



Socio Economic Status of Women Labourers in Bihar

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Abstract

Women grow half of the world's food but own hardly any land. They find it difficult to get loans and are overlooked by the agricultural advisors. Women are one-third of world's official labour force but are concentrated in the lowest paid occupations and are more vulnerable to unemployment. This trend has not changed for the past 50 years and is true for the state of Bihar as well. .

Key Words : Women Labour, Agriculture, Status, Grass Root, Wage Structure.

Introduction

"A nation would not march forward if the women are left behind" - Swami Vivekanand.

The socio-economic development of India and realization of developmental goals like Bharat Nirman, "Shining India or Mainstreaming of Grass Root Administration and Good Governance are not possible without participation and help of women workforce in India.

Women in India are engaged in a wide variety of occupations especially in the unorganized sector. Agriculture is the traditional sector of India and the role of women in this sector is significant. More than 80% of the rural women in India are engaged in agriculture and allied activities as cattle rearing, harvesting, weaving etc. They are also engaged in producing and selling a variety of goods such as vegetables, fruits, flowers etc. However, women labourers in rural India by and large remain unpaid or very lowly paid.

Women grow half of the world's food but own hardly any land. They find it difficult to get loans. They are overlooked by the agricultural advisors. Women are one-third of world's official labour force but are concentrated in the lowest paid occupations and are more vulnerable to unemployment. This trend has been followed in India as well and not changed for the past 50 years.

Women in India have always been discriminated against men in human resource development with utter disregard to their actual and potential contribution to the national



progress in general and agricultural progress in particular. While Our Constitution has given equal rights and opportunities to both men and women labourers in political, economic and social spheres and also prohibits any kind of discrimination against women; the situation on the ground is different.

In the five year plans , during the seventies, there was a shift in focus from welfare to development and women were started to be recognized as a partners in development. The eighties adopted a multidisciplinary approach with a special thrust on health, education and employment.A number of programmes were launched for the purpose under different sectors of agriculture and allied activities to enhance the participation of women . Recognising their role in the path of development in early nineties, the Government of India made a beginning in concentrating on training for employment-cum-income generating programmes for women to making them economically independent and self reliant.

Objective

The objective of my study is to find out the socio-economic status of women labourers in Bihar, their problems and suggest solutions for improving their conditions.

Hypothesis

My hypothesis is that the status of women labour in Bihar is not improving even in post reform era. They are less-paid and Gender discrimination is still prevailing in the state.

Methodology

The study is based on secondary data however it includes some inferences based on first hand observations .The sources of data are Economic Survey of published by Ministry of Finance for different years, Economic Survey of Bihar 2010-11, 2011-12; Reports from Gender Budget; Department of Finance Government of Bihar; Women Development Corporation and Census of India Report 2001. National Sample Survey Organisation data on Employment and has also been used.

Review of the Literature

Many studies have been done on wage earning in India and rural employment in particular. Studies by Krishnaji, 1971, Jose 1974 and 1998, Lal 1976 and Lakshminarayan and Tyagi 1977 are noteworthy. These studies have analysed rural and



agricultural wages which reported a significant rise in the real agricultural wages in several states. During the 1980's rural wages have accelerated quiet sharply in a number of poor states (Jose 1998). However, the studies conducted during 1990's revealed a reversal in the tendency of wage rise. There have been wide variations in the rate of growth of real wages across different segments of the labour market (Sen 1994), Parthsarthy 1996, Bhalla 1997, Sharma 2001, Sundaram 2001 and Himanshu 2005, Unni 2005 notes a different trend. She observes that during policy change the segment of workforce that benefited the most were skilled workers and there was increasing wage gap between men and women.

Socio-economic Status of women labourers in Agriculture and Allied Activities

In India about 76% of rural population is engaged in agriculture production and rural women comprise about 50% of agriculture force. There are more than 30 million women working in rural sector, 20 million as agricultural labour and 10 million employed in animal husbandry and related activities. In hilly areas of our country female labourers outnumber the male labourers. In family farm labour, women play an important role in all states. In all stages of crop cycle, starting from land preparation to harvest and post harvest processing, again they are indispensable.

Women in Agriculture (Census 2001) (Table 1)

Total Population	1,025.25 million
Total Women	494.82 million
	(48.26% of Total population)
Rate of Participation of Women in workforce	25.67%
out of total women in the country	
Rate of participation of men in the workforce	51.93%
out of the total men in the country	
Total Cultivators	127.62 million
Female cultivators	41.29 million (32.35%)
Total agricultural labour	107.44 million
Women Agricultural labour 1995-96	47.94 million (44.62%)
Total land holding	115.58 million
Land holding belonging to women	11.01 million



The participation by women labour in farm operation varies from state to state. For example participation rate of women in crop production in Haryana and Punjab is only 1.45% and 4.28% respectively. It is higher in Maharashtra and Tamilnadu i.e. 29% and 24% respectively and the rate is still higher in North Eastern region and Andhra Pradesh accounting for 70% and 96% respectively (Singh and Bhattacharya 1990).

Women in Agriculture (Census 2011) (Table 1A)

Total Population	1,210.85 million
Total Women	587.58 million
	(48.26% of Total population)
Rate of Participation of Women in workforce	25.51%
out of total women in the country	
Rate of participation of men in the workforce	53.26%
out of the total men in the country	
Total Cultivators	118.8 million
Female cultivators	35.99 million (30.3%)
Total agricultural labour	144.3 million
Women Agricultural labour 1995-96	61.47 million (42.6%)
Total land holding	115.58 million
Land holding belonging to women	--

From a comparison of these two tables important deductions are: in Census 2011, 65 percent of the total female workers in India is engaged in agriculture. Of the total cultivators (118.7 million), 30.3 percent are women. Out of 144.3 million agricultural labourers 42.6 per cent are Women. However compared to 2001, while the absolute number of women cultivators and labourers has increased as a percentage there is decline from 2001 in women cultivators (from 32.35% to 30.3%) and women labourers (from 44.62 to 42.6%). The first trend is explainable as it is due to population rise but the decline in women's labour force participation rate is a cause for concern and shows that the rise in population is adversely affecting the situation of women in the country.

Participation of Women in different Farm Operation in Bihar

In Census, 2001, the Work Participation Rate (WPR) is 32.9% for Bihar. The Gender gap is high with the female WPR for the state at 18.4% while male WPR is 46.3%. It must be noted that Urban females WPR in Bihar is 7% compared to all India figure of 9.4%. Poverty along with male migration is the main explanatory factor for increasing female WPR with majority of women being agricultural labourers.

The situation in 2011 is not much different. As compared to the All India figures of WPR of 40.6% for Rural workers Bihar is lagging behind with 28.4% participation, with rural women's participation in labour force at 5.8% (India- 25.3%) and Urban women participation at 5.4% (India-15.5%). The trend shows that not only is the female worker's participation declining in Bihar it is well behind the national level and shows the position of women in society.

Women labourers are engaged in wide variety of occupations especially in the unorganized sector. The table below summarises this .

Distribution of female workers across sectoral category and workers population ratio (Table 2)

Sector	Rural		Urban		All	
	1993-94	2004-05	1993-94	2004-05	1993-94	2004-05
Agriculture and allied	91.79	85.95	15.93	38.45	88.01	83.15
Mining	0.34	0.11	1.81	1.57	0.41	0.91
Manufacturing	4.00	8.12	22.10	18.10	4.91	8.71
Electricity, gas and water supply	0.03	0.00	0.39	0.00	0.04	0.00
Construction	0.23	1.18	6.22	3.65	0.53	1.33
Trade, hotel and restaurant	1.92	2.02	13.13	9.95	2.48	2.49
Transport, storage and communication	0.02	0.07	1.61	0.62	0.10	0.10
Financing and	0.00	0.00	2.10	0.68	0.11	0.04



real state						
Community social and personal service	1.68	2.55	36.71	26.98	3.42	3.99
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
Worker population ratio	17.25	17.92	6.88	9.19	16.03	16.97

Source:- IHD Estimates calculated from unit level NSS data for 50th and 61st round
When this table is analysed some results are noticeable.

1. The worker population ratio for women in Bihar is very low. It is ranked second from the bottom among the 18 major states with respect to female WPR in 2004-05. This further fell and Bihar occupied the bottom position in India in 2011.
2. In rural areas WPR in Bihar increased only marginally from 17.25 to 17.92 in a decade, but increased to 28.4% by 2011-12. This was mainly due to rise in male worker participation rate to 48.7%.
3. In urban area WPR increased from 6.88 to 9.12 and then to 44.1% by 2011-12. As compared to rural areas the change is in the same direction. However lesser number of workers are employed.
4. Overall, there is a slight increase in female WPR from 16.03 to 16.97 in 2004-05, but a significant decline thereafter.
5. If we see the development sectorwise we find that it is the agricultural sector where female participation ratio is higher in comparison to urban areas.
6. Agriculture sector is the largest employer of women with 92% participation although in 2004-05 it has decreased to 86%.
7. In financing services, the female participation in rural area is miniscule and in urban areas during 2004-05 it is almost less than 1%.

8. In manufacturing sector, there is some positive increment in urban areas,unlike than rural areas.
9. In Electricity, gas and water supply sectors, women participation is not so encouraging.
- 10.10. In 2011-12 the data shows that 51.7% of rural women worked as casual labourers as compared to 43.2% men. In Urban areas the figures were low i.e. 18.7% women as compared to 17.25 men. 41.7% of rural Women were self employed as compared to 52.9% men. Thus woemn’s control over land and resources appeared to be much less as compared to men.

Wage Structure

As far as wage is concerned the female regular workers not only receive lower wages but the difference is also quite stark, roughly 40% less in rural areas and 25% less in urban areas during 2004-05. The gender difference in regular wages has increased in rural areas while it shows a mixed trend in urban areas over the years.

Average Daily, Regular and Casual Wages and Ratio of females to males wages (Table-3)

Sector	1983		1993-94		1999-2000		2004-05	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
REGULAR								
Rural	17.89	12.81	58.48	34.89	127.32	78.61	144.93	85.33
Urban	25.66	19.50	78.12	62.31	169.7	140.26	203.28	153.19
CASUAL								
Rural	7.80	4.89	23.18	15.33	45.48	29.39	55.03	34.94
Urban	11.12	5.57	32.38	18.49	63.25	38.22	75.10	43.88

The data reveals that wages of rural women are suppressed. In urban areas, the effect may be less due to women's increasing participation in higher education. Women's work is always classified as marginal, secondary or subsidiary work. A study done by A. Das and P. Rustagi (Institute for Human Development : Status of Women in Bihar ExploringTransformation in Work and Gender relation - 2012) found that in Bihar the women from landlord family did not need to do anything. The females of labourers



family did everything, worked in the fields, fetched water, made cow dung cakes and engaged in other non agricultural activities. Apart from these, it was also found that animal rearing has increased multifold in Bihar. Collection of Fodder and maintenance of animals involved women.

The study also reveals that casual daily wages for non-agricultural activities from the village is in a range of 60-100 Rs. for men and Rs. 50-70 for women. Thus there is a wide disparity in wages between male and female workers.

Problems faced by women labour in Indian socio-economic Set-up

- (v) Traditional Value System :- In the patriarchal society men still dominate women in all walks of life. They cannot take any independent decision regarding work.
- (vi) Low Bargaining Power:- The perception of self worth of members within the household is an important component in determining their bargaining power. Many women do not even realize their deprivation due to their upbringing in this culture since their childhood. In intra-household bargaining therefore women fare worse than men as they are too much willing to sacrifice their own interest.
- (vii) Discrimination in wages due to gender difference.
- (viii) Lack of gender based technology training and extension services still exists.
- (ix) Women have limited access to modern technology, such as credit and training etc.
- (x) Due to migration of men, women have to bear the responsibility of children and family alone.
- (xi) Due to seasonal nature of agriculture, production there is lack of job security.

State Government's efforts and Interventions

The steps taken by the Bihar government can be classified into three categories:

1. Economic Empowerment

- Under Rural development initiatives , there was a focus to develop women SHG in a world bank funded programme called JEEVIKA. In 2009-10 in 176 blocks, 1519 Panchayats and 4819 villages in 27 Districts of Bihar 16367



women SHG were being formed. Savings worth Rs. 15.19 crores have been generated through this effort.

- There are 310 beneficiaries under women's development programmes who were trained under service sector programme in computer, housekeeping, beautician, training and sales management in Darbhanga, Gaya, Nalanda, Vaishali and Muzaffarpur Districts.
- 2654 Farmer families benefitted from income generation of Rs. 82471 through cooperatives for rice intensification in drought affected areas, 72 farmers benefitted through pure Potato seed technique, yielding and income of Rs. 174729.
- In 15 blocks collective farming has been started by the cooperative groups on 814 bighas of leased land.

2. Social and Cultural Empowerment

For social empowerment Balika Cycle and Poshak Yojana, Kanya Suraksha Yojana to stop female foeticide, Kanya Vivah Yojana and Nari Shakti Yojana have been initiated in Bihar.

Women's Development Corporation (WDC) is implementing "Mukhya Mantri Nari Shakti Yojana" in the state for programme managers in every district. In 20 women's colleges in 6 Districts, exhibition-cum-gender fair under "Sapno Ko Chali Choone", programme and Nari Shakri Utsav have been organized.

Aanganwadi centers, Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) under NRHM, Janani Suraksha Yojana, Priority of Women in NREGA are some of the programmes for upliftment of women labour in Bihar.

The most important step for empowerment of women taken in Bihar has been the reservation of 50% women's representation in Panchayati Raj bodies in Bihar, as opposed to statutory 33% all over India. This has foisted women in the lead role by making them the Prime movers of social development and change. The election of women Mukhia in the villages has improved the environment of working women in Bihar, especially women labourers.



The state government has introduced gender budget and started allocating a minimum of 30% beneficiaries are women. With a sex-ratio of 919: 1000, the gender gap in the state encompasses various dimension of discrimination and marginalization and more resources for gender equality are a step in the right direction.

Measures to strengthen women Status

ICAR's Krishi Vigyan Kendra have introduced Lab to Land programme to train farming women and organize them into Mahila Mandal which has transformed some rural women into becoming entrepreneurs. However more governmental efforts are needed such as increasing women's mobility in the social ladder through higher education, changing the women's labour pattern and giving women more access over control of financial resources like land and capital. The last important factor of production is technology and providing women with more technological education is likely to empower them more.

Further organising women into self help groups and training them in micro finance will help in transforming women's position in a very effective manner. Organisation of Mahila Mandal's Cooperative societies and discussion groups will be helpful in integrating women into the developmental process.

Conclusion

Indian Agriculture cannot improve without making women economically strong. To improve the position of women workforce it is necessary to improve their production potential by treating them as important economic factor of production , not as dependent member of the family. Institutional intervention on all fronts of the farming system should be made to provide them with productive resource around their vocations. Finally giving them more access to education, technology and land and capital will transform their position. All said, the most important improvement will be Human capital formation. As Milton Friedman wrote to Nehru, when called upon to give his observations on Indian Economy, “ Invest in Human Capital. Convert people from being liabilities into assets.” Educated , healthy , productive and capable people constitute national asset and this is the mantra of development of the women in Bihar.



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