

Women
in the
changing
world

WOMEN'S CELL, TEACHERS' UNIT
LAKHIMPUR GIRLS' COLLEGE

Women in the Changing World:

Published by Palki for Women's Cell, Teachers Unit, Lakhimpur Girls' College and Publication Cell, Lakhimpur Girls' College, Khelmati, Lakhimpur, Assam-787031.

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Women Labours in Rural Assam: A Study

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Abstract:

Assam, one of the major states of North Eastern region (NER), houses women constitutes nearly half of the total population of the state. Most of the social analysis usually incorporates this huge chunk of the population as it would be almost impossible to complete the scheme of things without any role of nearly 50% of humanity. At the advent of women empowerment and inclusive growth both men and women must act decisively to capture the various opportunities. In many states of India along with Assam, women life has been pathetic since they have to collect firewood, fetch drinking water, search fodder and feed cattle, milking, making of farm manure, work on their land to raise crop, work as paid labour in others land and take care of children. Women are silently adorns many roles in the agriculture sector-from homemaker to labourer to cultivator and even entrepreneur. Even then majority of women in the rural area are outside of the labour force. The paper intends to examine the labour market behavior in rural Assam, with the objective to assess the work status among sample individuals.

(Key word: *Employment, economy, labour market, work, etc*)

Introduction:

Women are the backbone of any developed society as well as an economy. The number of women in India is far outnumber than the total population of many countries. Therefore, women empowerment is a major challenge in India in recent times which requires an understanding of its multi-dimensional influences. India has been working towards empowering her women ever since independence. India has been an agrarian economy and about 85% of rural women are engaged in agriculture. About 33 per cent of women constitute as agricultural work force. Around 48 per cent self employed farmers are women and 64 per cent of the informal sector work force depending on agriculture in women (Economic Survey, 2017-18). In many states of India along with Assam, women life has been pathetic since they have to collect firewood, fetch drinking water, search fodder and feed cattle, milking, making of farm manure, work on their land to raise crop. work as paid labour in others land and take care of children. With the increase tendency in rural men migrating to urban areas for better opportunities, the responsibilities of women is increase to take care of agriculture. In such situation, women are silently adorns many roles in the agriculture sector-from homemaker to labourer to cultivator and even entrepreneur, and their roles are changing very rapidly in India. In Assam, though the women workforce participation rate is low, but still it is found that the women workforce participation rate is higher in case of rural area compared to that of urban area. Therefore, the rate of women unemployment in rural area, as per usual principal and subsidiary status approach, in 2015 is 7.2 per cent which is about 18 per cent in urban area (5th Employment Unemployment report, Govt. of India, 2015-16). However, it is seen that about 55 per cent females are self employed in Assam compared to 43 per cent female in All India level.

Statement of the Problem:

Historically Assam was one of the industrially developed states of colonial India. There are some districts in Upper Assam, especially Dibrugrah, Tinsukia, Sibsagar and Jorhat, where some heavy industries have grown up, some of which were established during the British period. Even today, the rate of industrialization in those districts is high, and consequently their unemployment rate (both men and women) is low compared with others. But in the north bank of Brahmaputra in general and Lakhimpur district in particular,

no big industry has appeared. There are few small and cottage industries in Lakhimpur district where a limited labour force is absorbed. Owing to the absence of modern or non-traditional industry in Lakhimpur and its adjacent districts the proportion of industrial women employment is very low, and this low level of industrial employment in the district under study is largely in tea industry and partly in sericulture. In Dhakuwakhana sub division, the rural people are engaged in sericulture activities where handloom and textile industries are growing up. Besides those, most of the rural women remain dependent on the agricultural sector.

Rural area of Assam is undoubtedly an agrarian sector. In spite of many other subsidiary working opportunities, the main source of income in rural areas is agriculture. Agriculture is looked upon not merely as the source of livelihood, but also the potential source of employment for the increasing rural labour force (Boruah, G.C, 2014). This is due to the slow growth of work opportunities in the non-agricultural and other subsidiary sectors (Khanka, 1988). An important characteristic of rural labour market is that the demand for women agricultural labourers increases in peak period of cultivation and decreases in post cultivation period, which implies the employment generations for women in the rural economy depend upon the change of seasons. This category of unemployment is seen not only in agriculture; but also in non-agricultural activities as well. For example, some small scale industries like the brick making, pot making, etc. cannot operate in the rainy season and during this time the workers in general and women workers engaged such industries in particular become jobless. Apart from agriculture many women in Assam are working in Sericulture sector. Especially many parts of Lakhimpur, Dhemaji and Soalkochi of Kamrup (Rural) district are well-known in sericulture activities and most of women are directly or indirectly absorbed there for livelihood. As per the data available in Statistical Handbook of Assam 2019, about 15, 30,073 number of women waver temporally engaged in sericulture sector while about 48,761 nos. are permanently engaged on this sector.

On the other hand, tea gardens demanded the largest workforce of women in Assam. Around one million women work in the tea gardens of Assam, producing more than 50% of tea in India, which is the second largest tea producer in the world. A large workforce, within the tea industry women works the lowest-paid jobs of plucking, pruning, hoeing, etc., but these are physically demanding jobs that

require standing, walking and carrying loads. There are very few women in the management and decision-making processes within the tea industry. Women workers are also absent from the negotiation and decision-making tables of the workers' unions.

Objectives of the studies:

The basic objective of the study is to analysis the status of women in rural labour market of Assam. Since the educational status of rural women has been growing rapidly and declining the rate of rural women work force participation; this paper tries to highlighting the relative importance of women in rural labour market. Moreover, women are considered as most vulnerable group of the society and always neglecting and paying low wage rate; hence the paper also tries to highlight such factors that makes it most vulnerable in society and focuses some measures to solve them.

Methodology of the study:

The study is basically an empirical one. Irrespective of religion and caste, after conducting a survey on 100 households of five villages of Lakhimpur district, namely Kathabari and Batchoramukh villages from Dhakowakhana sub-division and Chorimoriya, Soriyohbari and Kowadanga No1 villages from North Lakhimpur sub-division, by using purposive sampling, data has been collected. For analysis of data, various statistical methods are introduced so that the objectives of the study can be making easily understandable.

Review of Literature:

Segmentation of labour markets has been a subject of debate for labour and development economists for a long time. John Stuart Mills was the first economists acknowledging the segmentation of the labor markets together with the existence of persistent wage differentials among different groups of workers. Many researchers attempted to understand the developing country labour markets in terms of segmented labour markets. Labour market segmentation can be characterized as a situation in which people working in some jobs or in some sectors experience difference in earnings and enjoy different levels of protection and sets of opportunities with respect to others with similar productivity. If labour markets are becoming more segmented, the most vulnerable groups among workers like women likely to affect negatively (Reddy A. A., 2015). The nature

and pattern of women's work in rural economies present a complex set of issue because co-existence of wages and non-wage labour and absence of market for them makes it more difficult (Kak, S. 1995). Scarcity of job opportunities for women is a common characteristic in rural labour in almost every country of the world. The problem is more serious in case of developing and most populous country like India. There are plenty of works opportunities in rural area of India in both farm and non farm sector for male but due to the lack of proper development of rural sector and rigid socio-cultural restriction; the women employment opportunities are yet not be readily available. Women are also at a disadvantage position in terms of access to non-farm jobs. Therefore, share of women in non-farm employment has in fact declined continuously since 1999-2000. Decline in female employment was observed in case of agricultural activities as well. (Saha P. and Verick S. 2016). There is also evidence that the mechanisation of agriculture has contributed to the decline in demand for female agricultural labour (Verick 2018). This may happened, because women were always paid very nominal wage in farm and non-farm sector compare to that of male workers. Mohiuddin (1995) also pointed out that women's lower status is manifested in women's low wage rates than men in all occupational fields and industries.

On the other hand, many research argued that the trends in women labour force participation rates across many developed countries trace out a U-shaped curve of women labour supply. Goldin (1994) argues that women labour force participation rate declines initially with economic development and then rises on account of structural shifts in the economy, decline in fertility rates and expansion of women's education resulting in a U-shaped curve of women labour supply. But in Indian experience it is not show the 'U' trajectory as found in most other countries (Sundari S, 2020). Many studies using NSS data have appeared in recent years in both Indian states and abroad explaining the falling trend of women in rural labour market with economic growth. The findings of most studies make it clear that work participation rates of women in India are declining on account of increase in household income and increase in enrolment of women in both rural and urban India (Chatterjee et al. 2015; Bhalla and Kaur 2011). Higher attendance in schools by girls has resulted in the withdrawal of mothers from labour force to look after the younger siblings (Krishna et al. 2016). It has been pointed

out that highly educated women are more likely to marry highly educated men earning high incomes, and hence remain out of the labour force (Chatterjee et al,2015)

The above review of existence literature reveals that a number of studies have been undertaken on the issues of rural women labour market at the nationally and globally but no such serious studies has been found in case of Assam. The present paper in this regard is a modest attempt to bridge the gap.

Status of Rural Labour market in Surveyed Area:

The Lakhimpur district of Assam typically an agrarian one. As per the 2011 population census, about 91.24 per cent people are staying in rural area of Lakhimpur district by occupying 89.67 per cent out of total household. There are various activities absorbing the women in the district; some are employed as regular salaried workers in both government and private sectors. Some are self employed; some are contract and a large proportion work as casual or daily wage earners. It is shown in Table 1.1. The table shows the comparison of working activity out of per 1000 worker aged 15 and above by using Usual Principal Status for Assam and all India. As per the 5th Employment Unemployment Report, 2015-16, conducted by the Labour Bureau of India, GOI, the female self-employed and salaried employed in Assam is greater than that of all India level while the nos. of contract workers and casual labours is less than that of all-India level.

Table 1.1
Comparisons of Distribution of worker According to Activity

Category of Employee		Self employed	Wage/salaried employed	Contract worker	Casual labour
Assam	Rural	535	170	14	281
	Urban	490	361	38	111
	Total	549	196	15	240
All India	Male	459	190	21	374
	Rural	491	107	29	187
	Urban	412	343	57	302
Total	Male	486	174	38	419
	Female	429	125	27	

Source: 5th Employment Unemployment Report, 2015-16

Apart from these, there are another category of people who are neither within the 'labour force' nor belonging to the 'not in the labour force'. They are considered as willingly unemployed or voluntarily

unemployed. They are waiting for better jobs. As the employment opportunities are concern, the rural economy is characterized by predominance of agriculture which in most areas remains low productive. But the sector supplies food for people, fodder for domestic animals and raw materials for industries. However, with the rapidly increasing labour force both male and female as a whole, the rural economy has failed to create adequate employment opportunities.

The distributions of surveyed population in different occupational categories of the surveyed villages are shown in table 1.2. Most of the women in the surveyed area are engaged as casual labourers (35). All categories of labourers viz. the agricultural, construction, tea garden workers and others who works casually for daily wage are incorporated within this group. The numbers of service holders (or salaried employed) and self employed (sales and trading etc.) related categories are calculated as 4 and 15 respectively. In the survey area there are two women who are engaged in shop keeping in village Chorimoriya belong to self-employed category. Similarly, six women are working as casual labourers (both in agricultural and non-agricultural activities) and one has salaried job. The casual workers are poor owing to their low wage rate and a large number of dependants in their families.

Table 1.2
Status of Women Employment in the Surveyed Villages

Surveyed Villages	Self Employed (Sales and Trading)	Casual workers (Agriculture & Non-agriculture)	Salaried Employed (Govt. & Private)
Batchoramukh	3		
Chorimoria	2	6	0
Kathabari	3	6	1
Kowadanga No1	6	3	1
Soriyahbari		8	2
Total	15	35	04

Source: Primary Survey, 2018-19

The poor women are not occupationally uniform: some are small traders especially engage in Hotels, Restaurants, shops of grocery and cloths; others are engaged in low paid agricultural works during

the showing and harvesting period. Women in Tea garden and its neighboring areas are actively and regularly working in tea garden in government stipulated fixed wage rate. Since, the government stipulated wage rate is comparatively low then that of locally existing wage rate, therefore, most of the women labours left tea garden work during the showing and harvesting period. There are 8 and 6 women labours in Soriyahbari and Kowadanga No1 villages respectively informed that they left their tea garden work in peak agricultural period and engaged themselves as agricultural labour. Therefore, we may consider that women wage rate can play a vital role in terms of women employment. In spite of this we may consider that tea garden is one of the biggest possible employers in rural Assam in case of women work provider is concerned. Women, in areas, where sericulture is playing a vital role, engaged themselves in sericulture activities. There are 2 women in Kathabari villege of Dhakuakhana who engage themselves in sericulture work. There are many places in Assam viz. Sualkuchi, Dhakuawakhana, Ghilamara, Dhemaji, etc. where sericulture plays a vital role. Many women are working as weaver in different Handloom and Textile industries of the district as well as in the state.

Table 1.3
Status of Unemployment Women in the Surveyed Villages

Surveyed Villages	Full Employed	Under Employed	Unemployed
Batchoramukh	3	6	3
Chorimoria	3	6	2
Kathabari	4	3	3
Kowadanga No1	6	8	4
Soriyahbari	1	12	3
Total	17	35	15

Source: Primary Survey, 2018-19

However, the estimation of full employment, under employment and Unemployment in the surveyed villages, as per person days, is shown in Table 1.3. The data reveals that there are about 26.2 per cent full employed women while 53.8 per cent are remain underemployed women. By taking 300 days in a year and 8 hours per day as a full employment norm (as per Usual principal Status norms), the highest full employed women calculated on village

Kowadanga No1, i.e. 6 women (20.0%) followed by village Kathabari 4 women (16.6%) and lowest in village Soriyahbari 1 women (3.03%).

Table 1.4
Status of Unemployment Women in the Surveyed Villages

Surveyed Villages	No of Respondents	Housewives (Not in Labour force)	% of Unemployed
Batchoramukh	29	17	25.0
Chorimoria	27	16	18.2
Kathabari	24	14	30.0
Kowadanga No1	30	12	22.2
Soriyahbari	33	19	21.4
Total	143	78	23.1

Source: Primary Survey, 2018-19

From this observation it can be stated that the rate of full employment and underemployment in the rural economy basically depends on the pattern of farming. Where the multi cropping cultivations is prevalent, the rate of full employed is high and vice versa. On the other hand, from the calculation of women Labour Force Participation Rate and the Proportion of Women Unemployment in the surveyed areas; it is observed that the LFPR in the all surveyed areas are 45.4 per cent in UPS activity and percentage of women unemployment is 23.1 per cent. It implies that about 54.6 per cent of surveyed women are out of the labour force. This may be owing to the good economic condition of the households, give more emphasis on child's future then the income, Extension of the importance of education and Higher attendance in schools by girls has resulted in the withdrawal of mothers from labour force to look after the younger siblings, or Socio-cultural norms of the assamese society may influence the entry and exit of women from the labour market.

The women wage rates in the surveyed villages vary over the different activities and, of course, over the skill spectrum of the workers. The wage rate for the skilled women labour in showing and harvesting is high, while the wage rate for unskilled women labour is low. The rural wage rate is still not an effective factor for determining employment, yet in some cases it appears as the reflector of supply and demand for rural workforce. The wage rate in the

surveyed villages is not necessarily determined by the supply of labour, rather it depends on the availability and nature of work. The wage rate is high in those villages where the availability of work is comparatively high relative to the supply of labour and also in the villages which are near the urban centre. There is migration of the women workers to the tea garden and a labour scarcity sometimes occurs in some rural areas leading to a temporary rise in wage rates.

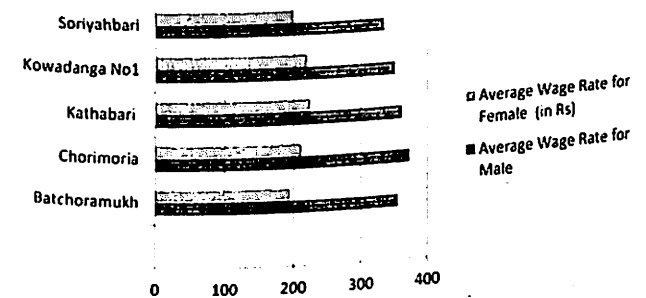
Table 1.5
Status of Women Average Existing Wage rate in the Surveyed Villages

Surveyed Villages	Average Wage Rate for Male (in Rs)	Average Wage Rate for Female (in Rs)	Difference of Wage Rate (in Rs)
Batchoramukh	355	195	160
Chorimoria	373	212	161
Kathabari	362	225	137
Kowadanga No1	351	220	131
Soriyahbari	335	200	135
Average Wage Rate in the surveyed villages	355	210	145

Source: Primary Survey, 2018-19

There is a huge difference in wage rates among the male and female casual workers in all the surveyed villages, which implies the demand for male labour is always high compare to that of female labour.

Diagram 1.1
Comparisons of wage rate in surveyed villages



Apart from the wage rate, status of education is another significant factor for employment of rural women is concern. The distributions

of women according to their educational level in the surveyed area are shown in Table 1.6.

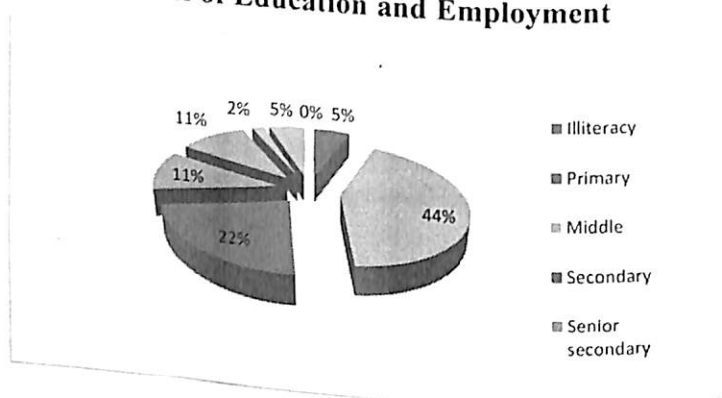
Table 1.6
Status of Education and Employment

Level of Education	No of Women in the surveyed villages	% of Women not in labour force	% of Unemployed
Illiteracy	18	58.9	11.1
Primary	42	83.3	9.5
Middle	33	18.2	9.1
Secondary	27	48.1	7.4
Senior secondary	12	25.0	25.0
Graduation	7	0.0	14.3
PG and above	1	0.0	0.0
Vocational	3	0.0	0.0
Total	143	54.5	10.5

Source: Primary Survey, 2018-19

However, there are about 12.59 per cent illiterate women in the study area. The women reading up to primary level is very high (29.37%) compared with other level while it is lowest in case of the PG and above (0.69%). There are about 3 women, i.e. 2.09 % has vocation education and fully employed in different job. Moreover, the level of education is not at all job oriented for a rural economy and there are many educated women who marginally engaged in the agricultural sector and most of them are out of the labour force. On the other hand, in many cases it is reported that once a woman joined in a non-agricultural job, she migrates into the urban area.

Diagram 1.2
Level of Education and Employment



Moreover, it is revealed in the surveyed villages that the economic conditions of the self-employed women are good, even some of them belong to very rich families. They are currently unemployed and searching high paid job. They have higher level of education; their parents have higher status in the society. Apart from this there are some child labourers (girls), those with age less than 15, are also found in the surveyed villages. They are engaged in different activities especially in agriculture, domestic work, trade and commerce. A girl child of thirteen was found to work as a domestic servant in Chorimoriya village while another girl child of aged 12 were engaged in Kathabari to look after the baby.

Conclusion:

Unemployment among women is a big problem in the country, and more so in Assam. Owing to the slow pace of rural development the problem has become serious day by day. The development of rural economy which can reduce women unemployment requires minimize the gender gap and equally pay of wages, expansion of infrastructure, the improvement of agricultural technology through new inputs, establishment of rural industries, expansion of women education, providing of training, etc. Since women education has expanded in the rural areas, but this expansion has not been accompanied with the opening of new avenues of women employment for the educated rural youth. The type of education imparted in schools and non-technical colleges is not much demanded in many branches of employment, rather technical skill and vocational training is more in demand.

Agriculture is the dominant occupation in the study area. Those with no land of their own or a very small size of landholding, tend to cultivate some land on share cropping or cash-rent basis. Most of the share-coppers and tenant-farmers, both male and female, do not depend only on cultivation; they also work as casual labourers. Since the size of landholding in many households is small, which results in the agricultural income being low, households have no way to avoid the non-agricultural work. In some cases, the women earn more from non-agricultural activities than her husband work from agricultural activities. The common women activities allied to agriculture in the study area are poultry, piggery, goatry, dairy, animal husbandry, search fodder and feed cattle, milking, making of farm manure etc. While the non-agricultural activities for women are

handloom, handicraft, pot making, brick-making, tailoring, shop keeping, vending on the streets, etc. in the surveyed area. Mechanisation of agriculture is one of the promising methods for raising the intensity of cultivation. It boosts the agricultural productivities and creates additional employment opportunities for both male and female workers in rural area.

In most cases the working opportunities of the rural women depend on the geographical as well as the natural factors of the localities. In the heavily flooded area, the farmers do not cultivate paddy, rather they cultivate mustard and other winter and spring crops. In such area, the demand for women workers in agriculture is comparatively low than the paddy cultivation. Moreover, many women in the surveyed area depend on common property resources (CPR) for subsidiary sources of their income. On the other hand, there are huge amounts of industrial raw materials in the rural areas which can support agro-based rural industries. Therefore, government should create an entrepreneur-friendly environment so that the private individuals come forward to establish agro-based industries and generate employment opportunities for both rural male and female.

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Women's Cell, Lakhimpur Girls' College: The Lakhimpur Girls' College is a pioneer institute of Assam providing higher education to women since 1972. On 14th December 2006, 'The Women Cell' of this college has been formed as per the guideline of Assam College Teachers Association. Dr. Musfick Ara Tayab was the founder President of the Cell while Mrs. Jobin Jerin Akhtar Boruah and Mrs. Malobika Chaliha were Vice President and Secretary respectively. In the year 2017, the Women Cell of Lakhimpur Girls' College was reconstituted according to the new guideline of ACTA. The Women Cell performed different activities for the welfare of the society and students studying in this institution since its formation. Successful programmes organized by Women Cell include-

- Face to face interaction of female teachers with the students studying in the institution in 2007.
- Awareness program entitled 'Early Marriage, Legal and Societal Issues'.
- Two 'Rural Awareness' programmes in collaboration with the department of Home Science in 2012.
- Extension activity entitled 'Students Attitude Towards Society' in 2012.
- Awareness program at Anganwadi Centre on the occasion of National Girl Child Day on 24th January 2015.
- A 'Cancer Awareness Programme' in 2016.
- Conference entitled 'Role of Women in Socio-Economic Development' in collaboration with the 'Khaga Biswajyoti Mahila Samiti' at Khaga Shankari Kala Kristi Sangha in 2017.
- A community-oriented programme entitled 'Maa' where 62 local elderly male and females were felicitated including students with remarkable achievements in different examinations in 2017.
- Awareness program on two distinct areas-'Breast Cancer' and 'Flori Culture' in 2021.

In 2021, a resolution was taken by the members of Women Cell, Lakhimpur Girls' College to publish a series of books with ISBN. The glorious journey of Women Cell, Lakhimpur Girls' College is rooted in our book entitled 'Women in the Changing world'.

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