



An Anthology on agricultural labour crisis

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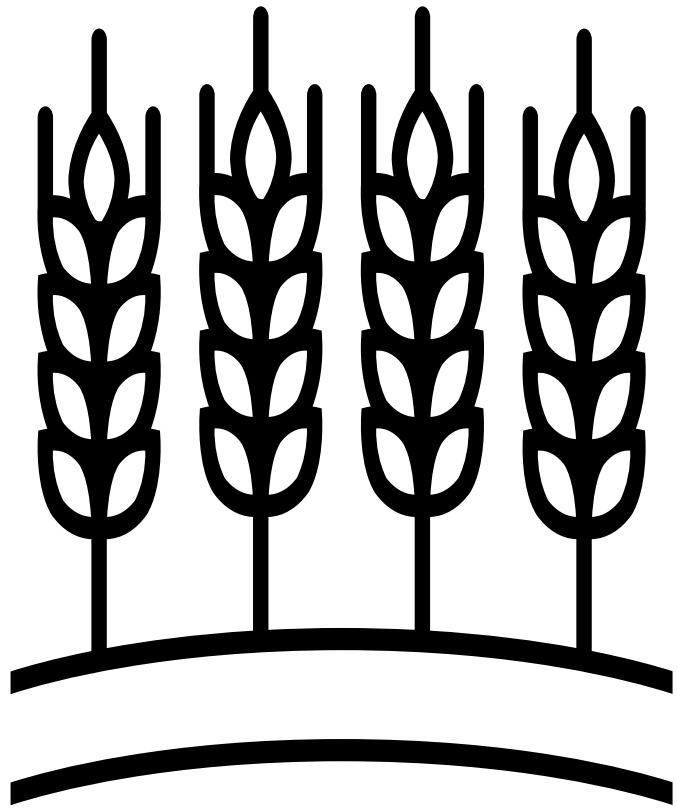
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"Farming looks mighty easy when your plow is a pencil, and you're a thousand miles from the corn field."

President Dwight D. Eisenhower

Introduction



- The importance of agriculture in the context of the Indian economy is paramount.
- Not only it is a pivotal component in achieving several of India's goals- attaining food security, an 8% GDP growth rate and enhancing rural income but it is also the sector with highest share of workers in the country.
- It is an established trend that as an economy matures, there is a movement of agricultural workers from low productivity agriculture to higher productivity sectors.

- A comparison across two time periods, 2004-05 and 2011-12, indicates that while there was an increase in the size of the total workforce in the country, the size of the agricultural workforce reduced by **30.57 million** people.
- The share of agricultural workforce in total workforce declined from **56.7 per cent** to **48.8 per cent** in the same period.





Objectives



To elucidate the concept of Agricultural labour

To analyze the recent trends of agricultural labour and its implications

To enlist the various interventions for mitigating the problems of agricultural labour crisis

To present related agricultural labour research reviews

A photograph of a man in a blue shirt and a white turban with a yellow flower, guiding two white oxen as they plow a field. The man is holding a whip in his right hand. The oxen are harnessed together and are pulling a wooden plow. The ground is dark brown soil, and the background is a lush green field.

Concept of agricultural labour

Agricultural labour

- Agriculture labour may be defined as labour who works in agriculture or allied activities for the whole or part of the year in return for full-time or part time work.
- According to the National Commission on Labour "*an agricultural labourer is one who is basically unskilled and unorganized and has little for its livelihood, other than personal labour.*"

Characteristics of agricultural labour

1) Widely scattered

2) Unorganised

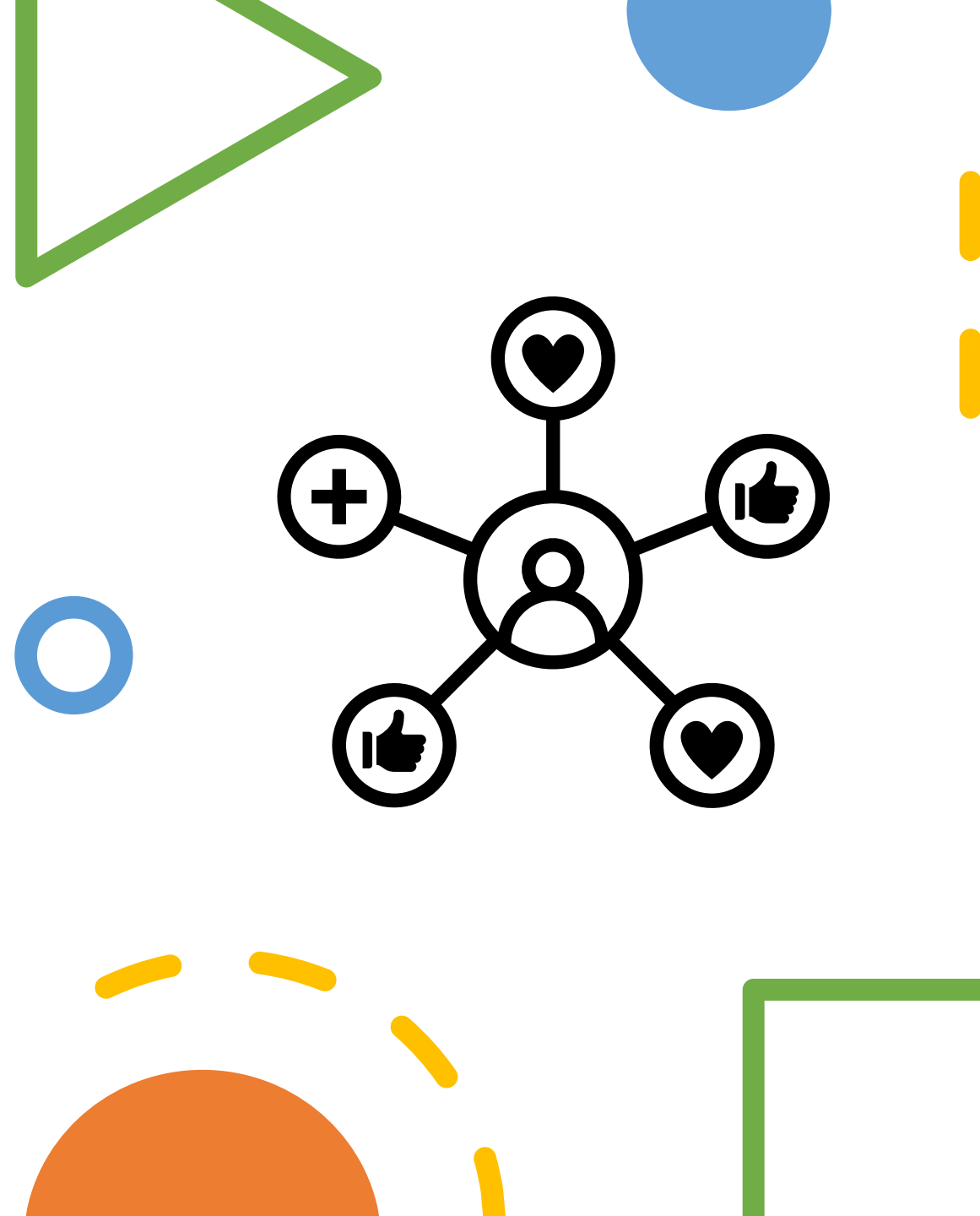
3) Unskilled and lacks training

4) Low social status

5) Have less bargaining power

Widely scattered

- Agricultural labour in India is being widely scattered over large number of villages in the country and so cannot be effectively organized. 6.6 lakh villages, of which half have population of less than 500 each.



Unorganised

- Agricultural laborers are not organized like industrial labourer. These laborers are mostly illiterate and ignorant.
- A lack of contact between workers makes it impossible to develop any meaningful organization.
- Hence they could not be organized into unions. Agricultural workers need not work in unison.

Unskilled and Lack of Training

Agricultural labourer, especially in smaller villages are generally unskilled workers carrying on agricultural operation at a very low wages.

Consequently, their supply is perfectly elastic and therefore whatever they earn is in the nature of transfer earnings.

Majority of them are generally conservative and traditionally bound.

There is hardly any motivation for change or improvement.

Low Social Status

- A large number of agricultural workers belong to the depressed classes, which have been neglected for ages. Most of them are illiterate, their income is low and employment irregular.
- In some parts of India, agricultural laborers are migratory, moving in search of jobs at the time of harvesting with a lot of dislocation of family life, dislocation of education of children and numerous other handicaps.

Low Bargaining Power

- The bargaining power and position of agricultural labourer in India is very weak.
- In fact, quite a large number of them are in the grip of village money lenders, landlords and commission agents, often the same person functioning in all the three capacities.

Types of agricultural labour



i) Landless
Agricultural
Labourer and

ii) Small and
Marginal
Landowners.

Landless Agricultural Labourer

- The laborers don't possess land and can be further sub-divided into:
- **Hired Labourer-** Hired labour can further be divided into two groups; *casual labour and attached labour*.
- **Attached workers** who are more or less in continuous employment, are under some sort of contract with the employers during the period of employment.
- **Casual Labourers** are employed on daily wages for specific operation which lasts only for a short period.



Bonded Labourer

- There is also a special class of agricultural labour called the 'bonded labour' who are at the bottom of agricultural ladder in India. The prominent feature of this system is that *a man pledges himself or sometimes a member of his family against a loan.*
-

Small and Marginal Land-Owners

These are very small cultivators whose main source of earnings due to their small and marginal holdings is wage employment.

These laborers can again be divided into three subgroups:



- i) Cultivators
- ii) Share croppers and
- iii) Lease holders

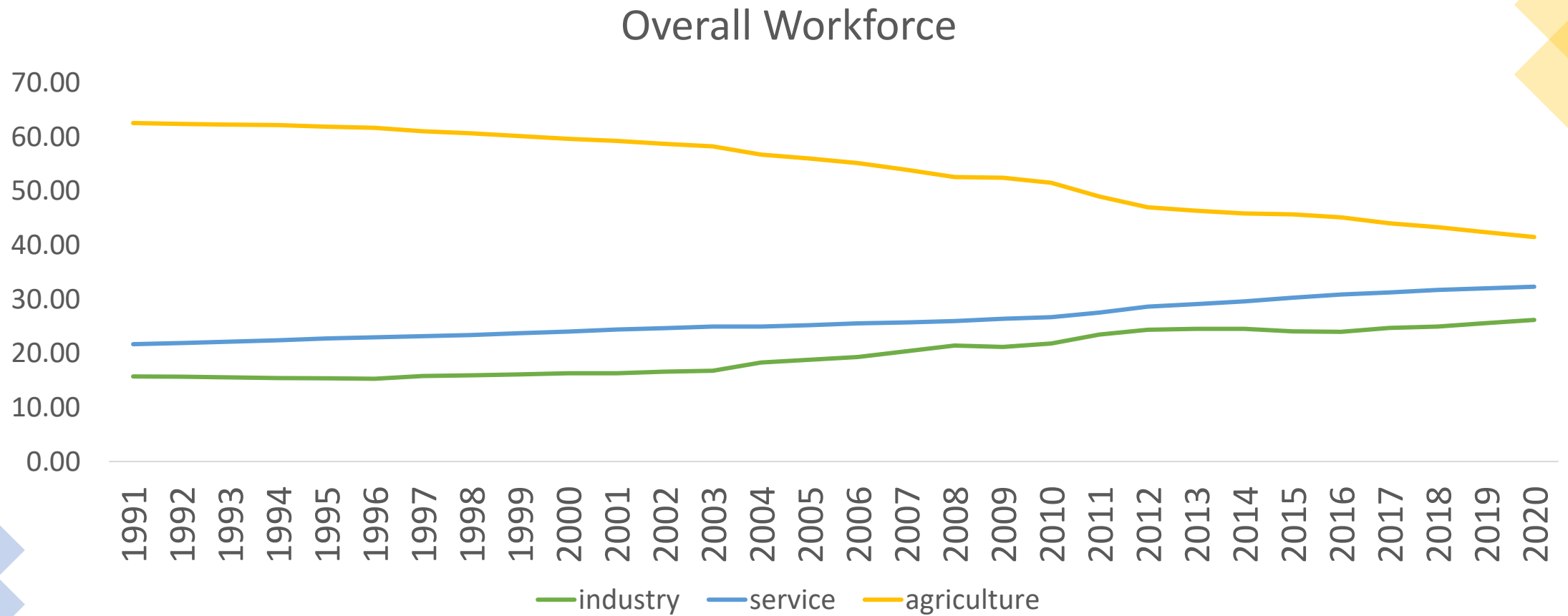
Small and Marginal Land-Owners

- i) **Cultivators:** Cultivators are small farmers, who possess very little land and therefore, have to devote most of their time working on the lands of others as labourers.
- ii) **Share croppers:** Share croppers are those who, while sharing the produce of the land for their work, also work as labourers.
- iii) **Lease holders:** Lease holders are the tenants who not only work on the leased land but also work as labourers.

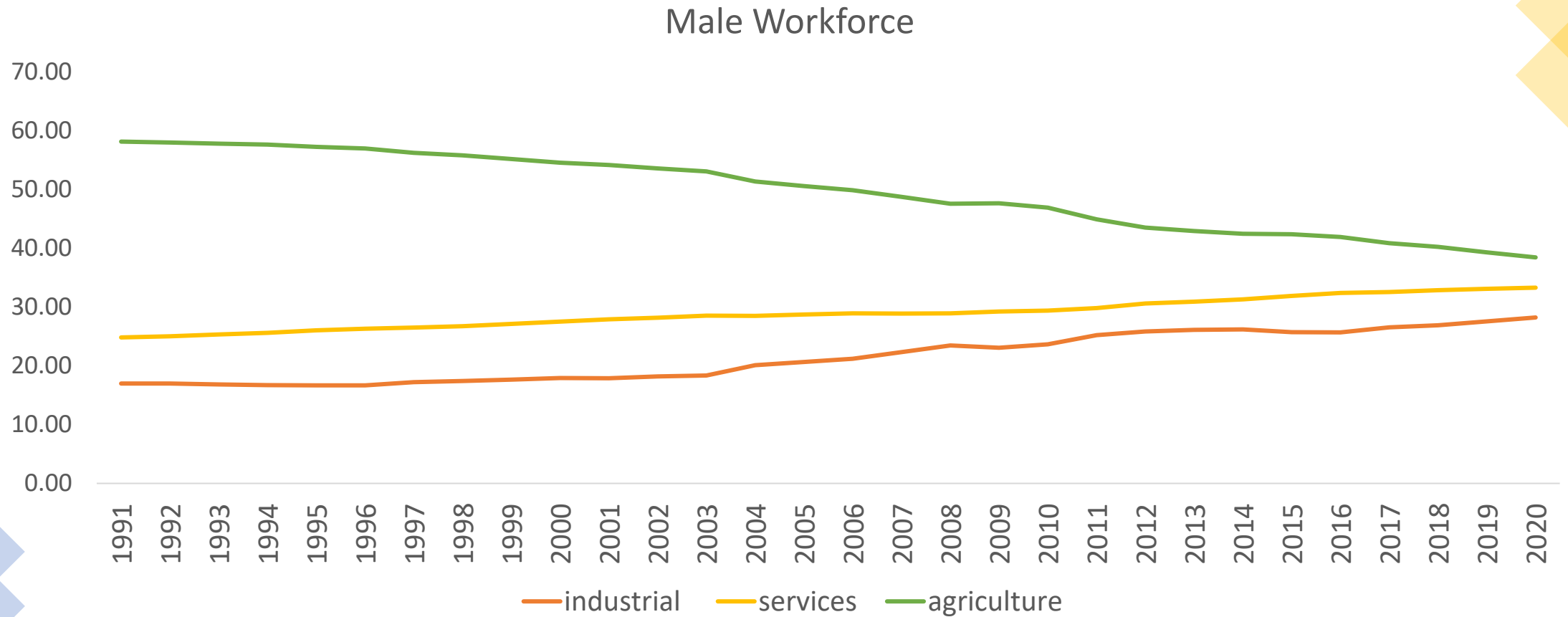
Trends in agricultural labour



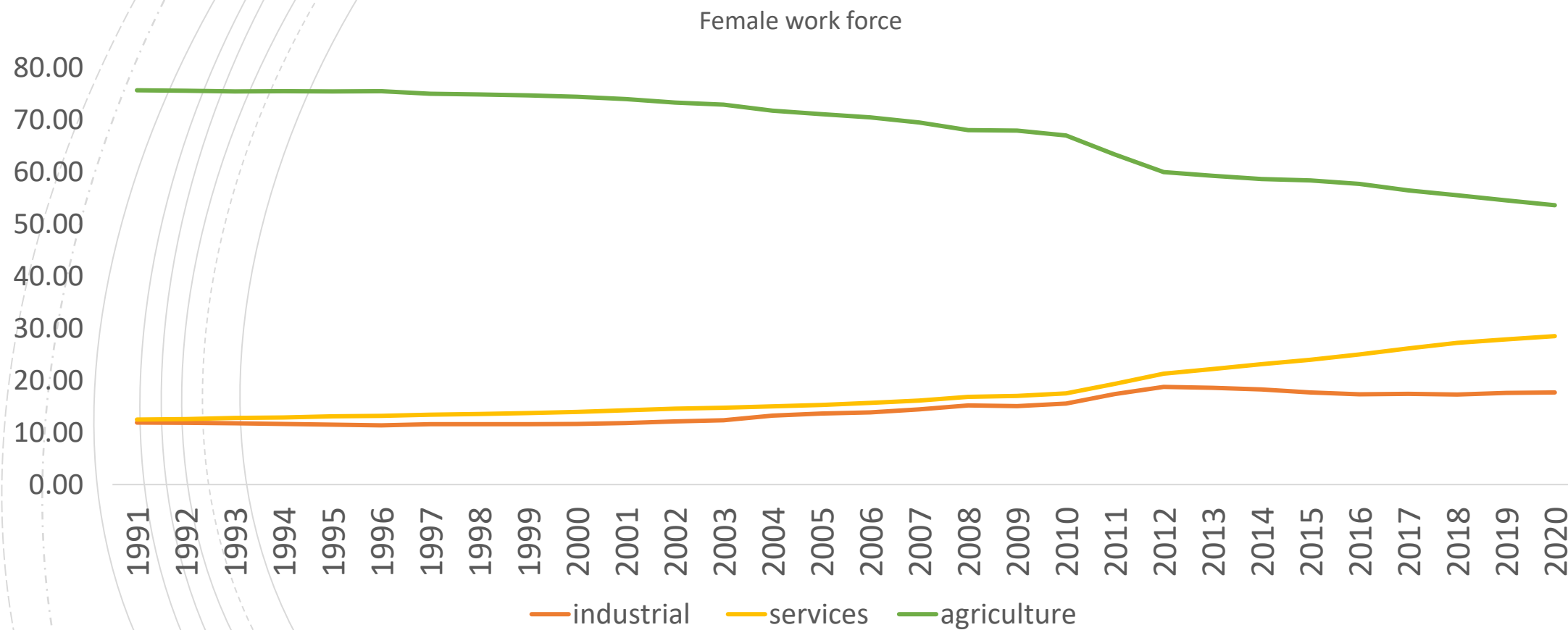
Overall workforce across different sectors



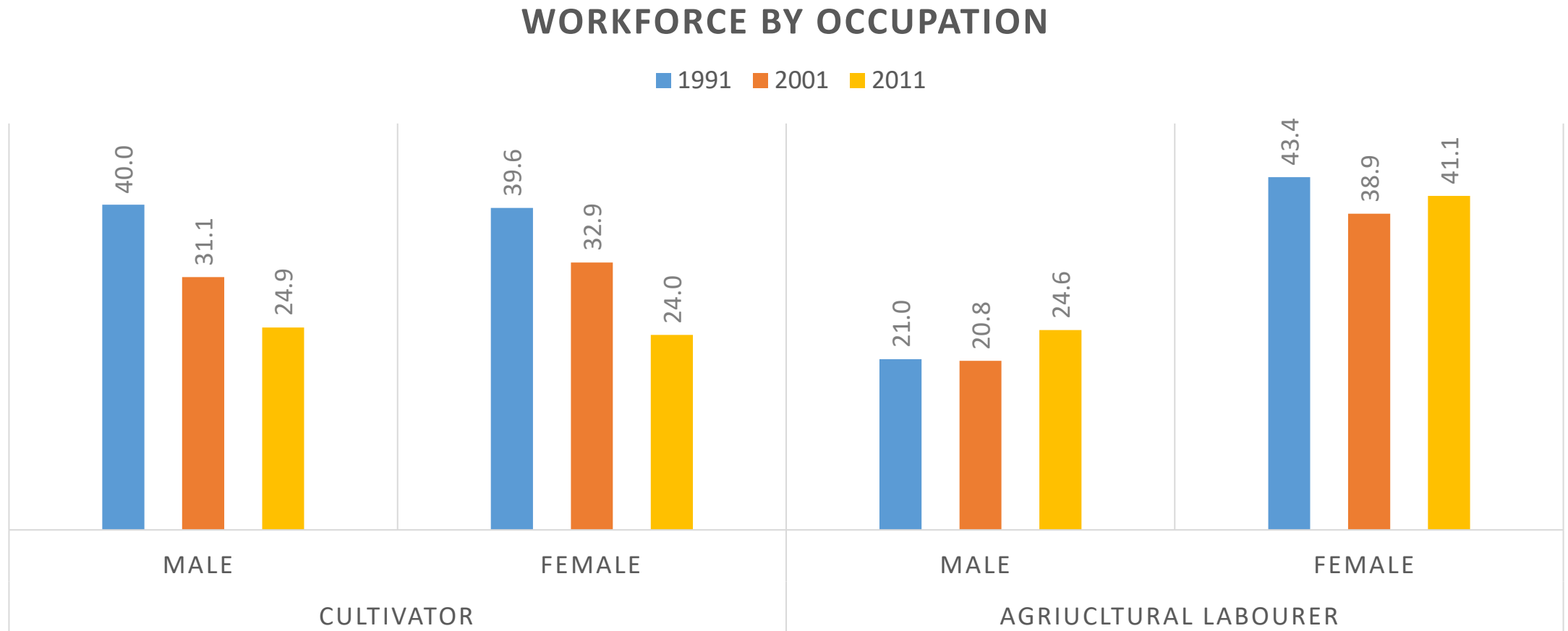
Male workforce across different sectors



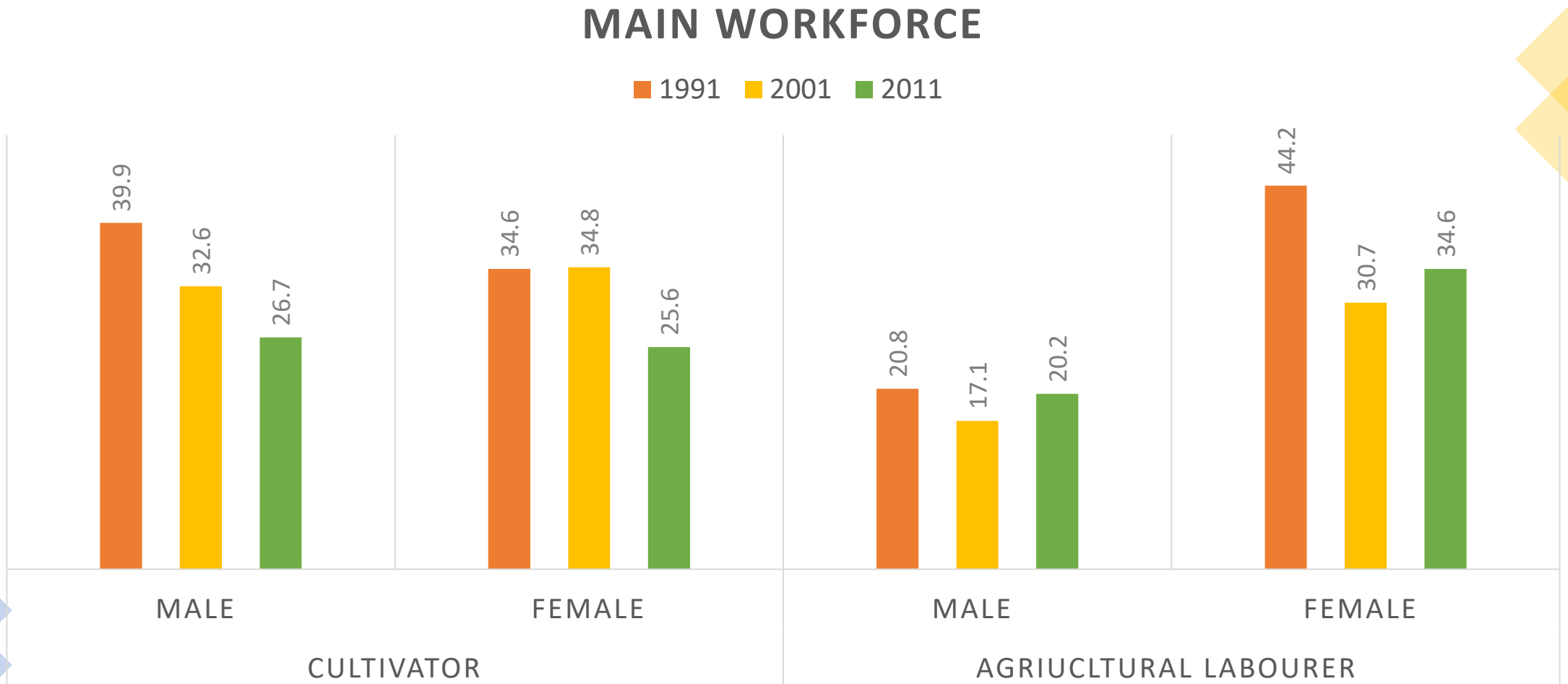
Female workforce across different sectors



Agricultural workforce by occupation



Main agricultural workforce

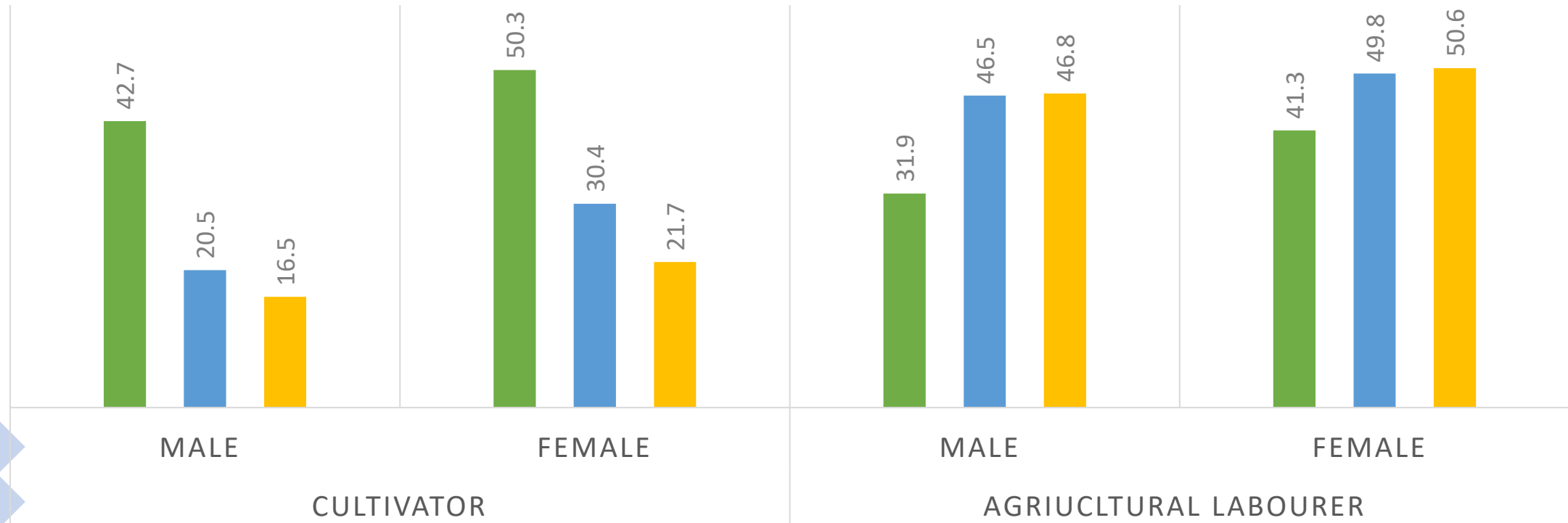


Source – Census of India

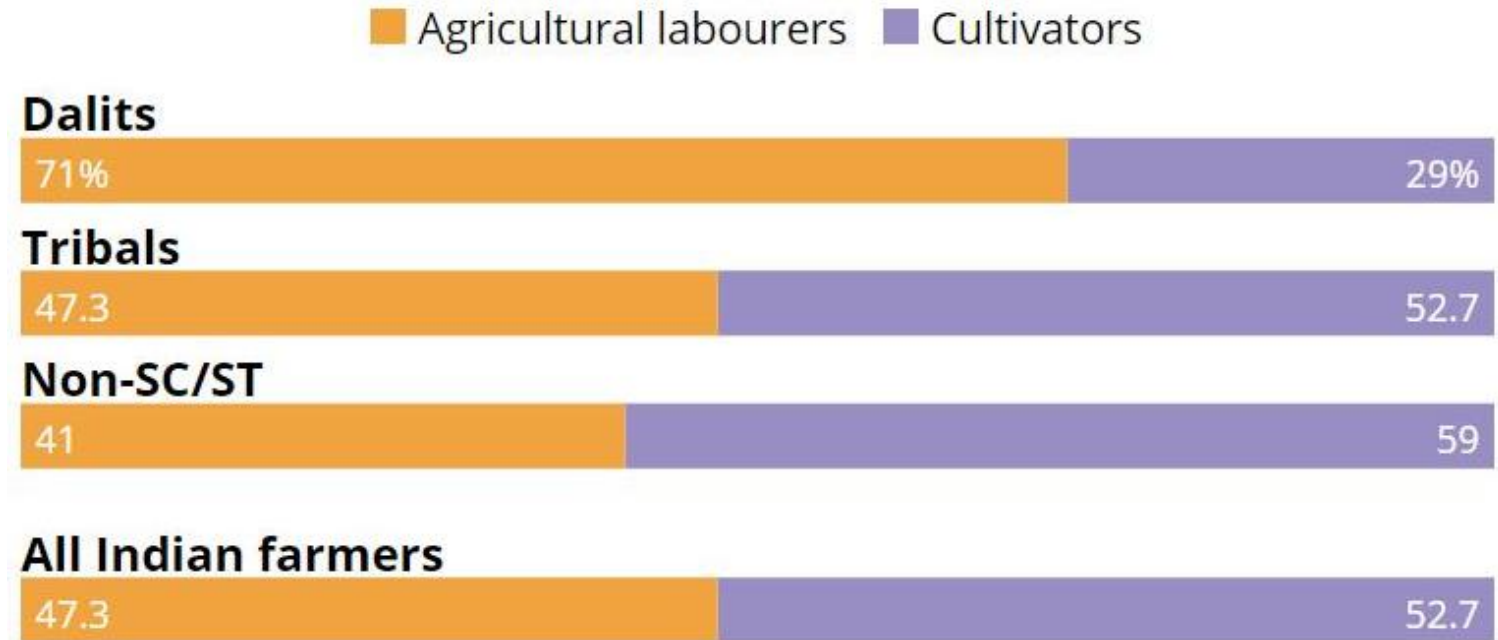
Marginal Agricultural workforce

MARGINAL WORKFORCE

■ 1991 ■ 2001 ■ 2011



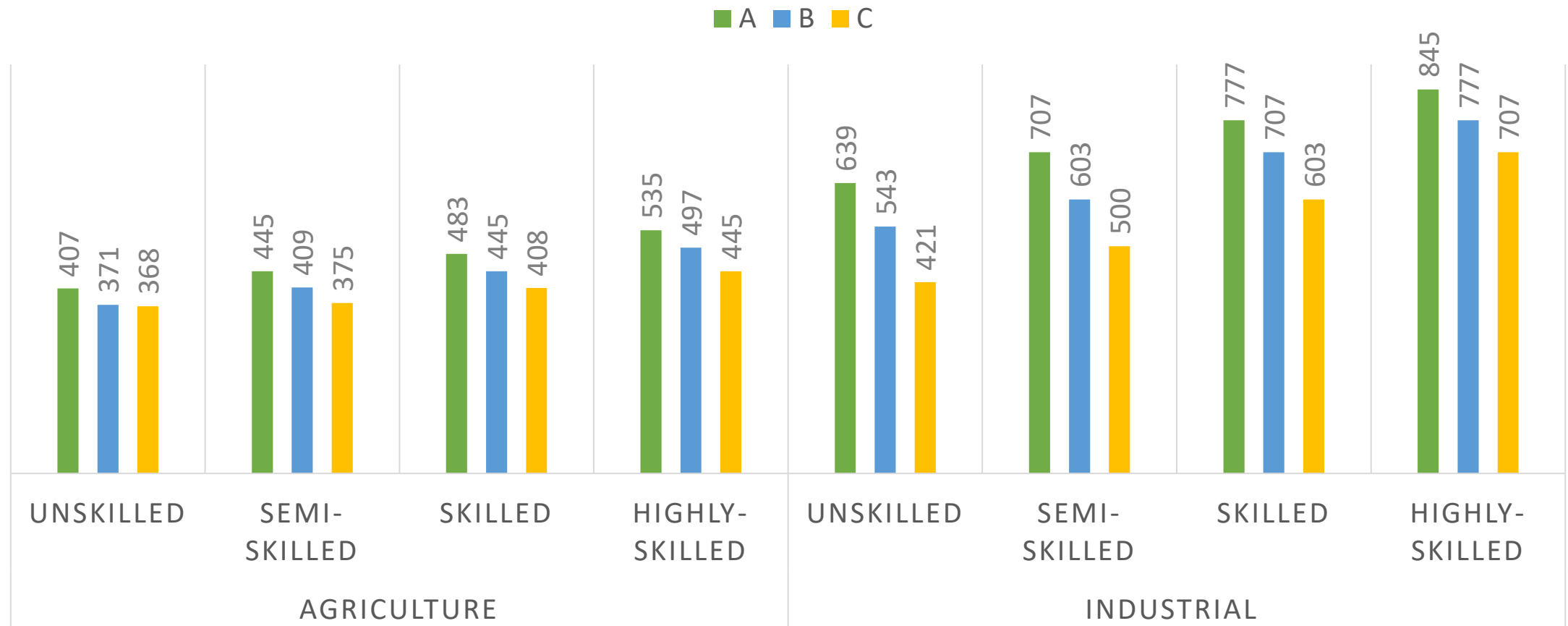
Agricultural Labour by social groups



Census of India; Hindustan Times

WAGE RATE DIFFERENTIALS

AGRICULTURAL WAGE RATE VS INDUSTRIAL WAGE RATE



Source -Ministry of Labour & employment

Reasons for the decline

Higher wages in other jobs available locally

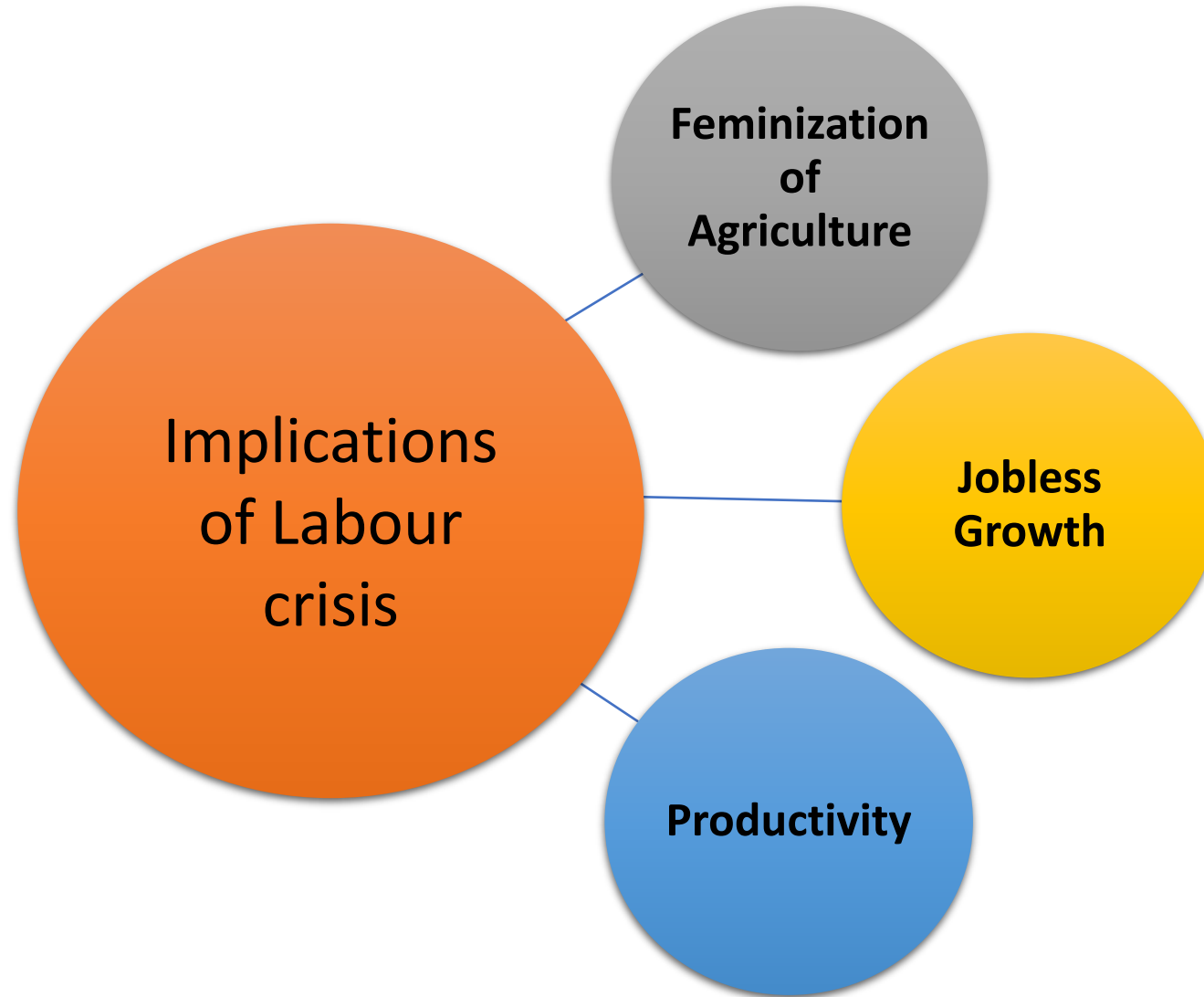
Shifting to a regular / permanent job since agricultural job is seasonal

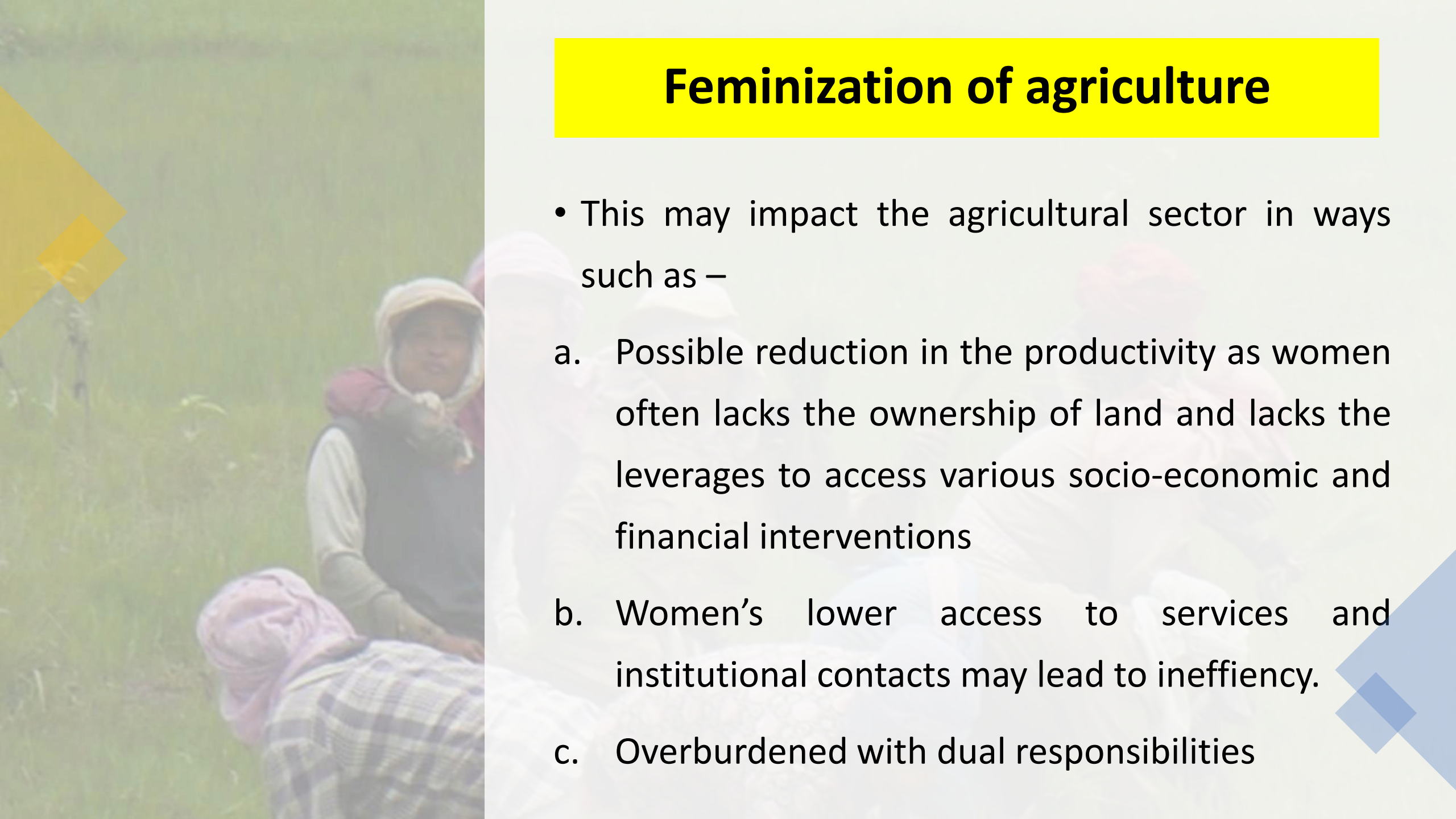
Agriculture labour is presumed to be a low esteemed job

Migration to nearby city for higher wages

Migration due to improvement in educational status

Implications of Labour crisis



The background of the slide features a photograph of two women in a rural, agricultural setting. One woman, wearing a pink headscarf and a dark vest over a white shirt, is standing and looking towards the camera. Another woman, wearing a pink headscarf and a plaid shirt, is bent over, working in the field. The field is green and appears to be a crop field. The overall tone of the image is soft and slightly blurred.

Feminization of agriculture

- This may impact the agricultural sector in ways such as –
 - a. Possible reduction in the productivity as women often lacks the ownership of land and lacks the leverages to access various socio-economic and financial interventions
 - b. Women's lower access to services and institutional contacts may lead to inefficiency.
 - c. Overburdened with dual responsibilities

Jobless growth

- A jobless growth economy indicates the existence of changes to the fundamental basis of work for everyone. Some workers will do well, as they have the skills and training that growing industries require.
- Others face long-term unemployment or underemployment and will be unable to find work until they obtain new skills.
- But since the out-migrated agricultural labourer lacks skills they may contribute to jobless economic growth which in turn would lead to demographic disaster.

Productivity

Productivity levels of labour scarcity affected and unaffected farms:

Crop	Productivity		Productivity difference	
	labour-scarcity-unaffected farms	labour-scarcity-affected farms		
	(kg/ha)	(kg/ha)	(kg/ha)	(%)
Paddy	5,090	4,487	603	11.8%
Sugarcane	153,292	144,165	9,127	6.0%
Groundnut	3,767	3,592	175	4.6%
Pulses	850	780	70	8.2%
Cotton	1,410	1,205	205	14.5%

Source: labour Scarcity – Its Immensity and impact on Agriculture by C. Prabhakar, K. Sita Devi and S. Selvam



Interventions to mitigate labour crisis

Two-pronged approach

To retain
workforce

To ensure
productivity

Legislative Measures

The Minimum Wages Act ,1948

The Plantation Labour Act, 1951

Abolition of The Zamindari system

Abolition of Bonded Laborers

In the chapter on Fundamental Rights in the Constitution of India, it has been stated that trading in humans and forcing them to beg is prohibited and can invite punishment under the law.

Since 1975 the concept of bonded labor has been abolished.

Under the Bonded labour system (Abolition) Act, every bonded laborer is free and is discharged from any obligation to render bonded labour.

Providing Land to Landless Laborers

Land reforms in terms of land ceilings and redistribution of land to small and landless labourer have been initiated.

The government's fallow and wasteland has been given to agricultural labourer.

The state government gives priority to landless labourer especially to those belonging to scheduled castes and tribes in the allotment of government land and surplus land.

Welfare Measures

- The welfare measures to help the agricultural laborer include provision of house-sites to homeless, primary education for rural poor, rural health services, supply of safe drinking water, educating and organizing rural workers.

Special agencies for development

- **Special agencies - Small Farmers Development Agency (SFDA) and Marginal Farmers and Agricultural Labourer Development Agency (MFAL) - were created in 1970-71 to solve the problems of Agriculture labour of the country.**

20-Point Programme

i) Speedy implementation of ceiling legislation and distribution of surplus land among landless Labourers and small peasants;

ii) Provision of house sites for landless Labourers and conferment of ownership rights of the houses if they have been occupied by them for a certain period;

iii) Abolition of bonded labour;

iv) Liquidation of rural indebtedness and moratorium on recovery of debts from landless Labourers, artisans and small peasants.

Anti-poverty and Employment Schemes

Jawahar Rozgar
Yojana/Jawahar
Gram Samriddhi
Yojana

Rural Housing –
Indira Awaas Yojana

Sampoorna Gramin
Rozgar Yojana
(SGRY)

Mahatma Gandhi
Rural Employment
Guarantee Act
(MGNREGA)

National Rural
Livelihood Mission:
Ajeevika

Pradhan Mantri
Kaushal Vikas Yojna

Garib Kalyan Rojgar
Abhiyaan

Pradhan Mantri
Garib Kalyan Yojana

What is lacking?

- Most of the schemes and provision are only strong in papers.
- Agricultural labourer lacks awareness of the benefits they can access to.
- Many schemes still remains in paper and unacted for instance
 - a) Agricultural labour and the maternity Benefit Act, 1961
 - b) The Employers provident Funds and Miscellaneous Provision Act, 1952.

What is lacking?

- Social protection for agricultural labourer
- Exclusion of agricultural labourer in various social intervention such as
 - a) Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi
 - b) PM Kisan Maan Dhan Yojana
- Non addressal of agricultural labour in the farm bills and minimal mention in the new Code of Labour(2020)
- Informal and temporary nature of agricultural labour organisation

What can be done?

Encourage rural industrial start ups

Formation of formal labour cooperatives

Diversification of laborer from agriculture to nonfarm sectors

Skills empowerment

Standardization of minimum wage rate.

Inclusion of landless agricultural labourer in social intervention.

Extension intervention to retain agricultural labourer

Timely training to agricultural laborer to skill the unskilled

Promotion of value addition activities

Attracting youths to the sector

Facilitate agricultural labour group formation

Awareness creation for agricultural laborer to ensure employment in off farm season

Strengthening extension services with special target to outreach female farmers

Intervention to ensure productivity

Input factors

- Improving agricultural efficiency through
- Mechanization
 - Promoting use of labour reducing technology
 - Shift towards alternate less labour crops

Output factors

- Strengthening linkages to agri-businesses via contract farming, agriculture cooperatives and market linkage

Study 1

*Declining Labour Use in Agriculture :
A Case of Rice Cultivation in Andhra
Pradesh*

Narasimha Reddy and
Venkatakanarayana Motkuri (2013)

A wide-angle photograph of a rice paddy field in Andhra Pradesh, India. Numerous farmers, mostly women in saris, are seen working in the field, which is filled with young rice seedlings. The scene is set in a lush green landscape with a line of trees in the background. The image has a slightly desaturated, greenish tint.

Objective

To examines the changing nature of labour use in rice cultivation in Andhra Pradesh.

Major findings

- The study observed that there is a fast decline in labour use in respect of rice cultivation in Andhra Pradesh.
- All three forms of labour (family, casual and attached) have followed the same trend.
- But the share of casual labour in the total labour used in rice cultivation is increasing with a corresponding decline in the share of family labour.

Major findings

By gender, although both male and female labour use in rice cultivation has been declining, it is faster for female labour.

Also, a noticeable decline in the share of harvesting and threshing/winnowing which are increasingly mechanized, in total labour used per hectare of rice cultivation.

Study 2

*Supply-demand analysis of
agricultural labour in Dharwad
district*

GAYATHRI MOHAN, L.B. KUNNAL
AND S.V. KANAMAD
(2015)

A background image showing a large group of farmers, mostly women, working in a flooded rice paddy field. They are bent over, planting rice seedlings. The field is green with rows of young plants. In the distance, there are trees and a line of people.

Objective

To identify the extent of labour scarcity with special reference to Dharwad district of Karnataka and to analyse the probable reasons responsible for this.

Major finding

- Highest labour scarcity was reported by the farmers of Garag and Morabha (both 60.00%)
- This was followed by the farmers of Hebballi village (50.00%) and Kalavad village (46.67%).
- While the total number of farmers facing labour scarcity in the study area was 54.17 per cent with a higher share of large farmers (85.00%) than the small farmers (23.33%) reporting the problem.

Reasons for labour shortage

Reasons	Mean score
Existence of NREGA (A)	35
Higher wages in other jobs available locally	57.8
Shift to a regular/ permanent job since agricultural job is seasonal	59.33
Agriculture labour presumed to be a low esteem job	39.82
Migration to nearby city for higher wages	60.62
Migration due to improvement in education status	47.77

Study 3

*Farmers Strategies to Cope Labour
Shortage in Northern and Southern Dry
Zones of Karnataka, India*

M. Satishkumar and K. B. Umesh
(2018)

A photograph of a rice paddy field with several farmers working. The field is filled with young rice seedlings in rows. Farmers are seen bending over, planting the seedlings. The background shows a line of trees and a clear sky. The overall scene is a typical agricultural landscape in a rural area.

Objective

To analyze the strategies adopted by the farmers to overcome the labour shortage in Sindhanur taluk of Raichur district and Mandya taluk of Mandya district.

Major findings

- The opinion survey carried out in Raichur and Mandya districts of Karnataka state, revealed that mechanization of agricultural operations, shifting towards less labour required crops, hiring labour from outside the village and intensive use of family labour are the major strategies adopted by farmers to overcome labour shortage.

Strategies adopted by farmers to overcome labour shortage (Sindhanur taluk, Raichur District)

Sl. No.	Particulars	No of farmers (n=120)	Per cent
1	Mechanization of operation (major operations like primary and secondary tillage)	120	100.00
2	Shift towards alternative crops with less labour-requirement (reducing area under main crop)	111	92.50
3	Hiring labourers from other regions (during peak periods for sowing and harvesting)	110	91.67
4	Intensive use of family labour	92	76.67
5	Giving land for lease	03	02.50

Strategies adopted by farmers to overcome labour shortage (Mandya taluk)

Sl. No.	Particulars	No of farmers (n=120)	Per cent
1	Mechanization of operation (major operations like primary and secondary tillage)	88	73.33
2	Shift towards alternative crops with less labour-requirement (reducing the area under main crop)	108	90.00
3	Mutual family labour assistance with neighbour farmers	42	35.00
4	Hiring labourers from other regions (during peak season for sowing and harvesting)	104	86.67
5	Intensive use of family labour	113	94.17
6	Giving land on lease by crop output Sharing basis	37	30.83
7	Abandon cultivation/ leaving land fallow	10	08.33

Conclusion

- The importance of agriculture in the context of the Indian economy is paramount.
- Recent labour trend reflects that workforce in the agricultural sector is declining.
- Therefore, it is important to formulate and implement transformative intervention so as to retain the agricultural workforce in order to ensure productivity and prosperity of the agricultural sector.



A photograph of three people in traditional Indian attire pulling a wooden plow in a field. On the left, a woman wears a green and yellow sari with a pink top. In the center, a man wears a white shirt and a green shawl. On the right, a woman wears a red sari. They are pulling a wooden plow across a dry, brown field under a cloudy sky. The text "THANK YOU" is overlaid in the center.

THANK YOU