

Agricultural Laborers and Cooperative

Jyoti Chaudhary*

M.Sc. (Physics), M.A. (Education), UCG-NET (Education)

*Assistant Teacher, Basic Education Department, Unnao, Uttar Pradesh, India.

Agriculture is a highly labor intensive activity and agriculture contributes significantly to the economy of India. The agriculture sector is the focal point of national goals such as food-security and development, as well as being highly labour-intensive, according to the 2011 census, more than 55 percent of the country's labor force is employed in this sector. Due to the important role of agriculture in the Indian economy, farmers and agricultural laborers are also an important part of the country's economy. In the year 1950-51, the contribution of agriculture in India's GDP was 51.81 percent, which is currently 18.3 percent of the contribution of agriculture and allied sectors. Farmers and agricultural laborers make their invaluable contribution to the country's economy, but how much they are able to develop themselves is a big question. The condition and direction of agricultural laborers is not proportional to India's development, but inversely proportional. As India is moving towards modernity, the condition of agricultural laborers is getting pathetic day by day.

On the other hand, the need for a co-operative movement is increasing day by day from the oldest movements of India started for rural development, welfare of farmers and agricultural labourers. The aim of the cooperative movement from the very beginning was to strengthen the condition of the vast rural community. Indebtedness due to paucity of funds was always a matter of concern for the farmers living in the rural environment of the country. Along with this, there was lack of other basic infrastructure problems related to agriculture like storage, transportation, irrigation etc. The then main objective of developing cooperative societies was to reduce the dependence of poor farmers and agricultural laborers on local landlords, moneylenders and traders. They used to give loans to farmers and agricultural laborers at very high interest rates and in case of non-payment of loans, they used to do bad things like exploitation, bonded labor and land grabbing. As a redressal mechanism, the co-operative movement emerged. At present, after the formation of a separate Ministry of Cooperatives at the Center, cooperatives have once again become a mainstream subject.

Meaning of agricultural labor- Agricultural laborers account for a major part of the contribution of agriculture to the Indian economy. Agricultural labor refers to such persons, who, for the purpose of earning money, do the work related to the farm of

another farmer, such as plowing the field, harvesting, guarding the orchards, gardening, rearing animals, management of bees and poultry and Engaged in other works related to agricultural life.

In 1950-51, the first Agricultural Labor Inquiry Committee was constituted to investigate the condition and direction of agricultural laborers, which stated that agricultural laborers are those who grow crops instead of paying wages. But a large number of laborers do not come under this purview, so the committee redefined it and said that agricultural laborer is a person who works as a hired laborer for more than half of all the days of his work throughout the year. I keep on

The Second Agricultural Labor Inquiry Committee constituted in 1956-57 widened the scope of agricultural laborers to include those working in the fields, besides those engaged in dairy, poultry, animal husbandry, horticulture, bee keeping, piggery, floriculture is engaged in other types of work.

Categories of Agricultural Laborers – The first Agricultural Labor Inquiry Committee classified agricultural laborers into two different categories. As-

(1) Bonded workers - They are the workers who are attached to any other farming families on the basis of written or oral agreement. These bonded laborers work as per the wishes of their employers and are not free to work at any other place. They work both at home and in the fields of their owners. In a way, they work as agricultural slaves or servants and can also be called bonded labour.

(2) Unattached Labourers- They are the laborers who are free to work in any field on payment of daily wages. These unconnected laborers in India include-

(a) small farmers with very small holdings who spend most of their time working in the fields of others;

(b) landless laborers who work exclusively on other farms;

(c) tenant farmers, who work on leased land but work most of the time on the farms of others;

(d) Share croppers, who also work as agricultural labourers.

Statistics related to agricultural laborers- According to the latest and last census conducted in the year 2011, there has been a significant increase in the number of agricultural laborers in India. In the year 2001 the number of agricultural workers was 234.1 million and in the year 2011 this number increased to 263.1 million. In this population, the number of agricultural laborers (landless or marginal land workers)

was 106.8 million in 2001, which increased to 144.3 million in 2011. On the other hand, the population of cultivators was 127.3 million and in 2011 it increased to 118.8 million. So we can conclude that the number of agricultural laborers in India is much more than the number of cultivators in India.

Current condition of agricultural laborers- If we talk about agricultural laborers engaged in Indian agriculture, then they come in the unorganized sector. The unorganized sector is the sector in which the terms and conditions of employment are not regular. These are not registered with the government and are not fully bound to follow the guidelines and regulations of the government. Agricultural workers almost entirely form part of the unorganized or informal sector labor force because of their low literacy and consequently low skills. The direct result of this specialty of agricultural laborers is that they lack the power to protect their statutory rights. As a result, they are also deprived of getting the minimum wages fixed by the Minimum Wages Act. Presently, the main conditions of agricultural laborers are as follows-

(1) Bad economic condition- The economic condition of agricultural laborers is very pathetic. The wages in the agriculture sector are very low, and there are more possibilities of exploitation, such as giving less wages for doing more work, getting work done more than the stipulated time, getting work done other than agriculture, etc. The low income has made life hell for him and his family. Their income forces them to live below the poverty line.

(2) Employment problem- Most of the agricultural laborers get work for less than 3 months, while some get work for 5 months in a year, some for 7 months in a year and some agricultural laborers get work for 9 months. For the rest of the months, they either remain unemployed or exploit themselves for two meals a day.

(3) Indebtedness- Indebtedness is also the problem of agricultural laborers. Most of the agricultural laborers take loans from big farmers, moneylenders, moneylenders etc. to meet their essential needs. Almost every agricultural worker takes a loan for marriage, funeral etc., which he is never able to repay completely. That's why big farmers, moneylenders, moneylenders etc exploit him in return.

(4) Unsanitary working conditions- The working conditions of agricultural laborers are very inconvenient and unsafe. They work in very difficult conditions without proper safety arrangements and equipment. Mostly there is pressure to finish the work in less time. There is an excess of work, the hours of work are very long, there is a lack of facilities like leave etc.

(5) Low standard of living- The standard of living of agricultural laborers is also very low. More than 75 percent of their income is spent on food etc. There is always lack of

facilities like clothes, house, medicine etc. They usually do not get enough clothes and do not have safe houses to live in.

(6) Lack of organization - Most of the agricultural laborers are landless laborers, marginal and small farmers, who are illiterate, ignorant and unable to form any 'organization' to meet their demands due to being spread in different parts of the country. Are. Due to their lack of organization they are unable to do anything to increase their wages, stop unemployment, fix working days and hours.

(7) Lack of other means of income- Apart from agriculture, there is a great lack of ancillary businesses and other means of income in rural areas. These agricultural laborers cannot use other business or other means of income due to non-availability of work in the fields, crop failure, frost, flood, famine or drought etc.

Measures to improve the condition of agricultural laborers- One of the major tasks that the Government of India paid attention to after attaining independence was to pay attention to the welfare of agricultural laborers. Various measures have been taken by the government from time to time to improve the condition of the agricultural laborers, such as by fixing the limit of holdings by the government, making arrangements to distribute the surplus land among the landless agricultural laborers, setting up of cottage and small scale industries in the rural areas by the government. Efforts to promote development, in the year 1975, the end of bonded labor system, the most perverted form of labor, in the year 1975 itself, the announcement of freeing small farmers, landless agricultural laborers and artisans from the loans of moneylenders etc. etc. But due to the absence of any structural permanent system, it has not been possible to completely redress the problems of agricultural laborers. For which the government can make a permanent effort to improve the condition and direction of the agricultural laborers through the cooperative movement.

Efforts for agricultural labor through cooperatives- Cooperative societies have a special significance for India. Individuals who want to work together for a common economic objective can form a co-operative society. It is a voluntary association of persons who work for their common economic interests. Co-operative societies work on the principle of self-help and mutual help. Co-operatives can be defined as an autonomous association of individuals united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations through jointly owned and democratically controlled enterprise. The principles and values give a unique character to a co-operative organisation, which is not found in a private enterprise. Cooperatives are socio-economic organizations that have community service as an essential ethos and are not driven solely by profit motive. They are mainly meant to help the poorer sections of the society.

Agricultural cooperatives in India can play an important role in organizing agricultural laborers and small farmers. Presently prevailing system has made agriculture, farmers and agricultural laborers all three problematic, while cooperation based production and utilization is the only practical solution to the problem of agriculture, farmers and agricultural laborers. One of the main reasons for the poverty of our agricultural laborers is the absence of rural industries and cottage industries. Agricultural laborers spend a major part of the year in unemployment. Cooperatives play an important role in the promotion of small scale industries. Cooperatives will not only benefit agricultural laborers individually, but villages and all villagers can be made self-sufficient, as well as migration of people from villages to cities can also be stopped.

For this, the government should promote small scale and cottage industries at the local level through cooperatives and arrange necessary training related to it. Since cooperatives are basically a state subject, the state governments should take new steps in this regard, so that more and more agricultural laborers can join the cooperative movement and find new hopes and opportunities for livelihood.

The co-operative movement has the potential to redress, revive and make it permanent the problems of agriculture, farmers and agricultural workers. There is a need to form new cooperatives targeting agricultural laborers so that they can work for the welfare of agricultural laborers and provide them with the right to a dignified life as mentioned in the Constitution of India, as well as new opportunities for employment and income generation, reasonable interest rates as per requirement. But credit, efforts to improve working conditions, can provide a stable and strong organization. Only by following the basic spirit of the cooperative movement 'Sahkar Se Samriddhi' can we bring a radical change in the lives of agricultural laborers and their families.
