

# Indian Agricultural Labour, Policy, Prospects & Problems

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## ABSTRACT:

This paper looks at the experiences of agricultural labourers and the struggles they are waging in a period when Indian agriculture is becoming increasingly integrated into global markets. It argues that global capital and the forces of globalisation are currently seeking to appropriate, reshape and redefine the transformation which is carried out in cultivation. It looks at how, rather than displacing existing feudal and patriarchal relationships in Indian agriculture, globalisation has incorporated and adapted them to its needs in a variety of regionally specific ways. It also discusses the political nature of agricultural labourers' movements, which are compelled to be progressive rather than defensive, projecting a vision of social and economic transformation, which also leads to a questioning of unequal relationships among those who are struggling for change.

**Keywords:** Agricultural Labours, Workers Transformation, Indian Agriculture,

## 1. INTRODUCTION:

It is one of the primary objects of the Five Year Plan to ensure fuller opportunities for work and better living to all the sections of the rural community and, in particular, to assist agricultural labourers and backward classes to come to the level of the rest. One of the most distinguishing features of the rural economy of India has been the growth in the number of agricultural workers, cultivators and agricultural labourers engaged in crop production. The phenomena of underemployment, under-development and surplus population are simultaneously manifested in the daily lives and living of the agricultural labourers. They usually get low wages, conditions of work put an excessive burden on them, and the employment which they get is extremely irregular. Agricultural workers constitute the most neglected class in Indian rural structure. Their income is low and employment irregular. Since, they possess no skill or training, they have no alternative employment opportunities either. Socially, a large number of agricultural workers belong to scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. Therefore, they are a suppressed class. They are not organised and they cannot fight for their rights. Because of all these reasons their economic

lot has failed to improve even after five decades of planning.

Labour is the most important input in increasing production in traditional agriculture. In the early stage of development, since land was available in plenty increase in labour supply led to the clearing of more land for bringing it under cultivation. At this stage of development the increase in labour supply was a boon to the society. It made positive contribution and helped in increasing agricultural production. Modernizing agriculture involved introduction of new technology. The technological innovation required increased use of capital in agriculture. Even with the use of more capital and new technology a number of farm-operations required intensification of labour use such as seed bed production, weeding, irrigation and harvesting. Thus, labour is critical input in modern agricultural development. Agricultural labourers are socially and economically poorest section of the society. Agricultural labourer households constitute the historically deprived social groups, displaced handicraftsmen and dispossessed peasantry. They are the poorest of the poor in rural India. Their growth reflects the colonial legacy of under development and the inadequacies of planning intervention in the past. Overcrowding and growth of agricultural labourer continued unabated, given poor labour absorption in the non- agricultural sector and also inadequacies of reforms in the agrarian structure. The poverty syndrome among agricultural labourers needs to be read against such a background of prolonged rural under development, assetlessness, unemployment, low wages, under-nutrition, illiteracy and social backwardness constitute the poverty syndrome among agricultural labourers. These reinforce each other so as to constitute a vicious circle of poverty. There is little inter-generational upward mobility among agricultural labourer households. Human factor is of supreme importance in any pattern of economic development. More so are the agricultural labourers of India, the country's largest unorganized section comprising the poorest workers, toiling on the sunny fields of India. Most of them hail from the socially disadvantaged

sections of our society and a large number of them continue to live under the poverty condition.

## 2. CHARACTERISTICS AND PROBLEMS OF INDIAN AGRICULTURE

As stated at the outset, Indian economy hinges on agriculture. The socioeconomic status of the people, the national polity and the gamut of life of the people is directly controlled by agriculture. The Indian agriculture, however, has its own characteristics. Some of the important characteristics and problems of Indian agriculture have been described briefly in the following section:

### 1. Subsistent in Character

Despite eleven five year plans, in greater parts of the country, Indian agriculture is subsistent in character. The cultivators and farmers grow crops mainly for the family consumption. It is only in the controlled irrigated parts of the country like Punjab, Haryana, western Uttar Pradesh, and Kaveri delta where agriculture has become an agri-business or is market oriented.

### 2. Heavy Pressure of Population

The Indian agriculture is characterised by heavy pressure of population. About 70 per cent of the total population of the country is directly or indirectly dependent on agriculture. At present, the per capita agricultural land is only about 0.10 hectare as against 0.30 hectare in 1951. The world average of per head availability of agricultural land is about 4.5 hectares. The fast growth of population industrialization and urbanization are putting enormous pressure on arable land.

### 3. Predominance of Food Grains

In both the Kharif (summer) and the rabi (winter) seasons, grain crops occupy the greater proportion of the cropped area. In fact, rice, maize, millets, bajra, ragi, and pulses are the dominant crops in the kharif season, and wheat, gram and barley occupy over three-fourth of the total cropped area in the rabi season.

### 4. Mixed Cropping

In the rain-fed areas of the country, mixed cropping is a common practice. The farmers mix millets, maize and pulses in the kharif season and wheat, gram and barley in the rabi season. In the areas of Jhuming (shifting cultivation), ten to sixteen crops are mixed and sown in the same field. The rationale

behind mixing of crops is to get good agricultural return. In case the monsoon is good, the rice crop will give better production and in case of failure of monsoon, the less water requiring crops like maize, millets, bajra and pulses will give good harvest. Mixed cropping is a characteristic of subsistent agriculture.

### 5. High Percentage of the Reporting Area under Cultivation

In India, about 55 per cent of the total reporting area is under cultivation of crops and pastures. This is much higher when compared with about 4 per cent in Canada, 12 per cent in China, 15 per cent in Japan, and 16 per cent in USA.

### 6. Small Size of Holdings and Fragmentation of Fields

Over 70 per cent of the holdings are either small or marginal, i.e. less than one hectare. The small size of holdings is mainly due to the law of inheritance and other sociocultural and economic factors. Moreover, the fields are scattered and fragmented. The small size of holdings and fragmented fields are unsuitable for the modern methods of agriculture.

### 7. Limited Intensive Agriculture

In India, only about one-third of the total cropped area is under double and multiple cropping. Increase in the double cropped area is difficult unless heavy investment is made in development of canal and tube-well irrigation.

### 8. Primitive Technology

Most of the farmers of the country, especially in the rain-fed areas, use draught animals (bullocks, male buffaloes and camels) for ploughing and other agricultural operations. The health and efficiency of draught animals is low which often retards the timely operations of sowing, weeding, and harvesting.

### 9. Indian Agriculture is Labour Intensive

In India, agriculture is a labour based enterprise in which most of the agricultural operations, like ploughing, levelling, sowing, weeding, spraying, sprinkling, harvesting, and threshing are carried on mainly by human hands. The use of machinery is still confined only to the rich fainers of Punjab, Haryana, western Uttar Pradesh, plains of Uttarakhand, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, and Maharashtra.

### 10. Rain-fed Agriculture

In the greater parts (over 56%) of the country,

agriculture is largely dependent on rainfall, especially the summer monsoon. Unfortunately, the behaviour of summer monsoon is highly erratic. Consequently, the variability of rainfall is high which affects the agricultural return adversely. Only about 55 per cent of the total cropped area is under irrigation in which the farmers are more confident about their agricultural returns even at the failure of monsoon, as it happened in 2009.

### **11. Less Area under Leguminous and Fodder Crops**

The nitrogen fixing crops like pulses are getting less area under their cultivation. Consequently, the natural fertility of the soil is depleting and the soils are losing their resilience characteristics. Moreover, less than 4 per cent of the cropped area is under fodder crops. This, together with lack of good pastures, has detrimental effect over the development of dairy farming and milk-production. India has the largest number of cattle in the world, but it occupies an insignificant place in respect of cattle products in the world.

### **12. Tradition Bound**

By and large, the Indian agriculture is tradition bound. Established several centuries ago, the structures of a self-contained rural economy were founded in caste-derived occupational land tenures, made complex by absentee and parasitic landlords. These institutional factors and tradition bound institutions are a major obstacles in the path of innovations and modernisation of agriculture.

### **13. Low Productivity**

One of the main problems of Indian agriculture is its low productivity. In comparison to the other agricultural countries, the Indian agricultural yields are among the lowest in the world (Table 9.4 and Table 9.5). The main cause of low yield per hectare is the low fertility of soil and less care to replenish it through green-manure, fertilisers, fallowing, and scientific rotation of crops. The consumption pattern of chemical fertilizers has been shown in Fig. 9.4. It may be seen from this figure that Punjab with 175 Kg/ha is the leading consumer of chemical fertilisers followed by Haryana 160 Kg/ha. Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil-Nadu and West-Bengal. In general the fertiliser consumption level is very low in the areas of dry farming.

### **14. Government Policy**

After the First Five Year Plan, Indian agriculture got a step-motherly treatment. The farming

community has been ignored, while there has been more emphasis on industrialisation and urbanisation. The growth rate of agriculture is only about 2.5 per cent, while the overall growth rate of the country is about 9 per cent (2010). The farmers are not getting remunerative prices, most of them are under debts and in several parts of the country, farmers are committing suicides. This dismal picture is the result of continuous careless agricultural land use planning. Muclenphasis has however, been laid on the rural and agricultural development in the Eleventh Five Year Plan to remove the rural, urban inequality. Creation of 580 lakh jobs has also been proposed in this plan to overcome the problem of unemployment and to check the rural-urban migration. The real challenge for the government is in trying to boost food output at home, and increase investment in rural and agricultural infrastructure for the same, while at the same time not letting its guard down on fiscal prudence or inflation management. The severe drought of 2009 over greater part of the country has increased the miseries of the farmers, which is a set-back in the revival of Indian economy.

### **15. Lack of Definite Agricultural Land Use Policy**

In the absence of a definite land use policy, the farmers grow crops according to their convenience. This sometimes leads to excess of production and sometimes scarcity. Many a times the farmers have to burn their sugarcane crop and often get less remunerative price of vegetables (onion, and other vegetables).

### **16. Lack of Marketing and Storage Facilities**

Lack of marketing and storage facilities and the role of brokers deprive the farmers to fetch remunerative prices for their agricultural products. Except a few states like Punjab, Haryana, Maharashtra, Gujarat, and Andhra Pradesh, marketing and storage facilities are inadequate. In greater part of the country, farmers are still at the mercy of unscrupulous traders and are easily exploited by secret brokerage, false weights and payment of inflated commissions. Moreover, due to lack of proper pricing policy, farmers fail to obtain fair price for their agricultural products.

### **17. Low Status of Agriculture in the Society**

In greater parts of India, agriculture is not considered as a dignified and honourable

profession. This leads to disappointment and lack of enthusiasm among most of the farmers. The younger generation of farmers prefer a petty government job to agriculture. Moreover, rich farmers invest their agricultural profits in non-agricultural sectors which are more remunerative. In fact, there is a mass exodus of people from rural to urban areas in search of lucrative jobs. There is a constant flow of human and material resources from villages to the cities. This has led to fast growth of urban centres which are infested with slums, ghettos, and shanty colonies.

### 18. Land Tenancy

In many parts of the country, there are absentee land lords and the tillers are not having the rights on agricultural land. The big landlords who own big farm houses are rich urbanites. The tillers and share croppers who actually cultivate the land of absentee land lords are not much interested in the development, proper management, utilisation of agricultural land, and modernisation of agriculture. This system leads to lack of interest on the part of the tiller and consequently, the per unit yield of most of the crops is low.

### 19. Poverty and Indebtedness of the Farmers

Although cultivators indebtedness is universal in subsistent farming, its impact is perhaps nowhere as crushing as in India. Unfortunately, over 85 per cent of all the cultivating families are under debt. It is because of heavy indebtedness that several thousand farmers in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Orissa, Gujarat, Punjab, and Uttar Pradesh have committed suicide during the last ten years. The small and marginal farmers are still dependent on money-lenders who charge exorbitant interest on loans (25 to 40 per cent per annum). In the case of non-payment, the money-lenders grab their mortgage property making them pauper. Some special provisions have been made in the draft of the Eleventh Five Year Plan to overcome the problem of farmers indebtedness. A scheme of debt waiving for small and marginal farmers and debt relief for other farmers was announced by the government in the Union Budget of 2008-09.

### 20. Inadequacy of Extension Service

For the diffusion of agricultural innovations both in the irrigated and rain-fed areas, a team of skilled village level workers is required. There is much to be done in this area. Training of workers and their dedication can help the tradition bound farmers to modernise their agriculture.

### 21. Inadequate Agricultural Research

### and Education, Training, and Extension

Though enough progress has been made in the field of agricultural research, there is no co-ordination between the farm and research laboratories in the different agro-climatic regions of the country. Hence, gains of new agricultural researches are not reaching the common cultivators, especially the marginal and small farmers. Very little attention is being paid for educating and training farmers for the adoption of new agricultural innovations and techniques to increase their agricultural production.

### 22. Soil Erosion and Soil Degradation

Soil erosion is a universal phenomenon. It is, however, significantly high in the areas of heavy rainfall with undulating topography and in the areas of scanty rainfall (deserts and semi-desert areas). The indiscriminate felling of trees, cattle grazing, unscientific land use practices have greatly accelerated the rate of soil erosion in the different parts of the country. Although soil conservation programmes were initiated in 1953, their impact has not been very encouraging. The people's awareness and their active participation in the soil conservation is essentially required.

### 23. Other Characteristics and Problems

There are numerous other problems also which are affecting the agricultural production and rural economy and society adversely. For example, unscientific methods of agriculture, inadequate irrigation facilities, less use of chemical fertilisers, insecticides, pesticides, less remunerative prices of agricultural products, poverty, hunger, and malnutrition of farmers and lack of infrastructural facilities like roads, water, irrigation, electricity, credit, banking, and crop-insurance.

## 3. IMPORTANT CHARACTERISTICS OF INDIAN AGRICULTURE:

India is essentially an agricultural country where agriculture plays a pivotal role in dominating the economic, social and cultural life of the people. So much so that even the prospects of ruling political parties and governments depend upon the quantum of agricultural productions and availability of cheap food grains for masses. Following are some of the broad features of the Indian agriculture:

1. Indian agriculture is subsistent type of agriculture whose prime aim is to meet the food and other requirements of its vast population. Farmers select the crops with major objective of meeting their domestic needs rather than generating surplus for national and international markets. It is recently that agriculture is becoming commercialised and market oriented, a role gaining

popularity in developed areas and amongst the big farmers.

2. Indian agriculture is characterised by heavy population pressure. About 70 per cent of the country's population derives its livelihood from agriculture and allied occupations. Since India's population is growing at a faster rate of 2.1 per cent per annum the per capita availability of agricultural land has declined from 0.75 ha. In 1951 to 0.29 ha. In 1971 and 0.13 ha. In 1991 (cf. world average of 4.5 ha). This puts enormous pressure on agriculture.

3. Indian agriculture has the predominance of the cultivation of food grains which occupy 76% of the total cropped area and account for 80% of the total agricultural production of the country. These cereals include rice, wheat, millet, gram, maize and pulses which are grown to meet the food requirements of India's vast population (1027 millions in 2001).

4. The agriculture shows diversity of crops. Sometimes four-five crops are grown simultaneously in the same field. This is done to ensure some agricultural production during unfavorable weather conditions. This mixed cropping reduces the agricultural output and per hectare yield.

5. India has the highest percentage (53%) of its geographical area under cultivation in comparison to many countries (USA 16.3%, China 11.8%, Japan 14.9%, Canada 4.3%, etc.) of the world. The climatic conditions especially temperature helps in providing a long growing season throughout the year. Due to pressure of population and consequent expansion in agricultural lands vast tracts of forests have been removed from the plains. Here there is very little scope for increasing cropped area and in certain pockets even negative trend is being witnessed.

6. Due to physical, economic and social factors the landholdings are tiny, fragmented and unsuitable for modern methods of agriculture.

7. In India intensive farming is carried on in limited areas. Elsewhere it is practiced on traditional lines. That is why per hectare yield of different crops is much lower than other countries of the world and India's total agricultural production is not very satisfactory and rewarding.

Although with the application of chemical fertilisers and crop safety measures there has been marked increase in per hectare yield of different crops (wheat from 663 kg/ha in 1950-51 to 2583 kg/ha in 1998-99, rice from 668 kg/ha in 1950-51 to 1928 kg/ha. in 1998-99, maize from 547 kg/ha. in 1950-51 to 1755 kg/ha. in 1998-99, oil seeds from 481 kg/ha. in 1950-51 to 944 kg/ha in 1998-99 and groundnut from 775 kg/ha. in 1950-51 to 1210 kg/ha in 1998-99) but it is still much lower from international standard.

8. Indian agriculture utilises a number of draught animals like bullocks, he buffaloes, camels etc. in agricultural work. It is also labor based enterprise where all agricultural operations like tilling, sowing, weeding, sprinkling of insecticides/pesticides, harvesting, threshing etc. are carried by human hands. Although the use of agricultural machinery is replacing animal and human power but the pace of progress is very slow and confined to rich sections of the cultivators.

9. Indian agriculture is mostly dependent on rainfall whose variability in time and place has adverse effect on agricultural output. It is really a matter of concern that despite five decades of constant endeavour only 41.2% of the total cropped area has been brought under irrigation. Rest is at the mercy of rain-god. That is why when rain fails agricultural production is badly affected, scarcity prevails and prices reach sky high. If the entire agricultural area is brought under irrigation agricultural production may be easily doubled.

10. On an average, climatic and seraphic factors are favourable for agriculture. That is why where enough moisture is available either through rainfall or irrigation three to four crops can be raised in a year. But in the absence of adequate moisture even the cultivation of single crop becomes difficult.

11. Indian agriculture puts minimum attention on fodder crops (4% of cropped area). This together with lack of good pastures has detrimental effect over the development of dairy farming. India has the largest number of cattle but it occupies an insignificant place in respect of cattle products in the world.

12. Indian agriculture has been the victim of negligence and step motherly treatment by the government. Still much attention is focused on the development of industries and urban areas neglecting the vast countryside. The remunerative price for agricultural products, restoring tiller's right over land, and schemes of crop insurance are still Cherished dreams difficult to be realised in near future.

13. Despite some breakthroughs, the basic structure of the agrarian economy still remains traditional in India. Established centuries ago, these structures of a self-contained rural economy, founded in caste-derived occupational land tenures made complex by absentee and parasitic landlords, have been slow to respond to modernization.

14. Indian agriculture suffers from numerous problems, i.e., small land holdings, unscientific method of farming, less irrigational facilities, less use of chemical, bio and natural fertilisers, greater vulnerability to pests and diseases, less remunerative prices for agricultural products, poverty amongst and lack of infrastructural facilities etc.

15. Indian agriculture also lacks definite a cultural land use policy at national or regional it is on the sweet will of the farmer to grow one another crop. This sometimes leads to excess production and sometimes scarcity. Lack of marketing and storage facility and the activity of broker and middlemen deprive farmers to fetch redutive prices for agricultural products.

16. In India agriculture is not considered to an honourable profession. This leads to dissepiments and lack of enthusiasm amongst farmers people prefer a petty government job to agriculture Rich farmers invest their agricultural profits in agricultural sectors which are more remunerate There is mass exodus of people from rural to areas in search of lucrative jobs. There is con flow of human and material resources from villa to the cities. This has led to mushroom growth urban centers and slums.

17. There is a need for initiating the process agricultural rehabilitation which should consist effecting improvements on several fronts, in inquest, in social institutions and in reducing de graphic pressures.

#### 4. AGRICULTURE POLICY

Labour policy in India has been evolving in response to the specific needs of the situation in relation to industry and the working class and has to suit the requirements of a planned economy. A body of principles and practices has grown up as a product of joint consultation in which representatives of Government, the working class and employers have been participating at various levels. The legislation and other measures adopted by Government in this field represent the consensus of opinion of the parties vitally concerned and thus acquire the strength and character of a national policy, operating on a voluntary basis. Joint committees have been set up to assist in the formulation of policies as well as their implementation. At the apex of this tripartite machinery is the Indian Labour Conference.

Agriculture is a way of life, a tradition, which, for centuries, has shaped the thought, the outlook, the culture and the economic life of the people of India. Agriculture, therefore, is and will continue to be central to all strategies for planned socio-economic development of the country. Rapid growth of agriculture is essential not only to achieve self-reliance at national level but also for household food security and to bring about equity in distribution of income and wealth resulting in rapid reduction in poverty levels.

Indian agriculture has, since Independence, made rapid strides. In taking the annual food grains production from 51 million tonnes in early fifties to 206 million tonnes at the turn of the century, it has

contributed significantly in achieving self-sufficiency in food and in avoiding food shortages. Over 200 million Indian farmers and farm workers have been the backbone of India's agriculture. Despite having achieved national food security the well being of the farming community continues to be a matter of grave concern for planners and policy makers. The establishment of an agrarian economy which ensures food and nutrition to India's billion people, raw materials for its expanding industrial base and surpluses for exports, and a fair and equitable reward system for the farming community for the services they provide to the society, will be the mainstay of reforms in the agriculture sector.

The National Policy on Agriculture seeks to actualise the vast untapped growth potential of Indian agriculture, strengthen rural infrastructure to support faster agricultural development, promote value addition, accelerate the growth of agro business, create employment in rural areas, secure a fair standard of living for the farmers and agricultural workers and their families, discourage migration to urban areas and face the challenges arising out of economic liberalization and globalisation. Over the next two decades, it aims to attain:

#### The salient features of the new agricultural policy are:

1. Over 4 per cent annual growth rate aimed over next two decades..
2. Greater private sector participation through contract farming.
3. Price protection for farmers.
4. National agricultural insurance scheme to be launched.
5. Dismantling of restrictions on movement of agricultural commodities throughout the country.
6. Rational utilisation of country's water resources for optimum use of irrigation potential.
7. High priority to development of animal husbandry, poultry, dairy and aquaculture.
8. Capital inflow and assured markets for crop production.
9. Exemption from payment of capital gains tax on compulsory acquisition of agricultural land.
10. Minimise fluctuations in commodity prices.
11. Continuous monitoring of international prices.
12. Plant varieties to be protected through a legislation.
13. Adequate and timely supply of quality inputs to farmers.
14. High priority to rural electrification.

15. Setting up of agro-processing units and creation of off-farm employment in rural areas.

## 5. THE MAIN FEATURES OF INDIAN AGRICULTURE WORKERS

1. Large areas have been brought under irrigation.
2. Use of fertilizers and pesticides has been increased.
3. Large area has been brought under high yielding variety of seeds which brings green revolution in India.
4. Although modern techniques are adopted still animals play a significant role in various agricultural activities.
5. Major part of the agriculture depends mainly on monsoon rain.
6. Food crops are the major parts of production.
7. Means of transport and facilities for storing food are inadequate and roads are un-metalled.

## CLASSIFICATION OF AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS:

Agricultural labourers can be divided into four categories –

1. Landless Labourers, who are attached to the land lords;
2. Landless labourers, who are personally independent, but who work exclusively for others;
3. Petty farmers with tiny bits of land who devote most of their time working for others and 4. Farmers who have economic holdings but who have one or more of their sons and dependants working for other prosperous farmers. The first group of labourers have been more or less in the position of serfs or slaves, they are also known as bonded labourers.

**Agricultural labourers can also be divided in the following manner:**

1. Landless agricultural labourers
2. Very small cultivators whose main source of earnings due to their small and sub-marginal holdings is wage employment. Landless labourers in turn can be classified into two broad categories : (1) Permanent Labourers attached to cultivating households. (2) Casual Labourers. The second group can again be divided into three subgroups: (i) Cultivators (ii) Share croppers (iii) Lease holders. Permanent or attached labourers generally work on annual or seasonal basis and they work on some sort of contract. Their wages are determined by custom or tradition. On the other hand temporary or casual labourers are engaged only during peak period for work. Their employment is temporary and they are paid at the market rate. They are not attached to any landlords. Under second group comes small farmers, who process very little land and therefore,

has to devote most of their time working on the lands of others as labourers. Share croppers are those who, while sharing the produce of the land for their work, also work as labourers. Tenants are those who not only work on the leased land but also work as labourers.

## 6. CHARACTERISTICS OF AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS:

Before any attempt is made to evolve a rational policy to improve the living conditions of agricultural labours which happens to belong to the lowest rung of social and economic ladder, it is essential to know the distinguishing features that characterize agricultural labourer in India. The main features, characterizing Indian agricultural labour are as follows :

### 1. Agricultural Labourers are Scattered

Agricultural labour in India is being widely scattered over 5.6 lakh villages, of which half have population of less than 500 each. And therefore, any question of building an effective organization, like that of industrial workers, poses insurmountable difficulties. Thus as the vast number of agricultural labour lies scattered all over India, there has been no successful attempt for long, to build their effective organization even at the state level not to speak of the national level.

### 2. Agricultural Labourers are Unskilled and Lack Training

Agricultural labourers, especially in smaller villages away from towns and cities, are generally unskilled workers carrying on agricultural operation in the centuries old traditional wages. Most of them, especially those in small isolated villages with around 500 population, may not have even heard of modernization of agriculture. Majority of them are generally conservative, tradition bound, totalistic and resigned to the insufferable lot to which according to them fate has condemned them. There is hardly any motivation for change or improvement. Since, there is direct supervision by the landlord, there is hardly any escape form hard work and since there is no alternative employment. The agricultural labourer has to do all types of work-farm and domestic at the bidding of the landlord.

**3. Unorganised Sector** Agricultural labourers are not organized like industrial labourers. They are illiterate and ignorant. They live in scattered villages. Hence they could not organize in unions. In urban areas workers could generally organize themselves in unions and it is convenient for political parties to take interest in trade union activities. This is almost difficult in case of farm

labour. Accordingly, it is difficult for them to bargain with the land owners and secure good wages.

**4. Low Social Status** Most agricultural workers belong to the depressed classes, which have been neglected for ages. The low caste and depressed classes have been socially handicapped and they had never the courage to assert themselves. They have been like dump-driven cattle. In some parts of India, agricultural labourers are migratory, moving in search of jobs at the time of harvesting. Government measures to improve their lot by legislation have proved ineffective so far due to powerful hold of the rural elite classes in the rural economy.

**5. Demand and Supply of Labour** The number of agricultural labourers being very large and skills they possess being meager, there are generally more than abundant supply of agricultural labourer in relation to demand for them. It is only during the sowing and harvesting seasons that there appears to be nearfull employment in the case of agricultural labourers. But, once the harvesting season is over, majority of agricultural workers will be jobless especially in areas, where there is single cropping pattern.

**6. Less Bargaining Power** Due to all the above mentioned factors, the bargaining power and position of agricultural labourers in India is very weak. In fact, quite a large number of them are in the grip of village money lenders, landlords and commission agents, often the same person functioning in all the three capacities. No wonder, the agricultural labour is the most exploited class of people of India.

**7. At the Bidding of the Landlord** There is generally direct and day to day 'contact between agricultural labourers and the landlords' on whose farm they are working. Unlike industrial workers, this direct contact between the employer and employees is a distinct feature of agriculture labourer. The above mentioned few important characteristics distinguish agricultural labourers in India from industrial workers. Thus partly because of factors beyond their control and partly because of their inherent bargaining weakness, the farm labourers have been getting very low wages and have therefore to live in a miserable sub-human life.

## 7. CAUSES FOR THE GROWTH OF AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS :

There are a number of factors responsible for the continuous and enormous increase in the number of agricultural labourers in India. The more important among them are:

1. Increase in population
2. Decline of cottage industries and handicrafts

3. Eviction of small farmers and tenants from land
4. Uneconomic Holdings
5. Increase in indebtedness
6. Spread of the use of money and exchange system
7. Capitalistic Agriculture
8. Displacement of means of subsidiary occupations
9. Disintegration of peasantry
10. Break-up of joint family system.

## 8. SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

The policy will seek to promote technically sound, economically viable, environmentally non-degrading, and socially acceptable use of country's natural resources – land, water and genetic endowment to promote sustainable development of agriculture. Measures will be taken to contain biotic pressures on land and to control indiscriminate diversion of agricultural lands for non-agricultural purposes. The unutilized wastelands will be put to use for agriculture and a forestation. Particular attention will be given for increasing cropping intensity through multiple-cropping and inter-cropping.

Rational utilization and conservation of the country's abundant water resources will be promoted. Conjunctive use of surface and ground water will receive highest priority. Special attention will be focused on water quality and the problem of receding ground-water levels in certain areas as a result of over-exploitation of underground aquifers. Proper on-farm management of water resources for the optimum use of irrigation potential will be promoted.

Erosion and narrowing of the base of India's plant and animal genetic resources in the last few decades has been affecting the food security of the country. Survey and evaluation of genetic resources and safe conservation of both indigenous and exogenously introduced genetic variability in crop plants, animals and their wild relatives will receive particular attention. The use of bio-technologies will be promoted for evolving plants which consume less water, are drought resistant, pest resistant, contain more nutrition, give higher yields and are environmentally safe. Conservation of bio-resources through their *ex situ* preservation in Gene Banks, as also *in situ* conservation in their natural habitats through bio-diversity parks, etc., will receive a high priority to prevent their extinction. Specific measures will also be taken to conserve indigenous breeds facing extinction. There will be a time bound programme to list, catalogue and classify country's vast agro bio-diversity.

Sensitization of the farming community with the environmental concerns will receive high priority. Balanced and conjunctive use of bio-mass, organic and inorganic fertilizers and controlled use of agro chemicals through integrated nutrients and pest

management (INM & IPM) will be promoted to achieve the sustainable increases in agricultural production. A nation-wide programme for utilization of rural and urban garbage, farm residues and organic waste for organic matter repletion and pollution control will be worked out. Agro-forestry and social forestry are prime requisites for maintenance of ecological balance and augmentation of bio-mass production in agricultural systems. Agro-forestry will receive a major thrust for efficient nutrient cycling, nitrogen fixation, organic matter addition and for improving drainage. Farmers will be encouraged to take up farm/agro-forestry for higher income generation by evolving technology, extension and credit support packages and removing constraints to development of agro and farm forestry. Involvement of farmers and landless labourers will be sought in the development of pastures/forestry programmes on public wastelands by giving financial incentives and entitlements to the usufructs of trees and pastures.

The history and traditional knowledge of agriculture, particularly of tribal communities, relating to organic farming and preservation and processing of food for nutritional and medicinal purposes is one of the oldest in the world. Concerted efforts will be made to pool, distil and evaluate traditional practices, knowledge and wisdom and to harness them for sustainable agricultural growth.

## 9. AGRICULTURAL STRUCTURE

Indian agriculture is characterized by predominance of small and marginal farmers. Institutional reforms will be so pursued as to channelize their energies for achieving greater productivity and production. The approach to rural development and land reforms will focus on the following areas:

- Consolidation of holdings all over the country on the pattern of north-western States;
- Redistribution of ceiling surplus lands and waste lands among the landless farmers, unemployed youth with initial start-up capital;
- Tenancy reforms to recognize the rights of the tenants and share croppers;
- Development of lease markets for increasing the size of holdings by making legal provisions for giving private lands on lease for cultivation and agri-business;
- Updating and improvement of land records, computerization and issue of land pass-books to the farmers, and
- Recognition of women's rights in land.

The rural poor will be increasingly involved in the implementation of land reforms with the help of

Panchayati Raj Institutions, Voluntary Groups, Social Activists and Community Leaders.

Private sector participation will be promoted through contract farming and land leasing arrangements to allow accelerated technology transfer, capital inflow and assured markets for crop production, especially of oilseeds, cotton and horticultural crops.

Progressive institutionalization of rural and farm credit will be continued for providing timely and adequate credit to farmers. The rural credit institutions will be geared to promote savings, investments and risk management. Particular attention will be paid to removal of distortions in the priority sector lending by commercial banks for agriculture and rural sectors. Special measures will be taken for revamping of cooperatives to remove institutional and financial weaknesses and evolving simplified procedure for sanction and disbursement of agriculture credit. The endeavour will be to ensure distribution equity in the disbursement of credit. Micro-credit will be promoted as an effective tool for alleviating poverty. Self Help Group – Bank linkage system, suited to Indian rural sector, will be developed as a supplementary mechanism for bringing the rural poor into the formal banking system, thereby improving banks outreach and the credit flows to the poor in an effective and sustainable manner.

The basic support to agriculture has been provided by cooperative sector assiduously built over the years. The Government will provide active support for promotion of cooperative-form of enterprise and ensure greater autonomy and operational freedom to them to improve their functioning. The thrust will be on:

- Structural reforms for promoting greater efficiency and viability by freeing them from excessive bureaucratic control and political interference;
- Creation of infrastructure and human resource development;
- Improvement in financial viability and organizational sustainability of cooperatives;
- Democratisation of management and increased professionalism in their operations, and
- Creating a viable inter-face with other grass-root Organizations.

The Legislative and regulatory framework will be appropriately amended and strengthened to achieve these objectives.

## 10. MEASURES TAKEN BY THE GOVERNMENT TO IMPROVE THE CONDITIONS OF AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS:

The Government has shown awareness of the problems of agricultural workers and all plan documents have suggested ways and means to ameliorate the lot of these people. Measures adopted by the Government for ameliorating the economic conditions of Agricultural labourers are

1. Passing of minimum wage Act.
2. Abolition of Bonded Labourers
3. Providing land to landless labourers
4. Provision of Housing cities to houseless
5. Special schemes for providing employment
  - i) Crash Scheme for Rural Employment (CSRE)
  - ii) Pilot Intensive Rural Employment Project (PIREP)
  - iii) Food for works programme (FWP)
  - iv) National Rural Employment Programme (NREP)
  - v) Rural Landless Employment Programme (RLEP)
  - vi) Drought Prone Area Programme (It was known as Rural Works Programme)
6. Jawahar Rojgar Yojana (which come in with the merger of NREP and RLEGP)
7. Desert Development Programme
8. National Scheme of Training of Rural Youth for Self Employment (TRYSM)
9. Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA)
10. Abolition of Bonded Labourer Act
11. Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP)

### 11. MANAGEMENT REFORMS

Effective implementation of policy initiatives will call for comprehensive reforms in the management of agriculture by Central and State Governments. Central Government will supplement/complement the State Governments' through regionally differentiated Work Plans, comprising crop/area/target group efforts specific interventions, formulated in an inter-active mode and implemented in a spirit of partnership with States. Central Government will move away from schematic approach to Macro-Management mode and assume a role of advocacy, articulation and facilitation to help States in their efforts towards achieving accelerated agricultural development.

The Government will focus on quality aspects at all stages of farm operations from sowing to primary processing. The quality of inputs and other support services to farmers will be improved. Quality consciousness amongst farmers and agro-processors will be created. Grading and standardization of agricultural products will be promoted for export enhancement. Application of science and technology in agriculture will be promoted through a regular system of interface between S&T institutions and users/potential users, to make the sector globally competitive.

The database for agriculture sector will be strengthened to ensure greater reliability of estimates and forecasting which will help in the process of planning and policy making. Efforts will be made to significantly improve and harness latest remote sensing and information technology to

capture data, collate it, add value and disseminate it to appropriate destinations for managing the risk and in accelerating the growth process. The objective will be to engage in a meaningful continuous dialogue with the external environment in the changing scenario and to have on-line and real time system of 'Agriculture on-line' capacity to analyze signals emanating from the farms and markets for the benefit of farmers.

### 12. SUGGESTIONS FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF AGRICULTURAL LABOURS:

The following suggestions can be made for the improvement of the socio-economic and culture position of the agricultural labourers :

1. Better implementation of legislative measures.
2. Improvement the bargaining position.
3. Resettlement of agricultural workers
4. Creating alternative sources of employment
5. Protection of women and child labourers
6. Public works programmes should be for longer period in year
7. Improving the working conditions
8. Regulation of hours of work
9. Improvements in Agricultural sector
10. Credit at cheaper rates of interest on easy terms of payment for undertaking subsidiary occupation.
11. Proper training for improving the skill of farm labourers , &
12. Cooperative farming

**Table 1 Population Projections in Eleventh Plan**

2011/12	1208 million
2016/17	1283 million

**Source:** GOI, 2008, Eleventh Plan, Vol.1, p.75

**13. CONCLUSION:** The prospects for Indian agriculture are good. Demand will grow fast and if we create the correct incentive and organization systems the Indian farmer will not fail us as he has responded well in the past when our policies were supportive. Research systems will have to concentrate on a much larger cafeteria of crops and support to non-crop agriculture, including animal husbandry, fish and forests. The real dangers, apart from anti-agricultural policies, are in running into real resource constraints. Again here the strategies for land and water management are known and agricultural research can fill in the gaps. Unfortunately, the Eleventh Plan is the first plan without a chapter on the Perspective of the

Economy and we have to rely on the efforts of people concerned on India's future outside the government like me. We may hope for a more serious effort in the midterm review of the Eleventh Plan. As member of the Planning Commission it was my good fortune to develop this vision of a detailed agro-climatic strategy for India. It is more urgent now.

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