CHAPTER 7

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

7.1 INTRODUCTION

An effort has been made to study the sociological aspects of gender participation in irrigation water management in the Lower Bhavani Project of Tamil Nadu State, India. The growing emphasis on the users participation in irrigation management transfer necessitated the identification and involvement of all the stakeholders. But most of the intervention programmes on irrigation management transfer do not necessarily lead to greater participation and empowerment of all stakeholders. Eventually, certain group remains grossly neglected due to intra-community power differences and social forces. While there may be many ways for identifying groups those are frequently marginalized, gender differences in power is a recurring pattern. Correspondingly, the literatures on irrigation management and on farmers participation in Water Users' Association have with a few exceptions, been essentially gender blind. The most common gender stereotype that has guided and shaped many irrigation policies, planning and interventions is that women are primarily housewives and mothers while men are farmers and irrigators. However, there are ample evidences showing that women use water at their different capacities as main cultivators or as co-farmers working along with their husbands. Overlooking women, as farmers or irrigators or water users will lead to faulty understanding of the determinants of the performance of irrigation system.
In view of the above facts, the general objective of the study was to identify the gender issues in irrigation water management with specific reference to gender participation in WUA. Though it had been estimated that women are responsible for more than half of the food produced, still there is a lack of research on specific roles and tasks played by women in irrigated agriculture. For any effective irrigation intervention, it is imperative that the variation in gendered local production arrangement is understood. Hence, the study attempted to understand the gender of farm decision makers and their participatory role in irrigated agriculture as one of its specific objectives. Women as a farm decision makers need access to water, as men need access to water as farm decision makers. So as a second objective, the study attempted to assess the problems encountered by women and men in access to irrigation water. In order to strengthen access to water at farm level, it is essential to have equal representation at WUA level. Hence, the study examined the levels of gender participation in WUA, which was the third specific objective of the study. It is clear from the available literatures that women’s participation in WUA has received considerable rhetoric, but there has been less careful attention paid to identify the actual barriers women face and the factors that prevent women and men from participating in WUA, which intended to be the fourth objective of the study.

The study was confined to the Lower Bhavani Project command located in the Erode district of afore mentioned State. The LBP command has a well-defined three-tier WUA structure for Participatory Irrigation Management. The Structure consists of 44 Farmers’ Councils at the lower level, 6 Distributory Committees at the intermediary level and a Federation at the project level. Out of the 44 Farmers’ Councils, one Council i.e. M12 FC has been selected for the study. The delineated M12 FC consists of two direct irrigation sluices, one minor distributory and one major distributory named as Poondurai Distributory, altogether irrigating 1762.72 ha of command area in five villages. Since the total number of beneficiaries from all the five villages is not of manageable size (1774, both women 129 and men 1645), a stratified sampling technique was employed for sample selection. Thus, 300 samples consisting
of both 78 women and 222 men pattaholders (land owners) were selected. Keeping in view the importance and significance of the study, both quantitative and qualitative methods were employed for data collection. An interview schedule consisting of six parts were designed and administered to the respondents under various reach and category. Focus group discussions were conducted to obtain qualitative information from various categories of farmers. Besides this, secondary data were also collected for supportive and supplemental information. Later the data collected were tabulated and analysed using the package SPSS, for statistical analysis, which in fact proved to be a cumbersome exercise. Further multiple regression analysis and factor analysis formed another important aspect of the study.

Based on data analysis the profile augments the fact that of the total respondents, 26.0% are women pattaholders and irrespective of gender majority of the farmers belong to marginal category. Though agriculture is considered as the primary occupation and main source of income, the occupation and occupational status of the respondents reveal that their actual performance in the field is reduced from contribution of labour to supervisory role. The land use and cropping pattern highlight that the magnitude of women cultivators prevalent in the study area indicates the need for special efforts to be taken by irrigation agencies to mainstream women in WUA and in management transfer process.

Majority of the decisions regarding agricultural activities are taken jointly along with their husbands who enjoy independent and joint decision making power, whereas women’s independent decision making seem to be very low. In spite of having well defined organizational setup and well delineated responsibilities at different levels, it is not performing well in gender equality in irrigation management. It was found that irrespective of category, none of the women landholding farmers are given representation in Farmers’ Council reflecting inequality of gender composition in membership.
7.2 CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results presented in the previous chapters, the following conclusions have been enumerated.

(i) Adoption of nuclear type of family had led to fall in contribution of family labour within the household and paved way for contract labour.

(ii) Predominance of male headship among women pattaholders households is one of the determining factors of male dominance.

(iii) Though majority of the respondents are homogeneous by caste, heterogeneity prevails in class discrimination leading to social constraint, which inhibits their participation in WUA activities.

(iv) The land use pattern in the study area disapproves the gender role ideology that men landowners are primary cultivators and women are dependents.

(v) The common pattern of production that women are primarily responsible for food or subsistence crops, while men grow cash crops do not testify in the study area as a section of women respondents also do cash crop cultivations.

(vi) Irrespective of gender, middle reach farmers resort to water intensive annual cash crop cultivation even during lean period. This practice is due to hejmans (feudal lords) contact in government bureaucracy is used as an asset by influencing officials coupled with political and economic power to direct subsidies and water to specific persons and area.

(vii) The locally prevailing production relation is the most important determinant of women's participation in agricultural activities. Due to the prevalence of contract labour system in the study region only negligible proportion of women contribute labour in various categories of agricultural activities while majority of women play either supervisory or managerial role.

(viii) In spite of women being landowners, they have little access to make major agricultural decisions. Decision making is still dominantly patriarchal,
controlled by husband and male elderly members in the family (who incidentally do not work in the fields).

(ix) The findings show that though both women and men farmers grow same crop (paddy) and are principally entitled to receive equal quantity of water proportional to their size of land holding, women find it difficult to claim and receive the amount of water they are entitled for.

(x) In addition to the prevailing social, cultural pressure and geographical position of the land, adequacy of water supply is greatly affected by gender.

(xi) The unique rule for membership, i.e. stipulating one representative for hundred acres of command, directly or indirectly excludes women and marginal men farmers from Water Users’ Association. However, there are one or two marginal farmers at Farmers’ Council level.

(xii) In addition to membership criteria in general, the socio cultural barriers like lower caste farmers can not participate in WUA, women should abide by men’s decisions and social stigma forms a formidable obstacle in integrating women in Farmers’ Council.

(xiii) In particular organizational barriers like that place of meeting is far off, timings of meetings are inconvenient and clashes with domestic and agricultural roles, participation of both husband and wife at a time would affect their domestic and economic activities are perceived as major hindrance towards their participation in WUA activities.

(xiv) The persistent ideological dichotomy that women’s place is in the field while men’s place is in public forums constitute a significant barrier in practice to incorporate women as members in WUA.

7.3 SCOPE FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Irrigated agriculture is an important area towards food production. India faced a high rate of population growth in the recent past and hence forced to look for
ways and means by which the food production can be increased to meet the growing requirement. Consequently, Participatory Irrigation Management involving all water users emerged as an important area towards increasing the production. Realising its importance, the main objective of the present study was set to identify gender issues in Irrigation Water Management with specific reference to their participation in Water Users’ Association. It is a sociological study attempted through the data collection by a pre-tested schedule. The study was specifically focused on women and marginal men farmers for their participation and hurdles faced by them. If they are identified, it would help to evolve effective strategies in mainstreaming women and men farmers in irrigation management transfer.

The present study has been carried out in a single distributary of the Lower Bhavani Project command in Tamil Nadu. It is needless to say that the above objective might have been effectively achieved if the study was extended over the entire command area or over few more commands. But the data collection process turned out to be a very cumbersome and time-consuming process. Extending the study over the entire command area or over more commands would surely require a project team involving several investigators. As a single investigator, it was possible only to cover the single distributary within the time period available for the investigation. However, the results obtained here are found to be encouraging and very useful in understanding the barriers towards gender participation in irrigation water management.

In the light of the results of the present study, it is suggested that the investigations can be extended over the entire Lower Bhavani Project command. Also, it can be extended to other irrigation commands as well. Such a study might evolve a complete strategy towards improved gender equality in irrigation water management and hence increased food production.