

PART I

1—THE SOCIOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

1.1 The need for a sociological perspective led to the setting up of this Study Group. It was pointed that almost every important aspect of rural labour—basic needs; economic and social security; organisations, unions and voluntary agencies; minimum wages; bonded labour; migrant labour; employment generation; anti-poverty programmes; indebtedness; land reforms; women and children; tribals and forests; technology and development strategy—was being studied by separate Study Groups. Further, sociological expertise was available with these groups. In spite of this, it was argued that a “sociological perception could be had only through a holistic study rather than picking threads from each study.” It was observed that “due to their poor socio-economic status the rural labourers, particularly those belonging to the weaker sections, were to face a large number of social constraints.”

1.2 At one level of abstraction, sociological analysis has to deal with social groups and collectivities. A social group is characterised at a given point in time, by a set of shared norms relating to membership recruitment and mode of articulation with reference to its own members and with the environment external to it (caste groups, trade unions, voluntary organisations, political parties etc.). Collectives, in comparison, can be considered as large and diffuse aggregations of individuals having some structural identity based on class, religion, language, age, race, gender or caste, etc. These do not have the organisational or normative coherence of social groups but provide important bases for their formation. Membership in a social group or collectivity can be through ascription (by considerations of birth) or can be non-ascriptive (by choice or achievement)

1.3 At another level of abstraction the ‘social’ is the relational. The nature and content of social relationships guiding the behaviour of individuals, groups and larger collectivities in a system of social interaction, the analysis of such relationships in the study of persistence and change, provide the very essence of sociological understanding. The social relationships between and within groups and collectivities, can be antagonistic or non-antagonistic.

1.4 At a third level of abstraction, systems of social interaction, be they social groups (of whatever size and complexity) or collectivities, are differentiated and/or stratified. Social differentiation does not involve stratification. That is, a society (say tribal egalitarian) may be differentiated in terms of age, sex and other roles, but need not be stratified in terms of subordinate-superordinate strata. Social stratification, in contrast, is the unequal layering of

the population of a given social system into different strata, be they on class or non-class criteria. Class therefore, is not an exclusively economic category, when viewed in social group, collectivity, and relational terms. In order to avoid semantic confusion we may note that in the parlance of the political economist social differentiation is class differentiation, and differentiation is stratification.

1.5 In what senses do ‘constraints’ operate on rural labour? Assuming that there are no constraints on rural labour, it would be ‘free’ to choose its employers and vice versa. Wages would be determined by the labour market. Employment, under-employment and unemployment would become a function of the supply-demand nexus of rural labour. It follows, when labour becomes ‘constrained’ it is ‘not free’ to exercise this choice. It is unable to operate freely in the employment and wage market. Constraints can be both class and non-class (ethnic and gender).

1.6 Rural labour, by definition, is a class category. It includes both agricultural and non-agricultural labour. Necessarily it is subject to class constraints of exploitation. The economically weak with little or no bargaining power is destined to suffer all kinds of deprivations. The asymmetrical relations of production are structured on exploitation, which in turn, is reflected in the unequal access of groups and individuals to the goods and services available in the market. The nature of class constraints on rural labour will vary with the variations in the systems of production and exploitation. Thus, the nature of class constraints in a backward feudalistic economy and society is likely to be different from those in areas of capitalistic penetrations in agriculture. It will be appropriate to view exploitation as the basis of class stratification in society.

1.7 The circumstances in which rural labour is situated is not limited to his class position. It also finds itself constrained by social discrimination. The asymmetrical relations of discrimination are structured around the ascriptive solidarity defined by the criterion of birth. These institutionalised inequalities are accretions through the milenia. The social composition of rural labour is predominantly constituted of scheduled castes and tribes, to a lesser degree of backward castes, and to a much lesser degree of upper castes. Among these, women and children provide a substantial labour force. The institutionalised structure of discrimination has been so pervasive and for such a long time, that it has affected the socially backward groups in almost every aspect of their lives, resulting in severe deprivations relating to

earning, shelter, food, clothing, education and so on, which constitute the basic ingredients of dignified human existence. It will be appropriate to view discrimination as the basis of non-class stratifications in society. These also are likely to vary with systems of production and exploitation. These asymmetrical relations of exploitation and discrimination are sought to be maintained by a structure of oppression (power), explicit or implicit, in which the relationship between the dominant and the dominated is sought to be institutionalised through custom, convention, tradition and the like.

1.8 However, these conditions have not remained static everywhere. Economic and political forces released since independence are producing social changes within the overall framework of our democratic institutions and processes. The changes taking place are far from even.

1.9 The 'social' variables that are relevant to this study have necessarily to be those which operate as constraints on rural labour. We have a priori two orders of such variables which have definite theoretical salience; (a) class (exploitation) and (b) ethnic or caste|tribe|(discrimination).

1.10 The class of rural labour is not a homogeneous category. Those who have to enter the labour market range from those who are entirely dependent on it to those who have to per force enter it for limited periods. Thus it is constituted of those who have only their labour to sell and those who own or control some assets or means of production (poor tenants, artisans and petty landowners). The latter enter the labour market to supplement their inadequate incomes. This assetted labour category is of strategic importance as it is likely to be composed of upward and downward mobile groups. In either situation of mobility it is likely to shed light on erosion or operation of social constraints at the level of class or non-class forces, as the case may be.

1.11 Rural labour is also not a homogeneous category in terms of its non-class social composition. It is socially (ethnically) differentiated by caste, tribe, religion, race, language, etc.

1.12 Heuristically, it can be stated that when class constraints solely restrict the freedom of rural labour in the market, the proposition takes the form: "If one is not free in the labour market, it is because he|she is poor and assetless no whether he|she belongs to a socially deprived group or not". When someone's access to the labour market gets restricted on account of membership to a social group which is low in the social hierarchy, irrespective of his|her asset position as rural labour, the proposition takes the form: "If one is not free in the labour market, it is because he|she belongs to a socially deprived group (harijan|tribal|....), no matter if he|she possesses some assets or not." These two positions, provide us with a heuristic model in which, in the event that social constraints are operative in the labour market, these may range from the purely class to the purely non-class. Thus the preponderant empirical situations are likely to lie intermediate bet-

ween the polarities. It would then become important to study the patterns of inter-correlations between the two. Are there any 'social selections' taking place among the rural labour in their 'emancipation' from, or 'continued subjection' to, constraints?

1.13 The different configurations that social constraints acquire are likely to vary according to the material conditions related to forces of production and productivity. The pertinent question that can be posed here is: Do social constraints on rural labour differ in regions where Green Revolution has taken place, from regions in which it has not?

1.14 While social constraints have been largely viewed in class and non-class terms, as exploitation and social discrimination respectively, restricting freedom of choice of employment within the labour market, this is not to say that social constraints are confined to these parameters. In fact, there can be other kinds of 'social' constraints. Further, the restriction of freedom within the labour market can be extended to freedom from the labour market; social constraints on rural labour can be extended to social constraints of rural labour, in which rural labour continues to encounter social discriminations even if it has become free within the labour market or free of the labour market.

1.15 Rural labour, is more often than not, diffuse and fragmented. Unlike organised industrial labour, it is severely restricted in its access to, and exercise of power. In the traditional agrarian system, it was kept totally outside the power structure. It is important to know how rural labour is being affected by the process of change, development and modernization in terms of its location in the structure of power. To what extent are the present political institutions—the panchayat, the legislature and the parliament really enfranchising them. Are they getting empowered through organisations such as political parties, peasant associations, rural labour association, participatory voluntary organisations, and so on?

1.16 In order to combat social constraints, the state has intervened with a policy of positive discrimination in both class and non-class terms. Thus, we have special programmes of economic assistance and legal enactments to help the socially deprived weaker sections to extricate themselves from the clutches of exploitation and social discrimination. In class terms, target group oriented poverty alleviation programmes are in operation for the poorer sections. It is necessary to study the concrete consequence of such state interventions for rural labour.

1.17 An important aspect of persistence and change in the conditions of rural labour is the non-dissemination or dissemination of information relating to state interventionist policies and programmes. A direct function of information is the spread of awareness and consciousness regarding the rights and protections of the poorer and weaker sections, 'guaranteed' by the state. Further, general free flow of information leads to a level of social interaction which goes on assessing the changes taking place in other

parts of the state, country or the world. Such a level of communication helps in preparing conditions conducive to change.

1.18 The weak political status of rural labour gives scope for the threat or exercise of physical coercion by the more privileged employer classes. The coercive apparatus of the state, more often than not, defends the interests of the exploiting classes and perpetrates inhuman atrocities on the poorer and weaker sections. For no other class are the problems of human and fundamental rights so central to their existence as those of the rural poor.

1.19 The structure of exploitation, discrimination and oppression within which rural labour is situated generate their own contradictions which can lead to a variety of agrarian and other mobilisations and conflicts. Such conflicts are of crucial significance where they include issues relating to populations engaged in rural labour. Over manifestations of agrarian conflict are the surest symptoms of the system's propensity for change. Such situations provide arenas within which opposing interests surface and hence are clearly delineable. Methodologically, they provide the dynamic contexts within which the conditions of rural labour and social constraints affecting them can be efficiently studied.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 For the purpose of the survey rural labour has been defined as: "any person (male, female or child) who has to engage in labour, agricultural and/or non-agricultural, in exchange of wages in cash and/or kind, or otherwise made to supply labour for less than market wage or for no wage at all, for a minimum period of one month during the last one year, will be considered as a rural labour household".

On this basis, occupational categories such as tenants leasing-in-land, self-employed artisans and other workers, petty landowners and shopkeepers, etc. who are compelled to or not, to engage in rural labour for a minimum period of one month in the year, are rural labourers.

2.2 The study has been conducted at two levels: (a) A pilot survey was completed covering the districts of Ranchi and Palamau in Bihar, Varanasi and Meerut in U.P., and Karnal and Panipat in Haryana. (b) A large scale survey was conducted for the districts of the Ranchi, Palamau, Karnal and Panipat on the basis of a comprehensive instrument constructed on our experience from the pilot survey.

2.3 During the pilot survey, data were collected from nearly 170 respondents including mostly labourers, a few landowners and 2 factory owners, in individual and group situations. They were from 27 villages. The interviews were held either in the villages (with the locals), or away from the villages (with migrants). Villages were selected (the ones which were visited) in consultation with officials of the State Labour Departments, colleagues in the academic profession, political workers, workers in voluntary organizations and so on. Basically the following criteria for selection were emphasised:

- (a) areas with sufficient labour concentration,
- (b) areas where varieties of labour types could be identified,
- (c) areas proximate as well as at a distance from urban centres.

2.4 A programme of holding the optimum number of interviews within a very short duration, such as our, compelled by the constraints of project time, necessarily was faced with certain insurmountable difficulties. There was no spare time for rapport creation with respondents. In most rural situations where rural labour is under social constraints, the arrival of unknown urban faces enquiring into their conditions of work and quality of life immediately become suspected in the eyes of both the employer and labourer. To circumvent this difficulty, in many places, help and cooperation from labour departments, political and voluntary workers, and from friends in the academia were solicited. This meant getting introduced to respondents via such local help.

2.5 Although the well intended and extremely valuable cooperation from such sources, for which we feel extremely grateful and obliged, yielded a lot of information, to which access would have otherwise been difficult, the interviews occasionally got undirected and the flow of information tended to become selective retrievals of our guest interventions. In general, the dual problem of hesitating to initiate fieldwork in relatively unfamiliar terrain without some local administrative and/or academic assistance, had to be faced.

2.6 Our major thrust in the pilot survey was to concentrate on the dimensions of social constraints. In what forms do social constraints operate? At what levels do they operate? With what intensities do they operate? Were they always felt or experienced by the rural labour? These have been some of the questions to which we have tried to address ourselves during the pilot work. We deliberately did not spend time on mechanically retrievable objective data at the household and other levels amenable to quantitative analysis.

2.7 Our intention was to look for differences between the feudalistic and tribal belts of Bihar at one end, with the regions where capitalist penetration has been strong, at the other. We have traced migrant rural labour from one part of our field to the other.

2.8 A large scale sample survey that followed was designed on the basis of a comprehensive instrument constructed out of our experience from the pilot survey. The sample design includes 912 rural labour respondents from 24 villages, 12 blocks and 4 districts from the states of Bihar and Haryana. The decision to select the states of Bihar and Haryana was taken out of the theoretical concern for a comparative study of 'feudal', 'tribal' and 'capitalist' belts in agriculture in which rural labour is situated. Our Study Group which met subsequently, advised us to confine the survey to the districts covered in the pilot survey.

2.9 The sample design was as follows:

- (i) Except for Karnal and Panipat in Haryana, which are fully irrigated, the districts of Ranchi and Palamau in Bihar were stratified into 'irrigated' and 'unirrigated' blocks on the basis of these being above or below the district average. 2 blocks were selected randomly from each strata. Thus, in all, 4 blocks were selected from each of the Bihar districts of Ranchi and Palamau.
- (ii) The original district of Karnal consisting of 9 blocks is now divided into the districts of Karnal with 4 blocks and Panipat with 5 blocks. 2 blocks from each district were selected randomly.

- (iii) Again, from each block, 2 villages were selected randomly. Thus 4 villages were selected from irrigated and 4 from unirrigated blocks respectively.
- (iv) Care was taken such that the 4 sampled villages in the 2 irrigated blocks were not actually unirrigated. Similar caution was applied to see that from unirrigated blocks actually unirrigated villages were selected. This was done by the replacement method.
- (v) Within each village, 38 rural labour households were selected randomly. Additionally, 2 landowner households were selected purposively from amongst the employers of the sample rural labour households. The analysis of landowners is not included in this report.

2.10 Due to extreme paucity of time, the analysis of primary field data had to be considerably restricted. Some of the most crucial variables have been quantitatively analysed. Others have to await analysis in the future. As a consequence, not all the aspects covered in the theoretical-methodological discussion above, will find reflection in the quantitative analysis to follow.

2.11 It should be kept in mind that the districts of Ranchi, Palamau, and Karnal-Panipat (taken together), are of equal weight for purposes of structural and cultural comparisons. They broadly represent tribalistic, feudalistic and capitalistic contextually-specific features in the agrarian relations of production, in the respective areas.

PART II

3. EXPLORATIONS IN SOCIAL CONSTRAINTS ON RURAL LABOUR

3.1. Rural Labour has been classified as agricultural and non-agricultural. It has been observed that they are subject to class, ethnic, gender and other constraints. These may vary in nature and form as we move through tribal, feudal and capitalist predominant areas. We shall keep close to this framework to provide coherence to our analysis.

A variety of labour types have been identified during the course of our pilot survey. These are associated with broadly institutionalised labour arrangements. We will begin with those that are under maximum constraints and move towards the ones that are less affected.

Bonded Labour

3.2. Rural labourers under class and/or non-class constraints are in various degrees of 'attachment' to their employers. The most extreme form of attachment is that of 'bondedness'. This is characterised by a grip of the employer over his labour, from which the latter can hardly extricate himself in the normal market process. Invariably, the kernel of bondedness lies in an unrepayable debt by a captive labour which tends to extend over long periods, even spanning generations. We have come across empirical evidences of this kind of arrangement in the feudal belt of Palamau, in the capitalist belt of Haryana and in Varanasi. In Palamau and in Varanasi region the labour arrangement under which generational attachment had become a part of the feudal system, is known as *banihari*. The features of this system are :

- (1) allotment of homestead land to the landless cultivator family (*banihar*);
- (2) allotment of a small uneconomic parcel of land for family cultivation and consumption;
- (3) fixed unalterable wages in kind; lower than the market wage;
- (4) extension of loans for family and ceremonial consumption;
- (5) extension of free petty medical assistance in return he was expected to provide ;
- (6) assured supply of labour throughout the year;
- (7) assured family labour during planting, transplanting and harvesting;

- (8) assured supply of labour for other kinds of labour requirement for which he was entitled to market wages (like construction work, repair work, etc.)

3.3. The system fluctuated around this ideal type depending upon the despotic or benevolent nature of the patriarch in the feudal dispensation. It has given rise, up to the not-too-distant past, to extreme forms of bondage with entire families of the bonded drawing bare subsistence sustenance from a single bond master family for two to three generations. However, not all *banihars* have necessarily been *bandhua* (bonded). Both in Palamau and in Varanasi the vulnerability of this system has been exposed. In Palamau, movements, market and state (legal) intervention, are in various combinations weakening the *banihari* system in many areas. Interestingly, the debt-burden of those in the second generation of *banihars* that came to our notice was not abnormally high. It was around Rs. 1000 as reported by the *banihars*. In Varanasi, in an area in which 8 years back there was a wide prevalence of *banihari*, only one *banihar* without any debt attachment could be located. This area has been penetrated by the handloom saree industry, and is characterised by large scale labour mobility, both out-migrant and local.

3.4. The debt-bondage in the Karnal and Panipat regions appear to be serving a capitalist function. The features of this system as we have come to understand through our limited field experience is as follows :

- (1) the labour takes a heavy consumption loan (for marriage, etc.) of say Rs. 3000 to Rs. 5000;
- (2) the condition of the loan is that he has to serve as the 'annual farm servant' of the creditor-landlord;
- (3) the annual remuneration is fixed at Rs. 3000 or so, which is less than what he owes to the creditor-landlord, which is capital plus interest @ 2 per cent per month;
- (4) the labourer therefore, receives no wages in hand, they all stand pre-adjusted,
- (5) he is given meals or its equivalent in grains, daily;
- (6) he is given firewood and other tit-bits free of cost;

- (7) he may be given a buffalo calf to tend, with fodder provided by the master, which when it reaches the milching stage is sold at a high premium—the price which it fetches is supposed to be split 50-50;
- (8) whatever other requirements of the labourers family, like salt, pulses, sugar, etc. can be obtained from a specified shop on the master's account, which when cleared by him enters the 'khata' or debt account ledger of the labourer;
- (9) when the labourers family indulges in some ceremonial revelry, or has to play host to his kins, the expenses including drinks and other items enter the khata;
- (10) the labourer is provided with cloth, petty medical assistance, etc., but his wife's and family's requirements enter the khata;
- (11) everyday's absence entails entry of a day's wage in the khata;
- (12) if the labourer has to marry his son or daughter, loans upto Rs. 5000 are advanced, this too swells the figures in the khata;
- (13) at the end of the 'annual contract', he is left with a massive debt, which again compels him to enter into another annual contract, and so the vicious cycle threatens to become never-ending.

3.5. The labourer, in return, is usually at the tube-well pump house day and night. The major task is to irrigate and keep watch. He had to operate the pump. When water fills up in one plot he has to divert it to the next. There are specific timings for watering which have to be maintained. For this kind of job, casual labour is not suited. Nor are salaried servants available for such tedious round-the-clock tasks. This posting at the tube well is the most critical of all the other jobs, as in proper and timely irrigation lies the success of a crop. The grip of the master on the servant is therefore fiercely strong.

3.6. In Karnal-Panipat, two variants of such bondage were found. One was the classic long term generational bondage, in which one bond master and his kins, who were also landlords, between themselves, drew into bondage other members of an already bonded family. As the sons of the bonded father grew up, got married through fresh debt-bondage, they entered the ranks of their father, into the extended family of the master of their father. That is, one bond master, unable or unwilling to keep more than a specified number of labourers in bondage, reproduces new labourers for supply as bonded labourers through debt bondage for their needy capitalist-farmer kins. This case is associated with a wealthy non-cultivating, upper caste landlord extended family.

3.7. The other form was in the nature of serial bondage. The labourer enters into debt-bondage. He is unable to clear his debt. Another landlord requires a tube well posting. He approaches the bond-

ed labourer. Offers him slightly better terms. The bonded labourer agrees to work for him. The new bond master clears his debts with the old bond master and transfers it to his account. The labourer resumes his bonded existence in a new form. Such parallel mobility in bondage was found to be quite prevalent in the Panipat areas, amongst Sikh employers. There is some kind of a market in trading of bonded labour, as bonded labourers prefer to move from one bond master to another with marginally better wages in conditions of work, in an effort to reduce the debt gap. In Panipat also, as in Karnal, we found a similar pattern of successive induction of male adult members of the family into bondedness. The conditions of work for the bonded labourer in Panipat is similar to those in Karnal.

3.8. Whereas in Palamau and Varanasi the stranglehold of bondmasters are becoming weaker, in the areas of capitalist development in agriculture, this seems to be extremely strong and oppressive. The debt amounts in these areas are also much higher in comparison to those in Palamau. The advance of debts by the bondmasters, which are heavy for the bonded have become part of the productive investment in capitalist agriculture. From our case studies we found the debt accumulation per bonded labour in this region is plus-minus Rs. 10,000. The bonded labour has become an extension of the pump set. It is unfortunate that the Haryana Government has declared the State as free of any bonded labour. This inhibits the administration, from identifying any bonded labour. The bondmasters can therefore take cover under this political position and refuse to acknowledge that these labourers are bonded.

3.9. The bonded labour phenomenon in agriculture is a classic convergence of class constraints and constraints of scheduled caste landless cultivators.

Annual Farm Servant :

3.10. The annual farm servant (A.F.S.) situation in the Meerut region seems to be quite contrary to the Karnal-Panipat experience just discussed. The AFS in Meerut has some bargaining power. There are two types of labour arrangements associated with the AFS that came to our notice. In one :

- (1) he is a migrant, and hence, whole time resident in the employer's house;
- (2) he has to be given an advance of Rs. 2000—Rs 4000 as part of the agreement;
- (3) salary around Rs. 400 per month;
- (4) 2 sets of dhoti and kurta;
- (5) winter uniform if he has served 2/3 years consecutively;
- (6) annual leave for 15 days to visit his home with fares provided;
- (7) gets all his meals and tiffins, the same as the family.

In the other :

- (1) he is a local and hence, does not reside in the employer's house;
- (2) he also has to be given a similar advance;
- (3) his wages are Rs. 500 to Rs. 600 per month;
- (4) he is entitled to 12 days leave in a year;
- (5) he is allotted land for his family on condition that they grow vegetables and that he is not to do cultivation work himself;
- (6) the land allotment is made on the basis of family size and labour productivity of the family, ranging between 1-2 acres;
- (7) the cropshare is on the basis of costshare which is as follows :
 - (a) cost of seed borne wholly by the employer;
 - (b) if the cost of manure and pesticide is borne $\frac{1}{2}$ or $\frac{1}{3}$, or $\frac{1}{4}$ or $\frac{1}{5}$ by the allottee then his crop share will be $\frac{1}{2}$ or $\frac{1}{3}$ or $\frac{1}{4}$ or $\frac{1}{5}$ as the case may be.

3.11 The migrant AFS is appointed with great caution, with proper certification by some confident of the employer who can vouch for his adherence to the contract. For there are instances when AFSs have vanished after working for a short duration, with the substantial advance as their gain. But the advantage of a migrant, resident AFS is that one can get a lot more work out of him than a local AFS who is always distracted by his family obligations. In general, an AFS does ploughing, planting, irrigation, fodder chopping and cattle feeding. Occasionally, the resident AFS may extend help for domestic work if he has the time and if needed.

3.12 The local AFS is paid more as he is given only breakfast. The extra incentive he is given of vegetable crop sharing by the family is of additional advantage to the employer. Vegetable cultivation is highly labour intensive, highly risk prone and very profitable. So the landowner himself does not engage in it. The AFS to whom the parcel of land is leased-out is made to share this risk. He makes sure that the family size of the AFS is large enough to do this highly labour intensive cultivation. This keeps the AFS 'attached' to the employer, without any element of bondage necessarily entering into their relationship.

3.13 It is interesting that while Karnal, Panipat and Meerut are all regions of intensive modern agriculture with capitalist penetration, the agricultural labour from amongst the AFS in Karnal and Panipat has been caught up in a vicious circle of bondage, whilst in Meerut they seem to be free, mobile and in a position of bargaining with the employer. How far these particular instances are indicative of general trends in these regions have to await detailed study. One reason for the difference in these two areas, definitely seems to be on account of the greater occupational differentiation and choice available to the rural labour in Meerut. Sugarcane industry, handloom,

and a variety of non-agricultural industries, have made the region commercially vibrant. We haven't had enough cases of AFS in Ranchi, Palamau, Varanasi to be able to comment.

Sharewage Labour And Share Cropping

3.14 There is this widespread phenomena of land being given to a cultivator family, which is expected to provide all the labour, whilst the landowner bears all the expenses. The crop sharing then ranges from $\frac{1}{2}$ of the produce to $\frac{1}{8}$ th. We have argued that where all cost is borne by the landowner, all labour is provided by the cultivator, and the crop is shared equally, this can be interpreted as equal participation by capital and labour with equal distribution of production between them. Hence this is an ideal-typical share-cropping arrangement. In all other situations, where the cultivator family provides all the labour, the landowner provides all the cost of cultivation, and the share of the cultivator is less than half of the crop, such a share should be considered as wages for the labour contributed by the family. This is a sharewage system in which the cultivator is a sharewager. There are however share cropping lease tenancies with various cost and crop sharing arrangements into which we have not entered.

3.15 It has been observed that where the sharewage system gave a very low share to the sharewager, the system got discontinued as soon as better options became available. For example, Jika Saihi system in Meerut district which gave $\frac{1}{8}$ th share to the sharewager, got discontinued as all of them found work in the brick kilns more remunerative and preferable. Interestingly the sharewagers tend to be from among scheduled castes, whilst this is less the case in share cropping arrangements. The lands under sharewagers have now been given in share cropping to Acharaj Brahmins (cremation priests) on a 50 per cent cost and crop sharing.

Jajmani Labour :

3.16 The traditional customary system of servicing and artisan caste households (kamins), providing services and goods to fix client households (jajmans), in the villages in exchange of stipulated quantities of grains and other payments, is still a pervasive phenomenon. We got details on the system from a village close to Meerut town, and from an interior village in Ranchi district. In the Meerut village, the Nai (barber), Lohar (blacksmith), Barhai (carpenter), Dhobi (washerman) and the Bhangi (scavenger), all had a number fixed traditional client households whom they served throughout the year from generation to generation with their services, in return for half yearly payments in grain ranging from 20—40 kgs. of maize or wheat. Besides they performed ritual or other special roles, during life cycle ceremonies, which got them handsome rewards during such occasions. Interestingly, the lowest in the caste hierarchy, the Bhangi, was paid the highest. Besides the family exercised its inalienable customary right of hereditary permanency more strongly than the others.

3.17 Not all the members of the servicing castes had their jajmans in the village, as this was beyond the demographic scope of the servicing and serviced caste households in the village. Nor was it that the members of the servicing castes who had their traditional jajmans, served only them for their exclusive earning. They also earned in the wage and professional market. Paradoxically, the relationship appears like a kind of 'reverse attachment'. The jajman was 'not free' to employ the services of any other member of the servicing caste, if he was already being served by one (kamin). Normally it was the kamin who could transfer his right to serve his jajman to another kamin.

3.18 The servicing caste members who have their jajmans to serve, work out adaptations with the market where they can sell their skills or services. Thus a Nai would start an open-air hair cutting saloon under a tree in which he would entertain clients at market rate. But whenever any member of his jajman families came for hair dressing or shaving he would serve him without charging.

Casual And Free Labour :

3.19 Casual labour as free labour is a universal phenomenon. The wages, the forms in which they are paid, the conditions and types of work associated with wages and the incidence of casual labour vary. The States have fixed minimum wages for agricultural and non-agricultural work. Further, casual labour is not the only form of free labour.

3.20 Without a systematic survey it is not possible to report on wage rates that prevail in districts. But certain broad comments can be tentatively offered through our casual observations. (1) In the feudalistic areas of Palamau, daily wages paid in kind well below the minimum wages, is a widespread phenomenon. (2) Where demand for casual labour through non-agricultural industrial work comes up, feudal 'attachments' become weak or are eliminated. We found evidence of 72 released bonded labourers not relapsing into bondedness, because of their absorption into magnetite quarry labour in Palamau. (3) In the tribal predominated agrarian structure of Ranchi with low incidence of landlessness, market wages co-exist with non-market wages fixed through community legitimation. (4) The penetration of non-agricultural rural industries, generating non-agricultural labour, like sari, carpet, brick kilns, and non-agricultural occupations generated through construction, transport, services, etc. make for the weakening of feudalistic relations of production in agriculture which tend to keep rural labour 'tied' to landowners in non-market conditions of earnings. (5) The mere penetration of capitalist development in agriculture is no insurance against bondedness or guarantee of universalisation of free labour, as we have seen in the case of Harvana. (6) While non-agricultural occupations may help 'detachment' from feudal landlordism, it may lead to new forms of 'attachment'.

Exchange Labour And Community Fixation Of Wages :

3.21 Exchange labour in agriculture involves the voluntary participation of a group of self-cultivating usually petty landowners (marginal peasants), who reciprocally contribute labour, without wages, for completing some particular labour intensive agricultural operation in each others lands, to avoid employing expensive wage labour from the market. This practice is highly institutionalised amongst the tribal communities of Ranchi district and has been adopted by the non-tribal population in Ranchi. Exchange labour in a variety of forms is to be found in other parts of the country.

3.22 Community fixation of wages is another economic institution specific to the tribal population of Ranchi district. It involves the entire tribal congregation of a village or a group of villages, on a ritualistic occasion preceding the onset of the paddy season, to fix agricultural wages for its own male and female members for the following year. The wages are fixed keeping in view the minimum needs of the poorer among them who would be wage earning, the paying capacity for labour of the poorer landowners, the price of rice etc. The wages fixed on such an occasion is always a little below the market wage rate. In one sense, this practice is an extension of the institution of exchange labour, in so far as it attempts to create a favourable non-market situation for its members. In another sense it differs, in as much as exchange labour is a totally voluntary arrangement, whilst the community fixation of labour is a collective imposition by the community. Further, while exchange labour also in places, extends non-tribal, community fixation of wages seems to apply exclusively to the tribal population. In this sense, the latter arrangement discriminates between tribal and non-tribal populations.

3.23 Do these economic structures operate as constraints affecting free participation in the labour market to the advantage of some and detriment of others? This will depend upon whether the principle of reciprocity is accompanied by the condition of symmetry. In the case of exchange labour the question to ask is: Are each of the voluntary participants contributing equal or unequal number of exchange labour days? If they are spending more or less the same number of exchange labour days then the system combines reciprocity with symmetry and is not constraining. If this is not so, then those who are spending lesser number of exchange labour days, are in a position to work more number of days in the wage earning market, which at that time has definitely peaked. Contrariwise, those who are engaged more number of days in exchange labour, are restricted from earning in the wage market for those extra number of days. Such an arrangement combines reciprocity with a symmetry, constraining some. The sample survey has attempted an empirical answer. For community fixation of wages, it has also to be seen whether the more assetted landed gentry is not at an advantage at the expense of the less fortunate members of the tribal community.

Brick Kiln Labour : Non-Agricultural Labour :

3.24 Brick kilns are to be found in all the 3 states of Bihar, U.P. and Haryana. The terms and conditions of brick kiln labour seem to improve as one moves north. The brick kilns begin operating from around October until the onset of monsoon. It requires uninterrupted supply of labour during this period. It is for this reason that migrant labour, made resident on the production site, make for the best production output. The different operations of brick production involves (1) laying bricks in clay, (2) loading these on pack asses or mules to be transported to the furnace site, (3) arranging these bricks on the site for the furnace, (4) furnace operations, and finally, (5) removing these to make place for the next instalment. These operations require different sets of labourers with different skills. Except for operation (2) where we found the involvement local labour, the rest of the labour came from Bihar, U.P. and Rajasthan. In Meerut and Karnal, labourer in each of the categories, compared their working conditions with their counterparts in their own natal places, working as brick kiln and agricultural labourers. The points of comparison included both remuneration and employer-employee relationships. At both the levels, they reported that their conditions were better than at home.

3.25 The brick kilns mobilise their labour force through contractors, who arrange to supply migrant labour from their respective areas in Bihar, U.P. and Rajasthan. The nexus of brick kiln labour exploitation through bondage often operate through usurious advances and loans extended by these contractors to their labourers. In our 2 brick kiln studies at Meerut and Karnal the migrant labourers didn't complain of any such experience. In both these kilns, the contractors (jamadars, thikadars) were wage earners along with the labourers. Further, the advances were made by the management of the brick kiln directly following accounting procedure. Unionisation of brick kiln labourers have also taken place, with tripartite agreements defining conditions of work. Annual rise in wages have been taking place for several years.

3.26 There are labourers who go in for an initial advance with which they neutralise whatever consumption loan they had incurred back at home. Further advances, or lump sum take-home pay packets at the end of the season result in petty investments in animal husbandry or something else.

3.27 It was reported that there was turnover in the composition of the groups brought by the jamadars, which indicated an element of choice in the selection of brick kilns by the labourers.

3.28 The kinds of constraints that affected the migrant brick kiln labourers flowed from their having to absent themselves from their home for long stretches of time. There were those who would have preferred to stay back at home if they could remain free and not socially looked down upon or discrimi-

nated in their normal social intercourse. They found certain local options closed because they all belonged to the scheduled castes. They could not open a paan-bidi, fruit or vegetable vending, sweet meat or any other shop for self-employment. They apprehended that either they would be economically ostracised by the upper castes, or worse, could even be physically intimidated for having had the temerity to start any such self-employment enterprise. At the work site, social discrimination was not experienced by them, but back at home they tended to swing back into it automatically.

3.29 Interestingly, brick kiln owners preferred migrant labour, even though brick kiln labourers were available locally. As a consequence, such local labourers migrated northwards whilst the brick kilns of their locality got their migrants from areas further south or east. Each set of migrant labourers moved from what they considered a worse local situation, to a better employment situation, always pushing upwards from Bihar to Haryana. The kilns in Varanasi drew their labour force from the tribal belts of Bihar. Local village people in Varanasi reported gross exploitation and social oppression perpetrated on them, including non-payment of wages.

Carpet & Sari Industry : Non-Agricultural Labour.

3.30 The carpet and sari industries have resulted in the penetration of looms in the rural areas of eastern UP and parts adjoining Bihar. It has generated a multi-level creditor-debtor relationships and a peculiar complex of self-employment and wage labour. The carpet industry has also led to the induction of child labour into the rural labour force.

3.31 The following features are associated with the carpet industry :

- (1) child labour skill and quality production of carpets go together ;
- (2) the vitality of the industry lies in its demand in the world market ;
- (3) exporters fetch bulk export orders ;
- (4) these are farmed out to weaver-masters either through contractors or directly ;
- (5) the weaver masters are experts at producing and reproducing designs which the foreign clients demands ;
- (6) they are provided with working capital as advances, towards cost of raw materials and for advance payment to his child labourers ;
- (7) the finished products have to be supplied within stipulated deadlines for order supplies to the clients as per contract ;
- (8) the weaver masters are often marginal peasants with looms at home ;
- (9) child labour is generally in short supply, hence it has to be lured through a sumptuous advance against wages to be earned by

it ; this assures continuity of labour supply, through an attachment to the weaver master, but is not bondage in the feudal sense ;

- (10) the master-weaver gets attached to contractors|exporters, and in turn, attach child labour for assured labour ; the debts and advance could be upto Rs. 35,000 for master weavers and Rs. 1000 or more for child labours, respectively ;
- (11) the master-weaver and his family also works on the looms when labour is not at work ;
- (12) the payment to child labourers is in piece rates varying with the skill that is employed to produce a given quality of carpet, deductions are made for defective weaving ;
- (13) today's child-labour grows up to become tomorrow's master-weavers ;

3.32 In the saree industry the features are somewhat different :

- (1) child labour is employed, but not as a condition of quality production ; adult labour involvement is therefore normally higher ;
- (2) the demand for sarees is mainly in the domestic market ;
- (3) the investors and orders range from categories to which the actual producer is linked either through middlemen (contractors or dalals), or directly ;
- (4) investors reach out to the direct producers by making their own capital investments in looms, getting them installed in the households, supplying them with all the necessary raw materials, clearing payments on receipt of the finished product, and again starting the cycle by the next instalment of raw materials ;
- (5) the rate of generation of new producers is quite fast ; an apprentice working for several years on a loom acquires the skill to operate one as a master ;

The carpet and the saree industries were traditionally associated with the Muslim (Momin) households. With the expansion in their demands in the domestic and world markets, and the consequent demand for labour, the scheduled and backward caste households in agriculture entered into this trade as apprentices, becoming in time, full fledged master weavers. Now this cottage industry draws its labour force from almost all the castes except the upper castes, who enter the market as investors but not as producers.

The widespread penetration of cottage industries and the generation of non-agricultural labour, has led to the weakening of the feudalistic agrarian system, as evidenced by the near elimination of the banihari system in these areas. The fact of Brahmin landowners withdrawing from leasing out land in sharecropping in the Varanasi district, did not seem to rudely perturb the erstwhile sharecroppers. The scheduled castes, in particular, have got looms established in large numbers, through government assistance. For others, the 'capitalist traders' have provided them with looms through their own investments.

3.33 The penetration of the carpet industry into Palamau district in Bihar, adjoining eastern U.P., presents an acute relationship of exploitation and bondage of child labour.

Feudal Erosion : Movement and Market :

3.34 The general pattern of change in the agrarian systems is in the direction of erosion of feudal structures of exploitation and discrimination. Where modernization of agriculture has been sluggish, it has tended to give rise to agrarian movements which have struck at the power of feudal domination and oppression. Thus in Palamau the agrarian power structure has been challenged by a host of progressive and left political and militant forces, which are facilitating the release of bonded labour, helping the enforcement of minimum wages and so on.

3.35 In Varanasi and Meerut regions, the feudalistic structure is being considerably affected by the release of market forces through greater diversifications in the rural economy, by the greater availability of non-agricultural work for the rural labour.

Administrative Response

3.36 The administrative response to the plight of rural labour has been less than satisfactory. Only in Bihar, of the three states studied, is there a separate Directorate of Labour for Agriculture. The Directorate is undervalued. Out of the 65 odd items on which monitoring on minimum wages is done, only 5 fall within the purview of the Agricultural Labour Directorate. Its Labour Inspectors are 'non-cadre staff' with no promotional avenue, whilst their counterpart in Industry suffer no such disability. All along the ranks of the Directorate, there is a general sense of disillusionment and apathy. The Directorate, unlike the Industrial Directorate, doesn't even have the symbolic importance of getting an officer of the Indian Administrative Service cadre to head it.

3.37 In the other two States, where there is no separate Directorate for Agriculture, there is hardly any evidence that we could find of any serious monitoring of agricultural labour.

PART III

SAMPLE SURVEY ON SOCIAL CONSTRAINTS ON RURAL LABOUR

Description of the field

4.1 A qualitative pilot survey with all its richness of insights falls short in its capacity to generalise. Further, there are limits to which one can go into analytical depth. The danger of being carried away by strong impressions of interesting phenomena is ever present. We, therefore, carried out a macro sample survey of the problem in the same districts of Bihar and Haryana. A comprehensive survey instrument was perfected with meticulous care to penetrate into the major phenomena that we encountered during our pilot survey. We have produced a wealth of data, which will require much time and patience, and even cross-checking, before they can be finally presented. What we present here is the barest minimum that satisfies our overall theoretical-methodological thrust. Even this small exercise exposes some of the biases in our earlier generalisations in our pilot survey.

Wage Pattern

4.2 The data on wages, we have realised require cross checking for greater specification and accuracy. Nevertheless, we shall present some idea of the prevalent wages in the three regions on a very tentative basis just for providing information. Two initial observations can be made: (a) surprisingly the wage range in Ranchi for the unirrigated villages is somewhat higher, and (b) in Palamau, the wages remain more or less constant irrespective of the factor of irrigation (Annexure II).

4.3 Piece rate and contract labour systems are prevalent in Ranchi, Palamau and in Karnal-Panipat for agricultural and non-agricultural operations. A contract system in Ranchi for agricultural as well as non-agricultural operations that was discovered during the survey, is an adaptation of a long established tribal institutional arrangement of exchange labour. Thus the Bara Pachcha organisation of tribal youth consists of a fixed number of volunteer members who put their labour at its disposal for 2 days a week. This collective labour power then accepts contracts @ Rs. 100 per day for work such as well construction, tiling, building construction, fencing, ridging, harvesting etc. The advantage of the client is, he gets done a week or ten days work, in one or two days. The income of the Pachcha remains in its treasury and becomes a source for credit for its members at 20 per cent interest per annum. The contract labour includes free meals and rice brine (handia) in plenty as part of the wages in kind. So tight are the norms of Pachcha membership that abstention by any member is fined @ Rs. 2 per day. Replacement labour by absentees is

admissible. While the Bara Pachcha undertake (collective) contract labour outside the village, (Chota Pachcha, and Mahila Pachchas generally operate within the village. These Pachchas are to be found among Mundas and Oraons in Ranchi and Palamau. In Palamau, the name Pachcha has lost currency but a similar arrangement still operates in some tribal villages.

4.4 In Karnal-Panipat, piece rate wages are associated with wheat, paddy and sugarcane harvesting, paddy transplanting and sugarcane birling. The rates are respectively, 80 kg. to 100 kg. of wheat per acre, Rs. 160 to Rs. 200 per acre of paddy, Rs. 3.50 per 100 kg. sugarcane, Rs. 130 per acre of sugarcane birling.

4.5 The only non-agricultural piece rate wage that can be compared across Bihar and Haryana is related to brick laying and loading/unloading of raw bricks in brick kilns. The rate for brick laying in Palamau is Rs. 40 per 1000 bricks, in Karnal-Panipat this is Rs. 56 to Rs. 58 per 1000. For loading/unloading, the corresponding rates for Palamau and Karnal-Panipat are Rs. 10 to Rs. 22 per 1000 bricks and Rs. 23 per 1000 bricks, respectively.

4.6 The phenomenon of labour which is 'not free' (attached) has been analysed in some detail. The criteria by which attachment is 'scaled', are two, (a) the nature of labour commitment—to a single master exclusively, or to a single master primarily, over a period ranging from the permanent to the annual to the seasonal; and (b) the extent of debt involvement. A more detailed analysis of this and the wage dimension will have to await future treatment for consideration of time and space.

Sources of Credit and Debt Obligations

4.7 The debt dimension of rural labour is of crucial importance. It is necessary to know how many of them enter the credit market, how many sources of credit do they tap, what are the rates of interest, and so forth. We have data on sources of credit from formal institutions such as the banks, as well as from informal sources such as moneylender, employers and kins (Annexure III). Rural labour households do not necessarily confine themselves to a single source of credit. The debt pattern varies widely as between the tribal, feudal and capitalist belts.

4.8 From the logic of credit supplied by institutions, both formal and informal, an RLH has taken loan from one or more sources. In Ranchi, only 15 per cent (44 out of 304) RLH have borrowed money, of

which 33 are from irrigated and 11 from unirrigated areas. Of the 44 borrowers, 43 have taken loan from the banks (98 per cent), only 1 from moneylender (2 per cent), 11 from employers (25 per cent) and 1 from kins (2 per cent). So although the proportion of RLH cash borrowers is small, they have borrowed invariably from the banks, and in addition, employer also have been a source of credit for them. The role of moneylenders and kins is negligible as sources of credit. The second point to note, is that whilst the number of debtors is almost thrice as large in the irrigated areas, the per-capita loan from banks is more than twice for those from the unirrigated areas (Rs. 2143, Rs. 4480 respectively). The per capita loan from employers in irrigated areas is much higher (Rs. 1293) in comparison to unirrigated areas (Rs. 690) but lower with respect to banks (Rs. 2143 and Rs. 4480 respectively).

4.9 In Palamau, only 27 per cent (83 out of 304) RLH have borrowed, of whom 45 are from irrigated and 38 from unirrigated areas. Again, all those who have at all borrowed (83), have all borrowed from banks. But moneylenders, employers and kins are also important sources of credit. As many as 19 per cent (16 out of 83), 31 per cent (26 out of 83) and 12 per cent (10 out of 83), respectively, borrow from these sources. Apart from the banks, where the per capita loan is high relative to the situation in Palamau (Rs. 2533 for irrigated and Rs. 2412 for unirrigated areas), the per capita loan from moneylenders is the highest (Rs. 2900), although only a few borrowers (5) are involved. An important feature is the conspicuous role of employers as creditors with petty loans (Rs. 858 per capita for irrigated and Rs. 315 per capita for unirrigated areas). Petty loans, associated with social power has been a characteristic feature of feudal attachment in Palamau. By contrast, in Ranchi the moneylender and the kins hardly figure as sources of credit.

4.10 In Karnal-Panipat, the percentage of borrowers is slightly less than that of Palamau (25 per cent or 77 out of 304). In sharp distinction to Ranchi and Palamau, banks are not universally patronised as a source of credit. Only 62 per cent (48 out of 77) borrow from banks, 64 per cent (49) from moneylenders, 58 per cent (45) from employers, and only 13 per cent (10) from kins. Surprisingly, employers account for the highest per capita source of credit (Rs. 5978), next in order are the banks (Rs. 5452), moneylenders (4459) and kins (Rs. 3235). The magnitude of debt and its attendant obligations will be evident from the fact that 15 per cent of RLH in Ranchi have borrowed Rs. 1,28,545, 27 per cent of RLH in Palamau have borrowed Rs. 2,63,898 and 25 per cent of RLH in Karnal-Panipat have borrowed Rs. 7,81,550. In Ranchi and Palamau, the overall debt loan shows contrary trends as between irrigated and unirrigated areas. In Ranchi it is quite high for the unirrigated areas (Rs. 3362 per case), whilst in Palamau it is high in the irrigated areas (Rs. 2076 per case).

4.11 So far we have examined the phenomenon of debt from the point of institutions extending credit to individuals. Now we shall examine the same phenomenon from the point of individuals seeking loans from different sources. What is the borrowing behaviour of RLH? The individual has access to more than one source of credit. Does he confine himself to a single source, whichever this may be—bank, moneylender, employer, kins, or does he reach out to several sources at a time? What kind of preference does he exercise?

4.12 What we come across is indeed very interesting. In Ranchi, 73 per cent (32 out of 44) borrow from banks only (as the only source) another 20 per cent (9 out of 44), borrow additionally from employers in combination with banks. These 73 per cent borrowers borrow 65 per cent of their total credit requirement from banks. Except for 1 RLH, who has borrowed Rs. 2000 from employer as the only source, all other cases of borrowing is in combination with bank loans. The role of institutional credit is all-pervading, although credit has been catered to only 15 per cent of all RLH in Ranchi.

4.13 The Palamau, scene is somewhat different. There 63 per cent of the borrowers (52 out of 83) do 53 per cent of their borrowing exclusively from banks (Rs. 1,32,003 out of Rs. 2,46,798). As in Ranchi, institutional credit is all-pervasive, and all other sources of credit are tapped in addition to banks. The pattern is an elaboration of the findings from Table 23.

4.14 In Karnal-Panipat, the situation, as has been observed earlier, is vastly different. None of the sources of credit is all pervasive, and the amounts borrowed are heavy. In sharp contrast to Ranchi and Palamau, only 4 per cent RLH (3 out of 83) borrow exclusively from banks. The corresponding figure for employers is 15 per cent (12 out of 83), for moneylenders is 21 per cent (16 out of 83), for kins is nil. The corresponding figures for the percentage amounts borrowed from these single sources are 2 per cent from banks (Rs. 15,000 out of Rs. 7,81,550), 12 per cent from employers (Rs. 94,750) 10 per cent from moneylenders (Rs. 74,400). The rest 60 per cent borrowers (52 out of 83) draw from more than one source of credit in various combinations (Annexure IV).

Interest Pattern

4.15 We shall conclude by making a brief observation on the interest configurations associated with various kinds of loans as reported by the rural labourers. There is an overall ignorance about the interests on bank loans, particularly in Ranchi and Palamau where they report 'don't know'. In Haryana a few responses mentioned 2 per cent, 3 per cent, 4 per cent, 10 per cent and 24 per cent as bank interests. For loans from moneylenders, the figures reported from Palamau are; 60 per cent, 72 per cent, 96 per cent, 120 per cent and 144 per cent from the irrigated areas, and; 60 per cent, 72 per cent, 120 per cent, 144 per cent, 240 per cent from unirrigated areas. In Karnal-Panipat, these are 24 per cent, 30 per cent,

36 per cent and 48 per cent. For loans from employers in the irrigated areas of Palamau, the reported figures are: 'no interest' in 2 cases, and for the rest, the RLH have no idea what the interest rates are. In the unirrigated areas, the situation is not dissimilar, but only 6 RLH reported the following rates: 0 per cent, 24 per cent, 60 per cent, 72 per cent, 120 per cent. For Karnal-Panipat the reported interest rates are: 24 per cent, 30 per cent, 36 per cent, 48 per cent, 60 per cent, 96 per cent. In Ranchi, interest rates reported generally, irrespective of the irrigation variable are: 0 per cent, 20 per cent, 48 per cent, 60 per cent.

It will be clear that in Palamau the non-institutional interest rates are wildly fluctuating, whereas in Karnal-Panipat its range is much smaller. We should remember that the quantum of credit transactions in Palamau is far smaller than in Haryana. In Ranchi, the role of non-institutional credit, and credit in general, is not sufficiently high.

4.16 In summary, with regard to the quality of life indicators, the availability of standard meal is indeed most revealing. To begin with, in the districts

of Bihar, the concept of standard meal for the RLH goes with the presence or absence of the staple cereal (usually rice, or wheat), in their diet. In Haryana, it is the presence or absence of their preferred cereal, wheat, which they replace by the less preferred, rice. So, in Haryana, the rural labour consumes staple cereals throughout the year, in addition to seasonal vegetables, and in most cases milk also. In Bihar, therefore, the availability of standard meal is a pungent indicator of their living conditions.

4.17 In the tribal district of Ranchi, at least this low level standard meal is available to most all the year round, but in the feudal, areas of Palamau, the situation is alarming.

4.18 Quality of shelter as an indicator is not structurally sharp, as cultural preferences tend to condition the type of shelter. However, the presence and absence of semi-pucca houses is a sharp pointer to the distinctly satisfactory situation obtaining in Haryana when compared to Bihar.

PART IV

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 Since our study has been conducted in the two stages (the pilot and the sample surveys) each having a different scope, there are aspects of analysis and interpretation issuing from both which have their distinctiveness and significance. In the pilot survey, the analysis is grounded in qualitative data and impressions from key and lay respondents approached at random. The variety of phenomena and patterns encountered, provided the basis of a light, comprehensively defined sample survey. For want of time, only a small fraction of the sample survey, has been used for the present analysis. We will proceed with our analysis, keeping in this view both these streams treating the pilot survey findings as the initiating point.

5.2 A 'social' constraint is associated with normative prescriptions and prescriptions guiding behaviour of individuals and groups. This is reflected in the content of social relationships that relate individuals and groups to each other in systems of social interaction. Thus the agrarian system defines the relationship between agrarian classes, the caste system defines the relationship between castes, and so on. In a given concrete situation there is an interpenetration of such systems.

5.3 No system of social interaction is static or frozen. There are contradictions within each system that generate their own dynamic of change. Thus the normative is never a once-for-all definition. Norms get redefined as systems change from inner compulsions and pressures from a changing outer environment.

5.4 The important question that comes naturally to one's mind is: what kinds of 'social constraints' affect rural labour. Such a poser obviously needs conceptual-theoretical explication for a purposeful comprehension of their conditions. To do this we can break up the original statement of purpose into: (a) social constraints as they operate on rural labour, and (b) social constraints of rural labour. With respect to the farmer, we have attempted to link social constraints, with the obstacles that come in the way of rural labour to operate 'freely' in the labour market, or even to move out of the labour class. Pursuant to this, we have isolated two social variables; one, class (exploitation), and the other, non-class (discrimination). These structures of exploitation and discrimination do exercise constraints on rural labour to operate freely in the labour market. While establishing clear empirical relationships is a difficult and complex task, for the present, we have been able to identify the 'social selections' in the rural labour class and their attendant conditions

of work. With respect to the latter (the social constraints of rural labour), to a considerable extent but not wholly, flows from the social constraints on rural labour. That is, social discrimination is not, ipso facto, eliminated with the freedom acquired or enjoyed by rural labour in the labour market, or with the 'freedom' from the class of rural labourers. This aspect of social constraints of rural labour, which is independent of social constraints on rural labour, is an area of much more complex processes at work, again both class and non-class, involving dimensions of struggle for power as a lever of social change.

5.5 It has been argued that social constraints can be understood in class and non-class terms. Sources of social constraints arise out of both. The class of rural labour is differentiated into asset and assetless rural labour. At the same time rural labour has a non-class social composition which varies in time and space. It should be clear that class constraints are limited to class, whereas non-class constraints are not.

5.6 The Pilot survey in Ranchi district took us to tribal, upper caste and intermediate caste cluster of households. The hierarchy of caste doesn't have the same intensity and consequences for the tribal society. Tribal cultural solidarity, their relative class homogeneity (most of them being petty landowners), their tradition and historicity of communitarian social organisation, are reflected in the institutions of exchange labour and community imposer cum labourer seeks to maximise his individual agricultural market wages which are invariably higher than the community wages. These social restrictions to the wage labour market act as "protection" from the market. The petty tribal owner-cultivator cum labourer seeks to maximise his individual gains collectively. This is possible first by reducing cost of cultivation on their own lands by protecting themselves from the prevailing higher market wages outside, and then by participating as labour in the same open market after completing their own agricultural operations.

5.7 The community imposition of wage is an extension of the principle of wage labour. While the latter applies to peak agricultural seasons requiring labour intensive agricultural operations, the former is devised to cater for the lean periods.

5.8 Both these economic institutions are essentially based on the principle of reciprocity and mutual gain. Our sample survey reveals that this principle of reciprocity is actually operating in places

where exchange labour is being practised. However, these economic institutions act as social constraints on the non-tribal sadani population if they are being 'excluded' from the universe of their operation. To the extent that they are deprived from the benefits of protection from the market, they are being discriminated. From our very limited field exposure we cannot be sure that this exclusion takes place generally. In one instance, this exclusion was operative against non-cultivating banias who were well off in urban professions. In this case their inclusion may not have been consistent with the principle of reciprocity. In another case, the non-tribal population seemed to be economically of the same class status as the tribals.

5.9 The institution of banihari attachment was not visible, but annual farm servants drawing Rs. 700-800 per year with fooding, clothing etc. exist but perhaps in small numbers. A generalisation cannot be made on this.

5.10 The only non-tribal village that we went to, practised exchange labour but not community wage system. It suggested a resemblance to the traditional caste stratified village with remnants of the jajmani exchange system.

5.11 Our impression that rural labour is almost exclusively scheduled castes in Palamau, underwent radical change with our results from the sample survey. Agricultural wages in many areas are still being paid in kind well below the minimum wages. There is a strong demand for prior work commitment to the twice-born upper caste, non-cultivating landlord. Strong attachments persist in the form of banihari system, the landlord allotting a patch of land to the family of the labour from whom he extracts year-round services mainly for agricultural operations. We shall see a little later the results of our sample survey on this.

5.12 Until about 8-10 years back feudal coercion had a lot of teeth. But there are clear evidences of winds of change. On the one hand, state initiated development programmes and the introduction of some industries like stone quarries, are preparing conditions for the creation of structural options for the agricultural labour in some parts. On the other hand, left and extremist political groups have mounted legal and extra legal political actions, resulting in sharp confrontations between the landed and labour interests in several parts. A group of 72 freed bonded labourers have not relapsed into bondage because the stone quarry in the vicinity has given all of them casual wage employment. In areas where extremist political activity is strong, cases of violation of minimum wage are piling. In Palamau social hierarchy and class stratification converge in the category of the feudally oppressed.

5.13 In Varanasi, the scenario again changes qualitatively. Here we find a situation in which cottage industries have made extensive inroads into the rural areas. The export oriented industries of carpet and saree have introduced a new set of production

relations in the rural areas. The exporter contractor—master weaver, weaver labour is the new system of relations in this production system. The carpet industry, in particular, has witnessed the quantum entry of child labour. This phenomenon has affected the labour supply agriculture. For historical reasons, the Muslim (Momin) caste is almost entirely in this industry, whilst Scheduled and Backward caste entry at the weaver level and is quite rapid. The govt. as well as the capitalist is investing in looms to expand these cottage industries.

5.14 Impressionistically, the petty owner-cultivator-cum-labourer from the S.C. and B.C. is rapidly taking to cottage industries, withdrawing from agricultural labour and moving into self-employment on looms. We found two interesting patterns: One that of petty landowner-cum-master weaver, owning 2-4 bighas of land in which he does self cultivation and owning 2-4 karkhas on which he employs weavers in addition to supplementary family labour. He is the self-cultivating small peasant-cum-self-employed master weaver employing weaver labour. The other pattern is that of petty landowner-cum-labourer, who has to be provided by the capitalist with all the instruments of production in his home and pays him for his labour for producing sarees. He is the self-cultivating small peasant cum-weaver labourer. These new social formations are leading to absorption of agricultural labour into non-agricultural occupations.

The shift from relations of production in agriculture to that of cottage industries is a qualitative shift. The nature of social relationships in the two modes of production are vastly different. In essence it is a shift away from feudal oppression and exploitation, and a movement towards a new set of exploitative relationships.

5.15 Another interesting development that came to our notice was the withdrawal of share croppers from their lands by non-cultivating Brahmin and Rajput landowners. Some recent pronouncements on the mass media by leaders of the ruling Janata Dal party that land should legitimately belong to those who till it, had led to this decision by the landowners. This clearly indicates a strong sense of insecurity among non-cultivating landowners. We found no such concern in Meerut or Karnal where owner-cultivators abound.

5.16 Our field experience in Varanasi did not include purely agricultural areas, as such, it is difficult to generalise. We were told by some of our respondents that strong feudal attachments and caste oppression persisted in certain parts.

5.17 Even where cottage industries had penetrated, loosening feudal ties, the scheduled caste was subjected to severe restrictions from entry into occupations related to food. Thus they could not serve in a flour mill or a sweet meat shop or do vegetable vending. This deprivation was echoed by scheduled caste respondents in Varanasi, migrant labourers from other areas in Uttar Pradesh working in Meerut and Karnal brick kilns.

5.18 However, even this restriction is loosening in the anonymity of the city. The veteran scheduled caste leader Shri Moti Ram Shastri pointed out that paan (betel) shops were coming up in Varanasi city; in Agra, in the leather market boosted by Russian exports, tea shops have come up run by scheduled castes; in Meerut region there is a fast erosion of social discrimination; areas around cement and aluminium factories, thermal power stations, dams and railway factories, wherever there has been industrialisation and urbanisation, the scheduled castes are distancing themselves from their caste oppressors. His classic illustration was that of Dikkar Mistana Bhandar in Rajaji Puram, Lucknow, which after initial difficulties has been accepted as one of the best sweetmeat shops.

5.19 In Ranchi we had witnessed women involved in beedi industry collecting beedi leaves from the forest and packing them for the market. In Varanasi we found women in beedi industry getting these leaves, tobacco and thread to roll out beedi. The exploitation and oppression is more severe on women workers. Their beedis get rejected more often than those of men, and yet men are much less involved in the production. There is a clear suggestion that the margin of profit is increased by declaring perfectly good beedies as defective and deducting from wages.

5.20 In Meerut, the scenario is that of a rapidly growing urban-industrial centre generating a lot of employment opportunities. This has led to occupational diversification and considerable labour mobility affecting the supply of agricultural labour. This has put the agricultural labour in a bargaining position. He is available for reduced hours of work, he has to be booked in advance by paying wages in advances, his wages have gone up. Productivity in agriculture has gone up resulting in better harvest hauls for the labour.

5.21 The annual farm servant now dictates terms regarding the amount of initial advance (without interest) and working conditions. Even after this the employer cannot be certain that he will not desert him without notice. From attachment and bondage the annual farm labour is moving towards a contract in which he is no longer a passive partner.

5.22 What was indeed surprising was to note the co-existence of the traditional jajmani exchange relations with the market forces that have been released. The jajmani structure has adapted to the market. For example a Nai Kamin (barbar) would open a haircutting saloon for clients in the open market, charging market rates. At the same time, he serves his jajmans in the same saloon not charging him anything but collecting his half-yearly quota of grains from each of them in exchange for his services. In particular the persistence of the special kamin status of the bhanga, who cannot be replaced, without his wish is of special significance.

5.23 In Karnal the agrarian scene presented a totally unexpected feature. In this highly productive, highly monetised agricultural belt we came across the

most excruciating form of exploitation and oppression. These were bonded labourers who were treated no better than slaves. They were precluded from taking up any other alternative employment, were expected to do 24-hour service, domestic as well as agricultural, one of them was even denied any wage payment on the plea that his loan outstandings did not warrant any such payments.

5.24 The otherwise free casual labourers with or without any land, were denied market wages by sheer threat of force. However, the area being very productive, one harvest time haul by a labour family gives him 5 to 7 months of reprieve. At other times he does casual wage labour. He has enough flexibility to exercise an element of choice between going to do wage labour 8—10 kms away on a particular day or spend the time in leisure.

5.25 The bondage phenomenon in Palamau and in Karnal deserve some observations. In Palamau (and parts of Uttar Pradesh) the bondage involved an attachment combining allocation of a plot of land, in addition to a loan nexus. The ex-bonded labourers, had mentioned their inter-generational tie-up through nominal loans which went on spiralling inexplicably. The treatment meted out to them was inhuman with a beck-and-call relationship. The whole family got tied to the master. In Karnal the loan which got them into the trap was much higher, around Rs. 3000. Further, accumulation that took place included additional loans in thousands as well as extortionate interests on them. This indicates the quantum difference in the amount of money taken in loan between the two places. Further, the family members of the bonded in Karnal can engage in regular occupations. This is reflected in the quality of life of the families of the two sets of bonded labourers. In Palamau they are out a bare subsistence existence with poor housing. In Karnal, relatively speaking, the household looks better off. But the demands on the Karnal labour appears much more inhuman.

5.26 Since it was not feasible to conduct a sample macro national survey, that the conditions of rural labour have been studied in three different agrarian situations. It is hoped that the findings arising out of the theoretical concerns will have utility and applicability extending to similar agrarian situations beyond the physical boundaries of our universe of study. The following conclusions and observations flow directly from the sample survey.

5.27 The a priori assumption, that the Ranchi, Palamau and Karnal-Panipat regions can be distinguished by their distinctive agrarian formations is now borne out by our empirical findings. If we 'construct' the agrarian systems with respect to various rural labour classes and other social groups represented in them we find that :

- (a) Ranchi is characterised by (i) the presence of a substantial landowning labour class (68 per cent) followed by a much lesser proportion of free agricultural casual labour (26 per cent); (ii) virtual absence of labour

attached exclusively or primarily to a single master; (iii) a small proportion of non-agricultural classes (17 per cent); (iv) a predominantly tribal rural labour composition (50 per cent) followed by a substantial Backward Caste presence (35 per cent); and a much smaller Scheduled Caste population (13 per cent);

- (b) Palamau presents a somewhat different picture. (i) Like in Ranchi, but to a lesser extent, there is a substantial presence of landowning labour class (58 per cent), followed by an almost identical proportion of casual agricultural labour (27 per cent); (ii) a significant 11 per cent presence of attached labour; (iii) a small proportion of non-agricultural classes; (iv) a predominantly Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe rural labour composition (56 and 41 per cent).
- (c) Karnal-Panipat is yet another structural scenario with (i) a 98 per cent landless agricultural labour population; (ii) a 14 per cent attached labour presence among the agrarian classes; and (iii) a rural labour population which is heavily Scheduled Caste (45 per cent) and Backward and Depressed Backward Caste (41 per cent).

Discrimination

5.28 The caste and community selection that enters into the rural labour force indicates its social composition. The Scheduled Castes constitute the largest social group located lowest in the social hierarchy. In Palamau and Karnal-Panipat they are more heavily represented 49 per cent and 45 per cent respectively. The Scheduled Tribes which are proximate to the Scheduled Castes in the overall social hierarchy, are again heavily represented in their areas of habitation in Ranchi and Palamau (48 per cent and 43 per cent respectively). The Backward Castes and the Depressed Backward Castes, find heavy representations in Karnal-Panipat (41 per cent) and in Ranchi (32 per cent).

5.29 The social selection is a differential representation of various caste/community groups in the rural labour force pointing towards their relative placements in the structure of discrimination. If there were no discrimination, the social composition of rural labour will be free from any social selection. That is each caste/community would be represented in rural labour in the same proportion to their population in the work force. Although an empirical substantiation of this calls for a different design of research, it is accepted that those castes/communities which are heavily represented in the rural labour force, are much less represented in the better off classes. In other words, low caste status generally finds a higher selection in low class occupations. Thus those caste/communities which have a low representation in the class of rural labour in proportion to their population in the work force, are less discriminated.

5.30 The question that arises now is: within the universe of rural labour are there any discernible processes of discrimination? It is far too complex a question, and rather than attempting an answer, it is useful to present the complexity. It would appear that in Ranchi the situation of Scheduled Castes and Backward Castes with reference to operational holdings worsens as we move from irrigated to unirrigated areas, relative to the position of the Scheduled Tribes which seems to better. In the irrigated areas, however, there is no discrimination in the social selection of landholdings. In Palamau, the position of Scheduled Castes with reference to landholdings remain low and unchanged in the irrigated and unirrigated areas, but the proportion of landholders among Scheduled Tribes increases greatly in the unirrigated areas. The class of attached labour is mainly composed of Scheduled Castes; In Karnal-Panipat landlessness is so overwhelming, that the question of discrimination does not arise, except in the case of attached labour who are mostly from the Scheduled Castes.

5.31 It would appear that a factor of discrimination, in terms of a better social selection in favour of Scheduled Tribes in landholdings, is in operation in the districts of Bihar. When we examine the period of availability of standard meal, which is a critical indicator of quality of life, we have a somewhat different scenario. In Ranchi, it is the Scheduled Tribe who are worst off (with 61 per cent being able to provide standard meal for 6-12 months a year) and the Backward Castes, the best placed (with 94 per cent providing for standard meal round the year). In Palamau, where there is hardly any Backward Caste rural labour, the deprivation suffered is chronic and shared between Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, only 12 per cent of all rural labour being able to afford standard meal throughout the year. Thus landholding, per se, doesn't indicate that things are better in Palamau.

Exploitation

5.32 In our pilot survey we have described and examined the various forms in which relations of exploitation have manifested themselves the banihari system in Palamau and Varanasi, the annual farm servant in Meerut and Karnal-Panipat, and various other forms of attachment and free labour in agricultural and non-agricultural occupations. We are in a position now to observe how the different class categories in the structure of exploitations vary with respect to the differing agrarian situations and with respect to irrigation.

5.33 Rural labour class as a whole is subject to exploitation. Exploitation, as we understand it, is not in the sense of extraction of surplus value only, but more importantly, in terms of the asymmetrical relations of production in which rural labour finds itself. Within the agrarian classes, we have the casual labour which is 'free', the attached labour which is 'tied', and classes such as tenant-labour, landowner-labour, who combine or control some land asset to their status as rural labour. Within the casual labour class we also have households with operational hold-

ings, but in all such cases the ultimate unit of enquiry (the respondent) is principally a casual labour. The non-agrarian classes, are 'free'. We do not find attached labour in the non-agrarian classes. This does not mean that 'attachment' does not exist among the non-agrarian classes. Labour associated with carpet and sari weaving display classic features of attachment.

5.34 Rural labour is now 'free' in large numbers. Together the class of casual labour, landowner-labour, tenant-labour constitute 89 per cent of all agricultural labour households. Nearly 9 per cent are attached. This is clear trend in favour of a change away from the agrarian feudalistic structures. Even in Palamau which was only 15' years back a bastion of feudal power, strong extremist and other anti-feudal movements are freeing rural labour from bondage.

5.35 In our survey analysis the expansion of the non-agrarian classes is an indication of basic shift, however small the tendency. In Ranchi, the proportion of agricultural rural labour households reduces from 93 per cent in the unirrigated areas to 74 per cent in the irrigated areas. The corresponding figures, consistent with this pattern, in Palamau, are 89 per cent and 80 per cent.

5.36 In Ranchi the class of agricultural casual labour shrinks to 18 per cent in the unirrigated areas (from 38 per cent in irrigated areas), accompanied by an enlarged proportion of landowner-labour class (73 per cent from 60 per cent), suggesting a contrary trend. But the proportion within landowner class, of those holding less than 1 acre, jumps from 16 per cent to 30 per cent suggesting increasing immiseriation. The availability of standard meal for the whole year in Ranchi, is satisfactory, but even this declines in the unirrigated areas, significantly for the landowner-labour class (90 per cent to 71 per cent), but quite sharply for casual agricultural labour class (88 per cent to 44 per cent).

5.37 In Palamau the same trend is visible although the pattern is somewhat different. The casual agricultural labour composition remains constant at 28 per cent the landowner labour class declines from 63 per cent to 54 per cent, accompanied by a sharp increase in attached labour from 9 per cent to 17 per cent, suggesting a higher prevalence of feudalistic exploitation in the unirrigated areas. The quality of life as indicated by the standard meal availability, suggests a decline to conditions of worsening destitution.

5.38 It is therefore clear that irrigation is proving to be a crucial variable bringing about alterations in the composition of classes and the attendant changing relations in the organisation of production.

5.39 The incipient trends in the non-agricultural classes, is also of far-reaching significance, a pattern which suggested itself more sharply in our pilot studies.

5.40 The large scale involvement of the Scheduled Castes, in search for non-agricultural occupation away from their native place, is the other side of the same coin. They are finding their freedom from discrimination in the anonymity of the urban-industrial milieu.

Polarisation, Pauperisation and Proletarianisation

5.41 Both the surveys generally confirm: (a) that Ranchi is relatively free from social or political oppression; (b) that in Palamau, left and progressive forces, individually and at times, in combination, are relatively striking at social and political oppression weakening the structures of feudal exploitation and oppression; (c) in Haryana, the rural labour, particularly attached labour, is under the exploitative and oppressive grip of the capitalist landowners. The process of enfranchisement of rural labour is most conspicuous in Palamau, almost non-existent in Karnal-Panipat.

5.42 The measure of satisfaction over the outcome of a large scale survey is the extent to which an interpretative understanding of the phenomenon is able to provide a somewhat clearer picture of the patterns and processes involved. The condition of rural labour in the three different agrarian systems as we have seen, vary. It is interesting to note that the rural labour in Haryana is almost completely polarised, in the sense that they are landless. This does not necessarily mean they are assetless. In comparison, the rural labour class is differentiated in Ranchi and Palamau. In that sense, they are not (or less) polarised with respect to the other classes. In Palamau, however, conditions of destitution are most pronounced. In Karnal-Panipat, rural labour is polarised but not pauperised; in Ranchi, they are neither polarised nor pauperised, in Palamau, they are pauperised though not polarised. In spite of this polarisation, no proletarianisation of rural labour has taken place in Karnal-Panipat, in the sense that the class of rural labour have not become a conscious class-in-itself. In Ranchi, too there is no proletarianisation of rural labour. The Jharkhand movement does not have on their agenda much about rural labour. In Palamau, where there is no polarisation, but pauperisation under extreme feudal oppression, political mobilisations form a formidable challenge to the agrarian system.

5.43 Why is it that in the capitalist and tribal belts there is no proletarianization? In Haryana the land prices are extremely high compared to Ranchi and Palamau, hence more out of reach of rural labour. Further, in the fully irrigated high yielding area, wages are higher, if we take into account daily wages and other piece rate wages during harvesting, transplanting, etc. Consumption standards are much higher, reflected in higher credit demand. The rural labour borrows from all available sources—banks, moneylenders, employers—and borrows substantially. Attached labour borrow, on an average, from Rs. 10,000—Rs. 15,000 from their employers, (there was one case borrowing upto Rs. 30,000). The capitalist farmer puts stringent and oppressive working

norms in exchange for the heavy credit he advances to him, binding him on a long term basis, if not perpetually. The attached labour here is not a feudal appendage, but a capitalist exploitation of cheap labour for arduous functions, for which any other form of labour is not easily available. In addition to wages, the interest rates have a much narrower range in Karnal-Panipat.

5.44 In the tribal mode in addition to the labour market, rural labour with operational holdings (which is a pervasive phenomenon), enter into various forms of exchange labour and community fixation of wages. The close-knit tribal social organization, reduces the contradictions of class and sharpens the contradictions based on cultural discriminations. The Jharkhand movement interprets exploitation of tribals as following from the primary cultural contradiction. Hence, proletarianization is weak, if not absent.

5.45 In Palamau, which is agriculturally backward, falling as it does in the rain-shadow area, feudal landlordism was the dominant mode of production. With the penetration of market and political forces, the system has become vulnerable. The Naxalite movement and the movement by the Left and other progressive forces have made a serious dent into the system, even as confrontation continues with militant organizations of the remnant feudal interests. State power has responded with legal and administrative measures, freeing bonded labour, and providing relief and rehabilitation to them. Land reform efforts at redistribution of surplus land is acquiring importance. Market and movements are posing a combined threat to agrarian obsolescence.

6 RECOMMENDATION

6.1 Policy recommendations and strategies for elimination of social constraints on rural labour require an understanding of the system which generates them, its contradictions and vulnerabilities, through which change can be initiated in a given direction. The more proximate goals should be consistent with the long term objectives. No society is likely to survive without labour who constitute the direct producers of wealth. The dignity of labour therefore has to be established at par with the rest of the society. It follows that the constraints which come in the way of their development towards this objective, their elimination should provide the basis of formulations for policies of state intervention and other social strategies.

6.2 Class and non-class constraints associated with exploitation, discrimination and gender, therefore need to be eliminated. As we have observed earlier, class constraints relate to those arising basically out of poverty and destitution, whilst non-class constraints operated at the level of social discrimination. The removal of these constraints from the bottom stratum will signal a process of change in the direction of a less inegalitarian social order.

6.3 Policy formulations and societal strategies to be maximally effective should be such that they affect the system of exploitation and discrimination, not

piece meal, but in an integrated manner. Class constraints have to be dealt with a battery of economic provisions and support through scope for employment generation, whilst non-class constraints have to be severely contained through legal provision, education and conscientization. All these measures are well within the purview of state intervention through policy implementations. Besides, the state should respond discerningly in favour of social movements, which the system contradictions have thrown up, which incorporate elements of class and non-class aspects of change in the conditions of the rural poor.

6.4 We have already pointed out that the category of bonded labourers combines the worst and extreme features of exploitation and discrimination. Their presence has been identified both in the agriculturally backward feudal areas, as well as in the agriculturally advanced areas of capitalist penetration. A concerted effort should be made by the state to eliminate this structure. It is evident that the structure has proved to be vulnerable in an area of feudal backwardness, where anti-feudal social mobilisation have matched the oppressive feudal power (Palamau). The experience is quite the contrary in a region of advanced agriculture, where the structure of bondedness seems to be persisting with tenacity (Haryana). In the former situation the State could no longer remain impervious to the winds of change, in the latter, the State has turned a blind eye by declaring the non-existence of this structure.

6.5 The policy of the States related to the phenomenon of bonded labour, revolves around their identification, release and rehabilitation. This is a symptomatic, as opposed to a systemic approach. While good in many respects, it is nonetheless a piece meal approach, having to deal with cases of relapse after release. The relapse takes place on account of three reasons : (1) the debt-burden of the bonded labourers is waived by a legal fiat, which makes the bond masters aggressively inclined towards restoration of the status quo; (2) the released bonded labourers are unable to sustain themselves at a level of living which was provided by their erstwhile bondmasters partly on account of the leakage in rehabilitation programmes, but largely because of the lack of opportunities in the employment market; (3) they are unable to withstand the power of the bondmasters in the absence of protection by the state, (which is difficult for the state to guarantee) and the absence of a social mobilisation against the oppressive institution. This is the reason why many bonded labourers avoid getting identified and released.

6.6 A systemic policy approach should approximate bringing about a situation in which the probability of relapse is reduced to the minimum. Consistent with this position the following measures are being suggested :

- (1) The State should provide legal aid to the bonded who are inclined to become free. This aid should be in the form of some stipulated fee to any lawyer whom he can approach and vice versa, i.e. someone in whom he has confidence.

- (2) There can be a shift from confiscation of debts to settlement of accounts. Thus if a bonded labourer has accumulated substantial amounts of debt, and wants to become free, he can appeal to the administration through the legal aid. This can be followed by a scrutiny of accounts by the State taking into account the period of service, loans advanced and interests charged, hours of work and overtime work, leave adjustments and so on as per the laws of the State. The State can then declare the debt transferred to its account, to be paid back in lump sum, in bonds, or on a deferred basis as may be found most suitable given the resource position of the State. If the scrutiny reveals that, in fact, money stands due in favour of the labourer, the State should recover the same with penal interest and give it back to the labourer who has earned it. This scrutiny should take place with the legal aid as a party.
- (3) A bondmaster who has been subject to settlement of accounts once will be liable to penal/criminal conviction if he is found to harbour bonded labourers subsequently.
- (4) The central government which has justified loan-waivers upto Rs. 10,000 for farmers with assets, should not hesitate to accept the debt-burden of the assetless bonded labour upto Rs. 15,000.
- (5) The States can seriously consider compelling all landowners advancing loans to their labourers to do so in prescribed forms, stating the amount, duration for which extended, interest charged, mode of recovery, and so on, duly endorsed by an appropriate formal authority, signed by the debtor-labour, countersigned by a witness of his choice. There should be a ceiling on accumulation of loans, which cannot be exceeded, say up to Rs. 5,000 for the green revolution belts, and upto Rs. 1000 for backward areas. Loans advanced in any other forms should not be entertained by the State as having any legal validity.
- (6) The major consumption loan requirements of labourers relate to marriage and death ceremonies. The State could consider providing free or highly subsidised ration for a specified number of persons, reducing or eliminating the need for consumption loans. The State can also consider extending loans at low or no interests upto a certain amount for such occasions. It should promote any kind of reform efforts at curbing wasteful expenditure in such ceremonies. Such facilities will help wean the rural labourers from their employers in the matter of debt dependency.
- (7) The freed bonded labourers should be automatically entitled (1) to right of work on minimum wages, (2) to education of their children, (3) to any of the provisions of development and training programmes that apply to them, on a first priority basis, e.g. homestead, land, loans/grants for purchase of instruments of production, stipendary training under TRYSEM and so on.
- (8) Any threat of physical coercion, or violence on a freed labour should be met with deterrent penal and criminal action;
- (9) Areas characterised by high incidence of bondedness should be subject to programmes of development for income generation, particularly through expansion of activities which create non-agricultural occupations. This can enable a shift of rural labour from agricultural occupations which tend to 'tie' him with his employer within the agrarian system, to a new set of production relations.
- (10) Bonding labour, through accumulated debt-burden by illegal means, should invite penal and criminal action. This can help to curb the oppressive feudal or capitalist power associated with bonded labour. In the process the character of rural leadership could undergo change, with greater scope for the empowerment of the rural poor.
- 6.7 The state should heavily legislate and protest against the practice of social discriminations which restrict the choice of occupations to the socially deprived groups. Thus self-employment efforts in the food-chain items like vegetable, fruit, sweet meat shops and vending by the socially deprived and backward castes and communities should be encouraged. Provisions for institutions credit/grant should be extended.
- 6.8 Informal cooperative arrangements in credit and farming, exclusively found among the poor, suggest that such efforts can be encouraged and formalized by providing substantial matching grants to make them self-sustaining. These could be linked with macro-scale cooperative movements.
- 6.9 The setting of minimum wages should be realistic. Where market wages are much higher than minimum wages, an upward revision should not be delayed. The case of maximum wages for brick kiln labour illustrates this point.
- 6.10 The State violations of minimum wages fixed by the State should be stopped forthwith.
- 6.11 The replacement of the present systems of (1) a single Directorate of labour (as in U.P., Haryana) or of (ii) two separate Directorates of Agricultural Labour, and, Industrial Labour (as in Bihar), by (iii) two separate Directorates of Rural Labour, and, Urban-industrial Labour, is well worth considering. This will bring rural Labour (both agricultural and non-agricultural) within the ambit of a single administrative set up.

6.12 Following from our sample survey, we have noted that areas under irrigation are associated with relatively better agrarian conditions. Considering that this indication is present in agriculturally backward areas like Ranchi and Palamau, where even irrigation in irrigated areas is woefully inadequate, the efforts to step up efforts in this direction should be taken up in right earnest. Irrigation programmes consistent with ecological balance, and after providing for adequate safeguards or acceptable alternatives to those who would be displaced, must be initiated expeditiously.

6.13 The periods of non-availability of standard meal in Palamau and Ranchi are periods of great distress. These periods should be monitored through Panchayats and local administration, and facilities of subsidised rations extended to them. The Jawahar

Rojgar Yojana which tries to provide employment during lean seasons should be combined with such a programme of rationing.

6.14 As a strategy of state intervention, distribution of surplus land to landless should be combined with skill development for non-agricultural occupations. Distribution of small parcels of land are counter-productive and result in their alienation in future. Training, production and marketing of non-agricultural goods should be organised to free rural labour and make it mobile.

6.15 The task of the National Commission on Rural Labour already poses a strong case for the establishment of a permanent National Council of Rural Labour, with a firm interdisciplinary, academic-administrative, activist composition.

STUDY GROUP ON SOCIAL CONSTRAINTS ON RURAL LABOUR

TERMS REFERENCE

1. To make a holistic study of social constraints of rural labour based on caste, tribe, sex and religion etc. and its impact on the socio-economic conditions and day-to-day life on the rural labourers.
2. (a) To study the differentiation by class on the class of rural labourers, in terms of those who are without any means of production, and those who own some means of production and yet enter the market of rural labourers.
(b) To study whether class and social differentiation intercorrelate in any patterns without consequences for rural labour. It would be of interest to know whether these are indicative of upward/downward mobility.
3. To study the conditions which promote/inhibit the mobilisation of the class of rural labourers.
4. (a) To study whether the labour market operates independently of the structure of discriminations, in respect of recruitment, determination of wages, and the living conditions of the rural labourers.
(b) To study whether the labour market, with regard to recruitment, wages, and conditions of living, undergoes any changes as between regions which have experienced the green revolution, and regions which have not.
5. To what extent are the basic human and fundamental rights within the reach of the class of rural labourers.
6. To identify the social organisations of labour associated with different types of rural labour, the mechanisms and processes by which these are reproduced, and the forces operating upon them to bring about changes.
7. To what extent are the political institutions, like the political parties, rural labour unions, legislatures, panchayats, administration, judiciary, etc. really enfranchising the class of rural labourers with a sense of power to change and transform their conditions of living.
8. To study the impact of constitutional and legal protection, poverty alleviation programmes etc. in counteracting the social constraints of rural labourers and suggest measures for improvement in this regard.

Daily wages for casual labour in the different agricultural operations by irrigated and unirrigated areas in the districts of Ranchi, Palamau and Karnal-Panipat

District	Ploughing/ Sowing	Planting/ transplanting hoeing	Weeding/ mouing	Harvesting	Threshing	Irrigating/ ridging
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Ranchi						
Irrigated	Rs. 12 & 4 Kg. paddy to Rs. 30 only	Rs. 7 & 4-6 kg paddy to Rs. 15 only	Rs. 7 & 4 kg. paddy to Rs. 15 only	Rs. 10 & 5 kg. paddy to Rs. 15 only	Rs. 12/- to Rs. 15 only	Rs. 12 & 4 kg. paddy to Rs. 15 only
Unirrigated	Rs. 12 & 4 kg. paddy to Rs. 25 only	Rs. 7 to Rs. 20 only	Rs. 12+4 kg. paddy to Rs. 15 only	Rs. 12+4 kg. paddy to Rs. 25 only	—	Rs. 10 & 4 to 5 kg. paddy to Rs. 25 only
Palamau						
Irrigated	Rs. 12/- to Rs. 15/- with 1 or 2 meals (breakfast+lunch) OR Rs. 6/- and 3 kg of paddy OR 4-5 kg of paddy only.					
Unirrigated	Rs. 12/- to Rs. 15/- with two to three meals OR 2 to 3 kgs. of paddy with 2 meals.					
Karnal-Panipat						
Irrigated	—	—	Rs. 25/- only	Rs. 25 to Rs. 30 for sugarcane.	15 Kg. wheat	—

Source of credit, and debt amounts for rural labour households in the irrigated and unirrigated areas of Ranchi, Palamau, Karnal-Panipat.

District	BANK			MONEYLENDER			EMPLOYER			KIN			RURAL		
	Debtor	Amount	Per Capita	Debtor	Amount	Per Capita	Debtor	Amount	Per Capita	Debtor	Amount	Per Capita	Debtor	Amount	Per Capita
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)	(14)	(15)	(16)
Ranchi															
Irrig. (N = 152) *n = 33	33	70,725	2143	8	10,350	1293	1	400	400	42	81,475	1940
Unirrig. (N = 152) n = 11	10	44,800	4480	1	200	200	3	2,070	690	0	0	0	14	47,070	3362
Total (1) (n = 44)	43	1,15,525	2687	1	200	200	11	12,420	1129	1	400	400	56	1,38,545	2295
Palamau															
Irrig. N = 152 n = 45	45	1,12,963	2533	5	14,500	2900	12	10,300	858	6	3400	567	68	1,41,163	2076
Unirrig. N = 152 n = 38	38	93,630	2412	11	5,700	518	14	4,405	315	4	1,900	475	135	1,05,635	782
Total (2) n = 83	83	2,06,953	2493	16	20,200	1263	26	10,705	412	10	5,300	530	203	2,46,798	1215
Karnal-Panipat n = 304	48	2,61,700	5452	49	2,18,500	4459	45	2,69,000	5978	10	32,350	3235	152	7,81,550	5142
TOTAL (1) + (2) + Karnal-Panipat n = 7	174	5,84,178	3357	66	2,38,900	3620	82	2,92,125	3563	21	55,150	2626	411	11,56,893	2815

*n — Total number of discrete RLH who have taken loan from one or more sources.

Credit utilisation from different sources by rural labour households in Ranchi, Palamau, Karnal-Panipat.

Institution	RANCHI			PALAMAU			KARNAL-PANIPAT		
	Debtor Clients (DC)	Amount	Amount/DC	Debtor Clients (DC)	Amount	Amount/DC	Debtor Clients (DC)	Amount	Amount/DC
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
1. Bank only	32 (73%)	83,525 (65%)	2610.15	52 (63%)	1,32,003 (53%)	2537.82	3 (4%)	15,000 (2%)	5000.00
2. Employer only	1 (2%)	2,000 (2%)	2000.00	0	—	—	12 (15%)	94,750 (12%)	7895.83
3. Moneylender only	0	—	—	0	—	—	16 (21%)	74,400 (10%)	4650.00
4. Kin only	0	—	—	0	—	—	0	—	—
5. Bank + Employer	9 (20%)	33,020 (26%)	3668.88	12 (14%)	32,120 (13%)	2676.66	12 (15%)	142,500 (18%)	11875.00
6. Bank + Moneylender	1 (2%)	5,200 (4%)	5200.00	1 (1%)	8,550 (3%)	8550.00	10 (13%)	110,400 (14%)	11040.00
7. Bank + Kin	0	—	—	3 (4%)	14,050 (6%)	4683.33	1 (1%)	8,000 (1%)	8000.00
8. Employer + Moneylender	0	—	—	0	—	—	1 (1%)	11,200 (1%)	11200.00
9. Bank + employer + moneylender	0	—	—	8 (10%)	41,225 (17%)	5153.12	14 (18%)	222,800 (29%)	15914.28
10. Bank + employer + Kin	1 (2%)	4,800 (4%)	4800.00	0	—	—	0	—	—
11. Bank + moneylender	0	—	—	1 (1%)	2,450 (1%)	2450.00	3 (4%)	33,500 (4%)	11166.66
12. Bank + employer + moneylender + kin	0	—	—	6 (7%)	16,400 (7%)	2733.33	6 (8%)	69,000 (9%)	11500.00
Total	44 (100)	1,28,545 (100)	2921.00	83 (100)	2,46,798 (100)	2973	78 (100)	7,81,550 (100)	10019

MGIPRRND—1598 Lab/91—S.c. IV D—30-7-91—2,000.