CHAPTER I

Introduction

India is basically an agricultural country as about eighty percent of its population is living in rural areas. Women constitute 46.68 per cent of India’s rural population and they have played a pivotal role in agricultural sector in India. According to 1971 census, out of 31.3 million women workers, 28 million (89.40%) were engaged in rural work and among them, 87.00% were performing agricultural operations. Also, majority of the Indian workers were involved in agriculture; 67.48 per cent of the male workers and 80.07 per cent of the female workers were either cultivators or agricultural labourers. Among the female workers (80.07 per cent) the per cent of agricultural labourers was significantly higher (50.46 per cent) than that of cultivators (29.61 per cent) (Menon, 1976).

In India, the role of women in different farm activities varies from region to region. Generally, the females are engaged in helping the males to carry out simple farm operations, particularly at the sowing and harvesting time and attending to cattle. They play an important role in several ways either independently or jointly with their men-folk and always had been sharing the farm activities needing lesser physical exertion.

Farming is their family occupation; all the members including children and housewives are actively engaged in farm activities related to food production, processing and storage. The well-being of the country depends upon advanced agricultural activities which are productive and rewarding. At present, when the farm technology is changing at a faster speed and new innovations are coming up on the scene, it is essential for a farmer to keep pace with the adoption of new technology which requires timely and judicious decisions. It is a well known fact that decision-making is the core of management process and much of the success of rural families depends upon how well the family members develop skills in the decision-making process. Now, the male-head of the family is no longer the sole decision maker on the farm. Besides physical labour, women play an important role in the process of decision-making also in various home and farm activities. In a traditional Indian patriarchal society, the man enjoyed exclusive right of decision-making. The modernization in all spheres of life and emancipation of women has led to
their increased role in the decision-making. In some activities her role is direct and in others it is indirect. But simultaneously with the rapid development of agriculture in Punjab and its transformation from traditional to more capital intensive technology, the role of women is also changing. Although many studies conducted in some parts of the country have peripherally mentioned the importance and the variety of tasks performed by women in agricultural operations, yet no proper assessment of their nature, contribution and potential is available, especially in the changing agricultural scenario of Punjab.

Females in rural families of developing countries like India, being generally not very educated and liberate, were hence subordinate to the dictates of the male head of the family. Yet their role in a family in arriving at an appropriate decision cannot be ruled out altogether. With the agriculture becoming more mechanized, their participation in various farm activities is expected to change. The change has also taken place in the rural family structure which is expected to bring changes in the role of women in decision-making in various farm and household activities. The neglect of women in agricultural development can be argued to be serious obstacle in reaching the desired objectives. It is conceded by all quarters that economic well-being is a pre-requisite for general development and economic progress of a society is possible only with an efficient management of the available resources. It is, therefore, surprising that almost half of the human resources in the rural sector have been ignored while planning. An important reason for this state of affairs could be the lack of scientific studies delineating the role of women in rural economy (Bariana, 2008).

Sangeeta Deol from Dhanal village in Jalandhar district, a polio stricken lady in her fifties, is a state awardee and one of the pioneers in the bee-keeping industry in the state. She not just overcame her physical disability but also set aside societal pressures that discouraged women from heading agricultural work. Her husband had quit the army, and was working as an automobile mechanic, while she tried her hand at farming. She even rode a tractor for many years. Today Sangeeta is the chairperson of the governing body of the Agriculture Technology Management Agency (ATMA) and president of the Bee Keepers Association, Jalandhar.
She faced many hardships before coming up trumps. She did her graduation as a private student because students used to tease and call her a lame duck. In 1972, without any background training, she took up poultry farming. She sold her gold bangles to raise the money. One day, more than three years later, sepoys from Jalandhar Cantonment bought her birds. Since they had not made the payment, she went to collect the money a couple of days later. There she saw the innocent birds being butchered. That was the day she left poultry farming.

She did a course in mushroom farming at Punjab Agriculture University (PAU), Ludhiana. “During the early 1980s, there was little awareness about mushroom as a food item”, she said. She used to take the 8.45 pm train to Delhi everyday and used to reach the market at 5.00 am the following day. She used to finish her work as soon as possible and board the train back. Back home, she had to take care of her children, cook food and prepare for the next day’s market. She did this for three months a year for four-odd years till there was greater awareness about the taste and benefits of mushroom in Punjab.

In 1984, she took up bee-keeping as a commercial venture. She started with ten boxes and by 1990 she had 3500 boxes. According to her, “The work for honey production has decreased now because of falling quality of pollen extracted from the flora”. As a member of the Punjab Bee Keepers Board, she is among the country’s first entrants in honey production. Buyers visit her farm for placing orders. Orders are also received telephonically. She was honoured by the Punjab Government as a leading farmer in 1988 and by the Bee Keepers federation in 1999. Every year, Sangeeta invites more than a dozen enthusiasts from different parts of the state for lectures on innovative farming. “Marketing is never a problem. Give people quality and buyers will reach your doorstep”, she said (Bariana, 2008).

Gurdev Kaur visits PAU on every Wednesday and Friday. She gets along the flavour of the season – sarson da saag. The food item can be purchased, both in cooked or raw form. She is usually out of her stock by afternoon. Things changed for Gurdev Kaur when she visited PAU in 1995 and became a member of the Kisan Club. She is currently based in Alyali Khurd village near Ludhiana, where she has a plot which is just little over an acre. She also has a dairy farm with as many as three dozen milch cattle.
Her husband was a government official so he could not take up any private business. She attended PAU classes and got interested in honey production. She started locally and now her team carries boxes to as far as Rajasthan to get their honey yield during the flowering season. She had a few relatives in Rajasthan who helped her in expanding her network. She has formed a women’s co-operative and is also engaged in pickles and jaggery products. For her, marketing was never a problem because in food items, there is no greater publicity than word of mouth. “A life is a beautiful gift from the almighty and I thought I should try to give it some purpose”, she said (Bariana, 2008).

Gurmeet Kaur, in her sixties, belongs to village Mana Talwandi in Jalandhar district. Many an eyebrow was raised at her riding a tractor. As she took on the tough machine and rambles on uneven terrains, she challenged mindsets that associated rough work on the field only with men. Known as thanedaarni, she is a familiar face manning a tractor on the streets and fields of the village for the past more than 20 years. It all started more than 20 years ago, when, as suggested by her nephew, they decided to ply a tractor on their 15 acre farm land for better yield. Her husband was a little skeptical about manning “the ghost of a machine”, as he called it and stopped manning it just after a couple of weeks. He then suggested that they give it out on rent. She however never wanted to waste either their machine or their money by employing anyone else.

After a few days, her nephew took her for driving lessons. By the evening, she drove home the tractor herself. That was just the beginning, because after that she even started accepting requests from other farms who wanted her services to plough their fields. In the beginning, she would see villagers looking at her curiously whenever she drove on the village roads. She was however always clear in her mind what she wanted to do and never bothered about any comments. Soon the odd glances of the villagers turned into respectful nods.

This mother of three is a member of the village panchayat and the mahila mandal. She also works for the Verka Milk Society. She feels that the government should take up the examples of the success stories to the common man as she was not the only woman in the state managing fields on the tractor. She said, “The achievers need to be made known among the general public through different media, including newspapers and television. Except for odd visits by students of PAU, I have not received any support”. She also
started a dairy project with dozen cows. She was supported by her son and her husband and they try not to engage the services of any outsider. “It is only a matter of taking the first step to reach any destination”, she said (Bariana, 2008).

Mohinder Kaur Dosanjh, 70, took to active work on fields at her farm in Jagatpur village in Nawanshehar district soon after her wedding. Winning awards in agriculture-related activities has become a routine for her, who returns with them from different kisan melas every year. The unconditional support of her husband has been the biggest guiding force in her life, she admitted. Her husband Mohinder Singh is a progressive farmer and an established writer (Bariana, 2008).

It all began in 1965 when she went to attend her first class at PAU. She came back and formed the Istri Sabha involving a number of women. During numerous interactions, they explored avenues to keep themselves busy and make an earning. Making pickles and murabbas was the first exercise which bore fruitful results. She learnt about rice beans from PAU. The produce did not find any big buyers in Punjab. She then discovered that the yield had a big market in Himachal Pradesh. Many other similar innovations were tried – one of them being broccoli. Interestingly, they never had to struggle for a market for their produce. Their mushrooms, pickles, haldi and certain other items had direct buyers, which she attributed to the publicity by word of mouth by their network of friends. Her workers even go around villages with their vegetables. The buyers got their purchase at a price lower than the market rates. This way, they also got a better price.

She also took up social issues. She has been a part of campaigns against female foeticide, drug addiction and alcoholism. Though her family had everything that was sufficient for a normal life, social issues like dowry, female foeticide and drug addiction had always troubled her. She formed small groups where small discussions and public opinion gave her greater strength for community action, she revealed. The lady with a firm resolve added, “I may not be able to usher in a revolution but if my endeavor at social reforming can change even one person, it would be worth the entire exercise (Bariana, 2008).

Amarjeet Kaur came on stage to take the prize from Chief Minister last year, when the name of Karnail Singh, her husband, a leading cotton grower from Alliana village in Fazilka district was announced at a state level prize distribution function for
leading farmers and he requested that his wife too be called on stage to share the award. Besides helping with the production, she specialized in the selection and storage of seeds. She belonged to a farming family before she got married. After a few days of her marriage, she expressed her desire to work in the fields. She actively participated in planning the cultivation and marketability of the crop. She formed help groups for women in the area and has also been associated with the PAU centre coming up in the village. “Determination, dedication and prayers best help a human being”, she declared.

For long, women have been the ‘unseen partners’ in agriculture in Punjab. Their role has been confined to that of daughters or farmwives. However, with changing times, women are stepping out of stereotypical roles and openly taking charge of farm lands in the state. In the state which ushered in the Green revolution during the 1960s, women are now managing farms, deciding cropping patterns, exploring marketing avenues and setting new and innovative trends in the business of food technology. The increasing list of awards bagged by women was a pointer to the changing agriculture scenario in the state (Bariana, 2008).

More and more women were coming forward to handle farm-related agricultural activities. The increasing number of women in this field was a result of the changing socio-economic scenario. Men needed the help of their spouses in the fields because of increased work pressures and shortage of trained manpower. Due to decreasing land holdings, men were allowing their wives to take care of the agricultural land, while they look for alternate job avenues (Bariana, 2008).

Smaller land holdings have led to higher investments on growing crops with state-of-the-art technology and superior fertilizers and insecticides. There was acute shortage of trained manpower and a number of women have effectively filled the vacancy of managers. The government needed to give more concessions to women attempting innovations in agriculture. Bee keeping and mushroom cultivation should be treated as part of agriculture by the government in its policies and necessary changes needed to be made in securing loans. Employment was one of the biggest problems faced by the youth of the state. Training courses in vocational subjects should be organized at the block level. A number of women in the state have secured a good future for their families with
innovative farming practices. The government need to do more to make people aware about the avenues available, particularly those related to farming (Bariana, 2008).

Women’s key role in the production of major grains and minor millets illustrated their invaluable contribution to the food security. In addition, women played a crucial role in ensuring supply of food as food vendors and post-harvest processors of livestock and fishery products. As major buyers of family food and meal makers, women ensured adequate food security. As primary providers of nutrition to the young children, women were the major decision makers in ensuring nutrition to the next generation.

Both women and men play critical roles in agriculture throughout the world, producing, processing and providing the food we eat. Rural women in particular were responsible for half of the world’s food production and produce between 60 and 80% of the food in most developing countries. Yet, despite their contribution to global food security, women farmers were frequently underestimated and overlooked in development strategies. In most developing countries, both men and women farmers did not have access to adequate resources, but women’s access was even more constrained as a result of cultural, traditional and sociological factors. Accurate information about men’s and women’s relative access to, and control over, resources was crucial in the development of food security strategies. Ownership of land encouraged farmers to invest time and resources in long-term improvements, and facilitates access to agricultural support services. Traditional inheritance and land tenure laws limited women’s ownership and use of land. Short and long term credit was needed to pay for inputs and hired labour. In the developing world, banks and credit associations were less inclined to lend to women because, without property and land rights, they lacked collateral security.

Improved seeds, fertilizers and pesticides were a vital means of enhancing production. Extension services and co-operatives distributing inputs rarely reached women who also lacked the necessary cash to purchase even government subsidized inputs. Agricultural extension programmes informed farmers about new technologies and plant varieties. Few extension services were targeted specifically at rural women, few of the world’s extension agents were women and most of the extension services focused not upon subsistence crops (primary concern of women) but upon commercial crops. Investing in human capital reduced poverty and encouraged sustainable economic
growth. But prevailing attitudes about women’s social, political and cultural rights severely limited girls’ access to education throughout the developing world (Sinha, 2006).

Women formed a very important and integral part of any society. Their role in every sphere of life was as important, if not more, as that of men. And it became even more so in sectors like agriculture which were generally perceived as very much male dominated but where changing socio-cultural environment and education levels were prompting men to allow women to take up a larger role and responsibility. The present study is expected to throw light on the role played by women in agriculture sector of India. The study is an attempt to examine decision-making patterns in rural families and also to find out the nature and the extent of the involvement of rural women in decision-making process. It is hoped that this study will prove useful for the social scientists and of interest to academicians and intellectuals.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The present study has been conducted keeping in mind the following objectives:

1. To study the extent of participation of women in agricultural sector.
2. To study the perception of women regarding their effectiveness in agricultural sector as compared to that of men.
3. To study the factors affecting the extent of participation of women in decision making process in relation to different agricultural activities.

ORGANISATION OF THE STUDY

The present study has been divided into seven chapters. Chapter I, that is, the present chapter, is introductory in nature which explained the scenario that was prevailing in rural India and the roles women were playing in various fields including agriculture. The chapter also emphasizes the change that women’s participation in agriculture sector was bringing about in their own lives and also that of their family as well as society as a whole.
Chapter II discusses the various studies done in the past by various researchers related to nature and extent of participation of women in agriculture sector, effectiveness of women in the same, their participation in decision making and the factors that affected their participation.

Chapter III deals with the research methodology used for the present study. It describes the universe of the study, sample design, methods of data collection and data analysis and some limitations of the study.

Chapter IV to VII are devoted to the data analysis and findings of the study.

Chapter IV of the study deals with the analysis of participation and effectiveness of women in subsidiary enterprises in agriculture sector.

Chapter V of the study deals with the analysis of participation and effectiveness of women in crop enterprises in agriculture sector.

Chapter VI of the study deals with the analysis of women’s participation in decision making as well as that of factors which affected their role in decision making in agriculture sector.

In chapter VII, the summary, conclusions and suggestions emerging from the analysis have been discussed.