CHAPTER-I

INTRODUCTION

According to the 2011 censuses, about 80 percent of women workers in India are in the unorganized sector. About three fourths of the total numbers of women in the country’s work force live in villages. Women workers in the unorganized sector suffer from fewer and poorer opportunities to work, face greater difficulties in their working place because of lack of skills and education, lesser mobility and of under-rating of their work and lack of access to better technologies, tools and productive assets.\(^1\)

A plethora of literature on women’s studies has appeared in recent times. They have all related to women in the labour market, and militant and non-militant feminist movements. The studies emphasize the positive elements in the traditional pattern of division of labour in the family and society. In India studies relating to women’s problems cover the four main areas of research. They are (i) the studies dealing with the position of women in the society in general, (ii) the studies investigating the problem of the working women, (iii) the studies which determine the overall position of women in society and the fourth area, research in the field of women studies which relates to the emergence and development of the women’s movement and feminism in India. The present study is related to the changing role of agricultural women labourers due to the changing governmental policies on the content and nature of the Public Distribution System which is a new area of research.\(^2\)
Most of the development literatures till the nineteen seventies failed to give equitable importance to the participation of women in various economic activities. Consequently, the formulation of developmental strategies in almost all the regions of world was based on near total ignorance of the nature and degree of women’s work participation. The gradual deficiency in developmental strategies helped in shifting the focus in recent years to the studies of several socio-economic aspects of women’s productive contribution to the economy. In India, several macro-level studies have been conducted in the past to provide real insights about how and to what extent developmental forces have influenced the nature of women’s involvement in several socio-economic activities.³

Agriculture in India is the backbone of our country and is regarded as the largest sector of the country’s economic activity. It is the major sector of the state economy, through which the majority of people earn their livelihood. Though the share of agriculture in the aggregate economy has been declining rapidly, it still assumes a pivotal role in the rural economy.

**AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS IN INDIA**

Labour is one of the primary factors of production. It is considered important not only because it is productive but also because it activities other factors and makes them useful for production purposes. The size of the labour force in a country is determined by the number of people in the age group of 15-59 years as generally children below 15 years and people above 59 years do not participate in productive activities.
Agricultural labourers, mostly the landless ones constitute the poorest segment of the Indian agricultural production. They belong to the economically backward and oppressed section of society which consists of scheduled castes and other backward communities. They are basically unskilled and unorganized and work in the farms of big prosperous farmers as casual workers on daily wages for a large part of the year and the case of women Agricultural workers is still worse.

AGRICULTURAL LABOUR: DEFINITION

Unlike Industrial labour, Agricultural labour is difficult to decline. However, the first Agricultural Labour Enquiry Committee (ALEC) 1950-55 defined Agricultural Labour as “Those people who are engaged in raising crops on payment on wages” (based on occupation). That is if half or more of a household have wage employment in agriculture then those households can be termed as agricultural labour households. The second ALEC 1956-57 enlarged the definition to include- “Those who are engaged in agriculture and other agricultural occupations like dairy farming, horticulture, rising of livestock, bee keeping, poultry etc”. According to the National Commission on Labour, “An Agricultural labourer is one who is basically unskilled and unorganized and has little for his livelihood, other than personal labour”.

CHARACTERISTICS OF AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS

Agricultural labourers, especially in smaller villages are generally unskilled workers carrying on agricultural operation in the century old traditional wages system. Most agricultural workers belong to the depressed classes, which have been neglected for ages. The low caste and depressed
classes have been socially handicapped and they never had the courage to assert themselves. In some parts of India, agricultural labourers are migratory, moving in search of jobs at the time of harvesting.

**WOMEN LABOURERS IN AGRICULTURE**

Today, women play a pivotal role in agriculture as female agricultural labour, as managers of farms and farm entrepreneurs. They are regarded as the backbone of the rural scene. Women work force outside the four walls is larger in rural areas than urban India. While women have always played a key role in agricultural production, their importance both as workers and as managers of farm has been growing, as an increasing number of men move to non-farm jobs.\(^4\)

According to the census reports, there is an increased participation of rural women in economic activities besides doing household duties though the participation of women in agriculture contributes a lot to the economic growth and progress of the country, their problems are shown least concern. The women’s role has biologically and socially combined to create four distinct functions that of a mother, wife, homemaker and worker. The role of workers is equally important as that of the other three roles. But her role as an active worker-producer is rarely acknowledged through it is significant for the family’s survival. These unknown and unacknowledged beings are responsible for keeping the economy at a steady peace and have helped the nation occupy a significant place in the world.

Women’s’ involvement varies widely in different regions, ecological sub zones, farming system, caste, class and stages in the family cycle.
Generally, the poorer the family, greater is the involvement of women in agricultural activities. Women have extensive role of management in the household such as fetching water, cooking and taking care of children. Despite women’s significant and crucial role in both agricultural development and allied fields, they have virtually no access to agricultural information, services or production assets and have very limited control over their earnings. Though the Green Revolution technologies enhanced agricultural productivity, they also widened the economic disparities and deepened gender discrimination in community life. The introduction of capital intensive technologies in the agricultural sector has had differential impact on men and women have been adversely affected due to lack of access to technology.\(^5\)

**IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY**

National security is a widely talked about topic and it is an important one for any nation. However, these days we talk a lot about health security, food security, human security and so on. The Government of Tamil Nadu, keeping in mind the food security, provides free rice to AAY cardholders and BPL cardholders. Also the Government sells rice at a subsidized rate of Rs.20 in many places. Again, there is also AmmaKudineer (Packaged Drinking Water), AmmaUnavagam (Corporation Canteen) etc. All these programs are meant for freeing Tamil Nadu from hunger. But a common criticism that is echoed that these measures are not reaching the deserving people of Tamil Nadu. Therefore, it becomes essential to make an in-depth study to ensure that the system is more effective in assure food security to all the people of Tamil Nadu and thus way the study becomes an important one.
STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEMS

Having a broad and good intention the Public Distribution System started effectively it was implemented in the initial days, however in course of time values of Public Distribution System started eroding and an outlook of misusing the system appeared. When the rice was distributed under the Public Distribution System at an unimaginable minimum price and after words when it was distributed totally free of cost in Tamil Nadu, it made the educators to question the validity of the Public Distribution System.

Also the minimum sale price of rice and the free distribution of rice had its efforts on the women agriculture labourers. When people began getting rice in a liberal way through the Public Distribution System under the fair price shops. The women agricultural labourers began withdrawing their agriculture work and turned their attention started to selling rice through the black market. Also a sizable portion of free rice was illegally transported to neigboring states like, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. When a system which was started with a good intention, deviates from the main objective, it becomes essential examine it and this research problem finally helps the Public Distribution System attain its past glory.
OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To trace the origin and present status of the Public Distribution System in India.
- To study the nature of the Public Distribution System in Tamil Nadu.
- To study the Distribution of the staple food Rice in Tamil Nadu through the Public Distribution System including free Rice supply.
- To examine the Socio-Economic characteristics of the women beneficiaries (agricultural labourers) of the Public Distribution System.
- To identify the Socio-Economic reasons for selling free rice by women agricultural labourers
- To find out the dimensions of reasons for selling the free Rice.
- To find out the modalities of the sale of free Rice

HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY

Based on the above objectives the following hypotheses are framed:

- The Socio-Economic characteristic profiles of the women agricultural labourers do not significantly influence their reasons for selling free Rice.
- The women agricultural labourers of LathurBlock in Kancheepuram District do not sell free Rice.
NEED FOR THE STUDY

The Public Distribution System in Tamil Nadu can be cited as one of the main reasons for non-occurrence of hunger deaths in Tamil Nadu, notwithstanding the concept practices the Public Distribution System is known for. This is more so during slack seasons and at times of lean harvests. Many discussions conducted in several poor villages in Tamil Nadu have endorsed this conclusion. The Public Distribution System is an essential scheme for ensuring the availability of essential food articles to the rural and urban poor. Despite Complaints, the majority of the poor still depend on the Public Distribution System to meet food requirements of the family for at least ten days in a month.6

There are a number of research works available on the Public Distribution System, also many studies on Women Agricultural Labourers. But no study is available on a combined study of both the Public Distribution System and the Women Agricultural Labourers. This research work makes an attempt to correlate these two areas. It becomes essential in these days of women diverting their attention in anon-constructive way.

SCOPE FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The problem of the Public Distribution System has been a matter of very serious concern after the liberalization era. This is the main thrust of the study of the Public Distribution System and its impact on women agricultural labourers in Tamil Nadu. Its findings would bring light on the changing
profile of women agricultural labourers due to free distribution of Rice through the Public Distribution System in Tamil Nadu.

This research work has only focused on the misuse of free rice, distributed through Public Distribution System by the women agricultural labourers in Lathur block of Kancheepuram district. There is ample scope for studying the other areas of pilferage in free Rice distribution.

Again this study focuses on the Rice distribution in the present context. A separate research study can be done to know about the attitude of Tamil Nadu people on free Rice distribution.

Also a scientific research study can be conducted to know about the possibilities in making the Public Distribution System more effective, that is the distribution of free rice to the deserving people.

LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

This study is confined only to the Public Distribution System in Tamil Nadu. Therefore this study may not represent the other states in India. As most of the respondents are illiterate, one cannot expect cent percent accuracy and there are chances of bias. However, great care has been taken to address this limitation. This study covers a decade and during this period, two regional political parties were in power. Accordingly, there could be a possibility of policy changes in the Public Distribution System.
ORGANIZATION OF THE THESIS

CHAPTER –I: INTRODUCTION

This chapter deals with a general picture of women agricultural labourers in India, the Public Distribution System in India, and women agricultural labourers in Tamil Nadu. This chapter also contains the statement of the problem, highlights the objective of the study, hypotheses, need for the study, scope of the study and limitations along with a brief outline of each chapter.

CHAPTER – II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Every attempt has been made to review the relevant literatures so as to identify in the research gap. This chapter has reviewed a number of related literature such as periodicals and journals, both Central and State Government records, research studies, and relevant materials which were retrieved from the Internet.

CHAPTER – III: METHODOLOGY

This chapter is discusses in brief the methodology adopted for the present study. It gives an account of the sampling procedure, sources of data and method of data collection. The collected data was analyzed using appropriate statistical tools.
CHAPTER–IV: PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM AND WOMEN AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS IN INDIA

This chapter proceeds to give a clear picture of the present day functioning of the Public Distribution System in India & Tamil Nadu meaning, the growth and performance of the Public Distribution System as also the economic status of women agricultural labourers.

CHAPTER – V: PROFILE OF THE STUDY AREA

This chapter provides an overview of the geographical content, political status, economic conditions and the demographic picture of the Lathur Block, Kancheepuram District in Tamil Nadu. To understand the place of Lathur Block in Kancheepuram District in Tamil Nadu, it becomes essential to present here a brief note on Tamil Nadu and Kancheepuram District.

CHAPTER – VI: ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

This Chapter has presented a general profile of the respondents like Age Wise Distribution, Marital Status, and Age at the time of Marriage, Religion, Social Status, and Educational Status of the Women Agricultural Labourers and so on.

Also, details regarding Debt of the Women Agricultural Labourers, Governmental Financial assistance to the Women Agricultural Labourers, Types of Family Card held by the Women Agricultural Labourers and the
distance between the Fair Price Shops and the residence of the Women Agricultural Labourers, etc are analyzed. Also, an analysis was made based on the information provided by the Women Agricultural Labourers regarding their opinion about the continuation of the free Rice distribution scheme.

CHAPTER-VII: FINDINGS, SUGGESTIONS AND CONCLUSION

A summary of the work done and the important findings are presented in this chapter. It is expected that based on this research work, new ideas come would up in the minds of the scholars to do new research work on these areas. Conclusions are drawn based on the analysis of this research work and suggestions are given for the policy-makers to act in a positive way to strengthen the Public Distribution System in India in general and Tamil Nadu in particular.


