

India's Labour, Gender and Employment trend in Agriculture Sector

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Abstract

The discovery of agriculture marked the beginning of a civilized life, and from independence to now, agriculture has played an indispensable role in the Indian economy, as it is the backbone of various sectors. Indian agriculture sector growth is needed for India's economic growth. India has 60% of its land in agriculture. Globally, agriculture employed 916 million people, that is 26.1% of the total workforce in 2023 (according to Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)). According to the World Bank, India's total labour workforce was estimated at 593.73 million in 2023, in which agriculture accounted 45.76% and agriculture, forestry and fishing (primary sector) contributed 16.4% in India's GVA. Since 1991 to 2023 total employment in agriculture was decline 19.85%-point, female employment in agriculture also decline 16.05% point with male employment 21.95% point. But the female employment is more than male employment since 1991 to 2023. The research paper is based on the secondary data. The data has been taken from the related reports (World Bank, Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers, Economic survey and official websites, etc.). It also shows the long-run analysis that is more than three decades. A research paper concludes that in the process of economic growth, from developing to develop nations, it is a normal phenomenon that employment shifted from agriculture sector to industrial and service sector. Despite agriculture is facing burden of labour workforce in the past decades, it gradually shifts from primary sector to secondary and tertiary sector.

Keywords: Agriculture, Female employment, Economic Growth, Labour workforce.

Introduction:

Agriculture is the root of the Indian economy, which helps in making the country self-reliant as well as women self-reliant. In the total population of the country 48.5% are women and 51.5% are men (Census, 2011). The female population is expected to be 48.8% in 2036, which indicates towards gender equality (PIB, 2024). In 1990, 25.54% of the country's total population lived in cities and most of the remaining population lives in rural areas. In 2024 36.86% of the population lives in cities, that is even today most of the total population of the country lives in rural areas. Agriculture employs 60% of the total population in 1990, which

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is about 45-46% in 2023-24.

According to Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) has increased in both men and women in the age group of 15 years and above as compared to 2017-18. LFPR in men was 75.8% in 2017 and has increased to 78.5% in 2022-23, whereas LFPR in women was 23.8% in 2017 and has increased to 37.1% in 2022-23. If we look at the LFPR in both men and women, the rate of growth has been higher among women. According to the Economic Survey 2024-25, the contribution of the Indian agricultural sector to net employment has increased, not decreased, from 44.1% in 2017-18 to 46.1% in 2023-24. The share of women workers in agriculture has also increased from 57% in 2017-18 to 64.4% in 2023-24. Male participation in agriculture has declined from 40.2% to 36.3% in this period of time.

Objective of the study:

1. To study the long-term trend of employment in the agriculture sector.
2. To study of agricultural employment from a gender perspective.
3. To study of urban and rural trends in employment.

Research Methodology and Source of data:

The study on “India’s trend in Gender employment in agriculture sector” was based on secondary data. It also based on descriptive analysis. Secondary data was collected from relevant reports such as the world bank, Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Economic Survey etc. the long-term trends in gender employment in agriculture sector have been studied using data from three decades.

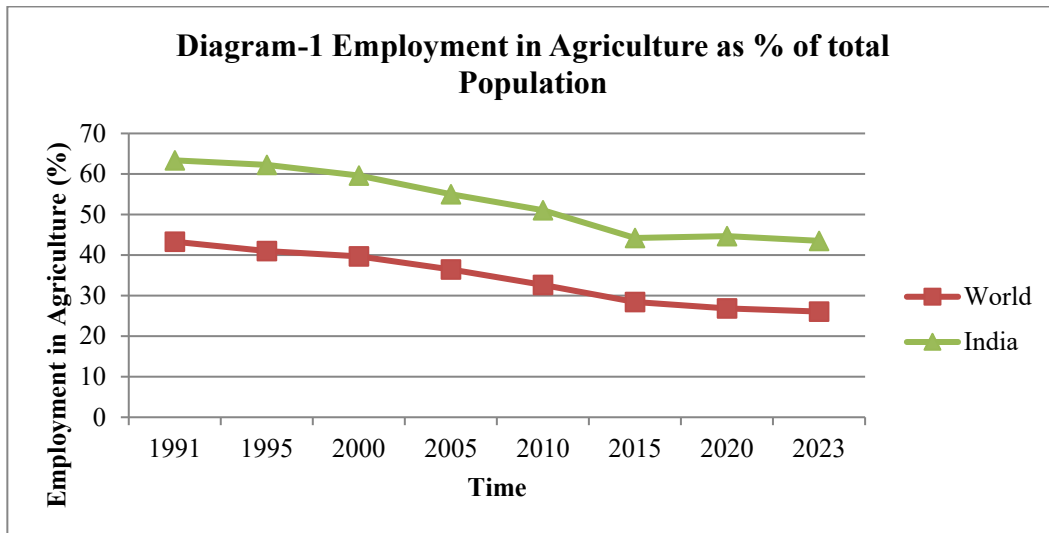
In table-1, the share of agriculture in total employment in India and the world is shown as a percentage. Globally, the share of agriculture sector in total employment has been continuously declining between 1991 and 2023. There has been also decline in agriculture sector employment in India as well.

Time	World	Change in % point	Decadal change in % point	India	Change in % point	Decadal change in % point
1991	43.29	-		63.36	1.11	
1995	40.99	2.3		62.25	2.61	
2000	39.67	1.32	3.62	59.64	4.62	3.72
2005	36.46	3.21		55.02	3.97	
2010	32.66	3.8	7.01	51.05	6.85	8.59
2015	28.42	4.24		44.2	-0.47	

2020	26.87	1.55	5.79	44.67	1.16	6.38
2023	26.07	0.8		43.51	1.11	

Source: World Bank Open Data

If we looking at the decadal change, from 1991 to 2023. We find that between 2000 and 2010; agriculture employment declined more in India with 8.59% point and the world with 7.01% point. However, the decline was greater in India than in the world.



Between 1991 and 2023, employment in agriculture as percentage of total employment is decline 17.22% point at the world level and 19.85% point in India, which is the main phenomenon of economic development that is as economic growth occurs, the share of the agriculture sector in total employment is decreases. Among the most pervasive features of the process of economic development is the shift of labour out of total agricultural sector into other such sectors as manufacturing and service. This pattern is thought to be a necessary component of the process of sustained macroeconomic growth because of two significant facts: that per capita demand for agricultural goods is relatively price and income inelastic at high levels of income and that the presence of dominant fixed factor in agricultural production (land) limits the ability of the agricultural sector to absorb labour in the face of growing population levels (Andrew D. Foster, Mark R. Rosenzweig, 2007).

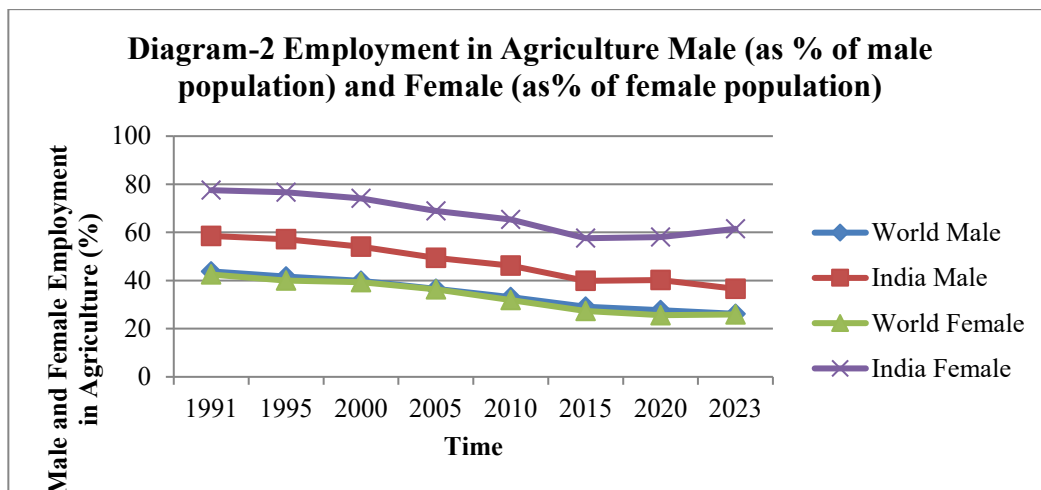
Table-2 Employment in Agriculture Male (as % of male population) and Female (as% of female population)

Time	Male		Female	
	World	India	World	India
1991	43.81	58.53	42.5	77.54
1995	41.63	57.18	40.01	76.65
2000	39.87	54.06	39.36	74.15

2005	36.53	49.45	36.35	68.97
2010	33.13	46.25	31.93	65.32
2015	29.08	39.89	27.4	57.59
2020	27.69	40.26	25.62	58.06
2023	26.19	36.58	25.89	61.49

Source: World Bank Open Data

Table-2 shows the trend of employment in Agriculture for male and female as percentage of their respective Populations. If we look at the share of men in agriculture employment at global level, it has been continuously declining between 1991 and 2023 there has been a decrease of 17.62% points. Whereas in India has been continuously declining and decrease of 21.95% points.



If we look at the share of women globally, it has been continuously declined from 42.50% to 25.89% between 1991 and 2023 that is globally there has been a decrease of 16.61% in women’s share in agricultural employment. In India there has been a decrease of about 16.05% point from 1991 to 2023 except for 2020.

Globally the share of both men (17.62%) and women (16.61%) decreased by approximately the same pace, while in India the share of men (21.95%) in employment in agriculture has declined more rapidly than that of women (16.05%).

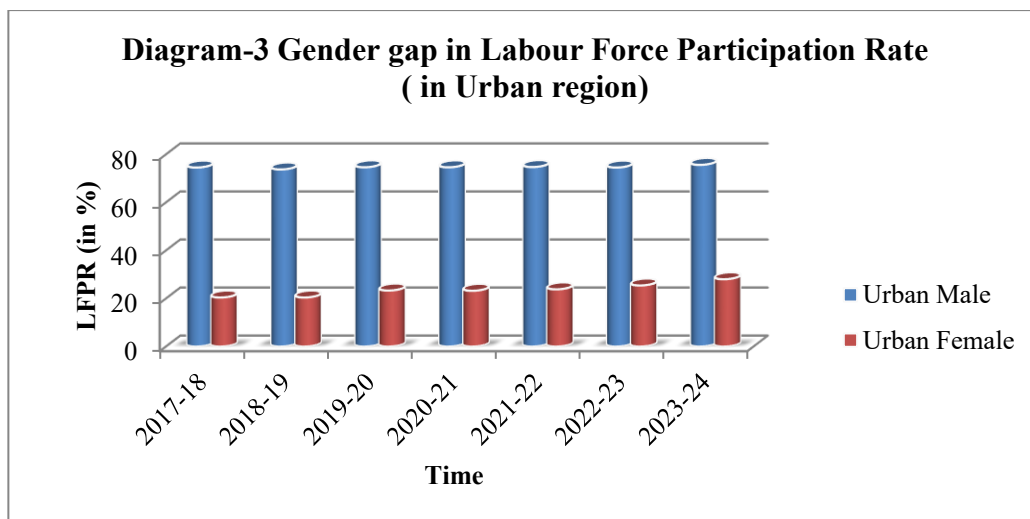
Beside this we can see in diagram-2, globally both men and women will participate almost equally in employment in the agricultural sector. Whereas in India the share is higher among women than men. That means 36.58% men are engage in agriculture sector out of the total employment of men. Whereas 61.49% women are engaging in agriculture sector out of the total employment of women. The positive impact of women’s efforts on agriculture is greater as compared to men’s efforts on husbandry. This mean that women have contributed more than men to the positive changes taking place in agriculture that is the agriculture sector has been growing at a growth rate of 4.6% for the last 6 years. If we look at gender equality in employment in agriculture sector in India, we can say that the gender gap was 19.01% point

in 1991, which has increased 24.91% point in 2023. This means the gender inequality increases in agricultural employment.

Time	Rural		Urban		Total	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
2017-18	76.4	24.6	74.5	20.4	75.8	23.3
2018-19	76.4	26.4	73.7	20.4	75.5	24.5
2019-20	77.9	33.0	74.6	23.3	76.8	30.0
2020-21	78.1	36.5	74.6	23.2	77.0	32.5
2021-22	78.2	36.6	74.7	23.8	77.2	32.8
2022-23	80.2	41.5	74.5	25.4	78.5	37.0
2023-24	80.2	47.6	75.6	28.0	78.8	41.7

Source: Participation in Economy, Social Statistical Division, MoSPI, 2025

Table-3 in labour force participation rate (LFPR) 15+ age group population in usual status shows the participation of women and men in rural and urban areas and total participation of women and men. If we look at the participation of men in rural areas, there is increase from 2017-18 (76.4%) to 2023-24 (80.2%) this in 3.8% point. While male participation in the urban sector increased from 74.5% to 75.6% that is by about 1.1% points.

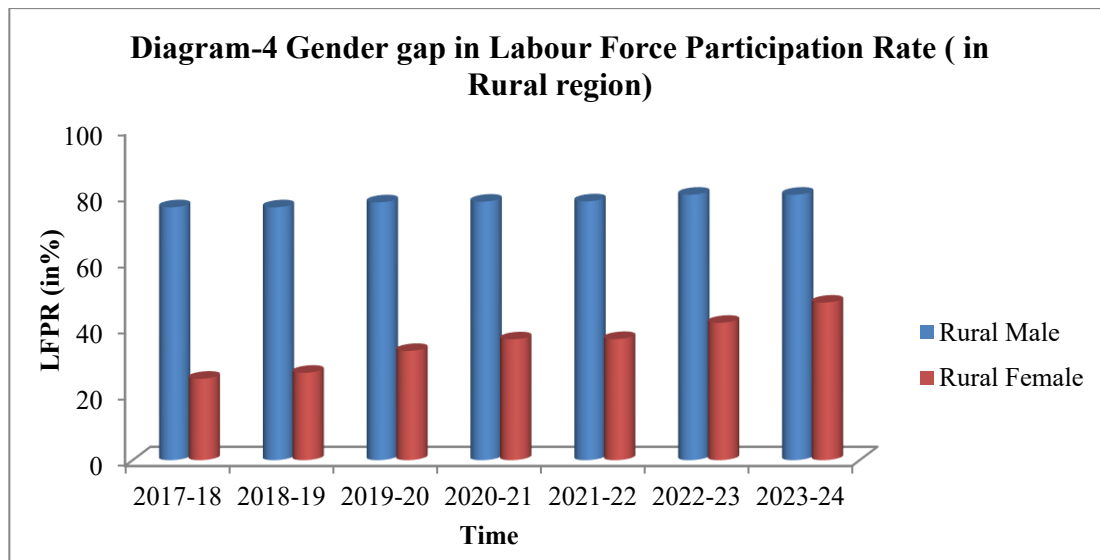


If we look at the total male participation, it increased from 2017-18 (75.8%) to 2023-24 (78.8%). If we compare table -3 with table-2, we can say that the LFPR of men has increased and this increase has been more in rural areas. However, in table-2 there has been a sharp decline in male employment in the agriculture sector, which indicates that the LFPR for men has increased but not in agriculture sector. Similarly, LFPR of women in rural areas 24.67%

in 2017-18 which increased rapidly to 47.6% in 2023-24 this means an increase of about 23.0% points where as in urban areas it increased by 7.6% points this means the LFPR of women in rural areas will increase at a faster rate than in urban areas. The total share of women in LFPR will increase by 18.4% points during 2017-18 and 2023-24. The contribution of women in rural areas to the increase in LFPR during this period is higher than that of women in urban areas. “Many factors react as a push and pull factors for female participation in employment. However, the rapid economic growth, rising education and declining fertility, results in increasing women participation in labour force but women faces barriers in accessing economic opportunities (Participation of women, annual PLFS report 2021-22, MoSPI)

If we compare table -3 with table-2, we can say that the LFPR of women has increased and this increase has been more in rural areas. However, in table-2 there has been a sharp decline in female employment in the agriculture sector, which indicates that the LFPR for women has increased but not in agriculture activities.

In agriculture the participation of women is still higher than that of men this shows the trend of feminization of agriculture but it is not a women empowerment because this work is invisible and unpaid therefore higher share of women participation in agriculture will have to shift from the unorganized sector to the organized sector.



If we look at the gender gap in Labour Force Participation Rate then in rural areas the gender gap was 51.8% point in 2017-18 which has reduced to 32.6% point in 2023-24. In urban areas it was 54.1% point in 2017-18 which has reduced to 47.6% by 2023-24. So, it is found that there is more gender equality in LFPR in rural areas as compared to urban areas. “World bank report “Reshaping Norms: A New Way Forward” reveals that the economic development and increasing income levels don’t seem sufficient to reduce stubbornly high gender gap across multiple dimensions in the region. Out of the total women, who are outside the labour force, around 44.5% women were not in labour force due to child care/ personal commitments in home making and 33.6% women are want to continue their study instead of joining labour force.” (Participation of women, annual PLFS report 2021-22, MoSPI)

Major Findings:

- The share of agriculture sector in total employment has been continuously declining between 1991 and 2023, which is the main phenomenon of economic development that is as economic growth occurs the share of the agriculture sector in total employment is decreases.
- The share of men in agriculture employment has been continuously declining between 1991 and 2023 in India as well as Global level. The share of women has also decline.
- Globally the share of both men (17.62% point) and women (16.61% point) decreased by approximately the same pace, while in India the share of men (21.95% point) in employment in agriculture has declined more rapidly than that of women (16.05% point).
- The gender inequality increases in agricultural employment.
- The LFPR of men has increased and this increase has been more in rural areas but not in agriculture sector.
- The LFPR of women in rural areas will increase at a faster rate than in urban areas but not in agriculture activities.
- There is more gender equality in LFPR in rural areas as compared to urban areas.

Conclusion:

Considering the above indicators, we can conclude that the long run trend shows that in India the employment share of the agricultural sector has declined but it still employs the majority of workers. Women still have a higher share in agriculture employment than men. The participation remains high and this participation is higher in rural areas than in urban areas. Thus, gender equality in the labour force participation rate is more pronounced in rural areas than in urban areas.

Limitations of study:

- The study has been conducted only in the context of India, employment trends at the state and inter-state level have not been studied.
- The study does not shed light on the reasons for these tendencies.

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