

THE ROLE OF WOMEN: IN INDIAN AGRICULTURE SECTOR

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Abstract:

“India is developing country. The main occupation is agriculture, because 70 per cent of the population is involved in this occupation. This paper examines the ways in which greater integration through agriculture impact women. This paper finds that agriculture creates many jobs for women in agriculture sector. Jobs that bring many household resources under women control leads to greater earnings in the family. Although, women are more than ever finally employed, differences in wages earned by women and men persist in India. Due to these reasons and women’s lower education level compel the women have a greater tendency to remain in subsistence agriculture. The impact of liberalization and globalization on women is important not only because they represent almost half of the total population, but also because they face constraints, which make them less beneficial from the liberalization. Once different impacts are ascertained well designed policy responses may aid women in taking advantage of greater openness to agriculture.”

Keywords: Developing, country, occupation, agriculture, women, globalization.

Introduction:

Swaminathan, the famous agricultural scientist describes that it was woman 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 have played and continue to 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. That women play a significant and crucial role in agricultural development and allied fields including in the main crop production, livestock production, horticulture, post harvest operations, agro/ social forestry, fisheries, etc. Studies on women in agriculture conducted in India and other developing and under developed countries all point to the conclusion that women contribute far more too agricultural production than has generally been acknowledged. Recognition of their crucial role in agriculture should not obscure the fact that farm women continue to be concerned with their primary functions as wives, mothers and homemakers. Despite their importance to agricultural production, women face severe handicaps. They are in fact, the largest group of landless labourers with little real security in case of break-up of the family owing to death or divorce; inheritance laws and customs discriminate against them land reform and settlement programmes usually give sole title and hence the security needed for obtaining production credits to the husband. It may not be out of place to mention here that considering their dual responsibilities within and outside the home, it would be in the fitness of things that more and more in

the village training is organized for rural farm women to suit their convenience with due realization that institutional training is important in its own place.

Significance:

Rural Indian women are extensively involved in agricultural activities. However the nature and extent of their involvement differs with the variations in agro production systems. The mode of female participation in agricultural production varies with the landowning status of farm households. Their roles range from managers to landless labourers. In over all farm production, women's average contribution is estimated at 55% to 66% of the total labour with percentages, much higher in certain regions. In the Indian Himalayas a pair of bullocks works 1064 hours, a man 1212 hours and a woman 3485 hours in a year on a once hectare farm.

Research Question and Methodology:

1. To find out the role of women in agriculture and its allied fields.
2. To find out main obstacles in women growth in agriculture sector.
4. To find out the various ways and means to reduce gender differences and to improve the role of women in the agriculture sector.

The entire research work has been done for the successful answering of the above mentioned research question. The whole paper is based on descriptive arguments, statistical data, case studies, comparative study and analytical logic developed through the understandings from various research papers, reports, books, journals, newspapers and online data bases.

The Role of Women in Agriculture and its Allied Fields:

Rural women performs numerous labor intensive jobs such as weeding, hoeing, grass cutting, picking, cotton stick collections, separation of seeds from fiber. Women are also expected to collect wood from fields. This wood is being used as a major fuel source for cooking. Because of the increasing population pressure, over grazing and desertification, women face difficulties in searching of fire wood. Like collection of wood, fetching water from remote areas is also the duty of women. Because 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. 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. Rural women are also responsible for collection, preparing dung cakes an activity that also brings additional income to poor families. It is evident that the women are playing a dominant role in the livestock production and management activities. Poultry farming is one of the major sources of rural economy. 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. The study also noted that majority of the rural women are uneducated, unskilled and tradition-bounded, therefore their productive capacities are also low, and counted as unskilled labor. 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, dish washing, laundry, preparing food for family, care of children, tailoring and sewing clothes. She manages these activities very smartly. Women farmers are frequently ignored in development strategies and policies. Women's are even more constrained because of cultural, traditional and sociological factors.

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 fewer 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.

1. Gender Discriminations: 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 labour has revealed that women typically take on three types of roles in terms of the paid and unpaid labour they undertake. These three roles can be described as follows:-

- a) The productive role:* this refers to market production and home/subsistence production undertaken by women which generates an income.
- b) The reproductive role:* this refers to the child-bearing and child-rearing responsibilities borne by women.
- c) 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.

2. 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.

3. More Work, Less Pay:

The estimates for changes in the last 5-7 years show declines in employment ranging from 20 per cent to as much as 77 per cent. Employment in agriculture is thus available for fewer days per year. It is therefore becoming essential for men to migrate in search of better-paid work. Women are filling this vacuum. Women are forced to accept work in agriculture in their own village under very bad conditions because they cannot migrate as easily as men. The farmer is faced with the increasing costs of production required for modern agriculture. He finds that he can squeeze his labour costs by using lower-paid women workers.

4. Increased Trafficking of Women.

One of the little known consequences of globalization and liberalization will be an increase in the trafficking of women. As the number of girls decline, the atrocities like rape, molestation, sexual harassment, kidnapping will increase manifold. Girls will be afraid to leave their homes. Women will be shackled at home. According to recent indications, India might soon be competing with Bangkok for the undesirable epithet of sex capital of the world.

5. Impact of Liberalization on Agricultural Women Workers. There is apprehension that economic liberalization, which tends to induce privatization and market-led technological change, may affect employment and income prospects of rural women adversely. The impact of economic liberalization on agricultural workers and women may be summarized as follows:

1. The volatility of international prices of agricultural commodities has affected agricultural workers in India adversely. The exports of agricultural commodities have fallen. Simultaneously, there have been increased imports of edible oils and raw cotton which have depressed the domestic prices of these commodities.
2. It is apprehended that the process of economic liberalization will ultimately result in a situation in which multinational companies will dominate the agricultural scene in India and small farmers may lose their grips over agriculture, posing a risk of livelihood insecurity for millions of agricultural workers and rural women.
3. In the wake of WTO, not only agricultural exports have declined, but also rate of growth of agricultural output and employment. Consequently, both cultivating households as well as landless particularly women labourers have suffered a loss of income.
4. In the wake of economic liberalization, cultivators as well as agricultural labourers look depressed because of deterioration in their income levels as well as uncertain future. Also the gap between agricultural and nonagricultural workers is widening.
5. There is a secular worsening of the condition of agricultural labourers due to increase actualization of labour force and inability of the organized farm and non-farm sectors to absorb the growing labour force.
6. In the plantation sector too, the decline in the export earnings from tea, coffee and rubber and low domestic prices have affected both income and employment of women. Particularly, smaller plantations find it difficult to maintain the levels of employment and wages of the labourers.
7. Erosion of Women's Control on Seed and Biodiversity; Seeds are the first link in the food chain. For five thousand years, peasants have produced their own seeds, selecting, storing and replanting and letting nature take its course in the food chain. The feminine principle has been conserved through the conservation of seeds by women in their work in food and grain storage. With the preservation of genetic diversity and the self renewability of food crops has been associated the control by women and Third World peasants on germ plasma, the source of all plant wealth.
8. Women have acted as custodians of the common genetic heritage through the shortage and preservation of grain. In a study, it was found that seed selection is primarily a female responsibility. In 60.4 percent of the cases, women alone decided what type of seed to use, while men decided in only 20.7 percent. As to who actually performs the task of seed selection in cases where the family decides to use their own seeds, this work is done by women alone in 81.2 percent of the households, by both sexes in eight percent and by men alone in only 10.8 percent of the households. Throughout India, even in years of scarcity, grain for seed was conserved in every household, so that the cycle of food production was not interrupted by loss of seed. The peasant women of India have carefully maintained the genetic base of food production over thousands of years. This commonwealth, which had evolved over millennia, was defined as primitive cultivars. By the masculinity view of seeds, which saw its own new products as advanced varieties?

6. Malnutrition

As an estimate between 40 to 50% of urban women and between 50 to 70 % of rural women suffer from anemia. A significant section of men and women continue to be at least 5 to 8 kg less than the desirable weight. Mean intake of 2100 calories by women suggests that 50% of the population is subsisting on deficit diet which is less than 2100 calories. Chronic low level of energy intake and increase in the work demand obviously effects women's health and nutritional status negatively.

Conclusions and Suggestions:

Rural women are the major contributors in agriculture and its allied fields. Her work ranges from crop production, livestock production to cottage industry. From household and family maintenance activities, to transporting water, fuel and fodder. Despite such a huge involvement, her role and dignity has yet not been recognized. Women's status is low by all social, economic, and political indicators. Women's wage work is considered a threat to the male ego and women's engagement in multiple home-based economic activities leads to under remuneration for their work. Women spend long hours fetching water, doing laundry, preparing food, and carrying out agricultural duties. Not only are these tasks physically hard and demanding, they also rob girls of the opportunity to study. The nature and sphere of women's productivity in the labor market is largely determined by socio-cultural and economic factors. Women do not enter the labor market on equal terms when compared to men. Their occupational choices are also limited due to social and cultural constraints, gender bias in the labor market, and lack of supportive facilities such as child care, transport, and accommodation in the formal sector of the labor market. Women's labor power is considered inferior because of employer's predetermined notion of women's primary role as homemakers. As a result of discrimination against female labor, women are concentrated in the secondary sector of labor market. Their work is low paid, low status, casual, and lacks potential upward mobility. The majority of women in the urban sector work in low-paying jobs. For the recognition of women contribution in agriculture and its allied fields and reducing the gender issues, these are the following recommendations:-

- a) Recognition of labor work of working women in the rural economy may be accounted in monetary terms.
- b) More facilities should be provided to poor rural women for land, agricultural and livestock extension services.
- c) 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.
- d) Measures should be taken to enhance women's literacy rates. A separate education policy for women may serve the purpose.
- e) 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.
- f) 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.

g) 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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