

CHAPTER III



CHAPTER III

FARM EMPLOYMENT PATTERN OF AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS

3.1 Terms and Conditions of Employment of Agricultural Labourers in West Bengal with Special Reference to Uttar Dinajpur District

3.1.1 Introduction

The terms and conditions of contract between employer and employee in our study area are oral and informal which increases the complexity of labour relation in agriculture. Generally, the dominant parties (employers) set the patterns as well as the terms and conditions of exchange of labour and exploit the weaker parties (labourers). But now situation has changed to some extent. Rural labourers can also considerably influence the terms and conditions of employment of labour in the labour market, as small holders are unorganized and economically very weak. The employer-labour relationship is not uniform across regions; it varies from region to region and even within the same region. The employer-employee relationship differ because of combination of certain number of attributes such as following: i) duration of contracts: day, month, season, period of a particular operation, year etc. ii) basis of payment: hourly, daily, piece rate, product share etc.; iii) frequency of payment: day, month, year, several irregular installments during the year, bonus during festivals etc.; iv) medium of payment: cash, kind, meals, snacks and their different combinations; v) degree to which work obligations, and hours of work are specified or are left unspecified; vi) interlink age with other contracts with the employer in credit or land relations or in employment of other members of the labourers family on the same employer's farm; vii) freedom to work for different employers: full freedom, total absence of such freedom, conditional or restricted freedom etc. Different combination of these attributes would determine the nature of employment and wage rates of agricultural labourers. Our objective in this chapter is to discuss the terms and conditions of employment of agricultural labourers in selected villages of Uttar Dinajpur district of West Bengal.

The Agricultural Labour Enquires (150-51, 1956-57) classified agricultural labourer in to two categories – attached and casual. After the publication of the first and second ALE reports, several criticisms have been leveled against the classification of agricultural labourer into two categories – casual and attached. Daniel

Thorner noted that the terms 'attach' and 'casual' as interpreted by the designers of the Enquiry, proved in practice to be mutually non-exclusive catch-alls for 'non-homogeneous groups', and what was worse, the specific content and meaning of these two items were left sufficiently vague as to allow arbitrary and conflicting interpretations by different field investigators in different areas. Because of these criticisms, the attach-casual distinction was altogether dropped in the later Rural Labour Enquires of 1963-64 and 1973-74 and only one category was retained – who were referred to as 'Agricultural Labourer' in an undifferentiated manner. But for better understanding the production relation in agriculture and the nature of rural labour market, it is necessary to give due importance to the various degrees of heterogeneity in labour contracts leading to different forms of employment and types of attachment of varying degrees.

On the basis of attachment, Bardhan and Rudra (1979) classified agricultural labourers in to five categories in West Bengal.

- i) Totally unattached labourers (casual labourers)
- ii) Totally attached labourers (or farm servant)
- iii) Semi-attached labourer (Type-I) – They are attached to an employer for part of the year, but for the major part of the year they have the freedom to work for other employers.
- iv) Semi-attached labourers (Type –2) – They are obliged to work for the employer whenever called for stipulated numbers of days in a stipulated period.
- v) Semi-attached labourers (Type – 3) – They are obliged to work for the employer whenever called for an unstipulated number of days over an indefinite period.

Under the changing the employer-employee relationship due to change in the mode of production process, this type of classification is not sufficient to depict the whole range of labour relation in agriculture. On the basis of data collected in the field and existing literature, the following classification of agricultural labourers is more useful to explain the employer-employee relation in agriculture. These are:

- i) Fully Attached Labourers (Annual Farm Servant),
- ii) Semi-Attached Labourers
- iii) Casual Day Labourers
- iv) Casual Group Labourers

v) Marginal Farmers-cum-Agricultural Labourers.

The terms and conditions of employment of agricultural labourers varied across the categories of agricultural labourers. Different categories of agricultural labourers are employed under different terms and conditions under the same employers or different employers. We discuss the terms and conditions of employment of each category of agricultural labourers.

3.1.2 Fully Attached Labourers (or Annual Farm Servant)

By annual 'farm servant' we mean who is tied up to their employer for duration of one year, although sometimes employed more than one year or slightly less than one-year contracts due to personal good relation between labourer and employers or any other reasons. Generally unmarried labourers are employed as annual farm servants because after marriage family burden of labourer increases and he has to look after the family. According to Richards (1979), the institution of regular farm servants has emerged as a subtle means of supervising labour (Sarap, 1991). Eswaran and Kotwal (1989a) proposed that it is an attempt by the employer to transform hired labourers into workers whose behaviour would approximate that of family labour, thus reducing the burden of job supervision and mitigating moral hazards of workers. This is being done by paying workers in excess of their opportunity wage (Sarap, 1991). Thus the payment of a wage in excess of market clearing may be effective way for employers to provide workers with an incentive to work rather than shirk (Akerlof and Yellen, 1986 and Sarap, 1991). But even if it is necessary to supervise the work of monitor (farm servant) who monitors casual labourers. One such choice is that the residual claimant who has an incentive to self-monitor becomes monitor (Eswaran and Kotwal, 1989 and Sarap, 1991). Family members can monitor the job of both casual as well as that of farm servants. Thus supervision problems are likely to be reduced not only when the ratio of family labour to hired labour is higher, but also when the hired labourer work side by side with employers in the field (Boyce, 1987 and Sarap, 1991).

In Uttar Dinajpur district, fully attached labourers are known, as '*Kamail*' or '*Chakar*.' Previously the system of employment of '*Kamail*' (fully attached labourer or annual farm servant) was widely prevalent in this district. Generally the landlord or *jotedars* employed '*Kamail*' (fully attached labourer or annual farm servant) to perform agricultural activities. The relationship between '*Chakar*' or '*Kamail*' and

'*Jotedar*' or employer is patron-client relationship. *Chakars* always pay respect to their employer as a master. The relationship between the regular farm servant and his employer takes a patron-client form; the patron saving on the non-wage cost of recruitment and supervising and utilizing hired labour and client benefiting from greater employment security and higher total earnings (Rao, 1988 and Sarap, 1991). Their work is not confined to agricultural operation. They are at times also engaged for domestic work like cleaning the house, marketing, feeding the livestock etc. In the lean season sometimes they have to perform the job of maidservants. But such type of contract of annual farm servants with their masters ensures them some degree of continuity and regularity of employment. They received wages both in the form of kind and cash. They take two meals and tiffin with employers everyday and their annual remuneration ranged from Rs.1, 500 to Rs.10, 000 determined on the basis of age and capabilities of work. They receive their payments partly at the end of the year and partly in irregular installments spread over the year. During festivals (Durga Puja and Dol Utsav), they get some kind of bonus in the form of cash or clothings like shirt, pant or trousers. When the annual farm servants enter into contract with their employer, they lose their freedom to engage themselves in any other activities, which ensures additional income. So there is an element of bondage in their relation with their employer. But bonded labour did not exist in West Bengal.

In Uttar Dinajpur district, the existence of annual farm servant is now hardly found. The present researcher surveyed 180 agricultural labour households and did not find any annual farm servant. The practice of employment of annual farm servant has been declining over the year. There are some reasons for this change. Firstly, majority of the farmers in the rural areas are converted into small and marginal farmers after introduction of land ceiling legislations in West Bengal and land is subdivided and fragmented further and further with passing each generation due to the existence of laws of inheritance. Small and marginal farmers have not been able to utilize the capacity of permanent labourers due to small size of holding. Secondly, the small and marginal farmers are not able to bear the expenditure of permanent labourers due to small size of holding and low income. So the decline in size of holding is one of the reasons that have led to the reduction of the demand for permanent labour. Moreover, permanent labourers are also not used to work properly and their tendency is to spend time lazily and to shirk the work. Naturally, farmers prefer to cultivate their land with the help of casual day labourers or group labourers.

Similarly, labourers are also not willing to work under long-term contract under the same employer because of bondage. They now want to enjoy more freedom.

3.1.3 Semi-Attached Labourers

Semi-attached labourer may be defined as a person who has some continuity of association with a particular employer for a few days or months. He has the freedom to work for other employers for the major part of the year. Semi-attached labourers can be divided into two categories on the basis of the duration of contract and freedom of choice of employers. The first category of semi-attached labourers has no freedom to work for other employers during the contract period and they are employed for a month or a few months during busy agricultural seasons. They are known as *Masila* in Uttat Dinajpur district. Wage rate of such labourers is generally higher than the ruling market wage rate and they are paid daily or weekly both in the form of cash and kind.

The second category of semi-attached labourers has enjoyed more freedom to work for other employers as compared to first category. They have to be freed to work for other employers on whichever days the employer does not have any work for the labourers. They have to be paid wages both in the form of cash and kind on a daily or weekly basis. But their wages are slightly lower than the market wage rate. They are also known as tied labourers in Uttar Dinajpur district.

In our field study, we found only 15 semi-attached labourers out of 180 agricultural labourer households. Five labourers fall under the first category and ten labourers fall under the second category of semi-attachment. In villages under highly developed blocks, both first and second categories of attachment are found. But in villages under moderately and least developed blocks, only second category of attachment is found. Thorner (1957) has described the 'beck and call' relationship – our semi-attached labour of type 2 as un free. He suggests that quite often long-term outstanding loans, which the labourer is not in a position to repay, bind him (or his family members) to the employers in such a relationship. In our West Bengal sample, none of the 'beck and call' labourers reported hereditary debt or a long-term debt incurred by the labourer as a basis for his attachment to the employer (Bardhan and Rudra, 2003). But the overwhelming majority of them reported periodic taking of consumption loans or wage advances from employer on the basis of their attachment (Bardhan and Rudra, 2003).

Bardhan and Rudra (1979) shows that the bases of attachment (full or partial) are the following: (a) allotment of land, (b) current consumption loans, and old debt. They show that allotment as a means of tying labourer to an employer works in the following way. The employer allots a tiny piece of land to the labourer who cultivates it with the help of employer's bullock and plough and receives the total or a fraction of crop output. He sometimes receives even other kinds of help from the employer, e.g. in the form of supplies of seeds and fertilizers. In exchange, the labourer gets committed to work for the employer at whatever time might suit the latter. It may be the case that the labourer works exclusively for the employer right through the year.

But in our field study, only few labourers have reported that the allotment of land and old debt are the basis of their attachment. Because the size of holding of the farmers is declining over the year and as a result they are not in a position to lease out their land to the labourers on the basis of share of crop by supplying bullocks and plough and seed, fertilizers and pesticides. Secondly, the employer did not lease out their land due to the risk of recording the names of labourers as a sharecroppers on their land. Similarly, no labourers have reported a hereditary debt as the basis of their attachment to an employer. In the villages under highly developed blocks, some labourers reported that consumption loan taken from employer is the basis of attachment to the employer as compared to the villages under moderately developed and least developed blocks. They take consumption loan from their employer during difficult periods. They repaid their consumption loan by working as a labourer to the employer's house. One of the important motivations of the lender-employer in giving such loans is to secure labour services for the peak season. Besides, in such a case he saves recruitment cost (Bardhan, 1979, 1983).

Over the years, the economic condition of farmers deteriorates because of low production, low prices of agricultural commodities and high cost of production. As a result, they loose the power to give consumption loan to their labourers gradually. Sometimes labourer takes consumption loan from their employers but do not repay. There is violation of credit contract that frequently happens from the labourer's side in our study area. They simply left the house of 1st creditor employer without repaying loan and went to another employer's house to work as a labourer. But most of them reported in villages under moderately and least developed blocks that they are attached to their employer in order to get work throughout the year. Though they sometimes work at less than the ruling market wage rate, they get the work of

harvesting of paddy (*aman* and *boro*), which is more profitable for them as compared to other works.

3.1.4 Casual Day Labourer

By casual day labourer, we mean, a person who enters an agreement or contract with a particular employer for a single day at a time. The contract for one day with one employer have not been influenced the contract with another employer on another day. He may contract with another employer for another day. He has the freedom to negotiate different contract for different days with different employers. According to H. V. Nagesh (1981), 'A labourer is free when he is able to accept or reject the conditions and wages offered by the employer. He should also have the choice not to work. Further he should be able to break the contract and quit, if he so wants'. The labourers as well as the employers are free to discontinue the arrangement. Generally the employer, or his son, or his wife comes to the houses of workers in the evening of the preceding day or before to call them for work the next day or on a particular day at particular wage rate. The employer always tells the workers to join the work as early in the morning for the same day. The employer approaches first a worker or one who has worked with him earlier. If he is not available, some one else capable of doing the work is employed. Note that in such case the search cost of labour increases (Bardhan, 1979). Information cost constitutes an important part of transaction costs (Bardhan, 1989). The high transaction cost in the casual labour market is accounted for by a host of factors such as social and demographic factors, emigration, farm fragmentation due to land reforms, commercialization and counter seasonality (Nair, 1997). When there is adequate information, which is not quite unlikely in a village setting, all employers know who is and who is not a good worker. Since there is heterogeneity of labour, employers preferentially employ labourers whom they know to be better workers (Binswanger et al, 1984; Richards and Martin 1983). Though there is heterogeneity, inferior labourers cannot be paid less than their better counterparts because of the intervention of various factors in the market. The preference for workers of known ability over those unknown ability results in what is known as adverse selection (Greenwald, 1986).

The working hours in all villages of the study area generally vary between seven to eight hours for ordinary jobs with an interval of lunch. Sometimes, workers are taking lunch at worksite due to heavy pressure of work. In order to reduce moral

hazard problems of workers, employers or their family members including female members work along with their workers. Sometimes, the employer is not in a position to work, he stays near the work site and closely watches the workers so that they cannot delinquencies and workers work properly. Thus supervision problems are likely to be reduced not only when the ratio of family labour to hired labour is higher, but also when the hired labourer works side by side with employers in the field (Boyce, 1987: 213).

Labourer is paid wages both in the form of cash and kind or only in cash at the end of the days work, but he may also take wage as an advance payment. He enjoys more freedom to choose the employer and works more freely as compared to semi-attached labourers and fully attached labourer. The casualisation of agricultural labourers has increased over the years because the farmers prefer more casual day labourers as compared to semi-attached and fully attached labourers. Similarly labourers also prefer to work as casual labourers as compared to semi-attached or fully attached labourers because they enjoy more freedom. . In the study area, casual day labourer is known as '*jan*' or '*janmajoor*'. The number of casual day labourers is more in villages under moderately and least developed blocks as compared to highly developed blocks.

During the peak period, the demand for labour is very high in all blocks. So in order to meet the demand for labour in the peak period, employers try to ensure the labour services of labourers through the provision of consumption loan in the lean period. Thus tying of labour services with consumption credit, tenancy or any other form of patronage are devices resorted by employers to reduce supervision cost and a variety of risk in production by ensuring timely supply of labour (Bardhan, 1979, 1983; Abhijit Sen, 1981; Platteau, 1990). But linkage of labour services with consumption credit is declining in the study area because of violation of credit contract from the labourers' side.

3.1.5 Casual Group Labourer

By casual group labourers, we mean, a group of labourers who forms groups with equal able bodied persons to work on piece rate basis. Piece rates are generally feasible where worker specific output is easily measurable in both quantitative and qualitative terms as in harvesting of grains. In other operations time rates are preferred. But if recruitment cost of labour is too high and there are other problems of

labour, the employer may prefer piece rate even in those operations where worker's specific output is not properly measurable (Sarap, 1991). Our field investigations revealed that this system has been spreading rapidly and is used for major agricultural operations such as transplanting, weeding, harvesting and threshing involving more amount of labour. There is no fixed working hours for them. They can extend the normal working hours to complete the particular piece of work. They work according to their willingness. So they enjoy much freedom as compared to other categories of labourers. In the study area, they are known as '*chuktia*'. They work under '*thicka*' (contract) arrangement. Generally, group labourers are taking '*thicka*' for transplantation of paddy, wedding of paddy and jute, harvesting of paddy, jute etc. For example, for transplantation of paddy (*aman*), the group labourers get wage Rs.206 to Rs. 212.5 per bigha. Each group has a leader who is searching work and bargaining with the employers. He has controlled over the whole group's work. Generally, the leader of the group is an elderly clever person and he also participates in the work along with other workers. But he does not get any additional wage. All members, both males and females get equal remuneration as wages. The income of the group labourers is higher as compared to other categories of labourers. In villages under highly developed blocks, most of the agricultural activities are being done by the group labourers. Generally, physically weak and not fit for group activities work as a casual day labourers. The practice of work done by casual day labourer has been declining over the years in villages under highly developed blocks. The cost of supervision of work done by group labourers is lower as compared to casual day labourers. So the farmers prefer more the work done by group labourers as compared to casual labourers.

The farmers-employers prefer the group labour because through employment of group labour it is possible to maintain the timeliness for different agricultural operation and also to reduce search cost involved in contracting a number of individual workers. Thus by employing group labour perhaps the employers are trying to reduce the managerial diseconomies of scale (Bardhan, 1973; Binswanger and Rosenzweig, 1986). Moreover, the supervision costs involved in the group labour, given the homogeneity in the group because of its place or origin, caste etc. will be lower as compared to individual workers. Monitoring of work efforts arising out of moral hazard will be less problematic in the former as compared to latter. The search cost for group labour is much less as compared to individual labour whereby the

employers reap economics of scale in employing the group labour (Sarap, 1991). Of course, the employer tries to monitor the work of the individual labourers as well as that of group as a whole by paying some extra benefits in the form of money, feast etc. to the leader of the group or to the group as a whole to raise their work efforts (Akerlofw, 1982). In the study area, the employers provide some kind of incentives to the leader as well as to the group as a whole besides the wage payment. The incentive payments include money for purchasing *biri* or tobacco or provide directly or sometimes special food served at home or at the worksite. The main objective of the employer is to motivate the workers to complete the work (quickly and nicely) by providing incentives to the workers.

The labourers in the absence of effective supervision may not put enough effort or work less carefully which may affect growth of crops and in turn the output. There may be problems of moral hazards in the case of piece rate job performed by a group of labourers. As Stiglitz (1975) has observed, "because piece rates reward speed, they tend not to provide the correct incentive to quality." Olson (1965) has shown that the mere existence of a large group with a common interest does not automatically lead to collective action, because individual labour may not put his best effort (Eswaran and Kotwal, 1989). Since in piece rate jobs, where a number of workers participate, the chief motivation of the group is to complete the task sooner, there is possibility of output loss (for instance, transplanting fewer numbers of plants or reckless plantation, etc.). The larger the group, the greater is the need for monitoring or individual incentives in order to achieve full participation of workers (Eswaran and Kotwal, 1989), in collective action. Monitoring the workers involve transaction cost. Due to these problems related to group labourers, the farmers are now in the villages under highly developed and moderately developed blocks leased out their land to the landless labourers or marginal farmers on the basis of contract for the cultivation of *boro* paddy, *aman* paddy and other crops. But the system of contract farming was more prevalent in the case of *boro* paddy as compared to other crops. For example, in the *boro* season, the labourer has to pay to the landlord of Rs. 500 to Rs.700 per *bigha* or three to five mounds (40 kg.) paddy per *bigha* that is determined on the basis of quality of land. The landlord has no risk in production.

3.1.6 Marginal Farmer-cum-Agricultural Labourer

By marginal farmer-cum-agricultural labourer, we mean a person who depends for his livelihood on not only self-cultivation but also hiring out their labour to another person for agriculture or allied activities in exchange of wage. He works another person's land when he has no work of his own farm. The annual income of marginal farmer-cum-agricultural labourer is generally higher than other categories of agricultural labourers because it is derived from more than one source. But their major source of income is agriculture. The number of marginal farmer-cum-agricultural labourer is generally higher in villages under moderately developed blocks as compared to villages under highly developed and least developed blocks.

Table 3.1
Types of Employment of Agricultural Labourers Across Surveyed Villages of Uttar Dinajpur District

Categories	Villages (<i>Delwalpur and Malon</i>) Under Highly Developed Blocks	Villages (<i>Tilna and Nakol</i>) Under Moderately Developed Blocks	Villages (<i>Jagatagaon and Dharampur</i>) Under Least Developed Blocks
Fully Attached Labourer	-----	-----	-----
Semi-Attached Labourer	10 (7.35)	3 (2.00)	2 (1.67)
Casual Day Labourer	30 (22.06)	54 (36.00)	55 (45.83)
Group Labourer	68 (50.00)	65 (43.00)	47 (39.17)
Marginal Farmer-Cum-Agricultural Labourer	28 (20.58)	28 (18.67)	16 (13.33)
Total	136 (100)	150 (100)	120 (100)

Data Source: Own Field Survey

In the above discussion, we observe the heterogeneity of labour contract in the labour market of Uttar Dinajpur district. Each type of labour contract differs from one another in respect of terms and conditions between employers and employees. During the survey, it was found that most of the agricultural labourers were employed as casual day labourers and group labourers (Table 3.1). It was also observed that the importance of group labourers increased with the level of advancement of villages. The proportion of group labourers accounted 50% in villages under highly developed blocks, 43% in villages under moderately developed blocks and 39.17% in villages under least developed blocks. The proportion of casual day labourer was higher in villages under least developed blocks i.e. 45.83%, 36% in villages under moderately

developed blocks and 22.06% in villages under highly developed blocks. On the other hand, the proportion of semi-attached labourers was higher in villages under highly developed blocks i.e. 7.35%, it accounted 2% in villages under moderately developed blocks and 1.67% in villages under least developed blocks. In villages under highly developed blocks, the opportunity cost of supervision is higher due to the economic development as compared to villages under moderately and least developed blocks and therefore, there will be greater tendency for the employer to employ group labourers on a piece rate basis. Secondly, the percentage of agricultural labour families with land is negatively correlated with the percentage of casual day labourers working on time rate.

3.1.7 Overall Findings on Terms and Conditions of Employment of Agricultural Labourers

We find that different categories of agricultural labourers are employed under different terms and conditions in the study areas. Out of the different categories of labourers, the group labour system has gained popularity among the large and medium size farmers. The analysis of the different categories of agricultural labourers suggests that there is higher motivation on the part of the employers for employing group labourers. Maintenance of timeliness for different agricultural operations, given the numbers of peaks with less time gap between peaks and problems of synchronization of management of crops, are a possible reason for such a preference on the part of employers (see also Binswanger and Rosenzweig 1986; Bardhan 1979).

3.2 Level and Pattern of Farm Employment of Agricultural Labourers in West Bengal with Special Reference to Uttar Dinajpur District

3.2.1 Introduction

Agriculture is the largest employment-providing sector in India as well as in West Bengal. It has been observed that while the share of agriculture in the net domestic product has been declining rapidly since 1951, its share in the workforce has not been reducing rapidly enough. The result is a declining labour productivity in agriculture (Bhaduri, 1993; Unni, 1997). More recently, there has been a modest gain in labour productivity in agriculture and slow transfer of labour away from agriculture (Bhaduri, 1993; Bhalla, 1996; Unni, 1997). While the slow gain in labour productivity in agriculture is a reflection of the inability of the agriculture sector to absorb any further labour gainfully, the slow transfer of labour from agriculture also reflects the inability of the non-agriculture sector to create employment rapidly enough (Bhaduri, 1993; Unni, 1997). The present study attempts to examine the level and patterns of farm employment of agricultural labourers in selected villages of Uttar Dinajpur district of West Bengal.

The main features about employment in agriculture are the abundance of labour, the extensive use of family labour, the decreasing average size of agricultural holdings and seasonality of demand for agricultural labour due to seasonal nature of agricultural operations. Each agricultural season has two periods – peak period and slack period. During the peak period, the demand for labour is very high for agricultural operations like transplantation, weeding, harvesting, carrying and threshing. On the other hand, the demand for labour is low during the slack period. Agricultural operations are carried on by both male and female agricultural labourers, but there are certain operations like ploughing, leveling, digging of wells and irrigating the fields in which male agricultural labourers are more efficient, which require hard physical labour. On the other hand, female agricultural labourers are more efficient in certain operations like weeding, transplanting etc.

3.2.2 Trends of Employment in West Bengal

The NSS data on employment and unemployment for both rural and urban areas at different points of time may be used for analyzing the trends of employment and unemployment in India as well as in West Bengal. The 27th round of (1972-73)

NSS data provide better temporal analysis of employment and unemployment as compared to earlier round of NSS estimate because data obtained from 27th round are based on three different concepts *i.e.* usual status, weekly status and current daily status. According to usual status, a person is considered to be employed, if he / she was employed for the major part of the year. According to weekly status, a person is considered to be employed, if he / she is employed for an hour or more on any one or more days. According to daily status, a person who is engaged in gainful activities for four hours or more during the reference day is employed for the whole day. A person who worked for one hour or more but less than four hours during the reference day is employed for half day. Due to greater consistency of concepts and definition, the NSS data are generally treated as being less hazardous than the alternative data sources, namely the decennial censuses (Jha, 1997).

However, it should be kept in mind that in spite of the broad consistency in definition used by NSS, there are procedural differences between different rounds, which make comparison overtime difficult (Bardhan, 1977; Krishna, 1976; Jha, 1997). However, researchers (including the above authors) often take the view that in spite of these problems, NSS data provides a clue to the direction of change in employment / unemployment situation (Chattopadhyay, 1985; Sen and Ghosh, 1993; Jha, 1997).

Table 3.2

Changing Structure of Employment of Agricultural Labourers in West Bengal: 1974-75 to 1993-94

	Adult Male					Adult Female				
	1974-1975	1977-78	1983	1987-88	1993-94	1974-75	1977-78	1983	1987-1988	1993-1994
WE	232 (90.27)	247 (84.3)	218 (82.89)	241 (80.87)	230 (78.50)	145 (74.36)	219 (85.88)	195 (84.05)	219 (79.06)	167 (73.89)
SE	22 (8.56)	42 (14.33)	42 (15.97)	48 (16.11)	58 (19.79)	48 (24.62)	34 (13.33)	35 (15.09)	49 (17.69)	38 (16.81)
ESB	3 (1.17)	4 (1.37)	3 (1.14)	9 (3.02)	5 (1.71)	2 (1.02)	2 (0.86)	2 (.79)	9 (3.25)	21 (9.93)
TOTAL	257 (100)	293 (100)	263 (100)	298 (100)	293 (100)	195 (100)	255 (100)	232 (100)	277 (100)	226 (100)

Data Source: Rural Labour Enquiry: Report on Employment and Unemployment, 1974-75, 1983, 1987-88, 1993-94 (provisional estimates), Labour Bureau, Chandigarh / Shimla.

WE = wage employment, SE = self-employment, ESB = employment on Salary basis.

The trend of employment days available to adult male and adult female labour in West Bengal has been shown in Table 3.2 for the period 1974-75 to 1993-94. Here total employment days available from farm and non-farm activities are divided into three categories – self-employment, wage employment and employment on salary basis. The total number of employment days available from farm and non-farm activities to adult male worker was 257 days in 1974-75 and it increased to 293 days in 1993-94. Similarly in the case of female, the total number of employment days available from farm and non-farm activities to her was 195 days in 1974-75 and it increased to 226 days in 1993-94. From the Table it is clear that the relative importance of wage paid employment (in percentage term) in total employment days has declined over the years. On the other hand, the share of self-employment has increased for both male and female labour in West Bengal. But the share of employment on salary basis in total employment for both adult male and adult female was very negligible in West Bengal.

3.2.3 Availability of Farm Employment of Agricultural Labourers in Uttar Dinajpur District

Uttar Dinajpur is a backward and predominantly agricultural district of West Bengal. Availability of farm employment per agricultural labourer in Uttar Dinajpur district is low. From the Table 3.3, it is clear that an agricultural labourer got an average annual farm employment of 169.71 days in the Uttar Dinajpur district. The male workers got an average annual farm employment of 180.98 days, which was 15.16% higher than the female agricultural labourer. Among the different activities, the wage employment of crop farming provided the larger days of employment (127.88 days) per agricultural labourer followed by employment in self-employment (23.51 days) of crop farming and employment in agriculture allied activities (18.32 days). Gender differential in per worker employment exist and it was found that the male labourer got wage employment of 137.06 days in crop farming, which was higher than the female agricultural labourer (118.70 days). In the case of self-employment of crop farming, the male agricultural labourer was employed for 28.35 days, which was higher than female agricultural labourer (17.38 days). But in the case of agriculture-allied activities, female workers got more employment (21.07 days) than the male workers (15.57 days).

Availability of farm employment per worker based on development of blocks has also been discussed and shown in Tables 3.4, 3.5 and 3.6. In the villages under highly developed blocks, agricultural labourer was employed for 176.70 days in a year followed by villages under moderately developed blocks for 163.60 days and 164.64 days in the villages under least developed blocks. Among the activities, the employment from wage employment in crop farming in the villages under highly developed blocks was 134.14 days which was 3.23 percent higher than the villages under moderately developed blocks and 12.28 percent higher than the villages under least developed blocks. In the case of self-employment, worker in the villages under highly developed blocks was engaged for 27.31 days which was higher than the villages under moderately and the villages under least developed blocks. But worker in the villages under least developed blocks was employed for 20.26 days for agriculture-allied activities, which was higher than the villages under highly developed and villages under moderately blocks. The availability of employment of agriculture allied activities like tealeaves plucking and weeding of tea garden was found in the least developed blocks. But these activities were totally absent in other

blocks. Naturally, employment from agriculture-allied activities in the least developed blocks is higher than the other blocks.

Table 3.3
Number of Employment Days Available to Per Agricultural Labourer in Agriculture of All Surveyed Villages / Blocks of Uttar Dinajpur District (Annual in Days)

Nature of Employment	Male	Female	Total
1. Crop Farming	28.35	17.38	23.51
a. Self-Employment	(15.66)	(11.06)	(13.85)
b. Wage Employment	137.06	118.70	127.88
	(75.73)	(75.53)	(75.35)
2. Employment in Agriculture Allied Activities	15.57	21.07	18.32
	(8.60)	(13.41)	(10.79)
Total	180.98	157.15	169.71
	(100)	(100)	(100)

Data Source: Own Field Survey

Table 3.4
Number of Employment Days (Annual) Available to Per Agricultural Labourer in Agriculture Across Surveyed Villages (Delwalpur and Malon) under Highly Developed Blocks of Uttar Dinajpur District

Nature of Employment	Male	Female	Total
1. Crop Farming			
a. Self Employment	32.98	20.16	27.31
b. Wage Employment	(17.82)	(12.10)	(15.46)
	139.35	128.93	134.14
	(75.30)	(77.35)	(75.91)
2. Employment in Agriculture Allied Activities	12.72	17.59	15.25
	(6.87)	(10.55)	(8.63)
Total	185.05	166.68	176.70
	(100)	(100)	(100)

Data Source: Own Field Survey

Table 3.5

Number of Employment Days (Annual) Available to Per Agricultural Labourer in Agriculture Across Surveyed Villages (*Tilna and Nakol*) under *Moderately Developed Blocks* of Uttar Dinajpur District

Nature of Employment	Male	Female	Total
1. Crop Farming			
a. Self Employment	26.25 (15.15)	15.78 (10.32)	21.54 (13.17)
b. Wage Employment	137.74 (79.52)	122.19 (79.95)	129.96 (79.44)
2. Employment in Agriculture Allied Activities.	9.23 (5.33)	14.87 (9.73)	12.10 (7.40)
Total	173.22 (100)	152.84 (100)	163.60 (100)

Data Source: Own Field Survey

Table 3.6

Number of Employment Days (Annual) Available to Per Agricultural Labourer in Agriculture Across Surveyed Villages (*Jagatagaon and Dharampur*) under *Least Developed Blocks* of Uttar Dinajpur District

Nature of Employment	Male	Female	Total
1. Crop Farming			
a. Self-Employment	23.56 (12.92)	15 (9.95)	19.91 (12.09)
b. Wage Employment	133.99 (73.50)	104.95 (69.64)	119.47 (72.56)
2. Employment in Agriculture Allied Activities	24.76 (13.58)	30.76 (20.41)	25.26 (15.34)
Total	182.31 (100)	150.71 (100)	164.64 (100)

Data Source: Own Field Survey

From the Table 3.3, it is clear that the share of wage employment of agricultural labourer in total employment of Uttar Dinajpur district is 75.35 percent that is higher than self-employment (13.85 percent) and agriculture allied activities (10.79 percent). The female labourer engaged in agriculture-allied activities is 13.41 percent of total employment, which is higher than male agricultural labourers (8.60 percent). Agriculture allied activities include animal husbandry, poultry, diary etc. Generally, women look after the animal property after maintaining their household activities and they stay within the village. However, male members frequently go

outside the village and even migrate to city in-search of better employment. Naturally, female labourers spend more times for agriculture-allied activities as compared to male labourers.

3.2.4 Seasonal Variation of Wage Employment in Agriculture

In our study area, agriculture has seasonal character, which affects the demand for labour in agriculture. Each agricultural season has two periods – peak period and slack period. During the peak period, the demand for the agricultural labourers is very high and they get maximum days of employment of a month. On the other hand, the demand for labourers is very low during slack period. However, few researchers have tried to concentrate their attention on this aspect of employment of agricultural labourers in West Bengal, but no comprehensive study is made in West Bengal to examine the seasonal variation of employment in agriculture. We have tried to give a comprehensive explanation about seasonal variation of employment in agriculture. The term ‘season’ includes different types of agricultural activities. Each season starts with preparatory tillage and ending with harvesting, carrying and threshing. Under each season, we have divided the agricultural activities into five categories – preparatory tillage and ploughing, sowing, transplantation, weeding and harvesting, carrying and threshing. It was found that the female workers were not efficient in operations like preparation of land, application of manures and irrigating field. So male workers generally did these types of work. But in the case of transplantation work, female workers were found to be more efficient as compared to male workers.

We have divided the agricultural season of a year into four categories – *pre-kharif*, *kharif*, *rabi* and *boro*. Important crops grown in the study area are paddy (*aman* and *boro*), jute, wheat, oilseeds and some vegetables crops like potato, tomato etc. But paddy (*aman* and *boro*) is the main crop in the study area and labourers got maximum employment from transplanting, harvesting, carrying and threshing of paddy.

Seasons	Duration	Main crops grown
<i>Pre-kharif</i>	Mid-April – Mid-July	Jute
<i>Kharif</i>	Mid-July – Mid-October	<i>Aman</i> paddy
<i>Rabi</i>	Mid-October – Mid-January	Wheat, oil seeds and pulses
<i>Boro</i>	Mid-January – Mid-April	<i>Boro</i> paddy (HYV)

Table 3.7

Average Number of Labour Days (Wage Employment of Farming) Available Per Agricultural Labourer During Pre-Kharif, Kharif, Rabi and Boro Across Villages under Highly Developed, Moderately Developed and Least Developed Blocks of Uttar Dinajpur District

Particulars	Villages (<i>Delwalpur</i> and <i>Malon</i>) under Highly Developed Blocks			Villages (<i>Tilna</i> and <i>Nakol</i>) under Moderately Developed Blocks			Villages (<i>Jagatagaon</i> and <i>Dharampur</i>) under Least Developed Blocks			All Villages / District		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
<i>Pre-kharif</i>	32.71	29.38	31.05	33.15	29.22	31.18	33.32	28.33	30.82	33.06	28.98	31.02
<i>Kharif</i>	49.57	46.61	48.09	50.99	43.15	47.07	46.92	37.88	42.40	49.16	42.55	45.86
<i>Rabi</i>	18.12	15.22	16.67	17.09	15.54	16.32	21.42	15.37	18.40	18.91	15.38	17.14
<i>Boro</i>	38.95	37.72	38.33	36.51	34.28	35.39	32.33	23.37	27.85	35.93	31.79	33.86
Total	139.35	128.93	134.14	137.74	122.19	129.96	133.99	104.95	119.47	137.06	118.70	127.88
Mean	34.84	32.23	33.54	34.44	30.55	32.49	33.50	26.24	29.87	34.27	29.68	31.97
S. D.	11.37	11.57	11.45	12.04	9.99	11.00	9.04	8.15	8.56	10.73	9.67	10.21
C. V.	32.63	35.90	34.14	34.96	32.70	33.86	26.99	31.06	28.66	31.31	32.58	31.94

Data Source: Own Field Survey,

S. D. = Standard Deviation C. V. = Co-variance,

3.2.4.1 Pre – *kharif*

The main crop grown in the study area during pre-*kharif* season is jute. Some vegetable crops are also grown during this period. This season includes the period ranged from mid-April to mid-July. Employment of agricultural labourers of four seasons of a year is sown in Table 3.7. The Table shows that on an average agricultural labourer got employment for 31.02 days during pre-*kharif* period. The number of employment days available to a male worker was 33.06 days and for female worker was 28.98 days. The mid-May to mid-June of pre-*kharif* season was noted as peak period for the employment of agricultural labourers. Because during this period of pre-*kharif* season, agricultural activities like weeding of jute, harvesting, carrying and threshing of *boro* paddy is carried on. Availability of employment has also been discussed on the basis of development of blocks in the study area. Farm employment available for per agricultural worker during pre-*kharif* period was 31.05 days in the villages under highly developed blocks and 31.18 days in villages moderately developed blocks, which was higher than the villages under least developed blocks (30.82 days).

3.2.4.2 *Kharif* Season

The main crop grown in the study area during the *kharif* season is *aman* paddy. Some vegetables crops are also grown during this period. *Kharif* season includes the period ranged from mid-July to mid-October. An agricultural labourer got employment for 45.86 days during *kharif* season. The male worker was employed for 49.16 days and female worker was employed 42.55 days. In the villages under highly developed blocks, an average agricultural labourer got employment for 48.09 days, which was higher than the villages under moderately developed blocks, and the villages under least developed blocks. The months of July-August were noted as peak period of *kharif* season and labourers got more employment during this period. Since paddy (*aman*) is the main crop in the study area during *kharif* season, transplantation of paddy, harvesting of jute and washing of jute carried on in the peak period of *kharif* season.

3.2.4.3 *Rabi* Season

The main crops grown in the study area during *rabi* season are wheat, oilseeds and pulses. Some vegetable crops are also grown during this season. The *rabi* season

includes the period ranged from mid-October to mid-January. The availability of employment during this season is low as compared to other season in the study area. An average agricultural labourer got employment for 17.14 days during this season. The male worker was employed for 18.91 days and female worker was employed for 15.38 days. The peak period of this season includes the months of mid-November to mid-December. Workers got maximum days of employment during this period. The Table also shows that a worker was employed for 16.67 days in the villages under highly developed blocks, 16.32 days in the villages under moderately developed blocks and 18.40 days in the villages under least developed blocks. This indicates that that employment availability in agriculture in the least developed blocks during *rabi* season was more as compared to moderately developed and highly developed blocks. In the villages under least developed blocks, agricultural labourers are employed in the tea garden for plucking tealeaves during *rabi* seasons for few days. So the employment availability in the villages under least developed blocks is higher as compared to other blocks during *rabi* season.

3.2.4.4 Boro Season

The main crop grown in the study area during boro season is *boro* paddy. Some vegetables crops are also grown. The *boro* season includes the period ranged from mid-January to mid-April. An average agricultural labourer got employment for 33.86 days in the *boro* season. The male worker was employed for 35.93 days and the female worker was employed for 31.79 days. The month of February was noted as peak period for the employment of agricultural labourers. Agricultural operations like preparation of land, ploughing, transplantation of *boro* paddy carried on during this month of this season. As a result, labourers got maximum days of employment during this month. The average number of days available per agricultural labourer in the highly developed blocks during the *boro* season was 38.33 days that was higher than moderately developed blocks (35.39days) and least developed blocks (27.85 days).

In the study area, *kharif* season is the busiest season of the year. The employment availability is higher in this season as compared to other seasons. During *kharif* season, agricultural labourers got employment 47.84 percent higher than pre-*kharif*, 167.56 percent higher than *rabi* and 35.44 percent higher than *boro*. In the highly developed blocks, the employment days available to them during *kharif* season was 54.88 percent higher than the pre-*kharif*, 188.48 percent higher than *rabi* and

25.46 percent higher than *boro* season. In the moderately developed blocks, agricultural labourers during *kharif* season got employment 50.96 percent higher than *pre-kharif* season, 188.42 percent higher than *rabi* and 33.00 percent higher than *boro* season. In the villages under least developed blocks, agricultural labourers were employed during *kharif* season 33.71 percent higher than the *pre-kharif* season, 130.43 percent higher than *rabi* and 52.24 percent higher than *boro* season.

From Table 3.7, it is found that the value of covariance of employment of agricultural labourers in the study area is 31.94 and in the highly developed blocks its value is 34.14, which is higher than the moderately developed blocks (33.86) and the least developed blocks (28.66). Higher value of covariance implies higher seasonal fluctuation of employment of agricultural labourers. From the discussion, it is clear that high seasonal fluctuation of employment exists in the study area. It is also clear that seasonal fluctuation of employment in the villages under highly developed blocks is higher as compared to villages under moderately developed blocks and villages under least developed blocks. In the case of villages under highly developed and moderately developed blocks, the value of covariance of male agricultural labourer is higher than the value of covariance of female agricultural labourer. But in the case of villages under least developed blocks, the value of covariance of female agricultural labourer is higher than the value of covariance of male agricultural labourer. In the highly developed and moderately developed blocks, seasonal fluctuation of employment of female agricultural labourer is higher than the male agricultural labourer. But in the least developed blocks, the seasonal fluctuation of employment of female agricultural labourer is lower than male agricultural labourer. In the least developed blocks, the availability of tea plantation activities reduces the fluctuation of employment of female agricultural labourer.

3.2.5 Overall Findings on Level and Pattern of Farm Employment of Agricultural Labourers

The proportion of agricultural labourer to total workers is very high in West Bengal as well as in Uttar Dinajpur district. The number of agricultural labourers has been increasing over the years in the Uttar Dinajpur district but in the case of West Bengal, the figure remains nearly stable. The number of farm employment days available to per agricultural labourer in the Uttar Dinajpur district is very low. They get employment in agriculture about six to seven months of a year even after

modernization of agriculture. We also find the high seasonal variation in employment of agricultural labourer in agriculture. They get the maximum days of employment during *kharif* and *boro* seasons. In other seasons, the employment availability in agriculture is very low. In the highly developed blocks, the availability of employment per agricultural labourer is higher as compared to others blocks. It has also been observed that seasonal fluctuation of employment in agriculture is also high in the highly developed blocks as compared to other blocks. So development of agriculture ensures higher availability of employment with greater seasonal fluctuation of employment. In order to solve the above problems, it is necessary to increase the availability of non-agricultural employment in rural areas so that they can get employment through out the whole year.

3.3 Summary

The terms and conditions of employment of agricultural labourers varied across the categories of agricultural labourers. We divide agricultural labourers into five categories – fully attached labourers, semi-attached labourers, casual day labourers, casual group labourers and marginal farmers-cum-agricultural labourers. Different categories of agricultural labourers are employed under different terms and conditions under the same employers or different employers. The existence of fully attached labourers or annual farm servant is now hardly found in this district. The relationship between annual farm servant and *jotedar* or employer is patron-client relationship. However, there is an element of bondage in their relation with their employer. Semi-attached labourers can be divided into two categories on the basis of the duration of contract and freedom of choice of employers. The first category of semi-attached labourers has no freedom to work for other employers during the contract period and they are employed for a month or a few months during busy agricultural seasons. The second category of semi-attached labourers has enjoyed more freedom to work for other employers as compared to first category. The bases of attachment (full or partial) are the following: (a) allotment of land, (b) current consumption loans, and old debt.

Casual day labourer, we mean, a person who enters an agreement or contract with a particular employer for a single day at a time. He enjoys more freedom to choose the employer and works more freely as compared to semi-attached labourers and fully attached labourer. The casualisation of agricultural labourers has increased

over the years because the farmers prefer more casual day labourers as compared to semi-attached and fully attached labourers. Similarly, labourers also prefer to work as casual labourers as compared to semi-attached or fully attached labourers because they enjoy more freedom.

Casual Group labourers, we mean, a group of labourers who forms groups with equal able bodied persons to work piece rate basis. The farmers-employers prefer the casual group labour because through employment of group labour it is possible to maintain the timeliness for different agricultural operation and also to reduce search cost involved in contracting a number of individual workers. It has been spreading rapidly and is used for major agricultural operations such as transplanting, weeding, harvesting and threshing involving more amount of labour. There is no fixed working hours for them. The income of the group labourers is higher as compared to other categories of labourers.

In the above discussion, we observe the heterogeneity of labour contract in the labour market of Uttar Dinajpur district. Each type of labour contract differs from one another in respect of terms and conditions between employers and employees. During the survey, it was found that most of the agricultural labourers were employed as casual day labourers and group labourers. It was also observed that the importance of group labourers increased with the level of advancement of villages.

The main features about employment in agriculture are the abundance of labour, the extensive use of family labour, the decreasing average size of agricultural holdings and seasonality of demand for agricultural labour due to seasonal nature of agricultural operations. The trend of employment days available to adult male and adult female labour in West Bengal has been discussed for the period 1974-75 to 1993-94. The total number of employment days available from farm and non-farm activities to adult male worker was 257 days in 1974-75 and it increased to 293 days in 1993-94. Similarly, in the case of female, the total number of employment days available from farm and non-farm activities to her was 195 days in 1974-75 and it increased to 226 days in 1993-94. The relative importance of wage paid employment (in percentage term) in total employment days has declined over the years. On the other hand, the share of self-employment has increased for both male and female labour in West Bengal.

Availability of farm employment per agricultural labourer in Uttar Dinajpur district is low. An agricultural labourer got an average annual farm employment of

168.51 days in the district. The male workers got an average annual farm employment of 178.71 days, which was 15.28% higher than the female agricultural labourer. Among the different activities, the wage employment of crop farming provided the larger days of employment (129.65 days) per agricultural labourer followed by employment in self employment (23.50 days) of crop farming and employment in agriculture allied activities (15.35 days).

Our agriculture is seasonal in character, which affects the demand for labour in agriculture. We have divided the agricultural season of a year in to four categories – *pre-kharif*, *kharif*, *rabi* and *boro*. Paddy (*aman* and *boro*) is the main crop in the study area and labourers got maximum employment from transplanting, harvesting, carrying and threshing of paddy. *Kharif* season is the busiest season of the year. The employment availability is higher in this season as compared to other seasons. During *kharif* season, agricultural labourers got employment 47.84 percent higher than *pre-kharif*, 167.56 percent higher than *rabi* and 35.44 percent higher than *boro*. From the discussion, it is clear that high seasonal fluctuation of employment exists in the study area.