



Feminization of Indian Agriculture: Causes and Way Ahead

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Women have a crucial role in agricultural output, particularly in small-scale and affordable farming. They provide the majority of farm labor and contribute significantly to household food security. Agriculture underperforms in a number of developing nations due to a variety of causes. Among these is a shortage of assets and possibilities for women to make the best use of their time.

India's economy relies heavily on agriculture. Women have an important part in constructing this economy. Over time, it has been clear that women play an important role in agricultural development, with significant contributions in farming, food safety, processing, sericulture, nutrition, horticulture, fisheries, and other related fields.

Concept of Feminization of Agriculture

In the 2017-18 economic survey, it was first noted that Indian agriculture was becoming more female-dominated. It recognised that women have played an important role in the primary sector, benefiting the economy by preserving agrobiodiversity and ensuring food security. In India, the "feminization" of agriculture refers to the increasing participation of women in agricultural pursuits.

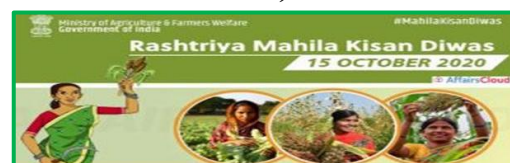
Historically, women have had a significant role in agricultural duties such as crop planting, removing weeds and harvesting, as well as animal care throughout rural India where agriculture is the primary source of employment. However, due to a variety of socioeconomic issues such as urbanization, migration, and changing demography, males are increasingly fleeing from rural areas in pursuit of work in cities, leaving women to shoulder farming responsibilities.

Women in Agriculture

- Women farmers account for about 25% of the global population. In rural areas, agriculture and allied sectors provide a primary source of income for 80 per cent of economically active women, with 33% working in agriculture and 48 per cent independently-employed as farmers.
- Women possessed only 12.8% of actual holdings.
- 25.7% of marginal and small operating holdings are owned by women.

National women farmer's day (Rastriya Mahila Kisan Diwas) in India

Since 2016, the 15th of October has been observed as National Women Farmer's Day, also known as 'Rastriya Mahila Kisan Diwas', with the goal of encouraging increased participation of women in agriculture.



Causes of Feminization of Agriculture

- ✚ **Agrarian Distress and Men Shift to Casual Work:** Agrarian distress is a major component in the disruption of farm labor or de-personalization, which is the transfer of males from agriculture to informal jobs. According to a 2013 analysis released in The Hindu, 7.7 million farmers quit the agricultural sector between 2001 and 2011. With the increasing migration of males from farm to activities other than farming, women have been more involved in agriculture and related activities.
- ✚ **Poverty:** Poverty is an important reason why women are obliged to work as farm workers to supplement their family's income. Women also labor unpaid in family-related sectors.
- ✚ **Migration to Urban Areas:** In accordance to the Economic Survey 2017-18, as males migrate from rural to urban areas, the agriculture industry has become more 'feminized', with a rise in women's engagement as cultivators, laborers, and entrepreneurs.
- ✚ **Mechanization of agriculture:** Men have shifted to non-farm activities as agriculture has become more mechanised, while women have been limited to traditional responsibilities such as winnowing, harvesting, sowing seeds, and tending livestock.
- ✚ **Mobility:** Women's upward mobility in the labor market is limited, and gender wage disparities exacerbate the situation. According to the census, approximately 33.7% of rural males move in search of better work and economic possibilities. However, for females, it can be as low as 3.6% in rural areas.

Impact of Feminization of Indian Agriculture

The female empowerment of agriculture in India has an impact on women and their communities in both positive and negative ways. Some of the key impacts are:

- ✚ **Socio-economic empowerment of women:** Women's increased involvement in agriculture has resulted in gradually increasing income and economic empowerment, allowing them to improve their standard of living and help their families.
- ✚ **Gender equality:** Feminism in agriculture opposes traditional gender stereotypes and fosters gender equality by allowing women more control over agricultural resources such as land, water, and other inputs, especially farming.
- ✚ **Food security:** Women's participation in agriculture has improved rural food security because they are responsible for ensuring nutritious food for their families.
- ✚ **Health:** Women are more willing to invest in healthcare and nutritious food, therefore their growing role in agriculture has led to better health outcomes among themselves and their families.
- ✚ **Education:** As women's incomes rise, they are more likely to invest in their children's education, particularly girls' education, resulting in improved educational performance and higher social mobility.

The role of self-help groups in supporting small farm women

- ✚ **Access to Credit and Financial Inclusion:** One of the key advantages of SHGs is their capacity to offer financial assistance to women who do not have access to traditional banking institutions. By pooling their money, SHG members can make collateral-free loans to one another for a variety of purposes, such as agricultural inputs, livestock, and small companies.
- ✚ **Skill Development and Capacity Building:** SHGs frequently hold training sessions and workshops on organic techniques for farming, environmentally friendly farming practices, livestock management, and financial awareness. These capacity-building programs provide women with the knowledge and skills they need to increase agricultural output, implement climate-smart methods, and diversify their revenue streams.

- ✚ **Collective Bargaining and Market Access:** SHGs allow small farmer women to jointly demand better prices for their agricultural produce and gain access to markets that would otherwise be challenging for them to reach independently.
- ✚ **Social Empowerment and Gender Equality:** The involvement in self-help groups develops an awareness of solidarity and shared support among women, leading to enhanced confidence, self-esteem, and assertiveness.

Government initiatives to support feminization of Indian Agriculture

The Indian government has implemented a variety of policies to boost women's participation in agriculture and improve their financial security. Among the main programs are:

- ✚ **Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana (MKSP):** Since 2011, it has been a centrally financed initiative or sub-component of the Deendayal Antodaya Yojana-NRLM (DAY-NRLM) with the goal of improving the current situation of women in agriculture and expanding the opportunity for them to be empowered. It provides women farmers with technical and financial assistance to boost their produce and revenue. It aims to promote smallholder agriculture by increasing the use of sustainable agricultural practices such as Community Managed Sustainable Agriculture (CMSA), Non-Pesticide Management (NPM), Zero Budget Natural Farming, and the Pashu-Sakhi model for doorstep animal care services, among others.
- ✚ **Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (RMK):** This worldwide credit facility provides low-interest loans to female company entrepreneurs, especially those in agriculture.
- ✚ **Kisan Credit Card (KCC) Scheme:** This initiative provides farmers, particularly women farmers, with finance to meet their agricultural needs. It also provides cattle and crop insurance coverage.
- ✚ **National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM):** This poverty-reduction strategy aims to improve the standard of life in rural households, with a focus on women in particular. NRLM provides women farmers with financial and technical help to boost their production and revenue.
- ✚ **Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY):** This crop insurance policy provides financial assurance to farmers in the event that the crops they grow are unprofitable. It includes a unique provision that allows women farmers to receive premium discounts of up to 5%.
- ✚ **Biotech-KISAN Scheme:** The Biotech-KISAN Scheme includes Mahila Biotech-KISAN fellowships for women farmers, which provide training and education in agriculture methods.

Conclusion

Overall, feminization of agriculture in India has both positive and negative consequences, thus it is critical to address these concerns and promote gender-inclusive policies and practices that enable women to fulfil their full potential while also supporting long-term rural development. In India, the term "feminization of agriculture" refers to the increase in the proportion of women working in farming, such as raising cattle and growing crops. As a result, women's duties in agriculture have grown, and females now hold a variety of positions within the industry, including farmers, workers, business owners, and investigators. As a result, investments and legislative changes are required to support women's participation and empowerment in agriculture, as well as to foster gender-inclusive agricultural development.

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