



**AN ECONOMIC ANALYSIS OF RURAL FEMALE AGRICULTURAL
WORKERS IN PUNJAB**

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Agriculture occupies a central place in the economy of the country is considered the life blood and backbone of the economy. Majority of people depend upon agriculture for their livelihood. The share of agriculture in GDP has dropped softly during the planned development of the country, despite that it plays a significant role in the rural economy. The share of agriculture to GDP was 55.4% in 1950-51 and it plummeted to 15.4% in 2017. Despite its low share in GDP, 60% of the total population depend upon agriculture for their livelihood. 58.4% the country's workforce is engaged in the agriculture sector and constitutes the single largest private enterprise. Agriculture provides raw materials for many industries and thus, it contributes to promoting industrial development of the country. India's foreign trade is also closely linked with agriculture and it brings in 14.7% of the total export earnings. Expanding agricultural production contributes to the growth of the economy by increasing the demand for other sectors. Demand for fertilizers, pesticides, machinery, transportation and communication gets boosted. Indian agriculture still depends upon the monsoon season. Labour is a very significant factor of production. Those who are in the age-group of 15-59 generally constitute the labour force of a country. Children below 15 years and people above 59 are not considered fit to participate in production activity.

Agricultural labourers most of them being landless, are the poorest people among the Indian agriculturists. They come from scheduled castes and other backward communities and constitute the oppressed and depressed section of the society. They fall in the category of unskilled and unorganized workers and they work on the farms of rich landlords as casual

workers on very low wages for a considerable period of the year. One of the most disturbing things in the rural economy of India has been escalating numbers of landless labourers over the decades. The miserable living conditions of agricultural labourers are the consequence of under employment, under development and surplus population.

Agricultural labour, according to the First Agricultural Labour Enquiry Committee (ALEC) 1950-55, could be defined as “those people who are engaged in raising crops on payment of wages”. If 50% or more members of a household are engaged in agriculture on wages, such a household can be described as agricultural labour household.

Agricultural labourers – (i) permanent labourers (ii) Casual labourers.

Very small cultivators who have wages as their main source of income due to extremely small size of their holdings. Permanent workers enter into a sort of contract since they work on seasonal or annual basis. Their wages are fixed according to tradition or custom. Casual workers find employment during peak period only. They are given wages as per market rate. Second group comprises small farmers who run their families mainly by earning wages by working on the land of others. Unlike industrial workers, they are highly unorganized. Agricultural labourers being generally unskilled workers work on very small wages, especially in smaller villages. Most of them are from depressed classes who have suffered exploitation and oppression for ages. They have never had courage to resist exploitation. In some parts of India agricultural labourers migrate to other states to find jobs during the harvesting season.

Being generally unskilled or marginally skilled, their supply exceeds their demand. Only during sowing and harvesting seasons, all the agricultural labourers are able to find employment. After the harvesting season, most of them turn jobless especially in those areas where single cropping pattern prevails. That is why the bargaining power of agricultural labourers is very weak. A substantial number of them are indebted to money lenders, landlords and commission agents, often the same person functioning in all three capacities.

Wages and employment opportunities depend upon a number of factors such as adoption of new technology, population and migration, marketing, credit system, the terms of the trade and size of the market, profitability, demand-supply etc. Job opportunities in the hilly regions are less than in those areas which have adopted new agricultural strategies. Wage rates also differ in these areas. The demand for agricultural labour and wage rates are higher in Haryana, Punjab and other areas of Green Revolution than in the remote areas of Orissa and

Assam where no agrarian reforms happened. A recent report by the govt. has revealed that women are more than men as agriculture labourers.

In the study area women labourers irrespective of their age, caste or marital status are engaged only in crop production activities. The working hours of the labourers are 7-8 hours per day. Transplanting, weeding, harvesting and post harvest activities are the main operations performed by the women labourers. Such operations account for 92.67% of the total employment days in agriculture.

TABLE - 1

DISTRIBUTION OF RURAL FEMALE WORKERS IN PUNJAB FROM 1987 TO 2009-10

NIC-Code	1987-88	1993-94	1999-00	2004-05	2009-10
Agriculture, etc.	91.6	92.7	90.6	89.07	82.3
Mining & quarrying	0.1	-	-	-	-
Manufacturing	2.8	1.3	2.3	3.7	4.0
Electricity, gas and water supply (utilities)	-	0.2	0.2	-	0.1
Construction	-	-	0.1	0.1	1.0
Trade, hotel and restaurant(THR)	1.1	1.0	1.1	1.0	1.4
Transport, storage and communication (TSC)	0.1	-	-	0.3	-
Finance, insurance and real estate (FIR)	-	-	-	-	0.2
Community, social and personal (CSP) services	4.2	4.7	5.7	5.1	8.8

Note: The figures pertain to the usual principal and subsidiary status (UPSS).

Source: NSS reports on employment and unemployment, various rounds.

Table 1 shows the distribution of rural female workers in Punjab from 1987 to 2009-10. In 1987-88, 1993-94 and 1999-00 there have been 91.6%, 92.7% and 90.6% respectively rural female workers participation in agriculture. In 2004-05 and 2009-10 there have been 89.07% and 82.3% respectively rural female workers participation in agriculture. In 1987-88, 1993-94 and 1999-00 there have been 2.8%, 1.3% and 2.3% respectively rural female workers participation in agriculture. In 2004-05 and 2009-10 there have been 3.7% and 4.0% respectively rural female workers participation in agriculture.

In 1987-88, 1993-94 and 1999-00 there have been 1.1%, 1.0% and 1.1% respectively rural female workers participation in trade, hotel and restaurant. In 2004-05 and 2009-10 there have been 1.0% and 1.4% respectively rural female workers participation in trade, hotel and restaurant. In 1987-88, 1993-94 and 1999-00 there have been 4.2%, 4.7% and 5.7% respectively rural female workers participation in community, social and personal services. In 2004-05 and 2009-10 there have been 5.1% and 8.8% respectively rural female workers participation in community, social and personal services.

TABLE – 2

DISTRIBUTION OF FEMALE WORKERS EMPLOYED IN DIFFERENT ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES IN PUNJAB FROM 1987 TO 2009-10

NIC-Code	1987-88	1993-94	1999-00	2004-05	2009-10
Agriculture, etc.	20.05	14.50	20.21	23.56	17.66
Mining & quarrying	0.02	-	-	-	-
Manufacturing	0.61	0.20	0.51	0.97	0.86
Electricity, gas and water supply (utilities)	-	0.03	0.04	-	0.02
Construction	-	-	0.02	0.03	0.21
Trade, hotel and restaurant(THR)	0.24	0.16	0.25	0.26	0.30
Transport, storage and communication (TSC)	0.02	-	-	0.08	-
Finance, insurance and real estate (FIR)	-	-	-	-	0.04
Community, social and personal (CSP) services	0.92	0.74	1.27	1.34	1.89
Total	21.87	15.63	22.30	26.24	20.77

Note: The figures pertain to the usual principal and subsidiary status (UPSS).

Source: NSS reports on employment and unemployment, various rounds and 2009-10 and Statistical Abstracts of Punjab.

Table 2 shows the distribution of female workers employed in different economic activities in Punjab from 1987 to 2009-10. In 1987-88, 1993-94 and 1999-00 there have been 20.05%, 14.5% and 20.21% respectively female workers employed in agriculture. In 2004-05 and 2009-10 there have been 23.56% and 17.66% respectively female workers employed in

agriculture. In 1987-88, 1993-94 and 1999-00 there have been 0.61%, 0.20% and 0.51% respectively female workers employed in manufacturing. In 2004-05 and 2009-10 there have been 0.97% and 0.86% respectively female workers employed in manufacturing.

In 1987-88, 1993-94 and 1999-00 there have been 0.24%, 0.16% and 0.25% respectively female workers employed in trade, hotel and restaurant. In 2004-05 and 2009-10 there have been 0.26% and 0.30% respectively female workers employed in trade, hotel and restaurant. In 1987-88, 1993-94 and 1999-00 there have been 0.92%, 0.74% and 1.27% respectively female workers employed in community, social and personal services. In 2004-05 and 2009-10 there have been 1.34% and 1.89% respectively female workers employed in community, social and personal services.

TABLE – 3
CHANGES IN THE NUMBER OF RURAL FEMALE WORKERS IN DIFFERENT CATEGORIES IN PUNJAB FROM 1987 TO 2009-10

NIC-Code	1987-88 to 1993-94	1993-94 to 1999-00	1999-00 to 2004-05	2004-05 to 2009-10
Agriculture, etc.	-5.55	5.71	3.35	-5.9
Mining & quarrying	-	-	-	-
Manufacturing	-0.43	0.31	0.46	-0.11
Electricity, gas and water supply (utilities)	-	0.01	-0.03	0.02
Construction	-	-	0.01	0.12
Trade, hotel and restaurant(THR)	-0.08	0.09	0.01	0.04
Transport, storage and communication (TSC)	-	-	0.08	-0.08
Finance, insurance and real estate (FIR)	-	-	-	0.04
Community, social and personal (CSP) services	-0.18	0.53	0.07	0.45
Total	-6.24	6.67	3.94	-5.47

Note: The figures pertain to the usual principal and subsidiary status (UPSS).

Source: NSS reports on employment and unemployment, various rounds and Statistical Abstracts of Punjab.

Table 3 shows the changes in the number of rural female workers in different categories in Punjab from 1987-88 to 2009-10. In 1987-88 to 1993-94 and 1993-94 to 1999-00 there was 5.55% and 5.71% respectively changes in the number of rural female workers of Punjab in agriculture. In 1999-00 to 2004-05 and 2004-05 to 2009-10 there was 3.35% and 5.9% respectively changes in the number of rural female workers of Punjab in agriculture.

In 1987-88 to 1993-94 and 1993-94 to 1999-00 there was -0.43% and 0.31% respectively changes in the number of rural female workers of Punjab in manufacturing.

In 1999-00 to 2004-05 and 2004-05 to 2009-10 there was 0.46% and -0.11% respectively changes in the number of rural female workers of Punjab in manufacturing.

In 1987-88 to 1993-94 and 1993-94 to 1999-00 there was -0.08% and 0.09% respectively changes in the number of rural female workers of Punjab in trade, hotel and restaurant.

In 1999-00 to 2004-05 and 2004-05 to 2009-10 there was 0.01% and 0.04% respectively changes in the rural female workers of Punjab in trade, hotel and restaurant.

In 1987-88 to 1993-94 and 1993-94 to 1999-00 there was -0.18% and 0.53% respectively changes in the rural female workers of Punjab in community, social and personal services.

In 1999-00 to 2004-05 and 2004-05 to 2009-10 there was 0.07% and 0.45% respectively changes in the number of rural female workers of Punjab in social and personal services.

Most of the agricultural operations are done by hand by women labourers. Transplanting is done by hand, weeding both by hand and by sickle, but for harvesting sickle is used.

Except for harvesting and post harvesting, operations, payment for all other operations is made in cash. Their working hours are 7 to 8 hours a day, but no fixed working hours during the harvesting period. For harvesting, payment is made in kind in the form of paddy or wheat per day of harvest.

Some labourers suggested that they should be imparted training in entrepreneurial activities like food processing and mushroom cultivation. They maintained that technical knowledge which they would gain from training would help them get higher wages. Some of them made the suggestion that they should be given interest-free bank loans to buy livestock, poultry etc. Some opined that under MGNREGA programme, work for at least 100 days should

be provided. Some of them suggested that wage rates should be hiked to improve their living conditions.

Realizing their family responsibility they had to work as agricultural labourers to supplement the meager income of their spouses, most of whom were also agricultural labourers. Some of them were living alone and had no other source of income. Some had school going children. In some cases their children did not earn enough to be able to support their family. Some despite being of younger age worked as labourers to help their parents. Some labourers had to look after the older members of the family who were dependent upon them.

Conclusion and policy implications :-

Education plays a vital role in improving women condition. The higher level of literacy especially among women has contributed to the development. Most of them were educated upto primary level because only primary level schools were there in their villages and most of them belonged to middle-age group. The younger women had better educational qualifications. Some households of women labourers were headed by women. Women headed the family either due to widowhood, or separation from their husbands or because of their being unmarried. Mostly lower caste people worked as agricultural labourers.

Most of the women labourers depended upon their wages earned as agricultural labourers. Only few of them had some land for cultivation, but the size of the landholding was too small to meet their family needs. So they had to supplement their meager income by working as labourers.

Most of women labourers worked as casual labourers. Employment opportunities being scarce, they had to work as casual labourers whenever they were able to get work with a fixed timing of work and fixed wages. Only few of them worked both as cultivators and casual labourers.

Most of the women labourers were unskilled and had no knowledge of machines. They carried out agricultural operations with their hands. Men performed those operations which required technical skill and in which the use of machines was involved. Women were paid lower wages than men because of their being unskilled.

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