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Farmer to Labour: A Study onfarmers descending from agriculture in South Indian State

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ABSTRACT

Recent trends in agriculture clearly show unprecedented things happing in Indian agriculture. Farming is the primary and largest profession in rural India, where 56% of the rural population depended on it. The socio-economic conditions of farmers apparently have complex linkages with the larger structure and pace of economic conversion. The present study conducted in Warangal District of Telangana State in South India, where multiple castes cultivating and having different landholdings. The present study discusses that, village farmers especially young farmers are moving out of agriculture due to non-favorable conditions in their cultivation process.

Key Words: *Agriculture, Farmers, Profession, Non-Farming Professions*.

Introduction

According to the 2011 census, 56% of India's population is dependent on agriculture and its allied activities for their livelihood and economic activity. Agriculture, which is the main economic activity of any state, is as ancient as human civilization. Civilization started with the emergence of agriculture. Agriculture is defined as an art of cultivating land. Agriculture refers to the sector of human activity between environment and human culture, which has grown in and from it (Lenka, 2000).Indian agricultural system is known for its multifunctional role of providing employment, livelihood, food

and nutritional securities. It contributes nearly 14.2% of the gross domestic product (GDP) to the country economy. Farmers' in India are following traditional way of cultivation practices in their cultivation process, which are intuitive and passing through generations to generations from the one person to another person in the process of cultivation. After independence, most of the states in India in their developmental plans have given high priority to programs of increasing agricultural production in order to bring about a tremendous change in its cultivation process. As a results of which, India witnessed the Green Revolution in the late 1960's, which entered with new technology in the form of High Yielding Varieties (HYVs) of seed, developing irrigation system, usage of chemical fertilizers and mechanization in the cultivation process. Green Revolution started drastic changes in cultivation practices from traditional way of cultivation to modern methods or scientific methods in the cultivation process. The technological change as experienced in the wake of the green revolution has about changes such as use of high yielding variety seeds, chemical fertilizer, farmyard manure and better water management. These changes have led to marked changes in the output per acre. It is opined that though the high yielding variety programs has increased the demand for labor, wage rates have not raised, as the supply of labor was quite elastic. It is also seen that the medium and large farms have intensified their agriculture by double and multiple cropping. This has led to the mechanization of farm operation and a decrease in employment of farm labor. A feature of the new technology is that skilled labor is needed to perform the water, soil and crop management practices and to maintain the machinery (Shah and Singh, 1970).

Green revolution also openedits doors to changing of cultivation patterns from traditional forms to modern or scientific forms of cultivation patterns resulted deviations in the cultivation process. Which influenced farmers to shift from traditional farming practices to modern practices in their cultivation process resulted need for agricultural extension services to the farming communities to learn new scientific cultivation patterns in the cultivation process. For implementation or practicing of new cultivable practices, which are new to the farming communities needs more information to achieve increase in farm productivity, improved product quality and standards, and understanding of value addition opportunities in their cultivation process. Vyas (2004) reports changes in the Indian agriculture, such as small farm character, spread of modern technology and source of different inputs like fertilizers, insecticides,

mechanical power and improved seeds from external sources. Within the high input and low output scenario, the result has been the failure to repay the loan. As most of these loans were procured from non-institutional sources, who resorted to social insistence as much as coercive tactics, many self-respecting farmers have taken the extreme step of suicide to save face.JayatiGhosh and Chandrasekhar (2006) in their study on 'the burden of farmers' debts' observes that the public agricultural extension services have disappeared, leaving farmers at the mercy of private input dealers. The input dealers functioning without adequate regulation often suggest a wrong crop and excessive input usage, and they also sell spurious inputs. Declining returns, increasing cost of cultivation and thereby indebtedness pushed farmers into stress resulting in suicides.Revathi(1998) in her study on 50 deceased farmers in Warangal district of Andhra Pradesh, points out that the foremost cause of the problem of agrarian distress was irrigation as wells were the largest source of irrigation for about three fourths of the farmers in the region. Generally, farmers had to bear the expenses for digging of bore wells in the region. Due to the depletion of ground water the cost incurred for deepening on bore wells ranges on an average anywhere between Rs. 50,000 to Rs.1, 00,000. 50 percent of the farmers in her study had obtained loans for improvement of wells and about 20 percent incurred debt for digging wells. In case of crop failure, debt burden forced many farmers to commit suicides.Sharma (2006) opined that agriculture seems to have lost its sheen completely if the rising incidence of farmer suicides and the growing debt burden on farmers are indicators to be considered. Rather, it has become legacies, which most want to get rid of. CTA (2010), found that the low level of production and entrepreneurship as well as decreasing involvement of youth in agriculture to be resulted from low level of agricultural skills and limited access to financial resources. In addition, for any given youth, the low incomes, high risk and insufficient gains compared to the effort required make agriculture a very poor proposition. In the coming years, one of the biggest challenges for Indian agriculture would be retaining its youth in agriculture. Unless farming becomes both intellectually stimulating and economically rewarding, it will be difficult to attract or retain rural youth in farming Swaminathan (2001).Today the agricultural practices are promoted by market forces and multi-national companies. Modern agricultural agenda in India has led to 'Taylorisation of agriculture'. It supports the erosion of the local practices of

agriculture and agrarian culture and promotes state and agri-business directed agendas making farmers dependent on market (Vasavi 2012).

Farmers' aspiration for upward mobility and the need to raise their income levels may be considered as another factor pushing farmers to adopt new agricultural technologies, new crops without adequate knowledge. As a result the intensity of risk is increasing inversely with the extent of land holding. In traditional agriculture collective decision making at the community level absolved risks to a greater extent. However, modern agriculture pushed for transformation from collective to individualized agriculture than leading to anomalies (Rizov 2004). As individuation intensified the extent of risk magnified. This is witnessed in significant proportions at the marginal and small farmer level when compared to semi-medium and large farmers. The present study aims at identifying what are the factors determine farmers to move out of farming as a farmer to other profession in their life.

Methodology:

The present paper is based on the findings of the study conducted in a village named Nainala in South Indian state of Telangana. Study village is located in Warangal district of Telangana, which falls under the semi-arid tropical climate. The village has a long history of agriculture as its major occupation. It is located about five kilometers from the lowest revenue headquarters indicating the greater amount of exchange of communication with the outside world. For decades, farmers in the village have been cultivating multiple crops in semi dry and dry land. Major crops grown in the village are paddy, maize, cotton, turmeric. Crops are cultivated in both seasons, namely Kharif and Rabi. Using the constructivist method, data was collected from 100 farmers on their socio-economic and their landholdings; out of 100 the researcher has collected in-depth interviews from 30farmers based on their farming categories. Field work was carried out in the village for a year from 2012 to 2013 covering both the crop seasons and researcher visited field again in the month of March in 2016. The study includes Research techniques like focus group discussions, observations, and key informants employed in the study.

Study village Agriculture:

The primary occupation of a majority of Nainala villagers is agriculture. Village revenue records suggest that the total cultivable area of the village is 1550 acres, out of

which 1143 acres of land is cultivable. 1143 acres include 740 acres of dry land and 403 acres of irrigated land. Sources of irrigation are village tank, and tube wells. During the Kharif season depending on the rainfall village tank is used for irrigating crops under its command area. Otherwise, in both Kharif and Rabi seasons there are complete dependence on tube wells which work on electricity. Commonly grown crops are Paddy (*Oryza sativa*), Cotton (*Gossypiumhirsutum*), Turmeric (*Curcuma longa*), Chili (*Capsicum annum*), Groundnut (*Arachishypogaea*), and Maize (*Zea mays*).

Caste and age of Farmers:

Table No 1: Caste and Age of Farmers

Sl. No	Caste	Below 40 years	41-50 years	Above 50 years	Total*
1	Chakali	2	1	2	5
2	Dudekula	1		2	3
3	Gowda	2	4	6	15
4	Madiga	7	9	9	25
5	Mala	3	3		6
6	Mangali			1	1
7	Mudhiraj	1	1	1	3
8	MunnuruKapu	2	1	2	5
9	Reddy		2	1	3
10	Yadava	11	12	11	34
	Total	32	33	35	100

*= Total Farmers from each caste community

Table No. 1 showing the age contribution among the farming community in the village, there is a remarkable age gap in participation of farmers in the village. There are twelve farmers out of hundred farmers in the village. It shows that, there are less number of farmers entering into the farming in the village and in the case of *gowda*, *madiga*, *yadava*, *reddy*, *munnurukapu* and *mudhiraj* communities youth are not attracting towards cultivation process in the village. At the age of less than thirty one to forty years age group farmers are twenty out of hundred in the village. By combining of both (20 to 40) age groups there are thirty two out of hundred farmers in the village. It means that, sixty eight farmers are fall under the above the forty years of age in the study village. There are thirty three farmers under the group of forty one to fifty years of age and this is the age group having largest number in the village farming community. There are thirty five farmers comes under the above

fifty one years of age group in the study village. Total number of village farming community is 278. Among them, forty seven farmers fall under the less than thirty five age group. 141 farmers come under the age group of thirty six to fifty years age group. Which means majority of the farmers falls under this group in the village. There are 90 farmers fall under the age group of above fifty years of age. From the above table clearly indicates that, there is less number of young age farmers in the village.

Table No 2: Caste and Age of Movedout of Farming

Sl. No	Caste	Below 30 years	31-40 years	41-50 years	Above 50 years	Total Farmers*
1	Chakali	2	1			3
2	Dudekula					
3	Gowda	2	1			3
4	Madiga	2	1			3
5	Mala	1	1			2
6	Mangali					
7	Mudhiraj		1			1
8	MunnuruKapu					
9	Reddy					
10	Yadava	1				1
	Total	8	5			13

*= Total Farmers from each caste community moved out of agriculture within span of two years.

Data collected on caste was cross tabulated with age of the farmer respondents. Age was considered as an indicator of farmers' experience in cultivation. Age was also considered for data collection as to know to which caste the young farmers belong. Data suggest that out of 100 respondents eight are from the below age of 30 years are moved out of farming in the span of two years (2013-14 and 2014-15). And 5 respondents are in the age group of below 40 years left the farming profession. it was reported by many respondents during the in-depth interviews that younger generation from SCs and some lower order castes from OBC castes are disinclined to engage in agriculture. This statement is supported by the fact that out of a total of 278 farmers in the village only 13 farmers are left farming profession in the village. 141 farmers are in the age group of 40 to 50 years and 90 farmers are in the age group of above 51 years. These farming categories reported

that while the younger generations from the upper castes have disappeared from agriculture long back (about two to three decades back) the younger generations from SCs and low ranking OBC castes have now started abandoning agriculture. Apparently the younger generations from these castes prefer seeking employment in towns and are engaged in non-farm occupations like, masonry, daily wage labourer, labour at construction sites etc.

Findings and Discussion:

Agricultural labour, unlike other forms of labour (like industrial wage labour or labour in non-farm occupations), is characterized by historical bondage with farmers. The earlier form of association with farmers, particularly large farmers was exploitative and unfree. The unfreelabour is an important characteristic of feudal relations. Unfreelabour helped the landed class to realize surplus. Indian agrarian relations were characterized by jajmani relations which provided hereditary, family based, caste based relationship between land owning families and the artisan castes in the village. Of course, agricultural labour was drawn from outside the artisan/service castes. Emergence of the cash economy and commercial agriculture resulted in significant changes in the labour relations in rural India.

It was observed in the study village that the *availability of agricultural labour* has been shrinking year by year. Many senior farmers have complained about the present situation of agricultural labour while young farmers are coming to terms with it through mechanization. Senior farmers (those who are more than 30 years of experience in farming) from medium and semi-medium category observe that the present generation of agricultural labour is not skilled in agricultural operations. *ChatlaSathaiah*, One of the senior farmers' complain that the "*present youth has no stamina that we used to have at that age. Young agricultural labour cannot handle laborious works for a long time during the day. That is why they prefer mechanization which needs more amount of money they have to spend on cultivation".* On the other hand the young men and women from the traditionally agricultural labour class feel that it is not worth spending the whole day in the hot sun (or rain or cold) in the farm doing agricultural operations. Given a chance they prefer taking up non-farm based works. It was observed that many landless labourers and even some of the small and marginal farmers going to work outside the

village, in the nearby towns, by autos for daily wages. The wages are more when compared to agricultural works. And also the payments are immediate when compared to farm labour. Increasing opportunities for work outside the village is one of the reasons for the shift from the agricultural work. Also the increased transportation facilities enabled greater mobility from the village.The patron-client relations have disappeared as farmers entered into commercial agriculture. Agricultural labourers are free to choose the work they like. The relationship between farmer and agricultural labourer doesn't spill over to other aspects of social life. It is monetary and immediate. There is no long term mandatory association between them. Moreover caste ceased to be a determinant. The relationship is based on trust. It is the trust that the agricultural labourer has towards the farmer for quick and fair payment of wages and farmer about the skill and sincere work of the agricultural labourer. The study did not find any agricultural labour associations in the village.

Today inputs such as fertilizers, pesticides, mechanical power and seeds occupy a prominent place in the input structure because they are seen as a means of high yields. The goals were set in terms of tangible outputs leaving anything beyond as untenable. Consequently, we witness a large scale displacement of traditional inputs like organic manure, animal power and farm-retained seeds, which are branded as low yielding. In the present-day agriculture, the cost of inputs contributes to a large share of expenditure pressurizing farmers to increase yields by any means. Input intensive cultivation is reported to be counterproductive in the small and marginal holdings as there has been a steep increase in indebtedness. At the same time there has been an erosion of localized, heterogeneous forms of knowledge in agriculture with the promotion of input intensive modern agriculture lead to farmers to move out of farming in the village.

The study village has inadequate irrigation facilities, a non-command area, where cultivation depended on rainfall for centuries, has been witnessing substantial changes in the farmers' perspective towards irrigation. The village has a pond, spreading over more than 50 acres. It collects rain water which is used by farmers for cultivation and others in the village for various purposes which include its use for human needs as well as cattle needs. The village has an ayacut (area cultivated using water from the pond through its canals) of 300 acres. The canal from the pond serves

the irrigation purpose to the fields under its ayacut. Otherwise, it also helps in recharging the bore wells and open wells. Farmers reported that they have adequate water availability through sources like village pond, open wells and tube wells in Kharif season. However, during Rabi there is always a shortage of water as water in the village pond recedes, open wells go dry and tube wells yield less quantity which makes farmers to incurred heavy loss crop cultivation at Rabi season.

Present day agriculture is production driven. Today inputs such as fertilizers, pesticides, mechanical power and seeds occupy a prominent place in the input structure because they are seen as a means of high yields. The goals were set in terms of tangible outputs leaving anything beyond as untenable. Consequently, we witness a large scale displacement of traditional inputs like organic manure, animal power and farm-retained seeds, which are branded as low yielding. In the present-day agriculture, the cost of inputs contributes to a large share of expenditure pressurizing farmers to increase yields by any means.Input intensive cultivation is reported to be counterproductive in the small and marginal holdings as there has been a steep increase in indebtedness. At the same time there has been an erosion of localized, heterogeneous forms of knowledge in agriculture with the promotion of input intensive modern agriculture. The promotion of modern technology, capital and external knowledge intensive agriculture and cultivation of commercial crops, in fact, suited the interests of corporate agri-business groups. The new regime of commercial agriculture caused distress and loss of livelihood for many small and marginal farmers. Thus, it is argued that green revolution based technology has brought about a convergence of interests of powerful groups formed by the rural elite at the local level, and the industrial elite at the national level.

The implementation of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA) 2005 led to drastic changes in the agricultural scenario in the countryside of India. Even though it is a welfare policy for the rural people and it affected agricultural activities at the larger level. By making employment available to the eligible persons in the village for not less than hundred days the MNREGA created a contradiction in the village. As the employment days coincide with farm activities like sowing or harvesting, farmers in the village find it difficult to find wage labourers. Farmers suggest that they have to pay more wages to attract labourers

for farm work. In the absence of sufficient labourers farmers also started relying on machines like tractors, harvesters, etc. The cumulative effect was the increase in the cost of cultivation. A 63 year old farmer having 15 acres of land with 36 years of experience, by name *VasireddyLakshmana Reddy* observes that, "*today cultivation has become expensive. The implementation of MNREGA in the village made severe changes in agriculture. Due to this farmers are unable to find agricultural labour. Even if they are available, we have to pay more wages. Earlier, labour cost was less and also the availability was sufficient. But after the implementation of MNREGA farmers don't find labour and have to give more wages for the same work. Ten years back men were paid Rs. 50/, per day per person while women were paid Rs.30/-. Now we don't find men and women labourer even if we pay Rs. 200/- and 150/- respectively. In fact, because of the programme of the government, work culture in the village has been damaged. It may be one of the reasons to move out of farming in the village by the small and marginal farmers".*Due to all these reasons present young farming community in the village from different castes choosing other professions to sustain their livelihood. These farmers are giving work to their wives to look after their fields in unseasonal time or giving tenants to other farmers in or around the village.

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