



Socio-economic conditions of women agricultural labourers in Nellore district of Andhra Pradesh: An analytical study

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Abstract

India is the second the largest part populous country of the world and has changing socio-economic condition and political demographic and morbidity patterns that have been illustration global thought in current years. Now, the agriculture contributes approximately one-fifth of the total Gross Domestic Product (GDP). It provides the means of livelihood to about two third of the country's population. Since long time agriculture is the prime occupation in India as well as Andhra Pradesh, even today about 58 per cent of the population relied on it as primary occupation. The agricultural development is an essential factor for the economic growth of India, the India's Planners State that agriculture is emphasized in every plan. The agriculture can also compensate the problem of unemployment. Though in recent times enacted MGNREGA, 2005 provides 100 days guarantee of employment in a year, there is great deal of fraud in issuing job cards. The problem of agricultural labourers is part of the wider problem of unemployment and under-employment in rural areas. The present study for agricultural women labourers the questionnaires were served and also interview was conducted by the researcher in order to gather the necessary data. The study is conducted among the agricultural women labourers in the Nellore district of Andhra Pradesh. A stratified random sampling method was adopted for selection of the respondents. In this, contexts were selected from 4 select villages of Jaladanki Mandal of Nellore district of Andhra Pradesh. It can be concluded that the socio-economic conditions of the women agricultures labourers is critical. In this regard, this paper is devoted to articulate the socio-economic conditions and problems of the women agricultural labourers in the study region. This study is relied on both the secondary and primary data for its analysis.

Keywords: socio-economic, women agricultural labourers

Introduction

India is the second the largest part populous country of the world and has changing socio-economic condition and political demographic and morbidity patterns that have been illustration global thought in current years. The agricultural labourers represent the largest part neglected class in Indian rural structure. Since they hold no skill or training, they have no alternative employment opportunities. One of the most characteristic features of the economy of India has been the increase in the number of agricultural labourers, cultivators engaged in crop production. The observable fact of underemployment, under-development and excess populace are at the same time clear in the daily lives and living of the agricultural labourers. They generally get low wages, environment of work put an excessive load on them, and the employment which they get is extremely irregular. Within society, a large number of agricultural landless labourers belong to BC, SC and ST communities.

The agriculture is the vertical backbone of the country. Major part of the country's population earns its livelihood from agriculture. Our country has a wide and very old setting of agriculture of about 10 thousand years. At present in terms of agriculture production the country holds second position across the world. The agricultural production in India encompasses field crops, fruit crop, plantation crop, livestock, forestry, fishery etc. So overall it is a huge industry which recruits or engages 52 per cent of overall manpower of India. The rural population of our country is mostly dependent on agricultural activity. Despite of the fact that there has been steady slump in the contribution of agriculture in country's GDP, Indian agriculture continues to remain the leading industry in the country contributing vastly in the socio-economic growth of India. States like Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Haryana, Bihar and West Bengal are the leading states in terms of agricultural contribution of the country followed by the rest. Thus agriculture in India is the key industry and in recent times with implementation and initiatives of various Government policies, NGO's and private agencies immense growth is recorded in this industry. The scenario of agriculture has completely changed with change in time but from 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. In developing countries like India, agriculture continues to absorb and employ 2/3rd of the

women work force but fails to give them recognition of employed labour. The women labour force in developing nations still faces the oppressive status of being majorly responsible for family and household maintenance. In addition to that their contribution of being an agriculture labour is suppressed under the status of family labour who works in farm in addition to her regular household chores. These problems of the rural women are further accentuated by the tribulations of illiteracy, underdevelopment, unemployment and poverty. Despite of the major productive women labour force in agriculture their needs and problems are somewhat ignored by the rural development initiatives. The multitasking potentiality of women labour brought significant propositions for agricultural productivity, rural production, economic vitality, household food security, family health, family economic security and welfare. Many of the systematic studies identify the trends of working women labour in agriculture.

The agricultural labour occupies the lowest place in the socio-economic structure of the rural set-up, mostly persons belongs to Backward Castes, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. They have no resource base and are mostly landless. The Sixth Plan highlighted a fact that small and marginal tenants cultivated 73 percent of the operational holdings as against 23 percent of work done by agricultural labourers on the holdings of middle and upper class land holders. The backwardness of agriculture forced even the small farmers to join the ranks of agricultural workers. The number of agricultural workers had continuously increased ever since due to poor returns from agriculture and division of small holdings of land due to increasing agricultural population in the country.

Definition of Agricultural Labour

The term agricultural labour is very difficult to define. According to the national commission on labour, an agricultural labour is one who is basically unskilled and unorganized and has little for its livelihood other than personal labour thus, persons whose main source of income is wage employment fall in this category. In the census of India 1961, all those workers were included in the category of agriculture workers who worked on the farms of others and received payment either in money or kind. The 1971 census excluded those people from agricultural labourers for whom working on the farms of others was a secondary occupation.

Classification of Agricultural Labour

The classification of agricultural labour in the following chart-1

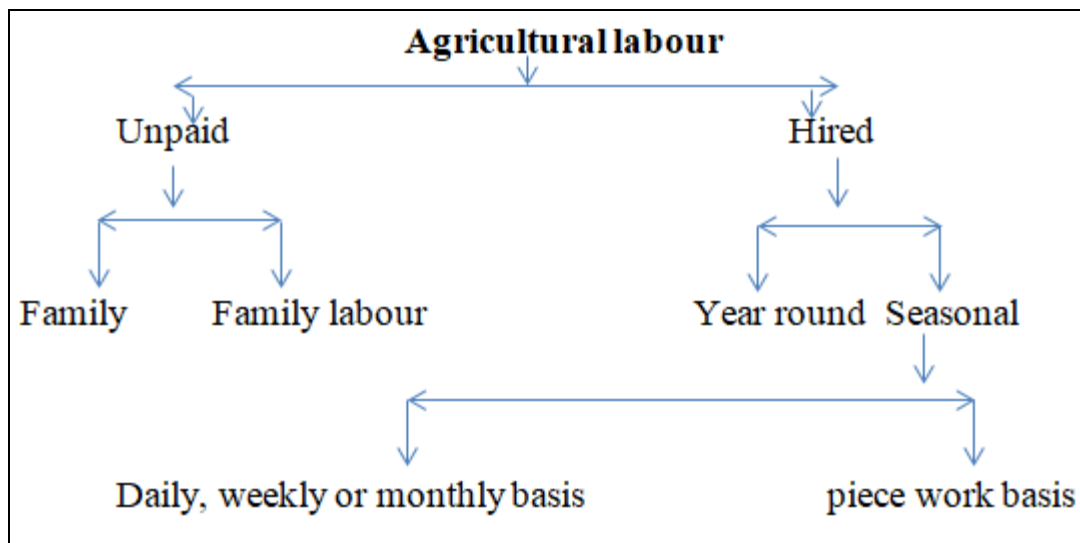


Fig 1

Characteristics of Agricultural Labour

The main Characteristics of agricultural labour are as:

- The agricultural labour is highly migratory in character;
- The agricultural labourers are basically, unskilled and consequently their bargaining power is low. Thus the supply is highly elastic;
- The agricultural labour is widely scattered, unorganized and unable to make strong union;
- The agricultural labour is difficult to be covered by any rules and regulation adopted by the Government such as minimum wage cut;
- The employer of the agricultural labour himself may not be a person of high means;
- Most of the labourers belong to back ward classes, Harijans and Tribal people etc. and
- The nature of employment of agricultural labourers is seasonal. Hours of work in agriculture have been found to be unduly long particularly during the peak agricultural seasons. In fact, there is no regularity in house of works which depend on the goodwill and co-operation between the workers and employments and local custom.

Before Independence, their position was nothing better than that of serfs. Landlords and Zamindars exploited these labourers for their benefit and treated some of them as slaves or bonded laborers and forced to continue the generation after generation. After 71 years of independence, the situation has slightly improved. Though even now the class of women agricultural labourers is the poorest and resource less class in rural areas. They remain unorganized and the economic exploitation of these labourers continues. The level of income, the standard of living and rate of wages remained abnormally low but the working conditions unhygienic. In the absence of alternative sources of employment, they are forced to depend on landlords who consequently dictate terms. Since their supply is excessive in relation to the demand for them, they have to settle for extremely low wage. Now day's women agricultural labourers are being migrated from Bihar to other developed regions of the country for better wage rate and employment opportunity resulting acute scarcity of agricultural labourers in Andhra Pradesh.

Since independence, India has been trying to reduce the level of unemployment rate in rural areas by initiating development measures and strategic options to eradicate poverty. The essential problems of the rural economy are low income, low productivity and be short of permanent employment. Though in recent times enacted MGNREGA, 2005 provides 100 days guarantee of employment in a year, there is great deal of fraud in issuing job cards. Moreover, muster rolls are not maintained accurately and work is not provided to job seekers who really are in need of such support. Every so often incidence is found in which fake names of workers are included and the work was being done with the help of machines which is cost effective. Use of JCB's, explosives, etc., in the place of man power was reported. Also for how many years surveillance should be taken under the said Act to provide employment is not clear. The planned effort to alleviate the agricultural labourers lot has failed because it consisted of temporary solutions disparate to the general pace and direction of economy as a whole. To succeed agricultural labourers policy has to be an important part of the overall policy of development. This programme for the longer term can then be supported by other short-term programmes aimed at guarantee, in the intervening time, a more reasonable minimum wage to farm labourers, food and clothing at more practical prices through disciplined promotion the social order, and offseason employment opportunities for earning additional income. The dimension of the problem of agricultural labourers disagree from region to region, depending on such factors as demands of population, availability of land for cultivation, differences in the extent of irrigation and double cropping, fertility of land, cropping patterns and opportunities available for seasonal migration and for employment outside agriculture. The considerable amount, the extensive underemployment that stay alive, and the fact there is enlarge in population has borne unkindly on this part of the labourers population. There is need for specific policies addressing the needs of part-time farm employments which will have a greater ability of success in providing boost for rural employment and economy. The problem of women agricultural labourers is part of the wider problem of unemployment and under-employment in rural areas.

Objectives

1. To find out the socio-economic conditions of the women agricultural labourers in the study area; and
2. To study the problems faced by women agricultural labourers in Nellore district.

Methodology

The stratified random sampling techniques were followed. In this, contexts were selected from 4 selected villages (Annaram, Chamadala, Gattupalle and Somavarappadu) of JaladaniMandal in Nellore district of Andhra Pradesh. The present study is based on primary data. Now in the study area 200 respondents were interviewed using the questionnaire and reviewed with secondary data collected from women agricultural labour in Nellore district of Andhra Pradesh. The interview schedules were distributed to Households and collected data are coded, tabulated and analyzed with statistical tools like simple percentage, ranks and averages. The distribution of the respondents by their socio-economic conditions of sample women agricultural labour is presented in Table-1.

Table 1: Distribution of the Sample Women Agricultural Labour by their Socio Economic Status in Nellore District

Variables	Sub Group	Number	Per cent
Age	18-25	6	3.00
	25-35	41	20.50
	35-45	82	41.00
	45-55	55	27.50
	Above 55	16	8.00
	Total	200	100.00
Religion	Hindu	87	43.50
	Muslim	38	19.00
	Christian	75	37.50
	Total	200	100.00
Educational Status	Illiterate	98	49.00

	Primary	56	28.00
	Secondary	41	20.50
	Higher	5	2.50
	Total	200	100.00
Type of Family	Nuclear	161	80.50
	Joint	39	19.50
	Total	200	100.00
Marital status	Married	165	82.50
	Unmarried	27	13.50
	Widow	8	4.00
	Total	200	100.00
Type of Houses	Hut	-	-
	Kutcha	25	12.50
	Pucca	68	34.00
	Mixed	107	53.50
	Total	200	100.00
Ownership	Own	168	84.00
	Rented	32	16.00
	Total	200	100.00
Daily Wages	Below 350	78	39.00
	Above 350	122	61.00
	Total	200	100.00
Monthly Income(Rs)	Below 2500	21	10.50
	2500-5000	179	89.50
	Above 5000	-	-
	Total	200	100.00
Monthly Expenditure (Rs)	Below 2500	14	7.00
	2500-5000	139	69.50
	Above 5000	47	23.50
	Total	200	100.00
Monthly Savings (Rs)	Below 2500	36	18.00
	2500-5000	--	--
	Above 5000	--	--
	No savings	164	82.00
	Total	200	100.00

Source: Filed Data

From the Table-1 shows that the sample women agricultural labour and majority of women agricultural labour (41 per cent) in the age group of 35-45 years, 20.50 per cent between age group 25-35 years, 27.50 per cent in the age group of 45-55 years and only 8 per cent of the women agricultural labour in the age group of above 55 years; based on the religion, 43.5 per cent of the women agricultural labour are Hindus, 19.5 per cent are Muslims and 37.5 per cent of the women agricultural labour are Christians; based on the education 49 per cent of women agricultural labours are illiterates, 28 per cent of women agricultural labour is primary, 20.5 per cent of women agricultural labour are secondary and 2.5 per cent of women agricultural labour higher qualifications of women agricultural labour in the study area; the most respondents are (80.50 per cent) of nuclear family and remaining also joint families(19.5 percent); the marital status observed that 82.5 percent women agricultural labour are married, 13.5 per cent are unmarried and only 4 per cent are widows; the type of houses of women agricultural labour found that no respondents huts, 12.5 per cent kutcha houses, 34 pucca houses and 53.5 per cent mixed in houses of the respondents; the ownership of houses in which the agricultural women the majority of women had their own houses (84 per cent) and rented houses (16 per cent); the majority of the respondents (61 per cent) get the daily wages in above Rs. 350/- and 39 per cent respondents below Rs.350/- get the daily wages; the income level observed that 10.5 per cent member below Rs.2500/- and 89.5 per cent between Rs. 2500-5000/-; the expenditure level observed that 7 per cent member below Rs.2500/-, 69.5 per cent between Rs. 2500-5000/- and 23.5 per cent above Rs. 5000/-; the saving observed that only 18 per cent respondents below Rs.2500/- and no savings respondents in the study area.

Problems of Women Agricultural Labour

In India as well as study region, the women agricultural labourers have been facing the various problems but it is not easy to find out the most severe problem which the agricultural labourers facing in the field. To find out the most severe problem they faced in the study region, researcher has employed Weight Point Score Method. The problems of sample women agricultural labour are presented in the following Table-2.

Table 2: Problems of Women Agricultural Labour in Nellore District

S. No	Problems	No	Per cent	Rank
1	Discrimination in wages	5	2.50	12
2	Health weakness of women	9	4.50	9
3	Incidence of Child labour	8	4.00	10
4	Less opportunity sources of employment	22	11.00	4
5	Low wages	14	7.00	6
6	Men were doing physically hard type work	10	5.00	8
7	Migration of Rural labour	18	9.00	5
8	Non-availability of MGNREGS Jobs	25	12.5	3
9	Poverty / Debt	12	6.00	7
10	Problem with landlords	6	3.00	11
11	Unable to do the jobs like the use of farm machinery	31	15.5	2
12	Unemployment during off season	40	20.0	1
	Total	200	100.00	

Source: Filed Data

From the Table-2 expressed that the problems faced by agricultural women labourers wise distribution of the respondents out of the total 200 respondents in each category, it is observed that problems faced by agricultural women labourers the majority of respondents is faced by problem unemployment during off season (20 per cent), followed by unable to do the jobs like the use of farm machinery (15.5 per cent), the non-availability of MGNREGS Jobs (12.5 per cent), the less opportunity sources of employment (11 per cent), the migration of Rural labour(9 per cent), the low wages(7 per cent), the poverty / debt (6 per cent), the men were doing physically hard type work(5 per cent), the health weakness of women(4.5 per cent), the incidence of Child labour(4 per cent), the problem with landlords(3 per cent) and the discrimination in wages(2.5 per cent) in the study area.

The problems rank wise observed that the unemployment during off season (1 Rank), followed by unable to do the jobs like the use of farm machinery (2 Rank), the non-availability of MGNREGS Jobs (3 Rank), the less opportunity sources of employment (4 Rank), the migration of Rural labour(5 Rank), the low wages(6 Rank), the poverty / debt (7 per cent), the men were doing physically hard type work(8 Rank), the health weakness of women(9 Rank), the incidence of Child labour(10 Rank), the problem with landlords(11 Rank) and the discrimination in wages (12 Rank) in the study area. Further, it is sadly to note in the main problem of the unemployment during off season that the majority of women agricultural labourers in the study area.

In this study conclude that the problem faced by women an agricultural labourer is not so good in, their living standard and income is very low. The wages are found to be varying on the gender basis and the kind of work they perform. To improve the women agricultural labourer working condition, to improve the development of rural areas like better irrigation faculties, water, employment, sanitation, housing and road facilities etc. To improve the conditions, Government should take proper steps for various aspect for women agricultural labourers, like wage pattern, hours of works, improve the living conditions and overcoming the natural factors like flood, draughts and erosion etc. The women agricultural labourers status is low by all social economic conditions. Hence the women agricultural labourers play an important to role in agriculture sector where the production depends on both the women agricultural labourers and landowning farmers.

The women agricultural labourers are taking low quality of food in the district. Health depends more or less on the quality of food. They fail to take the minimum nutritional requirements of 2,400 calories per person per day. Their caloric intake of diet indicates a deficiency of the normal requirements. Owing to this deficiency in their food, they fall on many kinds of diseases and affected their health and efficiency. Then, they have lack of adequate recreation facilities also. The standard of living of agricultural labourers in the study area is very low. With their small incomes, they can't expend to have proper maintenance of their families. The family budget of the agricultural labourers is the high percentage of the total expenditure on food. Then average monthly income of an agricultural workers family is very low almost negligible in the district. This income does not permit him to maintain a normal diet. The percentage of educated labour is also low. In order to raise their standard of living, it is necessary to take up and adopt several measures and programmes. The several measures and programme are listed below:

- The accurate provision of social security services like those connected with hospitals, drinking water, essential consumer goods at lower rate, education, family planning facilities etc.;
- The land is provided under reclamation and surplus land acquired through the policy of ceiling will be allotted among them. This should be raised their income and economic conditions and will improve their social status;
- The non-agricultural industries will be developed so as to absorb surplus labour. Credit, technical training etc., will be provided by the Government. The Co-operatives should be organized and strengthened with view to promoting such industries in the rural areas;
- To improve the housing conditions of agricultural labourers, they will be allotted land for housing and supplying with materials for house building. The establishment of suitable industries should be improved on

the economic life of agricultural labourers. This will also help in raising their economic and social status in the District.

The above analysis, however, does not lead to the conclusion that no measures and programmes have been adopted in the past for improving the lots of the women agricultural labourers in the State and particularly in the District. But what has gone wrong with all this is the poor and defective implementation of the plan programmes and measures. No one has made so far a serious effort to use these programmes to help the economically and socially backward labour classes to improve their standard of living and quality of life. Many passing of legislators, random placing of priorities in the planning will not solve the problem. These legislations and priorities have to be backed up by strict and effective implementation so that the minds of the richer sections, the Government employees and political workers have to change that will solve the problems of the women agricultural labourers are facing. Thus, there is necessary for a firm political will and clean administration in the progress of women agricultural labourers from their pathetic conditions to better conditions in the area/State/Nation.

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