Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

The greatest revolution in a country is the one that promotes the status and living conditions of women and ensures gender equality as the position and status of women in a society are reflected through an index of its civilization. Perhaps with this philosophy in mind, Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru (the first Prime Minister of India) said, when women move forward, the entire family moves, when the village moves, then the entire nation moves. Thus, women have been regarded as the nuclei of a nation and the builders and moulders of its destiny. Commensurately, gender equality is one of the constitutional mandates in most of the developing countries and under developed countries in recent time.

Women’s Role in Economic Development

The contribution of women to the society can not be over sighted as they constitute about one-half of the total population of the world that accounted for around 496 million as against a total human population of 1027 million. According to world scenario, sixty per cent of the working hours in the world goes to women’s share; makes up thirty per cent of official labour force; and fifty per cent share of the world economy is contributed by them (DFID, 2000).

Women in India are major producers of food in terms of value, volume
and number of hours they work. Nearly seventy per cent of all economically active women are engaged in agriculture as compared to sixty three per cent of men. In India, about 80 per cent of the female population lives in the rural areas and 86 per cent of the rural women work in agriculture and allied activities (Borah, 1998) and perform a variety of roles in domestic as well as socio-economic fronts, of which, many are of greater economic significance (Bhople and Palki, 1998). In addition, seventy per cent of farm work is being performed by women. The work participation rate of women is 23 and 27 per cent, respectively for urban and rural areas; beside 19 per cent of the total population work as unpaid family workers. Of the total workers, 94 per cent are concentrated in the informal sectors associated in low skill, low status and poor paid jobs in the country (Census of India, 1981).

The role of women in Sri Lankan agriculture and rural development does not differ from that of women in the other developing countries in Asia. According to Census of 2002, forty per cent of females are engaged in agriculture, forestry and fishing related activities as compared to thirty one per cent males. Women’s productive involvement in farming has created beneficial impacts on improving the status of livelihood as well as alleviating poverty.

**Status of Women**

The status of women in terms of social and economic pointers can be defined as the degree of equality and freedom enjoyed by women. Women’s participation on equal terms with men in domestic decision-making, freely expression of their views and participation in community life makes them being recognized in the society. This in turn, distinguishes the high and low status that the society vis-à-vis family allocates to women. Women’s power of expression and capacity to defuse problems through their views and ideas, generally come with education that makes them capable of being heard by their own folk as well as by the opposite sex. It is this
capability of a woman that often makes her strong and determined by spearheading the overall voice of woman in the society, attaining education and participating in gainful economic pursuit. The financial freedom that comes with her employment opportunity cannot be denied and these two aspects that generally make a woman capable of asserting her voice both in the family as well as in the society. Once she is able to achieve this, it automatically provides her an important position in the society and she is made to feel equal, if not above the others within the family circle and social environment.

**Women’s Placement in the Society**

In fact, it was the constitution of both the government (India & Sri Lanka), which laid a frame-work for providing an equal status to both men and women by granting them equal political, economic and social rights without any discrimination. More than half a decade of Independence and a century of striving for a better status for women in India and Sri Lanka, have not produced results even close to the desirable level. Also at the same time, it was realized that women are in a disadvantageous situation as they remain largely confined to domestic chores of life bearing the responsibility of looking after and caring the members of the household. There is widespread acceptance that women get barely one per cent of the world’s income and hardly one per cent of world’s wealth (DFID, 2000). Nevertheless, it is frequently asserted that seventy per cent of the world’s poor are women (UNDP, 1995, United Nations, 1996). This skewed distribution implies that globally there are 900 million poor females.

There is no denying the fact that in terms of all indicators of development like socio-economic and livelihood status, women have fared worse than men, across regions and strata of the population. There is a clear difference between male and female entitlement with respect to property/assets,
work/employment, earnings, education, health status, decision making, empowerment, etc., and as such, in reality women lagged behind men in terms of every aspect of life like, socio-economic and livelihood pointers. It has been amply supported recently by National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) study that wage rates are lower for women as compared to men both in rural and urban areas of developing countries.

The nation’s entry in to twenty first century unfolds an era of reconstruction to enhance the quality of Indian women. These efforts are pulsed through adoption of various measures namely, educational, social, political and economic empowerment to women. The society is advancing very fast with all round socio-economic development, but the position of the women is not improving at par the pace of development. A large number of Indian women are slowly emerging out of a system. So, emancipation of women has been recognized as one of the generator of economic development and social progress. United Nations conference on women status (1985) has rightly recommended that every nation should provide opportunities for full development of potentialities of women, particularly in rural areas. Despite that, the goal of achieving the economic and social development of women is enshrined in the Nairobi Forward – Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women (United Nations, 1985), Jakarta Declaration and Platform for Action (United Nations, 1995).

**Need of Improving Status of Women**

Any type of development cannot help women until or unless their socio-economic status and livelihood security are improved in urban as well as in rural settings. The most important means of achieving improvement in the status of women would be to secure for them a fair degree of employment opportunities in various sectors of economy, as the employment enhances economic status to women and in turn, it paves the way for higher social status. For this, most of the developing and under developed countries have had greater emphasis on the need for livelihood security of rural women by their active involvement in the main stream of development through granting employment and development schemes, particularly for women and children.
Also, commercialization and modernization have put the women to exploitative practices by way of family planning measures, low wages and arduous/unpleasant works. Since the new technologies demand presence of more permanent, trained and skilled labour force, men have again monopolized the skills and occupied their jobs in the fast changing economic environment, whereas women have been left as a low paid, unskilled and casual labour force in India and Sri Lanka. Above all this, till now, a woman has not been appropriately welcomed/respected in the society, particularly in the under developing nations of the world due to which she is generally given second rate treatment. Consequently, she has to undergo a series of maltreatment, hurdles and problems such as increasing burden of work and responsibility, increased domestic violence, limited economic advancement, continuing social and caste oppressions and constraints to decision making in the home right from childhood (as a daughter, a daughter in law/a wife and a mother) to old age. Thus, the dominance and guardianship of father / brother / husband continue to influence and shape her life in the name of care, protection and family values, though she significantly contributes to the family income. Also, another glaring and worrying aspect came to light that women in India continue to suffer from an adverse sex ratio. In fact, it has become an inevitable fact that the sex ratio is increasingly favouring men and if one examines the past hundred year’s record, it becomes doubtlessly clear that the proportion of females to males is declining substantially (972 in 1901 to 933 in 2001). However, in many South Asian countries poverty, poor access to basic facilities such as health, education and adequate nutrition, beside extensive hard work for survival do not give many of its women room to flourish in life, or develop/harness their full potential.

In fact the word status is an elusive one and it carries diverse and opposite views. Though, it is often felt that the opportunities of social participation, nature of work, legal status and more importantly the actual treatment given to a woman make her position in the society higher or otherwise. It is also a fact that woman ought to achieve these by remaining and honouring those many norms that the society had identified for her. It, therefore, makes her effort
towards gaining a better status living within the patriarchal norms that are much more difficult. However, it must be admitted that women in south Asian countries are not unlike India and Sri Lanka.

**Rationale of the Study**

There is wide variation in the degree of mobility, degree of control in decision making, status of livelihood and value of women across the societies, regions and countries. The women contribution in performing agricultural operations and household activities is quite high (Singh and Garcia, 1999), but adequate attention has not been paid to various visible and non visible problems faced by women in hilly areas. The heavy workload of women in hilly areas has more recently been aggravated by considerable male migration to the plains, urban areas and beyond in search for better income opportunities. Other common problems of mountain women are their limited access to social services, credit facilities and agricultural extension, levels of literacy are low and they have minimum or no control over resources. Moreover, there has been very slow progress in amelioration of socio-economic status and livelihood security of women especially in the hilly areas due to their uniqueness inherited with many myths and taboos. For in such types of socio-economic setting, it requires policy and programme actions for improving women’s access to the scarce and valuable resources of their societies (particularly, secured livelihoods and economic resources), alleviate disproportionate household responsibilities, remove legal and eliminate the spectrum of domestic and sexual violence from their daily lives and raise social awareness through effective programmes. There is an urgent need for a focused understanding of women’s status and work participation with respect to livelihood security for women themselves as well as for the family as a whole (IFPRI, 2000). Keeping the crux of the above problems of women in view, the proposed study has been planned to throw reasonable light on the socio-economic status and livelihood security of women in hilly areas of Himachal Pradesh (India) and Sri Lanka. Moreover, at such a juncture, when the world have recently celebrated ‘2002’ as international year of mountain, it becomes imperative to search out at length the issues relating to livelihood security of women in hilly regions so as to come out with appropriate policy to shape
their destiny by improving their socio-economic status and livelihood avenues in the society.

Objectives

Specifically, the main objectives of the present study are outlined below:

i. To identify the key socio-economic pointers contributing to the status of women

ii. To study entrepreneurial behaviour of women and their involvement in various activities/organizations for women empowerment, upliftment of the family, community and society.

iii. To examine livelihood security of women and problems faced by them in socio-economic upliftment.

Limitations of the Study

The precision of the study depends upon the accuracy and reliability of data and their sources and methodological approach followed. All the scientific inquiries are subjected to few limitations, although these may differ with respect to magnitude of limitations. The findings of the present study are subject to the following limitations:

1. As no records were maintained by the households, the data were collected by survey method on their memory and past experience. Though, efforts were made to extract accurate information, the probability of a few slips from the memory of the respondents could not, however, be ruled out.

2. As the study pertained to the agricultural year 2006-07, the results may not be valid over a longer period of time due to fast changing socio-economic settings in these study areas.

3. The study was confined to six tea growing locations of Kangra and Nuwara Eliya districts which were represented by 6 villages and 150 households. Thus the results of this study are applicable only to similar kind of situation analysis. However, the results can be made use of in other areas with some modifications.

4. Because of the limitation of time and other resources involved in research, the investigator had to seek a compromise between the objectives and problem of a study like this. Due to said reason, the present study was restricted to a limited number of
households in Kangra and Nuwara Eliya district. The results drawn from this study, therefore, may have a limited application. It is, therefore, important that such studies be taken on a macro level in order to make the estimates more reliable and to generalize the inference for wider application.

5. The secondary information collected for the study is not free from biases and errors and as such, the outcome of the study is subject to some variation.

**Organization of Study**

The entire study has been systematically planned in six chapters. Chapter I of the study is designed to focus the problem, rationale, objectives and limitations. A brief resume of the work already done in India, Sri Lanka and abroad, which is relevant to the present topic of investigation, in terms of socio-economic status of women, their entrepreneurial behaviour and involvement in various activities, livelihood security and problems and constraints faced by women received attention in Chapter II. The systematic methodology adopted for selection of samples, data collection and analytical frame-work of the study has been presented in Chapter III. The results of the study described under different sections have been presented in Chapter IV. In Chapter V, findings and interpretations of results are contained in respect to the objectives of the present investigation. The final Chapter VI synthesizes and summarizes the findings of the study and presents the policy implications. The additional information has been given under different appendices for further clarification, understanding and future use of the interested readers.