Chapter XIII

Summary and Conclusion

19.1 A Brief Review of The Findings of Field Study

A brief summary of the findings of field survey is presented in this concluding Chapter. The main conclusions emerging from the study as per objectives and hypothesis laid down earlier (Chapter IV) are highlighted here.

The study was conducted in ten villages ofibsagar District, Assam. The villages were selected purposively so as to represent different agricultural situations, and population characteristics e.g. caste, communities, religions and ethnic groups. From the total households, 216 land owning cultivator families and 17 landless agricultural labour households were randomly selected for detailed analysis. Land owning households were classified on the basis of operational holding into marginal (0-1 hectare), small (1.01 - 2 hectares), and medium (2.01 hectares and above). The data relate to the year 1979-80 i.e. from May 1979 to April 1980. Toddy was the dominant crop in all villages covering 22.55 per cent of total area under all crops. Other crops grown in the
villages were mustard, pulses (black gram), seasonal vegetables and sugarcane.

Total female population in ten villages was 278 and out of them 57.20 per cent were in the age group of 15-59. About 54.72 per cent of female population were workers. Total female workers in agriculture comprised of whole time workers (34.38 per cent) and helpers (19.40 per cent). Work participation rate of females varied significantly from 38.09 per cent in Gajpuria village to 90.20 per cent in Barsilina village. Cultivation was the primary occupation of 98.17 per cent of the female workers in the villages.

Female workers in cultivator families mainly worked in their own farms as unpaid family labours. Unpaid employments in others' farms were very less for such females. If total number of hours worked is converted to 8 hour mandays, an average female worker was engaged in farm activities during the year for 51.59 days in marginal farms, 73.13 days in small farms and 89.37 days in medium farms. Total mandays worked by females in agricultural operations increased along with increase in size of farm. Per hectare utilization of female labour declined in higher farm size groups. Utilization of female labour per hectare of gross cropped area and net sown area was found to be 83.59 days and 91.44 days respectively in actual mandate.
Female workers mainly carried on transplanting and harvesting operations. The proportion of female workers engaged in farm activities was highest during transplanting and harvesting seasons. In 8 hour days, an average female worker was engaged for 35.89 days during transplanting operation and for 28.80 days during harvesting operation. Female workers were engaged for 9.56 days for post harvest operations. Crop wise utilization of female labour indicated that for cultivation of Winter Rice (Oriya), the households engaged both female family workers and hired female workers. But for cultivation of Autumn Rice (Wu, IR-8), households depended mainly on female family workers.

Seasonal variation of participation in agricultural works was higher for female workers as they were engaged in farm activities during specific periods in the crop season. Employment pattern of females in farm activities was marked by sharp increase in mandays worked during busy seasons of transplanting and harvesting activities and steep decline in lean seasons. As about 90 per cent of net sown area was monocropped, the extent of seasonal fluctuation in employment was higher. Farm activities of female workers spread during a span of 9 months. July - August and December-January were the busy months for female workers. In other months farm activities were less for female workers. Differences in mandays worked by
females between busy months and lean months widened with
the increase of farm size. For all farm size groups, 2 to 99 per cent of the female workers were engaged in the
farm during July-August, while the proportion declined
to about 28 per cent in November and about 12 per cent in
May and October. Another significant feature of female participation in agricultural activities was the variation
in work intensity of females per day during the same crop season. Female workers were found to work in the farm
within a time range of daily work hours which varied from
6 to 8 hours during busy seasons of transplanting and
harvesting operations and 2 to 4 hours during other months,
when farm activities were less for female workers.

The relationship between work participation of
females in agriculture and educational standard indicated
that higher the educational standard of the females, the
lower was the participation in agriculture. About 79 per
cent of the female workers in agriculture were illiterates
and semi literates (just able to read and write). Educated
females were not interested to accept agriculture as the
primary occupation. Rather the tendency of migration to
urban areas in search of salaried jobs was present among
the educated females also. Occupation of the household
and economic status of the male family members also
influenced work participation of females in agriculture.
Ancillary agricultural activities like preparation and carrying of tiffin to farm labour engaged in the field, maintaining and attending cattle, cleaning cattle shed, storing dung and litters in the manure pit, milking cow and maintaining poultry, were found as important household based agro-economic activities in the villages. Such activities are essential part of the overall organisation of agricultural production. Due to dominant role of the household as the unit of organisation for productive activities, and the family members as the unit of labour, there is not much qualitative differences between ancillary activities and the activities of crop production. Work burden of females in ancillary activities was higher than males. The length of working periods varied for different types of ancillary activities and the nature of involvement of females was not uniform activity wise. Some activities like maintaining cattle and poultry, milking cow, cleaning cattle shed etc. were done throughout the year while some other activities like preparation of meal for farm labour and carrying it to the place of work etc., were done during specific periods of preparatory tillage, transplanting and harvesting operations. As some of the ancillary activities were directly related to farm operations, increase in the work burden of farm activities and ancillary activities occurred together. It was found that total work hours wer
month for females in farm activities and in ancillary activities varied from 89.24 hours in June to 190.67 hours in August. During December total working hours increased to 190.97 hours and to 192.87 hours in January. Size group wise variations in work burden of ancillary activities were less for female workers. In rural households adult females had to work for longer hours in family business and in domestic duties and had to maintain liaison between home and the farm. Engagement of females in such activities can therefore be taken as part of their overall burden of agricultural work.

Female workers in landless agricultural labour households mainly worked as casually hired workers in farms of other prosperous farmers in the village or in nearby villages. They also worked for wage employments in activities like pounding rice, domestic services etc. Handloom weaving was secondary source of income for female agricultural labours. Average annual employment for a female agricultural labour was for 132.60 days, and out of it 108.04 days were in farm activities during transplanting and harvesting seasons, and 24.56 days in non farm jobs, mainly domestic services. In handloom weaving, females were engaged for 45.71 days per annum on an average. Wage employments in agriculture for female agricultural labours varied from 25 days in Gajpuria Pakoty Gaon village to 89 days in Dhanpur
village. Demand for female agricultural labours for wage employment in farm activities depended on two considerations such as (a) total area under paddy cultivation and (b) availability of female family workers locally during busy seasons of transplanting and harvesting operations. If sufficient number of female family workers were available, dependence on hired female labour was less. In account of limited demand for female agricultural labours for wage employments in farm activities, and due to non availability of sufficient wage employments in other sectors of industry and services, within and around the villages, female agricultural labours were without employment for larger part of the year in all villages. Wage rates for transplanting operation varied in the villages from Rs. 4 to Rs. 7 and for harvesting operation it was from Rs. 6 to Rs. 8. Total annual income earned by a female agricultural labour varied from Rs. 200.00 in Gajpuria Kakoty Gaon village to Rs. 740.00 in Lkorani village. Due to insufficiency in the existing level of employment and consequent income for meeting family requirements, all female agricultural labours were willing to engage themselves in wage employments for additional days either in agriculture or in non agricultural jobs. But most of the female workers were not willing to move to other villages in search of jobs.
Contribution of female workers towards agricultural production is assessed on the basis of the proportion of mandays worked by female workers in farm activities during agricultural seasons. Female workers directly contributed 31.42 per cent of the total mandays worked in crop production. Operation wise contribution of female workers indicated that about 89 per cent of the mandays worked in transplanting and harvesting operations was contributed by female workers. In post harvest activities female workers contributed 28.35 per cent of the total mandays. In other operations, female workers participated for less than 5 per cent of the total mandays. Female family workers comprised 25.45 per cent of total family labour utilized in crop production.

It was estimated that average family labour income was Rs. 1104.03 per farm and Rs. 718.72 per hectare of cropped area. On the basis of direct contribution of females to agricultural production, it can be stated that the contribution of female labour, in the total family labour income of Rs. 1104.03, was Rs. 346.89 and Rs. 253.82 per hectare (in the total of Rs. 718.72) of cropped area. Income per farm was higher in higher farm size groups, but per hectare income declined with increase in farm size. If the labour time spent by females in ancillary activities is taken into account, the actual contribution of females to agricultural production would be higher, at least around 40 per cent of the total.
13.2 Objectives And Hypothesis

The present study was undertaken to achieve nine objectives (Chapter IV, Page 82). After detailed analysis of the field data collected by the researcher and after comparison of the findings with other similar studies it can now be stated that -

(1) Female workers are integral part of the total working force in rural areas and they constituted half of the total workers in the villages. In farm families all able bodied adult females worked in the field during crop seasons. Transplanting and harvesting operations were carried on mainly by female workers in all the sample villages. Female workers assisted male workers in post harvest operations.

(2) Crop wise utilization of female labour indicated that for cultivation of Winter Rice (‘Ala) households engaged both female family workers and hired female workers. But for cultivation of Autumn Rice (‘Abu, IR-8) the farmers depended mainly on female family workers. Female workers were not engaged in farm operations for cultivation of other crops like mustard, pulses, sugarcane. But females were found to assist the males for crushing sugarcane and preparing jaggery at home.

(3) Seasonal variation of participation in agricultural works was higher for female workers as they were engaged
in farm activities during specific periods in the crop seasons, particularly in transplanting and harvesting operations of paddy.

(4) Higher educational standard of the female workers and better economic position of the farm household had positive effect on work participation rate of females in farm activities.

(5) Ancillary agricultural activities were found to be important part of the daily activities of females in all farm households. Females worked for higher mandays and longer hours per day in ancillary activities than males, particularly in the small and marginal farm families.

(6) Female workers in landless agricultural labour families mainly worked as casually hired workers during transplanting and harvesting seasons in the farms of other prosperous farmers in the village or in nearby villages. They worked for higher mandays in farm activities than female family workers in owner cultivator families.

(7) It was estimated that female workers directly contributed about one third of the total human labour input in crop production in the farm households. If the labour time spent by females in ancillary agricultural activities is taken into account, the actual contribution of female workers to agricultural production would be higher.

(8) Economic compulsions, social custom, habit and tradition were important factors which encouraged the females
to participate in farm activities. Existence of the system of classification of farm operations by sexes had also influenced the demand for (as well as supply of) female labour in different periods in a crop season. Apart from illiteracy and ignorance, lack of suitable media to extend knowledge and training among the female workers was another factor which affected willingness of female workers to make more efficient contribution to agricultural production and rural incomes.

To achieve the objectives of the study, five hypotheses were laid down. On the basis of the findings of the study, it can be assessed that -

1) Although work participation rate of females was the highest in marginal farms as compared to small and medium farms, the total mandays worked by females in farm activities was higher in higher farm size groups.

2) Female agricultural labours were engaged in farm activities for transplanting and harvesting operations only. For other agricultural operations like post harvest activities, inter cultural operations etc., they were not engaged. Wage employments for female agricultural labours in farm activities were available mainly for cultivation of winter rice (Gali).

3) Higher the educational standard of the females, the lower was the participation in farm activities. Directly
females were mainly interested in getting salaried jobs or in migrating to urban areas.

4) There was no definite preference for other types of agricultural operations among the females than the present nature of their participation in farm activities. However, about 72 per cent of the female workers in the villages preferred to work in the field for harvesting operations than for transplanting operations as the former operation is less arduous and exhausting than the later.

5) Variations of female participation in agricultural works occurred according to social status and caste of the females and social attitude towards participation of females in agricultural operations. Females from high caste Hindu families did not participate in farm activities. Work participation rate of females was found higher among scheduled caste and scheduled tribe communities. In prosperous farm families, female workers did not work in the field due to social prestige. Female workers in owner cultivator families did not seek wage employments elsewhere and voluntarily remained without works.

Thus it can be concluded that out of the five hypotheses taken, two were found to be correct. but in case of two the hypotheses were partially true and in case of one it was found to be wrong.
The findings of the study revealed that the prevailing farm practices and technology in the ramie villages could not provide adequate employment opportunities to the farm families corresponding to the availability of working hours. The extent of underutilization was higher in case of female labours.

Considering the large quantum of unemployed manpower existing in the villages, it is highly desirable to evolve policy measures for creating additional employment opportunities in order to ensure effective and rational utilization of the available labours. Measures to generate additional employment for female workers should be based on several considerations. Firstly, the contemplated steps should aim at the creation of additional employment opportunities for female workers in the occupations in which majority of them are engaged at the moment, by developing the existing skills and by introducing new skills. Secondly, new work areas as alternative sources of income for female workers will have to be identified in order to increase their earning powers. Thirdly, through education and rural upliftment works, the prevailing social stigma against female participation in works must be removed. Fourthly, by establishment of institutions for provision of credit marketing and training,
the female workers should be given incentives for greater participation in painful economic activities.

In the villages, the largest group of female workers were engaged in farm activities as primary occupation. If additional employment opportunities are created in agriculture itself, it would lead to increased employment of female workers in farm activities. Additional employment can be created in agriculture through modifications in farming systems, production techniques, and cropping pattern. Intensive utilization of agricultural land through adoption of double and multiple cropping combined with improved farm practices would lead to higher utilization of labour in the farm and shorten the period of unemployed days both for males and females. To talk about changes in cropping pattern and to increase crop intensity, adequate irrigation facilities in the villages and financial assistance to the farm household would be necessary. Because, the extent of increase in labour demand due to changes in cropping pattern depends on availability and use of other essential inputs and on the nature of farm technology followed. The new agricultural technology selected for the purpose, should lead to increased employment of both male and female workers in farm activities.
Female labour utilization in agricultural work can be raised by diversifying their activities in the farm to several other related farm operations, instead of having their role restricted to one or two specific operations only. Training of female workers in improved farm practices is essential in order to increase their work efficiency and to expand their participation in agricultural works.

It is possible to make rational utilization of available female labour to a great extent in agriculture itself by modernising and reorganising farm practices through adoption of improved farm technology suitable to this region. At the same time, emphasis should be placed on integrating the new agricultural strategy with the long-term measures directed towards structural changes relating to land reform.

Allied agricultural activities like livestock farming, animal husbandry, bee keeping, pisciculture, have very good scope for enhancing productive work opportunities for females in the villages, if these are developed on scientific and commercial basis. Handloom weaving is the most important household industry pursued by every adult female in the villages. Reorganisation of handloom weaving with facilities of finance, marketing and remunerative price for handloom products would provide higher employment and
income opportunities to the females. Development of sericulture like endi, muga and silk industry, handicrafts based on local raw materials, food processing industries, tailoring, embroidery, knitting works etc. have great scope for increasing productive employment for females in the villages if adequate facilities are provided to develop these units on sound commercial lines. Non-agricultural wage employment for females can also be created in the villages by implementing rural works programmes suited to socio-economic conditions of different regions. In case of non-farm employment, the primary need of the majority of females in marginal farm households and in agricultural labour families, is the provision of employment at part-time jobs during certain parts of the year, to reduce the magnitude and extent of unemployment and underemployment.

13.4 Conclusion

The basic requirement for scientific study of the nature of work participation of females is the collection of adequate and correct information on the size of female workers, pattern and extent of their existing employment in various activities and the nature of their work participation. This is essential to formulate specific programmes for generating additional employment opportunities for the female workers.

Although the present study is undertaken in ten selected villages and the findings are relevant to these
villages, the general conclusions derived from the study are applicable to all rural areas of Assam with similar agro-economic situation. Slower pace of adoption of improved farm technology, traditional cropping pattern, and inadequate investment have limited the scope of generating additional employment and income in agriculture. But there is large scale underemployment and unemployment in rural areas, more so in case of female workers. Hence effective measures to expand employment opportunities in rural areas are urgently needed. If the underutilized labour force in the rural areas can be provided work, the rural economy will be greatly strengthened. Modernisation of agriculture through adoption of improved labour intensive farm practices has become necessary for enhancing employment and income opportunities in the rural areas where about 90 per cent of the people of the state lives and whose principal occupation is cultivation. Along with the intensive use of agricultural land through efficient utilization of the available labour force in agricultural operations, opportunities for employment in household industries will also have to be increased.

The present study has shown that most of the female labour force has not been utilized in gainful work. It is true that they are usually engaged in household works like cooking, cleaning of houses and homestead, rearing of children, but all these are not considered as gainful
employment to generate additional income to the females. Moreover there is scope for rationalisation of work in these activities through simplification of cooking practices, opening of nursery schools in the villagers, improvement of housing condition etc. Adoption of family planning in rural areas will also release a large number of female workers from the hazardous and time consuming child rearing activities. Hence it is essential to formulate future policy for generation of employment opportunities in rural areas. It is more so for females because they will not be able to benefit from additional employment opportunities created through expansion of activities like trade, transport, commerce, construction works, large scale industrialisation etc. Intensification of farm practices, expansion of allied agricultural activities, and improvement of household industries along with appropriate training facilities will provide gainful employment to the illiterate unemployed female labours in rural areas.