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WAGE AND INCOME DIFFERENTIALS ON THE BASIS OF GENDER IN INDIAN AGRICULTURE

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Abstract

In a predominantly agricultural country like India, women play distinctive role in rural economic activities in earning a livelihood for the family. Except in the case of rich landowners and the upper castes, women of other categories are engaged in both the production and marketing of products of agriculture and handicrafts, women of these categories also combine household work with these activities. Because of the complexities of the role of women in different types of work, it is very difficult to examine the women's contribution to family income through available employment statistics. There are almost intractable problems of definition as to what constitutes 'employment' and 'work' and as to who is as out to be over-simplistic and does not reflect the complexities of the situation. Until employment statistics relating to women are made more refined and meaningful, we are left with no option but to do the best we can with the available ones.

In order to examine gender dimensions within and income earnings in India, the context of gendered participation of female labour supplies in its entirety needs to be accounted for. The dimensions affecting pre-entry conditions that influence capabilities, human capital traits and labour supply characteristics; aspects of in-market discriminations and gender biases against women in terms of hiring, promotion, segregation, gender relations and remunerations; and factors influencing women's work time distribution among paid and unpaid activities, own and hired labour, extended activities of household maintenance, care-giving, socially derived, traditional roles and sexual division of labour that influences the different agents of the labour markets have to be explored to understand the nature of gender-based wage differentials in India.

The present paper highlights the wage and income differentials on the basis of gender in the Indian agriculture.

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Introduction

In a predominantly agricultural country like India, women play distinctive role in rural economic activities in earning a livelihood for the family. Except in the case of rich landowners and the upper castes, women of other categories are engaged in both the production and marketing of products of agriculture and handicrafts, women of these categories also combine household work with these activities. Because of the complexities of the role of women in different types of work, it is very difficult to examine the women's contribution to family income through available employment statistics. There are almost intractable problems of definition as to what constitutes 'employment' and 'work' and as to who is as out to be over-simplistic and does not reflect the complexities of the situation. Until employment statistics relating to women are made more refined and meaningful, we are left with no option but to do the best we can with the available ones.

Female labour participation

There has been some difficulty in assessing the number of women workers, especially in agriculture, due to the fact that census concept have changed from decade to decade. 'Earners' and 'earner dependents' have been classified differently in different census reports. However, the planning commission of India has said: "During the decades 1901-11 and 1911-21, the participation of female workers in agriculture actually increased even in relative terms, In the following two decades, a decline occurred which was followed by a rise during the decade 1941-51. Even this rise could not restore the level of economic activity among females as experienced till 1921."

Comparison of data on female work –participation between 1951 and 1961 also indicated a falling rate. Some keen controversies in this context were raised by the results of the 1961 census relating to the work force and occupation distribution. The same question has been raised regarding the concepts and definitions of question has been raised the concepts and definitions or 'workers'

in rural areas in connection with the results of 1971 census also. The 1971 criterion over the reference period (one year for agricultural activities), and defined workers only those who spent the major part of their time in economic activities. Thus, according to the concerned research workers, all irregular, marginal, part-time workers came under the category of 'non-workers'. They argued that the marginal, irregular worker were more likely to be concentrated among women, children, aged persons and that therefore the results could not provide the real picture. However, subsequently, the census commissioner's office, in a report based on sample resurvey designed for the purpose, gave estimates of two sets of adjustment factors: one for adjusting 1971 figures in terms of the 1961 concept. Whichever concept and set of adjustment factors is used, it is observed that worker participation rates declined between 1961 and 1971-a genuine decline among rural women in particular. This declining trend also continues in 1991 and 1998 and percentage change in 1991-1998 was - 4.3% Results of 2001 census also show the declining trend in women labour participation.

Thus, the declining trend of female work- participation over the years is of obvious interest in understanding the dynamics of operation of the female the female labour force in agriculture. In this context, it has been argued quite some time ago that a little education or enlightenment leads a woman to wish to become more lady-like and work less hard, and that this factor is possibly to some extent new more prevalent in rural areas, In fact, we have no empirical evidence to except or refute this hypothesis for explaining the declining tendency of female labour participation in agriculture. On the other hand, it is argued that much of the productive work that the women of farm families do is quite often not qualitatively different from some of the purely domestic chores and tends to be under-reported. This sort of under-reporting of female self-employment in rural areas would naturally affect female participation rates.

A very similar argument was that the drastic reduction in female labour participation in rural areas was due to the exclusion of housewives who were helping in economic activity largely in household industry or cultivation.

However, one plausible explanation for the sharp decline in the participation rate of female workers in agricultural development, particularly of the technological changes taking place in agriculture. It is argued in this in this

context that agriculture development with its accompanying technological changes –use of HYV technology, use of mechanical devices, etc.-will release the marginal workers, i.e., women, children, elderly men, from agriculture, and thus female worker will devote more time to their homes, children and education, setting in motion a whole process of social change in the rural areas. This hypothesis for falling work-participation rate of women with agricultural development will be supported partly if geographical differences in the participation rate among the states are revealed.

Wages and system of payments

The distinction between male labour and female labour has received some amount of attention in our analytical literature, as for instance in the discussion of wage structure. The essential difference in these two categories of labourers is that they do not respond to the wage rate in the same fashion. Male labour gets a higher wage rate than does female labour for the reason that these two different categories of labourers usually do not supply the same labour commodity. Official statistics like Agricultural Labour Enquiry and Agricultural Wages in India, which provide data on wage rates of male and female casual labourers, precisely confirm this phenomenon.

But, a close scrutiny of micro-type empirical studies on agricultural labour reveals that the difference between male and female labour cannot be fully accounted for entirely by the differences in their wage rates. There are several dimensions to the terms and conditions of the employment of male and female labourers which call for a more meaningful distinction.

Generally, the terms and conditions of employment refer to the service conditions like duration of employment, the basis of payment, means of payment wage amount, nature of work, labourer's dependence on employer and so on. Since hired female labour is more casual than permanent, the main distinction between the two categories of labourers lies in the attributes 'basis of payments', 'means of payments', 'nature of work' and 'wage amount'.

There is empirical evidence those different time-durations of payments, viz., daily, monthly, seasonally, annually, etc., are followed by employers vis-a-vis labourers. In different farming operations, beginning from manuring and leveling of fields to harvesting and carrying of crops, farmers use different kinds of labourers not only in terms of different time basis of payment but also in terms

of the sex of labourers, for example, in the harvesting and carrying, interculture and transplanting, employers prefer to employ female labour some times on daily basis or for the whole season, but payment to this type of labourers is nevertheless made 'daily'. Male labourers (whether casual or permanent) are also employed in these seasons, but there is no particular basis of payment which is uniformly followed for any type of male labour.

The mode of payment also appears to vary according to the sex of the labourers. While male labourers are paid in cash, or in kind or both, or even in the form of a share of the crop, payment to female labourers at least where there is exclusive female employment, is either solely in kind or in "cash and kind" wages.

Apart from the existing secondary source material, some of these points may be clearly justified with the data collected from the villages surrounding Sriniketan, Birbhum, West Bengal, during the year 1976-77. The data are presented in Table 4.

The following points are suggested by Table 4.

(a) Male labour is not considered as a substitute for female labour for the operations such as interculture and transplanting, winnowing, etc., at least in the region of Birbhum. A customary divisions of labour between the sexes with respect to these operations, appears to prevail.

(b) Activity-wise, wage differences indicate that different kinds of non-substitutable labour are involved. The labour that the average payment for agricultural casual labour in 12 villages of sriniketan, west Bengal, where the main crops raised are

Paddy, Wheat, Sugarcane and Potato: 1976-77

Name of work	Sex of the worker	Payment (per day)
(1)	(2)	(3)
April and May		
1. Levelling the field for paddy cultivation	Male and female	Rs.60.5 for male & Rs.50.1 for female
2. Manuring	Mostly male	Rs.50
3. Ploughing	Only male	Rs.60
4. Broadcasting of paddy seeds	Male and female	Rs.60

5. Clearing the fields	Male and Female	Rs.50
June		
6. Ploughing	Only male	Rs.60
7. Hoeing	Male and female	Rs.60
8. Watering	Only male	Rs.40
July and August		
9. Watering	Only male	Rs 40
10. Sowing	Male and female	Lunch
11. Interculture and transplanting	Mostly female	Lunch
September & October		
12. Weeding	Male and female	Lunch
13. Watering	Only male	Rs.30
November		
14. Harvesting and carrying paddy	Male and female	Rs.50
15. Threshing	Mostly male	Launch
16. Winnowing	Only female	5kg. paddy
17. Preparation of soil for Potato cultivation	Mostly male	5kg. paddy
18. preparation of soil for Wheat cultivation.	Mostly male	5kg. paddy
19. Sowing of potato seeds	Male and female	Rs.50
20. Sowing of wheat seeds	Male and female	Rs.50
December and January		
21. Harvesting and carrying Of Aman paddy	Mostly male	Rs.60
22. threshing	Mostly male	Rs.60
23. Weeding of potato and wheat crops	Male and female	Rs. 40 for both male & female
24. Watering of potato and wheat crops	Only male	Rs.40
25. Winnowing	Only female	Rs.40

February		
26. Winnowing	Only female	Rs.40
27. Sugarcane cutting	Only male	Rs.40
28. Sugarcane chopping	Only male	Rs.40
March		
29. Watering sugarcane fields	Only male	Rs.60
30. Manuring sugarcane Fields	Only male	Rs.60
31. Sowing of sugarcane	Male and female	Rs.60 for male & Rs.50 for women
32. Reaping of potato	Male and female	Rs.60 for male & Rs.50
33. Wheat cutting	Male and female	Rs.60 for male & Rs.50
33. Threshing of wheat Crops	Mostly male	Rs.50
34. Winnowing	Only male	5 seer wheat

Employer may hire for purposes of ploughing may be a different commodity altogether from his point of view compared to transplantation work. For purpose or heavier work like ploughing the employer prefers the labour of male workers, for transplantation of paddy, female labour. The point at issue is that a male labourer will not be employed in the place of a female labourer and vice versa. Further research is needed on whether the customary sex-based division of labour in farm operations is tending to be affected with the adoption of new technology.

Conclusion

Women's work is not recognized as "work". This has affected the self-image and self worth of women. While women account for half of the worlds population and perform two third of the hours (through are recorded as working only one third of those hours), they receive on-tenth of the worlds property registered in their name. These gender inequalities are either ignored in development planning and policy formulation, or reinforced through specific development projects and policies. "Women represent fifty percent of population, make up thirty percent at official labors, perform sixty percent of all working

hours, receive ten percent of world income and own less than one percent of the world property. Rural women in our country suffer from being both economically and socially "invisible". Economic invisibility stems from the perception that women are not relevant to the wage and market economy. Social invisibility is a result of the general status of second class citizens, usually accorded to women. It is not surprising that development programmes, which do not take into account the aspirations and the participation of women are not effective in achieving their objectives. The growing realization that rural women are not inarticulate, illiterate and ignorant objects of welfare, but are in fact productive, hard working adults, who have coped with the battle for survival from a very young age. Makes their participation in the development process increasingly necessary and imperative.

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