

Editorial

Labour is the most significant and important factor of production both from the social and economic point of view. Agricultural labour is the most exploited and oppressed class in rural hierarchy. The situation has improved after independence, though even now the class of agriculture labour is the poorest and resource less class in rural areas. Increased labour absorption in agriculture has been widely held to be the key to solving unemployment problems in developing countries, following the historical experience of East Asian countries. The new seed-fertilizer technology, interacting with expansion of irrigation and cropping intensity, initially increased labour absorption in agriculture. However, it is evident that new labour-saving chemical and mechanical innovations originating in the developed countries are being rapidly adopted by farmers of the developing countries owing to their private cost-reducing characteristics. This international transfer of technology contributes to increased productivity, but results in net reductions of agricultural labour use. Recognition of the declining capacity of the agricultural sector for labour absorption indicates the need to seek solutions to unemployment problems in the off-farm sector. In agricultural sector the input output relations are not unblemished to determine the right amount of inputs required to obtain optimum profit. Due to seasonality factor in agriculture, it is very difficult to use the necessary man days. Farmers generally employ less than the required number of labour in the peak season due to shortage of labour and more in the lean season due to social obligations that would force the farmers to accept extra hands every day. The decline in cultivators and rise in agricultural labourers is mainly attributed to the sinking size of land holdings. As the population size increases, the size of land holdings divided into small parts due to which cost of cultivation is increased. This tendency results the shifting cultivators to the non-farm sectors and work as agricultural labourers. Despite a large labour force in India, the labour shortages at peak period of agricultural activities are acute. This problem has been compounded by the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA). It appears that MGNREGA has made a perceptible difference to the 'choice of work' of the casual labour in rural and semi-urban areas. It is now widely recognised that primacy of employment objective is warranted not merely by the urgency of utilising vast masses of unemployed and under-employed labour, but also by the realisation that is the only way for execution of the major objective of development planning, namely elimination of poverty, reduction in inequality and sustenance of reasonable rate of economic growth. Therefore, periodic expansion of off-farm employment is one the major tasks ahead for the developing nations.

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