

Social Stratification and the Agricultural Labourers: Evidence from Village Labour Market in Maharashtra

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Agricultural sector in India, after the phase of Green Revolution, is again witnessing major policy changes under the environment of liberalisation and globalisation. In the wake of arguments for and against these measures, it can not be denied that favourable benefits of the policy measures are likely to benefit primarily and initially (at least in the short run) the prime segments of the sectors/markets/the economy in general. In this case, attention needs to be focused on the large population of agricultural labourers and their current socio-economic status. This segment becomes extremely vulnerable to these adverse effects, if any, of the new policies, and affect their real economic status due to their peculiar characteristics. An important additional factor that is likely to affect the market access, remuneration paid and other terms of contract for the agricultural labourers is their social status. In a traditional, closed village economy, the working of deep-rooted traditional institution of caste can get affected due to the modern forces of growth, various developmental activities and policy changes. The present paper looks into the village level agricultural labour market after the change has taken place and relate it to the economic status of various category(caste) household at the micro level. It is observed that there is no discrimination based on caste in the sense of separate markets for various category(caste) casual labourers. However, decay of traditional occupations along with historically determined poor resource (capital and human) base, difficulties in occupational mobility, lower bargaining strength make it difficult for the Scheduled Caste (SC) agricultural labourers to respond to any new developmental change. The exercise carried out hints at limited participation of the community of SC agricultural labourers in the process of change and shows systematic variations and a hierarchy in the economic status of the labourers based on their caste.

Introduction

Agricultural sector in India, after the phase of Green Revolution, is again witnessing major policy changes under the environment of liberalisation and globalisation. Though the implications of these policy measures and their impact on various sections of the society has remained a debatable issue, it can not be denied that the favourable benefits of the policy measures are likely to benefit primarily and initially (at least in the short run) the prime segments of the sectors/markets/the economy in general due to the typical problems of existence of supply bottlenecks, imperfections in markets, rural traditional institutions etc. This follows that for an underdeveloped country like India, with dualism as the integral part of its economic structure, transformation of the traditional agricultural sector trapped at the output growth rate of 3 per cent p.a. and more than half the population still depending on it, is a long drawn process.

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