

Gender Issues in Indian Agriculture: The Structural Changes in Agriculture Labour Force Participation

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Abstract- In India, there are distinct male and female roles in the rural economy. Women and girls engage in a number of agro-oriented activities ranging from seedbed preparation, weeding, and horticulture and fruit cultivation to a series of post-harvest crop processing activities like cleaning and drying vegetable, fruits and nuts for domestic use and for market. A disproportionate number of those dependent on land are women: 58% of all male workers and 78% of all female workers, and 86% of all rural female workers are in agriculture. Female headed households range from 20% to 35% of rural households (widows, deserted women as well as women who manage farming when their men migrate). Although the time devoted by both women and men in agricultural activities may, in several communities and agricultural situations, be taken to be almost equal, women are dominant within the domestic tasks. Rural Indian women are extensively involved in agricultural activities, but the nature and extent of their involvement differs with variations in agro-production systems. This paper re-affirms that women make essential contributions to agriculture and rural enterprises. But there is much diversity in women's roles and over-generalization undermines policy relevance and planning. The context is important and policies must be based on sound data and gender analysis.

Index terms- Women, Agriculture, Gender, Labour force, Impacts and Discrimination

INTRODUCTION

Agriculture can be an important engine of growth and poverty reduction. But the sector is Underperforming in many countries in part because women, who are often a crucial resource in agriculture and the rural economy, face constraints that reduce their productivity. In this paper we draw on the available

empirical evidence to study in which areas and to what degree women participate in agriculture. Aggregate data shows that women comprise about 43 per cent of the agricultural labour force globally and in developing countries. But this figure marks considerable variation across regions and within countries according to age and social class. The contribution of women to agricultural and food production is significant but it is impossible to verify empirically the share produced by women. Women's participation in rural labour markets varies considerably across regions, but invariably women are over represented in unpaid, seasonal and part-time work, and the available evidence suggests that women are often paid less than men, for the same work.

Regardless of the level of development achieved by the respective economies, women play a pivotal role in agricultural and in rural development in most countries of the Asia-pacific region. Evidently there are serious constraints which militate against the promotion of an effective role for women in development in those societies which were bound by age-old traditions and beliefs. Patriarchal modes and practices motivated by cultures and/ or interpretations of religious sanctions and illiteracy hinder women's freedom to opt for various choices to assert greater mobility in social interactions. Resulting from these situations. Women's contribution to agriculture and other sectors in the economy remain concealed and unaccounted for in monitoring economic performance measurement. Consequently, they are generally invisible in plans and programmes. They were, in fact, discriminated against by stereotypes which restrict them to a reproductive role, and denied access to resources which could eventually enhance

their social and economic contribution to the society. In terms of the ratio of membership of women in agricultural cooperative. The percentage is rather low, but they have a strong influence on them—through the heads of the households. Certain obvious barriers restrict their direct and formal entry in agricultural cooperatives. Even in countries like Japan, the ratio of women membership in agricultural cooperative is extremely low. Only very few women serve on the Boards of Directors.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Leela Gulati (1978) examined working women in India and value of their labour. She found that the children of the agricultural labour too continuing the same occupation despite whatever education they had been able to receive. She also found that hunger, disease and indebtedness are an integral part of the life of the women labour. There is little prospect of anyone in the family breaking out of vicious circle.

Sawant and Diwan (1979) in their study of 150 villages in two taluks of Maharashtra observed a fall in female work participation and decline in self-employment opportunities in developed villages. According to

Ashok Mitra (1980) opined that female who works in household, cultivation, household industry, livestock, fishery or in dairying etc., are subjected to wide fluctuations in registering female work participation in census survey. Thus, such fluctuations cannot be entirely due to the differences in concepts and definitions employed in census or surveys but must be due to substantial difference in perception of the respondent as to what constitutes economic contribution by way of female work participation in these subsistence sectors. He gives an economic explanation for the census undercounting of women's contribution is seen as equal to or more than the subsistence requirements of the family, they are 'seen' as economically active.

Sisodia (1985) study the magnitude of the female labour participation rate in the specific field operations as well as in other preparatory or supportive activities to agricultural production process, the family female labour participate in the decision-making process and the association between the extent and nature of female participation in agriculture and economic-demographic

characteristics of Bhind and Morena districts of Madhya Pradesh. The study revealed that the rate of female participations is very low. The pattern of division of labour between men and women varies from region to region according to social customs. In the Chambal region, the preparatory tillage operations are not performed by the farm women. On animal based tasks like cake making, ghee making, milking animals, removing of cow dung from the cattle shed and feeding of animals are mostly done by the farm women. There is no hired labour and female labour is employed for these animal-based tasks. Only a few per cent of total family labour is engaged in preparatory or supportive activities to agricultural production process and the rest is done by men.

Joshi and Alshi (1985) have attempted the impact of HYVs on female labour employment by size-groups of holdings and the employment effect of HYVs separately for family and hired female labour in Akola district of Maharashtra state. The study revealed that per hectare female labour use on HYV cotton and jowar farms is more as compared to the local variety farm. In cotton HYV cotton farms used about 157 per cent more female labour per hectare over local variety, while in jowar crop, the HYV used 26 per cent more female labour over local variety. The adoption of HYV of cotton and jowar increased the requirement of casually hired female labour to a large extent, implying thereby an increase in the employment opportunities for female labour seeking agriculture wage employment.

Availability of Women for Work in Household Premises:

It may be noted that a large section of women, even if they are not working, do not report themselves as unemployed as many of them may not be willing to come out of the household premises for work. But some of them may be willing to accept certain types of work if the work is made available to them at the household premises. The special probing enquiry carried out in the survey, therefore, included questions on willingness of women, engaged in domestic duties, to accept work at their household premises along with the nature and type of work acceptable to them.

The relevant information was tabulated only for women aged 15 years and above.

Table: 1 number of females who were willing to accept work at the household premises for the different types of work acceptable

Type of Work Accepted	Rural	Urban
Dairy	70	13
Poultry	20	6
Other Animal Husbandry	27	5
Food Processing	27	27
Spinning & Weaving	27	21
Manufacturing of wood and Cane products	7	3
Tailoring	97	114
Leather goods manufacturing	2	2
Others	51	79

Source: NSSO Report No. 550: Participation of Women in Specified Activities along with Domestic Duties, 2009.

GENDER DIVISION OF LABOUR IN AGRICULTURE

The particular tasks done on farms by men and women have certain common patterns. In general, men undertake the heavy physical labour of land preparation and jobs which are specific to distant locations, such as livestock herding, while women carry out the repetitious, time consuming tasks like weeding and those which are located close to home, such as care of the kitchen garden

Table: 2 Work force participation rate 2001

Total Workers	Number	Rate (%)
Persons	40,22,34,724	39.10
Males	275,014,476	51.70
Females	127,220,248	25.60
Main Workers		
Persons	313,004,983	30.40
Males	240,147,813	45.10
Females	72,857,170	14.70
Marginal Workers		
Persons	89,229,741	8.70
Males	34,866,663	6.60
Females	54,363,078	11.00

Source: Census of India 2001, Registrar General of India, New Delhi.

Women do a major part of the planting and weeding of crops. Care of livestock is shared, with men looking after the larger animals and women and smaller ones. Some jobs are gender neutral. The introduction of a new tool may cause a particular job to be reassigned to the opposite sex and men tend to assume tasks that become mechanised.

Table: 3 No. of agricultural workers in India 2011

Country	TRU	Persons	Males	Females
India	Total	106,775,330	57,329,100	49,446,230
	Rural	102,431,218	54,706,211	47,725,007
	Urban	4,344,112	2,622,889	1,721,223

Source: Census of India 2011, Registrar General of India, New Delhi.

The impact on women of the modernisation of agriculture is both complex and contradictory. Women have often been excluded from agrarian reform and training programmes in new agricultural methods. Where both men and women have equal access to modern methods and inputs there is no evidence that either sex is more efficient than the other. Technological changes in post-harvest processing may even deprive women of a traditional income-earning task.

Table: 4 Work participation rate of India 2011

Country	TRU	Persons	Males	Females
India	Total	39.10	51.7	25.60
	Rural	41.70	52.10	30.80
	Urban	32.30	50.6	11.90

Source: Census of India 2011, Registrar General of India, New Delhi.

TRU: Total, Rural, Urban

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 fibre. 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 is 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.

Table 5: number of females who carried out specified activities

Specific activities	Rural	Urban
Maintenance of kitchen garden	241	112
Work in House hold poultry	254	33
Free collection of fish	188	21
Free collection of fire wood	423	67
Husking of paddy (own produced)	74	5
Grinding of food grain (own produced)	65	19
Preparation of meat (own produces)	12	5
Making Baskets, etc. (own produced)	28	5
Husking paddy (acquired)	63	34
Grinding food grain (acquired)	72	58
Preparation of meat (acquired)	51	34
Making Baskets, etc. (acquired)	47	29
Preparing cow dung cake	424	56
Sewing, tailoring	287	229
Free tuition of own/others children	67	137
Bringing water from House hold premises	366	125
Bringing water from outside village	12	-
Number of females engaged in domestic duties per 1000 female	433	522

Source: NSS Report No. 550: Participation of Women in Specified Activities along with Domestic Duties, 2009-10.

Majority of women are involved in shed cleaning and collection of farm and manure. Poultry farming is one of the major sources of rural economy. 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 leave 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.

Table 6: Occupation-wise average daily wage rates in agricultural occupations in India (2002-2003, 2004-2005 and 2006-2007 to 2012-2013)

Year	Gender	Ploughing	Sowing	Weeding	Transplanting	Harvesting	Winnowing	Threshing	Picking	Herdsman	Well Digging	Cane Crushing
2008-09	Men	1085	900	805	8328	8755	8123	8506	8100	5348	11628	8727
	Women	743	650	602	743	7158	6508	6666	6337	432	6347	6123
2009-10	Men	12085	10478	9278	9229	10022	9632	10033	9628	6233	14081	9443
	Women	7043	7947	784	8615	8492	7902	8222	7844	466	7644	7549
2010-11	Men	14511	12575	11221	12215	12233	11882	12178	11170	717	17732	11333
	Women	8732	9787	957	10047	10038	9048	9708	10139	603	9313	8909
2011-12	Men	17047	15204	13401	14414	14909	13649	14406	14000	900	2020	1477
	Women	9977	10014	9674	12272	12072	11507	11750	11850	745	1230	1121
2012-13	Men	20411	17738	15681	16711	16030	14000	14800	14300	1130	2150	1551
	Women	1215	1411	1391	1443	1433	1334	1333	1333	863	1643	1333

Source: NSS Report No. 550: Participation of Women in Specified Activities along with Domestic Duties, 2009-10.

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 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 mens wages, while the Indian Labour journal showed that women received 75 per cent of men earnings.

Issues Involved

In the background of the above discussion and in view of the constraints faced by women with regard to their participation in agricultural cooperatives, the following issues need to be tackled by the concerned authorities and cooperative institutions:—

1. Identification of an appropriate mechanism which could provide development opportunities to women in rural areas;
2. Encouraging cooperatives to have special programmes and tasks for women to perform in the organisational and business affairs.
3. Review, revision and reformation of cooperative legislation and government policies which facilitate and encourage women to become members of cooperatives and participate indecision-making processes. Cooperative institutions and their federations may take the

lead on their own to institute programmes for the participation of women in cooperatives.

CONCLUSION

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. 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 labour 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.

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