

WOMEN FARMERS IN INDIA: AN OVERVIEW

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ABSTRACT : India is a land of villages. Being a land of villages, nearly 70 percent of the population is still living in rural areas with agriculture as its main occupation. Economic development of developing countries largely depends upon agriculture. Agriculture contributes to 32% of the national income. It is the main source of food and supplier of raw materials to industries. The development of agriculture largely depends upon development of rural communities and rural people especially peasants. In rural India, the percentage of women who depend on agriculture for their livelihood is as high as 84%. Out of 84%, 33% are cultivators and about 47% percent are agricultural labourers.

Agriculture in India defines familial tradition, social relations and gender roles. Female in the agricultural sector, whether through traditional means or industrial, for subsistence or as an agricultural labourer, represents a momentous demographic group. Women perform important roles in the farms all around the world, and farming is important for their survival. Yet, they are neither recognized as farmers, nor do they own the productive assets such as land or machines. As large numbers of working age males migrate steadily out of the farm sector, more women are left behind to care for agriculture. Hence present study will be made an attempt to study women farmers in India. Objectives of present study was to know the socio-economic conditions of women farmers in India and to study policies and programmes for women farmers in India. The present study was based on secondary data.

INTRODUCTION: Our country predominantly has an agrarian economy: 70% of the population is rural; of those households, 60% engage in agriculture as their main source of income. According to the 1991 Census, there are 74 lakh agriculture workers in India. Of all agriculture workers, 99.4% work in the informal sector. Thus, the sheer numbers and proportion of India's workforce dependent on agriculture labour and small scale agriculture demands attention. Only 17% of India's farmers subsist entirely on earnings from their farms alone, and although more than half of India's population is engaged in farming, agriculture provides less than 15% of the country's GDP. The women is the backbone of agricultural workforce and are a vital part of Indian economy. Over the years, there is a gradual realization of the key role of women in agricultural development and their contribution in the field of agriculture, food security, horticulture, dairy, nutrition, sericulture, fisheries, and other allied sectors. Women cultivators and agriculture laborers perform about 70% of all the agriculture activities – yet their valuable contribution is ignored and they are not acknowledged as farmers. In a country where farming has traditionally been a male preserve, and farming is becoming increasingly unproductive, the three women are remarkable outliers. Hence present study made an attempt to highlights issues related to women farmers in India.

II) OBJECTIVES: Objectives of present study were as follows

- To know the socio-economic conditions of women farmers in India and
- To study policies and programmes for women farmers in India.

III) METHODOLOGY: The present study was based on available literature on agriculture, women farmers and agricultural labourers

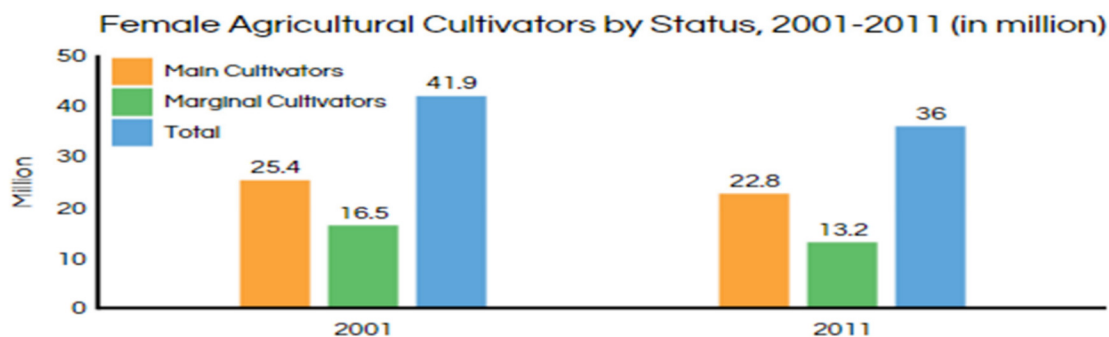
IV) WOMEN'S WORK PARTICIPATION IN AGRICULTURE:

According to the World Bank, rural women comprise 43 percent of the agricultural labour force that produces, processes and prepares much of the food available in the world. In rural India, the percentage of women who depend on agriculture for their livelihood is as high as 84%. Women make up about 33% of cultivators and about 47% percent of agricultural laborers. Women's participation rate in the agricultural sectors is about 47% in tea plantations, 46.84% in cotton cultivation, 45.43% growing oil seeds and 39.13% in vegetable production. While these crops require labor-intensive work, the work is considered quite unskilled. Women also heavily participate in ancillary agricultural activities. (www.wikipedia)

Agriculture continues to be the major employer of India's workforce. Of this workforce, mainly small and marginal workers are women. Day today Feminisation of agriculture is increasing. Beyond the conventional market-oriented narrower definition of 'productive workers', almost all women in rural India today can be considered as 'farmers' in some sense, working as

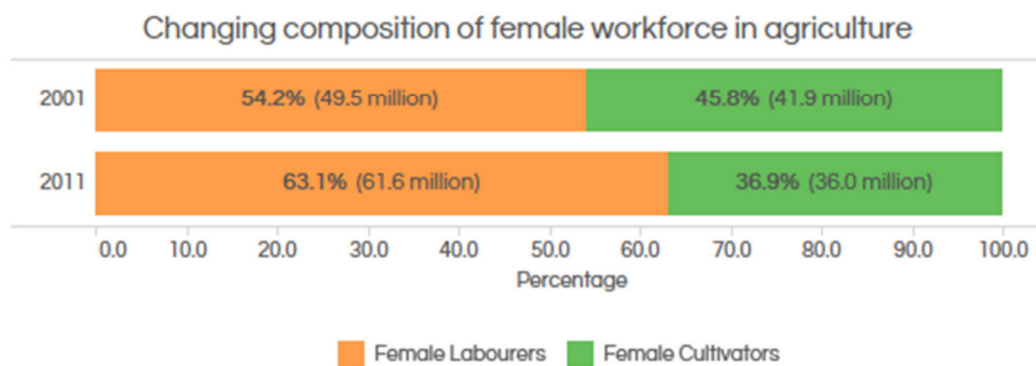
agricultural labour, unpaid workers in the family farm enterprise, or combination of the two. Moreover, several farm activities traditionally carried out by men are also being undertaken by women as men are pulled away into higher paying employment. Thus, Rural India is witnessing a process which could be described as Feminization of Agriculture.

Chart-I



(Source:Census of India:2011) **Chart-I**, shows that number of female cultivators are decreasing from 2001 census to 2011 census.

Chart-II



(Source:Census of India:2011)

Chart-II-There has been a 24% increase in the number of female agricultural labourers, from 49.5 million in 2001 to 61.6 million in 2011.

IV) SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS OF WOMEN FARMERS IN INDIA:Nature of Work: Women constitute half of the country's population. In Indian agriculture, women continue to share a number of farm operations with men. Women contribute directly to almost all agriculture labour without being the direct beneficiaries of agricultural inputs, training or capital. Women wages are generally lower than men's wages and the operations done by women are down with practically no mechanical aids and are time bound. Extent of participation of women in agriculture is not fully investigated. Women are involved in all aspects of agriculture, from crop selection, to land preparation, to seed selection, planting, weeding, pest control, harvesting, crop storage, handling, marketing, and processing In the Indian Himalayas a pair of bullocks works 1064 hours, a man 1212 hours and a woman 3485 hours in a year on a once hectare farm, a figure that illustrates women's significant contribution to agricultural production (Shiva FAO, 1991). Agriculture which is seasonal in nature also conditions the availability of employment. Further, women in this field are mainly engaged in only some works like transplanting, weeding, and harvesting. Concentration of vast number of women in this field also reduced the bargaining capacity of women labourers. Many women also participate in agricultural work as unpaid subsistence labour. Nature of work in

agriculture is unpaid, underemployed and unemployed. Based on time allocation studies, which pinpoint exactly how a woman's hours are spent throughout the week, Indian women spend about 25 hours in a week doing household chores and five hours in caring and community work. (www.wikipedia)

Role and Status in Family and Society: Women are placed in much precarious position in Indian society. She has to wage her many battles against the male domination. Woman has a significant role to play in the emancipation of the society in general and the women themselves in particular. She is the backbone of agricultural workforce but she is not recognized as women farmer. Caste-class dimensions have their profound influence on the women of both the upper and lower classes. The upper class women along with household work they work in field supplement the family income. This phenomenon confirms the view that the women of lower castes are over burdened with the household drudgery, taking care of children and cooking. Thus, women are not only over burdened but are subjected to exploitation at the work spot and at home for a number of hours. These exploitative feudal characteristics are explicitly visible in all the working class families in the agrarian societies. In addition to rigorous agricultural work that is undervalued and underpaid, women are also responsible for the well-being of the household. They care for their children, provide nutrition or usually take part in subsistence agriculture, and do chores around the house. Majority of rural families where male members of family are either lazy or migrated. In such situation women work as bread winners and also take care of all households. While women independently engaged in agriculture and came to market they feel comfortable and they face the problems. In many households daughters are not allowed work in farms.

Landownership and Land Assets: Although the majority of the female workforce in India is engaged in agriculture, most don't have land rights. Women manage every aspect of farm work, but are not considered farmers. They toil in the fields—planting, sowing, weeding, and harvesting—but are not landowners. Despite the fact that women contribute more labour to Indian agriculture than men, land remains almost solely in male hands. . Women seldom enjoy property ownership rights directly in their names. They have little control over decisions made in reference to land. Even with land in their names, they may not have actual decision-making power in terms of cropping patterns, sale, mortgage and the purchase of land. In India only 14.9% of households are female headed. Access to credit is difficult, since women lack many of the prerequisites for lending such as assets or ownership of property. Without access to capital or household decision making abilities women lack the resources that are necessary for their labor stability and stability of their households. (www.wikipedia)

Educational Status: An estimated 52-75% of Indian women engaged in agriculture are illiterate, an education barrier that prevents women from participating in more skilled labor sectors.

Health Problems: Lack of Knowledge about Dietary Pattern: Women have a lack of knowledge about the dietary pattern best suited to different age groups. They do not know how much food they need to consume during the time of pregnancy and about the lactation period for women. Lack of knowledge thus is a cause of high maternal mortality rate among the women. They suffer from various health problems such as anemia, weakness and vomiting. Food available is meager which creates malnutrition. Self-Employed Women Association in formal sector explored a variety of illness among women workers in various unorganised sectors. Lack of medical amenities and lack of nutritional education are major cause of health problems among rural women in India.

Income and Accessibility of Credit: There is gender discrimination in wage among rural women. Women those are working in agriculture as labour are paid less. As per male women are not control and access over marketing and credit. Women farmers have no their separate income.

Farmers Suicide and Women Farmers: India There are 300000 farmresa committed the suicides in India. of women farmers

Women Farmers and Environment Degradation: Extreme climatic changes are among the factors that have begun to jeopardize agricultural production globally. India's agricultural sector which depends greatly on the variations in climate and weather is defined mainly by the monsoon season The loss of biodiversity in India and specifically food crops is a serious concern of food

security and sustainability of the agricultural sector in India. Environmental degradation has effects more on women farmers than male farmers.

Problems Faced by Indian Women Agriculture: India's agricultural sector today still faces issues of efficiency due lack of mechanization with poorer conditions of farmers, as well as small farm sizes. In India traditional agriculture is still dominant as many farmers depend on livestock in crop production, for manure as fertilizers, and the use animal powered ploughs. Women who are working on the farm were suffering form a lot of problems. They are major contributors in the inside activities as well as outside activities. Hunger, disease and indebtedness are the integral part of the women farmers

V) POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES FOR WOMEN FARMERS IN INDIA:Land cannot be the answer to harsh conditions of rural women. Literacy rate among women farmers remain much below the 65 percent average for the entire female population. Such disadvantages limit women's ability to access government schemes or experiment with new technologies. Basic human assets, supportive networks and adapted infrastructure are key to improve the condition of rural women. Control over land has a positive impact, not just on women's productivity as farmers but also on their exposure to domestic violence, their ability to take decisions about household expenditure and about the education of children.

Since the Sixth Five Year Plan (1980-5), the government has stated its endeavor to give joint titles when distributing land and home sites. But figures show the challenges of implementation: an Oxfam baseline study finds that only 9 per cent of 1456 women farmers across Bihar, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand share a title with their husbands. Even in regions where governments have been more proactive in distributing them, the quality of land is often poor.

The Ninth Five Year Plan (1998-2002) made more specific recommendations on how to revive the agenda, with a greater focus on single land titles for women. In 2005, the Hindu Succession Act was amended to give married and unmarried daughters a right to a share of ancestral land and property equal to that of sons. But, as was the case for previous attempts, issues of implementation undermined the impact of the reform: studies suggest that very few women are aware of their rights to inherit and that those who are aware fear antagonising local power holders, including their family members. Clearly, land is a central piece of the power dynamics defining a woman's position in her family, her community and when interacting with the State. (Oxfam India Policy Brief, 2013, PP 01).

Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana:Women in Agriculture are generally not able to access extension services and production assets like seed, water, credit, subsidy etc. As most of them are not recognized as farmers for want of ownership of land, they are not considered as beneficiaries of various government programmes / services. The wage differentials between men and women being adverse to them, the situation are further aggravated. Some of the tasks performed by the women are not valued adequately and considered less important economically. Further, due to multiple roles that a woman has to perform within the family and the farm, her access to knowledge and information, is constrained and therefore her opportunities get limited. To improve the present status of women in Agriculture, and to enhance the opportunities for her empowerment, Government of India has announced "Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana" (MKSP),

Specific objectives of MKSP are as under:

- To enhance the productive participation of women in agriculture;
- To create sustainable agricultural livelihood opportunities for women in agriculture;
- To improve the skills and capabilities of women in agriculture to support farm and non-farm-based activities;
- To ensure food and nutrition security at the household and the community level;
- To enable women to have better access to inputs and services of the government and other agencies;
- To enhance the managerial capacities of women in agriculture for better management of bio-diversity;

- To improve the capacities of women in agriculture to access the resources of other institutions and schemes within a convergence framework (rural.nic.in/sites/downloads/latest/SGSY.pdf, PP 1-2)

The XI Five Year Plan had made suggestions for giving women rights over land, credit, common property resources and equitable wages as also enhancing their access to technology, education and skill training. Some aspects of these have been addressed in the XI Plan.

The XII Five Year Plan will continue to accord high priority to these issues. Efforts will also be made accelerate the pace of creation of alternative rural non-farm livelihood opportunities such as in agro processing, supply chains, maintenance of equipment, rural infrastructure development, etc. (Oxfam India Policy Brief,2013,PP 01).

Programmes for Agriculture Development:

Women play a pivotal role in agriculture not only as agricultural labourers, co farmers and family labourers but as managers of the farm and farm entrepreneurs. Women constitute a large number of the agricultural workforce. NSSO data for 2009- 10 shows that only 62.8% of all rural male workers are in agriculture, but 79.4% of all rural female workers are in agriculture. An estimated 20% of rural households are de facto female headed due to widowhood, desertion, or male out-migration. This increasing feminization of agricultural work and labour must be taken into account in any discussion on agriculture. In the XI Plan, the Ministry of Agriculture took various measures under the National Policy of Farmers, 2007, for empowering women in farming & allied areas to improve their access to land, credit and other services, such as joint pattas for both homestead and agricultural land, Kisan Credit Cards, etc. The Mahila Kisan Shashtikaran Yojana under the NRLM was launched recently. As a part of its Gender Budgeting initiatives, the Ministry of Agriculture is allocating at least 30% of the fund flow to women.

However, challenges remains on the ground. Women are increasingly becoming the prime agriculturists with little rights, authority, access to or control over resources required for enhancing production and household income. It is thus essential to look at the gender dimensions within agriculture. (XII Five Year Plan Report on Women's Agency and Development, PP.51-52).

Recommendations for Women Farmers:

Women and ownership of land:

Land survey should be done periodically and inheritance records updated.

To promote awareness regarding women's land rights, mass media campaigns particularly with reference to amendment in Hindu Succession Act needs to be undertaken.

Women SHGs should be encouraged to develop available common lands, given to them on a long term lease, through watershed development approach.

It has been seen that even after women have access to land, they face problems in having access to improved agriculture practices. There needs to be a special package scheme designed under Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana (MKSP) to meet the needs of women farmers with titles.

Women's access to credit.

Ministry of Finance, NABARD and RBI should analyze the problem of credit delivery at State Level and issue appropriate guidelines to remove the bottlenecks faced by women farmers.

The Ministry of Agriculture should facilitate the setting up of Credit counselling centres need to be set up in each block to counsel to assess the credit needs of women farmers and to advise them. Extension Services and Up-gradation of farming skills of women

All programmes in the field should be planned and implemented through farmers' groups which have atleast 33% women in both general body and executive committees.

Agricultural policy and programmes should adopt an Integrated Farming Systems Approach with special focus to reach out to small and marginal women farmer. (ibid: 53).

MAJOR FINDINGS:

1. Agriculture continues to be the major employer of India's workforce.
2. In rural India, the percentage of women who depend on agriculture for their livelihood is as high as 84%. Women make up about 33% of cultivators and about 47% percent of agricultural laborers.
3. Nature of work in agriculture is unpaid, underemployed and unemployed.
4. Women farmers work long hours upto 16 to 18 hours.

- 5.Hunger, disease and indebtedness are the integral part of the women farmers.
- 6.Lack of Land ownership it is very difficult for them to access the credit.
- 7.Environmental degradation has effects more on women farmers then male farmers.
- 8.An estimated 52-75% of Indian women engaged in agriculture are illiterate,With the five year plans, government is trying to focus on the development of women's issues right from the beginning.
- 9.Government has made positive policies regarding ownership of land to women farmers, kisan credit cards and also made amendment in Hindu succession act in 2005 to give right to share in ancestral land and equal rights in property.
- 10.Although government has taken various efforts through different policies and programmes to improve the condition of women farmers, Challenges remains on the ground. It is important to look in to gender dimensions within agriculture to change situation.

SUGGESTIONS:

- 1.There is a need to assess the socio-economic status of the farm women.
- 2.Land allotted in the women's own name or in the name of her women's cooperative is used more effectively. Such groups can construct water harvesting, storage and irrigation structures to revive wasteland. The programme affect is two-fold: first from an environmental perspective it regenerates natural resources, thus reducing soil erosion and desertification. Second, it provides a source of supplementary income, fodder, food-grains and vegetables for the women and is a resource they can hand down to the next generation.
- 3.Women farmers should be trained in various activities such as field operations, bio diversity conservation, organic farming etc.
- 4.There is a need to enhance technical knowledge of women in the area of animal husbandary, for floriculture and for mushroomcultivation.
- 5.More self Help groups should be created for financial support and for employment generation of poor women.
- 6.It is very important to give representation in land holdings which directly affect on their productivity as farmers but also on their exposure to domestic violence, their ability to take decisions about household expenditure and about.

CONCLUSION:

Although women constitute two-thirds of the agriculture work force, they own less than one-tenth of the agricultural lands. Women must be allowed to own land. Women working in the either as labour or farmer their condition is very Through soil regeneration activities and wasteland development, women can build productive assets while obtaining supplementary employment. Women farmers and Landless women need to be organized into cooperatives to avail of existing government schemes for land development and the creation of fodder farms and pasture land.

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