



# An Analysis of Women's Work Participation with particular emphasis on their role in Agriculture: Indian Context

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**Abstract:** Women represent almost half of the total world population, but their participation as the workforce is not up to their population proportion. Even in many of the developed world, they have the balance of work participation far below than male. The main reason behind their low ratio as a workforce is their poor socio-economic conditions as well the high gender discrimination they face in the households and society. Due to their backwardness and poverty, they have a high share of work participation in primary activities, especially in agriculture. India being an agricultural country employs the largest proportion of men and women in this sector. The analysis of the study reveals that female has a high ratio of work participation in agriculture than male. A considerable share (73 per cent) of the female workforce toils in the agricultural sector, mostly (96 per cent) in rural areas. Regardless of their dominance in the labour force, women in India are still marginalized and face an extreme disadvantage in terms of wages, land rights and their representation in local farmer's organizations. The study stressed the need for addressing gender-based problems and issues effectively and efficiently by the government to tackle the challenges faced by women in agriculture. The study suggested for check and balance of existing programme and policies for better implementation and output.

## 1. Introduction:

India is predominately an agricultural economy. India despite having recorded fast mode of development still 70 per cent of its population in the rural background, of which, 60 per cent households are engaged in agriculture for their primary source of income. Agriculture is regarded as an engine of growth and poverty reduction in developing countries where it is the main occupation of the poor (Slathia Nishi, 2014). The involvement of women in agriculture varies widely among different regions, ecological sub-zones, farming system, caste, class and stages in

the family cycle—generally, the more impoverished the family, the greater the involvement of women in agricultural activities.

Despite women's significant and crucial role in agricultural development and allied fields, they have virtually no access to agricultural information, services or production assets and have minimal control over their earnings. The farm sector has been the largest employer of women. Majority of the female workforce (84 per cent) works in rural India. A considerable share (73 per cent) of this female workforce toils in the agricultural sector, mostly (96 per cent) in rural areas. In most farming systems, females participate in all phases of agricultural production. However, their roles (including decision-making) and control over resources and incomes vary significantly from place to place (Swamikannan & Jeyalakshmi, 2015).

The agricultural sector employs not only four-fifth of all economically active women in the country and nearly half of India's self-employed farmers are women. There are 75 million women engaged in dairying as against 15 million men and 20 million in animal husbandry as compared to 1.5 million men. Despite being ample suppliers of labour, women also possess detailed knowledge of agriculture, ways to use plant and plant products for food production, medicine and animal feed. Agricultural activities including selection, cultivation, preparation, the harvest of food crops and breeding are predominantly being done by women today. Regardless of their dominance in the labour force, women in India are still marginalized and face an extreme disadvantage in terms of wages, land rights and their representation in local farmer's organizations. Apart from this, women also face many challenges due to limited access to productive resources in agricultural production which prevent them in enhancing their productivity. Despite the significant productive women labour force in agriculture, their needs and problems are ignored by the rural development initiatives (Varsha, 2018).

## 2. Literature Review:

The literature about the women's role in agriculture has been chosen to find out the various kinds of the role played by women in agriculture and the problem faced by them in this sector.

**E. Krishna Rao (2006)** examined the role of women in agriculture. His study shows that women face discrimination in the land, labour and wage market. Although they are doing the work more or less equal to men in agriculture, they are not paid similar to man, and they are under the various kind of discrimination in society.

**Basavaraj and V Suresh (2018)** highlighted the fact that women are farmers, workers and entrepreneurs. Still, almost in each sector, they face more severe constraints than men in accessing productive resources, markets and services. This "gender gap" hinders their productivity and reduces their contributions to the agriculture sector and the achievement of broader economic and social development goals.

**Swamikannan & Jeyalakshmi (2015)** evaluated that the agriculture sector employs 4/5th of all economically active women in the country. The study found that 48% of India's self-employed farmers are women. Dependence of women on agricultural wage labour as a source of income has also increased in the regions with the destruction of many household-based industries employing mainly women.

**Slathia, N. (2015)** examined the participation of women in agricultural production. The study reveals that women farmers do not have equal access to productive resources, and this significantly limits their potential in enhancing productivity. The contribution of women in agriculture is exceptionally significant. The study also throws light on the obstacles faced by them in terms of less access to productive resources which is not recognized her work as an active, productive member.

**3. Objectives of the study:** The followings are the primary objectives proposed for the present study.

1. To examine the trends of distribution of women workers in India.
2. To assess the participation of women labour in agriculture.
3. To find out the significant challenges faced by women in agriculture.

#### 4. Database and methodology:

The present study is based entirely upon the secondary sources of the data collected from the books, journals, government reports, websites and NSSO data. To show the trends and patterns of female work participation and the proportion of female in agriculture, the study uses different years of data. The study uses a simple percentage method for the calculation of the data. The tables and graphs have been used for the interpretation of the data.

#### 5. Result and Discussions:

##### 5.1: Female Work Participation Scenario:

Women share almost half of the world's population. Women's participation in farming contributes more than a quarter of the world's population. They comprise, on an average, 43 per cent of the agricultural workforce in developing countries, ranging from 20 per cent in Latin America to 50 per cent in Eastern Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. Yet they are not getting their due share in terms of accessibility and utilization of resources in the world, right from the agricultural field to skilled labour force.

**Table 1 Female Work Participation in India 1961-2011**

S. No.	Census Year	Female Work Participation (%)
1.	1961	27.9
2.	1971	14.2
3.	1981	19.7
4.	1991	22.7
5.	2001	25.7
6.	2011	25.5

Source: Government of India, Census Reports

It has been estimated that if the female had enjoyed the equal access to productive resources as men, women could have boosted yield by 20-30 per cent; raising the overall agricultural output in developing countries by 2.5 to 4.0 per cent. This gain in production could have resulted in the lessening of the number of hungry people in the world approximately by 12-17 per cent, besides increasing women's income (FAO, 2011).

Table 1 represents the female work participation in India 1961-2011. From the above table, it can be seen that female in India has a deficient proportion of work participation as compared to men. Female has registered the maximum ratio of work participation in 1961, i.e. only 27.9 per cent. In contrast, the male work participation has recorded more than 50 per cent of the work participation rate in every census years. The careful examination of table 1 reveals that in fact, the work participation of women has shown a decreasing trend over the years from 27.9 per cent in 1961 to 25.5 per cent in 2011. This decreasing trend of work participation of women could be the result of high population growth, lack of job opportunity, prevalent gender discrimination and the shrinking of land holdings size over the years. It was in 1971 that the female recorded the lowest rate of work participation.

## 5.2: Distribution of Women Workers in India:

Women in India represents almost half of the population. Although women have been actively participating in various economic activities but still in every census year, more than 70 per cent of their population is engaged in primary activities, mainly in agriculture (Table 2).

**Table: 2 Categories of Women Workers in India (1951-2011)**

S. No.	Year	Cultivators	Agricultural Labourers	Industry and Services
1.	1951	45.3	31.3	23.3
2.	1961	55.7	23.9	20.4
3.	1971	29.6	50.5	19.9
4.	1981	33.2	46.2	20.6
5.	1991	34.5	43.6	21.9
6.	2001	36.5	43.5	20.0
7.	2011	34.6	41.1	24.3

Source: Government of India, Census Reports

Table 2 indicates the proportion of women workers into different categories. One clear picture from table 2 is that women constitute a significant workforce in the agriculture sector in India. Despite facing a lot of difficulty and discrimination in households and society, and they have continued to contribute a vital share in agriculture. As a cultivator, they had the maximum share in 1961, and since then there is a decreasing observed in the cultivator category. The main reason behind the decrease in the cultivators' category may be due to the discrimination they face in land ownership. Agricultural labourer category is the now having the largest share of the female workforce which shows that they are compelled to do work in other's agricultural field for the sake of getting some meagre income to fulfil their essential needs. Industry and Services sectors record the least share of the female workforce;

their contribution in these sectors have been witnessing a slow change over the years. The main reason behind their low percentage in these sectors is the poor socio-economic conditions of women and the discrimination they face in enjoying the access to resources.

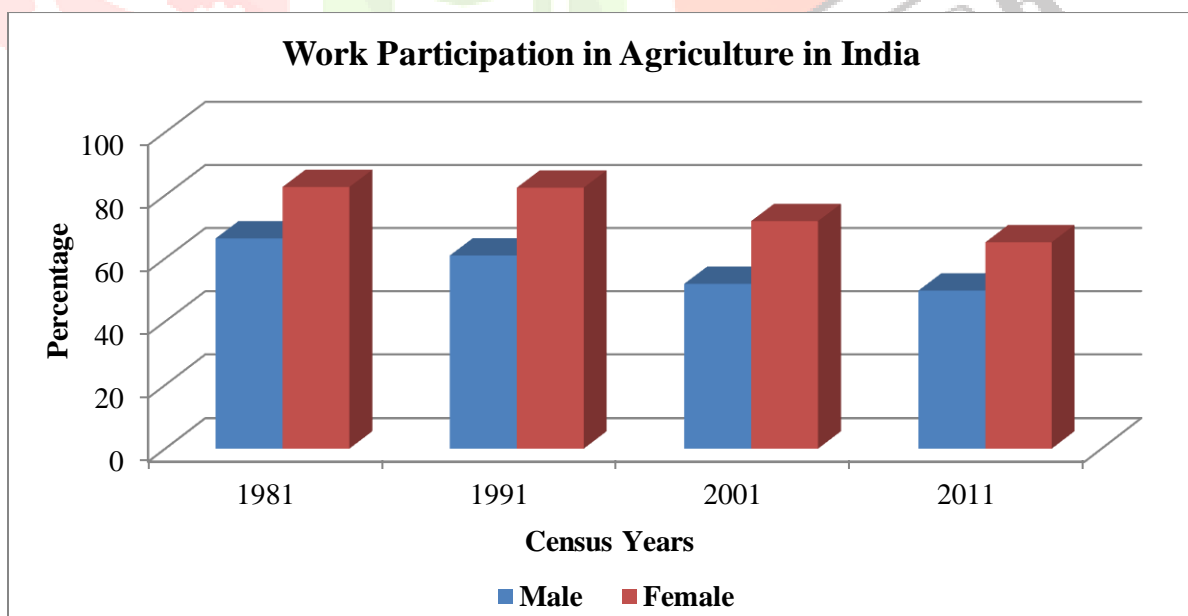
### 5.3: Women's Work Participation in Agriculture in Comparison to Male

All over the world female have a significant role in agriculture, ensuring food security and households chores. Despite that, they are the worst suffers when there is any crisis. They constitute a considerable share of the population in food insecurity, undernourishment, illiteracy etc. They are highly discriminated in the consumption of food, access to resources, technology, and services. Due to this fact, they are compelled to work as cultivators and agricultural labourers to earn money to contribute to the family economically. In many cases, they run their families by getting income from these sources.

**Table 3: Work Participation in Agriculture**

Census Year	Participation in Agriculture (%)	
	Male	Female
1981	66.3	82.6
1991	60.9	82.4
2001	51.9	71.8
2011	49.8	65.1

Source: Government of India, Census Reports



**Fig: 1**

Table 3 and Fig 1 represent the rate of work participation of male and female in different census years in India. It becomes quite clear that females have exceeded the males in work participation in agriculture in every census year. The main reason behind this is that females besides doing households works also work in their fields as

cultivators or as an agricultural labourer in other's field. In contrast, the male members of their households prefer to work in industries and other activities. Although the females have also shown some decreasing trends in the proportion of work participation in agriculture, still it is much higher than the male. It has been observed in various households that females are compelled to do agricultural work mainly because of their low socio-economic conditions which make them unfit to get multiple skilled and unskilled jobs.

## **6. Major Challenges Faced by Women in Agriculture Sector:**

1. It has been witnessed in most parts of the world that women have inequality in land ownership. This limits their livelihood options and hampers their productivity, and ultimately they suffer in socio-economic parameters.
2. Women in households are the worst sufferers in food and nutrition security, especially in times of any crisis. They are discriminated in the consumption of nutritious food items and lower households; they are either the last eater in the households, or they eat whatever leftover by the male counterparts in the family. This makes them weak and vulnerable to different nutritional deficiency diseases, and ultimately they underperform in agriculture.
3. Women besides doing households works also perform all un-mechanized agricultural tasks and perform multiple functions which add more burdens to them due to lack of equipment and appropriate technology.
4. Women farmers in agricultural sector lack in qualitative education that makes them vulnerable to the poor decision making, low-income generation, and discrimination in access to resources.
5. Women face inequality in the distribution of wages, especially in unorganized and private sectors.
6. Low mobility and poor socio-economic conditions of women result in a lack of market intelligence and inadequate information which give them low output from field and income from the market.

In the light of above-discussed challenges, it can be said that unless the socio-economic situation of the women does not improve they will continue to suffer in agriculture and other sectors and they will be in the vicious circle of poverty which will create impediments in their ways of progress. The different kind of discrimination they face in households and society has a significant bearing on their performance in agriculture. Thus, as a result of this production and productivity in agriculture are significantly reduced. Therefore, the government must address gender-based problems and issues effectively and efficiently. The existing programme and policies need to be checked and balanced for better implementation and output.



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