



---

## ROLE OF WOMEN LABOURERS IN AGRICULTURE: A CASE STUDY

Nagarathamma K. S.<sup>1</sup> and Dr. Rekha K. Jadhav<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Research Scholar , DoS in Sociology ,  
Manasagangotri, Mysuru University of Mysore.

<sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor , Dept of Sociology , Maharaja's College , University of Mysore .

### ABSTRACT:

*Increasing participation of women in the labour market in the developed and developing countries has brought out the issue of gender differentials in earnings and discriminated and disadvantaged in many aspects of employment such as employment diversification, quality of employment and wage earnings. The present study would explore the options for solving the problems of women labourers by making a detailed study assessing their employment position in agriculture, unemployment situation during of season, alternate source of employment and consequently suggesting the strategies to improve the present situation. The present study would suggest a number of fair reaching implications for the formulation of appropriate policies to generate employment in both agricultural and non-agricultural sectors, towards creation of better employment for women.*

**KEYWORDS** – vertical backbone , women labourers , Agriculture.

### INTRODUCTION

Agriculture in India is the vertical backbone of the country and is regarded as the largest sector of the country's economic activity. It is the major sector of the state economy, in which the majority of the people earn their livelihood. Agriculture also plays a very important role in industrial development of our nation as it is the source of raw materials for many industries. India's foreign trade is deeply associated with agriculture. Agriculture accounts for about 14.2% of the total export earnings. Agriculture and its related goods contribute 38% in the total exports of the country expanding agricultural production increases the demand for other sectors, notably fertilizers, pesticides, machineries, transportation and communication varying with the level of technology. Indian agricultural continues to be a gamble on the monsoon.

Agricultural labourers, mostly landless constitute the poorest segment of the Indian agricultural population. They belong to the economically backward and oppressed section of the society. They mainly belong to the scheduled castes and other backward communities. They are basically unskilled and unorganised and work in farms of prosperous big farmers as casual workers on wages for a larger part of the year. Factors like rapid growth of population, law of inheritance, rise in the cost of agricultural inputs and decline in the small scale industries have been responsible for this increase, the phenomenon of under employment, under development and surplus population are simultaneously manifested in the daily lives and living of agricultural labourers.



### CLASSIFICATION OF AGRICULTURAL LABOURER'S

The agricultural labourers can be classified into mainly two categories.

Landless agricultural labourers

- Permanent labourers attached to cultivating households

- Casual labourers

2. Very small cultivators whose main source of earning due to their small and sub marginal holdings is wage employment. Temporary or casual labourers are engaged only during peak period of work. They are paid at the market rate. Under the second groups come small farmers who possess very little land therefore have to devote most of their time working on the lands of other's as labourers.

Agricultural labourers especially in smaller villages away from towns and cities are generally unskilled workers carrying on agricultural operation in the countries old traditional wages. Most agricultural workers belong to the depressed classes, which have been neglected for ages. The low caste and depressed classes have been socially handicapped and they never had the coverage to assert themselves. In some parts of India, agricultural labourers are migratory, moving in search of jobs at the time of harvesting.

### Nature of Agricultural Labour Market

The agricultural labour market in India highly segmented. The labour absorption and wage rate depends on

1. Adoption of new technology
2. Population on migration
3. Marketing and other institutional support like credit etc
4. The terms of trade and the extent of the market
5. The probability.

Demand-supply and the quality of life of the labour in the various markets also differ widely. Some studies have reported the increasing casualization of labour, increasing feminization of labour due to male migration, decline in the customary and dependency relationship, increasing integration of labour market due to increased mobility of labour because of development in the means of communication and road infrastructure.

### ROLE OF WOMEN LABOUR IN AGRICULTURE

Women labour has a special labour significance. Women are a vital agent in Indian economy, the labour force participation rate of women is 31.56% less than half of the men's rate of 68.44%. A recent report by the government has revealed that women outnumber men as agricultural labourers.

Women today play a pivotal role in agriculture as female agricultural labour, as farmers, co-farmers, female family labour and farms and farm entrepreneurs. Among rural women workers, 87% are employed in agriculture as labourers and cultivators.

Women have always played a key role in agricultural production, their importance both as workers and as managers of farms has been growing as an increasing number of men move to nonfarm jobs. Women constitute 40% of the agricultural work force and this percentage is rising. An estimated 20% of rural households are *de facto* female headed due to widowhood, desertion, or male out-migration.

Women's role as biologically and socially combined to create four distinct functions that of mother, wife, homemaker and worker. The role of worker is equally important as that of the other three roles. But her role as an active worker producer is rarely acknowledged though it is significant for the family's survival. These unknown and unacknowledged beings are responsible to keep the economy at the steady pace and helped the nation to occupy a significant place in the world.

Women's involvement varies widely among different regions, ecological subzones, farming system, caste, class and stages in the family cycle. Generally, the poorer the family, the greater the involvement of women in agricultural activities, women have extensive workloads with dual responsibility for many of the farm operations and household management (fetching water, cooking and taking care of children). Despite women's significant and crucial role in agricultural development and allied fields, have virtually no access to agricultural information, services or production assets and have very limited control over their earnings.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To measure the season wise employment of woman labour in agriculture
2. To study the impact of seasonal women unemployment in agriculture
3. To elicit the opinions of the women labourers to overcome the problem of unemployment during off season.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Kapoor (1991) highlighted the role of women in rainfed farming in the states of Maharashtra and Gujarat making use of the primary data. It was disclosed by the study that men did all operations that needed more muscle power such as ploughing, threshing and stocking, women did such jobs that were highly strenuous such as weeding, delicate and time consuming jobs like planting seedlings, picking fruits, splitting, winnowing etc. They were also entrusted with the tedious job of preparation of farm yard manure and manuring each plant at the root.

Chauhan (1999) in his paper has examined the contribution of Gaddi tribal women in farm and household economy. The findings of the study revealed that the contribution of women was more than that of men in the activities performed near to their dwellings, which is reflected through more labour days put in crop production, cattle rearing and handloom weaving. The share of women in farm and off-farm income came to the extent of 21% and 12% of the total household income respectively, making an overall contribution of 24% on an average in the household income which did not include their contribution as home maker.

Sharma *et al* (1999) in their paper have attempted to study the magnitude of female labour participation in agricultural and livestock enterprises and also the contribution of female labour to farm income. Cobb-Douglas production function was used to study the resource elasticities and Euler's theorem was applied to estimate the income. In the cultivation of major crops and in livestock rearing, the contribution of female labour to total labour requirements was more than of expect for marketing operations. It was as high as 75% in the case of inter-culture and harvesting. In case of livestock enterprise also, the contribution of the female labour was around 70% for indoor activities. The result further showed that the contribution of female labour to total income in all the operations was higher than that of male labour. The study suggests that training should be given to females of tribal area in farm/ non-farm operations for enhancing farm/gross household income.

Bora *et al* (2000) in their study have examined the role performance of farm women in animal husbandry activities in the selected villages of Tezu development block of Arunachal Pradesh. The study identified a total of 18 roles performed by women. They were fodder gathering, feeding the animals, carrying fodder to the home, cutting and boiling of fodder, watering to the animal, grazing of animals, grinding of feed, bathing of animals, cleaning of seeds, cleaning of mangers, grooming, milking of animals, heating of milk, selling of milk, care of new born animals, care of sick animals and vaccination of animals.

## METHODOLOGY

### 1] Sampling procedure

The study was conducted in H D Kote and from the selected villages randomly a total of 120 women agricultural labourers were selected using multi-stage random sampling technique for collecting the required information.

### 2] Nature and source of data

Evaluating the specific objectives of the study, necessary primary data were obtained from the selected women agricultural labourers through personnel interviews with the help of a free tested and structured questionnaire. The data collected from the respondents include general information, their asset position, their debt position, their source of income, their season wise employment and unemployment days, the pattern and composition of employment, the impact of off-season unemployment etc.

### Description of the Study Area:

H D Kote – HeggadadevanaKote is a talukheadquarters in Mysore district in the Indian State of Karnataka. The totalpopulation as per the census of 2011 is 2, 63,706 out of which 1, 32,746 are males while 1, 30,958 are females. H D Kote has an average literacy rate of 66%, higher than the national average of 59.5%, male literacy is 72% and female literacy is 60%.

### Agriculture in H D Kote

It has four reservoirs: The Kabini, Nugu, Hebbala and Taraka reservoirs. Ironically, agriculture in this taluk is rain-fed mainly because the government has failed to harness the capacity of the reservoirs. Barring the kabini reservoirs, the other reservoirs are always dry. As a result, farmers who could otherwise raise three crops are able to hardly raise one and are perennially in debt. This is one of the main reasons for the economic back wardens of the taluk and distress migration to cities is been common.



### FINDINGS

#### 1] Women labourers in agriculture:

- Majority of the women labourers (83.4%) were found to be in the age group of 35-50 years
- About 80% of the women labourers were married and 10.5% were widows. The rest were separated from their spouse. Whereas 50% of the labourers had primary level of education and only 19.2% labourers were illiterate
- The women labourers 76.7% belonged to backward caste category and around 24.3% belonged to scheduled caste category. Besides the women labourers around 97.5% women had agriculture labour as their main occupation. The rest of them did both farming and labour activities. The women labourers were mostly involved in activities that required no skills.
- All the sample women labourers possessed ration card and voter's ID card and Adhar cards

#### 2] Pattern and composition of women labour in agriculture:

In the study area, the women labourers are involved in crop protection activities. The labourers got maximum number of days of employment in weeding. The labourers were involved in transplanting and harvesting operations in *Kharif* and *rabi* seasons. But they were involved in weeding operation in all the three seasons. The women labourers did the operations mostly by hand. They received wages in cash.

In the study area, the wage rate varied from Rs.200 to 400 per day. The labourers were also involved in operations like irrigation, gap filling and raising of nursery.

#### 3] Impact of seasonal women employment in agriculture:

The seasonal women unemployment in agriculture has caused a severe impact on the income of labourers, family expenditure, their savings and debt position. It also caused migration of labourers to other activities and other places.

Unemployment of women labourers in agriculture during off season resulted in migration of the labourers to non- agricultural activities and agricultural activities in other places. Maximum number of

labourers got involved in non- agricultural activities in their own village. The women labourers preferred to work in their own village. They worked in non- farm activities.

#### 4] Policy implication for women labourers:

The women labourers got employment in agriculture for only one third of the total days in a year. The rest of the days they are unemployment. So steps should be taken to impact entrepreneurship training to the labourers in activities like mushroom cultivation, food processing, dairying etc.

The women labourers are found to be involved in only specific crops and specific activities in agriculture. They are not involved in any mechanical operations due to their lack of skill and as a result they are not getting employment for more number of days. The farmers in the area, the local authorities and the labourers together should work this. Thus they can get higher wages and they will feel a status for their work.

In the study area summer season is the off season in agriculture as the fields are left fallow due to lack of irrigation facilities. Some labourers were involved in employment guarantee programmes and also other non-agricultural activities, but only for a few days. The local authorities should implement the employment guarantee programmes in such a way that the prescribed days of employment is assured.

The seasonal unemployment of women labourers has severe negative impact their income, consumption expenditure and savings. The debt position of the labourers also worsened. So steps should be taken to provide sufficient alternative employment sources for the labourers so that they can earn good income during off season.

The women labourers had many suggestions to overcome the problem of unemployment during off season like proper implementation of employment guarantee programmes, higher wages in agriculture, training to improve skill and for starting entrepreneurship activities and provide loans without much formalities. The suggestions are to be considered and suitable policies are to be formulated to provide the women labourers with wages on par with their male counterparts.

Loans should be provided at low interest rates so that these women agricultural labourers come forward to opt entrepreneurs.

#### CONCLUSION

The agricultural labour market in India is highly segmented. Demand supply and the quality of life of labour in the various markets differ widely. The hilly regions with shifting cultivation and forestry provide job opportunities to the agricultural labour at a lower level compared to the region which have adapted new agricultural strategies. There has been an increasing casualization of labour, increasing feminization of labour due to male migration decline in customary and independency relationship, increasing integration of labour market due to increased mobility of labour because of development in the means of communication and road infrastructure.

Women labour as a special significance in agriculture. According to the UN report, women represent half of the world's population and one third of the official labour force. But they receive only 1% of the world's income and own less than 1% of the world's property. Women today play a pivotal role in agriculture as female agricultural labour, as farmers, co-farmers, female family labour and (with male out migration, widowhood etc) as managers of farms and farm entrepreneurs. Three fourths of the women workers are in agriculture. Among the rural women workers, 87% are employed in agriculture as labourers and cultivators.

Women's involvement varies widely among different regions; ecological sub-zones forming system, caste, class and stage 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 agriculture development and allied fields, they have virtually no access to agricultural information, services or production assets and have very limited control over their earnings. The introduction of green revolution technologies in agriculture differential impact on men and women and women have been adversely affected due to lack of access to technology.

The women in India, especially in rural areas are discriminated and disadvantaged in many aspects of employment such as employment diversification, quality of employment and wage earnings. In this background the present study was undertaken to explore the options for solving the problems of women labourers by making a detailed study assessing their employment positions in agriculture, unemployment situation during off-season, alternate source of employment and consequently suggesting the strategies to improve the present situation.

## REFERENCES

- Badiger, A G.,1999, Participation of women in comparison with men in agriculture and allied activities. M.H.Sc. Thesis,Univ.Agric.Sci.Dharwad.
- Bhalla, S.,1993, The dynamics of wage determination and employment generation in Indian agriculture. Indian J. Agric. Econ.,48[3];448-470
- Bryceson, D. F., 2002, Multiplex livelihoods in rural Africa; recasting the terms and conditions of gainful employment. The J. Mod.African stud.,40[1];
- Chauhan, A. K.andSirohi, S., 1999, Women participation in dairying; Experinces of intensive cattle development programme in Hariyana. Indian J. Agric.econ.,54[3]309
- Chauhan S.K., 1999, Women participation in tribal economy. Indian J. Agric. Econ.,54[3]320
- Chawla, J. S., 1999, Changing education cum employment status of female labourers in rural areas of district Amritsar [Punjab]. Indian J. Agric. Econ.,54[3];319
- Jain,K.K. and Singh, P., 2000, Trends in tenancy and labour use pattern in Punjab agriculture. Indian J. Agric. Econ.,55[3];356.
- Mishra, P. K., Sahu, R. M. and Agrawal, G, P., 1999, Extent and proportion of women's participation in paddy cultivation- A study of kymore plateau and satpura hill of Manhya Pradesh. Indian J. Agric. Econ., 54[3]; 321-322.
- Sharma and Kumar, 2003, Functioning of agricultural labour market; Micro evidence from an agricultural developed region of Himachal Pradesh. Indian J. Agric. Econ., 58[4]; 695-714.
- Sindhu, S. and jayan, K. N., 2004, Work participation of women in coffee cultivation; A study in the hilly tracts of Kerala. Indian J. Soc. Res., 45[1];71-79.



**Nagarathnamma K. S.**

Research Scholar , DoS in Sociology , Manasagangotri, Mysuru University of Mysore.



**Dr. Rekha K Jadhav**

Assistant Professor , Maharaja's College , Dept of Sociology , University of Mysore .