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## CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR SUSTAINABLE RURAL DEVELOPMENT

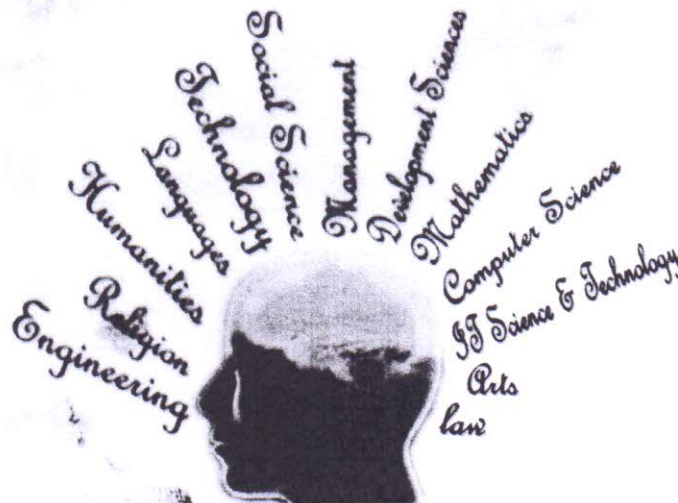
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## TRENDS AND PATTERN OF WOMEN AGRICULTURAL LABOURER'S IN INDIA

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**Abstract:** India has already started realizing its demographic dividend and female population which account for nearly 50 per cent of the population is an asset to be utilized carefully if we must reap this window of opportunity. Declining fertility rate and child dependency ratio are factors which can facilitate female workers to come out. In short, a bubbling rural economy is the need of the hour to create jobs and absorb the bulging economically active female population. In 1960s land reform has led to defragmentation of large land holders hence cultivators size decreased to 29.6% in 1971 from 55.7% in 1961, on the other hand agriculture labourers share in total employment for women has increased to 50.5% in 1971 from 23.9% in 1961. Industry and service sectors have been stagnant share in total employment for women that is around 20% since independence. Since 1971, female agriculture labourers' share has been decreasing and female cultivators' share has been increasing in the distribution of women workers in India. The economic reforms in India along with high female literacy have led to increase in marginal female agriculture labourers in India. More than 70% of the rural female workforce in India is engaged in agriculture, and the proportion of workforce engaged in agriculture in principal and subsidiary capacity is around 75% according to different NSSO rounds. Thus, in the past two decades, while the service sector has shown a rise in jobs for the rural females, agriculture shows a declining trend and the industry sector noticed reversal only in the last two rounds of NSSO survey. But only if the decline in agriculture jobs is commensurate with the increase in jobs in the non-farm sector, then the situation of loss of jobs can be compensated. Traditional male workers always felt as more strong and productive than female workers in India. In case of physical work women have lower productive than men, but it is not the case in recent years. Indian agriculture is mainly driven by female workers and their labour force participation is higher than male workers. Table 3 shows the male-female gap in the LFPR across Indian states during 1993-1994 to 2011-2012.

**Key Words:** Work Participation, Female Labour Force, Female Agriculture Labourers, Distribution of agriculture labourers.

### 1. Introduction

India is the largest democratic country in the world and she has second largest population with highest demographic dividend (i.e. working age population) in the world. In India agriculture sector contributes only 18% of income in total GDP while its employment share is highest at 49% in the year 2011-12. Manufacturing and service sectors were contributed 24% and 27% employment respectively in the same period. As per 2011 census, India has total 440.4 million people available for work, 415.7 million in the workforce and 24.7 million people are unemployed. Out of total workforce, male workforce is 78% and rest 22% as female workforce. Moreover, 52.2% are employed in self-employment, 17.9% in regular wage/salary and 29.9% in casual labour at all India level in 2011-12.

Agriculture is the vertical backbone of the country. Major part of the country's population earns its livelihood from agriculture. Our country has a wide and very old setting of agriculture about thousand years. At present in terms of agriculture production the country holds second position across the world. The agricultural production in India encompasses field crops, fruit crop, plantation crop, livestock, forestry, fishery etc. So overall it is a huge industry which recruits or engages 52 % of overall manpower of India. The rural population of our country is mostly dependent on agricultural activity. Despite of



the fact that there has been steady slump in the contribution of agriculture in country's GDP, Indian agriculture continues to remain the leading industry in the country contributing vastly in the socio-economic growth of India. States like Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Haryana, Bihar and West Bengal are the leading states in terms of agricultural contribution of the country followed by the rest.

## 2. Review of literature

**Suryanarayana and Zaidi (2003)** estimated regionally disaggregated poverty within India's states with special focus on Karnataka state. It attempted to ameliorate the sample size problem by pooling the 1999-00 NSSO 55<sup>th</sup> round central and state sample data. It used the pooled data to examine regional variation in poverty within Karnataka. The poverty estimates reveal significant geographic imbalances, with much higher levels and concentration of poverty in the northern districts. Regional patterns were found to be reasonably consistent with independent correlates of poverty, including agricultural wages, employment shares, and district domestic products. However, one important inconsistency is that the rural-urban differentials in poverty rates are not credible and warrant further attention with poor socio-economic conditions of agriculture women labourers.

**Sundaram and Tendulkar (2004)** examined all-India estimates of the number of workers and unemployed in 'below poverty line' households - together defined the poor in the Indian labour force during 1993-94 and 1999-2000. It also studied the gender status in labour force activity, their conditions and the rural-urban composition of this group for the two-time points. From a level of 115 million (43 million females and 21 million urban) the number of working poor declined by a little over 12 million that is all most entirely in rural India during 1994-2000 period. Over 51% of the rural 36% urban working poor were engaged in unskilled manual labour especially women agriculture labourers with a further 46% in rural and 44% in urban India are being absorbed by low-productivity self-employment.

**Duvvury (1989)** evaluated the trends in female labour force participation in India. India in the recent past has witnessed an upsurge in research on various aspects of women's existence, with the early focus on the social facets of their status giving way of analyses of women's location within the sphere of economic production, a shift that was prompted by the alarming decline in female participation. It reviewed literature on women in agriculture, highlighting the lacunae and pointing to possible areas of fruitful future research. The impact of technological change and the process of capitalist agriculture have had unequivocally negative implications for women of agricultural labour and marginal peasant households. They constitute the poorest of the poor and have been a target of various governmental programmes in the drive to alleviate poverty.

**Chavan and Bedamatta (2006)** examined the trends in agricultural wages with comparison to male-female agriculture labour force in India from 1964-65 to 1999-2000, using data from Agricultural Wages in India and Rural Labour Enquiry in 1990s. It also critically discussed the methodology used for collecting data on agricultural wages by the major secondary data sources in India. In the context of this discussion, the paper attempts a different approach to construct comparable time series on agricultural wages across states and districts. The trends show that there was a slowdown growth rate of real daily wages of male and female agricultural labourers in more than half of the districts in the sample in the 1990s. Earlier, there was a striking rise in the growth of daily real earnings across all states between 1983 and 1987-88. Second, there was a rising trend in the variations in real wages across districts in the 1990s. Third, the differences between the average wages of male and female agricultural labourers have widened over the years. Fourth, the daily wages of male agricultural labourers exceeded the minimum wage levels in most of the states, while those of women were below the minimum in most of the states.

## 3. Objectives of the study

- 1) To analyse the trends and patterns of Distribution of Women workforce in India.
- 2) To Examine the Rural Female Workforce Distribution in India
- 3) To Offer policy Suggestion to improve the women Agriculture labours in India.

## 4. Methodology of the study

The study is based on secondary data. The data is collected from Agriculture census of India. Simple statistical tools like, Percentage and Data Tabulation are used.





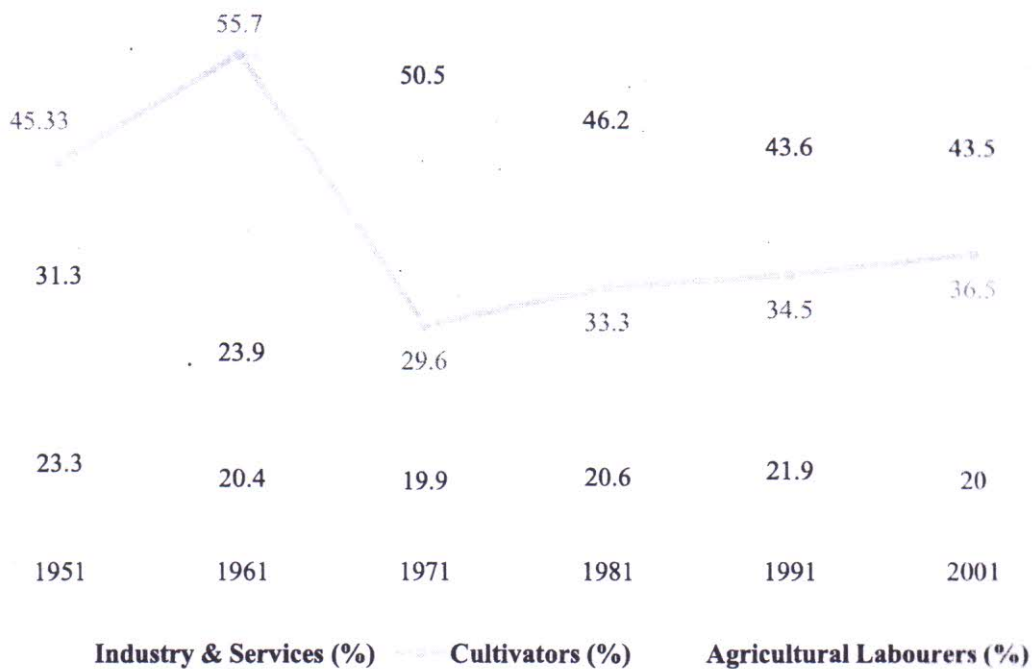
**5. Result and discussion**

**Trends and Patterns of the Distribution of Women Workforce in India.**

India has already started realizing its demographic dividend and female population which account for nearly 50 per cent of the population is an asset to be utilized carefully if we must reap this window of opportunity. Declining fertility rate and child dependency ratio are factors which can facilitate female workers to come out. In short, a bubbling rural economy is the need of the hour to create jobs and absorb the bulging economically active female population.

Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of women workers in India since independence. In 1951, highest employment for women generated from agriculture sector where cultivators were accounted 45.33% and followed by agriculture labourers 31.3%, industry and service sectors jointly accounted 23.3% share in total employment for women. In 1960s land reform has led to defragmentation of large land holders hence cultivators size decreased to 29.6% in 1971 from 55.7% in 1961, on the other hand agriculture labourers share in total employment for women has increased to 50.5% in 1971 from 23.9% in 1961. Industry and service sectors have been stagnant share in total employment for women that is around 20% since independence. Since 1971, female agriculture labourers share has been decreasing and female cultivators share has been increasing in the distribution women workers in India.

**Figure 1 Distribution of Women Workers in India, 1951-2001 (In %)**



Source: Registrar General of India, New Delhi, 2001

The Work Participation Rate is defined as the proportion of total workers (i.e. main and marginal workers) to total population.

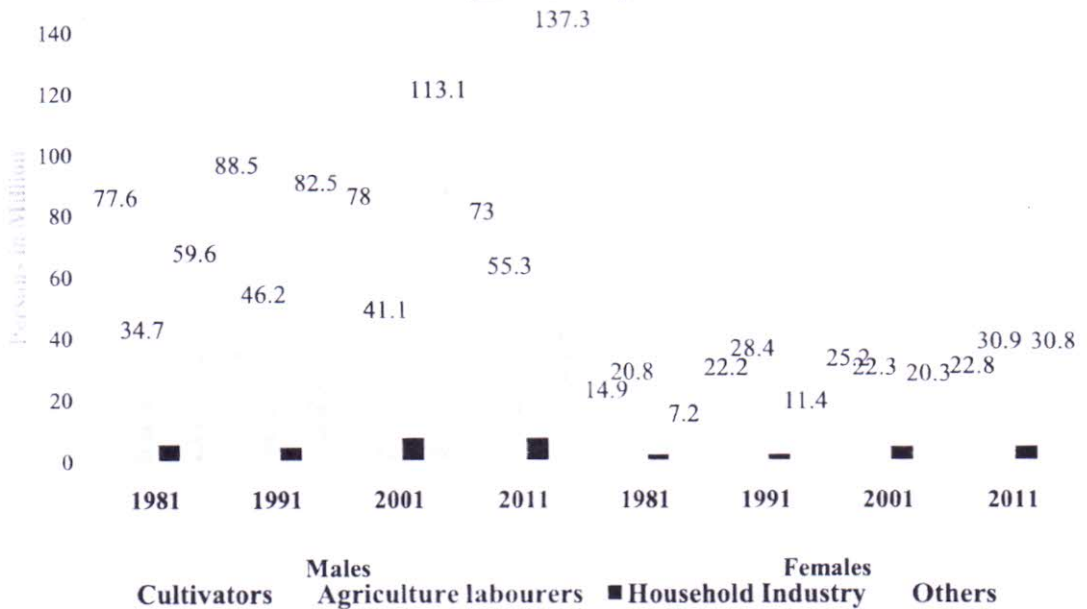
Table1 provides the occupation wise workforce distribution in India during 1981 to 2011. Workers are classified as main and marginal workers in India (As per NSSO documents) and again they are sub classified as cultivators, agriculture labourers, household industry and others.

In main workers, cultivators have been highest in the last four decades, followed by others, agriculture labourers and household industry. In 1961 total agriculture labourers among total main workers were 55.5 million which further increased to 74.6 million in 1991 and further increased to 86.2 million in the year 2011. Cultivators in main workers also increased over the period from 92.5 million in 1981 to 95.8 million in 2011. But marginal

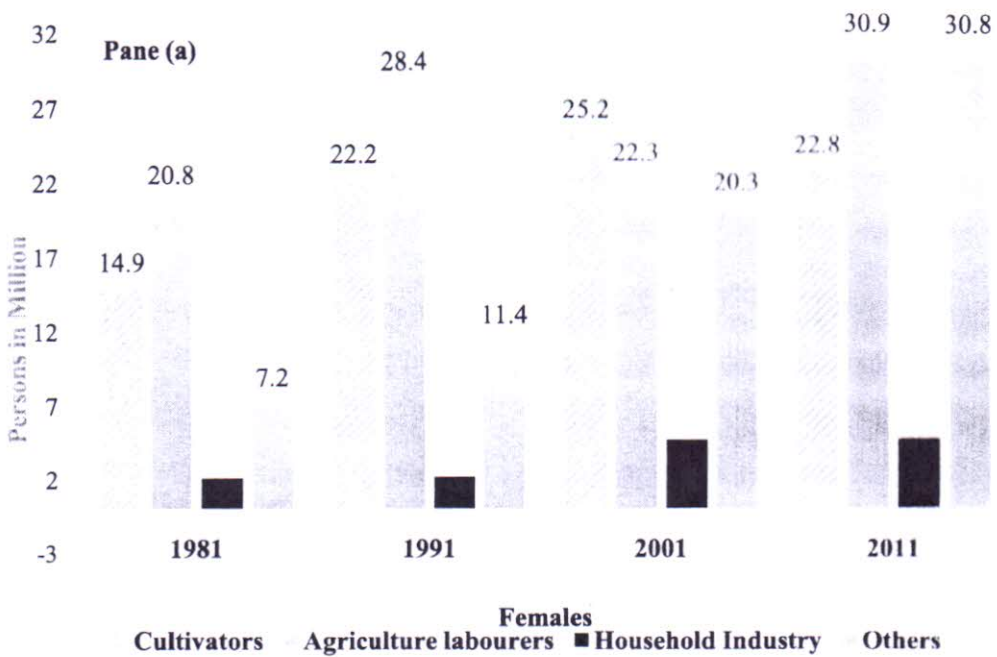
agriculture labourers have been increasing during last four decades, for example in 1981, total marginal agriculture labourers were 8.9 million which has increased to 58.2 million persons in the year 2011 that is almost six times. The number of marginal workers in India has been increasing over the period even though liberalization of Indian economy. Total marginal workers in the year 1981 was 20.3 million which further increased to 109.4 million in 2011 that is fivefold increase during last four decades. Moreover, number of marginal cultivators and agriculture labourers also increased at considerable rate in India. In 1981, total marginal cultivators were 10.3 million which doubled to 22.9 million in 2011 and agriculture labourers were 8.9 million and 58.2 million in the same period where marginal agriculture labourers increased more than six manifolds. While other employment such as service sector contributed more employment opportunities for marginal workers after economic reforms in India. Therefore, other employed persons' number increased to 32.3 million in the year 2011 from 2.1 million in 1991.

Figure 2 illustrates the workforce by occupation and gender among main workers in India during 1981 to 2011. In absolute numbers, male workers account two third of total main workers in India. Figure 2 shows that both male and female cultivators have been decreasing while other employees have been increasing. Moreover, male agriculture labourers have been increasing since 1981 compared to female agriculture labourers. Panel (a) of figure 2 shows the female occupation among main workers in India during 1981-2011. Female agriculture labourers in 1981 were 20.8 million which further increased to 28.4 million and it has declined to 22.3 million in 2001 due to service sector growth in India during 1991 to 2001 and in 2011, total female agriculture labourers have increased to 30.9 million due to better wage rate in agriculture sector and less employment opportunity in other sectors.

**Figure 2 Workforces by Occupation and Gender of Main Workers in India, 1991-2011 (In Millions)**







Source: Census of India 1981-2011

India is no more an agrarian economy where its contribution to GDP is lower than 15% but still Indian agriculture contributes half of total employment. Table 2 shows the distribution of agriculture workforce in India during 1961 to 2011.

**Distribution of Agricultural Workforce in India During 1961- 2011**

	Total Population (In Million)	Total Agricultural workers (in %)	Total Cultivators (in %)	Total Agricultural Labourers (in %)
1961	439	72.4	52.8	19.6
1971	548	70.1	43.1	27.0
1981	683	68.4	42.3	26.0
1991	844	67.4	39.9	27.2
2001	1027	58.4	31.7	26.7
2011	1210	54.6	24.6	30.0

Sources: Census of India 1961 to 2011.

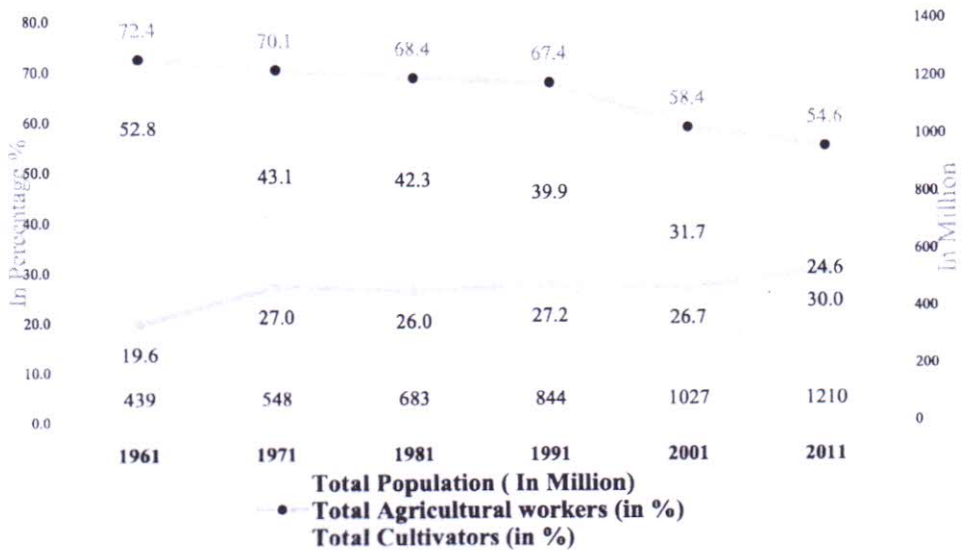
In 1961, total agricultural workers accounted 72.4% which slightly decreased to 67.4% in the year 1991 and further declined to 54.6% in 2011 but still agriculture sector is major employment provider in India. During last five decades, total cultivators share in total workers declined almost 50%. In 1961, total cultivators were 52.8% which further declined to 24.6% in the year 2011. However, total agriculture labourer's share in total agriculture workers has been increasing since 1961. Total agriculture labourers were 19.6% in 1961 which further increased to 30% in the year 2011.

The data illustrated in the figure 3 shows trend in distribution of agriculture workers in India. Total agriculture workers in 1961 were 439 million which further increased to 1210 million that is almost three times. Interestingly, since 1991 agriculture cultivators have been decreasing and the share of agriculture labourers have been increasing which is due to globalization of Indian economy.





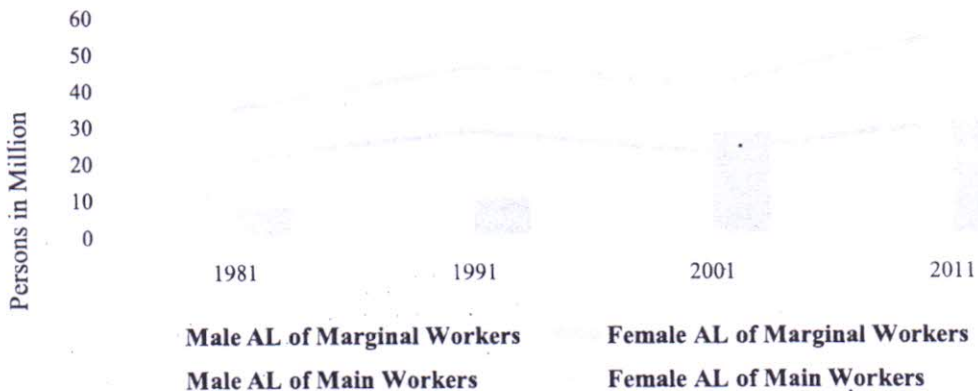
**Figure 3 Trend of total agriculture workforce in India, 1961-2011 (In %)**



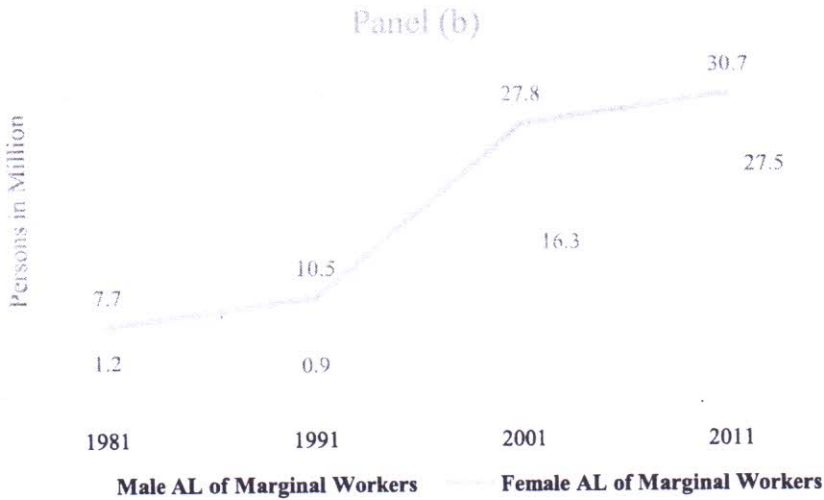
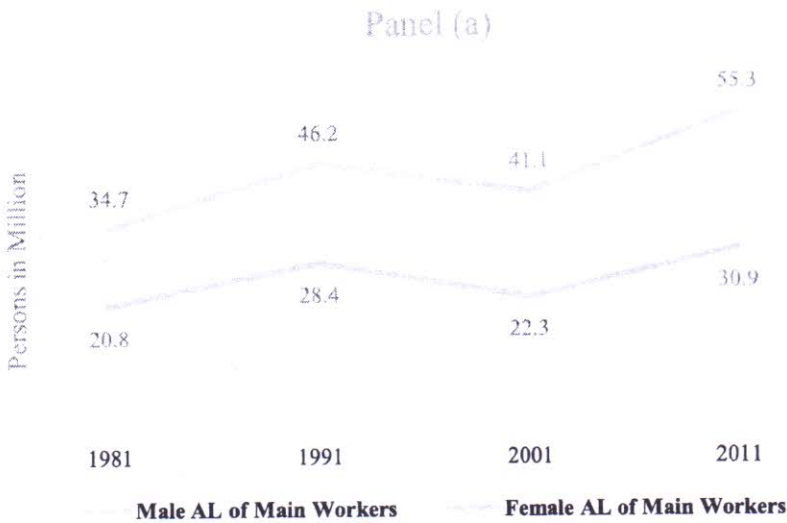
Sources: Census of India 1961 to 2011.

The data illustrated in the figure 4 shows the gender and occupation wise workforce of marginal workers in India during 1991 to 2011. The upper part of figure 4 shows the combination of male-female and main-marginal workers in India. In 1981, combined together main and marginal workers of male were 2162.1 million persons and their number gradually increased to 2342.8 million persons that is 8.32% growth whereas in case of combined main and marginal workers of female were 2044.5 million in 1981 which increased to 2161 million female persons in the year 2011 that is 5.69% growth rate which is lesser than male workers' growth rate. Panel (a) of figure 4 shows the male-female agriculture labourers' numbers among main workers. It clearly shows positive trend in male and female agriculture persons over the period while first decade after reforms has decreased in the main workers and later second stage of reforms after 2001 again increased in the main workers in India which was due to more productive work in agriculture sector. Panel (b) of figure 4 shows the male-female agriculture labourers' numbers among marginal workers. The marginal agriculture labourers have increased much faster than main agriculture labourers in India after reform period. In 1991, female marginal workers were 0.9 million number whose numbers have increased to 27.5 million in the year 2011 that is twenty-eight times compared to three times among male marginal agriculture labourers. The economic reforms in India along with high female literacy have led to increase in marginal female agriculture labourers in India.

**Figure 4 Workforces by Occupation and Gender of Marginal Workers in India, 1991-2011 (In Millions)**







Source: Census Reports, 1991, 2011

### Conclusion

The present study examines the trends and pattern of employment, workforce, agriculture labourers, agriculture wage rate, and distribution of agriculture workers in India during reform period based on NSSO rounds surveys. At all India level agriculture labourers have been increasing in absolute but in percentage share of agriculture labourers and cultivators in total distribution of workers have been decreasing since reform period. Service sector is more lucrative for skilled labourers after reform while industry is constantly providing employment avenues. However, agriculture sector still contributes more than 50% of employment in India while marginal agriculture labourers share in total workers have been increasing in India since 1991 compared to main agriculture labourers in India. In addition, marginal female agriculture labourers have increased four times compared to male counterpart at double.

For females in the 15–24 age group who are about to enter the labour force, vocational and basic skills training need to be provided so that they can enter the labour market overcoming social inhibitions and restrictions. Lack of adequate infrastructure in terms of roads and connectivity can also be deterring women from undertaking work in the nearby areas. Thus, improving connectivity between the villages and the satellite towns and small cities will also enhance female labour force participation.





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