



Feminization of Agriculture in Indian Society: A Critique

(*Mamta Chahal, Bas Kaur and Manisha)

Department of Sociology, CCSHAU, Hisar

*Corresponding Author's email: mamtachahal1999@gmail.com

Women play a critical role in sustaining local agro-biodiversity and guaranteeing food security globally. According to the 2011 Census approximately 33.7% of rural males migrate in search of work and better economic opportunities therefore, out of total female main workers, 55% were agricultural labourers and 24% were cultivators and the share of operational holdings cultivated by women has increased to 13.9 per cent in 2015-16. The agricultural sector has become more feminised as a result of the growing migration of rural men, with more women participating in agriculture and related fields. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), women's contribution to Indian agriculture is about 32%, while in some states (such as Hill states, Northeastern states, and Kerala) contribution of women to agriculture and rural economy is more than men. Every year, October 15 is celebrated as National Women's Farmer's Day (Rashtriya Mahila Kisan Diwas) for recognising the multidimensional role of women at every stage in agriculture. According to Economic Survey growing rural to urban migration by men, there is 'feminisation' of agriculture sector, with increasing number of women in multiple roles as cultivators, entrepreneurs, and labourers. A research by the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) shows that the participation of women is 75% in the production of major crops, 79% in horticulture, 51% in postharvest work and 95% in animal husbandry and fisheries.

Is there a feminization of the Indian agricultural sector?

The Economic Survey (2017–18) reports that feminization is taking place in the agricultural sector.

- Contrary to men, women have not relocated or altered jobs because of the agrarian crisis.
- As a result, they now play a larger role in agriculture, mostly as entrepreneurs, labourers (Dalit women predominate in this position), and farmers.
- Their responsibilities have expanded to include pre- and post-harvest processing, packaging, and marketing tasks.
- 80% of women working in India are employed in this industry, with 33% working as agricultural labourers and 48% being self-employed farmers.
- Rural women generate 60 to 80 percent of the food.

Indian agriculture's feminization: Reasons

- **Gender Diversity in the Workplace:** Women are more likely to take low-paying, irregular employment, are easy to hire and fire, are perceived as submissive and diligent, and some jobs are stereotyped as being performed by women.
- **Migration and Social Mobility:** Reserved for Men because they have more access to schooling and are favoured for physical labour, men are typically seen as the family's breadwinners. Consequently, in the rural belt of India, men are more likely to migrate from rural to urban areas in search of better jobs, whereas women are primarily in charge of household duties and agriculture.

- **Poverty:** Due to their low socioeconomic status, women frequently work as domestic or agricultural workers to help support their families.
- **Agrarian distress** and male migration are prominent reasons for increasing feminization of agriculture.

Impacts of Agriculture's Feminization on Women

- **Workload increase:** According to patriarchal societal norms, women are responsible for childrearing and other domestic duties. Due to the migration of men, women also perform agricultural work. This implies that they must now look after their own families in addition to working as agricultural wage workers.
- **Isolation on a Socio-Cultural Basis:** Communities frequently look down on women who step into traditional masculine responsibilities to support the family when males migrate because they have broken social norms.
- **Lack of Time for Child-Rearing:** Women who work too much have insufficient time for their children. Despite the economic benefits of male migration, parental absence may negatively impact child rearing due to a reduction in care and supervision.
- **Problems with Mental Health:** Female migrant workers' spouses who are left behind may experience mental health issues as a result of the separation caused by male migration, a lack of companionship, and increased home duties.
- **Lack of Ownership and Recognition:** Unfortunately, they are never given enough credit and continue to be marginalised in terms of land ownership. Women manage work at both the household and farm levels, including caring for livestock and selling milk and other produce in the market.

Challenges Faced by Women Farmers

- Lack of ownership of land
- Lack of access to financial credit
- Lack of access to resources and modern inputs (most farm machinery is difficult for women to operate)
- Increased work burden (on-farm and off-farm productive activities) with lower compensation

Government Schemes

The government has taken the following steps to increase the number of women working in agriculture:

- **Gender Budgeting:** Allocate at least 30% of the budget for women beneficiaries in all active initiatives, schemes, and developmental activities.
- The implementation of initiatives focused on women so that the advantages are delivered to them via various government schemes
- Through capacity-building initiatives and increasing their representation in various decision-making processes, women's SHGs are being connected to microcredit.
- Recognizing October 15th as Women Farmer's Day, which coincides with International Rural Women's Day, to recognise the crucial role women play in agriculture
- In order to ensure that programmes focusing on these characteristics are implemented, the government has acknowledged the necessity for pro-women policies with regard to land, water, credit, technology, and training.
- One such government effort, Mahila Shakti Kendra, aims to provide rural women with balances for skill development, employment, digital literacy, health, and nutrition. Through capacity building, the Mahila Shakti Kendras will promote civic involvement through student volunteers and act as a point of contact for rural women seeking to contact the government to receive their entitlements.

Way forward

The agricultural industry offers an important opportunity for female economic development. Yet a number of obstacles prevent this potential from being fully realised. One of these problems is that many female farm workers work on family farms where they cannot earn a living on their own. This problem can be solved by encouraging the export of high-value agricultural goods. The formalisation of the industrial process promotes female workforce monetization and enhances working conditions for them. Social conventions that restrict women's employment can be overcome by education, skill development, promoting technological use, and digital literacy. These can increase the female workforce's effectiveness, profits, awareness, purchasing power, etc. They will also make it possible for the government to assist these women by disseminating cutting-edge methods, technology, etc. Women are given training and skills through self-help groups and cooperative dairy ventures like Saras in Rajasthan and Amul in Gujarat. Through farmer-producer organisations, these can be researched further. Organising agricultural women into collectives, educating them about their rights, facilitating access to the state, and providing them with training for sustainable livelihoods are all essential roles that civil society can play.