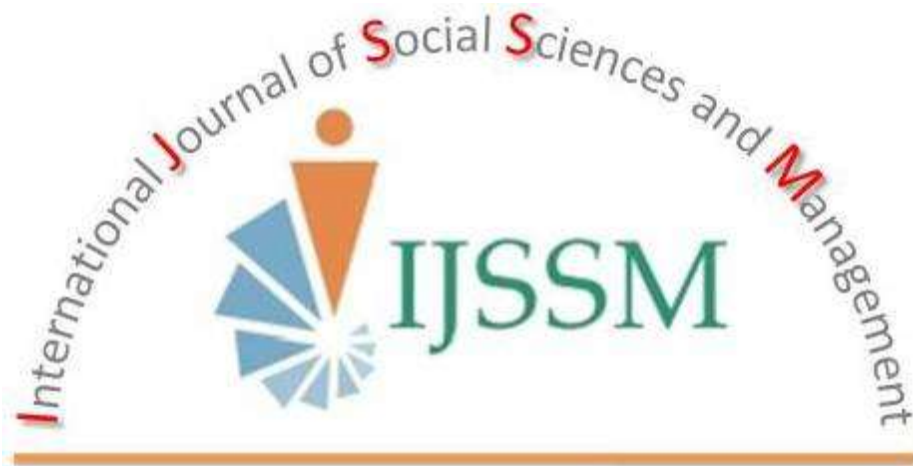




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## A SURVEY OF AVAILABLE LITERATURE ON RURAL WOMEN AND WOMEN'S WORK IN AGRICULTURE

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### Abstract

Literature review is an essential part for research. Before starting research on a meticulous topic, one needs to map the types of available writings on the topic of research. Literature review helps in choosing a topic for research which has not been studied yet or less studied. It also tells the importance of research topic. This study assembles all the major categories of research on rural women and their work in agriculture.

**Keywords-** Literature review, chronological, rural women, agricultural works.

### Introduction

A brief literature survey had been conducted on researches of rural women. These literary works done on women's work in agriculture have been arranged chronologically. The available literature on rural women can be categorised according to the following broad categories. These broad categories almost cover all the dimensions in which rural women were studied in the different parts of India and the world.

### Agriculture and Gender studies

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. In Kenya, Mook (1976) found that women obtained 6.6 per cent 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).

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 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.

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 30-40 years, female participation increases significantly, as most males seek job opportunities outside agriculture (Mohammed, 2002).

### Women, Agriculture and Household

Another study among the agricultural labourers in six villages, two each from Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and West

Bengal, found that despite the problems of underemployment, women's economic contribution to the household is more than half of the household income and displacement of women without offering adequate other employment opportunities will enhance the pauperisation and marginalisation of poor working families (Mencher; Saradamon, 1982). The article by Gopalan (1987) "Why are Women Lagging Behind" highlighted that the evidence of women's work apart from their low paid work is that they have to spend almost 10 to 12 hours per day on household chores, cooking, child care etc besides their contribution to agricultural production animal husbandry and other related activities of the household for which the economic work of their labour is not valued. 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 looking 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. Tiwari (1997) says in "Structural Change and Status of Women" that during the 19th century, it was not a commonly accepted idea that women should go out to earn for the family, but gradually such restriction loosed because of increasing economic pressures and increase in the cost of living.

### **Women as agricultural labour**

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. 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). The plight of women rural labour, it is a well-known fact that even after four decades of planning and development, majority of women are still concentrated in a narrow range of occupations, characterized by low level

of skills and thereby low wages and incomes. Majority of them are engaged in agriculture and allied activities and they constitute a distinct minority among non-agricultural workers (Singh; Singh, 1992). According to Hirway (1992) employers including farmers, also prefer men to women as labourers since men can work for long hours on a continuous basis. Consequently, on one hand women cannot compete with men for that work that is available at present while, on the other hand, the work that would suit them is not available. 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.

### **Women and Agricultural technology**

The introduction of capital-intensive technologies in the agricultural sector has differential impact on different sections of people and women are negatively affected due to women's lack of access to technology (Boserup, 1970). Though Boserup (1970) has been critiqued for acceptance of modernisation theory and lack of class analysis, the argument challenged the very base of the modernisation efforts that the benefits of the development will trickle down to all sections of people.

According to various scholars, the green revolution technologies have enhanced class polarisation and deepened gender inequities in many ways (Agarwal, 1984; Bardhan, 1985). Focusing on the impact of mechanization, Mencher; D' Amico (1986) argue that the increasing use of new technological devices resulted in an inevitable decline in employment opportunities for women. Women can neither put in long hours on a continuous basis, nor do they fit into the group demand system. Normally women labourers are not trained to use even simple mechanical tools used for spraying fertilizers or pesticides (Hirway 1992). According to Eapen (1994), supports that the accelerated shift towards the cash crops associated with the commercialization process in the agricultural sector resulted in reduced employment opportunities for women.

### **Women and Agricultural wages**

B. L. Tripathy (1978) refers to the tradition of employing females belonging largely to the backward and scheduled castes and lower caste Muslims as rural agricultural labour at a cheaper rate. Nayyar (1988) emphasized female participation rate is a function of landlessness, poverty and non-economic factors. It is undefined social prejudices that lead to the wage differentiation between male and female workers and it has social sanction. A. V. Jose (1988) observed that wage is very closely related to the output. He also noted some decline in the magnitude of gender disparities in most of Indian States from 1970-71 to 1984-85. This real wages, however, showed increasing trend for

both male and female workers. He however, argued that the real wages alone do not tell about the real earnings of the agricultural labourers. The quantum of employment per year and thereby, the total income earned is important. According to R. H. Dholakia (1992) the conditions of Indian labour market when examined in the context of sex-discrimination clearly reveal that wage differential between male and female workers is a casually observable phenomenon.

According to Vaidyanathan (1994), the adoption of green revolution technologies did not enhance the employment opportunities in the same proportion as the output, though the dependence on wage labour was increased. Differences in the skill, qualification experience and nature of the job for male and female workers do not fully account for their wage differential. As regards the wages, there are evidences to show that, the increase in real wages of the 1980s was not sustained in the 1990s either in agriculture or in non-agricultural sectors for both men and women (Unni, 1999).

### **Women, Agriculture and Politics**

Saradamy (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. In a majority of development programmes, involving women have become extremely important to ensure their successful implementation (Varalakshmi, 1993).

Subha, K. (1995) work on "Training- An Aid to Empower Rural Women Leaders" saying that for training, it should be kept in mind that mere learning about the functioning of Panchayati Raj is not enough to empower women; they should be given a fair knowledge about the functioning of the political system as whole and the interactions between the sub-system. The Self Help Group (SHG) is a viable alternative to the financial institution such as the rural banks and credit co-operatives towards achieving the objectives of rural development and to get community participation in all rural development programmes. Self Help Groups enhance the equality of status of women as participants, decision-makers and beneficiaries in the democratic economic, social and cultural spheres of life (Gurumoorthy, 2000). 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).

### **Women, Role in Rural Development and Empowerment**

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. Education no doubt widens the individual's mental horizon and releases him from the clutches of ignorance and superstitions. Economic incentives thus provided will free the women from the shackles of inside/outside dichotomy. Increased economic productivity will be able to influence their status and image in the family, as well as in the wider societal level. The ability of the women to contribute more in the family income will provide them with a greater bargaining power. 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).

### **Women and Animal husbandry**

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.

### **Women and Agriculture as Informal sector**

The recent trends in women's employment participation both in the NSS and census data shows a marginal increase, compared to previous decades, while the important feature of this trend is the increasing casualisation and informalisation of women's work (Vaisaria, 1999; Unni, 1999). P. T. Musiimenta (2002) explores the continuity of the practice by discussing the problems encountered by urban farmers and especially women. Although women are said to be prospering in this informal sector, a number of constraints characterize their survival strategy. This sounds



like a contradiction because despite the problems they encounter, most of those involved in urban agriculture are not ready to quit the practice. According to Padma (2004) in the article "Women Workers in India in the 21st Century – Unemployment and Underemployment", The 9 sectors where 90% of Indian women work in agriculture, live stock, textiles and textile products, beverage and tobacco, food products, construction, petty retail trade, education and research and domestic services. The number of women working in agriculture in the years 1999-2000 was 7,91,30,000 which accounted for 64.3% of the workforce. Next come livestock, which accounted for 9% of the workforce. The domestic services sector employed 3.2%, retail trade 3.4%, textiles and textile products 2.8% and beverage and tobacco industry 3.0 % of the workforce in the same period.

### Women and condition of life

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 unorganised 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. We have enough evidences to show that, in India, malnutrition among girls and women is higher than boys and men of same age group and the lower nutritional status is due to inadequate dietary intake by females in quantity as well quality (Chaterjee, 1989). 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). Even the WHO's initiatives on women's health which has a history of more than three decades, began with a focus on maternal health and family planning. However, over time, with new knowledge and understanding of the deeper issues in women's health, the vision has widened to relocate women's health in wider social context with a perspective of gender mainstreaming (WHO, 2000)

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