Chapter - I

Introduction
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The description about the status of women in agrarian societies and its comparison with that in the pre-agricultural societies is full of contradictory reports and its validity is rather difficult to judge. Whatever reports about the primitive societies are available are the accounts of travellers, missionaries and administrators, which were always superficial, compared with modern studies and often highly prejudiced (Evans Prichard, 1965). Thus, the historical analysis of the status of women in agrarian and post-agrarian societies leads us into theories of the origin and development of matriarchy and patriarchy. Sociologists and anthropologists to-day do not consider the attempt as worthwhile and generally incline to abandon it as out-moded.

But the status of women and tis relation with the economy is not a question that can be disposed off by abandoning it. It is rather a part of a larger issue-how the nature of woman is related with her society and culture; and it also involves some ethical and moral connotations in it, which make the issue furthermore irreconcilable.

Two contradictory perspectives are found about the status of women in any society with their specific ethical under-tones. One view finds that the woman, owing to some inherent characteristics of her nature and specially in fulfilling the demands of maternity and child rearing, confined within the
household; and had always been subjugated and subservient to men, irrespective of the kinds of societies and cultures. The other view assumes the social and cultural determination of nature to be more crucial than the biological or psychological characteristics of women. The former view held that throughout the history, the women have always been subordinated to men, and their dependency is not the result of a historical event or a social change. It was not something that occurred and hence it is not that can be changed. The latter argued that there are or have been, truly egalitarian societies (Leacock, 1972) and there are, or once were, societies of primitive matriarchs, wherein the women predominated just as the men do now the golden age of women. The fall of women from the age occurred due to change in economy and other conditions of society and culture; and with a designed change of conditions of society and culture; and with a designed change of conditions the women can again emancipate from their bonds. The former view held the golden age of women only as a myth.

WOMEN’S PARTICIPATION IN AGRICULTURE IN HILL AREAS

Let us have a close look at the situation of the women agricultural workers in the hilly areas of Northern Uttar Pradesh. Here we find the ubiquitous poverty, what with few tracts of land fit for cultivation, restricting employment opportunities and reducing agricultural productivity, by reducing monthly earnings to a pittance; poverty and unemployment in the hilly areas
have driven the men-folks to the cities and towns on the plains. Take, for instance, the annual income of a family in a village in Almora District is mere Rs.2797.

The catalogue of the variety of jobs done by the poor agricultural women labour in the hilly areas is virtually unending. When the corn becomes ripe for harvest, it is the woman again who come to the field with the sickle. After harvesting, in the case of marginal and small land holdings, paddy is threshed by stamping it by foot which sometimes leads to boils on the feet of woman. This is followed by winnowing.

A woman’s job in the villages in never-ending. The back-breaking chores begin in the wee hours and are not completed even as the poor mother goes to sleep late into the night. For the jobs are not complete even with harvesting, threshing and winnowing. She drives the produces in the sun, stores the grains, dehusks it by pounding and grinding it into flour. So the daily grind for the unsung house-wife-cum-mother-cum-worker goes on and on, unrecognised by national accounting.

WOMEN AND WORK IN INDIAN SOCIETY

One of the persisting features of Indian society has been the explicit division of labour based on gender and age. While small children, particularly girls and the aged are not expected to undertake hard work, spheres of activities of the adults are segregated by gender. Ideologically, males are viewed as
“producers” who provide material needs of their women and children; women, on the contrary, are treated as ‘consumers’ whose place is in the household and perform socially defined roles of cooking of food and caring of children. The division of work among men and women, rather than being arbitrary, is socially defined; whereas, men attend to difficult, heavy and arduous task that require physical strength. And women are expected to perform house-hold-dominated activities, which are relatively less arduous but supplementary and supportive to men-folk.

The normative framework is, however, altered in practice and women are involved in variety of tasks complementary to productive activities, even within the household according to the formal division of labour based on aged and sex. In fact, women’s engagement in productive and income-generating tasks is not distinct and isolated from those of cooking of food, caring of children etc. nor such engagement on the part of women frees them from normal house-hold obligations. This brings modifications in the traditional spheres of activities of males and females.

The contribution of women to economic activity, irrespective of the rates of their labour participation, is, generally, remains low. Once major production tasks are initiated, men rather rely heavily on women to undertake complementary and supporting activities. Social differentiation and the elaboration of power structures are believed to be closely associated with increasing subordination of women to male authority.
In most of the literature on the evolution of the sexual division of labour, women have been regarded as the traditional gardeners of the earth. This stems from the time of abundant land and technologically primitive subsistence agriculture. Women received periodic assistance from men for tasks such as breaking new ground. Men were the effective custodians of land, whether the society was patrilineal or matrilineal. In certain regions, the institution of polygamy provides men with a supply of female labour which left them relatively free of regular work. This system has been termed “female farming” as contrasted with later “male farming.” A common theory of evolution suggests that as land became less abundant relative to population, implements (notably the plough) were introduced to raise the productivity of land. Tasks became ungraded by the use of these implements, and men started assuming them. As output and income rose through productivity improvements, women tended to be regulated to the seclusion of the home as symbols of men’s prestige and family virtue. As faring systems increasingly absorbed male labour, women started to assist men in agriculture.

Farm women play an important role in agricultural development in India. They constitute about half of the rural population and about 30 per cent of them are directly engaged in farming. Their contribution in agricultural goes unnoticed and they remain as ‘invisible workers’ on the farms (Bina Agarwal ed., 1988) Women’s role in agriculture had remained unacknowledged because
of invisibility, resulting from false assumption of the relationship between women and agricultural activities.

Through the centuries women in India have been responsible for a wide range of agricultural operations like sowing, weeding, harvesting and as part of farming, animal husbandry too. In certain families they have functioned not only as workers but as decision-makers too. There interest covered a vast spectrum that included seed treatment, fuel and fodder requirement, family nutrition and allied activities like poultry, piggery and sericulture.

The division of labour between men and women is different from region to region because of social customs and physical conditions. Normally, preparatory tillage operation like ploughing, planting, irrigation bunding, inter-cultivation with spades, threshing, stacking etc. are jobs that need muscular power and are not performed by women. However, it is the women who take to strenuous and tedious jobs such as transplanting where they have to stand in knee-deep water throughout the day, hand weeding, picking fruits and vegetables, manuring each plant at the root etc. More women are hired at the time of harvest as they are paid less.

Though women paly an important role in agriculture both as cultivators and as agricultural labourers, women workers are paid less than men. This wage discrimination persists through the occupational segmentation of the labour market where women are confined to certain operations such as seeding,
transplanting and weeding. There is also open discrimination in certain sectors like harvesting where women are paid less for performing the same task.

Indian agriculture has made enviable strides in the planned area of economic development. As a result of introduction of High Yielding Varieties (HYV) with emphasis on intensive cultivation, India’s food grains production trebled from 50 million tones during 1950-51 to, 190 million tonnes during 1990-91. Fertilizer application has played a pivotal role in increasing cropping intensity and agricultural productivity. Other factors which contributed towards this development include introduction of intensive land reforms, mobilisation of village level administrative machinery to implement development programmes, nation-wide net-work of agricultural research and education facilities, a number of surface and ground water irrigation schemes, large-scale production of chemical fertilizers, credit and inputs distribution facilities, warehousing and storage facilities. The well thought out strategy has paid us rich dividends from scarcity to self-reliance in food-production, despite enormous population grown witnessed during the last few decades.

Since the dawn of civilisation, women have been equal partners in all human endeavours. On the farm front, women work shoulder to shoulder with their men-folk and undertake different farming operations right from sowing to harvesting, threshing and storage of grains. Besides, they also undertake various other operations connected with agriculture.
Out of the total population of 684 millions (1981 Census), 534 million people or about 76 per cent live in rural areas. Rural women comprise 50 per cent of the agricultural labour force. More than 75 per cent of rural women belong to the families of small and marginal farmers. More than 38 million women work in the rural sector, 20 million as agricultural laborers and 10 million are employed in animal husbandry, handicrafts or related activities.

UNRECOGNISED AND UNDER-PAID

In the areas with high rates of private land ownership, especially in-Latin America, parts of South-East Asia, North Africa, and in the Middle East, more than 40 per cent of the hired women labour are usually paid less than men.

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In the development countries, inspite of women being the major producers of food supplies by undertaking most tiring and time-consuming works in the process, their contribution is not recognised through recorded evidences. Statisticians, planners and scholars have problems in defining and
quantifying such works. As a result of the prevailing confusion over the
definition of ‘productive work’ or ‘household work’, there has been a gross
under-enumeration of women in the rural work-force of many of the
developing countries. Women’s work has been ignored. The ‘productive
workers’ have been defined as those who are paid wage against their work.
Such definition had led the researchers to consider those women, who work
only in the formal sectors. For example, in India, according to the 1981 Census,
only 14 per cent of the total female population in the country fall in the
category of ‘workers’. The unpaid economic activities of women and their
contribution through work in the domestic sectors remain unreported in the
Census.

The ultimate result of this conceptual confusion is a tendency to define
most rural women as dependents, who are peripheral to the development
process. Contrary to such myth of female dependency, an ILO Study (1975)
study estimated that the value of unpaid household work alone constitutes 25-
39 per cent of the total gross national product in the developing countries.
Women also play an important role in agricultural production, animal
husbandry and other related activities such as storage, marketing of produce,
food processing etc.

The real issue, therefore, is more serious, despite their involvement in
agriculture work in such a long magnitude. They have not been actively
involved in the main stream of development and there is hardly any
appreciation and recognition of their extensive contribution. By and large, they have remained as ‘invisible workers’.

The prosperity and growth of a nation depend on the status and development of its women as they not only constitute nearly half of its population, but also influence growth of the remaining half of the population. The crucial role of women in agriculture, allied activities and household activities have, however, been under-estimated, and under-valued.

The multiple roles played and the productive inputs made by women in terms of work hours contributed or equivalent income generated in the family are neither attended nor recorded.

WOMEN’S PARTICIPATION IN AGRICULTURE: POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Women’s role in agriculture had remained unacknowledged because of invisibility, resulting from false assumptions of the relationship between women and agricultural activities. It was strongly recommended that:

“The community of scientists and policy-makers responsible for designing agricultural development of the future must begin by viewing women, their roles, their lives and their experiences, the knowledge that they have stored away through generations of intimate relationship with the natural environment and its resources.” (Sharma 1989).
It is now realized that for sustaining the tempo of agricultural growth in the country, farm women will have to be given more prominence in agricultural and allied vocations. In fact, India, which is predominantly an agricultural country, cannot afford to ignore the women – an important segment of our rural population engaged in farming.

Agricultural intensification and diversification that increases demand for labour and reduces fluctuations in seasonal employment will benefit female agricultural labour in landless and near-landless families. For example, the major increases in irrigation coverage that would result from a shift to less water-intensive crops and wider and more careful distribution of irrigation water in India’s semi-arid regions would boost female employment. Measures which include emphasis on commercial crops like cotton that require high females labour inputs and for which demand is buoyant; diversification into high value non-cereal crop such as vegetables, fruits, nuts and other non-timber forest products; and allied enterprises such as dairying and fish/shrimp culture would through open increased avenues for employment of female labour.

Despite their increasing prominence in the agricultural labour force, rural women are not being absorbed in many of the jobs outside agriculture that are developing in the rural areas. These avenues of employment often require mobility and specific skills that women do not have. Women also have not been encouraged to seek out and adapt to non-traditional work situations.
The sharp regional variations in agricultural growth; infrastructural development, and poverty strongly suggest that the impetus for shifts in female agricultural participations is very different in different regions and in different socio-economic groups within the same region.

The agricultural department should make some special efforts to help these poor women cultivators to come up in life and become an instrument of socio-economic transformation by contributing their mite from a rural area towards the agro-industrial development of this country. An average woman works twice as hard as the average man. According to I.L.O. (1978), Geneva observation, “Women and girls are half the world’s population but do two-thirds of the world’s working hours” To arrive at this provocative conclusion, the ILO has taken into account work in the home as well as in field and factory.

In the popular imagination women of the Third World look after their house and raise children, while the men look after the land and raise crops.

The above stated facts demand two things to be done for improving the status of rural women. The first one is to involve the rural women in generating household income through increased homestead production and the second one is to create opportunities for women’s access to resources and decision-making in the household. If the first one is efficiently organised through programmes, it is expected that the second one will automatically fall into the pipe-line. One woman can take leadership in increasing homestead production and can control
the labour and other resources involved in it, their active role in decision-making in the family will be vital.

**WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING**

The landed property being fully under the control of man, the woman in the household has hardly any say in all matters pertaining to farming. But, the position is different in regard to small to marginal farms where women do play a part in decision-making in regard to small to marginal farms where women do play a part in decision-making in regard to land use. A study of the Chambal Command Area in Madhya Pradesh suggests that more than 30 per cent of farm women are consulted regarding the choice of crops to be grown, variety of seeds, fertilizer applications, quality of grain to be marketed etc. The degree of female participation in decision-making as stated earlier is higher among Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Backward Communities. In the State of Haryana, women are active in matter pertaining to animal husbandry rather than agriculture. For instance, they have a say in the purchase of draught and milch cattle, while in case of choice and area of crops, investment and irrigation, purchase of land, giving and taking up of credit, they are seldom consulted. However, it has been found the certain studies that women belonging to both small and big farmers., say nearly 70 per cent, participate in crop production and participate in a bigger way in dairy management.
In the state of Orissa, decision on such activities as hiring of labourers, disposal of produce, purchase from market, variety of seeds to be used, use of tools and pesticides are jointly taken by men and women. It is the women who control the income from the sale of vegetables from kitchen gardens. This brings us to the unique role played by women in animal husbandry.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The present study aims to probe into the work environment of the labourers in Thanjavur district. One characteristic feature of agricultural labour is that only men perform some jobs, while only women perform others but both men and women do few jobs. It creates a disparity in wage rates between the male and female workers. It brings down the bargaining power of women workers and reduces them to the state of marginal, intermittent or reserve labour, which is mostly unorganized. Discrimination within the labour market is the focus of attention of this study. By discrimination within the market it is implied that, workers who are distinguished by some characteristics such as sex, caste, status etc. that do not affect their present capacity but are treated less favourably in a given job than others who have no greater capability but are not marked-off by the characteristics. Thus discrimination exists in a labour market when persons with differences in productivity are paid equal wages. The most important types of labour market discrimination are in wages, days of employment and occupational characteristics. However, wage and employment discrimination are the outcome of occupational discrimination. In agricultural labour force, participation of both men and women is not uncommon. However
there are important differences between the male and female workers in agriculture, in the nature of works done, rate of participation, wage rate and income earned. Female workers do relatively less hard physical work, they are paid lesser wage rate, and are constrained by time to be shared between their responsibilities at home and out of it. Further, in the agricultural labour households, women go to work to help men and to supplement their income and they do work not paid for, the wage rates are to be imputed. Women manage to meet the scarcity of labour during peak season of demand in agriculture and to find non-farm employment in the off-season. Thus, their annual income forms a significant share of their family income, but they have little say in spending it. The present study is also a modest attempt to find out the factors responsible for the existence of wage and discrimination in agricultural labour market. It pays special attention to the problem of female labour at home and at the working place. Thus, gender discrimination in agricultural labour market in an important area of focus taken up for scrutiny.

1.3 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

An attempt has been made to analyze the nature and extent of employment of female workers in agriculture in both taluks under study. Special attention is paid to assess whether the differences between the male and female workers in employment, wages and working conditions are due to gender discrimination. Therefore the results would throw light on the special problems of female workers and possible remedies will be identified. Further, the study would show the extent of unemployment, underemployment and
exploitation of labour of either sex, due to the special characteristics of agricultural works. How far the market imperfection affects the wage rate and income of the agricultural labourers would be discussed. Remedies for the problems would be discussed and it would show the effectiveness of unionism of labourers. Important policy implications could be stated on the basis of the findings of the study, especially on wage discrimination. The state intervention in the form of legislations on wage rates, (minimum wages and fair wages); security of job and employment conditions will be studied for its effectiveness in increasing income of the agriculture labour households. An attempt is also made to compare the Minimum wage with that of actual wage and actual wage with expected wage. The thrust of the study will be on the wage structure for different agricultural operations and problems of employment during season and off-season.

1.4. OBJECTIVES

1. To study the socio-economic characteristics of women agricultural labour households in the selected two taluks of Thanjavur District.

2. To understand the nature and extent of employment of women agricultural labourers in the selected two taluks of Thanjavur District.

3. To assess the extent of discrimination of women in employment and wage rate (operation-wise) and

4. To compare the minimum and actual wage; actual and expected wage.
1.5 HYPOTHESES

The hypotheses framed during the course of study is as follows:

1. Participation of women in agricultural labour force is not less than that of men, but the nature of work done by them differs from men.

2. Women are discriminated from men in employment and wage rate in doing similar activities in the farm.

3. The percentage days of employed in a year in the case of agricultural and non-agricultural activities are lower in both the study taluks.

4. The minimum wage fixed by the Government is higher than actual wage and the expected wage is higher than the minimum wage in both the study taluks.

5. The percentage contribution of women to total family income is greater in the study taluks.

1.6 LIMITATIONS

1. The woman agricultural labourers do not maintain records of their income, expenditure and employment data. while they were interviewed, they could give the data only from their memories. Hence the data are subject to recall bias.

2. The respondents, some times, in their anxiety to over – state their difficulties, might have given an exaggerated account of their poverty,
indebtedness and unemployment. Similarly, some of them might have understood their income and assets position.

3. Hence, the data cannot be completely relied upon as precise. But, adequate care was taken to verify the veracity of the data by cross-checking of the responses.

4. In general, it is quite possible, that respondents could have genuinely forgotten some of the information on their economic conditions pertaining to one full year. However, the finding of the study could be relied upon to the extent it indicates the relative difference in the overall economic conditions pertaining to one full year.

5. However, the findings of the study could be relied upon to the extent it indicates the relative difference in the overall economic labourers, which could help draw policy conclusions for the development of these weaker sections of the rural society.

6. And due to the limitation of time, cost and resources, the study is limited to one particular period namely August – November 2013 and that too analyzed and restricted only to women agricultural labourers. So, the total sample size is 200.
1.7. CHAPTER SCHEME

The whole thesis is divided into Seven chapters, where in

**Chapter I**  It deals with the introduction, Scope of the study, need for the study, objectives, hypotheses, statement of the problem and limitations.

**Chapter II**  It brings out an account of the Concepts and Review of Related Literature.

**Chapter III**  It presents the profile of the study area, Materials and Methods

**Chapter IV**  It presents an Women Labour in Agriculture – An Overview

**Chapter V**  It deals with the Analysis and discussion.

**Chapter VI**  It gives findings, policy implications and suggestions.