



# A STUDY ON SOCIO ECONOMIC STATUS OF RURAL WOMEN LABOURERS IN AGRICULTURE

By

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## Abstract

Agriculture is the single largest livelihood system in India and specifically in rural areas. It is not only the main source of employment, income and food for the population, but it is also the main culture for rural families. Majority of the rural women, specifically from poor class and backward class, are extensively involved in agricultural activities as agricultural laborer for maintenance of their family. Rural women work mainly for economic independence, for economic necessity. Most of the women labourers are government scheme financially assisted beneficiaries. Still they take interest to work at agriculture sector for better economic sustenance. The objective of this research paper is to present a systematic study on status of rural women labourers those who are working in agricultural sector in Odisha. For the purpose the researcher focused to study the social life, the economic life, the health matter of women labourers, The researcher also tried to study the future prospects of women labourers and their family maintenance. The empirical method has been adopted in this study. The researcher conducted the study by using interview schedule, questionnaire, and personal / group discussion. Hundred (100) numbers of agricultural women have been selected as the sample respondent.

Key Word: *Agriculture, labourers, employment, unorganized, Maintenance, respondents, Questionnaire.*

## Introduction

Agriculture is the single largest livelihood system in India and specifically in rural areas. It is not only the main source of employment, income and food for the population, but it is also the main culture for rural families. Majority of the rural women, specifically from poor class and backward class, are extensively involved in agricultural activities as agricultural laborer for maintenance of their family. Rural women work mainly for economic independence, for economic necessity, as some women are well trained to work for a sense of achievement and to provide service to the society. Most Indian rural women, by and large, undertake “productive work” only under economic compulsion. Usually, upper class women are limited to homes. Work participation rate is found to be higher among rural women than the urban women. However, the nature and extent of rural women’s involvement differences with the variations in agro-production systems. The mode of female participation in agricultural production varies with the land owning status of farm households. Their roles range from managers to landless labourers. Almost all women in rural India today can be considered as ‘farmers’ in same sense, working as agricultural labour, unpaid workers in the family farm enterprise or combination of the two. Moreover, several farm activities traditionally carried out by men and at present these are also being undertaken by women as men are pulled away into higher paying employment. Thus, rural India is witnessing a process which could be described as feminization of agriculture.

## Plan period initiatives

The world employment conference (1976) recommended that measures be taken to relieve the rural women of their work burden and drudgery by improving working and living conditions as well as by providing more resources for investment. The First Five Year Plan (1951-56) sought, among its other objectives to ‘promote the welfare of women’ so that they could fulfill their legitimate role in the family and community. The Fourth Plan (1969-1974) of the first time made an effort to address the technological needs of women farmers. The Ministry of Agriculture, supported by UNDP, launched the ‘Farmers Training and Education Programme’ (FTEP). Initially, the inputs were common to both men and women but as the differential needs of men and women manifested themselves, many state governments started special training programmes exclusively for women within the FTEP set up. Committee on the Status of Women in Indians (CSWI) report, “Towards Equality”, provided an extensive database on the socio-economic position of women through an analysis of gender disaggregated

data on sex ratio, literacy, infant mortality, life expectancy and access to health, educational and employment opportunities for women, especially rural women. A National Plan of Action was prepared and recommendations were made to improve women's productivity in traditional occupations and to improve their access to skills and training which could open opportunities to modern occupations.

The Seventh Plan laid emphasis on science and technology for women farmers, particularly on improving existing skills, post harvesting processes, plantation, horticulture, fisheries and dairying. Eighth Plan (1991-96) explicitly promoted women's employment and by viewing women as producers as well as workers, reflected in the explicit provisions for promoting women's cooperatives and producer groups. During this period, agriculture came to be promoted in the wider context of rural development and donor agencies such as DANIDA and the Royal Netherlands Embassy funded the mobilization of women farmers through the 'Women in Agriculture' Programmes. These programmes organized Self Help Groups of farm women, in order to facilitate access to technical and support services and to build their leadership skills as extension workers. The state took up similar schemes during the Eighth and Ninth Plans to motivate and mobilize farm women to form groups, which were then provided with technological inputs, training in entrepreneurial skills and credit. The Shramshakti Report of the Committee on Women in the Unorganized Sector highlighted the need to recognize women's contribution to the informal economy, giving visibility to home-based workers and others.

The Ninth Plan (1997-2002) incorporated 'empowerment of women' as one of its primary objectives and adopted the National Policy for Empowerment of Women (2001), which laid definite goals, targets and policy prescriptions together with a well defined Gender Development Index to monitor the impact of its implementation. It also announced special steps for strengthening of the conditions of female labourers with a view to improving food security at the household level. Efforts in several other direction were also made within this plan to empower women by expanding the access of women farmers to various resources –granting property rights to women in the distribution of surplus land or enabling lease of waste land by women jointly with men or by women's Self Help Groups (SHGs); promoting institutional credit by agreeing in principle to accept collateral security provided by the male relative or by advancing group credit to SHGs. Finally, efforts were also made to provide market access to

women's cooperatives especially in the field of vegetables, milk, fish and minor forest products. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) placed human development at the centre of social and economic progress and recognize that women's empowerment is central to poverty alleviation and development.

## Objectives

The objective of this research paper is to present a systematic study on status of rural women labourers those who are working in agricultural sector in Odisha. For the purpose the researcher focused to study the social life, the economic life, the health matter of women labourers, The researcher also tried to study the future prospects of women labourers and their the family maintenance.

## Methodology

The empirical method has been adopted in this study. The researcher has followed available published literature in forms of books, reports, journals etc. Extensive library use has been made to collect theoretical data on this topic. The researcher conducted the study by using interview schedule, questionnaire, and personal / group discussion. Hundred (100) numbers of agricultural women have been selected as the sample respondent. They are asked questions as per format of questionnaire and their responses have been noted. This is a random sample of agricultural women from the selected study area villages.

## Study Area

Study was conducted at Astarang Block of Puri District in the state of Odisha. Odisha state is situated 17<sup>0</sup>45'N to 22<sup>0</sup>30'N latitude and 85<sup>0</sup>45'E to 87<sup>0</sup>45'E longitude on the Eastern Coast of India. It is a maritime state with coastal line along with the Bay of Bengal in the North East, Jharkhand in the North, Chhatisgarh in the West and Andhra Pradesh in the South. Puri district lies between 85<sup>0</sup>9' to 86<sup>0</sup>25' East longitude and between 19<sup>0</sup>28' to 20<sup>0</sup>10' North latitude. It is bounded by the Khurda district in North, Bay of Bengal in south, Jagatsinghpur district in the east and Gajam district in the west. The main occupation of the people of Puri district is Agriculture.

Astaranga block is situated at a distance of 95kms from the district headquarters and 84 kms distance from Bhubaneswar, the State Capital of Odisha. The geographical area of the block is about 164.02 sq.km. It is surrounded with Naugaon block of Jagatsinghpur district in the North

and South-east part, Kakatpur block in the west and north-west part and Bay of Bengal is in the south. Study was conducted at, particularly, in four villages. Two villages in each gram panchayat. Astaranga gram panchayat covers villages namely, Astarang and Ramachandrapur. Kendrapati gram panchayatti gram panchayat covers villages namely, Kendrapati & Ankua.

## Respondent Structure

In order to make study proper and to get valid output the researcher framed questionnaire and asked Hundred (100) women respondents those who are labourers at rural areas. The respondents are randomly selected. The respondent profiles are given in Table No.1.

Table No.1

### Respondents structure in terms of Age

Sl.No.	Age	Numbers of respondent	Percentage
(i)	18-25 years	14	14%
(ii)	26-35 years	26	26%
(iii)	36-45 years	44	44%
(iv)	46-55 years	12	12%
(v)	56 years and above	4	4%
	Total	100	100%

### Respondent's structure in terms of Religion

Sl.No.	Religion	No. of Respondents	Percentage
(i)	Hindu	100	100%
(ii)	Muslim	00	00%
(iii)	Christian	00	00%
(iv)	Any other	00	00%
	Total	100	100%

### Respondent's structure in terms of Caste category

Sl.No.	Caste	No. of Respondents	Percentage
(i)	Scheduled Caste	58	58%
(ii)	Scheduled Tribe	00	Nil
(iii)	Other Backward Classes	28	28%
(iv)	General	14	14%
	Total	100	100%

### Respondents structure in terms of Marital Status

Sl.No.	Marital Status	No. of Respondents	Percentage
(i)	Married	84	84%
(ii)	Unmarried	10	10%
(iii)	Widows	04	04%
(iv)	Any other	02	02%
	Total	100	100%

N.B. : Any other includes divorcees/separate.

### Respondents structure in terms of Educational Qualification

Sl.No.	Qualification	No. of Respondents	Percentage
(i)	Illiterate	84	84%



(ii)	Primary education, Under matric	16	16%
(iii)	Matriculate	00	Nil
(iv)	Intermediate	00	Nil
(v)	Graduation	00	Nil
	Total	100	100%

Respondents' profile in terms of monthly income of the respondent

Sl.No.	Income	No. of Respondents	Percentage
(i)	Below Rs.3000/-	6	6%
(ii)	Rs.3000 – Rs.5000/-	34	34%
(iii)	Rs.5000 – Rs.7000/-	42	42%
(iv)	Above Rs.7000/-	18	18%
	Total	100	100%

Respondents' profile in terms of period of staying

Sl.No.	Period of staying	No. of Respondents	Percentage
(i)	Since birth	10	10%
(ii)	Since 3 years	16	16%
(iii)	Since 5 years	22	22%
(iv)	Since 10 years	40	40%
(v)	Since 15 years and above	12	12%
	Total	100	100%

Source : Field Study.

## Study Findings

In the course of study, the researcher tried to know the family status of women agriculture labourers. Many of them are living with their family with having children. Even many of them are living without their family members. The socio- economic condition of the respondents is not so good. The researcher wanted to know the causes of their involvement as agriculture labourer. There are so many causes which are found. Their responses are presented in table No. 2.

Table NO.2

Cause of Profession

Sl.No.	Causes	No. of Respondents	Percentage
(i)	Family maintenance	96	96%
(ii)	Study maintenance of children	74	74%
(iii)	Health Maintenance	58	58%
(iv)	For Food Expenditure	100	100% <sup>^</sup>
(v)	Any other	40	40%

Source : Field Study

N.B. : Any other includes purchasing items, home appliances etc.

It clearly shows that women are doing the labourer work for maintaining their family and for maintaining food expenditure. In the process the researcher tried to know the satisfaction of the women labourers in regard to their work. Many of them opined that they are satisfied as they are earning and maintaining their family and some of them viewed about dissatisfaction. Their dissatisfaction is due to the nature of work, hard labour, insufficient money as per work etc. But as it is their main source of income so they are adopting it. Then, researcher tried to know the time devotion in a month for the work. The responses are presented in Table No. 3.

Table No.3

Working days in a month of respondents

Sl.No.	Particular	No. of Respondents	Percentage
(i)	1 day – 10 days	24	24%
(ii)	10 days – 20 days	50	50%
(iii)	20 days – 30 days	26	26%
	Total	100	100%

Source : Field Study

It clearly shows that women agriculture labourers are working at least in 10 to 15 days in a month. After gathering information about the working days, researcher tried to know the social life of respondents. For this purpose researcher asked some questions and their responses are presented in Table No. 4.

Table No.4

Maintaining Social Life

No.100

Sl.No.	Particular	No. of Respondents	Percentage
(i)	Children's Education	70	70%
(ii)	Family maintenance	96	96%
(iii)	Health Expenditure	50	50%
(iv)	Food Expenditure	94	94%
(v)	Personal Expenditure	36	36%
(vi)	Saving	26	26%
(vii)	Any other, specify	10	10%

Source : Field Studies

N.B. : Any other includes visiting to tourist place, assisting to my father and mother, assisting to my friends etc. It clearly shows that women labourers are maintaining some sort of social life in their income. Then the researcher tried to know the economic status of women labourers in the study area. So they were asked questions and their response are presented in table No. 5.

Table No.5  
Maintaining Economic Status

No.100

Sl.	Particular	No. of Respondents	Percentage
(i)	Marketing	36	36%
(ii)	Attaining relatives celebration	20	20%
(iii)	Giving money to my father's home	10	10%
(iv)	Spending money for children's education	70	70%
(v)	Savings	26	26%
(vi)	Any other	24	24%

Source : Field Study

N.B. : Any other includes purchasing useable things, new clothes, preparing constructed houses etc. It clearly shows women labourers are spending money for maintaining their economic status. During the study the researcher wanted to know the health condition of the agriculture, women. Different health problems are eye related, hearing problem, Artho problem,, illness, any other. The number of respondents and percentage are shown in the Table No.6

Table No.6  
Facing the health problems

No.100

Sl.No.	Particular	No. of Respondents	Percentage
(i)	Eye related	8	8%
(ii)	Hearing problem	6	6%
(iii)	Artho problem	60	60%
(iv)	Illness	84	84%
(v)	Any other	12	12%

Source : Field Study



N.B. – Any other includes back pain, tension, hear problem, eye problem etc. The study clearly shows that majority of the respondents belong to skin diseases. Researcher tried to know the mode of expenditure of the respondents. Modes of expenditure are meant for elder persons medicine, children’s education, buying dress materials, buying wood materials etc. The responses are presented in Table No.7

Table No.7

## Maintaining the expenditure of the family

No.100

Sl.No.	Particular	No. of Respondents	Percentage
(i)	Spending money in elder person’s medicines	30	30%
(ii)	Children’s education	78	78%
(iii)	Buying Dress Materials	64	64%
(iv)	Buying Food Materials	96	96%
(v)	Any other	30	30%

Source : Field Study

N.B. : Any other includes home appliances, giving to parents, attending ceremonies etc. It shows that women labourers were spending money for certain works. After gathering the expenditure mode, the researcher tried to know the developments, works done by the women labourers. Women labourers take some developmental works in their incomes which includes purchasing TV, constructed houses, digging well, purchase for home appliances. For this purpose, researcher asked question and their opinions are reflected in Table No.8.

Table No.8

## Developmental work by your income

No.100

Sl.No.	Particular	No. of Respondents	Percentage
(i)	Purchased a T.V.	20	20%
(ii)	Constructed houses	80	80%
(iii)	Digging well	42	42%
(iv)	Purchased for home appliance	86	86%
(v)	Any other	38	38%

Source : Field Study

N.B. : Any other includes saving money for future, purchasing cultivable land etc.

It clearly shows that majority respondents are interested to purchase of home appliances. After gathering knowledge regarding the developmental works of respondents, the researcher tried to know about the perceptions and attitude to land owners. As the study is based on women agricultural labourer definitely women labourers have no more cultivable land. They depend on the land owner and receive wages from the land owner. The land owner's nature of cooperations are of various types. The responses in this regard are presented in Table.9

Table No.9  
Helping of land owners

No.100

Sl.No.	Particular	No. of Respondents	Percentage
(i)	Money Advance	54	54%
(ii)	Sometimes give financial help	42	42%
(iii)	Give leisure time	06	06%
(iv)	Give work leave	06	06%

Source : Field Study

It shows that less facilities were provided by the land owners. Sometimes, it is found that land owners give work assignment to labourers and accordingly wages are paid to them. Financial assistances are less by the land owners towards prosperity of the labourers except the usual wages.

In regard to future perspectives, the researcher tried to know the future plan and programmes of the agricultural labourer. In this regard several questions were asked to the respondents. It is found that women agriculture labourer will continue their profession as far as they are capable enough. Again they expressed that they will earn money till they are getting daily work. The respondents also expressed their view that they are changing the land owners as per their options. Those who are in loan from land owner, they face problem while changing their work. The future of these agricultural labourers will be confined to the agricultural works.

## Conclusion

In the study area more numbers of agriculture labourers were found. Women are doing labour works for maintenance of their family, for their children's education, for food expenditure etc. As they have no alternative source they are doing such work. Even though they

have their other family members, yet they are working for the saving purpose, purchasing new items, wearing new dresses etc. The concerned women go for work for about 20 to 30 days. In all the days they are not getting labour. In their income they are visiting to different places, relative houses and able to purchase some kind of home appliances etc. They are able to share money with their parents and able to purchase utensils, clothes etc. During their work time they suffer from different disease. Even they suffer from health and mental problems. In their income they give loan to other people, financially help to other persons, celebrate different programmes etc. They are doing this work for their development and their family development. They continue their work till their capacity of having strength. They are getting less assistance from the land owners in other way besides wages. They did not face any sort of harassment during their work period either from land owners or from male working friends. They have good cooperation and good correlation. However, the current government assisted programmes have made them economically sound. The beneficiaries of government schemes are found from these labour groups.

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