

Life of Women Agricultural Labourers in Orissa

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"There is no chance for welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved."

- Swami Vivekananda

Although, 'GREEN REVOLUTION' has given our country self sufficiency in agriculture sector, its benefits have not been reached to the agricultural labourers especially the Women Agricultural Labourers (WALs). They get less and irregular wage and maintain lower living style remaining below poverty line. India being the agriculture oriented country, agriculture labourers are the integral part of total Indian labour force. The exploitation of women labourers in rural regions happens both horizontally and vertically. Therefore, the study of Women Agricultural Labourers (WALs) is very important in this regard.

Keeping this in view, one research study was undertaken under the project entitled "Efficient Resource Management of Women Agricultural Labourers" covering two blocks like Niali in Cuttack district (irrigated) and Dhenkanal Sadar in Dhenkanal district (non-irrigated). Hundred WALs were randomly selected (50 from each block) from twenty villages (ten in each block) having children and minimum three years of experiences in farm labour work.

The study is based on the objectives of assessing socio-economic profiles, the time management, family resource use and household activities of WALs. Data was collected through interview schedule on the basis of the objectives and observations were made as follows.

Observations

Socio-Economic-Personal Profile: Of the socio-economic variables, 96% of the Women Agricultural Labourers (WALs,) were from backward caste families and illiterate while most of them were landless. Only 6% of them had land with small size and low economic living standard. Forty percent of the WALs took up farming in leased-in lands, which is maximum up to three acres. Livestock management was the main source of income next to wage for maximum WALs (26%) followed by nutrition garden. The less number of WALs (16%) had other source of income like small business, contract work, betel farm, service, rural craft and farming. As in modern society the people prefer the nuclear family system due to over burden and self centeredness, the WALs were not out of it.

The wage rate was Rs.40 - Rs.50 and Rs.50 - Rs.60 for both farm (rice based) and non-farm activities (bond work) respectively. The

WALs (71.50%) got it in cash form against their labour. They also got in kind like 1 bundle of grams against 10 bundles of its harvest. In case of caste profession, the washer women had got 10 kg. of rice per family per year. The housing facilities were very poor and pitiable having no proper rooms for kitchen and sanitation although shelter is the basic human need. It was observed that the percentage of kacha house with WALs was 58.00%. They viewed food as the main item on which major expenditure was done.

Most of the WALs were with debt to manage their livelihood. They had borrowed money from different sources like LIC, money lender, friends and relatives, DRDA, bank, Mahila Sangha and SHG with interest rate up to eight percent.

Employment Opportunities: The comparison between the WALs of the two different situations brought out the following differences:

The employment of WALs in Cuttack district (irrigated) was little different from Dhenkanal district (non-irrigated) in Orissa. During summer, in Cuttack district, the WALs (4 to 8%) got employment for harvesting sugarcane (30 days), bond work (20 days), work in betel farm (10 days), harvesting ground nut and grams 15 (days) while not a single WAL in Dhenkanal district got employment for a single day in farm activities. Rather, sixty percent of WALs were engaged (20 -30 days) for collection of fuel, 50% for kendu leaves for bidi making (20-45 days), 20% for palm leaves (10-12 days) for mat making, 10% in brass handicraft (50-60 days) as caste profession and another 10% in cow dung cake preparation (20-25 days) for house hold cooking purpose. Here, training may be imparted for WALs to improve their skills in mat

making, bidi making and doing handicraft for better market.

In winter, 76% of WALs were engaged in rice harvesting (15 - 60 days) in Cuttack while (70%) for 8 - 50 days in Dhenkanal. In addition, the WALs in Cuttack got employment in other field activities like sowing of green gram (8 days) and harvesting of both sugarcane (30 days) and ground nut (10 days). But, for Dhenkanal situation, the WALs were busy in collection of kendu leaves for 10-15 days, fuel for 15-20 days and salia (khali) leaves for 10-20 days. So, for non-irrigated situation, some income generating programmes may be introduced for effective utilisation of their time.

In rainy season, majority of WALs (80%) in irrigated and (70%) in non-irrigated situations were employed in transplanting for 24 - 60 days and 25-32 days respectively. In both the situations 80 % of WALs were engaged in weeding. However in irrigated situation 4% of WALs were found in fertilizer application (8 days) but none of the WALs were involved in these activities in non irrigated trac. The WALs were found more in collection of fuel and grass which was not found in irrigated trac.

It was observed that 9.00% had gone 15 to 20 km and also above it by walking in search of wage and returned by public transport or by truck pre-booked by a Sardar /Contractor. Otherwise being harassed again by walking they returned home. For this, they started at 6.00 A.M. from home and returned with the same truck at night 9-10 P.M.

To establish good relation they did different types of part time activities like moping clay house (4%), fuel collection (8%), winnowing of milled rice (8%), rearing animals (12%), cow dung cake

preparation (2%), calf rearing (2%) cleaning cow shed (2%) without any wage. They had expectation that at the time of need could get loan from them with interest rate of 5-10 percent. Some of them did washing clothes of other families as part time job and earned Rs.50/- per day, total Rs.1500/- to 2000/- in a year against the work.

Factors Affecting Work Efficiency: The perception of WALs reveals that the wage rate was the most affecting factor (100%) by harming their efficiency. While the efficiency of 86% was much deteriorated due to low wage rate, 14% expressed the good wage rate contributed much for their efficiency. The major factors (where more than 50% respondents affected) affecting the efficiency were use of leisure time, family pressure, age, family support, distance, health, use of labour saving devices and inter-personal relationship. The other minor factors were skills, other incentives, experience, seasonal work, contractual work, cultural factor and attitude. The WALs (10%) who used their skills in farming perceived the skills contributing for their efficiency.

Social Participation: It was observed that more number of WALs had both active and passive participation in SHG. Very negligible WALs were ward members in Gram Panchayats. Other than these, there was no other organizational participation. In other words the contact was found to be most localised in nature. Therefore, there is need to increase participation of WALs in different formal organisations in order to make them active partners of developmental programmes.

Leisure Time Use: The study investigated the leisure time spending of WALs in different ways relating to family and household work. The interesting part of the study is that the time spent on different activities was sometimes non-

productive like gossiping, sleeping, playing cards and watching TV in orderly manner. It indicates that the WALs leave a substantial time at hand which can otherwise be utilised by making best use of it to earn more and leave better.

Food Habit: They preferred to consume mostly coarse rice in beverage form and locally produced fruits and vegetables. Sometimes purchased costly fruits from market during festivals like 'savitri' and meat once or twice only during festivals like 'raja'. Here awareness should be created among the WALs about family food and nutritional security coupled with training on raising nutrition garden, value addition etc.

Future Plan: For improving their economic standard of living, they were more interested for taking livestock management, opening small shop (betel shop) and raising vegetable crops in lease plot. Therefore, care should be taken for developing different enterprises and its management.

Physical Drudgery: For women agriculture labourers, the time and working hours are very important as besides farm labour work they have to take the burden of family-work, child care, animal care etc. It was observed in this study that in peak period, maximum WALs (28%) had worked for 14-18 hours while in lean period it came down to 14-16 hours. Further, the WALs had taken rest from 1-3 months during carrying stage before the delivery of their children whereas 14% had delivered their children without availing any rest. Even on the particular day of delivery also they had worked in the field itself.

Suggestions

- o The wage rate of the women agricultural labourers should be increased and equal with the male.

- o Work done by women agricultural labourers should be reserved for female only.
- o Technology and loan should be assisted for leisure time income generating activities.
- o Organizing unions for women agricultural labourers to avail benefits in different sectors.
- o Maternity leave facility, rest place, sanitation and special place for children should be taken care of.
- o They should be provided nutritious food, primary medical help and educational facility.
- o In maternity leave period, provision of lowest wage rate by government should be made.
- o There should be a special cell for women agricultural labourers' problems and settlement in each village/block level.
- o Deprivation of child from mother due to farm work in post natal period
- o Victim of child labour and exploitation
- o Low wage rate
- o Mental and physical torture by male persons
- o Poor access to health care services
- o Dawn to dusk hard labour
- o Insecurity at work place
- o Health hazards due to farm work
- o Dissertation and divorce by husbands
- o Worst sufferers of natural calamities

Conclusion:

It is time to address the issues and discuss the kind of policy reforms and institutional changes required for the emancipation and empowerment of rural female labour force. Empowerment should aim at changing the nature and direction of the power structures which marginalize the women labourers.

"Nature gave women too much power, the law giving them too little"

- Will Henry

The distinct features

- o Deprivation of child from play and education



A school student pinning up the Bharat Scouts and Guides flag to Hon'ble Chief Minister Shri Naveen Patnaik at Naveen Nivas on 7.11.2008.