



Contribution of Women in Revolutionizing Agriculture in India

(*Khyati Singh, Makhan Majoka, Monika and Amit Verma)

Department of Vegetable Science, CCS Haryana Agricultural University, Hisar,
Haryana-125004

* chaudhrykhyati@gmail.com

According to census 2011, around 74% of the workforce in agricultural activities is women, particularly in the village. Women play four roles- wife, mother, homemaker and animal worker. In rural India, the percentage of women who depend on agriculture for livelihood is as high as 84%. They make up about 33% of cultivators and 49% of agricultural labours. These statistics do not account for livestock, fisheries, various other ancillaries for food production.

Further, 94% of the female agricultural labour force in crop production were in cereal production, 3.72% engaged in fruit nuts, beverage and spice stock. Women participation in agriculture is 47% in tea plantation, 46.84% in cotton production, 45.5% in oilseed production and 39.13% in vegetable production. Swaminathan stated that historians believed that women first domesticated crop plants and thereby initiated the art and science of farming while men went out hunting in search of food. Women started gathering seeds from flora and cultivating food, grain, fibre, fodder and fuel. Women work 5-9 hours per day on the farm in the peak season. Agriculture and allied activities take equal time and energy as per household chores.

Women's Contribution in Agriculture and Allied Activities

1. Crop Production: Sowing, nursery raising, transplanting, thinning, weeding, gap filling, irrigation, fertilizer application, plant protection, harvesting, winnowing, storing, seed packaging, *etc.*
2. Domestic work: Cooking, cleaning, child raising, water collection, wood gathering, household maintenance, *etc.*
3. Allied activities: Cattle management, fodder collection, milking, *etc.*

Percentage of women contribution to agricultural activities:

Role of women in agricultural activities	Percentage of contribution
Paid labourer	49%
Cultivators on their lands	17%
Manager of particular agricultural supervision	10%
Wage labourer	24%
Land preparation	32%
Cultivation activities	80%
Harvesting and post-harvest activities	84%

Problems faced by Women as Agricultural Laborers

- Agricultural wages and family income is lesser in India as around 84% of farmers fall under marginal and small landholders. Women labourers are discriminated against for wage payment, against workers' constitutional rights.
- Gender division of labour on farm influences the type of farm task to be performed and the extent of women involved in farming. They face clear distinction in work and lack of social security is major issue for most women in India.
- Women agricultural laborer face the problem of unemployment and underemployment for a substantial part of a year. There is no provision for fixation of working hours. When sowing and harvesting, they have to work for the whole day and are employed daily.
- They have to work under adverse climatic conditions, and no holiday grant is facilitated.
- They don't have the liberty to take individual decisions, and appreciation of their work is highly ignored.
- The wages are not sufficient to meet nutritional requirements of a family. Hence, women come under stress and depression and are often sandwiched between agricultural work and family values.
- Farm wives handle both the farming business and family life at the same time. They want the excellent economic status of the family; therefore, suffer multiple stress which affects their health adversely. After all the atrocities, they are unable to get proper treatment due to the poor financial condition of their families.

Empowerment of Women

In the 10th Five-Year Plan, National Women Empowerment Policy, 2001 was suggested in three ways, i.e., social empowerment, economic empowerment and gender justice with the major objectives to provide them food and nutrient, education, reduce violence against women and girls, eliminate child marriage and support them financially by introducing them to several skill development and entrepreneurship. Section III of this policy emphasis on poverty, agriculture, industry, labour and employment that states following rights in favour of women in agriculture:

- The State Governments should liberate the tenancy restrictions on crop lands and top priority should be given to women and their collectives.
- The union Government should frame policies that collects data on women land ownership of all kinds of lands
- Women living on forest-based products, especially tribal women, should be supported for non-timber products and cottage industries by enabling minimum support price (MSP), skill development and providing market spaces.

Other strategies that can be adopted to boost and strengthen women's contribution in revolutionization of agriculture are mentioned below:

- Organize women into self-help groups.
- Equip them with specific awareness and generation, trading and marketing linkage
- Equip them with necessary skills in the upcoming modern trade which could help them fully engaged besides making them economically independent and self-reliant.
- To improve the standard of living, awareness, sense of achievement and engagement in political activities, women should be economically empowered which would bring a positive change in their confidence, social interaction, generate leadership qualities and decision-making capacity.
- Women friendly technologies should be developed like dibblers, seed-cum-fertilizer, cotton picking bags, mat nursery for rice. Mechanical transplanting should be promoted

as it saves time and lessens human effort. Upland paddy cultivation should be adopted in the region of marginal irrigation facilities.

- Generally, harvesting and digging of tuber crops are carried by sickle, *kurpi*, etc. Power tillers, harvesters, potato and groundnut diggers should be used.
- In rural areas, usually traditional methods are applied for some common agricultural activities, for instance, using animals for threshing. Mechanical ways of threshing and winnowing should be adopted. Combine harvesters, threshers and winnowers should be available for these farm activities.
- Wages should be increased and working hour should be fixed.
- Government should provide housing and land to the landless labourers.
- Granting holidays on festivals, sick leaves, maternity leaves, etc.
- Awareness should be spread among villages and labours about special schemes run by Government of India such as NREGA (National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005), RLEGP (Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme, 1983).
- More women personnel should be engaged in extension programmes to advise women.
- More cooperatives societies should be made in villages.
- Banks should provide loans at low-interest rates to the economically backward farmers.
- Every country should plan international meetings to sensitize the public about women empowerment.

