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Role of rural women in agriculture: A review

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Abstract

Agriculture is the first culture that man learnt to practice as a means of living and a way of life. It is the primary sector of any economy. This sector employs 4/5th of all economically active women in the country. About 48% of India's self-employed farmers are women. About 70% of farm work is performed by women. The rural women play a significant role in agriculture and other agro based activities like crop production, livestock production, horticulture, post-harvesting operations, agro/social forestry fisheries, and other allied sectors. It has been observed that women work every day for about 8-9 hours in agriculture and 4 hours in household activities and there are certain agricultural operations in which female agricultural workers are considered better than male. The present review complies the recent trends regarding various roles played by the women in agriculture sectors.

Keywords: Agriculture activities, women, rural and economy

1. Introduction

Agriculture is considering as the backbone of the Indian rural economy and is a family enterprise. It is an important engine of growth and poverty reduction. India's economic security is heavily dependent on agriculture. In terms of employment, it is the most important source of income, especially for rural women. According to 2011 World Bank Data, only 17.5% of India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) accounted for by agricultural production. Based on 2012 data, India is 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. Hence, continued and sustained growth of agriculture sector is critical to meet the food requirements of the country besides livelihood opportunities and income generation activities in rural areas.

Women play an important role in Indian Agriculture. Women are involved in 70% of major farm work and constitute 60% of the farming population (NSWF, 2014) [9]. In India, out of 30 million women work force, 20 million live in rural areas. The daily work schedule of rural women is very demanding and arduous. It is estimated that during peak period, women work for about 8-9 hours a day in agriculture and 4 hours in household activities and there are certain agricultural operations in which females are considered better than male workers (Suma *et al.*, 2005) [15]. Women carry out many jobs as weeding, transplanting, harvesting, threshing, storing grains and providing fuel and water.

Women in India are the backbone of the society. They play important role resource in agriculture and rural economy. They make essential contributions to the agricultural development and allied activities. They pursue multiple livelihood strategies. These activities include producing agricultural crop, rearing animals, preparing food, working in rural enterprises, being engaged in trade and marketing, caring family members and maintaining their homes. About 63% of all economically active men are engaged in agriculture as compared to 78% of women. Women play an important role in agriculture- as farmers, co-farmers, wage labours and managers of the farms. They have conventionally been producers of food from seed to kitchen. They carry the heavier work burden in food production and because of gender discrimination, get lower returns for their work.

2. Women in Agriculture Economy

Women make essential contributions to the agricultural and rural economies. 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. Agriculture including various sub-sectors employs 80 per cent of all economically active women; they comprise 33 per cent of the agricultural labour force and 48 per cent of self-employed farmers

(Kushwah, *et al.* 2018) [8]. Rural Women form the most important productive work force in the Economy of majority of the developing nations including India. According to census 2011, out of total female workers, 55% were agricultural laborers and 24% were cultivators. A recent study conducted by Women and Population Division of FAO revealed that in developing countries women provide 70% of agricultural labor, 60-80% labor for household food production, 100% labor for processing the basic food stuffs, 80% for food storage and 90% for water and fuel wood collection for households. Women produce 60 to 80% 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 the regions. Diro *et al.* (2018) [3] reported that women's empowerment contributes not only reducing the gender gap in agricultural productivity, but also to improve, specifically, productivity from farms managed by women.

2.1 Role of Women in Agriculture

Women play a significant and crucial role in agricultural development and allied fields including, main crop production, livestock production, horticulture, post-harvesting operations, agro/social forestry, fishing etc. (Banerjee *et al.*, 2016) [2]. Rural women participate in all aspects of agriculture, from crop selection to land preparation, to seed selection, planting, weeding, pest control, harvesting, crop storage, handling, marketing and processing. Majority of the farm women participate in threshing, preparation of land, sowing, weeding, harvesting, whereas farmwomen contribution is higher in seed cleaning and picking of vegetables (Humera *et al.*, 2009) [5]. According to Fabiyi *et al.* (2007) [4] the rural women participation in agriculture field includes land clearing 58%, planting 72%, weeding 80%, transporting of products 82%, harvesting 93%, processing 93% and marketing 88%. It has been observed that women play important role as labor (27.7%), cattle/sheep rearing (41.6%), and collection of minor forest produces (25.0%) and allied activities (25.0%). Only in horticulture, the participation rate of men was high (12.5%) as compared to women. (Kalyani *et al.* 2011) [6]. Further it has been observed that women are actively engaged in all major agriculture related activities such as ploughing of field (2%), cleaning of field 68%, leveling of field (23.3%), sowing (74.6%), transplanting (83.3%), manure application (56%), fertilizer application (12%), weeding (58%), thinning (60.6%), gap protection measures (8.6%), harvesting of crop and cutting of grass (78.6%), picking (77.3%), shifting produce to threshing floor (4.6%), winnowing (84.6%), drying of grains (96%), cleaning of grains (96%), grading (55.3%), storage (92.6%), marketing (8.6%) and processing (39.3%) (Aggarwal *et al.* 2013) [1]. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization, Indian women represent a share of 21% and 24% of all fishers and fish farmers, respectively. According to Revanwar *et al.* (2015) [11] the role of farmwomen in the cotton production system was found in weeding, cotton picking, gathering and heaping (100%) and dibbling activities (80%). And further followed by removing stalks and stubbles (80%) and spreading of manure (50%). The activity wise discomfort rating is highest for cotton picking followed by spreading manure, seed dropping and weeding. Activity wise drudgery load in cotton production system reveal that among the factor causing impact on overall drudgery in cotton production activities includes physical load, repetitive strain

load followed by physiological load and postural load.

2.2 Role of Women in Livestock Rearing

Animal husbandry is a major domain in which participation of rural women is seeing considerably high. Women do participate in all activities of animal domain like collecting and bringing fodder, milking, cleaning shed, feeding animals and processing milk. Women account for higher percent participation than men indifferent livestock activities. Sharma & Khandelwal (2002) [13] reported 100% participation of women in case of fodder collection and cleaning of animal shed, and milking of animal 91.66%. Sankhala and Sharma (2001) [12] found that less role is performed by farmwomen in marketing and healthcare of animals. Women play maximum role in caring of pregnant animals (91.66%) followed by taking animals for pregnancy diagnosis (90.83%). In case of livestock activities except health care (13.88%) and marketing of produce (6.66%) women are always involved in all the other activities including fodder collection (66.66%), feeding (77.78%), cleaning shed (91.67%), milking (97.22%), and processing milk (97.22%). About 90% women involved in milking while 89.16% women take care for newborn or young animals. Rural women are highly involved in cleaning of animal sheds (89.16%), feeding the animals (87%) and disposal of cow dung 86.66% (Rathod *et al.*, 2011) [10]. The farm women participation is least in farm record maintenance (52.5%) and getting loans or credits from the banks (49.16%). Women participate mostly in non-financial activities and there is a need to educate farmwomen about scientific management practices for increasing livestock production.

About 20-26%, women take their operational decision by their selves is the operational decisions of farmwomen (20-26%) take. On the other hand, about 54.82% of the rural women consult their spouse, to take decisions regarding all the activities. The 14% farmwomen consult all their family members and friends to take decisions and 4.28% of rural women never participate in decision-making of farming system (Kavita, 2006) [7]. All in all, the level of involvement of women in decision making regarding farming has been found medium (Singh *et al.* 2005) [14]

2.3 Problems Faced By Women in Agriculture

Gender biasness is one of the major problems faced by the women in rural areas. Lack of awareness and lower access to modern technologies is also a challenge for them. Constraints on time and mobility due to various other household responsibilities are also a big problem faced by Indian women. Low wages and incentives, non-recognition of women despite of their active contribution/participation, health and safety issues are also considerable challenges in their life of when compared to men.

3. Conclusion

Rural women are the major contributors in agriculture and its allied fields. They participate in all aspects of agriculture, from crop selection to land preparation, to seed selection, planting, weeding, pest control, harvesting, crop storage and handling, marketing and processing in addition to the household activities. From ancient time in farming, women are playing important role as that of men. Their contribution in every functional area of farming is never less than men. Even statistics says that, women produce 80 percent of crops and own about one percent of land. But still their position in agricultural economy is very insignificant and dominated by

men's. They are not getting more role indecision making related to strategy formation in the agriculture sector from household to national level. Women must have aware was regarding their existing rights, access to judicial relief and redress, removal of discrimination through legal reforms and providing legal aid, assistance and counseling. Further women must be involved in decision-making bodies that have the potential to introduce structural changes in the society.

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