



THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS OF WOMEN AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS IN SIVAGANGAI DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT

The study was conducted to investigate the role of female labour in agriculture in sivagangai District during 2017-18. An interview schedule was used to collect data from a convenient sample of 300 respondents. Most of the respondents were landless female agricultural labours. They show active participation in agricultural activities. The data were analyzed using appropriate statistical tools-percentage analysis, Weighted Score Ranking Analysis and Kendall's Co-efficient of concordance. The findings about the socio-economic conditions of the respondents includes age, marital status, number of members in the family, educational qualification, community, type of family, daily wage, monthly income, earning members in the family, account holding position, own house and type of house were analyzed using percentage analysis. The Weighted Score Ranking analysis is used to analyze the reason for accepting lower wages than men for the same work. Kendall's coefficient of concordance is used to examine the problems faced by female agricultural labourers at home.

Women with their less aggressive nature, patience, humanity and gentleness, compared to those of men under similar conditions, make women sound personnel managers in both outside and inside home. From time immemorial, women have faced the challenges of coping with a male chauvinistic milieu. Even after several years of planned development in India, the status of women in our country is low and their socio-economic conditions are much more depressed than that of men. A woman is identified as a mother, a wife, daughter-in-law or a daughter but she is not identified as an independent person. Women constitute almost half of the population, perform nearly two-third of its work hours, receive one-tenth of the world's income and own less than one hundredth of the world property. The womenfolk constitute the nerve centre of families, vital section of societies and backbone of the nation.

Keywords: Agricultural Activities, Contribution, Participation, Impacts, Post-Harvesting, Women



1. INTRODUCTION

In any economy, women play a prominent role at various levels. They are the backbone of the village economy in rural India. Women take up different works to eke out their livelihood and the majority of the rural women depend on agriculture which is the major, unorganised sector in India. Many of these labourers are landless, homeless and belong to the socially depressed classes of the society. Despite the seasonal nature of employment in the field of agriculture, enormous growth is witnessed in the size of the agricultural labourers since the beginning of this century.

Ours is basically an agricultural country. It is a source of livelihood for over 70 per cent of the population. Agriculture, therefore, has become a family enterprise. The whole family of men, women and children work on it and earn their livelihood. Men's role in agriculture is widely known, but women's role is not that open, though they mostly work for more number of hours, with less privileges, tedious activities and with painful postures. It is only in the recent times that the women themselves are not aware of their contributions, hardship, and, above all, overburden of not only the household jobs but jobs related to agriculture and allied fields. The condition is worse when they work on fields not of their own but on others. On others field, they work as labourers with no facilities for their selves or for their children. Children are left on the fields under the umbrella of sun, dust, rain, cold. Women do not know their rights, do not know how to fight for their rights.

A profile of the women labour explodes the myth that she belongs to the so-called weaker sex. While a man does the ploughing and harrowing in the hills, it is woman who breaks the clods with wooden hammers after the first few turns of the soils; she levels the land ensuring a uniform distribution of seeds and fertilizers and seeks to minimize the surface run-off a difficult job indeed in the hill regions where the terraces are steeply inclined. Then, she manures the land, one of most labour intensive tasks. Inter-cultivation is also the woman's job, which demands light turning over of this soil after the seeds have sprouted. This job is usually done with the aid of a small hoe.

Crops which grow tall like maize and do not have an extensive root system require earthing up twice or more in a season, particularly in rainy season, when the soil around the roots is washed away by heavy rains. The soil is rigged up around the main stem of the plant to cover the root zone. This job too is done by woman. With the help of small hoes, women do regular weeding of the crops in order to ensure better crop growth and yields.

India is a land of villages and agriculture is the mainstay of her economic life. Women constitute about one half of India's country's population. Their place in the Indian society has been prominent. They play a pivotal role in agriculture. They work in the fields alongside men, attend to off-farm activities like processing, grading and marketing of produce, tend the cattle and run the household. Nevertheless, certain basic inadequacies in terms of comparatively lower literacy and skills among women, their inability to engage in work consistently for various reasons, limited avenues for participation etc. have handicapped the desired level of



their contribution to rural development. As a result, participation by women has largely been confined to activities in involving low wages and drudgery.

Despite these disadvantages, the economic pressures and the urge to protect their levels of living from getting eroded fast have made them continue in the work stream. Removal of these inadequacies and constraints is crucial to the growth of agriculture in all developing countries, including India.

2. SCOPE OF THE STUDY

An attempt has been made to analyze the nature and extent of employment of female workers in agriculture in both taluks under study. Special attention is paid to assess whether the differences between the male and female workers in employment, wages and working conditions are due to gender discrimination. Therefore the results would throw light on the special problems of female workers and possible remedies will be identified. Further, the study would show the extent of unemployment, underemployment and exploitation of labour of either sex, due to the special characteristics of agricultural works.

3. OBJECTIVES

1. To study the socio-economic characteristics of women agricultural labour households in the selected threetaluks of Sivagangai District.
2. To understand the nature and extent of employment of women agricultural labourers in the selected three taluks of Sivagangai District.
3. To assess the extent of discrimination of women in employment and wage rate (operation-wise) and
4. To compare the minimum and actual wage; actual and expected wage

4. METHODOLOGY

Sivagangai district of Tamil Nadu was chosen for the study for reasons. First, the researcher was familiar with and had easy access to the areas. That reduced cost of work and facilitated an in-depth analysis. Secondly, the district is primarily an agricultural district with 76 per cent population depending on farming either directly or indirectly for their livelihood. Nearly 30 per cent of the total populations are women labourers. Therefore, the selection of area provided the scope for an analysis of labour problems, especially women labour in agriculture. Several government-sponsored schemes were in operation, benefiting the farm sector. Availability of irrigation facilities enhances the scope for and high wages to the farm workers. Therefore the conditions of labour vastly differ between irrigated and dry areas. Sivagangai district very distinct areas, totally This enabled the researcher to study the impact of irrigation on labour.



5. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The present study aims to probe into the work environment of the labourers in Sivagangai district. One characteristic feature of agricultural labour is that only men perform some jobs, while only women perform others but both men and women do few jobs. It creates a disparity in wage rates between the male and female workers. It brings down the bargaining power of women workers and reduces them to the state of marginal, intermittent or reserve labour, which is mostly unorganized. Discrimination within the labour market is the focus of attention of this study. By discrimination within the market it is implied that, workers who are distinguished by some characteristics such as sex, caste, status etc. that do not affect their present capacity but are treated less favourably in a given job than others who have no greater capability but are not marked-off by the characteristics. Thus discrimination exists in a labour market when persons with differences in productivity are paid equal wages. The most important types of labour market discrimination are in wages, days of employment and occupational characteristics. However, wage and employment discrimination are the outcome of occupational discrimination. In agricultural labour force, participation of both men and women is not uncommon. However there are important differences between the male and female workers in agriculture, in the nature of works done, rate of participation, wage rate and income earned. Female workers do relatively less hard physical work, they are paid lesser wage rate, and are constrained by time to be shared between their responsibilities at home and out of it. Further, in the agricultural labour households, women go to work to help men and to supplement their income and they do work not paid for, the wage rates are to be imputed. Women manage to meet the scarcity of labour during peak season of demand in agriculture and to find non-farm employment in the off-season. Thus, their annual income forms a significant share of their family income, but they have little say in spending it. The present study is also a modest attempt to find out the factors responsible for the existence of wage and discrimination in agricultural labour market. It pays special attention to the problem of female labour at home and at the working place. Thus, gender discrimination in agricultural labour market in an important area of focus taken up for scrutiny.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS OF THE RESPONDENTS

Table No-1: Socio-economic status of the respondents

Socio-economic factors	Particulars	In numbers	In percent	total
Age	Below 20 years	20	7	300
	20 – 40 years	150	50	
	41 – 60 years	105	35	
	Above 60 years	25	8	
Marital Status	Married	257	86	300
	Unmarried	43	14	

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Number of Members in the family	1	10	3	300
	2	55	18	
	3	53	18	
	4	170	57	
	5 and above	12	4	
Educational Qualification	Primary School	49	16	300
	Middle School	15	5	
	Higher Secondary	5	2	
Community	BC	31	10	300
	MBC	22	7	
	SC	227	76	
	ST	4	1	
	Others	16	6	
Type of Family	Nuclear	253	84	300
	Joint	47	16	
Daily wage	100 – 200	273	91	300
	Above 200	16	5	
Monthly income of the respondent	Below 2000	12	4	300
	2001 – 4000	74	25	
	4001 – 6000	198	66	
	Above 6000	16	5	
Earning Members in the family	1	64	21	300
	2	185	62	
	3	41	14	
	4	8	2	
	5 and above	2	1	
Account	Bank	256	85	300
	Post Office	20	7	
	Booth	24	8	
Own house	Yes	286	95	300
	No	14	5	
Type of house	Tiles	75	25	300
	Asbestos	76	25	
	Terrace	124	41	



6. FINDINGS

The socio-economic conditions of women agricultural labourers are given in Table-1. It is found that the number of women agricultural labourers in the age group of 20-40 years was 50% and about 35% of the women labourers belonged to the age group of 41-60 years and 8% of the respondents belonged to the age group of above 60 years and only 7% of the women agricultural labourers were of the age group below 20 years. It is found that number of married women labourers was 86% and 14% of the women labourers were unmarried. The size of the family members shows that 3% of the respondents were 1 member, 18% of the respondents have 2 members, 57% of the respondents have 4 members, 18% were again 3 members and 4% of women labourers have 5 and above members in their family. 77% of the women agricultural labourers were illiterate and only 16% of the women labourers have primary school education, 5% and 2% of the women labourers have middle school and higher secondary education respectively. This was due to the poverty of their parents. The women could not go for higher education. In Erode Taluk nearly 76% of the women agricultural labourers were from scheduled Caste (SC) community. This is mainly because they are from low income, landless category that fully depends on agriculture for their livelihood. Only 10% of the respondents were from BC community. About 84% of the respondents had come from nuclear family and only 16% of the respondents come from joint family. The participation of females in a nuclear family is found to be more than that in the joint family. It may be due to the reason that in the nuclear they get the opportunity to participate as they do not have heavy domestic responsibilities. But, in joint families, their domestic responsibility is so high that they hardly get time to participate in the activities.

It is found from the study 91% of female agricultural respondents in Erode Taluk had their daily wage between 100-200. More than 66% of female agricultural labourers have their monthly income between 4001-6000. Around 25% of the respondents belong to 2001-4000 monthly income category. 62% of the respondents have 2 earning members in their family. 21% of them have only 1 earner member and only 14% of the respondents have 3 earning members. Earner members in the family are vital for deciding living conditions.

Majority 85% of the female agricultural labourers have account in bank. This is because for getting wages of MGNREGA scheme, to get subsidy for cylinder and for self -Help Group transactions, an account in a bank is must. Around 95% of the respondents from Erode Taluk have their own house. While looking at the type of house, 41% of the respondents have terrace house with concrete roof, along with bathroom and toilet facility indicates the good standard of living. It is because the labourers have benefitted from the Indira Awaas Yojana.



7. REASONS FOR ACCEPTING LOWER WAGE THAN MEN FOR THE SAME WORK

Table-2: Reasons for accepting lower wage than men for the same work

(Weighted Score Ranking Analysis)

S.No	Reasons	Score	Rank
1.	Men were doing physically hard type work	1359	I
2.	Traditional Practice	1313	III
3.	Biological Weakness of Women	1331	II
4.	Preference for agricultural operations is more among female workers	1304	V
5.	Unable to report for duty on time	995	X
6.	Seasonal nature of demand for labour	1230	IX
7.	Unorganized nature of the farm labour	1307	IV
8.	Unable to do the jobs like the use of farm machinery	1240	VIII
9.	Difficulty in irrigation	477	XV
10.	Works which require the intensive use of spades	1295	VI
11.	Any work during night time	1263	VII
12.	Own social responsibilities	911	XI
13.	Have to cook 2-3 times a day	539	XII
14.	Have to prepare tea many times in a day	480	XIV
15.	Women feed, swaddle, loves, caresses, washes and lull the child to sleep in routine	507	XIII

The main reason for accepting lower wage than men for the same work is men were doing physically hard type work. The biological weakness of women was given second rank with the score of 1331 points. The third rank with the score of 1331 points was given to traditional practice. fourth, fifth and sixth rank with the score of 1307,1304 and 1295 points was given to unorganized nature of the farm labour, for the preference for agricultural operations is more among female workers and works which require the intensive use of spades, respectively. Seventh, eighth and ninth rank with the score of 1263,1240 and 1230 points was given to any work during night time, unable to do the jobs like the use of farm machinery and seasonal nature of demand for labour respectively. The reason unable to report for duty on time with the total score of 995 points was given tenth rank. Eleventh, twelfth, thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth rank were given to own social responsibilities, have to cook 2-3 times a day, womenfeed, swaddle, loves, caresses, washes and lull the child to sleep in routine, have to prepare tea many time a day and difficulty in irrigation, respectively.



8. PROBLEMS FACED BY AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS

Agricultural labourers encounter enormous number of problems.

- The chief among them being long working areas,
- long distance walk,
- lack of sufficient work throughout the year,
- compulsory completion of work,
- low wages for women,
- less bargaining power,
- physical weakness,
- heavy physical work,
- excess heat,
- scolding if late,
- harm due to insects,
- allergy due to poisonous herbs,
- lack of training and wages are not given in time.

9. SUGGESTIONS FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF AGRICULTURAL LABOURER

The following suggestions can be made for the improvement of the socio-economic position of the agricultural labourers:

- Better implementation of legislative measures
- Improving the bargaining position
- Resettlement of agricultural workers
- Creating alternative sources of employment
- Protection of women and child labourers
- Public works programmes should be for longer period in year
- Improving working conditions
- Regulations of hours of work
- Credit at cheaper rate of interest on easy terms of payment for undertaking subsidiary occupation
- Proper training for improving the skill of farm labourers

10. CONCLUSION

Agricultural labourers are not organized like industrial labourers. They are illiterate and ignorant. They live in scattered villages. Hence they could not organize in unions. Women produce not mostly goods and services but

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are the prime sources of accelerating human race. Thus, from the point of view of increasing labour force as well as of involving themselves in production and service activities, their active participation cannot be overlooked. However, the rural women have been under represented in the development process and particularly this is true in case of India. The male-dominated society never recognizes their proper contribution. Insurance and old age pension facilities should be created exclusively for women agricultural labourers.

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