

Working conditions of Women Agricultural Labourers in Cuttack District of Odisha

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ABSTRACT: Agriculture plays a vital role as the backbone of a nation's economy. Rural sectors of India completely depend upon agriculture as their basic livelihood. Here Women's agricultural labour force plays the most important contribution to the farming of the nation. Women agricultural labourers are socially and financially the poorest section of society. Unemployment, illiteracy, under nutrition, dual responsibility, shortage of wage, lack of access to resources, indecisive behaviour, and lack of efficiency in handling technology are major drawbacks of women agricultural labourers which create major hindrances in their working conditions. This research explains their wage structure, major involvement both in farm and home, working hours in the field, and major challenges encountered by women agricultural labourers. Hence to bring gender equity, reform gender equality, and provide equal rights to women agricultural labourers, there should be equal access to natural resources, agri-inputs, finance, technologies, equipment and knowledge. The purpose of this study was to measure the extent of production and non-production activities and to analyse the nature and extent of engagement of women agricultural labourers which directly or indirectly affect their working environment along with the problems encountered by women agricultural labourers. Multi stage random sampling technique was followed to select the sample for the study. A structured interview schedule has been prepared for data collection. The study was based upon both primary and secondary data. The primary data had been collected from 250 sample respondents. The secondary data had been collected from journals, books, articles, reports and websites. The data was analysed through SPSS software package and interpreted for result. This paper discovered underemployment, illiteracy and less access to the basic human surviving facilities is the major hurdles in growth of a female agricultural labourers' life.

Keywords: Women agricultural labourers, working conditions, problems.

INTRODUCTION

Agriculture is our country's backbone and provides a basic livelihood to the rural economy. Rural India completely depends upon farming for their employment and basic livelihood. In India, women in agriculture labour comprise about 2/3rd of the total labour force. The women agricultural labourers still face several challenges and hurdles but are still majorly responsible for farm production and home maintenance. Dave (2012) conducted the study on women workers engaged in unorganized sector to know about the socio-economic background, working conditions, wage rates, living conditions of women workers engaged in unorganized sectors like construction, domestic and agriculture in three districts of Haryana. She concluded that women labourers face problems like excessive work burden, wage discrimination, exploitation, untimely wage payment, seasonal unemployment, job

insecurity, health problems. As far as working conditions and facilities are concerned, there were no any facilities like medical/first aid, medical leave, and holidays. Only compensation of injury was given in rare cases in a less amount. In addition to that their contribution being agricultural labour has always been oppressed and suppressed by both family and society. Ghosh (2014) analysed women participation in Agriculture and estimated that 45.3% of agricultural labour force consists of women but most of them have remained as invisible workers. Study concluded that participation of women in agriculture increasing with time and their status as agricultural labour is now acknowledged. However, wage and working status discrimination is still there. The major problems of the women agricultural labourer are illiteracy, underdevelopment, dual responsibility, male dominance, indecisive behaviour, lack of access to

finance and facilities, and less knowledge and efficiency in handling a tool/technology. Das (2015) studies about work participation of women in agriculture in Odisha and concluded that women are concentrated in the agricultural sector of labour market. There is discrimination against female labours because women's labour power is considered as unskilled and inferior. Their work is low paid, casual and lacks potential upward mobility. Despite the major productive contribution of women labour force in farms and home, their needs and problems have always been ignored by the Government. The multitasking women agricultural labour should get proper economic independence, food security, income security good reproductive health and welfare. This study investigate and analyze the working condition such as, activities involved, wage structure, working hours and major problems encountered by women agricultural labourer in their working environment with some vital suggestions and recommendation to overcome such hindrances. Lal and Khurana (2011) discussed about multidimensional roles and obstacles faced by women in terms of employment, wages, dual responsibility, education level. Though women share is very high in agricultural and they are spending more hours for work on farm than men still they are paid less than males for the same work. Women are undervalued because of the predetermined notion that women's basic role is of homemaker. Therefore, they finally concluded that because of the lack of knowledge about their rights, rural agricultural women labours are exploited by their landlords. This paper may be helpful to Researchers, Extensionists, Scientists, Policy makers for their reference and reviews.

Scope of the Study

— This study will be helpful to researchers, academicians and also the scientists in the future which clearly elaborates the participation and challenges faced by the women agricultural labourers in their working environment.

— It will be a significant study for Government to formulate required policies and programmes for the welfare of the women agricultural labourers.

— This study is a systematic research about different activities involved, total working hours and major challenges faced by the women agricultural labourers in their working sector will give a thorough crystalline picture of their livelihood and working challenges may helpful for the policy makers to formulate need based plans and policies.

METHODOLOGY

The present research project was formulated on the basis of ex-post facto approach and survey research design. The study was conducted in 2 blocks namely Badamba and Banki of Cuttack district as number of women agricultural labourers were more in these areas. Multi stage random sampling technique was followed to select the sample for the study. The district, block and panchayat were selected purposively. A total of 250 number of respondents were chosen for data collection.

The data was analyzed through SPSS software package and further interpreted for result.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The Table 1 shows the production activities of the respondents. Out of the 250 respondents, 62 percent of respondents are engaged in land preparation, 44.8 percent of respondents are engaged in ploughing, 36.8 percent of respondent seed cleaning, 82 percent of respondents are agreed with sowing, 44 percent of respondents are engaged in weeding, 52.8 percent of respondents are engaged in transplanting, 38 percent of respondents are engaged in harvesting, 39.6 percent of respondents are engaged in reaping, 53.6 percent of respondents are engaged in winnowing, 42 percent of respondents are engaged in threshing, 33 percent of respondents are engaged in cotton picking, 36 percent of respondents are engaged in cane crushing, 59.2% of respondents engaged in drying, 60% of respondents are engaged in cleaning, 76% of respondents are engaged in storage, 48 percent are engaged in selling vegetables, groundnut and cereals and 78 percent of respondents are engaged in selling fuel wood. Chayal and Dhaka (2010) conducted a study on analysis role performance of women in from activities. Main objective of the study was to find out the participation of from women in agricultural activities. The study revealed that work participation of women was maximum in cutting, picking, cleaning of grains, storage, shifting production to threshing floor.

The study indicated that majority of the respondents (82%) are engaged in sowing followed by storage and land preparation. Hence among all the production activities mostly the respondents are involved in sowing operation along with storage and land preparation activities. Lal and Khurana (2011) conducted a study on gender issues: the role of women in agriculture sector. Paper was based on secondary data collected from research papers, articles and government published documents. Hurdle faced by women in agricultural sector was main objectives of the paper. Paper revealed that women agricultural labour performed activities like sowing, grass cutting, separation of seeds from fiber, weeding etc.

The Table 2 shows the non-production activities of the respondents. Out of the 250 respondents, 89.6 percent of respondents are involving in cooking, 82 percent of respondents are involving in sweeping, 83.2 percent of respondents are involving in washing clothes and utensils, 74 percent of respondents are involving in fetching and collecting water, 64 percent of respondents are involving in making cow-dung cakes, 86 percent of respondents are involving in feeding and taking care of children, 58 percent of respondents are involving in digging, 62 percent of respondents are involving in vegetable plucking, 76 percent of respondents are involving in feeding cattle, 70 percent of respondents are involving in milking and bathing cattle and 63.2 percent of respondents are involving in cleaning cattle shed.

The study indicated that 89.6 percent of the respondents are engaged in cooking followed by feeding and taking care of children and washing clothes and utensils.

Almost all of the respondents play the triple work burden of the households.

Table 1: Type of Production activities of the Respondents (n=250).

Sr. No.	Activities	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
1.	Land preparation	155	62
2.	Ploughing	112	44.8
3.	Seed cleaning	92	36.8
4.	Sowing	205	82
5.	Weeding	110	44
6.	Transplanting	132	52.8
7.	Harvesting	95	38
8.	Reaping	99	39.6
9.	Winnowing	134	53.6
10.	Threshing	105	42
11.	Picking cotton	84	33.6
12.	Cane crushing	90	36
13.	Drying	148	59.2
14.	Cleaning	150	60
15.	Storage	190	76
16.	Selling vegetables, groundnuts, cereals	120	48
17.	Selling fuel wood	85	34

The Table 3 shows that wage structure of respondents. Out of 250 respondents, 56 percent of respondents are getting wages on daily basis followed by 26 percent of respondents are getting wages as weekly basis where as 14 percent of the respondents are getting wages on the basis of 15 days and only 4 percent of respondents are getting wages as monthly basis. This study found that 78 percent of the respondents are taking a daily wage. Due to some reasons such as they are not work daily at the same place. Women perform range of duties at farm and home, also they work for longer hours than men and yet get less wages and exploited by landlords. They are treated as sub-servant and discrimination is there for female labours (Mandal, 2013).

The Table 4 shows that working hours of respondents. Out of 250 respondents, 22 percent of respondents are engaged in their works below 2 hours followed by 60 percent of respondents are engaged in works in between 2 to 8 hours and only 18 percent of respondents are engaged in their works above 8 hours. The study found that majority of respondents (60%) are engaged in between 2 to 8 hours in their works. Woman spends

around 8 to 9 hours on the farm during the peak agricultural season, 3 to 4 hours on taking care of the cattle and 3 to 4 hours on their household chores (Chakravorthy, 1975).

The Table 5 shows the problems and challenges facing by the respondents. Out of the 250 respondents, 82 percent of respondents are facing the problem of shortage of wages, 74 percent of respondents are having their low level of education, 78 percent of respondents have to play dual role at farm and home, 58 percent of respondents are suffered with unpaid work, 72 percent of respondents are facing the hurdle of seasonal unemployment, 55.2 percent of respondents have been neglected by policy makers, 43.6 percent of respondents are having the issues with inequality in decision making and 67.2 percent of respondents are facing the major problem as lack of training facilities for skill development. Lal and Khurana (2011) conducted a study on gender issues: the role of women in agriculture sector. Paper was based on secondary data collected from research papers, articles and government published documents.

Table 2: Type of Non-Production activities of the Respondents (n=250).

Sr. No.	Activities	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
1.	Cooking	224	89.6
2.	Sweeping	205	82
3.	Washing clothes and utensils	208	83.2
4.	Fetching and collecting water	185	74
5.	Making cow-dung cakes	160	64
6.	Feeding and taking care of children	215	86
7.	Digging	145	58
8.	Vegetable plucking	155	62
9.	Feeding cattle	190	76
10.	Milking and bathing cattle	175	70
11.	Cleaning cattle shed	158	63.2

Table 3: Wage Structure of the Respondents (n=250).

Sr. No.	Wage structure	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
1	Daily	140	56
2	Weekly	65	26
3	15 days	35	14
4	Monthly	10	4
	TOTAL	250	100

Table 4: Working hours of the Respondents (n=250).

Sr. No.	Working hours	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
1	Below 2 hrs	55	22
2	2-8 hrs	150	60
3	Above 8 hrs	45	18
	TOTAL	250	100

Table 5: Problems of Women Agriculture Labourers (n=250).

Sr. No.	Problems	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
1	Shortage of wages	205	82
2	Low level of education	185	74
3	Dual role at farm and home	195	78
4	Unpaid work	145	58
5	Seasonal unemployment	180	72
6	Neglect from policy makers	138	55.2
7	Inequality of decision making	109	43.6
8	Lack of training facilities for skill development	168	67.2

Hurdle faced by women in agricultural sector was main objectives of the paper. Paper revealed that agri. sector created many jobs for women workers. Women agricultural labourers face many obstacles in their growth in agri. Sector and unknown to their legal rights and wage discrimination. Women had no decision making power related to agriculture task. This paper suggested that women must have the right of participation in decision making process.

This study found that majority of respondents (82%) are facing the major problem of shortage of wages. Due to the reason such as almost all female agricultural labourers are quite dissatisfied about their wages as compared to their work load. Women face many problems like illiteracy, low and irregular wages, scolding & beaten by men etc. Women don't know how to face these problems (Mugadur & Hiremath 2014).

CONCLUSION

As India is the country of agriculture and women agricultural labourers are the largest contribution towards its production aspects, hence their working condition should properly analyzed and the several challenges and problems faced by them in their working environment should be encountered properly and timely. Almost half of the world's agricultural workforce comprises of women. They are contributing from production to sale as well as preparation of food. Though traditionally role of women worker in agricultural was under-estimated. Women are working as paid labour or unpaid family member in agriculture in developing countries but they are still facing gender inequalities (Vetrivel & Manigandan 2013). This study found and concluded about their production and non-production activities, wage structure, working hours

and challenges faced by the women agricultural labourers. It is concluded majority of respondents are contributing their major time in sowing, storage and land preparation in the field and in household function they are mostly involving in cooking, taking care of children and washing clothes and utensils, whereas most of them are daily wagger. Mostly working in between 2-8 hours and they are quite dissatisfied about their shortage of wages as compared to their hard work. Kanagarathinam (2014) investigated that around 52% of unorganized workers are engaged in agriculture and allied sectors. Agricultural workers are disadvantages rural groups such as small, subsistence farmers, tenants & sharecroppers, the unemployed and the landless. They get very low and irregular wages, wage discrimination between male & females, no public holiday and no standard daily working hours. In addition, they have very poor working conditions, lack of dignity, seasonal unemployment and harassment issues. So they have to face a lot of challenges like unpaid work, wage discrimination, low wages, dual responsibility, rigid tradition, lack of training facilities, triple burden of work etc. Goswami (2013) concluded that poor women are contributing more to household income by working as a labour even under poor working conditions and with lower wages to improve the economic conditions of family. There were no land ownership amongst female and even they do not have any right on their earnings. It was also proved that in spite of having more shares of females as agricultural labour than men, they get lower wages than males.

Hence this paper discovers some emerging issues arising in working situation of women agricultural labourers. Underemployment, illiteracy and less access to the basic human surviving facilities is the major

hurdles in growth of a female agricultural labourers' life. Thresia (2004) pointed out some very important issues of women agricultural workers. The biggest issue was related to physical (abortion, stillbirths, and premature deliveries) and mental health because of the dual work burden, economic and social insecurity, poverty. In addition, they have gender discrimination in terms of proper education, employment and resources, which make them helpless and powerless with low self-esteem. Basic facilities like clean drinking water and 28 washroom facilities were also not available in spite of having long working hours with lower wage rates on farms. Therefore the Government should take interest in solving their problems and focus on implementation on beneficiaries' schemes rather than only invention of new ones, so that women agricultural labourers will easily overcome from these obstacles and can lead a better life. The study shows that 94 per cent of the total women workers worked in the in formal sector in India. They have faced many problems like gender discrimination, low wages etc. their contribution in terms of income generation was less than male workers. This study suggested that women worker need economical and political support from government. New government measures are needed to the development of unorganized sector (Sharma, 2012).

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Conflict of Interest. None.

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