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Employment and wages of rural labour in Chittoor district of Andhra Pradesh: An analytical study

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Abstract

Human resources in an economy constitute a significant input in the production process of goods and services. The study of human resources their quality and problems is of immense use in manpower planning in both developing as well as developed economies. The agriculture is the major sector of Indian economy. The most of the population is depending upon agriculture which is contributing about half of the national income in the country. The agricultural labour constitutes an overwhelmingly predominant auction of the rural workforce. The agricultural labour occupies the lowest rung of the rural ladder. The agricultural labourers constitute the largest role of the labourers and they constitute one of the biggest slices of Indian population. The agricultural labour, total workers are fast growing which is purely depending on wage paid employment in India. The farmers will try to substitute family labour in place of hired labour because of their low capacity to pay. If the population grows at the present rate accompanied by low industrial development, the unemployment problem in the agriculture becomes serious and the agricultural labourers become the victims in that vicious circle. The objective is to study pattern of employment and wages of rural labour for different crops through operations wise; and nature of employment and wages for male and female labour through the operations wise in Chittoor district of Andhra Pradesh. The primary data included information collected directly from the sample respondents through a field survey in Chittoor district. In addition to primary data, a good bit of information was collected from secondary sources. The suggestions can be made for the improvement of socio-economic positions of the agricultural labourers. The better implementation of legislative measures, creating alternative sources of employment, protection of women and child labourers, public works programmes should be for longer period in year, improving the working conditions, regulations of hours of work, improvements in agriculture sector; the credit at cheaper rates of interest on easy terms of payments for undertaking subsidiary occupations, proper training for improving the skills of farm labourers and co-operative farming.

Keywords: Employment and wages, rural labour, analytical study

Introduction

The human resources in an economy constitute a significant input in the production process of goods and services. The study of human resources, their quality and problems is of immense use in manpower planning in both developing as well as developed economies. The most of the population is depending upon agriculture which is contributing to about half of the national income in our country. The character of Indian economic development reflects in the nature and magnitude of agricultural development of the country. The rural labour constitutes an overwhelmingly predominant per cent in the rural workforce. The rural labour constitutes the largest role of the labourers and they constitute one of the biggest slices of Indian population. The rural labour is provided mostly by backward classes and other depressed classes who are economically poor and socially downtrodden since the days immemorial. The most of the scheduled caste and backward caste population is depending upon the wage paid employment in rural to eke out their livelihood. The most of them possess no land. Some of them have cultivating rights in tiny bits of land where they are employed for a part of the year, but the extent of employment and earnings secured on their farm is so limited that they are compelled to supplement it by hiring out their labour on other holding. Now the trend is changing and the Government is taking sincere efforts to remove the serfdom of these neglected sections and trying to uplift them economically and socially. In spite of all the efforts to uplift them from the low social status, they are yet in the same stage with a helpless State. The most of them are illiterate and so they are not aware of the existing legislation and policies. They never had the courage to demand a high wage because

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of low social status and poverty. Their appalling conditions of poverty are too well known.

The rural labour has to work in cold and hot weather from sunrise to sunset. Their wages are low when compared to industrial labourers. They are generally custom bound. They suffer from many social handicaps and majority of these handicaps are interconnected with economic problems which outweigh other problems. The rural labour cannot earn their living in spite of sweating labour. The low incomes only enable them to have low levels of living. The low standard of living further causes social disabilities and malnutrition. The ultimate result is low efficiency of labour leading to low labour productivity in rural. Thus the problems of rural labour are interconnected with each other. The employment is a state of being engaged in productivity work. The continuous engagement in such work with sufficient amount of labour put in and adequate reward flowing from it constitute full employment in rural labour is a rare phenomenon. These rural labourers are suffering due to unemployment, underemployment and low wages. Their houses are hardly fit for human living. The phenomenon of unemployment in rural which is the major source of livelihood of the rural population of our country is the result of maladjustment between the demand for and supply of labour in this sector. The demand for labour in rural lags behind the increase in the size of population and consequently in the number of labourers. The factors like diminution in the size of holding, abundance of rural labour, employment of family labour by small cultivators and existence of seasonality in cultivation are mainly responsible for the creation of unemployment among agricultural labour.

The low wages are responsible for their sub-human standard of living. It is highly difficult for a rural labourer to make their both ends meet with these low wages. In certain occupations women workers are paid lower rates than men. The inevitable result is that they are mostly semi-starved, not having sufficient physical strength to perform all agricultural operations in a proper manner. The chronic imbalance between labour supply and complementary resource in rural is normally expected to result in fixing up of wages at subsistence levels over large parts of the country. The productivity of Indian rural is marginally lower than many countries in the world, which limits the employer's capacity to pay, so that few can afford to raise the wages above the prevailing level. The rural labour is paid on a daily basis or yearly basis depending upon the type of labour they provide. The rural labour is paid usually on a daily basis. In case they are employed regularly for three or four days for one operation of a single farmer, the amount will be paid in one installment calculated on a daily basis. The wages are also paid on a piece rate basis in operations like sowing, harvesting, transplantation and works connected with it. A few workers coming together as a group enter into an agreement with the cultivator to complete agricultural operations. They will be paid the entire amount agreed upon immediately after the activity is finished. The amount will be shared by the labourers among themselves. Sometimes, particularly in the case of groundnut harvest, wages are paid in kind proportionately with the produce harvested by labourers. The rural labour is conscious of the fact that there are various factors that determine the method of wage payment. Naturally if the prices of the food commodities are low the labourers will

demand cash wage and if the prices of food commodities are high they demand wage in kind. It is believed generally that kind payments may increase or decrease in quantity as well as in quality with a good or bad harvest. But it has not proved to be correct. But we can safely generalize that tradition and custom play a dominant role in the method of wage payment.

In India, population, rural labour and total workers are fast growing from 1901 to till today. The rural labour and total workers are purely depending on wage paid employment. In the areas where multiple cropping is practiced, the labourers get employment throughout the year with a minimum period of unemployment. Although several years of planned development have passed, still the conditions of rural labour are miserable and the meager incomes are resulting in a low standard of living. So the present study has been undertaken with the purpose of studying employment and wages positions of rural labour in Chittoor district of Andhra Pradesh. The objectives are:

Objectives

- To study the pattern of employment and wages of rural labour for different crops through operations wise; and
- To find out the nature of employment and wages for male and female labour through the operations wise.

Hypothesis

- The pattern of employment and wages of rural labour depend upon crops and operation patterns;
- The nature of employment and wages are different in males and females in operations wise.

To examine the objectives of this study, relevant data were collected from both primary and secondary sources. The primary data included information collected directly from the sample respondents through a field survey in the study area. The schedules were pretested and necessary improvements were made before conducting the survey. In addition to primary data, a good bit of information was collected from secondary data. Both the sources were used for the study.

Sample design

A multi-stage stratified random sampling frame is used for collection of the primary data. On the basis of proportion of rural labour to total labour, the Mandals were stratified into those with proportion of rural labour below 50 per cent and those with proportion of rural labour above 50 per cent are classified in Chittoor District. From each stratum, one Mandal was randomly selected. From each Mandal two villages are selected randomly. In the district 4 villages were studied, the total of 400 sample respondents was drawn on a random basis. The study was conducted with a scientific outlook to find out the causes responsible for the prevailing employment conditions of agricultural labourers therefore all the necessary and appropriate methods of research were used.

Employment of rural labour

The rural labour both annual or casual labour do perform various activities and these activities can be conveniently classified as agricultural and non-agricultural activities. The agricultural activities are concerned with work as rural labour concerning with performing agricultural operations. The

non-agricultural activities are the works performed in sectors other than rural and self-employment refers to

performing work of their own. The extent of employment of rural labour is presented in the Table-1.

Table 1: Employment Level of Rural Labour in Chittoor District

| S. No. | Classification of Works | No. of Man Days Worked | |
|--------|--|------------------------|--------|
| | | Male | Female |
| I | Working Days | | |
| | Ploughing | 1,704 | - |
| | Preparatory operations | 1,777 | 593 |
| | Sowing and Transplantation | 276 | 1984 |
| | Wedding | 461 | 3271 |
| | Harvesting and threshing | 1,367 | 3072 |
| | Sugarcane cutting and Jiggery making operations | 1,740 | - |
| | Other | 1,043 | 363 |
| | Total | 8,595 | 9283 |
| | Average No. of days Employed per labour | 260.45 | 201.81 |
| II | Non-Agricultural work | | |
| | Total working days | 467 | 363 |
| | Average No. of days per casual labour | 22.24 | 19.15 |
| III | Self-Employment | | |
| | Total working days of self-employed labourers | 329 | 497 |
| | Average No. of days worked per labour in self – employment | 19.35 | 41.41 |

Source: Filed Data

From Table-I found that the average number of days of employment of casual male labour in agricultural activities is found to be 260.45 days and in non-agricultural activities and self-employment, they are employed for 22.24 and 19.35 days respectively. All together the total number of days employed in all works put together comes to 302.04 days. The employments are female rural labour employment activities evident that the average number of days of employment of female labours in rural stood at 201.80 days and in non-agricultural work and self-employment they are engaged for 19.15 and 41.41 days respectively. Altogether the total number of days in all works out together comes to 262.36 days. On the whole the casual male as well as female rural labour is more engaged in rural and the employment in non-agricultural work is not considerable. From this we can safely state that the position of employment of casual female labourers is not unfavorable. The labour agricultural activities are concerned he is engaged in them for 269 days, non- agricultural operations for 56 days, and the remaining days he is permitted to be absent from work due to various genuine reasons are social functions, festivals, sickness and bad weathers (41 days). The employment of rural labour crop wise in presented in Table-2.

Table 2: Employment of Rural Labour in Chittoor District

| S. No. | Crops | Total Man days Worked | |
|--------|------------|-----------------------|--------|
| | | Male | Female |
| 1. | Paddy | 2,380 | 4,516 |
| 2. | Sugarcane | 3,544 | 2,138 |
| 3. | Ragi | 180 | 515 |
| 4. | Ground-nut | 2,209 | 1,645 |
| 5. | Chilies | 12 | 75 |
| 6. | Tomato | 9 | 31 |
| 7. | Others | 261 | 363 |
| | Total | 8,595 | 9,283 |

Source: Field Data

In Table –II show that the employment of rural labour according to crops wise was presented. The total man days worked by all the rural labour were classified according crops. It is evident that sugarcane largely requires male labour than female labour and paddy requires mostly female labour than male labour. This can be attributed to the nature and intensity of operations which vary from crop to crop. In case of paddy it has become a tradition to employ female labour for transplantation, weeding and harvesting. The family labour of the cultivators does not participate to work in these operations as it is a tradition in the villages to use hired labour. So female labour use will be high in case of paddy than male labourers. Whereas the intensive and difficult nature of operation in case of sugarcane requires mostly labour. In the case of groundnut the requirements of hired labour is high. Due to heavy seasonal rush of work and the urgency to harvest immediately after the rains, most of the cultivators use immigrant labour in order to complete the activity quickly. The rural labour in the villages is not in proportion to the area sown under groundnut. When we take the overall view in the case of food crops female labour use is high and in the case of commercial crops male labour use is generally high except in some instances.

Unemployment

The unemployment of rural labour takes place during some days in the year due to several socio, economic reasons like want of work sickness, social functions, bad weather, birth and deaths and festivals. But the days unemployed due to want of work constitutes the real period of unemployment and requires recognition as such. The remaining may be treated as absence from work. Hence the extent of unemployment in terms of the total man days of all the labourers and the causes for the unemployment is worked out in Table-III.

Table 3: Unemployment Reasons of Rural Labour in Chittoor District

| S. No. | Reasons | Total number Of man days | Percentage of man days of each category to the total man days unemployed |
|--------|---------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| 1. | For want of work | 4,460 | 47.95 |
| 2. | Sickness | 727 | 7.82 |
| 3. | Social functions | 1,088 | 11.70 |
| 4. | Bad weather | 1,498 | 16.11 |
| 5. | Births and Deaths | 659 | 7.08 |
| 6. | Festivals | 869 | 9.34 |
| | Total Man Days Unemployed | 9,301 | 100.00 |

Source: Field Data

From the Table-3 observe that the reasons for unemployment are worked out. Out of the total unemployed man days of all the labourers studied want of work accounted for 47.95 per cent, sickness for 7.82 per cent, social functions for 11.70 per cent and bad weather for 16.11 per cent, birth and deaths for 7.08 per cent and festivals for 9.34 per cent in the study area.

Wage rates of rural labour

The wage structure in different operations in rural areas (villages) in the study area. The wage rates in operations wise are presented in Table-IV

Table 4: Wage Rates of Rural Labour in Chittoor District

| S. No | Name of the operations | Wages (Rs) | |
|-------|---|------------|--------|
| | | Male | Female |
| 1 | Ploughing | 500 | - |
| 2 | Sowing | 500 | 300 |
| 3 | Transplanting | 500 | 300 |
| 4 | Weeding | 500 | 300 |
| 5 | Harvesting | 550 | 350 |
| 6 | Threshing | 550 | 350 |
| 7 | Sugarcane Cutting and Jiggery Making operations | 500 | 350 |
| 8 | Any other | 500 | 300 |

Source: Field Data

Table -4 shows that the paid wages in cash Rs.500/- rupees per day during harvest times. In the case when the labourers provide their own bullocks to the cultivators they will be paid Rs.1500/- per day. In case when he attend to the work without his own bullocks he will be paid Rs.550/- only. The wages for harvesting operations are generally paid in kind. In time of sugarcane cutting and jaggery making operations labour are paid Rs.500/- per day when the work is difficult and Rs.350/- per day in less strenuous operations. In addition they are provided with one meal a day respectively. In the case of harvest of ground nut they are given an Rs.500/- per day of the harvested produce. In paddy harvesting operations they are paid in cash only. In some cases especially in times of transplanting and weeding some female labourers form into a group to enter into an agreement with the farmers and get the work done and the contracted amount will be shared among themselves by participating women labourers equally. In the case of contract work they will work for longer hours. After that work is over they engage in some other work and their daily earnings will be high during such days. For some operations which need intensive and hard work they will be often paid high. In the case of seedling removal operations they may enter into contract for finishing the work or work on a daily basis. When they enter into such contact the seedlings will be prepared into bundles of a definite size. Usually,

customary labour will attend to the threshing operations. They receive paddy for the work done which is higher than the wage.

Wage differentials in rural labour

There is no uniformity in wage rates of rural labour, there are many factors which are contributing to the differences in wage rates. There are considerable disparities in wages between regions, between different crops, as well as between male labour and female labour. The differentials between the wages of men and those of women are much more than what they are in an industry. This is due to the fact that wage differentials in rural are based not merely on the demand and supply position, but also on social considerations. The wages vary even from operation to operation. The wages offered for ploughing differs from wages offered for weeding. The disparities in wages between different regions arise on account of diversity of socio-economic conditions and differences related to traditions. Generally wages offered in the peak season are high and wages offered in the slack season are low. The wages also in turn depend upon the hours of work. If the hours of work are more, the wages are high to some extent as in the case of sugarcane cutting and jaggery making operations. But this trend is extremely limited. In the slack periods also the cultivators are habituated to give usual wages and do not reduce the wage rate. The rural labour gets higher income when work is available throughout the year. The rural labour need not work compulsorily especially when they fall ill or have to attend to some important work of their own. Also they have freedom to choose any work they like. But the rural labour has less security against the vicissitudes of seasonal unemployment to which they are always exposed.

Minimum wages of rural labour

In order to ameliorate the conditions of this rural labour suffering from low levels of living due to low earnings and strenuous working conditions, the Minimum Wages Act of 1948 has passed by the Government which has fixed minimum wages in certain agricultural employments. The State Governments are directed to fix the wage rates and revise the rates at frequent intervals depending upon the agricultural conditions prevailing. The second schedule of the Act covers rural labour in this respect. It defines employment in rural as follows. The employment in rural, that is to say, in any form of farming, including the production, the cultivation, growing and harvesting of any agricultural or horticultural commodity, the raising of livestock, bees, of poultry and practice performed by a farmer of on a farm as incidental of in conjunction with farm operations.

The fixation of minimum wage has not shown any beneficial impact on the wage conditions of rural labour in the villages. They do know nothing about minimum wages legislation so far. So, mere enactment of minimum wages will not solve the problems relating to wages. As such the wages are governed by several socio-economic factors. A study has to be made identify the factors responsible for low wages and to take steps to improve these factors which can favorably influence the wage structure of the labourers. Hence an attempt has been made to identify the factors influencing rural wages and wage differentials in this study. All the State Governments have fixed minimum wages for rural labour. The process of implementation is beset with numerous administrative difficulties, which arises from factors such as vast areas to be covered, the small nature of holdings, illiteracy among employers and employees, fluctuating economy of agricultural operations due to vagaries of nature, system of payments in kind, prevailing customs and traditions and lack of organization among workers, lack of administrative machinery for implementing the minimum wage in rural.

Conclusion

Since, the agricultural sector experiences excessive dependence of population eking out their livelihood. In the absence of alternative work, they joined the ranks of rural labour to earn their living. Their low standard of living permits them to be satisfied with subsistence and low wage. Inadequate employment opportunities further aggravate the problem. The slow pace of industrialization is not able to absorb surplus manpower in rural. Until this pressure is wiped out from transforming surplus labour available in rural, no sustained growth in the economy can be possible. The first possible solution to free the rural economy from this undesirable situation is to improve villages and small scale industries which can absorb most of the rural manpower. If the rural economy is industrialized with the type of industries which are more labour intensive, they can generate rural employment.

The serious problem which rural labour is facing may be said to be seasonal unemployment. The seasonal unemployed labour can be utilized for the productive works like the development of rural infrastructure. This will help to increase the income of the labour household and reduce the intensity of poverty. In order to improve the conditions and availability of employment opportunities, development of irrigation will be a partial solution. The assured irrigation enable the farmers to grow more crops and more varieties of crops, they will have favorable effect on the employment of rural labour. As most of the farmers are illiterate, they are not responsive to developmental efforts of the Government. These programmes should be demonstrated to the villagers to enable them to understand their beneficial effects and as such practice them. The labour co-operatives should have to be encouraged to solve the problems of these labourers. These co-operatives can enable the labourers take up rural development programmes like road building, construction and other activities which will provide employment and income to them. Those co-operative should be established in several parts of the region to create increased demand for labour leading to rise in wages. The co-operatives should be provided with labour intensive activities which alone can provide more employment and higher wages. The working of these co-operatives should be checked to make them

work without corruption and immorality. As most of the rural labour are landless, possible distribution of surplus lands will ensure the labourers to get some land of their own that provides at least some security to their standard of living, the land reforms should have to be implemented drastically in order to cope up with the situation.

The agricultural development will be the best possible solution to improve the conditions of these labourers. The higher yield will enable the farmer to increase the wage rates which raise the standard of living of labourers. The most of the farmers are now trying to use high yielding varieties of seeds and chemical fertilizers. Some of them are using tractors for cultivation purposes. The Government should adopt strict measures for proper distribution of chemical fertilizers and High Yielding Varieties of seeds which, now, most of the small cultivators with no political status can hardly have a chance to get. The farmers are buying the fertilizers in the local market where the price is eventually high, which leads to high input costs and reduces the income of the farmers and it will have its indirect effect on rural labour. The small peasant is suffering due to exploitation by revenue authorities and also due to improper distribution of fertilizers etc.

The low economic standards of the rural labour are the primary cause for their low social status. The credit facilities should be extended to the agricultural labour to have dairy farming, poultry and such other activities which will help these labourers to have their standard of living and social status. As most of the rural labour in the interior regions is not aware of the facilities, they need to be educated in this matter. The improvement in the agricultural marketing facilities and ensuring remunerative prices for the agricultural produce will enable the farming community get reasonable incomes. The fluctuations in the prices of agricultural commodities are adversely affecting the incomes of the farmers which lead to changes in the cultivated area and cropping pattern. Assured reasonable prices can help to increase the farmers capacity to pay for the labourers. The controlled prices of the essential consumption goods and their proper distribution will have favorable effect on the levels of living of the labourers. The measures taken by the Government to improve the conditions of rural labour. The measures are the welfare programmes are implemented like, Cash scheme for Rural Employment (CSRE), Pilot Intensive Rural Employment Project (PIREP), Food for Works Programme (FWP), National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme (NREGP), National Scheme of Training of Rural Youth for Self Employment (TRYSEM), Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA) and Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP).

The following suggestions can be made for the improvement of socio-economic positions of the rural labour,

- The better implementation of legislative measures are creating alternative sources of employment; the protection of women and child labour; the public works programmes should be for longer period in year; the improving the working conditions; the regulations of hours of work and the improvements in rural sector.
- The credit at cheaper rates of interest on easy terms of payments for undertaking subsidiary occupations, proper training for improving the skills of farm labourers, and Co-operative farming.

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