CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION
In an underdeveloped or developing economy, agriculture is the most important economic activity. Despite the concerted industrialisation that has taken place in the Indian economy since 1951, agriculture continues to enjoy a position of pre-eminence. Though its relative importance vis-a-vis the industrial sector has gone down a little, agriculture, even today, is the backbone of our economy. To what extent the Indian economy depends on agriculture can be understood by looking to the role it plays in our economic life. Agriculture in India is of crucial importance from different stand points. It accounts for a large part of our national income; it is the most important sector from the point of view of employment. Further the agricultural sector has an important influence on industrialisation and its role in our foreign trade is also significant.

The economy of India is predominantly agriculture oriented. The majority of the Indian workers are the agricultural labourers who constitute the major segment of the rural work force. Though a significant number of women are found among these agricultural labourers their contribution to the rural economy has not yet been assessed correctly.

While men plough and do some other particular agricultural operations, the female agricultural labourers are employed largely to perform such agricultural operations as sowing, transplanting, weeding, harvesting, winnowing and threshing. This segregation is
followed by the discrimination in the matter of payment of wages. Though the Equal Remuneration Act was enacted in 1976, the female agricultural labourers are still paid less than their male colleagues for equal work. They are denied equal wages only because they are women. Because they desperately need some job, they do not hesitate to work at lower wages under harsh conditions. They slog alongside their men the whole day and then look after the house and children too, with no help forthcoming from the male members of the family. Most of these labourers lie at the lowest rung of the socio-economic ladder. They work for wages because of the economic necessity to supplement the family income. The so-called Development Programmes launched by the Government have failed to ameliorate their position.

Concrete information pertaining to the roots or degree of discrimination or exploitation of these women is not available. Also, the impact of the Development Programmes on their lives has not been studied exhaustively. No serious study has so far been undertaken to get to the core of the problem and critically examine the status of these women. The present study with some of its limitations, has modestly attempted to look into the question in the overall context of the existing agrarian relations and endeavoured to fill in, to some extent, the existing gaps in the available literature on the subject.

In Palghat district, nearly two hundred and forty female agricultural labourers, have been interviewed to assess the situation
prevailing there. The secondary data has been collected from the various libraries situated, throughout the country. Some eminent social scientists, well versed in the subject of study, have been consulted for getting their opinions on certain aspects of the subject. In the light of this investigation and consultation, the question of the female agricultural labourers has been analysed drawing some generalisations and the conclusions from the sample study.

Several definitions of the term "agricultural labourer" have been given from time to time but all those definitions, with little difference, accept broadly the principle that an agricultural labourer is one who is engaged in agriculture on wage employment either casually or permanently.

The agricultural labourers, in general, can be classified into two categories:-(i) the landless agricultural labourers, and (ii) the small cultivators whose main source of income is wage employment and not their small holdings. The landless labourers, in turn can be classified into two sub-categories:- (a) permanent labourers attached to a cultivating household, and (b) casual labourers. And, the small cultivators can be divided into three sub-groups - cultivators, share croppers and lease holders.

The fall of cottage industries, handicrafts and the other subsidiary occupations resulted in the decline of the village economy which, in turn, made a large number of villagers, including
women, depend entirely upon the agricultural operations available to them alternatively. The factors like the large size of the family, indebtedness and pauperisation compel women to go out of the house and do the back-breaking jobs besides working like the unpaid servants to men at home where their work is never measured in the economic terms. As they are unskilled like many of their male colleagues, they are naturally attracted towards this most unorganised sector of agriculture, perform some or the other agricultural operation that does not need any skill, and experience the sufferings of unemployment during the slack season, under-employment and discriminatory wages. Thus, landlessness, that makes them labour on other's lands and suffer, appears to be the root-cause of all their problems.

The classification of the rural women on the basis of their relation to the means of production helps us to identify the status of a woman in general and of a female agricultural labourer in particular.

The majority of rural women eke out their livelihood by working as mere wage labourers in the agricultural farms. Easter Boserup compares them with the African women who are supposed to support themselves and their families. They are generally attached to some landlord's family along with their men folk. These families do not own any land and live in thatched huts. They are followed by the women whose families hold tiny bits of dry land. Poor irrigation facilities, lack of cattle-wealth and other resources
impair them in cultivating their land. Generally, the women of the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Backward Castes come under these two categories known as the landless and the near landless agricultural labourers.

The women of the last two categories, who constitute the major women-work force in rural India, occupy the lowest positions in the caste-class hierarchy. The capacity to do some work is the only possession they have to rely upon. Lack of skills, wide shifts in the occupation, seasonal nature of the agricultural work, discriminating wages, the submissive nature of the immigrant-labourers, and the unacknowledged and burden-some work these women do at house - are the common factors that affect the development of these women.

India cannot be considered as under a single mode of production. It may, however, be convenient to say that it is a pre-capitalist, socio-economic formation offering a new kind of mixed mode of production. The class formation in this mode of production also does not seem to be indicating a clear-cut polarization and, hence, a multiplicity of classes co-exist aligning with one another. Though the rich peasantry take the side of the poor peasantry and the landless labour class in their fight against the feudal landlord class, they, at times, align themselves with the feudal landlord class to suppress the poor classes. Thus, they exploit the poor peasantry and the agricultural labourers who naturally fight against them while fighting the state that claims itself to be welfare
state on one side and comes to the rescue of the land-owning classes on the other side.

In this overall situation of the Indian society, women are placed in a very precarious position. They have become the targets of exploitation at every level. Since the emergence of the slave-owned societies, the women either became a slave and served the dominate sections of the society or was given the secondary role in the society. She became a part of the private ownership of the means of production, and was made to be subservient to men who happened to be her father, brother, husband, or her master, i.e., the owner of a property. This position continued to be the same basically. Hence the exploitative agrarian relations could easily put the female agricultural labourers in a position where they were made to believe that men and women were born with their well-defined roles to play, and that neither the segregation of the agricultural labourers on the basis of sex nor the policy of discriminatory wages is something unnatural or abnormal. But the female agricultural labourers, whose strength has increased enormously over the years, have come to realize the great potentialities they have, the significant contribution they make to the agricultural economy of the country and the need for the abolition of the policy of sexual discrimination. They are on the path of understanding the warrant of waging a two-fold war - against the male domination at home and in the society on one front, and against the exploitative and oppressive classes on the
other front. It is the necessity of the women's association with the oppressed sections of the males on the second front that questions the mode of studying or solving the problems of the female agricultural labourers separately - i.e., not as a part of the problem of the liberation of the toiling masses that include the male and female agricultural labourers. In attempting to study exclusively the fate of the female agricultural labourers and to assess their contribution to the rural economy, the researcher has aimed at unfolding in his own way and within his limitations, the untold ravages of the system on them while debating the above question that looks like a contradiction. The researcher has made an attempt to look at the main problem of the welfare of the agricultural labourers from the angle of the emancipation of the female agricultural labourers. The heterogeneous character of the Indian economy and the uneven rates of development that have had varying degrees of impact on the different segments of the labour-force also have underlined the need for the estimation of the different segments separately, taking into account the important factors that include sex, category of workers, rural or urban residence and region. Hence the present study on the female agricultural labourers of the rural areas.

The analysis of the socio-economic conditions of the agricultural labour households has revealed that the agricultural labourers, especially the female agricultural labourers, have not witnessed any radical change in their life styles over the years.
The majority of the agricultural labourers do not possess any productive source through which they can derive some income. Hence, they completely depend upon their wages. Lack of skills and poverty compel them to go into service in their young age i.e., even before they attain the age of 12. Even the children and old members of the family are compelled to contribute their mite for sustaining the family. Yet they cannot buy good food with the meagre wages they earn. Their hut-like dwelling places or dilapidated one-roomed houses have inadequate accommodation and poor ventilation.

More than 90% of the female labourers are deprived of the fruits of education because they have been earning something for their family. Now, most of the agricultural labourers in Palghat District are literate enough to read and write in their mother tongue. The girls are made to assist their parents at home and at the work-spot. Thus, the partiality in the treatment of the males and females begins at an early age and it grows to discriminate women at home, at the work-spot and in the society.

The economic condition of the female labourers is further deteriorated, with their men's addiction to alcohol and smoking. In the drunken state men beat them for no fault of theirs. The helpless situation, in one way, plunged them into indebtedness. Meagre wages, lack of work opportunities during the slack season and the dowry systems are some of the other factors that make them arise loans at exhorbitant rates of interest. The banks are not
found extending help to them. Pledging of articles for raising loans from the money lender is also widely prevalent. All the members of the loanee's family almost slave for the loan-giver. As the borrowed amount is usually spent on unproductive items like food, liquor and marriages, rather than on productive items, this results in their perpetual bondage to the landlord. Thus, the socio-economic condition under which these female agricultural labourers live have continued to be traditional, exploitative and anti-women in character. These conditions impede their development and go on lowering their socio-economic status day by day. Simply by improving their job opportunities by increasing their wages, their problems cannot be solved. Hence their domestic situation and their problems at the work-spot have been studied in detail before critically examining the development programmes launched by the government for their emancipation.

Their domestic, child-bearing and child-rearing functions are considered as unproductive because these are non-remunerative. The work at home is considered to be exclusively that of women though they work in the fields also. They too have come to accept their dual roles without opposition since time immemorial and this trend has been noticed in the present sample of the female agricultural labourers also. The superiority feeling of the male members of the family often prevents them from assisting their women in the domestic work. The burden of the women becomes heavier on the festive days. They go for working in the fields
even during the period of their pregnancy because theirs is a
hand-to-mouth existence. Though the Maternity Benefit Act was
enacted giving the working women the constitutional safeguards,
regulations were never implemented. Many of them leave their
infants uncared for at home while they go outside for work. And
these infants grow up to become the servants of the landlords and
earn something for the family sunk in poverty and indebtedness.
The female children work more and yet are treated by their parents
as a liability. Though they help their mothers in discharging
their household duties and work in the fields too, they are looked
down upon by their parents who are afraid of the dowry to be
offered at the time of their marriage.

The employment in the agricultural field has not changed
the status of the women who continue to suffer and remain fixed in
the traditional framework of a subservient wife or a dependent
mother in the male-dominated society. The factors like the
seasonal nature of employment in agriculture, preference of men
over women, lack of skills, landlessness, migration, and
discriminatory wage contributed considerably to the depressive work
situation of the agricultural labourers in general and of the female
agricultural labourers in particular. The growth of technology, the
provision of the irrigation facilities and introduction of new
commercial crops in agriculture have not improved the basic
life-styles of the agricultural labourers, and the discrimination at
work and in the payment of wages continued to remain unchanged.
Even when women do the work which usually men do, they are not paid on a par with men. The system of daily payment of wages in cash or in kind during the harvesting season depend upon the mercy of the employer. The method of payment made in kind is highly exploitative in character. Advances taken from the landlords result in deductions in their wages and starvation for some days. Poverty, drought and famine force the female labourers to shift to new places of work, facing many hardships. The emergence of nuclear families created new problems for them in the absence of creches and community canteens.

The various socio-economic problems that the female agricultural labourers force in their daily lives have never attracted the attention of the policy-makers whose prime interest always appears to be what is vaguely called rural development of which scientific understanding appears to be lacking. This can easily be seen by studying the Development Programmes launched by the Government from time to time in the name of rural development.

Though the issue of rural development became the focus of the public policies made under the five year plans, it was only after the first two plans were drafted and implemented that an attempt was made, by launching some development programmes, to solve the problem of rural unemployment that indirectly might have helped to ameliorate, to some extent, the pathetic situation of the agricultural labourers, and it was only after the passage of forty six long years since independence that the development of women
including the female agricultural labourers appeared to have attracted the attention of policy-makers when a separate section on the development of women was included in the sixth plan (1980-85). Now in the Eighth Five Year Plan some Development Programmes were drafted and will be implemented to solve the problem of rural unemployment including the pathetic situation of the female agricultural labourers. Neither concrete efforts were made nor substantial amounts were allotted to improve the economic position of the male and female agricultural labourers. The impact of new technology benefitted the rich farmers only, the gap between the poor and the rich further widened and the agricultural labourers in general and the female agricultural labourers in particular are left far behind.

In certain parts of Palghat District especially in Mannarghat taluk the situation is different. In several places the paddy fields are changed for cultivating banana and other crops. This will still reduce the employment rates of female labourers in that region. This will effect the employment potential and consequently affect the economic position of the agricultural labourers especially the female labourers who will be first to be denied work when the employment situation becomes bad. Obviously old workers also become the worst sufferers in this situation. Their condition becomes more distressing when even the younger ones in the family will have to remain without work for several weeks and when slender savings base of the family gets eroded without any chance or replenishment until the next harvest.
The Development Programmes and schemes like the Rural Works Programme, The Rural Manpower Programme, The Crash Scheme for Rural Employment, and the Pilot Intensive Rural Employment Programme, launched in the beginning were not successful in benefitting the rural masses. The food for work programme, which was launched later, mainly to generate additional employment and provide community assets to strengthen the rural infrastructure, was also a failure because of the factors like lack of co-ordination between the executive officials and malpractices of the contractors and executives. The Employment Guarantee Scheme was only experimental in nature and could not cover many of the villages including the sample villages. Though the National Rural Employment Programme (NREP) benefitted the rural poor to some extent, it had its own defects. While most of the allotted money under this programme was spent on material and not on wages in some places, contractors were engaged against the rules in some other places, and consequently the employment avenues generated under the programme were insignificant.

Though the District Rural Development Agency (DRDA) was meant to extend financial assistance to agricultural labourers among others, its cluster approach did not enable it to cover many villages and only insignificant number of the agricultural labourers were benefitted out of the total target. The Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP), which was implemented through DRDA, and, which benefitted the rural poor to a large extent, could
not benefit the agricultural labourers who were far below the poverty line.

Though women constitute half of the population, it has lately been realized that the process of development would be incomplete without the active participation of women in it, and the need of participation of women has also recently been felt very much whenever a change is necessitated in the society. But the Mahila Mandal Programme, wherein the Government has for the first time attempted to involve the rural women in the development programmes, like all other previous programmes, has failed to improve their position because it has vague objectives and meagre financial support. Development of the rural areas has been one of the abiding concerns of the successive Five Year Plans. The initial strategy of rural development focused attention on institutional reforms. The emphasis in the later strategy of rural development has been on area approach.

Rural development is a wider concept and it includes the development of a number of activities, the more important among these being as follows:-

1. Generation of employment opportunities.
2. Minimum wages to the rural workers.
3. Provision of essential goods and services especially for the weaker section of the rural society.
4. Abolition of the bonded labour.
5. Promotion of various arts and crafts.
6. Development of activities allied to agriculture such as poultry, piggery, fisheries, dairy, etc.

7. Development of agro-based and small industries.


9. Rural electrification.


11. Soil and water conservation.

12. Forestry development.


15. Development of storage and marketing.


17. Development of tribal and hilly areas etc.

18. Jawahar Rojgar Yojana.

Programmes of Rural Development:

After Independence, the Government has launched various schemes for the development of rural areas. The major programmes initiated so far are as follows:-

Introduction of the Panchayati Raj System to provide a democratic administrative set-up at the rural level.

Community Development Programme (CDP) to provide suitable infrastructure for extension work.

Intensive Agriculture Area Programme (IAAP) to bring progressive increase in the production of the main crops in selected areas by an intensive and co-ordinated use of various aids to production.
Intensive Agriculture District Programme (IADP) to bring spectacular increase in the agricultural productivity by developing a package of practices and using modern technology.

Small Farmers Development Agency (SFDA) to identify eligible small farmers and provide them all the basic facilities such as land, water, credit storage, transportation etc., to have at least a subsistence living.

Marginal Farmers and Agriculture Labour Agency (MFAL) to formulate economic programmes for the uplift of marginal farmers and agricultural labour.

Command Area Development Programme (CADP) for making an optimum utilisation of existing irrigation potential.

Crash Scheme for Rural Employment (CSRE) to create employment opportunities for rural labour.

Agro-Service Centers to provide employment to trained entrepreneurs and supply of inputs to the farmers at reasonable prices.

The Direct Development Programme (DDP) to increase the productivity and employment opportunities for the inhabitants of desert areas through optimum utilisation of physical, human, live stock and other resources.

Drought Prone Area Programme (DPAP) for the development of areas having erratic rain fall.

Hill Area Development Programme (HADP) to remove regional disparities and to evolve a suitable pattern of development of backward areas.
National Rural Employment Programme (NREP) to generate additional gainful employment for unemployed and under-employed persons in rural areas.

Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme (RLEGP). This programme was launched on August 15, 1983. In RLEGP, the Government will provide a job for at least one person in every rural family.

Special Livestock Production Programme (SLPP) to provide greater employment opportunities to the weaker sections of the rural society.

Tribal Development Agency (TDA) to foster the economic development of the tribal people so as to bring them within the main-stream of development effort of the country.

Minimum Needs Programme (MNP) to provide services like nutrition for the children and expectant and nourishing mothers, rural health, rural roads, rural electrification, rural water supply, housing for the landless agricultural labourer, elementary education etc.

Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) was launched for the uplift of target group comprising small and marginal farmers, agricultural labourers and rural artisans, etc.

Jawahar Rojgar Yojana (JRY) was launched on April 20, 1989, the Government announced a massive rural job scheme called Jawahar Rojgar Yojana (JRY). The JRY aims at benefitting about 44 million poor rural families. It is expected to provide employment to at least one member of each poor rural for 50 to 100 days a year.
Thirty percent (30%) of the employment would be reserved for women. Every Village Panchayat would receive between Rs. 80,000 and Rs. 1.00 lakh a year for this programme.

The various programmes initiated during the plan period for rural development have achieved limited success. No doubt the agricultural production and farm productivity have increased and additional employment opportunities have been created, but the rural sector still remains underdeveloped. About 40% of the rural population lives below the poverty line and many rural areas do not have the provision of basic needs of life. Landless agricultural labourers, artisans, etc., still remain a neglected lot. The pressure of population mounting on land is resulting into unemployment and disguised unemployment.

In brief, the scheme for rural development have still to go a long way to accomplish the task of the welfare of the rural society.

Mahatma Gandhi holds the view that the salvation of India depends upon the sacrifice and enlightenment of her women.\(^1\) Gandhiji advocated equality of sexes. 'I am uncompromising in the matter of women's rights. In my opinion, she should labour under no legal disability not suffered by men. I should treat the

daughters and sons on a footing of perfect equality. Rules of social conduct would have to be framed mutually by men and women. The nationalist stage in the development of woman's personality brought to light two antithetic elements which needed to be reconciled: the suffering and the assertive. These were inherent in the ethic of women's rights and of non-violent, non-co-operation. Could they be completely reconciled in the constructive work of society? Both were active in the minds of those who participated in the decisive decades of modern Indian history. When independence was finally achieved they were suggested as a standard for future national activity. As Shrimati Sarojini Naidu said to the nation on August 15, 1947, "Let us work for justice, for equity, for human rights but no privileges; for human duties; but no prerogatives."

No man in India has done more than Gandhiji in recent times for the elevation of women and the occupation by them of their rightful place in domestic and public life. A passionate lover of humanity, an implacable foe of injustice in whatever form or sphere, it is small wonder that Gandhiji espoused the woman's cause from a very early time. Throughout his long life of service, he preached forcefully against the wrongs done to women in the name of law, tradition and even religion. He has spoken out

fearlessly against enforced widowhood purdha, the dedication of girls to temples, prostitution, early marriage, dowry system, the economic bondage and material slavery of women.  

Gandhiji championed the cause of women. He considered woman as "the incarnation of ahimsā. Ahimsā means infinite love, which again means infinite capacity for suffering. Who but woman, the mother of man, shows this capacity in the largest measure? ... let her forget she ever was or can be the object of man's lust. And she will occupy her proud position by the side of man as his mother, maker and silent leader. It is given to her to teach the art of peace to the warning world thirsting for that nectar." Gandhi, in short, considered women as "the personification of self-sacrifice".

We may conclude that all the so-called Development Programmes, Anti-poverty programmes, the programmes sponsored by the different development agencies, Societies, Mahila Mandals appear to have just not proved the purchasing capacity of the small peasantry and middle peasantry without significantly helping the rural masses in general and the female agricultural labourers in particular. This situation makes one suspect that something has been going wrong at the top level where the policies are formulated.


rather than at the place where they are implemented in the shape of the above mentioned programmes. The defective policies had their counter-effects and are found to have helped the affluent sections of the society to raise their status making use of the loopholes noticed in the different programmes implemented from time to time, and thereby widening the gap between the landed gentry and the landless labourers.

The ever increasing disparities and the failure of almost all the so-called Development Programmes appear to have necessitated the self-organising of the rural masses, for asserting their correct share in the agricultural economy to which they have been contributing significantly. Their ignorance of the make-up of the present set-up, and their failure in their attempts to solve their different problems in different ways without understanding the root-cause of all their problems - appear to have forced them to come under the influence of an association of the agricultural labourers in Kerala. The Socio-economic situation taking into account their domestic situation and work situation reveals that even their mental capacities are mercilessly crumbled and crushed.

It is propagated time and again over the years that the state introduces radical changes in the life conditions of men and women in the society through its expanding organisations and implementations of various Development Programmes. All such programmes from the Community Development Programme onwards to the latest programmes have created new administrative structures,
though these programmes true to the spirit and nature of the state, could raise some hopes among the "dependent class" including women, they, in practice helped the dominant classes of the society defeating the very purpose for which they were introduced.

Demanding equal opportunities and equal wages, the female agricultural labourers in India, like the other working women in their own country and other countries - both the capitalist and precapitalist countries - are turning to the example of socialist countries where we do not find the problem of unemployment but, instead, find a steady growth of employment and a substantial rise in the standard of living, and where the agricultural labourers are found enjoying the same rights as the workers engaged in the national economy.

Having found that the several resolutions and declarations and laws made by the Government and various so-called Development Agencies are not leading to social progress and social justice, the workers in India have come to understand that the evil of exploitation, which permits a few people to exist at the expense of the majority of people, is to be completely exposed, attacked and but to an end to realize the objective of organising people on the new incalculably higher type of social relations. They have come to realize that their resolute and persistent struggle under the banner of the democratic forces alone can accomplish this. The situation demands active participation of women along with men in all the social activities, and their joint action alone can be
effective in achieving the common goals of all the working people including the goal of the development of the female agricultural labourers. The real problem seems to lie at the top level where policies are formulated rather than at the place where they are implemented. It is also due to the frequent shifts made in the policies that no concrete results are achieved.

Findings:

Women differ from men in their problems and needs at all ages and more particularly during old age. They live longer than men and hence widowhood, with all its social and economic disadvantages is faced by a large group at this age; they are not recognised as breadwinners of the family and hence even during youth their needs are neglected to marginality. So when old age comes, they are left high and dry.

In many developing countries, there is no organised social security system for agricultural workers, so when they are made physically unproductive by health and age, they have nothing to fall back upon. When this happens to women the principle of marginality increases the magnitude of the problem.

Even during their productive years women get less number of work in agriculture than men, hence their capacity even to meet daily needs, let alone save for the rainy day is highly circumscribed.
Agricultural labour force in India is dominated by members from the scheduled castes whose women suffer from the double handicap of belonging to the weaker sex as well as to the socially weakest class.

Women workers in agriculture constitute 43% of the total women workers in the country (The corresponding percent for men is 23).

79% of the rural labour households belong to the backward classes including SC/ST. While nearly 30% of the agricultural labour house holds belong to SC/ST, only 13% of the other rural labour households belong to SC/ST. This shows that SC/ST labourers are more predominant in agricultural sector than in non-agricultural sector.

The average size of wet land possessed by Agricultural Labour households is very small compared to that of dry land.

About 34% of the population in the rural labour households consist of children below the age of 15 as against 35% in 1981 census. About 60% of the population is in the age group of 15-59 and the remaining 6% in the age group above 60.

In the case of agricultural labour households Wynad district leads other districts where the annual income is Rs.6,189/. But the lowest annual income of agricultural labour households seen in Palghat district is Rs.3,775/.  

More than 3/4th of the amount of loan outstanding are interest group 8-13%, 14-19% and in the interest free group.

Most of the rural labour households (80%) have separate kitchens in their houses, but bathroom, latrine and electricity are not available in majority of rural labour households.

Majority of rural labourers have houses with mud floors.

Rural labourers mainly use unburnt bricks for the construction of their houses. The roof of houses of rural labourers is mainly with palm leaves.

We find that the daily wages of agricultural labourer is Rs. 40/= for men and Rs.30/= for women which is implemented only in Alleppey (especially in Kuttanad, which is a strong agricultural labour hold) but is not found in any other part of Kerala, including in Palghat which is the worst affected.

SUGGESTIONS

After conducting a survey amongst the rural women labourers in Palghat district we can conclude that they do not have the basic amenities of life. They lack proper sanitation facilities which are most important, as without these, there are chances of epidemics of various harmful diseases like cholera, typhoid etc. Another factor is that they do not have electricity which is equally serious as the Government in their various plans have suggested
rural electrification as one of the most foremost schemes. Thirdly there are no schools nearby to educate their children, so that most of them are seen along with their mothers on the work spots. As eradication of literacy happens to be one of the measures taken up by the government, it is a must to have at least nursery schools and creches for their children which should be set up either by the Government or by social organisations.

Fourthly, during pregnancy there are no basic facilities available to rural women locally, they have to trudge a long way in search of suitable hospitals for their post-natal and antenatal care.

They should also be taught about the saving schemes, so that they can save a little if not much, out of their wages which would be useful to them later on in life.

As these women rural labourers are prone to accidents and injuries, they should be covered by Insurance schemes, so that if they either lose their lives or get seriously injured, their families are not in any way affected by this.

After the delivery of her child, she is unable to work as an agricultural labourer as she has to look after the child and hence she has no income during the first three months. It would be helpful if the government prepares a scheme to enable her to get at least 30 days of wages as this would naturally decrease the rate of infant mortality which is considerably high in this section.
of labourers; with the result that the number of women labourers in that age group is dwindling according to the cases available (according to the 91 census report).

The joint/extended family has been found to be the primary place where the old women agricultural worker has found herself most comfortable in terms of economic, health and emotional support. However, the trends in social development could indicate that the joint/extended families are on their way out. Increasingly the old women will have to find an asylum in the nuclear family or will have to stay alone. In both cases, she will require adequate income to support herself. The son/grandson, who is himself an agricultural worker, will have to maintain his own family on his slender income hence the old destitute women should be given pension irrespective of having a son or grandson except when the son or grandson is affluent.

At present only one member (husband or wife) is eligible for pension. In a male dominated society where women are pushed to marginality and invisibility it is the male who gets the pension and the female passively permits this. The rationale for giving pension to only one member is not plausible, especially when the pension amount (Rs. 70/= per month) is inadequate to meet the expenses of even one person. When the male gets it, he, in most cases, spends it on himself. When the woman gets it she normally spends at least a part of it on the family, we would therefore suggest that the agricultural workers pension should be given to
both, man and wife. We came to the conclusion that pension was able to give some amount of morale boost to the old women and this thus should not be denied to her simply because her husband enjoys the pension.

    The pension amount is very small and inadequate and needs urgent upward revision. We are unable to suggest the quantum of the revised pension but the revision should effect the spiralling cost of living and the high cost of modern medicare on the one hand and on the other, the needs of the old in this field.

    The payment of pension should be regular and the old should get it every month. At present, there is no regularity and one cannot even expect when it will be received. Our study found that there are no regular receipts of pension.

    At present though medicare for the poor is free in government hospitals, this is only in name. Almost all drugs needed for treatment have to be purchased by the patient from outside the hospital. This puts heavy strain on the old women who suffer on several counts. The old (both men and women) are put on a lower order of priority in treatment by both doctors and kinsmen. Even among the old, women have lower priority in treatment compared to men. When the family resources are slender, this principle works with added strength. We are not able to suggest any way out of this social practice but it is necessary that society should be conscious to this evil phenomenon.
In the hospitals, there is no geriatric section at present. In view of the fact that the proportion of the old in the population is increasing, it is necessary that each major hospital should have a geriatric section with doctors trained in geriatric treatment and with a geriatric ward and adequate supply of geriatric medicine.

The agricultural workers Provident Fund, which now exists only in certain areas of the state, should be extended to all parts of the state so as to enable agricultural workers to retire with some savings, the size of which determined both the level of satisfaction (direct relationship) and the level of anxiety regarding the future (Inverse relationship). Savings give her status in the family and reduce her dependence on others. It also makes the old members more acceptable to the kin as the financial burden on her account is reduced. But recently, the Agriculture/Welfare Fund Scheme (AWFS), which was introduced with a contribution from the farmer's income, has not been successfully implemented by the government, and therefore has been a failure.

Finally, a number of programmes of social security should be devised to be implemented during the effective period of employment of the worker. Social security for the old should start from the time of entry to work. It will be optimal if the social security systems start with the commencement of one's working life so that it will be continuous and cumulative when one retires from it.
Another point to note is that from the point of view equity, workers in agriculture, should be treated on par with workers in industry as most of the problems and needs of both groups are identical. Hence, agricultural workers should be given all the benefits that are now enjoyed by the industrial workers - minimum wage, insurance against sickness and accidents as well as against unemployment, invalidity and survivors benefits, maternity benefits in case of women, and the like. This will eliminate the need for special benefits in old age. Needless to state that the discrimination against women that is built into many of the statutory benefits should be eliminated.

Social security should form part of a total security to cover all rural workers. The uniqueness of agricultural workers is that they form the majority of the rural labour force and women form the largest portion in them. The invisibility and marginality of women in every field of life would call for special protection for them in any programme of social security to ensure gender justice.

Minimum wages for these labourers should be fixed by law and adequate provision be made for their enforcement. The poor labourers, because of their large supply are not in a position to bargain for reasonable rewards for their hard work. They are scattered and very weak vis-a-vis land owners. It is therefore, necessary that the government not only fix minimum wages but also provides for its enforcement.
Land made available under reclamation and surplus land acquired through the policy of ceiling should be distributed among them. This will not only raise their income and economic level, but will also improve their social status. It is necessary also that these people with tiny pieces of land, form themselves into co-operatives. Further, necessary production inputs should be made available to them for efficient farming.

The study indicates that illiteracy, unemployment, lack of basic amenities like non-availability of drinking water, housing etc. continue to be the major problems of the rural labourers, many of whom belong to SC/ST and other backward classes. The other important highlight of this study is that agricultural labourers are shifting away from the agricultural occupation due to various reasons like less attractive remuneration, arduous work, lack of adequate job status etc. Another aspect noted in this study is that the rural labourers are becoming more and more conscious about the usefulness of the various financial assistance offered by the banks and co-operative societies and consequently their dependence on money lenders has decreased as a result of the various welfare schemes and land reforms.

Lastly the main aspect is poverty. As they form a large part of our population, it is a must to see that they are well looked after so that they can look forward to a bright future ahead of them.
Rural development, as a slogan, came to the fore only in Gandhiji's time. Gandhiji was a practical idealist who proclaimed for the first time that India was a country of villages and consequently, the real development of her villages. Most of the leaders, who preceded him, had either an urban elite base or a semi-feudal bias or a religious base. Gandhiji, spoke in clear terms about the importance of Indian village. "To serve our village is to establish Swaraj. Everything else is but an idle dream". He further stated, "If the village perishes, India too will perish. It will no more be India. Her own mission in the world will get lost". According to him, "We have to make a choice between India of the villages that are as ancient as herself and India of the cities which are a creation of foreign domination. Today, the cities dominate and drain the villages, so that they are crumbling to ruin.7

My Khadi mentality tells me that cities must subserve villages when that domination goes. Exploitation of villages is itself organised violence; we will have to give the villages their proper place". Gandhiji was the first practical economist who diagnosed the human sufferings in our country and suggested pragmatic remedies, which were however, not given a fair trial by Indian Planners.

Theoretically, Gandhian approach to rural development may be labelled as idealist. It gives primacy to moral values over material conditions.\(^8\) Man gains supremacy.

Gandhiji envisioned the establishment of a new civilization called Ram Rajya. He says; "I do not mean Hindu Raj. I mean by Ram Raj, Divine Raj or Kingdom of God on earth". Ram Rajya represents the "Sovereignty of the people based on normal authority".\(^9\) Politically translated, Ram Rajya is perfect democracy in which, inequalities based on possession and non-possession, colour, race or creed or sex, vanish. In it, land and state belong to the people, justice is prompt, and cheap and therefore, there is freedom of worship, and of speech and the press - all this because of the reign of the self imposed law of moral restraint. Such a state must be based on truth and non-violence and must consist of prosperous, happy and self-contained villages and village communities".\(^10\) There will be no exploitation of the poor by the rich, of the masses by the classes, of the villages by the towns and of the weaker by the stronger.

Gandhiji firmly believed that rural India is real India and that rural development alone - not industrialisation - can solve the country's problems of unemployment and poverty. Hence, his plea

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10. Ibid.
for decentralisation and agro-based industries. He advocated increased production and production was for use and not for a market. He stood for production by masses as against mass production. Swadeshi was a key concept in his philosophy. He favoured trade only in surpluses. His emphasis was more upon co-operation and inter-depence than upon competition. Human values were to dominate over economic values. 11

"India lives in her villages ... When I succeed in ridding the villages of their poverty, I have won Swaraj" — Mahatma Gandhi.

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