

WORK ACTIVITY STATUS AND SECTOR ANALYSIS OF RURAL WOMEN IN BIHAR

DR. RITU KUMARI

The difference between organized and unorganized sector is based on the organization and nature of problems in employment in that sector. The difference between these two is not functional as between agricultural industry and services because these functions may be found in both the sectors. According to the Committee on the Status of Women 1974, “the real difference between them lies in the organization of productive relations, the degree of penetration of public control and regulations and recognition of data collective agencies and scientific investigation.”

Labouring women in the informal sector are an important segment on the labour force. According to an estimate of the National Commission on Self Employment of Women, 94 per cent of the local female work force operates in the unorganized sector. They do arduous work as wage earners, piece rate workers, casual labour and paid family labour. The coverage of labour laws has not benefited these women workers in many areas of wage, working conditions, maternity benefits and social security.

According to the National Commission on Self Employed Women the unprotected workers include all those who are outside the preview of the organized sector. By the nature of their activities, they can be classified under the following broad categories (a) home based producers including artisans and piece-rate workers, entrepreneurs of Micro enterprises paid and unpaid family labourers b) petty vendors and hawkers (c) contract labour and casual labour (d) domestic helpers, scavengers, washerwomen (e) those doing manual work like construction labour and those working in agriculture and other primary sectors (f) women engaged in processing work in traditional and nontraditional areas. On the basis of the employment status the aforesaid group can be classified under three categories:

- (a) the self employed
- (b) wage earners working outside their home and working inside the home perhaps in the forth of micro enterprises and
- (c) unpaid family helpers. The unorganized sector presents two problems in policy makers.

First an increasingly large segment of the working population in being forced to live at the margin of survival. Second given the availability of such cheap labour in the unorganized sector, employees are likely to divert more activities to such organizations. This would mean that the working class as a whole will in future receive an ever declining share in the products of development. No popular Government can afford to ignore these possibilities for long (Nirmala Bannerjee, 1985).

- (i) economies in introducing new technology in agriculture and proper farm management.
- (ii) nutritive values of food crops, animal products and fish and their importance in family diets.
- (iii) Basic principles of nutrition and how family diets can be improved by using local resources.
- (iv) raising of kitchen gardens for supply of nutritive vegetables throughout the year;
- (v) supplementing the income of family through subsidiary occupations like dairying, sheep, pig, goat keeping and poultry raising;
- (vi) wastage in the family and its prevention;
- (vii) child care and
- (viii) relationship between a small family and socio-economic development

More and more rural women need to be involved in self employment. The self employment in agriculture, village and small industries and retail trade and services should be expanded. Self

employment is also conducive to the development of individual initiative and entrepreneurial talent and offers greater personal freedom. Self employment would enable women to combine their dual role of producer and home maker without stress. The majority of self employment women will engage in home based productive activity. Also home based self employment for women by avoiding increasing interaction between the sexes, would not disturb the institution of family.

Till the 1980s all over the world, on an average, women were found to earn about 60 per cent of the male wage for full time work. The situation has not changed much over the years. Some believe that the wage differential is due to differences in human capital; others attribute it to differences in the social positions of men and women. This means that the difference is not market determined. Even after adjustment for differences in hours of work, age and schooling, the earning of women do not equal those of men. The wage differential is there in respect of both agricultural and non agricultural operations.

It is a pity that women as wage earners in agricultural sector could not claim equal wages with their male counterparts. The reason given for this is that the output of women is lower than that of men. But, studies show that in certain operations women are admittedly more efficient.

However, it is observed that the average daily earnings of female child labour in agriculture were slightly higher than those of male child labour, probably because girls could do the better paid skilled tasks of women (e.g. transplanting) but boys could not do those of men (e.g. ploughing)

MEASURES NEEDED

The key to equality between men and women is the raising of the economic status of the latter. This is more true of the rural women. The rural women can think of raising their socio economic status only when they

are educated. The programme for education of rural women should include information on.

- i) specific agricultural practices;

workers engaged in cleaning sewers may be killed by the noxious fumes that at, often accumulated in the drains. This happens when the workers are not equipped with protective overalls or masks or when the mandatory test to ascertain the level of toxic gases in the drain are not conducted.

The conditions of women workers worsened because of low literacy. According to the 1991 population census, female literacy rate was 39.42 as against 63.86 per cent for men. In absolute terms there were 197.3 million female illiterates while the number of male illiterates was 126.7 million. There has been further deterioration in the sex ratio (the number of females per thousand males) to 929 in 1991 from 934 in 1981. The disparity between male and female population has widened from nine million to 31 million during the period 1981 to 1991. In some countries like South Africa, in the past the most overworked and under paid section of the society. But, the African women did play a crucial role in the liberation struggle.”

The new agricultural technology has adversely affected women’s participation in farm activities. The committee on the status of Women in India (1975) has observed,”.....another problem that affects women’s participation in agriculture is the introduction of modern methods of cultivation, which is resulting in a gradual displacement of women and shrinking of their activities.” Also, the new agricultural technology has not eliminated seasonality of work. On the other hand, it has only increased the extent of seasonal fluctuations in female.

The World Bank made certain recommendations in its Annual Report in 1989 to improve the productive capacity of women in India. These include provision of direct access to institutional credit;

- orientational and operational modifications in the agricultural research and agricultural extension systems;
- the promotion of direct membership in viable produce cooperatives; and
- organization of women into groups that provide them a legitimate forum beyond the private domestic sphere and a more ; audible voice in demanding services and inputs.

In the rural context, organization of the poor assumes special significance as the unorganized labourers are the victims of poverty and unemployment. It has been rightly observed, "Organisations of the rural poor is required to secure their full participation in the execution of government plans for integrated rural development. This is by itself deemed capable to solve the problem of unemployment and poverty. It also would guarantee the effective functioning of an alternative delivery system to help the poor population directly.

There is also need for strengthening grassroots initiatives as may provide a potential for change even though their wide impact remains to be seen. More productive employment on a durable basis appears to be the only panacea to the pitiable plight of the unorganized. Women workers who can seek better treatment only through collective action. The opportunities for wage employment are limited. Hence, problems of women workers in the self employment sector deserve immediate attention.

WOMEN WORKERS: MAJOR PROBLEMS

As per the census of 1981, only 14.44 per cent of women in the country are in gainful employment, a majority of whom remains confined to traditionally 'feminine' fields, which are often fields of low prestige, low economic returns and with poor scope for self development and upward mobility. A general under enumeration of women's involvement in gainful activity is due to confusion regarding the demarcation of 'domestic' from

productive work. In some countries women work in agriculture, animal husbandry and marketing water and fuel carrying, grain grinding etc. is completely ignored. Also, women's involvement in the cleaning and grading of agricultural produce contributes to the value added of articles sold in the market. Yet such work is treated as domestic work. Statistics relating to employment by status shows that between 1972 and 1988 the share of women in self employment and in regular employment has declined. The share of women in casual employment has increased in rural and urban areas. Female employment in India is getting increasingly casualised. This phenomenon may be due to two reasons. First, employers recruit women as casual workers in order to minimize the financial commitment. Second with the increase in the sub contracting of the production process, the employment in general and that of women in particular, is being gradually transferred from the organized to the unorganized sector. Most unorganized workers work under ad-verse conditions. For instance,