

MIGRATION AND AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT IN PUNJAB

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Rural economy of Punjab has undergone structural transformation. But the dependence of rural population in general and rural labour in particular for earning livelihood from the rural economy continues. This process of rural transformation has perpetuated distress among the rural workforce. It is a strange phenomenon that migrant labour continues to pour into the rural areas. The rural economy of Punjab, due to wage gap, continues to attract huge amount of inflow of people from other poorer states of India. Rural-rural migration is largely seasonal and stays of workers in most cases, is less than six months. The high rate of growth of productivity and value addition during green revolution period in the agriculture sector has given big push to raise the level of living in the rural economy of Punjab.

The most important impact of green revolution on the rural economy of Punjab was a dramatic reduction of the proportion of people living below poverty line. This has happened mainly because the availability of employment opportunities in the rural areas of Punjab has dramatically improved. The estimated demand for labour (based on cost of cultivation data) was 443.3 million man-days for the crop sector in the year 1971-72, which increased to 502.85 million labour man-days in the year 1985-86. During the era of early green revolution, the over-all development of rural areas and other sectors of the economy generated huge employment opportunities. The higher wage rate and higher level of living conditions also attracted labour force from other states, which was looking for survival. This has led to increase in the inflows of labour force from other states to both rural and urban locations in Punjab.

The green revolution in Punjab dramatically altered the cropping pattern. During the 1970's and 1980's, the diversified rural economy of Punjab turned towards predominantly wheat-paddy rotation. Crop diversification index for the winter season declined from 0.79 in 1960-61 to 0.297 in 2006-07. This indicates that there has occurred a clear "reversal" of diversification of the rural economy of Punjab. The assured market and prices of two crops (Wheat and Paddy) provided by the state agencies facilitated this transformation. The predominant two cropping pattern of agriculture has governed the technological changes which significantly affected the employment opportunities in the rural economy of Punjab. A rise in the income of rural households, particularly of

farmers, increased the capacity of the farm households to employ innovations to further exploit the potential of yields. Thus, the new technological innovations of threshing, tractor, use of pesticides and insecticides, diesel pump sets and electric tube wells increased the use of mechanical power for tilling and harvesting operations. The biological innovations for making crops free from weeds and pest attack started decreasing the demand for labour in most of the operations earlier done by the labour. This kind of technological progress has reversed the early green revolution's peculiar characteristic, that is, the increased labour intensity in Punjab agriculture.

Mechanical and biological technologies were mainly responsible for the decline in intensity of labour use in the major crops of Punjab agriculture. The capitalist pattern of agricultural economic development has increased the share of hired labour. In fact, the Punjab farmers have turned from peasant to managers of agriculture activities. The pattern of technological progress has reduced the sowing and harvesting operation time dramatically that has impinged upon reduction of family labour and spurt in the hired labour. This is a paradoxical situation of Punjab agriculture, on the one side, during the peak season an acute shortage of labour that is being met by seasonal migration from other states and on the other, surplus of local labour during the lean season.

During 1990s, the green revolution technology showed signs of fatigue. Productivity growth stagnated along with near freeze of prices, which resulted into the decline of agriculture sector's contribution to the state income. This has created imbalance in the structure of Punjab state's economy. The share of agriculture sector's (Crops and dairying) income has sharply declined in the state domestic product. But the proportion of workforce engaged in agriculture sector of Punjab continues to be very high. Furthermore, the 90.9 per cent of workforce in Punjab is engaged in the unorganized sector where the wage rate is very low. The workforce working in the agriculture sector, especially agriculture labour, small and marginal farmers, are earning below Rs. 20.3 per capita per day, which is called vulnerable by the National Commission on Enterprises in the Unorganized Sector.

The low growth of agriculture sector and high dependence of workforce are expected to further worsen the working and living conditions of the rural workforce. This will act as a disincentive for the migratory workforce usually comes to rural areas of Punjab for finding much-needed livelihood. This will either divert these flows to other fast growing states of India or will suffer because of non-availability of necessary skills required to be absorbed in the urban areas.

There was a dramatic improvement in agricultural productivity with the advent of green revolution, which resulted into rise in per capita income. Intensive agriculture has also increased the demand for labour. The high yielding variety of seeds, irrigation network of canals and tube wells have given big push to multiple cropping pattern. This process of agricultural development created shortage of labour force required for intensive agriculture. The successful and sustained agricultural transformation widened the gap of per capita income of Punjab compared to other states of India. The poor people of poorer states have started gradually flowing in the state of Punjab. The total migrants reported in

the census 1981 were of the order of 8, 22,377 persons. This increased to 11, 26,149 persons in 1991. The annual rate of growth of migrants in Punjab during the period 1981 to 1991 was of the order of 2.59. The inflow of migrants increased sharply during the decade of 1991 to 2001. The total number of migrants increased from 11, 26,149 in 1991 to 17, 52,718 persons in 2001. The rise in flows of migrants in Punjab during the period 1991-2001 was quite sharp. The annual rate of growth comes out to be 4.52 per cent, which is higher than the previous decade.

The compound growth rate of migrant inflows to Punjab was 3.55 per cent per annum during the period 1981 to 2001. The overall growth rate is higher than the first decade that is 1981 to 1991 compared with the 1991 to 2001. This implies that the migrant flow to Punjab was higher in the decade of 1991 to 2001 than that of the 1981 to 1991. The similar trend was also observed as far as the growth rates of migrants coming from other important states are concerned. The important fact is that the compound rate of growth of migrant inflows from Bihar was the highest compared to other states. There was a sharp rise in the migrant inflows from Bihar to Punjab. When we compare the structure of migrant inflows, Haryana tops in the year 1981 with 31.74 per cent migrants recorded in Punjab were from Haryana. Uttar Pradesh with 28.18 per cent of the migrant inflows to Punjab was ranked number two. Himachal Pradesh and Rajasthan ranked number 3 and 4 recorded migrant inflows shares 14.37 and 11.76 per cent respectively. Bihar state comes at number 5 so far as migrant inflow proportion in 1981 is concerned. The eight important states in terms of migrant inflows together covered nearly 90 per cent of migrant inflows to Punjab. The changing structure of migrant inflows clearly shows that

Uttar Pradesh has emerged as the most important state that sends migrants to Punjab. This is contrary to the widely held belief that the majority migrant inflows are from Bihar. However, the proportion of Bihar migrants in total migrants from other states to Punjab has sharply increased and Bihar is now ranked at number 3rd in 2001 and improved its rank from 5th in 1981. On the whole, the higher growth rate than the average of all states of India was recorded by four states, that is, Bihar, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh during the period 1991 to 2001. The relative shares of migrant inflows in Punjab from these four states improved, but the share of migrants declined for rest of the states.

Migration and economic development are closely connected. The workforce, especially of poorer households and of poorer regions, migrates for better employment opportunities. Punjab state has been continuously receiving substantial amount of migrant work force since the ushering in of green revolution. The total number of migrants increased from 8,72,377 in 1981 to 17,52,718 persons in 2001. The inflow of migrants increased at a fast rate during the 1990s compared with the eighties. Uttar Pradesh and Haryana were the major sources, which have supplied migrants to Punjab state. The growth of migrants also increased in Punjab from Bihar but still their proportion remained quite less compared with the proportion of migrants from Uttar Pradesh and Haryana. Haryana and Uttar Pradesh remained predominant so far as rural-rural migrants from other states to Punjab are concerned. The rural to rural migration has increased but at a lower pace compared with influx of migrants to urban areas of Punjab.

It is generally believed that Census do not record migrants whose stay in the state is less than six months which may under estimates of migrant inflows. However, the large chunk of migrant workforce comes to Punjab as casual labourers. The majority of these migrant workers (more than 90 per cent) are able to find work in agriculture only up to 50 days in a year. Wheat harvesting, paddy transplanting and paddy harvesting are three peak seasons when the migrant workers are most needed in Punjab and after the peak season they usually go back to their respective native places. Some of them shift to urban areas of Punjab, during the lean season of agriculture.