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Problems of Agriculture Labor in India

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Abstract:

Agricultural labor plays a vital role in the Indian economy, particularly as agriculture remains a primary source of livelihood for a significant portion of the population. However, the sector faces numerous challenges that hinder productivity, sustainability, and rural development. This paper explores the multifaceted problems associated with agricultural labor in India, including low wages, seasonal unemployment, lack of job security, poor working conditions, and the absence of social security measures. Additionally, the migration of rural youth to urban areas in search of better employment opportunities has led to labor shortages during peak agricultural seasons, further exacerbating the issue.

This research paper emphasizes the need to implement comprehensive policy reforms that improve working conditions, ensure fair wages, and promote skill development among agricultural workers. Strengthening institutional support and encouraging inclusive rural development are essential for creating a sustainable and equitable agricultural labor ecosystem in India. The paper concludes with recommendations aimed at alleviating the persistent challenges faced by agricultural laborers and enhancing the overall efficiency of the agricultural sector.

Keywords: Indian Agricultural, Indian Labors, Indian Agriculture Labor Force, Indian Agricultural Labour Problems,

Introduction:

Agricultural labor in India is a crucial element of the nation's economy, employing millions of people across the agricultural sector. As an agriculture-driven economy, India sees its agricultural sector as the largest employer, with approximately 50% of its workforce engaged in it. The agricultural labor force is essential to India's economy, playing a significant role in ensuring food security and fostering economic growth. The agricultural sector in India is defined by a sizable workforce, comprising individuals in various roles, such as laborers, farmers, and other related positions. This sector also experiences considerable regional and seasonal diversity, with different crops and farming methods being prevalent in various areas. Despite its significance, the agricultural sector in India encounters numerous obstacles, including poverty, unemployment, and exploitation, which affect the lives and livelihoods of agricultural workers. Gaining insight into the issues and challenges faced by agricultural labor is vital for crafting effective policies and interventions aimed at enhancing their quality of life. This necessitates a thorough understanding of the agricultural labor market, including demographics, employment trends, and working conditions.

The agricultural labor pool in India represents a substantial segment of the overall workforce. According to the Periodic Labor Force Survey (PLFS) conducted by the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) for the years 2022-2023, agriculture and related sectors employed 45.76% of India's workforce. This figure corresponds to a considerable number of individuals, given India's large population, which exceeds 1.4 billion. To further categorize, around 53% of India's population is involved in agricultural work, encompassing both farmers and laborers. While India possesses a vast agricultural labor force, I could not locate the precise number of agricultural workers in the country. The data available offer percentage figures and ratios of the workforce in agriculture, but do not provide an absolute number. For those in search of more extensive data or specific statistics on agricultural labor in India, it may be beneficial to consult reports from distinguished sources such as the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO), the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, or global organizations such as the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations.

Definitions of Agriculture Labor:

1. Ministry of Labor and Employment, Government of India

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"Agricultural laborers" means any person who works in agriculture, either as a wage earner or as a self-employed person, and includes:

2. Census of India

"Agricultural laborers" are defined as people who work on another person's land or farm for wages, whether in cash or kind, and include.

3. National Commission on Rural Labor

Agricultural laborers" is defined as a person who:

- Works on another person's land or farm for wages, whether in cash or kind.
- Works on own land or farm, but depends on others for employment or livelihood.
- Works in agriculture-related activities, such as livestock, forestry, or fisheries.

Objectives

1. To study the problems of agricultural labor.
2. To study the pattern of employment of agricultural labor.
3. To suggest measures for improving the conditions of agricultural labor.

Research Methodology

The analysis was primarily based on secondary data sources. Secondary data were collected from various studies. Additional information will be collected from books, journals, Gov. Publication, Library, and the Internet.

Hypothesis:

1. Agricultural labors face socio-economic problems.
2. The conditions of agricultural labors can be improved through various measures.

Agriculture Labor Force in India:

Sr. No.	Category	Number (in millions)	Percentage of Total Workforce
1	Total Agricultural Labor Force	263.2	45.76%
2	Male Agricultural Labor	173.4	52.4%
3	Female Agricultural Labor	89.8	47.6%
4	Rural Agricultural Labor	234.5	83.2%
5	Urban Agricultural Labor	28.7	16.8%
6	Main Workers (Agricultural Labor)	193.2	73.4%
7	Marginal Workers (Agricultural Labor)	70.0	26.6%

Source: National Sample Survey Office (NSSO), Periodic Labor Force Survey (PLFS) 2022-2023.

Problems of Agriculture Labor:

Agricultural laborers in India face numerous challenges that affect their livelihoods, well-being, and productivity. Some of the important problems faced by agricultural laborers in India are as follows-

1. Low Wages and Lack of Job Security:

Agricultural workers frequently receive very low wages, ranging from ₹100 to ₹150 per day. This situation contributes to poverty, malnutrition, and a cycle of indebtedness, as many are hired on temporary or seasonal basis, leaving them with no job security and at risk of exploitation.

2. Poor Working Conditions:

The working conditions for agricultural laborers are often perilous- as they are exposed to harmful pesticides, fertilizers, and various chemicals. They also endure physical strain, heat stress, and other health risks related to their occupation, and many do not benefit from social security programs such as pensions, health insurance, or maternity benefits.

3. Lack of Education and Skills:

Access to education and skill development is typically very limited for agricultural workers, hindering their ability to enhance livelihoods and escape poverty. Many of these laborers migrate to cities seeking employment, leaving their families and communities, which can result in social and cultural dislocation.

4. Debt and Indebtedness:

Agricultural workers frequently incur debt to satisfy their fundamental needs, creating a persistent cycle of poverty and indebtedness. With restricted access to credit and financial services, it has become challenging for them to invest in their livelihoods and enhance their productivity.

5. Vulnerability to Climate Change:

Agricultural workers are particularly susceptible to the consequences of climate change, such as rising temperatures, altered rainfall patterns, and a greater frequency of natural disasters.

6. Exposure to Pesticides and Chemicals:

The exposure of agricultural laborers to toxic pesticides and chemicals can lead to severe health issues, including cancer and neurological damage. Furthermore, they often have limited access to healthcare services, which complicates their ability to treat work-related injuries and illnesses.

7. Child Labor and Bonded Labor:

The issue of child labor remains prevalent in Indian agriculture, with numerous children working in dangerous settings and missing educational opportunities. Bonded labor, or debt bondage, represents a form of forced labor in which individuals are compelled to repay debts.

8. Social Exclusion and Discrimination:

Agricultural workers frequently encounter social exclusion and discrimination, especially those

hailing from marginalized groups, such as Dalits and Adivasis.

9. Limited Access:

Access to technology and equipment is usually restricted to agricultural laborers, making it difficult for them to boost their productivity and efficiency. Furthermore, they often struggle to access markets, which hinder their ability to sell their produce at equitable prices.

10. Exploitation by Middlemen:

Agricultural laborers are often taken advantage of by middlemen who exploit their lack of knowledge and bargaining power.

Suggestions to improve the conditions of agricultural labor:

1. Implementing Sustainable Agriculture Practices:

Promoting organic farming entails reducing reliance on synthetic chemicals and fertilizers, encouraging natural composting, and utilizing crop rotation methods. By offering training and resources to local farmers, we can enhance the soil health, boost biodiversity, and grow healthier crops. Possible initiatives could include workshops, subsidies for organic materials, and the establishment of local markets for organic goods. Incorporating renewable energy sources such as solar panels, wind turbines, and bioenergy into farming practices can greatly reduce carbon emissions and energy expenses for farmers. Providing incentives and making affordable technology accessible will enable farmers to implement these clean energy options, promote sustainable development, and decrease their reliance on non-renewable resources.

2. Enhancing Labor Laws and Enforcement:

Revising current labor regulations is necessary to guarantee fair compensation, safe work environments, and manageable working hours for every worker. This also involves filling gaps in protections for workers in the informal and gig economy, strengthening job security rights, and adhering to international labor standards. Increasing the frequency and effectiveness of workplace inspections is crucial for ensuring that labor standards are met. This requires providing labor departments with adequate resources and trained staff to perform both routine and unannounced inspections. Implementing stringent penalties for breaches and taking immediate action against non-compliance will discourage employers from taking advantage of workers and enhancing overall workplace conditions. Establishing specialized labor courts and tribunals will aid in the quick resolution of conflicts between employers and employees.

3. Providing Social Security Benefits:

The introduction of pension plans for agricultural laborers guarantees financial stability in later years. Considering the seasonal and informal characteristics of agricultural work, such plans should be easily accessible with adaptable contribution options. Government support and streamlined enrollment procedures can promote participation, provide reliable income for workers post-retirement,

and decrease their reliance on daily earnings. Implementing extensive health insurance and medical reimbursement programs for workers can protect them from significant healthcare costs. These programs should encompass hospitalization, ongoing medical conditions, and maternity coverage, ensuring that workers and their families can access essential medical care without facing financial hardships. Making the claims process easier and offering subsidies to low-income workers can improve the reach and impact of these benefits.

4. Promoting Education and Training:

Providing vocational training that emphasizes safe and sustainable agricultural practices helps farmers reduce the risks associated with pesticide applications, machinery use, and soil care. Establishing literacy initiatives for rural populations empowers farmers to obtain and comprehend information on contemporary farming strategies, financial management, and market dynamics. Training in skills development, which includes business management, digital skills, and practices for adding value, can enhance farmers' earnings capabilities and allow them to diversify their income streams effectively. Creating agricultural schools and specialized training centers offers organized education on various farming elements, including crop management, irrigation methods, and animal care.

5. Encouraging Collective Bargaining:

Encouraging collective bargaining enables workers to negotiate salaries, benefits, and working conditions more effectively. Promoting the establishment and functioning of labor unions gives employees a collective voice, allowing them to voice concerns and influence workplace policies. Legal safeguards and streamlined registration procedures for unions can enhance their ability to advocate workers' rights. Creating worker cooperatives and self-help groups allows employees to combine resources, share profits, and have greater oversight of their working environment. These organizations can improve bargaining power, diminish exploitation, and offer access to financing, training, and marketing assistance. Government incentives and support services can enhance the success of such initiatives.

6. Implementing Technology and Mechanization:

Promoting advanced machinery and contemporary agricultural technologies can greatly boost productivity and reduce the need for manual labor. This requires encouraging the adoption of precision farming tools, automated irrigation systems, and drones for crop monitoring. Offering financial incentives, subsidies, and resources for affordable technologies can facilitate a smooth transition for farmers to embrace these advancements. Implementing training sessions on the safe and effective operation of agricultural machinery ensures that farmers can utilize the equipment without the risk of accidents or injuries. Establishing rental services for agricultural machinery can provide access to advanced equipment for small and marginal farmers who may not have the means to purchase it outright.

7. Enhancing Market Access and Fair Prices:

Improving market access requires the development of infrastructure such as rural roads, storage units, and digital platforms, to directly link farmers with buyers. Establishing minimum support prices (MSP) and clear pricing systems protects farmers and laborers from being taken advantage of by intermediaries. Government initiatives should aim to promote fair trading practices, lower input expenses, and ensure that farmers receive a fair portion of their profits. Creating agricultural marketing cooperatives enables farmers to combine resources, negotiate better prices, and enhance their bargaining power.

8. Promoting Women's Empowerment:

Fostering women's participation in leadership positions within communities, cooperatives, and local governance structures ensures that their perspective and requirements are acknowledged. This can be accomplished by allocating reserved seats to women in decision-making panels, offering leadership development programs, and implementing supportive policies that allow women to express their views openly. Providing tailored training initiatives in entrepreneurship, financial management, and leadership skills empowers women with the self-assurance and knowledge necessary to establish and run their enterprises. Establishing self-help groups (SHGs) and cooperatives for women promotes financial autonomy and enhances collective bargaining strength.

9. Encouraging Sustainable Livelihoods:

Promoting sustainable livelihoods requires encouraging of practices that safeguard natural resources while providing reliable income for communities. This can be achieved by supporting agroforestry, ecotourism, and organic farming, in addition to fostering small-scale industries, such as handicrafts and fisheries. Providing training programs that focus on entrepreneurship and business management can equip individuals with the skills necessary to establish and maintain small businesses. The establishment of microfinance institutions and availability of accessible credit services empower small entrepreneurs, particularly in rural areas, to invest in activities that generate income.

10. Encouraging Corporate Social Responsibility:

Promoting the adoption of corporate social responsibility (CSR) within businesses involves incorporating ethical, environmental, and social factors into their operations. Establishing organized CSR programs that concentrate on education, healthcare, environmental protection, and rural advancement can greatly enhance community welfare. Providing training sessions for business executives and staff on CSR and sustainable practices enables them to understand the lasting advantages of ethical business practices.

Conclusion:

Agricultural laborers constitute a large proportion of India's total labor force. Even today, farmers and agricultural laborers in India face many problems, so the government needs to formulate specific policies to improve the economic conditions of these agricultural laborers.

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Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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