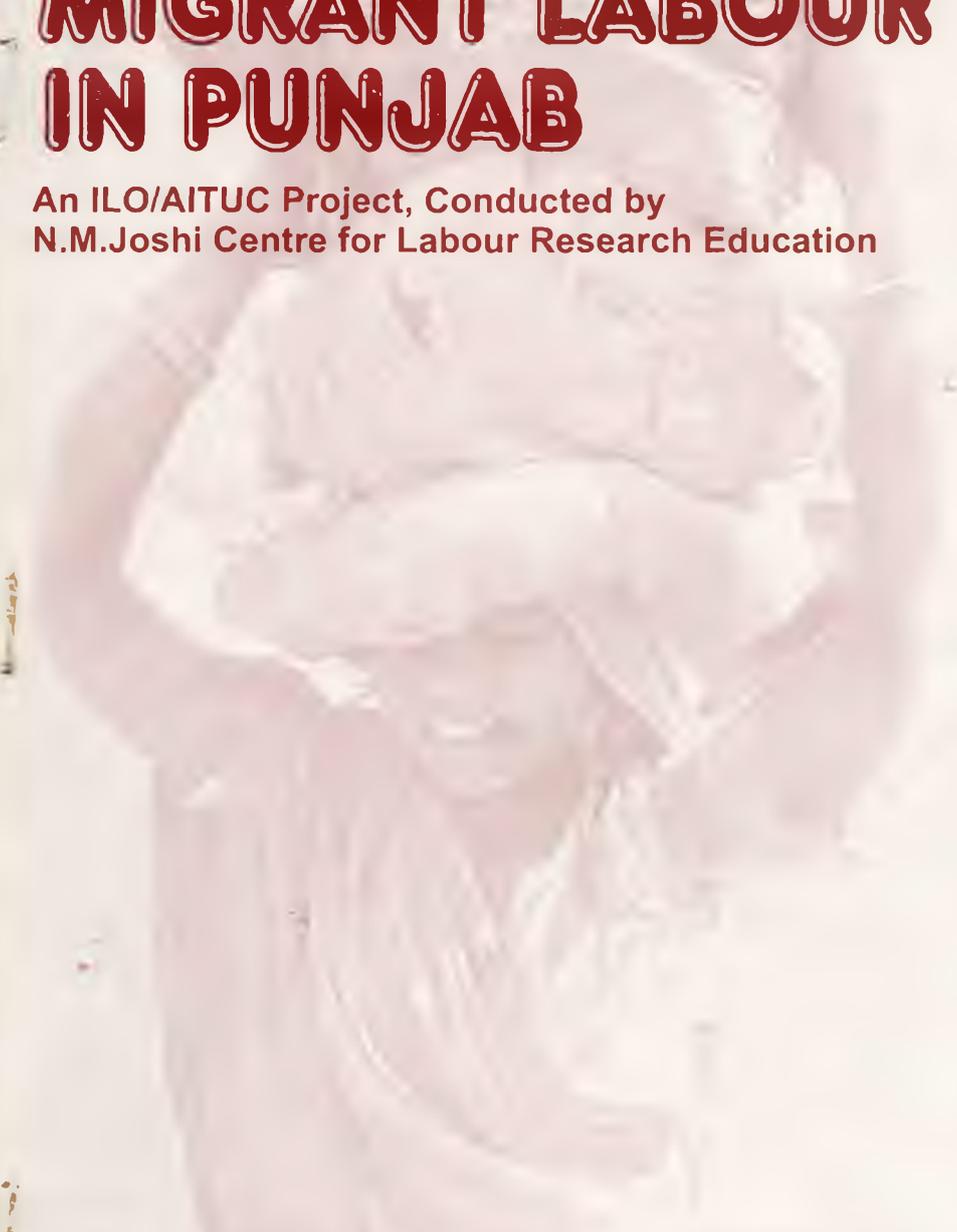


MIGRANT LABOUR IN PUNJAB

An ILO/AITUC Project, Conducted by
N.M.Joshi Centre for Labour Research Education



Krishna Jha

AITUC PUBLICATION

24, Canning Lane, New Delhi 110 001 (INDIA)
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Foreword

There are interstate migrant labour working almost in all the states. Then there are the migrant labour from India in other countries. Neither the government nor the trade unions have given any attention to their work.

In Punjab some Akali leaders demanded that the migrant labour should not be enrolled as voters and also should not be given ration cards. Com. Parduman Singh drew our attention and the AITUC raised the issue. After hearing about the conditions of migrant labour and necessity to organise them the AITUC decided that a study of migrant labour in Punjab should be conducted. This will help in understanding the problem in other regions as well. The study will help the trade union leaders to realise the necessity to organise them as they are the most neglected lot and the law requires that the home state should take up their cases.

With some help from ILO the AITUC requested the N.M. Joshi Centre for Labour Research & Education to conduct the study. Krishna Jha a person devoted to the cause of the oppressed took up the study with whatever little facility could be provided.

The study reveals the conditions of Bihari migrant labour, both in industry and agriculture in Punjab. Their income, living conditions, the difference between their earning and the earning of Punjab workers for the same job and an important aspect, their position and the position of their families in their home villages.

The study reveals the weakness in the legislation and lack of action by the authorities as they are not organised.

There are migrant workers from UP, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala and other states and also from the Tribal areas.

This study only reveals the tip of the iceberg.

The Migrant Labour can best be organised with the help from the state of origin. This study should lead to similar concrete studies in other states.

The study deals with the causes of migration and reveals that the socio economic conditions, the prevalent semi feudal relations as the main cause. The study also points out to the woes of women who are left in the village while the men migrate and visit the village say once a year. Thus the study also deals with the social aspect of their lives.

The booklet is useful for both trade union leaders and also the leaders of agricultural workers movement.

The study will be of interest for labour economists and those interested in social sciences.

(K.L. Mahendra)
General Secretary

Preface

The study of the socio-economic factors leading to the migration of labour from other parts of the country to Punjab and their status at the destination was taken up to understand the uneven process of economic development and its impact on the working class, especially from Bihar.

As the topic itself suggests, the project needed an in-depth study as well as wider field work. However, within the limited period of time and resources an attempt was made to analyse the issues involved which may be considered as a preliminary work only in this direction. I am grateful to Com. K.L.Mahendra who had been the source of inspiration for me. I want to thank Comrades Parduman Singh, Satpal Dang and Vimla Dang, Kartar Singh, Om Prakash Mehta, Arun Mitra, Gulzar Singh Ghoria, Gyani Gurdev Singh for their Co-operation and help in course of field work in Punjab. Without the affectionate support from Com. Jagdish, Com.Asal, Com Satya deo, Com Brahmadeo, Com Gulzar Singh and others, the study would have remained incomplete.

For the shortcomings in the study, responsibility is mine and suggestions are welcome.

-Krishna Jha

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Introduction

It was midnight. He was dragged out of bed by his master, the poultry owner and tied to a tree. Then the horror started. He was whipped till he fainted. There were others who were made to watch his ordeal — a warning against stealing a chicken, a crime allegedly committed by the hapless worker. After pouring a bucketful of water on him, the whipping was resumed. Nobody noticed when he breathed his last. Ordeal continued even on his dead body. The poultry owner was arrested later, but the charges are yet to be proved.

It was in Murgikhana area of Amritsar last year and the victim was a migrant labour from Purnea district of Bihar.

* * * * *

She was sitting in a dark, damp room of 8/10 ft with her one week-old baby and tying knots at the ends of a blanket. She earns Rs 20 to Rs 25 everyday. The chawl she lives in has only three latrines and two handpumps for 150 persons. It is in Hargovindnagar colony of Ludhiana where drinking water is polluted with the chemicals released from the factories around. The acid smell is heavy in the atmosphere. Chest congestion is a common ailment affecting even the babies.

She is a second generation migrant married to a seasonal worker from Bihar.

* * * * *

He took eight acres of land on contract for which a loan of Rs 64000 was paid to him by the landowner with five percent monthly interest rate. The crop of vegetable grown that year was a failure. So he took a loan from the money lender on even a higher rate of interest of six percent a year and paid back the landowner. Next year the crop was average and he could pay back the money lender only partially. In addition, he had to pay the contract money also to the land owner for this year. Thus a vicious circle was created and he remained tied to the farm for seven years to pay back all the debts and survive. In between he got better offers but could not accept as his first obligation was to clear the debts. He is not a bonded labour but cannot leave the farm without getting out of the debt trap.

He is a migrant worker from Bihar and is working in Nawa Pind village in Moga district.

* * * * *

Rankisun is a rikshaw puller in Bhatinda, but only for the months of April, May and June. In July, he goes to rural areas and works in the paddy fields till November. He gets employment in the wheat fields till March. For all these months, his wages vary from Rs 30 to Rs 60 a day with or sometime without food according to the seasonal needs. While in rural areas, he lives in the fields and toils in the nights as well. At home his wages were never more than Rs 15 or two kilos of grain. His life in Punjab is not always smooth but the hike in wages makes him tolerant. After working for five years in Punjab he has been able to pay back the family debts, buy some land and marry off his daughter.

* * * * *

These examples symbolise the diverse aspects of migrant workers' life who do not always come from the areas of surplus to counter shortage at the destination area but also to replace the local worker at a lower rate and thus create a labour surplus.

The explanation for the preference to the migrant worker in the presence of a surplus labour at home may be sought in his legal, political and social status, apart from the dominant economic parameter.

These incidents could take place only because the vast number of migrant workers there are unorganised. They belong to a floating population that keeps circulating according to the availability of jobs. They are either unaware of their rights as workmen or accept any wages and working conditions offered to them, as their only purpose is to earn as much as possible and go back. In this particular case, migration is temporary and a way of respite from the harsh conditions at source. The workers had the options to either stay back in their villages in conditions of unemployment or underemployment and eventually perish, or resist the injustices and try to reform the existing socio-economic conditions and possibly get suppressed. They opted for the third alternative and migrated to Punjab, an area of green revolution, industrial development and reor-

ganised productive forces engaged in commodity-based production. The consequent fallout was accentuation of the process of capital accumulation that formally established the ties between the wage-labour and the capital.

In the agrarian sector, with the changing market relations, the crop pattern has also changed. Emphasis has shifted from need-based production to supplement the consumer industry. Decimating the production of the original crops, the marketable cash-crops have been emphasised followed by the phenomenon of same "peak season" everywhere, giving rise to the need of extra hands for every household. The traditional multiple crop pattern with sowing, harvesting and processing spreadout in the months of the entire year and manageable within the family hands, stands abolished. Thus the peak seasons are followed by lean days with lack of employment even for the family hands forcing them to leave their roots and migrate even with the assurance of lower wages. The labour becomes a saleable commodity without the knowledge of its own price. They opt for not only agrarian sector with seasonal employment but also to meet the demands in the corresponding industrial sector with the assurance of uninterrupted employment.

Thus from the source areas, mass migration takes place to sustain the downward "push". The process of depeasantisation and the redistribution of human resources is predominantly initiated by unequal distribution of resources at the levels of regions, villages and even households. The immediate fallout of this process is polarisations at the level of the agrarian classes and accentuated contradictions in the industrial sector.

Thus the migration of labour is a necessity for the capitalist development as it provides a working population without any stress for minimum wages, provident fund and other facilities, without provision for security and finally, without clearly spelt out state policies towards them.

The migration of population in fact liberates the employers from any accountability towards the welfare of the worker. He does not have to provide for the reproduction of the labour power either at the stage of formation or retirement because of the seasonal and therefore circular character of the migration itself.

The labourers usually migrate in peak seasons to the areas of high demand and low supply especially in the rural sector. In the lean seasons they opt for industrial sector. However, very few aim for permanent or long-term migration. The reserve army of labour created thus affects the bargaining power of the local workers. They cannot demand even minimum wages as migrant workers are prepared to replace them at much lower rates. Thus the employer not only gets labour cheap but also is absolved from meeting the minimum needs of the workers. The result is that the migrant workers in the rural as well as urban areas of Punjab have almost no accommodation available. Their medical needs are never cared for. The employer has to pay only the price of their labour fixed at a very low rate without any other provision spelt out in the labour legislation.

The entire process leads to a split between the local and the migratory labour in the bargain, and thus at the community level, there is no assimilation. A new dimension is added to the existing discriminatory categories of caste, region, community and sex. A visit to Moga provided an insight to the issue as the local landless labourers asked for reservation of jobs since the acute deprivation, debt conditions and denial of minimum wages led to even suicides.

Theoretical Explanations For Labour Migration

To understand the process of the mechanisations of migration it would be necessary to discuss the phenomenon at general as well as particular levels.

The neoclassical economic theories have focussed on the will of the individual as a decisive factor influenced by rational calculations of costs and returns. Several other variables have also been taken into account such as nature, character and extent of migration, the utility significance of costs and returns and 'long term' or lifetime incomes.

In this context the features of migration suggested by Todaro (Todaro, M.P., "A Model of Labour Migration and rural unemployment in Less Developed Countries," American Economic Review, 59(1) 1969, pp.138-48) may be significant in summing up neoclassical approach. He has estimated migration primarily by rational economic considerations of relative benefits and costs mostly financial but also psychological. According to him

the decision to migrate depends on “expected” rather than real rural-urban wage differentials and probability of successfully obtaining employment in the urban modern sector. Todaro model also considers that the probability of obtaining an urban job is inversely related to the urban unemployment rate.

Todaro has also made observations about migration rates in excess of urban job opportunity growth rates are not only possible but also rational and probable in the face of continued positive urban-rural expected income differentials. High rates of urban unemployment are therefore inevitable outcomes of the serious imbalances of economic opportunities between urban and rural areas of most underdeveloped countries.

The distribution of the urban labour force between the relatively small sector and the traditional sector constitute the basic model for Todaro.

However, it may be added here that wage rates in the traditional sector are not determined by the same forces that maintain them at higher levels in the modern sector. Hence the rates are lower and the employment is temporary in the traditional sector.

Another significant feature of Todaro model is that it takes the rural-urban migration as a two-stage phenomenon. The migrant starts hunting for a job in the modern sector while staying back in the traditional sector. In the second stage after suffering the loss of wages in the traditional sector he manages a job in the urban modern sector that compensates his loss. However the formulation expects every migrant worker to have information about the availability of jobs in the modern sector as well as access to it.

Todaro model has methodological as well as conceptual problems as it estimates the expected income as well as their differentials at the source and also at the destination areas. He considers that the migration decision mainly centres around the expected earning gap and not the absolute real wage differentials.

Todaro has also been criticised because of the assumption that the potential migrants are homogeneous in skills and attitudes and do not have proper information about the possibility of finding a job in the modern sector.

The other theories explaining the phenomenon of migration consists that of Ravenstein’s laws of migration, (Ravenstein E.G.,

"The Laws of Migration", The Journal of Royal Staistical Society, 48(2), pp 167-227, 1885), Lee's migrant perception in 'pluses and minuses,' (Lee E., A Theory of Migration, in J.A. Jackson (edited), Migration, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1969), L-F-R model of development (Lewis W.A., "Economic Development with Unlimited Supplies of Labour", The Manchester School of Economics and Social Studies, May, 1954, Vol.22(2), pp 139-91, Ranis G. and Fei J.C.H., "A Theory of Economic Development, American Economic Review, 1961, 54(4) pp 533-65) and Sjaastad's human investment theory (Sjaastad, I. A., 1962, "The Costs and Returns of Human Migration", The Journal of Political Economy, October, 1062, Part 2, pp 80-93).

The issue of migration has been explained time and again with varying contextual significance and Ravenstein's laws of migration categorised in the last century have their own role in it. According him laws of migration was made in steps from lower opportunity areas and the choice of destination was made according to its proximity.

Ravenstein added that each stream of rural-urban migration produces a counter stream of urban-rural migration, although the former dominates the later. He also emphasised the role of communication. The types instead of laws of migration spelt out by Ravenstein are still valid in the context of economic motive and the negative influence of distance. Further developing the laws of migration, Lee prepared a "general schema" into which a variety of spatial movements can be placed. He also pointed towards the factors that played the role of "pluses" and "minuses" of a particular area, and finally getting balanced in a zero area. Lee's assumptions still provide the basis for the "push" and "pull" theories.

The concept of labour migration from surplus to deficit sector was conceptualised for the first time in the L-F-R model with formulations on the dualism in economy with subsistence agrarian sector to modern industrial sector.

However the conditions, under which the migration decisions are taken, are generally not in the control of potential migrants. On the other hand the assumption about the growth of urban sector expected to support the subsistence agrarian sector has also been criticised for its improbability. In fact the migration has often resulted into shifting of unemployment from rural to urban sector.

The human investment theory of Sjaasdt considers the decision to migrate as an investment with costs and returns that are divided into money and non-money components with "psychic" benefits. His assumption has been criticised for being situation oriented.

However Sjaasdt observes that migration will take place only when the benefits outweigh the costs and differ between destination and source. For him costs include moving expenses, opportunity costs between jobs and settling in unfamiliar environment.

The neoclassical theories have been summed up by Sasi Kumar S.K. ("Theories of Internal Migration : Problems and Issues", A paper submitted in a seminar on the problems of labour migration organised by Chandigarh University on 26-28 September, 1997), in several assumptions like migration is caused by differences in wage rates among regions; aggregate migration flows between regions are simple sums of individual moves undertaken on the basis of individual cost benefit calculations; migration will not occur in the absence of differences in earnings and/or employment rates between regions and will occur until expected earnings have been equalised; migration decisions stem from discontinuities between labour markets; other markets do not directly influence the decision to migrate and finally the way for governments to control migration flows is to regulate and influence the labour markets at the source and destination regions.

The neoclassical economic theories have been criticised by the formulations on economics of migration trend as the migration decisions are taken not by individuals but by either the entire household or by the entire families to derive maximum economic gains as well as to avoid the constraints of market failure and the uncertainties of the labour market.

The household resources can be diversified to accommodate the risk factor and also migrant remittances can provide support for insufficient family income. The supporters of the trend argue that migration takes place to improve income in absolute terms as well as to reduce the deprivation in relation with other reference groups.

The contention of this trend can be summarised as policy suggestions to take the households or other culturally defined

units of production as the units of analysis for migration research and not the individual. It was also suggested that the necessary condition for migration cannot be identified as wage differentials as the household income stands as a risk measure. It was also observed that the elimination of wage differentials may not necessarily tend to end the process of migration and the addition in economic gains may not be expected at the same rate as in other regions nor to have the same effect in such households and thus influence the migration decision.

It was also pointed out that the role of the government may not be effective only through various policy decisions in the labour market but also in the context of insurance and capital market.

The migration theories have been usually formulated in a phase when the low wages and underemployment have driven the labour to urban modern sector with growing investment of rural surplus. In last several years the agrarian surplus investment in the industrial sector has gone up with the further widening of rural-urban wage gap resulting into unprecedented rate of migration. In Delhi alone, at least four lakh persons migrate every year. But the employment generation graph has been going down creating a vast labour surplus living at a subsistence level.

In course of investigation, it was observed that the industrial migratory worker in Ludhiana and Amritsar does not have regular employment. They have to work on contract in the smaller units that pay them only at piece rate. After working for 12 to 16 hours, they earn not more than Rs 45 to Rs 50. They live in ghetto like conditions usually away from the mainstream city to spend minimum and save for lean days. Because of decentralisation and liberalisation, the bigger units are divided into ancillary units and the medium level companies can hardly face the competitive market. Consequently in last several years employment rate has gone down alongwith the deminishing rate of the migration of labour in some areas.

Rural sector has entered the era of automation and almost entire farmwork is managed by machines reducing the number of helping hands. However there are still some jobs left that need human handling.

It may be explained in terms of David Urquhart (1805-1877), a reactionary British diplomat quoted by Karl Marx (in Selected

Works of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, Vol.2, pp 132, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1969) as "...You sever the distaff and plough, the spindle and the yoke, and you get factories and poor houses, credit and panics, two hostile nations, agricultural and commercial."

However the hostility prevails only at the surface level as the agrarian sector remains the source of raw material for the industries and a source of surplus as well. However the movement of labour to the destination drains out the source area and thus causes regional as well as sectoral disparities.

In the developing areas of Bihar, migration of labour is the result of unequal distribution of land and the allocative measures taken in favour of the rich peasants.

Bihar was the first to declare abolition of Zamindari system and perhaps has the least success in protecting the actual producers—the tenants. The Bihar Land Reform Act 1961 (Fixation of Ceiling Areas and Acquisition of Surplus Land) was initiated as Ceiling Bill in 1955 and only after five years came as an act. However even after implementation, the revised estimates show at least one lakh acres as surplus land (Thakur D., 1989, "Politics of Land Reform in India", New Delhi, Commonwealth).

The facts reveal that land reforms could have success to certain extent only due to the struggle and pressures by the organised movements of the small peasants and the landless. However the majority of these sections still remain out of the folds of such organisations. They are still engaged by the landlords and the rich peasants with lower wages to provide the surplus as well as sustain themselves and the dependents on them.

The small peasant has no means to cultivate his land and finds difficult to manage between one crop season to another. The rural poor is oppressed by poverty, debts and rising living costs and finally leaves off the village generally without family to the higher wage areas.

The phenomenon of migration, thus, cannot be understood only in terms of individuals or households but the socio-economic, political and the historical aspects also have to be considered. The vulnerability of the migratory worker can only be assessed in relation with the rural capital that decides his course of sustenance strategy.

Chapter-1

Uneven Course Of Development And Migration

The process of migration is basically connected with the dialectical process of development generating underdevelopment. The other reasons could be categorised as high agrarian density, lower subsistence wages and frequent natural calamities often caused by human interference.

The example areas may be cited as Bihar, eastern UP, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh and Tamilnadu with highest concentration of rural labour and therefore source of migration. The other factors may be observed in the agrarian system itself where the proportion of daily wage worker continues to remain unchanged in the rural areas. According to official estimations, from 1951 to 1981, it has been 70 percent while among cultivators the 75 percent have two or less hectares of land operating in 26 million hectares. At least 12 percent have more than four hectares of land and operate 53 million hectares of land. The measures of land reform have not provided any respite to the rural poor as the larger holdings have now consolidated themselves with the economic inputs provided by the state.

In Punjab, the use of electricity has been rendered free but the initiative provides incentive to the rich farmers only who could afford to have motors run by electricity. The poor peasant has only generators that are run by deisel and for one acre, at least eight litres of diesel is required which is not free. They cannot hire combines or harvestors for farm use, nor many labour. The input material like seed, fertilisers and pesticides are also costly. Thus the beneficiaries of green revolution are not the majority peasants with small land holdings but the minority rich peasant.

The agrarian produce for the majority gets consumed at the family level as very little marketeable surplus is generated. They sell the product only to purchase essential commodities like clothes etc. However while visiting Moga in course of the project work one found women in torn clothes as they could not afford to buy any clothing for last three years due to agrarian irregularities. They were unemployed for last several months and earning their livelihood by selling skin and leaves of some medicinal herbs. Many of them have sold off their land and joined the majority group of landless labours.

It may be mentioned here that the rural poor is not only the economically deprived group but socially also it belongs to the lowest strata of caste and tribe. This section constitutes 27 per cent of the entire population while the other backward castes constitute 40 percent.

For these deprived sections the respite measures taken by the state often prove to be only misleading. The schemes like "Indira Awas Yojna" and "Jawahar Rojgar Yojna" appear to be benefitting only certain sections of the population and especially the vote banks. In reality, the small peasant is uprooted from the village and along with the landless labour moves to far off destinations for survival. The tribals constitute a considerable share in this floating group.

Bihar has been taken as the source for the present study that claims for 40 percent or 222.20 million persons living below poverty line according to the Planning Commission estimates. It may be pointed out that there has been an increase of 35.31 percent in the number of migrant agricultural rural force in the state during the year 1995-96. The migration rate has been recorded as going up in last two decades with the exception of last two years.

The reasons for the diminishing rate was analysed as the stagnation of the cropping intensity at 183 percent for last several years and the constant growth in the use of machines in the farm work. Thus the avenues of employment for the migrant labour has become static and their contribution proportion remains unchanged as the agrarian sector has become almost saturated.

This shift has forced the migrant as well as local labour to look for new avenues like vending vegetables, fruits and other goods, joining the construction work, factories or opting for kiosks to sell tea, cigarettes or shoe repairing.

In Moga and Bhatinda, the surplus agricultural worker was found to be shifting to the cities and joining the labour force which was larger and concentrated in some pockets of the city.

Most of the time the rural workers shifted to villages only. It was also found in course of the study that workers do not come back to the same area every year because of the varying rate of employment. They keep shifting from the villages of Ludhiana, Bhatinda, Moga and other districts and still the places like

Mukhtsar and others have very little involvement of migratory labour in their fields. However there is a small proportion of those workers who have stayed in the same village with the same household for decades managing all kinds of odd jobs. They have been almost assimilated by the families. However the destination villages for these workers even after decades of staying does not become home for them. Though they visit their home villages in Bihar only occasionally, yet their wives do not come to the destination and remain at the source only and children get married in their own community.

The workers staying for longer periods sometime on contract and otherwise on monthly payments constitute 16 per cent of the total migrant labour in Punjab, working for large and medium land holders.

However majority works only as seasonal labour and is treated as casual worker. This section constitutes 32 percent of the entire migrant labour population. They work on contract operating on the basis of acres involved especially in the peak seasons as they usually shift to either urban areas or the source villages in the lean period.

The rural labour migration usually generates from disparity in development at socio-economic levels. The industries are mostly located in the areas with facilities for cheap land, better transport facilities, market availability and cheap labour. Thus the chore areas are developed with a support system of labour surplus created by the rural poor from underdeveloped areas. In the agrarian sector also the same laws are operative after the promotion of green revolution belts. As a result the states like Punjab have higher per capita income that serves as a pull factor for the poor. The state support measures like price support, input subsidies and availability of credit has facilitated the process in these regions.

In course of the study it was also found that all migratory workers were not driven from the source for survival needs. Many of them wanted to acquire new skills or change of occupation. But those who needed support to continue living left their source villages in extremely adverse conditions, and belonged to the lowest strata of the rural social group, that of scheduled caste and tribes and other backward sections. The factors driving them out were found to be in the general phenomenon of socio-economic inequality itself. The feudal and

semifeudal relations of production forced them to toil with or without payment. The wages have been enough to leave the family half starved. These sections are usually caught in a debt trap which keeps them in bondage usually for a life time.

However migration to the destination area helps them improve their plight. The rural workers from the village called Dihiya in Supaul district of Bihar offer an example of the same. The scheduled caste families in this village were not only caught in a debt trap and consequently lost all the land they had but also were victims of contradictions among the rural rich. The village Panchayat also refused to help them. The miserable villagers were helped by one of their kinsmen who was working in Ludhiana. A group of 15 villagers came to Ludhiana and worked in factories and as rikshaw pullers in the lean season and in peak season, went to rural areas of the district. In last two years they have been able to clear off a major portion of their debts. Some of them have bought plots of land also.

Among the group, all were not landless. But the natural calamities like floods had rendered their fields uncultivable.

The recurring debts, months of unemployment, very little yield from the fields and low wages compelled them to leave in order to sustain.

They were educated upto school level and easily acquired skills to operate tractor, harvester etc in rural areas and various machines in the factories.

It may be pointed out here that while the migration offers a means of sustenance to the rural poor, it also plays a role in changing the socio-economic intercourse at the source, though not always in a positive sense.

Among the negative aspects are the health hazards like the highly infectious diseases of tuberculosis, AIDS etc. There has been a considerable increase in the death rate from such ailments and no measures have been taken in this direction.

The families that are left behind at the source have to depend on the women and old people as the remittances from destination come only at long intervals and the debts are incurred in the process. In the absence of the young and able

bodied men, the families are rendered defenceless against the atrocities committed by the money lender, landlord and the other stronger sections in the society.

The migration has various positive influences also. The workers are usually exposed to diverse experiences and learn to assert their rights. The absence of a major section of the rural workers forces the landlord often to raise the wages in the conditions of labour scarcity at the source.

The migration also helps in promotion of some specific skills at the source as well as destination. For example paddy transplantation as a skill was brought to rural areas in Punjab by the rural workers from Bihar. Even after measures taken for automation, the transplantation is done manually only.

It may be pointed out here that the migration has a pattern based on socio-historical experience as well as the management of labour sourcing. There may be areas with extreme conditions of deprivation yet the rate of population shift may be estimated at a very low level. Thus the shortage or abundance of labour also may not be the only determinants since the rural migration may not always be based on demand and supply and thus provide an equilibrating mechanism.

Chapter-2

Process And The Consequences Of Migration

In course of the study it was found that contractors have hardly a role to play anymore in the sense the Act on migratory workmen has defined. In majority areas, the friends, relatives and the acquaintances helped in the choice of the destination places. Some of them came on their own and even floated elsewhere when the working conditions were not found to be satisfactory. However, the choices remain restricted because of ignorance about the entire area. There were also cases of second and third generation migrants where the earlier generations settled down at one place but the offsprings went to other areas for alternative employment.

There were also cases of migrants shifting from villages in Bihar to Bombay and Calcutta and finally coming to Punjab. However such cases were only in small number. Majority had no idea about the availability of work especially in villages.

A group of migrant labour from Dhamdaha area of Purnea district in Bihar came to Ludhiana in search of jobs in the agrarian sector. They did not have any idea about the locality and were discussing the possibilities at the station itself for the whole day. By evening policemen came and started questioning. The villagers were scared and could not answer properly as even the language was unknown to them. The policemen asked them to pay a fine of Rs 40 each. At this point, a farmer from Khanna district came to their rescue, paid the fine amount to the policemen and asked the villagers to accompany him. The money paid to the police was a loan and the villagers were obliged to the farmer. Eventually, they decided to go with him.

* After reaching the village, these men were asked to work in the fields at the payment of Rs 1200 per acre for paddy transplantation. The farmer had five ares of land for paddy cultivation. For the period of employment they lived in the pumphouse of the farmer. These villagers worked in the night as well and in a week the work was over. The farmer deducted Rs 600 that was paid to the policemen and gave the workers only Rs 600. The earning was much higher than the source. However neither the working hours nor the remuneration were fixed in advance. The pumphouse was too small for 15 persons to live and

when they slogged in the nights it was too dark and cold. These men worked sometime for even 36 hours at a stretch to finish the job in time.

There have also been cases of combining the types of employment as in Nihal Singh Wada tehsil in Moga district where the rural agrarian workers shifted to construction work for a period. Some of them acquired skills and became even masons earning higher wages.

The options left for the migratory worker are mainly in the brick kiln, construction work and unskilled work in the factories. They stay in employment for six to seven years and then go back.

However in the cities some have bought plots and settled down but such cases are rare.

The migrant workers are usually hired directly but sometime contractors also recruit them. There are cases where the workers themselves have become contractors. Usually these contractors get commissions from the employer and the employee both. Sometime the employer pays the wages of the workers to the contractor to distribute among them and he is free to keep a share from the money for himself.

In course of the study it was found that at least in two cases the contractor had eloped with the earnings of the workers. In such cases the employer refuses to recognise the rights of the workers and the wages are eventually denied even after working for as long as six months.

The role of the contractor has been significant especially in the brick kiln areas. While visiting a brick kiln in Nihal Singh Wada, it was found that at least hundred families were recruited from villages in Muzaffarnagar district of Uttar Pradesh. All these people had taken debts from the local money lenders and were unable to pay back. The contractor cleared their loans and another trap was laid for them. They came with their families to work in the brick kiln.

While the kiln owner claimed to be paying the minimum wages, the workers themselves reported that they work with their wives and children from sunrise to sunset only to be paid Rs 45 to 50 a day. The wages are consolidated and the loan amount is deducted from the wages with interest.

These workers are educated upto school level but their children are illeterate. Their settlement consists of small shacks at the edge of the pit. There is no electricity nor water. Medical care is also denied to them.

In course of the study it was also found that workers preferred to migratre because at their native places they could not be engaged in menial jobs as it hurt their sense of self prestige. In the remote areas of rural Punjab they could toil in any form as long as they earned wages. Same is true about the brick kiln workers.

It may be noted here that the contractors, under the Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act 1979 and the Inter State Migrant Workmen (ISHW) Act 1979, have to be registered with the Labour Commisioner's office in their respective states by paying stipulated fees. But the responsibility to regulate the licensing process has been vested with the licensing authorities themselves. They do not have any accountability towards anybody. As a result large number of contractors are active without paying any licence fee or security deposit. In most states the number of registered contractors is negligible and is constantly falling.

In this context, the state policies have a significant role to play. The steps have been taken that in effect help the infrastructural growth of the industries only. Social service investiments have also been catering mainly to the urban needs. The agrarian sector has been promoted to extract maximum agricultural output with minimum investment and consequently reinforce the dominant groups in the farmers' lobby that gain further through input subsidies and higher remuneration prices for the marketable surplus. The fiscal policies in the context of agricultural income tend to be influencing adversely. Taxing the surplus in this sector has been also nominal. As a result, the emphasis shifts towards investment in capital intensive technology as the distribution of agricultural income remains less than the former.

The Extent of Migration

It may be relevant here to mention the extent of migration from the source area of Bihar to the destination area of Punjab in last three decades.

In Bihar the migration process has been identified within the state at district level and also among the population opting to migrate from the state which is always larger. The migrants within the state stay away only for days or months while those leaving the state stay out for a minimum of four years with occasional visits to the source village. However there have been examples of outmigrating for a lifetime too though the source village still remains the "home" for them.

According to a survey conducted by ADRI in Patna, at least every tenth house in a village in Bihar has sent out one person away and more often to Punjab. Thus the rural areas have been found to be losing their population to Punjab in great numbers.

The migration process started as long back as in the early years of post independence period and by 1971, according to census data, at least 1110 persons migrated to Punjab. The number had increased to 16186 by 1981. The share of the rural-rural migration in this phase was 33.7 percent.

The share of males and females increased in this process to the extent of 8.7 and 2.8 times respectively between 1971 to 1981 census. In the rural-rural stream, the share went up by 30.3 and 3.8 times respectively. It was at least 138 per 1000 persons in 1971. The number went up by 363 per 1000 persons in 1981. The duration when the largest number of population shifted to rural Punjab, was 1977 to 1980 and 1967 to 1970 according to the census report of these years.

It may be noted here that in earlier years of 1971 enumerations, the female migration had outnumbered their male counterparts but by 1981, the male dominance was obvious in the process.

The age group of these migrants in this phase was mainly from 13 to 35. The further division comes to light in the enumerations of 1981 as in the age group of 13-22, largest number of migrants came to Punjab while the second in the list were those who came in the age group of 22-32 years. However the enumerations also bring out the fact that the out migration from the other places in the country usually start at a younger age than Bihar.

The census details do not tabulate the marital status of these migrants. However in course of the study, the 80 respondents

that were taken from the industrial areas of Amritsar and Ludhiana and rural areas of Moga and Bhatinda, it was found that married persons outnumbered those who were unmarried though the families were in most cases left at the source village only.

A majority of the studies show that in Bihar the migrant labour is usually from a large family that can spare one or two young persons for earning in Punjab. Many of these migrants are not even the heads of their families as there is a joint family system prevailing with the dominance of the older generation.

Among the agricultural labour in Punjab the religious composition of these workers constitute 84 to 95.24 percent Hindus and 4.76 percent Muslims. Christian migrants constitute 5.60 percent.

Among the Hindu migrant labour in Punjab, the majority belongs to scheduled caste and tribes as well as other backward castes. The upper caste Hindus are usually engaged in better paid jobs.

In various studies it was found that among the migrant workers from Bihar scheduled caste members outnumber the scheduled tribes. The scheduled caste workers are usually from the lowest strata in the village and were exploited economically. The dehumanising conditions had been driving them away wherever better alternatives are offered.

The caste division among the migratory workers from Bihar has been tabulated as forward caste 2.9 percent, backward caste 30.4 percent, scheduled caste 30.4 percent, scheduled tribe 23.3 percent and Muslims 5.4 percent.

The tribals have usually been restricted to forests and hills but the trend has been changing in last several years with the fast deterioration of forest resources..

The largest number of migrants in Punjab belong to the category of landless labour as the proportion varies from 50 to 64 percent. Those, with marginal land holding, constitute 36 to 50 percent with at least two acres of land. At least 22.20 percent to 36.67 percent migrant workers were small and marginal farmers working even in their source village as wage labour.

Brick kiln migrant workers are also reported to be in major-

ity from scheduled caste and constituted 79 percent of landless and 1.5 percent as marginal farmers. Among the migrant workers from Bihar, 59 percent were found to be illiterate. However, among the total migrant population in Punjab, 72 to 86 percent were found to be illiterate. Among the literates, between 14.28 to 28 percent, 60 percent were educated upto primary level only

It was noted that among the seasonal migrants, majority were male. The female migration is mainly through marriage and varies through sector to sector. They usually work as domestic help, processing the wheat, paddy and other grains, clearing the fields and in industrial sector are mostly engaged as unskilled worker. They work alongwith their male counterparts and spend the same hours but always paid less.

However for male and female workers both, the employer never makes any agreement about payment for the labour in the beginning, only a small amount is paid as advance that restrains them from joining the other employers. Despite the difficult working conditions and the work itself, the price of labour does not vary much.

The ignorance of the labour themselves and the absence of any legal protection makes them vulnerable and defenceless. The employer can always go back from the promised amount after the work is done. The price of labour is fixed usually after consulting the other farm owners and in the negotiations, workers themselves are never taken into confidence.

The wages thus received are usually spent in clearing the debts taken by the family during his absence.

The condition of female worker is usually worse than the male counterparts. Despite the Equal Wage Remuneration Act making it obligatory for the employer to pay equal wages, the women labour are paid much less. In course of the study the female respondents working in the fields reported getting even Rs 15 a day after working for morethan 10 hours. In addition, they have to cook for the family, wash clothes and look after the children. Especially in the brick kiln, the entire families were engaged with one person's wages.

Chapter-3

The Role Of State And Legislation

The policy makers in the country have been aware of the role played by the labour towards the accumulation of capital and therefore formulated not only constitutional provisions but also legislations to promote their wellbeing and thereby increase their efficiency. There have been measures mentioned in the plannings for the protection of the unorganised labour.

In co-operation with International Labour Organisation (ILO), of which India is a member, at least 159 conventions and 168 recommendations have been formulated since its inception dealing with basic human rights such as freedom of association, freedom from forced labour and discrimination. Also conditions of work, occupational safety and health, social security and few others have been covered in it.

In the constitution itself, Article 39 gives directives to the states to secure:

- a) that the citizens, men and women equally, have the right to an adequate means of livelihood,
- b) that the ownership and control of the material resources and community are so distributed as best to observe the common good,
- c) that the operation of the economic system does not result in the concentration of wealth and means of production to the common detriment,
- d) that there is equal pay for equal work for both men and women,
- e) that the health and strength of workers, men and women and the tender age of children are not abused and that the citizens are not forced by economic necessity to enter vocations unsuited to their age and strength,
- f) that children and youth are protected against exploitation and against moral and material abandonment.

Apart from Article 41 and 42, the 43rd imposes upon the state the obligation to ensure by suitable legislation or economic organisation, to all workers, agricultural, industrial and otherwise, a living wage, conditions of work ensuring decent

standard of life and full enjoyment of leisure and social and cultural opportunities.

In this context it may be mentioned that a migrant labourer needs protection in several ways as he has to toil to earn wages after coming a long distance from the source.

However it was only in 1979 that the Inter State Workmen (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act was provided to protect the migrant worker.

According to the definition provided by the Act, a migrant worker is one recruited in his own state by a contractor registered under the Act. In the words of S C Avasthi, Joint Director of Factories in Punjab, "...not many workmen fall in this category." He has further observed that "...out of 14.53 lakh agricultural labour in Punjab, about 2.5 are migrant labour, 84000 out of one lakh in brick kiln and 1.1 lakh out of 1.56 lakh in construction work."

According to Labour Commissioner S Chani, no incidence of violation of the workers' right has been reported especially about the non-payment of minimum wages. As far as the working and living conditions are concerned, there has been no case reported to them.

However the migratory workers in rural as well as in industrial sectors live in atrocious conditions. The wages are much below the fixed minimum rates, working hours are stretched beyond any legal limits. Accommodation, drinking water and health care facilities are only mentioned in the legislations, without practice.

The Labour Inspectors are asked by the Labour Department to visit a unit only once a year.

There has been absolutely no security provisions for the labour. They live outside the village since they are strangers. They can not deposit money in the bank without paying extra. They have no medical facility and have to arrange their own finance and transport in cases of illness. Finally at the time of home coming they are robbed by the railway employees as well as the police not only at the destination but also at the source. The workers are more often treated with abusive language and insulting mannerism.

It may be pointed out here that the laws, meant to ensure the "rights" of these workers against economic, social and finally political exploitation were formulated by the state only under the pressure of mass movements launched by agricultural and industrial workers in the country.

It was finally recognised that wages were not entirely determined by the market forces and it was the sole responsibility of the employer to pay the minimum wages prescribed by the law irrespective of his capacity to pay, according to the National Commission on Labour (1969).

However it has been left to the zonal, sectoral, regional and state discretions to fix the rate of the minimum wages and hence there can be noticed a clear variation in it. It may be added here that these wages are not yet "living wages" as promised by the constitution as they are yet to be revised according to the changes in the consumer price index.

The welfare notions advocated by the constitution in terms of equal wages for men and women and the protection of children and youth could be brought into practice in terms of legislation only as late as the Equal Remuneration Act in 1976 and Child Labour (Prohibition and Abolition) Act in 1986.

As far as the protection of the migratory labour is concerned, the 1979 Act clearly promotes the trend of contract system that has been attacked in various committee decisions of the government itself. The National Commission on Labour has emphasised in clear terms "...more vigorous steps should be taken towards protection of workers against exploitation by middlemen."

The Interstate Migrant Workmen (Regulation of Employment and Condition of Service) Act 1979 came into existence after recommendations were made by the ILO (1956), and to resolve crisis at various levels including those emerging between the landless worker and the rich peasantry in the areas of green revolution.

However the basic difficulty with the Act was that it was not applicable to all individuals, but only to those hired by the middlemen. Thus any migrant worker working outside his state cannot be covered by the Act.

It applies to (4.A) "...every establishment in which five or more migrant workmen (whether or not in addition to other

workmen) are employed or who are employed on any day of the preceding twelve months.”

According to the Act, a migrant workman can be defined as a person who is recruited by or through a contractor in other than his/her “native” state under an agreement or arranged for employment in an establishment in the state other than his/her “home” state, whether with or without prior knowledge of the “principal employer” (head of the office or department/factory owner/manager) from engaging migrant worker in his/her establishment “unless a certificate of registration in respect of such establishment issued under this Act is in force”.

Every contractor, according to the Act, has to get a licence from the licensing official of the state government to recruit any body for the purpose of employing him in any other state.

The contractor has to issue (under section 12) to every inter-state migrant worker a passbook affixed with a passport size photograph of the workman and indicate information about him as well as the details of the advance payments in Hindi, English or in the mother tongue of the worker himself.

The Act also emphasises that no migratory worker will get less than the rate fixed for the minimum wages.

The contractors are also to pay a journey allowance both to and from the destination which would be a little less than the actual fare and monthly wages as if the worker is on duty.

The contractor, who employs an inter-state workman, has to ensure that the establishment pays regular wages, proper working conditions, provides and maintains suitable living conditions, medical facilities (free of charge), protective clothing and in case of fatal accidents or serious injuries, reports to the specified authorities of both the states and the next of the kin of the workman.

The Act holds principal employer as responsible for payment of wages and welfare facilities to the workman in the event of the failure of the contractor to do so.

One important aspect of the Act is the special provision dealing with industrial disputes. If the appropriate authority is the central government, the dispute can be referred to the industrial tribunal or the labour court within which the establishment is situated or in the state where the recruitment was made

provided the worker himself makes an application on the ground that he has returned to the state after completing his work. If the central government is not the proper authority, the Act empowers the state government wherein the recruitment was made to refer such a dispute to any of the authorities in that state if the worker returns to the home state and after completion of his work makes an application for the same within six months of his return and the state government, where the establishment is concurs to it. After six months the worker loses his right to go to the court for redressing his grievances.

If any person or company contravenes any provision of this Act or any rule of the provisions for which no other penalty is elsewhere provided, he or she will be punishable with imprisonment for at least two years with or without a fine upto Rs 2000. But section 27.1 of the Act also says, "...provided that nothing contained in this sub-section, shall render any such person liable to any punishment if he proves that offence was committed without his knowledge or that he had exercised all the diligence to prevent the commission of such offence." This provision in fact releases all the public sector companies, government project officials etc because any complain can be dismissed on the pretext that the concerned official was absent or was ignorant about the offence.

The offence is non-cognizable as section 28 of the Act says, "No court shall take cognizance of any offence under this Act except on a complaint made by or with previous sanction in writing of an inspector or authorised person and no court inferior to that of a Metropolitan Magistrate or a Judicial Magistrate of the first class shall try any offence punishable under this act."

The section 29 limits the periodicity also stating that "No court shall take cognizance of an offence punishable under this Act unless the complaint thereof is made within three months from the date on which the alleged commission of the offence came to the knowledge of the inspector or authorised person concerned." The Act further says, "Provided that where the offence consists of disobeying a written order made by an inspector or authorised person complaint thereof may be made within six months of the date on which the offence is alleged to have been committed."

After the lapse of this period, the aggrieved migrant worker has no way to get justice. It may be significant to point out that the Act has provisions (section 31) for the government to exempt "special cases" in which any establishment, department or contractor can be spared of "all or any provisions of this Act", by notification in the official gazette.

The government of Bihar gets a number of such complaints every year especially regarding harassment and non-payment of wages to the Bihari workers in other states. These complaints include death and serious injury as well. The instances are even published in the newspapers and debated in the assembly. The state government makes enquiries about some of them but since it does not have an office in the concerned state and also no infrastructure to carry out an independent enquiry in the state of offence, the host state has to take the responsibility. Also the complaint has to be filed at the place of offence and the labour department of the home state cannot act on its own. They depend upon the host state and more often in the process time limit lapses.

Even about death and injury, the family of the concerned labour comes to know after six months or a year when his other group members return home. The Act does not include in its definition those workers who migrate from one region of the state to another nor those who are recruited by a contractor at their place of origin and at destination, get hired by another one.

The Act excludes those workers also who are entitled to supervise the other workers while doing himself the same and earning more than Rs 500 a month. The prescribed amount is so little that any worker can be asked to supervise and be excluded from his rightful demands. On the other hand, even the minimum wages for unskilled work is fixed at a higher rate. In Punjab, minimum wages are fixed at the rate of Rs 1749 a month.

As far as the role of the contractor is concerned, usually a hierarchy is maintained in this context. There is a chief contractor who hires the labour from the one who recruits and brings them from the source state. In between also change of hands may take place. Thus the question of accountability gets blurred so far as the rights of the migrant labour is concerned.

More often the chief contractor plays the role of chief employer and the owner or the manager gets absolved from the responsibility.

The Act mentions facilities to be provided to the migrant labour by the contractor but lacks clarity on the issue of "the date of recruitment" and the "date of employment". Usually the wages and other facilities are provided to the worker only from the date of employment while the benefits mentioned can be availed from the date of recruitment itself including among others, maternity benefits also.

In course of visiting places like Amritsar and Ludhiana, none of the respondents were found to be getting such benefits. There was no clarity about the periodicity of such benefits and whether a worker could avail these facilities if he gets employment long after recruitment.

Regarding the settlement of disputes, the Act maintains that the provisions of Industrial Dispute Act will be applicable for such settlements. But it is not clear about the machinery through which the demand for redressal of grievances can be made. Basically the Industrial Dispute Act is meant for the organised workers and disputes are taken up by the unions only. However the migrant workers, who constitute, according to the Labour Commissioner of Punjab at least 60 percent of the labour force in the state, are almost nowhere organised.

The Act also leans heavily on the administrative machinery and thus is proved to be ineffective. Among the provisions that lead to such failures are primarily the issue of licence and registration of the establishment. This initiative is usually not taken in agricultural sector. In the industrial sector also, according to the Labour Commissioner in Chandigarh, in Punjab itself only fifteen percent of the contractors operate with licence.

Thus the violation of the law is common and left entirely to the licensing and registering officials to ensure its implementation.

However such officials are usually either overworked or apathetic towards the omissions to take any action. The migratory worker himself is not in a position to refuse employment offered by the contractor without registration or recruitment by unlicensed contractors. As a result most of the facilities pro-

vided in the Act remain unavailed. Even if such violations are reported, the punishment is usually nominal.

In the study conducted, no worker was found to be getting displacement or journey allowance from the contractor. If any amount of financial help was extended to them, it was only on the refundable basis and mostly with interest. In the brick kiln unit of Nihal Singh Wada, none of the workers got such benefits. They were only paid loans that was deducted from their salary. In the name of accommodation, they were provided with shacks without windows and cooking space. No toilets and the source of water was a handpump for hundred families. No inspection was ever made of this site.

The labour inspectors attend usually the complaints made by the unions. In the absence of such organisations, labour inspector visits an establishment only once a year and seldom use their right as law enforcement officer.

The migrant worker is usually employed by an establishment either directly to do the jobs connected with the main business or to toil in the connected branches.

In Bhatinda, the unit of Food Corporation of India has employed at least 50 migrant workers to carry the sacks of grain to the godown. These workers are employed by the contractors and are paid on the basis of loads they carry. They are kept in waiting and are employed when needed. But the irregularity of the employment opportunity cannot shield the fact that labour has been working for the FCI.

Since these workers were meeting the demands of the FCI business and were paid by the same through the contractor, the chief employer's responsibility must be owned by the FCI only. The unit has to be accountable for any damage or lack of legal benefits. However at least five workers were found with fractured arms, toes, dislocation of collar bone and rib injuries without any medical aid offered to them by the unit.

The workers themselves were blissfully unaware of their rights and did not want to disclose the injuries as they did not want to join the list of "unfit for job" and thus get excluded.

It may be pointed out here that many Acts including the one for the migratory labour remain unimplemented in the absence of infrastructure. Bihar and Punjab have developed machineries

to meet such needs but remain inadequate. As a result the migrant labour does not get any respite from the continued exploitation.

In view of the developments in the last two decades that has brought forth a change in the context as well, the Inter State Migratory Workers Act may be revised according to the emerging needs.

First of all the contractors are hardly involved in the process now and therefore the definition spelt out for the migrant workman in section 2(1)(e) should cover all the migrant workmen irrespective of the fact that they were recruited by the contractors or came on their own to the destination state.

The section 1.4 of the Act should include all the establishments having even a single migratory workman employed in the unit.

Any violation of the Act must be taken as a cognizable offence and third party should be allowed to file complaint under section 28. If the third party's complaint is found to be correct, the concerned labour officer also should face dismissal or imprisonment for the failure to take action.

The contractor must be held liable for any violation of the Act whether committed by him or the sub-contractor. However the contractor must not be allowed to play the role of the chief employer. The chief employer has to be held liable for the offence committed against the labour he has employed.

According to section 27, the chief employer could always plead not guilty on the grounds of ignorance or absence which leaves a loophole in the Act. Consequently chief employer of any organisation hardly faces any prosecution.

The section 31(1) confers immunity on government servants from prosecution on grounds of acting on good faith. Section 32 (23) confers immunity on the government from claims of damages. These provisions offer an opportunity to the establishment to exploit the labour including the migratory worker without any restraint. In the various government projects labour is hired and offences take place but the redressal remains unremitted.

There should be special courts for meeting the complaints of the migrant and contract worker since the labour courts are often overburdened and therefore take too long to reach a decision.

The Act should also take into consideration the migration made within the state itself as the issues do not vary much in both the cases.

Chapter-4

Migrant Labour In Punjab

Observation, Field Study

The growing rate of migration of labour has been in focus since last several decades. Both positive and negative aspects have been evaluated in this context in various studies and reports. The positive factors have been highlighted as the supply of labour in the shortage destinations and the improved status of the migrant labour in terms of growing resources as well as the new skills acquired in the process.

The negative factors have been pointed out as the denial of minimum wages, overstretched working hours, dehumanising living conditions and finally the shrinking of employment avenue level for the local workers and need to be analysed properly to find ways to resolve the emerging crisis.

Taking into consideration the relatively unexplored issue of migration of labour force from Bihar to the agrarian as well as industrial areas of Punjab, it was decided to conduct a study of the phenomenon with following objectives:

- a) The socio-economic context of migratory labour
- b) The changes over time in the character and intensity of migration of these labour
- c) State policies and legal protection to these migrant labour
- d) Migration as the result of the uneven economic development
- e) Impact of migration at the source: Case studies of the families of migrant labour left in Bihar

Data base and sampling framework:

To achieve these objectives, secondary data was collected from libraries with analysis of various theories on migration as well the enumerations about the existing situation.

To collect the primary data, a study was undertaken in four districts of Amritsar, Ludhiana, Moga and Bhatinda to understand the plight of industrial as well as agricultural migrant

workers in Punjab. From Amritsar and Ludhiana, 40 respondents were taken with 20 in each city to understand the industrial worker's situation. Same was done in the rural areas of Moga and Bhatinda with 20 respondents from each agrarian zone. The study was conducted with simple random sampling. To understand the connected issues as well, a dialogue with the local organisers, leaders as well as the Labour Commissioner in Chandigarh was also conducted.

A visit to residential areas of the workers and meeting their families also helped in understanding their plight.

It was considered imperative to meet the local workers to get a complete picture of the situation. In Bhatinda district, a visit to Doda village was also enlightening in this context. Same was true about the engineering and rubber workers of Amritsar.

Observations:

It was observed during the course of study that the share of migrant worker in the total labour force in industrial as well as agrarian sector was considerably high. It was substantiated further with the data offered by the Labour Commissioner's office in Chandigarh.

In Amritsar the total number of workers was approximately 95,618. In the organised sector 59,568 were engaged, out of which 35,245 were local and 24,323 were migrant workers. In the unorganised sector, 36,050 workers were employed and 26,323 were local while 9,727 were from other states. However in the data itself the clarification was made that the number of workers from other states in unorganised sector keeps varying depending upon the character of unemployment. The arrival of migrants in peak season and their departure in the lean season creates the variation also in the data collected. In Ludhiana the number of workers stated was 5,32,600 approximately. In the organised sector, 2,82,000 workers were engaged out of which 72,000 were local and 2,10,000 were from other states. In the unorganised sector, 2,50,000 were working in which the number of local workers was 1,50,000 and that of migrant workers was 1,00,000.

As far as the rural and agrarian sector was concerned, no estimation was available because of the circular and seasonal character of the population. Because of the same reasons, no information was available about Moga and Bhatinda.

Amritsar

In course of the study, the districts that were visited, Amritsar was the first one with high concentration of migratory labour and changing industrial scenario.

Migratory labour has been coming here since the early years of independence and thus Amritsar provides the impression of changes over decades explicitly.

In the beginning, the Punjabis from Lahore and the frontier districts came here after partition and influenced the industrial trends decisively. They employed the local as well as the Himachal workers and created a market for blankets, shawls and threads. In the following decades, labour from Eastern Uttar Pradesh and lastly from Bihar started pouring in.

The major fallout of the influx was setback to the existing working class movement here. The achievements in terms of wages, working hours and other facilities were rendered ineffective after the intervention of the migratory worker who was prepared to accept any wages offered as it was always more than what he got at the source and therefore was prepared to toil for as many hours as he was asked to. He did not bother about living facilities as he lived here only temporarily and tried to save as much as possible. He did not want to shift his focus from the financial earnings and was too scared of losing his job and therefore was difficult to get convinced about asserting for his rights.

However, it was soon realised that if steps were taken to ensure that justice was meted out to the migratory labour, the condition of local worker would improve automatically. It was a situation when at the local workers' demand for minimum wages, the factories were closed and after few months when it opened with the help of migratory labour, the wages were given even at lower rates.

There was also shift in the pattern of employment. The units were divided among the contractors who in turn employed migratory labour at their own prices. Most of the local workers became contractors as the migratory labour was exclusively unskilled and needed supervision.

The main industries in Amritsar are textile and engineering. With growing disturbances at the border and the negative in-

fluence of globalisation, there is a noticeable slump in the market here leading to the closure of bigger and some of the medium level units. The small units are run on contract basis. These are mostly power loom units with 15 to 20 workers toiling at piece rate. For every metre they weave, the rate is only Rs 1.50. The owner is also like middleman only getting Rs 5 to 6 per metre from which he has to pay the workmen as well. Thus everyday at least 50 metres of clothes are produced in a small unit per worker and the earnings amount to Rs 70 to Rs 75 per head. These workers do not demand any fixed hours as their only aim is to earn as much as possible.

The owner gets not more than Rs 300 to Rs 400 from which he pays the worker and looks after the unit. Such units are usually not registered and no documents exist about the production details. But the labour that is mostly employed in such units and consists of migratory population is highly organised in Amritsar. They are aware of their economic demands and many strikes were organised in the industrial units in cooperation with them. However the working conditions are dehumanising as there is neither ventilation nor proper lighting.

The workers keep standing for twelve hours a day almost without any break. Children are also employed in these units and work on night shifts for twelve hours.

The new generation of migratory workers is attracted more towards such units because of the piece rate system and scope for unskilled work. The other industries in the city are rubber, leather and engineering in which the majority of workers are local. Especially in the rubber units, most of the workers are confirmed and they get D.A. increases as well.

It was also realised that the economic and political awareness among workers leads them to courageous struggles and heroic sacrifices. In the days of terrorism, when the migrant labour was threatened of ultimate consequences and trade union leaders were in their hit lists, the workers unitedly faced the challenge and forced them to withdraw on several occasions.

The working class in Amritsar is highly political and the credit goes to the leaders like Parduman Singh, Satpal Dang and Vimla Dang and many next generation leaders among whom there are several migrant workers as well. Being at the helm of affairs of

religio-political trends, the challenges have been formidable but the struggle continues.

The migratory labour here has spent at least three generations. They live in chawl like rooms mostly without cooking space. Toilets and handpumps are common and, therefore, easily become source of infectious diseases like skin and stomach ailments. Tuberculosis is quite common in every age group because of the loom and spinning units.

Many of these workers have occupied unauthorised areas also and live there collectively. These slums are like ghettos for each community though not resented by the local residents. The living conditions are same here except the fact that shacks are kachcha with earthen floors.

In these areas the migratory workers are living for last 20 to 25 years. The next generation is a strange combination of local and ethnic specifics. Their roots are gone as they do not speak their own language and cannot identify themselves with those far off places where they go hardly once a year. But locally, they are still migratory labour. Assimilation process is slow as they have accepted a lower economic and thus social status because of their own needs.

The migratory labour has to face all the problems that any other labour faces. Since the cultural assimilation process is slow, these workers prefer to spend their leisure with their own wife and children. Parents are usually left at home with the breaking down of joint family system. However, the worker himself still pines for the vast stretches of fields and the freedom at home, poverty has driven him to far off regions and he can never forget this fact.

These families have their own problems. They have no land at home, no job in their own region and no financial security available anywhere. They have their own physical strength and sometime skill as their only possession.

Some of these workers send their children to schools as they are keen to improve the lot of the next generation. But for most of them children are the source of more earning as one of them observed, "If we have more children, we have more earnings and perhaps more desperation also."

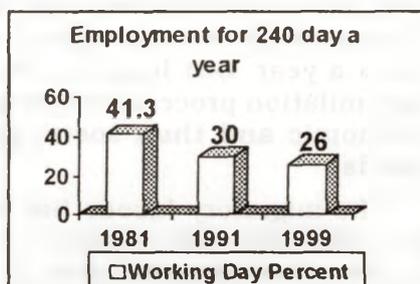
As their staple food, they usually take little dal with chapati. Even the kids of six to seven months are given the same. Milk and fruits are rare.

Among the workers, there are several community based organisations like Uttar Pradesh Kalyan Parishad, Bihari Samaj, etc. that have their own cultural and religious programmes but mostly dominated by the political parties at source.

One striking phenomenon was the exploitation of women at various levels. They usually migrate with their husbands and get unskilled jobs. Since the living conditions are abysmal, ailments are common. Most of these women are undernourished and overworked. If the husbands lose jobs or meet serious accidents, these women have to shoulder the entire responsibility. Many of them look after the men from their community and in turn get the money to run the house.

Moga

In the rural areas of Moga, according to 1991 census, only 30 percent of the labour could get employment for 240 days a year and thus joined the list of the main workers. It was higher in 1981 census and was 41.3 percent. By



1997 the percentage came down to 26 percent. The process of automation has affected the rural as well as the migratory labour here. The artisans are also suffering. As a result, the workforce has shifted from agrarian to non-agrarian sectors like cattle breeding, vending of vegetables or other items, rikshaw pulling, loading, shoe repairing etc.

In last one decade, the percentage of workers with one year contract with the farmer has come down to half and these labour are mostly working as domestic help. Child labour is preferred as it is cheaper. However the minimum wage rate is nowhere followed. Even the skilled ones driving tractors and manning the machines do not get more than Rs 1500 a month. The workers now prefer to go on daily wages and those on annual

agreement, shift to daily wages of Rs 50 if permitted. Many of them have started working in flour or rice mills with daily wages of Rs 50. Among the local workers there are small peasants also with three to five acres of land.

With the growing number of migratory workers, the local small and landless peasants have been facing a competitive job market and less avenues. With every generation, the land holding is also going down. Thus all the peasants with less than 10 acres of land are in debt. Most of them are defaulters and unable to pay now even the interest amount. These peasants have in turn become untouchables for most of the government schemes.

The frustration leads them to self annihilation. According to informal sources, every seven hours, a suicide is committed usually in the age group of 18 to 45 years, by both male and female. These people often wanted to live even after taking the final step. It is usually the pesticide which is easily available for them.

In Moga, the rural migratory worker was mostly found in three categories. The first one consisted of those who entered an agreement with the farmer and paid him Rs 8000 per acre for one year. If the crop fails the worker has to face the loss, take a loan from the money lender and pay the farmer. Thus he is tied to the field till he clears his debts. In the process, he hires some workers also at the rate of Rs 30 to Rs 40 per day. Women for such jobs get Rs 15 to Rs 20. However the entire unit lives together with a common kitchen. All the families are engaged in the field including women and children.

The second category belongs to those workers who enter an agreement to work for the entire year and get an annual income of Rs 16000 a year with food. These workers usually live in the fields without any proper accommodation. They work as domestic help and look after the fields also.

The third category belongs to daily wage earners who slog for the day and get paid. They shift according to availability of employment and thus keep moving from one district to another. The largest number of workers come in this category. They also opt for vending, rikshaw pulling and other odd jobs when the peak season is over.

However none of these workers is hired by contractors. Also none of the trade union rights is accorded to them. All these categories have unspecified working hours stretching sometime over 36 hours continuously. There is no accommodation granted to them except the pumphouse in the field itself. They usually sleep on bare ground and in the morning, get up with stiffness and pain. In cases of ailments and accidents, no specific provisions are made for them. Even the wages are cut for the period they abstain from work due to illness. In one of the instances, the worker suffered continuously from low fever and worked in the fields as he had to earn the wages before going back home. It all depended on the personal qualities of the farmer himself to offer them any help on such occasions.

These workers have rarely any voting rights since they keep floating from one place to another. However they are not encouraged to enrol as voters.

The ration cards are available for some of them. The public distribution system has its own limitations. The facilities offered thus are often below average. The wheat and rice quality is deplorable. The worker cannot afford to buy enough flour and rice from the market to meet his needs as the flour is Rs 10 a kg and rice Rs 12. Even the vegetables are costly. As a result the remittances sent by these workers are never enough.

The migratory workers complained of postal services in the rural areas of Bihar, where it takes months to reach a village. The usual practice as the workers said was that the postal officials circulated the money on loan and received interest for several months before delivering the money to the recipient.

There are also cases in some rice mills where the workers are not paid their wages for as long as three months. These workers themselves are employed in the factory while their womenfolk and children work as domestic help. They go through the hazards of life and continue living in the same circumstances where the ailments are suffered and babies are also born.

These workers have at the source employment for three months only for which they come back every year. But rest of the nine months, they move around from one area to another

to earn as much as possible. They do not have any personal or social life in this period. They become alive only for three months a year when they go home.

Bhatinda

In this district, the share of landless worker in the population is 55 percent and rest of them are peasants with all levels of land holding.

The peasantry usually hires the migratory worker for the field as the local workers demand Rs 50 to Rs 60 while for the samework, the former accepts Rs 25 to Rs 30 for a day's work usually with one meal and tea. These workers are usually given loan by the farmer which is deducted from the wages. Thus the worker cannot leave the farmer even if he is offered better wages.

There was also complaint that the government discusses only the problems of peasants and not those of the landless poor. The government schemes aimed to benefit the scheduled caste and scheduled tribe groups go waste in the process of corruption as the concerned officials have their own cuts deducted at every step. Those declared below poverty line get only ten kilograms of ration a month which is neither enough nor usable.

It may be significant to add here that the labour market has been found to be flooded with the migratory worker causing a growing trend of contradiction in the labour force itself. The employers do not prefer to engage the local worker for whom the jobs have become scarce. The migratory labour provides not only a surplus of labour but also helps to bring down the wage rate causing discontent among the local rural workers. Sometimes there have been even incidents of riots when the starving local workers were rejected to engage the migrants at cheaper rates.

These workers also observed that the automation has affected them adversely. They stated that machines are not their enemy but should be used only after the worker gets his due. Therefore more job avenues must be created, according to them.

However these workers have not failed to create jobs for themselves. They are engaged in dairy work, vending and running kiosks. Even with these petty employments they earn more than at the source.

These workers usually come in groups and circulate in the rural areas in the peak season.

Ludhiana

Most of the industrial units in Punjab are located in Ludhiana with more than five lakh working population. The share of the migratory labour in this estimation is more than three lakh involved mostly in spinning and hoisery work.

These workers are usually seasonal since hoisery itself has a seasonal character and three to four months a year the units are closed. Therefore the shifting workers are always on daily wages and never confirmed.

In the bigger units like Vardhaman and Avon, there is hardly any union. There has also been a slump especially in last one decade creating a scarcity of employment. There has been a noticeable reduction in the rate of influx to this city.

Contract system is popular in this city as well and the units are unregistered. In such establishments, at least 80 percent of the labour is migratory. The local worker is usually engaged in engineering units. The migratory worker lives in the chawl like rooms here either with his family or with other workers. These buildings have 60 to 100 rooms with two handpumps, usually no latrines, and no cooking space.

In some buildings there are rooms in the basements also without ventilation and no sunlight reaches them ever. Dampness has left the walls and doors green and black. The women-folk usually do not go to factories for work, they work at home only with nominal wages. Many of them stay here only temporarily and go back to resume their feildwork at source.

These women are not offered any medical help for child birth. With the help of neighbouring women, the child is born. The mother starts the daily chores in a day or two as they have five to six kids to look after. For nourishment, they cannot afford to have milk or fruits. The two meals a day itself is a luxury to them. When asked how a baby would take chapati, the reply was hunger made every thing eatable for everybody.

The rural suburbs of Ludhiana has turned into the colonies for these workers. These residential areas have become pockets

of Bihar as the costume, mannerism, language and even the songs played on the tapes in the shops belong to the source state only.

The local peasantry has built these chawl like constructions and rented the rooms to the Bihari workers. The landlord usually has a ration shop in the building itself. The room is rented on condition that the supplies would be bought from the shop in the building only. More often, the groceries are supplied on credit and on higher rates than usual.

The rooms were small without windows and there was a foul smell in the entire area. Kids were playing in the mud spread in the courtyard.

Drinking water here is highly contaminated with the effluents discharged from the factories. The manholes were often without cover and smelling of acid.

The workers from a colony even complained of boils in mouth caused by acid in drinking water.

Among the workers pneumoconiosis was a common disease affecting the lung and the respiratory system. Sulphur dioxide percentage in the atmosphere is quite high and turns every rainfall into an acid rain. The mud and waterlogged areas have high acidic contents eroding the bottoms of cars and other vehicles.

Field Study: Profile Of Migrant Labour In Punjab

In course of field study, it was realised that the phenomenon of migration had several dimensions and to understand them an integrated approach was needed. Therefore an attempt was made to collect data with reference to sociological, political and economic issues related with the life of migratory labour. However many other aspects concerning demographic, anthropological, historical and ecological issues could not be covered due to time constraint.

It was also realised that in course of time the migrant worker has started preferring circular movement of migration. As a result this category has the largest concentration of labour. Unfortunately about this mobile population, only case studies with area and time specifics are available. Hardly any initiative has been taken to study the phenomenon at macro level.

The other aspect that has remained untouched is the study of their status at the home state and influence of migration on their families left behind. Without taking up these issues, the determinants influencing the nature and flow of migration cannot be analysed.

On the basis of simple random selection, data was collected from 80 respondents with a structured questionnaire. An initiative was taken to organise group discussions and also participatory observations to understand the contextual issues.

In course of the interviews and discussions, data was collected from 40 industrial workers engaged in various types of jobs and in various categories like casual, regular, on contract, involved in rikshaw pulling and vending. This part of the study was conducted in Amritsar and Ludhiana.

The remaining 40 respondents were from rural areas employed as daily wage earners and on contract. Some of them were engaged in rice mills and brick kilns. The districts that were visited in this context were Moga and Bhatinda, especially the rural parts.

Nature of Migration

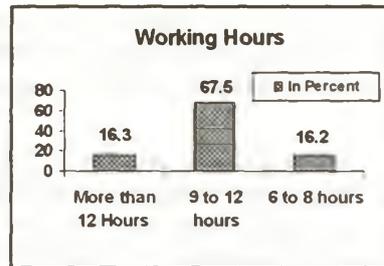
As far as the nature of migration was concerned, the assumption that the migratory labour was mostly working on temporary basis was proved to be correct. The share of such workers in the entire labour force of the respondents was 70 percent divided in the sub-categories of semi-permanent, seasonal and those on voucher. These workers had no document on them and large number of them came on their own. While the permanent among them counted for 20 percent, those on voucher were 12.6 percent and seasonal workers involved in rural areas or industries like hoisery that were closed for four months a year, constituted 20 percent. There were 12.5 percent workers were voucher. Thus the non-permanent workers dominated the scene.

In the further division of categories, those who had been looking for job constituted 2.5 percent while those terminated were 1.3 percent and those who had taken land on contract were 5.0 percent.

Working Hours

The most striking phenomenon observed during the study was the long uninterrupted stretch of duty hours. For last two

centuries, the working masses had been struggling to get the right to work for eight hours but in Punjab, even in the beginning of the new millennium, the share of those who toiled for more than twelve hours was 16.3 percent, while 67.5 percent slogged for 9 to 12 hours and only 16.2 percent worked for 6 to 8 hours. These workers had hardly any break while on duty and there were no weekly holidays for them. The leave was always taken at the risk of non-payment of wages.



Wages received

While the minimum wages have been fixed in Punjab at the rate of Rs 1749 per month and according to the labour department in the state there was hardly any complaint registered regarding non-payment of the same, the reality was that at least 17.5 percent received less than Rs 500. Those who received upto Rs 1000 per month were 12.5 percent, upto Rs 1500, 13.8 percent, upto Rs 2500, 40 percent, upto Rs 3000, 7.5 percent and more than Rs 3000 was received by 6.3 percent. Among these workers are all the categories like skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled also. However it may be a revealing information that 37.6 percent of workers were getting less than Rs 1500. In the category of Rs 1500 to Rs 2500, there were many who received less than minimum wages though engaged as skilled worker.

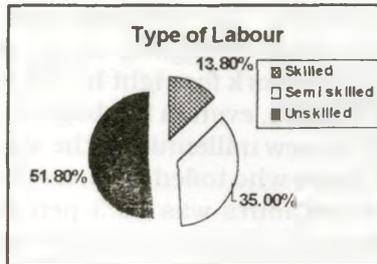
Occupation

In the division of types of occupation, the share of those engaged in the menial jobs was 12.5 percent, working in factories were 48.8 percent, working in agrarian sector were 22.5 percent (many of those working in fields had shifted to rice mills, flour mills and other areas as employment has been getting scarce with automation and mechanisation of agrarian sector), and some of them were self employed with 2.5 percent share.

Those who were engaged in agrarian sector as well as worked either as domestic help or did some other menial jobs constituted 7.5 percent. There was one worker who worked in the agrarian sector and also in a factory. There was another one who worked in a factory and in the spare time was self em-

ployed. One of them worked in the fields on daily wages and also was self employed in the spare time.

Among these workers, 13.8 percent were engaged in skilled work while semi skilled constituted 35 percent and unskilled 51.2 percent.



As far as the character of employment of these migrant labour was concerned, at the origin most of them were engaged as agricultural workers who were also involved in agricultural self employment constituting 36.3 percent.

The second largest occupational combination at source was that of agricultural work and wage labour and constituted 25 percent. In this category, those who were self employed were 2.5 percent, agricultural labour 7.5 percent and wage labour 5 percent. Those engaged in cattle breeding were 3.8 percent and in masonry, 1.3 percent. Those who were too young to work before migrating to Punjab constituted 2.5 percent and 7.5 percent were going to school before coming.

Social base of the migrant worker

Among the respondents, 97.5 percent were Hindus and 2.5 percent were Muslims. Caste wise division among the Hindu community population showed the majority of other backward castes (OBCs) with 56.3 percent share while scheduled caste and schedule tribe members were 17.5 percent. These categories together were 73.5 percent establishing the assumption that mostly backward caste among the social hierarchy left the village for distant destinations. Other castes had a share of 26.2 percent.

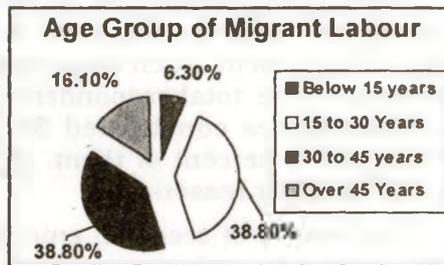
These migrant labour had left their families at the source. These families had usually three generations living together but there were also others with only wife and children. Those from a joint family of parents, wife, children and other dependents constituted 55 percent. Those who left only wife at source were 6.3 percent while the non-family individuals were 36.3 percent. Those who lived with their elder brother's family constituted 2.5 percent.

According to the size of the migrant household at the destination, those with only one more member were 42.5 percent, with three to four family members were 25 percent, with five to eight members were 30 percent and more than nine were 2.5 percent.

Among those who lived with their family were 83.8 percent married while 16.2 percent were unmarried and lived with their parents or brothers.

The respondents left their home state mainly in the age group of 15 to 30 years and constituted 65 percent of the population. Those who came with their parents or elders in the family while too young or got employed even before the age of 15 years were 27.5 percent. Those in the age group of 30 to 45 years at the time of migration were 7.5 percent.

Among the respondents, those in the age group of below 15 years and were engaged as child labour were 6.3 percent, while those in the age group of 15 to 30 years were 38.8 percent. Those who were 30 to 45 years of age constituted the same share of 38.8 percent. Those who were 45 to 60 years of age were 16.1 percent. The children who either came with parents or other family members and were going to school or sitting at home were 20 percent.



Status of the migrant labour at source

In the socio-economic status of the migrant labour, the fact that came out sharply was that those who had unproductive property like house or site for house upto 2.5 acres constituted largest number of the respondents with 43.8 percent. Those with no property were 8.8 percent and with unproductive property like only a small hut were 15 percent. Those who were marginal farmers with 2.5 acres of cultivable land were 12.5 percent. Those with five acres of land were 5 percent.

The economic reasons for migration varied very little. Those who could not find employment and migrated, constituted 37.5

percent. Those who could not run the family with lower wages available at the source and came out were 1.3 percent. Those who could not produce enough because of lack of irrigation facilities and other inputs and migrated constituted 2.5 percent.

The decision to migrate was taken at the family level for 71.3 percent and 2.8 percent came either with friends or contractors. The source of finance for migration was provided neither by the contractor nor by the employer but was arranged for 47.5 percent through family savings, for 36.3 percent, either it was loan or friends helped. Many of them took loan and also added family savings to arrange for the transportation and constituted 10.1 percent, For only 5 percent, contractor made arrangements for travel expenses.

Among the reasons for selecting a particular area were mostly the relatives who lived there and asked the respondents to join them. Such coincidences had taken place for 50 percent of the total respondents and those who came with acquaintances constituted 38.8 percent. The contractor brought 7.5 percent of them. At least 3 of the respondents came for other reasons.

The source of securing employment was mostly through acquaintances and constituted 60 percent of the respondents and through persons from their own village were 20 percent. Some of them were second generation migrants and got the job through their father and other elders in the family and constituted 2.5 percent. The contractor got jobs for 13.8 percent.

The stay of these migrants usually lasts upto five years in most cases and constituted 30 percent. Those who were staying for 5 to 10 years were 11.3 percent, 10 to 15 years were 20 percent and those staying for 15 to 20 years were 15 percent. Those staying for more than 20 years were 22.5 percent.

The migrants maintained usually regular contact with their villages and those who visited annually constituted 46.3 percent. Those who went back seasonally were 27.5 percent and 25 percent had not gone for more than a year.

Status at destination

Those respondents who received wages in Punjab every day at the completion of the job, constituted 37.5 percent, while those who periodically or monthly received were 41.3 percent and those getting lump sum at the end of the agreement period were 12.5 percent.

Many of these workers had brought their wives too but more often than not they remained at home. However those who came and were engaged in the menial work constituted 27.5 percent while those working as domestic help were 16.3 percent. Some of them were self employed and constituted 3.8 percent while the non-working constituted 52.5 percent.

The wage rate of these women varied according to the character of their employment. Those who received upto Rs 400 were 22.5 percent, from Rs 401 to Rs 600, were 17.5 percent, from Rs 601 to Rs 1000, were 8.8 percent.

Accommodation

Some of these workers had their own huts on unauthorised sites and constituted 5 percent, while 10 percent of the respondents owned their huts as well as plots on which their hut was built.

However, 80 percent of the respondents lived on rent and 10 percent in accommodation provided by the employer, inclusive of 6.3 percent living with either parents or friends.

The living conditions of these workers were found to be deplorable. Among the facilities available, only 10 percent population was provided with proper drinking water facilities, rest of them either shared with 70 to 80 families with two handpumps for 140 families or had corporation tap water with infrequent supply.

While water with electricity was provided to 20 percent families, those with water and latrine were only 1.3 percent without electricity. However only 21.3 percent had all three. Only one respondent or 1.3 percent had cooking space along with water and electricity. Among the respondents, 10 percent had water, electricity and also medical facilities, while 5 percent had everything including water, electricity, cooking space, latrine and medical aid.

Indebtedness of Migratory Labour

The migratory labour mostly were indebted and those who borrowed upto Rs 100 were 3.8 percent and upto Rs 1000 were 2.5 percent. More than Rs 1000 constituted 63.8 percent.

Those who were not indebted or had paid back the loan constituted 30 percent. The rate of interest paid by the respondents per annum upto Rs 12 percent constituted 32.5 percent, from Rs 13 to Rs 24 percent was paid by 6.5 percent, from Rs 25 to Rs 30 percent by 3.8 percent, from Rs 31 to Rs 36 percent by 3.8 percent, from Rs 37 to Rs 60 percent by 5 percent, from Rs 61 to Rs 100 percent by 5 percent and those who paid above Rs 100 percent were 3.8 percent.

The source of borrowing was for 27.5 percent, the money lender, for 6.3 percent, the contractor, for 2.5 percent, the employer and for 23.8 percent, their friends. Among the respondents, 3.8 percent borrowed from banks.

Investment by migratory labour

The labour usually invested at home state and built houses in their villages. Among them, 42.5 percent built houses at home village, 1.3 percent bought land there, 3.8 percent bought assets and 2.5 percent sent money for loan repayment.

As far as investment at destination was concerned, 97.5 percent did not invest locally at all. Only two respondents or 2.3 percent made investments of Rs 30000 and Rs 33000 respectively.

Contract labour

Those workers who worked on contract with period unspecified, constituted 23.8 percent and with annual contract, 2.5 percent.

The working hours are usually stretched long for those on contract. Those who worked for 8 to 10 hours constituted only 2.5 percent. Those who worked for 10 to 12 hours, constituted 17.5 percent. Those who toiled for more than 12 hours constituted 5 percent.

The wages for the contract labour were not found to be homogeneous. Those who received upto Rs 500 per month constituted 5 percent, upto Rs 501 to Rs 1000 per month were 5

percent, upto Rs 1001 to Rs 1500 were 3.8 percent, upto Rs 1501 to Rs 2500 were 5 percent, Rs 2501 to Rs 3500 were 5 percent and above Rs 3500 were 1.3 percent.

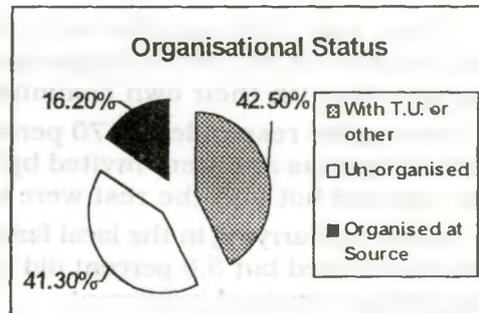
The dealings of the contractors have not always been satisfactory though 5 percent respondents were satisfied while those, who were not, constituted 6.3 percent and 12.3 were indifferent.

Remittances

As far as sending money home was concerned, most of them answered in negative and constituted 38.8 percent. Those who sent upto to Rs 200 were 1.3 percent. Rs 201 to Rs 500 was sent by 12.5 percent, Rs 501 to Rs 1000 by 21.3 percent and above Rs 1000 was by 18.8 percent. The remittances were sent home monthly by 26.3 percent, annually by 2.5 percent, personally carried by 16.3 percent.

Organisational status

Out of all the respondents, 42.5 percent were organised and were members of various trade unions at the destination. Those who were not members of any union constituted 41.3 percent while 16.2 percent were organised also at source before migration.



Political Awareness

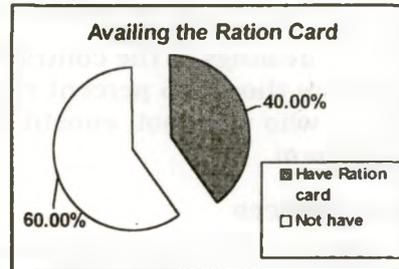
Among the respondents, 56.3 percent were not members of any political party and 28.8 percent were members of the Communist Party of India (CPI), 7.5 percent were Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) members, 5 percent were in Congress, 1.3 percent belonged to Samajwadi Party and 1.3 were in Shiv Sena.

The voting rights for these labour at destination was granted to 48.8 percent, while for 47.5 percent, their names were not included in the voters list and 3.7 percent made no reply.

Ration Cards and Public Distribution System

For availing the Public Distribution System, 40 percent had ration cards and 60 percent did not have it.

Among the respondents, 13.8 percent were from second generation of migrant labour and 86.2 percent were first generation.



Cultural Assimilation

The respondents either lived with their own community members and thus built up their own colonies or shared the village or the area with the local workers. However, none of them shared rooms with the local labour.

Those who lived together with local workers in villages and colonies constituted 43.8 percent while 45 percent lived exclusively with their own community people.

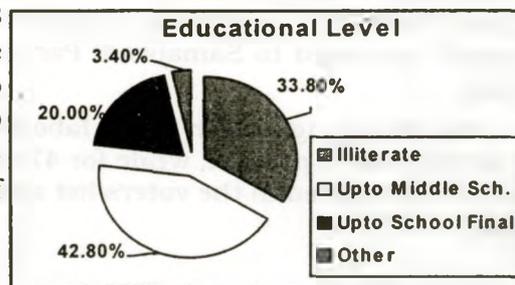
Among the respondents, 70 percent of them took part in local functions and were invited by their friends while 18.8 percent did not and the rest were indifferent.

As far as marrying in the local families was concerned, 62.5 percent refused but 3.8 percent did not resent it. The remaining portion remained indifferent.

Among the migrant labour, 92.5 percent celebrated their own festivals and 1.3 percent did not because of indifference or lack of means.

Educational Level

Among the migrant labour, 33.8 percent of the respondents were illiterate, 42.8 percent were literate and have studied upto middle standard, 20 percent upto school final and at least one of them was graduates.



Ailments and Drinking Habits

Among the ailments prevalent among these respondents, the largest number suffered from undernourishment constituting 17.5 percent while 10 percent had no disease. From tuberculosis, 5 percent of the respondents suffered, from orthopedic problems, 1.3 percent, and from breathing problem, 3.8 percent. The rest of them suffered from various other diseases.

So far as drinking habits were concerned, 15 percent confessed to it while 32.5 replied in negative. However, 42 percent were non-committal about their drinking habits.

Chapter-5

Plight of families left at source : A few case studies from North Bihar

The migrant worker leaves his home state only when he loses sight of the light at the end of the tunnel. The able bodied youngmen of 23 to 45 years of age are usually among those who go over to Punjab and earn their livelihood. However the dependents like old parents, wives and children are left back at the source only to face the extreme conditions of deprivation and sustain on the remittances which is often only nominal and infrequent.

The remittances are sent to the money lender directly who is the grocery shop owner also in the village. The supplies are taken from the shop and the money is deducted from the remittances that are often meagre. In return of the supplies, the money lender exploits the family and makes them slog for him.

There are also cases where no remittances were ever paid and the family had to fend for itself in this period.

More often in such cases, the family disintegrates.

The migratory labour is usually the poor landless and from scheduled caste category. As a result, the rich and higher caste peasants consider it within their rights to exploit such families.

The cases that were studied at the home state of Bihar represented various levels of deprivation and miseries for these families.

* * * * *

Razina Khatoon was married at the age of eighteen to Wali Mohammed. After four months of marriage Wali Mohammed migrated to Punjab for an uncertain period.

Razina was left with her parents-in-law. After months of desolation and suffering, she was attracted towards a neighbour who belonged to a different community. The family members of Razina came to know about the affair and when their son returned, the three together killed the daughter-in-law simply by suffocating her with a split bamboo.

The case was taken up by village Panchayat. The family was asked to pay a fine of Rs 10000 and arrange a feast for the panchayat members. Wali Mohammed got married again and left for Punjab.

It was in Mainhi village of Ghoghardiha block in Madhubani district.

* * * * *

Jalli Devi was left behind with two sons of eleven years and nine years of age. Her husband was in Punjab for last several years. Money lender Sitaram Yadav sent the supplies every month and wanted Jalli in return. One night he just barged in the house and tried to molest her. When she was struggling to get free, her sons entered the room, asked her to leave and brought down the hammer on the money lender's head who died instantly. The children surrendered immediately to the police in a jubilant mood as they felt victorious.

Both the children are in jail for last one year in Supaul and their father is dead. Mother has sold out the cow which was the only asset left, to get back her sons.

It was in Sirkharria village in Marauna block in Supaul district.

* * * * *

Sanhauli, Tilathi and Salamgarh are in Kusheshwarsthan block of Darbhanga district with almost all the landless labour and small peasants migrating to Punjab for nine months a year. These migrants are usually Mushars (Scheduled caste) and live below poverty line. They leave behind their parents, wives and children. One of them is Dharai Sadai. His sons are gone and only wives and children are left with him.

Dharai is 80 year-old and fumbles while walking. Old age pension is denied to him as he could not pay the bribe money of Rs 200 to the doctor for the age certificate.

Last year when the entire village was asleep, Dharai and other men were overpowered, tied and locked in the only pucca building of primary school and then started the night long orgy of loot and gang rape by 25 miscreants. The women recognised them as the upper caste men from the same village. Even father joined the son in the orgy.

Women in these villages feel scared and betrayed as their appeal for the redressal of their grievances have gone unnoticed.

They have now learned to take these setbacks stoically.

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In Banarjhula village of Ghoghardiha block in Madhubani district, Rameshwar Sau has a tea shop. He married off his only daughter to a migrant labour called Rajlal Sau from Parsa village in Supaul district. His father's name was Lakhan Sau.

When Rajlal left the village for Punjab, his wife stayed back with his parents. Lakhan Sau wanted to have relations with the daughter-in-law in the absence of his son but was refused rudely and firmly by her. Later when Rajlal came back from Punjab, Lakhan and his wife made false allegations against the daughter-in-law and all three together started torturing her till she fainted. Then they burnt her alive.

Rameshwar Sau is reluctant to make any complain for fear of social stigma. Meanwhile his son-in-law has married again and left for Punjab.

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Manchand Sadai is a landless Mushar. He left for Punjab six years back leaving behind three children and his wife in the care of his sister and her husband. During his prolonged absence of five years, Manchand neither wrote nor sent any money home.

The sister's husband, who was also the village shaman, tried to exploit Manchand's wife and soon made her pregnant. Eventually she was thrown out of the house as nobody came to her rescue. She went to her own sister's house and the baby was born there. But soon the man in the house started to take advantage of her helpless condition. Her sister also asked her to leave.

Now she lives with all her four children in the house of a rich peasant, slogs for him, gets nothing in return except food and shelter for her family.

Manchand Sadai is back in the village and is keen to take back his wife and all the children. But by now, the woman has

seen all the colours of life and her wounds are too raw to be healed. She has refused to oblige her husband.

Manchand keeps wailing in his desolate shack.

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Budhni has pimples all over her face spoiling her looks and her husband, a migrant labour in Punjab, left her to marry again. She is now a destitute woman living in Banarjhula village.

Ramadai has a deep wound in her right leg. The quack tried to operate her that made the case even worse. Her husband, a migratory worker in Punjab, has got married again. Ramadai lives in Karihar village of Ghoghardiha block.

In the same village, another grasswidow called Bhago had a twelve-year old daughter. Her name was Meena. One evening when the girl was playing in the fields, she was forcibly taken away by the Brahmins of Hatni, a neighbouring village that provided employment and credit to the poor villagers of Karihar inhabited by Mushars.

Meena was gangraped and burnt alive. Her mother Bhago is helpless. Meena's father is still in Punjab.

The silence in Karihar seemed to be explosive.

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Thus it may be concluded from the case studies that the semifeudal relations are still dominant in the rural areas with the overtones of caste exploitation. On the other hand, women become vulnerable as they have to face the lustful overtures of the rich peasants as well as the money lenders as they are rendered helpless in the absence of their menfolk.

Economically, these grass widows shoulder the responsibility of the parents, children and other dependents. In addition, the absent husbands never forgive if any social stigma is attached to these hapless women. The menfolk never even try to understand the plight they throw their wives in.

The contradictions in the rural life especially in its socio-economic context have been further accentuated with the growing phenomenon of migration. To sustain themselves with meagre earnings received at the destination, the men leave their

roots and go to far off places for years together. These families have lost even their basic right to live together.

It can not be denied that the earnings received at destination helps in financial upliftment of the labour, but migration itself becomes instrumental in intensifying the exploitation of their women left to suffer at the source.

In this grim struggle for survival, these grass widows are slowly learning to accept the challenge. It is a complex reality where anatomy is destiny and patriarchal system has been preserved through marriage with all avenues of power in the male hands and maintained with the principle of legitimacy. The women left behind by their migratory husbands are to maintain an inferior status in the society, accept unequal wages, surrender their reproductive rights to the infrequent visits by their husbands who carry various infectious diseases in the bargain.

She faces the socio-economic challenges that made the man in her life leave the scene. She may perish in the struggle but her sacrifice would not go waste. She has got her successors who would follow her example.