

Feminization Of Indian Agriculture: Trends And Driving Forces

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Abstract: The term “feminization of agriculture” refers to the growing proportion of women who work in agricultural in India. The term “feminization of agriculture” often refers to women’s increased involvement in the agricultural labour sector, whether as independent producers, unpaid family carers, or wage labourers. Yet, a quantitative increase in women’s employment participation does not always imply qualitative advancements or improved working circumstances for them. In their research, several academics claim that the state’s bigger developmental aims and policies are to blame for the deteriorating working and employment circumstances. The feminization of agriculture in rural India has been attempted to be examined, understood, and its numerous policy consequences.

Keywords: *feminization, agriculture, workers participation, empowerment.*

INTRODUCTION

The prosperity and growth of an economy largely depends on the status and development of its women as they not only constitute nearly half of its population but also

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influences growth of the remaining half of the population. Agriculture is the largest and oldest private sector enterprise initiated by women over 10,000 years ago. Agriculture, the single largest production endeavour in India, contributes 25% of GDP is increasingly becoming a female activity. Women have been actively involved in operations related to crop and animal production, as well as in post-harvest processing and marketing. Many of the activities assigned to women under the traditional gender division of labour involve great drudgery and hard work. Rural women form the most important productive workforce in the economy of majority of the developing nations including India. Moreover, several farm activities traditionally carried out by men are also being undertaken by women as men are migrated to urban areas. Thus, rural India is witnessing a process, which could be described as feminization of agriculture. While women have always played a key role in agricultural production, their importance both as workers and as managers of farms has been growing as an increasing number of men have move to non-farm jobs. Despite significant contribution of women in the production process, an all-pervasive bias of development planners in treating them primarily as consumers of social services rather than producers, kept them away from the development programmes in agriculture and allied sectors. Women's role in the agricultural sector increased during the 1960s and has continued to grow. The term 'Feminization of Agriculture' refers to increasing participation of women in agricultural activities. The phenomenon started during the 1960s with increasing shares over time. In the 1990s, during liberalization, the phenomenon became more pronounced.

Few studies (Kanchi, 2010; Kelkar and Wang, 2007; Srivastave, 2011) supported the notion that feminization is the result of distressed migration and crop production that results in losses, whereas Rawal and Saha (2015) supported economic liberalisation as a means of increasing women's participation in the labour force. Hardikar (2015) revealed that migration of men in small and marginal groups in Madhya Pradesh put pressure on women and forced some women farmers to abandon their farms. Several research have focused on particular regions. Bhandari and Reddy (2015) analysed the circumstances of migrant and non-migrant households in Uttarakhand and found that there was little to no capital formation on migrant households' farms. The work load of women from migrant

households was heavier than that of non-migrant households. Numerous studies have been conducted to determine a link between agriculture and suicide and how it affects families, but they do not provide a conclusive answer about the link between residence and suicide. However, it does appear that suicide rates are higher in rural than urban areas in India and other nations with large agricultural populations (GOI 2007). If true, fast migration, economic difficulties, a lack of social support, isolation, relatively simple access to fatal means (such as pesticides), and a lack of high-quality resuscitation services would all be possible causes for the greater suicide rates in rural locations (Wage Indicator Report).

In light of this, one of the main goals of this article is to examine the emergence of feminization of agriculture in India. The study also tries to examine the trends of work participation by both male and female labourers in the agriculture sector. Further, this research aims at studying the major problems faced by female agricultural workers in their respective fields. Certain policy prescriptions are also been suggested.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY :

The study is based on the secondary sources of data taken from various research papers, journals, books and reports provided by the government organizations and Census of India for the years 1981, 1991, 2001 and 2011. The survey is conducted over four decadal census reports. A descriptive and analytical method has been adopted to obtain the results. The study focuses on analysing the women participation rate and various fields of agriculture in which the females are engaged to have an idea on the trend and pattern of feminization of agriculture. The study uses the help of Tables and figures to analyse the results.

ORIGIN OF FEMINISATION OF AGRICULTURE :

Since the beginning of agriculture, rural women have worked in agricultural production. Throughout numerous geographical and culturally distinct locales, engagement has taken many various forms and depths. Throughout the past few decades, women's labour in agriculture has gained increased visibility. This is in part because of study and data collection efforts to more precisely gauge women's activities in rural areas. But during the past few

decades, there has also been a trend for women to widen and deepen their involvement in agricultural production as they take on more and more of the burden of maintaining households and take advantage of income opportunities in commercial agriculture. While the percentage of the labour force engaged in agriculture fell over the 1990s, the percentage of women engaged in agriculture rose, notably in developing nations, according to an FAO report (1999: 12–13). About half of the labour force is made up of women in various regions, including Africa and Asia. This pattern has been referred to as the feminization of agriculture.

Feminization of agriculture, or a rise in the proportion of women working in agriculture, is a phenomenon that occurred in India after agricultural liberalisation. Unfortunately, this feminization did not correspond with empowerment because these workers continue to be paid less than their male counterparts. The states with a higher proportion of agricultural employees had the smallest variations in gender involvement.

The feminization of agriculture, in its broadest sense, refers to women's growing involvement in the agricultural labour force, whether as independent producers, as unpaid family workers, or as wage workers. Women labour in agricultural processing and packing facilities as well as in the fields and pastures. Due to the persistent underpayment of women in the workforce, this problem does not support female empowerment. The percentage of land used for food grain, per capita income, and land ownership were some of the variables affecting the participation of women. The administration is now concentrating on gender budgeting in order to better the condition for women.

FACTORS LEADING TO FEMINISATION OF AGRICULTURE

- **Social Mobility and Migration- Reserved for Males:** Men in rural India have sought employment outside of agriculture due to the agrarian crisis and rural hardship that have plagued the economy for the past few years. Because of this, in the rural belt of India, men are more prone to migrate and shift from rural to urban areas in quest of better opportunities, while women are primarily in charge of domestic duties and agriculture.

- **Gender-Division of Work:** Women are more likely to take low-paying, irregular work, are simple to hire and fire, are perceived as submissive and diligent, and some jobs

are stereotyped as being performed by women. These aspects have made it possible for the sector to produce with lower costs and greater capital accumulation.

- **Poverty:** Due to poverty, women frequently work as domestic workers or agricultural labourers to help supplement the household's income. This leads to increase in female participation in agriculture subsequently leading to feminization of the sector.

- **Unfree labour:** Unfree labour refers to the various forms of exploitative labour relations that involve forcing workers to perform tasks against their will. This issue is particularly common in labor-intensive industries like agriculture, construction, and a number of manufacturing sectors. The feminization of agriculture is associated with women's forced labour; as a result, men are free to migrate, take on employment that are comparably better paying, and escape social discrimination in the village.

Census Year	Agriculture			Non-agriculture		
	Male(%)	Female(%)	Total Agricultural participation (%)	Male(%)	Female(%)	Total Non- agricultural participation (%)
1981	66.3	82.6	70.3	33.7	17.8	29.7
1991	60.9	82.4	67.2	39.1	17.6	32.8
2001	51.9	71.8	58.4	48.1	28.2	41.6
2011	49.8	65.1	54.5	50.1	34.9	45.5

Table 1: Work participation in agricultural and non-agricultural sectors by gender.

Source: Census (1981, 1991, 2001, 2011)

TRENDS OF WORK PARTICIPATION BY GENDER :

From 1991 to 2011, there was a significant expansion in non-agricultural activities as a result of economic liberalisation. While female participation doubled from 17.6% to 34.0% during 1991 to 2011, male engagement in non-agricultural activities grew from 39.1% to 50.1% during the same period. According to this, 65% of women are dependent on agriculture even if 50% of men work in non-agricultural occupations. Male participation in non-agricultural activities increased after liberalisation, compared to female participation.

The table depicts that over the years the participation of both male and female workers in agricultural sector has decreased gradually but the female workers has been contributing on a large scale as compared to the male workers. In 1991, about 82.4% of the female workers had contributed against 60.9% of male workers. The contribution has decreased to 65.1% of the female workers while the male workers contributed only 49.8% till 2011.

MAJOR CONSTRAINTS :

- **Lack of Institutional Credit:** Women farmers who lack land ownership are unable to apply for institutional loans from banks since banks often view land as collateral.
- **Non-recognition:** Women produce between 60 and 80 percent of the food and 90 percent of the dairy products, respectively, according to Oxfam India. But, the work that women farmers do at home, managing their livestock, or cultivating crops sometimes goes unappreciated.
- **Lack of Property Rights:** In general, women do not receive land rights in their names. Because of this, women in the family have less negotiating leverage than the male members who own the property.
- **Contract farming:** Because they do not have solid control over their land, family labour, and other resources necessary to ensure the delivery of a consistent flow of produce, female farmers are typically excluded from current contract farming arrangements.
- **Lack of Training:** Given their enormous numbers, government efforts to provide them with training in rural handicrafts and poultry apiculture are insignificant.
- **Innovation in Agriculture:** Women may lose their jobs when new technology is developed to automate certain manual labour since they frequently perform the manual tasks and also because of their low skill level.
- **Poor access to Resource and Inputs:** Women typically have less access to resources and contemporary inputs, including as seeds, fertilizers, and pesticides, compared to men. This is because women farmers in India experience a significant amount of gender discrimination.

POLICY AND PROGRAMMES

- The increase in budgetary support for female farmers has not kept pace with the rise in the number of women working in agriculture. For each programme, women should receive an adequate allotment.
- By enhancing information access and knowledge sharing through the click of a button, ICT led extension will be a revolutionary method to changing the lives of women farmers.
- A few of the steps the government has taken to create an environment where women can contribute to their fullest potential and increase their income include improving access to land by introducing “joint pattas” for both cultivable and homestead land, creating multiple livelihood opportunities through crop-livestock farming systems, agroprocessing, etc., and providing timely credit through Kisan Credit Card.
- It’s important to consider gender issues. The government has taken some initiatives related to gender mainstreaming, such as introducing “prowomen initiatives” to assist women in obtaining the benefits of all beneficiary-oriented elements of various programmes, schemes, and missions, focusing on the creation of women Self Help Groups (SHGs), and reserving 30% of funds for women under various major schemes/ programs and development interventions.

CONCLUSION :

Feminization of agriculture occurred mainly due to migration of male work force from agriculture. However, this phenomenon does not get consistent with women empowerment as women workforce are always underpaid. After liberalization of the Indian economy, while almost half of the male workforce got engaged in non-agriculture sector, in case of female counter part only 35% of total workforce engaged in non-agricultural sector. Women mainly dominate livestock sector. Proportion of land utilized for food grain, per capita income, land holdings were some of the factors which were determining the women’s participation. Among those variable poverty had a non-linear relationship with participation of female in workforce. Gender discrimination, gender biased against women, lack of refinement of technology for women, limited access to resource and inadequate access to

market are some of the factors which impeding women's contribution to agriculture. In order to improve the situation for women, government are now focusing on gender budgeting. Besides women's participation in research work had been encouraging to develop technology which will be suitable for the use of women. □

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