



Scenario of Cultivators and Agricultural Laborers–A Study

***Dr. C. Subathra**

Assistant Professor of Commerce, Pioneer Kumaraswamy College, Nagercoil – 3.

ABSTRACT

According to census data from the Indian government, the number of farmers in the country plunged by 9 million since 2001. "Cultivators," as the Indian government describes farmers, who has been decreasing, there are actually now more agricultural laborers (that is, people who work on farms but do not own the land) – the Census results show a fall of about 9 million in cultivators and an increase of about 38 million in agricultural labourers. In the 10-year period, there was a fall of about 8.7 lakh in the number of cultivators and a rise of nearly 9.7 lakh among farm workers. "The rise in agricultural labor could be explained by the falling size of land-holdings over time," Thus a survey conducted by a researcher to identify the reason for the agricultural force for shifting from agriculture to other sectors by selecting 50 agricultural workers who work in the field for wages from Suchindrum town in Kanyakumari District. The sample selected is convenient sample. As most of them are not much literate to answer through questionnaire, the researcher used interview method to get response from the respondents. According to a survey conducted in suchindrum town panchayat to assess the key reasons for shifting from agriculture to other sectors, 'higher wages in other locally available jobs' was ranked 'first' among various reasons identified. The study concludes that government should take some proper steps to improve the conditions of agricultural labourers.

Keywords: Agricultural Labourers; Census; Cultivators

INTRODUCTION

suzhandrum-Erp pinnadhu ulagam adhanaal
 uzhandhum uzhaavae thalai –(Thirukkural 1031)

Translation: However they roam, the world must follow still the plougher's team; Though toilsome, culture of the ground as noblest toil esteem. – (Thirukkural 1031)

“Agriculture, though laborious, is the most excellent (form of labour); for people, though they go about (in search of various employments), have at last to resort to the farmer” says Thiruvalluvar in couplet 1031. India is primarily an agrarian economy, but still Indian farmers continue to be among the poorest in the world. With the diverse climatic conditions found and

large areas of rich fertile land, India has a lot of potential to become one of the leading producers of various agriculture products. With presence of abundant raw materials in the form of natural resources, India lags far behind in ensuring food security for its own citizens.

Agricultural workers form the most disadvantaged economic group in India today. Their wages are typically low; conditions of work are often onerous; and employment frequently irregular. The level of living which their earnings permit is very meagre. Their daily lives, as it were, reflect the problems of underdevelopment, underemployment, and "surplus" population which figure so prominently In current national and international discussion, Prior to 1947, such



concern as the Government, of India had evinced in the labour field was focussed on urban workers, particularly those organized into strong or militant unions. In the years since the attainment of independence, Government has shown heightened awareness that the agricultural labourers constitute the largest single section of the national labour force.

SUMMARY OF REVIEW AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE STUDY

Among the authors who have analysed the agricultural sector in India, the study made by Srivastava (1993) examined the status of the Agricultural Labour and the Law; Agarwal (1978) studied Labour Relations Law in India; Biasucci's study (1997) The Green Revolution: Socioeconomic Insecurity and Agricultural Displacement in India, Praveen Jha's two works viz., Agricultural Labour in India, (1997) and "Continuity and Change: Some Observations on the Land scope of Agricultural Labourers in North Bihar, India, (2004), Sharma's work (2005) on Economic Conditions of agricultural Labour Households, Kulamani Padhi's work (2007) of Agricultural Labour in India - A Close Look, Amit Kumar Gupta's study (1996), The Agrarian drama: The Leftists and the Rural Poor in India, 1934-1951, Arputharaj (1981) provided Agricultural Economic Research in South India, 1954- 1979, Biplah Dasguptha (1977) studied The New Agrarian Technology and India, Jose (2002) analysed Organized Labour in the 21st Century all provide a lot of analytical information regarding the conditions of the agricultural labour in India and various states.

In this article, the researcher got various evidence that agricultural labour is increasing in the

country and number of cultivators is decreasing by the analysis through 2011 census and various secondary data and report. An official from the agriculture ministry says that the trend is very disturbing. "If agricultural labour is increasing in the country and number of cultivators is decreasing it can be because of two reasons. One is that farmers are losing their land and are being forced to work as labourers in the fields of others. The second can be that people are trying to work under MGNREGA so that they can live in their villages and work as agricultural labour." However, a proper study or survey on the trends would be the best way to come to a conclusion, thus the researcher decide to study on the topic.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objective of the study is,

- To examine the population and agricultural workers in India
- To identify the reason for shifting from agriculture to other sectors in Kanyakumari District
- To provide suggestions based on the findings of the study

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

This study examines the population and agricultural workers in India from the secondary data collected from national and state levels, the published books, articles and an analysis from the census report, also various Government reports. And made a survey to identify the reason for the agricultural force for shifting from agriculture to other sectors by selecting 50 agricultural workers from the suchindrum town in Kanyakumari District. The sampling selected is convenient

sample. 50 respondents are the agricultural Labourer who works in the field for wages. The researcher used interview method to get response from the respondents, as most of them are not much literate to answer through questionnaire. Data analyzed using simple frequency and Percentage analysis.

POPULATION AND AGRICULTURAL WORKERS IN INDIA

The term "agricultural worker" includes "all those who work in the fields for wages". (Agricultural Wages in India Vol I. p 1). Very

often, agricultural labourers are added with cultivators to calculate the number of farmers. This is not the case with the Census, which defines agriculture labour: 'A person who works on another person's land for wages in money or kind or share is regarded as an agricultural labourer. She or he has no risk in the cultivation, but merely works on another person's land for wages. An agricultural labourer has no right of lease or contract on land on which she/he works.'

Table.1 shows the number and percentage of cultivators and Agricultural Labourers, according to Census, since 1951 to 2011.

Table.1 Population and Agricultural Workers in India (in Millions)

| Year | Total Population | Annual Exponential Growth Rate (%) | Rural Population | Agricultural workers | | |
|------|------------------|------------------------------------|------------------|----------------------|------------------------|-------|
| | | | | Cultivators | Agricultural Labourers | Total |
| 1951 | 361.1 | 1.25 | 298.6 | 69.9 | 27.3 | 97.2 |
| | | | (82.7) | (71.9) | (28.1) | (100) |
| 1961 | 439.2 | 1.96 | 360.3 | 99.6 | 31.5 | 131.1 |
| | | | (82.0) | (76.0) | (24.0) | (100) |
| 1971 | 548.2 | 2.20 | 439.0 | 78.2 | 47.5 | 125.7 |
| | | | (80.1) | (62.2) | (37.8) | (100) |
| 1981 | 683.3 | 2.22 | 523.9 | 92.5 | 55.5 | 148.0 |
| | | | (76.7) | (62.5) | (37.5) | (100) |
| 1991 | 846.4 | 2.16 | 628.9 | 110.7 | 74.6 | 185.3 |
| | | | (74.3) | (59.7) | (40.3) | (100) |
| 2001 | 1028.7 | 1.97 | 742.6 | 127.3 | 106.8 | 234.1 |
| | | | (72.2) | (54.4) | (45.6) | (100) |
| 2011 | 1210.2 | 1.64 | 833.1 | 118.6 | 144.3 | 262.9 |
| | | | (68.8) | (45.1) | (54.8) | (100) |

Source: Registrar General of India.



During the year 2011 there are 118.9 million cultivators across the country or 45.1% of the total Agricultural workers of over 262.9 million. It can be seen from the table above that although the number of cultivators has been fluctuating, the percentage of cultivators has been coming down steadily. It has declined from nearly 71.9% in 1951 to 45.1% in 2011, which means the number of farmers has come down gradually.

The number of people working as agricultural labourers has been increasing since 1951. And the percentage of agricultural labourers has increased from 28.1% in 1951 to 54.8% in 2011. This shows that quite a few people have actually moved from being cultivators to being agricultural labourers. During the decade 2001-11, the Census results show a fall of about 9 million in cultivators and an increase of about 38 million in agricultural labourers.

The finding in the Census for Tamil Nadu: Between 2001 and 2011, the strength of cultivators declined and the number of agricultural workers went up. In the 10-year period, there was a fall of about 8.7 lakh in the number of cultivators and a rise of nearly 9.7 lakh among farm workers.

CULTIVATORS/FARMERS IN SUCHINDRUM WHO SOLD THEIR LAND WITH REASON

The increasing input cost of agriculture is growing fast, while the farmers are still at the mercy of exploitative middlemen who keep the

farm price subdued. This dynamics makes farming a loss making venture. Most Cultivators in Suchindrum sold their land for the purpose of housing plot (urban land/housing) which in return gave them unexpected amount of money for their investment towards non-agricultural activities, some build even home with the income from selling land. There are other equally important factors that force farmers to sell their land. Treatment for serious illness and social pressure of performing big family weddings force many farmers to raise money by pawning or selling their farmland. Most of the agricultural workers engaged in private construction and painting works which gives them 500 rs. Per day with lunch in the noon and also engaged in MGNREGP scheme, it is an Indian labour law and social security measure that aims to guarantee the 'right to work'. It aims to ensure livelihood security in rural areas by providing at least 100 days of wage employment in a financial year to every household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work) by central government.

REASON FOR SHIFTING FROM AGRICULTURE WORK TO OTHER SECTORS

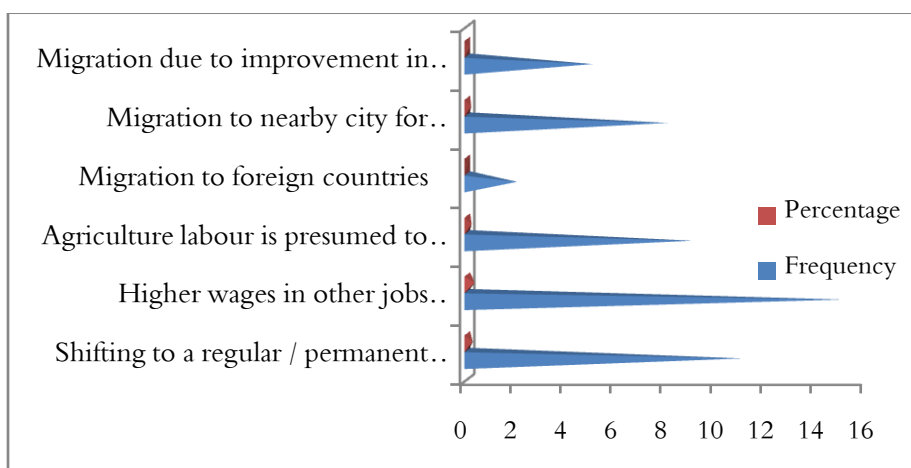
Agricultural labour is increasing in the country and number of cultivators is decreasing it can be because of any reasons. Table 2. And Fig.1 Show the result of the survey conducted in suchindrum town in Kanyakumari District among the selected agricultural workers.

Table 2. Reason for shifting from agriculture work to other sectors

| Reason for shifting from agriculture to other sectors | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|-------------|
| Shifting to a regular / permanent job since agricultural job is seasonal | 11 | 22% |
| Higher wages in other jobs available locally | 15 | 30% |
| Agriculture labour is presumed to be a low esteemed job | 9 | 18% |
| Migration to foreign countries | 2 | 4% |
| Migration to nearby city for higher wages | 8 | 16% |
| Migration due to improvement in educational status | 5 | 10% |
| Total | 50 | 100% |

According to a survey conducted in suchindrum town panchayat to assess the key reasons shifting from agriculture to other sectors, ‘higher wages in other locally available jobs’ was ranked ‘first’ among various reasons identified. The survey reported that this was because higher wage rates prevailing in non-agricultural works like masonry, carpentry, electrical and plumbing, which were locally available, attracted agricultural labourers. As the skill set required in agriculture is negligible, labour tend to adapt other skill sets if they get higher wages. Agricultural jobs being seasonal, labourers remain unemployed during lean season. This makes them seek a regular / permanent job that could provide them income throughout the year; this reason was ranked ‘second’. Working as an agricultural labourer was considered as a low-esteem job in the rural areas and this reason was ranked ‘third’. Outmigration due to improvement in educational status, migration to nearby town / city for higher wages and migration to foreign countries were ranked the fourth, fifth and sixth respectively.

Fig.1. Reason for shifting from agriculture work to other sectors



A report in the “Economist” outlined how agriculture labourers were increasingly seeking jobs as “Security Guards” in cities and towns, which besides giving them a higher wage also reduced their drudgery.

CONCLUSION

Government has taken Measures for ameliorating the economic conditions of Agricultural labourers viz., Passing of minimum wage Act. , Abolition of Bonded Labourers , Providing land to landless labourers, Provision of Housing cities to houseless etc., which is not up to the reach of poor agricultural labourers. Government must take effort to ensure a regular income for poor farmers.

SUGGESTION

Following suggestion provided by the researcher based on the findings of the study,

- As the key reasons for shifting from agriculture to other sectors is ‘higher wages in other locally available jobs viz., masonry, carpentry, electrical and plumbing, which attracted agricultural labourers, farmers working in the field should also be given fair wage.
- Method of government control of market rates for vegetables and grains is successful in several countries; it must be strictly followed in India to avoid exploitation by middlemen who keep the farm price subdued.
- Public agricultural land can be owned by the state government and agricultural labour should be given permanent job with fair salary with other benefits in order to safe guard the agricultural workers.

REFERENCES

- [1] Agarwal, 8. (1986): 'Women, Poverty and Agricultural Growth in India', The Journal of Peasant Studies. Vo1.15. No.4.
- [2] Ahuja, K. (1986) : 'Agricultural Labour and Rural Employment' in Dantwala, M.L. (ed) (1986) : Indian Agricultural Development since Independence, Oxford & ISH Publishing Co., New Delhi.
- [3] Bhalla, Sheila 1997, ‘Trends in Poverty, Wages and Employment in India’, Indian Journal of Labour Economics, Vol. 40, No. 2
- [4] Da Corta, Lucia and Davuluri Venkateshwarlu, 1997, ‘Unfree Relations and the Feminisation of Agricultural Labour in Andhra Pradesh, 1970-95’ in ‘Rural Labour Relations in India’, Special Issue, the Journal of Peasant Studies, Vol. 26, Nos. 2 and 3, January to April
- [5] Dantwala, M.L. (ed) (1986) : Indian Agricultural Development since Independence, Oxford & IBH Publishing Co., New Delhi.
- [6] Deb, Ashish T. (1986) : Some Aspects of Agricultural Labour and Wages in India. 1954-55 to 1974-75, M.Phil Dissertation, Delhi School of Economics, University of Delhi.

- [7] Fewer cultivators, farm labourers in Tamilnadu , a news reported in “The HINDU” Dated May 31, 2013 , Chennai Issue. Source:www.thehindu.com
- [8] Government of India (2011) : Census of India 2011 Series-1, Paper-3 of 1991 - 2011, Provisional Population Totals : Workers and Their Distribution, Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India, New Delhi.
- [9] Government of India (Various Years) : Agricultural Wages in India, Ministry of Agriculture, Directorate of Economics and Statistics, New Delhi.
- [10] Hanumantha Rao, C.H., 1998 ‘Economic Reforms and Prospects for Rural Labour’ in Radhakrishna and Sharma (eds.)
- [11] Jha, Praveen K., 1997, Agricultural Labour in India, New Delhi, Vikas Publishing House
- [12] “More and more small and marginal farmers are selling their meagre landholdings to become agricultural workers” report in “The HINDU” Dated June 3, 2013, Chennai Issue. Source: www.thehindu.com
- [13] Rural man-power and occupational structure, agricultural labour enquiry, Printed by the Manager, Govt. of India Press, Simla, for the Manager of Publications, Civil Lines, 1954