



'GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT: PROBLEMS OF SUGAR CANE CUTTER WOMEN WORKER A CASE STUDY OF RAJARAMBAPU PATIL SUGAR FACTORY, ISLAMPUR'

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ABSTRACT

Women play a significant and crucial role in Agricultural development. The nature of women's involvement in agriculture is changing very greatly from region to region, caste to caste and also by economical and social status. The women from land holder families contribute on their own farms, but the women from the landless family, mostly the lower cast (SC, ST), used to work on daily wages on others farms. The sugarcane cutting work is major work for this landless worker. Maharashtra state has been known for its first rating status in sugarcane production, so more labour is required for sugar cane cutting. "thousands of laborers leave their home every year between Diwali and the Monsoon to work as sugarcane cutter for sugar factories. Most of them belong to Dalit, Banjara and Pardhi communities .These cane cutter women have great contribution in this field but their contribution, hard work and problems are unnoticed by the Government , Society, labor Associations and also by the women's Association.

KEYWORDS: Gender , Development, Women ,Work ,Sugarcane cutter.

INTRODUCTION:

Women play a significant and crucial role in Agricultural development. It was women who first domesticated crop plant and thereby initiated the art and science of farming. "Dixon (1982) estimated that 45.3 % of agricultural labour force consist of women. According to him this figure in fact is an underestimate because of defects in data collection which include under counting of the contribution of unpaid family labour, under estimate of seasonality of women labour".(1) The nature of women involvement in agriculture is changing very greatly from region to region ,caste to caste and also by economical and social status. The women from land holder families contribute on their own farms, but the women from the landless family, mostly the lower cast (SC,ST), used to work on daily wages on others farms. The sugarcane cutting work is major work for these landless worker. Maharashtra state has been known for its

first rating status in sugarcane production, so more labour is required for sugar cane cutting. " thousands of labourers leave their home every year between Diwali and the Monsoon to work as sugarcane cutter for sugar factories. Most of them belong to Dalit, Banjara and Pardhi communities"(2) These cane cutter women have great contribution in this field but their contribution, hard work and problems are unnoticed by the Government , Society, labour Associations and also by the women's Association.

In this research paper I shall try to focus on the contribution of women, importance of their work, various problems of these women and try to give some solutions.

STUDY AREA :-

study area for this research paper is the Rajarambapu Sugar Factory Islampur ' RBCSM Sugar Factory is situated at Sakhrale village, Tahasil Walwa , Dist. Sangli. It began crushing operation in 1970 under the leadership of late Rajarambapu Patil, the Cabinet Minister of Maharashtra, who established this society under the name ' Walwa Taluka Sahakari Sakhar Karkhana Ltd.' After his untimely demise, the society was renamed as "Shree Rajarambapu Patil Sahakari Sakhar Karkhana" (3) RBCSM has the capacity of 90,000 litre 1 day. Near about 5000 sugar cane cutter male workers and 4500 women sugar cane workers are working in this factory. "Supervisor belongs to the upper Castes here. They persuade labours and their wives to work for 6 to 10 months for a measly Rs.25 -30,000. They make a legal agreement with the labourers". (4)

NATURE OF WOMEN'S WORK :-



After the agreement with supervisor (Mukadum) women with their families moved towards their respective factories. There are two types of sugar cane cutter workers.

1) Bullock cart based worker (gadiwale):-



“ first type of worker is bullock cart based worker. ‘Koyata’ means one pair of man and woman. One single person is considered as ‘half Koyata’ ,“They came with their ox. Bullock cart has been provided to them by respective factories. These workers live around the factory, permanently for six months. Early in the morning at 4 am. they go to sugarcane farm and cut sugarcane, load it on the bullock cart and bring it to factory” (5). There are total 600 bullock carts in this factory. Two or three persons on each bullock cart.

2) Transport based worker. (Toliwale):-

“Second type of worker is transport based worker. They are called toliwale (group). They have no bull and no bullock cart. They live in the group of 10 to 12 families. They cut the sugar cane, make the bundles and load it on the truck or tractor.” (6). There are 300 Tractors in this factory ten to twelve koyatas , mean twenty four persons on each tractors.

Mrs. Hirabai Mane said, “We wake up at 4 am. At morning, wash our face, have a tea and move towards the sugar cane farms. We have no time for bathing and cooking in the morning. For the entire day, we work so hard with our husband and children. At 6 to 7 pm. In the evening we come back to home. Take the bath, wash the cloth, clean the house and stainss, have a tea and make arrangement for cooking. We cook three time food at a night that is today’s dinner, tomorrows breakfast and lunch. For this entire season we can’t have fresh food due to lack of time.” (7). Hirabai and her family are working as Gadiwale.

Mrs. Hindubai Kale told us, “ at the break of dawn , male member from our tanda march towards the sugar cane farm and cut down the sugar cane. Ladies from the tanda take the bath, clean the house, wash the cloths and satins, and cook the food (Bhakari and Kalwan only) , pack the breakfast and lunch for their husband and son and move to farm. Then we have breakfast and start to work. We cut the green portion of sugar cane called ‘Wadha’ , clean the ‘Pachat’ and make the bundle of sugar cane. After this when truck comes we load it on the truck.” (8). Indubai Kale’s family is working as Toliwale.

One Koyata usually cuts about 2 to 3 tons sugar cane every day. “Without the help of women, male can’t work in this field” (9) this statement has proved the contribution of women and importance of their work.

PROBLEMS OF THE SUGAR CANE CUTTER WOMEN. :-

1) problems of the basic needs -



Living area, living condition of the tanda where the sugarcane cutters live are horrible. They live in very poor and insufficient shelter named 'Khopi'. Basic facilities like drinking water, bathroom, toilet, hygiene and sanitation, firewood, electricity are not available to them. Women lost their most energy in bringing the water and collecting the firewood. "Bathing is seldom heard and the women must bring their clothing to their worksite in order to wash them. Toileting is also a great concern and as the camps are crowded with men, women and children there is no privacy for this basic function" (10)

2) Problems of medical facilities.

The women and children have to face different kinds of diseases due to lack of nutritional food and proper sanitation. These camp sites are surrounded by mosquitoes, flies, different types of insects and also by poisonous snakes. Mrs Surekha Kamble laments, "Whole day we work very hard, but due to mosquitoes we can't sleep at night" (11).

They have no time for rest at least a moment. So the women face different diseases like malaria, typhoid, hypertension, mental stress are there in women. No medical service is made available to them, so they ignore their diseases and work and in future they have to face more health complications. Mrs Shalan Javir told that, "whenever we are getting ill we can't go to doctor because if I will go to doctor, my husband can't work alone and we have to lose our wages. So I used to bear the pain and work again, no other way for the women in this field" (12)

Average marriage age among these women were 13 to 14 years. This percentage is near about 99%. Most of them have their first child on the age of 15 to 16 years. So the unhealthy child was born. Malnutrition in women and children is very high in sugarcane cutting workers. 100% women said that we can't take rest at least a moment in whole day.

3) Problem of Education.

Every mother of the world dreams that her child should get the quality

education, better job, and best salary and live his or her life with luxurious facilities, but these cane cutter women have no permission to see this sweet dream because of their seasonal job. For every year they migrate to sugar factory for 6 months so their children get dropped out from school. Mrs. Laxmi Kale told us, " Meena is my daughter , she was studying in the 5th class but now she is with us because we need her help for taking care of her younger brother. So she left the school. When she will be completed her 12 or 13 years of age we will marry her with her cousin and then they will also become one 'Koyata' and come with us for sugarcane cutting."(13)

"Child marriage is a common practice here. Marriage often takes place among labourer families so as to increase the number of labourers within the families and hence the family income. Migration in this case perpetuates malice like child marriage." (14) Due to this migration, there are no facilities of school. Near the Rajarambapu factory, there is facility of School named 'Sakhar Shala' but the response of parents is not so good to send their children to School. Some parents left their children at their own village with their relatives or hostel. Mrs. Ashabai Arekar said, "I have told my daughter that you must take education and get self employment .My daughter Sangeeta is now doing D.Ed. in Sangli. I will face every pain of life for her better future. I want to see her as teacher." (15)

75% women from the tanda are illiterate, 25 % have the education up to 10th std.

4) problem of sexual harassment :-

Sexual harassment is very serious problem for these canecutter women, but they don't want to speak openly about this. When we ask them this question that " is there any sexual harassment ?" 100% women said "No". But when I personally ask them and ensured that the information will be kept confidential then they told that, "Yes, we have to face the problem of sexual harassment but we can't raise the voice against any one." Not only married women but also little girls have been victimized under sexual harassment and exploitation.

5) Gender discrimination :-

One Koyata cuts 2 to 3 tons sugarcane every day. They earn near about 500 Rs. a day but the payment must be received by the husband only. So women worker can't get the payment separately. Their work remains invisible. Most of the husbands are alcohol addicted, so they use their money for their own enjoyment. We have notice one interesting thing that there is no availability of basic things but alcohol (Deshi Daru) is easily available near tanda at factory site. Women have no right and no daring to ask her husband about the wages. Mrs Rakhumabai told us, "If I ask my husband about the wages he hits me" (16)

The sugar cane cutter women workers are mentally and physically discriminated. Gender discrimination and family violence are the major obstacles in the women's empowerment.

CONCLUSION :-

'Woman' is not one and only category. There are so many differences in the

Womanhood on the base of social, economical, educational and cultural ground. When I studied, I know that most of sugar cane cutter women were from lower cast like SC, ST,OBC etc. they have not their own land. Women's work in this sector is very hard and without her help sugarcane cutting can't be completed. But their contribution in this field is ignored or unnoticed by the Government and Women's Organization. Mrs Alka Jadhav asked us ,“ from last year to this year how rapidly sugar price has increased but why our wages are as it is from last 10 years ?”. (17)

They are facing a lot of problems. For their better life Government has to pay attention towards them. There are some solutions for these women's better life

- 1) Basic infrastructure should be provided them.
- 2) Basic facilities like drinking water, bathrooms, toilets, electricity must be provided by the Government and respective factory.
- 3) Medical facilities should be made available near the factory site.
- 4) Schools should be established near the factory site.
- 5) Women's organizations should pay attention towards various problems of the women.
- 6) Government has to make some policies for the empowerment of sugar cane cutter women.

In the brief Government and Society have to consider the problems of the sugarcane cutter, try to solve them and make these women really 'EMPOWERED WOMEN'.

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