

Women Participation and Contribution in Indian Agriculture

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SUMMARY

Agriculture is the main largest production endeavor in our country, contributing 25 per cent of GDP, is positively becoming a female activity. In India Agriculture sector employs about 70 to 80 per cent of all economically active women. About 48 per cent of India's self-employed farmers are women. Women are the backbone of our rural society. According to Census of India, 1991, about 75 percent of the Indian female populations are from rural families, who belonged to the small and marginal farmers and landless agricultural labourers. According to UN Report, globally women constitute half of the world's population and produce half of the agricultural products.

INTRODUCTION

Rural women play a vital and crucial role not only in agricultural production i.e crop production but also allied activities such as horticulture, livestock poor-harvest operation, tending animals, agro-forestry, fisheries etc. Most of the work that women do, such as collecting fuel, fodder and water, growing vegetables and keeping poultry for domestic consumption. An estimated 52-75% of Indian women engaged in agriculture are illiterate, an education barrier that prevents women from participating in more skilled labor force. In all activities there is an average gender wage disparity, with women earning only 70 percent of men's wage. Many women participate in agricultural activities are unpaid subsistence labor.

Women Contribution in Agriculture

In rural India, the percentage of women who depend on agriculture is as high as 70 per cent. In 2009, 94 per cent of the female labor worked in cereal production, 1.4 per cent worked in vegetable production and 3.72 per cent were engaged in fruits and spice crops. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization, Indian women revealed a share of 21 per cent and 24 per cent of all fishers and fish farmers respectively. Rural women engaged in agriculture from 78 per cent of all women in regular work. They are a third of all workers on the land. The traditional gender division of labour ensures that these women get on average 30 per cent lower wages than men. Women's participation rate in the agricultural sectors is about 47 per cent in tea plantations, 46.84 per cent in cotton cultivation, 45.43 per cent growing oil seeds and 39.13 per cent in vegetable production.

According to FAO, in developing countries women provide 70 per cent of agricultural labour, 60-80 per cent labour for household food production, 100 per cent labour for processing the basic food stuffs, 80 per cent for food storage and 90 per cent for water and fuel wood collection for households. 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's livelihood strategies, and their support and means of ensuring food security are diverged and complex, from cultivating field crops to livestock rearing, home gardening, gathering etc.

During the 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. Each bundle is carried as a head load by women, mostly bare footed, walking over the sharp shrubs of the harvested fields. Men rarely participated in this task. About two-thirds of poor livestock keepers are women. 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. In livestock production, mostly women are engaged in cleaning of animals, sheds, watering and milking the animals.

Main challenges faced by female workers in Indian agriculture

- Women have unequal land rights. They hardly enjoy land ownership rights directly in their names.
- Women have limited access to use of productive resources.

- Women perform dual responsibility of family and farm to perform multiple tasks which add more burden to them.
- Women have little control over decision making process. Without access to capital or household decision making abilities women lack the resources that are for their labor stability and stability of their household.
- Gender stereotypes related to family property rights.
- Poor women farmers are less able to purchase technology to adapt to climate change due to lack of access to credit and agricultural services and lack of equipment and appropriate technologies.
- Women farmers have low productivity due to an inability to invest in things such as improved seeds and soil replenishment.
- Women farmers in agricultural sector suffer from high illiteracy rate among them. They do not know their legal rights.
- Women earn fewer wages, especially in joint, informal and private sector.
- Lack of market intelligence and inadequate information put women farmers under unfavourable situation with weak bargaining power with the buyers.

Table 1: Female Work Participation, Rural Female Work Participation and Distribution of Female Workers in Agriculture in India 1961-2001

Census Year	Indian Female Work participation (in %)	Rural Female Work Participation (in %)	Total Female ('000s)	Cultivators ('000s)	Agricultural Labourers ('000s)
1961	27.90	31.40	212467	33103 (55.70)	14171 (23.90)
1971	14.20	15.50	263900	9266 (29.60)	15794 (50.50)
1981	19.70	23.20	321357	14932 (33.20)	20768 (46.20)
1991	22.70	26.70	402813	22871 (34.50)	28833 (43.60)
2001	25.70	23.10	495738	41299 (41.51)	50093 (50.35)

Source: Government of India, Census Report

In the Table 1, Column II shows that the female work participation rate in India has drastically declined from 27.90 per cent in 1961 to 25.70 per cent in 2001. That means that the female workers are moved from agricultural activities to non-agricultural activities. The Table 1 also indicates that 23.9 per cent of women are working as agricultural labourers and 55.70 per cent are cultivators in 1961. The number of agricultural labourers is increased to 50.50 per cent in the year 2001. The number of cultivators is decreased to 29.60 per cent in the year 1971 and then it is increased to 41.51 per cent in the year 2001.

CONCLUSION

It was found that majority of women is self-employed and work in adverse environmental conditions. They are involved in activities like winnowing, weeding, grading, threshing and cleaning of field farm operations. The physical stress of female farmers in agricultural activities seems to be high because of heavy workloads. Various activities done by women in agriculture and allied field such as manually handling material, threshing, transplanting, land preparation, cleaning of animals sheds, feeding the animals and disposal of cow dung. These activities have ill effects on women health. Most of women have got a poor health due to poverty and lack of required level of nutrient that is calorie, protein and fat intake. One of the major problems of female workers is the wage differences between male and female workers which discourage the female workers to involve in agriculture. As a result of it, the female workers are moved from agricultural activities to non-agricultural activities.

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