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A PROFILE OF POVERTY AND UNEMPLOYMENT IN 12 VILLAGES*

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The available data on the various aspects of rural poverty and unemployment are reasonably adequate for deriving some informed judgments on the type of development programme that would help to mitigate the acuteness of the problem. The concepts which have a bearing not only on the type of basic data to be gathered through field investigations but also on their interpretation have been clarified and refined. It is true that the results of the field investigations are not conclusive and are sometimes contradictory; but to a large extent, this may be due to the time and location differences. Some of the studies also suffer from methodological limitations, but usually these are well recognized by the authors themselves, though a writer in a hurry to prove his own point of view is apt to slur over them.

In spite of the abundance of the available material, we felt that two or three field studies of our own would help to throw light on certain specific aspects of this study to which references have been often made in the earlier discussion. The purpose of the field surveys was limited but specific. For one thing, it was not our intention to measure the magnitude of unemployment or poverty. By now enough is known about it. But we did want to know something more about the poor and the unemployed, particularly the inter-relationship between their social, economic and demographic background. Even in this regard, much is already known. For example, it could be confidently assumed that most of the poor would be landless agricultural labourers, that they would belong to the low caste groups and that they would mostly be illiterate. Yet, if our limited field investigation corroborated these hypotheses, we could further probe into their problems, partly by ascertaining their subjective views on the problems they face and their perception regarding the solutions to their difficulties, their preferences and inhibitions, the type of additional work they think they could undertake to augment their incomes and the type of assistance they would need for the purpose. On the basis of the information so collected, we could also attempt objective judgments about the type of programmes that would be most appropriate for the solution of their problems and the social and economic institutional changes necessary for the same. We also felt that household or per capita incomes/expenditures did not fully reveal many facets of poverty and decided to collect supplementary information about diet, health, medical facilities, housing and education to bring out what poverty means in the everyday life of the poor.

* This is an extract from a study undertaken by the author under a fellowship from the International Development Research Centre, Ottawa, Canada. The survey of these 12 villages was conducted in collaboration with Shri Ranjit Gupta (Musahri Block, Muzaffarpur, Bihar), Shri B. N. Juyal (Ghazipur, Eastern U.P.) and Shri Mahendra Desai (South Gujarat). We have borrowed liberally from their observations and reports, and the credit for whatever is useful in this article goes to them.

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Field investigations were conducted during 1972-73 in three regions : (1) Valod and Valsad talukas in South Gujarat, (2) Musahri block in the Muzaffarpur district of Bihar, and (3) Ghazipur tehsil in Eastern Uttar Pradesh. In all 9 villages and 3 *Gaon* (village) Panchayat areas were intensively surveyed : 6 villages in Gujarat, 3 villages in Musahri, and 3 *Gaon* Panchayat areas in Ghazipur.

All the three regions are known for their social and economic backwardness. Samples of households selected for the study were also drawn preponderantly from the weaker sections of the population—small farmers, agricultural labourers and artisans. In all, 543 households were selected.

The purpose of the study was not simply to collect statistics about poverty and unemployment but to gain a better insight into these problems through personal contacts with the households of the poor. The major topics to be studied were : (1) correlations between income, caste and occupation—further classified by the size of holding, in the case of those who owned or cultivated land; (2) work participation rates according to age, sex and occupations/class of worker; (3) employment and unemployment during the reference week, previous month and year, according to caste, occupation, etc.; (4) health, education, and housing conditions of the households according to caste, occupation and income. Some earlier studies had revealed that persons though under-employed were often “not available” for additional work. Hence, a special effort was made to look into the issue more closely. During the last few years the Government has introduced several schemes for generating additional employment and income for the weaker sections of the population. The working of these schemes was studied to derive insights regarding the workers’ responses to these schemes and assess the potential of these schemes to relieve the problem of unemployment.

For the sake of conciseness we have avoided incorporating all the findings from the surveys conducted in the three regions. In what follows, we have attempted to integrate the data and observations to highlight some of the salient features of the problem of rural poverty and unemployment.

Per Capita Household Income

Though, as stated earlier, measurement of poverty was not our major objective in conducting this study, we give below in a summary form information on per capita household income obtained from these surveys. Estimating income, especially of the poor household, is a tricky problem, particularly in view of the fact that many of these households resort to multiple occupations. The reported duration of employment in each of them and the income derived therefrom is subject to a wide margin of error. Besides, a substantial portion of payment for many of these jobs is made in kind. The quality of food (foodgrains) and other perquisites also vary from employer

to employer and their conversion in money terms cannot escape the investigator's bias. We would therefore suggest that the income levels reported below should not be viewed in isolation; their significance lies in the correlation they reveal between income levels and castes or occupations.

The measure selected for ascertaining income levels was monthly per capita household income (MPCI). While conversion of household income into per capita (household) income is necessary in view of the variations in the size of the households, such conversion may in some cases distort the picture. An illustration will bring out the point. The data from Bihar villages show, for example, that 73 households with an annual income of Rs. 1,200 to Rs. 2,400 were distributed in the following monthly per capita income groups : 18 in Rs. 15 and less, 41 in Rs. 16 to Rs. 30, 11 in Rs. 31 to Rs. 40 and over. Similarly, 87 households with MPCI of Rs. 16 to Rs. 30 were distributed in the following household income groups : 4 in Rs. 600 and less, 26 in Rs. 601 to Rs. 1,200, 41 in Rs. 1,201 to Rs. 2,400, 11 in Rs. 2,401 to Rs. 3,600 and 5 in Rs. 3,601 to Rs. 4,800. It can be legitimately argued that the four households with an annual household income of Rs. 600 and less and the five households with an income of Rs. 3,601 to Rs. 4,800 cannot be presumed to enjoy the same levels of living just because the two groups of households belonged to the same MPCI class.¹

Though we are fully aware of the limitations of the data on incomes and their MPCI classification, we adhere to it for the sake of comparability with our own studies in the three regions and studies by other scholars, many of whom however have used monthly per capita household expenditure as a proxy for income.

In our study, MPCI levels were divided into the following four groups : Rs. 15 and less, Rs. 16-30, Rs. 31-40 and Rs. 41 and over. The findings from the three regional studies are presented in Table I.

TABLE I.—DISTRIBUTION OF HOUSEHOLDS ACCORDING TO MPCI CLASS

Area	Total number of households	M P C I			
		Rs. 15 and less	Rs. 16-30	Rs. 31-40	Rs. 41 and above
South Gujarat					
Valod	60 (100·0)	2 (3·3)	27 (45·0)	19 (31·7)	12 (20·0)
Valsad	90 (100·0)	11 (12·2)	49 (54·4)	18 (20·0)	12 (13·3)
East Uttar Pradesh	160 (100·0)	29 (18·1)	64 (40·0)	30 (18·8)	37 (23·1)
Bihar	233 (100·0)	84 (36·1)	87 (37·3)	24 (10·3)	38 (16·3)

Note: Figures in parentheses show households in MPCI groups as per cent of the total number of households.

1. Attention to this issue was drawn by Ranjit Gupta who conducted the Bihar survey.

If the poverty line is drawn somewhat arbitrarily at a monthly per capita income of Rs. 30, the percentage of households living in poverty would range from 50 to 73. It may be reiterated that by deliberate choice, the regions as well as the households selected for the study were backward.

The data revealed that, by and large, the low caste households have lower per capita incomes. The association between per capita household income and caste was very high in all the regions. This is partly explained by the association between caste and occupations. Generally, the low caste households follow low productivity—low wage—occupation(s). Households owning or operating land were generally able to earn higher incomes than the landless. It is, however, important to note that in several instances those whose main occupation was cultivation, but who owned a small piece of land, had a lower income than even the agricultural labourers. In redistributing land under land reforms, this should be noted. Cultivation as a main occupation on a small farm—say, less than 2 acres of irrigated and 5 acres of dry land—is a poor income yielder. But the ownership of land half this size would be very valuable as a base for subsidiary occupations such as milk production (if feed and fodder are available at reasonable prices), vegetable cultivation (if the land is irrigated), poultry, etc. Since it would also provide a house-site, it will give the households some protection against exploitation or insecurity. Much more would of course be needed—credit, marketing, technical guidance—besides the land base to make these small, isolated enterprises remunerative.

As for the handicap of the caste, nothing very much can perhaps be done beyond the usual precept regarding education and cultivation of strong public opinion. The opinion leaders themselves are often the worst offenders. But the improvement in income itself will perhaps help to soften the caste distinctions. Better health and education would follow better incomes.

Land Ownership

The surveys confirm the well-known fact that the distribution of land ownership is highly skewed. Thus a survey of the three villages in Bihar, involving a census or complete enumeration of all households, showed that 4.9 per cent of households (with 6.2 per cent of population) owned 46 per cent of land. But we would plead for distinguishing excessiveness from concentration. In the above villages, the top ownership group of households—owning more than 10 acres each—had a per capita ownership holding of only 2.50 acres. Excessiveness is perhaps confined to the top one per cent of landowners. It is however quite likely that the land records conceal the extent of concentration, inasmuch as big landowners subdivide their land in the names of their near and distant relatives and even non-existing persons. More importantly, as revealed by another more intensive study

with which the author was associated, some persons owned land in more than one village; thus a survey of land ownership in any single selected village does not reveal the extent of land owned by landowners in that village.² The Ghazipur survey has cited a case of a hamlet in which the entire land was owned by non-residents.

The survey also confirms the high degree of association between caste and land ownership. For example, in the three Bihar villages, the upper caste Hindus constituting 13.3 per cent of the population owned 47 per cent of land, while the Scheduled Castes constituting 22.8 per cent of the population owned only 3.4 per cent of land. The share of the lower caste Hindus in land ownership was however only slightly less than their share in the population. It may be noted that even with this 'concentration' of land ownership with the upper caste Hindus, their per household ownership of land was only 7.5 acres, and per capita ownership was 1.1 acre.

Occupation and Caste

There is also a close association between occupation and caste. Thus, in the survey of the three Bihar villages, it was found that 92 per cent of the Scheduled Caste households had agricultural labour as their main occupation, while 78 per cent of upper caste Hindu households were cultivators, and only 3.4 per cent agricultural labourers. The majority (61 per cent) of lower caste Hindu households were also agricultural labour households, and only 29 per cent were those of cultivators. Similarly in Ghazipur, the household census of the 3 sample panchayats shows that out of 132 households belonging to the four castes with higher social status (*Brahmin, Thakur, Bhumiar and Kayasth*), 115 households (87 per cent) owned land with 5 *bighas* or more, 12 upto 5 *bighas* and only five households were landless. On the other hand, all the 49 households of the *Musahars* (an 'ex-criminal' tribe with the lowest social status) were landless, while among the *Chamars*, the numerically largest low caste group, 43 households owned more than 5 *bighas*, 123 owned upto 5 *bighas* and 71 were landless.

The tribals and persons belonging to the low castes and Scheduled Castes, being almost wholly illiterate and possessing no modern skills, are excluded from occupations like services and trade which provide higher incomes. Since their children also generally drop out from school even when they attend it, this handicap is not likely to be overcome in the near future. As such, they are not only poor, but destined to remain so for long.

² M. L. Dantwala and C. H. Shah : Evaluation of Land Reforms (With Special Reference to the Western Region of India), Department of Economics, University of Bombay, Bombay. United States Agency for International Development, New Delhi, 1971.

Work Participation Rates

Income evidently depends on the duration of employment—in man-days or man-hours—and the productivity of the work, assuming that wages and salaries correspond to their marginal productivity. One factor influencing the household income, which does not figure prominently in the discussion on the subject, is the work participation rate. For example, if only half the adult members (male and female) of a household participate in work, other things being equal, its income will be considerably less than that of the household in which all adults participate in work.

It could be argued that if a household does need more income, there is no reason why any adult (and able-bodied) member of the household should desist from participating in work. Alternatively, it may be that some adult members of the household do not seek employment because they know that there is no likelihood of their being able to obtain (suitable) employment. Thus non-participation may be just another name for unemployment. To obviate the latter possibility, unemployment surveys have adjusted the definition of labour force to include all those who may not be seeking employment (though not working) but are *available* for work, if it were offered to them. Whatever may be the reason, economic, social or psychological, a better understanding of the nature and magnitude of work participation (non-participation) and the causes underlying it is essential to the study of rural poverty and unemployment. In our field studies, a special attempt was made to collect information on this subject.

Participation rate is derived by reference to either the year-round usual activity or the current status, *i.e.*, activity during a given reference period. Depending on the purpose of the study, one or the other would be more relevant. If, however, the participation rate is derived from the current status, it would be important to note the timing of the reference period, since participation rates are known to vary from season to season.

Field surveys do not reveal a uniform pattern of participation. In the three Bihar villages, the participation rate (according to the usual activity criterion) was 51 per cent for males (of all ages), but for females it was incredibly low, being only 10 per cent. In households with a monthly per capita income of less than Rs. 15 (the lowest income class), the participation rate of males was nearly 10 percentage points lower than that of males in the MPCII group of Rs. 31-40. The former, it seems, had to carry a higher dependency load. As may be expected, in the highest MPCII group (Rs. 40 and above) the participation rates were the lowest. The variations in the participation rates of females in different occupations were also very marked, being 20.4 per cent among agricultural labourers and only 1.5 among owner-cultivators.

An attempt was made to ascertain the reasons for the low participation rates of females. In the Bihar sample, out of 507 females in the age-group 15 and above, as many as 427 did not participate in work and 160 of these were in the lowest MPCFI group of Rs. 15 and less. A large majority (330) reported "heavy domestic work including rearing of small children" as the main reason for non-participation. Some 45 women mostly belonging to the highest income group reported "caste and social prestige" as the reason. A very small number reported "no economic compulsion" or "lack of job opportunity" as the reason for non-participation. Most of those who reported "lack of economic compulsion" belonged to the highest income class, and the majority of those who reported lack of job opportunities belonged to the lowest income class with agricultural labour as their main occupation. But even in their case, the largest number reported "heavy domestic work, etc.," as the main reason for non-participation. These data are, no doubt, somewhat puzzling.

The labour participation rates particularly for women in the six villages in South Gujarat were high—higher than those observed in the 1961 Census.³ In Valsad, for all age-groups, the participation rate for males was 60.7 per cent and for females 58.6 per cent. In the productive age-group, the corresponding rates were 98.4 per cent and 95 per cent. A significant proportion of boys and girls below the age of 14 (22.8 per cent of girls and 17.6 per cent of boys) were found to be working—mostly grazing the cattle. In Valod, in the productive age-group (15-59), the participation rate for males was 95.2 per cent and for females 91.2 per cent. The rate for girls below 14 was distinctly lower (12.7 per cent) than that in Valsad. This is explained by the higher percentage of school enrolment of girls in Valod (44.5 per cent of the girls in the age-group 5-14) than in Valsad (10.7 per cent).

Unemployment

In all the three field surveys, unemployment was estimated with reference periods of (1) previous week, (2) previous month, and (3) previous year. The unemployed were defined as those without work and seeking and/or available for work. In what follows, the unemployment data with reference to only the previous week are analysed—as the problem of memory lapse is the least in this case. Unemployment is measured in terms of man-days in the labour force.

It was noted that in the villages of Bihar, out of 1,626 persons in the sample, 510 (430 males and 80 females) were working in the reference week, constituting 51 per cent of male population and 10 per cent of female population. In terms of man-days in labour force, unemployment among

³ The 1971 Census data available at present pertain only to 'mainly working' persons, and exclude 'secondarily' employed persons.

males was 17.2 per cent and that among females was 48.6 per cent. Altogether 185 persons were affected by various periods of unemployment : 58 were unemployed during all the seven days, one for six days, four for five days, three for four days, 43 for three days, 27 for two days, and 49 for one day. Among the 58 persons who were unemployed for all the seven days in the week, 26 were agricultural labourers, 13 cultivator-cum-tenants, 10 owner-cultivators and the rest were other categories.

Unemployment during the reference week (in terms of man-days) was the highest (25.6 per cent) among share-croppers and the lowest (7.1 per cent) among artisans. It was relatively lower among agricultural labourers without land (15.6 per cent) and owner-cultivators. When the period of unemployment is analysed separately for males and females, it appears that a large proportion of unemployment among share-croppers and cultivator-cum-tenants is contributed by females. It was also high among female landless agricultural labour class. Strangely, among owner-cultivators no female was unemployed during the reference week.

In Valsad, males found employment for 657 man-days out of 713 man-days for which they were in the labour force (see Table II). Thus there was unemployment for about 7.9 per cent of available man-days. In Valod, the extent of unemployment came to 9.9 per cent. In Valsad, 22 out of 115 males in the labour force found employment for four days or less. In Valod, out of 128 males in the labour force, 24 remained unemployed for three days or more.

TABLE II—DISTRIBUTION OF MAN-DAYS IN THE REFERENCE WEEK ACCORDING TO ACTIVITY AND EMPLOYMENT STATUS, AS REPORTED BY THREE FIELD SURVEYS

Survey area	Man-days in reference week	Man-days not available for economic activity	Man-days in labour force	Employed	Unemployed	Incidence of unemployment (per cent)
Males						
Bihar	3,010 (100.0)	420 (14.0)	2,590 (86.0)	2,144	446	17.2
South Gujarat						
Valod	833 (100.0)	120 (14.4)	713 (85.6)	657	56	7.9
Valsad	952 (100.0)	102 (10.7)	850 (89.3)	766	84	9.9
Females						
Bihar	560 (100.0)	87 (15.5)	473 (84.5)	243	230	48.6
South Gujarat						
Valod	637 (100.0)	161 (25.3)	476 (74.7)	355	121	25.4
Valsad	931 (100.0)	214 (23.0)	717 (77.0)	442	275	38.4

Note : Figures in parentheses show distribution of man-days according to employment status as per cent of the total number of man-days.

The incidence of unemployment among females was higher both in Valsad and Valod, being 25.4 per cent and 38.4 per cent (of the total man-days in the labour force) respectively. In Valsad 41 females out of 77 in the labour force during the reference week found employment for four days or less (21 for less than three days). In Valod 44 out of 90 females found employment for less than four days in the week (13 for less than three days).

When the reference period was extended to one month, the percentage of unemployed days increased slightly in Valsad both for males (from 7.9 to 9.1) and females (from 25.4 to 26.5), but in Valod it decreased for both males (from 9.9 to 8.1) and females (from 38.4 to 36.0).

Both in Bihar and South Gujarat, unemployment among the females was very high, in the former in spite of a very low participation rate (10.2 per cent). The relatively lower rate of female unemployment in South Gujarat may be viewed along with their longer non-availability for work. The low participation rates of females (particularly in Bihar) and their larger unemployment suggest that provision of suitable employment and earning opportunities to females would make a substantial contribution to the solution of the problem of rural poverty. Milk production is one occupation which appears to be eminently suited for the purpose. Rural works programmes, on the other hand, are quite unsuitable for a variety of reasons, such as the restricted mobility of women, the arduous nature of work, and social customs.

An analysis of the relationship between employment (and unemployment) and income also revealed some interesting features. In Bihar villages, earnings do not appear to be related to the number of days worked. Out of 284 persons who earned between Rs. 7 and Rs. 15, 90 had worked for all the seven days, 127 for six days, 36 for five days and 31 for four days. To put it differently, out of 127 persons who worked for all the seven days in a week, 8 earned Rs. 7 or less, 90 earned between Rs. 7 and Rs. 15, 25 between Rs. 15 and Rs. 22 and only 4 earned more than Rs. 22.

The analysis in terms of occupation would suggest that out of 100 persons who earned nothing during the week, 37 were agricultural labourers, 26 owner-cultivators, 23 were cultivator-cum-tenants, and the rest belonged to other categories. As a matter of fact, for the self-employed occupational groups like owner-cultivators, the measurement of weekly income is not meaningful. Very few agricultural labourers (only 8 out of 201) earned more than Rs. 15 during the week, and none over Rs. 22. Four out of 16 artisans earned between Rs. 15 to Rs. 22, and none more than Rs. 22. No share-cropper earned more than Rs. 15.

The data from South Gujarat villages, on the other hand, indicated a positive association between the duration of employment and per capita income. In Valod, the incidence of unemployment among females declined

sharply from 50 per cent to 3.2 per cent as the per capita income increased from Rs. 15 and less to Rs. 40 and above. For males, the decline in the incidence of unemployment was not so sharp; the percentage of unemployed days ranged between 16.7 for the lowest income group to 5 for the highest income group. In Valsad, for males and females together, the incidence of unemployment in terms of man-days (weekly data) declined from 31 per cent to 23.3 per cent and further to 16.8 per cent as we go up from the MPCII group of Rs. 15 and less to Rs. 16-30 and to Rs. 31-40. But it rose to 22 per cent for the income group of Rs. 40 and above, because of larger unemployment among females.

Thus, unlike in Bihar, in South Gujarat employment rather than the productivity of the worker, appears to be a stronger factor affecting income. This would counter our hypothesis that mere extension of employment without increase in productivity will not solve the problem of rural poverty.

Rural Works Programme

One of the questions included in the schedules of our field investigation pertained to the Government sponsored programmes to provide additional income and employment to the weaker sections of the population. These programmes include the Crash Scheme for Rural Employment (CSRE), scarcity relief works operated by the taluka/village panchayats, programmes of Marginal Farmers and Agricultural Labourer's Development Agency. Voluntary agencies like the Red Cross and the *Vedchhi Gramodyog Vikas Kshetra* (Vedchhi Rural Industrial Development Area) in South Gujarat and the Association of Voluntary Agencies for Rural Development (AVARD) in Bihar also operated some schemes. Employment was provided on road construction, metal breaking, brick soling, deepening of wells and canals, building culverts, etc.

We have obtained detailed data about the number of days of employment provided and wages earned from these programmes. The overall impression one gets from this information is that only a small number of persons benefited from these well intentioned programmes. Why should it be so when the employment situation was so bad? To get an answer to this question is to understand the crux of the unemployment problem and its solution. We shall, therefore, quote *in extenso* from the reports of our co-workers who conducted the field investigations, though as a result there would be some overlap and repetition.

Reasons for not Working on Rural Works Programmes

South Gujarat : Valod

A very small number of workers—41 out of 210—in the sample households worked in different projects in the last five years. To a considerable extent this feature was due to the small number of such projects, which again

were of short duration. All the same, it would seem strange that a large majority of workers from the low income households, even while they experienced unemployment (excluding under-employment) to the tune of about 16 to 18 per cent, should abstain from seeking work or should work for very short periods in special employment programmes. Useful light on the phenomenon is thrown by reasons given by the workers who did not work on such programmes or worked only briefly.

The unsuitability of the rural works programmes, from three different stand-points, was the dominant reason given by both the male and female workers. Within this broad category, unsuitability from the point of view of the nature of work on the rural works programmes was the most important reason. Male workers in particular emphasized the strenuous nature of work in rural works projects and lack of skills required for operations such as metal breaking, cement mixing, brick laying, etc. Most of the projects undertaken in the taluka were for construction of roads, in which earth digging and spreading was the main work, which would not ordinarily be considered as strenuous. In all probability, under-nourishment which was a commonly observed feature of the population in low income households in this area, explains this reaction.

The second major factor which rendered the rural works programmes unsuitable to a considerable number of workers was the long distance from home at which work was available. Disinclination to work on rural works programmes due to long distances was reported by a sizable number of male as well as female workers. Even though in terms of the weight to be attached to the reason, on the basis of its percentage share in total replies, it may not seem an important reason, there is no doubt that distance did matter to the workers while deciding whether to go in for employment on the rural works programmes. Thirty-eight workers out of 41 who had worked on such programmes in the last five years had worked within a radius of 8 kms. of their homes. Most workers prefer work in agriculture in or around their villages. So long as work in agriculture or related activities is available, the workers would look upon the rural works programmes as essentially a stop-gap employment source. Heads of 53 out of total 60 households favoured work in agriculture and related projects such as dairy, poultry, especially the former.

Facilities for accommodation and food at the work-site did not seem to be important factors in the situation. They might become so if the workers decide to go far from their homes to work on the rural works programmes, but not many workers are ready to leave their families. Obviously, domestic constraints deterred female workers more than they did male workers. The noteworthy point is that this reason accounted for a little over one-third of total replies of female workers. Thus as far as female workers are concerned, domestic circumstances, together with strenuous nature of the work to be done

on the rural works programmes, were the major reasons for their non-participation in special employment schemes.

A factor, which is quantitatively insignificant in this area, but which is suggestive of the operation of peculiar constraints, as far as low income sections in the rural areas are concerned, deserves highlighting. When the employment oriented schemes are very small, as most schemes undertaken in the Valod taluka were, the benefit of employment is restricted to a small group close to the powerful people in the villages. Other more needy sections would not even know about job opportunities, or even if they know about them, they are unable to avail of them. This means that special employment programmes have to be sufficiently massive to need large manpower, if they are to benefit job-seekers other than the favoured few. Another institutional hurdle in the way of the poor who want to take advantage of employment programmes is the form of employer-employee relationship in the case of attached farm workers. Under the semi-serf system (known as the *hali* system) that prevails in South Gujarat (under which the attached farm worker is virtually in bondage to his employer), the employee is required to report at the employer's household every morning to receive instructions about the work to be done during the day. Even if on a particular day there is absolutely no work to be done for the employer, the servant can go for other employment only with the express permission of the landlord. Of course, if the landlord refuses the permission, he is obliged to pay to the servant the daily wage rate (which is very low at Rs. 1.25 or Rs. 1.50) plus food. In the sample villages, the prevalence of *hali* system was not conspicuous but in the other prosperous parts of South Gujarat, the system is quite widespread. The fact that refusal of permission by the employer to work on the rural works programme has been reported as a reason (even if by only one worker) indicates the kind of constraints the weaker sections suffer.

Adequacy of employment in present occupations is also a reason of some importance for non-participation in special employment programmes, though the reason applies more to male workers than to female workers. Among male workers, again, the reason had a greater relative importance (among all reasons) in the case of workers in the last two higher income groups.

Thus, by and large, the unsuitability of the rural works programmes from the point of view of the period during which work is offered, nature of work to be done and the places of work, was the dominant reason for the workers not availing of the employment opportunities offered by the programmes. Domestic duties and responsibilities came next and were particularly important for the female workers. Other factors such as adequacy of employment and low wages are relatively less important; similarly unimportant, quantitatively speaking, are institutional hurdles, that stand in the way of the poor taking advantage of the programmes, but they shed useful light on the situation.

South Gujarat : Valsad

Considering the fact that a large majority of the sample households were those of landless labourers, the number of persons amongst them who reported having worked on the rural works programmes during the five years preceding the enquiry must be considered indeed very small. Most workers did not seek work on such programmes while some gave up work shortly after they took it up.

As many as twenty different reasons were advanced by the workers for the above phenomena. Most workers gave more than one reason. A little over 50 per cent of the reasons in the case of male workers and over 75 per cent of the reasons in the case of female workers speak of the unsuitability of the rural works programmes from different standpoints. The unsuitability from the point of view of the period when employment on the rural works programmes was available would seem to be the most important single reason in the case of both male and female workers. The workers complained that work on the rural works programmes was available when they could find employment in their usual activity (agricultural labour) and hence they could not avail of the programmes. The relevance of this reason to the male workers, who reported relatively small open unemployment, could be conceded, but it was indeed very strange that female workers with a quite large open unemployment should advance this reason. It would, however, be appropriate not to consider the reason in isolation but to consider it in conjunction with other aspects of the rural works programme which were also not liked by the female workers. Among the other unsatisfying aspects reported by the female workers, inadequate facilities at work-site (mainly accommodation, water and provisions) and lack of required skill (particularly of metal breaking) were important.

A small number of female workers mentioned one more reason for their unwillingness to work on the rural works programme. Thirteen women expressed dislike for the officers of the rural works programmes. For the female workers, the 'officers' were those who supervise their work, who mark their attendance and who make payment of the wages earned by them. It is not without significance that dislike for officials of the rural works programmes has been expressed by a much larger number of women than men workers.

When we focus our attention on the reasons advanced by the male workers, we are surprised by the large number of workers who said they never worked on the rural works programmes because they had adequate employment. No doubt, the extent of open unemployment among males, particularly those in the age-group 15-59 years was small. In this context, the fact that a large number of male workers (like female workers) complained of clash of availability of work on special programmes with work in their usual activity is of considerable significance. It is also important to note that a good number of the male workers joined the female workers in pointing to the inadequate facilities

at work-sites as a reason for their not seeking work on the rural works programmes. A sizable number of male workers also considered the wages offered on special programmes to be low.

In the Valod taluka also, some respondents mentioned institutional hurdles like the *hali* system as the reason for their inability to avail of work opportunities on special employment schemes. In one village (Kaparia-Sarangpur), the workers complained that they could not benefit from the rural works programmes because the contractor who carried out the road building project near their village did not hire any local labour but hired labourers from the neighbouring Dharampur taluka.

Thus the major reasons for the workers in the sample households for not working on the rural works programmes were the inappropriate timing of the programmes, lack of adequate facilities at work-sites and adequacy of employment in their present occupations. Institutional hurdles and personal reasons, which were pointed out by the workers as responsible for their inability to participate in the rural works programmes, bring out some interesting features of the labour supply situation with respect to special employment programmes.

Uttar Pradesh : Ghazipur Villages

Though it may not be proper to generalise about the reasons why eligible persons do not participate in the rural works programmes to the expected extent, it may be useful to record some observations. It should be borne in mind that in the area under study, no project experienced shortage of labour. It may also be noted that it was only in Khajurgaon village that regular crash and test work projects were executed at a convenient distance from the village. One of the reasons for low participation in this village may be that the two main eligible groups—*Nonia* and *Chamar*—have a better land holding status. However, several social and personal factors are involved in seeking employment on the rural works programmes.

The dominant value system is against the type of work offered on the rural works programmes, the bulk of which is just earth work. The reluctance to take up manual work for augmenting income because of social prestige and status is not confined to the higher castes alone. As a rule, the latter do not do manual work even on their own fields; but even among the traditional labour caste groups, few persons willingly take up such work. Thus, those who have a bit of land, howsoever insufficient it might be on viability considerations, are unwilling to work on such projects. If the economic status of the family even from the labouring castes improves slightly, their women folk cease working on such projects.

Among the intermediate peasant castes, men and women do perform manual work on their own farms and within their own houses, but they do

not take up such activities on others' farms or on public works programmes. The resistance is more for public works programmes which require them to go outside the village. However, in situations of distress, the males may take up work on such projects but not the females. There are certain intermediate castes—*Nonias*, *Binds*, *Mallahs*—who are largely landless or marginal cultivators. Amongst the *Nonias* and *Binds*, for whom earth work is regarded as their caste specialisation, their female workers do not normally take up work on public works, although they do work on the farms—mainly in rice transplantation and harvesting. The *Lohar* (blacksmith) males and females also do not generally undertake manual work. Some *Lohar* men may join public works projects as masons, but they would not do so as labourers, even if they can thereby get higher wages, or even when they are sitting idle.

The answers of the *Kahar* and *Nai* castes suggesting that they have never done manual work are typical. The service castes, such as *Kahar* (water carriers and domestic servants), *Nai*, Dhobi will not do manual labour either on farms or on public works, even though their traditional work is not much different from manual work. Surprisingly, they even make it a prestige issue. Some of the respondents, particularly the *Kahars*, also pointed out that they found it physically difficult to do earth work. This may appear unreasonable because drawing water from wells also involves hard physical labour. This attitude of "not being able to do the work" may be rooted in tradition. Perhaps, each person develops a habit or a certain kind of capacity (or skill) for doing the work that he routinely does in his regular vocation. He would, however, consider other types of activity, which may not require better skills or may not be more strenuous, as beyond his capacity.

The *Binds* and the *Nonias*, who occupy the lower rung in the intermediate caste hierarchy and who generally engage in earth work, availed themselves of work under the rural works programme. The *Chamars* (commonly referred to as Harijans), being numerically large (nearly 19 per cent of the district population), are not always able to get employment on the farms even during the peak agricultural season. As such, they do take up employment in rural works.

Any nuclear family in which there is only one adult male and female is not likely to participate in rural works projects. Any family in which the adult males are working as *Banihars*⁴ is not likely to participate in the rural works programmes, especially if the work conflicts with the agricultural operations. This is so even when the wages offered on public works are higher than the farm wages. In recent years, the 'bondage' of the agricultural labour has loosened and normally he can take up work on the public work projects if he wishes, *provided* he is available whenever he is required by the

4. *Banihari* is a customary arrangement (usually known as *Fajmani*) under which certain services such as repairs of ploughs, making shoes, etc., are provided for exchange in kind of foodgrains and other perquisites.

employer for his work. If he does not make himself available when the employer needs him, he may be prevented even physically from taking up other work. (Such incidents have taken place in the district.)

Any educated person who has studied even up to the junior high school level, regardless of his caste, is unlikely to participate in the rural works programme, unless he is offered a position as 'incharge' or with some similar status.

Any woman, even from the labouring castes, is likely to cease working on rural works once she attains the status of a mother-in-law. Also, the newly married women may not be sent to work on the project works.

The intending labour is not likely to go to work on projects which are not at a convenient walking distance from their residence. Some of them may migrate occasionally to distant places to work on brick kilns, etc., but not on temporary work projects closer to the village, which are considered "neither here nor there."

The climatic factor—the extremely hot summer months—also deters people from working on rural projects and anybody with a weak physique will not venture to undertake the work.

It is significant to note that the initial promise that the 'crash' schemes will provide work for 10 months has not been fulfilled. The *ad hoc*, short duration, sporadic projects undertaken so far, have not even produced a ripple in the wage pool frozen for nearly a century.

The observations cited above may not be valid for the country as a whole but they indicate the wide range of factors that are likely to determine the success of the special employment programmes undertaken by the Government.

Scope for Augmenting Income : Respondents' Perception

An attempt was made in our investigations to ascertain the workers' perceptions about the facilities needed to augment their income. Four facilities, (a) more land, (b) more equipment, (c) better credit-marketing and input services, and (d) better training were suggested to them. In Bihar, a substantial number (78 out of 227) felt that all the four facilities were necessary. A closer analysis showed the following order of importance attached to different facilities by the respondents : more land, more equipment, better supply and marketing service (only by owner-cultivators) and better training.

The workers' response was more specific when they were asked about a new occupation which would help them to earn more income. A significant majority of respondents (186) in Bihar villages, belonging to all income groups,

mentioned dairy as a preferred new occupation. Less than 10 per cent mentioned village industries (blacksmithy, leather work, etc.). As for the facilities needed to take up the new occupation, singly, credit was considered the most important; in combinations of any two, credit and technical assistance were considered important. Relatively few respondents considered marketing singly or in combination with other facilities, as important. All occupational groups—except artisans—considered dairy as most promising. Only the artisans preferred village industries.

The survey of South Gujarat villages also indicated that a large number of agricultural labour families was engaged in ancillary activities connected with dairying. Children in these families were mostly engaged in grazing the cattle. Some households (mostly tribal) also rear young stock and dry milch animals owned by others and when they come of age or calve, the rearers receive half the value of the animals from their owners. The animals which they maintain on their own are of non-descript breed. The animals are not stall-fed and are left loose to feed on community pasture land. The net result of this peripheral association with dairying is that the income derived from it is insignificant. In Valod, 35 out of 59 households earned some income from dairy, but the average household income from this source was only Rs. 67 or barely 3 per cent of the total income. In the three villages of Valsad, 46 out of 90 households (mostly of tribal agricultural labourers) reported dairy (and dairy labour) as one of the sources of income. But in the average income of Rs. 1,618 of the 90 households, its contribution was only Rs. 89.

There are indeed many hurdles in making this activity remunerative for the marginal farmers. The Small Farmers Development Agency in Valod is making an earnest effort to help these households by providing improved breeds of buffaloes at subsidised rates. The Agency has also offered an assured market for their milk through the Milk Co-operative Society which has been allotted funds for the purchase of a truck and for establishing a chilling plant. Yet, the respondents in the survey villages appeared sceptical about their ability to avail of this assistance. For one thing, they say that they do not have space to keep the animals and are not sure of obtaining feed and fodder. But the most important reason, we think, is their diffidence about their ability to take proper care of the high-breed cattle, their feed and veterinary requirements, and above all, they are afraid of the risk of mortality. Thus, it seems, the major problem is of education and training, because the rest of the problems—supply of proper breed, credit for inputs, supply of feed and fodder, veterinary service and even mortality risk fund—can be provided by the Development Agencies. In fact, one such integrated dairy scheme has been sponsored by the Agricultural Finance Corporation—a consortium of all major Commercial Banks—and to the best of our knowledge, it is being successfully implemented.