



# Geographical Study on Socio-Economic Status of Jute Mill Workers with Special Reference to Hooghly District, West- Bengal

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## *Abstract :*

Since from British period, Jute industries along both side of Hooghly River, plays a significant role in economy of West Bengal and India as well. Though in recent era, due competition with synthetic fibres, the industries are gradually declining, at the same time the increasing concern and awareness for Environment showing new light to this sector. Being a labour intensive industry, it's essential to have an intense look to the socio-economic condition of the workers as well as to address their problems for a better day. The present study has been done jute mill workers in Hooghly District of West Bengal and the major objective of the study is to identify the present socio-economic status of jute mill workers, their problems and prospect as well. The study has been done on the basis of collecting primary data by conducting survey on 80 jute mill workers along with secondary database. The ultimate analysis reveals that, the socio-economic parameters like housing condition, sanitation; wage rate, education, health facility etc. are not so progressing one. Besides there exist complicated labour and political issues the surely to be addressed.

**Key Words:** Jute Mills, Social-Cultural Status, Jute mill workers, Hooghly River

## 1. INTRODUCTION

With the increasing concern about the healthy environment and rising awareness about the effects of environmental degradation, in present era, eco-friendly products are receiving much attention. As Governments of India has taken initiatives to replace non-biodegradable products to bio-degradable ones, the materials like polythene bags, disposable plastic cups, thermocol or foam plates etc. are tried to be replaced by the items waste paper bags, jute bags, terracotta items etc. However, due to the existence of several factors, the restriction of these items to be popularized in the market is a common one and the written law in

favour of bio-degradable products, remained only on papers. Being an important fibre crops, jute has multiple utility alone with its biodegradable character. It is one of those crops, which is largely cultivated in India, and it has gained the economic importance as one of the profitable cash crops. During early period, jute is mainly used as packaging materials in several industry. It is used mainly for food grain packaging but with due course of time many diversified products of jute have come up in the market ranging from various useful daily use items to fashionable accessories, decorative household items etc. In the world of natural fibres production, Jute comes in the second position than cotton.

Being one of the largest producers of raw jute and jute products in the world, India holds the second largest position internationally as per the export of jute goods. Thus, Jute industry plays an important role in the national economy of the country in terms of Employment generation, contribution to the national exchequer by way of collection of duties and value-addition. Jute industry provides direct employment to about 2.60 lakh (till 2006) jute mill workers and indirectly generates additional employment of about 1.5 lakh (till 2006) people who are engaged in R&D work, manufacturing in machinery and spare parts, trade and other allied activities in service sector. Besides its technical advantages like strength and length of the fiber, good moisture absorption, dye-ability, good heat and sound insulation properties, the strength of jute primarily lies on its biodegradability, renew ability, eco-friendliness, However, jute has some disadvantages, like its coarseness, stiffness, high combustibility, yellowing and browning under sunlight, poor crease recovery, poor durability, poor wash-ability, etc. Considering all these advantages and disadvantages of jute, jute products still are predominantly used for packaging and wrapping purposes (Pratihar J.T, NA)

Although, India is a major producer of Jute products in the world not much progress has been made in the manufacturing process in jute industries other than cotton. Slow pace of modernization in jute industries has been due to insufficient availability of new efficient modern machines for processing jute.

In the industrial economy of India, jute industry occupies an important place both in terms of value of foreign exchange earned and the number of people employed. This industry accounts for Rs. 300 crores by way of capital employed, provides employment to nearly 4 lakh workers and exports more than 75 per cent of the production, earning nearly 5 per cent of the total foreign exchange on all commodities.

## 2 Literature review-

Before the study, several literatures have been reviewed in this perspective-

**Pal. A. and Chakroborty P. (2011)** discussed about the major reasons behind the Indian jute industries, their structures and performances. Here authors have attempt to find out the structural characteristics of the jute mills and their performance in the present era of globalization and the reasons behind its weak performance.

**Maheswari. Y. (2013)** raised his main argument for industrial harmony and its relevance for a healthy relationship between owners and workers of the jute mills, where the main problem is the industrial dispute and lack of industrial harmony.

**Pratihar J.T.** reveals the present position of Indian jute industries their import-export characteristics with their domestic production. Here the role of raw jute production in the world market and its position in

international market and the role of national jute policy-its aims and objectives have also been discussed here.

**Paul. A.(2012)** has mentioned the present scenario of Indian jute industry and its sustainability. His analysis is based on the present production and import export character and through these, he attempted to analyze the major problems in the sustainability of production system. This article also reveals the steps for future sustainability of the jute industry.

**Basu. T (1982)** has discussed the labour problems and shortage of workforce in jute industry. Here author tried to analyze the problems of workforce in jute industry which ultimately creating the problems such as political unrest and frequent lock out of the industries.

**Rai. A (1978)** has discussed about-The Trends In Jute Industry In The Years After Independence, Performance in the Late Fifties, Restriction and Regulation, Threats of Closure, Improved Export Performance and Export Boom of the Seventies. It further elaborates the argument on Monopolistic Restrictions and Growth, Constraints on Exports, Impact on the Cultivator, Impact of the Crisis.

**Sen. K. S(1983)** critically analyzed the structure of jute in terms of its productivities- capital and labour productivity, Extent Of Real Capital Expansion, Output, Value Added And Trends In Productivity, Total Factor Productivity, Wages And Salaries and also the gains of exploitation.

**Das. P (2011)** has discussed all about the Productivities of Labour and Capital in the Jute Industry, structural ratios in the jute industry and efficiency measures of jute industry.

### 3. Statement of the Problem

1. In India jute industry has remained one of the important economic sectors of income. With the passage of time due to several problems related to the availability of raw materials and age old production process, Jute industries failed to gain profits compare to other artificial or synthetic fibers.

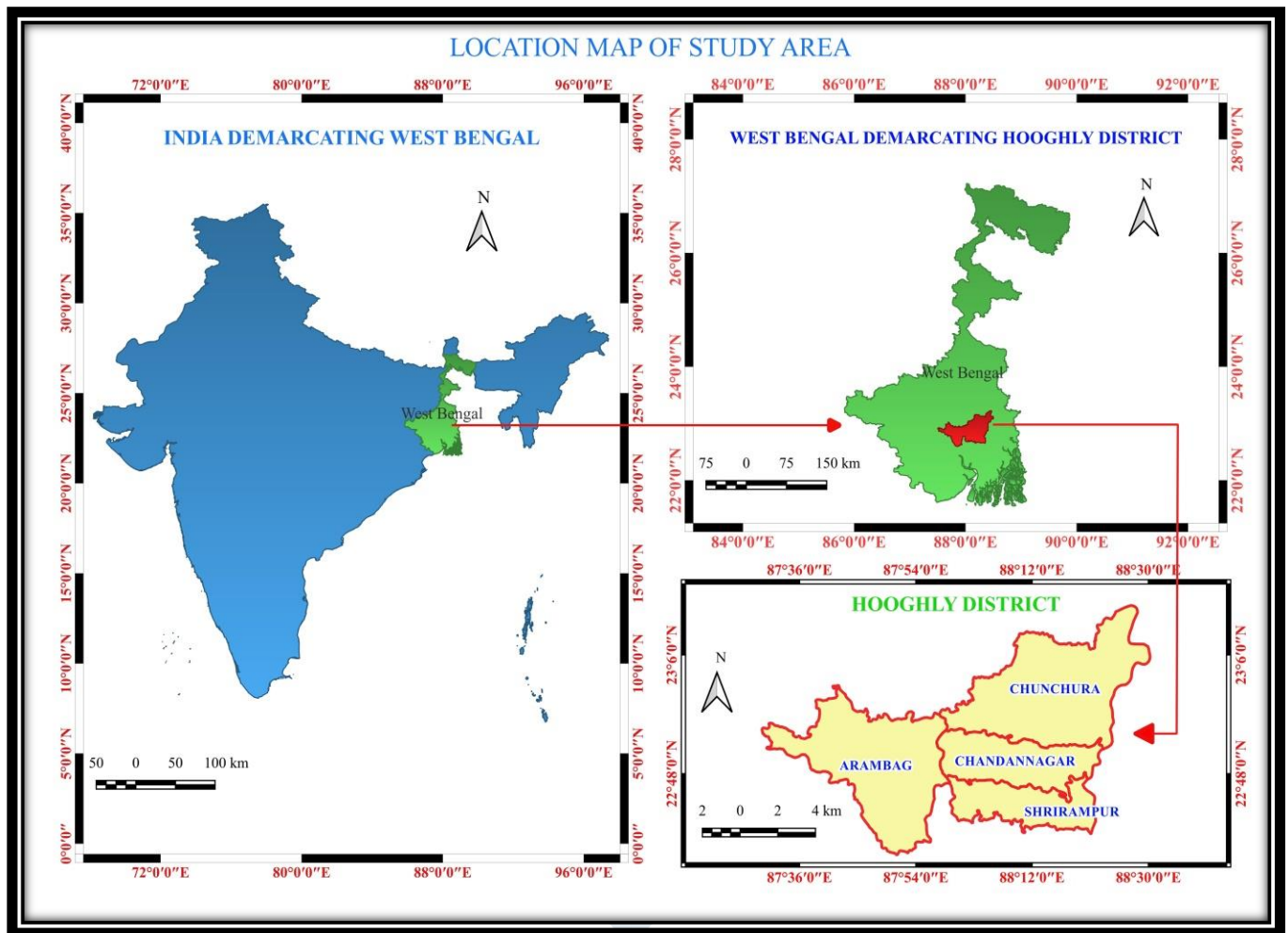
2. There are several socio-economic and political problems of workers which restricts jute industries to develop.

The present study aims to focus on these issues along with probable measures, which can help jute industries to revive and grow as important economic sectors of income in India.

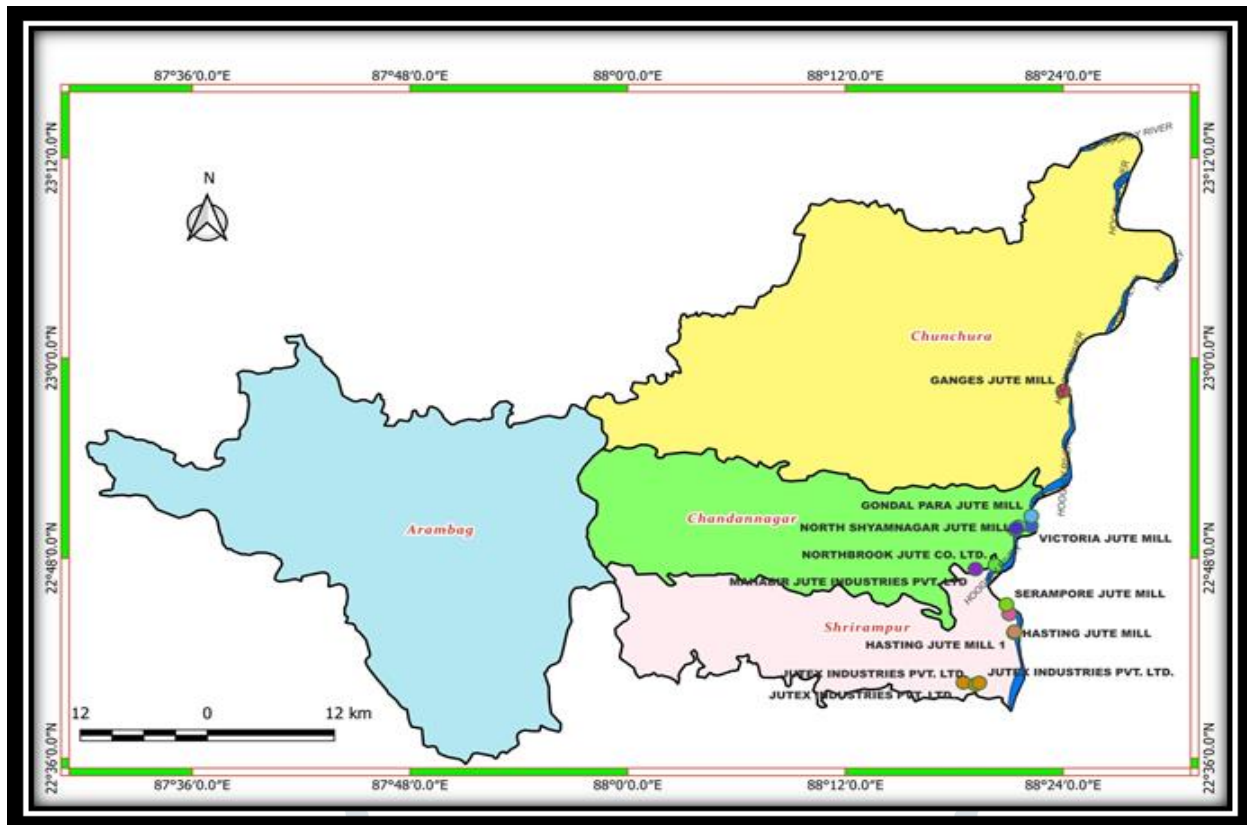
### 4. Study Area

The geographical extension of Hooghly district is from 23°.01'20" N to 22°.39'32" N and from 88°.30'20" E to 87°.30'15" E. The total area of the district is 31.49 sq. kilometers. It is surrounded by Nadia district in the east, Burdwan district in the north, Bankura in the west and Paschim Midnapore at the south. There are four subdivisions of the districts viz.-

Hooghly district of West Bengal is the most economically developed regions in West Bengal (according to human development index). It is a rich zone in both agriculture and industries. Most of the land of the district is alluvial in nature have an average elevation of about 30 metres and the average total of rainfall about 1,500mm which is ideal for agriculture. The land is favourable for the cultivation of paddy, jute, potato etc. The agro-based industries like- Food Products, Beverages, Tobacco etc. have been developed since long. Jute industries and Jute trade hubs are common in this district. There are many Jute mills located along the banks of the river Hooghly mainly in Tribeni, Bhadreswar, Champdani and Serampore etc in Hooghly district.



Map No.-1 Location of Study Area



Map No.2 Location of Jute Industrial Units in the District

## 5. Objectives

The present study considers the following objectives:

1. To understand the present socio-economic and working condition of the workers engaged in jute mills.
2. To underline the specific problems of workers regarding their housing conditions and at the work place.
3. To highlight the probable ways and measures for the welfare of the industries as well as for workers of jute industries in the sample region.

## 6. Data base:

The present study is based on two types of data:

➤ **Primary Data**- Primary data are collected during the field survey in different areas where different jute mills are taken as samples for the survey.

➤ **Secondary Data**- These are collected from different sources, like- published data from Jute Corporation of India, National Jute Board, Labour Departments of Hooghly District, National Atlas and Thematic Mapping (NATMO) etc.

## 7. Methodology of the Study

### A. Population of the Study-

All the jute mill workers of Hooghly district are the population of the study.

**B. *Sample of the study-***

The total 80 no. of workers from five different jute mills has been selected as the sample of the study.

**C. *Sample Design-***

Purposive sampling has been done to fulfill the objectives of the study. Specific mills are selected based on their production and size of the unit for an in-depth study. Respondents of the survey are the workers of the jute mills, both men and women, the officials of the mills as well as the jute corporation of west Bengal.

**D. *Method of the Study-***

The study was done by descriptive survey method where questionnaire and standardized tool have been incorporated.

**E. *Tools Used for the Study-***

To conduct the study it is very important to design the methods and required tool which will be used for the study. From this perspective, the present study was designed with the descriptive survey method, for which Questionnaire schedule made by researcher for analysing the present socio-economic status of jute mill workers and recommendations for improving the present Scenario. The construction of tool followed by expert verification, try out and final preparation of it and ultimately administered upon selected samples for collecting necessary data for it.

**8 Socio-economic status of the workers**

With a close look, it can be defined that the present socio economic status of workers are not much progressive one, rather it has been declined and deteriorated day by day. The wage problems, frequent lock outs, strikes by trade unions and other political issues made it worst one. As it is a highly labour intensive industry of India, the problems of labours are also complicated. Nearly one-third of the industry's net sales are considered for labour wage. Apparently there is no increase in labour productivity, but demand for wage is increasing in a regular fashion as per present economic scenario and demand for other benefit has become a routine feature. Thus the efficiency in functioning of the industry is completely relays upon the quality and productivity of the workers. The present socio-economic backgrounds of the jute industrial labours in West Bengal and in the study area can be discuss as follows-

**8.1 Types of workforce**

The workforce of jute industry can be broadly classify into three types

1. Labours
2. Official clerk
3. Managers or management department

At present, most of the employees of the jute mills are facing the problem of skilled and unskilled labour. Most of the units are lacking with sufficient officials as well as unskilled labours to run the same smoothly. It can be observed that most of the units due to frequent political unrest, lockouts are losing their employee or forced to cut down their workforce. The major parts of the workers are generally migrated from Bihar,

Orissa, Jharkhand and Uttar Pradesh by generation and now have become permanently settled in this region. Generally there is more than 80% of the people who are migrated here by generation. With the following diagram the existing workforce condition can be shown-

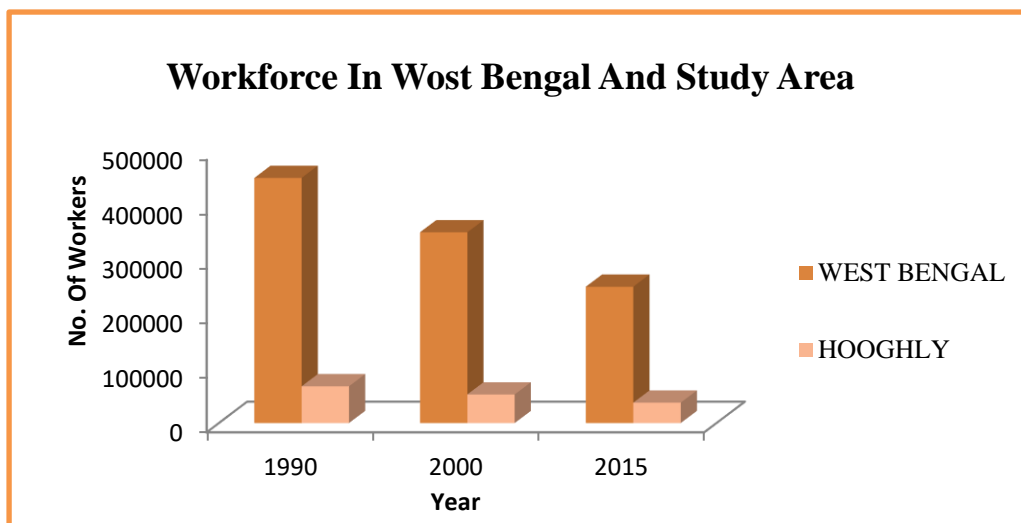


Fig. No.-1 Workforce in West Bengal and Study Area

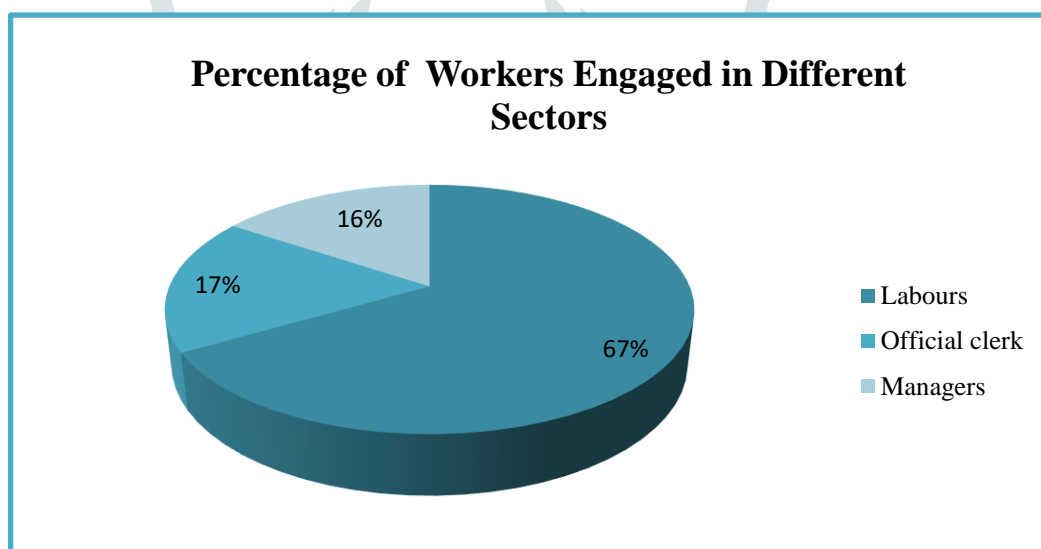
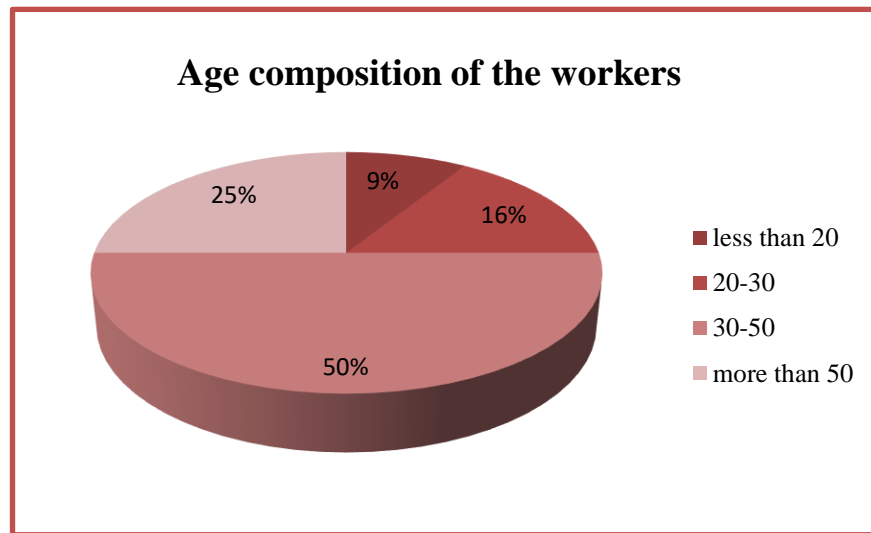


Fig. No.2 Percentage of Workers Engaged in Different Sectors

### 8.2 Age composition

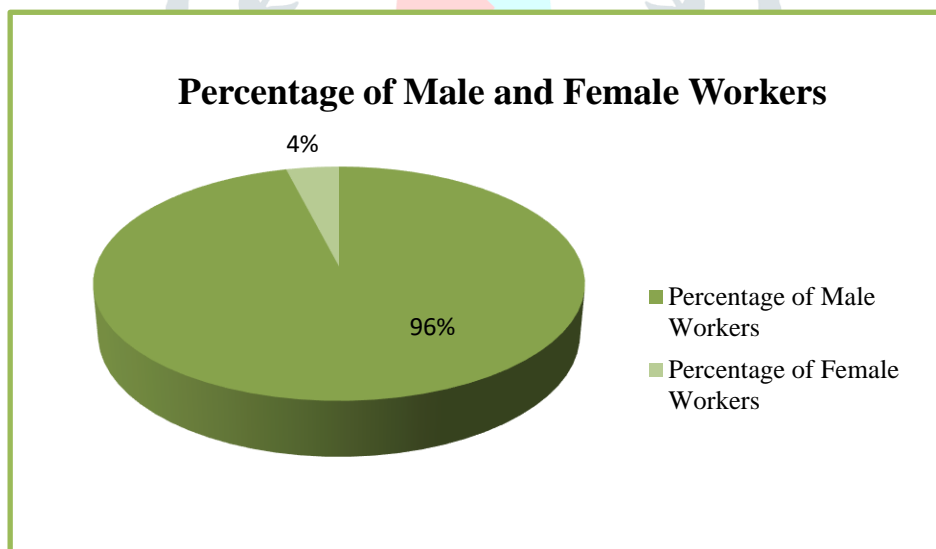
According to the survey in the sample jute mills a large segment of the workers (more than 50 per cent) belonged to the age group of 30-50 years. Nearly 16per cent of the workers belonged to the age group below 30 years while a little more than one fifth were in the age group of 20-30 years. The workers above 50 years of age constituted 25 per cent. So as per the primary survey it is understandable that most of the workers in the unit were relatively young.



**Fig.3 Age Composition of Workers**

### 8.3 Sex composition

As per the survey, most of workers engaged in jute industries are males. But in some special departments like spinning and finishing department most of the female workers are present for fine spinning of the fibers and women workers are specialist in this sector. According some studies, this relative increased presence of women reveals the fact that the production operations in jute industry are more suitable for women workers.



**Fig. 4 Percentage of Male and Female Population**

### 8.4 Average Monthly Wages of the Workers

In the following diagram (Fig.5), the average monthly wages of workers have been discussed. In the diagram it can be easily observed that most of the workers in these industrial sectors get the wages below 10000 Rs per month. Therefore, from this it can be easily observed that the wage of maximum no. of workers does not enough to spend their life smoothly. They are severely facing problem to meet their basic or daily needs for their living.



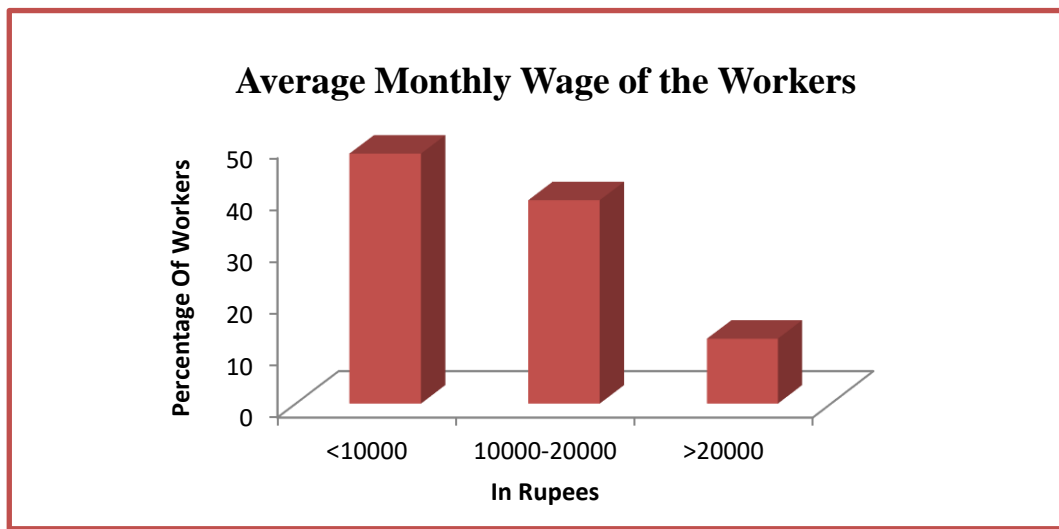


Fig. No. 5 Average Monthly Wage of Workers

### 8.5 Education

Educational level of the workers influences not only their perceptions but also their expectations and work behaviour. An enquiry was made into the educational levels of the workers. As per the primary level sample survey it is observed that maximum numbers of worker are either illiterate or can only sign their names. Most of the cases the no. of unskilled labour is much more than the skilled labour. Only the official stuffs of the industrial units are to some extents have completed their minimum education and some of them have completed higher education also.

### 8.6 Family Size and earning of workers

The main economic burden and the standard of living of the workers are very much related to the family size. So it is necessary to understand the family size of the workers including their dependents. The average size of the family is about 6-7 members which indicates the huge dependency on the earning member. So the maintenance of such large families drains away their entire income in meeting the basic needs with almost nothing left to take care of their other needs. From the primary level survey in the study region it can be said that more than 70% of the workers in this industrial unit having the monthly wage of only Rs. 8000/- 15000/- whereas his or her family member is more than 5-6. So it is very much difficult for them to carry out their expenditure for basic needs with the help of such little amount of wages.

### 8.7 Housing condition-

In most of the cases the general labour class of the industrial unit lives in the quarters provided by jute mills. Only one or two room is provided for the each family and no separate kitchen is provided. Besides that common toilet facility is provided for the all families. Electricity is also present there.

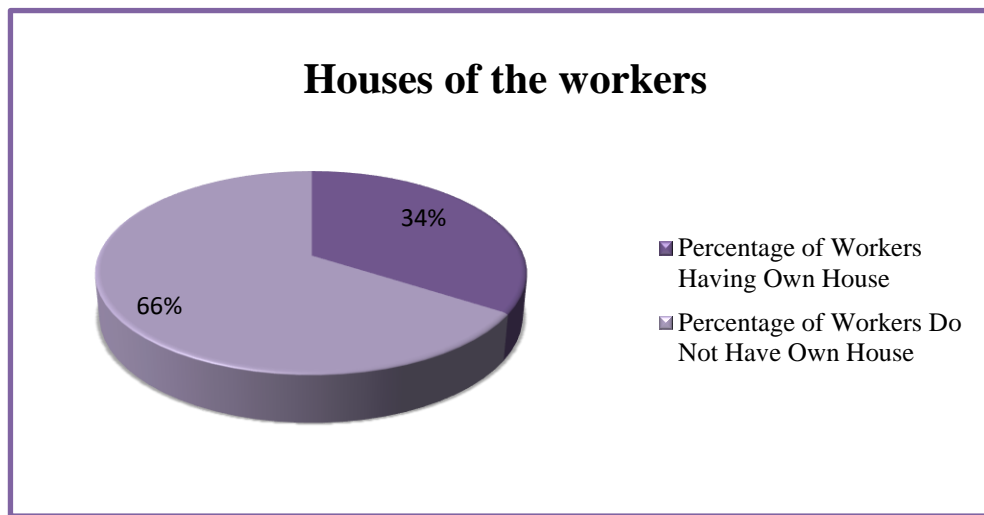


Fig. No.6 Houses of Workers

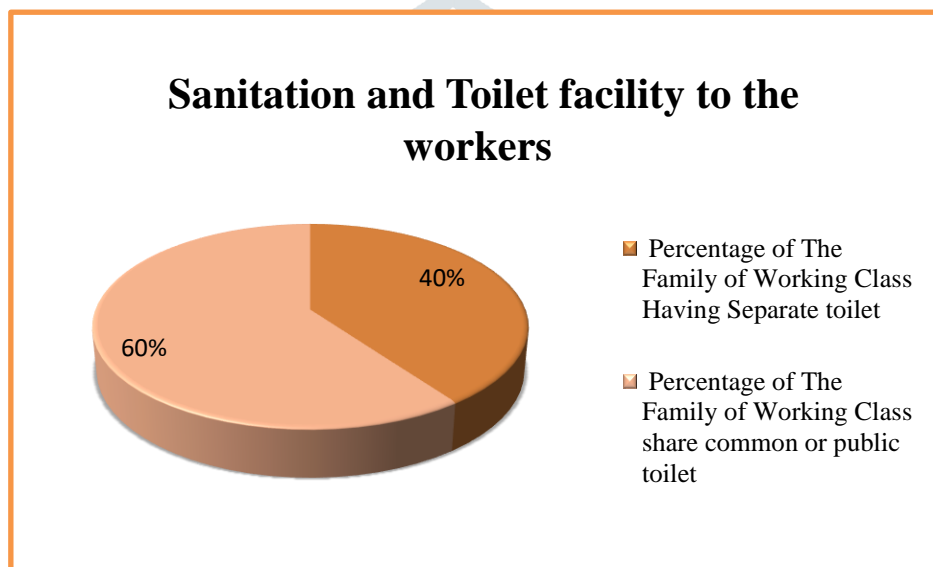


Fig. No. -7 Sanitation and Toilet Facility to the Workers

#### 8.8. Medical and other facilities

The workers have the medical facilities provided by the industry through ESI hospitals in West Bengal. Also they got ransom money from the industry if they got seriously injured during his working period. They also have toilet and drinking water facilities in the working place. Sometimes canteens are also available in the industrial unit. So these are some basic characteristics or the socio-demographic condition of the workers engaged in jute industries of the study area.

#### 9. Problems Regarding Workforce

Jute industry is a labour intensive industry. The jute mills of West Bengal have the workforce around 2.5lacks. The industry however is facing severe problems regarding workforce since from few decades. Shortage of skilled labour, political unrest, disputes regarding wage rates of labour and the poor socio-economic conditions of the workers are gradually leading to the problems like frequent lock outs, lesser productivity of labour and ultimately the decline of production and degradation in world market due to

insufficient supply of finished product. The present study has revealed certain problem regarding workforce which can be discussed as follows-

i. One of the major problems of the jute industries that prevail all over the study area is the lack of skilled labour in whole production process. In most of the cases it can be observed that the maximum number of workforce in the production process is either illiterate or can only sign. Only a few no. of workers are skilled and have the proper technological knowhow.

ii. At present the migration of workers from the neighbouring States of West Bengal has declined rapidly. During the primary survey in the jute mills of the study area it has been observed that the migration of workers from the different states of India to the West Bengal and their engagement in jute mills has been reduced drastically in last few years. Only the workers who are settled here by generation are the only migrated workers of the industries at present.

iii. Apart from this the socio-economic conditions of the workers is gradually declining day by day. In most of the cases it can be observed that the maximum number of workers of every mills live in the quarters provided by the mills are extremely in poor condition. Due to lack of repairing the present condition of the quarters is just unsuitable for living and in rainy season due to improper sewage system the water log situation occurs inside the quarters which makes impossible for living. Besides that all the worker's families have to share common toilet facility and only single room is provided for the family. Such socio-economic condition is not acceptable for a healthy working situation.

iv. Another major problem regarding the labours is the unsatisfactory wage rate of the labours. During the primary survey of this study it is noticed that the marginal workers of the different mills are very much dissatisfied regarding their wage rate. Also the bonus facility and the medical facility are not provided properly to the worker. But the mill owners blame lack of demand due to competition from synthetic fibers and plastic, coupled with poor implementation of the center's pro-jute measures for the mills functioning at less than capacity.

v. Medical and sanitation facility at the workplace are not satisfactory at all. In many jute mills separate clean washrooms are not available for workers. Besides, many mills do not have minimum medical facilities and amenities for any kind of medical emergency. The workers have to rely on ESI Hospital which is in limited capacity.

As the consequences of the problems the frequent lockout, political unrest etc. have become a common feature to this industrial sector which leads to the gradual decline of this industrial sector day by day. As a result this industrial sector is losing its importance in Indian economy as well as in world market.

## 10. Suggestive Measures for Overcoming Problems

- a. Proper implementation of the policies regarding welfare of workers should be incorporated.
- b. Besides that several welfare programmes regarding the proper housing and sanitation system should be incorporated.

- c. Along with these, nearby health centres, proper and improved medical facilities for the workers at the work place should be provided
- d. The different issues regarding the political unrest and labour unrest should be solved with the extra care. Frequent meeting and overall monitoring is much needed to resolve such issues by the management.
- e. Also the state Govt. of West Bengal should take some initiatives regarding supply of products by giving some orders to the industries like other state governments

## 11. Conclusion:

In the present world, the demand for the several diversified jute products is increasing which shows the future prospect of this industry. Though the jute industries of West Bengal is suffering from several interrelated problem, with proper initiatives and alternative way outs this age old industry can again revived. However, the government of India is trying hard to protect this ancient industry from losing its existing market nationally and internationally. It has set up a number of organizations, legislative councils to protect Indian jute industry from international competition by improving the standard and quality of the jute products. To receive this age old industries several strategies have already been taken by the Govt. of India like formation of National Jute Board, Jute Corporation of India, IJMA etc. and different policies and acts for the welfare of this industry. Also increasing the monitoring of this industry and solving the problems like labour and political unrest in this region has been incorporated.

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