

Women's Contribution to Agriculture, their Land Ownership Issues and Challenges in Rural Haryana

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ABSTRACT

This article seeks to present the major issues faced by rural women in Haryana. In any society gender and land are the key focal areas of contention. Women are the invisible entity in the agricultural economy of India. In Haryana, women work as free family labour in their family farms besides other household works like fetching water from far places. The Inheritance laws are too complex and there are differences based on religion, state, and type of property. It is emphasized that providing land ownership rights to rural women is one of the key reforms towards achieving the socio-economic empowerment of rural women in India.

Keywords: Farmer, land ownership, agricultural works, financial security, gender

1. Introduction

ownership, undermining of women labour

"When she is a girl she cultivates her father's land, when she gets married, she cultivates her husband's land, but where is her piece of land?"

In India, women contribute in every field like education, industry, agriculture and are the backbone of society. However, even after 74 years of India's independence rural women still struggle with issues like low wages in comparison to the male labourer, no or negligible land

recognition. According to late Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, the status and social position of women indicates the country's progress more than anything else. Women constitute 38% of the agricultural labour force in developing nations it is also estimated that 45.3% of the agricultural labour force consists of women only. Women in rural areas are required to handle multiple activities like working on farms, perform householdworks, and assistance in looking after the livestock and poultry.

Haryana state is the leading agrarian state of India, especially in the cultivation of

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wheat and rice crops. The state's economy has undergone a significant transformation since its creation in 1966. Unfortunately, contribution by the women has always been undermined and social issues like low female literacy ratio, female foeticide, and skewed sex ratio have always remained a matter of concern. In Haryana, except for plowing and deep digging, women work equally on the farms as men, they look after cattle and goats and collect fodder, drive bullock carts, and harvest crops. The women actively participate not only in the crop cultivation activities like post-harvest agricultural processing, fish farming, dairying but also in many non-agriculture activities too. Thus, in Haryana, women have emerged as the wealth creator and as an asset to society.

2. Gender and Work

In developing countries like India, agriculture is the major source of the rural economy. Haryana has emerged as the fourth largest wheat-producing state in the country, wherein women's contribution is significant. However, women's contribution to the rural economy remained invisible and their role has always been under-represented in India. The majority of rural women in India are illiterate, unskilled, and bound by old traditions.

According to the national census report 2011, the word operational holder means anyone who used agricultural land for crop production, irrespective of its ownership. Also, anyone who is operating a land is known as a cultivator. Thus, it is unjust to consider women's contribution in agriculture as mere help or as subordinate work. Yet the state government recognizes the identity of a farmer based on land ownership. This leads to exclusion of women from the government programs for farmers and access to credit. In India,

73.2% of rural women workers are engaged in agriculture but they own only 12.8% of land-holdings. The MS Swaminathan report brought out by the National Commission for Farmers offers a broader definition of 'farmer' as a person actively engaged in the economic or livelihood activity of growing crops and producing other primary agricultural commodities (National Commission on Farmer, 2004).

Usually, the work performed by women does not receive the recognition which men normally receive in return. Even in the household women's earnings are considered to be a supplement to men's earnings.

In Haryana, one can see the contribution of female labour irrespective of caste and religion. The dominant cultivating caste is Jaats, Gujjar, Bishnoi, and Ahir. These dominant castes do not feel that women working in the agriculture field will lower their family prestige and status. It is difficult to find case-wise data depicting the actual percentage of women working in the field.

Table 1. Share of Farm Women in Agriculture Activities in India

Activity	Share (%)
Land preparation	32
Seed cleaning and sowing	80
Inter-cultivation	86
Harvesting, reaping, winnowing, drying, cleaning, and storing	84

Source: Report of National Commission for Women, New Delhi (2005)

Table 1 shows that 86% of farm women are involved in inter-culture activities followed by harvesting, reaping, winnowing, drying, cleaning and storage. These activities require lots of physical strength. There is a division of agricultural work in terms of gender. Men are supposed to perform field works using farm machinery like power thresher, electricity operated fodder chauffeur, etc. While works like sowing, weeding requiring comparatively less effort and are performed manually is considered as soft skill work and as the domain of the women. Women are normally considered inferior to men in terms of machine operation and therefore are deprived of operating farm machines. However, as evidenced from Table 1, that the works that require more physical energy are performed by women.

Table 2. Title of the table

Districts	Female participation (%)
Kurukshetra	38.1
Sirsa	37.1
Karnal	36.6

Source - Census 2011

Table 3. Title of the table

Districts	Female participation (%)
Panchkula	6.1
Faridabad (Gurugram)	7.1
Rewari	12.3

(Source: Census 2011)

Tables 2 and 3 show those districts having the highest and the lowest participation of females as agricultural labourer. In Table 2, the districts Kurukshetra, Karnal, and Sirsa lie in the northern part and are fertile and suitable for agriculture production. In Table 3, the Faridabad (Gurugram) and Rewari which are located in the southern part of the state are drought-prone areas and the groundwater is saline. During the rainy season, the groundwater level comes up, bringing more salt to the field surface degrading the soil quality, and eventually affecting crop production. The cultivable land is also shrinking due to rapid urbanization.

3. Extra Burden on Rural Women

During water scarcity months the women are most affected. In India, usually, the sole responsibility to fetching water lies on women. More than half of Indian households do not have a drinking water supply to their homes. About 63% of rural folks comprising nearly a fifth of rural households have to walk more than a kilometer to get drinking water (2011 Census). In the district of Mewat, around 40 villages are facing drought-like conditions and women have to walk about 5km to fetch water in many villages.

Fetching drinking water is not only a time and manual labour consuming job but also a drudgery exacerbating their household work like cooking, washing, cleaning, etc. Besides walking long distances on daily basis women also have to wait in long queues in the scorching heat. It is the women who are responsible for fulfilling domestic water needs, but when it comes to making decisions in water management, they are invisible. In densely populated areas, improved water sources might be nearby but waiting in line can take an hour

or more (Ray, 2007). Women's workload in agricultural families often exceeds that of men, and collecting fetching water and fuel are the most time-consuming activities. Fetching and storing water for household uses is considered women's work. In the rural areas of Haryana, we can see a pathetic scenario of women carrying earthen pots or plastic cans in their hands walking in scorching heat, and also holding their children.

4. Land Ownership: Reforms and Reality

In ancient times women were considered as the dependent needing the support of males from birth to death. In Manuscript Manu writes: Her father protects her in childhood, her husband protects her in youth, and her sons protect her in old age; a woman is never fit for independence. Widows had no property right on the ancestral or marital land property and the women's right on succession on the family property was quite limited. Women received property only at the time of their marriage which is known as "Stridhan" which could include cattle, jewelry, clothes but in some cases landed property.

In India, when a girl gets married, she receives some money and clothes as a gift from her parents. However, such a gift cannot be a substitute for the inheritance of ancestral agricultural land. Not only in rural areas but also in urban areas too such a wedding gift is considered as the final share of the daughters in family property which directly goes to the groom side in which bride becomes a medium of transfer of property.

Ownership of land for rural women is not just a mark of financial security but it is their right to have a share in agricultural.

Women in India currently spend up to 352 minutes per day on domestic work while men spend 52 minutes which is 676% more than men and at least 40% more than women in South Africa and China according to Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development data the household work burden prevents women to become financially independent and learn some skills.

Women contributes in family farm then why they don't get a share in the land. In India, the land is more than a physical entity; it has been and continues to be, the economic backbone of the agrarian system and the rural power structure" (Bhandari 2001: 168) and a cultural bedrock. Women constitute over 60 % of the agricultural workforce of the country, yet hold only 13.96 % of agricultural land (Agriculture Census 2015-16). Men migrate to the urban areas for job opportunities while women have to shoulder the responsibility to look after the land. Asset ownership such as land is a major component of economic empowerment, giving women confidence and capabilities to change power relations between them and men in their favor (Kelkar, 2011).

In rural areas of Haryana, the land ownership of women will enable them to take independent decisions related to its selling, access markets, technologies, inputs, and institutional credit besides improving the land productivity. The absence of land entitlement handicaps women to access government schemes. According to a report by the UN, "If given proper rights and land share, women can control additional income and rather spend on food, health, clothing, and education thus helping in tackling poverty

"due to the lack of land ownership women have to do low paying agrarian work.

The Hindu Succession Act (HSA)1956 ushered in a new era for Hindu women. According to the Act "property" includes both movable and immovable property that she received as a gift, or purchasing from the market, etc. However, under section 4(2) of HSA concerning agricultural land the women's right to inherit agricultural land was left to the state land tenure laws and these state laws allowed only male heirs to inherit agricultural land. However, after 50 years a remarkable amendment was carried out in the Hindu Succession Amendment Act (HSAA) 2005. As per the amendment, HSA recognizes a women's right to have legal equality in all forms of property, including agricultural land, and gave all daughters (married and unmarried) rights by birth in the paternal joint family property.

The creation of accurate data on gender inequality is important as it enables to know the economic progress of women in terms of gender equality and also reveals the provisions of various laws vis-a-vis actual practice by assessing the land ownership among women in terms of caste, class, age, and land area which helps to understand the socio-economic condition of the women. With the help of such data, it is possible to know to what extent women have their land titles and how these land reforms of inheritance created any differences in the economic situation of rural women.

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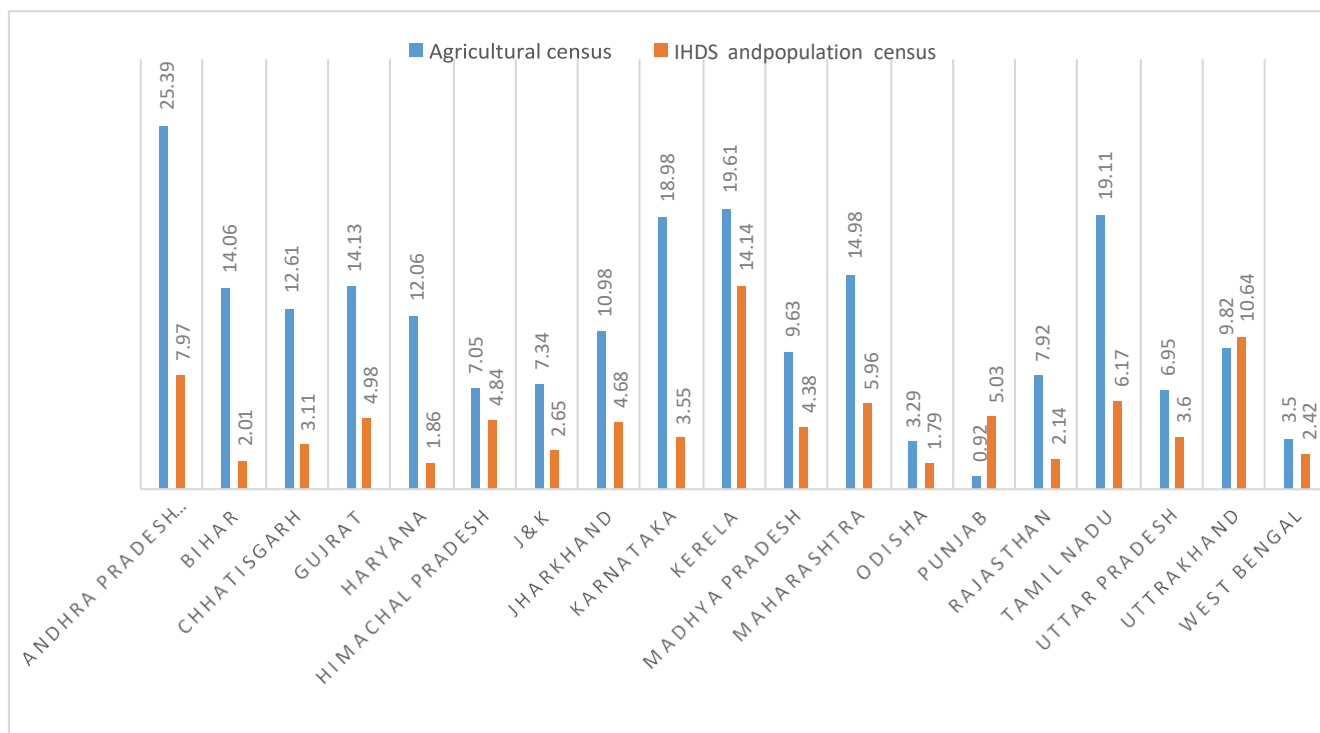


Figure 1. Comparison of percentage of women land Holdings (Agricultural Census, 2010-11), with Incidence of land ownership among women (IHDS, 2011-12)

In Figure 1, the agricultural census 2011 shows the operational holding of females; but in most of the cases, they are not the landowners. As per Agricultural Census 2010-11, India has witnessed a marginal increase in the share of female operational holders from 11.70 % in 2005-06 to 12.79 % in 2010- 11.

The Indian Human Development Survey (IHDS,2011-12) was carried out by the Consortium of American Universities in

2011-12 and it represents agricultural land ownership of women in rural areas. It is based on the share of the adult women population owning agricultural land among total adult landowners of agricultural land. The southern state showed a comparatively higher number and area of landholding operated by women in comparison to the northern state. As per the data of the (IHDS, 2011-12), only 1.8% of rural women in Haryana have a land title.

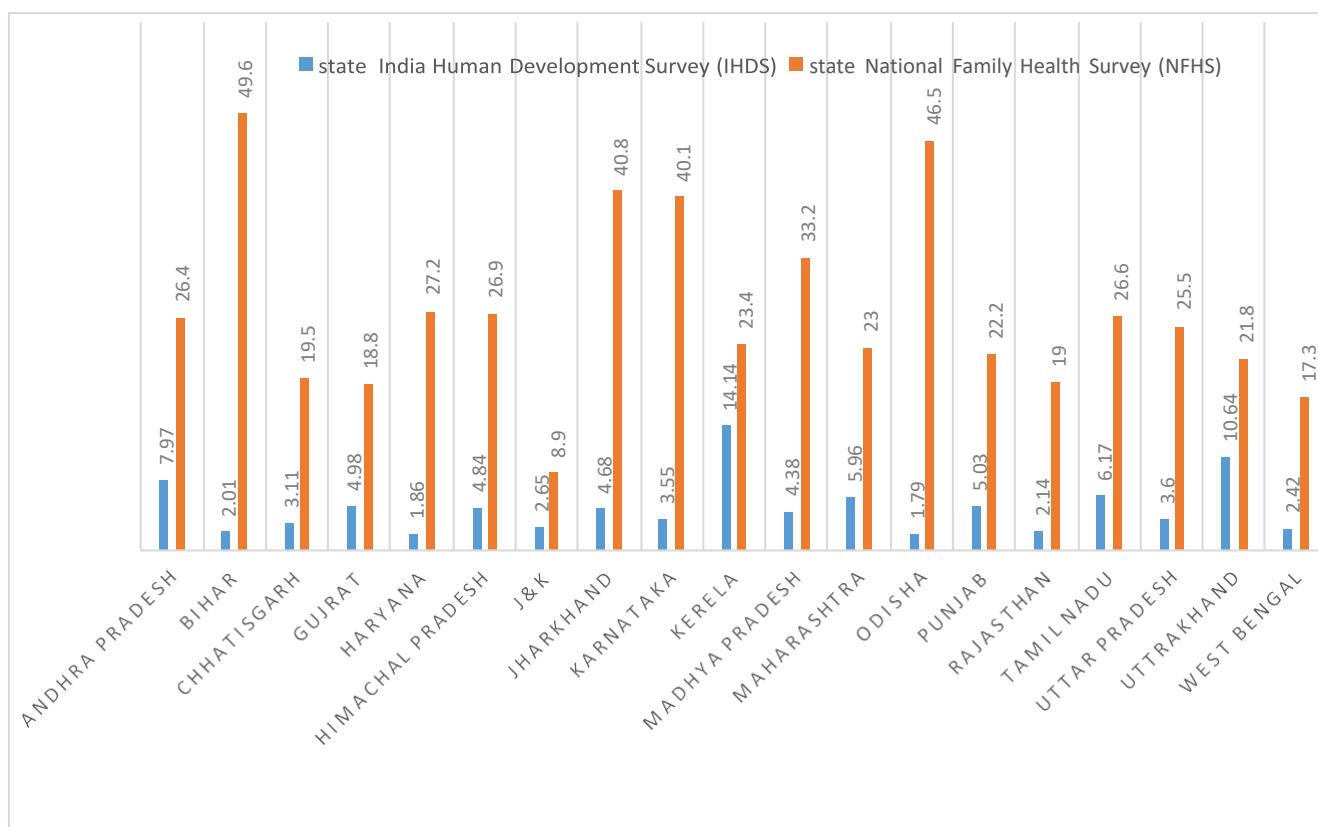


Figure 2. Comparison of percentage of land ownership of women in a rural area (IHDS, 2011-12), with (HFHS,2015-16) land ownership of women in the rural area based on land alone, or jointly, or both

Recently, the National Family Health Survey (2015-16) where villages were the primary unit

of sampling and include property rights, ownership of houses, and even non-agricultural land. Whereas the Indian Human Development Survey (IHDS 2011-12) only includes women's ownership of land in rural areas and there is no data on the joint ownership of land.

In Figure 2 in comparison, the data given by the (HFHS,2015-16) is four times higher than the data of (IHDS,2011-12). There are several reasons for such a high percentage. The HFHS 2015-16 provides the data on the percentage of rural women in the 15-49 age group owning land (individually or jointly) and were interviewed. Older women record is absent as also it includes all land owned for example house title and does not separate agricultural land data.

In Haryana, there is a "The Punjab Tenancy Act, 1887" (as amended up to 1977) . Section 59 governs the inheritance and the tenurial law which specify the order of devolution and is not based on gender equity. Women get a limited share in the land and lose the land if she remarries or doesn't cultivate the land for a specific period. However, even after the 15 years of (HSA) Haryana is a highly patriarchal state and often women are seen as a threat to family property. Women have to fight for their rights in court and at times the women lose their family ties. There are several incidents where married women are not allowed to enter their villages and in the worst cases, they are even murdered by their family members.

Based on our field observation and oral information in the villages of Haryana, we find that there is a lack of awareness among rural women about their land ownership rights. There is a village in Haryana known as Dhauj which comes under Faridabad district where we talked to an elderly woman about her life experience as a cultivator, she replied to us in a sarcastic way "*yaha ek din ruk ke dekh lo pata lag javega*" [stay here for a day and you will get to know (hardship)]. Indeed, the life of women is not easy in rural India where factors like village traditions, family customs, societal pressure dominate an individual's freedom.

5 Conclusion

Haryana is a highly patriarchal state where women are considered as subordinates to men both in the field and in the house as well. In agriculture, not only men but women also work in the fields but owing to lack of land title, they are not recognized as a farmer and thus they remain as a mere cultivator. Land ownership for a rural woman is not just a source of income but it gives them a sense of security and empowerment. The Hindu Succession Amendment Act 2005 gave the inheritance right of the ancestral property but the state tenurial laws are gender-biased, especially in the north-western states of India. This situation is quite prevalent in India where reforms although were made in existing laws at the national level but when it comes to implementation level women face several obstacles to get their right in the property, first at the state level and then at the judiciary level where women have to fight for several years.

The national data provided by the HFHS and the IHDS has certain limitations. There is no accurate data to know the caste .

In Haryana, as long as a woman works in a family field, helps to supplement the family income, everything goes as business as usual, but if a woman asks for her share in the property, it will create a family conflict, indicating that women are considered as free family labour and no appreciation is needed. In India, inheritance laws are complex and there are differences based on religion, state, and type of property and land.

The religion-wise details to understand the share and extent of land ownership of women. Studies are therefore required to have a clear understanding of women's ownership status.

If we look the women's land ownership at the international level, the CGIAR Research Program on Water, Land, and Ecosystems (WLE) research in southern Africa found that matrilineal societies are widespread in Southern African countries like Tanzania, Malawi, Mozambique, and Zambia. In Tanzania, the broad coastal belt south of Tanga, including Dar-es-Salaam, Morogoro, and the Uluguru mountains is a matrilineal based area. Malawi has the highest percentage of women who solely own the land, while Rwanda and Burundi have the highest percentage of women who own land jointly. The finding suggests that it is an egalitarian society and the decision related to land are taken jointly between men and women, girls inherit land from their mother's clan and stay at their parent's home. Boys too, after marriage, move to their wives' clan and

cultivate their in-laws' land. Thus, the matrilineal culture provides married, single, and widows with guaranteed access to land.

In Haryana to make changes in the property right is not an easy process, especially where land is considered as the symbol of power and prestige in the society. Nevertheless, there is a dire necessity of bringing transformation in the present set up which can be achieved by

education, creating awareness and change in the traditional mindset of the society. Educational programs and campaigns related to land ownership rights in a rural area can bring change and enhance their status and economic independence. Many studies suggest that women's land ownership can reduce domestic violence and makes women more confident and independent.

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