

CHAPTER-IV
WAGES OF SUGARCANE HARVESTING AND
TRANSPORT WORKERS

The sugarcane harvesting activity includes cane cutting, pruning and binding the canes into bundles which then are transported easily as the head loads towards vehicles/bullock carts. It is essential to crush the cane immediately after its harvesting, so as to get the benefit of sugar recovery. The sugar recovery is a ratio between sugar production to sugarcane quantity. If the factory is unable to lift the harvested cane quickly, the recovery rate falls and a factory goes in loss. So, a factory's profit depends on the harvesting and transport efficiency. The transport workers engaged in bullock carts have to perform both cane harvesting and transporting, while the harvest workers can only harvest the cane farm (cane cutting, pruning and binding into transportable loads) and load the vehicles viz. trucks or tractors. The responsibility of transport is that of vehicle owners.

4.1 TYPES OF WORKERS :

Basically there are two types of workers categorised into (a) Head Centre (HC) and (b) Bullock cart centre (BC). But for the sake of convenience the workers are categorised into four types depending on the nature of the work they perform.

4.1.1 Head-Centre Workers (HCW) :

In support of the order given by Agricultural Department of a sugar factory through a Slip Boy (a factory worker, below the rank of Fieldman, who's service is seasonal), the cane cutters have to harvest

the cane fields shown by a Slip Boy and have to load the cane in a vehicle. The HCWs are expected to transport the cane bundles as head loads only upto 100 mts. Such workers are called Head Centre Workers (HCW).

4.1.2 Direct Bullock cart Centre Workers (DBCW) :

A worker who owns both cart and pair of bullocks may make an agreement with sugar factories to the effect that he will harvest and transport the cane towards sugar factories. Such bullock cart owners, on advice of the Slip Boy, may harvest a particular cane field and transport the cane directly to the factory site themselves. Though an agreement is made with the bullock cart owner and the sugar factory, he may employ other male or female workers to help him in cane cutting, pruning, preparing bundles and loading the cart - generally female workers belong to the worker's family (mother, sister, daughter). But payment of wage to those he employs is made by the cart owner. He should be paid even if he has no work. Normally cane fields within range of 8-10 k.m. from sugar factory are allotted to bullock carts. Such workers are called as direct bullock cart centre workers (DBCW).

4.1.3 Tyre Centre Workers (TCW) :

In this category of workers the tyre carts are supplied by sugar factories on daily (24 hours) hire basis. The workers migrate with only bullocks. The nature of work and transport remains as DBCW.

4.1.4 Truck/Tractor Centre Workers (TCW) :

In this type of workers, the bullock cart or tyre cart workers harvest the sugarcane and carry the cane bundles upto motorable roads. The harvesting and loading of cane bundles in the vehicle is also performed by them. This category of workers generally work where the vehicle (truck or tractor) does not reach within the distance of 100 mts. from the location of cane bundles, because HCW only load the vehicle provided the distance is 100 mts. from the cane bundles.

4.2 WAGE RATES :

The trade union movement in sugar industry is of recent origin, eventhough the industry has began to organise in the early 19th century. Initially, the trade union movement in this industry was basically related to factory workers. After that the movement had entered in organising the contract workers and daily wage workers involved in factory sites. Simultaneously, with a growing number of sugar factories and growing number of cane cutters and transport workers, the workers got united to fight for their wage revision. The contractors and supervisors have also unionised to safeguard their interests.

The drought during 1972-73 canalised the workers to migrate towards factory areas. The wages of the workers were (are) paid higher than their original (drought) places, and hence the footways of migration of workers befouled seasons after season regularly. Since then the troubles and distresses of workers began.

The role of Maharashtra Rajya Sakhar Kamgar Mahasangh and Representative Board is immense; particularly in diverting the

attentions of the Management and Government towards the troubles and distresses of harvest and transport workers. Harvesting and transport rates during (fixed in 1968) 1972-73 were Rs. 4.20 per tonne for harvesting and Rs.3.20 per tonne for the first mile with 75 paise for every additional mile. At that time the Bombay Industrial Court worked out that a cart, on an average, transport the cane over a distance of 8 miles.

The Pravaranagar compromise between the Sugar Federation, Worker's Representatives and Government was the outcome of Maha-Sangha's (Worker's Union) continuous efforts. Basically the Pravaranagar compromise was held to discuss the problems of sugar workers (factory workers). But the worker's representatives were aggressive in wage revision of harvesting and transport workers engaged in cane cutting and transporting activities. A continuous efforts of workers and contractors/mukadamas representatives compelled the Government of Maharashtra to declare the award. The award was an outcome of Pravaranagar compromise. Sharad Pawar, the (then) Chief Minister of Maharashtra had held the award on 26th November, 1979, which was applicable for the 1979-80 season. The wage rates were as under :

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| 1) Direct Bullock cart Centre | |
| a) Cane cutting | 9.00 per tonne |
| b) Direct bullock cart centre upto 1 k.m. | 4.30 per tonne |
| c) Rate for next each 1 k.m. of cane transport | 1.00 per tonne |
| 2) Truck/Tractor Centre | 12.15 per tonne |
| 3) Head Centre | 10.25 per tonne |

A decision was also agreed to authorise the Chief Minister to declare the wage rates for 1978-79 season. Accordingly, as agreed on 30th October, 1980, the revised wage rates were notified and applied from April-May of 1977-78 season and the corresponding three seasons viz. 1978-79, 1979-80, 1980-81. The wage difference was agreed to pay before January 1981 and the same was also agreed to pay in the presence of trade union leaders of the factory units. But the workers were unsatisfactory with the above wage rates. The union leaders guessed the challenge of unionisation of harvest and transport workers, all things were favourable to trade unions during the period, therefore, a strike was declared in 1980 demanding further wage hike.

Meanwhile as decided in the earlier agreement of the award held on 26th November, 1979, the (then) Chief Minister A.R. Antuley and Labour Minister Narendra Tidke, with all representatives from Sakhar Kamagar Mahasangh, Sakhar Karkhana Mahasangh and Deccan Sugar Manufacturers Association had signed an agreement on 30th October, 1980. The revised wage rates were as under :

Category of Workers	Prevailing wage rates (per tonnes) Rs.	New wage rates revised (per tonne) Rs.
1. Direct Bullock Cart Centre		
a) Cane cutting	9.00	13.00
b) Transporting the cane upto 1 k.m.	4.30	6.00
c) Rates for next each 1 k.m. of cane transport	1.00	1.30
2. Head Centre	10.25	14.25
3. Truck/Tractor Centre	12.15	16.30
4. % of commission to Mukadams-Contractors	9%	10%

These revised wage rates were applied for 1980-81 and 1981-82 seasons.

The wage rates declared by 30th October, 1980 award were continued till 1985, though the agreement expired at the end of 1981-82 crushing season. So the workers, and mukadams including contractors were restless. The trade union leaders of sugar workers (i.e. factory workers) asked the mukadamas and workers not to join the work of 1985-86 season unless wages were revised. So, once again the workers went on a strike. Workers did not migrated to their destinations.

To solve an obstruction, the (then) Chief Minister of Maharashtra State, Shankarrao Chavan had called a meeting of all related representatives on 22nd September, 1987. On the same day an agreement was signed by all concerns. Revised wage rates were introduced for the crushing seasons of 1986-87, 1987-88 and 1988-89. The revised rates were as under :

Category of workers	Prevailing wages in 1985-86 season (per tonne) Rs.	New rates for 1986-87, 1987-88 1988-89 seasons (per tonne) Rs.
1. Directed Bullock cart Centre		
a) Cane cutting	13.00	21.05
b) Transporting the cane upto 1 k.m.	6.00	9.70
c) Rates for next each 1 k.m.	1.30	2.10
2. Head Centre	14.25	23.10
3. Truck/Tractor Centre	16.50	26.75
4. % of commission to Mukadams - Contractors	10%	11%

As decided in the agreement, 50 percent of leafy (green) head of sugarcane (fodder) was permitted to be taken by the workers and rest, 50 percent was allowed to be retained by the farmer owner. A worker can earn Rs.10 to 15 per day by selling the leafy fodder of sugarcane head. This rate in 1991-92 season was Rs. 16 per 100 pieces of head leaves of sugarcane. The wage difference of 1986-87 was agreed to be paid in the presence of trade union leaders and it was agreed that a worker himself should come before the cashier, so as to avoid the faulty payments. This was followed in repayment of arrears and same was brought to the notice by the trade union leaders because the mukadamas and contractors had exploited the workers in this regard earlier.

As agreed in the award of 22nd September, 1987 a Committee under the Chairman of Shri Dadasaheb Rupawate was appointed to oversee the various problems of harvesting and transport workers. The Rupawate Committee submitted its interim report on 28th June, 1990. Before that the Chief Minister had declared 35 per cent interim increments in the prevailing wage rates.

In its interim report, the Dadasaheb Rupawate Committee has recommended a revised wage rates, (inclusive 35 per cent interim increment declared by Chief Minister) applicable for 1989-90, 1990-91 and 1991-92 seasons. The differences of wages of 1989-90 season have been agreed to be paid immediately. A few sugar co-operative have already disbursed the wage differences. Such difference of payments were again compelled to be paid in front of the trade union leaders of a respective sugar units.

After declaration of every award, all factory management have to sign an agreement with the representatives of their workers. A few factories have yet not signed an agreement as per the recommendations of Rupawate Committee.

The prevailing wage rates recommended by the Rupwate Committee are as under :

Nature of work	Rates in 1988-89 season (per tonne) Rs.	Revised rates for the years 1989-90, 1990-91, 1991-92 seasons Rs.
1. Direct Bullock cart Centre		
a) Cane cutting	21.05	30.00
b) Transporting the cane upto 1 k.m.	9.70	14.00
c) Rates for next each 1 k.m. of cane transport	2.10	3.00
2. Head Centre	23.10	34.50
3. Truck/Tractor Centre	26.75	38.50

The consolidated wages of harvest and transport activities recommended by various awards is illustrated below in Table No. 4.1.

TABLE No. 4.1
WAGE RATES RECOMMENDED BY AWARDS

Categories of Workers	1979-80	1980-81 1981-82	1986-87 1987-88 1988-89	1989-90 1990-91 1991-92
1) Direct Bullock Cart Centre				
a) Cane cutting	9.00	13.00	21.05	30.00
b) Transporting the cane upto 1 k.m.	4.30	6.00	9.70	14.00
c) Rates for next each 1 k.m. of cane transport	1.00	1.30	2.10	3.00
2) Head Centre	10.25	14.25	23.10	34.50
3) Truck/Tractor Centre	12.15	16.50	26.75	38.50

Since last ten years almost all wage rates have gone up by three fold. All these rates have been derived on the basis that a worker can harvest one tonne of sugarcane a day. But actually the average cane harvesting quantity available for each worker is less than one tonne a day. Not only this but the average availability is declining.

The Maharashtra Rajya Sakhar Kamgar Mahasangh had recommended and justified the need to implement the following rates before the Rupwate Committee.

Nature of work	Rates per tonne (Rs.)
1) Direct Bullock cart Centre	
a) Cane cutting	50.00
b) Transporting the cane upto 1 k.m. (1st stage)	15.00
c) Transporting the cane upto 1 k.m. (2nd stage)	22.00
d) Rates for next each 1 k.m. of transport of cane	3.00
2) Head Centre	
Upto 1st 100 mts.	52.00
101 to 200 mts.	54.00
201 to 300 mts.	56.00
3) Truck/Tractor Centre upto 2 k.m.	80.00

Like all other trade unions, the Mahasangha had demanded high wage rates. The nature of works have been categorised into different sub-categories.

Majority of the sugar co-operatives have not yet implemented the revised wage rates recommended by Rupwate Committee. The Rupwate Committee's recommendations are applicable upto 1991-92 season. The committee is unable to submit its final and full report to the Government of Maharashtra. The trade union leaders are preparing to put their demands for further wage revisions during the corresponding three seasons i.e. 1992-93, 1993-94 and 1994-95. The declaration of awards seems to be a routine and regular task after every three years.

But the sugar industry is not accepting these workers as employees even when the BIR Act is in favour of the workers and trade unions. That is the task for the trade unions.