



Changing Status Of The Women Of Punjab: The Dynamics Of Inclusion And Empowerment

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Women empowerment is a rapidly growing theme that inspires women to feel courageous enough do what they feel they cannot do. Women seem far behind compared to men when it comes to participation in different sectors, particularly the economy and politics. A woman is considered to be empowered when she obtains the placement in the world of consistent challenges and obstacles that dominate Gender Disparity, and challenge the existing trends of power at the level of society at the outset. The primary objective of the study is to explore and identify the socio-cultural challenges to women's empowerment in the State that hinder their capacity to make their life choices.

Study Area and Focus: Punjab has been reeling under the burden of a weak sex ratio since 2001. Besides being outnumbered, women lag far behind in terms of availability and access to resources and opportunities as well as inclusion in the economy.

Scope: A notable gender disparity can be observed in all spheres of women's interaction, existence and empowerment. The research intends to explore the key socio-cultural challenges that hinder the progress of women towards empowerment in Punjab.

Methodology: The paper adopts a qualitative research design to explore the selected phenomenon.

Findings: As compared to the national average, which is INR 1,67,995, Punjab's per capita Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP)¹ (at current prices) in 2021-22 is roughly INR 1,88,015. The state's sex ratio² for 2017-19 was 891, which is lower than the comparable national average of 904. Additionally, this high number is primarily attributed to urban rather than rural areas improving because of increased literacy, effective medical care, and state-wide awareness. The Female Labour Force Participation Rate (FLFPR)³ is lower than the national average, which is 27.7 per cent and 18.6 per cent, at 19.4 per cent and 17.1 per cent in rural and urban areas, respectively. Punjab is doing well in terms of total literacy rates. Compared to the national average of 72.9 per cent, the state has a literacy rate⁴ of 75.8 per cent as per the 2011 Census. The gender disparity in the literacy rate is 80.5 per cent for men and 70.7 per cent for women, which is similar to the national averages of 80.9 per cent and 64.7 per cent, respectively.

Key words: Empowerment, Inclusion, economic, social, political, challenges, visibility

Introduction: The Economics of Women's Presence in Punjab

The term "Women Empowerment" refers to the elevation of women's status with their arrival in the power structure of society. It recognizes women's power and capability to standardize their existence politically, economically and socially (Lone, H & Amin, W, 2017, p. 68). Empowerment is defined as "the process of challenging existing power relations and of gaining greater control over the sources of power" (Cornwall, A, 2016, p.343). This definition emphasizes the recognition of the women's ability to control the activities that can impact their growth and progress in a male dominated and patriarchal society.

Research Objectives

The research objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To study the position of the women in Punjab in terms of visibility and inclusion in work participation
2. To understand the sectoral participation of the women of Punjab in overall work participation
3. To understand the gender inequalities among the the Punjab population compositions in various areas

Research Methodology

The mixed method approach has been used for conducting the research which has been conducted through the use of secondary and primary data. The secondary data has been taken from the Census details for the years 2001 and 2011 besides sundry reports and Statistical Abstracts pertaining to Punjab. The empirical research comprising field data collection was carried out in the Majri block of Mohali district in Punjab. The tools of investigation used were questionnaires, Focus Group Discussions and observations.

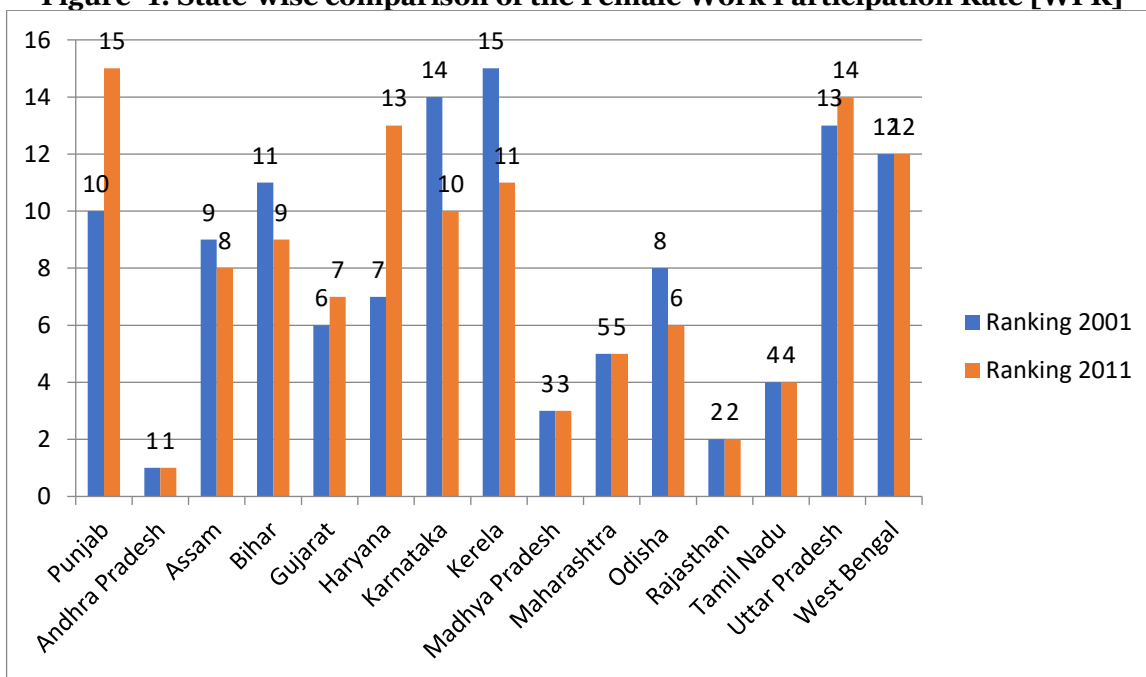
Research Findings and Discussion

Table-1: State-wise comparison of the Female Work Participation Rate [WPR]

S.No.	States	WPR 2001	Ranking 2001	WPR 2011	Ranking 2011
1	Punjab	19.1	10	13.9	15
2	Andhra Pradesh	35.1	1	36.2	1
3	Assam	20.7	9	22.5	8
4	Bihar	18.8	11	19.1	9
5	Gujarat	27.9	6	23.5	7
6	Haryana	27.2	7	17.8	13
7	Karnataka	15.4	14	18.2	10
8	Kerela	15.4	15	18.2	11
9	Madhya Pradesh	33.2	3	32.6	3
10	Maharashtra	30.8	5	31.1	5
11	Odisha	24.7	8	27.2	6
12	Rajasthan	33.5	2	35.1	2
13	Tamil Nadu	31.5	4	31.8	4
14	Uttar Pradesh	16.5	13	16.7	14
15	West Bengal	18.3	12	18.1	12

Source: Census of Indi 2001 and 2011

Figure -1: State-wise comparison of the Female Work Participation Rate [WPR]



Trends in Female Workforce Participation Rates (FWPR)

- In 2020-21, the Workforce Participation Rate (WPR) in rural Punjab was 17.9 per cent which is lower than the national average by 9.2 percentage points. In the urban region, it was 15.4 per cent which is marginally lower by 1.6 percentage points than national figures.
- In the rural region, FWPR has doubled from 9.9 to 17.9 per cent between 2017-18 and 2020-21. On the other hand, in urban regions, there is a slight improvement by 3 percentage points from 12.3 to 15.4 per cent in the same period. This also shows the convergence of women's participation rate in both regions.

Table-2: Sectoral Composition of the Workforce in Punjab

Category	Year	Female	Male	Total	Category	Year	Female	Male	Total
Cultivators	1981	5.9	37.0	35.9	Workers in Household Category	1981	4.9	2.5	2.6
	1991	8.7	32.5	31.4		1991	3.2	2.3	1.3
	2001	13.0	26.0	23.0		2001	7.0	1.3	3.4
	2011	9.9	21.7	19.6		2011	7.5	3.1	3.9
Agricultural Labourers	1981	25.3	22.1	22.2	Other Workers	1981	64.0	38.5	39.4
	1991	24.4	23.8	23.8		1991	63.8	42.5	43.6
	2001	17.9	15.9	16.4		2001	62.0	35.8	57.3
	2011	19.1	15.4	16.6		2011	63.4	59.9	60.5
Total	1981	31.2	59.1	58.1	Total	1991	68.9	41.0	42.0
	1991	33.1	56.3	55.2		1991	67.0	43.8	44.9
	2001	30.9	41.9	39.4		2001	69.0	38.1	60.7
	2011	29.1	37.1	36.1		2011	70.9	62.9	64.4

Source: Census of India 1981, 1991, 2001 and 2011

The gender gap in workforce participation has reduced by 7 percentage points in the rural region between 2017-18 and 2020-21. In the urban region, there has been a marginal decrease by 1.8 percentage points across the same reference period.

Distribution of Women Workers by Status of Employment

- As per the usual status, regular employment is available to most women in the urban region whereas, in the rural region, women are primarily self-employed across the reference period which is consistent with national trends.
- The number of women workers in regular employment has decreased from 64.1 to 54.2 per cent in the urban region. The rural region too shows similar trends, with the number declining from 30.9 to 20.8 per cent between 2017-18 and 2020-21.
- The number of self-employed women is increasing across both regions. In the rural region, it jumped from 47.7 to 49.4 per cent while in the urban region it rose from 30.3 to 36.8 per cent between 2017-18 and 2020-21. Alongside, unpaid family work⁵ within self-employment has escalated from 26.4 to 32.5 per cent and, in rural areas, it has decreased from 26 to 20 per cent between 2018-19 and 2020-21.
- The number of women employed in casual work is greater in the rural region as compared to the urban region, which is consistent with the national figures. The data reveal that the number of women engaged in casual work has increased in both urban and rural areas from 5.5 to 8.8 per cent and 21.2 to 29.7 per cent, respectively.

The proportion of women employed as employers and workers is higher in urban rather than than rural areas. Apparently the invisibility of the women's work in the rural areas is a palpable reality. Thus, the situation with unpaid family work is quite different with the numbers being much higher in rural as compared to the urban areas.

Findings from Empirical Research

The survey conducted to determine the status of the women in Punjab pertaining to their empowerment and inclusion status brought out the following results as discussed below.

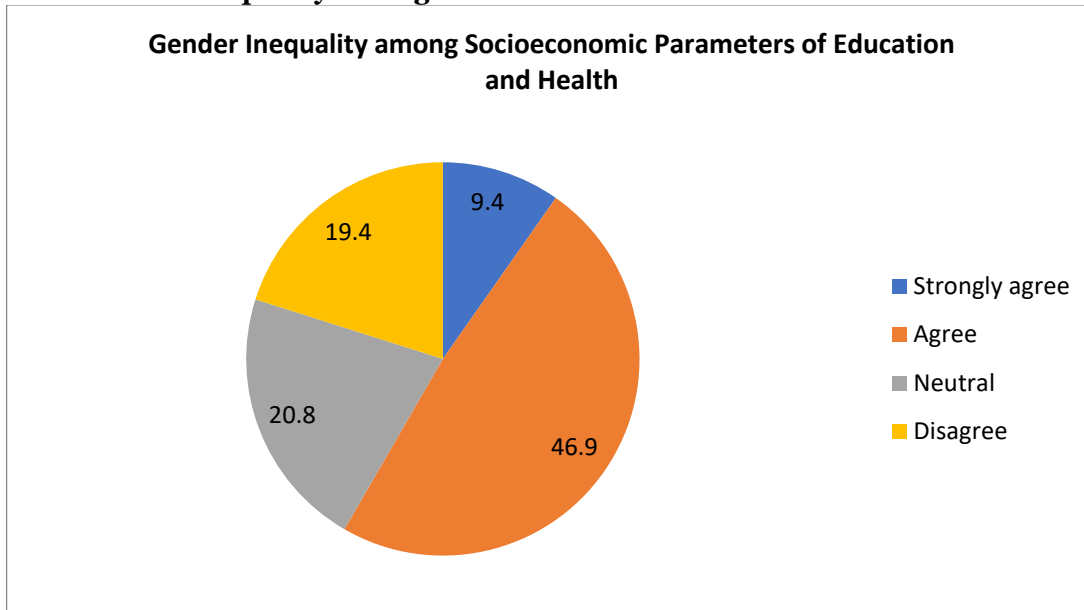
From the following Table-3 we can observe that, about 57 percent of the respondents agreed that the literacy and health socio-economic parameters are also considered in the gender inequality among women.

Table-3: Gender Inequality among Socioeconomic Parameters of Education and Health

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	34	9.4
Agree	169	46.9
Neutral	75	20.8

Disagree	70	19.4
Strongly disagree	12	3.3
Total	360	100.0

Figure 2: Gender Inequality among Socioeconomic Parameters of Education and Health

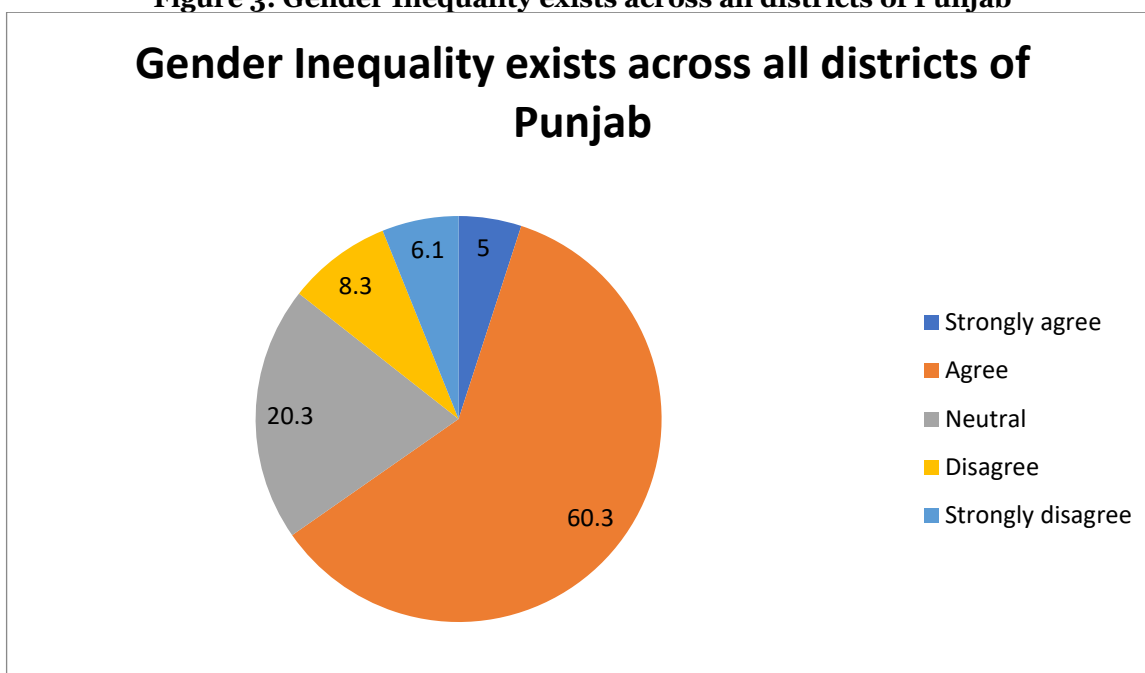


From the following Table-4 shows that more than 65 percent of the respondents agreed that gender inequality is apparent in all the districts of Punjab in recent times.

Table-4: Gender Inequality exists across all districts of Punjab

Responses	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	18	5.0
Agree	217	60.3
Neutral	73	20.3
Disagree	30	8.3
Strongly disagree	22	6.1
Total	360	100.0

Figure 3: Gender Inequality exists across all districts of Punjab

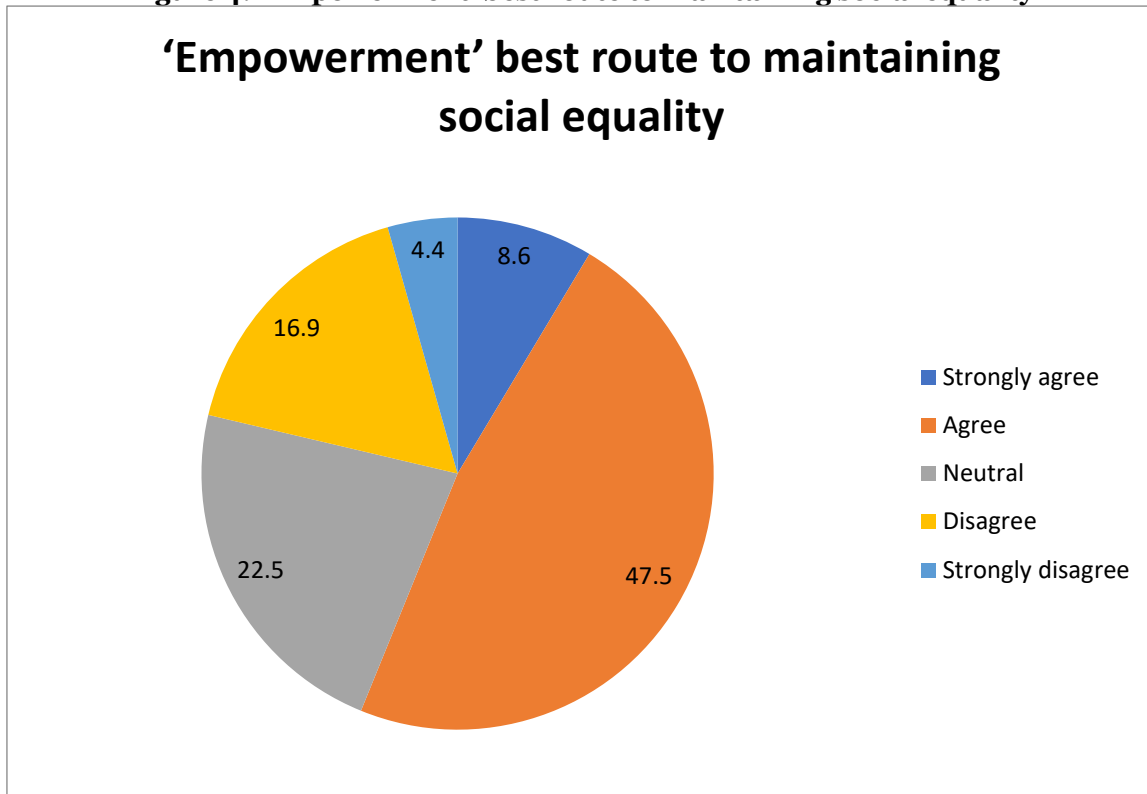


From the Table-5 we can observe that, about 56 percent of the respondents agreed that their in their opinion, “empowerment” is one of the best ways of maintaining social equality.

Table-5: ‘Empowerment’ best route to maintaining social equality

Responses	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	31	8.6
Agree	171	47.5
Neutral	81	22.5
Disagree	61	16.9
Strongly disagree	16	4.4
Total	360	100.0

Figure 4: ‘Empowerment’ best route to maintaining social equality

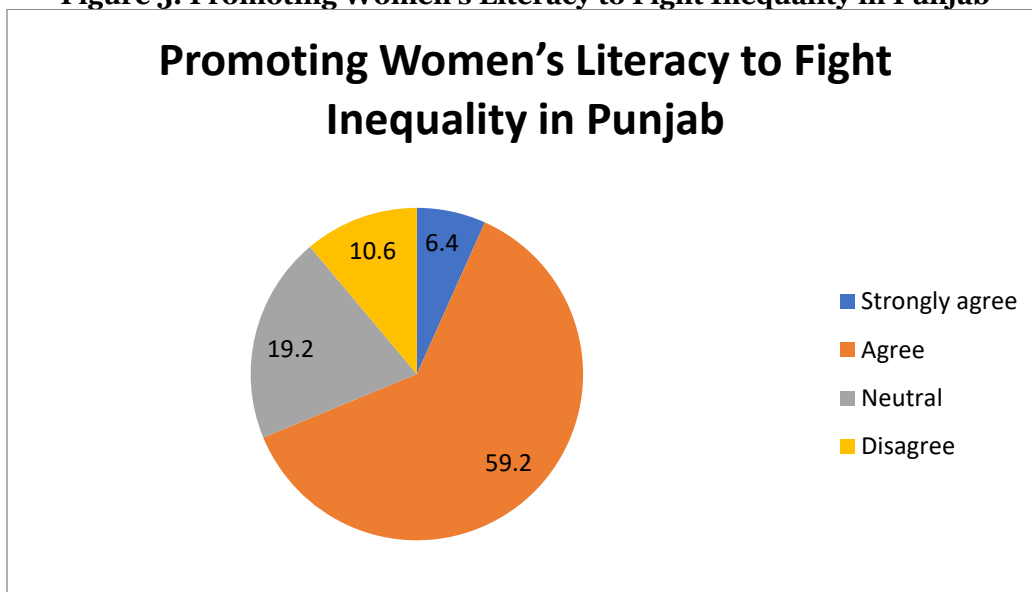


From the following Table-6 we can observe that, about 65 percent of the respondents agreed that, they think promotion of women literacy is effective in out casting inequality among women in Punjab. Following bar chart also shows taller bar corresponding to the same.

Table-6: Promoting Women’s Literacy to Fight Inequality in Punjab

Responses	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	23	6.4
Agree	213	59.2
Neutral	69	19.2
Disagree	38	10.6
Strongly disagree	17	4.7
Total	360	100.0

Figure 5: Promoting Women’s Literacy to Fight Inequality in Punjab

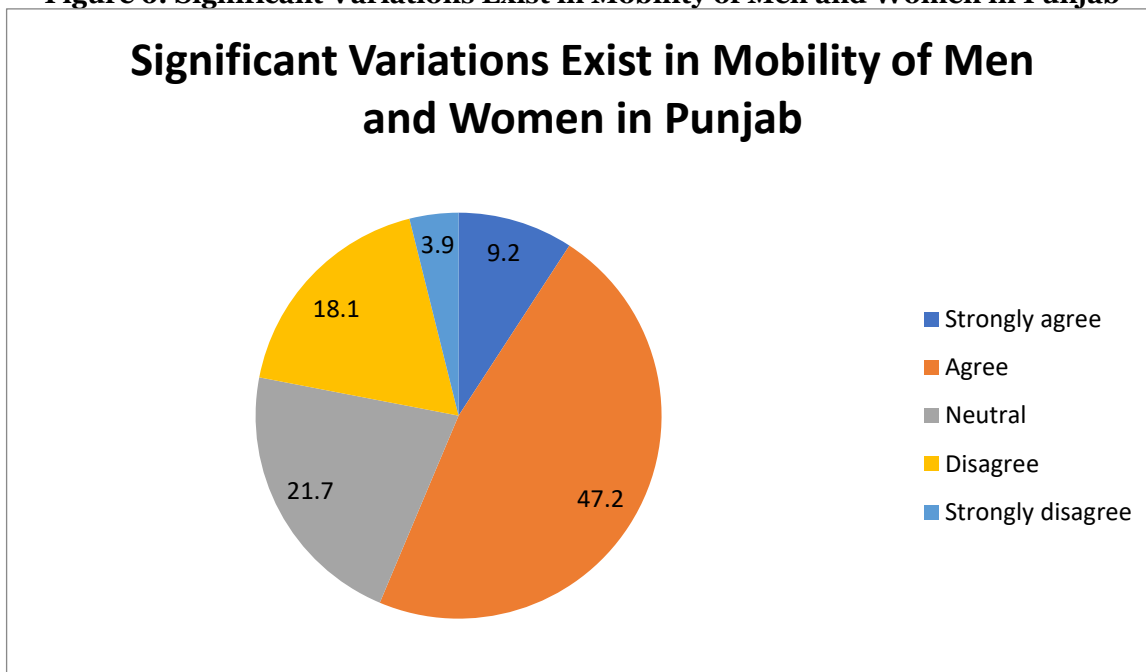


From the following Table-7 we can observe that, about 56 percent of the respondents agreed that they think there are differences between men and women in Punjab in terms of mobility. Following bar chart also shows taller bar corresponding to the same.

Table-7: Significant Variations Exist in Mobility of Men and Women in Punjab

Responses	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	33	9.2
Agree	170	47.2
Neutral	78	21.7
Disagree	65	18.1
Strongly disagree	14	3.9
Total	360	100.0

Figure 6: Significant Variations Exist in Mobility of Men and Women in Punjab

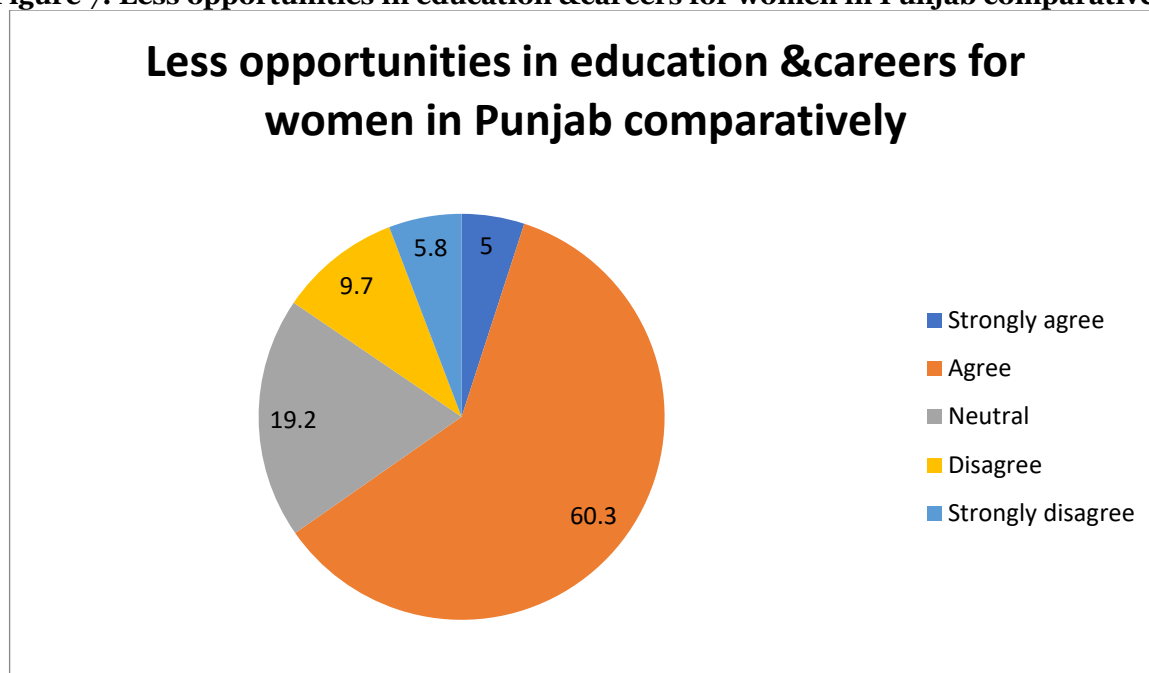


From the following Table-8 we can observe that, about 70 percent of the respondents agreed that they think women in Punjab have fewer opportunities compared to men in terms of job and education. Following bar chart also shows taller bar corresponding to the same.

Table-8: Less opportunities in education & careers for women in Punjab comparatively

Response	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	18	5.0
Agree	217	60.3
Neutral	69	19.2
Disagree	35	9.7
Strongly disagree	21	5.8
Total	360	100.0

Figure 7: Less opportunities in education & careers for women in Punjab comparatively



Distribution of Self-employed Women Workers in Various Industry Types

• According to PLFS 2020-21, 49.4 per cent of women in rural areas and 36.8 per cent in urban areas are self-employed. In rural areas, 70.7 per cent of women work in agriculture and allied areas, 21.9 per cent are visible in manufacturing and 3.3 per cent in other services.

Table-9: Women in Various Industries in Punjab

S.No.	Type of Industry	Percentage
1	Health	0.96
2	Education	0.76
3	Wholesale and Retail Trade	2.16
4	Manufacturing	21.99
5	Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	70.72
6	Other Service Activities	3.39

When considering the presence of the women of Punjab in various urban sectors as self employed women the details are given in Table-10 below:

Figure 8: Women in Various Industries in Punjab

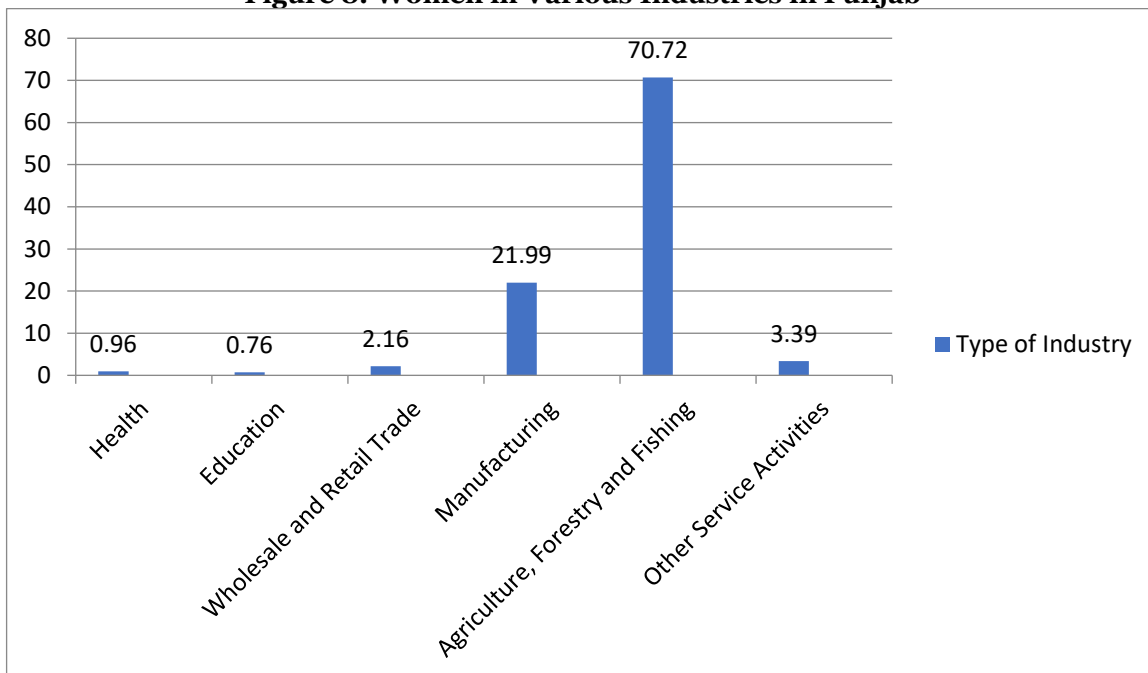
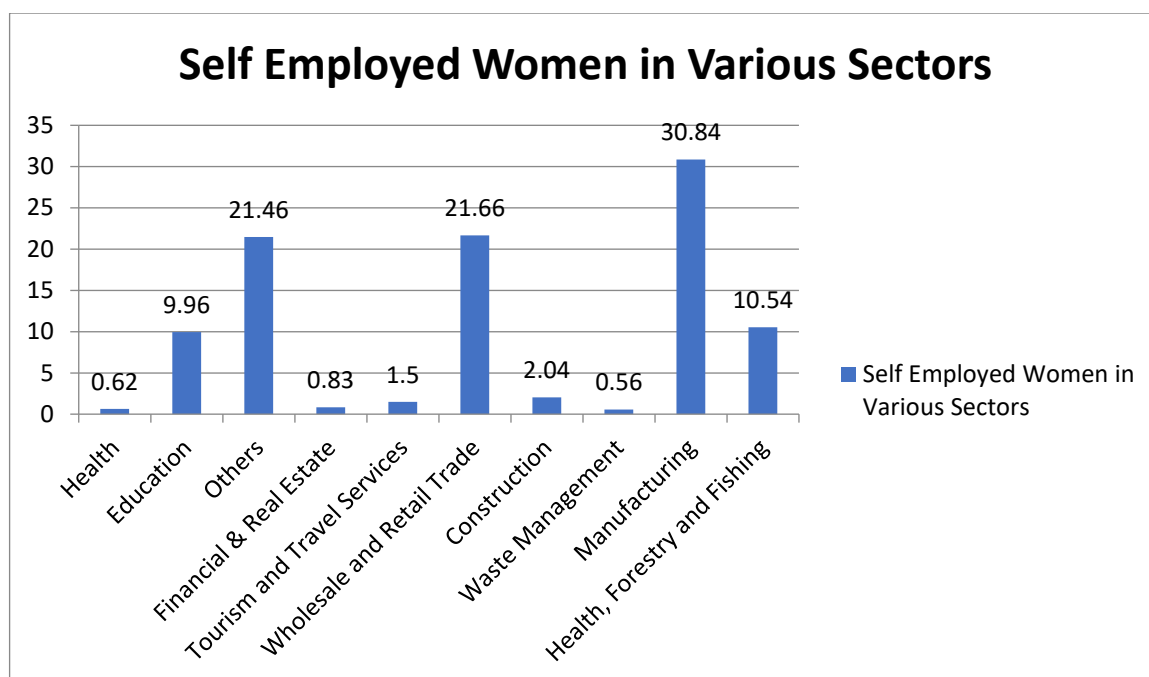


Table-10: Presence of Self Employed Women in urban sectors of Employment in Punjab

S. No.	Self Employed Women in Various Sectors	Percentage
1	Health	0.62
2	Education	9.96
3	Others	21.46
4	Financial & Real Estate	0.83
5	Tourism and Travel Services	1.5
6	Wholesale and Retail Trade	21.66
7	Construction	2.04
8	Waste Management	0.56
9	Manufacturing	30.84
10	Health, Forestry and Fishing	10.54

Figure 9: Presence of Self Employed Women in urban sectors of Employment in Punjab



- The urban region shows different trends with 30.8 per cent women are in manufacturing, and 21 per cent in wholesale and retail trade and other services.
- The sectors that employ less than 10 per cent women are healthcare and education, amongst others, across both regions.
- A deeper look into the non-agricultural sectors shows that, in rural regions, women are engaged in manufacturing, other services and wholesale and retail trade.
- In rural Punjab, 51.8 per cent women are engaged in agriculture, forestry and fishing which is lower than the national trends, followed by 16.7 per cent in manufacturing and the remaining spread across different industries.
- In urban Punjab, trends are different with 23 per cent women involved in the education sector, followed by 19 per cent in manufacturing

Distribution of Women Workers across various Occupation Types

- In rural Punjab, 35.2 per cent women are involved in skilled agriculture and fishery work. Around 32.6 per cent women are engaged in elementary occupations.
- In urban Punjab, the distribution is different with 26.1 per cent women engaged in elementary occupations and 23.1 per cent women are professionals.
- Across both regions, less than 10 per cent women are working as clerks, legislators, and technicians.

Table-11: Occupation Types Among Women of Punjab

S.No.	Types of Occupations	Percentage
1	Legislators, Senior Officials and Managers	3.87
2	Elementary Occupations	26.14
3	Plant and Machine Operators and Assemblers	1.49
4	Craft and Related Trade Workers	14.4
5	Skilled Agricultural and Fishery workers	3.5.7
6	Service workers and shop and Market Sales workers	14.06
7	Clerks	3.98
8	Technicians and Associate Professionals	9.36
9	Professionals	23.13

Figure 10: Occupation Types Among Women of Punjab

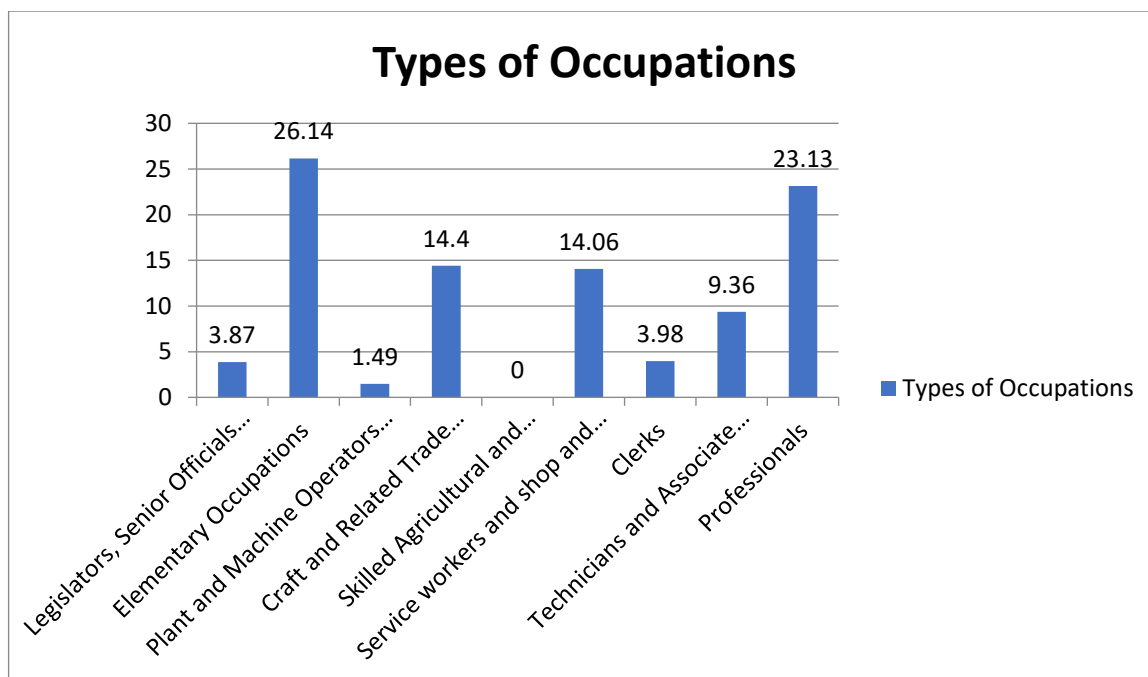


Table-11 gives the representation of the women of Punjab in the various types of occupations. It is apparent that they are fairly under represented in various sectors.

Distribution of Women Regular Workers by Industry Types

- According to PLFS 2020-21, 20.8 per cent of women are regularly employed in rural areas, compared to 50.2 per cent in urban regions (Figure 2). In the rural region, 35.1 per cent women are in the education sector while 31.2 per cent are involved in household activities as employers. The sectors that saw the greatest decline in women's workforce are education, manufacturing, finance and real estate. On the other hand, FWFP increased in health and household activities as employer sectors between 2017-18 and 2020-2019 .
- In the urban region, women are distributed similarly across sectors: 35.6 per cent are in education and 20.2 per cent household activities as employers. These low figures can be attributed to a decrease in women's workforce in education, manufacturing, wholesale and retail trade and finance and real estate sectors from 2017-18 onwards.
- The sectors that engaged less than 10 per cent women workers across both regions are finance and real estate, wholesale and retail trade and waste management, amongst others.

Women workers in rural casual employment

- PLFS 2020-21 depicts that 29.7 per cent women are employed as casual labourers in the rural areas (refer Figure 2).
- Around 77.4 per cent rural women are engaged in non-public work, followed by 17.1 per cent women in public work and 5.3 per cent women involved in the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS).

The number of women person-days under MGNREGS has been significantly lower than in other Indian states. In 2021-22, women person-days dropped to 199.7 lakhs 10 from 2020-21.

- Currently, 15.4 lakh women from rural Punjab are registered under MGNREGS, of which 60.8 per cent are active members 11. The low participation of women in MGNREGS may be a result of the registration process being complicated, the fact that women typically earn less money than men, more job cards are issued than jobs actually created, and the absence of child care facilities, which frequently forces women to work in the fields for longer hours.

Extent of work participation rate in rural and inclusiveness all over the state needs to be recognized across all sections and societal parameters. When gender – wise inferences are made among the various districts, the broader picture of inclusiveness or disparities for work possibilities for women.

Conclusion

While in the case of work participation rate of female workers, value of coefficient of variation (32.8 percent) is ten times more than their counterpart male workers' work participation rate. This reveals that women not only participating less than men in economic activities in Punjab but the participation rate is also largely varied across the district of the state. District level data show that rural workers work participation is more strenuous in the cotton belt of Punjab and districts fall in this area Bathinda, Muktsar, Mansa and Ferozpur reported higher work participation rate especially in rural areas. For female work participation rate surprisingly Mansa and Bathinda districts reported highest women work participation rates 30.5 percent and 20.9 percent respectively across districts. In male work participation rate, not as such variation was found because the value of coefficient of variation is 3.3 percent only, but variation in rural work force participation rate was also high for male workers (Kaur, 2012).

The majority of rural women in Punjab are self-employed and work in agriculture, fishing, and manufacturing with one-third working as unpaid family workers in low productivity jobs without social benefits. The number of regular salaried female workers is declining in both locations due to unsafe working conditions, less bargaining power and lack of awareness. The number of casual workers is expanding in both regions, with a minuscule fraction in MGNREGS due to lack of knowledge, difficulty filling out forms and registering, and demanding work that is sometimes difficult for women to execute. However, Punjab has undertaken certain encouraging steps in increasing female workforce participation rate and decreasing the gender gap, particularly in rural areas, but there is still a long way to go. The invisibility of women's work needs to be focused upon. The rural women of Punjab are the backbone of the economy but their actual contribution is not being acknowledged.

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