CHAPTER – I
INTRODUCTION

1.1. INTRODUCTION

Agriculture is one of the predominant pillars of Indian economy. This sector is the source of food items to its growing population. In many countries agricultural progress is responsible for industrial development. 70 per cent of the total population directly depends on this sector for their livelihood. According to the National Commission on Labour “an agricultural labourer is one who is basically unskilled and unorganised and has little for his livelihood, other than personal labour”. Thus, persons whose main source of income is wage and employment are in this category. Mishra and Puri have stated that “All those persons who derive a major part of their income as payment for work performed on the farms of others can be designated as agricultural workers. For a major part of the year they should work on the land of others for wages”. 70 percent or more of the labor force works in agriculture. Women are a vital agents in Indian economy. The labour force participation rate of women is 31.56 per cent, less than half of the men’s rate of 68.44 per cent. Women today play a pivotal role in agriculture - as female agricultural labourer works as farmers, co-farmers, female family labourer and as managers of farms and farm entrepreneurs. Three-fourths of women workers are in agriculture. Among rural woman workers, 87 per cent are employed in agriculture as labourers and cultivators. In many regions more women than men are employed in
agriculture. In the Middle East more than twice as many women work in agriculture as men, and in South Asia close to one-third more women are working in the sector than men. Many women in developing countries are occupied in agriculture. Women’s occupation in agriculture in low income countries in Asia is between 60-80 per cent. Women play a significant and crucial role in agricultural development and allied fields including the main crop production, livestock production, horticulture, post harvest operations, agro, social forestry, fisheries, etc. The nature and extent of women’s involvement in agriculture, no doubt, varies greatly from region to region.

In India, adult population consists of nearly 50 per cent of women, 77 per cent of the Indian adult population lives in rural areas. Rural women participate in agriculture and related activities. They contribute 75 per cent of the labour required for operations. About 36 million women are engaged in farm operations as main workers. They are actively involved in agricultural development and allied fields including crop production livestock production, horticulture post harvest operations, agro and social forestry, fishing etc. In view of all these things, woman is recognized as a partner of man in agriculture and she is included in the effort of bringing new technology to the farmers because of her intimate involvement in agriculture as a manager, decision maker and labourer. The status of rural women is improving day by day. The present study was carried out with women agriculture laborers in farm economy of Tiruchirappalli District. An attempt has been made in the study to
understand the socio-economic condition of women laborers, nature of their work, their working conditions, wage pattern, wage discrimination and other difficulties faced by them at their work place.

1.2. NEED FOR THE STUDY

Women are the moulders and builders of any nation’s destiny. They play a significant role in any economy. They are regarded as the backbone of the rural scene. Most of the women perform various types of work for their livelihood and agriculture. It is considered the biggest unorganized sector where large number of rural women take part actively.

According to Economic Survey 2010-2011, the total workers in India are 402,234 and 72. Among them male workers are 275,014, 47 and female workers are 127,220, 24. This shows clearly that the female participation in the work is very low. In Tamilnadu the total workers are 278,782, and 82. The women workers are only 977,788, 5 and it constitutes only 30.9 percent of the total work force in agriculture.

Women’s primary responsibility is in domestic work. Greater emphasis is laid on women’s earning in the form of money by working outside the four walls. In India, a significant proportion of the population is below the poverty line and it is a fact that labour force participation will increase with poverty, a large proportion of rural women are under pressure to participate in the labour force. These unknown and unacknowledged beings are responsible to keep the economy at a steady pace and help the nation to occupy a significant place in
the world. Women’s role has biologically and socially combined to create four distinct functions that of mother, wife, homemaker and worker. The role of worker is equally important as that of the other three roles. But her role as an active worker - producer is rarely acknowledged though it is significant for the family’s survival.

In the present study, the women performing agricultural operations have been classified into four categories”

i. The landless agricultural labourers

ii. Women cultivating their own piece of land and also work as wage earners

iii. Women working in their own land due to dearth of labourers; and

iv. Women supervising the agricultural operations performed by the labourers.

The present study is an attempt to explore the significant roles and participation of women in farm activities. A woman’s inevitable career in the domestic and economic spheres has assumed significance. The main aim of the present study is to ascertain the economic and sociological conditions of agricultural women.

1.3. MOTIVATION FOR THE STUDY

Agriculture can be a significant and appropriate engine of growth and poverty reduction. But the sector is underperforming in many countries because women, who are often a crucial resource in agriculture and the rural economy,
face constraints that reduce their productivity. The contribution of women to agricultural and food production is significant but it is impossible to verify empirically the share produced by women. Women’s participation in rural labour markets varies considerably across regions, but invariably women are over represented in unpaid, seasonal and part-time work, and the available evidence suggests that women are often paid less than men, for the same work. These facts motivated the researcher to undertake the present research work.

1.4. RESEARCH GAP

The present study covers the Women Labourers in the farm Economy of Tiruchirappalli District. So far no research has been conducted in the block, particularly on women labourers and agricultural labourers in general. Studies have been undertaken to analyse male agricultural labourers but there are no known studies regarding women labourers and agricultural labourers, work culture and family background. Several studies have been conducted by the researchers at national and international level with different dimensions. Those studies are not focused on women agricultural labourers in the farm economy specifically. Therefore the researcher felt and recognized this study is a research gap and consider for the present research Lalgudi Block of Tiruchirappalli District with appropriate methodological procedure.

1.5. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

One of the most serious and depressing problems of rural India is socio-economic conditions of agricultural workers. Women’s labour is an important
segment of the total workforce in India. More than 90 percent of the working women in our country were engaged as wage labourers in the unorganized sector. Even after six decades of development planning very little change has been seen in the status of the women in our country. Most of the women are under employed and destitute and have a lot of domestic work load and they are ill paid and their contributions are unorganized and unrecognized. Women were exploited to a greater degree as they were paid less compared to men for similar nature of work and hours spent on work. The conditions of work in the unorganized sector were unsatisfactory and the problems confronted by them were acute and most of them do not have year round employment. Their illiteracy, poverty and indebtedness forced them to work for lower wages under unjust conditions.

Women’s employment in family farms or business is rarely recognized as economically productive, either by men or women. And, any income generated from this work is generally controlled by the men. Such work is unlikely to increase women’s participation in allocating family finances. A World Bank study in 1991 reveals that the assumption made by extension workers is that information within a family will be transmitted to the women by the men, which in actual practice seldom happens. “The male dominated extension system trends to overlook women’s in agriculture and proves ineffective in providing technical information to women farmers.” The operational holding of women in agriculture is very low compared to their male counterparts.
As per the Agricultural census 2000, the percentage of female operational holders in the marginal farming is 11.84, Small farming is 10.27, Semi medium is 8.67, Medium farming is 6.86 and large farming is only 5.22. Overall the women operational holders are only 10.83 percent. This shows clearly that women are not having the ownership of land in India. Many maintain that women’s economic dependence on men impacts their power within the family. With increased participation in income earning activities, not only will there be more income for the family, but also gender inequality should be reduced. This issue is particularly salient in India because studies show a very low level of female participation in the labour force. At the same time, it is women who bear the primary responsibility for actions needed to end hunger: education, nutrition, health and family income. Hence it is necessary to study the plight of women labourers in the farm economy of Tiruchirappalli District.

1.6. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the characteristics of the women labourers in the farm economy in the study area?

2. What are the contributions of women labourers to the different farm operations?

3. How is the working condition of women agriculture labourers in the study area?

4. What are the constraints faced by the women labourers in the farm economy?

5. What are the measures to solve the problem of women agricultural labourers in the farm economy?
1.7. OBJECTIVES

The overall objectives of the present study are to investigate the “Women Labourers in the farm Economy of Tiruchirappalli District”. With this view in mind the following specific objectives are framed.

1. To study the characteristics of the women labourers in the farm economy in the study area.

2. To find out the nature of work and employment conditions of women labourers in the farm economy in the study area.

3. To study the wage patterns and causes of discrimination in wages of women Labourers in the farm economy.

4. To find out main constraints of women agricultural labourers in the study area.

5. To suggest measures to solve the problems of women labourers in the farm economy of the study area.

1.8. HYPOTHESES

1. There is a significant difference in income between the study areas.

2. There is an insignificant relationship between nature of work and employment conditions of women labourers in farm economy of the study areas.

3. There is a significant relationship between unemployment and seasonal variations in the different study areas.
1.9. THEORETICAL FRAME WORK

M.S. Swaminathan, the famous agricultural scientist describes that it was woman who first domesticated crop plants and thereby initiated the art and science of farming. While men went out hunting in search of food, women started gathering seeds from the native flora and began cultivating those of interest from the point of view of food, feed, fodder, fibre and fuel. Women have played and continue to play a key role in the conservation of basic life support systems such as land, water, flora and fauna. They have protected the health of the soil through organic recycling and promoted crop security through the maintenance of varietal diversity and genetic resistance. That women play a significant and crucial role in agricultural development and allied fields including in the main crop production, livestock production, horticulture, post harvest operations, agro/ social forestry, fisheries, etc. The nature and extent of women’s involvement in agriculture, no doubt, varies greatly from region to region. Even within a region, their involvement varies widely among different ecological sub-zones, farming systems, castes, classes and stages in the family cycle. But regardless of these variations, there is hardly any activity in agricultural production, except ploughing in which women are not actively involved.

Studies on women in agriculture conducted in India and other developing and under developed countries all point to the conclusion that women contribute far more to agricultural production than has generally been acknowledged.
Recognition of their crucial role in agriculture should not obscure the fact that farm women continue to be concerned with their primary functions as wives, mothers and homemakers. Despite their importance to agricultural production, women face severe handicaps. They are in fact, the largest group of landless labourers with little real security in case of break-up of the family owing to death or divorce; inheritance laws and customs discriminate against them land reform and settlement programmes usually give sole title and hence the security needed for obtaining production credits to the husband. Agricultural development programmes are usually planned by men and aimed at men. Mechanization, for example alleviates the burden of tasks that are traditionally men responsibility, leaving women’s burdens unrelieved or even increased. It may not be out of place to mention here that considering their dual responsibilities within and outside the home, it would be in the fitness of things that more and more in the village training is organized for rural farm women to suit their convenience with due realization that institutional training is important in its own place. In order that farm women get a fair deal at the hands of change agents, one of the remedial measures that needs to be undertaken is to induct a sizeable number of well trained women personnel in training and extension programmes.

Women in India

Indian women are considered as a source of power (shakti) since mythological times. The Hindus worship goddesses as mothers. But in reality,
women occupy a back seat to men. Moreover, they are revered as mothers, sisters and other social bondages. Many poets have imagined woman’s minds as ocean. The upper layers of their minds, like those of the ocean, have turbulent waves. But depths are serene and meditative. Women’s minds are essentially steadfast and strong. The truth is acknowledged by the Bhagvad Geeta wherein Lord Krishna describes his manifestation in the feminine quality of Medha or higher intelligence. In spite of these facts, in traditional Indian society women are accorded inferior status in family hierarchy. The Indian society considered women as weaker sex. Such sociological and cultural traditions and taboos have kept women dormant for quite a long time.

The Sati pratha [woman setting herself fire on the pyre of husband] almost disappeared, but shameful incidents like female foeticide continue to take place in our so called developed society. Women continue to face gender bias right from childhood. Incidences of malnutrition, school dropout, early marriage, harassment for dowry etc, are significant examples. The male female ratio in our country has also become a serious issue of concern these days. It is quite common in Indian families that the women take up more responsibilities in bringing up children and maintaining home with love and affection in a far better way. This aspect of women being the nucleus of the family is being envied by westerners since they lack such family affirmations. The task of coordination of various activities in a much useful manner, without feeling any pinch of it, is being well managed by Indian women in their families. Child
rearing and providing support services at home is till today recognized as principal function of an Indian woman. The traditional perception of woman as a homemaker or at the most a helper in the husband’s occupation is still prevalent.

**Status of women in India**

The historical research and literary writing of the ancient period - Vedic, Upanishad, Buddhist and Jainism establish the fact that women were educated, respected and honored. Their status was equal to that of me. After 300 B.C. women were degraded to a lower status. Her status was further marred by the practices of polygamy, the pardah, early marriage, sati and forcible widowhood. They were also denied inheritance to the right of property. In 19th century many social reforms in India rose against the evil practices. From Ram Mohan Roy to Gandhiji, efforts were focused to improve status of women. In 1829 Sati pratha was abolished and considered to be crime. Widow Remarriage Act was passed in 1856 and enforcement of monogamy was brought in 1872. With globalization and knowledge based society spreading like wild fire in the world today, the realization of women’s crucial role in human development has been gaining acceptance. Women today face many challenges and will face newer ones in future. They will now have to face more stringent forms of competition. They will have to polish their existing skill of wealth creation and time management to deal with the challenges of 21st century. They will have to devote more and more time to acquire new skill and knowledge, which now run the wheels of business and industry in the world.
Changing role of women

The decades after independence have seen tremendous changes in the status and the position of the women in Indian society. The constitution has laid down as a fundamental right – the equality of the sexes. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the recent changes in the status of women in India is not a sign of progress, but it is really a recapturing of the position that was held by women in Vedic period. Jayapalan in his book on women studies in 2000 describes the changing roles as follows:

Social Role

Literary and historical research has now established beyond doubt that the women held a position of equality with men during the Vedic period. There was a great change in the role of women after 300 B. C. During this period, son was valued more than daughter. Many young women renounced their homes and joined the Buddhistic and Jain monasteries. It was also presumed that one of the reasons for practice of early marriage of girls was to prevent them from entering monastic life. Girls were married off soon after puberty. Marriage was an irrevocable union for a woman. The wave of reformist movement in nineteenth century brought the changing role of women in the social field. Finally it led to the great emancipation of the Indian women in the twentieth century. There was a change in the outlook in society. Many legislative measures were brought about for the protection of women. The urgency of women’s education was felt and thus facilities for the same were made. Many
women leaders created a kind of political awareness among women which led to a great change in their role. Women even began to fight against the social evils during this period.

**Economic Role**

Rural women have always been working in the fields and farms from time immemorial. They have worked because that was way of life. Similarly women have been working to help their husbands in cottage industries. They have been working and they now continue to work. Work in the lives of majority of women is not a matter of self equity. Changing economic roles and responsibilities of women, particularly among the poor, make employment / work a matter of economic survival. Male unemployment or male low earnings resulting due to wage labour and high rates of urbanization have also meant an increase in the number of married women workers. Low male wages often impose double responsibilities on married women who need to substitute the family income through additional home production and work outside the home. Women’s contribution to household income provides the means to meet basic survival needs such as food, clothing and shelter. Ultimately, women’s contribution makes possible improvements in the health and nutritional status of household members.

In the census, “married women” are often classified as “housewives”, weighing the importance of economic contribution they make to the household. The actual number of economically active married women is much larger than
aggregate level data would indicate. The great change, however took place when the machines were introduced. Women were employed in factories. In 1901 as many as 6,38,000 women worked in factories, mines and plantations, forming 14.5 percent of the total working force. There was spectacular increase in the employment of middle class women who were working in secretarial or administrative capacities. More women were now working as stenographers, clerks, telephone operators and receptionists; In the educational field also about 15 percents of the teachers at primary and secondary levels were women. Women’s participation in all spheres highlights their changing role and the emerging pattern points towards equality of sex.

**Economic contribution of women**

It has been well accepted that women play an important role in economic welfare of the family. It is generally felt that the role of women in traditional societies is just confined to the household management based on traditional values, attitudes and customs. In fact, the family culture in the context of which early socialization takes place is a very important factor which later on induces or prohibits women’s participation in economic activities of the family. The economic role of women in the traditional society largely depends upon two important factors:

- Need for augmenting the family income
- Opportunities available for participation in such economic activities
Women entering business is comparatively recent phenomenon. By and large they had confined to petty business and tiny cottage industries. Although more and more women breaking the barriers, most of them still do not find it either possible or desirable for total involvement in entrepreneurial activities. In India, marriage is the only career for most women. Even professionally, they have largely confined their activities to areas such as teaching, office work, nursing and medicine. Female agricultural labourers who work the “double day” that is work plus house work are also faced with a wide ranges of problems which often hinder their work, participation poverty, lack of access to education and adequate health facilities are their major problems lack of training and suitable implements with respect to farm and home chores low wage rates, lack of recognition for their work and so on are some among the unending list of their problems. A part from customs and traditions, blind, beliefs, which are adverse to the good health and progress of women and to their drudgery, for a vast majority of these women, the question is not of right but of basic requirements. It is a well-known fact that female agricultural labourers are among the poorest of the poor and their families are ridden with problems, further female agricultural labourers than the female agricultural labourers from male-headed families.

Women contribution greatly to the economy employment of women is an index of their economic status in society especially with respect to equality. About 8790 of all economically active women derive their livelihood from the
agricultural sector and that 48% of self employed farmers are women. This the sector where women’s role as unpaid labour in productive activities is most prominent and is responsible work for conferring on women a non-working status but their contribution is after made invisible by statistical biases of work on their own farmers wages etc. The total share of women’s employment in the agricultural and allied activities sector has also been increasing steadily from 67% in 1901. 78%, in 1951 to 87% in 1991 further the ratio of the number of women per hundred men in this sector is also increasing. In 1971 there were 14 cultivators and 50 agricultural labourers, which used to 26 cultivators and 64 agricultural labourers in 1991. These trends emphasize that there is a significant presence of women in the agricultural sector.

Women are a part of labour force. She produces not merely goods and services but is a prime source of accelerating human race. Thus from the point of view of this labour force as well as involving themselves in production and service activities their active and positive participation cannot be overlooked. But throughout the world, the rural women have been under represented in the development process. The male dominated society never recognizes their proper contributions. The study on women agricultural labourers in Pappanviduthi village of Alangudi Taluk has been analysed with the help of few indicators like education, income, expenditure pattern, age, caste, and social status. The agricultural women labourers in Pappanviduthi village are traditionally doing the agricultural work. The village is a typical traditional village. The Hindus
are the owners of the land. The backward communities are the tenants and the scheduled caste people are mostly women’s in this village. The main of livelihood is agricultural work. Household in economics is defend as people live under one roof and shares the food in a common Kitchen. The survey analyses the expenditure pattern of the women agricultural labourers. Women in the urban sector play a significant role in the family decision-making. But in the rural sector especially in the working family they are under the control of the man folk women role in the expenditure pattern and other decision-making is nothing but they are supplementary to the family income by hard work. After completing the field work they attend the domestic work and rearing for their children.

**Household consumption Pattern**

The Theoretical Framework of Study of Household consumption Pattern

Household consumption behaviour is usually analysed on the basis of theoretical formulations of the utility theory of demand. Individual or household demand functions for different commodities are derived from constrained utility maximisation function. The study of household consumption pattern by Earnest Engel in 1857 is based on household income as the explanatory variable to demand function. From among the determinants of demand income, taste and fashions, time, social set up, etc., income is the most important determinant. That is, expenditure on ith commodity by fh household (Eij) is a function of total income of the fh household (Yj). $E_{ij} = F(Y_j)$ Although
income reported by households usually suffer errors due to under statement and the proxy of expenditure by household is used in empirical studies of consumption function, it is not practical in this study. In the present study income of household and the income of female earners separately have been used as the explanatory variables, although household consumption demand for individual commodity items are not looked into. Total monthly consumption expenditure out of total monthly income has been studied as well as the consumption level attained and maintained by the household at the changed situations of employment and income. Consumption pattern of households with female earners is significantly determined by the preferences of female earners. Not only this, female income is a deciding factor in the maintenance of labour household consumption at a higher level. If income earned by male member(s) of lh household is \( Y_{mj} \) and income earned by female member(s) of lh household is \( Y_{fj} \), then total income earned by the lh household, Thus the expenditure by household is determined by the income earned both by male and female members of the household. Thus a gender disaggregated analysis of influence of income on consumption demand for any commodity if theoretically possible. This conventional wisdom is being transformed for the present study that the gender disaggregated analysis of influence of incomes on expenditure for family consumption basket (total magnitude of household consumption expenditure) is possible irrespective of the commodity(s) in the consumption basket. That is, total family consumption expenditure of lh
household (Ej) is a function of incomes earned by male and female members of the household. The limitations of the analysis are that the demand elasticity for each commodity cannot be used as the total family expenditure is used, Engel's ratio is not relevant, and only descriptive study of the influence of income by male and female members is resorted to rather than using any econometric model.

1.10. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The period for the study was too short, covering only one period of agricultural operation. Majority of women agricultural labourers generally do not keep records hence, the information collection was based on mental recollection of recent events such as family expenditure, wage rates. Since schedule was prepared for data collection by researcher, there may be difference between actual and recorded data as perceived by researcher. Since the study focused only on women labourers in the farm economy it has restricted its generalization. The results of this study are useful for policy making where there is similar geographical entity available.

1.11. PLAN OF THE STUDY

The thesis is divided into eight chapters. The first chapter includes introductory aspects such as need for the study, research gap, motivation for the study, statement of the problem, research questions, objectives, hypotheses, theoretical framework for the study, Limitations and Plan of the study. The
second chapter deals with the review of Literature. The third chapter brings out the profile of the study area, the definitions and concepts, database and period of the study, sampling design and statistical tools used. The fourth chapter gives an analysis of characteristics of women agricultural labourers. The fifth chapter deals with the analysis of the nature of work and employment patterns of women labourers in the farm economy. The sixth chapter deals with the analysis of the wage patterns and causes of discrimination in wages of women agriculture labourers in the study area. The seventh chapter brings out the analysis of main constraints of women labourers of farm economy in the study area. And the last chapter furnishes the major findings, suggestions and conclusions. A small note on the areas for further research is also given.