



## RURAL LABOUR IN INDIA

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### ABSTRACT

Indian labour force is the second largest labour force in the world after China. As per the estimate, more than 94 percent of the Indian workforce is engaged in work activities which belong to the unorganized sector. It appears to be great at first sight that the employment status of the country is high, but in reality, the fact is much miserable. One of the most common problem that existed and still is faced by the rural workforce is the problem of unemployment. It is a very sensitive problem. Because of the unavailability of the job opportunities, unavailability of the land for agricultural purpose and other declining economic conditions, the rural labour force is forced to migrate from his area to another area, such as the urban regions, cities, etc. One another reason for this movement of working class from the rural region is because of the seasonal nature of agriculture. During the agricultural season, the rural population gets engaged in agricultural activities, be it the time of sowing or the time of harvesting. But in the off season, i.e., during the non agricultural season, they have no option other than heading towards other other promising regions where they can earn their living. The living condition of the rural workforce has been continuously deteriorating. Absence of facilities to earn their living, unavailability of better quality of fertilizers, lack of proper guidance, unavailability of modern agricultural equipments, etc all force the rural labour force to migrate to other regions. Even the wages that they receive are very less. More surprisingly, the return which they should get after sale of the agricultural products is much less in comparison to the rise in the market price of the same product. Even after there is a rise in the price of the agricultural commodities, the same is not reflected in the earnings of the labourers. All that they earn as a result of their work activities is totally consumed in meeting the food requirements of their family members. Generally a rural family has a large number of person to support. Most of them are unemployed and hence are totally dependent upon the earnings of some of the family members. One can very easily observe the disguised form of unemployment prevailing in the rural economy. For performing an activity, say for instance the agricultural activity, which would have require less number of family members, all the family members get involved. It appears as if all are employed, and the return was supposed to be proportionally increase in the same manner. But the truth is just the opposite. It does not result in the increase in the output and also does not lead to the increase in the per person earning of the family members. The return that is generated does not change significantly. Because of ever deteriorating economic and social condition of the rural workforce, the families are forced to even employ their children into some work, so that their contribution would help the family to sustain itself. This leads to the birth of the rampant practice of the child labour. Although child labour is not permitted in India, but its still being practiced at a gross level in nearly every corner of the rural India. One can even witness, child labour being practices in the cities as well, where they work in the chimney, as servants, etc. So as to combat with these problems faced by the rural labourers, the government of India came up with a number of Acts, schemes and plans. Many such new steps are regularly being taken by the government so as to ensure the labour rights in each and every corner of India. Some of the Acts so framed not only secure and protect the rights of the rural workforce but of all the employees who work in a licensed organization. Similarly, for the upliftment of the rural population, the government of India has come up with many schemes and programs. Some of these are programs are Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, Indira Aawas Yojna, Swarnjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojna, Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojna, etc. All these measure only promise to ensure that these would bring about change in the social and economic condition of the rural population by providing them opportunities of employment and help them to stand on their own foot. If in short, we try to summarize about the possible steps to uplift the socio economic condition of the rural labour force, then we need to first of all ensure that they are provided with all kinds of modern facilities to upgrade their business activities. They must be made aware of the modern tools and techniques used in the agricultural sector and other sector as well. Proper funding and guidance is also necessary so as to shape the business trends towards growth. Agricultural sector must be given much more priority as that is the backbone of the rural sector of India.



## INTRODUCTION

The business sector as of today that prevails in India can be categorized into two broad categories, namely the Organized sector and the Unorganized sector. The Organized sector or Formal sector constitutes all those organizations which are registered or are licensed organizations. In other words we can say that the organized sector refers to the organizations which pay taxes, say the sales tax, income tax, etc. On the other hand Unorganized sector covers rest all but the organized sector organizations. Unorganized sectors are also commonly known as Informal sectors. It refers to all unlicensed, unregistered economic activities that exist in the Indian business market.

The Unorganized labour in India can further be classified into following four groups. These groups are as mentioned below:

- *Based on the Occupation,*
- *Based on the nature of Employment,*
- *Specially distressed categories, and*
- *Service categories.*

The unorganized occupational groups include small and marginal farmers, landless agricultural labourers, share croppers, fishermen, labour force engaged in animal husbandry, beedi rolling, labeling and packing, building and construction workers, leather workers, weavers, artisans, salt workers, workers in saw mills and oil mills, etc. Labourers who are indulged in agricultural activities, bonded labourers, migrant labourers are categorized under the classification **based on the nature of employment**.

**Distressed unorganized sector** includes scavengers, carriers of head loads, drivers of animal driven vehicles, loaders and unloaders, etc.

**Service workers** includes midwives, domestic workers, barbers, hand cart operators, unorganized retail, etc.

The Rural economy of India is largely agriculture oriented, earning their livelihood by earning wages in farm and in some case non farm activities. The rural labour force may considered to constitute the agricultural labourers, labourers having small land plots, cultivators, artisans, etc. As maximum of the work is agricultural in nature, so majority of work force is oriented towards the agricultural activities. The rural labour force can be further categorized into three categories, namely:

- *Those engaged in agricultural activities;*
- *Those engaged in allied services; and*
- *Those engaged in non agricultural activities.*

Labor force which earn their livelihood by activities such as poultry farming, raising of lively stock, etc are considered under the allied services. On the other hand, all those activities which are non agricultural in nature, includes activities such as the work of blacksmith, carpenter, goldsmith, washer-men, etc. It is really very hard to draw a demarcation line in between the laborers engaged in agricultural activities and non agricultural activities. Its because the same labour force which is engaged in an agricultural activity at one particular time in a year, gets involved in non agricultural activities in other time of the same year. It is because of the seasonal nature of the agricultural activities. At one point of a year, the laborers are acting as a farmer, and for the rest of the time, so as to earn their livelihood they engage themselves in other activities, such as construction of houses, and may head towards the urban sector.

So as to understand the true nature of the rural workforce, we need to understand primarily about the surrounding environment and conditions that prevails in the rural sector of India. Some key factors on which we need to give our keen attention are as follows:

*Nature of Employment and Work Activities,  
Wage Structure, and  
Economic condition of the labour force.*

## Nature of Employment and Work Activities

Indian society has been an agrarian society. A large portion of Indian population resides in the villages and earn their livelihood from there only. Agriculture is a major source of income for them. It accounts for the employment for more than 90 percent of the Indian rural population. Members of the family are engaged in agricultural activities. Although it might appear that many people are engaged in the agricultural work or are employed, but in reality, it is nothing other than a kind of disguised form of employment. The involvement of a large number of members, specially of many of the family members does not produce an equivalent high output, rather the output remains the same. In many cases the output remains low. Apart from the agricultural activities, the rural population is also engaged in activities such as that of artisans, carpenters, blacksmith, etc. These non agricultural jobs also provide employment to a significant portion of the rural population. A major trend that has been observed in the workforce in the past two decades is that they have started moving towards the urban locations at the times of off agricultural seasons. It must be taken into account that the agricultural seasons are dependent upon the type of cultivation in which the farmers are involved in. For instance, the major workforce are



generally from the regions of northeast, east and central India. Cultivation of rice and other seasonal vegetables is the major agricultural activity. At the time of sowing, majority of workforce gets engaged in the farming activity. Till the time he crops gets ready to get harvested, the same workforce gets engaged in other activities. Majority of them head towards the urban cities to earn their livelihood. Here they get engaged in work activities such as construction of building, digging, stone breaking, road construction etc.

### **Economic Condition of the labourers and the Wage Structure**

It is sad to state but is a ground reality that the lowest income earning group in Indian economy is represented by the rural labour population. For a major part of a year they try to look for a source of employment, as not all the time through out the year they can be engaged in the agricultural activities. Roughly the rural labour in India gets an average wage of only rupees ten to fifteen in a day which is the lowest among the different kind of labourers in the whole of India. Similarly, during the time of sowing and harvesting, the labour force would be very scarcely be observed to offer their services in other fields. Thus there is always a difference in between the demand as well as the supply of the labour force because of the seasonal nature of agriculture. Debt bondage and child labour can be observed in the rural region. The families have a large number of dependent members and yet the earnings which they can gather are insignificant. Whatever is the earning, gets totally absorbed in meeting the food requirements of the family members. Even after that, the quantity and the quality of food that they consume is less and lacks the nutritional values.

### **GOVERNMENT SCHEMES FOR RURAL LABOUR PROTECTION AND DEVELOPMENT**

Government has taken into consideration the fact that the labour force of India, including the rural labour force should be able to safeguard itself from the malpractices if being followed by the employer. It has taken into consideration both the organized as well as unorganized sector in the Indian Business platform. For the safeguard of the workforce working in a licensed or organized sector organization, the government came with a number of Acts. Some of these acts are as follows:

#### **Trade Union Act**

Trade union act was introduced in the year of 1926. It aims at enacting the rules and protections granted to trade unions in India.

#### **Payment of Wages Act**

This act got enforced since 1936 and aims at regulating the distribution of wages from the employer to the employees.

#### **Industrial Employment Act**

This act was introduced in 1946. It requires the employers to define as post the conditions of employment. This is done via Standing orders. That is why this act is also known as Standing order act. These standing orders are approved by the government and aim at removing the flexibility from the hands of employer in terms of working hours, leave grant, job, etc.

#### **Workmen Compensation Act, 1923**

This act enforces the employers to provide the employee the proper compensation if he/she meets any sort of injury during the course of his employment. In case of the demise of the employee, his/her respective dependents would be eligible to receive the proper compensation.

Similarly, there are many different sorts of acts, such as Industrial Dispute Act, Minimum Wages Act, Industries Act, Maternity Benefit Act, etc. But all these acts come on the surface in the case where the employee is working under an organized and licensed organization. In the case of rural employment, such acts hardly can be supposed to be feasible. As a result to tackle this situation, the government of India comes with a number of schemes. Some of these schemes are as follows:

#### **Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana**

Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY) was launched on 25th December 2000 as a fully funded Centrally Sponsored Scheme to provide all weather road connectivity in rural areas of the country. The programme envisages connecting all habitations with a population of 500 persons and above in the plain areas and 250 persons and above in hill States, the tribal and the desert areas.

#### **Swarnjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana**

The objective of the Swarnjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY) is to bring the assisted poor families (Swarozgaries) above the Poverty Line by ensuring appreciable sustained level of income over a period of time. This objective is to be achieved by inter alia organizing the rural poor into Self Help Groups(SHG) through the process of social mobilization, their training and capacity building and provision of income generating assets. The SHG approach helps the poor to build their self-confidence through community action. Interactions in group meetings and collective decision making enables them in identification and prioritization of their needs and resources. This process would ultimately lead to the strengthening and socio-economic empowerment of the rural poor as well as improve their collective bargaining power.



### Indira Aawas Yojna

The objective of the Indira Aawas Yojana is primarily to help construction/ upgradation of dwelling units of members of Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes, freed bonded labourers, minorities in the below poverty line category 1 and other below poverty line non-SC/ST rural households by providing them a lump sum financial assistance.

### Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, a milestone in the history of Social Legislation was notified on September 07, 2005. Its sole aim is the development of the Rural India with an enhanced occupational security by providing 100 days of guaranteed wage employment in a financial year.

Well, the NAREGA scheme has appeared to be little bit promising for the rural workforce. The noble ideas of NREGA are to give strength to the rural poor and unemployed adult citizens of India. The Gram Panchayats have been given the authority regarding the issue of the Job card to the job seeker only after the verification of applicant's identity. The gram panchayats cover 50 percent of the works. NREGA aims at strengthening or empowering the rural female section, so because of it the female percentage accounts to 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the total working force. Grievance redressal mechanism has been put in action for ensuring a sound responsive implementation of the process. So as to provide the transparency and acknowledge the public about the mission, performances, achievements and comments, all accounts and records have been put for public examination. There are a number of other sound features included, major features covered under NREGA are summarized below:

- Employments to adults members of a rural family may apply for registration either orally or in writing to the local gram panchayat. The recipient must be willing to do unskilled manual work.
- The gram panchayat will issue a Job Card within 15 days of application(after verification) free of cost which will bear the recipients photograph.
- If employment is not provided to the recipients within 15 days, then daily unemployment allowance in cash has to be provided at the rate of 25 percent of the wage mentioned under the program.
- Employment has to be provided within a radius of 5 km, else extra wage of 10 percent has to be given to the seeker.
- In these 100 days of rural adult employment act, 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the working strength has to be filled by the women section.
- Equal wages has to be provided to both men and women according to the Minimum Wages Act 1948 for agricultural labours in the state, unless Centre notifies a wage rate which will not be less than Rs.60/ per day.
- Wages are to be paid according to piece rate or daily rate. Payment of wages has to done on weekly basis and not beyond a fortnight in any case.
- The shelf of projects will be recommended by the gram sabha and approved by zilla panchayat.
- 50 percent of the work will be given to gram panchayats for execution.
- No contractors or machinery is allowed, and a 60:40 wage is to material ratio has to be maintained. The central government bears the cent percent wage cost of unskilled manual labour and 75 percent of the material cost including the wages of skilled and semi skilled workers.
- **Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs)** have a principal role in planning and implementation of the NREGA.
- Social Audits has to done by gram sabha.
- For ensuring a responsive implementing process grievance redressal mechanism has to be put in place.
- All accounts and records relating to the scheme should be available for public examination.

**A Comparative Study of some Selected States**

Issues	Uttar Pradesh	Madhya Pradesh	Bihar	Maharashtra	Chattisgad h
<b>Work status</b>	-Work started in 70% villages & 25% works completed.	-50% works completed	-Work started in 20% of covered Panchayats.	-Work has started In 50% villages.	-Work started in all the villages covered, 15% work completed.
<b>Jobs generated</b>	SC-28%; ST- 20%; OBC- 50%; Women : 48%	SC -1%; ST-85% OBC-3%; Women :39%	-Hardly 200 person days generated so far	SC- 25%; ST-33%; OBC -42%; Women-58%	SC-37%; ST-15% OBC-8%;Women-53%
<b>Wage payments</b>	-Rs.58 against provision of 60-50% wage payment between 1-2 week	-Rs.61 for both male and female -In 40% case wages paid after 15 days	-N.A.	-Wages paid in the range of Rs.20-Rs.52 per day.	-Rs.60 per day for both male & female.
<b>Transparenc y</b>	-In 60% villages muster rolls were read	-In 30% villages muster roll are read.	-No transparency norms followed	-In none of the villages, muster rolls were read	-In 40% of the cases muster rolls read in the GS
<b>Work site Distance more than 5 km</b>	-20% case worksites 5 km away but only in 50% of such case extra wages paid.	-20% cases, nowhere extra wages paid.	-Even in the case of distance more than 5 km no payment of extra wages	-30% of the worksite farther than 5km but no extra wages paid.	-In 10% of the cases worksite farther than 5km but no extra wages paid.
<b>Worksite Facilities</b>	-Drinking water available but crèche and first aid facility rare.	-Drinking water available but crèche and first aid facility rare.	-No facilities available at the worksite.	-Drinking water available but crèche and first aid facility rare.	-Drinking water available but crèche and first aid facility rare.
<b>Additional manpower</b>	-At 15% of job sites surplus manpower available	-At none of the job sites surplus manpower available.	-No provision of extra manpower.	-No additional manpower.	-No additional manpower.
<b>Job Demand</b>	-Job demanded in 10% of the villages but even after job was provided after more than 15 days in 90% of the cases no allowance was paid.	-No demand made so far.	-No demand so far	-In one instance job demanded, job was provided after 15 days without any allowance.	-No case of job demand.

**CONCLUSION**

Agriculture has been considered to be the backbone of rural India, because it support a huge portion of the population. Although the rural population has been given special care by the government as well as by many organizations, but the proportional growth is not visible everywhere. The rural work force not only has the responsibility to support itself, bi also the dependent mouths to feed. The income generated by the tireless effort by the labourers involved majorly in agricultural activities and also of those involved in non agricultural activities is all consumed in meeting the

food requirements of their family members. Introduction of some schemes, framing of Acts, etc have not been able to bring about significant change in the status of the rural labourers. The wide spread unemployment, poverty, lack of land and financial assistance, unavailability of modern scientific tools and techniques, etc causes them to even set backwards to much more extent. The seasonal nature if agriculture, the absence of the facilities and resources in the rural areas force them to head towards the urban regions. The evil act of child labour, bondage labour etc can easily be observed. In a nutshell, we can say that the



remedy to these problems faced by the rural workforce does not just lie in the framing of some schemes, acts, rather its achievable just by ensuring that the basic development requirements of the rural labourers are met and they are provided with the equal facilities of growth and development just as is enjoyed by the urban population.

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