

Participation of Women Peasants in Agricultural Activities – a case study of Bellary District

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Introduction

Agriculture in India contributes about one third to the country's national income, is increasingly become a female activity. According to official estimates, one third of agricultural labour force and nearly half of self-employed farmers are women. Of the total female work force in rural areas 89.5 percent are employed in agriculture and allied industrial sectors. An FAO fact sheet on 'women in agriculture, environment and rural production' has noted that the nature and extent of their involvement in agriculture activities differ according to the variations in agro production system. The mode of female participation in agriculture production has been found to vary with the land-owning status of farm households.

Women play a pivotal role in agriculture from planting to harvesting and even post-harvest operations. They are engaged in seed selection, seedling production, weeding and preparation of green and farmyard manure. In live stock management and milk production women perform wide range of tasks, which include caring of animals, grazing, fodder collection, cleaning of animal sheds and dung composting, besides processing of milk and other livestock products. One third of the rural families, for all practical purposes, are headed by women. Rural India is thus witnessing a process, best described as 'feminization of agriculture brings with it 'feminization of poverty', with all its consequences on the nutritional status of the family of the rural women.

Self employed women's involvement in agriculture occupation income generating productive work, has been engaging paramount interest of social scientists. It has been realized that farm women workers make significant, albeit invisible, contribution to economy. The participation of women in economic activities, or their visibility in the economic sphere, can be considered a good measure of the status of women in a society.

Jeemol Unni (1992) women's participation in Indian Agriculture suggested that"

- 1) The functioning of the rural labor market and female participation within it are dynamic processes influenced by the broad micro processes and structural factors.
- 2) Women's participation in the work-force is dependent on the economic social status of the household to which they belong and the position of the household in the rural hierarchy.

- 3) In better endowed households women work to increase household incomes. Women wages are salaried workers add to incomes directly, while women family workers do so indirectly by reducing wage costs.
- 4) Poor household use female participation in the workforce as a strategy for survival to maintain their total household real incomes.
- 5) From the employers point of view female labour forms a large reserves of cheap docile labour.
- 6) The household strategies of surplus extraction and survival are to a large extent, conditioned by the structure and level of demand.”

This study indicates that:

- Female labour force in India is still concentrated in form based subsistence activities
- Their limited entry in non-agricultural sectors is mainly in low skill wage activities
- Most women workers enjoy extremely limited prospects of upward mobility and
- The terms of employment of most female workers are unfavorable

Therefore, the present study is an attempt to uncover all those questions pertaining to women's empowerment through agricultural activity viz. her involvement, decision making, etc.

Objectives of the study

1. To analyze socio-economic background of the female peasants
2. To asses and analyze the effects of the involvement of women in farm activity on the existing house hold activity and the family structure.
3. To find out the nature and extent of involvement of female peasants in decision making.

Tools and Techniques of the data collection

The data for the present study has been collected primarily from primary sources and secondary sources. Primary data is collected through the application of an interview schedule and observation method, in the study. Secondary data have been obtained through government records, published reports etc.

Sample procedure

The present study has been undertaken in Bellary District. For the purpose of the study a sample of four villages from Sandur, Hospet, Kudlgi, Bellary taluka have been drawn on the basis of size of the villages and distance.

Method of study

In the present study the eldest women in a household has been interviewed who is at present engaged in agriculture in any of the capacity as land owner, tenant or agriculture laborer. As such 100 women in all (25 women from each taluka) have been interviewed. An attempt has been made to observe the respondents doing cultivation and harvesting. These households have been identified through the latest village voter list.

Results and Discussion:

Table 1 revealed that the selected women peasants have low level of family income; generally they are illiterate landless laborers. Most farm women are married. Sex-wise there is a greater proportion of married female in the sample, and of most workers have nuclear family, the average size of the family ranges between five to eight members.

Table 1: Socio-Economic Profile of selected respondents

a) Age	No. of respondents (%)
Below 20	19
21-30	32
31-40	23
41-50	12
51-60	11
Above 60	02
b) Education	
Illiterate	43
Just literate	08
Primary	30
Middle	13
High School	06
Above Graduate	-
c) Marital status	
Married	96
Widow	01
Just separated	01
Divorced	02
d) Caste-wise distribution	
GM	51
OBC	26
SC	15
ST	08
e) Housing conditions	
self-owned houses	67
rented houses	33
f) House hold size	
More than 7 members	33
5-6 members	25
4 members	22
Less than 3	20

Power, is the ability of an individual to change the behavior of other members. Households/ family power, as a property of family system are the ability of individual members to change the behavior of other family members.

Division of Labour:

I) House work

It included the tasks related to sustenance of the household, such as fetching water, cooking, cleaning, washing and laundering.

II) Care of children: it included tasks relating to child rearing such as, feeding, bathing and teaching.

III) Marketing: It included tasks relating to purchasing of household provisions from the market

Table 2: Division of housework among different members of the household

Division of labour	No. of respondents (%)
Self	34
Female member	56
Husband	05
Other male member of household	05

Table 2 revealed that housework was shared with female members of the household. The main reason given by respondents for non-sharing of housework by men was custom or tradition. The division of labour within the household reflected a gender bias. Housework was shared with other female relatives. Women bare the entire responsibility of domestic work.

I) Care of children

Division of labour	No. of respondents
Self	28
Female member	38
Husband	01
Other male member of household	01
No help is needed	32

The working status of mothers did not necessarily lead to any change in their role as a custodian of children's well being. Table shows that child care was primarily a female task. It was shared with female relatives.

II) Marketing

Even in the area of marketing as is revealed in table, women workers were involved, though marketing was done mostly by elderly women. Young women were spared because they were not allowed to move out. Norms of purdah were strictly adhered to.

Division of labour	No. of respondents
Self	25
Female member	21
Husband	25
Other male member of household	29

Decision making within household

In order to understand contemporary pattern of power in household, it is essential to assess the influence of different members in important household decisions. Two broad areas of decision making relating to general domestic issues and relating to household asset management were selected. The respondent were asked as to who made the final decision. On the basis of information obtained, the following categories of decision-makers were made:

1. Respondents(R)
 - 2 Husbands (H)
 - 3 Other male member of the household (O)
 - 4 Respondents and Husband (RH)
 - 5 Respondent, Husband and other male member of the household (RHO)
 - 6 Respondent and other male of the household (RO)
 - 7 Husband and other male member of the household (OH)
- Decision relating to General Domestic Issues (%)

	R	H	O	RH	RHO	RO	OH
Children's education	13	25	20	14	11	12	07
Domestic expenditure	24	26	10	20	04	07	09
Festivals/gifts/donations	18	24	13	19	08	09	09
Medical care	10	20	19	22	08	12	09
Marriage	16	09	2012	12	26	10	08
Cloths	13	25	10	14	13	12	13

Children's education: above table have indicated that in the household 25% independent decision took with respondent's husband. Followed by both respondents and husband took joint decisions 14% followed by 13% respondent took independent decision. Husband and other male family member was the 12% decision-maker. Husband and other family was the key decision-maker and played an important role. *Domestic expenditure:* pattern of decision-making in this area, the respondents 24% took the final decision independently. Followed by 20% respondent and husband they took joint decisions. 9% of the household they took joint decision with husband and family member. 10% of the household, other family members played an important role. *Festivals, Gifts/ Donations:* Table has indicated the important role played by respondent 18%. Other male members of the household took active part in decision-making process. Respondent and husband their opinion was considered for final decision 19%. *Medical care:* such decisions include like deciding to consult doctor, purchase of medicines, and looking after the sick. The table revealed that both husband and respondent 22% and husband 19% were playing an important role in this area followed by 19% with other male member of the household. *Marriage:* Table revealed that 26% respondent's husband and other male member was decision-maker. Followed by 19% other male member of the household played a key role. 16% respondents were decision-maker. *Cloth:* Table revealed that 25% were husband the decision maker followed by 14% were respondent and husband, and 13% were respondents playing and important role in this area.

Household assets management

Household assets management	R	H	O	RH	RHO	RO	OH
House	13	32	14	10	13	07	11
Domestic animals	18	25	12	12	12	11	10
Vehicles	13	26	05	14	28	02	12
Electrical appliances	01	25	23	10	22	09	10

House: The sampled households husband were deciding alone 32% followed by 10% respondent and husband decided, 14% other male member of the household were decision-maker. *Domestic animals:* Table revealed that respondents 18% and husband 25% played an important role in decision-making. *Vehicles:* The important role played by husband 26% and other male members having 5% included 27%, respondents, husband and other male members of the household were decision-maker. *Electrical appliances:* Table revealed that the important role of husband in the family in this area of decision-making. They are decision-maker 24%. Other male member of the household 23% takes final decision.

Thus, it clearly points out that the husband is the main decision-maker in the agriculture labour household. In a sufficient number of households the family decision were taken jointly by the husband and the wife, probably as a consequence of the wife’s status as an earner in the family. Major decisions within the family are taken by husband through in certain cases such as the domestic expenditure, cloth and children’s education, he consults the wife and other areas like festivals, marriage and electronic appliances, he consults the other male members of the household.

Level of participation in household decision making

Level of participation	Respondents (%)
High	20
Medium	30
Low	50

Table revealed that women were not crucial decision-maker. Husband and other male member of the household were they key decision-maker. Women were not independently involved in the final decision.

Farm Women in Decision-Making regarding the Agriculture Activities

The respondents were asked as to who made final decisions. On the basis of information obtained, the following categories of decision-maker were made:

1. Respondent(R) 2. Female family member (F) 3. Husband(H)
4. Other male member of the household(O)

S. no	Agricultural activity	R (%)	F (%)	H (%)	O (%)
1	Selection the crop	19	15	34	32
2	Seed & fertilizer	21	17	35	27
3	Food processing	18	16	34	32
4	Sowing	20	10	39	31
5	Harvesting	17	15	37	31
6	Ploughing	03	14	59	24
7	Cleaning the field	34	16	30	20
8	Repair the field	15	21	33	31
9	Weeding	28	17	33	22
10	Carrying the implements	20	18	33	29
11	Selection of area	17	16	40	27
12	Storage of food	30	17	33	20
13	Leveling the field	17	15	35	33
14	Buy & Selling the crop	19	15	35	31
15	Food for animals	19	16	27	38
16	Buy & Selling the animals	21	16	33	30
17	Irrigation expenditure	15	18	39	28
18	watering	18	17	35	30

Table indicated that the husband who decided the major agricultural activities. It was the husband who took all the major decisions regarding the major activities in agricultural fields like selection of crop, seed and fertilizers, sowing, ploughing, weeding, buy and selling the crop etc.

An analysis of the data on decision-making gives a meaningful insight into the ideas mentioned above. On the whole, it was the husband who took all the main decision in the household, in a similar number of cases other male members of the household were the in order they took most of the decisions such as brother, father-in-law, brother-in-law and son etc. In third order decision were taken by respondents. So we can say that in almost all area of decision-making husband held an important place. This is perhaps due to the fact that they were associated with public domain. They had more access to resource and knowledge about work and general opportunities

The women are generally consulted more for selected agricultural decisions like amount of grains to be used, stored and sole, getting credit and its repayment, employment of family and casual labour for operations like sowing, weeding and harvesting, use of new variety seeds, selling and buying of new cattle, buying new equipments and selling and buying of land and property etc.

Women's role in farm management and other decision-making processes varied partly in relation to their status in the household and in the farm enterprise. The role in farm management and other decision-making processes is highest where they are heads of household or farm owners in a household. Women are the absolute decision-makers in families where the male members migrate to cities for better earning purpose.

Level of participation in decision-making

Level of participation	No. of respondents (%)
High	06
Medium	36
Low	58

The above table shown that in the area relating agricultural activities to decision, their participation was not significant. It shows that 58% respondents showed low level of participation. 36% showed medium level of participation. 6% showed high level of the participation. Women workers active involvement in decision making relating to agricultural activities indicates that since women worker contribute their earnings for

household substance and are responsible for household maintenance, they have more influence in the decisions of the household.

Conclusion:

The employment did not lead to a change in work patterns at home. The traditional role of women as a home workers remained unaltered. Division of labour within the household reflected the pattern of authority structure. Women perform a greater part of domestic work, and took care of children. They were also involved in purchasing household provisions from the market. They were also involved in purchasing household provisions from the market. They were intensely involved with the maintenance of the household. Study revealed a differential rate of participation of women in decision making in home and farm related level. Decision making pattern regarding farm affairs revealed it to be more or less male domain. Socio-economic status very much influence decision-making behavior of women in both farm and home activities. They worked out of necessity and their contribution to household subsistence was substantial. Men too worked but they owned no responsibility towards the household. Farm women showed low level of participation in household decision-making. They mostly took joint decisions with others. Their participation in decision making was influenced by various factors such as age, household income, household type and nature of husband's employment. Though farm women participated in household decision-making yet they had no access to household authority structure. Men had the authority. Women's subordination in household authority structure was maintained.

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