CHAPTER – 8

SUMMARY AND SUGGESTIONS

Agricultural labour is one of the most important segments of rural population in terms of numbers. But it is economically the weakest and socially handicapped section of rural society. A vast majority of them continue to live on the verge of poverty. Until the conditions of this vital section of the society are improved, the economy cannot progress as a whole.

It is one of the primary objectives of Five Year Plans to ensure fuller opportunities for work and better living to all sections of the rural community and in particular to assist labourers and backward classes to come upto the level of living of the rest. Economic development in general and agricultural development in particular, holds the key to the betterment of agricultural labour. The Punjab State has experienced the most spectacular progress in agricultural production in recent decades which seems to have improved the economic condition of the peasantry in general. But, it is also important to know how the progress in agriculture has influenced the economic and social conditions of agricultural labour in Punjab.

Migratory character is a distinct feature of agricultural labour in Punjab. In busy seasons, agricultural labourers migrate from other states particularly from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar where labour is relatively abundant. In slack season, surplus agricultural labour is in search of
employment in road construction, building, brick-kilns etc. Such migratory character of labour does have a direct effect on their incomes and it affects the local labour market as well in an indirect way.

A number of attempts have been made by various individual scholars to study the levels of living, wage-structures or some other aspects of agricultural labour. But, most of the studies are either impressionistic or based on inadequate and scattered evidences and do not provide precise and tenable information about the economic conditions of agricultural labour households in totality. Most of the studies deal with one or the other aspect of agricultural labour in a fragmented manner. Some studies deal with migration while others with wage-structure or labour-employment. Some studies have analysed the socio-economic conditions and characteristics of the local labour and has ignored the migratory part of agricultural labour. Moreover, most of the studies relate levels of living with wage rates. It is the level of income and not the wage rates upon which the level of living of labour depends. Hence, for meaningful and fruitful conclusions, a comprehensive study was needed. The main objectives of the study were:

1. To study the socio-economic and demographic profile of the selected native and migrant agricultural labour households.

2. To analyse the nature and magnitude of unemployment with the help of ‘time’, ‘income’ and ‘willingness’ criteria among the native and migrant agricultural labour households.
3. To study the pattern of income and assets among the agricultural labour households.

4. To examine the nature and magnitude of absolute poverty among the native and migrant agricultural labour households.

5. To analyze the nature and magnitude of indebtedness among the native and migrant agricultural households.

6. To study the problem of social seclusion among these agricultural labour households.

7. To study the reasons behind the influx of migrant agricultural labour to Punjab and the effects thereof on the socio-economic lives of the migrant as well as the native agricultural labour households.

8. To identify the problems of the agricultural labour households and to suggest appropriate policy measures for their increased incomes and improved levels of living.

To achieve the objectives of the present study, both primary and secondary data have been used. The secondary data has been collected from the related books, journals and reports of various government and private agencies. The primary data has been generated in a rural sample survey organised in the Ludhiana district of Punjab. From the point of view of the number of agricultural labourers as well as the wage rates, the Ludhiana district is the most representative. Moreover, being a local resident, it was also convenient and helpful to collect reliable first hand
information from the selected sample labour households.

Multi-stage random sampling procedure has been adopted to select a representative sample. Ludhiana district constitutes 12 blocks viz; Ludhiana-1, Ludhiana-2, Jagraon, Doraha, Samrala, Machiwara, Dehlon, Sudhar, Pakhowal, Sidhwabet, Khanna, and Raikot. All these blocks have been arranged in an ascending order on the basis of their respective population and three blocks namely Ludhiana-1, Dehlon and Doraha have been selected randomly. In the second stage, all the villages in each of the above selected three blocks have been arranged in an ascending order and four villages from each of the above selected blocks have been selected randomly. Finally, a list of both the native and migrant agricultural labour households in the above selected villages has been prepared and a sample of both the native and migrant agricultural labour households has been selected in proportion to their total number of households. A sample of 300 agricultural labour households has been selected which constitutes 140 native and 160 migrant agricultural labour households.

The native and migrant labour households had a population of 814 and 996 members respectively. Among the total population of native households there were 419 males and 395 females. While among the migrant households, there were 506 males and 490 females. Out of the total population of all the households together, there were 925 males and 885 females. The sex ratio among the native and migrant households
has been worked out 943 and 968 respectively. The difference of sex-ratio among the natives and the migrants has not been found statistically significant.

The total number of family labourers has been converted into standard mandays by assigning the 'proper coefficients of efficiency'. The number of standard mandays available among the native and the migrant households has been worked out 525.75 and 643.5 respectively.

Individual members in a household consume different quantities of food items according to their age and sex. Therefore, consumption expenditure of different age and sex groups is different. In order to avoid under or over estimation of levels of consumption and poverty rates among the sample population, the household members of different age and sex have been converted into standard consumer units by assigning 'scale of coefficients' suggested by the nutrition experts. The total number of standard consumer units among the native and the migrant labour households has been worked out 913.6 and 1117 respectively.

In the present empirical study, the average size of the family among the native and migrant agricultural labour households has been worked out 5.81 and 6.23 respectively. For all the labour households together, the average size of family came out 6.03. The percentage of family workforce among the natives and migrants has been worked out 62.40 and 62.45 respectively. The percentage of family workforce has been almost the similar among the native and the migrant labour
households. The average number of standard mandays per household among the native and migrant households has been estimated 3.75 and 4.02 respectively. For all the sample households taken together, the average number of standard mandays came out 3.90. The average number of standard consumer units among the native and the migrant labour households has been worked out 6.53 and 6.98 respectively. Among all the sample households, the figure worked out 6.77. The average family size among the migrant labour households was significantly greater than that among the native agricultural labour households. Consequently, per household standard mandays and standard consumer units were also higher among the migrant households than that among the native households. The figures suggest a higher degree of family planning awareness among the native agricultural labour households than its counterpart migrant agricultural labour households.

Among the native agricultural labour households, the percentage of literacy has been worked out 65.96 and 60.23 percent among males and females respectively. While among the migrant households, the percentage of literacy came out 30.35 and 23.93 among males and females respectively. The literacy rate has been found lower among females than males among both the native as well as the migrant labour households. It indicates one aspect of gender discrimination against women. The overall literacy percentage has been visibly and significantly
higher among the native agricultural labour households than that among the migrant agricultural labour households.

Out of 140 native agricultural labour households, 13 (9.29 percent) belonged to the general castes, 113 (80.71 percent) to the scheduled castes and 14 (10.00 percent) belonged to the backward classes. While, out of 160 migrant households, 62 (38.75 percent) belonged to the general castes, 85 (53.13 percent) to scheduled castes and 13 (8.12 percent) belonged to backward classes. It has been observed that majority of the total agricultural labour households belonged to the scheduled castes. The percentage of scheduled caste households came out significantly higher among the native households than that among the migrants.

In the present study, the extent of unemployment or underemployment among the agricultural labour households has been worked out with the help of ‘multi-dimensional approach’. Under multi-dimensional approach, ‘time’, ‘willingness’ and ‘income’ criteria have been used for estimating the magnitude of unemployment or underemployment. According to the ‘time criterion’, the percentage of the unemployed among the native and migrant labour households has been worked out 39.98 and 44.49 respectively. Among all the agricultural labour households, the percentage of the unemployed came out 42.46. The Z-test of significance has suggested that the extent of unemployment among the migrant labour households has been very
significantly greater than that among the native households. According to the ‘willingness criterion’, the percentage of the unemployed and/or the underemployed among the native and migrant labour households has been worked out 42.34 and 46.76 respectively. Among all the labour households taken together, the percentage came out 44.77. The percentage of the unemployed on the basis of ‘willingness criterion’ has been more than that estimated with the help of ‘time criterion’ among both the groups. It is due to many reasons. First, some members of the agricultural labour households are underemployed and they are willing to work more than their existing days of employment. Second, although the members of households are fully employed according to ‘time criterion’ among some of the agricultural labour households, yet the existing level of their income is not sufficient to meet their basic requirements. Therefore, they are willing to over work to make ends meet. Third, some labourers are willing to overwork for different reasons such as : to pay off old debts, to purchase new assets, to save for the education and marriage of their children. According to the ‘income criterion’, the percentage of the unemployed / underemployed among the native and migrant agricultural labour households has been worked out 43.39 and 49.38 respectively.

The pattern of income among the agricultural labour households shows that the native agricultural labour households earned 76.24 percent of their income from work in agricultural and allied activities and
23.76 percent from non-agricultural activities. The migrants earned 66.96 percent of their income from work in agricultural and allied activities and 33.04 percent from non-agricultural activities. It is worth mentioning that the percentage of income from non-agricultural activities indicates the extent of seasonality and casual employment in the agricultural sector.

The per household per month income among the native and the migrant households has been worked out Rs. 6244.28 and 6144.00 respectively. The per capita per month income among the native and the migrant households came out Rs. 1074.75 and 986.20 respectively. The Z-test has suggested that the per household per month income among the native households has been significantly greater than that among the migrants. The per standard manday per month earnings among the native and migrant households has been estimated Rs. 1665.14 and 1528.36 respectively. While, the per month per standard consumer unit income has been estimated Rs. 956.25 and 880.23 respectively. Among all the agricultural labour households together, the amount has been worked out Rs. 914.45.

The distribution pattern of household assets among the agricultural labour households shows that the per household average value of movable assets has been worked out Rs. 32478 and 22990 among the native and migrant households respectively. Whereas, the per household average value of immovable assets among the native and migrant households has been worked out Rs. 1,84,474 and 1,14,428
respectively. The per household average value of all the assets, movable and immovable, among the native and migrant households has been amounted to Rs. 2,16,952 and 1,37,418 respectively. The per household average value of total assets among the native households has been significantly greater than that among the migrant labour households.

For a proper understanding of the level of living of agricultural labour, the knowledge of their family expenditure is very essential. The present study shows that the percentage expenditure on cereals to the total food expenditure came out the highest among the native and migrant agricultural labour households. Among the native households and the migrants it has been worked out 52.69 and 53.59 percent respectively. As compared to the native households, the percentage expenditure on food items, except cereals, has been low among the migrants. It is because of the fact that the migrants spend relatively more on cereals, particularly on rice, than on other items of food. Among the native and migrant labour households, per standard consumer unit per month expenditure on food items has been worked out Rs. 513.86 and 466.28 respectively. While for all the agricultural labour households together, the figure came out Rs. 487.69. The Z-test suggested that the per consumer unit per month food expenditure among the native households has been significantly greater than that among the migrant labour households.

Along with the minimum food requirement, a certain minimum
amount of non-food items is equally important for the survival of human beings, because, the availability of the minimum food requirement is ‘necessary’ but not ‘sufficient’ for the existence of mankind. Therefore, in the present study, due consideration has been given to ‘non-food’ items such as fuel and light, clothing and bedding, footwear, health, education etc. The study shows that the percentage of expenditure to the total non-food expenditure on the items such as light and fuel, clothing and footwear has been almost the same among the native and migrant households. But, the percentage of expenditure on the items such as health and education has been visibly lower among the migrant households than the native agricultural labour households. It has happened mainly due to the reason that the migrant labour households has higher illiteracy percentage, lower levels of income and higher burden of debt repayments. Therefore, they are less aware of, rather they can not afford to provide proper health and education to their families. The per consumer unit per month expenditure on non-food items among the native and migrant agricultural labour households has been worked out Rs. 286.43 and 230.72 respectively. The per consumer unit per month non-food expenditure among the native households has been very significantly more than that among the migrants. The per consumer unit per month total consumption expenditure among the native and the migrant households has been worked out Rs. 800.29 and 697.00 respectively.
In the present empirical investigation, composition of actual diet among the sample agricultural labour households has also been estimated. The study shows that the per consumer unit per day average consumption of cereals among the native and migrant households has been worked out 531.18 and 490.00 grams respectively. The per unit per day average consumption of cereals and vegetables among both the natives and the migrants has been less than the quantities suggested by the Indian Council of Medical Research. The study also shows that the quantities of all the food items consumed by the native agricultural households have been greater than those consumed by the migrants. Among all the agricultural labour households, the quantities of four items—cereals, vegetables, milk and fruits have been less while quantities of four items—pulses, meat, fish and eggs etc, oils and fats, sugar and ‘gur’ have been more than the recommended quantities.

To assess the extent of poverty among the agricultural labour households, both ‘Nutrition’ and ‘Nutrition Plus’ approaches have been applied. Therefore, two separate poverty lines based on these approaches have been constructed. The poverty line on the basis of ‘Nutrition Approach’ has been constructed on the basis of per consumer unit per day recommended average diet which provides 2400 calories per consumer unit per day. The per consumer unit per month required expenditure on food items has been worked out Rs. 475.80. Therefore, the per consumer unit per month minimum food expenditure of Rs.
475.80 has been used as a poverty line under the 'Nutrition Approach'. Because the 'minimum non-food requirements' vary among different socio-economic groups, therefore under the 'Nutrition Plus' approach, two poverty lines, separate for the native and the migrant labour households, were constructed. In the present study, the 'minimum non-food requirements' for the native and the migrant households have been worked out 55.74 and 49.48 percent of their food expenditure respectively. Hence, under the 'Nutrition Plus' approach, the minimum per consumer unit per month food and non-food requirements have been calculated as Rs. 741.01 and 711.23 for the native and migrant labour households respectively.

Under the 'Nutrition Approach', the per consumer unit a minimum per month food expenditure of Rs. 475.80 has been taken as the poverty line. On the basis of this poverty line, the percentage of the poor among the native and migrant agricultural labour households has been worked out 38.66 and 42.73 respectively. The percentage of the poor among all the households together has been 40.90. The Z-test suggests that the proportion of the poor among the migrant labour households has been significantly greater than that among the native agricultural labour households.

Under the 'Nutrition Plus Approach', per consumer a minimum per month consumption expenditure (food and non-food) of Rs. 741.01 and 711.23 has been taken as poverty lines for the native and migrant
agricultural labour households respectively. On the basis of these separate poverty lines, the percentage of the poor among the native and migrant agricultural labour households has been worked out 43.39 and 49.38 respectively. According to this approach, the percentage of poor among all the agricultural labour households together has been worked out 46.68. The Z-test suggests that the proportion of the poor among the migrant households has been significantly higher than that among the native households.

It is important to note that the estimates of poverty among the agricultural labour households on the basis of 'Nutrition Approach' are far less than those worked out on the basis of 'Nutrition Plus Approach'. Man being a social animal, a minimum of non-food consumption is equally important as the minimum of food consumption for his existence. Therefore, estimation of poverty on the basis of 'Nutrition Approach' alone can lead to underestimation of it. Thus, from the policy point of view, the 'Nutrition Plus Approach' is a more realistic approach to work out the extent of poverty in a region or country.

The pattern of household borrowings among the sample agricultural households shows that at the end of the year preceding the year of survey i.e. upto March 31, 2009, the total outstanding amount of loan per household among the native and migrant households has been Rs. 4317.58 and 3236.18 respectively. During 2009-10, the per household increase in the amount of loan among the native and migrant
The study reveals that among both the native and migrant households the major source of borrowings has been the village moneylenders and the employers. It is because of the fact that other sources of borrowings such as banks, co-operative societies, government schemes are not as easily accessible for the poor labourers as the village moneylenders and the employers are. Among the migrant households, moneylenders and employers have been a much bigger source of borrowings. It is because of the reason that other sources of borrowings such as banks, co-operative, government schemes are mostly available for permanent residents only. During the survey, the households also revealed that generally the loans taken from moneylenders, friends and relatives have been used mainly for unproductive purposes such as celebration of birth, death, marriage ceremonies, illness and household consumption, and partly for productive purposes such as education of children. The loans taken from agricultural labour households has been worked out Rs. 719.50 and 580.88 respectively. The amount of loan paid back during 2009-10 among the native and migrant households came out Rs. 667.80 and 608.62 respectively. At the end of the year 2010, the per household balance amount of loan among the native and migrant households has been worked out Rs. 4369.28 and 3208.44 respectively. The per capita burden of debt among the native and the migrant households has been Rs. 752.03 and 514.00 respectively.
banks and co-operative societies at low rates of interest have been used primarily for construction and repair of residential houses and purchase of means of conveyance.

In the present study, causes of migration and its effects on the socio-economic lives of agricultural labourers have also been studied. The present study shows that it was the economic distress faced by the migrant labourers at their native places which motivated the labourers to migrate to Punjab. Unemployment, underemployment and low wages were the main reasons behind this economic distress. A casual labourer's wage rate, on an average, varied from Rs. 50 to Rs. 75 per day, while in Punjab the wage rates are 80 to 100 percent higher than those in the native places of the migrant labourers. A vast majority (61.87 percent) of the migrant agricultural labour households migrated to Punjab to earn money to repay the debts which they had incurred from moneylenders shopkeepers etc. Although, some migrant labourers (38.13 percent) owned some land at their native places but the land was not so fertile to meet the needs of their families. Therefore, both the push and the pull factors have been responsible for the migration of agricultural labourers from other states to Punjab. The study brought out that 69.38 percent of the migrant labour households have migrated to Punjab at the instance of acquaintances and co-villages, 19.37 percent at the instance of their relatives and 2.50 percent migrated to Punjab at their own. The remaining came to know about employment opportunities
from labour contractors, truck drivers etc.

The present study shows that there has been big changes in the socio-economic lives of the migrant agricultural labourers after migration to Punjab. Firstly, the language of the migrant labourers have changed. After migration, they speak Hindi mixed with Punjabi words. The percentage of migrant labourers, who reported a change in their language, has been worked out 70.63. The present study shows that 72 percent children of the migrant agricultural labour study in the rural-side government schools. Punjabi being a compulsory subject in these schools, the next generation of the migrant agricultural labour speaks and writes Punjabi. Secondly, there has been a change in the food habits of migrant agricultural labourers. The wheat is the staple food in Punjab. But migrant labourers prefer to eat rice. In the initial stages of migration, when they come to Punjab individually, food is usually provided by the farmers. Because rice cannot be prepared separately for these migrant labourers, therefore, they have to consume wheat. With the passage of time, they start liking wheat. In the present study, 80.63 percent of the migrant households have reported a change in their food habits. There has also been a change in the dress of the migrant labourers after migration. Previously, they wore ‘dhoti’ and ‘kurta’ in their native states. But after migration to Punjab, they have started wearing ‘pyjama’ and ‘kameej’ and the migrant women have started wearing ‘salwar’ and ‘kameej’ instead of ‘sari’ and ‘dhoti’. In the present study, 90.63 percent
of the migrant labourers reported a change in their dress.

The present study shows that the economic condition of the migrant agricultural labourers has improved after migration. The percentage of the migrant agricultural labour households, who made an annual savings of Rs. 7000/- and above, has been worked out 60.63. But most of their savings has been used as the railway fare; the balance has been utilised to meet the sudden needs of their families. Only 11.3 percent of the migrant labour households utilised their savings for creation of some assets. Among those, 79.38 percent built or renovated their houses and 21.62 percent purchased some land for cultivation at their native villages. The percentage of the migrant agricultural labour households, who agreed that they have been better-off after migration to Punjab, came out 91.88. The present study shows that there has also been some socio-religious changes among migrant agricultural labourers after migration to Punjab. Majority of the rural population in Punjab belongs to Sikh religion. The names of the Sikhs are followed by Singh. In the present study, the percentage of migrant agricultural labour households, among which one or two male persons have started using Singh after their names, came out 15.63. About 10.63 percent of the male migrant labourers have grown long beards and 7.50 percent of them have also grown long hair and it is very difficult to recognise them as migrants (called 'Bhaias' in Punjab). The percentage of the migrant agricultural labour households, who visit 'gurudwara' came out 38.75'.
The present study shows that 92.86 percent of the native agricultural labour households did not view the influx of the migrant labour favourably. They think the migrant labourers as their competitors. They are of the view that the migrant labourers have narrowed down employment opportunities for them and have depressed the wage rates. Besides, a vast majority i.e. 70.71 percent of the native agricultural labour households, have reported a change in their employment pattern due to the influx of migrant labour. The present study indicates that a large number of native agricultural labourers have engaged themselves in other occupations like unskilled manual workers in construction industry, rickshaw pulling, truck cleaners, vegetable vendors etc. Moreover, it is a general feeling that the habits of smoking ‘bidies’, chewing ‘zarda’ and betel nuts have been brought in Punjab by the migrant labourers. In the present study, 96.43 percent of the native agricultural labour households held migrant labourers responsible for spreading the evils of smoking and chewing ‘zarda’ in Punjab. Some native labour households (21.43 percent) are of the view that the crime rate in Punjab has increased since the influx of migrant labour.

In the present study, a number of questions have been asked during the sample survey to size up the problem of social exclusion among the agricultural labour households and their responses have been recorded. In the present study, the percentage of the native and migrant agricultural labour households facing caste/social discrimination has
been worked out 72.86 and 96.25 respectively. Among all the households the percentage came out 85.33. Because of differences in ethnicity, the problem of social discrimination was more severe among the migrant households. The percentage of households facing wage discrimination among the migrant labour households came out 95.00. While this percentage among the native agricultural labour households has been worked out 10.71. Both the native as well as the migrant households accepted that village Panchayat and politicians' behaviour towards them has been discriminatory. Majority of both the groups accepted that they did not get equal treatment in social/religious gatherings and their employer did not invite them to participate in their social ceremonies. Moreover, 73.57 percent among the native households and 86.25 percent among the migrant households expressed that they were feeling socially secluded.

From the study, it is clear that agricultural labour is the most handicapped and neglected section in the society. They feel excluded from the main social stream.

The findings of the present study show that the agricultural labourers are economically the weakest and socially the most handicapped section of rural society. A vast majority of them continue to live on the verge of poverty. Although they are not bonded as in the feudal system, yet they are not as free as in the capitalist system. They are semi-bonded; though they may be free to leave their employer (after
paying off their debt, if any), but this means little, because employment itself is difficult to leave. The debt trap is so vicious that more than 70 percent of agricultural labourers of Punjab are indebted\(^1\). The non-existence of formal or informal social support mechanisms cause many agricultural labourers to break under economic and social stress and commit suicides. There is nearly one suicide a day on an average by farmers or agricultural labourers in Punjab in just two districts of Punjab i.e. Bathinda and Sangrur, where deaths due to indebtedness are common. But of this phenomenon, a large number is that of agricultural labourers. Between the year 2000 and 2008, about 1133 agricultural labourers committed suicide in these two districts alone. The crisis of the agricultural labour is not just one generation’s suffering. Pushed out of agriculture, the quest for survival has turned the next generation of dalit agricultural labourers into waiters, prostitutes and dancers.\(^2\)

The factors which constitute the vicious circle of poverty among the agricultural labourers are: low social status of the agricultural labourers; low degree of unionization; high levels of unemployment or underemployment; paucity of non-agricultural jobs, low level of income and rural indebtedness. The low caste and the depressed classes have been socially handicapped and they have not the courage to assert themselves. Agricultural workers are illiterate and ignorant. They live in scattered villages. Hence, they cannot easily be organized in unions. Therefore, they have less bargaining power than their employers or
farmers. Agriculture sector being highly seasonal, agricultural labourers remain unemployed for four to six months in an year. Moreover, paucity of non-agricultural occupations in village areas is another important factor for the low wages and poor economic condition of the agricultural labourers. Agricultural labour is heavily indebted. Normally, the agricultural labourers borrow from the landlords under whom they work. Since they have no security to offer, they pledge themselves to the moneylenders and rich landlords. Hence, they are forced to accept lower wages.

The following measures are suggested for the improvement of socio-economic position of agricultural labourers.

The strategy of making the poor agricultural labourers viable has necessarily to be multi-dimensional. The first thing is how to deal with the problem of unemployment / underemployment among the agricultural labourers. It would be necessary to undertake employment generation programmes which aim at absorbing the excess supply of labour for agricultural operations and these, in turn, will raise the level of income of agricultural labourers. But, the agricultural development in the state has reached its saturation point and there is little scope for further increase in the net sown area. In fact, the ecological considerations and growing non-agricultural requirements may encroach on the existing net sown area and cause it to shrink. There is, however, some scope for intensive cultivation. Adoption of double and triple crops can solve the problem of
underemployment / seasonal unemployment. There should also be intensified development of dairying, poultry, fishery, piggery etc. in non-crop sector in agriculture. But in any case, agriculture alone cannot create conditions for full employment in the rural areas and the growing surplus rural labour force will have to be absorbed in other sectors, particularly in the secondary sectors through rural industrialization. The growth of rural industries not only tends to discourage the pressure on land but also reduces rural inequality by raising the level of employment and income for the rural labourers.

It is true that the centre and the state governments have started a number of employment generating programmes like Swarnjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (1999), Sampoorna Grameen Rozgar Yojana (2001), National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (2005) and Punjab’s rural poor are looking towards Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) with great hope. But the main difficulty with such types of rural employment programmes is that the employment created under these programmes is of casual or temporary nature. The main activities through which employment is created under these programmes are like construction of roads, social building etc. which are occasional by nature. What is needed is to create employment potentiality of continuing and permanent nature. But the question that needs to be answered in this context is: what should be the form of continuity of employment: continuous for the same group of workers or
continuous for a changing group of workers? The rural labour that offers itself for wage paid employment is a highly heterogeneous group consisting of landless labourers and farmers particularly the marginal and small farmers. The age and sex composition is also varied. Unemployment for them is nothing else except irregular employment. In such a situation, the number of persons getting employment is less important than the total quantum of employment generated in terms of additional mandays of work. Continuity of work must refer to the work and not to the persons doing work. The project may continue, but it is not necessary that the same persons are continued. Therefore, there should be continuity of employment as a method for the rationalisation of the rural employment pattern. Continuity of employment means provision or availability of employment to an unemployed person whenever he seeks it. Therefore, such projects or schemes should be of the continuing nature. Continuity of employment can also be achieved by intensive cultivation and also through promoting agro-industries in rural areas. The elasticity of factor substitution in favour of labour in modern small industries is relatively high, implying that a much larger increase in employment may be feasible with a given amount of investment. Flourishing villages can be developed into market towns with a purpose to provide specialized goods for the surrounding agricultural region and to provide basic infrastructure and services necessary for small scale modern industries.
Under the self-employment schemes, the government should open training centres for proper training and improvement of the skills of farm labourers. The government should also provide vocational training to rural youth to prepare them for employment other than in agriculture. The government should provide financial help at low rate of interest to develop other farming activities like dairy farming, poultry farming and piggery etc. Khadi and village industries should also be encouraged in rural areas. Efforts should also be made to encourage the formation of labour co-operatives of agricultural labourers which should have sufficient capital to undertake the contract of government projects, such as construction of roads, digging of canals and tanks, afforestation etc. Such co-operatives can provide employment to agricultural labourers during off-season and also eliminate the possible exploitation of workers by the private contractors. These co-operatives should also tackle the problem of debt among the agricultural labourers.

Secondly, the working conditions of the agricultural labourers are not specified. As a result, they are subject to every type of exploitation in the hands of their employers. The government should enact a legislation to regulate and standardize the working conditions of the agricultural labour. Wages for different types of occupations in agriculture should be standardized and hours of work be specified. Administrative machinery should be set up for its effective implementation. The government should ensure minimum conditions of work to agricultural labourers which should
include eight-hour working day with one-hour break, one paid day of rest per week, national minimum wage for all the workers in the unorganized sector, women workers to be paid at par with men, to ensure right to organise to agricultural labourers, compensation for accidents, provision of child-care and basic amenities at the workplace. It should be noted that the abolition of rural poverty largely depends upon the guarantee of minimum wages. The Minimum Wages Act was passed in 1948. The Act was subsequently extended to cover agricultural labour. But, the Act has been a dead letter in every state. Minimum wages in agriculture are not being revised over long periods. Almost everywhere, the actual wages are higher than the minimum wages during the peak season and tend to fall in slack seasons. Moreover, the Act does not clearly distinguish between various operations in agriculture and wages to be fixed for each operation. The difficulties in the proper implementation of the Act arise mainly from poverty and illiteracy of agricultural labour, absence of knowledge of the existence of legislation and scattered nature of agricultural labour. Therefore, for successful implementation of the Act, the agricultural labourers should be made aware of their rights. There should be wide publicity to the fixing of minimum wages and the notification of wages at public places. The minimum wages should not fall below the poverty line in any case and mechanism should be devised to link minimum wages with the consumer price index numbers. As regards enforcement, the village Panchayats should be asked to enforce
minimum wages. Agricultural labour should be organized to ensure proper implementation of the Act. Hence, great emphasis should be placed on the formation of unions of agricultural labourers and the government should help actively in the formation of such unions.

Thirdly, the agricultural labourers feel themselves neglected and less secure as compared to industrial labourers. On the lines of the social security measures available to the industrial workers, the agricultural labourers should also be provided some basic social security measures. There should be compulsory insurance of all the agricultural labourers with minimum premiums, so that they may be paid at the time of accident, old age or in case of chronic illness. Because the private insurance companies do not take the risk to insure the large number of farm labourers, therefore some government insurance agencies should come forward to insure all the agricultural labourers. There should be special arrangements for medical aid for the agricultural labourers as well as their dependents. The labourers and the farmers both should contribute to some extent for the expenditure of this medical aid and the aid should be available at the village level. The government should also provide old age pension for the agricultural labourers and the government should enact some legislation for the provision of unemployment allowance for the agricultural labourers during their period of unemployment. Besides this, Labour Welfare Centres should be opened by the government to look after the interests of the agricultural
labourers. The workers’ unions should be encouraged. It will give confidence to the labour to protect their interests and stand together against exploitation by farmers. Such measures can bring about a feeling of social security, increase the dignity of their labour, arrest suicide rates and raise the levels of living among the agricultural labourers.
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