

Multi-Dimensional Role of Rural Women in Agricultural: A Review

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ABSTRACT

For many studies, literature analysis is an essential part as it helps in identifying the area of research. India is a developing and predominately agrarian economy. Agricultural is the main source of sustenance for both developing and under developed countries. 70% of its population is rural, of those households, 60% engage in agriculture as their main source of income. Women in rural areas have to manage multiple activities like maintaining home, making food, arranging water etc. and they are working in farms also. So, they are living hard life. All the activities performed by rural women is essential for the well-being of the rural households, still they are not defined as 'economically active employment' in national accounts. The present paper shows that the contribution of women in agriculture is extremely significant. It is observed that women play a significant role in agricultural development and allied activities including main crop-production, live stock production, horticulture, post-harvesting operations etc.

Key words: Rural women, Multi-dimensional, Agricultural, Doubling farm.

INTRODUCTION

Agriculture is the backbone of the Indian economy. Even after 60 years of Indian independence, seventy – five per cent (75%) of the world's poor live in rural areas and most are involved in farming (World Bank, FAO & IFAD, 2009). In the 21st century, agriculture remains fundamental for economic growth, poverty alleviation and environmental sustainability (ibid). According to the International Fund for Agricultural Development⁶, three out of every four poor

people in developing countries live in rural areas, and most of them depend directly or indirectly on agriculture for their livelihoods.

According to the Indian Fiscal commission, "Agriculture is not merely an occupation; it is a way of life which for centuries has shaped the thought and outlook of many millions of people". According to World Bank¹⁹, 17.5% of India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is accounted for by agricultural production.

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Based on data (2012), India is home to the fourth largest agricultural sector in the world. It has an estimated 180 million hectares of farmland with 140 million of which are planted and continuously cultivated. In many parts of the world women are the main farmers or producers, but their roles remain largely unrecognized.

Status of Women in Worldwide

While women's participation in the wage labor sector is increasing, they represent half of all wage earners in only 17 countries. More than two thirds of the one billion people living on less than \$1.00 per day are women and children; the majority of these live in rural areas. The illiterate women range almost twice as that of men worldwide i.e. 600 million women to 320 million men. While countries have made progress in girls' education, the gender gap still persists even in primary school in under developed countries. At the secondary school level, fewer than half the girls remain enrolled, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia. Every minute, a woman dies in pregnancy or childbirth. This adds up to 1400 women dying each day and more than 500,000 each year, of which 99 percent are in developing countries. Each year approximately, 11 million children under five in developing countries die, mostly from preventable diseases¹⁸.

Status of Women in India

The status of women can be judged by some indicators. To measure the status of women a composite index is constructed by the Population Crisis Committee (PCC) and used by the World Bank and the United Nations which focuses on indicators measuring health, education, employment, marriage and childbearing and social equality. Rustogi¹⁴ tried to measure women's status with the help of a diverse set of indicators. She selected some broad indicators across Indian states namely education, health, survival, participation in private/public decision making and safety/security to measure the status of women in the society. The literacy rate of females was 8.86% in 1951 and reached 54.16% in 2001. Women's work participation

rate, was 19.7% in 1981, and reached to 25.7% in 2001. The data base also brings out the areas where the progress has been slow if not retrograde. The sex ratio in the 0-6 years age group dropped from 945 in 1991 to 927 in 2001, which indicates that society still does not welcome a girl child and the preference rests with sons. Nearly 50% women get married before they attain 18 years of age, and 57.9% pregnant women and 56.2% married women suffer from anaemia. Maternal mortality rate (MMR) is still quite high, at 254 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births in 2006¹¹.

Contribution of women in Agricultural

Women make essential contributions to the agricultural and rural economies in all developing countries. Their roles vary considerably between and within regions and are changing rapidly in many parts of the world, where economic and social forces are transforming the agricultural sector. Rural women often manage complex households and pursue multiple livelihood strategies. Their activities typically include producing agricultural crops, tending animals, processing and preparing food, working for wages in agricultural or other rural enterprises, collecting fuel and water, engaging in trade and marketing, caring for family members and maintaining their homes. Many of these activities are not defined as "economically active employment" in national accounts but they are essential to the well-being of rural household.

Women play a vital role in building economy of the nation. Over the years, women play a significant and crucial role in agricultural, allied fields. The nature and extent of women's involvement in agriculture varies greatly from region to region. But regardless of these variations, women are actively involved in various agricultural activities. As per Census 2011, out of total female main workers, 55 per cent were agricultural labourers and 24 per cent were cultivators. However, only 12.8 per cent of the operational holdings were owned by women, which reflect the gender disparity in ownership

of landholdings in agriculture. Moreover, there is concentration of operational holdings (25.7 per cent) by women in the marginal and small holdings categories.

In India, the percentage of women who depend on agriculture is as high as 70%. In 2009, 94% of the female labor worked in cereal production, while 1.4% worked in vegetable production and 3.72% were engaged in fruits and spice crops. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization, Indian women represent a share of 21% and 24% of all fishers and fish farmers respectively. A recent study conducted by Women and Population Division of FAO revealed that in developing countries women provide 70 percent of agricultural labour, 60-80 percent labour for household food production, 100

percent 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.

Multi-Dimensional Role of Women

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

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

Allied Activities: Cattle management, fodder collection, milking etc.



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

Agricultural activity means the cultivation of the soil, planting of crops, growing of fruit trees, including the harvest of such farm products and other farm activities and practices performed by a farmer in conjunction with such farming operations done by persons whether natural or juridical. Baig³ reported that women actively and extensively participate in the production of major crops and other farming operations. They contribute to household income through farm and non-farm activities. Prasad¹² reported that involvement of rural women in agriculture and household activities. Women take the sole responsibility of managing agriculture & household activities during large scale seasonal. Thus rural women should be trained for their effective involvement in agriculture. Amin *et al.*² observed that majority of the farm women participated in threshing, preparation of land, sowing, weeding, harvesting, whereas farm women contribution was higher in seed cleaning and picking of vegetables. Zend *et al.*²⁰ studied 150 rural women on participation, awareness and health problems in agriculture using personal interview method. It was

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observed that women solely performed the activities such as weeding, cotton picking, dibbling etc. Women spent more than six hours per day in the field. Rais *et al.*¹³ in their research paper have tried to assess the economic status of rural women involved in agriculture and livestock forming activities in Pakistan. He has showed that majority of the respondents have income from agriculture but a very few of them are employed, The research has revealed that the strong participation of women in activities such as crop production, livestock husbandry, poultry keeping, and food grain processing and storage, home management and handicraft making. Damisa and Yohana⁴ pointed out that various researches conducted on the contribution of women to agricultural development in the country suggest that women contribution to farm work is as high as between 60 and 90% of the total farm task performed. The contribution of the women ranges from such tasks as land clearing, land-tilling, planting, weeding, fertilizer/manure application to harvesting, food processing, threshing, winnowing, milling, transportation and marketing as well as the management of livestock. Jahan and Khan⁷ majority of farm women are engaged in farm activities like sowing, transplanting, harvesting and post harvesting operations. Most of the farm women are found engaged in dairy activities, poultry keeping, goat rearing, sericulture and horticultural operations. Some of them are found engaged in small scale industries and income generating activities. Sharon¹⁵ viewed that both women play critical roles in agriculture throughout the world, producing, processing and providing the food we eat. Women make up half the rural population and they constitute more than half of the agricultural labor force. Rural women in particular are responsible for half of the world's food production and produce between 60 and 80 percent of the food in most developing countries. Khushk and Panhwar⁸ studied that the role of women involves a wide range of tasks such as making feed concentrates, feeding, collecting fodder,

grazing, cleaning animals and their sheds, making dung cakes, collecting manure for organic fertilizer, as well as milking, processing and marketing of animal products such as ghee and eggs.

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

The women performed dual roles and despite of their farm related activities were equally responsible for household management and child care. The article by Gopalan⁵ “Why are Women Lagging Behind” highlighted that the evidence of women’s work apart from their low paid work is that they have to spend almost 10 to 12 hours per day on household chores, cooking, child care etc besides their contribution to agricultural production animal husbandry and other related activities of the household for which the economic work of their labour is not valued. Amin *et al.*¹ carried a study to analyze the role of rural women in childcare, education and training of rural women, acknowledgment and their competency and capabilities in Tehsil Faisalabad. The study revealed that almost 9% husband, 46% wives and 6% both were involved in the childcare. Similarly 9% husband, 51% wives and 26% both were involved in child education and training. As the house is considered first training institution of the children and mother as a first teacher, therefore, vocational institutes should be developed in the rural area to address the childcare and education. Mulugeta and Amsalu¹⁰ investigated the role of rural women in livestock and household activities, and to examine the level of rural women participation in decision making. The majority of rural women participated ‘regularly’ in cleaning of animal sheds, preparing milk products, gathering dung, selling milk/milk products, selling egg/poultry, and egg collection. In household management, majority of rural women are ‘regularly’ engaged in food preparation, looking after all family members, preparing local beverages, cleaning the house, clean-up after meals, washing clothes, child care, fetching water, and embroidery.

Allied activities: Cattle management, fodder collection, milking etc:

Women's contribution to the Indian allied activities is a recognized factor. They participate in several activities such as *Cattle management, fodder collection, milking* etc. Kishtwaria *et al.*⁹ conducted a study on women participation in different activities and also the time spent in performing these activities. A total sample of 900 women respondents from three different zones of Himachal Pradesh was selected. The analysis showed that farmwomen spent maximum time in transplanting activity and in dairy maximum time was spent in cutting of fodder. According to Sikka *et al.*¹⁶ women play a key role in animal, farm and home management. This study revealed that more than 8 working hours in a day are spent by women, covering all the buffalo rearing practices. Buffalo rearing covers more than 50 % of the working hours of women in comparison to 10% of the working time of their counterpart, the men. Hence, augmentation of buffalo entrepreneurship at the grass root level essentially requires training of the farm women.

CONCLUSION

Our Prime Minister Shri Jawaharlal once said that, "You can tell the condition of a nation by looking at the status of women"¹⁷. So, we can say that growth and prosperity of any country can be measured by the status and development of its women. Almost half of the human resource of the world constitutes women and that is why they influence the growth of nation's economy. According to Swaminathan, the famous agricultural scientist, "some historians believe that it was women who first domesticated crop plants and thereby initiated the art and science of farming".

In Indian society, women have a multi dimensional role. The largest number of women in India is engaged in farming operations either as cultivators or as supervisors or as agriculture laborers. Women contribute about ¾th of the labour required for agricultural operations. Their involvement in

agricultural operations is besides their usual domestic work. Most of the contributions made by women to the farm sector also go unaccounted as they are not directly paid. Therefore, rural women are the major contributors in agriculture and allied fields. Her work includes all activities in different fields i.e. crop production, livestock production, household, family maintenance, transporting water, fuel and fodder. Despite such a huge involvement, her role and dignity has yet not been recognized. Women status is low by all social, economic and political indicators.

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