

An Analysis of Women Agricultural Labourers at Gudiyatham in Vellore District

A S. Karpagam¹, Dr.K.Mariappan²

¹Research Scholar, Department of Economics, Government Arts College Udumalpet, Tiruppur District

²Associate Professor, Department of Economics, Government Arts College Udumalpet, Tiruppur District

Abstract- More than 70% of Indians depend on farming and related work to earn a living. Women play an important role in growing the economy. In one out of every three families, women earn half of the family's income. Women also do two-thirds of the world's work, produce half of the world's food, make up 60% of the workforce, but only 30% are in official labour records. This study looks at the role of women in paddy (rice) farming, other farm work, household decisions, the problems they face, their ideas, and possible government actions to help them. Farming is the most important industry in India. It has helped the country grow and change quickly. However, women working in farming are often unorganised, have no special skills, don't move from place to place for work, have no legal rights, and face difficult relations with landowners. The study found that women farm workers need better working conditions. Their work hours should be controlled, and they should get extra pay for working longer hours. Their living and working conditions also need to improve. The government can help by setting up health centres, maternity wards, youth clubs, and sports facilities. Special programmes can also be created to support women working in farming.

I. INTRODUCTION

Rural women continue to remain the backbone of India's agricultural workforce, even as urbanisation and diversification of employment opportunities reshape the country's labour profile. The latest figures from the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), released by the ministry of statistics and programme implementation, highlight that rural women have not only maintained their dominance in agriculture but have steadily increased their participation over the last three years.

As per 2024 data, a staggering 76.9% of rural women were engaged in agriculture, up from 76.2% in 2023

and 75.9% in 2022. This consistent upward trend indicates that women in rural areas are increasingly dependent on agriculture, either due to limited alternative job opportunities or the continuation of traditional livelihood practices. In contrast, rural male participation has seen a decline — from 51% in 2022 to 49.4% in 2024 — pointing towards a slow shift of men from farm-based to non-farm-based occupations. Overall, rural participation in agriculture stood at 59.8% in 2024, a marginal rise from 58.4% in 2023, showing the resilience of the sector despite broader economic changes. The figures also point to a subtle yet steady increase in urban women's involvement in farming-related activities. Urban female participation in agriculture rose from 11.1% in 2022 to 12.3% in 2024. On the other hand, urban male participation, however, remained almost stagnant at below 5%, with only 4.8% recorded in 2024. This shows that even in urban areas, the female workforce involved in the agricultural sector is more than twice male workforce.

According to some experts, this isn't necessarily a completely positive sign. Santosh Naitam, who has been associated with the agricultural sector for over four decades and has closely worked on farmers' issues, said, "Some farmers venture out to try their luck in other fields, leaving behind their farms. In such cases, it is the girls and women who take over agricultural activities. For many families, especially those who own land, farming remains the only option, and women shoulder that responsibility in the absence of men." When rural and urban data are combined, the total share of women employed in agriculture rose to 64.4% in 2024 from 62.9% in 2022. This has also, in turn, largely benefited the aggregated agricultural workforce of the country. For a segment that has been consistently facing a plethora of issues, be it financial, political or legal, India's agricultural sector recorded

46.1% in 2024, a major boost from the 45.5% as of 2022. This comes despite the fact that the male workforce consistently dipped, going from 38.1% in 2022 to 37.1% in 2023 to finally 36.3% in 2024.

In India, many people do not get basic needs like clothes, cereals, pulses, milk, and vegetables. Because of this, they cannot get enough calories to maintain a normal life. The minimum per person spending is the total money needed for these items. About half of all adults are women. But even though they are one-third of the workers, they do two-thirds of the work, earn only one-tenth of the income, and own just one percent of property. Dixon (1982) studied reports from the International Labour Organization, the Food and Agriculture Organization, and the National Population Census. He found that women were 38% of farm workers in developing countries. In 19 South and Southeast Asian countries, women made up 45.3% of the farm workers.

Dixon said this number is actually less than the truth. This is because many women's unpaid family work is

not counted, their seasonal farm work is missed, and most surveys are answered by men who may not report women's work correctly. The Planning Commission's Task Force on Employment Opportunities reported that farm jobs in India dropped a lot between 2011–2014 and 2019–2020. Because of this, some jobs where rural people—especially women—work are already facing problems. In 13 states, rural job growth has gone down since 2021 compared to the ten years before.

I.1 LABOUR PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN TAMILNADU AGRICULTURE

The production of food grains dominates the Tamil Nadu State's agricultural economy. Because agriculture plays a significant role in the state economy, it is estimated that farm women spend between 160 and 290 days working in the fields each year. The same has been categorised in accordance with the various types of land. (Table.1)

Table.1 - CLASSIFICATION OF LAND DURING 2023-2024

Sl. No.	District	Total Geographical Area		Forest			Barren & unculturable area		
		Area	% to State	Area	% share of		Area	% share of	
					Geographic	State area		District Geographic	State area
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1	Chennai	44111	0.3	300	0.7	0.0	7	0.0	0.0
2	Kancheepuram	170479	1.3	3685	2.2	0.2	2115	1.2	0.5
3	Chengalpattu	263892	2.0	20175	7.6	0.9	8826	3.3	1.9
4	Thiruvallur	324069	2.5	19736	6.1	0.9	13569	4.2	3.0
5	Cuddalore	367781	2.8	1415	0.4	0.1	14623	4.0	3.2
6	Villupuram	391468	3.0	14846	3.8	0.7	20604	5.3	4.5
7	Kallallurichi	330735	2.5	56851	17.2	2.6	36047	10.9	7.9
8	Vellore	223264	1.7	89953	40.3	4.2	10190	4.6	2.2
9	Ranipet	185553	1.4	9970	5.4	0.5	4729	2.5	1.0
10	Thiruppathur	183201	1.4	62363	34.0	2.9	5525	3.0	1.2
11	Thiruvannamala	631205	4.8	152810	24.2	7.1	20585	3.3	4.5
12	Salem	520530	4.0	125682	24.1	5.8	38198	7.3	8.4
13	Namakkal	336719	2.6	43909	13.0	2.0	24539	7.3	5.4
14	Dharmapuri	449777	3.5	164177	36.5	7.6	15804	3.5	3.5
15	Krishnagiri	514326	3.9	203964	39.7	9.5	23938	4.7	5.2
16	Coimbatore	472322	3.6	111871	23.7	5.2	4798	1.0	1.0
17	Thiruppur	519559	4.0	48168	9.3	2.2	2548	0.5	0.6
18	Erode	572264	4.4	227511	39.8	10.5	6270	1.1	1.4
19	Tiruchirapalli	440383	3.4	36773	8.4	1.7	12598	2.9	2.8
20	Karur	289557	2.2	6187	2.1	0.3	2786	1.0	0.6
21	Perambalur	175739	1.3	16281	9.3	0.8	2786	1.6	0.6
22	Ariyalur	193398	1.5	739	0.4	0.0	8523	4.4	1.9
23	Pudukottai	466329	3.6	23535	5.0	1.1	9863	2.1	2.2
24	Thanjavur	339657	2.6	3390	1.0	0.2	2149	0.6	0.5
25	Thiruvarur	209709	1.6	2452	1.2	0.1	113	0.1	0.0

26	Nagapattinam	154225	1.2	3531	2.3	0.2	32667	21.2	7.1
27	Mayiladuthurai	117358	0.9	1102	0.9	0.1	751	0.6	0.2
28	Madurai	374173	2.9	48473	13.0	2.2	13031	3.5	2.8
29	Theni	324230	2.5	134813	41.6	6.3	12226	3.8	2.7
30	Dindigul	626664	4.8	138923	22.2	6.4	36210	5.8	7.9
31	Ramanathapura	408957	3.1	4488	1.1	0.2	4457	1.1	1.0
32	Virudhunagar	424323	3.3	26466	6.2	1.2	4525	1.1	1.0
33	Sivagangai	418900	3.2	16533	3.9	0.8	4699	1.1	1.0
34	Tirunelveli	387606	3.0	83758	21.6	3.9	23787	6.1	5.2
35	Tenkasi	288244	2.2	44000	15.3	2.0	6240	2.2	1.4
36	Thoothukudi	470724	3.6	11012	2.3	0.5	19685	4.2	4.3
37	The Nilgiris	254485	2.0	142577	56.0	6.6	3402	1.3	0.7
38	Kanyakumari	167200	1.3	54155	32.4	2.5	4001	2.4	0.9

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Counting and measurement problems for women's agricultural work

Ruth B. Dixon's work shows that international statistics often undercount women's contributions in agriculture because unpaid family work and seasonal tasks are missed by conventional surveys. Her analyses argue that measurement errors make women's share appear smaller than it really is—an important methodological caution for any fieldwork in Gudiyatham.

Research comparing ILO, FAO and census methods highlights how different definitions (self-employed, wage labourer, unpaid helper) produce divergent female labour estimates. This literature underlines why local sample design and questionnaire wording matter when you estimate women's agricultural participation in Vellore.

Broader gender roles and productivity in agriculture (FAO / IFPRI syntheses)

FAO/IFPRI reviews show that women perform a wide range of farm tasks (cultivation, post-harvest, livestock care) and face structural constraints (access to land, credit, inputs) that lower measured productivity. Use these findings to frame hypotheses about asset ownership, task division, and productivity among Gudiyatham women labourers.

Data quality and female labour force participation (ILO insights)

ILO analyses detail interviewer/respondent biases and recommend alternative questionnaire designs to capture women's work better. These recommendations are directly relevant when you

design household interviews or focus-group guides in Gudiyatham.

State-level picture: women agricultural labourers in Tamil Nadu

Regional studies (e.g., Revathy, 2017 and related Tamil Nadu papers) document patterns of low wages, precarious employment, and social disadvantages for women in the state's agricultural workforce. These state-level patterns provide context for local outcomes in Gudiyatham (wage levels, caste/gender interactions).

- Local studies on Gudiyatham / Vellore block agricultural labourers

Several recent investigations focus specifically on Gudiyatham Block and Vellore district, documenting constraints faced by agricultural labourers (landlessness, wage disparity, seasonal unemployment). These local studies are directly useful as baseline literature and may contain primary data you can compare with your field results.

- Gender wage gap and discrimination in Indian agriculture

Empirical work on India shows persistent gender wage gaps in agricultural labour markets and explores policy levers to reduce discrimination. Use this literature to frame your analysis of male–female pay differences, bargaining power, and labour market segmentation in Gudiyatham.

- Constraints and coping strategies for rural women (recent empirical studies)

More recent case studies (e.g., Andhra/nearby-state studies) document constraints such as lack of social protection, seasonal migration, and limited access to

credit, and they list grassroots coping strategies. These pieces help you build a section on constraints, resilience, and policy implications for Gudiyatham women.

- Recent trends: rising female share in agriculture and structural change

National surveys and recent PLFS-based reporting indicate a rising share of women in agriculture as men shift to non-farm work—an important trend to test locally (are Gudiyatham women increasing their workload or just replacing male labour?). Use PLFS/NSSO trends to situate your Gudiyatham findings in the national picture.

- Policy, employment data reforms and implications for local research

Government task-force and planning reports (Planning Commission / NITI Aayog / recent task forces on employment data) highlight changing measurement approaches, employment definitions, and policy priorities. These reports help you argue why accurate local measurement (your study) is essential for better policy targeting for rural women.

The focus of earlier writings on women was their place in society and the value of their roles as mothers and housewives. Their contribution to the economy was viewed as either minor or subsidiary. The most well-known writing on women, however, was found in J.S. Mill's famous book on the "Subjection of Women," where he emphasised the value of earning for women's overall dignity. The intensity of labour employment varies for different crops. The most labour-intensive crop among cereals is rice. In India, rice production is the single largest employer because it occupies a significant portion of the country's land.

In their study on rural transformation, Saradmoni and Mehra Barunamitra insist that a number of programmes put in place since independence have had negative effects and have even limited women's participation in economic activity. The majority of rural development programmes lacked any kind of particular consideration for rural women. The institution of Mahila Mandals, which was nothing more than the adoption of a middle class model skewed toward home economics and welfare, was the

only programme worthy of the name.

According to Barunamitra, women in small and marginal farm families participate in a variety of agricultural tasks, either on their own land or on the land of others as hired labourers. Farmwomen work in crop husbandry to choose and store seeds, preserve healthy seeds, treat seeds, transplant seeds, apply fertilizer, and store food grains.

III. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Despite several obstacles, women contribute greatly. Women play significant roles in both the production of rice and the activities that take place after harvest, and they frequently acquire different agricultural expertise and knowledge than men do. They account for close to 50% of the world's population, 33% of the labour force according to official statistics, 70% of all hours worked, 10% of global income, and even less than 1% of global property. These hard statistics support the validity of a study that focuses on the state of women today. Many of the activities that women engage in that are financially rewarding are either not acknowledged or are inaccurately represented in statistical data. In actuality, neither their domestic labour nor their involvement in production-related agricultural and non-agricultural activities is evaluated economically. The discrimination that follows women today from the time of recruitment is one of the most glaring realities that they must deal with. Women are treated as inferior, and there is blatant pay discrimination as well. The goal of the current study is to provide light on the role that women play in agriculture. The majority of people in India rely on agriculture for their livelihood. As a result, women's participation is essential for strengthening the household sector. In addition to various recommendations and policy measures, this study aims to evaluate how women participate in and play a role in various farm activities, their contribution to household duties, their role in decision-making, and the issues they face. Additionally, it would assist programmers and decision-makers in identifying ways to empower women and address their problems.

IV. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To investigate the socioeconomic circumstances and pattern of income and expenditure

distribution among agricultural women labourers.

- The pattern of agricultural women workers' participation in agricultural production, specifically paddy cultivation, will be examined.
- To research how job segmentation in agriculture contributes to sex and wage discrimination.
- Analyse the labour utilisation of women in paddy cultivation and the supply responsiveness.
- To examine the challenges faced by agricultural women labourers in the study area and to recommend strategies for enhancing farm women's economic conditions and bolstering the agriculture sector.

V. SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The majority of rural households in our nation are those of cultivators, landless agricultural labourers, and artisans. Government programmes to reduce poverty must take into account the specific living circumstances of agricultural labourers who lack access to land. Therefore, it is hoped that this study will assist decision-makers in developing policies that will lift poor people out of poverty.

VI. HYPOTHESES

1. The participation of men and women in paddy cultivation is equal.
2. Farm households' annual income is unrelated to their agricultural income.
3. The age of the female labourers has no bearing on the farm households' yearly income.
4. Family size has no impact on the farm households' annual income.

VII. METHODOLOGY

In the current study, the economic and social circumstances of the households of landless agricultural labourers in Gudiyatham, Vellore District, are analysed. There are roughly 1022 farming households in Gudiyatham. 100 of these households were chosen at random, and 622 of them fall into the category of landless agricultural labourers. A list of the households of landless agricultural labourers was created with the assistance of the village administrative office, and it included the

names of the household heads in alphabetical order. Using a straightforward random sampling technique and the lottery method, 100 households were chosen.

VII.1 Period of the Study

Field investigation work was done between 2023 and 2024, and the information gathered relates to that time period, which was a typical year for agriculture.

VII.2 Socio-Economic Conditions of Selected Women Agricultural Labourers

From region to region, there are significant differences in the type and level of women's participation in agriculture. Their participation in a particular area is largely influenced by the type of farming system used, the opportunities for local families to make a living, and most importantly, the dominance of the caste, socioeconomic, and cultural characteristics of the local families. Knowing their personal information, such as age, caste, educational attainment, income, spending habits, etc., is crucial to comprehending the situation in real life.

VII.3 Distribution of Income of the selected Households

The following lists the specifics of the distribution of per capita income among the chosen households of landless agricultural labourers in Gudiyatham for the Villore district table.2.

Table.2 - Distribution of Income of the selected Households

Income Range	Number of Households
Less than Rs.15,000	42
Rs.15000 – Rs.30000	30
Rs.30000 – Rs.40000	28

VIII. FINDINGS

1. The majority of residents in the study area have received their primary education, which accounts for 42% of all education, followed by secondary education at 14% and higher education at 22%.
2. The majority of landless labourer households, or 76% of all households in the study area, are from schedule caste. The next caste with a majority representation of 18% is MBC.
3. In this area, 60 percent of the 100 households live in concrete homes, 28 percent in tiled homes, and 12 percent in homes made of asbestos.
4. Of the 100 households, 18 have fewer than 4 family members (representing 36% of the total),

24 fall into the category of 4-6 people (representing 48% of the total), and 8 fall into the category of 6 people or more (representing 12% of the total). According to the data, most families have between 4 and 6 kids.

5. The annual household income of landless agricultural labourers is Rs. 7,14,200. The households receive 100% of the total income from non-agricultural sources.
6. The annual expenditure for landless agricultural labourers' households is Rs. 6,70,160. Of which, Rs. 4,58,820, or about 68.46 percent of the total expenditure, was spent on the food items covered by this study. Non-food items receive the remaining 31.54 percent of spending.

IX. SUGGESTIONS

- It is important to encourage the landless agricultural labourers to focus more on activities away from the farm.
- The improvement of family planning knowledge is dependent on the expansion of educational facilities.
- These agrarian labourers without land may be eligible for low-interest bank loans and credit.
- The government may run training initiatives to provide instruction in nonfarm activities.
- A number of employment programmes should be implemented to reduce unemployment.

X. CONCLUSION

In this village, the level of poverty among agricultural labourers without land is not acceptable. They are unable to buy the necessities for their lives. The solution is to give unemployed people employment opportunities. The government must take the necessary actions to offer financial aid and implement job-oriented programmes for this group of agricultural labourers who are without land. To address the issue of rural unemployment and a low standard of living, the government must take the necessary actions for landless agricultural labourers. The government should offer enough credit options and job opportunities to landless agricultural labourers to give them more room to improve their socioeconomic circumstances and give them a better chance to tap into the potential of the community's resources. There

isn't a labour union for farmers. To ensure the welfare of the landless agricultural workers in these areas, the political leaders and the government should step forward and organise a union. This will enable them to obtain fair pay, appropriate working conditions, and prevent exploitation.

REFERENCE

- [1] J.S.Mill, *The Subjection of Women*, Cambridge, MIT press, 1870, pp.38-45 2K.P.
- [2] Devadass, S. Muthu and K. Thangamani, "Role of Selected Farm Women in Agricultural Development", *Indian Journal of Home Science*, 6(1), 1972, pp.50-51
- [3] Devadass, "Role of Women in Modern Agriculture", *Indian Farming*, 25 (8), 1975, p.15
- [4] Leela Gulati, "Female Work Participation: A Study of Inter State Differences", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.10, No. 1 and 2, 1975, p. 42
- [5] S.R.Mehra and K.Saradmoni, *Women and rural Transformation*, Concept Publishing House, New Delhi 1983, pp.12-15.
- [6] Barunamitra, "Training Needs of Farm Women", *Kurukeshtra*, 2 (12), 1984, pp.37-39
- [7] Varadarajan S. and P.K. Aiyasamy, (1983), "The Structural Content of Rural Poverty in Tamil Nadu", Paper presented at the Fourth Annual Conference of Association of Economists at Tirupathur.
- [8] Kuznets. S (1966), "Modern Economic Growth: Rate, structure and spread", Yale University Press, New Haven, Connecticut.
- [9] Chuts, E and C liedholm, (1979), "Rural Landless Agricultural Labourers: A review of the state of Art, MSU Rural Development of Agricultural Economics, Michigan State university, Michigan.
- [10] Kishor C. Samuel, (1998), "Poverty Alleviation after post – Liberalisation – Study of a Tribal Block in Orissa", *Economic and political weekly*, 33 (28)