

Seasonal Rural Migration: Quality of Life at Destination and Source

Prashant Bansode



**Gokhale Institute
of Politics and
Economics**

(Deemed to be University)
Pune - 411 004



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of Social Exclusion
and Inclusive Policy
(CSSE&IP)**

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A Study of Sugarcane Cutter Migrants

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Prashant Bansode

Preface

Migrant sugarcane cutter workers are a very important constituent of the rural economy of Maharashtra. Unfortunately, they are also one of its most neglected constituents when it comes to ensuring a decent livelihood and conditions of work and living. To a large extent, this is because sufficient attention has not been paid to this section in terms of academic understanding that could then help formulate policy. The current study is an important step in that direction. This study sets out to examine the quality of life of cane cutter workers at the place of work and compares it to the quality of life at the places from where the workers begin their migration. The study brings out the substantial decline in the quality of life that migrant cane cutter workers have to bear when they migrate in search of a livelihood. The important point that the study makes is that a large part of this deprivation is actually avoidable. Some remedies merely require more sensitivity from sugar-cane factories. For example, sugar cane factories could easily provide improved housing material as well as accessible water. On the other hand, some of the deprivations will require a wider policy change. For example, the study points out that cane cutter workers have no access to PDS at the destination source. This necessitates a re-look at the way food subsidy is provided in a country where a large number of poor are forced to regularly migrate. It might be necessary to examine methods of providing the food subsidy in a more direct fashion. It is also important to understand the manner in which assured employment under MNREGA helps or fails to help these workers.

In all, this is an important study and deserves to be taken seriously.

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Glossary

<i>Bajra</i>	बाजरी	a course cereal used for making a flat bread
<i>Chatai</i>	चटई	matting of bamboo, date, etc.
<i>Chimani</i>	चिमणी	a small lamp with a chimney
<i>Chul</i>	चूल	fireplace used for cooking
<i>Gabale</i>	गबाळे	disorderly and idiotic
<i>Ghaghar</i>	घागर	a vessel for holding water
<i>Ghamela</i>	घमेलं	a metal basin used for carrying soil, etc.
<i>Govari</i>	गोवरी	a cowdung cake used as a fuel
<i>Handa</i>	हंडा	an open mouthed vessel
<i>Jowar</i>	ज्वारी	a course cereal used for making a flat bread
<i>Kalshi</i>	कळशी	a metal pot
<i>Kandil</i>	कंदील	lantern
<i>Kapus</i>	कापूस	cotton
<i>Kardai</i>	करडई	safflower, safflower seeds (an oilseed)
<i>Kitli</i>	कितली	kettle
<i>Kopee</i>	कोपी	a structure in a field, of leafy branches, corn sheaves, etc.
<i>Math</i>	माठ	a round earthen jar
<i>Molee</i>	मोळी	faggot
<i>Mukadam</i>	मुकादम	labour contractor, headman of a group of labourers
<i>Nagari</i>	नागरी	one who belong to Ahmednagar district of Maharashtra
<i>Nullah</i>	नाला	rivulet
<i>Pachat</i>	पाचट	dry blades of sugarcane; squeezed sugarcanes
<i>Patela</i>	पातेलं	a vessel for cooking
<i>Patra / Patri</i>	पत्रा/पत्री	a sheet of metal
<i>Sarpan</i>	सरपण	firewood

<i>Sarwan</i>	सारवण	a cowdung-wash used for smearing the floor/wall
<i>Shengdana</i>	शेंगदाणा	groundnut
<i>Taluka</i>	तालुका	a division of the country smaller than the district/ zilla
<i>Tip</i>	टीप(<i>colloq.</i>) / <i>Pimp</i> पिंप	a cylindrical vessel for water/ drum
<i>Tyre gadi</i>	टायर गाडी	a bullock cart with rubber tyres
<i>Uchal</i>	उचल	money borrowed from a banker
<i>Usache dhaskat</i>	उसाचे धसकट	stubble, stub of the sugarcane
<i>Wade</i>	वाडे	leafy head of sugarcane

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Executive Summary

The present research on quality of life of seasonal migrants has brought out bitter facts. The quality of life of sugarcane cutter migrants deteriorates sharply at destination from the nominal quality of life at their source. Moreover their basic human rights stand violated at the destination. Seasonal migrants were found worse off on the parameters of quality of life on food intake, housing profile, medical and educational facilities. As far as the housing profile is concerned of the total 22 attributes of housing profile (which include quality/nature of house, electricity, fuel used for cooking and source of drinking water) on 18 attributes the destination was worse when compared with source.

The study further demystifies the fact that seasonal migrants make money. It was found that on an average the migrant household's monthly savings at destination was just Rs. 262 and for the entire season the savings were just Rs. 1546. Rather the study attest that seasonal migration for majority of migrants is predominantly a survival strategy i.e. coping mechanism, for few it is a source of additional income and some remain bonded due to debt.

These are the findings of a collaborative research study undertaken by the Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics, Pune and Janarth, Aurangabad a leading voluntary organization involved in marginalized communities including seasonal migrants.

Methodology and Sample

The present research uses both quantitative and qualitative analysis to describe the quality of life of sugarcane cutters at destination and source and to make a comparative analysis of the both. Altogether, 1689 migrant households were interviewed at destination sites. The sample covered ten factory sites out of 166 factories installed in Maharashtra. Out of these, nine belonged to co-operatives and one was a private factory. One each was selected from Gujarat and Karnataka. The same respondents were interviewed at their source villages after a gap of four months. At source, we were able to interview 1300 households in eleven *talukas* of Maharashtra. It was found that the addresses given by 389 families at destination had some errors which made it difficult to locate them at source. Therefore, the data of the source villages is based on the 1300 families interviewed.

Objectives of the study

The main objectives of the research were to:

- a) Offer a comparative analysis of the quality life at destination and source villages,
- b) To find out the reasons of migration,
- c) To find out whether the income from cutting and transporting sugarcane at destination helps to improve the quality of life at source,
- d) To determine the extent of exclusion from a good quality of life at both destination and source.

Nature of migration and social profile of migrants

From this sample it appears that the pattern of migration is mainly of three types - *inter-district*, *inter-state* and *intra-district*. The source villages are socially and economically backward regions of Maharashtra. In the sample at destination, 990 migrant families i.e. 59 % were from Beed, 180 (11%) from Ahmadnagar, 399 (24 %) from Dhule, 60 from Jalgaon and 56 from Nandurbar i.e. 3 % from each of the last two towns mentioned. The socio-economic categorization of these migrant families is as follows: Denotified Tribes 806 (48 % of the 1689 families), Open category 434 (26 %), Scheduled Tribes 357 (21 %), Scheduled Castes 74 (4 %) and OBC 16 (1 %).

Quality of life

Economists do not use GDP anymore as the only measure of quality of life and instead emphasise life satisfaction scores along with income as a measure of quality of life. For ascertaining the quality of life, the Economic Intelligence Unit's quality of life index study has taken nine factors into consideration including material wellbeing to compute life satisfaction scores. Since disparities in quality of life persist due to region, class, race, gender, caste, tribe, ethnic identity, etc. the segment wise analysis of quality of life need has arisen. The study by Bloom, Craig and Malaney on *The Quality of Life in Rural Asia* points out that there are regional disparities in the quality of life in different parts within countries such as urban and rural areas or even within rural areas though, in general, it may appear that the country as a whole has made progress on the quality of life. Therefore the present research is an attempt to describe quality of life of the sugarcane cutters who are seasonal migrants. In order to do so, the present research has considered availability of food, housing profile, medical and educational facilities available to the migrants as parameters of quality of life. This is because these parameters are the specific necessities of decent living conditions and human rights of seasonal migrants.

Comparison of quality of life

A comparative description of the various aspects of the lives of the seasonal migrant households on the basis of the data presented in the report is given below.

Availability of food

It was found that at destination 63 % of families are having three meals a day and 33 % take two meals a day while at source 77 % take three meals a day and 24 % take two meals a day. It was also observed that at destination 16% of the families may have to be without food once a week and 12%, twice a week, whereas this situation does not occur at source. This brings out the severity of deprivation of food intake at destination. At destination sites they compelled to buy food grains and essential commodities at market prices which increase their food expenditure. A big disadvantage at destination is lack of access to the PDS facility which is available for 95% families at their source. The root problem that migrants are facing is non-availability of PDS facility at destination.

Availability of water

It was found that only 35% of households got a tap water for drinking at destination. But even this minimal provision of single tap was for the entire settlement. However, majority of 65% of the households, have to depend on closets close to their settlement such as a public water storage tank, well, pond, river, stream, etc. Further, 41% of the migrants describe their source of water as being far away. For 24%, the source is nearby and for 35% it is within the premises of the settlement. At source, 68% of the families had a nearby and dependable 24-hour source of water in the form of well, hand pump or tap. Thus it clears that majority of the migrants are experiencing hardship due to uncertainty of drinking water sources at destination more than at source.

Medical Facilities

There is not much difference in regard to medical facilities available either at source or destination. The factory, government health care centres, private doctors and/or other home based/traditional remedies were available for migrants at destination and source. However, at destination when they cannot bear the expenses on their own and borrows money from *mukadams* it decreases their earnings and increases hardship.

Toilets/ bathrooms

At destination, toilets and bathroom facilities are totally absent for the migrants. They have to answer a nature's call in fields or in the open. At source also, except 4 per cent, most of the migrants have no toilet and bathroom facilities. Thus, no significant difference observed in this respect.

Housing profile

As far as housing is concerned the sugarcane cutters live in *kopees* (straw huts) in temporary settlements at destination near the sugar factories. These *kopees* are made of *chatai* and *pachat* i.e. matt/straw or/and dry tops of the sugarcane. They don't have adequate protection for person or property from the point of view of weather or security and, moreover, as being made of straw they are vulnerable to fire. Also, they are very small (both in height and space). The accommodation at destination has inadequate protection from nature and the lack of space makes it unsuitable for human living. The migrants reported that at destination they do not have electricity in their *kopees*. These and other undesirable attributes of the houses easily outnumber any good attributes they may have. Thus, the housing profile at destination is poor.

Generally, houses of the migrants at source are made of stones or un-burnt bricks, etc. and are of permanent structures. Approximately 49 per cent migrant households have electricity in their houses while 51 per cent migrants do not. The migrants' houses at source have a great number of desirable attributes comparing to their houses at destination.

The housing profile disparity index was calculated to quantify the difference between the housing attributes at source and at destination. The overall disparity was found to be -3.96. This shows that there is a substantial disparity between the housing at destination and source.

Education

There is no significant difference as far the education status concerned of the sugarcane cutter migrants at destination or source as it is low at both the places. The same is true with gender disparity in education status as it persists at higher levels of education at both destination and source. However, the most disturbing fact was, the children of school going age were deprived of education and instead were helping their families economically both at destination and at source. At destination within Maharashtra, an education facility in the form of the *Janarth Sakhar Shala* was available. However, if the workers migrate to other states, their children cannot continue schooling due to non availability /absence of Marathi medium schools.

The overall impression is that although conditions in source are not good while at destination the conditions are worst, hard, insecure and vulnerable.

Reasons for migration

It is true that there is no single reason for migration as the study also reveals variety and combinations of reasons for migration. The present research attests that indebtedness, economic hardship, unemployment and backwardness at source forces migration. At source the migrants' income-expenditure balance shows a high inclination towards indebtedness which naturally constitutes a reason for migration. The important reasons for migration as stated by the migrants are: unemployment - reported by 33 %, lack of water for agriculture- reported by 13 %, or landlessness- reported by 5 %, not enough land- 3 % and inability to repay loans/settle advance- reported by 1 % while the rest migrants have given combinations of these reasons for migration.

Income from sugarcane cutting and transporting

At destination, the average monthly income of the migrants from cutting and transporting sugarcane comes to Rs. 10,742. After adding earnings from other sources and deductions on expenditure towards maintenance of bullocks, etc and rent for the *kopees* the migrants' average monthly net incomes comes to Rs. 7,753 while at source it comes to Rs. 1,276 per month. We may infer that income at destination is 6 times as much as at source. Though the income gains are high at destination but after deductions i.e. advance to be repaid, expenditure on food and other household things it was found that the average savings of the migrants amounts merely Rs. 1,546 for the entire season.

Another important finding is that for 13 per cent of the migrants the current season income was above average, for 66 per cent it was average and for 20 per cent it was below average.

It was found that migrants spend advance on household and food expenses the savings from destination is just enough for coping with their indebtedness and poverty. Hence, it is clear that for the majority of migrants neither the advance nor the savings at destination contribute for betterment of lives at source. That only 8.8 per cent spend on agriculture and 2 per cent spend on constructing a house shows that very few are able to spend on improving their living conditions at source locations.

Therefore for 12/13 per cent migrants advance/savings are additional income, for 66 per cent it is survival strategy for coping with conditions of poverty and for the rest 22 per cent they are indebted to *mukadams* for the next sugar season. Thus seasonal migration for majority of migrants is predominantly a survival strategy i.e. coping mechanism, for few it is a source of additional income and some remain bonded due to debt.

Exclusion from a good quality of life

The sugar factories provide drinking water facility (by taps) and health care facility but it was either inadequate or was available only for the few migrants. They provide a common electric lamp at settlements, but there was no supply of electricity in their individual *kopees* except for a few i.e. 3 per cent of migrants. Also, the sugar factories do not provide land for the *kopees* except in few cases. They only provide bamboos and *chatai*. Most of the migrants prefer to stay near the place where water is available by paying Rs. 600 rent for land for the sugar season and besides this they have to give 5 *pendi wade* to landowners every day. Thus, by and large, the sugar factories deny the responsibility for the health, living conditions and survival of the migrants. These denials constitute the 'exclusion of migrants' from a decent quality of life.

Recommendations for inclusive policy:

There is a patent need for inclusive policy as far as human rights and quality of life issues are concerned. These may be enumerated in brief as follows:

- It is imperative to provide for the basic human needs of the migrant workers, on priority. These must include:
 - i. drinking water facility within easy reach of all,
 - ii. access to PDS facility at destination,
 - iii. Good housing material should be provided, at least for wall and roof, to give security and safety and there should be enough space for healthy living.
 - iv. toilet facilities and a bathroom inside the house or adjacent to the house.
 - v. Electricity should be provided to every house.
 - vi. Since the migrants often get minor injuries while cutting cane, i.e. cuts and wounds, mobile dispensaries could help them to use modern medical treatment for which they are able to spend time or money at present.
- As education is the only hope for further generations of migrant workers, satisfactory arrangements for the education of the migrants' children must be made. In short the RTE Act must be properly applied to the migrant workers' children, too.
- A head count of sugarcane cutters is a must to know the exact number of migrants. It is important for framing a social policy as well as for actual provision of all the facilities needed to meet the migrants' basic human needs and for all other welfare measures that may be provided.

Since the quality of life at destination deteriorates significantly than normal at source and the important human rights of migrants stands violated the inclusive policy incorporating the above recommendations and ensuring implementation of it is important for their dignified living. ■



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The Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics is one of the oldest research and training institutes in economics in the country. It was founded on the 6th of June 1930 with an endowment offered to the Servants of India Society by the late Rao Bahadur R.R. Kale, Member of the Legislative Council from Satara. The Servants of India Society, founded by the late Shri Gopal Krishna Gokhale, are the Trustees of the Institute. The Institute is registered under the Societies Registration Act, 1860, and the Bombay Public Trusts Act, 1950.

The object of the Institute is to conduct research into the economic and political problems of India and to train research workers in these subjects. Under the pioneering leadership of the late Professor D.R. Gadgil, its first Director, the Institute set the highest standards for quality research, teaching and training in a number of branches of economics.

Keeping in view the eminence of the faculty, the contribution the Institute has made in teaching, training and research in economics, the availability of physical infrastructure and the potential of the Institute, the Government of India, on the advice of the University Grants Commission, awarded to the Institute the status of a Deemed University on May 9, 1993, the birth anniversary of the late Shri Gopal Krishna Gokhale after whom the Institute is named. The National Assessment and Accreditation Council, after a review to satisfy itself of the merits of the Institute has, with effect from January 08, 2004, given its accreditation to the Institute with a grade of A+ (score 90-95%) for a period of five years.



**Centre for the Study
of Social Exclusion
and Inclusive Policy
(CSSE&IP)**

The Centre for the Study of Social Exclusion and Inclusive Policy (CSSE&IP) at the Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics (GIPE), Pune is a multi-disciplinary research centre established with the UGC grant in the year 2008 (Eleventh Plan) to carry out research and teaching in the areas of social exclusion, discriminatory studies and inclusive policy. The key objective of the Centre is to conceptualize and problematize discrimination, exclusion and inclusion based on caste, ethnicity and religion. The Centre proposes to focus on developing understanding of the nature and dynamics of social exclusion and discrimination at both theoretical and empirical levels.

The Centre also focuses on doing collaborative research/ other academic activities with NGOs working for the marginalized groups. The important objective of the Centre is to disseminate knowledge and sensitize on patterns of discrimination and exclusion to the public at large by holding public lecture series at the Institute.



Janarth is a Voluntary Organisation, active in Gangapur block and urbans of Aurangabad district, Maharashtra, since 1986. It is also a registered Charitable Society formed in the same year. It is headed by Shri. Pravin Mahajan. He is both the Executive Director and Secretary of the Society. Janarth was formed by a group of professionals from different fields, wanting to take up the challenge of bringing a perceivable change in the lives of people inhabiting backward regions.

Embodied in the logo of Janarth is “Freedom to Choose”. It is Janarth's belief that everyone has the freedom to choose his/her own road to development. As a group of professionals, its role is to bring an awareness of the sea of possibilities and development alternatives and bring them within the reach of the poorest.

The activities of Janarth vary from varying needs of the region; Women's Issues, Natural Resource Management, Education, Economic & Income generation, Rehabilitation of the Disabled, Warehousing & Marketing Assistance, are to name a few. The *Sakhar Shala* Project was another facet of Janarth which began in 2001 in Ahmednagar District. Since then Janarth has focussed on the rights of seasonal migrants with special emphasis on education of the migrant children.

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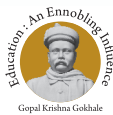
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