



Review Article

FEMINIZATION OF AGRICULTURE IN INDIA: WOMEN DEVELOPMENT AND EMPOWERMENT

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Abstract: The agriculture sectors are the largest sector to provide employment to rural women. In recent years, most of the policy attention has been drawn by the phenomenon of increasing feminization of agriculture. It is the phenomenon where the roles of men and women are unbalanced whether at household or community level. The increasing proportion of farm work in India undertaken by women – a phenomenon commonly referred to as the feminization of agriculture has a deep and wide-ranging impact on agricultural productivity. The drift towards the increased number of women participations in agricultural production appears to be associated with a variety of factors, such as male rural out migration, the growing number of households headed by women and the development labour-intensive cash crops. The actual reasons for feminization of agriculture are poverty and farmer suicide, restricted mobility of women, male labour out migration, mechanization of agriculture, agrarian distress and shift of men to casual work, male labour out-migration. Major constraints faced by women are access to land, water, credit and other agricultural inputs, technology, new practices and extension services and education. Without establishing gender equality, development of a nation cannot take place. In order to ensure mainstreaming of women in agriculture sector government has taken several measures. Providing access to education, extension services, information, land, credit facilities, resources, modern technologies and other relevant agricultural innovations will entice many women to agricultural productions and will help to reduce poverty among women farmers.

Keywords: Feminization, Casualization, Male-migration, Agrarian distress, Policies

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Introduction

The rural population of India is mostly dependent on agriculture. This agriculture sectors are the largest sector to provide employment to rural women. Nearly 78% of women are engaged in agriculture as compared to 63% of all economically active men [1]. Around 65% of total workforce, constituted by cultivators and agricultural labourers [2]. Women agricultural labour consists of 43% of total world agricultural labour force [3]. Graphically, women constitute nearly 50% of the world's adult population and one-third of the total labour force [4]. Women plays a vital and significant role in agricultural development and allied fields including the main crop production, post-harvest operations, agro/ social forestry, horticulture, mushroom cultivation, livestock production, bee keeping, fisheries, etc. There is rarely any activity in agricultural production, except ploughing in which women are not vigorously involved. Different studies conducted in India and other countries, on women in agriculture concluded that the contribution of women in agricultural production is far more than has generally been acknowledged. It is estimated that women are responsible for 70 %of actual farm work [5]. The drift towards the increased number of women participations in agricultural production appears to be associated with a variety of factors, such as male rural out migration, the growing number of households headed by women and the development labour-intensive cash crops. All of these bring about change in the traditional gender division of farm work. Rural women, mostly younger generation, progressively control household income and take decisions about the investment, purchase and sale of large items and agricultural products [6]. In recent years, most of the policy attention has been drawn by the phenomenon of increasing feminization of agriculture. It is the phenomenon where the roles of men and women are unbalanced whether at household or community level. This is happening due to globalization and advances in communication and transportation, which is leading to people migrating temporarily and permanently outside of their home country in

search of a better life. The term 'Feminization of agriculture' refers to growing participation of women in agricultural activities. The reason behind this feminization is mostly unprofitable crop production followed by increased casualization of work resulting distress migration of men in search for highly paid casual work in both agriculture and non-agriculture sectors, leaving those women to take up low paid work in agriculture.

Women in Indian agriculture

During last few years participation of both men and women in agriculture has declined, but the rate of decline has been faster among men than women. Though there is decline in number in women specifically in relation to their roles as cultivators but their numbers as agricultural labourers have increased. Approximately 4/5th of all economically active women in the country are employed in agriculture sector [8]. The increased responsibility of women in smallholder production as well as their rapidly growing participation as wage workers in agro-export production [9] reveals that there is increase in the amount or share of farm-related work undertaken by women hence, agriculture being feminized. According to Agriculture Census (2010-11), out of 118.7 million cultivators, 30.3% were females. Similarly, out of 144.3 million agricultural labourers, 42.6% were females. Around 84% of all rural women in India are now engaged in one or the other agricultural activity, which represents a remarkable rise from the pre-liberalization period before 1990, when rural women in India did not even have that critical right to till the land they were living on with their families [10]. Women, along with their men, have a significant role to play in agricultural activities in India. In the absence of male, female members of the households are bearing more responsibilities in agricultural activities than they used to do before. There has been a 24% increase in the number of female agricultural labourers between 2001 and 2011(Census,2011).

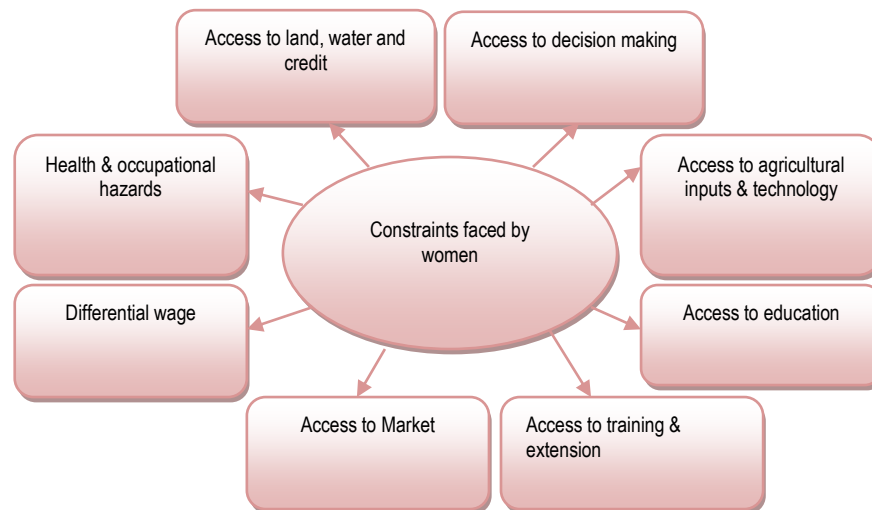


Fig-1 Constraints faced by women

Feminization of agriculture can be interpreted by three ways:

- An increased % of women who are economically active in agricultural and allied sector either self-employed or wage workers or unpaid family workers.
- An increased % of women in agricultural labour force relative to men.
- The extent to which women participate, control and authorise the process of agriculture.

Role of women in agriculture and allied sector

The increasing proportion of agricultural work in India undertaken by women – a phenomenon commonly referred to as the feminization of agriculture has a deep and wide-ranging impact on agricultural productivity. In production of crops right from the soil preparation till post-harvest activities and storage, rural women play key role by working actively. Various labour-intensive works such as sowing, transplanting, irrigation, fertiliser application, plant protection, weeding, hoeing, harvesting, threshing, picking, winnowing, cotton stick collections, separation of seeds from fibre, storing etc. are performed by rural women. They also play an important role in agricultural development, in ensuring food security and preserving local agro-biodiversity. Along with the farm activities rural women also carried out different activities related to livestock and its other associated activities like cleaning of animal shed, collection of farm yard manure, fodder collection, watering, preparation of dung cakes, milking, milk processing and preparation of ghee etc. Approximately 50% of agricultural and livestock workers are women, whereas in rural India the percentage is as high as 84% [11]. They are also responsible for the integrated management and use of diverse natural resources to meet the daily household needs. Depending on the socio-economic conditions and family requirement rural women are engaged in agricultural activities in different ways like agricultural labourers, cultivators of own land or managers of different activities of agricultural production by conducting labour supervision and the participation in post-harvest operations.

Reasons for Feminization of agriculture

1. Poverty and farmer suicide

Poverty is a major factor due to which women are forced to work as agricultural labourers to supplement the family's income. Women also work as unpaid workers in family fields. Due to the rising number of farmers suicides, women farmers are being forced to take up the farm work along with the family responsibilities.

2. Restricted mobility of women

Mobility of women in rural area for better employment is restricted due to several social constraints. Another major constraint is gender wage differentials. This leads to increase participation of women in agriculture. According to Census 2011, about 33.7% of rural males migrate for better employment and economic opportunities, as compared to 3.6% rural female.

3. Male labour out-migration

Due to migration of male from rural to urban to seek out off-farm urban jobs, women are left behind with increasing responsibilities and thus women labour participation in agriculture increases significantly. There is increase in participation of women as cultivators, labourers and entrepreneurs due to this growing migration by men in rural areas [12].

4. Mechanization of agriculture

Women have been confined to traditional roles such as winnowing, harvesting, sowing seeds and rearing livestock as men have driven to other non-farm activities due to increasing mechanization of agriculture.

5. Agrarian Distress and Shift of men to Casual work

One of the most pre-dominant factors for de-pesantization *i.e.*, migration of male from agriculture towards casual work is agrarian distress. Low productivity, natural calamities like drought, flood, monsoon and water scarcity, collapsing farm prices, fragmented supply chain etc. are the basic reasons for agrarian distress. As per a report published in Hindu 2013, a total of 7.7 million farmers left agriculture in between 2001 to 2011. With this rise shift of men to non-farm activities in rural areas, women have got absorbed in agriculture and allied activities which resulted in feminization of agriculture.

Major constraints faced by women in agriculture

Approximately Seventy percent of world poor are women and the major problems they face are peculiar social, cultural, educational, political and allied problems [13]. All these constraints play a crucial part in determining the nature and extent of work they do [14]. Access to land, water, credit and other agricultural inputs, technology, new practices and extension services, education are the major constraints faced by rural women.

Measures taken to ensure mainstreaming of women in agriculture sector

1. For women beneficiaries, government has earmarked at least 30% of the budget allocation in all ongoing schemes/programmes and development activities.
2. Initiation of women centric activities, to ensure benefits of various beneficiary-oriented programs/schemes reach them.
3. Focusing on women self-help group (SHG), Women Federations and Farm Women Producer Organisations /Companies; to link them to micro-credit through capacity building activities and to provide information and establishing their representation in different decision-making bodies.
4. Recognizing the critical role of women in agriculture, 15th October of every year has been declared as Women Farmer's Day by the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare.
5. The government has proposed that crop land holdings must be integrated to reap the benefits of enhanced productivity including agricultural mechanisation, promote the rental model of farm machinery and reduce the cost of operations, as

most of the women farmers are marginal farmers.

6. Promotion of women-oriented Mass Media and ICT support, so that access to information and sharing knowledge of farm women can be improved.

7. Different research on gender issues in agriculture and allied sectors including technology refinement in favour of women in order to reduce drudgery of work and improve work efficiency, is going on. At present, the AICRP on Home Science is being implemented through its ten Centres located in different State Agricultural Universities of the country and ICAR institutes focusing mainly on

- Drudgery assessment and mitigation
- Mitigating occupational health hazards
- Food & Nutrition security in selected farming system
- Capacity building of agrarian families
- Empowerment of women

Suggestive action for women development and empowerment

1. For development of policies and programmes directed towards benefit of women, it is essential to go for gender analysis as women's empowerment has a direct impact on agricultural productivity and household food security [15].

2. In order to increase productivity in agriculture and agriculture value chain, it is crucial to adopt gender specific interventions. So, there is an urgent need to promote an 'inclusive transformative agricultural policy' which should aim at gender-specific intervention to integrate women as active agents in rural transformation.

3. Women's land ownership and control is one a prime factor for enhancing the livelihood of rural communities. Yet, in India, only 13.5 percent of land holdings are in the names of women even though around 77 percent of women rely on agriculture as their primary source of income [16]. The lack of land ownership prevents women from accessing a number of benefits such as access to institutional credit and federal agricultural benefits. Without land ownership, it is likely that even those women classified as cultivators face considerable constraints. The government should ensure access to secure land and property rights so that it will help to increase productivity by facilitating investments and would ensure household food security and nutrition.

4. Provision of credit without collateral under the micro-finance initiative of the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development should be encouraged.

5. Very few women are benefited from extension services i.e., only 5 percent [17]. Krishi Vigyan Kendras in every district can be assigned an additional task to uplift, train and educate women farmers about innovative technology along with extension services.

6. In order to obtain an economically viable and ecologically sustainable agriculture, it is important to include women farmer in the process of modernization of farming practice [18]. It is crucial to have gender-friendly tools and machinery for various farm operations. Manufacturers should be incentivised to come up with more women-friendly machineries.

7. The differential wage, which affects mostly the efficiency of women agricultural labourers so the empowerment should aim at changing the nature and direction of the power structures, which marginalizes the women labourers [19]. Legal measures should be taken to ensure equal pay for work of equal value. Women should be made wide awake to help themselves to negotiate equal wages, in which women organizations and unions can play an important role.

8. It is important to have overall women empowerment through education, awareness and doing away with gender biases. Participation of women in training programmes will enhance their skills and strengthen the trust in them for effective and independent performance of farm operations and help them to make a shift from physically enduring operations to specialized tasks [20].

Application of review: The agriculture sector is the largest sector to provide employment to rural women. In this article some of the reasons were identified for this feminization of agriculture as well as constraints faced by women in this sector. Also, some opportunities which are provided by government and some suggestive measures which could highly benefit those women who are mostly engaged in agriculture for their livelihood sustenance as we all know that development of nation cannot take place without development of women.

Review Category: Agriculture Socio-economics

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