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STATUS OF WOMEN LABOUR IN AGRICULTURE (A case study of Guntur district in Andhra Pradesh)



D.Thirupathaiah¹ and K.Krishore Babu²

INTRODUCTION :

Agricultural workers constitute the neglected class in Indian rural structure. Their incomes are low and employment is irregular, since they possess no skill or training and they have no alternative employment opportunities either. Most of the 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 have the courage to assert themselves. The number of agricultural labourers being very large and skills they possess being meager, there is generally more than surplus supply of agricultural labourers in relation to demand for them. However it is only during the

ABSTRACT

The present study on Status of Women Labour in Agriculture- a case study on commercial crops in Guntur district of Andhra Pradesh State during 2012-13. A total of 80 women agricultural labourers were selected using multi-stage random sampling technique from two mandals namely Mangalagiri and Thadikonda for collecting the required information. The data were collected from the respondents by personal interview method, their season wise employment and unemployment days in agriculture, the pattern and composition of employment, the impact of off season unemployment etc. The results of the study showed that the women labourers got maximum employment in agriculture during rabi season (65.52 days) and kharif season (77.75 days). The women labourers got 155.52 days of employment in agriculture in a year. The labourers got maximum number of days of employment during harvesting (80.25 days) followed by weeding and post harvest operations (38.72 days). They received wages in cash for all operations. They worked for 8 hours a day. The women labourers had maximum unemployed days in summer (108.75 days) as this is the off season for agriculture in the study area. The lack of employment opportunities in agriculture during off season compelled the women labourers to seek alternative employment sources like NREGS activities, flowers picking etc. 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.

KEYWORDS : Agriculture, Women, MGNREGS, Employment, Migration

SHORT PROFILE

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sowing and harvesting seasons that there appears to be near full employment in the case of agricultural labourers. But, once the harvesting season is over, majority of agricultural workers will be jobless especially in areas, where there is single cropping pattern. Due to all the above mentioned factors, the bargaining power and position of agricultural labourers in India is very weak.

In Indian population women constitute 48.27 per cent accounting for 495.7 of whom million, 72.72 per cent live in rural areas, while 45.84 per cent of the female population is illiterate. The labour force participation rate of women is 31.56 per cent, less than half of the men's rate of 68.44

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per cent.

In India the labour force is largely masculine, with only one out of every four workers being a female. 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 women workers are in agriculture. Among rural womenworkers, 87 per cent are employed in agriculture as labourers and cultivators.

Women is the mouldar and builder of any nation's destiny. They are regarded as the backbone of the rural scene. Most of the women perform various types of work for their livelihood and agriculture is considered the biggest unorganised sector where large numbers of rural women take part actively. While women always play a key role in agricultural production, their importance both as workers and as managers of farms has been growing, an increasing number of men move to non-farm jobs. Women constitute 40 per cent of the agricultural work force and this percentage is rising.

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 is undertaken to explore the options for solving the problems of women labourers by making a detailed study assessing their employment position in agriculture, unemployment situation during off season, alternate source of employment and further suggesting the strategies to improve the present situation. The study is undertaken with the following specific objectives. 1. To measure the season wise employment of womenlabour in agriculture. 2. To examine the pattern and composition of womenlabour employed .3. To measure the extent of unemployment during off season and document the alternative sources of employment

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Guntur district of Andhra Pradesh state during 2010-20011. Guntur district was purposively selected for the study as it is the major agricultural district in the state and more than 50 per cent of the total women workforce is employed in agriculture. Based on the highest number of women labourers and high production commercial crops, two mandals namely Mangalagiri, and Thadikonda were selected. From each mandal one village were randomly selected and from each village 40 women labourers were randomly selected. Thus a total of 80 women agricultural labourers were selected using multistage random sampling technique for collecting the required information.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS:

Socio-Economic status of women Agricultural labourers:

The general characteristic features of the women agricultural labourers are presented in Table.1. The study covered 80 women labourers spread living in two villages, one village in each Mandal of Mangalagiri and Tadikonda of Guntur district Andhra Pradesh. It is evident from the table that majority of the women labourers constitute 33.75 per cent belonged to the age group of 35-44 years. About 22.5 per cent were in the age group of 45- 54 years, 12.5 per cent each were above 55 years of age and younger age group and 18 .75per cent were in age group of 25-34 years.

It is observed that 75 per cent of the women labourers were married, 8 per cent of them were widows, 10 per cent of the labourers were unmarried and 3.75 per cent of the labourers were divorced. The educational level of labourers showed that 50 per cent of the labourers had primary education, 31.25 per cent of the labourers were illiterate, 12.5 per cent of the labourers had upper primary education and 6.25 per cent of the labourers

had high school education. It is also observed from the Table-1 that the family type of 82.5 per cent of the women labourers was nuclear family and 17.5 per cent of the women labourers were joint family. The average family size of the sample labour households was 4.64 members. In the study area majority of the labourers belonged to backward caste category which 43.5 per cent followed by scheduled caste category which constituted 37 per cent. Among the women labourers 93.75 per cent was the main occupation of women agriculture labour. Only 6.25 per cent women labourers would engage both farming and labour activities. In the study area 93.75 per cent of labourers worked as casual labour. Only 6.25 per cent worked both cultivators and casual labour. There was no permanent labour in agriculture in the region. As regards to possession of assets by the agricultural labourers it is evident that 80 per cent of sample women labourers possessed ration card, 100 per cent had voter's ID card and 3.75 per cent of labours had agricultural land which is below 0.25 hectare and 12.5 per cent of labourers had gold of below 10 grams

Table.1
General Characteristics of the women agricultural labourers

Distribution	Category	Women labourers	
		Number of labourers	Per cent
Age groups	a. 15-24 years	10	12.50
	b. 25-34 years	15	18.75
	c. 35-44 years	27	33.75
	d. 45-54 years	18	22.50
	e. 55 years above	10	12.50
Material status	a. Married	60	75.00
	b. Unmarried	10	12.50
	c. Separated	0	0.00
	d. Divorced	3	3.75
	e. Widow	7	8.75
Educational status	a. Illiterate	25	31.25
	b. Primary	40	50
	c. Upper primary	10	12.50
	d. Secondary	5	6.25
Family type	a. Joint family	14	17.5
	b. Nuclear family	66	82.5
Caste category	a. S C	30	37.50
	b. ST	10	12.50
	c. OBC	35	43.75
	d. General	5	6.25

Type of Labour	a. Casual labour	75	93.75
	b. Cultivator and Agricultural labour	5	6.25
Persons possessing	a. Ration card	80	100.00
	b. Agricultural land	3	3.75
	c. Gold	10	12.5
Average annual income		48,580	

Source: Primary data

The season wise employment of women labour in agriculture is presented in Table-2. There are three main agricultural seasons in the study area, namely Kharif, Rabi and summer. Cotton and chillies are the major crops in the study area and they are mainly grown in kharif and rabi seasons.

Table-2
Season wise employment of women labourers in agriculture

Season	Employment days per worker	
	Days	Percent
Kharif	65.52	42.13
Rabi	77.75	49.99
Summer	12.25	7.88
Total	155.52	100.00

Source: Primary data

The labourers would secure 65.52 days of employment in kharif season and 77.75 days of employment in rabi seasons. The employment for the labourers in the two seasons showed variation. Generally cotton and chillies crops are sown in between the month of July and August. Most of the labourers are working in sowing transplantation works and weeding works. In the rabi season most of the labours employed under the cotton and chillies picking works which provide highest number of days employment in this season. During the summer season the women labourers are employed only for 12.25 days which is 7.88 per cent. In this season employment can be provided only in the month of March which is a meager number of days. There was on employment for the labourers in the month of May. Thus in the total the women labourers are employed on an average of 155.52 days in an

agriculture year which is 42.61 per cent of the total days in the year which is 7 per cent high when compared to traditional crops like paddy. Hence commercial crops are produced 7 percent high when compared to traditional crops.

Cotton and chillies are the major crops in the study area. The involvement of women labour is high in the commercial crops cultivation. Women labours are mostly involved in the crop production and the men would performed the works like in the application of fertilizers and pesticides and irrigation and look after works and also heavy works like plowing and seed bed preparation of crops. The women labourers are mostly involved in the sowing, weeding, application of fertilizers, harvesting of chillies and cotton works. The operation wise involvement of women labourers is presented in the table- 2.

The operations are very tradious, the women labourers got maximum number of employment days in a year weeding (38.72 days) followed by cotton and chillies harvesting (80.25 days),sowing (12.45 days), gap filling (4.58 days), rosining the nursery (2.5 days), transplantation work (2.54 days). Weeding is one of the major operations in the crop production which would provide 25 per cent employment in crop production. In crop production weedicides applied for control the weeding. As a result, the numbers of employment days have got decreased. Further low and erratic rainfall added more to the decrease of number of employment days. Another major operation in the cotton and chillies picking which is the final stage of crop production.

Most of the women labourers are operated by traditional way picking by hands .Nearly 52 per cent of the employment would be provided by the harvesting stage. The women labourers would do the operations mostly by hands, application of pesticides are operated by power spryer and hand pumps .The women labourers worked for 8 hours with a lunch break. The wage rate of women labourers in the study area ranged between 80-150 this is 30 to 40 per cent less

when compared to men in the study area (200-250).

Table-2
Operations carried out by women labourers in crop production

Operations	Wage rate ranges	Kharif	Rabi	Summer	Total
Raising the nursery	80-100	2.5 (3.82)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	2.5 (1.61)
Sowing	80-100	2.54 (3.88)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	2.54 (1.63)
Transplanting	80-100	12.45 (19.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	12.45 (8.01)
Weeding	100-120	26.2 (39.99)	12.52 (16.10)	0 (0.00)	38.72 (24.90)
Gap filling	80-100	4.58 (6.99)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	4.58 (2.94)
Application of fertilisers	100-120	2.5 (3.82)	5.48 (7.05)	0 (0.00)	7.98 (5.13)
Harvesting	120-150	14.75 (22.51)	59.75 (76.85)	5.75 (46.94)	80.25 (51.60)
Threshing	120-150	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)
Grading	120-150	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	6.5 (53.06)	6.5 (4.18)
Total		65.52 (100.00)	77.75 (100.00)	12.25 (100.00)	155.52 (100.00)

Source: Primary data

Note: Figures in parentheses indicates percentages to total.

Season wise unemployment of women labourer's days in agriculture is presented in the table- 3. During kharif season the women labourers were unemployed for 56.48 days which is 26.96 per cent of the total unemployment days. The unemployed days were maximum during August and July During rabi season the women labourers were unemployed for 44.25 days, which is 21.12 per cent of the total unemployment days. The unemployment days were maximum during the months of October and November in the season. This is the offseason for agriculture in the study area. The women laboures were unemployed for 108.75 days in this season.

Table-3**Season wise unemployment of women labourers in agriculture**

Season	Unemployment days per worker	
	Days	Percentage
Kharif	56.48	26.96
Rabi	44.25	21.12
Summer	108.75	51.91
Total	209.48	100

Source: Primary data

Table-4**Alternative sources of employment for women labourers in agriculture**

Source	No. of labourers involved	Months	Average number of days	Wage rate per day
NREGA	20	December- January	35	80
Domestic work	8	March -April-May	25	80-100
Harvesting in near by village	30	January-March	25	100-150
Picking of flowers	12	March -April-May	40	30-50
Total	70			
Labourers not moved to other jobs	10			
Total labourers	80			

Source: Primary data

Alternative sources of employment for women labourers in agriculture

Because of absence of irrigation facilities in the study region no crop was raised during summer season. It was off season for agricultural activities and women labourers could not find any job in agriculture during this season. As a result the women labourers had to find alternate sources of employment (Table-4). Among the 80 sample labourers, 107 labourers got involved in other activities during off season. About 28 labourers got employment through National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme. They got employment for 35 days at a wage rate of Rs.80/day. They were employed during the months of December to March. The labourers also worked as domestic servants. About 8 labourers were involved in this work. They worked for 25 days and the wage rate was Rs.80-100 per day. The labourers also got employment in agriculture in neighboring villages. In the months of January to March they would go for picking, for about 25 days to the neighboring villages and would earn wages at the rate of Rs.100-150 per day. About 13 labourers were involved in plucking of flower in the same village and neighboring villages in the month of March to May. They worked for 40 days and the wage rate was 30-50 per 5 hours.

CONCLUSION:

The present study on Women labour in agriculture-With reference to Commercial crops was conducted in Guntur district of Andhra Pradesh state during 2010-11. A total of 80 women agricultural labourers were selected using simple random sampling technique from two mandals namely Mangalagiri and Thadikonda for collecting the required information. The data were collected from the respondents by personal interview method, their season wise employment and unemployment days in agriculture, the pattern and composition of employment, the impact of off season unemployment etc. The results of the study showed that the women labourers got maximum employment in agriculture during rabi season (65.52 days) and karif season (77.75 days). The women labourers got 155.52 days of employment in agriculture in a year. The labourers got maximum number of days of employment during harvesting (80.25 days) followed by weeding and post harvest operations (38.72 days). They received wages in cash for all operations. They worked for 8 hours a day. The women labourers had maximum unemployed days in summer (108.75 days) as this is the off season for agriculture in the study area. The lack of employment opportunities in agriculture during off season compelled the women labourers to seek alternative employment sources like NREGS activities, flowers picking etc. 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.

SUGGESTIONS:

1. The women labourers had some suggestions of their own to overcome the problem of unemployment. Majority it is suggested that the NREGS programme should be implemented properly assuring 100 days of work in a year. And this programme must be provided during agricultural off season, which would benefit both for agricultural labourers and other farming communities.

2. It is also suggested that SHG activities should be enhanced and training for developing entrepreneurial skills. Some of them also suggested that existing wage rate in agriculture should be increased and some other required loan at lower interest rate to purchase livestock's and poultry.

3. Women agricultural labourers are unemployed for most of the days in summer. Some labourers were involved in employment guarantee programmes and also other non agricultural activities, but only for a few days. So steps should be taken to provide nonfarm employment for more number of days.

4. Further it is also suggested the local authorities should implement the employment guarantee programmes in such a way that the prescribed days of employment is assured.

5. 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 disbursed quickly and at lower interest rates, sufficient alternative employment sources should be provided in their village itself and skill development programs should be initiated.

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