

Rural Labour Market In Assam: Trends And Status Of Employment

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ABSTRACT

Based on National Sample Survey data for 1993-94, 1999-00, 2004-05 and 2009-10, this paper explores the situation of the rural labour market in Assam. While the Work Participation Rates (WPR) for males increased during the reference period, the same for females had been fluctuating around a lower level of 15 to 20 percent. Consequently, unemployment rates for females had been higher than males. A sector wise distribution of workers shows that the proportion of males employed in the farm sector had been declining in favour of the Non-Farm Sector (NFS), while the females were heavily tagged with the farm sector, leading to a lower degree of diversification into NFS. The employment growth rates for females suffered a serious setback during the period. The problem of casualisation is more acute for rural females than their male counterparts. Females stand in the most disadvantageous situation in the rural labour market as indicated by their low WPR, higher unemployment rates, lower employment growth, low level of diversification into NFS and higher casualisation index.

Keywords : Work Participation Rate (WPR), Non-Farm sector, Employment Growth, Casualisation Index

JEL Classification: J21, J22, O15, R23

INTRODUCTION

The jinx of near stagnant heavy agriculture dependent occupational structure of the Indian economy seems to have changed during the last two decades. The proportion of rural workers engaged in agriculture in relation to the total workforce remained stagnant at around 78 percent until 1993-94, and then declined to 68 percent in 2009-2010. This structural broke away from agriculture in favor of the secondary and tertiary sectors reflects the importance of the Rural Non Farm Sector (RNFS). With continued downhill slide of the share of agriculture in GDP, it has become difficult for the agricultural sector alone to generate enough employment opportunities to sustain the vast and ever growing rural workforce. In recent years, RNFS received considerable attention from both policy makers and researchers in propounding and implementing rural developmental strategies (Lanjouw and Shariff, 2004). A large number of studies made by the United Kingdom Department for International Development (DFID) and World Bank in developing countries of Latin America, South-East Asia and Africa have further added impetus to this sector. The arguments put in favour of RNFS are brief - its employment absorption capacity, growth potentiality, arresting rural-urban migration, and reducing inequality and poverty (Islam, 1997).

In the context of Assam, the RNFS is perceived to be a potent source of employment to the growing labour force in the face of heavy demographic pressure on land, small and fragmented land holdings and iniquitous land distribution structure. However, the importance of RNFS needs to be analyzed critically in the event of changing economic scenario led by an impact of economic reforms on all sectors of the economy during the last two decades. The economy of Assam hardly benefited from the reform process. The state witnessed an annual average growth rate of NSDP of only 2.84 percent during 1993-2007 against the national average of 6.16 percent (Debnath and Roy, 2010). The growth rate of the agricultural sector had been a little over one percent during the period from 1994-2004 (Roy and Dey, 2010). With such a sluggish growth rate, the agricultural sector is unlikely to provide gainful employment opportunities and a decent standard of living to the rural labour force. At the same time, employment growth in the organized sector has been waning. Under this setting, the rural labour market is facing a daunting challenge with a spurt of unemployed youths flooding the market. In this manner, the dualism in the labour market gets sharpened (Chadha, 2003). While a handful of educated and skilled job seekers adaptable to changing technology and marketing standards are getting absorbed in high productivity well-paid avenues, a significant proportion of their less educated,

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unskilled or semi-skilled counterparts are getting employed in low productive farm or non-farm activities. At a time when the rural labour market in Assam is at a critical juncture, there arose a need to have a close look at the employment and unemployment situation and their changes over time during the post reform period.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

In this context, the specific objectives of the present study are:

- a) To examine the Worker-Population Ratios (WPR) and unemployment rates in rural areas of Assam;
- b) To analyze the sectoral distribution of workers with a particular emphasis on non-farm activities; and
- c) To highlight the status of employment of rural workers.

DATA & METHODOLOGY

The present study is based upon secondary data collected from various rounds of National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) and Census of India, 2001. The trends in employment and unemployment and sectoral distribution of workers have been explained by using the data from NSSO's thick round surveys on employment and unemployment situation in the year 1993-94, 1999-00, 2004-05 and 2009-10.

In order to calculate the growth rates of employment, a procedure involving three steps was followed. First, as the NSSO estimates of population are lower than the census estimates, therefore, population figures for the mid-points of NSS periods were estimated for rural males and females separately by applying the annual exponential growth rates based on census data on population for the year 1991 and 2001. Next, the number of total workers was obtained by applying the work participation rates among males and females separately. Then farm and non-farm workers and workers in different sectors were obtained by multiplying the figures for males and females by the ratios for different sectors provided by the NSS. Finally, the growth rates were computed from the corresponding figures of workers in different sectors by using the following formula :

$$Y_t = Y_0 (1+r)^t$$

$$\Rightarrow \log Y_t = \log Y_0 + t \log (1+r)$$

$$= a + bt, \text{ where } a = \log Y_0, b = (1+r)$$

$$\text{Estimated compound average growth rate} = b \cdot 100$$

WPR AND UNEMPLOYMENT RATES

Before analyzing the structure of employment, it is useful to analyze the WPR (Worker-Population Ratios). WPR indicates the proportion of population that actively contributes to the production of goods and services of a country. The ratio is useful to analyze the employment situation of a country (Kumar, 2010). The trends in the WPR at the all India level and Assam are presented in the Table 1. It is seen from the Table 1 that according to the usual status principle (PS+SS), WPR for rural males in the state increased continuously during the post liberalization period from 51.6 percent in 1993-94 to 55.3 percent in 2009-10 as against a fluctuating trend observed in case of the country as a whole. However, there is a little difference in WPR for males at the state and national level. While more than 50 percent of the rural males were reported as workers for both India and Assam, only 30 percent of the females in India

Table 1: WPR in Rural Assam And Rural India According To Usual Status (PS+SS) (Percentages)				
Year/Round	Assam		India	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
1993-94 (50th)	51.6	15.9	55.3	32.8
1999-00 (55th)	52.9	15.1	53.1	29.9
2004-05 (61st)	55.1	20.9	54.6	32.7
2009-10 (66th)	55.3	15.8	54.7	26.1
Source: NSSO, Govt. of India				

and 15 to 20 percent in case of Assam were reported as workers. There exists a significant gap between the WPR of males and females in rural areas. The lower participation of rural female workers reflects the social status of females, wherein the work done by female workers generally is not recognized as economic activity either by females themselves or by the members of the household who report their work status (Reddy, 2009). A peculiar feature observed in case of female WPR is its fluctuation across different rounds of NSS. This is possibly because of income effect, which states that females participate in the labour force if there is a perceived fall in the reservation income of the households (Unni, 1989; Srivastava and Srivastava, 2010). A sudden increase in WPR of females in Assam in 2004-05 may be explained by the negative growth rate of agriculture in the preceding year and decline in WPR in 2009-10 was due to recovery of the agricultural sector in the subsequent years.

While the WPR provides an overview of the employment situation, the information on unemployment situation is equally important to have a better understanding of the nature of rural economy of Assam in general and the rural labour market in particular. The economy of Assam is largely agriculture based with a weak industrial structure having a few backward or forward linkages (Govt. of Assam, 2003). Rural household members are engaged in agriculture either fully or partly. Agriculture being seasonal, a large proportion of those engaged in agriculture remain unemployed in the slack season. Some of them get absorbed in household work or other self-employment or wage employment work. In order to capture such a complex situation of unemployment, all the three estimates - Usual Principal Status (UPS), Current Weekly Status (CWS), and Current Daily Status (CDS) of unemployment made by the NSS are shown in the Table 2.

Table 2: Unemployment Rates in Rural Assam and Rural India from the NSS (in percentage)							
Region	Year / Round	Male			Female		
		UPS	CWS	CDS	UPS	CWS	CDS
Rural Assam	1993-94 (50th)	3.3	2.8	3.5	1.4	1.6	1.3
	1999-00 (55th)	4.7	4.5	6.4	11.9	8.8	12.5
	2004-05 (61st)	3.0	3.6	6.0	7.0	6.2	8.7
	2009-10 (66th)	3.6	4.0	5.6	6.8	7.2	11.9
Rural India	1993-94 (50th)	2.0	3.1	5.6	1.3	2.9	5.6
	1999-00 (55th)	2.1	3.9	7.2	1.5	3.7	7.0
	2004-05 (61st)	2.1	3.8	8.0	3.1	4.2	8.7
	2009-10(66th)	1.9	3.2	6.4	2.4	3.7	8.0
Source: NSSO, Govt. of India							

The UPS indicates the numerical magnitude of the number of persons who remained unemployed for a relatively long period during the reference period of 365 days. It measures the open and chronic unemployment. The other two measures - CWS and CDS capture chronic as well as seasonal unemployment. It is observed from the Table 2 that unemployment rates in rural Assam for both males and females accelerated during the initial phase of the reform period 1993-94 to 1999-00 by all the three estimates of unemployment, then decelerated in the 61st round, but again took an upward trend in the 66th round.

As a whole, the situation of unemployment worsened during the entire period of reforms, highlighting the fact that economic reforms have badly affected the rural labour market in Assam. Unemployment rates for females are higher than their male counterparts as per all the three measures, reflecting their low work participation rates due to social customs and traditions. Further, there were wide fluctuations in unemployment rates of females than males, confirming the fact that a large number of rural females were employed only at the time of distress situations of the households, and once the normalcy returned, they withdrew themselves from the employment. As compared to rural India, it was found that there is widespread chronic unemployment among rural males and females in Assam. This is primarily due to the lack of industrial development and increasing pressure of population caused by large scale infiltration from neighbouring places.

SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF THE WORKFORCE

The aggregate trends in employment neither indicate the pattern of employment nor the changes in such a pattern. In order to have a better insight of the changes in the structure of employment caused by reforms, it is necessary to analyze the sectoral distribution of workers. A closer look at the sector wise distribution of workers would inform us of the declining and expanding avenues of employment for the rural labour force. A detailed classification of production and service sectors would throw up more firm empirical clues about the emerging 'trouble spot' or 'cheering corner' (Chadha, 2003). Such an analysis bears importance from the perspective of undertaking policy initiatives in such activities where the employment has slackened. The Table 3 presents data on the percentage distribution of workers in two broad categories - farm and non-farm along with a further break-up of non-farm activities into a number of sub sectors of the secondary and tertiary sectors. The researchers were primarily concerned with the post reform period, and the Table 3 shows the NSS estimates based on the usual status (PP+SS) from 1993-94 to 2009-10. However, to put the matter in broad perspective, the researchers referred to the important figures for the year 1983-84. The Table 3 reveals that there has been a structural transformation in the rural sector of Assam with an accelerated but fluctuating decline in the proportion of male workforce engaged in the farm sector in favor of the non-farm sector during the post reform period. During the decade from 1983 to 1993-94 (just before liberalization), the decline was marginal from 81.2 percent to 78.2 percent, but during 1993-94 to 2009-10, the decline was perceptible from 78.2 percent to 66.6 percent. However, in case of females, the proportion of workers engaged in the farm sector remained heavy, with a fluctuating trend within the range of 80 to 88 percent. Correspondingly, there had been a gradual increase in the proportion of male workers in NFS from 21.8 percent to 33.4 percent during the period from 1993-94 to 2009-10, but for the females, the same fluctuated around a lower level of 12 to 20 percent. That the employment base of the rural females is heavily tilted in favour of agriculture in itself is a gloomy picture of the rural labour market. The excessive dependence of females on agriculture can be explained by two factors. First, a weak human capital base of rural females in the face of increasing competition and critical challenges posed by economic reforms stands in the way of their switch over to the NFS (Chadha, 2003). Second, as more than 83 percent of the farmer family is small, and marginal farmers having little scope for mechanization of agricultural operations, most of the agricultural activities are carried out by family labours, thereby swelling the number of females working in the farm sector. While the income generated by these small and uneconomic holdings is insufficient for livelihood, some male members migrate to other rural non-farm activities or urban areas, leaving the females tagged with agriculture. Within the NFS, it is the tertiary sector activities which provide more employment opportunities for rural males and

Table 3: Distribution of Rural Workers in Farm and Non-farm Sector(s) of Assam								
NSS rounds	Male				Female			
Sectors	50th	55th	61st	66th	50th	55th	61st	66th
	1993-94	1999-00	2004-05	2009-10	1993-94	1999-00	2004-05	2009-10
Farm sector	78.2	64.7	69.6	66.6	83.2	79.4	88.3	86.2
Non-farm sector	21.8	35.3	30.4	33.4	16.8	20.6	11.7	13.8
(i) Mining and quarrying	0.2	0.3	0.3	0.4	0	0	0	0
(ii) Manufacturing	2.2	2.9	2.9	3.7	8.7	8.3	3.7	2.8
(iii) Electricity, water, etc.	0.3	0.1	0.2	0.1	0	0	0	0
(iv) Construction	0.8	2.2	3.0	4.1	0.1	0.2	0.8	0.9
Total of (i) to (iv)	3.5	5.5	6.4	8.3	8.8	8.5	4.5	3.7
(v) Trade, hotels and restaurants	8.2	9.9	11.6	11.2	1.9	1.5	1.1	2.8
(vi) Transport, storage, communication	1.6	3.3	3.2	3.3	0.1	0.3	0.2	0
(vii) Financial, insurance, etc. services	0.3	0.3	0.2	0.5	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.2
(viii) Community and other services	8.2	16.3	8.8	10.1	5.8	10.2	5.7	7.2
Total of (v) to (viii)	18.3	29.8	23.8	25.1	7.9	12.2	7.1	10.2
Sources: NSSO, Govt. of India								

females than the secondary sector activities. The secondary sector provided employment only to the extent of 8.3 percent of rural males and 3.7 percent of females in 2009-10 as against the corresponding figures of employment of 25.1 percent and 10.2 percent respectively for males and females provided by the tertiary sector. In the secondary sector, manufacturing continued to be the largest mainstay of rural non-farm employment. However, during the period from 1999-00 to 2009-10, there had been an increase in the share of employment in the construction sector, absorbing a large number of rural casual and seasonal labours.

Within the tertiary sector, trade, hotels and restaurants, transport and communication, community and other services hold the key in absorbing the rural labor force. There is, however, a limit to which the service sector can be expanded and unless the economy is having a sound industrial base, the service sector always remains fragile and susceptible to external shocks, leading to a sudden fall in employment. The relative employment absorbing capacity of different sectors and its changes during the post reform period in the rural labour market of Assam can be better understood by analyzing employment growth rates in different sectors. Such an analysis also bears importance from the perspective of policy formulation as it enables us to identify the sectors which require special attention to improve employment growth. The Table 4 presents the sector wise Annual Compound Growth Rates (ACGR) of employment in rural areas for both males and females during three sub periods - 1993-94 to 1999-00, 1999-00 to 2004-05 and 2004-05 to 2009-10. The overall rate of growth of employment for rural males increased from 1.89 percent per annum during the period from 1993-94 to 1999-00 to 2.28 percent during the period from 1999 to 2004-05 and then declined to the lowest level of 1.53 percent during the period from 2004-05 to 2009-10 due to high base effect of 2004-05. For rural females, the same increased abruptly from a low level of 0.73 percent during 1993-94 to 1999-00 to a pretty high level of 8.08 percent during the period from 1999-00 to 2004-05, but desperately fell down to a negative of - 4.02 percent during 2004-05 to 2009-10. This sudden increase or decrease in the growth rate of employment for females was due to their large involvement in the farm sector, which witnessed a similar type of abrupt increase and decrease of employment growth rate with 10.20 percent during 1999-00 to 2004-05 and - 4.50 percent during 2004-05 to 2009-10. Thus, the employment growth rate of females suffered a severe setback during the post reform period in rural Assam. The employment situation of females worsened due to their social exclusion and exploitation on account of their lack of access to education, information and mobility.

The trends in the ACGR of employment for NFS have been similar for both males and females across different NSS

Table 4: Sector Wise ACGR of Employment						
Sectors	ACGR of employment					
	Male			Female		
	1993-94	1999-00	2004-05	1993-94	1999-00	2004-05
	1999-00	2004-05	2009-10	1999-00	2004-05	2009-10
Farm sector	-1.27	3.74	0.65	-0.054	10.20	-4.50
Non-farm sector	9.92	-0.71	3.42	4.12	-3.24	-0.72
(i) Mining & quarrying	8.65	2.28	7.29	0	0	0
(ii) Manufacturing	6.49	2.28	6.41	-0.059	-8.08	-9.6
(iii) Electricity, water etc.	-16.42	16.14	-13.53	0	0	0
(iv) Construction	18.75	8.48	7.78	12.28	35.80	-1.67
Total of (i) to (iv)	9.42	5.31	6.72	-.58	-4.64	-7.94
(v) Tr., Hot.& Rest	5.03	5.45	0.83	-3.21	1.87	14.66
(vi) Trans, Storage & Com.	13.95	1.67	2.15	19.04	-0.032	0
(vii) Fin, Ins. Etc. services	1.89	-5.83	19.86	12.28	-5.79	9.84
(viii) Community & Other services	13.34	-10.05	4.29	10.13	-3.56	0.65
Total of (v) to (viii)	10.02	-2.22	2.60	7.97	-2.75	6.96
All sectors	1.89	2.28	1.53	0.73	8.08	-8.82
Source: Authors' calculation						

periods. The employment growth rate for males was 9.92 percent during 1993-94 to 1999-00, declined to - 0.71 in 1999-00 to 2004-05, and then increased to 3.42 percent from 2004-05 to 2009-10. Similarly for females, it was 4.12 percent from 1993-94 to 1999-00, declined to -3.24 percent in 1999-00 to 2004-05, and then improved but remained negative at -0.72 percent in 2004-05 to 2009-10. However, the Table 4 reveals a disparate picture of employment growth rates across different sub-sectors within the NFS for males and females in rural Assam. In the category of the non-farm industrial sector, employment growth rates in construction had been the highest for both males and females during the post - reform period. Provision of rural roads under PMGSY, housing under IAY and other rural development programmes generated a good amount of employment opportunities for rural males and females. Manufacturing is another important sector where the employment growth rate of rural males remained positive during the study period. The growth of SSIs due to the implementation of various self-employment schemes during the post-reform period led to increased employment opportunities for the rural labour force. However, the employment growth rate for females in this sector declined, although a large proportion of the females were employed in this sector. The employment level in the two sectors - mining and quarrying (M&Q), and electricity, gas and water supply had been too low and insignificant as these activities are largely carried out by the public sector, and economic reforms have downsized the burden of the public sector. However, the growth rate of employment in M&Q had been higher in the initial period and though the employment rate declined, it remained positive in the subsequent period as the state of Assam is rich in minerals like oil, gas, coal and lime and exploitation of these minerals increased in the reference period. Transport, storage and communication (TSC) and community & other services witnessed a comprehensive growth rate of employment for males during the initial period from 1993-94 to 1999-00. For females, the growth rates were phenomenal for the three sectors - TSC, financial, insurance, etc., services & community and other services. Trade, hotel and restaurants (THR) is the only sector where the employment growth rate for males increased in the later period from 1999-00 to 2004-05 over the initial period. This sector became a major contender in employing rural labour force because of the growth of rural roads and increased flow of tourists into the state. The growth of rural roads also led to a growth in the employment rates in the TSC sector. Community, social and personal services emerged as a major absorber of rural labour force during the period from 1993-94 to 1999-00. The share of this sector in rural employment for both males and females almost doubled between the period from 1993-94 and 1999-00, leading to an annual compound growth rate of 13.34 percent and 10.13 percent respectively for males and females. There has been a greater emphasis on this sector by the government, which implemented various employment generating schemes like JRY (later JGSY), IRDP (later SGSY), EAS (later SGRY-I) etc. However, the growth rate declined sharply and became negative during the period from 1999-00 to 2004-05. The employment base of finance, insurance, real estate-business services was very low, employing only a handful number of men and women possessing the required skill for this sector. The broad trends observed from the Table 4 suggest that almost all the sectors within the NFS performed

Table 5: Percent Distribution of Usually Employed Workers Under Different Categories									
Category	Sex	1993-94		1999-00		2004-05		2009-10	
		Rural Assam	Rural India	Rural Assam	Rural India	Rural Assam	Rural India	Rural Assam	Rural India
Self-employed	Male	60.0	57.7	59.0	55.0	71.3	58.1	71.8	53.5
	Female	49.1	58.6	54.8	57.3	70.3	63.7	65.3	55.7
Regular Employee	Male	13.4	8.5	15.7	8.8	9.3	9.0	9.1	8.5
	Female	18.2	2.7	19.8	3.1	8.4	3.7	10.8	4.4
Casual Labour	Male	26.6	33.8	25.3	36.2	19.4	32.9	19.1	38.0
	Female	32.7	38.7	25.4	39.6	21.3	32.6	23.9	39.9
Casualisation Index (%)	Male	198.5	397.6	161.1	411.4	208.6	365.5	209.9	447.1
	Female	179.7	1433.3	128.3	1277.4	253.6	881.1	221.3	906.8
Source: NSSO, Govt. of India									

well in terms of employment growth during the initial reform period and suffered a serious setback in the next period. However, these trends seemed to have recovered in the recent period from 2004-05 to 2009-10. A large-scale involvement of the private sector in trade, insurance and other financial services along with an expansion of health, education and community services due to a number of schemes like NRHM, Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (SSA), MNREGA, etc. adopted by the Govt. in recent times has led to an increase in the growth rate of employment in the service sector.

STATUS OF EMPLOYMENT

The status of employment is as important as the quantity of employment as it reflects the quality and captures the effect of the development process on the labour market (Reddy, 2009). The status of employment is studied by disaggregating total employment into self-employed, regular employees and casual labour. In terms of earning and employment, regular employment is viewed as the most secured, self-employment provides numerous opportunities and may be either secured or shaky. For casual workers, neither income nor employment is secured, and it is, in fact, associated with risk and uncertainties of losing the job. The Table 5 presents the percent distribution of usually employed workers (PS +SS) under different categories of employment in rural Assam and India across the various NSS rounds. A prominent feature of rural labor market in India and Assam is that a large part of reported employment is composed either of the self-employed or casual labour. The regular salaried employees or wage labourers form only a small proportion of the total workforce. However, the proportional size of self-employed workers and regular employees in rural Assam has been consistently on a higher side than it has been for rural India.

Similarly, the incidence of casual employment in the state has been very much on a lower side in comparison to the country as a whole. Thus, the status of employment in the state is far better than it is for an average rural Indian. A temporal comparison of employment categories suggests that self-employment for males remained stagnant in the initial period and increased suddenly to around 71 percent in the later period. The incidence of casual labour for rural males also declined. A decrease in the proportion of casual labour along with a lower proportion of regular employees is matched by an increase in the proportion of self-employed workers. This is also true for females. Increased self-employment takes place both in the farm and non-farm sector. As the proportion of workers engaged in agriculture has been declining over the years, it is very likely that much of the increased self-employment took place in the NFS. Increase in the educational level, provision of training and loan under various self-employment generating schemes as mentioned earlier have raised the number of self-employed workers. The casualisation index measured as the ratio of percentage of casual labour to that of the regular employees expressed in hundred declined for both males and females in the initial years but shot up in recent years. Overall, the problem of casualisation is more acute for rural females than it is for their male counterparts. This confirms the fact that rural females stand in the most disadvantageous position in the labour market.

CONCLUSION

This study explores the trends and status of rural labour market of Assam with an emphasis on RNFS during the post reform period. The WPR for males increased from 51.6 percent in 1993-94 to 55.3 percent in 2009-10. However, a fluctuating trend was observed for rural females' WPR at around 15 to 20 percent. Thus, there is a significant gap between the WPR of males and females in rural Assam. Corresponding to this, unemployment rates for females have been higher than they have been for their male counterparts, reflecting their lower WPR due to social customs and traditions. As there is a fluctuation in WPR for females, so is also for unemployment rates confirming the fact that a large number of rural females seek employment only at the time of distress situations of the households, and once the normalcy returns, they withdraw themselves from the employment. The situation of unemployment in rural Assam worsened during the post- reform period as compared to rural India due to the lack of industrial development and increasing pressure of population caused by large-scale infiltration from neighbouring places. An analysis of sectoral distribution of workers revealed that the proportion of male workers engaged in the farm sector declined considerably in favour of NFS, while the females have been heavily tagged with the farm sector. As a result, there has been a gradual increase in the proportion of male workers in NFS from 21.1 percent to 33.4 percent during the period from 1993-94 to 2009-10, but for females, the same remained fluctuating around a lower level of 12 to 20 percent. In terms of growth rates of employment, the employment growth rate of females suffered a severe setback during the post reform period.

The employment situation of females worsened due to their social exclusion and exploitation on account of their lack of access to education, information and mobility.

Within the non-farm industrial sector, the construction sector emerged as a leading source of employment for both males and females, this sector witnessed the highest rate of growth in employment. Within the non-farm service sector- trade, hotels and restaurants, transport, storage and communication and community and other services witnessed a comprehensive growth rate in employment during the initial years of reforms. For females, the growth rates are discernible for TSC, FIS and community and other services. The broad trends observed from the employment growth suggest that almost all the sectors within the NFS performed well in terms of employment growth during the initial reform period and suffered a serious setback in the next period and then recovered again in the recent period. Hence, as far as the status of employment is concerned; the casualisation index reveals that the status of employment in the state is far better than it is for an average rural Indian. However, between males and females within the state, casualisation is more acute for females. Thus, rural females are found to be in the most disadvantageous position in the rural labour market as indicated by their low WPR, higher unemployment rates, lower employment growth rates, low level of diversification into NFS and higher casualisation index. Therefore, the policy makers should focus attention to uplift the status of rural female workers by improving their educational levels and employment skills.

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