



FACTORS DRIVING RURAL WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION AS AGRICULTURAL LABOUR

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ABSTRACT This research investigates the motivations driving rural women to engage in agricultural labor, drawing upon primary data collected from 320 women agricultural laborers in Guntur district, Andhra Pradesh. Employing a multi-stage random sampling method, the study identifies key factors influencing occupational choices. The findings reveal that low literacy levels (56.30 per cent) and poverty (76.56 per cent) are significant drivers for women to choose agricultural labor. Fulfilling economic needs (77.20 per cent) and perceiving potential employment opportunities in agriculture (53.10 per cent) also strongly influence their choices. Family constraints, indicated by 59.70 per cent of respondents, and neutral stances (86.90 per cent) regarding familial influence further contribute to their occupational decisions. Recommendations encompass targeted education programs, poverty alleviation initiatives, skill development, and promoting women's active participation in the agricultural sector, aiming to uplift rural women and empower them to make informed occupational choices.

KEYWORDS :

Agriculture is among the most ancient economic activity in India and shares a noteworthy participation of women, akin to other global regions. Over 80 percent of economically active women are involved in agriculture and related pursuits. For the past 75 years, this pattern has remained consistent and has been a significant factor contributing to higher rates of labor force participation in rural areas compared to urban areas. Despite playing a crucial role in producing half of the world's food, women have limited land ownership, face challenges in accessing loans, and often receive less attention from policy makers and implementation. While comprising one-third of the global workforce, women are predominantly found in low-paying occupations and are more susceptible to unemployment. Women still surpass men in terms of illiteracy by a ratio of approximately three to two. Although about 90 percent of countries have organizations dedicated to promoting women's advancement, women's representation in decision-making bodies remains inadequate. In India, women have consistently faced discrimination from men in terms of human resource development, disregarding their true and potential contributions to overall national progress, especially in the agricultural sector.

As per the Agriculture Census of 2015-16, among the 20.4 million active landholdings owned by women in India, Andhra Pradesh holds the largest share, constituting 12.6 percent of the total. A comparison between the Periodic Labour Force Surveys conducted in 2004-05 and 2017-18 reveals that the proportion of rural women in Andhra Pradesh participating in temporary employment has risen from 48.7 per cent to 52.2 per cent. In the year 2017-18, the proportion of workdays contributed by women to the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) in Andhra Pradesh slightly surpassed the national average, standing at 59.6 per cent. However, this figure remains significantly lower than that of Kerala, which is at a remarkable 90.8 per cent. As per the PLFS data from 2017-18, the majority of rural women in Andhra Pradesh are involved in agricultural activities, constituting a substantial 76.9 per cent of the workforce. According to the 2019 Situation Assessment of Agricultural Households and Land and Livestock Holdings in Rural India, Andhra Pradesh holds the distinction of having the greatest proportion of households burdened with debt among all the states in the country.

Review of Literature

Raja Meenakshi and Sigamani Panneer (2020) investigated the correlation between agriculture and health, explored the health challenges encountered by women working in agriculture, and analyzed the relevant policy measures in India. The research revealed a clear link between occupational hazards in agriculture and the overall well-being of female workers, affecting both their physical and mental health.

Rathindra Nath Pramanik (2021) conducted a study on the rural labor market in West Bengal. The study aimed to understand changes in its structure and the driving factors. The research found a decline in

workforce participation rates for both genders in rural West Bengal after 2009-2010. The shift from agriculture to non-agriculture, particularly construction work, played a key role in this change. The study also highlighted a decrease in casual labor, indicating a positive labor market trend. Factors like changes in wage rates, rural development programs like MGNREGA, and labor migration were identified as interconnected drivers of these changes, leading to a more flexible and segmented labor market.

Alessandra Costagliola (2021) studied India's women's labor force participation rate (LFPR). The research shows that women initially entered as agricultural laborers, then shifted to industry due to higher household income, resulting in decreased LFPR. Subsequently, with lower fertility rates and improved education, women re-enter the workforce. Explanations include educated women marrying into wealthier families, increased education, higher household incomes, and low demand for female labor.

Neelam Patel and Tanu Sethi (2021) highlighted that rural women play a crucial role in driving social, economic, and environmental transformation in the context of 'New India'. With approximately 80 percent of rural women engaged in agriculture, enabling and integrating them into the agricultural workforce can lead to a significant transformation in terms of economic progress. This empowerment will not only improve food and nutrition security but also contribute to the reduction of poverty and hunger.

Sapna Goel (2022) observed that rural Indian women are mainly involved in agriculture, either as unpaid labor on family farms or as landless workers on others' farms. Her study showed that a significant number of women shifted between different types of employment in both agricultural and deagrarianized households in 2011-2012. These transitions were found to be bidirectional.

Tanuka Endow and Swati Dutta (2022) focused on analyzing the extent of women's engagement in the workforce and the quality of their employment in rural Jharkhand. The research revealed that the participation of women in the labor force is notably influenced by societal norms, which often align with a household's economic status as evident from their land and asset ownership. Furthermore, cultural conventions that ascribe a majority of household responsibilities and unpaid tasks to women hinder their ability to pursue paid job opportunities.

Soundarya Iyer et al. (2022) emphasized that women's economic participation is shaped by personal, household, community, and regional factors, along with historical, geographical, and governmental influences. India has one of the world's lowest female labor force participation rates, particularly in West Asia, North Africa, and South Asia. This rate has continued to decline over the past two decades.

Jagmati Sangwan and Shamsher Singh (2022) conducted a study on

women's involvement in protests against India's Farm Laws in Haryana State. They found that young Haryanvi women played significant roles in this male-dominated rural movement. These women led marches, speeches, and even faced police brutality at the forefront. Despite disadvantaged conditions, they actively participated, performing diverse roles such as organizing events, writing, singing, and managing resources like langars. The study highlights the substantial contributions of women, particularly those at the border protest sites.

Ayush Mishra et al. (2023) highlight women's crucial contributions to developing countries' agricultural economies. These roles vary across regions and are evolving due to economic and social changes. Despite not being recognized as "economically active employment" in national accounts, women's work is vital for rural households. They comprise over 40 per cent of the global agricultural labor force, producing a significant portion of food, but own less than 15 per cent of the land.

Objectives and Methodology

The study has examined the various reasons of rural women for working as agricultural labour. The study is based on primary data. Primary data is collected using 320 women agricultural labour in Guntur district of Andhra Pradesh. Out of four revenue divisions in the Guntur district, two revenue divisions, namely, Guntur and Tenali are selected purposively. From each revenue division, two Mandals are selected. From each Mandal, four villages are selected randomly. From each Village, 20 women agricultural labourers are selected randomly. Thus, the study has adopted Multi-stage random sampling method. Total sample size of the study is therefore 320. Percentages are used to analyze the data.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The study has examined various reasons for working as agricultural labourers such as low literacy levels, poverty, to fulfil economic needs, agricultural sector being the potential employer, family constraints and influence of family members.

1. Low Literacy Levels

Respondents are asked to state whether they are working as agricultural labour due to low literacy levels and their responses are furnished in Table -1. It is evident from the table that more than half (56.30 per cent) of the respondents agree with the statement that they are working as agricultural labour due to low literacy levels. While 16.90 per cent of the respondents strongly agreed, neutral response was received from 16.60 per cent of the respondents and only one tenth (10.0 per cent) of the respondents disagreed with the statement.

In the Guntur revenue division, the majority of the respondents (58.80 per cent) agree to the issue, followed by those who strongly agree (15 per cent) and disagree (13.80 per cent). The Tenali revenue division shows a similar pattern, with 53.80 per cent agreeing, and 18.80 per cent strongly agreeing.

In conclusion, a majority of the respondents are found to be working as agricultural labour due to low literacy levels.

Table -1 Respondents Opinion On Their Occupation As Agricultural Labour Due To Low Literacy Levels

Revenue Division	Opinions of the Respondents					Total
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	
Guntur	-	22 (13.80)	20 (12.50)	94 (58.80)	24 (15.00)	160 (100.00)
Tenali	-	11 (6.90)	33 (20.60)	86 (53.80)	30 (18.80)	160 (100.00)
Total	-	33 (10.30)	53 (16.60)	180 (56.30)	54 (16.90)	320 (100.00)

Note: Figures in the parenthesis represent percentages to row total.
Source: Computed from the Primary Data.

2. Poverty

Table 2 shows the opinions of the respondents on reason for working as agricultural labour being poverty. The data demonstrates that 76.56 per cent of the respondents strongly agreed and 10.90 per cent of the respondents agreed, neutral response is received from 9.40 per cent of the respondents, only 0.60 per cent of the respondents disagreed and about 3 per cent of the respondents strongly disagreed to the statement that their poverty is one of the reasons for working as agricultural

labour. In Guntur revenue division, 83.80 per cent strongly agreed, followed by 69.40 per cent of the respondents from Tenali revenue division. The respondents, who agreed to the statement, account for 10 per cent and 11.90 per of respondents from Guntur and Tenali revenue divisions respectively. As against this, 1.30 per cent of the respondents from Tenali revenue division disagreed with the statement.

Table 2 Respondents Opinion On Their Occupation As Agricultural Labour Due To Their Poverty

Revenue Division	Opinions of the Respondents					Total
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	
Guntur	8 (5.00)	-	2 (1.30)	16 (10.00)	134 (83.80)	160 (100.00)
Tenali	-	2 (1.30)	28 (17.50)	19 (11.90)	111 (69.40)	160 (100.00)
Total	8 (2.50)	2 (0.60)	30 (9.40)	35 (10.90)	245 (76.56)	320 (100.00)

Note: Figures in the parenthesis represent percentages to row total.
Source: Computed from the Primary Data.

3. To Fulfil Economic Needs

Respondents are asked to state whether they are working as agricultural labour to fulfil their economic needs and their responses are mentioned in Table 3. Those who strongly agreed that they are working as agricultural labour to fulfil their economic needs is higher (77.20 per cent), while 10.00 per cent agreed, neutral response is received from 10.90 per cent of the respondents and only 1.90 per cent of the respondents disagreed. Revenue division wise, it is noticed that largest percentage of the respondents (86.30 per cent) from Tenali revenue division strongly agreed, followed by 68.10 per cent of the respondents from Guntur revenue division. Respondents, who agreed to the said statement, constitute 13.80 per cent and 6.30 per cent from Tenali and Guntur revenue divisions respectively. Neutral response is received from 21.90 per cent of the respondents from Guntur revenue division. Only 3.80 per cent of the respondents from Guntur revenue division disagreed.

Table 3 Respondents Opinion On Their Occupation As Agricultural Labour To Fulfil Their Economic Needs

Revenue Division	Opinions of the Respondents					Total
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	
Guntur	-	6 (3.80)	35 (21.90)	10 (6.30)	109 (68.10)	160 (100.00)
Tenali	-	-	-	22 (13.80)	138 (86.30)	160 (100.00)
Total	-	6 (1.90)	35 (10.90)	32 (10.00)	247 (77.20)	320 (100.00)

Note: Figures in the parenthesis represent percentages to row total.
Source: Computed from the Primary Data.

4. Agriculture Sector is the Potential Employer for Women

Respondents are asked to state whether they are working as agricultural labour since the agricultural sector is the potential employer for women. Their responses are depicted in Table 4. A significant 53.10 per cent of respondents agree and 43.80 per cent strongly agree that agriculture offers potential employment for women, while 3.10 per cent disagree.

In the Guntur revenue division, a pronounced majority, 56.30 per cent, agree that agriculture is a potential employer for women, with another 43.80 per cent strongly agreeing. In Tenali revenue division, while 50 per cent agree and 43.80 per cent strongly agree, 6.30 per cent disagrees.

Table 4 Respondents Opinion On Their Occupation As Agricultural Labour Since Agriculture Is Potential Employer For Women

Revenue Division	Opinions of the Respondents					Total
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	
Guntur	-	-	-	90 (56.30)	70 (43.80)	160 (100.00)
Tenali	-	10 (6.30)	-	80 (50.00)	70 (43.80)	160 (100.00)

Total	-	10 (3.10)	-	170 (53.10)	140 (43.80)	320 (100.00)
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Note: Figures in the parenthesis represent percentages to row total.
Source: Computed from the Primary Data.

5. Family Constraints

Table 5 elucidates the opinions of respondents on them working as agricultural labour as a consequence of family constraints. Overall, 59.70 per cent agree and 6.88 per cent strongly agree that family constraints influenced their occupational choices. A quarter of the respondents (22.50 per cent) express a neutral stance, while only 1.90 per cent strongly disagree and 9.10 disagree. In Guntur revenue division, 50 per cent agree that family constraints necessitated their engagement in agricultural labour, with another 13.80 per cent strongly agreeing. However, 21.90 per cent, remains neutral, and 11.90 per cent and 2.50 per cent disagree and strongly disagree respectively. In Tenali revenue division, 69.40 per cent agree, while 23.10 per cent remain neutral, and only 1.30 per cent strongly disagree.

Table 5 Opinions Of The Respondents On Their Occupation As Agricultural Labour Due To Their Family Constraints

Revenue Division	Opinions of the Respondents					Total
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	
Guntur	4 (2.50)	19 (11.90)	35 (21.90)	80 (50.00)	22 (13.80)	160 (100.00)
Tenali	2 (1.30)	10 (6.30)	37 (23.10)	111 (69.40)	-	160 (100.00)
Total	6 (1.90)	29 (9.10)	72 (22.50)	191 (59.70)	22 (6.88)	320 (100.00)

Note: Figures in the parenthesis represent percentages to row total.
Source: Computed from the Primary Data.

6. Influence of Husband or Other Family Members

Table 6 shows the opinions of the respondents whether they are working as agricultural labour due to the influence of their husband or other family members. It is found from the table that 86.90 per cent of respondents across all revenue divisions were neutral towards the influence of husbands or family members on their occupational choice, followed by 9.40 per cent who agreed with the influence. In the Guntur revenue division, a majority of the respondents (81.30 per cent) were neutral, followed by 12.50 per cent who agreed towards the influence exerted by their husbands or other family members on their occupation. In Tenali revenue division, 92.50 per cent indicated a neutral position, while only 6.30 per cent agreed to the presence of influence.

Table 6 Respondents Occupation as Agricultural Labour Due to Influence of Husband/Other Family Members

Revenue Division	Opinions of the Respondents					Total
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	
Guntur	6 (3.80)	4 (2.50)	130 (81.30)	20 (12.50)	-	160 (100.00)
Tenali	-	2 (1.30)	148 (92.50)	10 (6.30)	-	160 (100.00)
Total	6 (1.90)	6 (1.90)	278 (86.90)	30 (9.40)	-	320 (100.00)

Note: Figures in the parenthesis represent percentages to row total.
Source: Computed from the Primary Data.

CONCLUSION

The research study investigated the motivations behind rural women in choosing to work as agricultural labourers. The findings highlight several key factors influencing their occupational choices. A majority of the respondents (56.30 per cent) acknowledged low literacy levels as a significant reason for engaging in agricultural labor. Moreover, a substantial percentage (76.56 per cent) strongly agreed that poverty drove them to pursue agricultural work. Additionally, a notable portion (77.20 per cent) strongly agreed that fulfilling their economic needs compelled them to work in this sector. Significantly, over half of the respondents (53.10 per cent) agreed that agriculture presented potential employment opportunities for women. Family constraints were also identified as a factor affecting occupational choices, with 59.70 per cent agreeing and 6.88 per cent strongly agreeing with this notion. Interestingly, a significant portion (86.90 per cent) of respondents across all revenue divisions displayed a neutral stance

regarding the influence of husbands or family members on their occupational choices.

Efforts should be focused on multifaceted strategies to uplift rural women engaged in agricultural labor. Firstly, investing in education programs tailored to their needs is crucial, aiming to enhance literacy levels and broaden their career horizons. Concurrently, targeted poverty alleviation initiatives, encompassing income-generating schemes and financial literacy programs, should be implemented to alleviate economic hardships. Diversifying economic opportunities beyond agriculture through entrepreneurship support and skill development can provide alternative career paths. Additionally, promoting active involvement of women in the agricultural sector with specialized training and resource accessibility is vital. Addressing family constraints necessitates awareness campaigns and fostering an inclusive environment that respects women's choices. Overall, a comprehensive approach encompassing education, economic empowerment, and societal transformation is essential to enable rural women to make informed and fulfilling occupational decisions.

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