

PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS IN INDIA

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Abstracts

Women form an integral part of the Indian workforce. As per Census 2011, the total number of female workers in India is 149.8 million and female workers in rural and urban areas are 121.8 and 28.0 million respectively. Out of the total of 149.8 million female workers, 35.9 million females are working as cultivators and another 61.5 million are agricultural laborers. Of the remaining female workers, 8.5 million are in the household Industry and 43.7 million are classified as other workers. The work participation rate for women is 25.51 percent as compared to 25.63 percent in 2001. The Work Participation Rate of Women has reduced marginally in 2011 but there is an improvement from 22.27 percent in 1991 and 19.67 percent in 1981. The work participation rate for women in rural areas is 30.02 percent as compared to 15.44 percent in urban areas. In most rural India,(Census2011) women work as agricultural and family farm laborers, in addition to performing nearly all the childcare and household duties. Longer working hours for women or increased work intensity can have detrimental effects on their health and, in turn, their ability to care for their children.

"Women's agricultural work could potentially have negative outcomes, especially for the young child whose nutrition depends more on the mother's time for breastfeeding and supplementary feeding. The double burden of work and care often leads to a time trade-off between the two," said Professor Rao.

Keywords: Women Participation Agriculture India

Introduction

Indian agriculture is characterized by the heavy pressure of the population. About 60 percent of the total population of the country is directly or indirectly dependent on agriculture. One of the most distinguishing features of the rural economy of India has been the growth in the number of agricultural workers, cultivators, and agricultural labors engaged in crop production. The phenomena of underemployment, under-development, and surplus population are simultaneously manifested in the daily lives and living of agricultural workers. Agricultural workers constitute the most neglected class in the Indian rural structure. Their income is low and employment irregular. Since they possess no skill or training, they have no alternative employment opportunities either. Labour is the most important input in increasing production in traditional agriculture. In the early stage of development, since the land was available a plenty increase in labour supply led to the clearing of more land for bringing it under cultivation. Agricultural laborers are the socially and economically poorest section of society. Agricultural labourer's households constitute the historically deprived social groups, displaced handicraftsmen, and dispossessed peasantry. They are the poorest of the poor in rural India. Their growth reflects the colonial legacy of underdevelopment and the inadequacies of planning intervention in the past. They remain largely unorganized, and as a result, their economic exploitation continues. Their level of income, the standard of living, and the rate of wages have remained abnormally low Thus, the farmworkers cannot bargain for securing a fair wage level.

Women are the backbone of the agricultural workforce but worldwide her hard work has mostly been unpaid. She does the most tedious and back-breaking tasks in agriculture, animal husbandry, and homes. Her enlightenment will change the face of rural India. The Indian agricultural sector accounts for 13.9% of India's gross domestic product (GDP) and employs just a little less than 54.6% of the country's workforce. The agricultural sector is the largest employer of women. The

majority of the female workforce (84 percent) works in rural India. A very large share (73 percent) of this female workforce toils in the agricultural sector, mostly (96 percent) in rural areas. In most farming systems, females participate in all phases of agricultural production, although their roles (including decision-making) and control over resources and incomes vary greatly from place to place. In India, agriculture contributes about sixteen percent (16%) of the total GDP and ten percent (10%) of total exports. Over 60 % of India's land area is arable making it the second-largest country in terms of total arable land. Thus agriculture in India is the key industry and in recent times with the implementation and initiatives of various government policies, NGOs and private agencies immense growth is recorded in this industry. The scenario of agriculture has completely changed with the change in time but for centuries one thing that didn't change is the visualization of women as key labour in this industry. The agriculture sector as a whole has developed and emerged immensely with the infusion of science and technology. But this latest emergence is not capable of plummeting the ignorance of women labour as an integral part of this industry. Gender discrimination in the employment sector is enduring, with an overwhelming majority of women working within the boundaries of informal sectors.

Review of literature

Padmaja Raddi (2003) focuses on the working conditions of agricultural women, and their familial background covering socio-economic conditions. These rural women who work on the farm participate in a wide range of farm activities by slogging alongside men in the field as well as taking care of the home and children, thereby performing a dual role of a homemaker and a partner in the farming activities outside the home.

Yadav and Kaushik (2006) conducted a study in the Rewari district of Haryana state on the role of performance of farm women in wheat crops. The study revealed that the total days of different activities in a season ranged from one day to 20 days, the maximum days being spent on weeding followed by harvesting. The total time spent by women was maximum on harvesting (75hrs), followed by weeding (50hrs), irrigation (24 hrs), and storing (10.5 hrs). The least time was spent on threshing, winnowing, plant protection, fertilizer application, and sowing (less than 10 hrs/season). The study concludes that as women mostly do jobs that are tedious, monotonous, and require manual labour while technical activities are taken over by men, women need to be trained in technical aspects as well to handle farming operations independently.

Tripathy.S et.al., (2006) reported that the majority of farm women were middle age group, illiterate, backward classes, having marginal landholding and agriculture as the main occupation. The majority of farm women knew high-yielding variety. The study concluded that the socio-economic status of the farm women is very low. The studies shed the light on positive benefits obtained from women's integration into the agricultural work plan despite the studies that revealed the proposal positive impart have not indicated, social network among the peoples.

Significance of the study

Women play a dual productive role as unpaid labour at home and in the fields and as paid laborers outside the home. Waged workers are often poorly paid, with wages will below those earned by industrial workers, lower even than the amount required to subsist. Agricultural employment is often unstable and temporary. Agricultural women laborers working and living conditions are often poor. In many parts of the world, agricultural workers are denied fundamental human rights: the right to freedom of association, to organize, and to collectively bargain with employers. Agricultural women workers are typically excluded from active participation in the decision-making process inside a home, and also on farms. Agricultural workers have wage discrimination. Women workers are paid less than men workers. They are dispersed, unorganized, and generally have poor bargaining power, due to seasonal work. Circumstances force many of them to borrow from time to time, from private sources either for consumption purposes or to meet social obligations and some of them end

up as bonded labourers. Women do work in agricultural operations more than what is recorded by official agencies. Thus, women at large continue to suffer from social and economic deprivation. This calls for evolving some strategies for survival and social dignity, welfare and self-reliance, and changes in the economic and social participation of rural women. This study proposes to propagate the inherent component of women's status, in terms of employment, wage as well as workplace discrimination and unaccounted laborers.

Objectives of the present study.

1. To analyze the season-wise employment of women labour in agriculture
2. To examine the distribution of women workers in India.

Methodology

The study is based on only secondary data which were collected from books, journals, government reports, websites, and NSSO data.

Season-Wise Women labour Employment in Agriculture

There are three main agricultural seasons wise in the study area namely Viruppu (Kharif), Mundakan (Rabi), and Punja (summer). The women labourers got maximum employment in agriculture during Kharif and Rabi seasons. In kharif, they got employment an average of 57.62 days and in Rabi for 54.91 days. In summer they got employment an average of a man 9.96 days. Altogether the women laborers got 122.49 days of employment in agriculture in a year which accounted for only 33.56 percent of the total days in a year. They got maximum employment days in June (22.79 days) and September (19.03 days) in kharif season and in October (21.73 days) and January (17.87 days) in Rabi season as these were the peak months of transplanting and harvesting. They got the least employment in February and May. In February they got only 0.5 days of employment and in May they had virtually no employment. The summer season was the off-season for agriculture. All the women agricultural labourers understudy got involved in agriculture during the months from June to January. But during the months from February to May, only a few of them got involved in agriculture as there was no crop cultivation in these months. In February only 8 women labourers got employment in agriculture. The Women got employment as an average of 61 and 60 man-day in March and April respective etc.

General Characteristics of Women labourers in Agriculture in India

The majority of the women labourers (83.4%) were found to be in the age group of 35-54 years. About 80 percent of the women laborers were married and 12.5 percent were widows. The rest were either unmarried or separated from their spouse. More than 50 percent of the laborers had a primary level of education. Only 19.2 percent laborers were illiterate. About 76.7 percent of the women laborers belonged to nuclear families. The average family size of the sample labour households was 4.54 members. Among the women laborers 85 percent belonged to the backward caste category and 15 percent belonged to the scheduled caste category. Among the women labourers 97.5 percent of women had agriculture labour as their main occupation. The rest of them did both farming and labour activities. The majority of the labourers (97.5%) worked as casual labour. The rest of them worked as cultivators and as casual labour. The women labourers were mostly involved in activities requiring no skill. The women labourers participation in labour unions and religious unions. Some Labourers also had membership in SHGs, cooperative societies, labour welfare boards, etc.

Table-1
Women's Work participation in India 1961-2011.

Census Year	Female India
1961	27.9
1971	14.2
1981	19.7
1991	22.7
2001	25.7
2011	25.5

Source: Government of India Census Reports

Table 1 show that the female work participation rate in India has been much lower than the male work participation rate. From table 1, it can be observed that the female work participation rate in India has drastically declined from 27.9 percent in 1961 to 30.2 percent in 2011. This means that female work participation in 2011 has been than half the rate at the beginning of the century, women worker participation rate although there were ups and downs in various years.

Table-2
Rural Women Work participation in India 1961-2011.

Census Year	Female India
1961	31.4
1971	15.5
1981	23.2
1991	26.1
2001	30
2011	30.79

Sources GOI Census Reports

Table2 reveals a fall in the WFPR for females during 1961-2011. One of the factors is the non-recognition of women's laboures and the difficulties stemming from not being able to distinguish between their household non-economic and economic activities. Second, it is the result of low remuneration that is both an outcome of their involvement in unpaid work as household members and helpers will an offshoot of the associated socio-cultural perception of the dignity of labour concept whereby declaration of women's working status is viewed as dishonorable or a matter of shame. The vast majority of women who work are employed in what is termed as an unorganized or informal sector sometimes considered being a residual sector and the poor conditions of their work.

Table-3 Distribution of Women Workers in India 1961-2011

Year	Total Women Workers	Cultivators	Agricultural Labourers
1961	212467	33103 (55.7)	14171(23.9)
1971	263900	9266 (29.6)	15794(50.5)
1981	321357	14932 (33.2)	20768(46.2)
1991	402813	22871(34.5)	28833(43.6)
2001	495738	41299(41.51)	50093(50.35)
2011	149877381	35985916(24.01)	61589482 (55.21)

About 75 percent of the Indian female population is from rural areas which took part actively and belonged to small and marginal farmers and landless agriculture. Table3 indicates that 50.35 percent of women are working, and in agriculture laboures 41.51 percent are cultivators, but it

increased to 55.21 and cultivators decreased to 24.01 respectively in the year 2011. Though they are from rural areas their contribution towards agricultural production and development is noteworthy.

Conclusion

The study concludes that the female work participation rate in agricultural sectors has drastically declined from 27.9 percent in 1961 to 25.5 percent in 2011. This means that female workers are moved from agricultural activities to non-agricultural activities. Besides, the laborer is a wage difference for the same type of between male and female workers which discourage female workers to involve in agriculture.

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