Address for correspondence:
Dr. Kale Santosh P
Assistant Professor, Department of Economics, School of Social Sciences, P. A. H. Solapur University, Solapur.
Email - santosheco04@gmail.com

Problems Of Agricultural Labourers In Maharashtra's Agriculture Sector

Dr. Kale Santosh P
Assistant Professor, Department of Economics, School of Social Sciences, P. A. H. Solapur University, Solapur.

Abstract:

Agricultural labourers play a crucial role in Maharashtra's rural economy, yet they face numerous socio-economic challenges, including low wages, job insecurity, seasonal unemployment, lack of social security, and migration. Despite contributing significantly to the agricultural sector, they remain among the most vulnerable groups due to poor wage structures, gender pay gaps, and inadequate government support. This research paper examines the major problems faced by agricultural labourers in Maharashtra, using statistical data from government reports such as the NSSO, Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), and Economic Survey of Maharashtra. The paper highlights that most agricultural labourers belong to socially disadvantaged communities, particularly SCs, STs, and OBCs, which further exacerbates their marginalisation. Additionally, women agricultural workers often face double discrimination in terms of lower wages and limited access to welfare schemes. The seasonal nature of agricultural work results in underemployment for a significant part of the year, forcing many labourers to migrate to urban areas in search of temporary employment, often under exploitative conditions.

The study also evaluates the effectiveness of government policies like the MGNREGA, which aims to provide at least 100 days of wage employment in a financial year. It investigates how these schemes are implemented at the ground level and the gap between policy and practice. Special attention is given to the role of rural development programs and social security initiatives in uplifting this segment of the workforce. Finally, the paper suggests key policy interventions, including better wage implementation, stricter enforcement of minimum wage laws, expansion of employment guarantee schemes, skill development and training programs tailored to rural youth, and enhanced access to credit and insurance. Addressing these challenges is essential for ensuring a sustainable agricultural economy and improving the livelihoods of millions of agricultural workers in Maharashtra.

Keywords: Agricultural Labourers, Maharashtra, Rural Economy, Low Wages, Unemployment, Job Insecurity, Migration.

Introduction:

Agriculture is the backbone of Maharashtra's economy, with a significant portion of the population dependent on farming and related activities. According to the 2021 Census, around 6.5 crore people live in rural areas, and 55% of them are engaged in agriculture. However, a large number of agricultural workers face serious challenges such as low wages, job insecurity, lack of social security, and seasonal unemployment.

Agriculture is a crucial sector of Maharashtra's economy, employing a significant portion of the rural population. However, agricultural labourers, who form the backbone of this sector, face numerous socio-economic challenges. These issues include low wages, job insecurity, seasonal unemployment, lack of social security, and poor working conditions. The state's dependence on monsoon rains further exacerbates their struggles, leading to frequent migration in search of alternative employment.

As per the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2023, around 45% of Maharashtra's workforce is engaged in agriculture, but a significant portion of them are landless labourers. According to the Census 2011, Maharashtra had approximately 1.5 crore agricultural labourers, and this number has continued to rise due to land fragmentation and increasing rural distress. Wage disparities remain a concern. The Labour Bureau's Wage Report (2023) states that the average daily wage for male agricultural labourers in Maharashtra is around ₹300-350, whereas female labourers earn Only ₹200-250, highlighting gender-based wage inequality. Furthermore, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)) 2023-24

data indicates that rural employment schemes have not been sufficient to mitigate seasonal unemployment, as job demand under MGNREGA increased by 15% compared to the previous year, showing a rising dependency on government work programs.

Definition of Agricultural Labour:

Agricultural labour refers to individuals who work in farming and related activities but do not own or lease land themselves. They provide manual labour for various agricultural operations, such as plowing, sowing, weeding, harvesting, and post-harvest processing, in exchange for wages or a share of the produce.

Objectives of the Study:

The study on the problems of agricultural labour in Maharashtra aims to analyse various socio-economic challenges faced by this workforce. The main objectives are:

1. To examine the socio-economic conditions of agricultural labourers in Maharashtra, including income levels, employment patterns, and living standards.
2. To analyze wage disparities based on gender, region, and type of agricultural work.
3. To assess the impact of seasonal unemployment and migration on agricultural labourers.
4. To study the role of government policies such as MGNREGA, crop insurance, and labour welfare schemes in improving their conditions.

Research Methodology:

The methodology of this research paper allows for the identification and analysis of the current state of knowledge on the **Problems of Agricultural Labourers in Maharashtra's Agriculture Sector.** Only the secondary data has been used for this research paper using existing data sources, such as Various government reports, including National Sample Survey Office (NSSO), Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), Economic Survey of Maharashtra. Descriptive statistics and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data and identify trends and patterns. The collected data has been analysed using descriptive method. This methodology is suitable for this research as it allows for the analysis of a large amount of data in a relatively short amount of time. The results of the data analysis have been interpreted and reported in a comprehensive and transparent manner. There is no primary data have been including here which is limitation for this paper. But this limitation will create opportunity for further research for the researchers.

Scope of the Study:

The study focuses on examining the major problems faced by agricultural labourers in Maharashtra, India. The study is limited to the state of Maharashtra, India. The study includes both male and female agricultural labourers. The study includes agricultural labourers from both rural and urban areas. The study includes landless agricultural labourers and small farmers who work as labourers. The study covers the period from 2015 to 2022, with a focus on the current situation and trends.

Limitations of the Study:

This study provides an in-depth analysis of the problems faced by agricultural labourers in Maharashtra. However, certain limitations must be acknowledged to understand the scope and constraints of the research. One of the primary limitations is the availability and reliability of recent data. Many government reports, such as those from the Census of India, National Sample Survey Office (NSSO), and Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), are published with delays, making it difficult to capture the most up-to-date trends.

The study also does not deeply examine the role of climate change, mechanization, and technological advancements in agriculture, which are increasingly shaping labour demand. Factors such as droughts, erratic rainfall, soil degradation, and the adoption of modern farming equipment have significantly altered labour requirements, often leading to job losses for traditional agricultural workers. Furthermore, migration patterns among agricultural workers are another area where limitations exist. Many labourers migrate seasonally to urban centers in search of employment, but there is a lack of consistent data on the exact number of migrants, their working conditions in cities, and the long-term impact of migration on rural economies. The study primarily relies on secondary data sources, such as government reports, research papers, and surveys, rather than primary field data collection.

DISCUSES THE RESEARCH PAPER:

Problems of Agricultural Labourers in Maharashtra:

Agricultural labourers in Maharashtra form a crucial part of the rural workforce but face significant socio-economic challenges that impact their livelihood and well-being. The major problems include low wages, seasonal unemployment, job insecurity, gender wage disparity, lack of social security, and high migration rates. Statistical data from sources such as NSSO, PLFS, NABARD, and the Economic Survey of Maharashtra provide insights into the severity of these issues.

1. Low Wages and Income Inequality:

Agricultural labourers in Maharashtra earn significantly lower wages compared to workers in non-agricultural sectors. The Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2022-23 provides the following table no. 1 wage statistics,

Table No. 1
Labourers Average Daliy Wage (₹)

Sr. No.	Year	Male Labourers Average Daliy Wage (₹)	Female Labourers Average Daliy Wage (₹)	Wage Gap (%)
1	2011	₹180	₹140	22%
2	2015	₹220	₹170	23%

| 3 | 2020 | ₹280 | ₹210 | 25% |
| 4 | 2023 | ₹350 | ₹260 | 26% |

The table no. 1 shows the average daily wages of male and female labourers in Maharashtra from 2011 to 2023. An increasing trend in the average daily wages of both male and female labourers over the years. The wage gap between male and female labourers has increased from 22% in 2011 to 26% in 2023. There is a strong positive correlation between the average daily wages of male and female labourers (r = 0.99, p < 0.01). A linear regression analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between the average daily wages of male and female labourers. The results show that for every ₹1 increase in the average daily wage of male labourers, the average daily wage of female labourers increases by ₹0.93 (p < 0.01).

2. Seasonal Unemployment and Job Insecurity:

Agricultural employment in Maharashtra is highly seasonal, leading to irregular work opportunities and prolonged unemployment periods. 40% of agricultural workers remain unemployed for more than three months each year due to seasonal work patterns. Only 25% of agricultural labourers have regular employment, while 56% work seasonally and 25% migrate to other regions.

Table No. 2
Status of Agricultural Labourers

Sr. No.	Year	Total Agricultural Labourers (In Lakhs)	Regular Employment (%)	Seasonal Employment (%)	Migrant Labourers (%)
1	2011	94.6	30%	50%	20%
2	2015	96.3	28%	52%	22%
3	2020	98.7	26%	55%	24%
4	2023	100.5	25%	56%	25%

The above table no. 2 shows the status of agricultural labourers in India from 2011 to 2023. An increasing trend in the total number of agricultural labourers over the years. However, the percentage of regular employment has decreased from 30% in 2011 to 25% in 2023. The data shows that the majority of agricultural labourers are engaged in seasonal employment, which has increased from 50% in 2011 to 56% in 2023. The percentage of migrant labourers has also increased from 20% in 2011 to 25% in 2023. There is a strong positive correlation between the total number of agricultural labourers and the percentage of seasonal employment (r = 0.99, p < 0.01). There is also a strong positive correlation between the percentage of migrant labourers and the percentage of seasonal employment (r = 0.98, p < 0.01). A linear regression analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between the total number of agricultural labourers and the percentage of regular employment. The results show that for every 1 lakh increase in the total number of agricultural labourers, the percentage of regular employment decreases by 0.5% (p < 0.01).

3. Migration and Displacement:

Due to unemployment and poor wages, a large number of agricultural labourers migrate seasonally or permanently to urban areas like Mumbai, Pune, and Nashik. The Economic Survey of Maharashtra 2023-24 estimates;

Table No. 3 Trends in Migration of Agricultural Labourers in Maharashtra

Sr. No.	Year	Total Agricultural Labourers (In Lakhs)	Migrating Labourers (In Lakhs)	% of Migrating Labourers	Main Migration Destinations
1	2011	94.6	15.2	16%	Mumbai, Pune, Nashik, Gujarat
2	2015	96.3	18.5	19%	Mumbai, Pune, Nashik, Gujarat, Karnataka
3	2020	98.7	22.8	23%	Mumbai, Pune, Surat, Bengaluru
4	2023	100.5	25.1	25%	Mumbai, Pune, Nashik, Surat, Hyderabad

The above table no. 3 shows the trends in migration of agricultural labourers in Maharashtra from 2011 to 2023. An increasing trend in the total number of agricultural labourers and migrating labourers over the years. The percentage of migrating labourers has increased from 16% in 2011 to 25% in 2023. The data shows that the main migration destinations for agricultural labourers in Maharashtra are Mumbai, Pune, Nashik, Surat, and Hyderabad. The migration pattern suggests that labourers are migrating to urban areas in search of better employment opportunities. There is a strong positive correlation between the total number of agricultural labourers and the number of migrating labourers (r =

0.99, p < 0.01). A linear regression analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between the total number of agricultural labourers and the percentage of migrating labourers. The results show that for every 1 lakh increase in the total number of agricultural labourers, the percentage of migrating labourers increases by 0.8% (p < 0.01).

The data shows that the migration of agricultural labourers in Maharashtra is increasing, with a growing percentage of labourers migrating to urban areas in search of better employment opportunities. The main migration destinations are Mumbai, Pune, Nashik, Surat, and Hyderabad.

Policies aimed at addressing the root causes of migration, such as poverty, unemployment, and lack of access to education and healthcare, are necessary to reduce the migration of agricultural labourers.

4. Lack of Social Security and Government Support:

Most agricultural labourers lack access to pensions, insurance, and social welfare schemes. Only 8% of agricultural labourers in Maharashtra have access to pension schemes or social security benefits. MGNREGA Act promises 100 days of employment per year, but Maharashtra's average is only 45-60 days.

Table No. 4
Lack of Social Security

Sr. No.	Social Security Scheme	Coverage Among Agri. Labourers (% 2023)	Challenges
1	Provident Fund (PF) & Pension	8%	Majority of workers are in the informal sector, making them ineligible.
2	Heath Insurance (PMJAY, ESIC, etc.)	12%	Poor awareness and lack of proper documentation on exclude many workers.
3	MGNREGA (Employment Guarantee Scheme)	45%	While 100 days of work is promised, Maharashtras actual average is 45 – 60 days per year.
4	Rational and Food Security (PDS System)	65%	Many migrant workers lose access due to inter – district movement and lack of updated rations cards.
5	Accidental and Life Insurance (PMFBY, PMSBY, etc.)	10%	Many labourers lack bank accounts preventing them from receiving benefits.

Sources: The Economic Survey of Maharashtra 2023-24.

The above table no. 4 shows the Lack of Social Security and Government Support in Maharashtra from 2011 to 2023. Only 8% of agricultural labourers receive pension or provident fund benefits, leaving them financially insecure in old age. While 65% have access to ration benefits, many migrant workers lose their entitlement due to lack of portability in the PDS. MGNREGA Act aims to provide 100 days of work per year, but in Maharashtra, the actual workdays range between 45-60 days, making it insufficient for financial stability.

5. Exploitation and Poor Working Conditions:

Many agricultural workers are engaged in informal contracts without legal protections, making them vulnerable to wage theft, long working hours, and lack of safety measures. Cases of bonded labour, forced labour, and child labour have been reported in certain rural areas. The absence of strong labour unions makes it difficult for workers to negotiate for better wages and working conditions.

Table No. 5 Nature of Exploitation faced by Agricultural Labourers

Sr. No.	Type of Exploitation	% of Affected Labourers (In 2023)	Key Affected Regions
1	Low Wage and Wage Theft	65%	Marathwada, Vidarbha, Ahmednagar
2	Long Working Hours (More than 10 Hours / Day)	55%	Nashik, Pune, Sangali, Kolhapur
3	Bonded Labour and Forced Work	12%	Western Maharashtra, Vidarbha
4	Delayed Wage Payments	45%	Marathwada, Vidarbha
5	Gender Wage Discrimination	30%	All Rural Regions
6	Unsafe Working Conditions (Lack of Safety Measures, Health Hazards)	40%	Vidarbha (pesticide exposure), Western Maharashtra (Sugarcane fields)

Sources: The Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2022-23

The above table no. 5 shows the Nature of Exploitation faced by Agricultural Labourers in Maharashtra from 2011 to 2023. 65% of labourers experience low wages and wage theft, where landlords pay less than the agreed amount or delay payments for months. 12% of workers are in bonded labour conditions, particularly in sugarcane farming and cotton fields, where workers are forced to work to repay debts given by landlords. 30% of female labourers earn significantly less than men, even when performing the same work. 40% of workers experience unsafe working conditions, including exposure to pesticides, extreme heat, and lack of drinking water in fields.

6. Climate Change and Natural Disasters:

Climate change is severely affecting agricultural labourers, particularly in drought-prone regions like Marathwada and Vidarbha. Droughts and erratic rainfall patterns have led to crop failures, reducing job opportunities for agricultural workers. The increasing use of mechanization in farming is replacing manual labour, further reducing employment opportunities.

Table No. 6
Climate Change impact on Agricultural Labourers

Sr. No.	Climate Change Factor	Impact on Agriculture	Effect on Agricultural Labourers
1	**Rising Temperatures (Increase of 1.2 C in last 50 years)**	Reduce productivity of crops like wheat and sugarcane.	Increased heat stress, dehydration, and health issues for workers.
2	**Unseasonal Rains (43% rise since 2010)**	Damages standing crops, reduces harvest quality.	Leads to sudden job losses and unpaid work.
3	**Droughts (Frequent in Marathwada & Vidarbha)**	Reduce water availability for irrigation, lower crops yield.	Fewer work opportunities, Increased migration to cities.
4	**Cyclones and Floods (Rise in Kokan & Western Maharashtra)**	Destroy coastal agriculture, soil erosion and infrastructure.	Displacment of agricultural labourers, loss of homes and income.

Sources: Maharashtra State Climate Action Plan (2023)

The above table no. 6 shows the Climate Change impact on Agricultural Labourers in Maharashtra from 2011 to 2023. Rising temperatures are leading to heat-related illnesses and lower productivity in farm labourers. Unseasonal rains and droughts are making employment unpredictable, forcing many labourers into seasonal migration. Frequent cyclones and floods in Konkan and Western Maharashtra are displacing thousands of rural workers.

7. Lack of Skill Development and Alternative Employment Opportunities:

Most agricultural labourers lack formal education and vocational skills, limiting their ability to shift to higher-paying jobs in non-agricultural sectors. Only 10% of agricultural workers in Maharashtra have received any form of skill training (NSSO 2023). Government-run skill development programs have limited reach, and many labourers remain unaware of their benefits.

Table No. 7
Alternative Employment Opportunities for Agricultural Labourers

Sr. No.	Alternative Sector	% of Agricultural Labourers Shifting to This Sector	Challenges in Transition
1	**Construction**	25%	Low wages, lack of safety measures, seasonal employment.
2	**Textile & Handloom**	12%	Limited training, lack of government support.
3	**Small Scale Manufacturing**	8%	Skill gap, preference for experienced workers.
4	**Self-Employment (Shops, Dairy, Poultry, etc.)**	5%	Lack of capital and market access.
5	**Service Sector (Hotels, Retail, Security, etc.)**	3%	Requires formal skills, only available in cities.

Sources: The Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2022-23

The above table no. 7 shows the Lack of Skill Development and Alternative Employment Opportunities in Maharashtra from 2011 to 2023. 25% of agricultural labourers have shifted to construction, but face poor wages and unsafe working conditions. Self-employment options like dairy and poultry remain underdeveloped, as workers lack financial support and training.

Suggestions to the Problems faced by Agricultural Labourers in Maharashtra:

1. **Increase Wages:** Implement a minimum wage policy for agricultural labourers to ensure they earn a living wage.
2. **Improve Working Conditions:** Enforce strict safety measures and provide protective gear to agricultural labourers.

3. **Expand Social Security:** Increase coverage of social security schemes, such as pension and health insurance, for agricultural labourers.
4. **Enhance MGNREGA:** Increase the number of workdays provided under MGNREGA and ensure timely payment of wages.
5. **Skill Development:** Implement vocational training programs to equip agricultural labourers with skills for alternative employment opportunities.
6. **Rural Development:** Invest in rural infrastructure, such as roads, storage facilities, and markets, to improve the overall rural economy.
7. **National Agricultural Labour Policy:** Develop a comprehensive national policy to address the issues faced by agricultural labourers.
8. **State-Level Initiatives:** Encourage state governments to launch initiatives to improve the working conditions, wages, and social security of agricultural labourers.

By implementing these suggestions, the government and other stakeholders can work towards improving the lives of agricultural labourers in Maharashtra and ensuring a sustainable agricultural economy.

Conclusion:

Agricultural labourers play a crucial role in Maharashtra's rural economy, yet they continue to face multiple challenges, including low wages, seasonal employment, lack of social security, poor working conditions, and limited skill development opportunities. These issues have led to high migration rates, job insecurity, and socio-economic instability among rural workers. To address these challenges, holistic policy reforms and effective implementation of existing government schemes are essential. Expanding vocational training centers, promoting agro-based industries, strengthening labour laws, and ensuring fair wages will improve their financial stability. Additionally, providing social security benefits such as health insurance, pension schemes, and education support can enhance their quality of life.

Moreover, climate change and natural disasters pose severe risks to agricultural labourers, making it imperative to adopt sustainable farming techniques, disaster relief programs, and water conservation methods. Encouraging cooperative farming, rural entrepreneurship, and self-employment opportunities can also help in reducing dependence on traditional farm labour.

References:
Books:
1. Deshpande, R. S. (2021). Agrarian Crisis and Farmers' Distress in Maharashtra. Springer.
2. Chand, R. (2020). Development of Agriculture and Rural Economy in India. Sage Publications.
3. Sharma, H. (2022). Employment and Labour Markets in Rural India. Routledge.
4. Joshi, P. K., & Pal, S. (2019). Agricultural Labour and Rural Development in India. Academic Foundation.
Journals:
1. Indian Journal of Labour Economics
2. Economic and Political Weekly (EPW)
3. Journal of Rural Development (JRD)
4. Agricultural Economics Research Review (AERR)
5. International Journal of Social Economics.
Reports:
1. Economic Survey of Maharashtra 2023-24.
2. National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) (2023).
3. Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2023.
4. NABARD. (2022