

Participation of Indian Rural Women in Rural Development

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Abstract - This paper highlights the Participation of Indian rural women in rural development like agriculture and its allied fields. It is argued that the rural women in India have been actively involved in agriculture and its allied fields. Rural women's work ranges from crop production to harvesting operations, from live stock rearing to raising babies. In addition to her daily work routine, consisting of, cooking, cleaning, and other domestic chores, rural women are also heavily involved in all aspects of country's agricultural sector. From crop production to livestock rearing, rural women are expected to regularly engage both domestic and commercial aspects of society. Despite such a huge contribution, her role has yet not been recognized. The paper recommends a fair treatment to the rural women and calls for social upliftment by enhancing education, employment, training, and health care facilities.

Keywords: Rural Women, Agriculture and allied fields, Fair Treatment, Social Uplift

INTRODUCTION

At the time of independence in 1947, India's population was million. In 2001, the figure jumped to six billion. Despite several efforts to control the population, the growth rate continued to climb at an alarming rate of 2.6% per annum.

Based on Economic Survey of India, 2001-11, 75% of the population lives in rural areas and is directly or indirectly linked with agriculture and its related fields. Agriculture and agro based industry is the back bone of the India economy.

The Federal Labor Force Survey of India mentions in its 2001/2011 report that the employment rate for women is 20.14 per cent. In rural and urban areas, women's participation is 23.63 and 12.53 per cent respectively. A comparison of this figure with the female population refers to a segment of population which is under-represented by 26.36 per cent in its own as women are 47.5 percent of the total population.

When compared with other semi-industrialized countries like Sri Lanka and Malaysia, one finds that the representation of women in economic activities in India is substantially lower. However, it is encouraging to note that more than 45 per cent of the adult women population has

made its way into the national economic scene, but the women's involvement in non-agricultural sector is only 6.7 percent. Aside from agriculture sector, large numbers of women entrepreneurs are found in India's traditional business sector, running small business such as boutiques, parlors, bakeries while some of them are also involved in manufacturing and consultancy services. The largest number of skilled women labor force is employed in garments and handicrafts sector. In general, urban women are better placed than those working in rural areas. Information gaps, marketing channels, and poor networking are major challenges to the growth of women enterprises. Women are either unaware of modern marketing tactics that would fetch better returns for the same product or remain restrained to the local markets due to a number of other problems. For variety of reasons, women remain out of touch from domestic and international markets. Major contributing factors are: lack of business awareness and lack of knowledge as to where these markets are; and how to reach them.

Furthermore, most women entrepreneurs are small business owners, operating businesses from homes and they have low level of education and technical skills. In addition, all financial aspects are controlled by male family members. Economic necessity, however is now forcing

more and more women to engage in some form of employment and income generation activities.

Like many other developing countries, in India the role of women in the national development has begun to attract attention in recent years. Women's role in the Indian economy and their overall social equality is being discussed at the national level to be followed by some initiatives by the government and the civil society organizations, mostly at legislative and policy levels. Women have also got reserved seats in all the three tiers of law-making bodies. The government is also executing a 'gender and development plan' 2001-2011 and recently, 'Women Protection' bills have been passed. The resulting impact of these measures remains to be seen.

In India, women's social and economic development is not only an issue about equalizing women with men but rather an issue of Indian's socio-economic development. Equality and equity between men and women is an academic issue but more important is the ground reality which says that nearly half of the population is lagging behind in all walks of life because opportunities of access to education, health-care, and choice of profession for women are almost negligible. And the discrimination on the basis of sex has proved counter productive.

Human capital theorists argue that such an under-utilization human capital is wasteful, irrational, and disadvantageous to the nation's growth.

In the case of India, the development of women human capital has not received adequate attention. The most recent "Human Development" report released by UNDP ranks India on 55th position. This low ranking is primarily due to the massive gap in gender inequality, especially within the education and health care sector. Lack of access to adequate health care and education has resulted in low literacy rate among women and high mortality rate during reproductive age, reflecting negatively on Human Development Indicators (HDIs).

Despite the rhetoric claims of successive governments since mid-eighties that there has been improvement in education and health sectors, the real picture is much different. Improvement in education and health sector need to be re-evaluated on the basis of growth of human capital. Policies relating to education, health and all sectors of economy need to be designed to utilize their flux of highly skilled and youthful work force and providing level playing field to both men and women for participation in all economic activities. In addition to these, initiatives needed from government, there also needed to change mindset of people, who tend to be overly influenced by traditional and social /cultural norms. In order to develop social standards

of women and to enhance their participation in all economic activities, there is need to equip them with quality education in the areas of latest technology, business and finance, manufacturing, information technology, service sector and of course, agriculture and industry.

The paper is organized as follows: In the following section, we will review the literature. Section three, describes the role rural women in agriculture and its allied fields; Section four discusses the conclusions and recommendations and finally ends with references

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

There is a vast body of literature linked with role of rural women in agriculture and its allied fields, but here we mention only recent work being done on the topic.

Brohi Sikandar (2005) in his research paper entitled "NDP Irrigation Reforms Lack Gender Equality" argued that despite gargantuan efforts and uncasing participation in socio-economic field, women role has been discarded.

Prof.Hudda (2008) has investigated in his research article entitled "Understanding Poverty in Rural Haryana" that rural women do all on farm/off farm works. Her day begins from pre-dawn with crushing. If the family is fortunate enough to have cattle, and end up by taking leftover bites of bread and bowl of porridge. Their traditional role of housekeeping has been extended to collect firewood, fodder, and working on farms. Owing to social taboos, ignorance, financial constraints, inadequate education facilities, and non-availability of lady teachers in rural girls' schools have not opened the doors of literacy for them. Agriculture-dependent rural people have struggled to improve their economic conditions. On the contrary, shortage of water, dry spell cycles, decrease in cultivable area due to soil deterioration, extension of towns and villages, contraction of infrastructure, rising cost of inputs, non-availability of high yield quality varieties seeds to small farmers, un-checked population growth, etc, have together adversely affected the lives of rural people.

Malik Saeeda (2009) in her paper "Women Welfare Projects and Development" has highlights the deplorable conditions of rural women in India. In her research, she has tried to link economic development with women welfare. For the development of women, she emphasizes on the need for governments to initiate women welfare projects.

A.S.Rahi (2009) has mentioned in his paper "Role of Rural Women" that role of women in agriculture sector is as important as men, therefore, women should educate themselves in agricultural.

Mr. Qureshi highlights the importance of education to rural female. He proposed to educate women in floriculture and food preservation.

S. M. Sharma (2009) has pointed out in his article entitled "Production Hazards, Marketing Risks" that rural women play vital role in meeting the food requirements of the country and are increasingly contributing foreign exchange earnings. The majority is self-employed and work in dangerous environments. Their daily tasks includes keeping and caring for the livestock at farms. They grow grains, cotton, fibers, fruit, and vegetables. The crop farmer plants, tills, fertilize, sprays, harvests, packs and stores the product. The livestock farmer feeds and cares for animals, while the horticulture farmers produce ornamental plants and nursery products.

The per capita income of the millions of agricultural workers is less than half a dollar per day.

These workers are deprived of basic human needs like health, food, education, clean water, and shelter.

In addition, their women are frequently tortured by the landlords and their thugs. Farmers, particularly women, face a high degree of economic, legal, and institutional uncertainties when investing in their land and other resources.

Successful implementation of such programs stem from in the motivation and attitude of individual farmers and newly instituted government policies to providing incentives to farmers to manage their natural resources efficiently and in a sustainable way.

3. INDIAN RURAL WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE AND ITS ALLIED FIELDS

Rural women have been intensively involved in agriculture and its allied fields. She performs numerous labor intensive jobs such as weeding, hoeing, grass cutting, picking, cotton stick collections, separation of seeds from fiber. Women are also expected to collect wood from fields. This wood is being used as a major fuel source for cooking. Because of the increasing population pressure, over grazing and desertification, women face difficulties in searching of fire wood. Clean drinking water is another major problem in rural India. Like collection of wood, fetching water from remote areas is also the duty of women. Because a rural woman is responsible for farm activities, keeping of livestock and its other associated activities like milking, milk processing, and preparation of ghee are also carried out by the women.

Livestock is the primary subsistent activity used to meet household food needs as well as supplement farm incomes. The majority of farms own some livestock. The pattern of livestock strength is mainly influenced by various factors such as farm size, cropping pattern, availability of range-lands including fodder and pasture. It is common practice in the rural areas of India to give an animal as part of a women's dowry. The number of small ruminants (sheep and goat) is 3 per farm. Studies have revealed rural women earn extra income an average of the amount of Rs.8780/- per annum from the sale of animals. Mostly women are engaged in cleaning of animal, sheds, watering and milking the animals. Further more, rural women are also responsible for collection, preparing dung cakes an activity that also bring additional income to poor families. Evidently, rural women are involved in almost all livestock related activities. Except grazing, all other livestock management activities are predominantly performed by females. Labor Survey of India 2006-07 disclosed that stall feeding of animals is carried out by 31% of females, whereas, milking, milk processing carried out by 58% and preparing dung cakes are carried out by 90% of females. 90% women are involved in shed cleaning and 85% in collection of farm yard manure. Watering is also performed by the 69% of females. Males, however, share the responsibility of taking care of sick animals. It is evident that the women are playing a dominant role in the livestock production and management activities.

Poultry farming is one of the major sources of rural economy. The rate of women in poultry farming at household level is the central in poultry industry. Even though rural women are not using modern management techniques, such as vaccination and improved feed, but their poultry enterprise is impressive. Every year, income from poultry farming has been rising. In order to generate more and more income, rural women often sell all eggs and poultry meat and left nothing for personal use. Due to poverty and lack of required level of proteins most of women have got a very poor health. Most of women suffer from malnutrition.

Our study examines the socio-economic characteristics of the rural household. It is revealed that the average family size in rural area is 9.87 and is composed of two males, two females, five children, and two elderly. Almost 48% of a family is not in a working age. There is wide gap between males and females in educational level. The difference in gender involvement in off-farm working is highly significant as the average involvement of adult males in off farm is 1.4%. Whereas, only one female is involved in off-farm activities, which are low as compared to male. The average off farm monthly income of males is Rs.5400/- while the average off-farm monthly income of females is Rs.3400/-.

Better education level of males might have provided them access to off farm job opportunities.

According to Labor Survey of India (2006-07), 70% of female labor force are engaged in agriculture and its allied fields and play very tough role like milking, feed and watch of the livestock.

Their brittle bodies transplant rice crop in the burning month of May/ July. Likewise, cotton grower's spray with poisonous pesticides to the crop; as women pick cotton from sunrise to sun set, it develops allergies, their skin festers. They are always besieged by ailments and medico abnormalities and usually die untreated. The growers are not providing them facilities of hand gloves and umbrella.

Neither government take steps to safe them. The study also noted that majority of the rural women are uneducated, unskilled and tradition-bounded, therefore their productive capacities are also low, and counted as unskilled labor. Though rural women also help to produce the staple crops like rice, wheat, and maize, but her contribution is secondary in staple crop production, however, in legumes and vegetables, her role is instrumental.

Indian Rural women play a significant role in farming. Traditionally, cotton picking is exclusively female activity and 89% women are engaged in it. They are also extensively involved in other activities such as 30% in hoeing and 22% in weeding. Aside from these activities, women have very little involvement in other aspect of cotton production, while the males play major role in seed preparation (85%) cotton ridge making (87%), sowing of cotton on ridges (54%), hoeing (17%), thinning of cottonplants (44%), preparation of pesticide application (98%), fertilizer application (99%), cotton stick cutting (77%), stick collection (62%), cotton field cleaning (55%) and cotton seed preparation seed (87%). Male seek consultation from female while selecting cotton pickers, time to start first Picking, total number of pickings and selecting the storage place for cotton. About 28-42% of females are also being consulted for the variety of crop, plant distance/population, timely sowing, source of seed, ensuring quality seed collection from own crop, applying seed rate as per cotton variety and selling of cotton at certain price. 14% female have not only been consulted to assess pest attack but have also been consulted to select pesticides and the time for pesticide applications. Only 21% of females have been consulted to use alternative methods of plant protection. 22-27% have some voice in decisions regarding area allocation to cotton crop, selection of land lord to work with as tenant, purchase of inputs, irrigating field from tube well and selling of production to a specific agency.

Rural women have very hectic life. Her work starts from dawn and ends at dusk. The daily routine work begins from house cleaning, fetching drinking water, dish washing, laundry, preparing food for family, care of children, tailoring and sewing clothes. She manages these activities very smartly. Even though rural women supply half of the India's food production, yet her own food security is always at risk. Women farmers are frequently ignored in development strategies and policies In most of the developing countries, including India, both men and women farmers do not have access to adequate resources, but women's are even more constrained because of cultural, traditional and sociological factors. Accurate information about men's and women's relative access to, and control over, resources is crucial in the development of food security strategies.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Indian Rural women are major contributors in agriculture and its allied fields. Her 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 no been recognized. Women's status is low by all social, economic, and political indicators.

The labor force participation rates for women are grossly underreported by the official sources of data. The 1997 Labor Force Survey reported the refined activity rate for women as 13.6 percent and 70 percent for men, while the crude activity rate was 9 percent and 47 percent, respectively. This is due to problems in data collection such as an inappropriate definition of economic activity, male enumerators who get information regarding working women from the male members of the family, questions seeking information on a single main activity, and exclusion of the informal sector. In the cultural context of Pakistan, 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.

Indian girls and 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 labor market is largely determined by socio cultural and economic factors. Women do not enter the labor market on equal terms when compared to men. Their occupational choices are also limited due to social and cultural constraints, gender bias in the labor market, and lack of supportive facilities such as child care, transport, and accommodation in the formal sector of the labor market. Women's labor power is considered inferior because of

employers' predetermined notion of women's primary role as homemakers. As a result of discrimination against female labor, women are concentrated in the secondary sector of labor market. Their work is low paid, low status, casual, and lacks potential upward mobility. Women are overwhelmingly concentrated in the agriculture sector, which employs 79 percent of female labor force as compared with 57.3 percent of male workers. Nearly 36–38 percent of economically active rural women work on their own family farms. The majority of women in the urban sector work in low-paying jobs. For the betterment of women folk and in recognition of her contribution in agriculture and its allied field, following recommendations have been made.

1. Women working in the rural economy and the informal sector are to be formally recognized and her labor work may be accounted in monetary terms.

2. Steps are to be taken to ensure the access of poor rural women to land, agricultural and livestock extension services and support mechanisms and facilities. Furthermore, providing women easy access to micro-credit, especially through the India Poverty Alleviation Fund (IPAF), Rural Support Programmes (RSPs), First Women Bank (FWB), Agricultural Development Bank (ADB) and the Khushali Bank and DRDA.

3. Women, particularly in general and female headed households, women bread earners, and women with disability, are given priority in accessing credit on soft terms from banks and other financial institutions for setting up their business, for buying properties, and for house building.

4. In most countries legislative changes have been made to facilitate women's rights and women's have direct access to agriculture credit. For instance, Thailand had made changes in legal term from house wife to women farmer to allow her access to agriculture credit. Similar legislative alterations are also need in India

5. To enhance women's literacy rates, and to improve the levels of female education ratio, other urgent measures required. A separate education policy for women may serve the purpose.

6. Women are entirely absent from the state structures and decision-making bodies that have the potential to introduce structural changes. Women's lack of involvement in government structures is critical to bring about substantive changes in the development policies and programs that would lead to a shift in gender relations in the society.

7. Law and access to justice is another target area. Key policy measures to be instituted including eliminating negative customary practices by increasing knowledge of women's existing rights to access judicial relief and redress, ensuring effective implementation and the enforcement of existing rights, removing discrimination through legal reforms, and providing legal aid, assistance and counseling. More specifically, the Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, the India Law Commission, and the National Commission on the Status of Women are to review all laws and formulate proposals for law reform.

Finally it is concluded that the rural women are exploited by land lords for their personal good and enrichment. Women are treated as sub- servant or personal property. In this regard government must formulate policies to enhance their skills and their work should be counted in economic indicators.

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