



Analysis Of Gender-Based Wage Inequality In Agriculture In Sultanpur District

Ankit Kumar Verma

Research Scholar

Department of Geography

University of Lucknow.)

Neelesh Kumar Agrahari

Research Scholar

Department of Geography

University of Lucknow

Abstract:

The issue of gender inequality in the rural labour market is still shaping the form of agricultural labour in most parts of India. Women form an essential part of the labour force in the agricultural industry and engage in almost all the stages of crop production. They have their work usually focused in activities, which include nursery preparation, paddy transplanting, weeding, harvesting, threshing and other post harvesting labour which requires patience, skill and long working hours. Mostly in many villages, these activities are highly dependent on the labour of women making them impeccable to the operation of rural agricultural economy. However, their contribution is often not well-rewarded with respect to jobs and with wages. Unequal payment of wages daily to the men and women working in agriculture sectors continue even with the similarity in the amount of effort and time spent in the farm. It is a paper that will discuss the trend on gender-based wage differentials in agriculture in Sultanpur district which is an area where the major proportion of the rural population depends on farming as their primary source of income. The study is directed at the character of an agrarian employment, the way the labour is arranged during various agrarian activities as well as the processes of the wage rates establishment within the local labour market. Specific emphasis is placed on the impact of social practices, professional roles as well as the financial situation on the wages that are paid to male and female labourers. Results show that changes in wages are closely connected with the gender norms and the division of labour, which prevailed in the rural society. Women are often put in labour intensive industries that are said to be routine or unskilled as opposed to those who are related to the use of machinery or preparing fields, which are more often taken by men and tend to attract more wages.

Keywords: gender wage gap, agricultural labour, rural labour market, women workers, and wage inequality, Sultanpur district.

Introduction:

Agricultural practices are the main source of employment in the rural India especially among the households whose acreage is minimal or none at all. In agriculture, wage labour is also the surest source of livelihood especially to many families. Women held the important position in this rural labour force and made a lot of contribution in the agricultural production. Their participation is on different cultivation stages with some of including land preparation assistance activities and followed by sowing, transplanting, weeding, harvesting, threshing and post-harvest tasks. The work required in these jobs is time consuming, physical, and experience gained knowledge. The involvement of women workers in agricultural activities is very important in most villages as the smooth running of the farms will not be possible without their involvement. The economic role of the labour of women is often hard to get even though they engage in it massively. One of the more vivid demonstrations of such a state of affairs is the disparity in the wages of agricultural labourers of male and female gender. In most cases, women also earn less than men do in their daily routine even in situations where they engage in similar work or work the same number of hours in the lines. These discrepancies cannot be defined only in productivity or skill, since they are tightly linked with the old traditions of social life and cultural demands affecting the labour market in the rural area. In most rural areas of the society, the labour performed by women is often seen as auxiliary or supplementary as opposed to being central in groundwork in agriculture. Most of the works done by women, like transplanting, weeding, and harvesting among others, are deemed as ordinary jobs. This image has added to underestimation of the role played by women and defines the wage system that prevails in village labour markets. As a result, women workers usually have a weak bargaining power in the negotiation of wages by the landowners or labour contractors.

Sultanpur district can be considered a suitable area to investigate this problem. The economy of the district is mainly agricultural and a significant percentage of the rural population relies on farming and agricultural wage labour to make ends meet. Most of the farm activities are visibly dominated by women, particularly at periods of labour-intensive cycles of the farming season. Nevertheless, their economic standing even in local labour market is rather low.

Farmer labour organization in Sultanpur:

Small and marginal landholdings are the main features of the agrarian economy of the district of Sultanpur. Most of the cultivators use small pieces of land, and family labour is used to support the agricultural processes along with the employment of hired labour. Since agricultural operations are seasonal, the demand of labour will be high at certain times like when crops are being planted, transplanting, and when harvest is being taken. Such high agricultural seasons are the periods when farmers often hire labourers of neighbouring villages to ensure promptness in the completion of activities. Therefore, farming in the district operates both on a household basis and hiring. Families which do not have enough arable land, or even farm resources, can also rely on the field labour in the immediate area as one of the major sources of income. In this regard, men and women workers are interested in seeking jobs during harvest time hence creating a large labour pool that ensures production of crops within the entire region. In this kind of labour structure, the distribution of tasks is usually done on the traditional lines on which graduates have focused over the years. Men are mainly involved in field preparation practices, mechanizing work, ploughing, irrigation control, and when it is available, tractor use on farm machinery, as well as, carrying inputs. These are usually considered as those demanding high technicality and therefore facing a higher cost of labour, in the rural labour market. Women on the other hand are carrying out a lot of labour-intensive cultivation stages which need patience and long-term labour. Participation is especially being noticed in the preparation of nurseries, transplantation of paddy seedlings, weeding of the fields, harvesting, threshing and other activities relating post-harvest. These practices usually involve the extended working hours in the fields and require a significant amount of expertise and stamina. However, agricultural labour local conceptions are often seen to incorporate routine or supportive work by them.

The process of how these activities are socialized is a key factor in the setting up of the wage patterns in the district. Efforts that are done by men are normally characterised as skilled or laborious, but efforts conducted by women are seen as a normal field labour. These views affect the way employers tend to value various types of labour, thus impacting on wages given to both male and female workers in the agricultural labour market in the district.

Trends in Inequality in Wages:

The conspicuous nature of the rural labour markets in the Sultanpur district is wage differentials between the male and female agricultural labourers. The rate of wages given to men on a daily basis in many of the villages in the district is usually high compared to that of women when both groups of people are doing similar jobs in the farming sector. Male workers are usually highly paid to work a day than the female workers during peak farming seasons like disability of transplantation of paddy or harvesting of wheat. The phone difference between the daily wages might seem small but when it is based on a complete set of the agricultural season the cumulative effects are a huge amount of earnings disengagement. This trend is further amplified when agricultural gainful employment opportunities are more than a few months. Men that earn more wages in consecutive jobs are in a position to earn more income and those with lower wage rates are financial underdogs. These inequalities are not only to the individual workers, but also to the economic state of the people, who rely on agricultural labour as their main source of livelihood.

Various social and economic issues support the existence of such pay disparities. A burning component is present in the established perception of the nature of men and women work. Activities that are normally the preserve of men are often linked with physical power, technical skills or the ability to use tools and machinery. Such jobs are therefore likely to be rated highly under local wage system. Conversely those performed by a woman like transplanting, weeding, and harvesting are usually mentioned as a routine work though it takes patience, accuracy and time spent working. The other important should be the informality of rural labour arrangements. Verbal agreements are the basis of finding employment in agricultural activities in most parts of the district instead of the formal contracts. The wage rate is usually set with the help of the local traditions and the old-rooted customs of the community. The valuation and compensation of labour in the absence of established ways through which the payment of wages can be controlled ensures that such tradition practices are still in place. The social perceptions and informal forms of employment combined in that way has a significant effect on perpetuating wage differentials between male and female agricultural labourers in the rural economy of the district.

Participation of Women in Agricultural Activities:

The involvement of women in agricultural activities is an indispensable part of agricultural labour system of the Sultanpur district where subsistence farming stands out as the most significant livelihood earnings of a reasonably good percentage of the rural population. Their participation is across practically all stages of crop production starting with the early preparation procedures and in the end being the post-harvest management. Women do regular water harvesting of seeds, conservation, preparation of nurseries, translocation of paddy seedlings, weeding, picking of crop, and processing of grain after harvesting. Such activities demand long-term focus, well-trained agricultural prowess and ability to work long hours in the field and do it under tough conditions. The effectiveness of seasonal agriculture activities in many villages highly relies on the promptness of the participation of women especially when the activities are at its climax like paddy transplanting and harvesting.

This is because the work that women perform is often meticulous and intense. Activities like translocation and weeding require extended use of body flexion in muddy grounds with a constant speed in order to achieve the best production of crops. The after harvest activities, such as threshing, drying, cleaning and storing grasses also largely depend on the efforts of women. Crops that are being cultivated can be preserved by women through these, where noble women directly ensure production in agriculture, ensuring that the crops that are produced find their way to the home - based harvest or to the marketplace. Although female agricultural work is often considered secondary in the rural society, their contribution is sometimes huge. Sociocultural discourses tend to make men the central figures as shepherding activities of agriculture and women mere farm helpers or assistants, which still occurs despite the fact that some women have spent equal or more hours operating in the farms. As a result, their work receives minimal recognition within the domestic decision-making processes and the labour market as a whole in the rural community.

This underestimation has far reaching consequences. When the work of women is marginalized and put into an adjuvant position, the economic role plays out in a less noticeable way and their bargaining power during wage bargaining is low. Therefore, payment is regularly lower than the value and the criticality of the work done and creating a cyclic cycle where their work is consistently underestimated even though they do the same work that supports the production of agricultural items.

Socio-Economic Impact of a Wage Inequality:

The inequality in compensation between men and women on farming activities creates deep consequences on the rural life and the society way of life. The area of Sultanpur district has a considerable percentage of families, whose main income is based on the agrarian labour which is seasonal. In these kind of house - holds, the income of the women workers forms a central aspect of the household revenue. The fact that women receive less rate leads to reduced proportion of income that can be earned by the family thus limiting the ability to meet daily demands of food, clothes, school and medical care. Women salaries often stabilize a household especially where the family does have little or no control over farm land. Field work earnings are generally used in buying basic food stuffs, feeding of children at schools and paying low medical costs. Continually discriminating against women wages only makes it a harder task to handle such crucial expenses. As time goes by, these inequalities in earnings increase economic suffering to the households that are majorly reliant on wage labour. The consequences of unequal salary are not limited to the economic circumstances only, as they affect not only the social status of women in families and villages, but also in the economic ones. Income helps an individual become an influencer of the domestic decision- making process including the issues of expenditure, education, and other social responsibilities. Women may not be appreciated as the providers of their own finances when they earn less to work hence reducing their contribution in the decision-making processes in the households.

At the local level, the wage disparity can support the existing social structures. The perception about the work of women is strengthened when the labour done by women is systematically underpaid to undermine the perception that women have lesser value in their work. This image determines the ways in which others view the input of women in the economic and community activities. With time this way of thinking will limit women to having chances to increase their economic input beyond the customary work opportunities. The legacy of wage inequality in the long run helps foster endemic poverty amongst the female workers and their companies. Low income decreases options to save or develop skills and invest in better means of livelihood. In turn, the issue of wage disparity in agricultural work also becomes inherently connected with the enlarge peripheral tendencies of social and economic disadvantage in rural conditions.

Sustaining Factors: Gender Wage Differences:

The fact that wage differentials between men and women relying on agricultural labour persist is closely related to a continuum of structural and social parameters defining patterns of employment in the rural areas. The limited access by women to land ownership is one of the most salient factors constraining women access in the Sultanpur district. Hereditary customs and social norms often dictate the land ownership of men in the rural regions' population; because of this, most women do not have independent control of the productive resources. Without land or other forms of assets they are placed on heavy dependency on wage labour to have their sustenance and this places them to the under-privileged side of the rural labour market. Educational opportunities have also decisive effect on employment opportunities that are offered to women. Girls are interrupted out of their schooling in most of the villages through household chores or by getting married off or limited access to educational institutions. Lower education levels reduce the possibilities of acquiring skills that would help them transform to other types of jobs other than agriculture. As a result, a large group of women in rural areas will still have to endure low paid agricultural labour, where wages are set by the local tradition and not by personal merits.

The opportunities of skills development are also one-sided. The work done by women is mostly experienced than being subjected to any training in agriculture. Constituting a common case, these skills, due to their not having official recognition, are hardly likely to translate into higher rates of wage. This trend emphasizes the view that the labour of women in agriculture can be performed with less skills, despite the fact that most of their activities involve patience, handling of crops with care, and long time working in the fields. The next element that is extremely essential is the dearth of an organized representation amongst the female agricultural labourers. Within the majority of the villages, there is an individual approach in the wage agreements between the labourer and the land owner, or contractor. The lack of solidarity implies that women in the workforce have little control in the wage rates. The fixed wage patterns hence persist in controlling the labour market favouring the male workers in most cases.

These patterns are further enforced through social expectation and traditional labour set ups. In the long run, these conditions create a self-reinforcing loop where women will always be focused on the low-paid jobs, and the status quo of wage disparities would become cemented in the rural economy.

Conclusion and Way Forwards:

Analysis of labour conditions in agricultural labour sector in the Sultanpur district shows that wage gap between male and female is still a salient attribute of the rural labour market. Women are actively involved in extensive farm activities in terms of transplanting, weeding, harvesting as well as post-harvest processing. They continue to work on the farms and provide support to the agrarian economy in the district by keeping crop production going. However, even with the heavy involvement in farm work, salaries that women get in most cases are generally lower than the wages that men would earn doing similar work.

These inequalities are tightly connected with other existing social ideas of gender roles, established labour market, and the unofficial Ness of labour in countryside. In most of the villages, agricultural work is planned on a verbal basis and the rates of wages are usually based on traditional trends. In this situation, the existing inequalities are likely to remain due to the fact that the workers have few chances to overcome the institutionalized wage systems. Women and especially females are limited through loss of land, access to education as well as other available alternative employment opportunities non-agricultural.

To decrease the wage inequality, there is a need to introduce a progressive shift in economic circumstances and social attitudes. The fact that women labour is vital in agricultural production is a significant move towards achieving better wage policies. Access to education and vocational training should be increased so that women in the rural areas learn to be more skilful and competitive in the labour market place and also be better negotiators during a labour negotiation. Enlightenment on labour rights and equal wage portfolio can also help to promote more fair treatment in the local labour markets.

In the long run, these measures may help reduce the gap in income and increase the economic security of rural families. Encouragement of fair wages of agricultural labourers would not only favour female workers but also other greater goals of balanced and inclusive rural development.

References:

1. Agarwal, B. (2010). *Gender and green governance: The political economy of women's presence within and beyond community forestry*. Oxford University Press.
2. Agarwal, B. (2018). Can group farms outperform individual family farms? Empirical insights from India. *World Development*, 108, 57–73. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2018.03.010>
3. Boserup, E. (1970). *Woman's role in economic development*. George Allen & Unwin.
4. Deere, C. D., & León, M. (2001). *Empowering women: Land and property rights in Latin America*. University of Pittsburgh Press.
5. Doss, C. R., Meinzen-Dick, R., Quisumbing, A. R., & Theis, S. (2018). Women in agriculture: Four myths. *Global Food Security*, 16, 69–74. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gfs.2017.10.001>
6. Food and Agriculture Organization. (2011). *The state of food and agriculture 2010–2011: Women in agriculture—Closing the gender gap for development*. FAO.
7. Government of India, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation. (2023). *Periodic labour force survey annual report 2022–23*. MOSPI.
8. International Labour Organization. (2018). *Care work and care jobs for the future of decent work*. ILO.
9. Kabeer, N. (2012). *Women's economic empowerment and inclusive growth*. International Development Research Centre.
10. Klasen, S., & Pieters, J. (2015). What explains the stagnation of female labor force participation in urban India? *World Bank Economic Review*, 29(3), 449–478. <https://doi.org/10.1093/wber/lhv003>
11. National Sample Survey Office. (2019). *Employment and unemployment situation in India*. Government of India.
12. Quisumbing, A. R., Meinzen-Dick, R., Raney, T., Croppenstedt, A., Behrman, J. A., & Peterman, A. (2014). *Gender in agriculture: Closing the knowledge gap*. Springer.
13. Sen, A. (1999). *Development as freedom*. Oxford University Press.
14. Srivastava, R., & Srivastava, N. (2010). Women, work, and employment outcomes in rural India. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 45(28), 49–63.

15. World Bank. (2012). World development report 2012: Gender equality and development. World Bank.
16. Desai, S., & Joshi, O. (2014). The paradox of declining female work participation in an era of economic growth. *Indian Journal of Labour Economics*, 57(4), 547–566.
17. Mehrotra, S., & Parida, J. (2017). Why is the labour force participation of women declining in India? *World Development*, 98, 360–380. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2017.05.003>

