

PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS OF AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS IN HARYANA STATE

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ABSTRACT

The landless agricultural labourers continue to form the weakest link in the rural economy. To appreciate and alleviate the problems of agricultural labourers, it was thought worthwhile to understand their personal, social and psychological factors, which may have contributed their socio-economic backwardness. The study was conducted in Haryana State, the total sample to 300 respondents was selected randomly for the present study. The study shows that majority of respondents were having poor living conditions, had low socio-economic status, belonging to hierarchically low castes, landless and illiterate. The most of the economic and social problems of this mega class can be solved if some active institution or organization is formed where agricultural labour can enroll themselves and this organization works in the interest of the labour.

Key words : Landless Agricultural Labourers, Backwardness

INTRODUCTION :

The landless agricultural labourers constitute a very important section of Indian rural society. The base of Indian social pyramid comprises the landless agricultural labourers. According to 2001 Census in India, out of total 402.2 million workers, 106.7 million (26.5%) are landless agricultural labourers. Almost the entire workforce engaged in agriculture, forestry, fishery and plantation are unorganised.

Despite the spectacular progress achieved in agricultural production in the country during the past few decades, the landless agricultural labourers continue to form the weakest link in the rural economy. In fact available evidence suggests that their living and working conditions are fast deteriorating. The data shows the constant rising trend in number of agricultural labourers. The problems of low wages, indebtedness, unemployment and deteriorating standard of living are on rise. They are the most neglected lot of population of the country and are living sub-human life under most abject conditions of misery, agony, poverty, despair, malnutrition, insanitation and diseases.

With a view to appreciate and alleviate the problems of agricultural labourers, it was thought worthwhile to understand their personal, social and psychological factors which may have contributed their socio-economic backwardness. There is need to enrich the quality of their life. This would not only result in raising their income or accelerating agricultural productivity, but this would also help them in sharing the benefits of modern agriculture. With these considerations in mind the present study was conducted with the specific objective to study the personal, socio-economic, psychological and political profile of agricultural labourers in Haryana.

METHODOLOGY :

The study was conducted in Haryana State. A multistage random sampling procedure was adopted to select the villages. In the first stage, three districts were selected randomly (Jhajjar, Gurgaon and Faridabad). In the second stage from each of the three districts two villages were identified. 50 agricultural labourers were selected randomly from each of these villages. Thus 100 agricultural labourers represented each district, pooling up the total sample to 300 respondents for the present study. An interview schedule appropriate to the study was developed by incorporating the questions concerning all variables under study. All the respondents were contacted in person for collecting data. The data were analysed using statistical methods like frequency, percentage and ranking.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION :

Personal Profile of the Respondents—The findings of the study show that majority of respondents (47.3 %) were less than 35 years of age followed by age bracket 36-50 years (35.3 %). The older age group of above 51 years comprised 17.3 per cent. It appears that younger people are more preferred by the employers than older age groups or else as the age progresses a person himself chooses not to work as labourer. The finding of the present study is in agreement with the findings of Khalache (1982), which reported that employers considered young age group more energetic possessing higher efficiency, which decreases with advance in age.

Male and female respondents accounted for 59.3 per cent and 40.6 per cent of the sample respectively. The number of male respondents formed the majority (72 %), in Jhajjar and Gurgaon districts. Females were in

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majority (66 %) in Faridabad district. Twenty four per cent of respondents belonged to joint family system while remaining 76 per cent were from nuclear families. It indicates the nuclearisation of families in rural areas also.

Table 1. Personal Profile of Agricultural Labourers (n=300)

Attributes	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Age	(1) Less than 35 years	142	47.3
	(2) 36-50 Years	106	35.3
	(3) More than 51 years	52	17.3
Gender	(1) Male	178	59.3
	(2) Female	122	40.6
Family Type	(1) Joint	72	24.0
	(2) Nuclear	228	76.0
Family Size	(1) Upto 5 members	134	44.7
	(2) 6-10 members	160	53.3
	(3) 11 & above	6	2.0
Family's Education	(1) Illiterate	118	39.4
	(2) Primary school	136	45.3
	(3) Upto Xth	46	15.3

Majority of the respondents (53.3 %) had family size of 6-10 members. 44.7 per cent respondents were from small family size of up to 5 members. Only 2 per cent were from large families having more than 11 members. This may be because of large number of nuclear families and also the younger generation might be aware about small family norm.

The data in table 1, shows that 45.3 per cent of respondents belonged to families having primary, 39.3 per cent belonged to illiterate families and only 15.3 per cent respondents had families having education level up to high school level. The findings suggest that literacy level of this class is still low.

Socio-Economic Characteristics of the Respondents—The data in table 2 shows that the maximum income of the sample of agricultural labours was Rs. 6000/- per month. Of these large majority (72 %) were having income only up to Rs. 2000 per month and 28 per cent had income between Rs.2000-6000 per month. Sheila (1991) also reported the low income of agricultural labours and stated that 41 per cent of respondents have annual family income between Rs.4,800 to Rs.10,000, 39 per cent of the above Rs.10,000 and 20 per cent of them had upto Rs. 4,800.

The findings indicate that respondents largely belonged to Scheduled Castes/ Tribes (82.7 %) and backward castes (16.0%). Thangaram (1995) and Heyer (2002) also reported the same. The forward castes constitute 13.3 per cent of respondents. In Faridabad district an overwhelming majority of respondents (98 %) belonged to Scheduled Castes. It is customary that women in lower castes work outside more than upper castes. This could be the reason of high representation of women respondents in Faridabad district. In India the

social origin of agricultural workers as a proletariat class is an outcome of the process of property differentiation, which had its roots in class domination by the ruling class. Thus, the social origin is an economic issue, which could be seen, in various socio-economic structures.

Majority of the respondents (93.3 %) were landless. Pawar (1995) reported that most of the agricultural labours are landless and totally dependent on wage earnings. Very small percentage i.e., 2.3 owned land up to one acre and 4.3 owned 1 to 2 acres of land.

Majority (60 %) of the respondents were illiterate. Almost equal number of respondents, comprising 16.7 and 17.3 per cent were educated up to primary and high school level respectively. Those educated up to high school belonged to younger age group.

Table 2. Socio-Economic Variables of Agricultural Labourers (n=300)

Attributes	Category	Total	Percentage
Family Income (pm)	(1) upto Rs. 2000	216	72.0
	(2) Rs. 2001-6000	84	28.0
	(3) Rs. 6001 & above	0	0
Caste	(1) Forward Caste	14	3.3
	(2) Backward Caste	48	16.0
	(3) Schedule Caste/ Tribe	248	82.7
Land Holding	(1) Landless	280	39.3
	(2) Upto 1 acre	7	22.3
	(3) More than 1 acre	13	4.3
Education	(1) Illiterate		
	(2) Primary school	198	66.0
	(3) Upto Xth	50	16.7
Other Occupation	(1) Construction labour	62	20.6
	(2) Service	12	4.0
	(3) Domestic servant	2	0.7
	(4) Caretaker/Watchman	2	0.7
	(5) Farming	6	2.0
	(6) Self employed	12	4.0
	(7) Shoemaker	2	0.7
	(8) Rearing animal on lease	14	4.7
	(9) Rickshaw Puller	2	0.7
House Type	(1) Kuccha	158	52.7
	(2) Mixed	106	35.3
	(3) Pucca	36	12.0
Material Possessions -Farm	(1) Animals		
	Baffalo	38	12.7
	Goats	9	3.0
	(2) Equipments (Sickle, Spade)	285	95.0
	(3) Farm Machines		
	Tractor	1	.003
Harrow	1	.003	
Spray Machine	1	.003	
- Household	(1) T.V	68	22.7
	(2) Fridge	30	10.0
	(3) Cycle	204	68.0
	(4) Gas	42	14.0
	(5) None of the above	95	31.7
Socio-political	(1) Non Member	268	89.3
	(2) Member	32	10.7

The labour job on farms was not the only occupation

which provided income to farm labour. There were nine types of occupations other than farm labour in which respondents engaged themselves during the lean agricultural period. Nearly one fifth (20.6 %) of the respondents were in the construction work, 4.7 percent were rearing animals on lease, an equal number of respondents comprising 4.0 per cent were either self employed or doing odd jobs, 2 per cent engaged themselves on their own farms (they were small farmers, earning alone from their land were not enough for them). Rest (0.7 % each) was working as domestic servant, watchman, shoemaker and Rickshaw puller.

Majority of the respondents (52.7 %) had kaccha house, 35.3 per cent had Mixed type of house. Only 12 per cent were having pucca house. The finding shows the poor living conditions in which respondents were living.

The material possessions indicate the living standard of the respondents. List of farm and household material was collected from the respondents, which they possessed. Among farm possessions it was found that only 15.7 per cent of the respondents possessed milch animals including buffalos (12.7 %) and Goats (3.0 %). Kaur (1991) also made similar observation while studying Agricultural Labourers in Hissar District of Haryana, stated that a very few possessed one or two milch animals and they bought them out of loan they got for it. Majority of the respondents (95.0 %) were having their own basic farm equipments such as sickle, spade, etc. Only one respondent owned a tractor, harrow and a spray machine, he had, bought these machineries on loan and was operating them on payment basis on others farms.

The data for household possession revealed that majority of the respondents, 68 per cent were having cycles. 22.7 per cent had T.V., which was mostly a gift in dowry. Only 14 and 10 per cent had Gas and Fridge respectively. 31.7 per cent had none of the above item. The findings on material possessions clearly indicate to the poverty of farm labour. This may be because of the fact that the respondents lack in assets, are socially low in status and hierarchically low caste persons. They were obviously in poverty and hence could not afford to possess substantial assets and durable goods.

As far as participation in social organizations was concerned, 89.3 per cent of the respondents were not member of any organization. Only 10.7 per cent of the respondents were member of an organization in the village like Balmiki association, religious organization etc.

Socio-economic Status—The data revealed that a majority of the respondents i.e., 88.6 per cent had low socio-economic status. 9.3 per cent had medium and only 2.0 per cent had high socio-economic status (table 3).

The majority having low socio-economic status, belonging to hierarchically low castes, landless, with prevalent illiteracy, having poor living conditions and lacked in assets and durable goods.

Table 3. Socio-Economic Status of Agricultural Labourers (n=300)

Category	Total	Percentage
(1) Low	266	88.6
(2) Medium	28	9.3
(3) High	6	2.0

Socio-Political Behaviour of Agricultural Labourers—As for political behaviour, majority of the respondents (89.3 %) had low score. Six and 4.7 per cent had medium and high scores respectively for political behaviour (Table 4). It is revealed from Table 4 that the respondents having low socio-political behaviour were not member of any social organization. And those who were members were mostly associated with caste or religious groups. Except few respondents majority of them were passive participants in their organizations. Thus the result shows low socio-political behaviour of agricultural labours.

Table 4 Socio- Political Behaviour of Agricultural Labourers (n=300)

Category	Total	Percentage
(1) Low	268	89.3
(2) Medium	18	6.0
(3) High	14	4.7

Psychological Profile of The Agricultural Labourers—In the present study psychological profile of agricultural labourers included variables, self-esteem, aspirations and fatalism.

Self Esteem—Table 5 presents the distribution of respondents according to the levels of their self- esteem. Majority comprising 52.7 per cent respondents had low self-esteem, 37.3 per cent had medium and only 10 per cent had high self-esteem. The findings suggest that living under poor conditions throughout and not able to earn enough to meet both ends, respondents might not be able to perceive themselves as worthy of anything. Thus majority were having low scores on self esteem. With low self-esteem make one ceases to see opportunities, thereby loses interest in life and stop believing in his own ability. This keeps them deprived and cause further decline in self esteem.

Table 5 Distribution of the Respondents According to Their Level of Self Esteem (n=300)

Category	Frequency	Percentage
(1) High	30	10.0
(2) Medium	112	37.3
(3) Low	158	52.7

Mean=19.8 SD=2.4

Aspirations—As regards the levels of aspirations (Table 6), the findings of the present study show that majority of the respondents (66.3 per cent) had medium levels of aspirations followed by low (29.0 %) and the high level (4.7 %).

Table 6. Distribution of the Respondents According to Their Level of Aspirations (n=300)

Category	Frequency	Percentage
(1) High	14	4.7
(2) Medium	199	66.3
(3) Low	87	29.0

Majority of the respondents having low to medium aspirations is probably because of their poor present conditions. Their aspirations were very basic things of life. A large number of the respondents aspired their children to be educated upto high school or graduate level, increase in annual income up to 10-20 thousands, enough cereal for both meals and clothes were their needs as for material possession was concerned. This also shows that agricultural labours are quite realistic in their aspiration. Only a small percentage (4.7 %) had high aspiration. This reveals their practical approach to life.

Fatalism—Table 7 presents a picture of extent of fatalism among respondents. Overall 66 per cent of agricultural labours were found to be somewhat fatalistic, 18.7 per cent were non-fatalistic followed by 15.3 per cent highly fatalistic. Thus study indicates that majority of the respondents believed that they can not change their life situations. Whatever they get they take it as their

destiny. This is a sad state of mind that people fall into sometimes, in which they do not know the difference between God and Fate.

Table 7. Distribution of the Respondents According to Their Extent of Fatalism (N=300)

Category	Frequency	Percentage
(1) Highly fatalistic	46	15.3
(2) Somewhat fatalistic	198	66.0
(3) Non fatalistic	56	18.7

CONCLUSION :

Findings of the study conclusively brought out that agricultural labourers in the study area were still living in very miserable conditions. Majority of agricultural labourers were male and belonged to younger age group of less than 35 years of age, having medium family size of 6-10 members. The family education and the level of their own education were found low. Almost all (98.7%) the respondents belonged to SC/ST or backward castes. Their economic level was found to be very low. The majority (88.6%) had low socio-economic status, belonging to hierarchically low castes, landless, with prevalent illiteracy, having poor living conditions and lacked assets and durable goods. Majority (89.3%) were not member of any social organization. Those who were members were mostly associated with caste or religious groups. Psychologically majority had low self esteem (52.7%), medium levels of aspiration (66.3%) and had fatalistic attitude (66.0%). Their major aspiration was to have sufficient food and clothing.

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