CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Origin and growth of agricultural labour:

Agriculture is the chief occupation of the people of Indus from prehistoric times. The archeological excavations at Harappa and Mohenjodaro (2500 BC), the ancient cities of Indus (Now in Pakistan) throw a significant light on the agricultural development of that age.¹

In the vedic times the fundamental principles of agriculture were known² and followed by the vedic aryans, but the information regarding agricultural labour is very scarce. We can only speculate about it from the list of skilled and unskilled labourers referred to in the vedas as Craftsmen, artisans, smelters, potters, arrow and bow-makers, carpenters etc.

As a matter of fact, most of the householders were farmers possessng their own fields, where they worked along with the members of their family. They took pleasure in doing the agricultural work with their own hands rather than allowing it to be done by

¹P.C.Jain "Labour in Ancient India," p. 57
²Ibid - Rigveda VIII 22,6, Atharvana Veda, VIII 10,22.
others. Their zeal and love for work is manifest in the
gamblers song where a man advises a gambler to give up
gambling and engage himself in agricultural work which is
sure to bring a wife, wealth and cattle.

The Vedas were followed by Brahmanas and Sutras.
Even these theological works refer to farmers but furnish
no information about agricultural labour. In the Bharata
and Ramayana we have a few references regarding the employ­
ment of labourers on farms. These labourers though they were
employed on other's farms, they were paid proper attention
both by the kings and the people thus were not regarded as
a separate class. In fact, they were regarded as the members
of the family of the employer.

In the Buddhist period we find Kshatriyas tilling the
soil and Brahmanas engaged in agricultural operations.
Brahmanas are also mentioned in the Jatakas as hiring them­
selves out as cowherds and even goatherds. During the
periods of Gupta and Harshavarman the farmers were put to
much hardship by the kings, his watch and ward staff and his

3 P.C. Jain "Labour in Ancient India," p. 57.
4Jataka IV, 38, 146, 315.
armies. But even here there is no mention of agricultural labour.

The Mughal period is marked by several changes in the ownership of land as well as the management of the land system. We do get an account of family servants working on the fields but there is no mention about the existence of a distinct class of landless agricultural labour.

Thomas Munro, census commissioner in 1840 reported "there were no landless peasants in India." J.C. Clerk in his treatise "Economic life of the Bengal districts," mentioned "the landless labour so common in England unknown here."

The whole account described above bears ample testimony to the fact that the landless agricultural labour as a distinct class did not exist in India till the 19th century.

The agrarian society was based on the integrated unity of agriculture and traditional handicrafts in India before the entry of the Britishers. Later on the Britishers

---

5 Thomas Munro, quoted in India Today 1947, By R. Palm Dutt, p. 198.

6 Allied Publishing House, Delhi, 1916, p. 84.
entered and changed not only the land system and method of payment of land revenue but also destroyed the traditional home industries. Thus the integrated unity of agriculture and handicrafts on which the entire village economy based was shattered.

More than a century ago Sri N. Trevelyn reported to the select committee of the House of Commons "we have swept away their manufacturers, they have nothing to depend on but the produce of the land."^7

Under the garb of land reforms the Britishers brought about a change in the land system and thereby created castes and classes among the rural community. They distributed land to those who helped them in establishing their rule. Such people were came to be known as Zaminiers, Isari, Zagirier and Inemis. These persons formed a class of non-cultivating owner pursuing agriculture by hired labour. The permanent settlement was forced in India. Lord William Bentink in one of his speeches defended the permanent settlement in these words "If security was wanting against extensive popular revolution, I should say the permanent settlement, although

---

a failure in many respects and in most important essentials has this great advantage at least of having created a vast body of rich land proprietors deeply interested in the continuity of the British dominion and having complete command over the mass of the people.  

In the period after the permanent settlement an alternative method of direct settlement with the cultivators was introduced. This was the Ryotwari system, under which the revenue assessment was made on the area and not on the actual productivity of land. The Madras Board of Revenue approved it in a memorandum quoted below, "In pursuit of this supposed improvement, we find them unintentionally dissolving the ancient ties, the ancient usage, which united the republic of each Hindu village by a kind of agrarian law newly assessing and parcelling the land which since times immemorial had belonged to a village community collectively. Professing to limit their demand to each field, but in fact, establishing such limit, an unattainable maximum, assessing the Ryot at discretion and like the Mussalmen government which preceded them binding the Ryot by force, to the plough compelling him to

---

till the land acknowledged to be over assessed, dragging them back to it, if he absconded deferring their demand on him until the crop came to maturity, taking from him all that could be obtained and leaving him nothing; but with his bullocks and seed grain, may, perhaps obliged to supply him even with these, in order to renew his melancholy task of cultivating, not for himself, but for them. 9

(From these early accounts it is clear that the landless agricultural labour class is the outcome of rape of the rural structure and organisation, the destruction of the village handicrafts and the transformation of the ancient land system.

The introduction of western notion of property and tenancy legislation resulted in free mortgage and transfer of land. The decline of home industry facilitated this process. The peasants were driven off the land to supplement their income from land by outside work or to sell their lands to middlemen. The increasing fragmentation and subdivision of holdings also drove out many farmers to work as casual labour. The total outcome has been the growth of landless agricultural workers.

---

9Member of Mairas Board of Revenue, January 5, 1918, quoted in India Today, 1947, p. 220.
With the growing pressure on the available land resources coupled with increasing indebtedness, facility of land transfer provided by the agrarian reforms, the number of landless agricultural labourers went on swelling. Their number was negligible in 1840. It rose to 7.5 million in 1882, 18.7 million in 1891, 21.6 million in 1901, 25 million in 1911, 21.6 million in 1921, 33 million in 1931, 39 million in 1951, 41.5 million in 1961, 47.5 million in 1971 and 55.4 million in 1981. The growing numbers of agricultural labour and their proportion to the total work force is depicted in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number (in Million)</th>
<th>Proportion to total work force</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>1882</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>1891</td>
<td>18.7</td>
<td>22.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>1901</td>
<td>21.6</td>
<td>18.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>1911</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>20.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>1921</td>
<td>21.6</td>
<td>19.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>1931</td>
<td>33.0</td>
<td>24.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>1951</td>
<td>39.0</td>
<td>19.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>1961</td>
<td>41.5</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>1971</td>
<td>47.5</td>
<td>26.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>1981</td>
<td>55.4</td>
<td>22.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Economic Structure of Indian Agriculture by A.N. Sharma, p. 147.
It is worthwhile to note that the census figures from 1891 to 1971 are not comparable as the classification of agricultural workers was done on a different pattern in censuses upto 1971 than that recorded in later censuses. But the figures do signify the relative magnitude of the changes. The figures in the above table point out that not only the actual number of agricultural labourers has been on the increase over the years, but their representation in the working force has become much more stronger.

Thus the major causes for this phenomenal growth in the number of agricultural labourers may be attributed to the growth in population, particularly in rural areas, decline of cottage industries and village handicrafts, eviction of small farmers and tenants from land, transfer of land facilities by the land laws resulting in subdivision and fragmentation, low wages and uncertainty in the employment of agriculture, increase in indebtedness and poverty, lack of non-farm employment opportunities etc.

After visualising the growing rate of agricultural labour population in India as a whole, it is necessary at this juncture to see presently how agricultural labourers are scattered all over the states of India.
Agricultural labour as a separate class can be attributed to the beginning of the 20th century. Although women shared equal responsibility in all the agricultural operations along with men, from the time when the agriculture came to be recognised as a separate industry to be depended upon, they could not be recognised as a distinct class. The reasons for this being many, the important one is, the then prevailing customs and practices against women in the traditional India.

In the later period India experienced a sudden transformation which compelled majority of non-working rural women of India to join the rural working class. Even in one generation a holding of 100 acres of land gets divided into several holdings depending on the inheriters in the family. The district gazetteers were evidence to the fact that several rich cultivating families have been reduced to petty landholders and landless labourers in the course of second or third generation. It is not the division alone, but the indebtedness caused by the division, lower holdings and many a times litigation has been responsible in reducing a landowner to the status of a landless labourer. The absence of home industries and means of self-employment and objective poverty compelled the female folk to break the barriers of tradition and join the labour force.
### DISTRIBUTION OF AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS IN DIFFERENT STATES OF INDIA - 1981

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State/Union territory</th>
<th>Total main workers</th>
<th>Percentage of male agrl. labour to total main workers</th>
<th>Percentage of female agrl. labour to total main workers</th>
<th>Percentage of SC, ST agrl. labour to total labour</th>
<th>Percentage of main workers to total labour</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INDIA</td>
<td>222516576</td>
<td>19.56</td>
<td>46.18</td>
<td>24.94</td>
<td>45.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AP</td>
<td>22622101</td>
<td>26.51</td>
<td>59.09</td>
<td>36.79</td>
<td>41.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bihar</td>
<td>20758326</td>
<td>30.65</td>
<td>63.35</td>
<td>35.50</td>
<td>41.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gujarat</td>
<td>10984042</td>
<td>17.59</td>
<td>48.08</td>
<td>22.66</td>
<td>44.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haryana</td>
<td>3663704</td>
<td>15.62</td>
<td>22.00</td>
<td>16.11</td>
<td>61.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H.P.</td>
<td>1471025</td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>1.71</td>
<td>2.72</td>
<td>51.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jammu &amp; Kashmir</td>
<td>1818571</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>2.19</td>
<td>3.49</td>
<td>22.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karnataka</td>
<td>12850480</td>
<td>19.01</td>
<td>49.72</td>
<td>26.78</td>
<td>37.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kerala</td>
<td>6791175</td>
<td>23.32</td>
<td>43.35</td>
<td>20.23</td>
<td>31.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madhya Pradesh</td>
<td>20041374</td>
<td>17.81</td>
<td>40.61</td>
<td>24.24</td>
<td>59.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maharashtra</td>
<td>24101793</td>
<td>18.51</td>
<td>45.61</td>
<td>26.43</td>
<td>32.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manipur</td>
<td>573339</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>10.91</td>
<td>4.99</td>
<td>15.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meghalaya</td>
<td>580220</td>
<td>9.42</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>9.98</td>
<td>81.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nagaland</td>
<td>869321</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>54.24</td>
<td>27.76</td>
<td>32.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orissa</td>
<td>8635285</td>
<td>22.65</td>
<td>25.29</td>
<td>22.17</td>
<td>63.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punjab</td>
<td>492775</td>
<td>22.05</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rajasthan</td>
<td>10442288</td>
<td>5.89</td>
<td>15.67</td>
<td>7.32</td>
<td>71.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sikkim</td>
<td>1477443</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>59.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamilnadu</td>
<td>19026293</td>
<td>23.24</td>
<td>53.43</td>
<td>31.73</td>
<td>21.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.P.</td>
<td>32996754</td>
<td>14.16</td>
<td>38.23</td>
<td>15.98</td>
<td>43.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Bengal</td>
<td>15424431</td>
<td>23.69</td>
<td>39.43</td>
<td>25.23</td>
<td>50.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tripura</td>
<td>608589</td>
<td>22.62</td>
<td>32.07</td>
<td>24.00</td>
<td>54.83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census 1981 Series I, Part II B(1) and PIII A, II, Primary Census abstract; General population.
It is crystal clear from the table 1.2 that the existence of agricultural labourers is not the special feature of only few states in India, but it is common to all the states and in three fourths of the states agricultural labour constitutes above 20 per cent of the total working force. It is also worth noting that the proportion of agricultural labour to the total work force is maximum in Andhra Pradesh which is 36.79 per cent. The next state is Bihar where the proportion of agricultural labour to the total working force is 35 per cent. In Nagaland 33.52 per cent of agricultural labourers is constituted by scheduled castes and scheduled tribe workers. In Andhra Pradesh 41.08 per cent of the total agricultural labourers consist of scheduled caste and scheduled tribe people. In 60 per cent of the states on the whole more than 50 per cent of agricultural labourers belong to scheduled caste and scheduled tribe population. It is seen that all the states that are industrially developed are experiencing lesser proportions of agricultural labour. However the rapid growth of agricultural labour in some states has wide repercussions on living conditions and farm wages in rural India.

Emergence of Women Agricultural Labour:

From times immemorial women have been playing a pivotal role in Indian agriculture. The recognition of women agri-
The traditional village community in India consisted of the cultivators, artisans and those performing menial services. In each of these women played a distinctive and accepted role in the process of earning a livelihood for the family, putting in sometimes more, sometimes less but often an equal amount of labour as men, in both production and marketing products of agriculture and handicrafts and thus contributed their share to the economy. But with the disappearance of such industries in the present times, they have been forced to depend completely on agriculture for their maintenance. This is also one of the factors that has led the Indian rural women to accept agricultural labour resulting in overcrowding in agriculture which is unable to provide them even with the basic necessities of life. The following table is given to show how the female agricultural labour population has been increasing decade after decade.

A casual observer of the table 1.1 is likely to remark that the proportion of female agricultural workers to total work force has registered a decline of about 5.4 per cent between 1971 and 1981. To say that it is a healthy sign or a redeeming feature, would be far from correct. The criteria adopted for defining the category of agricultural labourers and cultivators has been different in different census.
TABLE - 1.3

GROWTH OF FEMALE AGRICULTURAL LABOUR DURING THE LAST THREE

DECADES IN INDIA (as % to total work force)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl.</th>
<th>Female agricultural labour</th>
<th>1961</th>
<th>1971</th>
<th>1981 acc to definition of 1971</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Female labour</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td>55.0</td>
<td>49.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Male labour</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>25.8</td>
<td>24.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Total labour</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>31.4</td>
<td>30.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census of India 1981 and "estimated increase, if the definition of 1971 census is adopted for our agricultural labour.

While in 1961 any one cultivating a little land was considered a cultivator, the 1971 census listed only those as cultivators whose main occupation was cultivation. Thus as pointed by Panji, the 1981 census over estimated the category of cultivators.

In 1981 a person who worked in another person's land for wages in cash, kind or share of crop was regarded as agricultural labourer. Such a person had neither the risk of cultivation nor any right of lease or contract on land on
which he worked. The definition of agricultural labourer used in 1981 was exactly similar to that used in 1961, which explains how the 1981 census underestimated the category of agricultural labourers. However, the percentage of female agricultural labour to total working population increased from 25.6 in 1961 to 49.6 in 1981 holds out an unmistakable proof to the mounting number of female agricultural labourers.

If the definition of 1971 census is adopted in 1981, the percentage of female agricultural labour would increase from 49.6 per cent to 71.3 per cent indicating that if the same definition is adopted in all the censuses the increasing number of agricultural labourers can be easily seen. It is also worth noting that female agricultural labour population is increasing by more than one and half times from decade to decade while the increase in the percentage of their male counterparts is at much lesser rate within the same period.

Apart from that, 1981 census has compiled information on marginal workers among whom are included most of the under-employed, whose number is reckoned at 27.06 million i.e., 6.69 million males and 20.37 million females, against 200 million main workers. The bulk of these marginal workers i.e., 23.55 million of them live in rural areas. Here too, female marginal workers outnumber males. Thus the rural working force
mainly consists of agricultural labourers half of which is constituted by women agricultural labourers. The 1901 census also declares that 28 per cent of the total number of women workers are engaged as cultivators and 46 per cent as agricultural labourers indicating that 74 per cent of the total women work force is constituted by cultivators and agricultural labourers.

According to various rounds of the National sample survey, unaided family workers in rural India constitute between 41 to 49 per cent female labour force and between 15 to 17 per cent of the male labour force. The national sample survey in its third sub-round (Jan-March 1971) of twenty-fifth round (July-June 1971) found that in rural non-cultivating wage earner households females spend 20.7 per cent of the estimated mandays in a week in household work in contrast to 22 per cent of the same in case of males. In rural small cultivators households females spend 32.7 per cent of the mandays in household work. All this evidence justifies the fact that women agricultural labour plays an immeasurable role in Indian agriculture.

In modern agriculture too, women continue to play major role. There are four factors which affect their participation in modern agriculture. They are industrialisation,
collectivisation, mechanisation of agriculture and rural-urban migration. In all these issues, generally the males are involved. As a result of this, the burden of labour intensive agriculture falls heavily on women. This leads to the emergence of feminisation of agriculture.

Though the feminisation of agriculture has not yet been felt in Indian situation as seen in Poland, Yugoslavia, Romania and other countries, it has to be admitted that a beginning of the trend is seen in India also. Women take up a number of farm operations many a times even without a man's help. Activities like transplanting, weeding, scaring birds, sowing behind the plough, reaping, winnowing, the threshing, storage of seeds and foodgrains etc. are mainly carried out by women.

The various activities performed by the women workers are classified into three kinds: crop activities, livestock activities and crop plus livestock activities as shown below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE - 1.4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>CONTRIBUTION OF WOMEN WORKERS IN THE TOTAL AGRICULTURAL WORK</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SL. No.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above table points out that average family employment in crop activities is 125 days, while that of female workers employment in crop activities is 103 days, constituting 82.31 per cent. Even major share of livestock activities are carried out by women. Clubbing together the crop and livestock activities, women contributes to 73.7 per cent of the total activities. Thus it is clear that women workers take active part in the agricultural activities and contribute to more than 60 per cent of the work.

Despite the significant contribution made by the women labourers, they have been bypassed in the distribution of fruits of development. It is unfortunate that the diversity and importance of economic and social role played by women in rural life has not been duly appreciated by planners and policy makers and the development projects have been directed mainly at men.

The multiple programmes undertaken for the purpose of rural development appear to have an unwitting effect in distributing the benefits unequally, often increase inequality between different sections of the population and between men and women. To be more precise when development introduces or increases inequality within rural society, women, at least
the poorest ones, become doubly underprivileged, first as members of rural poor and then as women. What is funny is that social welfare services are offered to rural women as some sort of compensation for the lack of attention given to them to increase their productivity and earning capacity. But officially they are not recognised as workers. They are not eligible for benefits like loans for farm equipment, fertiliser, dairy cattle etc. which are limited to male farm workers.

Women workers are not compensated properly for their work, and their remuneration generally will be less by 20 to 40 per cent than those of their male counterparts for the same work with equal time spent on it. This should be seen against the fact that the minimum wages act is, in the present circumstances, impossible to be applied to the unorganised sector and the actual wages fell far short of statutory minimum. No welfare and protection rules govern these farm women labourer’s conditions of living. Often they are compelled by the economic pressure to return to their back-breaking tasks in the days of child birth. There are no maternity centres, no creches, no child care services to help them.
Due to social constraints women seek work nearer their homes and are the worst sufferers at times of flood, drought and famine. While the menfolk migrate to cities and other centres of work, women have to sit at home with their children. Unprotected and in economic distress they are exposed to social exploitation by those who dole out petty casual employment to them.

The studies of Indian council of social science research also indicate that while the country has launched various socio-economic development programmes, rural women have not only been left untouched by their benefits but their position has registered an opposite trend.11

When we talk of the status of women in India we have to make a distinction between rural women and urban women. It is generally seen that in our efforts to develop women, this distinction is lost sight of. Eighty per cent of women living in rural India have remained neglected. Indian planners must remember the words of Swamy Vivekananda - "... just as a bird could not fly with its one wing, a nation would not march forward if the women are left behind."12

---

12
Hence there is an urgent need to study the economic and living conditions of the rural women agricultural labour and to analyse and highlight their importance in the economic development with a view to awaken the planners and economists towards the urgent need for a separate plan for women agricultural labour within the overall plan frame, keeping in view the special needs and problems of the teeming silent millions of female agricultural labour folk.

A Review of Studies on Women Workers:

Recent years have witnessed a plethora of literature on women's studies. Studies on women first appeared in the developed countries when the mass scale of employment of women in the labour market became a phenomenon to be reckoned with. These studies can be divided into three categories.

In the first category are studies which deal with the women's role as a worker, their motivation to work and the role-strain and marital discards that inevitably resulted in the departure from women's traditional roles. These studies also discuss the problem of inequalities among the sexes.

In the second category fall studies about the emergence of both militant and non-militant feminist movements in these countries. Lastly there are those studies that emphasize the positive elements in the traditional pattern of division of labour in the family and society and advocate the
maintenance of the status quo.

In the developing countries the women studies are generally confined to the position of women in society and the problems of working women and their socio-economic status. Obviously because the socio-cultural context in the developed and developing countries has a wide difference, we have confined ourselves to the review of those studies which mainly deal with the socio-economic problems and the social status of women in general and working women in particular.

In India studies concerning women's problems cover four areas of research and can be accordingly classified. In the first group are studies that deal with the position of women in society in general. Such studies began to appear first during the fifth decade of this century with the publication of the report on "the role of women in Planned economy" by the National Planning Committee in 1947. The interest in this area of research has been maintained ever since. Most of these studies draw a historical sketch of the position of women in the Indian society through the ages and point out the main trends of change. Some of such studies are Altzker 1956, Wasi 1957 Gandhi 1964, Mahajan Amerjit 1966, F. P. Subramanyam 1970, Devaki Jain 1975, Mahave R HC 1978,


The second major area of research in the field of women's studies investigates the problems of working women in the society in general. These problems have been studied from various perspectives and at different levels. The studies on women workers are concerned mainly with such aspects as:


2. Studies describing the socio-economic situation of women workers and the exploitative and non-exploitative conditions of work under which these women are compelled to work. Most of these studies lack a clearly defined research focus. However
recent literature on this aspect seems to be aware of these shortcomings and the researchers appear to be making sincere efforts to make up the deficiency in this field (Jain 1980, Abraham 1980, Sundar 1981, Mies 1981).


4. There are studies on female labour participation rates and its correlates which indicate the trends in female labour force participation and the factors accounting for it. The important ones among these are: Chandra 1961, Geigil D.R. 1965, Nath 1968; Mukharjee & Mehta, 1975, Sanahu & Jasi 1977, Patel 1979, Paniker 1979 and Singh 1980;

5. Studies emphasizing the problematic aspect of female labour participation: The studies in this group deal mainly with the role-conflict and the problems of marital adjustments among educated working women and show a growing concern for the change in values; studies in this category are Thomas 1961, Kapoor 1970, Promilla Kapoor 1974, Kala Rani 1976 and Mies 1980.

6. There are very few studies dealing purely with the area of economic and social status of women workers. They are Labour Bureau 1953, Deshpande S.R. 1953, Ministry of Employment 1964, Ministry of Labour 1975.

The fourth area of research in the field of women's studies relates to the emergence and development of women agricultural labourers. The studies about the educated working women are abundant while the studies on illiterate women engaged in low prestige occupations like agricultural labour and other similarly situated workers are few and far between. It is this area of research which attracted the particular attention of the members at the National conference on women's studies in 1980 (Masumdar 1981). There are few studies in this area which deal with different aspects. They deal mainly with employment of female labour and its productivity in agriculture (R.P. Singh 1969); female work participation in the three crop regions of India with an inter-temporal study of rural India
(K. Choora 1971); impact of modernisation and irrigation on the economic and social conditions of rural women workers (S.P. Singh 1980; Rajan Vithal 1982). The literature in the area of studies on the socio-economic aspects of women agricultural labour is scanty. Though the study of Raj Mohan Sethi 1982 is completely devoted to female agricultural labour, it purely deals with the sociological aspects of female labour.

Thus the review of literature on agricultural labour in general and women agricultural labour in particular shows that while with the increase in population, the problems of this class of labour have been incessantly increasing, the neglect for them has been growing in equal proportions. Starting with the two Royal Commissions one on agriculture and the other on labour and the two general agricultural labour enquiries, we find none have attempted to focus attention on the specific problems of the women agricultural labour. The Royal Commission has brushed aside the problem of agricultural labour by considering it to be a simple problem of pressure of men on land while the Agricultural labour enquiries have considered it to be merely a problem of employment. Most of the Indian economists have followed the line adopted by the Royal Commissions and paid minimum attention to the question of women agricul labour. Some economists like Sir Atul C
Chetterji deplored this neglect of the Agricultural labour but yet had nothing to say about the problems the women are subjected to as workers in Agriculture.

Gilbert, Keating and Herold Mann and I.V. Lucas who conducted micro studies in Madras, Bombay and Punjab respectively although highlighted the socio-economic problems of this class of labour, had failed to focus light on the problems of women labour.

After Independence the question of agricultural labour has been discussed in several conferences and committees, but none of these conferences and committees have even once thought of this class for women Agricultural labour who constitute nearly 50 per cent of the casual agricultural labour work force. The two labour enquiries revealed that the Agricultural labourers were leading a sub-human existence but they too had simply a quantitative assessment and failed to bring out the qualitative assessment of the condition. These enquiries have highlighted the deteriorating conditions of Agricultural Labour without going into the details of how the deterioration of the physical conditions is resulting in the deterioration of the mind and spirit and the whole texture of the rural socio-economic fabric. Surprising it is that the National Commission on Labour which conducted an impressionistic survey of about 200 villages spread over 46 dis-
districts and brought out a massive report, had not devoted even a single chapter on the plight of the women agricultural labour.

However, the commission offered a number of measures to ameliorate the rural poor which attracted the attention of the Government in the course of the 4th, 5th, 6th and the 7th five-year plans. The impact of these measures is yet to be assessed. The Government has formulated several schemes for the development of the rural area and the rural poor. There is a lot of general criticism about the implementation of these schemes which needs authentic verification. Thus, we rarely come across a micro study concerning the socio-economic problems of women agricultural labour. Taking into consideration the differences—geographical, economic and social—no one has undertaken such a study in the coastal region so far. Obviously therefore, there is an urgent need for the study.

Importance of Micro study:

India is a large country with a geographical area of 1.3 million sq. miles. In such a vast country diversities and regional differences are bound to be great. There are differences within the states, districts and blocks. These
differences are generally associated with the differences in physical features such as the size of a village, changes in living conditions, the availability of communication facilities, administrative setup etc. Disparities of work opportunities, educational facilities, conflicts between social stereotypes and work capacities, social legislation, political representation are but a few major issues which need attention in the area of regional development.

Majority of the Indian districts are basically agricultural in nature and the development of agriculture demands major share in the district's development as a whole. Development of agriculture implies the development of people who depend on agriculture for livelihood.

Women agricultural labourers are the most neglected section of the rural communities in the districts. Traditions still dominate the rural social and economic scene. Ignorance and superstitions continue to be the chief characteristic features of the women agricultural labour in rural districts.

Women workers contribute major share of the development and yet are neglected by the planners; In order to include these women as a component in the mainstream of economic progress, it is essential to know what exactly they do,
where they need help and where they could contribute more than their present share, to the country's development.

Ours is a country of diversities. There can be no single plan which can be effective in solving the socio-economic problems of the country as a whole. Each region and even each district has diverse physical and social situations which need a solution suitable for the region or the district.

Hence there is an urgent need for micro studies at the district, block and even at village level to enquire into the prevalent economic conditions, resources available vis-a-vis the conditions of the inhabitants. Such studies have gained importance in view of the several developmental schemes formulated and launched by the central as well as state governments and their realistic evaluation. This study is an endeavour in this direction focusing its attention to the larger section of the rural working community i.e., the village women worker and her socio-economic conditions. The study is important in the sense that majority of the rural women population constitute the rural work force, if they prosper the rural industries will prosper. In the words of Jawaharlal Nehru "In order to awaken the people it is women who have to be awakened."
Once they are on move, the household moves, the village moves and the community moves."

Objectives of the Study:

Problems of rural women are mainly of two types i.e., economic and social. Economic problems have its origin in the lack of gainful employment opportunities, low and uncertain wages, lack of initiative and entrepreneurial skill and also the age old malady of indebtedness. While the social problems have taken their inception in the low status of agricultural labour, the caste system, exploitation of the poor by rich and illiteracy. It is however largely felt that if the economic problems are effectively tackled, some of the social disabilities will lose their edge.

The present investigation is therefore a study of a few agricultural villages in the district with the object of picturising the living conditions and the problems encountered by the women agricultural labour.

The constitutional protection provided to the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes and the conscious and deliberate policy and planning for the upliftment of the poor and the various schemes like the IRDP, NREP, marginal and small
farmers age agency etc. should have shown a positive impact on the development of the poor regions and upliftment of the poor, economically as well as socially. The programmes of adult education, schools in every village for free education and the crores of rupees spent through the various voluntary agencies should have had positive results. The minimum wage legislation, the employment guarantee schemes introduced by some states should have assured jobs and the minimum subsistence for the needy. It is this hypothesis that prompted the study at micro-level taking district as a sample.

The specific objectives therefore are:

1. To analyse the position of women labour in general and women agricultural labour in particular in the population structure of the district.

2. To study their role as earning members of the family with reference to literacy, family composition, contribution to family income and welfare and finally their status in the family vis-a-vis the rural community.

3. To explore their employment position, nature and the type of work and the problems they face as working women.

4. To find out the wages they earn, the rate of wages in different types of work and the relationship of rural wage rates with the prices of essential commodities prevalent in rural areas.
5. To study the relationship of employment, wages and earnings with the cost of living and to measure the proportion of women labour's contribution in the total family income.

6. To analyse the pattern of their consumption, expenditure and the state of their indebtedness.

7. To examine on the basis of the above their living and working conditions, economic and social status and the state of their general well-being.

8. To highlight the impact of all modern developmental schemes on various problems of women agricultural labour.

9. And finally to offer valuable conclusions and suggestions.

Scope of the study:

The study is restricted to 720 women agricultural workers belonging to 48 villages spread over 46 mandals of 3 regions viz dry, wet and mixed, of the coastal district ie Nellore, situated on the southern-east part of Andhra Pradesh. It is a survey as well as an enquiry into the economic conditions of these workers and their general living.

Method of study:

Nellore district is divided into three revenue divisions and 15 Panchayat Samithis (blocks) for taking up deve-
lomental activities. Unfortunately the different blocks are not countermirius in their boundaries except in the case of very few. The level of development, is also not the same among these 15 blocks and their physical characteristics and resource potentialities are not homogenous. This naturally calls for different approaches and strategies to be adopted in different areas of the district. Therefore all the 46 mandals of the district have been grouped into three different regions vis., dry, wet and mixed regions. The grouping of the mandals into different regions has been done on the basis of some homogenous characteristics existed within the regions. This is shown in the Table 1.5.

The various mandals that fall in each region along with the important crops grown are shown in the Table 1.6. Each region is explained with its chief characteristic features to show the differences in their physical, demographical and social and economic features.

I. Dry Region of Nellore District:

The mandals of Mayagiri, Seetharampuram, Juttalur, Marrpadu, Varikunta-adu, Visamur, Kondapuram, Kaligir, Podalkur, Chejarla, Rapur, Saidapuram and Kaluvaya fall into
### TABLE 1.5

**NELLORE DISTRICT - SOME INDICATIONS OF DEVELOPMENT IN DIFFERENT REGIONS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>State value</th>
<th>District value</th>
<th>Regional value Dry</th>
<th>Regional value Wet</th>
<th>Regional value Mixed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Density population</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>342</td>
<td>252</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Percentage of urban population to rural population</td>
<td>23.25</td>
<td>20.79</td>
<td>N.A</td>
<td>43.41</td>
<td>56.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Percentage of literacy to total population</td>
<td>20.72</td>
<td>31.89</td>
<td>27.62</td>
<td>34.2</td>
<td>55.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Percentage of scheduled caste population to total population</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Percentage of scheduled tribe population to total population</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Percentage of agricultural workers to total workers</td>
<td>69.8</td>
<td>71.5</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Percentage of female agricultural workers to total agricultural workers</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>49.28</td>
<td>47.09</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Percentage of male agricultural workers to total agricultural workers</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>50.7</td>
<td>52.91</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Percentage of agricultural workers to total workforce</td>
<td>36.68</td>
<td>44.41</td>
<td>34.9</td>
<td>53.82</td>
<td>88.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Per cent of net area sown to geographical area</td>
<td>80.2</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>24.84</td>
<td>35.12</td>
<td>53.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Per cent of net area irrigated to net area sown</td>
<td>32.0</td>
<td>69.3</td>
<td>42.31</td>
<td>96.44</td>
<td>65.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Per cent net area sown to total cultivable area</td>
<td>70.8</td>
<td>74.20</td>
<td>75.72</td>
<td>91.70</td>
<td>71.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>Region</td>
<td>Mandals</td>
<td>No. of % mandals total to crops grown</td>
<td>Important crops grown</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Dry Region: Udayagiri, Satharampuram, Bttalas,</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>28.26</td>
<td>Rice, Ragi, Jowar, Thil, Sugarcane, Mango, Cotton, Tobacco</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Harripedu, Varikuntapadu, Vinjanur, Kondapuram,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Cacao, Castor oil etc. (Dry farming)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kalgiri, Pedalur, Chejarla, Rapur Saijam</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>puram, Kaluvaya</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Wet Region: Kour, Mallore, Allur, Koivalur,</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>26.09</td>
<td>Rice, Groundnut, Tobacco, Green chilli, Jowar, Green</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vidavalur, Buchireddipalem, Sangham, Ogaarathi,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>gramadali, Bananas, cashew etc.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Indukurpet, Tottapalligudur, Venkatachelam</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&amp; Muttukur</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Mixed Region: Kaveli, Jaladanti, Begole,</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>45.65</td>
<td>Rice, Jowar, Ragi, Tob, Chillies etc (Dry Farming)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Atmekur, Anantasagaram, Anasamudirampet,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gudur, Manubole, Chillakur, Kota, Vakadu,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chittemur, Neidupet, Sulluroset, Pellekur,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dakkili Ogili, Venkatagiri, Poleyamme, Tada,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Oravariestran</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
dry region of the district. On the whole a total of 11 mandals together forming 28.26 per cent form the dry region.

The chief characteristics of the region are:

1. It is a chronically drought affected area.
2. Density of population is the least among all the three regions in the district i.e., 100 per Sq.Km.
3. The percentage of cultivable area to the total geographical area of the region is the minimum in comparison with the other regions i.e., 33 per cent.
4. Percentage of cash cropped area to the total cropped area is only 23.7 per cent.
5. Percentage of irrigated area to the total cropped area is least in the region i.e., 45 per cent.
6. The main sources of irrigation in this region are tanks and dug wells only, which does not give assured supply of water.
7. The region is mainly rainfed and essentially a dry farming area.
8. Percentage of literacy of this region is 27.62 which is low to that of the district and the state literacy rate. This calls for more emphasis on providing educational facilities in the region.
9. Percentage of the irrigated area of the region to the district total is only 12.3 per cent.
10. The percentage of agricultural workers to the total working population is very low in this region. It is as low as 57 per cent which denotes the lack of absorption and sustaining capacity of the agricultural sector of the region.

11. Percentage of agricultural pumpsets for 1000 hectares of cropped area in this is only 35, which shows that the main sources of irrigation are not either wells or filter points only minor irrigation tanks.

12. The percentage of milch animals to bovine population is only 10, which means that proper animal husbandry facilities are lacking and sufficient importance is not given to dairying in the zone.

13. Forests as percentage of total geographical area is 25.89 which is the highest in the district. However, the forests available are mainly shrub type and are useful for grazing purposes and social forestry. This gives the scope for sheep dairies, and calf rearing units in the region.

14. Availability of medical facilities is very low in the region. The number of medical institutions per one lakh population is just 10, which includes the smallest order institutions like health sub-centres and maternity child welfare centres.

The whole account is enough to prove that dry region is the least developed region in the district neither econo-
mically or socially. Though the district is an agricultural district, development of agriculture is poor in the region. It is proved that the potentialities for industrialisation is also nil in the region.

II. Wet Region:

Out of total 46 mandals, 12 mandals come under wet region forming 26.09 per cent. Wet region can also be called as the delta region of the district. 12 mandals that fall in the wet region are Kovur, Allur, Kodavalur, Videvalur, Buchirdipalem, Sengam, Bagadarthi, Nellore, Mandkurpet, Toapalligudur, Venkatachelam and Muttukur. The main characteristic features of the region are:

1. Density of population is highest in the wet region i.e., 342 per sq. km which denotes the urban characteristic of the area.
2. The percentage of cultivable area to the total geographical area is more than other zones.
3. Percentage of gross irrigated area to gross cropped area is the highest in the region i.e., 92.127.
4. Percentage of cash crop area is very limited.
5. This region forms about 40.7 per cent of the total irrigated area of the district.
6. The main source of irrigation in this region is the canal system.

7. Percentage of literacy is highest in this region which exceeds the state as well as the district average.

8. Percentage of Agricultural workers to total workers is more than the district average and state average i.e., 87 per cent.

9. Energisation of agricultural pumps sets is the highest in this region which shows the predominance of filter points i.e., 100.

10. Percentage of milch animals to total bovine livestock population is 25, which is highest in the district.

11. Percentage of household industry workers is about 49 which is above the district average. This comprises of rural artisans, weavers etc.

III. Mixed Region:

This region comprises of 21 mandals forming 45.65 per cent of the total mandals. The names of the mandals are Kavali, Jaladanki, Fogole, Atmakur, Anantesagaram, Annapoorneswaram, Gudur, Manubole, Chillakur, Kota, Vekeda, Chittamus, Naidupet, Sullurpet, Pellakur, Ojili, Venkatagiri, Delayapalem, Ockilli.
1. This region is also a drought affected area.

2. Density of population of this region is about 252 which is less than that of wet region only, which indicates the relative urbanisation of the different areas in the region.

3. The percentage of irrigated area to gross cropped area is 131 which is only next to wet region.

4. Percentage of net cropped area to total cultivable area sown is about 143.81.

5. Total irrigated area of this region forms about 49 per cent of the entire district.

6. The main sources of irrigation of this region are filter points, minor irrigation tanks and to a small extent wells and canal system.

7. Percentage of agricultural workers to total working population is 70 indicating the inability of agricultural sector to absorb more than what is being at present.

8. Percentage of literacy of this region is 55.6 which is the highest in the district average as well as state average.

9. The number of agricultural pumpsets per 1000 hectares of cropped area is 72 which shows the need to explore and exploit ground water potential and subsequent energisation.

10. The percentage of household worker to total workers is 9.2 which is above the district average and state average. This shows the availability of
artisan category, who are primarily weavers in this region.

11. The number of banks per every lakh of rural population is 6.6 which is higher to state and district average.

12. The percentage of forest area is 35.2 that of total geographical area, which shows the scope for forest based small enterprises and other animal husbandry schemes like sheep and goat rearing and cattle breeding.

Thus it is seen that all the three regions are different in physical and demographic features.

The study is based on the secondary and primary data. The secondary data has been drawn from the census reports, district census records, the land records and cropping records. Other information regarding planning and development, finance etc. has been obtained from the various official records and reports including the annual action plans and five year plans.

For collection of primary data the stratified random sampling method is adopted. The total number of villages in the district have been distributed to all the three regions on the basis of physical and geographical homogeneity. From each region 4 per cent of the villages are selected on random
sampling basis keeping in view that as far as possible no
manial remains unrepresented. The method of selection of
the sample is shown in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S1.</th>
<th>Name of the No. region</th>
<th>Total No. of villages</th>
<th>Percentage of sample</th>
<th>Villages investigated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Dry Region</td>
<td>321</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Wet Region</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Mixed Region</td>
<td>675</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>1207</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thus a total of 48 villages have been selected for
the survey. In each of the selected village a list of women
agricultural labourers was drawn with the help of the records
maintained by the Village Development Officer and from the
list so drawn 15 women agricultural labourers were selected
in each village at random for a detailed enquiry.
For the purpose of enquiry detailed schedules were prepared. The schedules were filled in by the scholar herself spending about 4 months in the area of study.

The results of the data were compiled, tabulated and got verified by interviews of the VDO, DRDA authorities, managers of RRB's and other revenue officials during the second visit of the study area.

**Limitations of the study:**

15 women workers selected on random sampling, may not form the same percentage considering the size of population and size of women agricultural labour population of the respective villages. This limitation of the study could have been overcome by taking a different sample percentage from each selected village but the financial as well as time constraint on the part of the individual researcher made it difficult.