

Privatisation, Economic Liberalization and Impacts on Women Workers in Nepal

Nepal is one of the least developed poorest country in the world. Our socio-economic life and hence the national life is largely dependent on agriculture. Of the total, 42 percent of the national income is being contributed by agriculture and almost 81% of the population is employed in this sector. However, agriculture itself is in a very miserable condition. It has become a way of life to majority of the population, but its fruitfulness is decreasing every year. Majority of women worker are in this sector, which their work been considered as unproductive work as most of them are unpaid family workers.

Nepal's per capita income also very low, that is only US. \$ 202. Almost fifty three percent people are below the poverty line. Nepal is in early stage of industrial development. The share of the manufacturing sector to GDP was 9 percent in 1994, lowest in South Asia. Manufacturing sector provides employment to only 1.6 percent of the total population.

Considerable number of women in industrial sector is involved in hand knitting of woollen carpets and ready-made garments, which are the major convertible currency earning products of Nepal. Women participation in garbage cleaners, hotel, tea plantation is also very high. Similarly tourism and service industries like trekking, mountaineering, river rafting, hotel, motel, jungle resort are also the considerable source of foreign currency, very few women are involved in this sector.

In other manufacturing sectors, women workers' participation is comparatively low in number such as food processing, seeds, jute, cotton, sugar, cigarettes, matches, breweries, distilleries, paper, leather, cement, plywood, cottage and handicraft products.

In spite of these things, chemical fertilizers, medicines, pesticides, raw materials of assembling industries, office and educational materials, transport vehicles and petroleum products are major import items.

In the past, governments encouraged industries that had no direct relation with national requirements to generate employment and income. The policies adopted by various governments resulted in mushroom growth of assembling industries, which, in fact, could not support to accelerate the pace of industrialization.

In Nepal, the liberalization and privatization policies were initiated with the implementation of economic stabilization and structural Adjustment programme in 1985/86 and 1986/87 respectively. But these policies were pursued more forcefully during the period of the Nepali Congress government, which came to power after the general election in 1991, it implemented the economic liberalization programmes, with predominant emphasis on privatization and price dictated market policies in line suggested by the world Bank and the IMF. After the adoption of these policies, a new industrial policy was formulated by abolishing the licensing system, which gives priority to the promotion of export oriented industries and subsidies on fertilizer, essential goods and services were reduced drastically. Similarly, prices of several public utility services and petroleum products were increased several times. Six public enterprises were already sold to individuals despite the fact that, most of them were operating on profit. The labour retrenchment policy was adopted without adequate facilities to workers, who were forcefully terminated from their jobs.

Existing coalition government has intensified the same policy with further emphasis. Women are the most vulnerable among the total work force. Women have been deprived from the beginning of their life from the fundamental human rights, that is, educational, health, nutrition etc. To get job is like a sweet dream of the women. If she is unmarried she can not get job opportunities due to the uncertainties of future life after marriage. In employers' opinion, they may give off the job, right after the marriage or she will be pregnant and give birth they. Also employers think that it is another heavier burden for their company, after forty they will not remain energetic, to give the job opportunities to the women are always risky and un-profitable to the owner. In this way there are several discriminations within men and women in the workforce. Since 8-10 year

onward none of the women has been employed in Balaju-industrial area, similar experiences in other industrial area has been visualized..

Social and labour structure

Nepal has a 40 percent of literacy rate, which means more than 60 percent of population are illiterate. The majority portion of population lives in rural area, engaged in peasantry as agri-labour and small farmer. Only a small portion of uneducated population are employed in industrial sector as industrial workers. A big portion of educated population is accommodated in teaching profession, civil services, tourism and service industries.

During recent years, a trend of overseas employment has been increasing. Nepalese migrant labourers are mainly distributed among Middle East countries, South Korea, Hong Kong and Japan along with India where millions of Nepalese labourers are working because of open border system between Nepal and India.

The government and public sectors have been providing most of the services and facilities to their employees, what related acts have provisioned. But in private sector, situation is different. Employers always violate the legal provisions and criterias.

Labour force participation rate

In general women have access in income, wealth and modern avenues of employment. This is partially due to their limited access to education and information ad partial due to traditional view of general public about women's activities. Besides this, the everyday tasks of family life in rural areas throughout the country involve women in labour intensive farm work and time consuming domestic chores to provide fuel, water and food for their children and other household members. very little time is left for activities with potentially higher economic returns, or to contribute the direct economic development of the country.

Formal economy do not include so called women specific activities like water and fuel collection, kitchen gardening, child care and small manufacturing inside home. Such activities, indirectly, contribute a lion's share in incomes of the households though it is not easy to compute its share in terms of value. In absence of reliable data in this regard, this section on the censuses and surveys carried out in the country.

The total active labour force as recorded by the 1991 census is 7340 thousands of which 4376 thousands are males and 2964 thousands females. Compare to 1981, the absolute number of males in the active labour force decreased by 2.3 percent whereas that of females increased by 25 percent

Table 1: Economically active population by sex compared

Year	1981	1991
Male	65.4	59.6
Female	34.6	40.4

In 1991, the proportion of women engaged in any occupation other than agriculture accounted for less than 10 percent, the corresponding percentage for males being more than 25 percent. The proportion of women in administration was almost negligible(0.1 percent) and less than one percent in professional/Technical(0.7 percent).

Table 2: Sex-wise distribution labour force in top five occupations, 1991

Occupation	Male	Female
Agriculture	54.9	45.5
Service	74.9	25.1
Production	81.2	18.8
Sales	77.4	22.6
Prof. technical	84.9	15.1

The relationship between the level of education and occupation of employed people is highly positive. Employment in agricultural occupation do not demand for education and better skills whereas white collar occupations demand for highest education and better skills. White collar jobs are highly paid compare to jobs in agriculture and these jobs accord higher prestige than any other occupations. Next to white collar jobs, job in other occupation are considered to be prestigious. In view of these consideration, one can easily expert that people with little or no education to be concentrated in agricultural occupation and people with some or higher education to prefer white collar occupation and other occupations.

Of the total illiterate population, nearly 87 percent were in the agricultural occupation, around 8 percent in other occupations and less than 2 percent in white collar occupations. As against this 69.4 percent

of the total literate population were in agricultural occupation, 13.7 percent in other occupation and 16.9 percent in other occupation.

Problems of Women Workers and Trade Union Response

It is well known that the condition of female workers in miserable in Nepal. Because of existing social system, women workers have also been victimized by the discriminations imposed on the female from their birth. The traditional concepts like 'May it be delayed, but, let it be a son' reflect how women are treated in our society. So the contemporary women-movement of our country has rightly put all kinds of exploitation, child marriage, Polygamy etc. In their hot-list including parental property rights, gender discrimination and sex trade. On the other hand, national trade union movement has always raised voice on equal opportunity for education, capacity development and promotion, equal remuneration, sexual harassment and rapes, nights-shift work, maternity leave and mother-child welfare, baby care centre, workplace conditions etc. as major issues concerning women workers.

In fact, the problems of Nepalese women workers include both types of issues. Our labour policies have to emphasize the issue of 'equal remuneration' for women workers. Both types of thinking - one, humiliating tendency and the other, over emphasis on protection are the outcome of the assumption that women are comparatively inferior in every field, so we feel an urgent need to wash it off the outlook of the society. "Equal wage for similar jobs" has to be associated with the efforts to increase productivity and efficiency of the women workers. Absolute equality has to be made common in minimum wage on the basis of working hours. Fair wage and incentive earnings have to be based on their productivity and efficiency. For this technical and skill development training have to be provide without discrimination so that they could get opportunity with high competitiveness in all types of works.

Moreover, other issues concerning women workers have to be solved in scientific manner. For women workers, our trade union movement ought to have concentration on the demands for those facilities which have already been used by women from other class-origin movement can't work for the solution of the social problems faced by the female mass. In order to tackle the problems of the women workers, working women from various industries and occupations have been organized under Central Women Workers' Department. Our aim is to enhance

leadership capabilities and develop them as trade union leaders. We are of the opinion that occupational problems of women workers have to be solved through this department and the concerned trade union while for the problems concerning the entire mass of the female, joint effort with country's women movement will be effective. Such as All Nepal Women Association, main stream of the national .

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