The district of Anantapur is considered to be the poorest among the poor districts of the underdeveloped and drought prone region of Rayalaseema situated in the south-western part of Andhra Pradesh. Satya Sai Taluk was created in the year 1981 with fifty one villages and named after Sri Satya Sai Baba who has His ashram in Puttaparthy village, which now is the taluk headquarters.

The labour bureau, Ministry of Government of India has conducted several rural labour enquiries from time to time. The enquiries have covered employment, wages, income and indebtedness of the agricultural workers at the macro level. These macro studies have not adequately revealed the economic conditions of the agricultural workers inhabited in poor, and drought prone regions where agriculture continues to be backward, employment is inadequate and uncertain, wages are abnormally low and indebtedness is rampant. There are district level studies but they too do not reveal the actual position of the pockets of backwardness in
these districts. This study therefore is a deliberate attempt to enquire into the economic conditions of the rural agricultural workers in a taluk, consisting of fifty-one villages which are mainly agricultural.

The study reveals certain characteristic tendencies such as the economic composition of the family, the level of literacy, change in average employment, wages, income and indebtedness, housing and levels of living. (Anantapur has been declared as a drought prone district and under the drought prone area programme, the World Bank has pumped in "lot of funds during the past decade) In addition to the various schemes of rural and agricultural developments which are in force under the successive five Year Plans, one may have a natural curiosity to know what changes these plans and schemes of developments have brought about and to what extent our declared objectives of creating a welfare state, economic and social equality and of ameliorating the conditions of the poorest sections of the community have been fulfilled. The findings of this study reveal that inspite of our continuous efforts and several schemes launched under the (drought prone area programmes)
or the schemes of Integrated Rural Development, the conditions of agricultural workers have deteriorated. Why our plans and schemes have not reached the poor and where the huge funds allocated for the poor have been channalised, has not been the subject matter of our study. We have restricted the study only to present the factual position as is obtained in the fifty one villages comprising the taluk.

Rural unemployment and the creation of landless agricultural workers is the outcome of the rape of rural structure and organisation, the destruction of the village handicrafts and the transformation of ancient land system.

The unchecked growth of population on one hand and the destruction of village economy, and village handicrafts and continuous outflow of the rural capital in urban investments, has further aggravated the problem of poverty and unemployment. The decreasing fertility of land and the lack of investment, the disintegration of the joint families and excessive fragmentation of holdings, turned the once prosperous
agricultural economy into a deficit economy. The unemployment and poverty in rural areas is a glaring evidence of our wrong strategy of economic development and planning. The agricultural labour population has been growing constantly. It was 7.5 million in 1882 and their number is reported to be 54.7 million in 1981. In Andhra Pradesh the agricultural labour population is higher when compared with the nation (as a whole and in Satya Sai Taluk) the proportion is higher than the district and the state average. Among the agricultural labour the proportion of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes is predominantly higher. The proportion of scheduled tribes is found higher than the proportion of scheduled castes and the agricultural workers. This shows that compared to scheduled caste, scheduled tribe has not been able to utilize the opportunities and facilities made available by the Government. The enquiry thus reveals that the rural resources when compared to the population depending on them has fallen short of the necessary limit.

The average size of an agricultural labour family was found to be 4.9 consisting of 1.22 males, 1.45 females and 1.86 children and old dependents.
Thus we see that a family of 4.9 lives on the earnings of 1.7 earning members. Hence roughly 2 earning members support 3 non-earning people in the rural areas. The literacy percentage was found to be 26.19 which is the lowest when compared to the state and the district. The literacy percentage for scheduled caste and scheduled tribes is still lower. Illiteracy itself is the biggest malady, which leads to ignorance.

The excessive burden of population on land resulting in the decline of per capita cultivated area, the defective pattern of land utilisation, the decay and destruction of traditional industries and crafts, has obviously brought about a chronic and difficult phenomena and underemployment which is found in the rural areas in all its forms and manifestations. The study reveals that out of the total agricultural workers nearly 7 per cent are found to be permanently employed of which 30 per cent are females and 70 per cent are males. 14 per cent of the total attached workers are either half yearly employed or seasonally employed. The half yearly employed days are 49 per cent and the days of self-employment is only 8 per cent. The casual male and female workers get employment for 48 per cent
and 41 per cent days in a year respectively. The percentage days of employment in a year in non-agriculture for male and female workers is 12 per cent and 7 per cent and the percentage days of self-employment for male and female workers is 13 per cent and 11.7 per cent. This is slightly lower than the days of agricultural employment in the state which was reported as 52.88 per cent by the fourth rural labour enquiry.

The scheduled caste and scheduled tribe form a very large percentage among the agricultural workers being 23 per cent and 22 per cent respectively. The wage rate in agriculture is Rs.6 for males, Rs.4 for females and Rs.3 for children. For permanent workers the cash wages ranges between Rs.7-50 and Rs. 8-50. The average wages for attached male and female workers is about Rs.1100 and Rs.905 respectively, which also includes the value of kind wages and perquisites received by them during the year. The average wage in cash and kind for a worker employed for four to six months comes to about Rs.685 and for the seasonally employed worker it comes upto Rs.570 for males and Rs.470 for females. The average daily wage of a permanent workers
is much lower when compared with that of the daily casual workers seek employment in non-agricultural work. The wage rate in non-agricultural work is slightly higher than that of the agricultural wages which ranges between Rs.10 and Rs.3 depending on the nature of work. The yearly income from agricultural work for attached male and female workers comes upto Rs. 1,255 and Rs. 1,375 respectively. The average annual income from agricultural work for casual male and female workers is Rs.1,068 and Rs.608 respectively. The villages constituting the Satya Sai Taluk offers very few opportunities for non-agricultural work and self-employment. The only opportunity for non-agricultural work available is at Puttaparthy where the construction activities go on throughout the year. The opportunities for self-employment are also almost negligible. The workers who are not employed in agricultural and noneagricultural work are seen collecting wood, tender tamarind leaves, etc. Thus the income from non-agricultural work and self-employment forms 38.7 per cent and 5.76 per cent for attached male and female workers and 32.3 per cent and 45.7 per cent for casual male and female workers. The price and wage statistics between 1901 and 1985 shows that the price
of rice per Kg. has gone up by 2,757 per cent while the wages have increased by only 900 per cent, which indeed explains the plight of the agricultural workers. The average income for the attached and casual labour families comes to Rs.1,140 and Rs. 1,106 respectively which means that the attached labour has a per capita income of Rs.226.5 and Rs.240.8 respectively. It is very difficult to assess the annual expenditure of the agricultural labour families. Firstly because it is difficult to formulate a standard question and to record the expenditure on different items of consumption and secondly because the expenditure is as uncertain as the income for which they never maintain any records. The expenditure data collected however proves the saying that "An illiterate man's memory serves him well". The pattern of expenditure appears to be different for Puttaparthy village and other neighbouring villages. The total annual expenditure per family is Puttaparthy village is found to be Rs. 2,501 and for other villages it is Rs. 2,016. The meagre income earned by them only permits them to buy cheap variety of rice, low quality Ragi, stony salt and green chillies which just enables them to satisfy their hunger. It is meaningless to talk of balanced diet and nutritious. Their meagre income
does not ever permit the basic needs of life - i.e. food and clothing. If one thinks of providing a very modest kind of nutritious diet to such people, one has to either double or thrible their present income.

For the casual worker families the average deficit per year is estimated to be Rs.925-40. Since the question 'how the families meet this deficit?' has not been answered satisfactorily it could be concluded that year after year they plunge into debt. There is nothing new in taking debt, indebtedness in rural India is an age old malady. Although the money lenders of yesterday do not exist today, yet money lending is a lucrative business in the rural areas. This fact is also supported by the fourth labour enquiry conducted by Government of India which revealed that 70 per cent of agricultural labour families are indebted. The average debt per family is found to be Rs.491. Among the indebted families in addition to the debt contacted by them, they bear the burden of debt contacted by their parents too. Only 60 per cent of these families have taken the debt for consumption purposes. Employers and traders together are found to have contributed
to 66 per cent of the rural debt. Commercial banks with all their rural banking branches account for only 5 per cent of total debt which makes the fact obvious that the banks has not reached even a fraction of the rural masses. Co-operative societies which are mostly defunct have contributed nothing. The study of employment, wages and earnings show that agricultural labour families are the lowest in the ladder of our rural economy. When we observe the food he eats, the incidence of diseases to which he fall a prey, the shabby dress he clads in and the hovels in which he lives, we have a terrifying account of the vast mass of humanity existing in the rural Indian villages.

The enquiry into their health, housing and living conditions again gives a very discouraging account of their economic status and one feels what use our economic development, growth and our freedom if we are not able to provide the basic necessary conditions of living to more than 30 per cent of our population.
The problems confronting the rural agricultural labour class are linked with rural development and the socio-economic transformation of the countryside through the eradication of backwardness, ignorance, unemployment and poverty. Therefore any effort of amelioration of the economic conditions of the rural poor has to be a well planned effort comprising all aspects and aiming at overall development.

On the basis of the foregoing conclusions the following suggestions may be offered.

1. Priority to agricultural development through minor irrigation projects and by making available mechanised inputs including capital for investment purpose.
2. Co-operation of the rural sector and a more effective linkage of the co-operative sector with the commercial banking sectors.
3. Rural industrialisation based on locally available resources.
4. Effective dissemination of population control methods among the rural poor.
5. A massive programme for literacy and education, health and housing.
6. An integrated approach by Government and private voluntary organisations in their task of village upliftment.
In India the pull and push strategy can not be made to work. We have to think of providing employment to the rural people in their own villages or in the neighbouring villages. Since the problem of agricultural labour is a problem of employment and earning, agriculture needs to be developed to afford higher rate of wages by increasing productivity and production. Additional job opportunities will have to be created in agriculture itself by improving the quality of provision of irrigation, all essential inputs and better storing and marketing facilities and by assuring that the farmer gets a major share of the price that the consumer pays for his products. On the other hand we need to establish and develop the village industries by reviving those which have faced extinction and by creating new ones utilising all available local resources. In this, our effort should be locate all those industries in the countryside which could use available local resources, and which was so far untapped or neglected.

The problem of rural area is the problem of disintegration of rural economy, rural sociology and rural polity. All the three have to be incorporated in
any effort of rural reconstruction. We have to infuse in the villager the self-confidence. This is possible by co-operation, not only in the field of cultivation of land but in all fields of economic and social activities. Farming, storage marketing and consumer services, all have to be linked up. And there has to be again an effective linking between the Government, Commercial banking and all other agencies, and institutions of rural development. Under the co-operative sector industries depending on available rural and local resources have to be started and developed. In fact co-operatives would be providing a kind of job insurance for the rural masses to ensure the basic minimum living needs.

Ignorance leads to several maladies. A war will have to be raged against illiteracy and ignorance, which will enlighten the rural groups, make them understand the need and importance for population control. It is a well known fact that the population rate in urban areas has appreciably declined. But the population explosion particularly in the poorest section could not be arrested so far. All out efforts are to be made to bring down the rate of growth of the rural population. This can be made easy by educating the rural groups about various
population control methods and schemes and by enlightening them of the number of advantages that are received by following the said control methods of population.

Presently we find multiplication of efforts towards rural development. There are several voluntary organisations which are involved in the task of rural reconstruction along with the Government agencies. By co-operating the villages as suggested above, all efforts need to be integrated and properly channalised. In Satya Sai Taluk, the Satya Sai Central Trust has a massive plan of adopting all the villages of the taluk and also the villages in the vicinity of the taluk and providing them with the basic amenities like a school, health centre, workable road and hygenic surroundings. Thousands of Satya Sai volunteers and hundreds of Satya Sai College students participate in this constructive programme.

Apart from the above voluntary organisational plans, the Government 20 Point economic Programme has been structured and the draft Seventh Five Year Plan which has recently been finalised and is now awaiting
implementation has as the priorities, the achievement of growth with social justice. In view of the targetted plans it may be hoped that rural development may assume greater importance and the agricultural labour may have a better deal.

An integrated all out thrust to place the rural India on the economic map has to be made. The above mentioned suggestions are made in all sincerity that if utilised they would bear this, much desired fruit.