Gender involvement in Farm Sector-An interpretative Study and Review
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Abstract:
Women in smallholders family farms have greater overall workloads than men, combining household responsibilities. Women in agriculture and rural areas have less access than men to productive assets and opportunities. Their off-farm work is often low-skilled and low-paid, but is particularly important in confronting the adverse shocks that affect agriculture, such as droughts or floods. The gender gap occurs for many assets, inputs and services, including land, livestock, labour, education, extension and financial services, and technology. It enforces costs not only on women themselves, but on the agriculture sector, the broader economy and society as a whole. In most regions women and girls still fall behind in education: this is particularly acute in rural areas, where female household heads sometimes have less than half the years of education of their male counterparts. Extension facilities in developing economies remain low for both women and men, and women incline to make less use than men of extension services. Women across all developing regions are consistently less likely to own or operate land; they are less likely to have access to rented land, and the land they do have access to be of poorer quality and in smaller plots. Male-headed households have larger livestock holdings, than female-headed households. Gender gaps occur for a wide range of agricultural technologies, including machines and tools, improved plant varieties and animal breeds, fertilizers, pest control measures and management techniques. If women have the same access as men to extension services, technologies and loans, they can afford to improve the agricultural productivity of family farms, engage in processing and marketing activities, and increase their voice in household decisions.

INTRODUCTION:
Empowerment refers to increasing the spiritual, political, social, or economic strength of individuals and communities.” It encourages people to gain the skills and knowledge that will allow them to overcome obstacles in life or work environment and ultimately, help them develop within themselves or in the society. Empowerment of the farm women is a current need of the time in an agrarian country like India.

Swaminathan, the famous agricultural scientist describes that it was woman who 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 the native flora and began cultivating those of interest from the point of view of food, feed, fodder, fibre and fuel. Women have played and continue to play a key role in the conservation of basic life support systems such as land, water, flora and fauna. They have protected the health of the soil through organic recycling and promoted crop security through the maintenance of varietal diversity and genetic resistance.

Women who perform two-thirds of the World’s work earn only one-tenth of its income and own less than one-hundredth of its property. Women get up early in the morning and start cleaning the little courtyard, ramming it with cow dung. Her back breaking chores begin in the wee hours with milking the cattle, feeding her children, and going to farm for sowing, weeding, harvesting, winnowing etc., but unrecognized by statistics.

A clear understanding of the participation of tribal farm women in crop production and other land based activities like dairy, poultry, their pattern of decision making, knowledge and skill level, time utilization pattern and contribution to family income would enable the extension organization and other policy makers to develop strategies for enhancing their participatory efficiency in different farming systems.

Women constitute a higher proportion of the labor force in the agricultural sector than men. However, they are generally not active in decision making in the community (Barman, 2001; Bose, Ahmed, & Hossain, 2009; Joshi, 2000; Nathan & Kelkar, 1997; Rahman & Routray, 1998; Satyavathi, Bharadwaj, & Brahmanand, 2010).
Chitrasena Padhy (2001) argued that social and cultural constraints lead to less mobility of women and less involvement in income-earning activities in far-off places. Women are largely involved in unpaid housework and crop production and livestock rearing within their homestead areas.

**Multi Dimensional Role of Women:**

**Agricultural Activities:** Sowing, transplanting, weeding, irrigation, fertilizer application, plant protection, harvesting, winnowing, storing etc.

**Domestic Activities:** Cooking, child rearing, water collection, fuel wood gathering, household maintenance etc.

**Allied Activities:** Cattle management, fodder collection, milking etc.

Mainly rural women are engaged in agricultural activities in three different ways depending on the socio-economic status of their family and regional factors. They are working as:

- **Paid Labourers.**
- **Cultivator doing labour on their own land.**
- Managers of certain aspects of agricultural production by way of labour supervision and the participation in post-harvest operations.

**Obstacles in Women Growth in Agriculture Sector:**

1. Women have no power for decision making process, either inside or outside the home. Women perform all un-mechanized agricultural tasks or perform multiple tasks, which add more burden to them.
2. Female farmers are just as efficient as male farmers but they produce less because they control less land, use fewer inputs and have less access to important services such as extension advice.
3. Women are less likely than men to own land or livestock, adopt new technologies, use credit or other financial services, or receive education or extension advice. In some cases, women do not even control the use of their own time.
4. Women workers in agriculture suffer from high illiteracy rate among them and drop-out of schools.
5. Women earn less wages, especially in joint, informal and private sector.
6. Women do not know their legal rights. Women seldom enjoy property ownership rights directly in their names.
7. They have little control over decisions made in reference to land.
8. Getting less opportunities for building individual capacity.

**Analytical Review:**

Boserup (1970) points that women as farmers were disadvantaged in comparison to their male counterparts. The literature clearly shows that women in Sub-Saharan countries play a predominant role in agriculture including plow cultures and their role has evolved over time with women assuming more and more responsibilities for male tasks and working in male sectors such as livestock.

Moock (1976) found that women obtained 6.6 percent more output on an average level of inputs than men. In Botswana, output per acre was slightly higher for female headed households. But that male-headed households had a higher profit per acre and higher net profit per acre despite the greater value of the farming equipments they owned (Lucas, 1979).

In a study of the conditions of life of agricultural workers in Kerala, Mencher (1980) points out that because of underemployment women either have to borrow or go hungry and the better health indicators in the state are not necessarily indicative of reduction of poverty.
The National Commission on Self-employed Women and Women in the informal Sector (1988) explored a variety of illnesses found amongst women workers in various unorganized production sectors. They found a high incidence of a variety of illnesses including postural problems, problems of contacts with hazardous materials, heavy work, lack of safety measures, lack of rest, and deplorable work environment. In the agricultural sector, it was found that the women suffer from a variety of ailments such as generalised body ache, cough, respiratory allergies, injuries, toxicity, etc. Given the patriarchal nature of medicine, until the recent past, crucial health issues of women were perceived to be related to fertility and its consequences, to wit, health issues were seen in relation with population issues. Hence, in India, studies on women’s health highlighting aspects other than maternity and nutrition do not have a long history.

Roy (1992) found that the incidence of women agricultural labourer is not only very high in Bihar, but there are wide variations among the different districts in this regard. Although there is large divergence in the incidence of women labour even within the plains of Bihar, it is generally higher there than in the plateau region, which has substantial proportion of scheduled tribes.

Gupta et al. (1987) in their article “Role of women in economic development” have revealed that the women’s contribution was generally found more in two fields - household activities and in agricultural labour. It was an indirect contribution of economic activity in the society that has not been counted since time immemorial. Srivastava (1988) work on “Women of Rural India” pointed out that the rural women have the dual burden of contributing to the family income as well as shouldering the responsibility of family living after the family. Although they play important roles, yet they do not find any place in the village power structure as Panchayats or Sabhas have no separate wings for women. The invisibility of women’s work and its undervaluation in the development discourses has been discussed widely. The low value and the social status given to women’s manifold activities such as domestic labour, child care, and other remunerated employment including agriculture reflects the reinforcement of gender inequities at ideological and practical levels as well.

Saradamony (1982), in another study on changing agrarian relations and its impact on women in Palakkad district argues that despite the fact that socio-political changes which coincided with the agrarian struggles favoured legislation for the underprivileged sections in the society, the advantages of justice did not reach all, especially women.

Gulati (1984) work “Agricultural Labourers” trace that every fourth male rural worker is an agricultural labourer, one out of every two female rural workers is engaged as agricultural labourer. According to Gulati, (1984) one would therefore be justified in saying that knowing about women agricultural labourers is a substantial part of the knowing about the Indian working woman particularly in rural India.

The lower intake by women and the reduced access to food is often due to the gender inequities that prevail in the intra-household relations (Agarwal, 1984; Harriss, 1995)

Agriculture is the dominant occupation in rural areas and its activities are seasonal, many women join the labour force during the sowing and harvesting seasons and withdraw on the face of non-worth work (Acharya; Mathrani, 1992).

In Ecuador, Bastidas (1999) found that women’s participation in agriculture was higher in female headed households. In households where the couple had small children women’s participation in agriculture was limited due to family obligations. Where the couple had no small children women preferred to engage in other activities where they could control their income. He also found that women with rural background are more likely to participate in agricultural activities than those with an urban background.

Women have played and continue to play a key role in the conservation of basic life support systems such as land, water, flora and fauna. They have protected the health of the soil through organic recycling and promoted crop security through the maintenance of varietal diversity and genetic resistance. Therefore, without the total intellectual and physical participation of women, it will not be possible to popularize alternative systems of land management to shifting cultivation, arrest gene and soil erosion, and promote the care of the soil and the health of economic plants and farm animals. (Prasad & Singh 1992).

Mukherjee (1993) in the article “Understanding Rural Women through Participation” emphasizes that the importance of perception of rural women can hardly be over emphasized. Their role in society, their problems
priorities and capabilities, if truly appreciated, can lay the foundation of a gender based approach to rural development much stronger and productive than that of earlier decades. The rural women as a mother, as a partner in a rural household and as a member of rural society and the nation as a whole performs functions which are both critical and burdensome much of which is not always visible and touchable in terms of economic output. In an interview with female respondents, it was noticed that male members only sought their consent whereas their suggestions/objections were not taken into account. Thus it was evident that women had to play second fiddle to men in decision-making.

In Egypt, both males and females start to participate in farming activities from early age (about 5-9 years) the level of female participation increases at the same rate as male participation. In the age group 30 years, female participation increases significantly, as most males seek job opportunities outside agriculture (Mohammed, 2002).

Another study conducted in Haryana revealed that farm women did not decide independently about any farm operation but participated in almost all the decisions and dominated only decisions more related to home sphere i.e. storage of farm produce, purchase/sale of animal and credit. The table 7.1 shows the decision making process of women in agriculture in Himachal Pradesh. (Bala, 2003).

Women are yet to be accorded equal status by the society. However, realizing the needs of women empowerment since independence, special emphasis was laid on the practical needs of women. Its purpose was to bring women into development as passive beneficiaries of development. Later, slowly with the time, strategic needs of women were also addressed during policy making and planning (Tripathi, 2005).

According to Suryanarayana; Nagalakshmi (2005) rural women are subjected to some hindrances, which impose limitations on their potential to play their role effectively. Women are said to have equal status in the society, but when it comes to the actual decision making, men have final say while the women have to accept a subservient status. In general, rural women have low literacy level, which in turn affects the attitude of women to be socially mobilized.

Gandham et al. (2005) found out that though a large number of women workers are found among the ranks of agriculture workers and their contribution to the rural economy is significant, they have not received adequate attention. Women agricultural workers encounter many difficulties because of their distressing and pitiable working conditions such as long working hours, low wages, inhuman treatment and gender discrimination. Direct access to income will in turn reduce the dependency syndrome they have been traditionally suffering from. In the long run such economic independence will have its impact on increased demand for better education, health and family welfare services needed for the overall wellbeing of women (Rath et al. 2007).

In India, according to Sikka et al. (2007) women play a key role in animal, farm and home management. This study revealed that more than 8 working hours in a day are spent by women, covering all the buffalo rearing practices. Buffalo rearing covers more than 50% of the working hours of women in comparison to 10% of the working time of their counterpart, the men. Hence, augmentation of buffalo entrepreneurship at the grass root level essentially requires training of the farm women.

Sinha and Singh (2000) observed that the involvement of farm women was found independently or jointly in all major operations except ploughing, puddling and seed sowing.

Gabriel Dietrich (1995) is of the view that insecurity and lack of safety are the hallmark of the employment of women in the informal sector. Majority of the women workers are classified as marginal workers because of the irregular nature of their employment. Since they are marginal workers, they are devoid of several social security benefits such as maternity benefits, pension etc. Work security is nil as even work records are mostly non-existing.

The existence of female occupations is cited in the study of 41 countries by Anker [1997] pointed out the principal reason for women’s wages being less than that of men. This implies lesser opportunities for upward mobility and greater financial pressure to survive. The same is the finding by Rubery, Smith and Fagan [1996] of the European Union. It points out that women’s jobs are low paid, precarious status with poor working conditions, inadequate social coverage and limited scope for promotion and upward mobility.
Assessing the performance of women in dairy operations in Bihar, Kumari et al. (1988) observed that 80 per cent of all important dairying operations in milk production were performed by women.

According to the research findings of Govind (1984) and Govind and Subramanija (1988), involvement of farm women was widespread and larger in respect of livestock related activities than in respect of crop activities.

**Conclusion:**

Women’s wage work is considered a menace to the male self-esteem and women’s engagement in multiple home-based economic activities leads to poor remuneration for their work. Women spend long hours fetching water, doing laundry, preparing food, and carrying out agricultural duties. These tasks are not only physically hard and demanding, but also they break into girls of the opportunity to study. The nature and area of women’s productivity in the labor market is largely determined by socio-cultural and economic factors. Women do not enter the labor market on equal terms when compared to men. Their occupational choices are also limited due to social and cultural constraints, gender bias in the labor market, and lack of supportive facilities such as child care, transport, and settlement in the formal sector of the labor market. In this age data collection has improved considerably over the last decades, as has our understanding of the complexity of women’s roles and the need to collect data not only on primary activities but on all women’s activities. Data are required to better understand gender roles in agriculture and how they change over time and in response to new occasions.

**References :**