



Title: *Exploring Time-Induced-Income-Poverty for Women in Indian Agriculture: 2019-2024*¹

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Abstract. This note investigates a few economic features associated with productive and socially reproductive labour hours spent by women who are engaged as self-employed workers in agriculture and allied sector in rural India. More specifically, we have utilised two rounds of nationally representative Time Use Surveys (NSO TUS 2019 and TUS 2024) to estimate prevalence of income distress for self-employed women, despite being part of the agricultural workforce. The reason with which self-employed women become crucial to this note follows from the fact that in the last seven years, women’s workforce participation has primarily risen through such forms of employment.

We observe that all self-employed women who are engaged in agriculture, spends nine to ten hours in total, combining both productive labour and socially reproductive labour hours. There is also evidence of eight-nine hours of activities associated with self-care and maintenance (including sleep), thus refuting the fact that the primary contradiction lies in compromised resting hours. Whereas, we observe that the daily levels of consumption do not mitigate the required expenditure to rejuvenate their labour power.

Empirically speaking, between 2019 and 2024, we estimated that a little more than 85% of self-employed women in agriculture in India, remain income poor who are unable to maintain the required levels of consumption (i.e. their earnings are less than the minimum required wage). It is in this context, we suggest that the existing frameworks within feminist discourse that understands ‘time poverty’ as a phenomenon where required ‘rest and self-care hours are compromised’ (in shorter and longer terms of capitalist development) falls short to explain the qualitative aspects associated with the working conditions, in both productive and socially reproductive labour spheres. More importantly, if the overall economy faces a downturn, we offer an alternative proposition: in an already distressed rural economy, work remains non-remunerative especially for women (but not restricted to women only).

With meagre remunerative hours in productive sphere and material conditions that does not improve the drudgeries of socially reproductive labour hours then continue to reproduce, a specific kind of ‘income poverty’, which is induced by the ‘time’ spent in production and yet not ‘rewarded’, or we have termed it as ‘Time Induced Income Poverty’.

JEL Keywords: Poverty; Income; Time Use; Agriculture; Rural India.

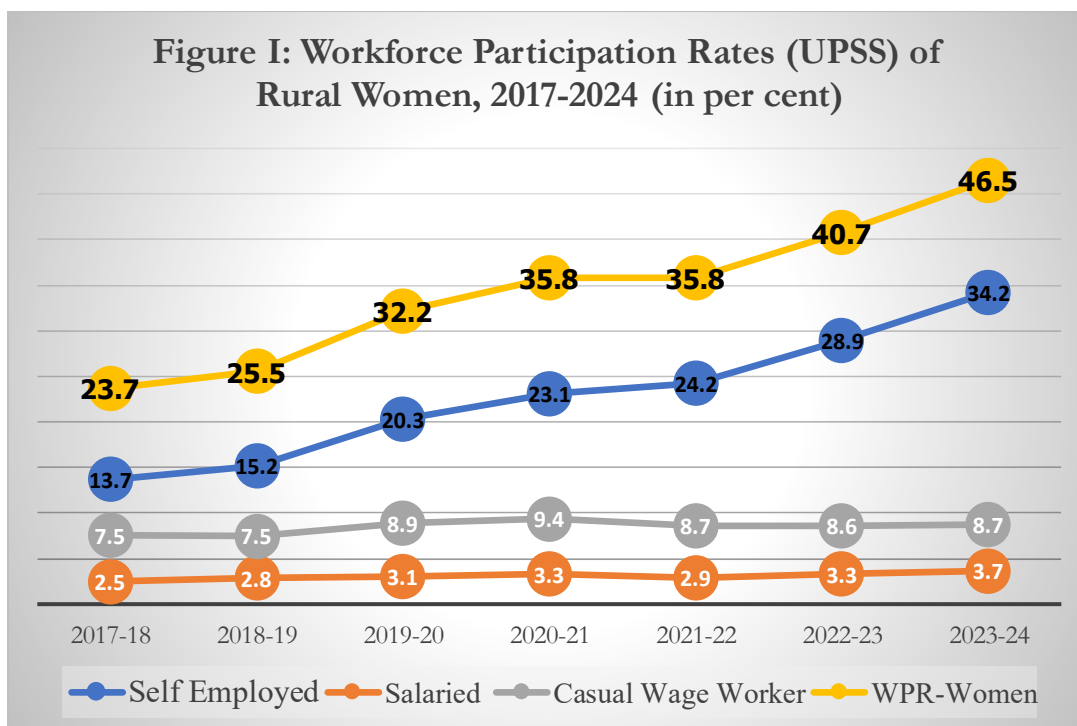
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1. Introduction and Motivation

Development concerns in the context of rural economy of India has persistently remain agrarian in its nature. This is primarily due to two reasons. Firstly, a stunted structural transformation (Ghose 2021) of the overall economy did not reproduce either a ‘Lewisian’ (where labourers move from primary sectors to modernised capitalist sector) or ‘Kaldor-Kalecki’ (manufacturing productivity creates an impetus to growth) path as was seen in the developed counterparts of the globe.

It is at this outset, this paper illustrates a few economic tendencies of productive labour and social reproductive labour that are associated with women who are engaged in the rural labour market, and are engaged in agriculture in contemporary India.

The immediate motivation emanates from *two sets of empirical tendencies* and one theoretical fallacy that is emergent out of these empirical tendencies. The first is a reversal of women’s workforce participation rate in rural India. During the last decade of 2000s a large body of literature deliberated upon explaining a declining Workforce Participation Rate (WPR) for females in the Indian context. It was in the backdrop of a drastically declining female workforce participation rates (especially when compared to the male-counterpart) in both urban and rural India during the 2000s. However, since, 2017-18 there has been a steady increase in the WPR for rural working age women (See Figure 1). More importantly this increase has been through the means of self-employment, which rose from 13.7% in 2017-18 to 34.2% in 2023-24.



ⁱSource: Author's Calculation from PLFS rounds.

Table1: Distribution of Self-Employed Women Engaged in Different Industries, in per cent, Rural India, 2017-2024

<i>Economic Sectors/Industries (NIC)</i>	<i>2019-20</i>	<i>2023-24</i>
Agriculture and Allied	82.5	84.6
Mining	0.0	0.0
Manufacturing and Utilities	10.4	9.9
Construction	0.0	0.0
Services	7.2	5.5
All Sectors	100.0	100.0

Source: Author's Calculation from PLFS Rounds.

The second empirical motivation for this article lies in the fact that most of the self-employed women are engaged in agriculture and allied sector. Almost 85% of the self-employed female workforce is engaged in agriculture during 2023-24 (See Table 1). Roughly 10% of the self-employment occurs in the manufacturing sector, followed by 5% of self-employment occurring in the rural services sector. Therefore, a combined empirical take away appears to explain the sources of rise in the female workforce participation in rural India, i.e., self-employment in the agricultural sector.

It is at this outset; this article examines the features of productive and socially reproductive labour hours spent by women who are engaged in agriculture and allied sector as self-employed workers during 2019 and 2024. The larger question beyond this is the immediate empirical

fallacy of existing surplus labour (especially women) in agriculture when the labour absorptive capacities are falling, what happens to the ‘time poverty’ for these women workers?

More specifically, how productive hours and socially reproductive labour hours are getting reorganised for the self-employed women in agriculture? A political formation out of these workers would pertinently raise the question in the Indian countryside that how concerns of class differentiation is related to the observed phenomenon of increased self-employment and labour time arrangement (we are deliberately avoiding the word, allocation, to avoid the mainstream positivist position on the same).

In section 2, we have introduced the theoretical departure that provide us with a framework. The subsequent sections (3 and 4), explain the databases and methodologies utilised to reach to the results. A final concluding section, summarises our results along with raising certain questions that would require further engagement.

2.An Empirical Puzzle: Increasing female WPR & Slow Convergence in Leisure, Self-Care and Maintenance hours for Women in Rural India

Plethora of literature that deliberates on the ‘incidence of time poverty’ often starts with the existing male-female differential that persists in the off-labour market hours, where women have to face a ‘second shift’ (Hochschild 1993) that necessarily curbs their choice (access) to leisure hours or hours spent for self-care and maintenance. However, in this article, we have slightly changed our initial theoretical concern. We aim to first see, if women are increasingly participating in the labour market in rural India (vis-à-vis women who are outside the labour market): Is there an emerging penalty in terms of their leisure, self-care, and maintenance?

Table 2: Average Minutes Spent on Different ICATUS Activities (Digit 1), in minutes, by Gender, for Self Employed (15-65) persons in Agriculture, Rural India, 2019-2024

TUS Activities / Gender	2024 (Minutes)		2019(Minutes)	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
<i>Employment (PL)</i>	337	223	273	185
<i>Production for Own Usage (PL)</i>	64	69	114	96
<i>Unpaid Domestic Work (SRL)</i>	32	256	42	267
<i>Unpaid Care (SRL)</i>	18	37	12	28
<i>Unpaid Volunteer</i>	1	1	4	4
<i>Learning</i>	1	0	1	1
<i>Socialising</i>	125	88	122	78
<i>Leisure and Cultural Activities</i>	141	87	120	90
<i>Self-Care and Maintenance</i>	721	678	750	692

<i>Total Minutes</i>	1440	1440	1440	1440
Source: Author's Calculation from TUS 2019 & 2024.				

An apparently puzzling outcome appears (see Table 2).ⁱⁱ In 2019, self-employed workers (in all sectors) spent roughly (own account, employer, and unpaid workers) 86-89 minutes for leisure and cultural engagement activities. The overall average for all working age women spending time on leisure activities is 117 minutes. A difference of 25-30 minutes in leisure time is observed. However, in 2024, this difference between working women who are self-employed and all working age women has remained same (87 minutes for the former and 120 minutes for the later) [Table 2]. Once we have looked into the same difference for self-care and maintenance, there has been an overall decline in these hours. Where self-employed women spent 690-692 (roughly a little more than 10 hours) minutes in 2019: roughly again a 30 minutes difference where all working age women spent 720 hours (12 hours). In 2024, there is an overall decline in self-care and maintenance hours, where self-employed workers spend 675-680 minutes, meanwhile overall working age women spends 702 hours, keeping the difference again around 20 minutes.

3. Gendered Work: Economy and Accounting of ‘Women’s Work’ through Official Approaches in India

System of National Accounts (SNA or UN SNA alternatively) plays an important role when it comes to accounting for work as it is the internationally agreed framework defining economic activity and non-activity (United Nations, 2009). India, officially also follows SNA recommendations and the updates them periodically. SNA considers all the domestic household work and care as economic inactivity, until a domestic staff is hired and paid for it. SNA 2008 cited three reasons for not imputing the value of unpaid household work: it is a self-contained activity, there is no suitable market price, it doesn’t influence economic policy (United Nations 2009).

In India, TUS and PLFS both are large Indian Datasets rely on SNA framework. The former particularly measures participation of men and women in paid and unpaid activities (SNA activities, extended SNA production activities, and non-SNA activities) (TUS, 2024) while the latter measures labour force estimates such employment and unemployment rates, workforce participation, engagement otherwise in domestic activities, education etc. (PLFS, 2024).

Four **Expert Group Meetings (EGMs)** in 1997, 2000, 2012, and 2016 respectively, shaped ICATUS's evolution, beginning with the first draft in 1997 and the **UN Trial ICATUS (2005)** published in the *Guide to Producing Statistics on Time Use: Measuring Paid and Unpaid Work*.

With renewed discussions on 2011 and 3rd EGM concluded ICATUS should be based on the SNA and adopt a simplified 3 digit code, complementing labour force surveys. In 2013, ICLS (International Conference of Labour Statisticians) in 19th session adopted a resolution defining “work as any activity performed by persons of any sex and age to produce goods or to provide services for use by others or for own use, irrespective of legality, formal / informal nature of activity, context or person status,” thereby, narrowing the definition of employment.

4. Setting the Question(s), Database(s), and Methodology: Time Induced Income Poverty

This note is limited in two ways, partly in setting the questions afront but more importantly with the existing secondary databases that allow us to inquire the primary question at hand. Here, the primary question being, whether self-employed women can reproduce their own labour power while they are engaged in agriculture and allied sector? An addendum to the primary question is then further explored. This ‘addendum’ seeks to investigate: are there material conditions in the so-called productive labour sphere and socially reproductive labour sphere that reinforces conditions of distress that is specifically associated with female self-employed workers within agriculture?

4.1. Secondary Databases: Time Induced Income Poverty (or Time Induced Income Poor)

This note utilises two specific large sample databases associated with labour force in India. Firstly, to establish the trends and patterns of female workforce participation, especially within the agriculture and allied sectors, we have taken up a descriptive analysis through the Periodic Labour Force Survey (2017-18 to 2023-24) conducted annually by the NSO-MOSPI.

Secondly, our main empirical analysis is dependent on two rounds of the annual Time Use Surveys (TUS) conducted by NSO-MOSPI in 2019 and 2024.

We have further utilised ICATUS (2014)-activities categorisation to define productive hours (Employment and Related Activities, Time Spent on production of goods for Own consumption) and socially reproductive labour hours (unpaid domestic care and unpaid domestic work), rest of the hours are kept as ‘other hours’ in our classification.

Methodologically, our primary interest in this note lies in the fact to evaluate whether this recent increase in the workforce participation through self-employment provide an income (with a minimal assumption) which can help self-employed women to at least meet their subsistence requirement. We define such a subsistence in the following manner (See Eqn.1) and this is the basis of defining ‘time-induced income poverty’ (*Tp Or TIIP*) for women in agriculture who reported any productive hours on the day of survey.

$$\text{Wage Line}^{\text{iii}} = \text{Minimum Wage (in 2019 Prices)} * \text{Productive Hours in a Day}$$

$$p = 1, \text{ if Per Capita Consumption per day} < \text{Daily Wage Line}, 0 \text{ otherwise}$$

$$Tp = \frac{p}{N} \dots (\text{Eqn.1})$$

p=Total number of women who are engaged as self-employed in the Agriculture and Allied Services and whose daily per capita consumption expenditure is less than daily wage-line.

N= All women who are engaged as self-employed in the Agriculture and Allied Services.

Table 3: Determining Per-Hour Wage Requirement or Time-Induced Income Poverty Among Self Employed Women Engaged in Agriculture, 2019-2024, in Nominal INR/8 hours Day & INR/Per Hours

<i>Wage Type</i>	2019: Hourly Wage Requirement	2024: Hourly Wage Requirement
<i>Minimum Wage (Unskilled for AREA C) Per Day (8 Hours)</i>	308	316
<i>Hourly Wage-Consumption Requirement</i>	38.5	39.5

Source: Author's Derivation with 2.5% Inflation rate applied for 2024 Wage Line, 2019 Wage Rates are informed through Labour Bureau.

Therefore Time-induced income poverty can be explained as (given hourly wage lines are kept constant), if absolute ‘number’ of p increases among the self-employed women in agriculture and allied sector, it is due to lack of work-hours. Minimum wage for agriculture is set at daily wages set for Area C (for unskilled workers engaged in agriculture)

In order to further understand, whether it is work hours that explains the inequality (between groups) or SRL hours, we have further decomposed GINI coefficient of time spent under different time use types.

5. Results and Discussion

There are three specific subsections through which we delve into the overall findings. Firstly, an overall incidence of time induced income poverty is discussed in detail. Secondly, we further look into this particular prevalence of time induced income poverty can be explained in terms of the composition of inter-group inequalities. More specifically, we have performed a population sub-group decomposition of GINI (Yitzhaki 1994) where subgroups of population represent time-induced poor women and non-poor women among the self-employed workers in agriculture. Finally, we have taken up a descriptive analysis of the existing material conditions that prevail within the socially reproductive labour sphere for women engaged in agriculture.

5.1. *Incidence of Time Induced Income Poverty: A New Lens for Political Economy of Gendered Work*

Through observation of an average time spent by self-employment women in agriculture, between 2019 and 2024, there is a slight change in terms of the hours spent on employment and own use production. For overall self-employed, these work hours have increased from 4.7 hours (i.e. decimal replaced to $7 \times 1.6 = 11$ minutes) in 2019 to 4.9 hours (14 minutes) in 2024, rest of the hours does not reflect any major structural changes in the arrangement of hours.

Table 2.1: Average Minutes Spent on Different ICATUS Activities (Digit 1), in minutes, by Gender, for Self Employed (15-65) persons in Agriculture, Rural India, 2019-2024

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<i>Unpaid Care (SRL)</i>	18	37	12	28

Source: Author's Calculation from TUS 2019 & 2024.

What remains of further importance is even with participation rates increasing, the hours spent in agricultural self-employment did not go through any significant changes (See Table 2.1).^{iv}

Our primary finding, through the index reveals a rather grim story of deprivation for women who are engaged in the agricultural workforce as self-employed women.

In 2019, 77.1% of self-employed women were time-induced income poor, which has slightly declined to 76.8% in 2024. The implication of this index, politically speaking is of two-fold.

Firstly, women workers who are engaged in self-employment in agriculture, even if they were paid with a minimum wage per hour, three-fourth of these women would remain poor in terms of income. Such low or meagre incomes are necessarily a sign of distress, economic and social.

Secondly, earlier in the 2000s the phenomenon of declining labour force participation was thought of either as a ‘withdrawal phenomenon’ that was ‘gendered’, however, within a decade what is revealed resonates with our theoretical position. It is a crisis of growth and labour absorptive capital formation where lack of labour absorption, leading to low labour hours, and thus making the agricultural sector a non-remunerative, yet populous sector, especially for women (See Table 3).

Table 3 Incidence of Time-Induced-Poverty for Self Employed Women in engaged in Agriculture and Allied Sector, 15-65 Years, Rural India, 2019-2024, in per cent

<i>Principal Status of Self-Employed Women</i>	<i>2019</i>	<i>2024</i>
Own Account Workers	81.8	77.2
Employer	73.9	68.9
Unpaid Workers in Domestic Enterprises	74.7	76.6
Overall Self-Employed	77.1	76.8

Source: Author's Calculation from TUS 2019 and TUS 2024

Note: Wage Line is derived by multiplying INR 38.5 in 2019 prices (which is roughly 39.5 INR in 2024 with 2.5% annual inflation) for total hours spent for employment and hours spent on production for own use.

Finally, for these working poor sections, even before getting robbed of 25-30 minutes of leisure and 30 minutes of self-care and maintenance (as would be a significant concern of certain feminist strands) (Kabeer 2015), is robbed of their dignity to work, as the productive sphere remains non-remunerative and very few mechanised operations are left for women to participate in (Niyati 2021).

Table 5: Results from GINI Decomposition (Yitzhaki Method) of Hours Spent on Different Activities by Self-Employed Women in Agriculture, By TIIP and Non-TIIP sub-groups, GINI in Decimals and Share in per cent, Rural India, 2019-2024

	2019		
	Overall GINI INDEX	Within Group Share (%)	Between Group Share (%)
Productive Hours	0.37	47.1	52.9
Socially Reproductive Hours	0.30	86.7	13.3
Other Hours	0.10	78.3	21.8
	2024		
Productive Hours	0.32	54.0	46.0
Socially Reproductive Hours	0.29	87.9	12.1
Other Hours	0.10	84.9	15.1

Source: Author's Calculation from TUS Unit Level Data.

This article aims to extend towards a more generalised theorisation of how ‘self-employed’ women engaged in agriculture faces a two-pronged distress. Firstly, their SRL hours are almost as similar as those who are non-workers. Secondly, the productive hours that these women spend are non-remunerative to an extent that 85-90% of these female workers are deprived of consumption that is essentially required to rejuvenate their labour power. More importantly, this is where we would like to depart from the usual time poverty literature, where self-care and maintenance hours are thought of as ‘homogeneous’ in quality. Sleeping in hunger and sleeping after a full meal necessarily produces two different kinds of rejuvenation. Furthermore, this gendered question of economic distress is necessarily linked with the processes of agrarian differentiation. These combined forces along with low non-farm absorption has given birth to a huge ‘reserve army of labour’, accounted as workers but utilised partially by the existing capital, and are bereft of economic dignity.

[END]

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ENDNOTES & APPENDIX

ⁱ UPSS i.e. Usual Principal and Subsidiary Status mean a person would be called a worker if she has engaged in gainful economic activity at least for a month in the reference year, in this case, the year refers to July-June.

ⁱⁱ All activities here considered are Major activities even if there are simultaneous minor activities.

ⁱⁱⁱ Firstly, INR 40 is roughly \$1.9 PPP/ Per Capita Per day equivalent in 2019 and further inflated for rural India in 2024 to INR 44.6. Since time is measured in terms of hours, even if some one worked under productive activities are designed to be not excluded. Secondly, average productive hours for Self-Employed women in agriculture is around 4.9 to 5 hours. That would produce an exact wage line of INR 200. Through Swaminathan and Baksi (2017) and Swaminathan et.al. (2021) one observes that an expected minimum/ median daily wage of INR 200 prevails in most parts of rural India.

^{iv} A clarificatory note here, TUS only collects information on activity status in terms of Principal Status, not in terms of PS+SS. If SS was included, these hours might increase/improve by at least 30-40 minutes [See Agrawal et.al. 2024]