

Recent Trends in Wage Earnings of Agricultural Labourers State Level Analysis for Different Social Groups

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The study based on the data emanating from Rural Labour Enquiry Reports, shows that daily real wage earnings of male and female agricultural labour belonging to different social groups (all groups taken together, scheduled caste and scheduled tribe) registered an increase of varying degrees in agricultural and non-agricultural occupations both in pre-reform (1983 to 1993-94) and post-reform (1993-94 to 1999-00) periods. More important, however, the per cent per annum increase in the real wage earnings of all categories of labour decelerated during the post-reform period compared to pre-reform period in a majority of the states. There was no neat pattern in the trends in differentials in male-female real wage earnings in agricultural and non-agricultural occupations; while gender disparities in real wage earnings increased in some states during the post-reform period, in others these were reduced. Likewise, the changes in the real wage earnings of male and female labour of different social groups in agricultural occupations as per cent of those in non-agricultural occupations during the pre and post-reform periods across states were also mixed; these declined in some states but increased in others. Insofar as inter-state disparities in the real wage earnings of male and female labour in different social groups were concerned, these decreased in agricultural occupations during the pre-reform period but became more pronounced during the post-reform period. However, in non-agricultural occupations, while the inter-state variations in real wage earnings of male labour declined in both the periods except in respect of labour belonging to scheduled tribe households, in case of female labour these decreased in the pre-reform period but increased subsequently in respect of all groups, remained unchanged for scheduled caste households and declined for those belonging to scheduled tribe households.

I Introduction

The agricultural labour households constitute an important segment of the rural population; the proportionate share of such households in the total rural households increased from 30.70 per cent in 1993-94 to 32.23 per cent in 1999-00. They possess virtually no human and physical assets and derive their livelihood from wage paid manual labour in agricultural activities. Among different economic groups, they are the least organised, most vulnerable, economically disadvantaged and highly impoverished. Recent studies have shown that composition of poor in rural India is changing, and the poverty is increasingly getting concentrated in households belonging to agricultural labour and rural artisans. Further, agricultural labour households have reportedly experienced the highest increase in the incidence of poverty on all the three poverty measures between 1993-94 and 1999-00. Consequently, the share of these households in

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