CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The study observes the women’s role in resource management and participatory planning with special reference to Birbhum in West Bengal. The complexity of the issue of women’s work is such that, even the Census data does not capture the accurate rate of women’s participation. Socio-economic background of women in urban areas is different from the women who live in the rural areas. In rural areas women are engages in livelihood occupation such as collection of water, fuel, firewood, etc for the entire family, while many of the women are also engaged in Cottage Handloom industries. They work as wage labourers in the agricultural fields. They are also engaged in the weaving, trading, busket making, and other productive occupations. These are not reported in the Census and sometimes not even considered in the family income. The strong gender bias is very much evident in rural societies.

The district is divided into ethnic and cultural zones i.e. the non tribal and tribal areas. Each zone nevertheless, contains a very small part of other ethnic group. The nontribal area comprises the eastern most of the central part of the district, while the tribal area covers the central and western part of the district. The identified tribal groups consists so the Santals, the Bagdi, the Lohars, the Doms, the Dhekarus, the Aheers etc. Women’s work participation rate has a wide ranging variation among the tribal groups and also between non tribal and tribal groups.

The type of work among women are extremely varied

These areas-

- Collection of fuel and, firewood and water for drinking and cooking.
- Looking after domestic animals, especially rearing goats and cattels.
- Work in the agriculture field, owned by the family.
- Providing help to the non-agricultural pursuits of the family.
- Manufacturing rice products such as Muri, Chira etc.
- Work related to food processing and manufacturing of garments.
1.1 Area of the study:

Birbhum is situated between 23°33' and 24°35'-North latitude and between 87°10' and 88°2' East longitude. Birbhum is bounded on the North by the Santal parganas and the District of Murshidabad, on the East by the District of Murshidabad and Burdwan, on the south by Burdwan District. The Ajay River forms the boundary for the entire district. The principal town is Suri, which is also the administrative Headquarters of the district, situated two miles south of the Mor River. The total area is 4545sq.km (2011).

The total population of Birbhum district as per 2011 Census is 3,502,404 persons of which the male and female population are 1790920 persons and 1,711,484 persons respectively.

1.2 Tribes and Caste:

According to Santal and Bagdi laws only men can inherit land. Sometimes various rules have been changing under public pressure. Tribal women are generally dependent on forest work. According to 2011 Census here total Scheduled Caste population is 1,033,140 where female no is 5,04,139. On the other hand total Scheduled Tribe population is 2,42,484, whereas female no is 1,22,697.

1.3 Aim & Objectives:

The aim and objectives of the study are as follows:

- To study the role of women in land resource utilization, biotic resource utilization, water resource utilization.
- To study the active participation of women in rural and urban development process.
- To examine the changes in education, employment, political empowerment, of women.
- To study the impact of women's Self Help Groups in resource management.
- To examine the role of Government and Non-Government agencies for women's development.
Fig 1.1

Study Area Map

LEGEND

I I BLOCKS OF BIRBHUM

STUDY AREA MAP
BIRBHUM

Legend

- BLOCKS OF BIRBHUM
1.4 The Hypotheses formulated are:

- The women in resource management strengthen the rural and urban economy.
- The active participation of women in productive occupation strengthens local economy.
- The women’s participation in decision making in the field of community development programmed enhance the development prospect.
- The women’s empowerment has a positive impact on resource mobilization and management at local and regional level.
- The gender gap in enrolment of primary and secondary schools can be minimized through greater motivation.
- The gender gap can be minimized in the field of work participation.
- The gender gap can be minimized in nutrition received.
- The gender disparity can be minimized in rural areas.
- The girl children can be provided better access to education, nutrition and health care.
- The women can be motivated to participate in planning and initiative development projects at the grass root level.

1.5 Methodology:

1.5.1 Introduction:

Fieldwork for this study was done over a period of 2 and half years (September 2009 –July 2012) in Birbhum. Most of our data on the economy, literacy, health, and politics were collected from the various offices of the concerned departments. The Block Development Offices of all the 19 blocks of the study area were consulted for relevant data. Basically the main focus of the study depends on the participation of women in several work sectors. During the period of field work information were gathered from the offices only. A considerable time was spent for collecting information from the local Government officials both at the state and local level. The representatives of NGO’s like
ICDS, LAMPS and other Government agencies were also interviewed. The District Headquarter of Suri also helped in collecting district level information.

1.5.2 Participant Observation and key informant interviews:

In the beginning, the key informants were women in various sectors of production. These are the sectors of Agriculture, Sericulture, Pisiculture; Forest based work, domestic workers. In few blocks like Nanoor, Illambazar the interaction was limited in the rural areas of the local dialect was difficult to understand. But during the interaction period it was observed that it had various problems especially in health and education sectors. In rural areas they do not have proper sanitisation facility as a result the women suffer from various diseases.

At the end of the visit it was evident that women’s health issues are important basically due to their own negligence and ignorance.

During the second phase of the visit the changes that were taking place in the women’s work pattern were noticeable. However women’s work was not uniform. In most of the blocks women were engaged in forest based work, in most of the blocks. But in some blocks like Sainthia, Nanoor many women and children were engaged in sericulture. The women who worked in the households were mostly occupied in fishing and cottage based industry from which some earning could be made. During our interviews, the employees of ICDS women who worked closely with tribal women agreed to do the interview schedules with us.

1.5.3 Qualitative and Quantitative Data Collection:

The data collection for this study was done in two phases:
The First phase (Qualitative data collection):

During the first 10 months qualitative data was collected through participant observation and interviews with key informants. In addition these data were collected to compile a list of work that women participated.

The Second phase (Qualitative and Quantitative Data Collection):

During this period almost 1,400 personal interviews taken from different blocks. The women were interviewed for one or two hours. Most interviews were done in one sitting.

The interview schedules consisted of fixed alternative questions. The schedules were used to gather information on the following topics-

- Basic demographics.
- Work pattern of all household members.
- Work participation in various sectors (agriculture, pisciculture, sericulture, cottage based industry and forest based industry).
- Household decision making.

1.5.4 Collection of information:

It is the first step for preparing a report. Here two types of data were used.

1> Primary data:

The primary data is the major source of information for the present research. It was being collected from the intensive field survey. The extensive field survey were held on the basis of personal interviews with Panchayat Pradhan in Village Panchayat, Samiti Pradhan in Panchayat Samiti, and Zilla Pradhan in Zilla Parishad. The officers of Self Help Groups (SHG) were also interviewed to gather primary data related to the study.
Secondary data:

Secondary data are those that are collected from secondary sources. These data were collected from the Bureau of Applied Economics and Statistics, Offices of the Census operations sources. The Gazetteers, Monographs, Statistical, Handbooks, District Census Handbooks and other published reports were consulted. The published data from the department of cottage and small scale Industry, Govt of West Bengal Department of Cottage and Handloom Industries, Directorate of Sericulture and Silk weaving, Forest office and other relevant Government and Non-Government sources were collected for the purpose of research.

This statistical information thus collected from various secondary sources helped in cross checking of data and data analysis.

1.5.5 Selection of Respondents: This study comprises seven group of respondents, i.e.

- Agricultural labourers
- Cultivator
- Sericulturist
- Women’s involved in Fisheries and Animal Husbandry
- Domestic Workers
- Women involved in Decision Making
- Tribal Women

1.5.6 Problem and Issues:

It was difficult to approach women in the predominantly tribal villages. There are strict rules and regulations imposed on women’s. After trying repeatedly a few tribal women in Khoyssole were interviewed. There after the interviews were conducted smoothly in other villages. The NGO’s helped a lot.
1.5.7 Data Analysis

The data is analysed and computed with the help of statistical techniques for greater clarity. The women’s work participation, their income from different sectors of production, the duration of their work within and outside home were calculated so as to get an estimation of women’s economic empowerment. Simple arithmetic calculations were made to project women’s role in resource utilisation both for subsistence and for marketable surplus to supplement family income.

1.5.8 Sample design: The survey was conducted during September-July 2009-2012. All units holders were interviewed personally by present investigation at their respective work places. The other information about literacy, participation, problems faced by women were also gathered during the visit to a particular unit.

1.5.9 Sample size: Birbhum has a population of 3,502,404 people. The sample size is 0.50 percent (1400) of the total.

Table 1.1

Selected Sample Size

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Respondents</th>
<th>Sample Size (in number)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agricultural Labourer</td>
<td>280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultivator</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sericulturist</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fishing and Animal Husbandry</td>
<td>290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic Worker</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tribal women</td>
<td>360</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1.5.10 Processing of data:

A> Statistical techniques:

Simple random sampling method is the statistical technique, used in processing of different kinds of data. This is a method of drawing the sample in which every member of the population has equal chance of being selected in the sample.

B> Non-statistical techniques:

The various spatial and non-spatial data here represented by actual cartographic techniques and mapping is done with the help of GIS software's i.e. Map Information, Arc View etc.

1.6 Literature Survey:

The literature survey includes a proper study of District Census Handbooks, District Gazetteers, books, published reports and journals.

Women's participation in income generation is strongly influenced by socio-cultural and economic factors. For this purpose various books have been studied. Those are “The Rural development a short term strategy” by Dr.Lahiri.T.B (1980) described the trends of rural population growth during 1980. Here he also described about the economic structure of the society and role of women in the rural economic sector. Most of the women engaged in the household work.

“Women as Human Resource Health, Nutrition, Education and Programmes” by Devi. L (1982) examined about the condition of working women and unemployed women in the society. In every where the unemployed women’s were deprived too much. In society people gave less respect to them.

“The economic life of Bengal District Birbhum 1770-1857”, by Kumar Gupta.R (1984) specifies that poor women from landless families are more likely to work as agricultural labourers. During this period women are mainly engaged in agricultural work. In many villages they worked as an unpaid labourer.
Banerjee. N (1985) discussed in her book "Women Workers in the Unorganised Sector" about the plight of women working in unorganised sector of Calcutta in detail, but her study ignores the organised sector.

Similarly, Bandyopadhyay. K (1996) reports in "Swasther Adhikar Nijer Hathe Nebar Pathe" that the outcome of women's participation in income generating activities is often measured in terms of women and children's health and nutritional status. It also indicates that women who work are better able to purchase food and provide adequate health care for their children, as compared to the women who do not work in the family.

Ray (1997) in his paper "Women Employment in the Organised Sector" analysed the availability and utilisation of female labour, their employment pattern in the organised sector in both urban and rural areas. Female participation in the organised sector has increased.

In another book "Women's Participation in The Workforce" edited by Devi (1998) mentioned about the various aspects of female employment in the organised and informal sector. She also mentioned about the problems of women's faced in the informal sector.

"Development of Women, Present Status and Future Strategy", by Dr (Mrs.) Mohanty.B (1998) reports that in rural areas women's participation in income generation is determined by their social and economic status. Most of the families they did not give value of the women's work.

"Reaching Womanhood" by Nandedkar .T.D and Rajadhyakshar. M.S (1999) was written specially for teenage girls. Here they explain why the girls need special care in our society. They also explained about the various health problems, which women are facing because of inadequate attention to reproductive health, can be avoided.

"A Post-Modernist Enquiry into Women's Workforce Participation" by Thakur. A, (1999), in his paper proposed that workforce participation is not the solution to gender discrimination. He presented a neo-Althurisian Marxist viewpoint and argued that
for lessening discrimination it is necessary to change the political and ideological processes.

“Women in Modern India”, by Desai. N and Thakkar.U (2001) specifies that Indian women’s journey towards gender equality, in the context of a changing political and economic background. Even they also mentioned that women’s work is of tremendous value to family and society, but it has always remained invisible.

“An Investigation into the Inter –relationship Between Women’s Empowerment and Trafficking in Women and Children” by Bela Bandyopadhyaya (2004) described about women’s social right empowerment.

Women’s participation in income generation is strongly influenced by socio-cultural and economic factors. For this purpose various books have been studied. Those are “The Changing Status of Women in West Bengal 1970-2000”, by Bagchi.J (2005). It states that the proportion of unpaid work done by women is more compared to the paid work. The report makes an assessment of production participation of women in various sectors and their health status is also discussed in this book.

Mukhopadhyay .I in “The Changing Status of Women in West Bengal 1970-2000”, by Bagchi.J (2005) also mentioned though the employment of women relative to men is low in the state compared to the entire country, it is significantly larger in agriculture than in all other occupations.

Even Manasha. H (2007) describes the political participation of men and women in “Birbhum er Panchayet Bebostha o Gram’. Here he explained the role of Panchayat in development of local areas, the panchayat committee and even the number of Zilla Parishad according to the block wise.

The Government reports like District Gazetteer of Birbhum (1975) and (1996), the Statistical Account of Birbhum, District Statistical Handbook of Birbhum (2001, 2003, 2007) have been studied. West Bengal and Birbhum 2001 and 2011 Census also been consulted. Specially the recent 2011 Census reports helped to understand the growth of population, changes in literacy rates, categories of workers and their changing participation rates and the types of workers.

At the same time different websites like www.birbhum.com, www.wikipedia.org also studied for the purpose of research.

1.7 Scope of the study:

The study undertaken portrays the levels of women's empowerment in the district of Birbhum. The region exhibits great contrasts in women social, political, cultural and economic status as it has heterogeneous ethnic groups, practising traditional and non-traditional occupations. The study attempts to project the women's role in both private and public domain and their tremendous efforts for obtaining economic self-sufficiency. There are economic and social constraints for constantly struggling for women livelihood which is sustainable and in most of the cases their work goes unpaid. The social and cultural differences between diverse ethnic groups have been studied to bring out the specific try and heterogeneity of the women's role in resource appraisal and pattern of utilisation of all resources in Birbhum district. The study has an interdisciplinary impact as it envisages studying the gendered space prevalent in rural societies having multi ethnic groups as stakeholders.