I J H S S

SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUND AND SEASONAL MIGRATION OF SUGARCANE HARVESTING WORKERS

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Abstract- The present paper aims at investigating the socio-economic background of the migrant sugarcane harvesting workers. At the outset it seems overtly to be a repetitive attempt as the knowledge of the socio-economic composition of any kind of labourers is shown that they are basically propertyless and belongs to the poverty ridden section of the society. What is new in studying the socio-economic composition of migrant sugarcane cutters and transport labourers? Is it a meaningful exercise? All such questions arise. It is interesting to know the fact that the migrant sugarcane cutting and transporting labourer's perse is not a homogeneous category. In other words, can we claim that the migrant sugarcane cutting and transporting labourers hail from one general class category or from one caste composition? The very compositions of migrant sugarcane cutting and transporting labourers become an attractive theme of investigation. In this paper, it is found that traditionally backward communities such as Scheduled Caste, Nomadic and Denotified Tribes and Other Backward Classes are still in large number in unorganized sector like sugarcane harvesting field. Scheduled Caste workers background (social and economic) is poor than all other sections of workers in the field. This is an attempt to study socio-economic background of the migrant sugarcane cutters in Maharashtra in general and Kolhapur district in particular. The paper is based on the data collected for the Ph.D. and other research work carried out in the area by other author.

Keywords- Seasonal Migration, Sugarcane Harvesting Workers, Agricultural Labourers, Socio-economic Background, Caste Composition, Causes of Migration, Regional Disparity, Weaker Section

Introduction

The seasonal migration of agricultural labourer is not a new phenomenon in Maharashtra and India. However, the nature and extent of labour migration is changed during colonial rule. British mobilized labour force for commercial crop production, mining and for other administrative purpose during their rule. After Independence government of India (GOI) adopted the socialist-capitalist (mixed economy) model of development through five year planning. As a result of the defective policies of agricultural development the regional disparity is increasing, which is leading to the increase in the seasonal migration of agricultural labourer. In the state of Maharashtra regional disparity has become the political issue of socio-economic development. *Western Maharashtra* region, which is politically dominant is also developed in terms of irrigational facilities and loan availability and other basic infrastructure whereas *Vidharbha* and *Marathwada* regions are comparatively less developed. As a result, every year thousands of marginal farmers and landless agricultural labourers migrate seasonally to *Western Maharashtra* for survival and further development. The percentage of seasonal sugarcane harvest and transport labourers in the total employment in sugar industry in Maharashtra

is greater. This type of seasonal migration is most closely associated with the capitalist development of rural agricultural production in this area.

In this particular study, attempt is made to study socio-economic conditions of the migrant labourers, which are important for understanding their living and working conditions. The working conditions are some of the obvious factors through which differential results are ascribed in the literature on seasonal migration. Therefore, the researcher attempts to assess the socio-economic conditions of the selected seasonal migrant labourers involved in sugarcane-cutting and transport activities in different sugar factories. Details regarding the socio-economic conditions of the selected labourers are based on the information collected through interview schedule. 200 respondents are selected from six sugar factories in Kolhapur as a field.

The analysis of the socio-economic background of the selected seasonal migrant labourers has helped to explain the situational factors at the place of origin which make them migrate. The specific focus of the paper is on the understanding of the socio-economic background of migrant sugarcane cutting and transporting workers of Beed district working in the

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field of six sugar factories in Kolhapur district during the season of 2007-08.

Review of Literature

In order to get the idea about the area of research it is essential to discuss the some of the previously undertaken studies in the field. Seasonal and other temporary migration for manual work from Indian rural areas has been shown by many researchers for south to be a major component of the livelihoods of poor rural workers and their employers in most parts of the country (Racine, 1997 for south India [1]; Breman, 1996 for western India [2]. Men, women, and children moving around India in search of manual work pose a major challenge for development policymakers. This is because while seasonal wage workers are among the poorest people, they and their children are often excluded from geographically based interventions by their absence. The intensity of migration of rural poor is dependent on the given historical social formations. The unevenness of development of different parts has resulted in differential rate of migration within the multinational state of India, Barik 1994 [3].

Kasar 1992 [4] in his book, "Economics of Seasonal Migration", scientifically studies the economic aspects of seasonal migration of farm labour to harvest sugarcane in Pune district. Jugale 1997 [5] in his book, "Employment Wages and Industrial Relations", analyzes the survey report of Labour Commissioner, Bombay of November -1986 and reveals socio-economic conditions of seasonal migrants including the wage rates; weather the labourers are under the level of minimum wage, their total number, service conditions, and nature of work etc. among the private and co-operative sugar factories in Maharashtra. The rural employment of agricultural labour in the sugar belt of western Maharashtra has gone up because of the increase in the irrigated area under cash crops such as sugarcane. Total number of migrant cane-cutters and bullockacrt labourers, who are seasonally employed in sugar factories, is near about 5 to 6 lakh, normally coming from backward areas of Maharashtra, particularly *Marathwada* and *Vidarbha*. The magnitude of migration towards sugar factories is growing since the drought of 1972-73 in Maharashtra (ibd).These studies have focused only on economic aspects of migrant labourers. Salve 1991 [6] conducts the study of the problems of migrant cane cutters in Kolhapur district. In his study he has emphasized the economic and socio-cultural life at their work places and has focused on the every day problems extensively. Deshpande 2008 [7] in her study, "Health and Nutritional Status of Women Seasonal Migrants: A Study of Sugarcane Cutters in Kolhapur District", studies three aspects of migrant women labourers. Health aspects such as physical, reproductive, mental, and other health practices among the migrant women labourers. She also refers to the factors affecting health status such as domestic violence and sexual harassment during process of migration and nutritional

status such as seasonal variations, food taboos, food and medicine pattern among the women labourers in Kolhapur district. Breman 1978 [8] a scholar of great eminence, specially visited India to study agrarian relation, nature of exploitation of seasonal migrants etc He narrates the socio-economic life of the labourers including the role of mukadams, recruitment of labourers, wages, working conditions and working hours.

However, the above mentioned studies have not considered the social and economic aspects of sugarcane cutting and transporting labourers in detail. The very agrarian process involves socio-economic aspects which are not adequately studied. Therefore, the present research intends to focus on the socio-economic background of migrant labourers and linkages which govern the process of migration occurring over a period of three to five decades between two regions in Maharashtra.

Research Methodology

The seasonal migratory agricultural labour-force assumes significance in harvesting and transport of sugarcane to sugar factories in western Maharashtra (October to April-May) every year. Most of these labourers are basically peasants (marginal Farmers) and landless labourers, belonging to drought prone belt of the state, especially Beed, Osmanabad districts in Marathwada; and some of them come from Vidharbha region and some others also come from dry parts of Ahmadnagar and Solapur districts in western Maharashtra.

The migratory labour-force coming from Beed district has been selected as a focus of this particular study, because of their prepodent number and also because they are engaged in harvesting and transporting sugarcane from the beginning of inceptions of sugar factories in western Maharashtra. On the basis of the secondary data available in the books and reports and the preliminary visits to some factories in Kolhapur district during crushing season, the researcher analyses the socio-economic aspects of the seasonal workers in the field of sugarcane.

Objectives of the Study

The present study attempts to probe into the socio-economic characteristics of the migrant Sugarcane cutting labourers in Maharashtra in general and Kolhapur district in particular. Thus the study aims at:

To study the socio-economic background of selected seasonal migrant Sugarcane cutters and bullock cart labourers and;

To study the causes of seasonal migration of workers working in different sugar factories.

Data Collection

For the purpose of primary data collection, Interview schedule, personal observation, and informal interviews with key persons and meeting with heads of households of sugarcane cutters and bullock cart

labourers are carried out. For the collection of secondary data different internet websites, government reports, books, journals articles, and local daily news papers are used. For the collection of primary data, the interviews /visits are conducted during the harvesting season for 2007-08 at the destination place of the workers.

Sampling Technique

There is no authentic information about the number of seasonal migrant workers in the field of sugarcane in Maharashtra. However, for the purpose of study researcher has selected six sugar factories out of 20 in operation during the 2007-08 season in Kolhapur district which were selected. Because all sugar factories in Kolhapur does not employ bullockcart labourers. Some sugar factories employ bullockcart and sugarcane cutting labourers. On the basis of the information obtained from the *Mukadama* and factory labour officer it is estimated that about five thousand (5000) household Sugarcane harvesting labourers come from Beed to Kolhapur. About 4 per cent of them are selected for this study. To identify the respondents the snowball technique is used.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

In order to authentic the data analysis, one need to employ both the qualitative and the quantative variables. For the present study (SPSS) Statistical Package for Social Sciences has been employed, because it has wide range of statistical techniques for effective classifications are used.

Caste Composition of Migrant Labourers

Caste system is unique in Indian society and also forms the basis of inequality and exploitation. The historical trajectory, the patterns of politico-economic changes experienced during the post-independence period and the composition of different ethnic communities determine the actual working of caste relations in a given region. It was only in the Hindu religious philosophy that the practice of caste was formally justified, social relations, as the popular sociological understanding of Indian society goes, were organized hierarchically almost everywhere in the sub continent including the Christians, the Muslims and the Sikh religions. This was believed to be the case particularly in rural India where caste differentiation was seen to be required for the working of the agrarian economy, Jodhka 2002 [9] .The essence of caste hierarchy is the absence of equality among the units which form the whole. Hiramani 1977 [10] during his research work also fins out that 'the Caste, which has its roots in religion and has been reared by the socio-economic forces and recognized by the erstwhile political structure, had once occupied and even now occupies a pivotal place in the village social life.'

The heterogeneity of composition of migrant labourers is reflected in the form of different castes (Table I). It is

worth noting that none among the higher caste, namely the Brahmins and Vaishya, is in the category of migrant sugarcane cutters and transporting (bullock cart) labourers. The middle caste is represented by Maratha; the lower middle caste is represented by Kumbhar and Nhavi. The lower castes are represented by Vanjari, Dhangar, Hatkar and Lamani. The lowest in the caste hierarchy is represented by the Chambhar, the Mang, the Bhil and the Mahar. The proportion of migrant Sugarcane cutting and transporting labourers belonging to lowest as against, middle caste.

Broadly speaking such hierarchies also operate throughout Maharashtra. The caste composition of migrant Sugarcane cutters and transporting labourers is mainly made up of middle, lower, and lowest castes. This is shown in the following way; caste hierarchy found in Maharashtra is still operating through its own way of superior and inferior status in social life. This kind of experience is found at place where labourer's settlements are made. Dalits are kept at outside of settlements at factory site.

Accommodation Pattern

To understand the socio-economic situation of migrant labourers, it is very important to know the status of housing at native place. Minimum standard of housing is an important indicator of human development. Proper housing is the basic need of human being and at least, it need to be fulfilled. The situation of accommodation has been analyzed with reference to housing conditions at original place and caste composition of respondents. The qualities of the houses have been categorized on the basis of the situation at native place. The quality of accommodation has been divided into three categories such as kuccha house, semi-pucca, and pucca house. The income level and caste composition of labourers have shown close relationship.

The table II reveals housing situation of migrant labourers at their native. The housing conditions also indicate the standard of material life led by the migrant labourers. The present status of the housing shows that near about 60 per cent of the labourers are having *semi-pucca* houses. Thirty seven per cent of the respondents have pucca houses and 3.5 per cent of them live in kuccha houses at native and none is found homeless.

Educational Status

Education is regarded as an important asset for an individual as it provide the key to the understanding of the society and equip the individual to assert his rights and to claim due share from others. Education not only improves level of awareness and knowledge but also changes attitude and values, modernizes and since economic benefits and social prestige are derived from formal education, a place of respectability is given to education.

Education is an important sphere of well being that can be affected by migration and the livelihood outcome in its own right. Literature about education emphasizes its importance in terms of breaking the intergenerational transmission of poverty. With regard to migration, education may be an important determinant in accessing more positive migration streams. Through migration, individuals may be educated or skilled. Where migration is an accumulative strategy, not simply one of survival, future generations may benefit through investment in their education. Education can assist the development of critical consciousness, and expose individuals to different values and norms

Among the migrant labourers the literacy rate and the level of educational position indicate lower than average. The workforce in the sugar production, 49 per cent of them are illiterate and rest of them have primary and secondary, higher secondary as well as graduation level education. During the interview and discussion in the field, it is noticed that the labourers who have completed their graduation and higher secondary education are dissatisfied with the present utility of education. They were very critical about the job opportunities. They were abusing the social system and its employment market. They used to point out that only those who are capable of making payment (bribe) could get job. They showed their weak economic condition as a reason for accepting such manual work. They also showed their apathy towards education. They were found in confusion whether to send their children to the school for education.

Table III highlights the educational status of migrant labourers on caste wise basis. All labourers from Kumbhar and Telangi are found literate. Seventy-five per cent Chambhar are found literate. Almost seventy per cent Gujar labourers are found literate. More than fifty per cent Maratha are found illiterate and all other are found literate. Fifty per cent of Lamani and Mahar found illiterate. Forty-eight per cent Dhangar and Vanjari labourers are found literate. Overall literacy rate is not satisfactory.

Nature of Work

The land ownership pattern has close relation with the nature of work at native of the labourers. It is clear that all workers are from agricultural background. Some of them are owners of agricultural land, whereas some of them are landless agricultural labourers who work on wages at native. The details' regarding the nature of work at native is as follow:

Table IV highlights the general fact regarding caste composition and labour type at village. Majority of the labourers have their own land and they work on their own land, however some of them work as casual labourer on others farm. This is another composition factor of migrant labourers. Local class position of all castes at native indicates that a few migrant labourers households who do not possess

land work as casual labour on others farm, that is Mang (9), Mahar (8), Lamani (2), Bhil (2), Maratha (1), and Dhangar(1). Thus, it can be argued that the casual labour composition seems to be predominant among the Mang and the Mahar followed by the Lamani and the Bhil. It means landlessness can be the main push factor to go for earning the bread and butter for survival. In the case of those who have their own farms but do not have assured irrigation move out for leading life.

Household Annual Income

Income is one of the important indices of socio-economic status. Income of a person is related to the nature of his occupation. The mode of life or overall standard of life of people depend on it. Thus the income pattern of income is important for economic analysis of the people. It is really very difficult to know the actual income of the migrant labourers. Though, the household income pattern is important indicator of economic status of migrant labourers. The income pattern of the labourers shows that majority of the migrant labourers at native place are very poor and their income is very low. More than 60 per cent labourers' income is found lower than 25000 per annum. Out of total labourers only 3.5 per cent labourers earn Rs. 60000 in a year and 5.5 per cent labourers earn Rs. 50000 at native place. It means most of the labourers income is not upto their requirements. The family income of most of the lower castes labourers is less than the other migrant labourers.

Reasons for Migration

Although migration is often viewed as voluntary or forced, people do not always have a choice about migrating. In many situations, where the agricultural possibilities are declining or due to conflict or persecution, leaving is clearly not a choice but is result of the destruction of the economic, political and social infrastructure required for survival at native. Many a times, it is not possible to know the specific reasons of migration even if structural questionnaire is canvassed. At times the migration is caused by a mixture of reasons although apparently it may not be visible. Therefore, causes of migration as evident reported in the study can be regarded as probable causes. Asking direct question or leading question to extract the reasons of migration may not also serve the purpose. It is found that majority of the labourers have given different response:

Much of the labour force of seasonal migrant labourers is engaged on semi-permanent basis at destination. The prominent reason for migration is very difficult situation of employment in winter and summer at native places. Respondents overwhelmingly indicated that they left their districts of origin due to non availability of source of work for livelihood (58 per cent 116); followed by the non economic expenditure and underemployment (36 per cent 72). Because of

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absence of source of irrigation (about 6 per cent 12). Different caste labourers have given different causes for migration on the basis of socio-economic composition of labourers (see table V).

Findings and Conclusion

It is interesting to conclude that the seasonal migration of workers in the field of sugarcane in western Maharashtra is a well established phenomenon for almost five to six decade and it is result of the capitalist development of agriculture. The analysis of socio-economic background has helped to understand the background situation of migrant labourers. The caste composition of migrant labourers showed the middle-II caste is represented by the Maratha. The lower-middle-I castes consist of the Gujar, the Kumbhar and the Nhavi. The lower middle –IV castes are represented by the Vanjari, the Dhangar, the Hatkar and the Lamani. The lowest castes are represented by the Chambhar, the Mang, the Bhil, the Mahar and other is represented by Kasab (Muslim). The housing condition of the workers is great concern. Nearly half of the migrant sugarcane cutting and transporting (bullock cart) labourers are illiterate. Among the literates primary school education is larger than the secondary and higher secondary school. The land holding patterns indicated that about 50 per cent of migrant labourers have marginal level holding. A few middle and lower middle castes have high amount of landholding. This has facilitated to posses some means of production (bullock cart & oxen) which enhances their economic position. It reinforces with the findings of Guru 1989 [11] the socio-economic conditions of the seasonal migrants seem more or less same in Maharashtra.

The nature of work of migrant labourers at native place shows that majority of labourers work on their own farm. However, landless labourers and small landholders also work on others' farm as agricultural labourers. Mostly lower caste labourers work as casual labourers at native. Although indebtedness exists in the life of migrant, some of them did not disclose it. It is brought to the notice that the main reason for hiding the debt incurred is to safeguard the 'clean' image of the labourers among the working milieu. However, among indebted labourers most of them are away from formal credit system. They have taken loan from relatives and money lenders.

Annual income of the migrant labourers at native shows association between caste and income. It is seen that the higher middle castes have more income than lower castes. Annual income of labourers at native place is not adequate. Most of the weaker section labourers' income is below poverty line.

The main reasons for migration given by migrant labourers are the non availability of livelihood source at native, non-economic expenditure, absence of irrigation and good earning at destination. Majority of lower caste labourers have no proper livelihood source at native is the dominant reason.

It can be concluded from the above analysis that, the labourers have come from various backgrounds at native. Most of the labourers socio-economic conditions are found poor, and most of them are from weaker sections of society. There are two types of sugarcane cutting labourers such as cane cutters and bullock cart labourers. Bullock cart labourers' socio-economic status is found relatively better than cane cutters. The educational status of migrant labourers is found not satisfactory; most of the labourers are small marginal farmers. Some of them are land less labourers who work on others farm after crushing season is over. Most of the labourers migrate due to survival problem and some of them for them to improve economic and social status.

Acknowledgement

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Table I-Caste Category Composition of Migrant Workers

Caste	Caste Categories				Total
	Open	Scheduled Caste	Denotified/ Nomadic Tribes	Other Backward Class	
Maratha	59				59
Gujar				12	12
Kumbhar				3	3
Nhavi				2	2
Vanjari			18		18
Dhangar			18		18
Telangi			1		1
Hatkar			2		2
Lamani			10		10
Chambhar		5			5
Bhil		4			4
Mang		33			33
Mahar		31			31
Kasab(Muslim)				2	2
Total	59	73	49	19	200

Source: Field Data of author

Table II-Housing Pattern at Native

Caste	Housing Pattern at Native			Total
	Kuccha*	Semi pucca**	Pucca***	
Maratha	3	25	31	59
Gujar		5	7	12
Kumbhar		2	1	3
Nhavi		2		2
Vanjari		6	12	18
Dhangar		9	9	18
Telangi		1		1
Hatkar		1	1	2
Lamani	3	5	2	10
Chambhar		3	2	5
Bhil		4		4
Mang		31	2	33
Mahar	1	23	7	31
Kasab (Muslim)		2		2
Total	7	119	74	200

Source: Field Data of author

Table III- Educational Status and Caste Composition

Education	Maratha	Gujar	Kumbhar	Nhavi	Vanjari	Dhangar	Telangi	Hatkar	Lamani	Chambhar	Bhil	Mang	Mahar	Kasab (Muslim)	Total
Illiterate	30	3		2	8	10		1	6	1	4	17	15	1	98
Primary	16	6	1		2	5	1		3	3		10	8	1	56
Secondary	9	3	2		8	2				1		4	5		34
Higher Secondary	3					1		1	1			1	2		9
B.A	1											1	1		3
Total	59	12	3	2	18	18	1	2	10	5	4	33	31	2	200

Source: Field Data of author

Table IV- Nature of Work at Native Place

Caste	Casual Labour	Own Farm	Total
Maratha	1	58	59
Gujar		12	12
Kumbhar		3	3
Nhavi		2	2
Vanjari		18	18
Dhangar	1	17	18
Telangi		1	1
Hatkar		2	2
Lamani	2	8	10
Chambhar		5	5
Bhil	2	2	4
Mang	9	24	33
Mahar	8	23	31
Kasab (Muslim)		2	2
Total	23	177	200

Source: Field Data of author

Table V- Reasons for Migration

Reasons for Migration	Frequency	Percentage
Non economic expenditure and underemployment	72	36.0
No source of work for livelihood	116	58.0
Absence of source of irrigation	12	6.0
Total	200	100.0

Source: Field Data of author