

RESEARCH PAPER

Role of women in agriculture: A study in Indian context

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ABSTRACT

Indian agriculturere has developed immensely after the infusion of innovative research and technological advancements. It has seen the light of day, but still ignores the himalyan role that women play in this particular sector. A huge section of women workers are involved in agriculture but are not duly recognised for their work. There is a gap between what people perceive and what women actualt contribute. It is imperative to notice that broad based goals and national interest can be acheived by involving women in this important sector of India. This paper emphasizes the role of women in agriculture and how to increase their maximum contribution. The gender gap that hampers the productivity can be minimised by creating opportunities for women and recognising their role and importance.

KEY WORDS : Women, Agriculture, Opportunities

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Agriculture is one of the most important yet under performing sectors of our economy. Out of the many reasons, ne reason can be the unduly recognised role of women entrepreneurs in agriculture and strategies to encourage and promote them. Women in agriculture mostly lack the requisite sources and resources to make their mark. If these barriers are removed, overall productivity can be increased and hunger and poverty can be reduced. It is the duty of

agricultural authorities to look after the requirements and needs of women agriculturists to help them achieve the major goals. If the role of women is recognised duly, it can go a long way in building a stable and productive economy.

Vertivel and Manigandan (2013) in his study reported that half of the agricultural workforce across world constitute of women, they are responsible for production as well as sale of food. Earlier the role of women agriculturalists was not duly recognised but the situation is changing now.

Mandal (2013) reported that women can perform range of activities at home as well as field. They can work for longer hours as compared to men but have more chances of being exploited. Discrimination is still faced by most women.

Goswami (2013) in his case study reported that

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financially weak women contribute to the household income by agreeing to work at comparatively lower wages. Due to lack of employment opportunities, they agree to work on farms in meagre salary.

Ghosh and Ghosh (2014) tried to analyse the role of women in agriculture and found out that about more than 40 per cent of agricultural labour force consists of women but they still remain invisible. Discrimination exists in labour force.

Swamikannan and Jeyalakshmi (2015) in his study found out that the participation of women in agricultural sector has drastically declined over years due to the price discrimination and exploitation faced by female labourers.

Objectives of study:

The study the role of women in agriculture and the allied sectors

– To come out with suggestions and improvements to enhance their role in improving the agricultural sector

METHODOLOGY

The data has been collected from various research articles, papers, census data, libraries, journals and trade journals.

Women in agriculture:

Indian women are considered to be the backbone of their economy; they do play a pivotal role in agricultural economy especially in rural areas. Their contribution is not only limited to agriculture but allied sector also. These activities include producing crops, preparing cattle food, cleaning farm animals, trade and marketing practices and managing household work. In traditional times, women played a significant role in agriculture as farmers and wage labourers but due to discrimination, they had to back off. Often women have less access to facilities and assets or inputs. Their contribution could be doubled if they are provided with adequate facilities and same recourses as provide to men. At present there are many opportunities that can be utilized in terms of supply chains and contract farming. Women are involved in crop production, livestock production at commercial levels. They are considered to be important part of fish farming as well.

Role of women in agriculture and allied activities:

The role of women in agriculture has been realized

by prominent agriculturists since times immemorial. It was a woman who domesticated the first crop plant and hence led to the inception of farming. Women used to cultivate seeds on their own and started taking interest in food, fibre and fodder. In India, women are producers of food that has both value and volume. In year 2004, the dependence on agriculture of women was 70 per cent. A large section of them is involved in cereal production, vegetable production or fruit crops, fisheries and fish farming, horticulture, post harvesting and agro forestry. Women are involved in activities like collecting fuel, growing vegetables, taking care of poultry. FAO conducted a survey in developing countries and revealed that women constitute 70 per cent of agricultural labour. More than 60 per cent are responsible for household food production, 80 per cent for storage process and 90 per cent for water and fuel collection. Their access to land, inputs and facilities are limited but still they make contributions in labour intensive jobs like grass cutting, separating seeds, weeding and stick collection.

Role of women in livestock management:

Livestock management has been regarded as one of the important systems for supporting women and improving their financial situation. They do care for animals especially poultry and dairy animals. They even have skills to market products like milk and eggs. This has been the occupation of rural women off late. Unfortunately the role women play in livestock management is not documented that much but steps should be taken to encourage women to do more in his regard. The demand for livestock products is increasing faster especially in Asian countries; this has fairer chances of engaging more women in this sector. They have different roles to play and dispense off their responsibilities in a better way.

Women in fisheries and aquaculture:

In India, it has been reported that women constitute upto 30 per cent of employment in fisheries which includes both primary and secondary activities. Women mostly do not engage in commercial or long distance activities because it involves laborious work; however they are occupied in subsistence fishing in small boats or inland waters. Women can be good entrepreneurs and provide labour in artisanal fisheries. Their contribution can be co-ordination of fisheries chain from production

to selling process. The prominent role that women can play in fisheries is felt processing and marketing stages.

Role of women in forestry:

Women play role in both the formal and informal sectors in many ways. Their presence is felt in agroforestry, watershed management, protection and conservational strategies. Women are involved in taking care of nurseries, plantation and wood processing. Their role is small but significant and needs to be documented properly. Women are involved in menial jobs in sawmills and logging camps or they do not hold senior positions especially in rural India. Women should be involved in research and policy making as that will help a lot to improve the present scenario.

Main challenges faced by female farmers in agriculture sector

- Indian women unfortunately have unequal land rights, their ownership is mostly not in their names and it gives them limited access to their lands. Due to this, they face limited livelihood options as well; it poses a threat of financial instability on women.
- Most of the women do not have access to recourses or inputs which can pose a challenge for them in improving their productivity or profit margin.
- Most of the rural women do not have mechanised tools and have to do laborious field jobs on their own, they perform multiple tasks single handily which adds to their burden.
- Rural Indian women have very little or no control in decision making, it affects their psyche and often act as a hurdle in their jobs, they do not enjoy financial stability or decision making powers in field or at home.
- Few women own land, cattle, property or any other asset which makes them to work like slaves for others rather than working on their own land.
- Poor women do not get the facilities of rural credit or agricultural information, improved variety of seeds or agricultural services.
- Women in agriculture are mostly illiterate and do not know their basic or legal rights.

Status of women in agriculture:

The contribution of women in Indian agriculture

cannot be ignored and they do play a role in making a nation prosper. They can infuse new life into agriculture by being recognised for their role. In spite of all the contributions they make they still suffer in a society dominated by men. They need to be provided with more employment opportunities and jobs. Women, like men also depend on agricultural sector for their income and also spend long hours of hard work in fields. They have to struggle a lot to get credit or loans and are exploited sometimes in this process. Women face additional burden of work at homes also, they manage home and fields with diligence. Women find it hard to migrate to cities as they have a lot of responsibilities and thus they agree to work for peanuts under severe conditions.

Conclusion and suggestions:

Role of women in agriculture and its allied sectors has to be duly recognised and felt as she is involved in diverse jobs right from production, maintenance to marketing. Her role is not limited to a single job only and has to work hard at both the fields and homes. Her wages are limited, she cannot leave her home for better jobs outside as she has to look after the family, and her wages are limited and choices as well. These suggestions can help in improving the role of women in agriculture.

- Women should be recognised for their contribution by paying them good and giving them monetary and non monetary benefits.
- Facilities like loans, services, education, awareness, tools, equipments and technological advice should be provided to women to help them increase their produce further.
- Women should be provided credit and loans without any hassle for buying new properties, building houses or setting their business.
- Stringent measures should be taken to educate women about their rights, redressal mechanisms and legal reforms.
- They should be involved in decision making process and roles.
- They should be educated about new tools and techniques used in agriculture that can ease their burden and also help them do their work more efficiently.
- Government should come up with various employment programmes and schemes to help them realize the potential of land and encourage

them to work more and efficiently.

- Discrimination against female workers should be stopped and there should be a fair wage system where minimum wages are set for female workers and stringent action should be taken against those who break the laws and codes of conduct.

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