

ROLE AND STATUS OF WOMEN IN INDIAN AGRICULTURE

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The agricultural scenario of our country is very dynamic due to varied agro-ecological conditions, which enables the production of various agricultural and horticultural crops with the involvement of wide group of growers. The country leads in production of milk, food crops like millets, spices, jute and is second largest producer of fruits and vegetable crops in the world. Though India is no longer an "agricultural economy", 70% of its rural households still depend primarily on agriculture for their livelihood. The magnitude of female workforce is enormous, around 63 % of all female workers, and 75 % of rural female workers are in Agriculture (NSSO 68th Round 2011-12).

Women make remarkable contribution in agricultural activities, starting from planting material production, transplanting, care and maintenance of crop to post-harvest processing & value chain. In allied activities such as tending of animals, bee keeping, mushroom cultivation and poultry farming, their contribution is immense. Their involvement is more significant in all monotonous, time consuming and tiresome activities like transplanting, weeding, rouging, watering, collecting, harvesting, sorting, wrapping, packing and processing. However, the contribution of women farmers is always unspoken, their input often ignored and the quantum of their output is non-quantified and undervalued. The nature of their work is always considered non-skillful as a result they receive lower wage rate than the male co-workers. Since the inception of agriculture, all the field activities were done manually, in which female and male had an equal role to play but with advancement in production technologies and with mechanization, male workers have dominated and shadowed the participation of women workers. Many a times, their working condition is unhealthy for instance, in the activity of rice transplanting, women have to stand or squat in muddy water for hours. The drudgery associated with women farmers and the occupational health hazards are paramount. For instance in traditional rice farming, on an average, a women worker dips finger 3,50,000 times to transplant one hectare of land and can transplant only 0.016 ha/day. The simple activity of removing the husks from maize cobs by hand, "a

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counterparts, who play an active role in decision making in farm and non-farm activities. Women lack empowerment and have poor accessibility to several resources needed for successful agriculture on account of lack of ownership of assets, poor mobility and over burdening household activities. They are deprived from the status of "Grower" or "Farmer" and are always considered as agricultural labourers or workers. The situation is even more acute in case of dalit and adivasi women, who requires much more attention and action. According to an ILO study, dalit and adivasi women farmers comprise 81 % of farming women in India.

With mechanization in agriculture, the importance of women has been ignored. Machines have replaced the role of women. For instance, most of the power operated machineries require more vigour and are women unfriendly. Even the traditional activities of transplanting, threshing, winnowing, and cutting have been taken over by machineries which are often operated by male members. In country like India when we talk of feminization of agriculture, there is a need to design and promote women friendly machineries and technologies for enhancing the working efficiency of women farmers. The mindset of the society is required to be redefined as it has already defined specific role for men and women for instance, the activities assigned to men were those which were considered to demand greater physical power, skill and performance. The activities assigned to women were considered to demand less physical power, lower skill and more time. Illiteracy is another important factor which blocks the developmental approach and in case of women workers the illiteracy rate is more than men workers. When it comes to sharing of benefit, it has been observed that men tend to dominate over marketing of produce and women are often deprived from the benefit. It has been assessed that the spending pattern of rural women is more effective than their male counterparts. As women spends judiciously in her child nutrition, education along with household expenditures.

The role of women in Agriculture has always lacked appreciation, their contribution ignored and their output under assessed. The gender blindness of the society have resulted in gender disparity in agriculture, which has resulted in poor sustainability. Realising the potential of farm women, the Govt. have introduced several schemes and have made several interventions to bridge the gender gap. Gender is now considered as a critical vulnerable group during the inter-ministerial consultation on the Union Budget 2018-19. Stress has been given in inclusion of specific guidelines for implementation of schemes for the critical vulnerable groups. There is special provision of budget allocation for women in the Union Budget. More and more funds are being allocated for direct and quantifiable benefits to rural women and children.

female worker uses her fingertips on average 522 times, her fingernails 144 times and her palms 55 times for every single kilogram of grain she produces" as per a survey by MOA in 2011. They face several issues in agriculture, which are required to be addressed at an earliest for bridging the gender gap and for providing them an appropriate platform where they can represent themselves.

Indian agriculture is witnessing several challenges, few being adverse impact of climate change, degradation of bio-resources, lack of regulated markets in several places, poor storage and cold chain facilities. Some of the societal issues are migration of male member from rural household and distraction of rural youth in agriculture. Under such circumstances, the situation of Indian farm women is even more devastating, as she has to solely shoulder the responsibility of earning livelihood for their families in absence of their male counterparts. It's the agriculture which is their primary source of earning. Under such challenging situation her condition is even worsened when she has poor accessibility to credit, extension and market facilities. It has been observed that only 26% of female adults in India have an account with a formal financial institution compared to 44% of male adults and the percentage is even lower in rural areas. The subsidy pattern of the Govt. policies debar her from taking any opportunity in Govt. schemes as she is a poor landless worker. Women's access to land is affected by a intricate web of social, legal, traditional norms and patriarchal pattern of inheritance in several parts of India. It has been assessed that women operated landholdings account for around 12.79 % of all holdings comprising about 10.36% of the total operated area (Land holding Census 2010-11). The United Nation's FAO estimated that if women had equal access to productive resources as men, they would increase yield by 20-30 %. This could raise the total agricultural output by 4 % in developing countries, which in turn will reduce the number of hungry people in the world by 12-17 %.

They are the most vulnerable group in terms of nutritional and livelihood insecurity. They lack access to the basic requisites needed for individual well being and sustenance. Their role is enormous not only in terms of agricultural production but also in sense of bio-diversity conservation. Many tribal women and children, who depend upon underutilized trees and field crops for their livelihood, play a major role in conservation of diversity of several primitive landraces and obsolete varieties. In many parts of India, women farmers are rationally practicing organic farming due to lack of awareness on use of agro-chemicals. The advanced technologies in agriculture are often out of reach of women farmers. As a result, they lack the skill and technical competency in their approach. They are most often dominated by their male