PREFACE

Mother India is said to be a village beauty. The real India still lives in villages. More than 70 per cent of its people live in over 5,75,000 villages spread over throughout the length and breadth of the country — on hills, plains, deserts and in ever green areas. The villages are the abodes of Indian traditional arts, culture, philosophy, music and religion. But there are also places where poverty can be seen in its most crude form, where the women carries most of the household burdens and yet the womanhood is insulted and exploited. Might be in employment or wages or in social treatment they are not treated as equals with men. Three decades of planning has not been able to bring the poorest and the oppressed to the level, which the founding fathers of the nation dreamt and which the constitution guaranteed.

Indian rural poverty has survived all attacks beginning from the land reforms in 1950s to the Integrated Rural Development Programmes of 1980s. The abolition of zamindary system resulted in conferring the ownership on vast majority of farmers but the gains could not be consolidated for, the size of holdings got fragmented and became uneconomic in large number of villages. Research studies have shown that not only the annual income
earned from small holdings decreased but also the capacity of the farms for absorbing the workers got dwindled. Studies conducted in Andhra Pradesh and other States confirmed that even with 100 per cent irrigation and cropping intensity of 1.7 to 2 the annual income earned from cultivation of one hectare of land did not enable the cultivating household to maintain itself. According to a recent report by the State Bank of India, more than one third of the total rural households owned assets below ₹2,000/- each.

The trickle down theory based on the circular flow of income of the economy did boost the economic activities in the beginning. But this could only help the growth of urban agglomerations, employment opportunities in urban areas and increase in the incomes of the people who were involved in industry, trade, commerce and services. The vast majority of village population having very meagre purchasing power did not receive any benefit of the growth in the industrial sector. These factors contributed in further worsening the condition of agricultural labour as their share in agricultural income fell down by 10 per cent in 1970s and again by 20 per cent in 1980s. The disparity in income continues posing serious threat to the social and community life in villages.

As the trickle down approach did not help in alleviating rural poverty, a policy of direct attack on poverty was adopted
from the fifth five year plan onwards with the introduction of special programmes such as IFAD, MFAL, DPAP, CADA, NREP and IRDP. Some of these programmes adopt family as a unit for providing benefits specially to the poorest section of the rural society. It was claimed that as a result of these programmes the poverty ratio would decline and the socio-economic conditions of the poorest section of the population will improve. This claim has already been contested in several quarters. The present study is an attempt to explore the truth in the matter.

In rural India the agricultural labour constitute the largest and the poorest segment of the population, and among the agricultural labour, the most oppressed section is the casual agricultural labour, of whom the majority are women. Neither in the five year plans nor in the specific of development any special attention has been given to them. Even the International year for women did not bring any change in the economic and social conditions of this class of labour. This study is an endeavour to focus attention on the economic and social problems of this class of women. For undertaking intensive study the district of Sullur has been chosen.

The study is divided into eight chapters. In the first chapter an analysis has been made as to how and why the agricultural labourers are growing in numbers and how the women
agricultural labourers in particular have been deprived of the economic, social and legal benefits. The Second Chapter gives the socio-economic profile of the study area i.e., Nellore district. The third chapter deals with the position of women in the Indian Agrarian Society. The fourth chapter is devoted to the problems of employment, unemployment and under-employment of the women agricultural workers. In the fifth chapter the rate of wages, and the total earnings received from agriculture, as well as non-agricultural work have been discussed. In the sixth chapter, on the basis of the family budget, income and expenditure; the general level of living of the women agricultural labourers, have been dealt with. The seventh chapter reviews the benefits received by the women agricultural labour from the IRDP and other special schemes and in the eighth chapter the study has been concluded and a few suggestions have been offered.

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