

Status of Women in the Agrarian Sector

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Abstract: *The present review article is aimed at studying the various trends and patterns that are emerging from the Indian agriculture sector due to the changing role of women in Indian agriculture system. Globally we find nearly half of the agricultural workforce is that of women in spite of that they have to face discrimination at both societal levels and within their own households, which has profound effects on their Right to Food. The purpose therefore is to study the involvement and contribution of women in the agrarian sector. The focus of the paper is on the issues such as importance of women in the agriculture system, ostracism of rural women workers, increasing importance of organic farming involving women activities and finally the organic farming as sustainable approach to strengthen the rural economy. The study suggests that there is a need for government support and agricultural research program to overcome the existing gaps and to face the emerging issues, challenges for sustainable development and livelihood of poor smallholders, especially women farmers.*

Keywords: Organic Farming, Women in Indian Agriculture, Gender Equity, Sustainable Development

I. INTRODUCTION

The future trends of Indian agriculture largely depend on the participation of women in Indian agriculture for sustainable development of the human society. There are many systemic problems that need to be addressed for women to achieve greater in the field of agriculture sector, The women may she be educated or uneducated has to face many hurdles, they are marginalized due to the persistent presence of the patriarchal structure and the continued oppression and discrimination in the society. We find the issues of land ownership, women involved in litigation cases etc. Changing role of women in Indian agriculture system through organic farming can be addressed through their participation and self-dependency for food, and empowerment. Gender Equity is the need of the society, because women can act as gatekeepers to food security. Our capacity development places emphasis on empowering the rural poor with a specific focus on women to ensure that their voices are heard worldwide. The Indian economy is largely dependent on agriculture as a source of livelihood for the ever-increasing population. Today India has reached a population of over 1.38 billion, with a tremendous growth in the past two decades. The per capita consumption has tripled with the increase in GDP 4.5 times. Similarly, food grain production has increased almost 2 times. India has achieved phenomenal industrial, economic growth and production of food to feed its population but still insufficient to provide food to a large number of people especially women and children¹. A change in the dietary habits of the people is found in the developing world and therefore an extra pressure is generated on the use of natural resources for the consumption of dairy products and meat^{2,3}. It is estimated that by 2050, the demand for agricultural products will grow by 1.1% annually as the world's population reaches around 9 billion⁴. Food security has become a priority for ever increasing population in India. Agriculture can act as an engine of growth and poverty reduction in country like India because over half of the territory is used as cropland, making India one of the largest producing countries of agricultural commodities worldwide^{5,6}. agricultural sector comprised 23% of the total economy in 2016 as measured by the gross domestic product and employed around 59% of the country's total labour force⁷ (FAO, 2017b). Two thirds of the Indian population live in rural areas⁸ (World Bank, 2016). According to 2011 Census about 481 million people are in workforce in India; out of which about 31 per cent or about 150 million of these workers were women when compared to 1981 which was about 14 per cent. Multitudes of women have entered the Indian workforce in the last few decades, and this growth has been exceptional in the case of the agricultural sector⁹. 71% per cent of the women employment is found in the year 2018-19. It is therefore necessary to give equal access to resources without gender bias. women can play a pertinent role in preservation and can fight against food insecurity¹⁰. A sense of

greater sensitivity can be seen in women farmers towards environmental activities and are found to be more inclined towards practicing organic farming for sustainable agriculture practices as compared to the male counterparts^{11,12,13}.

Table 1: All India rural agricultural workers (gender-wise)

Category / Census	1991			2011		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Workers (million)	129.0 (73)	48.9 (27)	177.9 (100)	165.5 (63)	97.6 (37)	263.0 (100)
Cultivators (million)	85.8 (80)	21.8 (20)	107.6 (100)	82.7 (70)	36.0 (30)	118.7 (100)
Agricultural Labourers (million)	43.2 (61)	27.2 (39)	70.3 (100)	82.7 (57)	61.6 (43)	144.3 (100)

Source: Census

Note: Number in parenthesis is % of total

1.1 Role of Women in Agriculture

Ester Boserup in 1970s first drew attention to women's roles in agriculture and thus women's work has been verified and documented. She also highlighted the prevailing thought that Women worked within household and not in economic activities like agriculture led to the failure of development agencies to incorporate them into development programs¹⁴. Therefore the pertinent question is What roles do the women play in agriculture sector? The answer to this simple question is that they are presented as farmers' wives, mothers or daughters even when participating in production¹⁵. Their role is perceived as helper or assistant in farm labours¹⁶, workers in fields working with their full potential but still face more severe constraints than men in accessing productive resources, markets and services. In order to achieve economic and social development the focus now need to be on women because the "gender gap" impedes productivity and reduces their contributions to the agriculture sector. Thus, to achieve significant growth in society through increased agriculture production, poverty reduction and overall economic growth the gender gap needs to be closed. Due to the differences in value orientations women practice agriculture in a more environmentally friendly or ecological way as compared to their men counterparts. Feminist tradition believe that women are associated more closely to nature and to have an inherently stronger bond with nature than men¹⁷.

II. MAJOR CONSTRAINTS FACED BY WOMEN IN INDIA

In India the gender gap is deeply rooted in our society, when it comes to patriarchy, we find a deeply seated discrimination of gender. In patriarchy men occupy a supremacy since traditional period which is still continuing, with little progress we find some improvement in the situation. When it comes to decision making and external dialogue women are least preferred candidates. In India we have another evil of caste and class which further intersects with the gender to shape access to, control over and ownership of resources across different subjectivities and geographical locations. History tells us Women being the submissive segment in a patriarchal society often are limited by restricted mobility, limited interactions with external audience and low decision-making abilities. Patriarchal norms erode the foundations of women's identity and lead to lack of self-confidence in engaging with male dominated spaces. Multiple instances of patriarchal social norms causing women to take a back seat in engaging with the scheme have been found. The scheme ecosystem is serviced largely by men who hold an extremely narrow view of women farmers in general. When women do not see any role models of other women managing public affairs in an external domain, their confidence falters. This lack of confidence along with restrictive societal environment alienates women from public sphere. Men are the conduit in accessing both formal and informal credit facilities and women remain submissive to them. Lack of ownership of assets or collateral leave them ineligible for a majority of bank loans which are necessary to finance Agri inputs and implements. This also causes them to accept menial and low paying jobs¹⁸. Lack of access to training, machinery, and new technology are also major constraints face by women. In highly unequal country like India, the majority of the farming population, particularly women, lacks the economic resources and capacity to invest in

appropriate agricultural technologies, as well as the knowledge to implement improved agricultural practices. Because of the disparity in access, women farmers face an increasing knowledge gap.

III. AGRICULTURAL SECTOR FEMINIZATION IN INDIA

Domestication of crops is widely believed to have begun by women. Seeds are the source of food and are valued for their quality to maintain genetic continuity. From time immemorial, it has been a woman's domain to sort seed at home by observation and through experience. In doing so, the methods of seed storage were always practised by women. The search for medicinal seeds and plant material for her family, fruit seeds for kitchen gardens and ornamentals to quench her aesthetic needs have all contributed, indirectly, for preservation of seeds and the biodiversity that we are endowed with. These activities make women trustees and users of crops, land races, forest genetic diversity, medicinal plants and also a source of information on use of local cultivars and various modes of conservation. Maintaining land fertility and sustaining it by adding domestic refuse and cattle dung to land when needed, use of trap crops as barriers, bench terracing and recycling water from water storage ponds to her kitchen gardens are all recognised activities by women practiced out of necessity. Realizing the importance of stabilizing the coastline planting shelter belts with coconut, areca nut, or grasses for stabilising coastline agriculture has been practiced. The farms are also dependent on the multiple uses of these trees. These are perennial and yield late and women have been involved in growing short duration intercrops to meet their family's nutritional needs¹⁹.

Indian agriculture is constantly evolving, not just for the technology it uses or modern practices it appropriates. Over the last decade, India has witnessed 'feminisation of the agriculture sector', a trend that encapsulates the changing role of women in agriculture – now assuming roles of cultivators, labourers and entrepreneurs, according to the Economic Survey conducted by Government of India in the year 2018. Presently, the agriculture sector employs 80% of all economically active women in India, which includes 48% of the self-employed farmers and 33% of the agriculture labour force. While conditions have improved in the recent years, there are still several areas where women in this sector require support to succeed.

IV. GOVERNMENT SCHEMES FOR WOMEN FARMERS

It has now been realised that women constitute an important organ of the society and therefore now regarded as the backbone of the Indian Agriculture on whose shoulders our self-sufficiency in food sector lies²⁰. The government of India is therefore taking various measures to strengthen the role of women in agriculture which in turn will benefit the country at large. There are schemes where even the women farmers are given more support and assistance than their male counterparts. There are various schemes/ programmes wherein provision of 30% of finances for women is given; taking pro-women enterprise similar as supporting women's food security groups, bearing macro/ micro position. studies in critical thrust area related to women are also being carried out, delivery of Gender Sensitization Module on Gender Learning through training programmes at National/ Region/ State Level, compendium and attestation of gender friendly tools/ technologies is also done. Farm Women Friendly Handbook and compendium of stylish practices/ success stories of the women growers, etc are also published. The guidelines of schemes of the Department of Agriculture & Cooperation and Farmers Welfare (DAC&FW), Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare and other Implementing Agencies provide at least 30 expenditures on women growers. These schemes include Support to State Extension Programmes for Extension Reforms, National Food Security Mission, National Mission on Oilseed & Oil Palm, National Mission on Sustainable Agriculture, Sub-Mission for Seed and Planting Material, Sub-Mission on Agricultural Mechanization and Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture.

V. CONCLUSION

Women are the main contributors in agriculture and its associated areas. The activities vary from farm labour, Crop production, Marketing etc. but still faces societal and traditional constraints in varied ways, gender favour in labour is also found because women labour is considered as inferior because of the predetermined opinion of women who is considered as the housekeeper and therefore if working in farm she is less paid. There are no opportunities to uplevel in this male dominated society. Thus, looking at the present significance of women in agriculture as grower its urgently needed to revamp the entire approach towards women. The government has to

take interest in working their problems, the government should not only construct the Schemes but they need to monitor whether the schemes are working successfully or not only then women farmers will come out of the problems and can lead a better life and help in turn in the progress of the human.

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