Ignoring Women Farmers

What is the issue?

- According to the agricultural census, 73.2% of rural women are engaged in farming activities but only 12.8% own landholdings.
- The gender gap in the agriculture sector will only widen more with the current farm laws.

What are the concerns for women in agriculture?

- In India, agriculture is mostly related as a filed for men who are alone seen as farmers. However, this is far from the truth.
- As mentioned, 73.2% of rural women are engaged in farming activities but only 12.8% own landholdings.
- Due to cultural, social and religious forces, women have been denied ownership of land.
- Notably, 83% of agricultural land in the country is inherited by male members of the family and less than 2% by their female counterparts.
- Thus, women are mostly left without any title of land in their names and are excluded from the definition of farmers.
- The government only labels them as ‘cultivators’ or ‘agricultural labourers’ but not ‘farmers’.

What impact does this create?

- Without any recognition, women are systematically excluded from all the benefits of government schemes.
- Moreover, they are not guaranteed the rights which they would otherwise be given if they were recognised as farmers.
- These include loans for cultivation, loan waivers, crop insurance, subsidies or even compensation to their families in cases where they commit suicide.

What are the other problems?

- Non-recognition as farmers is only one of their problems.
- Women have unequal access to rights over land, water and forests.
- There is gendered access to support systems such as storage facilities, transportation costs, and cash for new investments or for paying off old dues

and such services related to agricultural credit.
- There is also gendered access to inputs and markets.
- Thus, despite their large contribution to the sector, women farmers have been reduced to a marginal section, vulnerable to exploitation.

How do the recent farm laws affect them?

- The policies fall short of reducing disparity or alleviating their distress.
- Given this, women farmers fear that the farm laws will further deepen gender inequality in the sector.
- In this context, the first concern is the lack of any mention of MSP (minimum support price) that protects farmers from exploitation.
- Also, farmers will have no bargaining power in the corporatisation of agriculture.
- Corporates get to decide the price, with less safety net or adequate redressal mechanism for the farmers.
- Consequently, the small, marginal and medium farmers will be forced to sell their land to big agro-businesses and become wage labourers.
- In this, women are barely in a position as empowered agents who can either understand or negotiate (written) agreements with traders and corporate entities.
- Perhaps, this is why women are notable part of the ongoing farmers struggle to remind that they are farmers too and have an equal stake in this fight.

Source: The Hindu

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