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## A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY OF WOMEN WORKERS IN AGRICULTURE

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### **Abstract:**

*Women make important contributions to the agricultural and rural economies of all regions of the world. About 30.58 percent of the total workforces engaged in agriculture are female work force who is contributing a major proportion to the farm production as well as household income. In our country in different process of agricultural operation female workforce plays significant role although quantitative valuation in terms of money is ignored. Gender inequality is reflected in the unequal sharing of benefits and adversities between man and woman. It reflects itself in women's differential access to employment, education, health care, resources, and welfare measures. The need for exploration of the lives of women especially women belonging to the lowest sections of the society, is therefore obvious. The present study is focused on the lives of women agricultural workers from the Sociological point of view.*

**Key words:** Women, Agriculture, Labour, Gender Inequality.

### **INTRODUCTION:**

Women make important contributions to the agricultural and rural economies of all regions of the world. Agriculture is one of the largest enterprises of India which plays an important role in the country by contributing about one fifth of the national income, providing large employment opportunities, supplying adequate food grains to the growing population and giving a scope for earning foreign exchange through export, providing a base for industrial development. According to the 2011 census, 56.7 percent of the main workers labour force was employed in the agriculture and allied activities which reflect the predominance of agriculture in the matter of employment opportunity. About 30.58 percent of the total workforces engaged in agriculture are female work force who is contributing a major proportion to the farm production as well as household income.

In India, the typical work of the female agricultural laborer or cultivator is limited to less skilled jobs, such as sowing, transplanting, weeding and harvesting, that often fit well within the framework of domestic life and child-rearing. Many women also participate in agricultural work as unpaid subsistence labor. According to United Nations Human Development Report-2011, only 32.8% of Indian women formally participate in the labor force, a rate that has remained steady since 2009 statistics. By comparison men constitute 81.1%. An estimated 52-75% of Indian women engaged in agriculture are illiterate, an education barrier that prevents women from participating in more skilled labor sectors. In all activities there is an average gender wage disparity, with women earning only 70 percent of men's wage. Additionally, many women participate in agricultural work as unpaid subsistence labor. The lack of employment mobility and education render the majority of women in India vulnerable, as dependents on the growth and stability of the agricultural market (Satyavathi, C. Tara et. al. 2010).

The various activities performed by women can be divided into two broad headings, "Market activities" which constitutes women's participation in various farm and nonfarm activities for wages, another part in "Non-market activities" which includes women's contribution to a household as a mother, wife or daughter. The dual role of women as a paid



worker in outside the family and unpaid worker in the household contributes a significant portion in real terms to the productive system of a country. But throughout the world rural women is under represented in the development process (Davender Dommati, 2011).

Historically, Maharashtra economy is agro-based and a major proportion of women in the labour force work in agriculture. A significant proportion of the labour force in the agricultural sector comprises women. Men were able to opt out from agriculture and seek new employment avenues elsewhere when they encountered low prospects in agriculture. Women have remained, however, in the agricultural sector, accepting the traditional practice of paying wages to women at half the rates for men. Introduction of mechanization caused high levels of underemployment and casualisation in the agricultural sector. Increasing casualisation of work, falling incomes, and increasing insecurity of employment are real threats endangering the interests of women in the agricultural sector. These developments have had disturbing implications for their health as health is closely linked to a variety of socio-economic, cultural, political, and ecological dimensions. Gender inequality is reflected in the unequal sharing of benefits and adversities between man and woman. It reflects itself in women's differential access to employment, education, health care, resources, and welfare measures. The need for exploration of the lives of women especially women belonging to the lowest sections of the society, is therefore obvious. The present study is focused on the lives of women agricultural workers from the Sociological point of view.

#### **METHODOLOGY:**

The aim of the present paper is to sociological analyze the lives of women agriculture workers in Sangli District.

#### **OBJECTIVES:**

The main objectives set for the present study are as follows:

1. To study the socio-economic background of women workers.
2. To examining how gender inequities affect women's lives.

#### **Universe and Sample of the Study:**

For the study researcher has chosen Sangli district, one of the agro based region in Western Maharashtra. The sample consisted of households selected from two villages of the district namely, Nagaonkavathe and Kavathe Ekan. According to the panchayat data more than 70 percent of the population of these villages depends on agriculture for their livelihood. In order to understand the distribution of agricultural labour households, researcher conducted a baseline survey in these villages in which a large proportion of the agricultural labourers in the village are concentrated. Based on the information provided by the baseline survey, researcher has purposively selected sample of 50 households for an in-depth survey.

#### **Tools and Techniques of Data Collection:**

This study is mainly based on primary data. The primary data were collected from the agricultural women workers by using pretested interview schedule. The secondary data were collected from various secondary sources such as: books, journals, magazines, office documents, internet, etc.

#### **ANALYSIS OF DATA:**

The collected data were transferred to code sheets and statistical analysis was carried out. For open-ended questions such data were edited and coding. The whole data was

analyzed by using SPSS (Statistical Packages for Social Sciences) and excel. The out-put was used for interpretation of data.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

### A) General socio-economic characteristics of respondents:

This part of the survey aimed to determinate the general socio-economic characteristics of respondents i.e. their age, gender, caste category, housing condition and family's monthly income.

**Table No. 1: General Profile**

Variables		(%)
1) Gender	Female	100.00
2) Age	20-30	55.00
	30-40	28.33
	40-50	11.66
	50 and above	05.00
3) Caste Category	Open	30.00
	SC	33.33
	OBC	28.33
	Other	08.33
4) Housing Condition	Kaccha	43.33
	Semi-Pucca	56.67
5) Family's monthly income	Below 5000	11.66
	5000-7000	65.00
	7000-10000	20.00
	Above 10000	03.33

According to table no.1- 100% respondents are female (50) and majority of participants were between the age of 20-30 (55%), 28.33% of them were between 30-40 and 5 % are more than 50 years old. The majority of respondents were socially backward category 70 %. The majority lives in semi-pucca house (56.67%), while 43.33% of them live in kaccha house. Majority (65%) of respondent's family's monthly income were in between Rs. 5000-7000. As it can be seen from the numbers the majority of the participants grown up in poor area and their families have low living standards with low income.

### B) Gender Inequities in the Household and the Society:

Gender discrimination against women manifests itself in intra-household relations and in the social space. Within the household, women and men are differently positioned in relation to the allocation of responsibilities, processes of decision-making, and access to and control over resources.

#### Sharing of domestic responsibility:

Irrespective of the differentials in socio-cultural dimensions across communities and classes, women shoulder the responsibility of domestic labour. Among the agricultural worker households too the case is not different. Nearly 80 percent of the women reported they do not get any help from their men in the discharge of domestic responsibilities such as cooking, fetching water, washing clothes, cleaning floors or caring of children. The few women (12%), who get support, get it either in fetching water or in the care of children.

#### Decision-making:



The role of decision-making in the household is decided on the basis of sex and age. The role of women in economic and other important decision-making for the households is insignificant. 40% of women respondents reported that they do not have any role in decision-making in the household and that it is their father, husband or other male members who take decisions. Nevertheless, in 12% of the families, women have an important role in decision-making together with men. In 5% of the households, women take decision because they are households with only women, or of widows or separated women without older male members. Although gender discrimination ascribes to women an inferior status, old women (mother or elder sister) often wield the decision-making power. But the proportion of such households was found to be less than 10 percent.

**Resource control:**

Gender inequities are often reflected in women's lack of access to and control over resources including their own wages. Their labour power is practically the only economic resource they have. Even over women's wages men wield considerable control. Nearly 60% of women in sample reported that they have little freedom in spending their wage income; they have to hand over their earnings to their husbands. The women, who are 'free' to spend their income, exhaust it entirely on household expenditure. Thus, the 'freedom' they have is to spend it on household consumption mainly on food articles. Many of the women (25%) who conceded that they are forced to hand over their wages to husbands reported that they are not allowed to enquire into the ways their husbands spend the money. Also, for many of them, any reluctance on their part to hand over the money would invite abuse and assault. Men wield control not only over economic resources but on their women's mobility and freedom to work as well. Men and women have more conflicting than co-operative priorities. But the conflicts of interests are camouflaged most of the time under semblance of consensus. Open conflicts affect women adversely.

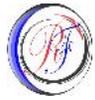
**SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION:**

The study points out some of the stressful issues in the life of women agricultural workers. The worker households' backwardness was reflected in low levels of housing facilities. More than one-third of them live in un-electrified houses. Two-thirds of the households do not have latrine facilities. Underemployment in the agricultural sector is a major problem confronting the women workers. Underemployment, low wage rates, and gender discrimination in the wages make the income of the households very low. Other than underemployment, illiteracy and inadequate facilities for life, women's access to livelihood is rendered increasingly difficult by men's lack of economic and emotional support and violence against women. Men's share in the sustenance of the family is found to be relatively much less than that of women in the sample households. In short, the poverty of the women agricultural workers encompasses a wide range of unmet needs and gender-specific inequities including lack of adequate access to education, employment, resources as well a range of violence, relative powerlessness, low self-esteem and denial of identity.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

In line with above results, it is suggested that:

- Since women workers lack in skill, skill development programmes should be provided to them to enhance their skill level.



- It is very much essential to create awareness among women workers about the institutional support available to them to protect their rights.
- Efforts shall be made to change social outlook towards women in general and women workers in particular. Mass media can play a great role to change social outlook towards women workers.
- A comprehensive law is needed to protect the rights of women workers.
- Any kind of exploitation including sexual harassment of women workers is to be prevented and stringent action needs to be taken against the wrong doer.

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