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MAGNITUDE OF AGRICULTURAL LABOUR IN INDIA: SOME OBSERVATIONS

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Abstract:

Indian agriculture has been changing over the decades. The number of agricultural labour in India has been increasing over the decades. The impact of globalization on Indian agriculture was seen at different level. The size of agricultural labour also has affected and it has showed an increase over the years. The phase of globalization has affected all the classes of the Indian society.

Keywords: agricultural labour, globalization, rural labour, workforce participation

1. Introduction:

Indian agriculture has been an important sector for large majority of the rural households. The agriculture was providing food and fodder to huge section of the society. Indian agriculture was contributing major part to the gross domestic product. After the globalization (1991), Indian agriculture has changed at its different level. The earning, occupation and labour all factors have changed. The agricultural labour force also affected by the globalization. The magnitude of the agricultural labour in India has changed. The rural households, with agricultural land and without agricultural land, have got affected. There is a slide difference in the meaning of rural labour and agricultural labour. According to the Labour Enquiry Report (1999-2000), a rural labour is that, who works manually in agriculture sector or non-agricultural sector, but works in the rural area. As against his/her manual work, he/she is paid. Whereas, an agricultural labour is that worker, who works in agriculture sector engaged in farming or allied activities related to farming. As against this work, he or she is paid in cash or kind. Thus, agricultural labour is only related to agriculture sector and rural labour is related to agriculture and non-agricultural activities. This paper explains the magnitude of agricultural labour and position of rural labour, especially after the globalization.

2. Objectives of the Study:

- 2.1 To take review of the magnitude of agricultural labour in India
- 2.2 To explore the position of agricultural labour in India
- 2.3 To explain the extent of rural labour based on social groups in India.

3. Hypothesis of the Study:

- 3.1 The magnitude of agricultural labour has been increasing over the years.
- 3.2 There was high representation from the weaker sections of Indian society among the total population of rural labour force.
- 3.3 The economic position of agricultural labour has been unsatisfactory.

4. Literature Review:

Pandey S.M. (1974) has argued that, the incidence of rural unemployment is much less in agriculturally less developed states of India, however in the same states the incidence of poverty was comparatively higher. Ranjan Kumar Som (1983) has argued that, the agricultural labour has shifted to non-agricultural jobs, which were less productive due to the change in the employment pattern in India. The wage rate agricultural was not rising and the supply of labour was quite higher than the demand for labour. This resulted into fall in the agricultural labour in India. Singh and Pankaj Kumar (2014) have argued that, the rural employment in the farm sector has declined over the years, especially for male labour. As against this, the rural women labour were comparatively in better situation in case of employment. Rukmini Thapa and Satyam Kumar Yadav (2015) have argued that, labour migration in India has been increasing over the years, especially the rural labour are migrating in search better waged jobs.

5. Methodology:

The present research analysis is based on the secondary data. The published reports of the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (2017), (GOI), Economic Survey of India (2017) (GOI) and Report on Rural Labour Enquiry (2011) have been used to analyze the data. Besides these, the researcher also has used other published books and research articles for the analysis.

6. Analysis of Data and Result:

Indian agriculture has been the backbone of Indian economy for the last several decades and still it sustains, especially in case of work force participation. Indian agriculture was once contributing highest in case of gross domestic product and employment. However the process of industrialization has emerged as faster sector, the significance of agriculture sector has reduced to considerable level. The globalization process also has made industry and service sector faster in terms of growth. As a result of this, the Indian agriculture has occupied lower position than other two sectors. In the year 2005-06, Indian agriculture was contributing 20 per cent of the total gross domestic product, which further declined to 18.4 per cent in the year 2019-20. Once it was measured as 55 per cent in the year 1951-52. In spite of the continuous fall in the share of agriculture sector in Indian economy, the Indian agriculture has remained major source of employment for the large section of the people of India.

The Indian agriculture was being practiced with the help of agricultural labour. The cultivators are hiring the agricultural labour force for the work related to agriculture. There are different types of agricultural labour force. Datta and Sundaram (2008) and other authors have classified agricultural labour into four categories. They are-

- i) the landless labourers attached to the landlords
- ii) landless labourers , permanently independent but works exclusively for others
- iii) petty farmers with tiny land, but works for others
- iv) farmers with economic holdings, but due to more dependents, works for others

According to Table No.1, the total employment in agricultural sector in India was measured as 63 per cent of the total workforce in the year 1992. This decreased to 59 per cent in the year 2002. This decrease was measured as 4 per cent of the total employment in agricultural sector. Further in the year 2010 and 2016, the employment in agriculture sector declined to 52 per cent and 45 per cent respectively. Finally, in the year 2019, this employment was measured as 43 per cent of the total workforce. Over the period of 27 years, the extent of employment in agriculture sector decreased by almost 20 per cent of the total workforce. The declining trend in workforce participation in agriculture sector shows that, there has been shift of labour force in other type of work. Despite of these all, the agriculture sector has remained one important sector in case employment generation for rural labour force.

Table No.1
Employment in Agriculture Sector (in per cent of the total workforce)

Year	Employment in Agriculture Sector (in per cent of the total workforce)	Fall in Employment as compared to the last decade/period, in which it was measured (in per cent of the total workforce)
1992	63	-
2002	59	4
2010	52	7
2016	45	7
2019	43	2

Source: Compiled from the World Bank Data (2022)

The magnitude of agricultural labour was increasing over the years. The social and economic position of the labour force was becoming weak. They have been living with lower socio-economic status. The landless labourers, who were attached to the landlords, had worst socio-economic condition. According to the National Commission on Rural Labour (1991), the agricultural labour force constituted around 77 per cent of the rural labour force. This shows that, rural labour force was employed in agriculture sector. There was insignificant size of rural labour force, who was engaged in non-agricultural work. The National Commission on Rural Labour (1991) also has pointed out that, there has been drastic increase in the magnitude of agricultural labour force over the years. This increase was a result of technological advancement in agriculture, marginalization of farmers, destruction of traditional cottage industries and other related factors. Census of India (2011) also has given data on the magnitude of the agricultural labour force. According to it, magnitude of agricultural workers in India has increased over the years. In the year 2001-02, the total agricultural labour force was measured as 234 million, which increased to 263.1 million in the year 2011. This means that, the rise in number of agricultural labour force was more than double. This Census data includes cultivators, small farmers, marginal farmers and agricultural labour. In case of number of agricultural labour force in India over the decades, the Census of India (2011) has explained this trend. According to this census, the total number of agricultural labour in India was measured as 47.5 million in the year 1971, which increased to 55.5 million in the year 1981. Further in the year 1991, it increased to 106 million. This rate of increase shows that, the number of agricultural labour in India increased more than double in last thirty years. (Table No.2)

Table No.2
Magnitude of Agriculture Labour in India (in Millions)

Year	Agriculture Labour (in Millions)	Actual increase compared to the last decade
1992	47	-
2002	55	8
2010	74	19
2016	106	32
2019	127	21

Source: Compiled from Census of India (2011), World Bank Data (2020)

The Report on Rural Labour Enquiry (2011) has studied the position of rural labour force in the recent period and has drawn some significant conclusions. These conclusions were important on the background of globalization. The report has highlighted the effect of globalization with respect to different social groups in India. Some of the important findings of the report can be given as below.

- i) There had been increase of around 9.55 per cent in the magnitude of rural households in the year 1999-2000, as compared to the year 2004-05.
- ii) In the post-globalization period, there was a rise of different classes in the rural area.
- iii) Out of total rural households, 70 per cent of the households were belonging to agricultural labour households.
- iv) The globalization has mobilized all the classes of Indian society, who moved to non-agricultural occupations.
- v) The magnitude of agricultural labour households declined in the rural area, since they had moved to non-agricultural occupations.
- vi) After the globalization, all the social class households had registered a decline in the agricultural households.
- vii) There was a trend of remaining land as uncultivated due to availability of non-agricultural job opportunities.
- viii) The globalization also had affected the 'Scheduled Castes', 'Scheduled Tribes' and 'Other Backward Castes', where they shifted from agriculture to non-agriculture sector.
- ix) Large majority of 'Scheduled Castes', 'Scheduled Tribes' and 'Other Backward Castes' did not have ownership of land, which was the main reason to leave the agricultural sector (as labour) in search of non-agricultural jobs.
- x) There was a declining trend in the average size of cultivated land in India, especially after the globalization.
- xi) There was trend of changing the occupational pattern in rural area.
- xii) The globalization had affected positively and negatively to Indian society, especially the weaker section of the society.

7) Conclusion:

Indian agriculture was a sector, where large number of labour force was employed. This situation was continued for the decades, but as the emergence of globalization started, the Indian agriculture situation started to change. The globalization has affected the positively and negatively. The magnitude of agricultural labour in India has changed. The size of the agricultural labour has increased. This shows that, the Indian agriculture has been moving through challenging phase.

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