

## **Plight of Women Agricultural Labourers in Vallakulam Panchayat, Sivagangai District**

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### **Abstract**

Women are a vital agent in Indian economy. The labour force participation rate of women is 31.56 per cent, less than half of the men's rate of 68.44 per cent. Women today play a pivotal role in agriculture - as female agricultural labour, as farmers, co-farmers, female family labour and as managers of farms and farm entrepreneurs. Three-fourths of women workers are in agriculture. Among rural woman workers, 87 per cent are employed in agriculture as labourers and cultivators. Woman is the moulder and builder of any nation's destiny. They are regarded as the backbone of the rural scene. The gender composition of agricultural wage labour is changing significantly in the era of globalisation. 'Feminisation' of agricultural wage labour is a result of a combination of regionally diverse processes which in many regions began well before the 1990s. In paddy cultivating regions especially, women's labour has always been the major basis of production. But the proportion among women counted as 'main workers' who are agricultural labourers has increased rapidly in relation to that among men since the early 1960s. This trend has been further intensified by the New Economic Policies since the early 1990s. Even after six decades of the development planning very little change has been seen in status of the women in our country. Most of the women are under employed and destitute and have a lot of domestic work load and they are ill paid and their contributions are unorganized. Hence an attempt was made to study the living and working conditions of the agricultural women labourers in the study area.

**KEYWORDS:** Agricultural women labourers, casual labourers, permanent labourers, socio economic profile

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### **Introduction**

Women make essential contributions to the agricultural and rural economies in all developing countries. Their roles vary considerably between and within regions and are changing rapidly in many parts of the world, where economic and social forces are transforming the agricultural sector. They comprise an average of 43 per cent of the agricultural labour force of developing countries. The female share of the agricultural labour force ranges from about 20 per cent in Latin-America to almost 50 per cent in eastern and south eastern Asia and sub-Saharan Africa (knowledge centre.drwa.org)

### **Most farmers in India are women:**

Women, who are almost half of our total population and contribute monetary and non-monetary inputs towards national income, however, occupy low position in the socio-economic index of India. Their role ranges from managers to landless laborers. Involvement of women in agriculture is inversely related to socio-economic conditions of the family, development in the area and scale and type of operations. In

underdeveloped tribal areas, where most of the agriculture is rain fed, the women have the responsibility from production management to marketing of produce like crop and livestock. (Someswar et.al, 2004)

### **Women agricultural laborers in India:**

Women are critical to the well-being of farm households. Women are involved in all aspects of agriculture like crop selection, land preparation, seed selection, planting, weeding, pest control, harvesting, storage and marketing. Agriculture, the single largest production endeavor in India, contributing about 18 per cent of GDP, is increasingly becoming a female activity. Agricultural sector employs 4/5<sup>th</sup> of all economically active women in the country. Forty eight per cent of India's self employed farmers are women. (knowledge.drwa.org) In the Indian Himalayas a pair of bullocks works for 1064 hours, men 1212 hours and women 3485 hours in a year in one hectare farm. This illustrates women's significant contribution to agricultural production.(Rajkishor et.al 2001). According to Swaminathan, the famous agricultural scientist "Some historian believe that it was women who first domesticated crop plants and there by initiated the art and science of farming. While men went out hunting in search of food, women started gathering seeds from the native flora and began cultivating those of interest from the point of view of food, foddors, fiber and fuel".

### **Statement of the problem:**

One of the most serious and depressing problems of rural India is socio-economic conditions of agricultural workers. They are large in number and they are growing and living under the poverty line. They happen to be the most backward; the most exploited and most neglected class of the rural economy. Women labour is an important segment of the total workforce in India. More than 90 percent of the working women in our country were engaged as wage labourers in the unorganized sector. Even after six decades of the development planning very little change has been seen in status of the women in our country. Most of the women are under employed and destitute and have a lot of domestic work load and they are ill paid and their contributions are unorganized. Hence it is necessary to study the plight of women agricultural labourers.

### **Review of Related Literature**

Women labour force has been rapidly growing in agriculture (Wajed Alishah and Romeo L. Saplaco, 2001, Gujala Sudarshan, 2004, Joshi, 2004 Paramjeetkaur, 2007, Joshi 2008). The female wage rate was considerably lower than the male wage rate (Madari, 2003, Krishna and Kumar, 2007, Ray et.al, 2009). The socio-economic conditions of the farm workers worsened because of heavy pressure on land. (Pushparani 2006 Jasuraderkaur, Rangi and Sindhu, 2007, Saikia, 2007 Sattya Sundaram, 2008, Rathindra Nath Pramanik, 2009, Manadhan Nair,2009, Aruna Kanchi, 2010).

### **Objectives of the Study**

- ✓ To find out the growth of women agricultural labourers over the years in India
- ✓ To study the socio –economic conditions of women agricultural labourers in the study area.

- ✓ To analyze the problems faced by women agricultural labourers and suggest suitable measures to improve their conditions.

### Scope of the study

This study would help the common people to understand the importance of women agricultural labourers and help the government to take up appropriate measures to increase their income and improve their living conditions. The problems identified and the appropriate suggestions given by the study would help the government authorities to design suitable techniques to overcome the problems faced by the women agricultural labourers.

### Sampling design and tools of analysis:

The present study is based on primary data collected from 50 samples of Vallakulam Panchayat, Sivagangai District, chosen among 1873 women agricultural labourers by simple random sampling. The study has used different tools of analysis such as Percentages, Trend and Garret Rank.

### Summary of Findings:

#### Growth Rate of Women Agricultural Labourers in India

To analyse the first objective of the study, straight line trend was used. The census data related to the women agricultural labourers in India is given Table No.1

**Table no .1 Growth rates of women agricultural labourers in india**

Census year	Women Agricultural labourers (Thousands)	YC
1951	12694	6871.571
1961	14171	13613.14
1971	15794	20354.71
1981	20768	27096.29
1991	28833	33837.86
2001	50093	40579.43

**Source:** Census of India

The result of the linear equation was  $y=130.00+6741.571 (x)$  Each and every census year that is from 1951 to2001 the growth rate of women agricultural labourers has increased by 6741.571. The number of women agricultural labourers has been continuously increasing mainly to supplement their family income.

### Social profile of the respondents

Percentage analysis was used to analyse the second objective of the study. Among the 50 respondents, 42 per cent of them were between the age group of 25-35. 30 per cent of them were between the age group of 35-45. 14 per cent of them were

between the age group of 15-25, 10 per cent of them were between the age group of 45-55 and 2 per cent of them were between the age group of 55-65. Forty six per cent of the respondents belong to most backward community and 26 per cent of them belong to Scheduled caste. The marital status shows that 60 per cent of them are married and 24 per cent of them are unmarried and 6 per cent of them are widow. Seventy four per cent of the respondents live in the nuclear family and 26 per cent of them live in the joint family. Study on the size of the family shows that 54 per cent of the respondents have 4-6 members, 36 per cent of them have above 6 members and 10 per cent of them have 1-3 members in their family. Religion wise classification shows that 66 per cent of the respondents are Hindu and 14 per cent of them are Muslims. Analysis of residential status of the respondents shows that 60 per cent of the respondents are in own house and 30 per cent of them live in rental house and 10 per cent of them live in leased house. Educational status shows that 80 per cent of them are illiterate, 14 per cent of them have completed primary education and 6 per cent of the respondents are educated up to secondary level.

### **Economic profile of the respondents:**

Data on the occupation of the respondents reveals that 70 per cent of the respondents are working in small size farm while 30 per cent of them are working in large size farm. Labour status of the respondents shows that 70 per cent of them are casual labourers and 30 per cent of them are permanent labourers. The analysis reveals that 54 per cent of the respondents work for 5 hours and 46 per cent of them work for 8 hours per day. The study on the wage shows that 70 per cent of the respondents get daily wage and 30 per cent of them get weekly wages. The study reveals that 60 per cent of them get monthly income between Rs.2000 to 4000, 20 per cent of them get Rs. 4000 to 6000 and 40 per cent of them get above Rs. 6000 to 8000. The study on the income from other sources reveals that 60 per cent of the respondents get income from cattle rearing and 40 per cent of them get income from poultry farming. The analysis on the monthly savings reveals that 66 per cent of them save Rs.300 to 500 and 14 per cent of them save Rs.600 to 800 and 20 per cent of them don't save. Data on the monthly expenditure reveals that 60 per cent of them spent Rs.2000 to 4000 and 10 per cent of them spent Rs. 4000 to 6000 and 30 per cent of them spent Rs.6000 to Rs.8000.

### **Problems of women agricultural labourers:**

To study the third objective of the study viz. to find out the problems faced by the women agricultural labourers, Garret ranking techniques has been used.

**Table No. 2: Problems of women agriculture labourers - Garret Ranking**

Problems	Total score	Mean score	Rank
Low wages	3244.8	64.89	I
Seasonalemployment	2671.84	53.43	II
Long distance	2095.28	41.90	V
Health problem	2440.12	48.80	III

Compulsory completion of work	2156.96	43.13	IV
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Source: primary data

As found in Table no.2 the problems faced by the women agricultural labourers were low wages, seasonal employment, health problems, compulsory completion of work and long distance

### Suggestion:

The following suggestions are given on the basis of the study which can bring a change in the life style of the women agricultural labourers in India.

- Better minimum wage scheme should be implemented in agriculture
- The governments should come forward to introduce housing scheme for the people in the lowest strata as well as for women in agriculture.
- The monthly income of the women agricultural labourers is very less. Taking into account the rise in the price level because of the rate of inflation prevailing in the economy income declines in real terms. These makes the respondents to go for borrowing which again will affect their efficiency. If income increases they meet their basic needs .So there is a need to provide additional employment to the labourers.
- Facilities for checking health should be arranged frequently through the government and voluntary organisation.
- Unlike industrial labour agricultural women labour has no social security no earned leave, no sick leave, no pension, no gratuity. Substantial effort should be directed in this field.

### Conclusion:

The socio economic conditions under which these women live are traditional and exploitative which impede their development and go on lowering their social-economic status day-by-day. The socio economic problems faced by these women rarely attracted the policy makers whose prime interest vaguely appears to be rural development. The impact of technology benefited the rich farmers but the gap between the poor and rich further widened. The above analysis relates to certain facets of agricultural women's life in rural areas, which raises several theoretical questions for a general understanding of the nature of the problems. Women's labour and management roles in agriculture vary from region to region and from crop to crop. The all round development of agriculture is only possible by the active part of rural women who form a significant part of the working class enormous growth in the economic production is witnessed by the orchestrated endeavor of millions of invisible rural working women.

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#### **Web Sites:**

- <http://knowledgecentre.Draworg.in/womenagri.htm>
- Role of women-in- Indian Agriculture [www.vigyanprasai.gov.in/.../](http://www.vigyanprasai.gov.in/.../).