

# Contribution of Female Labour in Agriculture: A Case Study of Erode District of Tamil Nadu

M.Kaleeswaran \*, C.Rajalakshmi\*

\*Former Associate Professor & Head, PG & Research Department of Economics, Erode Arts & Science College, Erode, Tamil Nadu, India.

\*\*Ph.D Research Scholar, PG & Research Department of Economics, Erode Arts & Science College, Erode, Tamil Nadu, India.

**Abstract-** The study was conducted to investigate the role of female labour in agriculture in Erode District during 2014-15. An interview schedule was used to collect data from a convenient sample of 300 respondents. Most of the respondents were landless female agricultural labours. They show active participation in agricultural activities. The data were analyzed using appropriate statistical tools-percentage analysis, Weighted Score Ranking Analysis and Kendall's Co-efficient of concordance. The findings about the socio-economic conditions of the respondents includes age, marital status, number of members in the family, educational qualification, community, type of family, daily wage, monthly income, earning members in the family, account holding position, own house and type of house were analyzed using percentage analysis. The Weighted Score Ranking analysis is used to analyze the reason for accepting lower wages than men for the same work. Kendall's coefficient of concordance is used to examine the problems faced by female agricultural labourers at home.

**Index Terms-** Agricultural Labourer, Contribution, Problems.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Agriculture is the largest sector in India. It continues to be main source of livelihood for majority of its rural population. Its performance has set the pace of growth of the economy as a whole. The agricultural growth is substantially more important for the poor segments of the population (Ligon and Sadoulet 2008). But during the recent years, agriculture has failed to generate sufficient employment opportunities for the rural poor.

Agricultural labour means "those people who are engaged in raising crops on payment of wages". Agricultural labourers constitute the largest chunk of the labour force. Most of the agricultural labourers are illiterate, unskilled and hail from depressed communities. They are landless and depend on wages. Aireen (1992) showed that women spent 13 to 15 hours for different agricultural and household work. They perform several tasks at a time. These valuable contribution of rural women are not only income generating, but also expenditure saving.

Due to seasonality of agricultural operations and recurrence of failure of monsoons, agricultural labourers are the worst affected lot. They suffer from widespread unemployment and underemployment (M.L.Singh et al., 1972). The wages are low which permits them hardly to have hand to mouth existence. During the lean period, they have to depend on cultivators and unscrupulous moneylenders who often exploit them. So most of

the agricultural labourers are in debts (Mukesh Eswaran et. al. 2009).

Women with their less aggressive nature, patience, humanity and gentleness, compared to those of men under similar conditions, make women sound personnel managers in both outside and inside home. From time immemorial, women have faced the challenges of coping with a male chauvinistic milieu. Even after several years of planned development in India, the status of women in our country is low and their socio-economic conditions are much more depressed than that of men. A woman is identified as a mother, a wife, daughter-in-law or a daughter but she is not identified as an independent person. Women constitute almost half of the population, perform nearly two-third of its work hours, receive one-tenth of the world's income and own less than one hundredth of the world property. The womenfolk constitute the nerve centre of families, vital section of societies and backbone of the nation.

## II. OBJECTIVES

- (i) To study the socio-economic conditions of the respondents.
- (ii) To examine the problems faced by agricultural labourer.
- (iii) To analyze the reason for accepting lower wages than men for the same work.

## III. METHODOLOGY

To study the contribution of female labour in agriculture, it is apt to select a place where agriculture is the main occupation of the people. So, Erode Taluk in Erode District is selected as the study area. In this area agriculture is the principal means of livelihood of the people. Erode Taluk comprises of 94 villages. First of all, the landless labourers of these 94 villages were listed. From this list, 300 landless agricultural labourers were selected on convenient basis. To study the contribution of female labour in agriculture an interview schedule personally administered. The required data was collected through personal interview method.

The collected data were classified, tabulated, analyzed and interpretations were made. Some of the findings of the study are summarized below.

## IV. STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Women in India play dominant and important role in agriculture production. Nowadays there are visible changes in women participation in agriculture production because of the

greater opportunities, education and employment. Large number of skilled women labor force employed in various organization and societies and they are aggressively fighting and opposed to restrict them in agricultural production. In agriculture sector the participating women have less education and technical skills and majority of them use low yielding and labour intensive, and traditional farm practices which may adversely affect agricultural production.

V. SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS OF THE RESPONDENTS

Table No-1: Socio-economic status of the respondents

Socio-economic factors	Particulars	In numbers	In percent	Total
Age	Below 20years	20	7	300
	20-40 years	150	50	
	41-60 years	105	35	
	above 60 years	25	8	
Marital status	Married	257	86	300
	Unmarried	43	14	
Number of members in the family	1	10	3	300
	2	55	18	
	3	53	18	
	4	170	57	
	5 and above	12	4	
Educational Qualification	Illiterates	231	77	300
	Primary School	49	16	
	Middle School	15	5	
	Higher Secondary	5	2	
Community	BC	31	10	300
	MBC	22	7	
	SC	227	76	
	ST	4	1	
	Others	16	6	
Type of family	Nuclear	253	84	300
	Joint	47	16	
Daily wage	Below 100	11	4	300
	100-200	273	91	
	Above 200	16	5	
Monthly income of the respondent	Below 2000	12	4	300
	2001-4000	74	25	
	4001-6000	198	66	
	Above 6000	16	5	
Earning members in the family	1	64	21	300
	2	185	62	
	3	41	14	
	4	8	2	
	5 and above	2	1	
Account	Bank	256	85	300

	Post Office	20	7	
	Both	24	8	
Own house	Yes	286	95	300
	No	14	5	
Type of house	Thatched roof	25	9	300
	Tiles	75	25	
	Asbestos	76	25	
	Terrace	124	41	

Source: Calculations based on Primary Data

**FINDINGS:** The socio-economic conditions of women agricultural labourers are given in Table-1. It is found that the number of women agricultural labourers in the age group of 20-40 years was 50% and about 35% of the women labourers belonged to the age group of 41-60 years and 8% of the respondents belonged to the age group of above 60 years and only 7% of the women agricultural labourers were of the age group below 20 years. It is found that number of married women labourers was 86% and 14% of the women labourers were unmarried. The size of the family members shows that 3% of the respondents were 1 member, 18% of the respondents have 2 members, 57% of the respondents have 4 members, 18% were again 3 members and 4% of women labourers have 5 and above members in their family. 77% of the women agricultural labourers were illiterate and only 16% of the women labourers have primary school education, 5% and 2% of the women labourers have middle school and higher secondary education respectively. This was due to the poverty of their parents. The women could not go for higher education. In Erode Taluk nearly 76% of the women agricultural labourers were from scheduled Caste (SC) community. This is mainly because they are from low income, landless category that fully depends on agriculture for their livelihood. Only 10% of the respondents were from BC community. About 84% of the respondents had come from nuclear family and only 16% of the respondents come from joint family. The participation of females in a nuclear family is found to be more than that in the joint family. It may be due to the reason that in the nuclear they get the opportunity to participate as they do not have heavy domestic responsibilities. But, in joint families, their domestic responsibility is so high that they hardly get time to participate in the activities.

It is found from the study 91% of female agricultural respondents in Erode Taluk had their daily wage between 100-200. More than 66% of female agricultural labourers have their monthly income between 4001-6000. Around 25% of the respondents belong to 2001-4000 monthly income category. 62% of the respondents have 2 earning members in their family. 21% of them have only 1 earner member and only 14% of the respondents have 3 earning members. Earner members in the family are vital for deciding living conditions.

Majority 85% of the female agricultural labourers have account in bank. This is because for getting wages of MGNREGA scheme, to get subsidy for cylinder and for self - Help Group transactions, an account in a bank is must. Around 95% of the respondents from Erode Taluk have their own house. While looking at the type of house, 41% of the respondents have terrace house with concrete roof, along with bathroom and toilet

facility indicates the good standard of living. It is because the labourers have benefitted from the Indira Awaas Yojana.

**VI. REASONS FOR ACCEPTING LOWER WAGE THAN MEN FOR THE SAME WORK**

**Table-2: Reasons for accepting lower wage than men for the same work (Weighted Score Ranking Analysis)**

S. No	Reasons	Score	Rank
1.	Men were doing physically hard type work	1359	I
2.	Traditional practice	1313	III
3.	Biological Weakness of Women	1331	II
4.	Preference for agricultural operations is more among female workers	1304	V
5.	Unable to report for duty on time	995	X
6.	Seasonal nature of the demand for labour	1230	IX
7.	Unorganized nature of the farm labour	1307	IV
8.	Unable to do the jobs like the use of farm machinery	1240	VIII
9.	Difficulty in irrigation	477	XV
10.	Works which require the intensive use of spades	1295	VI
11.	Any work during night time	1263	VII
12.	Own social responsibilities	911	XI
13.	Have to cook 2-3 times a day	539	XII
14.	Have to prepare tea many times in a day	480	XIV
15.	Women feed, swaddle, loves, caresses, washes and lull the child to sleep in routine.	507	XIII

Source: Calculation based on Primary Data.

Table 2 brings out the reasons for accepting lower wage than men for the same work using weighted Score Ranking Analysis.

**Table-3 Calculation of degree of association-Kendall's co-efficient of concordance**

K=4	Problems						N=6
	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Age below 20	9	8	7	5	7	8	
20-40	60	79	74	72	60	71	
40-60	64	52	67	53	49	60	
Above 60 years	11	11	7	12	9	11	
$R_j$	144	150	155	142	134	150	$\sum R_j = 875$
$(R_j - \bar{R}_j)^2$	3.24	17.64	84.64	14.44	139.24	17.64	S= 276.84

Source: Calculations based on Primary Data

$$W = \frac{1}{12} \frac{K^2 (N^3 - N)}{S}$$

The main reason for accepting lower wage than men for the same work is men were doing physically hard type work. The biological weakness of women was given second rank with the score of 1331 points. The third rank with the score of 1331 points was given to traditional practice. fourth, fifth and sixth rank with the score of 1307,1304 and 1295 points was given to unorganized nature of the farm labour, for the preference for agricultural operations is more among female workers and works which require the intensive use of spades, respectively. Seventh, eighth and ninth rank with the score of 1263,1240 and 1230 points was given to any work during night time, unable to do the jobs like the use of farm machinery and seasonal nature of demand for labour respectively. The reason unable to report for duty on time with the total score of 995 points was given tenth rank. Eleventh, twelfth, thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth rank were given to own social responsibilities, have to cook 2-3 times a day, women feed, swaddle, loves, caresses, washes and lull the child to sleep in routine, have to prepare tea many time a day and difficulty in irrigation, respectively.

**VII. PROBLEMS FACED BY AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS**

Agricultural labourers encounter enormous number of problems. The chief among them being long working areas, long distance walk, lack of sufficient work throughout the year, compulsory completion of work, low wages for women, less bargaining power, physical weakness, heavy physical work, excess heat, scolding if late, harm due to insects, allergy due to poisonous herbs, lack of training and wages are not given in time.

**Calculation of degree of association between different age-group and the problems at the respondents home due to farm work.**

W= 0.9887

## FINDINGS

H<sub>a</sub>: There is significant agreement in ranking by different respondents.

The table value of S at 5% level of significance for K=4 and N=6 is 143.3. The calculated value of S is 276.84. Since the calculated value is greater than the table, which fact shows that W=0.6887 is significant. Hence we infer that there is significant agreement in ranking by respondents of different age group at 5% level of significance.

## VIII. SUGGESTIONS FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF AGRICULTURAL LABOURER

The following suggestions can be made for the improvement of the socio-economic position of the agricultural labourers:

- Better implementation of legislative measures
- Improving the bargaining position
- Resettlement of agricultural workers
- Creating alternative sources of employment
- Protection of women and child labourers
- Public works programmes should be for longer period in year
- Improving working conditions
- Regulations of hours of work
- Credit at cheaper rate of interest on easy terms of payment for undertaking subsidiary occupation
- Proper training for improving the skill of farm labourers

- Cooperative farming

## IX. CONCLUSION

Agricultural labourers are not organized like industrial labourers. They are illiterate and ignorant. They live in scattered villages. Hence they could not organize in unions. Women produce not mostly goods and services but are the prime sources of accelerating human race. Thus, from the point of view of increasing labour force as well as of involving themselves in production and service activities, their active participation cannot be overlooked. However, the rural women have been under represented in the development process and particularly this is true in case of India. The male-dominated society never recognizes their proper contribution. Insurance and old age pension facilities should be created exclusively for women agricultural labourers.

## AUTHORS

**First Author** – M.Kaleeswaran, Former Associate Professor & Head, PG & Research Department of Economics, Erode Arts & Science College, Erode, Tamil Nadu, India

**Second Author** – C.Rajalakshmi, Ph.D Research Scholar, PG & Research Department of Economics, Erode Arts & Science College, Erode, Tamil Nadu, India, Email: rajalakshmi.prsr@gmail.com