

## Feminization of Indian Agriculture

Someshwari S.<sup>1</sup> and Bhagavathsingh C.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>III B.Sc., Hons. Agriculture, <sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor (Agricultural Extension)  
JKK Munirajah College of Agricultural Science, T.N. Palayam, Erode.

ARTICLE ID: 19

### Introduction

Dr. M.S. Swaminathan, the well-known agricultural scientist describes that it was woman who first domesticated crop plants and thereby initiated the art and science of farming. The women are the backbone of Agriculture. According to the Economic survey (2017-18), the agricultural sector is undergoing feminisation with the rural distress and agrarian crisis plaguing the economy for the past several years; men in rural India have sought employment outside farming sector.

National Sample Survey (NSS) data shows, that there has been a steady decline of men in agriculture over the last three decades. This trend can be fittingly termed as “Feminization of Indian Agriculture”. As more men have moved to non-farm work in the industrial and service sectors, women have remained in agriculture in substantive manner.

### Scenario of Farm Women

The women of the pre agrarian societies collected wild fruits, berries, tubers and roots and had generational experience in identifying edible plants and knowledge about plant’s life cycles and how they grow. It has been suggested that women’s extraordinary vision, more developed motor skills and ability to process finer details evolved due to the importance of their involvement in foraging activities for millions of years. For example: The average women’s eyes can distinguish about 250 shades and hues, while an average men can only see 40 – 50. In most traditional societies, even today this historical association of women in Agriculture is revered of ten women sow the first seeds to bestow good luck for a bountiful harvest.

Women farmers in agriculture sector employees 80% of all economically active women they comprise 33% of agricultural labor force and 48% of self- employed farmers. As per the Annual Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) report 2021-22, the agriculture sector had the highest estimated percentage (62.9%) distribution of female workers. In rural India, about 70-

80 % of the women depend on agriculture. Average women spend nearly 3300 hours in the field in a crop season as against 1860 hours spend by men.

### **Multi-Dimensional role of Farm Women**

The role of women includes their contribution in the field of agriculture, food security, horticulture, dairy, nutrition, sericulture, fisheries and other allied sectors. ICAR research revealed that the participation of women is 75% in cultivation of Major crops, 79% in Horticulture, 51% in Post-harvest work, 95% in Animal husbandry and Fisheries. Women play a significant and crucial role in Agricultural development and allied field. The nature and extent of involvement of women in agriculture includes

- ✚ **Agricultural activities:** Sowing, transplanting, weeding, irrigation, fertilizer application, plant protection, harvesting and post-harvest works.
- ✚ **Domestic activities:** Cooking, child raising, water collection, fuel wood gathering, household maintenance, etc.,
- ✚ **Allied activities:** Cattle management, fodder collection, milking, etc.,

As per National Livestock Policy there were 5.4 million women members in diary co-operatives in 2020-21, which is 31% of its total members. In poultry rearing 70% of the farm women were actively involved. They perform as a manual labour, performing maintenance on the farm, handling heavy machinery, management of farm activities, overseeing farm workers, devising strategies for harvesting or breeding, liaising with clients.

### **Farm Women- Unsung Warriors**

Women have engaged themselves in agricultural and allied Activities since ages, but still their hard work have gone unnoticed and unrewarded. They manage every aspect of farm Work but still they are not considered as farmers. Rural women are balancing farm works and domestic works. They deserve the title of "unsung warriors of agriculture" due to their invaluable contributions, resilience, and dedication to the farming sector. Recognizing their roles is essential for gender equality and also for the sustainable development and prosperity of agriculture and rural communities. Identifications of challenges and limitations of farm women is essential step to recognizing and mainstreaming them.

### **Challenges faced by Farm Women**

- ✚ **Property Ownership:** Increase in women workforce in the agricultural sector did not translate into decision-making powers over vital issues like property and marriage. This is



because they are included in the labour market under very adverse conditions. The percentage of female operational land holders are only 13.9% as per agricultural census of 2015-16. This is despite their critical role in the cultivation process. Laws like the Forest Rights Act, which are meant to protect property rights of tribals, are inadequately implemented in some states, resulting in such marginalised communities living in poverty. In addition, merely granting joint ownership of lands does not necessarily mean that control of the property would be vested with women farmers.

- ✚ **Exploitation:** Women are provided with little to no wages, as their work is often being considered as an extension of household work. Due to this situation, their labour is mostly undervalued, underreported and invisible. Such low-paying jobs and social constraints keep women confined in insecure and oppressive labour relations.
- ✚ **Impact of farmer suicides:** The issue of farmer suicides lacks female perspective. The suicides by male cultivators caused the majority of female family members, especially the widows, to take up the responsibility of managing the household. Due to this reason, experts are deeming feminisation of agriculture as the feminisation of agrarian distress.
- ✚ **Industrialization:** The mechanisation of agriculture has led to the confinement of women to traditional, low-paying jobs like winnowing, harvesting, sowing seeds and rearing livestock.
- ✚ **Inequality in market access:** Women in agriculture often face barriers to accessing markets due to limited mobility, lack of information, and gender-based discrimination. Providing access to markets and market information can help women increase their income, reduce their dependence on subsistence farming, and contribute to economic growth.
- ✚ **Financing and technology:** Women in agriculture often lack access to finance and technology, which limits their ability to invest in their farms and adopt sustainable practices. Providing financial services tailored to women's needs and promoting the use of appropriate technologies can increase women's productivity, reduce their workload, and improve their resilience to climate change.

### Approaches for empowering women in agriculture

Successful approaches for empowering women in agriculture include:

1. Providing education and skill development training in agricultural practices, financial management, and entrepreneurship.



2. Introducing digital initiatives for improving their awareness, knowledge level and financial information.
3. Providing secure land tenure and legal protection for women's land rights.
4. Providing financial services tailored to women's needs and promoting the use of appropriate technologies.
5. Promoting access to markets and market information.
6. Promoting allied sector enterprises like rearing milch animals, fisheries etc.,
7. Designing pro-women policies, schemes in agriculture.
8. Promoting collective approaches for meeting farm needs of farm women.

### **Government Initiatives**

The National Policy on Farmers 2007 had suggested giving priority to 'Recognition and Mainstreaming of Women's role in Agriculture'. Ministry of Agriculture and farmers welfare is taking pro-women initiatives through various schemes and programmes and 30% of benefits and resources are earmarked to women. Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana (MKSP) is a programme exclusively for women farmers. Objective of this scheme is to empower women in agriculture by making systematic investments to enhance their participation and productivity, as also create and sustain agriculture-based livelihoods of rural women.

Government has increased its focus on women self-help group (SHG) to connect them to micro-credit through capacity building activities and to provide information and ensuring their representation in different decision-making bodies. Recognizing the critical role of women in agriculture, the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare has declared 15th October of every year as Women Farmer's Day. National Gender Resource Centre in Agriculture (NGRCA) is set up in the Ministry to fulfill the national commitment to empowerment of farm women. NGRCA is a focal point for convergence of all gender related issues in agriculture and is to serve as an epicenter to coordinate and synergize various efforts aiming at women's empowerment through agriculture.

ICAR- Central Institute for Women in Agriculture, Bhubaneswar has been in the forefront undertaking research on issues affecting women 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 their refinement. The Institute is also



working to catalyse and facilitate Research and Development institutions to bring in farm women perspectives in their programmes.

### **Conclusion**

Farm women are the unsung warriors of agriculture, with their unwavering dedication, resilience, and versatile skills making them vital to the industry. Despite facing numerous challenges, they continue to make significant contributions to farming by pushing boundaries and driving innovation. It is crucial to recognize and support their role for achieving gender equality, sustainable farming practices, and the overall prosperity of rural areas. Only by acknowledging and uplifting these unsung warriors can we create a more inclusive and equitable agricultural landscape for all. As such, involving women farmers in the modernization of farming practices is crucial for achieving economically viable and ecologically sustainable agriculture.

