



Female agricultural labourers: Contestations and negotiations within agriculture in Rajasthan

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Abstract

The paper highlights a few markers of the newly emerging trends in the agrarian labour of Rajasthan with its focus on the female labour. The first part of the paper would be an introduction to the various debates on agricultural production and categorization of peasants. This would in turn help in defining the female landless labour for the paper. Second section would be a glimpse into the conditions of female labour within the fields and household. It would also be reflecting on the process of migration and the changes witnessed over time. These changing patterns would be in a specific context of Rajasthan. The last part of the paper consists of the observations from field visits to two villages: Somalpur and Dorai (Ajmer district). The observations would help substantiate the claim that changes in rural labour had impacts with far reaching consequences.

Keywords: female, labour, landlessness, migration, state

Introduction

In India agriculture still holds an important position as an employer to the booming population of the country. However, can one say that an increase in demographic pressure on land due to increasing population and shifting out of people for work to urban areas has led to lowering of importance of land? Similarly one would ask as to why the concept of 'land' still lingers on the minds of the academicians. One plausible answer could be that land is still the pre-requisite for production in agriculture and its distribution between individuals determines their position, power and status in rural society. Also land does not just form the economic dimension but also the social, cultural and political factor in the rural society. How much so ever, the relevance of land and the relations pertaining to it can never fade away in India where majority of population resides in villages. These interactions are followed by the relations of inequality and disparity in land distribution which reflect the hierarchies and different power relations in the rural setting.

This importance of land in the lives of rural people has led to the emphasis on agrarian relations time and again. The agrarian question in a society just does not restrict to the technical queries over productivity and fertility but it goes beyond it to define the role of state power in that society. Land reforms and community development programmes have all been implemented and analysed with an intention to put a stop to the exploitation let loose on the deprived sections of peasantry. However the benefits from these are varied and are felt differently on different segments in villages. Land reforms did target the abolition of intermediaries, redistribution of land to the tenants and transfer of land from a non-cultivating class to a cultivating one yet the implementation could not guarantee a much needed impact in the whole country with regard to agriculture.

In the series of attempts tried by different governments in agriculture the most lauded one is the Green Revolution in the

1960s which shifted the focus to a more sophisticated use of technology and HYV seeds. Green revolution boosted up the production and circulation of food supplies extensively but it came with a pinch of salt. Its biggest benefactors were states like Punjab, Haryana, U.P where the situations were conducive for such increase in production. The technologies that came along reduced the scope of tenancy and agricultural labourers on field. The landlords shifted to urban centres to become entrepreneurs but the right to cultivate did not get transferred to the poor peasants easily. The old relations of production underwent change but the tide of prosperity was still in the favour of the already well off. The unabsorbed labour from the rural had to settle for low paid unskilled jobs in urban areas with no social security.

The trend of such informality got another thrust with the coming of New Economic policies in 1990s. The labour belonging to the most marginalized sections of our society i.e. SCs and STs faced the most brutal form of casualization of labour. In the new strategy the focus shifted from agriculture to service sector which did not accommodate the rural poor immediately. The labourers faced a triple attack in fields of social, cultural and political. They could not cope up with the economic transitions easily which meant a disadvantage to their lot ^[1].

This paper therefore highlights a few markers of these newly emerging trends in the agrarian labour with its sole focus on the female labour. The labour here referred would be landless. The characterization of this stratum is done with a special attention to Rajasthan. In Rajasthan even after land reforms and welfare laws for the SCs and STs, we find that only 25% of the available land is reserved for the 30% of the population in this category ^[2]. The situation of the tribal in the state is not very well placed too. Bina Agarwal has raised concerns regarding women workers in agricultural production. She has argued for more entitlements to women on land as it raises their status in a household. Particularly in Rajasthan due to

massive deforestation women have to walk for miles in search of water and fuel wood. The way the common resources are exploited in the state women find it difficult at every step in coping with the daily needs ^[3].

It has been observed in various readings that the risk of poverty and physical well-being of women and children of a household could depend significantly on whether a woman has access to land. Also the economic status of women cannot be judged with the economic status of the household as women from rich family backgrounds can be equally vulnerable economically when it comes to marriage failures or widowhood. Women inheritance to land is resisted on grounds that it will lead to fragmentation and transfer of profit to the groom's family. However, another aspect of the argument could be to deny security; a woman gets with inheritance. Her opinions would have weight and her bargaining power in the household would improve with possession of land.

In order to reflect on all these different aspects related to labour especially female landless labour and the questions I am grappling with I would like to divide the paper into three parts. The first part would be a brief introduction to the debates on agricultural production and categorization of peasants. Second would be a glimpse into the idea of agrarian labour with special focus on female landless labour and the patterns specific in Rajasthan. And lastly the observations from field visits to two villages: Somalpur and Dorai (Ajmer district).

Debates on categorization of agricultural labour

There has been a rigorous debate and discussion over the definition of classification of peasantry in Indian society and a new plethora of ideas are suggested by scholars. However I still feel that the due recognition to female labour is still far from reality. The debates centered on the mode of production mostly with mention of the categorization of peasants in agriculture. Few scholars considered it as a capitalist mode of production while some would reject this proposition. Ashok Rudra has also argued that there are different ways the production relations and mode of production is defined in India. Some call it colonial mode of production, some others as semi-colonial, and few others as semi-feudal. Such an indulgence with the agrarian relation question is helpful while trying to grapple with the categories of labourers on fields. He identified two categories in peasantry: class of big landowners and class of agricultural labourers ^[4]. This classification is a simplistic explanation of the peasantry and does not engage with the dimensions of caste and gender in rural areas.

Alice Thorner, while intervening in this discussion over mode of production, argued for a dominance of capitalist relations of production though she does not deny existence of master-slave relationship prevalent in rural settings. The prevalence of usury and extra rents is also a norm within our agricultural settings is how she describes it ^[5]. Gail Omvedt has intervened in this debate over mode of production with acceptance of dominance of capitalism in this debate ^[6]. Her reasons for this are: firstly the majority of rural population is extracting wages. Secondly part of the agricultural production is for sale in the market as per laws of market. Thirdly means of production used in the agriculture are industrially produced. Fourthly the relation between that of the landholder and the

labour is that where the former exploits the labour of the latter. Also the labour is free and mobile.

In this debate I would like to present the point of view of Utsa Patnaik that mere presence of wage labour does not qualify to argue for a capitalist mode of production in rural India. It is much more complicated and with colonialism in the backdrop things have transformed much differently. To quote her:

Colonialism itself entailed an economic climate of relative stagnation (combined with creation of markets and a juridical system enforcing contracts) which was conducive to the growth of new economic forms of bondage on a monetized basis...The existence of propertyless peasants working on wages for landowners in a colonial country may, but need not necessarily, imply corresponding capitalist production relations in the agriculture of that country ^[7].

Her intervention to complicate the agrarian relations with colonialism in the backdrop is something that is helpful for me to analyse the ground reality in Rajasthan. She has introduced a new term of 'dominant landholders' which denoted such employers of farm servants and labourers who didn't invest in agricultural production. Her detailed classification of peasantry into big, middle, small farmers and labourers is well accepted in most studies on agriculture. However my attempt is to extend her classification further where female labour can be understood.

Having given a brief introduction of the few aspects of the debate on categorization of peasantry in agriculture, I would like to intervene briefly. When one talks of female labour in agriculture who are mostly unpaid or taken along with family labour or even when they are working for wages, can that be a simple qualification for it to be called capitalist mode of production. I am still trying to place female landless labour within agricultural labour and figure out what is their status and stakes and how well can their category be identified in the production relations.

The problem I am trying to understand is further aggravated with negligence on the part of government surveys to elaborate on female landless labour. If we look up at the survey reports or NSSO or Census, a long debate has happened which has also overlooked the due recognition to women labour. For instance when surveys just started, it classified into workers and non-workers or economically active and economically inactive. Further they moved on with the understanding and then came up with three categories: self supporting persons, earning dependants, non-earning dependents. And with time we came down to break it further where now female labour has a mention. However the point is that since ages the labour of women was taken for granted which led to a miscalculation of their participation till date. These reports are only a partial reflection of what the actual reality in rural areas is. I have used the data from these surveys with full knowledge that they can be mere indicators of the participation and wages. Their role as pointers are important but their shortcomings also need to be tackled.

Understanding landlessness in Female labour

Women play a pivotal role in agriculture from selection of seeds to the harvest, in different forms from wage labour to family labour, yet their statistical count is highly skewed. This is a result of the biases held against their work as non-

productive work contributing nothing to market goals. Around 73% of the rural residents are still dependant on agriculture as given in the Census 2001. According to the NSS 61st Round, 2004-05 there are more females employed in the rural areas than the females in the urban areas. Around 55% of men work both in urban and rural areas whereas women constitute 17% and 33% respectively. The share of women in agricultural labor force has increased from 38.8% in 1999-2000 to 41.6% in 2004-05^[8]. Within the rural economy bulk of women remain in agriculture (83%) whereas men are 67% of the rural work force in 2004-05 even with the declining share of this sector in the total employment data. This is a clear sign where men are moving out of agriculture to other non-farm activities or to urban areas for other work whereas women are deeply entrenched within the field labor. This is necessarily the phenomenon of *feminisation of labor*^[9]. Women participation is indicative of lack of options outside agriculture for women due to variety of reasons: lack of education and training, lack of geographical mobility, difficulty in combining work with household activities in non agricultural sectors.

Another important aspect in the lives of female labour is the absence of titles for women on land. This absence of land title is due to the privileged position of men in a household where they are considered the inheritors of land originally. Also there is no final preparation of land records as it is considered to be transferred automatically from father to son and so on (practices considered as norms). The reasons for such denial of land rights to women in general and specific to Rajasthan are: male preference, claim by women would lead to break of all ties from maternal family, ownership on paper would not mean control over decisions pertaining to the land, etc. Adding to the plight of women, Janaki Nair has pointed that women are largely denied the most fundamental rights such as right to inherit, right to divorce, guardianship and maintenance. It is therefore indicative of the outlook held against females in a household where their dependency on men is cherished as a symbol of power and traditions^[10].

It has also been pointed in various studies that female labor without labour (mostly the case) has been described as the segment marginalized by the 'double burden of production and reproduction'. Despite the fact that the female agricultural landless labourers formed the bottom layer of the working class, the differentiation arising out of their social positioning in the caste system is indeed striking. Apart from the segregation in terms of the social context of the work place there can be another important area which is the invisibilisation of labour offered by women in the household to save income by collecting firewood and fodder on their own. The tendency generally is to shove their labour as duty to the household. 53% of the women in rural areas were involved in domestic work with additional duties as argued by Arjun Sengupta while preparing a report on the unorganised labour in India^[11].

Many scholars determine the changes in agrarian relations over a period of time especially after independence. Post independence the planners focused on agriculture in order to increase production and extend sustenance to all. Since independence the changes witnessed in the agricultural fields have marked the adoption of new modes of production and use of sophisticated technology and more so after Green

Revolution in 1960s and commercialization of agriculture since 1990s. With all benefits accrued to these policy changes, such a capital and technology intensive agriculture works at the disadvantage of the women workers as they are excluded from the trainings and education as argued by Nirmala Banerjee while talking of women in Bengal^[12]. It has been argued that such an exclusion from education and training leads to a perception where women are seen merely as 'units of consumption' with complete denial of their economic productivity leading to the degradation of their status^[13]. Gail Omvedt in her interview with an agricultural labourer explains that the differentiation between men and women is stark. Even during regular days the pays are different and disparity is huge. Even after adding to the family income women do not benefit much out of it. While the income earned by women workers is generally spent on household items, it is men who decide where to spend. Other than such alienation there are casteist norms being followed on daily basis by the employers that further upset their pattern of livelihood earning. To further bring in the problem Omvedt points to the lack of attention paid to the poor women labourers in the researches. Most of the literature produced till now on rural studies focus on the upper or middle class-caste women. Rest of the labouring class is portrayed as the victim of say sometime tradition^[14]. Sumi Madhok here would argue that even in such complacency there is an agency at work. Submission is not always a sign of surrender but it is sign of negotiating in the work space^[15].

Having discussed the various dimensions of labour in agriculture I would now like to discuss my research area and the specific conditions of female landless labour prevalent over years in Rajasthan. The unification of Rajasthan in 1956 was a complex process in relation to not just land but also the importance land meant for the people of this state. Rajasthan has been studied from different perspectives in many researches but the agrarian question has been completely overshadowed by the emphasis on royal castes. The land reforms which were undertaken by the state government did not last long nor were the impacts evenly distributed. The reason for such disparity has been founded on the different tenurial systems prevalent in the state and explained in detail in writings of Colonel Tod^[16], Irfan Habib, Rosin. R. Thomas and P.S.Appu. These tenurial systems have been abolished on paper but the nature of their functioning has been intact in the rural areas say till the last decade. Rajasthan had been ruled by Mughals, Rajputs and British, which is why the impact of each system was differently witnessed on the population.

Even at the times of the early Hindu rulers and later Mughals the practice of extracting a part of the produce in the form of cess or *lag* was common. The emergence of the intermediaries came with the increasing expanse of the Mughal Empire where collection of revenue evolved a category of revenue collectors. These revenue collectors did not have proprietary rights over the land but with the coming of British rule and the Permanent Settlement, their status got transformed into that of the owner of the land they collected revenue from. Therefore, the actual cultivators were reduced to a low level of being tenants with no right over land while the mere collector of revenue became full owners of land with permanent rights. Along with this came the practice of insecure land relations

where the tenant survived at the mercy of the rich land owner and had to part with his crop to the extent of more than half in some parts of Rajasthan. These intermediaries formed the section favouring foreign rule endorsing all new changes brought about by the British. Even the National Movement was pitched against foreign rule and never against these intermediaries.

It is important to note that the middle section between the upper-lower castes has managed to secure status as tenants with some security of crops and cultivator rights. The most vulnerable category which has been cited in various researches is that of the landless labourers and share croppers who do not enjoy any kind of security and live on the basis of daily struggle for livelihood. There is a strong perception that of the upper castes, especially the old landholding ones, that working on farm was menial work and therefore they should not indulge in it. Therefore, the interaction between the different segments of agricultural castes is guided by their positioning on the ladder of social hierarchy.

The focus of the paper lies in understanding the plight of the poor female labour under this idea of landlessness. It has been noted by scholars like Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid that the right to inherit property has been largely on paper in Rajasthan [17]. It helps us to understand the relative disadvantage of female labourers which are exploited at the hands of both upper caste-class men and women. Patriarchy to quote Nair “achieves hegemony through seeking and obtaining consent, and not just obedience, especially by rewarding certain forms of complicity, or by deploying women themselves in enforcing essential patriarchal norms” [18]. Patriarchal norms in general have reconstituted with the changes in the mode of production and have managed to keep women in subordinate positions.

Dowry was and is still one of the biggest evil in the state. To reflect on historical accounts: marriages in Rajputana were matters of dynastic and family honour, not sentiment, a subject of deliberation and planning. It has made the birth of a girl child a curse as on her marriage huge sums of money would be paid as dowry. If not enough as per the in-laws a series of torture and abuses will follow. This burden led to two things in Rajasthan: first preference for a male child and second, increasing number of female infanticide. Another evil that attached itself to the women of the state was child marriage (still quite popular on *akha teej*) which produced many child widows who were inauspicious and doomed for life.

The working women in Rajasthan bore all of these social burdens along with those of economic ones. From cutting to collecting fodder for the animals twice a day to clean and make dung cakes to bathing animals, children to walking miles to collect fuel wood to carrying loads on heads while getting drinking water back home from far places to cooking meals for everyone; all of this is what constitutes the life of a woman labourer. If they are poor *Meo*, Punjabi, and *Chamar* women, they also will be working in someone's fields as *mazdoors*. If they own land, they will be laboring in their fields at sowing, reaping, and irrigating times. Here in Rajasthan, women do all the work that men do (except ploughing), “and men do none of what women do” [19].

Despite their contribution women are rarely the owners of the

land. They are also denied participation in decision making and production process. The land reform policy not just gave titles to men but the benefits in terms of training, technology and inputs. However for Gandhi and Shah this is nothing new, rather it is in complete tune with the patriarchal bias in our legal system, policies and structures which favour males [20].

Interaction and confrontation in work space

The above mentioned arguments were some of the ideas I carried when I went for my field work in these two small villages Somalpur and Dorai at the periphery of Ajmer district. The sample is of around 30 female labourers combined. Somalpur is a Muslim dominated village (around 85% of the population here is Muslim) and the land owners are both Hindus and Muslims while Dorai is a Hindu dominated one with Muslim household as well. In Somalpur the nature of problems are very different from yet similar to Dorai. While I was interviewing in Somalpur I met most women on a road construction site near a government school. So on asking about education, an elderly woman said- “*chori ko padake kya hoga, chora toh phir naukri kar lega*” (what good will come out of educating a girl? A boy would still work and earn). Hence the level of education was extremely low among the Muslim women in Somalpur. Out of the 15 women I met in Dorai, only one had passed 10th standard. In Somalpur out of the 15 women I interviewed most of them were married off at a very young age. They had to manage the household completely from cooking, cleaning, and caring for old to reproducing children, field labour and sometimes domestic labour in land owner's house. They faced constant abuses from in-laws for not contributing to family income as expected of them. Their dowry was meagre (one of the women said she got few utensils and two pair of clothes) and it caused a lot of distress to them. Few of the women revealed that their maternal side married them with nothing valuable. As told during the field work, a goat or a sheep and even a single piece of jewellery would add to their status, but none of the maternal sides could afford that. This is because most of the women had more than 3 siblings and parents were worried for their marriages as well.

On an average each woman I met had two to three children, both girls and boys. Most of the women I met at the work site were widows and had to take care of the entire house on their own. I met a very young widow of 16 years old during the visit. These women had to bear the stigma that they are the reasons for the death of their husbands for life. They were socially awkward and it also added to their difficulty in finding work.

To take a look at the situation in Dorai, the households here were a little better off than Somalpur. Most of the women I met had some land in the name of their husbands (around 0.3 hectares). The women here had all gone to school at some point and the minimum qualification each had was 8th pass while there was one who had done her B.Ed. Most of these women belonged to the SC category (*Regar* and *Raidas*) which was dominant in this village. Women pointed that the General caste were also there in the village but mostly land owners who never worked on fields. Muslim population was also in good number and most of them as revealed by one of them, were mostly labourers. Here I did not happen to meet

any Muslim woman so my submission would mostly based on my interactions with Hindu SC women. I spoke to around 15 women here. Here I happened to meet them at a centre opened to teach them stitching. This centre came under the government scheme to give vocational training to women.

The women here stayed with their in-laws and had two children on an average. Most of them sent their children to school. The marriage age was not decided but it was above 16 years for girls mostly. The men here moved out of the village and did seasonal work in the Ajmer city. Women here like Somalpur performed all tasks from house work to field work. Caring for children and old in the houses is an obvious responsibility of women.

In both the villages women faced a tough time while pregnant. They had to do all chores along with walking for miles for fuel wood and fodder for the cattle. Acceptance of medical help was greater in Dorai than in Somalpur. It is because the access to health facilities was costly and ignorance forced the latter to look for local help.

I started enquiring about their field job and stories started pouring. First I will talk of Dorai and the women labourers I met there. Their work timing used to be from 8 am to 4 pm. The wages they received depend on the *malik* (this is what women called the hirer of the labour). They did all kinds of work on field from *khudai*, *gudai*, *katai* to separating weeds. Women worked on fields growing cotton and wheat. Their wages varied depending on the work. For instance Rs 100 for cotton harvest, Rs. 150 for *khudai*, and Rs. 200 for harvesting wheat.

Apart from this women in Dorai spoke about how rich land owners had kept bonded labour from other places that were kept in miserable conditions and hardly any holidays to visit home. Such labourers as told to me by the women, work at home and in farms and the wages are given to their families or this is what is told to him/her. Women narrated how watching these young labourers suffer was heart wrenching and they could do nothing to help because of their own condition. The women workers added that they had to work at the houses of these rural rich without pay on occasions such as marriage and death and even festivals. This entire scenario does not let them help the labourers from outside the village.

In Somalpur, women work on fields ranged from threshing, weeding, *gudai*, fodder preparation and many more of such tasks which as women said men considered light and feminine jobs. The pay given to these women labourers is around Rs. 200 per day on fields. The wages of men on same fields were higher around 300-450 Rs. Per day. Female labourers spoke of their preference to work on fields then MNREGA as it gave them more money. However, the span of time that women work is only seasonal and as per requirement. One of them owned a plot 0.8 hectare. The family is unable to grow enough for their sustenance on this plot and which is why there is none produced for market sale. However this was mere title to the woman as decisions were made by the male members of family. The women who were employed as labour on fields were in the age group ranging from 10-60 years. One of the females said- "*10 saal ki bachchi bhi karti hai kaam aur 60 saal ki dokri bhi*" (a girl of 10 years also work and an old woman of 60 years also work). Many I met were widows who were not considered fortunate so finding work used to be a

struggle in itself. They had minimal break for lunch on fields and one holiday can lead to loss of work as well.

The women labour in Somalpur work for a shift from 8 am to 6 pm. These women need to wake up so early to collect firewood and water from far off places. They walk miles and it is a competition to do so because you get up late means that you have to walk further from the last day's place. Women labourers explained how there are no wells and no means of irrigating the fields which is why they have to do it manually most of the time.

In both the villages, women labourers pointed that the APL families have the BPL cards and the well-off draw benefits from it while those who truly need it are denied the card unless you pay a bribe. Women labourers in both villages have talked about how their wages are taken by their in-laws or husbands and it is very difficult for them to participate in the decisions of the house.

Policies and their impact on women

My field work began with two sites: in Somalpur a road construction site which came under MNREGA and in Dorai a vocational training centre under *anganwadi* run by state government. Women enrolled in the government scheme in both villages were not very happy with the way they were being implemented. In Somalpur, the road building site employed women labourers in the unskilled work of stone breaking or carrying stone to the spot or putting mixtures in the machine which was later laid down on roads, etc. This they were expected to do at a low wage of 75 Rs. per day (though the promised wage was Rs. 175 which they never received) whereas the men did the skilled work of laying the road, making the wall, etc. Their wages were quite high as compared to women, around 270 Rs. Per day. The entire load lifting was done by women and yet it was considered a 'light' job. The conditions of work were pathetic and harsh. The work place had no place for their children and no care was taken to look after them. The *anganwadi* was far from the village as told by one of the women. They were given lunch breaks where they had to run to homes to see if the kids are fine and then return with hardly time for rest or for eating properly. The promise of crèche was not fulfilled as per the government policy.

Also women complained of the policy launched for their health care in the form of a card called *bhamashah* card. This card had benefits of free tests, free medicines, free child delivery and other benefits for women labourers. This card was supposed to be available for free but the middlemen were charging Rs. 200 for each card. Women, who were the most important beneficiary, were upset and did not register as this was a huge cost according to one of them. The old women talked about how in their times medicine and hospitals were not considered good but with time things changed. When asked as to why not they complain, they reply almost in unison, '*Kaun sunta hai aurat ki aur wo bhi gareeb ki*' (who would listen to a woman and that too from a poor background).

They were weary of their *Panchayat* as most women spoke of favouritism practiced by their Sarpanch while awarding benefits for different policies. Most of the BPL cards were given to the *Sarpanch ka chamcha* (exact words of one female

labourer). For them *Panchayat* was not helpful as it never bothers of their water problems or fodder problems. There is no update from the *Panchayat* or the *Gram Sevak* of the policies regarding livestock animals. Women were unaware of the different policies like *Fasal Bima* (crop insurance), *fasal loans*, etc. They all had a *Jan Dhan* account but didn't know the benefits of it. They complained of how government schools are beyond their reach as the cost of educating even one child is high. One of the women labourers pointed to her son wearing school tie and shirt and said- *ye sab 100rupay ka, bhala kya hai isme?* (all of this has come for Rs. 100. What is there in it?) I guess the idea of free education till middle school is only on papers as there are evident ways to extract money. Women spoke of the problems of government schools and how there is no facility for their kids and they worry for them. One of them said- *"main padhana chahti hun taki wo mere jaise dusro ke yahan kaam na kare, lekin sarkar chahti hai ki ye kabhi ho nahi, hum mazdoor hi rahe"* (i want my kids to study so that don't have to work for other just the way i have to. But the government wants us to be labourers forever).

Women labourers complained that they heard that prize money was given to *Gram Sevak* for good MNREGA work but it never reached the labourers and it was taken away by *Panch* and his favourites. Talking of government and its response to their plight; women started cursing and showed disappointment. They want the rations and grain benefit instead of cash transfer as it help feed family in these times of high prices. They spoke of the corrupt practices and wish they could be removed.

In Dorai mostly the conversation stayed at MNREGA. Most of the work women labourers got were of *khudai* and carrying loads from one place to the other. Here as per their version they were paid only Rs. 50 mostly for it whereas the prescribed government rates are high. Here the women labourers did mention sexual violence on women in fields but stayed away from elaborating on it. They explained how they tried to complain about it but no one responded to it so they don't talk about it rather keep cautious. They spoke of bad sanitation facilities and provision of toilets was not taken care of. Families with APL card had access to ration shops whereas these laboring families find it difficult to receive enough from the ration shop.

The female labourers I met in Dorai knew about the schemes like *Jan Dhan Yojna* and *Bhamashah Card* but none of them received any. They also spoke of middlemen who benefit from schemes which are meant for them. I tried to seek information on credit services they use. Female workers said that their relatives in the village are mostly their option but in case they are unable to get loan from them then they go for banks. However, according to one of them it is very difficult to get loan from banks so it is a rare choice even in most difficult times.

In order to collate all the propositions in the discussion I have few observations. In both the villages female labourers preferred field labour then work on road construction under MNEGA. They demand more wages under government scheme. It is pertinent to point that socio-economic profile is different in both the villages but the problems of female labourers could still be common. Women in both the villages

are employed in harsh working conditions with less pay and stigma of 'light' job attached. Work availability was erratic and depended on the employer. Discrimination for being from the lower caste was common to both the villages. Even Muslim women labourers spoke of this caste aspect but didn't elaborate on it. Women had the burden of entire household yet the role of decision maker stayed with the male head. It reduced their chance of entitlement to land and further benefits like education and health. The hope of government intervention was also far-fetched. Most schemes didn't reach them and their ignorance to them is accrued to the unwillingness of local administration and government officials.

To counter the helplessness they had no organized body. Women in Dorai showed willingness that if they can be helped they can form a *samooh* to help themselves. But this motivation was absent in Somalpur. Female labourers in both the villages are mostly without land titles. Their work condition as explained by some of them was worst than males. Males could loiter around and yet not face any trouble but women had to be constantly on the lookout of maintaining the house. The social positioning of women here has denied them the bargaining power. Their time of work is almost 24*7 from house work to field and then again home. Such conditions have led to deterioration of their health as well but with no attention paid to it. The reproductive responsibility on women also takes a toll on their health. In the house the entire burden of taking care of children and old falls on the women though she is equally participating in the income generating process. The discrimination due to caste for many is still continuing and is obstructing in accessing most of the local areas. This is also mostly faced by females in a house as this barring of spaces makes them walk for miles in search of a hand-pump or fuel wood. The wages if you see are again less for women than the men workers. This shows that their work is still not considered fruitful and gainful. Hence the ground realities are still offering reasons to explain and work on female labour as their marginalization is linked to all discriminations (caste, gender and even class).

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