

Daughters of Sita; Servants of Varuna

The role of women in agriculture in the Hubli/Dharwad
rural-urban fringe

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Preface

Writing one's thesis is the final subject of the study-period. It's a good time to look back to all these years at the University of Groningen and thanking all the people who gave all the lectures. But in some cases one should say special thanks to special persons.

First of all I want to thank dr. Peter Druiven, my supervisor and a great scientist when it comes to Development Studies. Thanks to him I've had a good preparation and gained a lot of knowledge about the subject of agricultural activities in general and the rural women in developing countries in special. He handed me the tools to write this thesis and enabled me to have a very special research experience in Dharwad.

In Dharwad I had the best and most suited supervisor one could wish for; Professor dr. Nidagundi. He guided me and made me feel very welcome. I owe him and his family all my gratitude for the wonderful stay I had in Dharwad.

In the field I had a great translator, Gundur, whom I want to thank. He was a very competent translator and has learned me a lot about Indian culture.

Writing a thesis without interviewing people seems almost impossible; I want to thank all the people who allowed me to interview them and gave me a little piece of their culture.

Last but not least, I want to thank all the people who have helped me, inspired me and taught me so much during these years at the University of Groningen.

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Summary

Agriculture plays an important role in India; it involves a lot of people and is responsible for quite some contributions made to the national income. The majority of Indian people still live in the villages, making in one way or another their living with agriculture.

This thesis looks to the role of women in agriculture; what is the ideal and what is the social economic reality. But it also concerns the kind of activities women do.

In the villages had since long been a system in vogue that's called the Jajmani system. It consisted of economic relations between different castes, especially the dependence of landowners and the artisan and service-castes towards each other. When every member of the family performs their traditional caste-occupation, for instance priest, potter, carpenter, washer, or shoemaker, etc., then they depend also on the services of other castes for their daily needs. The person who receives the service is called the 'Jajman' and the person who gives the service, is called 'Kamin'. As payment for the service, the Kamin receives money or a payment in kind, this depends on whether the Jajman is a landlord, because the landowners will only pay in kind.

Caste had been since long the structuring principle in the agricultural society. When we speak of caste, we usually mean the Jati.

Jati is the group in which a person is born; it's the original occupation from the people.

On the other hand there is the Varna, this is the social status of the Jati. Varnas are divided into five groups: Brahmins (priests), Kshatriyas (warriors), Vaishyas (merchants), Sudras (artisans, servants and labourers) and untouchables.

Occupations that have to deal with dead for instance, are 'unclean' and are lower in rank. From these groups, the first three are the so-called people of 'double-birth' (dvija), through meanings of putting on the holy chain (upanayana).

In different states, the same Jati can be a different Varna.

These castes have each their own rules for how to behave; this also affects the position of a woman and how she is looked at.

Besides, a woman should do Purdah. Purdah is an important factor in this and it also gives a strong indication of status; the ideal in the villages is that a woman stays at home, in their own courtyard. She shouldn't have to perform any farming activities in the field.

A Hindu man gains status if his wife stays at home and the wife enjoys to be the woman which is taken care of. But in order to be able to let his wife stay at home, out of public space, the farmer needs to have a certain level of wealth, hence he needs to pay the workers on his land.

In medieval India, purdah became very stringent, but even nowadays, a woman should conform to it. This has consequences for her work; she can only work, if her husband lets her to.

Though, working outside the house seems a sign of freedom, but this ain't as nice when you have to work all day outside in 40°, working the land.

Dharwad lies in the Maidan, a plateau, just East of the Western Ghats. On the East – side of Dharwad lies an area with the black soil. This black soil is rather fertile and very useful for tilling cotton. In summer it can be dry here. Sometimes these plots of land are irrigated. Jowar, wheat and cotton are typically crops that do very well in black soil.

At the West-side of Dharwad, red soils are found. It's a poor soil, but is able to have a good waterhousehold. Crops grown here are paddy, groundnut, ragi, pulses.

All the villages visited were to some extent rural, though still under influence of Dharwad or Hubli. Hence in the thesis they will be referred to as rural-urban fringe.

In India these cropping patterns still follow the Physical Geographical areas. A whole regional pattern of crops growing occurs, sometimes with over 50 different species. Though thanks to irrigation, some crops can now grow in different areas.

The success of these development can not be concealed, over one-third of the total area of cultivated land is irrigated. But irrigation isn't the only thing that was used to improve the agricultural output; together with artificial fertilisers, a better energy-supply

system and less bureaucracy in getting credit it was, it lead to an increased agricultural output. With all these improvements, it was not only the agricultural sector that benefited, but it also contributed to the poverty-reduction.

India has had a lot of changes the last century, from British Colony, to an independent state in 1947 to a quick rising nation; developed rather then developing, though still with a large countryside in which changes, even that of the Green Revolution didn't rise so quickly. India's farmland is still gigantic.

But even due to changes in some occupations, India will not suddenly be 'freed' of it's rural area's aand habits, while this way of life has soaked itself into the Indians.

In some ways there hasn't been that much change; women also still don't work outside the home very commonly. Domestic work and running the household still dominates her daily life. The women who do work outside the house, often get less wages and are underpaid.

In te field of Hubli/Dharwad, there was still a rather strict divorce between the males and females activities, hence doing this other work, shows in some way that a woman does perform less labour and should be paid like this.

Women working in the field are nowadays comes from all kinds of castes; Lingayats very often work as coolis too.

Not the individual, but the family is dominant, playing the lead role.

Within this household, every member above ten years old is a potential labourforce.

Men, women, children; if the necessity is there they have to work.

Reality beats out the ideal in most cases.

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