

The Burden of Diabetes and its Impact on India's Economic Growth Major Problems of Agricultural Laborers in India

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ABSTRACT

This paper has two major problems of landless agricultural laborers. Firstly, agricultural workers constitute the most neglected class in Indian rural structure. This sector plays a significant role in the overall socio-economic development of the country. Their income is low and employment is irregular. They possess neither modern skill nor proper training; they don't have alternative employment opportunities. Therefore, they are a suppressed class. They don't have structured organization to fight for their rights. Because of all these reasons their economic status has failed to improve. The present study tries to analyse the reasons for increasing the number of landless agricultural labourers. Secondly, Agricultural productivity in India can be increased by adopting modern agricultural practices. Modern agriculture practices have been great promise for economic development of nation.. After first green revolution the use of agrochemicals became directly proportional to farm productivity. The agrochemicals such as pesticides made huge impact on environment and also human health. Pesticides cause 14 per cent of all known occupational injuries and 10 per cent of all fatal injuries to agricultural labourers.. Thus the farm workers have no capacity to bargain for securing a fair wage level and no protection against health hazards...This study analyses the problems of Modern agriculture practices among landless agricultural labourers.

Key words: Landless Labourers, Agrochemicals, Employment, Social Security

I. INTRODUCTION

Agricultural labourers are still remaining serfdom or slavery system. Their income, living standard, social status is very low. Agricultural labourer are those persons who work on the land of others on wages, for the major part of the year and can earn major portion of their income as a payment in the form of wages for works performed on the agricultural farms owned by others. They working both in the house and farms of their masters but faces various problems. The increase the number of agricultural laborer has causes as increasing size of population, The decline of cottage and village industries, evictions of small farmers, uneconomic holdings, growing indebtedness, deforestation, river erosion ,growth of capitalist farming etc are the main causes of agricultural labour problems. Agricultural workers constitute the largest segment of workers in the unorganized sector. 52 per cent of the total workers are found in agriculture (Economic Survey: 2007-08). Many small and marginal farmers, because of their small and uneconomical holdings and low yield, also work on the land of others and hence qualify as agricultural laborers. Further a significant number, are engaged in rearing livestock, forestry, fishery, orchard and allied activities. As a result of low income and rising consumption expenditure the problem of

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indebtedness is increasing amongst the agricultural labourer families. The increase has been due to the higher proportion of attached labourer households some of whom were under debt bondage and /or tie in allotment.

Landless labourers in turn can be classified into two broad categories:

1. Permanent Labourers attached to cultivating households
2. Casual Labourers.

The second group can again be divided into three subgroups:

- (i) Cultivators
- (ii) Share croppers
- (iii) Lease holders.

Permanent or attached labourers generally work on annual or seasonal basis and they work on some sort of contract. Their wages are determined by custom or tradition. On the other hand temporary or casual labourers are engaged only during peak period for work. Their employment is temporary and they are paid at the market rate. They are not attached to any landlords. Under second group comes small farmers, who process very little land and therefore, has to devote most of their time working on the lands of others as labourers.

II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The existence of large number of agricultural workers who lack sustained employment and frequently suffer from social handicaps is to be regarded as a source of serious weakness and even of instability in the present agrarian system. With the decline in rural industry, many artisans have become part-time labourers. The increase in fragmentation and subdivision of holdings has driven many peasant farmers to seek casual labour. Reduction in the larger farms which has been in progress in consequence of tenancy legislation leads to a diminution in the amount of higher employment which may be available. Few agricultural workers are dependent on agricultural labour alone; commonly they also combine other casual work with agricultural labour. Generally, agricultural workers have short periods of intensive employment, for instance, at harvest time or in sowing season or when cotton is picked. As compared to the farmer, the agricultural workers' problem, is perhaps in a larger measure one of unemployment rather than of under-employment, but the degree of unemployment depends almost entirely on the character of local agriculture and on the distance from urban centres. Modern agriculture practices have been great promise for economic development of nation. Farm productivity is directly proportional to use of agrochemicals as observed from the first green revolution. Improper and unsafe use of these agrochemicals, especially pesticides is not only harmful to environment but also human health. Pesticides cause 14 per cent of all known occupational *injuries in agriculture and 10 per cent of all fatal injuries*. Indian farmer is using wide ranges of chemical pesticides to limit the losses from pests and diseases, in which insecticides account for 73 per cent, herbicides 14 per cent, fungicides 11 per cent and others 2 per cent. Chemical pesticide use is associated with risk and health hazards if not handled properly. Improper handling and unsafe spraying of the agrochemicals cause high risk of health hazards. This study attempts to analyse the problems of agricultural laborers.

III. OBJECTIVES

More specifically the study makes an earnest attempt by having the following as its objectives :

1. To discuss the problems of landless agricultural labourers
 2. To analyse the problems of agricultural labourers by using agrochemicals especially pesticides .
- To suggest some measures to solve the problems of landless agricultural laborers.

IV. METHODOLOGY

This study has made use of secondary data to collect information with regard to total population, total number of cultivators ,agricultural labours ,socio-economic characteristics of agricultural labourers, etc.

Total Population, Total Workers and Agricultural Workers for the Census years 1951 to 2001 All-India:

The following Table presents figures of the total population, total number of main workers and the number of agricultural workers (including agricultural labourers) for the Census years 1951 to 2001.

Table 1
Total Population, Total Workers and Agricultural Workers for the Census years 1951 to 2001 All-India

(In millions)

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 (22.1)	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

Note: - Figures in brackets in Col.6 are percentages to those in Col.2.

@ Exclusive of figures for Jammu & Kashmir as no Census was conducted in that State

* Exclusive of figures for Assam.

Source: (i) Ministry of Home Affairs, Office of the Registrar General of India.

(ii) Website of the Ministry of Home Affairs.

The above table reveals a fluctuating trend in the proportion of agricultural workers to total population during the period 1951 to 2001. It increased from 27.3 per cent in 1951 to 29.9 percent in 1961 and thereafter noticed a declining trend to reach at 22.1 per cent in 1991. It however depicted a marginal increase during 2001. However, in absolute terms, it continued increasing during this period, except during the decade 1961-71. Similarly, during this period, there has been a steady increase in the number of agricultural labourers. The number of agricultural workers increased by 213 about 142 per cent whereas the agricultural labourers increased by about 291 per cent during this period.

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Table 2
Category of Workers - India: 2011

Main+marginal

Total workers (in millions)

Category	Total workers	Percentage
Cultivators	118.7	24.6%
Agricultural Labourers	144.3	30.0%
Household Industries Workers	18.3	3.8%
Other Workers	200.4	41.6%
Total Workers	481.7	100.0%

Source: census 2011

The above table shows that the percentage of cultivators are only 24.6% compare to agricultural labourers it is 30%. The diversion of fertile agricultural lands to non-agricultural purposes, low cropping intensity, depletion of ground water, increase of fallow lands, etc are the important reasons for this circumstances.

TABLE-3

Category of Workers - Change in Proportions - India: 2001 & 2011

Residence	Category	2001	2011	change
Workers (Main + Marginal)				
All Areas	Total Workers	100.0	100.0	
	Cultivators	31.7	24.6	- 7.1
	Agricultural Labourers	26.5	30.0	+3.5
	Household Industries Workers	4.2	3.8	-0.4
	Other Workers	37.6	41.6	+4.0

Source: census 2011

Main Worker: Persons who 'worked' for 6 months or more .

Marginal Worker: Persons who 'worked' for less than 6 months For the first time in Census 2011, the marginal workers have been sub-divided into two categories, namely, those worked for less than 3 months and those who worked for 3 to 6 months

Non-Worker: Persons who did not 'work' at all during the reference period. Includes students, persons engaged in household duties, dependents, pensioners, beggars, etc.

The above table also shows that the change in proportions of agricultural labours is greater than the cultivators during the above mentioned period.

Causes for the Growth of Agricultural Laborers :

There are a number of factors responsible for the continuous and enormous increase in the number of agricultural labourers in India. The more important among them are :

- (i) high net growth rate of the population in the country.
- (ii) growth of indebtedness due to low income leading to transfer of land from the small owners to the creditors, resulting in the former into becoming agricultural labourers.
- (iii) the extension of money economy to rural areas in replacement of payment in kind.
- (iv) decline of domestic industries and handicrafts.
- (v) Erratic and inadequate monsoon rain.
- (vi) Increase of fallow lands

(vii) Deterioration of soil health

(viii) Slowdown in growth rates of crop yields

(ix) Inadequate seed availability and low seed replacement rates for most of the crops and Over use of certain chemical fertilizers and leaching away of organic matter of the soil.

Safety and health in the use of agrochemicals: A guide

Agriculture involves a wide range of different types of machinery, animals, plants and products, and agricultural enterprises range from subsistence farming to highly mechanized large scale businesses. "Such wide-ranging profiles, both in terms of employment and of enterprise, have a significant bearing on levels of risk awareness and attitudes towards preventing accidents and diseases within the sector. Agriculture is in fact one of the most hazardous of all sectors and many agricultural workers suffer occupational accidents and ill-health each year

The agricultural sector employs an estimated 1.3 billion workers worldwide, that is half of the world's labour force. In terms of fatalities, injuries and work-related ill-health, it is one of the three most hazardous sectors of activity (along with construction and mining). According to ILO estimates, at least 170,000 agricultural workers are killed each year. This means that workers in agriculture run twice the risk of dying on the job compared with workers in other sectors. Agricultural mortality rates have remained consistently high in the last decade compared with other sectors in which fatal accident rates have generally decreased. Millions more agricultural workers are seriously injured in workplace accidents involving agricultural machinery or poisoned by pesticides and other agrochemicals. Furthermore, widespread under-reporting of deaths, injuries and occupational diseases in the agricultural sector means that the real picture of the occupational health and safety of farm workers is likely to be worse than official statistics indicate.

Much agricultural work is, by its nature, physically demanding. The risk of accidents is increased by fatigue, poorly designed tools, difficult terrain, exposure to extreme weather conditions, and poor general health, associated with working and living in remote and rural communities. These problems are compounded by the fact that working and living conditions are interwoven.

Subsistence farmers, waged workers and their families live on the land where there is much environmental spillover from the occupational risks mentioned above. Working conditions may vary from country to country, depending on working methods – from highly-mechanised extensive methods in commercial plantations to traditional intensive methods in small-scale subsistence agriculture. The most vulnerable groups are found in family subsistence agriculture, in plantations as daily paid labourers, seasonal or migrant workers without land, and, of course, child labourers. In most countries only some categories of agricultural workers are covered by national legislation, employment injury benefits or insurance schemes. A large number of agricultural workers are thus deprived of any form of social protection. Where national regulations exist, they are often only sporadically applied. Effective enforcement may be poor due to insufficient labour inspection, a lack of understanding and training on hazards and their prevention on the part of both of employers and workers, and low levels of organization among agricultural workers.

In 1990, with a view to reducing the incidence of chemically induced illnesses and injuries at work, the International Labour Conference adopted the Safety in the Use of Chemicals at Work. The International Labour Office is preparing a training manual on the safe use of chemicals at the workplace. It has also embarked upon the task of providing basic guidelines on safety and health in the use of agrochemicals – in the recognition that agrochemicals will continue to be used in large quantities worldwide in the years to come and that an estimated 2 million people annually are poisoned by pesticides, of whom some 40,000 die.

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V. FINDINGS

- The total number of agricultural labourers has increased from 27.50 million to 107.45 million during the period 1951 to 2001.
- The total number of cultivators has increased from 1951 to 1961. Whereas it has decreased during the period 1971. But after 1981 to 2001 it has raised.
- And also the percentage of agricultural labourers to total workers has increased from 28.28% to 45.71% during the period 1951 to 2001.
- Census 2011 report tells us that the percentage of agricultural labourers were 30.0 % of total workers .Whereas the percentage of cultivators during 2011 was 24.6%.
- Modern agricultural practices will surely bring economic development. But improper and unsafe use of agrochemicals will surely bring poor environment and also poor health among agricultural labourers.

Suggestions for the Improvement of Agricultural Labours

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

1. The fixation of working hours should apply to all agricultural workers.
2. The nature and amount of work and their conditions under which it is done should be under the special care of the Labour Officer.
3. Resettlement of agricultural workers
4. Creating alternative sources of employment
5. Protection of women and child labourers
6. Public works programmes should be for longer period in year
7. Improving the working conditions
8. Regulation of hours of work
9. Improvements in Agricultural sector
10. Credit at cheaper rates of interest on easy terms of payment for undertaking subsidiary occupation.
11. Proper training for improving the skill of farm labourers It is very important to train agricultural labourers about the use of modern agricultural practices.
12. Cooperative farming

Social Security Schemes for Landless Agricultural Labourers

With a view to providing social security to unorganised workers, including landless agricultural labourers, the Government has enacted the Unorganised Workers' Social Security Act, 2008. The Act provides for constitution of National Social Security Board to recommend social security schemes viz. life and disability cover, health maternity benefits, old age protection and any other benefit as may be determined by the Government for unorganized workers.

VI. CONCLUSION

The proportion of increase in agricultural labourers are greater than the farmers due to poor rainfall and low cropping intensity etc. To overcome this problem the government should adopt innovative measures to train the agricultural labourers for effective modern agricultural practices.

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