CHAPTER - II
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REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Agricultural labour problem in India is more than five centuries old. Especially after the invasion of the British and India becoming a colony, a section called agricultural coolies and labourers became predominant. A big gap between the land lords and landless also came up. Landless became restless every now and then there was a constant struggle for their daily bread. Their struggle with society and big farmers also became a common feature. After the establishment of a full pledged British reign in India, the Government started thinking of various measures to reform the agricultural labourers. Hence from there on the pre-independent Government and after independence, Indian democratic Government started formulating different types of commissions periodically to uplift the Indian agricultural labourers. Innumerable social organisations, labour unions, politicians, acadamecians and researchers also involved in bringing into limelight, the various types of problems encountered by Indian agricultural labourers. Some of the studies were on the basis of the nation as a whole and some of them were sectoral wise. So also some of the studies concentrated on social aspects, some on economic aspects and some others on women folk.

In this chapter various important studies conducted for the past two decades have been reviewed under the classifications of social and economic problems and the problems of women folk among the agricultural labourers.
The Report of the National Commission on Rural Labour talks about welfare funds for agricultural labourers and also suggests the following for utilisation of the same.

"The welfare fund must necessarily make provisions for the following:

1. Women agricultural labourers should be provided maternity leave with wages for a period of three months (six weeks before delivery and six weeks after delivery) for two surviving Children.

2. Old age pension at a minimum of Rs. 100/- p.m should be provided to every agricultural labourer of and above the age of sixty.

3. Death and injuries due to accidents are required to be compensated, particularly because of increased use of mechanical devices like tractors, threshers, combined harvesters etc., Compensation as would be admissible under the workmen's compensation Act may be expanded to the extent necessary for this purpose. This should be in addition to what is currently admissible under the personal accident insurance scheme.

4. The group Insurance scheme should be expanded to cover all agricultural workers with Insurance premium paid by the Government.

5. With Regard to the proposal for an Employment Guarantee Board on tripartite basis, the commission is of the opinion that the Board would be styled as Employment Security and Welfare Board which could supervise and monitor
the working of various provisions of the Act concerning agricultural labour. The Board could include experts, non-governmental voluntary organisations, SC and ST and woman members, such Board should be constituted at state level, district level and also at Panchayat levels."

The report of National Commission also brings out the fact of the landholding system in India in the following words:

"Small and Marginal farmers are, therefore placed at a disadvantage Vis-a-Vis the big owners and sometimes economic pressures might have forced them out to join the swelling ranks of agricultural labourers. The above mentioned facts, particularly those related to employment, wages, consumption expenditure, etc., clearly suggest that the benefits of agricultural development during the last four decades, by and large have gone mainly to particular landowning class (i.e. big farmers) and not proportionately to all the rural classes. It is evident that worst sufferers in this context are scheduled caste and scheduled tribe agricultural labour households. The worst suffers in the regional context are Bihar, Madyapradesh and Orissa".

The number of agricultural labourers also has been swelling is again reported by the National Commission on Rural labour and the report says that, "The number of agricultural labourers has been increasing over the last few decades for various reasons. The majority of agricultural labourers do not get employment

2. Ibid., p.37.
throughout the year, not even in the agriculturally better endowed regions such as Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh etc., on the same ground their annual earnings are so low that they cannot meet even their minimum consumption needs.\(^3\)

In the file paper, "Agricultural workers - Approach to the problem", redistribution of land in favour of the landless is emphasised and quoted as follows:

"The data obtained during the agricultural labour enquiry showed that although 50 percent of agricultural labourers have holdings of nearly three acres per family difference in standards of consumption between these agricultural labour families who have land and those who do not have land or not so marked. The conclusion suggested is that while redistribution of land in favour of the landless has an essential role in the process of social and economic change, its effect in terms of higher living standards and fuller employment are limited".\(^4\)

Joshi G.V has ascertained that one of the most distressing problems of rural economy of India is the increase in number of agricultural labourers as a consequence of the small and marginal farmers forming the rank of agricultural labour.\(^5\)

K. Jayashankar and K. Venkatanarayanan in their, "wages and conditions

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of agricultural labour, in the selected villages in Andrapradesh attempting to examine the employment and wage conditions, concluded that the male agricultural labour was employed for 258 days. Female for 196 days, child labourer 228 days per year. Most of the agricultural labourers continued to be attached labourers due to heavy indebtedness and low wages.\textsuperscript{6}

S.K. Misra and V.K. Puri in their book Indian Economy, explained the causes of growth in the number of agricultural labourers as follows:

There are a number of factors responsible for the continuous and enormous increase in the number of agricultural labourers in India. The more important ones are the following:

1. Increase in population.
2. Decline of cottage industries and Village handicrafts.
3. Eviction of small farmers and tenants from land.
4. Uneconomic holdings.
5. Increase in indebtedness.
6. Spread of the use of money and exchange systems.
7. Capitalist agriculture.

The simple law of demand and supply operates. Since their supply is

excessive in relation to the demand for them, they have to settle for extremely low wages. The alternative is worse unemployment.\textsuperscript{7}

While attempting to review the agriculture, the Economic and Political Weekly states that "Hence the basic solution lies in increasing demand for rural labour through intensive agriculture and through larger non-farm employment. As the planners have stressed in their approach to the 4th plan it is essential to develop industries in all parts of the country based on relatively small scale dispersed units, it is however also desirable to have a definite programme for rural industrial relation of the heavily populated and agriculturally backward areas in the country, so that the problem of farm labour is positively tackled. The planners have laid stress on Integrated District Development, which would provide a programme of rural works and would, according to them, make a separate rural works programme unnecessary. But even in the District development scheme, priority attention will have to be given to the agriculturally backward districts which have a large number of unemployed or under employed persons and landless farm workers. This is also what the original draft Fourth plan has emphasised."\textsuperscript{8}

The former Prime Minister V.P. Singh in his inaugural address at the National Seminar on Agricultural Labour held on 8th and 9th March 1990 observed that the problems of farm labour were compounded by their ignorance, illiteracy and


\textsuperscript{8} Economic and Political weekly Review of Agriculture, March 1969, p. A56.
lack of organisation. This is limited their access to social service like education, health, family welfare and housing. It was necessary to conscientise the rural labour with reference to their rights.\(^9\)

The employment days of agricultural labourers of both the genders, have gone down considerably. It is reported by the National Commission on Rural Labour and it is stated in the following terms:

"According to the Third Rural Labour Enquiry Commission (1977-78) the average days worked per year by men and women agricultural labour households in agricultural wage employment were 230 days and 184 days respectively. The corresponding figures for the year 1983 (4th RLE) were 159 days and 136 days. The decline in the days of employment should expectedly have some impact on the earnings and debt conditions of agricultural labour households. Therefore, generation of adequate employment opportunities in farm and non-farm activities in the rural areas, particularly during off-season assume importance in so far as agricultural labourers are concerned." \(^{10}\)

Mr. S. Sankaran Classifies Rural unemployment into two classes namely seasonal and perennial. He also visualises that three fourth of the unemployed were in the rural areas and an immediate solution should be sorted out. He expresses this view as in the following terms: "Another important feature of the


'Rural India' is the Massive unemployment and under employment of the people in the countryside. Of course, this is only a reflection of the prevailing unemployment problem in India as a whole. The rural unemployment exhibits in two classes viz, Seasonal and perennial, apart from chronic disguised unemployment. Three fourths of the total backlog of unemployed, the end of the quinquennium were in the rural areas.\textsuperscript{11}

The Central Advisory Committee on Agricultural Labour recently set up by the Planning Commission visualised that the problems of agricultural labour are to be traced to the long period of stagnation in the rural economy and the persistence of a rigid social structure largely based on caste. These basic deficiencies are being gradually removed, and the processes of social and technological change have to be hastened. Successive five year plans seek to harness the natural resources of the country, increased production and employment provide greater amenities to rural areas. Reorganisation of the rural economy along co-operative lines and emphasis on the role and obligations of the community are intended not merely to raise agricultural productivity and diversify the rural economic structure but equally, to bring about as rapidly as possible an integrated society in which there will be equal opportunity for every member of the community irrespective of caste or status.\textsuperscript{12}

The lack of organisation and low levels of education among the agricultural labourers has been highlighted by Jeemal Unni in his paper, "Changes in employment, wages and income" and he states that, "In the total Indian rural population, agricultural labour constitutes the largest segment. They are drawn from the socially and economically backward classes and constitute the poorest section of the rural hierarchy. They are also a less articulate section of the workers mainly due to lack of organisation and low levels of education.\textsuperscript{13}

The report of the Congress Agrarian Reforms Committee classified agricultural labourers into three groups, viz (a) field labourers (b) ordinary labourers and (c) skilled labourers. Field labourers have only seasonal work. Ordinary labourers are those unskilled labourers employed in digging, silt cleaning, building, embankments, etc., Skilled labourers include carpenters, masons, blacksmith, etc., who are employed by cultivators on the same rates as agricultural labourers.\textsuperscript{14}

The following suggestion has been given by B. Maria Saleth as a diversified job for the agricultural labourers in her paper Diversification Strategy for Small Farmers and Landless:

"Our results do suggest that the income and employment prospects of poor

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rural groups can be considerably enhanced by changing the size and composition of livestock enterprises to favour income wise more important dairy animals. The policy instruments for doing this are more targeted and tied livestock credit and fodder development including the promotion of feed industries and inter-regional fodder transfer. Obviously, besides the livestock sector, rural non-farm sector holds the key for promoting greater employment and income diversification among the landless and small farmers. Besides small farmers with an assured off-farm income cover and a higher opportunity cost for their time are more likely to go for high-value crops as the value addition potential of these crops fits well with the current value of their time. Finally, since farm groups and resource regions vary widely in terms of their relative performance in different dimensions of diversification, schemes conceived broadly and implemented within an area and group-specific context have a greater chance for success."^{15}

Using the N.S.S. data, a study on the situation in Tamilnadu observes that, "There is a high incidence of poverty among agricultural labourers and owner cultivators in the rural areas which confirms to priori expectations. The single most important occupation, accounting for the largest proportion to all households in poverty is agricultural labour in the rural areas. Workers in both agriculture and unorganised Industry account for the bulk of the poor while contributing to the bulk of output in the state of Tamilnadu (Kurien C.T. 1977).^{16}"

15. B. Maria Saletth, Diversification strategy for small farmers and landless, Some evidence from Tamilnadu Indian Journal of Agricultural Economic, Vol.52. No.1 Jan, Mar 1977, p.74.
Jeemal Unni states in his article titled, "Employment and Wages among Rural Labourers" that, the non-agricultural real wage rates of adult males in general indicated a decline after 1989-90, often after 1987 itself. The male non-agricultural wage rates are lower in the 1990s compared to 1980s. In Gujarat, Kerala and Rajasthan the declining tendency of non-agricultural real wage earnings was observed earlier in rural labour households as well. A slight rise in real non-agricultural wage rates is observed in Kerala and Uttar Pradesh in the last couple of years.

Further Unni states, if the initial assumption regarding 'economic transmission' are neoclassical, the decline in real wages in the non-agricultural sector should result in an increase in output and consequently employment in this sector. However, as observed earlier, the slow transfer of labour from agriculture to non-agriculture reflects the inability of the non-agricultural sector to 'create employment rapidly enough'. Among rural labour households, the increase in annual days of employment per worker appears to consist of self-employed days, mainly in agriculture. Obviously, it is difficult to determine empirically the cause and consequence of the real wage rate decline and much depends on the initial theoretical assumption. On balance, the decline in real wage rates in non-agricultural and the reduction in the non-agricultural - agricultural real wage gap imply that all is not well with the non-agricultural sector in the rural areas. The current euphoria with the observed shift of the work force to the non-agricultural
sector might not be well founded. The 'infamous' distress hypothesis may not be quite well and truly buried yet.\textsuperscript{17}

Kailas Sarap in his paper analysed the mechanisms of contractual arrangements between the employers and agricultural labourers in the specific context of some East Indian Villages (in Orissa), by taking into account the type of crops grown, prevailing technology and other characteristics of economic and social environments including external intervention such as in migration of labour, enterprising farmers and state intervention. The emphasis has been made examining the way contractual arrangements cope with or adjust to the process of change and its implications in terms of mode of payment and contractual enforcement.\textsuperscript{18}

S.M. Pandey in his "Pattern of wages, income and consumption expenditure of agricultural labour in India," compared the estimation of the wage rate of first and second labour enquiry with the rural labour enquiry (1964-65) for different states. He concluded that the money wage rates increased. Similarly, the employment of agricultural labourers increases over the period, in addition to that, he suggests some special schemes to increase the employment to the weaker sections.\textsuperscript{19}

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{17}Indian Journal of agricultural economics Vol.52. No.1. Jan-Mar. 1997. p.73
\bibitem{18}Kailas Sarap, Changing contractual arrangement in agriculture labour market, Evidence from Orissa, Economic and political weekly, Dec.28, 1991. p.46
\end{thebibliography}
Swarna Latha Ariya and Nirmal Sarhadi, senior scientists (Economics) in their case study titled, "Impact of agricultural development on female work participation" were of the opinion that, technological interventions in agriculture such as introduction of irrigation facilities, use of high yielding varieties and subsequent change in cropping pattern play an important role in increasing both income and employment among farm families. They have also stated that, the contribution of female labour was highest on marginal farms (55%) followed by small farms (52%) and large farms (50%).

Hanumantha Rao and Sharma in their paper on "Employment and wage structure in the Agricultural Economy of Andrapradesh" analyses the employment and wage structure of the agricultural economy of Andra Pradesh. They concluded that employment structure had not changed in the state of Andra Pradesh during 1951-71 and the work force was mainly concentrated in and heavily relied on the performance of the agricultural sector. Secondly though the output per hectare has increased substantially in many districts due to the technological break through, the real wages have neither increased nor the increase in the wage rate is associated with the increase in output per hectare. The study reveals that there is no structural change either in the composition of workers or in the levels of living of agricultural labourers in the State of Andra Pradesh.

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Harsh Deo Malaviya in his study on "Land ceiling, landless labourers and small holders" discusses the social status of agricultural labourers particularly scheduled caste labourers and those who are on the lowest rung of the social order. To him, unemployment, under employment, very low wages, combined with social oppression, make the life of the agricultural workers miserable.\textsuperscript{22}

Pandey in his article, "Organising Agricultural Labour" deals with the problems faced in organising agricultural labourers. The prevalence of owner-cum-workers in agriculture makes the employer - employee relationship in agriculture more complex and more complicated.\textsuperscript{23}

Uppal in his study on "Measurement of disguised unemployment in Punjab Agriculture", which has been confined to Punjab agriculture alone, attempted to estimate the extent of disguised unemployment. To him approximately one twelfth of the total labour force in agriculture in Punjab was disguisedly unemployed in 1956-57. He further observed that evidence of disguised unemployment was for greater no relatively smaller farmer and could be as high as 20\% of the labour force.\textsuperscript{24}

In their study, "Induced innovations and the Green revolution" Rutton and Binswanger note that in Thanjavur District of India, Green revolution, led to an

\begin{enumerate}
\item Harsh Deo Malavia, Land ceiling, landless and small holders, Main Stream 7th June 1975, p.14.
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increase in demand for both labour and land. This resulted in steep rise in the income of land ownership owing to inelastic supply of land. However, elastic supply of labour from surrounding districts prevented wage rates from rising substantially. This unequal impact led to labour unrest and to attempt by labourers to restrict immigration. Land owners were more successful in organising themselves and formed an association by means of which they prevented the labour units from gaining effective control over the labour supply in the district.  

From the analysis of the study made by Sindhur, Milglani and Singh on "The Expenditure Pattern of Working and Non-working Women of Ludhiana District," it was found that expenditure pattern showed high degree of association with the employment position of wives.  

Parthasarathi and Adishesh have analysed the growth rate of agriculture in Andrapradesh and its effects on the actual wage. They analysed the actual wage rate of agriculture labour in different areas of Andrapradesh.  

While delivering technical address under the title, "Work Opportunities for Indian Rural Labour Force - Recent Knowledge and Thinking," Mr. N.S. Sastry
gave the following statistics:

"The fall in the employment growth rate per annum in rural areas was observed in many states during the period 1993-94 to 1999-2000 as compared to the period 1983 to 1993-94 on current daily basis: Andrapradesh (0.29 from 2.88), Bihar (1.48 from 2.33), Haryana (1.96 from 2.22), Himachal Pradesh (0.19 from 2.64), Jammu Kashmir (1.25 from 4.48), Karnataka (0.80 from 2.38), Kerala (-0.12 from 2.67), Madhya Pradesh (0.92 from 1.85), Maharashtra (0.50 from 2.38), Tamil Nadu (-1.13 from 2.06), Uttar Pradesh (0.61 from 2.14), West Bengal (-0.25 from 3.25). In Gujarat, the growth rates on comparable basis were 2.05 and 2.09 and in Assam 1.87 and 1.52. The magnitude of slow down in the rate of growth of employment in rural areas indicates a highly desperate picture across the states. Kerala, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal in fact witnessed negative growth rates of employment in the recent period (1993-94 to 1999-2000)." 28

Indhu Bharathi in her paper titled, "Mobilisation of Agricultural Labour, Jehanabad Experience" has stated her findings that, "the first step in laying the foundation for socialist transformation was achieved in Jehanabad in that the agricultural labourers were organised into an independent class force. However, the next logical step, i.e. forging a unity between agricultural labourers and middle peasants was not achieved. This coupled, with other errors brought on a degeneration." 29

Mr. N.S. Sastry has indicated the statistics on the unemployed rate in his article titled, "Work Opportunities for Indian Rural Labourers - Recent Knowledge and Thinking" as follows:

Unemployment rate (as percentage of labour) on current daily basis in rural India decreased from 11.9% in 1983 to 8.1% in 1993-94, but then increased to 9.8% in 1999-2000 for SC males; it decreased from 14.9% in 1983 to 8.1 in 1993-94, but then increased to 9% in 1999-2000 for SC females. This unemployment rate decreased from 5.1% in 1983 to 4.3% in 1993-94, but then increased to 5.6% in 1999-2000 for ST males and it decreased from 6.3% in 1983 to 3.8% in 1993-94 but then increased to 4.5% in 1999-2000 ST females. In the general population, this employment rate decreased from 7.5% in 1983 to 5.6% in 1993-94 but then increased to 7.2% in 1999-2000 for rural males; it decreased from 9% in 1983 to 5.6% in 1993-1994 but then increased to 6.8% in 1999-2000 for rural females. It may be noted that the unemployment rates for rural SC males and females are higher than the corresponding rates in general population for OBC in rural India, the unemployment rate in 1999-2000 on current daily basis were 6.2% for males and 6.3% for females.30

Mr. Kripashankar in his articles titled, "Rural Development - Some Key Issues" reveals the inequality of landholdings as follows:

"According to National samples survey in 1992, one percent of most affluent

people in the village own equal area of land as own by two third of the poorest people. The land holdings by biggest 0.6% land owners was more than the land owned by 55% of the poorest people (see: Sarveksdar, Govt. of India 65th issue Oct-Dec.1995).31

The Report on National Commission on Labour Published by Ministry of Labour and Employment and Rehabilitation brought out the following statistics with regard to work force of SC population in agriculture:

Agricultural labour occupies the lowest rung of the rural ladder. Social stratification in a village is linked with land and caste which govern status, economic power and political influence as much as the level of living which is their consequence. Owner cultivators with large holdings are at the apex. Agricultural labour is provided mostly by economically and socially backward sections; poor sections from the tribes also swell their ranks. The working force in the rural agricultural sectors constitutes, according to the 1961 census, 134.3 millions as against a total rural working force of 162.3 millions.

These data bring out the magnitude of workers in agriculture in comparison with the total working force in the economy which was in the neighbourhood of 190 millions. Nearly 77% of scheduled caste workers in rural areas are either cultivators or belong to the category of agricultural labour. Among scheduled

tribes, the percentage is slightly over 89. Agricultural labour excluding small cultivators, according to the census, accounts for 30.6 millions. Agriculture in its broad connotation accounts for nearly 50 percent of our national income and engages about 70 percent of the working population.

The two census since independence have shown that the proportion of agricultural workers to total workers remained almost constant, there was an increase in the former category from 97.2 millions to 131 millions. The more numerous category of cultivators among agricultural works increased from 69.7 million in 1951 to 99.5 millions in 1961. A significant increase was registred in the number of women cultivators. Agricultural labourers increased from 27.5 millions to 31.5 millions. During the period, an increase of 14.5 percent against 43 percent in the number of cultivators. The proportion of male agricultural labourers to total male workers declined between the two censuses.

Dr. N. Lalitha when presenting a paper on "The Rural Aged - The Most Deprived Among the Deprived", recommends that the Govt. should take earnest steps to meet the health and pension needs of the aged labourers. She also recommends that the policy document should include the following aspects:

1) Elderly in urban, rural and tribal areas. 2) Elderly women and widows. 3) Handicapped and immobile elderly. 4) The abused elderly and abandoned.

5) Social participation of the elderly, 6) Voluntary assistance to older persons, 7) Social integration and community participation rather than segregation, 8) Nutrition and health of the elderly, 9) Orientation, training and placement of active elderly, 10) Self management and work participation, 11) Culture and recreation, 12) Care, Protection and Security, 13) Death with dignity and decent cremation, burial.33

While talking about the Economic conditions of Agricultural labourers. Mr. K. Hanumantha Rao States the following in his paper titled, "Changes in the Structure of Employment in Rural Areas."

"The structure of labour markets in rural India under went significant quantitative and qualitative changes during the 25 year period ending 1993-94. The contribution of demographic factors and the concomitant effects on labour supply and participation and also the role of technology in influencing the demand pattern for labour in eight major states (e.g. Bihar, Madyapradesh, Maharashtra, Uttarpradesh and West Bengal) need monitoring to gauge the emerging employment scenario and challenges posed by the development process. Infact, these are the states with high levels of poverty as well.34

When recommending to the Government for reducing the level of poverty among farmers, Mr. Satyapaul in his article observes as follows:

There has been an increase in the level of poverty among farmers during the seventies. After 1979-80 poverty shows a downward trend. Poverty seems to be associated positively with consumer prices and inversely with the level of per capita income in the region. This implies that any government policy which ensures a rapid growth of per-capita income and stabilises prices of consumer goods should help reducing the level of poverty among farmers.\(^{35}\)

Mr. Kripashankar also brought it to light the causes for the Indebtedness of agricultural labourers in Eastern U.P. in the same article as follows:

"Marriage was the biggest cause of indebtedness as it accounted for 38 percent of debts. Loans under IRDP accounted for 24 percent of the debt. 12 percent of the debt was incurred to meet day-to-day consumption needs, 3 percent of debt was for purchase of cloth. Significantly 47 percent of the debt was incurred for productive purposes like purchase of animals and to run a small shop. 43 percent of the debt was older than ten years and the usual rate of Interest on debts was in the range of 60 to 75 Percent per annum. Interest rates would depend on the urgency of the borrower. There was no fixity about it. While the usual rate will be one anna a rupee per month, that is 75 percent per annum. It could go upto 120 percent in exceptional cases, relatives usually do not charge any interest".\(^ {36}\)

\(^{35}\) Satya Paul, Green Revolution and poverty among farm families in Hariyana Economic and political weekly Vol. xxv, No.39, Sep.29, 1990, pp.82-83.

Mr. Venkata Reddy in his book titled, 'Rural Development in India-Poverty and Development' deplored the status of bonded labourers as below:

"The landlords fully exploit the illiteracy and ignorance of the borrower, in working out the loan amounts due. The borrowers and even their descendants are doomed to bonded labour and perpetual slavery. There are instances in Andhra Pradesh where a petty landowner, who borrowed a small amount of Rs. 100/- and who never succeeded in repaying it, lost his tiny holding, became an agricultural landless labourer and then a bonded labourer. Not only the person who actually borrowed became a bonded labourer, but his sons also were reduced to the status of bonded labour. Instances of this type are recorded in other parts of rural India.

The bonded labourers are exploited by the money lender-cum-landlord in several ways. They have to work for petty wages only on the farms of the landlord. They have to do any work entrusted to them, including domestic work. They are made to work for longer hours till late in the night. It is reported that bonded labour still exists in certain States. 37

Mr. Krupa Shankar in his article titled "Agricultural Labours in Eastern U.P." states the frustration of agricultural labourers in Eastern U.P. in the following terms:

"When discussed with a number of better informed respondents as to what

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was their perception about increasing their income, a regular salaried job was obviously their first preference but they were also conscious that it was not easy to get a job. As a matter of fact, no one among the households had a regular job. Surprisingly none asked for more radical land distribution programme. Probably, they knew that no government is going to do so, although they knew what it means to have land."^{38}

My P.B. Gajendrakatkar has indicated in his inaugural address at the National Commission on Labour, "The vast majority of the labour force in India however is in agriculture, rural employments and in unorganised industry, statutorily fixed at minimum wages. Their earnings although on the lower side individually are taken together, because of their numbers, greatly exceed the earnings of organised labour. The subject of minimum wage determination however has not received attention on a corresponding scale. An analysis of facts influencing minimum wage determination as was done for the fair wage by the committee known by that name could have placed minimum wages fixed in the early fifties under the law of 1948 on scientific lines."^{39}

He further points out that, "the state remains a mute witness and merely notifies the wage recommended by the Advisory Committees. As a result a fair

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wage is noticed under the minimum wage law in construction and a poverty wage is notified under the same law in agriculture".\(^{40}\)

While talking about poverty in India and the IRDP delusion, Mr. Jean Dreze expressed his views that, "the government should have a serious programme of employment generation, preferably in the form of an Employment Guarantee Scheme with legal status. Landless (or nearly landless) agricultural labourers represent a major proportion of the rural poor. If they are not provided with land (and there is little prospects of this happening in the near future), they should be provided with employment. Public works programmes, unlike IRDP, have the advantage of incorporating a 'self-selection' mechanism which ensures that its benefits are not captured by the relatively privileged sections of the population. In contrast with IRDP, the guarantee of employment also has the merits of reducing rather than enhancing insecurity".\(^{41}\)

In his paper titled, 'Unemployment and Poverty in Rural Areas'. Mr. Pradeep K. Sharma suggests that, "the problem of rural unemployment in India is one of low-income employment. This is a major determinant of rural poverty. The sustainable solution lies in increasing the productivity of agricultural sector by accelerating public and private investment in infrastructure technology and skills.

\(^{40}\) P.B. Gajendra Katkar-National Commission on Labour-Report of the National Commission on Labour appendix III
A well diversified agricultural growth will enhance the employment opportunities.
At the same time, the dynamism of rural non-farm sector should be exploited by
de-regulating this sector to make it attractive to investors".42

Mr. S. Mahendra Dev in his paper titled 'Government interventions and Social
Security for Rural Labour states. "It is true that there is a need for increase in
social expenditure for a poor country like India; but, merely increasing funds is
not enough if our aim is to reach the poor effectively. Between allocation of funds
and effective utilization of the existing funds, more weightage should be given to
the latter. Education for the poor seems to be a crucial parameter for the success
of social security programs in India."43

Mr. Dipak Mazumdar in his paper titled; 'Labour markets, Trade patterns
and Workers Living Standards' opines, "With a vast reservoir of surplus labour in
agriculture and the informal sector in the developing world, the key to raising
workers earnings in these economies is to increase the supply price of such
labour and this can only be done with policies that augments labour productivity
in agriculture. In many cases over emphasis on export growth might detract from
this objective".44

42. Mr. Pradeep K. Sharma-Unemployment and Poverty in Rural areas-Kurukshetra
43. S. Mahendra Dev-Government interventions and Social security for rural labour - The
44. Mr. Dipak Mazumdar - Labour markets, Trade patterns and Workers Living Standards-
Mr. G. Parthasarathy and Mr. G. Dasaradha Rama Rao in their article entitled, 'Minimum Wages Legislation for Agricultural Labour' emphasise that, the basic issues in relation to enforcement of minimum wages are as follows:

1. A strict enforcement may, however, be necessary and operationally feasible in case of those who employ attached labour.

2. The best agency for implementation is still the machinery of the labour department.

In the seminar on "Agricultural wages and employment", the rapporter Mr. S.R. Subramanian, from the discussion made, concluded that, in fixing the wages, the marginal value product criterion gives the maximum paying capacity of the farmers, while the poverty line criterion gives the minimum level of wage needed. So one can go for a via media and fix the wages for the agricultural labour by taking into account the simple average of minimum wage and marginal value product of labour.46

Jeemol Unni in his article titled, 'Employment and Wages Among Rural Labours: Some Recent Trends' concludes as follows, if the initial assumption regarding 'economic transmission are neoclassical the decline in real wages in the non-agricultural sector should result in an increase in output and consequently

employment in this sector. However the slow transfer of labour from agriculture to non-agriculture reflects the inability of the non-agricultural sector to 'create employment rapidly enough'. Among rural labour households, the increase in annual days of employment per worker appears to consist of self employed days, mainly in agriculture. Obviously, it is difficult to determine empirically the cause and consequence of the real wage rate decline and much depends on the initial theoretical assumption. On balance, the decline in real wage rates in non-agriculture and the reduction in the non-agricultural - agricultural real wage gap imply that all is not well with the non-agricultural sector in the rural areas".47

Balister and Singh(1987) found in their study that a majority of agricultural labour households were in debt. But the incidence of debt was higher among the cultivating labourers as compared to landless labourers.48

The work done by Garg. J.Sand and T.R.Singh, "An Enquiry into the Pattern of Employment and Levels of Earnings of Landless Agricultural Labourers in Western U.P. "shows that, "the male agricultural labourers were employed in large numbers compared to the female and child labourers. The average annual income of the households is Rs. 5672.57 per year. Their maximum earning in agricultural work is 78.3% of income from agricultural wages."49

49. Panday S.M. (Editor) Rural Labour in India problem and prospectives New Delhi, 1976,pp.52-60.
According to Ruddar Dutt and KPM Sundaram, the following are the important reasons for the low wages and poor economic conditions of agricultural labour. "1. Low social status, 2. Unorganised, 3. Seasonal employment, 4. Paucity of non-agricultural jobs, 5. Rural indebtedness".

Thus partly because of factors beyond their control and partly because of their inherent bargaining weakness, the farm labourers have been getting very low wages and have therefore to live a miserable sub-human life.

The following suggestions have been made for the improvement of agricultural labourers:


Mr. R.C. Saxena warns that, if early solution is not found out for the problems of poor toiling labourers, it may go out of hand and further states that, "the poverty and squalor of the persons who are primarily responsible for the production of agricultural commodities is telling heavily on our production. The human factor necessary for production can be ignored only at the risk of periling the whole nation. The long neglected and shamelessly exploited agricultural workers today

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form the most vulnerable element in our society, easily and rightly susceptible to exploitation by groups bent on creating trouble and disorder with a view to ward off this danger, if not out of sympathy for the poor toiling labourer it is incumbent on every thinking person to realise that this problem requires early solution. If further ignored, it will go out of hand and assume a proportion enough not only to unduly shock the whole social fabric but to destroy it. We hope that the government of India’s legislation of minimum wages, the Agricultural and Rural Labour Enquiries, various measures of the state governments and proposals in the Five Year Plans, would go a long way in solving the problem.”

Mr. H.B. Shivamaggi in his article titled, "The Agricultural Labour Problems-Past Misconception and New Guidelines" criticises that the planned efforts of the Government to alleviate agricultural labour problems were only short-term solutions and suggests long-term measures also in his paper. In his words, "the acute pressure of population and the adverse effects of tenurial and tenancy systems have led to much uneconomic subdivision and fragmentation of holdings. Many landlords have, besides, reduced their erstwhile tenants to the status of farm labourers in order to circumvent certain provisions of the land reform laws.

Farm labour households thus fall into three categories i) those that possess no land ii) those that possess a little land providing a small proportion of their

income and iii) those that have been reduced to the status of farm labourers. Acute poverty is common to all these categories and the farm labourer's physical dispersion and social backwardness prevent them from asserting their claims through organisations of their own. Planned effort to alleviate the labourers lot has failed because it has consisted of short term solutions unrelated to the general pace and direction of the economy as a whole. To succeed, farm labour policy has to be an integral part of the overall policy for economic development."  

Mr. K.V. Narayana is also of the opinion that the various programmes for alleviation of poverty among Agricultural labourer did not bring out any fruit and in his book Rural Economy of India states, "The programmes such as community development, small farmers development agency, marginal farmers and agricultural labour development agency and the integrated rural development programme have failed to cater to the needs of target groups in terms of either employment or income. Generation of employment and income through reformative programmes such as land reforms launched in successive plans after independence could not yield desired results."  

V.M. Dandekar in his book "The Indian Economy" brings into limelight the economic condition of agricultural labourers in the following two paragraphs:

"Clearly, beginning with the year 1975-76, the gap between the agricultural and non-agricultural sectors has been wider in terms of current prices than in constant prices and though there are fluctuations from year to year, the difference is progressively increasing. As a result, the agricultural sector is not only bearing the burden of the residual population but, in the past eight years, has further suffered from a differential rise in prices".\(^{54}\)

Inspite of almost 66 percent increase in the per capita NDP over thirty-four years, the problem of hard poverty remains almost untouched. An increase of 66 percent in the per capita NDP over thirty four years is not great. What is worse is that these small gains have remained confined to a small section of the population, may be 20 percent, may be 25 percent, may be at most 30 percent. The remaining 70 percent to 80 percent of the population has stayed where it was thirty years ago.\(^{55}\)

Griappa concluded that the decision roles of women were competitive. In order to lead to greater work efficiency, support services should be improved, especially in the areas of child care, education, health and nutrition.\(^{56}\)

In the chapter 'Employment, Income and Poverty' the Tamilnadu Human Development Report says that, there are gender differences in the morbidity profile

\(^{55}\) Ibid.,p.86.
\(^{56}\) S.Griappa, Decision Roles by women in different rural and semi-urban activities, Journal of Rural Development 7(4)433, 1988.p.23
of women and men. 56 percent of women in the 15 to 49 age group in Tamilnadu have anaemia as against 22 percent in Kerala and 42 percent in Karnataka (NFHS 1998-99) Respiratory problem, re-productive health problems and cancer are higher amongst women than men, while heart ailments are higher amongst men than women. Part of these differences can be attributed to the gender-based division of work and part to the lack of reproductive and sexual right of women.

given the fact that women are responsible for cooking and fire wood is the single largest source of energy, chronic lung diseases and cancer in women are some of the common fallouts (Swaminathan 1977) the posture of women labourers involved in transplanting and weeding also leads to a variety of health problems.

Women in the informal sector namely the beedy, lace and agarbathi industries are known to suffer from a variety of respiratory problems and skin ailments. In all instances the vulnerability of pregnant women is higher than others, leading to chances of miscarriages. Also while morbidity levels amongst women are higher than men, their access to quality health care is lower than men."

The Hindu in an article, observed the women folk in agricultural sectors, under the title, "Women trained to man the farm" in the following words:

"Women ascertaining their position in farming sector has been quite evident in several rural belts in Tamilnadu. They play a vital role at the time of

transplantation of seedlings in small farms managing the farms along with their husbands or parents, weeding operations etc., The women generally learn the various aspects of farming only from observing the men folk and by process of trial and error."58

Guleria and Agnihotri revealed that, "the monetary contribution of females in the farm income was found to be smaller than that of male workers. The difference has been explained to a considerable extent by the low farm wages of female workers in the study area."59

Agarwal Bina in her paper, "Women rural poverty and agricultural growth in India" describes the contribution of rural female labourers in poor rural households and agricultural development and forestry. In her research she discusses the working of females in the development of water resources.60

P. Kolappan in his report submitted to Tamilnadu government on agricultural labour observes, "the problems of agricultural women labourers, particularly the expectant mothers, are still worse, as they suffer from under-nutrition as well as mal-nutrition to a great degree. They are also deprived of proper both pre-natal and post-natal care."61

58. Women Trained to man the farm, The Hindu dated, Jan 29,1989 p.17.
Sinha in his study states that, "the planners should treat women as target group in all rural development programmes. Special attention should be given to them to improve the new skills through training for gainful employment / self employment."\textsuperscript{62}

Bhuvaneswari found that, "Women as a working force was a neglected class. They were socially discriminated. Better Women employability should be borne in mind for developing policies."\textsuperscript{63}

Seethalakshmi and Thangamani Swaminathan states that, "54 percent rural women are engaged in marginal occupation, through which they were supplementing income by collection of fish, firewood, cowdung, maintenance of kitchengarden, tailoring and weaving."\textsuperscript{64}

Shanthini indicates that, "rural women folk suffer several handicaps in the Indian Economy because of their illiteracy and traditional submissiveness. They need a lot of motivation and incentives to come forward and take up meaningful economic ventures."\textsuperscript{65}

\textsuperscript{62} AjitKumar Sinha, Rural Women and development process, A Micro level study -Kurukshetra 35(5):37,1988,p.80.
\textsuperscript{63} K. Bhuvaneswari, Women's Participation in Rural Tamilnadu Paper Presented in the eighth Annual Conference of Association of Economics, Tamilnadu Agriculture University, Coimbatore Feb.20-21, 1988,p.5.
\textsuperscript{64} Seethalakshmi and Thangamani Swaminathan, Organisational support for rural Women, paper presented in the National work - shop on Enterpreneurial Development of Rural Women Department of Agricultural Economics, Agricultural college and Reasearch Institute,Tamilnadu Agricultural University, Madurai, Dec.28-30,1987,p.4.
\textsuperscript{65} Feodore Shanthini, Organisational support for Rural Women, Paper presented in the National work-shop on Enterpreneurial Development of Rural Women, Department of Agricultural Economics, Agricultural College and Research Institute Tamilnadu Agricultural University, Madurai, Dec.28-30, 1987, p.1.
Diana. Tempelman observes that, "income earned by women has been more likely to be spent on food and other basic needs than income earned by men. Consequently, it was recognised that an increase in women's income was more likely to improve the standard of living which was a primary step for a country's economic development".  

Nirmala Banerjee in her study states that, "for uneducated poor women, employment in agriculture provides the major source of employment. They work even more than men. But the rate of wages for women are generally lower than those of men. In rural areas, the unemployment is higher for women than for man".

Gupta concludes that, "the female in rural areas remained without gainful employment for longer periods in the crop seasons".

Balaraman reveals that, "on an average, the wages paid to a female worker was roughly 60% to 80% of the wages paid to a male worker. The discrimination against women had been prevailing in all its forms. In the Agricultural sector, the discrimination was largely operated through open wage discrimination. Besides this, reduction in the quantum of work for female farm workers too prevailed".

Gholake and Rajan show that, "females are the major contributors to the supply of labour both for performing different kinds of cultivation and crop activities. In general, both males and females supply less than 50 percent of their available total labour time for crop activities. As farm size increases, the proportionate labour availability of male labour for crop activities increases, while that of female labour declines. The relationship between farm sizes and total labour time per hectare is associated with increased use of family labour". 70

Leela Gulati in her paper, "Unemployment among female agricultural labourers" notes that, "Recent estimates of unemployment have shown that the burden of unemployment is higher on working women in both the absolute as well as relative sense. Divergent though the female unemployment is among states, it is difficult to pinpoint any factors leading to this situation. All that one can say is that female unemployment tends to be high in states where male unemployment is also high. What causes either or both together remains an open question". 71

M/s Misra and Puri in their book Indian Economy, while talking about Agricultural labourer, suggest the following measures for solving labour problem.

"The problems of agricultural workers can be tackled only when a two-pronged strategy of providing land to the agricultural labourers (by strictly

enforcing land ceilings and distributing surplus land to agricultural labourers) and providing alternative avenues of employment (by promoting small and cottage industries and village handicrafts) is adopted. The former measure can be implemented even in short-term, provided the government is really serious about it. The latter measure, on the other hand, is a long-term process involving considerable resources and carefully chalked out long-range planning.\(^7^2\)

The various review of literature made above reveal the following salient features on agricultural labour in India. They are:

- The government should take earnest steps to meet the health and pension needs of the aged labourers.
- It is essential to develop industries in all parts of the country, so that the production of farm labour is positively tackled.
- Two prolonged strategy of providing land to the agricultural labourers (by strictly enforcing land ceilings and distributing surplus lands to agricultural labourers) and providing alternative venues of employment to be adopted to tackle the problems of agricultural workers.
- The low level of education and the lack of organisation are the main problems of agricultural labourers.
- The rural unemployment exists in two classes namely seasonal and perennial.

\(^7^2\) Misra and Puri, Agricultural labour, Indian Economy, 524 Himalaya Publishing house, Ramdoot, Dr. Bhalerao Marg, Bombay - 400 004. 1990, p.221.
• There is a decline in the days of employment in the field of agriculture and that leads to leases earning and debt. Conditions of agricultural labour households.

• The benefits of agricultural developments promoted by the Government through various plans during the last four decades by and large have gone mainly to big farmers.

• Schemes conceived broadly and implemented within an area and group specific context have a greater chance for success.

• There is a high incidence of poverty among agricultural labourers.

• The increase in annual day of employment per worker consists of self-employed days.

• The reasons for continuous and enormous increase in the number of agricultural labourers in India are:

1. Increase in population.
2. Decline of cottage Industries and village handicraft.
3. Eviction of small farmers and tenants farm land.
4. Uneconomic holding.
5. Increase in indebtedness.
6. Spread of the use of money and exchange system.
7. Capitalist agriculture.

• Most of the Agricultural labourers continue to be attached labourers due to heavy indebtedness and low wages.
Technological intervention in agriculture such as introduction of irrigation facilities, use of high yielding varieties and subsequent change in cropping pattern play in important role in increasing both income and employment among farm families.

Agricultural labourers are classified into three groups namely (a) field labourers, (b) ordinary labourers and (c) skilled labourers.

Unemployment, under employment, very low wages, combined with social oppression make the life of agricultural workers miserable.

Land owners were more successful in organising themselves and formed an association by means of which they prevented labour units from gaining effective control over the labour supply.

In Kerala, Tamilnadu and west Bengal a negative rate to employment was found in the recent period (93-94 to 99-2000).

The unemployment rates for rural SC males and females are higher than the corresponding rates in general population.

Agriculture in its broad connotation accounts for nearly 50% of our national income and engages about 70% of working population.

There has been an increase in the level of poverty among farmers during the seventies. After 1979-80 poverty shows a downward trend.

Marriage was the biggest cause of indebtedness and accounts for 38 percent of the debt.

The bonded labourers are exploited by the money lender cum landlord in several ways. They have to work for petty wages only on the farms of the landlord.
• A regular salaried job was obviously the agricultural labourers first preference.

• Public works programmes like employment guarantee schemes with legal status unlike IRDP have the advantage of incorporating a "self selection" mechanism which ensures that its benefits are not captured by the relatively privileged sections of the population.

• The problem of rural unemployment in India is one of low income employment. This is a major determinant of the rural poverty.

• Education for the poor seems to be a crucial parameter for the social security programmes in India.

• A strict enforcement through labour department is necessary to implement minimum wages.

• The incidence of debt was higher among the cultivating labourers as compared to landless labourers.

• Partly because of factors beyond their control and partly because of their inherent bargaining weakness, the farm labourers have been getting very low wages and have therefore to live a miserable sub-human life.

• Government of India’s legislation of minimum wages, the agricultural and Rural labour enquiries, various measures of government and proposal in the five year plans would go a long way in solving the problem.

• In fixing the wages, the marginal value product criterian gives the maximum paying capacity of the farmers, while the poverty line criterian gives the minimum level of wage needed.
• Bihar, Madhyapredesh, Maharastra, U.P. and West Bengal are the States with high levels of poverty.
• There has been an increase in the level of poverty among farmers during the seventies, after 79-80 poverty shows a downward trend.
• No one among the agricultural labour households had a regular Job.
• The Minimum wage determination for agricultural labourers has not received attention on a corresponding scale as done in organised industries.
• Most of the government programmes for rural labourers' upliftment, except IRDP were enjoyed mostly by those who were living above poverty line.
• Education for the poor seems to be a crucial parameter for the success of social security programmes in India.
• The wage fixation for agricultural labourers should be done by taking into account the simple average of minimum wage and marginal value product of labour.
• The increase in annual days of employment per worker in the agricultural sector appears to consist of self employed days. Hence it is difficult to determine empirically the cause and consequence of the real wage rate decline and much depends on theoretical assumption.
• The incidence of debt was higher among the cultivating labourers as compared to the landless labourers.
• The male agricultural labourers were employed in large number compared to the females and child labourers in western U.P.
Low social status, unorganised, seasonal employment, pausing of non-agricultural jobs and Rural indebtedness were the important reasons for low wages and poor economic conditions of agricultural labourers.

Removal of serfdom, better implementation of minimum wages, rehabilitation of land less agricultural workers, improvement in agriculture, peasant unions for Agricultural labourers and public-works programmes were the suggestion made for the improvement of Agricultural labourers.

The acute pressure of population and the adverse effect of tenurial and tenancy system have led to much uneconomic sub-division and fragmentation of holdings.

Planned effort to alleviate labourers' lot has failed, because, it consisted of short-term solutions unrelated to the general pace and direction of the economy as a whole.

The programmes such as community development, small farmers development agency, Marginal farmers and Agricultural labour development agency and the Integrated Rural Development Programme have failed to cater to the needs of target group either in terms of employment or income.

The gap between the agricultural and the non-agricultural sectors has been wide in terms of current prices than in constant prices, the difference is progressively increasing.

There is an increase of 66 percent in the per-capita NDP over 34 years, but these gains remained confined to a small section of the population. Nearly 70-80
percent of the population have stayed where they were 30 years ago.

- The monetary contributions of female in the farm income was found to be smaller than that of male workers.

- Planners should treat women as target group in all rural development programmes. Special attention should be given to them to improve the new skills through training for gainful employment / self employment.

- Women employability should be borne in mind for developing policies.

- 54 percent of Rural women are engaged in marginal occupation, through which they are supplementing income by collection of fish, fire wood, cow dung kitchen garden tailoring and weaving.

- Rural women folk in the Indian Economy suffer several handicaps because of their illiteracy and traditional submissiveness. They need a lot of motivation and incentives.

- It was recognised that an increase in women's income was more likely to improve the standard of living which was a primary step for a country's economic development.

- The discrimination against women had been prevailing in all its forms. In the agricultural sector, the discrimination was largely operated through open wage discrimination. A female worker was paid roughly 60 to 80 percent of the wages paid to a male worker.

The salient features extracted from through various review of literature reveal
that the agricultural labourers suffer from low level of education, lack of organisation among them selves, decline in days of employment, poverty, indebtedness, social oppression, labour bondedness etc., The various economic schemes implemented by the government have not done anything greatly either in the economic development of the rural poor or in the social improvement of the agricultural labourers.