CHAPTER - I

INTRODUCTION

In countries with dominant agricultural sector the level and speed of economic development is determined by sustained growth in agricultural sector, because there is strong sectoral linkages and also because the agricultural sector contributes many factors as inputs to other sectors of the economy\(^1\). (Thangaraj, 1993) India is predominantly an agrarian economy and it is no exemption. The development of agricultural to its fullest potential is therefore, the prerequisite for the economic development of the country. In Indian economy, agriculture accounts for nearly half of the National Income and offers employment to about 70 percent of the labour force. It provides raw materials for most of the industries, and accounts for nearly 48 percent of the country's foreign exchange earnings\(^2\). (Desai, 1985)

But one of the disquieting feature of the rural economy of India has been the growth of the agricultural labourers - cultivators and agricultural workers, in pace with the economic growth overall, so that the percentage of population dependent upon agriculture remain nearly invariant. So far, they get unusually low wages, and conditions of work put an excessive burden on them and employment which they get is extremely irregular. As observed by Sitaramaya, "the cultivator who spends the day between slush and mud, who
works with a starving stomach knows no rest in storm or sunshine, but knows nothing beyond 'Kanjee'. His condition is appalling and heartening\(^3\). (Sexena, 1963)

The situation is much worse particularly in the case of rural women. In the recent past, gender issues in agricultural development and women's role and contribution in agriculture have become the subject of considerable debate throughout the world. More recently, it has been recognized by the social scientists, policy makers, administrators and politicians that women contribute significantly in agricultural development and its allied activities. No longer farm women is considered as farmer's wife but a responsible individual equal to her father or husband or brother. She also performs several management and decision-making roles in farming and homemaking practices together with her male counterpart and sometimes alone. Hence, there is an urgent need to study, analyse and discuss the various issues and experiences concerned to women in agriculture in its broad perspective.\(^4\) (R.K. Samanta, 1995). This being the state of agricultural labour, lots need to be done to improve their status.

The need has been felt by the policy makers in the country and various Government Programmes, both employment generating and poverty alleviation have been implemented with the objective of improving the living condition of the rural labour\(^5\). (Editor, E.P.W.1985)
Women and Plans:

Welfare programmes oriented towards the welfare of women and children found a place in first five year plan of the country and in the sixth and seventh plan, separate chapters have been provided on women development. In 1971, Government of India appointed a committee on the status of women in India (CSWI) to comprehend the extent of changes in women's status and rights and to suggest measures which would enable women to play their full and proper role in the building up of the Nation. On the basis of the Report of the committee on the status of women in India, parliament urged the Prime Minister to "initiate a comprehensive programme of legislative and administrative measures aimed at removing as far as possible the economic and social injustices, disabilities and discrimination to which Indian Women continue to be subjected". Again the declaration of International women's decade in 1975 brought into focus the importance of bringing women as part of development. The women of rural India constituting 77% of the total women in the country, the need to integrate these women into development as an essential pre-requisite for overall development has been highlighted by policy makers and development planners.

Programmes:

In order to benefit the rural women in various fields like social, educational, health, economic, political, etc., and to integrate them into the process of development, a concerted effort was made at various levels, i.e., Central
Ministries, Planning Commission, State Government, non-governmental organisations, social service and research agencies, etc., through various programmes. An illustrative list of such programmes is given below.

Mahila Mandals of the Department of Rural Development and Rural Welfare Projects of Central Social Welfare Board provide a wide network of services which include educational, instructional, recreational, welfare and income generating activities with a large number of workers-mainly women-at the village level. There are over 50,000 centres, established in various states of the country with about 25 to 100 women members, in each of the centres, associated with it.

Integrated Rural Development Projects (IRDP):

This programme, oriented towards rural development and poverty eradication, is a credit-linked subsidy scheme and provides credit for agriculture and its allied activities such as sericulture, animal husbandry, horticulture, village industries, etc. It is perhaps due to lack of local participation that these programmes do not reach general poor women to the desired extent. Efforts have been made to bring more and more rural women within the fold of the programme. Also, while selecting beneficiaries preference is given to female-headed households.

Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA):

Recognising that the benefits of IRDP are imparted to only a fringe of the women in rural areas, the programme of DWCRA was brought into existence with the objective of help-
ing rural women and children to derive benefit from development programmes already in existence.

**Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS):**

In order to provide child care facilities, with a prior need of the rural women, ICDS programme was launched with a package of services like anganwadis, health services, nutrition, etc. The problems faced in the implementation include lack of coordination between the departments participating in the delivery of services like education, public health, Childcare, UNICEF, etc., lack of cooperation of village leaders, etc. in addition to the beneficiaries not being aware of the benefits imparted through the programme.

The minimum needs programme (MNP) is package of services for rural women which includes primary health programme, elementary education, rural water supply, electrification, roads, housing, environmental improvement, nutrition, etc. Since the responsibility for generating these services is vested in the Panchayats, women's ideas are not incorporated.

**Training of Rural Youth for Self-employment (TRYSEM):**

The main thrust of the scheme is on equipping rural youth with necessary skills and technology to enable them to take the vocation of self-employment. This is now an integral part of IRD programme. Priority is to be given to women accounting for at least one third of the beneficiaries.
National Rural Employment Programme (NREP):

This programme assists in generating additional gainful employment, creation of durable economic assets for strengthening the rural infrastructure etc. and is helpful in providing off-season employment to the under-employed. The crucial constraints in the implementation of the programme include lack of coordination with IRDP and the other programmes, payment of wages in kind, inability to mobilise local resources, etc.

Rural Landless employment Guarantee Scheme (RLEGPS): is designed to generate additional employment in rural areas especially during lean season.

Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVK): The scheme is intended to develop training infrastructure in rural areas.

Drought Prone Areas Programme/ Desert Development Programme:

The main components of the programme are irrigation, soil conservation and dryland farming, afforestation and pasture development, sericulture, horticulture and fisheries development.

Programmes of the Central Social Welfare Board:

The central social welfare Board extends financial assistance to Voluntary organisations for setting up income generating units under the 'Socio-economic programme' by introducing technical and marketing support with focus on diversified occupations and including new skills required by
the job market. Condensed educational and vocational training courses for Adult women and being organised by the aided agencies to improve their employment prospects and for rehabilitation of women in distress. The Awareness Generation Project for Rural Women is oriented to develop leadership qualities among rural women and to involve them in development activities.

In addition, programmes of Adult Education provide education on subjects like health, nutrition, child care, family planning, skills and craft, etc. Khadi and village industries provide employment opportunities to women. The National Small Industries Development Corporation, District Industries Centre, etc. also organise programmes for the benefit of rural women.

These programmes were supported by various other measures initiated by various agencies so that women may actively participate in their own development as well as the country development. (Sasmeeta, 1988)

As the programmes are intended to create jobs in rural areas and reduce open and disguised unemployment of rural labour, it is very reasonable to expect some improvement in the living conditions of the agricultural labour. After a decade of implementation of the programmes, it is right time now to evaluate their impact on agricultural labour in terms of number of days of employment in a year (against a standard of 300 days for full employment), wages, income and living conditions, vis-a-vis poverty line.
The Women in Jobs

The traditional village community in India consisted of cultivators, artisans and those performing menial services. In each of these, the women have significant involvement, contributing sometimes more, sometimes less, but often an equal amount of labour as men in both production and marketing of products of agriculture and handicrafts. In agriculture women have been traditionally working shoulder to shoulder with men. (Editor, I.L.J. 1975)

Backward mental attitudes, resulting from blind adherence to tradition and the absence of education especially among rural women are partly to be blamed. In rural households, the feeling that women are born to suffer and have to live a life of self-abnegations is deep rooted. This holds good not only to India as a whole, but also to Tamilnadu in particular.

Since Independence, the position of women in the Indian Society is clearly in the process of transformation. Thanks to several policies encouraging social reforms and will have an important impact on future social development. The Indian constitution grants women, equality of status and opportunity with men and asserts that there should be no discrimination on grounds of sex. A three major trends are discernible in the process of transformation.
(i) In the Socio-economic sphere, the continuing absorption of women into the work force is made possible by the access to higher education which is expanding the boundaries of women's social roles. It enables women to increasingly share the responsibility within the family, continuous employment in economically gainful jobs, lower fertility rate and greater participation in social and political activities.

(ii) The science and Technology contribute to a reduction in their drudgery and minimise the present imbalance between the sexes their ability to make personal decision and action.

(iii) The present redefinition of moral and psychological attitude that a single - parent family as the legitimate form of sexual cohabition, is likely to continue. (Ester Boserup, 1976)

Especially, the last two decades have witnessed some dramatic and visible changes in the economic position of women in India and many other Asian countries, the most significant being the rapid influx of women into labour markets.

In Agriculture:

It is, of late realised that without providing equal and productive employment to women, the problem of poverty cannot be solved (Bahuisikha 1988). In agriculture, women are engaged in less strenuous jobs, which do not call for any
particular skill. Occupation wise, agriculture appears to offer the main refuge to the working women. In rural India with about 87 percent of the economically active women engaged in this category. According to census of 1971, 1981 and 1991, although the economically active are only 11 percent, 14 percent and 15 percent of the total rural female population respectively in the three census. Thus, it is seen that the contribution of women to economic activity irrespective of the rates of their labour force participation is generally remains low. These low rates may be a gross under estimation. Since most of the work performed by women is of informal nature, it remains unreported likewise, women who are not normally engaged in active work but are drawn into production activities in peak periods to assist male works are also not taken into account while working out labour force participation rates.

The under estimation of women's work and contribution results from the economist's traditional view of time utilisation pattern into wage employments and leisure. Such a framework ignores the economic value of goods and services that women produce within the household concerning particularly to food preparation, child and animal care, housekeeping etc. A model has been substituted by a three phase model of female labour force participation. It divides women's work into home production, market employment and leisure. Under this model, women labour supply and work participation depend not only on wages but also on incomes derived from goods and services produced in the family it-
self. The factor which has exercised a formidable influence in recent times on the women's work participation rates and productivity is the economic development itself. Viewed as the increased access to goods and services, development offers women employment opportunities and public services in education, health, nutrition etc. Improved techniques have contributed greatly in enhancing productivity and income of women, though in practice the benefits of development that accrue to women are far less than those for their counterparts\(^{10}\). (T.M.Dak.1988). Industrialisation is another factor which has been able to increase the demand for-wage labour based on productivity rather than such personal attributes as sex. No doubt, women have made gains from industrialisation to the extent jobs created by it are assessable to them and the household tasks associated with them are not dislocated. Inspite of these changes, the labour market in general continues to discriminate against women as evident from their higher unemployment, their exclusion from certain occupation, and lower wages for equivalent work. It is in this context, that women's employment is often viewed as an indicator of women's economic contribution for the socio-economic development\(^{11}\) (Boserup,1976).

**Several causes:**

One of the main reasons for the differential impact of development on women has been the control of the men over the productive resources and inaccessibility of women to credit and other inputs necessary to augment, productivity and efficiency. The dependence decreases with the shift from
home production to wage employment in which women can have direct control over the income earned by them. The economic dependence of women can also be reduced by increasing their access to the sources of credit and other inputs that may enhance their productive capacity. The prevailing extended family pattern proved to be quite conducive for women to perform both productive as well as motherly roles. The conflict between productive and reproductive roles in rural areas is not as serious as in modern society. The problem arises when the members who are traditionally performing child-rearing function also seek wage employment and there remains fewer persons to do the household chores. The resultant incompatibility between motherhood and female labour force participation is often resolved through altering fertility behaviour which include limiting family size by late marriages, late bearing of children and other means of birth control. Women's work status and unemployment are greatly influenced by fertility levels and other fertility related behaviour. To become equals of men, they must have economic independence, they must be aware of their legal status, they should be aware of the world in general and they should be respected equal to men in every economic activity. They should be given equal participation in decision making of the family activities, they should stop being superstitious and approach every issue from a practical point of view.

In sum, as recent studies have proved the female participation rate has been on the increase and the main factor to help the cause is their economic independence. A
study by Munjal et-al (1988) show that though women perform a wide spectrum of activities, not much economic and social value is attached to their work. Another investigation by Saradamani (1988) reveals that Women's involvement in agriculture differs not only between labourers and landowners but also between households in each category. Manu (1979) finds that rural women have to work from early morning till late night and they have a spell of rest only when they visit their parental homes. Another observation of Malkit Kaur et-al (1988) is that the rural women hardly get leisure time and the average working hours is 13.2 hours, which reflects the miserable plight of rural women. These studies reveal that the rural women are yet to be recognised as productive factor, though they perform dual role as mothers and labourers and a remedy is in speeding up the reform process to reach quickly the unreached rural women.

Problem Focus:

Thus it is clear that the constitution, government policies and programmes, economic development of the country, particularly expansion of educational and employment opportunities, have all had a noticeable impact on the labour force participation of women, bringing about a slow but definite transformation in the status and share of women. However, the process is relatively slower in rural areas and most rural women, are by-passed. Their own attitude, tradition and capabilities remain still a stumbling block. The problems must be identified and remedies be found so that the
policy instruments can be sharpened and made more effective. It is in this context, the present study is taken up to analyse the conditions of agricultural women labourers in rural areas of Tiruchirappalli District. The main focus is on the pattern of employment, factors influencing women labour force, decision making, time use pattern, wage structure, Government programmes in uplifting their status, level of poverty, impact of IRDP on women agricultural labourers in lifting their families above the poverty line.

Objectives of the Study:

Overall objective of the study is to evaluate the labour force participation of agricultural women - its causes, benefits and problems and the impact of IRDP in the participation. Specific objectives of the study are

i) to study the extent and pattern of employment of agricultural women workers;

ii) to examine the factors influencing agricultural women labour force participation;

iii) to understand the time allocation method of agricultural female workers with the view to understand their problems in allocating time for work outside;

iv) to evaluate the contribution of agricultural women workers earning to the standard of living of the household with special emphasis on removal of poverty; and,

v) to evaluate the effect of IRDP in encouraging labour force participation of agricultural women workers and in lifting their family above poverty line.
Hypotheses:

Above objectives would require the following hypotheses to be empirically tested

i) The labour force participation of rural women is largely in agriculture and poverty of the household is a primary cause.

ii) The labour force participation of agricultural women improves the standard of living of the household;

iii) The problem of allocating time between their household duties and employment outside, forms the major constraint to women in their work participation.

iv) Low level of income and high variance of it are characteristics of agricultural women workers.

v) The IRDP has helped agricultural women workers with employment opportunities and income which has in turn removed poverty.

Scope of the Study:

The study investigates an urgent social problem of current importance. As women constitute a very large segment of the work force, their participation in labour force is very essential for the social and economic development of the economy which is predominantly agrarian. The study will provide estimates of labour force participation rate, gender differences in number of days employed, wages received, income earned and involvement in decision making. The study will also bring to light the impact of the labour force participation of women, on the living condition of the house-
hold, particularly the extent of reduction in poverty. The study will identify structural and operational constraints that limit labour force participation of rural women and suggest specific measures to relax the constraints and to speed up the process of transformation of rural women. Therefore the findings will be very useful to the policy makers, social reformers and officials concerned with rural development.

Limitation of the study:

Collecting field level data from the agricultural household is a difficult task. Many questions on the number of days employed, decision making, time allocation for economic and non-economic activities, wage they get for different operations, wage discrimination are all responded sheerly from the respondents memory only approximately i.e. only approximation could be made but not accuracy. This is one of the limitations which is found in most of the agricultural research. It required much time and efforts to educate them, to persuade them and to collect fairly accurate data. This problem was solved by restricting the universe of the study to one district and making comparative analysis of wet and dry regions within the district. Researcher's personal interview with the respondents allowed cross checks and clarification to minimise the response errors. Thus the results found may not allow much generalization, but it is useful for Tiruchirappalli district and its methodology for replication elsewhere. The data for the study related to one year cross section data of 1993-94.
Scheme of the Thesis:

The First Chapter of the Thesis gives an introduction, on role of women and the significance of the study followed by objectives, hypotheses, scope and limitations of the study. The Second provides the definition of the concept and an elaborate account of the review of literature. The Third describes the profile of the study area. The Fourth presents the theoretical background of agricultural labour along with the statistical tools used. The design of the study described and gives details of method of sampling, data collection, analysis, tools and models used. The Fifth presents the results of the analysis and inferences drawn. The Sixth and the final Chapter brings in a summary of the salient findings of the study and presents conclusions drawn and their policy implications.
References:-


13. Saradamani, Ibid.,
