

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Agricultural Labourers form the poorest section of the rural population in India as well as in West Bengal. In numerical terms, they constitute about one-fourth of the total work force. Their number has been rising faster than the rate of growth of rural population. By the term agricultural labourers we mean a person who sells his/her labour power to work to another person's land for wages in money, kind or a share of the crop. According to the 1991 Census definition, "a person who works on another person's land for wages – in money, kind or share of crop is regarded as an agricultural labourer. He or she has no risk in cultivation, but merely works on another person's land for wages. An agricultural labourer has no right of lease or contract on the land on which he or she works". (Census of India, 1991, paper – III of 1991, p. 6).

Thus the Census definition clearly excludes tenants as well as marginal farmers and includes only landless labourers. The definition adopted by us would be broader in the sense that it would include all those for whom sale of labour power in the agricultural sector is a source of livelihood.

The living condition and the standard of living of agricultural labourers would mainly depend upon the income earned by them. Therefore, in order to judge the standard of living of agricultural labourers it is absolutely essential to find out their total income and assets which calls for an inquiry into the determinants of their employment and wages.

There are a good number of studies in India and in West Bengal on the living conditions as well as on the employment, wages and income of agricultural labourers in the 1970's and early 1980's (Krishnaji; 1971; Jose, 1974; Bondopadhyaya, 1977; Lal, 1979; Bardhan, 1984, 1986; Dasgupta, 1984, Chattopadhyaya, 1985). But since the late eighties onwards very few studies have been undertaken on the topic. However, since the 1980s till date vast changes have taken place in the rural socio-economic scenarios of West Bengal including its northern part popularly known as North Bengal. A large area of land has come under modern agricultural strategy.

Along with the introduction of bio-technological innovation in agriculture there has been a perceptible increase in agricultural production and productivity. However, modern technology is yet to reach the every nook and corner of North Bengal. Along with the changes in technology, production relations has also undergone a considerable change. The old patron-client relationship between the employers and the employees is not prevalent in the same way as it was before the 1980s. Yet the relationship has not changed altogether. There has been widespread casualisation of agricultural labour. One can hardly find permanent farm servants today at the houses of large land holders. Moreover, the modern technology of production has brought about two types of effects on employment of labour, viz, labour displacing and labour absorbing effects. Naturally, the pertinent question that arises in this context is : How the living condition of the agricultural labourers are changing under this socio-techno-economic milieu? The answer to this question would actually depend upon the answer to the question: What has been the direction of change in agricultural wage rates and the number of days of employment per agricultural labourer in West Bengal during the period since 1980s to the present day? While finding out the answer to this question from secondary data, it is also necessary to find out the determinants of wages and employment and income of agricultural labourers through both secondary and micro level data. Because micro level data would give us more insight about the factors at work for the determination of wages, employment and income. This would require the finding out of answer to many more questions relating to the factors that we regard as determinants to wages, employment and income.

Since there is a large gap in literature providing answer to the significant questions related to the livelihood of a vast section of the poor people of West Bengal, we find it very appropriate to study this problem. However, given the time and resource constraint of an individual researcher we would like to choose Uttar Dinajpur district, a predominantly agricultural and backward district of West Bengal for the purpose of an in-depth study. The main objective of the study would therefore be an in-depth analysis at micro-level to find out the determinants of employment, wages and income which comprehensively determines the living condition of agricultural labourers. However, we shall also use macro level data to find out relevant determinants. Another objective of this study is to compare and contrast between the

factors influencing the determination of wages, employment and income between three irrigated villages and three non-irrigated sample villages selected from six block of Uttar Dinajpur district.

The study has enabled us to draw policy conclusions for suggesting appropriate government measures to raise the number of employment days available in the farm and non-farm sectors and also to raise the level of wages of agricultural labourers.

1.2 A Brief Review of Literature

A considerable amount of literature has grown on agricultural labour in India. We have briefly reviewed some of the literature relevant for our study.

Jose (1974) has attempted to defend the data that seem to support the 'new orthodoxy hypothesis' that wage rates of agricultural labourers are directly determined by the supply demand conditions in the rural labour market and that changes in the market situation, can be measured by the movement of wage rates in the process he raises some questions on the validity of the hypothesis, implicit in all such studies. He looks into relative merits and demerits of the different sources of agricultural wage data. To him the real earning of the agricultural labour household primarily depends on three variables; namely, the agricultural wage rates, the quantum of employment per year available per worker, and the price of wage goods consumed by the members of the household. Making use of the information available in the various enquires the author attempts to explain how in Indian context factors other than wage rates might be crucial in the determination of real earnings of agricultural labour households. He also examines the relative changes in the real earnings of agricultural labour households derived from wage employment in different states between 1963-64 and 1970-71. A comparison of these indices of income with those agricultural wage rate indices for the same period bring out clearly that the latter are inadequate to explain trends in the income of agricultural labourers in different states.

Misra and Gupta's (1974) paper focuses the trend in money wages, real wages and the wage-productivity relationship across the districts of Gujarat during 1960-61 to 1968-69 and also to identify factors affecting inter districts wage-differentials for 1968-69 in Gujarat. The compound rate of growth of money wages across districts varied 5 percent to 8 percent per annum during this period except Surendranagar,

Amreli and Subarkantha, where as in real terms the wages declined at the rate of 1 percent to 3 percent in all districts of Gujarat except Ahmedabad and Surat, where it increased at the rate about .87 percent and .30 percent per annum respectively. In view of the relationship between money wages and productivity, the regression analysis does not show serial correlation in most of the districts. The co-efficient of productivity again turn out to be non-significant in all districts except for Jamnagar, Bhabnagar, Amreli and Baroda, where it is influenced by the productivity changes probably due to the fact that there has been piece rate system of wages particularly harvesting of groundnut and cotton in these districts. Apart from productivity, there are several other variables such as distribution of lands holdings, irrigated area, availability of pump sets, tractors use, availability of agricultural labour, playing an important role in wage determination. However, only availability of pump sets and agricultural labour turn out to be significant. The former has positive sign for its co-efficient, where as in the latter the co-efficient have negative sign, indicating that the wage rate responds positively to the variations in the availability pump sets and negatively to the agricultural labourers

Bandyopadhyay (1977) has investigated the causes of sharp rise in the number of agricultural labourers from 1961 to 1971 in Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling and Malda districts of North Bengal. He has found different reasons in different districts for the rapid increase in the number of agricultural labourers. In the case of Jalpaiguri district, the reasons are the break down of the *giri-adhairy* system of cultivation, the ravages of the 1967-68 floods in Tista and its tributaries, spill over of tea labour into agricultural operations, possible inclusion of populations inhabiting unauthorized villages in and around forest areas of the district, growth of comparatively more intensive farming methods and rapid expansion of pineapple plantations in the stretches between Jalpaiguri and Siliguri. However, the last three reasons do not seem to be very much convincing. In the case of Darjeeling district, the incidence of increase in the number of agricultural labourers took place mainly in the Siliguri subdivision. Here the causes identified were the eviction of sharecroppers and rapid conversion of agricultural land for non-agricultural purposes around the town of Siliguri. In the case of Malda district, in addition to eviction of sharecroppers, the other causes for the swelling of the ranks of agricultural labourers were the natural

increase in population vis-à-vis the lack of scope of cultivation and limitation of cocoon rearing and mango cultivation to absorb additional labour force.

Chattopadhyaya (1977) has discussed some important aspects of employment and unemployment and surplus labour in Indian agriculture. According to the author there are two separate concepts in the expression of surplus labour – static and dynamic. Static concepts refers to that amount of population in agriculture which can be removed from it without leading to any reduction in output. Dynamic concepts refers to that amount of population which can be removed from the agriculture without its output falling, assuming a change in the method of cultivation – through reorganization in fixed and variable capital and a re-arrangement or re-allocation of work or through change in the cultivation, including additional use of both fixed and variable capital. Moreover, as the farm size increases, the importance of the farm servants also goes up, and employment pattern of farm servants vis-à-vis casual labour conforms to general expectation.

Bardhan and Rudra (1979) aims to focus on different categories of agricultural labour. On the basis of a survey of 110 villages in West Bengal, they have attempted to assess the relative numerical importance of these categories. To the authors, there exists a variety of labour relations in agriculture, not only in different regions of India but even in the same area. These different relations differ because of different combination of a certain number of attributes, such as, a) duration of contract, b) basis of payment, c) frequency of payment, d) specification of the nature and hours of work, e) medium of payment, f) interlinkage with other contract on credit or land relation with employer and, g) freedom of work for different employer. In their survey not a single labour respondent in any of the 110 villages reported an ancient debt as the basis of attachment to any employer. Only 2, out of 138 fully attached labour families in their sample villages are reported to have consumption loan as the basis of attachment .

Mencher (1980) has examined in some detail to what extent optimistic statement about the 'miracle' of Kerala will hold up under closer scrutiny. This is done by through an examination of the conditions of the life of agricultural labourers in areas of a) health and fertility; b) fertility and employment, c) nutrition, d) education, literacy, public facilities and the responsiveness of land reform measures on them.

To the author, Kerala has achieved a truly startling drop in the birth rate, along with a decrease in the infant mortality rate and a rise in the life expectancy. Agricultural labour unions started functioning at first in Kuttanand (Kerala), and such unions could assure wage rate which is regarded as one of the highest in India. In the event when availability of work would decrease, the only way that most labourers could stay on even ground would depend on their ability to demand higher wages. They did not find any economic advantages of having large families for they could realise that even the literate adult child would as also have to work as agricultural labourers. And thus family planning was considered important. To this was added the fact that land reforms had produced a more equitable distribution of land in Kerala and as a result the poverty in Kerala begun to be eliminated. According to the author, in Kerala, govt. had done a great deal to help the poor, in terms of health measure and education. In Kerala some public goods had been found to be better distributed than elsewhere. This had played a significant role in educating the poorest sections of the Keralian population.

Dasgupta (1984) discussed first the condition of the agricultural labourers in the pre-British situation and then traced the growth of agricultural labourers under the British regime. It showed how the then growth corresponded to the economic policies of the colonial govt. and how, by the 1920's, the land-man ratio turned against the labourers, which not only led to a worsening of their condition but also brought about a change in their ethnic composition. He investigated the possible size of the class of agricultural labourers in Pre-British societies where the population was divided into four major groups of castes – higher, agricultural, artisans and personal services. The major sources of the supply of agricultural labour were the so-called 'semi-Hinduised aborigine groups' as well as the labourers who came from outside the state. Landlessness as a characteristic of agricultural labour begun to emerge with large scale entry of these two groups in the settled agriculture of Bengal. His study revealed that there was a patron-client relationship between the tribal labour and the employer and as a result they did not like to go elsewhere, even when the wage was higher. Given the caste tribal influences the working of the "patron-client relationship", and the debt bondage as well as many other ties whgich linked them to their employer, they were never free in the Marxist sense to constitute wage labour of the capitalist type. However, towards the end of the British rule, a number of vital changes begun to

occur whose significance was more clearly understood after the independence. The important programme taken by the West Bengal Govt for the agricultural labourers had also been discussed.

Singh (1986) has depicted the impact of the green revolution on the levels of living of the agricultural labourers and the marginal farmers in the rural areas of Punjab. For doing this work the author had chosen three districts and ten villages and altogether 450 households. He had given much stresses to study the sources, composition and the pattern of income and the consumption expenditure of the agricultural labourers and the marginal farmers. The main source of income of the agricultural labourers showed an increasing trend but the per capita income of the marginal farmers were found to be positively co-related with income and the productivity level over income category across the districts. The study revealed that there were much similarities in the consumption pattern of agricultural labour household as well as marginal farmers in the rural areas of Punjab.

Ahlawat (1988), has made a short account of the various studies on agricultural labourers to study the impact of green revolution on agricultural labourers. Three regions had been taken under review of the Haryana state namely, Region A (Hissar, Sirsa, Bhiwani and Jind districts): the second most prosperous region. Region B (Karnal, Kurushetra, Senapat, etc), the richest agricultural area of the state. Region C (Ambala, Rohtak, Gurgaon, Faridabad and Mahendragar districts), the least-agriculturally developed area. To the author, during the British rule the peasants lost their land then joined the rank of the landless agricultural labour force. During the period 1966-67 to 1978-79 the annual growth rate in primary sector experienced a great push and in 1977, states's domestic product per-adult worker was the highest both for primary and the whole economy. The average real wage of the agricultural labourers, had risen substantially over the years. The author also pointed out that the economic development due to green revolution in India removed rural poverty to some extent, but could not reduce the poverty of the landless agricultural labourers. Without a large measures of conscientisation of the rural poor, no plan or strategy could uplift them.

Parthasarathy (1990) focuses on trends of wages and employment during 1985-86 to 1993-94 and provides functional analysis of variables influencing to the level of wages, employment and also unemployment. This paper also discusses the

options in public interventions for improved conditions in agricultural labour. The post – 1985s scenario particularly the phase of economic reforms, was marked by worsening of real wages since the prices of wage goods rose faster than the earlier period. The functional analysis of money wage rates suggests that labour productivity, percentage of agricultural labour households in total rural households, diversification as measured by percentage of non-agriculture in total households, landlessness influence variations in wage rates and explain 85 percent of the variation across the states. Wage rate could be raised only by increasing productivity, by decrease in the supply of agricultural labour, diversification of non-agricultural occupations. Employment in agriculture by usual status measure showed little absorption in the 1980s. By daily status measure there was an improvement in absorption in agriculture. Employment of agricultural labour is found to be negatively related to money wage rate, to agricultural worker per hectare and it is a positively related to the supply of agricultural labour and negatively related to growth. Among policy options, the most higher is demand for labour. This will imply effective implementation of land reforms to sustain the growth process. There is a need for sharper targets for distribution under PDS. Universal primary education among agricultural labour must be given top priority.

Sarap (1991) has analysed the mechanism of contractual arrangements between the employers and agricultural labourers in the specific context of some east Indian villages (in Orissa) by taking into account the type of crops grown, prevailing technology and other characteristics of economic and social environment including external intervention such as in-migration of labour, enterprising farmers and state intervention. A variety of contractual arrangements with diverse mode of payment and contract enforcing mechanism are found among labour households in the study area. The speed of change is more in the wet area as compared to dry ones. The mode of payment for farms servants have undergone changes (more in wet area) to cope with the external intervention from the state and because of in-migration. The large farmer-employers prefer group-labour in order to save time schedules required and recruitment cost when utilized new technology. The employer take variety of strategies to attract labour, such as by giving interest free loans, others loans, tie in with casual and group labour by incentive payment, giving house-site to the semi-permanent worker and tiny pieces of land for cultivation to farm servants, not just to

reduce the cost of recruitment, the moral hazard and incentives problems but to discipline the labour and help in the exercises of social cost. The personalized relationship through caste link are also factors to help in contract enforcement. To the author many employers do try to change their farm servant frequently as well as not all casual labourers seek attachment to particular employers, despite the security and benefits offered to them. The agricultural labour market in the study area is segmented on the lines of caste, tribe, kinship, gender, local/migrant and so on, suggesting lack of collective bargaining and collusion among the labour households, for demanding higher wages. The daily wage paid to the labourers is below the minimum wage prescribed by the state, which itself is low.

Bhalla's (1991) paper deals with some aspects of wage determination and labour absorption in Indian agriculture. Agricultural wage rates in India are systematically below the marginal product of labour and the gap between the wage rate and productivity tends to widen whenever labour productivity goes up. The regression analysis has been done to determine factors influencing the real wage rate using time series data for each state separately or cross-section analysis for single year instead of the average long periods. The results shows that inter-state variations in labour productivity constitute the most significant factor in explaining differences in real wage rate. Relatively high labour productivity, it appears, tends to push up real wage rates, while poverty among self-employed cultivators pulls wage rates down. The time series results indicate that the dominant factors in most states have been, first and foremost, the availability of non-farm work, and secondly change in the cost of living. Overtime, changes in labour productivity do not seem to have played a significant role in any state, except in Uttar Pradesh, in the case of the CPIAL deflated wage series.

Unni (1992) explores the process of women's work participation in agriculture by analyzing the relevant secondary data for the period 1960 to 1988. The study highlights the fact that unlike men, women's supply behaviour and response to demand for their labour are not necessarily determined by market mechanisms. Specific agro-climatic conditions and crop cultural practices are associated with high female labour use and women from different classes respond differently to these opportunities for work. That is, changes in prices and incomes alone can't explain the

participation of women in the work force. Various social, cultural and ideological factors condition women's work participation.

Ansari's (1992) study has focused on socio-economic conditions of agricultural labourers in one of the least developed regions of Uttar Pradesh, Bundelkhand where there is little economic activity except agriculture. Employment availability in agriculture is irregular and low. It is estimated that an agricultural labourer, on an average, was employed on wage in his household occupational activities for 216 days of the year. If full employment is being equated to 300 days of work in a year, an average agricultural labourer is found without employment for as long as period as about 3 months in a year. There is some evidence of a decline in the real wage rate over the 1970's and 1980's of farm work. An average agricultural labourer is estimated to have earned Rs. 840 during the years of reference. They spent a higher proportion of time in self-employment than in wage employment. The author also considers the likely impact of technological improvement in agriculture on the absorption of labour within agriculture.

Basu and Kashyap (1992) review the works and studies relating to labour absorption in the farm and non-farm sector. It also examines the reasons of growth of non-agricultural sector due to agricultural growth and exploring rural-urban employment linkages through micro level study conducted in 1989-90 in different districts of some states of our country. Most of the available studies lend support to the 'residual' sector hypothesis regarding the emergence of the non-farm rural employment, implying that relative population pressure and unemployment are the determinant factors. The author argued that such a generalized hypothesis is not satisfactory, as it tends to conceal the role of agricultural development process. The micro level studies that were cast over different typologies of agricultural development give some clue to the process that lead to the emergence of non-agricultural sector. It turns out that it is not the level of agricultural productivity but the cropping mix, particularly in favour of cash crops. That leads to the emergence of 'farmer-entrepreneur'. Wide spread distribution of cold storage facilities in Farukhabad district, growth of processing units in Hoshangabad district and emergence of agro-processing units such as sugar, champaign, raisin and tomato-ketchup units in Nasik district support this phenomenon. As a matter of fact, as the findings of micro level studies in nine districts suggest that growth of agro-based

activities is more in small and medium towns than villages. Migration process and urban accessibility play important role in determine the non-farm employment. Micro level studies demonstrate that temporary migration labour force from rural to urban area account for a sizeable portion of work force in various economic activities of the urban centre.

Chadha's (1993) paper focuses expansion of non-farm sector in rural India, type of people engaged in non-farm against those in farm activities, earning/age differentials between the two sets of employments, the modes of employment prevailing in agriculture against those in non-agriculture and so on. The rural workforce is gradually shifting from low productivity agricultural sector to more productive non-agricultural job of divers variety, partly in rural areas themselves and partly in urban areas. By the close of the eighties, nearly one-fourth of rural male and about one sixth of rural female workers were engaged in different types of non-agricultural activities. In particular, the eighties, witnessed a significant turning pointing of rural employment structure when the incremental rural workforce went mostly to non-agricultural sectors. While during the seventies, agriculture was a big absorber of incremental work force. The mode of employment too is undergoing significant changes while self-employment is on the decline, both in agriculture as well as non-agriculture, increase in wage labour and their rising space of actualization are the emerging realities of the eighties. The wage rate for non-agricultural work employment is significantly higher than for agricultural work. Gender differential in wage rate are also found. The wage rate for female workers for any specified variety of employment is lower than the corresponding wage rate for male workers.

Sharma (1993) examines the trends in the agriculral money/real wage earnings, gender differentials in the real wage earnings, the effect of rising agricultural productivity on money/real wage earnings and the number of employment days available to an agricultural labourer. The money wage earnings of both male and female agricultural labourers increased continuously practically in all the states since 1956-57, the trends in real wage earnings are mixed; these increased in a majority of the states between 1956-57 and 1977-78 followed by a decline of varying degrees between 1977-78 and 1983. Consequently, taking long period view, in as many as nine states, namely, Assam, Bihar, Jammu and Kashmir, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal, the daily average real wage earnings

in 1983 were lower as compared to those in 1956-57. Nevertheless, the number of employment days available to male and female labour, despite fluctuations from one period to other, were significantly higher in 1983 compared with 1956-57. The study further brings out the declining male/female real wages earnings differentials and also supports the hypothesis that the per worker agricultural product affects the money / real wage earnings favourably.

Pal ((1996) has shown that economic development in rural India goes hand in hand with an expansion of alternative employment opportunities for agricultural labour and also with an expansion of access to credit leading to a downward shift in the supply of regular wage labour along with a trend towards casualisation of rural labour. Using NSS data and Census data from India, the author attempts to generalize the result from study village for wider extent. She points out that there is no evidence that improved credit facilities have affected the incidence of regular labour, however, it appears from the existing evidence that there is a close relationship between the declining incidence of regular labour and increasing availability of alternative employment opportunities with better wage facilities in different Indian States, though an inter-state variation is observed in this respect. It is argued that this decline in regular labour contracts is due primarily to a shift to the left of the supply curve itself due to better employment and/or credit opportunities, rather than to a shift to the left of the demand curve, reflecting an increasing reluctance on the part of the farmers to hire regular labourers. A possible manifestation of this effect is that the decline of regular contracts has gone hand in hand with an increase and not a decrease in real wages.

Pandya (1996) analyses the problem of labour absorption in Indian agriculture. The problems are studied using farm level, 'Cost of Cultivation', data. He points out that the farm size has negative impact on labour use and fragmentation of land holding has positive impact on labour use. The effect of farm size vary according to the types of labour use. The effect of HYVs and irrigation on labour use is positive. Mechanization, when carried out with simultaneous introduction of HYVs and irrigation, does not reduce labour input. The wage rates and labour use are inversely related.

Rogaly's (1996) study draws on a study of labour exchange in two contrasting localities in Purulia and Bardhaman districts of West Bengal between 1991 and 1993.

The author recorded six main indigenous type of hired labour arrangement in each locality, 'using local terms'. It was found that workers from the poorest households (indicated by ranking lowest in terms of assets), more likely than other to hire out labour in beck and call arrangements, based on lean season loan and advances (in Bardhaman locality). At the same time it was found that for a given level of wealth households with larger number of able-bodied adults were more likely than others to have at least one member hired out in beck-and-call arrangement. The study revealed that variation in remuneration within hired labour arrangement is economically and socially embedded in wealth differences among labourers, in gender and caste ideologies and in party policies. The state level data indicate rising average real wage during a period of rapid growth in output, but the poorest workers receive much lower than the mean remuneration. To the author, increased multiple cropping and adoption of high yielding varieties has sharpened time constraints assuning an increase in the use of gang-based piece rate labour for greater speed of tusk completion.

Jha (1997) in his study of agricultural labour in Purnea district of Bihar describes the conditions of agricultural labourers in the past and present and visualizes the future and utilize secondary and primary sources of data. It is a study at macro, regional and micro levels. It tries to relate the findings of these in one direction, i.e. changes in the labour process in the changing socio-economic scenario in the process of agricultural development. He has rightly searched the need for analysis of this type. However, it seems that the findings are over shadowed on information collected from secondary sources and personal acquaintance rather than from information gathered through questionnaire / schedule. Though the author has attempted to make his study more analytical, it remains descriptive. It is a good collection of materials on the subject and it would be better to view the work in the light of raising more issues than solving them.

Nath (1998) has explained the reasons for the growth in the agricultural labourers, particularly, those without land. He also explains the factors that have historically influenced the pattern of land ownership and control. The study makes an attempt to compare and contrast the agrarian labour situation in the advanced regions with that of the backward regions.

Reddy's (1998) study deals with trends of money and real wages of agricultural labourers in paddy farming by size / zone in Andhara Pradesh during the period 1981-82 to 1991-92 and also analyses the factors influencing the variations in real wages. There was a steady increase in money wages during 1981-82 to 1991-92 at state level and all the zones though the magnitude of the increase differed from one zone to another. Money wages of attached labourers were highest in zone-2 and lowest in zone -5 Money wages of casual labourers in zone-4 and zone-5 were higher than zone-2 in triennium ending 1983-84. The study shows an increasing trend in real wages with a little fluctuation at the state as well as zonal level. An attempt has been made to study the relationship between wages and yield and wages with output price per quintal of paddy using linear and non-linear fuctions. The results show significant positive co-efficient with respect to output prices at the state as well as at the zonal levels implying that money wages are positively associated with output prices. This indicates that the benefit, which accrued to the paddy farmers through a rise in the output prices, also percolated to the agricultural labourers. With respect to yields also, the co-efficient were positive and significant for the state as well as in all zones implying that wages are influenced by changes in the yields. Thus, the benefits of technology has also reached the asgricultural labourers at the state as well as at the zonal level, though not uniformly.

Sajjad (1998) conducted a comprehenshive survey in the years of 1995 and 1996 in 85 sample villages consisting of 850 landless labour households of Aligarh district of Uttar Pradesh to study the conditions of landless labourers. The high growth rate of landless labourers in this district is the result of rapid decline in the number of workers engaged in household industries and in other occupations, fragmentations of intermediaries. Landless labourers did not gets employment for the whole year in the agricultural sector. On an average a labourer gets work in the agricultural sector are also low and vary across sex, operations and seasons. The growth of employment in the non-agricultural sector in the study area is a result of distress phenomenon of unemployment agricultural labourers who are forced to undertake non-farm work either inside the village or as daily commuters to nearby city area or as seasonal migrants to some far urban centers. The average annual per capita income of landless labourers was Rs. 2,444/-. The major share of family budget (68.6 percent) was spent on food and clothing followed by social ceremonies (5.2 percent) and education (3.2

percent). Most of the landless labour households (81.8 percent) were under debt. The debt was mainly taken from professional moneylenders, co-operative credit societies, landlords, relatives and friends.

Tripathy (2000) makes an attempt to examine the socio-economic features of contractual agricultural labour in India with special reference to Orissa with the help of both primary as well as secondary sources of data. Analysing the genesis of the agricultural labour from the historical perspectives, the study has focused light on the various types of labour prevalent in India viz, bonded labour, attached or contract labour, migrant labour, casual labour etc.

Purukayastha (2001) conducted a study on the incidence and extent of indebtedness in rural areas of Assam. It is a great tragedy that when almost all the major states of India recorded a steady sharp fall in the share of informal sources in the recent past, the sample villages of Assam registered a reversal of the trend during the economic liberalization period (1991). The share of the organized sector subsidized loan has declined considerably in recent times. In fact, not a single household was provided with a subsidized loan carrying rate of interest less than 10 percent. Out of 256 sample households, only 44 households constituting just 17 percent of the sample got loans from different organized agencies over the last twenty years (1979-80 to 1999-00). The IRDP (SGSY) beneficiaries accounted for as high as 73 percent of all beneficiary households. The 'Swarna Jayanti Gram Swaraj Yojana', aims at covering groups of beneficiaries including self-help groups rather than providing assistance to individuals. In this respect, the situation of Assam is worst. This is a very significant move although the ground work for group loan is only in the infant stage in the country. The development of co-operative credit infrastructure in this region is the urgent need of the hour so as to replace the dominant position of the informal sources in the rural scene of the state of Assam.

Sharma (2001) examines the trends in number and changes in quantum of employment days available to agricultural labour and also to examine the changes in the relative importance of different sources of employment like wage-paid employment, self-employment and employment on salary basis. Changes in the real wage earnings including gender differentials and the effect of different factors on daily wage earning has also been discussed. The data show a significant increase in the total numbers of employment days both adult male and female labour, in almost all

the states. The evidence also suggests a trend towards diversification of employment especially from land to non-land activities: as many as 10 major states (Andra Pradesh, Assam, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa, Rajasthan and West Bengal), substantial decline in the percentage share of wage paid employment was associated with an equally significant increase in the percentage share of self-employment. In the case of adult female labour, the trend was mixed. In seven states (Bihar, Haryana, Jammu and Kashmir, Karnataka, Kerala, Punjab and Uttar Pradesh), wage-paid employment become more important where as in seven others (Andra Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa, Rajasthan and Tamil Nadu) as a decline in the percentage share of wage paid employment was accompanied by an increase in the share of self-employment. The real wage earnings of both adult male and female labour increased continuously, practically in all states since 1974-75 except during 1983, both in agricultural and non-agricultural operations. There was no consistent trend in the male-female wage differentials. The regression analysis further shows that while productivity per worker and the proportion of rural workers employed in the non-farm sector have a positive and significant on daily money and real wage earnings, the proportion of landless households had a negative effect.

Bagchi's (2003) study deals with the evolution of land tenure system in a northern part of West Bengal known as Duars region from the Bhutanese period to the post independence period, based on field survey of six villages of Western Duars during 1985-86. The study points out that in the post- independence period the land tenure system has undergone major changes. With the enactment of new legislation, all sorts of intermediary interests in land have been abolished and direct relationship has been established between the state and the tenants. Under Operation Barga (OB) programme, some *bargadars* have been able to record their names and they are now in a secured position than unrecorded ones. Some arrangement have been made to provide finance to *bargadars* from institutional sources, but on the whole they still depend on other forms of non-institutional sources of finance for which they borrow mostly on unfavourable term. The study also highlighted the facts that recording has nothing to do with increasing the productivity of land. Big landowners have evicted the large sections of *bargadars*, who are not able to record their names. They have been reduced to the status of agricultural labourers. The enormous growth of

agricultural labourers may be considered as one of the most important changes that the Duars economy of North Bengal along with other parts of West Bengal has witnessed since the attainment of independence of India. Breakdown of *jotedari-adhiary* system, the rate of growth of population, absence of alternative sources of livelihood of the rising number of population, eviction of *bargadars* and the decline of the *bargadari* system are some of the important causes identified by the author.

Pandit's (2003) work is a micro study of the Bengal agrarian labour force from 1885 to 1952, which tries to explain the history of emergence of wage labourers and the problems of poverty and production in the region in the context of commercialized agriculture under colonial rule and after. There are various factors such as the cash-crop cultivation, the pressure of population on lands, price of the articles of daily use and indebtedness of the indigent cultivators, which accounted for the emergence of the agrarian wage labour. These factors were directly and intimately related to commercial agriculture. The spread of commercial agriculture in jute riveted the process of pauperization of the peasantry instead of reinforcing their bargaining power. The author has also been discussed about mobility of wage labourers across the villages, districts and states, variation of wage rate and involvement of wage labourers in the agrarian movements in different districts of West Bengal. The variation in wage rate in agriculture has been due to the variation of lands, person and items of work. Lower wage rates to immigrant labour, women and children indicated while the daily wage rates at different times have been mentioned along with some yearly and monthly wage rates in agriculture. The wage labourers would live almost like destitute in the villages. They would fail to earn an amount needed for their bare subsistence. To raise the level of their wage rates and to stop exploitation, agricultural labourers had actively participated in the agrarian movements in each district of Bengal and many *kishans* or wage labourers died in their struggle against the joint attacks of their police force and land owner's resistance partly of armed guard. Wage labourers were first enlisted as members of the Bengal Provincial Kishan Sabha (BPKS) in 1937 and no political organizations in villages thought about them as a separate section of farmers to be protected by political means. But they were not able to assert their rights, get a gainful employment and raise the level of their wage rates by any form of agitation.

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1.3 Research Questions

We have raised certain research questions in order to study the stated problem and try to find out the answer to these questions by analyzing secondary and primary data.

- i. Does the employment of the agricultural labourers increase by the use of irrigation facilities in the area under study ?
- ii. Do the number of employment days increase or decrease by the use of biotechnological innovations in agriculture ?
- iii. How many employment days are available to the agricultural labourers in a year ?
- iv. How much non-farm employment is available to the agricultural labourers ?
- v. What factors affect the demand for labour ?
- vi. What factors affect the supply of labour ?
- vii. What is the degree of attachment of the agricultural labourers with the employer ?
- viii. What factors affect the real and money wages of agricultural labourers ?
- ix. Is there any tendency of unionisation among the agricultural labourers in the study area ?
- x. Is there any seasonal variation in the wage rate ?
- xi. What are the factors influencing the wages of the agricultural labourers in the study area ?
- xii. Do some of the family members of the agricultural labourers migrate outside ? If so, what factors affects the out migration?
- xiii. Is there any patron-client relationship between the employer and the employee ?
- xiv. What are the components of total income of agricultural labourers ?
- xv. How much indebted the agricultural labourers are ?

- xvi. What is the pattern of asset holdings of the agricultural labourers ?
- xvii. Do the labourers get minimum wages fixed by the government?
- xviii. Do the labourers enjoy any social security ?

1.4 Chapterisation

The proposed study consists of eight chapters as follows :

Chapter I: Introduction

In this chapter, we have given a statement of the problem, the justification of the study, research questions, research methodology, review of literature and short description of the region of our study.

Chapter II: Trends in Wages and Employment of Agricultural Labourers in West Bengal

Trends in wages and employment of the agricultural labourers in West Bengal since independence have been discussed in this chapter with the help of secondary data.

Chapter III: Determinants of Employment of Agricultural Labourers

Determinants of the employment of the agricultural labourers are discussed in this chapter. The factors like seasonality, crop variety, cropping intensity, application of advanced technology which affects the employment of the agricultural labourers are analysed. We have also discussed the non-farm activities in this chapter.

Chapter IV: Factors Affecting Real and Money Wages of Agricultural Labourers

In this chapter we have discussed the factors affecting real wages and money wages of the agricultural labourers. Method of calculation of money wages, role of demand and supply of labour in fixing the wages, wages in kind and fringe benefits have been analysed. In this chapter we have also discussed how the minimum wages is fixed by the government and try to assess whether it is rational . Moreover, we have analysed the field survey data regarding the receipt of minimum wages and the social security benefits available to the agricultural labour households.

Chapter V: Determinants of Total Income of Agricultural Labourers

The calculation of correct figure of income of the agricultural labourers is quite difficult. They are unable and sometimes reluctant to divulge their total earning throughout the year. So by taking indirect method we try to find the actual income of the agricultural labourers. Income from wages (cash and kind), income from sale of home produced goods, farm and non-farm produced goods, income from non-farm employment and income from other sources have been analysed in this chapter. Relative significance of the each of the sources of income have also been analysed.

Chapter VI: Dynamics of Employer-Employee Relationship

This chapter consists of the variations in employer-employee relationship of attachment and dependence.

We have analysed patterns of relationships between the employers and the employees with respect to the following attributes, viz, duration of contract (day, month, season, period of particular operation, year, etc); basis of payment (hourly, daily, piece-rate, product share etc.); frequency of payment (day, month, year) mode of payment (cash & kind), degree to which work obligations and hours of work are specified or are unspecified; interlinkage with other members of the labourer's family on the same employer's farm; freedom to work for different employers (full freedom, total absence of such freedom, conditional or restricted freedom, etc).

Chapter VII: Assets and Liabilities of Agricultural Labourers

In this chapter we have analysed the nature, pattern and magnitude of indebtedness of the selected household, and try to find out the implication of the indebtedness on the wages, employment, living condition of agricultural labourers.

Chapter VIII: Summary, Conclusion and Suggestions

This chapter bring out together the conclusions that have been drawn from the study. This chapter also brings out the possible suggestions for the betterment of the socio-economic condition of the agricultural labourers.

1.5 Research Methodology

The present study is based on the existing literature, official documents and field survey. So both the secondary data and primary data have been incorporated in this study. For the secondary data we have used the Library of the University of North Bengal, Raja Rammohunpur; the National Library, (Kolkata); the Library for the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Kolkata; Indian Statistical Institute Library, Kolkata; Library of the New Secretariate Building, Kolkata; Labirary of the District Collectorate of Uttar Dinajpur, Raiganj and Block Development Offices of this district as well as other relevant and useful sources.

The following major steps have been followed as part of the Research methodology of this study :

1. **Area of the Study:** Area of the study is the State of West Bengal in general and the district of Uttar Dinajpur in particular.
2. **Universe of the Study:** The Universe of the study is the State of West Bengal in India .
3. **Sampling Frame :** We have used three types of sampling as mentioned below :
 - i) the stratified, ii) purposive and, iii) the random sampling.

4. Sampling Procedure:

Uttar Dinajpur district consist of nine blocks. We have categorised the block into three heads on the basis of their level of development, viz., highly developed, moderately developed and least developed block respectively. So in each category three blocks have been included. Then two blocks have been randomly chosen from each category, i.e., altogether six blocks have been chosen. Then two non-irrigated villages have been chosen from the two highly developed blocks and one irrigated village has been chosen from one of the moderately developed block. Again, two non-irrigated villages have been chosen from the two least developed blocks and one non-irrigated village was chosen from one of the moderately developed block. From these six villages thirty households have been taken from each village randomly; among them, fifteen households are of the landless labourers and fifteen households are of the marginal farmers-cum agricultural labourers. For the purpose of selection of villages. At first we made a list of the villages from the District Census handbook

1991, where the numbers of the agricultural labourers have been shown as 150 or above. For we assume that an average family consists of six members then in order to get 25 households of agricultural labourers the total number of such labourers in the village must have to be 150 or above.

5. Units of Observation and Sample Size: As noted above, the units of observation is household and the total size of sample is one hundred and eighty households.

6. Tools and Techniques of Data Collection: Data have been collected by the researcher through personal interview with the relevant respondents with the help of an appropriate questionnaire made for that purpose. Various books, journals, bulletins, articles, reports, documents etc. have also been consulted to gather relevant data and information.

VIII . Data Collection

Data on income employment, wages, minimum wages, mode of wage payment, other sources of income, non-farm employment, indebtedness, consumption level and pattern of asset holding position, education, health, production, productivity etc. have been collected, both from the secondary and primary sources.

IX. Data Processing

After the collection of data these are processed for relevant statistical calculation manually, by using calculator and also through the computer. The tools used for analyzing data are simple frequency counts, simple average and percentage.