CHAPTER–I

INTRODUCTION

Agricultural progress occupies an important place in the economic development of a country. Increased agricultural output and productivity tend to contribute substantially to the overall economic growth of a country which is predominantly agricultural and over-populated. Agriculture in India is the vertical backbone of the country and is regarded as the largest sector of the country’s economic activity. It is the major sector of the State economy, in which the majority of people earn their livelihood. Though the share of agriculture in the aggregate economy has declined rapidly during the planned development of the country, it assumes a pivotal role in the rural economy. The contributory share of agriculture in Gross Domestic Product in India has declined from 55.4 per cent in 1950-51 to 17.3 per cent in 2010-11. Agriculture at present provides livelihood to 60 per cent of the total population. The sector provides employment to 58.4 per cent of country’s workforce and is the single largest private enterprise.\(^1\)

Agriculture also plays a very important role in industrial development of our nation as it is the source of raw materials for many industries. India’s foreign trade is deeply associated with agriculture. Agriculture accounts for about 14.7 per cent of the total export earnings. Agriculture and its related goods
contribute 38 per cent in the total exports of the country. Expanding agricultural production increases the demand for other sectors notably fertilizers, pesticides, machineries, transportation and communication varying with the level of technology. Indian agriculture continues to be a gamble on the monsoon².

Rural Indian women are extensively involved in agricultural activities. However, the nature and extent of their involvement differs with the variations in agro-production systems. The mode of female participation in agricultural production varies with the landowning status of farm households. Their roles range from managers to landless labourers. In overall farm production, women’s average contribution is estimated at 55 per cent to 66 per cent of the total labour with percentages much higher in certain regions. In the Indian Himalayas a pair of bullocks works 1064 hours, a man 1212 hours and a woman 3485 hours in a year on a once hectare farm, a figure that illustrates women’s significant contribution to agricultural production³.

India has a geographical area of 328.73 million hectares; of which reported area for land use is 306.04 million hectares. The net area cultivated is about 142.60 million hectares i.e. about 46.6 per cent of the total reported area. Since nearly 50 million hectares of area is sown more than once, the cropping intensity works out to 135.1. Forests account for about 68.97 million hectares i.e. 22.5 per cent of the total reported land area. Also nearly 13.97 million
hectares are cultivable wastelands and 9.91 million hectares are fallow lands. Only about 30 per cent of the total cropped area is irrigated and the remaining area is rain fed. The available statistics further shows that only about 66 per cent of the gross cropped area is under food crops and nearly 34 per cent area under non-food crops. Cereals and pulses account for nearly 52.93 per cent and 12.64 per cent of the total area respectively. Fruits and vegetables occupy nearly 4.24 per cent of area. According to population census of India 2001, there are about 402.5 million rural workers of which 127.6 million are cultivators and 107.5 million are agricultural labourers. In other words, pure agricultural workers constitute nearly 58.4 per cent of the total rural workers, of which 31.7 per cent are owner cultivators and 26.7 per cent are mainly agricultural wage earners⁴.

The latest available agricultural census data also reveal that about 78 per cent of operational holdings in the country are marginal and small, having less than 2 hectares. About 13 per cent holdings have 2 to 4 hectares and 7.1 per cent have 4 to 10 hectares of land. The relatively large holdings above 10 hectares is only about 1.6 per cent of the total operational holdings. However, this 1.6 per cent of the large holdings occupy about 17.3 per cent of the total area, while 78 per cent of holdings which are less than 2 hectares, operate only about 32.4 per cent of the total area⁵.
## TABLE 1.1
Population and Agricultural Workers

(in Millions)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>Average Annual Exponential Growth Rate (%)</th>
<th>Rural Population</th>
<th>Agriculture</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Cultivators</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Agricultural Labourers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>361.1</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>298.6</td>
<td>69.9</td>
<td>27.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(82.7)</td>
<td>(71.9)</td>
<td>(28.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>439.2</td>
<td>1.96</td>
<td>360.3</td>
<td>99.6</td>
<td>31.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(82.0)</td>
<td>(76.0)</td>
<td>(24.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>548.2</td>
<td>2.20</td>
<td>439.0</td>
<td>78.2</td>
<td>47.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(80.1)</td>
<td>(62.2)</td>
<td>(37.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>683.3</td>
<td>2.22</td>
<td>523.9</td>
<td>92.5</td>
<td>55.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(76.7)</td>
<td>(62.5)</td>
<td>(37.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>846.4</td>
<td>2.16</td>
<td>628.9</td>
<td>110.7</td>
<td>74.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(74.3)</td>
<td>(59.7)</td>
<td>(40.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>2011*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1028.7</td>
<td>1210.2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.97</td>
<td>1.64</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>742.6 (72.2)</td>
<td>833.1 (68.8)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>127.3 (54.4)</td>
<td>na</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>106.8 (45.6)</td>
<td>na</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>234.1</td>
<td>na</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Provisional

Source: Registrar General of India, 2011.

**IMPORTANCE OF AGRICULTURE AND WOMEN**

The International Development Community has recognized that agriculture is an engine of growth and poverty reduction in countries where it is the main occupation of the poor. But the agricultural sector in many developing countries is underperforming in part because women, who represent a crucial resource in agriculture and rural economy through their roles as farmers, labourers and entrepreneur almost everywhere, face more severe constraints than men in access to productive resources.

Women make essential contributions to the agricultural and rural economies in all developing countries. Their roles vary considerably between and within regions and are changing rapidly in many parts of the world, where economic and social forces are transforming the agricultural sector. Rural women often manage complex households and pursue multiple livelihood strategies.
Their activities typically include producing agricultural crops, tending animals, processing and preparing food, working for wages in agricultural or other rural enterprises, collecting fuel and water, engaging in trade and maintaining their homes. Many of these activities are not defined as “economically active employment” in national accounts but they are essential to the well-being of rural household.

Women work in agriculture as farmers on their own accounts, as unpaid workers on family farms and as paid or unpaid labourers on other farms’ agricultural enterprises. They were involved in both crop and livestock production at subsistence and commercial levels. They produce food and cash crops and manage mixed agricultural operations often involving crops livestock and fish farming. All of these women are considered part of the agricultural labour force. Women comprise an average of 43 per cent of the agricultural labourers force of developing countries. The female share of the agricultural labour force ranges from about 20 per cent in Latin- America to almost 50 per cent in Eastern and South Eastern Asia and sub- Saharan Africa.

AGRICULTURAL WOMEN LABOURERS IN INDIA

Labour is one of the primary factors of production. It is considered to be important not only because it is productive but also because it activates other factors and makes them useful for production purposes. The size of labour force in a country is determined by the number of people in the age group of 15-59 years as generally children below 15 years and old people above 59 years do not participate in gainful production activity. India’s labour force consists of 459.1
million workers (2004-05), growing at the rate of 2 per cent annually. Out of this 268.1 million workers are employed in agriculture as cultivators and labourers (Nagaraj, 2007)\(^8\).

Agricultural labourers, mostly landless, constitute the poorest segment of the Indian agricultural population. They belong to the economically backward and socially oppressed section of the society. They mainly belong to the scheduled castes and other backward communities. They are basically unskilled and unorganized and work in farms of prosperous big farmers as casual workers on wages for a larger part of the year (Padhi, 2007)\(^9\).

One of the most disquieting features of the rural economy of India during the past several decades has been its constantly increasing trend in the number of landless labourers. Factors like rapid growth of population, law of inheritance, rise in cost of agricultural inputs and decline in small scale industries have been responsible for this increase (Sajjad, 1998)\(^10\). The phenomenon of under employment, under development and surplus population are simultaneously manifested in the daily lives and living standards of agricultural labourers.

Out of 94 per cent of the female labourers found in the unorganized sector, nearly 80 per cent belong to agriculture since India is still predominantly agricultural country. The low rates of wage for women labourers are due to the unorganized nature of employment, the case with which hired labour can be substituted by family labour; the seasonal nature of the demand for labour and the traditional classification of agricultural jobs into male and female. The agricultural women labourers are handicapped by poverty, illiteracy and ignorance of the law are amongst the worst affected. Apart from wage differentials for the same jobs, assigning lower rates for jobs traditionally done by women strengthens
discrimination against women agricultural labourers and higher wages are assigned to the jobs traditionally done by men.

Women are a vital part of Indian economy. Over the years, there is a gradual realization of the key role of women in agricultural development and their vital contribution in the field of agriculture, food security, horticulture, processing, nutrition, sericulture, fisheries, and other allied sectors. Women form the backbone of agriculture, in India, comprising the majority of agricultural labourers. Women have been putting in labourer not only in terms of physical output but also in terms of quality and efficiency.

Women are critical to the well-being of farm households. Apart from raising children, women are expected to prepare all meals, maintain the homestead, and assist in crop and animal production, all the while leading to the general health of their families. Perhaps ironically it is because women have so many responsibilities that they have been over looked by agriculturists and policy makers, it has been more convenient to label men as farmers and women as child-raisers and cooks. Women are involved in all aspects of agriculture, from crop selection, to land preparation, seed selection, planting, weeding, pest control, harvesting, crop storage, handling marketing and finally to processing.

A rural woman forms the most important productive work force in the economy of majority of the developing nations including India. Agriculture, the
single largest production endeavour in India, contributing about 18 per cent of GDP, is increasingly becoming a female-supported activity. Agricultural sector employs 4/5\textsuperscript{th} of all economically active women in the country. Forty eight per cent of India’s self employed farmers are women.

\textbf{TABLE 1.2}

\textbf{Comparative Performance of Growth of GDP & Agricultural GDP}

\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|}
\hline
\textbf{Year} & \textbf{Growth of GDP} \hspace{3cm} & \textbf{Agricultural GDP} \\
\hline
1992-93 & 5.4 & 6.7 \\
1993-94 & 5.7 & 3.3 \\
1994-95 & 6.4 & 4.7 \\
1995-96 & 7.3 & -0.1 \\
1996-97 & 8.0 & 9.9 \\
1997-98 & 4.3 & -2.6 \\
1998-99 & 6.7 & 6.3 \\
1999-2000 & 7.6 & 2.7 \\
2000-2001 & 4.3 & 0.0 \\
2001-2002 & 5.5 & 6.0 \\
2002-2003 & 4.0 & -6.6 \\
2003-2004 & 8.1 & 9.0 \\
2004-2005 & 7.7 & 0.2 \\
2005-2006 & 9.5 & 5.1 \\
2006-2007 & 9.6 & 4.2 \\
2007-2008 & 9.3 & 5.8 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Wage Employment</th>
<th>Unemployment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2008-2009</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009-2010</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010-2011</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**AGRICULTURAL LABOUR - ETYMOLOGY**

The First Agricultural Labour Enquiry Committee (ALEC) 1950-55 defined Agricultural Labour as “Those people who are engaged in raising crops on payment of wages” (based on occupation). That is, if half or more of a household have wage employment in agriculture, then those households can be termed as agricultural labour households. The Second ALEC 1956-57 enlarged the definition to include- “Those who are engaged in agriculture and other agricultural occupations like dairy farming, horticulture, raising of livestock, bee keeping, poultry etc.” (based on income). According to National Commission on Labour “An Agricultural labourer is one who is basically unskilled and unorganised and has little for his livelihood, other than personal labour” (Srivastava, 1993).

**CLASSIFICATION OF AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS**

The agricultural labourers can be classified into mainly two categories.

1. Landless agricultural labourers - i) Permanent Labourers Attached to Cultivating Households, ii) Casual Labourers. 2. Very small cultivators whose main source of earnings from their small and sub-marginal holdings is wage employment. Permanent or attached labourers work on annual or seasonal basis and they
work on some sort of contract. Their wages are determined by custom or tradition. Temporary or casual labourers are engaged only during peak period of work. They are paid at the prevailing market rate. Under the second group come small farmers who possess very little land and therefore, have to devote most of their time working on the lands of others as labourers.$^{13}$

CHARACTERISTICS OF AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS

Agricultural labour in India is being widely scattered over 6.38 lakh villages of which half have population of less than 500 each. And therefore, any question of building an effective organization, like that of industrial workers, poses insurmountable difficulties. Agricultural labourers, especially in smaller villages away from towns and cities, are generally unskilled workers carrying on agricultural operation in the centuries old traditional wages. Most agricultural workers belong to the depressed classes, which have been neglected for ages. The low caste and depressed classes have been socially handicapped and they never had the courage to assert themselves.$^{14}$ In some parts of India, agricultural labourers are migratory, moving in search of jobs at the time of harvesting. The number of agricultural labourers being very large and skills they possess being meagre, there is generally more than abundant supply of agricultural labourers in relation to demand for them. It is only during the sowing and harvesting seasons that there appears to be near full employment in the case of agricultural
labourers. But, once the harvesting season is over, majority of agricultural workers will be jobless especially in areas, where there is single cropping pattern. Due to all the above mentioned factors, the bargaining power and position of agricultural labourers in India is very weak and deplorable. In fact, quite a large number of them are in the grip of village money lenders, landlords and commission agents, often the same person functioning in all the three capacities.

NATURE OF AGRICULTURAL LABOUR MARKET

The agricultural labour market in India is highly segmented. The labour absorption and wage rate depends on 1) adoption of new technology, 2) population and migration, 3) marketing & other institutional support like credit etc. 4) the terms of trade and the extent of the market, 5) the profitability. Demand-supply and the quality of life of the labour in the various markets also differ widely. The hilly region with shifting cultivation and forestry provide job opportunities to the agricultural labour at a lower level compared to the region which have adopted new agricultural strategies. These regions vary with regard to wage levels also. Further, the inter-zonal movement of agricultural labour is rigid.
**TABLE 1.3**

Employment of Agriculture in Selected Countries

(Percentage of Total)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Albania</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argentina</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narway</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pelgium</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preciel</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulgaria</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Columbia</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinna</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idaly</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


((-) Not Available)
WOMEN AS LABOUR FORCE

In India, the labour force is largely masculine, with only one out of every four workers being a female. Women today play a pivotal role in agriculture - as female agricultural labour, as farmers, co-farmers, female family labour and (with male out-migration, widowhood, etc.) as managers of farms and farm entrepreneurs. Three-fourths of women workers are in agriculture. Among rural woman workers, 87 per cent are employed in agriculture as labourers and cultivators. Woman is the moulder and builder of any nation’s destiny. They are regarded as the backbone of the rural scene. Women workforce outside the four walls is larger in rural areas than in urban India. The ILO revealed that women are responsible for 50 per cent of food production in the developing world.

Most of the women perform various types of work for their livelihood and agriculture is considered as the biggest unorganised sector where large number of rural women take part actively. While women have always played a key role in agricultural production, their importance both as workers and as managers of farms has been growing, as an increasing number of men move to non-farm jobs. Women constitute 40 per cent of the agricultural work force and this percentage is rising. An estimated 20 per cent of rural households are de facto female headed, due to widowhood, desertion, or male out-migration.
According to the census reports, there is an increased participation of rural women in economic activities besides doing household duties, though participation of women in agriculture contribute a lot for the economic growth and progress of the country, their problems are shown least concern. Woman’s role has biologically and socially combined to create four distinct functions that of mother, wife, homemaker and worker. The role of worker is equally important as that of the other three roles. But her role as an active worker-producer is rarely acknowledged though it is significant for the family’s survival. These unknown and unacknowledged beings are responsible to keep the economy at a steady pace and helped the nation to occupy a significant place in the world.

Women’s involvement varies widely among different regions, ecological sub zones, farming system, caste, class and stages in the family cycle. Generally, the poorer the family, the greater the involvement of women in agricultural activities. Women have extensive workloads with dual responsibility for many of the farm operations and household management (fetching water, cooking and taking care of children). Despite women’s significant and crucial role in agricultural development and allied fields, they have virtually no access to agricultural information, services or production assets and have very limited control over their earnings. Though Green Revolution technologies enhanced agricultural productivity, they also widened economic disparities and deepened
gender discrimination in community life. The introduction of capital intensive
technologies in the agricultural sector has had differential impact on men and
women and women have been adversely affected due to lack of access to
technology\textsuperscript{20} (Boserup, 1970a\&b).
AGRICULTURAL SCENARIO OF TAMILNADU

Tamil Nadu economy is agro-based and a major proportion of women in the labour force work in agriculture and traditional industries like cashew, coir, and handloom. A significant proportion of the labour force in the agricultural sector comprises women. Men were able to opt out from agriculture and seek new employment avenues elsewhere when they encountered low prospects in agriculture. Women have remained, however, in the agricultural sector, accepting the traditional practice of paying wages to women at half the rates for men. Introduction of mechanization caused high levels of underemployment and casualisation in the agricultural sector; women in Kuttanad even talk of the ‘hours’ available for work rather than days of work (Mencher and D’Amico, 1986).21

Increasing casualisation of work, falling incomes, and increasing insecurity of employment are real threats endangering the interests of women in the agricultural sector. Tamil Nadu has carved out a special niche for itself in development discourse due to its impressive performance over the years in the demographic and social development front. Much has been written about Tamil Nadu’s high level of female literacy, custom of matrilineal inheritance, political achievement regarding decentralized governance and commitment towards social welfare, high level of life expectancy, low infant mortality and cohesive
social structure promoting effective interpersonal channels of communication. Such achievements in social development have led to so called ‘Tamil Nadu Model’ of development. However it is paradoxical that in such a society well acknowledged for according higher status and position to women, participation of women in labour force has been consistently on the decline. Such a paradox deserves close scrutiny.

**TABLE 1.4**

**Agricultural Statistics of Tamil Nadu**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State: Tamil Nadu</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Population</td>
<td>31,400,909</td>
<td>31,004,770</td>
<td>62,405,679</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workers</td>
<td>18,100,397</td>
<td>9,777,885</td>
<td>27,878,282</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main Workers</td>
<td>16,303,310</td>
<td>7,454,473</td>
<td>23,757,783</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main Cultivators</td>
<td>3,107,543</td>
<td>1,631,276</td>
<td>4,738,819</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main Agricultural Labourers</td>
<td>3,273,642</td>
<td>2,789,144</td>
<td>6,062,786</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main Workers in Household Industries</td>
<td>594,025</td>
<td>667,034</td>
<td>1,261,059</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main Other Workers</td>
<td>9,325,100</td>
<td>2,367,019</td>
<td>11,695,119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marginal Workers</td>
<td>1,797,087</td>
<td>2,323,412</td>
<td>4,120,499</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marginal Cultivators</td>
<td>154,946</td>
<td>222,274</td>
<td>377,220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marginal Agricultural labourers</td>
<td>982,718</td>
<td>1,592,126</td>
<td>2,574,844</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marginal Workers in Household Industries</td>
<td>54,564</td>
<td>184,138</td>
<td>238,702</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marginal Other Workers</td>
<td>604,859</td>
<td>324,874</td>
<td>929,733</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CAUSATIVE FACTORS FOR WOMEN’S PARTICIPATION IN AGRICULTURE

The following are specific factors that affect women active participation as the labour force in agriculture.

**Education and Literacy:** The value and importance of educating women has not been adequately recognized. High illiteracy and low enrolment rates, especially in secondary schools, affect women’s ability to acquire the skills needed for income-generating activities and will have repercussions for generations to come.

**Family Responsibilities:** The duties of a woman at home are so enormous that they could affect their duties in the place of work. This is especially so if the women is raising a family. It is always difficult to give adequate time to both work and home activities.\(^{22}\)

**Pregnancy:** The biological reproductive role of the woman expects her to get pregnant in order to deliver a child. The period of pregnancy and child nursing are very demanding and much is expected from the woman in the home. Even though there is maternity leave there isn’t enough time to attend to the child.
**Low Socio-economic Status:** In the traditional Nigerian society, the female is accorded a low status that leaves her with less choice than to be at the background. The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/the World Bank (1994) stated that women’s disadvantaged social position which is often related to the economic value placed on familial roles, helps perpetuate poor health, inadequate diet, early and frequent pregnancy and a continued cycle of poverty. They also explained that parents may invest less in girls often because they perceive them to have less economic potentials since girls often become part of another family at marriage and generally earn less income. They further state that women’s low socio-economic status can also expose them to physical and sexual abuse and mental digression.\(^{23}\)

**Physical Factors:** These are the basic factors such as nutrition, water and health services. The health of the women has always been affected because of their disadvantaged position in the society. Poor health reduces women’s productive capacity to carry out their multiple productive and reproductive responsibilities. Women, because of their desire to take care of other members of the family, eat the less nutritious foods. This has significantly affected their nutritional status and perpetuated lower standards of health. This affects their overall contribution to the labour force and subsequent economic development.\(^{24}\)

**WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE**
According to Swaminathan, the famous agricultural scientist, some historians believe that it was woman who first domesticated crop plants and thereby initiated the art and science of farming. While men went out hunting in search of food, women started gathering seeds from the native flora and began cultivating those of interest from the point of view if food, feed, fodder, fibre and fuel. Women have played and continue to play a key role in the conservation of basic life support systems such as land, water, flora and fauna. They have protected the health of the soil through organic recycling and promoted crop security through the maintenance of varietal diversity and genetic resistance. Therefore, without the total intellectual and physical participation of women, it will not be possible to popularize alternative systems of land management to shifting cultivation, arrest gene and soil erosion, and promote the care of the soil and the health of economic plants and farm animals.

Women play a significant and crucial role in agricultural development and allied fields including the main crop production, livestock production, horticulture, post harvest operations, agro/social forestry, and fisheries. It is a fact long taken for granted but also long ignored. The nature and extent of women’s involvement in agriculture, no doubt, varies greatly from region to region. Even within a region, their involvement varies widely among different ecological sub-zones, farming systems, castes, classes and stages in the family.
cycle. But regardless of these variations, there is hardly any activity in agricultural production, except ploughing in which women are not actively involved. In some of the farm activities like processing and storage, women predominate so strongly that men workers are numerically insignificant. Studies on women in agriculture conducted in India and other developing and underdeveloped countries all point to the conclusion that women contribute far more to agricultural production than has generally been acknowledged²⁶.

Recognition of their crucial role in agriculture should not obscure the fact that farm women continue to be concerned with their primary functions as wives, mothers and homemakers. Despite their importance to agricultural production, women face severe handicaps. They are in fact, the largest group of landless labourers with little real security in case of break-up of the family owing to death or divorce; inheritance laws and customs discriminate against them land reform and settlement programmes usually give sole title and hence the security needed for obtaining production credits to the husband. Agricultural development programmes are usually planned by men and aimed at men²⁷.

About 60 per cent of agricultural operations like sowing of seeds, transportation of sapling, winnowing, storage of grain etc are handled exclusively by women, while in other jobs they share the work with men. Apart from participation in actual cultivation, women participate in various forms of
processing and marketing of agricultural produce. In rural India, the prosperity of the household depends on the prosperity of agriculture and allied occupation in any particular point of time vis-à-vis the role of women in innumerable activities connected with farming, dairying and sericulture.
MULTI-DIMENSIONAL ROLE OF WOMEN

(i) Agriculture: Sowing, transplanting, weeding, irrigation, fertilizer application, plant protection, harvesting, winnowing, storing etc.

(ii) Domestic: Cooking, child rearing, water collection, fuel wood gathering, household maintenance etc.

(iii) Allied Activities: Cattle management, fodder collection, milking etc.

Mainly rural women are engaged in agricultural activities in three different ways depending on the socio-economic status of their family and regional factors. They work as:

(i) Paid Labourers

(ii) Cultivators doing labour on their own land and

(iii) Managers of certain aspects of agricultural production by way of labour supervision and the participation in post-harvest operations 29.

THE CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS IN INDIA FOR GENDER EQUALITY

The constitutional provisions in India aim at providing equal treatment for all. Article-15 guarantees to citizens that the state shall not discriminate on the basis of sex. The Equal Remuneration Act (TERA) passed in 1976 was the first legislation to specifically prohibit sex discrimination in India. TERA requires equal remuneration for male and female employees performing the “same work” or work of similar nature. “Same work” is defined as that requiring similar or the same skill, effort and responsibility when performed under similar conditions.
Article-39 of the constitution supports the principle of equal pay for equal work for men and women. Except for the measures provided in the Minimum Wages Act, the state regulation of wages was achieved. Until 1957 by the conciliation and adjudication machinery created under legislation passed to settle industrial disputes. The Industrial Disputes Act of 1947 similar to that of TERA of 1976 established tribunals to deal with wages. Because of the long delays caused by the tribunals, unions and employers sought alternative ways to fix wages. The need for a natural wage policy led to the establishment of wage boards. Equal pay for the sexes has received consideration by the wage boards. Besides, the GOI ratified the International Labour Organization (ILO) principle of Equal pay for equal work. But the publicity and call for equal pay is ignored in actual practice.

The fair Wages Committee established in 1948 accepts the principle in general, but makes exceptions when fixing minimum wages. It held that when women are employed on work exclusively done by them or where they are admittedly less efficient than men, there is every justification for paying lower wages to women. According to the fair wage committee the equal pay principle does not apply when “Male Work” and ‘female work’ is distinguished. Yet the very notion of classifying jobs by sex is discriminatory.

“Minimum wages are determined by taking into account the needs of labourers, the size of the family being an important factor. The fair wages committee suggested that the wage of female works should be calculated on the basis of a smaller family than that of male workers. The All India Industrial Tribunal explained in 1956 that lower wages for women were justified because (a) female workers generally belong to a family group with at least one male earner as its head and (b) special amenities enjoyed by women, like maternity benefits, provision of crushes etc., should make up for the deficiency in wages earned by women as compared to men. However, the very assumption that wages should be lower because of less need or the provision of benefits discriminates against women because there are widows or run-away husbands who do not support their families. In agriculture, the situation is still worse because throughout India, the agricultural labourers are often extremely unorganized. This is particularly so in the case of women.

The rural poor compare peasants and the rapidly rising agrarian proletariat, coming from depressed castes and varied ethnic linguistic and religious faith. They also compare a vast section of women. These struggles are bound to increase and succeed as they are rooted in a situation where in the poorer toiling classes constituting an over whelming majority of the population are being confronted with the option either to becoming redundant and perish or struggle and revolt for bare survival. The rural poor do not want to perish. They no longer want to live a passive existence.

ECONOMIC DISCRIMINATION OF WOMEN
IN INDIAN LABOUR MARKET

Women population constitutes half of the country’s population accounting for 496 million in absolute number as per 2001 census. The women population in India is characterized by low literacy rate (54.16%), low work participation rate of 25.68 per cent and low level of development participation during 2001 census. More than 90 per cent of the women in rural areas and 69 per cent in urban areas were found having no technical skills. Women continued to be “treated as a source of cheap and secondary labour that can be hired and fired to suit the requirements of the employer”.

After independence, as women development is directly related to national development, a large number of programs have been initiated for women development in India. These programs lay emphasis on providing equal opportunities to women by removing gender basis, empowering women and creating self-reliance. It stresses adoption of a holistic approach to women development, to enable them to overcome their problems based on their involvement and participation in the process of development.

Women play a crucial role in the socio-economic development of a country. But both in the industrially developed and less developed countries, women are burdened with cumulative inequalities as a result of discriminatory socio-economic practices in India. The situation is much worse particularly in the
case of rural women in India. Women not only get pushed into low wage jobs but they are even paid lower remuneration than their male counterparts. The underlying rationale behind this is the supposition that women are materially dependent on men, and therefore the issue of equal remuneration seems an aberration. Still, in agriculture women in general take up only specific jobs, which the male workers usually avoid. It shows a tendency towards a system of job-segregation in the agricultural labour force. Such job segregation has several consequences. It creates a disparity in wage rates between the males and females, the reservation of high prestige and high wage jobs for men and low prestige and low-wage jobs for women workers. It brings down the bargaining power of women workers and reduces them to the state of marginal, intermittent oppressive labour, which is mostly unorganized. Hence the agricultural women labourers constitute the most exploited segment of labourers and their levels of employment and wages remain significantly below those of men in the agricultural labour market.

Discrimination against women in the payment of wages is widespread in India. Women workers are in general classified as those belonging to the organized and unorganized sectors. The economic conditions of women are quite obvious from the fact that 94 per cent of them are found in unorganized sector leaving only 6 per cent in the organized sector. Out of the 94 per cent of the
female labourers found in the unorganized sector, nearly 80 per cent belongs to
agriculture since India is still, by and large an agricultural country. The low rates
of wage for women labourers are due to the unorganized nature of employment,
the case with which hired labour can be substituted by family labour, the seasonal
nature of the demand for labour and the traditional classification of agricultural
jobs into male and female\textsuperscript{35}.

**THEORIES OF LABOUR MARKET**

The changing labour force participation rates of women and the persistently
lower pay they receive for their efforts are the two major topics on which
economists are recently concentrating their attention to a considerable extent.
Different economists discussing the differentials in incomes and employments in
the labour market put several viewpoints forth. They are, in general, classified as
orthodox labour market analysis, human capital theory, the economics of
discrimination and segmented labour market theories.

**ORTHODOX TRADITION OF LABOUR MARKET ANALYSIS**

The orthodox tradition of labour market analysis assumes that wages and
employment are determined by demand and supply and that demand is determined
by the marginal productivity of homogenous units of labour. There will be one
wage rate at which the supply of and demand for labour will be in equilibrium. It
assumes that the demand of labour makes no distribution between workers other
than their marginal productive activities. If at all women have been mentioned in
the theory of labour market, it has been about the supply of labour. For instance,
women are then assumed to make choices as individuals in a way that is different
to men’s choice about whether to work or not. But when this framework came to
be applied to women’s pay and the relative pay of men and women, it was unable
to predict the scale of pay differentials found between either the sexes or the
persistence of these differentials.

However, these orthodox theories suggest jobs are differentiated by the
income they command and this is determined by the quality of labour. That is, jobs
are differentiated on the basis of quality of labour in terms of his or her skills or
productivity and consequently incomes are differentiated. The labourers
possessing different skills or productivities came to be known as non-competing
groups as stated by Cairness\textsuperscript{36} (1874) and Mill\textsuperscript{37} (1909) each with boundaries
determined by geographical, occupational and most important institutional factors.
Moreover, within the orthodox theory, the first source of explanation for persisting wage differentials would have been labour market imperfections, i.e. if monopoly elements prevent women from taking up higher paying jobs, or if they are less mobile as workers or have less information than men about jobs, they would be expected to end up with less pay on the average.

With regard to discrimination some neoclassical theorists such as Becker\(^38\) (1957) assume that discrimination, of course, exists in labour market but still under competitive conditions, employers who discriminate make lower profits than employers who don’t. According to them, discrimination is attributed to tastes and predicted that it will vanish under competitive conditions.

**HUMAN CAPITAL THEORY**

Human capital theory has been concerned with how far the differences in wage rates can be explained by productivity difference between men and women and how far men’s and women’s’ preference for different jobs might also explain the differentials. Human capital theory has developed an elaborate supply-side economic theory. It assumes demand-side to be stable and hence differences in worker productivities on the supply side will be the main source of difference in earnings. The concept of human capital was adapted from physical capital Investment Theory by Becker (1957) and Schultzl during the late 1950s and early 1960s. According to the human capital theory, an individual can make an investment in himself or herself by devoting time for education, acquiring skills and work experience. The predictions of this theory are that it would bring a higher return to the forthcoming from making a larger investment. Jobs requiring considerable educational qualifications or a long training would be expected to pay much more over a long time than those which can be done without either of them.

The application of human capital theory to the problem of women’s earnings undertaken, first by Polachek\(^39\) (1975) suggest that women in general have different expectations from men and therefore, women make different investment decisions. Since women are all assumed to plan to abstain themselves from work for child bearing they are expected to choose the low occupations and hence in most cases they accumulate less human capital and have lower lifetime earnings as a result. However, Polackek (1976) is also of the view that it is women’s’ preferences for different occupations, which in large part explain both their lower earnings and their occupations segregation.

According to him, even though, individuals assumed to choose their occupations with a view of maximizing lifetime earnings, given their level of investment in education and training. They might also consider the other advantages in any occupation hence choose to accept lower pay for improved conditions or conversely expect higher pay to compensate for dirty or dangerous
work. But still, through this idea has been used considerably it does not give satisfactory explanation in terms of human capital requirements and compensation for disadvantages or sacrifice for advantages found in the occupation, but as a matter of fact, they are not. This is because, in general, the occupations preferred or chosen by women are defined as less productive and less skilled and hence become less rewarded jobs. Again, since the human capital concept depends heavily on the assumption that labour is paid equivalent to its marginal product and hence the problem of measuring productivity appears as in the case of orthodox theory. Moreover, measurement of worker’s productivity taking years of schooling alone into consideration while ignoring the important quality differences tells upon the real value of workers and hence payment of salaries on the basis of number of years of schooling or training would provide a misleading conclusion. For, when one starts to look in more details about the existence of wage or earning differentials and education or training differences between individuals or groups, the earning differences are usually far greater than the theory would lead one to expect and it could be stated that human capital theory explains only part of the earning differentials. The equation between earnings and the levels of skills thus have proved to be misleading and it, therefore suggests that differences in earnings need to be attributed to factors other than education and training. The other factors can easily be traced out from socially based ones such as class, racial and sexual discrimination and economists have started attributing discrimination to be one of the important causes for earning differences. (Becker, 1957)
THEORY OF ECONOMIC DISCRIMINATION

Quite a few economists have suggested that discrimination is an important factor in understanding lower pay and employment of women. Economists usually define discrimination as a situation when workers of the same productivity receive different pay or when workers of dissimilar productivity are paid equally.

Gary Becker (1957) played a founding role in formulating a theory of discrimination. His desire was to analyze the economic discrimination against women and black workers in the U.S.A. His approach was innovative in that Becker introduced non-pecuniary motives into economic theory and said that discrimination is the result of “taste” and that a price could be put upon this “taste” and it became equivalent to the wage differential which could not be found to be explained by productivity differences.

Becker’s fundamental work received considerable attention and criticism and a number of developments have since come up. Some regarded Becker’s discriminatory concept as unrealistic and have attempted to modify it in the light of empirical work. There are others who have challenged the main predictions of Becker’s theory and have also suggested alternative concepts of discrimination, which are meant to constitute more realistic assumptions as well as predictions.

Some of the main features of the alternative concepts of discrimination are given by Alexis (1973), (1963) Thurow (1969), Stiglitz (1973) and Madden (1973). According to Alexis, the motive for discrimination could be envy or malice, which he calls the economics of racism. But Kruger’s opinion is that the aim of discriminations is to benefit from discrimination rather than lose from it. Economist like Thurow, Stiglitz and Madden have pointed out that imperfections in labour markets are responsible for wage differentials and hence discrimination is then a product of, for example, trade union involvement, minimum wage legislation, monopoly power or imperfect information. However, the application of monophony models to sex discrimination has become one of the more innovative developments.

Bergmann (1974) in her work treats discrimination in a different way. Her viewpoint is regarded quite important because it is an attempt to link earnings and occupational structure. In other words, Bergmann thinks earnings to occupational segregation or occupational “crowding”. Exclusion of women from certain jobs forced women to get crowded in a few women specific jobs, ends up in lower earnings because it is believed that excess supply in certain jobs would end up in diminishing marginal productivity. However, Bergmann did not elaborate upon the exclusion mechanism. But her contribution is regarded as an important starting point for the development of segmented or segregated labour market theories.

Thus, a shift in emphasis from sex discrimination in the form of unequal pay for equal work to occupational segregation started appearing to explain
women’s’ low pay which, of course, is an extremely subtle way of showing discrimination against women.

**WAGE DIFFERENTIALS IN INDIA**

Discrimination against women in the payment of wages is widespread in India. Women workers are in general classified as those belonging to the “organized” and the “unorganized” sectors. The organized sector is characterized by modern relations of productions and is regulated by laws that seek to protect the security and working conditions of labour as well as the labour organization that can engage in collective bargaining. The unorganized sector, which includes agriculture, as well as certain industries and services, is characterized by the absence of all these protective measures and machinery. Information about socio-economic conditions and work opportunities at women in the unorganized sector is also exceedingly scanty. However, the economic conditions of women are quite obvious from the fact that 94 per cent of them are found in unorganized sector leaving only 6 per cent in the organized sector.

**RESEARCH PROBLEM**

Labour is the crucial factor of production in the primary, secondary or tertiary sector of an economy. Labour productivity in agriculture has two important aspects. In the first place, it significantly affects national prosperity, through the crucial economic datum of national income. Secondly, it principally determines the standard of living of the agricultural population. National prosperity in the economic perspective is largely synonymous with the high output per man-hour. Therefore, if a country intends to attain prosperity it needs to encourage technical assistance and improvements to the labour population, which help to increase productivity in the agricultural economy. (Shafi 1981)

Women agricultural labourers constitute largest number in the unorganized sector. These agricultural labourers are extremely vulnerable to shackles of exploitation on account of low levels of literacy, lack of awareness, persistent social backwardness and absence of Unionisation and other forms of viable organization. The avenues of stable and durable employment for them have been limited to migration in search of better avenues of employment and wages but with numerous other handicaps. Several measures have been put in place to protect the interest of labour-class and uplift the conditions of women agricultural workers. But still, the condition of women agricultural labourers is seems pathetic as they become invisible and voiceless having to accept agriculture as a way of life.

Increasing participation of women in the labour market in the developed and developing countries has brought out the insurmountable issue of gender differentials in earnings and employment opportunities to the fore. The women in India, especially in rural sector are discriminated and disadvantaged in many
aspects of employment such as employment diversification, quality of employment and wage earnings. The present study would explore the options for solving the problems of women labourers by assessing their employment position in agriculture, unemployment situation during off-season, alternative source of employment and consequently suggesting the strategies to improve the present lot of this voiceless segment of population.

**OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The objectives of the study are;

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 livelihoods of women agricultural labourers in Theni District.

**PERIOD OF STUDY**

The study period covers three years from January 2009 to December 2011.

**LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

The study is confined to Theni District of Tamil Nadu focusing on the problems of Agricultural Women Labourers. This study takes into account only eight sample villages in the district. The study period is limited to three years. The Primary Data were collected through personal Interview through a pre-tested interview schedule with the help of user’s recall method subject to limited memory power of the agricultural women labourers. Researcher found it very difficult to get the details with regard to their employment, wage structure and alternative sources of employment from women laboures.

**CHAPTER SCHEME**

The introductory chapter brings out the importance of women and Agriculture, Characteristics of labourer, Agricultural scenario of Tamil Nadu, Theories of Labour Market, research problem, objectives and limitations of the study.

The second chapter focuses on the review of earlier studies in respect of the research work on Agricultural women labourers.
The third chapter is devoted to highlight Glossary, Research Methodology and profile of the study area.

In the fourth chapter, an attempt has been made to examine the socio-economic and living conditions of agricultural women labourers in the study area.

The fifth chapter concentrates on the agricultural employment and pattern of unemployment of women labourers in agriculture.

The sixth chapter analyses the wage structure and agricultural labourer problems in the study area.

The summary of findings, suggestions and conclusion are presented in the concluding seventh chapter.
REFERENCES


12. India Council of Social Science Research, Review on Indian Agriculture, 1971, p.64.


Chapter-II