

ISSN: 0976-2744

ANU Journal Of

SOCIAL SCIENCES

Vol. XIV

Issue. 2

July - December 2022



ACHARYA NAGARJUNA UNIVERSITY NAGARJUNA NAGAR, GUNTUR - 522 510

A.N.U. Journal of Social Sciences

Vol. XIV, No.2 JULY - DECEMBER 2022

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Gender Issues in Agriculture and Activity - A Study of Rural Women in Andhra Pradesh

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Abstract

Rural women constitute the most vital workforce in the majority of emerging countries, including India, as their economies grow. In the Indian economy, agriculture is the most major production venture. The agriculture sector employs the majority of the country's economically engaged women. Agricultural activity is carried out by around 63 per cent of all economically active men, compared to 74 per cent of women. (Jyoti Upadhyay, 2014). Women are key contributions to agriculture all throughout the world. Their primary contributions to food production are frequently unnoticed and unappreciated. The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization's (FAO) State of Food and Agriculture report (2014) highlights ongoing challenges for women in agriculture, such as lack of access to resources and infrastructure, lack of decision-making power in the home, and gender biases in policymaking leadership. Agricultural restructuring and land reform, international trade agreements and food trade, land ownership and rural development, and rural feminisms have all been covered in extant documentation of women in the agricultural sector over the last two decades.

Information about successful interventions to improve the situation of women in agriculture, including gender-based evaluations of specific policies and programmes, is also in high demand (Amber J. Fletcher and Wendee Kubik, 2016).

Traditionally, women have played a huge role in agriculture, with about half of the population working in agriculture or allied fields. The majority of agricultural operations are women-specific, yet unfortunately, women are disproportionately hired as agricultural labourers around the world, earning significantly less than men in the same work. Inadequate education, a lack of adequate technology dissemination, globalisation, economic liberalisation, commercialization, urbanisation, political instability, natural disasters, mechanisation of agriculture, decreased agriculture, migration of men to urban areas, and occupational health hazards such as long hours of physical labour resulting in musculoskeletal injuries, pesticide poisoning, and other factors make life difficult for rural women (Shakunthala Sridhara et al. 2009).

In both developing and underdeveloped countries, agriculture is the primary source of revenue. In the current global context, women's

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labour contributes significantly to the agriculture sector. In recent years, women, who make up about half of the Indian population, have become a highly important subject of development literature. The Committee of Feminist Economists was formed by the Planning Commission to analyse facts and analysis of the Eleventh Five Year Plan through a gender lens in order to identify women as a growth agent in India's political economy across all sectors. To seize the chance for quicker, more inclusive growth, both men and women must act aggressively (Gobin Chandra boruah and Biman Kumar Nath, 2014).

Significance of the Study

In the unorganised agricultural sector, rural women are the most vulnerable and neglected group of employees. In any society, women play a vital role. The importance of women in agricultural operations cannot be overstated. They provide about a third of the labour needed in agricultural activities. Their participation in agricultural operations is in addition to their regular domestic responsibilities. Women's contributions to the agricultural sector are mostly unaccounted for because they are not directly compensated (Patnaik S.C. and Sailabala Debi, 1991). Despite its fast expansion in the last two decades, India has one of the world's lowest female labour force participation rates (LFPR), which has been dropping. According to the International Labour Organization, India ranks 121st out of 131 nations in terms of female labour force participation rates (Soundarya Iyer et al. 2022)

The statistical invisibility of women is a fact, echoing the deep-rooted social bias against women, according to a feminist investigation into the subject of women's work. Women's contribution to the economy is 'hidden' since their labour is undervalued, particularly in agriculture and the unorganised sector. Agriculture is still an important source of employment for women. Agricultural labourers account for over half of rural female employees, while cultivators account for 37 per cent. Women contribute to the economy by working harder and for longer hours. Women's job is critical to both the family and the nation. This was emphasised in the report on the State of the World's Women (1985), released at the close of the United Nations Decade for Women. Women are said to do two-thirds of the world's work, earn one-tenth of the world's income, and own less than one-hundredth of the world's property (Neera Desai and Usha Thakkar, 2005).

Review of Literature

According to Praveen Jha (2006), in a largely agricultural country, the well-being of rural labour has a lot to do with agriculture sector improvements. Since the early 1990s, it appears that the neoliberal economic regime has had a negative impact on the rural economy, with frightening implications for the well-being of agricultural labourers, who are already at the bottom of the food chain. Deshpande and Khalil Shah (2007) investigated the agrarian crisis in Indian agriculture and its consequences on agricultural labour. It is reported that the agricultural industry's percentage of GDP has

been dropping, but the workforce in the sector has not been declining at the same rate. According to Prasad Rastogi (2013), women's employment in the agriculture industry is considerably higher than men's, at 63 percent in 2011-12, while there has been a dip in the proportional share of women over time, as male employment has decreased more slowly. In rural Bihar, Anjani Kumar et al. (2015) looked at problems such as job creation, incomes of different types of workers, and the extent of indebtedness and earning levels of workers. Women's employment in the agricultural sector has decreased, while their employment in non-agricultural sectors has increased. Syed Norman Ahmad and Mohd. Murtaza (2018) investigated the trends in female agricultural labour participation. In addition, the research looked into the link between female labour participation and farm mechanisation. The research is being carried out in Uttar Pradesh. Reforms, according to Deepika Jajoria (2015), have failed to provide greater work options for rural women. The number of job openings in the farm sector has decreased as the sector's growth has slowed.

Mahendrader (2017) looked at the issues and strategies surrounding agriculture and reducing poverty. Gender discrimination is considered to be a form of labour fragmentation. Agriculture, rather than absorbing labour, is thought to have a different function to play in improving productivity and wages. Jose (2017) studied the earnings of agricultural field workers, both men and women, in 18 Indian states during 2005-06 to 2015-16. The analysis reveals that

the ranking of States with nominal salaries has stayed nearly same, except that there are some new low-wage States. The same can be said for salary disparities between men and women, which have remained stable throughout time. Gian Singh et al. (2017) investigated various aspects of indebtedness among farmers and agricultural labour households in rural Punjab that had previously been overlooked. It examines the size and distribution of debt among farmers and agricultural labourers, as well as the sources of debt and the amount of debt incurred per household for various objectives. The research also examines and contrasts differences in interest rates paid by different types of farmers and agricultural labourers. A study by Amaresh Dubey et al. (2017) looked into the fall in rural female labour force participation. It is argued that rural women's engagement in the labour force in India has historically been low when compared to other developing countries. Shanmugan and Bhagirath Prakash Baria (2019) attempted to investigate agricultural labour productivity in several aspects, as well as its drivers and, as a result, its consequences for agricultural growth.

Objectives of the Study

The objective of the present study is to explore the problems of women agricultural labourers. The study has examined the various problems faced by the agricultural labourers such as seasonal employment, lack of sufficient alternative employment opportunities, gender-wise discrimination in wage rates, low wage rate

in agriculture compared to non-agriculture, delay in wage payment, mechanization of agriculture, migrated labour and occupational hazards, and average number of days employed in the agricultural sector in a year and percentage of economic contribution of the respondents to the household income.

Methodology

The research is based on primary data. A pre-tested interview schedule is used to acquire primary data. The primary data is collected using a multi-stage random sampling method. The present study is conducted in the undivided Krishna district of Andhra Pradesh. One Mandal

from each revenue division of the district with the largest number of agricultural labourers as of the 2011 Census is chosen for the study. Six villages are chosen at random from each Mandal. A total of 30 sample responders are chosen from each Village. As a result, each Mandal has a sample size of 180 people. The total number of people in the sample is 720. The data is analysed using percentages.

Results and Discussion

Sample respondents are asked to state whether seasonal employment in agriculture is a problem to them. The data shows that about 41 per cent of the sample respondents are agreed that seasonal

Table-1 : Distribution of the sample respondents by problems of women Agricultural Labourers

Sl No	Problems	Opinion of the sample respondents					Total
		Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	
1	Seasonal employment	168	296	205	51	0	720
		(23.30)	(41.10)	(28.50)	(7.10)	(0.00)	(100.00)
2	Lack of sufficient alternative employment opportunities	249	249	79	85	58	720
		(34.60)	(34.60)	(11.00)	(11.80)	8.10	(100.00)
3	Low wage rates in comparison to males	305	319	76	20	0	720
		(42.40)	(44.30)	(10.60)	(2.80)	(0.00)	(100.00)
4	Low wage in agriculture as compared to non-agriculture	224	225	163	108	0	720
		(31.11)	(31.25)	(22.30)	(15.10)	(0.00)	(100.00)
5	Delay in wage payment	266	119	118	217	0	720
		(30.90)	(16.50)	(16.40)	(30.10)	(0.00)	(100.00)
6	Mechanization of agriculture	208	237	146	129	0	720
		(28.89)	(32.92)	(20.28)	(17.92)	(0.00)	(100.00)
7	Migrated labour in getting employment	65	385	58	178	34	720
		(9.03)	(53.47)	(8.06)	(24.72)	(4.72)	(100.00)
8	Occupational health hazards	53	353	189	125	0	720
		(7.40)	(49.00)	(26.30)	(17.40)	(0.00)	(100.00)

Source: Computed from the primary data

employment in agriculture is a problem to them, while about 23 per cent of the sample respondents are strongly agreed to the said statement. Neutral response is received from around 29 per cent of the sample respondents. Merely about 7 per cent of the sample respondents are disagreed to the statement. It is evident from the table that about one third of the sample respondents are strongly agreed that lack of sufficient alternative employment opportunities is a problem to them, while another one third of the sample respondents are agreed to the statement. Less than 20 per cent of the sample respondents are either strongly disagreed or disagreed. It is noticed from the table that about 44 per cent of the sample respondents are agreed to the statement that low wage rates in comparison to males is a problem to them, while about 42 per cent of the sample respondents are strongly agreed to the statement. Very negligible percentage of the sample respondents are disagreed to the statement. It can be inferred from the table that just little over three fifths of the sample respondents are agreed that low wage in agricultural operations as compared to non-agricultural operations is a problem to them, while around 23 per cent of the sample respondents are neutral to the statement. Around one sixth of the sample respondents are disagreed to the statement.

The study has made an attempt whether there is any delay in wage payment. It is noticed that merely just little over one third of the sample respondents are agreed that there is delay in wage payment, while about one third of the sample respondents are neutral to the said statement. It

is interest to note that distribution of the sample respondents by problem as to mechanization of agriculture. It can be deduced from the table that three fourths of the sample respondents are strongly agreed that mechanization of agriculture is a problem to them to get employment, while about 20 per cent of the sample respondents are agreed the same. The study has made an attempt whether the migrated labour causes problem to the sample respondents in getting employment. The table shows that as many as three fourths of the sample respondents are agreed that they are facing problem in getting employment due to migrated labour. Sample respondents are asked to state whether occupational health hazards is a problem to them. It is observed from the table that nearly half of the sample respondents are agreed that occupational health hazards is a problem, while about 7 per cent of the sample respondents are strongly agreed the same. The field survey finds that they are facing body pains, backbone problem etc. due to working as agricultural labourers.

The study has made an attempt to elicit the reasons for being as agricultural labourers (Table - 2). According to the survey, illiteracy is one of the reasons for working as an agricultural labourer for nearly a third of the sample respondents. Availability of work inside the hamlet is mentioned by roughly a third of the sample respondents at the next level. Nearly a fifth of the sample respondents cited poverty as a cause. Other factors cited include a lack of exploitation (12.10 per cent) and ease of employment (3.20 per cent).

In addition, the sample respondents are asked how they would learn about the job opening. Table 3 shows that almost three-fifths of the sample respondents were aware of agricultural labour through their co-workers. Nearly a quarter of the sample respondents said they learned about the job from their relatives. In the case of only about 3 per cent of the sample respondents, their husband is also a source of employment. In the case of about 11 per cent of the sample respondents, the employer approached them directly.

Sample respondents are asked whether they work as individual labour of Mutha (Group) labour. The responses of the sample respondents

are furnished in Table - 4. Majority of the sample respondents are found to be working as Mutha Labour (Group labour) (58.50 per cent), while close to 19 per cent of the sample respondents are working as individual labour. The study also consists of the sample respondents, who are working sometimes as Mutha labour and sometimes as individual labour, constituting around 23 per cent of the sample respondents.

Sample respondents are asked to state the mode of reaching the workplace. Distribution of the sample respondents by mode of reaching the workplace is presented in Table - 5. It is evident from the table that nearly three-fifths of the sample

Table -2 : Distribution of the sample respondents by reasons for being as agricultural labour

Reasons	Number of respondents	Percentage
Availability of work within the Village	225	31.11
Poverty	138	19.17
Easy employability	23	3.21
Illiteracy	240	33.33
Lack of exploration	87	12.08
Total	720	100.00

Source: Computed from the primary data

Table -3 : Distribution of the sample respondents by source of employment to work as agricultural labour

Source of employment	Number of respondents	Percentage
Co-workers	459	63.75
Relatives	166	23.06
Husband	39	5.42
Employer approached	76	10.60
Total	720	100.00

Source: Computed from the primary data

In addition, the sample respondents are asked how they would learn about the job opening. Table 3 shows that almost three-fifths of the sample respondents were aware of agricultural labour through their coworkers. Nearly a quarter of the sample respondents said they learned about the job from their relatives. In the case of only about 5 per cent of the sample respondents, their husband is also a source of employment. In the case of about 11 per cent of the sample respondents, the employer approached them directly.

Sample respondents are asked whether they work as individual labour or Mutha (Group) labour. The responses of the sample respondents

are furnished in Table - 4. Majority of the sample respondents are found to be working as Mutha Labour (Group labour) (58.50 per cent), while close to 19 per cent of the sample respondents are working as individual labour. The study also consists of the sample respondents, who are working sometimes as Mutha labour and sometimes as individual labour, constituting around 23 per cent of the sample respondents.

Sample respondents are asked to state the mode of reaching the workplace. Distribution of the sample respondents by mode of reaching the workplace is presented in Table - 5. It is evident from the table that nearly three fifths of the sample

Table -2 : Distribution of the sample respondents by reasons for being as agricultural labour

Reasons	Number of respondents	Percentage
Availability of work within the Village	225	31.30
Poverty	136	18.90
Easy employability	23	3.20
Illiteracy	249	34.60
Lack of exploitation	87	12.10
Total	720	100.00

Source: Computed from the primary data

Table -3 : Distribution of the sample respondents by source of employment to work as agricultural labour

Source of employment	Number of respondents	Percentage
Co-workers	439	61.00
Relatives	166	23.10
Husband	39	5.40
Employer approached	76	10.60
Total	720	100.00

Source: Computed from the primary data

respondents are reaching their workplace by walk, while close to one fourth of the sample respondents are reaching the workplace through transport provided by the Employer. One third of the sample respondents are reaching the workplace by Husband's bicycle/motor cycle.

As regards average number of days employed in the agricultural sector in a year, the study finds that majority of the sample respondents' average number of employment days in agriculture sector in a year ranges from 120 days to 150 days (54.70 per cent). Less than 120 average days of employment are reported by around 23 per cent of the sample respondents. Merely about one tenth of the sample respondents reported average employment days in a year beyond 180 days, whereas about 12 per cent of the sample respondents reported average employment days as 150-180 days (Table – 6).

The study has made an attempt to know the percentage of economic contribution of the respondents to their household income. Table – 7 presents the data pertaining to the same. It is obvious from the table that just little over half of the sample respondents' economic contribution to the household income ranges from 25 per cent to 50 per cent, whereas about 30 per cent of the sample respondents are contributing less than 25 per cent. Sample respondents, who are contributing more than 75 per cent account for about 8 per cent of the sample respondents, while close to 10 per cent of the sample respondents are contributing 50% to 75% to the household income.

Major Findings

- ❖ The study finds that seasonal employment nature of agriculture is one of the problem

Table – 4 : Distribution of the sample respondents by mode of working as agricultural labour

Mode	Number of respondents	Percentage
Individual labour	135	18.80
Mutha Labour	421	58.50
Sometimes as Mutha labour and sometimes as individual labour	164	22.80
Total	720	100.00

Source: Computed from the primary data

Table – 5: Distribution of the sample respondents by mode of reaching the workplace

Mode	Number of respondents	Percentage
Walk	430	59.70
Employer's transport	174	24.20
Husband's bicycle/motor cycle	116	16.10
Total	720	100.00

Source: Computed from the primary data

- in the opinion of the majority of the sample respondents.
- ❖ Lack of sufficient alternative employment opportunities is a problem to them in the opinion of about two thirds of the sample respondents.
 - ❖ Low wage rates in comparison to males is a problem to them in the opinion of more than four fifths of the sample respondents.
 - ❖ Just little over three fifths of the sample respondents are agreed that low wage in agricultural operations as compared to non-agricultural operations is a problem to them.
 - ❖ Merely just little over one third of the sample respondents are agreed that there is delay in wage payment.
 - ❖ Three fourths of the sample respondents are strongly agreed that mechanization of agriculture is a problem to them to get employment. As many as three fourths of the sample respondents are agreed that they are facing problem in getting employment due to migrated labour.
 - ❖ Nearly half of the sample respondents are agreed that occupational health hazards is a problem. It is suggested that the Government should take stringent steps

Table – 6 : Distribution of the sample respondents by average number of days employed in the agricultural sector in a year

Average No. of days employed	Number of respondents	Percentage
<120	162	22.50
120-150	394	54.70
150-180	89	12.40
180+	75	10.40
Total	720	100.00

Source: Computed from the primary data

Table – 7 : Distribution of the sample respondents by percentage of economic contribution of the respondents to the household income

Percentage of contribution	Number of respondents	Percentage
<25 per cent	218	30.30
25% - 50%	375	52.10
50%-75%	69	9.60
75%+	58	8.10
Total	720	100.00

Source: Computed from the primary data

to avoid gender-wise discrimination in the agriculture wage rates for same kind of work. Further, it is suggested that the Government should encourage more number of women agricultural labourers to work under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme during the seasons, where there is no agricultural work.

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Conclusion

The present study is conducted to examine the employment of rural women in the agriculture sector as labourers. The study finds that illiteracy is one of the reasons for working as an agricultural labourer for nearly a third of the sample respondents. Availability of work inside the hamlet is mentioned by roughly a third of the sample respondents at the next level. Almost three-fifths of the sample respondents were aware of agricultural labour through their coworkers. Majority of the sample respondents are found to be working as Mutha Labour (Group labour). It is evident from the study that nearly three fifths of the sample respondents are reaching their workplace by walk, while close to one fourth of the sample respondents are reaching the workplace through the transport provided by the Employer. Majority of the sample respondents' average number of employment days in agriculture sector in a year ranges from 120 days to 150 days. Just little over half of the sample respondents' economic contribution to the household income ranges from 25 per cent to 50 per cent.

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