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## **UNIT 10 LABOUR : RURAL**

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### **Structure**

- 10.0 Objectives
- 10.1 Introduction
- 10.2 Rural Labour in the Pre-British and British Period
- 10.3 New Measures and Rural Labour in the Post-Independence Period
  - 10.3.1 Land Reforms
  - 10.3.2 Agricultural Modernisation
- 10.4 Problems of Non-Agricultural Labourers and Artisans
  - 10.4.1 Pre-Independence Period
  - 10.4.2 Post-Independence Period
- 10.5 Rural Unrest and Labour Welfare Measures
  - 10.5.1 Rural Unrests: An Over View
  - 10.5.2 Status of Labour Laws
  - 10.5.3 Welfare Programme for the Rural Poor
- 10.6 Contemporary Social Processes and Rural Labourers
  - 10.6.1 General Impact on Agricultural Labourers
  - 10.6.2 Impact on Female Labourers
- 10.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 10.8 Key Words
- 10.9 Further Readings
- 10.10 Answers to Check Your Progress

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### **10.0 OBJECTIVES**

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In this unit an effort is made to introduce to you the changing status of rural labourers in the country. After reading this unit you should be able to:

- explain the situation of agricultural labour during the British rule;
- examine the changes brought about by the Indian government through various land reforms and welfare measures;
- discuss the changing status of village artisans and other non-farm workers;
- describe the nature of conflict in rural areas in the context of agrarian social structure;
- explain the policy formulations for alleviating various problems of agricultural labourers, tenants and artisans; and
- discuss the impact of broad social process on the rural labourers in general and rural female labourers in particular.

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### **10.1 INTRODUCTION**

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In this unit we shall discuss the social problems of rural labour in India. Rural labourers constitute a distinct component of rural labour force. However, the

socio-economic position of rural labourers has not been the same over the broad historical periods. Hence, besides making a brief historical over view on the issues of the agricultural labourers, this unit also presents various dimensions of the problems of rural labourers. This unit begins with a discussion on the rural labour force in the pre-British India and the emergence of a new labour force in the British period. The problems of the rural labour of contemporary India are discussed at great length here with special reference to land reform and agricultural modernisation. The problems of non-agricultural labourers and artisans are also discussed in this unit. Rural unrest is an integral part of rural labour problems in India. An over view of the rural labour unrest in India and also the major labour laws and welfare programme for rural poor are presented in this unit. Lastly we have placed the socio-economic position of the agricultural labourers in general and female labourers in particular in the context of the broad social processes in India.

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## 10.2 RURAL LABOUR IN THE PRE-BRITISH AND BRITISH PERIOD

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India is predominantly an agrarian society with three-fourths of her population living in villages and depending mainly on agriculture and related occupations for its livelihood.

### i) Pre-British Period

Traditionally, the dominant Hindu society was divided into hierarchical caste groups. Village based occupations were linked with caste groups where mostly the upper castes owned and controlled the land. They wielded economic and political power over all low castes and tribes and acted as patrons of the social and ethical codes of the entire village. The landless groups over a period of time were reduced to serving castes at the farms or related work places of higher castes. The **jajmani** system, under which hereditary patron-client relationships were maintained, provided minimum security to the serving castes. The result was that the serving castes lived a life of want and misery. As the control of land mainly decided the productive relationship among various sections of village population, the low caste groups remained a deprived section of the rural population.

The above types of land relations were associated with the subsistence nature of agriculture with low production and subsistence economy. Each village lived almost an independent and self-sufficient life. It represented a relatively closed society governed by caste and community rules.

### ii) British Period

These traditional relationships in land experienced a steady transformation during the British rule in the country. The colonisers introduced private property in land through the new land system and thus created class of landowners, tenants, sharecroppers and agricultural labourers (see Units 24 and 25 of ESO-04). Without modernising the agriculture and by appropriating the surplus land, the British rulers inflicted untold miseries particularly on the marginal farmers and agricultural labourers. There were instances of tenant-cultivators fleeing from the land once they were unable to pay the rent or clear the debt. Wherever the commercial crops were introduced, their benefits went to the middle-men

and land owners. The conditions of tenant-cultivators and agricultural labourers in prosperous agricultural zones, instead of showing any improvement, deteriorated. Thus the British rulers in India not only disturbed the age-old self-sufficient village economy but also created land and property relations which proved to be disadvantageous to the rural poor. Another set-back to the village economy was the destruction of the artisan class by colonisers by turning India into a dumping ground for the finished products manufactured in their home land.

Thus in due course of functioning of British land policy the rural society of India emerged to be highly stratified. It led to the concentration of land in the hands of a few while many of the poor peasants lost their land. Many of these poor peasants who lost lands, because of poverty etc. were resettled on these lands as sharecroppers. And those who were not resettled joined the army of agricultural labourers. Many of the displaced artisans and craftsmen also joined the army of agricultural labourers. In this period the volume of rural labourers increased enormously.

Thus prior to Independence, Indian agriculture had a large class of poor peasants and landless labourers, the two groups together forming the majority within the agricultural sector. With the deterioration of the rural economy the survival condition of these groups of people became highly precarious. They were exploited by the landowners. Indeed they were under utter insecurity and misery.

**Check Your Progress 1**

- 1) Who were the serving castes in traditional India? Write a note on their socio-economic positions in about six lines.

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- 2) Tick mark the correct answer.

In the British period the colonisers introduced

- a) community ownership on land
- b) only subsistence crop cultivation
- c) private ownership in land
- d) none of the above.

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**10.3 NEW MEASURES AND RURAL LABOUR IN POST-INDEPENDENCE PERIOD**

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In this section we shall be discussing the major facets of land reform and agricultural modernisation, that have enduring impact on rural labour in India. Let us begin with land reform.

### 10.3.1 Land Reforms

When the country became independent, it was faced with the major task of removing inequality and exploitation in the agrarian socio-economic structure. The most exploited group—agricultural labourers and marginal farmers—had to be the main focus in such efforts. The land, being central to village economy, needed redistribution. In the First Five Year Plan itself the land reform policy was concretised at government level. Hence the main objectives of the land reform have been: (a) abolition of intermediaries, (b) imposition of ceiling restrictions on landholding, (c) distribution of surplus land, (d) tenancy reforms and (e) increase in agricultural production. As the first and major step, the various state governments passed acts to abolish zamindari system and redistribute surplus land to the tenants and poor peasants. Most of these acts were passed in the early 1950s. As a result of these measures the governments assumed direct responsibility for revenue administration. However, these measures met with several set-backs. The zamindari interests used every means at their disposal to prevent, delay or dilute the legislation. In some parts of the country, they managed to acquire ownership rights on vast extent of land by claiming them to be their personal estates. Large number of tenants were evicted in the process. Overall, the abolition of zamindari did not make significant impact to improve the position of share croppers and labourers. Many of the tenants, however, get ownership rights of the lands. In view of the above the land reform policies were radicalised again in early 1970s. Some of the states enacted various progressive laws. Mobilisation of rural poor was also initiated in various parts of the country for the implementation of these laws. You may see Unit 24 of ESO-04 for further details.

As regards the protection of tenant from forceful eviction by the landlord and also the transfer of ownership of land into the hands of tiller at reasonable terms the outcome was quite disappointing. In many cases, the reform resulted in forceful eviction of tenants by their landlords. This happened mainly because the landlords exercised economic and political power over their tenants. In areas where the zamindari system existed revenue collection rights were already in the hands of government. The cultivators automatically became the owners of land.

#### Box 1

##### Tenancy Reforms

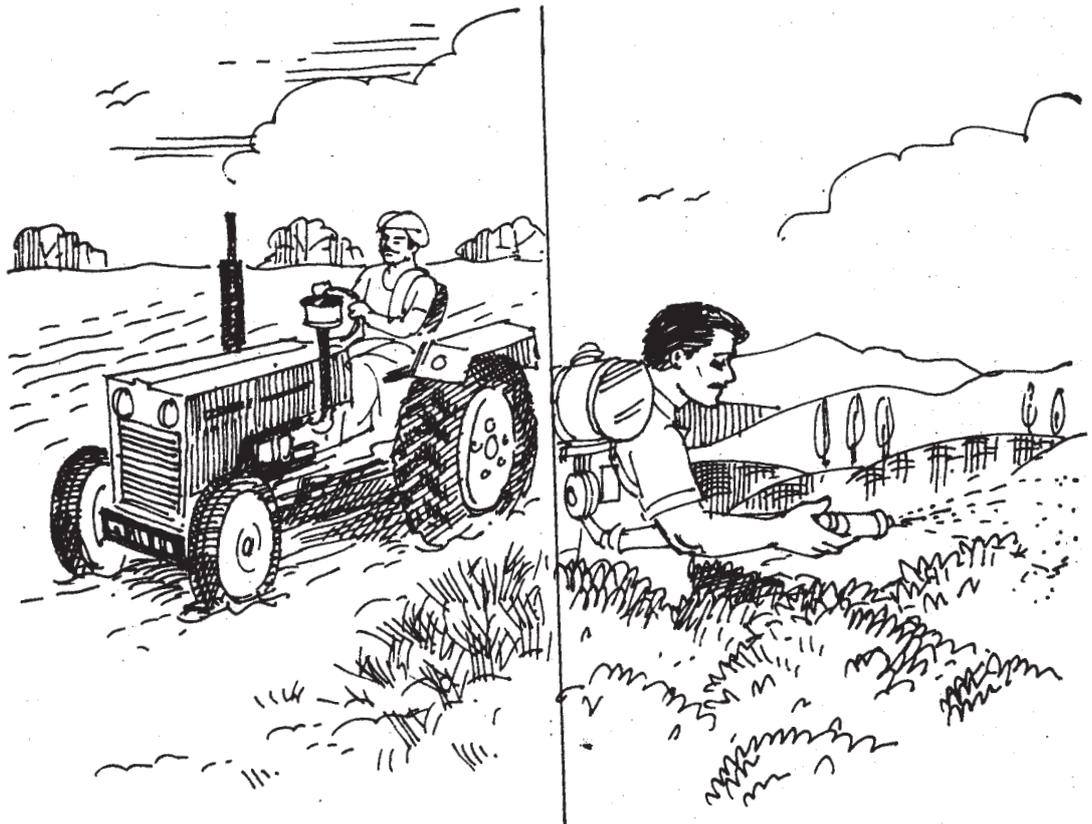
It is an inseparable part of the land reform programme. You are aware that the old agrarian social structure was not very conducive to modernisation of agriculture and needed to be replaced by a more egalitarian social structure. The land reform programme has, therefore, been designed to break the old feudal socio-economic structure by abolishing the intermediary system of land tenure, distributing surplus vested lands among the rural poor and protecting the interests of the tenants. Under the tenancy reforms legislative provisions have been made in most states providing ownership rights and security of tenure to the tenants or sub-tenants or to the sharecroppers. For example, under Operation Barga (a tenancy reform programme) in West Bengal arrangements are made to give sharecroppers permanent tenurial security, 75% of the produced crops as their share, institutional facilities required to cultivate the land etc.

### 10.3.2 Agricultural Modernisation

Other than the agrarian reforms there were several factors which influenced

the rural society in the last four decades. These could be listed under two categories—institutional efforts and general changes. Under the first category, Indian government which committed itself to a democratic system, introduced several schemes for the welfare of rural poor. Particularly the landless labourers and non-farm workers. Government also invested heavily on the modernisation of agriculture. Several irrigation schemes were taken up and improved seed and technology were introduced.

The thrust of the government to change village economy was based on a technological perspective which was best reflected in the Green Revolution experiment in Indian Agriculture. India adopted modernisation of agriculture by improving technology and other inputs. The Punjab-Haryana Western U.P. experience of dramatic growth in agricultural production and rural incomes is often cited as evidence of the validity of the perspective. Such experiments have shown very encouraging results in these states and part of Andhra. The country today is in a position to produce more than 170 million tons of foodgrains.



#### Agricultural Modernisation

However, some experts are skeptical about this ‘technological thrust’ of agricultural growth. For instance, about the Punjab-Haryana success story, G. Parthasarthy, an agricultural economist, observes: “It fails to note the unique circumstances particularly the substantial public investments in irrigation in Punjab agriculture, the relatively large size of holdings and relatively low demographic pressures, etc. Technology spreads in high resource areas and on richer farms by sucking the resource of the poor areas and of the poor people.”

It is also worthnoting that the higher productivity and more income to big

landlords do not necessarily bring better rewards to the farm labourers whose share in the increase is negligible as compared to the gains of landlords. High-technology cultivation reduces the intensity of labour absorption. Equally relevant is the fact that for attaining some kind of equity in the distribution of productive resources Indian government needs to allocate more and more funds for the backward regions where the condition of marginal farmers and farm labourers is pathetic. Overall, the present trends of development in agriculture shows a highly unequal distribution of resources with its benefits mainly going to some regions only. The rural or are the critical manifestation of this growing imbalance. Several experts have brought out the fact that in the early years of agricultural growth, in few prosperous zones like Punjab, Haryana and Western Uttar Pradesh, wages in real terms had declined over a period of time. Though the situation shows a positive change in the eighties when the real wages increased steadily, the quantum of increase particularly in backward agricultural zones is less than satisfactory.

Equally disturbing is the fact that due to more and more privatisation of land, the common property resources (bachat land, grazing grounds, forest land, etc.)—which mainly used to benefit the poor rural families—have been diminishing fast. This has deprived them of free access to fuel and grazing grounds for their cattle. (for further information see Unit 24 and 25 of ESO-04.)

**Check Your Progress 2**

- 1) What are the major objectives of the land reform laws in India. Answer in about five lines.

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- 2) Write a note on the impact of agricultural modernisation on the rural labour in India in about five lines.

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**10.4 PROBLEMS OF NON-AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS AND ARTISANS**

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The non-agricultural labourers and artisans constitute an important segment of rural labour force since ages. However, their socio-economic position has not been uniform in nature over a period of time. Hence, let us know their position in the pre-independent and post-independent India.

### 10.4.1 Pre-Independence Period

The artisans formed the base of village and urban economy in India during the pre-colonial and early-colonial periods. All members of an artisan family were usually involved in production with specific division of labour for males, females and children. Numerous lower caste families have traditionally been engaging in various crafts and agriculture-related non-farm activities. The main among them were those of carpenter, blacksmith, potter, weaver, leather worker and basket maker. In addition to these, non-farm labourers used to perform jobs requiring special skills spread in various regions of the country—depending on the availability of particular raw materials or nature of cultivation. All these skills and activities were limited to the extent of either manufacturing articles to meet the local requirements or to provide technical services to the local population. The artisans' products usually remained out of the modern market economy—confining to the poor village consumers. Most of them worked at subsistence level of economy and usually did subsidiary jobs to supplement their earnings. Indeed the jajmani system formed the backbone of the rural society of that period. It gave them substantial socio-economic security in daily life.

In spite of many odds, village artisans and craftsmen enjoyed a reasonably good social status in the society. However, the socio-economic condition of these artisans and craftsmen deteriorated sharply with the introduction of British rule in India. Because of the import-oriented British Policy these artisans and craftsmen lost their traditional market. Many of them also lost these traditional avenues of employment. This displaced labour force was in search of alternative employment. They were extremely insecure in the rural economy. Many of them joined either the army of the agricultural labourers or migrated to the urban areas for the mainstay of their livelihood. Only those who remained in their old occupation tasted the pains of insecurity, exploitation and alienation in the society.

### 10.4.2 Post-Independence Period

The post-Independence period changed the situation further. The growth of urbanisation as a manifestation of the linkages between society and modern technology resulted in the weakening of traditional bonds of society. Equally significant was the creation of new opportunities in non-farm occupations. Many of the traditional artisans and craftsmen either migrated to urban areas for improving their incomes, or shifted from their traditional occupations to non-farm employment. This further weakened the traditional 'jajmani' system and caste linkages of occupations.

Due to the sharp increase in rural population, it is considered necessary to relieve agriculture from the pressure of excess labour. This would check decline in the land man ratios and thereby increase labour productivity in agriculture. It is also being realised that urban areas cannot absorb the growing migratory rural labour force due to the ever-growing number of job-seekers in both formal and informal sectors. Therefore, it becomes essential to promote non-agricultural employment in rural areas. Several studies show a slow but steady increase in the proportion of non-farm labourers in the total rural workforce.

**Table: Work Participation in India by Rural and Urban areas**

**Labour : Rural**

State Code	India/State /Union Territory*	Total	Persons	Total Workers (Main +Marginal)	Category of workers (Main +Marginal) with percentage to Total Workers			
		Rural	Males		Cultivators	Agricultural Labourers	Workers in Household Industry	Other Workers
		Urban	Females	Number	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
	INDIA	Total	Persons	402,512,190	31.7	26.7	4.1	375
			Males	275,463,736	31.3	20.8	3.0	44.9
			Females	127,048,454	32.5	39.4	6.4	21.7
		Rural	Persons	310,655,339				
			Males	199,199,602				
			Females	111,455,737				
		Urban	Persons	91,856,851	3.2	4.7	5.1	
			Males	76,264,134	3.0	3.4	3.8	90.1
			Females	15,592,717	4.3	11.0	12.9	71.8

**Source:** Census of India 2001

Government has intimated a number of schemes through which the artisans and non-farm workers are trained in various trades or skills and are helped financially to improve their earnings. There are efforts to organise them under cooperatives so that they could be freed from the clutches of middlemen. Also, several research and development schemes have been implemented in order to raise their productivity and to make their products competitive in the market. For those non-farm labourers who are engaged in seasonal works, efforts are there to provide them gainful employment during the off-seasons. It is more and more felt that the integration of non-farm manufacturing activity with the farm activity can only create a viable economy absorbing the surplus man power in rural India. There is a need for taking up an appropriate combination of farming activities with animal husbandry, priggery, poultry, duckery and fish farming. Such an approach has taken deeper roots and is extensively practiced with substantive social and private profitability in China and in a number of South-East Asian countries.

**Activity 1**

You may have come across some artisans or craftsmen working in your neighbourhood. Collect information from them on the items produced and problems faced by them for the marketing of their products. Now based on your observation and discussion write a note in about two pages on the problems and the prospects of the artisans and craftsmen in your area. If possible, exchange your note with your colearners at the Study Centre.

## **10.5 RURAL UNREST AND LABOUR WELFARE MEASURES**

In this section we shall be discussing the important of rural unrest and welfare measures initiated by the government. Let us begin with an over view of the rural unrest.

### **10.5.1 Rural Unrest : An Overview**

As stated in the introductory remarks, traditionally village India remained a self-sufficient, closely maintained. Well-knit society. The prevalent hierarchy in socio-economic relations was primarily based on the caste system, with the dominant castes controlling power and acting as guardians of the serving castes. Such a static village, once in a while, experienced dissent from the peasants when it became almost impossible for them to survive against the odds such as inadequate crops and ruthless exploitation by kings, their middlemen and moneylenders. The British rule polarised the landowners against the landless groups on one hand and weakened the traditional power of caste panchayats on the other. The isolation of the peasantry from the ruling class was well manifested in repeated insurgencies by peasants. Ranjit Guha, a well known historian, has cited as many as 110 known instances of such uprisings between the period, 1783 to 1900.

In Unit 25 of Block 6, ESO-04 we talked about the important facets of rural revolt in India. In the pre-colonial period there had been numerous rural revolts against the tyranny of the rulers. You may be aware that in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries the Marathas of today's Maharashtra, the Jats and Rajputs of Rajasthan, Sikhs of Punjab revolted against the Mughal rule on the issues of rack renting and allied agricultural problems and religious persecutions. The latent discontent of the poor peasantry against the colonial rule were manifested through their participation in the revolt of 1857. In the independent movement the issues of the peasantry viz. the racks renting, indebtedness, growth of poverty, decline of rural industries etc. were the major concerns of the leaders. Thus the peasant movements in Champaran (Bihar), Kheda and Bardoli (Gujarat), Oudh and other places of U.P., Bihar, Chirla and Perala in Andhra and the formation of the All India Kisan Sabha became the integral parts of the Independence Movement. The discontents of the rural labour were also manifested in vehement out burst of the radical peasant movements viz., the Tebhaga Movement 1946-47, Telangana 1948-52 and in the Naxalite Movement 1967-1971. For details you may like to go through the above mentioned Unit.

In the post-Independence period, village India has no more remained a harmonic system. Various socio-economic and political changes have created conflict of interests within the village community. Traditionally, the higher castes used

to receive obedience and marked difference from their tenants and agricultural labourers—mostly the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes—but are now finding them to be ‘disobedient’ and ‘defiant’. Due to a high proportion of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribe among landless labourers, a conflict between landowners and labourers can easily turn itself into an inter-caste conflict. Such conflicts many times turn violent resulting in inhuman torture particular of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes and their families. Mass murders, rapes, burning of houses and eviction of tenants from land, are the outcome of such growing intolerance among higher castes towards the serving castes.

Efforts to organise farm and non-farm labourers by voluntary social groups or political parties have resulted in their intimidation by the employers. Wherever the labourers have become conscious of their rights and try to assert themselves against injustice and exploitation, the feudal elements try to suppress this new awakening among them with increased brutality. Social oppression in its worst form is rampant in almost all parts of the country. The Scheduled Caste workers are discriminated in getting employment, their women are criminally assaulted, their holdings are destroyed and properties looted. The distressing aspect is that such oppression is often aided and abetted by public officials who are usually linked with the rural rich. This way the law sides with the powerful. Looking into the causes of such state of affairs, A.R. Desai observes..... “The genetic causes of numerous struggles in rural areas are the existing land relations whereby a handful of landlords own a sizeable land and the left out majority—the sharecroppers or labourers—live below the poverty line. Wherever there are mobilisations, the conflict is bound to occur. Many times, as the ownership of the land is on caste lines, such initiative take the shape of caste struggles”.

### 10.5.2 Status of Labour Laws

Though officially rural labourers are covered under the Minimum Wage Act of 1948, it by and large remains on paper. One often sees reports in newspapers about rural workers agitating to get the minimum wages. As compared to industrial workers, only a few labour laws exist for agricultural labourers and those also supply to a few sections of them. Leaving aside a few activities like tea plantations which have a history of the organised labourers, in majority of the categories the affected workers never get benefits under these Acts: In reality, a majority of them are not even aware of such legal measures which protect their interests. The main factors which make it difficult to organise the workers are:

- the large number of employers (land holders), dispersal of workers over a large geographical region,
- uncertainty of employment (seasonal in nature),
- rapid growth of rural population resulting in surplus man power,
- family labour substituting for the hired labour, and overall low productivity in agriculture.

There are other factors too which contribute towards their backwardness. The continuance of the caste system results in a form of patron client relationship. Here the worker feels obligated to his master who usually belongs to a higher caste. This prevents the worker from taking any independent decisions. The

various forms of social backwardness is further enforced by widespread illiteracy. This keeps the agricultural labourer backward and isolated. All these ultimately result in their loss of self confidence. They are therefore unable to organise themselves against the exploitative relationship perpetuated by their masters. However, in spite of all these limitations rural labourers of India are organised under the auspices of various peasant organisation and political parties in various parts of the country. Their organisational ability and strength have been manifested during organised mass mobilisations and peasant movements. These mobilisations are usually directed against the landlords, businessmen and the administrative apparatus of the state.

### 10.5.3 Welfare Programme for the Rural Poor

We have discussed so far the problems faced by the weaker sections in rural society. These are mainly a result of uneven and unbalanced development in the rural economy. Therefore in order to protect the rural labourers and marginal farmers the government launched several anti-poverty programmes. Some of these programmes, such as the NREP, JRY and TRYSM, have been discussed in Unit 8. There are other schemes such as the Integrated Rural Development Programmes (IRDP) which operated at the level of the development block. This programme identified the weaker families in the villages and provides them loans and subsidies for obtaining inputs which would help improve production or create self-employment. The selected families are provided seeds, fertilisers, milch or draught cattle, pigs, looms etc. according to their needs. A major part of the cost of procuring these inputs are covered by government subsidies and the rest is through bank loans at low interest rates.

Besides the IRDP, there is the Indira Avas Yojana which provides homes and house-sites for the rural poor. The Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) seeks to improve the mental physical growth of the children. It provides for crèches, **balwadis**, **anganwadis** nutrition programmes and mother and child care programmes.

These programmes are initiated at the national level but operate through the various state governments. Some more programmes are run by some state Rajasthan started the **antyodaya** programme in 1978 through which five of the poorest families in every village are provided special assistance to improve their economic conditions. This state and some others have the Drought Prone Areas Programme for providing development activities to overcome draught and the Desert Development Programme. West Bengal introduced the Food-for-Work Scheme in 1977 where the rural unemployed were provided work and were paid partly in food grains and partly in cash. Maharashtra during the same time started the Employment Guarantee Scheme in rural areas which is similar to the NREP. The objective of all these development schemes is to provide some form of employment or inputs to the rural poor so that they are not left to the mercies of the exploiting sections.

Several official and unofficial evaluations of these programs have been done. One major criticism is that a majority of them are independent of the agricultural activity—without direct linkage to agriculture and allied sectors. The beneficiaries of these programmes are not necessarily the most needy. This is mainly because of the malpractices and inefficiency of the implementing agencies. Programmes are devoid of creating a sustainable activity, and



Labour Welfare in Rural Area

therefore, are more relief-oriented than development-based. In some states like West Bengal and Kerala the results are more encouraging as compared to many other states. An observation on the IRDP, states that at the end of seven years of operation of the IRDP, only about 3 per cent of the poor households in rural India have been helped to rise above poverty, and that too only for a while. This programme attempts to provide assets to the rural poor which are labour intensive and it helps in marketing the products. In order to ensure continuity the recipient (the poor household) has to be assured of continuous institutional credit (i.e. from banks or other sources). If this is withdrawn then there is every chance of failure.

### Check Your Progress 3

1) Tick mark the correct answers.

With the introduction of British rule in India the economic conditions of the rural artisans and craftsmen

- improved enormously
  - declined sharply
  - remained unaffected
  - none of the above.
- 2) A rural development programme, started in 1978 through which five of the poorest families in every village are provided special assistance to improve their economic conditions, is known as
- Balwadis Programme

- b) Employment Guarantee Scheme
- c) Desert Development Programme
- d) Antyodaya Programme.

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## 10.6 CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL PROCESSES AND RURAL LABOURERS

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Other than the institutional efforts for raising life standards of agricultural labourers, several changes have been occurring in both rural and urban societies which have also influenced their life.

### 10.6.1 General Impact on Agricultural Labourers

Regions close to the command areas of agricultural growth have been experiencing exodus of manpower, which in turn, hikes the wages of farm labourers. Similar situation has emerged in regions which are in contact with industrial growth centres. Earlier studies on the consumption pattern of rural poor showed that over three-fourths of their income used to be spent on food items alone. Such a trend is on the decline and wherever wages of labourers show an improvement, they spend more on durable items like purchasing a bicycle or a transistor, or improving housing. There is also evidence of change in food habits in some regions—from the coarse grains to wheat and rice.

Though in the areas of health or education no appreciable change are witnessed, the fact cannot be denied that in prosperous agricultural zones, farm labourers show improvement in their health or education. Conditions of farm and non-farm labourers also show improvement in a state like Maharashtra which has a long history of socio-religious reforms, or a state like Kerala which has successfully implemented several welfare schemes for the poor. In contrast, in states like Bihar, Orissa and eastern Uttar Pradesh, the rural poor remain a victimized lot. Particularly the Harijan labourers become the main target of social oppression. The situation of tribal is equally appalling. Commercialisation and market integration of tribal areas coupled with the replacement of collective land tenure system by individual holdings has led to growing landlessness, loss of food security and diminishing access to forest produce. These developments are slowly dividing the traditionally egalitarian communities into class-based social groups.

Wherever there are mobilisations of the rural poor by voluntary organisation or political parties, a new consciousness has emerged among them against their age old exploitation and about their rights. This has earned them social pride and economic relief. It is also a fact that such organised groups have to face the wrath of rich landlords and dominant caste groups. Traditional caste system is also going through several changes which has affected the rural poor. Rigid caste discriminations against the lower castes are slowly losing their effect. Caste based occupations are no more a binding. Caste groups are taking shape of 'interest groups' in order to mobilise resources against other competing groups. Even political mobilisations are more and more on caste lines. This is bound to create caste tensions and intolerance.

Thus, several interrelated changes are occurring in rural (as well as urban) society which are bound to create impact on the lives of farm and non-farm labourers. Their outcome is again uneven without substantial gains to the deprived sections of rural population.

## 10.6.2 Impact on Female Labourers

Traditionally females have actively been participating in the farm activity. They look after the cattle, domestic work and even part of the farming activity. In paddy cultivation, for instance, operations like weeding, harvesting and post-harvest operations require active participation of females—whether labourers or working on their own farms. In a male dominant society like India, it is well expected that female share the main burden in the deprived agricultural families. They are also discriminated as farm labourers against their counterparts. A few case studies show evidence to this effect. According to the NSS data the average daily earnings (of females) are found to be lower than those of male labourers in all the states and in various age groups. Punjab and Haryana, where the overall earnings of male labourers are higher, have higher female earnings. However, there are gender differential in earnings. The reported differences in the daily earnings of male and female agricultural labourers are a clear indication of discrimination against the latter. Women also suffer from a higher instability in employment. It was found that more than 50 per cent of the male workers are cultivators, while more than 60 per cent of women workers are agricultural labourers in the rural sector.

For improving the work conditions of female labourers, experts suggest measures like training of women for unconventional jobs, provision of land rights, permanency in jobs and equal wage for equal work. To achieve this, the need is felt of educating women against their victimisation on all fronts of life. Several voluntary organisations which are working among the rural poor have their programmes for the upliftment of women. Recently action groups exclusively of women have emerged which are spearheading the cause of emancipating the women from exploitation in a male dominated society.

### Check Your Progress 5

Tick mark the correct boxes

- i) In the rural India caste based occupations are no more binding.  
 True  False
- ii) In rural India no political mobilisation takes place on caste line.  
 True  False
- iii) In prosperous agricultural zones farm labourers show improvement in their health and education.  
 True  False
- iv) In tribal areas commercialisation of agriculture and rapid spread of market forces have led to landlessness among the tribal people.  
 True  False

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## 10.7 LET US SUM UP

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This unit began with a brief discussion of the present status of agricultural and non-agricultural labourers in the country. The discussion was spread in six main sections which covered issues like condition so agricultural labourers in the Pre-Independence and Post-Independence period, role of agrarian reforms,

general changes influencing their lives, condition of female labourers, status of non-farm labourers and artisan, and scope for their improvement, peasant unrest during pre and post-Independence periods, and need of appropriate policies and strategies for improving socio-economic status of farm and non-farm labourers. All these put together should give us a general profile of their life conditions.

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## 10.8 KEY WORDS

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- Green Revolution** : It is also widely known as the new strategy for agricultural development. Under the influence of Western economies, India adopted the modernisation of agriculture by improving technology and other inputs. The Punjab, Haryana, Western U.P. experience of dramatic growth in the agricultural production is popularly known as the 'green revolution' in India.
- Jajmani System** : In traditional rural India, the producing castes were treated as 'jajman' by the serving castes or groups (like agricultural labourers, carpenters and washermen), who used to get payments for their services in cash or kind from the producing castes. Such a system of giving and taking of services in rural areas is known as 'jajmani system'.
- Ryotwari System** : Prior to the British rule in India, the collection of revenue by a king from his peasantry was practiced mainly under two systems—the 'Ryotwari' system and the 'Mahalbari' system. Under the 'Ryotwari' system, the king directly collected revenue from the peasantry by appointing revenue officials. In the British period Ryotwari system was operational only in some parts of the country.
- Tenancy Act** : The main purpose of introducing Tenancy Acts by the governments was to confer permanent, heritable and transferable rights on the actual tillers of the land.

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## 10.9 FURTHER READINGS

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## 10.10 ANSWER TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress 1

- 1) The landless low caste people formed the bulk of the serving castes in traditional India. Through the jajmani system they were tied up with the upper castes of the village which provided them minimum security of life. Indeed, they lived a life of want and misery. They remained a deprived section of the rural population.
- 2) c)

### Check Your Progress 2

- 1) The major objectives of land reform in India are as follows : (a) abolition of intermediaries, (b) imposition of ceiling restrictions on landholding, (c) distribution of surplus vested land, (d) tenancy reforms, and (e) increase in agricultural production.
- 2) The technological modernisation has helped tremendously to enhance agricultural production in India especially in the Punjab, Haryana, Western U.P., parts of A.P. etc. places. However, experts are of the opinion that technological modernisation has not helped the rural poor improve their economic lot. It has led to the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few, while the majority of the rural poor remained in altered insecurity and poverty.

### Check Your Progress 3

- 1) b)
- 2) d)

### Check Your Progress 4

- i) True
- ii) False
- iii) True
- iv) True