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WOMEN AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS IN PADDY CULTIVATION IN ALAPPUZHA DISTRICT OF KERALA

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ABSTRACT

The study is based on women agricultural labourers in paddy cultivation. An attempt has been made in the paper to examine the wage pattern, working hours and working conditions of these women labourers. For this, 200 women agricultural labourers in paddy cultivation were purposefully selected for administering the interview schedule from Alappuzha district of Kerala. The findings show that majority of the women agricultural labourers in paddy cultivation are not satisfied with their wages as they are not able to repay their debts with the amount they earn and are struggling to come out of the poverty. In some families even, the male members of the family are also depended up them. These women labourers are not interested in sending their grown-up children to seek jobs under agriculture and agriculture allied works this is mainly because of the low wages and seasonality of the work. Government must ensure that the policies adopted by them are implemented and are benefiting the targeted group.

KEYWORDS

agriculture, women agricultural labourers, paddy cultivation, unorganised labour.

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INTRODUCTION

The unorganised labour market constitutes a major segment in any society, whether in developed or developing countries. It is estimated that the percentage of workers in the unorganised sector in the developed and developing countries is about 46 percent and 76 percent. In India out of the total workforce nearly 81 percent are working in the unorganised sector. Out of the total unorganised labour 22.86 percent is constituted by women. That is out of the total working women population 95.33 percent comes under unorganised labour, where as it is 86.69 percent for men.

The unorganised sector plays an important role in the growth of the Indian economy. This sector is vast and consists of a large number of job opportunities and this may be one of the reasons why labourers in this sector are outnumbering. The socially and economically underprivileged section of the society can find ample job opportunities in this sector. Agriculture sector continues to be an important component of unorganised sector and it also provides direct employment to millions of people. Economic Survey 2017-18 says that with growing rural to urban migration by men, there is 'feminisation' of agriculture sector, with increasing number of women in multiple roles as cultivators, entrepreneurs, and labourers.

AGRICULTURE LABOURERS: AN OVERVIEW

According to the National Commission on Labour, "An agricultural labour is one who is basically unskilled and unorganised and has little for its livelihood, other than personal labour."

Agricultural sector contributes 20 percent towards India's GDP and almost 42.6 percent of the working population of India is employed under this sector which also includes 75 percent of the country's economically active women labourers. Agricultural labourers have increased tremendously over a period of time. Most of them are landless and are purely depending upon their wage from agriculture and about 70 per cent of the country's population earn their livelihood from agriculture and allied occupations. They even don't have any savings or other source of income. Agriculture sector is also characterised by seasonal employment therefore the agricultural labourers are frequently facing the problem of seasonal unemployment and under-employment. Agricultural workers on an average get employment for about 200 days in a year. These labourers are considered as the most neglected class in Indian rural structure, they possess no skill or training and they have no alternative employment opportunities.

The poverty among agricultural labourers is due to prolonged rural under development, unemployment, low wages, under-nutrition, illiteracy and social backwardness. These factors reinforce each other so as to create a vicious circle of poverty among them.

In paddy cultivation women are involved in almost all agricultural activities like land preparation, seed selection, seedling production, uprooting of seedlings, transplanting and weeding, harvesting and post-harvest activities. Mentioning about the pay disparity between men and women labourers in paddy cultivation, employers always prefer to hire women due to their low wages. Women working in equal conditions in paddy field earn much less than their counterparts. Thus women provide a cheap source of labour in paddy cultivation.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Gulati L in her paper 'Women in the unorganized sector with special reference to Kerala' presented a macro level picture of work participation by women in India as a whole as well as Kerala state and also to the extent to which working women are concentrated in unorganised sector of the economy of India and Kerala. In the second part of the paper she offered insights gained on the basis of micro level studies of the working women in Kerala drawn from different occupational categories, putting together the main stands of observation. It would appear that women who work in the unorganised sector come from household where the parents are in casual wage labour and also tend to get married to men who are in this sector. [4]

Mazumdar & Guruswamy (2006) in their paper broadly aim to take a fresh look at the current situation of women's work in Kerala, primarily on the basis of data provided in the 2001 Census of India. It is apparent that structural transformation of women's economic activity has certainly taken place in the state with agriculture and conventional industries losing their significance and tertiary sector taking up its place, yet reduction of employment among women have taken place in the process, the event being more pronounced in some districts. Migration, reduction in paddy cultivation, growth in per capita income, male workforce participation, sex ratio, and female literacy rate to certain extent emerged as the variables having a considerable correlation with female workforce participation rate. Reason behind the paradox of low female employment and excessive social development is the development process in the state, which has remained largely irresponsive to the transition in the quality of the women workforce, as well as the overall occupational transformation in the state. At the end, the authors suggest that sincere efforts from the government towards identifying and encouraging promising sectors and at the same time reviving traditional industries with an eye towards emerging markets both within and outside the country, can address the unemployment problem among women in the rural areas to a certain extent. [6]

Prakash (2009), conducted a study in the districts of Palakkad and Alappuzha (Kuttanad) to analyse the socio-economic conditions of female agricultural workers. Secondary and primary data are used for the study. The major problems faced by the female agricultural labourers are poverty, low income, lack of employment, lack of the sufficient number of days of work, lack of land for cultivation, lack of income-earning assets or livestock, increasing debt liabilities, poor housing, and inability to construct good houses, inadequate toilet facilities or lack of toilets, lack of availability of drinking water, sickness of family members, health problems

of old people, low consumption levels and consumption of alcoholic drinks by their husbands and other members of the family. In the concluding session, the author recommends many strategies to improve the socio-economic conditions there. [8]

Shanthy (2009) conducted a study in two districts of Kerala and Tamil Nadu to recognise the organisation of women agricultural labourers in rice farming systems. The study discloses that majority of the women agricultural labourers were low in labour efficiency and there is remarkable difference between the women agricultural labourers of Kerala and Tamil Nadu. The study has pointed out that; since the labour efficiency of both the states were poor, greater attention is to be given focusing on the factors associated with labour efficiency. [9]

Kispotta et. al (2016), carried out a study in Chattisgarh, India to apprehend the participation of the woman labour pressure in the agricultural zone. In India, the female work participation rate has been changing over the years in general and the agricultural female work participation rate has improved in particular. As in line with National Sample Survey (68th Round), the employee population ratio for women within the rural zone become 24.80percent in 2011-12, whereas for men, it become 54.30 percent. In the city zone, it was 14.70percentfor women and 54.60percent for men. In Chhattisgarh, the women labour force participation rate in agricultural activities within the rural location has increased indicating the contribution of the educated women. The authors suggest that to increase female work participation within the average improvement of the Indian economy, discrimination towards female labour ought to be stopped and female labour ought to receive the same wages as male labourers. [5]

Mehrotra & Sinha (2019) recommended a set of policies based on the evaluation of the nature and tendencies of female work participation and brief analysis of the underlying reasons for setback of such tendencies. Women are shifting out of the low productiveness agricultural sector, which necessitates a boom in employment opportunities in the non-agricultural sector. Gender equality through maximizing women's presence and involvement in positions of strength and decision making at all levels in both public and private spheres can revise the secondary status of women in the political – financial – home spaces. The evaluation suggests that the gender gap in labour force participation in India is excessive and annoying over the period. Even though there may be a structural change in female employment with declining agricultural employment, there is not a commensurate increase in non-agricultural activities, except for construction. Job opportunities for women are limited to a few sectors; policies and regulations are needed to promote access of employment throughout the spectrum of sectors and occupations. [7]

Department of Agriculture, Cooperation & Farmers' Welfare (2021) submitted a report to the Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers' Welfare discussing the status of different agricultural practices, involvement of labourers, issues faced by the farmers and the effectiveness of different policies and regulations implemented by government. Agriculture plays an important role in India's economy. 54.6percent of the total workforce is engaged in agricultural and allied sector activities. More than half of the Indian population is engaged in agriculture and related activities. [3]

IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

A major chunk of women is working in the unorganised sector and in the unorganised sector majority of them are still working in the agriculture sector. These agricultural workers are working under poor working conditions without any social security and are also paid less, and in spite of various labour movements in Alappuzha, the conditions of the female agricultural labourers in paddy cultivation is still the same i.e. there is no much improvement in their working condition It's in this context the author proposes to enquire into the working conditions of women agricultural labourers in Alappuzha district of Kerala.

OBJECTIVES

1. To examine the working condition of women agricultural labourers in paddy cultivation in the district of Alappuzha.
2. To identify the problems faced by these women agricultural labourers in paddy cultivation.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

AREA UNDER STUDY

The data was collected from women agricultural labourers in paddy cultivation from the Alappuzha district of Kerala.

SAMPLING TECHNIQUE AND SAMPLE SIZE

The population of the study is women labourers in paddy cultivation, which is very large. Therefore 200 women agricultural labourers were purposefully selected for administering the interview schedule.

DATA COLLECTION METHOD

The data is collected from both primary and secondary source. Primary data was collected through interview schedules from women agricultural labourers in the paddy cultivation in the Alappuzha district of Kerala. Secondary data have been collected from various books, reports, journals, online resources etc.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

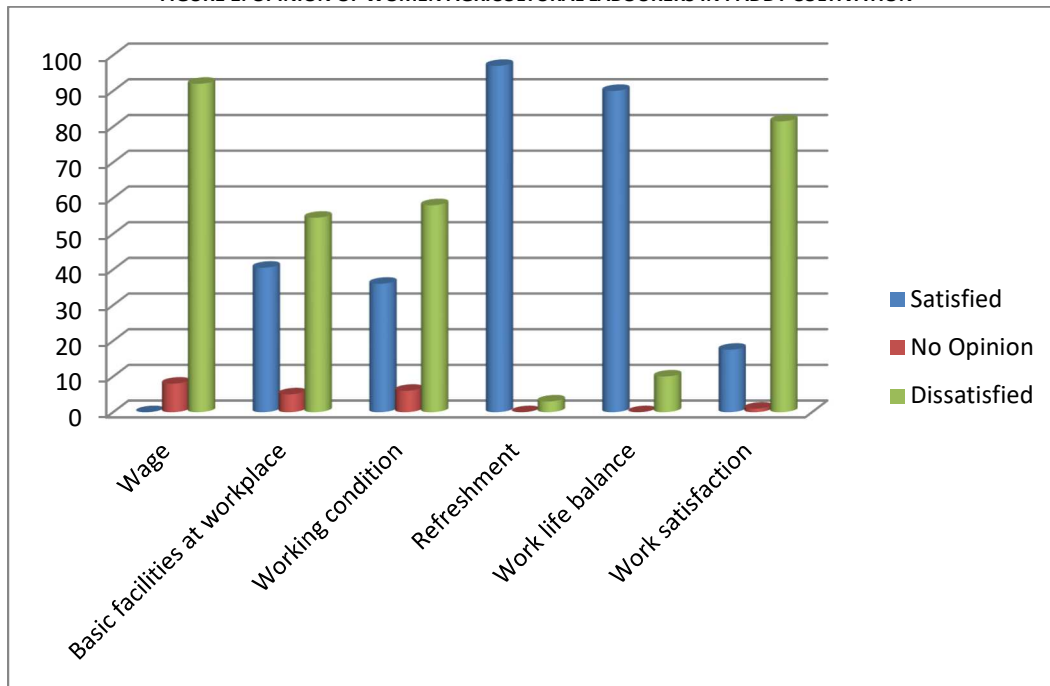
The data regarding wage, work satisfaction, family commitments, working hours, basic facilities at work place, working condition, refreshment at work place etc. of the women agricultural labourers in paddy cultivation were collected through interview schedules and the major findings are summarised in the following table.

TABLE 1: OPINION OF WOMEN AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS IN PADDY CULTIVATION

Opinion	Satisfied		No Opinion		Dissatisfied	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Wage	0	0	16	8	184	92
Basic facilities at workplace	81	40.5	10	5	109	54.5
Working condition	72	36	12	6	116	58
Refreshment	194	97	0	0	6	3
Work life balance	180	90	0	0	20	10
Work satisfaction	35	17.5	2	1	163	81.5

Source: Primary Data

FIGURE 1: OPINION OF WOMEN AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS IN PADDY CULTIVATION



Source: Primary Data

Table.1 and Figure.1 shows that 92 percent of the agricultural labourers are not satisfied with the wages that they get. Only 40.5 percent of the workers is satisfied with the basic facilities provided at the work place but 54.5 percent of them are not satisfied with the basic facilities provided at the work place. Regarding the working condition 36 percent of the workers are satisfied but 58 percent of them are dissatisfied with it. With respect to the refreshment provided at the work place majority of them i.e. 97 percent are satisfied with it only a few of them are not satisfied with it. Majority of the workers are able to manage their work life, only 10 percent of them are finding difficulty in managing their work life. Regarding work satisfaction only few of them are satisfied with the work they do and 81.5 percent of them are not satisfied with it, this may be because of the very less wage that they get.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

Women agricultural labourers contribute a major chunk in the unorganised labour market. This is mainly because agricultural work does not require much skill and is easily accessible. The participation of women agricultural labourers in paddy cultivation is quite large in the study area and these women agricultural labourers are involved in almost all of the agricultural activity.

The major problems faced by agricultural women which was revealed through the interview was; less wage and also gender discrimination in payment of wage. Their working condition was also very poor. Majority of them are having a lot of debts and they also find it difficult to repay it with their wages. In some families even, the male members of the family are also dependent upon them. Due to their poor economic condition they are not willing to send their grown-up children to agriculture relate works, instead these children are seeking jobs in factories and construction sector.

The Government should arrange some special credit schemes for the agricultural labourers, so that they can educate their children and also repay their debts of high interest rates. There by they can at least come out of the vicious circle of poverty.

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