Chapter 7
Summary and Conclusion
Agriculture has greatly influenced the human civilization. The agriculture constitutes the main source of livelihood and the main area of work for most people in the developing countries.

Agriculture is the chief occupation of the people of India since the time immemorial. Agricultural labourers were not found in pre-nineteenth century India; that is to say there were only cultivators in the olden days. The increase in the strength of the agricultural labourers is a significant aspect noticed in the 20th century and several reasons may be ascribed for this increase. During the British rule the disappearance of cottage and domestic industries, decline of handicrafts and other subsidiary occupations are some of the reasons responsible for the decline of the village economy, which, in turn, made a large number of people depend more upon agriculture which was the only alternative occupation readily available to them. In the absence of other alternatives, people in rural areas who are generally unskilled, continue to stick on to agriculture and the women are no exception.

The women agricultural labour are swelling in large number over the years. Ignorance and superstitions continue to be the chief characteristic features of the women agricultural labour in rural areas. They are predominantly drawn from the poorest sec-
tions of the Indian society viz., Landless Classes, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. They work for wages to supplement the family income. As they desperately need some work to do and earn wages, they do not hesitate to work even at lower wages under harsh conditions. Besides, the socio-economic problems from which these people already suffer as a consequence of their subordinate class position, factors like their unorganised state, the insecure job conditions, lack of skills, low wages and casual nature of employment further reduced them into a subservient position in the society. There has been very slow progress in ameliorating the working conditions, social and economic problems of women, such as, underemployment, low social status, low wage rate etc. These problems demand immediate attention of the planners and policy makers.

Chittoor, one of the drought prone and backward districts of Rayalaseema region in Andhra Pradesh has been selected for the purpose of this micro-level empirical study. All possible efforts have been made to collect the needed data for the study from the district. The data has been collected through canvassing of a pre-tested schedule among the women agricultural labour taken as a sample in the rural areas of the district. The main purpose of the study is to shed light on Socio-Economic Conditions of Women Agricultural Labour in the district. The study takes the following as its main objectives:

1. To review the status of women in India;
2. To study the social conditions of women agricultural labour;
3. To study the level of employment and wages of women agricultural labour;
4. To assess the pattern of income, expenditure, savings, indebtedness and poverty among the sample women agricultural labour households; and
5. To suggest measures, in the light of the empirical study, for improving the socio-economic conditions of women agricultural labour.
The sampling consisted of three stages: Selection of mandals, selection of villages and selection of households. There are 66 Revenue mandals in Chittoor district. All the mandals in the district have been grouped into three categories for the purpose of stratified random sampling on the basis of percentage of agricultural labour households to total rural households. One mandal from each category has been selected for the present study. The three selected mandals are Madanapalle, Bangarupalem and Satyavedu. Four villages have been selected at random from each mandal, on the basis of percentage of agricultural labour to the main workers and the percentage of female agricultural labour to female main workers.

All the women agricultural labour households of each village have been classified on the basis of castes: Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Backward Castes and Other Castes. From each sample mandal, 100 women agricultural labour households have been selected as a sample representing proportion of each category and in each selected village. Thus a sample of 300 women agricultural labour households have been covered for the purpose of study. Of these, 197 households belonged to Scheduled Castes, 35 to Scheduled Tribes, 49 to Backward Castes and 19 Other Castes.

It is now recognised that the status of women in the society, both in developed and developing countries, continues to be inferior to that of men. Although the status of women is crucial in the family, and household economy, they have not been given equal rights in respect of social, political and economical fields. In many parts of rural India, women participate equally or even more in number compared to men in various agricultural operations. Nevertheless, women labour in the field of agriculture are drawn from the lowest section of the society, it is significant to note that a majority of the women agricultural labour (nearly 66 per cent) belonged to Scheduled Castes.
It is learned that the age groups of 15-30 and 30-45 are the main contributors of labour accounting for 82 per cent of the total labour in the sample villages in the district. Illiteracy and lack of skills have compelled them to join the workforce at an early ages, irrespective of their castes.

It is sickening to note that 83 per cent of the women agricultural labour happened to be illiterates. Hypothesis inferred that, castes do not strongly influence the educational status of women agricultural labour.

Married life lasts longer; it is a life-long binding on the part of the couple; as such divorce and remarriages are uncommon events in their lives. Almost all of the sample women agricultural labour got married before attaining the age of puberty. Hypothesis inferred that there is no relationship between caste and marital status of women agricultural labour. Their traditions, ignorance of law and illiteracy coupled with low social and economic status compelled them to go in for marriage at an early age.

It is reported that more than 43 per cent of the respondents are badly affected with the dowry problem. All castes people in the study area have been practising dowry system.

The Joint family system has disintegrated and structurally non existing one and in its place one interestingly notices nuclear families in the study area. As a matter of fact more than 95 per cent of the sample women agricultural labour households have been living as nuclear families. Caste does not reflect over the type of family of women agricultural labour.

The total population of the sample women agricultural labour households is 1393 persons; of which males account for 706 and females 687 that is to say there are 97 women for every 100 men in study area.
The rural people are of the opinion that education is not essential for women and they feel it is a sheer waste of time and resources; and it is for this reason that one finds a low percentage of women as literates among the sample households.

The housing conditions of agricultural workers are miserable and deplorable. Their houses are generally situated at places where insanitary conditions of the highest order are found. Nearly 93 per cent of the respondents have houses of their own. While only seven per cent of them have been living in rented houses. Nearly, 74 per cent of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes live in thatched huts. Hypothesis inferred that caste structure significantly influence the type of houses in which the women agricultural labour have been living.

Nearly 54 per cent of the sample women agricultural labour households come under the category of workers and 46 as non-workers. Among female population, 55.60 per cent of them are workers and 44.40 per cent as non-workers. While it is 77 per cent of them are engaged as agricultural wage labourers. And it was noticed that an insignificant percentage of them have been engaged in allied agricultural activities.

More than 45 per cent of respondents have appreciated and adopted family planning methods. More number of women that belonged to the Other Castes are highly inclined in favour of family planning methods than the women that belonged to the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Backward Castes. Hypothesis inferred that caste structure significantly influence the adoption of family planning of women agricultural labour.

It is observed that a majority of the women reported to be scared of side effects of family planning and a few of them kept on postponing the adoption of family planning with a view to begetting of male child. Hypothesis inferred that, caste structure does not influence on reasons for not adopting family planning methods of women agricultural labour.
It is pertinent to notice that women have been completely ignored in the decision-making with regard to construction of a house or attending of house repairs, or purchase of a house site, purchase of land, live-stock or other assets; education and occupation of children, and adoption of family planning methods. In all these, the decision making power was vested in the hands of men.

However, regarding purchase of household articles, borrowing and saving money; amount to be spent on food, clothing, social ceremonies, it is revealed that women were consulted in the decision making. It is rather pathetic to note that though women actively participated both in productive and reproductive activities, they were denied of their participation in the family decision making process.

**VERIFICATION OF HYPOTHESIS**

1. There is no significant difference in the social status of sample women agricultural labour among all castes.

The hypothesis formulated with regard to the social status of the sample women agricultural labour was that there is no significant difference in the social status of the sample women agricultural labour among all castes. The data and the analysis have validated the hypothesis formulated in this regard and clearly brought forth the fact that, the status of women agricultural labour is still very low irrespective of the castes.

Women in rural areas depend mainly on agriculture for their sustenance. They have to seek employment in agriculture to avoid starvation of their children or themselves. In some cases, the earnings of the husbands, however committed the husbands may be, are quite inadequate to take care of the family responsibilities. In such circumstances, women were forced to supplement the family income. It is also reported by some women respondents that their husbands' sometimes, neglect their responsibilities in the maintenance of families due to gambling and drunkenness.
Women agricultural labour in the study area have worked for 192 days per annum in agriculture engaging themselves in sowing/plantation/transplantation and harvesting/processing operations. And there are no significant differences in this regard irrespective of the fact that women agricultural labour belonged to different castes in the rural areas.

However, it is revealed that, on average, employment of sample women agricultural labour worked for 21.65 days per annum in non-agricultural sector. Most of the Scheduled Tribe respondents engaged in the collection and sale of firewood. Absolutely non-farm sector does not offer alternative employment opportunities in the villages selected for the study.

An analysis of the work-load of the respondents of the three mandals surveyed indicates that the women are usually overburdened with monotonous household chores and tedious agricultural activities. The working hours are generally ranging from dawn to dusk.

Wage differentials have been noticed on the basis of gender, place and nature of work. They have been influenced by customs and practices that are in vogue. The employer usually has an upper hand in the fixation of wages and the casual women agricultural labour has little or no say, in influencing the wage structure. The seasonal nature of work does influence the wage structure and causes periodic fluctuations in wage rates. These periodic fluctuation makes the payment irregular and uncertain. It is also observed that the women agricultural labour were in great demand during the sowing and harvesting seasons and they would paid more than the going wages prevailing in the villages. But this lasts for a short period.

Significant variations are noticed between wage rates paid for different activities in the study area. The highest wages paid to labour for their participation in harvesting
operations. Women were mainly paid in kind for their participation in paddy harvesting. In the case of harvesting of groundnut, wages have paid on the piece rate basis. Weeding is a low paid activity and wages are generally paid in cash.

The study reveals that the wages from agriculture constitute 79.51 per cent of the household income; 18.63 per cent from the non-agricultural employment and contribution from cultivation accounted for 1.9 per cent of the household income. The per capita income of the women agricultural labour household is Rs. 1451.11. This varies significantly from mandal to mandal. In the Madanapalle mandal the per capita income of the women agricultural labour household is Rs. 1623.38, Bangarupalem it is Rs. 1416.76 and in Satyavedu mandal the annual per capita income is Rs. 1292.29.

Consumption is a function of income which determines the socio-economic status of the households. Therefore, expenditure patterns have also been included in the study. It incorporates expenditure over different items. The expenditure pattern consists of the expenses over food grains, provisions, health care, education, clothing and others. It is observed that overall average expenditure is higher on food grains in all the three selected mandals. And the average expenditure of Other Caste households is higher than that of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Backward Castes on most of the items in all three mandals in the district. They spent very meagre amount on their children's education. It was also reported that men were habituated to consumption of liquor which had brought down the economic position of the sample households.

Savings are a rare phenomenon that takes place in the lives of the women agricultural labour households as their incomes are too meagre to meet the barest necessities of their lives. As the gap between their incomes and the expenditures is too narrow to be discerned their level of savings which do not acquire any significance. However, they saved some amount to encounter the critical conditions. Most of the women agricultural labour saved money by themselves without their husbands' knowledge, lest their savings
forcibly taken away by them. Thus the above analysis revealed that the sample women agricultural labour could not save more money to meet the future requirements such as, house construction and marriage of their daughters/sons with their incomes. If in any case they wanted either to get marry their daughters/sons or construct a simple house to live in, they have to raise loans.

Regarding the magnitude of savings in selected mandals, the average savings of a household is recorded as the highest in Madanapalli mandal than in Bangarupalem and Satyavedu. Average amount of savings of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Backward Castes is higher than that of Other Castes. It is also revealed that almost all sample households prefer bank to keep their savings if there are any.

The study revealed that, most of the women agricultural labour households were under debt burden. Money was raised from different sources as loans, largely, to meet consumption expenditure, to perform marriages of their sons/daughters, to celebrate social ceremonies, to purchase cattle and very rarely money was raised from the known sources to buy an asset which is a very rare phenomenon observed during the study period.

Nearly 65 Per cent of the loans are taken utilised for consumption, marriages and social ceremonies, 22.52 per cent of the loans are taken for purchase of cattle and less than one per cent of the loans are taken for the education of their children.

Debt utilised for consumption purposes has been the highest in Satyavedu mandal than in Bangarupalem and Madanapalli. It was reported that the Backward Castes and Other Caste women agricultural labour very often borrowed money for celebration marriages, and purchase of cattle.
II. The income-expenditure gap of women agricultural labour households is so wide that it is compelling them to borrow money even to meet for day-to-day needs. Women agricultural labour could spend more than what they could possibly earn. The deficit between the income and expenditure is made up by borrowing. The incidence of borrowing is found to be high among almost all of the women agricultural labour households. It is revealed that a majority of the women agricultural labour households have raised loans to meet even their consumption expenditures.

Poverty is a serious social and economic problem. The unchecked growth of population on one hand, the destruction of village agrarian economy and the continuous outflow of rural capital to urban areas on the other has substantially contributed for persistence of poverty in rural India.

Sen's 'P' measure has been used to measure the extent of poverty among the women agricultural labour households on the basis of per capita income and per capita consumption expenditure. Women agricultural labour households whose per capita income or per capita consumption expenditure was less than Rs. 1280 have been treated as 'poor households'. As many as 43.79 per cent and 41.06 per cent of the sample women agricultural labour households live below the poverty line based on per capita income and per capita consumption expenditure respectively.

The analysis revealed that Sen's measure of poverty among the selected households on the basis of per capita income is 0.1986. However, the Sen's measure of poverty is at a higher level for Scheduled Castes (0.2456) and Scheduled Tribes (0.2588) and it is at a lower level for Other Castes (0.0951) and Backward Castes (0.0818). And the intensity of poverty is at a higher level in Satyavedu (56.32) and Bangarupalem (51.02), than in Madanapalli mandal (25.62).
Sen’s ‘P’ measure has been worked out by taking into consideration the per capita expenditure. On the basis of the per capita expenditure of Rs.1280 which is taken as poverty line, 41.06 per cent of persons among the sample households are living below the poverty line.

However, the Sen’s measure of poverty is at a higher level for Scheduled Castes (0.1303) and Scheduled Tribes (0.1977) and is at a lower level for Backward Castes (0.0521) and Other Castes (0.0667). And the intensity of poverty is at a higher level in Satyavedu (0.1530) and in Bangarupalem (0.1400) and is at a lower level at Madanapalli (0.0756).

III. Considerable proportion of sample women agricultural labour live still below the poverty line among all castes and all the three mandals.

Sen’s measure of poverty (P) has been used to test the above hypothesis.

As regards the above statement, it is observed that the most of the women agricultural labour still below the poverty line among all castes and mandals.

In the first twenty years after Independence Indian economic policy makers were primarily concerned with the overall economic growth. The third decade of independence witnessed an increase in concerns for equity and poverty alleviation. But even at this stage, gender issues were subsumed by poverty related concerns. As a result, policies and programmes specially aimed at women were limited in scope and resources. It is only the last ten years that it has been recognised that though women constitute an overwhelming majority among the poor, programmes of economic and social development are structurally biased in favour of men. This bias is now being increasingly acknowledg-
edged and corrective policies and programmes have been initiated by the Governments both at the centre as well as at the states.

The various evaluation study groups are of the opinion that the implementation of the development schemes in the country did not yield the anticipated results, especially the agricultural labourers in the rural areas. The schemes launched by both the Central and the State Governments were defective and have failed to generate adequate employment avenues for the improvement in the conditions of the agricultural labourers, particularly, women agricultural labour. Thus none of the schemes launched and implemented by the Government seem to have completely eradicated abysmal poverty and generated employment opportunities to the rural masses in general and to the agricultural labourers in particular.

A careful study of the development schemes revealed that none of the schemes is directly related for the improvement of the economic conditions of the women agricultural labour, except the loans sanctioned to women in rural areas to buy the milch animals under the IRDP scheme.

Almost all the schemes are either land-based or property based, and naturally a large number of the women agricultural labour feel that they are out of their reach. Though the schemes are launched to help the weaker sections to cross the poverty line by improving their economic position the schemes neither assured them of any sustainable work nor generated any income. Hence the schemes have, in a way, widened the gap between the peasantry and the landless poor. Thus the majority of the agricultural labourers want that they should be given tiny bits of land for cultivation in the manner in which the agricultural implements like the plough are supplied to them as this would enable them engage in their own work during the slack season when they do not find any employment. That means strict enforcement and land reforms would certainly better the living conditions of the ruralites.

Many a women agricultural labour felt that natural calamities and unforeseen events in the village should be taken cognizance and the agencies concerned—both Governmental agencies and voluntary organisations—should advance loans and grant subsidies to tide over the adverse situation.
The Integrated Rural Development Programme though meant to extend financial assistance to small farmers and marginal farmers and agricultural labourers only some insignificant number of people were benefited out of the total target. Among the sample mandals only 40 women agricultural labour received some financial help under IRDP scheme. As many of the programmes of DRDA were asset-based or land-based, women were deprived of its benefits as they never owned any land nor were they heads of this families. Thus the programmes of DRDA benefited the affluent sections of the society and they were also male-biased in approach. Some of the schemes like SC Action plan and Yanadi Action Plan were meant to cover exclusively launched for the betterment of women for to speak of the welfare of the women agricultural labour. Ignorance and illiteracy of the labourers also caused the failure of the scheme.

The following specific measures can be suggested for the upliftment in the socio-economic conditions of women agricultural labour in the rural areas of the district.

1. The status of women in India has undergone considerable change, but the status of women agricultural labour in the rural areas continued to remain unchanged. The right kind of education for women in rural areas would certainly improve their lot.

   The State Government should provide all facilities-hostels, well equipped schools and good environments—to promote quality education among girl students in the rural areas of the district.

2. Rural women should be educated through oral instructions to adopt spacing between one issue and the other compulsarily to go in for family planning operation after the second issue.

3. Number of social welfare agencies should be created by the Government at the national and local levels to take care of the women agricultural labour in the rural areas.

4. Pensions for the widowed women agricultural labour where there are no male members to support them should be provided without discrimination.
5. Working hours should be regulated to the extent possible. The arrival and departure time may be fixed according to the conditions of work and the prevalent season.

6. A suitable agricultural labour code should be evolved which should govern the employee-employer relationships. The court should spell out in detail obligations of employers as well as employee(s) items like payment of wages, working conditions, social security, grievance handling etc., may be included in the code.

7. The women agricultural labour is subjected to inferior social treatment which comes in the way of its contributing the best to the society. Society degenerates where women is insulted, exploited and ill treated. It is necessary that they should be given due recognition for all their contributions.

8. Though law has abolished untouchability, a majority of the women agricultural labour that belonged to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes are still suffering from the stigma. The Government should strive hard to root out this malady.

9. Most of the women agricultural labour live in thatched huts in rural areas. Of late, housing schemes and other facilities have come into existence but unfortunately rarely do the needy get benefited by these. It is necessary that a specially designed rural housing programme should be provided to these poor people.

10. Women development programmes are to be formulated and implemented to better the living conditions of the women agricultural labour in the rural areas. For this purpose a special wing/branch may be created in the DRDA programme besides the existing schemes like DWCRA.

To sum up, agricultural women labour in Chittoor district as in other parts of the country requires a New Deal.

In rural areas 30 per cent of the agricultural labour households exist with almost no land, sometimes do not even a house-site. In these families men and women are employed for roughly six to eight months in the year. Women generally receive only 60 per cent of wages earned by men and the wages they get depend on the local demand for the work. The number of agricultural labourers is increasing between 1961 and 1981, the percentage of agricultural labourers went up by 50 per cent, resulting in massive under-employment and disguised unemployment in agrarian sector of India.
It is worth mentioning here that Mrs. Helvi Sipila, Secretary-General for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs of the United Nations focussed in a recently published report on the state of the world’s women: “Women and girls, who constitute half of the world’s population and one-third of the agricultural labour force, performed nearly two-thirds of work hours, but according to some estimates received only one-tenth of the world’s income and owned less than one-hundredth of world’s property”. The situation as explained in the study in Chittoor district of Andhra Pradesh is in no way different from the observation made by Mrs. Helvi Sipila.

Since poverty in rural areas of Chittoor district is essentially due to lack of regular work and gainful employment, a number of programmes have been taken up to give the poor a means of livelihood and bring them above poverty line. The rural poor, on the basis of analysis presented in the study, have derived very little benefit from programmes for their development largely because these provide work for only a limited number of days. Programmes of loans and subsidies for the poor to help them to produce simple goods such as pots, ploughs, bricks, milk through milch animals, a self-employed workers, have also met with little success.

The development of women agricultural labour in Chittoor district calls for re-orientation of institutional setup in such a way as to provide access to the needed resources - monetary and technological skills - for the women to participate in the economic development. Above all, the more important fact is to educate them through adult education programmes, for education holds the key for all round development and educate women agricultural labour would strive for empowerment both in social and economic spheres of life. The educated women agricultural labour can read the simple manuals on the Agricultural Development and participate in highly productive oriented agricultural operations and thus not only raise their household income levels many a fold but also promote rapid economic development of the district as a whole.