

Issues and Challenges of Agricultural labour in India: Special reference to Chamarajanagara District of Karnataka

Mahadevaswamy H. R

*Assistant Professor of Sociology, Government First Grade College for Women, Vijayanagar, Mysore -570
032*

Abstract: We are aware that near about 53% population of India is engaged in agricultural activities (2011 Census Report). It is increased after Covid 19 but agriculture in India is still at mercy of monsoon. At this juncture, the condition of the farmers and agricultural labourers depend on the moderation of monsoon. In-fact Indian monsoon is gambling with the farmers. If rain comes in such a way that it is washing away the standing crops, otherwise if rain does not come farmers are facing drought conditions. If monsoon is good, then crop is good and vice-versa. Agriculture labour is calculated in the category of unorganized sector, so their income is not fixed. Henceforth they are living an insecure and underprivileged life and earning just Rs. 150/day or 170 a day along with full of insecurity. The agricultural labourers are one of the most oppressed and burdened classes in rural ladder. At this point the paper, highlights the problems of agriculture labour and pointed out some of the suggestions.

Key Words: Agriculture, oppressed Class, Exploitation, Monsoon, Neglected class

INTRODUCTION

In the economic year 2020, about 46.6 percent of the workforce in Karnataka was involved in agriculture activities. In contrast the workforce distribution in industry and services sector was approximately 19.8 and 33.7 percent, respectively. The distinctive feature of rural economy of India has been the growth of agriculture labour in the crop production. The phenomena of under-employment, under-progress and surplus population are visible amongst agricultural labourers. Agricultural labours constitute the most neglected class in Indian rural sector and are highly unorganized. The wages level of these workers is quite low and employment is quite irregular. Additional, these workers lack alternative employment due to lack of training and skills. In today's world, the agricultural

industry employs half of the global labour population, with an estimated 1.3 billion people (according to 2011 Census Report) working in agricultural production globally. The most of agricultural labourers live in developing nations. The huge majority are small-scale farmers. They were more often victims than beneficiaries of the green revolution, technical advancement, and globalisation tendencies that marked the twentieth century.

Census Information of land less agricultural labours in India

In 1951 the landless agricultural labour numbers just 27.3 million. Which went up to 144.3 million (14.4cr) in 2011. the socio-economic and caste census of 2011, which acknowledged and counted landlessness as major indicator of poverty, put the households with no land at 56.14% of total rural households. With a mean households size of 4.9 in rural India (as per the census 2011). The number of landless come to 494.9 million (49.49cr) total 5.4 corer landless laboures identified during the socio-economic caste census of India. In Maharashtra total number of landless labourers are 41,73,705 and the Kolhapur district.5 has total population of 38,76,001 as per the census 2011 Report.

Definition of Agriculture Labour:

Agriculture labour may be defined as labour who works in agriculture or allied activities for the whole or part of the year in return for (in cash or kind or both) full-time or part time work. The agriculture labourer has no risk in the cultivation, and no right of lease or contract on land but merely works on another person's land for wages.

Major characteristics of Landless agricultural labourers in India

1. Landless agricultural labourers are extensively dispersed: Agricultural labour in India is being widely scattered over 5.6 lakh villages. Consequently, any question of building an effective organization like that of industrial workers poses insurmountable difficulties. Therefore, there is no effective organization of agricultural labourers found in India.

2. Landless agricultural labourers are unqualified - Agricultural labourers are required to do all types of farm and domestic work at the request of the landlords. In short, agricultural labourers are exploited by landlords, which is one of the major causes of their backwardness. Agricultural labourers, particularly in smaller villages far-flung from towns and cities, have long been unskilled labourers carrying on agricultural operations.

3. Landless agricultural laborers are not systematized: Agricultural labourers are not organized like other workers. They live in villages and scattered hence they could not have organized. So there it is difficult to bargain with landlords and owners for their rights and good wages. Agricultural labourers are not able to establish national movements for their rights. Due to their unorganized nature

4. Landless la have assigned lowest status in the society: Most of agricultural labourers belong to the depressed classes. They have neglected from main stream. These oppressed classes are also socially negligible part. And they have never courage to defend themselves. In some parts of India agricultural laborers are in wandering stage. They are wandering or migrating from one place to another place in search of employment and for food. They are socially and economically weak. So they have lower social status in society.

Causes for the Growth of Agricultural Laborers:

a. Gradual rise of Rural Population: The increase of population in the rural villages are the chief cause of the rise of agricultural laborers. When the increase the size of the population then naturally sub-division and uneconomic land holding in the rural area as the same piece of land gets distributed among large number of persons in the family which becomes inadequate for their own basic requirements. Consequently the rural families have to search for the employment to fulfil their economic needs.

b. Deterioration of Cottage Industries and Handicrafts: The rural cottage industries are on the decline due to increased competition from modern factory based industries. In the absence of the alternative employment opportunities for workers engaged in these village industries there is an increase of agriculture labour in India.

c. Throwing out of Small Farmers and Tenants from the Land: During the British rules increase in the number of middlemen, the land started slipping out of the hands of small farmers and they were forced either to adopt the status of tenants or work as agricultural labourers. As majority of these people had no substitute but to seek employment as agricultural labourer.

d. Inefficient Land Holdings: In India vast amount of agricultural land is in the hands of influential and rich farmers. From centuries together land belongs to the well to do families.

e. Surge in Indebtedness of farmers: There is a old saying Indian farmers born in debt and dies in debt. Farmers spend considerable amount of money on religious and for non-economic activities. Hence majority of the farmers are in the grip of non-institutional source of credit especially money-lenders that charge huge interest

LITERATURE REVIEW

A very brief review of studies on the topic has been made here under:

M.H. Wani, Yousuf Shahid, S.H. Baba and S.A. Wani (2011), in their research article entitled Agricultural Labour Migration:

Causes and Implications, found that the agricultural wage rate is low compared to the industrial sector. Their study also found that rural labour and particularly the youth have better propensity to migrate in the urban areas like better education, employment opportunities arising from urbanization as well as the changing market context as economies become more liberalized and globalized. K. N. Doddamani (2014), in his research paper entitled "A Study on Migration of Agriculture Labourers from Hyderabad Karnataka Area to Maharashtra", argued that regional disparity is the major reason for increasing seasonal migration of agricultural labourers in Hyderabad-Karnataka area. The study further found that migrants from

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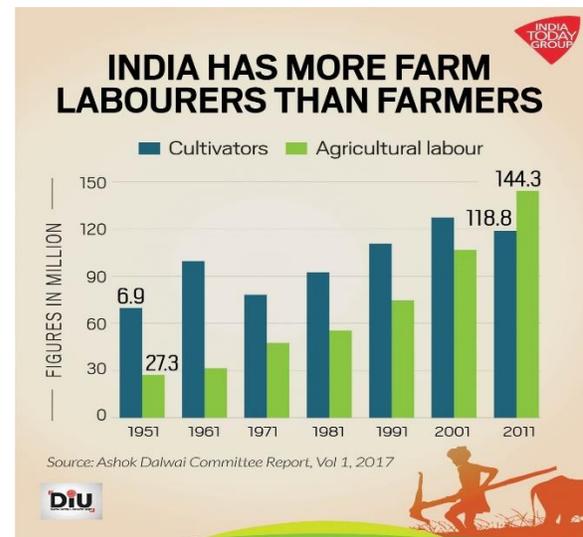
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A study on Agricultural Labour Migration and Remittances in Karnataka State of India, made by B.N. Venu, K.B. Umesh and G.M. Gaddi (2016), found that migration was a major option for agricultural labourers in rain-fed areas of Karnataka for their better livelihood. Most of the labourers migrate from rain-fed areas to irrigated areas. The study also found the youths in rural areas are increasingly migrating to industrial sector in urban areas. Majority of labourers migrated seasonally and the frequency was the highest (70%) in rain-fed situation. In rain-fed situation, after sowing season they were migrated to other regions and return at the time of harvest.

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CLASSIFICATION OF AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS

Agricultural labourers can be divided into four categories

1. Landless Labourers, who are attached to the land lords;
2. Landless labourers, who are personally independent, but who work exclusively for others;
3. Petty farmers with tiny bits of land who devote most of their time working for others and
4. Farmers who have economic holdings but who have one or more of their sons and dependants working for other prosperous farmers. The first group of labourers have been more or less in the position of serfs or slaves; they are also known as bonded labourers.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To study the problems of Agricultural Labourers in India.
2. To know the causes for the growth of agricultural labourers.
3. To identify the types of agricultural labour in India.
4. To understand the problems of the agricultural labour in India
5. To analyse the measures to improve the life of agricultural labour in India.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The present study is based on Primary and Secondary data. The research work is done in the villages of Chamarajanagara District. The researcher visited the villages like Hundipura, Huttur, Jakkahalli, Kabbahalli and done interview schedule method to collect Primary Data. In order to easy the study 50 agricultural labours have been selected on the Random Sampling Method from the above mentioned villages. Secondary data collected after visiting the library of University of Mysore, information also collected from the magazine, journal and newspapers.

Problems of Agricultural Labourers in India – Results and Discussion

1. No stable Working Hours: Out of 50 agricultural labours 38 of them consisting of 76% of them optioned that the working hours of them are not only irregular but also extreme. They said they have to work from morning 7 am to late night. At the same time, they is guarantee for their work, at any movement the owners may remove them the hard labour.
2. Periodic Employment/temporary employment: out of the 50 agricultural labours 45 of them consisting 90% of them replied that they do not get work for the whole year. They said they work only for some days of the year and rest of the time they remain idle. According to Agricultural Labour Investigation Society, a Seasonal labourer gets an average of 197 days of work in a year. Women labourer gets 141 days of work in a year. It leads very low income.
3. Less Wages for the unskilled agri labours: Out of 50 agricultural labours 42 of them consisting of

84% replied that the agricultural labourer are considered as unorganised sector. They said painfully that there is no fixed wages for specified agriculture work and the wages level of agricultural labour very low as compared to that of industrial labour. At the same time they get meagre amount of Rs. 150 to Rs. 160 for a whole day for male and Rs. 45 to Rs. 60 rupees for the female agricultural labours.

4. Rise of Indebtedness among the agricultural labours: Due to lower income, the indebtedness of agricultural farmers is increasing. Out of 50 agricultural labours 46 of them consisting of 92% per cent responded that they hesitate in negotiating their wages with the land owners in the fear that their services would be sacked. They said, as when necessary or the when they face a financial crunch then they borrow the hand loan form the landlords at the high rate of interest. This inevitably lands them into debt.
5. No unity among the Agricultural labours: Agricultural labourers are considered as unorganised sector. 48 of the respondents who are consisting of 96% of them responded that they are uneducated and ignorant, lived in remote villages. They said, they are not able to form any union like trade unions or market labours.
6. Exploitation of Women Labourers: Indian society from centuries are male dominated society. Women are not given with good status. Hence they are treated as second graded citizens especially in rural arrears. 50 per cent of the agricultural labours reportedly said that due to lower income women of agricultural labourers are also forced to work for their livelihood.
7. Increase in migrant labour: The wages of the labourers in the irrigation areas are less compared to the wages of the labourers in the rain-fed areas. This led to the migration of the labourers from the dry areas to the heavy rain areas.
8. Agricultural Slavery of rural labours: Majority of agricultural labourer consisting of 46 of them consisting of 92% replied that they are landless and belongs of Schedule and Scheduled Castes Tribes. Due to their lower social status they are treated in inhuman way. The labours also said painfully that wealthy land owners make them work like slaves, they are made to work early morning 7 am to late evening. Sometimes the

owners instructed them to them bring their teenaged son or daughter to do farm work. They are used as labourer and in return given minimum wages.

9. Unskilled and Lack Training: Agricultural labourers, especially in less significant villages away from towns and cities, are generally unskilled workers carrying on agricultural operation in the centuries old traditional wages. Most of them, especially those in small remote villages with around 500 populations, may not have even heard of modernization of agriculture. Majority of them are generally conservative, tradition bound, resigned to the insufferable lot to which according to them fate has condemned them.

Welfare measures undertaken by the Karnataka State and Government of India

1. *The employees state insurance Act 1948*: which provides comprehensive medical care and monetary compensation in case of sickness, maternity, death or disablement.
2. *The minimum wages Act 1948*; which fixes a minimum amount of wages to be paid to employees.
3. *Workmen compensation Act 1923*; which requires payment of compensation to the workman or his family in cases of employment related injuries, resulting in death or disability.

Constitution Provision for the Safeguard for the landless agricultural labors in India:

- a. Article 14 of the Constitution, State shall not deny to any person equality before the law or equal protection of the law within the territory of India.
- b. Article 21 of the Constitution; "Protection of Life and Personal Liberty: No person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to procedure established by law."
- c. Article 41 of the Constitution; Right to work, to education and to public assistance in certain cases
The State shall, within the limits of its economic capacity and development, make effective provision for securing the right to work, to education and to public assistance in cases of unemployment, old age, sickness and disablement, and in other cases of undeserved want.

Government of India, Ministry of Labour - Programs implemented for agricultural labourers

The Government Ministry of labour employment introduce the following schemes for the agricultural labours;

1. Life and disability cover is provided through Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana (PMJJBY) and Pradhan Mantri Surksha Bima Yojana (PMSBY).
2. The health and maternity benefits are provided through Ayushman Bharat- Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY) which is a universal health scheme. Under this Scheme, a total of 17.81 Crore individuals including agricultural labourers have been verified and provided with Ayushman cards till 14th March, 2022.
3. In order to provide old age protection to the unorganised sector workers including agricultural labourers, the Government of India launched Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maan-Dhan Yojana (PM-SYM) in 2019. It provides a monthly minimum assured pension of Rs. 3000/- after attaining the age of 60 years. As on 09.03.2022, more than 46 lakh workers have been registered under PM-SYM.
4. Apart from above, other schemes such as Public Distribution System through One Nation One Ration Card scheme under National Food Security Act, Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, Deen Dayal Upadhyay Gramin Kaushal Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, Gareeb Kalyan Rojgar Yojana, Deen Dayal Antyodaya Yojana, PMSVANidhi, Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana etc. are also available for the unorganised workers including rural and agricultural labourers depending upon their eligibility criteria.

SUGGESTIONS FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF LANDLESS AGRICULTURAL LABOURS

The following suggestions can be made for the improvement of the socio-economic position of the agricultural labourers:

- a. Landless agricultural labours must be given with free government land for the construction of their small houses. Government must provide interest free loan for the construction of their houses.

- b. Normally landless agricultural labours won't get employment throughout the year, hence the government must provide alternative employment opportunities for the oppressed classes.
- c. Women members are the integral part of the Indian society. There are so many disparities are going in the life of women hence, government must ensure equal protection of women labours. Those who are showing disparities must penalized severely.
- d. The government of Karnataka must ensure Public Works Department to ensure work must provide to the unemployed agricultural labours.
- e. Social Welfare Department of officials and labour department officials must visit the agricultural lands in a random way and check the working conditions of landless agricultural labours. If they are working like slave the government take immediate action for the welfare of the labours. Improving the working conditions
- f. Regulation of working hour – labours must give with 8 hours of work, The government must circulate a memo to the agricultural officers and PDOs of the villages to ensure the working hours of the labours.
- g. Proper training for improving the skill of farm labourers. This ensures the labours a guarantee for their employment.

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