

Gender Roles of Garo Women in Paddy Cultivation- A Critical Study

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ABSTRACT

Meghalaya being the only matriarchal state of the country, women enjoys more power and decision making capacity as compared to women of rest of the country. About 72 per cent of the total female workers in the state are engaged in agriculture as cultivators and labourers as against 61 per cent of male workers. In addition, about 46 per cent of the cultivators in the state are women; while the corresponding national figure is only 32 per cent. Most of the agricultural operations are performed by women folk in addition to the household chores. The major crops grown in Garo Hills are paddy, maize, cashew nut, betel nut, oranges, pineapple, black pepper and other fruits & vegetables. The study was conducted under University funded research project (IRP) during 2011. The main objective of the study was to study gender roles of the respondents engaged in paddy cultivation. A total of 120 respondents (couple) were selected from four villages (random) from the two randomly selected blocks of West Garo Hills district, Meghalaya. The main findings of the study were that application of FYM (75%), land preparation (65%), seed selection and treatment (39.17%), preparation of nursery (92%), sowing (87%), transplanting of nursery (91.67%), fertilizer application (15%), weeding (83.33%), plant protection measures (5%), harvesting (95.83%), threshing (75.83%), storage of grains (71.67%), sale of produce (38.33%) and adoption of modern technology (18.33%) were performed by farm women in contrast to their spouse. Access and control profile of the respondents showed that except for land preparation, burning of jungle and grain storage, most of the other operations –seed selection (55.3%), sowing/nursery raising (55.26), harvesting/plucking (72.9%) and threshing (72.63%) are done exclusively or predominantly by women. The study signifies significant but unrecognised contribution of women in major crop cultivation in the selected district of Meghalaya.

Keywords: Gender roles, Paddy cultivation, Women, Meghalaya

INTRODUCTION

Women in Meghalaya are believed to be better placed and to have more autonomy than their counterparts in the rest of the country. Women are respected, honoured and placed in high position. According to the Development Assistance committee (1999) "Gender refers to the economic, social, political and cultural attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female. In most societies, men-women differ in the activities they undertake, in access and control of resources and in participation in decision – making. In most societies women as a group have less access than men to resources, opportunities and decision – making.

Gender issues have been recognized as both indicators of and foundations for effective social and economic development. There is a strong emerging consensus that to achieve sustainability, people-cantered development,

progress towards equality in the roles of women and men are essential. The analysis of gender is the commonly accepted term used for studying the role of male and female in intra and inters- household dynamics within a farming system (Feldstein and Poats, 1990).

The labour force participation rate of women is 31.56 per cent as compared to men's rate of 68.44 per cent. Agriculture is the highest employer of women's labour to the extent of 84-97 per cent in India. Farm women carry 75-80 per cent work with 50-66 per cent of them contributing as agricultural labour. Women play active roles in farmstead activities but usually they work behind the scenes and most often their contribution in production goes unnoticed. Various studies conducted in different parts of the country to assess their contribution in farming have shown that they prepare land, carry and apply manure, sow seeds, transplant seedlings, pull out weeds, attend to

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hoeing, harvest crops and stack the hay. They carry thresh, clean, grind, store and cook the grain. They also graze animals, collect fodder, wash cattle, clean sheds, feed animals, milk them, process the product and often take the product for sale. Over the years, the percentage of women in agriculture, both as labours and cultivators has increased from 20 per cent to 32 per cent in the same period. Agriculture, the single largest production endeavour in India, contributing 25 per cent of GDP, is increasingly becoming a Female Activity.

Several farm activities traditionally carried out by men are also being undertaken by women as men are pulled away into higher paying employment. Thus rural India is witnessing a process which could be described as *Feminization of Agriculture*. With these points in mind the study was conducted to analyse the gender roles in paddy cultivation in Meghalaya.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was carried out in West Garo Hills district of Meghalaya State. It was purposively selected because the college is situated in this district. There are six blocks in the revised map of West Garo Hills w.e.f. 2012. Out of these, two blocks i.e. Gambegre and Rongram were randomly selected. From each block two villages were selected randomly. The villages selected were Darak A. Kongre and Chekwatgre from Gambegre and Ganol Songma and Chibragre from Rongram. Since the study was carried out on "Gender Analysis", therefore equal number of male and female respondents was selected. Fifteen number of male and female each (couples) were randomly selected from each of the four selected villages. Thus the total sample size was 120 consisting of 60 male and female each engaged in agriculture. Gender roles were analysed using Harvard Analytical Framework.

Harvard Analytical Framework or Gender Roles Framework or Gender Analysis Framework: The framework consists of a matrix for collecting data at the micro (Community and household) level. It has four interrelated components:

(i) **Activity profile-** which answers the question, "who does what?", including gender, age, time spent and location of the activity

(ii) **Access and control profile-** which identifies the resources used to carry out the work identified in the activity profile, and access to and control over their use, by gender

(iii) **Analysis of influencing factors-** which charts factors that influence gender differences in the above two profiles

Data were collected from the respondents by using a structured interview schedule developed for this purpose as per Harvard Analytical Framework. The data was collected through personal face to face interview during the year 2011. The data so obtained were quantified and subjected to statistical analysis for drawing meaningful conclusions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Gender roles of rural people of West Garo Hills, Meghalaya engaged in paddy cultivation were analysed using Harvard Analytical Framework consisting of 'Activity Profile', 'Access and Control Profile' and 'Analysis of influencing factors'. The results of the study were tabulated and presented for meaningful interpretation.

Table 1: Gender roles of Garo farm women engaged in paddy cultivation

Activity	Frequency (n=60)	Percentage
Land preparation	8	13.33
Seed selection and treatment	49	81.67
Sowing and nursery raising	55	91.67
Transplanting of nursery	56	93.33
Harvesting	52	86.67
Threshing	43	71.67
Storage of grains	17	28.33

Activity Profile: The activity profile of farm women of West Garo Hills district of Meghalaya engaged in paddy cultivation has been presented in Table 1. The results of the table show that except for land preparation and storage of grains, farm women play a major role in all other activities of paddy cultivation. Majority of the respondents are engaged in seed selection and its treatment (81.67%), sowing and nursery raising (91.67%), transplanting (93.33%), harvesting (86.67%) and threshing (71.67%) which highlights their significant contribution in paddy cultivation.

Their male counterparts lend a helping hand in domestic chores and as such they get more time to contribute in agricultural operations. Moreover, land preparation (cutting of jungle) for paddy cultivation being a labour intensive activity is mostly done by males.

Table 4: Gender Analysis of the respondents engaged in paddy cultivation-Harvard Analytical Framework (Analysis of influencing factors)

Constraints	Frequency	Percentage	Opportunities	Frequency	Percentage
Women doesn't have skill to climb trees for cutting and jungle clearing	105	87.5	The cutting or burning paddy field & grain storage is mostly done by male	110	91.67
Males doesn't have skill in seed selection and its treatment	96	80.0	Except burning paddy field, all other activities are mostly controlled by female	94	78.33
Males don't involve in most of the paddy cultivation activities due to other household works	85	70.83	Threshing is done exclusively by females	88	73.33

predominantly by female i.e. 46.67 and 30.0 per cent respectively. Access to paddy grain storage is held predominantly or exclusively by male i.e. 50.83 and 21.67 per cent respectively.

An analysis of 'Control by gender profile' of the respondents reveals that land preparation is controlled either exclusively or predominantly by male i.e. 56.67 and 34.17 per cent respectively. Data of seed treatment activity reveals that it is exclusively controlled by female for majority of the respondents (60.0%). Sowing and nursery raising activity showed that it is predominantly or exclusively controlled by female for majority of the respondent i.e. 39.17 and 35.0 per cent respectively. Harvesting and threshing is exclusively controlled by female for majority of the respondents i.e. 46.67 and 55.0 per cent respectively. However, grain storage is predominantly or exclusively controlled by male for 40.83 and 27.5 per cent of the respondents respectively.

Sah *et al.* (2007) in their study found that harvesting 66 per cent and sorting and grading 52 per cent of potatoes were primarily performed by women. Land preparation was found to be carried out jointly by men and women farmers. Women had a major say in deciding land (52%) and number of nurseries (raised beds) to be utilized (49%), and amount and sources of other production inputs (60%). Potato farmers as well as farm women had equal access to the production resources and farm benefits. However, women were found to have an edge over men in controlling the resources like land and labour, and also on the farm benefits of the gender in potato cultivation in the state.

Analysis of Influencing Factors: Analysis of influencing factors that pose constraints and offer opportunities to farmers and farm women in different activities of paddy cultivation was analysed using Harvard Analytical Framework. The result of the investigation is presented in

Table 4. The major constraint for women to contribute in land preparation (trees cutting and jungle cleaning) as reported by majority of the respondents (87.5%) was that women do not have the skill to climb trees for cutting and jungle clearing and have less physical potential to do it. The major constraint that hinders men to contribute in most of the paddy cultivation activities is their involvement in other household chores as reported by majority of the respondents (70.83%). Majority of the respondents (80.0%) reported that men are not skilful in seed selection and its treatment hence is a constraint for them.

The factors that offer opportunities to male for land preparation for paddy cultivation is that men are skilful in climbing trees and have more physical strength to do it as reported by majority of the respondents (91.67%). Most of the paddy cultivation activities are controlled by farm women, reported by 78.3 per cent respondents. It is an opportunity for women to take charge of most of the paddy cultivation activities and give their significant contribution in the field of agriculture. Threshing is done exclusively by women as reported by majority (73.33%) of the respondents. It connotes that there is gender division of activities in paddy cultivation.

CONCLUSION

It is concluded from the above study that there is gender division of activities in paddy cultivation among Garo people of West Garo Hills, Meghalaya. Some of the activities like land preparation and grain storage are exclusively or predominantly carried out by male whereas other activities like seed selection and treatment, sowing and nursery raising, harvesting and threshing are exclusively or predominantly done by women. Various reasons or factors influence this division of work as indicated in the above study. Some activities are designated as masculine while others as feminine and this is the chief reason for gender discrimination of activities in paddy cultivation.

Further analysis of the activity profile to study gender roles with respect to their contribution in paddy cultivation is tabulated in Table 2. The results of the table show their contribution in paddy cultivation with reference to the gender and age.

It can be concluded from this table that land preparation (44 no.) and grain storage (36 no.) is carried out mainly by male respondents particularly the young adults. The contribution of old people is none in case of male while significantly low for female. The main reasons are that they have less energy to carry out these activities and availability of other family members (children and adults) to shoulder the responsibility. The activities that are carried out from being at home are mainly carried out by old females. The contribution of children (male and female) is also low because most of them go to school for education. Only the school drop-outs are involved in these activities.

As far as the number of hours per day is concerned, it can be seen from the data of Table 2 that the hours per day spent by females in these activities are slightly greater

than their male counterparts. The reason is that most of the spouse stays at home to take care of the young kids and look after other household chores while wives go out for work for long hours. However, there is no difference in the no. of days spent per season in various activities of paddy cultivation. Most of these activities are carried out within 2-3 kms from their home, which they usually cover by walk while some of the activities like seed treatment, harvesting and grain storage are carried out from the comfort of their homes.

Access and Control Profile: Access and control profile of the respondents with respect to paddy cultivation are depicted in Table 3. The data of this table reveals that access to land preparation is held exclusively by male (72.5%), while access to seed selection and treatment and sowing and nursery raising is held exclusively by female 75.83 per cent and 74.14 per cent respectively.

In case of harvesting, the access is held predominantly by female for majority of the respondents (40.0%). In case of threshing, the access is held exclusively or

Table 2: Gender Analysis of the respondents engaged in paddy cultivation-Harvard Analytical Framework (Activity Profile)

Activity	Male (n=60)			No. of hrs./ day	No. of days/ season	Distance of activity from home (km)	Female (n=60)			No. of hrs./ day	No. of days/ season	Distance of activity from home (km)
	Children	Young	Old				Children	Young	Old			
Land Preparation	16	44	0	7-8	60	2-3	2	8	1	6-7	60	2-3
Seed treatment	0	4	0	1-2	7	0 (at home)	3	49	3	1-2	7	0 (at home)
Sowing and nursery raising	8	7	0	5-6	18	2-3	11	55	1	7-8	21	2-3
Harvesting	12	9	0	4-5	12	2-3	6	52	2	6-7	15	2-3
Threshing	7	4	0	3-4	20	0 (at home)	14	43	2	5-6	30	0 (at home)
Grain storage	11	36	0	4-5	30	0 (at home)	10	17	7	6-7	30	0 (at home)

Table 3: Gender Analysis of the respondents engaged in paddy cultivation-Harvard Analytical Framework (Access and Control Profile) (n=120)

Activity	Access by Gender*					Control by Gender*				
	M	F	F/m	M/f	M/F	M	F	F/m	M/f	M/F
Land Preparation	87 (72.5)	9 (7.5)	2 (1.67)	16 (13.33)	6 (5.0)	68 (56.67)	4 (3.33)	2 (1.67)	41 (34.17)	5 (4.17)
Seed treatment	16 (13.33)	91 (75.83)	9 (7.5)	0 (0)	4 (3.33)	4 (3.33)	72 (60.0)	35 (29.17)	6 (5.0)	3 (2.5)
Sowing and nursery raising	11 (9.17)	89 (74.17)	12 (10.0)	2 (1.67)	6 (5.0)	10 (8.33)	42 (35.0)	47 (39.17)	7 (5.83)	14 (11.67)
Harvesting	27 (22.5)	24 (20.0)	48 (40.0)	6 (5.0)	15 (12.5)	14 (11.67)	56 (46.67)	32 (26.67)	6 (5.0)	12 (10.0)
Threshing	4 (3.33)	56 (46.67)	36 (30.0)	8 (6.67)	16 (13.33)	8 (6.67)	66 (55.0)	28 (23.33)	5 (4.17)	3 (2.5)
Grain storage	26 (21.67)	14 (11.67)	12 (10.0)	61 (50.83)	7 (5.83)	33 (27.5)	12 (10.0)	16 (13.33)	49 (40.83)	10 (8.33)

*M = Exclusively male; F = Exclusively female; F/m = Predominantly female; M/f = Predominantly male and F/M = Equally female/ male

**= Figures in parenthesis indicate percentage

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