

Industrial Relations and Migrant Steel Workers of Mandi Gobindgarh, Punjab

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Abstract

With the advent of Green Revolution, increased mechanisation of agriculture resulted in the development of small-scale industry. Major industries developed, all of which used migrant labour. Being the cheapest source, every industry in Punjab prefers migrant labourers. Migrant labour has contributed substantially to the growth of Punjab. Yet these groups continue to labour under many severe problems, which rise mainly from the nature and manner of employment and economic relations that dominate migrant labour markets. Not only are they burdened with poverty but their nutritional levels are low, their bodies are weak and they are overwhelmingly illiterate. It is therefore imperative to ensure that the migrant is able to avail of the entitlements that Punjab provides for all its citizens. Based on the primary and secondary data, this paper is an attempt to study socioeconomic profile and welfare measures in respect of migrant steel workers.

Keywords: Migration, Profile of migrant steel workers, Industrial Relations, Problems.

Introduction

With increased mechanisation of agriculture, the Punjabi farmer no longer needed to work his own lands. After the Green Revolution, there was an accumulation of capital, which resulted in the development of small-scale industry. Major industries developed, all of which used migrant labour. Migrants have been coming to Punjab ever since opportunities in agriculture were created by the state's agricultural leap forward. The new agriculture created a new demand for labour, which was met by states across northern and central India. There also occurred a simultaneous growth in small manufacturing sectors. Large numbers of migrant labour poured in to meet the demand for factory hands, and to provide other services that were required in the growing and crowded industrial belt. Over time, migrant labour became institutionalized in Punjab and regular, long-term relationships between job providers and migrant labourers were established. By now, systems of migration have become regularised. Migrant labourers have not only become an integral part of Punjab's economy, but also important constituents of society.

Punjab has historically been associated with tremendous population movements both national and international and is considered economically better-off state than Bihar and U.P. And it is, thus, the obvious reason for the migration of these poor rural migrants to Punjab. Today Punjab is one of the most sought after destinations from poor backward states' unskilled rural population.

Migrants reach the state with varied intentions like working as seasonal labour or to settle in the state. These migrant workers' living/shelter arrangements are often extremely unhygienic with inadequate basic amenities. They pay for all their basic requirements of food, shelter, medical/health care and are generally left with/little savings, therefore, the debt cycle continues year after year. They are mostly illiterate and belong to younger age group and with large family size back home. Friends, relations and Influential people of their village employed in Punjab are generally instrumental in getting them migrated and finding the job. Regarding factors influencing migration from their state of origin are better prospects and regular employment, security of jobs, higher wage rate, better living condition etc. Along with those "Pull factors", the push factors include lack of employment, low wages, poverty, natural disasters, and indebtedness as also feudal power structure and associated social repression.

Though Migrant labour has contributed substantially to the growth of Punjab but yet these groups continue to labour under many severe problems, which rise mainly from the nature and manner of employment and economic relations that dominate migrant labour markets. Not only are they burdened with poverty but their nutritional levels are low, their bodies are weak and they are overwhelmingly illiterate. It is therefore imperative to ensure that the migrant is able to avail of the entitlements that Punjab provides for all its citizens. Ensuring decent working conditions and proper contract systems, providing basic health care for migrant families together with education opportunities should be primary concerns of the state.

Thus, with this an attempt has been made to explore the profile and industrial relations of migrant steel labourers in Mandi Gobindgarh, Punjab.

Data Base and Methodology

The study has been conducted in Steel town of Punjab that is, Mandi Gobindgarh, Punjab for the year 2013. This area has been purposively chosen as it is the largest steel market all over Asia and majority of the steel operations are performed by migrant labourers.

From this area, a simple random sampling technique was used to select five units where a sample of 10 workers from each mill was taken and thus, an aggregate sample of 50 workers- 23 local and 27 migrant- was selected. The primary data for the study have been mainly generated through a comprehensive questionnaire through personal interview method.

Main Findings of the Study

Characteristics of Migrant workers:

Place of Origin - It was revealed that out of 50 respondents (23 local and 27 migrant), 77.78% (21) of migrant workers belongs to U.P. and 22.22% (06) belonged to Bihar. The interesting feature that came into notice is that all the (100%) respondents were found to be from rural areas.

Survey reveals that 77.78% (21) of migrant workers have directly migrated to Mandi Gobindgarh (Punjab) while only 22.22% (06) of workers first migrated to other states and then to Mandi Gobindgarh (Punjab). This implies that majority of workers have come directly to Mandi Gobindgarh as their friends and relatives were already working here and they helped them to migrate and get employment. This indicates that rural to urban migration is the dominant pattern among the different patterns of migration.

Age at the time of migration- The Table 1 clarifies that 81.48% (22) migrated in the age group of 12-20 years followed by 14.82% (04) in the age group of 21-29 years and 03.70% (01) in the age group of 30- above years. It signifies that due to pull and push factors, the migrant labourers are forced to leave their native places during a relatively younger age.

Table 1: Distribution of respondents on the basis of different aspects of migration

Variables	Migrant Workers (n=27)
Place of Origin	
U.P.	21 (77.78)
Bihar	06 (22.22)
Total	27 (100)
Age at the time of Migration	
12-14	04 (14.82)
15-17	08 (29.63)
18-20	10 (37.03)
21-23	01 (03.70)
24-26	02 (07.41)
27-29	01 (03.70)
30- above	01 (03.70)
Total	27 (100)

Note: Figures within the bracket indicates percentage of the total respondents.

Age group at the time of survey- According to socio-economic profile (Table 2) of the respondents, migrant workers in the age group of 17-27 years constitute 44.45% (12) followed by 25.93% (07) in the age group of 28-38 years and workers in the age group of 39-49 years constitute 14.81% (04). However, the least number of workers that is 11.11 % (03) and 03.70% (01) falls in the categories of 50-60 years and 61- above years respectively. Thus majority of the migrants fall in the younger age group of 17-27 years because it is the preferred segment by the employers and also, this age group has to shoulder majority of social and demographic responsibility.

Gender- The distinguishing feature which came into notice is that all (100%) respondents are males. There is no single female worker in all the five units visited. This implies that female workers do not prefer to work in the rolling mills due to occupational hazards and work place stress and also, employers prefers male workers in order to achieve higher efficiency, economy of cost and other supplementary benefits. Therefore, women employment in this sector is almost negligible.

Marital Status- The majority that is, 77.78% (21) of migrant workers are married as shown in Table 2. This means that married workers are the main earners of their families.

Caste and Religion - By looking at caste wise distribution of respondents, majority of migrant workers that is, 37.04% (10) each belong to OBC and SC categories followed by 22.22% (06) to General category and 03.70% (01) to ST category. This means that majority of workers belong to SC and backward castes. Gill (2012)¹ also finds that labour both in rural and urban areas mostly belongs to SC, ST, OBC and minorities. As far as religion of the workers was concerned, all of the migrant workers (100%) belong to Hindu community

Education - Education is a crucial input for development as it enables a person to understand his surroundings and environment in particular and to acquire information for promotion of his or her interests. In other words, education is the backbone and foundation of getting a job and performing better in the job. The right to education has been described as basic human right. Education is known as the third eye of the human beings. A man without education is equal animal (Ghuman, Ukpere and Sethi, 2012)². Thus, education is the key that opens the doors of life.

From Table 2, the 37.04% (10) of migrant workers have education upto Middle level followed by 25.93% (07) with Matric level education and 14.81% (04) with Primary level education. The overall picture indicates that literacy level is low among migrant workers.

Table 2: Distribution of the respondents according to their social background

Variable	Migrant Workers (N= 27)
Age	
17-27	12 (44.45)
28-38	07 (25.93)
39-49	04 (14.81)
50-60	03 (11.11)
61-above	01 (03.70)
Total	27 (100)
Marital Status	
Married	21 (77.78)
Unmarried	06 (22.22)
Total	27 (100)

¹ Gill, Sucha Singh (2012), "Distribution of Income and Share of Wages in India: Labour under a Globalised economy", *Indian Journal of Labour Economics*, Vol. 55 (1), January-March.

² Sethi, Saurabh, Ghuman, Ranjit Singh and Wilfred Isioma Ukpere (2010), "Socio-economic analysis of the migrant labourers in Punjab: An empirical analysis", *African Journal of Business Management*, Vol. 4(10), pp. 2042-2050, 18 August.

Caste	
General	06 (22.22)
OBC	10 (37.04)
SC	10 (37.04)
ST	01 (03.70)
Total	27 (100)
Religion	
Hindu	27 (100)
Muslim	00
Sikh	00
Total	27 (100)
Education	
Illiterate	06 (22.22)
Primary	04 (14.81)
Middle	10 (37.04)
Matric	07 (25.93)
Total	27 (100)

Note: Figures within the bracket indicates percentage of the total respondents

Family size – Table 3 shows that majority of the migrant workers (33.33%) have family size in the range of 3 to 4 followed by 29.63% have in the range of 5 to 6, 25.93% in the range of 7 to 8, 7.41% (02) in the range of 11-above and 3.70% (01) in the range of 9 to 10.

Pattern of living- The 33.33% of migrant workers live among group of workers followed by 29.63% (08) living alone and 22.22% (14) live with their families. Only 14.82% (04) of migrant workers lives with their relatives. Also, it can be seen migrant workers collectively take a room/house on rent and share the rent, simply aiming to save money. Results show that 55.55% of migrant workers share room with 1 to 5 people while 44.45% donot share. Those workers who do not share accommodation imply that either they are paying rent or they live in the mill quarters provided by the employer. Nevertheless, collective living is mainly due to economic reason: cost cutting. Of course, the sense of security and community feeling are other important reasons behind such a tendency of living together.

Monthly Rent - Table 3 shows majority of the migrant workers that is 77.78% (21) pays monthly rent as against 22.22% (06).

Table 3: Distribution of Respondents on the basis of their household characteristics

Variables	Migrant Workers (n=27)
Family Size	
1-2	0
3-4	09 (33.33)
5-6	08 (29.63)
7-8	07 (25.93)
9-10	01 (03.70)
11- above	02 (07.41)
Total	27 (100)
Pattern of Living	
Alone	08 (29.63)
Family	06 (22.22)
Relatives	04 (14.82)
Other workers	09 (33.33)

Total	27 (100)
Sharing Accommodation	
0	12 (44.45)
1	03 (11.11)
2	03 (11.11)
3	05 (18.52)
4	01 (03.70)
5	03 (11.11)
Total	27 (100)
Monthly Rent	
Do not pay rent	06 (22.22)
Pays rent	21 (77.78)

Note: Figures within the bracket indicates percentage of the total respondent

Table 4: Distribution of respondents by Remittance:

Variable	Migrant Workers
Monthly Income	
Average Monthly Income	6575
Monthly Expenditure	
Average monthly Expenditure	3681
Monthly Savings	
Average Monthly Savings	2894
Monthly Remittances	
0	05 (18.52)
Upto 2000	12 (44.44)
2001-4000	07 (25.93)
4001-6000	01 (03.70)
6001-above	02 (07.41)
Total	27 (100)
Average Monthly Remittances	2157.40

Note: Figures within the bracket indicates percentage of the total respondent

Monthly Remittances:

Remittances refer to transfer of money by worker (migrant worker) to his or her native place. It is treated as means of meeting the social obligations of migrants towards their aged parents and other family members. Table 4 reveals that the average monthly remittances turned out to be Rs. 2157.40. This implies that migrant workers save a portion from their income and remit these savings. From the above it is observed that on an average, monthly savings of migrant worker is Rs. 2894, out of which, he remits Rs. 2158 to his native place. This means after remitting back also, he is able to save Rs. 736 monthly.

Thus, it is revealed that remittances have short as well as long term impact. The short term impact of remittance is an increase in household's income. It undeniably boosts consumption levels, investment and economic activities within the community. On the other hand, the long term impact is that, an improved economy and society would lead to increase in autonomy and decrease in dependence on external sources of income.

Therefore, remittances sent home by workers play a significant role not only to the individual migrant but also to their families, communities and the country.

Industrial Relations:

Working Conditions

Working conditions refer to the working environment and all existing circumstances affecting labour at the workplace, including job hours, physical aspect, legal rights and responsibilities.

Hours of Work, Rest Interval and Working Shifts

The Factories Act, 1948 provides that normally an adult worker shall not be allowed to work for more than 9 hours in a day and 48 hours in a week. As regards rest interval, the Act stipulates that no worker shall work for more than 5 hours before he has rest interval of at least half an hour.

Table 5 shows that 100% (27) of migrant workers works for 8 hours per day. This implies that normal work week is 40 hours that is, 8 hours a day and five days a week. The data reveals that all the workers are provided with half to one hour rest interval. Workers often work in rotating shifts like day, afternoon and night but as these units are small scale units and due to lack of facilities available to them, these units work in day only from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. thereby employing workers only for day shift.

Overtime

As per the law, no adult worker shall ordinarily be required or allowed to work in an establishment for more than 8 hours a day. Overtime work is an advantageous and an extra earning source for rolling mill workers. Table 5 reveals that 55.56% (15) of migrant workers do not do overtime. On the other hand, 44.44% (12) of migrant workers do overtime for upto 3 hours. It implies that majority of the migrant workers do overtime in order to earn extra income because their family size is bigger. Also, majority of migrant workers live alone that is, without families so, in order to utilize spare time they do overtime.

Table 5: Distribution of respondents on the basis of working hours and overtime

Variable	Migrant Workers
No of Man Hours Per Day	
8hours	27 (100)
Total	27
Overtime Work Hours	
No overtime	15 (55.56)
1 hour	02 (07.41)
2 hours	09 (33.33)
3 hours and above	01(03.70)
Total	27

Source: Field Survey, 2013

Leaves and Holidays

There are different kinds of leaves i.e. casual leave, medical leave, privileged leave and earned leave. It has been observed that there is provision of only medical. Nevertheless, weekly off is there.

Generally there are three types of holidays which are granted to workers in industry. These are statutory holidays, Festival holidays and National holidays. It has been observed that as per the norms, in a year total of 20 holidays including national and festival holidays are being provided to its workers in each unit taken as sample for study.

Welfare facilities

Welfare connotes a condition of well being, happiness, satisfaction, conservation and development of human resources. It has been observed that basic facilities provided at work place were not of the desired level. Drinking water facilities existed in all the units surveyed while majority of the units had provided latrines, washing facilities and rest shelters to their workers. Transport, canteen (free meal) facilities were non-existent in all the five units.

The standard of cleanliness was not satisfactory in all the units surveyed whereas, the standard of safety provisions was observed to be satisfactory. Every worker was provided with protective clothing made of jute, safety shoes, gloves and goggles while working within the premises. But it has been observed that most of the workers do not prefer to wear safety despite being known that they will be harmed by the hazardous environment. Thus, carelessness of workers in this aspect has been reported during the survey.

Social security

According to ILO, Social Security is the security that furnishes against certain risks to which its members are exposed. Social security is an end by itself and it includes: Social insurance and Social assistance.

Provident Fund Schemes

The EPF is a scheme intended to help employees save a fraction of their salary every month in a saving scheme, to be used in an event that the employee is temporarily or no longer fit to work or at retirement.

During the course of survey it was found that every worker was covered under the Employees Provident Fund scheme. The rate of contribution and eligibility conditions were as per the Act i.e., 12% of their wage should be deposited in EPF and the owner is liable to deposit 12% for him.

Pension, Gratuity and Accident Insurance

There is no provision of pension to the workers working in the sampled mills.

The payment of gratuity act is applicable to factories, plantation, shops and establishments, mines, oil fields, ports etc., which employ 10 or more employees. Moreover, a continuous service of five years or more with one employer is also essential to be eligible for gratuity benefit.

It is observed that the labourers if work for one year they should avail services for 15 days in the shape of money at the time of their retrenchment and if they work for more than 5 years they get gratuity for 15 days in every year.

Provision of accident insurance is there in all the 5 units covered but it is not satisfactory. It has been reported that, if some accident occurs within the mill only then compensation is provided to the worker and employer provides medical treatment from the private practitioner.

Maternity Benefits

No unit in the sample was employing women therefore, the question of maternity benefits could not be considered.

Medical care

ESI Act, 1948 provides medical benefits, sickness benefits, maternity benefits, disablements benefits and dependents benefits in case of sickness and employment injury.

It has been observed that all workers are covered under ESI scheme. Under ESI scheme, 1.75% is deducted from workers pay while employer is liable to deposit 4.75% in worker's account. The workers generally preferred government clinics, district hospitals, ESI hospitals, private practitioners and private hospitals. It has been observed that free medical facilities offered by the government clinics attract workers but in reality, services offered are not satisfactory. So, workers prefer to seek better treatment from private medical practitioners even at higher cost.

Housing Accommodation

Housing is the primary need of a worker. It constitutes the most important part of the physical environment which continuously influences the health and well being of a worker. Provision of shelter is therefore, regarded as one of the most important of the social need.

But only 14.81% (04) of migrant workers avail these facilities while others live with their relatives or have rented accommodation. This implies that only few workers avail this facility because employers provide the accommodation

within the units in the shape of godowns or single-congested rooms with no basic facilities. Also, they are made to share accommodation with 2-3 co-workers (as mentioned in Table: 3). So, the migrant worker prefers to live with relatives or in the rented house.

Grievance Redressed Procedure

It has been observed that worker's complaints were initially received and heard by the contractor or site in-charge and appeals were heard by the mill owner in all the units covered.

Work environment

Work environment means your surroundings at your place of occupation. It also refers to a sort of mental state while on the job. It includes other factors relating to the place of employment, such as the quality of the air, noise level, and additional perks and benefits of employment etc.

Working in steel units involves physical accident and blows, muscular and nervous strain, monotony, noise, unhealthy dust and air, which diminish and dampen workers efficiency. Long hours of work and poor working condition render them inefficient and make them physiologically unwilling to work.

The main environmental factors at the workplace are ventilation, temperature, noise and smell. Standard of ventilation is satisfactory as workers work in open area in the mill.

Reasonable Heat / Temperature at work place is an essential working condition. It has been observed that area near the bhatti's is extremely hot in summers and winters. For this, a special provision of fans is provided to every worker working near bhatti's.

Noise has also adverse effect on work efficiency of the workers. In mills, blasting, drilling and breaking the big pieces into small creates noise. Movement of transported vehicle also creates noise. This noise effect is of long run effect with diseases like, hard hearing and dumpness. It is reported that since, workers work regularly in the mill so, the gravity of noise is not felt by them as compared to the person who visits there for the first time.

Effect of Smell is dangerous one. Smell of dust, carbon monoxide through transportation etc affect the respiratory system of the workers in the mills. All workers are working in an unpleasant smelling condition. It implies that the smell in the mills have a disastrous repercussion on the workers health. Generally at the end of the service period workers are affected with diseases in respiratory system i.e. diseases of lungs and heart.

Posture of work in mills hampers the productivity of labour. Instability in workplace, working in continuous standing position for longer hours makes the job strenuous. This also leads to decrease in health condition. Hence, the jobs of steel mills are tedious and restless. During small stint of rest, the rest pause is not enough in taking lunch and tea is not sufficient for them. Overall we can say that posture of work in steel mills dampen the productivity of the workers.

Factors responsible for Migration

It has been observed that all of the sampled migrant workers migrated to Mandi Gobindgarh, Punjab due to social, economic and psychological factors. Social factors include less civic amenities; economic factors include push factors viz; poverty, low wage rate, unemployment at their native place and pull factors viz; better employment opportunities, high wage rates and better income and other facilities and psychological factors include poor life. All these factors lead to migration.

Problems faced by Migrant labourers

Migrant workers are the highly disadvantaged group due to number of problems faced by them. Unhygienic living conditions have led to deplorable living conditions which have increased the health hazards of migrant workers making them more susceptible to diseases and infection. Majority of the workers live without their families and donot possess assets which have led to social isolation .Lack of basic amenities available to the workers is another major problem faced by them. Since, they are conscious about ground reality in their parent states, where they would not be in position to get remunerative job. Hence, they have no choice but to continue.

Recommendations

The main policy implications and recommendations on the basis of analysis and field observations are as follows:

Education level is very low, they work at lower positions due to their poor productivity. Hence, they get poor wages and they cannot claim for more. If education level of workers is improved then their productivity will increase and they will be able to perform better and earn more. For educational development, the mill owners and government should establish educational institutes and training centers to make them educated about different rules and regulations as well as make them aware of their responsibilities.

Wages and salaries are not sufficient to lead a decent life, it may be hiked.

As the main reasons behind migration are unemployment and poverty, there is an urgent need to find out ways and means to supplement their incomes at their native places. It is very crucial to create employment opportunities in their native places.

It is also suggested that steps have to be taken by the mills to implement various voluntary welfare facilities such as educational facilities to the children of the workers, medical facilities to the family members of the workers, recreational and entertainment facilities etc., In addition to that the mills have to strictly implement the provisions of various Acts and Laws which have been implemented for the purpose of protecting the interests of the workers at the work place. The benefits derived by the workers because of such voluntary welfare facilities and statutory facilities offered by the mills will increase the satisfaction of the workers on the Working Conditions in the mills.

The mills should take steps for the improvement of these basic facilities at the work place. It has been suggested that the mills have to take positive steps for provision of better toilet facilities to the workers in the mills. The toilets in the mills have to be cleaned at regular intervals and adequate quantity of water has to be supplied for the toilets. There should be provision for safe and clean housing facilities with proper sanitation and water for the workers. By providing better lighting, ventilation, cleanliness and proper toilet facilities at the work place, the extent of satisfaction of the workers on the Working Conditions can be improved.

There is also a need to evolve some institutional mechanism to protect the migrant labourer from the discrimination and ill-treatment they face at working place and also in the society. Their living conditions also need to be improved. Most of the migratory workers, sometimes hesitate to visit their families because of transport expenses. The railways may evolve some policy to issue a concessional ticket, may be twice a year, so that they may feel encouraged to visit their close relatives at their native place. It is the duty of our state and central government to aware these migrant labourers of the drawbacks pertaining from the consumption of intoxicants like bidi, tobacco etc. There is no doubt that our central government has got a lot of success and positive response with the implementation of NREGA in our country but there is a dire need of these kind of some more policies. Since, all the migrant labourers are working in the unorganized sector, the government must take some policy initiatives to improve their socio-economic conditions and also introduce some social security measures.

Conclusion

The steel sector in Mandi Gobindgarh contributes to the development of the country in general and to the development of Punjab in particular. Due to participation in this income generating sector, the life and status of steel workers in the society got upgraded. However, largely, the condition of migrant steel workers is very frustrating. They face various crises and the print media had written many reports had aired many pathetic stories on their low wages, unfriendly working environment, health issues, nutrition, insurance, etc. but feeble measures have been taken so far to address these problems. Overall, these problems are hampering the production and environment of the steel sector and if these obstacles are not removed, the sector may be affected more and more in the coming days. Last but not the least, steel workers, who are the major workforce behind this sector, must be recognized properly and concrete ideas and their implementation

should come to lessen the plight of them. Unless and until the basic rights of the workers are ensured, it may not be expected that this sector will achieve its desired goal. If the recommended measures are implemented then it may improve the present situation and the workers and owners may achieve their goal.

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