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## Socio-economic Condition of Agricultural Labour in India

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### **Abstract:**

Agriculture plays an important role in Indian economy not only because of its contribution to GDP but also for providing livelihood to a sizable population of the country. This paper was a modest attempt to study the different dimensions of agricultural labour in India like growth of agricultural labourer, its composition, land holding, wage earning pattern of agricultural labour, their indebtedness. Secondary data from different sources are used for analysis in the study. It is found from the study that the number and proportion of agricultural labour households to total rural household in India is increasing, they are mostly depending on wage labour, there is a predominance of the weaker social groups who are getting low wage, major percentage of agricultural labourers are landless and most of them depends on non-institutional sources for loan and uses the loan for consumption and social ceremony. Policy measures like strict implementation of the minimum and uniform wage, increase employment opportunity in rural area, attracting the agricultural labour towards institutional sources are suggested to improve the socio-economic conditions of agricultural labour in India.

**Keywords:** Household, Social groups, Wage, Non-institutional source, Indebtedness

### **1. Introduction**

Rural economy of India is characterised by increasing growth in number of agricultural labour but agricultural labour constitute the most neglected class in rural sector. According to NSS Rural Labour Enquiry Report(2011),the total number of rural household is 150.2 million ,out of which rural labour household is 55.1 million(about36.69%).The agricultural labour household were 38.8 million i.e. 70% of Rural Labour Household. The phenomena of under employment, underdevelopment, lack of alternative employment opportunity and surplus population are simultaneously manifested in the daily lives and living of agricultural labourer. Agricultural labour are unorganised and thus have weak bargaining power, the gap between actual wage and minimum wage is large ,there is disparity in wage of labourers, a large number of them belongs to SC and ST, possesses no land or less land with high indebtedness etc. In this backdrop it became imperative to study the socio-economic condition of agricultural labour with following objectives

- To study the growth of agricultural labourer and its composition.
- To study the land holding and wage earning pattern of agricultural labour.
- To study the indebtedness of agricultural labour.
- To recommend policy for improvement.

### **2. Data and Methodology**

Present study is based on the secondary data collected from different published & unpublished sources, different types of descriptive statistical technique is used in the analysis.

### **3. Result and Discussion**

#### *3.1. Growth of Agricultural Labour*

Estimation of exact number of agricultural labourer has some difficulties because agricultural worker includes not only fulltime labourer but also seasonal labourer. There are three sources of data for estimating agricultural labourer, namely Population Census, Rural Labour Enquiry Report, National Sample Survey Organisation.

As per population census 2001 proportion of agricultural labourer to total agricultural worker increased from 37.8% in 1971 to 45.6%in 2001.During this period the no of agricultural labour increase from 47.5 million to 106.8 million having growth rate of2.74 % per annum

compared with the growth rate of 2.07% for total agricultural workers. So far as rural labour inquiry report is concerned the number of agricultural labourer is increasing rapidly over time. As per report the proportion of agricultural labour household to total house hold has increase from 25.3% in 1974-75to 32.2% in 1999-2000.And agricultural labour increases from 45.7 million(1974) to 79.46 million(1999-2000) at compound growth rate 2.24% per annum as compare to 2.74% in population census

.It is also found that increase proportion rural households are engaged in agriculture. It is revealed from data that nearly 40% of rural house hold are rural labour household(RLH) in 1999-2000 as compare to 30% in 1974-75. Similarly the proportion of agricultural households(ALH) to rural house hold have increased from 25.3% in 1974-75 to 32.2% in 1999-2000.

Particulars	Total population	Average Annual Growth	Rural population	Cultivators	Agricultural labours	Total
1951	361.1	1.25	298.6(82.7)	69.9(71.9)	27.3(28.1)	97.2 (100)
1961	439.2	1.96	360.3(82.0)	99.6(76.0)	31.5(24.0)	131.1(100)
1971	548.2	2.22	439(80.1)	78.2(62.2)	47.5(37.8)	126.7(100)
1981	683.3	2.20	523.9(76.7)	92.5(62.5)	55.5(37.5)	148.0(100)
1991	846.4	2.14	628.9(74.3)	110.7(59.7)	74.6(40.3)	185.3(100)
2001	1028.7	1.95	742.6(72.2)	127.3(54.4)	106.8(45.6)	234.1(100)
GR1971-2001	2.12	2.10	1.77	1.64	2.74	2.07

Table 1: Rural Population and Agricultural Labour and % Annual growth rate  
Source: Census of India, Various Years

Particulars	1 <sup>st</sup> RLE 1963-65	2 <sup>nd</sup> RLE 1974-75	3 <sup>rd</sup> RLE 1976-77	4 <sup>th</sup> RLE 1983	5 <sup>th</sup> RLE 1987-88	6 <sup>th</sup> RLE 1993-94	7 <sup>th</sup> RLE 1999-00
No of Rural Hsds(mn)	70.4	82.1	95.7	100.5	108.4	119.5	137.1
%RLH to RurHsds	25.4	30.3	36.8	37.3	39.7	38.3	40.2
%ALH to RurHsds	21.8	25.3	29.9	30.7	30.7	30.3	32.2
Num RLH(mn)	17.88	24.88	35.22	37.49	40.03	45.77	55.11
Num ALH(mn)	15.35	20.77	28.61	30.85	33.28	36.21	44.15
Avg Size ALH	4.5	4.8	4.7	4.6	4.6	4.4	4.6
Avg Size RLH	4.5	4.8	4.7	4.6	4.6	4.5	4.7
Avg Earners ALH	2.0	2.2	1.8	1.9	1.4	1.7	1.8
Avg Earners RLH	2.0	2.2	1.7	1.8	1.3	1.6	1.7
Num Rural Lab(mn)	35.76	54.73	59.87	67.48	55.95	73.23	93.69
NumAgr Lab (mn)	30.70	45.70	51.51	58.62	46.59	61.55	79.46
% Agr Lab to Rur Lab	85.85	83.50	86.04	86.87	83.27	84.05	84.81

Table 2: Rural and Agricultural Labour Households 1963-65 to 1999-00  
Source: Rural Labour Enquiry Report 2000

### 3.2. Social Composition of Agricultural Labour

Social composition of rural labour household and agricultural labour household reveals that there is predominance of weaker section. It is found from the table that 35.3% of ALH belongs to SC, 13.6% are ST, 33.4% are OBC and rest 17.7% belongs to other cost. Again it is found that the proportion of SC and ST household is higher among ALH than in total rural household indicates that there is a concentration of SC and ST in ALH.

Particulars	SC	ST	OBC	Others	All
All Rural Household	22.1	11.1	36.9	29.9	100
Rural labour Household	33.8	13.3	34.0	18.9	100
Agl Labour Household	35.3	13.6	33.4	17.7	100

Table 3: Percentage of Social Composition (1999-00)  
Source: Rural Labour Enquiry Report 2000

### 3.3. Landlessness among Agricultural Labour

The extent of landlessness among the rural labour household and agricultural household is rising over time. It is found that at all India level 58.90% of RLH, 57.40% of ALHs are without any land in 199-2000. Among the landed RLH and ALH, the area owned was very small and was insufficient. Again it is found that average area with ALH's was continuously reducing overtime.

Particulars	Land in cult in (Hec)		Nil	.01-.20	.21-.40	.41-.60	.61-.80	.81- 1.00	1.01- 2.00	2.01- Above
	1993	1999								
RLHs	0.23	0.18	58.9	17.6	10.6	4.1	3.6	1.7	3.0	0.5
ALHs	0.23	0.18	57.4	17.7	11.2	4.2	3.9	1.8	3.3	0.5

Table 4: % Distribution of RLHs and ALHs with Cultivated land by size of Land Cultivated  
Source: Rural Labour Enquiry Report 2000

### 3.4. Wages and Earnings of Agricultural Labour

Average earning of agricultural labour is lower in comparison to the rural labour as well as rural non-agricultural labour. Again there is a clear distinction between the wage of male and female agricultural labour. The real wage of rural and agricultural labour is increasing over time for growth of labour productivity in agriculture. Besides there is also a significant difference in wages for men in various agricultural work. But the worker in plantation and forestry are receiving much higher wage in comparison to other worker.

Particulars	Sex	Wage Rate			
		1983	1987-88	1993-94	1999-00
Agriculture	Male	25.72	31.47	34.27	40.15
	Female	17.44	20.8	23.99	28.5
Non-agriculture	Male	38.05	44.04	47.94	59.52
	Female	18.19	25.51	27.62	37.29

Table 5: Real Wage Rates of Agricultural Workers in India (1983 to 1999-2000)  
Source: Rural Labour Enquiry Report 2000

Particulars	Men				Women			
	All Class	SC	ST	OBC	All Class	SC	ST	OBC
Ploughing	36.64	43.16	36.07	41.45	33.21	28.84	30.05	39.21
Sowing	38.75	40.91	28.78	38.36	28.30	30.25	25.94	27.82
Transplanting	39.53	40.80	63.62	41.02	28.95	29.84	25.79	28.83
Wheeling	84.99	37.16	29.47	34.24	25.41	26.33	23.63	24.99
Harvesting	38.44	39.57	32.13	38.47	23.30	30.78	26.05	29.01
Cultivation	39.31	41.25	31.23	39.66	27.72	29.16	25.56	27.46
Forestry	46.03	38.93	38.82	58.01	33.41	32.18	33.78	27.45
Plantations	58.27	66.94	42.81	65.56	43.99	49.64	39.71	43.59
Animal Husd	32.25	39.29	22.14	27.87	22.68	19.98	25.83	23.83
Fisheries	54.11	47.76	33.54	59.82	34.33	25.71	44.76	38.14
Other Agr Op	43.30	44.04	36.41	43.63	27.97	29.48	27.43	26.92

Table 6: Average Daily earnings of Agricultural Labour Household (1999-2000)  
Source: Rural Labour Enquiry Report 2000

### 3.5. Indebtedness of Agricultural Labour

The incident of indebtedness among rural agricultural labour household, is the percent of indebted household to total agricultural labour households. It is found that percentage of indebtedness among ALH has reduced from 35.5% in 1993-94 to 25.1% in 1999-2000. Average debt per household has increased from Rs 1031/ in 1993-1994 to Rs 1312/ in 1999-2000. But average debt indebtedness of ALHs has found increased from Rs 2901/ in 1993-94 to Rs 5230/ in 1999-2000.

Agricultural labours are found to be dependent on non-institutional sources for their borrowings. Share of bank is having a disturbed trend but it has reduced from 33.3% in 1983 to 16.6% in 1999-2000. But the share of money lender has increased from 22.2% in 1987-88 to 34% in 1999-2000.

Again it is found that a significant purpose of total debt of ALH is for unproductive purpose such as household consumption (31.05%), marriage etc (24%) in 1999-2000. It is found that the debt for productive purpose is reducing where as for marriage etc. is increasing over the years.

Particulars	1 <sup>st</sup> RLE 1963- 65	2 <sup>nd</sup> RLE 1974- 75	3 <sup>rd</sup> RLE 1976- 77	4 <sup>th</sup> RLE 1983	5 <sup>th</sup> RLE 1987- 88	6 <sup>th</sup> RLE 1993- 94	7 <sup>th</sup> RLE 1999- 00
% Indebtedness among ALH	60.6	66.4	52.3	51.1	39.4	35.5	25.1
Avg Debt per Hsd	148	387	345	774	769	1031	1312
Avg Debt Indebted ALH(Rs)	244	584	660	1516	1952	2901	5230
<i>% Debt from</i>							
Govt				2.9	3.6	8.2	4.1
Money Lender	30.7	47.8	37.3	18.6	22.0	29.4	34.0
Co operative	4.9	5.3	8.6	7.9	10.0	7.0	10.3
Banks		3.6	6.0	33.3	21.0	20.7	<b>16.6</b>
Employer,shopkeeper,Relatives, Friends	27.1	16.8	13.7	29.3	34.4	32.0	30.9
Other	37.3	26.5	34.4	8.0	9.0	2.8	4.1
<i>% of Debt Purpose</i>							
Productive	11.9	12.7	20.9	41.4	29.1	28.3	21.5
Hsd Consumption	53.3	48.1	44.4	30.4	34.3	32.3	31.0
Marriages etc	24.2	18.8	22.3	14.7	13.8	17.1	24.1

Table 7: Indebtedness of Agricultural Labour Households (1999-2000)

Source: Rural Labour Enquiry Report 2000

#### 4. Conclusion

Thus, it is concluded that the number and proportion of both rural labour and agricultural labour households to total rural household is rising over a period of time. Increasing proportion of rural households is depending on wage labour. Among the agricultural labourers there is a predominance of the weaker social groups belonging to SC and ST. It is found that rural labourers are getting low wage. Wage rate of agricultural labour is much less than the labour of non- agricultural labour. But it is found that the real wage of agricultural labour is increasing over time. And a major percentage of agricultural labourers are landless. Those owned the land the size is found to be very less and insufficient for livelihood. So far as indebtedness is concerned it is found that ALH depends on moneylenders and non-institutional sources for loan and they mostly take loan for the purpose of consumption and for social ceremony.

#### 5. Policy Implication

Following policy are suggested to improve the socio-economic conditions of agricultural labour in India

- Action must be taken for strict implementation the minimum and uniform wage.
- Steps may be taken to increase employment opportunity in rural area.
- Measures may be taken to attract the agricultural labour towards institutional sources.

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