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Women Labour in Agriculture in India: Some Facets

¹Dr.D.Swamikannan and ²C.Jeyalakshmi*

¹Associate Professor & Head, Department of Environmental Economics, School of Economics, Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai, India.

²Ph.D Research Scholar, Department of Environmental Economics, School of Economics, Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai, India.

*Corresponding author E-mail id: jeya361987@gmail.com

Abstract

The main occupation is agriculture, because 70 per cent of the population is involved in this occupation. Many women in developing countries are occupied in agriculture. The objectives of the present study are (i) To measure the season wise employment of woman labour in agriculture, (ii) To examine the distribution of woman workers in India. Women play a significant and crucial role in agricultural development and allied fields including in the main crop production, livestock production, horticulture, post harvest operations, agro/ social forestry, fisheries, etc. The nature and extent of women's involvement in agriculture, no doubt, varies greatly from region to region. Rural Women form the most important productive work force in the economy of majority of the developing nations including India. Agriculture sector employs 4/5th of all economically active women in the country. 48% of India's self-employed farmers are women. Women's dependence on agricultural wage labour as a source of income has also increased in the regions with the destruction of many household based industries employing mainly women.

Keywords: Agriculture, Women, India

Introduction

Many women in developing countries are occupied in agriculture. Women's involvement varies widely among different regions, ecological sub zones, farming system, caste, class and stages in the family cycle. Generally, the poorer the family, the greater the involvement of women in agricultural activities. Despite women's significant and crucial role in agricultural development and allied fields, they have virtually no

access to agricultural information, services or production assets and have very limited control over their earnings. In view of the critical role of women in the agriculture and allied sectors, as producers, concentrated efforts will be made to ensure the benefits of training, extension and various programmes will reach them in proportion to their numbers. The programmes for training women in soil conservation, social forestry, dairy development and other occupations allied to agriculture like horticulture, livestock including small animal husbandry, poultry, fisheries etc. Are expanded to benefit women workers in the agriculture sector.

The agricultural sector is the largest employer of women. Majority of the female workforce (84 per cent) works in rural India. A very large share (73 per cent) of this female workforce toils in the agricultural sector, mostly (96 per cent) 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 varies greatly from place to place.

Statement of the problem

The problems of women in agriculture are more acute and distressing manner. When addressed in a women-centric manner, the potential for increased productivity, restoration of ecological balance, for high positive social impacts like increased status, self-confidence and food security for communities which all are increased much more tangibly than working in a gender-neutral manner. The problems relate to land ownership, security of tenure, land quality issues in cases where land ownership is assured, and finally, land management issues in agriculture and the support systems are required. Any changes in land ownership and agricultural patterns affect women far more than men (positive or negative), given the existing gender roles that women are expected to fulfill, mainly related to management of the household in their reproductive roles – fuelwood collection, fodder collection, livestock tending in general, food security needs and so on. Women are equally working with men in agriculture but still there is wage difference between male and female for the same type of work.

Methodology

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

Objectives of the percent study.

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

Review of Literature

The review of literature is pertaining to the study indicates that women play significant role in agriculture.

Zar Quresh (2005) study highlights the importance of education to rural female and proposed to educate women in floriculture and food preservation.

Nisha N (2008).study brings out that the labourers got maximum number of days of employment in weeding followed by harvesting and postharvest operations. The woman labour had maximum unemployed days in summer as this is the off season for agriculture in the study area which compelled the woman labourers to seek employment opportunities like NREGS activities, construction work, tile making etc. The study also concluded that woman unemployment in agriculture has caused a severe impact on the income of labourers, family expenditures, and their saving and debt position. It also caused migration of labourers to other activities and places. Increase workforce participation rates do not always indicates increase in the level of welfare. So it must be accompanied by higher educational capabilities and asset and income.

Tahir Munir Butt et al. (2010) study indicates that the fact that rural women along with men play an important role in the agricultural sector like crop production, livestock production as well as cottage industry. But they have incomplete access to resources, agricultural extension, education services and newest technical knowledge and information sources. Their study was conducted in Okara district of Pakistan. It was

concluded that cultural norms, male dominance and traditional belief system were the major social constraint faced by rural women as reported by more than 80 percent of the respondents.

Season-wise Employment of Women Labour in Agriculture

There are three main agricultural seasons 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 for 57.62 days and in Rabi for 54.91 days. In summer they got employment an average of man 9.96 days. Altogether the women labourers got 122.49 days of employment in agriculture in a year which accounted for only 33.56 per cent of the total days in a year. They got maximum employment days in the month of June (22.79 days) and September (19.03 days) in kharif season and in the months of October (21.73 days) and January (17.87 days) in Rabi season as these were the peak months of transplanting and harvesting. They got least employment in the months of 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 under study got involved in agriculture during the months from June to January. But during the months from February to May only few of them got involved in agriculture as there was no crop cultivation in these months. In the month of February only 8 women labourers got employment in agriculture. The Women got employment as an average of 61 and 60 manday in March and April respective ect.

General Characteristics of Women labourers in Agriculture in India

Majority of the women labourers (83.4%) were found to be in the age group of 35-54Years. About 80 per cent of the women labourers were married and 12.5 per cent were widows. The rest were either unmarried or separated from their spouse. More than 50 per cent of the labourers had primary level of education. Only 19.2 percent labourers were illiterate. About 76.7 per cent of the women labourers belonged to nuclear family. The average family size of the sample labour households was 4.54 members. Among the women labourers 85 per cent belonged to backward caste category and 15 per cent

belonged to scheduled caste category. Among the women labourers 97.5 per cent women had agriculture labour as their main occupation. The rest of them did both farming and labour activities. 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 had participation in labour unions and religious unions. Some Labourers also had membership in SHGs, cooperative society, labour welfare boards ect.

Table. 1 Female Work participation in India 1961-2001.

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

Source: Government of India Census Reports

Table1 shows 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 25.7 percent in 2001. This means that the female work participation in 2001 has been than half the rate in beginning of the century, although there were ups and downs in various years.

Table.2 Rural Female Work Participation in India 1961-2001.

Census Year	Female
1961	31.4
1971	15.5
1981	23.2
1991	26.7
2001	23.1

Source: Government of India, Census Reports

Table2 reveals that a fall in the WFPR for females during 1961-2001. One of the factors is non-recognition of women's labour and the difficulties stemming from not being able to distinguish between their household non economic and economic activities. Second, it is the resultant of low remuneration that is both an outcome of their involvement in unpaid work as household members and helpers as well as an offshoot of the associated socio-cultural perception to the dignity of labour concept whereby declaration of women's working status is viewed as dishonourable or a matter of shame. The vast majority of women who work being employed in what is termed as unorganized or informal sector sometimes considered to be a residual sector and the poor conditions of their work.

Table.3. Distributions of Female Workers in India 1961-2001.

Year	Total Female	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)

Source: As inTable1

About 75 percent of the India female population is from rural areas who took part actively and belonged to the small and marginal farmers and landless agriculture. Table3 indicates that 43.6 percent of women are working, as agriculture labours 34.5 percent are cultivators, but it is increased to 50.35 and 41.51 respectively in the year 2001. Though they are from rural areas their contribution towards agricultural production and development is note worthy.

Conclusion

The study concludes that the female work participation rate has drastically declined from 27.9 percent in 1961 to 25.7 percent in 2001. This means that the female workers are moved from agricultural activities to non- agricultural activities. Besides, laborer is a wage differences for the same type of between male and female workers which discourages the female workers to involve in agriculture.

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