

# Women in Agriculture: A Study of Lanjia Soura Tribe in Gajapati District, Odisha

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**Abstract:** This paper discussed about women in agriculture of Gajapati district. Gajapati district is tribal dominated district of Odisha i.e., 53 percent population of the state average. The Souras is a vulnerable primitive group in Gajapati district as well as Odisha. The Souras are plains depend on their wet cultivation, wage earning and selling firewood for their survivable and the Soura are also depend padder, hill, or forest. The hill Soura are practice shifting cultivation, mixed farming cultivation; terraced cultivation on the hill slopes and collection firewood is the main occupation of the Sabara or Soura women which provides them minimum sustenance throughout the year. Both men and women are collect firewood but the collection of Mahua flowers is done exclusively by women and children.

**Keywords:** Lanjia Soura Women, Hill Agriculture, Literacy, Sex Ratio, Work Participation

The Lanjia Soura tribe practise traditional cultivation for sustenance of their livelihood. Their very survival critically depends on land and forest resources. Agriculture is the mainstay of the Lanjia Soura economy. The Lanjia Soura tribe mostly depend on traditional wisdom for in agriculture sustenance of their livelihood. Almost all practises in shifting cultivation and terrace cultivation. The study area of Gajapati district is a rugged, mountainous highland country predominantly inhabited by the particularly vulnerable tribal groups called the Lanjia Soura. The Soura society is divided into as many as twenty five subdivisions such as Kapu Soura, Jati Soura, Sudho Soura, Jadu Soura, Jara Soura, Arsi Soura, Duara Soura or Muli Soura, Kindal Soura, Kumbi Soura and Basu Soura. Agriculture, the main component of India's economic life, is of great importance because it employs 80 per cent of the total population, Indian agriculture has undergone a revolutionary change in recent years to feed the millions of population of India. Natural resources studies have gained a matter of great importance in recent years, to raise the standard of living of the growing population and also a necessity to safeguard the natural environment for future generation. An inventory of resources of an area needs to include a good estimate of the available land resources including its usage. As evidence of women's roles in local production system has grown, there has been increasing pressure for more accurate estimates of women's contributions to national agricultural systems. Census statistics have tended to under estimate women's agricultural labour through their definitions of economic activities, their sampling patterns and their interviewing procedure. The main objective of the study of Soura women in agriculture is to examine their family structure and economy and to study the subsistence agrarian tiny economy in their life.

In this study we have tried to know the access of Soura women in agricultural production processes and understand the gender discrimination, gender role stereotypes within these activities. We have also discussed to find out the life sustaining activities of women in agrarian practices and to find out the reality of existing land rights of Soura women in their families. We have analysed the gender role practices and discrimination if any in their customary land rights system. We have documented the typical indigenous agrarian practices among men and women of Soura tribes. We have to investigate the extent of access and rights of women in agriculture also we have documented the aspects of self-sustaining agrarian economy that exists in the life and living of Soura women. In our thesis the first chapter deals with the introduction of the problem and study frame work. Chapter two deals with the Access and rights of Women in Agriculture: A conceptual discussion. Third chapter discusses the Statistical Analysis of Women's Work Participation Rate. Socio Demographic Profile of Respondent has been analysed in chapter four. Land Ownership and Land Use Pattern is included in chapter five. Sixth chapter deals with Common Property Resources and Rights of Tribal Women. Chapter seventh deals with Traditional Wisdom of Tribal Women in Agriculture and finally in last chapter we have summed up all our observation, findings and drawn conclusion.

In all the agricultural operations although the entire household is involved yet women's contribution is significant. Her participation is indispensable in carrying out the whole range of agricultural activities. She is involved in various operations right from preparing the land, sowing and weeding, transplanting, threshing and winnowing. Women are also involved in ploughing, which is always considered as a man's job. In India, farm women are largely illiterate, ignorant, hail from asset-less farm family or are paid labourers from backward and down-trodden communities. According to population census of India 2001, there are about 31.7 million are cultivators and 26.6 million are agricultural labourers and 41.7 million other workers. The latest available agricultural census data (Govt. of India, Agricultural Census Division, and Ministry of Agriculture 2002) also reveal that about 78 percent of operational holdings in the country are marginal and small, having less than 2 hectares. About 13 percent holdings have 2 to 4 hectares and 7.1 per cent have 4 to 10 hectares of land. The relatively large holdings above 10 hectares number only about 1.6 percent of the total operational holdings. However, this 1.6 per cent of the large holdings occupies about 17.3 per cent of the total area, while 78 percent of holdings which are less than 2 hectares, and operate only about 32.4 percent of the total area. This

speaks of inequality in the distribution of operational holdings. Also there is inequality of income between agricultural and non-agricultural workers, which is evident from the fact that percentage share of agriculture in current total GDP is only 24.2 while the percentage share of agricultural work force to total work force comes to about 60 percent. The agricultural Census data clearly bear out the fact that Indian agriculture is dominated by small and marginal farms, which are basically subsistence farmers. They provide mainly for self consumption. However, some of these farmers have to sell their produce immediately after harvest at low prices and buy the same products later at high prices.

Table 1 Population and Agriculture Workers in India

Years	Cultivators	Agriculture	Other Workers
1951	49.9	19.5	30.6
1961	52.8	16.7	30.5
1981	37.8	22.7	39.5
1991	35.2	23.8	41
2001	31.7	26.6	41.7

Source: Registrar General of India, New Delhi, 2001

Another important source of data is Census of India (2001), according to which there are nearly 127 million cultivators, 107.5 million agricultural labourers and 6 million other farm workers engaged in livestock, forestry and plantations. Of the total agricultural labourers, 38.0 per cent were female and 61.9 percent male workers. Also among livestock, forestry and plantation workers, 78.3 percent were male workers and 21.7 percent were female workers. About 99.2 percent of agricultural workers were reported to be unorganized and unprotected.

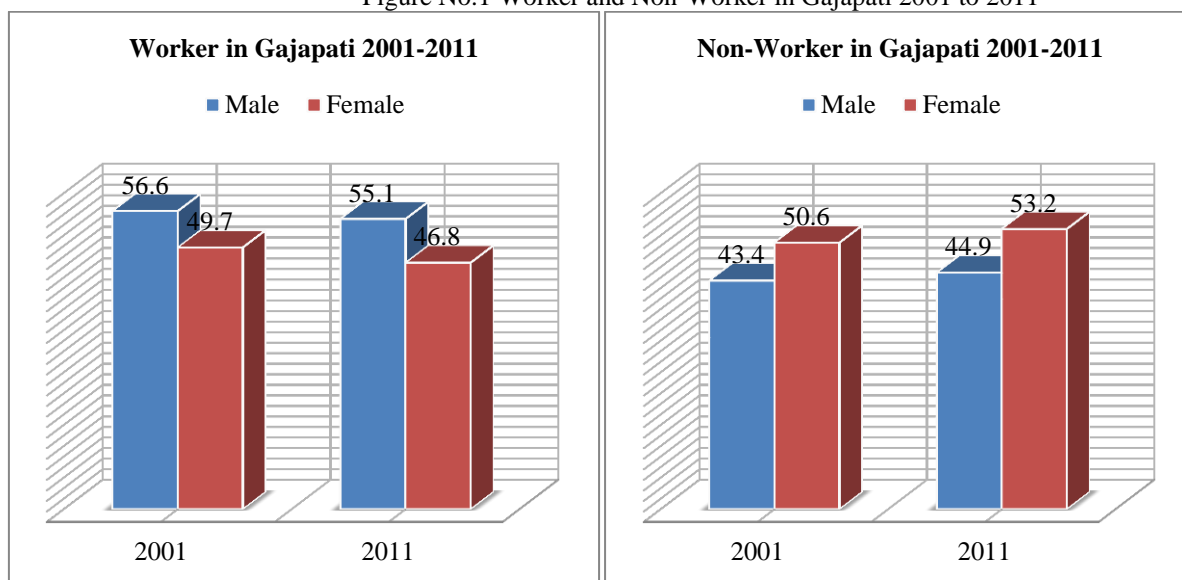
According to various rounds of National Sample Survey, the absolute number of rural poor persons increased from 232 million in 1987-88 to 244 million in 1993-94 and then declined to 193 million in 1999-2000. As shown by table 1.2 still about 27 percent rural people are reported to be below the poverty line. Equality between men and women is a matter of human rights and condition for social justice and is also a necessary and fundamental prerequisite for equality, developmental and faeces. Gender composition reflects nationality, mortality and migration character of a given population. Distribution pattern of male and female in a population affects relative roles and economic relationships. Agrarian field is one of the most importances in sectional analysis to measure gender unbalanced. According to the provisional population totals of census 2011, out of a total population of 41974218, persons 10707543 are main and 6834046 marginal workers. In agrarian fields women are basically marginalised in total of population and women are marginalised out of total marginal workers. Odisha is a poor state, where majority of the population depend on agriculture for their livelihood. Before discussing the agrarian economic conditions of the state, In Odisha 2001 census, men are 1797266 marginalised and female are 2894953 marginalised out of Odisha total population. Main worker for male is 8004740 and female main worker 1584529 out of total population in Odisha 2001 census. In District of Gajapati is total men marginal workers 28096 and women 67476 marginalised worker out of total Gajapati population and women main workers 63536. So we need to have detail idea about the socio- demographic pattern of Odisha and that of Gajapati. Sex ratio is one of the most vulnerable indicators of the social profile of any society. Sex ratio of the state is consistently declining since 2001 to 2011.

Table No.2 Worker and Non-Worker in Gajapati 2001 to 2011

	Worker and Non-Worker in Gajapati 2001		Worker and Non-Worker in Gajapati 2011	
	Worker	Non-Worker	Worker	Non-Worker
Male	56.6	43.4	55.1	44.9
Female	49.7	50.6	46.8	53.2

\*(Source: Census of India 2011 final data, Registrar General of India), Data book for PC: 4<sup>TH</sup> Aug-2014. Census of India 2011, Primary Census Abstract Figure at a Glance and Data Highlight.

Figure No.1 Worker and Non-Worker in Gajapati 2001 to 2011



In Gajapati district we find Women constitute 50% of the workforce where as men constitute 57% of the total workers. Among non-worker women are more (50.6) in comparison to men (43.4). This is trending all India, all Odisha level also. But same how 50% WWPR shows a significant highest of Women Work Participation Rate (WWPR) in Gajapati district. May be due to high concentration % of tribal population are engaged as marginal worker for their own survival. This is a marginal status of tribal women in Gajapati district. Which will be further clarified while stratify women engaged in Agrarian sector.

Figure No. 2 Sex Ratio of Odisha 1901-2011 Census

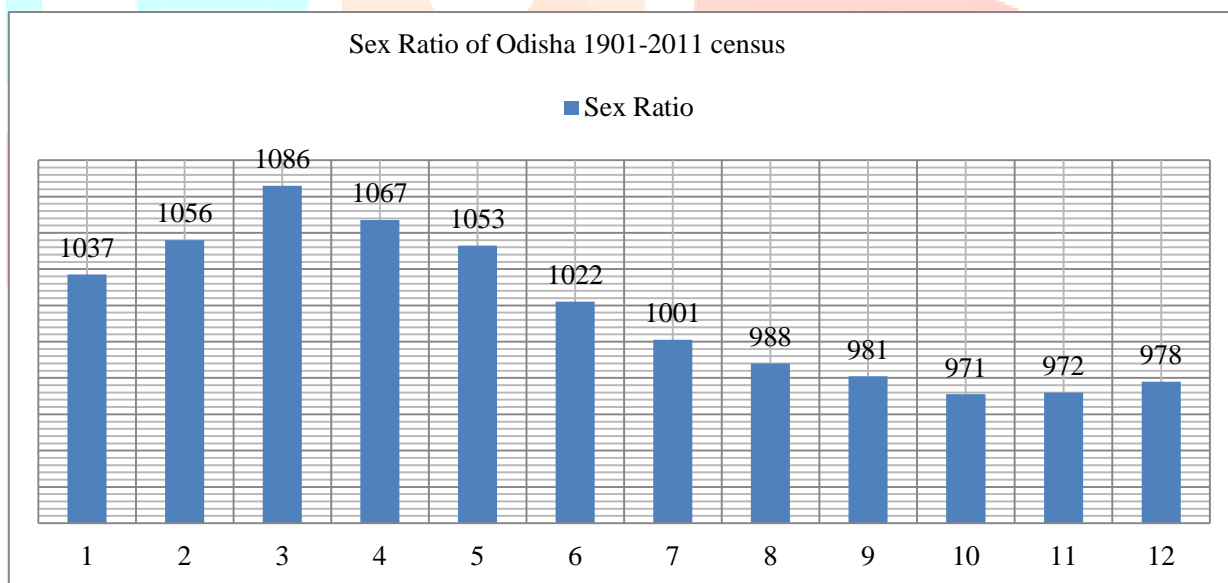


Figure No.3 Distribution of STs Population by state 2011

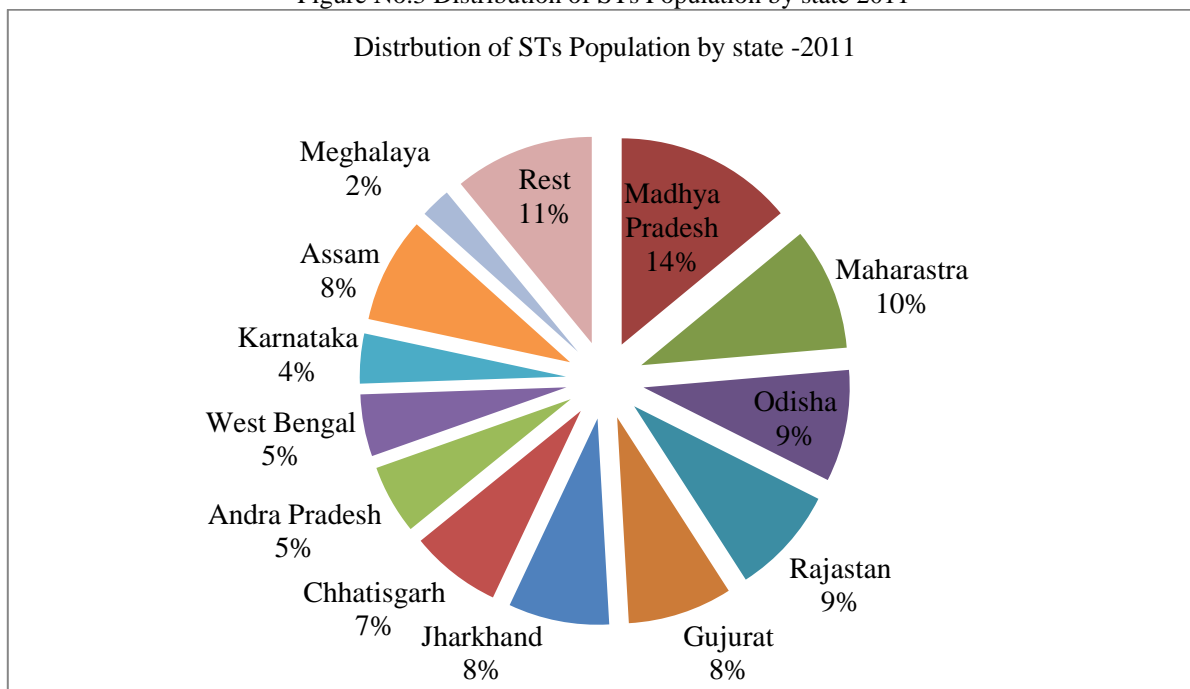


Figure 3, reflect the pie-chart the distribution of ST population by states- 2011 in India. Reflect 15% of highest ST populated area is the state of Madhya Pradesh, 10% of populated area is Maharashtra, 9.2% of is Odisha, 9% of is Rajasthan, 8.6% of is Gujarat, 8.3% of is Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh is 7.5%, Andhra Pradesh is 5.7%, West Bengal is 5%, Karnataka is 4%, Assam 3.4%, Only 3% of is Meghalaya and rest 12% of population on other communities in India. In Odisha the total Scheduled Tribe population returned in census 2011 is 9590756. Of this, 8994967 are in rural areas and 595789 in urban areas. In terms of population, the Scheduled Tribe population constitutes 22.8% of the total population. The proportion during the last census was 22.1%. The highest proportion of Scheduled Tribes has been recorded in Mayurbhanj (58.7%) and the lowest in Puri (0.4%).

Our observation and finding shows 100% of women respondents used to collect firewood required for the family. Almost all adult women are responsible for the collection of the firewood from the Jungle for family consumption. Men in some families also collect firewood, they are 30.6% it shows nearly 31% of families are liberal for a woman which is reflected by doing shows a part of their activities such as collection of firewood which is supposed to be taken as women's work of the family requirement. Cleaning of the forest is done by both male and female, around 77% of men and 100% women do this work for shifting cultivation which is a primitive practice still operation in some portions of Gajapati district. Preparing land for cultivation, another agricultural practice by which men and women plough and make levelling of the land. In these activities 100% of men used to take part and 94% of women also involve themselves in this practice. Collection of minor forest produce is one of the everyday activities of Soura people to maintain their livelihood. Table No. 5.23 shows 100 percent of women and 35.4 percent of men collect mahua flower from the forest for preparation of liquor. It is a type of drinks which is used as food by both men and women to ease out their tiredness after a long day work.

Our finding shows gender role in agricultural activities in Soura community. Discrimination between men and women among Soura are very less. Our study Table No. 5.21 reflect around 43.17% of male do ploughing where as 16.65% of women also do ploughing in their own land and other agricultural field. This is an interesting picture for women to ploughing as per agricultural activities in concern. Earth bonding is done by male 43.7% and 29.57% of female. Gender role stereotype is found among women for sowing the seeds and doing transplantation is agriculture operation (41.42%). Only 10.8% of male are engaged in transplantation work. Cutting the Paddy or any types of crops is mostly done by women (41.42%) where as only 18.73% of men are engaged are Paddy cutting activity. Collections of crops are total done by women.

### Caste Structure

Our sample is purposive to study the Lanjia Soura tribal women and their involvement in agriculture. It reflects the caste structure of tribal male and female in our sample among Soura community. In total around 57% respondent are tribal women from all the Soura community of the study area of Gajapati district. Our sample consists 43% tribal male from all the Soura community in the study area of Gajapati District. Lanjia Soura constitutes 50% of our sample and a little less on 17% each constitute mala Soura, Telegu Soura, and Zorai Soura.

Figure-4

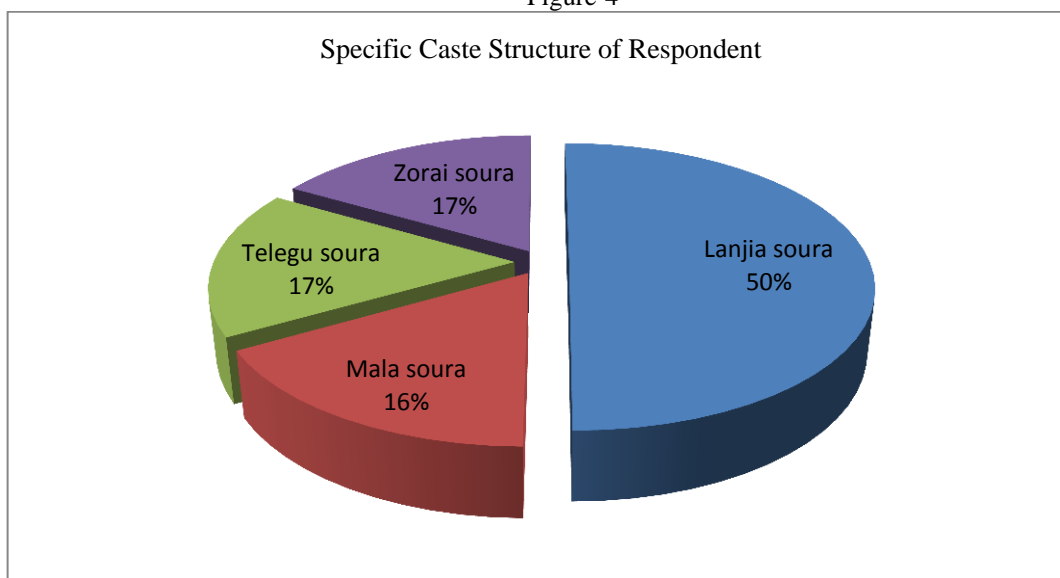


Figure 4 explains the specific caste group composition of the area in my sample. I have purposively taken the interview of men and women in Soura tribe. Within the Soura communities there are various sub-caste groups such as; Lanjia Soura Mala Soura Zorai Soura and Telegu Soura. Only Lanjia Soura constitute 50 per cent and other caste constitute 16.6 per cent each.

Illiteracy is very high in our study area. Our table shows that nearly 82% are illiterate and only 18% are literate. Illiteracy is much high among women i.e. 90% and that of men is 69%. Literacy among women is only 9% and among man is 31%.

Among the literate person around 3% have studied up to class 7<sup>th</sup> are women and 6% of up to class 9<sup>th</sup> among women. Among men literacy rate is 31%, around 16% of have studied up to class 7<sup>th</sup>, 12% per cent up to class 10<sup>th</sup> and 4% of studied up to +2. This shows among even men, education is very low. It shows only 4% of men is matriculate. Among women nobody has studied beyond school level and only 8 percent of women are literate who have been educated within class 7<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>. More than 81 percent of women are illiterate and mostly women are engaged as the agricultural and daily wage labourer.

Agriculture is the old primitive occupation of the tribal people. Though the people had changed their cultivation pattern from traveller's cultivation to settled cultivation, but some of the practices have remained unchanged among many groups of farmers. The unchanged practices may be due to fact that they find the practices more sustainable. It is painful when somebody says the tribal's are backward or primitive.

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