CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The understanding of the term 'gender' requires the appreciation of the difference it has from sex. Sex refers to one of the two categories of the biologically observable human body, female and male. Gender, on the other hand, refers to the categories fulfilling social expectations and roles and conforming to different behavioral patterns and values that are socially acceptable. In other words sex is a mere physical difference, gender is a social difference according to which men and women are differently raised and valued (Cathy, 1995).

Irrigated agriculture is nothing but practising agriculture with a controlled supply of water through a variety of means. The widespread awareness of the involvement of women in irrigated agriculture in recent years has made researchers more inquisitive about the degree of gender participation amidst the diverse socio-cultural and economic conditions, particularly in terms of region, crops, caste and class in India. The fundamental rural hierarchy is defined in terms of 'landholding', which is also the base for subsistence. Bogardus, (1924) says that while the caste system is deeply entrenched in the custom, class is less precise in its limits, but more "formidably belligerent" in its attitudes with segregation and a sense of superiority. With castes, conflict is 'inter' while with a class, it is chiefly 'intra'.
This is especially true in the Indian context of irrigated agriculture in which there exist deep-rooted class divisions such as labourer and landowning classes with clashing interests. While the farm families endeavors to improve the yield and sustain the family, the labourers strive to enhance their returns from labour. In the communist manifesto Marx and Engels (1848) developed a theoretical framework for the analysis of class struggle and the emancipation of the worker class. It is based on dialectical and historical materialism. For Marx the two contradictions thesis and anti-thesis struggle against each other until one is victorious and a new synthesis is reached. This was the main principle he took from the dialectical materialism.

Marx and Engels argued that the real material and historical struggle between different classes and the contradictions between the development of productive forces at a given historical moment and the relations of production, namely property relations, are the true moving forces of history. Under the capitalist mode of production the struggle is between those who own the main means of production (land or factories) and the capitalist. The workers who own nothing but their labour power, which they have to sell to the capitalists for a wage. As the early proletariats were to a large extent female, Marx and Engels looked at the problems of women from this point of view. According to the surplus value theory of Marx, the capitalists swelled their profits (i). by prolonging the workers day as much as possible to increase the number of hours of surplus labor and by (ii). by diminishing the number of hours necessary for worker's subsistence. It is notable that, it was done by employing women and children.

Even in this contemporary period of green revolution the class hierarchy has its impact on women in agriculture. Agarwal (1986) classified
women's contribution in agriculture based on the three different socio-economic classes to which they belong. According to this classification women belonging to landless households need to work as wage labourers. Women belonging to small cultivators household, do some manual work on the family farm and those from large cultivator families get much of the work in the fields done by hired labour while they themselves perform some supervisory functions on the farm. Again between the two sexes the participation level differ say Prasad et al, (1992) Men involve themselves, in activities, which are more prestigious and earn more wages. Certain jobs are denied to women simply because men prefer these jobs and succeed in reserving the same for themselves.

Differences in gender roles have been observed since time immemorial. The effort to involve women in various developmental activities began only in recent times. This effort to improve the status of women through development using an integrated approach turned the attention of the world to the position of women.

1.2 INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S YEAR (IWY)

The declaration of IWY in 1975 threw light on the issues of women and recognised the need to bring women into the mainstream with the effective links between local and national levels, or between specific programmes and macro policies, which usually prevented women's involvement in development.

In addition to the IWY, there were three programs which championed the cause of upliftment of women by integrating them in the developmental process, namely Women in Development (WID), Women and Development (WAD) and Gender and Development (GAD) according to Kate Young (1993).
1.3 WOMEN IN DEVELOPMENT (WID)

The (WID) approach, rather than looking women's issues in terms of historical perspective or structural divisions such as class, caste, race, or creed, focuses mainly on women and their experience. The approach places its major emphasis on individuals and their capacity for self-betterment. It therefore emphasizes the importance of 'role models' of outstanding women who have gained social recognition in the public sphere. The institutional practice of WID looks to reforming the social and economic system to be more 'user friendly' to women. Strategies largely focus on technical solutions to the problems of inequality, training, access to resources, and incorporation in the market.

1.4 WOMEN AND DEVELOPMENT (WAD)

The next most important approach is Women and Development (WAD). WAD concentrates more on the inequalities of LDCs (Least Developed Countries) within the development process, and the nature of development itself, as the prime determinants of women’s poverty, marginalisation and inequality.

1.5 GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT (GAD)

The GAD approach attempts to be holistic. That is, it tries to comprehend the main features of social organization, economic and political life, in order to understand the shaping of particular aspects of society. While it assumes that gender - a hierarchical ordering - will be a relevant aspect of social organization, it does not assume it will be the most important or powerful, nor that gender relations will necessarily be the principal determinant of women's situation. Rather, it seeks to analyze culturally specific forms of social inequality.
and divisions, to see how gender is related to or interlocked with other forms of social hierarchy.

1.6 WOMEN IN NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT APPROACHES

The process of planned economic development in India began with the launching of the first five-year plan in April 1951. The central purpose of planning has been to achieve a rapid rate of economic development with a view to raise the levels of living of the Indian people. The major objectives of the plans have been stepping up the rate of economic growth, modernization of economy, achieving self-reliance and promoting social justice. And subsequently introduced Community Development Programmed (CDP) launched in 1952, was the major attempt to bring about the development of rural people.

In the beginning CDP had nothing for the development of women in general and never even talked about women working in agriculture even though the major emphasis was on the development of agriculture for increasing food production. The first critical attempt to study this issue was made by the Committee on the Status of women in India, which prompted the ICAR (Indian Council for Agricultural Research) to start in 1975-76, and KVK (Krishi Vigyan Kendra) to organise training programmes for farmwomen and girls in agricultural operation. Here is where the necessity of modifying the present extension service structure to take science and technology to women farmers for improving skills in performing agricultural operations was felt and schemes were implemented to achieve this aim.
1.7 WOMEN IN THE FIVE-YEAR PLANS

The first plan (1951-56) was largely confined to agriculture, irrigation and power. The Central Social Welfare Board was established by the Government in 1953 with nationwide programmes grants for promoting the development of women and children. The Board had its counterparts in the states and they provided assistance to voluntary agencies for improving and developing welfare programmes. This led to the growth of a number of women's organizations and provided status and activity to many of the erstwhile active women social workers. In the Second Plan (1956-61) aimed to achieve rapid industrialization. As far as women's issues were concerned this plan persisted in adopting a welfare approach in the organized sector. Rural women who worked in the industries were benefited from this phase of development. The Third Plan (1961-66) focused on extending education to girls as a strategy for women's development. Efforts to provide condensed courses for women in health nutrition and family planning were continued.

The Fourth plan (1969-1974) recognized the importance of agriculture as a key factor in economic development and schemes of irrigation were assigned an important place. The plan continued the emphasis on women's education. The Fifth Five Year Plan's (1974-79) objective was the removal of poverty and attainment of self-reliance. Priority was given to adult education and functional literacy received more emphasis. Functional literacy programmes to train women in the age group 15-45 in the functions of a house-wife, including childcare, nutrition, health care and home economy were stressed. In the Sixth Five Year Plan (1980-85) a variety of programmes, were taken up in different sectors of development to ameliorate the working conditions of women and to raise their economic and social status. Vocational
Training Centres and Industrial Training Institutes exclusively meant for women were set up. The Integrated Rural Development Program accorded priority to women heads of households and a new scheme called 'Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas' (DWACRA) was started in 1982-83. Training in a chosen economic activity such as weaving, fish vending, rope making and so on was provided. The Ministry of Social Welfare implemented a programme called "Science and Technology for Women" a wide spectrum of activities was taken up.

In the Seventh Plan (1985-1990) the basic approach was to instil confidence in women to bring about an awareness of their own potential for development as also of their rights and privileges. The Government of India opened a separate department in the Ministry of Human Resources Development, for the development of women and children. The Department of Women and Child Development set up a core group to evaluate the impact of developmental plans and programs on Indian women and review the policies and program and draft perspective plans for 1988-2000 A.D. This plan has made sectoral reviews of the situation of women in Rural Development, Employment, supportive services, Education, Health, Legislature, political participation and Media and Communication and suggested inter-linkages and converging strategies. The specific recommendation of this plan is that well articulated national policies with specific objectives should be formulated for increasing the participation of women in developmental plans. These should aim at the creation of productive employment for women as well as provision of services to women so as to enable them to participate more fully in economic growth and social progress.
The Eighth Five Year Plan (1992-97) has left much of the responsibility for monitoring gender-related issues on the National Commission for Women and to Women's Group. The appointment of a National Commissioner of Women's Rights was also proposed. This plan document (unlike the Sixth and Seventh Plans) does not have a separate chapter on women and development, but subsumes women's concerns largely under the chapter on social welfare (which also deals with children, the disabled, the elderly, and the destitute), and these concerns are touched essentially in the language of women as victims, rather than women also as agents of change and contributors to development. The plan makes two specific points in relation to women and agricultural land. 1) It recognises that one of the basic requirements for improving the status of women is to change inheritance laws so that women get an equal share in parental property, inherited or self-acquired. 2) In a concrete policy directive, state governments have been asked to allot 40 per cent of surplus land (i.e. land acquired by the government from households owning more land than the specified ceilings) to women alone and to allot the rest jointly in the names of the husband and wife.

The major perceptual bias, which has caused scholars and planners alike to ignore rural women, is a reflection of their difficulty in seeing women in social interaction at all. Rural women in South Asia are perhaps more 'invisible' than women anywhere else in the world, with the exception of the Middle East and North Africa. Women all over South Asia are physically secluded to a greater or lesser degree; there are variations related to region, religion, class and age.

In India the female workforce is 60 per cent in agriculture. But still they are landless and poor, and do as much as an 80 per cent of the work. In rice
cultivation and in rice production women have predominant roles such as pulling the seedlings in the nursery, transplanting, weeding, and harvesting and post-harvest activities. In spite of the tremendous contribution of women to the agriculture it is the men who are always formally perceived as decision makers and as "Farmers" (Das et al, 1996). In Tamil Nadu studies show that as far as the agricultural laborers are concerned women account for a greater percentage than men. The variation between men and women within the existing labor pattern in agriculture motivated a study on variation in participation in terms of districts. This is the point from which this research emerged.

1.8 THE PROBLEM

The study entitled, "Gender in irrigated agriculture: An analytical study of women's participation in Tamil Nadu", focuses on the agricultural labourers of three districts, namely South Arcot (although it is bifurcated as Villupuram and Cuddalore districts, the working population is clubbed together under South Arcot for the sake of uniformity in the labor participation in 1971, 81 and 91), Kanyakumari and Nilgiris. From the census report of India, it is seen that there is a differential participation in irrigated agriculture between men and women, which is marked in the above, said three districts. As an attempt to study the reasons for the differential participation, the objectives of the study are understanding whether the existing socio-economic condition of the district affects the differential participation or gender division of labor or the impact on agricultural technology, which causes variation. In order to have better understanding and to examine the comparability the cultivators (marginal and small land holding) also are studied.
1.9 NEED FOR THE STUDY

Tamil Nadu, one of the largest agrarian states which depends on irrigation, needed attention, as there is a marked differential gender participation in various districts. This study attempts to explore the extent and nature of gender participation in irrigated agriculture in certain districts of Tamil Nadu as also to analyse the factors affecting the labor intensity in the state. The study also throws light on the status of landless laborers in general and women in particular, and their social backwardness with the view to alleviate poverty among them.

1.10 DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY AREA

Tamil Nadu has undergone changes in its administrative divisions. According to the Census of India 1971 the state had 14 districts. In 1981 the number of district increased to 16. With the effect of bifurcation and trifurcation, it further increased to 22 in 1991 with the population of 55,858,946 of which 50.66% were men and 49.33% were women, who constituted half of the total population.

1.11 OBJECTIVES

The main objectives presented are

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 labor manifested in irrigated agriculture, and

3) To highlight the nature and extent of the impact of agricultural technology has on the greater or lesser gender participation in irrigated agriculture.

1.12 METHODOLOGY

In Tamil Nadu, Nilgiris has the lowest participation level of both men and women in agriculture but between men and women the latter participate more. Kanyakumari has a very low participation of female agricultural laborers, when compared to that of the male agricultural laborers. And the South Arcot district on the other hand, shows a very sharp distinction in having the highest level of female participation in agricultural operations. These districts have attracted the attention for their remarkable variation in gender participation levels in agriculture.

1.12.1 Sample

In three chosen districts, sample villages namely Helical and Arsedin in Conoor taluk, in Nilgiris district, Irumpili and Patharai in Kalkulam taluk, in Kanyakumari and Kiloor and Pacharapalayam in Panruti taluk, in South Arcot district.

The villages chosen were on purposive sampling method and the samples collected were at random. Data from 10% of the total number of households of each village was collected. The samples are categorized as below.
Landless < .2 ha
Marginal holdings < 1.0 ha
Small Land holdings 1.0 - 2.0 ha

In South Arcot, 80 sample households (14 landless, 46 marginal and 20 small farm households) and in Nilgiris 65 households (31 landless, 17 marginal and 13 small farm households) and finally in Kanyakumari district 76 households (11 landless, 18 marginal and 47 small farm households) who constitute the above categories were selected.

1.12.2. Techniques of Data Collection

The techniques used to collect data were of two fold: 1) At the outset, a Pilot Survey on the samples of the three districts was done. 2) Also, the Questionnaire and Observation techniques on pre-tested samples were used. Then, for the analysis the data were cross-tabulated. The analysis included the qualitative data obtained using the observation technique, and the quantitative data, specifically statistical data, with the use of graphs and tables.

1.13 CONCLUSION

The first and foremost reason for the existing nature and extent of participation among women and between men and women in irrigated agriculture is that of their socio-economic and cultural position. Subsequently the gender division of labor and the use of technology at varied levels augment the differential gender participation in irrigated agriculture.