

Female Agricultural Labourers: Their Role and Constraints

Neela Multani^{#1}, A. N. Sanghvi^{#2}

¹Research Scholar, Faculty of Management, C. U. Shah University, Wadhwan, Surendranagar, Gujarat, India

²Research Supervisor, Faculty of Management, C. U. Shah University, Wadhwan, Surendranagar, Gujarat, India

neela1408@gmail.com, sanghvi.an@gmail.com

Abstract— There are distinct roles for males and females in India. Females are engaged in various activities including agriculture, but their position is not as strong as men both economically and socially and she faces more constraints than men. This paper finds that in male dominated society, female labourers face many constraints. Females have dual work responsibilities; work for longer hours, engaged in almost all types of agricultural activities with low wages. These females have low education level and thus less bargaining power. As their primary role is considered as homemaker, she faces many constraints when it comes to outside work.

Keywords— Agriculture, Females, Role, Constraints, wages, discrimination

I. INTRODUCTION

India's first Prime Minister, Shri Jawaharlal Nehru once said that, "You can tell the condition of a nation by looking at the status of women". So, we can say that growth and prosperity of any nation can be measured by the status and development of its women.

In our male dominated society, men enjoy superiority and women are cultural victims and faces hardship. Women's economic and social position in India is not as strong as men and she faces more constraints than men. They cannot relocate easily. Female workers face a double burden of doing 'unpaid' as well as 'paid' work. Women spend much of their time in unpaid monotonous household activities. The work hours for rural women are longer than men, because there is no clear boundary between productive and unproductive work in case of women.

The dignity of women can be linked with their fiscal post which depends upon the opportunities for presence in fiscal activities. The casual essence of employment, absence of opportunities to progress the skills, segregation of work, unequal wages, corrupt surrounding of work, commercialization and mechanization of agriculture are some of the problems that have oppressed the female agricultural labourers. Concentration of vast number of women in this field also reduces the bargaining capacity of labourers which affect their wage pattern.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

There are many studies linked with the role of rural women in agriculture sector. Few recent related works has been mentioned in this section.

A. S. Godara & V. Rani (2015) in their paper "Women Contribution in Agriculture Sector: An Economic Analysis in Haryana State" concluded that in agricultural sector, crop production activities related decisions such as crop selection, crop variety, crop rotation etc. are mainly taken by males. As far as picking, cutting, harvesting activities are concerned, males consult women but in this also 74.4 % women have not any say in decision making. In buying and selling of land, seeds, fertilizers, crops etc. majority of the decisions are taken by males. In decisions regarding wages for labourers, farm credits etc. females are having very low participation. In buying and selling of milk, livestock decisions are taken jointly by males and females. So, women's contribution in agricultural activities is high but their participation in decision-making is very low. Women's participation is affected by various socio-economic factors like age, education, family income etc.

A. Sharma et al. (2014) studied about farm women's role in various agricultural operations and their pattern of decision making in Raised district of Madhya Pradesh. Their study revealed that 47.50 % females had high participation, 33.33 % had medium and 19.17 % had low participation level in agricultural activities.

Study also found that majority of women that is 58.33% had less say in decision making, 22.50 % had medium and only 19.17 % had high participation in decision making process. There are many socio-economic factors like education, age, family size, social participation, mass media exposure, innovativeness, socio-economic status, training exposure etc. significantly influence the participation and decision making pattern of farm women.

D. Dave (2014) analysed constraints and opportunities of agricultural women. She found that females face many constraints like land ownership, access to credit, market, technology and other productive resources. They are generally paid less and exploited, because of less education, work experience and low bargaining power than men. They accept to work in low wages in poor working conditions. Study concluded that females have very positive attitude for conservation than males and this is the best part, but they face constraints because of little knowledge about management practices.

M. Mondal (2013) analysed women participation in agricultural production of Sagar Island, West Bengal, India. He investigated that women perform range of duties at farm and home, also they work for longer hours than men and yet they get less wages and exploited by landlords. They are treated as sub-servant and discrimination is there for female labours.

C. T. Satyavathi et al. (2010) studied about farm women's role in agriculture sector and found that women play a crucial role in various farm related activities from land preparation to crop marketing and their contribution in agricultural sector is higher than males. In spite of this, they are not active participant in decision making. Study revealed that females were involved in activities which have less physical labour and more drudgery such as weeding. Women performed these tasks in addition to their primary role of home maker. Women work harder and for longer hours than males and they perform more tasks compared to females. Study concluded that for economically viable and ecologically sustainable agriculture, modernisation of farming practice is a must and women must be involved in the process. New technologies should be adopted to reduce the drudgery of work both at home and on farm. Also, for quick adoption of technology, exact training needs of women in different categories should be identified and farm women oriented training programs must be developed. All these can be done through gender sensitive planning by considering impact of various policies and programs on women.

III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The present study focuses on following objectives:

- To explore the role of women in agricultural farming sector.
- To identify the constraints faced by these women.
- To analyse the gender issues in agriculture sector.

IV. ROLE OF WOMEN IN AGRICULTURAL FARMING SECTOR

Rural women perform a multi-dimensional role. They perform various agricultural and its allied activities as well as domestic activities. Women perform various agricultural activities like ploughing, sowing, transplanting, weeding, harvesting, manuring, pesticides spraying, thrashing, winnowing etc.

On the basis of social, fiscal position of the family and various local factors, agricultural women are occupied in three types of activities of the sector. They may work as:

- Labourers in other's farms
- Cultivator/Labourer on their own farm
- Labour supervisor and involvement in post harvesting activities

Females work for 4-6 hours on farm and they are mainly involved in monotonous and labour intensive non-mechanised activities like weeding, cutting etc. Women also perform various agricultural allied activities like livestock keeping, milking, dung cake preparation, shed cleaning, collection of manure for farm etc. Other than agriculture and its allied activities, she also perform her primary role of homemaker which includes activities like house cleaning, laundry, fetching drinking water, food preparation, cleaning utensils, taking care of children and all the family members etc.

So, due to this multi-dimensional role, females in rural areas work for longer hours and they have very hectic life.

V. CONSTRAINTS FACED BY FEMALE AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS

Women face many obstacles in their growth in agriculture sector. The biggest obstacle they face is a lack of education. Majority of the rural females are either illiterate or have only primary level education. Because of this, they do not know about their legal rights and thus working in fewer wages. Females mainly get non-mechanized agricultural tasks and they also perform multiple tasks which increase drudgery. They do not have any say in decision making process, neither at home or at work. In few situations, their opinions and suggestions are taken but ultimate decision maker are the males of the family.

The main constraints faced by female agricultural labourers can be divided under three heads.

A. *Social Constraints*

India is a male dominated country with traditional beliefs and systems and these are the biggest constraints for females. Females face various social constraints like,

- Cultural norms
- Traditional belief system
- Male dominance
- Resistance from family members
- Less availability of time

Depending on the social and fiscal position of the family, females chose to work in agricultural field to support their family financially. They contribute much to their family income but still there is dominance of male in a family. Also, as per social taboos she needs to work for longer hours on and off the farm. This increase in work burden affects women's physical and emotional health which in turn may affect their children's health and educational progress.

B. *Economic Constraints*

Agricultural female workers face economic constraints in terms of access to credit, land ownership, access to market etc. All these constraints, rules and regulations restrict the opportunities of these females for more productive employment and income. Women do not have any land rights and thus they work as a labourer or work on small land holdings. They have less access to productive resources. Women spend their earnings on food, child education and for the welfare of the family, whereas men mostly utilise their income for their personal goods to fulfil their desires.

Females face difficulties in getting credit from banks because they do not have any holdings or ownership. In spite of earning, females are financially dependent on males. They do not have any rights on crop or livestock and income earned from all the activities usually belong to men. Females are dependent on males for money.

C. *Technological Constraints*

Illiteracy, lack of training and extension services are the main technical constraints faced by female agricultural labourers. Because of the less education, females do not know about their rights and facilities/schemes available to them for their development. They do not have any technical knowledge which increases drudgery in their work.

As we know that agriculture suffers from the uncertainties of climate change like droughts, cyclones, floods, erratic rainfall etc. So, women should be properly trained as per the local conditions to use natural resources in a sustainable manner. Most of the agricultural development programs are usually planned by males by keeping males in mind. For the economic development of the agriculture sector, it is very important to provide training to female agricultural labourers about adoption of modern agriculture techniques.

So, despite of working for longer hours on and off the field and performing almost all the activities in agriculture sector, women are still considered as invisible workers. Agricultural farming programs and extension services almost exclusively target males and ignore females. As per the current labour market data, there is more females work as a labourer than males in agriculture, but still they face constraints.

VI. GENDER ISSUES IN AGRICULTURE SECTOR

As discussed earlier in the paper, women's contribution in agriculture is not recognised fully. The role of women is considered as 'invisible worker' and they are not allowed to participate in decision making. When it comes to resources, women do not have or have very less access to productive resources. Due to lack of resources, females produce less compared to males in spite of being equally efficient. Males migrate in a search of work and females take responsibilities of agricultural work. They have long work hours, less wages, hazardous work conditions and sometimes face sexual harassment also.

Due to social taboos females do not get ploughing work which can help them to earn more. As females do not have equal work opportunities, they are not able to earn equal wages as males. Another reason behind not getting all type of work is lack of education, training and extension services. In few parts of the country, past studies reveal that woman faces discriminations in terms of wages. Farmers prefer to hire females because of their less bargaining power, low wages, sincerity and dedication.

VII. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Females are contributing much in agriculture sector and she involved in all activities from crop production, harvesting to post harvesting. They perform farm as well as all the household activities. In spite of this, her role is not appreciated and recognized yet in agriculture and they are considered as secondary workers in labor market.

Women spend longer hours on work which leads to more physical stress. They face social, economic and technological constraints. They are the victims of gender discrimination in terms of occupational choices, wages and access to productive resources. Also, they do not get any supportive facilities from employer which organized sector's females get. They do not have mobility and cannot relocate easily. Males migrate to non-farm activities in search of better opportunities and wages which increases burden of females in agricultural work.

For betterment of rural women and for the recognition of their contribution in agriculture sector, following recommendations have been made:

1. Measures should be taken to improve the female education level ratio and separate education policy should be formed for women.
2. Women should be aware about their legal rights to improve their conditions. So, such awareness programs should be conducted by government.
3. There should be specific law for females working in agriculture sector to remove gender discrimination and exploitation by employers.
4. Women should be given proper training regarding modern agriculture technologies, machineries etc.

Thus, it can be concluded that women are exploited by employers and they face many constraints. Their role is not recognized and is treated as sub-servant. So, government should formulate the policies to improve conditions of agricultural laborers and their work should be recognized economically.

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