

Marginal Workers in India

THE concept of 'worker' adopted in the Indian census has changed from census to census. The data about workers upto 1951 census were based on income concept, while the 1961, 1971 and 1981 censuses followed the concept of work measured in terms of time or the labour force concept. The 'labour force' approach classifies persons into workers and non-workers on the basis of current activity in the reference period. The basis of identifying workers was economically productive work in 1961 as well as in 1971 and 1981 censuses,

The 1961 census used a liberal definition for 'worker' to include a person who has had some regular work of more than one hour a day throughout (he greater part of the working season). The census of 1971 went ahead and every person was first asked a sorting question regarding the type of main activity that the person was engaged in mostly. To take care of the 'marginal workers', i.e., those who performed both economic and non-economic activity but spent most of their active time in the non-economic activity, every non-worker was asked about participation in economic activity as his/her secondary activity. It was intended to classify workers into fulltime workers and the marginal workers. This classification becomes useful in an economy like ours where agriculture is the main industry and family enterprise as the dominant mode of productive activity.

In view of the shortcomings of the 1971 census data on workers, the 1981 census improved upon the format of the question on economic activity and adopted a 'trichotomy' of classifying persons into workers, marginal workers and non-workers. When a person worked during the preceding one year for 183 days or more on a full time basis, he/she was classified under main activity as a 'worker*'. However, if a person worked for less than 183 days or less than full time basis, he was classified as a student/household worker/ retired person or other non-worker or seeking or available for work, under the main

activity as 'non-workers' but for his economic activity he/she was categorised as 'marginal worker'. The 1981 census format of questions permits classification of marginal workers into those who were seeking/available for work i.e. unemployed and those whose main activity was either household duties or studies but engaged themselves in the spare time from their main activity to help in family enterprise or to augment family income and were not viewed as unemployed. The classification of the marginal workers into these categories is not presented in the census publications released so far.

In this paper, we focus on the level of marginal work among males and females in the rural, urban and all the areas in India and different states in 1981. It further reflects on the relative importance of marginal workers in the various sectors of the economy. Finally, it considers the age pattern of the marginal workers.

The 1971 census recorded only 5,775,750 persons, reporting secondary work whose main activity was recorded as non-worker. The persons in this category increased to 22,088,412 in 1981. The extent of increase of persons in this category during the decade 1971-81 is not real as several analysts had come to the conclusion that the figure of marginal workers in the 1971 census was an underestimate. The undercount of marginal workers was mainly attributed to inadequate emphasis on the question about secondary work both in terms of the lay-out in the form and the instructions to the enumerators. The distribution of the marginal workers in the total, rural and urban areas separately for males and females in 1971 and 1981 are presented in Table 1. The table also indicates the share of marginal workers among the total workers (main workers plus marginal workers).

In 1971, the marginal workers constituted only 3.1 per cent of the total workers (main plus marginal); their share among the male workers was nominal but for the females it was as high as 14.7 per cent. The role of the marginal workers in urban areas was comparatively small but in the rural areas it was somewhat higher. The females among the marginal workers accounted for about 93 per cent. With the improvement in the recording of marginal workers in 1981 census, as much as 9 per cent of all workers in the country were performing some economic activity in addition to their main activity as household duties, studies etc. Marginal workers constituted more than 29 per cent of the total female workers, whereas among the males, their share was just 2 per cent. Marginal work continued to be confined mostly to the females in 1981, they accounted for about 84 per cent of the marginal workers. Marginal work is mainly confined to the rural areas as about 95 per cent of all the marginal workers were enumerated in the rural areas. In the urban areas, the share of the female workers was about one-eighth. The male marginal workers account for over a third of all the marginal workers in the urban areas.

Considering the large underestimation of marginal workers in 1971, we confine here to the 1981 census data for detailed examination. The extent of varia-

TABLE 1--NUMBER OF MARGINAL WORKERS AND THEIR SHARE IN THE TOTAL IN INDIA IN 1971 AND 1981

	<i>Rural</i>		<i>Urban</i>		<i>Total</i>	
	1971	1981	1971	1981	1971	1981
I. Number of marginal workers, (in '000)						
Males	350	3,090	34	447	384	3,537
Females	5,144	17,785	247	767	5,391	18,552
Both	5,494	20,875	281	1,214	5,775	22,089
II. Share of marginal workers to total workers:						
Males	0.3	2.2	0.1	1.1	0.3	2.0
Females	15.5	31.0	6.9	12.5	14.7	29.3
Both	3.6	10.0	0.9	2.6	3.1	9.0

tion among the different states in the share of the marginal workers to the total workers is presented in Table 2.

It may be observed that the share of the marginal workers to the total workers varied from 31.4 per cent in Jammu and Kashmir to 1.5 per cent in Nagaland. Their share is significant, apart from Jammu and Kashmir, in Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Orissa and Kerala. Among males, they claim sizable share in Kerala, Jammu and Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh. Among females, they constituted more than a half, apart from Jammu and Kashmir, in Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan, all falling in the northern region. There were as many as 432 female marginal workers per hundred female main workers in Jammu and Kashmir, 170 in Punjab and 126 in Haryana and in Rajasthan. This ratio is also quite high in Gujarat (87), Orissa (85) and Himachal Pradesh (70). On the other hand, the female marginal workers accounted for only 1.6 per cent of all the female workers in Nagaland. Apart from Nagaland, the other states in the far eastern region, which are still matriarchal, the females participate in economic activity basically as main workers, where women enjoy a high economic status.

The share of the marginal workers in the urban areas is smaller as compared to the rural areas in all the states except Manipur. The share of the male marginal workers in the urban areas is very small in all the states except Kerala,

TABLE 2—PER CENT SHARE OF MARGINAL WORKERS TO TOTAL WORKERS
(MAIN+MARGINAL) IN INDIA AND STATES IN 1981

State	Total			Rural			Urban		
	Both	Male	Female	Both	Male	Female	Both	Male	Female
India	9.0	1.9	29.3	10.5	2.2	31.0	2.7	1.6	12.0
Jammu & Kashmir	31.4	6.5	81.2	35.6	7.7	83.6	7.7	1.4	45.7
Himachal Pradesh	18.9	5.7	41.2	20.0	6.1	41.9	3.4	1.5	15.0
Punjab	6.7	1.1	62.9	8.7	1.5	75.4	1.0	0.4	11.9
Haryana	10.4	2.0	55.7	12.7	2.4	60.2	1.0	0.6	11.1
Rajasthan	16.7	2.0	55.7	19.4	2.3	57.6	2.9	0.6	23.7
Gujarat	13.7	1.3	46.6	17.2	1.7	49.8	2.0	0.6	15.4
Maharashtra	9.2	2.2	21.6	11.4	2.7	23.3	2.5	1.4	9.9
Uttar Pradesh	4.9	1.0	23.3	5.7	1.0	34.4	1.1	0.4	14.2
Madhya Pradesh	10.5	1.8	27.1	11.7	1.9	27.9	3.0	1.1	13.5
Orissa	13.9	2.7	46.0	14.9	2.8	47.4	4.1	1.4	18.9
Bihar	8.3	2.0	32.6	9.0	2.2	32.9	1.9	1.1	12.5
West Bengal	6.3	3.2	28.4	7.6	3.8	30.3	3.0	1.8	16.1
Tripura	8.0	2.9	29.7	8.5	2.9	32.3	2.9	2.2	5.7
Manipur	6.5	1.9	10.6	6.5	1.5	10.4	9.9	2.8	20.6
Meghalaya	5.4	1.7	11.2	6.1	1.8	11.9	0.9	0.4	3.1
Sikkim	3.5	1.2	7.7	3.8	1.2	8.2	1.0	0.8	2.6
Nagaland	1.5	1.3	1.6	1.6	1.3	1.6	1.1	0.6	3.7
Kerala	12.5	8.7	22.9	13.1	8.9	23.7	9.5	6.9	17.8
Karnataka	8.7	1.3	25.3	10.4	1.4	27.4	2.9	1.0	11.0
Andhra Pradesh	7.6	1.0	19.4	8.6	1.0	20.3	2.6	0.6	11.0
Tamil Nadu	5.8	1.2	15.5	7.1	1.5	17.0	2.2	0.8	8.3

where they account for about 7 per cent of all the male workers. A high share of male marginal workers both in the rural and the urban areas increases the share of all the marginal workers to the total workers in the state of Kerala. The share of the female marginal workers in the urban areas is notably high

(45 per cent) in Jammu and Kashmir, it is also high in Rajasthan, Manipur, Orissa and Kerala and very low in Meghalaya, Sikkim, Nagaland and Tripura, all falling in the far eastern region.

The share of the male marginal workers in the rural areas of Kerala and Jammu and Kashmir is higher as compared to all other states. For females in the rural areas, the marginal workers account for more than three-fourths of the total workers in Jammu and Kashmir and Punjab and more than half in Haryana and Rajasthan and a little less than half in Gujarat, Orissa and Himachal Pradesh. The ratio of female marginal workers per hundred female main workers comes to 510 in Jammu and Kashmir, to 307 in Punjab, to 151 in Haryana to 136 in Rajasthan. It means that the females in the rural areas of these states participate in economic activity basically as marginal workers and report household duties as their main activity.

For a better understanding of the share of marginal workers in a state, it might be useful to relate the share of female marginal workers in total female workers with the female work participation rate as main worker in the state in 1981. This data is given in Table 3. The table shows that the share of the female marginal workers in the total female workers is generally high in the states where the participation of females in economic activity as main workers generally low, and low in the states where the female participation rates as main workers are high. However, there are some exceptions where the female participation rates as main workers are low and the share of female marginal workers is not high; for example West Bengal, Bihar and Tripura. This implies that in these states women do not assist in family enterprises or do not participate in economic activity to augment family income to the extent they do in other states. Another exception is provided by Himachal Pradesh where with a sizable female participation rate, the share of female marginal workers is quite high indicating an overall high female participation rate in the state.

It is generally believed that housewives and students participate in their spare time in traditional sectors of the economy like agriculture and household industry. In order to examine this hypothesis we present in Table 1, the ratio of marginal workers to main workers in each broad industry class in India separately for both the sexes.

The ratio of marginal workers to the main workers is the highest in the industry class of agriculture labour, which is not related to family enterprise. This reflects that the work in this class is not available on a continuing basis. If the work of agriculture labour is available somewhat more on a continuing basis, the ratio of marginal workers will tend to decline. Next in importance are the sectors of cultivators, household industry and livestock, forestry etc, These sectors basically relate to family enterprises and a high ratio of marginal workers in these sectors support the hypothesis we had intended to verify. The role of marginal workers in the other sectors is comparatively small. The males participate basically as main workers in all the sectors

TABLE 3-COMPARISON OF THE SHARE OF FEMALE MARGINAL WORKERS TO TOTAL FEMALE WORKERS WITH THE FEMALE PARTICIPATION RATE OF MAIN WORKERS IN INDIA AND STATES IN 1981

<i>Slate</i>	<i>Female Participation Rate (Main Workers)</i>	<i>Per cent of Female Marginal Workers in the Total Female Workers</i>
India	14.0	29.3
Jammu & Kashmir	5.9	81.2
Himachal Pradesh	18.7	41.2
Punjab	2.3	62.9
Haryana	4.7	55.7
Rajasthan	9.3	55.7
Gujarat	11.0	46.6
Maharashtra	24.0	21.6
Uttar Pradesh	5.4	33.3
Madhya Pradesh	22.4	27.1
Orissa	10.7	46.0
Bihar	9.1	32.6
West Bengal	5.8	28.7
Tripura	9.0	29.7
Sikkim	34.7	7.7
Meghalaya	33.3	11.2
Manipur	34.6	10.6
Nagaland	43.0	1.6
Kerala	12.8	22.9
Andhra Pradesh	27.0	19.4
Karnataka	19.0	25.3
Tamil Nadu	22.4	15.5

of the economy. The ratio of marginal workers to the main workers for the females are higher than for the males in all the sectors. The role of the female

TABLE 4—PER CENT MARGINAL WORKERS TO MAIN WORKERS IN EACH BROAD INDUSTRY CLASS IN INDIA IN 1981

<i>Broad Industry Class</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Both</i>
1. Cultivator	19	59.5	11.2
2. Agricultural Labour	3.4	37.0	16.0
3. Household Industry	1.9	36.6	11.2
4. Livestock Forestry, Fishing, Hunting, etc.	3.7	36.6	8.7
5. Mining and Quarrying	0.8	6.8	1.6
6. Non-household Industry	1.2	24.9	3.4
7. Construction	2.1	20.1	3.9
8. Trade and Commerce	1.3	21.0	2.6
9. Transport, Storage and Communications	1.0	6.8	1.2
10. Other services	0.9	7.3	2.0
Total	2.0	41.3	9.9

marginal workers in mining & quarrying; transport, storage and communication and other services is comparatively much smaller. It may also be seen that almost three-fifths of the women working as cultivators participate as marginal workers.

The importance of the various sectors of the economy in providing work to the marginal workers can be judged when we classify the marginal workers according to the broad industry classes. This distribution reveals that 46.9 per cent of the marginal workers in 1981 were engaged in cultivation, 40.1 per cent as agricultural labour, 3.9 per cent in household industry and all other sectors combined together claimed just 9.1 per cent of the marginal workers. The overall picture that emerges, is that the agricultural sector (cultivators plus agricultural labour) alone provided marginal work to over 87 per cent of all the marginal workers in 1981. The role that each of the sector plays in providing marginal work to males and females separately in the rural and the urban areas is shown in Table 5.

It may be observed that the distribution pattern in the rural areas is almost the same as indicated by the country as a whole. Here the shares of cultivators and agricultural labourers improve slightly and all other sectors record nominal decline. The largest share of 20 per cent, among the marginal workers in the urban areas, is again claimed by the cultivators, followed by the agricultural

TABLE 5—PER CENT DISTRIBUTION OF MARGINAL WORKERS IN RURAL/
URBAN/ALL AREAS OF INDIA BY INDUSTRY CLASS IN 1981

Industry Class	Rural			Urban			All Areas		
	Males	Females	Both	Males	Females	Both	Males	Females	Both
Cultivator	6.7	41.8	48.5	5.6	14.4	20.0	6.7	40.2	46.9
Agricultural Labourer	5.4	36.0	41.4	4.3	14.4	18.7	5.3	34.8	40.1
Livestock etc.	0.5	1.4	1.9	1.1	1.4	2.5	0.6	1.4	2.0
Mining etc.	Neg.	0.1	0.1	0.2	Neg.	0.2	Neg.	0.1	0.1
Household Industry	0.4	2.9	3.3	2.1	12.9	15.0	0.5	3.4	3.9
Non-household Industry	0.5	1.4	1.9	7.1	7.8	14.9	0.9	1.8	2.7
Construction	0.2	0.3	0.5	2.5	1.0	3.5	0.3	0.3	0.6
Trade	0.5	0.6	1.1	6.1	4.4	10.5	0.8	0.9	1.7
Transport etc.	0.2	Neg.	0.2	2.5	0.4	2.9	0.3	Neg.	0.3
Other Survey	0.4	0.7	1.1	5.3	6.5	11.8	0.6	1.1	1.7
All	14.8	85.2	100.0	36.8	63.2	100.0	16.0	84.0	100.0

Neg.—Negligible.

labourers. The combined share of the cultivators and the agricultural labourers is, however, less than 40 per cent; whereas the combined share of industry, both household and non-household type, claim about 30 per cent share as compared to a little more than 5 per cent in the rural areas. It may be mentioned that mining, livestock, forestry etc., transport, storage and communication and construction play an unimportant role in providing marginal work even in the urban areas. In the urban areas, the males claim larger share in non-household industry and trade but amongst the females, both cultivators and agricultural labourers claim higher share, followed closely by household industry.

Regarding the characteristics of the marginal workers, we have confined ourselves only to their age structure. In Table 6, we present the distribution of the marginal workers by age and sex.

TABLE 6—PER CENT DISTRIBUTION OF MARGINAL WORKERS BY AGE
AND SEX IN INDIA IN 1981

Age	Total Persons	Rural			Urban				
		Males	Females	Persons	Males	Females	Persons	Males	Females
0-14	11.0	19.4	9.4	11.3	21.3	9.6	5.0	5.7	4.6
15-19	14.2	20.6	13.0	14.1	21.0	12.9	16.6	17.9	15.8
20-59	69.9	52.1	73.3	69.8	50.1	73.2	72.2	66.7	75.5
60 +	4.9	7.9	4.3	4.8	7.6	4.3	6.2	9.7	4.1

It may be seen that about 16 per cent of the persons participating as marginal worker, did not belong to the working age groups; 11 per cent being children. The working age groups accounted for 72.7 per cent among the males and 86.3 per cent among the females. It may be observed that about 8 per cent of the male marginal workers were either below 20 years or aged above 60 years, whereas among the females these two groups accounted for only about 26 per cent of the female marginal workers. The share of the children (below 5 years) among male marginal workers is more than double the female marginal children.

The share of the male children in the Urban areas is just 5.7 per cent as compared to 21.3 per cent in the rural areas.

It may further be mentioned that the proportion of marginal workers among the females declines very slowly from 31.7 per cent for 0-14 age group to 27.1 per cent for 60 and above age as we move up the 5 year age groups. But in the case of the males, the proportion declines sharply from 6.9 per cent for 0-14 age group to 3.6 per cent for 15-19 age group, to 2.5 per cent for 20-24 age group, to 1.5 per cent for 25-59 age group, to 0.8 per cent for 55-59 age group and increases to 1.8 per cent for over 60 age group, indicating a sharply declining proportion as we move up the age ladder. In other words, the participation of males as marginal workers in higher working age groups is very small and increases again for the age group 60 and above.

This analysis leads us to conclude that as much as about 9 per cent of the workers were marginal workers in 1981 in India and the marginal work was mostly confined to females and in rural areas. The share of marginal workers was highest in Jammu & Kashmir and was significant in Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Orissa and Kerala. The females in the rural areas of the northern region, comprising Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan, participate in economic activity basically as marginal workers. The share of the female marginal workers was generally found to be higher in states where the participation of females in economic activity as main workers was low, The industry classes of 'cultivators' and 'agricultural labourers' provided marginal work to over 87 per cent of all marginal workers. The proportion of male marginal workers in the young age group of below 20 years and above 60 years was comparatively higher than the females.