



*OP-ED WRITING*

# FARMING FEMINISM

*~Unveiling the Unnoticed*

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## **Farming Feminism: Unveiling the Unnoticed**

How unnoticed are women cultivating change in the shadows? It signifies the reality of women in the Indian farming sector. Their contributions are considered to be 'invisible' which makes them easy targets of discrimination. As per NITI Aayog, 80% of women are engaged in agriculture and allied activities, highlighting the feminization of agriculture in India. This phenomenon is the result of the migration of rural males to urban non-farm activities. Women in agriculture are statistically counted but often unnoticed in the economy, resulting in the farming feminism movement to reclaim their deserved recognition and rights. The discrimination towards women was attributed to their perception of performing unpaid caregiving work, which led to their contribution towards their family's farm activities being unpaid. Furthermore, historical biases favoring male heirs and women's lack of ownership rights to their husband's property have deprived them of their rightful status as landholders. In addition to the stated reasons, some external factors like inefficient transmission of government welfare policy benefits to specific sections of society and poor financial literacy, lack of skills, and illiteracy among women are also key contributors to discrimination against women in agriculture.

Women in agriculture face inequality in various forms, including lack of recognition as laborers and landholders, biases in daily wages, limited access to resources, a lack of decent income sources, a limited role in decision-making, and a lack of freedom. The presence of gender discrimination becomes noticeable even in our general tendency to imagine a farmer as a man, disregarding a woman. This contradicts the current trend towards the feminization of agriculture. Women's contribution to farm produce is crucial, from sowing to post-harvest activities, yet their work is not considered in economic terms. Women have always been vulnerable to land rights. In India, widows of farmers are a highly deprived section of society. The National Crime Records Bureau estimates that 10,000 farmers will have died through suicide in 2021, and this tragedy will have a negative impact on their wives. These women, devoid of rights, autonomy, and any means of income, suffered severe consequences and found themselves in a relentless cycle of poverty. It highlights the immense need for recognition of women engaged in agricultural activities. Women are an asset in agriculture but are never recognised as a primary contributor. The main problem is the non-recognition of women because they are not included in the subsequent activities. The recognition encourages other women to act and makes farming more of a profession than a chore. Unnoticed women create barriers to economic development, inclusion, sustainability, and equal pay. There is ample evidence that women ensure food security and preserve the diversity of local agriculture. A woman, without knowing any of her rights, capabilities, or recognition for her work, cannot contribute to development. Similarly, women can be seen as more productive in the field in terms of managing both farm and household activities. The Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations also estimates that "women can increase the productivity of farms by 20-30% if they have the same level of access to productive resources as men." Consequently, women's contribution to agricultural activities holds the promise of igniting a groundbreaking revolution in this industry.

There are immense contributions from the government in support of women to encourage them in agriculture activities. One of the innovative measures was the declaration of October 15 as “National Women Farmers Day” by the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare to empower women farmers. This represents the first move towards officially recognising women as farmers at the national level, and women entrepreneurs' success stories are also coming into light. Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana (MKSP) and financing for women-led self-help groups (SHGs) are two more government initiatives. MSKP aims to "create a sustainable livelihood for rural women and empower women through systematic investment." Some of the anticipated results of this program includes, increasing the amount of land under cultivation, raising the incomes of women in agriculture, improving performance, skill levels and recognition of women in agriculture as an interest group, demonstrated by the growth of female institutions and entrepreneurship. The Economic Survey 2023 highlights the importance of SHG in uplifting women in agriculture. The report has observed that self-help groups (SHGs) have yielded favorable outcomes for women in terms of their economic, social, and political status. India has 1.2 crore homegrown SHGs, and 88% of them are owned by women. It signifies the importance of SHGs in women's empowerment. But there are structural flaws in framing government policies that lead to a skewed transfer of benefits in society. For example, Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojna (PMFBY), the world's largest crop insurance scheme, can only be availed of by farmers who have legal land ownership papers; hence, women are deprived of the benefits. Because only less than 13% of women have owned landholdings. Therefore, they are excluded from availing themselves of the benefits of this scheme. It also contributed to the problem of limited credit availability and other financial benefits. For reclaiming the lost rights of women, the feminist movement in farming is working to bring back the invisible to the visible.

### **Way Forward:**

Discrimination against women is prevalent not only in agriculture but also in other sectors. There is a need to change the perception of women from being caregivers to future leaders as equal as men. The emphasis on the recognition of women in the farming sector will be a crucial component in remodeling society. Some other measures are:

***Recognising unpaid caregiving work:*** No person in the household could ever imagine their day without their mother's tireless efforts, yet their work is considered unpaid and a limitless commodity. Government and private sector intervention through economic and social support for unpaid care work is the need of the hour. Because a woman, as a caregiver in households, excels at living with a single source of income with accurate budgeting and also with some savings in hand. We may recall our dadi's (grandmother's) bank, which is always with liquid cash at our time of need. Hence, women's unpaid work cannot be left unseen.

***Giving back the rights they deserved:*** Women should get equal ownership of their husband's property and should not face discrimination for the inheritance of ancestral property. The proportion of women having land ownership of farm lands must be gradually increased. These measures can collectively work for the upliftment of women's rights.

***Encourage women's leadership:*** women's leadership would create a platform for women. A case study of Dharamshala in Himachal Pradesh is a great inspiration for women's leadership. A story of a young woman, Smt. Mamta Devi, from the SC community. This case study explores how elected women leaders in the PRI succeed in their roles despite the highly patriarchal and traditional social norms prevalent in the region. These factors include developing herself first through awareness and training from odd jobs for her livelihood, having good intentions to do something for herself and others through networks with agencies like CORD (an NGO) and the government, and then taking on the leadership role of becoming an effective and capable Pradhan. Proper funding for women-led organizations will give impetus to bringing out more successful women in society.

***Establishment of Mentorship Programs:*** Provide a platform for accomplished women farmers to share their knowledge and experiences with aspiring female farmers. This could be beneficial in many ways, like expanding networks; they can meet other farmers, organizations, and industry experts, which opens the door for other opportunities and resources. Other benefits include motivation, personalized guidance, and confidence building.

***Women farming awards:*** The government should establish awards that recognise and celebrate the achievements of women in farming. These awards can be given in fields like sustainability and innovations in farming. This will not just recognise women in these fields but also set an example for other women.

Putting into practice previous policies is essential for better policymaking. In addition, new initiatives that can be taken include proper training of women, skill development, and improved credit facilities. The downstream activities engagement should be improved for women because it is male-dominated. At the end, the competition faced by small farmers needs to be addressed, which is causing men to migrate into agriculture.

## **Conclusion:**

The contribution of women to agriculture and food production is clearly significant. The participation of women in agriculture is varying at the regional level, which suggests that women are still unrecognized and underpaid for their work compared to men. There is an urgent need for the intervention of government, private, and NGO institutions to empower women in agriculture to create sustainable and inclusive growth in the future. We conclude that accurate and regionally specific information is necessary for good gender-aware agricultural policymaking, and feminism in agriculture is good as long as it is recognised and gets proper aid.

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