

Socioeconomic Status of Agricultural Labours in India

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SUMMARY

India is essentially an agricultural country, as about seventy percent of the population live in villages. Majority of the Indian rural workers are agriculture dependent, in which the share of agricultural labourers is quite high. The agricultural labourers constitute a considerable proportion of rural work force in India. Agricultural labourers contribute enormously towards the rural economy and also to the national economy. Historically, they were the working class and the chief reason for the development of the society and economy. The direct contribution of agricultural sector to the national economy reflects by its share in total GDP, total employment and so on. It still remains the most acceptable fact that agriculture continues to play greater role in the socio-economic development of the country. The agricultural labourer constitute a considerable proportion of rural work force in India. Majority of the agricultural labourers are belongs to Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes. Their income is low and irregular. Since they possess no skills or training and then have no alternative employment opportunities either.

INTRODUCTION

India is mainly an agrarian country .where 70% of its population still depend on agriculture for its livelihood . The Agricultural Labours constitute a considerable proportion of rural work force in India Agricultural labourers constitute an important segment of weaker sections by economically and socially backward sections. Agriculture has a dominant role in Indian economy contributing nearly 25% of national income providing employment to about 70% of the working population. Agriculture is being the main occupation of the Indian people. Agriculture labourers contribute enormously towards the rural economy and also to the national economy. The Agriculture sector has an important influence on industrialization and its role in foreigen trade is also significant. One of the most distinguishing features of the rural India has been the growth in the number of agricultural workers, cultivators, and Agricultural labourers engaged in crop production.

Division of Agricultural Labour

The agricultural labour generally classified into two sub-categories such as landless agricultural labour and small cultivators, whose main source of earnings is wage employment from agriculture and not their small and sub-marginal holdings. Landless labourers, in turn, can be classified into two broad categories as Permanent labour attached to the cultivating household and casual labour.

Condition of Agricultural Labour

Agricultural labourers are belonging to the economically and socially backward sections. It consists of landless labourers who work on others lands and the petty landowners who work on others. They mainly depend on wage employment in agriculture and allied sectors for their livelihood. Agricultural labourers are basically unskilled and earn their food through manual labour. They constitute the most disadvantage economic groups in the rural society. They work on daily wages and do not possess any land and a small number own very small holdings. The level of living which their earnings permit is very small. The number of agricultural labourers has been continually on the increase. In every condition, that has weakened the economic position of the small hold thereby leading to the increased supply of agricultural labourers in the district. They live from hand to mouth. Most of the agricultural labourers have no margin money with them. A result, they mortgaged their belongings to the money-lenders at low cost which use to return at high cost and rates of interest per month are being taken from 5% to 10% in the district. The village money-lenders, richness and Co-operative Societies are money-lending agencies. Actually, agricultural labourers are not taking from the Government and Co-operative Societies owing to they have no property and guarantor. In fact, most the families are having excess of expenditure over income. Low incomes of the agricultural labourers have to indebtedness. The debt to the labourers has led to all kinds of evils consequences which are economic, so and moral nature. Thus, the rich become richer and a poor become poorer.

Economic Condition of Agricultural Labourers in India

Agricultural labourer is at the lowest rung in the socio- economic set-up of the rural society as would be seen from the following facts.

- A major part of agricultural labour households do not own any land. As per the 32nd round of the NSS about 51.37 per cent of the agricultural labour households did not own any land. The average size of land cultivated per agricultural labour households was 1.33 acre only.
- The household income and consumption expenditure of an average agricultural labour households are precariously balanced, and that too when they find some work.
- The money wages of agricultural labourer are miserably low. In Spite of the fact that minimum wages legislation has been enacted in most of the states, this is hardly observed. The main difficulties were low productivity of agricultural labour, small size of holdings of many farmers and their consequent incapability of paying more wages.
- Hours of work in agriculture depends upon natural factors. The working conditions obviously are fixed by nature. Since they have to work in the open they work both in sun and rain.
- The hours of work vary from place to place, season to season and from crop to crop. The working hours are generally from sunrise to sunset. Sometime they are made to work during the nights as well for irrigation and threshing. In fact, terms are dictated to them and they have absolutely no bargaining power.
- The money wages of agricultural labourer are miserably low. The women farm labour are generally forced. to work harder and are paid less than their male counterparts. At many places, wages paid to female workers are even less than the minimum wages.
- Finally the standard of living of agricultural labourers is degrading.

Suggestions for the Improvement of Agricultural Labours

The following suggestions are be made for the improvement of the socio-economic conditions of the agricultural labourers –

- Improving the working conditions.
- Credit at cheaper rates of interest on easy terms of payment for undertaking subsidiary occupation.
- Public works programmes should be for longer period in year.
- Protection of women and child labourers.
- Proper training for improving the skill of farm labourers.
- Strengthening of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) creating alternative sources of employment.

CONCLUSION

The above analysis, however, does not lead to the conclusion that no measures and programmes have been adopted in the past for improving the lots of the agricultural labourers in the State and particularly in the district. But what has gone wrong with all this is the poor and defective implementation of the plan programmes and measures. No one has made so far a serious effort to use these programmes to help the economically and socially backward labour classes to improve their standard of living and quality of life.

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