

The Hali/Sajhi (SIRI) Contract Culture in Phunahana Tehsil and Role of Females in Agriculture Activities

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Abstract – It is not an exaggeration, that women in India are backbone of agriculture. They make fruitful economic contribution in the agriculture and rural economy. The female participation in agricultural activities varies with the land owning status of farm households. In this paper an attempt is made to analyze the participation of female in agriculture at the micro level by taking – tehsil as a unit of study. In this area most of work on farm is done by the female. In this paper an attempt is made to analyze the participation of female in agriculture at the micro level by taking – tehsil as a unit of study. In this area most of work on farm is done by the female. Women between the age group 15 to 60 years; illiterate to women having education upto 10th were found to be engaged in agriculture. Their status is low mostly due to their limited access to economic resources. One way of bringing about an improvement in the status of the female workers is to raise the wages of the women workers to improve their economic condition.

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INTRODUCTION

It is not an exaggeration, that women in India are backbone of agriculture. They make fruitful economic contribution in the agriculture and rural economy. Indian rural women are extensively involved in agricultural activities. However, the nature and extent of their involvement differs with the variations in agro production system. The female participation in agricultural activities varies with the land owning status of farm households. But throughout the world rural women have been under represented in the development process. The unique features of the female participation throughout India is that they are workers, labourers, cultivators, producers beside performing all household activities which are considered as unproductive. Females are engaged in seeding, planting, weeding, irrigation, processing, harvesting and threshing operations. Many economically productive activities performed by women go unrecorded. It is estimated that women are responsible for 70 percent of actual farm work and constitute up to the about 60 percent of the farming population. But it is most unfortunate that the role of women in agriculture has not been highlighted. In this paper an attempt is made to analyze the participation of female in agriculture at the micro level by taking – tehsil as a case study. The tehsil falls in socially backward Mewat area of Haryana and participation of women in agriculture activities is much higher than many other parts of the state.

OBJECTIVES

1. To examine the multi-dimensional aspect (demographic characteristics, standard of living, education, health, livestock and agriculture and infrastructure) which effect female agriculture workers across the study area.
2. To study role of females in agriculture actives in Phunhana Tehsil.
3. To examine the problems faced by female at their farm.

UNIT OF STUDY AND SAMPLE SIZE

The study is undertaken in Punhana tehsil of Mewat district of Haryana, to analyse contribution of female in agriculture. It's become necessary to know the social and cultural profile of an area because the social structure, cultural customs and traditions of an area decide the occupational structure of that particular area. Samples of 100 farm females have been selected and detailed information about each female's role in different activities and time spent was collected. Also detailed information about social profile of sample female's workers was collected. Out of hundred respondents 27 % females were in the age category of young in which the age of respondents varies between 15 year to 30 year. As expected,

the percentage of females is highest (58 percent) in the in middle age groups (31 to 45 year).

THE HALI/SIRI/ SAJHI CONTRACT IN MEWAT AND ROLE OF FEMALES

The people who are landless or having very less land for agriculture are doing agriculture on the land of other people on contract basis are known as Hali/Siri/Sajhi (Hali is a local name used for these kind of farmers in Mewat). The contract of a hali resembled a share cropping contract in terms of the mode of payment. The hali and the landowner shared the material costs of production and the agricultural produce in a pre-decided proportion. The hali, in addition, provided all the labour that was required for the production. This included any labour that needed to be hired for the work. Most commonly, the hali provided one fifth of the material costs and provided all the labour. In return, the hali got only some share of production (amount of share varies from 1/4 to 1/10 of the produce. All decision making powers in respect of the choice of crops to be sown, the amount and types of inputs to be used and farming practices were vested solely in the landlord. The landowner closely supervised work on the field on a daily basis. Although the landlord typically entered into the contract with a male worker, typically, the whole household had to work on the farm as part of the contract. The contract also often required the hali's to live on the field with their families. Typically, the hali took an advance from the landowner at the starting of the contract. This advance was treated as a loan and the landowner charged an interest at the rate of about 3 to 5 per cent per month on this loan.

The fact that a hali had to provide all labour used in cultivation had important implications for the pattern of labour use in agriculture in the village. The hali's had to bear all the cost of labour to get a small share in the output, their only hope to make a small net income lay in maximizing the use of family labour. In general, all workers from hali households except old persons, children and a few workers who were also involved in other occupations worked every day from the time land preparation work started until the crop was harvested, threshed and stored. On double cropped land, this meant about nine months of work. During these months most workers from the hali households were on the field every day. The work participation rates among men and females in the hali households were very high. Secondly, work participation rates among children, particularly girls, is also very high. Thirdly, among the households living in the fields, work participation rates for females were higher than for men in all the three age groups. Conversely, the hali contract ensured that hiring of casual labour was minimized. The use of hired labour was limited by maximizing the use of family labour and the widespread use of labour displacing technology. Given the design of the hali contract and the fact that it was cheaper to use

machines like combined harvesters than get the work done using hired labour, the interests of the hali's and the landowners converged on the use of family labour displacing technology. Some of the most important tasks done by females from the hali households were weeding, harvesting of crops, harvesting and threshing of paddy, winnowing, loading of grain and straw, picking and harvesting of vegetables, and harvesting of fodder crops. It is noteworthy that in case of family workers in the hali households, unlike say the casual workers in the village, the distinction between tasks done by men and females was not clear-cut. Females from these households did a number of tasks that were otherwise considered men's work in the village and only men were hired for such tasks. These tasks included application of fertilizers, spraying pesticides, clearing of field channels, making bunds, irrigation and threshing. In addition, there were a number of other tasks, many of them done by females, which were done on a regular basis over a long duration. These included, most importantly, weeding and hoeing. Females typically spent a few hours on most days weeding in the fields. Similarly, females did a lot of work over a long period hoeing the cotton fields. Females typically removed grass from the field bunds and channels every day, collecting them for use as fodder. It is important to note that the burden of work on females from the hali households was really enormous. In case of households that did not live in the fields, females had to do a number of domestic and animal husbandry related activities in the morning, carry food for rest of the members to the fields, participate in the agricultural work, collect grass and firewood, harvest fodder, and carry them home. In the evening, after having done backbreaking work for the whole day, after that, she again got back to household chores, cooking, taking care of children, milking cattle and moving them into the shed. The hali system imposed severe restrictions on the freedom of the hali and his family to use their labour power and many hali's worked under conditions of bondage. They were indebted to the landlords and were usually not allowed to quit working for the landlord until their debts were cleared. In cases of eviction or when a hali quit working for a landlord, the hali was required to repay the debt. It was common for the landlords to prevent the hali from taking away his possessions from the field unless the debt was repaid. As a result, hali's who lived on the fields faced the threat of dispossession of their cattle and other assets unless they repaid the debt. The hali contract typically involved restrictions on the freedom of hali, and sometimes even on other workers from his family, to work for any other employer. The hali's were typically required to perform various kinds of labour services for the landlord. These services included all kinds of agricultural, non-agricultural and domestic work. A hali could be required to deliver fodder to the landlord's house every day. Women from hali's

family could be asked to do domestic services in the landlord's house or remove dung from the landlord's cattle-shed. The design of the hali contract ensured that the hali household provided as much family labour as possible and mobilized cheap hired labour through their social relations.

CONCLUSION

Mewat has a strong tradition of women's involvement in agriculture since a long times. Main problem for the worst condition of female agricultural workers is this area is the lack of education opportunities because of poverty and mail dominating society. Peoples allow the girl child go to the school only in their village. For example if village has the facility of primary school, they will not allow them to move to nearby village for further education. Marriage in early age (sixteen or seventeen year) is another major problem in this area also affects their education and decides their future to work on farm in her husband house. Female from poor and middle class have last access to high school education. In these conditions there is no question of opportunity for higher and technical education. That's why they are limited between house and farm. Self employment schemes are also not effectively implemented in this area. Ownership of land is almost non-existent for female workers. They also do not have the right over their own earnings. Gender development is a necessary condition both for economic growth and human development. Measures for consideration include appointment of women extension officers and workers, instituting special training camps for women agriculturists, extending agricultural credit to women. They should also be integrated into the mainstream through better education, health and other support facilities. One way of bringing about an improvement in the status of the female workers is to raise the wages of the women workers to improve their economic condition. Their status is low mostly due to their limited access to economic resources (land in this case). The strategies adopted by the Government to increase women welfare should be made more focused to bring forth appropriate results. According to an Indian study, development, which provides education and training to women, can enhance the productivity of all farm inputs (Cloud, 1985). Planners should not ignore productivity of domestic activity. Improvement in productivity of domestic chores makes it possible for women to spend their time on other income generating activities. A new paradigm with women at the core will ensure better participation of men and women and help the society and the economy to grow. Women have the potential to contribute to agricultural productivity equivalent to men.

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