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INCOME AND EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES OF WOMEN IN RURAL LAKHIMPUR DISTRICT OF ASSAM

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ABSTRACT

Empowerment of women is a major social phenomenon in recent time in all parts of the society. In rural area women empowerment is more needed because three fourth of the countries women lives in village. Education, poverty, health and safety are major determining factors of women empowerment. Education itself does not merely mean the three R's – reading, writing & arithmetic but also increasing the level of understanding and realization their working right. Health and nutritional need of women are not just dependent on availability and access to these service, which constantly depriving her from getting these needs appropriately address. The economic condition, gender bias, discrimination, etc. have an adverse impact on the health of women and their working condition. In order to know the economic condition of rural women, the present paper tries to highlight the employment opportunities for women in rural economy and their level of income, by focusing conducting a primary survey in different villages of Lakhimpur district by canvassing a structural quaternaries so that a test of effectiveness can be made. Moreover, for secondary data use various government bulletin and authentic web sources.

KEYWORDS

Economic condition, Employment, Empowerment, Rural, Women.

INTRODUCTION

Empowerment of women is a major social phenomenon in recent time in all parts of the society. It requires an understanding of its multidimensional influence including family structures and other units. The issue is somehow globalised in all over the world including India due to the increasing trends of educated women which is widely spread among the urban areas. Therefore, women are now able to constitute about 35% of the workforce in software industry and enjoy the same status as men. But in the rural India in general and rural areas of Assam and the study district in particular, a large number of women have remain untouchable by empowerment. Therefore, it is more need for empowerment of rural women because they continue to play second fiddle to men and are handicapped socially and economically since independence. Basically Education, poverty, health and safety are major determining factors of women empowerment. Education itself does not merely mean the three R's – reading, writing & arithmetic but also increasing the level of understanding and realization their working right. Health and nutritional need of women are not just dependent on availability and access to these service, which constantly depriving her from getting these needs appropriately address. The economic condition, gender bias, discrimination and a number of other reasons have an adverse impact on the health of women and working condition respectively. Economic independence is a vital aspect of empowerment. The government has offered several programmes for welfare and support of women so that they are economically and socially empowered and become equal and active partners in national development along with men. For instance the National Policy for Empowerment of Women, 2001 has outlined three policy approaches to do away with gender inequality. MGNREGA, SGSRY also another means to provide job opportunities to women. Basically most of the rural women are housewife while some of them are working in the farming sector. But still there is no any gainful employment opportunity for them in rural area. This is not that women are not willing to work; they are highly interested but due to the absence of such opportunities they are workless. Illiteracy is one of the major causes of women unemployment. Presently the SSA and RMSA tries to expand formal education in each and every sector of the societies and they might success but in this globalised era formal education not enough for a work rather skill-based education is most essential in every sector as the women working opportunities is concern.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Several scholar has been conducted numerous works on this global issue since long in all over the world. Srivastava, N. and Srivastava, R. (2009) studied on the basis of unit data and concluded that the employment opportunities for rural women has grown over the decade but the outcomes is not enough satisfactory. According to them the rural women are still largely concentrated on agriculture as self employed or casual labour. They are faces different types of problem in every stage of their working life including their types of job i.e. low paying job inspite of their adequate ability. Another some scholar has study the impact of government sponsored scheme on rural women in terms of income and employment generation. For instance, according to the Adolph, B. (2003) the poor women have succeeded in improving their life through membership of Self help group (SHG) in both side i.e. from economic as well as social improvement. In this context Tamuli, R. and Bhuyan, S. (2014) point out that through SHG, the Swarnajayanti Gram Swarajgar Yojana (SGSY) has a tremendous scope for improving the socio-economic condition of the rural poor women. The proper implementation of SGSY in rural area will expands the economic, social and democratic status of the rural women and promotes the rural development process.

OBJECTIVE AND METHODOLOGICAL ISSUE

The basic objective of the paper is to study the income and employment opportunities of rural women. However, the paper also tries to make an eagle eye view on the basic problems of women that they are generally facing in their working place. Therefore, in order to know the economic condition of rural women of Assam, more specially in the Lakhimpur district of Assam, the present paper tries to highlight the employment opportunities for women in rural economy and their level of income, by focusing all social groups through collecting some data from different villages of Lakhimpur district by canvassing a structural quaternaries so that a test of effectiveness can be made. For collection of data, both the partly purposive sampling and partly random sampling is used. The survey covers 15 percent households of each village. On the other hand, for secondary data use various government bulletin and authentic web sources.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The economy of Assam in general and Lakhimpur district in particular is basically agrarian in nature. So far as the agrarian economy is concerned, the income and employment structure is depends on many factors; these are the level of physical capital, ownership of land, mechanisation of agriculture, level of the expansion of small scale and cottage industries, level of education, family size, etc. But due to some societal causes the women work participation is always low compared with men. As farmers, agricultural workers and micro entrepreneurs, women constitute the backbone of Assam economy. Yet, together with children they remain one of the most vulnerable groups. Women shoulder the entire burden of looking after livestock, bringing up children and doing other household chores. At present they have attained levels of eminence and distinction, as educationist, doctors and engineers contributing the growth of the state and uniqueness of its local fabric. Contributing at work and at home, women-their status and their role – hold the key to the advancement of the state, its people and economy (HDR Assam, 2003). But in most of the rural area of the study district, the women are still serving as a house keeper and child bearers.

A few women are taking part in every sector, i.e., in household, farm as well as non farm sector. But the women work force participation rate of Assam (20.71%) is less than the all India women workforce participation rate (25.68%). Interestingly, the women work participation rate among the women of urban Assam (10.61 %) is less than the work participation rate among the women of rural Assam (22.15%) (Statistics of Women in India 2007). Therefore, it is one of the very crucial issues of study in all around.

WOMEN EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES IN RURAL ECONOMY

There has been a general notation since long that the traditional agriculture provides employment to more person than is necessary to produce a given level of output in a backward area like Lakhimpur district of Assam. But as time departs, agriculture sector has partially mechanized, the additional occupational opportunities is creates and the rural job market also changed. As per employment policy in Assam 2010, about 89 per cent employment of Assam absorbed in unorganized sector. In rural area about 27 per cent of workforce is purely depends on primary sector. But agriculture sector is the main employment provider in rural area. As per the rural women employment is concern, the main women employment providers are:

AGRICULTURE AND ALLIED SECTOR

In a rural economy almost 80 per cent of the population earns their livelihood from agriculture. The rural women are extensively involving agricultural activities. However the nature and extent of their involvement differ with the variation of agro production system. The mode of women participation in agricultural production varies with the land owing status of farm household. Besides cultivation, there are some other agricultural subsidiary occupations where a large number of women are engaged in that sector. In animal husbandry, women have played a multiple role. With regional difference, women take care of animal production. Their activities vary widely ranging from care of animal, grazing, fodder collection, cleaning of animal sheds to processing milk and livestock products. In livestock management, indoor jobs like milking, feeding, cleaning, etc. are done by women in 90 per cent of families while management of male animal and fodder production are managed by men.

The nature and extent of women participation in fishery is varies across the country. In the highly fish producing state like Andhra Pradesh, Tamilnadu, Orissa, the rural women are involved in fish drying/curing, marketing and hand braiding and net-mending professionally.

Pigging, poultry, goatery, fishery are also providing the employment opportunities for rural women of the study district to some extent. The women are taking the care of them while the men are conducting the marketing activity. There are large numbers of pigging and poultry farm in rural area in the various part of the Lakhimpur district of Assam which are fully maintaining by the women. Nurserying and Gardening also another economically beneficiary opportunity for women where number of women are engaged in rural as well as semi urban economy.

Sericulture, handloom and textile industries in rural economy specially Dhakuwakhana subdivision of Lakhimpur district of Assam and the other part of the state, has huge potentiality for women employment generation, gives that the communities has some basic skill and the local market has demand for the product. As per the Employment Policy of Assam, 2010, there are almost 20 lakhs families in Assam who are engaged in this sector. Moreover the total no of women weavers in Assam are 13, 21,438 as per the statistical Handbook of Assam 2009, which implies its potentialities in rural areas.

The Tea Industries, especially in Assam, also provide some working opportunities basically who are belongs to the low literate group or very low literate group. For this the small tea growers played a significant role. The no of small tea gardens are continuously increasing across the state and the participation of rural women as a tea garden workers increase over time. As per the Statistical Handbook of Assam, 2009, the total no of women engaged in tea industries of Assam are 2, 86,096 in 2008-09 while around 15000 women tea workers from Lakhimpur district.

SMALL SCALE INDUSTRIES

Women in rural economy are directly or indirectly involved in processing of Non-Timber Forest Product (NTFP) particularly in the small scale enterprises. This includes basket, broom, rope making, tasar silk cocoon rearing, lac cultivation, oil extraction and bamboo works etc. Women constituted almost 51 per cent of the total employed in to forest based small scale industries. As for example, in Orissa, man collect grass for basket making while women cure it and make the basket. But in Assam and some north eastern states, the basket making is considered as man work only.

Besides these, there are some other job opportunities for women which generally notice in the rural area at a large scale. These are the insurance agent, company representative, NGO workers, etc. those are generally belongs to the highly educated group. As an effect of globalization and IT sectors on the rural area, the Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) has growth exponentially across the country in recent year. The gigantic growth is now reaching out to the most conservative part of the rural India as well. For instance, the "sources of change" in rural Rajasthan is a classic point. Rajasthan is highly conservative states where rural women are remain backward for centuries. But the "source of change" BPO, a socio-economic initiative launched by the Piramal Foundatin, presents a different picture of hope, with rows of rural women sitting behind the computers and running the BPO centre with great efficiency. Same pictures are emerged in rural area of Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh also. Therefore, the Rural BPOs have successfully communicated the message that women can supplement family's primary income. In Assam, the rural women who are staying nearest of the urban communities have taken the batter chance regarding the IT sectors and successively get the employment opportunities.

WOMEN EMPLOYMENT AND THE GOVERNMENT PROGRAMME

The Indian planners and the Government of India have been taking an enormous steps regarding the rural employment generation since long. Now there are four major employment generation schemes which serving for rural women. Some employment generation programmees are providing self employment while some of them are provide wage employment. The major ongoing rural employment generation (self-employment) programmes are namely i) Swarnajayanti Gram Swarogjar Yojana (SGSY) ii) Prime Minister's Employment Generation Programme (PMEGP) and major wage employment programme are i) Sampoorna Gramin Rojgar Yojana (SGRY) and ii) Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Generation Programme (MGNREGA). The entire employment generation programme launched jointly for both male as well as female, no separate programme for female only. Among the above mentioned programme, SGSY and MGNREGA are most effective for women employment generation. As per the official website report of MGNREGA, there are 67.58lakh person days employment providing for women i.e., 24.66 per cent out of total 274.01lakh person days provided for rural unemployment in 2011-12 financial year in Assam. For India the MGNREGA generate 49.4 per cent person days for women which is considered as very high with compare to Assam. Besides these, there are some another programme which are implemented by states Government for providing employment generation in rural economy. For instance, in Assam, the Mukhya Mantri Karma Jyoti Achari, Mukhya Mantri Kalpataru Achari, etc. are implemented in this regard. Moreover, there are also some departmental programme e.g. ASSA (National Rural Health Mission), Anganwadi worker (Integrated Child Development Programme), etc. which also directly or indirectly providing for employment generation in rural area.

WOMEN WORKING STATUS IN THE SURVEYED VILLAGES

To understand the economic status of women in the rural economy of Assam in general and Lakhimpur district in particular, an attempt has taken to conduct a primary survey on 100 rural household in the different villages of Lakhimpur district. For this, five villages are taken in such a way that all category people are

incorporate under the process and all typical characteristics of Assam are focus throughout the villages. There are all together 142 women are surveyed under this process including the children and student.

TABLE 1: WOMEN WORKING STATUS IN SURVEYED VILLAGE

Village	Working person												Not in Labour force	Unemployed		
	Self employed			Regular Salaried			Casual Worker			All						
	M	F	P	M	F	P	M	F	P	M	F	P		P	M	F
Kharkati	12	0	12	5	2	7	19	1	20	36	3	39	41	4	5	9
Chorimoriya	5	3	8	0	0	0	28	2	30	33	5	38	45	4	2	6
Brisnupur Boloma	3	0	3	3	0	3	20	3	23	26	3	29	49	2	4	6
Nijarapar	23	0	23	5	0	5	15	0	15	43	0	43	34	3	2	5
Joriguri	7	0	7	2	1	3	14	1	15	23	2	25	42	6	2	8
Total	50	3	53	15	3	18	96	7	103	161	13	174	211	19	15	34

Source: Primary survey, 2011

Note: 'M' stands for Male, 'F' stands for Female and 'P' stands for Person

It is reveals in table 1 that out of 100 surveyed household there are only 40 females are participating in the work while 112 females are remain in the non-working group. On the other hand, during the same period, the no of total working male in the surveyed household are 161 and non working male are only 19. There are all together 419 respondents in the survey area including the children and student, where 279 are male respondents and 140 are female respondents. There are 30.4 per cent workers under the self employed where only 1.7 per cent is female self employed worker. The regular salaried worker in the study area is very less; only 10.3 per cent working people are able to get the wage in regular bases, where 1.7 per cent is belong to the female group. On the other hand, the no of casual workers or daily wage workers in the study area is very high. There are about 55.1 per cent male and 4.0 per cent female people are belong to the casual workers group.

FIGURE 1: STATUS OF WORKING OPPORTUNITIES

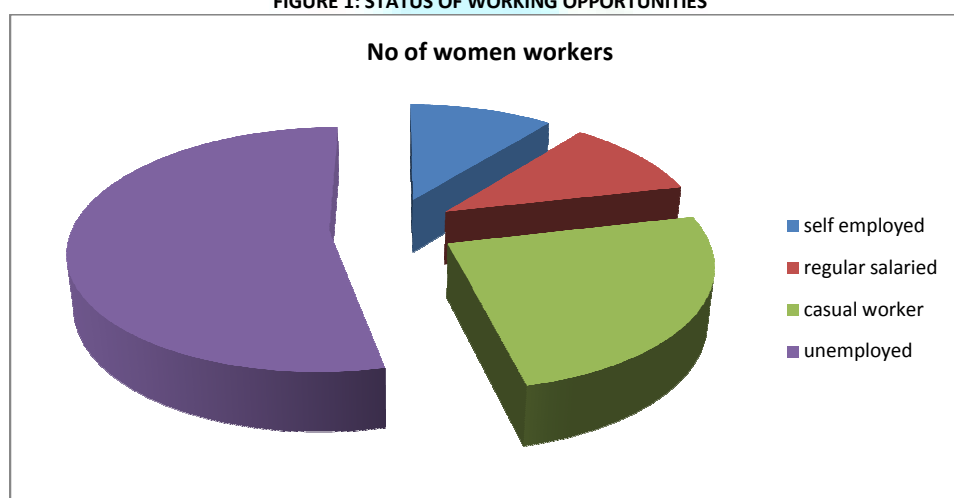


TABLE 2: WORKFORCE PARTICIPATION RATE IN THE SURVEYED VILLAGE (IN PER '000)

Village	Labour force participation rate			Unemployment Rate		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Kharkati	73	52	125	100	455	176
Chorimoriya	75	23	98	108	500	146
Brisnupur Boloma	46	42	88	71	571	214
Nijarapar	73	20	94	65	1000	104
Joriguri	86	23	109	153	500	242
Total	353	43	513	94	575	165

Source: primary survey, 2011

However, the Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) and Unemployment Rate (UR) in per 1000 population are shown in table 2. The LFPR in the all surveyed village is 353 in case of male where it is just 43 in case of female. This is due to the over restriction of women in the Assamese society. The LFPR among the surveyed village is high in Kharkati i.e. 52, followed by Brisnupur Boloma 42 and it lowest in Nijorapar i.e. 20. On the other hand, the unemployment rate in all surveyed villages calculated as 9.4 per cent in case of male where it is only 57.5 per cent in case of female. The overall unemployment rate in the surveyed villages recorded as 16.5 per cent. In case of female unemployment rate, it is highest in village Nijorapar (100 per cent) followed by Brisnupur Boloma (57.5 per cent) and lowest in village Kharkati (45.5 per cent). As the average unemployment rate is in concern; it is highest in village Joriguri (24.2 per cent) followed by Brisnupur Boloma (21.4 per cent) and lowest in Nijorapar village (10.4 per cent).

There are certain reasons behind the low LFPR & UR in the surveyed villages. The data reveals that the village where the male unemployment rate is lowest; the female unemployment is highest and vice versa. For instance, village Nijorapar, it is pre-dominantly agricultural dependant village. The villagers have given more importance on horticultural crops and vegetables rather than the paddy crops and the women work participation in case of vegetables cultivation is significantly lower than the women participation in the paddy cultivation. This is the cause behind the higher women workforce participation rate in the khakati village because the inhabitants are agricultural dependant and cultivates only paddy crops. However, the tribal women are very hard working in nature therefore the women labour force participation of Joriguri village is comparatively high then the other village. Similarly, Chorimoriya, which is nearest of urban centre, has emerged some effect of non-farm sector works also. But village Brisnupur Boloma is frequently flood affected since long and hence the agriculture is minor occupation there. It is, therefore, noted that the women workforce participation in rural area is basically depends on the agricultural sector, if agriculture is well practices the WLFPR rate is high and if agriculture is not practices the WLFPR is less in that area.

STATUS OF INCOME IN THE SURVEYED VILLAGES

So far as the status of income of the women worker is concerned, the highest average annual income of the employed women is shown in village Kharkati (₹90,000) while lowest in village Brisnupur Boloma (₹30,000) as shown in Table 3.

TABLE 3: STATUS OF INCOME AND EDUCATION OF WOMEN IN THE SURVEYED VILLAGES

Village	Average annual income of the employed women	Average educational level of working women	Average family size	Ownership of physical capital (money terms)
Kharkati	90000	8	5	25000
Choraimoriya	60000	7	5	20000
Brisnupur Boloma	30000	4	4	10000
Nijorapar	0	9	8	30000
Joriguri	50000	3	7	20000
Overall	57500	6	6	21000

Since there is no employed women respondent is covered in Nijarapar village so it is calculated as zero. The level of average education of the women in the surveyed village, average size of the family and average ownership of physical capital (in money terms) is shown in table 4. However, there is a direct relationship between income (Y) and education of workers (Ed), their family size (Fz) and ownership of physical capital (Pc), a model is being fitted for find out the effectiveness as equation (i).

$$Y = 5.376 + 60.02 Ed^{**} + 0.023 Fz^{**} + 80.26 Pc^{*} \dots\dots\dots(i)$$

$$(8.32) \quad (9.75) \quad (2.32) \quad (7.58)$$

$$R^2 = 0.482 \quad \text{Adjusted } R^2 = 0.479 \quad N = 142$$

*significant in 0.01 level

**significant in 0.05 level

In the above specification it is found that one additional level of education has increase the women income by 60 rupee. Similarly, one increment of family size can enhanced the level of income very marginally by 0.02 rupee. It implies that the women belongs to the large family has motivated to work anywhere due to their poor family status in the rural area. However, one additional unit of the ownership of physical capital (in money terms) has increase the level of income by 80 rupee. The explanatory power of the specification is 0.482.

PROBLEMS FACE BY WOMEN IN EMPLOYMENT SECTOR

There are numbers of problem which generally facing by the working women at home or in the working place, which are discussed as follows:

The paid working women are facing the problem at their working place just by virtue of their being women. The social attitude to the role of women lags much behind the low. The attitude which considers women is fit for certain jobs and not others, cause prejudice in those who recruit employees. Even when the qualified women are available, the preferences are given to male candidates of equal qualification. A gender bias creates an obstacle at the recruitment stage itself. In the time of remuneration or wages, the women are unable to get the adequate wages or remunerations which generally get male workers for the same work. Moreover a woman could still bear with the problems if she has control over the money she earns. Most of the woman's salary handed over to her father, husband or in low.

Moreover, the working women are often facing the sexual harassment in the working place, in the overcrowded public place like public transport station when the women are in the way to their working place. Similarly in the time of employment or up gradation of employment on the basis of merit, the women are exploited by officers or her advancement is often attributed sexual favours.

The psychological pressure is always emerging by women to getting her job. Most of the problems, which beset working women, are rooted in the social perspective; that men are the bread winners and women are seen as the house keeper and child bearers. This typical role model continues to put obstacles for the working women.

CONCLUSION

On the basis of above discussion it is clear that for improvement of income and employment status of rural women, the expansion of education, both formal and skill base, ensure of women security in the working place, ignoring the neglecting habits of women in working place, removing the over restriction on women in society are some essential pre-action. The Government should take encouraging initiatives by providing financial, material and institutional support for the business endeavors of rural women. Moreover, government should introduce proper act for women protection in the working place. Since, women is the half part of the society and the development of society as well as economy is determined by the development of women in every side, so we should never neglect women as weak and inviting them to participate simultaneously with men in better nation building goal.

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