CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter is devoted to review some of the literature related to the subject under study. This chapter is divided into five sub-sections:

2.1 AGRICULTURAL WORKFORCE AND FEMALE AGRICULTURAL LABOUR IN INDIA

In the Indian context several studies have significantly focused the position of rural labour force and labour markets. The First Agricultural Labour Committee (1950-51) defined agricultural labourers as 'those people who are engaged in raising crops on payment of wages'. The Second Agricultural Labour Committee (1955-57) enlarged the definition of agricultural labourers to include 'those who are engaged in other agricultural occupations like dairy farming, horticulture, raising of livestock, bees, poultry, etc.' According to the National Commission on Labour (NCL), 'an agricultural labour is one, who is basically unskilled and unorganised and has little for his livelihood other than personal labour'. Thus agricultural wage earners consist of two sub-categories:

a) Permanent Labour (PL) attached to a cultivating household and
b) Casual Labour (CL)

The permanent or attached labourers generally work on annual or seasonal basis and on some sort of contract. Their wages are determined by traditional methods. On the other hand, the temporary or casual labourers are engaged only during peak seasons of work. Their employments are purely temporary and are paid at the market rate. Agricultural labour is economically and specially backward sections including the poor tribes and they may be divided into four types:

i) Landless labourers who are attached to the landlords.
ii) Landless labourers who are personally independent but who work exclusively for others.

iii) Petty farmers with tiny bits of land who devote most of their time to working for others.

iv) Farmers who have economic holding but who have one or more of their children and dependents working for other prosperous farmers.

The first types of agricultural workers have been known as 'bonded labour' who do not normally receive wages in cash and can not shift from one employer to another. Among the other groups, the major portion belongs to the category of 'landless labourers' and 'marginal farmers'. The agricultural workforce constitutes an important section of the rural community and they possess certain distinctive characteristics vis-à-vis other segments of the population (Balakrishan, 2005).

Despite the far-reaching restructuring agriculture in the post-war period, family farms remain the principal units of agricultural production in advanced capitalist societies. However, the world of farming like many other spheres of activity has traditionally been depicted as a 'man's world' (Williams, 1964). The issue of women and development, women and agriculture were basically non-issues until Boserup (1970) arrived with her landmark study based on data from Africa, Asia and Latin America, growing attention to a badly neglected area. Boserup's study proved to be a catalytic factor in opening up the field of women and development to critical inquiry by tracing the marked decline in women's economic status under colonial and post colonial states. In her study she contended that biases, prejudices and misunderstandings related to women's labour force participation had eroded the household economic base by augmenting an overall increase in poverty. After that the International Women's Year in 1975 began with an international conference to discuss the status of women around the world. The role of
women in economic activities was brought to limelight by the World Conference on Agrarian Reforms and Rural Development in 1979 which pledged for equal participation for women along with men in social, economic and political process of rural development and equal access to the benefits. This further revolutionised our understanding of issues related to rural women, their works and their lives. Thus, integrating women into the process of socio-economic development was of vital importance in achieving overall development (Bagwe, 1995).

There has been another branch of literature on the issue of women and farming. More recent research, informed by pioneering feminist work in the third world, has argued that this narrow concept of work misrepresents the farm labour process and under-represents women’s participations in it (Reimer, 1986). Further more, traditional analyses ignore the fact that women are primarily involved in farming through specific forms of gender relations, most significantly through marriage, as wives, but also as the daughters and mothers of men ‘farmers’ (Gasson, 1987). The study focuses the broad dimensions of gender divisions of family labour on the farm, concentrating on the activities and conditions of women as farm wives. The analysis highlights points of conflicts arising within the ideologies and practices for women at a personal level and between them and the process of commoditisation.

Studies on women employments, whether in general or in agriculture, are of fairly recent origin in India. The impetus for these studies was given by the submission of the Report of the Committee on Status of Women, Government of India (1974). The study presented interesting facts and figures of an overall decline in women’s status in India in all areas. Ashok Mitra’s (1980) detailed analysis of census data also agreed with the findings of other researchers that there was a sharp decline in labour force participation of women in India, particularly in
agriculture, with a corresponding rise in female unemployment over several decades up to 1971 (Bagwe, 1995).

A study of female agricultural labourers can be conceived as a study of women where class and gender inequities coincide. Women are an integral part in every society. The status of women in a society is directly linked with social and cultural tradition, stages of economic development achieved, educational levels and political attainments for women in society. Women's activities are recognised and given their due importance, depending on various factors such as — socio-economic, ethnic status, traditions and customs, religious belief, education, etc. (Saikia, 1992; Saikia, 2000). The issue of including women's work in a subsistence economy, between domestic and farm work and in the unorganised sectors found to be close attention in the recent studies. The invisibility of the women worker in the third world agriculture has been the subject of considerable empirical research in India (Dixon, 1982; Baneria, 1982; Agarwal, 2001). Most of these studies viewed that although women contribute significantly to household incomes, many of these activities that women perform remain un-acknowledged as work, and hence, they remained 'invisible' in agricultural operations.

Sharma (1991) explained that education in employment of women is the first prerequisite not only for improving the status of women but also for moving towards gender equality. Women's status in society can be measured in terms of educational level, income, employment as well as the role played by them in the family, society and the community. Education plays a crucial role in determining employment opportunities and decision-making role of the women (Wasnik, 2006).

Regarding farm labour, female workers contribute significantly to household income across all farm sizes and their earnings are found crucial for landless and small farm households. But the status of female agricultural workers in decision-making processes is very poor. The
ownership of land is almost non-existent for female workers for small and landless households. They usually surrender their earned income to the family and have no freedom to spend their earned money. Moreover, female agricultural workers contribute significantly to households but they lack education, health and other support services and often do not have access to economic resources (Wasnik, 2006).

Giriappa (1988) studied the role of women in rural development and found that in India rural women in particular have remained relatively backward due to traditional values, illiteracy, superstition, dominant roles in decision-making, social evils and many other factors. Moreover, women’s participation in the organised sector is found to be very low as compared to that of developed countries. A major factor determining the socio-economic status of women is concerned with education and occupation. The impact of modernisation on changes in the status of women could be visualised through social change, economic change, occupational structure, cultural change, changes in education, health, nutrition and political awareness. Thus it is evident that status may be affected by the influence of internal as well as external socio-economic factors.

Gender inequalities have the largest impact on women and it has wider detrimental impact on development. Bardhan (1985) highlighted the structural elements of society responsible for economic exploitation and socially condoned, culturally rationalised discrimination and explosion even within their class. A good number of research works undertaken by eminent scholars have focused the view that the participatory role of women in agricultural operations is underestimated. Women form a separate analytical and empirical category in addition to, but distinct from, the more commonly used categories such as class, race and caste (Agarwal, 1983). There are still two field studies that attempt to capture women’s position in class formation and social transformation in
agriculture. Agarwal (1985) studied the gender specific problems in agriculture and points to the emerging gender specific problem of unemployment and poverty affecting the status of female agricultural worker. Moreover, to meet some empirical challenges, more theories emerged (Bardhan, 1985; Mazumdar, Sharma and Acharya, 1979; Kelkar and Anandalakshmi, 1980), some of which highlighted the features of rural women's labour market while others pointed out the general situation of poverty, illiteracy and gender discrimination in the existing social structure. Parthasarathi and Rao (1980) focused the poor economic and low social status of women farm household and their low work participation rates reflecting economic invisibility of the farm women in agricultural operations.

Choudhury (1994) studied the Work Participation and Economic Status of Women and held the view that in the rural sector, though agriculture and allied activity accounts for the heaviest concentration of labour for both male and female workers, the proportion of workforce is much more for women than for men in this occupation. Lack of absorption capacity of female labour to a comparatively higher degree is to be found in the rural sector. From his study it is found that occupational diversification originating from technological advancement in production has not been able to benefit the position of women in employment, though the rate of participation and of addition to the unemployed is larger among female labour force than among the male labour force. The female workers are found to be ill-paid. He concludes that though the rate of female work participation has increased in India over the years, this has not been able to improve their economic status lot and their share of development gains has remained much below what their contribution could justify.

Mahapatra (2002) highlighted the Status of Female Agricultural Labourers in Rural India in terms of the nature and type of work
performed by them in agriculture in the Post Green Revolution period. The empirical evidence from Mahapatra’s study indicates the increasing unequal relations inherent within the agrarian system both in terms of class and gender. He concludes that women were not the beneficiaries of the permanent reorganisation and could not able to maintain an equal status as compared to their male counterparts. Their workload as single woman and otherwise has increased but not their control over increased production and resources. He, thus, raised the need for proper intervention of the women’s movement in order to address the fundamental issues relating to women empowerment in the development strategy.

Gulati (1984) undertaken an empirical research project on the Economic Profile of Working Women in Kerala and found an overall trend in women’s role in agriculture, a shift from cultivator to labourer status which can only be explained by loss of land for subsistence cultivation and inadequate growth of productive employment opportunities on family farms which lead to withdrawal of women from active cultivation. Moreover, the incidents of existing gender disparity have been found between men and women that characterises most agricultural labour work. Female agricultural labourers are found to perform significantly longer hours than male labourers, though regional variation in the nature and use pattern of agricultural labour is quite extensive.

Though comparatively lesser number of studies have been carried out both at theoretical and empirical level to highlight the status of female agricultural labourers in Assam, most of these studies focus on high participatory rates of women in agricultural activities but suffering from low economic status as most of the women in Assam are engaged in agricultural production as – i) unpaid family labours who work in their own farms and ii) low wage paid agricultural labours. Saikia, Gogoi and Lekharu (1986) studied Role and Status of Rural Women in Assam and
pointed out that the role and status of rural women have undergone certain changes during the post-independence period and the participation of women in economic activities has increased in many cases. The Assamese women have made remarkable progress in socio-economic filed during post-independence period. In case of educated and enlightened section, women are usually consulted in taking decision on important family matters. Seasonality in women employment is found to prevail in the agricultural occupation and work up to a longer hour than their male counterparts. Women are usually overburdened with monotonous household and other economic activities. Most of the women are engaged in activities in family farmers and comparatively lesser proportion of women are engaged in wage earning activities. In the poor families women are performing heavy work load and maintaining a low nutritional standard. The study indicates the presence of nominal discrimination of women in different aspects of life and at the same points out that the scope for expression of mental abilities of women is utterly lacking in rural areas.

Saikia (1992) marked the existence of high proportion of women workers in the agricultural sector of Assam as compared to other sectors and concludes that due to economic hardship females start hiring out for wage-paid employments. The extent of seasonal fluctuation in employment is found to be higher in Assam in case of female labours than male labours. The study emphasised the existing inadequate employment and income opportunities for rural women for not providing adequate scope to raise their economic status. In this regard, major emphasis should be given on expansion of productive work opportunities in agriculture for the upliftment of the economic status of rural women by raising their efficiency through education and training.

Sharma (1994) pointed out that the benefit of economic development is found to be poorer in case of women than their male
counterparts. Like other parts of the country, even in Assam the physical quality of life of women is found to be worse not only in comparison to their male counterparts but also in comparison to the women in other parts of the country. The inter-district disparity reflects that generally a low status value is accorded to daughters. But where a women's productivity is higher than that of male and when and wherever there is a high demand for female labour force in agriculture, the undervaluation of women and girls are relatively less. This explains the relatively higher sex ratio in Southern States of India and can be taken to have explained the inter-district variation in the sex ratio in Assam as well, because the districts of Goalpara and Dhubri, with a broader agricultural base are somewhat favourable to women.

Kar (2002) studied the phenomenon of Gender Geography in North East India and found that being primarily engaged in agriculture females in the primary sector constitute a significant proportion of the total female workforce in the region. The work participation is significantly found higher in the tribal society than the plain areas of the region. It is evident that particularly in Assam and Tripura there is significantly high proportion of female workers as agricultural labourers which is primarily due to poor economic condition and landlessness as prevalent among these two states. The concentration of high female participation in agriculture is observed in the ecologically disadvantageous and backward areas of the region. It is evident from the study that a significant proportion of women population engaged in various agricultural activities remains mostly invisible. The proportion of female marginal workers is found to be higher. Along with their household domain, women also take active part in the production sphere but their contribution is either not given due importance or sometime underestimated and hence, their economic status have remained more or less stagnant.
The explanation grounded regarding female agricultural workforce and their traditional role and their status seem to be relevant for explaining the changing role and status of women in the agricultural sector in our study area. In this backdrop, we like to examine the prevailing social and economic role performed by the rural women in determining their socio-economic status in the study area within a theoretical framework.

2.2 CHANGING NATURE OF WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN AGRICULTURE

The integration of women in rural development has been going on since the beginning of the Post-Independence era with varying succession. For the first time, the matter was discussed in Development Commissioner's Conference in 1954. Several studies have focused the trends in women's employment patterns, relative share of women in earnings etc. by improved methodologies. There has been recently another spurt of literature on the issue of the changing nature of women's participation in agriculture to draw the implication of the structural adjustment programme for women with a special focus on the likely changes in agriculture. The pioneering work in this regard has been done by Krishnaraj (1990). The author argued that the secondary status of women farmers emanates from the mainstream economic perspective, which treats production and reproduction as separate entities.

The nature and pattern of women's work in subsistence economics present a complex set of issues. Co-existence of wage and non-wage labour and absence of markets makes it difficult to measure women's work with definition developed and used in advanced capitalist countries. The interplay of patriarchal ideology with pre-capitalist relations of production marginalises women's work and presents a 'no options' scenario for them (Mahapatra, 2002). Despite three-fourth female workers
engaged in the agricultural sector, women are seldom recognised as independent workers or farmer-producers. In most cases, women are being treated merely as subsidiary workers, helpers and secondary wage earners, who also shoulder the major responsibility (Duvvury, 1998). Evidence suggest that it is inadequate to reflect on the impact of macro-economy changes on women's work and lives, rather there is worsening of women's work status during nineties (Shah, 2005).

Biradar and Bagalkoti (2001) studied the changing scenario of employment in rural India and points out that with speedier implementation of economic reforms, the proportion of workers participating in different economic activities has started to exhibit a dismal scenario in India, especially in the rural economy. The labour force participation registered a marginal decline in the late 1980s, even before the reform period and again sharply increased in the early 1990s; and again steeply declined in the late 1990s, the post-reform period. Moreover, the percentage share of female participation, has witnessed a significant reduction in the rural areas as compared to the urban areas. This implies that the employment opportunities for rural females are getting limited as compared to urban females in recent years. Duvvury (1998) studied the changing participation of women's work in the agricultural sector in the new regime and points out that changes in agricultural growth and prices have a direct relation to poverty. The high rate of inflation has adversely affected women as they shoulder the burden of provisioning for the family. Ninan (1994) has shown strong relation between the incidents of poverty on the one hand, and agricultural output, prices, and the public distribution system on the other.

Analysis of some of the recent trends in agricultural growth and its links with female work participation and autonomy leads to a reflection on three important aspects namely; feminisation, casualisation and women's autonomy. These issues are particularly important in the light of
the evidence indicating declining work participation among rural women not only in terms of proportion, but also in terms of absolute number (Shah, 2005). Literature on rural women and workforce participation focused an important view that in the present day subsistence economics women neither have any control over land nor are they allowed playing an equal role in the production process. In agriculture, women engaged as casual low paying wage workers. The gender-specific tasks in the production process leads to increased segregation with supervisory role still with the male workers. The introduction of machinery takes jobs away from women and pushes them further in the unskilled labour pool. In agriculture, women get employment during peak seasons like sowing, cotton picking and harvesting (Mahaputra, 2002).

The discussion of women's work in general and agriculture in particular should be placed in the backdrop of this largest setting, the changing socio-economic milieu within the rural societies. Within the large body of empirical studies in the area of women's work there are some deeply held beliefs, for instance, increased work participation rates of women is a good indicator of women's development; occupational diversification represents better opportunities; migration from rural to urban areas is bad; mechanisation always relates to marginalisation of female workforce; and wage employment (income) implies more autonomy. All these may have influenced the overall dynamics of rural labour force. Women labour too, is implicated in this process, but faces a differential impact being subject to discrimination from both demand as well as supply side forces. Even if the poor in general and women in particular, do not participate directly in bringing about such changes, they affect their aspirations and their response to the dynamics of labour market in whatever limited a manner (Krishnaraj and Shah, 2004).

The various studies looking into employment trends over the last five decades have primarily focused on the changes in Worker Population
Ratios (WPRs), which reflect the reported level of economic activity by different segments of people. At the outset, it is necessary to point out that estimates of worker participation rates of women based on Census and the NSSO data are subject to the changing concepts and definitions regarding ‘work’. The concept of work used by the Census does not include domestic work and considers only productive activity outside the home as ‘economic participation’ in the labour force. This creates the problem of measurement of work performed by women between categories like market and non-market production, farm and non-farm activities in the subsistence agriculture. The two sources show substantial differences in their estimation because their concepts, coverage and approach to data collection vary and, therefore, are not comparable. The Census with a more restrictive approach in identifying an individual as a worker consistently provides not only lower estimates of work participation rates, but also greater variability (Mahapatra, 2002; Krishnaraj and Shah, 2004).

In fact, the phenomenon of shrinking labour use in the agricultural sector had set in even prior to the nineties which, by and large, support the claims of a positive development shift in terms of work force diversification (Shah, 2005). In the nineties, with a massive use of labour saving techniques and labour displacement mechanism in the urban organised sector, the size of the unorganised and informal sector both in the rural and urban areas has been not only widening but also becoming more complex and competitive which calls for immediate attention (Tulpule, 1997; Papola, 1999). While the former notwithstanding the issues of wage discrimination and unfair labour process is a positive phenomenon, the later is unmistakably a negative attribute (Shah, 2005).

The declining labour force participation, informalisation of formal employment, casualisation and feminisation of employment (NSSO, 2000; Standing, 1999; Biradar and Bagalkoti, 2001; Baneria and
Feldman, 1992; Unni, 2002) and their implication for sustainable development and generation of productive employment opportunities in the rural economy have become the central theme for research at different level. Mahapatra (2002) points out that the evidence in 1991 census suggests an increase in the employment rates of women in both the main and marginal categories of workers. This increase has taken place in spite of an overall decline in employment levels in the country. It is to be noted that the available evidence on women workers in 1991 census does not counter the declining trend in female worker participation on the basis of NSSO data. The decline since the beginning of the century has been started both for female workers as a proportion of total population as well as in comparison with male workers. The NSS data for 1999-2000, however, indicates a sharp decline in WPRs for women especially in rural areas (Sundram, 2001).

Other parts of the history made it imperative to know that the adoption of various structural adjustment policies and programmes as a result of continuing economic crisis of the eighties has created compulsion to join the women labour force for subsistence economy. Several studies have been made to analyse the nature and extent of participation by women in work other than domestic work (Duvvury, 1989; Duvvury, 1998; Mahapatra, 2002) and it is observed that the predominance of women in agriculture has lead to the relatively higher incidence of female subsidiary or marginal workers in rural areas (Krishnaraj and Shah, 2004). The relative importance of female cultivators can be discerned from an examination of their share, in total cultivation and there is an increasing spread of districts where the numbers of female agricultural labourers in fact outnumber male agricultural labourers (Duvvury, 1998). In fact it has been found that the area under commercial crops such as cotton, tobacco, etc. has a strong
positive association with the incidents of female agricultural labourers (Duvvury, 1989).

Recent studies concerning female agricultural labourers focus the view that given the agro-climatic conditions as well as the traditional gender ideologies, women's work participation rate seems to be influenced by the class identity of households belonging to landless, small peasants and peasant employers (Bardhan, 1985). Similar explanation has been made by eminent scholars (Duvvury, 1998; Mahapatra, 2002) that the large number of women employed as agricultural labourers have frequently focused on the proportion of Dalits in the population and the degree of poverty. This uneven development and a high degree of social stratification not only leads to varying participation rates for women workers across geographical limits but these variations also exists across various segments of population within a geographical area.

On the changing scenario of women's participation in agriculture another view came into existence which asserts that casualisation is often seen to be closely associated with the process of feminisation and is, hence, considered gender non-conducive (Shah, 2005). Casualisation may have differential impact at the micro and macro level. The impact of casualisation and gender differential has been studied by eminent scholars in the recent economic literature and held the view that casualisation could be a positive feature at the household level and it may provide better theme and greater mobility as well as space for both men and women (Visaria, 1999; Banerjee, 1999).

Choudhury (1994) studied that in the rural sector, though agriculture and allied activity accounts for the heaviest concentration of labour for both male and female workers, the proportion of the workforce is much more for women than for men in this occupation. The study observed a comparatively larger work participation of rural female workers in the period from 1973 to 1983. Kar (2002) studied the special
pattern of women work participation in North East India and concludes that although the female work participation in the North East has witnessed a noticeable increase during 1971-1991; it is still lower than its male counterparts as in other parts of the country. The female work participation is significantly found to be higher in the tribal dominated hill states of the region than many other non-tribal dominated plain states including Assam and Tripura. As a consequence, the sex-disparity in work participation has remained strikingly low in these areas of the region. Noticeably low female work participation in the urban areas as compared to the rural counterparts, particularly in the tribal dominated hilly areas of the region, has resulted in high rural-urban differential in these areas. However, the degree of spatial variation (at the district level) in female work participation in the urban areas is found to be significantly high compared to the rural areas of the region. The female work participation is found to be appreciably high among certain social groups like the Meitei of Manipur, Khasis of Meghalaya and Mizos of Mizoram. The Nagas inhabiting the Western part of Nagaland also show a relatively high position in this respect (Kar, 2002). The study highlights that although the female participation in the primary sector is found to be quite high in the region, it varies significantly state wise depending on ecological and certain socio-economic factors. However, the occupational diversity among the women is found to be more in the plains among the non-tribal population.

From the recent literature and empirical studies related to changing contours of women’s work in agriculture, it is vital to mention that despite three-fourth female workers engaged in the agricultural sector, women are seldom recognised as independent workers or farmer-producers. In most cases, women are being treated merely as subsidiary workers, helpers and secondary wage earners who also shoulder the major responsibility. The proportion of casual worker has been increasing
during the last two decades. Casual workers form a much larger proportion of the female workforce as compared to their male counterparts. The precise impact of ongoing changes in agriculture for the livelihood of rural women has not been able to diversify the work participation of women particularly among the uneducated rural India. Their employment opportunities are not only dependent on demand for labour consequently to cropping changes, but also depend on forms of labour recruitment, as well as the extent of substitutes between male and female labour. However, in the context with the changing scenario of women's participation in agriculture, it should be vital to mention that women are still primarily dependent on agriculture for sustenance. Therefore, it becomes immense need of the hour to protect the female cultivators in the regional level by attributing to expansion of the activities of small and marginal cultivators. Another important characteristic of female agricultural workforce is that they form a significant portion of the agricultural labourers throughout the country with exception of the North-West and Eastern belt of the North East, Bihar, Bengal and Orissa (Duvvury, 1998). Hence, micro level studies are necessary to assess the pattern of women's participation in agriculture. The present study, in this regard is relevant to analyse the pattern of women's participation in our study area.

2.3 TECHNOLOGICAL TRANSFORMATION IN AGRICULTURE AND GENDER ISSUES

In the new perspective of agrarian studies, a significant body of literature has emerged in recent years. It has variously focused on technological transformation in agriculture, Green Revolution, changing patterns of stratifications and so on. However, none of these studies has treated women as a distinct agrarian category (Singha Roy, 1995). The introduction of technological change in the 1960s in the shape of High
Yielding Varieties (HYVs) has been one of the major changes in the agricultural literature. Conventional agricultural technology in India was unable to meet the challenge of the rapidly worsening situation of food shortage. It was under such circumstances that India evolved in 1965 the New Strategy of Agricultural Development (Maheshwari, 1985) which emphasised the adoption of modern western technology for a rapid development in agriculture. Consequently, varieties of sophisticated technologies were introduced in some of the selected areas of the country. In association with these, a significant change also marked in the Government's irrigation policy. The new agricultural strategy, also widely known as the Green Revolution had important consequences for women in rural areas in the third world societies that have not been fully studied. Several literature have been evolved in recent years on this subject to analyse various facts regarding the form and extent of women's access to and control over the new technology; its impact on gender division on labour and on the social and economic lives of women and to examine how far the new technology been considered to be gender neutral and women friendly. There is growing evidence that technological transformation has often been biased against female agricultural labour. Various studies have been conducted by eminent scholars (Agarwal, 1983; Agarwal, 1985; Nair, 1987; Singha Roy, 1992; Meenakshi, 1999; Rajesh and Kombairaju, 2000) on this subject. Most of them have mentioned that technology may well have played the role of both a 'gender equaliser' as well as the primary force for the redrawing of gender based boundaries of work.

The evidence on the impact of technology on women has been fairly varied across time to time. In a transitional society, women's position both in the family as well as in society at large is radically changed by the processes of technological modernisation, economic development and social change (Singha Roy, 1995). Boserup (1990)
studied that economic development is a gradual change from family production to specialised production of goods and services. This specialisation of production makes it possible to use better technologies, scientific methods, and an increasingly elaborate economic and social infrastructure.

Agarwal (1983) indicated that tractorisation leads to reduce requirement of labour time, though it may not actually displace labourers. Unlike mechanisation, irrigation induced demand for labour, especially hired labour. A similar phenomenon is observed with respect to High Yielding Varieties (HYVs), owing to the timely completion of operations. In this context, the seed fertilizer-irrigation technology (i.e., the GR-Technology) is seen as a ‘gender equaliser’. Banerjee (1999) argued that paddy being one of the two priority crops promoted through the GR-technology, has lead to a significant increase in female work participation rates, especially, among the five major paddy growing states.

A notable recent study has been made by Agarwal (1985) on the impact of agricultural modernisation on women’s status in India. The study has given emphasis on new technology and irrigation and points out that technological changes that benefit the men in general, may not always benefit women and may even be detrimental to them or certain changes that adversely affect men may have a worse effect on women. She also mentioned that technological change would have a differential affect by gender within each class and concludes that technological changes have affected the status of rural women adversely, especially of the lower strata. A widely held view, in the context of the Green Revolution based strategy is one that is cognisant of the discriminating impact of agricultural technology on women. The impact has been exerted through various processes such as – mechanisation and labour displacement, increasing commercialisation, hence, increased dependence of cash income; neglect of traditional knowledge system; lopsided
emphasis on crop-production at the cost of other components of the farming system; and resource degradation resulting into intensification of work (and drudgery) for provisioning of food, fodder, fuel and water. It is alleged that globalisation is going to further consolidate these process hence, needs to be protested against (Shah, 2005).

Technological advancement in production sphere, which raises the yield per unit of labour, is generally biased towards female workers (Meenakshi, 1999; Singh and Meenakshi, 2000). The women farmers have multidimensional role as mother, housewives, producers and entrepreneurs. Because of the dual responsibility of the households and children, women prefer to have home based enterprises. Modernisation and advancement of technology in most cases have not benefited women. In fact, in many areas women have been displaced from their traditional jobs because the technology necessitates training, upgradation of knowledge and skill, which are out of their reach (Wasnik, 2006). New technologies have affected the nature and extent of women’s work participation and household responsibilities in diverse wage across the villages. In most cases, it has played a part in increasing unequal relation inherent within the agrarian system both in terms of class and gender. Moreover, the modernisation and commercialisation of agriculture has also adversely affected the bargaining strength of women agricultural labour (Krishnaraj, 1988; Singha Roy, 1995).

Kaur and Sharma (1989) studied the impact of the Green Revolution on the status of rural women in both the most advanced and least advanced villages of Haryana and points out that full mechanisation of agriculture had both positive and negative impacts on women from different socio-economic strata. Women belonging to the upper socio-economic strata are generally benefited being withdrawn from the farm work and utilising themselves in other areas. While the women of lower strata have been negatively affected due to lack of mobility and access to
training opportunities and have been marginalised to agricultural occupations. Similar findings have been observed by Agarwal (1985). She also mentioned that technological changes have affected the status of rural women adversely, especially of the lower strata.

Singha Roy (1995) studied that the introductions of new technologies have affected the nature and extent of women's work participation and household in diverse ways across the villages. He pointed out that introduction of advanced technology and commercialisation of agriculture have increased women's work burden, employment opportunities and household responsibilities across classes and caste, without increasing their share in rewards or their voice in decision making processes both within and outside the family.

A study conducted in dry land areas of Andhra Pradesh by Haffis and Reddy (2000), observed that many corporations continue to be characterised by gender based specialisation which in turn has translated into lower wages for women, even though the length of their working day is comparable to that of men. However, male-female wage differential is the least in the high awareness villages. This gender specificity also extends across crops, with certain crops using relatively more female labour than others. With higher yield rate and technicality of the work, the jobs have commanded higher wages especially for the male workers.

The use of labour saving equipments in the operational areas by weeding, watering, harvesting, carrying, etc. has proved to be competitive to the female labour in agriculture. Men typically operate machinery such as tractors; this has meant that women have to take on those agricultural tasks that must be conducted concurrently. Thus it is not to suggest that operations traditionally performed by women have not undergone labour saving technical change (mechanical and chemical weeding techniques are a good illustration), but that perhaps the net benefit to women has not been substantive (Singh and Meenakshi, 2000). With the emphasis on
Green Revolution technology women's are generally offered with inferior jobs which increase gender inequality. However, men with experience, skill and performance; achieve both horizontal and vertical mobility in the labour market (Baruah, 1992; Gopalan, 1995).

In Indian society, gender plays crucial role in determining role and status to an individual. In fact various factors like status, social norms and cultural set up determined to a great extent. Because of their inherent inequality, rural women suffer as social category. Due to lower access to education and training facility and marginal access to productive recourses, women continue to be engaged in their traditional occupations in a changed market context but are unaware of it. Women's work participation; however, has been complex and disaggregated within the hierarchy of each class, based on the caste, ethnic and localised norms and values of society (Singha Roy, 1995). Some studies (Agarwal, 1981; 1984; Meenakshi, 1999; Singh and Meenakshi, 2000) pointed out that the occupational diversification originating from technological advancement in production had not been able to benefit the positions of women in employment though the rate of work participation and of addition to the unemployed is larger among them than among the male labour force.

However, the debate on women's contribution in the agricultural work force has been marked by two apparently contradictory observations. The first relates to the mechanisation and displacement of female workers, and the second refers to women replacing men in most of the agricultural operations, except ploughing, and thereby accounting foremost of the labour time on farms and related activities. The empirical evidence on these is somewhat weak. There are no macro level estimates for the actual numbers of days per person of the employed on farm from cultivating and labourer households. An examination of these issues is therefore difficult (Krishnaraj and Shah, 2004).
Bhatt (1985) points out that three categories of problems emerge out of the issues related to the stage of technological development of an economy as well as the existing division of labour between men and women in the society. Firstly, unequal or lack of access of women to the education and training in scientific and technical skills in modern sector; secondly, women continue to 'manage' the subsistence economy, with or without skills with 'traditional' techniques, new technology frequently men's work. Third often, the introduction of new technique displace women totally, or in low skills, low productivity jobs. The significant features that emerges from these three categories of problems is the profile of inequality of women workers in relation to technical training, inputs and know how.

It is evident from some micro studies that mechanisation, which is by definition labour replacing, does reduce employment on specific farm operations like ploughing, weeding, threshing, etc. This has happened, to a large extent, by use of tractors in Punjab and Haryana (Agarwal, 1981; 1984). However, some experience especially from paddy cultivation areas suggests that new technology tended to mechanise operations typically performed by men (Meenakshi, 1999).

A study conducted by Saikia (2000), mentioned that the women contributes significant share of labour use in crop production but also spend a considerable amount of time in livestock, food processing, sericulture and weaving activities. There is substantial gender specificity in to many agricultural operations. Moreover, women agricultural workers continue to be paid less than their male counterparts and suffer great seasonality in employment. Overtime, as technological change in agriculture has brought in substantial changes in labour use pattern in general, the nature of work of rural women has also undergone a change but it is increasingly being recognised that women have typically little say in decision making process relating to farm operation, despite their
substantial labour contributes to agricultural activities. In fact, there is hardly any agricultural activity (except ploughing) in which women are not actively involved. At this backdrop, it would be appropriate to say that men and women, belonging to the same class hierarchy, are differently affected by development initiatives and technological transformation in the agrarian society. It is recognised that if agricultural output and productivity is to be raised on a sustainable basis, new technologies have to address the specific requirements and skill of women in the farm sector. Despite increasing feminism in different activities, the interface between ‘gender’ and ‘context’ is yet to be empirically appraised at the micro level studies with regard to space, occupation and culture (John, 1996).

Other side of the studies highlight the view that all over rural India, women work longer hours than the male counterparts both in market economy as well as in non-market economy and spend much effort and labour on repetitive operations resulting in fatigue and drudgery. It is the nature and type of their work which raises various fundamental and social issues related to the stage of the technological development of an economy as well as the existing division of labour between men and women in society.

Approaching such a section of rural society for development requires interaction with extension services supported by socio-economic, family-welfare and income generating and income enhancing projects. This implies optimum utilisation of women’s energy, mitigating drudgery, providing improved skills, means and tools to achieve a better level of productivity and efficiency and permitting participation in production of value added manufacture in the village itself. (Srivastava, 1985).
In this backdrop, there is the need for studies along similar lines so that trends common to rural women all over the country are identified and delineated from those that are specific to certain region.

2.4 EMPLOYMENT PATTERN OF WOMEN IN AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITIES

There were various studies emphasising the positive elements in the traditional pattern of division of labour in the family and society. A review of the studies of women at large and women workers in particular point out the fact that the studies on the women in the unorganised sector are only limited which do not cover every aspect of the women employment in the sector. However, according to an estimate by the National Commission on self employed women (1988), 94 percent of the women workers are engaged in the unorganised sectors of the economy, and among the women employed in unorganised sector, 80.1 percent and 19.9 percent are respectively employed in agricultural and non-agricultural occupations (Desai and Patel, 1990).

Mishra (2002), highlighted that the women in the unorganised sector are employed in land based occupations such as, agriculture and forestry, dairying and small animal husbandry, fisheries, sericulture, mining, tobacco and bidi industries, home-based occupations such handloom weaving and spinning, handicrafts garments, food processing, vending and hawking construction, domestic work and contract work for the manufacturing industry. Workforce participation of women is declining among certain occupation in the agrarian sector as a result of increasing pauperization leading to loss of land and insufficient growth of employment opportunities on family forms, technological displacement in agriculture, etc. He focussed that there is a drastic increase in the percentage of landless women agricultural labourers from 1961 to 1991. Among the women employed in the non-agricultural sector, there had
been a serious decline in workforce during the seventies, in the same sectors but in the eighties this trend is reverted with a slight increase. In the household industry, women’s employment opportunities have increased slightly. Women were the greatest victims of the process of industrialisation in the post-independence period because these household industries were the largest source of women’s employment in agriculture.

Jha (1996) studied that intensive agriculture and the Green Revolution have reduced women’s participation in on-farm activities but the workload related to the home based activities has increased considerably which has only reduced them from the ‘working’ to a ‘non-working’ status. Limited employment opportunities created by technology resulting in the means of production being concentrated in hands of a few, and increased landlessness for the poor led to men replacing women in many traditional areas of employment. They are thus found gradually moving to the non-traditional sectors seeking employment for survival.

The nature and pattern of women’s work in subsistence economics present a complex set of issues. Co-existence of wage and non-wage labourer and absence of markets make it difficult to measure women’s work with definition developed and used in advanced capitalist countries (Mahapatra, 2002). From various empirical studies (Visaria, 1999; Visaria, 1993; Bandyopadhyay and Giri, 2001; Unni, 1999; Singh, 2005), it is observed that although, historically, women have engaged themselves in agricultural activities but in the present day subsistence economies, they have neither nor have they allowed to play an equal role in the production process. In agriculture women get pushed into causal low paying wage work and get employment mainly during peak seasons like sowing, harvesting, cotton picking etc. In subsistence agrarian societies, women are employed on the farm as part of the family; there work being contracted out to men who employ their female family member on need basis. These women do not have any option in terms of the type, nature or
location of employment. Evidences show that setting up of modern agricultural and industrial sectors based on capital intensive technology has pushed women into low wage sectors, thereby marginalising their contribution in economic activities they perform.

Unni (1999) found that women’s participation in the labour force has been increasing in most countries in the last few decades. The Indian case is similar to the development experience of other countries, involving a shift out of women workers from the unpaid family worker status to that of employees. The study observed an increasing casualisation of the workforce, both male and female, in rural areas and an increasing proportion of labour households among the total rural households over the period 1964-65 to 1993-94. However, the character of labour household seemed to be changing that an increasing proportion of them had marginal land holdings. The study marked an undergoing change in the nature of employment undertaken by the women and men in these households. The proportion of wage earners in the household was declining. While the total number of days of employment in the year per worker has increased overtime, the percentage of wage employed days declined. Another interesting gender differential was observed that regarding landless labourer households, the percentage of wage employed days of women increased, while that of men declined. The diversification of economic activities in labour households over the period is reflected a declining percentage of days spent in wage employment. The stagnating real wages in agricultural sector are found to be relatively unfavourable to the condition of women worker in agriculture. The recently observed increase in the proportion of women workers in the primary sector, reversing the earlier trend, indicates that the option of diversification to non-agricultural employment is increasingly limited for women. The interplay of patriarchal ideology with pre-capitalist relations of
production marginalises women’s work and presents a ‘no options’ scenario for them (Maahapatra, 2002).

Technological, organisational and structural changes in production process are not always gender-neutral in their employment effect. The extent to which male and females employment would get differentially affected depends on the degree of gender based division of labour and occupational segregation and production processes that undergo technological changes. Organisational changes leading to greater formalisation of employment and shift from casual, part time and informal employment to regular full-time employment are accompanied by reduction in the proportion of women in the workforce. Impact of structural and technological changes on employment of women, tends to be different (Papola and Sharma, 1999).

It is evident that women’s participation has gradually been increasing in most of the countries for a few decades. But this movement is not comparatively successful in the Indian context as these women have already got the less advantageous status of casual employees. Moreover, the women workers face discrimination in employment from various gender differential outcomes of labour market processes. Casual workers form a much larger proportion of female workforce as compared to the male workers. However, self employed workers of men and women categories have been falling in rural areas in recent years. A number of studies on rural employment that have come up in recent years highlighted many disturbing features regarding rural employment (Sundaram, 2001; Chandha and Sahu, 2002). The rate of growth of employment is reported to have slackened in many segments of the rural economy during the reforms period. For example, the report of the Planning Commission’s Task Force on Employment Opportunities shows an absolute decline in the number of employed in agriculture, between 1993-94 and 1999-2000 at all India level (Chandha and Sahu, 2004).
It is observed that agricultural output has experienced a sharp deceleration in growth after 1994-95. The value of agricultural production had undergone significant fluctuations especially since 1994-95 that might have forced a large portion of the labour force to seek alternative employment outside agriculture. This perhaps reflected as the declining growth rate of rural employment in agriculture during the period 1993-94 to 1999-2000 which created a serious debate about the implications of macro-economic policies.

The notable feature that irrespective of the structural shifts that took place during the pre and post 1993 period, in most of the states, agriculture continues to be the main stay for the rural female workers. Several studies based on various aspects of employment (Visaria, 1999; Unni, 1999; Chandha, 2001; Chandha and Sahu, 2002) support the hypotheses of widespread discrimination against women at various levels—low participation rates, small proportion of women in better paid and more secure jobs and lower wage rates and earnings of women than of men in similar employments. In the sphere of employment, discrimination is manifest in three forms: non-employment of women, their employment in low paid peripheral jobs with little scope for upward mobility and payment of lower wages than men for similar work (Papola and Sharma, 1999). However, employment situation in India as revealed by the analysis of available data based studies suggest presence of discrimination against women at all levels. An interesting aspect of women’s employment in a changing economic situation relates to the impact of technological change. The phenomenon, of late, has created a fair amount of confusion: on the one hand, women have found more opportunities for entering the labour market, within the realm of paid work, on the other hand, there has been an intensification of unpaid work for women due to labour displacement, privatisation of social infrastructure, and increased prices (Baneria and Feldman, 1992; Unni, 2002).
A comparison of the macro level data from the three censuses of 1961, 1981 and 1991 brings out the following points: a) increasing dependence of women for employment in agriculture b) decline in women cultivator and increase in women agricultural labourers c) decline in the women workers in the manufacturing sectors. An analysis of the main and marginal workers in agriculture based on 1991 and 2001 Census data show that fewer women were employed formally in the agricultural sector than men. A higher proportion of women were employed as marginal workers. Despite the large proportion of women that work in agricultural cultivation and allied activities are perceived as a male share. The unorganised sector is characterised by lack of stability and durability of employment, low wages, absence of social security, long hours of work, non payment of overtime wages, unhygienic and unsafe working conditions, etc.

The national Agricultural Policy announced in July 2000, seeks to mainstream gender concerns in agriculture. It promises to initiate appropriate structural, functional and institutional measures to empower women, build capabilities and improve their access to inputs, technology and other farming resources. In the Tenth Five Year Plan period, the activities of the central sector scheme of ‘Women in Agriculture’ have been successfully subsumed and 30 percent of the total resources have been allocated for gender purposes (Wasnik, 2006).

A substantial proportion of social scientists of different disciplines have shown concern over the poor participation of women. Existing economic analysis have approached the problem from different view points. A consensus should be reached in defining the concept of ‘work’ which should be adhered to by Census and NSS. The ongoing Structural Adjustment Programme has thrown up an emerging challenge along with some opportunities before the women workers. In order to meet these challenges and take advantages of emerging opportunities, strengthening
women’s capabilities is essential. Micro level studies can provide rich insight in this respect.

2.5 FEMINISATION AND EMPOWERMENT

The gender equality doctrine is an outstanding contribution of the twentieth century. The UN Declaration of Women’s Rights, 1667, postulated the egalitarian doctrine of achieving equal rights for women as that of men and advocated its universal recognition in law by all countries as an unavoidable necessity. Maximum participation of women as well as men in all fields of human activity is essential for the full and complete development of a country, the welfare of the world and the cause of world peace. Concerned with the nature of power and its impact on gender equations, feminism has criticised the existing socio-political theories as prejudicial to women. Research has enabled them to identify the gender blindness within dominant theories and shift the focus of inquiry from the vantage point of men to women. The first wave feminist movement of the 19th and the early 20th century did not question the rationality as the basis on which men claimed their rights. It merely argued that women too, were capable of rational thought and were therefore entitled to similar rights. However, the radical version of feminism, which were so popular in the west at one time, continued to be the dominant trend among the Indian feminists even till as late as the 1970s. Now it is being questioned by the protagonists of the new feminism or the authentic feminism. The emphasis now is on the equality of genders and not on the myth of female superiority which erupted from the myth of the male superiority (Tapan, 2000).

Developmental feminism was born from the recognition that male dominated international institutions financing ‘development’ projects in the Third World were biased against women and tended to ignore women’s contribution to economic production. In 1970, Ester Boserup
highlighted the prominent role of women in field agriculture, particularly in Africa. Since then, there has been a veritable wave of investigations into the productive activities of women in Third World countries. A school of developmental feminism emerged, whose research work is largely geared towards 'integrating women in development' (Custers, 1997).

In the 1970s, a distinct trend of ecofeminism has emerged which was given further shape by feminists from different countries, especially by women belonging to various Third World countries. One of the most prominent representatives of ecofeminism today is Vandana Shiva, an Indian scientist, who is a critique of Western, patriarchal science with a powerful destruction brought by Green Revolution technology upon Indian agriculture. Her analysis of women's position in the food chain in India, to sustain their families and nature, provides fruitful material for comparisons with development feminism. Ecofeminists draw parallels between the oppression of women and the destruction of nature, and trace both to the philosophical views that have dominated Western science since the 17th century. Shiva's (1991a) analysis of the Green Revolution in India amply illustrates that the impact of the package of modern seeds and chemicals inputs has been negative in many invisible ways. Feminist authors have also printed out the labour displacement effect of the Green Revolution and a central theme in the literature has been emerged in the gender division of labour between male and female. However, Shiva looks at the types of activities undertaken by women in organic agriculture, at both their quantitative significance, and at the significance such activities have for the sustenance of nature.

In recent years there has been considerable interest and research undertaken for both women's unpaid domestic work and women's home based productive work for income. In the developing world, an increase in home based work has been identified in certain contexts. This seems to
span an enormous range of both traditional activities and new technologies and to be associated with increasing landlessness and poverty (Sing, Kelles-Vitanen, 1987). Women’s participation has gradually been increasing in most of the countries of the world for a few decades. The Indian case is similar to the development experience of others countries involving a shift of women workers from the unpaid family worker status to that employees. The term ‘feminisation’ is used to represent increased presence of women in the agricultural labour force but this move is not successful in Indian context as these women have already got the less advantageous status of casual employees. Generally increased participation of women as against men, in the subsistence sector is treated as a negative feature because such a change is taking place as a part of the larger processes of informalisation and casualisation. The issue of feminisation of workforce has been a recurring theme in the rapidly growing literature on gender and globalisation (Shah, 2005). The incidence of ‘feminisation’ can be gathered from both aggregate national level data as well as a series of micro studies, especially during the 1990s (Singh and Meenakshi, 2000). The more recent studies (Baneria and Feldman, 1992; Chandha, 2001; Sundaram, 2001; Unni, 2002) viewed that this trend has created much confusion. On the one hand women have found more opportunities for entering the labour market within the sphere of paid work, on the other, this trend have tapered off in the 1990s as a part of the more general slowing down of the absorption of women labour in agricultural activities due to labour displacement, privatisation of social infrastructure and increased prices.

Singh and Meenakshi (2000) studied that three different issues are involved with feminisation - the changing nature of women’s work; the persistence of gender based differentials in wages and whether feminisation has at all translated into empowerment in order to understanding the implication of feminisation. This study highlights that
though women perform a major role in agriculture but most of the agricultural operations are characterised by gender specificity. There are evidences that technical change has often been biased toward female agricultural labour and it has been widely observed that causal contracts are increasingly replacing older tied relationship. Various literature (Mukherjee, 1998; Krishnaraj and Shah 2003) held the view that casualisation is integral to the process of feminisation, and as detrimental to women’s welfare. The persisting wage differentials across gender are endemic in the agricultural labour market all over India is a well established fact and some of these differential is attributed to the operation specificity existing in agriculture. There are, however, lack of evidences to reflect the productivity differences between male and female. The study viewed a broader hypothesis regarding feminisation and empowerment and mentioned that so far as women’s work is concerned, most of the discussion has related to visible aspects of women’s work. There are significant implications of overwhelming ‘invisible’ component of women’s work in interpretation of welfare in the economic literature. However, the board issue that may arise whether feminisation has been empowering or not. The greater participation of women in the agricultural workforce clearly implies that they are able to contribute to household expenditure but at the same it is evident that the greater participation in agricultural work does not itself give women the power to make key decisions. The study highlighted several potential areas of research in the area of feminisation of the agricultural labour and suggests that the normative concerns that are associated with the feminisation of labour, in particular the empowerment of women, needs to be studied more closely before any explicit conclusions can be drawn (Singh and Meenakshi, 2000).

The macro statistics for India suggest that the share of women in rural work force has increased in the 1970s, but in late 1980s, it went
down and continued to do so till the end of nineties. Several studies (Chandha, 2001; Sundaram, 2001) indicate the slowing down of the absorption of rural labour in agriculture related activities. Banerjee (1999) argued that a large part of the increase in women’s work in agriculture is mainly due to intensification especially in the five major rice growing states where women have been traditionally engaged in specific operations. There are evidences suggesting a loosening of the gender division of work both in agriculture as well as in non-agricultural activities, especially, in the traditional industries. Casualisation is often seen as closely associated with the process of feminisation and is hence, considered gender non-conductive (Shah, 2005). It is evident from various studies (Bardhan, 1977; Agarwal, 1994 a and 1994 b) that women have a reduced access to private property resources like land, employment, productive assets, etc. They are consequently more dependent than men on communal resources for subsistence needs. It is argued that women are likely to perform better in collective action than men; and that the gender difference attributed to conservation can stem from the gendered division of resource use. Agarwal (2001) studied how participatory institutions exclude significant sections, such as women, even though today the management of local natural resources by village communities is widely accepted as an institutional imperative and concludes that participatory exclusion, as it affects women, extends into many arenas. In this sense, participatory exclusion predicated on gender is a phenomenon that cuts across many contexts and countries, and the factors underlying it appear to have more universal features than hitherto recognised (Agarwal, 2001).

Sen (1990) studied that wage work increases the bargaining power and therefore, is empowering. Recent evidences (Krishnaraj and Shah, 2003; Singh and Meenakshi, 2000) suggest that the greater participation of women in agricultural activities implies their increased contribution to
household expenditure. It is observed that women working for cash income have greater autonomy in decision making process especially with respect to spending of the self-earned income. At the same time recent evidence suggests that real earnings among female workers have increased at faster rates both rural as well as urban areas as compared to their male counterparts. However, there is a complex link between women’s workforce participation and empowerment since the link is mediated by the interplay of their economic contribution and social values (Singh and Meenakshi, 2000; Shah, 2005).

Saikia (2004) found that in traditional societies women’s role in agriculture is still considered insignificant. It is because the jobs done by women in agriculture do not apparently generate any exchange value to her. They used to deliver the services in their own paddy fields. As far as the concept of ‘farmer’ goes, it includes only the male portion. Thus to change the concept, it is perhaps necessary to change over policy statement also. In India, the constitution, apart from guaranteeing fundamental rights to all its citizens, both men and women, has also incorporated a set of ‘Directive Principles of State Policies’ laying down guidelines as to how the State is expected to function. Specific measure to achieve equality among both men and women are clearly brought out. Socio-economic development has over the years, addressed itself to gender issues, particularly equal pay for equal work, and how to prevent forcing women into unsuitable vocations through economic necessity, thus providing vertical mobility to enable every one to rise in economic and social status.

It is seen that gender inequality retards economic growth. There is growing evidence to suggest that several aspects of gender relations, the gender-based divisions of labour, disparities between male and female in power and resources and gender biases in rights and entitlements act to undermine economic growth and reduce the well-being of men, women
and children. It is commonly held that, investments in female education and health tend to increase the incomes of families, better educated women are able to adopt newer technologies, hold on to new opportunities and cope with economic shocks. In India under the sixth Five Year Plan, the policies and programmes relating to women were given a shift in approach from ‘curative’ to ‘preventive’ and ‘welfare’ to ‘developmental’. Economic developments through income generating activities were given top priority so that women would become economically independent and self reliant to take part in the socio-economic development of the country. The concept of ‘empowerment’ was introduced by women from the south at the International Women’s Conference at Nairobi at 1985 as a counter project to the integration concept for advancing women (Lalitha, 1997). The concept of ‘empowerment’ aims at redistribution of social power and control of resources in favour of women based development strategy (Wichterich, 1995). One of the important objectives of ninth Five Year Plan of India is the empowerment of women which has become an integral part of the development strategy.

However, upholding the equality of rights is not an act of benevolence by those in power. It is needed for the progress of every society. Such equality has been enshrined in global and national commitments from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1945) and the Vienna Human Rights Declaration (1993) to various national constitutions. The reality, however is that woman does not share equally with men in the opportunities, benefits and responsibilities of citizenship and development (Gupta and Gupta, 1996). They held the view that the participation of women in socio-economic activity of the nation is recognised as an important element in the adoption of small family norm, essential for achievement of the twin goals of economic development and population planning. In developing economies women are commonly
engaged in various activities which produce substitutes for market goods, or where labour force participation is almost an extensive household activities. In India, women participation in activities other than cultivation, agriculture and household activities are low which is one of the valid reasons for less participation of women in health and family welfare programmes and other developmental activities. Greater women participation is possible only if women are educated and gainfully employed in economic activities other than cultivation and agriculture.

Human development encompasses elements that constitute the critical issues of gender and development. There are four major elements in the concept of human development productivity, equity, sustainability and empowerment. Enhanced capabilities, the creativity and productivity of people must be increased so that they become effective agents of economic growth. Economic growth must be combined with equitable distribution of its benefits. Equitable opportunities must be available both to present and future generations resulting in sustainability. And all people women and men must be empowered to participate in the design and implementation of key decisions that shape their lives’ (UNDP, 1995). Thus the process of challenging existing relations and gaining greater control over the forces of power may be termed as empowerment. Empowerment of women must be an integral part of sustainable economic development. The goals of women’s empowerment challenge the patriarchal ideology to transform the structure and institutions that reinforce and perpetuate gender discrimination and social inequality and to enable poor rural women to gain access to and control of both material and informational resources (Lalitha, 1997). It is mentioned that empowerment of rural women should embody several factors like equality of work and wages, expansion of girls’ education, autonomy over reproductive life, access to ownership of land and property, training and technology, access to bank credit and markets, safe water, sanitation and
energy. Among these various determinants of women’s empowerment, access to bank credit is one of the crucial factors (Lalitha, 1997).

Devdas (1999) held the view that rural women’s participation in income generating activities is believed to increase their status and decision making power. With empowerment, women do not remain as ‘objects’ of social change but becomes ‘agents’ of it. They cease to be only consumers of economic goods and services to turn to producers to participate in social reproduction as well as reproduction of labour for the next generation (Samanta, 2005).

Pankajam and Lalitha (2005), studied Gandhigram Experience which was designed to work for the social, economic and political empowerment of women especially for those from marginalised sections. It follows the ‘participatory approach’ involving the community in planning and implementations of development project for the empowerment of the marginalised sections of women to different kinds of opportunities and creativity shaping their future development. Gandhigram was designed to fulfil the broad goals of enhancing women’s access to and control over productive endowments; increasing the productivity of women’s labour and expanding their access to extension services, credit, education, information and training; increasing women’s control over their income and their ability to use it for their own survival; and increasing women’s ability to exercise political power.

Samanta (2005) studies that in India the rural development can be achieved only by developing and empowering rural women socially and economically. Therefore, a specific effort has to be made not only to increase employment opportunity for farm women labourers but also to reach housewives and unpaid female family workers with proper training, credit and other necessary information coupled with support services for productive self employment. Until and unless such accesses are created, the process of development and empowerment of rural women will fail to
achieve its focused objectives. He concludes that our wisdom, resources, administrative mechanisms, service and helping attitudes to develop people coupled with technological breakthrough are to be channelised to overcome the deprivation of rural women in every aspect of their lives. Thus it becomes the urgent need of the hour to protect the rural women by making provision of equal economic and social opportunities to them by the process of economic and social liberalisation of women.

Mathew (2005) studied the role of Micro Finance Institutions for empowering rural women and found that the micro finance programmes have given women the confidence to undertake activities requiring a lot of capital. Since 1990s, micro finance initiatives based on the Grameen Bank model have been increasingly adopted by development practitioners as the most powerful intervention to reduce poverty and to empower rural women in particular. Micro finance institution is such an organisation that offers financial services to the very poor and serves rural women in empowerment and poverty alleviation. If we see empowerment as a holistic concept, than policies must be initiated to promote the efforts of micro financial institutions in advancing the position of women (Mathew, 2005).

The issue of women empowerment is very complex and multidimensional. Besides, providing rights and creating awareness does not solve the problem of women. The development programmes and policies, which aim at women empowerment, should categorise women based on their age, caste, class, region, education etc, as they are not a homogeneous group which aims at empowerment (Wasnik, 2006). To create a general awareness about the role played by women in agriculture and to increase their access and involvement in the overall farm economy with a view to increasing efficiency in agricultural sector, the Ministry of Agriculture, Government of India had formulated a scheme ‘Women in Agriculture’ by the Extension Division, Ministry of Agriculture,
Government of India during the Eighth Five Years Plan on pilot basis covering one district each of the seven states of the country and later on it was extended to fifteen states of India. Wasnik (2006) conducted his study ‘Women in Agriculture’ in Thane district of Maharashtra to access the impact of this scheme on the decision making, having a bearing on the socio-economic status and income constraints faced by the women in the farm sector and found that the Department of Agriculture was the major source of information in case of beneficiary farm women and at the same, beneficiary farm women generally taking their decisions regarding the activities requiring technical competency. Moreover, the study found that the beneficiary farms were operating at the higher levels of income as compared to the non-beneficiary farms under study. The implementation of Central Sector Scheme ‘Women in Agriculture’ has been found to have a significant effect on the annual gross family employment and income beneficiary household as compared to non-beneficiary households.

In the Indian context, the last decade has been marked by the growth and development of the women’s movement. Even in the twenty first century, female agricultural labourers form the single largest category of workers particularly in rural India. But in most of the region their economic status is very low as most of them are engaged in agricultural production as unpaid family labour and low wage paid laborers. The proportion of casual workers has been increasing during the last two decades. Women are still primarily dependent on agriculture for sustenance. Technological advancement in production sphere which raises the yield per unit of labour is generally biased against women workers. In many areas women have been displaced from their traditional jobs because technology necessitates training, upgradation of knowledge and skills, which are out their reach. In agriculture, women are mainly employed as casual low paying wage workers and get employment
mainly during peak seasons. In fact, women do not have any option in terms of the type, nature or location of employment.

The present approach of empowerment looks at unequal gender and power relations and uses consciousness, mobilisation and collective action as the solutions. An important dimension in this regard has been the shift from exclusive women’s programmes to the incorporation of a gender perspective in all most of the development programmes. The empowerment approach, thus, arises from a strong commitment to women’s right and capacity to make their own decision about development strategies.

In this backdrop, the present study attempts to provide the empirical analysis to a number of theoretically established proposition relating to the pattern of women’s participation in agriculture in the Barak Valley region of Assam and also attempts to explore the status of women in relation to workforce participation and the pattern of access over resources in the Barak Valley region of Assam.

NOTES:

1. The complex task of defining census schedule and instructions to be modified. In India, the task continues to be assigned to IAS officers rather than to technical experts who play only a nominal rather than a decisive role in the design of Censuses. Also our statistical expert need to provide expert persons to recognise the actual field conditions in data collection.

2. Work Participation Rate (WPR) for Censuses before 1961 may not be comparable as the concept of “work” was linked previously with adequacy of earning, etc. “Workers in the Census of 1961 and later years are defined in terms of their participation in economic activities.
3. The female subsidiary workers need to be classified because of their dual participation in the work of household enterprises. Most of their participation may be during peak season due to inability of households to engage hired labour required to complete the production activities in a time bound manner.

4. Evidently, unorganised sector workers, constituting 286 million in India, work and live in the most precarious conditions. Often they work at back-bearing labour, such as construction work or agricultural labour, for a wage that does not even fetch them two square meals a day. Forty percent of these workers are women who earn even less than the male workers in the same employment.

5. The economic liberalisation policies of the Government and its new economic policy package prepared under pressure from the international agencies and foreign investors appears to negate the need for according priority to the welfare of the poor. Feminists have strongly criticised this skewed policy since it is expected to undermine the work and security of women workers in both organised and unorganised sectors with disastrous consequences for their own well-being and that of their households.

6. There are many studies related to mechanisation of agriculture and its impact on employment of rural women with particular reference to Africa.

REFERENCES:


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