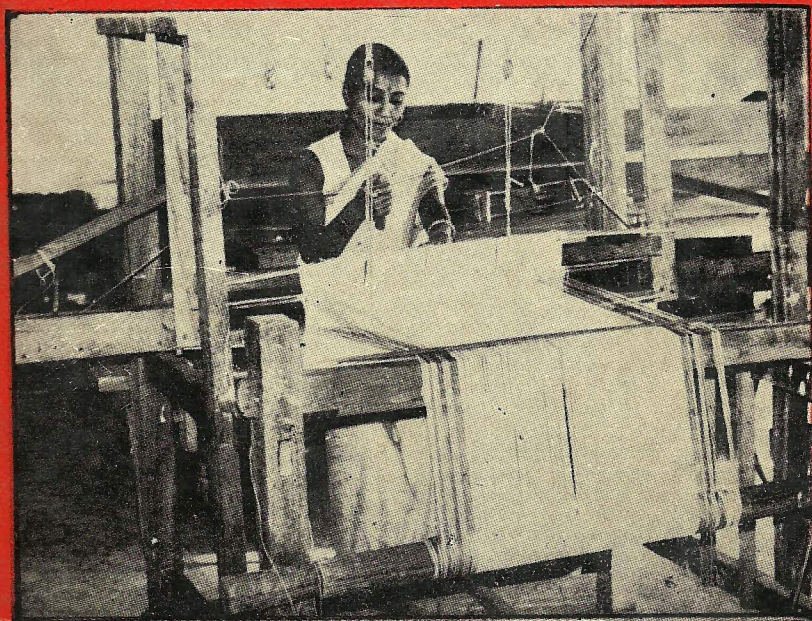


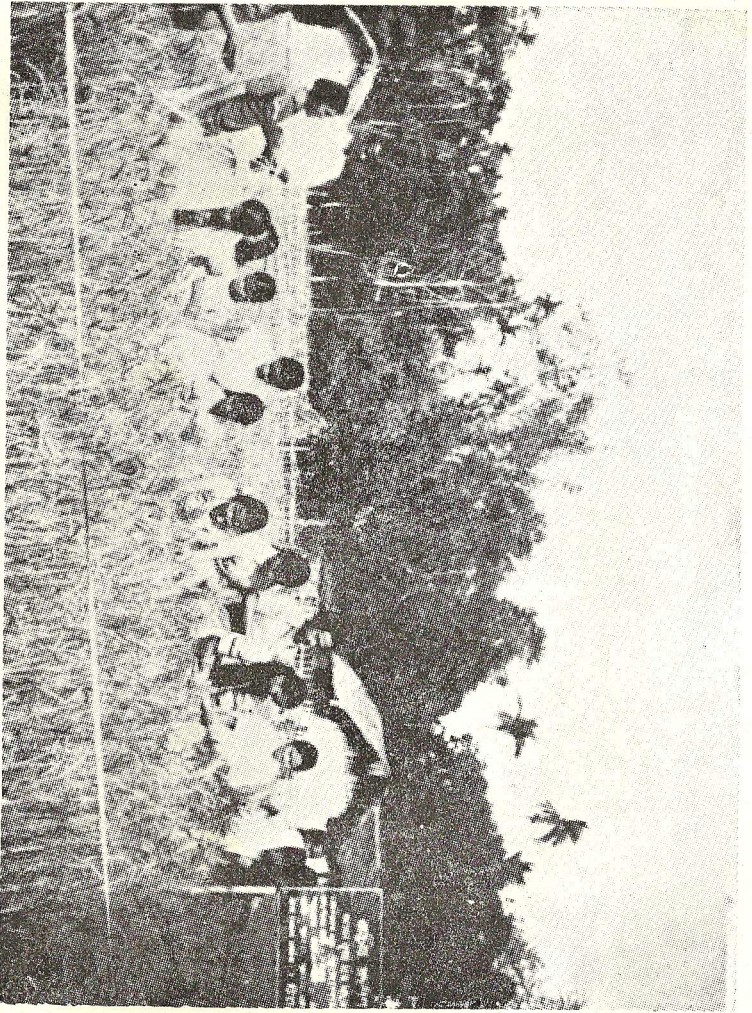
indian rural women



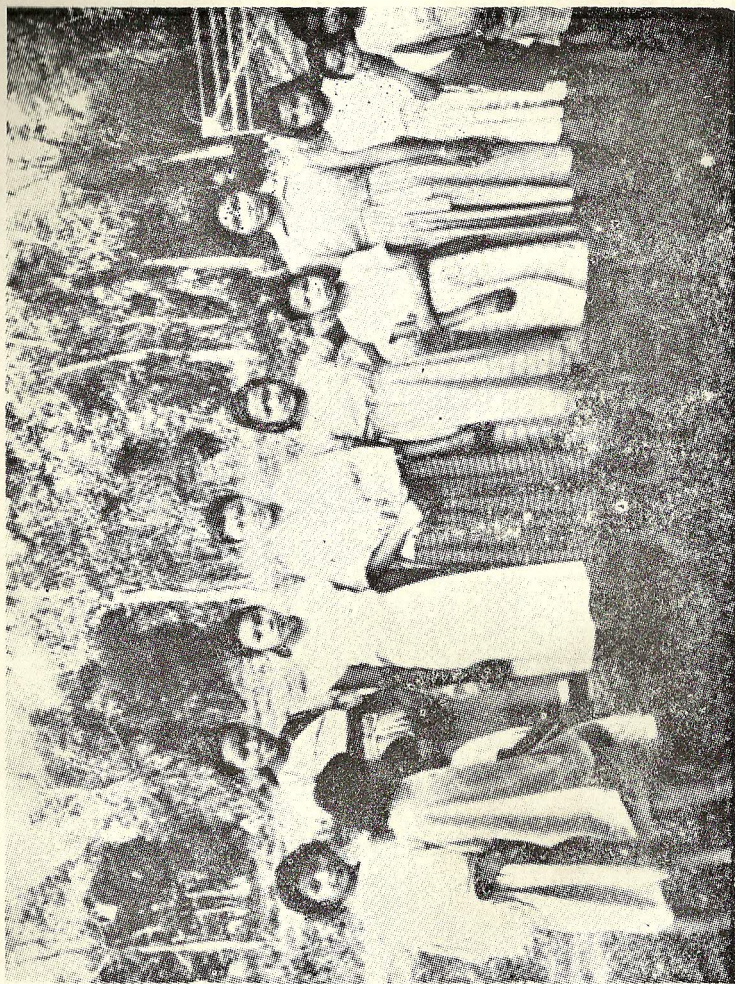
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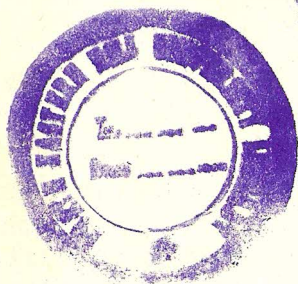
Women reaping paddy



Village girls in modern dresses

INDIAN RURAL WOMEN

(A Study on Role and Status of Rural Women in Assam)



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&

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Preface

The book is the outcome of the study undertaken at the instance of the Indian Council of Social Science Research, New Delhi on the Changing Role of Women in Rural Societies of Assam. The study was undertaken during 1980-81.

Role and status of women were studied in three situations i.e. peri-urban, interior rural and tribal village to assess the condition in different situations. It is observed that the women are overburdened with agricultural and domestic works which keep them busy upto fourteen hours a day. Barring some women of well-to-do families and certain castes all the able-bodied women take part in economic activities in addition to their household chores. Some notable changes have been observed in these situations. Discrimination of women in various aspects of life is found to be nominal. Equality of status in most spheres of life is apparent among these women. The stereotype life style is also changing in these societies, but the pace of change is rather slow. The coming generations of women are now aspiring after activities which give them a better status in the family and the society.

We are grateful to all the members of the research staff of the Agro-Economic Research Centre for North-East India who helped in completing the study and specially to Shri Bhadreswar Bora and Miss Anjali Lekharu of the ICSSR Scheme who conducted the field investigation. We are also thankful to Shri J.N. Dutta who typed the manuscript.

The authors are thankful to the ICSSR for kind permission to publish the Report.

We are very much grateful to M/s Mittal Publications, Delhi for publishing the book in a short time.

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Introduction

Women play a vital role in the society. Apart from the matriarchal society, women play a decisive role in most of the patriarchal societies also. The future of children depends, by and large, upon the mothers who generally stay at home and take care of their children's health and education. This is particularly so in countries like India where society and life of people are moulded by traditional and spiritual foundations.

In the world over it is now recognised that the status of women in society, both in the developed and underdeveloped countries, continues to be inferior to men. Although women's role is crucial in the family, and household economy women have not been given equal rights in social, political as well as economic fields. The improvement of status of women has now been recognised all over the world as an important aspect of national progress and development. It is also felt that the problem of poverty cannot be tackled without providing opportunities of productive employment to women. Productive employment to women would provide necessary economic base and improve their social status. But it is still a fact that women in many countries of the world are facing discriminatory attitude in varying degrees on ground of sex in employment and working conditions.

Though women are the key factor in the process of change and development, yet in many countries they are underestimated. For example, women in the traditional societies of Asia and Africa take equal part with men in producing foodstuffs, in addition to endless household works, yet their works are not

given due weightage. In many parts of rural India women participate equally or even more in some societies with men in various agricultural operations.

Female Work Participation

Table 1.1 gives the participation rates of women for a number of countries. It is apparent that countries which have

TABLE 1.1

Female work participation rates in selected countries

<i>Countries</i>	<i>Economically active female population (percentage)</i>	<i>Countries</i>	<i>Economically active female population (percentage)</i>
Portuguese	62.8	Italy	19.5
Cape Verde	56.7	Nigeria	16.0
Jairo	49.6	Argentina	16.4
Romania	48.0	India	13.2
Bulgaria	45.7	Srilanka	13.1
USSR	44.0	Brazil	13.1
GDR	39.8	Columbia	11.4
Zanjibar	39.8	Maxico	10.4
Denmark	37.8	Iran	8.0
Japan	37.6	Pakistan	8.8
Germany (West)	30.2	Iraq	2.1
U.K.	32.2	Egypt	4.0
France	29.7	Algeria	1.8
Australia	25.0	East Malayasia	24.5
Korea	23.4	Indonesia	23.3
Philippines	21.3		

Source : From a note prepared for the Course on Role of Women in Economic Development, NIRD, Hyderabad, 1982.

Original Source : 1972 Year Book of the Labour Statistics, ILO, Geneva, 1972.

centrally planned economics viz. Romania, Bulgaria, USSR, GDR encourage and promote female work participation. Generally rate of women participation in productive work in European countries is high. On the other hand countries having tribal population have higher percentages of female workers. The Muslims usually discourage their women to work outside in agricultural operations or as manual labour. These countries are grouped under four categories according to female participation rates.

Below 10 per cent	—Islamic countries, Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Algeria.
Between 10-20 per cent	—Latin America, Srilanka, India.
Between 20-30 per cent	—South-East Asian countries.
Higher than 30 per cent	—Tribal Africa, Europe.

Statistics relating to women's employment in different countries show that in USSR, the proportion of working women between the age group of 20-40 is nearly 80 per cent and between 41-54 is 75 per cent. Moreover, women are employed in heavy industries and working women constitute about 50 per cent of the employed force. In USA, 25 per cent and in U.K. 32 per cent women work full time. The average participation rate for most of the Muslim countries is only 4 per cent. This is because of the fact that women are virtually absent from clerical occupation, factory work and domestic services.

Indian Women : Their Role in Economic Activities

The female population of India was 264 millions or 48 per cent of the total population of 548 million in 1971 as compared to 213 million or 49 per cent of a total population of 439 millions in 1961. In 1981 Census, female population of the country was 33 crores out of 68 crores of the total population, the percentage of female population being 48. The female population increased by 24 per cent during 1961-71 as against 24.75 per cent increase in total population of the country. Of the 264 million females in 1971, only 31.3 million or 11.92 per cent, were workers. During 1961-71 decade, the male workers increased by 15.4 per cent while female workers

decreased by 47.4 per cent. The decline in female workers was perhaps due to the adoption of amended definition of 'workers' in 1971 Census. The sex-wise distribution of working and non-working population of India according to 1971 and 1981 Censuses is shown in Table 1.2.

In 1971 Census 19 per cent of the total rural working force in India was women. The women workers are mainly engaged in agricultural operations and allied occupations. It is

TABLE 1.2

Sex-wise distribution of working and non-working population

Industry Division	Population (P.C.)			
	Male		Female	
	1971	1981	1971	1981
(A) Working Population	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00
(1) Cultivating	46.21	43.70	29.71	33.20
(2) Agricultural Labourers	21.26	19.56	50.48	46.18
(3) Livestock, Forestry Fishing, Hunting and Plantations, Orchards and allied activities	2.35	2.34	2.55	1.85
(4) Mining and Quarrying	0.54	0.62	0.32	0.36
(5) (a) Household Industry	3.36	3.18	4.47	4.59
(b) Other than household industry	6.64	8.92	2.56	3.55
(6) Construction	1.34	1.81	0.64	0.80
(7) Trade & Commerce	6.37	7.33	1.60	2.04
(8) Transport, Storage and Communication	2.88	3.32	0.32	0.38
(9) Other Services	9.05	9.22	7.35	7.05

Source : Registrar General of India, Labour Bureau, Ministry of Labour, Government of India, 1975 and Census of India, 1981.

found that in 1971, 80 per cent of working female population is engaged in agriculture. Nearly the same rate prevailed in 1981 Census also. In 1971 Census female participation rates for rural and urban women is 14.55 and 7.37 per cent respectively. Table 1.2 indicates that 50 per cent of the total working women is agricultural labourers while it was 46.18 per cent in 1981.

The agricultural labourers are mainly drawn from the poorest class of society viz. landless classes, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Employment in agricultural jobs for women is seasonal and sporadic. Women generally stay at home engaged with their domestic duties. It is primarily the economic reason that compels women to come out of home, for manual labour works. Shortage of labour in certain pockets draws women to the agricultural labour force. Generally largest number of urban women is employed in services and manufacturing. The broad distribution of male and female workers of India is in the ratio of 5:2:3 and 1:2:1 among cultivation, agricultural labour and the other work. Table 1.3 shows the distribution of workers by broad occupational categories.

TABLE 1.3

Distribution of workers according to broad occupational categories, 1971 Census

Categories of occupation	Rural (%)		Urban (%)	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
1. Cultivation	32.64	55.49	4.17	5.21
2. Agricultural Labourer	54.39	25.41	—	—
3. Livestock, Forestry, Hunting & Allied activities	2.56	2.53	2.04	1.64
4. Mining & Quarry	0.32	0.42	0.99	1.00
5. Household Industry	3.57	3.13	9.97	4.38
6. Manufacturing other than household	1.56	2.46	12.88	24.02
7. Construction	0.38	0.82	2.88	3.57
8. Trade & Commerce	1.01	2.78	8.23	21.42
9. Transport	0.14	0.97	3.21	10.76
10. Other Services	3.43	5.59	38.13	28.84

Source : Census of India, 1971.

The rate of urban women's work participation is lower. This is because of the fact that in rural areas, most of the agricultural works do not require much skill. Wages paid to female workers are lower and employers find it economical to employ them.

The female participation rates vary considerably within the States of India. Tables 1.4 and 1.5 show the female participation rates (per cent) State-wise and age groupwise respectively.

TABLE 1.4
State-wise female participation rates, 1971

<i>States</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Rural</i>	<i>Urban</i>
India	13.18	14.55	7.37
Andhra Pradesh	25.24	28.59	11.05
Maharashtra	21.49	26.56	9.16
Himachal Pradesh	21.46	22.37	7.51
Madhya Pradesh	19.77	22.01	7.62
Tamil Nadu	16.96	19.88	10.10
Mysore	15.13	16.82	9.70
Kerala	13.68	14.29	10.50
Gujarat	10.65	12.51	5.74
Bihar	10.58	11.00	6.42
Rajasthan	10.42	11.47	5.40
Uttar Pradesh	8.78	9.52	4.07
Assam	6.15	6.31	4.25
West Bengal	5.36	5.54	4.74
Jammu & Kashmir	4.86	5.17	3.45
Haryana	3.17	3.17	3.17
Punjab	1.67	1.26	3.01

Source : Census of India, 1971.

TABLE 1.5

Work participation rates (per cent) for main workers,
1981 : India

<i>Age group</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>
All ages	51.62	13.99
0—14	5.46	2.95
15—19	51.15	18.48
20—24	76.91	20.32
25—29	91.08	22.52
30—39	96.22	25.31
40—49	96.81	25.97
50—59	92.43	21.57
60 and above	63.71	10.19

Source : Census of India, 1981.

It has been observed that women work mainly because of the low income of their menfolk. When the households' income is not adequate for the support of the family, the wife is compelled to work for earning. But in many rural areas it is customary for women to take part in agricultural operations irrespective of their economic conditions. In the richer section of the society women are generally not allowed to work outside the household. However, certain communities do not allow their women to work outdoors due to their traditional restrictions.

Female Literacy

The female literacy rates in different States of India are given in Table 1.6.

From Tables 1.4 and 1.6 it is apparent that rural literacy for women is second highest in Punjab in 1971 but the work participation rate of women in that State is the lowest. So, literacy rate and work participation rate may not have positive relationship. In 1981 Census, after Kerala, rural literacy is second highest in Himachal Pradesh.

TABLE 1.6

**Female literacy rates in the States, 1971 and 1981
Censuses**

State	Rural		Urban		Total	
	1971	1981	1971	1981	1971	1981
India	12.92	17.96	27.37	47.82	18.44	24.82
Kerala	52.03	64.25	60.52	72.20	53.90	65.73
Tamil Nadu	18.87	25.80	45.55	53.99	26.83	34.99
Maharashtra	17.49	24.88	46.58	54.65	25.97	34.79
Punjab	19.78	27.63	45.11	34.45	25.75	33.69
Gujarat	17.07	24.06	44.38	51.13	24.55	32.30
West Bengal	18.82	22.06	47.82	54.82	22.08	30.25
Mysore (Karnataka)	16.74	19.77	41.32	47.78	20.76	27.71
Himachal Pradesh	17.93	29.36	52.25	60.04	20.04	31.46
Assam	16.28	N.A.	50.54	N.A.	18.91	N.A.
Andhra Pradesh	10.88	14.08	35.86	41.55	15.65	20.39
Haryana	9.00	15.37	41.43	47.35	14.68	22.25
Orissa	11.94	18.45	35.75	49.72	13.75	21.12
Madhya Pradesh	6.00	8.99	37.08	42.26	10.84	15.53
Uttar Pradesh	6.59	9.49	33.27	35.43	10.18	14.04
Jammu and Kashmir	4.74	10.47	28.29	66.44	9.10	15.88
Bihar	6.15	10.17	31.02	39.81	8.49	13.62
Rajasthan	3.86	5.46	29.46	45.42	8.26	11.42

Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Women

The work participation rate of women is higher among Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes population than that of other castes. In some States of North-East India the tribal population is predominant. It is found that female work participation in these hills tribal societies is higher than non-tribal

societies. In Table 1.7 the number of workers in the tribal dominated States of North-Eastern India according to sex is presented.

TABLE 1.7

**Workers according to sex of the hill states of N.E. India,
1971 and 1981**

States	Workers (percentages)			
	1971		1981	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Meghalaya	27.40	16.77	53.02	34.97
Nagaland	29.70	21.06	50.09	40.83
Mizoram	26.43	19.18	49.13	32.73
Arunachal Pradesh	33.93	23.72	56.63	40.64

Source : Census of India, 1971 and 1981.

Table 1.7 shows that in tribal dominated societies the proportion of women workers is quite high. In the tribal areas of Assam and Manipur the proportion of women workers is almost equal to men. Moreover in Assam 1.90 lakhs women are employed in 777 tea gardens.

Employment Opportunities for Women

(Besides agriculture plantation and mines, women are gradually entering into various other occupations since independence. Some such popular occupations are teaching, nursing, clerical jobs, etc. In these occupations, more than 5 lakhs women are employed in India in public and private sectors. The opportunities of employment for women are increasing day by day. Some opportunities for employment of women are being created by the Khadi and Village Industries Commission in rural areas. Though wages for women are less than that for males all over the world except in few countries, in India women's wage rate in organised sectors is made equal in the recent years. Except Government services and local bodies, co-operations etc. wages earned by women are generally lower than those of male workers.

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