

## **SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS OF WOMEN FARM WORKERS IN MEWAT: NEED FOR DIVERSIFICATION OF THE ECONOMY FOR THEIR EMPOWERMENT**

**Mahender Pal**

Assistant Professor, Department of Geography, CMG GCW BhodiaKhera, Fatehabad  
[mp941987@gmail.com](mailto:mp941987@gmail.com)

### **Abstract**

The level of the socio- economic development in an area can be judged from the occupation structure of its women working force. A high proportion of agricultural female workers refer to a very low level of female literacy and social development. A large number of females in the agricultural operations manifest itself into various socio-economic issues of acute backwardness, poverty, less developed economy and the unequal distribution of the land. The present study attempts to evaluate women participation in agriculture at the micro-level by taking the Mewat district as a case study. This area is characterized by a low level of social and economic development. Here, the participation of women in agricultural activities is much higher than in many other parts of the state of Haryana. The study also makes it clear that they have very less work opportunities outside the agriculture due to social restrictions, low level of literacy and less diversified economy. These problems can be tackled through an improved public policy, formation of SHGs, improvement in female literacy and family welfare services. Innovative local efforts can go a long way in solving the problems of women farm workers in the area.

### **Introduction**

Rural women in India are extensively engaged in agriculture and allied activities. Women play an important and vital role in agriculture development and related fields and they make profitable economic contribution in agriculture and rural economy. Their involvement differs with the nature and variations in agro production system. Participation of women in agriculture varies with status of landowning of farmers. In broader sense, women contribution in socio- economic development has two folds i.e. in home and outside home. Women responsibility as wife, daughter and mother cannot be ignored in home. Women act as caretaker of family members and fulfill their requirement

of food. They are involved in seed sowing or plantation of crops, weeding, irrigating, processing of crops, harvesting, threshing work and storage of crops. Women twin role in home as well as outside home shows an important contribution in productive system. Most of the activities of women that are related to economic aspects go unnoticed. It is assumed that more than 70 per cent of farm work are performed by women and constitute nearly 60 per cent of population of farming. Women role in agriculture has not brought to light and this is very unfortunate for women as well for society. This paper tried to analyze the role of women in different kind of farm activities at micro level by considering district as a case study.

### **Study Area**

Mewat district was created on April 4, 2004 from Gurgaon district which lies in southern parts of Haryana state (Fig. 1). Mewat is largely comprises of plain and undulating topography. There is little cultivation to rocky areas, poor soil cover and roughness of surface. Mewat has prominent Muslim population which is 79.20 per cent (2011 census) with 20.80 per cent of Hindu population. Mewat is a cultural region rather than an administrative unit and people of Mewat are known as Meo's or Mewati. On an average 5.6 members live in Hindu families, while Muslim families are a bit large with 7 to 9 members. Mewat has come out with 10,89,263 persons out of which 5,71,162 are males and 5,18,101 females in census 2011 and accounts for only 4.3 per cent of the total population of the state. The decadal growth rate of population during 2001-2011 was 38.7 which is higher than the state average (19.9 per cent). The overall sex ratio of Mewat was only 906 females to 1000 males as against the national average of 927 females per 1000 males but it was higher than state average of 879. In comparison to the state average of 76.6 per cent, the literacy percentages in Mewat are the lowest (56.10 per cent) with 69.9 per cent literacy recorded for male and 36.6 per cent for females. Work participation rate of women is higher in primary (70.78 per cent) activities. Out of the total women agriculture working population 41.67 per cent were engaged in cultivation and 29.11 per cent were working as agricultural labour.

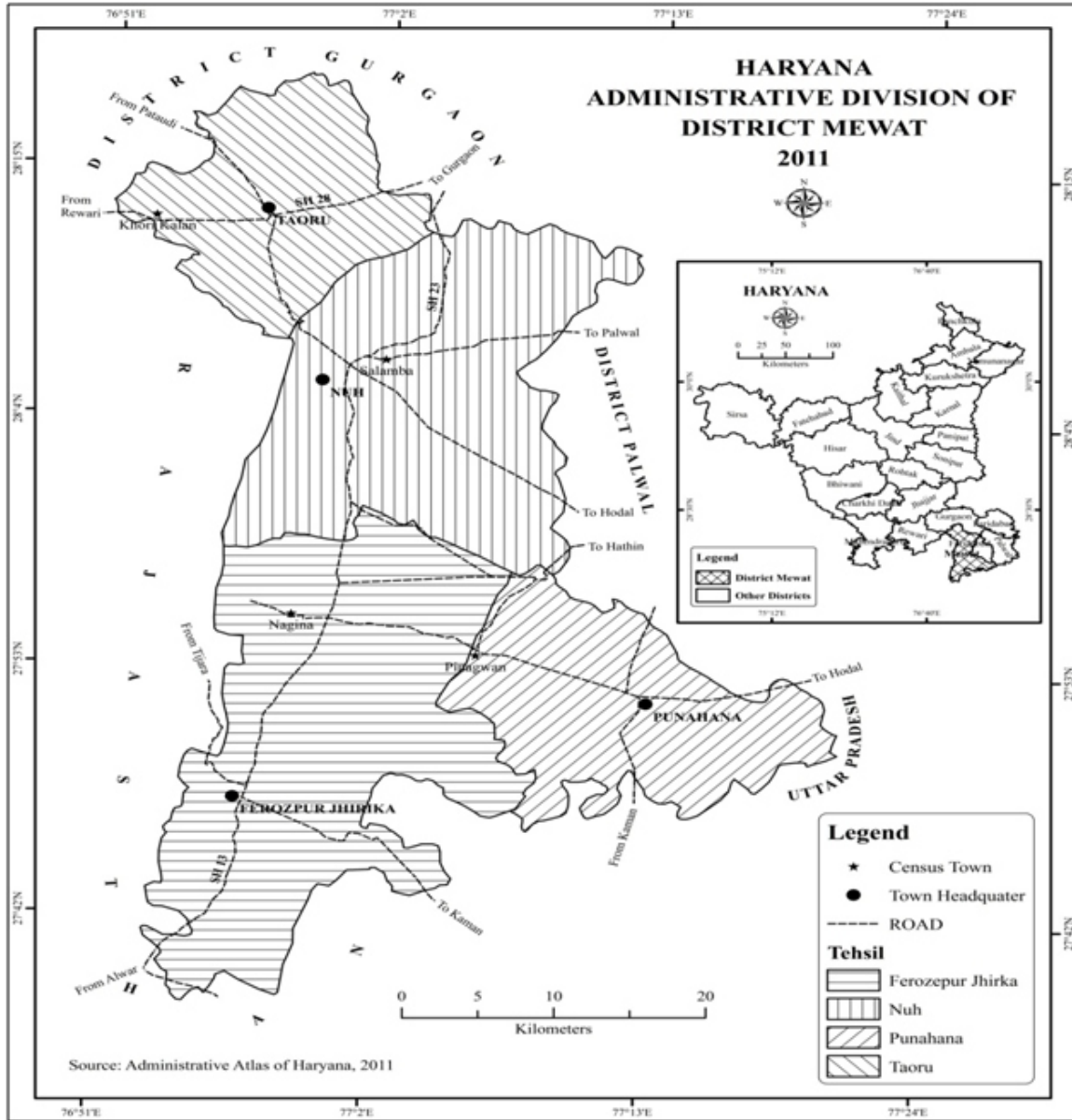


Fig. 1

### **Methodology**

The present study has been conducted in Mewat district of Haryana state. In spite of being surrounded by the two most prosperous districts of Gurgaon and Faridabad, Mewat continues to languish in severe backwardness in terms of well-defined socio-economic parameters of development. Mewat district was therefore chosen as the sample area for study to understand this paradox and the focus of the study was the existing socio-economic status of women farm workers. Random sampling method was adopted to select respondents and a total sample size of 200 women agricultural workers were selected for interview.

### **Social, Economic and Literary Aspects of Women Farm Workers**

Women socio-economic profile plays significant role to know the position of women in a society. Therefore, effort has been made to evaluate the general profile of women through the indicators such as personal character, religious, literary, demographic, socio-economic and others aspects of their life. Age of sample respondents varies between 15 to 60 years. The majority of respondents come in the middle age group followed by the young age and an old age group. As per age classification, the sample taken up to the age of 30 to 45 years is of big size i.e. 65 per cent because in this age group, women are found more active accordingly their surroundings. Percentage of women in old age group was low to 11 per cent and 24 per cent respondents belongs to young age group (Below 30 year). Interestingly the main reason for low share of old age women in work is not that they are getting aged, rather it is because their children get married in early age and daughter's in law works in fields while elders work at home. This is a common scene in joint families. 90 per cent of the respondents were married followed by 10 per cent unmarried respondents. According to the sample, education level of the women farm workers was particularly very low. 79 per cent of respondents were illiterate, 10 per cent acquired education up to primary level while 7 per cent were middle school passed; very few 4 per cent have passed secondary or senior secondary examination. The proportion of literate/educated respondents is the only 21 per cent. Religion and caste category indicate that maximum women respondents have formed a part of Muslim community and the only 20 per cent respondents belonged to the Hindu religion. Seventy per cent respondents has comprised of Meo community (BC B), ten per cent belonged to BC A. Only a small proportion of our respondents (20 per cent) were from scheduled caste.

### **Participation of Women Farm Workers in Different Farm Activities**

Women in rural areas play important role in farm activities but their contribution is not recognized. Hence, this study was conducted to evaluate the women role in agricultural

activities. The findings reveals that farm women were involvement in different farm operations such as manure application, sowing, transplanting, gap felling, fertilizer application, weeding, irrigation, using plant protection measure (insecticide and pesticides), harvesting and binding of crops, shifting of production to threshing floor, threshing, clearing of field, drying of grains, storage and marketing of crops. The participation of women in the agricultural activities varied from 0 to 100 per cent which was the highest in harvesting, drying and storage of grains and the lowest in marketing of crops which was nil. Analysis of data clearly indicated that the highest proportion of involvement of women was observed in farm operations mainly in harvesting, shifting of crops to threshing floor (100 per cent). Their involvement in activities associated to harvesting and threshing was maximum as these operations are labour intensive and has to be finished in a minimum time due to uncertain weather conditions. Storage and cleaning of grain are sole responsibility of women and accounts for 100 per cent engagement of all women whether they were working in their farm or working in another farm. Role of hired labour was absent among the small and marginal farmers due to poor economic condition.

Women also contribute a lot in irrigation and fertilizing the crops, where as in other parts of state, this work is considered solely male responsibility. Analysis of data revealed that involvement of women in farm operations like irrigation (48 per cent), fertilizer (48 per cent) and manure (50 per cent) application was moderate and more than one third work was done by them. In manure and fertilizer application work females assist male members in fields. Some time they do it solely if her husband or other male is not available at home. It happens many times because main occupation of males in our study area is driving and they stay out of home for a long time. The extent of participation of women in farm activities like ploughing, sowing and plant protection measure (Insecticide and pesticides) was less than 21 per cent. Purchase of inputs and sales of output are exclusively done by male family members only. The role of women in selection of crops and varieties was reported zero. Most of decisions related to farm operation are taken by male members of the families. All above observation of analysis of data reveals that all farm operations which required more labour were done by women. Ploughing and sowing of seeds is done with tractors. They were doing hard job in this region to maintain food security of family.

### **Factors Affecting the Socio-Economic Status of Women Farm Workers**

Status of women in a society or family is very much complex issue and difficult to define. Findings reveals that factors like literacy rate, size of land holdings, family size, type of

family, caste, unavailability of nonfarm employment, traditions of Muslim community and high incidents of poverty were major factors that decided women role in agriculture activities in study area. In fact, Mewat district has lowest literacy in country and issue is further provoked because of inflexible socio-cultural mind-set of the inhabitants. Most of villages in study area have only access to primary school. Insufficient infrastructure for education is united with poor quality of teaching and deficiency of secure living options hollow the status of education in this region. Large size of family comes with associated hardship as these families have poor living standard. This is not possible to run livelihood of large family by single person with limited land resources. Poverty rate is very high. Among all districts of Haryana, Mewat has lowest per capita income. It had 45,934 per capita incomes while that of Gurgaon at Rs. 4.46 lakhs was the highest (Statistical Abstract of Haryana, 2020). It shows poverty and backwardness story. People are still living in period of suffering and deprivation and are trapped in extreme indebtedness. In this area quality of ground water is also not good with high rate of salinity. Agriculture is less mechanized due to poor economic conditions of farmers and small size of land holdings. Most of the work on farm is done manually except ploughing of fields and sowing which is done with help of tractors. According to 2011 census Mewat sex ratio was the highest in entire Haryana state, with availability of 906 females per 1000 males. This also results in greater availability of women for agricultural activities. Men from landless families were working in private sector to nearby urban areas and their women were working as labourers on the other farm to collect food grains and fodder for whole year. Hence, participation of women observed in activities of agriculture is quite widespread and women are involved in almost every farm operation except sowing and ploughing.

#### **Diversification of Economy- A Way of Women Empowerment**

At present non-agricultural sector in this area was unable to generate enough jobs; female workers must be provided with financial and technical assistance to work in the cultivation of labour-intensive and high value vegetable crops. More female friendly machinery and farm implements should be developed. A policy to improve their employability in non-farm occupations under micro, small and medium enterprises through short term skill development programs is urgently needed. There is a need to initiating some concrete efforts to increase the number of commercial dairies and they should be given the required financial assistance, quality infrastructure, technical training, and assured marketing in order to generate income and jobs in rural areas. Lack of land rights is one of the crippling issues for female farm workers in almost all parts of the

country. Therefore, there is an immediate need to reform and implement inheritance laws in favour of women. This will increase their productivity and well-being. Also, women farm workers should be encouraged to form Self Help Groups. These groups can help them to get financial support in terms of loans. To increase their participation in marketing of farm produce, may be at the local level, MahilaKissanMandis should be introduced where they can sell their goods without any trouble and at fair prices. Special support and market connectivity should be established for their products. To fulfill the dream of progressive India, it is important that issues related to women farm workers are addressed both at the level of policy formulation and its implementation.

### Conclusion

Agriculture retains its foremost place in the economy of Mewat by engaging 58.9 per cent of workers in cultivation and agricultural labour. Mostly women are illiterate and had not done any training in agriculture, whereas most of farm activities are performed by them and hence contribute a lot toward enhancement of social and economic status of their families. They were facing problems like long hours of working, low wages, lack of facilities at work place, poor health condition, lack of training and indebtedness. Main reason of women worst situation in this region is less opportunities of education due to high occurrence of poverty and men dominated society. Women are not able to access financial resources but add in their heavy burden of animal care and domestic duties. Study suggested that efforts should be done to improve the women empowerment in this area.

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