

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH IN COMMERCE, ECONOMICS & MANAGEMENT

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ROLE OF WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE SECTOR IN INDIA

HARDEEP KAUR

ASST. PROFESSOR

DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMICS

SETH NAVRANG RAI LOHIA JAIRAM GIRLS COLLEGE

LOHAR MAJRA

ABSTRACT

India is a developing country. The main occupation is agriculture, because 70 percent of the population is involved in this occupation. Many women in developing countries are occupied in agriculture. Women play a significant and crucial role in agriculture development and allied fields. Women constituted 38% of the agricultural labour force in developing countries. It is also estimated that 45.3% of the agriculture labour consists of women. But a large number of women have remained as "invisible workers". Since there has been concern expressed regarding the gap between women's actual economic participation and public perception of it. Several researchers have attempted to overcome this invisibility. This study analyzed women participation in agriculture in India. In this paper tried to discuss the actual role of rural women in agricultural sector and examined the major constrained faced by the women.

KEYWORDS

women in agriculture sector, role of rural women.

INTRODUCTION

The advent of settled life happened with the beginning of agriculture, when people started cultivating food for their livelihood. Agriculture is the vertical backbone of the country. Major part of the country's population earns its livelihood from agriculture. The international development community has recognized that agriculture is an engine for growth of poverty reduction in countries where it is the main occupation of the poor. But the agriculture sector in many developing countries is underperforming, in part because women who represent a crucial resource in agriculture and the rural economy through their roles as farmers, laborers and entrepreneurs, almost everywhere face more severe constraints than men in access to productive resources. But the prosperity and growth of a nation depend on the status and development of its women as they not only constitute nearly half of its population, but also influenced the growth of the remaining half of the population.

Swami Nathan, the famous agricultural scientist describes that it was women who first domesticated crop plants and thereby initiated the art and science of farming, while men went out hunting in search of food, women started gathering seeds from the native flora and began cultivating those of interest from the point of view of food, feed, fodder, fiber and fuel. Women play a key role in the conservation of basic life support systems such as land, water, flora and fauna. They have protected the health of the soil through organic recycling and promoted crop security through the maintenance of varietal diversity and genetic resistance.

Women play a critical role in agriculture in the developing world accounting for about 70% of household food production in Africa, 45% in Latin America, 65 % in Asia, 48% in India. In Sudan women provide 30% of the labour for food production while in the Congo women provide 80% of the labor (Rojas, 2004 world bank 1996). The nature and extent of women's involvement in agriculture, no doubt, varies greatly from region to region. The crucial role of women in agriculture, allied occupations and household activities has however been underestimated and undervalued. In this backdrop, an attempt has been made to discuss the women participation in agriculture and suggestions for better utilization of women population in agricultural activities and developments.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objectives of the study are as follows:

- 1 To find out the role of women in agriculture and its allied fields.
- 2 To find out the main constraints faced by the women in agriculture sector.
- 3 To find out the various way and means to improve the role of women in the agriculture sector.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study is based on the secondary data. The data is collected from Census of India- 2001 and Statistical Report on profile of women for the year 2001. The entire population has been classified into three main categories i.e. Main, Marginal and Non – Workers. They are again further divide into Cultivators, Agricultural Laborers, Household Industry and Other workers depending on nature of their works. A person is considered as cultivator if he or she was engaged either as employer, single worker or family worker in cultivation of land owned or held from government or held from private persons or institutions for payment in money, kind or share of crop. Cultivation included supervision or direction of cultivation and a person who worked in another person's land for wages in cash, kind or share was regarded as an agricultural labourer. Such a person had no risk in cultivation but merely worked in another person's land for wages. An agricultural labourer had no right of lease or contract on land on which he worked.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Gupta et al. (1987) have revealed that the women's contribution was generally found more in two fields- household activities and in agricultural labour. It was an indirect contribution of economic activity in the society that has not been counted since time immemorial.

Roy (1992) found that the incidence of women agricultural labourer is not only very high in Bihar, but there are wide variations among the different districts in this regard. Although there is large divergence in the incidence of women labour even within the plains of Bihar, it is generally higher there than in the plateau region, which has substantial proportion of scheduled tribes.

Bastidas (1999) found that women's participation in agriculture was higher in female-headed households. In households where the couple had small children women's participation in agriculture was limited due to family obligations. Where the couple had no small children women preferred to engage in other activities where they could control their income. He also found that women with rural background are more likely to participate in agricultural activities than those with an urban background.

Padma (2004) in the article explored that the 9 sectors where 90% of Indian women work in agriculture, livestock, textiles and textile products, beverage and tobacco, food products, construction, petty retail trade, education and research and domestic services. The number of women working in agriculture in the years 1999-2000 was 7,91,30,000 which accounted for 64.3% of the workforce. Next come livestock, which accounted for 9% of the workforce. The domestic services sector employed 3.2%, retail trade 3.4%, textiles and textile products 2.8% and beverage and tobacco industry 3.0 % of the workforce in the same period.

Meer & Parhiar (2005) has investigated that rural women do all on farm/off farm works. Her day begins from pre-dawn with crushing. Their traditional role of housekeeping has been extended to collect firewood, fodder, and working on farms. Owing to social taboos, ignorance, financial constraints, inadequate education facilities, and non-availability of lady teachers in rural girls", schools have not opened the doors of literacy for them. Agriculture- dependent rural

people have struggled to improve their economic conditions. On the contrary, shortage of water, dry spell cycles, decrease in cultivable area due to soil deterioration, extension of towns and villages, contraction of infrastructure, rising cost of inputs, non-availability of high yield quality varieties seeds to small farmers, un-checked population growth, etc. have together adversely affected the lives of rural people.

Alam SM (2006) has mentioned that majority of women is self-employed and work in dangerous environments. Their daily tasks includes keeping and caring for the livestock at farms. They grow grains, cotton, fibers, fruit, and vegetables. The crop farmer plants, tills, fertilize, sprays, harvests, packs and stores the product. The livestock farmer feeds and cares for animals, while the horticulture farmers produce ornamental plants and nursery products.

Sikka et al. (2007) revealed that more than 8 working hours in a day are spent by women, covering all the buffalo rearing practices. Buffalo rearing covers more than 50 % of the working hours of women in comparison to 10% of the working time of their counterpart, the men.

Bala (2010) explained in his working paper regarding engagement and participation of women workers in almost all activities of agriculture but there is discrimination in wages even if they do same type of work as male labour. Further despite of their extensive and active involvement in agriculture of India, they are not considered for decision making in farm activities. Women participation in agriculture will be acknowledged when women farmer will actively participate to build and improve their knowledge and gain access to new and necessary information to make use of most of them in their farming activities. By linking the knowledge and information flow amongst women socio economic progress can be achieved.

Singh and Vinay (2012) discussed in their working paper about the significance of female labour in agriculture and allied activities. They further stated that the role of women in agriculture as female labour is not highlighted in India. Despite of their presence in activities sowing, transplanting and post-harvest operations they are considered as an invisible workers.

PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE AND ITS ALLIED ACTIVITIES

Women play a significant and crucial role in agriculture development and allied fields including crop production, livestock production, horticulture, post-harvest operations, agro/social forestry, fishing etc. Rural women perform numerous labour intensive jobs in agriculture field. They are directly attached with summer rainy and winter season agriculture system. Women work such as weeding, hoeing, grass cutting, picking, cotton sticks collection, separation of seeds from fiber. Women are also expected to collect wood from fields. This wood is being used as major fuel sources for cooking. Clean drinking water is another major problem in rural area. Like collection of wood, collecting water from remote areas is also the duty of women.

Livestock is the primary subsistent activity used to meet household food needs as well as supplement farm incomes. A rural woman is responsible for farm activities, keeping of livestock and its other associated activities like milking, milk processing and preparation of ghee are also carried out by the women. 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. Mostly women are engaged in cleaning of animals, sheds, watering and milking the animals. Rural women earn extra income from the sale of milk and animals, it is a common practice in the rural areas of a women's dowry. Rural women are also responsible for collection, preparing dung cakes an activity that also brings additional income to poor family. Except graying, all other livestock management activities are predominantly performed by females. Majority of women are involved in shed cleaning and collecting of farm yard manure. It is evident that the women are playing a dominant role in the livestock production and management activities.

Women play an important role in the poultry farming; 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. Every year, income from poultry farming has been rising. Even though rural women are not using modern management techniques, such as vaccination and improved feed, but their poultry enterprise is impressive. In order to generate more and more income, rural income 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 suffer from malnutrition.

Though rural women also help to produce the staple crops like rice, wheat and maize but her contribution is secondary in staple crop production; however in legumes and vegetables, her sale is instrumental. In the way, women play multi-dimensional role in life. Rural women are engaged in agricultural activities like sowing, transplanting, weeding irrigation, fertilizer application, plant protection, harvesting etc. Women engaged in domestic activities included cooking, child caring, water gathering, house hold maintains etc. Rural women also played an important role in allied activities like cattle management, fodder collection, milking etc. Rural women have very hectic life. Her work starts from dawn and ends at dusk. The daily routine work begins from house cleaning, fetching, drinking water, dusting, washing, laundry, preparing, and food for farming, care of children, tailoring and sewing clothes. She manages these activities very smartly. Even though rural women supply food production, yet her own food security is always at risk, Women farmers are frequently ignored in development strategies and policies. The study also noted that majority of the rural women are uneducated, unskilled and tradition bounded, therefore, their productive capacity are also low, and counted as unskilled labour.

TABLE - 1: STATISTICS ABOUT WOMEN IN INDIA

			Percentage to total women population
1	Total Women Population	494.83 million	
2	Total Women Workers	127.05 million	25.63
3	Total Women Main Workers	72.65 million	14.68
4	Total Women Marginal Workers	54.40 million	10.95
5	Total Women Owner Cultivators	41.30 million	8.34
6	Total Women Agriculture Wage Workers	50.09 million	10.12
7	Total Women Household Industry Workers	08.08 million	1.63
8	Total Women Other Workers	27.57 million	5.57

Source: Census 2001

TABLE 2 - SHARE OF FARM WOMEN IN AGRICULTURAL OPERATIONS

Activity	Involvement (Percentage)
Land preparation	32
Seed cleaning and sowing	80
Inter cultivation activities	86
Harvesting reaping, winnowing, drying, cleaning and storage	84

Source: Registrar General of India, New Delhi, 2001

TABLE 3: STATE-WISE TREND OF WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN AGRICULTURAL & NON – AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITIES

State	Total Female Workers	Percent of Female workers in Agriculture	Percent of Female workers in Non- Agricultural Activities
HIMACHAL PRADESH	630521	82.47	17.53
MANIPUR	229137	55.59	44.41
NAGALAND	279166	82.66	17.34
ANDHRA PRADESH	9585381	73.44	26.56
RAJASTHAN	4595570	81.07	18.93
MADHYA PRADESH	5046293	79.45	20.55
KARNATAKA	5467914	61.11	38.89
TAMIL NADU	7454473	59.3	40.7
MAHARASHTRA	10331758	74.53	25.47
GUJARAT	3544508	57.12	42.88
ORISSA	1584529	60.47	39.53
TRIPURA	170238	52.78	47.22
ASSAM	1265065	42.47	57.53
PUNJAB	1409704	24.51	75.49
BIHAR	3541857	83.56	16.44
WEST BENGAL	3528612	32.62	67.38
UTTAR PRADESH	4999389	65.87	34.13
KERALA	1776280	21.27	78.73

Source: Census 2001

Table 1 reveals that at an all India level the total women workers constituted 25.63% of the total female population. Among these 14.68 are main workers and 10.95% are marginal workers. Agriculture wage workers are 10.95% and owner cultivator are 8.34%. The household industry workers are 1.63% and other workers are 5.57%. A majority of the female population (74.34%) are non-worker.

Table 2 shows that the average time spends by farmwomen in household and agriculture activities. Women involved 32% in land preparation, 80% in seeds cleaning and sowing, 86% in inter cultivation and 84% in harvesting reaping, winnowing, drying, cleaning and storage. In this way, women spend five to nine hours per day on the farm in the peak season. Agriculture and allied activities almost take the equal time and energy at par with household activities.

Table 3 explain the scenario of female workers across Indian states and also visualizes the percentage of women involved in agriculture as primary occupation and the rest shows that percentage that generates their income from non-agriculture activities like household, industry services etc. Women majority generates their income through agriculture and agriculture activities. Exceptions where there like Punjab, Kerala and west Bengal where women were comparative involved in non-agriculture activities.

MAIN PROBLEMS FOR WOMEN GROWTH IN AGRICULTURAL SECTOR

1. TECHNOLOGY TRANSFER

Women's participation in agricultural is adversely affected by modern method of cultivation, which results in gradual displacement of women and sharing of their activities. Most of the agricultural development programs are planned even today by men for men. As and when technology developed they were focused towards male farmers and the development and enhancement of capability of farm women are rarely the consideration.

2. MORE WORK LESS PAY

Generally man can easily shift from one place to another place for better job opportunities and better income facilities and women cannot shift from their living place. So women receiving lower wages than men. The wages difference from men and women workers is a main constraint for the development of women. Women earn fewer wages, especially in joint, informal and private sector.

3. UNSKILLED AND ILLITERATE

Apart from 90 % of rural women are unskilled and 80% women are illiterate, which makes them vulnerable to exploitation. They have no proper knowledge about modern agriculture system.

4. OFF SEASON PROBLEM

During off season the women in agriculture have to struggle hard to find for alternative sources of income. The absence of alternative opportunities for employment in the rural sector is intensified by the decline of traditional handicrafts.

5. NON- AVAILABILITY OF LOANS

Financial institutions are hesitant to extend credit for agricultural activities taken up by women as they lack security. At the same time women are unaware of the exacting credit facilities, physically unable to reach the banks, unfamiliar with policies and cumbersome procedures.

6. IGNORANCE OF LEGAL RIGHTS OF WOMEN

7. LOW LEVEL OF NUTRITION AND FREQUENT PREGNANCIES MAKE WOMEN PRONE TO POOR HEALTH AND THUS LIMITING THEIR PRODUCTION

SUGGESTIONS AND STRATEGIES FOR BETTER PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE

The following suggestions and strategic plans may help in better participation women in agriculture.

1. First of all recognize women's role as farmers and producers of crops and livestock; as users of technology; as active agent in marketing; processing and storage of food and as agricultural laborer. Secondly assess the needs of women farmers and provide support services such as input support, technological support and extension support.
2. Women's programs must recognize the balance, which exists in the workloads and working condition of men and women. Many programs design for women neglect the already heavy burden of the work they carry.
3. Government should launch specific training skills courses and educational programs for rural women keeping in view their problems and also should be broadcast through television radio and group meeting at the access area.
4. To enhance women's literacy rates and to improve the levels of female education ratio, other urgent measures required. A separate policy for women may serve the purpose.
5. 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.
6. Agricultural education institutions and training centers should develop regular curricula and provide technical training in agriculture and allied sectors to help women farmer take up a vacation in agriculture and allied sector. Also, training in increased managerial organization entrepreneurial and decision making skill.
7. 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.
8. 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

9. The important requirement for effective integration of rural farm women into the stream of development is to build their access to resource-base, such as land and other movable properties.

CONCLUSION

Women in agriculture have vast potential, intelligence and ability, which if trapped properly, may enable them to join the mainstream of agriculture development. The source of exploitation and disabilities of these women are rooted in their ignorance, helplessness, landlessness, lack of education and inequality of status. It is, therefore, necessary to equip women with required information, knowledge and skills to enable them to do their work efficiently and become equal partners in agricultural production. Appropriate structural, functional and institutional measures need to be proposed to empower women and build their capacities and improve their access to inputs proper technology exclusively designs for women will increase their participation and crop production. According to Jawaharlal Nehru, "Once she is on the move, the household moves, the village moves and the country moves and through the women her children are brought into the picture and given the opportunity of higher life and better training. Thus, we give the opportunity of the women of today we build the India of tomorrow".

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