

The varied dimensions of women work participation as a whole and in different sectors have been analysed in detail so far. Even here, some of the variations could not be explained properly. Since agriculture is the most prevalent category, a discussion about the Agricultural scenario of Palakkad, Land Utilization and cropping pattern of the study area may help to understand the status of women workers better. This is attempted in the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **CONCEPTUAL BASE AND METHODOLOGY**

#### **1.1 Introduction**

Women are the real treasure of any nation. They are the principal architects of the family, the nation and the world. They give birth to generations. “The changing agency of women is one of the major mediators of economic and social change, and its determination as well as consequences closely relates to many of the central features of the development process... Nothing arguably is as important today in the political economy of development as an adequate recognition of political, economic and social participation and leadership of women”. (Amartya Sen, 1999). The World Conference of the FAO on Agrarian Development in Rome (1978) recognized women’s role not only as farmers and members of the rural community at large but also emphasized the importance of consulting and involving women in the decision making process.

According to Boserup (1970), both the status of women and the type of family organization are related to the agricultural system, which in turn, is affected by population density and technological choices. Contribution of

women to the required labour depends on the type of agricultural system in place, the pattern of land use, the crops grown, labour intensity and the methods of cultivation.

Universally, the general opinion is that the main role of the women is expected and confined to perform the household chores, child bearing and care of the entire family. In the rural agrarian set up these duties are further extended to work in the field, cultivation, plantation, tending cattle and little more skilled jobs in the forms of weaving, dyeing, printing and household industry. A women's status in a rural society, apart from her role as a mother and wife, depends on how her labour is utilized – a decision made by men. In short, in most of the countries, male domination is apparent and women are treated as subordinates to men leading to gender inequalities.

## **1.2 Gender Inequality**

*“There isn't a single country in the world, not one where men and women enjoy equal opportunities. We cannot maintain the illusion that someone else is going to do the job and establish equality with men. We must fight for that freedom”* (Gro Brunt Land, 1995)

One of the most crucial issues that is to be addressed is the development planning of any area is related to Gender inequality. Basically, the term gender inequality refers to the imbalance between the male and female members of the society with regard to opportunities, accessibility, utilization and decision-making processes in the society as a whole. Thus, gender inequality is a multifaceted phenomenon and may encompass a wide variety of aspects such as social, economic, political,

cultural and legal dimensions. In each of these dimensions, discrimination exists between the male and female. This in turn affects not only the growth of individuals but also that of the nation or evolution of the society as a whole.

Considering the gender inequality as a crucial issue affecting not only human rights but also the overall development, the *State of World Population Report 2000*, also differentiates between “gender issues” and “women issues”. The gender issue refers to the economic, social and cultural attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female. On the other hand, women’s issues are mostly unrelated to developmental concerns and include human rights, democratic governance, globalisation, etc. Women's issues have not been systematically addressed in the planning and programming process (UNESCO, 1995).

According to the 1995 Human development Report of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), out of 1.3 billion people living in absolute poverty, over 70 percent are women. Dwelling further, Amartya Sen (2001) brings out the existence of various facets of gender inequality in terms of mortality, natality, ownership, household, professional, basic facility as well as special opportunities. It is astonishing to note that the prevalence of this gender inequality spans the whole world from Japan to Morocco and from Uzbekistan to the United States of America.

Discrimination on the basis of ‘gender’ has been observed in all spheres of human interests including the granting of land rights by the state [Agarwal 2002], intra-household allocation of food and resources [Harris-White 1996; Cowan and Dhanoa 1983; Sen and Dreze 1989] and payment of wages and remuneration [Unni 1999].

Gender inequality can have adverse effects on economic growth. A reciprocal relationship exists between economic development of the society and the development of the household. In addition, there are numerous studies to show that higher incomes for women leads not only to their increased voice and empowerment, but also to improved well being for the household and a better nutritional status of children in the household (World Bank, 2001). Sources of modern economic life can be fully understood by examining the development of the household with particular reference to the role of women. Employment opportunities available to women are also limited in many parts of the world. It is primarily related to the social view that a woman's first responsibility is towards her home. This social attitude finds its full expression in the division of roles and responsibilities in the family – a division that is far from equal between husband and wife. The fact that a wife and mother working seems to have little effect upon her expected performance in the home for her domestic responsibilities. They are exposed to two sets of conflicting demands – outside work requires attendance in fixed hours during working days while home and family exert diverse pressures at all hours of the day. As a result, woman continues to have a different economic status in her occupations. In the same way, for same tasks, women are paid less than men because of the assumption that women are less productive than men.

All the points discussed so far prove that gender equality is to be effected, because this alone strengthens the countries' abilities to grow, to reduce poverty and to govern effectively. It is not out of place to discuss a brief review about the status of women in India from ancient period to the present period here.

### 1.3 Status of Women in India

*You can tell the condition of a nation by looking at the status of its women.*  
- Jawaharlal Nehru

During the Vedic and Rig Vedic periods (approximately 4000-1000 BC), women in India enjoyed equal status with that of men (Kuppuswamy 1972). The degradation of women started only since 300 BC. The patriarchal joint family system, structure of property ownership, early marriage, self-immolation of widows (*sati*) or state of permanent widowhood, all became obstacles to the development of women (Neera Desai, 1975). Since the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries of the Common Era, several reformers fought against those aspects of the system that have resulted in the oppression of females. To them, women should labour under no dissatisfaction not suffered by man, and as a result of their efforts, independent India has adopted several rules and regulations to protect the rights of women and tried to establish equality of status.

A number of specific measures have been undertaken by the Government of India to improve the status of women. Legal protection against domestic violence, stringent punishment for dowry related issues and enactment of legislation to provide specific reservation for women in Panchayats/ Assemblies/ Parliament are some of the measures aimed to rectify the gender imbalance in Indian society.

Education is an important index to measure the status or development of a society as a whole or as a part. Considering this, priority has been given by the Government of India to improve female literacy. A remarkable improvement has been achieved in terms of female literacy in

the last few decades (21.8% in 1971 to 54.2% in 2001). However, here again, there is inequality and the female literacy rate is considerably lower than male literacy rate. Improvement in literacy rate helps to develop women's position in various economic activities and the awareness of their rights and opportunities. Status of women is intimately connected with their economic position, which in turn depends on opportunities for participation in economic activities.

#### **1.4 Status of Women and Development**

The study of the status of women gets another added dimension in the context of the development. Women form nearly half of the population of India. They form an important component of the labour force. It is therefore important to study how development has affected the status of women. Therefore, an understanding of the relationship between development process, policies and programmes and their impact on women will throw light on women's participation in development. This is an important indicator of the status of women. Without total intellectual and physical participation of women, it is not possible to achieve the goals of rural uplift. In spite of all this, it is unfortunate that because of centuries of inertia, ignorance and conservatism, the actual and potential role of women in the society has been ignored, preventing them from making their rightful contribution to social progress. It is also because of distorted and /or partial information about their involvement in agriculture and consequent devaluation of their contribution that they are denied their rightful status as active producers in agriculture and access to developmental resources and services contributing to their marginalisation. Women must be empowered by enhancing their awareness, knowledge, skills and technology use

efficiency so that agricultural production multiplies at a faster pace, environmental degradation is reduced and conservation of resources is practiced earnestly, thereby, facilitating overall development of the society, and hence the nation.

## **1.5 Women and Work**

The International Labour Organization, Geneva report (1975) on women power illustrates that women work longer hours than men do in market and non-market activities – not only in industrialized and urban sectors of developing countries, but also more obviously in the rural areas of Asia, Africa and Latin America. The World Women's Conference (1985) demanded that if the domestic work of women is paid and if it is estimated in terms of GNP it would account for half of the national income. Most of the families in rural areas would starve to death if women do not work for much of the days in the fields to grow food for feeding them. Hence, it seems inconceivable that the contribution of this nature could be overlooked for so long.

### **1.5.1 Women Workers in Agriculture**

Women's work has been a subject of special analysis because of its gender nature. The nature and condition of the labour market for women differs from that of man because of reproduction role of women. Women face discrimination in the market because of engendered aspects of work. The women labour is constrained by the gender roles assigned to her

(mother, caretaker of the household etc.), gender attributes (that women is a secondary earner and she is capable of doing certain kinds of work) and gender taboos (should not work in nighttime, should not work in travel oriented work etc.). Employees do not prefer to women employee in several industries and for several top posts. As a result, one finds concentration of women in certain kinds of jobs and employment. Agriculture is one such field as far as rural areas are concerned. In agriculture, poor women find employment as agricultural labourer in which no skill is needed and no investment is required.

Women play a significant role in agriculture, the world over. About 70 percent of the agricultural workers, 80 percent of food producers and 10 percent of those who process basic food stuffs are women and they also undertake 60 to 70 percent of rural marketing; thus making up more than two-third of the work force in agricultural production (FAO,1985). In most of the South East Asian countries, majority of poor women depend on agriculture for their livelihood, even more than men.

In spite of various steps and measures taken by Governments, the menace of gender inequality still exists because it is difficult to change the mind set of people suddenly over a short period of time. Research is still needed to fill up the gaps and the present study is one such attempt to bring out the problems of women agricultural workers. It is logical to discuss the earlier empirical investigations in this regard here.

## **1.6 Earlier Empirical Investigations**

Social Scientists and Geographers have made a number of studies about the female participation in various economic activities. These studies vary

from topical studies to regional studies and from meso to micro level regions.

Collver and Langlois (1962) have undertaken a study on female economic participation in 38 countries comprising of both developed and developing nations. Some of the earliest pieces on women and works appeared during the late 1970s and early 1980s and were couched solidly within a historical materialist framework with a strong focus on gender and employment in urban areas (Hayford 1974; Mackenzie and Rose 1983). The influence of socialist feminism was important during this period as patriarchy and capitalism were used to explain how gender roles and divisions of labour contribute to social and economic inequality (Mackenzie 1989; Bowlby *et al.* 1989).

An increase in the level of awareness and understanding about women's role in labour came with the publication of Boserup's (1970) pioneering work. In her study entitled "Women's role in Economic Development", she discussed the role of a women as a socially and economically productive member of society. Her analysis of farming system in Africa, Asia and Latin America reveals that development frequency causes a decline in the productivity and status of women. However, studies by Youssef (1974), de Miranda (1977) and Chinchilla (1977) suggested that trends in female participation in developed countries were positively related to economic development, while the same relationship was not universally observed in developing countries.

National level studies on female work participation have been undertaken after 1950s. Notable works in this regard include studies on female work participation in Puerto Rico (Hernandey, 1975), Guatemala

(Chinchilla, 1977), Philippines (Gonzales, 1977), Venezuela (Arenas de Acosta, 1980), Japan (Hill, 1981), Malaysia (Mason and Palan, 1981) and Sri Lanka (Kiribanda, 1981). All these studies have pointed out the higher rates at which women have been entering the labour force since the fifties.

Studies have also brought out the fact that there is a comparatively higher concentration of women in low status jobs and even where they do the same job, women get lower wages than their male counterparts do. (Miller 1980; Malik 1981). In yet another study done in 2005, Malik has highlighted the deplorable conditions of rural women in Pakistan. Linking economic development with women welfare, she emphasizes the need for governments to initiate women welfare projects.

A number of empirical investigations have also been carried out in India. Trends in women's employment in different sectors of the economy of India have been outlined by a report of Government of India (1964). It also explains the laws and regulations governing the employment of women and their wages and earnings. Another report by the Government (1974) explains that the employment status of females were found to be differing in the different socio economic strata. As the education level of the respondents increased, their participation rate decreased. Similarly, work force, the level of agricultural mechanization and family income were negatively associated with the female work force participation.

Kaur (1982) conducted a study in eight villages of Haryana and ascertained that 72.6 percent of the females were participating in the work force and this participation was the highest in backward regions. Educational status of women was most significantly related with participation of women in work force followed by level of mechanization, family income and caste.

Lal (1985) discussed how women, particularly those working in the unorganised sector, are discriminated. Potential employers remain convinced that women would produce a lower output per unit of labour input and so their wage remains meager in comparison to that of men.

Kumar (1989), attempted to analyse the trends of female labour force participation in rural and urban areas of India. Participation of women included in various sectors of major economic activities and household industries has been examined at length.

Jumani (1991) conducted a study to analyse the status of self-employed women in rural areas. She concludes that economic activities through which the income of the women is increased have to be identified with great care. They have to be in consonance with time availability with family roles and with their awareness levels.

Jaiswal, (1993) investigated into the nature and extent of the women's participation in two major areas namely, Science and Engineering where men dominate more at present. The study reveals that despite their educational attainment and relatively good family background, women do not hold the socio economic status, professional recognition, job placement and work allotment as enjoyed by men in similar conditions.

Dixit (1998) conducted a study to evaluate the economic participation of women; it was found that women make an important contribution to the family income. The lower the socio economic level of the family, the greater the contribution of women to the total income.

Kannan (1998) argues that there is a mismatch between labour supply and labour-demand because of changing job expectations of the younger generations in a technologically stagnant economy. Moreover, the

rural labour market in Kerala exhibits a paradox of high unemployment and high wages.

Kundu (2003) examined the composition and organizational structure of selected Self Help Groups and tried to explain the characteristics / performance and the major constraints inhibiting the sustainability of these SHGs. Both formal and informal SHGs were formed with homogeneous groups of similar socio economic strata, need and exact requirement, income and repayment possibilities etc. to arrive practical and human decisions. Rural poor gained the confidence and cultivated habit of thrift / saving and utilization of collective wisdom to tackle their own problems. It is concluded that Micro financing is to be considered as a supplementary to the existing rural credit operations to ensure increased access of credit to the rural poor.

Sundaram (2004) analysed the decline in the female work force participation ratio (FWPRs) between 1993-94 and 1999-2000. He explained the sharp slowdown in the average annual increments to women workers in the 1990s, especially in rural India, by shifts in the age-structure of the female population and the shift out of work force and a beneficial rise in participation in schooling of girls in the 5-9, 10-14 and the 15-19 age groups.

Dutta (2006) attempted to assess the current status of women in the state of Jammu and Kashmir on the basis of secondary sources of information. The study has attempted to visualize the type of policy-framework one must evolve to ensure that the status of women is ensured for an overall development of the region. This includes empowerment of women, education, health care, human rights, and community awareness in disaster preparedness.

Ahoojapatel (2007) illustrates that mere economic indices of development do not necessarily reduce gender inequalities. The two northern States of Haryana and Punjab — where despite a high rate of economic growth, women's work participation rates are very low, dowry rates are high and female foeticide the highest — give an indication of the low status of women.

### **1.6.1 Literature on Women in Agricultural Sector**

Women's participation in agricultural production varies widely both among and within countries. First, women's participation in agriculture is much greater in rice-based cropping systems than in dry land farming. A comparison of women's participation in northern and southern India also indicates that rice systems have traditionally used more female labour, and within rice farming, the more intensive irrigated systems use more female labour (Boserup, 1970; Rosenzweig and Schultz, 1982; Sen 1983).

Singh (1979) explained the changing position and role of agricultural labourers in Uttar Pradesh in the changing matrix of relationship emerging in a backward but developing region, which is predominantly agricultural. The study attempts to examine such changes with reference to their socio-economic background, wages, employment, indebtedness, demographic structure and participation rate. A brief attempt has also been made to study their perception and opinion regarding some socio-economic issues and to examine their participation in political process. The study reveals that the percentage of agricultural labour households was higher in villages where land/man ratio was higher and where per capita cultivable land was higher. The inference is that if per head cultivable land is higher, a larger number

of households get absorbed in agricultural labour. One of the findings of the study is that casual labourers constituted the majority. The caste wise analysis showed that the majority of the attached agricultural labourers belonged to Scheduled Caste. The study further revealed that political perception of the agricultural labourers was very much limited.

Sethi (1981) explained that there is wage discrimination between men and women in agricultural activity. According to her, the male wage rate is always higher than the female wage rate in similar number of hours of work. According to her study, farm owners prefer female workers because they are cheap and hardworking. In addition, she found that women have double burden. Even though they were major earners of the family, they did not have any decision making power within the household.

Sen (1983) analysed district level data for 291 districts of the major states of the country that indicate a bigger incidence of women agricultural labourers in the female population in the districts where agricultural growth is low, coarse grains tend to grow, and land ownership is unequal. Furthermore, the unemployment rate among rural women is higher in the states which have a higher incidence of women agricultural labourers while average daily earnings are lower.

Guleria and Agnihotri (1985) tried to understand the nature of female labour participation in various farm operations and examined their contribution to the total farm and household income. The study was based on a primary household survey in the rural areas of Himachal Pradesh. The conclusion was that the monetary contribution of females in the farm income is found to be smaller than that of male labourers, mainly because of the low farm wages of female workers in the study area.

Palmer and Dey, (1985) studied on the women's participation in agriculture and brought out the adverse impact of modern methods of cultivation in Indian conditions. This resulted in the gradual displacement of women and shrinking of their economic activities

Volimiheni (1986) examined the socio economic status of women agricultural labourers of Telengana, the level of their participation and their family affairs, assessed the quantity of work and identified the jobs available for women in agriculture.

Shobha (1987) highlighted the discrimination and exploitation of female agricultural labourers and focuses the attention on the socio economic status of women in rural areas, particularly the subordinate position of women. In addition, the gender division of labour in the family and sexual exploitation are some of the problems discussed in the study of Warrangal and Nizamabad districts.

Bhalla (1988) examined, as to how technological change affected female employment in agriculture. The study draws conclusions by considering regions in Haryana.

Issac (1988) made a thorough study of the women workers in the South Indian Tea plantations. Their socio economic background, consumption pattern, savings and debt position etc. are analysed in the study.

Savithri (1990) explained the socio economic discrimination against agricultural labourers in Madurai district of Tamil Nadu. It is a theoretical study. It covers mainly labour market, economic profile of agricultural labourers and wage differentials in the samples.

Sethi (1991), in a study of selected villages of Himachal Pradesh highlighted the role of women in agricultural production, the management

of the livestock and the household. She provided a clear understanding of the socio economic condition of rural women working on family farms and emphasized the need for recognizing and leading support to activities of rural women both within and outside the home in order to improve their status.

Rathore and Gaur (1996) studied the nature and extent of farmwomen in agriculture by comparing the time utilization pattern of males and females in farm operations in tribal and non-tribal areas of Udaipur and Chittorghar districts of Rajasthan. It was noted that farmwomen worked for longer hours than men did. Most of the farm women were performing inter cultural and post harvest activities in both tribal and non-tribal villages. There was a significant difference in performance of home and farm activities between tribal and non tribal women.

Kaur and Punia (1998) examined the participation of women in home, dairy and farm activities in three districts of Haryana. It was revealed that on an average, farmwomen spent 8 to 10 hours in household activities. The level of rural development, caste, per capita income, socio economic status and level of household technology were found to be positively and significantly related with the time spent in household activities. The paddy transplanting, weeding, harvesting and winnowing emerged as female dominated activities, while women were equal partners in harvesting and threshing.

Boehar (1999) attempted to study the contribution of farmwomen in paddy cultivation based on the data collected from 50 samples of farmwomen from Sendari village in Chattisgarh. The study revealed that both the family and hired female labour were used in sowing and

transplanting, harvesting, transporting and winnowing operations. With the increase in the farm size, the involvement of family women labour in paddy cultivation decreased but there was an increase in hired female labour. Use of female labour was observed to be more than male labour in transplanting and harvesting of paddy crop.

Misra (1999) examined the extent and proportion of women labour participation in paddy cultivation and the gaps in wages between men and women labour in Kymore plateau and Satpura hill region of Madhya Pradesh. It was observed that the participation of farmwomen was higher in the transplanting of paddy and harvesting while operations like field preparation, sowing, manuring and fertilizer application, irrigation and threshing operations were performed jointly with men. The hiring of female labour was highly associated with the increase in the size of farm. The results of the study also showed that lower wages were paid to women for all the operations as compared to men and the wage gap was more than 71 percent. It was suggested that diversified farming such as dairy, poultry etc. could help to increase the employment opportunities of farmwomen.

Panghal (1999) conducted a study to compare the efficiency of 200 male and female labour in performing different crop operations based on time factor in major crops of Haryana. The study concluded that women labour participation is quite high in some of the crop operations like transplanting, weeding and picking. The total women labour participation increases with the size of the farm. Women labour was also found relatively more efficient than men labour in these operations. There was no participation of women labour in irrigation and ploughing operations in all the zones of Haryana and in almost all the crops.

Singh (1999) examined the pattern of employment of men and women farmers in rice - wheat production system based on the data collected from Kausambi district of Uttar Pradesh. The study revealed that farmwomen were intensively engaged in crop and livestock production and in the processing of farm produce. The introduction of technology in rice - wheat farming system has led to the reduction in the male labour demand and increase the use of female labour. The differential pattern of wage structure between women and men was largely determined by nature and duration of agricultural task. The study suggested that there was a need to evaluate technologies for reducing women drudgery and to increase labour saving gender adjustable technology in agricultural development in future.

Rai (1999) examined the impact of Central Sector Scheme in Hissar district of Haryana on different aspects of farmwomen. The study brought out that the scheme was found to be very effective with respect to increase in knowledge regarding various agricultural technologies, their adoption and resources used by the farmwomen. On an average, about 60 percent of farmwomen had adopted improved varieties of seeds. All the farmwomen adopted seed treatment, weed control, use of fumigants, rat control measures and kitchen gardening. The overall use of farm inputs was increased due to the implementation of the scheme.

Seema (2000) conducted a study of twelve villages on participation pattern of rural women in post - harvest activities in Haryana state. The study revealed that the activities like cleaning, drying and storage were done independently by 37.7 percent of farm women and jointly by 56.1 percent of farm women and some of the activities like dehusking, shelling, grading and marketing were monopolized by farm women. It was inferred that farmwomen were responsible for most of the post harvest activities.

Sobha (2001) based on her study in Chittoor district of Andhra Pradesh, reported that being landless, women belonging to lower socio - economic groups had to perform labour intensive activities. Women performed sowing (55 percent); winnowing (90 percent), transplanting (85 percent) and poultry care (75 percent).

Sandu (2002) examined the problems faced by female farm labourers of the three districts of Punjab, both at home and at work site. The study explained that the agricultural labourers faced numerous household work management problems due to their small children, poor health, poor housing, lack of proper water supply, electricity, etc.

Sundari and Gowri (2002) assessed the impact of new agricultural technology on rural male and female workers in terms of employment in Thanjavur district of Tamil Nadu. The study explained the impact of the New Agricultural Technology used in paddy cultivation on rural males and females with regard to employment, wages and living conditions, and assesses the economic status of rural households. The study also explained that there is overcrowding of females into agriculture as labourers and women need access to inputs such as education, training, credit and other agents of growth and change. Adequate self-employment opportunities should be generated for poor rural women.

Sharma and Ogale (2003) examined the share of women workers in total family income so as to ascertain the impact of women on their family members. The study conducted in the rural and urban areas in Panipat district of Haryana. The percentage contributions of women workers in both rural and urban area show much variation. Due to employment of women, the life expectancy and education of children in these families was

improving over time. It is concluded that their daily wages should be raised so that they can contribute much money to the welfare of their family.

Sindhu and Jayan (2003) argue for feminisation of communication techniques for women who were involved in the development of agriculture. There is no secured development policies exclusively designed for women agriculturists. The gender blindness of policies pursued by development practitioners could be attributed largely to the gender insensitiveness of communication techniques employed. The needs of women agricultural labourers are not properly chalked out. Trainings and extension programmes have concentrated on certain areas like home science and nutrition education for women and agricultural development projects have always evaded women.

Bharati and Badiger (2006) analysed the impact of National Agricultural Technology Project (NATP) on family living of the Self Help Group (SHG) members. The study revealed that the project played an important role in empowering rural women and has given them due recognition in the society and made them economically independent.

Panda (2006) analysed the employment opportunities for women in agriculture in the northeast region of India. The study concluded that the forces of globalization, liberalization, scientific development and infrastructure development have helped the male-folk to graduate to high-end and productive jobs leaving the women folk to take care of the low-end primary agricultural works in addition to their household chores. This has become a double burden on them. However, women in the entire Northeast region are ideologically more empowered than women in the main land. This ideological empowerment has not greatly been translated into

economic and political empowerment in terms of access to land, assets, information, knowledge, etc.

Alam (2006) has pointed out that rural women play a vital role in meeting the food requirements of the country and are increasingly contributing to foreign exchange earnings. The majority is self-employed and work in dangerous environments. These workers are deprived of basic human needs like health, food, education, clean water and shelter. In addition, the property owners and their thugs frequently torture their women. Farmers, particularly women, face a high degree of economic, legal and institutional uncertainties when investing in their land and other resources.

Choudhary and Parthasarathy (2006) seek to quantify women's contribution to household food security based on research conducted in two villages in Nanded, Maharashtra. The study concluded that women almost solely take charge of household work irrespective of whether they work and earn outside or not. Women's contribution to food security is visible through all the three pillars of food security, viz, food production, food accessibility and food utilisation.

Gill et al (2007) analysed the factors associated with the involvement of women in agricultural activities. In terms of family life, the positive impact of women's participation in agriculture and allied activities was low while in the education of children, household standards and economic and social status it was medium. The prime factor was a feeling of responsibility with farmwomen but with non-farm women, economic factors were of top importance.

### **1.6.2 Studies from Kerala**

Most of the research work related to women workers in Kerala has been undertaken only after 1980 on a large scale. Some of the studies aimed at examining various dimensions of women's work in Kerala is briefly discussed in this section.

Radha Devi (1981) studied the extent of female participation in economic activity in the State and the occupational pattern among them. She found that women in Kerala are primarily engaged in skilled or semi-skilled vocations and level of education among working women is much higher than the rest.

Gulati (1981) has given a profile of a female agricultural labourer in the outskirts of Thiruvananthapuram city. The study focuses on the lives and problems based on interviews and direct observation. She concluded that women's life seems vulnerable, she struggles to keep alive their family members and her children, especially female children, suffer a lot.

Mencher and Saradhamoni (1982) studied the problems of agricultural labourers in six villages, two each from Kerala, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal. They pointed out that despite the problems of underemployment, women's economic contribution to the household is more than half of the household income and displacement of women without offering adequate other employment opportunities will enhance the poverty and marginalisation of poor working families

Saradhamony (1982) in another study on changing agrarian relations and its impact on women in Palakkad district argued that despite the fact that socio-political changes which coincided with the agrarian struggles favoured legislation for the underprivileged sections in the society, the advantages of justice did not reach all, especially women.

Mencher (1983) addressed the impact of new technology on women's employment, especially the displacement of labor, and how technologies can help to diversify income-earning opportunities for women. It is pointed out that there has always been a significant use of landless labour in India's rice regions and that this landless group is larger today — and more underemployed — than previously. It is strongly suggested that schemes for alternative employment for these women be introduced before labour saving innovations are brought about in paddy cultivation.

Alphonsa, (1984) has undertaken a study to examine the dimensions of educated unemployment in Kerala. The study finds that employment opportunity did not commensurate with the increase in the number of educated man power. The problem is more accurate among younger age group and among women.

Sukumaran Nair (1986) conducted a study of women agricultural workers in Kuttanad, 'the rice bowl of Kerala'. Women's basic needs and social support system were examined from a life course perspective. A woman of the Scheduled Caste begins working in rice culture from a very early age and although married early, does not get any support from her husband and she is expected to maintain the children with her own earnings. The newly emerged social security system and its adequacy were examined in the context of the needs and problems of the Kerala women.

Jose and Shanmugaratnam (1990) explained that women play a significant role in reproducing the rural household economy by their involvement in household production systems. However, their role is rather underplayed by the conventional statistics and the ambiguity in classifying women's work. The study was conducted in Palode Village, Trivandrum

district and shows that even when women are the owners of the means of production, their labour is being exploited and that their role in decision-making is rather limited.

Kumar (1994) had pointed out the nature of the economic structure in Kerala which has shown reduced demand for female labour and loss in the primary and secondary sector that has not been offset by the service sector.

Mahesh (1994) in his study pointed out that the changes that have taken place in the cropping pattern could not be seen as phenomena isolated from changes in the farming system determined by factors such as land ownership patterns, access to resources, labour relations, livelihood strategies, farming practices and traditions and culture. He explains that changes in the cropping pattern lead to decline in the employment opportunities of agricultural workers and displacement of women labourers from agriculture.

Frank and Chasin (1996) observed lack of mobility of women in Kerala as a major constraint on female employment in the State.

Rajan et al (1997) suggested that level and nature of female workforce participation in the State has responded to census modifications over time and although a large proportion of female workers are engaged in primary sector activities, the expansion of urban and tertiary sector activities has had a beneficial impact on the levels of female labour activity.

Issac et al, (1999), revealed that the work participation rate of women in the State was declining steadily, while the rate in India as a whole increased. The higher social capability due to better education and reduction in child care burden due to declining fertility have, however, not

led to an increase in the work participation rate of women or in their social leadership role.

Panda (1999) studied the effects of family structure on young women's employment in Kerala and came out with significant influence of household composition, family characteristics and class status on employment.

Sukumaran Nair (1999) in the study done in Pathanamthitta district found that educated people often prefer to be unemployed than to take on agricultural employment. Moreover, 14 per cent of farmers reported that female workers who have children going to schools or colleges withdrew from the labour market because parents' involvement in the casual labour would affect the social status of the children. Thus, the educational policies of the government intertwined with the people's attitude towards the incompatibility of education and agricultural work (and often the view that manual work is degrading for the educated) led to the decrease of available labour in agriculture. In the study, he explained that without outside interference, these parallel trends continue to reinforce themselves. The movement of the workforce to the secondary and tertiary sectors is also partly responsible for the labour shortage in agriculture. With the reduction in the number of labourers available for agricultural work, the proportion of workers in construction and in the service sector has increased.

Chathukulam and John (2000) examined some initial outcomes of the incorporation of women in local governance, following the introduction of 33 percent reservation of seats for women representatives in local-level political bodies in rural areas of India in 1995. The study was conducted in Vaikom Block in Kottayam District, Kerala. They concluded that quotas in local bodies alone are insufficient for ensuring women's political visibility.

Therefore more fundamental changes are needed for creating a more women-friendly political environment.

Eapen and Kodoth (2002) attempted to highlight some dimensions of the labour market in Kerala which suggest certain continuity in terms of the gendering of employment, reflecting women's weaker position.

Anand (2002) enquired into the performance of women groups in Kerala commonly known as Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and Neighbourhood Groups (NHGs) and tried to identify the factors contributing to their failure or success so that the strategy may be replicated effectively for empowering rural women. This study has shown that a positive change has taken place in the attitude of the beneficiaries. Beyond financial intermediation, SHGs can and should bring about drastic changes in the lives of the poor. It has been clearly established that delivering credit alone may not produce the desired impact. The supporting services and structures through which credit is delivered, ranging from group formation and training to awareness-raising and a wide range of other supporting measures are critical to make the impact of group activity strong and sustainable. Thus micro credit is seen to have created a positive impact on the families of members

Sebastian and Navaneetham (2004) analysed the gender, education and work aspects of Kerala and concluded that education alone does not enable women to acquire gender equity in economic participation. Women's education has not played the transformative role so generally expected of it. Low levels of female employment and persistence of a gendered work structure have limited women's claims to independent sources of income.

Mazumdar and Guruswamy (2006) attempted to examine the trends and patterns of female workforce participation across Kerala during 1991 and 2001 from the census. Acceleration in social development in the context of demographic transition has led to a mismatch between labour supply and labour demand resulting a vast population of educated, young labour force in a stagnant economy, surviving largely on expansion of service sector, facilitated by international remittances. Large scale outmigration from the State brought about prosperity to a certain extent but has failed to provide tenable solution to the problem of unemployment. A declining trend in work force participation among females is noticed, besides widening the gender gap in employment during the last decade. The declining trends in work participation are equally acute in the districts. Agriculture no longer remains the most important sector of female employment.

Oommen (2008) attempts to narrate the story of Kerala's *Kudumbashree* as a women empowerment and anti-poverty programme. He concluded Kudumbasree is a micro finance institution with a radical difference from its counterparts in the rest of the world. Micro enterprises (supported by bank loans or Thrift Credit loans) are one of the most important instruments for creating employment and income to the poor women. In Kerala with a dominant group of part time farmers and lease land farming in which over three lakh Neighbourhood Group members are engaged, Kudumbasree programme is a welcome trend.

The discussion on the status, characteristics, problems and policies on female work force has brought out the fact that the gender inequality is still widely prevalent in all parts of the world especially in India. It is also

surprising to note that even in Kerala, a State which ranks high in terms of women literacy and empowerment in India, the situation is not better. Though women work participation is noticed in all sectors, agriculture remains '**the**' major economic activity for female workers. Advancement in technology and changes in the mindset of people have adversely affected female agricultural workers. The literature explained above exhibits that there are still wide gaps in the proper understanding of the problem of female work force. Considering all these points, the present study has taken a district in Kerala where a detailed investigation is made with respect to female agricultural workers.

### **1.7 Statement of the Problem and Choice of the Study Area**

The State of Kerala has achieved the highest status of women in India. The Gender equality or otherwise may be measured by the Gender Development Index (GDI). Among the Indian States, Kerala has the highest GDI value of 0.597. In the International scenario, India has a GDI value of only 0.410 and Kerala's GDI is similar to that of China or Maldives (Human Development Report, 2008). However, it is important to note that the State has a lower economic performance than India as a whole. The case of Kerala underlines that economic growth and high income is not a necessity to promote equal gender relations. The high status of women in Kerala is built on three cornerstones of practical gender needs: health (life expectancy), demographic transition and literacy. However, women's high status in terms of health, education and demographic factors actually corresponds poorly with an equal visibility in the work participation.

A mere presence of positive indicators does not necessarily suggest that women are well placed in Kerala. It does not assure that women participation in economic activities is conducive for women empowerment. In fact, situations are there where the work participation of women has faced a number of barriers and resultant retardation of women development.

With improvement in education and decline in fertility, one would expect that the female work participation rate in economic activities would rise. However, in the case of Kerala the female work participation rate has declined from 21 percent in 1961 to 16 percent in 2001. Kerala is one of the few States in India where the female work participation rate has continued to decline.

Agriculture has been largely stagnant in the State and industrial growth lacklustre. It has one of the lowest levels of per capita income in the country, as well as the highest level of unemployment. Agriculture and traditional industries that account for a major share of female employment have been in deep crisis.

Agricultural research has focused on increasing the production of high value major cereals and cash crops, rather the traditional varieties of cereals and subsistence crops which are farmed by women and which provide the major source of food for their families. Similarly, technology up-gradation has bypassed women – Implements and tools are designed with male users in mind and focus on cash crops. Where mechanization has been introduced, it has resulted in the displacement of women from the labour force. Thus changes in cropping pattern and the precise tasks created

and displaced by different aspects of technical change are crucial determinants of absorption of female labour. Among the various districts of Kerala, Palakkad presents a different picture as far as work participation and female agricultural workers are considered.

Palakkad district is selected for the present investigation because it is the area where the percentage women workers especially women agricultural workers are higher, compared to other districts of Kerala. Paddy is the prominent crop of the district which provides employment to the larger sections of women. Work participation rate of Palakkad is comparatively higher than that of other districts. The proportion of women workers in the agricultural sector in the district is also higher.

Studies on such theme are relatively low and spatial perspectives have been analysed only to a limited extent. Keeping this in mind an attempt has been made to study the status of women in agriculture and their work participation at a district level. For the present study, a spatio - temporal analysis has been made, taking three time points of 1971, 1991 and 2001. A detailed investigation about women work participation and the status of women agricultural workers in Palakkad district is made with blocks as micro units.

## **1.8 Aims and Objectives**

Taking into consideration the various aspects discussed in the earlier empirical investigations and the characteristics of Kerala in general and Palakkad in particular, the following are set as the main aims and objectives for the present study:

1. To study the spatial pattern of women workers in the study area.

2. To bring out the temporal variation in the spatial pattern in the selected time points of 1971, 1991 and 2001.
3. To analyze the causes for the sectoral shift of women workers in the study area for the selected time points.
4. To study the impact of changing cropping pattern in the work participation rate of women
5. To study the socio-economic status, health and working conditions, gender disparity and problems of women agricultural workers.
6. To suggest suitable planning strategy for improving the status of female agricultural workers and to reduce gender inequality.

## **1.9 Methodology**

### **1.9.1 Sources of Data**

The study is based on both primary and secondary data. Secondary data is collected from various governmental and quasi governmental agencies like Land use board, Department of Economics and Statistics Trivandrum, Department Economics and Statistics, Palakkad, Department of Agriculture, Palakkad, Meteorological centre, Trivandrum and State Planning Board. Main secondary data source for the analysis is from Census reports. Based on Census reports and other data from various agencies the first four objectives have been studied. Data collected from the Agricultural department, Agricultural offices and from Economics and Statistics Department in Palakkad and Trivandrum is used to fulfill the fifth objective. Data collected from various Panchayats are also helpful in the analysis.

Primary data is collected from among the women agricultural labourers to get a clear picture of the socio -economic status, health and

working conditions, gender disparity and to understand their problems. Pre - tested questionnaires were used for this. Based on the analysis of the female agricultural labourers, the sample size for the primary survey is finalised. Sample size is based on the variation in the female agricultural labourers between 1971 and 1991 and between 1991 and 2001. Percentage variation of female agricultural labourers is divided into three categories, high variation, medium variation and low variation. Based on the variation, the number of samples are selected. 50 samples are selected from blocks with high variation, 40 samples from blocks with medium variation and 30 samples from low variation blocks.

Random sampling method is applied for primary data collection. This data is used for studying the sixth objective. Only wage labourers are selected for the study. Field notes, observation and discussion methods were also taken into consideration while collecting data from the respondents.

The information collected includes basic socio-economic data (religion, caste, occupation, income etc) as well as the working and earning condition and daily expenditure on different items. Apart from this, information on domestic work, indebtedness, property ownership, decision-making power, etc were also collected from the respondents. In addition to that, health condition of the respondents, participation in labour union activities and Kudumbasree activities were also included.

### **1.9.2 Techniques Used**

The primary data collected was categorized and classified block wise in order to facilitate comparison. The data were tabulated and analysed

using statistical and cartographic methods. Statistical tools like percentages, correlation techniques and Factor analysis were used for analysis. Based on analysis, tables and maps were prepared and conclusions were drawn. Maps were prepared using Arc GIS software.

### **1.10 Limitations of the Study**

Covering all the agricultural workers in the selected blocks is a tough task and hence the present research is restricted for studying the case of only a limited number of female agricultural workers. Since the socio - economic analysis is based on the field survey made for 520 samples selected randomly, overall generalisation cannot be drawn from it.

Literature available on the topic from Geography is limited. Literature from economics, sociology and women studies are also incorporated, since it is an inter- disciplinary study. In this background role of Geography has been tried for analysis.

### **1.11 Organisation of the Study**

In Chapter One an attempt has been made to catch a glimpse of the position of women, their status and gender inequality have been brought out. The literature on this field, need for the study, statement of the problem, research methodology, its objectives and limitations also have been specified.

Chapter Two deals with the geographic profile of the area in terms of physical and human environments. Various aspects such as relief, drainage,

climate, soil, vegetation, population density, growth, literacy, sex ratio, occupational structure and other infrastructural details are elaborated.

In Chapter Three, the work participation of women for three periods, its changing pattern and also the overall work participation of the area is considered. Spatial and temporal variation of the work participation of women in the district is analysed.

Chapter Four deals with the spatial and temporal variation of various sectors of women workers and their shift from one sector to another. In Chapter Five Agricultural scenario of Palakkad is explained briefly. The land utilization and cropping pattern of the area and the changing cropping pattern is also analysed here.

In Chapter Six various aspects of social status of the women workers, their economic condition and working condition, gender disparity, health status, and political participation and the problems facing them is given in detail.

Factor Analysis of the primary data is done with 39 variables and four dimensions were extracted and interpreted in Chapter Seven. Chapter Eight deals with the conclusion and findings. Recommendations for the improvement of the status of women workers is also given in this part.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **ANALYSIS OF SOCIO ECONOMIC STATUS**

#### **7.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, data from the primary survey have been analyzed using factor analysis to extract various dimensions with regard to the socio economic