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. 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 & 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 : (1) how to measure accurately the role of rural women in economy, and (2) if rural women are so vulnerable, why they have remained so and what can be done to help them?

The role of rural farm women in agriculture 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 G.D.P. This increase will perhaps be larger in the case of women where is a 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 nor a new development. The magnitude to their involvement, however, is correlative to socio-economic and political prevalent in a country. From time immemorial, women in India have been working both in the active economic field and at homes though 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.

The total workforce of 374.39 million in India in 1993-94, 121.63 million (32.5 per cent) 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 in urban areas. The rural female workforce has increased by more than 50 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 workforce 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 rates of rural women has shown the highest increase among all the components of labour force (an increase of 15 per cent) during 1981-1991**.

In agriculture sector, female workers predominate as agricultural labourers: 49 per cent of rural female workers as agricultural labourers 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 of work (main workers, when fully employed), as against this, female labour gets 265 days of work. Adult male labourer 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

*** Govt. of India (1973; 1981a; 1981b; 1984; 1994; 1998) and Unni a.b.)
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 Economic 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 again in the worst position. Only 2.8 per cent 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.

Time use studies essentially provide information on how individuals spend their time on a daily or weekly basis and reveal the details of individual's 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

**** N.S.S. Rounds
***** N.S.S. Rounds
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 a 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).

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. The negative impact of economic reform and transition to market economies has tended to hit women harder than men. The number of women living in poverty has increased in most regions. On the whole, about 35 million women are engaged in agricultural labourers (1981 census) over the years. 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 mechanisation 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 mechanisation was not introduced in operations performed by females. If sowing and harvesting of paddy are mechanised, 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 (Subrahmanyam, 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 Subrahmanyam). 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 in 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, 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. Kanpur Dehat is dominated by the women labourers including male and female workers. The study area is dominated by rice-wheat cropping system and with the livestock production, which demanded 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 livings.

Apart from the general miserable condition of the women labourers, very little is known by way of scientific and empirical studies on the pattern and level of women employment, wage structure and
income level etc. Inspite of all other developments in various walk of life, women worker 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.

**Objective of the Study:**

The main objectives of the present study were:

1. To study the socio-economic profile of the sample households.
2. To examine the wage structure and employment of rural farm women workers in the study area.
3. To study the extent of farm women labour participation in the agricultural and non-agricultural sectors.
4. To workout the level of income of farm women workers in agricultural and non-agricultural activities.
5. To identify the problems associated with the rural farm women workers of the study area.
6. To suggest suitable measures for the improvement of the socio-economic conditions of the rural farm women workers.

**Layout of Dissertation:**

The thesis opens with chapter of **Introduction**, this is followed by **Review of Literature** as the second chapter. The third chapter deals with **Research Methodology** used in the study. General informations about study area are given in the **General Features of the Study Area** as
fourth chapter. The most important chapter of the thesis are fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth which deals with *Research Findings*. The ninth chapter covers *Problems and Suggestions*. The tenth and eleventh chapters deal with *Discussion, Summary, Conclusion and Suggestions*. In the end, the *Bibliography* and *Appendix* are given.