



## Women Problems in Agriculture Sector - An Overview

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*In order to awaken the people, it is the women who have to be awakened. Once she is on move, the family moves, the village moves, the nation moves". — Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru*

**ABSTRACT:** Women are the backbone of the village economy of rural India. Women take up different works to eke out their livelihood and the majority of the rural women depend on unorganized sector like agriculture. Many of them are landless, homeless and belong to the socially depressed class of the society despite the seasonal poor nature of employment in the field of agriculture for laborers since the beginning of this century. A large number of women who depend mainly on this economic activity in rural India live below the subsistence level. The female agricultural labour is very high despite facing difficulties in the field of the existing socio-economic framework of Indian society. Casual nature of employment, absence of opportunities to improve the skills, segregation of work, ignorance and less vocal nature of the workers, unemployment, lack of other revenues, commercialization and mechanization of agriculture, sexual exploitation and some of the problems that have oppressed the female agricultural labour in the country. In general, six decades of independence, constitutional safeguards and various developmental programmes adopted by government have not altered the basic life conditions of agricultural labour in general and female labour in particular. It also highlights the level of exploitation that is being carried out on the oppressed in general and women belonging to lower class in particular. The problems of some agricultural labour expose the various dimensions of their everyday life. The main objectives of this study are to analyze the role of rural women in agriculture sector, to understand the women problems in agriculture sector and finally to suggest the measures to improve the status of women in Agricultural Sector.

### Introduction

Women are the backbone of the village economy of rural India. Women take up different works to eke out their livelihood and the majority of the rural women depend on unorganized sector like agriculture. Many of them are landless, homeless and belong to the socially depressed class of the society. A large number of women who depend mainly on

this economic activity in rural India live below the subsistence level. The female agricultural labour is very high despite facing difficulties in the field of the existing socio-economic framework of Indian society. Casual nature of employment, absence of opportunities to improve the skills, segregation of work, ignorance and less vocal nature of the workers, unemployment, lack of other



revenues, commercialization and mechanization of agriculture, sexual exploitation and some of the problems that have oppressed the female agricultural labour in the country.

### **The Role of Women in Agriculture and Its Allied Fields**

Rural women perform numerous labour intensive jobs in agricultural field. They are directly attached with summer, rainy and winter season agriculture system. Topographically maximum area of this study area has been considered as mono crop. Rain fed agriculture system is the dominant agricultural practice in this area. There is no irrigation facility for summer and winter cultivation. Women are also expected to collect wood from fields. This wood is being used as a major fuel source for cooking. Clean drinking water is another major problem in rural areas. Like collection of wood, collecting water from remote areas is also the duty of women, because a rural women 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. Therefore rural women earn extra income from the sale of milk and animals.

Mostly women are engaged in cleaning of animals, sheds, watering and milking the animals. Rural women are also responsible for collection, preparing dung cakes and activity that also brings

additional income for poor families. In most of the cases rural women are involved in almost all livestock related activities. Majority of women are involved in shed cleaning and collection of farm yard manure. 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. As a result most of the women suffer from malnutrition and severe diseases. The study also noted that majority of the rural women are Uneducated, unskilled and tradition bounded, therefore their productive capacity are also low and counted as unskilled labour. Rural women have very hectic life. Her work starts from dawn and ends at night. The daily routine works begins from house cleaning, collection of drinking water, dish washing, laundry, preparing food for farming, care of children. She manages these activities very smartly

### **Multi-Dimensional Role of Women**

- i. **Agriculture:** Sowing, transplanting, weeding, irrigation, fertilizer application, plant protection, harvesting, winnowing, storing etc.



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

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

In other words, constitutional safeguards and various developmental programmes adopted by government have not altered the basic life conditions of agricultural labour in general and female labour in particular. It also highlights the level of exploitation that is being carried out on the oppressed in general and women belonging to lower class in particular. The problems of some agricultural labour expose the various dimensions of their everyday life. The present study deals with the various bureaucratic organizations engaged in the implementation of welfare programmes to improve the lot of the rural poor-women

The invisibility of women's work and its undervaluation in the development discourses has been discussed widely. The low value and the social status given to women's manifold activities such as domestic labour, child care and other remunerated employment

including agriculture, reflects the reinforcement of gender inequities at ideological and practical levels as well. The debate on role of women's domestic labour and its value has initiated serious discussions in and outside feminist and academic circles. It has been estimated that the house work is equivalent in value about a third of total production per year in modern economy.

However, the nature and extent of their involvement differs from the variations in agro-production systems. The mode of female participation in agricultural production varies from the landowning status of farm households. Their roles range from managers to landless labourers. In over all farm production, women's average contribution is estimated at 55 percent to 66 per cent of the total labour with percentages, is higher in certain regions. In the Indian Himalaya, a pair of bullocks works 1064 hours, a man 1212 hours and a woman 3485 hours in a year on one hectare farm, a figure that illustrates women's significant contribution to agricultural production.

#### Review of the Literature

Research work of various researchers recognized that discrimination prevails between male and female labor force in terms of treatment from employers, working conditions, wages etc. This leads to poor position of women in agricultural sector because they are unrecognized group of workers. **Lipishree Das (2015)** studies about work participation of women in agriculture in Odisha and concluded that women are concentrated in the agricultural sector of labour market. There is discrimination against female labours because women's labour power is considered as unskilled



and inferior. Their work is low paid, casual and lacks potential upward mobility. The study of **Singh and Vinay (2012)** briefed in their working paper about the significance of female labour in agriculture and allied activities. They further stated that the role of women in agriculture as female labour is not highlighted in India. Despite of their presence in activities sowing, transplanting and post harvest operations they are considered as an invisible workers. **On the other Lal and Khurana (2011)**, in their research paper entitled "Gender Issues: The role of women in agriculture sector" discussed about multidimensional roles and obstacles faced by women in terms of employment, wages, dual responsibility, education level. Though women share is very high in agricultural and they are spending more hours for work on farm than men still they are paid less than males for the same work. Women are undervalued because of the predetermined notion that women's basic role is of homemaker. Therefore, they finally concluded that because of the lack of knowledge about their rights, rural agricultural women labors are exploited by their landlords. Even the study of **Damisa et.al (2007)** highlighted in their study that despite of various social, economic and various other constraints women have high level participation in agriculture and they are very committed in their agricultural activity. Overall the level of involvement of women in farm decision making was found very medium. The extent of involvement and decision making in activities like intercultural operations is 48 percent in harvesting of crops 45.33 percent, storage of farm produce is 42.67 percent; 42.00 percent in sale of farm produce and in subsidiary occupation like animal husbandry and

dairy business is 38.67 percent and financial management is 36 percent only (Unati et.al, 2011). The research study of **C. U. Thresia (2004)** in his paper "women workers in agriculture: gender discrimination, working conditions and health status" pointed out some very important issues of women agricultural workers. The biggest issue was related to physical (abortion, stillbirths, and premature deliveries) and mental health because of the dual work burden, economic and social insecurity, poverty. In addition, they have gender discrimination in terms of proper education, employment and resources, which make them helpless and powerless with low self-esteem. Basic facilities like clean drinking water and washroom facilities were also not available in spite of having long working hours with lower wage rates on farms

The primary need of women working or seeking employment in various agricultural is to meet the family needs and to enhance their family income.

#### Objectives;

The main objectives of this study are mentioned below.

- To analyze the role of rural women in agriculture Sector and other allied activities
- To understand the women problems in Agriculture Sector
- To suggest the measures for overcoming the problems of women in Agricultural Sector.



**Methodology**

The study is based on Secondary sources and the data was collected from

various books, magazine, journals, newspapers and websites.

**Findings**

**Table-1**  
**Men and Women involved in different activities in**  
**Agricultural Sector**

Activity	Women	Men
Household Activates	Cooking (grinding, cutting preparing food etc)	-
	Sweeping,washing Clothes & utensils	-
	Fetching water	-
	Collecting water	-
	Making cow dung-cakes	-
Child care	Feeding children	-
	Taking care of children	-
Agricultural Activities	Digging	Ploughing, digging
	-	Irrigation of fields
	Harvesting crops	Harvesting crops
	Sowing	Sowing
	Weeding	-
	Cutting grass from fields	-
	Groundnut picking	-
Selling Allied Activities	Husking/ winnowing	-
	Vegetable plucking	Vegetable plucking
	-	Fertilizing
	Sells vegetable, groundnuts, Cereals, sometimes sells fuel wood	Occasionally
	Feeding cattle, milling& Bathing the cattle sometimes	Cattlefeeding, milking, bathing cattle
	Cleaning of cattle shed	Cleaning of cattle shed sometimes ed,

Source: National commission for women. 2005

According to National Commission for women picture in agriculture perhaps most of the manual operations like sowing, weeding, transplanting, harvesting, winnowing and threshing are done by women. Their contribution to the rural economy especially agriculture and cottage



industries, dairy and quite a number and cottage industries, dairy and quite a number of back breaking jobs are yet to be assessed. While the work put in by the women and their earning meet the survival need of the family, their contributions in the fields of agriculture food productions, forestry, animal husbandry, industry, processing occupations contribute to the growth of GNP, thereby making direct contribution to the national economy. There is no doubt that the women contribution to the family and national economy is much more than the actual earnings.

Rural women play the dual role of housewife and mother along with that of

primary producer, processor and seller of products from the family farm. In any farming system in rural women is a central part of the human eco-system in which resources are produced, brought or gathered and transformed for use or sale by the family. Live-stock farms are a part of that eco-system, and rural woman's role extend from her labour contribution to participation in decision-making about the choice of animals and poultry, their care and feeding, housing, breeding, adequate quantified baseline data, however, precise production responsibilities cannot be identified, and this makes it difficult to direct inputs appropriately.

**Table -2**

**Share of Farm Women in Agriculture Operations**

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

**Source:** National commission for women, "Impact of WTO on women in Agriculture, by research Foundation Science and Technology, New Delhi, 2005.

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.

Over the years, there has been a decline in the number of cultivators and more and more women are working as agricultural laborers. According to the Census of India, in 2011, the work force participation rate for female at the

national level stands at 25.52% compared to 53.26% for males. In the rural sector, it was 15.44% for female workers and 53.76% for male workers. As per census 2011, 41.1% of female main and marginal workers are agricultural labourers, 24.4% are cultivators, 5.7% are house hold industry workers and 29.2% are engaged in other works As per National Sample Survey (68<sup>th</sup> round), the worker population ratio for females in rural sector was 24.8 in 2011-12 while for males it was 54.3. In urban sector, it was 14.7 for females and 54.6 for males.



### Problems of facing by women in Agriculture

- Wages and Income: Agricultural wages and family incomes of agricultural workers are very low in India. Through, money wage rates started increasing, prices also increased considerably, the real wage rates did not increase accordingly. Currently labours are getting around Rs. 150/day under the MGNREGA in rural areas.
  - Indebtedness: In the absence of banking system in the rural areas and trial process of sanction by the commercial banks, farmers prefers to take loans from un institutional sources like Sahukars (moneylenders), landlords at the very high rate (in some cases at 40% to 50%) . This exorbitant rate traps in the vicious circle of debt.
  - More work less pay: Generally man can easily shift from one place to another place for better job opportunities and better income facilities. They can move as a migrant from their birth of place to anywhere. But women cannot shift from their living place. 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 of family farms, especially during the peak periods of sowing and harvesting has become very common. Farmers on the other hands also seek to prefer women as agricultural workers. The farmer is forced 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 present a big proportion of all women workers continue to receive lower wages than men. The ministry of labour puts the differences at 60 % of men wages, while the Indian labour journal showed that women received 75 % of men earnings.
- Women have unequal land rights. They hardly enjoy land ownership rights directly in their names. Limited rights or access to arable land further limits livelihood options and exacerbates financial strain on women, especially in women- headed households.
  - Women have little control over decision making process, either inside home or outside home. Without access to capital or household decision making abilities women lack the resources that are for their labor stability and stability of their household.
  - Poor women farmers are less able to purchase technology to adapt to climate change due to lack of access to credit and agricultural services. They often have low productivity due to an inability to invest in things such as improved seeds and soil replenishment.
  - Lack of market intelligence and inadequate information put women



- farmers under unfavourable situation with weak bargaining power with the buyers.
- Gender biasness is one of the major problems faced by the women
  - Lack of awareness and lower access to modern technologies
  - Lack of training and less access to productive Resources
  - Lack of opportunity and meager exposure
  - Low wages and incentives Physical and mental stress Non recognition of women despite of their active contribution Health and safety issues
- Suggestions to overcome the problems**
- **Effective implementation of the Minimum Wage Act:** - This would go a long way in the development of quality work forces in agriculture in India.
  - **Development of agriculture- multi-cropping:-** for better utilization of land resources.
  - **Self Help Groups (SHG):** The movement SHGs is primarily aimed at elevating the status of economically weaker sections of the society. The main and prime requirement of women and their families to fulfill their financial needs. The empowerment of women is a multidimensional process, which enables the group of individuals to rely their identity and powers in all the spheres of life. The journey of the women in the SHGs towards looking their own needs, their solutions, social empowerment, understanding the problems of the society. There are many good results of the SHG movement.
  - Proper health and safety measures should be taken into consideration
  - More facilities should be provided to poor rural women for land, agricultural and livestock extension services.
  - Measures should be taken to enhance women's literacy rates. A separate education policy for women may serve the purpose.
  - Priority must be given to women in accessing credit on soft terms from banks and others financial institutions for setting up their business, for buying properties, and for house buildings.
  - 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.
  - Minimum and equal wages should be fixed by state government for women agricultural labours and the rates should be reviewed periodically.
  - 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.
  - Conscious efforts are needed for training of female agricultural workers in the rural areas in alternative skills.
  - There is a need to make available cheap credit to needy agricultural women to start self employment and as a result of that our rural women





may get additional opportunity for gainful employment.

- Addition to above, some alternatives employment programmes and opportunities should be provided to agricultural women labour in rural areas.

Finally it is concluded that agriculture is central to economic growth where women can learn the best way to grow and cultivate their own nutritious food and sell at markets. So closing the gender gap in agriculture is imperative if we want to grow productivity and ensures food security.

#### Conclusion

Rural women are major contributions in agriculture and 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. 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. For the recognition of women contribution in agriculture and its allied fields are reducing the gender issues. In this regard Government must formulate policies to enhance their skills and their works should be counted in economic indicators.

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