



Socio-economic conditions of rural women labourers in Dharwad district of Karnataka state: An analytical study

¹ Dr. Anil Kumar, ² Nafisa

¹ Assistant Professor & HOD, Department of Studies in Economics, SJM First Grade College of Arts & Commerce, Tarikere, Chikkamagaluru, Karnataka, India

² Assistant Professor, Department of Studies in Economics, SJM First Grade College of Arts & Commerce Tarikere, Chikkamagaluru, Karnataka, India

Abstract

The importance for rural economy and agricultural activities always retained primary attention in India. In India women consist more than 60% of the total agricultural labour force. Rural women are engaging in some of the most laborious and very hard work pertaining to agriculture under various harsh climatic conditions and for the meagre earnings. As it is seen that without the participation of women in agriculture it is impossible to imagine the completion of agricultural productions throughout the country. However, the roles of rural women in agriculture are also looked down and not acknowledged as it should have been. In most of the situations rural women were unpaid or less paid for their contribution in the field of agriculture owing to its informal and non organizational sector. Hence the present study has been placed in this context to analyse and examine the socio-economic conditions of rural women working in agricultural sectors, particularly in the district of Dharwad in Karnataka state. In the study it is found that there is gender discrimination at agricultural work, while choosing the women, assigning work to women, paying wages and including the number of hours of work. Pertaining to the health status of rural working women in Dharwad district it was found that the majority of them were facing many health problems. Further, many more interesting findings have been analysed in this study.

Keywords: rural women, agricultural economy, socio-economic conditions, women empowerment

1. Introduction

The importance for rural economy and agricultural activities always retained primary attention in India. Agriculture plays very significant role in India's development. Even today, it is empirically evident that the number of people living in villages (69%) is higher than the people living in urban areas (31%). It also provides employment for 65% of the population in India. Rural women occupy vital position in agriculture and its related activities. As the studies on women participation in agriculture indicate that rural women are responsible for the 55% of agricultural production and they comprise of 67% of total labour force in the primary sector (Shivaram; 1988) [5].

In the recent study by the Food and Agriculture Organization (2011) it was mentioned that women consist 43% in total agricultural labour force in the world. The activities of women pertaining to agriculture vary from culture to culture, society to society and from country to country.

Comparing to western countries the role of women in agricultural activities are more among Asian and African countries. In India women consist more than 60% of the total agricultural labour force. Here rural women have been involved themselves in numerous agricultural activities such as crop production, agro forestry, livestock rearing, horticulture, post harvest activities, fisheries, etc. The rural women in farm are the contributors of labour in agricultural production. These women are also responsible in managing

cattle and farm animals, storage of seeds, food grains, processing and marketing (Purohit; 1995).

In the sector of agricultural production apart from ploughing, remaining activities are performed by both men and women. Rural women are engaging in some of the most laborious and very hard work pertaining to agriculture under various harsh climatic conditions and for the meagre earnings.

In India it is a special characteristic feature of rural women participating in the labour force as workers, cultivators, producers, along with besides carrying out all the household chores which are regarded as unproductive. As it is seen that without the participation of women in agriculture it is impossible to imagine the completion of agricultural productions throughout the country. However, the roles of rural women in agriculture are also looked down and not acknowledged as it should have been. In most of the situations rural women were unpaid or less paid for their contribution in the field of agriculture owing to its informal and non organizational sector.

Hence the present study has been placed in this context to analyse and examine the socio-economic conditions of rural women working in agricultural sectors, particularly in the district of Dharwad in Karnataka state.

2. Review of Literature

The role of women is very significant in the process of rural

development. In this background, Suranarayana and Nagalakshmi (2005) [6] have tried to analyse the role of women in rural development. As they implore that there are several restrains on the women in playing their roles effectively. In the actual scenario while doing decision making pertaining to household affairs and agricultural aspects always men dominate women. Since the level of education is very low among women puts them into such a situation where their views are not considered.

A study entitled "Understanding rural Women through Participation" conducted by Mukherjee (1993) [3] stresses on the lesser recognition of women's role in agriculture in India. Mukherjee suggests that if women's roles in society, agriculture and in all other sectors are being appreciated than an actual rural development can take place. The rural women perform crucial activities which are very critical and they are usually un noticed in economic terms.

A study conducted by Bastidas (1999) [1] clearly indicated that the participation of women in agriculture was higher among women-headed families (matriarchal). Bastidas also states that the women who have rural background participate more in agriculture than those who had urban background.

In the study entitled "Marginalised Women and Economic Development: Empowerment of Agricultural Labour" (2005) Gandham had tried to analyse the role of agricultural economic development in the empowerment of women. As the study found that even though large number of rural women working in agriculture and their contribution to the rural development is very significant, these women didn't get required appreciation and acknowledgement. These rural women working in agriculture face numerous hurdles due to their distressing and hardworking conditions such as long working hours, meagre wages, and gender discrimination. Due to the participation of rural women in agricultural economy these rural women were able to achieve economic empowerment, whereas this has led to the improved conditions of women like good education, healthcare and better services.

In a study entitled "Women workers in India in the 21st century" the author named Padma tried to analyse the women labour force in the sectors of agriculture and allied areas. As the study found out that the conditions of these working women were very bad and didn't have any economic profits.

3. Objectives of the study

The present study aims at examining the study on the socio-economic conditions of rural women labour in Dharwad district of Karnataka state. For this purpose following objectives have been outlined

- To analyse the socio-economic conditions of working women in agricultural sectors of Dharwad district.
- To make a profile of rural women working in agriculture to facilitate the magnitude of rural women labour force.

4. Methodological approach of the study

To examine the socio-economic conditions of rural women working in agriculture both qualitative and quantitative methods have been used. Both questionnaires and interview methods are employed to acquire the required primary data from the rural women and their employers in the district of

Dharwad of Karnataka state. The sources of secondary data for the study are; existing literature and data in websites, various publications of Central and State, and other sources like books, magazines, newspapers, reports, articles, seminar papers published by universities and research institutions. Apart from the published material, study is also based on discussions with various people such as officials and non-officials of the and members of panchayaths of Dharwad district.

5. Socio-economic conditions of the rural women

The following analysis is made on the basis of the obtained primary data from the fieldwork. As the study aimed to analyse the socio-economic conditions of rural women labour in Dharwad district, here the substantial data has been presented under several categories for the better understanding.

Women in rural areas play significant role ranging from household activities to farm activities. Looking at the important roles played by rural women it is important to find out the magnitude of women labours over the years in India. So that it will give us a clear picture about the condition of women agricultural labourers over the years in India.

Table 1: Distribution of Rural Women in Agricultural Work

Activity of women labour	Percentage of Involvement
Land Preparation	32
Seed cleaning and Sowing	80
Inter Cultivation Activities	86
Harvesting, Cleaning And Storage	84

The above table clearly depicts that rural women are largely involved themselves in inter cultivation activities (86%), Harvesting etc. (84%) and in seed cleaning and sowing activities (80%). Much of these agricultural works are by nature physically demanding, involving long periods of standing, stooping, bending, and carrying out repetitive movements in awkward body positions. Even when technological change has brought about a reduction in the physical drudgery of agricultural work, it has introduced new risks, notably associated with the use of sophisticated machinery and the intensive use of chemicals often without appropriate safety measures, information and training. The demand for agricultural women labour in India fluctuates according to the seasons according to different regions and this is reflected in the nature of the workforce. Hours of work tend to be extremely long during planting and harvesting.

5.1. Gender discrimination in agricultural work

Earlier it was found that majority of the people both men and women used to work in agriculture in rural areas. But, the number of men working in agriculture has declined over a period of time comparing with the involvement of men due to various reasons. As it is seen that men tend to go out or migrate for better employment and other benefits, whereas women are handling agricultural activities.

In our study it is also found that women engage in agricultural activities more than men do. In reality employment chances are also reducing due to non-availability of land and adverse environmental impact on agriculture. However, clearly there is

a gender discrimination of work in the sector of agriculture, particularly it is clearly visible in allocating the types of work and fixing the wages.

Tedious manual activities such as transplanting of seedling, harvesting, weeding, transporting, threshing, etc are mainly performed by women. Other than the mechanical operations, men's work includes the making of field boundaries and setting up of barriers in the field. Also, some of the men work in the drying of hay. As the primary data revealed that there is a high level of underemployment among women working in agricultural fields.

5.2. Health status of rural women

As the primary data shows that the majority of the women labourers were facing many health problems due to their working and living conditions. Further, the ill-health among their children and family members constrain working in agricultural fields.

Significantly, many of these women do not have supportive mechanisms for child care or care of the older members of the family. Institutions such as primary health care or anganawadis have not developed into the status of agencies which would take care of young children of employed mothers. These women have this problem of taking care of children while working, often limit their working days as well as income generation. Invariably, this situation impacts on the rural women, their children and the members of their families.

5.3. The conditions of rural women in households

As it is seen in all the societies women have a higher responsibility of domestic labour. It is no different among the agricultural workers households too, rural women are performing a significant proportion of the various chores domestic work which are non paid. Further these women also have to work in the farms as agricultural labourers. Hence they have to perform two major roles; one as working in farm and another is working in the household.

As almost 75% of the rural women have responded that they do not get any help from their men in the discharge of domestic works such as cooking, fetching water, washing clothes, cleaning floors or caring of children. There is no difference in this regard even in the better off families among them. The few women who get support get it either in fetching water or in the care of children. The gendered relations have created an environment at home which does not allow women to put their feet up even after long hours of tedious hard work such as transplanting, weeding or harvesting. After collecting wages, these women rush to the nearby shops for buying food items and then to their kitchen for preparing dinner. Usually, women do errands and fetch food articles and other household items, in addition to the work in the kitchen. They are considered women's responsibility.

5.4. Wage discrimination against women

As it is seen in the villages there is an existence of gender discrimination in giving wages to women and men who perform similar works. Discrimination against women in the payment of wages is wide spread throughout the country. Women workers are in general classified as those belonging to the organized and unorganized sectors. The economic

conditions of women are obvious from the fact that 94% of them are found in unorganized sector leaving only 6% in the organized sector. Out of the 94% of the female labourers found in the unorganized sector, nearly 80% belong to agriculture since India is still, by and large an agricultural country. The low rates of wage for women labourers are due to the unorganized nature of employment, the case with which hired labour can be substituted by family labour, the seasonal nature of the demand for labour and the traditional classification of agricultural jobs into male and female. This clearly shows that the so-called less skilled jobs are relegated to rural agricultural women and paid lower wages.

5.5. Scope of further research

There is also a need to carry out further research studies intensively in analyzing the various factors influencing the rural women agricultural labourers' existence in the Dharwad district. There is also a need to carry out further research studies intensively in analyzing the various factors affecting on the socio-economic conditions of rural women labour in Dharwad district of Karnataka state. Which may help to develop an appropriate strategy to improve the socio-economic condition of the rural women labour in Dharwad district as well as in the state.

6. Major findings of the study

The analysis of the primary data yielded interesting factors about the socio-economic profile of the rural women working in agricultural fields. The major findings of the study have been portrayed in the following manner;

- In the study it is found that there is gender discrimination at agricultural work, while choosing the women, assigning work to women, paying wages and including the number of hours of work.
- Pertaining to the health status of rural working women in Dharwad district it was found that the majority of them were facing many health problems due several factors.
- Rural women are performing a significant proportion of the various chores of domestic work which are non-paid.
- Women farmers in agricultural sector suffer from high illiteracy rate among them. Women have less land rights compared to men. Limited rights or access to arable land further limits livelihood options and exacerbates financial strain on women, especially in women-headed households.
- Women perform all un-mechanized agricultural tasks and perform multiple tasks which add more burden to them due to lack of equipment and appropriate technology, which invariably affect on their health.
- While making decisions rural women have very less control, both in the matters of household and agriculture.

7. Concluding Remark

The empirical investigation has proved that the rural women play very significant role in the field of agricultural production. Even though they contribution hugely but their work is not considered economically profitably sometimes not even acknowledged in the society in general. These rural women face numerous problems pertaining to their health status, economic aspects, household activities and etc. The

special programmes of governments and panchayats have not uplifted these women from the miseries of generations. Hence, in the future governmental agencies have to play vital role in solving the problems of agricultural rural women in India.

8. References

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