

Chapter-6

Agricultural Labourers

Introduction:

In the previous chapter we studied about agriculture as well as the food grains. We also came across with the measures of food supply particularly during natural calamities such as epidemic and earthquake.

Now, in this chapter we shall know about the producer of food grains, i.e., agricultural labour. We shall study about the problems of farmers and agricultural labourers in Bihar and find solution for their problems.

In Bihar, during farming season various types of inoccupation emerge and compel the agricultural labourers to migrate to other states in search of livelihood. During migration they suffer many types of family, social and political problems. These problems will be discussed in this chapter in detail.

Objective:

The life history of agricultural labourers is worth knowing. They change themselves according to variable seasons. What are the reasons of the change? It is our prime objective. To find out solution for the pitiable condition of the agricultural labourers is our basic aim. The main objective of our study is to throw light on the various programmes or schemes carried out for the labourers time to time by the governments of India and Bihar.

Agricultural Labourer:

Children! We shall try to know about the agricultural labourer through this picture.

Picture: 6.1



Agricultural labourers planting paddy in field

In the picture 6.1. we see some rural women planting paddy in the field. All women are working as agricultural labourer in the field of big farmers for livelihood. Therefore, they are such agricultural labourers who are '**landless**' and it is their compulsion to work as agricultural labourer to get food.

It is very important to understand the agricultural labourers. About 64% of the total population of India is engaged in agricultural sector. The condition of agricultural labourers is extremely pitiable due to rural indebtedness.

The agricultural labourer are the people working as agricultural labourer in village. According to first agriculture enquiry committee 1950-51, the agricultural labourers are those persons who are engaged in

Agricultural labourer

First Agriculture Enquiry Committee defined agricultural labourer as a person who for more than half of the total number of days in a year work as an agricultural labour. Thus the people who are engaged in agricultural work as labour in half or more than half period of his work are called agricultural labour.

agricultural work and in the total period of their work, in half of the period and more than that they work as labourer, will be called agriculture labourer.

A major portion of the rural people belongs to these agricultural labourers. Quesney 's remarks, "**Poor agriculture, poor king and poor country**", may or may not apply to other countries but it holds good to India. It does not require much effort to imagine what would be the condition of the labourers in the country where the farmers who work in others' field to get their livelihood, remain poor? They do not get enough to eat, nor do they have clothes to wear and house to live in. The agricultural labourers lacking facilities of food, clothes and shelter are forced to live the life of helplessness.

The agricultural labourers can be divided mainly in three categories-

1. The labourers working in the field - as ploughman, harvester, etc. - can be said agricultural labourers in true sense.
2. Labourers related to other agricultural activities - as well diggers, cart man, etc. They can be categorised as semi skilled labourers.
3. Labourers engaged, other than agricultural works, in additional industries like - carpenter, blacksmith. They can be called as village artisans.

The National Labour Commission has divided agricultural labourers into two classes-

1. Landless labourers – The labourers who do not have their own land for cultivation.
2. Marginal farmers – The labourers who have their own land, but in a very small quantity and most of the time they work as labourer.

From table 6.1, it is clear that in 1991 the number of agricultural labourer in Bihar was 37.1 percent in comparison to agricultural labourers in India (26.1%). In 2001 the number of agricultural labourer in Bihar was 48 percent whereas in India the percentage was 26.5.

Table: 6.1.

Ratio of agricultural labourers

Year	Bihar	India
1991	37.1%	26.1.%
2001	48.0%	26.5%

Source- Economic Survey of Bihar – 200607

Problems of agricultural labourers in Bihar:

On the one hand the problems of agricultural labourers have been increasing due to increase in population and on the other hand their conditions are very pitiable. The agricultural labourers of Bihar are very poor. Their life is full of poverty, inoccupation, exploitation, oppression and uncertainty. Their social condition is not very good. In many places they live like slaves.

The problems of agricultural labourers are numerous and some of them are as follows:

Main problems of agricultural labourers

- Lower wages
- Seasonal employment
- More working hours
- Indebtedness
- Low life standard
- Problem of residence
- Bonded labour
- Lack of auxiliary jobs
- Lack of organisation
- Inoccupation due to mechanisation in agriculture
- Lower social strata

1. **Lower wages** – The major problem of the agricultural labourers is lower rate of wages. The reports of various surveys reveal that in spite of their excess work they get very meagre wages. As they have not any option so they are compelled to work even on lower wages.
2. **Seasonal employment** – Seasonal employment is a major problem for all agricultural labourers. Actually they do not get work all year round rather they get it for some period in particular seasons. So they become

workless for at least four months in a year. Thus they have to face a longer period of inoccupation and underemployment.

3. **More working hours** – One of the major problems of agricultural labourers in Bihar is that there is no fixed timing for their work. They work 10 - 14 hours and sometimes when they remain engaged in night watch they have to do work for 24 hours.
4. **Indebtedness** – Due to their meagre wages the agricultural labourers of Bihar remain indebted all year round. So they work as a *begar* under bigger farmers.
5. **Lower life standard** – The life standard of agricultural labourer is very low. As their wages are extremely low, so they are not able to fulfil the minimum needs of food, clothes and shelter. The pity is that that they do not even get two squares of meals every day. Their clothes are tattered. There is no question of shelter.
6. **Problem of residence** – One of the problems of the agricultural labourers is the problem of residence. The labourers live in a house of mud and straw (Jhuggi) made on the langlord's plots, with the permission of the landlord. These huts are very small and the labourer can hardly stretch their legs. There is not any ventilation for light and air. So health of agricultural labourers and their children goes on deteriorating.
7. **Bonded labour** – Due to indebtedness such agricultural labourers work whole life or till the payment of debt, under their land lords, for food only. The other family members also help them in their work for which they do not get any remuneration. Such labourers are called ' Bonded Labour'. These labourers remain connected to landlords who exploit them.
8. **Lack of additional jobs** – There is lack of additional jobs in villages. If there is no production of crops due to flood, drought or famine the agriculture labourers do not have any other source of livelihood and eventually they come more and more into the grip of debt with each passing day.

- 9. Lack of organisation** – Another problem of agricultural labourers in Bihar is that they do not have their organisation. The agricultural labourers are illiterate, without knowledge and superstitious. In absence of organisation, they fail to develop the feeling of togetherness. And thus they could not raise voice for increasing wages, fixation of working hours, abolition of begari, etc.
- 10. Inoccupation due to mechanisation in agriculture** – Now machines are being used in Bihar in agriculture and therefore, inoccupation of labourers are on increase. This is a vital issue related to agricultural labourers.

Picture: 6.2



Condition of agricultural labourers

- 11. Lowe social strata** – Most of the agricultural labour in Bihar belong to scheduled castes or scheduled tribes that have been a victim for centuries. That is why they remain at the lower ladder of the social stratal.

Picture 6.2 illustrates the condition of agricultural labourers. It vindicates that the condition of the agricultural labourers in Bihar is very miserable.

In the words of Bhikhari Thakur-

*Laagal jhulaniya ke dhakka,
Balam gayeelan kalkatta.*
(With a push to swindle, the
beloved one - husband -
reached Kolkata)

The famous folk song composer Bhikhari Thakur through his folk songs tried to describe the migration of agricultural labourers. It seems suitable to present some lines of his lyric to visualise it.

Folk lyricist Bhikhari Thakur tried to explain how the people of Bihar migrated to states particularly to West Bengal, Assam, Maharashtra, Punjab, Haryana, etc. in search of job. Those days Kolkata (then, Calcutta) was very famous for jute mills. Biharis in a large number migrated there to earn livelihood for their families. Even today Bihari labourers have been making immense contribution the farming in Punjab and have been behind its success.

Similarly, the Bihar workers in search of job migrated to distant lands such as Mauritius, Trinidad, Uganda, Nepal, etc. Due to their ability and efficiency they became very famous. The example of Sir Shiv Sagar Ram Gulam is very recent. He became the first Prime Minister of Mauritius. He is called the father of the nation of Mauritius. It is noteworthy that Sir Shiv Sagar Ram Gulam belongs to Shahbad (presently Bhojpur) Bihar. The road south to Gandhi Madan, Patna, in the capital of Bihar, has been named after him in his owner.

Story of a promising child

A child born in a small village of today's Bhojpur (Arrah) district would never have realised that his family would be able to give such pride to his native state Bihar as well as his country India. This is the story of Late Mohit Ram Gulam. When the child grew up, he started to look up for a job. Due to his miserable economic condition he had to work as an agricultural labourer but it was not enough for him. He started thinking to migrate. Finally, he set out for Mauritius in search of work. He started working in Mauritius and lived in a small village

Belle Rive, with his family. The family on the basis of thier labour, honesty and work endeared themselves to the people of Mauritius. Mohit Ram Gulam was blessed with a son named Shiv Sagar Ram Gulam. The child was very promising. Be it a field of education or politics, he remained on the top. He became a famous leader of Mauritius. Later on he was honoured with the title of 'Sir'. Now he became famous as Sir Shiv Sagar Ram Gulam. He was credited to be the first Prime Minister of Mauritius. Children! Sir Shiv Sagar Ram Gulam is called father of the nation in Mauritius like Gandhi ji is called father of the nation in India. Even today Shri Navin Chandra Ram Gulam , the son of Sir Shiv Sagar Ram Gulam and the Prime Minister of Mauritius, is keeping the legacy of his father intact.

Picture: 6.3



Sir Shiv Sagar Ram Gulam -
The promising child

Migration of agricultural labourers:

Thus we see that there are several problems related to agricultural labourers in Bihar. Their condition is extremely bad. The problems of poverty, unemployment have taken them under grip , compelling them to suffer from inferiority complex.

Picture: 6.4



A family migrating in search of work

And due to these reasons they migrate to other states in search of employment. **Moving from one place to another in search of work is called Migration.** Presently it has come to notice that in search of work mostly agricultural labourers have been migrating to Punjab, Haryana, Assam, Delhi, Kolkata, Mumbai, etc. Picture 6.4 specifies how a family is migrating in search of work.

The agricultural labourers view this migration as a disgrace and simultaneously various problems have been emerging out of the migration of the agricultural labourers. On the one hand the number of agricultural labourer has started decreasing and on the other hand there is great scarcity of labours for agricultural work. At the same time the Bihari Labourers are being exploited in other states. In Punjab, Haryana and other states Bihari agricultural labourers are forced to work till late hours. Only recently in 2007 the Bihari labourers were ill-treated in Assam. Several labourers were killed. Thus the Bihari Labours started returning to their home state. A similar situation occurred in Mumbai in

2008. Bihari labours were beaten up badly and brutally killed. Such incidents instilled feeling of fear among Bihari labourers and this was a serious problem.

Picture: 6.5



Labourers migrating due to Kosi flood

In this backdrop, the economic development programme in Bihar, at present, is very commendable. After the oppression and tyranny of Biharis (who were called *Bhaiyya* as a mark of disregard) in Mumbai, the statement of Bihar Chief Minister Shri Nitish Kumar is of great importance. He said” **Whosoever Bihari labour has gone to other states, come back to Bihar. There will be no dearth of job for them. The government will treat them in a better way**”. The statement influenced immensely the Bihari labourers living in other states and they started moving back to their motherland. It is a matter of happiness that very shortly there will be smile on the faces of Bihari labourers.

Natural calamity is also one of the reasons of migration. Agricultural labourers migrate also due to flood and drought. The recent Kosi flood changed

the condition of Bihar. It is evident from the picture 6.5., how flood affected agricultural labourers and other people are migrating to other places.

Solution for the problems:

We have learnt that the problems of agricultural labour are the reason of their migration. And their migration cannot be checked fully unless we have concrete remedies for them.

Their problems can be solved through the ways mentioned below:

1. Development of agricultural based industries-

To solve the problems of agricultural labourers in Bihar, agricultur based industries should be developed so that the agricultural labourers could get job during off season to increase their income and make their lives better.

2. Development of small and cottage industries-

There will be development of small and cottage industries in rural areas along with agricultural industries to provide work to landless workers to earn money.

Solution for the problem

- Development of agriculture based industries
- Development of cottage and small scale industries
- Proper implementation of minimum wages law
- Fixation of working hours
- Reform in working conditions
- Construction of houses
- Establishment of agricultural labour welfare centres
- Establishment of rural employment centres
- Arrangement of land for agricultural labourer
- Arrangement for suitable organisation for agricultural labourer
- Establishment of cooperative institutions
- Extension of education
- Bhoo Daan (Land gift)

- 3. Proper implementation of minimum wages law** – In all states of India including Bihar minimum wages is in force with a provision to pay minimum wage to labourers. But less wages are paid to them. Therefore, minimum wages law should be implemented in a proper way.
- 4. Fixing working hour**- The working hour for agricultural labourers should be fixed. There should be provision of extra payment in case of overtime work.
- 5. Reform in working condition** – There should be reform in the service conditions of the agricultural labourers. They should be entitled to avail of leave time to time. And in case of any accident during work, workers should be given proper support and help.
- 6. Construction of houses** – Construction of houses should be made in villages and provided to agricultural labourers.
- 7. Establishment of agriculture labour welfare centres** – In villages, at block level agriculture labour welfare centres should be established so that labourers could receive medical help for any hurt and disease.
- 8. Establishment of rural employment centres** – Employment centres should be established in rural areas so that they could get correct information regarding employment and go urban areas to get jobs.
- 9. Arrangement of land for landless agricultural labourers** – Making reforms in land settlement, efforts could be done to provide additional land to agricultural labourer. The barren and waste land should be made cultivable and distributed among them.
- 10. Arrangement of suitable organisation for agricultural labourers** – An organisation should be established for agricultural labourers so that their exploitation be checked. Through the organisation they could say their problems and welfare schemes could be implemented in their favour.

11. Establishment of cooperative institutions – Such cooperative institutions should be established that can provide loan to labourers with facilities of repayment of loan in instalments. The rate of interest on such loans should be lower.

12. Extension of education – It is a matter of great pity that the children of agricultural labourers in Bihar do not go to school even today and look after the cattle of the landlords. When they do not have work in villages they move towards urban areas and clean utensils in hotels. It is a matter of great shame. The little children should not be indulged in such activities. Wide extension and publicity of education can be helpful in solving their problems.

13. Bhoo Daan (Land gift) – The programme started by Acharya Vinoba Bhave with a view to solving the problems of landless agricultural labourers is called 'Bhoo Daan'. He started the movement for distribution of land among the landless labourers by seeking additional land from big landlords. Though many landlords donated their useless lands yet this programme developed self-confidence and courage among labourers. Therefore, together with land the agricultural labourers should be provided with high yielding variety of seeds and fertilizers.

Government Effort:

Our government has taken several measures to solve the problems of agricultural labourers. Some of them are as follows:

- i. **Minimum wages act, 1948** was implemented in agricultural sector as well. In all states of India including Bihar, the minimum wages was fixed for agricultural labourers.
- ii. **In all five year plans** provision has been made for providing free of cost land to landless labourers for constructing house.

- iii. After **abolition of zamindari system** several plots of additional land were distributed among landless workers. Even under BhooDaan movement some plots were gifted to the landless labourers.
- iv. **Bonded labour system was abolished** during emergency in 1976 by an act. Now any landlord found having bonded labour are punished. Many landlords have been arrested in Muzaffarpur for continuing with such practices.
- v. The surplus land procured after the implementation of **land ceiling** and barren land is being distributed among the agricultural labourers.
- vi. For **development of cottage and small scale industries** government has established **industrial villages in rural areas**.
- vii. **Agriculture service committee** has been established for providing **financial facilities**.
- viii. Different states have made **law** with the objective to make landless labourers **free from old loan**.
- ix. The central government has appointed a **permanent committee** for agricultural labourers.
- x. Similarly government has started **RLEGP** and **NREGA** with a view to reforming and increasing job opportunities for rural landless workers.
- xi. The exploitation of children of agricultural labourers has been declared crime under **Child Labour Prevention Act**.
- xii. Besides, our government has adopted several measures in five year plans to **ameliorate the condition** of agricultural labourers.

Summary

In this chapter we discussed about agricultural labourers and also who is called an agricultural labourer? What are the types of agricultural labourers? What are their problems in Bihar? How can their migration be checked by taking care of their problems? For this, we have given many suggestions and the means adopted by the government have also been mentioned.

The direction of the steps taken by the government for improving condition of agricultural labourers is right but not sufficient. For this there are three things to be taken into consideration:

1. The steps taken by the government should be spread fast so that more and more agricultural labourers could be benefited.
2. More funds should be obtained for these programmes so that the lack of source should not come in its way.
3. Only formulation of such programmes is not enough; proper managing of the implementation of these programmes is essential.

Permanent improvement can be expected by adopting small industries in rural life. To augment the hunger of land is not right in view of future economic development. It is not essential that landless labours should be settled on land. Instead of land the agricultural labourers should be provided employment. It is expedient to adopt scientific agriculture and minimise the burden of population on land and the additional population could be driven towards capital creation for economic development and the useless labour force could become producers. The large labour force of villages should be utilised in works such as making embankments, conservation of soil, forestation, road construction, digging of canals, etc. The migration of agricultural labourers can be checked and their condition should be improved by providing them employment opportunities and by implementing NREGA in all districts of Bihar properly and effectively. In this connection Agriculture Reform Committee rightly said **“non inclusion of problems of agricultural labourers in any programme of agricultural reform is as a horrible wound that is left out without dressing”**.

Exercise

I. Objective question:

(Write only a, b, c, or d for correct answer)

1. The number of agricultural labourers in 2001 was.....
(a) 48% (b) 42% (c) 52% (d) 26.5%
2. In 1991 the number of agricultural labourers in Bihar was.....
(a) 26.1% (b) 37.1% (c) 26.5% (d) 37.8%
3. Agriculture labourers of Bihar are-
(a) uneducated
(b) educated
(c) learned
(d) skilled
4. Generally the agricultural labourers can be divided into following categories
(a) Three
(b) Two
(c) Four
(d) Five
5. The labourers who have no their own land for cultivation are called
(a) marginal farmer
(b) big farmer
(c) landless labourers
(d) landlord

II. Fill in the blanks:

1. The labourers who do agriculture related works are called.....
2. Quesne said- poor agriculture, poor king and poor.....
3. Agricultural labourers in Bihar mostly belong to..... and backward castes.
4. In Bihar now.....are being used in agriculture.
5. The agricultural labourers of Bihar are.....towards other states in search of job.

III. Short answer question:

(In not more than 50 words)

1. What do we mean from agricultural labourers?
2. In how many categories can agricultural labourers be divided?
3. Who will be called agricultural labourers?
4. Give definition of bonded labour.
5. Tell the meaning of migration.
6. Throw light on Bhoo Daan movement.

IV. Long answer question:

(Answer in 100 words)

1. Mention the present condition and problems of agricultural labourers in Bihar.
2. Why are the problems of agricultural labourers in Bihar increasing rapidly? Mention the ways for improvement their conditions.
3. Throw light on the necessary measures for solving the problems of Bihari agricultural labourers.
4. Throw light on the government efforts done for improving the condition of agricultural labourers.
5. Focus on the problems emerged in Bihar out of migration of agricultural labourers. How can it be resolved?

Answer

I. Objective question:

1. a
2. b
3. a
4. a
5. c

II. Fill in the blanks:

1. agricultural
2. country
3. scheduled caste
4. machine
5. migration

III. Project work:

1. Conduct a survey of 10 families of agricultural labourers in your village.
2. Write a story on a migrating family.
3. When, where and how migration happens? Present a brief *nukkad natak* (street play) in context of famous folk lyricist Bhikhari Thakur.

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