

Contributions and Challenges of Women in Agriculture and Allied Sectors in India

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Abstract:

India is a developing country. As a developing country the main occupation of the people is agriculture and its economy is predominantly agrarian economy. Around seventy percent of the population is live in the rural area and sixty percent are engaged in agriculture as their main source of income. Among them approximately 63% of the agricultural workforce is female. It indicates that women are significantly involve in agriculture, and allied activities contributing substantially to the sector's productivity. They are engage with the production of crops, live-stock, horticulture, sericulture, post harvesting operations etc. Likewise 70% of farm works are performed by women. Although, women are more than ever finally employed, differences in wages earned by women and men persist in India. Despite their significant contribution, women in agriculture often face gender based disparities, such as limited access to land ownership, credit and decision making power. The dominance of male in decision making in the household and economy has continued even in areas where women are the key provider of labour because the influence of women has not been recognized.

Keyword: Allied activities, Disparities, Harvesting, Horticulture, Predominantly

Introduction:

Indian is a developing country and its economy is basically a rural based agrarian economy. As a developing country Seventy percent of the population lives in rural area and among them sixty percent are engage in agriculture as their main source of income. Agriculture is an engine of growth and poverty reduction in developing countries like India where it is the main occupation of poor people. Among them 70% of women are engaged in agriculture and its allied activities, while 12% are engaged with own farm land activities. In almost Asian countries, the number of women employed in agriculture as a percentage of the economically active population is higher. Efforts by national governments and the international community to achieve their goals for agricultural development, economic growth and food security will be strengthened and accelerated if they build on the contributions that women make and take steps to mitigate there constraints. During the struggle movement of India M.K. Gandhi the father of the nation who had thought that the development of India could be made possible only when the villages would develop as India is a country of villages. Even after 76 years of Indian independence, 70% of the people are living in rural areas and 60% people are depending on the agricultural sector for their livelihood. Agriculture is the main culture that man learnt to practice as a means of living and a way of life. In terms of employment, it is the most important source of income, especially for rural women. In India the agricultural sectors contributes approximately 18.2% to the country's Gross

Domestic Products (GDP) at current prices in 2024-2025. This sector also provides livelihoods for about 42.3% of the population.

Women in India are the backbone of the society and important resource in agriculture and rural economy. Women make essential contributions to the agricultural development, allied and household activities and pursue multiple livelihood strategies. These activities are including producing agricultural crop, preparing food, working in rural enterprises, cleaning animals, caring family members had maintaining their homes. Data reflects that about 64% of economically active men are engaged in agriculture as compared to 78% of women. As by tradition, women have played a significant role in agricultural farmers, co-farmers, wage labour and managers of different farms.

2. Objectives of the Study:

In the male dominated Indian society, there is need to change the make and women aware their rights, get financially equipped and indirectly helping the economy of the country to grow faster. The main objectives are highlighted below:

1. To identify the role and contributions of women in agricultural and allied activities,
2. To identify the various types of obstacles faced by female farmers in agricultural sector,
3. To analyze the gender differences in roles and activities in agricultural sector,
4. To identify the more realistic approach to address and resolve the issues and steps taken to enhance the developmental potentials.

3. Methodology of the Study:

The present study is basically based on secondary data collected from different books, magazines, newspaper, journals, web pages and other printed materials etc. While the analytical methods employed to analyze the facts pertaining to the study.

4. Contribution and Role of Women in Agriculture and its Allied Sectors:

The role of women in agriculture has a long history. Historically, women have been playing a crucial part in food production and rural livelihood particularly in rural areas. The famous agricultural scientist Swaminathan describes that, it was women who first domesticated crop plant and thereby initiated the art and science of farming. While men went out hunting in search for food, women started gathering seeds from the native flora and began cultivating those of interest from the point of food, feed, fodder, fiber and fuel. From that time women make essential contributions to the agriculture and rural economic. These are as follows:

4.1. Agriculture:

Rural women are mainly engaged with agricultural activities. They are major producers of food. The agricultural sector has the highest estimated percentage distribution of female workers followed by manufacturing. Nearly 65% workers are female in agricultural sector at the pan Indian level. Among them 94% of the female labour worked in cereal production, while 1.4% worked in vegetable production and 3.72% are engaged in fruits and spice crops. Along with the estimated percentage distributions of female worker in the manufacturing sector is 19.7%.

4.2. Sericulture:-

In India's sericulture industries, women contribute a significant portion of the workforce, with estimates suggesting they make up around 60% of the total workers. They are contributing in sericulture as worker

in raising food plants, leaf collection, and silk worm rearing, reeling/spinning and weaving.

4.3. Horticulture:

According to Annual Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) Report 2022-23 in India, while precise figures for female labour specifically in horticulture production are not readily available but women constitute a substantial portion of the agricultural workforce in India, including horticulture with estimated ranging from 33% to 64.4%. Women's roles are particularly prominent in labour intensive tasks like weeding, harvesting and post-harvest processing.

4.4. Livestock:

Women are largely involved in various aspects of livestock management, including food collection, feeding, watering, healthcare, animal management, milking and household level processing. In India women account for approximately 70% of the labour force engaged with the livestock sector. This significant contribution is often overlooked as women's involvement is frequently under reported.

4.5. Fisheries:

According to Food and Agriculture Organization, women play a major role in fisheries workforce, with estimates ranging from 44% to 50%. The records include both direct involvement in fishing activities and post-harvest activities like processing and trading.

4.6. Poultry:

Poultry farming is one of the major sources of rural economy to advance the women empowered. While specific comprehensive data on the exact percentage of female labour in Indian Poultry farming is difficult to find but it is known that women plays a significant role in this sector particularly in backyard poultry farming.

5. Challenges face by the women farmers in agricultural and its allied Sectors:

The women farmers in India face various challenges these are as follows:

- a. Despite contributing significantly to agriculture, women won only a small percentage of land, with titles often registered in men's names. The lack of ownership restricts their access to credit, governmental schemes and decision making process.
- b. women farmers always faces the difficulties for acquiring loan and credit due to lack of primary land and lower financial capability.
- c. Women have limited access to modern agricultural technologies and extension services, hindering their ability to adopt new practices and improve productivity.
- d. Lack of control over decision making process, either inside or outside home is another obstacle. Without access to capital or household decision making abilities women take the resources that are for their labour stability and their household.
- e. In India, women earn fewer wages, especially in joint, informal and private sector.
- f. Lack of opportunities for earning appropriate extension training materials.
- g. Mal-practices of national laws and regulations in favour of women such heritage legislation etc.

6. Suggestions to improve the women Agriculturists:

To improve the involvement of women agriculturist, it's crucial to focus on providing them with better access to resource, training and markets, while also addressing gender specific challenges. There are as follows:

- a. Strengthen Land Rights and Ownership rights to women,

- b. Improve access to financial service relating to women's need,
- c. Promote Agricultural Education and Training, Entrepreneurship to the women,
- d. Enhance Market Linkages and provide end-to-end services to help women access market,
- e. Ensure equal access to agricultural technology and digital tools,
- f. Encourage the adoption of sustainable and climate resilient farming practices,
- g. Implement gender responsive agricultural policies that address women's specific needs.

7. Conclusion:

Women are the major contributors in agriculture and its allied fields. Despite such a huge involvement role and dignity has yet not been recognized. Because, socio-economic and political indicators in our society, the status of women is regarded as low. But the level of women involvement in agriculture is very high. The involvement of the works like land preparation, crop production, livestock production, cottage industry weeding plant protection, harvesting etc. They are also performing their agricultural activities like post-harvest tasks like grading, packaging, cleaning, storing, and drying. By addressing all the above challenges and implementing targeted interventions, India can further empower its women farmers, leading to a more inclusive and sustainable agricultural sector.

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