Chapter VI

Conclusion and Recommendations
CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In most underdeveloped and developing economies, agriculture is the mainstay of a large proportion of the population. Moreover, women in these economies also play an important role in this sector. However, unfortunately they are not given equal status to the men engaged in agriculture. Women working in agricultural sector in India are no exception, as was seen in this study. The study examined the role and status of women in agricultural work in Uttar Pradesh. The study also reconstructed the role of women in agriculture from pre-independence era to the present.

In spite of the fact that, Uttar Pradesh is the most populous and primarily agricultural state, women’s role in agriculture sector was found to be highly invisible. Although women have been performing an important role in the agricultural sector they have always remained invisible due to traditional values, gender biases, illiteracy, superstition, dominant role of males in decision making, etc.

Though women agricultural workers in U.P. represented a big proportion of all women workers, they continued to receive lower wages than men. While earnings from agricultural work had not improved for women, modernization of agriculture had in some cases brought new kinds of problems and demand. They were also the largest group of
landless labourers with little real security in case of break-up of the family owing to death or divorce. Inheritance laws and customs also discriminated against women. The land reforms and settlement programmes too usually gave land rights and the security needed for obtaining credits for production to the male in the family. Unfortunately agricultural development programmes were usually planned by men for male farmers as the focus group.

It was also found that the condition of women agricultural workers and their problems were different from that of workers in the organized sector. Women agricultural labourers have been mostly employed in the most arduous field work like sowing, weeding and transplanting since pre-independence period. The agricultural work was distributed according to caste and sex of the workers. Lower caste women were actively involved in field work. Some of these castes were the Kachchi, Koris, Kurmis, Chamar, Passi and Dhobi. Women of these castes worked as agricultural labourers along with their husbands. Even though these women actively participated in agriculture but the work they did was considered inferior and repetitive.

The use of plough was controlled by men. Moreover there were social restrictions that forbade women from using the plough in the fields. A woman was never allowed to plough the fields as the plough was
considered to be the most auspicious tool and was held in high esteem. Technological innovations and modernization in farming also left women’s work untouched. Ironically, the only implements that women used continue to be traditional hand tools and were mostly employed in tasks which were non-mechanized.

Compared to their male counterparts, women agricultural workers got lesser employment opportunities. They were not the main income earning members of the families, and were ready to work as an additional earner in the family; moreover the availability of work was also not regular. Other than agriculture rural women were engaged in child nursing, family activities and household work like animal husbandry. The main problem of female agricultural labourers in pre-independent India was lower wage rate and lack of employment opportunities.

After independence the condition of women agricultural workers continued to be the same or even worsened in some cases. Lower caste women performed majority of farm work and the purdah system which restricted women’s movement was still prevalent in the society. Even after more than six decades since independence women continue to occupy a secondary position in agriculture.

Women in post-independent India have continued to be excluded from the use of new farm technologies. Moreover modern machines took
over the work that was previously done by women workers. Most of the female agricultural labourers were unskilled therefore they were given only those tasks where mechanization was not possible. For instance transplanting operations remained the domain of women labourers and was done manually by hands.

Agricultural women labourers not only lacked the use of advanced technology but they also had no rights to the agricultural holdings. Uttar Pradesh incidentally had the lowest number of women with agricultural lands in their names. The tradition of inheriting agricultural land by male members of the family deprived women of an equal share in land. The Land Reform Acts were highly discriminatory in considering women as land holder. Moreover, all the land reform Acts only provided protection to widowed or unmarried women. Although women sometimes acted as caretakers of the land, they were deprived of the entitlement rights to the agricultural land. They also faced lot of social pressures which restricted them from owning or declaring a share in agricultural land.

Access to productive resources such as land, credit, inputs, appropriate technology, training and extension services have remained insufficiently available to women. On the other hand, males held most of the resources, but this did not mean that all men had greater access to the resources. An upper caste man was highly privileged in the society
because he was both a man and a person of a dominant caste, but a
scheduled caste man did not gain better access to all the resources in
agriculture. However, women faced discrimination not only for being a
weaker sex, but also for belonging to the lower castes.

Agricultural work was highly gendered as ploughing, watering,
fertilizer application or marketing agriculture produce were distinctively
men’s activities. Women were mostly found weeding, transplanting,
cleaning the cattle shed and raising calves. In contrast, men mostly
performed core tasks. Their work involved more skill and knowledge and
therefore gave them greater power and gave them a place even beyond
the household. It was found that men and women had different role in the
socio-economic scenario.

Women’s domain was an extension of the home and the skills
required to manage it. Their social boundaries were also restricted, which
affected their mobility. The situation of women agricultural labourers was
both grim and pathetic. These women worked hard in the fields, at wages
which were lower than those paid to men. There was division of labour
between sexes and a striking difference in the work done by men and
women. Women’s work was also ranked low and given lesser value while
men’s work was considered more superior to women.
In Uttar Pradesh the male-centered development ideology, recognized males as unitary heads and decision-makers; this legitimized and reinforced lower wages for women. Against this background, the state’s assertion of imparting equal wages for both men and women agricultural labourers, appeared weak and unconvincing and was not operational.

Apart from the differentials in wages for same jobs, discrimination against women was strengthened due to lower rates for the jobs traditionally done by women, viz. sowing, weeding, transplanting, winnowing, threshing and harvesting, as against ploughing, which was normally done only by men. The other factor that led women to receive lower wages in agriculture was due to the practice of considering a workday as equivalent to 7 to 9 hours. Many women were unable to report for duty on time because of household responsibilities, and did not get the full rates of wages. Even Minimum Wages Act, 1948 and the Equal Remuneration Act, 1976 did not provide adequate and equal wages to women agricultural labourers.

The problems that women agricultural workers faced were numerous. Since their work was mostly in unorganized sector they, did not receive the benefits received by workers in the organized sector. There were no medical health care facilities available to women.
agricultural labourers. Both men as well as women had serious health problems while working in agricultural fields. However women were likely to be affected more than men due to biological factors such as their menstrual cycle, reproductive function and menopause. The Maternity Benefit Act, 1961 was also not applicable in the agriculture sector. Women’s exposure to a variety of pesticides was also associated with spontaneous abortions, premature births, low birth weights, and birth defects. However, there were no government records which monitored the health of women in the unorganized sector.

Women also faced the brunt of poverty and were under double burden. They worked more than men but earned less than men. Under distress situations like male migrations, women were forced to take over the tedious tasks of farm management and household responsibilities alone. Migration of males in search of better-paid work, forced women to take over agricultural work in the absence of males. In such situations women faced meager wages, long working hours and hazardous work.

Women also had lesser access to information technology because of their inferior educational status and relative isolation from public life. Women were mostly ignored and were not taken seriously because of the male centric society. There is a need to bring about change in the attitude
of men and only then women can avail the benefits provided by the government.

The empowerment of women can help them determine their own actions, and have the freedom to make decisions and guide their future. This power in decision making could be acquired and exercised if, they have knowledge about the various programmes, plans and current issues, access to social policies and their rights. The Government schemes and programs must be women-centric and should have a gendered approach. Therefore in order to change the plight of women agricultural workers the following recommendations were made.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

The recommendations have been made on the basis of main findings of the study. They have been divided into four broad categories.

a) **Knowledge and Information**
   
i. Women’s role in agriculture should be duly recognized and they should be given equal participation in decision-making. This will make farming a joint venture for both men and women.

   ii. Opening up information centers that could provide all the necessary information to women and updated news regarding their
right to agricultural land, bank loans, lease and mortgage of land, etc.

iii. Education and training are important tools for women to know their rights and use their skills in the most efficient manner. Government should create conditions conducive for female education. For this purpose night schools should be arranged near their dwelling places. Once they are educated they can become aware of their rights and the laws for ownership of land.

iv. There should be new employment opportunities for women during the off season. For example dairying, employment in agro-based industries, making jams and jellies and pickles, etc.

b) Technology

i. There is a need for development of agricultural technologies that may help women. The tools and equipment used in agriculture should also be designed according to the needs and requirements of women farmers.

ii. Women’s skills in agriculture could be improved by encouraging them to utilize new agricultural techniques. Other specific steps that can be used are by promoting technologies that help to alleviate the drudgery of women's household chores.
iii. Proper training should be provided to women farmers for operating advance farming equipments like tractors, threshers, harvesters. Social barriers which restricted women from using the advance machines should be removed.

c) Role of State and Women’s Organizations

i. There should be a special cell in each village/block where women agricultural labourers could register their problems.

ii. Female officers should be appointed for registering the complaints of women workers in order to avoid any form of gender based discrimination in wages.

iii. The wage rates for women agricultural labourers should be increased and should be made equal with the male wage rates. Moreover, there should be a mechanism to verify that women labourers are receiving equal wages or not. Any negligence should be treated as a serious offence.

iv. Maternity leave facilities, rest places, sanitation and day care facility for children should be provided at the workplaces. Women should also be provided nutritious food, primary medical help and educational facility.
v. Active role of non government organizations for allotment of *pattas* to landless women workers in agriculture.

vi. Since there are no unions for workers in the agriculture sector there is a need for organizing unions for women agricultural labourers to avail benefits in different sectors and also to raise their voice against any form of discrimination.

d) **Legal and Administrative Measures**

Legal and administrative measures should be adopted to improve social conditions of women in rural areas and also access to productive resources should be provided to women agricultural labourers.

i. Government should give loans, subsidies, land, equipment, finance and other assistance to assist female agricultural labourers in setting up an industry and generating employment.

ii. Implementing the Tenancy Acts and Inheritance Laws for providing equal rights to women in agricultural holdings.

iii. Imparting land rights to women will not only make them economically strong but it will also help in them to take their own decisions and work for the welfare of family.
iv. Women’s rights in agricultural land should not be different for different states. It should come under one jurisdiction. All the state land Reform Acts must not discriminate against women and should consider them the rightful heir.

Finally, the society at large and men in particular should be aware of the significant role of women in agriculture. Only then can the women agricultural workers of Uttar Pradesh as well as those across India can be assured of getting their due and also contribute in the growth of agricultural sector, which even today sustains a large proportion of the population in the country.