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PROBLEMS OF AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS IN INDIA: SOME ISSUES

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ABSTRACT:

Many landlords have besides reduced their erstwhile tenants to the status of farm labourers in order to circumvent provisions of the land reform laws. There are many Acts/reforms in agricultural sector but the pressure of population on land contemned even after attaining industrial development in India. Even today India is predominantly an agrarian Country in which the farmer (cultivator) and the agricultural labourer are kingpins. The inevitable result is that they are mostly semi starved, not having sufficient physical strength to perform all agricultural operations in a proper manner. Generally, the supply of agricultural labour is abundantly available in certain areas. The supply of labour is higher they the actual need of the agricultural work. The chronic imbalance between labour supply and complementary resources in agriculture is normally expected the result in fixing up of wages subsistence levels over large parts of the country. Generally, agricultural labourers are paid wages on a daily basis. In case they are engaged regularly for three or four days for one operation of a single farmers the amount will be paid in one installment calculated on daily basis. Different wage rates are prevailed for each agricultural operation. In a nutshell, the agricultural labourers are loading a miserable life with extreme poverty with low wages unemployment and underdevelopment. In fact, they are living with abject poverty. With low wages which are not obtained regularly because agriculture provides seasonal employment. The lands less labourers have no private houses. They live in tached houses, cottages and mud no use house. The housing schemes of the governments have not property implemented in the country.



KEYWORDS: Agricultural labour, Labourers, Green Revelation, Employment, social mobility.

INTRODUCTION:

The Acute pressure of population and the adverse effects of prevalent tennorial and tenancy systems have led to much uneconomic subdivision and fragmentation of land holding. Many landlords have

besides reduced their erstwhile tenants to the status of farm labourers in order to circumvent provisions of the land reform laws. There are many Acts/reforms in agricultural sector but the pressure of population on land contemned even after attaining industrial development in India.

Even today India is predominantly an agrarian Country in which the farmer (cultivator) and the agricultural labourer are kingpins. The cultivator and the agricultural labourer are considered as farm families. An attempt is made here to analyze the growth of agricultural problems and their

problems in India.

MAGNITUDE OF AGRICULTURAL LABOUR

Agricultural labour constitutes an overwhelmingly predominant percentage share in the rural work force. The census of India-1981 shows that about 69 percent of the total workers were engaged in agriculture in total employment and marginally declined to 68 percent in 1991. In absolute terms agriculture provided employment to 256 million persons in 1997, thus, the active population who engaged in 2011 census to 263.02million, constituting 72.57 percent of total main workers i.e 362. 45 million². In fact, the above figures reveal has increased that the proportion of agricultural labourers has increased, on the other the cultivators have continuously declining in the agricultural sector. It is evident from the following table-1

Table-1
Growth of Agricultural Labourers in India

Year	Cultivators	Agricultural Labourers.	Total
1951	69.9 (71.9)	27.3 (28.1)	97.2 (100.0)
1961	99.6 (76.0)	31.5 (24.0)	131.1 (100.0)
1971	78.2 (62.2)	47.5 (37.8)	125.7 (100.0)
1981	92.5 (62.5)	55.5 (37.5)	148.0 (100.0)
1991	110.7 (59.7)	74.6 (40.3)	185.3 (100.0)
2001	127.3 (54.4)	106.8 (45.6)	234.1 (100.0)

Source:Various census Reports of India.

The table above reveals that farm work force has increased from 97.2 million in 1951 to 2630 million in 2011, registering an increase of about 171 percent. There is a steady increase in the total farm workforce during the last six decades except 1971. The member of cultivators has risen by 57.4 million in 2001 over 1951 registering an increase of 82 percent. But the number of cultivators has drastically declined from 127.3 million in 201 to 118.70 million in 2011. On the other, there is a steady and continuous increase in the number of agricultural labour in India during the last seven census periods. In fact, there is more than five-fold increase in the number of agricultural labourers over the period from 1951 to 2011. For the first time since independence, agricultural labourers have outnumbered cultivators in India during 2001-2011. The number of agricultural labourers has vole to 37.5 million during the last decade (201-2011). The percentage share of cultivators to the total work force in agriculture i.e farm work force has steady declined from 71.9 percent in 1951 to 43.4 percent in 2011. As against this the percentage share of agricultural labourers has significantly increased from 28.1 percent to 54.9 percent during the same period. However there is a marginal increase in the percentage share (5.9 percentage points) of cultivators in 1961. With regard to the agricultural labourers, there is a marginal decrease in the percentage share in 1981. The census reports of India from 1961 to 2011 are showing the warning notes/signals about the growth of surplus population which creates pressure as land. It was as land tenure, mobilization and commercialization of agriculture³. Many workers earlier engaged in traditional village and cottage industries have also swelled the ranks of rural labour.

PROBLEMS OF AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS

There are many problems in the employment, working conditions, low wages, indebtedness, exploitation of child and women labourers etc. let us discuss in brief.

1. Seasonal Employment The agricultural labour does not get work for the whole year. The agricultural operations being seasonal in nature, the demand for agricultural labour is also seasonal. During the sowing and harvesting seasons, almost all the labourers including child labourers are fully employed.
2. This is not the situation continuous for the entire year the labourers suffer with seasonal unemployment. In many areas where cultivation of the land is primarily depend on rains, employment in agriculture for landless agricultural labour is confined to any a short-period and the rest of the period of them remain unemployed. In case of the cultivation are irrigated areas the multiple cropping is practiced, the agricultural labourers get employment throughout the year with minimum period of unemployment.

Low Wages Practiced in Rural Areas

Majority of the agricultural labourers are marginalized sections like scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. They are socially and economically backward sections of the rural society. They are unorganized and they remain poor because agricultural wages and family in censuses of agricultural labourers are very low in India with the advent of the Green Revolution money wage rates started raising. However, as prices also increased considerably, the real wage rates did not increase accordingly. The low incomes only enable them to have low levels of living. In fact, the wages are responsible for their sub-human standard of living. It is highly difficult for an agricultural labourer to make their both ends meet with these low wages. In certain occupations women workers are paid lower wages. In certain occupations women workers are paid lower wages than they. The inevitable result is that they are mostly semi starved, not having sufficient physical strength to perform all agricultural operations in a proper manner. Generally, the supply of agricultural labour is abundantly available in certain areas. The supply of labour is higher than the actual need of the agricultural work. The chronic imbalance between labour supply and complementary resources in agriculture is normally expected the result in fixing up of wages subsistence levels over large parts of the country. Generally, agricultural labourers are paid wages on a daily basis. In case they are engaged regularly for three or four days for one operation of a single farmers the amount will be paid in one installment calculated on daily basis. Different wage rates are prevailed for each agricultural operation. In a nutshell, the agricultural labourers are leading a miserable life with extreme poverty with low wages unemployment and underdevelopment.

Participation of Rural Households in MGNREG Works

MGNREG programme is one of the employment generating schemes for the rural poor. It is a boon for agricultural labourers who constitute major segment of the rural poor. Among the rural households in India, about 54 percent of the bottom decile class had MGNREG job cards. Among the major states in the rural areas, proportion of persons of age 18 years and above registered in MGNREG job cards was highest in Madhya Pradesh (56 percent) followed by Rajasthan (53 percent) and Chhattisgarh (51 percent). The job card holders can participate in the MGNREG works. At national level among rural people of age 18 years and above registered in MGNREG job cards, about 51 percent worked and about 19 percent sought but did not get MGNREG works. The proportion either worked or sought but did not get work was in general higher for the lower decile classes as compared to the upper decile class and about 58 percent in the top decile class. The proportion of persons got MGNREG works was the highest in Haryana (78 percent) followed by Tamil Nadu (75 percent) and Chhattisgarh (72 percent), among the job card holders, the proportion of persons sought but did not get work was the highest in Maharashtra (45 percent) followed by Bihar (85 percent), Karnataka (31 percent) and Punjab (30 percent).

Indebtedness

Indebtedness has been described as impoverishment by debt¹. Or as a situation where household is caught in spiral debts². One in three Indian Rural households is in debt in 2013, an

increase from 26.5 percent in 2002³. The average amount of debt per indebted household was Rs.103457 and Rs.3, 78,238 in rural and urban areas respectively. The report of the NSS-2013, said that the incidence of indebtedness was about 31.4 percent among the rural households and 22.4 percent among urban households. The report further revealed that more than 70 percent of the urban population has one or more standing loans. About 74 percent of the farmer households are in debt in 2013 as opposed to 64 percent of the on-farmer households. Non-institutional credit agencies had advanced credit to 19 percent of rural households while non-institutional agencies had advanced credit to 17 percent households. In cities institutional agencies played a greater role, advancing credit to 15 percent of households against 10 percent by non-institutional agencies⁴. This is an indication of the gulf in urban and rural areas where 833 million or 68.8 percent of Indian live, most of them are poor, majority of them are agricultural labourers these labourers remain indebted even after working the land owners for their whole time.

Exploitation of Workers Child and Women Labourers

The agricultural labourers have to work in cold and not weather from sunrise to sunset. The working hours of these labourers are not only irregular but also excessive. In the agricultural operations, normally, the land lord directly supervises the work and therefore, there is a direct contact between agricultural labourer and the land lord. In such situation, the land lord extracts much work and there is no possibility of escaping from the work by the labourers. It is particularly so in the case of small-size land lower. Agricultural labourers are sometimes asked to do, apart from farm work domestic work like processing of food stuffs, cooking, clearing of vessels, carrying of food to the farm for workers on head load etc.

The land lords used to give some money for marriage or other purposes to the agricultural labourers. If he not able to clear his dues with interest, the land lord made these workers as bonded labourers and exploits them in several ways. They are made to work for longer hours till late in the night. Some studies reported that the bonded labour still exists in certain state even though there are laws that prohibit the bonded labour system in the country. The male labourers low wages are given to the children and women. The children and women are forced to work continuously for the long hours with male workers in the farm. The low wages enable the agricultural labourers to have low levels of living. The low standard of living further causes social disabilities and rural migration. This ultimately results in low efficiency of labour leading to low labour productivity in agriculture.

Low Social Status with large size Families

Majority of the agricultural labourers are marginalized sections like scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. They are economically and socially very backward sections of the rural society. The incomes of agricultural labourers are very low. Hence, their standard of living is not improved even after 70 years of the independence. Their social status is very low compared with other income group of people. They do not have the social mobility. Generally, the poorer sections have larger families. They consider their children are the asset as they work and get income. Their income earning sources only in the field of agricultural land.

Unorganized Labourers

Since the agricultural labourers are spread in millions of villages all over the Country. They don't have any unity. As they are a suppressed class in rural India, they are not they unable to negotiate their wages etc. with the land owners by uniting themselves. Due to low employment potential in other sectors of the rural economy, most of the rural people is forced to be dependent on agriculture. They do not have the social mobility to migrate any places for eke out their living.

Housing Problems

Agricultural labour is provided mostly by backward classes, scheduled castes and scheduled tribes and other depressed classes who are socially handicapped from the earlier days and are leading a

life of misery. In fact, they are living with abject poverty. With low wages which are not obtained regularly because agriculture provides seasonal employment. The lands less labourers have no private houses. They live in tached houses, cottages and mud no use house. The housing schemes of the governments have not property implemented in the country.

No Social Security

Naturally agricultural conditions are poor and dependent and man soon vagaries different rates of agricultural wages are prevailed in most parts of the country. They do not have any amenities in their hamlets. The government has not been implemented minimum wages acts. Industry and company have schemes to provide social security measures like paid leave, sick leave and medical benefit, PF and gratuity for their workers. In agricultural sector, such social security resources did not appear in the Country. Very few of the agricultural laborers whose age crosses 60 years will get old age pension.

CONCLUSION

We would like conclude these agricultural labourers have been leading a pathetic condition in the rural areas. The cultivable land has countered for non-agricultural use in many parts of Andhra Pradesh particular in the capital city area. Majority of agricultural labourers have loss the empowerment is those areas. Moreover, contractors are given works under MGNREG programme. Finally the poor agricultural labourers should loose these opportunity of work under MGNREG programme. Government should protect the intensity agricultural labourers for their socio economic development.

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