



Participation of Women in Cultural Practices of Fruit Production in India

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The country has witnessed massive agricultural distress during the past couple of years. Limited access to resources, illiteracy, land allocation for farming and recognition is consistently adding trouble for women farmers and women's play significance role in fruit production. According to OXFAM 2018, agriculture sector employs 80% of all economically active women in India, they comprise 33% of the agriculture labor force and 48% of the self-employed. Major participants of these protests were women farmers and their unattended demands. The participation of women in fruit production activities can be enhanced through development of low cost technologies and adequate awareness programs should be organized. Women as farmers, laborers and entrepreneurs are the driving force of India's farmland. In spite of their large contribution women continue to remain invisible in the rural economy of India. Ministry of Agriculture, Government of India has started National Agricultural Technological Project and Technology Mission of Horticulture, National agricultural Innovation Project at national level for women empowerment through various activities like Nursery development, value addition, processing and marketing of fruit crops.

Fruit crops play vital role in economy of the nations and provide basic needs like food, fodder, fuel, feed, fiber. India is the second largest producer of fruits in the world next only to China. Their roles vary considerably between and within regions and are changing rapidly in many parts of the world so, the nature and extent of women's involvement in fruit production varies greatly from region to region crop to crop, operation to operation depending on agro-climatic and sociocultural variations. However, almost 20-30% of the fruits are lost at post-harvest stage (Krishnamurthy and Rao, 2001). India leads the world in the production of mango (65%), banana (11%), acid lime (10%) and sapota (9%) besides recording highest productivity in grapes (Ghosh, 2001). The leading fruit growing states are Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. Maharashtra accounts for 17.39% of production. Rural women make essential contributions to the agricultural and rural economies in all developing countries. In north India, women mostly participate in fruits processing and kitchen gardening. In south India, besides these operations, rural women also participate in nursery technology. 60 % percent women participate in nursery raising, 70% in irrigation of nursery, 70% in application of manures and fertilizers, 80% in weeding and hoeing and 80% in post-harvest and processing of fruits and vegetables (Pandey and Pareek, 1990). However, rural women face a lot of constraints/problems in the production and post production of fruit crops. Unfortunately, the inadequate/ lack of access to knowledge, technology, finances; information and training are main factors that hamper their effective participation. There is meager information available about participation of women in fruit production activities.

Involvement of women in orchard management:

Women are 48% of the total population of Northern parts (ESCAP, 1997), and play a major role in fruit production. In the study area, it was found that women were actively involved in weed removal/hoeing, input transportation and its application, irrigation, picking, grading, drying of apricot, almond, walnut and mulberry, and cracking of walnut and almond.



Participation of women in fruit crops production:

A study was carried out in Himachal Pradesh by Bala and Sharam in 2005 to highlight the magnitude of female labor participation in apple orchards and estimate the contribution of female labor to the total income from horticultural crops. The operations predominantly performed by women in orchards were digging of pits, preparation of basins, FYM and fertilizer application, irrigation, watch and ward, cleaning of the orchards and applying paste after training/pruning, picking and assembling of fruits. Women were also involved in taking them to godowns and about 65-70% of the labour required for these operations was performed by women. It was noticed that women's participation was more (45%) in cultural and physical control of insect pests as compared to chemical control (31%). Grading and packing of fruits was a very important operation in fruit cultivation and was generally carried out by specially trained males. In post-harvest management of fruits also women contributed significantly through home scale preparation of different products like jams, jellies, pickles, chutney etc. However, for the technical decisions like selection of varieties, rootstocks and plants, plant protection measures, time and place to market the produce etc. the females were totally dependent on their male counterparts (Bala and Sharam, 2005). The study thus revealed that the commercial fruit cultivation involves greater use of new technologies and inputs to which the tribal women need to be exposed. They need to be trained in different technical operations using time saving techniques in horticulture preferably through female extension workers, so as to reduce their drudgery and make better utilization of their time.



Fig. 1. Empowering women in rural India. **Fig. 2.** Rural women process Mango pulp during lockdown

Participation of women in tropical and sub-tropical fruits:

Study on percentage share of women labor force in processing of fruit crops in India indicated that women's participation ranged from 20- 80% with 72 % in coconut, 84 % in cashew nut (Nair and Das, 1990). Women constitute 90 per cent of labor force in cashew processing industry. Most labor-intensive operations like shelling and peeling in cashew are done by women workers, while 60 percent of grading of kernels was carried out by women (Kannan, 1983 and Das, 1985). Tripathi et. al., (2009), conducted study in five villages of Orissa and concluded that the role of women was less than men in large orchards but the role of women in maintenance of fruit plants in homestead garden was much higher. In fruit crops the precocity (early bearing) of the crop was preferred by men and women. In case of mango, cultivar Amrapalli was preferred by men and women over cultivars Banganapalli and Gulabkhas. In case of papaya, cultivars Pusa Dwarf and Farm Selection were preferred by women due to higher yield, less seed content, suitable for vegetable in immature condition and good in taste. Women preferred cultivation of fruit crops for home consumption, processed, family nutrition and fire wood purpose while men preferred cultivation of fruit crops for sale and profit purpose. As per data on participation of women in agriculture and varied sectors collected during 2007- 2008 under All India Coordinated Research Project on Home Science coordinated by DRWA, with nine centres located in State Agricultural Universities, indicated that only about 6% of the women participate independently in horticulture activities. Highest percentage of women performed the activities jointly with men in all the states. It was observed that the joint participation in horticulture was 79.70%. Tripathi et.al (2012) suggested



in order to encourage rural women to be self-reliant and reap advantage of the benefits under this scheme, several initiatives have been taken under Technology Mission such as:

- Organization/ identification of women groups which would act as network for channelizing the horticultural support.
- Need-based assessment of women farmers in terms of the horticulture support such as input, technological and extension support.
- Prioritizing the activities of individual women groups on the basis of the need-based assessment.
- Providing adequate organizational and financial support to the women groups.
- Providing technical training in horticulture and allied areas to women farmers.

Directorate of Research on Women in Agriculture (DRWA) mandated to conduct basic, strategic and applied research on gender issue in agriculture and allied sectors, has initiated studies for qualitative and quantitative assessment of role of women in fruit crop production and post production process through testing and refining appropriate technologies and policies. Thus, empowerment of rural women for attaining economic and nutritional security can be achieved by enhanced production and productivity of fruit crops through development of appropriate and need based technologies.



Fig. 3. Marketing of Custard apple **Fig.4.** Packaging of Strawberry

Conclusion:

Rural women are the major contributors in agriculture and its allied fields. Her work ranges from crop production, livestock production to cottage industry. From household and family maintenance activities, to transporting water, fuel and fodder. Despite such a huge involvement, her role and dignity has yet not been recognized. Women's status is low by all social, economic, and political indicators. Women's wage work is considered a threat to the male ego and women's engagement in multiple home-based economic activities leads to under remuneration for their work. Women spend long hours fetching water, doing laundry, preparing food, and carrying out agricultural duties. Not only are these tasks physically hard and demanding, they also rob girls of the opportunity to study. The nature and sphere of women's productivity in the labor market is largely determined by socio-cultural and economic factors. Women do not enter the labor market on equal terms when compared to men. Their occupational choices are also limited due to social and cultural constraints, gender bias in the labor market, and lack of supportive facilities such as child care, transport, and accommodation in the formal sector of the labor market. Women's labor power is considered inferior because of employers' predetermined notion of women's primary role as homemakers. As a result of discrimination against female labor, women are concentrated in the secondary sector of labor market. Their work is low paid, low status, casual, and lacks potential upward mobility. The majority of women in the urban sector work in low-paying jobs. The participation of women was more in various production and post production activities of vegetables than fruits and flowers. The research revealed that showed that women's participation was maximum in stubble collection, seed sowing, seed cleaning, transplanting, and weeding of horticultural crops. They play major part of field preparation, manure application, harvesting, cleaning and collection of produces, sorting and grading. In case of pit digging, training and pruning, planting of fruit trees, levelling of field, fertilizer application, plant protection measures their participation is less.



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