

A CRITICAL UNDERSTANDING OF WOMEN'S RIGHT ON AGRICULTURAL POLICIES IN INDIA

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INTRODUCTION

The World bank statistics of 2018 indicates the percentage of agricultural land in India which is 60.43%.ⁱ The calculation of workforce in the agricultural area amounts to 55%, out of which the share of women is 33% as agricultural labor force. Also, the percentage of women as a self-employed farmer is 48% in India.ⁱⁱ The growth of women has always been expanding in this sector. The Institute of Human Development (IHD) reports of 2014 reflects that the women engaged in the household level has increased to 70% due to male migration to urban areas for work.ⁱⁱⁱ The Economic Survey of 2017-18 has termed the situation of male migration as 'feminization of agriculture' due to the women's active participation rates.^{iv}

Even though the role of women has always acted as the backbone to uphold the agricultural sector but in reality, it can still be realized to have been overshadowed by the male predominance which is learnt through the landholding rights of agricultural lands in India. The rural women engaged in agricultural areas amount to 85% but only 13% women have their own lands. The disparity of landholding rights lights the patriarchy which still is a major game changer.

The situation calls out to protect and uplift the rights of women farmers through affirmative policies and actions by the Government. Thus, through this paper attempt will be to understand the Government policies supporting women farmers and critically analyze the impacts it has on them.

ANALYSIS ON WOMEN FARMERS AND THE FIVE-YEAR PLAN

The Constitution of India recognizes the ‘principle of equality’ as a blanket, covering the caste, creed and gender^v in it, and lays down various mandatory instruments through which affirmative actions were sought by the State in various forms such as reservations and special measures under Article 15(3) of the Indian Constitution.^{vi} The addition of the Directive Principles of State Policy in the Constitution has further aided in achieving equality through it.

The Planning Commission has realized to incorporate the issue of women farmers and uplift their roles through various five-year plans. In a snippet are the following:

The role of women farmers was recognized for the first time in the fourth five-year plan which was launched in the year 1969-74. It addressed that the women farmers should be linked with the “Farmers Training and Education Programme”. This Programme was initiated to meet various differential technological needs of women.

The fifth five-year plan which was introduced in the year 1974-79 brought “training and visit system of extension”. Also, a committee was set up on the Status of women in India to assess gender equality.

The sixth five-year plan was introduced in the year 1978-85. It focused on “employment of women”. Also, a census was conducted in the year 1981 through which some new dimensions were brought to light regarding the definition of “employment category”. Attempts were made to identify marginal workers wherein women workforce prioritising in the agricultural sector can be included.

Scientific improvements to aid the women farmers especially those engaged in the post harvesting season was initiated in the Seventh Plan in the year 1985-90.

The Eighth and the Ninth five-year plan were a move forward as Self Help Groups (SHG) were introduced to enhance the woman farmers in their technological, excess micro credit facilities and various entrepreneurship skills. In 2001, “National Policy for Empowerment of Women” was introduced through the Ninth five-year plan. The idea through it was to strengthen the women farmers with proper food security.

The tenth five-year plan was to reduce the gender gap which was prevalent.

The Eleventh five-year plan of 2007-2012 was thoughtfully brought to deal with the wage increment of the women farmers. There was a gender disparity based on wages where the women farmers or workers are paid considerably less to that of the male workers. Thus attempts were being initiated through this plan to bridge the difference. Also, various other concerns were also brought through like the implementation of the new gender sensitive technology.

The twelfth five-year plan of 2012-2017 tried to eradicate poverty.

Outcomes of the Five-Year Plan on Women Farmers

The Planning Commission has revamped its approach from its first to its subsequent five-year plans. In the beginning the status of women workers were just understood as mere 'beneficiaries' which improved from the fifth five-year plan. The change was evident as the umbrella was shifted from women's welfare to women development. The CSWI report which was published in the year 1974 brought to light various issues of socio economic indicators and the age old gender gaps. The report tried to develop a holistic and an inclusive framework to plan in order to bring to light the issues of women empowerment.^{vii}

In the subsequent plans the shift was to upgrade women workers as an active partner in the development rather than just backsliding them focussing on mere welfare for the women. Also, during that time a separate ministry of "Human Rights Development for Women and Children" was set up under the chairmanship of the then Prime Minister.^{viii}

The ninth and the tenth five year took a sharp turn to strengthen the policies to a more firm position. The introduction of the Self Help Groups (SHGs) focussed on the credit facilities for the generation of income through various programmes such as the "Swara Shakti Programme" (1998) and "Swayamsiddha" (2001). The development flowed to various areas such as education, rural-urban wage difference, focus on self-employment programmes which are in various acronyms known as SGRY, USEP, SJRSY etc. The targets were to make the women trained in the components of skill development.^{ix}

The period also made some important footprints to strengthen and safeguard women's rights. The "National Commission for Women Act" (1990) was passed by the Parliament. The Act was primarily enacted to review women laws and also deal with the denial and violation of women's rights. The 73rd and the 74th amendment made to the Constitution gave women reservation of one-third seats to participate in the local governance and in the various posts as being chairperson. Steps to secure the gender justice and equality was passed in 2001 through the "National Policy for the Empowerment of Women". The climax of the tenth five-year plan witnessed a separate "Ministry for Women and Child Development"(2006).^x

UNDERSTANDING VARIOUS LEGAL FRAMEWORKS INCORPORATED TO DEVELOP WOMEN FARMERS

There are various legal initiatives which have been incorporated to uplift the women farmers through introduction of various commissions and policies. They are as follows:

- National Commission on Farmers (NCF) 2005

The NCF was introduced under the chairmanship of Prof. Swaminathan. It was constituted in November 18,2004. There were five reports which were submitted between the period of Dec 2004 to Oct 2006. The goal was to increase the inclusive growth. The finding of these reports and the recommendations can be learnt to include 'access to resources' and 'social security entitlements'.^{xi} The NCF made suggestions on issues such as food security, programmes for dry land farming, increasing credit flow. The report also focussed on 'gender-based strategy' like:

1. Proposal was made to confer land ownership rights to women
2. Recommendations were made to improve the knowledge, credit, skill and technology of women workforce
3. Steps to empower both the gender in Panchayat to increase their role in the conservation and improvement of the ecological foundations for sustainable agriculture.
4. Role of village women should be encouraged to take responsibility and take part in various development schemes relating to drinking water, health, education and

nutrition.^{xii}

- National Policy for Farmers

The final report by the ‘National Commission on Farmers’ was submitted in the year 2006. The ‘National Policy for Farmers’ (2007) totally neglected the issues of upliftment of women farmers as it was even recommended by the ‘National Commission for Women’(NCW) when the policy framing was in progress. Thus, the NCW came out with a draft policy in 2008 which discusses few issues which were left out by the Swaminathan Commission. The draft policy of NCW is as under:

Draft National Policy of Women In Agriculture (April-2008)

The draft policy reads that the women’s role in farming has never been recognised fully. Thus, the directives by the NCW are as follows:

- There should be also be inclusion of women’s control over the resources which includes land rights, water, biodiversity, seed, labour and livelihood issues.
- Recognising single women in all rural household, provide them the benefit of equal wages for equal work and give them all benefits an agricultural worker have access to.
- Focus on problems which are faced by women in the agricultural area such as gathering forest produce, rearing livestock, fisheries etc
- Develop women sensitive agri practices for women-oriented schemes.
- To draft and check laws such as ‘Recognition of Forest Rights Act,2007’, ‘Food Safety Act’, ‘Biodiversity Act’ etc that are formulated/amended in a way that prioritises women’s interest as primary producers.^{xiii}

The policy had initiated few policy indicators which are ‘Natural Resource Assets’, ‘Production System’, ‘Agriculture Marketing and Trade’, ‘Agriculture organisation Science and technology’.^{xiv}

- Mahila Kisan Sashakti karan Pariyojana (MKSP), 2011

The MKSP is a sub part of the ‘National Rural Livelihood Mission’ (NRLM). The main idea to bring to life NRLM was to empower women in agriculture and help strengthening community institutions of the poor women farmers. Empowerment of women rolls down to provide women with more control over the production process and enhance the support system.^{xv}

The MKSP was announced with an intention to boost the women farmers in the financial process to enhance the productivity of women in the production process. A start up fund of around 100 crores was sanctioned by then Finance Minister Shri Pranab Mukherjee. MSKP focused on bringing food and nutrition security at household level by financially aiding women to create institution for women farmers.^{xvi}

- The Women Farmer’s Entitlement Bill 2011

This bill was introduced considering the distress of the “suicide widows” of various States. The women of the household would be left dispossessed from their lands, also humiliated being disowned from their marital families. Thus, they are left to force themselves into waged labor. To deal with it the ‘Women Farmers Entitlement Bill’ (2011) was tabled in Rajya Sabha. Even though the bill lapsed it provided precisely care for the concern of the women farmer needs, safeguard their legal entitlements and supplement the gender specific needs.^{xvii}

- The Draft National Policy on Women, 2016

The Policy provides financial inclusion for women. The Policy proposes that the women should have financial access such as credit sources, insurance, schemes relating to pensions which attempts to uplift the poor women and avail various benefits which the Government offers time to time. The Policy proposes “Krishi Sakhis” by promoting their utilization of their skills and capacities of being a successful women farmer.^{xviii}

The policy also involves to recommend amendments to some of the existing legal enactments by prioritizing women in Government land distribution, joint registration land with spouse, special package for wives of farmers who committed suicide due to crop failure and issues relating to debts due to farm loans etc.^{xix}

Government of India has taken various schemes through the Ministry of Agriculture and Family Welfare to provide various reformatory policies to the women farmers some are as follows:

- Sub Mission on Seed and Planting Material Program (SPSM)

The aim was to develop the entire gamut of seed production chain. In this chain, provisions were made to include women as 'beneficiaries.

- National Food Security Mission (NFSM)

The mission makes mandatory to train cropping pattern to women to spread awareness on technological developments.

- Sub Mission on Agricultural Mechanization (SMAM)

The mission makes women to be trained for the new drudgery reducing technologies. Which is promoted by ICAR.

CONCLUSION

The paper attempted to bring to light whether the rights of the women farmers were catered by the Government of India and whether any planning was being done to accommodate the women farmers who toil hard on the agricultural lands but gets overshadowed by the male dominance.

The discussion through this paper has brought to light that from the first five-year policy to this time, measures has been taken to give women their rights in regard to farming activities and loans been given to uplift their financial standards as well timely training has also been initiated to develop the technological skill of women farmers per se men.

The problem sometimes lies with the implementation of the policy as to how well the policies are implemented so it is the duty of the Government concerned to check the implementation so that there is a holistic growth in the development of women farmers.

ENDNOTES

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- ^v The Constitution of India, 1950, Article 14 and 16.
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