

**Original Research Article**

**Analyzing Gender Disparities in Land Ownership and Wage Rates in Indian Agriculture-An Empirical Study**

**Abstract**

The Indian economy relies heavily on agriculture, employing approximately 48 percent of the workforce, including men, women, and children. Women contribute significantly as agricultural workers, and their role is gradually gaining recognition, although certain obstacles persist. This study aims to analyze the trend of women's operational land holdings and average land holding sizes from 1995 to 2016, using secondary data. The findings reveal a negative growth rate in the number of land holdings and average holding sizes for women. This indicates a substantial gap between men and women in terms of land ownership, which hampers women's potential as farmers. It also suggests that women may have limited knowledge about their land rights. Additionally, the study examines wage disparities between male and female laborers across different agricultural tasks. In the realm of sowing, gender inequality was observed, with the highest wage gap occurring in 2005-06 when female earnings were 31 percent lower than those of male laborers. By 2019-20, the disparity had decreased to 17.97 percent. In the case of threshing, the wage gap ranged from 20 percent to 15 percent, indicating a relatively smaller disparity. Overall, women tend to receive lower wages compared to men in various agricultural activities. However, the study reveals a positive trend of increasing wages for female laborers, growing at a faster rate than wages for male laborers over time. Hence, it is crucial to acknowledge and appreciate women's roles in agriculture while addressing the existing gender-based wage gap. Efforts should be made to promote gender equality and empower women in the agricultural sector. This involves tackling disparities in land ownership and improving women's understanding of their land rights. Additionally, it is essential to work towards ensuring fair wage rates for women and implementing equal pay for equal work. By recognizing and addressing these challenges, the agricultural sector can foster gender equality and create a more inclusive and equitable environment for women engaged in farming.

**Keywords-**Operational Holding, Land Rights, Rural Women, Gender Discrimination Agriculture Wages, ~~Male Labors, Female Labors.~~

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Globally, women's labor force participation has remained relatively stable in the two decades from 1990 to 2010, at about 52% (ILO, 2014). The set-up of agriculture has changed fully with the shift of time in India, but the conception of women as the primary labor force in India has not changed for centuries. Universally, women are paid less than men. The gender pay gap is assessed to be 23 per cent. This means that women receive 77 percent of what men earn (ILO, 2015). Sustainable development goal 5 of Gender equality and women's rights emphasizes women's empowerment, yet in some cases gender inequality is found. Even after performing the same function, the female laborers are often unaware of their constitutional rights and unorganized. As a result, more than 90% of rural women are treated as cheap and secondary laborers (Javeed & Manuhaar, 2013).

Women's unpaid work along with field work raises women's labour burden as opposed to men in agriculture (FAO 2011), which affects their wellbeing (Pattnaik *et. al* 2017). This impacts not just their economic status but also their nutritional level leaving them undernourished (FAO 2011). The participation of women in agriculture is growing, on the one hand, and discrimination is being observed, on the other. Apart from wage discrimination, it can be seen that women do not have an equal access to land when compared with their male counterparts, according to the India Human Development Survey (IHDS, 2018), 83% of the country's agricultural land is acquired by male family members and less than 2% by female counterparts.

Empowering women through land ownership rights has the potential to increase overall agricultural output in developing countries by 2.5 to 4 per cent and to reduce hunger worldwide by 12-17% (FAO, 2011). With the advent of economic planning in India, even though some steps have been commenced for refining the conditions of agriculture, its settings have not transformed much. It is thus pretty critical to investigate the several factors which are accountable for the gender gap and also there is a need to acknowledge women's role in agriculture. This research paper highlights the changing status of women in agriculture on account of operational holdings what they possess and trends in wages of men and women in agricultural operations like sowing and threshing.

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## 2. MATERIAL AND METHODS

**2.1 Nature of data:** This study is mainly based on secondary data. Quinquennial all India secondary data on number of operation holdings and average size holdings possessed by women were obtained from Indian Agricultural census reports of the last five censuses from 1995 to 2015-16 obtained from the Department of Agriculture, Cooperation and Farmers Welfare, Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, Government of India. The data were collected gender-wise and size-class wise. To study the differences in wages paid to male and female agricultural laborers, the data was collected for male and female laborers and the period of study was from 1999 to 2019 ([Reference?](#)). Field operations for which wage rates were studied were sowing, and threshing.

**2.2 Statistical tools:** Various growth rates like average growth rate and compound annual growth rate were used to study the trends.

Average growth rate -To calculate the mean variable X growth rate over n-periods in time, say  $X_0, X_1, \dots, X_n$ . Where variable X can be any interest variable, and the n-periods can be defined as any discrete-time measure, such as days, months, or years. This method only takes into consideration the first and last time-series observations, not the intermediate values. The average growth rate has been calculated using the following formula in MS Excel ([Reference?](#)).

$$r_{AVG} = \left( \frac{X_n}{X_0} - 1 \right) / n$$

Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR). Growth rate are worked out to examine the tendency of variable to increase, decrease or stagnant over a period of time. The rate of change of “Yt” per unit of time to express as a function of the magnitude of “Yt” itself is usually termed as the compound annual growth rate (CAGR) which can be expressed mathematically as ([Reference?](#)):

$$Y_t = Y_0 (1 + r)^t$$

Where, “ $Y_0$ ” be the value of variable under study in the base period.

“ $Y_t$ ” = value of a variable in time “t”.

“r” = value of Compound Growth Rate (CAGR)

The expression above if multiplied by 100, in percentage form, gives the compound growth rate of "Yt."

Percentage difference =  $\frac{\text{wage of male labor} - \text{wage of female labor}}{\text{Wage of male labor}} \times 100$

Wage of male labor

CAGR was calculated using statistical package for the social sciences software (SPSS).

### 3. Results and Discussion

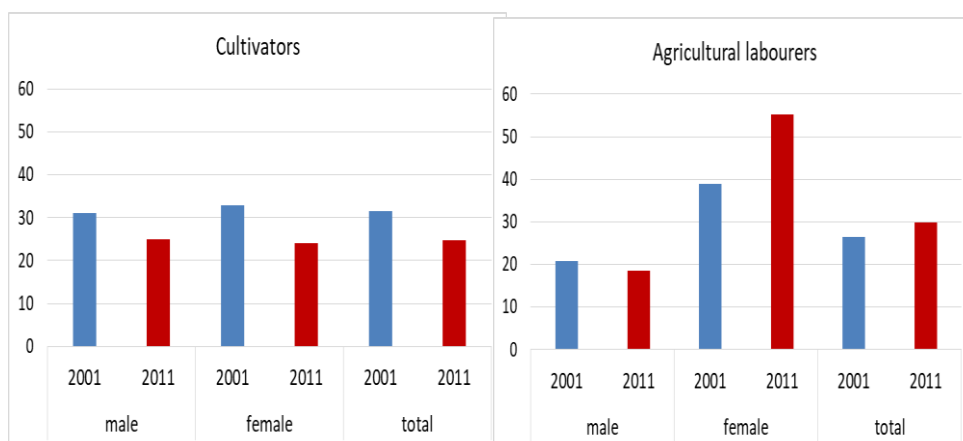
#### 3.1 Gender wise composition of Cultivators and agricultural laborers in Agriculture over the decade

Agricultural workers have been listed by the Indian Census as cultivators and agriculturallabourers. An individual shall be classified as a farmer if he or she is engaged in farming land owned or owned by the organization or held by individual persons or organizations for repayment of income, kind or share. On the other hand, an individual who serves on another person's land for earnings in cash or kind or stake is called an agricultural worker.

**Table-1** Gender-wise Distribution of workers and percentage of Cultivators, Agricultural Labourers, Household industry(HHI) workers and Other workers (AllIndia) 2001-2011

	Percentage to Total Workers					
	2001			2011		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
<b>Cultivators (%)</b>	31.06	32.93	31.65	24.92	24.01	24.64
<b>Agricultural labourers(%)</b>	20.85	38.87	26.55	18.56	55.21	29.96
<b>HHI workers(%)</b>	3.18	6.46	4.22	2.95	5.71	3.81
<b>Other workers(%)</b>	44.92	21.75	37.59	47.2	29.18	41.60
<b>Total workers (in nos.)</b>	275014476	127220248	402234724	331865930	149877381	481743311

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**Fig.1.** Gender wise percentage of Cultivators and agricultural laborers in Agriculture (2001-11) (Source: Census of India)

If we compare the percentages of male and female agricultural workers (either as cultivators or agricultural labourers), out of total workers in India, we can see that females have been stimulated away more abruptly than their male counterparts from being cultivators, while they have been drawn to becoming agricultural labourers, this shows a deterioration in the level of work. The status of women in agriculture is also questionable on this note. [we-We](#) can see that their percentage has dropped from 32.93% in 2001 to 24.01% in 2011, while there is a stark contrast in the increased percentage of female agricultural labourers from 38.87% to 55.21% during the decade 2001–11(Fig.1) This shows that there are constantly growing tendencies in agriculture labour in India and particularly for women. This is troubling the development of India. For the first time since independence, agricultural labourers have outstripped cultivators. One of the explanations has been quoted by the Economic Survey 2017-18. It says that with growing rural-to-urban migration by men, there is a "feminization" of the agriculture sector, with a growing number of women in several roles as cultivators, entrepreneurs, and labourers.

### 3.2: Trend in the number of landholdings and average holdings of women in Agriculture

Operational Holding refers to land that is used in whole or in part for agricultural production and that is managed as one technical unit by one person alone or with others irrespective of title, legal type, size or place. According to the 2011 Census, 55% of the total female workers were agricultural labourers and 24% were cultivators (Table- 1). However, only 12.8% of the

operating holdings were held by women, reflecting the gender imbalance in land tenure ownership in agriculture. Study of trend of operational holding of women reflects the status of women as farmers, and at the same time, it tells how much women are aware of their land rights.

**Table-2** Growth rate of no. of operational holding (in 1000) possessed by women in India between 1995-96 and 2015-16

Growth rate of no. of operational holding (in 1000) possessed by women in India				
Size class	Average growth rate			
	1995-96 to 2000-01	2000-01 to 2005-06	2005-06 to 2010-11	2010-11 to 2015-16
Marginal	-0.76	-0.76	-0.75	-0.76
Small	-0.75	-0.77	-0.77	-0.76
Semi-medium	-0.76	-0.77	-0.78	-0.77
Medium	-0.78	-0.78	-0.79	-0.78
Large	-0.8	-0.79	-0.8	-0.8

Source: Agricultural Census of India

The growth rate of the number of women in the operational holdings has decreased since 1995 and in all land classes (Table 2). The growth rate is similar over the years i.e. (-0.76) showing that not much improvement has been made in women's holdings and although this number is not large, there is still negative growth. It reveals that women are way behind than men in occupancy of land holdings in agriculture that can establish them as sole farm operators on farm.

**Table-3** Growth rate of Average land holding size (in 1000) of women in India between 1995-96 and 2015-16

Growth rate of Average land holding size (in 1000) possessed by women in India				
Size class	Average growth rate			
	1995-96 to 2000-01	2000-01 to 2005-06	2005-06 to 2010-11	2010-11 to 2015-16
Marginal	-0.79	-0.8	-0.78	-0.80
Small	-0.79	-0.80	-0.79	-0.80
Semi-medium	-0.80	-0.80	-0.79	-0.80
Medium	-0.80	-0.80	-0.79	-0.80

Large	-0.81	-0.80	-0.77	-0.80
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Source: Agricultural Census of India

When coming to the average holding size possessed by women that can reflect the exact status of women in agriculture like what she has as a farmer, on what scale she can operate but it has been found in the that the growth rate of the size of the average holding of women has decreased over time in all land classes-(Table 3). The growth rate is nearly similar over the years i.e. (- 0.79), showing that there has been little significant improvement in women's holdings. The interesting thing is that there has been found also a slight increase in the size of women's average holding in the second half of the decade (2005-2010), that may reflect some policies envisaged for women during that period but, after that, it again shows a negative trend in the years that followed.

### 3.3 Trends in the wages of women workers in different farm operations

Sowing refers to the placing of seeds in the soil. There is the requirement of laborers for sowing and transplanting operations, while ~~Threshing~~ threshing work involves the use of threshers, manual separation of crop products through sticks, hand-operated machines, etc. In general, all field crops require threshers, and males and females are equally involved in the task.

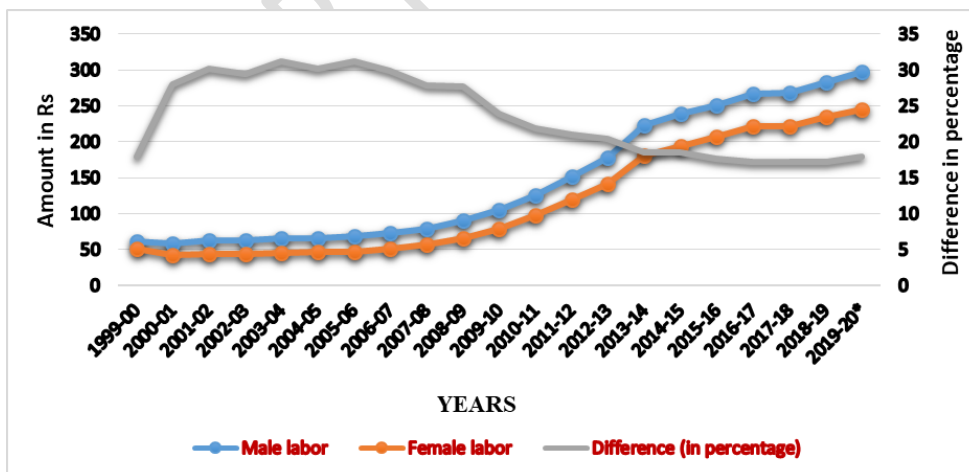
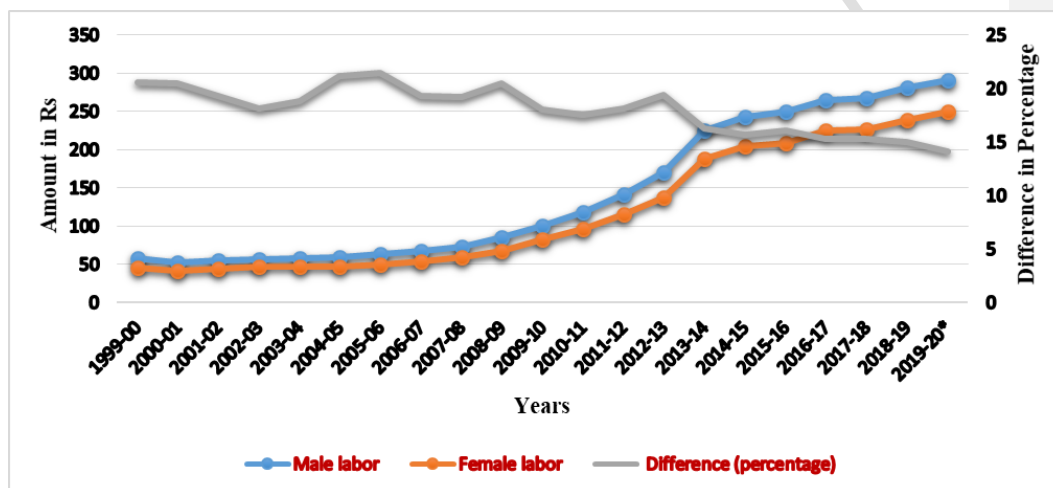


Fig.2. Gender wise wage rate of agricultural laborers for sowing at all India level from 1999-2000 to 2019-20. (Source- indiastats.com)

The female laborers received 17 percent fewer wages than male laborers in the year 1999-00 (Fig 2). There was a significant decrease in wages received, and women received 28 percent less than men's labor in 2000-01. In 2010-11, female labor received about 22 percent less than male labor. The gap further narrowed, falling to 17 percent in 2019-20. Salaries in sowing have shown an increase from 2000-01 to 2006-07. This shows that there is discrimination in wages in sowing operations and that female labor receives lower wages compared to male labor.



**Fig 3.** Gender wise wage rate of agricultural laborers for threshing at all India level from 1999-2000 to 2019-20. (Source- [indiastats.com](http://indiastats.com))

In 1999-00, female labor received 20% fewer wages compared to male labor in case of threshing. This difference decreased in the succession of two years, but again an increase was seen in the next year 2004 where the difference was 21 percent. (Fig 3) The data also reveals that although the wage rate increased in the year 2017-18, the difference remained the same until 2018-19, it means that in the last three years, female labor received 15 percent fewer wages compared to male labor in the same period for the same work of threshing. In the year 2019-20, it further gets reduced to 14 percent that is a good indication but this concludes a remark that wage discrimination still exists in threshing operation and female laborers receive fewer wages as compared to male laborers. [Why and what are the main cause of this wage discrimination? You may add some references to support your arguments.](#)

### 3.4 The growth rate of wages of male and female agricultural laborers

In order to find out the growth rate of wages gender wise, the whole period is divided into three sub-periods i.e., 1999-2005, 2006-2012, and 2013-2019. The compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of the wage rate for male and female laborers was calculated first for each period and was also calculated altogether separately for the complete period of 1999-00 to 2019-20.

**Table 4** Gender-wise CAGR of wage rate of Agricultural Laborers for field operations from 1999-2019

Field operations	Period I (1999-2005)		Period II (2006-2012)		Period -III (2013-2019)		Total Period (1999-2019)	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Sowing	2.2	0	16	19	4	4	10.3	11.3
Threshing	2	1.8	17.1	17.4	4.1	4.5	10.9	11.4

*Calculated by author*

If we look period wise, then in the second period that is from 2006 to 2012, the growth in wages of female labor was much more than men as compared to other two periods concerning every operation, and in case of sowing it is highest, i.e., 19 percent increase in case of female labors. It refers to some conceptions that some policies had been implemented and revised that helped in increasing wages growth during that period. One such scheme is MGNREGA i.e., Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), Government of India flagship programmed, implemented by the Ministry of Rural Development (MORD) since 2005 to improve the security of the rural livelihoods, sustainable development mainly aimed at ensuring wage jobs for at least 100 days a year, per household. The average daily wage rates of male farmworkers have grown sharply after MGNREGA in various regions in the country as compared to almost a negative growth rate before MGNREGA. Both the farm and non-farm wages have increased by almost three times during the period of MGNREGA implementation in some areas (Nagaraj *et. al*, 2014).

The growth in wages of female labor was more as compared to males from 1999 to 2019-20. In the case of sowing the difference was not significant but still, the CAGR for females was 11.3 which was higher than male i.e., 10.3. In the case of threshing, the growth was almost similar to the male average wage rate at 10.9 percent CAGR and female labor wage growth rate at 11.4 percent showing that both the wages have increased almost parallel. This concludes that the compounded annual growth of average growth from 1999 to 2019 was

higher for female laborers as compared to male laborers. Showing that the disparity in wages has abridged over time, but still persists. Such a trend should be continued so that wage discrimination is brought down significantly.

#### 4. Conclusion

Women are active widely in food production but the acquaintance and maintenance of land by them are rather limited because they rarely own the land they farm, both legal and patriarchal gender standards may prohibit or make it difficult for women to do so. Therefore, women need to be conscious of their rights and challenge social norms that restrict women's land rights. As it was found in this study that there is a negative rate of growth in the number of operating holdings and an average holding size for women, which means that women are far behind men in the occupation of land holdings in agriculture that can develop them as farmers. It can also be anticipated that women's understanding of their land rights is insufficient. Also, there is an urgent need to change the inheritance practices and give land rights to women as well.

~~Therefore, in order to improve productivity and encourage sustainable agricultural practices, skills development training needs to be offered to women farmers. Skills creation projects will train women farmers in field activities, organic farming, etc.~~ The study of wage trends shows that gender inequality was observed in sowing with the highest gap in 2005-06, where female earnings were 31% lower than male labor, the disparity in 2019-20 was 17.97 per cent. The threshing gap was found to range from 20 per cent to 15 per cent. In the threshing case, this indicates that wage disparity was lower. It was concluded that in various agricultural activities women's labor gets lower wage rates compared to men, but over time wages paid to female labor have risen, and at a rate of growth that is more compared to male labor. Women's positions in agriculture need to be recognized, and those patterns need to be maintained in order to further reduce the gender-based wage gap. Wage rates should be equal for both male and female workers in agriculture

There should also be a mechanism for scrutinizing that women workers are paid equal salaries, or not. Gender-specific approaches are also important in empowering women workers who in return help us leverage the diverse demographic dividend in our country. An 'inclusive progressive agricultural strategy' would call for gender-specific action to boost small-scale farms' productivity, including women as active supporters of the rural change.

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