CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The widespread awareness of the involvement of women in irrigated agriculture in recent years has made researchers inquisitive about the degrees of gender participation under diverse socio-cultural and economic condition, particularly those arising from region, crops, caste and class in India. In agriculture the gender division of labour is clear cut, and the returns from labour are discriminative. The Literature available on farm women also says that there is a high degree of involvement of women in irrigated agriculture for comparatively less wages than men. And it is seen that the participation of men and women is at differential levels in certain districts. With the objective of understanding whether the existing socio-economic conditions foster variations in the position of men and women labourers and cultivators in these districts which are distinct from other districts, six villages were selected and studied.

6.2 SUMMARY OF WORK DONE

As per the Census report, in Tamil Nadu, three districts, namely South Arcot, Nilgiris and Kanyakumari show striking differences in the levels of participation. Nilgiris differentiates itself with the lowest participatory levels, of both men and women in agriculture but comparatively higher participation
by women. Kanyakumari shows very low participation by women in agricultural labour when compared with male agricultural labourers. And the South Arcot district, on the other hand, shows a very sharp distinction with the highest female participation in agricultural operations. These findings gave rise to the research question. "What are the reasons for the differential levels of participation (greater/lesser participation) of men and women in the three districts?"

To identify the reasons for the differential gender participation and to estimate the extent of participation of men and women the following objectives were formulated. The objectives attempted 1. to analyse the socio-economic and socio-cultural position of men and women who have greater/lesser participation in irrigated agriculture. 2. to examine the existing gender division of labour in irrigated agriculture, and 3. to highlight the impact of the nature and extent of the use of agricultural technology on the greater or lesser gender participation in irrigated agriculture.

From each of the three districts, with the aid of remote sensing satellite imagery (which was superimposed on the topo-sheet) two places were marked based on intensity of cultivation. The places thus marked were the villages Helical and Arsedin in Conoor taluk of the Nilgiris district, Irumpili and Patharai in Kalkulam taluk of Kanyakumari and Kiloor and Pacharapalayam in Panruti taluk, of South Arcot district.

The villages chosen were based on purposive sample method and the samples advocated were at stratified random. Samples from 10 per cent of the total number of households of each village were collected. The samples were
categorized as below. Landless < 0.2 ha, Marginal holdings < 1.0 ha and the Small land holdings 1.0 - 2.0 ha.

The techniques used to collect data were 1. Pilot Survey on the samples of the three districts and 2. Questionnaire and Observation techniques on the pre-tested samples.

6.3 SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS

Then, for the analysis of data, cross-tabulation was done for all the three districts maintaining the size of landholding as the basis of classification. In other words each response was analyzed for the three districts keeping landholding as control factor. Then the proportion of involvement of men and women for each category was derived. The analysis included the qualitative data collected through observation and the quantitative data specifically statistical with the use of graphs and tables.

From the analysis it is seen that in most cases the land holding type decides the employment pattern in the rural areas. The economic condition is an important factor that compels men and women to take up certain tasks in agriculture. The jobs that landless labourers take up are weeding, harvesting and transplanting. The Nilgiris district has immense labour supply and the wage labourers are regarded as industrial labourers. It is because quite a number of large farms owned by affluent farmers give little chance for others to own land. It is noticed that in this district, there is a comparatively higher participation by women labourers than by men. Landlessness and female labour requirement are the reasons for the higher participation by women. In the erstwhile South Arcot district where the marginal farms are many, there are farmers who work both as
cultivators and as labourers. The participation by women is marked and intensive. Kanyakumari reports the highest number of small farms. The tasks performed by the labouring women in agriculture is much less pronounced for the reason that as far as on-farm activities are concerned, the male contract or casual labourers dominate and are second only to the landowning men and women.

The existence of sizeable number of Scheduled Caste people, who are either the landless or marginal farmers in all the three districts, more especially in Nilgiris and South Arcot, is the reason for their highest labour participation in agriculture. This is true in the case of women whose returns from labour are unequal and less, and whose work hours are, therefore, longer.

In the sample villages of all the three districts the returns for the landless women are less when compared to those of the male labourers. In Kanyakumari district the male labourers receive much better wages than the labourers of other districts. This encourages a good contribution of men towards the family expenditure and consequently restricts the participation of women.

The income of the marginal farmers is close to that of the landless labourers. This forces them to higher themselves out as labourers or take up other activities from which they could earn extra money. In this regard, in Kanyakumari the marginal farmers go for other jobs and in the sample villages of South Arcot the marginal farm women work either as hired labourers or exchange labourers. Thus, the extra work women do as hired labourers in South Arcot increases their participation to the highest level.
The labour requirement arising from the above conditions have altered the composition of the total labour participation. In South Arcot district the explicit absence of women in other activities is the reason for their highest labour contribution for agriculture, but for men it is otherwise. It is evident that the involvement of farmwomen of Kanyakumari district is distinctively more in other activities.

The marginal farm women who participate more in labour tend to know more about the details of produce than the small farm women who do not participate much in South Arcot district. The awareness among the marginal farm women boosts their participation in agriculture. At the same time both marginal farm and small farm women in Kanyakumari show a better awareness of the details of produce and therefore enjoy a better status in the household. This has increased the participation of the landholding women more than that of landless women in agriculture. Labour exchange is done in different degrees more in terms of days worked. The marginal farmwomen both from South Arcot and Nilgiris districts have a crucial part to play which also affects the total labour participation among women. The patterns of ownership and control over resources are strictly patriarchal in the sample villages of all the three districts.

The economic contribution of men to the household expenditure represents the responsibility of men in household progress and enhances the economic status of their women. The greater household contribution of the husband restricts women from going out for work in Kanyakumari district. The factor that encourages most of the women from Nilgiris and South Arcot districts to involve themselves intensively in agriculture is the nil or less contribution of their men.
The socio-economic status of the farmwomen enjoyed by Kanyakumari district enhances their extensive participation in decision-making. In the labour-intensive South Arcot and Nilgiris districts, the complex work pattern discourages farmwomen from being involved in decision-making. But men occupy the principal position in making decisions. Thus the restriction in decision making due to their poor knowledge has encouraged the participation of women as labourers in agriculture. Yadav, (1982) observes a similar condition in rural Haryana, that the more complex the farm operation, the lesser was the participation of women in decision making due to their poor knowledge about new practices.

The literacy level among women in small and marginal farms needs emphasis for it is the reason for their higher economic status in Kanyakumari district. On the contrary, the literacy rate of women in other districts forces them into intense labour without alternative.

The days worked in agriculture show that there is a high participation of women from marginal farms in South Arcot and small farm households in Kanyakumari districts. This affects the labour days of the landless labourers and their employment. One of the striking facts about South Arcot district is that the marginal farm women apart from working in their own farms, work as labourers in other farms either as hired labour or as exchange labour. This increases the number of work days for them but decreases the labour days of the landless labourers. This has given rise to unemployment among the landless women. On the other hand, men work for relatively fewer number of days than women in all places except in Kanyakumari.
In Nilgiris the participation of landless labourers is more and the agricultural operations women involve themselves in are intensive. In South Arcot district the participation of marginal and landless labourers is greater and intensive. In Kanyakumari the participation of men labourers is more and intensive, but among the landholding in three specific operations women are found more. The number of times the weeding operation is taken up by women increases the labour intensity for women. This accounts for the higher participation of women in the sample villages of South Arcot district.

The next most important activity which employs more number of women is animal husbandry. The outstanding participation in animal husbandry also accounts for the differential labour participation. Among the three districts it is in South Arcot the highest number of marginal farm women engage themselves in animal husbandry.

In Irrigation the monopoly of men in all activities is obvious. The participation of farm women is mostly only supportive in nature. Apart from joint operations in South Arcot district women irrigate fields on their own. This shows their greater involvement in irrigated agriculture than the women of other districts. Except the labour saving technology such as rice mill, that replaces the women in processing the yield, other technologies such as tractor, application of pesticide and fertilizer do not affect the participation of women.

6.4 CONCLUSIONS

As far as the nature of participation is concerned the landless women work as labourers and the farm owners work either as labourers or as cultivators in the three districts, namely South Arcot, Kanyakumari and Nilgiris. The
reasons for a higher participation by women than by men in Nilgiris district are landlessness and female labour requirement in tea plantations. In South Arcot district the highest number of marginal farm women work as labourers and exchange labour and their labour in commercial crops is the reason for the higher participation of women than men. Kanyakumari district has more number of small farm women who do not have to work in others’ lands due to their literacy and better economic status.

Subsequently the gender division of labour affects participation of men and women in the three districts.

1. It differs from place to place. For example what is done only by men (harvest) in Kanyakumari district is done either exclusively by women or done jointly by men and women in other districts.

2. The crops such as plantation and commercial crop (ground nut) are labour intensive and need the labour of women for it is cheaper and better than that of men.

3. Though the contribution of women is marked in other allied agricultural activities in Kanyakumari it is not accounted for and remains invisible.

4. Invariably irrigation is the monopoly of men. It is encouraging to note that a few women irrigate fields independently without any assistance and many are involved in joint operations with men.

The use of technology also at varied levels augment the differential gender participation in irrigated agriculture. Except tractor, rice mill, pump set, pesticides and fertilizers, no other technology is used in all the three districts. Even the existing technology has replaced women. The labour saving
technology such as rice mill has by and large affected the participation of women though does not have much effect on men in irrigated agriculture.

6.5 FURTHER SCOPE OF THE STUDY

To meet the growing challenge of population growth of India, and the increasing number of mouths to be fed, the agricultural production has to be increased. This needs planning that reaches the lower levels and triggers development from local levels to the region, state, and the nation. This dream can be realised only when the potential of the labourers, especially women, who are fifty percent of the population, is tapped. This micro-level study may act as a preamble for the planners and policy makers to have an understanding of the nature and extent of participation of men and women in the three districts in irrigated agriculture in Tamil Nadu. Though the social conditions vary from place to place, region to region and country to country and further differ with crop sown, socio-economic and cultural factors, it is a universal fact that status of men and women in agriculture is different. This study can be used elsewhere to see the underlying differences between men and women in agricultural operations.