

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

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Female agriculture labour is an important segment of the total workforce in India. Female agriculture labour in general, work both for economic or non-economic reasons. The social and economic status of female in a society is largely determined by the social element, economic structure of the society and education. Though, female's contribution is very small as compared to the males in employment, their problems and conditions are in fact, inseparably linked everywhere with the general problems of the society they live in. The female participation has increased sharply in the rural areas from 13.36 percent in 1971 to 16 percent in 1981 and shows that female participation has increased from 6.65 percent in 1971 to 7.28 percent in 1981. Thus, the participation of female is observed to be increasing both in the urban and rural areas.

The total workforce (main workers plus marginal workers) of females indicates that it has increased to 19.76 percent in 1981 from 14.15 percent in 1971.

With the above understanding, it is necessary to look into various aspects already studied. As re-search is a continuous on-going process, it must have some continuity with earlier facts. This chapter is an attempt to present a brief resume of research findings conducted related to agricultural labours in India.

Meera Gattu Swami, K. Venkat Narayana and N. Linga Murthy¹ reported that the social status of female agricultural labour reveals that most of them belong to socially backward and economically disadvantaged group like scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and backward classes. It has enquired into the conditions of female agricultural labour, their socio-economic status, cultural background, employment pattern and wage structure. Most of the women, when compared with men, bear the brunt of poverty, landlessness, homelessness, underemployment and destitution. They are also very often subjected to different kinds of exploitation such as economic, cultural, sexual and political.

Female labourers are paid less when compared to men. Female agricultural labourers irrespective of their caste or religion are at a disadvantage vis-a-vis their male counterparts in terms of relative wages in agricultural operations. Women work for operations like ploughing and harvesting, while women labourers are widely hired for transplantation weeding and harvesting. Even for the same type of work wage, discrimination is found.

The main findings of the study are that there is discrimination in the payment of wages between males and females in both the areas. Irrigation and modernisation of agriculture could not increase the number of days of employment, effective organisation of labourers was responsible for increased wages.

Amitab Tewari² study also indicates that women constitute the most significant part of society everywhere in the world. The results

suggest that the economic status influences the social attitude of Indian women, which proves the hypothesis. But, the economic status, in no way influences their religious attitude. The women may have different attitudes towards religion owing to several factors, the economic status certainly not being one of them.

Ram Pyare Chaturvedi³ conducted a study of socio-economic status of women in Bandelkhand region and proved that the participation of women in the labour force lags behind the man to a significant extent. With rapid expansion of employment in the secondary and tertiary sectors, women are attracted to job oriented occupations especially, in unskilled labour, the economic and social development of a region depends on the number of persons who are economically active, the quality of their work and regularity of their employment.

According to the First Agricultural Labour Enquiry⁴ (1950-51), 90 percent of the total agricultural labour families were 10 percent attached and 90 percent casual workers. The corresponding figures for the Second Enquiry (1956-57) are 27 and 73 percent respectively. The percentage of agricultural labour rural population was 30.4, of which 50 percent were without land at the time of First Enquiry. During the Second Enquiry, these figures were 24.5 percent and 57 percent respectively.

According to the Assam "attached" workers were employed and paid on a monthly basis, or annual basis, while "casual" workers were

paid daily wages for a short period during busy season⁵. In Madras⁶, "attached" workers were engaged for the entire year or during the busy season for a period of three to six months. "Casual" workers being engaged either on time or on piece rates. In Pepsu⁷, "casual" workers were paid on a daily basis while "attached" workers generally employed for longer periods on yearly, half-yearly or monthly agreements. In case of Bihar⁸, on the other hand, a striking feature of agricultural employment was the payment of daily wages both to casual and attached workers. Similarly, in Rayalseema⁹ area some of the attached workers got daily wages even though the contract of employment was casual.

The Madhya Pradesh Studies¹⁰ in economics of Farm Management reported that 50 percent of the female labour is primarily employed in weeding operations.

Lakdawala¹¹ et al., reported that in Bombay employment opportunities for women were limited to only few occupations, which did not require much skill. They have shown that professional occupations were second in importance in women. But even in this category most of the women were concentrated in lower grades.

National Committee on the Status of Women¹² (1974), reported that women had lost employment in agriculture and their lack of other skills had reduced them to complete destitution even in the programme of rural works. They are employed as unskilled labourer at the lowest

rate of wages. This low employment and low wage rate were indicative of the lower economic status of female labourers as reported by Ray et al¹³.

Sawant and Dewan¹⁴ (1979), examined the impact of economic development of rural women particularly on their employment and reported that declining work participation, widening male-female wage differentials and substantial improvement in female literacy were associated with the forces of development. Women's access to the labour market in general depended not only on their skills but on the value of job available and competition from the male members for those jobs. According to the Rural Labour Enquiry¹⁵ (1963-64), a male agricultural workers, on an average, was employed for about 240 days in a year and female agricultural labourers for about 159 days in a year.

The Rural Labour Enquiry¹⁶ (1974-75) found a steep fall in wage-paid employment of agricultural labourers. They got wage paid employment for only 193 days in a year and female agricultural labourers for only 138 days in a year. Thus, the broad picture that emerges is labourers remain practically unemployed for about four months in a year.

According to the Second Agricultural Labour Enquiry¹⁷, during 1956-57, casual male workers got wage employment for 197 days and worked on their own for another 40 days. For the remaining 128 days of the year, these labourers remained unemployed. Female workers

remained unemployed for a longer period of about 197 days. Thus, casual agricultural labourers remain without work for four to five months in a year.

According to Sonachalam¹⁸, women worked on an average a maximum of 129 days in the garden zone and a minimum of 85 days in the dry zone.

The First and Second Agricultural Labour Enquiries¹⁹ (1950-51) and (1956-57) respectively show that agricultural wage employment of women had increased over the years. In the year 1956-57, the average employment of women workers was 131 days in agricultural and 10 days in non-agricultural labour, the corresponding figures in the First Enquiry being 120 and 14 days respectively.

During the Rural Labour Enquiry²⁰ (1964-65), the agricultural wage employment of women further increased from 131 days in 1956-57 to 149 days in 1964-65.

Another Farm Management Study²¹ (Monghyr District, 1970) found that when the demand for women labour was highest during the busy season of sowing or harvesting, in a district in Bihar, women compared to men. During the other months, however, women were not employed in sufficient numbers and were paid comparatively much less than men. In this connection, it must be kept in mind that the need for women labour is determined largely by the nature of the crop and the operations required for its cultivation. In paddy cultivation, the

requirement of women labour is the maximum. In fact, in many parts of the country certain operations such as transplating and harvesting of paddy are done mainly by women.

In Goswami and Bora's study²² (1970), in terms of mandays, the farm workers remained unemployed for about three months in the case of adult male workers and for six months in the case of female workers. The female workers remain idle for a considerable period in each month of the year.

The Labour Ministry²³ conducted intensive family surveys in some of the villages in a few states. In one of the villages in West Bengal, agricultural workers were found to be employed on an average for 220 days during the year. Of these, agricultural operation accounted for 166 and non-agricultural work for 54 days. In another village in Madras, the agricultural worker has employment for 200 days in the year, in Bihar for 151 days, and in Mysore for 121 days. Other enquiries have also shown that in Madras, where one-third of the area is cultivated with paddy, the work is provided for only about 10 weeks in the year, if there is a single crop, and for about 16 weeks, if there is double crop. Dry land cultivation for millets, oil seeds, etc., provides work for three or four weeks in the year. In Punjab²⁴, Mr. Calvert estimated that agriculture provided work for only about 200 days per year. The Agricultural and Rural Labour Enquiries²⁵ also pointed out that agricultural labour by and large are underemployed. All this shows that the agricultural workers are gainfully employed at the most for only six months during the year and during the remaining

part either take to some handicraft or some other type of work such as carting, digging of trenches, work on daily wages on the roads, etc. However, these occupations are hardly sufficient to meet their economic needs.

The study conducted by the ILO Feature Service, Geneva²⁶ (May, 1987), concluded that the rates of changes in unemployment is some of the developed and developing countries do change significantly. Further, the proportion of women in the workforce has grown in many parts of the world. In fact, 21 developed countries and 13 developing countries registered an increase of working women during 1982-85, according to the 1986 edition of ILO Year Book of Labour Statistics. Even then, in most of the countries, unemployment rate continued to be significantly higher for women than for men. In addition, where total unemployment rose, female unemployment increased more than male un-employment. Where male unemployment declined, female unemployment decreased at lower rates.

Rao and Sharma²⁷ found that the average days worked per casual labourer engaged only in agricultural labour worked out to 247 and 92 for males and females respectively.

Bhat²⁸ showed that a female casual labour worked on farm on an average of 192 days and some of them got work for more than 237 days in a year. Similar findings were reported by Joshi and Pandey²⁹. Pandey³⁰ has also indicated that during agricultural seasons, sometimes women work for a greater number of days than men.

The data from Agricultural Land Rural Enquiries³¹ reveal that in three agricultural operations namely, transplanting, weeding and harvesting employment of women in terms of number of full days per year had been more than that of men.

Noting the data on unemployment among agricultural workers, The Second Rural Labour Enquiries found that adult women were unemployed in India for 196 days. All of them were not agricultural workers, but some of them worked in non-agricultural occupations too.

Joshi and Pandey³² disclose that unemployment is found to be high among females than males. The Committee on Status of Women in India³³, found large number of women seeking employment during slack agricultural seasons in irrigation, road, and other construction work.

In the Farm Management Studies³⁴, it was found that except for the Central Zone, almost all types of field operations are performed. Studies conducted in different regions in India confirmed that full days employment of women is lesser than men for wage employment.

Standing³⁵ states that empirical research has so far not adequately demonstrated any constant association between education and female labour force participation. Studies³⁶ conducted in field also bring light that though the literacy among the marginal farmers and landless labourers is low, the incidence of female literacy is much lower than among male counterparts.

Nath³⁷, 1961 and 1971 census data suggest that women's participation in the labour force tends to decline with increase in literacy. Alfred de Souza³⁸ found that female work participation fluctuates very highly from region to region. The percentage of women workers in total working force as well as their percentage in the total female population have been declining. While the majority of both male and female workers are illiterate, the percentage of illiterate workers among females is much larger than among males. The rate of female work participation declines from rural and urban and from smaller to larger communities. The lower level education, say below matriculation, with increasing education of women the rate of female work participation declines, at higher educational levels the rate goes on increasing.

De Souza³⁹ has shown by comparing different regions that the rate of women workers varies with the level of socio-economic development and the percentage of women engaged in tertiary occupations. Comparatively, the rate of women workers is much higher in less developed areas where more people are engaged in primary and secondary occupations and it is lower in more prosperous regions where a large proportion were working in tertiary occupations.

A recent study⁴⁰ (Kaur, 1987) shows that rural women devote on an average 8.70 hours daily in home, 1.70 hours in dairy/livestock/husbandry and 1.73 hours in farm sector. Existing empirical literature by Jain and Chand⁴¹ (1982) and Khan et al (1983) show that the women of poor households put in long hours of work, often much

longer than that of men, domestic work, of course, is included. Chakravarty⁴² (1975) found that a female spent 15-17 hours in a day out of which 8 to 9 hours on farm, 3-4 hours in care of animals, and 3-4 hours in attending household chores during peak season.

Other empirical studies⁴³ by Jain et al (1981), Kaur (1982), Srivastava (1982), Verma and Malik (1984), Manjal et al (1985), Soni, Jinda and Arora (1985), Kaur (1986), Singh et al (1987), Agarwal (1988) and Kashyap (1988) have also revealed the fact that women generally work more than 12 hours in a day in different activities. However, women working as agricultural labourers devoted lesser time in household chores. Their direct contribution in the family income was also much higher. Malathy⁴⁴ (1988) tried to estimate the monetary value of domestic work of women in Madras city. It was estimated that working women devote on an average 1991 hours in a year to work at home of which 33 percent go towards child care and remaining time was devoted to other household tasks. She was spending 1827 hours a year working in the market, thereby spending 3818 hours a year in production activities. Women who were full time house wives did 2408 hours domestic work. The money value of household services done by women was approximately Rs. 7600 which was about 42 percent of the family income. Studies by Grewal et al⁴⁵ (1985), Verma (1986) and Dogra (1988) clearly indicated enhancement in the status of employed women as a result of their increased earnings.

As regards working conditions and hours of work, the First Agricultural Labour Enquiry⁴⁶ wrote ".... there was no goodwill and

co-operation between workers and employers and by local custom. The length of the working day was also determined by seasonal needs. During harvesting and threshing seasons, casual workers were engaged for about 10 to 11 hours a day. The working conditions of agricultural labour are fixed obviously by nature. Since they have to work in open, they work both in sun and rain."

According to the Second Agricultural Labour Enquiry,⁴⁷ wages formed 73 percent of their total income during 1956-57. They are paid partly in cash and partly in kind, about 49 percent of their wages are paid in cash, 40 percent in kind and the remaining 11 percent in a mixed form.

According to the Second Agricultural Labour Enquiry⁴⁸, the annual percapita income in 1950-51 was Rs. 104 which decreased in 1956-57 to Rs. 92.7. The income of an agricultural labour household during this period decreased from Rs. 447 to Rs. 437.5, but increased to Rs. 660.2 during 1963-64.

The 25th round of the National Sample Survey⁴⁹ has revealed that during July 1970 to June 1971, the average wages per day for the country as a whole was Rs. 2.03 for the landless worker and Rs. 1.80 for small cultivators.

Sinha⁵⁰ reported that the payment was paid lesser than the prevailing rate. In UP an Enquiry⁵¹ into rural wages in four villages, two in Meerut and two in Jhansi District, showed that in

Meerut District, in one village the "attached" labourers were paid one rupee a day for ploughing and this was supplemented by 4 chattaks of atta and 2 chattaks of gur. Casual ploughmen were paid a monthly wage in vogue. "Attached" ploughmen were paid a monthly wage of Rs. 20 plus three chattaks of atta every day. Those employed on piece work in weeding, harvesting, etc., were given annas eight per bigha without any perquisites. The piece wage for harvesting was supplemented by 5 seers of the harvested grain for men and 3 seers for women per day. In Jhansi village, farm servants were paid in kind and were 2 seers and chattaks of wheat or grain per day. In another Jhansi village, the permanent farm servants were paid a monthly wage of Rs. 16 and were supplied with 4 breads per day. They were also granted 2 bighas of land free of rent. In addition they were given daily cash wage of ten annas for weeding and 3 seers of grain for harvesting. Women were also employed as casual workers for weeding and harvesting, the rate for weeding was eight annas per day and for harvesting 2 seer, 8 chattaks of harvested grain. The ploughmen in this village worked for ten hours a day while the labourers engaged in other operations worked only for eight hours.

The findings of the Agricultural and Rural Labour Enquiries⁵² regarding earnings and income of agricultural labourers are mentioned here. The difference in the wages of agricultural and industrial workers is striking. The annual income per capita of agricultural labour as against industrial labour was estimated to be Rs. 160 against Rs. 268 in Bengal, Rs. 119 as against Rs. 332 in Bihar, Rs. 79 as against Rs. 145 in Orissa, Rs. 87 as against Rs. 262 in Madhya

Pradesh, Rs. 121 as against Rs. 216 in Madhya Pradesh and Rs. 88 as against Rs. 368 in Bombay.

Gupta and Singh⁵³ (1981) highlighted that the agricultural labourers engaged in any of the selected enterprise viz. shoe-making, weaving and rope making and higher percapita and family income as compared to those who worked exclusively as agricultural labourers throughout the year.

Johri and Pandey⁵⁴ (1972) found that in UP the largest percentage (36.42) of women from the age group 30-39 years were working. Further analysis of data on age and sex composition of workers revealed that a greater number of male workers belonged to relatively younger age groups than female workers. In fact, the proportion of females of less than 20 years of age was less than half of male workers in the same age.

The All India Debt and Investment Survey⁵⁵, conducted by the Reserve Bank of India revealed that around one-third of agricultural labour households were in debt, average debt per such household being Rs. 162. It needs to be noted that the survey found the bulk of indebted agricultural labour households are still in the grip of non-institutional source of credit, namely, the traditional money lenders. What needs to be emphasised is that the major part of the debt is raised not to meet productive demand but to satisfy daily consumption needs. This leaves little scope for escape once such loans are raised by indigent agricultural labourers.

The Rural Labour Enquiry⁵⁶ (1974-75) revealed that the proportion of agricultural labour households in debt to total agricultural labour force in the country has increased from 61 percent in 1964-65 to 66 percent in 1974-75, the average household debt having risen from Rs. 244 in 1964-65 to Rs. 584 in 1974-75. With all the progress made by co-operative credit societies and nationalised commercial bank branches in rural areas, it needs to be noted that even in 1974-75, traditional money lenders accounted for 43 percent of the total debt raised by the indebted agricultural labour households. (This was higher by 17 percent compared to the position in this respect in 1964-65).

According to Narayan Swamy⁵⁷, who conducted investigations into the rural indebtedness in Madras, the indebtedness of the landless labourer had increased by 46.6 percent during the war. While there has been a reduction in the total agricultural indebtedness, the benefit has gone to the landed peasants, the landless labourers per capita debt rising from Rs. 5.7 to Rs. 8.3.

According to the Agricultural Labour Enquiries⁵⁸, the total debt of the agricultural labourers was Rs. 180 crores in 1950-51 and Rs. 143 crores in 1956-57. The average amount of debt per family was Rs. 105 in 1950-51 and Rs. 138 in 1956-57. The percentage of families in debt was 45 in 1950-51 and 64 in 1956-57.

The findings of Agricultural and Rural Labour Enquiries⁵⁹ regarding indebtedness among agricultural labour households are

mentioned in the following pages. The agricultural workers have not been benefited so much from the rising prices, because their wages have not gone upto the same extent, and have not been able to share the profits of agriculture while the cost of living has been constantly increasing.

Governement of India⁶⁰ conducted the First and Second Agricultural Labour Enquiries in 1950-51 and 1956-57. According to the First Enquiry, 44.5 percent of the total agricultural labour households were in debt and the average debt per family was Rs. 47. The corresponding figures according to the Second Enquiry were 63.9 percent and Rs. 88 per household respectively. The average cash debt per household of agricultural labourers inclusive of rural artisans rose to Rs. 652 in 1971 and Rs. 1678 in 1981 as revealed by the All India Debt and Investment Survey.

According to one estimate⁶¹, 44.5 percent of agricultural labour households were under debt in 1950-51 and the percentage of such households was 63.9 in 1956-57. Taking indebted households, the debt on an average per household was Rs. 105 in 1950-51 and Rs. 138 in 1956-57. The total debt in 1950-51 was estimated to be Rs. 88 crores which had increased to Rs. 143 crores in 1956-57. Thus, these poverty stricken workers are not only under debt, but the burden of debt has been on the increase.

In the opinion of the National Commission on Agriculture⁶² (1976), the real wages appear to have declined in Assam, Gujarath,

Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka and Orissa with rampant unemployment and under employment and with such low rates or real wages and with hardly any productive assets (around 69 percent of agricultural labourers had assets worth only Rs. 1,000 or so, consisting mostly of household goods and a few agricultural implements). It is not at all surprising that majority of agricultural labourers happen to be in debt to money lenders charging excessively high rates of interest on loans sought by these indigent and needy agricultural borrowers. Majority of them, are therefore, living at the subsistence level. Quite a large number of them are born in debt, live in debt, and die in debt.

The females in the agricultural sector are still largely a neglected area; those who are drawn from rural areas are unskilled labourers. Poverty compels them to enter jobs which entail hard labour and reward very little. In the ILO Report, it is observed that agricultural labourers are the reservoirs which provide a constant flow of labour into agricultural occupations. Ignorance, tradition bound attitudes, illiteracy, lack of skill, seasonal nature of employment, heavy physical work of different types, long hours of work with limited payments, discrimination in wage structures of men and women, lack of job security, minimum wages, lack of comprehensive legislation to cover the workers in the agricultural sector, competition in employment and the resultant deprivation of minimum wage, lack of minimum facilities at work place, ill-treatment, bondage and alienation, etc., are some of the characteristics of the employment of female in this sector. Although, these jobs offer no attraction and require a great deal of physical ordeal, a large number of females continue to search for these

jobs for their livelihood over the years only to taste disrespect, slavery and ill-health. The present study attempts to make an enquiry into the employment conditions of women workers in the agricultural sector.

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