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INCLUSIVE GROWTH AND THE INFORMAL SECTOR: A STUDY OF THE FEMALE DOMESTIC WORKERS IN SOUTH 24 PARGANAS, WEST BENGAL

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ABSTRACT

The inclusive growth agenda can reduce poverty, improve quality of life and ensure that all segments of the society benefits from the globalisation led economic growth of the country. Inclusive is a very broad concept and covers economic, social and cultural aspects of development. Generally, "Inclusive Growth" is synonymous with "Equitable Development" with benefits accruing to every section of society. In the rural areas of West Bengal, however, sluggish agricultural growth and limited development of the rural non-farm sector raises rural poverty, unemployment and underemployment. Further, lack of employment opportunities in the rural areas lead to either no work or increase the number of marginal and casual workers in the labour force. This drives large number of people to the cities for work and livelihood. Under such circumstances even illiterate and unskilled women are forced to move out in search of survival. The hypothesis is that women work to make up the difference between subsistence requirements and the total earnings of the family. This study provides an understanding on the availability of job opportunities for such women in the urban informal sector, especially in the domestic labour market and how far the remittances received by a domestic labour provides sustenance to her distressed family. Further the paper would discuss about the benefits of the recent social security schemes directed towards female domestic workers as a part of the inclusive growth agenda.

KEYWORDS

domestic workers, inclusive growth, informal sector, millennium development goals.

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the last few years, the world economy has seen an unprecedented economic growth, particularly in the developing countries. Globalization has influenced the world in several spheres such as economic, financial, industrial, technological, political, cultural, ethical etc. Globalisation is often perceived as having positive impacts on living standards, although the gains are not automatic, and can even be negative for some segments if they are left out from the growth process. In the last two decades, India has emerged as an important factor in the globalisation process with growth emerging around 7% during 1993-94 to 2009-10. Yet India continues to have the largest number of poor in the world (approximately 300 million). Analysing the evolution of the drivers behind that process and its impacts on poor people's lives is crucial to a better understanding of the overall economy as well as of living standards of the poor people.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

At the micro-level, diversification of income sources and occupations are important tools for understanding the complexities of people's livelihoods and their strategies. Time devoted to, as well as the income share derived from such activities are substantial parts of the lives of rural households. There are a handful of studies that focus on the role of women workers in development process, as also, diversification of income sources and occupations that are important tools for understanding the complexities of people's livelihoods and their strategies. Literatures are available on the feminisation and increasing demand for domestic workers.

Nirmala Bannerjee (1978) brought forward some aspects of role of women workers in India's development since independence. She highlighted the changing economic and social role of poor women in India and showed domestic service as a market where wages are determined by what the customer can afford to pay. It was further explained that in most cases poor women work to make up the difference between subsistence requirements and the total earnings of the family. Given the size of the family there is an absolute minimum below which life becomes impossible. This gives the women some kind of a target real income to work for.

Bridget Anderson (2001) explores the experiences of migrant domestic workers in Europe and mentions that ageing population, nuclear families and the increasing number of women entering the paid workforce outside home are reasons for high and rising demand for domestic workers.

Ananya Roy (2007) highlights that the inability of agriculture to provide adequate income throughout the year is one of the root cause for the city ward movements of rural residents, working mainly in the city's informal sector or in informal jobs in the formal sector.

Deepita Chakravarty and Ishita Chakravarty (2010) explains how the domestic labour market, a traditionally male domain, became segregated both by gender and age in post partition West Bengal.

Paul et.al (2011) covered themes like nature of services, work profile of the domestic workers, health awareness etc. and argued why it is important to create a comprehensive social security system for domestic workers in India.

Kamala Kanta Mohapatra (2012) aimed at understanding the degree of vulnerability of the women workers in informal sector in India. Given their vulnerable status, income generation alone may not improve the socio-economic status of women attached to the informal sector.

K John (2013) enumerates the push and pull factors that drive and attract a rural woman to opt for domestic work and highlights the vulnerabilities of such workers.

M Madumathi (2013) conceptualises domestic services as major informal sector activity which assumes importance due to transformations in class relations and the development of new life style combined with unprecedented mobility of labour.

Ajoy Sharma (2014) studies the issue of commuting choice of workers across rural-urban boundary through the lenses of changing urban scenario and relocation of activities in rural and urban areas in the Indian context.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

In light of the growth and expansion of the Suburban areas surrounding the major cities of West Bengal, this study is carried out to identify the employment option for the illiterate and unskilled women workers who are forced to move out in search of survival. The study would also focus on some fundamental issues in the changing life style of this rural people and the gap that persists in the gamut of employment with inclusive growth.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Primary data has been collected from the field survey of 100 respondents. Secondary data were collected from different sources like the census of India and Planning Commission. The questionnaire was framed in such a pattern which enabled us to get diversified responses to all the questions

5. MACRO-ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE IN INDIA

India has vast diversity in the areas of language, religion, culture and social norm. Since the inception of India as an independent country, population explosion has been projected as prime concern of the state. A very important historical characteristic that severely influenced the development of India was "British Colonial Legacy". Soon after independence, Indian leaders were thinking of strategies of economic development the country should follow. The top priority of the Indian

Government was to have rapid growth in stagnant economy. India decided to follow a socialistic pattern of society, which meant growth with social justice, self-reliance and poverty alleviation. India laid stress on rapid industrialization and planned for a shift from its historic agrarian-based economy to a mixed economy with sectoral balance. The fall-out was creation of heavy industries and larger role of public sector. In the process, the Government neglected rural economy and rural population which is almost 2/3 of the total population. In 1991 India introduced economic reforms. Globalization, industrialization, liberalization and privatization led to tremendous economic growth (Nagaraj, 2008) as shown in Table-1.

TABLE- 1: MACROECONOMIC PERFORMANCE IN POST 1991 YEARS

Year	Real GDP Growth	Unemployment (in Millions)
1991-92	0.96	36.30
1994-95	7.3	36.74
2001-02	5.4	33.53
2004-05	7.0	34.30
2009-10	8.6	28.10
2011-12	6.7	-

Source: Planning Commission, Government of India

India entered the new millennium with a strong and robust financial outlook (Bhaduri, 2007). Analysis on data connected to post-liberalization performance for more than a decade in India show that the real GDP growth has increased from 0.96 in 1991-92 to 6.7 in the year 2011-12. Unemployment has reduced to a large extent in these years.

But the story of growth in the post liberalization era carries the characteristic feature of urban centric saturation. Exclusion has been identified as the primary reason for unequal distribution of the benefits of growth. Though unemployment rates show a decreasing trend the quality of employment is very low. The prevalent situation in the form of social, spatial and regional disparities has been aggravated due to unplanned approach.

6. EMPLOYMENT PROBLEM IN INDIA

Globalisation opens up new opportunities but the ability to accept them depends on a number of factors. In India there is the prevalence of mass poverty and unemployment.

TABLE-2: NUMBER OF POOR (in million)

Year	Number (in million)
1973-74	321
1983	323
1993-94	320
2004-05	302

Source: Planning Commission

Though there has been a reduction in the number of poor people in India, still more than 300 million are below the poverty line. To get positive effects of globalisation these marginalised or left out section of population should be included in the growth process. Inclusive globalization would lead to poverty reduction, decrease in underemployment and unemployment problem, creation of global knowledge systems and global value chains, and would ensure that marginalized communities have access to essential services (Sen, 2000). Inclusion thus implies that the quality of life should change.

It is worth examining the employment structure of the economy which shows that though there has been a decrease in employment in the agricultural sector, employment in the secondary and tertiary sectors has increased over the years.

TABLE-3: EMPLOYMENT IN DIFFERENT SECTORS (in percentage)

Sector	1960-61	2004-05
Agriculture	75.9	56.4
Industry	10.6	18.2
Tertiary	13.5	25.4
Total	100	100

Source: Planning Commission, Government of India

Though employment has increased over the years but the quality is low. The demographic pressures as manifested in excess supply of labour in relation to demand for productive employment opportunities are responsible for absorption of labour in low productivity activities. There are 458 million workers in India in 2004-2005. Out of this 423 million workers are informal/unorganised workers (92%). Thus the quality of employment is a major problem.

7. DOMESTIC WORK IN INDIA

According to Domestic Work Link (Vol-12, No-1, 2003), female domestic workers occupy the largest segment of unorganized female workers in India. International Labour Organization (ILO) broadly defines a domestic worker as 'someone who carries out household work in private households in return for wages'. In comparison, India's Commission of Justice Development and Peace defined domestic workers as 'an individual employed to do household chores on a temporary, permanent, part-time or full-time basis'. The commission further states that this unorganized sector of the society produces materials for consumption in the households, but those commodities are not for profit or sale.

In India, as also in other countries there is a high and rising demand for domestic work. Poor women find it convenient to be employed as domestic labour in the surrounding residential areas. Since it is convenient for them to shoulder their own double burden if work is in the close vicinity, and it also permits them a few hours at home in between shifts.

Though the sector occupies a central role in women's employment, there is no uniformity in the level of wages, hours of work, number of working days, nature of payment and other conditions of work.

According to the 1989 Shramshakti report there were at that time 16.8 lakh female domestic workers in the country. But domestic work is not recognised as informal or unorganised work (Kundu, 2008).

8. ABOUT SOUTH 24 PARGANAS

The South 24-Parganas district is located between 22°30'45" to 20°29' North latitude and between 89°4'56" and 88°3'45" East longitudes. South 24 Parganas district is an important district of West Bengal State with its district Head Quarters in Alipore. It is the largest district of West Bengal State by area and second largest by population. On one side it has the urban fringe of Kolkata and on the other, the remote riverine villages in the Sundarbans. The areas like Sonarpur, Baruipur, Joynagar, Diamond Harbour and Canning are adjacent to Kolkata city and have a locational advantage (Fig-1). The choice of the places is prompted by the inter-linkage between the growth and expansion of the city and daily commuting from those areas of south 24 Parganas, the major source of manual labour clustered in the urban informal labour market. And in the process the percentage of rural population to total population in the district dropped from 86.70 in 1991 to 84.27 in 2001.

FIGURE- 1: MAP OF SOUTH 24 PARGANAS



9. ORIGIN OF THE PROBLEM

In the rural areas of West Bengal, sluggish agricultural growth and limited development of the rural non-farm sector raises rural poverty, unemployment and underemployment. Lack of employment opportunities in the rural areas lead to either no work or increase the number of marginal and casual workers in the labour force. Given the size of the family there is an absolute minimum below which life becomes impossible. Thus the target real income drives large number of people to the cities for work and livelihood. Under such circumstances even illiterate and unskilled women are forced to move out in search of survival. Women work to make up the difference between subsistence requirements and the total earnings of the family. The growth and expansion of Suburban areas surrounding the major cities of West Bengal is creating informal job opportunities for the poor. Thus the employment option for the huge number of illiterate and unskilled workers (who are at times commuters) is to work as vegetable or fruit vendors, hawkers, domestic servants and as helpers in the construction sectors. It is interesting to note that domestic work has evolved as a feminine occupation, where large numbers of woman from rural areas are usually competitors for such jobs.

10. DOMESTIC WORKERS IN SOUTH 24 PARGANAS

It is worth taking a note of the fact that women’s share in domestic service in urban West Bengal has moved up by about 30 percent during 1971 to 1991 (from 41.99 to 71.22). In these 20 years, an improvement in the percentage share of girl children among the women domestics in the urban areas of the state can also be noticed. Girl children constituted 14 percent of the total women domestics in the year 1991 (Table- 4).

TABLE 4: PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN AMONG DOMESTICS AND PERCENTAGE OF GIRL CHILDREN AMONG WOMEN DOMESTICS IN URBAN WEST BENGAL

Years	Percentage of women in total Domestics	Percentage of girl children (5-14 years) in total women domestics
1971	41.99	12.97
1991	71.22	14.00

Source: Census of India

Ananya Roy, in her survey conducted in 1997 found a large number of women domestics commuting daily from their rural homes (in South 24 Parganas) which were connected to Kolkata by regular trains (Roy, 2008). In fact, as early as the late 1980s those local trains which carried every morning hundred of maid from the villages of south 24 Parganas to Kolkata were described as ‘jhee specials’ by the city elites. This is a common sight even in 2015 except that the distance travelled might have shortened for some with the extension and overlapping of the suburban and the rural areas. These workers work with families or individuals and perform a wide range of household tasks such as cleaning, cooking, washing and care of children and the elderly. Domestic workers may comprise of different categories- they may be residential workers (Live-in domestics) who stay with the employers and are allowed leave as per requirement. Among the daily commuters there are some who work as part-time with a single family and there are others who perform heterogeneous work in different households to increase their earning. Preliminary survey (Table-5) among 100 domestic workers around Narendrapur- Sonarpur areas reveal that there are many who work in different houses, moving from one to the other, perform one or more tasks in each household. They may clean in one house, chop vegetables in another and wash clothes in the third, while some others may perform only one task, such as cooking. They number of times they visit these households depend on the requirements of the families. Another form of part-time live-out work is in terms of piece-rate. It is often applied to washing clothes or mopping the floor and wages are calculated on the basis of family size or the number of rooms respectively. The domestic service providers are at times an indispensable part of an urban nuclear family. They are the ones who release urban women from household work to participate in productive work in the formal/organised sector. An interesting trend is observed in recent years among the domestic workers of different metropolis, and suburban Kolkata is not an exception. They hire labour for domestic work and childcare and are released for household work only when their maids come for work. The wage rate they provide is at par with the prevailing rates. A domestic worker who earns ₹ 2000 per month hires someone to look after her child (say) at a rate of ₹ 700 per month. The amount she saves is used up to pay the rent for her house or buy necessary goods or for her child’s education. Social networks play a vital role in this process. Support is extended to the commuting or migrant family by the kith and kin or even by people from the same place. There are instances where these workers are the main bread-earners, either in the absence of adult males in the family or in the case of irregular earning of the male members.

Domestic service requires engagement in long hours of repetitive work with no social security, no chances of skill formation and involves considerable risk and hazard. Many studies have reported that there are no standard norms that decide working conditions for domestic workers. Specified working hours does not exist for many domestic workers. They can work from 5 to 12 hours a day while live in domestic workers are on call 24 hours each day (Neetha, 2004). The wages of these workers are differentiated by the broad division of work which ranges from 200- 2000 rupees per month. Cooking is the best paid occupation. Wages also vary according to the area of residence. They demand more wages for the same work when performed in the residential complexes then when it is carried on in the local areas (‘para’). This difference in wage creates a gap of at least ₹ 200-300 and sometimes even more between the places of work. The wage is also tied to the hours that are spent at this task daily, which vary with frequency of visits in a day, the size of the house, and the number of house hold members. The fragmentation of the domestic labour market by the area of residence and the class of the employer within one town/city is noticeable. In sum, the wage structure and service packages are complex and variable, making it problematic to arrive at a uniform wage rate for domestic work even for a specific locality (Neetha, 2004).

TABLE 5: WAGE RATE OF DOMESTIC WORKERS AS PER THE CATEGORY OF WORK IN 24 PARGANAS SOUTH

Category of work	Wage Rate
Live-In Domestic (Adult)	₹ 3500-5000
Live-In Domestic (Child)	₹ 1500
Cooking	₹ 2000-2500 (Two times) ₹ 1200-1500 (Once a day)
Part-Time Work	₹ 800- 1500
Work at Piece- Rate	₹ 300-400 per work

Source: Primary Survey

However, the remittances they create are critical source of sustenance for the receiving households. They use it for consumption, investment in child education, health care, improvement in household food and security, water and sanitation.

An important manifestation of these female 'working poor' creating remittances is that they are performing a great deal of work of low productivity. Thus the dualism of the economy (formal/informal sectors) that leads to a large number of workers being absorbed in marginal jobs of very low productivity outside the 'formal sector' also comes within the scope of 'employment problem'.

11. SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM

The solution to such problems are general and cannot only be applied to the domestic workers in particular. To fill the gaps that hinder inclusive growth and poverty reduction it is necessary to increase economic growth by improving its structure and quality and making appropriate changes to national development strategies.

The very basis of poverty reduction is the goal of human development. Human development is about much more than the rise or fall of incomes and economic growth; it addresses the multidimensional aspects of poverty and goes beyond mere increases in income. It is about creating an environment in which people can develop their full potential and lead productive, creative lives in accord with their needs and interests. The state must see that every section of population is benefited with the opening up of the economy by ensuring basic health, education and credit to the marginalised group, to have access to the resources needed for a decent standard of living and to be able to participate in the life of the community. Without these, many choices are simply not available, and many opportunities in life remain inaccessible.

The 12th five-year plan (2012-2017) lists some strategy challenges directed to the poor, which continue the focus on inclusive growth. The Millennium Development Goals (*UN Millennium Development Goals, 2010*) put emphasis on abolishing hunger and generating employment. Active State Intervention is necessary to achieve this.

The objectives of an inclusive growth agenda is to reduce poverty, improve quality of life and ensure to the extent possible, that all segments of the society benefits from the economic growth of the country. A number of macro and micro level interventions have shown to be conducive to promoting inclusive growth. But all this are general commitments and does not apply to a particular category of workers.

The Government of India has been paying a lot of attention to social security as part of its inclusive growth agenda. Recently, it introduced a law in parliament to provide social security to unorganised labour. The law proposes a minimum salary of ₹ 9,000 per month for the skilled full-time household helps, along with a host of benefits including social security cover and mandatory leaves. Besides, the policy provides that the domestic workers be given a right to pursue education, a safe working environment and a grievance redressal mechanism. It also has a provision for mandatory contribution from the employer towards social security of the domestic worker. The employer will have to pay his contribution over and above the salary, like to be pegged at 10% of salary. The law also looks at providing benefits like pension to those domestic helps registered under the scheme for 15 years. Workers and employers will also have rights to form groups and engage with each other for collective bargaining.

The aim of the policy is to empower the domestic workers by making this large workforce a services industry in due course of time. Such social schemes deserve strong support and would go a long way in making inclusive growth a reality.

12. CONCLUSION

We have to wake up to the benefits of globalisation. There exists a positive association between a state's initial literacy rates and inclusive growth outcomes. Therefore, raising the quality of the labour force through better access to education can help unlock a virtuous cycle of higher potential growth. Needless to say, the presence of appropriate labour market policies and continued structural reforms are critical to enable education to enhance and broaden economic growth. On the other hand, we have to get out of the grip of corporate led industrialisation by making agriculture and rural economy the centre of economic dynamism and on the other there should be timely policy response by the governments, in order to promote a pro-poor, more inclusive process of globalization. A start can be made by extending an ambitious time bound employment programme. The state must use its freedom and responsibility to identify, formulate and execute local employment generating productive projects. This would help us to put forward at least the first step towards genuine process of development.

13. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study has got some limitations which are summarized as follows:

The research work does not consider detailed analysis. It would have been better if all the districts were covered individually for this study. Further lack of information on the policy prescriptions about different categories of worker decelerated in streamlining the research work in a more focussed manner.

It is a self-financed research work and in some places the area of research work has been restricted due to lack of financial assistance.

The time of study is very limited.

14. SCOPE FOR FURTHER STUDY

There are huge scopes of further study in this topic. The entire district could have been covered and the primary data collection could have been satisfactory through the use of descriptive statistics on more structured data for detail analysis.

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