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# **Participation of Indian Women in Agricultural Sector: A Study Based On Rural Areas in India**

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## **Abstract**

*Agriculture is the prime engine of growth and backbone of developing nations. In India, a developing economy, nearly 60% of the working population find agriculture as their main source of income/livelihood. Women play multiple roles in agriculture and allied activities such as food production, horticulture, harvesting operations, fisheries, etc. It is also estimated that in India about 75% of women are working as agricultural labour force and are active agents of the primary sector. The present study focuses on the nature and extent of female participation in Indian agriculture using secondary data on the period 1993-2012.*

**Key Words: Agriculture, Female Work Participation, Labour Force, Women.**

## **INTRODUCTION**

In recent times, Women empowerment assume to have a significant role in the fight against poverty, hunger and ill-health of the society. The growing recognition that women can become an agent of economic and social transformation has also started gaining wide acceptance in the policy and academic circles. The women's participation as workforce plays a major role in determining women's autonomy and self-dependency. As opined by famous economist Amartya Sen that women agency should become a determinant factor to take care of overall development of society. In nations with a high human development index, females are more consistently employed in every sector at par with their male counterparts. In our

country, the Female Labour Force Participation (FLEP) rate has remained visibly low and the International Labour organization ranks India's FLEP rate at 121 out of 131 countries in 2013, one of the lowest in the world. India has the lowest FLEP rate in South Asia, except for Pakistan.

The agriculture sector is the backbone and livelihood of more than 50% of overall manpower of India. where women play the role of a key partner. Women constituted 38% of the agricultural labour force and employ two-third of the female workforce in India. Women are working extensively in farm activities like production of major grains and millets, sowing, applying manure, fertilizer, and pesticide, seed selection and seedling production, weeding, transplanting, threshing, winnowing and harvesting, in livestock production, fish processing, collection of non-timber forest produce (NTFP), etc. Also, the government has moulded an agricultural policy of India by integrating women as active agents in rural transformation. This paper is an attempt to analyse trends of female participation in Indian as agricultural workers from 1993 to 2012.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

(Swamikannan & Jeyalakshmi, 2015) identify the trend of women's participation in agriculture across various Indian states. The secondary data had been used to analyse growth trends of the agricultural workers from 1961-2001. The study briefed that women has been facing discrimination in our agrarian society where their status in all aspects is below to their male workforce. Steps have been taken by the government through amending laws to reset their status.

(Ghosh & Ghosh , 2014) has discussed women's workforce participation in the agricultural sector from 1961 to 2001. The ups and downtrend of female participation is due to discrimination which insists women labour has shifted from agrarian activities to non-agrarian activities.

(Mahata, Kumar, & Kumar, 2017) had analysed the regional disparity of, literacy rate, sex ratio, and women' work participation and the improvement of women empowerment in the and state of Haryana. This paper suggests that the enhancement of social and educational status can be achieved only by progressive interventions at social and government levels.

(Sudaeshan & Bhattacharya, 2009) conducted a study on the work participation of women from Urban Delhi and estimated that WPR is much more than that of the NSSO survey. This

Paper explores key factors affecting the decision, desire, constraints, benefits, and cost of involvement in paid work outside by females. The decisions of marital household and childbirth have influenced labour decisions of a woman. Thus, the women's workforce participation rates appear to be affected by higher education, reduction in time spent on housework (domestic technology, water, and electricity, childcare arrangements), and safety in public spaces (transport, lighting).

(Sen, 1999) in his book "development as freedom" described that women can become dynamic promoters of social transformation by transferring into active agents of change. For him their wellbeing is influenced by various factors like women's ability to earn an independent income, to find employment outside the home, to have ownership right and to have better social status.

## **OBJECTIVES**

- To analyse role of female labours in the agriculture sector of India.
- To trace out factors affecting the falling level of female agricultural participation

## **RESEARCH PROBLEM**

Agriculture has been the main recruiter of female work force in India, but their needs and problems are somewhat ignored in rural development initiatives. Generally, at present, female is less willing to get involved in primary sector and it is necessary to identify the factors behind it.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study is based on data from the data statistics of NITI Aayog and other secondary sources. It also makes use of the cross tabulation method and descriptive statistical tools for further analysis.

## **ANALYSIS**

In India, agriculture stated as the main basic livelihood and a source of employment. But its contribution to GDP per year has been falling and even after still, it has been the bread and butter of 50% of families. Women who actively involved in agriculture comprise two-third of the rural female workforce, but the majority of them are invisible workers, who spent their entire life as informal labourers. Rural females are active participants in every phase of

agricultural production with their household activities. But in the real world, they experience less significance than that of their male counterparts.

### **1. Major Characteristics of Female Workers In Indian Agricultural Sectors.**

Women play an essential role in the development of agriculture and rural sectors of developing and underdeveloped nations. They manage their household and agricultural-allied activities systematically. In rural India, out of 89.5% of the labour force, about 80% are working to be agricultural workers. Among them, 50 percent of the labourers had an only primary level of education and 19.2 percent labourers are illiterate. Out of the total work force, about 76.7 percent of the women labourers belong to the nuclear family. The average number of family households of labour was 4.54 members. Among the women labours 85 percent belongs to the backward caste category and 15 percent belong to the scheduled caste category. Another wide custom prevailing in villages and informal sectors is that females are always paid less than their male counterparts.

### **2. Female Work participation in India 1981-2011**

Table 1 reveals that the female work participation rate initially shows an upward tendency from 19.67 in 1981 to the 25.63 in 2001 and 25.50% in 2011. This does not mean there are wide variations in the work participation rate over these years, just minute changes can be noted here.

**Table 1.** Female Work participation in India 1981-2011

| Census Year | Indian Female |
|-------------|---------------|
| 1981        | 19.67         |
| 1991        | 22.27         |
| 2001        | 25.63         |
| 2011        | 25.5          |

Source: Office of the Registrar General, India.

### **3. Female Rural Work participation in India 1981-2011**

Table 2 shows the ups and downs in female rural work participation rates during 1981-2011. The Women Rural Workforce Participation Rate which 23.06% in 1981 become 30.73% in 2001 and then decline of 30% in 2011. In rural sector about more than 80% of female workforce engaged in agriculture and other allied activities. A major part of women in

the primary sector working in the informal or residual sector can be fetched of low wages. Women are working as hired labour and pressurised to do works from morning to evening, even at late night, in deplorable conditions.

**Table 2.** Female Rural Work participation in India 1981-2011

| Census Year | India Female |
|-------------|--------------|
| 1981        | 23.06        |
| 1991        | 26.79        |
| 2001        | 30.73        |
| 2011        | 30           |

Source: Office of the Registrar General, India.

#### **4. Distribution of Female workers in the agricultural and non-agricultural sectors in India from 1981 – 2011.**

Here, the entire population of the study has been classified into two main categories i.e. Agriculture workers and non-agricultural workers, i.e., who are from manufacturing, construction, trade, community service activities.

Table 3 explains that number of female agricultural workers per 1000 in 1993-94 period was 869 which is drastically declining to 749 in 2011-12, but at the same time number of labours in other sectors shows an upward trend, that is from 138 per 1000 in 1993-94 to 251 per 1000 in 2011-12. This comparison indicates that, females have been shifted from agrarian activities to the industrial -service sector which provides better wage, working condition, and social status.

**Table 3.** Distribution of Female workers in the agricultural and non-agricultural sectors in India from 1981 – 2011.

| Year    | Female workers in agriculture sector (per 1000) | Female workers in non-agriculture sector |
|---------|---|--|
| 1993-94 | 862   | 138                                      |
| 1999-00 | 854   | 146                                      |
| 2004-05 | 833   | 167                                      |
| 2009-10 | 794   | 206                                      |
| 2011-12 | 749   | 251                                      |

Source: NITI Aayog State Statistic

## **CONCLUSION**

The purpose of this study is to analyse the women's participation in agriculture in India based on secondary data sources. The analysis had concluded that female involvement in agriculture is falling day by day and year by year, due to primitive working condition and low wages. So, women tend to leave the agriculture sector and move to the non-agrarian sector, where they get a better wage according to educational qualification and experience with high social status and working environment.

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