

“An overview of Landless agricultural labourers in India”

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1.0 Introduction:

The majority of people in the nation (67%) live in rural areas. The majority of people in these rural regions work in agriculture or agribusiness. As a result, the agricultural sector is crucial to the financial prosperity of India.

Agriculture generates more than 34% of overall national GDP Income. As a result, agriculture is India's economic backbone. During the green revolution, Indian agriculture enterprises have improved the most. Few people possess significant expanses of land in India, many have marginal land, and the great majority are landless. As a result, agricultural labour has become the most essential component of India's agricultural industry.

Agricultural labourers and landless people have been a modest and negligible element of Indian society since the Colonial era. Agricultural labourers are in high demand. Over 6.30 lakh villages exist in India, with agricultural and agriculturally related activities employing more than half of the labour force. Agriculture contributes 18% of Indian GDP. As a result, agricultural growth is critical to national development.

India provides exceptional diversity in many areas of society. Despite differences in race, language, geography, religion, caste, food, culture, and class, widely accepted cultural themes support societal harmony and order.¹

Indian society is divided into three societies: tribal, rural, and urban. India is mostly a rural country, with rural regions housing two-thirds of the population and employing more than 49% of the workforce. The rural sector accounts for around 46% of national revenue. Throughout history, the country's rural community has experienced both social and economic challenges. The majority of the rural population is economically and socially disadvantaged. Impressing landless labours, tiny and marginal farmers, and so on²

The census of India defines an agricultural labourer as "a person who works on another person's land for wages in money, kind, or share." Even today, agricultural labour, in particular, is disorganized and mostly unskilled. They may not be skilled in cultivation at all.³

In today's world, the agricultural industry employs half of the global labour population, with an estimated 1.3 billion people working in agricultural production globally. The most of agricultural labourers live in developing nations. The vast 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.⁴

1.1 Census Information of landless labour 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 2011⁶

1.2 Objective of the research

1. To study the situation of landless agricultural labourers
2. To study the problems of landless agricultural labourers

1.3 Methodology

The present research paper based on secondary source of data. The researcher used books, research articles, websites etc. for present research paper.

1.4 Conceptual understanding:

The various concept regarding agricultural labourers and landless agricultural labourers so here discuss some key concept regarding research paper.

1) Agricultural labour :

According to national commission of labour “An agricultural labourer is one who is basically unskilled and unorganized and has little for its livelihood other than personal labour”

According to the Mishra and Puri “ all those persons who derive a major part of their income as payment for work performed on the farms of others can be designed as agricultural workers for major part of the year they should work on the land of others on wages”⁷

The first agricultural labour inquiry committee 1950-55 defined agricultural labour as “those people who engaged in raising crops on payment of wages”

2) Landless Agricultural Labourers.

“Used to refer to people who do not have any land for farming or who are prevented from owning the land that they farm by the economic system of by rich people who own a lot of land”⁸

“An agricultural worker who does not own or rent any land who earns a living by working on someone else land”⁹

1.5 Types of Agricultural Labourers:

Agricultural labourers divided into four types

- 1) Landless laborers, who are attached to land lords
- 2) Landless laborers, 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
- 4) Farmers who have economic holdings but who have one or more of their sons and dependents working for others prospering farmers

The first classification of labourers have been more or less the positions of serfs of bonded labourers agricultural labourers can also divided in the following manner

- 1) Landless agricultural labourers
- 2) Very small cultivators whose main source of earning due to their small or sub-marginal holdings is wage employments. Landless laborers in turn can be classified in to two broad categories
 - A) Permanent laborers attached to cultivating house-holds
 - B) Casual laborers

1.6 Major characteristics of Landless agricultural labourers in India

1) Landless agricultural labourers are widely scattered:

Agricultural labour in India is being widely scattered over 5.6 lakh villages. Therefore 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 unskilled -

Agricultural labourers, particularly in smaller villages far from towns and cities, have long been unskilled labourers carrying on agricultural operations. There is little motivation for change or improvement in the old traditional wage system because landlords have direct supervision. There is little escape from hard work, especially since there is no alternative employment. Agricultural labourers are required to perform 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.

3) Landless agricultural laborers are not organized

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

4) Lower Social Status

Most of agricultural labourers belong to the depressed classes.They have neglected from main stream. These depressed classes are also socially negligible part. And they have never courage to defense themselves. In some parts of India agricultural laborers are in migratory. They are wondering in many regions for employment. They are socially and economically weak. So they have lower social status in society

5) Demand and supply of labour

The number of agricultural laboures being very large and unskilled they posses being meager. There are generally more than abundant supplies of agricultural labour in relation to demand for them. It is only during the showing in harvesting seasons. That there appears to be near full employment in the case of agricultural laborers. But once the harvesting seems in over, majority of agricultural workers will be jobless especially in areas where there single cropping pattern.

6) Less Bargaining Power-

Due to all the above mentioned factors, the bargaining power and position of agricultural backgrounds in India is very weak. In fact quit a large number of them are in the grip of village money lenders landlords and commission agents, often the same persons functioning in all the three capacities, no wonder, the agricultural labour is the most exploited class.

7) At the Binding of the landless-

There is generally direct and day-to-day contact between agricultural labourers and the landlords. on whose farm they are working. Unlike industrial workers. This direct contact between the employers and employs is a distinct feature of agricultural labourer. The above mentioned few distinguish characteristics in agricultural labourers in India. From industrial workers.Thus partly because of their inherent bargaining weakness. The farm labourers have been getting very low wages. And have therefore to live in the miserable sub-human life

8) Many landless agricultural labourers live like bonded labourers

At the bottom of the agricultural cadre in India are those labourers whose conditions are not very different from those who are serfs. Agricultural serfdom has been most prevalent in those parts of India. Where the lower and the depressed classes most in numbers. The ethnic composition of villages which governs the social stratification is responsible for the survival of the slavish conditions in Gujarat, Maharashtra, Kerla, Tamilnadu, Karnataka, Bihar, Orissa and M.P. The large

aboriginal population lives and the condition of these agricultural labourers are very much like that of slaves. These are called in different names in various states¹⁰

1.7 Reasons of the poor economic condition of landless agricultural labourers

Agricultural labourers face numerous challenges. They are extremely impoverished. As a result, the government should take the initiative to address their social, economic, educational, and health issues. However, the government has yet to solve the problem. The following points indicate the true causes of agricultural labourers' situation

1) Unorganized in Nature

Agricultural labourers are all over in India they are mostly unorganized they are ignorant, illiterate and widely scattered. So therefore agricultural labourers have no capacity to bargain for searching a fair wage level

2) Mostly Seasonal Unemployment-

As the agricultural activity is seasonal so therefore half of the days of the year they have unemployment or under employment they have to get work in a year maximum 200 days.

3) Absence of alternative Occupation-

In the rural areas the agricultural workers are not getting alternative jobs because they have no additional skills. Most of the workers are illiterate so they suffer seasonal unemployment

4) Growing indebtedness-

Agricultural labourers of India are highly indebted as they have to get wages which is very low so they have not fulfilled their basic needs. So they are very poor. They have been borrowing from landlords and become bonded labourers. So to fulfill their needs they get loans regularly so they always live in indebtedness.

5) Natural disasters/Calamities

The various natural reasons like flood, drought and natural calamities etc. So they affect the farm and as well as agricultural labourers.¹¹

1.8 Problems of landless Agricultural labourers in India

Agricultural labourers are among the most exploited and oppressed classes in rural society. Agricultural workers' marginalization. In 1991, the agricultural labour force (cultivators plus agricultural labourers) total 97.2 million people. In comparison, the number of agricultural workers increased from 27.3 million in 1951 to 74.6 million in 1991. Furthermore, the contribution of agricultural and related activities to GDP at factor cost. Has consistency deteriorated over time? 55.3 percent in 1950-51, 37.9 percent in 1980-81, and 14.0 percent in 2011-12. Today, the agricultural sector contributes significantly to the Indian economy. However, Indian agricultural labourers continue to face the following issues¹²

1) Agricultural labourers are unskilled and lack of training :

Agricultural labourers, especially in smaller villages, are generally the workers are unskilled in agricultural operations over the centuries. There is an old traditional wage system. Most of them especially there in small isolated villages around many of them. Many have not even heard of modernization of agriculture. Majority of them are bonded labourers. There is hardly any motivation for change or improvement of them. Since there is direct supervision by the landlords. There is no escape from supervision by the landlords. There is no escape from hard work. And no alternative employment. The agricultural labourer has to do all types of work.

2) Unorganized sector :

Agricultural labourers are not organized like other any workers. They are illiterate and ignorant. They live in rural areas. Hence they could not organize in union. In urban areas workers would generally organize them in unions and it is convenient for political parties to take interest in trade union activities. This is almost difficult in trade union activities. This is almost difficult in case of farm labour. Accordingly, it is difficult for them to bargain with the land owners and secure good wages.¹³

3) Excess working hours:

The working hours of their labours are not only irregular but also excessive. They have work since morning to late night. His working hour is not fixed and it also changes in harvest season.

4) Seasonal Employment:

The agricultural labour does not get work in whole year. According to the second agricultural labour gets an average of 197 days of work in year. Similarly, child labour gets 204 days and women gets 141 days of employment thus their average annual income is very lower.

5) Low wages

The wage level of agricultural labours very low wages as compared to the industrial labours. These reasons increase in landless labourers. Lack of non-agricultural areas of work in rural areas.

6) Agricultural slavery:

Majority of agricultural labourers are landless and come from backward class due to their low social status they are treated as like animals. The landlords make them treat as slaves. They give them minimum wages

7) Indebtedness:

Due to lower income, the indebtedness of agricultural labourers is increasing. They hesitate to negotiate their wages with land owners. They fear that their work will terminate by the owner. Low wages do not fulfill their needs so they get loan from private moneylenders.

8) Not Untied

Since agricultural labours are spared in millions of the villages all over the country. They are not untied. Thus they are unable to negotiate their wages.

9) Exploitation of children and women labourers

Due to lower income the children and women doing work as agriculture labour and many of children and women are exploited by land owners and landlords

10) Lower social status:

Most of the agricultural labours are come from backward classes. Who have been exploited since centuries? Their social condition was very low. So that their social status is very low.

11) Shortage of other jobs

There is shortage of other jobs in rural areas. Due to floods, drought etc. it becomes difficult for the agricultural labour to survive

12) Housing problems

The landless labour have not land so they have no their own house so they live in others houses or most of labours bonded with land lords so they live near farms in kaccha house.¹⁴

13) Demand and supply of labour:

The number of agricultural labours being very large in number. Agricultural labours being very large in number and unskilled, they possess being merger, there are generally more than abundant

supply of agricultural labourers in relation to demand of them. It is only during the harvesting seasons. That their appears to be nearful employment in the case of agricultural labourers. But once the harvesting season is over majority of agricultural worker will be jobless, especially in areas where the single cropping pattern.

14) Bonded labourers

At the bottom of the agricultural cadre in India there are those labourers condition are not very different from the slaves. Agricultural serfdom has been most prevalent in those parts of India where the lower and depressed class and most in numbers which governs the social stratification is responsible for the survival of the slavish conditions.¹⁴

1.9 Summary:

In this research paper, the researcher discusses important aspects of the lives of landless labourers. The researcher has concentrated on the historical background of landless labourers, demographic information about landless labourers, conceptual understanding, types of agricultural labourers, characteristics of agricultural labourers, various problems of agricultural labourers.

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