

# Fluctuating Expansion of Rural Employment in India

S. Vamsi Krishna\*, P.Nirmal Kumar, N.Swaminathan

Department of Agricultural Economics, College of Horticulture Parvatipuram (DR.YSRHU)

vamsikri2407@gmail.com

Since 1991, the Indian economy has witnessed a series of economic reforms, encompassing all major sectors of the economy (agriculture, industry, trade, foreign investment and technology, public sector, financial institutions, and so on); it has marked a steady break from the past policy regime. The import-substituting development strategy, hitherto nurtured by the Indian planning regime since 1951, was given up in favour of export linked strategy; India could no more keep aloof from the rest of the world, particularly if technological advances occurring elsewhere were to be assimilated and adapted to India's own production requirements. And then came WTO on January 1, 1995 because of which India got further integrated into the global economic system, and became an adherent of the multilateral trade system.

The experience of countries that succeeded in reducing poverty significantly indicates the importance of high rates of economic growth in achieving this. High growth, however, is not a sufficient condition for poverty reduction; the pattern and sources of growth as well as

the manner in which its benefits are distributed are equally important from the point of view of achieving the goal of poverty reduction. And employment plays a key role in that context. Indeed, countries which attained high rates of employment growth alongside high rates of economic growth are also the ones who succeeded in reducing poverty significantly.

Every section of the Indian economy is now linked with the world outside, either through its direct involvement in international trade or through its indirect linkages with the export or import transactions of other sectors of the economy. The new policy regime is as much important, and relevant, to farmers, industrialists, traders and sundry service providers as to scientists, writers and singers. It needs hardly to be emphasized that all categories of economic functionaries engaged in production and services sectors have to adjust to the changing technology-intensive investment, production, labour management and marketing requirements, dictated partly by compulsions of internal competitions and partly by international commercial pressures. Production and marketing management now needs new visions, initiatives and networking, both at home and abroad. Concerns for environment, labour standards and product acceptability, etc. have acquired added significance. Human element becomes the kingpin, from the beginning to the end; the era of captive domestic market is over and with that, quality consciousness and price competitiveness become prime considerations, for staying on in the market.

The present study is to attempt into some of the crucial dimensions of the changing employment scenario in rural

India at the national as well as the state level. The present paper mainly focus on the agricultural sector is also heavily dependent on migrant, temporary and seasonal workers; the precarious conditions in which these workers labour often rob them and their families of food security. Low pay, however, is not the only problem facing agricultural workers. Agriculture is one of the most dangerous industries to work in, alongside construction and mining. Indeed, it is the sector with the most fatal accidents. Agricultural workers face many hazards: dangerous machinery, livestock, extremes of temperature and inclement weather, dehydration due to lack of access to potable water, and exposure to biological hazards arising from pesticides and other agro-chemicals. In doing so, the paper attempts to figure out the challenges and threats, as well as the potential for employment expansion that lies ahead.

## Rural Women employment shifting Scenario in India

Lack of employment and lack of rights are the daily reality for millions of agricultural workers in India. In 2023 the Indian parliament passed historic legislation, the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), which guarantees 100 days of employment for rural households across the country. Initially focused on 200 districts, it was extended to 330 districts the following year and, from 1 April 2008, it has covered all rural districts in the country. The potential benefits of the MGNREGA are significant: its employment guarantee goes some way towards securing livelihoods for the most marginalized section of the workforce and contributes to a reduction in extreme levels of hunger and poverty; it can help to sustain livelihoods in the

countryside and thus to reduce urbanization; it can deliver greater employment opportunities to women; it can develop necessary basic infrastructure in rural areas, including education, health and environmental sustainability; it can deliver social justice in areas of significant inequality. The MGNREGA guarantees payment of the legal minimum daily wage and is specifically geared towards unskilled labourers working in water conservation, drought proofing, irrigation, repair (for example, de-silting), land development, flood control and road works. During employment, workers are entitled to drinking water, access to shade, medical kits and childcare. If workers are unable to obtain employment through the scheme, they are entitled to unemployment benefit. The act also specifies that records of funds received and projects carried out through the MGNREGA are publicly available at district level and can also be obtained through Right to Information legislation. Following implementation during 2006–7, the average number of days worked per household was 17. This covered a very significant range across different states, however: from 77 days in Rajasthan to 3 days in Kerala. In the initial stages of the MGNREGA schemes, concerns were raised about the take-up rate and problems of corruption. By organizing workers, trade unions have managed to achieve much greater adherence to the payment of the minimum wage and to get more workers participating in the scheme. For example, members of the IUF-affiliated Andhra Pradesh Vyavasaya Vruthidarula Union (APVVU) in the south of India were able to achieve three times as many work-days than the state average. In addition, while in 2006–7 40 per cent of

workers in the scheme at a national level were women, in those schemes where APVVU members participated, women's participation reached 52 per cent. While the average wages earned by agricultural workers before the introduction of MGNREGA in Andhra Pradesh ranged from Rs. 30 to a maximum of Rs. 60 per day, after the introduction of MGNREGA, the average wages earned have been between Rs. 81 and Rs. 93 per day. Similarly, the rate of distress migration of agricultural workers has fallen by 70 per cent in several districts of Andhra Pradesh. In Bihar, in the north of India, where the state-wide average work per household in 2006-7 was 8 days, members of the IUF-affiliated Hind Khet Mazdoor Panchayat (HKMP) were able to obtain 60–70 days' employment. In the North Bengal district of West Bengal, in eastern India, following interventions from IUF affiliate Paschim Banga Khet Majoor Samity (PBKMS), rural workers in one area were able to get 45 days' work per household in 2006, while the district average was 12.7 days per household.

The MGNREGA is a major improvement in social protection for agricultural workers. It shows that by intervening actively trade unions can monitor and fight corruption and ensure that social justice is delivered to rural workers.

#### **Annual Growth of participation of women (in employment) under MGNREGA**

The annual growth of participation of women in employment under MGNREGA has increased only in sixteen states and only in two union territories. These eight states are : Andhara Pradesh, Bihar, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Kerala, Maharastra, Punjab, Rajasthan, Sikkim, West Bengal,

Chhattisgarh, Uttarkhand, Meghalaya, Odisha, Dadra & Nagar Haveli Puducherry, and Andaman & Nicobar is the two Union Territories where the annual growth of participation of women (in employment) under MGNREGA has increased.

Since the implementation of MGNREGA, the annual growth of participation of women (in employment) has been reduced in 11 states and in only one union territory. These states are: Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Gujarat, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Tripura, Uttar Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram, and Nagaland. The only one union territory is Goa, Another important point to be noticed here is that the annual growth of women employment participation in MGNREGA has most positive states is Tamil Nadu, it's contribution of MGNREGA is very high. This means that the contribution of agriculture is declining year by year in the state and the agricultural sector is not able to develop and it is not in a position to retain even its earlier positions.

During the Year 2020-21 and 2021-22, the average daily wage rate of agricultural occupation of the wage rate of the Well digging is the highest (Rs.114 to Rs.141.54), Ploughing is in the second place with Rs.100 to Rs.119, Cane Crushing is in the third place with Rs.87 to Rs.98, Sowing is in the fourth place with Rs.87 to Rs.101, Harvesting is in the fifth place with Rs.85 to Rs.101, Picking is in the sixth place with Rs.83 to Rs.93, Transplanting is in the seventh place with Rs.82 to Rs.96, Threshing is in the eighth place with Rs.83 to Rs.99, others have less than Rs.80. During the Year 2020-21 and 2021-22, the average daily wage rate of non-agricultural occupation of the wage rate of the Mason is the highest (Rs.159 to Rs.182),

Carpenter is in the second place with Rs.143 to Rs.165, Tractor Driver is in the third place with Rs.111 to Rs.129, and Black Smith is in the fourth place with Rs.106 to Rs.124, others have less than Rs.100.

personal habits also minimize the chances of morbidity. Higher temperature levels increases the chances of health damage and so workers demand higher wage for this risk.

becoming agricultural labourers. The decelerating but a high rate of growth in workforce engaged non- agriculture compared to that of agriculture could not bring any drastic change in the structure of workforce – a small

**Table.1 Growth Rate of Participation of women (in employment) under MGNREGA (%)**

State / UT	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
Andhara Pradesh	54.79	57.75	58.15	58.10	57.05	57.73
Arunachala Pradesh	30.02	29.75	26.13	17.26	33.26	28.57
Assam	31.67	30.85	27.16	27.70	26.51	24.66
Bihar	17.38	26.62	30.02	30.04	28.50	29.05
Gujarat	50.20	46.55	42.82	47.55	44.23	45.64
Haryana	30.60	34.42	30.65	34.81	35.62	36.04
Himachal Pradesh	12.24	30.10	39.02	46.09	48.25	59.71
Jammu & Kashmir	4.46	1.08	5.76	6.67	7.47	16.02
Karnataka	50.56	50.27	50.42	44.94	46.01	45.93
Kerala	65.63	71.39	85.01	88.29	90.39	92.93
Madhaya Pradesh	43.24	41.67	43.28	44.23	44.40	42.52
Maharashtra	37.07	39.99	46.22	39.65	45.88	46.03
Punjab	37.76	16.29	24.61	26.29	33.84	43.24
Rajasthan	67.14	69.00	67.11	66.89	68.34	69.28
Sikkim	24.79	36.74	37.66	51.22	46.68	46.12
Tamil Nadu	81.11	82.01	79.67	82.91	82.59	74.70
Tripura	75.00	44.51	51.01	41.28	38.55	38.36
Uttar Pradesh	16.55	14.53	18.11	21.67	21.42	17.19
West Bengal	18.28	16.99	26.53	33.42	33.69	31.89
Chhattisgarh	39.32	42.05	47.43	49.21	48.63	45.19
Jharkhand	39.48	27.17	28.51	34.25	33.47	30.95
Uttarkhand	30.47	42.77	36.86	40.28	40.30	43.96
Manipur	50.89	32.80	45.92	47.98	35.07	34.36
Meghalaya	19.41	30.87	41.35	47.20	43.92	41.08
Mizoram	33.38	33.62	36.58	34.99	33.93	23.46
Nagaland	29.97	29.65	36.70	43.53	35.02	22.67
Odisha	35.60	36.39	37.58	36.27	39.40	38.49
Puducherry	-	-	67.07	63.51	80.39	79.72
Andaman & Nicobar	-	-	39.00	44.85	47.39	45.92
Lakshadweep	-	-	40.66	37.59	34.33	41.22
Dadra & Nagar Haveli	-	-	79.17	87.14	85.11	-
Goa	-	-	-	62.16	68.38	75.59
All India	40.65	42.52	47.88	48.65	47.73	49.26

Better awareness may lead to a market signal of higher wages for more toxic chemicals, which can act as an economic instrument to restrict the use of such chemicals. We find that the use of protective gadgets reduces the risk of health damage, which emphasizes the necessity for ensuring the use. Better health conditions and safe

### Conclusion

Occupational distribution of workforce shows that labour absorption in self-cultivation is saturated and declining. But the increase in the size of agricultural labourers is more than the size decline in cultivators indicating farmers those who are leaving farming activity and those who enter newly in to agriculture are

change in workforce shifting towards non-agriculture. This is contrast with the highest ever growth of non-agricultural GDP of India that is registered during the last decade. Within the non-agriculture, growth of workforce engaged in household industry is decelerating.

Moreover, the rate of growth in marginal workers engaged in non-agricultural activities is

**Table 2: Average Daily Wage Rates for Agricultural and Non-Agricultural Occupation in India**

OCCUPATION	2020-21		2021-2022	
	Men Rs	Women Rs	Men Rs	Women Rs
Ploughing	100.33	53.00	119.27	78.92
Sowing	87.33	63.87	101.93	79.38
Weeding	78.63	67.53	92.17	78.68
Transplanting	82.29	71.36	96.60	86.18
Harvesting	85.03	70.27	101.51	83.50
Winnowing	78.86	63.55	95.42	79.21
Threshing	83.24	66.33	99.18	80.67
Picking	83.97	66.70	93.37	74.75
Herdsmen	52.95	40.43	61.47	45.54
Well digging	114.43	62.63	141.54	75.70
Cane Crushing	87.97	60.86	98.37	75.83
Carpenter	143.42	-	165.02	-
Black Smith	106.06	-	124.57	-
Cobbler	79.10	-	89.16	-
Mason	159.92	-	182.16	-
Tractor Driver	111.48	-	129.45	-
Sweeper	62.39	59.97	72.28	74.43
Unskilled Labourers	85.60	64.81	100.65	76.99

found to be higher than those of main workers increasing share of marginal workers in the total workforce of non-agriculture sectors is a cause of concern. Moreover, relatively high growth of female workforce engaged in non-agriculture appears to be a welcome feature but one needs to be prudent in interpreting it so, especially in the context of increasing informalisation of labour market

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