CHAPTER VIII

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Agricultural labourer mainly comprises those workers belonging to the economically depressed and socially backward sectors of the rural society. It consists of landless labourers who work on others lands and the petty landowners who work on others. They mainly depend on wage employment in agriculture and allied activities for their livelihood.

They constitute the major portion of have-nots who are basically unskilled and earn their cake through manual labour. Unfortunately, they form the most disadvantaged economic groups in today's rural society. Their wages are typically low; conditions of work are often onerous; and employment frequently irregular. Much worst are those who get casual agricultural employment and work on daily wages and do not own even a piece of land.

The level of living which their earnings permit is very meagre. In other words, they, as a significant section of the society, merely exist and do not live. Their morning holds no promise for the evening and they can never sleep without tensions for they have no stocks left for the morning.¹ Their lives, as it were

¹ Baxhu and Singh-op-cit. p-338.
reflect the problems of underdevelopment and surplus population, which are so much talked of in current economic discussions.

In the preceding chapters, a considerable discussion has been made on almost all aspects of agricultural labourers in Thoubal district. The Thoubal district is a rural district having a rare combination of higher degree of poverty and dense population than in the other districts of Manipur. Agriculture is the main occupation in the district. Nearly 90% of the total population depends on agriculture in Thoubal district. There is a different picture of economic life of the people. The food production, in spite of every effort, is still subject to the law of diminishing returns whereas the population is increasing in geometrical proportions. The existing state of affairs can show no signs of improvement unless the primary producers, the tillers of the soil, are assured of stability of income and minimum necessaries. In this region, agriculture still depends on the mercy of the monsoon. Rains are uncertain and varies greatly from place to place, area to area and year to year. Sometimes, in the hill areas, there are abundant rainfall. On the other hand, there is lack of rainfall in the valley. Adequate irrigation facilities are lacking in the District. "The Cultivable area
in the region is about 43,000 hectares. The chief
products in the District are paddy, wheat, maize,
sugarcane, potato, mustard and pea etc. There are
other minor products also like cabbage, cauliflower,
chilly, local salt (Thum), bangle, tomato, etc.
There is defective tillage system, poor quality live
stock, lack of adequate supply of proper organi-
zation and so on in cultivation in the District. The
member of agricultural labourers has been continually
on the increase. In every circumstance, that has
weakened the economic position of the small holders
thereby leading to the increased supply of agricul-
tural labourers in the District.

To improve the conditions of agricultural labourers,
an all round effort and attack is needed. A funda-
mental change in the technique of agriculture in the
District is indispensable for making agriculture a
successful occupation. Therefore, first of all, the intro-
duction of green revolution is highly needed. Then, Pre-
monsoon, monsoon, Kharif, Rabi crops studied in
Chapter I should be adopted and popularized with all
means of providing irrigation facilities adequately.

2. Government of Manipur, District Planning Office, District
The agricultural labourers should be educated so that they should know, the use of manures and pesticides. The main aim is to increase the yield of crops. It will absolutely help in the effort to grow more crops to increase the supply of food and fodder for animals. It is connected with the general improvement in agriculture and reclamation of waste lands.

"Agricultural labourers have been helped to settle on lands as cultivators. For this purpose, land has been made available through reclamation and that acquired as surplus under land ceilings". 3 9.4 percent of the agricultural labourers families are landless. The land holdings are so small and they are scattered here and there. Generally, industry is backward in the district.

"There are only 4 registered factory and 94 registered small scale industries in the District." 4 The percentage of mobility of labour in the District is large only during their off season. The number of employment in the registered factories, as there are not well-organised, is quite insignificant.

As the majority of the population in the district depends on agriculture, for their livelihood, the pressure on land is very high. The lasting solution of such a


problem lies in the development of the other sectors of the economy. There is ample scope for the establishment of medium and large scale industries based on the materials available in the area under investigation. The medium and large industries which can be profitably and successfully established in the region are pottery, brick making, fishery, sugar manufacture, etc. There is also a wide scope for social forestry for the supply of fuel and wood in the area.

The conditions of work in agriculture in the district is far from satisfactory. "Sweating with its triple evils of long hours of work insanitary conditions and low wages is common in agriculture". Agricultural workers are generally to work in dirty mud knee-deep water during the rainy season, in the scorching heat of the summer and in the early and late hours of winter with cold and biting winds. These conditions make them an easy prey to itchies, ringworm, skin diseases, besides cold and sun-stroke. For the improvement in the condition of workers in the region, the following conditions can be taken into consideration:

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1. Woman and children workers should be prohibited from heavy work under unhealthy conditions. Woman at five or more months of pregnancy should be prevented from participating all types of manual work.

2. Only male adults may be allowed to work during the rainy season when liability to diseases is high and difficult to work.

3. The nature and amount of work and the condition under which it is done, should be under the special case of the Labour Officer of the Government.

Agricultural workers are illiterate, unorganized and scatter. The capacity of agriculture to pay wages is generally low in the district. Hours of work vary from place to place and season to season and crop to crop. Sometimes, it is happened that agricultural workers move to the nearby villages in order to get a higher wages. But, generally, the mobility of labour is low. Their earnings are no doubt insignificant to manage their families. To improve the economic conditions of agricultural workers, every possible arrangement is to be made for paying them higher wages than
they are getting at present. The methods of wage payments also differ considerably. In some areas, payment is made in cash and in some other areas, in kind. The payment of wage in agriculture is diversified and complex. Wages are paid by time or piece. "Their low wages are also due to lack of collective bargaining among them because of their being unorganized. There is pre-dominance of women and child labour in them." The pre-dominance of agriculture, low yield sub-divided and fragmented holdings, absence of scientific methods of cultivation, prevalence of burdensome agricultural debt and possibility of employment of women and children and drain of ability from the villages to the towns have been some of the factors that influence the wage levels of the agricultural workers in the district. So, betterment of the conditions of workers lies in the improvement of agriculture. To solve the problem of agricultural labour today in the district, the adoption of scientific method of cultivation, double cropping, intensive farming, use of high yielding varieties, etc., if urgently needed production will be increased and the economic

6. Dr. Raghu Raj Singh Prof. I.C. Singh op. cit. p-283.
condition of workers will be better and improved.

"The Government of Manipur has also fixed range of minimum and maximum wages per day at Rs. 12.40 for valley and Rs. 13.40 for hill for agricultural worker (both men and women) as on 30th September 1986." which has been revised at Rs. 23.70 for valley and Rs. 26.70 for hill regions as per order No. 11/2/87 - Lab. Imphal dated the 23th December, 1988. Here, the investigator has come to the conclusion that the following minimum wages without prequisites should be fixed for the agricultural workers in Thoubal District:

**For Adult Male Workers**

- for heavy work - Rs. 25 a day or Rs. 750 a month.
- for light work - Rs. 20 a day or Rs. 600 a month.

For adult Female workers: - Rs. 18 a day or Rs. 540 a month.

For Children (between 15-18 years) Rs. 15 a day
- or Rs. 450 a month.

The minimum wages may be paid in cash or kind with free supply of cigarettes and light refreshment. The existing rates of wages are higher than the

minimum rates fixed by the Government thereby necessitating to raise it at least to the existing rate. Efforts should also be made to increase the capacity of agriculture to pay the wages. The minimum wage rate fixed by the Government should be modified from time to time in order to keep it in touch with the increasing and changing rates of wages. The increase in wage means increase in purchasing power of the agricultural workers and hence betterment in the economic conditions of the workers. In well-organized and developed economies, inter-relation between priori conditions. In other, with a large measure of regimentation, dogmatic solutions can be enforced. But in an economy in the process of development and with people wedded to democratic institutions, the difficulties in framing a wage policy are manifold. Keeping in view the traditions in the locality and also for the betterment of all, the following conditions of work and hours or work can be suggested in the District.

1. The day should not exceed 10 hours in any case for workers and extra payment is to be made for

additional work on the basis of minimum wages as seen in Chapter IV.

2. Overtime work should not be allowed to complete the piece of work.

3. The fixation of working hours should apply to all the agricultural workers and to all the agricultural operations.

4. Male workers may be allowed to night work in certain conditions given in chapter V and in no case night work should be allowed in case of women and child workers.

5. In order to protect the agricultural labourers the legislative measures should be enforced strictly.

6. The following hours of work may be prescribed in the Thoubal District.

During Summer - 6 a.m. to 11 a.m. and 3 p.m. to 6 p.m.
During Monsoon - 6 a.m. to 11 a.m. and 1 p.m. to 6 p.m.
During Winter - 7.30 a.m. to 4.30 p.m. with a break of 1 hour.
It is found that a worker in Thoubal District can be employed from 152 to 175 days in a year in the agricultural operations. The agricultural population in Thoubal District consists of 42,000 families having 5 members each on an average seeking employment of about 42 thousands of persons— one person from each family. But agricultural operations in the region engaged the workers for about 6 months only. There are at present 4 registered factories and 97 registered small scale industry in the district.

But, as these undertakings are also not well-organised, only a very small fraction of the population is engaged in this enterprises. For giving gainful employment to these vast army of unemployed and underemployed workers, agriculture is to be modernised and developed. The existing cottage and household industries should also modernised with the provision of all essential material and infrastructures.

Nar making, Rope making, Jeinaphak making, handloom weaving, Bee Keeping, Poultry, Brick-making, Suckery, Carpentry, Fishery, Dairy, Basket Making, Pottery, Jute and Bamboo works, Cycle repairing, Goatsary, Piggery, Forestry etc.

are some of the cottage industries that may be developed in the region to solve the problem of unemployment and underemployment on the co-operative basis—details are given at chapter VII. Fruit canning can also be developed in the Kakching Sub-Division. Here, different types of fruits like banana, mangoes, papaya, pears, peach, guava and other local fruits can be cultivated in abundance. In Thoubal Sub-Division, pineapple can be grown in abundance.

Sub-Division and fragmentation of land holdings is a serious problem in this District. Solving this problem lies in the strengthening of co-operative farming societies in the District. These societies have to be provided with housing, medical and educational facilities. "The fact that members would claim a right to work on the societies farm could mean, in the first place that it becomes obligatory on the society to provide work to all who at any time offer themselves for employment on the farm. This is the single most important implication of the fact of pooling of labour". 10 In Co-operative farming, they have reduced working hours.

and regulated wages. Co-operative farming will solve
these problems of agriculture and hence it should
be popularised in the District. In Democratic way,
demonstration and propaganda for besting of agricul-
ture and social reformation can be made through co-
operative farming societies.

The problem of agricultural labour is so serious
in the District that they live from hand to mouth.
They are forced to borrow money from the money len-
ders. On and above this, the workers mortgaged their
belongings to the money lenders or rich man at low cost
which they use to return at high cost. Rates of interest
per month range from 5 percent to 10 percent in the
District. The village money lenders, cultivators, richman,
Government and co-operative societies are the money len-
ding agencies in the area. Generally, agricultural
labourers are not taking loan from the Government and
co-operative societies because they have not enough
property and guarantors so far. The amount of debt per
family is lower in the Kakching sub-division than in
the Thoubal sub-division where wages are higher and way
of living is somewhat better there. Heavy debt to the
workers has led to all kinds of evil consequences which
are economic, social and moral in nature. As a result, the rich become richer and a poor become poorer in the district.

An effective solution of the problem lies in the cancellation of old debts and control over the new borrowings with creation of new feasible credit agencies for providing borrowing facilities. Regarding this matter, co-operative movement will go a long way for solving the problem of indebtedness. Co-operative societies are provided with loans at cheaper rate of interest and at easy instalment basis. This will solve the problems of indebtedness in the district. Mention may be made in this connection the huge damages that have been caused by the construction of the Loktak Project and the Ithai Barrage to the economy of the district. So, efforts should be made and attention should be given by the Government and the Loktak Development Authority for the early and effective solution to the problem so that the economic conditions of the workers should not be affected to that extent, if not improved considerably.

Housing, Clothing, Fooding etc., are the elementary need for a man. In the district, agricultural labourers are
having rag clothes, half meals and kutcha thatched houses. Their doors are bad and ventilated. When cooking and lighting, their houses are gathered with full of smokes and it brings harmful effects in their eyes and health. Poor housing, ill clothing, half meal, etc. are the results of lack of finance. These existing conditions constitute a social problem in the district.

Low cost housing is needed for the agricultural labour in the district. It will be no exaggeration to state that the rural labour housing conditions of agricultural workers are deplorable. They occupy the worst quarters or the worst houses or huts in the villages. Here, it can be suggested that the government should supply low cost housing materials through the co-operative housing societies. The labourers should form housing societies. Under this housing co-operative society, financial assistance in the form of loans to the extent of two-thirds of the cost of the construction of the house, should be provided and should be repayable in easy annual installments. The co-operative societies may be entrusted with the tasks of organization and implementation under
community project scheme. Therefore with the locally available cheap materials and co-operative efforts, the problem of housing can be tackled easily.

The agricultural workers are semi-starved and taking low quality of food in the district. Health depends, more or less, on the quality of food. "Their intake of cereals per consumption unit is 20.3, cms. per day. The Caloric intake of diet shows a deficiency of about 25 percent of the normal requirements. The protein intake is different by 16 percent. Due to this deficiency in their food, they fall an easy prey to many kinds of diseases. Their health and efficiency are adversely affected. Not only food but the agricultural workers have lack of adequate recreation facilities also.

The standard of living of agricultural workers in the district is very low. With their meagre incomes they cannot afford to have proper maintenance of their families. One of the most salient features of the family budget of the agricultural workers in Thoubal district is the high percentage of the total expenditure on food. Food is essential for human beings. Then average monthly

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income of an agricultural workers family is very low almost negligible in the District. This income does not permit him to maintain a normal diet. They are normally degraded. The percentage of educated labour is very low.

In order to raise their standard of living, it is necessary to take up and adopt several measures and programmes. Firstly, proper provision of social security services like those connected with hospital, drinking water, essential consumer goods at cheaper rate, education, family planning facilities etc., be available at the threshold of the workers. Secondly, land should be provided under reclamation and surplus land acquired through the policy of ceiling should be distributed among them. This will raise their income and economic conditions and will improve their social status. Thirdly, non-agricultural industries should be developed so that the surplus labour should be absorbed. Credit, training facility, etc. should be provided by the Government co-operatives should be organised and strengthened with a view to promoting such industries in rural areas. And lastly, to improve the housing conditions of such agricultural workers, they should be allotted land, for housing and supplying with materials
for house building. The establishment of modern industries and productivity of land will together create a favourable impact on the economic life of agricultural labourers. This will also help in raising their economic and social status in the District.

It should be realised that so long as agricultural labour remains sullen and discontented, they will not put their whole heart to the job of increasing food production. The agricultural labourers, the lowest rung of the ladder in the society, have been facing many problems because of ignorance, illiteracy, poverty, and weak bargaining power. A lasting solution of the problems of the agricultural workers lies in the establishment of labour co-operatives. These co-operatives play a vital role for the agricultural labourers. "In some states small works are given to Labour Contract societies without the formalities of inviting tenders etc. Concessions like technical guidance, exemption from payment of security deposit, extension of financial assistance, loans for purchase of tools, etc. are also extended to them."

It can be reiterated here that the recommendations of the investigator will bring about maximum social advantages with minimum cost.
The long neglected and exploited agricultural workers, from the most vulnerable section of our society and need urgent attention and early solution, if not out of sympathy for the poor toiling labourers, but at least with a view to warding off the danger of social tension of growing dimension in the District. High wages no doubt, increase the efficiency of work and raise their standard of living. Indebtedness of the workers whose solution lies in the strengthening and quick development of labour co-operative in the District. Agro-based industries, small scale industries and village industries be developed in the region. There is every possibility and prospect of these industries. Intensive farming is highly needed by providing irrigation facilities, good seeds, pesticides and manures in the area. No efforts in economic planning can succeed without a substantial improvement of the agricultural labour i.e., landless labour in the society. So, for a greater recognition of the problems of agricultural labourers and for a more realistic approach to the problem, it would not be an exaggeration to point out that top priority in the whole planning-process is to be given to the consideration of the problems of this section of the rural society.
The above analysis, however, does not lead to the conclusion that no measures have been adopted in the past for improving and ameliorating the lot of the agricultural labourers in the state as well as in the District. But what has gone wrong with all this is the poor and defective implementation of the plan programmes and measures. No one has made so far a serious effort with a missionary zeal to use these programmes to help the toiling and tilling labour classes to improve their standard of living and quality of life. More passing of legislators, random placing of priorities in planning will not solve the problem. These legislations and priorities have to be backed up by strict and effective implementation so that the hearts of the richer sections, government employees and political workers have to change a lot and that alone will solve a multitude of the problems these labourers are faced with. There is, thus, always the need for a firm political will and strong and clean administrative determination in the process of shifting the vast majority of agricultural labourers from their present pathetic conditions to a more egalitarian type of society.