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IMPORTANCE OF FEMALE IN THE FIELD OF AGRICULTURE AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN KOCH BIHAR DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT

Inadequate employment opportunity due to industrial backwardness, inherited fragmented landholdings, minimum returns from agricultural activities, growing price of necessary commodities and increasing consumerist ideology have compelled simple rural male of the district to migrate in search of work elsewhere. In rural society of Koch Bihar district, women generally participate in food processing, child care, nursing, gossiping, and

intensive agricultural task as helper. Temporary absence of man affects social status and life style of the women who are left behind both positively and negatively. In this study, an attempt has been made to highlight the status of women who are left behind, in terms of gender division of labor and economic perspectives to provide few strategies for the policymakers.

KEYWORDS: Agriculture, Koch Bihar, Socio-Economic, Empowerment.

INTRODUCTION

The state of Koch Bihar merged with the Indian Union on 12th September, 1949, and came to be recognized as a separate district of West Bengal from 1st January, 1950. Historically King Naranarayan (1533-87) was the best among the Koch Kings. He established a big Kingdom by fighting many wars.

Labor Circulation may be defined as a pattern of circulatory migration where individual or a group of people move away from their home to other places in search of work, then return to the place of origin over the courses of time. In the present paper, 'Male labor circulation' refers agricultural male laborer, who are the head of their family. Status of agricultural labor of the study area is associated with irregular employment due to seasonal character

of agriculture of this region, over time of work, low wages and marginalization. An observation in 1993 observed that 42% agricultural labor of the study area have no land and land possessed by the remaining portion is very poor. Development of technology, changing political standpoint and several steps taken by the Government have altered the dimensions of agricultural laborer but over all socio-economic condition remain the same as compared to the previous. In every year, a large number of male agricultural laborers leave their family member at home and move out in search of work from Koch Bihar district. During the field work of Bijay Bihary Som, in the year of 1995 to 1996, at Tufangang subdivision of Koch Bihar district, observed that, males are going out the villages for work in different states of India like Rajasthan, Hariyana, Maharashtra, Tamilnadu, Bihar, Delhi and Arunachal Pradesh. Researcher finds similar condition during his field study at Poaturkuthi Enclave surrounded by Koch Bihar district.

Although, women contribute half in the history of human civilization, men always label their supremacy in the forehead of women. Human rights of women have been snatching away and they have been tended to be imprisoned within the barriers of familial activities, norms, rules and regulation throughout the history of human civilization. Casually, wives of absentee husband who are circulated in search of work, have an opportunity to be the head of the family. Consequently, male labor circulation has much importance in the life of rural women who left behind at home in the study area.

A lot of researches have been done in the field of migration by lot of exponents since long past and gender has been incorporated in this field in last twenty century. But the main focus has been concentrated on the women who migrated herself. The women who are left behind have been bearing the negligence by the researchers. In comparison to the number of studies on men and women who migrate, there are fewer studies on the women left behind. Even though, women are totally affected by such migration process, rather they are not migrants themselves. From Indian perspective Desai and Banerji in 2008, have been contributed significantly in this field on the basis of Human Development Survey 2005. They focused on two dimensions of women's live: (a) Women's autonomy and control over their lives; (b) Women's labor force participation. They conclude that, household structure forms the key mediating factor through which absence of husbands affects women.

FEMALE ORIENTED ACTIVITIES IN AGRICULTURE

In every human society, different works are distributed according to the age, class, capability, caste and also according to traditional social norms, beliefs and rituals. Such division of labor reflects the cultural heritage and stability of a particular society. Different works are also assigned to different genders, which strengthens the society's evaluation of status. In this study, females generally get up as early as possible and enter into the cycle of their duty. They are traditionally engaged in food processing, house cleaning, caring of children and other family member, looking after domestic animal and cloth washing. Besides male are assisted by women during crop rising through weeding, transplanting, harvesting and thrashing of crop. In the third world countries like India female participation in agriculture is very high due to its intensive subsistence nature.

But very few, participate as agricultural wage earner as wage laborer. Women are considered as agricultural helper and naturally expected to fill the gap. Husband's circulation in search of work has altered the circumstances and women typically become farm manager and perform many extra agricultural tasks spending more hours.

DECISION MAKING POWER OF THE WOMEN

Various studies on women autonomy and empowerment pointed out that the decisions taken

by women are neglected by the family members in India. In the study area, generally the women are more intelligent and better informed in all matters than the men. Male labor circulation from a family creates an opportunity to exercise the decision which is taken by women in different familial matter.

SOCIAL INSECURITY

Social security of rural Indian women is male-concentrated. Male member of a family provides to women physical security during illness and pregnancy and also they guided during their treatment and physical check-up. Other than this, food security, income security, and protect them from violence. So, when husbands are circulated to another place in search of work women who are left behind become helpless to encounter the violence committed against them and theoretically feel more insecure. Although, in several reports it is revealed that West Bengal is a more secure place for women in India but the domestic violence plays a significant role against women, which is reflected in Human Development Report of West Bengal (2004).

Status of Satisfaction of Women who are Left Behind

The financial outcomes that are resulted for male labor circulation to the women who left behind are mixed. Being separated from their husband, the conjugal happiness of the women of absentee husbands becomes grey. In addition, over responsibilities to their family members bend their backbone. In such condition, their happiness depends on the improvement of their socio-economic status through remittance received from their males who are circulated. If the remittances get reduced in any circumstances, the women who are left behind become like a captain of sinking ship.

Empowerment of Women, who Left Behind

The wheel of development of any society has equally been drawn by both men and women. But the decisions taken by women for well being of the society is abandoned by male. In spite of their hard work, they remain in the status of ever unskilled, less paid and less significant. Male labor circulation brings opportunities for the women to take on new tasks, new responsibilities and learn new skills to prove their capabilities which transform gender relations and gender ideology to improve women status and empowerment. The overall status of empowerment of the women who are left behind has been calculated with the help of composite score considering five parameter like Satisfactory index, Freedom of movement index, Decision making index, Female agricultural work participation index, and Social insecurity index. The scale of composite score ranges from 0 to 5. It is common assumption that higher will be the value lower the women empowerment and vice versa.

CONCLUSION

In earlier, while Koch Bihar had been ruled by the Koch Kings, the rural women enjoyed more liberty in every aspect of life. In that period, society claimed massive hard work from the inhabitants for living as they were uneducated and primitive agriculturally dependent. Consequently, people had no time; rather they must have to take assistance of women in every sphere of their activities. Later, continuous invasion of southern people brought the culture which transformed the gender ideology of Koch Bihar. The traditional history of tears of women has been started. But male labor circulation from the district offered women who are left behind, an opportunity to escape from patriarchal domination. But this opportunity is fruitful only for the mature young women belonging to the age group of 30-44. Youngest women belonging to the age group of 15-29 never solely left at home by their husband. They remain under the headship of aged women or men. So, the circulation of male labor gifts them pain of

separation and less responsibility to their home. The aged women get all the opportunity to establish her as head of the family but, lack of education, lack of confidence and obviously age prevent them from their capabilities. Although the decision of the said women is executed in much respect but actually, they are directed by her husband through Telephone. In spite of these, rural women of Koch Bihar who are left behind at home due the male labor circulation have built self confidence, bringing a sense of independence and have generated capability to defend against discrimination imposed by the male dominated society. Thus, ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them have been obtained through the male labor circulation process which, partially enable women to take right decision at right time in every sphere of their social, economic, political life ranging from daily household activities to local extent. At present, the decision which is taken by the women gets respects and values equally from the male of their counterpart.

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