

A study on “Agricultural Labour Problems and Prospects in Bongaigaon district of Assam”

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Abstract:

Most of the agricultural laborers are living in backward rural areas of India. Agricultural labourers are that person who tills the soil of others for wages. They possess no skill or training; they have no alternative employment opportunities. So, agricultural labour is counted as the category of unorganized sector, as a result their income is not fixed. They have been suffering from various problems. To study the agricultural labour mainly; Social status of agricultural labourers, to the economic conditions of agricultural labourers, to the magnitude of agricultural labourers, to the income distribution pattern of agricultural labourers. This paper includes problem and prospects of agricultural labourers, government steps and suggestion for improving the conditions of agricultural labourer's. Lastly, the conditions of agricultural labourers are so pathetic in Bongaigaon district of Assam. The State Government should take proper steps for improving the conditions of agricultural labour.

Key words: *Agricultural Labour, Problems, Prospects, Social status, Economic condition, and Pathetic*

1. Introduction

Agricultural labour is an important segment of rural society of India. As we know that more than 70 percent population of Assam are getting their means of livelihood from agricultural sector. About 64 percent of the total workers in Assam are agricultural workers. But agriculture sector is still depending on the gamble of monsoon. If monsoon is good then production of crops is good and vice versa. Agricultural labourers are that

person who tills the soil of others for wages. They possess no skill or training; they have no alternative employment opportunities. So, agricultural labour is counted as the category of unorganized, bonded, low social status, as a result their income is not fixed. Hence, they are living a life of abject poverty with full uncertainty. So, agricultural labour problems arise in the district. Thus, both disguised and seasonal unemployment problem increases day by day. Moreover, illiteracy, poverty, lack of training facilities also increases the labour problems.

2. Objectives of the study

The main objectives of the research article are as follows....

- [i] To study the social status of agricultural labourers of Bongaigaon district of Assam.
- [ii] To study the economic conditions of agricultural labourers in the study area.
- [iii] To study the income distribution pattern of agricultural labourers.
- [iv] To study the magnitude of agricultural labourers.

3. Scope of the study

The study on agricultural labour problems and prospects of Bongaigaon district is very important. About 64 percent population is depends on agriculture and allied activities. However, size class of landholdings distribution in the district shows that 66 percent of the total landholdings in the district are less than one hectare which indicates that most of the farmers have less than marginal size class. Due to fragmentation and land alienation there has been 52 percent decrease of cultivators in the workforce in Bongaigaon district, simultaneously the agricultural workers has increased by almost 25 percent compared to the figure for 1991. As a result landless agricultural labour and marginal labour has increasing trend. Government policy has no better work in the district.

4. Research Methodology

The study of agricultural labour problems and prospects of Bongaigaon district of Assam is mainly based on secondary source of data collected from different books of eminent writers, Government publication, Newspapers, Research Journal and Internet etc.

5. Magnitude of Agricultural Labourers

Bongaigaon district was newly created in 1989 from undivided Goalpara district. Total population of Bongaigaon district was 7, 38,804 according to 2011 census. The number of agricultural workers has continuously increased in Bongaigaon district day by day.

According to census report, 1991 the number of agricultural workers was 41,709 persons. As per census report 2001, the total number of agricultural workers has increased to 51,972 persons which were only 17.72 percent of the total working population. Again, as per 2011 census, the total number of agricultural workers has increased to 57,407 persons which constituted nearly 22.44 percent of the total working population in Bongaigaon district of Assam (Shows in the following figure). Moreover, landless agricultural labour and marginal agricultural labour has increased due to flood and erosion. In Bongaigaon district about 66 percent of the total rural households either have no land or hold uneconomic holdings less than one (01) hectare.

Figure: Information about agricultural labour in Bongaigaon District.

Census Year	Number of Cultivator	Number of Agricultural Labour
1991	1,36,744	41,566
2001	1,13,791	51,972
2011	83,442	57,407

Source: Statistical Handbook Assam, 1997, 2010 & 2012.

6. Causes of growth of Agricultural labour

There are many causes of growth of agricultural labour in Bongaigaon district of Assam.

The main causes are as follows.....

[i] Increase in population: The population of Bongaigaon district has increased at a very rapid pace compared to the other district of Assam. The growth of population has become one of the most important constraints on the economic development process. Therefore, due to the increases in population, people were engaged in agriculture for their livelihood. Thus, increase in population is one of the major causes of growth in the number of agricultural labourers.

[ii] Decline of cottage industries and village handicrafts: Due to decline of cottage industries and village handicrafts the people were forced to seek employment as agricultural workers in the country side.

[iii] Eviction of small farmers and tenants from land: With increase in the number of intermediaries' Indian agriculture becomes subsistence farming. As a result, the land started slipping out of the hands of the small farmers and they were forced works as

agricultural labourers. As a result, majority of the people falls in the category of agricultural labour.

[iv] Uneconomic holdings: The process sub-division along with growing fragmentation of lands due to the law of inheritance and decline of joint family system has continued unabated for a long period of time. Particularly in Bongaigaon district, the size of holdings is very small and uneconomic due to the unrelenting pressure of population and lack of alternative employment opportunities outside agriculture, the size of holdings has become very small size. As a result, farmers work on these holdings and find difficult to meet both ends. Therefore, they are forced to work on the farms of big landlords as agricultural labourers.

[v] Increase in indebtedness: The increasing indebtedness of small farmers in rural areas is also responsible for increasing the number of agricultural workers. There is lack of adequate financial facilities for the farmers in Bongaigaon district and thus they have to depend on village money lenders and mahajans, who charge exorbitant rates of interest. Thus, the farmers are reduced to the status of agricultural labourers.

7. Problems of Agricultural Labour

Agricultural labourers the most exploited unorganized class in the rural population of Bongaigaon district. The level of income, standard of living the rate of wages remained abnormally low. Agricultural labour faces various types of problems. The main problems are as given below.....

[i] Marginalization of Agricultural Workers: In agricultural sector, proportion of cultivators and agricultural labour is completely opposite direction. It shows that cultivators are decreasing but agricultural labour is increasing day by day in the rural areas of Bongaigaon district. Totally, the agricultural sector is on marginalized. This fact indicates that fast pace of casualisation of workforce in agriculture in Bongaigaon district of Assam.

[ii] Wage and Income: Wage and Income of agricultural workers are very low in Assam. The first Agricultural Labour Enquiry Committee mentioned that the per capita annual income of agricultural household was as poor as Rs. 104 in 1950-51 and annual average

income was Rs. 447. After introduction of green revolution the level of income of middle and rich farmers increased but at the same time real wage has been declined due to fall in the demand for labour.

[iii] Employment and Working conditions: The agricultural labourers are facing the problems of employment and underemployment as there is no alternative source of employment. There is no regulation in favor of agricultural workers. Workers will have to work from dawn to dusk as there is no fixed hour of work and provisions for leave and other benefits.

[iv] Growing Indebtedness: As the level of income of the agricultural labourers is very poor thus they are seeking loan from village money lenders continuously and become bonded labourers ultimately.

[v] Landlord-labourer relationship: Landlord-labourer relationship is not so healthy in India.

8. Policy undertaken by the Government for Removal Agricultural Labour Problems

In order to improve the condition of agricultural labourers can be considered under the following headings:

[i] Abolition of bonded labour: In order to remove agrarian slavery after independence Indian constitution has undertaken measures to abolish the practice of bonded labour. Considering the various estimates of bonded labourers, a large number of bonded labourers are yet to be liberated in India.

[ii] Minimum wage Act: In 1948, the Minimum wages Act was passed and state Government were advised to fix the minimum wages accordingly. But due to the excessive supply of labour, lack of organization among rural workers, uneconomic holdings etc. agricultural labourers could not reap much benefit out of this Act.

[iii] Distribution of land to landless labourers: After passing legislation for fixing ceiling on land holdings, state Government acquired surplus lands and distributed it among the landless labourers. But most of these lands distributed are found for cultivation.

[iv] Provision for Housing Site: Various States have passed necessary legislation for providing housing site to agricultural labourers. The Second and Fourth plan have undertaken various steps for this purpose. Again under Minimum Needs Programme and 20 point Programme high priority is being attached to rural house site-cum-house construction scheme.

[v] Various Employment Schemes: For providing alternative source of employment among the agricultural labourers various schemes have already been launched by both the central and the state Government. These include Rural Works Programme (RWP), Crash Schemes for Rural Employment (CSRE), Employment Guarantee Scheme (EGS), Food for Work Programme (FWP), National Rural Employment Programme (RLEGP) and Jawahar Rozgar Yojana (JRY) etc.

[vi] Special Agencies: During the Fourth Plan two special agencies – Small Farmers Development Agency (SFDA) and Marginal Farmers and Agricultural Labourers Development Agency (MFAL) were developed for conducting various works.

[vii] 20 - point Programme: The Government introduced the 20-point programme in July 1975 for improving the economic condition of landless workers and other weaker section of the society in the rural areas.

9. Finding

The major finding of agricultural labour problem in Bongaigaon district is given below.

[i] It is found that most of the agricultural labour family has no proper knowledge of family Planning. As a result high birth rate takes place and proportion of land holding decreases.

[ii] Practice of early marriage is major problem which is found among the agricultural labour family. They want large family, because they think only a large size family will help them to improve their economic conditions.

[iii] Low literacy rate is found among the people of agricultural labour families.

[iv] Due to uneconomic holdings, flood and erosion many people have become landless labour.

[v] Size of income of the agricultural labourers is very small; they can't fulfill their basic needs.

- [vi] Housing facilities of the agricultural labourers is not good.
- [vii] Drinking water facilities are not sufficient.
- [viii] The Government policy does not work better in Bongaigaon district.

10. Suggestion

In order to bring about suitable change in the conditions of agricultural labourers, the several measures can be grouped under two broad types. One type of measures is concerned in their working conditions, and the second pertains to the raising of the level of their living.

1. Improving working conditions: For effecting improvement in their working conditions, the following measures should be adopted.

[i] Working hours of these labourers should be fixed so that they work for a definite period of time only. Besides, during working hours provisions should be made for such essential things as water, rest interval, etc.

[ii] Minimum wages for these labourers should be fixed by law and adequate provisions are made for their enforcement.

[iii] To improve their bargaining power, the agricultural labourers should be organized through the formation of unions of farm labourers under the protection and support of the government.

2. Raising standard of living: In order to raise their standard of living several measures are needed. Among them the major ones may be listed briefly.

[i] Proper provisions of social security services like those connected with hospital, drinking water necessary consumer goods at cheap rates, education, family planning facilities, etc. should be provided.

[ii] Land made available under reclamation and surplus land acquired through the policy of ceiling should be distributed among them.

[iii] To arrange irrigation facilities for dry land.

[iv] Non - agricultural industries should be developed so as to absorb surplus labour.

[v] Housing facilities near their place of work should also be provided.

11. Conclusion

In the conclusion we may conclude that agricultural labourers are the most backward, the most exploited as also the most neglected class of the rural economy. To improve of all the problems and conditions faced by the agricultural labourers, Government take step for policy making but, grass root level worker, or officer not fully utilized them. Without a satisfactory solution of their problems, real and durable progress cannot takes place.

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