentrated location for scheduled castes. There are significant socio-cultural variations, akin to psychogeography. Primarily, two major categories of blocks have been observed in this district. The distinctive characteristic of forested land and the sloping, infertile lateritic soil impede agricultural development and obstruct educational progress. It diminishes employment prospects and exacerbates poverty. In contrast, the eastern region offers educational facilities, employment opportunities, and agricultural development. This is highly conducive to women's empowerment. Every environmental factor has both direct and indirect effects on women's empowerment in the Paschim Medinipur. There are several spots in Paschim Medinipur's western region that are over 200 meters high. Conversely, the elevation of the eastern region is merely 3 meters. The terrain is predominantly divided by various river basins. The correlation between educational attainment and land elevation is evident. The rates of political and workforce engagement are correlated with the physiography of Paschim Medinipur district. Every aspect of empowerment is fundamentally influenced by controlling factors of physiography. The highest female literacy has been seen in the low elevated land of this district. The highest political participation rate of females has been observed in the eastern blocks of Paschim Medinipur. However,

the elevated labour participation rates are concentrated in the western blocks of this district, including Binpur-I, Binpur-II, Jhargram, Nayagram, and Jamboni. The physiographical landscape influences the status of women's empowerment in numerous ways. The influence of the environment on the status of empowerment cannot be overlooked.

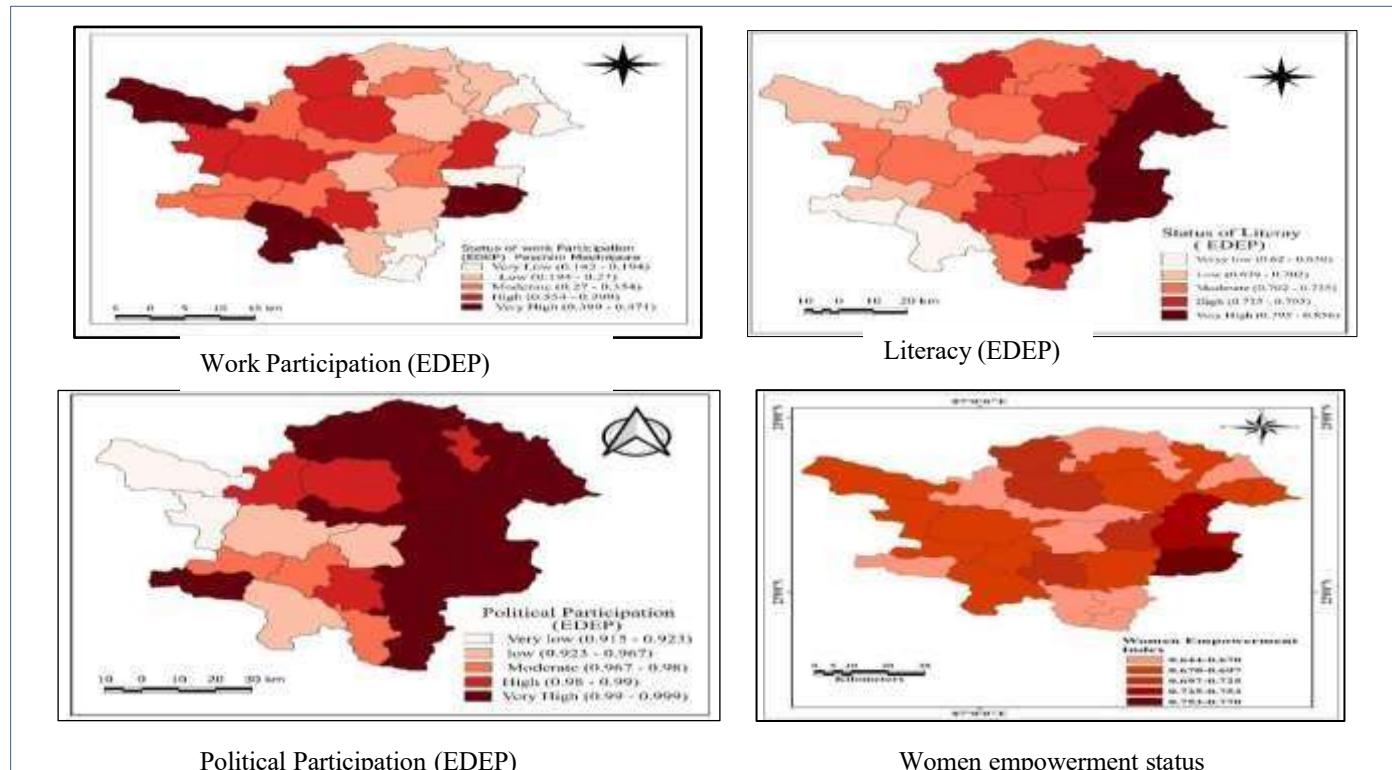


Fig – 3. Women empowerment status and different aspects, Paschim

Table 2: Categories of blocks according to empowerment status.

Women Empowerment index	Status	Name of the Blocks
0.644-0.670	Very low	Chandrakona-II, Dantan-I, Dantan-II, Garbeta-I, Ghatal, Kharagpur-I, Medinipur, Mohanpur, Gopiballavpur-I, Binpur-I
0.670-0.697	Low	Chandrakona-I, Daspur-I, Daspur-II, Garbeta-III, Keshpur, Narayangarh, Jhargram, Jamboni, Gopiballavpur-II, Nayagram, Sankrail
0.697-0.725	Medium	Garbeta-II, Keshiary, Kharagpur-II, Salbani, Binpur-II
0.725-0.753	High	Debra, Pingla
0.753-0.770	Very high	Sabong

Table 3: Correlation and ANOVA matrix for the indicators.

Indicators	Work participation	Seat share female	Female literacy rate	women Empowerment status
Work participation	1.00			
Seat share female	-0.28	1.00		
Female literacy rate	-0.30	0.58	1.00	
Women Empowerment status	0.70	0.17	0.41	1.00

Groups	Count	Sum	Average	Variance
work participation	29	9.185	0.316724	0.007593
Political participation	29	28.545	0.98431	0.000455
Educational attainment	29	21.796	0.751586	0.003562

ANOVA						
Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Between Groups	6.659723	2	3.329862	860.4319	1.1196E-56	3.105156608
Within Groups	0.325079	84	0.00387			
Total	6.984802	86				

### 3.2 Very low empowerment status

Approximately 35 percent of the blocks in Paschim Medinipore district fall into this category. Chandrakona-II, Dantan-I, Dantan-II, Garbeta-I, Ghatal, Kharagpur-I, Medinipur, Mohanpur, Gopiballavpur-I, and Binpur-I are the names to note. This analysis explores the connection between women's empowerment status and three key indicators. The participation of women in the workforce is closely linked to their empowerment status; however, there is a negative correlation between female literacy and empowerment. The ten districts of Paschim Medinipore are located in both the southern and northern regions. With the exception of the Medinipur and Binpur -I blocks, all other blocks exhibit a notably low rate of work participation among main workers. In the regions of Chandrakona – II, Dantan -I, Dantan – II, Garbeta – I, and Garbeta – III, the workers' participation rate is below 10 percent, indicating that a significant portion of the workforce falls into the non-workers category. The women in these neighbourhoods face economic challenges. This is a key factor contributing to the low empowerment status of the blocks. A lower female literacy rate contributes significantly to a diminished empowerment status. The female literacy rate varies between 60.00 and 70.00 percent. The percentage of female seats at the panchayat samity level in terms of political participation ranges from 40.00 to 45.00 percent. This reflects a significant lack of involvement in decision-making roles regarding policies and programs.

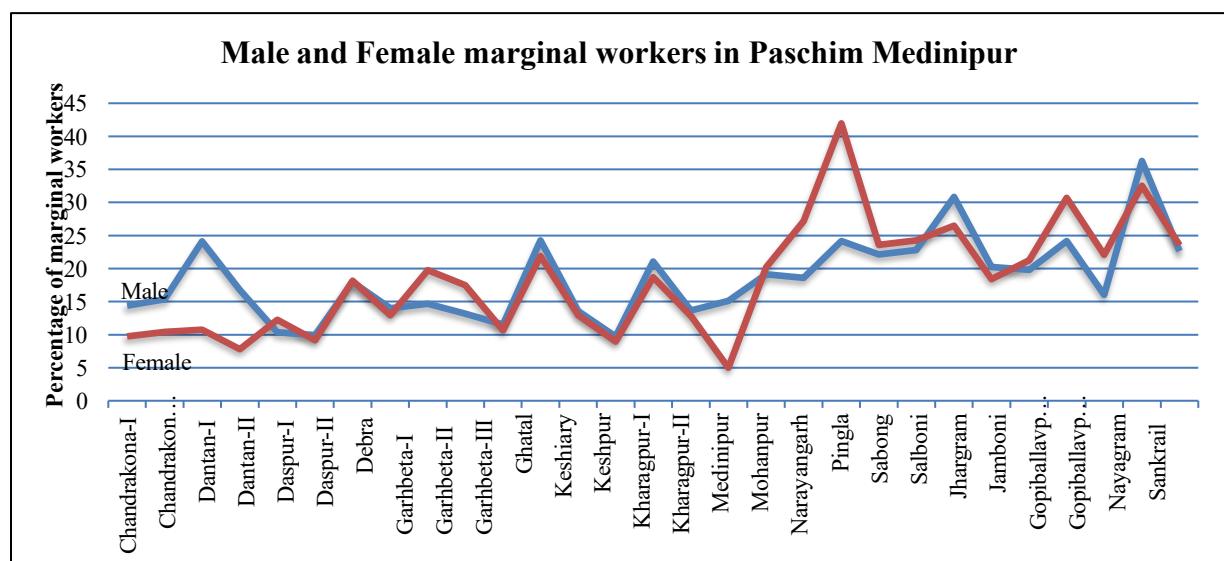


Fig -4. Percentage of male and female marginal workers

### 3.3 low empowerment status:

This category comprises eleven blocks within this district. The female labour participation rate is notably low, although female literacy rates are elevated. Only 8 percent of female workers belong to the primary worker category. The proportion of female marginal workers in these blocks is equally low. The blocks include Chandrakona-I, Daspur-I, Daspur-II, Garbeta-III, Keshpur, Narayangarh, Jhargram, Jamboni,

Gopiballavpur-II, Nayagram, and Sankrail. The high rate of female political engagement in these blocks fosters women's empowerment. Two types of blocks have been recognised in this category. The blocks of Chandrakona – I, Daspur – II, Daspur – I, and Keshpur exhibit a female literacy rate of 70.00 percent; yet, the female main worker participation percentage is merely between 6 and 9 percent. Additionally, an exceedingly low percentage of female marginal labourers (10 to 12 percent) has been seen in certain blocks. The ratio of non-working females ranges from 60 to 85 percent. Daspur -II exhibits the greatest proportion (85.48 percent) of non-working female population in Paschim Medinipur district. Conversely, districts such as Jhargram, Jamboni, Nayagram, Sankrail, and Narayangarh exhibit notably low female

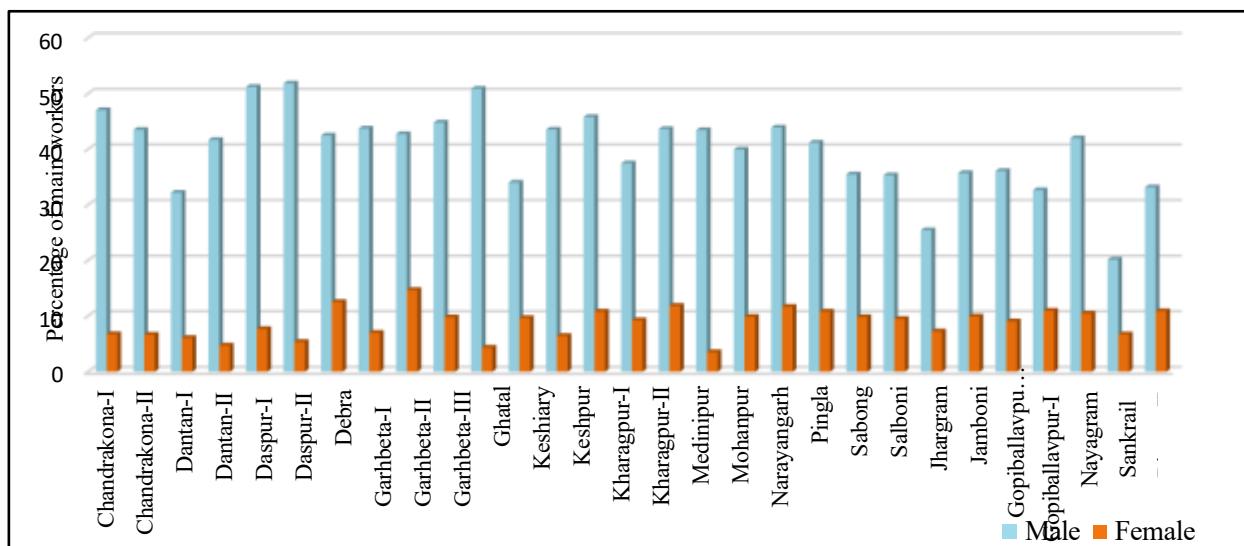


Fig. – 5: Percentage of male and female main workers in Paschim Medinipur

literacy rates

(ranging from 55 to 70 percent), while having a higher proportion of both primary and marginal female workers compared to other blocks in this category. The female seat share in this group of blocks is significant regarding political participation.

### 3.4 Medium empowerment status:

The levels of women's empowerment in Garbeta-II, Keshiary, Kharagpur-II, Salbani, and Binpur-II are moderate. This group of blocks has a high percentage of female main and marginal workers. The proportion of primary female employees varies between 14 and 36 percent, whereas the proportion of marginal female employees is between 20 and 32 percent. Between 60 and 70 percent of women are literate. These blocks have a 45–48 percent female political engagement percentage. Women's empowerment status is strongly connected with the rate of female literacy and political participation.

### 3.5 Highly empowerment status:

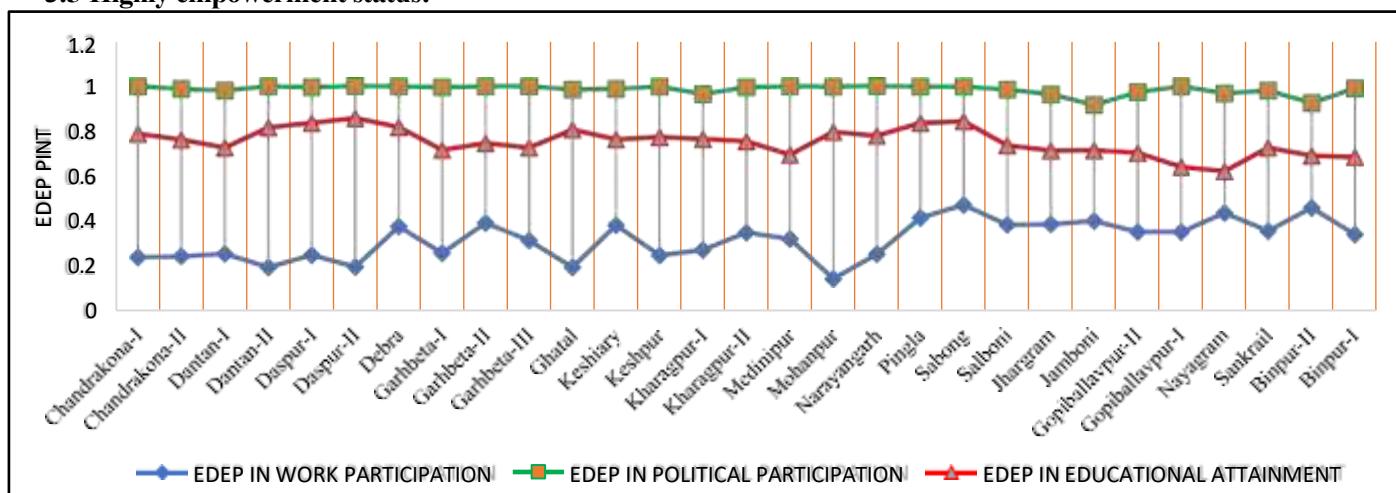


Fig.- 6: Comparison among three EDEP

In the Paschim Medinipur district, only the blocks of Debra and Pingla exhibit a notable level of women empowerment. The levels of work participation and educational attainment among women in these blocks are notably high. Women demonstrate significant political engagement, with nearly fifty percent of seats in the Panchayat samity held by female representatives. The indicators of women's empowerment demonstrate a significant level of achievement. Both the block Pingla and Debra attain a female literacy rate exceeding 75 percent. The rate of political participation approaches the proportion of the female population.

### 3.6 Very high empowerment status:

Out of the twenty-nine blocks in Paschim Medinipur district, Sabong block stands out with a notably high-status regarding women's empowerment. The driving force behind women's empowerment is significantly influenced by the high female literacy rate, which exceeds 80 percent. Over 40 percent of females are involved in marginal activities, while 10 percent are classified as main workers. The representation of women in Panchayat samity level is approximately 50 percent. Political participation, literacy, and work participation hold equal significance in achieving a high status in women's empowerment.

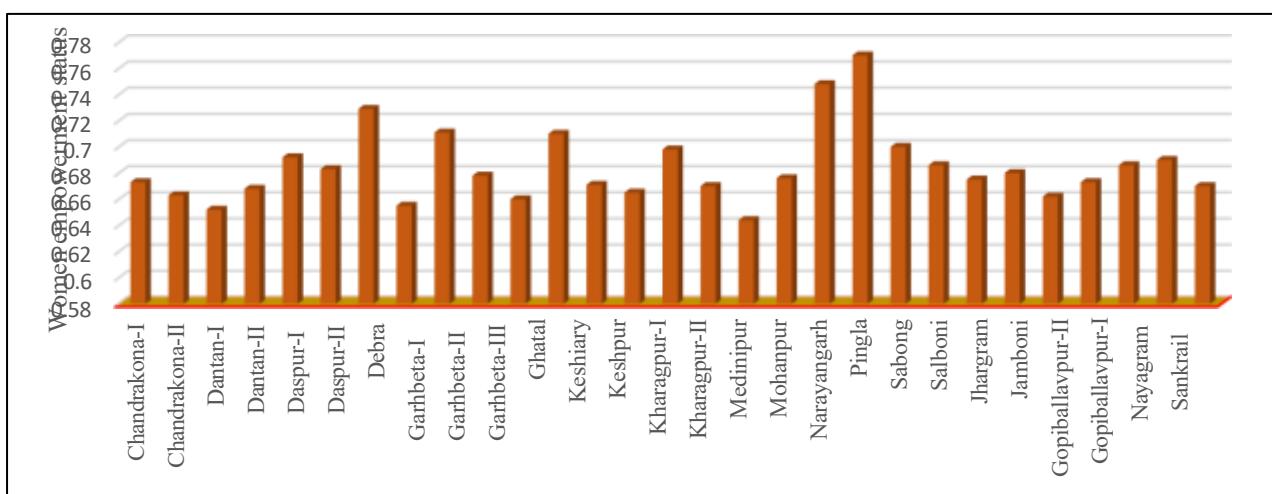
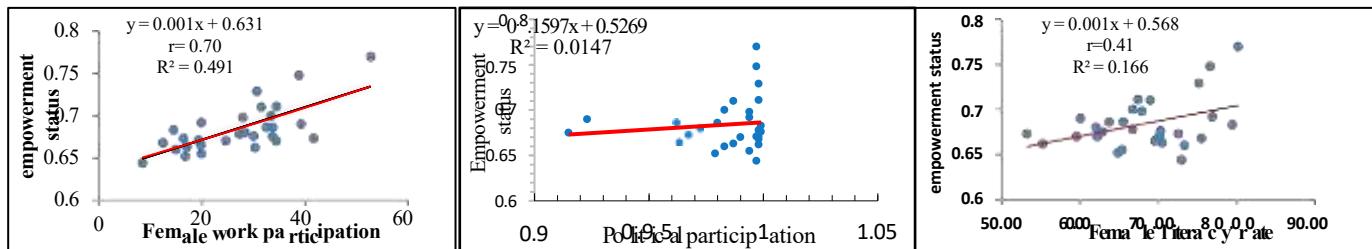


Fig- 7. Block wise women empowerment status in Paschim Medinipore

### 4. Major Findings:

This investigation yielded several note worth discoveries. The Paschim Medinipur district exhibits a geographic variation in the extent of women's empowerment. Women's empowerment is inadequate in approximately 70% of the districts in this region. This investigation demonstrates that the attainment of complete or high status in the realm of women's empowerment necessitates the implementation of more than one potent empowerment component. Literacy, employment, and political engagement are all equally critical components of women's empowerment. In spite of a high literacy rate, women's employment engagement is currently low. Occasionally, individuals are unable to engage in the workforce due to societal norms, values, and traditions. The proportion of women employed in marginal activities is greater than that in primary activities. There are no such distinctions in women's political participation at the Panchayat samity level with respect to their seat allocations. It is now mandatory to reserve 33% of seats for women in the Panchayati raj system. The blocks of Chandrakona-II, Dantan-I, Garbeta-I, Ghatal, Kharagpur-I, Medinipur, Mohanpur, Gopiballavpur-I, and Binpur-I demonstrate a high percentage of female work involvement and a low rate of female literacy. On the other hand, Chandrakona-I, Daspur-I, Daspur-II, Garbeta-III, Keshpur, Narayangarh, Jhargram, Jamboni, Gopiballavpur-II, Nayagram, and Sankrail illustrate that women's empowerment has a limited correlation with work participation and a substantial correlation with female literacy. The gender gap in the main labour participation rate has decreased from the eastern part (Daspur-II) of Paschim Medinipur to the western part (Binpur-II) (Fig. 4). Therefore, the western side units of this district have a high rate of female work participation.



## 5. CONCLUSION:

From the analysis above, some conclusions can be made. Both in terms of women's empowerment and physiography, Paschim Medinipur is highly diverse. In this district, very few blocks have a comparatively high level of women's empowerment. Since women's empowerment is a multifaceted process, each component should be given equal weight. Women should be given employment opportunities in addition to literacy. Being literate enables individuals to participate in work and obtain information. They become more monetarily empowered and have more negotiating leverage in the family and social spheres of life when they work more. A meaningful and just life requires a balanced level of accomplishment in three areas. However, majority of the Paschim Medinipur district's blocks have had an uneven development. Women must therefore be literate, actively participate in politics, and work decently in order to get the higher position empowerment. The government should take significant action to boost the number of working women because their marginalisation at work leaves them at risk of poverty. Only seat shear in public representation should be the limit of political engagement. Government initiatives and public conciseness should have promoted their active involvement in politics and decision-making.

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