



Review Paper/Short Communication

Womenfolk in High Altitude Agriculture in Uttarakhand: A Review

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Abstract

The women are the backbone of hill economy, who contributed maximum work force in hill agriculture. Though it is subsistence but it takes lot of time starting from burning and slashing to reaping and harvesting. The routine work of women in hills start from early morning since dawn to late evening with numbers of working activities like milking the cattle, water fetching, cooking food and serving, collecting fodder or firewood and working in agriculture field. Since maximum men are out migrated, the women folk are the soul responsible for shouldering all family responsible with agriculture and animal husbandry as the main activities.

Keywords: *Agro-based society, Cropping, Chipko, High altitude, In-hostile climate winnowing, Terrace agriculture, Womenfolk*

Introduction

The role of women and their status in any society is an index of development of any civilization, it is said that women are equal with their men counter part in the process of development, but in practical scene women are not as par with man, particularly in Indian society. They were always exploited and treated as slaves by our male based Indian society. Women have been active contributor to the development of any nation. But their contribution is always under valued and they have not been actively involved in the mainstream of development, although they are equally shared in labor force. An Indian woman has to play many roles, like mother, sister, wife, and daughter and so on, besides many different roles in the society. Present day in modern Indian society she has been playing as earning members which were certainly not seen in the past. An Indian woman submerges her identity by playing these entire multiple role and hesitate to come to front or lime light, particularly in rural belt of Agro-based society.

In mountain areas of India, women's contribution to agriculture (cropping, composting, winnowing, animals tending and all agriculture related work) is far greater than in compared to their man counter part. All the household activities, virtually women are responsible. They are the real farmer and back bone of mountain agriculture. Their role in farming activities is so crucial that without their participation mountain agriculture can't be imagined. In the hill State of Uttarakhand the women are the back bone of society. Starting from "Chipko" movement to struggle for new states formation, the women of Uttarakhand is fore front runner. In total the women of Uttarakhand are the main care taker of culture, tradition as well as agro-based economy and conservation of natural resources in their surrounding.

In the rural areas of Uttarakhand, adult male members of the families usually migrated to towns of plains in India for service and other earning sources, keeping behind the women and children al alone, some times with old aged diseases parents. The woman of such families heads the family and carried out dual work of man and woman al alone. Even where men reside with families, it is the women and girls children who look the agriculture and the cattle. The situation is that the women contributing 90 percent of the total agricultural and cattle rearing work in rural areas of the states (Dang, et, al). The men folk only plough in the agricultural field, rest of the agricultural operation like making of compost, sowing, harvesting, winnowing, picking and cleaning all work done by female folk only. Some times women are taking up plough also especially in female headed house hold, single women houses and among nuclear families (USNPSS, 2005).

The area and people:

The present study was carried out in the remote villages of Dharchula (Sosha, Rantagaontonta, Pangu, etc) and Muniary (Suring, Tallaghorpata, Mallaghorpata, etc). Tehsils of Pithoragarh district in Uttarakhand during May 2010. The areas of Dharchula and Muniary solely inhabited by Bhotia tribe, a Mongolian race traced it origin from Tibet. These areas come under high altitude zone with 2000-2400 m comprising of high mountains and inhostile Climatic zone & the soil of the areas is red to dark in color. The average rain fall of the area is 1200-2500mm/yy and temperature comes to freezing point during winter. The main crops of the areas are *amaranthus paniculatus*, *fagopyrum escuntum*, *fagopyrum tataricum*, *Hordeum himalayans*, *Panicum miliaceum*, *Triticum aestvum*, & (finger, millet, French beans, peas, apple, stone fruits) etc. Though the district Pithoragarh having two cropping pattern i.e winter season cropping (Rabi) and rainy season cropping(Kharif), but in the these two Tehsils, the studied villages, only one cropping pattern is permits i.e between April to September during short rainy & summer due to heavy snow falls during winter season.

The entire region of high altitude studied villages of Dharchula and Muniary, agriculture activities are subsistence and done during Kharif only. The only cash crops in the areas is Potato (*Solanum tuberosum*) and little bit of Rajma/ Kidney bean(*Phaseolus vulgaris*)

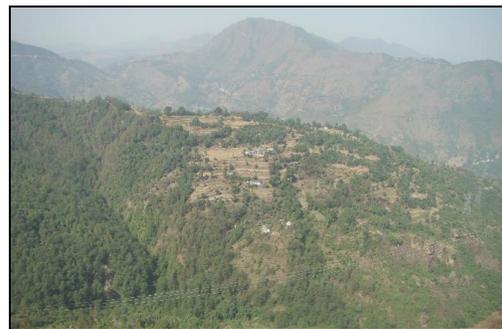
which they curtailed from their consumption and sell in the market for earning a bit of money. A little area of land is utilized for Paddy, madua(finger millet) & maize (*Oriza sativa*, *eleusine coracana* & *Zea mays*) which they used for food for a month or two. A little amount of Gohat/ horse gram (*Macrotyloma uniflorum*) is cultivated which is high demand and valued in lower region of Pithoragarh and adjoining areas. Among the spices Ginger (*Zingiber officinale*) is major items cultivated. Besides all these, Pumpkin, Brinjal, Tomato etc are cultivated in kitchen garden for their consumption for 15/20 days only.

Role of womenfolk in agricultural practice and management:

Like other part of the State the women folk in the region contributing more than 80 percent in agricultural sector (Singh, et, al). They get up before sunrise and after call of nature, tends to the live stock, prepared food for family members, clean the cow shed and with the garbage of caw-shed move to cultivation field or in off season of agriculture move to Jungle for collecting fuel wood/ fodder or forest leaf litter (conifer or board lead, according to availability) for *Pirul* (to keep the agricultural land fertile the women collect large amount of board leaves or grass from the jungle and used it as bedding materials for the cattle, mixture of this litter with left over of fodder, dung and urine of cattle's cleaned from the shed in 2/3 days interval and kept in a pit to became bio-compost & within 4/6 month it rotten than transfer it to agriculture field & spread it in the field, so as to the crops get nutrients from the manure) and returned home around noon. Than after bathing remained busy with home work and children & old parents if any. During agriculture season they move to crop field in morning and returned to home in afternoon only. They carried their lunch with themselves and have it in the field it self, remain busy in the field with work of cropping related work like cleaning, winnowing, pricking etc. Time to time weeding in cropping field is cleared mainly by women folk and larger portion of this weeds are used as fodder during rainy days.

Since agriculture fields are located on terraces in the region and are generally very small in size, the modern agricultural implements can not be used and all work is done manually, as a result agricultural work became highly time consuming, thus increasing women's work loads is tremendous. Men prefer to do less time consuming work which required less labor and generates more & quick money. They do not show much interest in routine agricultural work because it required hard labor and less productivity. Therefore instead of sharing the work with women, they prefer to migrate to urban center (Nautiyal, 2003) for earning by doing any type of work. Being responsible for farming doesn't come easy for women. The womenfolk of this area work in an average of 12-16 hours a day in agriculture related work with house work. However the women in the state do not has the property rights on which they working hard. They can't negotiate with banks or micro finance organization for sale or investment neither the power to make decision in major economic matters concerning property (Anonymous).

The human and livestock population in the region is largely resulting in heavy burden on existing land resources. Over grazing with over cutting of forest for fuel wood, fodder and timber persist hard time. Loss of crops is very high due to wild animals and natural calamities like over rain some times & land slides etc. As a result high altitude families get only 4/6 months subsistence food in an average from its terrace cultivation. Decline quantity of land due to soil erosion, land slides etc are problem for the high altitude farmers for better productivity and quality in compared to past. Early aging and drudgery among rural working women in the farm sector continued vicious circle like low product, less income dissatisfaction and lead to many social problems like migration to better place if money permits.



Terrace agriculture field in the high altitude villages of Dharchula & Munsriary



Women Busy in their agriculture field with harvesting

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