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Role of Tribal Women in Agriculture – An Empirical Study

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Abstract:

Agriculture in India defines familial tradition, social relations and gender roles. Female in the agricultural sector, whether through traditional means or industrial, for subsistence or as an agricultural labourer, represents a momentous demographic group. Agriculture is directly tied to issues such as economic independence, decision-making abilities, agency and access to education and health services and this manner has created externalities such as poverty and marginalization, and compounded issues of gender inequality.

According to Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum's Capability approach, equality in access is critical step to economic empowerment to create gender equality. In conjunction, the early access to education and health services is critical to the capabilities and self-actualization of girls. The small farmer tradition of India can be drawn back to the first farm reforms of independent India. In view of this, women are in turn left to support the family structure and support small farm lifestyle. In 2011, the agricultural sector workforce in the sub-continent was 75 per cent women (Singh, R and Sengupta, Ranja, 2009). In the case of rural India, the women depend on agriculture for their livelihood is as high as 84 per cent. Women make up about 33 per cent of cultivators and about 47 per cent of agricultural labourers (Rao, E. Krishna, 2006). These statistics do not account for work in livestock, fisheries and various other ancillary forms of food production in the country. In 2009, 94 per cent of the female agricultural labour force in crop cultivation was in cereal production, while 1.4 per cent worked in vegetable production, and 3.72 per cent were engaged in fruits, nuts, beverages, and spice crops (Singh, R and Sengupta, Ranja, 2009).

Women's participation rate in the agricultural sector is about 47 per cent in tea plantations, 46.84 per cent in cotton cultivation, 45.43 per cent growing oil seeds and 39.13 per cent in vegetable production (CTD, 2009). While these crops require labor-intensive work, the work is considered quite unskilled. Women also heavily participate in ancillary agricultural activities. According to the FAO (2010), Indian

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women represented a share of 21 per cent and 24 per cent of all fishers and fish farmers respectively.

Keywords: Agricultural Sector, FAO, Livestock, Fisheries, Ancillary Agricultural Activities.

Introduction:

In India, the typical work of the female agricultural labourer or cultivator is limited to less skilled jobs, such as sowing, transplanting, weeding and harvesting, that often fit well within the framework of domestic life and child-rearing. In cotton seed production, they are engaged in pollination activity which requires patience and a little bit of precision. Many women also participate in agricultural work as unpaid subsistence labour. According to United Nations Human Development Report only 32.8 per cent of Indian women formally participate in the labour force, a rate that has remained steady since 2009. By comparison, men constitute 81.1 per cent. Thus, it can be said that in rural India, women's role in the household is greatly defined by social structure and familial ties. Depending on caste and economic class a woman's role can be determined as one of more in the public eye, a life in which women are expected to care for children and maintain the household. The typical rural Indian household is a patriarchal and part local one, in which a husband, or in his stead the oldest son will make the decisions for a family.

In addition to rigorous agricultural work that is undervalued and underpaid, women are also responsible for the well-being of the household. They care for their children, provide nutrition or usually take part in subsistence agriculture, and do chores around the house. As per the time allocation studies, Indian women used to spend about 25 hours in a week doing household chores and five hours in caring and community work (Satyavathi, C. et.al; 2010). Besides the 30 hours of unpaid work, women used to spend the same amount of time as men carrying out agricultural work. Daughters keep on helping the mothers' unpaid work around the household. Considered female tasks, the opportunity cost of girls' time for school is higher than that of sons. Girls do significantly more house work than boys, which compromises their schooling.

Women form an integral part of the Indian work force. According to the information provided by the office of Registrar General and Census Commissioner

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of India and as per Census 2011, the total number of female workers in India is 149.8 million and female workers in rural and urban areas are 121.8 and 28.0 million respectively. Out of total, 149.8 million female workers, 35.9 million females are working as cultivators and another 61.5 million are agricultural labourers. Of the remaining female workers, 8.5 million are in household industry and 43.7 million are classified as other workers. As per Census 2011, the work participation rate for women is 25.51 per cent as compared to 25.63 per cent in 2001. The Work Participation Rate of Women has reduced marginally in 2011 but there is an improvement from 22.27 per cent in 1991 and 19.67 per cent in 1981. The work participation rate for women in rural areas is 30.02 per cent as compared to 15.44 per cent in the urban areas. In the case of organised sector, in March 2011, women workers constitute 20.5 per cent of total employment in organised sector in the country which is higher by 0.1 per cent as compared to the preceding year. As per the last Employment Review by Directorate General of Employment and Training, on 31st March 2011, about 59.54 lakh women workers were employed in the organised sector (Public and Private Sector). Of this, nearly 32.14 lakh women were employed in community, social and personal service sector.

In Telangana, the integration of tribal women in agriculture needs to be studied and understood from multiple dimensions. Their contribution to food security, household income, and community well-being is immense, yet the challenges they face often go unnoticed. This chapter aims to provide an introduction to the role of tribal women in agriculture, highlighting their contribution, challenges, and opportunities for empowerment.

Review of Literature:

Reddy (2002) in his study analysed that most of the respondents with 60 per cent have above 20 years of farming experience and it has helped them in making rational choice and decision to impact positively in their farming activities. Further, other group of women farmers with 37.80 per cent had between 10 - 20 years of farming experience and only 2 women farmers, representing 2.20 per cent of the respondents, has 5 -10 years of farming experience which might be associated with their age.

Deepa (2003) expressed that 65 per cent of the respondents possessed high level of farming experience followed by medium with 24 per cent and low with 11 per cent level of farming experience in the study area. Smitha (2004) observed that an overwhelming majority (35 per cent) of the sample respondents had above 40 years of farming experience and followed by 20 to 30 years (32.50 per cent), 30 to

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40 years with 20.80 per cent and the remaining (11.70 per cent) had below 10 years of farming experience.

Sathyachitradevi (2006) revealed that 43.33 per cent of the respondent had medium level of farming experience, followed by low (29.17 per cent) and high (27.50 per cent) level of farming experience. Elakkia (2007) reported that 43 per cent of the sample respondents possessed high level of farming experience and followed by low with 34 per cent and medium with 23 per cent level of farming experience.

Sathyannarayan et. al, (2015) revealed that a majority of the farmers had low to medium profiles. It is also noted that more than half (63.08 per cent) of the livestock farmers lived in the nuclear type family and joint family livestock sector providing type(36.92 per cent).

Prasad (2017) indicated that a majority of the organic cotton farmers i.e. 53.33 per cent are belonged to the middle age group, were educated up to primary school level (41.66 per cent), had a medium level of decision-making behaviour (48.33 per cent), farming experience (45 per cent), small farm size (28.33 per cent), used a high level of organic inputs (48.33 per cent), had medium annual income (48.33 per cent), received a medium level of training (50 per cent) and had a medium level of extension contact (43.33 per cent).

Statement of the Problem:

The participation of tribal women in agriculture plays a pivotal role in ensuring the sustainability and growth of agricultural practices in many regions. In the context of Telangana, a state in Southern India, the involvement of tribal women in agriculture is not just a matter of livelihood but also a crucial aspect of rural development and empowerment. Tribal communities in Telangana primarily depend on agriculture, with a significant portion of their population engaged in farming, both for subsistence and economic purposes. However, their work is often unrecognized and undervalued, as women continue to be the backbone of the agricultural sector despite facing numerous challenges.

Tribal women in Telangana are involved in various agricultural activities, such as sowing, weeding, harvesting, processing, and even marketing agricultural produce. They are also responsible for managing livestock and engaging in activities related to water and forest resources, making their contribution crucial to the sustainability of the ecosystem and the agricultural economy.

This study aims to examine the participation of tribal women in agriculture, focusing on how their roles and responsibilities shape agricultural practices in the

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Telangana State. The study also explores the socio-economic challenges faced by these women, such as access to resources, decision-making power, and social and cultural barriers. In addition, the study seeks to highlight the potential for improving the position of tribal women through policy intervention, educational opportunities, and economic empowerment.

Understanding the role of tribal women in agriculture is essential not only for promoting gender equality but also for ensuring the long-term viability and resilience of agricultural communities. By shedding light on their contributions and the hurdles they face, this study will contribute to the broader conversation on rural development and gender inclusivity in agriculture. Marginalisation of agricultural workers, wages and income, employment and working conditions, indebtedness, feminization of agricultural labour with low wages and the land lord-labourer relationship are the important conditions and problems of tribal women in agricultural sector in India. Keeping all these facets in view, the researcher made a maiden attempt to examine the participation of tribal women in agriculture of Adilabad and Warangal districts in Telangana State.

Objectives:

The objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To analyse the participation of tribal women in agriculture in the selected villages; and
2. To find out the problems faced by the tribal women in agriculture in the study area.
3. To offer suitable findings and suggestions.

Hypotheses:

The hypotheses of the proposed study are mentioned hereunder:

1. There is a significant relationship between socio-economic features i.e. age, education, occupation, income, landholding and the level of agricultural participation of tribal women.
2. Participation of tribal women in agriculture is significantly affected by household responsibilities.
3. There are significant differences in the level of agricultural participation among women belonging to different tribal communities in Telangana.
4. Institutional support from ITDA programs and government schemes significantly increases the agricultural participation of tribal women.

Methodology:

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The research design adopted for the study is to examine the participation of tribal women in agriculture with special reference to Adilabad and Warangal (erstwhile) districts of Telangana State. Further, it is to be noted that from two districts, two mandal had been chosen. From the two mandals, four villages had been selected at random and from each village, 60 sample women households have been chosen at random. Altogether, two mandals, four villages and 60 sample women households had been selected for the present study. The sample design chosen for the study has shown in Table-1.

Table-1: Study Area

District	Mandal	Village	No. of sample Households in the villages
Adilabad	Utnoor	Mattadi	60
		Lakshettipeta	60
Warangal	Tadvai	Kamaram	60
		Kondaparthu	60

In view of the research design adopted for the study, a sample design had been worked out for the present study. The stratified random sampling frame had been adopted while selecting the sample households in the study area. At the first stage, one mandal in Adilabad district and one mandal in Warangal district, representing the women households of the different schedule tribes of the Telangana State had been chosen. Among these two mandals in a relative sense, in Utnoormandal, the tribal women households are having the highest number where as the Tadvai Mandal is having a moderate number of tribal women households. At the second stage, from each mandal two villages have been selected at random. Finally, at the third stage, 60 women households from each village had been selected at random. Further, it is to be noted that, altogether four villages had been taken up for the present study. In each village 60 sample households have been chosen at random. Altogether, 240 sample women households had been selected for the study.

The field study had been taken up during 2022 to 2023 and the data relate to the 2021-22 reference year. Further, the field work had also been carried out at two terminal periods in a year. Prior to the undertaking of the field study, the researcher visited the designed sample villages to make a reconnaissance with the help of the local people and at this visit the village schedules were properly filled in with the **61National Conference On “Contemporary Issues In Global Business Management Practices”25 &26 February,2026 by University Arts & Science College (Autonomous), Kakatiya University.**

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help of the old inhabitants and some literate, knowledgeable and other key persons in the villages. The information that have been documented in this study is done with the help of different interview schedules on the basis of the information provided by the households, field observations and the field notes recorded in the study wherever required. Therefore, this part of the field survey was based on both observational and measurement techniques.

The tools used for processing the data are two and three way cross-breaks coupled with statistical techniques. Thus, the presentation is often self explanatory. In addition to the use of measures of central tendency, and the simple percentages had also been adopted to find the inter-dependability and the strength of the association between the variables used in the analysis and further to find out the relationship between the parameters used in the analysis. The statistical techniques like Chi-square test and other measures based on Chi-square had been taken up and some of them had been explained here under.

The socio-economic conditions of the tribal respondents in general and the sample households in particular have shown through the primary data collection during the field investigation by the researcher in the four villages in the two mandals of the two districts- Warangal and Adilabad.

Table-1.1

Tribe-wise Particulars of the Respondents

Tribe	District		Total
	Warangal	Adilabad	
Koya	120 (50.0)	-	120 (50.0)
Gonds	-	120 (50.0)	120 (50.0)
Total	120 (50.0)	120 (50.0)	240 (100.0)

Source: Primary Data

Note: Column-wise percentages are in the parentheses

Table-1.1 deals with tribe-wise and district-wise particulars of the sample respondents. As per the Table, there was no trace of Koyas in Adilabad district. Gonds, were there in the Adilabad district owing to the fact that though the Gond tribe is predominant in Adilabad, this district is also having the tribal groups of Naikpods and Kolams along with the Gond tribe which is a predominant tribe.

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Koyas were there only in Warangal because this district is the hub of these tribal groups along with the lambadies in this district.

Table-2.2

Type of House Particulars of the Respondents

Type of House	District		Total
	Warangal	Adilabad	
Kutchha	52 (21.7)	81 (33.8)	133 (55.4)
Pucca	34 (14.2)	36 (15.0)	70 (29.2)
Semi pucca	34 (14.2)	3 (1.2)	37 (15.4)
Total	120 (50.0)	120 (50.0)	240 (100.0)

Source: Primary Data

Note: Column-wise percentages are in the parentheses

Type of house particulars of the sample respondents has shown in Table-1.2. From the table, it can be stated that 55.4 per cent are having the Kutchha houses, 29.2 per cent are having pucca houses and the remaining 15.4 per cent are having semi-pucca houses in the study area. In the case of district-wise analysis, from Adilabad district, 33.8 per cent are having kutchha houses, 15 per cent are pucca and only 3 respondents are having semi-pucca houses. But in the case of Warangal district, 21.7 per cent are having kutchha houses, 14.2 per cent are pucca and 34 respondents are having semi-pucca houses. From the analysis, it can be observed that a majority of the sample respondents i.e. 55.4 per cent are having the kutchha houses in the study area.

Table-1.3

Age Particulars of the Respondents

Age particulars	District		Total
	Warangal	Adilabad	
<25	-	3 (1.2)	3 (1.2)
25-35	8 (3.3)	41 (17.1)	49 (20.4)

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www.ujmr.in Vol-3, SpecialIssue-2,2026

35-45	42 (17.5)	61 (25.4)	103 (42.9)
45-55	40 (16.7)	15 (6.2)	55 (22.9)
55+	30 (12.5)	-	30 (12.5)
Total	120 (50.0)	120 (50.0)	240 (100.0)

Source: Primary Data

Note: Column-wise percentages are in the parentheses

The age-wise particulars of the sample respondents had been depicted in Table-1.3. While looking at the Table, it can be said that most of the sample respondents were in the age group of 35 to 45 years, accounting for 42.9 per cent of the total followed by the age group of 45-55 years with 22.9 per cent. The district-wise data also confirms the same finding. 17.1 per cent and 3.3 per cent of the sample respondents in Adilabad, and Warangal respectively were in the age group of 25-35 years. 12.5 per cent of the respondents in Warangal district were in the age group of above 55 years and only 1.2 per cent of the sample respondents in Adilabad were in the age group i.e. below 25 years. By and large, it can be said that putting the two age groups i.e. 35-45 years and 45-55 years together, one can say that an overwhelming majority of the sample respondents were found to be in the effective working age groups which attests the fact that the active involvement in the pursuing the agricultural and other income earning activities effectively.

Table-1.4

Educational Particulars of the Respondents

Educational particulars	District		Total
	Warangal	Adilabad	
Illiterate	70 (29.2)	87 (36.2)	157 (65.4)
Primary	16 (6.7)	29 (12.1)	45 (18.8)
Secondary	8 (3.3)	2 (0.8)	10 (4.2)

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www.ujmr.in Vol-3, SpecialIssue-2,2026

Inter	14 (5.8)	2 (0.8)	16 (6.7)
Above Degree	12 (5.0)	-	12 (5.0)
Total	120 (50.0)	120 (50.0)	240 (100.0)

Source: Primary Data

Note: Column-wise percentages are in the parentheses

The high rate of illiteracy among the sample households in study area underscores the absence of adequate schooling facilities in the tribal areas which in turn reflects the lack of communication facilities. The educational particulars of the sample households had been depicted in Table-1.4. The Table clearly shows that both Adilabad and Warangal districts had the higher per cent of illiterates and the percentage in both the districts being 65.4 per cent. And the rest of the sample households had received education like primary, secondary, inter and above degree. 12.1 per cent of the sample households had educated up to primary in the Adilabad district followed by the Warangal district with 6.7 per cent. Therefore, it can be inferred that the rate of illiteracy is a glaring phenomenon as it had been more pronounced on the part of the tribal households. From the study, it had also been observed that the high rate of illiteracy reflects their poor socio-economic status.

Table-1.5

Marital Status Particulars of the Respondents

Marital Status	District		Total
	Warangal	Adilabad	
Married	104 (43.3)	116 (48.3)	220 (91.7)
Unmarried	16 (6.7)	4 (1.7)	20 (8.3)
Total	120 (50.0)	120 (50.0)	240 (100.0)

Source: Primary Data

Note: Column-wise percentages are in the parentheses

The marital status particulars of the sample respondents had been shown in Table-1.5, which attests the fact that almost all the sample respondents are having the family system as an institution. 48.3 per cent, and 43.3 per cent in Adilabad and

Warangal respectively are married, and the remaining 8.3 per cent of the sample respondents are not married in the study area. During the field work, it had also been observed that almost all the sample respondents are having the firm belief in holding the good familial relationships.

Table-1.6

Primary Occupation Particulars of the Respondents

Primary Occupation	District		Total
	Warangal	Adilabad	
Agriculture	112 (46.7)	120 (50.0)	232 (96.7)
Agriculture Labour	8 (2.30)	-	8 (3.30)
Total	120 (50.0)	120 (50.0)	240 (100.0)

Source: Primary Data

Note: Column-wise percentages are in the parentheses

The primary occupation of the respondents had been shown in Table-1.6. The Table clearly shows that an overwhelming majority of the sample respondents primary occupation is agriculture follows the occupation of agriculture labour, and other occupation. A majority of the sample households are performing agriculture as a main occupation in both the districts of Adilabad and Warangal with respective percentages of 50 and 46.7. While looking at the Table, the same tendency can also be discerned even in the case of the district-wise analysis.

Suggestions:

The suggestions offered are based on the overall comprehension observed during the fieldwork over the performance of agriculture in particular in the study area as well as tribal women in general mentioned hereunder:

1. Education should be developed in tribal areas;
2. There should be provided the awareness programmes relating to various agricultural development programmes in tribal areas;
3. There should be strengthened the agricultural extension programs in tribal regions;
4. There should be improved the irrigation facilities in tribal areas;
5. Agricultural infrastructural facilities should be developed in tribal areas;
6. There should be provided the pucca road facilities in tribal villages;
7. Medical facilities should be available to all;

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www.ujmr.in Vol-3, SpecialIssue-2,2026

8. More funding should be allocated to agricultural sector in tribal areas;
9. The fund allocated for agriculture in tribal areas should be proportional to their population;
10. To provide the agriculture officer dedicated to working in tribal areas.

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