

## **Women Labour in Agriculture in India - An Economic Analysis**

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### **ABSTRACT**

In the country countless of women in developing countries are engaged in agriculture sector. But the Indian Women's contribution vary broadly amongst different region, environmental sub zones, undeveloped system, caste, class and stages in the family phase. The main employment is agriculture, since 70 per cent of the population is concerned in this employment. A lot of women in developing countries are engaged in agriculture. In the country has rural Women form the most important productive work force in the economy of majority of the developing nations as well as India. Agriculture sector employs 4/5<sup>th</sup> of all cost-effectively 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. 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.

### **INTRODUCTION**

India is mainly agricultural country and agriculture plays a vital role in India's economy. As per the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, over 58% of the rural households depend on agriculture as their most important means of livelihood. Agriculture, along with fisheries and forestry, is one of the largest contributors to the GDP. India is the largest producer, consumer and exporter of spices and spice products. For most of the Indian families, agriculture is the most important occupation. As per the data of year 2015, agriculture contributes about 16% to the total GDP and about 14.7% of the total export earnings.

India is a developing country having the second largest arable land in the world. About 60% population of India is depending on agriculture. Because of this only India can survive even during recession period. Therefore, agriculture is a backbone of India. Agriculture contributes in India's national income as well as it helps in generating employment in the country. Only because of the agriculture, India can meet the food demand of ever-increasing population. Agriculture is the main source of sustenance for both developing and under developed countries. Human civilization history shows that the emergence of agriculture was the beginning of settled life. Settlement of nomadic people emerges relationships of family and women assumed a special role in the family and they started to live near rivers for production of food. So, we can say that beginning of agriculture had a special significance in defining and determining the role and status of women throughout the world.

Women are for the most part depends on the accessibility of employment for women. The casual fundamental nature of employment, absence of opportunity to growth, lack of required skills, and isolation of work, unequal wages and corrupt environment of work, commercialization and mechanization of agriculture are some of the problems that have exploited the female agricultural laborers. Attention of enormous number of women in this field also reduced the bargain capacity of laborers. It also affects the wage model of this laborer. Women's occurrence in the labor market is determined by her family circumstances, education, and growth in job opportunity and the normal leveled of fiscal action. Female work attendance in agriculture depends on a severity and related growth of cultivation. Nearly 80 percent of the fiscally active women in sub Saharan Africa and at least half in Asia except West Asia are in agriculture. The Indian censuses categories those employed in agriculture into two broad divisions-cultivators and agricultural laborers.

As per the census 2011, Gujarat's population is 6.04 crore with 3.15 crore males and 2.89 crore females. The total number of workers in Gujarat is 247.68 lakh and the work participation rate is 41 percent, which is higher than the national average of 39.8 percent. About 70.5 percent of total workers are rural based. Out of 247.7 lakh total workers, 203.7 lakh are main workers and the remaining 44 lakh are marginal workers, which consists of 39.3 lakh (89.3 percent) worked for 3 to 6 months and 4.7 lakh (10.7 percent) worked for less than 3 months in the state. During the year 2001, there were about 58.03 lakh of cultivators in the state, constituting about 27.3 percent of total workers. Among the total cultivators, about 32.7 percent (19 lakh) were women and 51.4 percent of total agricultural laborers were women.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

**MANASMANDAL (2013)** in "An experimental study of agricultural labour in India" states that almost half of the world's agricultural labor force comprise of women. They are contributing from production to sale as well as preparation of food. Though usually function of women worker in agricultural was underestimate. Women are working as paid labor or unpaid family member in agriculture in developing countries but they are still facing gender inequalities.

**V. VETRIVEL, R. MANIGANDAN(2013)** to analyses women contribution to the agricultural production of Sagar Island, West Bengal, India. He investigated that women perform range of duties at farm and home, also they work for longer hours than men and yet they get less wages and exploited by landlords. They are treated as sub-servant and discrimination is there for female labors.

**GHOSH (2013)**, in "Female agricultural workers in Assam: A case study of Darrang district" concluded that poor women are contributing more to household income by working as a labor even under poor working conditions and with lower wages to improve the economical conditions of the family. There were no land ownership amongst female and even they do not have any right on their earnings. Women accept to work in farms because they can get employment without proper training or education and it is temporary in nature. It was also proved that in spite of having more shares of females as agricultural labor than men, they get lower wages than males.

**KANAGARATHINAM (2014)** examine the paper women contribution in the agriculture and predictable with the purpose of 45.3% of undeveloped labor strength consists of women but most of them have remained as invisible human resources. To study accomplished that involvement of

Women in farming mounting with time and their status as agricultural labor are now acknowledged. However, wage and working status unfairness is still there.

**CHANDRAMAGOSWAMI (2014)** investigated that around 52% of unorganized workers are engaged in agriculture and allied sectors. Agricultural workers are disadvantages rural groups such as small, subsistence farmers, tenants & sharecroppers, the unemployed and the landless. They get very low and irregular wages, wage discrimination between male & females, no public holiday and no standard daily working hours. In addition, they have very poor working conditions, lack of dignity, seasonal unemployment and harassment issues.

**SWAMIKANNAN AND JEYALAKSHMI (2015)** study about women labor in Indian agricultural sector and found that female work participation rate has declined drastically during last few decades, which shows that female workers are moved from agricultural to non-agricultural activities because wage differences between male and female workers for the same type of work discourages female workers.

## **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

The Indian agriculture has problems of women in agriculture are more sensitive and stressful method. 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 – fuel wood 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.

## **OBJECTIVES OF THE PERCENT STUDY**

1. To study measure rural households depend on agriculture livelihood the employment of women labour in India
2. To examine the distribution of women workers in India.
3. To states that almost half of the world's agricultural workforce comprises of Women in India.

## **METHODOLOGY**

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

**TABLE -1: ANNUAL GROWTH RATE OF VARIOUS CATEGORIES OF WORKERS (%)**

AGR	1981-1991	1991-2001	2001-2011	AVG AGR(1981-2011)
Total Population	2.3	2.0	1.6	2.0
Main Workers	2.5	0.9	1.5	1.6
Marginal Workers	2.4	11.5	2.9	5.6
Non-Workers	2.2	1.8	1.5	1.8
Total CL	1.7	0.4	-0.7	0.5
Total AL	1.5	3.5	3.0	2.7
Total HH	-0.2	8.1	0.8	2.9
Total OT	3.6	4.6	2.8	3.7

**Source:** Census documents from 1981 to 2011; Registrar General, Government of India.

While it is clear from the above analysis that there is no doubt about drastic changes in the structure of the rural economy especially the agricultural workforce, but it is crucial here to know the relative changes in the workforce population to the overall growth in population. Understanding such relative changes would enable the stakeholders to know the gravity of the problem. Table provides the annual growth rates of population with various categories of the workforce. India’s population has grown at an average of 2 per cent from 1981 to 2011. The trend since then shows a decreasing growth rate, from 2.3 per cent between 1981 and 1991 to 1.6 per cent between 2001 and 2011. The question here is about the dynamics of the contribution by various sectors behind the growth of the population. The first segregation is between main, marginal and non-workers that constitute the total population. In regular circumstances, the main workers population is expected to grow but Indian figures shows a dip of 1.5 per cent in the growth rate in the latest census.

Whereas, the marginal workers’ population has increased substantially since 1991 despite their small numbers in the absolute terms (Annex Table 2). The economy is witnessing a steady decrease with respect to the non-workers’ population. This is a good sign as the dependency ratio reduces. However; the significant issue is in the sectoral growth of the workforce. The cultivators’ population has been drastically decreasing both in absolute and in percentage terms since 1991. On the contrary, there has been an upward surge with respect to the agricultural laborers in absolute terms and from growth perspective. Further, the household sector and other sectors have grown well since 10 1991 with other workers gaining the maximum. A shift of workforce from farm to non-farm is a common aspect while a shift to marginal and agricultural labor requires deeper investigation. Therefore, from 2001 to 2011 the change in population was to the tune of 1.6 per cent contributed by a negative growth in cultivators’ population and growth among the rest. Thus, the applicability of structural change is evident in the economy as a whole. Nevertheless, the shift of labourers is not from rural to urban areas but from rural to rural<sup>13</sup>, i.e., due to the existence of a vibrant non-farm sector in rural areas which can reduce travel cost and other associated costs of

moving to urban centers (Sharma and Bhaduri, 2009). It can also be said that the rural attachment and sentiments play a major role in intra/inter rural mobility (Pretty et al., 1996).

**TABLE -2: 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

From table shoes 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. Table analyses the female work participation rate in India has been much lower than the male work participation rate. 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 -3: 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

Table reveals that a fall in the WFPR for females during 1961-2001. One of the factors is non-recognition of women’s labor 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 will an offshoot of the associated socio-cultural perception to the dignity of labor concept whereby declaration of women’s working status is viewed as dishonorable 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 -4: DISTRIBUTIONS OF FEMALE WORKERS IN INDIA 1961-2001.**

YEAR	TOTAL FEMALE	CULTIVATORS	AGRICULTURAL LABOURS
<b>1961</b>	212467	33103 (55.7)	14171 (23.9)
<b>1971</b>	263900	9266 (29.6)	15794 (50.5)

<b>1981</b>	321357	14932 (33.2)	20768 (46.2)
<b>1991</b>	402813	22871 (34.5)	28833 (43.6)
<b>2001</b>	495738	41299 (41.51)	50093 (50.35)

**Source:** Government of India, Census Reports

Table indicate that 43.6 percent of women are working, as agriculture labors 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. As regards 75 percent of the India female population is from rural areas that took part actively and belonged to the small and marginal farmers and landless agriculture.

## CONCLUSION

To find the 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. Women workers have no facilities like regulated working hours, good working conditions, maternity benefits, and medical assistance etc. which are available to organized sector’s female workers. So, work status of female agricultural workers in India is still more or less similar to what it was decades ago.

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