Chapter VIII

PROBLEMS OF AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS

1. INTRODUCTION

Agricultural labourers in U.P. have suffered a lot during the past so many years. None has shown any sympathy towards them. Labourers of every district of U.P. are passing through a very critical position. Many of them are not getting regular employment. Even if they are employed they do not get proper wages. They always fear that at any time their services may be terminated. Hence, there is a lot of uncertainty in their career.

2. SURVEY OF VARIOUS PROBLEMS IN KANPUR DISTRICT

Researcher has surveyed the position of agricultural labourers in Kanpur district in order to acquaint himself regarding various problems which are faced by the agricultural labourers of this district.

These problems are either related with labour welfare, labour union, rural indebtedness, employment or working conditions, etc.

i) Housing problem

The housing problem of the agricultural labourers is one of their most important problems. In majority of the cases they do not possess any house of their own and pass their nights either
in the open atmosphere under the sky or take shelter in the 'Verandas' of schools or society houses, etc. which are not used by any one in the night. This shelter is also on the mercy of the principals or other authorities connected with that building. In return the labourers have to do their personal work, or look after the maintenance of the building or small gardens in the vicinity of the buildings, free of cost.

In some cases where the shelter is given in a house by the house-owner the cost free services are offered to house-owner by the concerning labourers. In cases, where the agricultural labourer constructs his own house, the ground or the plot on which the house is constructed belongs to some land owner, and in that case the whole thing is on the mercy of the land owner. Thus, it is clear that the housing problem of the agricultural labourers is a problem indeed which is related with the building owners, house owners or the land owners.

The second problem in this connection is that the houses which are constructed by some labourers are not 'Pucca buildings' and hence, are partly or wholly destroyed in the rainy seasons by the rains. The thatch of the house is also so weak that it is blown away by the wind or destroyed by the rains. The shortage of space in that house is also a problem for them, because their whole family cannot be accommodated in the available space. In such house the labourer and his family members have to go out for the different calls of nature and have to cook their food and wash the utensils in the open space outside the house. Entertainment of any guest becomes a difficult problem under these conditions. The privacy under these conditions is out of question.
The third problem connected with the housing problem is that of unhygienic conditions of the place where they live. The unhygienic conditions are not being controlled even in the city nothing to say of village. These unhygienic conditions of the places, where these agricultural labourers live, tell upon the health of their own and that of their family members. At present there is no remedy for this even after 42 years of the independence of the country.

ii) **Problem of health and medical facility**

The healthy environment and the medical facility are of vital importance in the life of every body. The rich and well to do persons are least affected by the shortage of such facilities, but an agricultural labourer, who is neither rich nor has such facilities with the help of which he may face the problem of unhealthy environment and shortage of medical facilities, has to bear the consequences of unhealthy environment. In the locality where he resides no doctor or 'Vaidya' is easily and freely available to him on the occasion of the illness of any of his family members. The hospital facility in the villages of Kanpur district are although available, yet there number is scant and the services unsatisfactory. In majority of the village hospitals either there is no doctor, or his visits are very few and irregular. Thus no body can be sure at any time that the doctor will be available in the dispensary. In the absence of doctor, treatment to the patient, whether good or bad, is given by the compounder who is a resident of that village in which the hospital is located or is a resident of a village which is in the vicinity of the hospital.
The second problem faced by the labourer is that no medicine shop is there in his village, and at the time of emergency he has to travel a long distance for the purchase of the required medicines. If an accident takes place suddenly, there is no facility in the village, at least for his first aid even. In such a case he is not able to attend to his duties, with the result that his financial condition goes from bad to worse. In the condition of his illness or any injury, his health becomes shattered and he remains of no worth so far as the physical labour is concerned. At this time his life and the life of his family members wholly depend on the mercy of the land owner to whom he is attached.

The unhealthy conditions of the locality, in which a labourer resides, is on account of the accumulated water, and the ponds where the water remains in the stagnant position. In some cases the drinking water is not available and the labourers are compelled to use the pond water for drinking purposes. This water is so polluted that different types of diseases and illness attack his family members and ruin their health. Under these conditions there is a danger of different types of infectious diseases.

During the period when a labourer remains ill or unable to do any labour due to his weakness, no wages are paid to him for this period, and this brings his whole family at the stage of starving. Under such circumstances he is compelled to take loans from money lender or any other source, and this creates the problem of indebtedness.
iii) Problem of education

There is a great importance of education in any country, on which the progress of the country is based. It is essential in all the types of activities in life, on account of which the whole society becomes civilized and disciplined. In our country the education to agricultural labourers is a problem. In the localities where the labourers live there are either no schools or the number of schools is so scant that the agricultural labourers cannot be enrolled for education. The school and college education is, now-a-days, a costly affair which is beyond the reach of an agricultural labourer with scanty income. The only way to educate these poor labourers is to open such schools and colleges which may impart the education free of cost and provide facilities for free use of books and free stationery. Such facilities are not available in the villages of Kanpur district.

In the villages where they live there are no such institutions which may teach them about the discipline and Indian culture which are the essential factors for the maintenance of the cordial relations with their land-owners and also with other members of the society.

In Kanpur district there are no facilities for adult education also. Although the facility for technical education in Kanpur district is not much, yet under existing facility, this technical education to the agricultural workers is beyond their reach. Nothing to say of agricultural labourers even well to do persons also are not able to get it on account of the tough competition and dearth of Institutes of Technical Education.
iv) Problem of wages

The problem of wages is also one of the major problems of an agricultural labourer. It is not that the labourers of Kanpur district do not get a profitable job, but the wages that are paid to agricultural labourers are also less than the wages which are received by the industrial labourers.

The problem of wages is a problem more on account of the payment and also irregular payment. In general, the agricultural labourers of Kanpur district feel and face a lot of difficulties when they do not receive the wages in cash. Under such circumstances, in case of need of money, they have got no other alternative except to take loans from any of the money lending agencies. This simultaneously creates indebtedness. In some cases they are treated as bonded labourers which is still a worse situation. Although bonded labourers have been made free by the Government orders, yet there are many such labourers who receive the treatment of bonded labourers at the hands of their land-owners. Thus, in Kanpur district there are numerous types of wage problems to the agricultural labourers.

v) Problem of safety

The safety of an agricultural labourer is associated with the idea of safety from the consequences of (i) Poverty (ii) unemployment, (iii) quarrel with the other members of society due to differences in opinions and due to individual selfish motives (iv) illness and different types of accidents, (v) incapability of doing any work due to weak health being handicapped by old age, and (vi) lack of money saving.
Although the Government has prepared the different types of schemes and plans for the safety of the public in general, yet the agricultural labourers of Kanpur district have not been benefitted by these plans. In some cases free Government help is provided to the agricultural labourers and the public in general, but in some of the cases some investment is needed which an agricultural labourer cannot afford.

Although the Government have decided to eradicate the poverty from the society and they are also trying for the same, yet the majority of the agricultural labourers of Kanpur district are running below the poverty line. Thus till today there is no safety of the labourers from poverty.

The safety from unemployment is also not there and a large number of labourers are running unemployed without any Government scheme for some financial help to them or without any scheme for their training to make them efficient for any particular job.

In the society, where an agricultural labourer lives, there are different types of quarrels between them on any issue due to the differences in the opinions or the individual selfish motives. At present there are neither sufficient number of police stations nor any such agency which may decide their cases and give justice to all. Wherever, the police stations are available, the labourers face many difficulties in lodging their complaints and in getting justice at the hands of the police.

There is no safety from the consequences of their illness or certain accidents due to lack of the medical facilities in the villages of Kanpur district. Although some hospitals have
been opened in some of the villages, yet a poor labourer is not in a position to avail himself of such facilities due to non-availability of the doctors and proper medicines. In the villages, where this medical facility is not available, the labourers have to travel the long distances for the places where this facility is available. Even then, it is not sure that the proper medical treatment will be available to him. Thus the agricultural labourers of Kanpur district are not safe with respect to this point.

The old labourers or physically handicapped labourers are also trying to remain alive some how. Neither there is any financial help nor there are facilities for pension, provident fund and gratuity, etc. Although a scheme of old age pension is there, but they are not able to get its benefit due to lack of education and lack of any help from persons who may help them in this respect. Thus the labourers of Kanpur district are not safe from the consequences of old age and physical handicaps.

vi) Problem of recreation

For every one recreation in life is very essential for his health and active life. A person who remains busy in his work for the whole day requires some sort of entertainment in order to be fresh and full of enthusiasm for his work on the following days. An agricultural labourer who remains at work for the whole day under the sun, cold blast, and rains, requires some sort of recreation in order to break the monotony of the busy life. A few hours passed in a good mood, humour and happiness may definitely bring his energies back and fill in him enthusiasm for his work on the next day. But now-a-days there is a shortage or absence of such sources of entertainment.
Formerly the 'Dramas' 'Nautankies' and 'Dhanush Yagya' were used to be arranged in the villages for the entertainment of all, but now-a-days the enthusiasm for arranging such activities has been gradually decreasing due to a number of causes. One of the cause is the dispute between the different sections of the villagers on account of election of 'Gram Panchayat'. The enmity among the villagers has increased to such an extent that the festivals, like Holi, and Diwali, which were celebrated for weeks in the villages on the mass scale, have now remained as the festivals of the individuals and are celebrated at the individual levels. Thus the sources of recreation for the agricultural labourers are becoming lesser and lesser due to which the labourers, who can afford, have thrown themselves in the bad habits of drinking and 'Charas smoking', etc.

b) Lack of agricultural labour union

The industrial labourers are in the advantageous position in the sense that there is an Industrial Labour Union, and they can put up their problems to the union and the union tries to solve these problems by approaching the owners or other responsible authority of the factory. But for agricultural labourers there is no such labour union which may try to solve their problems. Thus the problems of agricultural labourers are either solved by themselves, if possible, or remain unsolved due to which an agricultural labourer is the only sufferer.

c) Problem of rural indebtedness

In Kanpur district the income of an agricultural labourer is so low that he is not in a position to afford for the bare
necessity of life and he has to take the loans from others. Besides the necessity for existence, there are other circumstances also, like the illness of any family member, marriage ceremonies of his sons and daughters, etc., when he is compelled to take loans from any agency who helps him in this regard. Due to lesser wages and scanty income he is generally unable to pay off these loans. Ultimately he has to dispose of some of the items of his property. Sometimes, the agricultural labourer has to mortgage his freedom for getting the loan and thus remains like a slave of the money lender.

The loan which is raised by an agricultural labourer from time to time is sometimes on his own responsibility, and sometimes this loan is inherited from his fore-fathers, which later on becomes responsible for being a bound labour. Thus the rural indebtedness of agricultural labourer is a very great problem of vital importance which he is unable to solve at his own level.

d) Problem of employment

It has been observed that in Kanpur district the agricultural labourers remain employed for about three to four months only in a year when there is a pressure of work in different agricultural operations, like harvesting and threshing, etc. In the remaining part of the year they remain unemployed in the villages, and therefore move to the cities for earning their livelihood. Those agricultural labourers who are not successful in earning their livelihood in the villages or cities face the problem of indebtedness. This problem of unemployment, which creates other problems also, is due to the fact that the intensive
agricultural operations are for a few months only in a year which do not require the full and permanent engagement of all the labourers.

e) **Inferior working conditions**

The agricultural labourers at all places and in Kanpur district, in particular, are required to work in the scorching heat of the summer and the biting cold in the winter. They are also required to work in the mud and dirty water during the rainy season. The working in the early and late hours in winter season is also a problem for them. They cannot afford to wear the clothes which are suitable for the season due to their low income. All these conditions are not suitable for their good health, but at the same time there is no help for the same, as the agricultural operations are done under these very conditions for getting a good produce.

f) **Problem of working hours**

Although for other types of labourers the number of working hours is 8 hours per day, but an agricultural worker has to work at least for twelve hours or even more on the field. Under these conditions the land-owner should engage more labourers for the work but they do not follow this principle and keep the same labourers employed for a very long time, and for this they pay the wages for this overtime period. In majority of the cases the agricultural labourers receive the wages for this overtime period which are very low. No rule for this extra payment is followed by the land-owners of Kanpur district and the labourers are compelled to face the triple problems of long period of work, unsanitary
conditions, and low wages.

g) Other problems

In Kanpur district the agricultural labourers are facing some other problems also like,

i) Caste problem
ii) Religion problem
iii) Lack of transport facility
iv) Problem of postal services
v) A food problem
vi) The problem of bonded labour, etc.

The caste problem is faced by those labourers who are of upper caste and do not like to work on the field of a land-owner who is of lower caste. In a similar way the religion problem is also faced by narrow minded labourers who do not like to work on the field of a land-owner of other religion even if they are unemployed.

The lack of transport facility is also a problem for the agricultural labourers of Kanpur district. If their places of work are situated at long distances and the transport facility is also not there, it becomes very difficult for a labourer to reach the place of work daily on foot and in time. Specially in rainy season this difficulty increases, as the foot-paths and muddy roads of villages become more muddy and full of water.

The problem of postal services is a problem for those labourers who have got no house of their own and therefore no permanent postal address. For a postman in the villages, it becomes difficult to search out and deliver the letters, money
undelivered and goes back to D.L.O.

The food problem is a problem for those labourers who neither possess any land nor get food from the land-owner. Under this situation a labourer has to purchase everything from the market where he has to face the problem of high prices of the commodities, with the result that he purchases only that much quantity of food grains which is necessary for the existence of his family members. In some cases the labourers remain partially starved.

The problem of bonded labourer is a very great problem which makes them slaves of the land owners from generation to generation. Although bonded labour system has been abolished all over the country according to bonded labour system abolition act, 1976, yet in Kanpur district it has been found that many of the agricultural labourers are in the clutches of big land owners and have not been made free according to this act.
Table 8.1: Number of workers in Kanpur district and U.P. according to 1981 population census.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Particulars</th>
<th>Workers Kanpur district</th>
<th>Workers Uttar Pradesh</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>10,57,906</td>
<td>32,30,2606</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workers engaged in agriculture</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i) Farmers</td>
<td>3,97,653</td>
<td>1,87,40,356</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii) Agricultural labourers</td>
<td>1,31,795</td>
<td>52,72,707</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>5,29,448</td>
<td>2,40,13,063</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of agril. workers to total workers</td>
<td>50.05</td>
<td>74.54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Agricultural Statistics, 1988, CSA University of Agriculture and Technology, Kanpur