



# Occupational Pattern of Tribal Women in Andhra Pradesh: Livelihood Diversification, Employment Structure and Emerging Opportunities

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## Abstract

Tribal women constitute an important component of the rural labour force in Andhra Pradesh and make a substantial contribution to household livelihoods through agriculture, agricultural labour, collection of minor forest produce, livestock rearing, horticulture, construction, household industries, petty trade and other informal activities. However, their occupational structure continues to be characterised by seasonality, low and irregular earnings, limited access to productive assets and inadequate opportunities for formal and skilled employment. The present paper examines the occupational pattern and livelihood diversification of tribal women in Andhra Pradesh, with particular reference to the Scheduled Areas of Srikakulam District. The study combines secondary information from the Census of India, Periodic Labour Force Survey and government publications with primary data collected from 360 tribal women workers selected from four villages of Meliaputti and Mandasa mandals of Srikakulam District. The study finds that farm-related activities constitute the principal occupation of 75.00 per cent of the sampled women, while non-farm and service-related activities account for 11.67 per cent and 13.33 per cent respectively. When principal and subsidiary occupations are considered together, the share of farm-related activities declines to 65.92 per cent, whereas non-farm activities rise to 21.36 per cent and service-related activities account for 12.71 per cent. The study further reveals a high degree of occupational

diversification: 83.99 per cent of the selected women participate in two or three occupational activities. Agricultural labour, minor forest produce collection and animal husbandry are particularly important components of the livelihood system. The findings indicate that occupational diversification is primarily a livelihood-security strategy rather than a complete transition away from agriculture.

**Keywords:** Tribal Women, Occupational Pattern, Scheduled Tribes, Agriculture, Agricultural Labour, Minor Forest Produce, Livelihood Diversification, Migration, Andhra Pradesh, Srikakulam.

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## 1. Introduction

Occupation is one of the most important determinants of the economic and social well-being of tribal households. In the tribal areas of Andhra Pradesh, livelihood systems are historically associated with agriculture, forests and natural resources. Tribal women participate extensively in cultivation, agricultural labour, collection of minor forest produce, livestock management, horticulture, household production and wage employment. Their contribution extends beyond income-generating work because they simultaneously perform household and community responsibilities.

The occupational structure of tribal women cannot be understood merely through the principal occupation reported by a worker. Agriculture in tribal areas is frequently seasonal and largely dependent on rainfall, while opportunities for regular non-farm employment are limited. Consequently, women often combine two or more occupations during the year. Collection of minor forest produce, livestock rearing, agricultural wage labour, construction work, petty trade and household industries frequently supplement the principal source of livelihood.

The Census of India provides detailed Scheduled Tribe-specific information on economic activity and occupational structure. The Census B-01 (ST) table distinguishes main workers, marginal workers and non-workers by age and sex, while the ST occupational tables classify tribal workers by industrial category, education, sex and residence. ([Census India](#)) The Census ST-06 table further provides occupational classification of Scheduled Tribe main and marginal workers other than cultivators and agricultural labourers. ([Census India](#))

Recent labour-market evidence also indicates the continuing importance of self-employment and casual work among rural women in Andhra Pradesh. According to PLFS 2025, 46.3 per

cent of rural female workers in Andhra Pradesh were self-employed, 9.8 per cent were in regular wage or salary employment and 43.9 per cent were casual labourers under usual status (ps+ss). These figures relate to rural women as a whole and are therefore not directly comparable with the ST-specific field survey, but they provide useful context for understanding the wider employment environment. ([MoSPI](#))

Against this background, the present paper examines the occupational structure of tribal women and the extent to which diversification has emerged as a livelihood strategy.

## 2. Review Perspective

The occupational structure of tribal communities has traditionally been influenced by access to land, forests, water resources and local markets. In tribal areas, women's economic participation is often high because household survival requires the contribution of multiple family members. However, high participation does not necessarily imply high income or secure employment.

The Census classification of Scheduled Tribe workers demonstrates the broad range of tribal employment, covering cultivation, agricultural labour, plantation, livestock, forestry, fishing, household industries and other service activities. ([Census India](#)) The Census also separately identifies marginal employment, which is particularly relevant to tribal women whose employment is often seasonal. ([Census India](#))

The contemporary tribal livelihood system is therefore characterised by a combination of traditional and emerging occupations. Agriculture continues to be the foundation, but increasing participation in non-farm activities, casual employment, small enterprises and service activities indicates gradual occupational diversification.

## 3. Objectives of the Study

The study has the following objectives:

1. To examine the occupational pattern of tribal women in Andhra Pradesh.
2. To analyse the importance of agriculture and allied activities in tribal women's employment.

3. To examine the role of agricultural wage labour and minor forest produce collection.
4. To assess the extent of occupational diversification among tribal women.
5. To examine the growth of non-farm and service-related occupations.
6. To identify differences in occupational patterns between relatively interior and better-connected tribal villages.
7. To identify major constraints affecting tribal women's occupational opportunities.
8. To suggest measures for improving sustainable employment and income among tribal women.

#### 4. Methodology

The study is based on both secondary and primary information.

For the state-level perspective, secondary information has been drawn from the Census of India, PLFS, Ministry of Tribal Affairs and relevant Government of Andhra Pradesh publications. Census 2011 remains the principal comprehensive official source for Scheduled Tribe-specific occupational classification because it provides detailed ST data by sex, age, residence and industrial category. ([Census India](#))

The primary component of the study covers **360 tribal women workers** selected from four villages in the Scheduled Areas of Srikakulam District. Two villages were selected from Meliaputti Mandal and two from Mandasa Mandal, with 90 women workers selected from each village. The primary survey was conducted during March 2024–June 2025 using a pre-designed and structured interview schedule. Information was collected regarding occupational activities, subsidiary employment, migration, working conditions, wages, income-generating activities and participation in government programmes.

The data were processed using percentages, averages and comparative analysis. The present paper concentrates specifically on occupational structure and livelihood diversification.

**Table.1. Sample Distribution of Tribal Women Workers**

| Sl. No. | Mandal       | Selected village | Women workers | Percentage    |
|---------|--------------|------------------|---------------|---------------|
| 1       | Meliaputti   | Gangarajapuram   | 90            | 25.00         |
|         |              | Karajada         | 90            | 25.00         |
| 2       | Mandasa      | Budarasingi      | 90            | 25.00         |
|         |              | Gowdururanti     | 90            | 25.00         |
|         | <b>Total</b> |                  | <b>360</b>    | <b>100.00</b> |

**Source:** Field Survey.

The four villages represent two somewhat different livelihood environments. The Meliaputti villages are relatively interior, whereas the Mandasa villages have comparatively better connectivity and greater proximity to roadside and plain areas. This distinction is useful in examining occupational diversification.

## 5. Women's Economic Participation in the Selected Households

The field survey indicates a substantial contribution of women to the household economy. Female members accounted for 51.61 per cent of the family members in the selected households. Among female family members, 77.76 per cent were part of the working population, compared with 64.80 per cent among male family members.

**Table.2. Distribution of Family Members of Selected Households by Sex**

| Category     | Adult      | Children   | Total        | Percentage    |
|--------------|------------|------------|--------------|---------------|
| Male         | 472        | 98         | 570          | 48.39         |
| Female       | 461        | 146        | 608          | 51.61         |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>933</b> | <b>244</b> | <b>1,178</b> | <b>100.00</b> |

**Source:** Primary Field Survey.

The relatively high proportion of female working members demonstrates that tribal women are economically active participants in the household economy. Their contribution is spread across agriculture, forest-based activities, livestock and non-agricultural employment.

### 5.1. Occupational Diversification among Tribal Women

Occupational diversification is one of the most significant findings of the study. The field evidence shows that tribal women rarely depend exclusively on one occupation. The seasonal nature of agriculture, limited local employment opportunities and the need to supplement household income encourage participation in multiple activities.

**Table.3. Occupational Spread of Selected Tribal Women Workers**

| Number of occupational activities       | Number of workers | Percentage    |
|-----------------------------------------|-------------------|---------------|
| Single occupation                       | 126               | 16.01         |
| Two occupations                         | 318               | 40.41         |
| Three occupations                       | 343               | 43.58         |
| <b>Total occupational participation</b> | <b>787</b>        | <b>100.00</b> |

**Source:** Primary Field Survey.

**Note:** The total represents occupational participation rather than unique workers because individual women may undertake more than one activity.

The table shows that only 16.01 per cent of the women were confined to a single occupational activity. About 40.41 per cent participated in two occupations and 43.58 per cent participated in three occupations. Thus, **83.99 per cent of occupational participation involved two or three activities.**

This is a significant indication of livelihood diversification. Multiple occupations enable women to compensate for the seasonal nature of particular activities. For example, agricultural work may be combined with forest-product collection, livestock rearing or non-farm wage employment.

## 5.2. Principal Occupational Structure

**Table.4. Occupational Activities as Principal Means of Livelihood**

| Occupational sector        | Gangarajapuram | Karajada  | Budarasingi | Gowdururanti |
|----------------------------|----------------|-----------|-------------|--------------|
| Farm-related activities    | 71             | 70        | 64          | 65           |
| Non-farm activities        | 5              | 11        | 14          | 12           |
| Service-related activities | 14             | 9         | 12          | 13           |
| <b>Total</b>               | <b>90</b>      | <b>90</b> | <b>90</b>   | <b>90</b>    |

**Source:** Primary Field Survey.

Farm-related activities are clearly dominant, accounting for 75.00 per cent of the selected women workers. Non-farm activities account for 11.67 per cent and service-related activities for 13.33 per cent.

A spatial difference is evident. Farm dependence is higher in the relatively interior Meliaputti villages. In contrast, Budarasingi and Gowdururanti, located in relatively better-connected areas of Mandasa, show greater participation in non-farm and service-related activities.

### 5.3. Farm-Related Occupational Activities

Agriculture remains the core of the tribal women's occupational structure. However, farm-related employment extends beyond cultivation to agricultural labour, minor forest produce collection, animal husbandry, fisheries and horticulture.

**Table.5. Principal Occupational Pattern of Tribal Women in Farm-Related Activities**

| <b>Farm-related activity</b>         | <b>Number of women</b> | <b>Percentage</b> |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------|-------------------|
| Cultivation                          | 28                     | 7.78              |
| Horticulture, plantation and orchard | 10                     | 2.78              |
| Fisheries                            | 22                     | 6.11              |
| Animal husbandry                     | 46                     | 12.78             |
| Minor forest products                | 67                     | 18.61             |
| Agricultural labour                  | 97                     | 26.94             |
| <b>Total</b>                         | <b>270</b>             | <b>75.00</b>      |

**Source:** Primary Field Survey.

Agricultural labour constitutes the largest individual farm-related category, accounting for 26.94 per cent of the total sample. Minor forest produce collection accounts for 18.61 per cent, followed by animal husbandry at 12.78 per cent.

The importance of agricultural labour reflects the limited capacity of many tribal households to generate adequate income exclusively from own cultivation. Tribal women participate in weeding, transplanting, harvesting, threshing and other labour-intensive operations. The field evidence indicates that agricultural work is seasonal and that women may obtain employment for fewer than 180 days in a year.

### 5.4. Minor Forest Produce and Tribal Women's Livelihoods

Minor forest produce remains an important component of tribal women's livelihood diversification. Women collect forest products and combine this activity with agriculture and wage employment.

The importance of minor forest produce is particularly visible in the interior villages. Women use forest-product collection as a supplementary livelihood source when agricultural employment is limited. This indicates that forests function not merely as environmental resources but also as livelihood-supporting assets.

At the policy level, this has important implications for value addition. Moving from the sale of raw forest produce towards processing, packaging, branding and collective marketing can substantially increase women's returns.

### 5.5. Principal and Subsidiary Occupational Structure

The occupational pattern changes considerably when subsidiary activities are included.

**Table.6. Occupational Activities Considering Both Principal and Subsidiary Employment**

| <b>Occupational sector</b> | <b>Meliaputti – Gangarajapuram</b> | <b>Meliaputti – Karajada</b> | <b>Mandasa – Budarasingi</b> | <b>Mandasa – Gowdururanti</b> |
|----------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Farm-related activities    | 126                                | 142                          | 114                          | 121                           |
| Non-farm activities        | 28                                 | 36                           | 49                           | 50                            |
| Service-related activities | 26                                 | 24                           | 19                           | 28                            |
| <b>Total</b>               | <b>180</b>                         | <b>202</b>                   | <b>182</b>                   | <b>199</b>                    |

**Source:** Primary Field Survey.

The combined analysis demonstrates the importance of diversification. The proportion associated with farm-related activities declines from 75.00 per cent as the principal occupation to 65.92 per cent when subsidiary occupations are included. At the same time, non-farm participation rises from 11.67 per cent to 21.36 per cent.

The difference is particularly marked in the Mandasa villages, where non-farm participation is relatively higher. Better road connectivity and proximity to semi-urban areas appear to provide women with additional employment opportunities.

### 5.6. Non-Farm Employment

Non-farm employment provides an important alternative to agriculture. However, it remains concentrated in low-skilled and informal activities.

**Table.7. Principal Non-Farm Occupational Activities**

| Non-farm activity                                         | Gangarajapuram | Karajada  | Budarasingi | Gowdururanti | Total                 |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|----------------|-----------|-------------|--------------|-----------------------|
| Wage workers in traditional crafts/small-scale industries | 2              | 1         | 5           | 5            | 13<br>(3.61)          |
| Artisan work and household industry                       | 1              | 2         | 2           | 2            | 7<br>(1.94)           |
| Construction wage workers                                 | 2              | 8         | 7           | 5            | 22<br>(6.11)          |
| <b>Total</b>                                              | <b>5</b>       | <b>11</b> | <b>14</b>   | <b>12</b>    | <b>42<br/>(11.67)</b> |

**Source:** Primary Field Survey.

Construction labour is the largest principal non-farm activity, accounting for 6.11 per cent of the total sample. Traditional crafts account for 3.61 per cent and household/artisan activities for 1.94 per cent.

The evidence indicates that non-farm activities provide opportunities for diversification but remain predominantly casual and low-paid. Women working in traditional crafts also face limitations relating to skill development, technology, institutional finance and market expansion.

### 5.7. Service-Related Activities

Service-related employment constitutes another emerging component of tribal women's livelihoods. These activities include petty trade, leaf-plate making, storage and communication work and miscellaneous services.

**Table.8. Subsidiary Service-Sector Occupational Activities**

| Service activity          | Number of women | Percentage of subsidiary participation |
|---------------------------|-----------------|----------------------------------------|
| Trade and business        | 37              | 4.85                                   |
| Leaf-plate making         | 36              | 4.72                                   |
| Storage and communication | 16              | 2.10                                   |
| Other services            | 47              | 6.16                                   |
| <b>Total</b>              | <b>136</b>      | <b>17.82</b>                           |

**Source:** Primary Field Survey.

The table demonstrates that other casual services constitute the largest component, followed by trade and business and leaf-plate making.

Leaf-plate making is particularly important during the agricultural slack period from January to May and is generally undertaken on a piece-rate basis. Thus, it functions mainly as a supplementary source of income rather than a stable principal occupation.

Similarly, storage and communication work is generally casual and piece-rated. Its irregular availability makes it an unreliable livelihood source.

### 5.8. Occupational Diversification and Location

The comparison between Meliaputti and Mandasa demonstrates the influence of geographical accessibility on occupational diversification.

**Table.9. Occupational Diversification by Selected Village**

| Village        | Farm-related (%) | Non-farm (%) | Service-related (%) | General occupational pattern        | Village        |
|----------------|------------------|--------------|---------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------|
| Gangarajapuram | 70.00            | 15.56        | 14.44               | Predominantly farm-based            | Gangarajapuram |
| Karajada       | 70.30            | 17.82        | 11.88               | Predominantly farm-based            | Karajada       |
| Budarasingi    | 62.64            | 26.92        | 10.44               | Greater non-farm participation      | Budarasingi    |
| Gowdururanti   | 60.80            | 25.13        | 14.07               | Greater diversification             | Gowdururanti   |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>65.92</b>     | <b>21.36</b> | <b>12.71</b>        | <b>Agriculture remains dominant</b> | <b>Total</b>   |

**Source:** Primary Field Survey.

The interior villages of Meliaputti demonstrate relatively greater dependence on farm-related activities. The Mandasa villages show greater participation in non-farm activities. This suggests that **connectivity, access to nearby markets and proximity to semi-urban centres are important determinants of occupational diversification.**

### 5.9. Broader Andhra Pradesh Employment Context

The field findings should be interpreted within the broader labour-market context of Andhra Pradesh.

**Table.10. Employment Status of Rural Female Workers in Andhra Pradesh**

| Employment status   | Percentage of rural female workers |
|---------------------|------------------------------------|
| Self-employed       | 46.3                               |
| Regular wage/salary | 9.8                                |

|               |              |
|---------------|--------------|
| Casual labour | 43.9         |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>100.0</b> |

**Source:** PLFS 2025, Government of India. (MoSPI)

The state-level PLFS data demonstrate the continuing significance of self-employment and casual labour among rural women. Nearly half of rural female workers are self-employed, while 43.9 per cent are casual labourers. Regular wage or salary employment accounts for only 9.8 per cent.

## **6. Major Constraints Affecting Tribal Women's Occupations**

The study identifies several structural constraints.

### **6.1. Seasonality of Employment**

Agricultural work is strongly seasonal. Women may experience periods of intensive employment followed by periods of unemployment or underemployment.

### **6.2. Small and Limited Productive Assets**

Limited access to cultivable land, irrigation, livestock and productive assets restricts the capacity of households to generate regular income.

### **6.3. Low Returns from Agricultural Labour**

Agricultural wage labour provides important employment but remains vulnerable to seasonal demand, low wages and limited bargaining power.

### **6.4. Limited Market Access**

Tribal producers frequently depend on intermediaries for the sale of agricultural and forest products. This reduces their bargaining power and limits returns.

### **6.5. Skill Deficiency**

Traditional skills remain important, but limited access to modern technical and entrepreneurial training restricts movement towards higher-productivity occupations.

### **6.6. Limited Institutional Finance**

Inadequate access to affordable credit constrains the development of livestock, small businesses, household industries and other enterprises.

### 6.7. Inadequate Social Security

Casual and informal workers remain vulnerable to employment interruption, illness, accidents and income shocks.

### 6.8. Occupational Health Risks

Several activities involve physically demanding work. Women involved in agricultural labour, carrying loads, construction and storage-related work may face considerable physical strain.

## 7. Conclusion

The occupational pattern of tribal women in Andhra Pradesh reflects a livelihood system in transition. Agriculture continues to form the foundation of employment, but tribal women rarely depend on agriculture alone. The field survey of 360 tribal women workers demonstrates that 75.00 per cent identify farm-related activities as their principal occupational sector. Agricultural labour is the largest individual activity within this sector, followed by minor forest produce collection and animal husbandry.

The most significant finding is the extent of occupational diversification. Only 16.01 per cent of the occupational participation is confined to a single activity, while 40.41 per cent involves two activities and 43.58 per cent involves three activities. Thus, multiple occupations are an integral part of the livelihood strategy of tribal women.

When principal and subsidiary activities are considered together, the dominance of agriculture declines from 75.00 per cent to 65.92 per cent, while non-farm participation rises to 21.36 per cent. This indicates that occupational diversification is taking place, although it remains closely connected with the agricultural economy.

The spatial comparison is also important. Women in the relatively interior villages of Meliaputti depend more heavily on farm-related activities, whereas women in the better-connected Mandasa villages have greater participation in non-farm and service-related employment. The finding suggests that physical connectivity and proximity to markets have an important influence on occupational diversification.

The occupational transformation of tribal women should therefore not be interpreted simply as a movement from agriculture to non-agricultural employment. Rather, it represents a process

of livelihood portfolio diversification, through which women combine agriculture, forest-based activities, livestock, casual labour, small trade and services to manage seasonal employment and household income risks.

The principal policy challenge is consequently to improve the quality and productivity of women's existing occupations while creating new opportunities for sustainable non-farm employment. Strengthening agricultural productivity, developing minor forest produce value chains, expanding livestock enterprises, improving women's access to credit and skills, promoting collective enterprises and strengthening market connectivity can contribute significantly to occupational and economic empowerment.

The evidence from the Scheduled Areas of Srikakulam provides a useful micro-level illustration of wider issues affecting tribal women in Andhra Pradesh. The future development strategy should recognise tribal women not merely as agricultural labourers or beneficiaries of welfare programmes but as workers, producers, entrepreneurs and economic decision-makers. Such an approach can transform occupational diversification from a coping mechanism into a pathway towards sustainable livelihoods and greater economic empowerment.

## 7. Policy Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following measures are suggested.

- Agricultural development programmes should focus on improving productivity rather than merely increasing labour participation. Irrigation, improved inputs, climate-resilient practices and extension services are particularly important.
- Minor forest produce should be developed as an organised women-centred livelihood activity. Collection centres, storage, processing, packaging and collective marketing can increase returns to women.
- Women's Self-Help Groups should be connected with productive enterprises. SHGs can be developed into producer groups for food processing, livestock products, handicrafts and forest products.
- Skill-development programmes should be linked with actual local and regional market demand. Training without market linkage is unlikely to create sustainable employment.
- Institutional credit should be made more accessible to tribal women entrepreneurs. Simplified procedures, group lending and enterprise-oriented credit can support occupational diversification.

- Local non-farm employment should be strengthened in tribal areas to reduce excessive dependence on seasonal migration.
- Government employment programmes should be better integrated with women's livelihood plans so that wage employment can function as a bridge towards more sustainable self-employment.
- Transportation, rural roads, digital connectivity and market infrastructure should be strengthened, particularly in interior tribal villages.
- Occupational safety and social-security coverage should be expanded for tribal women working in agriculture, construction, casual services and other informal activities.

Women's traditional knowledge and skills should be recognised as economic assets and integrated into modern value chains.

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### **Data Availability**

The raw data supporting the findings of this research paper will be made available by the authors upon a reasonable request.

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