

Agricultural Labour and their Problems and Prospects in Andhra Pradesh

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Abstract

Agricultural labour occupies the lowest place in the socio-economic structure of the rural set-up in India. The percentage of agricultural labourers to total workers has increased over a period in rural India. There was a marginal decline in the total farm workers in the second phase and this decline reflects in the increase of the non-farm workers i.e., four percent and marginal workers by 11 percent. The increase in the agricultural labourers was compensated by the decline in the cultivators so that at the aggregate level, there was no change witnessed in the case of the total farm sector. In the post-reform period, marginal workers increased at a higher level compared to the non-farm sector. The promotion of small and cottage industries and village handicrafts and deployment of industrial estates in rural areas have created job opportunities for agricultural labour in a nonagricultural sector.

Key Words: Main Workers, Marginal Workers, Pre-Reforms Period, Post-Reforms Period, Sub-Marginal Holdings, Landless Labourers, Advanced, Incremental Increase, Proportion, Deprivation, Consumption Standards

Introduction

Agricultural labour occupies the lowest place in the socio-economic structure of the rural set-up, mostly persons belongs to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes or backward classes. They have no resource base and are mostly landless. The Sixth Plan highlighted a fact that small and marginal tenants cultivated 73 percent of the operational holdings as against 23 percent of work done by agricultural labourers on the holdings of middle and upper class land holders. The backwardness of agriculture forced even the small farmers to join the ranks of agricultural workers. The number of agricultural workers had continuously increased ever since due to poor returns from agriculture and division of small holdings of land due to increasing agricultural population in the country.

Conceptual Back Ground of Farm Labour

The first Agricultural Labour Enquiry Committee of 1950-51 regarded those people as agricultural workers who were engaged in raising crops on payment of wages. Accordingly, the committee defined that those people as agricultural workers who worked for 50 percent or more days on payment of wages. The Agricultural Labour Enquiry Committee of 1956-57 took a broader view of agricultural activities and included those workers who are engaged in allied activities like animal husbandry, dairy, poultry and piggy as agricultural labour.

Accordingly, all those persons who derive a major part of their income as payment for work performed on the farms of others can be designated as farm workers. For a major part of the year, they should work on the land of others for wages. However, in the overall context of the Indian agriculture, the definition is not adequate because it is not possible to separate those working on wages from others. Thus, persons whose main source of income is wage employment fall in this category.

Division of Agricultural Labour

The agricultural labor 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.

Increasing Scenario of Agricultural Labour Force in India

Rapid growth of population accompanied by the inadequate growth of the non-agricultural sector has been one of the primary causes for the rapid growth of agricultural labourers. It may be observed that the total workers had increased from 180.48 million in 1971 to 402.51 million in 2001. The percentage of agricultural labourers to total workers has increased from 26.31 percent in 1971 to 26.70 percent in 2001 while the percentage of agricultural workers has decreased from 37.76 percent in 1971 to 33.80 percent in 2001.

Changing Scenario of Main and Marginal Workers

In 1981, the percentage of main workers in the total population was 42.25 percent and the share of marginal workers was around 3.51 percent of the total population. By 1991, there were 0.53 percent increase in the share of main workers and -1.23 percent declines in marginal workers. In 2001, there was a major decline of -4.67 percent among main workers and a 5.4 percent increase among marginal workers. This change is either due to the decrease in demand for labour, that lead to the decline in main workers or due to supply-side condition with individuals withdrawing from labour force as their incomes have increased.

It is observed that cultivators to main workers are found to be more in backward districts of the Coastal Andhra region i.e., Srikakulam, Vizainagaram, Visakhapatnam and Chittoor in Rayalaseema region. The very few cultivators are found in advanced districts such as Krishna, East-West Godavari and Guntur in the Coastal Andhra region, Chittoor and Ananthapuramu in the Rayalaseema region. The agricultural labourers to main workers are found to be more in advanced districts in the Coastal Andhra region and Kurnool in the Rayalaseema region. It reveals that the high percentage of cultivators are found in Chittoor district and the least is in Nellore, West Godavari districts.

Work Force Distribution in Andhra Pradesh by Main Workers

In Andhra Pradesh, the high percentage of cultivators are found to be in the range of 33.15 percent to 33.37 percent of work force in the districts of Chittoor and Viyanagaram districts in the state. The low percentages of cultivators are in Krishna, East Godavari and West Godavari districts ranging between 12.66 percent to 14.20 percent. The agricultural labourers are very high and they are in the range of 53.24 percent to 42.69 percent of work force in West Godavari, East Godavari, Guntur and Krishna districts. As shown in table 1, in the three Censuses viz., 1981, 1991 and 2001, the percentage of agricultural labourers significantly declined in all the districts in 2001.

Table 1: Changing Scenario of Farm Labour by Main Workers: 1981, 1991, 2001

Sl. No.	District	1981	1991	2001
1	Srikakulam	33.47	41.45	36.54
2	Vizianagaram	33.00	34.19	31.81
3	Visakhapatnam	21.15	23.60	20.31
4	East Godavari	42.71	50.40	46.23
5	West Godavari	47.69	55.19	53.24
6	Krishna	43.66	48.60	42.69
7	Guntur	45.23	51.48	44.57
8	Prakasam	42.45	50.86	39.05
9	Nellore	44.41	47.67	38.81
10	Chittoor	32.05	34.99	30.59
11	Kadapa	38.05	40.23	32.11
12	Ananthapuramu	34.57	38.62	31.42
13	Kurnool	46.72	49.54	41.68
Andhra Pradesh		33.47	41.45	36.54

Source: Statistical Abstracts of Andhra Pradesh 1995, 2004, 2008

More agricultural labourers are found in West Godavari in the Coastal Andhra region and Kurnool in Rayalaseema region. Almost all the districts have witnessed that agricultural labourers have increased from 36.67 percent in 1981 to 40.87 percent in 1991. The situation has changed in the post reform period. The agricultural labourers have decreased from 40.87 percent in 1991 to 33.83 percent in 2001.

Spread of Work Force

In all India level, the share of cultivators decreased during the period 1961-2001. In Andhra Pradesh, the share of cultivators is lower than those of all India. There is a decrease from 47.1 to 31.8 percent among males, from 40.9 to 21.9 percent among the females and from 44.5 to 27.6 percent among cultivators. In 1971, there is a sudden jump in the share of agricultural labourers at the all India level. The rise among males is from 18.6 to 25.2 percent, among females from 28.1 to 53.8 percent and among persons from 32.7 to 43.4 percent. Interestingly, the commensurate declines in the share of cultivators have been recorded at all levels. The component of total workers declined between 1981 and 1991 but increased significantly in 2001 Census. Marginal

workers increased by 11.70 percent in 2001.

There was 15 percent decline in the total farm workers in the second phase and this decline reflects in the increase of the non-farm workers i.e., four percent and marginal workers by 11 percent. In 2001 census, there was a significant decline in the percentage of farm workers in all districts. The decline was highest in Srikakulam, Nellore, Kadapa and Ananthapuramu districts. Farm sector shows a significant change in the second period compared to the first. The percentage decline in the second phase is higher than the percentage increase in the first phase.

Spread and Changing Scenario of Work Force among the Cultivators and Agricultural Labourers

The following table 2 has given the percentage change over a period in the state.

Table 2: Proportion of Total Workers to Cultivators and Agricultural Labour

Type of workers	1981	1991	2001
Cultivators	30.23	26.34	21.2
Agricultural labours	33.97	38.8	28.15

Source: Census of India

Cultivators formed nearly 30 percent of the work force in 1981 and have declined to nearly 21 percent by 2001. The decline is by nearly the same proportion in 1991 and 2001. In the year 1981, they formed 33.97 percent of individuals and they increased to 38.80 percent by 1991. But the proportion of agricultural household shows a ofsignificant decline around 10 percent in 2001. As shown in table 3, in three Censuses the percentage of cultivators significantly declined in all districts between 1981 and 2001. The agricultural labour has not declined in advanced districts compared to cultivators and total workers. Generally, as agriculture improves many agricultural labourers have to upgrade their economic position and they turn into small and marginal farmers. This has not happened in developed districts. Still, many districts are found above the state average like advanced districts in Coastal Andhra region and Kurnool in Rayalaseema region.

In overall, the situation of agricultural labourers has not improved inspite of advanced agriculture in Andhra Pradesh. All districts shows the same trend as the state for cultivators. The average rate of decline in the first period i.e., pre-reform in all districts was

3.67 percent and in the second phase i.e., post-reform period, the rate of decline was 5.5 percent. The share of agricultural labourers to total workers shows an uneven path.

Table 3: Changing Scenario of Cultivators and Farm Labourers in all Districts of A.P.
(Figures shown in percentages)

SI. No	Districts	Cultivators			Agricultural Labours		
		1981	1991	2001	1981	1991	2001
1	Srikakulam	36.76	29.57	19.44	30.21	37.49	26.47
2	Vizianagaram	39.48	34.68	25.76	27.50	30.90	24.72
3	Visakhapatnam	37.27	33.71	25.20	18.88	21.92	16.54
4	East Godavari	20.21	14.26	10.75	40.18	48.21	38.47
5	West Godavari	20.57	14.43	12.07	47.26	52.88	45.23
6	Krishna	19.03	15.19	10.83	40.67	46.95	36.52
7	Guntur	23.59	19.55	16.94	41.43	49.21	38.05
8	Prakasam	28.58	25.14	23.39	39.78	48.30	33.19
9	Nellore	24.93	19.97	16.05	40.35	44.78	31.56
10	Chittoore	40.20	35.29	27.84	29.40	32.74	25.52
11	Kadapa	29.56	27.35	21.62	34.90	36.97	25.67
12	Ananthapur	37.63	33.34	27.46	33.36	36.27	23.98
13	Kurnool	24.84	24.00	20.86	44.40	48.04	35.84

Source: Statistical abstracts of Andhra Pradesh 1981, 1991 and 2001

It shows a rise in 1991 but on the other hand the share shows a highly significant decline in the second phase. The districts of Srikakulam and Guntur indicates a higher increase in the share of agricultural workers compared to other districts during 1991. In 2001, all districts witness a significant decline in the proportion where as Prakasam district witnessed the highest decline. On the average in 1991, the increase was of 5.12 percent and in 2001 the percentage decline was 15.01 percent. The composition of work force witnessed a major change in the census of 2001 when compared to 1981 and 1991 census data. The changes are as follows. The rate of change in composition of work force between 1981 and 1991 census is termed as pre-reform period. The rate of percentage change in between 1991 and 2001 census is termed as post-reform period for the rest of discussion.

Pre-Reforms Period

This period has not witnessed a significant change in the structure of distribution of labour force between the workers and non-workers and in the distribution of workers between the farm sector and the non-farm sector. But in the pre-reform period, the distribution of cultivators and agricultural labour did witness a major change. There is a proportionate decrease in the proportion of cultivators and increase in the proportion of agricultural labour households with marginal increase in the non-farm sector. In other words, there is a substitution of labour between cultivators and non-cultivators. There is 3.89 percent decline in cultivators to total workers and 4.83 percent increase in the agricultural labourers to total workers (Table 4). The increase in the agricultural labourers was compensated by the decline in the cultivators so that at the aggregate level, there was no change witnessed in case of total farm sector.

Table 4: Rate of Change in the Composition of Work Force over time

Category	Pre-reform	Post-reform
1. Farm-Sector	0.93	- 15.78
Cultivators	-3.89	-5.14
Agricultural labourers	4.83	- 10.65
2. Non-farm Sector	1.66	4.07
3. Marginal workers	-2.59	11.71

Note: Pre-reform 1981-1991, Post-reform 1991-2001.

Scenario of Farm Labour Force during Post-Reform Period

This period witness a major structural change in the work force in different sectors. There was a major decline of main workers in the state and increase in the marginalan workers . There is a major shift in work force from farm sector to the margin all workers and an incremental increase in the non-farm sector . The decline in the farm workers is proportion mainly because of sharp decline in the shathe re of agricultural labourers .

There was 15 percent decline for the cultivators and agricultural labourers. In the post-reform period, marginal workers increased at a higher level compared to the non-farm sector . Only marginal workers increased by about 11.71 percent. The percentage increase for the non-farm sector was only 4 .07 percent. Thus, ultimately, it implies that the decline in the proportion of the cultivated ators of -5.14 percent mainly moved towards non-farm activity. The major part of decline in prop ortion of the agricultural labour moved towards marginal workers. The proportion of cultivators is declining and may be they can get employment dominantly in the non-farm sector .

The proportion of agricultural labour households are also declining in this period. Apart from the decline in the agricultural labour households, the dominant proportion of agricultural labourers shift from main workers to marginal workers. In other words, the employment opportunities of agricultural labour households are declining in the country.

There is diversification for the cultivators to non-farm activities and decrease in the employment of agricultural labour households. So, the structural change represents distress to the agricultural labour households and diversification for the farm households.

Problems and Prospects of Agricultural Labourers

Agricultural labourers are victims of social discrimination and economic exploitation. If they failed to tow the lines of the master, they were beaten up and tortured. By advancing small loans to them, the zamindars and landlords often succeeded in trapping these poor people in their net and converted them into bonded labour. This slavery continued from generation to generation and forced the agricultural workers to lead a wretched existence of deprivation and oppression. Even now their level of income is very low and highly insufficient to enable them to make both ends meet. Even now, their consumption standards are very low. In the absence of alternative sources of employment, they are forced to depend on landlords who consequently dictate the terms. The simple law of demand and supply operates. Since their supply is excessive in relation to the demand for them, they have to settle for extremely low wages. The alternative is worse - unemployment.

Wage Disparity

The women farm labour are generally forced to work harder and are paid less than their male counterparts. Such bias against female workers exists is most of the dry land areas. At many places, wages paid to female workers are even less than the minimum wages. Though there are so many technological changes in labour force where women also involve in all activities along with men, there are disparities in payment of wages to female agricultural labour in many parts of the country.

Incidence of Child Labour

Incidence of child labour is high in India and the estimated number varies from 17.5 million to 44 million. It is estimated that one-third of the child workers in Asia are in India. The largest number of child workers are in agriculture. Child employment

benefits the employer but adversely affects the poor as a class although it may supplement the income of the household supplying child labour. The poor are made worse-off as the employment of children brings down the wage levels .

Migration of Rural Labour

The number of inter-State distress rural migrant workers is estimated to be around 10 million in India. Even in areas of abundant labour supply, employers prefer rural migrant workers because of the greater control that can be exercised in such labour without regard to any social responsibility.

Minimum wages

The Minimum Wage Act was passed as long back as in 1948 and since then the necessity of applying it to agriculture has constantly been felt . However, because of some difficulties , it was not found possible to fix the minimum wages for agricultural labour in most of the States up to 1974. The main difficulties were low productivity of agricultural labour, small size of holdings of many farmers and their consequent incapability of paying more wages, determination of wages by traditional methods and opposition of any changes from the landlords, lack of organisation among rural workers, excessive labour supply in many areas, prevalence of widely different conditions of employment, etc. Some changes have occurred during the planning period.

Special Agencies for Development

The Special Agencies like Small Farmers Development Agency, Marginal Farmers and Agricultural Laborers Development Agency were initiated by the government . Also the to these , a special programme is initiated for Drought Prone Area Programme during the Fourth Plan period for employment generation to agricultural labour. Now, The MGNREGS is the major step to improve the socio-economic conditions of agricultural labourers through the country.

Measures to Improve the Conditions of Agricultural Labour

Since they are unorganized and have irregular employment potential for their livelihood, it is the duty

of the state to provide opportunities for employment to them. Their livelihood is based on agricultural operations or activities which are incidental to the agricultural operations after harvesting and therefore in the absence of timely state help; they may become bonded or attached labourers. Various other measures adopted by the government from time to time have either directly or indirectly sought to improve the condition of agricultural labour. The promotion of small and cottage industries and village handicrafts and deployment of industrial estates in rural areas have created job opportunities for agricultural labour in non agricultural sector.

Conclusions

The number of agricultural workers had continuously increased ever since. The incomes of agricultural labour are generally below those of other workers. The level of income and the economic well-being of people in agriculture general is determined by many factors, such as the prices they receive for their output, the rate at which the economy, in general, is growing the ease with which people can move from-farm, average income per person distinguished from total income, the prices received and paid are probably less important than the other factors mentioned. The low percentages of cultivators are in Krishna, East Godavari and West Godavari districts ranging between 0.99 to 14.20 percent. The agricultural labourers are very high and they are in the range of 42.69 percent to 53.24 percent of the work force in West Godavari, East Godavari and Krishna districts. It reveals that in the three Censuses viz., 1981, 1991 and 2001, the percentage of agricultural labourers significantly declined in all the districts in 2001. More agricultural labourers are found in West Godavari in the Coastal Andhra region and Kurnool in Rayalaseema region. Almost all the districts have witnessed that agricultural labourers had increased from 36.67 percent in 1981 to 40.87 percent in 1991. In all India, the shares of cultivators decreased over the period 1961-2001. Among males, the share decreased from 61.1 to 42.2 percent, among females from 58.9 to 36.5 percent and among persons, it went down from 60.3 to 40.1 percent. In Andhra Pradesh, the share of cultivators is lower than those of all India.

In Srikakulam, Nellore, Kadapa and Ananthapuramu districts, the decline was the highest. In Advanced districts - East, West Godavaries, Krishna, Guntur, Nellore of the Coastal Andhra region, Chittoor and Kadapa in the Rayalaseema region and at the state level also, there is a clear demarcation of change of cultivators. In 2001, all districts witnessed a significant decline in the proportion where as Prakasam district witnessed the highest decline. In the post-reform period, marginal workers increased at a higher level compared to the non-farm sector. Only the original workers increased by about 11.71 percent. Apart from the decline in the agricultural labour households, entry into the non-farm sector but the dominant proportion of agricultural labourers shift from main workers to marginal workers.

Even now their consumption standards are very low. In the absence of alternative sources of employment, they are forced to depend on landlords who consequently dictate the terms. There are substantial differences not only among different States but even among different villages of the same State as regards the period of employment, mode and time-period of payment, freedom of movement, bargaining power vis-a-vis landlords, begar, etc. Female agricultural workers are, generally forced to work harder and are paid less than their male counterparts.

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