



Role of Women in Agriculture and Its Allied Fields in India

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Abstract: In many areas of the world, women farmers are positively influencing their communities. They come from diverse backgrounds in regards to social status, land ownership, education, political climate, and access to technology. The agriculture sector 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. There is an increased demand for women workforce in this sector because they are considered to be more willing to accept low-wage informal jobs. Women farmers are still known as invisible farmers as the state and society are concerned. Women also have traditionally engaged in horticultural sector, fisheries and poultry farming.

Keywords – Invisible farmers, Agricultural, horticulture, fisheries and poultry farming.

I. INTRODUCTION

Women play a significant and crucial role in agricultural development and allied fields. According to agricultural statistics, about 73.2% of women in rural India work in agriculture, but only 12% of women own farm land. The Supreme Court ruled in 2020 that women have the same right to inherit property as men. Women, who form the backbone of Indian agriculture, may be particularly vulnerable to corporate exploitation.

The nature and extent of women's involvement in agriculture varies greatly from region to region. But regardless of these variations, women are actively involved in various agricultural activities. Rural women perform numerous labour-intensive jobs such as weeding, hoeing, grass cutting, picking, cotton stick collection, separation of seeds from fibre, keeping of livestock and its other associated activities like milking, milk processing, preparation of ghee, etc.

After liberalization the Indian agriculture went through a phenomenon called feminization of agriculture which means increase the share of women in agricultural work force. Nearly 75% of the full-time workers on Indian farms are women, according to the international humanitarian group OXFAM. Female farmers produce 60% to 80% of the South Asian country's food. The Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR, 2020) research revealed that the participation of women is 75 per cent in the production of major crops, 79 per cent in horticulture, 51 per cent in post-harvest work and 95 per cent in animal husbandry and fisheries. In 2021 Akanksha Kumari became the first woman mining engineer to work in an underground mine in India.

II. FEMINISATION OF AGRICULTURE

The term ‘feminisation of agriculture’ was first seen in the Economic Survey 2017-18. It is used to describe the increased absorption of women workforce in agricultural and allied activities. It points out the disproportionate concentration of women in the agriculture sector. Economic Survey 2020-21 says that with growing rural to urban migration by men, there is ‘feminisation’ of agriculture sector, with increasing number of women in multiple roles as cultivators, entrepreneurs, and labourers. Globally, there is empirical evidence that women have a decisive role in ensuring food security and preserving local agro-biodiversity. Rural women are responsible for the integrated management and use of diverse natural resources to meet the daily household needs. This requires that women farmers should have enhanced access to resources like land, water, credit, technology and training which warrants critical analysis in the context of India. In addition, the entitlements of women farmers will be the key to improve agriculture productivity. The differential access of women to resources like land, credit, water, seeds and markets needs to be addressed.

With women predominant at all levels-production, pre-harvest, post-harvest processing, packaging, marketing – of the agricultural value chain, to increase productivity in agriculture, it is imperative to adopt gender specific interventions. An ‘inclusive transformative agricultural policy’ should aim at gender-specific intervention to raise productivity of small farm holdings, integrate women as active agents in rural transformation, and engage men and women in extension services with gender expertise.

III. NEED OF THE STUDY

In this male dominated society, there is need to change and make the women aware about their rights, get financially equipped and indirectly helping the economy of the country to grow faster. Women working in agriculture, livestock, poultry, fisheries sectors face many barriers such as lower access to finance, social and labour rights, and lower voice and visibility. So, there is a need for more realistic approach to address and resolve the issues of low paid women workers and emphasis on its effectiveness to enhance the development potential.

IV. WOMEN WORK PARTICIPATION IN INDIA (1981-2021)

India is celebrating and commemorating the progressive 75 years of India after independence with ‘Azaadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav’ and promulgating mission of warranting women as “Empowered women- Empowered Nation”. Fig. 1 indicates that women participation in India gradually increased with 19.67 percent to 29.56 percent from 1981-2021 in agricultural and allied sector activities except in 2011. Further MoSPI (2021) stated that the workforce participation rate for rural females is significantly higher at 41.8 percent against urban women participation rate of 35.31 percent. Fig.3 indicates the female beneficiaries above 30% under PM-Kisan during 2020-21 in India.

Agriculture: 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: Paid Labourers., Cultivator doing labour on their own land., Managers of certain aspects of agricultural production by way of labour supervision and the participation in post-harvest operations. The agriculture sector has the highest estimated percentage distribution of female workers followed by manufacturing. Nearly 63% workers are female in the agriculture sector at the pan-India level, while the estimated percentage distribution of female worker in the manufacturing sector is 11.2% (Fig.2), according to the annual Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) Report 2021-22. Details of activities taken up by women in Agriculture and its allied activities are given in Fig 2.

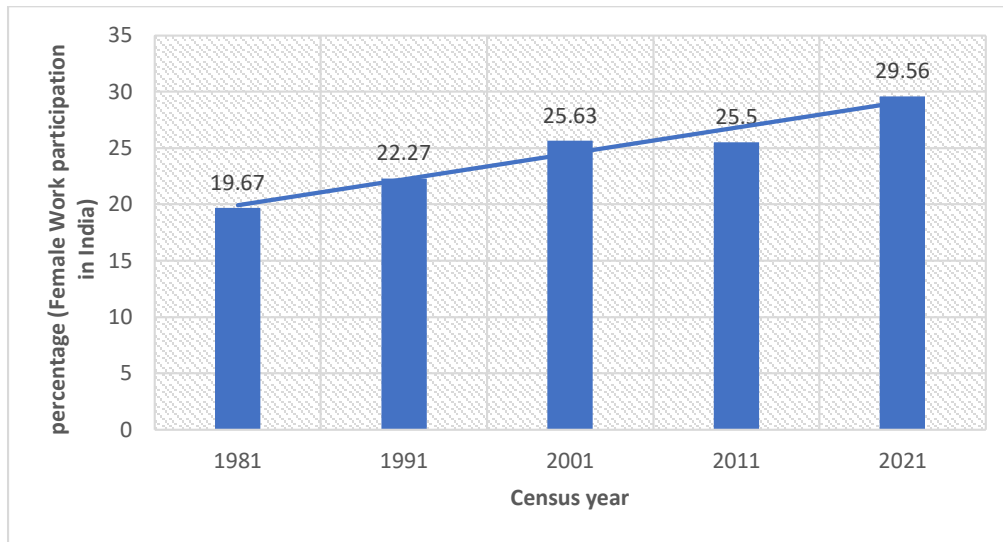


Fig.1 women work participation in India
(Source: Office of the Registrar General, India)

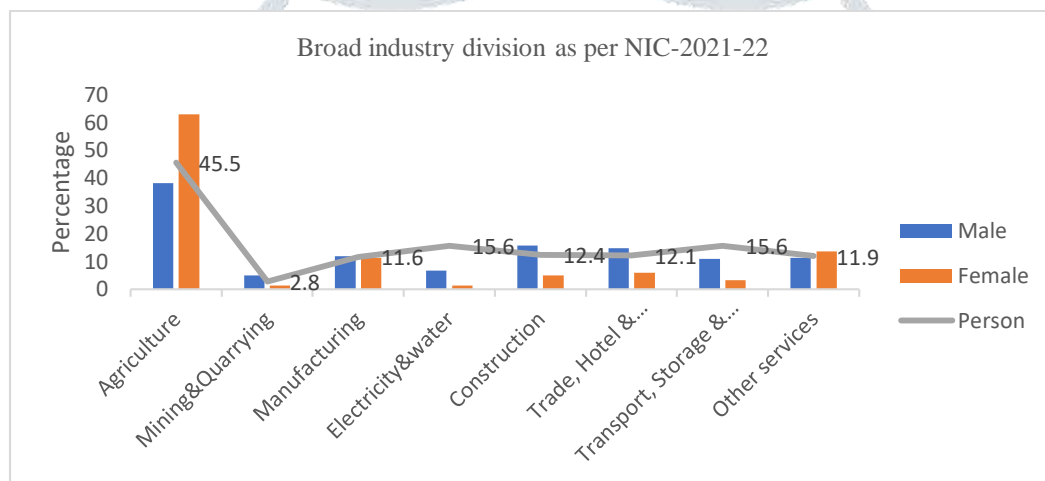


Fig.2 Source: Ministry of Labour & Employment, Govt. of India

Women leadership in India's horticulture sector: Women have historically been the most important consumers of horticultural commodities, not only in India but also in other parts of the world. But many people are oblivious to the reality that the horticulture and agriculture industry in India is dominated by prominent women who hold positions such as business leaders and owners, growers, marketers, and researchers. A very recent announcement made by the Agricultural and Applied Economics Association (AAEA) revealed that economist Jayati Ghosh was chosen as the recipient of the 2023 Global Agricultural Economics Award (AAEA).

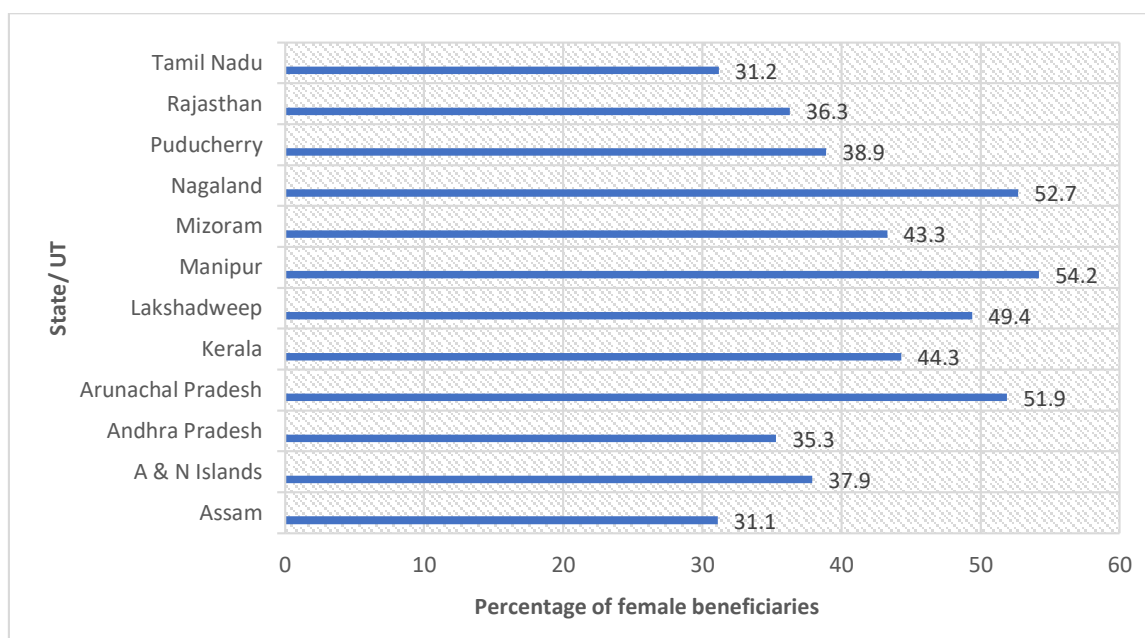


Fig.3 female beneficiaries above 30% under PM-Kisan during 2020-21 in India
(Source: Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare)

Livestock: Livestock is the primary livelihood activity used to meet household food needs as well as supplement farm incomes. It is a common practice in the rural areas to give an animal as part of a women's dowry. Studies have revealed rural women earn extra income from the sale of milk and animals. Mostly women are engaged in cattle management activities such as Cleaning of animal and sheds, Watering of cattle, Milking the animals, Fodder collection, Preparing dung cakes, Collection farm yard manure etc.

Except grazing, all other livestock management activities are predominantly performed by women. Men, however, share the responsibility of taking care of sick animals. It is evident that the women are playing a dominant role in the livestock production and management activities.

The livestock sector is one of the most rapidly growing components of the rural economy of India, accounting for 5% of national income and 28% of agricultural GDP in 2018-19. In the last six years, the livestock sector grew at 7.9% (at constant prices) while crop farming grew by 2%. Our field studies show that in rural households that own livestock, women are invariably engaged in animal rearing. On the International Day of Rural Women (October 15), we need to recognise the role of women in livestock rearing, and to include women in all facets of livestock development, be it breeding, veterinary care, extension services, training or access to credit and markets.

It is widely recognised that the majority of women workers in rural areas (72%) are engaged in agricultural activities. However, with the exception of participation in dairy co-operatives, specifically in milk marketing, women's role in the livestock economy is not as widely known or discussed. There were five million women members in dairy co-operatives in 2015-16, and this increased further to 5.4 million in 2020-21. Women accounted for 31% of all members of dairy producer cooperatives in 2020-21.

Issues in the inclusion of women livestock farmers

Data collection: Conventional labour force surveys fail to accurately record women's work in livestock-raising. Further women livestock farmers are not visible to policymakers due to the lack of gender-disaggregated data.

Reasons for inaccurate data: Sporadic nature of work undertaken and Own responses of women.

Underestimation: Women actually engaged in the livestock economy were four times the official estimate. Statistics from India's first national Time Use Survey in 2019 corroborate this finding.

Reach of extension services: The reach of extension services to women livestock farmers remains scarce. According to official reports, 80,000 livestock farmers were trained across the country in 2021, but we have no idea how many were women farmers.

Credit availability: Women in poor households, without collateral to offer to banks, found it difficult to avail loans to purchase livestock. Around 15 lakh new Kisan Credit Cards (KCC) were provided to livestock farmers under the KCC scheme during 2020-22 but there is no data on how many of them were women.

Technical knowledge: Women livestock farmers lacked technical knowledge on choice of animals (breeding) and veterinary care. They were not aware of the composition and functions of dairy boards.

Decision making: Men exercised decisions even in women-only dairy cooperatives.

Marginalised: The voice of women from landless or poor peasant Scheduled Caste households was rarely heard.

Poultry: Poultry farming is one of the major sources of rural economy. The rate of women participation in poultry farming at household level is central in poultry industry. According to the Indian government's National Action Plan for Egg & Poultry-2022 (NAPEP), backyard poultry accounts for 20 percent of India's poultry sector, which is worth over ₹800 billion (around £8.5 billion). Across the country, around 30 million farmers are engaged in backyard poultry, estimates the 19th Livestock Census of India.

Invisible role of women in India's fisheries: Women have long been involved in fisheries. The priceless function played by women generally remains unrecognized. The contributions of the fisherwomen penetrate every aspect of pre and postharvest handling, preservation, processing & marketing of seafood products, and provide an integral link between producers and consumers. In India, women constitute about one-third of the labour force. In the total population of 5.4 million active fishers, 3.8 million is fishermen and 1.6 million are fisherwomen. The fisherwomen take part in the fish auction, buy fish and later take it to the market to sell it. Fisher women involved in marketing suffer the double burdens of being women in a traditional and highly prescriptive society and of being engaged in a form of employment, which is considered to be suitable only for older women, widows and the destitute. KC Rekha broke taboo out of necessity in 2017 and picked up the trade and became first and only licensed fisherwoman in India.

IV. CHALLENGES FACED BY WOMEN FARMERS

1. 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.
2. Women have limited access to use of productive resources.
3. Women perform all un-mechanized agricultural tasks and perform multiple tasks which add more burden to them due to lack of equipment and appropriate technology.
4. 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.
5. Few women holding of agricultural productive resources such as land, animals and machinery.
6. 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.

7. Women farmers in agricultural sector suffer from high illiteracy rate among them. They do not know their legal rights.
8. Women earn fewer wage, especially in joint, informal and private sector.
9. Miss applying some laws and regulations in favor of women such heritage legislation.
10. Lack of market intelligence and inadequate information put women farmers under unfavourable situation with weak bargaining power with the buyers.

V. CONCLUSION

Women have contributed significantly to the growth of the agricultural sector and other associated industries. The nature and level of women's involvement in agriculture vary greatly by region. Land preparation, sowing, nursery management, transplanting, weeding, irrigation, fertilizer application, plant protection, harvesting, winnowing, storing, and other agricultural duties are all performed by women. Women also predominate in post-harvest tasks like grading, packaging, cleaning, cleaning, storing, and drying. Milk and livestock sales help rural women supplement their income. As caretakers, feed gatherers, and birth attendants, women have a significant role in the management of livestock, notably goat, poultry, dairy, piggery, fishing, and goat rearing, processing, and marketing. Producing milk is another activity they engage in.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors stated that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.





Wheat harvesting in Moradabad



Cotton buds' collection in Bathinda



Paddy saplings plantation in Pilibhit



Poultry farming in Harthala village, Mbd



Woman Livestock Farmer in Moradabad



KC Rekha, First fisherwoman from Kerala

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