

DIFFICULTIES FACED BY RURAL DALIT WOMAN LABOURERS AT WORKPLACE-A CASE STUDY OF HARYANA

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ABSTRACT

In the present study, an attempt has been made to discuss the difficulties faced by Dalit (SC) woman labourers at the workplace in the rural areas of Haryana. The present study relates to 2020-21 and is based on a sample of 535 rural Dalit woman labour households. The analysis reveals that more than half (60.57 per cent) started working as labourers when they were less than 20 years of age. Only 12.52 per cent of women labourers have some facilities at the workplace, while a large majority of them, i.e., 87.48 per cent are not provided with any facility. One-third of the respondents, i.e., 37.57 per cent have reported that female labourers are paid less wages as compared to their male counterparts for the same work. About 35 per cent have been discriminated against at the workplace based on their caste. The analysis further reveals that 15.88 per cent of the total respondents faced sexual exploitation. Another 26.92 per cent of respondents faced no such type of harassment at the workplace. However, the majority of the respondents 57.20 per cent gave no response regarding this. This may have been because of saving their chastity in society.

Keywords: Dalit, Women, Labourers, Workplace, Rural

Jel Codes: J15, J16, J31, J71

Introduction

Dalits are still suffering on an economic, social, political and cultural basis. They are discriminated against by society and hence face problems regarding human rights and social justice. The woman belongs to the Dalit community are more vulnerable. They face the battle of three fronts i.e. in the form of being poor, a Dalit and a woman. They face insult at the hands of upper-class women due to the practice of untouchability. The caste system of India divides the communities based on their occupation. Dalit woman labourers play an important role in all income-generating activities to improve society and also in social functioning. Despite such a valuable contribution they face social discrimination. In rural areas, a large number of woman labourers work in the agricultural sector as landless labourers, as domestic labourers for the land owner, in animal husbandry and work in small-scale industries in villages. Most rural women are illiterate. Rural women lack facilities, novelties and self-dependent attitudes. Government policies are not properly applied in rural areas (Kongolo, Bamgose, 2002). The majority of women labourers i.e., 93 per cent work in agriculture and other rural works, and get income on daily basis in the agriculture sector. For the same work and at the same time, men are getting more wages compared to women (Balakrishnan, 2005). Dalit women are discriminated against and exploited for their castes in society. Dalit women are also discriminated against based on gender in the family. Dalit women's social position depends on their education and employment (Natekar, Patil, 2014). Dalit women are charged with the double burden of caste and sexual division of labour and are physically exploited by men from other communities. Dalit women are badly off sections and they have fewer resources for development. They are poor, illiterate, sexually harassed and exploited. They face so many conflicts in day-to-day life (Rai, 2016). Most of the time rural woman labourers were unpaid and less paid in the field of agriculture sector as compared to other fields. It has been found that there is gender discrimination in agricultural work, wages, choice of work and working hours (Kumar, Nafisa, 2017). Women have faced discrimination in education, economics, and social, domestic, political as well as sexual fields (Kumari, 2017). The work participation rate of Scheduled Castes was high as compared to other Castes because they have to accept every type of work without any refusal for their livelihood, due to their economic compulsions. Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes suffered from so many types of discrimination on a social, economic and political basis (Raghunath, 2017). Exploitation and oppression against Dalit women are visible in the form of hunger, malnutrition, diseases, physical and mental torture, rape, illiteracy, ill health, unemployment, insecurity and inhuman treatment (Singh, Vashistha, 2018).

Haryana stood at 5th position among all Indian states with a high Scheduled Caste population. In the census of 2011, the total Scheduled Caste population of Haryana is 51, 13,615 which is 20.17 per cent of the total population of Haryana (GOH, 2018). The economic growth of Haryana is faster than in other states but Haryana

has been limelight for its traditions and custom dispute with the freedom of lower caste women. It showed the crimes and exploitation of Dalit women (Pal, 2018). The sex ratio is very low in Haryana; it is a serious matter of demographic imbalance and unfavourable social issues in the future. There are distinctions in sex ratio, literacy rate, and labour work participation in favour of males in Haryana (Nisha, Raj, Kumar, 2015). Economically Haryana is a growing state, but socially it is still backward and patriarchal. Out of the total 21 districts, 19 districts have a sex ratio of less than 880. In Haryana state, the status of women is poor, and the crime against women is high (Parihar, Devi, Kaur, Sharma, 2015). The rural woman labourers need to recover from poverty and improve their economic status and also need freedom from the misuse of the upper classes, which is justified by the Hindu religious Holy Book (Rani, 2017).

Review of Literature

In the villages, there has been a remarkable increase in the number of women going out of the home and becoming workers. They give a great contribution to household income. In Indian society, there is some element that helped to make women independent and fight against injustice and their rights. Women have succeeded to make their social status and survive day by day (Singh, 2014). Demographic data show the Dalit population records a high fertility rate and lower life expectancy compared to the upper-class caste. Dalit women have a higher work participation rate, but low wages paid to them. Underage marriage is a major problem in the Dalit class. Nearly 15-16 percent of girls get married before the marriage age in the Dalit population (Mukherjee, Sabharwal, 2015). The rigor of Dalit women is not only due to their poverty, education and economics but also the exploitation and restriction by the upper classes (Ashalatha, 2013). Rural women are most affected and exploited in rural society. In the present day, globalization and urbanization have shifted rural women to the way of development but they cannot get potential success in society. Rural women are facing different types of social, psychological, cultural, physical and economic problems (Joshi, 2016). Even the Indian government implements various policies to develop the conditions of Dalit women, but Dalit women face a high degree of poverty, gender gap, casteism and socio-economic deprivation (Shahare, 2016). Rural Dalit woman labourers are lives in very poor housing conditions. The income and consumption expenditure is very low. Dalit woman labourers are facing the burden of poverty. Rural Dalit woman labourers have no knowledge or interest in political participation. Rural Dalit woman labourers are working on wages at an early age due to their poor economic conditions (Singh, Dharmpal, Kaur, Kaur, Jyoti, 2019). The socio-economic status of agricultural women workers is very low. Women workers have a low level of housing facilities. The existence of underemployment in the agriculture sector is a major problem for women workers. Low wage rates and gender discrimination in the wage make the income of households very low. Women workers bear the double burden of work inside the house and outside the house (Thresia, 2004). Females from below-poverty-line families are more engaged in domestic work. Female in India is part of the unorganized sector. The trend of female domestic workers has risen day by day due to a lack of education, employment and other vocational skills. Female workers faced multiple problems like health issues, low wages, and mental, physical and sexual harassment at the workplace (Augustine, Singh, 2016). The caste system creates unequal opportunities for work. The social status and economic condition of Scheduled Caste people are very poor. Scheduled Caste has faced discrimination by the upper caste in the villages (Rajpal, 2016). The living conditions of the Dalit women are very poor due to their poverty, poor economic status and lack of education. Dalits are exploited by the upper classes. Dalit women bear a triple burden as Dalit, as poor and as women. The main reason for the exploitation of Dalit women is the lack of awareness of women's rights. Education is the major factor to change the social and economic conditions of Dalit women. Empowering women exclusively attempts to remove gender biases, cultural restrictions, provision of adequate facilities etc (Bakshi, 2017).

Objectives of the Study

In the present study, an attempt has been made to analyze the difficulties faced by Dalit woman labourers at workplaces in rural areas of Haryana. More specifically, the aims are:

- 1) To estimate the age of opting to work as labourers and facilities available at the workplace
- 2) To investigate wage discrimination and delay in getting wages.
- 3) To analyse the caste discrimination and sexual exploitation/harassment faced at the workplace.

Research Methodology

The present study describes the analysis of difficulties faced by Dalit woman labourers at the workplace in rural Haryana. It is a cross-section analysis related to the year 2020-2021 that includes the data related to the workplace problems of the rural Dalit woman labourers in Haryana. The sampling design is selected by the three-stage-stratified sample given as under:

Selection of districts;
Selection of villages; and
Selection of households.

Purposely, Haryana state can be divided into four parts based on geographical factors and natural regions, i.e., Eastern Haryana, Western Haryana, Ambala Plain or Sub-montane Belt and Southern Haryana. For the study, four districts have been selected. Based on random sampling, Sonipat district has been selected from Eastern Haryana, Sirsa district from Western Haryana, Yamunanagar district from Ambala Plain or Sub-montane Belt and Mahendargarh district has been selected from Southern Haryana.

Based on the random sampling method, one village from each development block of the selected district has been chosen. Thus in all, thirty villages have been selected for the survey, eight from Eastern Haryana, seven from Western Haryana, seven from Ambala Plain or Sub-montane Belt and eight from Southern Haryana. Out of a total of 30 selected villages, 535 Dalit woman labour households have been randomly selected and investigated by taking 10 per cent households from the total number of Dalit woman labour households. In the whole sample, 130 households from Sonipat, 140 households from Sirsa, 136 households from Yamunanagar and 129 households from Mahendragarh formed the total sample of 535 households. The study is based on primary as well as secondary data. The secondary data that have been related to districts, development blocks and villages under the study were collected from published and unpublished sources. The main sources of secondary data such as include Census books, Economic Surveys etc. The primary data were collected from the selected villages and households through two types of well-structured questionnaires. One questionnaire was prepared for collecting the facts related to the sampled villages and other for obtaining the facts about the sampled households. Since the majority of the respondents were illiterate, so the questionnaire was filled out by the meeting method.

Primary Data Analysis

As per the data shown in Table 1, out of 535 respondents, more than half (60.57 per cent) started working as labourers when they were less than 20 years of age. The labourers who started their labour work at the age of 20 to 30 years are 28.78 per cent. A very small proportion of the respondents, i.e., 6.17 and 3.55 per cent started working as labourers at the age of 30 to 40 and 40 to 50 years respectively. Even 0.93 per cent of the respondents began to work as labourers after the age of 50 years or above because of their economic compulsions.

Age-group	Haryana	
	Number	Percentages
Less than 20	324	60.57
20-30	154	28.78
30-40	33	06.17
40-50	19	03.55
50 and above	5	0.93
Total	535	100
Source: Field Survey, 2020-21		

Table 1, Age of the Respondents Opting to Work as Labourers

There is no doubt that the basic facilities such as the arrangement of a toilet, canteen, first-aid and other facilities made available to the labourers at the workplace. Table 2 provides the data collected in this regard. Out of 535 respondent woman labourers, only 12.52 per cent of women labourers have these facilities, while a large majority of them, i.e., 87.48 per cent are not provided with any facility. The table further shows that 10.47 per cent of respondents have been provided with a toilet facility at the workplace, while the canteen facility is available to only 5.23 per cent of them. A very small proportion of the respondents, i.e., just 1.68 per cent have the facility of first-aid. Not even a single Dalit woman labourer has conveyed the facility of the creche at any workplace. The field survey has revealed the fact that the respondents, who are availing some of the services at the workplace, are those working in manufacturing units or as a mid-day meal or asha workers and domestic servants. Even under the famous government scheme MGNREGA, there is no proper arrangement for basic facilities such as toilets, crèche, and first aid for working women.

Particulars	Response	Haryana	
		Number	Percentage
Facilities	Available	67	12.52
	Not available	468	87.48
	Total	535	100
Types of facilities (multiple responses)	(a) Canteen	28	05.23
	(b) Toilet	56	10.47
	(c) Creche	0	0
	(d) First-aid	9	01.68
Source: Field Survey, 2020-21			

Table 2, Facilities Available to Rural Dalit Woman Labourers at the Workplace

Table 3 carries the data highlighting wage discrimination among male and female labourers in the rural areas of Haryana. The table shows that more than one-third of the respondents, i.e., 37.57 per cent have reported that female labourers are paid less wages as compared to their male counterparts for the same work. It implies that 62.43 per cent of respondents find no discrimination regarding this.

The respondents have given different reasons for such a type of discrimination in the wage rate. For example, 28.04 per cent have reported wage discrimination among male and female labourers due to the nature of work. Different types of work require hard labour only men can do such type of work. Hence, they are paid more as compared to women. Another 15.33 per cent have stated that due to gender discrimination, men are paid more as compared to women. More than 10 per cent of the respondents believe that men can do all types of work; so they are given higher wages. Lack of mobility among the woman labourers has been another reason as explained by 3.17 per cent of the respondents. Some of the respondents 3.36 per cent gave no response in this regard. Pre-independent Indian society gave no right over immovable property to women. Therefore, women too had been exploited both economically and socially. Though seven decades have passed since India's independence, incidents of caste and gender-based discrimination are often reported (Kumar, 2020). Women are given work which is often unskilled and little skilled. They have to work under very pitiable working conditions. Women workers have very poor bargaining power and that is why they cannot force employers for their rights, which leads to further exploitation (Divyakamakshi, Kalavathi, 2014).

Particulars	Responses	Haryana	
		Number	Percentage
Wage discrimination	Yes	201	37.57
	No	334	62.43
	Total	535	100
Reason for wage discrimination	Male labourers can do all kinds of work	70	13.09

(multiple responses)	Nature of work	150	28.04
	Lack of mobility	17	03.17
	Gender discrimination	82	15.33
	No response	18	03.36
Source: Field Survey, 2020-21			

Table 3, Wage Discrimination among Rural Dalit Male and Female Labourers

Table 4 shows the nature of exploitation the Dalit woman labourers faced in getting their wages. It is evident from the table that 63.18 per cent of respondents do not face any problems in getting their wages, while the remaining, i.e., 36.82 per cent of respondents have reported that they face problems in getting their wages. The main problems expressed by them include delay in payment of wages, extra work without any payment, and commission taken by the contractors/ agents. One-fourth of the respondents express the view that there is a delay in payment of wages, 13.46 per cent of the respondents express the view that they do extra work without any payment and 05.23 per cent of the respondents express the view that they have to pay commission to the contractors/ agents for getting their wages.

Particulars	Response	Haryana	
		Number	Percentage
Exploitation	Yes	197	36.82
	No	338	63.18
	Total	535	100
Types of exploitation(multiple responses)	Delay in payment	140	26.16
	Overtime work without any extra payment	72	13.46
	Commission to agents/contractors	28	05.23
Source: Field Survey, 2020-21			

Table 4, Exploitation Rural Dalit Woman Labourers Faced in Getting Their Wages

The Dalit woman labourers have to even face caste discrimination at the workplace. The so-called higher caste employers often used abusive language for the Dalit woman labourers. Table 5 reveals that 35.70 per cent have been discriminated against at the workplace based on their caste. Half of the respondents 51.21 per cent do not have any complaint, whereas the remaining 13.09 per cent of respondents have given no response in this regard. The table further reveals that 15.88 per cent of the total respondents faced sexual exploitation. Another 26.92 per cent of respondents faced no such type of harassment at the workplace. However, the majority of the respondents 57.20 per cent gave no response regarding to this. This may have been because of saving their chastity in society. This may be because of social issues. In reality, almost all working women are disposed to sexual harassment, irrespective of their status, the types of employment and personal characteristics. They face sexual harassment on way, to educational institutions and hospitals, on transport, at workplaces, at home and even in police stations when they go to file complaints (Tyagi, 2016). Women's experiences in the workplace

are shaped by intersections between age, race, gender and class and migration status. If capitalism is overthrown, women could be freed not just from the capitalist society but also from the patriarchy (Lokot, Bhatia, 2020).

Particulars	Response	Haryana	
		Number	Percentage
Caste discrimination	Yes	191	35.70
	No	274	51.21
	No response	70	13.09
	Total	535	100
Sexual exploitation/ Harassment	Yes	85	15.88
	No	144	26.92
	No response	306	57.20
	Total	535	100
Source: Field Survey, 2020-21			

Table 5, Caste Discrimination and Sexual Exploitation/Harassment Faced by Rural Dalit Woman Labourers at Workplace

Findings

The study reveals that Dalit woman labourers have to start work at an early age i.e., more than half (60.57 per cent) of the respondents started working as labourers when they were less than 20 years of age.

As findings show that out of 535 respondent woman labourers, only 12.52 per cent of woman labourers have some facilities at the workplace, while a large majority of them, i.e., 87.48 per cent are not provided with any facility.

The study shows that more than one-third of the respondents, i.e., 37.57 per cent have reported that woman labourers are paid less wages as compared to their male counterparts for the same work.

The study reveals that 35.70 per cent of the respondents have been discriminated against at the workplace based on their caste. Half of the respondents 51.21 per cent do not have any complaint, whereas the remaining 13.09 per cent of respondents have given no response in this regard. Further 15.88 per cent of the total respondents faced sexual exploitation/harassment. Another 26.92 per cent of respondents faced no such type of exploitation/harassment at the workplace. However, the majority of the respondents 57.20 per cent gave no response regarding this. This may have been because of social issues.

Conclusion

The analysis concludes that more than half of the rural Dalit woman labourers started working as labourers when they were less than 20 years of age. They dropped their education in between and started working due to economic compulsions. Government policies must ensure that nobody is forced to leave school in between, and the government must frame policies for the improvement in the economic conditions of the families. The facilities available at the workplace clearly show that the Dalit woman labourers have to work under pitiable

conditions. To overcome this problem, the workplace facilities programmes chalked out by the government should bring all the working places in its ambit. As the study shows that most woman labourers face wage discrimination at the workplace as males are paid more wages as compared to females, an important policy implication is that equal pay for equal work should be implemented more effectively. The respondents have been discriminated against at the workplace based on their caste. Further, the respondents faced sexual exploitation/harassment at the workplace. An important policy implication is that government should implement rigid laws against caste discrimination and sexual exploitation/ harassment.

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