

CHAPTER-I

INTRODUCTION, NATURE AND METHODOLOGY

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A) INTRODUCTION:

India is a developing country having agriculture as its main economic activity. Inspite of the last so many years of the process of economic development, industrialization and urbanization, the percentage of rural population to total population is still more than 70. According to the 1981 census, there are 557,137 inhabited villages in India. 76.7 percent of the population lives in these villages and majority of this population is engaged in agriculture. It is not necessary to further elaborate the fact that India is predominantly an agricultural country.

The rural population is mainly dependent on agriculture. The agriculture may be considered as the central point of rural economy. One of the most serious and depressing problem of the Indian rural economy is that of the agricultural labour. Their number is very large and ever increasing; and they live a life of object poverty. Even after completion of Seven Five Year Plans, about 30 per cent of our population lives under poverty line. This is due mainly to the poor income of a large section of small farmers and landless, labour population in villages and increasing unemployment in all over urban areas. The present study is an humble effort to understand the total situation as regards the landless agriculture labour a_{ij} a village level.

B) INDIAN VILLAGE - TRADITIONAL AND CHANGING:

Agricultural labour as a separate class is of recent origion. In the traditional village social structure we do not find such a separate class. It will not be out of place if we begin with a brief outline of the traditional village set-up. The village has been a significant centre of Indian life since very early days. It was more or less an independent administrative unit and had a distinct Socio-cultural character. According to A.R. Desai " The rise of the village is bound up with the rise of agricultural economy in history. The emergance of the village signified that man passed from the nomadic mode of collective life to the settled one. This was basically due to the improvements of tools of production which made agriculture and hence settled life on a fixed territorial Zones possible and necessary. (1) The main economic activity in a village is thus agriculture and hence the social structure of the village has been developed as per the needs of the agriculture and allied activities. Basically therefore a village in India has been a group of families permanently residing in a definate geographical area and carrying out agriculture and allied activities as the main source of their livelihood. The main features of a typical traditional Indian village are as follows:

i) <u>Isolation</u>:

Each village is at some distance from others. Due to lack of communication between them. Isolation has become a characteristic of Indian villages. Only on rare occassions

like fairs, wars, famines, pilgrimages etc. The villagers use to go away from these villages. Otherwise contacts with the outside world were negligible.

ii) Economics Self Sufficiency:

The economic self reliance is an obvious result of the isolation. A system of division of labour was evolved to procure essential goods and services provisions from outside were not possible. Occupations were heriditary. The Balutedari or Jajmani system was a natural outcome of the need of self reliance and the resulting division of labour.

iii) Autonomy:

The villages in India also created an independent machinery for their day to day administration. The panchayat system of village administration has a long history. The important function of the panchayat was to give judicial decisions. The other functions included collection of land revenue digging wells, construction of roads and temples, village defence etc. This characteristic made Gnarles Medkoff to regard the village communities in India as *little republics*.(2)

iv) Caste and habitation:

In Indian rural community caste or sub-caste used to determine the rank, status and nature of social relations of the individuals. The community is divided on the basis of caste. Residential areas in the village were also generally based on caste. Dr. Iravati Karve has shown that *A map of a village will

show almost invariably that the habitation area of each caste is separated from that of the others by a greater or a lesser distance (3)

v) Cultural Uniformity and Cohesiveness:

Rural Society in India has been the peasant Society.

All the people have hereditory occupations because of isolation living at the same place for a long time and doing same work from generation to generation. There is homogeneity in respect of language, custom, religious faith, ideas of morality, festivals and overall cultural traditions.

vi) Lack of Social Mobility:

Occupational mobility was almost unknown. Similarly the practice of endogamy made the caste system very rigid. It was therefore impossible for an individual to change his place in caste hierarchy.

These were the main characteristics of traditional Indian village. The village community was isolated, economically self-relient, politically autonomous and socially more or less static. Peasants on the one hand and artisans on the other, collaborated with each other. The peasants tilled the soil and exchanged part of their crops for the goods and services of non agrarian specialists. (4)

This traditional village community is undergoing rapid changes since the advent of British in India. The British rule brought out fundamental changes. The nature of these changes can be described with following aspects.

- a) Means of transport and communication.
- b) Education.
- c) Industrialization.
- d) Technological changes.
- e) Administrative and legal changes.
- f) Western values, ideologies and other cultural aspects.
- g) Agrarian reforms.

Due to these factors the traditional village is rapidly changing. The change in economic activities and relations is prominently observed. On this background we can understand how a new class of agricultural labourers emerged in rural India.

C) AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS IN INDIA:

The terms, "Agricultural workers" and "agricultural labourers" have been used by different scholars and Government agencies with different connotations. We need not go into the details of how the successive agricultural labour enquiry committees and Censuses defined the term agricultural labour. In the present context we can consider only two broad categories of agricultural labourers.

1) Very small farmers whose main source of income, in view of their very small land holdings, is wage employment.

2) Landless agricultural labourers:

National Commission on labour has given this broad classification.



The first group of small farmers has been further divided into three categories.

- i) Those small farmers who possess very little land and consequently have to devote most of their time working on the lands of others as labourers.
- ii) Share-croppers, who while sharing the produce of the land where they work, also work as labourers, at other farms.
- iii) Tenants, who, besides working on leased land, also
 work as labourers.

The second group of landless labourers has further been divided into two categories;

- i) Permanent labourers, who are attached to agricultural households, and
 - ii) Temporary or casual labourers.

Permanent or attached labourers generally wrok on annual or seasonal basis. Their relations with the landowner are based on some sort of contract. Their wages are determined by custom or tradition. Generally they are not free to work elsewhere.

As against this, temporary or casual labourers are engaged only during the period of heavy work. Their employment is temporary and they are paid of the market rate. They are not attached to any landlord. Individually, they are free and they can leave the job any time they like. The landless labourer families that we have studied fall under this category.

EMERGENCE AND GROWTH OF AGRICULTURAL LABOUR CLASS: ORIGIN:

The origin of agricultural labourers in India can be traced back to the ascendancy of the British rule when, because of the Government Policy, native traditional industries began to decline. As no modern industries grew to replace the disappearing traditional industries, craftsmen and artisans living in the villages were left with no alternative but to fall back on agriculture as labourers. (5)

Though the British Government adopted a Policy of ruralism of country, it did not modernise agriculture, except plantations like tea and jute where the British had vested interests. The backwardness of agriculture forced even the small farmers to join the ranks of workers. Thus the destruction of native industries and primitive character of agriculture alongwith small holdings led to the rise of the class of agricultural labourers in the country. Besides the poverty of the agriculturists, such factors as the Great Depression of 1929-33, when prices of agricultural products fell sharply, made small owners of land sell their property and swell the ranks of agricultural labourers. (6)

FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR GROWTH OF AGRICULTURAL LABOUR CLASS:

There are many factors that explain the fast growth in the number of agricultural labourers. The major ones among are listed below:

i) Lack of Industrial Employment:

While the native cottage industries and handicrafts

declined before independance, there was no growth of modern industries in the country. In the case of present day developed countries, side by side with the disappearance of old traditional industries, new industries took their place. But the same did not happen in India because of the British Government Policy. The British rulers were interested only in increasing ruralisation with the objectives of sucking the country of its agricultural raw materials and food for export to England and of the same time converting it into a vast market of manufactured goods produced in their home country. Thus the people working in the native industries were compelled to become labourers in agriculture. As more and more traditional industries were destroyed, a large number of people found themselves. Pushed into the ranks of landless agricultural labourers.

ii) Rapid Growth of Population:

The present century has seen a tremendous risk in the population of the country. Since more than three fourths of the people live in villages, most of the population growth has taken place in the rural areas. In the rural sector, agriculture is the main occupation. There has been virtually no expansion in non-agricultural industries. As a result, a considerable part of the increased population has no other alternative than to turn to agricultural work.

iii) Increase in Indebtedness:

A large number of small farmers in course of last hundred years has become heavily indebted. Not being able to pay interest and pay back the principal, many of shch farmers had

to loose their land. These people have no alternative but to work as labourers for their livelihood.

iv) Uneconomic Holding:

The process of sub-division and fragmentation of holdings, which has been taking place over a long time, has led to the emergence of a vast number of uneconomic holdings. Such holdings ceased to be viable propositions, making if difficult for the farmer and their families to subsist on mere cultivation of land. Dissappearance of non-agricultural occuptions made the position of small holders of land all the more difficult. As such, these farmers joined the ranks of agricultural labourers, in increasing numbers.

v) Spread of the use of Money:

As the use of money is spreading in the tradition bound agriculture, the old method of payment through goods is giving place to the practice of payment in money. As a result, it has become convenient for landlords to engage the labourers and pay them in money. In view of the Cash payment of wages, labourers too are no longer attached to land in the same way as they were when they were compensated for their work through payment in kind. Thus the land owners have found it easier to get their land cultivated by labourers. Workers in agriculture are thus turning into wage-labourers in the true sense. (7)



CHARACTERISTICS OF AGRICULTURAL LABOUR IN INDIA:

The main features characterising Indian agricultural labour are as follows:

- i) Agricultural labour in India is very widely scattered over 5.6 lakh villagers, of which half have population of less them 500 each. Therefore, any question of building an effective organisation (like that of industrial workers who are generally concentrated in factories in towns and cities) posses insurmountable difficulties. Thus, as the vast number of agricultural labour lies scattered all over India, there has been no successful attempt for a long time to build their effective organisation even at the state level.
- ii) Agricultural labourers, especially in smaller villages away from town and cities are generally 'unskilled' carrying on their agricultural occupation in the centuries old traditional ways. Most of them, especially those in small isolated villages with around 500 population, may not have, even heard of modernisation of agriculture. Majority of them are generally conservative, tradition-bound, fatalistic and resigned to the insufferable lot to which, according to them, fate has condemned them. There is hardly any motivation for change or improvement.
- iii) The number of agricultural labourers being very large and the skills that they posses being meagre, there is generally more than abundant supply of agricultural labourers in relations to the demand for them. It is only during the sowing and harvesting season there appears to be almost full employment in the case of agricultural workers. But once the harvesting season

is over, majority of agricultural workers are job-less especially, in areas where there is single cropping pattern. Their position is slightly better in irrigated tracts (around 25 percent of the total cultivated land in the country). But their position in dry farming areas is deplorable.

- iv) Due to all the above factors, the <u>bargaining power</u> 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 wholesale traders, often the same person functioning in all the three capacities. No wonder, the agricultural labour is the <u>most exploited</u> class of people in India.
- v) There is generally direct and day-to-day contact between the agricultural labour and the landlord on whose farm he is working. Since there is direct supervision by the landlord, there is hardly any escape from hard work and since there is no alternative employment, the agricultural labourer has to do all types of work, i.e., farm as well as domestic at the bidding of the landlord.
- vi) In <u>some parts of India. agricultural labour</u> is found to be <u>migratory</u>, moving in search of jobs especially, in the time of sowing and harvesting.
- vii) All attempts by the Government to improve their lot by <u>legislation</u> such as Minimum Agricultural Wages Act <u>have proved</u> ineffective so far due to the powerful hold of the rural elite classes on the rural economy.

The above characteristics should help distinguish agricultural labour in India from industrial workers. Their number is vast, they lie scattered over wide areas all over the country; they are generally unskilled, they are not organised; their bargaining position vis-a-vis the village money lender-cumlandlord-cum-wholesaler is very weak; and therefore, they are open to grave exploitation. (8)

MAJOR PROBLEMS OF AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS:

In order to appreciate and eradicate the problems of agricultural labourers, the need is to evaluate the sociological factors which have resulted into failure of their economic development. These sociological factors may have negative as well as positive character. First group of problems arise out of the persistence of old social institutions like caste, joint family, tribes, traditional religious organisations and serfdom etc.

The second group of problems arise from the very nature Started of the economic development which has been inaugurated by the Government since independence.

One of the major sociological factors deciding the fate of agricultural labourers was belief that low castes are born to labour with hands and high castes were to enjoy the fruits of their labour.

The major aggravating factors that are likely to proceed the problems of agricultural labourers are as follows:

Firstly, the demographic addition of labour force during the last four decades is estimated to be very substantial, since the effect

of population control measures on labour force would make itself felt with a lag only much later. Secondly, the expansion of non-agricultural avenues of employment is unlikely to provide adequate relief to the agricultural labourers from pressure of population for many decades ahead. Thirdly, in the absence of basic institutional reforms and effective controls to promote selective mechanisation, technological change in agriculture can easily prove to be bane rather than boon to the agricultural labourers.

Some specific problems of agricultural labourers felt all over India are as follows:

1) Unemployment and underemployment:

The problem of unemployment is comparatively more acute and chronic in agriculture sector. A man in rural India may be unemployed, underemployed or partially employed. The problem of rural unemployment may be classified under three heads:

- (i) Unemployment, (ii) Under-employment
- (iii) Disguised unemployment.

Under the first category the bulk of the people are the poor landless labourers who have been deprived of their profession due to reasons like exploitation of the Mahajans, negligence of the Zamindars, hereditary rural indebtedness and, above all, colossal ignorance or incompetence about any professional efficiency. Under the second category are the members of the gradually dying out joint family system. The land which can hardly accommodate tillers of the soil is perhaps engaging double the quantity. This excess labour force could have got job opportunities

in other sections of rural economy. This is a case of underemployment. The third i.e. the case of disguised unemployment is very much similar to the second one, with the only added proviso that there are sometimes cases of voluntary unemployment.

The employment problem, it is often contended that time devoted to work is a less important variable than the income earned. Persons are inadequately employed not because they devote less time to work but because the earning from work is not sufficient.

2) Agricultural Wages:

The labourers of unorganised sector in general and agricultural sector in particular, due to their peculiar situations are bound to accept wages, as are fixed by their employers.

Majority of them is facing problems of laissezfaire days.

Wage period in agriculture has its own characteristics.

Payments are made by the day, week, month or on a piece rate basis and with or without supplements and prerequisites. There may be wide disparity in wage levels between regions, seasons and crops. Wage level has the influence of peak and slack periods.

There is also a prevalence of gender disparities.

Agricultural operations like ploughing and post-harvest operations, which carry higher rewards are generally performed by male workers. On the other hand, operations such as sowing, transplanting and weeding with relatively lower wages are predominantly performed by women workers.

3) Income:

The income of the agricultural labourers is primarily dependent on three variables: (i) the agricultural wage rates, (ii) the quantum of employment per year available to per worker, and (iii) the price of consumer goods. There are considerable variations across states with regard to the relative magnitudes of the three variables and hence in the real earning of the agricultural labourers.

4) Indebtedness:

The problem of agricultural indebtedness is more or less a universal one, which has reached up to alarming situation in developing countries. The old dictum than workers in India are born in debt, live in debt and die in debt is still true, particularly in agricultural sector.

The problem of indebtedness which forms the agricultural labourers poorest of the poor is age-old with special character-stics. These loans are not economically productive in that they do not help in creation of agitational incomes but are used for household requirements.

5) Problem of Migration:

Migration is a necessary condition for economic development, people will have to move away from the dwindling opportunities at prosperous rural or urban centres. But the migration of agricultural labourers in India is a negation to the common meaning of migration for economic prosperity. Their migration by and large being the last alternative, exposes them to various kinds of exploitation and proves to be a bane rather than a boon.

6) Problem of Organization:

In India more than 90% of the total work-force are engaged in unorganised sector, of which majority are in agriculture. Agricultural labourers in India are unorganized. Because of this the bargaining power of agricultural labourers is weak as compared to that of Industrial labourers. The economic backwardness of agricultural labourers at present is not due to this that they have remained neglected by social workers, Political leaders or the government, or their wages are not revised regularly. The actual cause for such a sorry state in non-implementing machinery on the one hand and absence of organised pressure from these workers on the other. (9)

From the above discussion, it is clear that the economic and social life of agricultural labourers is very deplorable indeed. They are also so poor that they have to remain in debt for sheer physical existence. Poverty and indebtedness persists for generations and alongwith it exists serfdom. A majority of these people live below the poverty line.

D) STUDIES ON AGRICULTURAL LABOUR:

Right from the beginning of the British rule in India, various government agencies, individual administrators and research scholars took interest in studying village communities in general and agrarian structure in particular enquiries into land problem were initiated by the people who were concerned with the formulation of land and revenue policies. Gradually social scientists also took interest in these studies. After independence the agrarian study has become a very important academic subject.

The official reports of the governmental agencies contain lot of information about the agrarian structure in different regions of India. After independence the reports of the National Commission on Labour (1969), National Commission on Agriculture (1976), National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (1978-79), various plan documents of planning commission and Report of Dantawala Committee on unemployment. Estimates, are provide insight into various aspects of agricultural problem. The Government of India has conducted two Agricultural Labour Enquiries (1950-51) and 1956-57) and three Rural Labour Enquiries (1963-65. 1974-75, and 1977-78). These reports give us good idea about the employment situation wages, income, indebtedness, consumption and expenditure patterns, etc. of rural labourers in India. Information about the Socio-economic conditions of rural labourers helps in the formulation of policy towards desired economic and social change of this section of society.

Social Scientists both independently and as part of official research organisation have made significant contribution in understanding rural communities. Some of the well known contributors are A.R. Desai, S.J. Patel, A.S. Altekar, M.N. Dantwala, C.H. Shah, A.M. Khusro, V.M. Dandekar, Rajkrishna, Arvind N. Das, Neelkant, Viplab Das Gupta, Bhowani Sen, P.C. Joshi, J.N. Sinha, P.S. Minhas, G. Parthasarathy, S.C. Dubey etc. Besides several scholars from abroad including Gunnar Myrdal have also made significant contribution in agratian studies of India. Shailendrajha has summarized various aspects of agricultural labour in his book 'Agricultural Labour' published in 1990. Several research articles dealing with employment pattern, wages, caste composition, income

etc. have been published in various Journals such as Rural India,
Man in India, Economic and Political weekly, ICSSR Journal etc.
This vast literature gives us complete picture of the rural
Society in India in general and the agricultural and other rural
labourers in particular. However very few scholars have concentrated
on the agricultural labourers who are landless and are totally
dependent for their livelihood on daily wages.

E) NATURE AND SCOPE OF PRESENT STUDY:

As noted about the problems of landless labourers in rural areas have not attracted attention of the students, particularly of sociology. The present study initials to be a small contribution in this gap. There have been planned development programmes, implimented since the first five year plan. However several development schemes exhibited during the last fourty years could not remove poverty and unemployment in rural areas. It has been observed that only the upper Strata of Society some how take the benefit of development schemes. It is not just a gess or politically motivated statement that poor people are becoming poorer and rich-richer. This has been shown by several studies at all Indian level. Our intention is to concentrate on the landless labourer families in a particular medium sized village. We are interested not only in studying the employment parttern, income and expenditure patterns and overall economic conditions of these families. But also in the caste composition, literacy, education of Children and the relationship between position in caste hierarchy and scope and extent of socio-economic development.

With this broad outline of the nature of our study we shall turn to the methodology used in the study and the plan of the work, which will give a fare idea of this study.

F) METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY:

1) Selection of The Topic:

India is a predominantly a developing country, and even after more than forty years of planned development agriculture remains the major economic activity. Agricultural Sector provides livelihood to about 70 percent of the labour force in India. Out of this labour force engaged in agricultural and allied activities, a sizable section is such that does not hold any land. The exact number of such landless rural labourers is not known.

Several researches have been carried out to study their problems. Several schemes under community development programme have been suggested as well as implemented for the development of these landless labourers and their families. It is however, necessary to keep a continuous watch on the result's of these schemes.

Many research scholars attempt such surveys but they mainly concentrate on agricultural workers or agricultural labourers in general. We intend to make a micro-level study of landless labourers mainly engaged in agricultural work.

2) Objectives of the Study:

The main objective of this study of Landless Agricultural Labourers are as following -

(1) To know the social composition of landless labourers in Khadaklat village.

- (2) To know the nature of economic activities and living conditions of these landless agricultural labourers in Khadaklat village.
- (3) To ascertain their attitudes towards certain important aspects like, such as marriage, religion, education, etc.
- (4) To understand the problem faced by these labourers in their day to day life.
- (5) To see the nature and direction of change in the socioeconomic conditions.
- (6) To see the obstacles, if any in the process of development.

3) Selection of The Village for Micro-level Study:

As the main objective of this study is to know the Socio-economic conditions of the rural labourers who have no land of their own and whose sole source of income is daily wages we had to select a proper village for micro-level study. After considering several villages in the area where the researcher has her residence. The village of Khadaklat in Chikodi Taluka of Belgaum District was selected because of following reasons-

- (1) The village is sufficiently large with a population of over 10.000.
- (2) The caste-composition of the population is quite mixed consisting of 20 castes. This is sociologically significant as we can have a comparative picture.

- (3) The is a sizeable section of population which has no other means of livelihood them the daily wages.
- (4) The villages is socio-politically conscious and this fact may help us the process of change in the labour community as such.
- (5) There are several institutions like banks, Gram Panchayat etc. which are functioning towards the integrated rural development. We can evaluate their work in the context of the economically weaker sections.

For these reasons and also for the sake of convenience the village of Khadaklat was selected for in depth study. This may prove to be quite representative of the villages in general at least in this part of the country.

4) Data Collection:

In order to make the study as exhaustive as possible all the necessary data have been collected. There are two types of data used in this study.

- (1) Secondary Data: Statistical information from the census reports, information about village from several govt. offices, and knowledge informants.
- (2) Primary Data: Collected through in-depth personal interviews with heads of the families of the selected samples.

5) Preparation of Interview Schedule and Pilot Study:

Initially a draft of interview schedule consisting of questions on all relevant aspects of study was prepared in consultation with the guide. In order to make the schedule sufficiently fruitfuly, three interviews were conducted on the basis of this rough schedule. Immediately the drawbacks, faults and inadequacies were realised and noted down. In view of there shortcoming the schedule was consequently modified and restructured. It was noted that the respondents were bound to be mostly illiterate and ignorant and hence many questions had to be reformulated. Thus the schedule was finally ready for use.

6) Sampling:

The village of the Khadaklat has in all about 2238 families or households. From the records available with the Talathi, it was found that there are in all 166 families whose only means of livelihood is work on daily wages. They have no land of their own and they do not cultivate land as tenants. We prepared a castewise list of these landless labour families. In order to make the some representative and to enable us to make a comperative study. (1) about 25% of the families were selected at random, (2) it was also seen that at least one family is included in the sample from each caste.

Wherever the selected family was not available for interview another was interviewed for the sake of convenience. The sample is thus, stratified random some and presumatly a representative ene. It consists of 45 landless labour families.

7) Analysis:

As a sequence to the collection of data, next step was obviously the processing, codification and tabulation of the collected facts. This was only the table work and was carried out in consultation of the guide.

8) Difficulties Encountered in the Field Work:

The experiences of the research student during the actual field work were quite interesting. We can record that following difficulties had to be faced in the process of field data collection.

- (1) It was rather difficult to contact the labourers (respondents) in the village due to their work throughout the day.
- (2) In the initial stage it was difficult to get the accurate total annual income and total expenditure.
- (3) Some of the respondent did not co-operate with the investigator because the investigator was unfamilies to them. However, with due rapprochant we could convince the respondents of our purpose, ultimate it was noticed that a majority of the respondents was listening to the subject of the study and they showed their willingness readily, without any degree of hesitation to give interviews.

9) Report Writing:

The last stage of the research project is writing the report on dissertation. The entire work is divided into five chapters.

- (1) Introduction, Nature and Methodology.
- (2) Khadaklat: A Brief Profile of the village.
- (3) Landless agricultural labourers in Khadaklat Socio-economic conditions.
- (4) Process of Socio-economic development opportunities and obstacles.
- (5) A picture of change or otherwise during the last two decades (1971-91).

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