

Socio-Economic Conditions of Female Agricultural Labour in India “A Case Study of Andhra Pradesh”

¹Dr. D. Rajyalakshmi, ²Prof. K. Madhu Babu

¹Head Department of History, Government Degree College, Avanigadda, Krishna (Dt). Andhra Pradesh

²Professor, Department of Economics, Acharya Nagarjuna University, A.P -522510

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.910000366>

Received: 20 October 2025; Accepted: 27 October 2025; Published: 12 November 2025

INTRODUCTION

Women's role in economic development, in most countries of the world, cannot be undermined. In the third world countries, especially, where agricultures still constitutes the main source of livelihood and the main area of work for most people, women's contribution is quite high. The strategies undertaken for the development of agriculture in these economies were more concerned with the increase in productivity through mechanization of the agricultural production process and neglected the sex specific composition of the rural labour force. Overtime, men gained from the technical change that came about in agriculture while women were marginalized. They remained mostly as low paid casual labourers. India's female population, as per 2011 census, is 586.46 million and constitutes 48.46 percent of the total population. Nearly 75 percent of the female population in rural and mostly belong to the subsistence sector. In agriculture women mostly undertake labour intensive and drudgery prone activities like transplanting, weeding, harvesting and post harvest operations. They also work in the allied fields such as animal husbandry, forestry, plantation, fishing etc. More often, the economic activities undertaken by the rural women on their own farm or in animal husbandry get disguised as household work and remain unreported. Agricultural work is seasonal in nature. During the off season women in agriculture have to struggle hard to find alternate source of income.

The Indian caste system divides society into closed, hereditary groups ranked by ritual status. Dalits stand at the bottom of the hierarchy and in fact outside the varna system. Dalit women agricultural labourers are the most exploited and oppressed class in rural hierarchy in India. They were victims of not only economic exploitation but also social discrimination. If they failed to bow to the tunes of the masters, they were beaten up and tortured. Hence, in this background the empirical, scientific, inductive, factor finding investigational study among Dalit women agricultural labourers to work participation rate, wage and productivity trends and the determinates of wages and productivity of labour in the rural economy of Andhra Pradesh state in India is an important phenomenon.

Keywords: Women labourers, Scheduled Caste (Dalit), productivity, exploited, wage and Discrimination)

Importance of the Study

The current research seems to be attempting to explain income and productivity patterns among Dalit women agricultural labourers in Guntur, Andhra Pradesh, as well as their challenges and potential. Guntur district is situated in a coastline region. A lot of studies have been conducted in the Guntur district's agriculture sector. However, no research has been done among Dalit women agricultural labourers in the study region. In order to examine the Dalit women's agricultural labour concerns, empirical research is required.

Scope of the Study

The study is limited to the analysis of the socioeconomic status of Dalit Women agricultural labor in Guntur District of Andhra Pradesh. The study area characters by semi-developed agricultural region in which dry land, crops and irrigated crops are growing. The study focuses on the socio-economic conditions and the factors

influencing the poverty among female agricultural labour in the selected district. The study is carried on basing on 320 households of Dalit Women agricultural labour.

Statement of the Problem

In India's rural hierarchy, Dalit women agricultural labourers are the most exploited and mistreated. Prior to the Declaration of Independence, they were in a similar situation. Not only were they exploited economically, but they were also subjected to social prejudice. They were flogged and tormented if they did not bend to the masters' songs. The landowners frequently succeeded in capturing these impoverished individuals in their net and converting them into virtual slaves by extending modest sums to them. Agricultural labourers are the poorest and resource-starved class in rural regions, despite the fact that their status has improved to some degree during the previous 75 years of independence.

Need for the Study

Women are the backbone of rural India's economy, as well as Andhra Pradesh's. Women work in a variety of jobs to make ends meet, and the bulk of Dalit Agriculture labour women rely on agriculture, which is India's largest unorganised sector. Many of these workers are landless and from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. The position and status of women are transformed in the agricultural social transformation process as a result of agriculture technology. Women from every area, ethnicity, class, and caste are affected differently by the disaggregated pattern of development. In light of this, it's important to look at the position of women at various stages of rural transition as a result of technical and agricultural progress. Aside from a few studies here and there, no real research has been done to explain this societal phenomena. So there is a need to make an attempt to study the Dalit women Agriculture labour Guntur District of Andhra Pradesh. So, it is proposed to make a study with the following objectives.

Objectives of the Study

The present study is conducted in Guntur district of Andhra Pradesh. The study takes the following as its objectives:

To study the Socio-economic conditions of Dalit women Agriculture labourers in Guntur District of Andhra Pradesh.

To understand the composition of income, expenditure, assets and liabilities of the sample Dalit women agricultural labour households in the study area.

Limitation Of the Study

The subject selected for the detailed study has a fairly wide scope, particularly in Dalit women agriculture labourers. But due to time and financial constraints, it is obviously not possible for an individual researcher to cover and give justice to all aspects of Economic condition of Dalit women Agricultural Labour in the study area during 2022-23.

Methodology and Sample Size

The present study is based on the Primary Data as well as Secondary Data. Guntur district of the Coastal region of Andhra Pradesh has been selected for the purpose of the present study which has been divided into four revenue divisions based on criteria of socio-economic conditions of the district. Multi-stage random sampling method has been used for selecting the sample respondents.

The scheduled caste population is spread all over Andhra Pradesh. The selection is based on following criteria:

First stage, Andhra Pradesh state has been selected purposively. In the second stage, four revenue divisions have been considered for the study.

Third stage, from each revenue division, two mandals (8) have been chosen by using stratified Random Sampling Method based on the highest SC women agricultural labourers.

Finally, in each mandal two villages (16) are selected by following the same method. From each village, 20 Scheduled Caste women agricultural labourers were selected. Therefore as a whole 320 samples were collected by using Stratified Random Sampling Technique. Structured interview schedules have been used to collect the primary data from the sample respondents.

Table No. 1 Distribution of Sample Size

Sl. No.	Name of the Mandal	Name of the village	SC population			No. of Respondents
			Male	Female	Total	
1	Sattenapalle	Nandigama	964	1597	2561	20
2		Lakkarajugarlapadu	990	1001	1991	20
3	Thullur	Mandadam	1580	1554	3134	20
4		Thullur	1197	1164	2361	20
5	Amruthalur	Mulpur	1537	1508	3045	20
6		Amruthalur	1229	1153	2382	20
7	Ponnur	Mulukuduru	1020	1097	2117	20
8		Chintalapudi	1040	1072	2112	20
9	Narasaraopet	Ellamanda	1964	1817	3781	20
10		Mulakalur	1249	1209	2458	20
11	Edlapadu	Edlapadu	1453	1394	2847	20
12		Thimmapuram	1202	1270	2472	20
13	Gurazala	Gurazala	1781	1906	3687	20
14		Madugula	610	654	1264	20
15	Dachepalle	Nadikudi	1284	1282	2566	20
16		Dachepalle	872	851	1723	20
		Total	19972	20529	40501	320

Source: Compiled secondary data from district hand book of Guntur, Census 2011. & 2018 (provisional)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSETIONS

Chi-Square Test:

Chi-square test is applied to test the significant difference between observed frequency and expected frequency under certain assumptions such as the uniform distribution of objects in a specific category.

Formula

$$\chi^2 = \sum \frac{(O_i - E_i)^2}{E_i}$$

$\sum O_i$ is larger enough

Where;

O_i = observed frequency

E_i = expected frequency

Frequency of Payment

H₀: There is no frequency of wage payment is paid through cash to the respondents among the revenue division wise in various spells.

H₁: There is a frequency of wage payment is paid through cash to the respondents among the revenue division wise in various spells.

They felt flexible as they are paid simultaneously after the completing of work. From the above analysis, it is clear that most of the payments are made after completion of work. The Pearson Chi-square value is 22.102 at 0.001 significant levels.

Table No.2

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	22.102 ^a	6	.001
Likelihood Ratio	22.748	6	.001
Linear-by-Linear Association	17.786	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	320		
a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 19.25.			

Source: Field data.

From the above table it can be interpreted that, there is a difference in the frequency of wage payment made to the respondents in the study area, since chi-square value is $.001 < 0.05$. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected and alternative hypothesis is accepted and it is concluded that there is a difference of wage payments made to the respondents.

Difference of Payment between Men and Women.

H₀: There is no difference in payment of wages between men and women in the agricultural work in the study area.

H₁ : There is a difference in payment of wages between men and women in the agricultural work in the study area.

Table No.3.

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	6.753 ^a	3	.080
Likelihood Ratio	6.577	3	.087
Linear-by-Linear Association	.155	1	.693
N of Valid Cases	320		
a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 14.00.			

Source: Field data.

As of various divisions, more than 70 per cent of the respondents have been differed between men and women on payment basis. It shows that women are neglected at work basis on payment basis after fulfillment of entrusted agricultural activity. The Pearson Chi-square value is 6.753 at 0.080 significant levels. From the above table it can be interpreted that, There is a difference in payment of wages between men and women in the study area, since chi-square value is 080>0.05. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected and alternative hypothesis is accepted and it is concluded that there is a difference in payment of wages between men and women in the study area.

Amount paid differed per day to the Respondents:

Table No. 4.

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	13.675 ^a	6	.033
Likelihood Ratio	13.792	6	.032
Linear-by-Linear Association	.029	1	.864
N of Valid Cases	320		
a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 14.00.			

Source: Field data.

H₀ : The payment of wages to the respondents are not equal among the revenue division wise.

H₁ : The payment of wages to the respondents are equal among the revenue division wise.

The Pearson Chi-square value is 13.675 at 0.033 significant levels. From the above table it can be interpreted that, The payment of wages to the respondents are not equal among revenue division wise in the study area, since chi-square value is 033<0.05. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected and alternative hypothesis is accepted and it concluded that the payment of wages to the respondents are differed.

Income sufficient for your livelihood

H₀ : The Income level of the respondents insufficient for their livelihood among revenue division wise.

H₁ : The Income level of the respondents are sufficient for their livelihood among revenue division wise.

Table No. 5.

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	4.457 ^a	3	.216
Likelihood Ratio	4.394	3	.222
Linear-by-Linear Association	2.316	1	.128
N of Valid Cases	320		

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 13.75.

Source: Field data.

The Pearson Chi-square value is 4.457 at 0.216 significant levels. From the above table it can be interpreted that, there is insufficient income for their livelihood among revenue division wise in the study area, since chi-square value is $0.216 > 0.05$. Hence, the null hypothesis is accepted and alternative hypothesis is rejected and it concluded that there is insufficient income for their livelihood.

Type of problem faced by the Dalit Women

Table no .6 entails the type of problems faced by the Women dalit agricultural labourer from the Co-workers / Owner.

Table No.6 Type of Problem Faced by the Women Dalit Agricultural Labourer

Type of problem faced	Revenue division				Total
	Guntur	Tenali	Narasaraopet	Gurazala	
Sometimes they are using abusing	5 (6.3)	8 (10.0)	8 (10.0)	6 (7.5)	27 (8.4)
Sometimes they are making social distance	3 (3.8)	4 (5.0)	7 (8.8)	4 (5.0)	18 (5.6)
Workplace harassment	5 (6.3)	2 (2.5)	3 (3.8)	4 (5.0)	14 (4.4)
Gender discrimination	5 (6.3)	2 (2.5)	2 (2.5)	3 (3.8)	12 (3.8)

Not applicable	62 (77.5)	64 (80.0)	60 (75.0)	63 (78.8)	249 (77.8)
Total	80 (100.0)	80 (100.0)	80 (100.0)	80 (100.0)	320 (100.0)

Source: Compiled from collected data.

Out of total 320, 249 (77.8 per cent) do not face any problem, followed by 27 (8.4 per cent), 18 (5.6 per cent), 14 (4.4 per cent) and 12 (3.8 per cent) are abused, making social distance, workplace harassment and gender discrimination respectively.

Table No. 6. (a)

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	6.569 ^a	12	.885
Likelihood Ratio	6.368	12	.896
Linear-by-Linear Association	.043	1	.836
N of Valid Cases	320		
a. 12 cells (60.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 3.00.			

Source: Field data.

Apart from this, there is a description of various divisions. In Guntur division, out of 80, 5 (6.3 per cent) opined that sometimes they are abused, 5 (6.3 per cent) faced workplace harassment, 5 (6.3 per cent) have gender discrimination and only 3 (3.8 per cent) facing social distance. In Tenali division, out of 80, 8 (10.0 per cent) opined that sometimes they are abused, 4 (5.0 per cent) facing social distance, 2 (2.5 per cent) faced workplace harassment and 2 (2.5 per cent) have gender discrimination.

In Narasaraopet division, out of 80, 8 (10.0 per cent) opined that sometimes they are abused, 7 (8.8 per cent) facing social distance, 3 (3.8 per cent) faced workplace harassment and 2 (2.5 per cent) have gender discrimination. In Gurazala division, out of 80, 6 (7.5 per cent) opined that sometimes they are abused, 4 (5.0 per cent) facing social distance, 4 (5.0 per cent) faced workplace harassment and 3 (3.8 per cent) have gender discrimination.

It also absorbed in the various revenue division wise that few of them got exploited by the respondents i.e. making social distance, harassment, Gender discrimination, abusing etc. The Pearson Chi-square value is 6.569 at 0.885 significant levels.

Expenses incurred on non-food items

H₀ : There is no huge expenses incurred on non-food items per month by the respondents among revenue division wise.

H₁ : There is a huge expenses incurred on non-food items per month by the respondents among revenue division wise.

Table No.7.

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	5.822 ^a	9	.758
Likelihood Ratio	5.712	9	.768
Linear-by-Linear Association	.698	1	.403
N of Valid Cases	320		
a. 4 cells (25.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2.25.			

Source: Field data.

From the above table it can be interpreted that, there is less expenditure made on the non-food items per month in the study area, since chi-square value is $0.758 > 0.05$. Hence, the null hypothesis is accepted and alternative hypothesis is rejected and it concluded that there is more expenditure incurred on the non-food items in the study area.

MAJOR FINDINGS

Following are the various findings:

It is found out that the most of the dalit women agricultural labourers are of teenage group and early working age group. Few women are from productive ages.

Dalit women agricultural labourers prefer to do agriculture due to poverty and to meet their daily needs and; their family members didn't send them for works.

It can be noticed that more than 70 per cent land owner show difference between men and women on payment basis. Apart from this, they do not get satisfied from the earned income which is very less between Rs.200 and Rs.300 on daily basis.

Approximately, 50 per cent of the respondents work for 201 to 250 days in a year. Therefore, they are ideal in remaining days as there is unproductive season or no other works to do except agricultural in rural areas. They are strictly dependent on agricultural activities whole year.

It can also be noticed that most of the income earned is spent by the labourer is on non-food items. Thus, they could not able to save any amount for future needs.

The dalit women agricultural labourers consider that acquiring the loans from the money lenders is flexible, convenient and in meeting their emergency needs. On the other hand, they are levied high rate of interest where they could not able to repay their debts. Hence, they do not have proper awareness about Government schemes.

There are no extra facilities for female labourer at work place such as crèche, toilet facility.

From the research analysis, it can also be pointed out that more than 50 per cent do not have proper hygienic water facility and procuring through common well, public taps, tanks and hand pump.

Most of them work on seasonal basis as they do not have any other work available during unseasonal time as it making them to be idle, raising debts, to meet basic needs and requirements, health and educational expenses etc.

They are not aware of labour acts like payment of wage act, 1936, payment of minimum wage act 1948, Child labour Act 1986, maternity benefits Act 1979 etc.

SUGGESTIONS

On the basis of above findings, the study suggests following steps to improve the socio-economic conditions of dalit women agricultural labourers who are mostly landless women for their livelihood is based on agriculture:

Small Ownership of land should also be ensured with due consideration to Dalit women on their access and control over resources.

Technical, vocational and academic education should be provided to Dalit women by the State Government so that they can implement it in agricultural activity for smooth functioning of system.

The discriminatory laws, traditional practices such as untouchability and dogmatism against Dalit women should be abolished by providing them the social security.

Constitutional Dalit Commission should be established to safeguard and protect women rights with special support centers for Dalit women.

Various Dalit women's economic generation programs should be launched by the Government for their income generation and self-reliance. Dalit women's employment opportunities should be ensured.

Large awareness against caste discrimination should be escalated. Strict legal action should be implemented in the case of caste discrimination and abuses.

More Self- Help Groups and meetings should be also encouraged so that dalit agricultural women can put up their issues and allegations.

The Government should encourage small scale industries for Dalit women in the rural areas to improve their economical position.

Massive awareness programmes should be encouraged by the Government regarding labour laws, minimum wages act, child labour act etc.

It is suggested that agricultural women labourer should be ensured with other income earning source apart from agriculture as they do not have any income during unseasonal period.

Besides government efforts, NGOs and other institutions should provide skills-training to Dalit women to help them find alternative means of income.

Higher officials should aim young Dalit men and women to positively change their attitudes towards women and violence against women.

Dalit women are losing their traditional jobs and households are suffering from poverty. NGOs need to take interventions on livelihood development options related to the market value chain. Sector players need to provide integrated development programmes for Dalit communities so that Dalit women can accumulate social, economic and cultural capital.

Land reform programmes should be inaugurated with the objective of redistributing Government owned land resources to the landless, targeting Dalit women residing in rural areas, to use it for agriculture to generate income. Special subsidies should be made available for women from marginalized communities on agriculture loans, land ownership tax etc.

A group insurance scheme should be considered for the health insurance of women, particularly those employed in hazardous and difficult occupations. Group insurance can also be considered in the context of natural calamities.

Informal education should be made part of Dalit women.

Social Security schemes of creches, health care, maternity benefits for SC/ST women who engaged in unorganized sector should be extended.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the present study evidences the 'Socio-economic status of the dalit women agricultural labourers in Guntur district. The entire study represents that Scheduled Castes women agricultural labourers and it was exploited section of the society. Their income is always been meager, resulting in poor living and heavy indebtedness. It's much worse for those who get agricultural work merely exist and do not live. The Dalit women were deprived of education and they were not allowed to join schools because women were threatened, particularly of the Scheduled Caste women that if they become literate they would become widows.

A large number of Dalit women are landless agricultural workers working for others on daily wages. With the mechanization in agricultural operations most of them have lost their traditional occupation. The traditional Indian society treated woman in general as an object of sex and sexual exploitation. It was an established fact that woman was looked down in all aspects of life. Discrimination is showed towards her in all spheres in the disguise of tradition and culture. Right values and ethics have to be inculcated in the minds of young Dalit children. Human Rights education should be a compulsory component of the school and college curriculum that is respecting every human, whatever be the caste, race, creed or sex, each belong to. Government has to create more awareness among dalit women about their rights and privileges which can be approached through information technology and should reach even to the remote rural citizen where large majority of Dalit women population reside in our country.

REFERENCE

1. Mohan Kumar S (2008), "Kerala's Agricultural Labourers - Victims of a Crisis", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.4(2), pp.48-52.
2. Narula S (2008), "Equal by Law, Unequal by Caste: The Untouchable Condition in Critical Race Perspective", *Wisconsin International Law Journal*, Vol.26, pp.255-257.
3. Jose C T and Jayasekhar (2008), "Growth trends in area, Production and Productivity of Arecanut in India", *Agricultural Situation in India*, Vol.65(3), pp.135-140.
4. Kannappan P (2008), "Scheduled Castes Welfare", APH Publishing Corporation, New Delhi, Vo.5(8), p.44.
5. Nisha N (2008), "Women Labour in Agriculture in India : Some Facets," *International Journal of Business and Economic Research*, Volume 1(1) pp.1-4.
6. Wankhede G G (2008), "Accessing Higher Education : Affirmative Action and Structured Inequality – The Indian Experience", *Social Change*, Vol.38(1), pp.31-51.
7. Farid et.al (2009), "Nature and extent of Rural Women's Participation in Agricultural and Non-agricultural Activities", *Agricultural Science Digest*, Vol.29(4), pp.254-259.
8. Sukhadeo Thorat and Nidhi Sadana (2009), "Caste and Ownership of Private Enterprises", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.44 (23), pp.13-16.
9. Shailaja Paik (2009), "Amchya Jalmachi Chittarkatha (The Bioscope of Our Lives): Who is my Ally?", "Economic & Political Weekly", Vol. XLIV (40), pp.39-47.
10. Rajnish Kumar, Satendra Kumar, and Arup Mitra (2009), "Social and Economic Inequalities : Contemporary Significance of Caste in India", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.44(50), pp.55-62.
11. Darshan Singh (2009), "Development of Scheduled Castes in India – A Review", *Journal of Rural Development*, Vol.28(4), pp.529-542.
12. Bala N (2010), "Selective discrimination against women in Indian Agriculture - A Review" *Agricultural Reviews*, Vol.31 (3), pp.224–228.

13. Sukpal Sing (2009), "Survival of Agricultural labour in Punjab: A burning question", Economic and Political Weekly, Vol.XLIV(29), pp.24-25.
14. Jodhka Surinder (2010), "Caste and Democracy: Assertion and Identity among the Dalits of Rural Punjab", Sociological Bulletin, Vol.55(1), pp.4-23.
15. Vijayabaskar (2010), "Saving Agricultural Labour from Agriculture: SEZs and Politics of Silence in Tamil Nadu", Economic and Political Weekly, Vol.78(4), pp.65-73.
16. Tahir Munir et al. (2010), "Women Labour in Agriculture in India : Some Facets," International Journal of Business and Economic Research, Vol.1(1) pp.145-147.
17. Smitha M Patil (2010), "Social Exclusion and Exploitation of Dalit Women", Women's Link, Vol.20(2), pp.43-45.
18. Nirantar Centre for Gender and Education (2011), New Worlds, New Skills Leadership Development with Muslim and Dalit Women, www.nirantar.mail@gmail.com.
19. Madhura Swaminathan (2010), "Women and Agriculture, Works and Wages", Gender and Discrimination, Vol.2 (3), pp.59-77.