
Socio-economic conditions of landless agricultural labourers in Telangana

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Abstract:

The present paper aims to understand the socio-economic conditions of the agricultural labourers of the Gaggupalli village. The study village is located in Armoor mandal in Nizamabad District of Telangana State and the study was conducted during 2015 and 2016. The study village is predominantly dependent on agriculture and allied activities and the irrigation is depends on bore wells for agriculture. The landless labourers from the study village and the migrant laborers from neighboring districts (Medak, Mahbubnagar) are contribute to the economy of this village besides depending on their labour for livelihood. The proximity of this village to the capital city of the state, penetration of capabilities improving agencies like education, health care, modern agricultural tools, transportation and communication etc. have affected the socio cultural, economic and political situation to a large extent. Migration is one of such effects. Thus the paper tries to explain the impact of migration on landless laborers' households in the study village.

Parameters such as the caste, education, health, income, property ownership, household amenities etc. are taken for the study to understand the socio-economic conditions of the labourers. Data was collected by using anthropological techniques like participant observation, interviews, household schedules and case studies. Using statistical tools like SPSS, the interpretation of data was done. It's found that most of the labourers belong to lower castes Mala, Madiga and also backward castes' Kurma, Tenugu and Vaddera and the living conditions of these labourers differ from those of the study village.

Key words: landless labourers, socio-economic conditions, settled labourers, migration, income.

Background:

In Telangana region the large agricultural lands were owned by few upper castes such as Reddy, Velama, and Brahmins for centuries. The lower castes and backward castes ae remained as landless labourers even after independence and despite of many Government policies. The historical background of the region, social hierarchy, caste system itself are the major factors for the uneven distribution of lands among all castes in the region.

In the study village only a single caste Reddy(upper caste) households were controlling the large agricultural lands till 1985. The lower castes Mala, Madiga and the landless households from backward castes Kurma, Yadavs used to work as agricultural labourers for the upper caste landowning farmers. In later periods (i.e. after 1985), majority of the agricultural lands were purchase by lower castes Mala, Madiga and backward castes Kurma and Yadav in the study village. The Mala caste households emerged as the major agricultural farmers after 1990. The Reddy casts sold their large lands for various reasons and migrated to cities, towns and also to abroad in order live a better life style.

Introduction:

In developing countries like India, agriculture and agricultural related activities provide livelihood for the majority of the population in rural areas. The agricultural production is not only depends on the landholding farmers alone but also on the landless labourers who contribute their physical labour. The traditional agricultural practices were mostly confined to manual labour and the intervention of heavy machinery replacing the human labour gradually in recent times in farms activities in agriculture sector. Hence it is important to understand the conditions of agricultural labour and issues related to agricultural labourers.

In agriculture sector, along with other inputs, manual labour plays a significant role. The agricultural sector in India does not provide continuous employment for the agricultural labourers round the year. The continuous employment for landless labourers in agriculture is one of the major problems in the present agrarian scenario. At the same time availability of the labour for agricultural works in peak seasons one of the major problems for the medium and big farmers in rural agrarian sector. Hence this paper throws light in these areas by taking a village as a case.

The farm operations require sufficient number of labour in agricultural seasons for various operations round the year. In rural India agricultural labour play a significant role since the farm activities did not substitute with the complete mechanisation. So the present Indian agrarian sector depends on human labour to a certain extent where the machines are not used for such agricultural works. The Indian agrarian sector constitute majority of the small and marginal farmers and the farm operations are seen with combination of human labour and the machinery in agriculture. The small and marginal farmers also work as agricultural labourers since these groups find agriculture as not viable for many reasons, viz, drought situations, less productivity and unviable conditions in agriculture etc. So they depend on their physical labour most of the times. Even the small and marginal landholding farmers do not afford the high costs on inputs along with the manual labour. So these groups recruit the landless labourers for agricultural operations when they are not affordable to hire machinery on times in agriculture.

Objective of the Study:

The present paper aims to understand the socio-economic conditions of the landless labourers, the employment conditions and the impact of mechanization on employment conditions of the labourers.

Study area and Methodology:

The study conducted in Gaggupally village, Armoor mandal, Nizamabad district in Telangana state. The village located 200 kilo meters away from Hyderabad the state capital. The village is multi-caste in nature and the agriculture is the primary source of livelihood for majority of the population. The data was collected through various combinations of techniques/methods such as household schedules, questionnaires, observation, in-depth interviews, informal interviews and case studies were used to collect the primary data.

Socio-economic conditions of the agricultural labourers:

The landless labourers belong to different castes, such as the majority of the labourers belong to the scheduled castes *Mala*, *Madiga*, and backward castes *Kurma*, *Tenugu* and *Vaddera* in the study village. The landless members from other castes such as Reddy also found work as

agricultural labour in the study village. The landless and marginal farmers from other villages of Medak district who have migrated and settled also work as agricultural labourers in the study village. Most of these settled labourers are belong to scheduled castes *Mala* and backward caste *Tenugu (Muttarashi)*. Most of the *Tenugu* caste members who settled in the village have migrated from the villages of Pedda Shankarampet mandal of Medak a neighboring district. It is observed that the women members from these households contribute their physical labour in agricultural operations along with the other landless labourers from the same village.

There are 46 households which constitute 34.9 percent from total *Mala* population (from total 130 households) are landless and who work as labourers. From *Kurma* caste, out of 22 total households 13 households do not possess agricultural lands and most of them work as labourers. All the nine landless households belong to *Tenugu* caste involve as labourers in agriculture. Interestingly, landless household members from *Reddy caste* also work as agricultural labourers which consists 8.3 percent of the population. The important observation from the study village is that out of total 14 households belong to *Reddy caste*, 11 households do not own agricultural lands and they depend on the daily wage labour either in the farms of *Mala* or *Kurma* castes farmers.

The landless labourers from the other mandals like Nandipet from same district (Nizamabad) work as seasonal agricultural labourers. These landless households are the primary source of labour for the farmers in the village. It is observed that these migrated labourers from other villages found either work as casual labourers or yearly attached labourers. It is observed that the labourers who have migrated work predominantly as agricultural labourers since these labourers do not have any other employment sources at their native places. The labour households migrated to this village mostly belongs to two major castes i.e. *Mala and Tenugu*. It is found that the households which have migrated in the past to this village helped the other household members to migrate to this village for the employment in agriculture.

Housing conditions and basic amenities:

The information related to the living conditions of the labour households both migrated and the labour households from the study village were collected during the study period. It is found that most of them live in rented houses and which are very small to adjust for all the members. These houses belong to the farmers for whom they work most of the times in year. Most of these houses are mostly built with cemented roof or tiles.

Most of these labourers found living in small rooms (in most of the cases, only one or two small rooms) which are hardly to adjust foreven for three to four members. Most of these labour households do not have basic amenities like bathrooms and toilets and drinking water and water for their regular usage. They fetch water from community water tanks and bore wells for drinking and other purposes.

In some cases, these households found without proper electricity connection or no electricity at all. Most of the households found cooking either with the help of kerosene stoves or with traditional hearths. The hygienic conditions of these households found poor when compares to the labourer households belong to the study village. Most of these labourers found residing in rented houses located along with the main road which leads to village where an open drainage runs along with the road.

When it comes to the communication and recreation aspects, almost all the labour households own at least a mobile. Few labour households own television sets (and ceiling fan). The overall households' conditions of the landless households from the same village are better when compared to those labour households migrated and settled in the village from other districts.

Education levels among the labourers:

It is observed that the education and the literacy levels among the landless labourers found very poor. The total number of labourers which constitutes 9.6 per cent from total population of the village found only 4.3 members done their primary education whereas 4.9 percent of them done their secondary school education. Only 2.2 per cent of the members completed their intermediate education and 1.1 per cent of them done their graduation. The significant finding is that 18.4(96) per cent of the labourers are illiterate.

Table 1: Education status agriculture labourers

Education	Agriculture labourers	
	Number of persons	%
1 - 5 class	9	7.14
6 - 10 Class	17	13.4
Inter/Diploma	3	2.3
UG	1	0.79
PG	0	0
Illiterate	96	76.1
Total	126	100

Source: field work (2015-2016).

It can be understood that, most of the members even did not complete their primary schooling and very fewer members did their secondary school education. It shows that these labourers did not have proper education. The similar situations can be seen with most of labourers all over Telangana region who belong to backward and scheduled castes.

The children from these labour households found going to study in Government primary School located in the village. It's hardly found the children from these households go to corporate schools for education. Whereas the children from landless households belong to the village found studying in corporate schools in the Armour town.

It is found that these labour households spend an average of 30000 rupees on their health problems per a year. When they get some major health issues they spend more than rupees 30000. Whenever they need money in urgency they borrow on interest from the farmers or employers for whom they work. They repay the amount either at a time or in installments. Some of these labour households found having debts where they borrow money for different purposes such as for marriages in the family, for health related problems and for other ceremonies etc.

Marital status of the labourers:

Table 2: Marital status of the agricultural labourers

Status	Number of persons	%
Married	111	88.09
Unmarried	15	11.9
Total	126	100

Source: Field work 2015-2016

It is observed that from the above table that from the total 126 labourers, 14.4 per cent of the labourers are married and 2.7 per cent of labourers are unmarried. These numbers include both male and female labourers in the village. These numbers of labourers include the labourers who have settled as well from the same village.

Age groups involve as labourers:

It is found that 20.7 percent of the members belong to the age group 46-60 years who work as labourers. 34 members fall under the age group of 16 to 30 years. Whereas 48 members belong to the age group 31 to 45 years which is the highest number labourers belong to this age group.

Table 3: Age group wise agriculture labourers

Age groups (in Years)	Agriculture labourers	
	Number of persons	%
Below 15	0	0.0
16 - 30	34	26.9
31 - 45	48	38.09
46 - 60	34	26.9
61 - 75	8	6.34
76 - 90	1	0.79
Above 90	1	0.79
Total	126	100

Source: Field work (2015-2016)

Employment conditions in agriculture:

The agricultural labourers (both male and female labourers) get an average of 20 days in a month in better agricultural seasons whereas in peak agricultural seasons they get around 25 days of work. The labourers who settled in the village opined that they work as full time labourers round the year for the farmers of the village. The settled labours are paid rupees 150 to 200 based on the work they involve in agriculture and the wages differ based on the nature of work they involve. The male labourers are paid rupees 100 more than the female labourers for the works they involve in agriculture. Balakrishnan (2004) argues that the women labourers have a significant role in rural agriculture and they do not paid the wages based on the work they perform but they usually paid less. Even Srikanth (2014) in his study observes the differences in wages for male and women labourers.

The village labourers do not involve as full time labourers in agriculture whereas the settled labourers work as full time labourers. The village labourers do not involve as full time labourers in few cases they cultivate small agricultural lands i.e. one acre or less than an acre. When they have work in their agricultural lands they do not work for other farmers in the village. The settled labourers do not have any agricultural lands at their native places and found migration to the areas where they get better employment in agriculture. They found the study village as their choice with the help of their relatives and from the same villagers who have migrated in the past. The introduction of heavy machinery increased the production in agriculture for the farmers and at the same time affected the employment conditions of labourers to an extent. The traditional farm methods are replacing with heavy machinery in recent years in the study village and the number work days are reducing significantly. Hence the village labourers found migration as one of the coping mechanism in the absence of regular employment in agriculture which is causing the labour shortage in peak agricultural seasons in the study village.

MGNREGA:

Most of the landless labourers and medium farmers from the study village found working in MGNREGA in lean periods of agriculture along with other works. The labourers from the same village found working in MGNREGA and the labourers who have migrated and settled and who have the job card of MGNREGA found working often. Whereas, the labourers have come recently and not having the provision of this facility do not work in MGNREGA. Generally the work is available in the month of February, March and April where the employment conditions in agriculture is limited. The wages and the working hours are found better in MGNREGA for the landless and marginal farmers hence they prefer to work in MGNREGA. The less number of working hours and the wages for the work the labourers perform are found better which creates problem for the farmers in peak seasons of agriculture. The peak periods, MGNREGA is creating demand for wages from the landless labourers. Farmers suggest combining the agricultural activities with MGNREGA that the farmers get benefits from MGNREGA and the demand for labour in peak seasons does not take place.

Migration to cities and to the Gulf countries is seen as one of the major employments sources in non-agricultural sector by the members from the study village. The landless labourers found migrating to the Gulf countries for the continuous employment and also for better earnings. The earnings from the Gulf countries are far better when compared to the earnings from the physical labour they perform in agricultural works. These landless labourers found working in different

sectors in cities and Gulf countries such as labour in construction sites, in cleaning sectors, petrol bunks, as security guards, in luggage counters in airports, in reception counters where they receive the labourers from the other countries. The marginal farmers and the landless labourers who work as agricultural labourers often found migrate to the Gulf countries in search of continuous employment. Since the agriculture in lean periods do not provide regular employment for these groups.

The migration of landless labourers and marginal farmers who often engage as agricultural labourers creating the labour shortage in peak seasons of agriculture in the village for the farmers. Which causes the increases the demand for wages as well demand for more number of farm labourers in peak agricultural seasons. The large landholding farmers and medium farmers pay more wages to recruit the daily casual labourers from neighboring villages to cope up the labour shortage conditions for agricultural activities.

Conclusion:

The landless labourers in the rural agrarian sector play an important role since long decades and still the labourer have prominent role in agricultural production despite of mechanization. The labourer work in the farm work found from different social backgrounds from the study village such as Mala, Madiga, Kurma, Vaddera etc.it is found that the labourers who have migrated to this village and settled contribute their physical labour in the farm works and these landless laborers consider as one of the reserved labour pool for the farmers in the village. The number of landless labourers found more in number from the castes such as Tenugu, Mala, Madiga, Kurma and Vaddera. The small, marginal farmers also found working as labourers in farm works where they do not have proper production form their marginal farmers.

The employment conditions for landless labourers are found better in agricultural peak seasons and not same in agricultural lean seasons. Hence the landless labourers and marginal farmers found migrating to cities and to the Gulf countries in search of continuous employment and better earnings. The artisan castes such as washermen household members also found migrating to cities like Mumbai and to the Gulf countries in search of employment since they do not own agricultural lands. The wages are found to be varying on the gender basis and the kind of work they perform. The seasonal labour got demand in peak seasons and the farmers recruit the labourers from the neighboring villages by paying extra wages. The shortage of labourers can be seen due to the migration and employment availability in non-agricultural sectors such as in construction sites, cleaning sections, drivers in both in abroad and cities.

The non-agricultural sectors such as beedi work (in case of women), migration to cities and Gulf found as major source of employment from the study village. Mechanization did not substitute all the farm works but to certain extent it displaced the labourers. The skilled labourers from other districts found working in farm works as drivers and harvester operators. Hence the landless labourers play an important role in agriculture sector where the production depends on both the landless labourers and landowning farmers.

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