Women constitute half of the global population and one-third of the labour force, but receive only one-tenth of the world income and own less than one per cent of the world’s property. The process of economic development induces several key changes in the structure of the developing economies that includes changes in the allocation of labour in different economic activities. The most important change concerns with the participation of women in the economic activities. Women are often more vulnerable than men, disproportionately concentrated in low-wage sectors or occupations and often segregated into the informal sector.

Women constitute nearly half of the adult population in India and 77 per cent of them belong to the rural area. The major occupation of rural women is agriculture and related activities and thereby they contribute about three-fourth of the labour required for agricultural operations. Women workers play a significant role in agricultural development and allied fields including in the main crop production, livestock production, horticulture, post harvest operations, agro/social forestry, fisheries etc. Women also play vital role in allied agricultural activities such as entire management of dairy animals starting from collection and cutting of fodder to feeding, cleaning of cattle and cattle shed, collection of dung, milking, preparation of milk products, etc. Their role in sectors like poultry, piggery, duckery, goatery, sheep rearing, rabbit rearing, fisheries, sericulture and mushroom cultivation is also overwhelming. Sericulture is another area where women perform better than men.

Women exploitation is more in the Indian society. She became slave and served the dominant sections of the society. Even for the same type of work, wage discrimination is there particularly, if the women belong to scheduled caste, scheduled tribe or backward classes, as they are poor, landless and illiterate. A large proportion of female earners in agriculture are mainly from low castes, because it was considered derogatory for higher castes to allow their women to work on the fields. Economic conditions of women labour are very pitiable. The hours of work are not fixed. The wage rates paid are also low compared to the male workers for the same work. Illiteracy, lack of awareness, low level of skills, suppression, nature of employment, lack of knowledge about Minimum Wages Act, lack of bargaining power and migration are the disadvantages of women labour.
In the process of development women labour suffers in many ways. Many of these labour are landless belongs to lower social and economic status. The role and status of women are altered in the process of agrarian social transformation due to the technology of cultivation. The disaggregated pattern of development has varied impact on women members of every region, group, class and caste. To find the reasons which led to marginalization of women is crucial in order to address the problem adequately. This assumes most significance in view of the importance of female labour contribution to the agricultural economy in Andhra Pradesh. The need to study the status of women agricultural labour in the socio-economic ladder and its impact on poverty and agricultural economy are therefore of paramount interest in both academic and policy circumstances. Much has been written on the socio-economic conditions of agricultural labour but little information is available on the status of women across the levels of socio-economic settings. This study attempts to present an insight view of the status of women across the levels of socio-economic settings. The study also tries to shed light on the government initiatives towards the development of rural women. The main objective of the study is to analyze the status of women labour in agriculture within the framework of economic and social perspectives.

The study is based on both primary and secondary data. All the sample households were interviewed personally to collect the required primary data using structured questionnaire. The household survey was conducted to collect information on the socio-economic status which includes employment, income and consumption expenditure of women labour in agriculture. The secondary data was collected from the Directorate of Economic and Statistics, Government of Andhra Pradesh and from different reputed journals, articles and books.

The present study is organized in eight Chapters. Introduction, problem of the study, objectives and methodology are presented in Chapter I. Chapter II provides a review of the past studies related to women labour in agriculture. Agro-economic profile of the study area is presented in Chapter III. Chapter IV analyses changing trends in women participation in employment. Policy support to women agricultural labour is portrayed in Chapter V. Socio-economic status of sample households is presented in Chapter VI. Determinants of poverty among women agricultural labour households have been analyzed in Chapter VII. Summary, conclusions and suggestions are presented in the last Chapter.

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