

PARTICIPATION OF FARM WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE

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Farm women play a significant role in agricultural production. A number of studies revealed that development has had adverse consequences on women in third world countries with accelerated development, women's work load increased. Status of women's work decreases and poor rural women have increased difficulty in meeting the subsistence needs of their families, with the result, often plagued by malnutrition. The development process has actually made the day-to-day living of women a drudgery and misery by excluding them from access to modern agricultural techniques.

Women's work, especially in agriculture, has been made peripheral and women's multiple roles in the rural economy have been ignored in the androcentric environment of planning and policy making.

Women contribute directly to almost importance of the problem without being the direct beneficiaries of agricultural inputs, training or capital. Irrespective of agrarian structures, women's work is buried in the collectivity of a household or family. Women also perform more agricultural operations than men. In all the three crops, they work for more months in a year than men, and perform all operations except ploughing. During the agricultural season, the working day of the women is as long as fifteen hours including her house-hold work. Women's wages, however, are generally lower than men's wages and the operations done by men are done with practically no mechanical aids and are time-bound. The casualisation of female labour has been because of limited impact of overall growth in agriculture and the growing displacement of workers in the rural nonagricultural sector.

Women in agriculture in India

India has a national tradition bound to agriculture fertility. In the North, the Indus valley and Brahmaputra region are critical agricultural areas graced by the Ganges and monsoon season. Based on 2011, World Bank data, only 17.5% of India's gross domestic product (GDP) is accounted for by agricultural production. Yet for a majority of the country, an estimated 72% of the 1.1 billion people who live in rural India, it is a way of life. Agriculture in India defines familial tradition, social relations and gender roles. Female in the agricultural sector, whether through traditional means or industrial, for subsistence or as an agricultural laborer, represents a momentous demographic group. Agriculture is directly tied to issues such as economic independence, decision-making abilities, agency and access to education and health services.

Background on Indian agriculture

Based on 2012 data, India is home to the fourth largest agricultural sector in the world. India has an estimated 180 million hectares of farmland with 140 million of which are planted and continuously cultivated. Yet India's agricultural profile is shadowed by the controversial impacts of Green Revolution policies that were adopted in the 1960s and 70s with pressure from the United States Agency for International Development and the World Bank. The Green Revolution brought a modern approach to agriculture by incorporating irrigation systems, genetically modified seed variations, insecticide and pesticide usage, and numerous land reforms.

India's agricultural sector today still faces issues of efficiency due lack of mechanization with poorer conditions of farmers, as well as small farm sizes. In India traditional agriculture is still dominant as many farmers depend on livestock in crop production, for manure as fertilizers, and the use animal powered ploughs. According to 2011 statistics, the average farm in India is about 1.5 acres, when compared the average of 50 hectares in France and or 178 hectares in United States and 273 hectares in Canada. Furthermore, as small farmers face the increasing competition with larger farm operations an increasing number of men migrate to city centers for higher wages and employment. Women are in turn left to support the family structure and support small farm lifestyle. In 2011, the agricultural sector workforce in the subcontinent was 75% women.

Multi-Dimensional Role of Women:

- ❖ **Agricultural Activities:** Sowing, transplanting, weeding, irrigation, fertilizer application, plant protection, harvesting, winnowing, storing etc.
- ❖ **Domestic Activities:** Cooking, child rearing, water collection, fuel wood gathering, household maintenance etc.
- ❖ **Allied Activities:** Cattle management, fodder collection, milking etc. Mainly rural women are engaged in agricultural activities in three different ways depending on the socio-economic status of their family and regional factors. They are work as:
 - Paid Laborers.
 - Cultivator doing labor on their own land.

.Role of Women in Indian Agriculture

A statistical profile

In rural India, the percentage of women who depend on agriculture for their livelihood is as high as 84%. Women make up about 33% of cultivators and about 47% percent of agricultural laborers. These statistics do not account for work in livestock, fisheries and various other ancillary forms of food production in the country. In 2009, 94% of the female agricultural labor forces in crop cultivation were in cereal production, while 1.4% worked in vegetable production, and 3.72% were engaged in fruits, nuts, beverages, and spice crops.

Women's participation rate in the agricultural sectors is about 47% in tea plantations, 46.84% in cotton cultivation, 45.43% growing oil seeds and 39.13% in vegetable production. While these crops require labor-intensive work, the work is considered quite unskilled. Women also heavily participate in ancillary agricultural activities. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization, Indian women represented a share of 21% and 24% of all fishers and fish farmers, respectively.

Despite their dominance of the labor force women in India still face extreme disadvantage in terms of pay, land rights, and representation in local farmer's organizations. Furthermore their lack of empowerment often results in negative externalities such as lower education attainment for their children and poor familial health.

The woman is the backbone of agricultural workforce and is a vital part of Indian economy. Over the years, there is a gradual realization of the key role of women in agricultural development and their contribution in the field of agriculture, food security, horticulture, dairy, nutrition, sericulture, fisheries, and other allied sectors. Women form the backbone of agriculture, in India, comprising the majority of agricultural laborers; women have been putting in labor not only in terms of physical output but also in terms of quality and efficiency. With various targeted efforts, her enlightenment will change the face of rural India. Following are the key points, which will help in creating respectable role of women in Indian agriculture:

1. Skill empowerment.

a. By training in the area of various operations:

- i. Field operations ii. Conservation of biodiversity iii. Nutritional bio-security
- iv. Vocational training v. Organic farming

2. Technology development for women

- a. Designing of tools for various field operations b. Animal husbandry

- i. Artificial insemination. ii. Veterinary knowledge

C. For side income

- i. Mushroom cultivation ii. Floriculture

3. Creation of self help groups

- A. For financial support B. For generation of employment

4. Projection of contribution of women by collecting and analyzing data

- a. Collection and display of data b. Projection of successful women in agriculture
- c. Representation of their contribution in economic terms

5. Providing Financial Powers

- a. Giving representation in land holdings b. Accessibility to Bank loans

Women as Agricultural Labor

Women contribute about 3/4th of the labor required for agricultural operations. Their involvement in agricultural operations is besides their usual domestic work. Most of the contributions made by women to the farm sector also go unaccounted as they are not directly paid. The contribution of female labor in agricultural production is always more than the male labor in all types of landholding size. The jobs traditionally done by farm women in the order of importance are mainly the kitchen gardening, harvesting, seedling raising and transplanting. Table 1 shows the extent of female labor utilization in various field operations.

Women in Farming Operations

Several activities during crop production are taken up by women. They include presowing activities like seed treatment, leveling of land, cutting bushes, puddling, spreading of cow dung manure etc. and other functions like paddy transplantation, weeding, harvesting, threshing, post harvest activities etc.

Women in Sericulture

Sericulture is a small scale industry which is an important entrepreneur for rural families. The role of women as agricultural laborer in mulberry cultivation is important because mulberry garden requires labor from the beginning for pruning, weeding, application of farm yard manure, fertilizers and other jobs. The main work involves plucking of leaves for feeding the silkworms.

Women in Livestock

Livestock is the primary subsistent activity used to meet household food needs as well as supplement farm incomes. The majority of farms own some livestock. The pattern of livestock strength is mainly influenced by various factors such as farm size, cropping pattern, availability of range-lands including fodder and pasture. It is common practice in the rural areas to give an animal as part of a women's dowry. Studies have revealed rural women earn extra income from the sale of milk and animals. Mostly women are engaged in cleaning of animal, sheds, watering and milking the animals.

Women in Poultry

Poultry farming is one of the major sources of rural economy. The rate of women in poultry farming at household level is the central in poultry industry. Even though rural women are not using modern management techniques, such as vaccination and improved feed, but their poultry enterprise is impressive. Every year, income from poultry farming has been rising. In order to generate more and more income, rural women often sell all eggs and poultry meat and left nothing for personal use. Due to poverty and lack of required level of proteins most of women have got a very poor health. Most of women suffer from malnutrition.

Gender Differences in Roles and Activities:

Another issue is the problem-ridden conceptualization of women's and men's work in rural environments, in particular, the failure to recognize the importance of their differing roles. Analysis of the gender division of labor has revealed that women typically take on three types of roles in terms of the paid and unpaid labor they undertake. These three roles can be described as follows:-

- ❖ **The productive role:** this refers to market production and home/subsistence production undertaken by women which generates an income.
- ❖ **The reproductive role:** this refers to the child-bearing and child-rearing responsibilities borne by women (which are essential to the reproduction of the workforce).
- ❖ **The community management role:** this refers to activities undertaken by women to ensure the provision of resources at the community level, as an extension of their reproductive role.

An understanding of these three roles can inform gender-aware planning that takes into account the differential impact of programmes and projects on women and men because of women's triple role. When under-estimations and under-valuations of rural women's work are found, as they so often are, in the sphere of development planning, the consequences are serious. Failure to acknowledge the importance of women's multiple contributions to rural survival means that practical policy interventions are frequently detrimental both to women themselves and to their communities. Another factor that needs to be taken into account is that certain tasks, activities or enterprises may be regarded as male or female. For example,

women typically gather forest products for fuel, food for the family, fodder for livestock and medicinal uses. Men more often cut wood to sell or use as building materials. In order to secure sustainable and equitable management of forest resources, therefore, both women and men need to be consulted in the design and implementation of forestry projects. Similarly, where livestock is concerned, women and men often own different animal species and use different animal products, and any policies or programmes would need to address the needs of both.

Time allocation

In addition to rigorous agricultural work that is undervalued and underpaid, women are also responsible for the well-being of the household. They care for their children, provide nutrition or usually take part in subsistence agriculture, and do chores around the house. Based on time allocation studies, which pinpoint exactly how a woman's hours are spent throughout the week, Indian women spend about 25 hours in a week doing household chores and five hours in caring and community work. Besides the 30 hours of unpaid work, women spend the same amount of time as men carrying out agricultural work. Daughters typically supplement or substitute for mother's unpaid work around the household. Considered female tasks, the opportunity cost of girls' time for school is higher than that of sons. Girls do significantly more housework than boys, which compromises their schooling.

Gender discrimination runs deep at many levels: Women manage every aspect of farm work, but are not considered farmers. They toil in the fields—planting, sowing, weeding, and harvesting—but are not landowners. They harvest and process the produce, but men largely control the market and income. Women are also the primary seed keepers, conserving and managing an incredible variety of India's vital food crops. But industrial agricultural growth threatens to place these seeds in the hands of seed companies, including large multinational corporations that are motivated primarily by profit.

A study conducted on the status of women farmers in Uttar Pradesh shows that **only 6% of women own land**, less than 1% have participated in government training programs, 4% have access to institutional credit and only 8% have control over agricultural income.

Main Obstacles in Women Growth in Agriculture Sector:

- Few women holding of agricultural productive resources such as land, animals, and machinery.
- Women absence from decision making process, either inside or outside home.
- Women perform all un-mechanized agricultural tasks and perform multiple tasks, which add more burden to them.
- Women workers in agriculture suffer from high illiteracy rate among them and drop-out of schools.
- Women earn less wages, especially in joint, informal and private sector.
- Women do not know their legal rights.
- Miss applying some laws and regulations in favor of women such heritage legislation

The per capita income of the millions of agricultural workers is less than half a dollar per day.

These workers are deprived of basic human needs like health, food, education, clean water, and shelter. In addition, their women are frequently tortured by the landlords and their thugs. Farmers, particularly women, face a high degree of economic, legal, and institutional

uncertainties when investing in their land and other resources. Successful implementation of such programs stem from in the motivation and attitude of individual farmers and newly instituted government policies to providing incentives to farmers to manage their natural resources efficiently and in a sustainable way.

Chayal and Dhaka (2010) showed that cutting, picking, cleaning of grains, drying of grains, storage, processing, weeding, winnowing are the major farm operations mainly performed by farm women. Participation of farm women in agriculture was significantly affected by socio-economic variables like –age, family income, land holding

A paper on “Female labour force participation in Kerala: problems and prospects” Mazumdar and Guruswamy (2006) find that in Kerala, woman cultivators and agricultural labourers together account for only 22 percent of the female workforce in the main category in 2001, which has fallen dramatically from 42 percent in 1991. Agriculture is no longer the most significant channel of female employment in Kerala, at least from the employment point of view. In Kerala, female labour activity in agriculture is mainly confined to the cultivation of food crops mainly paddy. But area under paddy declined over time which results in decline in the female workforce in agriculture, particularly the hired female member

Kak (1994) identified those women participation rate in economic activity is a function of socio economic conditions interlinked with the stage of development. So in an economy differentiated along social and economic categories, no generalized features of female labour can be drawn up. Moreover he argues that education, skill formation relegate them to the lower rungs of the job market as unskilled casual workers

Butt *et al.* (2010) in their paper “Role of Rural Woman in Agricultural Development and their constraints”, highlighted the fact that rural women along with men play an important role in the agricultural sector like crop production, livestock production as well as cottage industry. But they have incomplete access to resources, agricultural extension, education services and newest technical knowledge and information sources

National Research Centre for Women in Agriculture (Nrcwa)

The National Research Centre for Women in Agriculture (NRCWA) has been functioning at Bhubaneshwar, Orissa, for developing methodologies, for identification of gender implications in farming systems approach and to develop women specific technologies under different production systems. There are 16 ongoing research projects in the areas of gender study on agriculture and household economy, management of coastal agro-eco system, extension methods for farm women, standardization of women specific field practices, occupational health hazards, reducing drudgery of women in agricultural operations, improvement of farming system suited to farm women, eco-friendly pest management technologies for vegetables among farm women, evaluation of interactive learning modules, technological needs in empowering women in rural aquaculture, and improvement in storage practices of seeds and grains.

Recommendations

For the recognition of women contribution in agriculture and its allied fields and reducing the gender issues, these are the following recommendations:-

- ✓ Recognition of labor work of working women in the rural economy may be accounted in monetary terms.

- ✓ More facilities should be provided to poor rural women for land, agricultural and livestock extension services.
- ✓ Priority must be given to women in accessing credit on soft terms from banks and other financial institutions for setting up their business, for buying properties, and for house building.
- ✓ Measures should be taken to enhance women's literacy rates. A separate education policy for women may serve the purpose.
- ✓ Women must be involved in decision-making bodies that have the potential to introduce structural changes. This action will bring some changes in the gender relations in the society.
- ✓ Women must be aware regarding their existing rights, access to judicial relief and redress, removing discrimination through legal reforms, and providing legal aid, assistance and counseling.

Finally it is concluded that the rural women are exploited by land lords for their personal good and enrichment. Women are treated as sub- servant or personal property. In this regard government must formulate policies to enhance their skills and their work should be counted in economic indicators.

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