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**Santosh Kumar Varma**  
Ph.D., Department of  
Psychology, Patna University,  
Patna, Bihar, India

## Status of Neera project in Bihar: A socio-economic study

**Santosh Kumar Varma**

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### Abstract

This study was conducted to examine the success and failure of Neera Project in Bihar. For this purpose a sample of 400 people from two districts of Bihar: Nawada and Nalanda were chosen from purposive random sampling. Samples were also taken from Neera producer group especially from pasi community. Data was analyzed on SPSS software. Result shows that due to its improper arrangement and lack of awareness among pasi community' it became fail in its own state. The cost of Neera products and its taste also got its market down. The profit from Neera selling was also low in compare to toddy selling while pasi community were not prepare to compromise with their income. So in the light of these weakness the Neera project became fail in Bihar.

**Keywords:** Neera, pasi community, Neera producer group, toddy selling, SPSS, failure etc.

### Introduction

Neera Project is one of the most ambitious programme of the present government in Bihar. Government promoted Neera as a substitute for providing support to Pasi community but its success still remains questionable. In Bihar, Government provided Neera as an alternative to provide hygienic and nutritious drink in place of toddy. But its implementation and success is matter of investigation. Neera is a natural non- alcoholic beverage high in nutritional value and an instant thirst quencher. It is obtained by slicing the spathes of the sago palm and scraping the tender most part, just below the crown. Neera is rich in carbohydrates mostly sucrose and has a nearly neutral pH. Neera is collected every morning just at sunrise. The sap is extracted and collected by a tapper. It is collected in earthen pots. Neera is highly susceptible to natural fermentation at ambient temperature within a few hours of extraction from palm unless it is quickly treated with some preservatives. Once fermented; it transforms to toddy with 4% alcohol. Using several technologies like freezing it and then pasteurizing it; Neera can be processed and preserved in its natural form to retain the vitamins, sugar and other nutrients beneficial for health. To maintain its quality scientific approach has to be maintained like selection of healthy palm surface, sterilization of the palm crown, cleaning of the spadix. The collection vessel also needs to be sterilized. It is generally done by using lime coat. But repeated use may cause bacteria; so vessel needs to be changed after short interval. Harvested Neera then needs microfiltration, pasteurization, bottling and storage. Value added products like palm syrup, palm wine, palm sugar, palm candy, palm jaggery etc. are made from Neera. Neera can also be promoted as soft drink by using some preservatives and bottling it and can be used for 45 days. Chilled Neera is used as a nutritive drink.

Toddy was finally banned through the Bihar Prohibition and Excise Act, 2016, which came into effect from October 2, 2016. The government pushed ahead with its Neera plan and things were being put in place for the toddy season. The state government provided licence to tap Neera (Unfermented palm/ date/coconut sap) free of cost, but the licence were given only to those who climbed the trees. The government has also set up four Neera processing plants at Hajipur (Vaishali), Khijarsarai (Gaya), Biharsharif (Nalanda) and Barari (Bhagalpur), with capacity to process 10,000 litres daily. According to an agriculture department survey, there are around 1.3 crore palm trees (including date and coconut trees) in the state, and each tree can produce up to 10 litres of Neera daily.

Government has started Neera (Palm Nectar) centres. Bihar State Milk Cooperative Federation, also known as COMFED, has tied up with Jeevika for packing of Neera bottles.

**Corresponding Author:**  
**Santosh Kumar Varma**  
Ph.D., Department of  
Psychology, Patna University,  
Patna, Bihar, India

Around 286 counters in Gaya, Nalanda, Nawada, Banka, Bhagalpur, Samastipur, Aurangabad, Muzaffarpur, Vaishali, Saran, Jehanabad and Patna districts have been started. And around 31000 toddy tappers are roped in to provide toddy at these centres. Now the question arises how far people from this community is able to survive after liquor prohibition. How far they are able to gain from these Neera centres. Does commodification of toddy help them to raise their economic status or reaching these centres for them is another problem. How far it will be helpful for their social and economic upliftment is a matter of concern for us.

#### Fixation of Neera tree cost and its products

Fixation of Neera tree cost and its products is the matter of bi possession. In some cases it was dealt at the level of land owner of tree while in other cases it was fixed by the committee made by the government to look at the Neera production in the state. Most of the responses were in the favour of Government Committee. According to the people, in Nawada and Nalanda, Government Committee has played a significant role in the fixing of Neera related product rate while in some cases in Nalanda it was fixed by the land owner of the tree. According to the Deputy Manger COMFED, Bihar Sharif, Nalanda, "The cost of Neera products including land rent, labour charge and collection charge, it's cost (jaggery or peda cost) goes upto Rs. 900 per kg. This price was very high for the ordinary people to purchase. The taste and smell of palm jaggery or peda is also not good in comparison of sugarcane jaggery. Due to less profit in giving palm nectar to the JEEVIKA than selling in the form of toddy, the collection of palm nectar is below the 1000 litre and Neera plant cannot function below the 1000 litre. So we are unable to produce the further product. The jaggery made once in the year 2017 is getting rotten due to no demand in the market."

The main purpose of the proposed study is to carry out the psycho-social study including the socio-economic condition

of Pasi community and how Neera Project has affected them.

#### Objective of the study

The main objective of the proposed study is to carry out the status of Neera project in Bihar. How prohibition of liquor has affected pasi community in Bihar. However the specific objectives of the present study are as follows:

1. To examine out the socio-economic status of the Pasi community;
2. To examine the impact of liquor prohibition on Pasi community;
3. To explore reason behind success or failure of Neera project.

#### C. Methodology

##### (i) Sample

For this purpose two districts from Bihar e.g. Nawada and Nalanda were chosen. From each district four blocks, from each block two village and from each village 25 households were taken as sample. All the samples were taken from Neera Producer Group (especially from pasi community). The purposive random sampling technique was used to select the sample households. Selection of District

(ii) **Design:** Data collection was designed at three level viz. village level, block level and district level.

(iii) **Tools:** Self-developed questionnaire, FGD (Focus Group Discussion) Schedule and Capacity Building Programme were applied to collect data.

(iv) **Data Analysis:** The collected data was analysed through statistical software like STATA and SPSS using appropriate statistical measures.

#### Results and Discussion

**Table 1:** Facility of keeping Neera at right temperature at local level

District	Keeping Neera at right temperature at local level						Total	
	Yes		No		Do not know		N	%
	N	%	N	%	N	%		
Nalanda	29	14.50	111	55.50	60	30.00	200	100.00
Nawada	10	5.00	136	68.00	54	27.00	200	100.00
Total	39	9.80	247	62.10	114	28.50	400	100.00

From table 1 we see that maximum people of Nalanda (55.50%) and Nawada (68.00%) reported that there is no arrangement of keeping Neera at right temperature at local level while 30% in Nalanda and 27% people in Nawada reported that they do not know about such type of facility provided by the government. Although 14.50% people in Nalanda and 5% people in Nawada reported about such type of arrangement. During field survey three or four Neera

shop (Neera Gumti) was seen in sampled villages of Nalanda district but no such Gumti was seen in Nawada. The shop which we saw in sampled blocks; two out of four was either shut or used for selling cold drinks, tobacco or betel leaves (paan). This result shows that after 2017; the practise/production of Neera is not in function. Therefore Neera shops (local centre) are misused by the local people.

**Table 2:** Government facility to reach Neera at Chilling Centre

District	Government facility to reach Neera at Chilling Centre						Total	
	Yes		No		Do not know		N	%
	N	%	N	%	N	%		
Nalanda	11	5.50	134	67.00	55	27.50	200	100.00
Nawada	0	0.00	148	74.00	52	26.00	200	100.00
Total	11	2.80	282	70.50	107	26.80	400	100.00

**Source:** Estimated from field data

From table 2 we see that on asking about the Government facility to reach Neera to the Chilling Centre in time; 67.5% people in Nalanda and 74% people in Nawada reported that no facility was provided by the government to reach Neera to the Chilling Centre in time while 27.5% in Nalanda and 26% people in Nawada reported that they do not know about such type of facility. Only 5.5% people in Nalanda reported that they know about the Government facility to reach Neera to the Chilling Centre in time. This result occurs due to the unawareness and unwillingness of Pasi community about Neera business and limitation of Neera Plant (not running below 1000 litre). The Neera officials said that due to the aloofness of Pasi community about this business we are unable to collect Neera up to 1000 litre and the plant cannot operate below this unit. On accounting the plant establishing cost, land rent and labour charge; the cost of Neera product goes up to Rs. 900.00 per kg (jaggery cost) which is impractical and is not purchased by the public and the taste is also not good in comparison with normal jaggery. Pasi community people said that due to very hard condition of extracting Neera (*viz.* extraction before sun rise or about 5 o'clock in the morning, painting with lime and using new vessel on every of extraction, less taste than toddy etc) they are comfortable in selling toddy than giving Neera to the centres. Due to liquor ban demand of toddy has raised and they get good money for it. So due to these reasons production of Neera and it's by products almost failed in Bihar.

**Table 3:** Profit in selling toddy in comparison to Neera

District	More benefit in Toddy than Neera						Total	
	Yes		No		DK/NA		N	%
	N	%	N	%	N	%		
Nalanda	102	51.00	53	26.50	45	22.50	200	100.00
Nawada	50	25.00	102	51.00	48	24.00	200	100.00
Total	152	38.00	155	38.80	93	23.30	400	100.00

**Source:** Estimated from field data

Table 3 shows that on asking about profit in selling toddy in comparison to Neera, 51% people in Nalanda and 25% people in Nawada said that they get more benefit in selling toddy than Neera. Neera is sold at the rate Rs. 20 per litre while toddy is sold at the rate of Rs. 30 per litre in the open market.

### Conclusion

On the basis of above result we conclude that although Neera had been an ambitious and welfare project of government yet due to it's improper arrangement and lack of awareness among pasi community' it became fail in it's own state. The cost of Neera products and it's taste also got it's market down. The profit from Neera selling was also low in compare to toddy selling while pasi community were not prepare to compromise with their income. So in the light of these weakness the Neera project became fail in Bihar. Although in some parts of Bihar it can be seen sold at some places. But it's popularity is very less in compare to other drinks.

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