

Role of Women in Indian Agriculture

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Abstract

Women have been under privileged due to Indian social system- the labor and contribution of women in balancing work and life are a challenging one- the traditional misconceptions force the set-up in refusing women in all respects- wage payments and other entitlements have unjustly denied to them aided by pre conceived notions. Poor educational opportunities remain the curse for women in asserting their roles in getting primacy in sharing the fruits of their labor. Still, of late, things have started improving owing to some positive policy pronouncements from the government.

Introduction

India, being one of the largest economic power with agricultural as the backbone of it, providing employment opportunities to large no of people either directly and indirectly. Out of this dedicated labor force, women constitute a sizeable number because of inherent dependant stature conferred on them by the society. More than 70% of Indian populace is absorbed by the farm sector in which women includes a sizeable chunk both as cultivators and agricultural laborers. The term agriculture is having broader perspective as it ranges from the production of paddy and related crops to cultivation of produces, besides livestock rearing.

Women- Indian Perspective

Traditionally, India has been one of the countries where the role of women in various issues has been consistently debated upon. The reason for this phenomenon is attributable to a variety of reasons since the evolution of womanhood in Indian perspective has undergone a lot of troubles and tribulations for long.

Though part of this problem is entrenched with the society's system and conventions, the remaining is due to the myopic mindset of the potential of woman power. In rural India, the percentage of women who are involved in agriculture for their livelihood is close to 84%. Women constitute about 33% of cultivators and about 47% percent of peasants. These data do not take into account the people in livestock, fisheries and various other ancillary forms of food production in the country. In 2009, 94% of the female agricultural labor force 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 farm sector 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 and not recognized.

Women also heavily involved in ancillary agricultural activities. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization, Indian women constituted a share of 21% and 24% of all fishers and fish farmers, respectively.

Despite their significant no of the labor force, women in India still face many disadvantages regarding pay, rights, and representation in local farmers organizations. Furthermore, their lack of empowerment and skill development schemes often results in negative externalities such as lower educational attainment for their children and poor familial health and the resultant decline in health.

Perceptual Bias towards Women

There are misconceptions about women like they are stumbling blocks to the development in general and the empowerment of women in particular. But the fact remains that they have been contributing in every possible way if given an opportunity and proved their mettle. This logic held good to agriculture too and contributed significantly. But a careful and detailed analysis on the role of women in Indian agricultural scenario points to the systematic development of agriculture as a profession by way of collecting seeds, domesticating animals for agriculture purposes and providing food security to family and cattle were the women as pioneers. This is the indication of remarkable changes in the socio-economic profile of women in the society.

Further, women contributed to protecting the soil health by way of resorting to organic recycling. The art of nourishing soil has come naturally to them due to their settlements predominantly in river beds. According to the Food and agriculture organization, the role of women in Indian agriculture is standing at 32 percent. Now, owing to increased exposure levels, the women have drafted into many schemes as beneficiaries which includes land development, training in traditional female skills, food production, and preservation techniques and many more. If given an opportunity, there are enormous opportunities existing to tap the expertise and role of women in all fields.

The protection of soil health is also taken care of, by the women admirably by ably contributing to the cause of agriculture.

Present Scenario

The modern age is the age of awakening of rights of women in all walks of life thanks to developments in information technology enabled living style predominantly. Their participation is very strong in all walks of life. The impact of education in society is very strong over the period which resulted in the emancipation of women in various fields and significant progress in many ways. Women constitute almost half of the population in the world. But the masculine ideology made them suffer a lot as they were denied equal rights on par with male counterparts which is also a reason for the slow development of their economic progress.

The participation of women in diverse roles in various categories of agriculture (in approximate) percentage is as below:

S.No	Category	Percentage of Engagement
1	Tea plantation	47
2	Cotton	46
3	Oil seeds	45
4	Vegetables	39
5	Fish Farmers	21

Education and Women

While education played a pivotal role, the fruits of education and other developmental evolutions have not resulted in the well being of women in certain informal sectors like agriculture due to many reasons.

- The Indian agriculture scenario is highly labor intensive. The large part of agricultural operations has been handled by farm hands with traditional methods involving primitive techniques. Hence, large no of farm hands both men and women taking part diverse role is no surprising. But the ratio is a more skewed one against the women for the reason that the women are traditionally confined to households work were liberated and let into the agriculture work to supplement and makeup the shortage in farm hands. The reasons for over absorption of women into agriculture in India ranges from poor wages which can be paid to lack of skill sets as preferred by the

industry. For long women being looked upon as a 'helper' in economic operations than the main player. This forfeits them rightful share in the production process and subsequently lead to underpayment of wages. Moreover, women are being considered as an appendage which can be added or disbanded is the thinking pattern predominantly runs across among various stakeholders.

- Secondly, women themselves not able to organize themselves as an asserting group owing to small landholdings held by them. It deprives them any guaranteed income of large scale out of agricultural operations. Because of this, they are being considered as the less important stakeholder in the overall scheme of things by their compatriots.
- Thirdly, Educational level of women who are into various roles in agriculture happens to be very poor in academic exposure. It deters them from taking up any meaningful role in enhancing their skill sets building, getting expertise in value addition programmes and other pursuits. Compounding this, the large semi and unskilled womenfolk remain content with what they are by not initiating anything of their own to come up in the ladder of economic well being.

Causes for poor representation

The main reason for lack of skill enhancement programmes for women is an increasing tendency to practice subsistence farming as the operations proved largely uneconomical owing to primitive agricultural practices with feeble income. It forces the men folk to diversify their earning pursuits by taking up other ventures while keeping the women into agriculture as a permanent workforce.

The anatomy of Indian agriculture is such that the huge proportion of the works have been assigned to women. It makes them more vulnerable in the sense that they are mistakenly taken for granted in getting the work done by cheap labor than resorting to mechanization. The important activities like sowing, transplanting are taken up by the women as they contribute a lot to the yield and cropping pattern of the agriculture. Further, weeding operations have

been carried out across the country with farm hands, Here too, the services of women have been roped into, largely.

The system of irrigation and water availability remain a concern in large parts of the country, especially in southern states. It prompts the need for going for sinking bore wells and exploring other options of water harvesting. As the economic wherewithal of the large farmers remains a concern, they still opt for traditional methods such as pulling out water from conventional wells with great vigor and effort. Here, the women members are being asked to take up this work on par with male counterparts for obvious reasons.

Mechanization in Harvesting

Many advancements have been made in agriculture frontier, of late. Sadly, it does not lead to meaningful quality changes in the work life of women in any way. Still, the women continue to be employed in harvest and post-harvest operations much to the chagrin of feminists. Harvesting process itself involved a lot of sub-processes like winnowing and storing. For this, women members are preferred as they are known to be perfect in carrying out this processes or else the produce will get low prices owing to poor quality.

Storage Facilities

Storing of food grains serves the dual purpose. Primarily, it serves the food requirements to the desired level. Further, it helps to ready the seed for the ensuing crop season. Hence, this work calls for meticulous planning as far as safekeeping and supply is concerned. Because of the changes witnessed in the legal, financial, and educational systems, the economic contributions of women can be improved in a way which will improve agro-economy and rural development in both mid and long terms.

The emancipation of women in an economic sense is possible more than ever before now owing to massive improvement in rural agriculture infrastructure and the emphasis on food processing related industries for employment generation can be better tapped into. A lot of women-centric schemes have been developed in recent times to create an era which is graduating from women-centric to women-led.

Conclusion

Indian women have been contributing tremendously to the cause of agriculture in all possible ways. This aspect is manifested in various forms. Besides agriculture, every sector is witnessing, getting enriched with the contribution of women. Hence, the status of women has improved a lot post liberalized era. Against this backdrop, it can be reasonably concluded that the status of women is a much-improved one in present times.

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