

AGRICULTURE AND ALLIED ACTIVITIES AND RURAL WOMEN: A CASE STUDY OF COOCH BEHAR DISTRICT IN WEST BENGAL

Dr. Ranjit Kr. Ghosh
Associate Professor of Economics
Alipurduar College, Alipurduar

Abstract

India is an agrarian developing country in which the agricultural sector and rural small scale and cottage industries are the main pillars of development. The actual development of agricultural sector and rural small scale and cottage industries depends mostly upon the active and honest participation of women. There is nothing to deny that the active participation of women in all economic activities will make the entire country developed by developing the rural India along with the urban India. In Indian society, from the very primitive age, women are the backbone for all round economic development and they act as the important human resource in an agrarian rural economy for maximum and careful utilization of rural natural resources in a sustainable manner. They used to play a multi-dimensional role in the development process of the country, especially of the rural India. Besides their household activities and child caring works at home they make essential contributions to the agriculture and allied activities and pursue multiple livelihood strategies. In rural areas, these activities include producing agricultural crops, cleaning animals, preparing food, working in rural enterprises, engaging in trade and marketing, caring family members and maintaining their homes effectively. In India, about 63% of all economically active men are engaged in agriculture as compared to 78% of women. So, the role of women is very remarkable to make India a wealthy and strong nation.

Keywords: women; agriculture; production; employment, multidimensional.

INTRODUCTION

. In Indian society, from the very primitive age, women are the backbone for all round economic development and they act as the important human resource in an agrarian rural economy for maximum and careful utilization of rural natural resources in a sustainable manner. They used to play a multi-dimensional role in the development process of the country, especially of the rural India. Besides their household activities and child caring works at home they make essential contributions to the agriculture and allied activities and pursue multiple livelihood strategies. In rural areas, these activities include producing agricultural crops, cleaning animals, preparing food, working in rural enterprises, engaging in trade and marketing, caring family members and maintaining their homes effectively. In India, about 63% of all economically active men are engaged in agriculture as compared to 78% of women. So, the role of women is very remarkable to make India a wealthy and strong nation. Prof. Swaminathan, the eminent agricultural scientist, states that **it was women who first domesticated crop plant and thereby initiated the art and science of farming in the world. In primitive society, while men went out hunting in search of food, women started gathering seeds**

from the native flora and begun cultivating those of interest from the point of view of food, feed, fodder, fiber and fuel. They have conventionally been producers of food from seed to kitchen.

It is undeniable that the desirable socio-economic rural development can be achieved only when women are stimulated and motivated to accept and adopt new techniques in all economic activities. In India, the largest numbers of women are engaged in farming operations and allied activities either as cultivators or as co-cultivators or as decision makers in agricultural activities, traditional local handicrafts and cottage industries or as agricultural labourers or as owners of maintaining small grocery and fast food shops. In an agrarian economy, like ours, they often act as the main participants and decision makers in various agricultural operations like seed sowing, transplanting, weeding, harvesting, threshing, application of manure for different crops, storage of seeds and food grains and also the post harvest home level processing. In addition to all these, they are also involved in bringing fodder from field, chaff cutting, feeding and cleaning of cattle, maintaining cattle shed, compost making, etc.

In view of all these things, in recent times, women have been recognized as the main partner of men in agriculture and allied activities and they are included in the effort of bringing new technology into operation effectively. The status of rural women has been improving day by day due to their whole hearted effort in making the rural economy wealthy and independent. All these activities have already shifted rural women from domestic activities to the commercial fields as income earning partners of the family. In this way, the modern rural women have also been empowered in agriculture and agriculture allied fields by showing their performances actively. In India, women contribute about 3/4th of the labour force required for agricultural operations and they produce more than 50 percent of agricultural output. Although women play an indispensable role in farming operations and allied activities, and in improving the quality of life in rural areas by increasing households income, their contributions often remain concealed due to some social barriers and gender bias. So, the main objective of this fundamental research work is to explain the multi-dimensional role of rural women in agriculture and allied activities and the scope of their empowerment through employment in a marginalized local level economy, like ours.

STUDY AREA

For the purpose of this present study we have considered a marginalized local level economy which is made up with the villages around the village market town of *Rajarhat* and the market town itself in *Cooch Behar District* of *West Bengal*. The two villages we considered for special study are *Yatrapur* and *Jagyanarayan Kuthi* under the *Rajarhat Gram Panchayat*. We have considered these two villages due to their strong base in agricultural and agriculture allied activities. The first village is nearer to the market town Rajarhat and relatively more developed in all respects than the second village. The second village has cheap irrigation facilities arranged by the government. So, our choice of these two villages may also reveal the effect of cheap irrigational facility in agricultural activities of the economy. Elsewhere these two villages will be termed as village-1 and Village-2. In fact, the whole Rajarhat Gram Panchayat area is synonymous with the local level rural economy being studied. The sale town or market town of Rajarhat is the centre of interaction of the activities of the villages around.

METHODOLOGY

Now we are in need of selecting a methodology that will be more suitable for our type of object. For explaining the multi-dimensional role of rural women in agriculture and allied activities and the scope of their empowerment through employment in a marginalized local level economy, like ours, we resort to a two-phase and one-stage stratified sample. In the first phase, out of total 1042 households, we have surveyed each and every household of the sample villages Yatrapur and Jagyanarayan Kuthi with a specially prepared household schedule. In the second-phase, for the special study of the activities of women in rural agriculture and allied fields, we have rather confined our study on 300 sample households taking 150 households from each sample village. Selection of these 300 sample households has been done on the basis of stratified sampling taking farm size as strata. Out of these 300 households 211 are the farm households. Again, out of these 211 farm households 133 belong to our Yatrapur village and the rest belong to Jagyanarayan Kuthi village. But in our study we have considered all the 300 households for our purpose. We have considered only the adult and able women who are actually engaged actively in agriculture and allied activities, in rural cottage industries, in grocery and fast food shops, etc. in our study. We have also included the local women representatives in **Three-Tier Panchayat System** as their works are positively correlated with the rural development. The total number of women participated actively in the above mentioned activities, in any form, that we found in our sample is 142. So, our analysis is mainly related to these 142 rural women. We have used the simple mathematical and statistical measures for our purpose. All the information used in the write up have been covered the agricultural year 2017-18 which is synonyms to our traditional agricultural year.

ROLE OF WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE AND ALLIED ACTIVITIES

In India, apart from their household activities and child caring works as loving mother, the rural women play a significant role in agricultural activities such as seeding, transplanting, weeding fertilizer application, plant protection, harvesting, processing, storage etc. and also in agriculture allied activities either as workers or supervisors. The actual development of agriculture and allied activities depends upon the participation of rural women either as labourers or as supervisors. In rural areas, they not only participate in agricultural activities as workers but they also act as the main decision making agent in various agricultural operations like seed sowing, transplanting, weeding, harvesting, threshing, application of manure for different crops, storage of seeds and food grains. Rural women play a vital and crucial role not only in agricultural production i.e. crop production but also in allied activities such as horticulture, tending animals, agro-forestry, fisheries etc. Their involvement in agriculture and other allied activities varies from region to region and also among different ecological zones, farming system, caste, class and socio-economic status of families. In our sample economy, the rural women are mostly engaged in agriculture and allied activities, in traditional rural handicrafts and cottage industries, in small grocery and fast food shops and also as representatives of the people in rural developmental works. The involvement of rural women in different agriculture and allied activities with Mean Percent Score and Ranks are shown in table 1.

Table1: Participation of Rural Women in Agriculture and Allied Activities (n= 142)

Activities	M.P.S	Rank
Before Sowing		
a) Land Ploughing	24.11	4th
b) Selection of Seed	23.47	5th
c) Sowing	53.24	2nd
d) Manure & Fertilizer	19.21	6th
e) Weeding	56.41	1st
f) Harvesting	46.73	3rd
After Harvesting		
a) Winnowing	55.81	1st
b) Storage	35.80	2nd
Household Activities		
a) Cooking	72.80	1st
b) Knitting & Stitching	30.91	3rd
c) Child care	62.60	2nd
Livestock Activities		
a) Cleaning Cattle Shed	65.60	2nd
b) Treatment of Animal Disease	22.21	4th
c) Milking	49.61	3rd
d) Dung Cake	69.22	1st
Marketing Activities		
a) Selling of Agriculture Products	22.81	2nd
b) Selling of Dairy Products	40.67	1st

Source: Field Survey; 2017-18

From the above table it is seen that in our agro-based rural economy most of the women are engaged either in agricultural activities or in agriculture allied activities. Their participation is comparatively better in household activities and in livestock activities. We should rather mention here, that we noticed from our several visits in the villages, that household activities and livestock activities are mainly the assigned duties for women in rural areas. In our sample economy, it is the women who bear the sole responsibility to maintain the livestock by cleaning the cattle sheds, milking, etc. and, also to maintain the peace in the family by feeding the members in time including child care and cleaning the household environment. Nearly 50 percent works in agriculture before sowing and after harvesting are performed actively by women along with their responsibility of maintaining the households. Our several visits in the villages rather compelled us to disclose the facts that women are engaged even at nights for winnowing and storing the agricultural products in addition to their duties of cooking and feeding the family members without taking any rest.

ROLE OF RURAL WOMEN IN OTHER DEVELOPMENTAL ACTIVITIES

Besides their active participation in agriculture and allied activities, the rural women also play very important roles in other rural developmental activities such as, in traditional rural handicrafts and cottage industries, in grocery and fast food shops, in rural development and cleaning environment as people's representatives and also as decision making agents in agriculture and allied activities, rural handicrafts and cottage industries and family development planning. All these activities not only help their own families in earning extra income but also act as stimulus for all

round rural development. In our sample economy, some women have been successfully engaged in operating fast food shops mainly in the evening, some have been engaged in traditional local cottage industries such as Bidi making, Sital Pati making, making of cloths by Hand Tats, making in earthen Religious Idols, etc. In this way, the rural women have already been emerged as the main income earning agents of their families. The multi-dimensional roles of women in other rural developmental activities are shown in table 2.

It is seen that in our rural economy most of the women are traditionally engaged in vegetable gardening for occasional domestic consumption. Again, a good number of rural women are actively engaged in home adjacent grocery shops and fast food shop operations, in making religious idols, as Bidi labourer and also in making fashionable Sital pati, etc. It is important to mention here that the rural women have been engaged in the above mentioned works mostly as their subsidiary occupations and they used to operate these works during their off time i.e. mainly in slack agricultural seasons. It is undoubtedly the sign of glory in the history of rural economic development that, though too small in number, some rural women have already acquired the status of decision making position in agricultural, agriculture allied and also in household activities. This has become possible due to their whole-hearted efforts for the betterment of their families and also for the society. The women representatives of the people used to take developmental decisions along with the men representatives for the up gradation of the rural economy by constructing streets, cleaning environment, distribution of works arranged by the Central and State Governments. Sometimes, the representative women arrange environmental awareness programmes and health awareness programmes and engage the rural women in fulfilling the objective of the Government. So, the local women representatives also act as the important wings of rural development.

Table 2: Participation of Rural Women in Agriculture allied and Other Activities (n=142)

Important Activities	No. of Women Engaged	Rank
1. Grocery Shop & Fast Food Shop Operation	19	3rd
2. Workers in Rural Cottage Industries	17	4th
3. Decision Making Agent in Farm Operations	14	5th
4. Veg. Gardening	76	1st
5. Decision Maker in the Households and Society	33	2nd
6. Activities in Rural Development	4	Representatives
7. Activities in Cleaning the Environment	4	„
8. Awareness Programmes	4	„

Source: Field Survey; 2017-18

EMPLOYMENT AND EMPOWERMENT OF RURAL WOMEN

Empowerment of women includes the action of raising the status of women through education, raising awareness, literacy, and training. Women's empowerment is all about equipping and allowing women to make life-determining decisions through the different problems in households and society. In our agrarian social system, it is

nothing to deny that the empowerment of rural women depends mainly on two things: **education and income earning**. The educated women usually exercise their power equally in operating agriculture and allied activities, in household decisions, in operating traditional local handicrafts and cottage industries and also in policy making for rural development. But the reality in an agrarian rural economy is that most of the rural women are illiterate and as a result they have to acquire the status of decision making agent in household and other developmental activities through employment and income earning with strong efforts and labour. The rural illiterate women who earn most of the incomes for family operations either as agricultural labourers or as farm partners or as operators of grocery shops and fast food shops or as workers and supervisors of local cottage industries along with their all household activities, are respected mainly as decision making agents in the families. These rural women are actually empowered in the society through their employment in different activities by their own efforts and hard labour. We rather mention this as **acquired empowerment**.

The number of rural women according to income earning groups and also as decision making agents in different household activities, in farm operations and also in other agriculture allied activities is shown in table 3. The table gives us a clear picture that the rural women who earns a major portion of income for the family, are able to exercise their power as decision maker either in household activities or in agricultural activities or in agriculture allied activities or in operations of fast food shops and grocery

Table 3: Distribution of Rural Women according to Annual Income Earned and also as Decision Maker

(n=142)

Annual Income Earned(Rs.)	Number of Women	No. of Decision Maker
Up to 50,000	07	03
50,001-100,000	19	14
100,001- 1,50,000	31	17
1,50,001-2,00,000	13	12
2,00,001 & Above	02	01

Source: Field Survey; 2017-18

shops. The number of women is comparatively more in the annual income group Rs. 100,001- 150,000, followed by the income group Rs. 50,001-100,000. The real picture is that the women who have been engaged in earning a sizable amount of income for the family, they are entitled to exercise their power equally in operating agriculture and allied activities, in household decisions and also in operating traditional local handicrafts and cottage industries. Thus, there is a positive correlation between income earning and empowerment among the rural women.

CONCLUSION

In an agrarian developing economy, like ours, the government should take initiatives to generate more employment opportunities for the rural women by creating new ventures such as agro-based industries, extension of traditional rural handicrafts and cottage industries, small businesses, etc. The micro finance structure should be extended and accelerated for the rural illiterate women. All these activities of the governments in all layers will not only open the scope of more employment opportunities to the rural women but these will also help them for successful employment in both economic and developmental spheres. The self-employment process of the rural

women in different rural development spheres will help their families in one hand and this will also develop the rural economy on the other. The rise in family income will undoubtedly increase the living standard of the families and this will help to educate their children in desired lines. Thus, when women are fully empowered in both rural and urban areas, the development process of the entire country will be completed.

REFERENCES:

1. Agarwalla and Singh ed. (1958): The Economics of Underdevelopment; Oxford University Press; Oxford.
2. Babu, P.K. (1988): Regional Planning in India; Chough Publications, Allahabad.
3. Banerjee, M. (1988): Planning in India; Oxford Publications and IBH, New Delhi.
4. Bhaduri, A. (1984): The Structure of Backward Agriculture; MacMillan India Limited; New Delhi.
5. Bharadwaj, K. (1974): Production Condition in Indian Agriculture- A Study Based on Farm Management Surveys; Cambridge University Press, London.
6. Gilling, D. (1975): Regional Planning and Social Change: A Responsive Approach; Saxon House, West Mead.
7. Jain, Swapnil (2007): A Study on Participation of Tribal Farm Women in Agriculture and Decision Making in Jhabua District of M.P. Thesis (unpublished), JNKVV, Jabalpur
8. Charnes, A. Cooper, W. W., Lewin, A. Y. & Seiford, L. M. (Eds.) (1994): Data envelopment analysis: Theory, methodology, and applications. Boston: Kluwer.
9. Chayanov, A.V. (1966): The Theory of Peasant Economy; Irwin Homewood.
10. Kar, S.C and Bhumali, A (2014): Mainstreaming Indian Rural Economy and Policy, Abhijit Publishing House, New Delhi
11. Koopmans, T.C., (1951): Analysis of Production as an efficient combination of Activities; in T.C. Koopmans, ed. Wiley, New York
12. Koopmans, T.C. (1957): Three Essays on the State of Economic Science; McGraw Hill Book Company, New York
13. Sahoo, Rajan Kumar and Gyanindra Dash (2009): Agriculture and Rural Economy; Regal Publications, New Delhi.

JOURNALS & ABSTRACTS:

1. Ahire, R.D;Kulkarni, R.R; and Lambat, A.H. (2001): "Participation of Rural Women in Farm Activities"; Maharashtra Journal. Extn. 20: 152-154.
2. Arrow, Chenery, Minhas and Solow (1962): "Capital and Labour Substitution and Economic Efficiency"; Review in Economic Studies, XXIX.
3. Baba, Z.A.; Hakeem, A.H.; Ganai, N.A; Malik, K.M. and Sheikh, T.A. (2009): "Role of Rural Women in Agriculture and Income Generating Activities"; Asian J. Home Sci. 4 (1): 1-3.
4. Banker, R. D., Charnes, A., & Cooper, W. W. (1984): "Some models for estimating technical and scale inefficiencies in data envelopment analysis"; Management Science, 30(9), 1078- 1092
5. Charnes, A., Cooper, W. W., & Rhodes, E. (1978): "Measuring the efficiency of decision making units"; European Journal of Operational Research, 2, 429- 444.
6. Deka, M.B; and R.M. Saikai (2002): "Participation and Decision Making Pattern of Karbi Women in Farm Related Activities"; Indian Journal. Hill Farming, 15 (1), 100-105.

7. Divya, Singh and Deepa Vinay (2013) "Gender Participation in Indian agriculture: An ergonomic evaluation of occupational hazard of farm and allied activities" International Journal of Agriculture, Environment and Biotechnology, Vol.6, Issue. 1, PP.157.
8. Humera. Amin; Tanvir, Ali; Munir, Ahmad and Zafar, M. I. (2009): Participation Level of Rural Women in Agricultural Activities"; Pakistan Journal. Agril. Sci. 46 (4): 294-301.
9. Jhamtani, Anita, Singh, Premlata, Sharma, Nishi and Singh, Baldeo (2001):" Women in Panchayats Perceptual Roles"; Indian J. Extn. Edu. 47(1&2): 35-41.
10. Khare, N.K. and Jaiswal Manisha (2001): "Role of Farm Women in Decision Making Related to Farm Practices"; Madhya. J. Extn. Edu., Vol. IV & V, No. 3, 32-34
11. Koopmans, T.C. (1951): "Efficient Allocation of Resources"; Econometrica.
12. Rathod, P.K, Nikam, T.R, Sariput Landge. Rajeshwari. S, Amit Hatey (2011): "Participation of Rural Women in Dairy Farming in Karnataka"; Indian journal of Extension. Education; 11:2, 31-36.
13. Rawana, M.L. and Vijayalakshmi,D. (2006): "Empowerment of Farm Women Through WYTEP Programme"; Journal. Extension. Education. 18 (3&4) :3888-3891
14. Rizwana, P.N.; Sharma and Narayana Swamy (2006): "Role of Farm Women in Decision Making in the Adoption of Improved Agricultural Practices in Rice Farming"; Mysore Journal. Agric. Sci., 40 (4) , 545-551.
15. Sweta, Prasad (2007): 'Involvement of Rural Women in Agri. & Household Activities'; Journal of applied Biology;17;1/2,83-87.

