Chapter - I

Introduction
CHAPTER- I
INTRODUCTION

In any economy, women play a prominent role at various levels. They are the backbone of the village economy in rural India. Women take up different works to eke out their livelihood and the majority of the rural women depend on agriculture which is the major, unorganised sector in India. Many of these labourers are landless, homeless and belong to the socially depressed classes of the society. Despite the seasonal nature of employment in the field of agriculture, enormous growth is witnessed in the size of the agricultural labourers since the beginning of this century.

Ours is basically an agricultural country. It is a source of livelihood for over 70 per cent of the population. Agriculture, therefore, has become a family enterprise. The whole family of men, women and children work on it and earn their livelihood. Men’s role in agriculture is widely known, but women’s role is not that open, though they mostly work for more number of hours, with less privileges, tedious activities and with painful postures. It is only in the recent times that the women themselves are not aware of their contributions, hardship, and, above all, over-burden of not only the household jobs but jobs related to agriculture and allied fields. The condition is worse when they work on fields not of their own but on others. On others field, they work as labourers with no facilities for their selves or for their children. Children are left on the fields
under the umbrella of sun, dust, rain, cold. Women do not know their rights, do not know how to fight for their rights.

A profile of the women labour explodes the myth that she belongs to the so-called weaker sex. While a man does the ploughing and harrowing in the hills, it is woman who breaks the clods with wooden hammers after the first few turns of the soils; she levels the land ensuring a uniform distribution of seeds and fertilizers and seeks to minimize the surface run-off a difficult job indeed in the hill regions where the terraces are steeply inclined. Then, she manures the land, one of most labour intensive tasks. Inter-cultivation is also the woman’s job, which demands light turning over of this soil after the seeds have sprouted. This job is usually done with the aid of a small hoe.

Crops which grow tall like maize and do not have and extensive root system require earthing up twice or more in a season, particularly in rainy season, when the soil around the roots is washed away by heavy rains. The soil is rigged up around the main stem of the plant to cover the root zone. This job too is done by woman. With the help of small hoes, women do regular weeding of the crops in order to ensure better crop growth and yields.

India is a land of villages and agriculture is the mainstay of her economic life. Women constitute about one half of India’s country’s population. Their place in the Indian society has been prominent. They play a pivotal role in agriculture. They work in the fields alongside men, attend to off-farm activities like processing, grading and marketing of produce, tend the
cattle and run the household. Nevertheless, certain basic inadequencies in terms of comparatively lower literacy and skills among women, their inability to engage in work consistently for various reasons, limited avenues for participation etc. have handicapped the desired level of their contribution to rural development. As a result, participation by women has largely been confined to activities in involving low wages and drudgery.

Despite these disadvantages, the economic pressures and the urge to protect their levels of living from getting eroded fast have made them continue in the work stream. Removal of these inadequacies and constraints is crucial to the growth of agriculture in all developing countries, including India.

As agriculture is still a major activity in our country, very high percentage of female population, as a whole, is directly or indirectly, involved in farming as cultivators or labour. Majority of women is the village participate in agricultural labour. Women’s participation as cultivators is minimal.

Rural women play the dual role of housewife and mother along with that of primary producer, processor and seller of products from the family farm. In any farming system, the rural women is a central part of the human eco-system in which resources are produced, brought or gathered and transformed for use or sale by the family. Live –stock farms are a part of that eco-system, and rural woman’s role extend from her labour contribution to participation in decision-making about the choice of animals and poultry, their care and feeding, housing, breeding, marketing and the use of animal products. In the absence of
adequate quantified baseline data, however, precise production responsibilities cannot be identified, and this makes it difficult to direct inputs appropriately.

Farm women play a significant role in agricultural production. A number of studies revealed that development has had an adverse consequences on women in third world countries with accelerated development, women’s work load increased. Status of women’s work decreases and poor rural women have increased difficulty in meeting the subsistence needs of their families, with the result, often plagued by malnutrition. The development process has actually made the day-to-day living of women a drudgery and misery by excluding them from access to modern agricultural techniques. It is disconcerting to note that development experts recognize women as ‘reproducers’ but ignore them as ‘producers’.

In India, nearly 70 per cent of the male and 87 per cent of the female workers are dependent upon agriculture, livestock, forestry etc. for their livelihood. Women are engaged in a number of farm operations along with men. Activities such as application of manure, land preparation, seed grading, sowing, dabbling, planting, irrigation, fertilizers application, plant protection, harvesting, threshing, shelling, hulling, winnowing, cleaning and storing grain, feeding cattle, looking after milch animal, poultry and kitchen gardening are the main occupations of farm women.

Community-wise women’s participation in agriculture is highest among the tribals, than among the Scheduled Castes. However, social science
researchers mention that the degree of participation declined with higher position in the social hierarchy.

Women play a significant and crucial role in agricultural development and allied fields including crop production, livestock production, horticulture, post-harvest operations, agro/social forestry, fishing etc. The nature and extent of women’s involvement in agriculture vary greatly from region-to-region and even within a region, their involvement varies widely among different ecological sub-zones, farming systems, caste, class and socio-economic status of families etc.

Women’s work, especially in agriculture, has been made peripheral and women’s multiple roles in the rural economy have been ignored in the androcentric environment of planning and policy making.

If development is process of construction, we have two pillars, man and woman; but, the latter is structurally weak. It is hardly surprising, then, that the super-structure becomes lop-sided. For the first time in forty years, the significant contribution of women to the gross national product gets a mention in the document of Seventh Five Year Plan. In the State of Andhra Pradesh, the agricultural sector absorbs 69.5 per cent of the total work-force and 82.9 per cent of female workers.

Women contribute directly to almost all agricultural labour without being the direct beneficiaries of agricultural inputs, training of capital. Irrespective of agrarian structures, women’s work is buried in the collectivity
of a household or family. Women also perform more agricultural operations than men. In all the three crops, they work for more months in a year than men, and perform all operations except ploughing. During the agricultural season, the working day of the woman is as long as fifteen hours including her household work. Women’s however, are generally lower than men’s wages and the operations done by men are done with practically no mechanical aids and are time-bound. The casualization of female labour has been because of limited impact of overall growth in agriculture and the growing displacement of workers in the rural non-agricultural sector.

The women agricultural worker has rarely been recognized as a producer in her own right. Lacking land rights as an individual, the women worker cannot even cultivate land on behalf of a male member of the family or contribute her labour towards her own betterment. Most land tenure systems exclude women one way or other. To-day when there is so much rhetoric about land reforms, one wonders why it is being applied only to men and not to women.

In the context outlined above, the female agricultural worker emerges as one with limited or no access to any productive resources (land, credit, skill upgradation) or basic facilities or amenities and renders to invisibility in the agricultural economy. Her gender compels her to take up the less visible and less remunerative reproductive role and her caste limits her social network and despite the decreased contribution by the man (due to alcoholism, debt etc.,)
she has to survive by her ingenuity and adaption for survival. She is, thus, assetless, under-employed, under-paid, illiterate and under-nourished and lacking accessibility to credit and other needed resources.

Women are moving slowly from invisibility to visibility and are being recognized as developmental partners all over the world. As per the world economic profile, they form 50 per cent of the world’s population, contribute 60 per cent of working hours and make up 30 per cent of the food production. Rural women play involvement in crop production, live-stock production, horticulture, sericulture, post-harvest operation etc.

Over the past few years, development of women has been receiving a special emphasis. However, in practice, it is staggering due to various factors such as low literacy, the restrictive social structure, predominance of patriarchal society, lack of decision-making opportunity and ability, low exposure to growth opportunities. Apart from all these, the major factor responsible for the lack of development impetus among women is their non-involvement in activities that result in income generation.

A large proportion of working women are in rural areas and their principal source of employment is agriculture. Majority of women in agriculture are working on their own account or as unpaid family workers and most of them do not have access to cash income.

The seasonal nature of agriculture and low productivity reduce demand for female labour and as a result forced idleness is higher among women than
men. Women’s productivity in agriculture also suffers from uneconomic holdings and subsistence nature of agriculture in which the family consumes the produce. Tasks performed by women are labour-intensive and mostly done by hand. This has evidently reduced the work efficiency of women. Regardless of these variations, there is hardly any activity in agricultural production.

Women in agriculture make up substantial portion of the Indian rural population. Like men, they undertake various types of agricultural operations including the allied fields, such as live-stock, forestry, plantations, fisheries etc. broadly, they are engaged in these operations in their ways depending on socio-economic status of their family and certain other regional factors. They work as (i) paid labourers, or (ii) cultivators-doing labour in their own land as unpaid workers or (iii) managers of certain aspects of agricultural production by way of labour supervision, participating in post-harvesting processing etc.

1.1 ROLE OF AGRICULTURE IN THE CONTEXT OF DEVELOPING INDIAN ECONOMY

Agriculture means not only the production of crops by the cultivation of the soil, but also the rearing of live-stock. Thus, milk, meat and wool are agricultural products as wheat, rice and cotton. Agriculture is a basic and important occupation as it provides not only food-stuff but also essential raw-material to the industry. It is the oldest business in the world. Two –thirds of
the population of the world is dependent on agriculture either directly or indirectly for its livelihood.

Of the total arable land of the world, India’s share is nearly 12 per cent. The total agricultural population of India is 42.1 million which constitutes 21.6 per cent of the World’s agricultural population. Nearly 15 per cent of the total irrigated lands of the world lie in India. In the production of jowar, pulses, oil-seeds, tea and jute, India’s share accounts for more than 30 per cent of the world’s production. Thus, India has become one of the biggest agricultural countries of the world.

India is predominantly an agriculture country. Agriculture is the largest and the most important industry in India. Nearly 70 per cent of the people in India depend on agriculture for their livelihood.

Another important feature is the dependence of most of the Indian industry on agriculture. All leading industries of India are agro-based industries. Cotton, jute, sugar, plantation, vanaspathi and paper industries depend on agriculture directly. Many of the small industries too depend on agriculture directly or indirectly. Handloom-weaving, rice milling, oil crushing, jiggery making, beedi manufacture, coir making, sericulture etc., depend on agriculture for their raw-materials. Though with the advent of planning and development, many new industries have come up which do not depend on agriculture, the basic feature remains the same.
The internal trade and transport system in India secure the bulk of their business only from the movement of agriculture commodities.

In the sphere of international trade and foreign exchange, the role of agriculture is significant. We export mostly agricultural products like jute, tea, oilseeds, spices, tobacco and millets. Nearly 70 per cent of India’s export accounts for agricultural goods or manufacturers of agricultural produce.

Besides, the agricultural sector supplies food to the teeming millions on India. In short, almost all sectors of the economy of India depend on agriculture. The prosperity of the country depends on the prosperity of the farmer.

1.2 SHARE OF AGRICULTURE IN NATIONAL INCOME

Economic regeneration attempted in successive Five Year Plans has made agriculture a pride of national economy. This sector, today, provides livelihood to about 70 per cent of the labour force, contributes nearly 32 per cent of net national product and accounts for a sizeable share at total value of the country’s exports. It supplies bulk of wage goods required by non-agricultural sector and raw-material for a large section of industry. It is gratifying to note that per capita net availability of food-grains went up to a level of 511 grams per day in 1991 as compared to that of 395 grams in early fifties. In 1992, it had, however, been provisionally estimated lower at 476 grams per day. In terms of gross fertilizer consumption, India ranks fourth in
the world after USA, the erstwhile lower at 476 grams per day. In terms of gross fertilizer consumption, India ranks fourth in the world after USA, the erstwhile USSR and China. The country has the largest area in the world under pulse crops. In the field of cotton, India is the first country to evolve a cotton hybrid. The country has made a major break-through in prawn seed production and pest culture technology.

Compound growth rate in agricultural production during the period 1949-50 to 1991-92 is 2.7 per cent per annum. Production of food-grains increased significantly from 549.2 lakh tones in 1949-50 to 1670.6 lakh tones in 1991-92. Cropping pattern is more diversified and cultivation of commercial crops has received new impetus in line domestic demands and export requirements. During post-green revolution period i.e., 1967-68 to 1991-92, growth rate in agricultural production was assessed at around 2.78 per cent per annum. Production of food-grains during this period increased from 950.5 lakh tones to 1,670.6 lakh tones. Cropping pattern has undergone perceptible changes and non-traditional crops like summer moong, soyabean, summer groundnut, sun-flower etc., are gradually gaining importance. In order to utilize scarce resources optimally, a short duration third crop is also being raised in some areas utilising residual moisture available from post-karif and post-Rabi cultivation.
1.3 GROWTH IN AGRICULTURAL EMPLOYMENT

Modern agricultural technologies appear to have increased the absorption of female per unit of agricultural land. Much has been written about the “displacement of female labour” with agricultural modernization, and there is evidence that the use to pesticides and mechanization has reduced female employment in these operations.

According to U.N. Food and Agricultural Organisation, Rome, women are responsible for almost 50 per cent of all food production. And women also do 60 per cent 80 per cent of all the agricultural work on the continent plus 50 per cent of the food processing (U.N Food and Agricultural Organisation 1983).

Despite the productive force these women represent, rural development policies rarely take into account their needs and problems. One wonders whether their productive role to the community and nation is seriously considered by planners. Unfortunately, this group has been ignored by development planners. Indian Parliament has passed several reform bills to protect women’s rights, such as land redistribution, Equal remuneration for Men and Women, Minimum Wage Act etc. But these measures have not evoked any positive on the life style of the weaker sex.
1.4 PROFILE OF FEMALE AGRICULTURAL LABOUR

Female agricultural labourers are, indeed, among the poorest sections of Indian society, with the lowest wage levels (about-three-fourths of the male rate) and among the highest unemployed (18 per cent) with 61 per cent of their numbers below the poverty line. Female casual labourers in rural areas show the highest incidence of poverty of any occupational category, male or female. Because of their lack of mobility and marketable skills, 90 per cent of the rural female workers are unskilled, 88 per cent are illiterate. These women are the most vulnerable to seasonal fluctuations in labour demand. Their poor nutritional status and frequent pregnancies make them especially prone to illness, which keeps them out of the labour force even when jobs are available and limits their productivity.

While much attention has been focused on this trend, there has been little notice of women cultivators. Women working as unpaid family workers in field crop production and other agricultural activities are an increasingly important segment of the agricultural labour force. Although there are some critical areas of overlap, women agricultural labourers and unpaid family workers, to a certain extent, fall in separate “recommendations domains”.

As the clock ticks off to the close of the twentieth century and as the world zooms into the “great expectations” of the twenty-first century, here is the still primitive world of millions of women labourers in India and most parts of the developing world, struggling to stay afloat, unrecognised, unrewarded
and unsung for all the tedious and laborious work they put in for a wide range of farming operations right from the hilly regions of Uttar and at Phhorgarh to the paddy fields in Kanyakumari District or from the dryland cultivation in Rajasthan to the shifting cultivation in Arunachal Pradesh.

It is an irony that while the different occupational become more modernised with inputs of science and technology, the majority of illiterate women workers are being pushed into the back-ground. Day after day, they work on the land that does not belong to them because proprietary rights are still vested with men and with society continuing to be what it is, patriarchal and male-employed., they could hardly get any financial assistance from banks or other institutions. The ancient scourges still dog them-poverty, illiteracy. Ignorance, the secondary role given to them by society and the out-moded social attitudes-all these compounded by the dual role of carrying the heavy load of household responsibilities as well as the back-breaking jobs on the farm, have reduced our pretension to respect for womanhood to farcical proportions.

1.5 CAUSES FOR FEMINIZATION OF AGRICULTURAL LABOUR

In agricultural sector, the remuneration and division of labour is highly sex based. Discrimination is manifest in the male and female earnings. Though the existing legislations like the Minimum Wage Act, the Equal Remuneration
Act, the Plantation Act, do not permit discrimination in wages on the ground of sex, the daily earnings of women labourers are generally less than that of men.

A study on “Public Enquiry On Women In the Unorganised Sector”, conducted in Tamil Nadu by the Centre For Labour Education and Development for the National Commission For Women (1994) also shows that there is exploitation of women agricultural workers and discrimination in wage payment inspite of the hard work, done by them. They always fear losing the job if they demand minimum wages. Other problems brought out by this study are: non-permanent nature of work, non-payment of accident relief, absence of crèche facility and lack of facilities for education, health care including maternity care, housing, drinking water and sanitation. In short, the basic reasons for the disparity in wages are: (i) seasonal nature of the demand for labour, (ii) the traditional classification of some jobs as the monopoly of women, (iii) unorganized nature of farm labour, (iv) the case with which hired labour can be substituted by family labour and (v) poverty, illiteracy and ignorance of the laws.

There also exists the problem of off-season during which women in agriculture have to struggle hard to tend for alternative sources of income. The absence of alternative opportunities for employment in the rural sector is intensified by the decline of traditional handicrafts. In drought-prone areas, the plight of such women is worse. Some of the new technologies have further added to the problem as these have displayed women from many of the
traditional activities. Such women try to take up any work available to them in or near their villages eg. road construction, forest produce collection etc.

Another problem faced by these women is the non-availability of loans. The financial institutions are hesitant to extend credit to them as they lack security to offer as collateral. By and large these women are unaware of existing credit facilities or are physically unable to reach the banks or are unfamiliar with their policies and cumbersome procedures. Consequently, women are accustomed to taking informal credit from a variety of sources, such as relatives, money-lenders at exorbitent rates of interest etc. There is lack of women’s groups/co-operatives which may help such women in obtaining the required credit.

Increase in rural women’s labour force participation is a sign of deepening poverty that has forced women into the labour market for family survival. It is an indicator of new economic opportunities that are inducing households to move against the cultural grain and send women out to work to raise family living standards.

Agricultural wage labour is generally the least desirable form of employment taken up by only the poorest. Therefore, an increase in the share of the female work-force in this category, relative to men and relative to other occupations, can be considered a negative sign—an indication of women’s disadvantaged position in the economy and as an increased economic disparity and poverty (variously labeled “proletarianization,” “pauperization.”, or
“femmiserization”). Poverty is pushing a growing number of women into agricultural wage work, who previously were not in the labour force or were self-employed as cultivators or artisans. Some interpret this as a sign of distress.

Positive correlation has been established between the incidence of female agricultural labour and State-level agricultural stagnation (Chatterjee 1984). The incidence of female agricultural labour also has been positively correlated with district level indicators of poverty such as area under coarse grains, low incomes of agricultural labour force participation is a supply-driven phenomenon resulting from increasing poverty.

1.6 IMPACT OF TECHNOLOGICAL BREAK-THROUGH IN AGRICULTURE

Men placed in a privileged position in societal set-up, could get access to technical know-how pertaining to agricultural development; access to institutional support in terms of credit and market services. On the contrary, women have to shuttle the maximum member of hours between house-hold duties and farm work, denied of access to drudgery-easing and productivity-raising technological and institutional support.

Thanks to the International Women’s Decade which brought an awareness about degradation of women’s condition and awakened the sleeping society to recognize women’s role and contribution in home and field.
Modern agricultural technologies appear to have increased the absorption of female labour unit of agricultural land. Much has been written about the “displacement” of female labour with agricultural modernization, and there is evidence that the use of pesticides and mechanization has reduced female employment in these operations. (Mencher 1983) But, on the whole, the new technologies, by increasing cropping intensity and crop yields, demand more total annual labour input per hectare. In fact, the increase in female labour use associated with technological change has been greater than the increase in male labour (Joshi and Alshi).

Chand, Sindhu and Kaulk (1985) together, view that in the wake of male migration into non-farm employment, and with modernization of agricultural practices, the share of women in agricultural labour force in India seem to be on the increase.

Women play a crucial role in the socio-economic development of a country. However, in both the industrially developed and less developed countries, women are burdened with cumulative inequalities as a result of discriminatory socio-economic practices. The situation is much worse in the case of rural women. Women labourers are an important segment of the total work force in India. More than 90 per cent of the working women in this country are engaged as wage labourers in the unorganized sector and they belong to the poorer sections¹. In the traditional Indian society, women

confined themselves to the role of household and only women in the lower strata were found in agriculture. Both men and women of the socially and economically backward communities were serving the higher class of the hierarchy. Class divisions were prominent and the women with their families worked with a landlord to meet the basic subsistence. However, things have changed in the agriculture sector and the traditional ‘bonded labour’ has not vanished, on still in existence in spite of the implementation of land reforms and abolition of land tenure system. Accordingly agricultural labourers have been relieved from the clutches of lavery system and became independent labourers. However, the status of women and their employment pattern did not show much improvement. With the implementation of ‘General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs’ (GATT) and ‘World Trade Organisation’ (WTO) norms, womens’ employment is getting increasingly casualised. The ‘Mutinational Corporations’ (MNCs) and other transnational corporations prefer cheap labourers which result in feminisation of labour.

However, one may not be happy about feminization of labour because it brings the ‘putting-out’ system into practice, wherein women will be made to work in an environment with micro enterprises without any security and other

---

facilities which the organized sector labourers enjoy.\textsuperscript{7} With the emergence of the sub-contracting system in the production process, the employment in general and that of women in particular is being gradually transferred from the organized to unorganized sector.\textsuperscript{8}

Women workers constitute the largest proportion of agriculture labour and most of them belong to socially backward and economically disadvantaged groups like schedule castes, schedule tribes and backward classes. Women workers are in general classified into organized and unorganized sectors. The organized sector is characterized by modern relations of production and is regulated by laws that seek to protect the security and working conditions of labourers as well as the labour organizations engaged in collective bargaining. The unorganized sector, which includes agriculture as well as certain industries and services, is characterized by the absence of all these protective measures and machinery. Information about socio-economic conditions and work opportunities of women in the organized sector are also scanty. However, the economic conditions of women is quite obvious from the fact that 94 per cent of them are found in unorganized sector and six per cent is in the organized sector.\textsuperscript{9} Over the years, the share of the agriculture sector in the National Income has dwindled from about 59 per cent in 1950-51 to 33 per cent in 2001 due to the development process initiated through the five year plans. But, the

population dependent on agriculture remained almost the same at around 70 per cent. The progress in the non-agricultural sector failed to provide employment to the surplus of the agricultural labour.\textsuperscript{10} The prospects of increase in the employment opportunities in the years to come are also bleak in view of the emphasis laid on privatization and globalization, that encourage use of capital intensive production technology.\textsuperscript{11} Thus the need for providing employment and generating income in agriculture is all more important now than ever before.

In India, the work participation rate of women indicates that the women in self-employment is on the increase\textsuperscript{12} (53.1 per cent) where in women are mostly found in less risky ventures for the reasons that they have to balance the household and business. Hence, women are discriminated and subjected to discrimination both in wage and self-employment opportunities. As Rajuladevi\textsuperscript{13} pointed out, there is a legal sex-based wage differential in Tamil Nadu which leaves women with 90 per cent of male wage averages in most of Tamil Nadu. She added that even when women take up vacant male jobs they are paid only female wage rate. During the five decades, the agricultural sector has experienced various strategies of the government for augmenting income and increasing employment. In the initial years of planning, elimination of

\textsuperscript{10} Tamil Nadu Human Development Report, Government of Tamil Nadu in association with social Sciences peers, New Delhi, 2003.
exploitative elements like absentee landlordism, village money-lenders and marketing functionaries played a vital role along with the expansion of area under irrigation. The next phase witnessed the propagation of co-operative farming for boosting agricultural productivity. A real break through came about with the introduction of high yielding varieties and use of commercial fertilizers, contributing to the green revolution. As the new technology was scale-neutral, it was thought that it would create vast employment opportunities in the rural sector. How far were these expectations realized? In other words, what is the progress in mitigating the problem of unemployment in the agricultural sector? They have however seemed to have little impact on real income of agricultural workers and their employment status. Therefore this study was taken up to understand the employment conditions of agricultural labourers with special attention to understand gender discrimination if any, in wages and employment of agricultural labour.

1.7 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The present study aims to probe into the work environment of the labourers in Thiruvarur district. One characteristic feature of agricultural labour is that only men perform some jobs, while only women perform others but both men and women do few jobs. It creates a disparity in wage rates between the male and female workers. It brings down the bargaining power of women workers and reduces them to the state of marginal, intermittent or reserve
labour, which is mostly unorganized. Discrimination within the labour market is the focus of attention of this study. By discrimination within the market it is implied that, workers who are distinguished by some characteristics such as sex, caste, status etc. that do not affect their present capacity but are treated less favourably in a given job than others who have no greater capability but are not marked-off by the characteristics. Thus discrimination exists in a labour market when persons with differences in productivity are paid equal wages. The most important types of labour market discrimination are in wages, days of employment and occupational characteristics. However, wage and employment discrimination are the outcome of occupational discrimination. In agricultural labour force, participation of both men and women is not uncommon. However there are important differences between the male and female workers in agriculture, in the nature of works done, rate of participation, wage rate and income earned. Female workers do relatively less hard physical work, they are paid lesser wage rate, and are constrained by time to be shared between their responsibilities at home and out of it. Further, in the agricultural labour households, women go to work to help men and to supplement their income and they do work not paid for, the wage rates are to be imputed. Women manage to meet the scarcity of labour during peak season of demand in agriculture and to find non-farm employment in the off-season. Thus, their annual income forms a significant share of their family income, but they have little say in spending it. The present study is also a modest attempt to find out
the factors responsible for the existence of wage and discrimination in agricultural labour market. It pays special attention to the problem of female labour at home and at the working place. Thus, gender discrimination in agricultural labour market in an important area of focus taken up for scrutiny.

1.8 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

An attempt has been made to analyze the nature and extent of employment of female workers in agriculture in both taluks under study. Special attention is paid to assess whether the differences between the male and female workers in employment, wages and working conditions are due to gender discrimination. Therefore the results would throw light on the special problems of female workers and possible remedies will be identified. Further, the study would show the extent of unemployment, underemployment and exploitation of labour of either sex, due to the special characteristics of agricultural works. How far the market imperfection affects the wage rate and income of the agricultural labourers would be discussed. Remedies for the problems would be discussed and it would show the effectiveness of unionism of labourers. Important policy implications could be stated on the basis of the findings of the study, especially on wage discrimination. The state intervention in the form of legislations on wage rates, (minimum wages and fair wages); security of job and employment conditions will be studied for its effectiveness in increasing income of the agriculture labour households. An attempt is also
made to compare the Minimum wage with that of actual wage and actual wage with expected wage. The thrust of the study will be on the wage structure for different agricultural operations and problems of employment during season and off-season. Lastly, the study makes an objective review of provisions of the Minimum wages Act 1948 Amendments and Rules there under.

1.9. OBJECTIVES

1. To study the socio-economic characteristics of women agricultural labour households in the selected two taluks of Thiruvarur District.
2. To understand the nature and extent of employment of women agricultural labourers in the selected two taluks of Thiruvarur District.
3. To assess the extent of discrimination of women in employment and wage rate (operation-wise) and
4. To compare the minimum and actual wage; actual and expected wage.

1.10 HYPOTHESES

The hypotheses framed during the course of study is as follows:

1. Participation of women in agricultural labour force is not less than that of men, but the nature of work done by them differs from men.
2. Women are discriminated from men in employment and wage rate in doing similar activities in the farm.
3. The percentage days of employed in a year in the case of agricultural and non-agricultural activities are lower in both the study taluks.

4. The minimum wage fixed by the Government is higher than actual wage and the expected wage is higher than the minimum wage in both the study taluks.

5. The percentage contribution of women to total family income is greater in the study taluks.

1.11. LIMITATIONS

1. The woman agricultural labourers do not maintain records of their income, expenditure and employment data. while they were interviewed, they could give the data only from their memories. Hence the data are subject to recall bias.

2. The respondents, some times, in their anxiety to over – state their difficulties, might have given an exaggerated account of their poverty, indebtedness and unemployment. Similarly, some of them might have understood their income and assets position.

3. Hence, the data cannot be completely relied upon as precise. But, adequate care was taken to verify the veracity of the data by cross – checking of the responses.

4. In general, it is quite possible, that respondents could have genuinely forgotten some of the information on their economic conditions
pertaining to one full year. However, the finding of the study could be relied upon to the extent it indicates the relative difference in the overall economic conditions pertaining to one full year.

5. However, the findings of the study could be relied upon to the extent it indicates the relative difference in the overall economic labourers, which could help draw policy conclusions for the development of these weaker sections of the rural society.

6. And due to the limitation of time, cost and resources, the study is limited to one particular period namely August – November 2013 and that too analyzed and restricted only to women agricultural labourers. So, the total sample size is 200.
1.12 CHAPTER SCHEME

The whole thesis is divided into Seven chapters, where in

**Chapter I**  It deals with the introduction, Scope of the study, need for the study, objectives, hypotheses, statement of the problem and limitations.

**Chapter II**  It brings out an account of the Concepts and Review of Related Literature.

**Chapter III**  It presents the profile of the study area, Materials and Methods

**Chapter IV**  It presents an Women Labour in Agriculture – An Overview

**Chapter V**  It deals with the Analysis and discussion.

**Chapter VI**  It gives findings, policy implications and suggestions.