



SOCIO - ECONOMIC STATUS AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN INDIAN AGRICULTURE

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ABSTRACT:

Women's economic empowerment in agriculture is a prerequisite for sustainable development and pro-poor growth. Women are major players in agriculture, making up the majority of farmers and farm labourers in many countries. Women produce most of the food that is consumed locally and are responsible for household food security in many rural areas. More equitable access to land, fertilizers, water for irrigation, seeds, technology, tools, livestock and extension services would make agriculture a more efficient means of promoting shared economic growth, reducing poverty and improving food security. This research paper based on the socio-economics status of women in Indian agriculture in which the participation of women in agriculture development is analysed.

KEYWORDS:

SOCIO-ECONOMICS, SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, EMPOWERMENT, AGRICULTURE.

INTRODUCTION

According to Swaminathan, the famous agricultural scientist, "some historians believe 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."

In general, when we talk about socio-economic empowerment, we are referring to the economic empowerment of groups that are powerless. These are people who have had very little control of their economic destinies and have been largely controlled by others. For example, women in many developing nations fall into this category. Economic empowerment is the capacity of women and men to participate in, contribute to and benefit from growth processes in ways that recognise the value of their contributions, respect their dignity and make it possible to negotiate a fairer distribution of the benefits of growth. Socio-Economic empowerment increases women's access to economic resources and opportunities including jobs, financial services, property and other productive assets, skills development and market information.

Women's socio-economic empowerment is a prerequisite for sustainable development and for achieving the Millennium Development Goals. and economic empowerment is also a right. There is no quick fix: women's socio-economic empowerment takes sound public policies, a holistic approach and long-term commitment from all development actors.

OBJECTIVE

The specific objectives of the study are as under:

- To take stock of evidence on experiences in enhancing role of women in agriculture.
- To identify strategies that may economically empower women in agriculture.
- To study the trend of women participation in agriculture as agriculture labourers.
- To identify strategies that may socio empower women in India.

The entire study has been done considering the four specific objectives. To accomplish the requirement of the research work secondary data has been recorded. For the first step the data set is collected from census of India-2011 and statistical report on profile of women labours-2011. The entire population has been classified into two main categories i.e. men and women workers. They are further divided into percentage of female main workers to total female population under broad categories -1981 to 2011.

INDIAN AGRICULTURE AND WOMEN

Agriculture is the back bone of our country more than 70% of the people engaged in agriculture and it is the livelihood occupation for majority of the people. Our country has a wide and very old setting of agriculture of about 10 thousand years. At present in terms of agriculture production the country holds second position across the world. The agricultural production in India encompasses field crops, fruit crop, plantation crop, livestock, forestry, fishery etc. So overall it is a huge industry which recruits or engages 52% of overall manpower of India. The rural

population of our country is mostly dependent on agricultural activity. Despite of the fact that there has been steady slump in the contribution of agriculture in country's GDP, Indian agriculture continues to remain the leading industry in the country contributing vastly in the socio-economic growth of India. The role of women in the field is highly substantial. More than 80% of the work has to be performed by women. Women play an integral part in agricultural production, as subsistence farmers, cash crop growers, food processors, and livestock owners, among other roles. It follows that empowering women will impact the agricultural market overall. Recently, many development organizations have begun to integrate gender into their agriculture development projects. While this new generation of projects are too recent to provide evidence on the long-term impacts of targeting women in agriculture.

Based on 2018 data, India is home to the fourth largest agricultural sector in the world. India has an estimated 165 million hectares of farmland with 145 million of which are planted and continuously cultivated. Yet India's agricultural profile is shadowed by the controversial impacts of Green Revolution policies that were adopted in the 1960s and 70s with pressure from the United States Agency for International Development and the World Bank.

India's agricultural sector today still faces issues of efficiency due lack of mechanization with poorer

conditions of farmers, as well as small farm sizes. In India traditional agriculture is still dominant as many farmers depend on livestock in crop production, for manure as fertilizers, and the use animal powered ploughs. According to 2011 statistics, the average farm in India is about 1.5 acres, minuscule when compared the average of 50 hectares in France and or 178 hectares in United States and 273 hectares in Canada.

The small farmer tradition of India can be drawn back to the first farm reforms of independent India. Known as the Laws of Divided Inheritance, the reforms were meant to limit the conglomeration of land, by mandating redistribution as land was divided among male inheritors from the prior generation. The perpetuation of these laws not only limits farm size but also bars women from ownership or inheritance. Furthermore, as small farmers face the increasing competition with larger farm operations an increasing number of men migrate to city centers for higher wages and employment. Women are in turn left to support the family structure and support small farm lifestyle. In 2011, the agricultural sector workforce in the subcontinent was 75% women.

WOMEN WORKERS

A brief analysis of the Tables presented in this chapter is as follows the ratio of total workers in India as per 2011 Census.

TABLE 1.1 TOTAL WORKERS IN INDIA-CENSUS 2011

Population/worker	Person		Male	Female
Population	Total	1,21,05,69,573	62,31,21,843	58,74,47,730
Workers		48,17,43,311	33,18,65,930	14,98,77,381
Percentage of workers		39.79	53.26	25.51
Population	Rural	83,34,63,448	42,76,32,643	40,58,30,805
Workers		34,85,97,535	22,67,63,068	12,18,34,467
Percentage of workers		41.83	53.03	30.02
Population	Urban	37,71,06,125	19,54,89,200	18,16,16,925
Workers		13,31,45,776	10,51,02,862	2,80,42,914
Percentage of workers		35.31	53.76	15.44

Source: office of The Registrar General, India.

Table 1.1 reveals that workers constituted 39.79 per cent of total population whereas the ratio of female workers was 25.51 per cent. The ratio of total workers in rural areas was 41.83 per cent the whereas in urban areas the ratio of total worker was found to be 35.31 per cent. The ratio of female workers in the rural areas was 30.02 per cent whereas in the urban areas it was 15.44 per cent respectively.

ROLE OF WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE

Percentage of Female Main Workers to total Female Population under Broad Categories – 1981 to 2011 Census of India. (Table 1.2) shows that the percentage of Female under all categories of workers have increased in 2011 as compared to 2001.

TABLE 1.2 PERCENTAGE OF FEMALE MAIN WORKERS TO TOTAL FEMALE POPULATION UNDER BROAD CATEGORIES-1981 TO 2011

Census year	Female main workers (in percent)	Agricultural labourers (in percent)
1981	13.99	6.46
1991	15.93	7.05
2001	14.68	4.51
2011	25.5	41.1

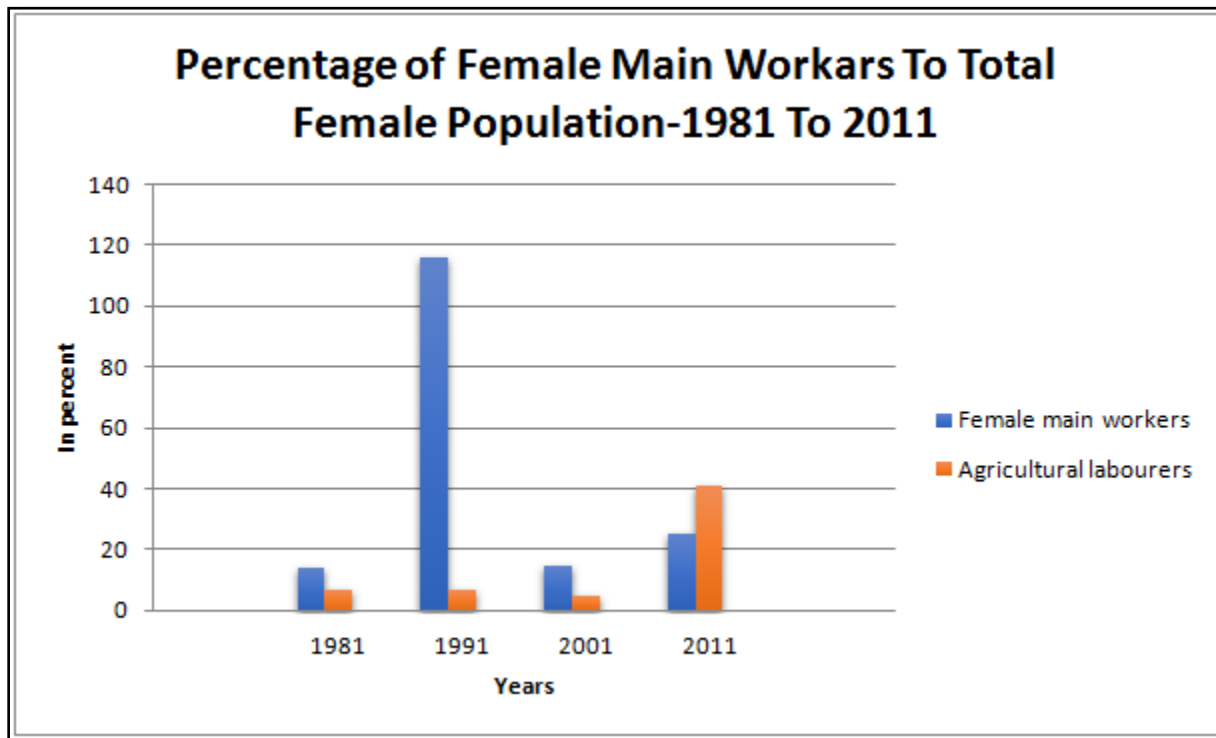
Source: office of the Registrar General India.

Women are 48.5% of the general population of India and agricultural sector is the largest employer of women. According to official statistics (National Sample Survey 68th round), in the rural areas, 59% men work in agriculture, but the figures are 75% for women. Women's participation in agriculture has been growing relative to men who not only implies increased dependence of women on agriculture but also reiterates their crucial role in the sustainable growth and future of this sector.

Rather than in rural India, (Based on 2012 data) the percentage of women who depend on agriculture for their livelihood is as high as 84%. Women make up about 33% of cultivators and about 47% percent of agricultural laborers. These statistics do not account for work in livestock, fisheries and various other ancillary forms of

food production in the country. In 2009, 94% of the female agricultural labor forces in crop cultivation were in cereal production, while 1.4% worked in vegetable production, and 3.72% were engaged in fruits, nuts, beverages, and spice crops.

Women's participation rate in the agricultural sectors is about 47% in tea plantations, 46.84% in cotton cultivation, 45.43% growing oil seeds and 39.13% in vegetable production. While these crops require labor-intensive work, the work is considered quite unskilled. Women also heavily participate in ancillary agricultural activities. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization, Indian women represented a share of 21% and 24% of all fishers and fish farmers, respectively.



Despite their dominance of the labor force women in India still face extreme disadvantage in socio-economics, terms of pay, land rights, and representation in local farmers organizations. Furthermore, their lack of empowerment often results in

negative externalities such as lower educational attainment for their children and poor familial health.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

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 labour market is largely determined by socio-cultural and economic factors. Women do not enter the labour market on equal terms when compared to men. Their occupational choices are also limited due to social and cultural constraints, gender bias in the labour market, and lack of supportive facilities such as child care, transport, and accommodation in the formal sector of the labour 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 labour, women are concentrated in the secondary sector of labour 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 labour 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 counselling.

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 socio-economic indicators.

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