



## **Women Empowerment – A Comparative Case Study among Agricultural and Coir Industry Wage Labourers**

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### **Authors' contributions**

*This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. Author PB was the lead researcher. She designed the study, wrote the protocol and wrote the first draft of the manuscript. Authors Bikram Borkotoki and PH managed the critical analyses of the study. Authors JD and BKD managed the literature searches. Authors Buddha Bora and AMB helped in the field survey and data collection. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.*

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### **ABSTRACT**

A comparative study was conducted among randomly selected Agricultural and Coir Industry women wage Labourers of Sonitpur district, Assam, India during 2012-13 to find out whether more economic empowerment of women is able to change the status of women in society or still customs and values play a role to assign status of a person thorough field survey and questioner methods. It was found that the agricultural wage labourers had more children than that of the coir industry

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wage labourers. It was because of preference for male child and lesser control over choices. Though they didn't want to have another child, the preference and inability to take the decisions along with their husbands led to more children. The decision making authority was solely with the male partners. Whereas, the coir industry wage labourers had some power with their husbands to take decisions like family planning. Those decisions had an impact on the family income and expenditure. The family income of the coir industry wage labourers were higher than that of the agricultural wage labourers and having lesser children had positive impact on the children's education and nutritional supply in the families. The coir industry wage labourers were comparatively more educated than the agricultural wage labourers. This also helped them to go for family planning. With extra income, the coir industry labourers were able to spend more in nutritious food, education for children and the expenses on the alcoholic items were cut down as came up in the study *vis-a-vis* the agricultural wage labours. The agricultural wage labourers were new in the field of savings. Very recently they had started savings and they didn't have any bank deposits rather they saved very small amounts with Self Help Groups (SHG). The coir industry wage labourers also had savings with SHGs and very few had deposits in banks. However, the concept of saving was new to them. The household items of the agricultural labourers' house didn't include electricity, but most of them had mobile phones. Nevertheless, the coir industry labourers were well equipped with household items necessary for better sustenance. Economic self-sufficiency and education, use of technology, exposure to the outer world, decision making etc. determined the amount of empowerment. The agricultural labourers were comparatively lacking in empowerment than the coir industry labourers in Tezpur sub-division of Sonitpur district of Assam, India.

*Keywords: Wage labourers; agricultural; coir industry; empowerment.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In rural India, the source of livelihood is still predominantly dependent on agriculture. Livelihood occupations in which rural women are involved include traditional production system and commercial agricultural work including agro based small scale industries where women are engaged as wage labourers [1,2,3,4]. With time, the idea of agriculture seems to be changing gradually with the use of machineries and better scientific innovations and bringing possibilities to give it a shape of modern industry in states like Punjab and Haryana.

In Assam, the scenario is little different. Here, still farmers are lagging in farm mechanization due to fragmented land holding, subsistence farming, and dominance of poor and marginal farmers in the farming community. There is no big city except Guwahati and the city culture is not yet come with its fullest. Most of the places in Assam followed a rural and semi urban picture with lots of emphasis on agriculture. The total number of agricultural labourers in Assam is 18,45,346 numbers according to the 2011 census data and the percentage of agricultural labourers to total workers is increased from 13.2 in 2001 to 15.4 in 2011 [5]. Women in Assam, since time immemorial engaged in agricultural work, poultry farming, weaving and processing or value addition of food. It had been in subsistence basis

and never been a commercial venture. However, under influence of industrialization and modernization, it started to shape commercially. According to Population Census 2011, the proportion of women worker in the total agricultural worker is 42.67%. that is the number of total agricultural labourers 14,43,29,833, among them 8,27,40,351 male workers and 6,15,89,482 are female agricultural workers [5]. When we talk about working women we mean only when she gainfully employed [6].

The role of women in the production system is less acknowledged in male dominated society and they hardly been included in the decision making process of the family and production system [7]. Nevertheless, the tendency has changed in recent decades. Women start earning livelihood of their own. Empowerment of women can be best thought of through agriculture and related aspects. They can be made more productive if appropriate technologies and transferred to their use. And that need not to be very technical and expensive but to be scientific [8].

The household processed foods, poultry farming, weaving even the traditional agricultural process (as a wage labourers) bring economic empowerment to the women. The type of agricultural activities generally expected of women is highly labour intensive and the rural

women generally do not enjoy the benefits of new technologies [6].

In general, the improvement of technologies and industrialization bring about tremendous changes in the socio-economic structure of the society. The Government has also initiated programmes for women empowerment. The emergence of Self Help Groups and small scale industries give new dimensions to the earning women. Apart from that, women from lower class engaged in the production system as wage labourer be it in the industrial sector or in agriculture.

The aim of this study is to see whether mere economic empowerment of women is able to change the status of women or still the social customs and values play a role to assign status of a person. What is the role of earning women in a family, does it differ from work to work, and does it really contribute to the empowerment of women?

## 1.1 Objectives

The main objectives of the study are–

1. To study the socio-economic status of women of the study area.
2. To examine the role of education and scientific technology in the process of empowering women.
3. To study the link between economic self sufficiency and empowerment of women.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Area of Study

Sonitpur District is situated in the North Bank Plain Zone of Assam. The district was created in the year 1983. District headquarter is located at Tezpur. As of 2011, it is the third most populous district of Assam with the population 1925975, after Nagaon and Dhubri district. Undivided Sonitpur district had an area of 5280.58 Sq.km. It was divided into three sub-divisions, 14 blocks, 158 Gaon-Panchayats and 1876 villages. In Sonitpur 91.11% population are reside in rural areas which is figured 1754835 peoples. Sex ratio is 946, literacy rate is 69.96%. In Tezpur sub division Population is 58016. However, in 2015 the sub division Biswanath Chariali has been converted to the head quarter of the newly created district viz. Biswanath.

The study was conducted in Tezpur sub-division of Sonitpur District of Assam among the women engaged in the agriculture and allied sector. The agricultural wage labourers (N=20) are selected from Napaam village and the coir industry wage labourers (N=10) are selected from the two nearby coir industries under Tezpur sub-division following purposive random sampling technique with 7 variables viz. level of education, size of house hold, income of house hold, pattern of family expenditure, saving pattern, household gadget owned and magnitude of autonomy in decision making.

## 2.2 Details of the Study Area

### 2.2.1 Details of farming community and agricultural wage labourers

The Napaam Village is situated 12 kilometres far from the Tezpur Town where almost 120 women workers are engaged as agricultural wage labourers covering adivasi community of both Hindu and Christians. The village is a mix community village with communities like Bengali speaking Muslims; Assamese, Nepalis, Biharies belonging to Hindu and Adivasies. These communities of the village intermix among themselves in social occasions like marriage functions though they maintain some restriction in intermixing in religious and family affairs. Though women were engaged in their own farm land, but generally not allowed to work as agricultural wage labourers except the women from Adivasi community. This restriction is more common amongst muslims though maximum numbers of male agricultural wage labourers are from the Bengali speaking Muslim community. The agricultural works, generally performed by the women in other places of Assam like, planting and transplanting, winnowing are also performed by the male members of the community. More strikingly, even for these job to these labourers are paid higher than women.

Non Adivasi women also work outside their home. Some of them are working as household helper especially women from Muslim community. Nepali women used to make dairy products and Bihari women work in their paddy fields and sugarcane fields. The women from Assamese communities are relatively better in education and family background. Most of them are housewives or engaged in service sector. But they never worked as agricultural wage labourers. The reason behind the role of women in the village varies community to community is

may be due to the economical background and more or less religious and social customs. The Adivasi women who worked as agricultural wage labourers belong to a very poor economic background. They have been engaged as agricultural wage labourers to fulfil their basic needs of day to day living. They are traditionally engaged in this occupation for generations. But they are unaware of the drastic technological changes that are coming up in agricultural sector and they still practices the traditional ways of agriculture.

### **2.3 Back Ground of Coir Industry and Its Wage Labours**

In the year 2005, Indian Institute of Entrepreneurship in collaboration with Indian Coir Board organized a 5 days training programme on Entrepreneur Development Programme on coir products financed by the Indian Coir Board covering 76 participants in Tezpur, Assam. Later on, two trained beneficiaries viz. Mrs Amrit Madhuri Devi and Mr Kishor Debnath were selected from Tezpur for further advanced training on coir products in IIE, Guwahati for 15 days & in Coir board, Kerela for one month in November and December-2006, respectively. After coming back from Kerala, Amrit Madhuri Devi, with the help of District Agriculture Office, Sonitpur started awareness programmes on coconut cultivation in Sonitpur, Assam. In 2007 she joined a NGO viz. Udayan and prepared a list of farmers for coconut cultivation to distribute coconut seedlings with the help of Coconut Development Board, Guwahati. But due to less cooperation she left Udayan and joined Sonitpur Social Development Organization in the year 2008. In these awareness programmes, Mrs Amrit Madhuri Devi, noticed poor participation of women. Subsequently she slowly shifted her target to women and organised several training programmes for women on different coir products through Sonitpur Social Development Organization for entrepreneurship development. These trainings were conducted by the faculties from Kerala and Orissa. After the trainings, 13 trainees applied for industrial loan, however, only two Coir industries were came up in Tezpur. These two industries are 'Ramdhenu Coir Industry' and 'Mitali Coir Industry'.

#### **2.3.1 Ramdhenu coir industry**

Ramdhenu Coir Industry was established in the year 2008 with the help of Indian Institute of Entrepreneurship, Guwahati with 40% subsidy

for machine purchase. The industry owned by Juri Boniya, one of the first batch trainee of the training on making of coir products organized by Sonitpur Social Development Organisation, in Da-Porbotia Sonari gaon, providing employment to five women. They produce coir yarn from the coir collected from a local supplier. These five women were engaged in daily wage basis.

#### **2.3.2 Mitali coir industry**

Mitali coir Industry, owned by Ms. Anju Boishya and run by Ms. Minu Boishya was also established with the help of IIE, Guwahati with 40% subsidy for purchasing machineries. Both Anju and Minu were also trained by Sonitpur Social Development Organisation. Mitali coir Industry was situated in the Ketekibari, Tezpur where 6 women were employed. The industry produced coir yarns, coir mattresses and coir pith mostly sold in the local market.

### **2.4 Techniques of Data Collection**

The data has been collected through both primary and secondary sources. Primary data was collected from a field study with Purposive sampling by interviewing and observation methods. The secondary data collected from sources like books, journals, official documents and news papers. However, mostly primary data collected from field survey, 2013 is being tried to analyse in this research paper. A total of 30 respondents were selected covering 10 as coir industry labourers and 20 as agricultural labourers. Interviews and discussion were made with the Secretary of Sonitpur Social Development Organization, Owners of two Coir Industries, ASHA workers, Anganvadi Workers, Scientists and other staffs of the Krishi Vigyan Kendra, Sonitpur.

## **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The comparative family economic status of studied agricultural wage and coir industry wage labourers is presented in Table 1.

The data reveals that maximum household income came under the group Rs 40,000-80,000 per annum for both the groups. However, the mean income of the agricultural wage labourer family was Rs 51200, while the same was Rs. 79400 per annum for coir industry wage labourers. When respondents were asked about the reason that drive them to opt for the occupation, the common answer was to meet the

day to day expenditure of the family in case of agricultural wage labourers. Agricultural labourers denied the choices to opt for other occupation as they were unskilled. On the other hand, the coir industry labourers informed that they opt the occupation to meet the increasing family expenditure and they had a choice to continue with the same or change to some other occupation as they were educated and trained. The accessibility to the choices of occupation was distinctly seen amongst the coir industry labourers, which give them some kind of freedom to think for entrepreneurship development. But the only hindrance was source of funding. The reason behind this freedom and choice had an impact on the size of the household. The number of the household members has an impact on the financial position of the household [9].

**Table 1. Income of the household**

Income (Rs)	Agricultural wage labour (n=20)	Coir Industry labour (n=10)
Upto 40000.00	10%	0%
40000.00-80000.00	80%	60%
80000.00 and above	10%	40%
Mean annual income (Rs.)	51200.00	79400.00

*Source: Field Survey, 2013*

Size of the household of the studied groups is presented in Table 2.

**Table 2. Size of the household**

	Agricultural wage labour	Coir industry labour
No of household	20	10
Male	55	25
Female	61	28
Total	116	53
Average household size	5.8	5.3

*Source: Field Survey, 2013*

Perusal of data from Table 2 reveals that Size of the household had an impact on the household income. The average size of the household among the agricultural wage labourers was 5.8 and most of them stayed in nuclear family. The average number of children (0-12 years) was 4

and maximum up to 6. Conversely, among the coir industry labourers the average number of children was only 2. Although, preference over a male child was predominant amongst all respondents belonging both the groups might be due to common social notion of superiority of male over female. A girl is considered a burden by parents. Since a girl child would be going to her husband's place upon marriage, the parents did not want to waste their resources on her upbringing. Again the demand for large dowry and the huge wedding expenses caused a lot of hardship to the parents. So, the parents preferred a male child [10]. On the other hand the other group was happy with their 2 to 3 children. Almost all of them adopted different types of birth control measures of their choice. Agricultural labourers also revealed that as they had more members in the family and the income was less so they must be engaged in laborious job sometimes might be against their will. So, it was quite clear that with lesser income and greater no of children women were forced to work for subsistence. She was denied for her freedom to choose her own way of life. John Caldwell's wealth flows theory proposes a direct link between family structure and fertility [9]. The theory proposes that fertility decisions in all societies are economically rational responses to familial wealth flows. In societies with net upward wealth flows, the economically rational decision is to have as many surviving children as possible (within the constraints imposed by biology), because each additional child adds positively to a parent's wealth, security in old age, and social and political well-being. In societies with net downward wealth flows, the economically rational decision is to have no children or the minimum number allowed by a psychological disposition that derives pleasure from children and parenting. The worldwide transition from high to low fertility is the result of a change in family structures from upward to downward wealth flows [11]. The theory is more or less applicable in this field scenario too.

The amount of literacy also had an impact on the accessibility of the 'agency' and the 'resources'. The Table 3 shows the level of education of the respondents.

Perusal of data from Table 3 reveals that the literacy rate of respondents of both the groups revealed a significant difference. The coir industry wage labourers were more or less educated whereas half of the agricultural

labourers were illiterate. One of our respondents of 33 years age having 3 children, residing in a nuclear family revealed that she went for school up to class three. However, she did not know how to count and even write her own name. When she was asked how do she knew that she was paid full? She replied that if it was not full she would be beaten up by her husband as case she submitted all her wage in her husband's hands and he decided how much and on what the money should be spent. Thus she has some kind of 'resource' through which she could access her achievement into power, but, it is not been done. She was unable to access or exercise her power [12]. But, the coir industry labourers are little more literate than the agricultural labourers. And their access to power can be easily seen. This power is not necessarily 'power over' but 'power within' which must not be ignored as mentioned in CWD, which is reflected in their words. One of my respondents from this group aged 37, matriculate, mother of two child told me that she always wanted to do something to earn to support herself, and she used to weave but not in a regular manner, however when she got a chance to get engage with the coir industry she grab it at the first chance, although it needs to convince her in laws and her husband. Here it could be seen that two types of power one 'power within' and 'power with' [13]. She also revealed that if she was not that literate she might not able to think like this. Many a girls from her neighbourhood refused to go out and join the industry only because they felt that they were not literate enough. But in the coir industry we also met women educated only up to class five. They also expended that initially they hesitated to join the industry, however, with time they also felt keep going.

**Table 3. Level of education of the participants**

Education	Agricultural wage labour (n=20)	Coir industry labour (n=10)
Matriculate	0%	30%
Under metric	10%	40%
Middle school	15%	20%
Lower primary	25%	10%
Illiterate	50%	0%

Source: Field Survey, 2013

Table 4 shows the differences in expenditure of both the agriculture and coir industry labourers after they started earning. Significant changes were observed in the family expenditure after they started earning.

The agricultural wage labourers tried to meet their basic food needs through their extra income which was pretty difficult to fulfil by ones earning because of low earning and higher number of dependent members in the family, whereas the coir industry labourers tried to get more nutritious food through their extra earnings, especially for their children by consuming on food items like health drinks.

Though both the groups tried to expanse more in education, coir industry labourers tried to avail better facilities like good equipments, tuitions; while the agriculture wage labourers tried to cope with the basic educational needs like examination fee and school uniform. Still they couldn't afford to manage it with the little seasonal income and the adverse affect came up to the girl's education. The girl, in most cases, had to take care of the house and the younger siblings.

**Table 4. Pattern of family expenditure**

Name of the item	Agricultural wage labour	Coir Industry labour
Food	Basic food need could be made up. Still lake of nutritious food	Can invest in Nutritious foods like health drinks, eggs etc.
Cloth	No change	Able to invest little more for child's clothing
Education	Childs educational needs could be made up	Could bare child's extra needs related to education
Religion	More expenditure coming in the name of religion	More expenditure coming in the name of religion
Medicine	Start investment in medicine	More investments in medicine
Intoxicant Items	No change	Less expenditure on alcoholic items

Source: Field Survey, 2013

Very importantly the religious and medical expenditure went up for both the groups supported by the extra income of the women. Table 4, reveals that there were no changes in the expenses of intoxicant items consumption amongst the agricultural labourers. That was because they didn't take the readymade alcohol rather they prepare it at home. However, surprisingly due to the expenses in alcoholic and tobacco products were been reduced among the coir industry labourers families probably due to more women empowerment in the family. But, very crucially, in the agricultural labourer's family the women had very less say on the family expenditure. The usual trend was to give all part of her wage to her husband's hands. But recently they started saving money in the SHGs of the villages. Saving was a very new concept for the agricultural wage labourers. The table given below shows the saving pattern of both the groups before the Central govt scheme on Jan Dhan Yojana.

**Table 5. Savings pattern**

<b>Savings/Insurance</b>	<b>Agricultural wage labour (N=20)</b>	<b>Coir industry labour (N=10)</b>
Life Insurance	0	1
Savings account	0	2
Postal deposits	7	6
Savings in SHG	16	10

*Source: Field Survey, 2013*

Among the agricultural labourers 16 and 7 members had deposits in SHGs and Post office, respectively. None of them had Life insurance covering and Savings in bank accounts. The coir industry wage labourers were little forward in this matter. Each and every one of them had deposits in SHG and most of them were having deposits in the post office. Savings account was also getting an entry so as the life insurance. Savings gives women power to access the 'resources' and finally leads to the empowerment. Resources are the major dimensions of women empowerment. Greater the accessibility to resources, greater the agency through women could be empowered [12].

Accessibility could be seen through the household items that possessed by the respondent. The Table 6 shows the household items that were possessed by the families of both the groups.

**Table 6. Household gadgets owned**

<b>Item posses</b>	<b>Agricultural wage labour</b>	<b>Coir industry labour</b>
Radio	35%	30%
Television	0%	20%
Mobile	70%	70%
Electricity	0%	60%
LPG connection	15%	40%
Sanitary latrine	35%	80%

*Source: Field Survey, 2013*

Perusal of data from the Table 6 interestingly reveals that in spite of having no access to electricity, 70% of agricultural wage labourers' possessed mobile phones at their households although they were dependent on either their husbands or children for operating the gadget. As, the expanses of the cell-phone service was solely borne by the male counterparts the female folk had a little say on its uses. 15% of agricultural wage labourers had L.P.G. connections. But the percentage was little higher among the coir industry labourers (40%). These gadgets were quite useful in reducing drudgery and time. It gave a 'power within' and 'power to' women [12]. When the respondents were asked about the sanitary latrine, it was found that they were aware of its essentiality but the economic constrain and unawareness of the way to its free construction through the ASHA workers under Government scheme hindered the possession.

Technology was a prominent 'agency' through which 'resources' could be exercised [12]. The agricultural wage labourers were totally deprived of the technological part of the production system. These women were not known to the simple technologies which could be implemented in the field without much expense. Technologies like Japanese paddy weeder which is a roller like machine for weeding could be easily adopted. Improved Sickle, Garden rake, Circular Blade Weeder, Improved Spreading tool (*kurhuna*) are some other small technologies that could be easily adopted by the farm women. But when the respondents of the respective group were asked about these small technologies they seemed to be totally ignorant about all these. In contrast, the coir industry labourers were well equipped with technology. Though in the coir industry, initially they made yarn and doormats by hands, but present days all these jobs are done by machines. They were well trained to handle machines. Use of technology increases production, reduces drudgery and time, resulting

in more production and wages. More the wage more will be the amount of power to take decisions, which is referred by the intellectual ability or knowledge and technological knowhow as well as economic resources [13].

‘Agency’, ‘resource’ and ‘power’ can only be measured through the women’s representation in the decision making process [12]. Table 7 shows women’s magnitude of autonomy in decision making process in both the groups.

Participation in the decision making process is the key indicator of the achievement. ‘Resources’ and ‘agency’ make up people’s capabilities: that is, their potential for living the lives they want [2,14]. The term ‘achievements’ refers to the extent to which this potential is realised or fails to be realised; that is, to the outcomes of people’s efforts [12]. In the Table 7, participation in decision-making was found higher for the Coir Industry Wage Labourers as compared to Agricultural wage labourers in some aspects of household decision making. Higher the participation in decision making higher is the degree of autonomy. Still one needs to look into the nature of this participation of women. The magnitude of decision making varies across trivial issues, issues related to own self, issues related to children and critical issues. For matters relating trivial issues autonomy were highest.

Autonomy in going for outing or visiting friends/relative/parents i.e., freedom of mobility was almost equal. On the other hand, independent decision making in own health related issues was almost double for Coir Industry Labourers. Decision making was most restricted in financial matters among the agricultural wage labourers. Usually the women were not considered to be a part of any decision making process because of the pivotal role of patriarchy from time immemorial. But now-a-days, gradually with coming up of education and access to the economic resources along with the transfer of technologies to the women bringing up some change to the so called weaker section. The Table 7 also supports similar kind of data. The autonomy was increased with the factors like education and transfer of technology because, the percentage is higher among the coir industry wage labourers, who had more education and equipped with technology. In the agricultural wage labourer’s family, the strong hold of patriarchy and social practices were well visible from our previous discussion. One of our respondents told us that the first and last time her opinion was considered and implemented when she demanded and fight for her child’s further education after class four. Here we can see that she acquired the power, but couldn’t be able to exercised and retained.

**Table 7. Magnitude of autonomy in decision making**

Type of issues	Autonomy in decision making	
	Agricultural wage labourer (N=20)	Coir industry wage labourer (N=10)
<b>Trivial issues</b>		
In making in what items to cook	VH	H
Answering freely to questions asked	H	VH
<b>Issues related to children</b>		
Purchasing requirements for children	H	VH
Education of children	L	H
<b>Issues Related to own self</b>		
Obtaining health care for own health	L	H
Going for outings	M	M
Purchasing requirements for own self	L	M
Visiting and staying with friends, parents & relatives	H	H
<b>Critical issues</b>		
Expenditure on Marriages.	VL	VL
Borrowing money for household demands	L	M
Borrowing money to start business.	VL	M
Paying back debts	L	M
Control over using money earned/saved	L	H

Note: Very High (VH) =above 80%, High (H) =60-80%, Moderate (M) =40-60%, Low (L) =20- 40%, Very Low (VL) = Below 20%

Source: Field Survey, 2013



The coir industry labourer's autonomy was little higher in the decision making process. Autonomy was increased after they engaged with the industry. One of our respondent, a girl age of 23, unmarried and stayed with her parents, told us that she was been consulted after she started earning through the industry which was not the case earlier. Another respondent, a mother of one child told us that initially her husband asked her not to continue with her job but it was not possible because of financial condition of the family. However, now she could resist her husband's order and take her own decision to continue with the job. In both the cases the power exercised and in the second case not only exercised but also retained. The 'power within' and 'power to' as mentioned by Commission on Women and Development [13] to do according to oneself and take her own decision was clearly visible. The achievement gained through agency and resources is leading to the exercise of power through decision making process.

### 3.1 Causes of the Differences

The amount of 'agency' and 'resources' determine the amount of achievement [12] and difference in these causes differences the level of women empowerment of the two groups studied. There are reasons behind all these differences which came up in the study-

- **Seasonal labour:** The agricultural labourers were the seasonal labourers worked only in the seasons for Summer and Winter paddy cultivation. They remained unemployed for almost four months of the year except in the seasons of paddy cultivation more particularly at the time of transplanting and harvesting. Accordingly, the accessibility to the economic resource was not continuous and thus the power that acquired couldn't be retained and exercised in a continuous way. Whereas the coir industry laborers were regular employees. They had been employed for the whole year and the accessibility to the economic resources were constant and thus the power gained through economic resources could be retained and exercised.
- **Unskilled labour:** The agricultural labourers were usually unskilled and not trained to do agricultural work. But the practice made them perfect and competent. But still, the preference of male agricultural labourers was found to be

more because they could do works like ploughing and tilting, though they were more costly. Whereas the coir industry was basically dependent on women labourers. They prefer women labourers as they believe that women could do better in making yarn and doormats. Men were also employed in the coir industries but only for the marketing purposes and for heavy works like importing coir bundles from the local supplier etc. Moreover they were well trained in their job and this gave them 'power within' and enable them to think of another job if needed. Nevertheless, the need and importance gave women engaged in the industry a sense of 'power within' which was not seen in case of agricultural wage labourers [12].

- **Non-use of technology:** The agricultural laborers were totally ignorant about the technologies used in the field of agriculture. Garden rake, circular blade Weeder, Improved Spreading Tool (*kurhuna*), Japanese Paddy weeder, Improved Sickle were some small technologies specially meant for women that could be easily adopted by the agricultural labourers which could reduce drudgery. Agricultural labourers even ignorant about small technologies that could be adopted in household works. But the coir Industry labourers were observed to be well equipped with machinery and trained to handle them all. Use of technology in job and home made them confident and powerful.
- **Less exposure:** The agricultural wage labourers had less exposure. They were not exposed to the outer world except their own circle as they were not educated. They didn't feel like get to know to the world. Even they didn't want to participate in the village level activities as they were not allowed by their husbands. Husbands were the ultimate source of knowledge, they felt. But with the ASHA and *Anganabadi* Workers active roll, little exposure to the need of medication and education of their children had been observed. On the other hand, the coir industry wage labourers were exposed to the society. Some of them were also members of the local SHG and *Mahila Samitee*.
- **Social constrains:** Social constrain were higher among the agricultural labourers.

The strong hold of patriarchy was distinctly seen among the agricultural wage labourers. The reason behind was most importantly the lack of education. Without education women were not been able to challenge the existing discrimination of man and woman. The coir industry labourers were literate higher than that of the agricultural labourers, so, they were seems to be little free from the social constrains.

- **Less political knowledge:** The lack of political knowledge was also a reason for difference among the agricultural and coir industry wage labourers. The agricultural labourers were not familiar with the *Panchayatiraj* system and they did not show any political view when surveyed. They cast their vote only when and whom their husband want to. Whereas the coir industry wage laborers were aware of the political parties and their rolls. Thus the different factors affecting the amount of empowerment, which was not essentially the factors relating to the economic resources but also socio-politico-educational in nature. These factors were related to each other, one led to the other and finally led to the empowerment or disempowerment.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Finally it can be concluded that mere economic self-sufficiency is not enough for women empowerment, as power is a multidimensional concept. In societies where the agrarian and the urban cultures go hand in hand simultaneously, the traditional systems don't lose their rigidity to allow women to be an important identity and thus block the way of empowerment. Nevertheless, process of empowerment finds its own way with time. Economic self-sufficiency, education, use of technology, exposure to the outer world etc. are some interconnected phenomenon which determines the amount of empowerment. In our study, the agricultural labourers are comparatively lacking in many aspect of empowerment than Coir industry labourers. However, both the groups are not said to be fully empowered and they are only in the initial steps of empowerment. There is a scope of empowerment through more education, exposure, political knowledge accessibility to the liberal thoughts of other social service organizations.

#### COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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