

Sustainable Agriculture in India

Issues and Challenges

M. Koteswara Rao



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Problems of Women Agricultural Labourers - Some Issues

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1. Introduction

Agriculture is the largest sector of the rural economy and is a family enterprise, since 56 per cent of its population is dependent on it in India. India's economic security is heavily dependent on agriculture. In terms of employment, it is the most important sector. Women in India are the backbone of the society and important human resource. They play a significant and crucial role in agriculture and allied operations and household activities. Traditionally, women have always played an important role in agriculture – as farmers, co-farmers, family labour, wage labours and managers of farms. The selection, preservation and maintenance, the development and sharing of seed stock has long been preserve of women. They have been active not just in crop cultivation but also in allied areas such as horticulture, livestock and fisheries. The fact is that women's contributions in these sectors have either been largely ignored or inadequately acknowledged. Women constitute nearly half the population in any country either it is developed or developing country. Accordingly to U.N. Reports, "Women are almost half of the adult population. They constitute one-third of labour force but consume two-thirds of the world's working hours and yet earn only one tenth of the income and own only one per cent of world property.

Women constitute in innumerable way to the development process. Broadly their contribution to socio-economic development has two fold i.e., i) in the home ii) outside the home. In the home, women's role as daughter, wife and mother cannot be under estimated. A woman as a caretaker of the members of the family attends to food requirements. She looks after the health of all members of the family. Woman is also the first teacher. The training imparted by her to the child forms the basis of future skills formation among the work forces. Outside home, a woman tries to be an equal and able partner in the economic activities. In agriculture, she is engaged in seeding, planting, weeding, irrigating, processing, harvesting and threshing operations. In Economic terms women:

1. Quantitatively, supply labour force through her reproductive function,
2. Qualitatively, improve productivity of workers through her proper care, at home,
3. Supplement income of the family and thus helps in improving the standard of living and
4. Help by contribution to savings.

The various activities of women can be divided into two broad headings viz., "Market Activities" which consist of activities of women in farm and non-farm sectors and "Non-Market Activities" which include personal care of children, cooking, washing clothes, fetching water, animal care etc. In these activities women play an effective role. The dual role of women as paid workers in the outside market and unpaid workers in the household leads to a significant contribution in real terms to the productive system. But throughout the world the rural women have been under-represented in the development process. The male-dominated society has not recognized their proper contribution. A unique feature of female participation throughout India is that they are workers, labourers, cultivators, producers, traders besides performing all household duties which are considered as "Unproductive". In cultivation except ploughing, levelling, irrigation and all other works are generally shared by both men and women.

2. Importance of the Study

Agriculture is a backbone of our country. Women are the biggest contributors to the agricultural labour force and majority of employed women are engaged in agricultural work. Women labour play a multi-dimensional role like allied activities and domestic activities should in addition of agricultural activity also. In spite of these, they face many problems such as, exploitation, long working hours, and unhealthy working conditions. Insecurity of job, low wages, health hazards and low socio-economic status etc. This study focuses on socio-economic status regarding women agricultural labour. Further, the study also helps to the policy makers, planners, researchers and agriculturists.

3. Objectives of the Study

Objectives of the present study as follows;

1. To analyse the socio-economic conditions of the women agricultural labour.
2. To analyse the nature of work, working conditions and wage pattern of women agricultural labour.
3. To find out main problems faced by women agricultural labour.
4. To suggest the remedial measures for uplift the status of women agricultural labour.

4. Review of Literature

ZarQuresh (2005) study highlights the importance of education to rural female and proposed to educate women in floriculture and food preservation.

Nisha N (2008). study brings out that the labourers got maximum number of days of employment in weeding followed by harvesting and postharvest operations. The woman labour had maximum unemployed days in summer as this is the off season for agriculture in the study area which compelled the woman labourers to seek employment opportunities like NREGS activities, construction work, tile making etc. The study also

concluded that woman unemployment in agriculture has caused a severe impact on the income of labourers, family expenditures, and their saving and debt position. It also caused migration of labourers to other activities and places. Increase workforce participation rates do not always indicates increase in the level of welfare. So it must be accompanied by higher educational capabilities and asset and income.

Tahir Munir Butt et al. (2010) study indicates that the fact that rural concluded that cultural norms, male dominance and traditional belief system were the major social constraint faced by rural women as reported by more than 80 percent of the respondents.

5. Women Labour in Agriculture

Women are involved in some of the most arduous and hardest work is agriculture fields under different climatic condition and on the lowest wage rate. This includes bending for hours while weeding and transplanting in knee-deep water and mud. The farm women are the contributors of labour in agricultural production. They are responsible for the management of cattle and other farm animals, storage of seeds, food grains, processing and marketing. But women's contribution in terms of production, employment and earnings, have been over looked and labelled as 'supplementary', 'casual', and 'supporting'. Far from these, their contribution is substantial. It is unfortunate that her role is not adequately recognized and properly her contribution not qualified. There is gross under-estimation of this invisible force. However, 'women and development' as a subject entered in the international scene around 1970, when the disguised economic administrative and social contribution of invisible labour force began to be uncovered.

The United Nations General Assembly considered the role and position of women in society and declared 1975-85 as the Women's Decade. In India, constitution has provided equal rights and privileges for men and women and has made special provisions for women to improve their status in society. Five year plans, those do not seen to have significant impact on them as unequal and unimportant partners. This is evidenced by the fact of low sex ratio, low life expectancy, high mortality, illiteracy, low nutritional status, and low economic and social status of women especially in rural areas. Sixth five year plan on words, the Government of India has evolved a number of programmers in order to benefit the rural women in various fields like social, education, health, economic, political etc. and brings them in to the orbit of development.

Table 1: Female Work participation in India 1961-2001.

Census Year	Female
1961	27.9
1971	14.2
1981	19.7
1991	22.7
2001	25.7

Source: Government of India Census Reports

Table 1 shows that the female work participation rate in India has been much lower than the male work participation rate. From table 1, it can be observed that the female work participation rate in India has drastically declined from 27.9 percent in 1961 to 25.7

percent in 2001. This means that the female work participation in 2001 has been than half the rate in beginning of the century, although there were ups and downs in various years.

Table 2: Rural Female Work Participation in India 1961-2001.

Census Year	Female
1961	31.4
1971	15.5
1981	23.2
1991	26.7
2001	23.1

Source: Government of India, Census Reports

Table 2 reveals that a fall in the WFPR for females during 1961-2001. One of the factors is non-recognition of women's labour and the difficulties stemming from not being able to distinguish between their household non-economic and economic activities. Second, it is the resultant of low remuneration that is both an outcome of their involvement in unpaid work as household members and helpers as well an offshoot of the associated socio-cultural perception to the dignity of labour concept whereby declaration of women's working status is viewed as dishonourable or a matter of shame. The vast majority of women who work being employed in what is termed as unorganized or informal sector sometimes considered to be a residual sector and the poor conditions of their work.

6. Suggestions for the development of women agricultural labourer

The following suggestions can be made for the improvement of the socio-economic position of the women agricultural labourer.

1. Better implementation of labour laws and legislative measures.
2. To creating alternative sources of employment to the agricultural labourers and improvement the bargaining position.
3. Regulation of hours of work and explanation of women labourer and protection of women and child labourers.
4. Credit at cheaper / zero rates of interest on easy terms of payment to under taking subsidiary occupation.
5. To provide proper training facilities for improving the skill of farm labourers.
6. Women must also be included in land and water management, pani panchayats, preservation of soil fertility and nutrition management, sustainable use of soil, water, livestock and fishery resources and in creating village level community seed banks, and so on.
7. Women's access to the various agriculture schemes being implemented by the government will be ensured. A quota for women will be incorporated by modifying the guidelines of agriculture related schemes like Rashtriya krishi Vikas yojana (RKVY). Further involvement of women can be ensured by providing financial and infrastructural support to SHGs for seed production, storage, preservation, and distribution.

8. Access to agricultural technology for women will improve by designing agricultural technology that is women friendly.
9. Women and young girls will be given training in the use and repair of bore wells with special focus promoting low cost irrigation.
10. Endowing women with land is an important instrument for empowering them economically and strengthening their ability to challenge social and political gender inequities

CONCLUSION

Agriculture is increasingly becoming the preserve of women has important implications for policy. Agriculture policy has been largely blind. In order to formulate policy that is sensitive to women's roles and needs in agriculture, it is first of all necessary to improve the measurement of their participation and to recognize their contribution. Women empowerment should imply a process whereby women become able to organize themselves to increase their own self-reliance, to assert their independent right to control resources which will assist in challenging and eliminating their own subordination.

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Agriculture is the largest and important livelihood sector for masses in India. According to International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) report India has displaced from previous 97th place to 100 in 2017 and the value is 31.4 shows the place of our country found in serious category. Agriculture have been dominant sector in India for economic prediction and the situation will remain same in future. The dependency on agriculture sector has not minimize as proportionate the sectoral contribution of agriculture decline in India's GDP from independence. The dependency of population decline from 75% to 58% but at same time the sectoral contribution fallen from 61% to 15% in the Gross Domestic Product of the country. The present conventional farming can however be improved by adopting appropriate technologies of crop production, post-harvest processing and by improving quality so that agriculture becomes not only sustainable in long term but a profitable business also by linking production with consumerism. Sustainable agriculture improve soil health by integrating all possible measures so that crop productivity is maintained for a longer time. The book explains the emerging concerns of Indian Agriculture in terms of Agricultural growth performance land degradation, water efficiency and natural farming, inclusive agriculture development, distress in agriculture, problems of dry land agriculture, employment problems of small farmers, socio-economic conditions of agriculture labour, women and the issues of farmers' suicides. The book is useful to students, researcher and policy makers and others having interest in the field of agriculture and development.



Prof. M. Koteswara Rao is a Professor of Economics having put up three and half decades teaching and research experience published very widely in National and International Journals of repute and presented papers in National and International Conferences. Guided 28 Ph.D's and 26 M.Phil's so far for the award of Research Degrees. Specialized in the areas of Urban Development and Labour Economics. Carried out 6 Research Projects sponsored by UGC and other Agencies. Prof. Rao is currently the Dean of Faculty of Social Sciences, Dean, College Development Council and Vice-Principal, University College of Arts, Commerce & Law, Acharya Nagarjuna University, Nagarjuna Nagar, Guntur District.



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