

## GENDER ISSUES: THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE SECTOR

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### Abstract:

India is developing country. The main occupation is agriculture, because 70 per cent of the population is involved in this occupation. Many women in developing countries are occupied in agriculture. Women occupation in agriculture in low income countries in Asia is between 60-80 per cent. In almost, Asian countries, the number of women employed in agriculture as a percentage of the economically active population is higher. Long standing obstacles faced by rural women in terms of limited access to productive resources (Land, Credit, Inputs, Transport, Extension Services, Storage and Technical Assistance) prevent them from adopting new technologies or encoring them economies of scale. This paper examines the ways in which greater integration through agriculture impact women and men differently and ensures implications for growth. This paper finds that agriculture creates many jobs for women in agriculture sector. Jobs that bring many household resources under women control leads to greater earnings in the family. Although, women are more than ever finally employed, differences in wages earned by women and men persist in all countries. Women also have less access to productive resources specially in developing countries. Due to these reasons and women's lower education level compel the women have a greater tendency to remain in subsistence agriculture. Professional women continue to discrimination in hiring and promotion. The impact of liberalization and globalization on women is important not only because they represent almost half of the total population, but also because they face constraints, which make them less beneficial from the liberalization. Once different impacts are ascertained well designed policy responses may aid women in taking advantage of greater openness to agriculture.

[Keywords: Agriculture, Gender, Liberalization, Impacts, Globalization and Discrimination]

## 1.0 Introduction:

Swaminathan, the famous agricultural scientist describes that it was woman who first domesticated crop plants and thereby initiated the art and science of farming. While men went out hunting in search of food, women started gathering seeds from the native flora and began cultivating those of interest from the point of view of food, feed, fodder, fibre and fuel. Women have played and continue to play a key role in the conservation of basic life support systems such as land, water, flora and fauna. They have protected the health of the soil through organic recycling and promoted crop security through the maintenance of varietal diversity and genetic resistance.

That women play a significant and crucial role in agricultural development and allied fields including in the main crop production, livestock production, horticulture, post harvest operations, agro/ social forestry, fisheries, etc. The nature and extent of women's involvement in agriculture, no doubt, varies greatly from region to region. Even within a region, their involvement varies widely among different ecological sub-zones, farming systems, castes, classes and stages in the family cycle. But regardless of these variations, there is hardly any activity in agricultural production, except ploughing in which women are not actively involved. Studies on women in agriculture conducted in India and other developing and under developed countries all point to the conclusion that women contribute far more to agricultural production than has generally been acknowledged. Recognition of their crucial role in agriculture should not obscure the fact that farm women continue to be concerned with their primary functions as wives, mothers and homemakers.

Despite their importance to agricultural production, women face severe handicaps. They are in fact, the largest group of landless labourers with little real security in case of break-up of the family owing to death or divorce; inheritance laws and customs discriminate against them land reform and settlement programmes usually give sole title and hence the security needed for obtaining production credits to the husband. Agricultural development programmes are usually planned by men and aimed at men. Mechanization, for example alleviates the burden of tasks that are traditionally men's responsibility, leaving women's burdens unrelieved or even increased.

It may not be out of place to mention here that considering their dual responsibilities within and outside the home, it would be in the fitness of things that more and more in the village training is organized for rural farm women to suit their convenience with due realization that institutional training is important in its own place. In order that farm women get a fair deal at the hands of change agents, one of the remedial measures that needs to be undertaken is to induct a sizeable number of well trained women personnel in training and extension programmes of agricultural development agencies at all levels and more so at the grass-root level.

## 2.0 Main Objectives of the Study:

The main objectives of the present study are as follows:

1. To find out the role of women in agriculture and its allied fields.
2. To find out main obstacles in women growth in agriculture sector.
3. To analyze the gender differences in roles and activities in agriculture sector.
4. To find out the various ways and means to reduce gender differences and to improve the role of women in the agriculture sector.
- 5.

### 3.0 Literature Review:

There is a vast body of literature linked with role of rural women in agriculture and its allied fields, but here we mention only recent work being done on the topic.

**Brohi Sikandar (2005)** in his research paper entitled “NDP Irrigation Reforms Lack Gender Equality” argued that despite gargantuan efforts and uncasing participation in socio-economic field, women role has been discarded.

**Meer & Parhiar (2005)** has investigated in his research article entitled “Understanding Poverty in Rural Sindh” that rural women do all on farm/off farm works. Her day begins from pre-dawn with crushing. Their traditional role of housekeeping has been extended to collect firewood, fodder, and working on farms. Owing to social taboos, ignorance, financial constraints, inadequate education facilities, and non-availability of lady teachers in rural girls’, schools have not opened the doors of literacy for them. Agriculture- dependent rural people have struggled to improve their economic conditions. On the contrary, shortage of water, dry spell cycles, decrease in cultivable area due to soil deterioration, extension of towns and villages, contraction of infrastructure, rising cost of inputs, non-availability of high yield quality varieties seeds to small farmers, un-checked population growth, etc, have together adversely affected the lives of rural people.

**Malik Saeeda (2005)** in her paper “Women Welfare Projects and Development” has highlights the deplorable conditions of rural women. In her research, she has tried to link economic development with women welfare. For the development of women, she emphasizes on the need for governments to initiate women welfare projects.

**Zar Quresh (2005)** has mentioned in his paper “Role of Rural Women” that role of women in agriculture sector is as important as men, therefore, women should educate themselves in agricultural. He also highlights the importance of education to rural female and proposed to educate women in floriculture and food preservation.

**Alam SM (2006)** has pointed out in his article entitled “Production Hazards, Marketing Risks” mentioned that majority of women is self-employed and work in dangerous environments. Their daily tasks includes keeping and caring for the livestock at farms. They grow grains, cotton, fibers, fruit, and vegetables. The crop farmer plants, tills, fertilize, sprays, harvests, packs and stores the product. The livestock farmer feeds and cares for animals, while the horticulture farmers produce ornamental plants and nursery products.

The per capita income of the millions of agricultural workers is less than half a dollar per day. These workers are deprived of basic human needs like health, food, education, clean water, and shelter. In addition, their women are frequently tortured by the landlords and their thugs. Farmers, particularly

women, face a high degree of economic, legal, and institutional uncertainties when investing in their land and other resources. Successful implementation of such programs stem from in the motivation and attitude of individual farmers and newly instituted government policies to providing incentives to farmers to manage their natural resources efficiently and in a sustainable way.

#### **4.0 The Role of Women in Agriculture and its Allied Fields:**

Rural women performs numerous labor intensive jobs such as weeding, hoeing, grass cutting, picking, cotton stick collections, separation of seeds from fiber. Women are also expected to collect wood from fields. This wood is being used as a major fuel source for cooking. Because of the increasing population pressure, over grazing and desertification, women face difficulties in searching of fire wood. Clean drinking water is another major problem in rural areas. Like collection of wood, fetching water from remote areas is also the duty of women. Because a rural woman is responsible for farm activities, keeping of livestock and its other associated activities like milking, milk processing, and preparation of ghee are also carried out by the women.

Livestock is the primary subsistent activity used to meet household food needs as well as supplement farm incomes. The majority of farms own some livestock. The pattern of livestock strength is mainly influenced by various factors such as farm size, cropping pattern, availability of range-lands including fodder and pasture. It is common practice in the rural areas to give an animal as part of a women's dowry. Studies have revealed rural women earn extra income from the sale of milk and animals. Mostly women are engaged in cleaning of animal, sheds, watering and milking the animals.

Rural women are also responsible for collection, preparing dung cakes an activity that also brings additional income to poor families. Evidently, rural women are involved in almost all livestock related activities. Except grazing, all other livestock management activities are predominantly performed by females. Majority of women are involved in shed cleaning and collection of farm yard manure. Males, however, share the responsibility of taking care of sick animals. It is evident that the women are playing a dominant role in the livestock production and management activities.

Poultry farming is one of the major sources of rural economy. The rate of women in poultry farming at household level is the central in poultry industry. Even though rural women are not using modern management techniques, such as vaccination and improved feed, but their poultry enterprise is impressive. Every year, income from poultry farming has been rising. In order to generate more and more income, rural women often sell all eggs and poultry meat and left nothing for personal use. Due to poverty and lack of required level of proteins most of women have got a very poor health. Most of women suffer from malnutrition.

The study also noted that majority of the rural women are uneducated, unskilled and tradition-bounded, therefore their productive capacities are also low, and counted as unskilled labor. Though rural women also help to produce the staple crops like rice, wheat, and maize, but her contribution is secondary in staple crop production, however, in legumes and vegetables, her role is instrumental.

Rural women have very hectic life. Her work starts from dawn and ends at dusk. The daily routine work begins from house cleaning, fetching drinking water, dish washing, laundry, preparing food

for family, care of children, tailoring and sewing clothes. She manages these activities very smartly. Even though rural women supply half of the Pakistan's food production, yet her own food security is always at risk. Women farmers are frequently ignored in development strategies and policies. In most of the developing countries, both men and women farmers do not have access to adequate resources, but women's are even more constrained because of cultural, traditional and sociological factors.

## 5.0 Multi-Dimensional Role of Women:

**5.1 Agricultural Activities:-** Sowing, transplanting, weeding, irrigation, fertilizer application, plant protection, harvesting, winnowing, storing etc.

**5.2 Domestic Activities:-** Cooking, child rearing, water collection, fuel wood gathering, household maintenance etc.

**5.3 Allied Activities:-** Cattle management, fodder collection, milking etc.

Mainly rural women are engaged in agricultural activities in three different ways depending on the socio-economic status of their family and regional factors. They are work as:

- Paid Labourers.
- Cultivator doing labour on their own land.
- Managers of certain aspects of agricultural production by way of labour supervision and the participation in post harvest operations.

## 6.0 Main Obstacles in Women Growth in Agriculture Sector:

- Few women holding of agricultural productive resources such as land, animals, and machinery.
- Women absence from decision making process, either inside or outside home.
- Women perform all un-mechanized agricultural tasks and perform multiple tasks, which add more burden to them.
- Women workers in agriculture suffer from high illiteracy rate among them and drop-out of schools.
- Women earn less wages, especially in joint, informal and private sector.
- Women do not know their legal rights.
- Miss applying some laws and regulations in favor of women such heritage legislation.

## 7.0 Characteristics of labour Market in Agriculture:

**Table 1 Population and Agricultural Workers (in Millions)**

Year	Rural Population	Cultivators	Agricultural Labourers	Other Workers	Total Rural
1951	298.6 (82.7)	69.9 (49.9)	27.3 (19.5)	42.8 (30.6)	140 (100.0)
1961	360.3 (82.0)	99.6 (52.8)	31.5 (16.7)	56.6 (30.5)	188.7 (100.0)
1981	523.9 (76.7)	92.5 (37.8)	55.5 (22.7)	96.6 (39.5)	244.6 (100.0)
1991	628.7 (74.3)	110.7 (35.2)	74.6 (23.8)	128.8 (41.0)	314.1(100.0)
2001	741.7 (72.22)	127.6 (31.7)	107.5 (26.7)	167.4 (41.6)	402.5 (100.0)

**Source:** Registrar General of India, New Delhi, 2001

According to 55th of National Sample Survey (NSSO, 2001), agricultural labour households constitute nearly 32.2 percent of the total rural households. The self-employed in agriculture account for 32.7 per cent of the total rural households. In fact, the proportion of agricultural labour households increased from 30.3 per cent in 1993-94 to 32.2 percent in 1999-2000. While that of cultivating (self employed) households declined from 37.8 percent in 1993-94 to 32.7 per cent in 1999-2000. The proportion of female-headed households increased from 9.7 per cent in 1993-94 to 10.4 percent in 1999-2000. Nearly 62.6 per cent of the rural households belonged to less than Rs. 470 monthly per capita expenditure class. Nearly 4.6 percent rural households reported that none in the family was (4) having any work, 27.7 per cent reported that only one male member was, usually working, while 27.8 households indicated that one male and one female member were usually employed.

22.8 percent female households reported that none of their person was usually employed and 39.6 percent mentioned that only one female member was usually working. The NSSO data further revealed that 7.2 percent of the rural households did not possess any land and 51 percent households possessed less than 0.4 hectare. About 19.1 percent household possessed between 0.41 and 1 hectare and 11.5 percent between 1.01 and 2 hectare. Only 11.2 percent possessed land above 2 hectare. Thus by and large Indian farming is dominated by small and marginal farmers. In fact, the proportion of rural households not possessing any land or which possessed less than 0.4 hectare land was quite high in the states of Bihar, Goa, Maharashtra, Sikkim and Tamilnadu. Also the proportion of agriculture labour households was quite high in some of these states. It was 38 percent in Bihar, 41.7 percent in Maharashtra and Karnataka and 45.2 percent in Tamilnadu.

Another important source of data is Census of India (2001), according to which there are nearly 127 million cultivators, 107.5 million agricultural labourers and 6 million other farm workers engaged in livestock, forestry and plantations. Of the total agricultural labourers, 38.0 per cent were female and 61.9

percent male workers. Also among livestock, forestry and plantation workers, 78.3 percent were male workers and 21.7 percent were female workers. About 99.2 percent of agricultural workers were reported to be unorganized and unprotected.

**Table 2 - Share of Farm Women in Agricultural Operations:**

Activity	Involvement (Percentage)
Land preparation	32
Seed cleaning and sowing	80
Inter cultivation activities	86
Harvesting reaping, winnowing, drying, cleaning and storage	84

**Source:** Registrar General of India, New Delhi, 2001

Table 2 shows that the average time spends by farmwomen in household and agricultural activities. In the peak season an active farmwoman spends five to nine hours per day on the farm. Agriculture and allied activities almost take the equal time and energy at par with household activities.

**Table - 3: Statistics about Women in India**

1.	Total Women Population (2001)	494.83 million
2.	Total Women Workers (2001)	127.05 million
3.	Total Women Main Workers (2001)	72.65 million
4.	Total Women Marginal Workers (2001)	54.40 million
5.	Total Women Owner Cultivators (2001)	41.30 million
6.	Total Women Agriculture Wage Workers (2001)	50.09 million
7.	Total Women Household Industry Workers (2001)	08.08 million
8.	Total Women Other Workers (2001)	27.57 million
9.	Total Women in Organized Sector (1999)	04.80 million
10.	Total Women in Livestock, Forestry, Fishing, Hunting, Plantation, Orchards and activities (1991)	01.32 million

**Source:** Censuses 2001

## 8.0 Gender Differences in Roles and Activities:

Another issue is the problem-ridden conceptualization of women's and men's work in rural environments, in particular, the failure (by census-takers and researchers who are not gender-aware, for example) to recognize the importance of their differing roles. Analysis of the gender division of labour has revealed that women typically take on three types of roles in terms of the paid and unpaid labour they undertake. These three roles can be described as follows:-

**8.1 The productive role:** this refers to market production and home/subsistence production undertaken by women which generates an income.

**8.2 The reproductive role:** this refers to the child-bearing and child-rearing responsibilities borne by women (which are essential to the reproduction of the workforce).

**8.3 The community management role:** this refers to activities undertaken by women to ensure the provision of resources at the community level, as an extension of their reproductive role.

An understanding of these three roles can inform gender-aware planning that takes into account the differential impact of programmes and projects on women and men because of women's triple role. When under-estimations and under-valuations of rural women's work are found, as they so often are, in the sphere of development planning, the consequences are serious. Failure to acknowledge the importance of women's multiple contributions to rural survival means that practical policy interventions are frequently detrimental both to women themselves and to their communities.

Another factor that needs to be taken into account is that certain tasks, activities or enterprises may be regarded as 'male' or 'female'. For example, women typically gather forest products for fuel, food for the family, fodder for livestock and medicinal uses. Men more often cut wood to sell or use as building materials. In order to secure sustainable and equitable management of forest resources, therefore, both women and men need to be consulted in the design and implementation of forestry projects. Similarly, where livestock is concerned, women and men often own different animal species and use different animal products, and any policies or programmes would need to address the needs of both.

## 9.0 More Work, Less Pay:

The estimates for changes in the last 5-7 years show declines in employment ranging from 20 per cent to as much as 77 per cent. Employment in agriculture is thus available for fewer days per year. It is therefore becoming essential for men to migrate in search of better-paid work. Women are filling this vacuum. Women are forced to accept work in agriculture in their own village under very bad conditions because they cannot migrate as easily as men. The dependence of women's labour on family farms, especially during the peak periods of sowing and harvesting has become very common. About 15 years ago, agricultural work was considered acceptable for poor tribal women, Muslim women today even, who were traditionally bound by rules of purdah, go out to work for wages in the fields in certain areas.



Farmers, on the other hand, also seem to prefer women as agricultural workers. The farmer is faced with the increasing costs of production required for modern agriculture. He finds that he can squeeze his labour costs by using lower-paid women workers. Similarly, the work of women within family-based agriculture is preferred because it is cheaper than hiring labour. Women agricultural workers, although they represent a big proportion of all women workers, continue to receive lower wages than men. The Ministry of labour puts the difference at 60 per cent of men's wages, while the Indian Labour journal showed that women received 75 per cent of men earnings.

**Table 3: Average Wage Earning Received per day by casual labours by sex in Agriculture Sector**

Type of Operation	Female	Male
(a) Manual Work in Cultivation	38.06	48.14
Ploughing	27.91	39.09
Sowing	32.73	41.81
Transplanting	28.37	38.78
Weeding	29.22	39.15
Harvesting	25.74	34.68
Other Cultivation activities	29.24	39.21
(b) Manual Work in other	27.65	39.27
Agricultural	30.65	44.84
Activities	33.34	46.45
Forestry	41.30	61.59
Plantation	21.88	28.14
Animal Husbandry	55.73	57.74
Fisheries	27.96	42.64
Other Agriculture activities	27.34	42.31
(c) Non-Manual work in cultivation	34.98	56.49
(d) Non manual work in activities other than Cultivation.	29.01	44.84

**Source:** Men and Women in India (Census Report).

Figures from the census show that, amongst rural women, the percentage of marginal workers (defined as working for less than 183 days per year) has increased significantly from 8.1 per cent in 1991

to 14.2 percent in 2002. During the same period, there was a sharp fall in the percentage of main workers. (More than 183 days in a year), especially male workers, coming from rural areas. The figures thus show a casualization and feminization of the workforce in rural areas, with the number of marginal women workers becoming larger and more significant, while male main workers in rural areas have declined.

These changes also coincide with the period of the 1990s, when India really began to part of a globalize economy. Some of the changes that have ensured the huge displacement of labour from agriculture are given below:-

- A shift from subsistence farming to marketable crops - irrespective of regions, changes in crop patterns showed a common trend, all the shifts resulted in a decrease in the labour required.
- Greater use of labour-displacing machinery.
- A change in land use patterns-from agriculture to urban, industrial areas or brick kilns and in coastal areas to export-oriented aquaculture. All the new activities displace labour from agriculture but create fewer jobs than they destroy.

## 10.0 Conclusions and Recommendations:

Rural women are the major contributors in agriculture and its allied fields. Her work ranges from crop production, livestock production to cottage industry. From household and family maintenance activities, to transporting water, fuel and fodder. Despite such a huge involvement, her role and dignity has yet not been recognized. Women's status is low by all social, economic, and political indicators.

Women's wage work is considered a threat to the male ego and women's engagement in multiple home-based economic activities leads to under remuneration for their work. Women spend long hours fetching water, doing laundry, preparing food, and carrying out agricultural duties. Not only are these tasks physically hard and demanding, they also rob girls of the opportunity to study. The nature and sphere of women's productivity in the labor market is largely determined by socio-cultural 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, gender bias in the labor market, and lack of supportive facilities such as child care, transport, and accommodation in the formal sector of the labor market.

Women's labor power is considered inferior because of employers' predetermined notion of women's primary role as homemakers. As a result of discrimination against female labor, women are concentrated in the secondary sector of 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 low-paying jobs.

For the recognition of women contribution in agriculture and its allied fields and reducing the gender issues, these are the following recommendations:-

- ❖ Recognition of labor work of working women in the rural economy may be accounted in monetary terms.
- ❖ More facilities should be provided to poor rural women for land, agricultural and livestock extension services.
- ❖ Priority must be given to women in accessing credit on soft terms from banks and other financial institutions for setting up their business, for buying properties, and for house building.
- ❖ Measures should be taken to enhance women's literacy rates. A separate education policy for women may serve the purpose.
- ❖ Women must be involved in decision-making bodies that have the potential to introduce structural changes. This action will bring some changes in the gender relations in the society.
- ❖ 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.

Finally it is concluded that the rural women are exploited by land lords for their personal good and enrichment. Women are treated as sub- servant or personal property. In this regard government must formulate policies to enhance their skills and their work should be counted in economic indicators.

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