



A STUDY ON AGRICULTURAL LABOUR IN INDIA

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INTRODUCTION

Agriculture plays an important role in Indian economy. It is the primary source of livelihood for about 58 per cent of India's population. Along with fisheries and forestry, agriculture is one of the largest contributors of the GDP. GDP of agriculture and allied sectors in India was recorded at US\$ 244.74 billion in the financial year 2016.

India is the largest producer, consumer and exporter of spices and spice products. It is the second largest fruit producer in the world. It ranks third in farm and agriculture outputs. India has diversified agro industries such as fisheries, meat, poultry, food grains, canned products, dairy, processed, frozen food. Agricultural exports constitute nearly 10 per cent of Indian total exports.

But it is an unorganized sector. The workers working in agriculture are the most neglected class in Indian rural structure. As per survey carried out by the National Sample Survey Organization in the year 2009-1 the largest segment of workers in the unorganized sector are agricultural workers (24.6 crore), who are extremely vulnerable to exploitation on account of their low level literacy, low level literacy low level of awareness persistent social backwardness and absence of unionism and other forms of viable organization.

OBJECTIVES

1. To study conceptual background of agricultural Labour.
2. To study whether there is increase or decrease in the agricultural workforce.

METHODOLOGY

Present study is completely based on secondary data compiled from various books, journals, websites etc.

Definition of Agricultural Labour

According to the first Agricultural Labour Enquiry Committee of 1950-51 those people are regarded as agricultural workers who were engaged in raising crops on payment of wages, The Second Agricultural Labour Enquiry Committee of 1956-57 took a broad view of agricultural to include those workers also who were engaged in allied activities like animal husbandry, dairy, poultry, piggery etc, According this committee if 50 per cent or more of its income is derived as wages for work rendered in agriculture, only then it could be classified as agricultural labour household.

According to the National Labour Commission, a major portion of income of agricultural workers is in the form of wages obtained as a result of working on land.

Classification of Agricultural Labourers

The First Agricultural Labour Enquiry Committee had classified agricultural labour into two categories

- 1 Attached Labourers- These are attached to landlords on written or oral basis. They have to work for lengthy periods.



- 2 Casual Labourers- they are free to work on the farm of any farmer on a daily wages basis. Casual Labourers are again classified into three types
 - a. Very small cultivators who has very small holdings and whose main source of earnings is wage employment due to small holding.
 - b. Tenants are those who not only work on the leased land but also work as labourers.
 - c. Share croppers are those who, share the produce of the land for their work and also work as Labourers.

Growth in Agricultural Labourers in India

Before the advent of Britishers the number of agricultural labourers was very less. The census of 1881 showed that there were 7.5 million landless labourers in India and in 1921 their number increased to 21 million which was nearly 17.4 of the total population.

Table 1
Growth in Agricultural Labourers in India

Census Year	Total Population	Total Workers	Agricultural Workers				Agricultural Labourers	
		All Occupations (Main Workers)	Agricultural Labourers	Cultivators	Total	As Percentage to total workers (Col. 3)	As Percentage to total workers (Col. 3)	As Percentage to agricultural workers (Col. 6)
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1951	356.86	139.42	27.50	69.74	97.24 (27.3)	69.75	19.72	28.28
1961	439.24	188.68	31.52	99.62	131.14 (29.9)	69.51	16.71	24.04
1971	548.16	180.48	47.49	78.27	125.76 (22.9)	69.68	26.31	37.76
1981	665.29	222.52	55.50	92.52	148.02 (22.2)	66.52	24.94	37.49
1991	838.58	285.93	74.60	110.70	185.30 (22.2)	64.81	26.09	40.26
2001	1025.25	313.17	107.45	127.63	235.08 (22.9)	75.06	34.31	45.71
2011	1210.57	362.45	144.33	118.69	263.02 (21.7)	72.57	39.82	54.87

Source : Registrar General of India, Census Reports from 1951 to 2011.

From the above table it is clear that the number of agricultural labourers has increased to 27.5 million in 1951, 31.52 million in 1961 and 144.33 million in 2011. The total number of agricultural workers including cultivators reached up to 263.02 million in 2011. There was continuous growth in percentage of agricultural labourers. This increase may be due following reasons.

Reasons for growth in agricultural workers

1. Increase in population – After 1921, there has been rapid growth in population. As the rate of development was slow, it was not possible to provide employment opportunities to the increased population. The increased population was dependent on agriculture as their livelihood.



2. Decline in cottage industries and village handicrafts – There was rapid declination in cottage and village industries. These jobless people seek employment in agricultural sector.
3. Eviction of small farmers and tenants from land - After independence big landlords, zamindars evicted number of tenants on the pretext of personal cultivation. These people seek employment in agricultural sector.
4. Uneconomic holding – Sub-division of small piece of farms among future generations, say among three to four sons , led to each son getting meager piece of land, which proved to be insufficient holding of land to fulfill their daily needs.
5. Increase in indebtedness –There is increasing indebtedness among rural areas. Sometimes, it becomes difficult to repay debts, and the poor farmers have to work as agricultural workers.
6. Spread of the use of money and exchange system – In past times, land was given to tenants to cultivate. But, now days agricultural workers are forced to work on daily wage basis.
7. Capitalist agriculture – Today, due to capitalist agriculture in some parts of India like Punjab, Haryana etc. the farmers have adopted capitalist farming on a large scale. This farming forced many tenants to leave land and work in agricultural sector in India.

Measures taken by Government for improvement of conditions of Agricultural Labourers

Since independence government of India has adopted various measures to improve economic conditions of agricultural Labourers. Some of them are discussed as under

1. Minimum Wages Act – In 1948, Minimum Wages Act was passed. But up to 1974, it was not found possible for most of the states to fix minimum wages. because of lack of bargaining power, agricultural Labourers do not force for minimum wages and earnings of agricultural workers.
2. Abolition of bonded labour – In 1976, Bonded Labour System Act was passed because bonded labour system is exploitative, inhuman and there is violation of norms. As a result of this act, 2,82,368 bonded Labourers were rehabilitated till March 195.
3. Providing land to landless Labourers – Government of India has passed Act for fixing ceiling on land and acquired surplus land. In Bhoodan and Gramdan movements, many people donated land. Near about 74 lakh acres were distributed among 41.5 lakh landless labourers, However, most of the land made available to these labourers is not fit for cultivation.
4. Provision for housing sites – Several states have passed laws for providing house sites to agricultural workers in villages. During Fourth Plan a scheme of financial assistance to state for provision of free house sites and construction assistance. During Eighth Plan this scheme was continued with same specific measures.
5. Special Schemes for providing employment – Central and State Government has initiated various schemes for providing alternative sources of employment to the agricultural Labourers. These schemes include Rural Works Programme (RWP), Crash Scheme for Rural Employment (CSRE), Employment Guarantee Scheme (EGS), Food Work Programme (FWP), National Rural Employment Programme (NREP), Rural



Landless Employment Guarantee Programme (RLEGP), Jawahar Rozgar Yojana (JRY) etc.

6. Special agencies for development – in 1970-71, under Forth Five Year Plan special agencies named Small Farmers Development Agency (SFDA), Marginal Farmers and Agricultural Labourers (MFAL) were crated to perform programmes of irrigation, land leveling, soil conservation, dairy development, poultry breeding, piggery development etc. with an outlay of Rs.115 crore.

In order to provide employment to agricultural workers, a special programme named Drought Prone Area Programme (DPAP) was also initiated.

The Fifth Five Year Plan merged SFDA and MFAL into a single programme.

Some of the recent initiatives for agricultural sector are under

In order to increase rural income in agricultural sector the NITI Aayog has proposed various reforms including contract farming, direct purchasing from farmers etc.

The Central Government is planning to open Krishi Vigyan Kendra at district level for technical assistance to the farmers.

Measures for improvement of Agricultural Labourers

1. Proper implementation of legislative measures – There should be proper implementation of legislative measures. For example Minimum Wages Act should be seriously implemented by taking into consideration the changing price trends.
2. Improving the bargaining positions – Agricultural labourers are unorganized. They should be organized under the protection and support of the government.
3. Creating alternative source of employment – Because of increasing population, there is burden on land in absorbing the additional labour. It is necessary to create alternative source of employment in rural area.
4. Improving working conditions – There should be fixed working hours for agricultural Labourers.
5. Public work programmes- Agricultural workers cannot get employment opportunities throughout the year. They may remain unemployed for three and six months in a year, During this period. Public work programmes such as construction of roads, digging of canals, wells etc should be organized.
6. Raising the standard of living – Special programmes to improve standard of living of agricultural workers such as health care centers, baby sitters, sport facilities, library facilities should be arranged.
7. Social security – Social security measures such as insurance, pension scheme, sick leave, earn leave should be provided to agricultural labourers.

CONCLUSION

The role of agriculture and agricultural labourers in the development of Indian Economy cannot be overemphasized. Agricultural labourers are unorganized, scattered and unskilled. They are neglected and have no bargaining power. In order to improve their conditions, social status and living standard organization of farmers are necessary. The State and Central government should undertake number of initiatives to make agriculture more productive. There should be widespread use of technology on farms to replace many traditional farming occupations. Legislative measures must be implemented properly and attempts should be made to improve the economic conditions of agricultural labourers.

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