Chapter 4
The Women-Market Interface and Women’s empowerment – A Primary Survey-based Analysis in the District of Murshidabad

Introduction:

This chapter makes an attempt in terms of our class-focused approach to understand the women’s empowerment in contemporary Murshidabad. The application of class-focused Marxist approach along with different gender processes which are in operation at the level of families and also, in the public domain is made while analyzing the primary data gathered from the selected rural and urban areas of the district of Murshidabad. We tried to infer from this analysis to what extent the women-market interface in the district of Murshidabad is associated with women’s empowerment. As we have already indicated in the earlier chapters the gender process has diver forms when considered with class processes along with other non-class processes within the family and within the market together. In fact, gender process itself may be of three types – (a) oppressive gender process implying oppression of women by men in family and/or in market; (b) gender-neutral gender process implying equality of men and women in family and/or market in terms of sharing of each sex’s work-types (without any gender-biased stereotypes) in family and/or in market, and (c) lastly, which is always overlooked or remained foreclosed is an oppressive gender process where men are oppressed by women in family and/or market. However, as we have already adumbrated earlier in the previous chapters the predominant gender process in the Indian society in general is guided by the rules of patriarchy and hence, it is oppressive gender process of type (a) which may be regarded as the most prevalent gender process in the country with the district of Murshidabad in the state of West Bengal being no exception. Here, we will try to understand the women’s empowerment at different levels or tiers of society in the district of Murshidabad in terms of our primary survey which is mostly based on focused group based discussion of the targeted individuals in some selected rural and urban areas of the district of Murshidabad.

The chapter is organized as follows. While Section 1 deals with the methodology of the study Section 2 will provide some general findings of our field survey. Section 3 makes an attempt to analyze the performances of working women belonging to different categories (based on income, region, and education) in terms of some chosen indicators which may
be useful in understanding the empowerment of women. The concluding section sums up the major findings of the chapter.

4.1 Methodology of Primary Field Survey:

This section provides a methodological framework for the primary survey we have conducted for the present study. We have opted for stratified multistage cluster design. There are two reasons for this as follows:

(1) The absence or poor quality of listings of households or addresses makes it necessary to first select a sample of geographical units, and then to construct lists of households only within those selected units. The samples of households can then be selected from those lists.

(2) The use of multistage designs controls the cost of data collection. Stratification is commonly applied at each stage of sampling. However, its benefits are particularly strong in Primary Sampling Units (henceforth, PSUs). It is, therefore, important to stratify the PSUs efficiently before selecting them.

Stratification partitions the units in the population into mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive subgroups or strata. Separate samples are then selected from each stratum. A primary purpose of stratification is to improve the precision of the survey estimates. In this case, the formation of the strata should be such that units in the same stratum are as homogeneous as possible and units in different strata are as heterogeneous as possible. This means as far as possible within a sample homogeneity is to be maintained and also, as far as possible heterogeneity between different samples are to be maintained so as to arrive at meaningful comparisons of sample units (a) within a sample and (b) between the samples. Other benefits of stratification include (i) administrative convenience and flexibility and (ii) guaranteed representation of important domains and special subpopulations.

Previous experiences of experts in many countries pointed out sharp differences in the distribution of population characteristics across administrative regions and across urban and rural areas of each country. Some administrative regions, such as capital cities, may not have a rural component, while others may not have an urban component. As we intend
to find out the women belonging to different categories as delineated in chapter 1 therefore our intention is to examine the variations that come due to regional and other differences.

Within each explicit stratum, a technique known as implicit stratification is often used in selecting PSUs. Prior to sample selection, PSUs in explicit strata are sorted with respect to one or more variables that are deemed to have a high correlation with the variable of interest, and that are available for every PSU in the stratum. A systematic sample of PSUs is then selected. Implicit stratification guarantees that the sample of PSUs will be spread across the categories of the stratification variables.

Once the selection of PSUs is completed, a further procedure is carried out whose aim is to list working place units in each selected PSU. The objective of this listing step is to create an up-to-date sampling frame from which working women could be selected. Prior to sample selection, the listed working women have been sorted with respect to income group (low, medium and high).

Some of the general information was collected through personal discussion with the officials and heads of the Panchayat Samities and Gram Panchayats and general public of the selected sample areas. After that working women are sampled from the ordered list by an equal probability systematic sample procedure. Here women are economically clustered. Reason is that we considered women belonging to the same economic cluster may be categorized separately due to overdetermined significance of the existing social processes. 23

Finally, we selected a total of 200 working women - 100 from each sub-division. In order to obtain the desired data, interviews were conducted at the working places of women mostly.

A pilot field work was carried out during August-September 2012 followed by final round of survey during May-September 2013. Since the focus of the study was to examine specific experience of working women, we chose to interview working women of different income groups. Further, focused group-based discussion surveys (henceforth, FGDS) were conducted so that the selected groups of women can participate in the discussion

23 See sub-section I.5 in p.23-27 for details about the stratification of our field work.
spontaneously. We have conducted 20 different focused group-based discussions – five each in the two selected rural areas and five each in the two selected urban areas.

4.2 General Findings of the Field Survey:

A working woman has to bear double burden of work as she has to perform her domestic chores and economic activities inside/outside family. This is the general picture. Exceptions may be there. And the conditions of women vary across the families if we distinguish families in terms of high, middle and low income group families. There are several possibilities as delineated in the following table.

Table 4.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Women in family</th>
<th>Women Market</th>
<th>Domestic Chores performed by the family member(s)</th>
<th>Decision Making Power in Family</th>
<th>Decision Making Power outside Family at the workplace</th>
<th>Gender Process</th>
<th>Class-focused position of women in terms of the Taxonomy provided in Chapter1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Performers of surplus labour</td>
<td>Performers of surplus labour</td>
<td>Women of the Family</td>
<td>No power of women</td>
<td>No Power of women</td>
<td>Oppressive within family and outside family</td>
<td>Not Empowered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Performers of surplus labour</td>
<td>Non-performers of surplus labour and may belong to subsumed class</td>
<td>Women of the Family</td>
<td>No power of women</td>
<td>No power of women</td>
<td>Oppressive within family and outside family</td>
<td>Not empowered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Performers of surplus labour</td>
<td>Appropriator of surplus labour</td>
<td>Women of the Family</td>
<td>No power of women</td>
<td>Power of women</td>
<td>Oppressive within family but non-oppressive outside family</td>
<td>Partly Empowered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sl. No.</td>
<td>Women in family</td>
<td>Women Market</td>
<td>Domestic Chores performed by the family member(s)</td>
<td>Decision Making Power in Family</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Non-performers of surplus labour which is performed by paid domestic servants</td>
<td>Performers of surplus Labour</td>
<td>Women of the family</td>
<td>No Power of women</td>
<td>No power of women</td>
<td>Oppressive within family and outside family</td>
<td>Not empowered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Performers of surplus labour</td>
<td>Performers of Surplus Labour</td>
<td>Sharing of domestic chores with male members of the family out of mutual love and understanding</td>
<td>Power is shared between male and female</td>
<td>No power of women</td>
<td>Non-Oppressive within family and oppressive outside family</td>
<td>Partly Empowered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Performers of surplus labour</td>
<td>Non-performers of surplus labour and may belong to subsumed class</td>
<td>Sharing of domestic chores with male members of the family out of mutual love and understanding</td>
<td>Power is shared between male and female</td>
<td>No power of women</td>
<td>Non-Oppressive within family and oppressive outside family</td>
<td>Partly Empowered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Performers of surplus labour</td>
<td>Appropriator of surplus labour</td>
<td>Sharing of domestic chores with male members of the family out of mutual love and understanding</td>
<td>Power is shared between male and female</td>
<td>Power of women</td>
<td>Non-Oppressive within family and outside family</td>
<td>Empowered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sl. No.</td>
<td>Women in family</td>
<td>Women Market</td>
<td>Domestic Chores performed by the family member(s)</td>
<td>Decision Making Power in Family</td>
<td>Decision Making Power outside Family at the workplace</td>
<td>Gender Process</td>
<td>Class-focused position of women in terms of the Taxonomy provided in Chapter 1</td>
</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Performance and appropriation of surplus labour jointly done by men and women</td>
<td>Performance and/or appropriation of surplus labor jointly by men and women</td>
<td>Sharing of domestic chores between men and women out of mutual love and understanding</td>
<td>Power is shared between male and female</td>
<td>Power is shared between male and female</td>
<td>Non-Oppressive within family and outside family</td>
<td>Empowered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Non-performers of surplus which is done by men and/or women may remain as appropriator of surplus labour or receiver of surplus labour (in which case men are the appropriators of surplus labour performed by them)</td>
<td>Performers of surplus labor</td>
<td>Mutual sharing of domestic chores of entire domestic chores is performed by men</td>
<td>Women may have more decision making power than men</td>
<td>No power of women</td>
<td>Non-oppressive within family and oppressive outside family</td>
<td>Partly-Empowered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Non-performers of surplus which is done by men and/or women may be either appropriator of surplus labour or receiver of</td>
<td>Non-Performers of surplus labor either as appropriator or as receiver of surplus labor</td>
<td>Mutual sharing of domestic chores of entire domestic chores is performed by men. It is highly likely in this case entire</td>
<td>Women may have more decision making power than men</td>
<td>Women may have more decision making power than men. Sometimes women may have the absolute</td>
<td>Non-oppressive both within family and outside family</td>
<td>Empowered as well as exploiter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sl. No.</td>
<td>Women in family</td>
<td>Women Market</td>
<td>Domestic Chores performed by the family member(s)</td>
<td>Decision Making Power in Family</td>
<td>Decision Making Power outside Family at the workplace</td>
<td>Gender Process</td>
<td>Class-focused position of women in terms of the Taxonomy provided in Chapter I</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>surplus labour (in which case men are the appropriators of surplus labour performed by them)</td>
<td>domestic chores is performed by me with/without the help of paid domestic servants</td>
<td>decision making power, not men</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Constructed by author herself

Irrespective of whichever category a woman belongs in terms of the above Table 4.1 some roles for women within their families remain mostly unchanged as follows:

(a) Women are generally the main care-giver to their children vis-à-vis the male members of the family.

(b) Women are the main care-giver to the old and sick people in their family vis-à-vis the male members of the family.

(c) It is always taken for granted that a woman as wife would always love her husband and would take care of her husband in every possible sense of the term irrespective of whether she is a housewife or working woman. She implicitly expects reciprocated treatment from her husband, which may not be the case always. However, some family spaces (even under hegemonic patriarchal system) may be characterized by subjugation of men (husband) to women (wife) – but this we consider as exception here and there are very few instances of these type of family spaces in our samples.

(d) A woman within a family always thinks more about other family members than male members of the family even if the concerned woman is a working one.
Besides when a woman enters market and gets engaged in some income-generating economic activities there are several possibilities which are depicted in terms of the Table 4.2 below:

**Table 4.2**

**Plausible Status of Working Women’s Empowerment as per the Class-focused Marxist Approach**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Nature of entry of women in the labour market to get herself engaged in some economic activities</th>
<th>Purpose of income of women earned from some economic activities in the labour market</th>
<th>Gender process</th>
<th>Class Process to which the woman belongs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Forced or out of some distress</td>
<td>To earn bread and butter for the family</td>
<td>Oppressive</td>
<td>Exploitative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Forced or out of distress</td>
<td>To supplement family income</td>
<td>Oppressive</td>
<td>Exploitative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Forced or out of distress</td>
<td>To supplement family income</td>
<td>Non-Oppressive</td>
<td>Non-exploitative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Forced or out of distress for being the single woman due to the death of her husband or divorce or outmigration of the male member of the family</td>
<td>To earn bread and butter for the family</td>
<td>Oppressive</td>
<td>Exploitative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Forced or out of distress for being the single woman due to the death of her husband or divorce or outmigration of the male member of the family</td>
<td>To supplement the family income</td>
<td>Oppressive</td>
<td>Non-exploitative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Forced or out of distress for being the single woman due to the death of her husband or divorce or outmigration of the male member of the family</td>
<td>As the sole income earner of the family or to supplement the family income</td>
<td>Non-Oppressive</td>
<td>Non-exploitative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Self-choice</td>
<td>To supplement the income for the family</td>
<td>Oppressive</td>
<td>Exploitative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Self-choice</td>
<td>To supplement the family income</td>
<td>Non-oppressive</td>
<td>Non-exploitative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Self-Choice</td>
<td>To earn income for herself only</td>
<td>Oppressive/Non-oppressive</td>
<td>Non-exploitative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Self-Choice</td>
<td>To earn income for herself only</td>
<td>Non-Oppressive</td>
<td>Non-exploitative</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Constructed by author herself*
As the above table shows, there are several possibilities some of which may signify oppressive and some non-oppressive gender processed (within and/or outside family). However, there are women who are housewives. For them performance of surplus labour in a household production process is essential mostly and some of them may be appropriator of their own surplus labour (which is exception).

There are challenging choices that a woman has to make whether she likes it or dislikes it as follows:

(a) Care for children and old and sick in the family (even in her parental family),
(b) Financial needs of the family,
(c) Control over their own earnings either for family or for their own causes to fulfill,
(d) Allocation of time between family and outside work, and
(e) Balancing all these functions every day.

These are not easy choices to make. Each one of these functions mutually constitutes each other in contradictory manner following the logic of over-determination. And the process of choices to be made by a woman is over-determined as each one of these choices is both cause and effect of the others. The prevailing economic, political, legal, cultural and natural factors affect their choices and hence, status within family and in their working places. Thus, women’s empowerment which we have defined in earlier chapters signifi es that woman becomes empowered when they gain/achieved capacity/strength from one or more than one favourable social processes facilitating her to rebel against the existing unfavourable socio-economic processes and struggle to alter her surroundings as per her desired choice without subjugating and/or dominating her opposite sex and/or a group of women within family and/or outside family. Thus envisaged as a process women’s empowerment is a very complex phenomenon having multiple dimensions and domains.

In this chapter we make an attempt to empirically verify these over-determined spaces of women in family and market. This is attempted in terms of our field surveys – the methodology of which has been mentioned in the preceding section of this chapter.
4.2 Findings from the Field Survey in the Selected Rural and Urban Areas of the District of Murshidabad:

We have already explained our area of survey in the previous chapter. Here we give an aggregate picture of our survey areas. Our primary sampling units consist of two sub-divisions that we have selected among the five sub-divisions in the district of Murshidabad. These are Sadar sub-division and Kandi sub-division. At the second stage, we have selected one rural block area and one urban municipal area from each one of these two sub-divisions. We have selected Hariharpura Block and Baharampur Municipality from Sadar sub-division and Kandi Block and Kandi Municipality from Kandi sub-division. At the final stage we have surveyed mostly working women in these regions following probability-proportional to estimated size rule (PPES). A brief summary of the number of respondents is given in the Table 4.3 below:

Table 4.3
Distribution of Respondents Across the Selected Regions in the District of Murshidabad

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Sub-division</th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>Urban</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sadar</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kandi</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field Survey conducted by the author during June 2012 - September 2013.

4.2.1 Composition of the Population in Our Samples:

The primary data and related information was collected for 200 respondents, with 100 respondents from each block. About 86% of the respondents have the male household heads believing in Hindu religion and 14% of the respondents with male heads of the family believing in Islam religion. Among the Hindu families/households, 67.5% of respondents belong to the general category, 22.5% belong to different scheduled castes and remaining belongs to the different scheduled tribes. These are shown in the Figure 4.1 and Figure 4.2 below.

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24 We had a discussion with housewives of the same regions. Focused group based discussion (FGDS) were conducted. we have conducted 4 FGDS – one from each selected area. Each FGDS consists of 25 non-working women. During this process 25 non-working women are interviewed in Manigram and another 25 in Jhakha Danga in Kandi sub-division. In Sadar sub-division we have interviewed 25 non-working women in Radhar Ghat and Kumardaha Ghat region( rural) and another 25 from Gorabazar municipal area.
Around 41% of respondents have single child and only 2% of the respondents have more than four children. 25.71% of respondents have 2 children, 12.14% of respondents have 3 children and 5.71% of respondents have 4 children. The remaining respondents (12.86%) do not have any child.

We found that the working women cutting across income groups and religions generally prefer less children due to their dual burden (Figure 4.3). However, this choice mostly depends on their husbands, not on them as we were told during our field survey.
It is interesting to note from the Figure 4.4 that 37% of the respondents have preference for male child. We found from our group discussion with both working and non-working women that working women, who are financially independent25, do not have a strong desire for male child and they hold that given their financial independence they do not want to depend on their children (whether male or female) when they will be old. So that some working women in our sample are indifferent to their choice for the sex of their children and many of them in our sample want to treat male and female children alike. This is particularly the case when we took interviews and had group discussions with women in the two selected urban areas viz. Baharampure Municipality are and the Kandi Municipality area.

Among the low income group of families, where majority of the family members are involved in outdoor economic activities, the working women hold the view that their daughters can also earn for the family and also for their own marriage-related expenditure. In addition, they opined their daughters help their mothers in the domestic chores, when their mothers remain engaged in economic activities outside the family. But the prevailing social and cultural taboos always have deep concern and desire/preference in their mind for son. This is more so because after their marriage their daughters have to leave their parental homes.

Therefore, in spite of having a major percentage of working women who are able to come out from old taboos and traditional beliefs, a significant number of them still have confined within old beliefs. However, some among the latter group are engaged in informal sector where social securities are almost absent. As a provider of income at old age, they prefer male child. Additionally from figure 4.3 and 4.4, it is also clear though only 37% of respondents have preference for male child, but 41% of respondents have more than four children. So in spite of earning income, working women have less capacity to make decision about the number of child that they want to have.

25 Here, financial independence implies that these working women do have control over their earnings and it is they, not their husbands or other male members of their families, who actually decide how to spend and save from their own earnings. This is not the case with all the working women in our sample.
Around 70% of the respondents have the family size of four and above (See Figure 4.5 below). Most are nuclear families. The process of disintegration of joint-family system started long ago and it is still continuing. As most of the families are of nuclear type, therefore the parents these days hardly expect that their sons will care for them at their old age. Hence, a change in social outlook is under way which came out clearly from the
several focused group based discussions both in the selected rural and urban areas of the district. Matter related to Figure 4.5 is quite significant to our research problem. At the backdrop of women-market interface, we have already stated that women have joined labour force as their family failed to provide economic security to them. Joined family structure has broken and individuals have started to live in a nuclear structure of family. In the following figure we can see the same picture where majority of respondents (represented by those working women who are compelled to join labour force as family became failed to provide them economic security) that is 53% (=28%+25%) are residing within nuclear family. Therefore it is hard to say that joining working force is an indicator of ‘empowerment of women’. Concept of disintegration of family is very much relevant to our research problem as because it help us to understand changes in cultural process which is one of relevant factor to realize over-determined process.

![Distribution of respondents according to their number of family members](image)

*Source: Author’s calculation based on field survey in the district of Murshidabad during June 2012-September 2013.*

**Figure 4.5**

### 4.2.2 Educational Attainment:

Only 55% of the respondents (Figure 4.6) have more than 10 years of schooling whereas 26% of the respondents are illiterate. Average year of schooling of a respondent in our sample is 11 years (See Figure 4.7 below for average year of schooling of different groups in terms of their educational attainment).
Source: Author’s calculation based on field survey in the district of Murshidabad during June 2012-September 2013.

Figure 4.6

Figure 4.7

Figure 4.8 below shows that the majority of the respondents opted Bengali as the medium of education and very few were convent educated with English as the medium of instruction. 19% of the respondents could have access to the vocational training (See Fig 4.9).

Source: Author’s calculation based on field survey in the district of Murshidabad during June 2012-September 2013.

Figure 4.8
Among the drop-outs, 43% of respondents had to do so due to financial crisis and social taboos remained responsible for 33% cases of drop-out (See Figure 4.10 below). Girls had to leave their studies so that boy could continue with their studies in the same family when financial distress forced the girls to leave their formal education and concentrate on domestic chores and/or to get engaged in economic activities either as unpaid family labour or as a supplementary income earner of their respective families. But as can be seen from Figure 4.10 apart from above said reasons, there are other reasons for drop outs. Most common reason of such category is that respondent’s unwillingness to study. Their parents enrolled their children in schools, but due to the child’s unwillingness to study, parents decided to stop their schooling. Some parents struggled enough so as to make their children complete their study but in vain mostly. But children in some of these cases, as we found out during our conversation with them, were either more eager to earn pocket money for enjoyment or liked to have relatively more leisure time as they found school education or the method of teaching to them at their respective schools quite uninteresting and not related with their life forms to which they were familiar with.

Women belonging to low income group do not have (quality) time which they can spend for monitoring their children’s education. Some other factors may be held responsible for the drop-outs of girl-child from school education at an early age. They are as follows:

1. Some time children – especially the girl students – do not want to go to their schools due lack of toilet facility - especially for the girl students.

2. In many primary schools there are not adequate numbers of teachers – especially lady teachers who can otherwise be an inspiring source for the girl students.
(3) Sometimes even the girl students (even aged less than 10 years) do not want to go to schools (especially to those schools where no female teacher(s) is(are) there and only one/few male teachers run the schools) due to their apprehension regarding lack of physical security for them.

(4) Another reason for drop-out may be the prevalence of early marriage for a girl child even at this age – particularly in the rural areas. Many parents in the rural areas (especially those belonging to the Islam religion) consider investment in their girl children’s schooling is meaningless for them as the future expected earnings of their daughters will be appropriated by their husbands’ families and they will not have a share on it.

As the Figure 4.10 below points out in 43% of cases in our total sample drop-outs of girl children from their school education at an early age (less than 10 years) is owing to social taboo against the female education (which is still prevalent even in the 21st century) among certain families (Hindus and Muslims alike) – especially in the rural areas. Financial crisis in the families is the second reason for such drop-outs as 33% of cases in our total sample it remains the reason for drop-out of girl students at an early age. In fact, in many cases, when financial crises occur in the families there are two plausible scenarios which can emerge, as we found during our field survey, as follows:

(1) Both boy and girl children are taken out of school education so that both of them can be put into paid work as child labour outside family to supplement the dwindling family income and/or may be put into unpaid economic activities as family labour. In the case of girl children, often along with performing unpaid family labour to support their father/parents they are also engaged in domestic chores along with their mothers and other senior female members of the family.²⁶

(2) Sometimes only girl children are taken out of their studies when financial crises occur in their families and the boy children are retained in the schools. The cause is social. A boy child is expected to earn for his father’s family in future and for that skill

²⁶ It is a unique phenomenon for a girl child in a family (particularly in low-income family in both rural and urban areas) to get engaged in domestic chores irrespective of whether they are going to schools or not. Behind this there is a social reason which is related to the social construction of a girl/female/daughter as not-male since they are supposed to be skilled in terms of performing domestic chores and/or unpaid family labour in farming and/or non-farming activities of their families so that they get prepared for social exchange, which is marriage, in the existing society for their husband’s families.
formation in terms of formal schooling is regarded as a necessity, which is not the case with girl children. Investment in education for girl children is often considered as an over-burden for the financial crises-hit families as the daughters would soon leave their parental homes when they would get married and hence, even if she works in future after her marriage her income will be appropriated by her husband’s family – the parental family would not have any demand on that. However, the social factor like preparing a girl child to perform quality domestic chores and/or unpaid family labour for her husband’s family is perhaps one of the most significant social factors behind large drop-outs of girl students at an early age vis-à-vis the boy students, as we have found from our focused group based discussion with the women communities in both rural and urban areas of the district.

![Percentage-wise distribution of respondents according to their arguments about drop-out](image)

*Source: Author’s calculation based on field survey in the district of Murshidabad during June 2012-September 2013.*

**Figure 4.10**

### 4.2.3 Employment and Earnings:

Women in our sample are engaged in various income earning economic occupations/activities. In this regard, they can be broadly classified in two groups – (a) women working as paid household workers in their family spaces (like biri binding household women workers) and (b) women working outside their families for paid economic activities along with the male members of the society.
Women belonging to the low income group are attached with the productive activities including (a) agriculture (as agricultural daily labour), (b) paid household work (like biri binding), (c) retail trade as vendors (say vegetable sellers and like), (d) paid construction work (as helpers mostly to the male workers in construction activities), (e) paid care work (like nurses in hospitals, para-medical attendants who in local Bengali parlance are called *ayas*, and domestic maid servants) and (f) teaching in primary schools/government project related work (such as *anganwadi* workers in ICDS programme, ASHA in National Rural Health Mission programme or cooks in Mid-Day Meal programme and like).

Mostly, the women workers in our sample (both in rural and urban areas) are involved in service-related economic activities. We could categorize 200 women in our total sample in terms of 14 different economic activities as can be seen from the Figure 4.11 below.

![Figure 4.11 Distribution of respondents according to their nature of Occupation](image)

*Source: Author’s calculation based on field survey in the district of Murshidabad during June 2012-September 2013.*

In terms of their income-level all the women in our sample are classified as belonging to (a) High Income Group Family (with monthly income more than Rs. 15,000/-), (b) middle income group (with monthly income between Rs. 5000/- and Rs. 15000/-) and (c) low income group (with monthly income less than Rs. 5000). The logic behind such type of categorization lies in terms of the official description of rural and urban poverty lines. The existing all India rural poverty line anchored in the daily per capita calorie norm of 2400
calories for a rural person was originally defined in terms of Per Capita Total Consumption Expenditure (PCTE) at 2004-05 market price of Rs 356.30 per capita per month and that for an urban person is 2100 calories signifying Per Capita Total Consumption Expenditure (PCTE) of Rs 538.60 per capita per month at 2004-05 market price (Dutt and Sundaram, 2011). Respondent whose income is below Rs 356.30 per month in rural areas and Rs 538.60 per month in urban areas then, as per this official demarcation of poverty line, should be considered as working poor women.

Note that in India the per capita income at current prices during 2012-2013 was Rs 68,747 i.e.; Rs 5,728.92 per month (Press Information Bureau, GOI, released on 19th February 2014 and retrieved on 20th February 2014). Further, India is categorized as low income country on the basis of Per Capita Income (Dutt and Sundaram 2011). Therefore, we have categorized working women earning less than Rs5000 as belonging to low income group of families and they are as per this all-India level data on annual per capita income should be treated as working poor women.

Figure 4.12 below indicates that 51% of the respondents in our sample belongs to the low income category, 27% belongs to high income group and remaining 22% to middle income category. So, majority of the working women in our sample belong to the low-income category of families and hence, majority of working women in our sample are actually working poor as per the official data on annual per capita income at the all-India level during 2012-13 and also, in terms of the official demarcation of rural and urban poverty lines in 2011-12 as cited in (Dutt and Sundaram 2011)

Source: Author’s calculation based on field survey in the district of Murshidabad during June 2012-September 2013.

Figure 4.12
However, the Figure 4.13 below reveals the fact that 24% of the low income group women in our sample actually belong to families with better economic conditions. Therefore, although these 24% of low income group women themselves earn low income (less than Rs. 5,000/- per month) their families do provide them the necessary social/economic security. There are three reasons for them to work in paid economic activities either within family or outside family which are stated below:

(1) Most of these women (24% of the low income group women) do not have necessary skill to get engaged in high-paid jobs. They are, therefore, unskilled workers and hence, they receive low income every month.

(2) Many of these women (24% of the low income group women) were forced to get engaged in paid and unskilled economic activities due to some financial distresses in their families and even after those distresses were over they still continued with their outside work as they got accustomed with that life and the income they do earn (however little may be) is actually used to satisfy their own needs for which their families neither have any restriction nor they try to control or appropriate their income, although exceptions are there but their number is quite negligible in our sample.

(3) Lastly, to work outside the family (even though they belong to families with good economic conditions) was absolutely out of their own choice. They wanted to get out of monotonous drudgery of everyday domestic chores. This does not mean that after joining the labour market outside their families they were relieved of their domestic chores. On the contrary, the double burden of performing surplus labour within family and also, performing surplus value (labour) outside family remains as it is. In the focused group based discussions with these categories of women (especially in urban areas) we found they do not mind taking this double burden. Rather, they are quite happy to earn (however, meager that may be) for themselves and consume it as they like.

![Distribution of respondents according to their monthly family income](image)

*Source: Author’s calculation based on field survey in the district of Murshidabad during June 2012-September 2013.*

**Figure 4.13**
The majority of the working women in our sample expressed that they do suffer from lack of social securities. Only 33% of them who belong to high and middle income group do enjoy some social securities (See Figure 4.14 below). Social security here signifies non-wage benefits during their working ages and also, after their working ages when they become old. These include paid leave facilities including paid maternity leaves, medical facilities, job securities, and allowances for different purposes, bonus, pension, gratuity and equal remuneration at par with their male counterparts for performing the same job, skill reproduction and like.

Women belonging to low paid jobs suffer from social security benefits as they are mostly engaged in the informal economic activities. Moreover, none of the women in our total sample is aware of the Unorganized Sector Workers’ Social Security Act which was passed by the Indian Parliament in 2008 following the recommendations of the Arjun Sengupta Committee Report (Government of India 2009) \(^{27}\).

Since they were either unaware or were not recognized as workers in the unorganized sector they do not get the benefits of the social security as laid down in the 2008 Act. For example, biri binders have some documents like Biri Card which enable them to get medical, educational facilities. However, the reality is otherwise. Availability of such recommended facilities is quite irregular and in most cases is almost absent. In fact, even women performing informal services in the government-aided programmes (like under the Sarva Sishkha Abhijan Mission) do not get any social security benefits and they, themselves, are not aware that they are entitled to some social security benefits under existing law of the country however, meager those monetary benefits may be. Some women vendors in informal retailing in our sample who are generally engaged in their retailing activities for 12-14 hours a day, failed to get such benefits due to their failure to complete some official formalities owing to their (a) ignorance, (b) illiteracy and (c) hence, dependence on some local intermediaries who always promised them that they would complete all the formalities on their behalf but generally cheated them after taking some monetary commission/fee from them for their promise to do the work. Moreover, these women vendors, since they always remain busy in their retailing activities almost half of the day, do not have the sufficient time to meet such official formalities. Similarly,

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the maid-servants in our sample for the same reasons mentioned above do not receive any such social security benefits to which they are entitled under the existing Central Law. As the figure 4.14 below indicates only 33% of the women in our sample of 200 working women do receive some social security benefits like say, widow pension and like.

**Figure 4.14**

Majority of the respondents (89%) is willing to continue with their economic activities outside their families as long as they can (Figure 4.15). Forced entry due to financial distress at their family level took place in the case of 46% of the respondents (Figure 4.16). Remaining respondents are either economically independent and/or want to work outside their families out of their own choice.

**Figure 4.15**
Cutting across income-groups as the Figure 4.17 above indicates 44% of the respondents want to work outside their families in order to be economically strong and independent. The financial crisis plays major role for joining the market – 53% of the women in our sample have joined the market following some financial distress at their family levels and hence, their participation in the labour market may be dubbed as stressed participation or
forced participation (where their freedom making independent choice for themselves regarding whether to work outside or not is irrelevant). This is mostly prevalent among the women belonging to the low income group families in our sample. On the other hand, for women belonging to high and even middle income groups in our sample made independent choice to enter the labour market and few of them (only 3% in our sample) wanted to join the market in order to have (a) some social security benefits and (b) also, for some social status in their lives with which they feel quite satisfied and which would not have been possible if they remained confined as housewives within their own families as housewives and/or mother.

Only a meager percent of women in our sample (5% of the total respondents in our sample) regard the environment and/or ambience of their working places are satisfactory and they have no complaint as they found the working place ambience is women-friendly. This is mostly the case in some primary schools, Secondary and Higher secondary Girl’s schools, Girl’s colleges where the managing committees are represented by substantial number female members vis-à-vis the male members. However, leaving aside this meager 5% of working women in our total sample of 200 working women, 95% of the women find the ambience of their workplaces not women friendly. The major complaint of most of these non-satisfied working women is with regard to women-friendly toilet facility and also, the presence of sexual harassment by the male working members – mostly the bosses/masters. Hence, neither in rural areas nor in urban areas majority of the women who work outside their families for paid jobs do not get a perfectly women-friendly working ambience. Sometimes the lack of this women-friendly ambiance in the workplace does have adverse psychological impact on the working women and their mental health gets adversely affected. Most of them do not report this out of the fear psychosis of losing their jobs and hence, earnings which go a long way in supplementing the low income of their families. We tried to gather information on human trafficking from the district as the district of Murshidabad was in the news several times of late regarding human trafficking. However, we could not gather any first hand information on this. No working woman in our sample showed their unwillingness to discuss the matter with us in the focused group based discussions with them.

Almost 18% of the respondents in our sample, as can be seen from the Figure 4.18 below, opined that they were actually compelled to continue with their present occupations due to
lack of access to better alternatives. A meager 6% of women in our sample preferred their present occupational status and they were mainly home-based women workers. Pattern of their jobs allowed them to maintain subtly a balance between their work and domestic chores in a day. Majority of women workers (around 32% of total respondents) wanted to continue with their jobs in order to keep their economic security. Around 31% of the total respondents are satisfied with their jobs in all respects. A small percentage of women (5%) engaged in such type of working activities faced good women-friendly environment at their workplaces and decided to continue with their jobs. A small percentage of women (7% in our total sample) wanted to continue with their jobs so that their social status remained unaltered and 1% of the total number of respondents in our sample wanted to continue with their present work as they had become habituated with their jobs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Distribution of respondents according to the reasons for continuation of their jobs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Satisfied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absence of better alternative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Habituated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good administration</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s calculation based on field survey in the district of Murshidabad during June 2012-September 2013.

**Figure 4.18**

A majority of women in our sample did not bother about gender-based discrimination or oppression which they might have been encountering. Rather, they took as the normal for them in the society as thinking otherwise is abnormal. Even if they were very conscious about gender-based oppression which includes domestic violence against them and sex-based harassment to them in their working places outside their families, they were reluctant to raise their voices against it either (a) out of fear psychosis of being getting identified in the society as a woman who is the victim of sex-based oppression/harassment or (b) by presuming it as quite normal for them as women in the Indian society.
Our survey indicates that 31% of the respondents said ‘No’ when they were asked about the presence of such discrimination. However, other sources confirmed the presence of such discrimination. We have interviewed some women who belonged to the high income group. Some of them are teachers at different degree colleges in the district. They opined that only in eight among the twenty colleges, female teachers have been selected as members of the governing body of the college which is the highest decision making authority of the colleges. In fact, they also did not bother much about it presuming it as normal for them as the social norms in the present society characterized by patriarchy.

One significant gender-based oppression/discrimination is related with the financial status and/or problem within and/or outside their families (See Figure 4.19 below). It is interesting to note that 45% of women opined that there is gender discrimination although they are well aware of such discrimination at their workplaces as the Figure 4.19 below indicates. Only 24% said “yes” implying they acknowledged the presence of gender-based discrimination at their working places. And 31% of the women in our sample opined that they had no knowledge about the presence of such discrimination at their working places.

The women biri workers (who are basically home-based workers) always received less than their male counterparts for performing the same job. Usually male biri binder gets Rs. 80 – Rs. 120 per thousand of biris they bind whereas a female biri binder usually gets Rs. 40 - Rs. 75 per thousand biris they bind. This violates the Equal Remuneration Act of the country, although the Act is meant for the organized manufacturing factory-based workers. Once again most of these biri binding women workers considered this inequality in payment between male and female workers as something normal and demanding equal remuneration at par with men is something abnormal from their societal point of view. By organizational discrimination we mean presence of such discrimination against women which have been created by the organizers or employers themselves. Such type of discrimination is about 38% of total discrimination (See Figure 4.20 below). For example, in case of biri binding, employers (locally called Mahajan) disburse low quality inputs to the female binders.

A very negligible percent of the working women in our sample who are engaged in the formal sector of the economy as teachers, nurses, doctors and like is capable of taking own decisions regarding themselves and also for the others in their families. Note that they all belong to the high-income group families (except the nurses).
Lastly, *place discrimination* refers to such type of discrimination against women that have restricted the mobility of women which, otherwise, would have fetched them higher earnings than they are getting now. For example, a woman biri binder earns more (say, Rs 163.70 per 1000 biris they bind) if she can bind biris at cooperative centres which are mostly located in urban areas and it is difficult for them to go to urban areas daily from the residences at rural areas. Also, their families generally do not want them to go out of home to earn higher income ignoring their domestic chores. Hence, they remained as home-based workers. In our rendition, this place/mobility based discrimination which a male member of a family usually does not face is an example of a typical kind of oppressive gender process in the local society in the district.

![Distribution of respondents according to their knowledge about the presence of gender discrimination at the working place](image)

*Source: Author’s calculation based on field survey in the district of Murshidabad during June 2012-September 2013.*

**Figure 4.19**
Moreover, majority of women, nearly 61% of the respondents in our sample lacked the decision making power some of which may be pertaining to their own personal matters at their working places and/or in their families (See Figure 4.21 below). Concerned authorities (Employers of the concerned individual) generally do not allow women workers to make decision of their own at the working places. Figure 4.22 below shows that 57% of the respondents who lack decision-making power of their own are in reality forced to follow the decisions of their concerned authorities.
The majority (51.43% of the total women workers in our sample) of the respondents informed us that they were not attached with any organizational activities (See Figure 4.23 below). Here by organizational activities we imply their involvement in political, cultural, and other social activities including NGO-related activities and like. The respondents who have such involvements find it hard to maintain regular contact or find it difficult sometime to continue such activities due to paucity of their time – 60% of them lack time for such involvement given the double burden of performing domestic chores and income-earning works outside/inside the families (See Figure 4.24 below). They keep contact with
political parties not inspired by any political idealism. Rather they consider that attachment with some political parties (mostly the ruling party or the party which is most powerful at the local level) may help them to give some protection and also, may help them to obtain some benefits from the different social sector based programmes for women framed by the Government of India from time to time. In some cases, they have been forced by the male members of their families to get attached with a political party (which is not their own decision) so that they can avail some advantages/benefits which ultimately would be appropriated by the male members of their families from them.

**Figure 4.23**

**Distribution of respondents according to their involvement with any organization**

- Yes: 51%
- No: 49%

*Source: Author’s calculation based on field survey in the district of Murshidabad during June 2012- September 2013.*

**Figure 4.24**

**Distribution of respondents according to the reasons for irregular contact/ non-involvement.**

- Lack of time: 60%
- Lack of self-willingness: 0%
- Family Restriction: 11%
- Male dominance in the organization: 5%
- Defunct organization: 24%

*Source: Author’s calculation based on field survey in the district of Murshidabad during June 2012- September 2013.*
4.2.4 Gender Processes within the Family:

Motherhood and family bondage with love and care and marriage are still very important social norms for an average woman both in rural and urban areas of the district. A woman’s place in the family remains as mother/wife/daughter – weaker sex vis-à-vis the men in the same family. A female is a social construction as not-male or other than male. And the majority of the women both in rural and urban areas where we carried out our field survey considered this as something normal for them, which pre-ordained, pre-given from their birth. Hence, the general aspiration of an average woman in the countryside as well as in small towns is to make her ready and physically and mentally prepared for marriage. So from their very childhood they are trained in domestic chores and/or unpaid family labour and if required at times of distress in the family, she must be prepared to join the labour market to supplement the dwindling family income along with performing the domestic chores. She is care-giver in the family. She is supposed to perform the surplus labour in the family which may or may not be appropriated by her but by the head of the family who is generally a male. What we observed from our field-survey that the families characterized by oppressive gender process, are also those families where appropriator(s) of surplus labour performed by woman is a non-woman – the head of the family who is a male. There are exceptions. However, exceptions in our sample are very few.

However, the point to note in terms of our field survey that there are two types of gender processes within the different family spaces – (1) an oppressive gender process which is biased against women members of the family and (2) a non-oppressive gender process which is not biased against women, rather the process itself is gender-neutral in terms of equal sharing of performance and appropriation of surplus labour within the family. As we have found, oppressive gender process characterizes majority of the families (say, 96% of the total families) in the rural areas of the district cutting across the income group based categorizations of the families into high, medium and low income. So, it is not the level of family income which matters in determining the nature of gender process within the family space – which is also the living space for a woman and also, for a man. Rather, what will be the prevalent nature of gender process within the family is to a large extent determined by the (both Hindu and Islamic) religious norms coupled with the age-old social customs and norms which envisage womanhood as mother/wife/daughter who will
be care-giver, performer of surplus labour (not appropriator of surplus labour) and will remain loyal to all the members of the family (particularly to her husband) and will perform in addition to her domestic chores unpaid labour as family labour to assist her husband or other male members of the family. Hence, in rural areas where we did our field survey, we have found that the women lacked the power of free choice or decision-making power; and even if she is a working woman outside the family, she remains deeply and passionately reliant on her husband or son(s) or father-in-law – that is to say on the male members of the family. And they have accepted this social position within their families as something normal for them because, as they opined to us, thinking otherwise and raising their voices against their husbands (even in cases of domestic violence on woman) is something unethical for her and she will commit a sin if she does otherwise. Hence, the gender process within the family in our rendition in the rural areas, where we have carried out our survey, is mostly oppressive one.

On the other hand, in urban areas where we have carried out our survey there is some correlation with income level of the family and the gender process within the family. Almost every woman belonging to the high income group of families opined that they could enjoy some freedom as far as their decision making power is concerned and if they work outside they generally do not rely upon their husbands financially. Rather, in some cases they enjoyed their entire income and do not perform even domestic chores. The financial expenses of the family are met by the male earning members. And the domestic chores are performed by the paid maid-servants. So, they have some quality time to give to their children and also some leisure to spend according to their wishes. In fact, in some families in the high income group in the urban areas the surplus labour is jointly performed and appropriated by the male and female members of the family equally. Hence, we cannot dub the gender process pertaining to such families as an oppressive one.

We have mixed picture as far as gender process is concerned in the middle income group of families in the urban areas – particularly in Baharampure Municipality area where we did our field survey among the working women. In some families working women do not face any social taboo for working outside and also do not face oppressive gender process in terms of being doubly burdened with the performance of domestic chores including care giving to their husbands, children and old members of the families and with working outside in paid jobs. These women have certain flexibility to decide whether to use their
income to supplement their total family income or to use it every month as per their own
wishes. Hence, this type of middle income group families is not characterized by
oppressive gender process. And we may consider these middle-income groups of women
in the urban areas are empowered as per our class-focused view of women’s
empowerment which we have discussed in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 of the present work.
But only 25% of the total number middle income families in our sample in the urban areas
the families characterized by non-oppressive gender process and also, by women who are
empowered. This means in the remaining 75% of the middle income families in the urban
areas gender process within the family is oppressive and most of these women who also
work outside face exploitative class processes and sex-based harassment and non-woman
friendly ambiance in their working places. So, the picture for the middle income families’
women is a mixed picture.

However, in the case of low income group of families we found half of the such families
in our sample is actually characterized by oppressive gender process including domestic
violence in some cases. This means 50% of working women belonging to low income
group of families do not witness oppressive gender process within the family. Rather,
performance of surplus labour as well as appropriation of surplus labour is jointly shared
by the working women along with their husbands. There is sharing in domestic chores
which do not in all cases follow the typical gender-based stereotypes of social division of
labour within a family – the living space. Rather, typical feminine works like cooking and
washing cloths and caring for children are jointly shared by the men and women in such
families. Men particularly perform these works within family when they find time and
when the women are absent owing to their outside-family work. Even 50% of the women
belonging to the low-income group of families said that they are capable of taking
decisions regarding themselves and also for their families although they work outside to
supplement their family income. Hence, these women in our rendition are empowered
although they belong to low income families which, as we have shown in Chapter 3)
means that these women are working poor. So, we have a combination of empowered
woman who are working (income) poor.

Around 60% of the women belonging to the low-income family group in our sample in
rural and urban areas taken together were actually forced to join the labour market outside
their families either as (a) self-employed (mostly in informal retailing), or (b) home-based
workers, or (c) care-workers, or (d) paid agricultural workers, or (e) paid informal manufacturing workers and like. A high percentage of women belonging to low income group (around 75%) in our sample in the rural areas is compelled in unpaid family labour along (to assist their husbands – particularly in rearing domestic animals and as helpers in the farming activities of the family where the land is mostly owned by the male members of the family, not by the women). This implies that actually a working woman belong to a low income family in the rural areas of the district (even though she may not face oppressive gender process within family always and sharing may the principle on which her living space is built) has to face triple burden of (a) performing domestic chores (although shared with their husbands and other members of the family in a very cooperative way), (b) performing unpaid family labour to assist her husband in his economic activity which is the principal source of family income, and (c) performing surplus labour (value) in a production process (including services) outside family. However, despite the presence of this triple burden this type of woman may be dubbed as empowered woman as she in majority of the cases has her own voice within the family and along with her husband or without her husband is capable of taking decision for her and for other family members. Further, a small percentage of such women (around 20% of working women in rural areas of our sample) have the freedom over her own income which implies it is “she” who decides what to do with her income viz. how to distribute her earnings between different consumptions (for her family and also for herself) and savings, if there is any scope for it after meeting her consumption needs.28

Although our field survey indicates that in both rural and urban areas women belonging to the low income families (or working income poor families) are actually forced to join the labour market out of the compulsion of supplement their family income, a small percentage of such women (say around 5% of the total low income working women in urban areas) in urban areas joined the labour market out of their own choice and we found the presence of non-oppressive gender process within family in such cases. This is an interesting point to note. But after joining the labour market 50% of them have the freedom to take their own decisions and have control over their own earnings every month

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28 In fact, almost 90% of working women involved in informal retailing in urban areas and belonging to low income family told us that they preferred to save (however, meager that saving may be) in chit funds like Sarada and Ramel and like. And now after the complete collapse of the Ponzi type financial institutions like Sarada and others they have lost all their savings and now they have no faith on any local political leaders or activists who were assuring them that they would get their money back from the State Government.
and the remaining 50% do not enjoy such freedom and control. This means joining the labour market (particularly when a woman hails from a low income family) on one’s own will/choice does not necessarily signify that the concerned woman becomes empowered. Rather, she may remain non-empowered as before after joining the labour market as per her own choice. So, those women hailing from low income family and joining the labour market out of their own decisions to do so may or may not be empowered after joining the labour market. We find only those women hailing from low income families in the urban areas and joining labour market at their own desire are empowered where the gender process associated with her in her family is non-oppressive and the performance and appropriation of surplus labour within family is jointly (and equally) shared between men and women.

Hence, it can said at this juncture that as we face various heterogeneous class and non-class processes (which include gender process as well) within and outside family, the process of women’s empowerment is also heterogeneous. And different combinations of class and non-class processes within and/or outside family would render different types of meaning and significance for women’s empowerment. So, a mere female participation in the labour market does not necessarily lead to women’s empowerment although the mainstream economics and social sciences hold that women’s empowerment and female participation in the labour market are highly positively correlated. This we cannot say from our study. The different types of over-determination of the living space and working space for a woman, which are shaped by different economic, political, cultural and natural processes, produce different meanings for women’s empowerment. However, one may conclude that to some extent when a woman faces non-oppressive gender process within her living space i.e. family her participation in the labour market outside family may empower her. This holds good for some working women hailing from either high or low income groups of families in the selected urban areas of our sample. But this does not hold good at all for the women in the rural areas in the district irrespective of which kind of income groups of families they belong to. This once again vindicates our rendition that the mainstream neoclassical economic theory’s claim that female participation in the labour market is highly and positively correlated with women’s empowerment.

One interesting point to note at this juncture is the fact that most of the women in our sample (say 97%) both in rural and urban areas do not like in disharmony in their living
spaces despite the fact they work outside. They always try to make a balance between
domestic chores and their outside economic activities. They are in general care givers and
they like to give that to their families even if they are subject to domestic violence and/or
are subjugated to men as the patriarchy warrants. This is their own pleasure and perhaps,
one should treat this in *normative* sense the typical femininity which characterizes a standard
Indian woman – mostly belonging to the middle income groups of families. There are
exceptions. But such exceptions of unhappiness for being forced to give care and love to
her family are quite rare (at least in the case of 200 working women in the selected rural
and urban areas of the district of Murshidabad).

The case for single woman may be different. We have two different types of single
woman: (a) Type I single woman implies either a widow who has no kith and kin, or a
divorced woman who is the single member of her family or an unmarried woman and old
with no other member in the family; and, (b) Type II single woman who is either divorced
from her husband and/or unmarried and living with her parental family.

In case of Type I single woman she is the lone earner for herself. So, the gender process
that she faces within a family may be oppressive in the sense that there is no one in the
family to take care of her. She has to take care of herself. She may not consider this gender
process as oppressive as she may like it as she can freely decides what to do, how to do
and for whom to do within and outside her family. The point, however remains that they
do not have (even at their prime) to take care for them or to love them. So, in this sense the
plight of such women is more appalling relative to the other women who are either
housewives or maintain a life divided between family and outside job.

The plight of Type II single woman (in rural areas particularly) is really appalling vis-à-vis
such type of single man in the family. Firstly, she always subject to oppressive gender
process as being widow or divorcee her social status even within her parental family
remains devalued. This devalorization further subjects them to every kinds of domestic
chores which otherwise could have been performed either jointly or by a paid maid-
servant. So, in this sense she not only encounters an oppressive gender process but also
exploitative class process within her parental family. She may encounter either
exploitative or non-exploitative class process in her workplace outside her family.
However, gender-based discrimination as well as harassment often continues remaining
part and parcel of her working space as she is generally considered under patriarchy a soft
and safe target for gender-based discrimination and sexual harassment by men.

Our field survey indicates that out of the total number of 200 women in rural and urban
areas taken together (all of whom are working women) nearly 65% spend more than 50%
of their total income for their families. For most of the women in our sample (58% of the
total respondents) their children depend on them and they try their best to ensure care for
their children which is, as if, the sole objective of each one of them in their lives. They live
for their children and also, for their husbands despite facing oppressive gender processes
(sometimes characterized by domestic violence) within and outside family. In case of 12%
of the total respondents in our sample their husbands’ families depend on their income.
Along with their husbands 16% of the total respondents in our sample have to bear the
responsibilities to earn bread and butter for their husbands’ families. And 12% of the total
respondents in our sample (in both rural and urban areas) bears such type of
responsibilities for their parental families also even after their marriage. Only 14% of the
total respondents have no such responsibilities to earn bread and butter for their family.
See Figure 4.25 and Figure 4.26 below for a percentage wise division of working women
in terms of their responsibilities of earning for their families.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expenditure</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nothing</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 50%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal to 50%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 50%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denied to answer</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s calculation based on field survey in the district of Murshidabad during June 2012-
September 2013.

Figure 4.25
It is revealing that the society still expects, even in urban areas, that working women must do their domestic chores properly, attend social invitations and other typical works that a housewife is supposed to do irrespective of the fact whether she is working outside or not. Society and social institutions like family and market have identified some works as “female work”. So to keep balance within work and family is the most important challenge for today’s working women – especially in the middle income group of families as our field survey suggest. The findings of the study show that for 59% of the respondents have heavy burden of domestic chores and the remaining respondents are either manage it by spending money on maid-servants or the female members in family (like mother, sisters, daughter, daughter-in law, mother-in-law etc). Note that to maintain balance between family and working life the latter category of women depend on the other female members of the family, not on the male members. It is very rare that their husbands (in our sample only 10.6% reported like that) help them in doing such jobs. So, even if a woman joins the labour market there is hardly any role reversal within family. They are still perceived as a housewife, rather than working housewife. See Figure 4.27 below for a quantitative assessment of our judgment.
Women who have the opportunities to bear low volume of domestic chores, they are actually successful in reducing their burden by hiring maid servants out of their own money. This holds good for 54% of respondents in our sample. In remaining cases, mostly women (like, daughter-in-law, mother, mother-in-law, daughter) compensated the burden of domestic chores of the working women in the family, not their male partners in general. See Figure 4.28 below for a quantitative assessment of our findings in this regard.
Our study shows that 54% of the working women (who mostly belong to the middle and upper income groups of families – nearly 70% of such families in our sample) are unwilling to continue such time-consuming domestic chores. Women belonging to the low income group find their out-door jobs quite time consuming and lowly paid. However, despite being exhausted they have to perform domestic chores either before going to the workplace or after coming from the workplace. But as we have noted in this chapter already among the low-income groups of families (particularly in the urban areas) the concept of sharing and cooperation characterizes gender process for a significant percentage of low income urban families. This is generally not the case with middle income urban families and also for high income urban families. But due to their higher levels of earnings they can somehow manage to maintain the balance between domestic chores and outside work by getting most of the domestic chores done by the paid maid-servants – the expenses for whom are generally incurred by these working women in these families. Hence, they could somehow manage to get some time for leisure and relaxation after returning home from their workplaces. The rural picture in this regard is totally reverse and still remains conservative one for the working women irrespective of her family background in terms of high, medium and low income family groups.

Of the total respondents in our sample, 38% of working women in rural and urban areas have to spend more than 15 hours a day to bear the double burden of domestic chores and outside work and 43% of them have to spend more than 10 hours a day due to this double burden. Moreover, among the respondents who spend more than 15 hours on this double burden of work inside and outside (as a paid worker and/or unpaid family labour), 70% of them in rural areas spend roughly 18 to 20 hours a day and these types of working women mainly hail from low income group families in the rural areas. They may get help from their siblings to assist them in domestic chores, but their paid working activities (like binding biri, retailing and like) need almost 15-16 hours a day to meet their target including the target of their daily domestic chores.
Figure 4.29 above indicates that 38% of the total working women (respondents) in our sample in rural and urban areas taken together do spend more than 15 hours a day for bearing the brunt of double burden of work as a societal norm principled on conservatism characterized by patriarchal value system. This is followed by 43% of total working women in our sample who actually spend between 10 and 15 hours for shouldering this double burden. Only 19% of women in our sample spend less than 10 hours but more than 5 hours a day to carry out this double burden. As the Figure 4.30 above shows 54% of the total respondents actually do not prefer to perform domestic chores as they are working.
outside. However, they are mostly compelled to do so (a) due to the financial condition of their families and/or (b) due to the prevailing conservatism in the family and/or working place characterized in terms of hegemonic patriarchal norms.

In case of high and also for some middle income group families (and that too in urban areas mostly) modern technology has come as a boon to the working women in these families as it helps to reduce time needed for performing domestic chores and in some sense, helps them to maintain balance between the domestic chores and outside works. Note that 67% of total respondents in our sample have access to modern technology (See Figure 4.31 below.) However, note that (especially for high income families in urban areas) the expenditure for buying and maintaining the modern gadgets like fridge, micro-oven and like is incurred by the working women. Rarely, this expenditure is shared on 50-50 basis between men and women. However, the working women from the low income group of families do not have that level of income to avail these modern facilities at home. For them, the technology is a dream – a luxury, not a necessity as they cannot afford it. On the contrary, the modern household technology is not a luxury but necessity or need for the working women belonging to the upper and middle income families in urban areas. The use of these modern gadgets, even in high income families, in rural areas is quite rare and is still envisaged as wasteful expenses which would otherwise make their women/house-wives indolent and would indulge them to have more freedom which they do not or should not deserve under patriarchy. So, the rural women remain voiceless and less empowered, if not-empowered at all, cutting across income groups as in rural society in India still the conservative patriarchal norms still maintain its hegemony in shaping the living and/or working space for a woman. From the Figure 4.32 below it can be noted that only 37% of the respondents in our sample can afford such technology by spending their own income. Only in case of 13% of the total respondents their husbands helped them in purchasing such gadgets.
Excluding 34% of the respondents in our sample, everyone in our sample stated that their families remained very co-operative for them as they go out to work since their families consider them as one of the major supplementary contributors to the total family income. At the same time they reported that most of them spend nearly 15 hours on their dual activities as housewives in the family and as service providers at their workplaces. See Figure 4.33 below for a quantitative assessment of this family-related cooperation received by the working women in rural and urban areas. However, it is our feeling that many of the respondents (especially those in the rural areas) actually did not want to divulge the
true picture in this regard as they regard implicitly that what they are doing they should do, they are destined to do that as women in the society.

![Distribution of respondents according to their opportunities to get family's co-operation for their upliftment at outside working place](image)

*Source: Author’s calculation based on field survey in the district of Murshidabad during June 2012-September 2013.*

**Figure 4.33**

### 4.2.5 Decision-Making and Other Indicators of Women’s Empowerment:

Working women were asked whether they need any permission to purchase golden ornaments or properties in their name out of their own income or not? In case of 64% of the total respondents in our sample we find that they actually do not require that kind of strict permission from their husbands. But in most of the cases – particularly with regard to purchase of land or any real estate property – the property when purchased out of working women’s savings – is in the joint name (husband and wife). Many respondents are actually unable to buy such things/property due to their abysmally low income. Of the total respondents in our sample 76% have savings bank account and 79% of such account holders have accounts in their own names solely. And 65.71% of the total respondents feel that they also have their say in decision-making at the family level. However, in the rural areas our feeling is that the respondents did not want to divulge the truth in this regard and generally shied away in responding to our questions.

As far as women suffrage is concerned, 81% of the respondents told us that they can cast their vote according to their own choice. But when it comes to the question of democracy
at the working places only 20% of the total respondents actually opined that they were able to raise their voices against some unfair decisions of their employers at their working places as the Figure 4.34 below indicates.

![Distribution of respondents according to their capacity to deny the decision of others at different places](image)

Source: Author’s calculation based on field survey in the district of Murshidabad during June 2012-September 2013.

Figure 4.34

Empowered women in our class-focused rendition signify those women who can raise their voices against oppressive gender processes within and/or outside family spaces, who have free decision making power to join the labour market or not, who have complete control over her earnings, and who along with her male counterparts may be appropriator of surplus labour in non-exploitative class processes at their living and/or working places. From our empirical study in terms of focused group based discussions in the selected rural and urban areas of the district of Murshidabad we may opine that compared to the rural society working women in the urban society to some extent is more empowered. But this empowerment takes diverse images depending on the mutual constitutivity of different class and non-class processes within the living and/or working places of the women. Therefore, it can be said that in spite of having increasing economic growth and also increasing female participation in the labour market since 1991, women – especially rural women in the district of Murshidabad - still remain not so empowered as is generally claimed by the mainstream neoclassical economic theory based image building of the Indian economy and Indian woman-hood in the neoliberal period.
4.3 Comparative Analysis of the Empirical Findings:

This section offers some ideas of women’s empowerment in the selected rural and urban areas of the district of Murshidabad based upon certain chosen indicators such as (a) Ability to say “No”, (b) Work-load within family, (c) Amount of money spent on family expenditure, (d) Political involvement, (d) Irregular contact and (e) Gender discrimination at working place. This is indicated in Table 4.4 below. The women in our sample are categorized as belonging to either (i) low income group family, or (ii) middle income group family or (iii) high income group family as can be seen from the Table 4.4 below.

Table 4.4
Comparative Performances of Working Women Belonging to Different Income Groups (in percent)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance indicators of women’s empowerment</th>
<th>Low income group</th>
<th>Middle income group</th>
<th>High income group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ability to say ‘No’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0) None of the place</td>
<td>63.89</td>
<td>3.34</td>
<td>64.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1) Within family</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) At workplace</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>8.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) At both places</td>
<td>20.83</td>
<td>33.33</td>
<td>8.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Seldom</td>
<td>1.39</td>
<td>53.33</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) No response</td>
<td>1.39</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>8.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work-load within family</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heavy</td>
<td>58.33</td>
<td>60.00</td>
<td>59.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>40.28</td>
<td>40.00</td>
<td>37.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Burden</td>
<td>1.39</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>2.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. Amount of income spent on family expenditure</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 50% of total family spending</td>
<td>13.89</td>
<td>23.33</td>
<td>43.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Almost 100% of total family spending</td>
<td>61.11</td>
<td>23.33</td>
<td>21.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political involvement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>55.56</td>
<td>26.67</td>
<td>54.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>44.44</td>
<td>73.33</td>
<td>45.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. Irregular contact</td>
<td>32.5</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI. Gender discrimination at working place</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>68.06</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) No</td>
<td>31.94</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>59.46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s calculation based on field survey in the selected rural and urban areas of the district of Murshidabad during June 2012-September 2013.

It is generally held that women could have a secured and enhanced quality of life if they get financial independence. This economic independence or self-reliance is held that would enable them to patronize their needs and interests and hence would create a women-
friendly environment for overall development of herself and the community. It is further held that ‘decision making autonomy’ that plays a pivotal role in the life of any individual can be enhanced once an individual attains economic self-reliance. This is the standard logical correlation between women’s empowerment and economic self-reliance that the mainstream neoclassical economic theories put forward. We do not undermine the importance of economic self-reliance as a major factor which would go a long way to empower a woman socially. However, it is not the factor for women’s empowerment. Otherwise, the women with high income in rural Murshidabad would have high level of empowerment, which is otherwise as we have seen above. Women belonging to the different income groups, as the above table shows, actually have different levels/degrees of empowerment and also nature of empowerment varies between the different income groups. Our study suggests that women belonging to the low income group enjoy more autonomy to deny decision of others. Within family they are more vocal compared to their counterparts in high income group. Percentage of their inability to say ‘no’ in both family and in market is comparatively low than women belonging to high income group. Note that 20% of low income group women in our sample enjoyed the decision making autonomy in both family and working spaces whereas only 8% of women from high income group are enjoying such autonomy. On the other hand, latter group can enjoy more autonomy in decision making in workplaces compared to the low income group. Women belonging to middle income group enjoy more autonomy in saying ‘no’ in both places. In our survey, majority of women belonging to middle income group which does not mean that they do not face oppressive gender process within family. Joining labour market may be out of own choice or they may be forced to do so. Generally a typical middle-income urban family gladly today accepts the pattern of jobs for their female members in which either less time may be spent without earning less (like teaching at schools) or in which the women remain home-based workers so that they do not have to sacrifice their socially stipulated time for care giving to her family. We observe that women belonging to the middle income group are more burdened with domestic chores compared to the women belonging to the low and high income group. Some women in the middle income group in our sample have joined labour market to supplement family earning to meet sudden financial crisis of the family and hence, theirs are forced/stressed participation – not female participation out of own choice. Some of their families have strong need for their income and some of them do not have such need. As their family failed to provide economic securities, their ability to say ‘no’ is higher than women belonging to high income group. In the labour market women of both low and middle income group suffer
from the autonomy to utter ‘no’ to any unfair decision of their employers as their jobs are mainly temporary/non-regular in nature. Women of low income group encounter more gender-based discrimination against them (here financial in nature) compared to their counterparts in the high income group. Most of the women belonging to the low income group in our sample are engaged in informal occupations which lack any job and social security. They are reluctant to say ‘no’ at working place because (a) they do not have any economic and social security for their future and (b) for them future is more uncertain compared to other income categories of women. As the pattern of jobs of high income group is somehow more secured, they can face less discrimination at the working place. However women of all the three groups are facing significant gender based discrimination in their working places. From our discussion on the function of family in Chapter 2, we observe that in most cases family is no longer a provider of economic security for women. Even at times it becomes a space for facing domestic violence for women, which as living space for them should have been otherwise. This is mostly observed in the case of women belonging to the low income group. As their families have failed to provide them economic securities, these women (though their number is very few in our sample) no longer feel liable to keep family bondage and obey gender and cultural processes of the family – particularly in the urban areas. In the rural areas, the conservatism still dominates and not keeping loyalty and bondage with the husband’s family makes a married woman a bad woman in normative sense. On the other hand, for most of women belonging to the high income group their families do not rely on their monthly income but their families otherwise demand from them more loyal bondage to their husband’s/parental family. Despite being economically independent some of them may be subject to oppressive gender process and not empowered in our term. Hence, women belonging to high income group may actually lack enough independent decision-making power within their families.

Note that women belonging to the low income group have relatively more involvement (55.56%) in political activities compared to women belonging to the high income group (54%) and women belonging to the middle income group (27%). This may not be their voluntary choice. Rather, as we could infer from our focused group based discussions with the women belonging to the low-income groups they tend to involve more with political activities (particularly with the ruling political party or the political party which is most powerful at their local levels) due to (a) fear psychosis of not getting any benefit from various government programmes meant for them like widow pension, old age pension and like and (b) also due to their apprehension that unless they are under the umbrella of some
political parties of their locality they cannot continue with their occupations in the
ingformal economy. So, most of this participation in political activities does not signify
their empowerment; rather, as we could gauge, it signifies forced-participation in political
spaces out of the sheer fear psychosis regarding their social security and protection as
women workers in the informal economy. In fact, whenever needed this contingent of low-
income group women are used by their political parties (either when a big meeting or rally
or procession has to be organized or when any election takes place). Hence, large
percentage of female participation from low income families (both in rural and urban
areas) in political activities does not necessarily signify their independent emancipation as
women political activists. Rather, as in their families they remain subjugated to their male
political leaders of their parties.

The percentage of women who can manage to maintain regular contact with such political
activities on a continuous basis is low (30% for the high income group and 67% for the
low income group). Women belonging to the middle income group have less political
involvement due to two reasons: (a) they do not feel any compulsion or force to join
political activism and (b) given the fact, that they have to perform the double/triple burden
of domestic chores and outside income generating activities they find very little or no time
at all for such political activities. These two reasons explain low female participation from
middle income families in political activities which we could infer from our focused group
based discussions with such women in both rural and urban areas of the district. They
generally prefer to shy away from political activities and do consider their attention/focus
on their children and old and husbands as their primary and most important social duties,
which they have to perform whether they like it or do not like it. Women belonging to the
high income group do not feel much necessity for such activities unless they are
compelled to do so by their families. This happens especially with those high income
working women who hail from families which are historically associated with politics in
their areas. Otherwise, they generally shy away from political activities and are not willing
to maintain regular contact with political parties even if they are somehow involved with
them. In many of the cases high income women were forced to enter politics as
replacement of their husbands or other male members of the family – particularly in the
Panchayat and Municipal elections given the fact that 33% of the total seats are now
reserved for women. So, in Gram Panchayat or Panchayat Samity or Zilla Parishad and
similarly in Municipality elections many seats which earlier were contested by the male
members of their families are now contested by these women belonging to the same
families. Hence, in a sense this represents a forced participation of women in electoral politics in lieu of their husbands/fathers/other male members of their families. And hence, this to our understanding cannot be valorized as women’s empowerment in real sense. This is more so because in many seats, which are now reserved for women candidates only, the elected women members perform their political duties at the dictates of their husbands/fathers/other male members of their families so that the vested interest of the particular politicized families goes on to be fulfilled as it is continuously.

As is expected, the percentage of women who spend their entire income is greatest (61%) for the low income group compared to the high income group (21.62%) and the middle income group (23.33%). This finding is not surprising given the fact that most of low income group female participation in the labour market (which some years ago was glorified as “feminization of labour force” and hence, increasing women’s empowerment) is forced or stressed participation – a participation which is not based on their own choice, rather dictated by the financial condition of the family.

In the modern age and with population explosion, many of the economic functions which were previously better performed by the male members of the family are now being performed also by women at factories, market, government and other associations. Female members of the family in many cases were compelled to join the job market keeping intact their home-based household works as wife or mother or sister.

Women of the low income group have joined the labour market for financial distress of their families so as to supplement low (and under subsistent) income of their families. Even their children also join the labour market as child workers. For women in high income group self-decision making autonomy within family is mostly missing as we have found from our field survey, which is quite surprising. Although most of such women have entered the labour market out of their self-choice, for them family bondage is very crucial for their own happiness. Therefore, most women belonging to the high income group fail to raise their voices (particularly in rural areas) against the prevalent oppressive gender process within and/or outside family; and hence, we cannot dub them as empowered. Women belonging to the low income group who have gained some autonomy in decision making within their families also mostly remained shy or silent against the oppressive gender process which they face within and/or outside family; and hence, all of them also cannot be regarded as empowered women. Only a tiny percentage of such high
income group women in our sample can be said to have acquired some empowerment over the years through their experiences both within and outside family.

A handful few number of women belonging to middle and high income groups could raise their voices against oppressive gender process both within and outside family, and over the years gained the autonomy in decision making (particularly within their families given the fact that they work outside and have some economic freedom). These women can, therefore, be called as empowered women. Despite the fact that domestic violence is mostly prevalent in low income families (particularly in rural areas) one-fourth of low income group women (especially in the urban areas) gained their capability to raise their voices against oppressive gender process within and/or outside family and also, against exploitative class processes at their workplaces where they continue to face an environment quite hostile to them. And hence, despite the fact these women should be regarded as working poor women may at the same time be dubbed as empowered women. However, the nature of empowerment which characterizes this type of women differ significantly the empowerment of the high and middle income group women. Whereas the high and middle income groups of women due to their social status and social hierarchy have access to the upper echelons of the society directly (particularly with the upper levels of political and administrative people) and they can organize themselves, if needed, to secure their needed benefits from the local administration and political leaders without much harassment and hurdles and hence, transaction costs or opportunity costs (both time cost and money cost) involved with obtaining such benefits are comparatively low for these two income groups of women vis-à-vis the empowered low income group women. This is the paradox of much hyped inclusiveness for women in Indian economy and society since the heydays of planning and also, now continuing as it is even at this age of neoliberal transition since 1991. As the Table 4.5 below indicates in terms of six selected categories including (a) ability to say “No”, (b) workload within family, (c) percentage share of women’s income for family expenses, (d) political involvement, (e) irregularity of their involvement in political and such activities, and (f) gender-based discrimination in the workplaces women in the rural areas of the district in general are less empowered than the women in the urban areas. However, note that in terms of the indicator (d) and (e) above rural women can be said to be much more empowered than the urban women. However, as we have already indicated above whether this does signify a real political empowerment of women? This is more so because of the fact in rural areas due to 33% of total seats reserved for three-tier Panchayat system, women are mostly mere substitute of
their husbands/fathers/sons/other male members of their families and they act as dictated to them by the concerned male members of their families whose substitute the particular woman is.

**Table 4.5**

Comparative Performances of Working Women across Regions

*(in percent)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance indicators of women’s empowerment</th>
<th>Urban Area</th>
<th>Rural Area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>(I) Ability to say ‘No’</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0) None of the place</td>
<td>16.67</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1) Within family</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) At workplace</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) At both places</td>
<td>26.67</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Seldom</td>
<td>38.89</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) No response</td>
<td>4.44</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>(II) Work-load within Family</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1) Heavy</td>
<td>57.78</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Low</td>
<td>41.11</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) No Burden</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>III. (III) Percentage of income spent on family expenditure</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1) Spending more than 50%</td>
<td>28.89</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Spending 100%</td>
<td>25.56</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>(IV) Political involvement</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1) Yes</td>
<td>44.44</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) No</td>
<td>55.56</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>(V) Irregularity in maintaining political contact</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52.5</td>
<td>42.86</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>(VI) Gender discrimination at workplaces</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1) Yes</td>
<td>31.11</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) No</td>
<td>68.89</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Author’s calculations based on the field survey in the selected rural and urban areas of the district of Murshidabad during June 2012-September 2013.*

Let us now see how the geographical region-based differences do matter in women’s empowerment? Or whether they matter at all? Or whether the typical concept of “space” which is physical in geographical terms does really matter for women’s empowerment? From the Table 4.5 above, we can infer the following:
(a) The working women belonging to the urban regions in our sample enjoy more autonomy in saying ‘No’ both within family and market vis-à-vis the rural working women.

(b) The nature of job in rural areas is mostly informal and seasonal, and, therefore the rural women in our sample lack such ability to say “No” both within and outside family. In fact majority of rural women actually has to bear triple burden of doing domestic chores, unpaid family labour and paid labour outside family.

(c) Women in the rural areas vis-à-vis the women in the urban areas in our sample are bound more by the family bondage and the expected loyalty to their paternal/marital family, marriage oath, societal and cultural taboos and like.

(d) The burden of domestic chores is relatively higher for rural women when compares with the urban women in our sample.

(e) The rural women in our sample vis-à-vis the urban women do spend a larger share of their monthly income (70% of them spend entire income) on family expenditure.

(f) Our survey reveals that rural (working) female participation in political activities is much higher than the women in the urban areas in our sample. We have already cited the probable reasons for this high female participation in political activities especially after the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment during 1992-93 which made it obligatory to reserve 33% of the seats at the local government-level elections for the women.

(g) But the rural working women’s performance in terms of keeping regular contacts with their political organizations is poorer than the urban working women in our sample. This may be due to fact that most of them neither have enough time left for being in regular touch with their political parties nor they are politically more conscious or inspired by some political ideals which would facilitate their empowerment, inclusiveness in the society and ultimately may lead to what is known as women emancipation at par with men.
(h) As our field survey reveals expectedly 98% of the rural working women in our sample face or are victim of gender discrimination at their working places vis-à-vis the urban working women in our sample.

(i) Finally, we may conclude that working women belonging to the rural areas are less empowered than the working women belonging to urban areas in terms of their free decision making capacity and freedom of choice at the economic level. However, when viewed in terms of their political involvement rural women seem to be more empowered than the urban working women in our sample. However, as we have explained already above, this (political) empowerment to a certain extent is delusory although our intention is not to undermine or devalue rural working women’s participation in politics whatever may be the reason behind it.

Next we have made an attempt to analyze the performances of working women not only across the different regions, but also across three different income groups to which they belong. This is indicated in the Table 4.6 below. We make the following observations in this respect:

(1) We observe that most of the rural working women in our sample belong to the low income group families.

(2) In urban areas women belonging to the low income group families do enjoy more autonomy and freedom in making decisions compared to women belonging to two other income groups in the urban areas.

(3) However, rural working women belonging to the low income category have less free decision making power vis-à-vis the urban low income group working women in our sample. This may be due to the variation or differences between rural and urban life forms which are over-determined by local economic, political, cultural and natural processes.

(4) The rural working women belonging to the low income group have to bear more burden of domestic chores compared to their counterparts in the urban areas.

(5) Rural working women in the low income category do spend relatively more on family expenditure that the urban low-income group women in our sample.
(6) Although the rural low income group women’s involvement in political activities is slightly higher than the urban low income group women the former group finds it quite difficult in maintaining regular contacts with their political parties/organizations. And in this term they stand behind than their fellow counterparts in the urban region.

(7) Women belonging to the low income category in urban regions are mainly vendors, maid-servants, mid-day meal cooks, members of SSA and like. Such types of jobs are mostly envisaged as feminine jobs and hence, women get the preference over men in such kind of jobs, which speaks of gender-based stereotyping in the urban and rural society in the district.

(8) Women belonging to the low income category in the rural areas are mostly engaged as home-based workers (like biri binding and stitching etc.), daily agricultural wage labour and like which are not necessarily particular gender specific. Although if one looks at these rural jobs quite minutely one would find the existence of gender stereotypes there also. For example, in home-based biri binding activities and stitching (not weaving) women are preferred to men. Similarly, as daily wage labour in agriculture women workers are considered as helpers to the male workers and hence, their jobs are undervalued and they are generally paid less than the male daily wage labour in agriculture. Hence, rural working women of low income category also face gender discrimination like the urban low income group women in our sample.

Table 4.6
Comparative Performances of Working Women in terms of Different Income Categories across the Rural and Urban Regions

(in percent)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance indicators of women’s empowerment</th>
<th>URBAN</th>
<th>RURAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Middle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I) Ability to say ‘No’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0) None of the place</td>
<td>18.18</td>
<td>3.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1) Within family</td>
<td>4.55</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) At workplace</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) At both places</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>33.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Seldom</td>
<td>22.73</td>
<td>53.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) No response</td>
<td>4.55</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II) Work-load within Family</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1) Heavy</td>
<td>54.55</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Now we categorize working women in terms of their different education levels. Here we have considered five different education levels as follows:

(1) Working women with no formal education are treated as illiterate.

(2) Next we have the women with primary education less than 5 years of schooling.

(3) Women with secondary education between 5 and 10 years of schooling.

(4) Women with higher secondary level education between 10 and 17 years of education at schools

(5) Women with higher education having more than 17 years of education including education at schools, colleges and universities.

The following observations can be made which are imminent from the Table 4.7 below:

(j) The level of education and freedom of decision making power are positively correlated.

(ii) In rural areas working women have at most 10 years of educational experiences. And they lack enough freedom to make own decision for themselves and for their family members when compared with the urban working women in our sample.
(iii) Within family rural women’s capacity to make free decisions (even though low) has been increasing along with the increase in their educational level.

(iv) In urban area we observe that the illiterate working women are enjoying more autonomy in making decision at workplaces when compared with the other urban women having higher educational levels. This contradicts with the prevailing mainstream neoclassical economic view that with rise in the educational level of a female her capacity to make free decision within and/or outside family also increases. As a probable reason we can opine here that low income group illiterate women in the urban areas are mostly self-employed and being so they actually encounters ancient/self-independent class process which is different from a typical exploitative class process like feudal and capitalist and like.

(v) As far as work-load is concerned, one can notice that the burden of work-load gets reduced as one moves from the lowest educational category (which is illiterate) to higher and higher educational categories in the rural areas.

(vi) On the other hand, in urban areas although the picture reveals the same trend as in (v) above, but it is quite volatile. Working women belonging to primary and secondary categories respectively are burdened more with their domestic workloads compared to the illiterate women.

(vii) One can also observe that in spite of having higher and higher educational attainments in terms of number of years spent in their early lives for education, more than 50% of working women in the urban areas do still incur comparatively more burden of domestic chores than their counterparts in the rural areas and also, when compared with the illiterate working women in the urban areas. This once again goes against the standard mainstream neoclassical economic belief that with more and more education as more skill is formed a woman gets gainfully employed and receives higher wages/incomes and can, therefore, afford to have less burden for performing domestic chores as these household works are then performed by the paid maid-servants in the family. Our findings do not corroborate to this view. So, the connection between a woman’s educational achievement and her empowerment is not necessarily always positive and highly correlated. The picture is diverse like the economic space which is
disaggregated and decentred in terms of various exploitative and non-exploitative class processes in an over-determined manner.

(viii) Also, it is not the case always that with increase in female educational levels, gender processes within and/or outside family may become more and more non-oppressive. We are not denying this claim as higher levels of education generally makes a female more aware and conscious about the prevailing gender processes. But even attaining this conscious may not be sufficient for her to raise her voice against patriarchy-based gender oppression in many cases.

(ix) Further percentage of working women spending their entire income on family expenditure has been reducing as her educational attainments increased.

(x) However, with regard to the political involvement it is found that highly educated working women are less willing to get involved with political activities since they dislike politics which may be regarded as the neoliberal tendency of de-politicizing an individual.

(xi) Lastly, we can infer from our field survey that education may not have strong effect in reducing gender discrimination at workplaces. Note that the gender discrimination is almost nil in the urban areas among the illiterate women. This is due to the fact that they are mostly self-employed. On the other hand, in rural areas we have high degree of gender discrimination irrespective of a woman’s educational attainment which actually has no value in rural society in India so far.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance indicators of women’s empowerment</th>
<th>Urban Area</th>
<th>Rural Area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Ability to say ‘No’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0) None of the place</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I) Within family</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-5 Years</td>
<td>80.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 5 and 10 years</td>
<td>11.36</td>
<td>9.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 10 and 17 years</td>
<td>14.71</td>
<td>14.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater than 17 years</td>
<td>77.42</td>
<td>9.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-5 Years</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 5 and 10 years</td>
<td>77.78</td>
<td>22.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 10 and 17 years</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater than 17 years</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.7
Comparative Performances of Working Women between Different Educational Categories across the Urban and Rural Regions in the Murshidabad District (in per cent)
### Performance indicators of women’s empowerment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I) Ability to say ‘No’</th>
<th>Urban Area</th>
<th>Rural Area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Illiterate</td>
<td>0-5 Years</td>
<td>Between 5 and 10 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) At workplace</td>
<td>16.67</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) At both places</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Seldom</td>
<td>33.33</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) No response</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### II) Work-load within Family

| 1) Heavy               | 50         | 100        | 80.00       | 56.82         | 55.88       | 64.52      | 50         | 55.56                         | 0.00                         | 0.00                         |
| 2) Low                 | 50         | 0.00       | 20.00       | 43.18         | 41.18       | 32.26      | 50         | 44.44                         | 0.00                         | 0.00                         |
| 3) No Burden           | 0          | 0.00       | 0.00        | 0.00          | 2.94        | 3.23       | 0.00       | 0.00                         | 0.00                         | 0.00                         |

### III) Percentage of income spent on family expenditure

| 1) Spending more than 50% | 20         | 0.00       | 20.00       | 20.45         | 47.06       | 12.90      | 10         | 22.22                         | 0.00                         | 0.00                         |
| 2) Spending 100%          | 60         | 100        | 60.00       | 31.82         | 14.71       | 70.97      | 90         | 44.44                         | 0.00                         | 0.00                         |

### IV) Political involvement

| 1) Yes                  | 83.33      | 100        | 80.00       | 31.82         | 47.06       | 54.84      | 70         | 44.44                         | 0.00                         | 0.00                         |
| 2) No                   | 16.67      | 0.00       | 20.00       | 68.18         | 52.94       | 45.16      | 30         | 55.56                         | 0.00                         | 0.00                         |

### V) Irregular contact

| 0.00                    | 0.00       | 0.00       | 71.43       | 68.75         | 29.41      | 71.43      | 50         | 0.00                         | 0.00                         | 0.00                         |

### VI) Gender discrimination at workplace

| 1) Yes                  | 0.00       | 0.00       | 20.00       | 27.27         | 44.12      | 100        | 90         | 100                           | 0.00                         | 0.00                         |
| 2) No                   | 83.33      | 100        | 80.00       | 72.73         | 55.88      | 0.00       | 10         | 0.00                         | 0.00                         | 0.00                         |

Source: Author’s calculations based on the field survey in the selected rural and urban areas of the district of Murshidabad during June 2012-September 2013.

### 4.4 Conclusion:

We have observed that among the different categories of women, the concept of empowerment is seen to be different. All types of empowerment including economic empowerment, social empowerment, educational empowerment, political empowerment, legal empowerment are there in different levels and hierarchies for women and women’s empowerment as a process is very much over-determined in terms of various exploitative
and non-exploitative class processes along with oppressive and non-oppressive gender processes within and/or outside family.

From our findings, we can observe that working women, who belong to low income group in the rural region of the District of Murshidabad, can be categorized as working women of serial no 3,9, 20 that we have constructed in our taxonomy in Chapter 1. These women face exploitative class processes both in market and within family. Simultaneously, they face oppressive political processes, non-cooperative gender and cultural processes in both market and within family. Here the women have been compelled to join the market to earn so as to supplement (low) family income and may render some security to family from economic suffering, but the family extracts the entire surplus labour from her through capture of her earned income in the market as well as produced use-value within the family. Woman under such circumstances could not be able to enhance her perception and may be caught in productivity trap that is working hard on an uneven playing field with unequal access to productive inputs. Further it is argued that owning income substantially enhances women’s voice and agency in the family. But if the gender processes which create the image of women as mother and obedient wives, then women may perform more feudal surplus labour without imagining the possibility of using their power and agency to resist their family decision. If the women are unwilling to change the non-co-operative gender processes and remain dedicated to produce more surplus labour for feudal family, then they may be categorized as silent adaptor. Working women in lower income group in rural Murshidabad are silent adaptor of patriarchal society.

Women belongs to low and middle income group in urban area of district of Murshidabad are generally represented the working women with serial no 1,10, 13 and 16. Their family have financial need. Women have joined market to earn income in order to protect family from economic suffering. Family may follow co-operative gender processes. Under such circumstances, even if women face exploitative class processes in the market, she can spend quality time within family to enhance her productivity, perception and voice so that she performs competently in market (Especially working women belong to middle income group in urban area of the district). At the same time she may face communist class processes where members of family encourage equal share of the performance, management and fruit of domestic surplus labour and all family decision making. Family
is the space where women come after a day’s work and may relax and regain/reproduce her physical and psychic balance in order to be able to perform in the market competently. Here, women can use their earned income according her choice. Her decision may be influenced by the cultural processes of co-operation, self-sacrifice, services to humanity, universal brotherhood and like. Here, family faces radical transition from feudal to non-feudal family structure. Women are empowered here. From the above mentioned taxonomy, serial numbers (1, 10, 13 and 16) represent these groups of women. Under, the above circumstances, if the family is in no need for extra income to be earned by female members, it can pressurize the women to quit the job and produce only surplus labour for family member against her will. The tensions and strains inside traditional households may drive women sooner or later to leave market and resign themselves to live within the feudal family. The communist family structure may re-transform into feudal family structure. In few cases of such group, No pressure on women to do domestic chores exists. But family captures her earning and she has no control over her earning from the public domain. Women are here silent adaptor and not empowered. Women of this type belong to category (6, 10 and 17) in our taxonomy. Working women with high income in urban areas are suffering from opportunities to take decision in family matter when economic condition of their family is strong.

Moreover, the working women in middle income group in urban area of this district also represents women with serial no 2. They belong to such family which do not have any need female income but looking for her active participation in market to raise the social status of family. Woman may be unwilling to join the market. In spite of having co-operative gender processes, woman is non-empowered as she lacks in this case to take her own decision about her life.

Finally, few highly educated working women who belong to high income in urban Murshidabad can able to take her own decision and exert control over other. They are empowered. But some time they exploited other member within the family. They are women with serial no 11 and 21 in our taxonomy.

Empowerment in liberal feminism refers to a certain standard process which offers a woman free (the nature and extent of the free can of course be put to question; one may ask, which decision is a fully free decision) decision making power, economic independence and political consciousness against oppressive gender processes at her living
and working spaces. Within the framework of liberal feminism a woman may be empowered politically but she may not be economically independent and vice versa. So, empowerment as a non-class process has diverse significations or meanings for diverse categories of women categorized either in terms of their habitat, or in terms of different income groups, or in terms of their levels of educational attainments. For example we have observed that women belonging to the high income group lack free decision making power within their family when compared with the working women belonging to the low income category. On the other hand, low income group women generally lack the necessary freedom of making decision on their own at their workplaces even though they are otherwise empowered at their living spaces. A working woman in the urban areas is in general more empowered vis-à-vis a rural working woman in the district. However, the different parameters of women’s empowerment do have diverse expressions in different contexts and also in terms of different categorizations of women as we have shown in this chapter. There may be a common ground of understanding as well as some common knowledge about ‘empowerment’. But our class-focused Marxist rendition has envisaged that women’s empowerment as a (non-class) process may take different forms and are mutually constituted by various class and non-class processes (including gender processes) within and/or outside family. This helps disaggregate the concept of empowerment, in terms of its class and non-class coordinates; we thus do not see empowerment as an ‘identity’; as about ‘someone’ who is empowered and someone who is not; we see empowerment in terms of overdetermined and contradictory processes of the flow of power as also of the subtle and sublime gradients of power.