

Socio-Economic Status of Rural Women Agricultural Labors in Puducherry Region

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Abstract: This study is an attempt to analyze the socio-economic condition of rural women agricultural labours in puducherry region. The major objective of this study is to understand the socio-economic condition of women agricultural labourers in Puducherry region. For this study both primary and secondary data were collected. Secondary data were collected from census of India (2001-2011), national sample survey, directorate of economics and statistic, Puducherry and for primary data three case studies were done by using purposive sampling. This study also uses simple methodology of ratios and percentages to explain the variables dealt with. The finding of the study reveals that the wages of agricultural labourers the number of days they are employed in a year and their income earned annually are lower than that of their counterparts in the industrial as well as service sector. Regarding unemployment it was found that the problem of unemployment under employment and the consequent migration of agricultural labourers seen as a general problem faced by agricultural labours. It was also found that the women agricultural labourers are more acute and they are vulnerable to several ways by balancing themselves between the daily domestic household Chorus and rendering their labour outside. Migration by rural men to urban areas or to neighbouring states to escape from poverty traps has increased the number of women participant in agriculture who has to carry the full burden of earning income and managing households for their families.

Keywords: Agriculture, Rural Women Agricultural Labour, Socio-Economic Status, Wage Structure, Technology and Displacement, Puducherry Region.

1. INTRODUCTION

Strong economic growth is a pre requisite for human development for any country because it only provides the required resources for improving the capability of people through better education, health and other social services. This helps the income earning opportunities of individuals. However, the benefits of economic growth have not equitably benefitted people across all section of society. Unless there is a progressive public policy initiative to achieve maximum welfare gains for all people irrespective of class, caste or gender, whatever be the economic growth the fruits of benefits will be enjoyed by few without benefitting the vast majority of the population. Sustained economic growth is possible only when agricultural growth supplemented the overall economic growth. Evidence shows that “developing countries which have achieved sustained economic growth are generally the countries in which the rate of agricultural growth exceeded population growth“(HDR in South Asia, 2002).

Agriculture is one of the most significant contributors to the Indian economy. It is the only means of living for almost 60% of the employed class in India. The economic reforms, initiated in the country during the early 1990s, have put the economy on a higher growth trajectory. Annual growth rate in GDP has accelerated from below 6 per cent during the initial years of reforms to more than 8 per cent in recent years. This has happened mainly due to rapid growth in non-agriculture sector. However, the workforce engaged in agriculture between 1980-81 and 2006-07 witnessed a very small decline; from 60.5 per cent to 52 per cent. In current scenario the role of women has been increased. Now days their participation in agricultural work has been increased, but the problem is even after working a whole day in the agricultural

field, they were given very less wage because of which they are not able to improve their socio-economic status. Now a days woman are facing lots of problem like health, education, credit availability etc. Thus it is very important to look after this issue in order to improve their standard of living.

2. RURAL WOMEN AGRICULTURAL LABOUR

Rural women are key agents for development. Rural women play a key role in food production and form a large proportion of the agricultural work force globally. They play a catalytic role towards achievement of transformational economic, environmental and social changes required for sustainable development. But limited access to credit, health care and education are among the many challenges they face.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

The following are the major objectives of the present study:-

- The present study has the following objectives:
- To understand the socio-economic condition of women agricultural labourers in Puducherry region.
- To study the wage structure of women agricultural labour and the nature of problem encountered by rural women
- To study the impact of technology in the displacement of labour
- To suggest some policy interventions.

HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY:

- The socio economics status of rural women agricultural labours not high.
- There are no down turns of agricultural employment

LIMITATION OF THE STUDY:

The present study is confined to the rural women agricultural labourers of Puducherry region and therefore may not be true for other regions of Puducherry or for the rest of the country as there is a lot of variations in the agro climatic conditions and other variables besides policy intervention of different magnitude.

3. METHODOLOGY

The present study is confined to the Puducherry region of the Union Territory in general and concentrates on the rural areas of the region in particular. The study uses simple methodology of ratios and percentages to explain the variables dealt with. In order to have an understanding of the changes graphical presentation of the data is also done. The study mainly uses secondary source of data census of India, national sample survey, directorate of economics and statistic, Puducherry. In order to have an understanding of the status of rural women we have also conducted a case study of three rural residents who are experienced and knowledgeable and residing in that area for a long period so that we can get details of transformation taking place in the villages and the status of women. The respondent for the case study is selected purposively. However, due caution is paid before selection of the respondent. Several rounds of investigations were done before selecting the person for the case study mainly keeping our objectives of the study.

4. SURVEY OF LITERATURE

The agricultural labor households constitute an important segment of the rural population; the share of such households in the total rural households increased from 30.70 per cent in 1993-94 to 32.23 per cent in 1999-00. They possess virtually no human and physical assets and derive their livelihood from wage paid manual labor in agricultural activities. Among different economic groups, they are the least organized, most vulnerable, economically disadvantaged and highly impoverished (H.R. Sharma, 2001). NFARM employment on real wage earnings of adult female labor could be ascribed to two reasons. First, female agricultural laborers do not benefit much from the expansion in rural non-farm employment opportunities as Compared to their male counterparts in that they have relatively low level of education and skills to access non-farm jobs (Lanjouw and Shariff, 2004). Second, since rural non-farm employment opportunities are quite often available outside the village, many female laborers find it difficult to avail them. On the other hand, growing agriculture

in conjunction with non-farm employment opportunities tightens labor market and create more demand for female agricultural laborers, which ultimately leads to an increase in their daily wage earnings. These results are consistent with the findings of other studies that have reported positive effect of the proportion of workers employed in the rural non-farm sector and negative effect of the proportion of agricultural labor households on their wage earnings (Bhalla, 1993; Parthasarthy, 1996; Sharma, 2001; Lanjouw and Shariff, 2004). Leela Gulati (1978) examined the condition of working women in India and the value of their labour. She found that the children of the agricultural labor households too continued the same occupation despite whatever education they had been able to receive. She also found that hunger, disease and indebtedness are an integral part of the life of the women labor. Sudarshan Reddy and Girija Rani (1982) tried to work out the workdays of female in different economic activities and domestic work according to different categories of household such as agricultural households, artisan households and agricultural labour households and also compared the workdays of females with males. Taking economic and domestic activities together, women work for more number of days in a year and longer hours in a day as compared to men. The study also reveals that the females work days are higher among cultivator families compared to artisan and agricultural labour families. Krishna Ahoja Patel (1979) and Ela, Bhatt (1985) have analyzed the influence of crop pattern, agrarian relations and technological progress on the conditions of women labor. They opined that technological progress has the dual effect of widening women's employment opportunities and at the same time pushing them into less skilled and less mechanized occupations.

TABLE-1 WORK PARTICIPATION IN PONDICHERRY

REGION	MALE						FEMALE					
	1991	RANK	2001	RANK	2011	RANK	1991	RANK	2001	RANK	2011	RANK
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
PUDUCHERRY	50.94	3	53.65	1	56.22	1	16.27	1	18.50	1	20.11	1
KARAIKAL	51.15	2	52.65	2	53.71	2	13.02	3	15.16	2	17.33	2
MAHE	39.34	4	44.81	4	48.64	4	7.18	4	8.24	4	9.66	3
YANAM	51.75	1	52.32	3	53.19	3	15.10	2	10.28	3	6.22	4

Source: census of India, 2001, 2011.

The work participation rate for both male and female for Pondicherry is given from the above data table we can conclude that in 2011, this percentage of female workers engaged as agricultural labourers has increased from 16.27 to 18.50 in 2001. Similar trend is noticed also for the other regions of the union territory. As we are interested in the status of women agricultural labourers, a classification of the main workers into different categories will give idea an about the women engaged in different occupations as main workers. The table below gives the details of distribution of main workers.

Table – 2 DISTRIBUTIONS OF MAIN WORKERS BY CATEGORY IN PUDUCERRY

SI NO	YEAR	TOTAL POPULATION	MAIN WORKERS								TOTAL MAIN WORKERS
			CULTIVATORS		AGRICULTURAL LABOURS		HOUSEHOLD INDUSTRY		OTHER SERVICES		
			MALE	FEMALE	MALE	FEMALE	MALE	FEMALE	MALE	FEMALE	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
2	2001 CENSUS	974,345	9,409 (12.41)	1,102 (0.35)	36,631 (11.54)	22,963 (7.24)	2,988 (0.941)	2,380 (0.75)	196,177 (61.81)	45,717 (14.40)	317367
3	2011 CENSUS	1247953	9187 (23.16)	1,576 (3.97)	33,410 (84.17)	17,197 (43.32)	3,520 (8.87)	2,853 (7.19)	26,0292 (658.3)	71,654 (180.6)	39689

Source: Census of India, 2001, 2011.

From the above table it is clear that, there is an increase in the number of agricultural labourers. The preparation of other workers is also on the increase this is a way falls us that the erstwhile cultivation who are marginal and small farmers, unable to cultivate their land which is without any proper irrigation coupled with high cost of cultivation alienated their land to rich farmers and cultivation their land to rich farmers and became agricultural to eke out their living the women are the worst affected in this process because now they lost the freedom of employment and have to work in others laud according to the wires and fancies of landlord.

TABLE – 3 DISTRIBUTIONS OF MARGINAL WORKERS BY CATEGORY IN PUDUCERRY

SI NO	YEAR	TOTAL POPULATION	MARGINAL WORKERS								TOTAL MARGINAL WORKERS
			CULTIVATORS		AGRICULTURAL LABOURS		HOUSEHOLD INDUSTRY		OTHER SERVICES		
			MALE	FEMALE	MAL E	FEMAL E	MAL E	FEMAL E	MALE	FEMAL E	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
2	2001 CENSUS	974,345	25,288 (56.0)	228 (0.50)	161 (0.35)	7,171 (15.2)	260 (0.56)	711 (1.58)	7491 (16.7)	3,780 (8.39)	45090
3	2011 CENSUS	1247953	846 (1.85)	490 (1.07)	9384 (20.4)	8400 (18.3)	1519 (3.31)	527 (1.16)	15765 (34.41)	8875 (19.3)	45806

Source: census of India 2001, 2011

The following data table illustrates the distribution of marginal workers by categories. In this table the researcher classified the whole marginal workers into four different sub groups as cultivators, agricultural labours, household industry and other service. From the above data table it comes to know that out of total population 974345, the marginal workers have been distributed in four different categories in which the participation of female workers in cultivation is very less as compared to men workers. In agricultural labours we can see a large difference between male and female workers that is the population of female workers in agricultural activities is too large compared to men workers. In the field of household industries the participation of female workers are higher than the male workers.

Thus the various related information regarding the present study have been presented above with authentic data at this state level. This chapter gives a bird's eye view of rural women agricultural labour in Puducherry region. It is quite evident that the status of women agricultural labourers is not comfortable. On the others the condition is becoming poor. From a status of cultivator, many such households have become agricultural labourers. Moreover, the wage structure is such that women's are always paid a lower wages compared to men though they perform the similar operations in agricultural.

CASE STUDY OF WOMEN AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS:

For the present study three case studies has been done in order to get a deeper understanding.

Findings of the case study:

- According to them most of the agricultural operations are now mechanized and displaces labour.
- Mechanisation has reduced labour absorption to a very great extent which cause the male members migrates too far off places seeking employment in non-agricultural sector.
- Agricultural operations are seasonal and therefore, employment opportunities are restricted to peak seasons.
- Earlier it used to be direct contact between the land lord and the labour. But, now, middleman emerged in the engagement and there is no direct relationship between landlord and labour which in turn affects the wage they receive.
- The mechanisation of agricultural operations has affected the bargaining power of the workers.
- The availability of employment is seasonal and during lean season they either remain unemployed or go to neighbouring areas looking for employment. While this is the general situation, when sickness comes the condition is still worse.
- Most of the agricultural land is getting converted into housing plots by real estate promoters.
- The number of days and hours work varied significantly between male and female labourers. On an average the number of days a male labour in a year was about 150 days, while it was about 100 days for female labourer.

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- When responding to questions relating to minimum wages act all were of unanimous opinion that they are not aware of any such thing.

It is quite evident that over a period of three generations of involvement in agricultural activities, a lot of changes have taken place and now many agricultural operations are mechanised and labour is displaced from these operations. Thus male labourers are rendered unemployed forcing them to migrate outside their village in search of employment. Also, this is a way reduces their bargaining power. Unless some affirmative interventions are made, the status of agricultural labour in general and women agricultural labour in particular will not show any improvement.

5. FINDINGS

The followings are the major findings of the present study:-

- With regard to their standard of living, the wages of agricultural labourers the number of days they are employed in a year and their income earned annually are lower than that of their counterparts in the industrial as well as service sector. Therefore, the agricultural labourers are finding it difficult even to meet the bare minimum expenses with their earnings.
- It was found that the problem of unemployment under employment and the consequent migration of agricultural labourers seen as a general problem faced by agricultural labours.
- It was also found that the women agricultural labourers are more acute and they are vulnerable to several ways by balancing themselves between the daily domestic household Chorus and rendering their labour outside. Unlike their male counterparts they are not able to migrate early.
- Migration by rural men to urban areas or to neighbouring states, to escape poverty traps has increased the number of women who have to carry the full burden of earning income and managing households for their families.

6. CONCLUSION

The studies at the all India level showed that the female work participation rate has increased according to the NSS 55th round and from the data available from Agricultural Wages in India (AWI), the micro level studies through light on the condition of women labourers, the problems they encounter as a family member and in doing the daily household chorus and in the society by selling their labour in farm and non-farm activities. It is clear from the survey that the status of rural labour.

The participation of women in agriculture depends on a number of factors such as the type of activity, the crop in question, the particular geographical area, socioeconomic status of the family and whether the agricultural production is of subsistence or cash crop

With the help of case studies the specific aspects the women agricultural labour face was explained with the help of Case studies. It is quite evident that over a period of three generations of involvement in agricultural activities, a lot of changes have taken place and now many agricultural operations are mechanised and labour is displaced from these operations. Thus male labourers are rendered unemployed forcing them to migrate outside their village in search of employment. Also, this is a way reduces their bargaining power. Unless some affirmative interventions are made, the status of agricultural labour in general and women agricultural labour in particular will not show any improvements.

7. SUGGESTION

- Since their wages are very low practical revision of wages should be carried out- into account the inflationary situation. This is not just for female agricultural labour alone but generally for all agricultural labourers.
- Agricultural labour household should be provided with free rice up to 20kg along with groceries at subsidised rate which will go long way ameliorating their poverty.
- The labours were suffering from many diseases. It is therefore suggested to provide medical assistance to these household. The extension of prime ministers insurance scheme and the accident insurances scheme can make these financially inclusive. This should also include maternity benefits.

- Due to lack of latrines poor household go for open defecation. It is therefore suggested to make provision a scheme now extended through centre government to their households of latrines to these agricultural labour household.
- Often in off season women labours face unemployment, thus women labourers can be provided with some skill training by the government so that they can be absorbed in viable non-economic activities.

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