Introduction

Various writers on 'Personnel Management' emphasise that discipline is the foundation of productivity and progress. Generation and maintenance of labour/employee discipline is considered to be a must, if organised group-efforts are to be effective and productive. The term "discipline" connotes that the members of a group should reasonably conform to the rules and regulations which have been framed for it or by it so that everyone may benefit by them.¹ Discipline is the indication of

the attitude of the employees which they hold towards the organisational rules and regulations and supervisory level established by the enterprises in which they work and their fellow workers. It is said to be good in an organisation when its employees willingly obey its rules and regulations and the orders of the superior authorities. Unwillingness to obey them or disobedience makes it bad. Any deviation from the observance of the set rules and orders from superior authorities is indiscipline. According to William R. Spriegel, discipline is the force that prompts an individual or a group to observe the rules, regulations and procedures which are deemed to be necessary to the attainment of an objective; it is the force or fear of force which restrains an individual or a group from doing things which are deemed to be destructive of group objectives. It is also the exercise of restraint or the enforcement of penalties for the violation of group regulations. "Discipline in the broad sense means orderliness -- the opposite of confusion..... It does not mean a strict and technical observance of rigid rules and regulations. It simply means working, co-operating and behaving in a normal and orderly way, as any responsible person would expect an employee to do".

4. Ibid., p. 662.
The concept of discipline is a relative one, depending upon the code of conduct prescribed by each organisation. Good discipline is ensured by a positive motivation of the employees and a careful handling of the grievances. A corporate organisation with a hundred per cent discipline all the time is a myth. Sooner or later, every organisation faces a situation involving troubles of sullen disregard or disobedience in varying degrees from at least some of its employees. Such possibilities call for the evolution of a system for its enforcement. Managements are rarely disposed to taking stern corrective action for minor or unwilful disciplinary slackness. Disciplinary action consists of a chain of graded steps so that the remedy does not prove to be worse than the disease.  

Code of Conduct

There are no standard rules and regulations governing the conduct and discipline of the agricultural labourers. However, there are a few unwritten traditions and code of behaviour which are to be observed by the agricultural labourers while they are on the jobs. This informal code of conduct is determined by the farmer-employers in consultation with the concerned agricultural labourers at the time they are engaged/employed, taking into consideration of the prevalent customs and traditions.

which, normally, included (i) attending the duties at
the farmer-employer's residence/farm early in the morning
without any call by the farmer-employer, (ii) showing
good behaviour towards the farmer-employer and the members
of his family, (iii) observing loyalty, sincerity, honesty,
courtesy and regularity in attendance and job-performance,
(iv) handling with proper care the agricultural tools,
implements and animals entrusted to them so as to see that
no damage is done to them knowingly or otherwise, (v)
following and observing the instructions given to them by
the farmer-employer in regard to the agricultural operations
to be carried on, (vi) behaving properly and with courtesy
with their comppeers, and (vii) settling the differences
and grievances that may be arise in course of their
employment by mutual negotiations and/or voluntary
arbitration.

The above mutually agreed upon understandings are
generally observed by the agricultural labourers. Of course,
there are no hard and fast rules which compel them to do so.
However, the observance of discipline would depend upon the
degree of harmonious relationship between the agricultural
labourers and concerned farmer-employer, work-efficiency
of agricultural labourers and attitudes of the farmer-
employers towards their agricultural labourers.

Disciplinary Action

Frequent breaches of any of the informal understandings
by the agricultural labourers may necessitate disciplinary
action by the farmer-employer against the concerned agricultural labourers, and therefore occasionally some degree of force and penalty become essential when agricultural labourers cross the limits of tolerance. Oral reprimands, requests, warnings, loss of privileges, fines and deductions, suspension and as a last resort dismissal from employment by farmer-employers of their concerned agricultural labourers are common penalties for the disciplinary action. The determination of the extent of a breach or default on the farmer-employers' own failing is a pre-requisite for decision in regard to the form and degree of disciplinary action; because the chief aim is not to penalise the concerned labourer but to prevent the recurrence of such events and to improve the working situations. The intensive field-study (Vide: Table 5.1) undertaken by the author revealed as follows:

(i) Oral reprimands, requests and warnings which are mild ones were most common penalties for all the agricultural workers,

(ii) 39.00 per cent attached and 21.00 per cent casual agricultural labourers were penalised by withdrawing the privileges in the forms of perquisites from their,

(iii) 6.2 per cent attached and 3.3 per cent casual agricultural labourers were penalised in the form of deductions of their emoluments,
Table 5.1

Penalties imposed by agriculturist-households
on agricultural labourers for indisciplinary
behaviour in Bharuch district during
the year 1979

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of penalty imposed</th>
<th>No. of agricultural labourers penalised by agriculturist-households</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total attached labourers: 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total casual labourers: 2989</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oral reprimand</td>
<td>2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Requests</td>
<td>2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warnings</td>
<td>2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Withdrawal of privileges/concessions</td>
<td>782</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fines</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suspension</td>
<td>242</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dismissal</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6. Based on author's field-work.
(iv) 12.00 per cent attached and 8.00 per cent casual agricultural labourers were suspended, and
(v) 7.5 per cent attached and 5.2 per cent casual agricultural labourers were dismissed.

The areas of indiscipline on the part of agricultural labourers were irregularity, low productivity, rude behaviour, dishonesty, damage to agricultural tools and implements. The analysis of the data presented in Table 5.2 in regard to the causes of indiscipline and workers involved in Bharuch district during the year 1979, would reveal that (i) 87.8 per cent of the total attached agricultural labourers were found indisciplined by irregularity on their jobs, followed by 74.9 per cent in low productivity, 28.2 per cent in damaging agricultural tools and implements, 25.9 per cent in rude behaviour and 19.7 per cent in dishonesty, and (ii) 76.4 per cent of the total casual agricultural labourers were found indisciplined in the area of low productivity, followed by 63.4 per cent in irregularity, 26.9 per cent in rude behaviour, 26.2 per cent in damaging agricultural tools and implements and 14.3 per cent in dishonesty.

The study further revealed that mild punishments like oral reprimands, requests and warnings were sufficient to improve the behaviour of the concerned agricultural labourers and to set the deviating labourers right.
Table 5.27

Causes and cases of indiscipline by agricultural labourers in Bharuch district during the year 1979

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cause of indiscipline</th>
<th>No. of indisciplined agricultural labourers</th>
<th>Total attached labourers:</th>
<th>Total casual labourers:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Irregularity</td>
<td>1765</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>1895</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low productivity</td>
<td>1505</td>
<td></td>
<td>2284</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rude behaviour</td>
<td>521</td>
<td></td>
<td>804</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dishonesty</td>
<td>397</td>
<td></td>
<td>427</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damage to agricultural tools and implements</td>
<td>568</td>
<td></td>
<td>785</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7. Based on author's field-work.
The field-study undertaken by the author could further bring out one of the alarming forces, responsible for germinating indiscipline among the agricultural labourers, particularly the casual workers, has been the undertaking of illegal profession of stealing by them agricultural produce from unguarded farms at night. The agricultural labourers who are idle, ungrateful, unemployed and underemployed are always deeply interested in finding out the ways and the means of theft. Cotton produced in the district is the main commercial crop which can easily be theftable even at night time. Tiny, small, scattered and fragmented farms of the farmer-employers do not permit the farmers to arrange for their watch and ward for all the time even with the help of paid watchmen. The acute shortages of the able 'Rakhas' (watchmen) and the licensed weapons restrict the watch and ward work of the farms in the villages. Insofar as village thefts are concerned, the loyal attached and regularly employed casual agricultural labourers generally do not thieve the produce of their respective farmer-employers. The labourers of surrounding villages are mostly engaged in the theft of agricultural produce from farms. The data as presented in Table 5.3 in regard to the cases of theft in Bharuch district during the year 1979, would indicate that (i) only 6.00 per cent of the total attached agricultural labourers were found as thieves in the theft of cotton and other commercial crops and nearly 3.00 per
cent were found in stealing foodgrains, and (ii) 8.3 per cent of the total casual agricultural labourers were found as thieves of cotton and other commercial crops and only 5.1 per cent were found in the theft of foodgrains.

Table 5.3

Number of agricultural labourers involved in the cases of thefts in Bharuch district during the year 1979

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Crop</th>
<th>No. of agricultural labourers involved in the thefts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total attached labourers: 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial Crops</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foodgrains</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The study further brought out that (i) all the agriculturist-households were of the firm view that the problem of theft of agricultural produce had been very much vexatious for them despite their arranging for regular overall watch and ward work of the farms in the villages, for which the 'Rakhas' charged remuneration ranging between Rs. 8,000 and Rs. 20,000 according to the size of the village, (ii) the labourers of

8. Based on author's field-work.
surrounding villages where the proportion of unemployment and underemployment was high, enticed them to thieve from their neighbouring villages, and (iii) the attractive inflationary prices of cotton was responsible for enticing the rural workers to undertake its stealing on massive scale. It is estimated that a thief, on an average, can thieve cotton worth Rs. 60 to Rs. 80 per night which would suffice for the maintenance of his family for a week and, therefore, this practice very widely prevailed in almost all the villages of the district during the busy cotton season.

**Absenteeism**

The tendency of remaining absent has been developing among the attached labourers and, hence, the farmers have to face the problem of absenteeism on massive scale. Absenteeism has been variously defined by different authorities. According to the Labour Bureau, Simla, "Absenteeism is the total manshifts lost because of absences as a percentage of the total number of manshifts scheduled to work". It signifies the absence of an employee from work when he is scheduled to be at work. It is unauthorised, unexplained, avoidable and wilful absence from work. An employee is to be considered scheduled to work when the employer has work available.

and the employee is aware of it, and when the employer
has no reason to expect, well in advance, that the
employee will not be available for work at the specified
time. The problem of absenteeism is more serious in
organised industries than agriculture one. As the
agricultural labourers are not legally entitled to any
paid holidays and leaves as a right, the problem of
absenteeism causes financial loss to the labourers.
Further, it adversely affects the economy of agricultural
labourers, reduces their earnings and increases their
indebtedness. The analysis of data as presented in Table
5.4 in regard to the average number of days of absence
per agricultural labourer in Bharuch district during the
year 1979, would reveal that (i) all the attached
agricultural labourers remained absent, (ii) 75.9 per
cent of the total casual agricultural labourers remained
absent, and (iii) the overall absenteeism was 85.6 per
cent among the agricultural labourers.

The intensive field-work made by the author revealed
that the concerned absentee remained absent for genuine
or otherwise reasons which may covered sickness of oneself
or the members of one's family, injury, social ceremonies,
religions ceremonies, bad weather, death of any member of
the family, birth among the family, community obligations,
procurement of rationed articles/commodities and attending
funerals. The most predominant ground for absence was
sickness followed by social and religious ceremonies.
Table 5.4

Average number of days of absence per agricultural labourer in Bharuch district during the year 1979

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category of agricultural labourer</th>
<th>Total No. of agricultural labourers contacted</th>
<th>Total no. of agricultural labourers remained absent</th>
<th>Total no. of days of absence per agricultural labourer</th>
<th>Average no. of days of absence per agricultural labourer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attached</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>14,112</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casual</td>
<td>2989</td>
<td>2270</td>
<td>9,094</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>4998</td>
<td>4279</td>
<td>23,206</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Absenteeism not only harms the agricultural labourers but it also adversely affects the work of farmer-employers who have to find out other labourers at eleventh hour for completing the agricultural operations which were left out by absentee-labourers or for starting new agricultural operations which were required to be started on that day. This situation sometimes compels them to pay high rate of wages to the agricultural labourers. The agricultural labourers who remained absent frequently will have to face immediate dismissal or from the date of the completion of the contracted year.

10. Based on author's field-work.
Dismissal is the most serious and last step in the ladder of the disciplinary action by a farmer-employer against an indisciplined agricultural labourer as dismissal is the termination of the services of an employee by way of punishment either for gross misconduct or for unauthorised and frequent absence from work places. Before his service is terminated, normally an employee is given an opportunity to explain his conduct and to show cause why he should not be dismissed. Dismissal -- as a disciplinary action -- is a very easy step for casual labourers in the field of agriculture. Of course, the services of attached labourers are not easily possible to terminate because of local customs and traditions and social pressures. However, irregular, shirker, lazy and rude behavioural workers easily become victim of the dismissal penalty by farmer-employers. This is possible because of the complete absence of any law relating to security of employment, dispute settlement machinery, suspension, discharge or dismissal for agricultural labourers in agrarian sector.

Dismissal, in agriculture, does not require any notice, memo or letter indicating that the services are not required by the farmer-employer from a particular day as farmer-employers would not renew the employment contract for the next year and thus the services of the concerned agricultural labourers automatically stand terminated.
But, for termination of services during the middle of the year, a farmer-employer can, however, manage to dismiss the employed agricultural labourers as early as possible. The author's field-work in Bharuch district showed that during the year 1979, out of 2009 attached labourers and 2989 casual labourers, 152 and 156 respectively were dismissed from their services. Such abrupt dismissals of agricultural labourers put them on the roads and they were compelled them, thereafter, to accept jobs, of any, at low rates of wages.

Reappointment

It is not always that dismissed agricultural labourers would never get an opportunity of serving the said farmer-employer in future. There are numerous cases where the farmer-employers engaged the agricultural labourers who were dismissed by them in the past. Reappointment, however, depends upon situational factors where a dismissed agricultural labourer by a farmer-employer gets reemployed by the said farmer-employer, he is said to be reappointed. The term 'reappointment' in agriculture is now getting a wider acceptance. The introduction of high-yield variety seeds, fertilisers, irrigation, spraying & dusting of pesticides and double cropping cultivation demand more hired hands in agriculture. Insofar as Bharuch district is concerned 20.00 per cent attached labourers and 17.7 per cent casual labourers were
reappointed respectively by their former farmer-employers. It is interesting to note that the concept of "reappointment" has been liberally extended and widely used in the Kerala Agricultural Workers Act, 1974, which lays down that a land-owner shall not employ any agricultural worker other than an agricultural worker who has worked in the same land during the previous agricultural season provided that preference shall be given to agricultural workers employed for the previous agricultural operation in the same agricultural land during the same agricultural season and where there are permanent workers of the land-owner, such workers shall be given preference over other agricultural workers. The Draft Bill viz., The Agricultural Workers Bill, 1980, formulated by one of the sub-committees set up by the Government of India, to regulate the employment and the conditions of service of agricultural workers had also provided that an employer can not employ a new worker unless all the workers who had worked any time during the previous agricultural season have been employed. However, the agricultural labourers in Gujarat has not yet been protected in this regard under any legislation.

Disputes

There does not exist any field of activity where, in one form or the other, disputes do not arise. But disputes

12. The Indian Worker, dated 24-3-1980, p.3.
in economic fields prove much harmful and disastrous if they occur frequently and last long. In agricultural sector, such factors as work - stoppages, work spoiled during the operations, irregularity on work places, irregular wage payments, refusal to grant of leaves, damage done to agricultural tools and implements and theft of agricultural produce by agricultural workers generally prove as bone of contention for a dispute between a farmer-employer and an agricultural labourer. Agricultural labourers being mostly unorganised and widely scattered are normally not in a position to protect their interests either on individual or group basis and have to accept the decisions -- favourable or unfavourable -- taken by their farmer-employers. The penetration of the political parties in the field of organisation of rural labour and the assurance of minimum specified wage/s provided in the Minimum Wages Act, 1948 made the agricultural labourers enlightened about their rights and they started organising agitations, led by one or the other political party, against farmers in the event of their exploitation in one form or the other. Yet, in many cases, they fail to enforce collective bargaining. In others, they may be successful through mutual compromise and understanding in lessening the hardship of individual labourers and in forestalling the farmer-employers their abrupt dismissals.
However, the fact remains that the alertness among the agricultural labourers, negative role of the agitators, unreal and hypocrite well-wishers of the downtrodden rural people, rivalry among different political party led unions, and misleading and/or faulty interpretation of statutory provisions for agricultural labourers have disturbed the normal atmosphere and environment of calm and harmonious rural life. Clashes between the farmers and the agricultural labourers and conflicts of their interests have become frequent and wide-spread. In the absence of any machinery, the disputes remain unsolved for long, and both the parties suffer and, in particular, the farm labour. It is high time to create such a machinery on long term basis. The Minimum Wages Act, 1948 as applied to agricultural labourers made provisions regarding the settlement of the disputes in regard to wage payments and some other conditions of employment, but they are very much formal and lengthy and vexatious legal and court procedures do not attract our illiterate agricultural labourers to take the advantage of the statutory provisions. Except the Kerala State Government, neither our Central Government nor any State Government has passed any law regarding the machinery for settlement of disputes in agriculture. According to the Kerala Agricultural Workers Act, 1974, the Conciliation Officers have to play more active and constructive role by holding conciliation proceedings where any kind of agricultural
dispute arises or is apprehended. In the event of their failure to bring about a settlement, the dispute will have to be referred to the Agricultural Tribunal for adjudication under the Act which lays down (i) strict time limits for the final disposal of each case by the Tribunal and (ii) subsequent enforcement of the award by the District Collector. Thus, the Act seeks to provide a machinery for settlement and enforcement which is labour-oriented, speedy, effective and less likely to get bogged down in prolonged court proceedings.  

No doubt, this is a good piece of legislation for our illiterate, unorganised and ignorant agricultural labourers. But it is observed that the fact that the fruits of the provision must go to agricultural labourers has been forgotten and enforcement machinery gets the benefits, therefore, the system requires radical change that may lead to the realisation of the basic goal of protecting the interests of poor, illiterate and downtrodden rural agricultural labour. The long discussions of the author with farmers, agricultural labourers, labour leaders, social workers and persons interested in the upliftment of the village community led him to suggest that a statutory provision be made for the constitution of a local tripartite committee comprising (i) a representative of farmers of the village

concerned, (ii) a representative of the agricultural labourers of the village, and (ii) the 'Sarpanch' of the Village Panchayat or any other member of the Village Panchayat nominated by it on the committee. All disputes arise in the jurisdiction of Village Panchayat should be refer to this committee which should be empowered to decide them within a period of 15 days from the date of the reference to it and the decision given by the committee should be binding on both the parties and the award, in case of need, should be executed by the machinery of the District Collector.

Concluding Observations

The aforesaid discussions would amply show that there has been complete absence of statutory or otherwise code of conduct in regard to the determination of employer-employee relationship and the observance of behaviour between the farmer-employer and the agricultural labourer. This does not mean that there has been a complete vacuum in the field. The relationship and behaviour of the agricultural labourers with the farmer-employer are governed by the local customs, traditions and practices. It is now high time for taking a quick action for statutorily regularising them with suitable modifications, which serve the basis for enforcing and maintaining discipline among the agricultural labour sector in our country.