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Need for bridging a gap between agriculture and manufacturing sector

An Interview with Jayshree Sengupta

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Jayshree Sengupta is a Senior Fellow (Associate) working with Observer Research Foundation's Economy and Development Programme. Her work focuses on the Indian economy and development, regional cooperation related to the SAARC, BRICS, ASEAN and EU groupings, social sectors like health, education and unemployment, and women and development. In the interview with her, she has highlighted on the plight of women agricultural labourers in India. She also talked about how women will be affected after adoption of new technology and also emphasized on more investment and more jobs to be created especially in countryside from both public and private sectors.

There has been an increasing trend of feminisation of agriculture in India, what are the reasons behind this?

Feminisation of agriculture in India is due to many causes—migration of men to towns and cities for work, migration to the Middle East, suicide by farmers and addiction of husbands/sons to narcotics in some states.

Can you elaborate on plight of women agricultural labourers?

Women labourers are paid less than men and are often taunted because they are not able to perform heavy tasks. This maltreatment of women labourers apart from sexual harassment in tea estates is a common practice. More details can be found from following article: <https://www.orfonline.org/research/women-farmers-plight/>

Do you think there is a gap in forward and backward linkages between agriculture and manufacturing sector in India? Can you elaborate on that?

There is a gap between forward and backward linkages between agriculture and manufacturing because though manufacturing depends heavily on agricultural demand, it is not creating enough job opportunities in manufacturing units to absorb surplus agricultural labour specially the youth. This is leading to major drug and addiction problems in Punjab and other states.

The youth is disillusioned about working in agriculture and yet young job seekers are not finding jobs in the manufacturing sector.

Can you give details regarding prevailing unemployment condition in India?

The unemployment situation in India touched around 7 per cent of the working population after Demonetisation and GST. Now the unemployment situation has improved and was 6.3 percent in March 2018, because, according to CMIE, there are fewer people seeking jobs and labour force participation rate has fallen. It is not because more jobs have been created! This happened because after people returned to their villages following the demonetization shock many have stopped actively looking for jobs.

'Adoption of new technology to improve productivity likely to affects jobs' how do you see it when there exist a growing workforce and huge demographic dividend in India?

Adoption of new technology and mechanization will definitely affect demand for labour. Women particularly will be less employed as they are engaged mostly in menial activities like winnowing and harvesting that can be performed by machines. Increase in mechanization and rise in productivity and incomes should lead to opening up of other agro industries which will employ the youth and women like in food processing. Non-farm jobs in India have been stagnant and this has to be corrected through more investment in the countryside from both public and private sectors.