Map Series No. XIV
Punjab-Haryana Region: Agricultural Sector Workforce, 2011

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Blessed with high quality primary resource of flat agricultural land, forward looking and hardworking populace, the emergence of Punjab-Haryana region as chief bread-basket of the country was only a natural outcome. Such a bread-basket would normally be expected to have bulk of its workforce engaged in agricultural sector either as cultivator or as agricultural labour. However, as per 2011 Census, the region has 24.67 per cent of its workforce as cultivators and another 13.50 per cent in agricultural labour, together making it only 38.17 per cent in agricultural sector. Thus, in comparison to the national average of agricultural workforce of 50.22 per cent, such a proportion for the study region was much less (38.17 per cent). However, while the proportion of the cultivators in the study region (24.67 per cent) compared fairly well with that for the country, the proportion of agricultural labour fell much short of that in the country. While in the study region only 13.50 per cent of the workforce was engaged in agricultural labour, the corresponding figure for the country was 23.76 per cent i.e., almost double the figure for the study region.

Within study region, Punjab sub-region displayed almost ubiquitous proportion of cultivators with little spatial variation in the same. The district of Mansa had highest (36.40 per cent) proportion of cultivators, while Ludhiana district displayed the lowest proportion (11.73 per cent) of cultivators in the state. The districts of Mansa, Barnala, Sangrur, and

Tarn Taran had comparatively higher workforce in cultivation (Fig.1). There were 13 such districts in the state, where the proportion of cultivators was above the state average. In case of agricultural labour too, the south-western districts of Punjab displayed more than 20 per cent of their workforce in agricultural labour. Spatially speaking, the proportion of agricultural labourers declines gradually as one moves from south-west to north-east so as to reach the lowest in the state's industrial hub of Ludhiana district. Other districts displaying comparatively lower proportion of agricultural labourers included Jalandhar, SBS Nagar, Rupnagar, SAS Nagar and Fatehgarh Sahib (Fig. 2).

The Haryana sub-region had spatially more variable proportion of cultivators. It varied from highest of 47.23 per cent in Bhiwani to the lowest of 4.78 per cent in Faridabad district, a part of industrial hub of Haryana. In all, 11 districts in Haryana had higher proportion of cultivators in comparison to the state average of 27.99 per cent which in itself is higher than the national average of 23.76 per cent. These included Sirsa, Fatehabad, Jind, Hisar, Bhiwani, Kaithal, Jhajjar, Mewat and Palwal districts. Spatially speaking, most of the districts had more than 30.00 per cent of their workforce in cultivation and more than 15 per cent in agricultural labour. Most of the north-western districts of Haryana displayed higher proportion of agricultural labour along with the districts of Kurukshetra,
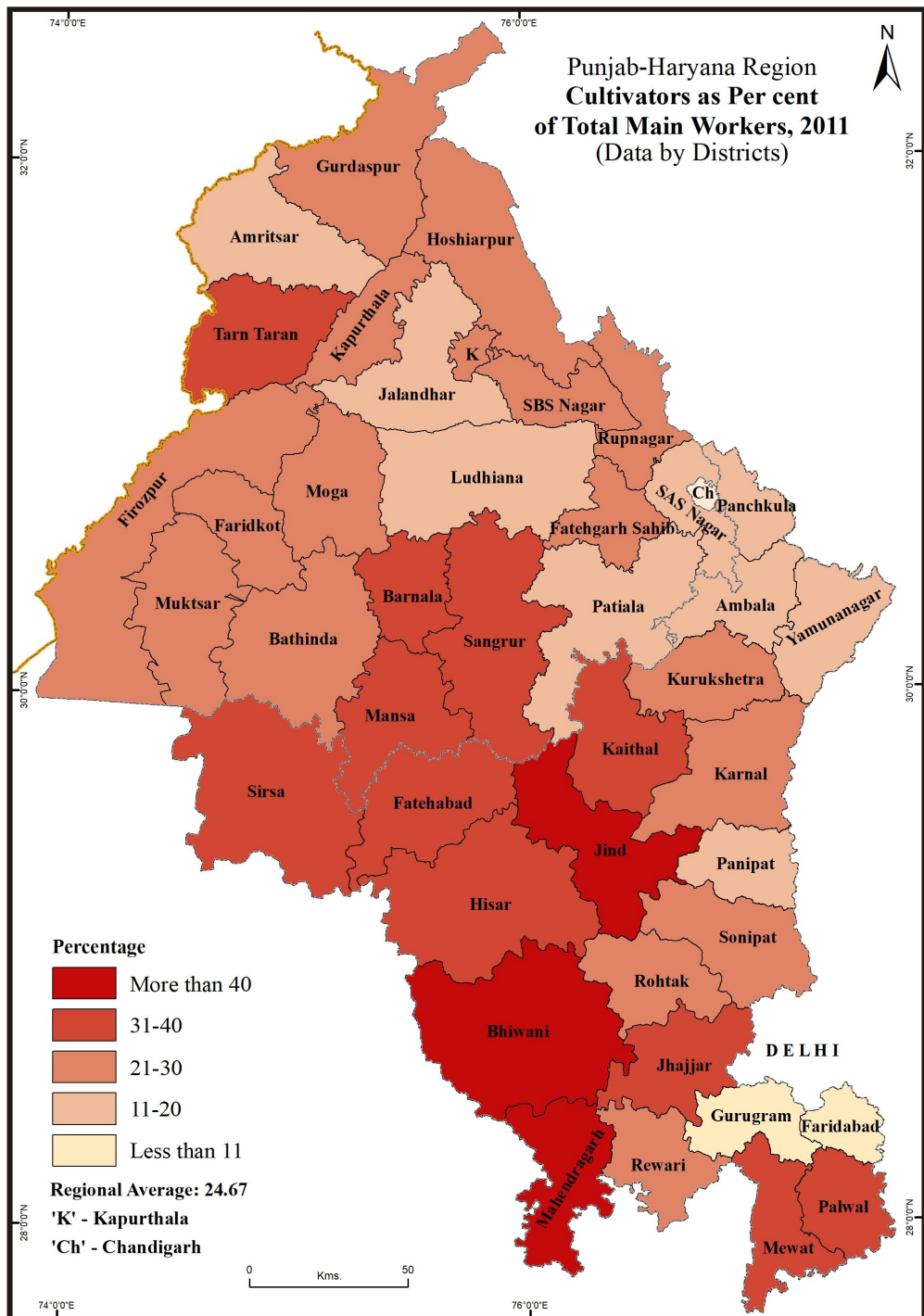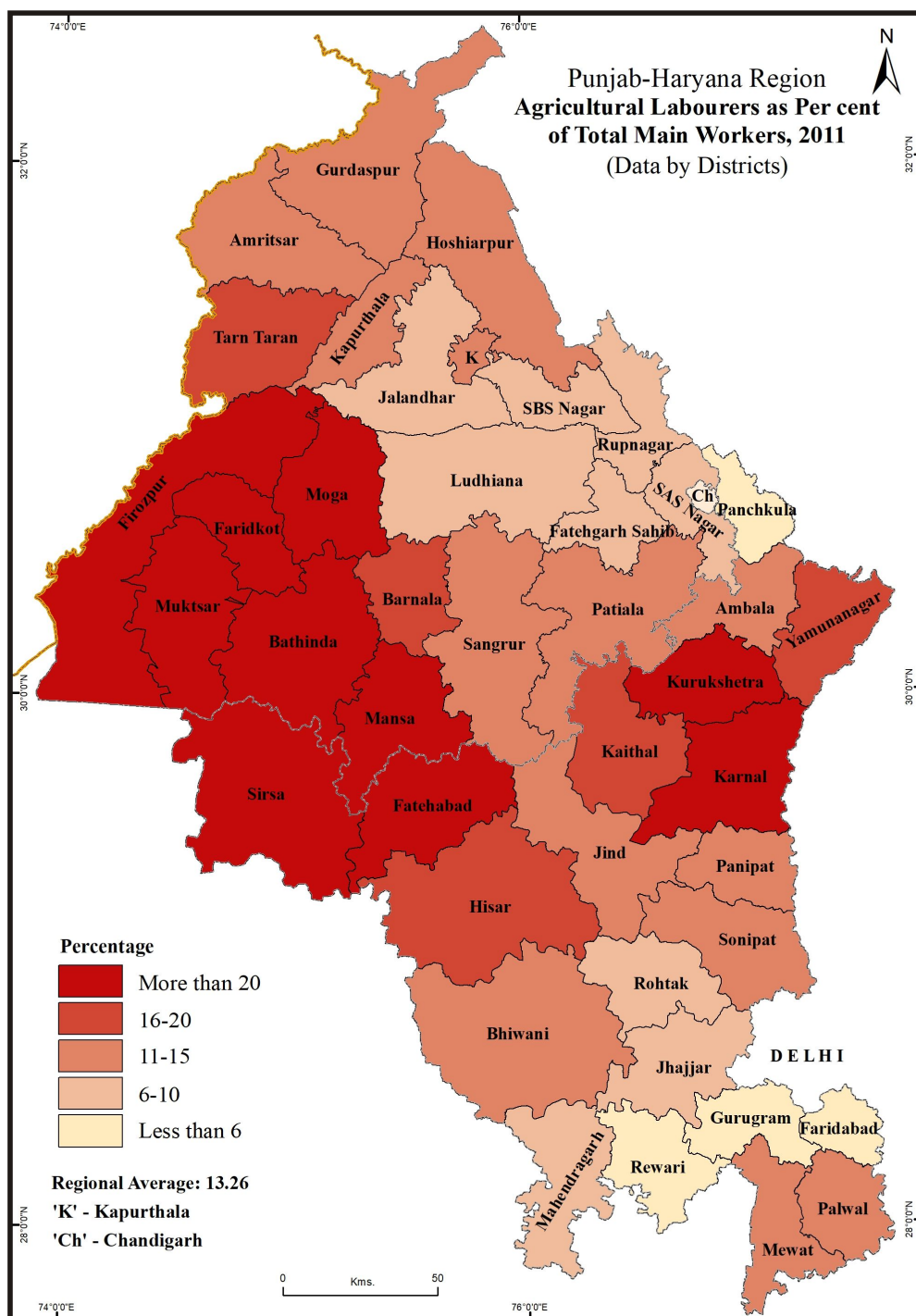
Fig. 1

Fig. 2

Kaithal and Karnal. Faridabad had the lowest proportion of agricultural labourers in the state followed by Gurugram, Rewari, Rohtak, Jhajjar, Mahendragarh and Panchkula districts. Thus, Haryana sub-region still appears more agro-oriented in comparison to Punjab sub-region. However, the running decade of 2011-21 may appear to be the game changer as during this decade the state of Haryana has displayed greater dynamism than its Punjab counterpart and has attracted huge non-agricultural activity in its region that falls within National Capital Region (NCR). The Census of 2021 as and when held may hold testimony to this effect. Haryana is likely to emerge as most vibrant state in terms of diversification of economy during this decade as a result of mushrooming of service sector around NCR. Gurugram has emerged as Bengaluru of north.

The existing spatial pattern of cultivators and agricultural labour in the study region has been the product of multiple historical, social, economic and demographic factors impacting the region's socio-economic milieu. These include region's long history of emigration to almost every continent of the world; location of the region in and around the NCR; rice-wheat mono-culture combination; heavy dependence on migrant labour (from Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar etc.); consequent increasing mechanization of various farm activities; shifting of migrant labour to more remunerative options like construction work, petty trade of vegetable/fruit selling etc.; shifting of scheduled castes/backward castes labour from traditional jobs to expanding urbanization related jobs; declining size of landholding forcing the forward looking farming families to give their land on lease and look for better options for raising their income; mushrooming of housing colonies/educational, professional institutions in private sector in the proximity of urban centres or along the state/national highways etc. all of which together have put a visible dent on the agricultural sector's employment potential. However, the areas having focus on labour intensive crops such as cotton still continue to have high proportion of agricultural workers, while the areas having industrial concentration whether they fall in the NCR or in the proximity to state capital city of Chandigarh or along the state/national highways exhibit extremely low proportion of agricultural workforce due to obvious reasons. Thus, the spatial pattern of agricultural workforce in the study region is to be understood in the context of complicity of functioning of all such factors mentioned above.

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