

Role of Indian Women in Agriculture

Dr.Triveni Dutt*

**Reader, Deptt of Ex.Extension, A.S.College, Lakhaoti, Bulandshahr.*

Abstract

India is a developing and agriculture country. Agriculture is considered as the backbone of the Indian rural economy and is a family enterprise. It is an important engine of growth and poverty reduction. Women in India are the backbone of the society and important resource in agriculture and rural economy. About 63% of all economically active men are engaged in agriculture as compared to 78% of women. Traditionally, women have always played an important role in agriculture- as farmers, co-farmers, wage labours and managers of farms. They have conventionally been producers of food from seed to kitchen. Women produce between 60 to 80 percent of the food in most developing countries and are responsible for half of the world's food production; therefore, women's role in food production ensures the survival of millions of people in all regions. Women must be aware of regarding their existing rights, access to judicial relief and redress, removing discrimination through legal reforms, and providing legal aid, assistance and counseling.

Key Words: Women, Agriculture, Discrimination, Production, Backbone.

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The women are the backbone of agricultural workforce but worldwide her hard work has mostly been unpaid. She does the most tedious and back-breaking tasks in agriculture, animal husbandry and homes. The research efforts at the ICAR institutes have been tried to relieve her of the drudgery by providing time and labour saving tools. Vocational trainings are also being conducted, to impart skills to undertake different avocations. In extension activities the women is now the centre point and activities are being planned keeping her in view. Her enlightenment will change the face of rural India

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 labour not only in terms of physical output but also in terms of quality and efficiency.

Women play a significant role in agriculture, the world over. About 70% of the agricultural workers, 80% of food producers, and 10% of those who process basic foodstuffs are women and they also undertake 60 to 90% of the rural marketing; thus making up more than two-third of the workforce in agricultural production (FAO, 1985).

In West Africa, up to 80% of the labour force in all trade is female. Yet, the role of women in these activities, so important economically, has remained obscure for long because women seldom played any major roles in political activities or decision making processes. Despite the fact that women produce much of the food in the developing world, they also remain more malnourished than most men are. In many rural societies, women eat less food than men do, especially when the food is scarce, such as just before the harvest, or when the workload increases without a corresponding increase in the food intake.

In India, in over all farm production, women's average contribution is estimated at 55% to 66% ...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, a figure that illustrates women's significant contribution to agricultural production.

Women make essential contributions to the agricultural and rural economies in all developing countries. Their roles vary considerably between and within regions and are changing rapidly in many parts of the world, where economic and social forces are transforming the agricultural sector. Rural women often manage complex households and pursue multiple livelihood strategies. Their activities typically include

producing agricultural crops, tending animals, processing and preparing food, working for wages in agricultural or other rural enterprises, collecting fuel and water, engaging in trade and marketing, caring for family members and maintaining their homes. Many of these activities are not defined as “economically active employment” in national accounts but they are essential to the wellbeing of rural households.

Agriculture is an engine for growth where it is a main occupation of the people. Economic security of India heavily depends on agriculture because 58.2 percent population directly or indirectly employed in the agricultural sector. Women in India are the backbone of the society and important human resources in the economy. They make fruitful economic contribution in the agriculture and rural economy. Indian rural women are extensively involvement in agricultural activities. However, the nature and extent of their insolvent differs with the variations in agro-production system. The female participation in agricultural activities varies with the land-owning status of farm households. Broadly, their contribution to social- economic development has two fold in the home and outside the home.

Labor is one of the most important factors of production. Labour contributes to the production process through its productivity and by activating the other factors of production. The size of labour force in a country is determined by the number of people in the age group of 15-59 as generally children below 15 years and old people above 59 do not participate in the production process (Bill Grami). Agriculture is that enterprise where a large proportion of female agricultural workers is directly engaged and plays a very significant role.

Participation of Women in Agriculture

Women in India are major producers of food in terms of value, volume and number of hours worked. In rural India, the percentage of women who depend on agriculture is as high as 70%. In 2009, 94% of the female labor worked in cereal production, while 1.4% worked in vegetable production and 3.72% were engaged in fruits and spice crops. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization, Indian women represented a share of 21% and 24% of all fishers and fish farmers respectively. Women in India are major producers of food in terms of value, volume and number of hours worked. In rural India, the percentage of women who depend on agriculture is as high as 70%. In 2009, 94% of the female labor worked in cereal production, while 1.4% worked in vegetable production and 3.72% were engaged in fruits and spice crops. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization, Indian women represented a share of 21% and 24% of aThey share responsibility with men for the care of animals, and particular species and types of activity are more

associated with women than men. For example, women often have a prominent role in managing poultry and dairy animals and in caring for other animals that are housed and fed within the home. When tasks are divided, men are more likely to be involved in constructing housing and herding of grazing animals, and in marketing of products if women's mobility is constrained. The influence of women is strong in the use of eggs, milk and poultry meat for home consumption and the income from these products. ll fishers and fish farmers respectively.

Mostly women are engaged in cleaning of animals, sheds, watering and milking the animals. She has very hectic life. She rises before dawn and ends at dusk and walks miles to collect water, if there is to be found. They are also responsible for collection, preparing dunk cakes, an activity that also brings additional income to their families. She works all day in a field, sometimes with a baby on her back. If she is lucky, droughts, blight or pests don't destroy her crops and she raises enough to feed her family and may be has left over to sell. But in some rural areas, there is no road to the nearest market. In spite of this, her work is considered as 'unproductive'. Moreover, her work is not counted in many economies "as economically active employment." In harvesting season, utilization of women labour is maximum, carrying bundle of harvested crop to the stop where threshing would be done is a heavy task which is performed mostly by women. They are involved in activities like winnowing, weeding, grading, threshing and cleaning of field farm operations. The physical strain of female farmers in agricultural activities seems to be high because of heavy work tasks. Various activities done by women in agriculture and allied field such as manually handling loads/material, threshing, transplanting, land preparation, cleaning of animals sheds, feeding the animals and disposal of cow dung.

Challenges Faced By Women In Agriculture

Women farmers in agricultural sector suffer from high illiteracy rate among them. They do not know their legal rights. They often have low productivity due to an inability to invest in things such as improved seeds and soil replenishment. They hardly enjoy land ownership rights directly in their names. Limited rights or access to arable land further limits livelihood options and exacerbates financial strain on women, especially in women- headed households. Without access to capital or household decision making abilities women lack the resources that are for their labor stability and stability of their household. Women earn fewer wages, especially in joint, informal and private sector. Women have unequal land rights.

Initiatives to promote women towards empowerment

At the initial stage of the project, the prescriptive approach was used which

dealt with exploring information for providing a package of instruction regarding what rural women should do to endure health security, food security, economic security and livelihood security. Gradually the project thrust shifted towards integrated and participatory approaches for working with rural women in they're own context. For this, the nutrition component laid emphasis on nutritional security for human health in agrarian ecosystem. The component focused attention on documenting uncommon foods for its wider acceptability by determining nutritional quality of identified food sources, development of recipes and nutrition guide. The nutrition guide is user - friendly computer software for knowledge empowerment of nutrition educators and its subsequent transfer at grass root level.

The nutrition component has also strived to identify micro-nutrient deficiencies with the aim to suggest diet modifications and establish nutrition gardens as approaches to health and nutrition security. The Human Development component which initially focused attention on data generation for developing growth norms of rural children is now empowering rural mothers for optimal development of children through interventions on scientific child care practices. The establishments of farm creche for comprehensive child care facilities in supplementary feeding and development of child through creative play materials. The training of creche workers through training materials on child care practices empowers them to be efficient caretakers. The ergonomic management of drudgery undertaken by Family Resource Management component aims at introducing women- friendly drudgery reducing technologies related to farm, home and allied activities. The ergonomic cost is being calculated for respective tool/ technology as a measure for suggesting improvements in tool/ technology that will promote health empowerment. The clothing and textile component since its inception has focussed attention on economic feasibility of use of locally available agro and animal based fibres and exploration of indigenous dyes textile product preparation. A large wealth of natural dyes has been explored for use on wool and silk and the interventions have been conducted to empower rural women and weavers with knowledge and skill. The economic empowerment is also being assured by transferring technologies of natural dyes to rural women for preparing textile handicrafts.

Conclusion

The ranges of women work from crop production, livestock production to cottage industry. From household and family maintenance activities, to transporting water, fuel and fodder. Women spend long hours fetching water, doing laundry, preparing food, and carrying out agricultural duties. The nature and sphere of women's productivity in the labor market is largely determined by sociocultural 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 and lack of supportive facilities such as transport, and accommodation in the formal sector of the 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 lowpaying jobs. agriculture is central to economic growth where women can learn the best way to grow and cultivate their own nutritious food and sell at markets. So closing the gender gap in agriculture is imperative if we want to grow productivity and ensures food security. 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.

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