CHAPTER-VII

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION
Chapter-VII

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION.

Women make a considerable contribution to agricultural production in developing countries. Women workers in farming may be unpaid family labour or self-employed own-account workers and wage labourers on farms. The distinctions between these three categories are not always clear cut. Women's traditional jobs in agriculture are to transplant, sow, weed, harvest, winnow, and thresh. But due to reduction in size of land holding, increasing trend of poverty and natural calamities and increased male migration have seen many changes in the traditional roles played by women in the farms.

There needs a clear understanding of the role played by women in agriculture. The recognition that most women in rural areas are farmers necessitates a reorientation in research work related to women and agriculture.

The socio-economic characteristics have a definite role to play with FWPR. There is an increasing trend of shift of women workers engaged in their own family farms as agricultural labourers during the last decades due to damage of agricultural lands in Dhemaji district indicating increased poverty, although accurate data is not available in this regard.

The present research work as outlined in the preceding chapters basically embodies the detailed geographical treatment of the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of women population in the Dhemaji district of Assam. Main focus was given to the Mishing, the Deori and the Sonowal Kachari tribes and
their participation in the primary activities and their economic contribution to the
family income. An analysis of the pattern of socio-economic characteristics of
women at local level was also studied to know the position of women in various
socio-economic and cultural situations in the region.

Chapter -1 encompasses the research problem, its goal and significance. It
also includes the relevant review of research in the related fields, which forms the
basic foundation and direction of the study. Methods and approaches thought to be
appropriate for the present study have been applied including field observations. It
may be mentioned here that the analysis of the problem is sometimes constrained due
to non availability of adequate data.

A study of the physical and socio-economic background of Dhemaji district is
made in Chapter-II. Dhemaji district occupies a unique position amidst complex
geological and physiographic makeup of the state of Assam. The district falls under
the upper Brahmaputra valley agro climatic zone. The major tribes of the district
include the Mishings, the Bodos, the Sonowal Kacharis and the Deoris. However,
linguistically the actual population of these tribes in the district is not reflected in the
census figures as some of them have adopted Assamese as their mother tongue. The
topography of the district varies from undulating uplands on the northern foothills
belt to low lying plains in the south. The climatic conditions of the district is hot
humid during summer and cool dry during winter months. About 80 per cent of the
total rainfall occurs during the summer months from May to September. As the
district is located near the hills of Arunachal Pradesh, it exhibits differences in
temperature, rainfall, fog, wind etc. All the tributaries of River Brahmaputra in the
district originate from the hills of Arunachal Pradesh and have a shorter course in the plains. Moreover, they reach the plains at an enormous speed carrying silts especially during the summer months when rainfall is abundant in the catchments of the rivers, resulting in flush floods and devastation in the plain regions.

The economy of the district is mainly agro-based. However silt deposition coupled with other adverse effects of chronic flood which is becoming worse due to mainly deforestation in the hill regions, have made cultivable lands almost useless rendering even erstwhile affluent families poor. Moreover lack of good communication system, shortage of power (electricity), lack of proper irrigation and marketing facilities adds to the backwardness of the district. Dearth of any major and small industry worth mentioning is also responsible for multiplying the problem of unemployment, while galloping explosion in the rate of population growth has already shown signs of negative impact.

Chapter-III deals with the inter tribal and inter ethnic variation in work participation of tribal women in Dhemaji district of Assam. Demographic feature of female population like age composition, age at marriage, health, care, fertility and child care practices, rural urban composition of population, nature of migration determine the potential labour force which can be utilized for productive purposes. Social status, prestige and customs, attitudes and religious believe affects the volume of female labour supply in the society. The work participation rate of female in Dhemaji district is 34.80 per cent which is much higher than the state average of 18.09 per cent. The percentage of female main workers to total population in the district is 9.88 per cent against 6.03 per cent for the state of Assam. The
corresponding figures in female marginal workers are 10.13 per cent and 0.43 per cent in Dhemaji district and Assam respectively. This indicates that FWPR in the district is much higher than the state average although the proportion of marginal workers indicates that most of the female workers in the district are underutilized.

Women within a geographical area, though not a homogenous group by way of caste, class or economic activity, the work participation in agriculture has a similarity in many aspects. Any assessment of the role and problem of women in agriculture has to be made not only on the nature and structure of the agricultural economy but also on the characteristic feature of land resources, labour utilization and the agro-ecological setting of a region. The agricultural sector employs as much as 85 per cent of all economically active women where there are two categories of women. The self employed women cultivators working on their own farm and the women working as agricultural labourers for wages or share of produce. In Dhemaji district it was observed that there has been a decline in the number of cultivators over the years and more and more women are working as agricultural labourers due to the impact of flood and declining trend of land holding. The study further reveals that the women work participation in agriculture is more or less similar among different tribal and ethnic groups except slight differences in some aspects. In some occasions it is found that the women have to work for more hours than men but gets less money or wage compared to men. Women are involved in transplantation, preparation of farm yard manure, seed selection, thinning, weeding, scaring of birds, using plant protection measures, harvesting and post harvest activities but are not involved in ploughing fields and marketing of crop; making female population a significant
workforce. Studies have shown that application of modern science to the agricultural sector raises the productivity factor more than similar investment made in the industrial sector and that agricultural growth has a greater effect on the reduction of poverty than do industrial growth.

Among social groups in Assam, the female work participation rate of upper caste women is the least in comparison to the scheduled tribes and scheduled caste. The average rate of participation for general women is 14 per cent which is significantly lower than that of scheduled tribes (37%) and scheduled caste (22%). This chapter also indicates the socio-economic characteristics namely age, education and land holding of different ethnic groups with their work participation rate in agricultural activities and the resultant support towards family income. It is evident that the percentage of workers of tribal women is substantially higher than non tribal women irrespective of age groups. The percentage of non workers irrespective of age groups reflects the higher FWPR of the tribes as compared to non tribal women. Moreover, it was observed that, women remained economically active up to 45 years of age after which their economic contribution tends to decline. The study revealed that the socio-economic characteristics have definite role to play with FWPR. In the present study the Mishing women are found to be more active than the other tribes in terms of work participation rate. However, proportion of main workers is observed to be higher in Sonowal Kachari and Deori tribe than the Mishing tribe. The FWPR of all the three tribes are much higher than their non tribal counterpart residing within the district.
The inter tribal and inter ethnic variation in occupational structure among the women in the region has been presented in Chapter-IV. It is observed that female work participation is much higher in the district (18.47%) than that of the state average (10.03). However, most of the main workers in the district are found in the primary sector of occupation. In contrast to the high proportion (88.45%) of female workers in the in the primary sector, only 4.07% and 7.48% female workers in the district are engaged in the household industry and other sector respectively. The present study found very little variations in the occupational structures among different ethnic groups of respondents residing within Dhemaji district.

Chapter-V tries to explain the female participation in light of sexual division of labour. Sexual division of labour in Dhemaji district varies very little by region and farming system but not among the tribes. Some tasks are almost exclusively undertaken by men, and some by women. Predominantly male tasks include the felling of trees, ploughing with oxen, digging etc. and the market related activities as purchase and use of pesticides/ fertilizers, sale of produce etc. Women, besides household task usually undertake transplanting, harvesting, threshing, crop drying, other post harvest operations, winnowing, fetching water and pig and poultry-rearing. Other tasks, such as weeding, bagging and crop storage, are almost equally undertaken by both women and men. It was also reflected that housework (child care and household chores) and economically extended work (as fetching of water), which is crucial for family’s survival, is still a women’s responsibility. On the whole, distribution of task responsibility and help received for housework and economically extended work was gender biased and divided along traditional lines.
Agriculture is the main source of income for rural households in Assam and is also the main occupation of women. Most of the women of the district work in agricultural fields and also weave in addition to the daily household chores. Although the cultural restrictions that women face are changing, women are still not as free as men to participate in the formal economy. In Dhemaji district women are over represented in the marginal workers category and account for a small proportion of the formal labor force. A very low percentage of female workers are engaged in other sector of the economy such as social work, government jobs, teaching, religious activities, household and non household industries etc. However, many women are involved in undocumented wage work than in the formal labor force. The informal sector includes jobs such as domestic servant, small trader, artisan, or field laborer on a family farm. Most of these jobs are unskilled and low paying and do not provide benefits to the worker.

Cash crops are not grown in a generalized way in the district. However, mustard seed plantation is carried out in many flood affected and sandy field areas. In the family farms where such crops were grown, men tend to be responsible for them, but much of male labour is withdrawn if those crops decrease in profitability. Women and children tend to be delegated the farm tasks that are tedious and time consuming.

Technological development in the district is at its rudimentary stage. Hence, influences through changes in technology on the division of labour are less felt in the district. However, wherever such development is felt, they are associated of with
males, as required training is targeted towards men and they tends to derive status
benefits from use of such technologies.

Due to progressive disintegration in joint type of family structures, changes
are also taking place on the level of the gender division of labour within the family.
The transition to the nuclear family often results in a shortage of work capacity
within the family resulting in more involvement of woman in all aspects of fieldwork
and the field work in agriculture generally takes priority over all. The changes in
family structure are accompanied by willingness and capacity on the part of the men
to act supportively in works that are previously and exclusively performed by
women.

Although the district posses multifaceted society, a generalized trend in
gender division of labour is observable among various regional, religious, social, and
economic groups, as most of the ethnic groups residing within the district are living
at close proximity of one another hence, the pattern of gender division of labour of
one ethnic group must have influenced the other groups resulting in similarity.

Chapter-VI is devoted towards explaining variation in agricultural work
participation rate. The present study of female work participation rate among
different ethnic groups reveals that the variations in agro-ecological conditions does
not determine the extent of variations in female participation in work among the
tribes as well as the non-tribal segments of the population. Although tribal women
are involved in a higher proportion in various activities related to agriculture than
their non tribal counterpart and the proportion of non workers is comparatively low.
However, significant differences of work participation rate among the different ethnic groups are observable even in similar agro-ecological units of the district. This may be because of differences of cultural, traditional and historical traditions among different ethnic groups despite the influence of one ethnic group over the other as they used to live in close proximity for decades together.

Some definite patterns in gender division of labour in agriculture in the district are observed during the study. However, gender division of labour in agriculture is subject to variation over time and generalization is difficult to make. However, some patterns of gender division of labour are observable in spheres like cooking, feeding the family, cleaning and washing household clothes and utensils, grinding grain, transplantation, harvesting etc. which are more commonly female activities while ploughing, preparation of field, carrying harvested crop home etc. are more commonly are male activities. However, increase in the numbers of nuclear type of families has in one hand expedited the concept of duel earner and in the other it gave flexibility to the traditional concept of the gender division of labour.

Although Dhemaji district possesses a multifaceted society and customs vary from region to region, a generalized pattern of gender division of labour is observable among various regional, religious, social, and economic groups. Most of the ethnic groups residing within the district are living at close proximity of each other and there are cross integration of each others cultures, traditions etc. and inter-caste, inter-tribe and inter-ethnic marriages are not also uncommon in the district. Hence, the pattern of gender division of labour of one ethnic group has definite influence on the other groups resulting in a generalized trend.
MAJOR FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

1. Dhemaji district has a substantial population of tribes (43.92%). The urban population is only 1.85%, indicating a rural character of the district. The district is situated in one of the heaviest rainfall areas of Assam and thus is most flood prone. The economy of the district is mainly agro based characterized by subsistence level of production and consumption. Sericulture, fishing and driftwood business are also carried out in smaller scales.

2. There exists a small difference in work participation pattern in agriculture among women of different ethnic and tribal population residing within the district. Agriculture is carried out through a traditional lines and customs and thus it is more labour intensive and low in productivity.

3. The proportion of female main workers involved in the agricultural sector is much higher than that of the state average. However, very few female main workers are found outside the primary sector. Similarly the proportions of female marginal workers are also much higher in Dhemaji district (10.13% of total population) than the state average of 0.43%.

4. The FWPR of tribal women are substantially higher than the non-tribal women irrespective of age groups. Women of the district remain economically active up to 45 years of age after which their economic contribution tends to decline. There is a significant relationship between age group and work participation rate in agriculture.
5. There exists an insignificant relationship between education level and FWPR in agriculture sector for all ethnic groups in the district probably due to lesser job opportunity outside the primary sector within the district.

6. Economic status of a family has a direct relationship with the women’s work participation in agriculture, and thus land holding, which holds a direct relation to the economic connotation of a family, has shown a significant relationship with the FWPR of tribal women as well as of non tribal women.

7. Mishing women are found to be more active than the other two tribes in terms of work participation rate. However, proportions of main workers are observed to be higher in Sonowal-Kachari and Deori tribes. The FWPR for all three tribes are much higher than their non tribal counterpart residing within the district. There is an increasing trend of shift of women workers engaged in their own family farms to agricultural labourers during the last decades due to damage of agricultural lands by flood and erosion in Dhemaji district. This also indicates increase in landlessness and poverty, although accurate data is not available in this regard.

8. Very little variation in occupational structures among different ethnic groups of respondents residing in Dhemaji district was observed in the present study. Female workers in the district are mainly engaged in primary sector and work variation is relatively lower than the state scenario. As women workers prefer to work nearer to their homes, diversification of occupational structure of women in the district is found to be negligible. The shares of female workers in the primary occupations
among the non-tribal population in the district are considerably lower than the scheduled tribe population.

9. Most of female workers in the district are engaged in the primary sector (88.45%), while negligible proportions of female workers are found to be involved in household industry works (4.07%) and other sectors (7.48%) respectively. Lack of industrial and associated infrastructure development in the district is the primary cause for low percentage share of female workers in other sectors in terms of employment.

10. Over the years, there is a decline in the number of cultivators and more and more women are engaged as agricultural labourers in the district, mainly due to floods and resultant sand deposition and erosion making the farm lands unusable for cultivation. Moreover, there seems to be moving away from agriculture as the primary livelihood, to mix cultivation, small scale tea plantations and off-farm employment as wage labourers in the western part of the district (Bordoloni block) as subsidiary income-generating activity.

11. As most of the ethnic groups residing within the district are living at close proximity to one another and are interacting with each other for decades together hence, the pattern of gender division of labour of one ethnic group must have influenced the other groups resulting in similarity.

12. As in other cultures and societies, the sociological system of the region is also firmly rooted in a hierarchical system of economic, social and political relations based on the sexual difference between men and women, where male domination and
female submission form the basic structuring principle of society resulting in gender
division of labour. Generally tasks related to the public domain and to the generation
of family income were assigned to men, while women were assigned tasks of
biological and human reproduction that were mostly limited to private, domestic
domain.

13. Predominantly male tasks in the primary sector includes the felling of trees,
ploughing with oxen, digging, preparation of field, carrying harvested crops to home
etc and market related activities such as purchase and use of pesticides/ fertilizers,
sale of produce etc. Women, besides household task usually undertake transplanting,
harvesting, threshing, crop drying, other post harvest operations, grinding grain,
winnowing, fetching water and pig and poultry rearing etc. Other tasks, such as
weeding, bagging and crop storage are almost equally undertaken by both women
and men.

14. Most of the women of the district work in agricultural fields and also do weaving
activities. It was further revealed that livestock care was more or less a female work.
Men’s involvement in livestock activities was rather limited to cleaning, milking and
market related activities of livestock and livestock products. Cash crops are not
grown in a generalized way in the district. However, in the family farms where such
crops were grown, men tend to be responsible for them.

15. Due to progressive disintegration in joint type of family structures, changes are
also taking place on the level of the gender division of labour within the family. The
changes in family structure are accompanied by willingness and capacity on the part
of the men to act supportively in works that are previously and exclusively performed by women. However, lack of elementary knowledge of work simplification techniques is increasing the drudgery of rural women's work.

16. The work participation rate of women within Dhemaji district does not differ significantly among different tribal groups and proportions of non workers are comparatively low. However, the non tribal counterpart had shown lower proportions of main workers and higher percentage of non workers.

17. Variations in agro-ecological conditions within the district had no effect on the extent of female work participation rate among the tribes as well as the non-tribal segment of the population.

18. Only a negligible section of the tribal women are involved in activities other than agriculture and weaving in the district and is comparatively lower than that of females in the general population in similar occupations. Sericulture practice is a major source of income for many women of the district. Almost all the rural households of the district have looms for weaving. Sericulture is recognized as an intensive employment area for women. Women are actively involved in silkworm rearing including their feed, silk reeling, spinning etc. Sericulture being a small-scale industry, is a source of subsidiary income in many rural households of the district, and is operated exclusively by women.
SUGGESTIONS:

1. Though considerable attention was paid to identify and calculating the value of women's unpaid work, there was hardly any attention paid to women's work in terms of income in the home based production. As the FWPR of tribal women is always higher than their non tribal counterpart hence, this fact assumes more importance in tribal societies. This is an area where statistical data is not available from official records, except a few. As rural women are becoming increasingly responsible for household activity and food production, development programs must adapt to this changing demographic profile so that rural women can acquire the necessary training on new productivity-enhancing techniques and technologies. The study of this sector assumes importance because most of the income derived from this work frequently provides the very basis for family survival particularly among the extremely poor farmers.

2. There are very few data available on the number of women engaged in home based production due to the lack of recognition of home based producers as workers in most data gathering system. A wide range of productive activities can be included in the home-based work as production of handicrafts, garments, rearing of small animals and poultry, grain cleaning etc. Women often combine their household tasks with income generating work. The hours of work vary from part time work to extended days work. Data on tribal women in this sphere may be gathered, which in turn can be analyzed in a meaningful way for the benefit and economic uplift of the district in general and the tribal societies in particular.
3. Tribes are always associated with the nature and agriculture is the main source of income for them. Tribal women always play a key role in agricultural production and thus there is a need for re-defining the concept of ‘worker’ and giving a monetary status for these activities. These should also be reflected in Gross National Product.

4. Analysis of rural women’s work showed that there was increasing drudgery of the household work because of lack of elementary knowledge of work simplification techniques. This is particularly true for the tribal societies. It is, therefore, necessary to evolve time-saving technologies for these household chores. Non-formal education emphasizing work simplification, time and energy management can considerably reduce the physical labour of work, thereby releasing more time and energy for economically productive activities. Education programs on such areas can be incorporated in rural development programs.

5. Access to science, technology and information improve life for rural women and help to reduce poverty. Basic education for women has been shown to have significant impacts on agricultural production. However, women have lesser access to skill acquisition, skill training and skill upgradation. While women play a predominant role in agriculture and food provisioning women’s participation in agriculture extension training and research in next to insignificant. These areas of consideration need immediate attention for uplifting the rural economy of the district.

6. With a commitment to sustainable development, priorities emerged to work with rural and tribal communities which are vulnerable to underdevelopment. Further, a growing realization of the need for a comprehensive process of development,
the significance issues of core areas are addressing Women's Development and Sustainable Agriculture.

7. Tribal women traditionally possess a commendable knowledge about feed value of various fodder plants, indigenous medicinal plants and about organic farming, though they themselves are ignorant about their knowledge. A systemic study of such know-how should be made for their maximum utilization and to promote organic farming so as to increase women's productive role in agriculture, decrease health hazards and avoid the drain of scarce family income to pay for unnecessary chemicals.