Chapter-VII

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, SUGGESTIONS AND CONCLUSION
INTRODUCTION

Agriculture is the mainstay of Indian economy. Women perform a variety of tasks in agricultural works. The involvement of women in farming activities found very high in all aspects. But women’s contribution in terms of production, employment, earnings have been overlooked and labeled as ‘supplementary’, ‘casual’, ‘optional’ and ‘supporting’. The worth of women’s contributions on crop production depends upon the season and the physical health of women labourers. The substance and sustenance of agricultural growth depends on the real contribution of women labourers in the study area. Farm women will have to be given more prominence in agricultural and allied vocations. It is a fact, that women in India are major producers of food in terms of value, volume and number of hours worked. Women labourers are also facing many problems in farming activities. To improve the position of women work force it is necessary to improve the production potential by treating them as important economic agents, not as dependent members of the family.
With this background, the following objectives are made in the present study:

1. To study the socio-economic and living conditions of agricultural women labourers in the study area;
2. To identify the pattern of season-wise employment and unemployment of women labourers;
3. To analyse the wage structure and wage differentials of the sample labourers;
4. To study the causative factors for the supply of agricultural women labourers in sample villages;
5. To identify the problems faced by agricultural women labourers in agriculture and
6. To offer policy suggestions to improve the quality of life and multiplicity of livelihood of women agricultural labourers in Theni District.

**MAJOR FINDINGS**

The age wise distribution of agricultural women labourers shows that 39.25 per cent belong to the age group of 41-50 years and fewer number of women labourers are in the age group of 51-60 years.

The analysis of religion wise distribution reflects that 87.25 per cent of the women labourers are affiliated to Hindu religion whereas 5.75 and 7.0 per cent are affiliated to Christian and Muslim religions respectively. Majority of the agricultural women labourers in the study area are only Hindus.

In community-wise distribution of the sample labourers, it is found that labourers belonging to Backward Class outnumber all the other groups. The labourers belonging to Most Backward Class account for 33.0 per cent whereas
only 3.0 per cent of labourers belong to Forward Community. The Scheduled Caste labourers account for 24.0 per cent in the study area. The labourers belonging to Backward and Most-Backward Communities spread over the entire area.

With regard to the marital status of women labourers, 76.0 per cent are married, 11.50 per cent are unmarried; 7.75 per cent are widowed and 4.75 per cent are independents. The number of unmarried women labourers is only minimum in sample villages.

Among the selected eight villages, majority of agricultural women labourers completed (73.0%) only schooling. It is noteworthy to mention that only 24.0 per cent of labourers has polytechnic and ITI education. There are a number of illiterate women labourers (24.0%) in the study area. It is learnt that educational status of the respondents retards the entry into farming activities.

Analysis of the family-size of the women labourers shows that 62.75 per cent have the family size of 2-4 members. Families consisting of fewer children are found in the study area. Nuclear family system is obviously gaining currency among the agricultural women labourers. The share of nuclear family members accounts for 67.50 per cent of the total respondents.
The analysis of domicile-status shows that most of the women labourers belong to local area only. It accounts for 85.5 per cent of the total labourers. There are only 11.50 per cent and 3.25 per cent of women labourers who hailed from other regions and states.

The analysis of housing shows that larger number of women labourers (71.25%) live in concrete houses compared to those living in tiled (21.0%) and thatched (7.75%) houses. Majority of labourers live in own houses which account for 78.0 per cent. The analysis reflects that the rented and leased houses are used by only a minimum number of labourers in the study area.

It is also clear from the study that only 29.75 per cent of women labourers have houses having certain basic facilities like bathroom, bedroom, open space, toilet and drainage. Women labourers do not possess own houses an account of their poor parental legacy and poor economic status.

Among the 400 agricultural women labourers, only 42.21 per cent have landholdings whereas 57.79 per cent do not have any land holdings. It is found that firewood is used by 60.75 per cent of women labourers for cooking purposes as it is cost-effective and poor-friendly. LPG and kerosene are used only by a minimum number of women labourers for cooking.
The agricultural labourers perform various kinds of work in agricultural activities such as Ploughing, Sowing, Weeding, Transplanting, Harvesting, Winnowing, Threshing, Picking Vegetable/Fruit and Others. The flurry of weeding and harvesting activities take place in the sample villages.

Income Analysis reveals that sample labourers earn less than Rs.1501- Rs.3000 per month and majority of labourers less than Rs.1500 per month. They jointly account for 85.25 per cent of the total income. The amount of income earned in agricultural work was not adequate enough to meet their basic needs necessitating most of the labourers lead a precarious life style.

Expenditure Analysis shows that major chunk of income of women labourers is spent on food items again a sizable portion of income is earmarked for repayment of loan majority of the women labourers are debt-ridden being economically-crippled and emotionally-battered.

It is noticed that only 105 women labourers have the potential for saving whereas 295 labourers are non-savers. Their income is just enough to meet the basic requirements only. It is found that only 8.75 per cent of women labourers are debt-free. Among the sources of borrowings, Self Help Groups top the list and friends are the important sources accessed by majority of women labourers. It is clear that only 95.25 per cent of labourers reside in the same village for long number of years.
Analysis of family background confirms that 56 per cent have agricultural background and 44 per cent of labourers do not have any agricultural background worthy of mention. Most of the sample labourers are daughters of the soil. Women labourers have parents who were mostly casual labourers and illiterates in the study area.

The irrigation facility of the sample villages shows that canal irrigation is available for Vadugapatti, Vayalpatti and Surulipatti villages, whereas the other five villages have only well irrigation and monsoon-irrigation facilities for agricultural activities.

It is clear that 90.25 per cent of women’s labourers families are male-headed whereas 9.75 per cent are female-headed once in the study area. Further, 75.50 per cent of labourers are unskilled and 21.75 per cent are semi-skilled labourers. It is surprising to note that only 2.75 per cent of total labourers are skilled agricultural labourers knowing a little knowledge about the scientific agricultural management. The analysis of types of women labourers shows that 65.75 per cent are landless labourers and 34.25 per cent are cultivating labourers. Again, there are casual and contract labourers. It is observed that 71.05 per cent are casual agricultural women labourers.

The results of the study reveal that 205 women labourers are intoxicant-free. It is noted that 243 labourers are morbidity inflicted persons and
all the morbidity affected persons have taken recourse to health care system for treating their illness. Traditional health care is the common practice for 182 women labourers. The majority of agricultural women labourers do not prefer socializing, due to illiteracy and male chauvinistic attitude.

The village-wise analysis of categories of work shows that majority of labourers do weeding work. These labourers are largely found in Vadugapatti, Maniampatti, Thamminayackanpatti and Eathakovil villages. The category of labourers doing is found in Eathakovil village. The Fruit and Vegetable picking labourers are largely seen in Odaipatti and Surulipatti villages.

In the season-wise analysis, it is inferred that the largest number of days of employment was offered to women labourers in Kharif season. They account for 96.5 days out of 123 days. It is found that summer recorded season provided only 53 days of employment to agricultural women labourers out of four months in a year. In all, the seasons those in the age groups of 31-40 and 41-50 years obtained larger number of days of employment in Kharif, Rabi and Summer seasons.

Among the four months in Kharif season, June and July recorded higher number of days of employment to women which work out to 24 and 29.5 days respectively. September provides the lowest number of days of employment (21 days) to women labourers in the study area. The labourers in Vayalpatti
village obtained more number of days of employment (102 days) out of 122 days in Kharif season compared to other villages. The labourers in the age groups of 41-50 years and 31-40 years get more number of days of employment in Kharif season.

Among the 400 sample labourers, a maximum of 104 days and a minimum of 88 days were offered to employment to women labourers in Rabi season. Out of four months, larger number of days of employment was offered to labourers in October of Rabi season. The labourers in the age groups of less than 20 years and more than 60 years do not find adequate number of days of employment in Rabi season.

It is clear that only 53 days of employment were obtained by the 400 sample women labourers in the summer season. Among the eight sample villages, Vayalpatti and Vadugapatti villages have recorded relatively larger number of days of employment. Unfavourable weather and climatic conditions were responsible for fewer number of woman days of employment in the study area in summer season. Among the four months in Rabi season, February has recorded relatively fewer days of employment for agricultural women labourers.

Factor analysis is administered to the motivating factors of women labourers prove the variation in the dependent variable to the extent of 64.83 per cent. The most important motivating factor that causes the emergence of
women labourers is “Economic Necessity”. It consists of five motivating variables with the reliability co-efficient of 0.0807. The Eigen value and the percentage of variation explained by this factor are 3.4754 and 21.95 per cent respectively. The important motivating variables under this factor are unemployment, use of human resources, economic reasons and dissatisfaction over previous jobs, since the factor loadings are 0.9262, 0.8421, 0.7963 and 0.6628 respectively under ‘Economic Necessity’.

The next vital motivating factor is ‘societal relevance’. It consists of three motivating variables with the reliability co-efficient of 0.7668. The extracted three motivating variables explained 16.73 per cent of variation. The Eigen value is 2.7618 and the percentage of variation is explained by these factors is 16.73 per cent. The important variables under “Societal Relevance’ are social prestige and social recognition.

The third and fourth motivating factors are family network and ambition since their Eigen values are 2.4281 and 1.9412 respectively. The family network factor consists of three motivating variables with the reliability coefficient of 0.7166, whereas the ambition factor consists of five motivating variables with the reliability co-efficient of 0.685. The extent of variation explained by these two factors is 14.67 per cent and 11.48 per cent respectively.
With regard to the perception of Economic Necessity factors, the significant profile variables are age, education, sources of income, occupational background, parents occupation family income and personality index. These variables are significant at five per cent level of probability with respective ‘F’ statistics. Regarding the perception on the ‘socialization factor’ the significant associating profile variables are provenance and personality index with the ‘F’ statistics of 2.9565 and 2.5686 respectively.

The significant associating profile variables in respect of perception on family network are Provenance, Parental Occupation, Personal income and Family income, since the respective ‘F’ statistics are significant at five per cent level of probability. The perception on ‘ambition factor’ reflects that the significant association is found between the variables of age, provenance and sources of income, since the respective ‘F’ statistics are significant at five per cent level of probability.

The analysis of employment status of women labourers shows that Kharif and Rabi season recorded higher number of days of employment compared to summer season. It was evidenced that July provided higher number of women days of employment (29.5 days) and April and May recorded higher number of days of unemployment.
The analysis of village-wise employment and unemployment revealed that Vadugapatti provides the maximum number of days of employment (261 days out of 365 days) and Eathakovil provides higher number of days of unemployment (133 days out of 365 days) in the study area. The labourers in the age groups of 31-40 years and 41-50 years get 216 days of employment each respectively. Those aged 61 and above have remained unemployed for a period of 154 days to their discomfort.

The results of Multiple Linear Regression Analysis revealed that all the eight explanatory variables pooled together accounted for 86 per cent of variation in the supply of agricultural women labourers. The current wage structure of agricultural women cultivating labourers influences significantly the supply of labourers with the value of 2.4189 at 5 per cent level of significance. The magnitude of co-efficient has been the highest in the estimated equation. It is clearly established that current wage structure has been positively associated with the supply of women agricultural labourers. Expenditure of the family is significant at one per cent level of probability in influencing the supply of labour. The family size has positive and significant influence at 10 per cent level of probability. However, age of the labourer, level of agricultural operations and natural climate have not been positively associated with the supply of cultivating women labourers.
All the descriptive variables taken together account for 89 per cent of variation in the supply of women labourers in Multiple Linear Regression Model. Among the eight explanatory variables, four of them have statistically significant co-efficients and remaining four variables have statistically insignificant co-efficients in the estimated equation. The statistically significant variables are family size, level of agricultural operations, current wage structure and age of the labourers. Current age structure and age of the labourers have emerged the most important variables influencing supply of women labourers in the study area.

The number of days of unemployment was 25.5, 29 and 67 days in Kharif and Rabi and summer seasons respectively due to various personal reasons and climatic factors. Among the sample villages, labourers in Thamminayakanpatty experienced severe unemployment problem compared to those of other villages. Altogether, 121.50 days of unemployment was noticed in all the age categories of women labourers. The problem of unemployment was acute for labourers aged 61 years and above in the study area.

The lowest number of days of unemployment was found in June of Kharif season. It is also inferred that the lowest number of days of unemployment is recorded in Surulipatty village in June, in July in Odaipatty village and in August in Vayalplatti village. The number of days of unemployment is the highest (36) in respect of labourers aged less than 20 whereas it is the lowest in respect of the
age group of 41-50 years. Further, November in Rabi season recorded more days of unemployment for women labourers. It depicted that labourers aged less then 20 years experienced 38 days of unemployment in Rabi season forcing them to seek alternative sources of employment for livelihood support.

Labourers in the Eathakovil village faced severe unemployment problem in summer season with 70 days of unemployment bringing them to brink of economic collapse and forcing them to financial borrowing. In the summer season also, labourers in the age groups of 60 years and above face acute unemployment problem on account of their lack of agility and physical discomfort for increased physical labour.

The analysis of Garrett’s Ranking Technique shows that climate was the influencing factor for the problem of unemployment with the total score of 15410.25 and the mean score of 84.58. Poor wage structure is the second major factor for the persistent problem of unemployment along with its untold deprivations among women labourers in the study area.

The MNREGA work participation of the sample women labourers is found to be the alternate sources of employment accessed by the women labourers. The harvesting and construction work in nearby villages attracted more women labourers. The promotion of Self Help Group activities and of cash incentives are
the two suggestions put forwarded by the sample labourers to minimize the severity of unemployment in the study area.

The analysis of the nature of employment portrayed that contract labourers are largest in harvesting activity (28.50%) and lowest in ploughing activity (21.43%). In the case of casual labourers, weeding work attracts more number (61) of labourers in the study area. The ploughing work was done only by 14 women labourers is inferred from the study.

Among the eight sample villages, the number of cultivating labourers is the largest in Vayalpatti village (34 out of 50 labourers) and the lowest in Thamminayackanpatti and Duraisamypuram villages. Landless farm labourers are largely concentrated in all the villages excepting Vayalpatti and Vadugapatti villages. There are more number of landless farm labourers than cultivating labourers in the study area.

It is found that a total of 55.25 per cent of labourers worked on the basis of day-time work whereas 16.25 and 28.50 per cent work for piece-work and contract work. Day time work is the most preferred form of work for the majority of the labourers. The category of piece work is the highest in respect of threshing and harvesting work. The weeding work was undertaken by the women labourers on the basis of day-time work.
The labourers had previous experience in agricultural, industrial and construction activities in the study area. It is inferred that 322 labourers out of 400 have had previous work experience in agriculture. The experienced categories of agricultural women labourers are mostly concentrated in Duraisamypuram village.

Proximity facility is the criterion for the choice of place of work for agricultural labourers. It is evidenced that 213 labourers prefer to work only in nearby village lands. It is found from the analysis that 64.50 per cent of labourers work in wet land and 35.50 per cent work in dry-land. There are 223 labourers who worked only for fixed working hours of 6 hours per day in the study.

The wage structure of women labourers shows labourers doing ploughing get higher wages with Rs.220 per day compared to those of other kinds of work. The labourers doing weeding and picking vegetables/fruits work get only Rs 80 per day.

A sum of Rs 5, 04,820 was realized as income by all the 400 women labourers every month in the selected sample villages of the study area. The highest percentage share of income was received by threshing labourers in the study area. The percentage share of income was very low in respect of others categories (2.09%) of women labourers.
It is inferred that the wage spread of harvesting labourers is higher compared to that of labourers of other categories. They workout to be Rs.50 and Rs.20 per day respectively.

The wage structure is not uniform for men and women labourers in the study area. Wage differentials are perceived in respect of all kinds of work. In fact, gender-bias gives rise to the prevalence of wage discrimination in the study area.

The poverty analysis shows that 156 women labourers are poverty-ridden. These labourers spread across all categories of work. Labourers Below the Poverty Line are working in large numbers in weeding work (3.78%) whereas, it is the lowest in respect of ploughing category (1.94%). The APL labourers are largest in harvesting work and lowest in others categories of labourers. It is exhibited that more number of BPL labourers live in Duraisamypuram village (16.03%) whereas, labourers Above the Poverty Line are mostly concentrated in Maniampatti (14.75%) village.

Among the sample villages, the wage rate is the highest in Eathalkovil village in respect of ploughing, sowing, weeding, and harvesting, winnowing and threshing works. They work out to Rs 240, Rs.120, Rs.90 and Rs. 120 respectively. The wage structure is fixed on the basis of demand for and supply of women labourers in the study area.
The practice of time-wage dispersal mechanism was favoured by 190 women labourers. They insisted on the monthly payment system due to discontinuous work nature of agricultural activities. The time-wage payment system is mostly prevalent in Maniampatti village and but it is the lowest in Vadugapatti and Surulilpatti villages. The practice of piece-wage is applicable only to vegetable and Fruit Picking labourers in the study villages.

It is found that 63.0 per cent of women labourers receive their wages in cash. The credit system of wage payment was favoured by only 10.0 per cent of sample labourers. Few of them receive cash or payments in kind as wages for their agricultural work.

The over-time work facility was used by 316 labourers out of 400 agricultural labourers. Among the 316 overtime workers, only 251 received overtime wages whereas 65 labourers work free of wage. It is a routine that women labourers receive loans and advances, which account for 91.25 per cent of the total number of labourers.

With regard to insurance coverage, it is clear that 78.50 per cent of labourers do not have personal insurance coverage in the study area. The labourers in the personal insurance coverage are largely present in Odaipatti village.
The occupational health hazard was perceived by 124 labourers largely due to natural climatic factors and spontaneous involvement in work. There are 276 labourers who do not perceive any ill-effect in their agricultural work. The health hazard perception is higher in respect of threshing and weeding categories of labourers.

The Application of Garrett’s Ranking Technique has identified the reasons for work disputes among the women labourers. Among the personal factors, personal reason was ranked as the first reason for dispute with the Meanscore of 88.97. Family Factor was rated as the first social factor causing work dispute in farming activities. The level of wages is the major economic factor which causes work disputes in agriculture with the mean score of 90.83. Climate change is rated as the another external factor causing work dispute in agriculture with the mean score of 47.98.

The prospector-form of management strategy was adopted in agriculture by the cultivators as opined by 131 women labourers. It is also found that women agricultural labourers do multiple-tasking apart from farming work in the sample villages.

The analysis of problem ranking by the women labourers revealed that work burden is rated as the number one problem followed by seasonal employment and slavery as identified by agricultural landless women labourers in
the study area, with the mean scores of 5.21, 4.74 and 4.70 respectively to the total. Among the 263 landless women labourers, job insecurity and climate change problem are rated as the seventh and eighth problems with the mean score values of 3.74 and 3.61 respectively. It is highlighted that wage discrimination and gender disparity problems are also rated as the fourth and fifth problems faced by landless labourers with the mean score values of 4.45 and 4.09 respectively. Climate change was rated as the least problem by women labourers.

With regard to cultivating women labourers, it is identified that the problems of seasonal employment and gender disparity were rated as the major problems faced by the labourers with the mean score values of 4.81 and 4.51 respectively. It is also observed that wage discrimination and migration are rated as the third and fourth problems in the order of ranking of problems. The natural factor of climate change was rated as the last problem faced by women cultivating labourers with the mean score value of 3.23.

The analysis of problems faced by casual labourers during agricultural operations confirms that work burden was identified as the major problem (mean score value of 4.43) faced by casual women labourers. Wage discrimination and job security are the second and third problems identified by the casual labourers in the study area with the mean score values of 4.33 and
4.04 respectively. As far as the casual labourers are concerned, gender disparity is not found to be aggressive in causing work dispute among women labourers.

It is established that among the 114 contract labourers work burden, job insecurity and gender discrimination are the problems rated as first, second and third once faced by labourers with the mean score values of 5.11, 4.58 and 4.50 respectively. Wage discrimination and seasonal unemployment are the problems rated as fourth and fifth once by contract labourers in the study area. Climate change is least problem for the sample labourers in the study area.

Analysis of Rank Correlation confirms that landless, cultivating, casual and contract labourers have the nearest approach in ranking the common problems in the field of agricultural works since the co-efficient of Rank correlation is the maximum (0.54) in the ‘Judgement of casual labourers (R3) and landless labourers (R1) followed by casual (R3) and contract labourers (R4). Hence, they have nearest approach in ranking the problems in the study villages. The Co-efficient of Rank Correlation is negative in the 2nd judgment between cultivating labourers (R2) and casual labourers (R3), where the correlation coefficient is 0.29. Hence, they have a negative approach to the common problems experience by women labourers in the study area.

It is found that 128 labourers migrated to other forms of work in the village. It is observed that 105 labourers moved to near by villages and only 18
labourers migrated to other districts. It is clear that 24 labourers have opted for inter-state migration seeking livelihood support and improvements in the study area. Easy employability was the prime reason for the labourers to remain in agricultural work followed by easy interaction with relatives and friends.

POLICY SUGGESTIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following policy options are suggested to ensure and promote better quality of life and multiplicity of livelihood for agricultural women labourers.

1. Agricultural women labourers need to be encouraged to establish Farm and Non-Farm enterprises by providing appropriate facilities at a reasonable rate of interest by the banks for enhancing farm/household income.

2. Policy makers should take into consideration of the interests of women agricultural labourers, at the time of framing policies for the development and welfare of agricultural labourers. The law enforcement agencies must play a crucial role in implementing laws related to agricultural labourers like equal wage for equal work.

3. With a view to promoting sustainable agriculture, farm women will have to be given more prominence in agricultural and allied vocations through
provisions of critical resources, education and training that helps them participate in modern scientific agriculture.

4. The seasonal unemployment of women labourers has severe negative impact on their income-consumption expenditure and savings. The debt position and fiscal fitness of women labourers also worsen. Hence, concerted steps should be taken by governments to provide alternative sources of employment to the women labourers to eke-out a living in off-seasons. A convergence process involving natural resources, productivity, human development (health, education), risk coverage (life, health) and skill sets should be evolved and made a part of government policies and programmes which would be a demand-driven approach to the employment needs of women labourers.

5. Women labourers mostly do work that are tedious, monotonous and requiring manual labour, while technical activities are taken over by men and hence women need to be trained in technical aspects as well as handle farming operations independently to achieve the goal of sustainable agriculture with greater ease and certainty. Scientific agricultural education and training of women labourers are as essential as for administration, business and industry.
6. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA) work implementation should be implemented only in the non-agricultural season. This would empower communities and eventually contribute towards making the programme inclusionary to fight the conundrums of poverty and unemployment which are intrinsically inter-related.

7. Organizational efforts should be made for integrating farm women into the cumulative process of development. The present beneficiary approach to women’s development should be replaced by participatory approach with role clarity and co-ordination mechanism. Strong internal and external monitoring systems, along with concurrent studies, help in diagnostic-remedial measures.

CONCLUSION

Agriculture is the base of Indian Economy. Women labour force participation in agriculture is basic to India’s agricultural progress and development. The problem of Indian agriculture is not one of just mismanagement – of water and other resources – but also of the refusal to acknowledge women’s contribution to agriculture. The deprivation of the invisible and voiceless women farmers accentuate poverty, because the poorest families are the most dependent upon women’s economic productivity.
Increased economic productivity of women labourers will be able to influence their status and image in the family, as well as the general morale of the farming community. Direct access to income by the agricultural women labourers would reduce the dependency syndrome they have been traditionally suffering from. In the long run, such economic independence will generate positive ripple effect which promotes the overall well being of women labourers. This is an imperative for inclusive and equitable growth and to unlock the huge potential of the population that is trapped in poverty with its associated deprivations.

The life of women agricultural labourers in Theni District of Tamil Nadu is one of abject poverty with its humiliations. There are both causative and motivating factors for the emergence of women agricultural labourers. Local work availability, flexibility in work choice and participation, notified wage rates, easy working conditions and reduction in risk associated with migration are the important causative factors while motivating factors include economic necessity, socialization, family net work and ambition. Gender disparity and seasonality of employment are the two major problems encountered by the women labourers in Theni District. The study underscores the need for abolition of contractors that eliminate the chances of exploitation and discrimination based on caste and community and so restores dignity and self esteem. This is an integral aspect of social inclusion with improved livelihood opportunities for the deprived classes.
in a more coherent manner so that agriculture could be viewed as a market driven system apart from being a way of life.

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