

Visibility of Women in Agriculture: A Prerequisite for Women Empowerment in Rural Area.

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ABSTRACT

Agriculture is the backbone of Indian economy and always has been a priority in the five years plans since independence. Women’s role in agriculture has been rarely discussed yet their presence in this sector is a fact. The rising number of women labors also is a startling fact of the diminishing value of women workers in agriculture and agriculture as a lucrative sector in Indian economy. This research article is based on secondary data of the unacknowledged role of Indian women in agriculture and their comparison with the Chinese women farmers who are working under a favorable condition of supportive institutional, economic and societal condition. Economic growth of the country and individual is not only a desired goal but also has many social consequences. This article deliberates on the importance of the productive role of women farmers for an overall economic and social development and empowerment of the country and women in specific.

Keyword: Agriculture, feminization of labor, gender division of labor, invisibility of women farmers.

I. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Agriculture in Indian economy

Adam Smith in 1776 emphasized agriculture as the base on which the growth of industrial and other sectors of economy has to stand (1). Agriculture in India plays a vital role in Indian economy. It not only provides food, raw materials ,employment, capital for its own development and but also surpluses for national economic development. Agricultural growth in India has witnessed major ups and downs and always been a part of planning commission five year plans. Taking its immense role as major source of livelihood for the Indians, contribution in foreign trade and as primary source of saving in economy, it becomes a major sector for national policy planning along with updated, science and technology transfer to this sector for economic growth and prosperity of the country. This dominance of agriculture and agricultural institutions in our economy has aroused the importance of rural policy for overall growth of GDP and national income since independence.

1.2 Agriculture in crises

Agriculture in India is traditional in process but socially complex and integrated with everyday life. Limited use of technology, dependence on monsoon and increasing agriculture labor supply accompanied by environmental degradation has severe consequences not only to the economy as a whole as it is becoming less lucrative source of income and becoming a sector of a large number of unproductive laborers but also makes another picture clear that this major sector of our economy is loosing its hold. This condition is threatening the very base of the survival for the vast majority of population depended on agriculture.

The rural scenario has witnessed recent changes, it is the acknowledged bitter truth that past rural policies have often failed to recognize underlying changes in economic structures.(2).The simple agricultural structures and rural social and economic organization has changed from a homogenous and to a complex and heterogeneous rural economy in which agriculture has taken a back seat. The setback is because of problems in economy across globe such as crisis in international food system, changed structure of international business and markets which has resulted in a continued movement of labor out of agricultural production and changed consumption pattern resulting in transfer of land and capital out of agricultural production in major crop producing countries across the globe.

1.3.Gender in agriculture

Understanding rural social life through agriculture becomes very important in India because conditions of social life can undermine or boost economic sphere. This is the case in India also. There is a remarkable presence of female agriculture labor in agriculture or feminization of labor but there is invisibility of women farmers. Agriculture policy with a focus on women farmers is the need of the hour. There exist gender biasness in farming .There is societal and institutional restrictions on women in agriculture. There exist a huge gap and inequalities between man and women farmers and women farmers are never talked of or discussed. (3) Rural women are engaged in double burden and responsibility as producers in the farm and in home as caregivers, thus the actual potential as producer gets subdued. Women has a major role of in farming and non-farming responsibilities especially in post harvest operations, homestead gardening, livestock and poultry rearing, selling labor etc.(4) They are primarily responsible for the production of vegetables whether in small kitchen gardens or in fields which are often the only source of nutrition available to their families. Women farmers are very committed in their agricultural activity despite lots of struggles and hindrances (5) unfortunately in spite of their involvement; their voice is unheard in decision making (6)

1.4.Problem faced by women farmers in India.

They lack the access and control over productive resources such as land and credit facilities which deprives them of opportunities of income generation in farming. They also lack opportunities for their own capacity building and an improved quality of life. Policy and programme under recognize female farmers which is undermining the potential of women farmers and thus resulting in invisibility of women farmers.

- There exists gender biasness in media as women agriculturist are rarely discussed about in media.
- There exists conservatism in some states of India regarding women in agriculture like if women plough the field, there will be a drought in the village. Another belief in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar is that if a drought occurs then women should help plough the fields—at night and in the nude, which shows the sexism in agriculture.
- Since 2001, there has been an increase of 38% and 13% of women, main and marginal agricultural laborers from being the cultivators of their own land.
- Majority women in rural areas work on land that belongs to their husbands or to other land owners who contract their services as laborers in the fields and not on the land registered in their name.(7)

A rational family management system, supported by society and an appropriate technology to ease their work stress and to improve their productivity along with an increase in economic opportunities for women by a genuine capacity enhancement facilities is required in order to achieve a remarkable development in agriculture

.Women participation in agriculture should be recognized and valued by making information and skill accessible to them and acknowledging their presences in decision making (8).Engendering agricultural to empower marginalized women farmers has become a prerequisite for reasonable changes towards an equitable and just agricultural developed country.

The below table illustrates the number of women farmers across the major rice and wheat producing states which strengthens the necessity of involvement of women in farming.

Sex-Wise Distribution Of Workers And Percentage Of Cultivators, Agricultural Laborers, Workers In Household Industry And Other Workers By States -2011 Census (9,10,11)

State	Major crop	Male/Female/Total	Total workers	Percentage to Total Workers			
				Cultivator	Agricultural Laborers	Household Industry	Other
All-India		Male	331865930	24.92	18.56	2.95	47.20
		Female	149877381	24.01	55.21	5.71	29.18
		Total	481743311	24.64	29.96	3.81	41.60
Uttar Pradesh	Wheat and rice	Male	49846762	31.12	27.69	4.72	36.47
		Female	15967953	22.21	38.43	9.67	29.69
		Total	65814715	28.96	30.30	5.92	34.82
West Bengal	Wheat and rice	Male	26716047	16.84	27.90	4.17	51.09
		female	8040308	7.67	34.03	16.69	41.52
		total	34756355	14.72	29.32	7.09	48.87
Tamil Nadu	rice	male	21434978	12.75	22.59	2.76	61.90
		female	11449703	13.24	41.61	6.76	38.40
		total	32884681	12.92	29.21	4.15	53.72
Madhya Pradesh	wheat	male	20146970	32.71	31.32	2.54	33.43
		female	11427163	28.47	51.47	3.92	16.14
		total	31574133	31.18	38.61	3.04	27.17
Orissa	rice	male	11902655	28.36	29.25	3.69	38.70
		female	5638934	12.92	57.78	6.10	23.20
		total	17541589	23.40	38.42	4.46	33.72
Punjab	Wheat and rice	male	8074157	21.72	15.35	3.09	59.85
		female	1823205	9.94	19.14	7.50	63.43
		total	9897362	19.55	16.05	3.90	60.51
Rajasthan	wheat	male	18297076	41.09	11.66	1.89	44.87
		female	11589179	52.64	24.22	2.46	20.68
		total	29886255	45.57	16.53	2.41	35.49
Maharashtra	wheat	male	32616875	23.28	20.77	2.12	53.83
		female	16811003	29.61	39.92	3.18	27.29
		total	49427878	25.43	27.28	2.48	44.81
Gujarat	wheat	male	18000914	23.58	20.27	1.17	54.98

		female	6766833	17.78	47.14	1.97	33.11
		total	24767747	21.99	27.61	1.39	49.00
Haryana	Wheat and rice	male	6806636	26.28	15.30	2.74	55.68
		female	2109872	32.78	13.60	3.59	40.55
		total	8916508	27.82	17.14	2.94	52.10
Himanchal Pradesh	wheat	male	2043373	44.35	5.04	1.82	48.79
		female	1516049	76.24	4.75	1.42	17.59
		total	3559422	57.93	4.92	1.65	35.50
Assam	rice	male	8541560	36.29	13.22	2.41	48.08
		female	3428130	28.06	20.89	8.33	42.72
		total	11969690	33.93	15.42	4.10	46.55
Bihar	Wheat and rice	male	25222189	22.78	49.84	3.02	24.36
		female	9502798	15.27	60.77	6.83	17.13
		total	34724987	20.72	52.83	4.06	22.38
Chhattisgarh	rice	Male	7133866	33.98	32.87	1.59	31.57
		female	5046359	31.32	54.44	1.47	12.76
		total	12180225	32.88	41.80	1.54	23.78

Source: Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Ministry of Agriculture 2014-2015

1.5. Women in agriculture in China.

China is one of the top 10 rice producing countries in the world along with India.(11) Chinese women have been taking over to agriculture and the results are beneficial in terms of labor supply, productivity and income point of view. Policies that ensure equal access to land, access to credit, and other economic development strategies such as markets and other support system which contribute to an environment in which women farmers can succeed, can be followed in Indian context too with regards' to policies and institutions to help make women more productive and make a visible and appreciated contribution to a nation's economy.

1.6. Women in agriculture in China after the reform

Agriculture in China in 1949 was planned to be integrated in a broader socio economic development emphasizing collectivities or the communes as means of production, distribution and consumption. They were politically and economically empowered institutions with full control over labor and material bases necessary for the production .Since the commune were self determining, their choice of production changed according to the demands of the markets. China agricultural scenario got a boost through the system of rural responsibility with a goal of common prosperity and the household responsibility system in 1984.It improved the villagers' standard of living and strengthens people's interest in agriculture. Apart in work in the communes, each individual family is engaged in 'specialized households activity such as raising sheep, snake, goats, tailoring, processing grains, growing mushrooms ect.

This resulted in changed traditional division between the two sexes. Women participated in collective production as independent laborers, which results in socially recognition having a positive impact in the status within the household. Secondly, with increase scope for interaction, resulted in gradually women empowerment through the dissemination and acceptance of new ideas and knowledge. Third, the government encouraged and trained a group of women model workers to encourage women workforce, some of whom were promoted to administrative departments at all levels. (12).

1.7. Favorable policies toward women in China under the household responsibility system.

Because of the new orientation towards economic reconstruction, rural development and increased demand for labor, the full participation of women in production became important and thus altering the traditional customs and habits which were subordinating to women. A number of policies and programs to promote gender equality and to protect women and children were implemented, such as equality of women, reformation in marriage law denouncing patriarchal authority in the household and granting both sexes equal rights to file for divorce. Introduction of new patterns of inheritance favorable to women (13) was implemented. Economic production become the utmost priority in the country and also recognizing the role of women as equal partner as economic producer saw a rising entrepreneurs among rural women in form of setting up of public cafeterias throughout rural areas and child care centers, sewing centers, laundries, hair salons, shoemaking shops, knitting shops and so on . For the first time, women prioritized field work more than household as men did without being made guilt conscious by the society for their changed priority.

Consequences of this reform were that women were paid for their field work and received individual recognition for the work performed. This changed their role as dependents and the gap between the male workers and female workers narrowed down a lot. Rural women have more choices and flexibility at both home and workplace. Women’s traditional role as mothers in addition to other productive roles were well balanced and adjusted .The societal support system towards women dual role was favorable and hence number of women participating in production increased with more and more work and household chores shared by all the family members. Women now have an increasingly important role in production, their status and position in society and at home steadily improved. (14)

II. SUGGESTION AND CONCLUSION

The Government of India should also prioritize women in agriculture by acknowledging gender differences within households, society and in sphere of production. Policy-makers and planners in India formulate institutional and structural support system to encourage women farmers. This can be done

- By statically examine the presences of women farmers regionally and the benefits accessible and availed by them in comparison to male cultivators and reform those which are gender biased in nature. .
- Develop a rural technology and training agenda to assist rural women to improve their productivity in agriculture.
- Integrate gender into all aspects of programmes and projects of government;
- Reformation of land policy of land and provision of secure ownership in favor of women farmers.
- Formulate gender sensitive policies and plans balancing the performance of gender roles in house and at field.
- Gender mapping and considering rural women’s needs in agricultural.
- Increase women’s access to credit, training; and other support in the marketing activities and agricultural production.
- Improved transportation, processing, packaging techniques and storage facilities.

- Strengthened self help groups in agricultural skill and strategies.
- Institutional changes in terms of narrow mindset towards women in agriculture.

If women are well integrated into agricultural scenario of our country with gender neutral skill enhancement facilities, the economic development will be all-round and a renewed agriculture growth of India can be expected.

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