

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### 1.1 Gender and Poverty

Attempts to understand poverty in its various dimensions and new paradigms of women in development and women and development of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century evinced the inextricable relationship between gender and poverty. A major contribution of such studies that focussed on the gender dimensions of poverty is that they enriched the conceptual understanding of gender relations. Thus, the term gender relations refers to the relations of power between women and men which are revealed in a range of practices, ideas, and representations, including the division of labour, roles, and resources between women and men. It also ascribes different abilities, attitudes, desires, personality traits, and behavioural patterns, and so on to women, creating stereotypical images of men and women. Gender relations are both constituted by and help constitute these practices and ideologies in interaction with other structures of social hierarchy such as class, caste and race (Agarwal, 1994). Further, gender hierarchies also influence and structure relations between individuals of the same sex such as the relationship between two women of the same household, which is influenced by the gendered character of their relations with the household men.

A focus on gender in poverty analysis means looking at both women and men, while recognising that it is women who suffer from gender inequality and discrimination. The intrinsic link that exists between gender and poverty is drawn from this inequality between the genders. Feminisation of poverty is hence conceived as a resultant phenomenon of women's socially restricted access to and control over resources and income. Although this has informed policymaking in recent years, the nuanced nature of the nexus between gender and poverty in a rapidly changing society needs better understanding and operationalization. The types and forms of gender inequality depend on the economic and social contexts of a particular society. Thus an analysis and understanding at the micro level is important to inform policy makers on gender biased programmes and policies.

## **1.2 Women in Bihar: Rationale for the study**

Generally, in the realm of everyday life of Bihar, there is a commonly shared perception that women have experienced an improvement in their status. This position is partially acceptable. Women in Bihar have made gains in some areas such as education and work participation rates over time. This may be perceived in a comparison of statistics of various age cohorts of women in Bihar - older generation of women vis-à-vis the younger generation. Starting with a low base would, obviously make comparisons tenuous. At the same time, data based on primary fieldwork provide more substantive qualitative evidences on the real gains in terms of empowerment and changes in material conditions. Thus, apart from statistics, which would show a relative change, a study based on primary survey can bring out the absolute changes through a prism of qualitative and inter temporal data. An alternative to this would be to compare women's position in matters related to various basic needs and livelihood. These include education, health and other basic needs, as they would provide absolute measure of welfare, that any constitutionally elected government have to deliver to its citizenry.

The present study is concerned largely with changes in the status of women after 'Towards Equality', a benchmark report which came out in 1974 highlighting the role of economic, social, cultural and political institutions in reinforcing women's subordination. Specifically, it deals with the differences in women's access to, and control over resources and the implications of these variations on women within the family. The purpose of the study is to bring out insights on gender and poverty so as to enhance our understanding of its dynamic relationship at the grassroots level. It is hoped that the insights would provide necessary inputs to the policy makers to design and improve upon policies and programmes that can address the structural issues of discrimination and exclusion.

## **1.3 Conceptual Framework**

This study aims to analyse variations and changes in women's status and poverty by examining the differences in women's access to and control over resources, and the impact this had on women's bargaining power within the household. In order to define the research questions further, the study draws strength from the available literature.

These include general literature on demography and intra-household poverty as well as the various theoretical and empirical works on ‘gender and development’.

One can gather different streams of analysis of gender and poverty in the development literature. Most of these analyses stem from a particular understanding of discrimination- its forms and causes. In the context of India, one of the dominant paradigms of such analyses has identified the major axis of gender discrimination arising from the so-called inside/outside dichotomy. (Bennett et al, 1991). According to this: “the culture’s very definition of female is her association with the “inside” – the home. By Contrast, men belong to “outside” where livelihoods are earned and political and economic power is wielded (*ibid.*, xv)

But there are limitations to this approach as it appears to advocate provisioning of inputs to women or shifting the focus from men to women which would not suffice to address both strategic and practical needs of women. As a matter of fact on some occasions such provisioning may infact lead to worsening of the position of women. Evidences also point out to the fact that only a very small percentage of women are in fact exclusively associated with ‘inside’ and their numbers are decreasing, as one can see evidences of women’s participation in ‘outside’ sphere, from all economic strata. A vast majority of poor women work in various economic activities, like agriculture, animal husbandry, forest based activities etc, which often gets un-recognised as they work in their own farms or for their household economy. Such women face disproportionately higher level of discrimination in terms of wage, work place harassment, recognition and leisure as compared to women who engage in ‘inside’ activities. Also women from the urban areas and those engaged in career employment though small in percentage suffer discrimination when they are engaged in ‘outside’ activities. At the same time it is to be recognised that women who ‘work’ from home, enjoy relatively higher levels of flexibility and perhaps control over incomes as they are in a advantageous position to take care of both ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ engagements. This approach appears to have caught the imagination of several scholars who have provided evidences on several aspects of ‘inside – outside’ dichotomy that women face and advocated for strategies that provide basic support for women in terms of education, health and other services.

Literature concerned with the role and position of women in poor households are based on studies or analyses of census or other survey data, and have been carried out from a development perspective (Kalpagam, 1986, Jeejeeboy, 1998). In terms of their approach and description of women's position, most of these studies have been exploratory. However, over the decades, there has been a visible change in the focus of these studies. In the period spanning the 1970s and early 80s, there was a greater emphasis on women's work in rural development than on their status in the society (UNDP, 1980). Although these studies contributed greatly to the knowledge about women's labour, a number of problems remained especially in understanding the differential intra-household status of men and women. Moreover, understanding women's status from their work status suffered many methodological weaknesses. Firstly, though women's labour is of great significance to women's status, it accounts for only a smaller part of a whole spectrum of activities that determine their status. Secondly, most studies with this approach concentrated on specific sectors that are feminised for cultural or economic reasons. And finally, irrespective of the sector, women's work is usually concentrated at the 'low-end' categories of work characterised by low wages and low status.

The latter half of 1980s witnessed a paradigmatic shift in the perspective towards women's status. Linkages were drawn between women's roles within the household and their position in the broader socio-economic spheres. Women's role in environment and ecology have also become focus of studies, especially from gender and livelihoods perspective. These led to a plethora of literature questioning the approach of the hitherto studies with economic development as the focus. Thus, studies on demography, environment and poverty began to focus on women's decision-making capacities and its relationship to women's relative status vis-à-vis men. It can be noted that the gender specificity of the effects of poverty stems from pre-existing gender inequalities in the division of labour; the intra-household distribution of subsistence resources; access to productive resources, other assets and income-earning opportunities; and participation in public decision-making fora (Agarwal, 1995). Resource claim of women, their livelihoods and legitimization of their access to resources and pattern of usage have come into close scrutiny in understanding the change in social and gender relations.

Drawing from the above understanding, the present study attempts to add to this body of literature by investigating the nexus between poverty and gender in a rural populace, experiencing slow economic growth and development. The focus would be to bring out whether there are any differences in gender relationships and if any, what contributes to these differences. In essence, this study attempts to present a more systematic consideration of women's position within the household based on household level data in an inter-temporal perspective.

It has been argued that certain factors affect women's familial position, mostly through their impact on autonomy. For instance, the impact of girl's schooling on autonomy, women's involvement in economically productive activities has been singularly researched and it has been argued that educated women and those with an independent source of income have greater autonomy. In other words, the basic premise of this study is that women's position within the household and within the society is closely inter-linked with their access to, and control over private and public resources. Thus, the study examines:

- Whether there has been a re-distribution of resources in favour women,
- Whether state policy has facilitated women's autonomy, and
- The extent to which transformation of unequal relations between women and men has occurred

Redistribution of resources as an important variable of change leads to two other related questions: i) how do women gain access to and control over various types of resources, ii) what are the mechanisms that contribute to a favourable redistribution of resources. In the context of this study, access refers to the opportunity available to use material and human resources. For instance, if girl children are able to go to school, or women are able to access a health centre, they can be said to have access to these resources. Control is more complex than it refers to women's ability to bargain so as to determine the use of the resource. The point here is not only to identify control with a shift of decision-making power from men to women, but that both men and women engage in an active process of participation in decision –making.

Before considering the differences in women's access to and control over private and public resources it is imperative to discuss the institutions that influence women's differential access to resources. This discussion is also aimed to operationalise the key concepts used in the study. Institutional barriers often prevent certain sections of the poor, especially women, Dalits, tribal and other minority groups, from utilizing enhanced income to increase access to basic needs. Intra-household inequalities in distribution of food, community norms on seclusion and restricted interactions as well as gender bias of community service markets and government service delivery systems reduce poor women's ability to have access to basic needs, even with increase in their income.

Therefore, in this study women's access to, and control over resources have been operationalised as follows. Firstly, differences in the extent to which women as spouses participate in various types of household decision-making activities are considered. The proposition is that older women have appropriate social authority to participate in decisions concerning the household as compared to women who are relatively younger and married for only few years. Thus comparison of the relative status and position of women of different age-cohorts (or generations) provide useful insights into the way family dynamics operate in negotiating gender relations. Another aspect is related to the level of education and the extent to which it determines women's access to a range of public and private resources. It is hypothesized that higher levels of education will give women a wider access to resources. Further, married women and the number, age and sex of children are treated as proxy for household responsibility and the extent to which it determines women's access to, and control over private and public resources. It is assumed that early years of motherhood or younger children reduce their access to public resources as well as lessens their control over private resources. And finally, the extent to which membership in particular community (caste or religion) influences women's access to various types of resources. The proposition is that the community related stratification impinges on women's access to resources and gender relations vary significantly across communities.

Thus, the study adopts a framework to measure women's relative position vis-a-vis men by relying on the components of status as tools of analysis. The components<sup>1</sup> or benchmarks are:

- Access to, and control over private assets and resources
- Access to public resources
- Control over their labour and income
- Control over their body – sexuality, reproduction and physical security
- Control over physical mobility
- Access to and control over political spaces
- Access to and control over intangible resources – information about government programmes political influence etc.

#### **1.4 Operationalisation of Concepts**

##### 1. Women's access to, and control over private resources

Family has a major influence in the life choices women make in terms of education, work and type of partnership in marriage. The family-based household is the first line amongst the numerous other determinants that determine women's role in the family and society. The proposition therefore, is that the personal and household characteristics of women structure their opportunities and degree of autonomy.

Based on the assumption that the personal and household characteristics influence women's access to private resources by impacting on their bargaining power within the household, several of its manifestations have been considered. These include socio-economic characteristics of the household such as caste, class, variations in household composition, ownership of assets such as land, house as well as personal characteristics of the women such as age/life cycle, education, access to natal kin during exigencies etc.

---

<sup>1</sup> The framework is modified from the model developed first by Murthy, Ranjana K 1994 and later by Batliwala, *et al* 1998.

## 2.Women's access to public resources

This is concerned with the impact of different types of services provided by the state and how the changes in the access to these services change women's position in the family and society. Public resource has been defined in terms of the basic services provided by the state such as education, health as well as community resources such as water, fuel, sanitation and food. Women's access to these resources is analysed from intra-household as well as from their societal position. Further, it focusses on the basic services such as education and health as this in turn pre-determine women's autonomy within the family and thus access to public resources. The latter (food, water, fuel etc.) have traditionally been women's preserve, that is, women have been the primary providers of these 'survival needs'. Women's lack of access to the survival needs in turn directly affect their stake within the family and community. The discussion on access to public resources would entail the following two aspects:

- There exists a gender-gap in the access to these resources. In comparison to men, women have lower access to education and health care and when survival resources are scarce, this gender gap extends even to food.
- Women's access to public resources is pre-determined by their household characteristics, mainly by class and caste and to a lesser extent by personal features such as educational levels.

## 3.Women's control over their labour and income

It has been well acknowledged that family is a significant factor in influencing women's choices of work – both productive and domestic. So is the relationship between women's labour and autonomy. The study therefore first attempts to capture the economic activities in which women participate and then explores the extent to which women's access to material resources enable them to negotiate the existing degrees of social autonomy within the family. However, the degree to which they can do so is related to the characteristics of the household and of the work they perform and more so to the cultural norms and values of the household (Baud, 1992).

#### 4. Women's control over their physical mobility

The existing restrictions on women's physical mobility connote many abominable facts about women's status in the society. It reflects the patriarchal notions about women's bodies and sexuality. Women's bodies with exclusive monopolistic rights, sanctioned to men according to various stages of life- father and husband- dominate such notions. According to this, women's bodies are to be protected from infringements on exclusive rights. Implied in this is also the larger question of the construct of women's bodies as a commodity that can be acquired by men under various conditions- conjugal rights with marriage to sheer physical coercion. It is also that these restrictions are convenient mechanisms by which men can control women's sexuality. Mostly, these restrictions are in the form of various traditions and customs. And, women are conceived as the upholders of these customs. This conception ensures that these customs are given continuity across generations and forms a part of the socialisation process of girl children.

While this perspective constitutes a masculine version with its exclusive and protective rights of women's bodies, it is essential to understand the same from the perspective of women. Where bodies are commodified, and rights over bodies are non-existent, prevention of physical onslaught can be controlled only with the help of protectors. Behind this obvious reason of security, what makes women comfortable with such restrictions is the gendered socialisation that they undergo. Women internalise patriarchal norms and restrictions as a result of this socialisation. Many of the customs that allow for the violation of their basic bodily rights assume immutability through the gendered socialization and this internalized patriarchy subverts voices of dissent and scope for emancipation.

Younger women are allowed to come out of their households only in the company of their family men or with elderly women. Control over sexuality that is implied in the restrictions on physical mobility is evident from the fact that elderly women are granted freedom of mobility. Restrictions on physical mobility are only one part of the story. The lack of control over their bodies extends to their reproductive rights and sexual rights too. Decisions about number of children and adoption of family

planning methods, that are more to do with women's lives and bodies are seldom in their hands is another unfortunate outcome of these restrictions.

#### 5. Women's access to, and control over intangible resources

Intangible resources include women's collective bargaining power to address issues that concern their lives and representation and articulation of their interests as women. Many of the oppressions and violations that women undergo in their homes can be addressed through accessing these intangible resources. These resources constitute social capital and other informal voices of authorities. Formation of women's groups and political participation of women reflect such processes.

## **1.5 Method**

This study is based on the re-survey of 12 villages which were surveyed during 1981-83 by a group of researchers from the International Labour Organisation (ILO), Geneva and the A.N. Sinha Institute of Social Studies (ANSIIS), Patna. This survey adopted a combination of random and purposive sampling techniques to choose a representative sample of villages, which would typify the characteristic features of north and central Bihar (the new state of Bihar after the bifurcation). Several stages of sampling were undertaken before the final choice of villages was made. For the purpose of comparability, and to see the changes over time, the present survey (1998/99) adopted the same 12 villages as in the earlier survey (See Appendix 1 for methodological framework and survey design). The six districts identified for the purpose of the study were Nalanda, Rohtas, Gaya, Gopalganj, Madhubani and Purnea. Two villages were surveyed from each of these districts. Information was gathered from 820 households through interview schedules.

### *Data Base*

In the 1980s, a census survey of 2,533 households in the 12 sample villages was undertaken during August-October 1981. Subsequently, a detailed survey of 569 households from these twelve villages was conducted during 1981-83. In the current survey undertaken between 1998-1999, a census of 3903 households was conducted, of which a detailed sample survey of 820 households was carried out. The interview schedule was specifically designed to permit a class stratification of each village and subsequent sampling was undertaken within class strata. The class structure is similar to what had been undertaken in the earlier ANSISS-ILO survey of 1981, which includes nine principal groups. These groups are described below with their essential characteristics:

- Agriculture labour, not cultivating, free labour - ALNF
- Agriculture labour, not cultivating, attached labour - ALNA
- Agriculture labour, cultivating, free labour - ALLF
- Agriculture labour, cultivating, attached labour - ALLA
- Cultivators neither hiring in nor hiring out labour - Poor middle peasant

- Cultivators hiring in labour and both male and female work - Middle peasant
- Cultivators hiring in labour and only males work - Big peasant
- Hiring out land - Landlords
- Involved in non-agricultural activities - Non agriculture

The details of the total number of households and the number of sample households in all the 12 villages are presented in table 1.1.

**Table 1.1: Village-wise Total and Sample Number of Households 1998-99**

Sl. No	District	Village	No. of Households	No. of Sample Households
1.	Nalanda	Chandkura	296	68
2.	Nalanda	Mohiuddinpur	96	31
3.	Rohtas	Samhutibuzurg	262	65
4.	Rohtas	Amarhi	153	44
5.	Gaya	Alalpur-Bishnupur	148	43
6.	Gaya	Salempur-Rupaspur	331	59
7.	Gopalganj	Paharpur Dayal	62	21
8.	Gopalganj	Dewanparsa	192	55
9.	Madhubani	Mahisan	714	131
10.	Madhubani	Khangaon	470	96
11.	Purnea	Belabandan	283	65
12.	Purnea	Jitwarpur	896	142
		Total	3903	820

As has been pointed out earlier, this study is based on the re-survey of representative sample of 12 villages from six districts of Bihar, three each from North and Central Bihar respectively. As can be seen in Table 1.1, there is a substantial variation in the number of sample households selected across the villages. The proportion of selected households is greater in Purnea and Madhubani in North Bihar because the villages in these districts have a larger population. However, recognising that an equal sampling would result in an over-representation of households in these districts, a greater representation was provided in the districts of Gaya, Gopalganj, Nalanda and Rohtas. While every sixth household was selected for survey in Purnea and Madhubani, every fourth household was selected in the other districts. Despite this, measure a majority of the surveyed households both in the earlier and in the current survey belong to the two highly populated districts. In the 1990s, the proportion of households surveyed from Madhubani and Purnea districts constitute 28 per cent and 25 per cent of the total

sample. As can be seen from Table 1.2, the proportion of households from these districts were high even in the earlier survey.

**Table 1.2: Distribution of Households across District 1981-83 and 1998-99 Survey**

<b>District</b>	<b>1998-99</b>		<b>1981-83</b>	
	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Gaya	102	12.44	76	13.36
Gopalganj	76	9.27	58	10.19
Madhubani	227	27.68	153	26.89
Nalanda	99	12.07	87	15.29
Purnea	207	25.24	120	21.09
Rohtas	109	13.29	75	13.18
Total	820	100.00	569	100.00

### *Participatory Rural Appraisals (PRA)*

Several tools of Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) were also employed in the 1998-1999 phase of the study. These were primarily used as a pre-survey tool to enable in the identification of issues to be focussed in the interview schedule. However, this was not the sole objective in using and adapting the PRA techniques. Recognising the innate problems and shortcomings of a survey, an attempt was made through the use of PRA to get qualitative insights into the livelihoods and coping mechanisms of poor women. Tools like, Transect walks, and Social Mapping, Wealth Ranking, Focus Group Discussions and Seasonal Food Calendar were used to gather the data (A brief description of the tools employed is provided in Appendix 1).

## **1.6 Choices and Limitations of the Data Collection Methods**

As mentioned above, although the study largely rests on the survey method, certain tools belonging to the PRA were also used to augment the explanatory potential of the database. The choice to use survey, a traditional research method was based on the advantages it has over case studies. The advantage of using case studies lies in its superior depth and quality. However, it is difficult to make generalisations based on case studies. Further, empirical material from case studies can only indicate whether the hypotheses adopted for the study is plausible or not. But large-scale survey can measure the extent to which various indicators related to women's position and autonomy have changed. The survey, however, lacks the depth and quality of analysis that the use of

qualitative method would generate. Recognising this, we augment the explanatory potential of its quantitative database by collecting information through the use of certain tools belonging to the Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) method.

### **1.7 Chapter Scheme**

Followed the introductory chapter, a profile of the selected villages is provided in chapter 2. The emerging commonalities based on the characteristics of the villages along with the observed changes over the period from the 1980s to the 1990s are discussed keeping in view of the conceptual framework of this study. A description of the socio-economic characteristics of the women respondents from the sampled households is presented in chapter three. Chapters four and five deal with gender dimensions of work and poverty respectively. In chapter six, women's access to public resources, survival needs, such as food, water and fuel are presented. Status and position of women of rural Bihar based on the analyses of the data on their access and control over decision-making are included in chapter seven. The last chapter summarises the study with relevant policy recommendations.