CHAPTER - I

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INTRODUCTION:

India lives in villages. A major portion, about 80 per cent of the country's population reside in the rural areas. Agriculture is the base of Indian economy and it is the largest sector of economic activity which provides employment to a very large proportion of the population. About three-fourths of the country directly or indirectly depends on agriculture for their livelihood. In the rural society the rural labour including agricultural labourers form a sizeable proportion. And this segment of the rural society suffers from both social and economic problems as they are mostly drawn from the economically and socially weaker sections comprising landless workers, small and marginal farmers and artisans.

Mobility is greater among the landless as compared to those who hold meagre holdings and have a sense of attachment to their holdings however, small or unproductive their land holdings may be. Owing to lack of proper organisation, the movement of agricultural labour from surplus to deficit areas is haphazard. Social stratification in rural
areas is conducive to some workers attaching themselves to certain land owning families, on a long term permanent basis and this causes reduction in employment opportunities for casual labour migrated from neighbouring areas. The system of attachment has certain advantages for both employer and employee. But the system has its undesirable aspects too. It makes the supply of rural labour inelastic and leads to debt bondage. The evil of 'debt bondage' continues to exist in the country in many stages despite the steps taken by the Government to abolish it. It chiefly stems from the inability of the poor agricultural labourer to meet his inevitable social obligations from his meagre economic resources which ultimately compel him to incur debts beyond his repaying capacity, thus resulting in a state of never-ending bondage and serfdom. Bonded labour is, therefore, an exploited form of attached labour. The prevalence of this system affects the equilibrium of demand and supply in respect of hired form of labour. The casual labour is mobile, but is unable to secure employment by moving to the right places at the right time in the absence of knowledge of available employment opportunities. Labour from the non-agricultural sector, ex-artisans, factory and mine workers, etc., also invade the farm labour market during peak seasons, and this sometimes leads to supply exceeding the demand, haphazard movements of the casual
labour also leads to labour shortages in certain areas. Further, the recruitment of labour by farmers is mostly on the basis of personal contract, social and caste considerations. This the rural labour market presents an unorganised form.

The conditions of rural labour in India are simple appalling. They are miserably poor and their levels of living is very low. They have no social status. At places they lead the lives of serfs or bonded labourers. Most of the attached workers end up as bonded labourers due to the stringent conditions of labour contract. The seasonal employment offers very little opportunities for raising the standard of living of the rural labour.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM:

Agricultural labour constitute about 25 per cent of the total labour force in the country. It has grown in absolute numbers from 27.5 million to 55.47 million between 1951-81. The proportion of agricultural labour to the total labour force has also increased from 19.72 per cent to 24.94 per cent during the same period. In spite of the difficulties and problems involved in estimating the agricultural labour force, it is quite evident.

that the agricultural labour class is growing which is explicit from the growing incidence of poverty in rural areas.

That the development process in the Indian economy has by-passed the vulnerable sections of the society is a well established fact. The conditions of agricultural labourers as reported by the various enquiries are not satisfactory. These indicate inadequate and unsecure employment, low real wages, low income and consumption and growing indebtedness. Though the rapid technological advancement and the consequent green revolution in agriculture has brought about substantial increase in production and income, yet the agricultural labour force has not been benefitted much by this technological revolution.

The realisation in recent past that the growth will not trickle down unless specific policy measures to help these sections are evolved, has led to the formulation of a series of development programmes. But unfortunately studies...
on the working of such programmes have brought out that these have failed to improve the socio-economic conditions of these weaker sections.

While the industrial labour force is fully protected through adequate legislation and its proper implementation, the unorganised agricultural labour force is left to its lot. The Minimum Wage Act, the Equal Remuneration Act and the abolition of Bonded Labour Act, though exist on paper, have failed to bring about any change in the conditions of this labour class.

The unorganised labour force, therefore, constitutes a bulk of the population below poverty line. Their fortunes swing with the vagaries of monsoons. The lower wages, longer hours of work, indefinite and inadequate unemployment clearly indicate their life scene. It is aptly remarked that "the conditions of agricultural labour are pathetic and heart-rending."4

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE:

Johar and Sharma in their research paper titled "Agricultural labour - A Socio-economic Survey", (1978)5 focussed on earnings, expenditure, indebtedness, working and living conditions, assets, family structure and attitude towards family planning etc., of Indian agricultural labour.

Subba Rao (1982)\(^6\) studied wage differentials of agricultural labour in East Godavari and West Godavari districts of Andhra Pradesh.

Muniratna Naidu and Rao (1983)\(^7\) emphasized the importance of the agriculture in Indian Economy. They explained the structure of employment, strength of work force and occupational pattern etc., by using census figures from 1901 to 1981.

Radha Kumari (1985)\(^8\) studied 'the Social and Economic conditions of Agricultural Labour in Sathya Sai Taluk'. In her dissertation, she focussed on employment, wages and earnings, family expenditure, indebtedness and living conditions of agricultural labour.

IMPORTANCE OF THE PRESENT STUDY:

India is a vast country with diversities and regional differences. There are differences even within the district, mandal, panchayat and village. With the assumption that the socio-economic conditions and problems

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of agricultural labour differ from region to region, the present study is undertaken to examine the region-specific socio-economic conditions and problems of agricultural labour in Maddikera Mandal of Kurnool District of Rayalaseema Region of Andhra Pradesh.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

Agricultural labour, the majority of whom live in abject poverty, are beset with many problems—problems such as lack of gainful employment opportunities throughout the year in agricultural sector, low and uncertain wages, absence of trade unions and age-old problem of indebtedness and exploitation. The social problems of agricultural labour have their origin in the low status of agricultural labour, discrimination on the basis of caste, exploitation by the big farmers and ignorance and illiteracy.

The present study had been undertaken to get an insight into the socio-economic conditions of the agricultural labour and seek alternative strategies for their socio-economic betterment. More specifically, the present study is directed (i) to make a brief review of the place and problems of agricultural labour in Indian economy. (ii) to make a case-study of the socio-economic conditions and location-specific problems of sample agricultural labour in two sample villages of Maddikera Mandal of Kurnool District of Rayalaseema region of Andhra Pradesh.
and (iii) to examine the strategies for the socio-economic betterment of the agricultural labour.

METHODOLOGY:

The study aims at a comparative study of the socio-economic conditions of agricultural labour in two sample villages (one village which enjoys relatively better irrigational facilities and the other a rain-fed village) of Maddikera Mandal in Kurnool District of Rayalaseema region of Andhra Pradesh. The two sample villages, viz., Burgula and Peravali were selected on random basis based on the list of villages of the Mandal. Peravali village was selected from out of the list of irrigated, agriculturally developed villages. The second village, viz., Burzula was selected from the list of rain-fed, agriculturally backward village. In order to make an in-depth study of the socio-economic conditions of the agricultural labour in the sample two villages, ten per cent sample of agricultural labour households was selected on stratified random basis from the list of agricultural labour households of the two villages. In all one hundred agricultural labourers (i.e., sixty from Peravali village and forty from Burzula villages) were selected for the purpose of detailed study.
Secondary data were collected from Agricultural Labour Enquiry Reports, National Sample Survey, Statistical Abstracts, papers published in Journals and 1981 Population Census and the revenue records available at the Mandal Office. A structural schedule was administered to the sample agricultural labourers to collect the primary data.

DEFINITIONS OF THE KEY CONCEPTS:

In 1981 census the term 'agricultural labourers' was defined as, "a person who worked in another person's land for wages in cash, kind or share of crop. Such a person had neither the risk of cultivation nor any right of lease or contract on land on which he worked. On this account the percentage of agricultural workers in total working population increased from 16.7 per cent in 1961 to 24.9 per cent in 1981, bulk of them not possessing any land.

According to the National Commission on labour, "an agricultural labour" is one who is basically unskilled and unorganised and has little for his livelihood other than personal labour. Persons, whose main source of income

9. 'Work' is defined in 1981 census as participation in any economically productive activity which may be either physical or mental in nature. Work involves not only actual work but also effective supervision and direction of work.
is wage employment, fall in this category. There are permanent labourers attached to cultivating household, and casual labourers like cultivators, share croppers and lease holders.

TYPE OF LABOUR:

On the basis of mode of work and payment, farm labour can be categorised into Family Labour, Permanent Labour, Casual Labour and Contract Labour.

FAMILY LABOUR:

The Labour put in by the farmer's family and for which no direct payment is made, is known as family labour. Under this, only those family members are considered who devote their time to farming purposes. Depending upon the availability of time and the type of work they do, there may be some family members who work full time on the farm, and whose labour is available throughout the year. Some may be able to devote only limited time, doing some part-time job or pursuing studies.

PERMANENT LABOUR (ATTACHED LABOUR):

Generally, permanent labour is hired for one year and paid either in cash or in kind or both. Some additional facilities like residence, farm produce (at concessional rates) or perquisites of food, clothing, beedies, betel leaves, chappals etc., may also be provided.
The labour is supposed to work for one year after that he can either go to some other employer, or renegotiate his contract with the same farmer.

CASUAL LABOUR OR DAILY WAGE LABOUR:

Casual labourers are engaged temporarily according to requirement and are paid at a rate fixed for a day. This type of labour fulfils the need for additional labour at the peak period of farm operations viz., transplanting, weeding, harvesting etc. The payment is made either in cash or in kind or both. The wage rate varies from place to place at different times of the year.

DEFINITIONS OF KEY CONCEPTS:

TOOLS OF ANALYSIS:

Simple statistical tools such as averages, percentages, etc., have been used for interpretation of data.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY:

The present study is confined to two sample villages of a Mandal and as such the findings are more location-specific and broad generalisations may not be made. However, it is hoped, that the study may help to get an insight into the socio-economic conditions of the agricultural labour of Rayalaseema region.
CHAPTERISATION SCHEME:

The study is divided into Five chapters. First chapter introduces the problem, reviews the relevant studies and describes the methodology adopted. Second chapter presents an over-view of the agricultural labour in India. Third chapter deals with the profile of the economy of Kurnool district and the sample two villages. Chapter four is devoted to the study of socio-economic conditions of the agricultural labourers in sample villages. The last chapter summarises the major findings and examines the strategies for the socio-economic betterment of agricultural labour.