



Dimensions of Poverty in Rural Areas of Rayalaseema Region of Andhra Pradesh- A Sociological Study

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ABSTRACT

The present paper attempts to study the dimensions of poverty in rural areas of Rayalaseema region of Andhra Pradesh. To explore the social, economic dimensions and determinants of poverty among the Agricultural Labourers, Marginal farmers and Small farmers with reference to absolute, relative and chronic poverty. The study based on primary data collected through intensive field survey and selected variables are group into age structure, marriage, family, type of house, land ownership, income, health, educational and employment. The study reveals that, 57.6 per cent of the agricultural households are observed in the low level of expenditure on education and health, which are main contributors for Human Development as non-income poverty indicators.

Keywords : Rural Poverty, Social & Economic dimensions, Agricultural Labourers, Marginal and Small farmers

Introduction

Poverty is complex and multi-dimensional in nature. It is reflected in multiple deprivations like inadequate resources/assets/capital required for a minimum living/ livelihood; lack of access to skill development, education, health and other basic amenities. The Small farmers, Marginal farmers and Agricultural households are the worst sufferers of these deprivations. Even within the category of the poor, scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, woman-headed households, the elderly and female children are the worst affected. The poverty of Indian masses, particularly those who dependent on Agriculture is proverbial; its removal is the cardinal goals of the programme for national socio-economic reconstruction. Poverty is a complex and multi-dimensional phenomenon in its content and nature and is not only widespread but also intense; it might be social, economic, cultural, psychological or ecological poverty. It is intrinsically related to the existing of socio-economic disparities.

Agriculture has been the main occupation for the bulk of its workforce in India. According to the 2001 Census, the agricultural sector provides employment to about 65 per cent of the total working population. There has been a rapid increase in the number of agricultural labourers, most of them do not possess any land or other assets and purely depend on wage employment in agriculture. The number of agricultural workers has increased from 139.42 million in 1951 to 285.42 million in 1991 and to 402.5 million in 2001. The percentage of agricultural labourers was 19.72 per cent in 1951 as against 26.15 per cent in 1991 and 45.62 per cent in 2001. The percentage of agricultural labourers to agricultural workers has been 28.28 per cent in 1951 and has increased to 40.30 per cent in 1991 and has further increased to 58.20 per cent in 2001. Thus, the agricultural sector has been overburdened with surplus manpower. The vagaries of monsoons and the protective irrigation covering only 30 per cent of the cultivated area, there is continuous increase in unemployment in the rural areas. The rural labourers are usually employed during the peak agricultural seasons and remain unemployed for a significant part of the year. During the lean period, they are forced to depend on the employer/cultivator to meet their basic needs of subsistence which pushes them into the debt trap. Due to higher incidence of unemployment and poverty, there is a large scale migration to urban areas in search of

employment.

The national poverty line at 2004-05 prices is Rs.356.30 per capita per month (Rs.21, 378 or say Rs.22,000 per household (per annum) in the rural areas and Rs.538.60 per capita per month (or say Rs.32,316 per HH per annum) in the urban areas. While poverty in the rural areas, in percentage terms, has declined to half from 56.4 per cent in 1973-74 to 28.3 per cent in 2004-05, in absolute terms, the reduction is not very significant. The population living below the poverty line (BPL) in the rural areas is still unacceptably high, at over 22 crore.

Andhra Pradesh is lagging behind on many other dimensions of poverty, its performance in terms of income poverty based on consumption expenditure shows that there has been a remarkable reduction in the level of poverty, particularly rural poverty, from 48.4 per cent in 1973-74 to 15.77 per cent in 2004-05. The rural poverty level in the state was less than half of that of all India. But, it still continues to be a rural based state having a rural population of 73.11 per cent out of the population and urban population remained at 26.89 per cent. Nearly 69 per cent of the geographical area is being cultivated. Out of the cultivable land 70 per cent of the gross cropped area is under food grains followed by oilseeds covering 16 per cent of cropped area. The Literacy rate has increased from 44.8 per cent in 1991 to 61.1 per cent in 2001. Rayalaseema districts contribute another 24.89 per cent of rural poor. While 42.3 per cent of rural poor families are small and marginal farmers, 8 per cent are rural artisans. The distribution of resource poor households in agricultural sector across the districts shows much concentration of BPL families. A larger proportion of the labour force depends on agriculture in the state (62.3 per cent) when compared with that at the All- India level (56.2 per cent).

Poverty can be defined as a social phenomenon in which a section of the society is unable to fulfil even its basic necessities of life. Now poverty is considered as a burden or a threat to peace. Amartya Sen commented "there is a problem of poverty to the extent that it creates problems for those who are not poor and the real tragedy is, the non-poor people try not to allow the poor people to become so poor (Sen, 2001)." Professor Mohammad Yunus, the Nobel Peace Laureate 2006 also argued in his Nobel Lecture in Oslo he commented

“we can put poverty in museums”. A major goal of the development policy in India since the country became independent has been poverty reduction.

Importance of the Study

The crux of the research problem as it has emerged today is in realistic sense and understanding of the outstanding question: why is the condition of the poverty in rural areas still gruesome despite the various alleviating poverty programs launched by State and Central governments. But, these programs, could only be a nibble at the fringe of the problem, because the nature, magnitude and backwardness of the poverty forms a regular characteristic feature of the social fabric or economic ebullition more than political panacea is the need of the hour.

In the present study, an attempt made to understand the social and economic dimensions of poverty, which comprises age, caste, family, marriage, education, housing conditions, occupation, land holdings, income, food, health and educational expenditure among the Agricultural Labourers, Marginal and Small farmers, who are backward socially, economically, culturally deprived substantial segment of below poverty line (BPL) population in the sample villages.

Methodology

The field work was undertaken in Rayalaseema region of Andhra Pradesh. The data was collected through interview schedule with structured questions and with more open ended/unstructured questions in order to elicit reliable information. The sampling is purposive. The data for the preset study was generated through the schedule, which is the survey. A field study has been conducted at 18 villages of 18 mandals in 3 districts representing from the rural areas of Anantapur, Chittoor and Kurnool districts of Rayalaseema region. The sample chosen for the main study consisted of 540 respondents i.e., 30 households in each sampled villages which includes both male and female respondents. Out of 540 sample households, selected 315 respondents (58.3 per cent) were belongs to Agricultural labourers (46 per cent male and 54 per cent female), 176 were Marginal farmers (46.6 per cent male and 53.4 per cent female) and 49 were Small farmers (51 per cent male and 49 per cent female). The sample has been selected on the basis of Rural population size, Literacy rate, percentage of Agricultural Labourers, Marginal and Small farmers. After collection of data on the subject under study, analysis and interpretation of data would be done in depth.

The Rayalaseema region consists of the four districts of Chittoor, Anantapur, YSR Kadapa and Kurnool extending over an area of 67.30 thousand sq.km and accounts for 24.26 of the total area of the state. The region is scarcely populated, accounting for 17.73 per cent of the total population of the state. The percentage of rural population and agricultural workers as percentage of total workers is higher than the state average. It has an average rain fall of 25 mms, with a low dependability on rains and therefore, subject to recurring famines and droughts. The climate is dry almost the whole year. A larger part of the region is not irrigated and the percentage of net irrigated to net area sown and also the percentage of gross area cropped is far less than that of the state's average. It is clear from these facts that the Rayalaseema region is drought prone and is known for its backwardness.

Result and Discussions

The findings of the study are summarized as social and economic dimensions of rural poverty in this section.

Table-1: Social Dimensions of the respondents

Social Dimensions	Particulars	Rayalaseema Region			
		Agricultural Labours	Marginal Farmers	Small Farmers	Total
Age (in years)	0-19	18 (5.7)	10 (5.7)	2 (4.0)	30 (5.6)
	20-39	189 (60.0)	107 (60.8)	27 (55.1)	323 (59.8)

Caste	OC	37 (11.7)	27 (15.3)	21 (42.9)	85 (15.7)
	BC	119 (37.8)	57 (32.4)	14 (28.6)	190 (35.2)
	SC	135 (42.9)	82 (46.6)	11 (22.4)	228 (42.2)
	ST	24 (7.6)	10 (5.7)	3 (6.1)	37 (6.9)
Marriage	Married	274 (87.0)	155 (88.1)	45 (91.8)	474 (87.8)
	Widower	41 (13.0)	21 (11.9)	4 (8.2)	66 (12.2)
Family	Joint	105 (33.3)	65 (36.9)	20 (40.8)	190 (35.2)
	Nuclear	166 (66.7)	90 (51.1)	26 (53.0)	282 (52.2)
Education	Illiterates	231 (73.4)	112 (63.6)	28 (57.2)	371 (68.7)
	Primary	77 (24.4)	50 (28.5)	15 (30.6)	142 (26.3)
	Secondary	7 (2.2)	12 (6.8)	5 (10.2)	24 (4.4)
	Higher	0 (0.0)	2 (1.1)	1 (2.0)	3 (0.6)
House	Thatched	186 (59.1)	70 (39.8)	28 (57.2)	284 (52.6)
	Tiled	29 (9.2)	11 (6.2)	6 (12.2)	46 (8.5)
	Pucca	100 (31.7)	95 (54.0)	15 (30.6)	210 (38.9)

Table-1 presents about the social dimensions, 65.4 per cent of the respondents are below 29 years of age including 5.6 per cent of them below 19 years. It can be inferred that agricultural works are labour intensive works and young and healthy persons will only succeed in these unskilled tasks. Older persons can't undertake such works for long hours. Only 15.7 per cent respondents belong to the general caste and the more than 80 per cent of the Agricultural labourers, Marginal and Small farmers are belong to the backward, scheduled caste and the schedule tribes. What is emphasized by this finding is that agricultural operations which are the basic and primary economic activities. The least skilled, the least remunerative were assigned to the backward and the scheduled caste population. Land-holding was traditionally the right of the higher castes and the labourers were the lower castes. It is well established fact that the scheduled caste and the scheduled tribes except the people of urban areas are the least educated, least skilled and the least qualified workforce.

87.8 per cent of the respondents are married and 12.2 per cent of the respondents are widowers. Most of the respondents get married at their 16-19 years of age and few of them become widowers in their fifties. It may evident that most of the respondents are married from all three districts of the region. Most of the families of the respondents are nuclear families and significantly 35 per cent of them belong to Joint families.

About 68.7 per cent of the respondents are illiterate. Literacy rate of the agricultural labourers is nowhere near to the national average. This explains the susceptibility of this vulnerable section of population to easy exploitation. This confirms the general belief that the victims of social justice are the least educated, the marginalized and the most backward section of the society. Only 26.3 per cent of the respondents have reached up to their primary level of education. Few 4.4 per cent of the respondents have reached up to secondary level of education and very few of them 0.6 per cent have up to higher level. The respondents who are literate are of younger age. It sets the progressive trend. The younger generation is better educated. Majority of the respondents are living in the thatched and tiled roof houses and 38.9 per cent of the respondents are living pucca houses built by government through IAY, Indiramma programmes. But still, 60 per cent of the households were living in thatched houses. These people could not convert their houses in the form of pucca/concrete, due to their poor income and employment opportunities.

Table-2: Economic Dimensions of the respondents

Economic Dimensions	Particulars	Rayalaseema Region			
		Agricultural Labours	Marginal Farmers	Small Farmers	Total
Main occupation	Agriculture	315 (100.0)	176 (100.0)	49 (100.0)	540 (100.0)

Land Holdings	Possession of Land	5 (1.6)	176 (100.0)	49 (100.0)	230 (42.6)
	Landless	310 (98.4)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	310 (57.4)
Irrigation facility	Irrigated	0 (0.0)	10 (6.7)	18 (36.7)	28 (12.2)
	Un-Irrigated	5 (100.0)	166 (94.3)	31 (63.3)	202 (87.8)
Annual Income (Rs.)	0-5000	63 (20)	22 (12.5)	5 (10.2)	90 (16.7)
	5000-10000	142 (45.1)	69 (39.2)	23 (46.9)	234 (43.3)
	10,000-15,000	110 (34.9)	73 (41.5)	15 (30.6)	198 (36.7)
	15,000-20,000	0 (0.0)	12 (6.8)	6 (12.3)	18 (3.3)
Food Expenditure (Rs.)	0- 5000	145 (46.0)	54 (30.7)	6 (12.2)	205 (38.0)
	5000-10000	170 (54.0)	119 (67.6)	29 (59.2)	318 (58.9)
Expenditure on Education (Rs.)	0- 5000	200 (63.5)	101 (57.4)	10 (20.4)	311 (57.6)
	5000-10000	115 (36.5)	57 (32.4)	15 (30.6)	187 (34.6)
Expenditure on Health (Rs.)	0-2000	195 (61.9)	112 (63.6)	4 (8.2)	311 (57.6)
	2000-4000	86 (27.3)	41 (23.3)	5 (10.2)	132 (24.4)

Further discussions, Table-2 reveals about the economic dimensions, 58.4 per cent of the respondents are agricultural labourers, 32.6 per cent are Marginal and 9 per cent are Small farmers engaged in unskilled agricultural occupation. Occupationally the entire families of the respondents seem to be agricultural or unskilled daily labourers. Since majority of the agricultural labourers are illiterate they remain unskilled and are forced to look for unskilled agricultural occupations that yield poor income.

Out of 540 respondents, 42.6 per cent of them have own land. 57.4 per cent of the respondents are landless. Those who are acquired land have acquired it recently by taking loans. Those who have land have relatively better family income. Only 5 per cent of agricultural labourers, 70 per cent of Marginal farmers and 25 per cent of Small farmers are having their own land. From this, 87.8 per cent of the land was un-irrigated and 12.2 per cent of land is irrigated who have major portion is Small farmers.

About 43.3 per cent of the respondents have disclosed their annual income between Rs. 5000-10000 while over 16 per cent have the annual income as below Rs. 5000. Over 35

per cent of the respondents have annual income in between Rs. 10000-15000. Only 3.3 per cent of the respondents have their family income more than Rs. 15000 which mean most of the respondents have their annual income below Rs. 10000.

59 per cent of the respondents spend their income in the family for food expenses between Rs. 5000-10000, 57.6 per cent of the respondents are spending less than Rs.5000 on education and same 57.6 per cent of them are spending less than Rs.2000 on health per year. Agricultural labour is leading a lifestyle of hand to mouth sustenance. Much of their earnings are spent in their family for food, paying off the bank debts, and for savings. The families of landless agricultural labour depend largely on the income of the women. The work of female members is very important in poor families. When their husbands are unable to earn enough to maintain the family, the rural women get out rendering a helping hand to them.

Conclusion

The study reveals interesting insight into the issue of regional disparities in term of deprivation in Rayalaseema region. There is wide micro-regional disparities exist within the region. It is evident from the discussion that almost all the aspect of human development, Rayalaseema region is a distant follower of the other region of India as well as Andhra Pradesh. The results provide the relative backwardness of the agricultural households of Rayalaseema region in various dimensions of deprivation at different indications. It is common observation that the Agricultural Labourers of the districts are generally treated as backward ones as they levels of social development, are much less than the relatively advanced Small & Marginal farmers of the region. The major causes for poverty in general and the Rayalaseema region in particular are, recurring famines & drought due low rainfall, high population growth rate, high illiteracy, caste systems and the discrimination against low caste, rural-urban divide, a large number of population depends on agriculture.

Policy Implications

The non-income poverty indicators like Education, Health along with child welfare and equality of gender should be prime concern of the state government in general as well as the district administration in particular. Adequate infrastructure for basic education, health along with sustained campaign by government will be reflected in mass awareness for small family and high level of education particularly female which in turn will set the pace of development and reduced the poverty level. Although government poverty eradication under various programmes such as Self Employment programmes, Wage Employment programmes, Area Development programmes, Social Security programmes, Indira Kanthi Patham (IKP) and NREGA has some positive impact to reduced the poverty in the study area, but they are run in full swing.

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