

# Assessing the Role of Farm Women in Agriculture: A Case Study of Jammu District of J&K State

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## Abstract

In India, the typical work of the female agricultural labourer or cultivator is limited to less skilled jobs, such as sowing, transplanting, weeding and harvesting, that often fit well within the framework of domestic life and child-rearing. The nature and extent of women's involvement in agriculture, no doubt, varies greatly from region to region. A study has been conducted in R.S. Pura block of Jammu district with an aim to know the role and extent of women involvement in decision making in agriculture and constraints they faced while performing the agriculture activities. A sample of 50 women farmers selected from the two villages namely Raipur and Badyalbrahmna of R.S Pura and was interviewed. The results of the study revealed that most of the respondents (64%) get up early in the morning to perform the dual responsibility of domestic work and outside in the fields. About 56% of the respondents work for 5-7 hours and more in the farm activities and stated that agriculture is their primary occupation. An average of 89% of women takes part in almost every agriculture activities from seed cleaning to harvesting and post harvesting of produce. Regarding decision, only 14% provide input in almost every productive decision related to farms. About 90% of women don't have autonomy in any productive decisions, 96% of the respondents don't own land or any other assets. Majority (88%) of respondents do not purchase or sale of any other assets. Majority (84%) of the respondents felt that they find difficulty in carrying out farm operations. About (75%) women told that their main problem is related to health like headache, backache, fatigue and restlessness. 74% responded that their social life is disturbed due to heavy work both in farms and domestic work and they are not able to go often to their friends and relatives. About 64% of the women not enjoying agriculture work and find it very hectic and need some type of women friendly equipments.

## Keywords:

Agriculture is the major stay of our economy. Based on 2011 World Bank data, 17.5% of India's gross domestic product (GDP) is accounted for by agricultural production (World Bank data, 2011). Based on 2012 data, India is home to the fourth largest agricultural sector in the world. India has an estimated 180 million hectares of farmland with 140 million of which are planted and continuously cultivated. A majority of the country, an estimated 72% of the 1.1 billion people who live in rural

India, it is a way of life. Agriculture in India defines familial tradition, social relations and gender roles. Women in the agricultural sector, whether through traditional means or industrial, for subsistence or as an agricultural labourer, represent a momentous demographic group. In 2011, the agricultural sector workforce in the subcontinent was 75% women (Senugupta and Ranga 2011). In rural India, the percentage of women who depend on agriculture for their livelihood is as high as 84%. Women

make up about 33% of cultivators and about 47% percent of agricultural labourers. In 2009, 94% of the female agricultural labour forces in crop cultivation were in cereal production, while 1.4% worked in vegetable production, and 3.72% were engaged in fruits, nuts, beverages, and spice crops. Women's participation rate in the agricultural sectors is about 47% in tea plantations, 46.84% in cotton cultivation, 45.43% growing oil seeds and 39.13% in vegetable production. While these crops require labour-intensive work, the work is considered quite unskilled. In India, the typical work of the female agricultural labourer or cultivator is limited to less skilled jobs, such as sowing, transplanting, weeding and harvesting, that often fit well within the framework of domestic life and child-rearing. Women also heavily participate in ancillary agricultural activities. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization, Indian women represented a share of 21% and 24% of all fishers and fish farmers, respectively. Despite their dominance of the labour force women in India still face extreme disadvantage in terms of pay, land rights, and representation in local farmer's organizations. Furthermore, their lack of empowerment often results in negative externalities such as lower educational attainment for their children and poor familial health (Krishna 2006). In rural India, women's role in the household is greatly defined by social structure and familial ties. Arranged marriages specific to each caste system, determine their economic worth, and are expected early on in a woman's life. Depending on caste and economic class a woman's role can be determined as one of more in the public eye or predominantly of seclusion; a life in which women are expected to care for children and maintain the household. The typical rural Indian household is a patriarchal and part local one, in which a husband, or in his stead the oldest son will make the decisions for a family.

The economy of the Jammu and Kashmir state is largely agrarian with 70% of the population dependent on it and about 49% of the working population engaged in it. Agriculture is the dominant occupation in the entire state. The contribution of the agriculture sector is around 26% in the economy and it has grown at an average rate of about 1.8% between FY2003 and FY2008. Basmati rice, rapeseed, oilseed, pulses, fruits like- apples, walnuts, cherries, pears almond are produced in huge numbers in the

state. Block R.S. Pura in district Jammu is called "The Rice Bowl" due to its famous Basmati-370, rich in fragrance. Among cereals, wheat and maize is also produced. Fruit crops like mango, litchi, anola and other also produced. Women are involved in different operations of the crop-production, collection of cow dung and composting of manure, weeding, land harvesting, sowing, transplanting, winnowing and threshing etc. They also help the men in preparing the field, hoeing, picking, plucking maize cobs and millet ear heads, stripping sugar canes before crushing, carrying heavy load of fodder crops on their heads to the home, storing the food grains and looking after these to avoid any pilferage. Since, women play a key role in production, they should be well trained, take part in decisions and make plans for agriculture production. Keeping these in mind, the present study had been undertaken with the objectives to identify the major activities performed by women in agriculture and the extent of women's involvement in productive decisions to identify the various problems faced by the women in performing agriculture activities. The study would be good feedback to extension functionaries for motivating rural women to adopt women friendly equipment's so that their participation in earning family income can be increased.

## Methodology

The present study has been conducted in R. S. Pura block of Jammu district of Jammu and Kashmir State. The block was selected purposively as it is one of the most agriculturally active blocks of the state. Basmati of Jammu region, particularly of Ranbir Singh Pura (R. S. Pura) block is world famous for its high aroma. The primary data was collected directly from the respondents selected through convenient sampling in two villages of R.S. Pura block. Two villages namely; Raipur and Badyalbrahmna were selected purposively as there are sufficient numbers of women farmers present in these villages. Fifty respondents from each village were interviewed through convenient sampling, thus making a total sample of hundred respondents for the present study. The respondents were asked questions according to the pre-framed interview schedule according to the objectives of the study. Personal visit was made to gather the response and observation method was used to observe the farm activities of women. The collected data were arranged in tabular form for

assessing quantitatively the objectives set under the present study. Absolute and percentage forms were used for interpretation of the collected data.

## Results and Discussion

### *Profile of the respondents*

The profile of the respondents has been presented in Table 1. The majority (46%) of the respondents

falls within the middle age group followed by old age (28%) and young age (26%) group. 54 per cent of respondents acquired upto primary education while 28 per cent were high school passed, 18 per cent were illiterate, very few 12 per cent have passed higher secondary and only 8 per cent were graduate. This shows the literacy level of the respondents. The majority (68%) were belong to joint family followed by 32 per cent were from nuclear family.

**Table 1: Profile of the respondents (n=100)**

| Variables               | Categories         | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------------------------|--------------------|-----------|------------|
| Age (in yrs.)           | Young (<30)        | 26        | 26         |
|                         | Middle (31-40)     | 46        | 46         |
|                         | Old (>40)          | 28        | 28         |
| Education qualification | Illiterate         | 18        | 18         |
|                         | Up to primary      | 34        | 34         |
|                         | Primary to metric  | 28        | 28         |
|                         | Matric to Hr. Sec. | 12        | 12         |
|                         | Graduation         | 8         | 8          |
| Type of family          | Joint              | 68        | 68         |
|                         | Nuclear            | 32        | 32         |

### *Time spent in farm activities*

Most of women in the study area (64%) get up early in the morning i.e. between 5-6 am because they performed the dual responsibility of domestic work and outside in the fields. This is also supported by the findings of Reddy (2003) that rural women had a

very busy schedule and get up early in the morning. Even rural women started doing domestic work at an early age of 9 years. The majority (56%) of the respondents were engaged for 5-7 hrs and above in the farm activities. They believed that agriculture is their primary occupation and they have to spare their time for it.

**Table 2: Time spent by women in farm activities**

| Time of getting up from Bed (n=100)  |           |            |
|--------------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Time                                 | Frequency | Percentage |
| 4-5 AM                               | 28        | 28         |
| 5-6 AM                               | 64        | 64         |
| 6-7 AM                               | 8         | 8          |
| <b>Time spent in farm activities</b> |           |            |
| 1-3 hrs                              | 14        | 14         |
| 2-5 hrs                              | 30        | 30         |
| 5-7 or above                         | 56        | 56         |

### ***Major activities performed by women in agriculture***

The women respondents took part in almost every agricultural activity performed in the study area. 92 per cent of the respondents clean their seed before sowing; almost every woman (94%) indulged in the activity of post-harvest management and storage of produce. 82 per cent helped in livestock management activities namely milking (38%), fodder cutting (68%) and cleaning of animal shed (74%). But only 42 and 38 per cent of women respondents were helping in harvesting and sowing of crop respectively (Table 3).

**Table 3: Major activities performed by women in agriculture (n=100)**

| Type of activity        | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Seed cleaning           | 92        | 92         |
| Sowing                  | 42        | 42         |
| Harvesting              | 76        | 76         |
| Post harvest Storage    | 94        | 94         |
| Livestock management    | 82        | 82         |
| Milking                 | 38        | 38         |
| Fodder cutting          | 68        | 68         |
| Cleaning of Animal Shed | 74        | 74         |

### ***Extent of women's involvement in productive decisions***

The majority (52%) of the women did not participate in productive decisions whereas 24 per cent were sometime involved in decision making process and only 14 per cent provided input in almost every productive decision related to farms (Table 4). 90 per cent of women did not have autonomy in productive decisions, 96 per cent of the respondents did not own land or any other assets. 88 per cent of respondents never engaged in purchase or sale of any assets while only 12 per cent of respondents involved in purchase of small equipment for farms. Further, 46 per cent of the women had no access to credit. 78 per cent of the women respondents had no control over use of income; only 22 per cent used the family income which is limited to household purpose only. 86 per cent of respondents did not belong to any social

group and 76 per cent were also are not aware about the latest technologies. Raju *et al* (1991) also revealed in the similar study that rural women in our country shared abundant responsibilities and performed a wide spectrum of duties in resuming the family, maintaining the household, attending to farm labour, rearing domestic animals and extending a helping hand in rural artisanship and handicrafts. In spite of discharging all these duties her involvement in decision making process specially related to money matters is low

**Table 4: Extent of women's involvement in productive decisions (n=100)**

| Decisions                           | Extent of involvement | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------|------------|
| Input in productive decisions       | Yes                   | 14        | 14         |
|                                     | No                    | 52        | 52         |
|                                     | Sometimes             | 24        | 24         |
| Autonomy in productive decisions    | Yes                   | 10        | 10         |
|                                     | No                    | 90        | 90         |
|                                     | sometimes             | -         | -          |
| Own land/ machinery or other assets | Yes                   | 4         | 4          |
|                                     | No                    | 96        | 96         |
| Purchase/ sale of assets            | Yes                   | 12        | 12         |
|                                     | No                    | 88        | 88         |
| Access to credit                    | Govt./ private        | 26        | 26         |
|                                     |                       | 28        | 28         |
|                                     | Any other             | 46        | 46         |
| Full Control over use of income     | No access to credit   |           |            |
|                                     | Yes                   | -         | -          |
|                                     | No                    | 78        | 78         |
| Belong to any social groups         | sometimes             | 22        | 22         |
|                                     | Yes                   | 14        | 14         |
| Awareness about latest technology   | No                    | 86        | 86         |
|                                     | Yes                   | 24        | 24         |
|                                     | No                    | 76        | 76         |

### ***Views of farm women related to farm activities***

The majority (84%) of the respondents felt that they faced difficulty in carrying out farm operations (Table 5). About 75 per cent of women faced health problems like headache, backache, fatigue and

restlessness. 74 per cent responded that their social life is disturbed due to heavy work both in farms and homes and they were not able to go to their friends and relatives. 38 per cent of the respondents were unable to manage time between farm and domestic works. 42 per cent felt that the unhygienic conditions in the farms also add to their health problems. The majority (79%) of women did not attain any sort of

training in agriculture. Only 21 per cent got trainings arranged by department of agriculture and other agencies. About 64 per cent of the women did not enjoy agricultural works and found them very hectic. 63 per cent of women believed that agriculture is not profitable at all but, however 37 per cent of women felt otherwise (Table 5).

**Table 5: Problems and satisfaction in farm activities**

| Particulars  | Frequency | Percentage |
|--|-----------|------------|
| Problems faced by women                                |           |            |
| Health problems like headache, fatigue, restlessness   | 78        | 78         |
| Unhygienic conditions                                  | 42        | 42         |
| Unable to manage time between household work and farm. | 38        | 38         |
| Difficulty in carrying out farm operations.            | 84        | 84         |
| Disturbed social life                                  | 74        | 74         |
| Satisfaction from the work                             |           |            |
| Got training in agriculture                            | Yes       | 21%        |
|  | No        | 79%        |
| Enjoying agriculture work                              | Yes       | 36%        |
|  | No        | 64%        |
| Agriculture is profitable                              | Yes       | 37%        |
|  | No        | 63%        |
| <i>The data involves multiple responses</i>            |           |            |

### ***Economic Contribution by farm women***

Economic contribution by rural women in terms of work and time spent by them in farm activities has been presented in table 6. The study showed that majority of women contributed ₹ 84.50 to 118.30 per

day as per the government sector rate and ₹ 156.25 to 218.75 per day as per the private sector rate. This monetarily contribution of women has never been acknowledged in their houses.

**Table 6: Economic Contribution in home (n=100)**

| Time         | % women | Economic Contribution @ government rate (₹ 135/8hrs) | Economic Contribution @ private rate (₹ 250/8hrs) |
|--------------|---------|--|---|
| 1-3 hrs      | 14      | Rs 16.9 -50.6  | Rs 31.25-93.75                                    |
| 2-5 hrs      | 30      | Rs 33.8- 84.5  | Rs 62.50-156.25                                   |
| 5-7 or above | 56      | Rs 84.5-118.3  | Rs 156.25-218.75                                  |

### **Conclusion**

Farm women are actively involved in agriculture operations and play a key role in agricultural

production but their involvement in decision making in agriculture is very poor. Most of them are less educated, not had any training in agriculture; however they perform the maximum farm operation



thereby contributing a lot towards the upliftment of the economic and social status of their families. They are involved in different farm operations like sowing, winnowing, storage, harvesting of crops etc. are handled exclusively by women. They also face many health problems while performing the activities. Women's contribution in farm activities is still considered to be the invisible workforce, their significance role in farm as well as household activities are not usually recognized and counted in formal activities even though they are essential productive workers engaged in farm operations either as cultivators or as agricultural laborers. There is a need to impart training to farm women in order to strengthen the knowledge farm activities. The capacity building of farm women regarding latest technology know-how in agriculture, information acquisition and processing should be carried out. A sizeable number of well trained women personnel in training and extension programs of agricultural development agencies at all levels should be included at the grass-root level.

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