

A CRITICAL ANALYSIS ON WOMEN RELATED ISSUES IN AGRICULTURE**SREE KRISHNA BHARADWAJ H****BBA.LL.B., LL.M., PGDHRM****ABSTRACT**

Rural Women form the most important productive work force in the economy of majority of the developing nations including India. Yet they are the most ignored and neglected section of the society especially farming sector. This paper analyses the role and importance of women in agriculture and also the issues related to women are highlighted.

KEY WORDS: women, agriculture, issues, gender.

INTRODUCTION

Women's pivotal role in agriculture has never been recognized fully. They work as female agricultural labourers, as farmers, co-farmers, family labourers and (with male out-migration, widowhood etc.) as managers of the farm and farm entrepreneurs. Women in agriculture refer not only to women agricultural labourers and farmers but also to women working in the various sub-sectors of agriculture and allied non-farm work.¹ Women make essential contributions to the rural economy of all developing country regions as farmers, labourers and entrepreneurs. Their roles are diverse and changing rapidly, so generalizations should be made carefully. Yet one fact is strikingly consistent across countries and contexts: women have less access than men to agricultural assets, inputs and services and to rural employment opportunities.²

GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE:

Rural women, mainly farmers, number at least 1.6 billion worldwide, and represent more than a quarter of the total world population. Nearly half of the world's farmers are women, and women comprise most of the agricultural workforce in developing countries. Approximately one third of the rural households in sub-Saharan Africa are headed by women. Women produce on average more than half of all the food

¹ Draft National Policy for Women in Agriculture (April – 2008), http://ncw.nic.in/Comments/Agricultural_Policy.pdf(last visited on: September 5, 2015)

² The State of Food and Agriculture 2010–11, <http://www.fao.org/docrep/013/i2050e/i2082e00.pdf>(last visited on: September 5, 2015)

that is produced (up to 80% in Africa, 60% in Asia; and 30 to 40 % in Latin America and Western countries).³

KEY FACTS ON WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE

The Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) has provided the following data-

1. Indian Population is 48.1% women and 51.9% men with Female illiteracy of 62%.
2. The labour force participation rate of women is 22.7%, less than half of the men's rate of 51.6%
3. In rural India, agriculture and allied industrial sectors employ as much as 89.5% of the total female labour.

Rural Women form the most important productive work force in the economy of majority of the developing nations including India. Agriculture, the single largest production endeavour in India, contributing about 18% of GDP, is increasingly becoming a Female Activity. Agriculture sector employs 4/5th of all economically active women in the country. 48% of India's self-employed farmers are women. There are 75 million women engaged in dairying as against 15 million men and 20 million in animal husbandry as compared to 1.5 million men.⁴

IMPORTANCE OF WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE:

According to a factsheet of women in agriculture, environment and rural production published by the FAO, in the Indian Himalayas a pair of bullocks works 1064 hours, a man 1212 hours and a woman 3485 hours in a year on a one-hectare farm, a figure which illustrates women's significant contribution to agricultural production.⁵

Women are a vital part of Indian economy. Over the years, there is a gradual realization of the key role of women in agricultural development and their vital contribution in the field of agriculture, food security, horticulture, processing, nutrition, sericulture, fisheries, and other allied sectors. Women form the backbone of agriculture, in India, comprising the majority of agricultural labourers, women have been putting in labour not only in terms of physical output but also in terms of quality and efficiency. Women are critical to the well-being of farm households. Aside from raising children, women are

³ Gender Mainstreaming in Agriculture & Allied Sectors, <http://www.manage.gov.in/studymaterial/GM-E.pdf>(last visited on: September 5, 2015)

⁴ Concept Note On Gender Resource Centre Department Of Agriculture & Cooperation, Ministry Of Agriculture, <http://agricoop.nic.in/PolicyIncentives/GRConcept.htm>(last visited on: September 5, 2015)

⁵ A factsheet of women in agriculture, environment and rural production, <ftp://ftp.fao.org/Gender/IND.PDF>(last visited on: September 5, 2015)

expected to prepare all meals, maintain the homestead, and assist in crop and animal production, all the while tending to the general health of their families. Perhaps, ironically, it is because women have so many responsibilities that they have been over-looked by agriculturalists and policy makers – it has been more convenient to label men as farmers and women as child raisers and cooks. In truth, women are involved in all aspects of agriculture, from crop selection to land preparation, to seed selection, planting, weeding, pest control, harvesting, crop storage, handling, marketing, and processing. Whatever the reason for this neglect, the importance of developing farming technologies relevant to women has only recently been recognized.⁶

An assertion of Mr. Alexandra Stephens, FAO, Regional sociologist and women in development officer, is that-

1. Women are a majority of all farmers in Asia, although invisible because their work is uncounted.
2. Women's work day is longer than men's, and most have reached the limits of endurance in stretching their day.
3. Women harbour specialized knowledge, and represent a pool of highly-skilled labour in many areas of agricultural and rural development, which men lack.
4. Women increasingly head rural households, and are the chief economic providers for their families.
5. Women's productivity is severely constrained by the fragmentation of their time, their dual and triple responsibilities, and their lack of access to essential inputs including knowledge.
6. The gap between rural men and rural women is steadily widening, with a growing percentage of rural women among the absolutely poor and destitute.
7. Small farm production is increasingly unattractive to males who too frequently abandon agriculture in favour of better remunerated work in other sectors, leaving women to eke out a living on often degraded land.
8. There is no biological imperative for men to maintain a stranglehold on technology, whether biotechnology or machines.

⁶ Women in Agriculture, <http://knowledgecentre.drwa.org.in/> (last visited on: September 5, 2015)

9. Agricultural research and extension largely ignore the major concerns of women farmers - nutritious food crops, hardy planting materials, household food security, home storage and small-scale processing, for example.

WOMEN ISSUES IN AGRICULTURE

Women unlike men face numerous problems in agriculture and handling of its operations. Some of the key issues which women face are:

1. Extensive workloads with dual responsibility for farm and household.
2. Changing agricultural technologies and practices
3. Women's work in agriculture is treated as family labour and is underestimated
4. Credit facilities are not easily made available.
5. Tools and technological modifications for women use are not made.

POLICIES TO EMPOWER WOMEN:

The New Agriculture Policy, 2000

Upgradation of agricultural education and its orientation towards uniformity in education standards, women empowerment, user-orientation, vocationalization and promotion of excellence will be the hallmark of the new policy.. Mainstreaming gender concerns in agriculture will receive particular attention. Appropriate structural, functional and institutional measures will be initiated to empower women and build their capabilities and improve their access to inputs, technology and other farming resources.

One of the institutional reforms also targeted under the Policy was the recognition of women's rights in land.

National Policy For The Empowerment Of Women (2001)

Concentrated efforts will be made to ensure that benefits of training, extension and various programmes will reach them in proportion to their numbers. The programmes for training women in soil conservation, social forestry, dairy development and other occupations allied to agriculture like horticulture, livestock including small animal husbandry, poultry, fisheries etc. will be expanded to benefit women workers in the agriculture sector.

The Task Force For Technological Empowerment Of Women In Agriculture, 2004

The Task Force for Technological Empowerment of Women in Agriculture, the National Commission for Women in the year 2004 and some of its recommendations were as follows:

1. Reservation upto 40 percent for women farmers as beneficiaries in all horticulture programmes and 50 percent reservation for mushroom and bee keeping programmes should be permitted. Effective marketing arrangements/intervention may be insured.
2. Reservation of 20-30 percent seats for girls in agriculture universities. Regional/ Department level vocational training centres may be revived to provide Diplomas/ Certificate courses in various agro based entrepreneurial activities for rural youth.
3. Reservation to the tune of 10 percent for women beneficiaries in all programmes which have components like distribution of agricultural inputs; subsidies on inputs, training and extension etc. may be made. Impact studies to be undertaken to ascertain viability of the programmes and accordingly work out the future strategies.
4. A 'women cell' should be constituted in each KVK to provide focused attention to the trading needs of farmwomen in agriculture and allied areas.
5. Set up a separate research cell to study, document and disseminate the appropriate practices, equipment, hand tools etc. for women farmers.
6. Ensure women's integral role in these activities in future programmes.

ICAR-Central Institute For Women In Agriculture

The Working Group on Agricultural Research and Education, constituted by the Planning Commission for the formulation of the Eighth Five Year Plan (1992-97), recommended the establishment of a National Research Centre for Women in Agriculture (NRCWA). Accordingly, the Indian Council of Agricultural Research established the NRCWA in April 1996, at Bhubaneswar that has since then been upgraded to the Directorate of Research on Women in Agriculture (DRWA) in the year 2008. Keeping in view the role of women in integration of farm and household activities, AICRP on Home Science started in the VI Five Year Plan (1980 – 85), was merged with NRCWA in 2007. Since its inception, DRWA has been in the forefront undertaking research on issues affecting women and the opportunities in agriculture. It has focused on participatory action research in different technology based theme areas involving rural women to test suitability of technologies for women and suggest for their refinement. The Directorate is

also working to catalyze and facilitate R & D institutions to bring in farm women perspectives in their programmes. The Directorate has been upgraded and renamed as “ICAR-Central Institute for Women in Agriculture” (ICAR-CIWA) in the year 2015 under XIIth plan.

Working Group On Gender Issues, Panchayat Raj Institutions, Public Private Partnership, Innovative Finance And Micro Finance In Agriculture

The Working Group on Gender Issues, Panchayat Raj Institutions, Public Private Partnership, Innovative Finance and Micro Finance in Agriculture for the Eleventh Five Year Plan (2007 – 2012) by the Planning Commission which came out with the report in the year 2007 were provided by the following terms of reference:

1. To review and access the availability and utility of gender-disaggregated data on women in agriculture and suggest measures for effective generation of needed data.
2. To review the recent initiative of gender budgeting and outcome budget for empowerment of women in agriculture and suggest measures, if any for their improvement.

National Policy For Farmers 2007

The research strategy should be pronature, pro-small farmer and gender sensitive. Community-managed seed villages and seed technology training centres are needed, with women playing the major role because of their traditional knowledge of seeds and seed management, especially in tribal communities. Women especially need woman-friendly implements / tools which can reduce drudgery, save time, enhance output and can 13 National Policy for Farmers be handled comfortably. Agri - entrepreneurs including farm graduates and progressive farmers would be encouraged to provide implements and tools, machinery, tractors and other farm implements on a custom-hire basis.

For capacity building and livelihood, women working in the farms need appropriate support services like crèches, child care centres, nutrition, health and training, etc. For funding such activities, existing schemes of the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, the Ministry of Rural Development and the Ministry of Agriculture would be augmented and utilised and new schemes would be introduced, if required. Women need special attention in credit access because of their lack of land title/collateral. Kisan credit cards would be issued to women speedily with joint pattas for homestead / agricultural land. For the cases without joint pattas, indemnity bonds / guarantees from husband, and relatives would be considered by the banks for extending credit and kisan credit cards to the women farmers. Group

Farming by SHGs: SHGs for supporting micro-enterprises operated by women with the help of micro credit have been highly successful.

FARMER SUICIDES IN INDIA

According to the Economic Survey 2014-15, India is an agrarian country with around 48.9% of its people depending directly or indirectly upon agriculture. Nowadays the problem of farmers' suicides is one of the vital concerns that need to be addressed by the Government. The number of farmer suicides has been on rise and reached an alarming stage. However even under this, the deaths of women farmers has been highly neglected.

Table No.1: Age Group wise Farmers' Suicides during 2014 are as under⁷:

Age	Number of suicides
Below 18 years	24
18 yrs to Below 30 years	169
30 yrs to Below 60 years	232
60 years & Above Total	47
Total	472

Table No.2: Cause wise deaths of women farmers in the year 2014:

Cause	Number of deaths
Poverty	9
Marriage Related Issues	58
Family Problems	97
Farming Related Issues	101

⁷ Source: NCRB Data.

Illness	63
Fall in Social Reputation	1
Bankruptcy or Indebtedness	51
Causes Not Known	23
Other Causes	69
Total	472

CONCLUSION

It can be said that women in most aspects of earning and especially agriculture are highly neglected. The Policies framed, reports submitted remain on paper only. Many of the issues concerning women are not addressed by the Ministry. The administrative failures have contributed in execution of existing schemes as well. There is an urgent need to address these issues as they too form a considerable section of farming society in the world. The National Commission for Women alone cannot take up the task of women empowerment in field of agriculture. There is a need to set up a new committee for the women related issues in agriculture.

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