

Feminisation of Agriculture

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Globally, there is empirical evidence that women have a decisive role in ensuring food security and preserving local agro-biodiversity. During current pandemic situations women are playing a decisive role in ensuring food security for their households.

In news: Covid-19-led crisis leading the way to 'feminisation' of agriculture

Placing it in syllabus: Society

Dimensions:

- Rural migration trends
- Women farmers and problems – credit and land titles
- Implements for women centric farming – mahindra tractor
- Role played by cooperatives and SHG
- Government schemes
- Way forward

Content:

The term '**Feminization of agriculture**' refers to increasing participation of women in agricultural activities. It can be interpreted in the following ways:

- An **increase in the percentage of women who are economically active** in agricultural sector either as self-employed or as agriculture wage workers or unremunerated family workers
- An **increase in the percentage of women in the agricultural labour force** relative to men, either because more women are working or because fewer men are working in agriculture.
- The extent to which women define, control and enact the processes of agriculture

Causes of Feminization of Indian Agriculture:

- **Poverty:** Poverty is a major factor due to which women are forced to work as agricultural labourers to supplement the family's income. Women also work as unremunerated workers in family fields.
- **Agrarian Distress:** Agrarian distress is a predominant factor for disruption of farm labour or depeasantization i.e. migration of males from agriculture towards casual work. According to a 2013 report published in The Hindu, between 2001 and 2011, a total of 7.7 million farmers left agriculture. With rising shift of men from farm to non-farm activities, women have got absorbed in agricultural and allied activities.
- **Migration to Urban Areas:** According to the Economic Survey 2017-18, with growing rural to urban migration by men, there has been 'feminisation' of the agriculture sector; there has been an increase in participation of women as cultivators, labourers and entrepreneurs.

Lack of Mobility: The upward mobility of women for employment is restricted and is further constrained by gender wage differentials. As per Census, about 33.7% of rural males migrate for reasons of employment and better economic opportunities. However, in the case of females, it is as low as 3.6% for rural females

Rural Migration Trends:

- Rise in migration of men from rural to urban areas is one of the main drivers behind feminisation of agriculture.
- With the rural distress and agrarian crisis plaguing the economy for the past several years, men in rural India have sought employment outside agriculture.
- They are opting to either shift to a non-farm sector or migrate to urban areas.

- These jobs include construction works, driving, teaching etc., which are socially perceived to be “male work”.
- They are readily available, respectable and provide better remuneration when compared to agricultural labour.

Is the Indian agriculture sector undergoing feminisation?

According to the **Economic Survey (2017-18)**, the agriculture sector is undergoing feminisation.

- Women, unlike men, have not migrated/shifted jobs during the agrarian crisis
- This has led them to increase their role in agriculture, mostly as entrepreneurs, labourers (Dalit women dominate this role) and cultivators.
- Their functions have diversified to include pre-harvest and post-harvest processing, packaging and marketing activities.
- The sector employs 80% of all women workforce in India, with 33% being agriculture labourers and 48% being self-employed farmers.
- Around 60-80% of food is produced by rural women.

Women farmers and problems

Gender Disparity in Land Ownership:

- Increase in the women workforce in the agricultural sector has not translated into decision-making powers over vital issues like property and marriage.
- This is because they are included in the labour market under very adverse conditions.
- The 2017-18 NSSO data reveals that **more than 70% of rural women are engaged in agricultural work.**
- Yet, only **13.9% of women own land holdings**, according to the agricultural census of 2015-16.
- Moreover, there is concentration of operational holdings

(25.7 per cent) by women in the marginal and small holdings categories.

Inadequate Access to Credit:

- Lack of property ownership keeps landless women and female agricultural labourers on the fringes since insurance, credit, irrigation and other entitlements by government schemes are denied in the absence of land security.
- While land and agriculture are state subjects, laws governing them are influenced by religion, tradition and socio-cultural norms that go against women's right to property.

Wage Disparity:

- Women are provided with little to no wages, as their work is often being considered as an extension of household work.
- Due to this situation, their labour is mostly undervalued, underreported and invisible.
- Such low-paying jobs and social constraints keep women confined in insecure and oppressive labour relations.

Impact of farmer suicides:

- The issue of farmer suicides lacks female perspective.
- The suicides by male cultivators caused the majority of female family members, especially the widows, to take up the responsibility of managing the household.
- Due to this reason, experts are deeming feminisation of agriculture as the feminisation of agrarian distress.

Impact of Mechanisation:

- The mechanisation of agriculture has led to the confinement of women to traditional, low-paying jobs like winnowing, harvesting, sowing seeds and rearing livestock.

Implements for women centric farming:

- Traditionally women were using manually operated farm tools and equipment.
- Their work life is characterized by long hours of work, awkward postures and drudgery experiences due to workload and unsuitable farming equipments
- Of late, it has been realized that the needs of men and women with respect to technologies differ because of the differences in preference, priorities and working environment.
- Many farm equipment are not suitable for women as the ergonomic characteristics (aerobic capacity, strength, anthropometry, physiological workload, work preference, clothing patterns and safety issues) of farm women differ from that of men.
- This could be suitably addressed through introduction of women friendly ergonomically
- designed farm tools and equipment through well designed and targeted interventions.
- Mahindra Tractors funded the program “Empowering women in agriculture through promotion of efficient and ergonomic farm tools and equipment”.
- It intends to use a combination of carefully sequenced supports to reduce the women’s drudgery issues in paddy and vegetables-based farm operations, increase work efficiency and enhance their income.

Role played by cooperatives and SHG

- Rural cooperatives and farmers’ organizations play a crucial role in the eradication of hunger and poverty.
- One of the ways they achieve this is through their vocation to empower small agricultural producers, and in particular women farmers.
- Through the power of association, cooperatives and farmers’ organizations help small scale producers overcome barriers to gain better access to resources and

inputs.

- For women producers, who are at a greater disadvantage, cooperatives offer networks of mutual support and solidarity.
- This allows them to grow their social capital, improve their self-esteem and self-reliance, acquire a greater voice in decision-making, and collectively negotiate better contract terms, prices and access to a wide range of resources and services
- Cooperative education programs of women are organized through State Cooperative Societies to ensure women participation in various activities in the field of cooperatives.
- **Self Help Groups (SHGs)** movement: SHGs are small groups of women from marginalised communities that operate on the tenets of mobilising, organising, self-help, and mutual interest.
- According to an **April 2020 report by the Ministry of Rural Development**, 14, 522 SHGs comprising 65,936 members from 24 states of India made over 132 lakh masks in just 15 days.
- They have also contributed to the manufacture of sanitisers and protective gear for the health sector.

Some of the key functions that SHGs perform are:

- **Inculcate a habit of savings and investment:**
- All members must regularly save a small amount of money, which is put into a joint account with other members of the group.
- Loans to members are given out of these joint savings. The loans are always collateral-free and the terms of the loan are decided by the members of the SHG.
- The remaining funds stay in the account and earn interest.
- **Financial Inclusion of Women**
- In India, very few farmers have access to banking and

credit.

- The informal credit system of the SHGs gives them access to loans that can be availed with collateral and paid back on terms that are mutually agreed upon.
- **Create more employment opportunities in rural areas:**
- Easier access to loans creates opportunities for more micro-entrepreneurship in villages and underserved areas.
- This opens up newer streams of revenue thereby reducing the dependence on agriculture as the only source of income.
- **More awareness of government schemes**
- While there are several government schemes that are targeted at the weaker sections of society, many people are unaware of them and how to access them.
- With the creation of these groups, state livelihood missions are able to identify who needs help, removing the dependence on touts and agents.
- **Makes women independent and gives them a platform**
- SHGs make their members financially independent and allow them to have a greater voice in decisions at home.
- Many also have an active voice in grassroots politics and administration.
- SHGs have also been known to take an active role in campaigning against alcoholism, drug addiction, gambling, etc. in their locality.

Government Schemes:

The government efforts to mainstream women workforce in the agriculture sector include:

- **Gender Budgeting:** Allocating at **least 30% budget for women beneficiaries** in all on-going schemes, programmes and developmental activities
- **Implementation of women-centric activities** so that benefits reach them via various government programmes.

- Women SHGs are being connected to micro-credit through capacity building activities and increasing their representations in different decision-making processes
- Recognising the critical role women in agriculture by declaring **15th October as Women Farmer's Day** – the same date of International Rural Women's Day
- The government has acknowledged the need for pro-women policies with respect to land, water, credit, technology and training – a step to ensure schemes focusing on these aspects.
- **Mahila Shakti Kendra** is one such government initiative aimed at empowering rural women with opportunities for skill development, employment, digital literacy, health and nutrition. The Mahila Shakti Kendras will work towards community engagement through student volunteers and provide an interface for rural women to approach the government to avail their entitlements through training and capacity building.

Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana (MKSP)

- The “Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana” (MKSP), a sub-component of the **Deendayal AntyodayaYojana-NRLM (DAY-NRLM)**.
- MKSP recognizes the identity of “Mahila” as “Kisan” and strives to build the capacity of Women in the domain of agro-ecologically sustainable practices.
- MKSP will be implemented as a sub-component of NRLM through specially formulated projects.
- Under NRLM, provision has been made to invite project proposals for Skill Development and Placement.
- It seeks to strengthen smallholder agriculture through increased adoption of sustainable agriculture practices like **Community Managed Sustainable Agriculture (CMSA), Non-Pesticide Management (NPM), Zero Budget Natural Farming, Pashu-Sakhi model for doorstep animal care services** etc.

- MKSP recognizes the centrality of women in agriculture and therefore aims to provide direct and indirect support to enable them to achieve sustainable agriculture production.
- It mainly focuses on strengthening community institutions of poor women farmers and leveraging their strengths to promote sustainable agriculture.

Some State Government Initiatives

- **Kudumbashree Mission:** Kerala's poverty eradication programme, is deemed to be the world's largest women empowerment programme. It organises poor women at the grass-root level and enhances their socioeconomic standing through micro-credit and women empowerment initiatives like vocational training, education and healthcare.
- **Sex-disaggregated database:** Karnataka has created a sex-disaggregated database on farmers and decoupled land ownership. This enables women farmers to have easier access to government-offered entitlements and schemes, as well as assistance and training.

Joint Ownership: Maharashtra government has enabled joint ownership of house and agricultural land for husband and wife. Previously, only male household members were allowed to register as asset owners.

Way forward:

- The agriculture sector provides a much-needed opportunity for female economic empowerment. Yet, this potential remains unutilised due to various challenges.
- One of these issues is many women labourers work on family farms, where they cannot earn an independent income (or in many cases, any income at all).
- This issue can be addressed by promoting exports of high-value-added agricultural products, like seafood.

- The formalisation of the production process encourages the monetisation of the female workforce and improves their working conditions.
- Social norms shackling women workforce can be addressed via education, skill development, encouraging technological adoption and digital literacy.
- These can improve women workforce's efficiency, profits, awareness, purchasing power etc.
- They will also enable the government to support these women through the dissemination of innovative technologies, techniques etc.
- Training and skills imparted to women as has been done by some self-help groups and cooperative-based dairy activities (Saras in Rajasthan and Amul in Gujarat). These can be explored further through farmer producer organisations.
- Civil societies can play an important role in organising agrarian women into collectives, educating them of their rights, enabling access to the state and giving them sustainable livelihood training.

Mould your thought: Feminization of agriculture in India can be conceptualized as a consequence of agricultural transformation. Evaluate.

Approach to the answer:

- Introduction
- Define Feminisation of Agriculture
- Write about the causes of feminisation
- Mention the problems & solutions briefly
- Write about the way forward

Content: