



WOMEN AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS IN TAMIL NADU

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Abstract:

Agriculture is the principal source of livelihood for more than 40 percent of the population of this State. Agriculture provides wage goods required by the non-agricultural sectors and raw materials for the industrial sector. Ratcheting up the growth of the economy would be possible provided the agriculture sector fares well on a sustained basis. A good performance of the agriculture sector is viewed as an effective instrument for attainment of inclusive economic growth and poverty reduction. The State achieved an all-time high record production of 10.1 million tons of food grains during 2011-2012 and received the Krishi Karman Award from the Government of India.

Key Words: Agricultural Labourers, Women & Tamil Nadu

Women agricultural labourer of Tamil Nadu performed well ahead of other major State in terms of productivity of important crops. It ranked second in the productivity of paddy next only to Punjab and came first in the yield of maize and oilseeds. The productivity of sugarcane in Tamil Nadu was almost double of what was obtained at the national level. The better agricultural accomplishments are the result of continued technological gains and appropriate policies and timely intervention measures of the Government. Unfortunately, the strong growth performance of 2011-2012 has been interrupted due to the severe drought conditions caused by a large rainfall deficit and the non-release of water in the Cauvery by Karnataka during 2012-2013. Growth in the agricultural sector has taken a big dip in 2012-2013. The State Government has stepped in with the special relief packages for samba paddy to aid farmers in distress and to ensure an early recovery of agricultural production and productivity.

Categories of Agricultural Labourers:

The first agricultural labour Enquiry committee has classified agricultural workers into two categories:

- ✓ Attached labourers, and
- ✓ Casual labourers

Attached labourers are attached to some cultivator household on the basis of a written or oral agreement. Their employment is permanent and regular. Accordingly, whenever the master wishes, they are ready to work in his land. Normally they are not free to work at any other place. In many instances attached labourers also do the task of domestic servants in addition to working on land. The hours of work are very lengthy and in some cases, attached agricultural labourers have to work from dawn to dusk in the houses and farms of their employers. All workers who are not falling in the category of attached labourers, constitute casual workers. They are free to work on the farm of any farmer and payment is generally made to them on a daily basis. There are broadly three types of casual agricultural workers in India.

- ✓ Small farmers who have very small holdings and are thus forced to work on the farms of others to make both ends meet;
- ✓ Tenants who work on leased land but this is not their main source of income (the main source of their income being work performed on the land of others);
- ✓ Share croppers, who besides sharing the produce of land cultivated by them, also work as labourers.

Causes for the Growth of Agricultural Labourers:

There are a number⁷ of factors responsible for the continuous and enormous increase in the number of agricultural labourers in India. The more important among them are:

- ✓ Increase in population
- ✓ Decline of cottage industries and handicrafts
- ✓ Eviction of small farmers and tenants from land
- ✓ Uneconomic holdings
- ✓ Increase in indebtedness
- ✓ Spread of the use of money and exchange system
- ✓ Capitalistic Agriculture
- ✓ Displacement of means of subsidiary occupations
- ✓ Disintegration of peasantry
- ✓ Break-up of joint family system

Kinds of Agricultural Labourers:

The national commission on⁹ labour classified the position in respect of agricultural labourer. The commission on state workers in agricultural sector is distributed into three main categories.

- ✓ Cultivators.
- ✓ Agricultural labour.
- ✓ Workers engaged in forestry, fishing and livestock. etc,

According to the national commission, on labour “an agricultural labourer is one who is basically unskilled and unorganized and has little for its livelihood, other than personal labour”. Thus, persons whose main source of income is wage, employment will fall in this category.

Agricultural labourers can also be divided in the following manner:

- ✓ Landless agricultural labourers.
- ✓ Very small cultivators whose main source of earning, due to their small and sub-marginal holding is wage employment.

Economic Conditions of Landless Agricultural Labourers:

The main feature, characterizing Indian agricultural labour are as follows:

Agricultural Labourers are Scattered: Agricultural labour in India is being widely scattered over 5.6 lakh villages, of which half have population of less than 500 each. And therefore any question of building an effective organization, like that of industrial workers, poses insurmountable difficulties. This as the vast number of agricultural labor less scattered all over India, there has been no successful attempt for long, to build their effective organization.

Agricultural Labourers are Unskilled and Lack Training: Agricultural labourers, especially in smaller villages away from towns and cities, are generally unskilled workers carrying on agricultural operation in the centuries old traditional wages. Most of them, especially those in small isolated villages with around 500 populations, may not have even heard of modernization of agriculture. Majority of them are generally conservative, tradition bound, totalistic and resigned to the insufferable lot to which according to them fate has condemned them. There is hardly any motivation for change or improvement.

Low Social Status: Most agricultural workers belong to the depressed classes, which have been neglected for ages. The low caste and depressed classes have been socially handicapped and they never had the courage to assert themselves. They have been like dump-driven cattle.

Unorganized Sector: Agricultural labourers are not organized like industrial labourers. They are illiterate and ignorant. They live in scattered villages. Hence they could not organize in unions. In urban areas workers could generally organize themselves in unions and it is convenient for political parties to take interest in trade union activities. This is almost difficult for them to bargain with the land owners and secure good wages.

Demand and Supply of Labour: The number of agricultural labourers being very large and skills they possess being meager, there are generally more than abundant supply of agricultural labourer in relation to demand for them. It is only during the sowing and harvesting seasons that there appears to be near full employment in the case of agricultural labourers. But, once the harvesting season is over, majority of agricultural workers will be jobless especially in areas, where there is single cropping pattern.

Ministry of Agricultural Labourers: India's work force comprises nearly 92 per cent in the unorganized segment, with the entire farm sector falling under the informal category, which only one-fifth of the non-farm workers are found in the organized segment. Over half of India's national output comes from the unorganized sector, large portion of the work force in India is found to be employed on the unorganized sector. In 1999-2000, it is estimated that out of 399million workers employment in the unorganized sector, (i.e.) 93 per cent where as only 27.8million workers (i.e.) 7 per cent are engaged in the organized sector. It was on 1993-94, the unorganized sector 348.8million but in organized sectors 27.4million. One can observe that over the last two decades, agriculture, hunting, forestry and fishing absorbed an overwhelming proportion of work force on Indian economy a continuations of trends witnessed during previous decades moreover, most prominent has been the unorganized pattern of cultivation. It is clear that during the 1980s and 1990s, 99 per cent of employment in agriculture, hunting etc, could be categorized under the unorganized segment. The share of unorganized sector workers in Tamil Nadu during 1999-2000 was 89.54 per cent in farm sectors.

Present Position of Agricultural Labour in India:

Agricultural labour¹⁶ is provided mostly by economically and socially backward section; poor sections from the tribes also, it may be divided into four type.

- ✓ Landless labourers, who are attached to the landlords;
- ✓ Landless labourers, who are personally independent, but who work exclusively for others;
- ✓ Petty farmers with tiny bits of land who devote most of their time working for others, and
- ✓ Farmers who have economic holdings but who have one or more of their sons and dependants working for other prosperous farmers.

The first groups of labourers have been more or less in the position of slaves, they are also known as bonded labourers.

Population of Agricultural Labourers in Tamil Nadu:

The problem of estimating the size of the agricultural labour force is a complicated task due to the conceptual difficulties involved in identifying the agricultural labourers. While the rural labour enquiry

committee has included the marginal land holders within they have been excluded according to the census of India reports. The various estimates of the population of the agricultural labourers in Tamil Nadu have been presented in Table 1.2 and 1.3. The census data indicate that number of agricultural labourers in Tamil Nadu has increased both in absolute terms and respect of its percentage. It has increased from about 28 lakhs in 1961 to about 87 lakhs in 2001. During the same period the percentage of the total labor force in the State have also risen from 18.42 to 32.20. With regard to the whole of India, the percentage of the number of agricultural labourers has risen from 19.50 to 26.73 between 1961 census and 2001 census. Table 1.1 has presented details related to the number of agricultural labourers in Tamil Nadu.

Table 1.1: Number of agricultural labourers in Tamil Nadu

S.No	Sources and Year	Number of agricultural labourers (in lakhs)
1	Census of India 1951	19.40
2	First agricultural labour Enquiry 1950 – 51	54.10
	Landless Workers	22.20
	Landholding Workers	31.90
3	Second agricultural labour Enquiry 1956 – 57	38.10
	Landless Workers	24.20
	Landholding Workers	13.90
4	Census of India 1961	28.30
5	Census of India 1971	43.90
6	Census of India 1981	59.50
7	Census of India 1991	79.00
8	Census of India 2001	86.70

Source: Census Reports, 1961, 1971, 1981, 1991, and 2001.

The Total Number of Main Workers in India and Tamil Nadu:

The percentage of cultivators, agricultural labourers and other workers to the total number of main workers in India and Tamil Nadu has been given in the Table 1.2

Table 1.2: The Total Number of Main Workers in India and Tamil Nadu

	Sources and Year	Cultivators (in Percentage)	Agricultural Labours (in Percentage)	Other workers (in Percentage)	Total Percentage
Tamil Nadu	Census 1961	42.07	18.42	39.51	100
	Census 1971	30.97	29.13	39.90	100
	Census 1981	29.22	31.73	39.05	100
	Census 1991	23.41	32.64	43.95	100
	Census 2001	18.40	31.20	50.40	100
India	Census 1961	59.90	19.5	20.60	100
	Census 1971	51.20	31.40	17.40	100
	Census 1981	51.00	30.10	18.60	100
	Census 1991	35.24	23.75	41.01	100
	Census 2001	35.75	26.73	37.52	100

Source: Census Reports, 1961, 1971, 1981, 1991, and 2001.

It could be observed that there has been a decline in the percentage of cultivators between 1961 to 2001 in India. In India Tamil Nadu the decline was from 42.07 percent to 18.40 percent and for the whole of India the decline was from 59.90 percent to 35.75 percent. There has been an increase in the percentage of agricultural labourers during the same period for India as well as in Tamil Nadu. The agricultural labourers are the economically weak and the socially most handicapped section in the rural society of Tamil Nadu. They constitute a high population of the weaker sections in the rural areas. The highest incidence of rural poverty was seen in the agricultural labour households in the State.

Table 1.3: Population potential labour force in Tamil Nadu

Category	Tamil Nadu	
	2001	2011
Population (millions)	62.41	12.15
Labour force (15 -59 years) (millions)	40.00	47.76
Workers (millions)	27.88	32.88
Labour force as percentage to total population	64.10	66.20
Percentage of workers to labourforce	69.70	68.84
Percentage of non-workers to labourforce	30.30	31.16

Sources: directorate of Census Operation, Tamil Nadu.

The State's total population grew from 62.41 million in 2001 to 72.15 million in 2011, the decadal growth being 11.6 percent. The estimated labour force (15.59 years) went up 1.19 percent per annum from 40.00 million in 2001 to 47.76 million in 2011. Consequently, its share in total population improved from 64.10 to 66.20 percent. Between these two Censuses, the total number of workers in the State increased by 1.18 percent annually from 27.88 million to 32.28 million. Share of the total members of workers in total labour force, however, had witnessed a decline from 69.70 percent to 68.84 percent, indicating that there was a reduction in the employment absorptive capacity of the economy or there was a preference to pursue higher education or both. As a result, the proportion of persons who are not working in the State increased from 30.30 percent to 31.16 percent.

Table 1.4: District-wise work participation rate in Tamil Nadu-2011 and Census (%)

Category	Overall	Rural	Urban	Males	Females
State	45.6	50.7	40.2	59.3	31.8
Among the District					
Highest	Erode 53.1)	Erode 58.1	Erode 48.4	Thiruppur 65.8	Perambalur 48.4
Lowest	Kanniyakumari 36.3	Kanniyakumari 37.9	Thiruvarur 34.6	Cuddalore 57.1	Kanniyakumari 16.4

Sources: Directorate of Census Operations, Tamil Nadu.

The work participation rate in the case of males was significantly higher than that of females both in rural and urban areas. The pace of increase in WPR of males also was greater than that of females. The overall WPR of males increased from 57.6 percent in 2001 to 59.3 percent in 2011 in Tamil Nadu. The WPR of females improved from 31.5 percent to 31.8 percent. The WPR of males and females in Tamil Nadu at 59.3 and 31.8 percent in 2011 was higher than that of All India-53.3 percent and 25.5 percent respectively. The WPR of males among the districts was the highest in Tiruppur 65.8 percent and that of females in Perambalur 48.4 percent. The lower WPR for females than that of males does emphasize the need for more concerted efforts to ensure greater social employment of women to enable them to participate in productive economic activities.

Four fold Classification of Workers in Tamil Nadu:

The Census 2011 further classifies the workers (both main and marginal) into four industry group's viz., cultivators, agricultural labourers, household industries and other workers. The four fold classification revealed that there was a declining share of the cultivators, agricultural labourers and household industry workers.

Table 1.5: Four Fold Classifications of Workers in Tamil Nadu (million)

Industry groups	2001	2011
Cultivators	5.11 (18.4%)	4.25 (12.9%)
Agricultural labourers	8.67 (31.1%)	9.61 (29.2%)
Household industry	1.46 (5.3%)	1.36 (4.2%)
Other workers	12.57 (45.2%)	17.66 (53.7%)
Total workers	27.81 (100%)	32.88 (100%)

Sources: Directorate of Census Operations, Tamil Nadu.

The proportion of cultivators to total workers came down from 18.4 percent in 2001 to 12.9 percent in 2011. The share of agricultural labourers declined from 31.1 percent to 29.2 percent. It underlines the fact that agricultural activities have lost their sheen of primary and centrality. This trend is a tagger for rural-to-urban migration and mushrooming growth of urban slums. The proportion of agricultural workers (cultivators and agricultural labourers) which stood at 42.1 percent in Tamil Nadu was significantly lower as compared to that All India 54.6 percent. The proportion of household industry workers fell from 5.3 percent to 4.2 percent. Contrary to this, the share of other workers moved up from 45.2 percent to 53.7 percent. However, at the all India level it was lower a 41.6 percent in 2011. Among the districts, proportion of cultivators to total workers was the highest in perambalur 39.1 percent, agricultural labourers in Thiruvarur 54.6 percent, household workers in Tirunelveli 16.7 percent and other workers in Chennai 96.4 percent. It indicates that perambalur district is agrarian based and least urbanized.

Index Number of Agricultural Wages in Tamil Nadu:

Index number of agricultural wages is very essential for ascertaining the trend in cost of cultivation. The index numbers for wages of different categories of labours are being worked out on the basis of the wages prevailing in the selected villages in the State with the base year 1993-94. District – wise details of average rates of daily wages paid to certain categories of agricultural labourers for 2010 – 2011. Index number of wages paid to certain categories of agricultural labourers in Tamil Nadu for the year in 2010 – 2011.]

Table 1.6: Work participation Rate (WPR) – Tamil Nadu and All India

Category	Tamil Nadu		All India	
	2001	2011	2001	2011

WPR – By Demographic Segment (%)				
Rural	50.3	50.7	41.7	41.8
Urban	37.5	40.2	32.3	35.3
Overall	44.7	45.6	39.1	39.8
By Sex (%)				
Male	57.6	59.3	51.7	53.3
Female	31.5	31.8	25.6	25.5

Sources: Directorate of Census Operation, Tamil Nadu.

The working population in Tamil Nadu increased from 27.88 million in 2001 Census to 32.88 millions in 2011 Census witnessing an annual compound growth rate of 1.18 per cent. The Work Participation Rate (WPR) i.e., the proportion of workers to total population in Tamil Nadu edged up from 44.7 percent in 2001 to 45.6 percent in 2011. The ratio at the All India level during the corresponding period was lower at 39.1 percent and 39.8 percent respectively. Across the districts, the work participation rate was found to be the lowest at 36.3 percent in Kanniyakumari despite the fact that the district had the highest literacy level. It was the highest at 53.1 percent in Erode as per 2011 Census. This was the case irrespective of rural and urban segments. The work participation rate in rural areas was higher than that of urban areas. However, with regard to the pace of increase, it was greater in urban than in rural areas. The work participation rate in rural Tamil Nadu marginally increased from 50.3 percent in 2001 to a share of 50.7 percent in 2011, whereas it raised from 37.5 percent to 40.2 percent in urban respectively.

Table 1.7: Main and Marginal Workers in Tamil Nadu and all India – As per 2011 Census (Million)

Category	Tamil Nadu			All India		
	Main workers	Marginal workers	Total	Main workers	Marginal workers	Total
By Gender						
Male	18.9	2.5	21.4	273.1	58.7	331.8
Female	9.0	2.4	11.4	89.3	60.6	149.9
Total	27.9	4.9	32.8	362.4	119.3	481.7
By demographical segments						
Rural	15.3	3.5	18.8	245.7	102.9	348.6
Urban	12.6	1.4	14.0	116.7	16.4	133.1
Total	27.9	4.9	32.8	362.4	119.3	481.7

Sources: Directorate of Census Operations, Tamil Nadu.

The total number of workers as per 2011 Census in the State was estimated at 32.8 million comprising 27.9 million main workers and 4.9 million marginal workers. The proportion of main workers i.e., those engaged in economically gainful activities during the major part of the year to workers was higher at 85.0 percent in Tamil Nadu as compared to that of All India 75.2 percent. Contrastingly, the ratio in respect of marginal workers was lower in Tamil Nadu 15.0 percent as against All India 24.8 percent.

Average Daily Wage Rates in all India 2013-2014:

The wage rates for the year 2013-14 report that average daily wage rates varied widely for agricultural occupations. The variations, Rs. 178.82 for male animal husbandry labourers, Rs.304.72 for male labourers engaged in loggers and wood cutters, Rs. 133.80 for female animal husbandry labourers, Rs. 185.39 for female labourers engaged in ploughing activities and Rs. 77.51 for child animal husbandry labours and Rs.150.48 for harvesting occupation. Lowers and wood cutters with the average daily wage rates ranged between Rs. 301.49 to 310.57 which were the highest paid occupations. Plant protection workers with average daily wasge rate of Rs.281.67 to 348.00 and Rs.26.85 to 288.94, ploughing and tilling workers fetched the highest wages for women followed by harvesting and sowing occupations. The all-India average daily wage rate for women in ploughing and tilling workers was in the range of Rs. 175.89 to 195.75. Finally this study reveals that main factors responsible for poor condition of agricultural labourers are ignorance, negligence, illiteracy and poverty of labourers. Unless social census is arrived and strict laws are made the exploitations of labourers may not end in near future. Agriculture is the backbone of India; it is a way of life to the mass of rural India. In order to uplift the agricultural activities, the agricultural labourers should be given more weight age especially landless agricultural labourers. Their social status is very poor when compared with other labourers in India. Activities of the government should be always at the aim to improve the landless agricultural labourers. This will take colorful economic development of India.

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