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An analysis of women's participation in the agrarian India

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Abstract

India is a developing and predominantly agricultural country. About 67% of India's total population lives in rural areas and about 60% of the households engaged in agriculture get their income mainly from farming. Agriculture is an engine of development and poverty alleviation in developing countries like India and here it is the main occupation of the poor. About 61% of all the economically active men are engaged in agriculture while this percentage is about 74% among women. In developing countries like India, it has also been seen that women play an important role in activities related to main crop production, live-stock production, horticulture, post-harvesting operations etc. and especially in vegetable farming. Despite the structural shift from the primary sector of the Indian economy to the tertiary sector, there has been no major business diversification in the employment status of women; agriculture is still a leading sector in women's employment. In India it is also estimated that women comprise 45.3% of the agricultural labour force but a large number of women remain as invisible workers worrying about the gap between women's actual economic participation and public perception about it. In developing countries like India the agriculture sector has developed holistically and has emerged with the incorporation of science and technology but even this latest development has not been able to reduce the ignorance of female labour force as an integral part of agriculture industry. The Indian agricultural economy continues to absorb and employ the female work force in agriculture but fails to recognize them as hired labour. This research paper attempts to study the status of women in agriculture in India and highlight their various activities related to agricultural farming that are prominently faced by women. In this study, an attempt has been made to compare the trends in the percentage participation of women working in agriculture with that of men, as well as research reveals the trends of women participation in agriculture in different Indian states.

Keywords: Agriculture, gender, women, production, employment, labour force, work participation rate.

Introduction

India is predominantly an agrarian economy. Despite the selection of development, about 68% of its population is still in rural background out of which 60% of the households are engaged in agriculture as their main source of income. Agriculture is a major source of growth and poverty reduction in developing countries like India where it is the main occupation of the poor. Agriculture is the vertical backbone of the country. Major part of the country's population earns its livelihood from agriculture. Our country has a wide and very old setting of agriculture of about 10 thousand years. Currently, India ranks second in the world in terms of agricultural production. Agricultural production in India includes farm crops, fruit crops, plantation crops, livestock, forestry, fisheries, etc. Hence overall agriculture is a huge industry which engages about 52% of the total population of India. In spite of the fact that the rural population of our country is mostly dependent on agricultural activities, there has been a steady decline in the contribution of agriculture to the country's GDP. Indian agriculture continues to be the leading industry in the country which is contributing immensely to the social and economic development of India. Agriculture is the first culture that man learned to practice as a means of living and a way of life. It is the primary sector of any economy whether it is a developed or a developing economy. India's economic security is largely dependent on agriculture, it is the most important source of income from the point of view of employment, especially for rural women. According to World Bank data in 2011, 17.5% of India's GDP comes from agricultural production.

Women are the backbone of society in India and an important resource in agriculture and rural economy. Women make essential contributions to agricultural development and other allied and domestic activities and follow a number of livelihood strategies. These activities include crop production, livestock production, horticulture, post-harvest, social forestry, fisheries, working in rural enterprises, engaging in trade and marketing, supporting family members, including taking care of and maintaining their homes.

The nature and extent of women's involvement in agriculture, no doubt, varies greatly from region to region. Even within a region, their involvement varies widely among different ecological sub-zones, farming systems, castes, classes and stages in the family cycle. But in spite of these various variations, there is hardly any activity in agricultural production in which women are not actively involved. About 61% of all men who are economically active are engaged in agriculture, compared to 74% of women. Traditionally women have always played an important role in agriculture.

Despite their above-mentioned dominance in the labour force, women in India remain marginalized and face significant losses in terms of wage land rights and their representation in local farmer organizations. Apart from this, women also face many challenges due to limited access to productive resources in agricultural production which hinder them in increasing their productivity. Despite women being the dominant productive labour force in agriculture, their needs and problems are somewhat neglected by various aspects of rural development. This research paper will highlight the trends in women's and male participation in agriculture.

Attempts have been made to compare and analyse whether women's participation trends have been affected by progress in education. Studies on women in agriculture in India and other developing and developed countries point to the conclusion that women contribute much more to agricultural production than is generally accepted. Despite their importance to agricultural production, women face serious constraints.

Materials and Methods

Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of the present study are as follows:

1. To find out the role of women in agriculture and its allied fields.
2. To study the trends in the participation of women and men in the agricultural sector.

3. To analyse the impact of education on the participation of women in agriculture.

Data and Sources of Data

To meet the requirements of this study, secondary data has been used and data set is collected from Census of India-1991, 2001, 2011 and Statistical Report on profile of women labour. Thus statistical data from SSO, International Labour Organization and World Bank have been used for this study. The study uses both descriptive and analytical methods to interpret the data. Trend analysis has been used to evaluate time series data from 2000 -2017. Tables and graphs have been used appropriately to explain the results of this study.

Results and Discussion

a. Women's Participation in Agriculture and Literacy Rates

Table 1 provides a comparison of women's literacy rates and their participation in agriculture. It appears from the table that women's participation in agriculture is continuously decreasing due to increase in literacy rate, that is, there is an inverse relationship between literacy rate and women's participation in agriculture. In conclusion, it can be said that with the increase in the literacy rate of women, their participation in the second and third sectors increases and at the same time the migration of women to the cities becomes more.

Table 1: Comparison of Women's participation in agriculture and literacy rates

Year	% of Female employed in agriculture	Literacy rates		
		Male	Female	Gender Gap
1991	75.7	64.1	39.3	24.8
2001	74.9	75.3	53.7	21.6
2011	63.1	82.1	65.5	16.7

Source: Census of India

b. Trends in Percentage of Female and Male Employed in Agriculture in India

Table 2 shows the percentage trend of male and female employees in agriculture. It is clear from the table that the employment rate in agriculture has been higher among females than males. If we compare the employment rate in agriculture of women and men separately, then we find that the employment rate in agriculture has been decreasing till 2017 in comparison to 1995 in women and men. The employment rate in agriculture was 73.9% among females as compared to 55.9% among males in 1995 which steadily declined to 59.9 and 39.3 % respectively in 2017.

Table 2: Trends in percentage of female and male employed in Agriculture in India (1995-2017)

Year	Employment in Agriculture (% of female employed)	Employment in agriculture (% of Male employed)
1995	73.9	55.9
1996	74.4	55.8
1997	74.8	55.5
1998	75.5	55.8
1999	75.5	55.4
2000	74.9	54.2
2001	74.9	54.9
2002	74.1	53.5
2003	73.5	52.8
2004	72	50.7
2005	71.1	49.5
2006	69.5	49

2007	68.3	47.9
2008	67.6	47.1
2009	66.6	46.8
2010	65.4	46.2
2011	63.1	42.6
2012	62.3	42.4
2013	62.5	42.4
2014	62	41.7
2015	61.6	41
2016	60.6	40.1
2017	59.9	39.3

Source: ILO, ILOSTAT Database (March 2017)

c. Trend in Unemployment Rates According to Usual Status

The unemployment rate in India on the basis of female and male work force in rural and urban areas as per round in 68

of the NSSO report has been properly displayed in Table No. 3 and the diagram presented here.

Table 3: Unemployment rates (in the labour force) according to usual status

Round	Year	Rural		Urban	
		Female	Male	Female	Male
27 th	1972-73	0.5	1.2	6.0	4.8
32 nd	1977-78	2.0	1.3	12.4	5.4
38 th	1983	0.7	1.4	4.9	5.1
43 rd	1987-88	2.4	1.8	6.2	5.2
50 th	1993-94	0.9	1.4	6.1	4.1
55 th	1999-00	1.0	1.7	5.7	4.5
61 st	2004-05	1.8	1.6	6.9	3.8
66 th	2009-10	1.6	1.6	5.7	2.8
68 th	2011-12	1.7	1.7	5.2	3.0

Source: 68th Round of NSSO



Fig 1: Trend in Unemployment rates according to usual status

d. Labour Force Participation Rates by Age-Group, Sex and Residence

Table 4: Table number 4 shows the labour force participation rate of women and men in the age group of 5 to 9 years in rural areas to 60 and above in rural areas and similarly in urban areas

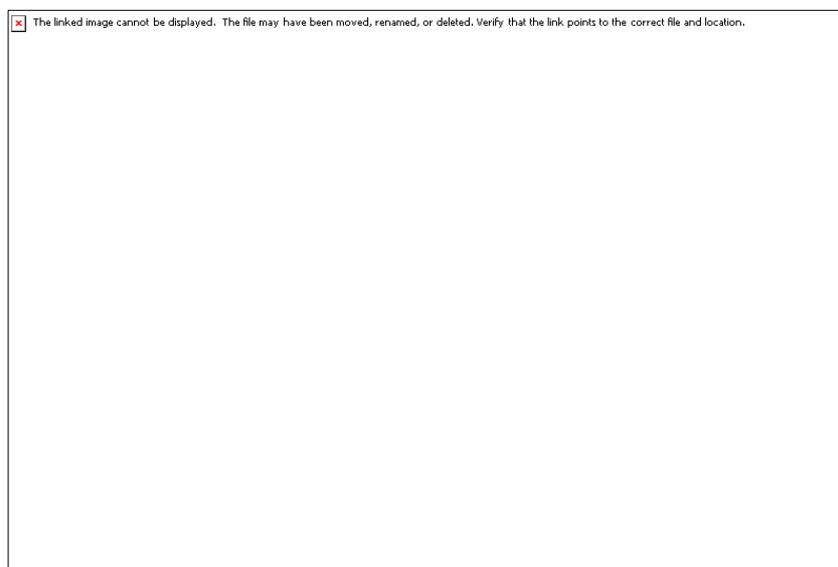
Age Group	1993-94		1999-2000		2004-2005		2009-2010		2011-2012	
Rural										
(years)	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
5-9	1.4	1.1	0.7	0.7	0.3	0.3	0.4	0.4	0.1	0.0
10-14	14.2	13.9	9.6	9.3	7.5	7.0	3.6	4.6	3.0	2.9
15-19	37.1	59.8	31.4	53.2	33.1	52.9	19.5	39.0	16.4	33.3
20-24	47.0	90.2	42.5	88.9	43.5	89.1	31.4	81.3	29.7	78.8
25-29	52.8	98.0	49.8	97.5	53.0	98.2	40.4	97.5	36.9	96.3
30-34	58.7	98.8	55.7	98.7	59.3	98.8	43.4	99.0	43.1	99.0
35-39	61.0	99.2	57.9	98.6	64.2	99.1	49.7	99.2	48.1	99.1
40-44	60.7	98.9	58.6	98.4	62.7	98.5	49.8	99.4	48.2	98.8
45-49	59.4	98.4	56.6	98.0	61.6	98.2	49.2	98.4	48.4	98.8
50-54	54.3	97.0	51.5	95.3	56.2	96.3	48.5	96.7	44.4	96.6
55-59	46.8	94.1	45.0	93.0	50.9	93.1	41.1	93.4	39.4	93.5
60 & above	24.1	69.9	21.8	64.0	25.4	64.5	22.6	64.7	21.3	64.9
Total	33.1	56.1	30.2	54.0	33.3	55.5	26.5	55.6	25.3	55.3
Urban										
5-9	0.4	0.4	0.2	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1
10-14	4.7	7.1	3.7	5.2	3.5	5.3	1.2	3.0	0.9	3.5
15-19	14.2	40.4	12.1	36.6	14.4	38.1	8.5	26.3	8.9	25.6
20-24	23.0	77.2	19.1	75.5	25.0	76.9	19.7	68.2	19.7	66.4
25-29	24.8	95.8	21.4	95.1	26.1	95.7	22.2	94.7	25.3	95.1
30-34	28.3	98.3	24.5	98.0	30.8	98.7	23.9	98.5	25.9	98.9
35-39	30.4	99.0	28.9	98.6	34.0	98.4	27.8	99.1	28.4	99.0
40-44	32.0	98.4	28.5	98.0	31.7	98.3	25.6	98.7	27.6	98.8
45-49	31.7	97.6	26.9	97.4	26.9	97.6	23.1	97.9	24.5	97.9
50-54	28.7	94.5	26.4	93.9	25.9	93.9	22.8	94.8	21.9	94.6
55-59	22.5	85.6	20.8	81.1	21.8	83.2	19.1	85.5	17.7	86.9
60 & above	11.4	44.3	9.4	40.2	10.0	36.6	7.0	34.2	7.8	36.5
Total	16.4	54.2	14.7	54.2	17.8	57.0	14.6	55.9	15.5	56.3

Source: National Sample Survey Office 68th Round, July 2011-June 2012

e. Female Work Participation Rate in India

According to the general state of WPR in India, women's WPR is not only low but is visible in a declining trend since 2009-10. Women's WPR which was 29.6% in 1983, dropping by about 13% points in 2017-18 was 16.5 percent. It is clear from the diagram of female work participation rate in India that a closer look at the rural-urban composition of the female work force reveals that rural women have significantly higher WPRs than their urban counterparts across all periods of study. It is also important to note that although women's WPR has been declining after 2009-10 in

both rural and urban India, the rate of decline is more rapid in rural women than in urban women. While the WPR for rural women fell from 32.7% in 2004-5 to 17.5% in 2014-5, it had fallen from 16.6 percent to 14.2% for urban women during the same period. In case of males it is found that more than 50% of them are in the workforce in both rural and urban India over time but male WPR also declined by 2% points between 2011-12 and 2017-18. Presented diagram presents WPR trends of male and female workers in India.



The rural–urban gap in female WPR is shrinking, mainly due to the withdrawal of women workers in large numbers from the rural labour market. This gap has fallen from 19 percentage points in 1983 to three percentage points in 2017-2018. There exists male/female gap in WPR as well, and the difference is showing a rising tendency. The gap has expanded from 24 percentage points in 1983 to 36 percentage points in 2017-2018. The gender gap in WPR is relatively more in urban (39 percentage points) than rural

India (34 percentage points), not because rural women are on equal footing with men but because of low work participation levels of urban women.

f. Work Participation Rate

According to table number-5, the work partition rate has been displayed in different states of India as per the year 2011. This rate is shown separately in rural and urban areas as well as women and men, combined as per 2011 census work partition rate is displayed

Table 5: Work Participation Rate: 2011

State/Union Territory	Rural			Urban			Combined		
	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total
Andaman & Nicobar Island	17.9	59.1	39.8	17.7	60.35	40.47	17.81	59.59	40.08
Andhra Pradesh	44.6	58.4	51.5	19.1	54.14	36.75	36.16	56.98	46.61
Arunachal Pradesh	39.5	48.5	44.1	21.3	50.91	36.97	35.44	49.06	42.47
Assam	23.7	53.1	38.7	14.9	56.79	36.41	22.46	53.59	38.36
Bihar	20.2	46.7	34.0	10.4	44.9	28.62	19.07	46.47	33.36
Chandigarh	14.2	62.2	42.6	16.0	56.34	38.17	16.00	56.51	38.29
Chhattisgarh	46.3	56.4	51.3	17.4	53.09	35.66	39.70	55.59	47.68
Dadra & Nagar Haveli	33.4	46.8	45.9	14.7	66.51	45.48	25.25	61.57	45.73
Daman & Diu	15.9	58.2	38.6	14.5	75.12	53.58	14.89	71.48	49.86
Delhi	9.7	49.3	31.1	10.6	53.08	33.34	10.58	52.99	33.28
Goa	22.6	55.5	39.1	21.5	57.48	39.89	21.92	56.76	39.58
Gujarat	32.0	57.1	44.9	11.4	57.18	35.73	23.38	57.16	40.98
Haryana	20.8	50.1	36.4	12.1	51.15	32.95	17.79	50.44	35.17
Himachal Pradesh	47.4	59.0	53.3	19.9	55.72	39.22	44.82	58.69	51.85
J & K	20.8	46.3	34.2	14.5	52.68	35.23	19.11	48.11	34.47
Jharkhand	35.0	50.8	43.0	10.1	46.72	29.26	29.10	49.75	69.71
Karnataka	38.8	59.8	49.4	20.8	57.81	39.66	31.87	59.00	45.62
Kerala	20.2	53.6	36.3	16.0	51.76	33.12	18.23	52.73	34.78
Lakshadweep	12.6	52.3	32.9	10.5	44.56	28.01	10.96	46.25	29.09
Madhya Pradesh	39.3	54.3	47.0	15.1	51.66	34.18	32.64	53.56	43.47
Maharashtra	42.5	59.7	49.8	16.8	55.16	36.95	31.06	56.00	43.99
Manipur	41.2	52.4	46.9	33.2	49.87	41.41	38.56	51.58	45.09
Meghalaya	35.0	47.0	41.0	23.6	57.68	35.63	32.67	47.17	39.96
Mizoram	41.9	53.9	48.0	31.1	50.89	40.98	36.16	52.35	44.39
Nagaland	52.3	55.7	54.0	25.9	57.95	37.44	44.74	43.42	49.24
Odisha	29.7	56.5	43.2	14.1	54.08	34.81	27.16	46.11	41.79
Puducherry	21.1	54.2	37.4	16.1	54.41	34.84	17.63	54.36	35.66
Punjab	14.3	54.9	35.6	13.2	55.51	35.75	13.91	55.15	35.68
Rajasthan	42.7	51.7	47.3	12.0	50.75	32.27	35.12	51.47	43.60
Sikkim	44.6	61.0	53.3	24.8	57.52	41.90	39.57	60.16	50.47
Tamil Nadu	41.2	60.0	50.7	21.8	58.54	40.16	31.80	59.31	45.58
Tripura	26.3	55.3	41.1	16.0	56.97	36.76	23.57	55.77	40.00
Uttar Pradesh	18.3	47.4	33.4	11.3	48.94	31.16	16.75	47.71	32.94
Uttarakhand	32.9	49.1	41.0	11.3	50.98	32.36	26.68	49.67	38.39
West Bengal	19.4	57.2	38.7	15.4	56.84	36.69	18.08	57.07	38.08
Total	30.0	53.0	41.8	15.4	53.76	35.31	25.51	53.26	39.79

Source: Census 2011, Office of the Registrar General, India

g. Status of Women in Agriculture

Globally, women make up half of the world's population and produce half of agricultural products according to a United Nations report. This indicates the contribution of women to the economic prosperity of those nations whose livelihood is agriculture. There has always been participation of women in the form of farmers, agricultural labourers and agricultural assistants. Despite this, in the male dominated society, women are suffering from the mother's womb to the grave, their labour plays an important role in the existence of millions of families. The problem of poverty cannot be solved without providing productive employment opportunities to rural women. Women in India are important economic agents especially in the context of poverty. Worldwide, three quarters of women live in rural areas and

work in a wide range of agriculture and allied activities. In addition, a large number of women in rural areas depend on the daily wages earned in agricultural work like their men. Though they work hard for long hours but in return they get very little money which makes them indebted and then dependent on land owners for employment and loans. They are often harassed by landlords for their personal interest and prosperity, they are used as sub-servants or personal property. Agricultural labourer's women also become victims of sexual harassment in the process of economic exploitation. Farmers, especially women, face high levels of economic, legal and institutional uncertainties while investing in their land and other resources.

Employment in agriculture is available only for a few days every year, so male farmers migrate to cities in search of

better paid work. Women are filling this gap because in addition to working in the fields, they are also burdened with other work which does not fall on the men. In most rural societies, women are responsible for all household work and child-rearing activities. This extra work is highly unpaid and limits women's ability to engage in income-generating activities which often requires a minimum fixed amount of time before being profitable. In addition, the nature of work such as the need for women to stay close to home to take care of children and elderly members, thus limiting the options to work for wages, they can do agriculture in their own village in very poor conditions are forced to work because they cannot migrate as easily as other men in cities.

Most of the rural women labourers are landless and homeless and belong to the socially and economically depressed sections of the society. In our society, rural agricultural women are exploited and deprived of basic rights, their inherent dignity and equal rights are not recognized in the society. However, along with the new developments in the rural society, their socio-economic status, working trend and way of life of the people have been changed. But the society, especially the rural society, still needs a change in the status of women due to conservatism and conservative beliefs and will have to be ready to accept it.

h. Major Challenges

1. Women do not have equal rights to agricultural land, they rarely enjoy the rights of land ownership in their own name. Women's limited rights or access to arable land further limits livelihood options and increases the financial strain on women, especially in households headed by women.
2. Women have limited access to the use of productive resources of agriculture.
3. Women do all the non-mechanized agricultural work and do many jobs which put more burden on them due to lack of equipment and suitable technology.
4. Women have little rights in the process of making economic decisions inside or outside their home. Women do not have the ability to make capital or household decisions, due to which they lack the resources which are necessary for their labour stability and stability of their households.
5. Only few women are in possession of agricultural productive resources such as land, animals and machinery.
6. There has been a lack of enforcement of certain agricultural laws and rules in favour of women such as inheritance laws.
7. Lack of adequate market knowledge of agricultural commodities has also put women farmers in an unfavourable position, as a result of which women are unable to deal fairly with buyers due to the power of weak bargaining.
8. Most of the poor women farmers are less able to purchase climate change-friendly technology due to lack of access to credit and agricultural service. It is because of the inability to invest in good fertile seeds and to maintain the fertility of the soil that women have the disadvantage of low productivity.
9. Women earn less than men, especially in the combined, informal and private sectors.
10. Very low level of literacy is found among the women farmers of rural agricultural sector, as a result of which they are not aware of their legal rights.

Conclusion

Agriculture is the backbone of the economy for developing countries around the world. India as one such country is highly dependent on agricultural resources where the majority of the agricultural workforce is dominated by women. Women in India do most of the household chores as well as agriculture and allied work. It cannot be denied that women are the backbone of the Indian agricultural work force. Despite such a large participation of women, their role and dignity are yet to be recognized. The status of women is low in all socioeconomic and political indications Women's wage work is considered a threat to the male ego and women's engaging in many home based economic activities reduces the remuneration for their work. The contribution of women to agricultural and food production is clearly significant. However, it is impossible to verify empirically the share produced by women because agriculture is usually a venture among household members and involves a range of resources and inputs that cannot be readily assigned by gender. Women's participation in rural labour markets show much heterogeneity at the regional level, but women are over represented in unpaid, seasonal and part-time work, and the available evidence suggests that women are often paid less than men, for the same work. The primary role of women as domestic workers is assumed to be the labour force of women due to a predetermined perception by employers. Women working as invisible labourers should be given equal importance in right, wages and decision making, as a result of which all this will bring a change in the current scenario. The purpose of this study was to analyse the trends in the participation of men and women in agriculture. This study is based on secondary source data and this study analyses women's participation in agriculture in India. An attempt has been made to systematically collect the data and analyse the trend of women's participation in India. Although discrimination in prevailing rates of wages and working conditions still prevails for women agricultural workers but due to the implementation of various policies and initiatives taken by the Government of India, the status of women as agricultural workers is improving and it is likely to improve further in future.

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