

## Women in Maximisation of Crop Production

By

~~Kunjamma~~ V. K. KUNJAMMA )

AND

S. VARADARAJAN, (M.A.)

(Agricultural College & Research Institute, Coimbatore)

This paper deals with the subject of women in relation to crop production and how far they can help to achieve this objective.

Man is the only animal that grows its own food. The rest of them eat their food as and when they find or collect and store food for their future use. The lines of Dorothy Wellesley will bring home the truth how animals are unconcerned about their food:—

“The sheep.....

They stand upon their breakfast,  
And lie down upon dinner,

If only we too had,

“Fish growing round our legs,  
If we had floors of Marmalade,  
And beds of buttered eggs.”

We would not have to suffer all the ills of the present day.

Primitive man was just a hunter and food collector. He did not grow his own food. He stumbled upon the discovery only very much later that he could produce from the soil all that he required. It was undoubtedly the women of some primitive tribe who first made the exciting discovery, that plants come up when seeds are scattered upon the earth. When they spat out seeds around their huts, they were surprised to find plants growing up later on. The knowledge of cultivation of plants led to the civilisation of man and from his primitive stage of blissful ignorance, brought him to the present stage of crying for food and yet more food.

So at this juncture, it is but fair that women came forward and showed the world a way out of the woods. Women have, all through the ages, done the job of raising plants. While men went out to hunt and fish, women grew plants around their crude dwellings. Even from the earliest days, women were doing most of the work in producing crops and that too, entirely by hand at first and later on with the aid of crude implements such as the shoulder-blades of buffaloes, deers antlers and pointed sticks of fire-hardened wood.

In Oceania, where animal husbandry is absent, agriculture is practised by women, developed from the age-old habit of gathering seeds and roots. Even to-day, most of the operations in agriculture are being done by women and they cannot be replaced. This truth of women doing all work in the field and at home can be seen even to-day among the Badagas of the Nilgiris. Most of the potato cultivation is done only by women there. The women of Africa, West Indies, Burma and almost in every country devote a good lot of their time and energy in crop production. Are we not employing women on all our farms to transplant, for hoeing and for weeding, for the harvest of crops and many an item of work where manly hands are of no avail?

It is little wonder therefore when the Red Indians say that "When women plant maize the stalks produce 2 or 3 ears, why? Because they know how to produce children." But thank God that twins, triplets and quins are not of such frequent occurrence! It is perhaps the maternal trait of tending children that make women so eminently fitted for tending crops.

It is a fact for legitimate pride that in spite of the disabilities of their physiological make-up, they had been managing the cultivation of crops in the best possible manner throughout the ages. Did not the women of Sparta manage the lands to feed their military husbands who did nothing but fight? It is only when animals were domesticated and used instead of human labour that man entered the field of agriculture. Women, irrespective of their place in life, can come forward and lend a hand to mitigate the present-day problem of food shortage, here and now. Here are some of the suggestions that may be taken up. They are given in the spirit that a penny saved is a penny earned.

Women can, where ever there is scope, raise a small kitchen garden round their dwellings and grow pot herbs, root crops and vegetables. They need not depend on their menfolk to do this job. The bread winner often winds a long way to office, spends many hours there and returns home too weary to do any work. If women spend a few happy and healthy hours every day in their garden they could save a lot and save the bother of buying stale things from the market or from street hawkers. If they grow more than they require they may freely exchange them with their neighbours or sell them to others.

Women can look after a cow or two if they find place in their houses, to meet all their milk requirements. A cup of good milk is worth four you buy from the rider of the steed of steel. Eggs, a lot of them, you can have and fresh too, if you keep a small flock of fowls. We believe that an egg a day will keep an ounce of rice

away. What is meant is that we can manage with the rice that we get as rations if we take a variety of dishes. This suggestion is not meant to affect the vegetarians unless they wish to change the classification of eggs.

Bee-keeping is yet another way of providing sweet food for young and old with little trouble.

Women can do a lot reduce the demand for food if they reduce waste. The age-old adage "Waste not want not" was never truer than it is to-day. They can achieve this by making dainty dishes and adhering to austerity menus. Entertainment on a lavish scale leaves a lot of waste in its wake. Women can render some service to the nation at large at the present moment if only they make up their minds to observe a few simple things while processing food for the table. Polishing rice is almost a craze now-a-days; while it satisfies the desire for glamour when rice looks like jasmine flower at the table, it is devoid of all its goodness. Why not women do all the pounding of rice as of old in their own homes? They will get all the bran too and the much-needed vitamin B.

If more of millets and pulses are included in preparations, wherever possible, there is no need to be depressed about the reduction of rations now and then. More of roots and tubers can be included in the daily menu. Even an ounce of groundnut in the daily diet will make it richer.

Women can help a lot in saving foodstuffs that would otherwise go to waste by sun-drying or "dehydrating", as it is called by the scientists. Drying of bananas, mangoes, brinjals, fish, meat etc., was common in our country for ages. The idea behind this primitive practice has been to provide some victuals against rainy days. Canning of fruits and vegetables can be done at home and every housewife can do it with a little practice. With some care and ingenuity, every housewife can do many other useful things that will be too lengthy to describe here. If she only bears in mind that if she makes less demands on the meagre stock of the Nation's food she would be serving her country well. It is now her duty to render all the help she can, directly or indirectly, to tide over the present crisis.

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