BEARING THE BRUNT
IMPACT OF RURAL DISTRESS ON WOMEN

SWARNA S VEP A
Bearing the Brunt
To the tribal woman of Koraput, drenched in the rain and shivering in the cold, at dusk to collect few fish in the rain puddles.
## Contents

*List of Tables*  
ix  

*Foreword by M.S. Swaminathan*  
xiii  

*Acknowledgements*  
xvii  

*Introduction*  
xix  

### 1 Spreading Rural Distress at the Turn of the Century 1

- Marginalization of Rural Workforce 2
- Shrinking Land Base 7
- Rising Indebtedness 12
- Declining Profitability of Farming 18
- Fewer Livestock Assets with the Poor 18

### 2 Women in Agricultural Production 26

- Feminization of Agriculture 26
- Women’s Access to Technology 33
- Women’s Access to Land and Water Resources 41
- Implications for Productivity Enhancement in Agriculture 54

### 3 Women in Natural Resource Conservation and Management 62

- Women’s Involvement with Natural Resources 62
- Types of Natural Resource Conservation Efforts 65
- Women in Natural Resource Management Programmes 75
- Benefits from Women’s Participation in the Natural Resource Management 93
4 Women’s Access to Livelihoods 100
   Labour Force Participation and Work 100
   Participation of Women 100
   Type of Employment Available to Women 104
   Women’s Paid Work and Unpaid Work 108
   Unemployment and Wage Differentials 115
   Women’s Access to Literacy and Education 123
   Micro-Credit and the Self-help Groups 129

5 Women’s Survival, Nutrition, and Healthcare 154
   Survival Chances 155
   Food Intake and Nutritional Status 167
   Healthcare 174

6 Gender Gap Index 182
   About Gender Equity 182
   Widening Gender Gap 185
   Reasons for Widening Gender Gap 195
   Policy Implications 201

Bibliography 216
Index 223
About the Author 231
## List of Tables

1.1 Composition of Workers India-Rural (Persons in Millions) .................................................. 2
1.2 Distribution of Cultivators, Including Landless, among Various Occupational Groups in Rural India, 2004–05 ........................................................... 4
1.3 Human Labour Input and Bullock Labour Input per Hectare in Paddy Cultivation, 2001–02, 2002–03 ............. 6
1.4 All India Unemployment Rate (CDS) ..................................................................................... 7
1.5 Percentage of Landless ............................................................................................................ 8
1.6 Land Ownership Pattern of Tiny Land Holders .................................................................. 9
1.7 Social Profile of Tiny Land Holders ...................................................................................... 9
1.8 Land Ownership Pattern ....................................................................................................... 9
1.9 Rural Households by Occupational Category ..................................................................... 10
1.10 Percentage of Cultivator Households in Rural Areas ....................................................... 11
1.11 Percentage of Operational Holdings ................................................................................... 12
1.12 Non-Cultivating Land Owners in Rural India ................................................................. 13
1.13 Incidence of Indebtedness in Rural India .......................................................................... 13
1.14 Average Debt–Asset Ratio by Household Assets-Holding Class, All India, June 2002 (Rural) .......... 14
1.15 Percentage Share of Institutional Agencies in Outstanding Cash Debt for Major States .............. 14
1.16 Percentage of Households Possessing Assets (Rural) ...................................................... 15
1.17 Percentage of Agricultural Labour Households to Total Rural Households and Their Asset Value per Household as on 30.06.02 (Rural) ...................................................... 16
1.18 Projected Cost of Wheat and Paddy (2005–06) .................................................................. 19
1.19 Fallow Lands in India (‘000 Hectares) ............................................................................. 20
1.20 Changes in the in-Milk Cattle Stock per 100 Households (Rural) ....................................... 21
1.21 Changes in the Stock of in-Milk Buffaloes per 100 Households (Rural) 21
1.22 Changes in Ovine Stock per 100 Households (Rural) 21
1.23 Changes in Stock of Poultry per 100 Households (Rural) 22
1.24 Lower Poverty Reduction at the Turn of the Century (Percentage of Population) 24

2.1 Main and Marginal Workers in 1991 and 2001 (in Millions) 27
2.2 Female-headed Households 28
2.3 All India—Agricultural Workers 29
2.4 Distribution of Districts as per the Percentage of Female Workers in All Districts 31
2.5 Distribution of Districts as per the Percentage of Female Workers in 151 Food for Work Districts 32
2.6 Distribution of Households by Size Class of Land Owned for Each Household Type-Rural Only 43

4.2 Age-specific Labour Force Participation Ratios 102
4.3 LFPR, WPR According to Usual Status Principal, and Subsidiary Status-India 103
4.4 Main and Marginal Workers in Rural India over a Decade 105
4.5 All India per Thousand Distribution of the Employed 106
4.6 Weekly Average Time Spent on Crop Production and Other SNA Activities 114
4.7 No. of Women of Age 15 Years and above Usually Engaged in Household Duties (Principal Status) and also Participating in Specified Activities (per 1000 Women Usually Engaged in Household Duties)—All India 115
List of Tables

4.8 All India Unemployment Rate (Current Daily Status) 117
4.9 Unemployment Rates per 1000 Persons in the Labour Force 117
4.10 Average Earnings per Day of Regular Employees Aged 15–59 (2004–05) 119
4.11 Average per Day Earnings of Women as a Ratio of Men in Regular Employment (Gender Gap in Earnings) 119
4.12 Real Wages/Day of Males and Females 122
4.13 Literacy Rate (per 1000 Persons) by Sex for Rural and Urban India during 1983 to 2004–05 124
4.14 Percentage of Household without a Literate Female Member 124
4.16 Per 1000 Distribution of Children (5–14 Years) by Status of Current Attendance 127
4.17 Per 1000 Distribution of Children (5–14 Years) by Status of Current Attendance 128

5.1 Expectation of Life at Age 1 by Sex and Residence in India 157
5.2 Life Expectancy at Birth 159
5.3 Sex Ratio in India (Rural and Urban) 159
5.4 Juvenile Sex Ratio in the Age Group 0–6 in 1991 and 2001 161
5.5 Infant Mortality, Total Fertility, and Birth Rates (Rural) 167
5.6 Percentage of RDA Consumed—Sedentary Workers (Kcal per Day) 170
5.7 Percentage of RDA Consumed—Moderate Workers (Kcal per Day) 170
5.8 Cereal Intake Differences of Men and Women (Grams/Day) 172
5.9 Differences in Weight for Age of Male and Female Infants 173
xii  Bearing the Brunt

5.10  Chronic Energy Deficiency 174
5.11  Percentage of RDA Consumed—Expectant and Lactating Mothers (Kcal per Day) 175
5.12  Rate of Hospitalization/100,000 Persons during Last 365 Days in 2004—All India 175

6.1  All India Gender Gap Index 195
6.2  Gender Gap Index—States 198
Gender equity and justice constitute an important part of the UN Millennium Development Goals. The Beijing Platform for Action developed in 1994 provides a comprehensive blueprint for achieving the goal of mainstreaming gender concerns in all areas of development. Agriculture in particular is getting increasingly feminized and women are forced to share the burden of farm management and post harvest technology without appropriate support services. Because of lack of land rights, women in agriculture have extreme difficulty in getting access to institutional credit and other essential inputs. The present publication clearly brings out the many dimensions of the consequences of women bearing the brunt in relation to agrarian distress.

An extreme manifestation of this distress is found in 33 districts of India, which have been identified as ‘agrarian distress hotspots’. In many of these districts, particularly in the Vidarbha region of Maharashtra, indebtedness and other hardships lead to farmers engaged in a life-giving profession taking their own lives. In such cases, the men often leave behind young widows and children. The households then become headed by women. Unfortunately the land title is invariably not a joint one between husband and wife. Therefore, the wife is denied the right to ownership and thereby the right to credit and inputs. On the other hand, the responsibility of educating and bringing up the young children is on the shoulders of the widows. This compounds the tragedy and the plight of such women and children. This is why M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF) has started in Vidarbha a Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana (Women Farmers’ Empowerment Programme) in order to empower women farmers with the needed technology, inputs, and remunerative marketing opportunities.
Indian agriculture is going through a phase of stagnation. Obviously, there will be agricultural renaissance only if women, who constitute over 70 per cent of the workforce, are enabled to play their rightful role in moving agriculture forward. The role of women in the conservation of natural resources, cultivation, consumption, and commerce is becoming more significant day-by-day. The present publication bring out this fact very clearly. The National Commission on Farmers has offered in its very first report submitted to the Government of India (GOI) in December 2004, detailed suggestions on the empowerment of women in agriculture. Unless action is taken to provide women the essential support services and the right to land, the fatigue in agricultural productivity and production will continue.

On the occasion of the Indian Science Congress held at Visakhapatnam, the Jamsetji Tata National Virtual Academy for Rural Prosperity organized a National Virtual Congress of Mahila Kisans. Women farmers from different parts of the country suggested the following nine point charter for enabling them to do their best in improving the productivity, profitability, and sustainability of the major farming systems of the country. Given the right support, women farmers can take the country to great heights of achievement as is clear from India’s leading position in the world in milk production. It is estimated that nearly 75 million women are involved in small scale dairy enterprises in the country. They have been empowered through cooperatives, which ensure producer-oriented processing and marketing. We should learn lessons from this women farmer-led milk revolution in the country and transfer this experience to other farming systems. The nine components of the charter for Mahila Kisans are the following:

1. Title to land: Joint pattas are absolutely essential for Mahila Kisans to get access to Kisan Credit Cards and institutional credit.
2. Right to credit, to both individuals and to women self-help groups, and right to insurance: New insurance schemes