

# STATUS OF WOMEN IN BIHAR: EXPLORING TRANSFORMATION IN WORK AND GENDER RELATIONS

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Amrita Datta and Preet Rustagi



INSTITUTE FOR HUMAN DEVELOPMENT  
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**Amrita Datta**  
**Preet Rustagi**



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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

AAV	Akshar Anchal Yojana
ASHA	Accredited Social Health Activist
BCY	Balika Cycle Yojana
BPY	Balika Poshak Yojana
ICDS	Integrated Child Development Services
IHD	Institute for Human Development
JSY	Janani Suraksha Yojana
KSY	Kanya Suraksha Yojana
KVY	Kanya Vivah Yojana
NREGS	National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme
PHC	Primary Health Centre
PHSC	Primary Health Sub-centre
PRI	Panchayati Raj Institutions
SSA	Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan
WPR	Worker Population Ratio

# **STATUS OF WOMEN IN BIHAR: EXPLORING TRANSFORMATION IN WORK AND GENDER RELATIONS**

## **1. INTRODUCTION AND OBJECTIVES**

### **1.1 Introduction**

This study was conducted to ascertain broad insights into the status of women in rural Bihar with a view to examine any signs of transformation in work and gender relations. The objectives are stated in the next section and the methodological details are annexed. It is based on a survey of groups of women in 14 selected villages across 9 districts of north and south Bihar. For 12 of these 14 villages, this study is linked to a village resurvey undertaken by the Institute for Human Development (IHD) within the umbrella of its research programme on the *Dynamics of Change over 30 years (1980-2010) and the Emerging Policy Framework*. Two new districts of Saharsa and Madhepura, which fall in the Kosi flood affected zone, were added to the survey areas and one village from each district was selected.

A total of 106 groups of women from 14 villages were administered the specially designed gender module. The methodology and surveyed areas are given in Appendix 1 and Appendix 2, respectively. As a sample of the rural populations, the groups included upper caste, Other Backward Caste I, Other Backward Caste II, Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe groups. While the composition of population in the villages was predominantly Hindu, some Muslim groups were present in the districts of Gopalganj, Purnia, Araria, Rohtas and Madhubani (see Appendix 3a and 3b). An exhaustive listing of caste by socio-religious groups is given in Appendix 4.

### **1.2 Objectives**

The main objective was to ascertain broad dimensions pertaining to women's lives with respect to their work, their access to basic

amenities, the impact of male migration on women and children, and the influence of public policies. There has been an attempt to also gauge the changes over time, if any, that may be either transforming women's lives or have the potential to do so. Particular efforts were made to examine the implementation of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) as well as some of the more recent schemes relating to incentives for institutional child deliveries, encouraging girls education, provision of mid-day meals to primary class children, and nutritional supplementation for 0–3 years children and lactating mothers through Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS).

The nature and extent of transformation in the status of women with respect to work and gender relations is explored over time by eliciting information on economic, political and social aspects to ascertain whether transition towards gender equality and empowerment has been witnessed in rural Bihar. Given the socio-cultural influences and the widespread variations noted in the earlier surveys across different caste groups within a village, this survey identified groups of women belonging to specific caste groups inhabiting the villages. The survey was undertaken through a specifically designed gender module canvassed to the groups of women in all the selected villages.

In addition to the gender module, village specific information was solicited by administering a detailed village schedule to key informants. Although the Census information provides village specific data, in particular on population and social composition (SC/ST), some of the dimensions which are important for a state like Bihar are not easily available. For instance, further disaggregation by socio-religious categories, such as OBCs, Muslims and so on. Recent changes in communication, e.g., use of mobile phones, is another instance of information that was not available. Some of this information has been collected through the village schedule administered in the survey. The purpose of gathering such information is to ascertain the significance of various factors impinging on women's lives, with a view to incorporate specific questions around such phenomena in the subsequent household survey which was to be carried out at the second stage of the research. It, however, needs to be made clear right in the beginning that data from the gender module is based on the collective perceptions of groups of women and may, at times, differ from what one may elicit from individuals covered in a household survey.

## 2. CONTEXT OF THE VILLAGES

The 14 selected villages belong to 9 districts of Bihar. Appendix 2 provides the details of the selected villages in terms of the names of districts and blocks they belong to. Village specific information from the Census of India was collated for the socio-economic profile of the surveyed areas such as total households, family size, literacy, work related information regarding main workers, female workers distribution by sectors and so on.

Villages of different sizes were surveyed, ranging from a very small village to a fairly large village. However, it was desirable not to include a very large village (more than 1,200 households) as eliciting the kind of perception based information from a group of women for the entire set of households may have been relatively more difficult in such villages.

### 2.1 Socio-Religious Groups

The distribution of households by social groups in 2009, at the time the survey was carried out, is provided using information from the village schedule. The social composition of households in the survey villages is provided in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1  
Distribution of Households across Major Socio-Religious Groups (%)

Village	Major Caste Groups						General	Total
	SC	ST	OBC I	OBC II	Upper Muslim	Lower Muslim		
Alalpur Bishunpur	11	0	9	18	0	0	62	100
Amarhi	24	0	3	52	0	0	20	100
Belabadan	36	0	4	26	9	25	0	100
Bhabtia	23	0	5	56	6	0	10	100
Chandkura	42	0	13	43	0	0	2	100
Dewan Parsa	32	17	3	6	5	5	31	100
Jitwarpur	4	2	41	5	14	0	33	100
Khangaon	32	0	23	9	6	0	30	100
Mahisan	25	0	12	10	34	0	20	100
Mohiuddinpur	50	0	34	9	0	2	6	100
Paharpur Deyal	0	0	0	78	0	0	22	100
Parsa	33	0	16	38	12	0	0	100
Rupaspur	26	0	10	34	0	5	24	100
Salempur								
Samhauti Buzurg	41	14	0	14	9	0	22	100

Note: SC – Scheduled Caste; ST – Scheduled Tribe; For OBC I and OBC II, see the classification in appendix 4

Source: IHD Village Schedule, 2009.

Almost all the survey villages (except Paharpur Deyal) have SCs households and also OBC population. While Dewan Parsa and Samhauti Buzurg have some tribal concentration, Mahisan, Jitwarpur, Belabadan, Parsa and Paharpur Deyal have some Muslim population. A few villages are predominantly inhabited by households of upper caste Hindus.

## 2.2 Demographic Profile and Sex Ratio

There were nearly 40 million females in Bihar as per the 2001 census. The sex ratio (921 women per 1000 males) for Bihar has been relatively more balanced compared to most parts of the country (Table 2.2).

Table 2.2  
Sex Ratios for Bihar and India

<i>Indicator</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Bihar</i>	<i>India</i>
Female to Male ratio (FMR)	1991	907	927
	2001	921	933
FMR – rural	2001	927	946
FMR – urban	2001	869	901
Child Sex Ratio (CSR)	1991	953	945
	2001	938	927
CSR – rural	2001	940	934
CSR – urban	2001	924	903
Sex ratio among SCs	1991	912	922
	2001	923	936
Sex ratio among STs	1991	923	972
	2001	929	978

*Source:* Calculated from Census, 1991 and 2001.

Despite the declining trend observed in the sex ratio among 0–6 years (that is considered more reliable since there is no disturbance due to migration) since 1981 onwards, Bihar's sex ratio is higher than the all-India level. The rural sex ratios are relatively more balanced than their urban counterparts. Is this by far the only positive indicator with respect to women in Bihar? Given the fact that poverty, agricultural dependence, high illiteracy and low work participation, especially among the non-agricultural community, is commonly noted in the state, are there any changes in women's lives over time with the high incidence of male migration? This question was addressed in substantial detail in the surveyed villages.

In nine of the 14 villages, the sex ratio is more balanced than that of rural Bihar in 2001. The situation was slightly different when the child sex ratio among the 0-6 years is considered, with only six of the 14 villages recording a more balanced ratio compared to rural Bihar (Table 2.3).

Table 2.3  
Some Demographic Information about the Survey Villages

<i>Village</i>	<i>No. of Households</i>	<i>Household Size</i>	<i>Sex Ratio</i>	<i>Sex Ratio (0-6 years)</i>
Alalpur Bishunpur	143	6.1	888	764
Amarhi	152	7.2	1,051	1,080
Belabadan	195	5.8	891	802
Bhabtia	726	5.3	892	929
Chand Kura	378	6.4	976	1,075
Dewan Parsa	228	6.4	1,145	1,126
Jitwarpur	1,004	4.8	862	969
Khangaon	498	5.6	1,040	915
Mahisan	902	4.8	959	979
Maura*	5,791	5.8	929	892
Mohiuddinpur	91	6.5	845	877
Paharpur Deyal	58	7.4	1,088	825
Rupaspur	291	6.5	994	964
Samhauti Buzurg	257	7.1	890	856

*Note:* \* This is the census village of which Parsa is one part.

*Source:* Census of India, 2001.

### 2.3 Facilities

Rural populations severely lack access to basic amenities such as water, electricity and sanitation. Even though water is abundant in this eastern state of India, there appears to be a differential in access to water facilities across social groups. Since managing the household chores is generally a woman's task, not having easy access to water can create problems for women. Provision of electricity makes mobility of women safer and easier to some extent. Poor sanitary conditions expose women to disease and make them vulnerable to assaults. Efforts to provide these basic amenities, especially in rural areas, can help in improving the condition of women tremendously.

Inadequate communication facilities are also a deterrent to mobility and accessing higher education and health care especially for women in rural areas.



### 2.3.1 Electricity

Of the 14 survey villages, three villages did not have electricity. Of the eleven villages electrified, 5 had electricity for more than 10 years. The supply of electricity remained erratic with only two and a half hour to six hours of supply per day across the villages. In Parsa village of Madhepura, although the electricity connection was made available 32 years back, a few months later the wire was cut (Table 2.4).

Table 2.4  
Number of Years since the Village was Electrified and  
Average Hours of Supply per Day

Village	Alalpur Bishunpur	Rupaspur Salempur	Paharpur Deyal	Devan Parsa	Mahisan	Khangaon	Chandkura	Mohiuddinpur	Jitwarpur	Belabadan	Samhauiti Buzurg	Amarhi	Bhabtia	Parsa
Years since Electrified	0	0	16	8	24	50	1	0.6	38	1	1	15	19	32*
Averages hrs per day	0	0	4	4	3	2.5	4	6	4	5	3	5	6	0

Note: \* Wire cut after few months of electrification.

Source: IHD Village Schedule, 2009.

### 2.3.2 Water

The situation of access to water was relatively better, most of the better off households depended on private hand pumps, while the others had to depend on public hand pumps.

Unfortunately, not all the public hand pumps were functioning, see Table 2.5. Only two households had piped water inside their houses through private tube wells. A caste wise differential regarding the kind of facilities was noted, with the SC households clearly depending more on the public hand pumps, some of which did not function.

### 2.3.3 Phones

In spite of the limited supply of electricity, interestingly, there was a very high incidence of mobile phone use in these villages. It ranged from 29 per cent to 76 per cent. This was explained by the high incidence of male migration and the desire to keep in contact

Table 2.5  
Village wise Number of Public/Private Hand Pumps

Village	Public Hand Pump		Private Hand Pump	
	Total nos	Functioning	Total nos	Functioning
Alalpur Bishunpur	13	6	58	58
Amarhi	10	9	158	158
Belabadan	79	76	121	121
Bhabtia	15	11	178	178
Chandkura	40	25	100	100
Dewan Parsa	14	14	90	90
Jitwarpur	42	33	306	306
Khangaon	74	65	145	145
Mahisan	47	37	387	387
Mohiuddinpur	12	12	10	10
Paharpur Deyal	7	6	50	50
Parsa	18	12	222	222
Rupaspur Salempur	20	15	167	167
Samhauti Buzurg	14	12	285	285

Source: IHD Village Schedule, 2009.

Table 2.6  
Percentage of Households with Mobile  
and Landline Phone Connection

Village	% hhs with mobile	% hhs with landline
Alalpur Bishunpur	36	0
Amarhi	60	0
Belabadan	45	3
Bhabtia	30	5
Chand Kura	45	0
Dewan Parsa	65	0
Jitwarpur	29	0
Khangaon	69	16
Mahisan	40	0
Mohiuddinpur	35	0
Paharpur Deyal	76	0
Parsa	45	0
Rupaspur Salempur	44	0
Samhuti Buzurg	69	0

Source: IHD Village Schedule, 2009.

with the family in the village. Percentage of households having landlines, on the other hand, was very low.

### 2.3.4 Roads and Transport

Among the 14 villages surveyed for the study, while 7 villages had a *pucca* road, only 5 of them had a bus stop. In another five villages, proximity to railway station at a distance of about 5-6 km or less was noted.

Table 2.7  
Facilities in the Village and Distance at which  
it is Available Distance from Village (in km)

<i>Village</i>	<i>Bus stop</i>	<i>Railway Station</i>	<i>Pucca Road</i>
Alalpur Bishunpur	2	36	2
Amarhi	√	23	√
Belabadan	6	6	5
Bhabtia	√	10	√
Chandkura	1	1	1
Dewan Parsa	3	5	1
Jitwarpur	√	65	√
Khangaon	√	10	√
Mahisan	1.5	16	1
Mohiuddinpur	3	4	3
Paharpur Deyal	√	2	√
Parsa	5	24	√
Rupaspur Salempur	2	12	√
Samhauti Buzurg	3	40	3

Note: √ refers to the presence of the facility within the village.

Source: IHD Village Schedule, 2009.

### 2.4 Health

Only 5 of the 14 villages had a Primary Health Sub-centre (PHSC) in the village, while another two had one within 1 km and two more villages (in Gopalganj and Nalanda districts) had a PHSC within two km. The farthest distance to a Primary Health Centre (PHC)<sup>1</sup> was 4 km in the case of Jitwarpur of Araria. Except for six villages, the other eight reported a PHSC within 5–6 km of the village.

It would be better to look at the PHCs. In the case of nine villages, the nearest PHC was no more than 6 km away, while the distance from the remaining villages varied between 8 and 24 km. Five villages hosted PHSCs and no village was more than 5 km from a PHSC.

1. The PHSC is the first contact point of the public health system for populations living in rural areas. It is supposed to provide services such as immunisation, care in pregnancy, control of communicable diseases, health education, promotion of nutrition and basic sanitation. Each PHSC is supposed to have one male and female worker (Auxiliary Nurse Midwife).

Table 2.8  
Health Facilities in the Survey Areas

Village	Distance of the Facility							
	PHC	PHSC	Public Hospital	Priv. Hospital	Priv. Allopathic Doctor	Maternity/Child Care Centre	Family Planning Clinic	Chemist/Medicine Store
Alalpur Bishunpur	6	3.5	6	6	6	40	6	3
Amarhi	3	3	9	3	3	25	9	3
Belabadan	10	3	52	10	10	52	10	6
Bhabtia	8	1	24	24	24	24	8	0
Chandkura	3	0	3	6	6	6	6	6
Dewan Parsa	4	5	5	4	4	5	5	3
Jitwarpur	24	4	24	22	22	12	12	2
Khangaon	12	1	10	10	10	10	10	1
Mahisan	1.5	0	2.5	60	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5
Mohiuddinpur	3	2	3	12	3	3	3	3
Paharpur Deyal	2	2	20	2	2	2	2	2
Parsa	5	0	15	22	15	15	5	5
Rupaspur Salempur	15	0	45	30	15	15	15	6
Samhauti Buzurg	3	0	40	3	40	40	3	3

Note: PHC – Public Health Centre; PHSC – Public Health Sub-centre

Source: IHD Village Schedule

Four of the villages reported a private hospital within 5 km and as many as eight of the 14 survey villages had a private hospital within 10 km of the village (See Table 2.8). It is interesting to note that for some villages, such as Rupaspur Salempur, Mahisan and Mohiuddinpur, private allopathic doctors were located closer than hospitals. It should also be noted that chemists and medical shops were located within 6 km of all the villages. In a majority of the villages, the Family Planning Centre to which the women had access was at the Primary Health Centre.

## 2.5 Sanitation

The overall sanitation situation was particularly bad in all the survey villages. Across districts, open defecation was the most common practice among women and men. Lack of public or private toilets in the survey villages meant women had no option but to resort to open defecation. This particularly exposed them to health risks and made them vulnerable.

## 2.6 Education

Bihar reported the lowest female literacy rates in 2001 out of all the states and union territories in India. The average educational level of women in Bihar was lower than that of men, which was itself very low in comparison to other states in the country. Therefore, the literacy gap in Bihar is lower than states such as Rajasthan, Jharkhand and Uttar Pradesh.

Table 2.9  
Basic Literacy Rates for Bihar and India

<i>Indicator</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Bihar</i>	<i>India</i>
Female Literacy Rate	1991	22	39
	2001	34	54
Male Literacy Rate	1991	51	63
	2001	60	76
Gender based Differences in Literacy Rates	1991	29	25
	2001	26	22

*Source:* Calculated from Census of India, 1991 and 2001.

However, women's literacy rates varied significantly between rural and urban areas and rural women had lower literacy figures than any other population group in Bihar. Table 2.9 shows that 60 per cent of the male population was literate compared to 34 per cent of the females. It may also be noted that the literacy gap between men and women had improved from 29 per cent in 1991 to 26 per cent in 2001.

The poorer households displayed a worse scenario with respect to their literacy rates. This was true for both men and women. While men in rural Bihar reported a literacy rate of 71 per cent in 2004–05 as per the NSS data,<sup>2</sup> the literacy rate for the men in poor households was 14 points lower at 57 per cent. A similar variation of 12 points was noted for women in poor category versus those in rural Bihar households (see Table 2.10). It is noteworthy that it was the northern region that reported a worse performance with much lower literacy rates as compared to South Bihar (called Central before the formation of Jharkhand).

The entry into schooling displayed gender differentials with far lower proportions of girls being enrolled for education. This is further compounded by a higher dropout rate among girls. As a

2. The increase in literacy rate from 2001 to 2004–5 can be attributed to the *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan*.

Table 2.10  
**Region-wise Literacy Rate for Individuals from Poor and  
 All Categories by Gender for Rural Bihar 2004-05**

<i>Region</i>	<i>Male</i>		<i>Female</i>		<i>Person</i>	
	<i>Poor</i>	<i>All</i>	<i>Poor</i>	<i>All</i>	<i>Poor</i>	<i>All</i>
Northern	51.5	67.3	26.4	39.1	38.9	53.4
South (Central)	64.6	76.1	34.4	45.9	49.8	61.6
Bihar	57.0	70.9	29.7	41.8	43.4	56.7
Rural India	65.3	76.4	42.2	53.2	53.7	65.1

*Source:* Calculated from NSS, 61st round

result, girls lagged far behind boys in the number of school years completed.

The female literacy rates were better than the state average in some of the surveyed villages, such as Paharpur Deyal, Alalpur Bishunpur, Samhuti Buzurg, and Amarhi, as shown in Table 2.11. However, the gender gap in literacy rates remained quite substantial even for these villages.

In terms of educational facilities, all villages had a primary school, while 9 had a middle school. Only one village – Jitwarpur had a high school. While none of the survey villages had a college, the closest college was within 3 km in the case of Paharpur Deyal and Belabandan, and 40 km in the case of Rupaspur Salempur.

Table 2.11  
**Literacy Rates in the Survey Villages**

<i>Village Name</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>
Alalpur Bishunpur	60.3	72.7	47.0
Amarhi	62.2	80.2	45.0
Belabandan	52.4	63.7	39.9
Bhabtia	40.7	57.0	22.2
Chand Kura	52.5	68.4	35.7
Dewan Parsa	44.7	62.2	29.4
Jitwarpur	37.9	50.5	23.0
Khangaon	35.6	51.1	21.2
Mahisan	40.4	51.7	28.5
Maura*	31.5	45.7	16.4
Mohiuddinpur	51.2	70.4	28.2
Paharpur Deyal	72.1	88.5	57.9
Rupaspur Salempur	50.6	67.6	33.6
Samhuti Buzurg	65.7	82.8	46.7

*Source:* Calculated from Census of India 2001. \* Parsa is a part of this Census village.

Table 2.12  
Educational Status of Males and Females (%) in Survey Villages

Village	Illiterate		Up to Primary School		Up to Middle School		Up to Secondary and Higher Secondary School		Diplome and Degree		Masters and above	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Alalpur Bishunpur	21.8	51.2	37.2	36.4	16.7	6.6	23.7	5.0	0.6	0.8	0.0	0.0
Amarhi	29.7	40.6	20.6	26.6	8.0	17.5	34.9	14.0	7.1	0.0	0.0	0.0
Belabadan	35.5	50.9	28.7	33.3	11.6	8.1	21.9	7.7	4.9	2.0	0.8	0.0
Chandkura	31.7	60.4	26.6	18.0	6.2	3.9	28.2	14.5	2.1	1.3	1.5	0.0
Dewan Parsa	33.2	53.7	25.7	24.2	6.4	4.1	29.1	16.0	3.8	0.3	0.8	0.0
Jitwarpur	38.4	61.0	26.2	25.4	8.8	5.2	19.0	7.6	4.3	1.4	2.7	0.0
Khangaon	39.3	56.5	27.7	27.2	8.8	8.0	19.8	8.0	5.8	3.1	0.6	0.0
Mahisan	41.4	60.2	27.5	26.3	5.6	7.6	20.4	4.6	6.8	0.0	0.9	0.0
Mohiuddinpur	40.8	60.6	23.3	25.0	7.8	5.8	21.4	8.7	1.6	0.0	0.0	0.0
Paharpur Deyal	25.3	46.8	29.5	27.8	17.9	15.2	25.3	8.9	4.9	0.8	0.0	0.0
Rupaspur Salempur	25.5	51.0	31.4	20.7	7.5	7.7	27.1	20.7	6.9	1.4	1.6	0.0
Samhauti Buzurg	30.2	57.3	26.9	20.6	10.1	10.1	26.5	11.3	6.0	0.8	0.4	0.0

Source: Household Schedule

While most of the survey villages had provision of drinking water at the main government school, this was starkly missing in Mohiuddinpur. Toilet facilities for girls in the main government school were missing in three survey villages – Mohiuddinpur, Belabadan and Bhabtia. It was also found that in two of the survey villages – Jitwarpur and Dewan Parsa, less than half of the teachers employed were present on the day of the survey.

From the sample of households covered in the survey of the 12 villages, some further information is available on the status of educational levels among men and women. While women illiterates predominate, their share in primary and below primary levels is almost the same as men or higher in some villages but, at times, tends to drop out earlier than boys since women drop out at an early age at times. This is also clear from the gender differential in the middle school level. Chandkura, Mahisan, and Amarhi report more women graduates compared to other areas. All of this has implications for the kind of work participation women undertake.



### 3. WORK AND EMPLOYMENT

#### Women's Paid and Unpaid Work

Work undertaken is classified into main/marginal and principal/subsidiary activities, based on a time criterion or major income source. The Census of India defines all workers who undertake work for more than six months a year (that is 180 days) as main workers, while all those who work for lesser number of days are classified as marginal workers. Women's work often tends to be classified as marginal, secondary or subsidiary work. This classification has implications for the significance attributed to women's work and the wages paid.

Table 3.1  
Distribution of Female Workers across  
Sectoral Categories and Worker Population Ratios

	<i>Rural</i>		<i>Urban</i>		<i>All</i>	
	<i>1993-94</i>	<i>2004-05</i>	<i>1993-94</i>	<i>2004-05</i>	<i>1993-94</i>	<i>2004-05</i>
Agriculture and Allied	91.79	85.95	15.93	38.45	88.01	83.15
Mining & Quarrying	0.34	0.11	1.81	1.57	0.41	0.19
Manufacturing	4.00	8.12	22.10	18.10	4.91	8.71
Electricity, Gas & Water Supply	0.03	0.00	0.39	0.00	0.04	0.00
Construction	0.23	1.18	6.22	3.65	0.53	1.33
Trade, Hotels & Restaurants	1.92	2.02	13.13	9.95	2.48	2.49
Transport, Storage & Communications	0.02	0.07	1.61	0.62	0.10	0.10
Financing, Ins., Real Estate	0.00	0.00	2.10	0.68	0.11	0.04
Community, Social & Personal Services	1.68	2.55	36.71	26.98	3.42	3.99
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
Worker Population Ratios	17.25	17.92	6.88	9.19	16.03	16.97

Source: IHD Estimates, calculated from unit level NSS data for 50th and 61st rounds.

The worker population ratio (17 per cent) for women is very low. In fact, Bihar ranked second from the bottom among the 18 major states (including Delhi) with respect to its female worker population ratio (WPR) in 2004-05. Nevertheless, over the period 1993-4 to 2004-5, women's WPR in Bihar increased only marginally from 17.25 per cent to 17.92 per cent in the rural areas and from 6.88 per cent to 9.19 per cent in the urban areas. In absolute terms, there has been an increase of about 3.5 million women workers in the state of Bihar as a whole during this period.

The agricultural sector is the largest employer of women with 92 per cent of them working in it. But the NSS 2004–05 round records a decrease in this figure to 86 per cent. The majority of rural women workers participate in agriculture and related activities, either as casual workers or self-employed. The lower castes are found to be working predominantly as paid agricultural labourers due to their poverty and inaccessibility to land resources. Women are also seen to be involved in other sectors such as forestry, fishing, animal husbandry and related tasks. The self-employed in agriculture are from the landowning, sharecropping or traditional artisan households. They work as unpaid family workers or as supervisors.

Women's WPR ratio varies from a low percentage of 16 in Sheohar district to 62 per cent in Madhepura district (Census, 2001). However, a regional pattern can be seen in women's labour force participation. Women from the northern Bihar districts are more active in paid work as compared to their sisters in the southern part of the state. This is linked to the landowning and sharecropping patterns in the region as well as the level of rampant poverty.

Table 3.2  
Worker Population Ratios and Share of Main Workers in Total Workers

Village Name	Worker Population Ratio			Main Worker to Total Worker		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
Alalpur Bishunpur	32.9	44.9	19.4	93.4	94.7	90.0
Amarhi	35.3	50.6	20.8	76.0	87.3	50.0
Belabadan	42.2	49.3	34.3	74.2	91.2	46.7
Bhabtia	42.2	53.5	29.5	82.3	87.9	70.7
Chand Kura	46.5	51.9	41.0	73.9	92.7	49.4
Dewan Parsa	39.7	39.9	39.5	55.2	67.8	44.1
Jitwarpur	40.2	53.5	24.9	67.3	73.1	53.0
Khangaon	32.4	48.6	16.9	71.3	88.6	23.4
Mahisan	33.5	50.0	16.3	73.6	92.1	14.3
Maura*	50.9	55.2	46.2	69.5	88.6	44.9
Mohiuddinpur	41.9	43.7	39.9	89.2	95.0	81.7
Paharpur Deyal	21.3	42.0	2.2	60.4	61.6	40.0
Rupaspur	38.2	43.6	32.7	90.5	95.4	83.8
Samhauti Buzurg	46.8	58.4	33.8	35.1	51.1	4.1

Note: Main workers are all those who worked for more than 180 days a year.

Source: Calculated from the Census of India, 2001. \* Parsa is a part of this Census village.

- It may however be noted that this figure appears to be a bit of an anomaly as information from the survey, both household schedule and gender module, indicate otherwise.

Table 3.3  
**Percentage Distribution of Total and Female (Main+Marginal) Workers**

Village Name	Percentage Distribution of total workers				Percentage Distribution of female workers			
	Cultivators	AL	HH Industry	Others	Cultivator	AL	HH Industry	Other
Alalpur Bishunpur	47.8	47.8	1.4	3.1	13.8	83.8	2.5	0
Amarhi	34.4	51.6	7	7	5.2	74.1	18.1	2.6
Belabadan	20.2	73.4	0.2	6.2	7.1	92.4	0	0.5
Bhabtia	32.8	54.4	4.7	8.2	20.1	75.2	3.4	1.3
Chandkura	45.3	45.7	0.6	8.3	42.2	54.1	0.4	3.3
Dewan Parsa	59	39.1	0.3	1.6	57.2	42.5	0	0.3
Jitwarpur	34.3	60.7	1	4.1	20.9	77.1	1.3	0.7
Khangaon	36.6	54.6	1.8	7	33.9	65.3	0.4	0.4
Mahisan	45	47.2	0.5	7.3	38.4	59.3	0.6	1.7
Maura*	44.4	49.9	2.4	3.4	40.2	55.7	2.6	1.6
Mohiuddinpur	38.8	54.8	0	6.4	36.7	63.3	0	0
Paharpur Deyal	65.9	5.5	0	28.6	80	20	0	0
Rupaspur	22.4	62.7	5	10	30.7	59.5	7.1	2.6
Samhauti Buzurg	25.7	71.5	0.6	2.2	6.6	91	0.3	2.1

Source: Calculated from the Census of India, 2001. \* Parsa is a part of this Census village.

The Census of India information for the villages is used to calculate the WPRs for males and females (Table 3.2). The female WPRs range from a low of just 2 per cent in a small village in Gopalganj,<sup>3</sup> which is on the highway, to a high of 46 per cent in Madhepura district. Even in areas where women's participation is relatively higher, a large proportion of them are marginal workers except in the villages of Mohiuddinpur and Rupaspur Salempur.

As in the state as a whole, even in the survey villages women's work is characterised by a preponderance of agricultural activity. It was observed that any other opportunities for work in the local economy were fairly limited for men as well as women. This can be seen from Table 3.3 as well, in the low proportion of total workers involved in the household industry and any other work. Irrespective of being male or female, workers are predominantly involved in agricultural work.

The sample of households, which is part of the panel study, reported quite a high rate of work participation for women when both main and subsidiary activities were taken into account across villages. Although it may be noted that this information pertains to a period of ten years later, approximately, yet the WPR of females for Paharpur Deyal is the lowest across the survey villages.

The distribution of women workers across the four categories reveals the predominant involvement of women in agriculture

Table 3.4  
Worker\* Population Ratio (%)

Village	Worker Population Ratio	
	Male	Female
Alalpur Bishunpur	70.5	33.1
Amarhi	68.6	48.3
Belabadan	63.7	44.0
Chandkura	61.0	37.3
Dewan Parsa	66.8	37.7
Jitwarpur	66.7	45.8
Khangaon	61.0	35.2
Mahisan	64.2	39.6
Mohiuddinpur	67.0	43.3
Paharpur Deyal	56.8	26.6
Rupaspur Salempur	62.4	37.5
Samhauti Buzurg	68.7	35.5

Note: Calculated for both primary and secondary work

across the 14 villages. Amarhi and Rupaspur Salempur are the two villages which stand out for the proportion of women workers in non-agricultural activities.

### 3.2 Agricultural Work and Wages

#### 3.2.1 Agricultural Work

Given this context in the survey villages, the study aimed to find what work women did – both within and outside the domain of the household. A large number of women worked in farms. We found that women from SCs were predominantly agricultural labourers. The main activities in which they were involved were transplanting, weeding, and harvesting of paddy and wheat. They worked in the cultivation of maize, jute and vegetables as well. As we moved up the caste ladder, to the OBC I and OBC II communities, work for both men and women diversified. Women reported that they undertook post-harvesting activities such as winnowing, cleaning, drying, shelling, milling, etc., for paddy and wheat, albeit without a wage, within the household. Sharecropping was also found extensively among these intermediate castes and women worked on the leased land. Even in the upper castes, such as the Rajputs and Brahmins, women reported that they undertook unpaid agricultural activities mentioned above in their homes. Pulses were processed by women in the Ansari *Tola* in Jitwarpur. On the other hand, Yadav women in Amarhi were involved in post-harvesting activities in agriculture for which they were paid wages.

Pulses such as *moong* and *masoor* were found in the survey villages, and women were involved in their cultivation. They were also involved in growing vegetables such as potatoes, onions, cabbage, cauliflower, tomatoes, pumpkin, white radish, ginger, garlic, sweet potato, etc. Jute cultivation was also found in some of the survey sites. There have been some changes in the cropping patterns in the villages surveyed. While paddy and wheat remain major crops, maize also occupies a significant share. Pulses have been on the decline and jute cultivation, which is undertaken in some of the villages, was also declining.

In recent years, with the introduction of the harvester for wheat, especially in the districts of South Bihar, it appeared that work had greatly reduced and this mechanisation had hurt agricultural labourers. While men managed to find other avenues of work

outside the village, the women were not able to do so, and were greatly affected by this development. This was also specifically articulated by women in the Harijan *Tola* in Amarhi.

On an average, women worked for approximately 7 to 8 hours for transplanting and 4 to 5 hours for weeding of paddy. For harvesting of both wheat and paddy, they would go early in the morning and return only late in the evening, with a break for lunch in the afternoon.

Among the marginal and small cultivator households, women also grow vegetables on small plots of land. Most of this is for home consumption, while some of them also market these at times. They grew white radish, brinjal, potato, sweet potato, cauliflower, ginger, garlic, onion, pumpkin, etc. For vegetable cultivation, no labourers are used. Both men and women worked in these farms, but only the men are involved in selling the vegetables in the market. In a few cases, labour was also hired for wages in the cultivation of vegetables.

### 3.2.2 Wages

Wages in agriculture are often a combination of cash and components of kind. The kind component could consist of grains or what is more common a *nasta* and/or a meal (cooked food such as *rotis*, vegetables or salt; or rice and vegetables). While it is usually difficult to ascertain the average value of this cooked/prepared food component accurately due to variations across caste/class groups of employers, generally the wage rate cash component is relatively easy to find out. However, it was noticed that there is very often a discrepancy between the cash wage reported by the employer and that reported by the labourer. Often a Rs10–15 variation in the reported daily wage was observed, with the employers reporting a higher rate.

An approximation of the *nasta* and/or meal component of wages in areas where this is in practice, in value terms, amounts to a Rs 5–7 for breakfast/snack for *nasta* and Rs 10–12 for a meal. In almost all cases, *nasta* was provided for weeding and transplanting activities. In some cases, lunch was also provided. It was interesting to note that while the landowners alleged that they provided a filling (*bharpet*) meal to labourers, often, the labourers thought otherwise. The Khatve women in Khangaon said that the *nasta* was not filling and it did not fill their stomach.

Table 3.5  
**Prevalent Daily Wages (Range) for  
 Agricultural Work Reported in the Villages**

	Cash (in Rs)		Kind* (when provided)	
	Full Day	Half Day	Nasta	Meal
Men	40-90	15-35	5-7	10-12
Women	30-80	15-25	5-7	10-12

*Note:* Children's wages are lower, with the upper range of the cash wage component not exceeding Rs. 50 for a full day's work.

\* Translated approximately into value terms.

There appears to be a tendency to shift towards more cash wages in certain villages and for some kinds of agricultural tasks. It was also interesting to learn that in some cases, there seemed to be an option of taking a higher wage, if breakfast and/or lunch was not provided to the labourers. It would be pertinent here to note that in most cases, the women in landed households prepared the meals for the agricultural labourers. Thus, while transplanting and weeding operations were carried out in the farms by women of the lower castes, women of upper caste households, which employ labourers, worked too and spent a few hours every morning on the task of preparing meals for farm workers every day.

Jute retting work is unpleasant and more arduous and, hence, higher wages of Rs 100 have been reported. Women from landlord and cultivating communities had a tendency to report higher wages than what they actually paid. For instance, women in the Mahabrahmin *Tola* in Samhauthi Buzurg reported that the daily wage which they paid to their labourers for paddy transplantation is Rs 70-80 and alleged that *nasta* (5 *rotis* and *subzi*) and a meal (rice, *dal* and *subzi*) was provided. These wages deviated significantly from those reported in other *tolas* where women worked as agricultural labourers.

The practice of giving food grains in lieu of the cash component was reported from Gaya, Madhepura, Nalanda and in a small measure from Rohtas. Women mostly reported that they were getting 4 kg of rice for transplanting and 3 kg of rice for weeding. For instance, Kahar women in Chandkura received 2.5 kg of rice for a day's work, along with half a kg of *sattu* for breakfast. Baniya women in Rupaspur Salempur received 3 kg of rice for a day's work in paddy transplantation. Chamar women in Madhubani too said that they receive either Rs 30 for transplanting or 4 kg of rice. The ongoing market price for rice at the time of the survey was Rs 12-14 per kg and around Rs 7-8 per kg in the PDS shop.

Irrespective of the form and combination of wages for agricultural work, there is a differentiation in the wages paid to men and women. This is so even for work for both full and half days.

In some areas, the wage payment systems are changing over time with a gradual shift towards monetised/cash wages as well as some contractual/piece rate systems.

However, the practice of share wages in kind for harvesting is predominant for all food grains, paddy, wheat, maize, and pulses. The rates prevalent across villages for paddy and wheat are given in the Table 3.6. In one case of sugarcane harvesting, the byproduct is taken as wage share by the workers to be used as fodder and fuel.

Table 3.6  
Harvest Shares for Paddy and Wheat

<i>Village Name</i>	<i>Prevailing Share of harvest – Paddy</i>	<i>Prevailing Share of harvest – Wheat</i>
Alalpur Bishunpur	1/11	1/11
Amarhi	1/11	1/11
Belabadan	1/9	1/9
Bhabtia	1/12	1/10
Chandkura	1/14	1/14
Dewan Parsa	1/10	1/20*
Jitwarpur	1/8	1/8
Khangaon	1/12	1/12
Mahisan	1/12	1/12
Maura	1/9	1/9
Mohiuddinpur	1/11	1/12
Paharpur Deyal	1/7**	1/10
Rupaspur	1/12	1/12
Samhauti Buzurg	1/9	1/9

Source: Village Schedule, 2009.

\* Only harvesting (threshing not done by the labourer).

\*\* This share includes post-harvesting operations.

### 3.2.3 Attached Labour

Though the practice of attached labour in rural Bihar has significantly diminished, it is still found in some places. In Amarhi, we learnt from women in the Brahmin *Tola* that the practice followed was that a *mazdoor* was given one *bigha* of land, where he stayed with his family and, in turn, did all or whatever work was required



for the household where he was attached. The women from the landlord family did not need to do anything. The *mazdoor* family did everything: worked in the field, fetched fuel/firewood, made cowdung cakes, and any non-agricultural activities they required. However, they reported that women from landowning households were involved in post-harvesting activities at home for domestic purposes. Having said that, there are still instances of the power and control some of the landed gentry exercise over the lower caste households. However, with the option to migrate for better livelihoods, in terms of higher returns compared to the agricultural wages, some of these practices are on the decline.

Leasing in of land, working on these farms and undertaking cultivation under a share agreement for input costs and output, are also practiced which involve women as unpaid family workers. Some similar practices seem to also be there for rearing of milch cattle.

### 3.3 Animal Husbandry

There is an overwhelming consensus that animal rearing has increased phenomenally in Bihar. Our survey villages were no different. In fact, due to the lack of any other productive enterprises, animal husbandry appeared even more ubiquitous in the survey sites. There was a presence of domesticated animals, more or less across all caste groups and religions. These were perceived as an additional source of income, consumption smoothening and a means of quick cash at times of emergency, especially in the economically poor and vulnerable communities. Collection of fodder and maintenance of animals involved women.

#### *Milch Animals*

While the upper caste *tolas* such as Brahmins and Rajputs owned considerable milch animals, the intermediate and lower castes followed a practice called *posaiyya*, which literally means 'to care'. Here, the lower caste women took a young calf (or two) from upper castes, fed and reared the animal, and then, shared the income generated from the animal with its 'owner' in a 1:1 ratio. In the Paswan *Tola* in Amarhi, all the women had taken cows on *posaiyya*, and tended to them. Thus, the presence of milch animals such as cows and buffaloes was observed in a majority of the *tolas* which we studied. Women reported that milk was consumed at the

household level and excess milk is sold in the market at around Rs 20 per kg. The Sauji women in Mahisan sold milk and curd outside the *tola*. In spite of a considerable population of milch animals, it is surprising that the milk produced did rounds only in the local village economy and there were no dairies or dairy cooperatives which procured milk in the vicinity of these villages.

While rearing of milch animals was found to be most predominant among Yadav communities<sup>4</sup> across survey sites, across most communities women were responsible for fodder collection and cutting fodder, washing the cows and buffaloes, giving them fodder, and milking the animals. While in some cases both men and women shared this work, in most communities women exclusively undertook these tasks. In some communities, where migration had become ubiquitous in the recent past, the burden of such work was now entirely on women. This is discussed in detail in another section. An interesting deviation from this norm was found in the Rajput *Tola* in Samhauti Buzurg, where men took care of all the animals and the women did not participate in any of the aforementioned activities.

### 3.3.2 Oxen

The introduction of the tractor in agricultural operations, especially for ploughing, has led to a near disappearance of oxen from rural Bihar. Yet, their presence was noted in some villages of the study and it was more marked in the districts of North Bihar. For instance, the Yadavs and Mallahs in both Mahisan and Jitwarpur owned oxen. It was also interesting to note that most of the communities where oxen are found in the survey sites, practiced sharecropping. These included, among others, Paswans and Nais in Khangaon. It is also pertinent to note here that ownership of oxen is only with the lower and intermediate castes. This can be explained by the smaller size of farms of the members of these communities, where it is economical to use oxen rather than hire a tractor. Here too, like the milch animals, it was the women who predominantly took care of the oxen.

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4. In the Yadav Tola in Belabandan, women said rearing animals was the most prominent activity undertaken by women after their household chores.

### *Goat and Chicken Rearing*

Goats and chicken were also plentiful in the rural sites. The upper castes mostly appeared not to rear these, especially chicken, and told us that such animals were raised only by the lower castes. Upper caste Muslim women in Gopalganj specifically told us that they did not rear chickens; their *tola* only had oxen and milch animals.

We found that chickens were reared in the Chamar *tolas* of Jitwarpur, Samhuti Buzurg and Amarhi, Muslim *tolas* (upper caste and lower caste) of Jitwarpur, Belabadan and Mahisan, and the Paswan *Tola* in Samhuti Buzurg. Eggs were sold at around Rs 5 a piece, and a hen went for around Rs 100–150 per kg, or around Rs 150 a piece. However, at the Paswan *Tola* in Samhuti Buzurg, a *desi* chicken was sold for Rs 200, whereas at the Dhunia *Tola* in Belabadan, a hen sold for around Rs 70–80.

Goat rearing was more common than chicken rearing. On an average, it took about 6 months for a young calf to mature and be sold. Goat rearing was very popular in Jitwarpur, where there were goats in 7 of the 10 *tolas* under study, namely the Chamar, Musahar, Santhal, Mandal, Yadav, Ansari and Mansuri *tolas*. In Samhuti Buzurg, they were found in 7 of the 11 *tolas* under study, viz., Lohar, Dhobi, Paswan, Kanu, Muslim, Yadav and Chamar *tolas*. They were also found in the Koeri and Chamar *tolas* in Amarhi, and the Dhuniya, Musahar and Paswan *tolas* in Belabadan. There was a considerable variation in the price of goats across villages and across *tolas*, depending on their weight and quality. At the Harijan *Tola* in Amarhi, goats were sold at Rs 150 per kilogram. At the Paswan *Tola* in Samhuti Buzurg, they were sold at Rs 800 a piece, whereas at the Lohar *Tola*, a goat could fetch up to Rs 1,000. In Belabadan, the price of a goat ranged from Rs 500 to 700 a piece, whereas in Madhubani district, in both Khangaon and Mahisan, goats were sold at Rs 2,000 a piece. In the Nai *Tola* in Khangaon, women reported that they followed the practice of sharing half the proceeds of the sale of the goat with the person/ upper caste member who had 'given' the young goat to rear, just like the practice of *posaiyya* for milch animals.

While investments in milch animals like cows and buffaloes are fixed, the poorer communities perceive goats and chickens in their households as fungible – they are a means of insurance. In case of emergencies, money can quickly be raised by selling them.

Alternatively, they are also consumed by the households, as is more prominent in the Muslim *tolas* in comparison to the non-Muslim *tolas*.

### *Other Animals*

In the Dom community, pigs were reared and while men took them out during the day, the women were involved in feeding them and taking care of them. In the Dhobi community, women also reared donkeys, which were used to carry clothes to their *jajman's* house. Women also domesticated swans, ducks and pigeons. Swans and ducks sold at rates similar to hens, whereas a pigeon could be sold in the range of Rs 25–40 a piece.

### **3.4 Non-Agricultural Work and Wages**

As already seen, agriculture and animal husbandry were the most predominant activities in which women were involved. The use of byproducts from agricultural crops and transformation of these into useful things for both home use and at times for sales to generate small sums of money were common. Making of dung cakes for fuel was another activity which women commonly undertake.

Scope for non-agricultural work was much limited and mostly confined to earthwork, domestic service, artisanship and running petty shops. A detailed caste-wise list of non-agricultural work undertaken by women in the survey villages is given in Table 3.7. While petty shops were run by women across almost all castes, domestic servants are predominantly from the SCs. Artisans were women with traditional caste occupations such as the Kumhars and Mallah. Kumhar women in Alalpur Bishunpur and Bhabtia continued with their traditional caste occupation of making pots. Women from the Mallah community were especially mobile and undertook work such as preparing snacks like rice puffs and selling them at the local *haat*. They also sold flour, bananas and tobacco. In the Teli *Tola* in Khangaon, one lady had a small shop where she sold vegetables. Some women from the Mandal *Tola* in Jitwarpur sold white radish, milk, pigeons, swan eggs, and swans in the *tola*. Dom women made baskets and sold them in the market. We found very few instances of artisan work and no small scale industry at the survey sites. Santhal women reported that other than working as agricultural labourers, they produced local liquor, which they sold if needed.

Table 3.7  
Caste-wise Involvement in Different Types of Non Agricultural Work

S.No	Type of work	Predominant Castes Involved
1.	Earthwork	Kumhar+2, Ravidas+1, Manjhi+1, Musahar+1, Mallah+1, Jamadar, Paswan+2, Noniya, Santhal, Mansuri, Yadav, Dhuniya, Dhobi
2.	Domestic Servant	Sauji, Mallah+1, Jat, Ravidas, Musahar
3.	Artisan	Kumhar, Mallah, Dom
4.	Petty Shop	Rajput+1, Baniya+1, Koeri+1, Chamar, Teli+1, Mallah, Musahar+1, Ansari, Mandal, Yadav+1, Sheikh

Note: +1 or +2 indicates how many groups of the same castes reported being involved in this type of work.

While in all the communities where women worked agriculture was the primary occupation, be it as a cultivator or a labourer, things were different in the Dom community. Lowest in the caste hierarchy, Dom women were not allowed to even work as agricultural labourers. While Dom men engaged in pig rearing, Dom women made baskets and sold them in the market.

As already noted earlier, according to Census figures, in Amarhi and Rupaspur, 18.1 per cent and 7.1 per cent of the female workers were involved in household industry, respectively. It is possible that remittances sent by male migrants have played a role in creating and sustaining these enterprises by women. However, the level of enterprises is generally quite low in rural Bihar.

Information on the casual daily wages for non-agricultural activities from the village schedule reveals a range of Rs 60–100 for men and Rs 50–70 for women. Since a large part of the non-agricultural daily wage was for construction related work in the village, this also entailed being given a *nasta* and meal. Mostly, men were involved in such work, with very few women joining in.

### 3.4.1 Making Dung Cakes

Cowdung cakes were the most commonly used source of fuel in the villages. In most cases, women made these cakes for their own domestic consumption. However, it was interesting to note that in the Rajput *Tola* in Rohtas district, it was the men and not the women who made cowdung cakes. Baniya women in Jitwarpur reported that they went to the upper caste households to make these and received half a kilo of grain for the service provided. Paswan women in Samhauti Buzurg said that 4-5 baskets of cowdung cakes were

bought for Rs 200 and Kahar women in the same village reported that they bought them at Rs 1 per piece. Women in the Brahmin *Tola* in Amarhi reported that attached labour was used to make cowdung cakes. Harijan women in Amarhi said that they sold 100 cakes for Rs 20 and Yadav women in the same village said that they sold 250 cakes for Rs 150. Indeed, there was much diversity in the size and composition of dung cakes across districts and villages, and even within villages.

Women from poor communities spent a substantial time outside the *tola* hunting for firewood and sorting cowdung. Irregular access to fuel sources for cooking means they were forced to venture far from the *tola* in their search. This problem was specifically articulated by Chamar women in Khangaon, Musahar, Mansuri and poor Brahmin women in Jitwarpur and Chamar women in Samhauti Buzurg.

#### **3.4.2 Earth Work**

In some villages where roads were made, mostly men were involved. Seldom did women do such work. Musahar women in Khangaon told us that if a woman goes for earth work, she is called a woman of bad character (*bachman*). We found that women in Dhobi and Paswan *Tolas* in Samhautibuzurg village in Rohtas district had worked on such sites in the past. Dhuniya (Muslim) women in Belabadan had also done similar work, which was procured by a contractor and earned daily wages which ranged from Rs 50–80. Mansuri women in Jitwarpur had been involved in earthwork, with Rs 25 as daily wage and had also worked at a brick kiln. Women in the Musahar *Tola* in Parsa had been involved in digging ponds under NREGS.

#### **3.4.3 Domestic Workers**

While we did observe some cases of women from lower castes working as domestic workers in the houses of the landed gentry, such self-reporting has been found to be low as women were ashamed to report that they engaged in such work. Sauji and Mallah women in Mahisan reported that they worked as domestic servants when required. Mallah and Santhal women in Jitwarpur too worked in the homes of others. The Santhal women alleged that they did not get the 'right wage' for such work. The Ansari women in Jitwarpur said that they employed domestic servants at a daily wage of Rs

20 and also provided them with a meal. Women in Chamar *Tola* in Samhauti Buzurg said that a few of them (around 10–15 women) go to the upper caste *tolas* to do post-harvesting activities. They get food to eat and are given one kg of rice for a day's work. Bania women in Parsa said that they received 2.5 kg of grain (wheat or rice) for a day's work in upper caste households.

#### **3.4.4 Women's Role in Traditional Caste Occupations**

For the Kumhar community (traditional potters), work in their traditional caste occupation of making earthen pots has reduced considerably as earthen pots are being replaced by metal or plastic containers. However, it is still done and women are normally involved in this work as we found in Alalpur Bishunpur and Bhabtia.

In some traditional caste occupations such as Lohar (blacksmiths) and Mallah (fishermen), the role of women was negligible. Only the men in these communities did such work. However, while women in the Mallah community were especially mobile in other kinds of work, such as preparing snacks like rice puffs and selling them at the local *haat*. They also sold flour, bananas and tobacco. On the other hand, we observed across survey sites that women from the Lohar community were exceptionally immobile and did not do any kind of work outside the household.

#### **3.4.5 Petty Shops**

A small endeavour found in most villages was a local grocery/ convenience store/petty shop, almost in each *tola*. While in the majority of such cases it was men who predominantly ran the store, often, women were also found to contribute to the running of such home-based petty enterprises. In the Chamar *Tola* in Khangaon, there were 2–3 such shops where women sat. In the Musahar *tolas* in Belabadan and Jitwarpur, the Rajput *Tola* in Khangaon and the Muslim, Bania and Teli *tolas* in Parsa, Kuswaha (Koeri) *Tola* in Rupaspur Salempur, women worked in such home based small shops.

### 3.4.6 *Jajmani*<sup>4</sup> Work

*Jajmani* work is generally in continuation in areas where payments in kind or barter exchange is still operational. A gradual decline is commonly witnessed in most villages. Ritual requirements still constitute domains for which *jajmani* work continues. Women from several communities are also involved in *jajmani* work. For instance, in the *Nai Tola* in Khangaon, the women went to their *jajmans* during weddings to carry out *jajmani* activities for the preparation of the weddings. *Nai* women in Alalpur Bishunpur told us that they went to their *jajmans* at the time of weddings and other important occasions to perform *jajmani* activities such as cutting nails and painting the feet of women in *jajman* families. In the *Dhobi Tola* in Samhauti Buzurg, we found that women washed, ironed and delivered their *jajman's* clothes.

### 3.5 Child Labour

Though the incidence of child labour has been decreasing in India, it remains relatively high in Bihar with reports of trafficking from many parts of the state as well. The Registrar General's Census data, however, records a low proportion of child labour among the 5–14 years (see Table 3.8). While the share of children enrolled and going to school is increasing and this was quite visible in the surveyed villages too in 2009, the proportions of children neither at school nor workers is worrisome. Post the turn of the millennium with the introduction of the *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* (SSA),<sup>5</sup> and establishment of new schools in more habitations, improvement in enrolment is clearly occurring.

As seen in the earlier section on facilities, all the surveyed villages have primary schools with many of them even having a middle school. There is also the growing recognition among parents of the importance of education. In many communities, we were told that child labour in the villages has significantly declined

4. The caste-based occupations of washermen, barbers, sweepers and lavatory cleaners, carpenters and blacksmiths commonly still come under *jajmani* system. The *jajmani* system is a caste-based occupational system which is held together by a network of relations between the *jajman* (patron) and the *kamin* (service provider). The remuneration for such caste-based professions is generally in kind, as a fixed share of crops harvested, generally for a period of six months. It is characterised by reciprocal social and economic arrangements between families of the *jajman* and the *kamin*, who are of different castes.

5. The *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* is a National flagship Programme for universalisation of elementary education.



Table 3.8  
**Status of Children (5–14 years) in Rural Bihar**

State	Boys		Girls		All		Boys	Girls	All
	1991	2001	1991	2001	1991	2001			
Working Children	5.1	5.89	2.31	3.89	3.81	4.95	0.79	1.58	1.14
Attending School	39.27	46.3	21.58	34.18	31.08	40.62	7.03	12.60	9.54
Nowhere Children*	55.78	48.92	76.17	62.44	65.22	55.26	-6.86	-13.73	-9.96

Note: \* indicates children neither in school nor working.

Source: Calculated from Census of India, 1991 and 2001.

because children are going to school now and spending more time on education.

However, the poverty levels and paucity of local employment avenues, in turn resulting in the high incidence of migration from the villages, often has an impact on the children and their labour participation as well. Apart from the usual tendency of children getting involved in agricultural work, both on own farms as well as for paid work in others fields, reports of children migrating outside the village with or without adults were also noted. The survey villages showed that young male children were migrating for work. They go to Patna, Surat, Delhi, and Ludhiana to work in factories, dyeing centres, dhabas and restaurants. While not so easily revealed, children going to urban towns and cities to work as domestic help in private households were another avenue for upward mobility and earning a living.

### 3.5.1 Child Labour within the Village

Within the village, it appeared that children are most likely to work in farms – be it as agricultural labourers or unpaid family workers. Some would work after school hours or miss school altogether. We found that the activities most frequently undertaken by children were transplanting, weeding, and harvesting of paddy and wheat. In the Dhunia *Tola* in Belabadan, women reported that children also worked in jute cultivation. Whilst both boys and girls undertook agricultural activities, we learnt in the Paswan and Kanu *tolas* in Samhauti Buzurg, and the Mansuri *tola* in Jitwarpur that only boys were involved in non-agricultural work such as earthwork. However, in the Musahar and Ansari *tolas* in Jitwarpur, both boys and girls worked at brick kilns. Children also undertook *jajmani* work, as reported by *dhobi* women in Samhauti Buzurg, and they

helped their parents in washing clothes of their *jajmans*. Children were also involved in activities such as grazing animals, giving them fodder and collecting fuel. It was reported that girls helped in the domestic chores of the households and cared for young siblings. Their involvement in such tasks often led them to drop out of school at a young age.

In most *tolas*, questions related to child work were answered in a very politically correct fashion. Women often simply retorted that children in their *tola* did not work and they went to school. Only after much probing was it conceded that they worked after school and were likely to miss school in the times of transplanting, weeding and harvesting.

The women's perceptions about whether child labour had increased or decreased within their *tolas* in the last 10 years were diverse. The different perceptions of different castes about this issue truly reflects that it is the caste/ *tola* within the village, and not the village per se, which is the focal point of reference for understanding key social and economic changes in rural Bihari society.

In the Dhunia *Tola* in Belabadan, women said, 'to fill our stomachs, we have to work; whether it is the old or the young.' In the Paswan *Tola* in Belabadan, women said, 'Prices have increased, things are more expensive now. There is no choice but for our children to work.' We heard in the Kanu *Tola* in Samhauti Buzurg that children work more now because the population of the house has increased; there are more people now. In the Paswan *Tola* in Samhauti Buzurg, women simply said, 'We have to work because of poverty.' In the Mandal *Tola* in Jitwarpur, women said, 'Our children cannot go to school because of poverty they have to work on the farms.' Santhal women in Jitwarpur said, '*Do paise se pet nahin bharta*' (two cents don't fill a stomach), arguing that their children have no choice but to work. Jamadar women in Chandkura commented that while earlier, children from their community were involved only in agricultural work, now they are also involved in earth work.

At the same time, women also reported that child labour had declined over the last 10 years. We heard in the Harijan *Tola* in Amarhi village that because of education, child labour has decreased. In the Chamar *Tola* in Jitwarpur, women reported that children go to school; they work sometime. Khatve women in Mahisan reported that child labour had decreased because, 'children study more now.'

In the Chamar *Tola* in Samhauti Buzurg, women felt that over the last 10 years though child labour for girls had remained the same, it had increased for boys in the *tola* as, 'Population has increased, so boys have to work (to feed more stomachs).' However, in the Sheikh *Tola* of Belabadan, apart from the activity of grazing cows and goats, in which children were involved, the women reported that girls were more involved in working in the fields at the time of harvesting in comparison to the boys in the *tola*.

Upper castes such as Brahmins and Rajputs found no change in the status of child labourers in their *tolas*. Women from these *tolas* reported that children from these communities had not worked in the past and did not work now. Women from Lohar *Tola* in Samhauti Buzurg and Kumhar *Tola* in Khangaon too reported that children from these *tolas* had never worked.

### 3.5.2 Child Labour outside the Village

A recent development in some survey sites is the migration of children to urban centres to work. This new phenomenon is particularly disturbing. We learnt that young boys often accompany their fathers, other relatives, members from their village, or even contractors in search of work. Ravidas women in Chandkura explained that if one child from the village goes, other children follow. The most common destinations of migrants are Punjab, Haryana, Delhi and Gujarat (see table 3.9).

Table 3.9  
Main Destinations of Child Migrants and Types of Work Undertaken

<i>Type of work</i>	<i>Main destination</i>
Labourers at construction site, welding, brick kiln, dyeing factory, tea shop, eatery, <i>paan</i> shop, stitching, painting, domestic work	Punjab (Ludhiana), Haryana (Ghaziabad, Kurukshetra) Delhi, Gujarat (Surat), Kashmir, Maharashtra (Mumbai), Patna

We learnt that five boys from the Gorhi (Mallah) *Tola* in Jitwarpur had gone to Kurukshetra, Ludhiana and Ghaziabad, where they are involved in works such as taking care of animals, stitching and painting. They accompanied their fathers to these destinations and earned, on an average, around Rs 400 per month. At the Ansari *Tola* in Jitwarpur, women told us that around 10 children had migrated to Delhi and Punjab, where they were involved in welding and construction related work and went with either relatives or contractors. From the Dhunia *Tola* in Belabadan, eight to ten children

had migrated for work to Delhi, Punjab and Haryana, where they worked in tea shops, *paan* shops and as domestic servants. They had gone with their fathers/other members of the family and earned Rs 400–500 every month. The women in the upper caste Muslim *tola* in Belabadan reported that 10 boys from their *tola* had migrated to Delhi, Punjab, Haryana and Kashmir, and worked in brick kilns, tea shops and hotels, and were involved in painting and tailoring activities, where they managed to earn Rs 1500–2000 every month. In the Mia *Tola* in Samhauti Buzurg, we were told that five children from the *tola* were in Surat and Mumbai, involved in dye-work. They had been accompanied by men from the Harijan *Tola* in the village and earn around Rs 80 every day.

In child migration too, it was telling to observe that caste patterns of work within the village were reflected in nature of work undertaken by migration at their destinations as well. For instance, from the Musahar *Tola* in Belabadan, four to five children had accompanied their relatives to rural Punjab at the time of harvesting of paddy and wheat. On the other hand, as we have already seen, the higher castes, and the ones with specific skills (blacksmiths, carpenters), and better networks were translated in better work opportunities at the destination of migration.

#### **4. IMPACT OF MALE MIGRATION ON WOMEN**

Migration is ubiquitous from both north and south Bihar. From the household survey undertaken, only in the villages which were part of the panel study, it was noted that in the 12 census villages, incidence of migration ranges from 35 per cent to 84 per cent. A large part of these migrants go to urban locations. The share of migrants to rural areas constitutes 55 per cent of all migrating households in Belabandan and 33 per cent in Jitwarpur. In the north Bihar villages, at the time of the survey, there were no young men to be seen. Only women, children and the elderly live in the village. When we visited, all adult (and possibly some children) males were in Punjab and Haryana to work in harvesting activities.<sup>6</sup> Men usually go to Punjab and Haryana for agricultural work.

Bulk of the migration is to urban locations outside the state, with a few men moving outside the country as well. Relatively higher incidence of such international migration was noted from Dewan Parsa, followed by Chandkura and Mahisan.

The migrant males opting for non-agricultural work engage in activities such as construction, hawking, rickshaw-pulling, tailoring, security guards and factory work. The main destinations are urban centres like Delhi, Gurgaon, Faridabad, Mumbai, Ludhiana, Chandigarh, Hisar, Ghaziabad, Ahmedabad, Surat, Jamnagar, Jaipur, Hyderabad, Kolkata, Siliguri, Darjeeling, Patna etc. Few men, mostly from the upper castes, migrate to work in government jobs. Men going abroad for work were recorded in Gopalganj district, where mostly Muslim men have migrated to West Asian countries like Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Oman.

##### **4.1 Impact on Paid and Unpaid Work**

The migration of men has brought about profound changes in the work women do, both within and outside their household. Though it appears that the nature of work for most women has remained the same before and after migration, there are many caveats. For instance, while women who were agricultural labourers before their husbands migrated continued to remain agricultural labourers, but they also have to tend to animals and single-handedly undertake many other activities which were earlier shared by the male and female members of the family.

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6. Harvesting season in Punjab and Haryana is earlier than in Bihar.

Similarly, the burden of work has tremendously increased for women in households that own land or sharecrop after male members have migrated. Kurmi women in Paharpur Deyal said that they 'struggle more than the men.'

For families owning large tracts of land, women now have to oversee work in the farms, supervise agricultural labourers, and often make decisions related to sowing, transplanting, weeding, harvesting, usage of seeds and fertilisers, and other such agricultural activities in the absence of their husbands.

Not many changes have occurred in non-agricultural work done by women in the village, post the migration of men from their communities. This can be explained mainly by the lack of opportunities for non-agricultural work. However, we found that animal husbandry has increased and absorbs substantial time of women across different castes and classes.

In the Mansuri *Tola* in Jitwarpur, women were mainly agricultural labourers. They also worked as casual labourers and at brick kilns when they got the opportunity. They said that the burden of their work had increased after male migration even though they did all of the work earlier. Sardar women in Parsa said that they now have to undertake chores both within and outside the household. Musahar women in Khangaon told us that when men were there, the work was shared. Now, women alone do all that work. Musahar women in Jitwarpur said, 'We have to work at our homes and we have to work in the farms; more than the men.' Kurmi women in Amarhi said that they now had to pay labourers; oversee and manage work in the farm, and give fodder to animals. Brahmin women in Jitwarpur shared with us that other than taking care of the animals on their own, they had 'full responsibility of the children.'

Women now necessarily undertook more tasks, including those which require more mobility. Women often went outside the *tola* to buy vegetables, to take their children to school, to meet the school teachers, to visit the doctor and buy medicines. They were likely to go with other women from the *tola*, but also alone when required.

#### **4.2 Impact on Decision Making in the Household**

It is evident that because of male migration women were more involved in taking decisions. With the aid of mobile phones,

communication with migrants was easy and women frequently consulted their husbands on the phone. If a woman lived in a joint family, the parents-in-law generally played a major role in key decisions made in the household. Having said that, women across *tolas* clearly articulated their involvement in taking crucial and every day household decisions in the absence of their husbands. Mallah women in Mahisan said, 'From buying vegetables to choosing our saris, we make all the decisions ourselves.' Women in the Yadav *tola* in Amarhi said that they decided on matters independently – from arranging marriages to how to spend money. When a research investigator asked Ansari women in Jitwarpur if they consulted their husbands who were away, they asked in an exasperated manner, 'Are we supposed to keep asking them all the time?' Brahmin women in Jitwarpur told us that they took decisions regarding their children's education and managed remittances. Women in the Chamar *Tola* in Jitwarpur said that they 'take all decisions on their own because we don't trust anyone else.'

At the same time, strong footholds of patriarchy were felt when we heard voices such as those of the Koeri women in Amarhi, who said, "all decisions are taken by parents-in-law"; Yadav women in Mahisan confided that their in-laws control everything, they have to ask husbands for consent. Another common response that elicited from the Nai and Chamar *tolas* in Khangaon and the Harijan *Tola* in Amarhi was that whilst women take *small decisions* on their own, they consult their husbands and parents-in-laws to take the *big decisions*.

### 4.3 Impact on Involvement in Managing Money

With their husbands away, women were more involved in managing money in the household. A woman in the Paswan *Tola* in Belabadan said that 'it (managing money) was a bit hard in the beginning, but got used to it.' Women in Kurmi *Tola* in Paharpur Deyal, Ansari *Tola* in Mahisan and Chamar *Tola* in Jitwarpur had identical responses when asked if they were more involved in managing money in the absence of male members of the household. They simply retorted, 'If we don't, who will?' In some *tolas* of the survey sites, albeit a minority, women reported that only their parents-in-law managed all the money in the household.

#### 4.4 Access to Credit

In the absence of male members of the family, women often faced barriers in both accessing credit and getting credit on favourable terms. The local moneylender was the main source of credit for women across all the *tolas* in the absence of male members in the family. While richer, landed women from upper caste households were often able to borrow money from relatives, friends and neighbours, the poorer women had to resort to the moneylender. Interest rates varied from 5–10 per cent per month and women from the poorer communities, like the Chamars, Paswans, Musahars and Mallahs, paid a higher interest rate. Paswan women in Khangaon told us that the regular interest rate paid by them is 6–7 per cent per month but, sometimes, out of helplessness, when money is urgently required, they end up paying 10 per cent. Even in the Brahmin *Tola* in Jitwarpur women complained, 'We often have problems getting loan; it's not easy.'

As complex as the phenomenon of migration is, the larger impact of male migration can be considered to be positive for women's mobility in rural Bihar. As appears from the Dhuniya *Tola* in Belabadan, while the men have migrated to Delhi, Punjab, Haryana, Kashmir, etc., and, albeit increasing work pressure for women, they articulated that they have become self confident and more aware, want their children to be educated, and they participate in SHG activity. In spite of the fact that they live in a village with no men (literally), they said they felt safe. It appeared in a discussion with Chamar women in Jiwtarpur that after male migration to North India, their economic condition had greatly improved. The women said that they sometimes chose not to go to work as the pressure to work for survival has considerably reduced.



## 5. MOBILITY

### 5.1 Women's Mobility outside the *Tola*

The *tola*, where a particular caste resides, has been considered as an undefined boundary wherein women can move around. Historically, women's mobility outside the *tola*, for most castes and communities, had been restricted – its severity defined by where women can be located in the caste hierarchy. Higher the caste, more severe the restrictions are likely to be. We wanted to know if in the last 10 years there have been any changes in women's mobility outside the *tola*. At the survey sites, there was a unanimous sense that women, across all castes, had become more mobile, and were going out of the *tola* for work errands and leisure more frequently than earlier. However, in the lower castes, where women have always been more mobile and faced fewer restrictions, women said that there was no change from this situation in their movement outside the *tola* as they had been fairly mobile in the past, and continued being so.

It is interesting to note that male migration has been quite a catalyst in enhancing women's mobility, especially in some conservative communities. Women went outside the *tola* to work in the farms as agricultural labourers and cultivators. It was observed in some upper caste *tolas* that migration of male members of the family had led to women overseeing and managing day-to-day farm activities, which included managing and paying labourers. In some communities, it appeared that economic hardships forced women to be more mobile. Khatve women in Khangaon said, 'Since family size has increased, women have to go out more to work.'

Women also went to their children's school, the doctor, market, or the local *haat* to purchase groceries and vegetables. In some survey sites women reported they went to the circus. We also observed high levels of religiosity among women across caste and social groups. Women across *tolas* reported that they visit temples regularly and go to the river to take holy dips and pray. Young women leave the *tola* to go to school, to take tuition classes, to visit their friends. Paswan women in Mahisan said, 'We can go alone for any kind of work now.'

In spite of a strong hold of patriarchy in rural Bihari society, women were found to be more mobile. The nuclear family was more widespread, as we saw in the survey sites of rural Bihar. We

found that the pervasive hold of parents-in-law over the household and married women had considerably reduced. Kurmi women in Amarhi told us, 'Now, there are less restrictions, we get out of the house more often. Earlier, in-laws restricted us a lot.'

Women mostly went outside the *tola* with other women of the *tola*. However, we heard that they also went out alone, and carried on with their work, if they did not find company. In the upper castes, however, the picture is somewhat different. In Samhauti Buzurg, in the Mahabrahmin *Tola*, women told us that they do not go out normally and if they do go, it is with a male member of the family. Women in the Rajput *Tola* said that the only reason for which they left the *tola* was for religious activities (*shiv charcha*) and to visit relatives. Women from the Lohar *Tola* said that they went outside their *tola* only when they had to go to religious places, accompanied by other women of the *tola*.

We have already seen that most women went outside the *tola* to go to the market to buy vegetables. We also found that an overwhelming majority of women bought their own saris. This was not the common practice in the past. Not many years ago, women reported that their mothers-in-law and husbands bought saris for them. At the outset, this may appear as trivial information, but it sheds light on the deep changes which are taking place in rural Bihar. It reflects that as women's mobility has increased and as they go out more, their agency is enhanced as well as they are now deciding what clothes they will wear. This is indeed an instrumental change.

## 5.2 Caste and Women's Mobility

As expected, the higher the caste of women in the hierarchy, the less mobile they were in rural Bihar. It was interesting to note that even if their economic condition was not that good, as with the Brahmins in Jitwarpur, they could access many services. For instance, sari sellers came to their homes and sold saris. Same was the case in Samhauti Buzurg village in Rohtas district. The women did not feel the need to go out to shop. The sari sellers came and sold saris in their *tola*. Brahmin women in Samhauti Buzurg vainly explained to our research team that 'only women from lower castes go out of their homes, we don't.'

In rural Bihar, where caste intersects patriarchy in myriad ways, women's perceptions about their own mobility are worth noting. A Brahmin woman in Jitwarpur said, 'Earlier, we were taken care of. Now, there is a need to get out. Families have increased, prices have increased. There is a need for women to go out.'

Historically, women in upper caste societies have stayed within the realm of their homes. Their movement in the outside world was severely restricted. The lower castes, however, have always been fairly mobile. With growing disposable incomes in the rural belt, perhaps a process of *sanskritisation* can be observed, where the economically better off lower castes now seem to look down upon women's work and we find communities, where women undertook paid work in the past, now are homemakers – quite content about not having to go out to work.<sup>7</sup> Paradoxically, this *decreased* mobility of women outside the *tola* may be perceived as a leap in social status in the village.

### 5.3 Restrictions on Newly Married Women

While mobility for women in general seemed to have increased, newly married women across most castes and social groups continue to face restrictions in their movements. In most communities, women were able to leave the *tola* around 1 to 3 years after their marriage, or after they had a child. Even communities which did not follow such practices in the past are adopting them now. Muslim women in Gopalganj told us, 'Only when there is (economic) compulsion, do newly married women go out. Otherwise, they leave their homes for work or otherwise after a long time.'

However, newly married women in the poorest communities, who cannot afford to resort to such measures, continue to work and leave the *tola* soon after marriage. Here women perceive their own (enhanced) mobility as a sense of economic compulsion. This was articulated well by Paswan women in Belabadan who said that 'A new bride gets out of the house in a year, but if the family is poor, then she starts working in 15 days.' Paswan women in Mahisan told us, 'We have to get out to earn; poverty compels us to do so. After one month of marriage, young brides leave to work on the farms.'

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7. Paswan women in Khangaon fit this category. They also reported that women in their *tola* were less mobile than they were 10 years ago.

On the other extreme, we found in the Koeri *Tola* in Samhauti Buzurg, neither mothers-in-law, nor daughters-in-law leave the homes and, in some sense, face restrictions for their lifetimes. In the Mahabrahmin community, it is normal for women to get out of their homes only after 10–15 years of marriage, and in the Brahmin *tola* these restrictions last until around 20 years.

#### 5.4 Sources of Information for Women

Since most women spent a majority of their time within the *tola*, we wanted to know what the sources of information for women in rural Bihar were. It appears that women receive information mostly from other women in the *tola* and government officials. Male relatives and radio were other commonly reported sources of information. Some women from well-off *tolas*, although few in number, said they read newspapers and watch television. At many places, women told us that they receive information from the *mukhiya* of the village. Telephonic conversations with their sons and husbands in faraway lands are also a common source of news and information.

#### 5.5 Entertainment

When we asked women what they did for entertainment, participation in religious activities was the most common open-ended response which cut across all castes and social groups. It appears that women, irrespective of their economic and social status, spent considerable time, energy and resources in the pursuit of religious activities – whether it was a religious meeting in the *tola* or an excursion to a place of pilgrimage. *Bhajan, kirtan, satsang, pooja path, shiv charcha, mandir, ganga nahana* were the various components of the religious portfolio of rural Bihari women. Such proliferation of religious activities in the recent past can perhaps be located in a stagnant rural society with no means of recreation for women, compounded by individual loneliness due to the absence of male members of their family.

Other means of entertainment for women included chatting and gossiping with women in their *tolas*, stitching, knitting and embroidering. They also occasionally went for fairs and to the *haat*. Most women enjoyed listening to the radio and a small minority said that they read newspapers and watched television for entertainment.

## 6. GOVERNMENT INTERVENTIONS

There are various programmes and schemes that are operational with differential outreach and impact on the lives of women. They range from health, nutrition, education, employment generation, widow pensions, micro finance, housing and so on. The information on their functioning in the survey villages, and both the current performance and potential for empowerment and transformation is examined in this section.

The different interventions, schemes covered or noted in the village include mid-day meals, NREGS, Integrated Child Development Services, ASHA (Accredited Social Health Activist, Janani Suraksha Yojana, Mukhyamantri Kanya Suraksha Yojana, Mukhyamantri Kanya Vivah Yojana, Balika Poshak Yojana, Balika Cycle Yojana, Akshar Anchal Yojana, Widow Pension, Microfinance Interventions and Indira Awas Yojana.

### **Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS)**

A flagship programme of the government of India and enacted by legislation in October 2005, the NREGS aims at enhancing the livelihood security of people in rural areas by guaranteeing hundred days of wage employment, in a financial year, to a rural household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work. The daily wage for such work is supposed to be the minimum ongoing wage in the state and, furthermore, women and men are to receive the same wages. In Bihar, 36.42 lakh person-days of employment have been provided to households so far, whereby women have received 28.8 per cent of this employment.

However, NREGS appeared to be largely absent in the survey sites. In most of the villages we surveyed, women had not even heard of the scheme. In places where they had, either little work had been done under NREGS or only men had been involved. For instance, in Dewan Parsa, in 2007–08, 1,369 person days and in 2009, 10,492 person days of employment had been generated, respectively, and not a single woman had participated in this work. In Samhauti Buzurg, some Paswan women had done work under NREGS. In Mohiuddinpur, Noniya women had worked under NREGS. In Parsa too, some Musahar women reported that they had worked in pond digging under the NREGS. The daily wages they reported were lower than the wages earned by males. There

was a complete lack of information about the scheme. Women in Teli *Tola* in Khangaon reported that women were not given work under the scheme and only men got work. Musahar women in the same village said only men had job cards – women did not have them. Ansari women in Madhepur reported that they had a job card, but had not got any work under NREGS. Khatve women in Madhepur too shared that they had tried hard to get work but even after meeting the *mukhiya*, they were unable to get work.

Discussions about NREGS also revealed the deep inroads of patriarchy and caste in the Bihari society and their perceptions of paid work undertaken by women. Yadav women in Amarhi reported that women *can't* work under NREGS – they are not physically capable of doing such manual labour, while Yadav women in Samhauti Buzurg told us that women don't do manual labour/earth work. Like many other groups, Kanu women in Samhauti Buzurg said that men do not let women work in NREGS.

In many villages, upper castes and better off communities reported, rather proudly, that they had not heard of such a scheme (Kurmi women in Amarhi) and even if they had (Brahmin women in Amarhi), they did not *need* to work under such a scheme.

### **Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS)**

The ICDS was launched in 1975 with the objectives to improve the nutritional and health status of children in the age-group 0–6 years; to lay the foundation for proper psychological, physical and social development of the child; to reduce the incidence of mortality, morbidity, malnutrition and school dropout; to achieve effective co-ordination of policy and implementation amongst the various departments to promote child development; and to enhance the capability of the mother to look after the normal health and nutritional needs of the child through proper nutrition and health education.

A key component of the scheme, the Aanganwadi centre (AWC) caters to preschool children in the ages of 3 to 6 years. Across survey sites, most AWCs in villages were functional. Aanganwadi Workers (AWWs) opened the Centre in the morning at around 8–9 am and children remained present till around noon, when lunch was served to them. Women from poor communities said that they sent their children to AWCs because free food was given. The provision of other facilities such as growth monitoring and health check-ups was

erratic. In most AWCs, the AWW also gave grains to pregnant and lactating women in the vicinity. Most AWWs complained that the biggest problem they faced was lack of adequate resources which hindered the smooth functioning of AWCs. In recent years, high inflation of food prices had also affected the quantity and quality of food served at AWCs. Almost all AWCs were dark and dingy, and had no electricity. The quality of pre-school education provided was abysmal – there were bare minimum teaching tools and kits, if at all, and centres were devoid of any basic and creative aids for young children – like posters and toys.

### ***6.2.1 Caste Discrimination at Aanganwadi Centres***

In each village, the number of AWCs was determined by the overall population of the village. However, in most of the *tolas* we visited, we learnt that not all children in the eligible age group went to the AWC. In some *tolas*, none of the children went to AWCs. The most common explanation for this can be traced to caste issues in a variety of ways. We found that if AWCs were located in lower caste *tolas*, upper castes families did not send their children there. If they were located in upper caste *tolas*, lower caste children happened not to attend them. If they were located in Muslim *tolas*, it was very likely that Hindu children, from both upper and lower castes, did not attend. For instance, Brahmin women in Amarhi reported that their children did not go to the AWC because it was in the Harijan *tola*. In Mahisan too, the Yadav, Musahar and Khatve women said that their children did not go to the AWC because it was located in the Muslim *Tola*. In Beladaban, the AWC was located in the Sheikh (upper caste Muslim) *Tola*. While Musahar children attended the AWC, Sheikh children did not go there. Santhal women in Jitwarpur complained that their children had stopped going to the AWC because it was located in the Brahmin *Tola* and only Brahmin children were given food there. Not a single child from the Muslim *Tola* in Dewan Parsa went to the AWC in the Brahmin *Tola*. In Bhabtia, the AWC was in the Yadav *Tola*, the most dominant community in the village, and all children from Musahar, Dom, Ravidas and Kumhar communities did not attend it. Commensality was at stark display when our research team reached an AWC in Amarhi. Hot steaming *khichdi* with vegetables was served for lunch and being eaten by evidently poor children. While we were talking to the Aanganwadi worker, a child walked in to the AWC, appeared to be very tempted to eat, and then walked off. The teacher shared

with us that the young boy was from the Brahmin *Tola* and was not allowed by his parents to eat with other lower caste children. The teacher, from the Yadav community, found herself helpless to intervene. The ramifications of practicing such strict caste rules from such an early age have far reaching impact on the socialisation of children and the perpetuation of such practices.

### **6.2.2 Other Problems in Aanganwadi Centres**

We also found that a lot of young children, who were eligible to go to the AWCs, went to the primary school instead. This could be explained perhaps by relatively lesser caste discrimination at the school. It is also likely that they preferred to accompany their older siblings and were more comfortable in their presence and, hence, went to the primary school instead of the AWC.

At some survey sites, where the AWC was far from some *tolas* in the village, it appeared that distance was a big hindrance, and Mallah women in Alalpur Bishunpur said that their children did not go to the AWC as there were no means of transport.

We heard from Paswan women in Dewan Parsa that their children were summoned to the AWC only when there was checking or inspection of any sort. Otherwise, they did not attend the AWC.

It was also disturbing to note that in Samhauti Buzurg, stark caste divisions propped up while children were vaccinated. While vaccinations generally take place at an AWC in the village, vaccinations could not take place at either of the AWCs in the Paswan or Brahmin *Tola* in that village because the members from the Brahmin community refused to go to the Paswan *Tola*, or let people from the Paswan *Tola* come to the Brahmin *Tola* for vaccinations. Thus, at the suggestion of the ASHA worker, vaccinations were carried out at the local school.

### **ASHA (Accredited Social Health Activist)**

A key functionary of the National Rural Health Mission is the ASHA. She is selected at the village-level, preferably from the village itself and is trained to work as an interface between the community and the public health system. Her role is to deliver first-contact healthcare and be the contact person for any health related demands of deprived sections of the population, especially women and children, who find it difficult to access health services.



She is also supposed to create awareness on health and its social determinants and mobilise the community towards local health planning and increased utilisation and accountability of the existing health services. She is also to provide information to the community on determinants of health such as nutrition, basic sanitation and hygienic practices, healthy living and working conditions, information on existing health services, and the need for timely utilisation of health and family welfare services, and counsel women on birth preparedness, importance of safe delivery, breast-feeding and complementary feeding, immunisation, contraception and prevention of common infections, including Reproductive Tract Infection/Sexually Transmitted Infections, and care of the young child. Her key role is also to mobilise the community and facilitate them in accessing health and health related services available at the Anganwadi/PHSC/PHC, such as immunisation, ante-natal check-up, post-natal check-up, supplementary nutrition, sanitation and other services being provided by the government. She acts as a depot holder for essential provisions being made available to all habitations like Oral Rehydration Therapy, Iron Folic Acid Tablet, chloroquine, Disposable Delivery Kits, Oral Pills and Condoms, etc. The ASHA is expected to work with Auxiliary Nurse Midwives, AWWs and Panchayati Raj Institution functionaries.

In almost all districts, women were familiar with only one responsibility of the ASHA – as a contact point for facilitating institutional child deliveries. There was not much awareness about her other roles mentioned above. An ASHA's most important task, as perceived by the women, was to take pregnant women to the hospital. She also assists in giving vaccinations to children and some ASHAs give tuberculosis medicine as well. We found, in Dewan Parsa, the ASHA was active in facilitating sterilisations and took women to the hospital to undergo surgery for sterilisation. It appears that this service of the ASHA is widely appreciated. In the survey villages of Khangaon and Mahisan, there were still no ASHAs at the time of fieldwork of this study.

It also appears that the caste of the ASHA also played a role in her work. Brahmin women in Dewan Parsa frankly told us that they did not cooperate with the ASHA because she belonged to a lower caste. With the presence of ASHA in the rural landscape, the role of the *dai* (traditional midwife) appears to be on the decline. Villagers too perceive hospitals as safer place to give birth and in one village a *dai* herself told us that though her economic condition had much

deteriorated much in the recent past due to lack of opportunities to deliver children, she thought that this new maternity scheme (see below) was very good, as it provided appropriate medical intervention at the time of childbirth and ensured safety of the mother and child.

Though the use of the service of *dais* (traditional midwife) at the time of childbirth is on the decline, mainly due to state interventions such as the ASHA and Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY), wherever it is undertaken, remuneration is higher for a male birth than for a female birth reflecting a deep rooted son-preference in Indian society. For instance, Chamar women in Amarhi and Muslim women in Gopalganj paid Rs 100 to the *dai* if a baby boy was born, but Rs 50 if a baby girl was born. Ansari women in Mahisan gave Rs 300 or 20 kilograms of rice if a boy was born and Rs 250 or 10 kilograms of rice if a girl was born. The general practice, across communities, was to give the *dai* either cash or kind, or a combination of both at the time of childbirth. The kind component of remuneration generally comprised of foodgrains and a new sari. In some instances, oil and turmeric were also given. It was very interesting to note that Mallah women gave one pigeon to the *dai* for her services, irrespective of whether a baby girl or boy was born.

### **Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY)**

The JSY was launched on July 1, 2006. A 100 per cent centrally sponsored scheme, under the overall umbrella of National Rural Health Mission (NRHM), JSY integrates the cash assistance of Rs 1,400 at the time of childbirth with ante-natal care during the pregnancy period, institutional care during delivery and immediate post-partum period in a health centre by establishing a system of coordinated care by the field level health worker. The field level health worker, the ASHA, as per JSY norms receives Rs 600 per case. JSY's vision is to reduce maternal mortality ratio and infant mortality rate, and to increase institutional deliveries. According to the Bihar Economic Survey (2008–9), the number of institutional deliveries went up very rapidly and was estimated to be approximately 8,38,481 in 2007–08. This increased to 11,43,039 in 2008–09.

The JSY was among the most popular government schemes in the survey sites. More number of women appeared to be using this scheme for institutional delivery for which they received Rs

1,400. In fact, some women accessed private pre-natal and ante-natal services, while using public health services for childbirth. The following table gives an account of village-wise beneficiaries for JSY in the survey villages.

It can be noted that Dewan Parsa and Mahisan had the maximum number of beneficiaries in the scheme.

### **Mukhyamantri Kanya Suraksha Yojana**

Initiated by the government of Bihar, on November 14, 2008, the Mukhyamantri Kanya Suraksha Yojana aims to 'ensure the rightful place of pride in the society for a girl child, her safety and security, improve the sex ratio and to encourage registration of births. The mandate of the scheme is to cover every girl child born below the poverty line, from 22nd November 2007 onwards. The government of Bihar contributes Rs 2,000 for every such girl child and up to a maximum of two girls per family. This amount is invested by the Women Development Corporation, Patna, on behalf of the Government of Bihar, in UTI-Children's Career Balanced Plan-Growth Option. When the girl child is 18 years of age, the maturity value is paid to her on the condition that she has not married before the age of 18, which would have a positive consequence – a delay in the marriage age of girls. The year old scheme has been extremely popular and more than 3 lakh girls have been enrolled in the Mukhyamantri Kanya Suraksha Yojana in the one year since its inception.

In the survey villages, the maximum number of beneficiaries of the scheme were found in Mahisan (54) and Chand Kura (30).

### **Mukhyamantri Kanya Vivah Yojana**

Launched on February 16, 2008, the Mukhyamantri Kanya Vivah Yojana provides financial assistance of Rs 5,000 for a girl's marriage to families whose annual income is below Rs 60,000. It covers marriages which have taken place after November 22, 2007.

The Scheme was found to be operative in some survey villages, namely, Belabandan, Chand Kura, Rupaspur Salempur, Jitwaripur, Mahisan and Amarhi.

**Balika Poshak Yojana**

A scheme to provide school uniforms to girls in middle school, it gives girl students from Class VI to VIII Rs 700 every year for purchasing two pairs of uniforms under the Balika Poshak Yojana. In the survey sites, it was extremely popular in Jitwarpur, where 300 girls were beneficiaries. The scheme was also found in Amarhi, Mahisan, Belabadan, Chand Kura, Alalpur Bishunpur.

**Mukhyamantri Balika Cycle Yojana**

According to the Mukhyamantri Balika Cycle Yojana, all girls are to be given bicycles free of cost by the State Government after getting admission to Class IX. The scheme mandates a cash transfer of Rs 2,000 per girl child to purchase a bicycle within a stipulated time.

Visible motivation and the consequences of the scheme were noted. Almost all the survey sites found beneficiaries of this scheme. While Jitwarpur had 33 such beneficiaries, Dewanpasra had 22, Mohiuddinpur had only 4, and Alapur-Bishunpur had only 2. The possibilities for transformation of girls' lives in terms of their enhanced mobility and how society views girls are tremendous.

**Mukhya Mantri Akshar Anchal Yojana**

This adult literacy programme was launched by the government of Bihar in September 2009 to address high levels of illiteracy among women. With an allocation of Rs 52.6 crores it aimed to make 40 lakh illiterate women in the age group of 15–35 years literate within a period of 6 months.

It was found that many women in the survey villages participated in this adult literacy programme. The Akshar Aanchal Yojana was popular with illiterate women in poor communities. The classes were usually held at the local school after school hours. However, in many survey sites, such as the Ravidas *Tola* in Mohiuddinpur, women reported that they had received books under the scheme, but they do not go to attend classes. Attendance of Majhi women in Chand Kura was also erratic.

**Widow Pension Scheme**

Widow pension scheme was found to be active in most of the survey villages. The maximum number of beneficiaries were in

Jitwarpur (40), followed by Samhauti Buzurg (36), Mahisan (35), Rupaspur Salempur (15), Khangaon (12), Mohiuddinpur (11) and Dewan Parsa (1).

### **Microfinance Interventions**

Formation of Self Help Groups (SHGs) which are micro-savings and credit units are another prominent development in some of the villages. These have been facilitated by government and non-government organisations (NGOs) and its members participate in periodic meetings. Access to small sums of money, especially at times of emergency, is a huge benefit to most women. In Bhabtia, there were 9 SHGs in all, of which 3 were particularly active. Women from Sahu SHG were involved in making snacks, packaging them and selling them in the market. They had received a loan of Rs 2.5 lakhs after the group's second gradation. The Vishkarmi SHG too, involved in making furniture, had received a loan of a similar amount. The Harijan SHG in Bhabtia was involved in goat rearing and they had received Rs 25,000 as a revolving fund after their first gradation.

In Parsa, an organisation called the Gyan Vigyan Samiti had facilitated the formation of 12 SHGs, each with 20 members. Their key activity was to save regularly and they also gave loans to members @ 2 per cent per month at times of emergency, as against the normal rate of 6–10 per cent of the traditional local moneylender. This was purely a non-governmental initiative. The village as a whole seemed to view this as a positive and beneficial introduction.

In Belabadan, 11 SHGs of the World Bank aided Jeevika (Bihar Rural Livelihoods Project) were active. These groups undertook savings and credit activities. Each member had a passbook and regular meetings were conducted by the SHGs. Some of the research team members were able to attend a meeting of all SHG members at the survey site and the empowering effects of such activities on women members were evident. Some SHGs were also found in Khangaon and Samhauti Buzurg.

### **Indira Awas Yojana (IAY)**

A flagship rural housing scheme, the Indira Awas Yojna (IAY) has the primary objective to help construction/upgradation of

dwelling units by members of SC/STs, freed bonded labourers and also other BPL non-SC/ST rural households by providing them a lump sum financial assistance. It provides a grant of Rs 25,000 for the construction of a house. It also caters for upgradation of unserviceable *kutchha* houses into *pucca* houses, for which the grant is Rs 12,500. A crucial positive ramification of the scheme is that the house is allotted in the name of a female member of the household.

In the last 5 years a total of 995 households in the survey sites of 12 study villages were assisted by the IYA. Of these, 46 per cent were SCs households, 7.8 per cent were STs, 10.9 per cent were OBC I, 9.2 per cent were OBC II, 14.8 per cent were upper caste and 3.5 per cent Muslim households. Among SCs, Mahisan and Khangaon had the maximum number of beneficiaries (196 and 108). ST beneficiaries were found in 3 villages – Dewan Parsa, Jitwarpur and Rupaspur Salempur. OBC I beneficiaries were spread across Dewan Parsa, Jitwarpur, Belabadan, Chandkura, Mohiuddinpur and Alalpur Bishunpur, while OBC II beneficiaries were maximum in Belabadan, followed by Jitwarpur, Paharpur Deyal, Rupaspur Salempur, Dewan Parsa and Chandkura. Among Muslim beneficiaries, more than 90 per cent were located in Mahisan, and the remaining in Rupaspur Salempur and Belabadan. Ninety five per cent of the upper caste beneficiary households were found in the three villages of Khangaon, Mahisan and Jitwarpur.

## 7. EMPOWERMENT

The discussions on the various government schemes and interventions are a reflection of the efforts being made to move towards gender equality and empowerment in Bihar. Amidst the continued presence of patriarchal norms and structures, gender stereotypes are less resilient to change. There are, however, certain forces that bring about changes over time. The absence of adequate employment opportunities pushes men to migrate out of their villages which, in turn, have consequences in changing women's roles and responsibilities. These have elements both of positive and negative dimensions. While women's roles in decision making, supervision and work participation have seen shifts along with improving mobility, both within and outside the village, increases in utilisation of child labour or migration of children for work may be viewed as a negative repercussion.

Given the extremely high poverty levels in Bihar over time, especially among the poorer and backward communities, one witnesses definite improvements in terms of education, health and nutrition, communications, public services, mobility, and enhancing potential for empowerment. The enhanced incomes from the remittances received by households of migrants and higher local wages have enabled better access to essential food and healthcare. As we have seen in the previous section, many of the governmental and non-governmental initiatives have also contributed to the process of improvement.

The introduction of reservations for women in *Panchayati Raj* Institutions (PRIs) is seen as a big measure for improving the political participation of women and, hence, their empowerment. Post the 73rd Constitutional amendment in 1992, which reserved 33 per cent seats for women in local bodies, the *panchayati raj* elections took place in Bihar after a gap for the first time in 2001. The share of women, as members in the three tiers of the PRIs, was 44 per cent then. It is noteworthy that in 2006 the state government reserved 50 per cent seats for women belonging to all the social categories and for all posts within the three tiers of the PRIs (*gram panchayat*, *panchayat samiti* and *zilla parishad*). When the second elections happened in Bihar in 2006, the share of elected women representatives increased to 54 per cent.

However, in the villages surveyed, the representation of women on local bodies seems to be rather low. Further investigation in the

future surveys at the household level may give a more accurate picture of this dimension. It is encouraging to see that in the group interviews, women recognised the importance of their representation in the local institutions. It is equally interesting to note that in the village schedule administered to key informants attested that men reacted positively when asked whether women ought to participate in these activities. In the village meetings (*gram sabhas*) it is still rare for women to speak up when men are present, but at least some villages reported their participation in the meetings. In at least seven of the surveyed villages, women's participation in *gram sabhas* was more than one-third.

One of the factors that is a constraint on effective participation by women in local institutions, whether political bodies or other village committees of any kind, is their low level of education. The women who were educated reaching up to matriculation levels were seen taking up various posts such as para teachers, running of the *anganwadi* centres, as ASHAs, and also as leaders within the savings credit schemes operational in some villages. Some of these women have benefited from the various training programmes run by different departments of the government.



## **8. PRIORITIES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR ILO ACTION IN VIEW OF ENHANCING WOMEN'S STATUS IN BIHAR**

The previous sections have shown that changes have occurred in rural Bihar over the last decade. Due to the massive migration of men looking for better employment opportunities, the disposable income of a majority of households has increased. During the same period, a better coverage of some public services and programmes has been achieved. Improvements in infrastructure, communications, education, health and nutrition have been noticeable. However, though social development indicators appeared to have improved, the transformation of the rural economy has been sluggish. Furthermore, several areas of concerns have been identified in particular (i) improvements have not affected all segments of the rural population to the same extent; (ii) newer forms of child labour seem to have appeared; and (iii) the lack of employment opportunities for women outside agriculture. Though women have gained mobility and visibility, their workload has increased, gender wage differentials persist and their representation in the PRIs is more nominal than effective. So we can conclude that if the empowerment of women has gained momentum in the domestic sphere, it remains limited in the public sphere.

The priorities and opportunities for action suggested below aim at the following objectives: to add value to the work of women in the agricultural sector; to create job opportunities linked to agricultural products; to create income generation opportunities outside agriculture; to organise women; to combat child labour; and to assist in the training of both women workers and government officials.

### **8.1 Income Generation Activities and Productivity Enhancement**

The crop cultivation in the villages surveyed remains concentrated on food grain production. A very limited and gradual shift has occurred in the cropping pattern over the years, especially in terms of commercial or cash crops. Given the agro-ecological conditions of the region, there is tremendous potential for diversification into higher value crops such as horticulture, floriculture, medical plants which are crops likely to absorb female labour.

An effort to create jobs through the establishment of agro-processing units is also a very fitting direction, which is so far non-existent. The state produces fruits such as *litchi*, mango, banana, and

so on. Most of these products are locally consumed or the cultivators are compelled to sell their perishable produce locally at cheaper rates for lack of alternatives. Establishment of agro-processing units in areas where these fruits or other products are cultivated will benefit the cultivators as well as provide employment in non-farm activities.

Our survey has shown that almost all households are involved in animal husbandry and women have the prime responsibility for their care. There is a need to improve the quality of milch cattle so as to increase the yields. Assistance of the extension services for animal husbandry and veterinary services may also be improved and be directed towards women.

The agricultural and veterinary extension services through improved supply of inputs, education and training in the techniques, and related information for productivity enhancement could be extremely beneficial. Agriculture extension services are primarily targeted at men, while with the migration of men, women are increasingly involved in farm management. In addition to improvements in land and soil fertility, methods of cultivation, efficient and effective use of inputs, introduction of new crops, and so on, facilitation in acquiring good quality seeds, fertilisers, etc., can also be routed through such services.

## **8.2 Job Creation**

The limited local employment opportunities are a major drawback in most of the surveyed areas. Efforts to create local jobs, whether through the establishment of small scale enterprises, household industry or home-based activities, SHGs or through expansion of the operation of the NREGA, is a must given that Bihar displays a lower participation of women in the scheme than in many parts of the country. The income from NREGA is not only stipulated to be at the minimum wages, it is also equal for men and women. This, itself, has a big potential for the gains in terms of additional earnings for women and the benefits flowing from that.

## **8.3 Skill Development**

Given the extremely low educational levels and lack of training among women, skill development and farm management can be routes to improvement in income earning and enterprise

development. While this is a major concern for the country as a whole, especially in villages women are involved in activities either by their own initiative or through training on the job. Additional efforts from governmental and non-governmental sources are very welcome in this area, for instance, handicrafts, embroidery, etc. Women can be trained in the making and employed in making handicrafts (e.g., derived from jute), embroidery, etc. It could be developed in coordination with the tourism department.

#### **8.4 Organising Women**

Formations of *Mahila Samoohs*<sup>8</sup> and credit/savings SHGs have been initiated in some villages. The women members of these groups and the nominated leader were seen having acquired social recognition and power. The potential for transmission of diverse information in many areas of concerns through such groups is tremendous. Translation of credit and savings scheme into income generation activities is a crucial link. .

#### **8.5 Small and Medium Enterprise Development**

Migrant remittances have so far been directed essentially to consumption and improving the living standards of the rural population. It would be necessary to foster investment in productive activities by exploring the possibilities for entrepreneurship development and the formulation of strategies for commercialisation of products with elements of product standardisation, marketing, and income generation in order to enhance employability of women.

Development of small and medium size enterprises can be planned to facilitate the commercialisation of agricultural products for example. The absence of cold storage capacity is a deterrent to the commercialisation of agricultural products. It prevents the introduction and expansion of higher value crops and limits the production of surplus to satisfy demand beyond self-sufficiency and local markets.

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8. *Mahila Samooh*, in Hindi, is literally women's groups or a group of women.

### **8.6 Combating Child Labour**

The survey has shown that though school enrolment has increased, child labour remains significant in some villages. The migration of men and subsequent shortage of labour has raised the demand for women and child labour in agriculture. Children may work outside school hours or not attend school at the time of high labour demand such as the harvesting season. A disturbing new development that has occurred since the last 4–5 years is the migration of boys going to work in factories (bangles making, toys making), hotels and restaurants, etc., in other states. Work in bangle factories, for example, would be qualified as worst forms of child labour under ILO Convention 182 (the children are exposed to the glass making furnaces) for its danger and health impairing environment.

### **8.7 Capacity Building**

Given the low literacy level, and the absence of training facilities, especially for women, their participation in local community and ability to participate in decisions regarding local development (*gram sabhas* for NREGA, or non-NREGA, membership in 3 tiers of PRIs). The training of women for non-agricultural income generation activities is lacking. It is a felt need, strongly expressed by the women, as immediate and urgent. If women as members, in PRIs and other village committees, are to have a voice, improving their capacities through awareness generation and training is essential.

## 9. CONCLUSION

The study has shown that there is an urgent need to upgrade the livelihood opportunities for women workers Bihar. Given the current situation of the labour market, various avenues to increase income and empowerment opportunities for women need to be explored and strengthened. Support to a diversification of activities, through access to credit, market linkages, improved skill development, etc., are only but a few alternatives.

Elements of exclusion and discrimination are prominent features of village life. There is a need to develop more inclusive avenues within the policy framework, of which decent work is a critical element, so as to help in addressing some of the patriarchal and social exclusion dimensions. Efforts to explain the objective of 'decent work' to government officials from different ministries, to bring changes in the perceptions regarding women's roles and capabilities, and child labour need to be instituted and strengthened.

## Appendix 1

### Methodology of the Study

The study is aimed to elicit information from women belonging to different castes. Generally, village habitations are organised into *tolas* which very often have a caste-based grouping. However, based on our previous survey experience in the same villages, the variations across caste groups appeared to be very significant. Nevertheless, there were some caste groups which may comprise relatively better off and poorer sections. In such cases, it is likely that there may be differences even within the caste group of women in terms of the various facilities available and accessible to them. In order to capture these dimensions, wherever large groups of a particular social category were present and preliminary enquiry elicited information regarding the broad class composition, an attempt was made to cover more than one group in such cases.

The village schedule collected general background information on the *tola*-wise caste composition, total households, public amenities and access to facilities, education, health and village organizations, land use, cropping pattern, work related information including wage rates for casual daily wage and harvesting labour, migration and government programmes. In addition to this, further household survey information was collected from the same households which are part of the panel study. Some information which is relevant and available from the household survey has also been used here, for instance, the incidence of migration.

The gender module focused specifically on women related aspects with regard to work and employment, animal husbandry, child labour, and impact of male migration on women's lives and mobility. It also elicited information on the drinking water, sanitation, and cooking facilities. It also captured women's perceptions of change and issues related to empowerment of women. A copy of this module is annexed.

Caste information, being the most important unit of social organisation, was collected from groups of women belonging to various castes. Very often, hamlets within each village were

synonymous with caste habitations. In consultation with key informants in the village, all the *tolas* (hamlets) in each village were identified. The module was administered in various *tolas* in the village to capture the diverse groups of women in the village. Therefore, in a small village, with less social diversity and few *tolas*, the number of gender modules administered were fewer than a village which had more castes (and *tolas*). Village and district-wise break-up of groups interviewed is given in the annexure.

In addition, for each village, four key sets of information, by interviewing the Aanganwadi worker, primary school teacher, ASHA – the community health worker under the National Rural Health Mission, and *dai* (traditional midwife) were recorded to specifically understand the health and education situation in the village. To reiterate, the information is primarily based on the perceptions of groups of women.

## Appendix 2

### Names of District, Block and Surveyed Villages

<i>Village Name</i>	<i>District Name</i>	<i>Block</i>
Alalpur Bishunpur	Gaya	Tikari
Amarhi	Rohtas	Rajpur
Belabadan	Purnia	Banmankhi
Bhabtia	Saharsa	Saur Bazar
Chandkura	Nalanda	Karai Parsurai
Dewan Parsa	Gopalganj	Phulwaria
Jitwarpur	Araria	Araria
Khangaon	Madhubani	Pandaul
Mahisan	Madhubani	Madhepur
Maura/Parsa	Madhepura	Shankarpur
Mohiuddinpur	Nalanda	Rahui
Paharpur Deyal	Gopalganj	Kuchaikote
Rupaspur	Gaya	Tikari
Samhauti Buzurg	Rohtas	Dinara



## Appendix 3a

### Group-wise List of Villages Where Gender Module was Administered

S. No	Villages	Upper caste	OBC I	OBC II	SC	ST	Upper Muslim	Lower Muslim	Number of Groups
1	Alalpur Bishunpur	1	2	2	2	-	-	-	7
2	Amarhi	1	-	3	2	-	-	-	6
3	Belabadan	-	-	2	2	-	2	1	7
4	Bhabtia	1	-	3	3	-	-	1	8
5	Chandkura	-	1	1	4	-	-	-	6
6	Dewanparsa	2	2	2	3	-	1	-	10
7	Jitwarpur	1	1	1	3	1	-	2	9
8	Khangaon	1	2	2	3	-	-	-	8
9	Mahisam	-	3	2	2	-	-	1	8
10	Mohiuddinpur	-	1	2	1	-	-	-	4
11	Paharpur Dayal	1	-	2	-	-	-	-	3
12	Parsa	1	-	5	3	-	-	1	10
13	Rupaspur Salempur	1	1	3	3	-	-	1	9
14	Samhauti Buzurg	3	-	3	3	1	-	1	11
		13	13	33	34	2	3	8	106

## Appendix 3b

### Village-wise Listing of Groups Interviewed by Caste

<i>S.No</i>	<i>Villages</i>	<i>Number of Groups</i>	<i>Groups Interviewed</i>
1	Alalpur Bishunpur	7	Mallah, Kumhar, Mushar, Ravidas, Nai,
2	Amarhi	6	Kurmi, Koeri, Bramhin, Paswan, Chamar, Yadav
3	Belabadan	7	Dhuniya, Musahar, Yadav, Paswan, Sah, Sheikh, Muslim
4	Bhabtia	8	Ravidas, Brahmin, Musahar, Yadav, Kumhar, Badhai, Muslim, Dom
5	Chandkura	6	Matoji, Manjhi, Jamadar, Ravidas, Paswan, Kahar
6	Dewanparsa	10	Chamar, Muslim, Dhobi, Godhi, Bhumihar, Lohar, Kumhar, Dushar, Noniya, Brahman
7	Jitwarpur	9	Godhi, Santhal, Musahar, Mansuri, Ansari, Mandal, Brahmin, Yadav, Chamar
8	Khangaon	8	Chamar, Rajput, Paswan, Khatve, Teli, Kumhar, Musahar, Nai
9	Mahisam	8	Paswan, Yadav, Sauji, Ansari, Musahar, Khatve, Mallah, Nai
10	Mohiuddinpur	4	Noniya, Swarnkar, Paswan, Ravidas
11	Paharpur Deyal	3	Rajput, Kurmi, Koeri
12	Parsa	10	Kumhar, Jat, Ram, Muslim, Teli, Musahar, Baniya, Thakur, Sardar, Badhai
13	Rupaspur Salempur	9	Muslim, Baniya, Koeri, Paswan, Kahar, Ravidas, Manjhi, Lohar, Bhumihar
14	Samhauti Buzurg	11	Brahmin, Maha Brahmin, Lohar, Rajput, Dhobi, Paswan, Kharwar, Kanu, Muslim, Yadav, Chamar

## Appendix 4

### List of Caste Names

<i>Category</i>	<i>Caste Name</i>	<i>Category</i>	<i>Caste Name</i>
Upper	Bhumihar	OBC I	Kahar
Upper	Brahmin	OBC I	Kewat
Upper	Kayastha	OBC I	Mali
Upper	Rajput	OBC I	Mallah
OBC II	Baniya	OBC I	Mandal
OBC II	Barhi	OBC I	Nai
OBC II	Gaderia	OBC I	Nonia
OBC II	Jat	OBC I	Rajwar
OBC II	Kanu	SC	Bhuiyan
OBC II	Koyari	SC	Chamar
OBC II	Kumbhar	SC	Dhobi
OBC II	Kurmi	SC	Dom
OBC II	Lohar	SC	Dusadh
OBC II	Matoji	SC	Manjhi
OBC II	Sah	SC	Mushar
OBC II	Sauji	SC	Pasi
OBC II	Sonar	SC	Paswan
OBC II	Sundhi	SC	Ravidas
OBC II	Swarnakar	SC	Sardar
OBC II	Teli	Upper Caste Muslim	Sheikh
OBC II	Yadav	Lower Caste Muslim	Ansari
OBC I	Beldar	Lower Caste Muslim	Dhuniya
OBC I	Bind	Lower Caste Muslim	Mansuri
OBC I	Dhanuk	ST	Kharwar
OBC I	Godhi	ST	Santhal
OBC I	Hharwar		

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This monograph explores the nature and extent of transformation in the status of women with respect to work and gender relations over time by eliciting information on economic, political and social aspects to ascertain whether transition towards gender equality and empowerment is witnessed in rural Bihar. A qualitative study based on a survey of 106 groups of women in 14 selected villages across 9 districts of north and south Bihar, broad dimensions pertaining to women's lives with respect to their work, their access to basic amenities, the impact of male migration on women and children and the influence of public policies are studied.

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