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Rural Non-Farm Female Workers in Sivasagar District of Assam

Jugita Konwer

Ph.D. Scholar, Department of Economics, Dibrugarh University, Assam, India

Abstract:

The economy of rural Assam is predominantly based on agriculture and allied activities. Bulk of population in Assam is dependent on agricultural activities for their livelihood. Towards the end of the 1960's the importance of rural non-farm sector has gained high policy significance in the state. Growing pressure on land over the years has resulted in fragmentation of land holding among rural households, which in turn has led to increase in landlessness and marginalization of farmers.. The present study is an attempt to examine the magnitude of employment in rural non-farm sector and to examine socio-economic condition of rural non-farm female worker.

Keywords: Female, non-farm sector, Sivasagar

1. Introduction

The economy of rural Assam is predominantly based on agriculture and allied activities. Bulk of population in Assam is dependent on agricultural activities for their livelihood. Towards the end of the 1960's the importance of rural non-farm sector has gained high policy significance in the state. Growing pressure on land over the years has resulted in fragmentation of land holding among rural households, which in turn has led to increase in landlessness and marginalization of farmers. As a result agriculture sector is not able to absorb growing population; in such a circumstances non-farm sector has become employment provider for rural people.

1.1. Definition of Rural Non-Farm Sectors

The concept of rural non-farm sectors is quite new and Indian debate on this sector began just after publication of Vaidyanathan's article on "Labour use in India: A Study of Spatial and Temporal Variations" in 1986¹. It is difficult to identify and define the rural non-farm sector in clear and concrete term because of the diverse character of this sector that includes the secondary and tertiary sector in rural areas. The World Bank also mentions the difficulties in presenting clear cut classification of agriculture and non-agricultural activities or rural and urban categories due to absence of concrete and consistent set of definition². Very often, there is confusion between farm and non-farm, off-farm and on-farm employment³. Mahajan and Fisher have defined rural non-farm as comprising of all non-agricultural activities, mining and quarrying, household and non-household manufacturing, processing, repairing, construction, trade transport and other services undertaken in villages and rural towns having up to 50,000 population and the enterprises varying in size from the household own account enterprises all the way to factories⁴.

The Census of India has classified the workers into the following nine categories-

1. Cultivator
2. Agricultural Labourers
3. Livestock, Forestry, Fishing, Hunting, Plantation, Orchards and allied activities
4. Mining and Quarrying
5. Manufacturing and Repair, a) Household Industries b) Other than household industries
6. Construction
7. Trade and Commerce
8. Transport, Storage and Communication
9. Services

From category IV to IX fall under rural non-farm sector. This definition partly allies with that of National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development ((NABARD, established 1986) as it excludes allied activities from rural non-farm sector. The spatial dimension

¹ Vaidyanathan, A., Labour Use in India-A Study of Spatial and Temporal Variations, EPW, Vol-21, No-52 pp A130-A146.

² World Bank, Rural Enterprise and Non-Farm Employment, World Bank Paper, Washington DC, 1978

³ Bhimjani, R. et.al., The Rural Non-Farm Sectors in Assam, NABARD Study Group Report, B-63, Defence Colony, New Delhi, 1994

⁴ Mahajan, V. and Fisher, T., The Forgotten Sector, Non-Farm Employment and Enterprises in Rural India, Oxford and IBH, Delhi, 1997, p-274

leads to difference of opinions. For, the concept of rural area is much debated. The tightest definition of rural area would include only village which defined in the Census of India (Report of Study group of Rural Non-Farm Sector) as habitats with population of less than 5,000 which are not notified as urban areas or towns.

2. Objectives

1. To examine the magnitude of employment in rural non-farm sector.
2. To examine socio-economic condition of rural non-farm female worker.

3. The Study Area and Methodology

3.1. Area of Study

The present paper selected Sivasagar District of Assam for study. The district is a place of historical heritage of Assam State and is famous for the ancient monuments of Ahom Kingdom. This district is comprised mostly of rural set up except the Sibsagar town. The district has nine (9) developmental blocks, 118 Gaon Panchayats and 878 villages. In the district, literacy rate is 74.47% and total population is 10, 51736 having a population density of 394 persons in per square k.m.

3.2. Data Collection

The data required for the study have been collected both from primary and secondary sources. The secondary data on certain aspects have been collected from official records and file materials, printed books, news paper journals.

The primary data, on the other hand, were collected through personal interview with a pre-designed questionnaire having both close-ended and open-ended questions. At the first stage out of 9 development blocks of Sibsagar district of Assam, three development blocks *viz* Pachim Abhoypur development block, Lakowa development block and Demow development block are purposively selected on the basis of their backwardness, In the second stage five village were randomly selected from each development block and in the third stage 2 Non-farm female worker were selected from each village. The sample size, therefore, is $3 \times 5 \times 2 \times 10 = 300$ workers. Thus 300 female non-farm workers were selected as respondents for sample for the present study.

A household survey was made during 2012-2014 financial year.

3.3. Tools of Analysis

Simple statistical tools such as averages, percentages, diagrams and tabular presentations are used.

4. Scope of the Study

The present study covers only women Workers Performing non-farm activities such as pickle making, weaving, knitting and embroidery. Moreover, the study encompasses the look into the socio-economic characteristics of the respondents and the problems faced by them in running their activities.

5. Review of Literature

N. Islam in his book "The Rural Non Farm Sector and Rural Development: Review of Issues and Evidence" in (1997) explains that in most of the countries rural Labour force is growing rapidly, but employment opportunities are not increasing at the same rate. There the agricultural sector is not able to absorb the growing Labour force. So non-farm sector is helpful for both rural and urban sector in providing employment opportunity to the redundant labourers.⁵

D.K. Mishra in his book "Rural Non Farm Employment in Arunachal Pradesh-Growth, Composition and determinants" (2007) explains about specification of the northeastern region which exists with enormous diversity, in terms of resource endowments, population composition, ecological and social preconditions and historical encounter with modernity.⁶

None of these studies have touched the issue of female Labour force participation and related issues in the rural non-farm sector in a systematic way. As such this aspect becomes vital and time need.

As regards rural non-farm sector in Assam a few district level studies have so far been made. These are as follows-

M. Raja (2002) explains socio-economic factors responsible for non-farm employment and its structural change in Nagaon district.⁷ B. Chakraborty (2006) explains about nature and size, diversity of non-farm sector in Nalbari district.⁸ R. Sharma (2007) explains about contribution of rural non-farm micro enterprises and also explain forward and backward linkages of rural non-farm micro enterprises in Sonitpur district.⁹

⁵ Islam, N., The Rural Non-Farm sector and Rural Development: Review of Issues and Evidence, 2020 Breif 47/2020 Visions For Food, Agriculture and the Environment, 1997

⁶ Mishra, D.K., Rural Non-Farm Employment in Arunachal Pradesh, V.V. Giri Institute, New Delhi, 2007

⁷ Raja, M., A Study of Rural Non-Farm Employment in Nagaon District of Assam, Msc Unpublished Thesis, Assam Agricultural University, 2002

⁸ Chakraborty, B., A Study of Rural Non-Farm Sector in Assam with Special Reference to Nalbari District, PhD Unpublished Thesis, Guwahati University, 2006

⁹ Sharma, R., Micro Enterprises in the Rural Non-Farm Economy of Sonitpur District of Assam, PhD Unpublished Thesis, Guwahati University, 2007

As such, a major study on rural non-farm sector of the state and female Labourforce participation into it with the following objectives has become most urgent at the present context.

6. Results and Discussion

6.1. Magnitude of Employment in Rural Non-Farm Sector

The proportion of male and female population in both farm and non-farm sectors of the state and Sibsagar district has been examined with the secondary data collected from the Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Guwahati. Distribution of male and female workforce in farm and non-farm sectors revealed that the non farm sector is highly dominated by the male workforce while in the farm sector participation of women is higher as compared to male workforce. However both sexes have increasingly been influenced to engage themselves in non-farm sectors during the last decade, 1991-2001. This has been shown in Table-1.

SL. No	Workforce in Farm Sector				Workforce in Non-Farm Sector			
	1991		2001		1991		2001	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Assam	73.5	86.4	50.45	52.27	29.5	13.6	49.55	42.73
Sibsagar	67.8	93	37.38	51.52	32.2	7	62.62	48.48

Table 1: Distribution of Male and Female Workforce in Farm and Non-farm Sector
Source: Calculated from Population Census, Assam 1991, 2001

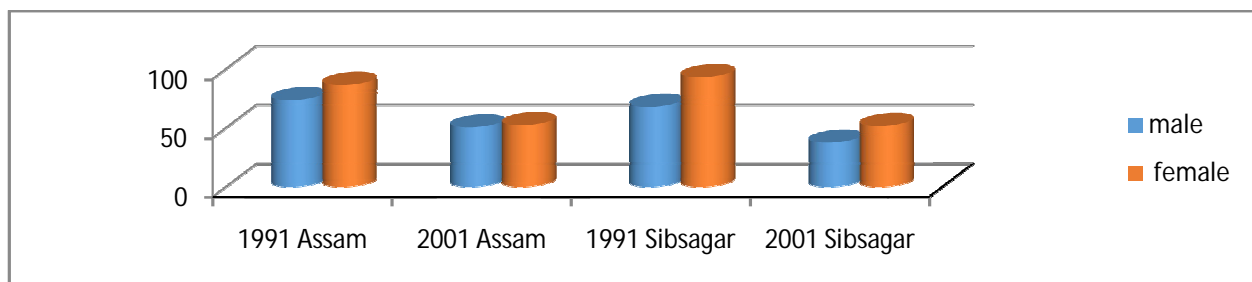


Figure 1: Workforce in farm sector
(Figures in percentage)

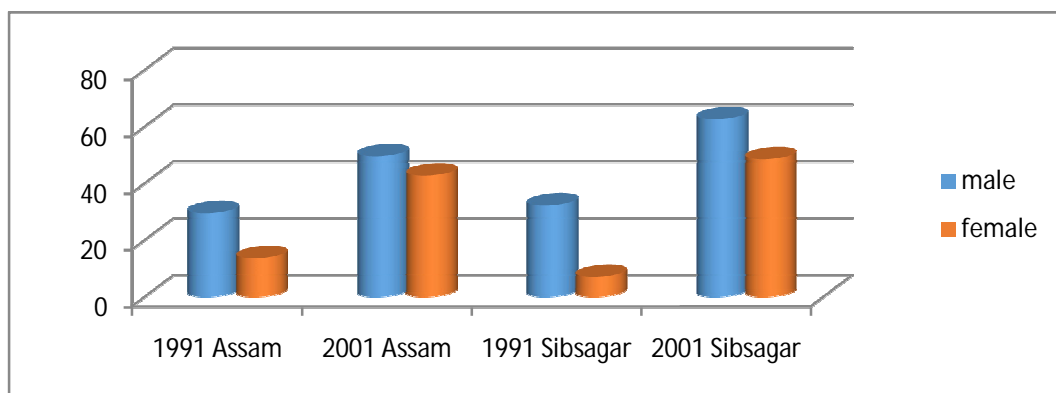


Figure 2: Workforce in Non-Farm sector
(Figures in percentage)

The women workforces in rural areas usually engage themselves in household related economic and non-economic activities. As per 1991 census report, proportion female workforce engaged in farm sector is reported to be significantly higher than non-farm sector. But as per 2001 census report, male and female workforce participation rate of Assam in non-farm sector has increased by 49.55% and 42.73%, over the years of 1991's, which had a lower ratios of 29.5% and 13.6% respectively. Thus, the non-farm sector of the state is gaining importance as increasing employment provider, through with gender bias for male workers. Equal opportunity for female section of the society remains a slogan of the decade. In case of Sibsagar district both male and female workforce participation rate has increased to 62.62 and 48.48 percent, respectively in 2001. The percentage share of workforce in the farm has found to be gradually decreasing, but proportion of female workforce in the farm sector is always high. However, compared to the year of 1991 the proportion of female workforce in rural non-farm sector has increased from 32.2% to 62.62% in case of male; and 7% to 48.48 % in case of females during the period of 1991-2001.

6.2. Socio-Economic Characteristics of the Respondents

6.2.1. Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Particulars	Response	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Age (years)	15-25	56	18.7
	25-30	160	53.3
	30-35	84	28
Total		300	100
Educational Status	Illiterate	130	43.4
	Primary	70	23.3
	Middle	70	23.3
	Secondary & above	30	10
Total		300	100
Poverty Status	APL	50	16.7
	BPL	250	83.3
		300	100
Family Status	Joint Family	120	40
	Nuclear Family	180	60
		300	100
Number of Children	1-3	40	13.3
	3-6	180	60
	6-9	80	26.7
Total		300	100
Caste	OBC	160	53.4
	ST	40	13.3
	SC	40	13.3
	OTHERS	60	20
Total		300	100

Table 2: Demographic profile of Respondents

Source: Field Survey, 2012-14

Table-2 indicates the particulars of respondents, 53 percent of respondents belong to age group 25-30. 83.7 percent respondent belong to age group 15-25 and 28 percent of respondents belong to age group 30-35. 43.4 percent respondent are illiterate, 46.6 percent respondents have primary and middle education and only 10 percent respondent have matriculation and above. Majority of respondents belong to nuclear family (60 percent). 83.3 percent respondents belong to BPL families. 60 percent of respondents having children 3-6. 53.4 percent respondents belong to OBC, 26.6 percent respondent belong to ST, SC.

6.2.2. Accommodation of the Respondents

Type of house	Respondents	Percentage
Pucca	20	6.6
Semi pucca	50	16.7
Katcha	230	76.7
Total	300	100

Table 3: Type of Accommodation

Source: Field survey, 2012-14

Table-3 depicts that 76.7 percent respondents live in kutch houses. Only 6.6 percent respondents live in pucca houses.

6.2.3. Income Generating Activities of the Respondents

Nature of Activity	Respondent	Percentage
Weaving,	120	40
pickle making,	80	26.7
knitting and embroidery	100	33.3
Total	300	100

Table 4: Income generating Activities of Respondents

Source: Field Survey, 2012-14

Table-4 and figure-8 shows main activities of the respondents are weaving (40 percent), second highest activities of women is knitting and Embroidery (33.3 percent) and only 26.7 percent respondents engaged in stationary goods shop.

6.3. Problems Faced by Non-Farm Female Workers

There are many socio-economic problems and difficulties faced by these non-farm female workers at outside the home and inside the home. The problems faced by them can be summarized in the following words:

1. It is found that large family is the important cause and it fuel to poverty, unemployment problems.
2. The study reveals that 30 percent of gross illiteracy among the large mass of working women is responsible for their mobility, exploitation and poverty.
3. The non-farm workers work for longer hours.
4. Majority of non-farm female labour are habituated to bettlenuts, tea and tobacco taking. These habits reduce their income and cause illness.
5. The women labours are exploited at work. They get lower wage rate in comparison to male workers.

In the present study following results are revealed-

1. In Assam both male and female participation in rural non-farm sector has increased by 49.55 percent and 42.73 percent in 2001 Census report .In case of Sivasagar district male and female participation has increased to 62.62 percent and 48.48 percent respectively in 2001 census
2. 53.3 percent respondents belong to age group 25-30 and 28 percent respondent belong to age group 30-35
3. 43.4 percent respondent illiterate and 56.6 respondents have formal education
4. 83.3 percent respondent belong to BPL families
5. 60 percent of the respondent belong to nuclear families
6. 60 percent of the respondents have 3-6 children
7. 53.4 percent respondent belong to OBC
8. 76.7 percent respondent have kutcha houses
9. 40 percent of respondent pursuing weaving as income earning source

7. Suggestion

The non-farm sector plays an important role in most developing regions. In the context of non-farm workers the following suggestions have been forwarded:

1. Equal pay for all types of unskilled work and Schemes for skill up gradation of women workers should be undertaken, through endorsement of laws.
2. Awareness about legal literacy programme should be extended.
3. Non-farm worker should be organized for uplifting their living standards.

8. Conclusion

Rural non-farm sector emerge as a job provider for people. Hence, there is a need to organise this sector for its huge potentiality. Awareness of various plan and programmes implemented by government is needed for claiming their own rights.

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