

# *The Role of Women in Indian Agriculture*

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## **ABSTRACT**

According to the census report, India's population ratio is 943 women for every 1000 men, while the country's literacy rate is 74.04 percent, according to the 2011 Census. However, women's workforce engagement rate is 25.51 percent, while men's is 53.26 percent. Women continue to be the backbone of the agricultural sector, accounting for 43% of all agricultural workers worldwide. The role of women in Indian agriculture is crucial. Women farmers contribute significantly to Indian agriculture, but in order for them to reach their full potential, we must guarantee that they have access to resources like land, water, credit, and seeds. This will allow them to increase farm productivity and management and contribute to India's overall rural economic development. Despite the fact that women contribute significantly to agriculture, their contributions are sometimes disregarded and unacknowledged. We have to acknowledge their endeavours and give them chances to escape patriarchal systems. Although women's participation in agricultural development varies greatly by location, generally speaking, they take part in a range of agricultural tasks, such as cultivating crops, rearing animals, running family enterprises, and handling household finances. Their efforts are sometimes hindered by a lack of funds or obstacles that keep them from formally entering the workforce; typical household duties and child care frequently take up a large portion of their time, leaving little time for entrepreneurial ventures and investments. This essay stresses gender equality, the vital role that women play in agricultural techniques, and their contribution to food security and family production.

## INTRODUCTION

One of the most common agricultural practices worldwide, in both developed and developing nations, is family farming. In India's rural economy, men and women have different roles. From seedbed preparation, weeding, horticulture, and fruit growing to a variety of post-harvest agricultural processing tasks including washing and drying fruits, vegetables, and nuts for home use and selling, women and girls participate in a wide range of agro-oriented activities. Women make up a disproportionate share of individuals who rely on land: 86% of all rural women workers are employed in agriculture, compared to 58% of all male workers and 78% of all female workers. Between 20% and 35% of rural families are led by women (widows, deserted women as well as women who manage farming when their men migrate).

Women dominate household chores, even if the amount of time spent on agricultural activities by men and women may be considered almost equal in many communities and agricultural settings. Although rural Indian women are heavily engaged in agriculture, the kind and degree of female participation varies depending on the Agro production systems in place. (Nagaraja, 2013). Because women's involvement in agriculture varies by community, factors such as geography, cropping patterns, ethnicity, and educational and economic background also affect the precise division of labor within a household. Women work profitably in agri-based related fields such as dairying, animal husbandry, poultry, goatery, rabbit raising, beekeeping, floriculture, horticulture, fruit preservation, post-harvest technologies, value-added food products, etc., in addition to their involvement in agricultural output. Crop production, horticulture, livestock management, postharvest operations, fisheries,

agroforestry, and home chores are all heavily occupied by women.

The majority of their time is spent gathering water, fuel, and fodder, cultivating vegetables on the property, and raising chickens in the backyard. Taking into account involvement in agriculture, around 70% of agricultural labor is done by women, and 89.5% of all women working in rural regions are employed in agriculture and related fields. Depending on the areas where women are crucial, India produces a range of grains, pulses, millets, oilseeds, cash crops, plantation crops, and horticulture crops. Almost all agricultural activities, including planting, transplanting, weeding, harvesting, value addition, and selling, are carried out by women. In horticulture, they are important for production, post-harvest operations, and value addition. Weeding, watering, gathering, sorting, and grading are all part of fruit horticulture. Women make significant contributions to the management and usage of land.

In order to prepare fertilizer and apply it to the soil, they gather resources from the forests. Field preparation, seed cleaning, seed sowing, seedling transplanting, weeding, harvesting, sorting, and grading are all areas in which women participate in vegetable production. They may apply manure as well. Cleaning, chopping, picking, storing, and processing are the farm operations where women make up the whole workforce. Organic farming of certain fruits, vegetables, and medicinal plants is taught to women. Through the production of mushrooms, vermi-compost, processing, floriculture, seed production, nursery care, tissue culture, fruit and flower seedlings, and food processing, they provide very lucrative jobs.

## Women in Sericulture

Sericulture, one of the most significant cash crops in India, is primarily a village-based sector in which women are the primary activists. Asia is considered the world's largest producer of silk, accounting for more than 95% of the overall production. With an annual production of over 28,000 metric tons, India is the world's second-largest producer of silk and accounts for 18% of the world's raw silk production. They cultivate silkworm food plants, intercrop, weed, apply farm yard manure, collect leaves and transport them, prune, and raise silkworm larvae for raw silk manufacturing in the mulberry garden. Women at post-cocoon technology are skilled in twisting, dying, weaving, printing, finishing, and silk reeling, which is used to unwind the extremely fine and fragile silk filament. Silkworm raising tasks, such as slicing leaves, cleaning the bed, feeding the silkworms, maintaining cleanliness, picking up mature worms and putting them on montages, and so forth, are exclusively handled by women at home.

## Women in Food Security

In order to guarantee food and nutritional security, women are essential. They process livestock and fisheries goods and generate meals from main grains and minor millets. They work as landless labourers and managers. When it comes to feeding the family including youngsters, elderly and ill people, pregnant and nursing moms, and others women make the decisions.

## Women in Animal Husbandry

The backbone of India's Agro-based economy is animal husbandry. India is the world's top producer of milk, third in terms of eggs, and fifth in terms of poultry. Women have a variety of responsibilities in animal husbandry, depending on the location. Their responsibilities in the dairy industry include

cleaning animal shelters, caring for animals, milking, feeding, watering, grazing, gathering fodder, chaffing and storing it, cleaning milking tools, and turning milk and dung into ghee, butter, khoa, and other products. Additionally, they provide medical care for ill and pregnant animals as well as newborn or young calves. From feces, women create compost, which they then transport to the field. They play an important role in the management and production of livestock, although having very little control over the animals and their output. Individual homes should be the first to empower women, taking into account their mental and intellectual capacity.

## Farm Management

In the administration of farms, women are indispensable. Women are especially exposed to climate change because they typically perform labour-intensive jobs like gardening and harvesting, as well as unpaid childcare and household labour. Their susceptibility to climate change and the quality of their agricultural output may be greatly impacted by this. However, the type of agricultural labour differs depending on the crop and the locality. Additionally, women do not always have equal access to land or other resources, and our research found that their level of empowerment in agriculture is correlated with their interactions with markets. Strategies that allow women to acquire skills and engage in markets must be implemented in order to overcome these barriers; this may be done through government programs that provide small farmers financing or cooperatives. Women who work in small farms are also greatly impacted by climate change.

## Unpaid Labor

Lack of recognition and rights for female farmers is a significant obstacle in Indian agriculture's quest for gender balance. In



India, women comprise 33% of the agricultural workforce and 48% of self-employed farmers, according to research published by the Indian Council of Agricultural Research. This includes 33% of farm labour force members and 48% of self-employed farms. In Indian agriculture, women farmers engage in gardening, production, postharvest activities, agro/social forestry, and fishing, among other facets of agriculture.

In Indian agriculture, women farmers perform the majority of unpaid labor in rural areas. They are in charge of home chores, supporting their family, and engaging in subsistence agricultural operations such as planting, weeding, harvesting, and sowing.

Despite the fact that women are vital to agriculture, their labor is frequently underappreciated, and they have limited access to government agricultural programs and finance. Additionally, having less decision-making authority limits their capacity to buy inputs or invest in their farm, which lowers production and exacerbates gender inequality in agriculture. Therefore, it is crucial to promote better agricultural methods and provide women farmers in Indian agriculture with greater chances.

### **Entrepreneurship**

In order to make farming lucrative, women farmers in India are playing increasingly important roles as agricultural arbitrageurs. In order to make agriculture sustainable throughout their country, they prepare food, cultivate crops for domestic and commercial use, provide animal feed, gather milk for poultry, and use different technological interventions. Unfortunately, illiteracy and a lack of high-quality education are major obstacles to being a successful business owner. In Indian agriculture, women farmers are becoming more well-known, taking on additional responsibilities, and striving for a

steady income. They receive assistance from a variety of platforms, initiatives, and government programs, which increases their visibility and influence in the agricultural sector.

One such tale is that of Padma Bai, who has built a remarkable agricultural enterprise by effectively utilizing her knowledge of agriculture. She went from barely making ends meet on her 3-acre cotton crop to starting a business that lends money to low-income farmers for agricultural equipment. She also leads a number of social projects for each of the eight villages she serves as Sarpanch for.

### **Technology Adoption**

For the majority of people living in rural areas, agriculture is their primary source of income. Even though agricultural technologies have the potential to improve livelihoods and production, there are still several barriers preventing their broad adoption, especially among Indian women farmers.

Women continue to adopt technology at substantially lower rates than men, according to research, and this difference holds true for both sexes. (Doss et al. 2003; Doss and Morris 2001; Carr and Hartl 2010; Quisumbing and Pandolf Elli 2010). Other obstacles to adoption may include restricted access to agricultural technologies (such as irrigation systems), insufficient training in their use and application, and a lack of funding or credit resources. Beyond financial freedom, women who join self-help organizations claim several benefits. In addition to feeling more powerful and self-assured as a consequence of actively participating in the organization, their extra cash enables them to spend on things like their children's education. Lastly, this might promote rural women's empowerment by encouraging them to take up leadership positions in their communities.



## Challenges Faced

Unfair access to resources and markets is one of the many particular challenges faced by Indian women farmers. Lack of funding, seed, or fertilizer can drastically cut output, and being shut out of pricing or market knowledge decreases their ability to negotiate prices. Women's mobility, decision-making authority, and involvement in agricultural operations can all be restricted by gender norms. Women farmers in Indian agriculture or farm widows might benefit from a social safety net that offers crucial financial security, and land tenure changes that put women's rights first could help close ownership and control gaps on agricultural fields.

Despite these obstacles, women farmers are vital to India's economy since they produce high-growth commodities like milk and fruit and make up about half of the country's agricultural workforce, ensuring the food and nutrition security of households. Regretfully, their efforts are still underappreciated and sometimes overlooked when advocating for causes or shaping legislation.

## Empowerment Initiative

Women make up the majority of those working in agriculture. In Indian agriculture, women make up the great majority of both independent farmers and agricultural labourers. They also participate in related activities including horticulture, postharvest operations, livestock rearing, and agro/social forestry. Women's economic independence is facilitated by their involvement in farming, which helps provide revenue for family livelihood and economic emancipation.

When attempting to escape conventional roles and gain a greater presence in agriculture, women encounter several obstacles, such as societal conventions that restrict their independence, land ownership concerns, lack of government backing, and lack of

recognition. In addition, women frequently labour in the fields with their husbands, which makes it more difficult for them to get resources and run farms independently. If women want to become independent farmers, they must acknowledge and solve these concerns, since this will better prepare them to handle future challenges like the effects of climate change on food production. This help might be given through gender-specific initiatives designed especially for Indian women farmers.

## CONCLUSION

In Indian agriculture, women contribute significantly and are an integral component of the industry. Considering any gender implications of policies or development activities in this industry, it is crucial to acknowledge their contributions and empower them appropriately. These tactics, which aim to improve the lives of rural women farmers and increase their economic possibilities, include enhancing educational access, promoting the adoption of technology, providing financial inclusion services, and developing supporting regulations. A breakthrough in rural development would result from rural women's involvement in agricultural endeavours. It would improve agricultural profitability, decrease poverty, and raise food and nutritional security. India's female workforce in agriculture must therefore be empowered. This can be done by implementing a comprehensive gender-sensitive agricultural policy that prioritizes land ownership, empowering female entrepreneurs, utilizing state-of-the-art technology, and offering training sessions tailored to their needs.

Women have been just as significant as men. In actuality, a country's total success may be determined by the position, employment, and labour undertaken by women in society. A nation's social, economic, or political



advancement will stall if women do not participate in national activities. Through their effective and capable participation in business endeavours, rural women may make a substantial contribution. They possess the fundamental indigenous knowledge, abilities, and resources needed to start and run their own business. Income-generating activities are the finest tool for rural women since they increase family income and are an excellent social and economic development tool that creates jobs for many farm women within their own social structure. The teaching of new skills is a crucial component of a successful intervention aimed at empowering women. As a result of women taking on new duties, they also require training to enable them to carry them out. Trainings must help women understand how culture shapes their perspectives. Women must be encouraged to think critically, question exploitation and unfair gender relations, and think for themselves as part of the training curriculum.

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