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**EMPOWERMENT OF DALIT WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE
SECTOR WITH REFERENCE TO TELANGANA
STATE – A PERSPECTIVE STUDY**

Lavanya Chintham

Research Scholar,
Department of Public Administration
& HRM,
Kakatiya University,
Warangal District,
Telangana State,
India

ABSTRACT

The women constitute almost half of the workforce engaged in agriculture labour. The rural women participate in a broad range of agricultural activities such as production, processing preservation and utilization of food. They play a key role in the entire agricultural system starting from the selection of seeds, sowing, manuring, drying, storing and feeding the family from the harvested product. Even though women contribute 60 to 80 % of the labour in agriculture and animal husbandry, their involvement in selection of suitable crops and adoption of innovative and good management practices, is very low. Women play a critical and potentially transformative role in agricultural growth, but they face persistent obstacles and economic constraints limiting further inclusion in agriculture. The Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index measures the empowerment, agency, and inclusion of women in the agriculture Labour in an effort to identify ways to overcome those obstacles and constraints. The empowerment of the Dalith Women in Agriculture Labour has been a major concern. This information is vital for the researchers, government and voluntary agencies, NGOs, social reformers, social activist to take appropriate measures to improve the health outcome of Dalith population.

KEYWORDS: *Women Empowerment, Dalith, Agriculture, Labour, Farm Work.*

1. INTRODUCTION

India being a fast-growing country, still remains as one of the country with farmers below poverty line in the world. It is prone to weather-related shocks and experiences high levels of food insecurity, particularly among rural populations and smallholder farmers. Agriculture is the main

occupation in India giving employment to about 58 per cent of the people. The contribution of agriculture and allied sector in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the country has reached about 14 per cent in 2011 – 2012. Women play a critical role in agricultural growth in India, but they face persistent obstacles and economic constraints limiting further

inclusion in agriculture. Women's empowerment is a socio-political concept that involves cognitive, psychological, economic and political dimensions

Agricultural technology has helped to pull millions of people out of poverty, but a gender-sensitive approach is required to address some of the inequalities women face like time and labour constraints, including childcare, domestic violence and rape, lack of physical security during common tasks that require unsafe travel, like firewood and water gathering, land ownership laws and the tendency to let men control financial decisions. USAID reports that women are more likely than men to improve the health and nutrition of their families, and communities with women serving as strong leaders may fare better in events of climate disaster. Providing equal access to land, markets and technologies can ensure safety and increase production.

Although women make up at least 43 percent of the agricultural labour force worldwide, they typically lack access to education, extension services, land and credit. And this gender inequality comes at a huge cost, not just for women, but society as a whole. Discrimination against women can undermine economic development by limiting food security for families and preventing women and girls from achieving greater opportunities in education. In addition, many agricultural research and development programs ignore the needs and hopes of women farmers.

Discrimination against women

Critics of the Indian family system say that women in the Indian society have from time immemorial been victims of discrimination. They haven't enjoyed an equal platform with their male counterparts. They have not only been deprived at the society level but also in the family. It is not uncommon to come across individuals from all strata of society, not expressing happiness at the birth of a girl child. In fact there are sections of societies in India that even kill the girl child before she could come into this world. She may not even have any share in her father's property. Ideologies, institutional practices and existing norms in society have contributed much to their harassment. In spite of the legislative measures adopted in favor of women in our society after independence, the spread of education and women's gradual economic independence, countless women still continue to be discriminated and harassed. In the light of this dismal picture, the condition of the rural women is even more pathetic. Illiteracy, cultural and religious oppressions have made their condition even more pitiable. Comparatively, in some sections of the urban areas, women are considerably aware of their rights and privileges. They have learnt to be assertive and accept new roles for themselves.

Main Challenges For Dalit Women In Rural Situations

Caste-affected women in rural settings face a number of serious challenges, including lack of access to resources, land, basic services and justice. On the following pages, we describe some of the main issues with a particular focus on the situation of Dalit rural women in India and Nepal.

Women Empowerment

Women Empowerment While it is heartening to note that NRCWA, KVKS and ICAR Institutes have undertaken several researches and facilitated women in agriculture, there is simultaneous need to empower them in real sense of women empowerment as is being briefly discussed here. Empowerment in the literature refers to the act of bestowing power and authority on some one. Thus, women empowerment refers to the conferring of leverage to women who are otherwise deprived. This includes granting to women effectual decision-making power/authority and the power to influence others decisions along with economic, social and civil freedom. Empowerment, by its very definition, implies an increase in the ability to exercise power. In India, as in most developing countries, women are believed to be and treated as inferior to men. Moreover, as the lives of women and men are embedded in a matrix of unequal gender relations, a decrease in the gender inequality is necessary for an outcome of 'empowerment' for women. In other words, changes such as increased income, skills and self-confidence, may be better understood as enablers that promote women's empowerment. However, the women, in order to be significantly empowered to achieve their perceived goal, firstly need authority at home, which in most cases they do not have. The process should, therefore, be carried out concurrently at home and outside. Within the family they must have equal say as men and so should be the case at work.

Role of ICAR

ICAR takes the lead through the KVKs across the country, by launching the Idea of "Women empowerment in Agricultural Development". These women farmers form the village level Extension wing of KVK and work closely with ATMA. ICAR considers launching it on a pilot scale in a few states during the year and observe its impact. This process itself of selection of women farmers and awarding them will create greater awareness among the local officials and general public about the importance of empowering women.

2. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The Dalith Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Labour is a crucial issue facing women as a whole and Telangana State women in particular. Today as they themselves have become better aware of the need and as they struggle to reaffirm their indigenous identity, rights, values and dignity as human beings and have become determined to stand

against the threat to their existence perpetrated by ideologies of sexism, colonialism, materialism and individualism.

Thus, for the women of Telangana State, the struggle for gender equality is to be launched not only within the confines of the home and the community but also at the state and national arenas and platforms where negotiations for socio-economic cooperation and understandings are accomplished. Women have no contribution as they have no control over their lives and natural resources. Mahatma Gandhi, the father of the nation, clearly points out, "If an ancestral treasure lying buried in a corner of the house unknown to the members of the family were suddenly discovered what a celebration it would be for the occasion." Telangana State women's marvelous power is lying dormant. If the women of Telangana State wake up they will dazzle the Nation.

Objectives of the Study

The main aim of my study of the women empower in Agriculture Labour in Telangana State was to realize the following objectives:

1. To study the concept of empowerment and its various dimensions among different communities in Telangana.
2. To study the Status and process of Empowerment among the Agricultural Dalith Women in Telangana.
3. To bring to light the reality and causes of the existing social inequality between men and women in Telangana with a view to compare the structure of both the Dalith and non-Dalith societies of the state.

Hypothesis

Therefore, the various other hypotheses that I have also deeply delved into are as follows:

1. Customary and legal laws like male inheritance, the root causes of inequality among men and women in Dalith societies of Telangana.
2. The culture of Telangana society, the customs and patterns of behavior, are not different as far as Dalith and non-Dalith women are concerned. However the process of empowerment is comparatively different among them.
3. Status of Rural Dalith women is comparatively lower than that of the non-Dalith women in Telangana.
4. Women's position and degree of empowerment is defined by gender and gender-relations in Daliths societies in Telangana.
5. Level of literacy along with higher education is a powerful and multi-prolonged force in improving women's status in Telangana, especially among the Dalith community.

6. Conscientization with regards to gender equality is low in Agriculture Labour among women as seen in their educational aspirations for girls and boys in Telangana both Dalith and non-Dalith women.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

According to 1991 census the male cultivators has increased in the country by 11.67 percent from 76 in 1981 to 85.6 million in 1991. The female cultivators however have increased at much faster of 45.23 percent from 14.8 million in 1981 to 36.45 percent. About 60 percent of agriculture operations like sowing of seeds, transplantation of sapling, winnowing, storage of grain, etc., are handled exclusively by women, while on other jobs they share the work with men. Apart from participation in actual cultivation, women participate in various form of processing and marketing of agricultural produce.

Rural Indian women are extensively involved in agricultural activity. However the nature and extent of their involvement differs with the variations in agro production systems. The mode of female participation in agricultural production varies with the landowning status of farm household. Their roles range from manager to landless labourers. In overall farm production, women's average contribution is estimated at 55 percent to 66 percent of the total labour with percentages, much higher in certain regions.

Female make up about 30 percent of the farm work force and often play an active role in the daily activities. They are involved in heavy physical work on the farm and perform many of the same tasks as males. The farm activities such as weeding (97.84%), uprooting and transplanting the seedlings (96.40%) and harvesting of cereals (93.52%) also provided employment to the farm women labourers to maximum extent.

The average time devoted by women in agricultural operation is 8 to 9 hours per day in peak season and 4 to 5 hours in slack season. Except ploughing, cart driving, and arranging inputs and marketing farm produce, women help in carrying out all other farm operations like compost making, sowing, weeding, application of fertilizer and manure, application of irrigation, protection from birds, harvesting, threshing, manuring, winnowing, drying, stacking and carrying were well documented. Seventy percent of the Indian women are engaged in agriculture work either in their own field or as hired labourers. The farm women perform almost each and every agriculture activity right from land preparation to harvesting and storage of the agriculture activities without any productions from sun, soil or shower with the traditional tools

Criteria and method of selection of Women

Cafeteria for women in agriculture Mainstreaming gender is an important component of the Policy Framework for Agricultural extension (PFAE) developed by the Ministry of Agriculture (Government of India). The Centre developed a cafeteria for the Ministry of Agriculture for offering it to states to guide the development of new programmes for women in agriculture. New Programmes for women in agriculture should be developed based on the following key principles identified in the cafeteria. New programmes that are proposed should expand their definition of agriculture beyond crop production and should be based on site specific needs assessments. New projects that are proposed should build on groups, networks, organizational capacity and resources already in place and functioning from existing project initiatives and should take on and build on lessons from existing projects. Apart from extending agricultural technologies on production and post harvest to women farmers, new programmes should concentrate their efforts in providing crucial back-up services and support (backward and forward linkages) to help women groups to successfully adopt new techniques, crops and enterprises to increase their incomes and employment opportunities. New programmes should be planned with adequate resources for mobilizing women, forming groups, improving capacity and capability in technical, organizational and commercial (business/micro-enterprises) sectors and support systems (credit, raw material and markets).

SUGGESTIONS

Women are the backbone of agricultural workforce but worldwide her hard work has mostly been unpaid. She does the most tedious and back-breaking tasks in agriculture, animal husbandry and homes. Due to various problems that are being faced by the women farmers, they are not able to contribute more to the agriculture of our country. The major obstacles start at their homes in the form of gender inequality, not able to decide by themselves in farm activities and lack of awareness about the latest technologies of agriculture. When a woman empowers herself in agriculture, the nation starts developing faster and more widely. In extension activities the woman is now the centre point and activities. Women play a pivotal role in all economic and crop production activities in the hills. Yet due to gender insensitivity they do not receive the desired

recognition. Women farmers' needs and rights have been largely ignored and in many cases their condition is little better than that of farm labour. Therefore, the State felt the need to mainstream women farmers in developmental activities and utilize their potential with adequate recompense. This empowerment initiates a global level support for humanists thinking. Her enlightenment will change the face of rural India.

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