PREFACE

The present study attempts to examine the changing structure of employment of the non-cultivating labour households in rural India. More specifically, it seeks to examine the employment pattern and the corresponding levels of income and consumption of such labour households in the selected areas of Punjab and Bihar. The basic objective is to understand, on the one hand, the internal dynamics of rural transformation, and the impact of the newly cropping up interaction between this internal dynamics and the growing rural-urban linkages on the employment structure of the rural labour households, on the other.

During the last 15-20 years, remarkable changes have occurred in the production technology in Indian agriculture. It is now widely believed that under the spurt of this technological breakthrough, not only that agricultural production and productivity have registered fairly sizeable increases, but the structure of rural employment has also so changed that the relative importance of non-farm activities has steadily grown over the years. Consequently, the quantum of total yearly employment and its components as also earnings accruing to the non-cultivating rural labour households from various employment avenues are believed to have changed substantially.

Depending upon the irrigation base, infra-structural facilities and institutional framework, the new farm technology has been adopted by different areas in varying proportions. Consequently, the impact of the new farm technology on agricultural production and productivity as also on the rural employment structure has differed from one area to another. It is now widely acknowledged that states such as the Punjab and Haryana have experienced the most profound impact of the new technology, whereas states such as Bihar and Orissa have
generally lagged behind. This, however, should not be construed to mean that the whole of Punjab has experienced the same degree of the impact and the whole of Bihar has remained devoid of it. There are some pockets of Punjab such as the sub-mountainous terrain in districts of Hoshiarpur, Ropar and Gurdaspur which are still far behind, while in Bihar, districts such as Bhojpur, Rohtas and Nalanda are substantially ahead of others, in the matter of their respective agricultural development.

Another important feature connected with the changing agrarian conditions in India has been the emergence of strong rural - urban linkages over the years due to the expanding inter-sectoral exchanges both on demand and supply sides. These linkages are increasingly facilitated by a growing network of village link roads. Although the physical distance from a nearby marketing and/or industrial town still remains an important constraint on the mobility of men and material, yet the rural - urban linkages have grown substantially over the years and with them have changed the employment pattern and the corresponding levels of income and consumption of the rural population. For example, while some of the old activities have tended to disappear gradually over the years, some others have expanded fast and some new ones have emerged as important sources of employment and earnings for the rural labour households. Further, some of the rural households are getting increasingly linked with the nearby sub-urban and urban towns for the purpose of their employment and earning, depending upon the level of general development of the area and the availability of infrastructural facilities. In brief, the structure of total yearly employment/earnings of the rural labour households has undergone sizeable changes. The degree of change has varied with the rate of growth of agricultural output on the one hand, and, the possibilities of non-farm employments opening up in rural as well as nearby urban areas, on the other. The extent to which the
rural labour households have been able to avail themselves of the non-farm avenues of employment in the nearby urban marketing and/or industrial town has, in turn, depended upon the availability of such employment opportunities on the one hand, and, daily commutability of working people from their native villages to urban centres of employment, on the other. The prime mover has undoubtedly been the sheer availability of highly lucrative non-farm employment.

It needs to be pointed out that in the wake of the Green Revolution in India, many studies have been conducted by various researchers. In most such studies, an attempt has been made to examine the impact of new farm technology or its specific input - output relationship for technology adopters and non-adopters, possibilities of capital formation, employment levels and wage rates, levels of living of different strata of the rural population etc. Some scholars have also sought to investigate farm sizewise gains of the new agricultural technology. In brief, most studies on the impact of the Green Revolution have focussed on production performance, distribution of production gains between different strata of farmers, between surplus and deficit regions, and so on. But if viewed carefully, most of such studies not only pertain to the early years of the Green Revolution but also have had a limited scope of enquiry. For example, those dealing with production effects did not attempt to go into the question of income distribution and those concerned with the later did not generally examine the closely related but crucial aspects of household consumption, savings and so on. Similarly, the scholars dealing with the problem of rural employment have not gone far enough to examine adequately the consumption pattern of those who constitute the lowest rung of the rural society's socio-economic ladder. This implies that these households have continuously been neglected not only by the policymakers but also by the academicians a few exceptions
notwithstanding. For instance, the institutional and technological changes have almost exclusively been directed towards the farming sector. Concentration of attention towards the farming sector may have its own justification in that the increased agricultural production has been one of the most urgent and major concerns for the country. However, keeping in view the fact that the non-cultivating rural labour households form an integral part of the rural community, both in terms of the size of their population and their involvement in socio-economic activities they should not have been bypassed by researchers. Again, with repeated stress on production and productivity breakthroughs in policy pronouncements and piles of research material thrown up since the arrival of the new production technology, one may be led to believe that an expansion of employment opportunities for these households has not been a prime objective of the Green Revolution. Consequently, one does not know much about the impact of the internal dynamics of rural transformation on the structure of rural employment and the corresponding levels of income and consumption of such households. It can, therefore, be maintained that even though the studies conducted so far do provide a very useful insight into some special aspects, yet they can at best regarded as disjointed bits. And, as such they do not adequately analyse the changing agrarian reality in areas of high agricultural growth contrasted with that in areas of low growth. Besides, the issue pertaining to the employment pattern of the migrant labour, an important phenomenon of Punjab agriculture, has not attracted much serious research.

From the above, one may easily presume that a systematic and coherent empirical attempt to examine simultaneously the employment-income-consumption nexus of the non-cultivating rural labour households as also the employment pattern of labour seasonally migrating to Punjab is still
wanting. It points to a research gap. Based upon a survey of a cross-section of 300 such households from each of the two states of Punjab and Bihar and another 150 migrant agricultural labourers from the sample villages of the former, the present study seeks to fill a part of this research gap. A concrete claim that the present study can make is that with a fairly large sample information gathered over quite a few months, it is the first major attempt by an individual research worker to capture the impact of the newly growing above mentioned interaction on the employment-income-consumption nexus of the labour households of Punjab and Bihar. More specifically, among other things, the questions to which we address ourselves are:

What is the incidence of occupational diversification, its inception as also the factors accounting for it? What are the variations in the overall as well as villagewise pattern of on, non- and total yearly employment/earnings between Punjab and Bihar? Does the composition of different sources of on-, non- and total yearly employment/earnings in Punjab reveal a pattern distinct than that in Bihar? If so, the nature and extent of these differences? Do labour households in Punjab earn more in terms of per household and per day of employment? Does the differential pattern of total yearly earnings/income between Punjab and Bihar also transmit itself in the consumption pattern or the levels of living of the labour households? Have the gains of rapid economic growth in general and agricultural transformation in particular percolated more in Punjab than in Bihar? What are the socio-economic characteristics as also the areas of outmigration of the migrant agricultural labourers in Punjab? What proportion of the year-round employment/earnings in agriculture is enjoyed separately by the resident labour and the migrant labour in rural Punjab? And finally, what are the pull and push factors responsible for inmigration/outmigration?
Concrete empirical answers to the numerous questions posed above should throw adequate light on as to how rural labour households have fared in the total process of socio-economic development witnessed in recent years in varying form and content in different areas of India.

For whatever academic merit the present study may possess in answering the above mentioned and other related questions, I am indebted beyond measure to Dr. G.K. Chadha, Professor of Economics in the Centre for the Study of Regional Development, School of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi for his scholastic and inspiring directional guidance. But for his searching criticisms, competent suggestions and constant inspiration, this work could never have acquired its present form. I have literally encroached upon his time and financial resources many a time. Mere words of gratitude are, therefore, by no means the appropriate coins to repay the greatest debt I owe to him. Mrs. Suneeta Chadha, like an elder sister, has been helping me time and again in meeting various domestic exigencies. I gratefully acknowledge my deep sense of obligation to her also.

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(M. R. Khurana)

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