CHAPTER - 4  
WORKING CONDITIONS

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Introduction

The productivity of agriculture to some extent, depends upon the efficiency of the agricultural labourers
and the conditions under which the farm-labourers have
to work have great bearing on their efficiency. The
various agricultural operations on the farms, in this
country, have been practised more as a means of
livelihood rather than as an organised industry.
Geographical, climatical and natural environments play
very important role in governing the working conditions
in agriculture. It is said that conditions create and
shape the life of a man. While good working conditions
not only improve the efficiency of the worker but also
they increase the concentration of the worker in the
work he attends to, the quantum of work he puts up, and
improve the employee-employer relations. Wherever
the conditions of work are healthy and employers make
provision for the welfare of the workers, the labourers
are willing to work even at lower wages. It is a matter
of common knowledge that healthy, bright and inspiring
atmosphere leads to more work than dirty, sullen and
unhealthy atmosphere.

Scope of Working Conditions in Agriculture

The term — working conditions — is a very broad
one covering a number of aspects like sanitation, dirt
and dust, temperature and humidification, lighting,
ventilation, heating, space available for actual working,
safety measures & machinery for prevention of accidents,
welfare measures including provision for canteen, bath-rooms & wash-basins, drinking water, refreshment-rooms, rest shelters and latrine & urinal accommodations, hours of work, night work, shift system, rest pauses & intervals, leaves and holidays, and cleanliness.

The concept of working conditions for agricultural labourers and that of industrial workers varies very widely. While agricultural labourers work under the open sky throughout the year, the industrial workers perform their jobs under the roof of the factory building. The agricultural farms though small in size unlike large-size factories, even under one ownership are scattered and, very often, far away from one-another. Though, specific provisions in regard to working conditions for industrial workers have been made under the Factories Act, 1948 and other industrial laws, no statutory provision for any aspect of working condition for agricultural labourers exists even to-day in any part of our country. The arduous nature of work, scattered work places under the open sky and higher proportion of non-specified work on farms the range for working conditions in agriculture remains very narrower than that of the industrial sector.

Actual Working Conditions in Agriculture

Insofar as working conditions in agriculture are concerned, they have been categorised into two broad groups, viz., (A) Conditions on the farms and (B) Conditions
off the farms, and have been discussed separately under each head.

(A) Conditions on the farms: They cover work places, work conditions, implements & tools, provisions for accidents & safety measures, night-work and overtime, hours of work, rest pauses and intervals, work-timings, rest shelters and place for meal, drinking water, and lavatories. These have been discussed in the paragraphs to follow:

Work places: While work places for industrial workers are situated at the concerned factory building, work places for agricultural labourers are scattered and far away from residential places. They are under open sky and unsheltered. Agricultural labourers have to work on farms which are not protected from heat, cold, wind, rain and any natural or other calamities. Industrial workers normally get the facility of transport -- private or public -- for reaching their work places and returning from there, but agricultural labourers have mostly to go to their work places by walking. During the rainy season, the kachcha roads and the farms -- their work places -- become so muddy and miry and uneven that they cannot even walk smoothly. Moreover, they are required to carry with them the bags of fertilisers, pesticides, seeds and duster & sprayer pumps and a pot of water.
Work conditions: Work conditions are hazardous for agricultural labourers. They have to perform various agricultural operations during a particular season and more than one operations in a day. All the agricultural operations are more or less very laborious, strenuous, hazardous, and sweepstible to frequent accidents. Ploughing and digging operations require more labour and the workers have to take care of the edges of the harrow, plough and spades. In grass-cutting and harvesting operations utmost care is necessary otherwise injuries to hands and legs are very common by sickles. Similarly, during watering operations, scorpions and serpents come out angrily from their burrows and rush for biting any one who happens to be there and, therefore, the workers have to be very alert and cautious while attending watering operations. The operation of threshing machine if attended negligently, does invite crushing the fingers of the agricultural labourers. The most serious and dangerous operation is the dusting and spraying of insecticides and pesticides. The intensive study made by the author in regard to working conditions on the farms in the selected villages of the district revealed that during the agricultural seasons 17 agricultural labourers seriously suffered from suffocation resulted from the smell of pesticides and 2 of them died within a week even after medical treatment.
Implements and tools: Machines, tools, spare-parts etc. are used in the process of manufacturing the goods and services in the industrial units. Similarly, various agricultural operations do require tools, implements, machines and animals for their performances. Most of the Indian agricultural operations are non-mechanised and only the traditional, indigenously designed and made tools and implements are in use. They are few in number, simple in kind, smaller in size, obsolete in character and very insignificant in value. They are also light, portable and within the capacity of even small and marginal farmers to possess. The analysis of the data presented in Table 4.1 would reveal that various operations require specific types of implements and tools. These tools, implements, machines, pumps, bullocks, etc. have to be handled and/or managed with great care when they are used. For instance, sickle, spades, duster and sprayer pumps, tractor, thresher, edge of harrows and plough require special care and attention when they are operated upon. When any agricultural labourer gets injured during the job on the farms, in the absence of any provision for medical first-aid appliances, he just applies the dust as a powder, or his urine or juice of available green leaves of herbs and/or plants on the wound to stop the bleeding, and if a piece of cloth is found, he ties the wound and continues the work. If the wound is big and serious, he returns from the farm to
the village and, somehow, manages to consult a locally practising physician and starts his treatment if the accident is of very serious nature. Farmer-employers hardly appear in the picture. Of course, at times they do help, voluntarily, to such injured workers on humanitarian grounds.

**Accidents**: Severe accidents do occur in agricultural sector too. Biting of serpents, scorpions and other poisonous insects; fall down from the bullock-carts; injury during digging, ploughing, harvesting and threshing operations which become a tetanus; fall down in the well during the going down into the well for attending to repairs; injury by electric shock on well; injury by horn and/or kick of bullocks, buffaloes and cows; reaction of inhaling of the particles of pesticides and insecticides while spraying them on the farms, etc. are the examples of accidents which the agricultural labourers had to meet. While, industrial workers are protected against the accidents under the Workmen's Compensation Act, 1923; Employees' State Insurance Act, 1948, and such other industrial acts, agricultural labourers as a whole are not protected by any law. It is high time to have a comprehensive legislation for agricultural workers. As an immediate action, it is suggested that at least attached agricultural labourers should be insured under the Janta Policy Scheme by paying only Rs. 12/- as a
yearly premium by the farmer-employers. This would not only give definite protection to agricultural labourers but would also increase the morale of the agricultural labourers.

Similarly, agricultural labourers work under the open sky and in all the three seasons — summer, monsoon and winter. It is, therefore, necessary to provide agricultural labourers with such facilities as supply of shoes, drinking water, woolen coats or cotton blankets and rain coats or umbrella to protect them from the hazardous effects of heat, cold and rain during the working hours. If such safety measures are not possible for all the agricultural labourers at a time, at least all the attached agricultural labourers should be initially brought under the full orbit of these protective measures. As detailed out in Table 4.2, only 32.00 per cent of the attached agricultural labourers were availed of the facility of umbrella during the rainy days, 48.00 per cent of the attached labourers were availed of having a pair of shoes, 11.4 per cent were given the benefit of woolen and/or cotton blankets and only 1.7 per cent casual agricultural labourers were getting cotton and/or woolen blankets.

Night-work and overtime: The operation of the shift system and night-work has been a regular feature of modern industrial units in almost all the organised
Table 4.2

Number of agricultural labourers availed safety measures in Bharuch district surveyed during the year 1979

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of agricultural setting</th>
<th>No. of agricultural labourers interviewed</th>
<th>No. of agricultural labourers getting the facility of</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attached</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>643 985 229</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casual</td>
<td>2989</td>
<td>None None 52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

industries. It is necessitated by great demand for more production and fuller use of machinery and other resources. In agriculture, the introduction of high-yield variety seeds for more production and commercialisation of some cash crops necessitated the resorting of taking night work and granting overtimes for agricultural operations. At times, dearth of agricultural labourers during peak seasons encourages night-work and overtime. For instances, watering of crops and threshing operations are normally performed during night-hours. It is observed that ordinarily the agricultural labourers were paid at the

2. Based on author's field-work.
normal rates of wages. However, in few cases, they were paid overtime charges at the rate of one and a half times of the normal rates. Apart from exploitation of agricultural labourers in denying them the wages for night and overtime work at overtime work-rates, the agricultural labourers had to face the difficulty of working in restricted lighting. They work under the moonlight or lantern light, where the possibility of meeting with accidents gets accelerated. Moreover, they have to take extra care to protect them from the sudden attacks of wild animals including bears, tigers, lions, foxes, wolves, giraffes, leopards, wild pigs, hyenas, mangooses, boars and large male cats.

Hours of work: The health and efficiency of the workers mostly depend upon the number of hours they work. Long hours of working is one of the important factors for tiredness and slackness in the duties of workers. They not only generate depression in workers but also make them exhausted at a very faster rate. They also lower down the efficiency of workers and reduce the quantum of output. As Pigon observed that after a point, an addition to the hours of labour normally worked in any industry would, by wearing out the work - people, ultimately lessen, rather than increase the national dividend.³ On the other hand, long hours of working

also keep a worker away from home for a long time, hence he cannot reasonably look after his household affairs and his family members. Apart from this, there are also social and religious consequences of long working hours. He cannot take part in the social and religious functions as and when need arises.

The hours of work in agriculture vary from day to day, time to time, season to season, crop to crop, village to village and region to region. The First Agricultural Labour Enquiry (1950-51) had, in this regard, observed that "there was no regularity in hours of work which depended on the goodwill and cooperation between the workers and employers and on local custom. The length of the working day was also determined by seasonal needs. During harvesting and threshing, the casual workers were engaged for about 10 to 11 hours a day, with suitable rest intervals." Of course, the Government of Gujarat has fixed 9 hours for adults and 4.5 hours for children as hours of work, under the Minimum Wages Act, 1948 for agricultural labourers.

The analysis of the data presented in Table 4.3 in regard to season-wise working hours on farms of agricultural labourers -- attached and casual -- in Bharuch district during the year 1979, would reveal as follows:

(1) In busy season, (a) 41.6 per cent of the total attached agricultural labourers worked between

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9 and 10 hours a day, followed by 29.6 per cent workers worked between 7 and 8 hours a day, 25.5 per cent workers worked between 11 and 12 hours a day, and only 2.5 per cent workers worked more than 12 hours a day and (b) 46.00 per cent of the total casual agricultural labourers worked between 7 and 8 hours a day, followed by 28.8 per cent workers worked between 9 and 10 hours a day, 17.1 per cent workers worked between 11 and 12 hours a day, and only 3.5 per cent workers worked more than 12 hours a day.

(2) In slack season, (a) 42.6 per cent of the total attached agricultural labourers worked between 7 and 8 hours a day, followed by 36.8 per cent workers worked for 9 to 10 hours a day, 18.5 per cent workers worked for 11 to 12 hours a day, and (b) 55.6 per cent of the total casual agricultural labourers worked for 7 to 8 hours a day, followed by 27.8 per cent workers worked for 9 to 10 hours a day and only 10.8 per cent of them worked for 11 to 12 hours a day.

(3) None of the attached and casual agricultural labourers worked more than 12 hours a day in any slack season.

(4) The hours of work for both attached and casual labourers were shorter in slack season than those of the busy season.
(5) The attached agricultural labourers worked for longer hours in a day in any season than the work - longevity of the casual agricultural labourers.

(6) Inspite of the statutory provision of the 9 hours of work per day for adult agricultural labourers, they had worked less than this statutory limit prescribed due to the unavoidable circumstances, viz., rainfall, want of other agricultural works and cut off of the electricity supply.

Table 4.35

Hours of work of agricultural labourers in Bharuch district during the year 1979

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Season</th>
<th>Duration of working hours</th>
<th>Attached</th>
<th>Casual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Busy</td>
<td>Upto 6</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7 to 8</td>
<td>595</td>
<td>1375</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9 to 10</td>
<td>835</td>
<td>862</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11 to 12</td>
<td>513</td>
<td>510</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>above 12</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>2989</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slack</td>
<td>Upto 6</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7 to 8</td>
<td>856</td>
<td>1662</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9 to 10</td>
<td>740</td>
<td>822</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11 to 12</td>
<td>371</td>
<td>325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>above 12</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>2989</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. Based on author's field-work.
The author's intensive field-study revealed that while the attached agricultural labourers were of the firm view that the long hours of working assured them of the continuation of employment very next year, the casual agricultural labourers were of the firm view that the shorter hours of working would assured them of the continuation of employment very next day and saved them from the hardship of soon coming unemployment and/or underemployment.

The intensive study made by the author in regard to the hours of work of the agricultural labourers in the selected villages of the district brought out as follows:

(i) Even within a village there was no uniformity in the hours of work between the attached and casual agricultural labourers because of the fact that (a) all attached labourers entered into oral contracts for their employment with farmer-employers, (b) the long-standing hereditary cordial relationships existed between the farmer and the concerned attached agricultural labourer/s and (c) the prevailing local custom and traditions in the villages had strong grip on the farm labourers.

(ii) The working hours for female agricultural labourers were shorter than those of the male agricultural labourers because almost all the female labourers had to attend to their domestic duties of their own residence and at the farmer - employer's house before joining the farm-work.
(iii) Inspite of the statutory provision of the maximum 4.5 hours of work per day for child agricultural labourers, they had to work in all cases for more than the statutory limit prescribed.

(iv) Consciousness, of late, has developed among the agricultural labourers that they should not work more than 9 hours a day. But, for want of union/s, they were helpless to take concrete steps for implementation of this provision of the Minimum Wages Act, 1948 for agricultural labourers.

Rest pauses and intervals: The longer hours of work; arduous nature of agricultural operations which involve physical strain; work in hot, cold and rainy seasons and use of traditional agricultural implements and methods of cultivation of land are major factors responsible for tiredness and slackness of agricultural labourers. Almost all the agricultural operations are spasmodic and, therefore, a worker cannot work continuously for hours. He needs regular rest pauses and rest intervals during the entire range of the hours of work and their judicious distribution would not only prevent loss of efficiency, weariness, listlessness but would lead to more production. The agricultural operations like ploughing, sowing, dusting & spraying and digging require about 15 minutes of rest pauses at the interval of every 1.5 to 2.0 hours of work; manuring and watering operations which are light in
comparison to ploughing, sowing and digging require rest about 10 minutes at the interval of every two hours and weeding, harvesting, threshing and cotton picking require only 5 minutes of rest at the interval of every 1.5 to 2.0 hours (Vide: Table 4.4). However, weeding, harvesting and cotton picking operations are generally performed on contract/piece-rate wage system and, therefore, labourers take minimum rest in the anxiety of completing their work as early as possible.

However, it is the usual practice to provide rest period of 1.5 to 2.0 hours in a day to take lunch and rest. The period of rest depends upon the custom and traditions prevailing in the villages, the nature of agricultural operations and the type of season - busy or slack. While during the busy season agricultural labourers enjoy 1.5 hours as a rest period, in slack 2.0 hours are generally granted as rest period. This long duration is required because except in some cases, agricultural labourers who are far away from their places of residence can return there to take their lunch at noon and some rest before restarting their work on the farms. However, in monsoon, the labourers generally do not prefer to come back to their residences at noon, the farmer - employer himself or any member of his family carries with him the cooked food and water for labourers on the farms (Vide: Photograph 4.1) and during this rest period the labourers finish their lunch distributed by
Table 4.4

Period of rest pauses normally followed in agricultural operations in Bharuch district during the year 1979

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rest Pauses (in minutes)</th>
<th>Ploughing &amp; Sewing</th>
<th>Manuring</th>
<th>Digging</th>
<th>Watering</th>
<th>Cotton picking</th>
<th>Weeding</th>
<th>Harvesting &amp; Threshing</th>
<th>Dusting</th>
<th>Spraying</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Upto 5</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 to 10</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 to 15</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6. Based on author's field-work.
the farmer - employer under the shades of trees on the farm itself. (Vide: Photograph 4.2)

The author has, during his intensive field-work, observed that almost all the farmer - employers had firm view that rest pauses and rest intervals allowed to labourers are absolutely necessary to enable them to recoup the lost energy and to acquire fresh vigour to complete the particular operations in time. If we calculate all these rest pauses and rest intervals taken by the agricultural labourers during a day, the actual working hours per day would be about 8 to 9 hours in busy season and 7 to 8 hours in slack season.

The author has further noticed that the workers who, during these rest pauses, remain at the very place of work, pass their time in smoking of beedies, drinking of water and gossiping.

Work-timings: Agricultural occupation is not so organised and systematic as that of the industrial manufacturing units. We cannot find a time-keeper, production schedules and systematic shifts in agriculture. Our total agriculture sector, even to-day, purely rely on nature and weather conditions and, therefore, exact time-schedulings are not feasible. Moreover, mechanisation in agriculture is not widely accepted and used. The work-timings -- beginning and completion times of the particular job/work/operation -- are not uniform. They normally depend upon the types
of agricultural operations and custom and traditions in regard to agricultural operations prevailing in the village/area. For instance, the weeding and cotton picking operations in the villages of the district always start at about 7.00 a.m. and 8.00 a.m. by attached and casual male labourers respectively and at about 9.00 a.m. by casual female labourers and last upto 5.00 p.m. Ploughing and sowing operations, in the monsoon and winter seasons, start at about 6.00 a.m. and last up to 6.00 p.m., but ploughing, in summer, starts at about 6.00 a.m. and last up to about 7.00 p.m. (Vide: Table 4.5).

If the casual agricultural labourers perform cotton picking, weeding, harvesting, threshing, digging, grass-cutting and removing of stalks of cotton and tuver operations on contract or piece wage system the work-timings become insignificant for both the concerned parties, viz., the farmers and the contract labourers. They use their discretion in these particular operations. Moreover, the work-timings during the monsoon season - particularly during the rainy days - are totally uncertain and irregular. Further, observance of exact time either for commencing or for ending agricultural work by a agricultural labourer on any day was not possible in any part of the district.

Rest shelters and place for meal: Rest shelters for taking meals or for use during rest intervals is the service provided to the industrial workers by the large
### Table 4.57

**Work-timings in vogue for agricultural operations in Bharuch district during the year 1979**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agricultural operations</th>
<th>6 a.m. to 6 p.m.</th>
<th>6 a.m. to 7 p.m.</th>
<th>7 a.m. to 8 p.m.</th>
<th>8 a.m. to 9 a.m.</th>
<th>9 a.m. to 10 a.m.</th>
<th>5 p.m.</th>
<th>5 p.m.</th>
<th>5 p.m.</th>
<th>5 p.m.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ploughing:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Monsoon</td>
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<tr>
<td>Winter</td>
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<tr>
<td>Summer</td>
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<td><strong>Sowing:</strong></td>
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<td>Winter</td>
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<tr>
<td>Monsoon</td>
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<td><strong>Weeding</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Attached Casual labourers male</td>
<td>Male labourers</td>
<td>Female labourers</td>
<td>Female labourers</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Manuring:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Summer</td>
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<td>Monsoon</td>
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<td>Winter</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Watering</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Harvesting &amp; Threshing</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Cotton picking</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Attached Casual labourers male</td>
<td>Male labourers</td>
<td>Female labourers</td>
<td>Female labourers</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Digging</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Dusting &amp; Spraying</td>
<td>✅</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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7. Based on author's field-work.
The agricultural labourers, during the monsoon season, generally do not prefer to go back to their respective residential houses to take their lunch and rest on account of the muddy and miry ways and long distances. Because of the absence of rest shelters, an agricultural labourer has to take his lunch under one or more shady trees, if available, on the farm (Vide: Photograph 4.3) and lie down there on land for rest. However, it is little difficult for the farmers to build rest shelters on the farms because of (i) the prevalence of small-size of land-holdings scattered in all the directions and (ii) weak financial position of farmers. The intensive field-study made by the author revealed that nearly 15.5 per cent of the total agricultural labourers were using the rooms attached to the wells as rest shelters for taking lunch and rest.

**Drinking water:** The Factories Act of 1948 requires that the industrial workers be provided with sufficient supply of good drinking water, the place be marked "drinking water" in a language understood by workers, and no such points be situated within 20 feet of any washing place, urinal or latrine. In case of factories, employing more than 250 workers, arrangements for cooling drinking water during hot weather also be made. Agricultural labourers, on the other hand, have to carry with them a pot filled up of drinking water from the houses of the farmer - employers to the respective farms. All the
attached labourers carry with them drinking water in "Batak" — duck shaped vessel for holding water (Vide: Photograph 4.4), and the casual labourers, generally in group, carry with them big brasso or copper pots for this purpose, but if the quantity of water is exhausted during the working hours, they have to go to the nearest well and, as a last resort, more generally in summer season when the wells are not operated, and in winter and monsoon seasons also if they do not find any well nearer to their farms, to the small pond (Talavadi) and bring water if it possesses. If water is available in small pond, it may be nonhygienic, dirty and muddy which cannot be used for drinking purposes. However, the agricultural labourers had to drink it, and carry on their job. But if they do not find any drop of water in small pond they have either to remain without water for the rest of the day or to return to the village for fetching water.

Lavatories: Every human being has to obey the calls of the natural habits. Be it passing out urine or night-mud. Adequate provision for their satisfaction is a bare necessity in any work-place. According to the Factories Act, 1948, in every factory, employing more than 250 workers, such facilities shall be a prescribed sanitary type with floors and internal walls upto 3 feet made of glazed tiles. The State Governments can lay down the number of latrins and urinals and rules for sanitation
in every factory for industrial workers. Agricultural workers are not provided with any of these amenities for meeting with natural habits. Even at the residential places they do not have any facility for urinals, latrins and bath-rooms. All the agricultural labourers, while they are on the farms, use fences, standing crops, gutter, bush and trees as the place of urinals and latrins. Insofar as bath-rooms are concerned there was not a single bath-room at the place of residence as well as on the farms. The agricultural labourers, who are engaged in dusting and spraying of pesticides and insecticides operations, use the small pond's water for washing their hands and mouth before taking food or water (Vide: Photograph 4.5). They do not have any soap for washing their hands affected by pesticides and insecticides and, therefore, sometimes they suffered from suffocation and unconsciousness.

(B) Conditions off the farms: Under this head are included bathing facilities, leaves and holidays and welfare measures which are discussed in the paragraphs to follow:

Bathing facilities: Tiredness and slackness resulting from continuous laborous work on the farm under the open sky in all the seasons — winter, summer and monsoon —, the agricultural labourers can be refreshed only by
The wife of a farmer of village Rodh carries
with her cooked food and water for employees
Photograph 4.2

An ag. labourer of Tralsa village taking rest after lunch under the shadow of a tree
Photograph 4.3

An ag. labourer of Hansot village taking his lunch under the tree
Photograph 4.4

An ag. labourer of Karena village carrying

with him, drinking water
Photograph 4.5

An ag. labourer of Karala village washing his hands at the nearby small pond
Photograph 4.6
Photograph showing where and how an ag. labourer takes bath

Photograph 4.7
A female member of an ag. labour family brings water from a long distance
taking a bath after the work is over. As mentioned earlier there was complete absence of bath-rooms, in real sense, at the residential places of the agricultural labourers' houses. They, generally, use the pond as their bath-rooms during the monsoon and summer seasons. However, during the winter season, they take bath with hot water if they can afford to procure or spend for the fuel in sufficient quantity, otherwise they use cold water for taking bath. The bath-rooms are made of cotton and tuver stalks covered by 'Kantan' if they afford it. Otherwise, they take their bath under the open sky (Vide: Photograph 4.6). The young female members of the agricultural labour family have to take their bath compulsorily early in the morning or at the time of washing the clothes in the pond. The intensive field-study made by the author showed that 76.00 per cent of the total villages selected for the study had no facility of water connection in the localities of agricultural labourers. They have to bring water from wells or ponds or canals situated nearer to their locality (Vide: Photograph 4.7).

Leaves and holidays: Leaves and holidays are very popular terms for industrial and office employees. The value of holidays and leaves with wages in maintaining and increasing labour efficiency as well as employee-employer relationships cannot be over-emphasised. Our agriculture sector can, however, not remain an exception to this. The Bihar Labour Enquiry Committee (1940) aptly
remarked that, "Tripical climate, poor diet and physique of the workers and insanitary and unattractive conditions in which they live, combine to make holidays with pay even more necessary in India than the West." Moreover, labourers -- industrial or agricultural -- are, recognised as human beings. No human being -- irrespective of age and sex -- in any walk of life can continue working days after days or months after months without leaves and holidays. The labourers are also treated as social creatures and, therefore, there are many occasions in their lives like, social and religious ceremonies, urgent family matters, sickness of themselves or the members of family, legal and political attendance, etc., when they find themselves unable to attend their respective jobs/works. This requires the grant of leaves with wages/salaries and holidays within a regular interval of days and specially a casual leave for casual works or occasions.

In industrial and commercial units holidays, weekly leave and leaves with wages are granted only to permanent -- clerical and supervisory -- personnel. The daily and piece - waged workers and temporary employees are generally not entitled to get holidays with pay. However, holidays are granted on festivals. But, insofar as agriculture sector is concerned there is complete absence of provisions

8. Saxena R.C., op.cit., p. 84.
regarding holidays and weekly and festival leaves (Vide: Sec 23(5)). On the contrary, every factory worker under the Factories Act, 1948, is entitled to leave with wages with a qualifying period of 240 days in a calender year. Further, the National Commission on Labour said that every employee should be allowed in a calender year three paid National holidays, viz., 26th January (Republic Day), 15th August (Independence Day), and 2nd October (Mahatma Gandhi's Birthday) and five paid festival holidays as may be fixed by the appropriate Government in consultation with the representatives of employers and employees.

While there is no question of holidays and leaves for the casual agricultural labourers as they get wages when they work, the attached agricultural labourers are not granted any leave or holiday as a matter of right, but as favour. The analysis of the data presented in Table 4.6 in regard to leaves and holidays — with and without wages — availed of by the attached agricultural labourers in the district would reveal that (i) 100.00 per cent attached agricultural labourers availed of sick leaves — with and without wages, followed by social leaves 98.9 per cent and religious leaves 51.00 per cent; (ii) While 62.1 per cent labourers availed of legal and political

10. Saxena R.C., op.cit., p. 87.
11. Ibid., p. 91.
attendance leaves without wages during the year 1979, and (iii) none of the labourers availed of any leave with wages for legal and political attendances.

Table 4.6

Leaves and holidays with and without wages availed of by attached agricultural labourers in Bharuch district during the year 1979

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons for leave</th>
<th>Total no. of agricultural labourers interviewed</th>
<th>No. of days of leave enjoyed by each agricultural labourer got benefits with wages</th>
<th>Without wages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>1987</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>1023</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sickness</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal &amp; Political attendance</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>1248</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Welfare measures: The term 'labour welfare' is one which lends itself to various interpretations and it has not always the same importance in different industries and countries. It has been stated in a Report on the Provision of Facilities for the Promotion of the Workers' Welfare, -------

12. Based on author's field-work.
that the workers' welfare may be understood as meaning such services, facilities and amenities, which may be established in, or in the vicinity of undertakings to enable the persons employed in them to perform their work in healthy, congenial surroundings and provided with amenities, conducive to good health and high morale. This is the story for industrial workers who are strongly and systematically organised and united. The welfare measures are necessary from the three point of views:

(i) It is the humanitarian view which aims at providing certain facilities and amenities of life to the workers which they themselves can not get.

(ii) It is the economic point of view which aims at to improve the efficiency of the workers and keep the workers satisfied and reduces the chances of grievances and conflicts.

(iii) It is the civic view point which aims at to promote a sense of responsibility and dignity among the workers and to make them better citizens.

Like industrial workers, our massive agricultural labourers should also, for the purpose, be covered under the activities of welfare measures. Certain aspects of labour welfare activities by which our industrial workers are benefitted may be provided to our agricultural workers.

labourers. Such measures broadly cover the following areas:

(i) Recreational facilities to relieve the monotony and drudgery of working long hours on the farms.

(ii) Medical facilities to the attached agricultural labourers themselves and to the members of their families. Bad climatic conditions under which they have to work throughout the year, unhealthy conditions at the residential places, tropical diseases and illness due to the ignorance and poverty demand for some medical treatments and helps. Similarly, the introduction of the continuous use of pesticides and insecticides from last two decades in agriculture for more and more production and protection against massive attacks of the insects and other creatures and the need for the grant of relief to the agricultural labourers when they become victims of attacks of wild and/or tamed animals and leopards, bears, tigers, etc. When they are working on the farms.

(iii) Educational facilities to the workers and their children. This area covers social service of great importance in rural India, where illiteracy widely prevalent. In order to make the agricultural labourers useful citizens, to promote better and cordial relations, to enable workers to understand modern economic trends, to discipline the mind of workers and to develop their thinking power and latent potentiality, the provision for
educational facilities is highly emphasised. The Adult Education Programme introduced in rural and urban areas by the Government would, to some extent, yield fruitful results if it is implemented in letter and spirit by the teachers involved in it.

(iv) The importance of creches in agriculture industry should not be underestimated because the work-efficiency of mothers on farms undoubtedly depends to a considerable extent on the perception that their children are safe and in good hands. In the absence of creches female agricultural labourers keep their children with them while they are on farms or leave them at home on 'Ram Bharose'. Insofar as Bharuch district is concerned, 80.55 per cent of the total female labour force were agricultural labourers and out of the total agricultural labourers surveyed in the selected villages of the district, 49.4 per cent were female labourers. The Government of India under the Factories Act, 1948 have empowered the State Governments to make rules regarding creches, and room for the use of children under the age of six years, belonging to woman workers in a factory employing 50 or more woman workers. Similar provision for creches, creches-room and a nurse in-charge of room should be made for those villages where at least 50 female agricultural labourers are employed on farms. It is, however, a practically impossible task for the individual
farmer-employer to provide for creches or such care on
the farms or elsewhere. But, the Gram Panchayat and/or
the Government can work out a scheme for setting up at
least centre at each village for taking care of the
children of the workers during the specified period of
time. The Panchayat, the Government, the social
organisations and the farmer-employer community of the
concerned village should arrange for meeting the
expenditure of running these centres.

Efficiency

By efficiency of labour we mean the amount of work
which a labourer can do within a given time. The word
efficiency denotes the capacity of a labourer to do more
or better work in a given time. Efficient labourer is
regarded as a great blessing not only to the employer
but to the country as a whole and serves as a powerful
instrument of economic upliftment of the country. The
efficiency of labourers is measured through the use of
ratio technique. This ratio is obtained by dividing the
total output of a particular farm by total number of hours
of work of the total number of agricultural labourers
employed on that farm. This ratio, then, is converted
into the output per agricultural labourer. This is termed
as the efficiency of agricultural labourers. However,
there prevails complete absence of the system of separating

the more efficient agricultural labourers from the less efficient ones because more or less all are at the same level of the efficiency. The efficiency of the contract labourers obviously remain at high level than that of the common wage earners.

While such factors as the climatic conditions, illiteracy, absence of training facilities, low standard of living and heavy indebtedness have direct adverse effect on the level of efficiency of agricultural labourers, agricultural implements, types of soil, irrigation facilities, types of crops grown, proper and sufficient availability of fertilisers, better quality of seeds and other inputs have also great bearing on the efficiency of agricultural workers. It is, therefore, necessary to bring about improvement in the entire environ under which the agricultural labourers perform their tasks.

Security of Employment

Unlike industrial workers, our agricultural workers do not enjoy any statutory right of their job security. The attached agricultural labourers can be turned out of their jobs by the farmer - employers at any time. They are at the mercy of their employers. However, the farmer - employers respect the age - old local traditions prevailing there. Normally, a farmer would not employ any attached agricultural labourer other than the ones
who had worked under him during the immediate last season. If the labourers themselves do not desire to change the employer, the farmer - employer continue them, if he is satisfied with his work and behaviour, for the ensuing year or agricultural season. The working of this tradition not only improves the relations between the farmer and the agricultural labourers but also increases the efficiency of labourers. If the attached agricultural labourers are not willing to continue their jobs, they are free to do so subject to the condition that they give guarantee of repayment of their dues to the farmer who would mostly accept the would - be farmer - employer of the labourer as his guarantor. Insofar as Bharuch district is concerned, the intensive field-study made by the author revealed that (i) out of total 2009 attached agricultural labourers 26.7 per cent attached labourers changed their former farmer - employers willingly, 20.00 per cent attached labourers were reappointed by the former respective farmer - employers, 28.3 per cent attached labourers were compelled to change their employers, 22.5 per cent attached labourers became casual labourers and remaining 2.5 per cent attached labourers migrated during the year - specially at very beginning of the agricultural year, and (ii) out of total 2989 casual agricultural labourers of the district only 17.7 per cent had secured their employment at their former respective farmer -
employers. Where the farmer-employer himself is unsecured of his livelihood on account of small size of farms and uncertain farm incomes, how can the issue of grant of security of job to an attached labourer be thought of? What type of security can be expected of from an unsecured farmer-employer?

Concluding Observations

The working conditions for the agricultural labourers in Bharuch district are so bad and the entire environ is so depressing that no citizen of an independent country, having some self-respect would like to work either as casual or attached labourer. But, thousands of agricultural labourers not only accept the work and work even half-starved because most of them have no other lawful source to find a gainful employment elsewhere. The economic conditions of majority of the farmer-employers in the district are so weak that none of them can think of increasing his financial burden on account for bringing about and any improvement in the working conditions of the farm labourers. Thus, a vicious circle prevails and an outside agency—may be social, political, philanthropic or governmental—has to intervene and break it for the good of our agrarian sector.