

## EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY FOR DALIT WOMAN: A CASE STUDY OF ISHWARIKHEDA VILLAGE OF LUCKNOW

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### INTRODUCTION

One of the most under-utilized resources in our country is our women<sup>1</sup>. Female labour force participation rates are extremely low in our country and have remained more or less constant over the past decades. In order to bring more women into the work force, constraints that they face in balancing their family and work responsibilities needs to be understood in context of changing society. This study has been undertaken as a response to the growing concern over declining female employment in India, with the objective of understanding some of the reasons behind this phenomenon. It might be mentioned at the outset that findings of this study cannot be generalized beyond specific study locations. Irrespective of society to which she belongs, women world over are burdened with all sorts of responsibility, but little authority to meet the challenges posed. Moreover in stratified society like ours (Indian) woman is not a homogenous group, and therefore study of women in different groups is inevitable to understand the plight of women belonging to particular category. Dalit woman is one such category. Formerly called untouchables members of the lowest class whom those of the four main castes were formally forbidden to touch are called dalits. Ex-untouchables and other low castes in contemporary cultural movement identify themselves as dalit, broken, ground-down, downtrodden, oppressed not as untouchables, schedule castes, or harijans. The word dalit literally means poor and oppressed person. But it has acquired a new connotation to mean those

who have been broken, ground down by those above them in deliberate and active way. It was propagated and popularized by Dalit Panthers movement. These are the communities that are socially, educationally, economically and culturally backward and have been so, for many centuries. The situation of Dalit women in India needs special attention. In a male dominated society, "Dalit women face a triple burden of caste, class and gender. The hardships of Dalit women are not simply due to their poverty, economical status, or lack of education, but are a direct result of the severe exploitation and suppression by the upper castes, which is legitimized by Hindu religious scriptures. We see many examples of brave Dalit women who being quite aware of the horrifying truth and despite the heavy odds still strive to put an end to their suffering. In doing so they most certainly ensure a brighter future for the generations to come. Dalit women are a distinct social group and cannot be masked under the general categories of "Women" or "Dalits".

1. **Former** Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh in his speech to the Indian Labour Conference on 14 February 2012,

Indian labour market is highly dualistic in nature, with a small minority of organized formal workers (7% of the total work force) (Mehrotra et al., 2013) and a vast majority in unorganized informal sector including those engaged in agriculture as low paying subsistence workers. Female workers largely belong to the latter group which is more susceptible to

economic shocks. The decline in female employment in the second half of the decade is a reflection of their declining numbers in agriculture, unorganized sector and those engaged as self-employed. Out of 131 countries, India is placed 11th from the bottom in female labour force participation (ILO, 2012). The Global Gender Gap data on 135 countries shows that women's economic participation and opportunity is worse in India than in 95 per cent of all other countries studied. India is ranked below many sub-Saharan African countries in the UN Gender Inequality Index. Global Gender Gap Index ranks India 105 out of 135 countries. India ranks 123 in gender gaps in economic participation and opportunity, and labour force participation rates for males and females, 121 in gender gaps in educational attainment, and the worst, rank 135, in differences between women's and men's health (WEF 2012). Clearly, India has a long way to go in order to enhance women empowerment, and achieve gender equality.

In regard to women's employment. Since the 1980s, there has been a consistent decline in Work Participation Rate(WPR) for women (Mazumdar and Neetha 2011; Rangarajan et al 2011). In the Indian case, far from being a bad thing, this is entirely a welcome development. For male Principal Status employment in ages 25 or more, there has been a sharp increase in the growth of workers – quite the opposite of what might be implied by the mere two million increase in total employment that occurred between 2005 and 2010. However, the situation is quite different for women, whose employment has declined. Their employment fell because young women are attending school, which is where they belong. In fact, a comparison over a longer period shows that from the 1980s there has been a sustained decline in women's employment. The main worry here is that as Rangarajan et al (2011) note, only 44% of the decline in the female WPR is accounted for by increased participation of women of working-age in education. The rural unemployment rate has been consistently lower than the urban, which is not surprising given the reliance of the rural workforce on self-

employment in agriculture. This, of course, might be a last resort activity since evidence is growing of rural distress among the 84% of all farmers who till under one hectare of land – the small and marginal farmers who eke out an uncertain livelihood. Literature on female employment looks at different factors from both demand and supply side, explaining women's participation in labour force. There are certain factors like participation in education, social norms and household responsibilities which pull back or deter female participation in the labour market. On the other hand, non-availability of appropriate employment opportunities pushes females out of the labour market. The net effect on female employment is determined by the relative magnitude of these factors.

Possible determinants for the decline in female employment include different factors. Determinants mentioned in the literature are the following: Education, Social, cultural norm, Household responsibilities, Household income, Access to suitable jobs etc.

According to the National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes 2000, approximately 75% of the Dalit girls drop out of primary school despite the strict laws of the Government of India, which hold reservations for Dalit children. Despite showing keen academic aptitude, reasons for this early drop out from the education system is poverty or to escape humiliation, bullying and isolation by classmates, society, and even their teachers.

The main reasons for the very low literacy rate among Dalit women could be some or all of the following:- Lack of educational resources especially in rural areas, Privatization of schools and colleges, Extreme poverty, because of which they cannot afford the expensive fees for the private schools, The demand for an increase in the Dowry for educated girls, Humiliation and bullying by the high caste students and teachers.

Since only a small percentage of the total population of Dalit women are educated, the fate of

the majority is very grim. According to India's Ministry of Labour, 85% of the Dalit women have the most formidable occupations and work as agricultural laborers, scavengers, sweepers, and disposers of human waste. Many of these women work for minimal wages under the upper caste landlords, since it is proposed by the National Commission for SC/ST that 85% of the Dalits are landless. When the Dalit women refuse to work for ridiculously low wages or fail to follow their harsh orders it results open violence, humiliation, beatings, rape, and jail.

The idea of studying this topic came to my mind after meeting Mrs Sangita Sharma (Changed Name) who is a resident of the village under study. She is Post graduate in Sociology and is working as Anganwadi Sahayika in the same village. She comes from a very poor family and is married to an alcoholic husband. Her post graduate degree gave her a job of Field worker in NAVJAGRITI SHELTER HOME an NGO maintained and run by Christian Missionaries. From there she learnt about SHG and formed an SHG in her own village and she herself is the treasurer and member of that SHG.

An opportunity knocked and she passed the exam to become ANGANWADI SAHAYIKA but for joining to the above mentioned post she was asked to pay Rs.50000 as bribe by some of the officials, otherwise; she may lose the opportunity. She took loan from SHG and paid the bribe and joined the post. It has passed more than four years to that event by this time she has paid all her loan from her salary. She has all the household items in her home and she is leading a life of successful women in her group, despite the fact that her husband is alcoholic. All this is because she is well educated and employed. Can this be replicated and universalized is the moot question to which the the policy executioners needs to pay attention.

## OBJECTIVES

To explore patterns of livelihood in Iswarikheda Village.

1. To discuss the employability of dalit women in Iswarikheda Village.

## METHODOLOGY

### Selection of Village

Uttar Pradesh (UP) is the most populous state of India and has an economy that is primarily agriculture based. More than 60% of its population depends on agriculture for its livelihood. It is one of the fastest developing states in India and has shown a healthy growth path during the last decade (PHD Research Bureau 2011). However, the percentage of population below poverty line in UP remains greater than the all India average for both rural and urban areas (Planning Commission, 2013). Uttar Pradesh has been the economically backward State. Analysis of NSS data (2009-10) on female workers points out significant decline in their numbers in this State as per usual principal activity status as well as usual subsidiary activity status. Uttar Pradesh has lower Labour force participation rate (LFPR) and Work Force participation rate (WFPR) as compared to the national average.

Ishwarikheda village. The village under study is around 10 km. away from Charbag Railway station and is situated on Raibarely road. The Agricultural land of the village is taken over by the Lucknow Development Authority, therefore most of the villagers have to depend on city for their Livelihood earnings/employment. However expansion of city has generated various new sources of income for villagers like women may work as Domestic workers; there extra room in homes may be rented, wage labour, street vendors, helpers in commercial complexes, construction labour in cities etc. They may sell milk to the city people directly on higher rates.

Sample size = 40 (women from S.C.)

Tools of study - Interview schedule, observation notes, transit walk, group discussion.

Techniques of study – In order to build rapport with the village women investigator took help of his better half, and first visited a know person in the village i.e.

Anganwadi worker. She is well known to investigators wife. With the help of Anganwadi worker investigator used all his research tools to gather data from S. C. women. Interview schedules were filled by the investigator couple. Observations were taken during group discussion and transit walk. Group discussion among women was carried out with the help of Anganwadi worker who facilitated SC women to put forth their view.

## FINDINGS

Dalit women are triply exploited first being a woman second being a dalit third being poor. Being a woman every Indian woman suffers in her own household but when it comes to comparison between the dalit and women of other castes it is dalit women who is additionally exploited by the women of higher caste because of being dalit. Poor are vulnerable to all

kinds of sufferings dalit women happen to be poor also and therefore she is again used by the others to compensate her poverty. Husbands of these dalit women rarely act as protector of their wives unlike husbands of higher castes women, therefore in most cases dalit women finds herself humiliated. She suffers to fend her family and children. These dalit women choose to go for paid employment because there is no gainful employment by her husband or guardian, other dalit women who are lucky enjoy being housewives. Being housewife for a dalit woman is a prestige in this village. It was found in the study that only those illiterate women whose husband were alcoholic or chronically ill went to work as a domestic worker other employed women went to work to enhance their family income. Literate women were voluntarily unemployed because the job to which they are suitable is considered below standard by them.

**Table-1 Educational status and occupation**

Educational Status	Number of women	Working women
Illiterate	14	5
Literate	26	3
Total	40	8

Source: During field Study

It was found that out of total women respondents only four were working. It can be seen that the number of illiterate working women is more than literate working women, this figure is even bigger but hidden because of it being unreported during

interview due to various socio-cultural reasons. However during group discussion it was found that almost 20% of the dalit women from village go to work either as Domestic worker or labour.

**Table-2 Number of women already trained and wishes to take training in different fields.**

Activity	Training taken	Wish to take training
Tailoring	10	12
Weaving	1	11
Pickle making	1	3
Training not taken and don't want to take.	26	14
Total	40	40

Source: During field Study

Number of women already trained in tailoring, weaving and embroidery are not many, but they are there and their presence can be felt. However during field study it was found that women were keen in learning one or the other livelihood related activity. Even those who were already trained were not satisfied by the training undertaken by them, and in order to sharpen their skills they wished to retrain themselves. However number of aspirant trainee is appreciable. The training that they wish to take varies from tailoring to pickle making. It shows that

they are interested in skill development and given opportunity they can turn to become self employed entrepreneurs. No trained women was found to be engaged in any kind of economic activity. The reason being again socio-cultural. Many women do have the skill to run economic activity but they do not pursue those activity because that is not satisfactorily paying, moreover their social status is at risk, if they start any such activity. They have that societal fear of getting stigmatised of being ambitious.

**Table-3 Membership of SHG and Bank account**

	Yes	No	Total
SHG Member	15	25	40
Bank account	19	21	40

Source: During field Study

Only 15 women were found member of one or the other SHG group. These women were seemingly more aware and sound compared to the other non SHG members. All of these 15 women have bank accounts. It can be seen from the above Table that almost half of the respondents have Bank account in their name. When asked for reason of opening bank account following were the responses:-

1. For getting compensation for land acquisition.
2. For saving money from husband.

3. For future savings for children. This was the response which came mainly from SHG members.

However less than 10% of these women were found to be engaged in any kind of livelihood activity. Although there is a facilitation programme running on behalf of govt. to motivate these SHG members to initiate livelihood activity and for this purpose one SHG motivator per village is also appointed by govt. on honorarium basis for running the affairs of SHG programme. However the effect of this motivator was not visible.

**Table-4 Sources of Income of respondents**

Sources of Income	Number of women
Labor	8
Domestic work	5
Animal Husbandry	3
Service	2
No source of income	22
Total	40

Source: During field Study

Out of the total respondents 22 women reported to have no source of income, these are those women who come from a comparatively well off families and whose family income is somewhat sufficient enough to meet dialy requirement of life. These women enjoy a better prestige in their social group because they do not to toil to feed their family. They compare

themselves to the housewives of the city, who have have to do daily course of looking after children and household work and the male members of the family are the bread earners. Only 8 said they do labour work 5 work as domestic worker, 3 earn from animal husbandry while 2 reported to have earnings from doing service to some organization.

**Table-5 Guardian source of income**

Guardian source of Income	Number of women
Labor	32
Shop	5
Pension	1
No source of Income	2
Total	40

Source: During field Study

Guardian of 32 women worked as labour, 5 have their own shops, 2 do nothing and 1 meets his family obligations from pension.

**Table-6 Decisions relating to employment of respondents**

Decision is taken by	Number of women
Self	37
Husband	3
Total	40

Source: During field Study

It seems from the response of the women that they are comparatively free to take decision relating to their employment, as 37 reported that they themselves take decisions whether they should take employment or not. It can be construed from it that they are voluntary unemployed, but that is not the

case employment for them means descent work. Though they are not aware of the definition of descent employment there definition of it is quite similar to the on given by ILO. Probably because of it they are unemployed as such descent work is not available in villages for them.

**Table-7 Decisions relating to children education.**

	Self	Children themselves	Son	Both	Husband	Total
Decision related to children education	12	6	1	11	10	40

Source: During field Study

From the above Table-7 it can be construed that, regarding education of children 12 women said that it is they who decide where child will take education,

while 11 said it is joint decision of both and 10 responded that husband take decision and other 6 said it is children who decides where he shall study.

**Table-8 Decisions taking behavior regarding movement and purchasing**

	Self	Husband	Total
For going out of village	0	40	40
For making big purchases	4	36	40
For going anywhere in village	4	36	40
For making small purchases	36	4	40

Source: During field Study

It was found that all most all women took permission from their guardian for going out of village and making big/valuable purchases. However

in emergency and working women whose husbands were alcoholic took decisions of their own relating to all matter.

**Table-9 Major issue in a family**

	Number of women	Consulted to solve issue	Did not consult anyone
Poverty	16	12	4
Health	5	5	
Alcoholism	6	3	3
Family Disputes	1	0	1
Big family size	1	1	0
No issue	11	0	11
	40	21	19
Total		40	

Source: During field Study

As can be observed in above Table no-9 11 women responded that they do not have any issue in their home, 16 said they are suffering poverty, 5 Health, and 6 have alcoholism as the main issue in family. All most all of them contacted someone else or the other to solve their problem. In the case of issue

related to alcoholism which is a major issue in village as can be seen in Table above half of the respondent consulted while other half did not consult anyone. When asked why did not they consult their answer was that it is of no use, because if wife can change one's husband than no other can also change.

**Table-10 Source of employment in Ishwarikheda village**

Are there sources of employment in your village	Number of women
Yes	21
No	19
Total	40

Source: During field Study

From the above Table no-10 it can be seen that the response is almost 50:50, it is because most women see Human skill as the resource that can be applied in village for income generating activities. While others focus on paid/service as the only mode of employment and therefore for them there is no source available in village which can employ them.

## DISCUSSION

From the systematic study of the village Ishwari kheda it was found that most of the dalit women are illiterate and unaware of the modern progressive values. Even the new generation is not serious about education, the ratio of school dropout is still high among dalit girls. Household works for girls and extra money earning by boys leads to school dropouts. But These dalit women no longer work as scavengers, sweepers, and disposers of human waste. Dalit women are equally talented and have aptitude for training and skill development as can be seen from the data above. But unavailability of resources and poverty restricts opportunity for their employment. In Iswarikheda it can be seen that most of the women are interested in learning Tailoring, weaving and Pickle making while many of them have already taken training. A proper management of these resources can be channelized to get benefit from each other and thereby generating employment opportunity for themselves and for others. There are a number of SHG group functioning in village, if these SHG can be given special training like basket making or papad making they can do well, as rest of the things like Humar resource, organizational bonding, team spirit, motivation to excel, hardwork is already there in them. By channelizing the energy and motivational standard of village women a lot employment

opportunity can be generated in the village itself. The need of the hour is a helping hand from the government and proper clear vision to utilize the resources available in the village. There are trained dalit women who are working in the nearby hospital in different capacities. If they can be given some honorarium for improving the Health or guiding the villagers for healthy living, the status of both party can be improved in different capacities.

## CONCLUSION

Iswarikheda is a village with potential as can be seen from the data above. If resources of the village are channelized in proper way and in time it will become a complementary to the nearby developing colonies and play vital role in the economy of the city. Otherwise like all other villages surrounded by colonies, it will also turn into a slum where all the problems of society will take birth creating different crime and adding to the vulnerability of the city.

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