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RESEARCH ARTICLE

PLIGHT OF WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE SECTOR: A CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Agriculture is becoming increasingly 'feminised' globally as men move out of the sector more quickly than women. The reasons for increasing female representation in agriculture vary from voluntary and involuntary withdrawal of men from farming, to growing wage opportunities for women in export-oriented non-traditional crops and activities. An attempt has been made in paper to discuss the condition of women working in agriculture sector in India with special reference to Haryana. The women working in agriculture sector have to face much more problems as compared to women in any other sector. The central focus of the paper is to throw light on the state of women while critically analysing their condition in terms of their socio- economic status in contemporary globalised society. Generally, there is lack of formal education, skills and knowledge among women working in agriculture sector. Beside lack of proper legislations, there is also lack of awareness of rights among women working in agriculture sector. The problem of improving the condition of women working specially in agriculture sector seems to be extremely complex in developing nations like India. Very little efforts are made in for the women working in agriculture sector. It calls for serious attempt on improving their financial and social condition. Actions such as recognition of labour; more facilities to poor rural women for land, agricultural and livestock extension services; separate education policy to enhance women's literacy rate; Priority to women in accessing credit on soft terms from banks and other financial institutions for setting up their business, for buying properties, and for house building and involvement of women in decision-making bodies that have the potential to introduce structural changes could bring some changes in the gender relations in the society.

INTRODUCTION

India is developing country. The main occupation is agriculture, because 70 per cent of the population is involved in agriculture occupation. Many women in developing countries are occupied in agriculture. Women occupation in agriculture in low income countries in Asia is between 60-80 per cent. In almost, Asian countries, the number of women employed in agriculture as a percentage of the economically active population is higher. "If a total range of women's actual total activities were to be taken into account, all over India, women work long in market and non-market economy and more so in rural India¹". Long standing obstacles faced by rural women in terms of limited access to productive resources (Land, Credit, Inputs, Transport, Extension Services, Storage and Technical Assistance) prevent them from adopting new technologies or encoring them economies of scale. The integration through agriculture impact women and men differently and ensures implications for growth. Agriculture sector creates many jobs for women in agriculture sector. Jobs that bring many household resources under women control leads to greater earnings in the family.

Although, women are more than ever finally employed, differences in wages earned by women and men persist in all countries. Women also have less access to productive resources specially in developing countries. Due to these reasons and women's lower education level compel the women have a greater tendency to remain in subsistence agriculture. Professional women continue to discrimination in hiring and promotion. The impact of liberalization and globalization on women is important not only because they represent almost half of the total population, but also because they face constraints, which make them less beneficial from the liberalization. Once different impacts are ascertained well designed policy responses may aid women in taking advantage of greater openness to agriculture. Swaminathan, the famous agricultural scientist describes that it was woman who first domesticated crop plants and thereby initiated the art and science of farming. While men went out hunting in search of food, women started gathering seeds from the native flora and began cultivating those of interest from the point of view of food, feed, fodder, fibre and fuel. Women have played and continue to play a key role in the conservation of basic life support systems such as land, water, flora and fauna.

They have protected the health of the soil through organic recycling and promoted crop security through the maintenance of varietal diversity and genetic resistance. The international development community has recognized that agriculture is an engine of growth and poverty reduction in countries where it is the main occupation of the poor. Women make essential contributions to the agricultural and rural economies in all developing countries. Their roles vary considerably between and within regions and are changing rapidly in many parts of the world, where economic and social forces are transforming the agricultural sector. Rural women often manage complex households and pursue multiple livelihood strategies. Their activities typically include producing agricultural crops, tending animals, processing and preparing food, working for wages in agricultural or other rural enterprises, collecting fuel and water, engaging in trade and marketing, caring for family members and maintaining their homes. Many of these activities are not defined as “economically active employment” in national accounts but they are essential to the wellbeing of rural households. This the gender debate in agriculture by assessing the empirical evidence in three areas that has received much attention in the literature: But the agricultural sector in many developing countries is underperforming, in part because women, who represent a crucial resource in agriculture and the rural economy through their roles as farmers, labourers and entrepreneurs, almost everywhere face more severe constraints than men in access to productive resources. Efforts by national governments and the international community to achieve their goals for agricultural development, economic growth and food security will be strengthened and accelerated if they build on the contributions that women make and take steps to alleviate these constraints. Among the rural women workforce, most of them are agriculture labour and some of cultivators. There are lot of variations in involvement of women in agriculture which is based on their culture, economic status, regions and crop selection. While the men are moving to cities for better occupations the women are taking care of cultivation and sometimes they used to work as farm labour to support their family needs. The weaker section of the women used to market their products such as selling vegetables and other food crops in farmers market or door to door.

Most of the women cultivators are involved in food crops rather than cash crops since cash crops need more marketing efforts which are traditionally taken care by men. The women in higher socio economic sections are not involved directly in cultivation or live stock and they used to help in labour administration, supporting activities and accounting. Ironically, we often define the men as farmers, in fact the women also equally involved in agriculture in all phases. If we think beyond the conventional definition of “FARMER”, most of the rural women should be considered as farmers but they are ignored. “Friedman (1992) defines empowerment in terms of ‘inclusion’ and ‘exclusion’ and central importance of ‘power’ in a political sense, not merely limited to a particular development activity. The involvement of women’s associations in development projects at the grassroots’ levels through direct involvement in the decision-making and implementation procedures, not only empowers them, but also gives them the chance of contributing their own efforts to the main stream of the development of their communities” Still Indian society has some gender boundaries, but the rural women involve in multiple productive roles and it is necessary to give equal opportunity in agriculture.

Most of the women farmers are marginal or small farmers, landless tenant farmers and farm labour, they don’t have enough land to cultivate, less knowledge, limited access to innovative technologies, low capital and less credit facilities. In order to empower and improve the women farmers’ productivity, they need to have proper farm training and capacity building programs to compete various challenges in their rural livelihood. Women land ownership plays a major role in their credit worthiness, if they have right on the agriculture land they will have access to financial resources and savings. Rural women have been acknowledged as the core food producers and processors, banks should recognize them as entrepreneurs, loans and Kissan credit cards have to be approved for them. Special support and market connectivity has to establish for rural women artisans to sell their agro based handicrafts. The farm labor wages should be the same without gender differences and the equal employment benefits have to be given in all rural schemes like NREGA. Sufficient political representation must be required by rural women in local level councils, it directs them as an equal partners in political, economical and legal decision making. We know that most of the developing countries depend on agriculture for livelihood and food security. Agriculture needs manpower, if the manpower split into gender wise, amazing fact is that the women contribution is greater or equal to men.

Main obstacles in women growth in agriculture Sector:

Male workers are more mobile and risk taking and seeking job opportunities outside their own territories. In the case of women the choice is restricted to the extent to which the female member is able to exercise influence on the family. Married status, child bearing and rearing, education, attitude of the head and other family members, etc, may constrain the women’s possibility of seeking jobs outside the locality. This would suggest that the decision roles for men and women cannot be looked as the same thing. The norms prescribed for male decision may differ from those of females.

- Few women holding of agricultural productive resources such as land, animals, and machinery.
- Women absence from decision making process, either inside or outside home.
- Women perform all un-mechanized agricultural tasks and perform multiple tasks, which add more burden to them.
- Women workers in agriculture suffer from high illiteracy rate among them and drop-out of schools.
- Women earn less wages, especially in joint, informal and private sector.
- Women do not know their legal rights.
- Miss applying some laws and regulations in favour of women such heritage legislation.

Household technologies for farm women: Women’s increased workloads in agricultural tasks, combined with dwindling natural resources, mean that they often have less time to meet other household needs. Although the amount of labour and resources required for maintenance of the household is tremendous, very little research has gone into developing techniques for gathering fuel and water or for postharvest activities such as food processing and preparation. The lack of women-specific technologies constrains their ability to produce enough food, earn an adequate income, ensure household maintenance, and care for family members.

This situation has led to changes in cooking habits and the preparation of fewer, less nutritious meals. In some instances, child malnutrition has increased, as nutritional security often depends upon the availability of non food resources such as child and health care, clean water, and fuel supplies. As women's needs and priorities are excluded from the research agenda, they are often affected by the unintended side-effects of modern technologies introduced for the benefit of others. Experience has shown that technology development and dissemination is not gender-neutral, and can have a devastating impact on women's access to resources and income generating activities as well as on their control over their own labour. If farm women have to adopt new technologies at the farm, they should be assisted in liberating themselves from the drudgery of household work. Technological innovations to reduce time and labour on household work are needed. The most hazardous and time-consuming tasks of rural women are collecting fuel wood and its use in a smoke filled kitchen. Introduction and popularization of technological innovations like thermal-efficient cook stoves, biogas, and solar stoves could help. Further development of low-cost housing technology to provide comfortable housing is also essential. Use of alternate income-generation technologies like household-level food processing, rural and cottage industries have the potential to supplement family income. Water is scarce in most Indian villages. Popularization of water harvesting structures and water conservation, community afforestation /reafforestation will not only help conserve natural resources but also generate employment¹¹.

Training needs of farm women: For quick adoption of technology by farm women, properly oriented training programs, provision of credit, inputs and facilities, and effective dissemination of information are essential. Exact training needs of different categories of women should be identified. There is a need for training women in entrepreneurial and operational skills. One of the things generally overlooked is that change agents are mostly men, which restricts free participation and discussion by women. Encouraging women scientists and trainers, and identifying more women farmers as contact farmers and resource persons in villages would not only make the training more acceptable but also more effective. A two-way dialogue between extension personnel and women farmers needs to be encouraged. To be empowered, women have to be made self-reliant and free from discrimination, exploitation, and oppression. This could be achieved through gender-sensitive planning, which takes into consideration the impact of policies and programs on women, and is sympathetic to their needs.

Production resources for farm women: Farm women's access to production resources is restricted. Access to credit is difficult, since most women are not asset holders and do not own property, which is a prerequisite for lending agencies. Thus, access to one of the most important factors of production, such as capital, is denied. Agencies like National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD), banks, cooperative societies, and market yards could easily remedy this situation. Women's cooperatives should be revitalized with an increased focus on entrepreneurship. Women's active role in the decision-making process is not only warranted but essential. Farm information and communication support should highlight farm women. Unless socially sound technological packages are coupled with

appropriate services and policies, the fruits of scientific work will not automatically accrue either to women or manⁱⁱⁱ.

Working women in agriculture: Women have been exploited to a greater extent than they were paid less than men for similar work and hours spent on the job. Working conditions in the unorganized sector were unsatisfactory. The working women spend around 7-8 hours daily working in the fields. They get a wage of Rs 240-00 per day. Their working time is from 9.00 a.m. to 5.00 p.m. They get only half an hour of lunch time. In this division pay paid work is, in light of current circumstances, non-unionized because of pleasing and irregular nature of business and scattered scope of tries. This segment is stamped by low jobs, shaky and sporadic business, and unfortunate lack of certification either from foundation or exchange unions. According to Swaminathan, the famous Agricultural Scientist, "some historians believe that it was woman who first domesticated crop plants and thereby initiated the Art and Science of farming while men went out hunting in search of food; women started gathering seeds from the motive flora and began cultivating those of interest from the point of view of food, feed, fodder, future and fuel".

Working women at the centre of vegetables: These women work in high-tech green house plants where they do all kinds of work such as sowing, manuring, irrigating, and also artificial pollination. Irrigation technique which women use is the deep pipe technology. The women also take care of removing the weeds and the appropriate moisture level of the soil. The wages these women get is Rs 130-00 per day whereas the DC rate happens to be Rs160-00. The working time is from 8.30 a.m. to 5.30 p.m. In these 8 hours of working, the lunch break is of about half an hour. The women belong to Gharaunda, Haryana state (India). All the women work on contract basis. Besides vegetables, they are also engaged in planting flowers. Their main activities are sowing, mulching, inter-culture harvesting and packing. The packed product is then sent to Mother Dairy. They are sometimes asked to stay back for some extra work also but do not get any extra wage for the same. Women do artificial pollination in plants by using a device called as Manual Bee. The manual bee is used for dropping pollen grains from anther to stigma by artificial means. The woman does this process by creating artificial vibrations through the manual bee.

Working women in potato farming, cold stores and Sugarcane farms: These women working in the agriculture fields of the above mentioned areas. These women are labourers who live in the nearby villages and work in the fields to earn some money in the form of daily wages. These women can be seen digging field to take out potatoes, filling these potatoes in jute bags to load them in tractors, trolleys etc. then unpacking these jute bags in the cold stores and finally separating them quality wise for further storage. The number of women who work in an agricultural field is around 12-15 and in the cold stores these are around 20-25 in number and the wage they get is of Rs120-00. They work for at least 7-8 hours in a day. Their working time is from 9.00 a.m. to 5.00 p.m. and they bring their lunch along. Some of the women work on contract basis and get as lesser wage, as a part of their wage is paid to the contractor. These women get around Rs 100.00 as wage. They work for 8 hours in a day and are engaged in back breaking activities. They are vulnerable to all sorts of climate and fall prey to many types of diseases due to stress and burden. They have to simultaneously manage their household chores also. Most of these activities mean a lot of bending and

squatting. Besides, many of the tools and implements used were not designed for the comfort of women. The work women do in the fields sees them move forward constantly while bending and squatting. So, severe pain in the back and legs is very common. Often standing shin-deep in water during transplantation, they're also exposed to skin diseases. Then there's injury from implements made for men and never refashioned for women. Injuries from sickles and machetes are common and decent medical care is rare. Tetanus is a constant threat. High infant mortality is a big problem of such work in agriculture. During transplantation work, for instance, women remain bent or squatting for much of the day. Also, women workers don't get to eat enough. Their general poverty ensures this. And the custom of serving the family first and eating last worsens it. Pregnant women don't get to eat any better, though they need to. Since the mothers are anyway under-nourished, premature babies are too underweight to survive.

Sugarcane farm: The women work in sugarcane fields and are engaged in the activity of removing sugarcane and cleaning it i.e. peeling of the dried grass from it. They work for a couple of hours with a break of half an hour. The women are local residents and get the wages in kind. They take away this dried grass with themselves and use it as fodder for their cattle. Most of the woman worked 16 hours a day, get up at 4 am were often involve doing task simultaneously such as looking after children, answering their questions and teaching them skill while working in the field tending crops that are utilized for both cash and subsistence needs. Men did not generally do the daily cooking, food processing, cleaning the house, washing dishes and clothes or care for children, the elderly or the sick.

Women works in forestry: The women engaged in various activities such as making the soil ready for sowing the seed either in the structure or in plastic bags, watering the plants, changing the direction of the plants according to the sunshine and many other tasks linked with it. The women here work mostly on contract basis and have fixed permanent hours of working i.e. 9.00 a.m. to 5.00 p.m. They get a wage of Rs 140/- These women are particularly engaged in planting hybrid Safeda (*Eucalyptus*) seeds. They nurture and nourish the plant from the beginning to the end and these plants and trees are then auctioned by the Government. The eucalyptus trees are further used for making coal etc.

Other Agriculture Activities

Women working as domestic agriculture servants: Women working as domestic agriculture servants form an important element in social life. They contribute in general social life of people. But they are most subjugated, mistreated, unexplored and neglected section of the unorganized sector of economy and society. Domestic service is one of the low ranking occupations mostly belongs to socially and financially poorest class of society. The women shuffle the soil which is a very significant task in agriculture. Shuffling of the soil is done basically for the purpose that the soil retains its fertility. This work is done from 9.00 a.m. to 5.00 p.m. and around 10-12 women are engaged by the landlord for this work. They are sometimes made to work for longer hours in the evening but are not paid accordingly. They get a wage of about Rs 120-00 per day. The women are engaged in cutting the weeds basically included in cleaning the field. The other women pluck coriander, fenugreek and green peas from the field for their household cooking purposes. The woman make drain like

structure in agriculture field so as to supply proper water into the field for better irrigation. The woman ensures a proper way for the water to reach every corner of the field. The women wash the radish for the purpose for selling it the market. The women sell by removing extra leaves from the radish and then washing it. The woman earns an amount of Rs 3-4 per Kg.

Innovative strategies for the future: Agricultural research and technology should pay more attention to meeting farm women's needs. This calls for reorientation of technology development not only toward the agro-climatic region but also toward the end user. New approaches to increase women's involvement in agricultural research are emerging in national and international institutions such as International Rice Research Institute (IRRI), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), United Nations Development Program (UNDP), International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA), Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), and Integrated Tribal Development Agency (ITDA). These seek not only to benefit women but also to benefit from them, especially in the areas of crop production and biodiversity. In Peru, for example, the International Potato Centre (CIP) is testing and screening staple food crops grown by women in sub Saharan Africa, such as sweet potato, to breed early maturing, high yielding varieties with some degree of drought tolerance. These crops are often used by women during famine and are eaten before the main harvest or when the staple harvest is poor (FAO, 2003a, 2003b). In Côte d'Ivoire, the West Africa Rice Development Association (WARDA) has been conducting surveys to identify the preferences of women and men farmers in adopting improved rice varieties. While men prefer short-stature high-yielding varieties, women are reluctant to grow these varieties because of the difficulties in harvesting them while carrying infants on their back. As this constraint may lead women farmers to reject such varieties, WARDA has increasingly shifted its emphasis toward the development of medium- to tall-stature varieties (FAO, 2003a, 2003b). Technology cannot remain in isolation nor create cultural shock. Science as a magic wand alone cannot remove these gender inequities. Farm women are confronted with the triple burden of farm work, household duties, and child rearing. There is an urgent need for a new agricultural research and extension agenda that integrates gender analysis into the technology generation and dissemination process. Gender equity should form an important variable in the holistic analysis of farming systems in future. Through their daily activities, experience, and knowledge, women have a major role in agriculture and rural livelihoods. However, at all levels of policy planning, rural women are ignored and hampered by restricted rights to the resources they rely on to meet their needs. The autonomy provided by the law is merely statutory or symbolic, and rarely seen in real life. Though some improvements by way of reserving seats for women in panchayats and local governance have been achieved, there is still some distance to go before women in the rural sector can truly be considered "empowered"^{iv}.

Need for reforms: Rural women are the major contributors in agriculture and its allied fields. Their work ranges from crop production, livestock production to cottage industry. From household and family maintenance activities, to transporting water, fuel and fodder. Despite such a huge involvement, her role and dignity has yet not been recognized. Women's status is low by all social, economic, and political indicators. Women's wage work is considered a threat to the male ego and

women's engagement in multiple home-based economic activities leads to under remuneration for their work. Women spend long hours fetching water, doing laundry, preparing food, and carrying out agricultural duties. Not only are these tasks physically hard and demanding, they also rob girls of the opportunity to study. The nature and sphere of women's productivity in the labour market is largely determined by socio-cultural and economic factors. Women do not enter the labour market on equal terms when compared to men. Their occupational choices are also limited due to social and cultural constraints, gender bias in the labour market, and lack of supportive facilities such as child care, transport, and accommodation in the formal sector of the labour market. Women's labour power is considered inferior because of employers' predetermined notion of women's primary role as homemakers. As a result of discrimination against female labour, women are concentrated in the secondary sector of labour market. Their work is low paid, low status, casual, and lacks potential upward mobility. The majority of women in the urban sector work in low-paying jobs.

Legislation for unorganized and organized sector in India:

Social security in India falls under the concurrent list, according to which both the Union and the State Governments can make legislation on this subject. The broader policy making responsibility lies and various with the Union Government whereas, the responsibility to implement central acts, programs etc lies within the jurisdiction of state. A number of directive principles of state policy relating to aspect of social security were incorporated in the Indian constitution. Some of the legislations are as follows:

- Workmen's Compensation Act (1923);
- the Industrial Disputes Act (1947);
- the Employees State Insurance Act (1948);
- the Minimum Wages Act (1948);
- the Coal Mines Provident Funds and Miscellaneous Provisions Act (1948);
- The Employees Provident Fund and Miscellaneous Provisions Act (1952);
- the Maternity Benefit Act (1961);
- the Seamen's Provident Fund Act (1966);
- the Contract Labour Act (1970);
- the Payment of Gratuity Act (1972);
- The Building and Construction Workers Act (1996) etc. reveal the attention given to the organized workers to attain different kinds of social security and welfare benefits.

These acts are also applicable to all the workers whether in they are in organized or unorganized sector, but their contribution is very negligible to the unorganized workers.

Some of the schemes related to Social Security for workers are as follows;

- Indra Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme
- National Family Benefit Scheme
- Jannani Suraksha Scheme
- Handloom Weavers Comprehensive Welfare Scheme
- Handloom Artisans' Comprehensive Welfare Scheme
- Pension for Master Craft persons
- National Scheme of for Welfare of Fisherman and Training and Extension

- Janshree Bima Yojana
- Aam Aadmi Bima Yojana
- Rastriya Swasthya Bima Yojana

ACTS

- The Worker's Compensation Act 1923
- The Industrial Dispute Act 1947
- The Employees State Insurance Act, 1948
- The Employees' Provident Fund and Miscellaneous Provisions Act, 1952
- The Maternity Benefit Act, 1961
- The Payment of Gratuity Act, 1972

Suggestion to improve the implementation and suggestion women related laws: For the recognition of women contribution in agriculture and its allied fields and reducing the gender issues, these are the following recommendations:

- Recognition of labour work of working women in the rural economy may be accounted in monetary terms.
- More facilities should be provided to poor rural women for land, agricultural and livestock extension services.
- Priority must be given to women in accessing credit on soft terms from banks and other financial institutions for setting up their business, for buying properties, and for house building.
- Measures should be taken to enhance women's literacy rates. A separate education policy for women may serve the purpose.
- Women must be involved in decision-making bodies that have the potential to introduce structural changes. This action will bring some changes in the gender relations in the society.
- Women must be aware regarding their existing rights, access to judicial relief and redress, removing discrimination through legal reforms, and providing legal aid, assistance and counseling.

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