

Socioeconomic Significance of Rural Women's Agricultural Role in Haryana

*Neelam Devi, Dept. of Geography, Research Scholar, SunRise University, Alwar (Rajasthan)
Dr. Vivek Sharma, Professor (Dept. of Geography), SunRise University, Alwar (Rajasthan)*

ABSTRACT

This research paper delves into the crucial role that rural women play in agriculture within the context of Haryana, a northern Indian state. It examines the multifaceted ways in which rural women's contributions impact the social and economic standing of the state. By analyzing various factors such as traditional norms, agricultural practices, economic empowerment, and policy interventions, the paper underscores the pivotal role that women play in shaping Haryana's agricultural landscape and its overall development.

Keywords : Northern Indian State, Economic Empowerment

1. INTRODUCTION

Haryana, known for its agrarian economy, is characterized by a significant involvement of women in agriculture. Traditionally, women have been relegated to subservient roles, often confined to domestic chores. However, over time, their active participation in agricultural activities has gained recognition. This paper explores how this transformation has impacted the social fabric and economic trajectory of the state.

2. HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND CHANGING ROLES

Traditionally, Haryana's rural women were predominantly engaged in agricultural activities but were restricted to specific tasks within the agricultural domain. These tasks included sowing, weeding, harvesting, and other labor-intensive activities. The patriarchal social structure and prevailing gender norms relegated women to supportive roles and limited their participation in decision-making processes related to farming and agriculture.

Changing Roles: *Over the years, several factors have contributed to the transformation of women's roles in Haryana's agricultural sector:*

Education: Increasing access to education has empowered women with knowledge and skills that extend beyond traditional agricultural tasks. Education has provided them with the tools to understand new technologies, modern farming practices, and diversified crop management techniques.

Urbanization: Urbanization has exposed rural women to new ideas, lifestyles, and economic opportunities. As they gain exposure to different ways of life, women have started challenging traditional gender roles and seeking more active roles in agricultural decision-making.

Women's Empowerment: The awareness of women's rights and empowerment has been growing, both globally and within India. This has encouraged women to assert themselves in various spheres, including agriculture, and demand a more equal role in decision-making.

Government Initiatives: Various government schemes and initiatives have been launched to promote women's involvement in agriculture. These initiatives provide training, resources, and financial support to help women adopt modern farming techniques, access markets, and engage in entrepreneurship.

Factual Data:

- According to the Census of India 2011, the female literacy rate in Haryana increased from 56.91% in 2001 to 66.77% in 2011. This rise in literacy has played a crucial role in enhancing women's participation in decision-making processes.
- The Haryana State Rural Livelihoods Mission (HSRLM) has been working towards women's empowerment and promoting their active participation in agriculture. Through various programs, women have been trained in crop diversification, organic farming, and livestock management.
- Women-led Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in Haryana have been successful in fostering entrepreneurship among rural women. These groups engage in activities like food



processing, handicrafts, and dairy farming, enabling women to contribute economically to their households.

- The adoption of advanced agricultural technologies, such as drip irrigation and mechanized farming, has been facilitated by women's increasing involvement in decision-making. Women are now taking part in workshops and training sessions to understand and implement these technologies effectively.
- The Haryana government's efforts to promote women's participation in agriculture are reflected in initiatives like the "Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana," which aims to empower women farmers through training, capacity-building, and creating awareness about various agricultural schemes.

3. SOCIOECONOMIC IMPACT

3.1 Women's Rights in Haryana

Table 1 : Women work Participation and Rank of Haryana in census 2001 and 2011

Census	Work Participation Rate	Rank
2001	27.2	18
2011	17.8	27

Census of Population, 2011

Fig. 1 : Women work participation and rank of Haryana in census 2001 and 2011
 Sex Ratio



Table 2 : Sex Ratio of Haryana (1921-2011)

Year	Sex Ratio
1921	844
1931	844
1941	869
1951	879
1961	868
1971	867
1981	870
1991	865
2001	861
2011	879

Source: Various Census Reports



Educational Status

Table 3 : Literacy Rate in Haryana (1971-2011)

Year	Total literacy rate (in %)	Female Literacy rate (in %)	Male literacy rate (in %)	Gender gap in Literacy rate (in %)
1971	26.9	14.9	37.3	22.4
1981	36.1	22.5	48.2	25.9
1991	55.85	40.47	69.10	28.63
2001	68.59	56.31	79.25	22.94
2011	76.64	66.8	85.4	18.61

Source: Various Census Report, Haryana

Health Status

Table 4 : Birth Rate, Death Rate and Infant Mortality Rate as per SRS (Per thousand)

Year	Birth Rate	Death Rate	Infant Mortality Rate
2000	26.9	7.5	67.0
2005	24.3	6.7	60.0
2010	22.3	6.6	48.0
2012	21.6	6.4	42.0
2013	21.3	6.3	41.0
2014	21.2	6.1	36.0
2015	20.9	6.1	36.0
2016	20.7	5.9	33.0
2017	20.5	5.8	30.0
2018	20.3	5.9	30.0
2019	20.1	5.9	27.0

Source: Haryana Statistical Abstract

Working Status

Table 5 : Category wise classification of population in Haryana (in percentage)

Category	Total population	Male	Female
Rural population	65.2	53.1	46.8
Urban population	34.8	53.6	46.3
Working population	35.1	76.2	23.7
Rural working population	67.3	74.1	23.6
Urban working population	32.6	82.8	17.1

Source: Directorate of Census Operations, Haryana

Parental Figure

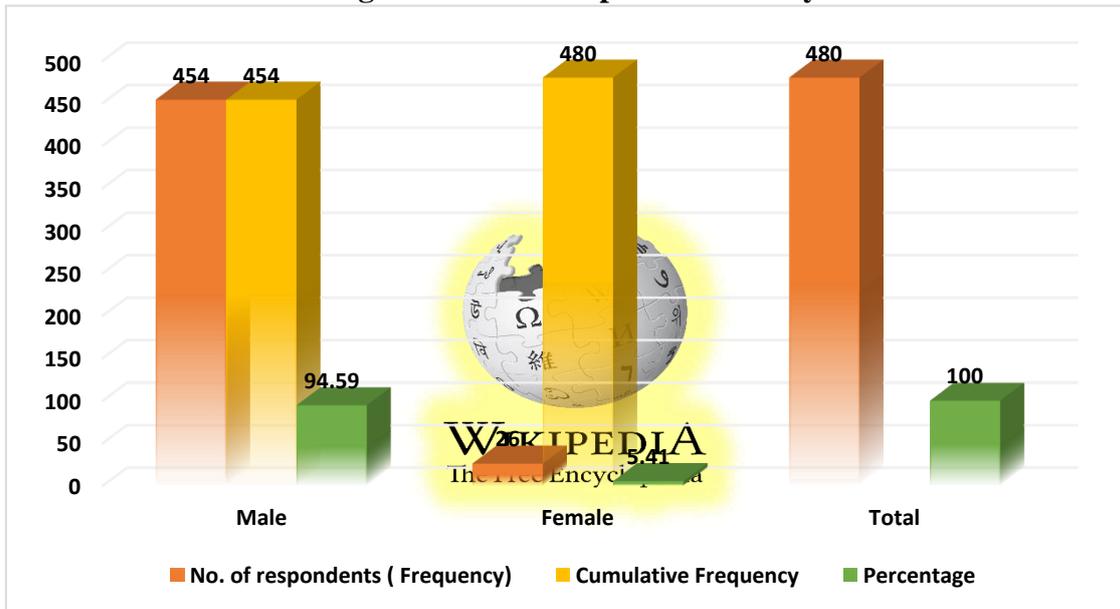
Table 6 : Head of Respondents family

Head of the Family	No. of respondents (Frequency)	Cumulative Frequency	Percentage
Male	454	454	94.59
Female	26	480	5.41
Total	480		100

Source: Field Survey

Belongingness (Category)

Fig. 2 : Head of Respondents family



Category	No. of Respondents (Frequency)	Cumulative Frequency	Percentage
General	414	414	86.26
Scheduled Caste	17	431	3.54
Backward Class	49	480	10.20
Other	0	480	0
Total	480		100

Source: Field Survey

Table 7 : Category of the Respondents

Empowerment and Gender Equality:

Rural women's increased participation in agriculture has indeed brought about multifaceted changes, not only in terms of economic outcomes but also in terms of empowerment, gender equality, and social dynamics. Let's delve deeper into how this transformation has unfolded:

Economic Empowerment:

- Women's involvement in various agricultural activities has led to increased household income. This economic contribution enhances their economic independence and financial well-being.
- Income generated from women's agricultural activities often goes towards meeting essential household needs, including food, education, healthcare, and other necessities. This economic contribution reinforces their value within the family and community.

Skill Development and Capacity Building:

- As women engage in a wider range of agricultural tasks, they acquire new skills and knowledge. These skills not only improve their productivity but also boost their self-confidence and sense of competence.
- Capacity-building initiatives, often provided through government programs and NGOs, empower women with the ability to make informed decisions about crop management, use of technology, and market engagement.

Social Recognition and Voice:

- Women's active participation in agriculture challenges traditional gender norms and perceptions about women's roles. This challenges the perception that their role is limited to domestic activities.



- As women contribute to the household income and demonstrate their capabilities in agriculture, they gain increased respect and recognition within their families and communities.
- Economic contributions often translate into a stronger voice in household decision-making, including matters related to family expenditures, children's education, and community issues.

Empowerment within Families:

- Increased economic contributions by women can lead to shifts in power dynamics within households. Women gain a more equal standing when it comes to decision-making on matters that were traditionally dominated by men.
- Women's involvement in agriculture can lead to improved negotiation skills and assertiveness, enabling them to express their opinions and preferences more effectively within the family context.

Community Engagement and Leadership:

- Women's participation in agriculture can extend beyond the boundaries of their households. Engaging in agricultural cooperatives, self-help groups, and community-level initiatives allows them to network with other women, share experiences, and collectively address common challenges.
- Through community engagement, women often develop leadership skills and become advocates for women's rights and issues within their communities.

3.2 Agricultural Diversity and Sustainability:

1. Subsistence Farming and Home Gardening:

Subsistence farming refers to the practice of growing crops and raising livestock primarily to meet the needs of the farmer's household. Home gardening involves cultivating a variety of crops and plants near or within the home for personal consumption. Women play a significant role in these activities, contributing to food security at the household level. The diversity of crops grown in subsistence farming and home gardens helps to ensure a balanced diet and reduce dependence on a single staple crop.

2. Diversifying Agricultural Production:

Women tend to grow a wide range of crops, including fruits, vegetables, herbs, and legumes, alongside staple crops like grains. This diversification is essential for several reasons:

- **Nutritional Benefits:** Diverse crops provide a broader range of nutrients, reducing the risk of malnutrition and diet-related health issues.
- **Risk Mitigation:** If one crop fails due to weather conditions, pests, or diseases, the diversity of crops grown can act as a buffer, ensuring food availability.
- **Environmental Resilience:** Growing various crops enhances the resilience of agricultural ecosystems by reducing the vulnerability of the entire system to specific pests or diseases.

3. Food Security:

- Food security is the availability, accessibility, and utilization of sufficient, safe, and nutritious food to meet dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. Women's engagement in subsistence farming and home gardening directly contributes to food security by:
 - **Increasing Food Availability:** Women's involvement in agricultural activities increases the overall quantity of food produced within households.
 - **Diverse Diet:** The variety of crops grown by women ensures a diversified diet, which is crucial for meeting nutritional requirements.

4. Traditional Seed Preservation:

Women have traditionally played a role in preserving and selecting seeds for future planting. This practice is vital for maintaining agricultural biodiversity. As commercial agriculture



often focuses on a limited number of high-yielding crop varieties, preserving traditional seeds helps prevent the loss of valuable local plant varieties that are adapted to specific environmental conditions.

5. Sustainable Farming Practices:

Women often employ sustainable farming practices due to their close connection to the land and their reliance on it for household needs. These practices include:

- **Agroecological Farming:** Women often use agroecological principles that promote natural processes and minimize the use of synthetic inputs. This includes techniques like crop rotation, intercropping, and natural pest control.
- **Water Management:** In many settings, women manage water resources efficiently, ensuring that water is used judiciously and not wasted.
- **Soil Conservation:** Sustainable farming practices promoted by women often focus on maintaining soil health through techniques like mulching, composting, and terracing.
- **Local Knowledge:** Women's traditional knowledge about local ecosystems and agricultural practices contributes to sustainable resource management.

6. Biodiversity Conservation: Women's involvement in seed preservation, traditional farming, and agroecological practices contributes to the conservation of biodiversity in agriculture. By maintaining a diverse range of crops and using sustainable techniques, they help preserve local plant and animal species, which in turn maintains ecosystem balance and resilience.

3.3 Economic Contribution:

Laborers: Rural women in Haryana actively participate in various agricultural activities as laborers. According to the Census of India 2011, around 75% of rural women in Haryana are engaged in the agriculture sector, performing tasks such as sowing, transplanting, weeding, and harvesting. This substantial labor force significantly contributes to the cultivation and processing of crops.

Entrepreneurs: Women in Haryana are also involved in agricultural entrepreneurship. For instance, many women are engaged in dairy farming, which is a significant economic activity in the state. According to the Haryana State Cooperative Milk Producers Federation, over 4,000 women's dairy cooperative societies were active in the state, contributing to milk production and rural income. Additionally, the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) supports rural women in establishing agribusinesses, including food processing units and handicraft enterprises.

Managers: Rural women in Haryana play a crucial role in managing various aspects of agriculture. According to a study conducted by the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), women contribute to decision-making processes related to crop selection, resource allocation, and adoption of new agricultural practices. Their involvement in managing farms ensures better resource utilization and improved agricultural productivity.

Household Income: The economic contribution of rural women directly impacts household income. Women's participation in agriculture and agribusinesses adds to the family income. The National Sample Survey (NSS) data reveals that in Haryana, around 38% of rural households derive their income from agricultural activities. Women's contribution to these activities enhances the overall income of these households.

Stimulating Rural Economies: The active involvement of rural women stimulates local economies. Their engagement in agricultural activities and agribusinesses generates employment opportunities within rural communities. According to the Socio-Economic and Caste Census (SECC) 2011 data, nearly 25% of rural women in Haryana are cultivators or agricultural laborers. This labor force supports rural livelihoods and contributes to rural economic growth.

Government Initiatives: The government of Haryana has recognized the significance of women's contribution to agriculture and has launched various initiatives to support them. The "Mukhya Mantri Doodh Uphar Yojana" focuses on promoting dairy entrepreneurship among

women. Additionally, schemes like the NRLM provide financial assistance and training to women for establishing and managing agribusinesses.

4. CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

4.1 Social Norms and Gender Bias:

Challenges: In many rural societies, deeply ingrained gender norms and traditional expectations continue to hinder the progress of rural women. These norms often dictate that women's roles are confined to household and caregiving activities, relegating them to the background in decision-making processes and limiting their access to resources. This situation perpetuates gender inequality, undermines women's agency, and prevents them from realizing their full potential in agriculture and beyond.

Opportunities: Addressing social norms and gender bias requires a multi-faceted approach. Efforts should be made to challenge and change these norms through community awareness campaigns, education, and advocacy. Highlighting the successes of women who have broken free from traditional roles can serve as powerful examples, inspiring other women to pursue their aspirations. By empowering women economically and socially, societies can gradually shift perceptions and beliefs, enabling rural women to play more active roles in agriculture and decision-making processes.

4.2 Access to Resources and Education:

Challenges: Limited access to crucial resources like land, credit, and modern agricultural training poses significant challenges for rural women. Land ownership, in particular, is often skewed towards male family members, leaving women with minimal control over productive assets. Lack of access to credit and financial services further inhibits women's ability to invest in their farms and businesses. Additionally, inadequate education opportunities for girls limit their ability to acquire skills that could enhance their agricultural productivity and overall well-being.

Opportunities: Improving women's access to resources involves policy changes and awareness campaigns. Land tenure reforms that recognize and protect women's land rights can make a significant difference. Providing financial literacy and microfinance services tailored to women's needs can empower them to invest in their agricultural enterprises. To address the education gap, campaigns promoting girls' education and reducing school-related gender disparities are essential. Scholarships and incentives for families to send girls to school can also play a role in breaking the cycle of poverty and exclusion.

4.3 Policy Interventions:

Challenges: Despite some policy efforts, there are challenges in effectively implementing and scaling up initiatives aimed at empowering rural women. Limited funding, lack of coordination among government agencies, and inadequate infrastructure can hinder the success of these programs. Additionally, deeply entrenched cultural norms and resistance to change might lead to slow adoption of new policies.

Opportunities: Policy interventions play a crucial role in empowering rural women. Initiatives like the Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana (MKSP) in India are steps in the right direction. These policies provide a comprehensive framework that includes training, financial support, and market linkages, enabling women to transition from subsistence farming to agri-entrepreneurship. To enhance effectiveness, policymakers should focus on providing adequate funding, improving program coordination, and ensuring that the voices of rural women are heard in the policy-making process. Regular monitoring and evaluation can help identify areas for improvement and ensure that these initiatives have a lasting impact.

In conclusion, addressing challenges related to social norms, resource access, and policy implementation is crucial for unlocking the potential of rural women in agriculture. By promoting gender equality, providing equitable access to resources and education, and implementing well-designed policies, societies can empower rural women to contribute significantly to agricultural development, poverty reduction, and overall community well-being.



5. CASE STUDIES

District: Ambala

Case Study: Women-Led Horticulture Initiative

In Ambala district, a group of rural women formed a cooperative to venture into horticulture. Led by Priya, they received training on cultivating high-value crops such as exotic vegetables and fruits. Despite limited land, the women optimized space using vertical gardening techniques. They faced challenges like accessing markets and water scarcity, but with local government support, their produce gained popularity in nearby urban centers, enhancing their income and status.

2. District: Kurukshetra

Case Study: Solar-Powered Watering for Crop Diversification

Women farmers in Kurukshetra, led by Radhika, embraced sustainable agriculture. They adopted solar-powered irrigation systems to diversify crops beyond traditional wheat and rice. With access to a consistent water source, they successfully cultivated vegetables and herbs. This not only enriched their diets but also increased their earnings through selling surplus produce, demonstrating the positive impact of eco-friendly technologies.

3. District: Bhiwani

Case Study: Microcredit for Agri-Entrepreneurship

In Bhiwani, a group of women under the leadership of Suman joined hands to start a microcredit initiative. With financial assistance, they established small agribusinesses like poultry farming, beekeeping, and dairy production. Overcoming initial hurdles of technical knowledge and market access, these women not only improved their economic conditions but also inspired others in the community to explore entrepreneurial avenues.

4. District: Panipat

Case Study: Women-Driven Food Processing Unit

Women in Panipat, guided by Anjali, set up a food processing unit to prevent post-harvest losses. They learned to process surplus fruits and vegetables into jams, pickles, and dried products. Collaborating with local markets, they found a niche for their value-added products. This initiative not only reduced wastage but also offered an additional source of income, showcasing the importance of skill diversification.

5. District: Sonipat

Case Study: Knowledge Exchange through Mobile Technology

In Sonipat district, women farmers, led by Kavita, adopted mobile technology to access agricultural information. They used apps and messaging platforms to learn about weather forecasts, pest management, and market prices. This empowered them to make informed decisions and apply best practices in farming. Through this digital intervention, the women enhanced their productivity and became more resilient to challenges.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

- Research could delve into the lasting effects of women's agricultural participation on the overall household income. This might involve examining changes in income patterns over several years and identifying any trends that emerge. You could consider factors like changes in crop yields, market access, and income distribution within the household. This research could shed light on the economic sustainability of women's involvement in agriculture and provide insights into its contribution to poverty alleviation and economic development.
- Investigating how women's participation in agriculture influences broader community development is crucial. This could involve assessing changes in local infrastructure, access to services, and community well-being. For example, does increased women's participation lead to investments in local education, healthcare, and infrastructure? Does it promote social cohesion and community engagement? Understanding these dynamics could highlight the role of women in shaping not only their households but also their communities.



- Exploring the shifts in gender dynamics within households and communities due to women's increased involvement in agriculture is another significant avenue for research. This might involve studying changes in decision-making power, division of labor, and gender roles. Additionally, understanding whether these changes lead to increased agency and voice for women within their families and communities is essential for promoting gender equality and empowerment.
- Evaluating existing policies aimed at promoting women's empowerment in agriculture can provide valuable insights into their impact and potential areas for improvement. Furthermore, identifying innovative approaches to enhance women's participation, such as providing access to technology, training, credit, and market linkages, could be explored. By assessing the effectiveness of different interventions, policymakers can make more informed decisions on resource allocation and strategy development.
- Investigating the barriers that hinder women's active participation in agriculture, as well as the factors that enable their engagement, is essential for designing effective interventions. This might involve understanding cultural norms, access to resources, land ownership, and childcare responsibilities. By identifying and addressing these barriers and capitalizing on enablers, policymakers can create a more inclusive and equitable agricultural sector.
- While quantitative data is crucial, qualitative research methods can provide deeper insights into the experiences and perspectives of women in agriculture. Conducting interviews, focus groups, and case studies can help capture nuances that quantitative data might miss. This qualitative data can enrich the overall understanding of the impacts of women's participation on a personal, social, and cultural level.
- Comparing the situation in Haryana with other regions or countries can provide a broader context for understanding the unique challenges and opportunities women face in agriculture. This comparative analysis could reveal lessons learned from elsewhere that could be applied to Haryana's context.

7. CONCLUSION

Rural women's agricultural roles in Haryana have evolved significantly, transforming not only their own lives but also the social and economic landscape of the state. To leverage their potential fully, it is essential to address gender biases, enhance access to resources and education, and continue implementing inclusive policies that recognize and support their contributions. From the data collected, we can conclude that the vast majority of respondents came from families with marginal or small landholdings and performed family labor in the family field. Despite the fact that most of the women were read and some had even earned a master's degree, the majority of the respondents were still working in agriculture, revealing a dearth of employment possibilities for women generally and rural women in particular. Most respondents supplemented agricultural employment with other endeavors such as cloth stitching, cosmetic shop ownership, and participation in self-help groups (SHGs).

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