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Role of Women in Agriculture: The facts

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Abstract

The women are considered as backbone of agricultural workforce. Mostly women in developing countries are occupied in agriculture. Women play a significant and crucial role in agricultural development and allied fields including in the crop production, livestock production, horticulture and post harvest operations. Agriculture in India defines familial tradition, social relations and gender roles. Agriculture is directly tied to issues such as economic independence, decision making abilities, agency and access to education and health services. This paper indicates the role and major obstacles in women growth in agriculture sector.

Keywords: Agriculture, education, health, women.

Introduction

Agriculture plays a vital role in India's economy. Agriculture is a major source of rural livelihoods and supports over half of the Indian population, helping to alleviate poverty and unemployment to a large extent. Over 58 per cent of the rural households depend on agriculture as their principal means of livelihood. Although the share of agriculture in India's GDP (Gross Domestic Product) has been declining, yet agriculture and its allied sectors like forestry and fishing contributes nearly 14% to India's GDP, accounts for about 11% of our exports, and supports half of our population's livelihood, besides also being the source of raw material for a large number of industries (Anonymous, 2015). As per the 4th Advance Estimates (2015-16), food grain and pulses production is estimated at 253.16 and 17.33 million tonnes (MT), respectively. With an annual output of 146.3 MT, India is the largest producer of milk,

accounting for 18.5 per cent of the total world production. India, the second-largest producer of sugar, accounts for 14 per cent of the global output. It is the sixth-largest exporter of sugar, accounting for 2.76 per cent of the global exports.

Women play an important role in agricultural development and allied fields including in the crop production, livestock production, post harvest operations, agro/social forestry, fisheries, etc. As per Census 2011, workers constituted 39.79 per cent of total population whereas the ratio of female workers was 25.51 per cent. At All-India level the share of females as cultivators, agricultural labourers, workers in the household industry and other workers reported at 24.92, 18.56, 2.95 and 47.20 per cent, respectively. The graph of female main workers to total female population raise of 25.51 per cent as compared to 14.68 per cent reported in the 2001 Census. Work participation rate of female workers in rural areas was higher which stood at 30.0 per cent as compared to 15.4 per cent in urban areas. (Anonymous, 2013)

According to the M.S. Swaminathan (Father of Green Revolution in India) “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”.

Review of Literature

The review of literature is pertaining significant role of women in agriculture.

Aggarwal et al. (2013) studied that around 20 to 70 per cent of the rural women are involved in agricultural production and post harvest activities.

Khan (2013) stated that any activity in agricultural production except ploughing in which women are not actively involved and played actively all others farm-activities decision making and saving activities in the households. So women have greater roles in agriculture and economic activities.

Recognition of their important role in agriculture should not obscure for the reason that farm women continue to be concerned with their primary functions as wives, mothers and homemakers (Lal and Khurana, 2011).

Mondal (2013) concluded that rural women are exploited by landlords for their personal good and enrichment. Women are treated as sub-servant or personal property

Swamikannan and Jeyalakshmi (2015) observed that female workers are moved from agricultural activities to non- agricultural activities. Besides, laborer is a wage differences for the same type of between male and female workers which discourages the female workers to involve in agriculture

Approximately 3/4 of all women workers in rural India are in agriculture and many more contribute to it through their unpaid activities even though their work is not officially or statistically recognized. They are especially prominent in production of some food grains and particular cash crops including in plantation-based work (Ghosh, 2015)

Role of women's in different sectors

(i) **Agriculture sector:** Seed sowing, transplanting, weeding, irrigation, fertilizer application, plant protection, harvesting, winnowing, storing etc.

(ii) **Domestic work:** 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 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.

Rural women performs many labor intensive jobs such as field preparation, weeding, hoeing, grass cutting, picking, detrashing in sugarcane, cotton stick collections, separation of seeds from fiber and wood collections etc. Today, women face more difficulties in searching of fire wood because the area of grazing, desert and forest are reducing continuously. Availability of clean drinking water is another major problem in rural areas and it is also the duty of women.

Women in Dairy Sector

A rural woman is responsible for livestock management and its other associated activities like milking, milk processing and preparation of ghee are also carried out by the women. On an average, a woman devotes 3.5 hours per day for animal husbandry activities against only 1.6 hours per day devoted by men in this category. Women accounted for 93 per cent of total employment in dairy production (Verma, 1992). Rural women's are well aware of each animals behaviour and their rearing procedure. Although majority of women are involved in shed cleaning and collection of farm yard manure. Women also prepare cooking fuel (dung cakes) by mixing dung with twigs and crop residues.

Women in Poultry Farming

Poultry farming is the main sources of rural economy in our country. The involvement of women's is higher in poultry farming at household level. Although rural women are not follows modern management techniques such as vaccination and improved feed but their poultry enterprise is impressive. It is observe that income from poultry farming has been rising year after year. In order to generate more and more income, rural women often sell all eggs and poultry meat. Now there is some realization about the knowledge possessed by women and the need to improve their knowledge, skills and awareness.

Women in Decision Making in Agriculture

The decision making process is an important part of every household because it makes implementation of a better or easy programme. In general, both husband and wife are jointly responsible for making decisions on matters like family obligations, specific housing expenses and other formalities. Rural women did not decide independently about any farm operation but participated in almost all the decisions. Nevertheless, women's suggestions are not given due consideration in the decisions pertaining to agricultural sector and important family matters. It is because the majority of women is illiterate, has little time to know about the latest techniques of framing and restricted mobility due to several cultural taboos. Moreover, the women should have a penchant for self- empowerment through enhancing their knowledge and skills. Today, many

government policies are frame to provide legal support and instill confidence in women to build leadership skills for managing agricultural community based development activities.

Women in Land Agenda

The land reform measures adopted by the Indian Union or respective states are not in accordance with any personal law of any community. In matter of women's right to inheritance of agriculture land, states either have their own policy or refer it to the principle of personal laws. (Gupta, 2002)

1. Old age security if sons do not look after them.
2. The predominant notion that their daughters can inherit land if the mother has it in her own name.
3. Women can use the property to pay for their daughter's marriage in the absence of the husband, as sons usually inherit the property and may be unwilling to pay for their sister's marriage.
4. Lack of security in the matrimonial home as women do not have any legal right to property, be it land, cattle or house.
5. Given the rise in the cases of divorce, desertion and physical violence against women by husbands, the women expressed the urgent need for secure shelter, be it legal right to be homestead of their parents or land to cultivation.
6. The younger women especially those who have already divorced, deserted or remained unmarried, preferred to be given a share in the parents property, be it land, house or both.
7. The women also pointed out that apart from ploughing, they participate in all agricultural operations. Women who belonged to peasant house hold, but did not have to work as agricultural labourers also pointed out that they bear all responsibility for the agriculture produce once it is brought home from the field.
8. While women do not have ownership rights recorded in their name, they however bear the responsibility of returning debts, incurred by their husbands in lieu of land mortgage.
9. Women are often not informed about such debts or transactions the husbands enter into with the assets of the family. The women felt that such a solution could be checked if they as owners were to be signatories to the transaction.

Major Obstacles in Women Growth in Agriculture Sector:

- Lack of access to improved tools, agricultural productive resources, animals and machinery to increase labor productivity is a major constraint of women farmers in the world.
- As men migrate in search of better-paid work, women in rural India are taking over agricultural work in the villages.
- The dependence of women labour on family farms, especially during the peak periods of sowing and harvesting has become very common.
- They face meager wages, long hours, hazardous work and sexual harassment.
- The less consideration of rural women in decision making process.
- Women do not know their legal rights.
- Due to the use of agro-chemicals women are exposed to several health hazards such as gynecological infections, arthritis, intestinal and parasitic infections.
- Women from landless families difficult to purchase fodder for their animals.
- Women workers in agriculture suffer from high illiteracy rate among them and drop-out of schools.
- Miss applying some laws and regulations in favor of women such heritage legislation.
- Currently, the limited availability of credit hampers women's ability to purchase necessary inputs.

Suggestions

The role of women in agricultural activities is incredible but the following suggestions are given to improve their status.

1. Determine the working period of rural women according to monetary terms.
2. Additional facilities should be provided to poor rural women for land, agricultural and livestock extension services.
3. There is an urgent need to enhance women's literacy rates. Government should conduct many workshops, seminars and awareness programmes where the rural women are aware with modern cost effective agricultural techniques.

4. Rural 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.
5. Rural women must be involved in decision making bodies that have the potential to changes the gender relations in the society.

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