CHAPTER - I

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Women constitute an important part of our society. The age old belief that the place of women is in their homes to run the domestic affairs of family unit and take care of children is no longer accepted in the present developing society. Earlier also women have been helping men folk to generate some additional income for the family. The women workers are the backbone of agricultural workforce but worldwide her hard work has mostly been unpaid. She does the most tedious and back-breaking tasks in agriculture, animal husbandry and homes. They were deeply involved in all activities of farming except ploughing, farming, weaving, spinning etc. and in many other rural cottage industries. Inspite of all these burdens of farm and home, their contributions are not given due recognition. Their condition is far from satisfactory and they suffer from various social and cultural constraints which come in the way of improving their productivity. Women are biologically more vulnerable, sociologically less valued, less mobile and consequently more neglected during childhood.

It is widely argued that rural women constitute one of the most vulnerable sections of our society. Inspite of this, however, two basic issues in this context are still unresolved in the literature (i) how to measure accurately the role of rural women in economy, and (ii) if rural women are so vulnerable, why they have remained so and what can be done to help them.
Women constitute a significant part of the work-force of India. A profile of women in the work-force of the country showed that the women lag significantly behind males in terms of work participation, employment, etc. However, there are some positive trends. While there has been marginal improvement in annual rate of growth of female employment, the annual rate of growth of employment of educated women is substantially higher.

Constitutionally women are having equal rights with men but due to persistence of patriarchal traditions they are being exploited. Generally, women constitute half of global population and one-third of labour force, but receive only one-tenth of world income and less than one per cent of world’s property. In Indian context, women account for 495.74 millions and represent 48.3 per cent of India’s total population. Thus, women constitute one-third of the national labour force in the country (Census 2001). National sample survey organization data shows that women workers constitute 70 per cent of total women population and about 84 per cent of all economically active women (NSS, GIO, 1991).

The role of farm women in agricultural economy has become an important issue. The wider definition of Gross Domestic Product (G.D.P.) will automatically increase the size of workforce, women being the main component of the increase in G.D.P. This increase will perhaps be larger in the case of women where there is prevalence of subsistence economy and therefore, the system of production of
goods for self consumption is quite common. Any assessment of women’s role in the rural economy has to view women’s contributions in this wider perspective.

Sharing the economic activities by women is neither a new phenomenon none a new development. The magnitude of their involvement, however, is correlative to socio-economic and political prevalent condition in a country. From time immemorial, women in India have been working both in the active economic field and at homes thought not in the strict sense of earning wages. With the change in the outlook attitudes and approach towards living, it has how become necessary, by and large, for the families with inadequate incomes to supplement their requirements through additional earnings. Women of course can fill this gap and breaking social conventions and religious taboos etc; they have come forward to meet the challenge enthusiastically. This, no doubt is a healthy development. However, in a country like India, the process of development is slow owing to the prevalent illiteracy among women.

Around the world, especially in the developing countries, women are living under conditions of social and economic inequalities, despite the fact that they constitute half the work force in the rural areas and participate actively in household and other related areas. However, planners, academic researchers, social workers and parliamentarians now unanimously agree that for any desirable social transformation, it is essential that the status of
women should improve towards a situation in which women are guaranteed equal rights with men. There is a need for a concerned effort to steer the directions of social change towards a more equalitarian distribution of roles between men and women. In a report published in 1967' U.N. declared that the orientation of a society as a whole regarding the desirability that women should play an equal part in the country's development, is an important pre-condition for the advancement not only of women but of the country as well.

In the total workforce of 374.39 million in India in 1993-94, 32.5 per cent (121.63 million) were women. This percentage was 35.72 for rural areas and 21.03 for urban areas, which indicates that relatively more women participate in work in rural areas than that of urban areas. The rural female workforce has increased by more than 5 per cent during the last two decades, from 69.2 million in 1972-73 to 104.29 million in 1993-94, while the rural female population has increased at a much lower rate, by 43 per cent during the period. The worker force participation rates are about 33 per cent of rural females in the workforce against a mere 15.4 per cent of urban females. The workforce participation rate of rural women has shown the highest increase among all the components of labour force (an increase in 15 per cent) during 1981-1991.

The work participation rate continues to be substantially less for females than for males. There has been some improvement in the
work participation rate of females since 1971. Work participation rate for women, which was 7.18 and 9.74 percent in urban areas in 1971 and 1991 respectively, went up to 11.55 in 2001. In the rural areas the female work participation rate has shown steady improvement since 1971 as compared to urban areas. It has risen from 15.92 in 1971 to 27.20 in 1991 and to 30.98 in 2001. However, the female work participation rate continues to lag behind that of males. In 2001, it was a little over half of the male work participation rate.

The majority of women workers are employed in the rural areas. Amongst rural women workers, 87% are employed in agriculture as labourers and cultivators. Amongst women workers in urban areas, about 80% are employed in unorganized sectors like household industries, petty trades and services, buildings and construction, etc. A woman was engaged on an average for 138 days in a year in crop-related activities including post harvest as against only 98 days for a man. In crop related activities, a clear cut division of labour was observed along gender lines with some common activities for both men and women. Men were at an advantageous position so far as access to agricultural implements were concerned. Poor access of households to extension and training was clearly discernible. Women were quite aware of the health workers and benefited from them but not of agriculture extension agents. Men were quite aware of the institutional sources of credit, and 30% of men have availed institutional credit facilities. For individual woman, it was the self-help-groups that mostly serve as a source of credit.
In agriculture sector, female workers predominate as agricultural labourers. Rural female workers as agricultural labourers are 49 per cent against 26 per cent of rural male workers. However, when it comes to employment intensity, i.e. average number of days of employment as hired agricultural labour and wage rates, rural women labourers get much less employment and much lower wages. The adult male labour gets 305 days to work (main workers, when fully employed), as against this, female labour gets 265 days of work. Adult male labour earns Rs 1.90 as wage rate at 1960-61 prices, while female labour earns Rs 1.30 as wages rate at 1960-61 prices (Unni, 1991).

The increased share of rural women’s employment in agriculture sector is largely because of their increased employment in cultivation of crops, mainly as unpaid family workers. About 58.5 per cent rural women are self employed against 56.8 per cent of rural male workers. This self employment of rural women is largely as unpaid family workers as revealed by Economics Census 1990. It appears that self employment of rural women has continuously declined during the past two decades, from 64.5 per cent in 1972-73 to 58.5 per cent in 1993-94.

The decline in self employment of rural women has been mainly due to their increase as casual labour. The share of casual workers among rural women has increased by 23.25 per cent, from 31.4 per cent in 1972-73 to 38.7 per cent 1993-94. The regular employment of
rural women workers are employed as regular workers against 28.6 per cent of urban women workers and 8.3 per cent of rural male workers.

Studies on pattern of time utilization essentially provide information on how individuals spend their time on a daily or weekly basis and reveal the details of individuals’ daily life with combination of specificity and comprehensiveness not achieved in any other type of social survey. This information can be extremely useful in estimating work and workers in an economy. Both developed and developing economies therefore find time use studies useful in improving their statistics on workers as well as national income. It is not easy to collect information on time use in India because one cannot use the diary method as well as the level of literacy is low and because people and particularly rural women are not always used to clocks or watches. In the present study an attempt has been made to collect information on time use of rural farm women workers in domestic activities. According to Government of India, Time use Pilot Survey 1997, rural women spend much time on free collection of goods like fuel, fodder, water, fruits, fish etc. While men spent about 0.65 hour per week on these activities women spent 2.54 hours per week. Though women spend slightly less time per week (3.12 hours) on animal husbandry than men (3.93 hours), women spend most of their time on tending animals, making dung cakes and milking, while men spend time on grazing and tending, sales and purchasing and related activities.
Rapidly increasing participation of women in labour market, in the developed as well as developing countries, has brought out the issue of male female wage differentials into sharp focus. While gender based wage differentials have reduced over the years, there is still as significant difference between men and women’s wage. Even though endowment differences account for about 50 per cent of the male-female gross wage differentials, there is a clear indication of discrimination against women to quite a great extent in labour market, in India, that any Government Committed to gender equality cannot ignore. This discrimination is found to be more in the form of denied access to higher jobs than in the form of lower wages within occupation (Divakaran, 1996). Labour wages disparity amongst men and women are not a new issue for debate but it is surprising that even after several efforts made by the government to remove the evils from the agrarian society, we are unable to prohibit exploitation of female based on gender inequality.

Quantitative increase in women’s economic participation have not generally been matched by qualitative improvements or better working conditions and equality of opportunity and treatment for women in employment has yet to be achieved anywhere in the world. Relative to men, women still face unequal hiring standards, unequal opportunities for training and retraining, unequal access to productive resources, segregation and concentration in a narrow range of ‘female’ sectors and occupations, unequal pay for equal
work, unequal participation in economic decisions making, unequal sharing of family responsibilities, unequal career prospects and greater likelihood of being unemployed and being poor. About 35 million women are engaged in agricultural labourers (1981 census) over the year. There has been a decline in the number and proportion of women cultivators and a substantial increase in the number of agricultural labourers.

The introduction of high yielding varieties of seed and mechanization in agriculture, the two opposing forces on labour demand, has the net effect of a mild increase in the demand for total labour, but a steep increase in the demand for female labour by 85 per cent. This has increased the share of female labour in rice cultivation from 30 per cent to 47 per cent. All this was possible because mechanization was not introduced in operations performed by females. If sowing and harvesting of paddy are mechanized, there will be a large scale displacement of female labour. The increase in the demand for female labour led to rise in the share of casual labour in the share of casual labour in paddy cultivation (Subrahmanyan, 1999). However, this cannot be interpreted as withdrawal of female family labour on prestige consideration after the increased in incomes resulting from increase in yield. Females of 85 per cent of the cultivating household participate in the family farm activities and among marginal and small farmers, this operation is still higher (Agrawal, 1984 and Subrahmananyam). Studies have also shown
increased relation between farm size and labour use (Oberai and Ahmad, 1981). The labour contribution of women in milk production was more than 82 per cent of the total labour employed. The participation of female labour was more a operation such as fodder collection, cleaning of cattle shed and in milking and preparation of milk products (Tripathi, 1999).

Thus, even after 50 years of independence our women continue to be a neglected mass. Being illiterate and ignorant folk it remains over exploited. A victim of the man made system, she is hardly considered equal to men in wages and social status. Consequently, they lead their life below the poverty line. Unemployment and under employment are its chronic attributes. Women are socially handicapped. The work status of female worker in India remains more or less similar to what it was decades ago. They have no facilities like regulated working hours, working conditions, medical assistance, and maternity benefits etc. which are available to female factory workers. Almost all the problems of the workers revolve round the wage rates. The women workers are not only paid low wages but also suffer from differential wage rates. They are generally paid less as compared to men workers for performing even the same operations.

Like other parts of the state, rural labour force of the selected district i.e. Meerut is dominated by the women labourers. The study area is dominated by rice-wheat cropping system and with the
livestock production, which demand higher employment opportunities for rural farm women worker in different operations. The social stratification in villages is linked with land and caste which governs status, economic power and political influence as much as the level of living.

Women’s perspectives are required to be included in designing and implementing macro-economic and social policies by institutionalizing their participation in such processes. Their contribution to socio-economic development as producers and workers need to be recognized in the formal and informal sectors (including home based workers) and appropriate policies relating to their employment and working conditions need attention.

Globalization has presented new challenges for the realization of the goal of women’s equality, the gender impact of which has not been systematically evaluated fully. However, from the micro-level studies that were commissioned by the Department of Women & Child Development, it is evident that there is a need for re-framing policies for access to employment and quality of employment. Benefits of the growing global economy have been unevenly distributed leading to wider economic disparities, the feminization of poverty, increased gender inequality through often deteriorating working conditions and unsafe working environment especially in the informal economy and rural areas. Strategies will be designed to enhance the capacity of women and empower them to meet the
negative social and economic impacts, which may flow from the globalization process (National Policy for the Empowerment of Women, 2001).

In view of the critical role of women in the agriculture and allied sectors, as producers, concentrated efforts have been made aims to ensure that benefits of training, extension and various programmes will reach them in proportion to their numbers. The programmes for training women in soil conservation, social forestry, dairy development and other occupations allied to agriculture like horticulture, livestock including small animal husbandry, poultry, fisheries etc. aimed to be expanded to benefit women workers in the agriculture sector (National Policy for the Empowerment of Women, 2001).

The women's equality in power sharing and active participation in decision making in agriculture and non-agriculture sectors including decision making in political process at all levels aimed to be ensured for the achievement of the goals of empowerment. All measures are envisaged to be taken to guarantee women equal access to and full participation in decision making bodies at every level in agriculture and non-agriculture sectors including the legislative, executive, judicial, corporate, statutory bodies, as also the advisory Commissions, Committees, Boards, Trusts etc. Affirmative action such as reservations/quotas, including in higher legislative bodies, considered whenever necessary on a time bound basis.
Women-friendly personnel policies also drawn up to encourage women to participate effectively in the developmental process (National Policy for the Empowerment of Women, 2001).

Uttar Pradesh is a largest state in the country in terms of population of human and animals where large number of population depends upon agriculture and the progress of crop production and dairy development is very slow due to various reasons like lack of credit facilities, high incidence of diseases, low productivity and poor technology. In Uttar Pradesh, Meerut is one of the few developed and prosperous district of Western Uttar Pradesh where crop production and animal husbandry practices are mainly followed by women workers along with their male counterpart. Meerut district is one of the few developed and prosperous district of Western Uttar Pradesh and it has a fairly good network of metalled roads, fertile land, ample facilities of irrigation resources and necessary infrastructure, which is required for planned development. The district is having the geographical area of 2564 km². The total arable land was about 316272 ha with a net cultivated area of 202420 ha. The major source of irrigation is private tube-wells and pumping sets. The cropping intensity is 156.25 percent. The soil of the district in general is loamy and sandy loam. The population of total workers was found 720852 in the district during the 1990-91 census which constituted 29.82 per cent to total population. Of this total population of workers, agricultural labours constituted 18.82 per cent. However,
agricultural practices of Western Uttar Pradesh are some what better than that of rest districts of the state but the working conditions of rural farm women workers are not found satisfactorily up to desired levels due to various gender discrimination reasons.

Apart from the general miserable condition of the women labour, very little is known by way of scientific and empirical status on the pattern and level of women employment, wage structure and income level etc. in the study area. Inspite of all other developments in various walks of life, farm women workers has largely been ignored and inadequately understood in the Indian context. Very few research attempts have been made to examine employment, earning and wage structure of farm women workers engaged in agricultural and non-agricultural activities. An examination on this aspect of problems assumes greater importance in context of the present study.

1.1 Objective of the study

Present study aims at the following specific objectives.

- To study the socio-economic profile of the sample households.
- To find out the wage structure and employment of farm women workers in the study area.
- To estimate the level of income of farm women workers in agricultural and non-agricultural activities.
- To study the role of farm women workers in decision making in different activities of agricultural and non-agricultural sector.
- To identify the problems associated with the farm women workers and suggest the suitable measures for the improvement.