

## An Analytical Study on the Socio-economic Status of Agricultural Labour in Bishnupur District, Manipur

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**ABSTRACT:** The Bishnupur District is a rural district of Manipur State where agriculture and allied activities is main occupation of the inhabitants. This study examines the socio-economic condition and problems of agricultural labourers. The remedial measures are also suggested for improvement of agricultural labourers.

**KEYWORDS:** Agricultural Labour, Bishnupur District, Mortgage, Village Money-lender, Minimum Nutritional Requirement

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### I. INTRODUCTION

Agricultural labourers constitute an important segment of weaker sections of rural areas. Agricultural labour is provided mostly by economically and socially backward sections. Hence the problems of agricultural labour assume crucial importance in the context of rural development aiming at betterment of rural poor. Agricultural labourers are numerically more than any other category of labour in India, more particularly so in the rural sector [1]. According to the second Agricultural Labour Enquiry Commission Published in 1960, agricultural labour families constituted 25% of the rural families and nearly 85% of the agricultural labourers were casual labourers, and these emanated from scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and other backward classes etc. Fifteen percent of the labourers were attached to specific landlords as permanent labourers. More than 50 % of the workers did not possess any land and even those who possessed land did have very little land i.e., less than 1 acre. The size of labour population is increasing overtime.

According to National Commission on Agricultural (1991), 33.30 million households were agricultural labourers among 108.3 millions rural households [2]. Agriculture has a dominant role in Indian Economy contributing nearly 25% of national income providing employment to about 70% of the working population [3]. Agriculture is being the main occupation of the people of Manipur. Agricultural population constituted bulk of the total population of the state since time immemorial. As agriculture is not yet fittingly modernized and developed, it is not free from association of a number of problems, the resultant effect which falls on the depending on it.

Among agricultural population, there are a large number of agricultural labourers also on whose back stands the whole edifice of agricultural economy of State and particularly in the study area. These labourers neglected in today's society. The following **Table No.1.**, Shows the percentage of cultivators, agricultural labourers to the total workers in Manipur in 2001 and 2011 Censuses respectively.

**Table No. 1**  
**The Percentage of Cultivators, Agricultural Labourers to total Workers in Manipur in 2001 and 2011 Censuses**

Sl. No.	Districts	Cultivators		Agricultural Labourers	
		2001	2011	2001	2011
1	2	3	4	5	6
1	Senapati	62.27	74.96	13.25	8.75
2	Tamenglong	77.34	69.12	1.74	2.72
3	Churachandpur	56.46	52.85	8.52	6.75
4	Chandel	61.56	56.74	7.14	10.91
5	Ukhrul	69.60	64.61	2.88	4.38
6	Thoubal	37.70	39.59	20.75	16.94
7	Imphal East	20.24	18.65	14.25	10.39
8	Imphal West	26.26	17.39	8.77	6.03
9	Bishnupur	28.09	31.25	15.73	18.56
	<b>Manipur</b>	<b>40.17</b>	<b>44.00</b>	<b>12.02</b>	<b>10.06</b>

**Sources:**

1. Govt. of Manipur, 2010-11: Economic Survey Manipur: Directorate of Economics & Statistics.
2. Govt. of Manipur, 2015-16: Economic Survey Manipur: Directorate of Economics & Statistics.

Bishnupur District came into existence on 24<sup>th</sup> May, 1983 [4]. It has a geographical area of 496 Sq.Km. with a population of 2,37,399 persons in the 2011 census as against 2,08,368 persons in the 2001 census. The **Table No. 1** shows that in 2001 census, there were only 15.73 % of agricultural labourers, but in 2011 census, it increased to 18.56%. The above numbers don't cover other agricultural labourers in the district, e.g., marginal, small farmers and landless farmers etc. Owing to these farmers cultivate to small land with their family members at short duration. After that, maximum of their family members seek agricultural works for want of money for maintaining their families. If we cover these farmers to the total agricultural labour force in the district, it would be at a very higher. The increasing number of agricultural labourers those need additional avenues of employment. Thus, agricultural labourer is increasing day by day and as a result, problems of agricultural labourer become more serious in the district.

The different pictures of economic life of the people are fundamentally depending upon the agriculture and allied sectors. There are many lakes in the District, namely, i.e. Loktak Lake, Oinam Pat, Laishoi Pat, Sana Pat, Utra Pat, Meichakpi Pat, Manungkom, Shaibat Pat and Mayang pat etc. Fishing and rearing of fish are an important part in the economic life of agricultural labourers in the District. Many scheme for the development of pisciculture has been taken up in and around the Loktak Lake and other small lakes. Loktak Lake is the biggest source of fish supply not only in the District but also in the State. Preservation of Loktak Lake has been taken up by Government of Manipur for getting natural fresh water. As a result, agricultural workers are living around the Loktak Lake to affect their economic condition. Frequently, these lakes are over-flooded during the rainy season and affect the surrounding villages and harm majority of crops. A wild grass called "KaboNapi" [5] is grown in the fields. They encroach and cover the fields which ultimately become trouble to clear. During the off season, they go to the town for pulling rickshaws and manual works from early morning till sunset for want of work. They earn Rs 200 to 250 in the average per day. They expend this amount to maintain their family. During the rainy seasons, as all the fields are being occupied by water for many days, damage and destruction happen to their crops. As a result, they become indebted to the money lenders.

## **II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY.**

The main objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To understand the socio-economic conditions of the agricultural labourers in the District.
2. To study that the correlation between the agricultural labourers actual facts of life and conditions of their works and living.
3. To study the various problems related with the agricultural labourers and suggesting ways and means for their early removal in larger interest of the District.

## **III. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY.**

The work is mainly based on the secondary data available from the different sources, such as books, newspaper and reports published by both government and non-government organizations. The unpublished report, document, etc., are also consulted. To supplements the secondary data, primary data have also been consulted. Further, data have been generated through questionnaire in the form of random survey method from the research workers, prominent scholars and social workers in the different related fields.

## **IV. DISCUSSION AND SUGGESTIONS.**

Agricultural labourers are belonging to the economically and socially backward sections. It consists of landless labourers who work on others lands and the petty landowners who work on others. They mainly depend on wage employment in agriculture and allied sectors for their livelihood. Agricultural labourers are basically unskilled and earn their food through manual labour. They constitute the most disadvantage economic groups in the rural society. Their wage are low; conditions of work are often onerous; and employment also irregular. They work on daily wages and do not possess any land and a small number own very small holdings. The level of living which their earnings permit is very small. Their lives, as it were reflect the problems of underdevelopment and surplus population, which are so much tackled of in current economic discussion.

Agriculture is being the main occupation of the people of Bishnupur district. Nearly 90 percent of the total population depends on agriculture in the district. There is a different picture of economic life of the people. The food production, in spite of every effort is still subject to the Law of Diminishing Returns whereas the population is increasing in geometric proportions. The existing state affairs can show no signs of improvement unless the primary producers, the tillers of the soil, are assured of stability of income and minimum necessities. The prospects of agriculture in the district depend largely on the mercy of the monsoon. Monsoon is uncertain

and varies from place to place, area to area, and year to year. Sometimes, in the district, there is plenty of rainfall. On the other hand, there is lack of rainfall. Adequate irrigation facilities are lacking in the Bishnupur District. The cultivable area in the district is about 42,366 hectares. The main products in the district are paddy, wheat maize, and sugarcane, etc. There are other minor products are also like potato, mustard, pea cabbage, cauliflower, chilly bangle, and tomato, etc. There is defective on tillage system, poor quality of livestock, lack of proper organization, and so on in cultivation in the district. The number of agricultural labourers has been continually on the increase. In every condition, that has weakened the economic position of the small holders thereby leading to the increased supply of agricultural labourers in the district.

They live from hand to mouth. Most of the agricultural labourers have no margin money with them. As a result, they mortgaged their belongings to the money-lenders at low cost which use to return at high cost. The rates of interest per month are being taken from 5% to 10% in the district. The village money-lenders, richman and Co-operative Societies are money-lending agencies. Actually, agricultural labourers are not taking loan from the Government and Co-operative Societies owing to they have no property and guarantor. In fact, most of the families are having excess of expenditure over income. Low incomes of the agricultural labourers have lead to indebtedness. The debt to the labourers has led to all kinds of evils consequences which are economic, social and moral nature. Thus, the rich become richer and a poor become poorer in the district.

Housing, Clothing, Fooding etc., are the basic require for a person. Agricultural labourers are having rag clothes, half meals and kutcha thatching houses. Their doors are bad and unventilated. When cooking and lighting, their houses are gathered with full of smokes and it brings harmful effects in their eyes and health. Poor housing, ill-clothing, half-meal etc. are the results of lack of finance. Thus, these existing conditions make a social problem in the district.

To improve the conditions of agricultural labourers all round effort is necessary. A basic change in the technique of agriculture in the District is indispensable for converting agriculture a successful occupation. Thus, the introduction of Green Revolution is required. Then, Pre-monsoon Crops, Monsoon Crops, Kharif Crops, Rabi Crops should also be evolved at the earliest possible with all means of providing irrigation facilities adequately. They should be educated so that they should know the use of manures and pesticides. The main aim is to increase the yield of crops. It will help in the effort to grow more crops to increase the supply of food.

There is large scope for the set-up of medium and large scale industries based on the materials available in the region. The medium and large industries which can be profitably and successfully established in the district are pottery, brick-making, fishery and sugar manufacture, etc. The district is necessary to encourage some suitable small scale and cottage industries based on local resources. Fishing boat and net making industries may also be encouraged in some towns to meet the demand of the fishing population of the area.

Agricultural workers are generally to work in dirty, mud, and knee-deep water during the rainy season, in the heat of summer and in the early and late hours of winter with cold. These conditions make them an easy prey to itches, ringworm, skin disease, cold and sun stroke. For the improvement in the condition of labourers in the district, the following steps may be taken into discussion:-

- a) Women and children labourers should be restricted from heavy work under unhealthy conditions. Women at four or more months of pregnancy should be restricted from all types of manual work.
- b) Only male adults should be allowed to work during the rainy season when liability to diseases is high and difficult to work.
- c) The nature and amount of work and the condition under which it is done, should be under the special case of the Labour Officer of the Government.

The capacity of agriculture to pay wages is low in the district. Hours of work vary from place to place, season to season and crop to crop. Their earnings are difficult to manage their families. To improve the economic conditions of agricultural labourers, every possible arrangement is to be made for paying them higher wages. The methods of wage payments also differ considerably. In some villages, payment is made in cash and in some other villages, in kind. The payment of wage in agriculture is diversified and complex. Wages are paid by time or piece. The minimum wages should be paid in cash or kind with free supply of smokes and light refreshment. Existing rate of wages are higher than the minimum rates fixed by the Government thereby necessitating to raise it at least to the existing rate. Every effort should be made to increase the capacity of agriculture to pay the wages. The minimum wage rate fixed by the Government is modified from time to time to keep with the increasing and changing rates of wages. The increase in wage means increase in buying power of the agricultural workers and hence betterment in the economic conditions of the workers. The following conditions of work and hours or work can be suggested in the district.

- a) The day is not exceeding 9 hours in any case for workers and extra- payment is to be made for extra-work on the basis of minimum wages.
- b) Over-time may not be allowed to complete the piece of work.
- c) The fixation of working hours should apply to all the agricultural workers as well as agricultural operations
- d) Men workers are to be allowed to night work and in no case night work should be allowed in case of women and child workers.
- e) To protect the agricultural labourers the legislative measure are to be enforced strictly
- f) The following hours of work are to be laid down in the Bishnupur District.

During the Summer:- 6 a.m. to 11 a.m. and 3 p.m. to 6 p.m.

During the Monsoon: – 6 a.m. to 11 a.m. and 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. During the Winter:– 7 a.m. to 4 p.m. with two times of breaks of 1 hrs.

In the district, it is found that a worker may be employed from 150 to 170 days in a year in agricultural operations. But, agricultural operations in the district engaged the workers for about six months only in a year. In this connection, more giving gainful employment to these vast mass of unemployed and underemployed workers, agriculture is to be modernized and developed.

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In the study area, low cost housing is required for them. The housing conditions of agricultural workers are miserable and deplorable. They occupy the worst houses or huts in the villages. It may be suggested that the Government should supply low cost housing materials through the Co-operative housing societies. Agricultural labourers are to be formed housing societies. Under this Housing Society, Financial Assistance in the form of loans to the extent of two-thirds of the cost of construction of the house should be provided and should be repayable in the annual installments. The Co-operative Societies may be entrusted with the tasks of organization and implementation under the Community Project Scheme. Consequently, the locally available cheap materials and Co-operative efforts, the problem of housing may be tackled at early.

The agricultural labourers are taking low quality of food in the district. Health depends more or less on the quality of food. They fail to take the minimum nutritional requirements of 2,400 calories per person per day. Their caloric intake of diet indicates a deficiency of the normal requirements. Owing to this deficiency in their food, they fall on many kinds of diseases and affected their health and efficiency. Then, they have lack of adequate recreation facilities also. The standard of living of agricultural labourers in the study area is very low. With their small incomes, they can't expend to have proper maintenance of their families. The family budget of the agricultural labourers is the high percentage of the total expenditure on food. Then average monthly income of an agricultural workers family is very low almost negligible in the district. This income does not permit him to maintain a normal diet. The percentage of educated labour is also low. In order to raise their standard of living, it is necessary to take up and adopt several measures and programmes. The several measures and programme are listed below:

- a) Accurate provision of social security services like those connected with hospitals, drinking water, essential consumer goods at lower rate, education, family planning facilities etc.
- b) Land is provided under reclamation and surplus land acquired through the policy of ceiling will be allotted among them. This should be raised their income and economic conditions and will improve their social status.
- c) Non-agricultural industries will be developed so as to absorb surplus labour. Credit, technical training etc. , will be provided by the Government. Co-operatives should be organized and strengthened with view to promoting such industries in the rural areas.

- d) To improve the housing conditions of agricultural labourers, they will be allotted land for housing and supplying with materials for house building. The establishment of suitable industries should be improved on the economic life of agricultural labourers. This will also help in raising their economic and social status in the District.

## **V. CONCLUSION.**

The above analysis, however, does not lead to the conclusion that no measures and programmes have been adopted in the past for improving the lots of the agricultural labourers in the State and particularly in the district. But what has gone wrong with all this is the poor and defective implementation of the plan programmes and measures. No one has made so far a serious effort to use these programmes to help the economically and socially backward labour classes to improve their standard of living and quality of life. Many passing of legislators, random placing of priorities in the planning will not solve the problem. These legislations and priorities have to be backed up by strict and effective implementation so that the minds of the richer sections, Government employees and political workers are having to change that will solve the problems of the agricultural labourers are facing. Thus, there is necessary for a firm political will and clean administration in the progress of agricultural labourers from their pathetic conditions to better conditions.

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