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Role of Women Agricultural Labourers – A Socio – Economic Scenario

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Abstract

Presently, agriculture contributes approximately one-fifth of the total gross domestic product (GDP). It provides the means of livelihood to about two third of the country's population. Agricultural development is an essential factor for the economic growth of India. India's planners state that agriculture is emphasized in every plan. While agriculture products will grow, its marketable surplus will grower they provide food to the growing population and raw materials to industries. Agriculture can also compensate the problem of unemployment. Hence, this study is placed in this context, aims presenting the Role of Women Agricultural Laborers: A Socio-Economic Scenario. The present study was conducted on 50 samples through the pilot study. For agricultural women labourers the questionnaire were served and also interview was conducted by the researcher in order to gather the necessary data. It can be concluded that the socio-economic condition of the women labourers is critical. The analysis show that their monthly earnings are 1000 and they live in worst conditions and majority of them belonged to middle age groups most of these women were married owing 2 to 3 children. The other source of income was that their husbands too were agricultural labourers. Hence, though all the respondents belong to the poor sector of the society but the above mentioned respondents are found to be the poorest of the poor section of the society.

Keywords: Women, Agricultural Laborers, Socio-Economic Condition, Agricultural Labour

Introduction

Agriculture forms the care sector of the Indian economy. Agriculture occupies a very significant place in the sphere of national income, employment, capital formation, food and fielder supply, industrial expansion, trade, transport, government budget exports, economic planning growth etc.

Presently, agriculture contributes approximately one-fifth of the total gross domestic product (GDP). It provides the means of livelihood to about two third of the country's population. Agricultural development is an essential factor for the economic growth of India. India's planners state that agriculture is emphasized in every plan. While agriculture products will grow, its marketable surplus will grower they provide food to the growing population and raw materials to industries. Agriculture can also compensate the problem of unemployment.

Definition of Agricultural Labor

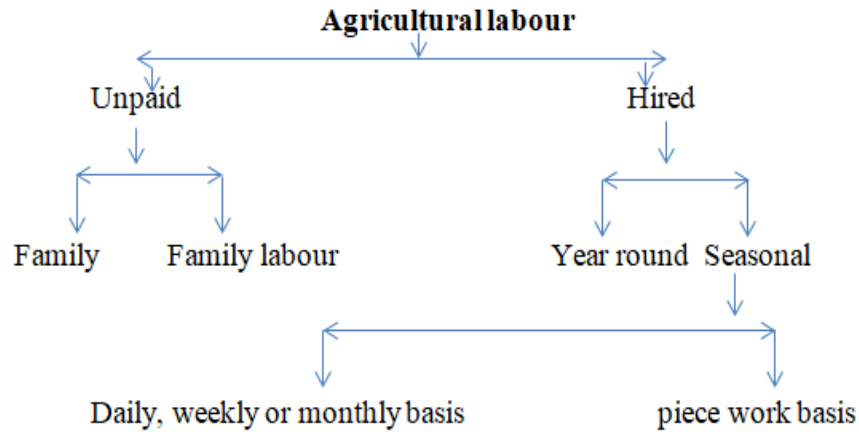
The term agricultural labour is very difficult to define. Difficulties in defining agricultural labour are compounded by the fact that many small and marginal farmers also work partly on the farms of other to supplement their income.

According to the national commission on labour, an agricultural labour is one "who is basically unskilled and unorganized and has little for its livelihood other than personal labour thus, persons whose main source of income is wage employment fall in this category.

In the census of India 1961, all those workers were included in the category of agriculture workers who worked on the farms of others and received payment either in money or kind. The 1971 census excluded those people from agricultural labourers for whom working on the farms of others was a secondary occupation.

Classification of Agricultural Labour

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Family labour: It includes the labour performed by family members of the farmer.

Hired Labour: It includes the labour performed by other than family members on payment of wages. The hired labour is employed at the time of demand of work, by the small and large farmers. The necessity of hired labour occurs during the sowing time and more intensity at the harvesting period when there is a great rush of work to be finished within few days.

The hired labour may be classified as under:

- a. Year-round
- b. Monthly
- c. Daily and
- d. Piece work

In India, a further category of hired labour is as:

a) Landless Agricultural Labour

The second agricultural labour Enquiry (1956-57) reported that 57 per cent of the agricultural labour households were landless.

b) Attached Labour

These labourers are attached to some cultivator households on the basis of a written or oral agreement. Their employment is generally permanent and regular. Accordingly whenever the master wishes, they are ready to work on his land. The hours of work are very lengthy and in some cases, attached agricultural labourers have to work from dawn to dusk in the houses and farms of their employers. Of the total agricultural labour households 17 per cent were attached i.e., on a contract basis for a specified period.

c) Casual Labour

The casual labour is employed on daily wages for short unspecified periods. There are broadly three of casual agricultural labourers in India (i) small farmers who have very small holding and are thus forced to work on the farms of others to make both ends meet: (ii) tenants who work on leased land but this is not their main source of income, and (iii) sharecroppers who besides sharing the produce of land cultivated by them, also work as labourers. According to the report, 83 per cent were casual labourers of the total agricultural labourers.

d) Bonded Labour

These are the serfs found in traces in certain parts of the country.

e) Forced Labour

Under the old tenancy system, a tenant was forced to

work without payment under the threat of eviction from land.

f) Migratory Labour

The labour migrates temporarily from the densely populated areas to other regions in search of employment particularly during the rush periods.

The agrarian (labour) legislation has made the employment of labour as bonded labour and forced labour illegal with the result that such types of labour have practically been wiped off

Characteristics of Agricultural Labour

The main Characteristics of agricultural labour are as:

1. The agricultural labour is highly migratory in character
2. The agricultural labourers are basically, unskilled and consequently their bargaining power is low. Thus the supply is highly elastic.
3. Agricultural labour is widely scattered, unorganized and unable to make strong union.
4. Agricultural labour is difficult to be covered by any rules and regulation adopted by the Government such as minimum wage cut.
5. The employer of the agricultural labour himself may not be a person of high means.
6. Most of the labourers belong to backward classes like harijans, tribal people etc.
7. The nature of employment of agricultural labourers is seasonal. Hours of work in agriculture have been found to be unduly long particularly during the peak agricultural seasons. In fact, there is no regularity in hours of work which depend on the goodwill and co-operation between the workers and employers and local custom.

Condition of Agricultural Labour

The class of agricultural labourers is the most exploited and oppressed class in rural hierarchy. Before Independence, their position was nothing better than that of serfs. Landlords and zamindars exploited these labourers for their benefit and treated some of them as slaves or bonded labourers and forced to continue the generation after generation. After 71 years of independence, the situation has slightly improved. Though even now the class of agricultural labourers is the poorest and resource less class in rural areas. They remain unorganized and the economic exploitation of these labourers continues. The level of income, the standard of living and rate of wages remained abnormally low with the working conditions unhygienic. In

the absence of alternative sources of employment, they are forced to depend on landlords who consequently dictate terms. Since their supply is excessive in relation to the demand for them, they have to settle for extremely low wage. It must be noted here that now day's agricultural laboures are being migrated from Bihar to other developed regions of the country for better wage rate and employment opportunity resulting acute scarcity of agricultural labourers in Karnataka.

Study Area

The Study was conducted in H.D.Kote Taluk, which include 280 villages within this taluk and were rearranged to 5 Hoblies.

This place is recognized as the less irrigated place due to lack of irrigation facility. Majority of agriculture land owners depend upon manson only cotton and Ragi are the popularly grown crops of this region.

In this region most of the agricultural laboures are land less labourers and are daily wages earners. So, such women labourers of agricultural sector are selected here for the study.

The present study was conducted on 50 samples through the pilot study. For agricultural women labourers the questionnaire war served and also interview was conducted by the researcher in order to gather the necessary data.

Socio-economic and Familial Characteristics of the Women Labours

Age Distribution

Table: 1.1

Age Group	f	%
18 to 25	05	10.00
26 to 35	08	16.00
36 to 45	22	44.00
45 to above	15	30.00
Total	50	100

The above table shows that majority of 44% women laborers belonged to the age group of 36 to 45 years of age and very less labour were traced in-between age group of 18 to 25 ie they were armed 10%.

Caste-wise distribution of the respondents

Table 1.2

Caste	f	%
GM	03	6.00
SC	28	56.00
ST	12	24.00
OBC	06	12.0
Others	01	2.0
Total	50	100

Table above clearly exhibits that out of 50 sample respondents, a Majority of 56% women labourers were SC and 24% were ST. whereas 12% of them belonged to OBC group and 60% of then were from GM and only respondent belonged to other category.

Marital Status

Table 1.3

Marital Status	F	%
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Married	43	86.0
Unmarried	03	6.0
Widow	04	8.0
Total	50	100

Table above shows that majority of 86% women labourer were married and only 60% them were unmarried and 8% of them were widows.

Respondents Monthly Income

Table 1.4

Monthly income	f	%
2000 – 4000	36	72.00
4000 – 6000	09	18.00
6000 – 8000	04	8.00
8000 – above	01	2.00
Total	50	100

The table above reveals that majority of women labourer in agricultural sectors income level was low and can be considered as below the poverty line. They are living in very poor and critical conditions due to the lowest income. Inspite of the family burdens these women laboures are striving hard to stand economically independent in order to take care of their near and dear ones.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that the socio-economic condition of the women labourers is critical. The analysis show that their monthly earnings are 1000 and they live in worst conditions and majority of them belonged to middle age groups most of these women were married owing 2 to 3 children. The other source of income was that their husbands too were agricultural laboures.

There women labours stated that their other counter parts were receiving 100 Rs of wages more as they were male and were receiving 100 Rs lesser than them as they were female. Discrimination in sex, gender biaris, and criteria's are very much traced in this sector. Most of them lived in katcha house and semi-pacca houses living below poverty line.

Hence, though all the respondents belong to the poor sector of the society but the above mentioned respondents are found to be the poorest of the poor section of the society.

To improve the overall economic condition of these female domestic workers, the following suggestions are put forward:

- Keeping in mind the workload in a house for a day or so, the wage rate should be fixed and there must be a provision for time to time increments in their wages. Further, these workers must be covered by the Minimum Wages Act of the respective State governments.
- To improve the economic condition of the families of the respondents, the Self-Employment Scheme must cover the poor families of domestic workers. Further, the government should also introduce some additional employment schemes in the area, so that their husbands and children can get some profitable work.
- In the present study, the economic condition of widows/separated respondents are found to be very poor. To improve this, they must be provided some financial help. These respondents and their children

must also be specially considered in the provision of social security benefits.

- The female domestic workers must be registered under the Trade Union Act. This effort will enable them to enjoy their strength, unity and also satisfy their grievances towards their employers through different kinds of pressure building and bargaining strategies.
- The study has found that exactly half of the respondents' families are negatively affected by anti-social habits of their husbands/fathers (like drug addiction). There is a need to start some Drug Consoling Centers in order to help these families overcome their problems

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