



Status of Rural Women in Agriculture Sector

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Abstract:

India is considered as developing country in the world and Indian economy is known as the fastest growing economy at present. Almost 70 percent of the total population depends upon agricultural sector for their livelihood in India. So the agricultural sector works as spine for Indian economy. Not only men but several women also get employment in agriculture. In Asia, almost 60 to 80 percent women get employment in agriculture in developing countries. Among the economically active population, the percentage of women employee in agriculture is more than that of men. Women play multi-dimensional role in their lives. They take care for their children, household works, livestock, etc. They work hard to generate income and fulfill their needs. In gender biased society, they play visible role, but remain invisible. So their contribution in the development process is not considered. Women are facing many problems at their work place, which become a major hindrance in their path of success, especially in rural areas.

Being illiterate, they suffer a lot. They are not paid or less paid compared to men. They can do limited work in agriculture sector, due to some social and cultural beliefs. In present paper, an attempt is done to empower them, to spread awareness among them for their rights and education, especially in rural areas.

Keywords: Gender, Agriculture, Discrimination, Empowerment

1. Introduction

Indian economy is known as agricultural economy as more than 50 percent of its population depend on agriculture sector for their livelihood. Here, both men and women play vital role. In Asia, almost 60-80 percent women get employment in agriculture in developing countries. Among the economically active population, the percentage of women work force in agriculture is more than that of men.

In India, agricultural sector is known as unorganized sector, where a number of rural women get employment. Though women contributed a lot in the development process, they are constantly underestimated. In rural areas, women play a dual role. They are taking care of their home and children and along with it they are toiling in a number of farm activities. According to 2001 census, in India, 43.6 percent of women are working as agricultural laborers and 34.5 percent are working as cultivators (census of India 2001). Whereas, if we talk about Gujarat during that period, almost 58.03 lacks cultivators were there. Among them, about 32.7 percent were women. And if we talk about agricultural laborers, 51.4 percent were women, which show the supremacy of women in agriculture sector. Though women play a vital role in agriculture, they have been discriminated, not given much importance in the development process.

If we talk about farmers, generally man dominant society is perceived. This clearly indicates even though women worked a lot, they are not getting much importance in the gender bias society. In such society

women face many problems to upgrade themselves in the field of technology services etc. which may enhance their capacity to work.

2. Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of the study are described below:

- To find out the role of women in agriculture and its allied sectors.
- To find out hurdles which stop women growth in agriculture sector.
- To analyze the gender discrimination in agriculture sector.
- Try to reduce gender discrimination and give importance to women in agriculture sector.
- To introduce various policies to uplift women's status in main stream.
- To frame various plans and apply them for women's bright future.

3. Methodology

The present paper is based on secondary sources of data available from magazines, newspapers, research articles, journals, various websites, reports etc.

4. Literature Review

- Meer and Parhiar in their article "understanding Poverty in Rural Sindh" (2005), stated that women play multi dimensional role in their lives. They wake up very early in the morning and work till late night. During the whole day they do all their household works like collecting firewood, foddering, cooking, working on fields, taking care of their children and families etc. They lived in pity condition as they did not access financial services, they were restricted for getting education in gender as society. Though they worked hard on farms, they did not get any importance. Condition of rural poor people was worst as they struggled a lot for changing their financial conditions.
- Zar Quresh in his research article on "Role of Rural Women" (2005) opined that men and women both play equal role in agriculture sector. So to educate women in agriculture is required. Due to education they can have good command over agricultural and related activities.
- Brohi Sikandar in his paper on "NDP Irrigation Reforms Lack Gender Equality" (2005) found that though women played a drastic role, they are not getting respect or much importance in the society.
- Alam SM in his research paper on "Production Hazards, Marketing Risks" (2006) stated that among the women population, most of women are working women and they are not working in safe environment. In their routine they keep and care for the livestock at fields. They feed and take care after them. Not only that but they worked for growing grains, fruits, vegetables, flowers, cotton etc. Most of these agriculture workers are very poor. They cannot even manage their basic needs like health, education, food, pure and clean drinking water, shelter etc. Women farmers have to face many problems while investing in land.

5. Women in Agriculture and its Allied Fields

Indian economy is known as agriculture economy. Most of people in India depend on agriculture and its allied fields for their livelihood. In many rural areas women take responsibilities of their families as rural men migrate in urban areas for income. In Latin America, 17% of rural households are headed by women, whereas in sub-Saharan Africa, 31%. Almost in all countries female headed households are found. Such families mostly belong from low income strata of the society.

In rural areas women directly depend on agriculture and allied fields to satisfy their basic needs like food, water, fuel etc. Since 1961 proportion of women workers in agriculture and allied activities has been growing. According to the 68th NSS Round, in 2011-12, in the agriculture sector 59% workforce belong from male and 75% from female which shows that the role of female workers in the agriculture activities is increased.

Table:1 Percentage of cultivators and agricultural laborers to total workers by sex

Indian Census	Proportion of Total Female Workers	Proportion of Total Male Workers
1991	80.9	62.9
2001	87.6	72.4
2011	81.3	68.3

Source: Indian Census and Registrar General and Census Commissioner

Rural women execute various jobs at fields like hoeing, weeding, cutting, picking, separating, collecting etc. They are also responsible for some farm activities such as keeping livestock, milking, milk processing, taking care for animals etc.

Agriculture activities are highly connected with livestock. Through it many household needs can be fulfilled and income can be generated. In many rural areas, animals are given as a part of dowry. So most rural women at fields remain busy with taking care of animals and related activities. The concept of poultry farming is also having much importance now a day. Rate of female workforce is also growing now in poultry farming. Some women workforce remain busy in horticultural activities and fisheries.

Table: 2 Average number of principal livestock/poultry owned per 1000 households by category of operational holdings, 2012-13

Livestock/Poultry	Landless	Marginal	Small	Semi-medium	Medium	Large
Bovine (Cattle + Buffalo)	1586	1518	2575	3278	4409	7453
Sheep & Goat	527	815	909	992	3627	2271
Pig	0	47	92	69	26	15
Poultry	2357	2166	3397	2979	1878	570

Source: NSS KI (70/18.1): Key indicators of land and livestock holdings in India, December 2014

According to the 70th round of NSSO, almost 1% to 1.8% of land is used for livestock farming over kharif and rabi season. The largest areas were used for dairy farming. As shown in the above table, the large land holders give their choice for bovine livestock. While the small landholders give their preference for poultry farming.

The poorest women farmers can rely on livestock for their income and food. They can keep some goats, sheep, hens, or pigs as productive and profitable resources. Poverty can be eradicated through rearing of livestock.

Table: 3 Distribution of persons performing particular activity

Activity	Female	Male
Kitchen, gardening-backyard cultivation	52	48
Milking tasks and processing of milk, collecting and storing of poultry products	57	43
Making dung cakes	96	4
Fetching of water	86	14
Collection of edible goods (fruits, berries, mushrooms, vegetables etc.)	91	9
Collection of minor forest products, leaves, bamboos etc.	72	28
Collection of fuel, fuel wood etc.	81	19
Collection of raw material for crafts	78	22
Collection of fodder	53	47

Source: Report of the Time Use Survey, Central Statistical Organization, 2000.

Note: Figures based on the number of persons in the sample performing a particular activity

In the above table, various agriculture related activities are mentioned. The pilot survey was conducted in four rounds between July 1998 and June 1999. The sample size was 18,600 households. The survey was done in 52 districts across six states. According to this survey, it has been found that if women's non-market economic activities are considered then the Indian GDP would be increased by 11%. These four rounds were conducted in different seasons and in Gujarat, Haryana, Meghalaya, Orissa, Tamil Nadu and Madhya Pradesh.

6. Visible Role, Invisible Women (Vital Role but no Significance)

Though women played vital role in the agriculture activities, they are not having much importance. Their role become invisible in gender biased society. So their contribution in the development process is not considered. Women's activities in the agriculture field are limited i.e. up to the production of crops. Work done by women farmers has been underestimated in the development process. They are considered as the most disadvantaged group of the society. Works done by them are mostly unpaid, so they are overlooked.

7. Roles played by women

Women played multi-dimensional role in their lives. So in India it is said, "Yatra Naryanstu Pujayante, Ramante Tatra Devta".

- Women at agriculture: Women do various agricultural activities at fields like sowing, weeding, harvesting, cutting, plant protection etc.
- Women as housewives: Many domestic activities are done by women. As housewives, they perform numerous activities like cooking, cleaning, child rearing, fetching water, washing clothes, collecting fuel wood, taking care for each and every person at home etc.
- Women at allied sector: Being a part of agricultural activities, they do various allied activities like milking, milk processing, rearing of cattle, collecting fodder, making dung cakes etc.
- Rural women remain busy in agricultural activities mainly in three ways. Activities done by them depend upon their socio-economic conditions and the area in which they dwell. They worked as paid laborers, doing work on their own farm, perform duty as a manager at the time of production.

8. Issues of Women in Agricultural and Allied Activities

- Though women perform the most important role in the agriculture and allied fields, they never got significance for their role. Not only that but they are always being discriminated and underestimated in development process. Specifically contribution of rural women remains invisible in data collection by various departments. There are some aspects where issues arise for them.
- Women do not have enough access to resources and services. Because of some social, cultural and other factors their access become very less.
- A very few women occupied their own land.
- Due to national legislation and customary law, they are not having rights to share land property.
- Women have very less access to credit.
- As very few women are members of cooperatives, they become unable to purchase even subsidized agricultural inputs.
- Women farmers or agricultural workers, being illiterate, suffer a lot.
- As being uneducated, women workers are paid less and they are not aware for their rights.
- Mostly women are excluded from decision making process which may depress their skills.
- Women do not have access to the advantages of research and innovations.
- Market information does not reach women farmers rapidly.
- Contribution of women workers is not considered.
- Women workers having more work load of farm, house and social.
- Women labors do not have access for training and information.
- Women workers are suffering from malnutrition.

9. Empowerment of Women

To make women's contribution considerable and significant, they must be empowered. Women empowerment is the only way by which they can get power and their own identity in various field of their lives. Government of India has realized that without contribution of women the goal of development cannot be achieved. So he has launched various schemes to empower women, as they play a very significant role in the developmental process.

The National Policy of Education (1996) has considered various parameters to empower women. They are:

- To develop self confidence
- Do not underestimate herself
- To make progressive and develop thinking
- To make powerful in decision making process
- Removing gender bias vision from the society

Rural women can be empowered mainly by empowering them educationally, socially, economically and technologically. Through education, they can get new knowledge and come to know about various techniques. Social development is basic requirement for the development of country. Through women empowerment, goal of social development can be achieved. Economically empowered women can contribute for development process. Through micro-credit programs, access to limited resources etc. women can be empowered economically in the era of innovations. Women should be technologically empowered to walk parallel with men.

10. Measures for Empowering Women and Rural Development

As women play a key role in development of a country, some plans should be made and implemented in a proper way to empower them. As women constitute almost 50 percent of the total population in the world, their contribution can increase national income of a country. Through following measures women can be empowered:

- By finding out various sources for women to generate income.
- By disposing training programs to develop entrepreneurship among them.
- For involving maximum women, interior areas should be covered.
- Through education women can come to know about their ability and capacity of work in various spheres.
- Educated women can easily be familiar with plans or schemes announced for them.
- They can have will to support their family by their financial independence.
- To support women plans for micro credit should be effectively implemented.
- For women's employment and problems, special unit can be established.
- Infrastructure should be developed to develop rural areas.
- Mahila mandals, SHGs, micro-finance, women's associations etc. should be established and developed.
- To encourage women for participation, government should announce some concessions, subsidies etc. in women related sectors.

11. Conclusion

Women is the base of any household. She plays multi dimensional role in her life. Not only that but she also plays a role of transmitter as she passes cultural and social values to the next generations. She performs visible role, but she remains invisible producer at agriculture and allied sectors. She is never given a credit for any contribution, especially in rural areas. Though rural women worked hard in agriculture and its allied sectors, they are not given any importance. To improve the condition of agriculture sector, it becomes necessary to give equal importance to women.

Even in developed countries women are getting less remuneration than men. In gender biased society, women are paid less for the same work done by men. Their status is very low in the society. She does different works at different places like she does house hold works, crop production, livestock rearing, gathering fuel, fetching water, rearing children etc. for early morning till late night. Ultimately no one can play these much roles in a day as she performs.

12.Recommendations

To give importance to the women and reduce gender discrimination from the some recommendations are given below:

- Work done by women should be considered in monetary terms in rural areas.
- Facilities should be given to the rural women for owning land, rearing livestock etc.
- To encourage women concessions, subsidies etc. should be given for women related labor in agriculture and allied fields.
- Financial institutions should facilitate credit on easy terms and conditions.

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