

Migrant Labour and Industrial Work Environment: A Relationship Vital to National development

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ABSTRACT

The present paper focuses on the work environment, which is the core of employment relationship, faced by the migrant labourers that work in the industrial units of Ludhiana, also known as 'Manchester of India'. Despite their unquestionable vital role in the economic growth of the city, especially the secondary sector, many of the migrant labourers inhospitable work environment as they are made to work for more than the stipulated time, not paid for the overtime work, not provided with safe work environment, face health issues due hazardous work, do not get work according to choice, employed as temporary labour, and discriminated during the routine work and at the time of payment of wages. Though dissatisfied with the workplace, these labourers are change averse for they put up with the existing work conditions and prefer to get employed again at the same place of work. This clearly points to the fact that these labourers are helpless, neglected, exploited and discriminated to which they wilfully accept for being financially depressed. There is a dire need to preserve the interests of the migrants to ensure a flourishing homogeneous social and economic environment.

Keywords: Migrant labour, work environment, work conditions, plight of migrants, manchester of India.

Labour migration is a complex phenomenon that differs in duration, origin, destination and migrant characteristics. Migration of individuals in search of superior livelihoods is a key feature of human history. Due to inability of the native place to meet the needs, the individuals are forced to either to accept a life of low standards of living or to migrate to areas with sound opportunities, usually the urban or developed rural areas. Most of the labourers migrating from the rural areas of different states comprise of landless agricultural labourers, casual labourers and very small proportion of cultivators who earn their livelihood through wage employment (Singh, 1974).

Migration has become a way of life in rural India. It acts as a lifeline for people from the regions that face frequent shortage of rainfall or suffer floods, or where population densities are high in relation to land. Areas facing unresolved social or political conflict also become prone to high outmigration. Poverty, lack of local options and the availability of steady work in other locations become the forces that

push for rural out-migration. Circular and seasonal migration is a part of livelihood portfolio, especially in rural India. The migrants maintain close links with their areas of origin where they return regularly and remit substantial part of their incomes (Rani and Shylendra, 2001). Rural to urban migration is both cause and effect of social and economic change in response to regional economic development, urbanization and industrialization (Bisht and Tiwari, 1997). While some regions and sectors fall behind in their capacity to support populations, others move ahead and attract migration to encash the emerging opportunities. Industrialization has widened the gap between rural and urban areas that induces a shift of the workforce towards these areas.

Migration brings along variable socio-economic impact on migrants and their families. The rural out-migration has been playing an active role in economic development, urbanization and industrialization both in developed and underdeveloped countries (Sharma, 1991). The benefits reaped during the

initial years are low which increase steadily with the passage of time. However, excessive rural-urban migration leads to excessive urban unemployment and under-employment. Many of the researchers share the view that migrant labourers tend to get employed in better paid jobs as compared to their non-migrant counterparts at the place of origin. Also, the proportion of migrants in the productive sectors like manufacturing and services is higher than that of locals (Mehta, 1996). Migration leads to improvement in socio-economic conditions, cultural and environmental status, availability of physical and social infrastructure, and improvement of status of a country as a whole through interaction of labour supply and demand conditions (Mehta, 1991). At destination, migrant labour affect markets by lowering the cost of labour due to increased supply, which reduces the cost of production. Migrant earnings affect income, expenditure and investment patterns, and changes relations at household and community levels. Though individuals migrate for different reasons but the goals are not equally attained by all. People who are more competitive, more educated and possess better skills tend to achieve their goals and improve their economic conditions. Since the people who migrate do better economically than their non-migrant counterparts, the economic status of existing migrants attracts more migration (Long and Heltman, 1975).

Migrating and adjusting at a new destination place is not a smooth process. Devoid of critical skills, information and bargaining power, migrant workers often fall prey to exploitative informal labour arrangements. They are forced to work in low-end, low-value jobs, and perform hazardous work. Due to lack of credible proof of identity and with poor legal protection, migrant workers become easy victims to non-payment of wages and grim work conditions. Various policies have failed to provide legal or social protection to this vulnerable group. In a state of continuous drift, migrants are often ignored in state provisions at both ends – their homes as well as their workplace. Though they are the support system for any economic sector, the urban labour markets exhibit opportunistic indifference towards them. Though they are demanded to work hard but are denied basic entitlements such as decent shelter, fair-priced food, subsidized health services, training and education. The contribution of migrant workers

to national income is enormous but little is done for their security and well-being.

The focus of present study is on one of the most perplexing dilemmas of development, i.e., migration. The study concentrates on the industrial migrant labourers working in the industries of the Manchester of India, i.e., Ludhiana. Migrants are playing a vital role in the growth of both agricultural and industrial sector of the state. Every fourth person in the city is a migrant from neighbouring states (Singh et al., 2003). On one hand migration is assisting in reducing cost of production by lowering the wages, improving labour productivity by reducing inter-regional demand-supply gaps and also helping the city fight the problem of shortage of local labour; and on the other it ameliorates the economic position of migrants, helps them learn new skills and new cultural traits. However, it is posing a threat to both employment and survival of the locals. The migrants provide a competition to local labourers as the supply of labour is being increased as compared to the demand of labour and thus, making their wages cheap in almost all the sectors of Punjab as the labour supply has become more elastic (Singh et al., 2003). Thus, the dilemma is that though these migrants are a vital organ in boosting the economic health of an economy, they are unwelcomed by their local counterparts for being a threat to their livelihood. Though competition is never bad, but there is a need to carefully cater to the issues of the migrants and locals, and safeguard and facilitate migration in order to create a compatible work environment for both the locals and migrants.

Objective

The objective of the current study is to analyse the work environment of industrial migrant labourers working in the small and medium/large industrial units of Ludhiana city.

Research Methodology

A total of 500 industrial migrant labourers were surveyed from the small and medium/large scale industrial units of the hosiery and knitwear and cycle and cycle parts industries in Ludhiana city. Primary data was collected through structured questionnaire to record observations of the respondents; and the secondary data for industries was collected from District Industries Centre (2008-09).

Results and Discussions

The type of employment a migrant gets at the place of destination helps in deciding whether he would settle down or would migrate further. The level of social and economic satisfaction determines whether the reasons for which one migrated have been satisfied or not. Not only remuneration but work environment, which includes type and nature of job, working hours, etc., also play an important role in determining satisfaction of migrants. Migration often involves longer working hours, poor living and working conditions, social isolation and poor access to basic amenities. Various aspects related to work of the industrial migrant labourers in Ludhiana city that were highlighted during the study are as follows:

(i) Daily Working Hours

A labourer should not be forced to work for more than eight hours as per the labour law. However, a labourer can work overtime according to his will or as and when demanded for which he gets an extra remuneration. Table 1 exhibits that about 82 per cent of the industrial migrant labourers from the total industrial units had been working for 8 hours a day, whereas the percentage of those that had been working for more than 8 hours, the extra hours not being accounted as overtime, from the total industrial units was 18.20. The percentages of the migrants from small and medium/large industrial units that were made to work overtime without being paid for were 18.21 and 18.18 respectively. In other words, these labourers were subjected to more work without being paid for the same. This highlights the plight of these labourers who did not quit the job even though they were forced to work without getting any remuneration for the same.

(ii) Particulars of Work

Among the important driving forces for labourers to work are getting work according to their choice and the nature of work they do. Table 2 shows that as many as 71.60 per cent of the total industrial migrant labourers from the total industrial units in the city, 71.03 per cent from small and 73.64 per cent from medium/large scale industrial units were performing a job as per their choice of work, while 28.97 per cent and 26.36 per cent of these labourers from the respective industrial units did not have the privilege to do the same. The study highlights that though majority of the industrial migrant labourers managed to get work according to their choice but still some of them did not. This simply indicates the desperation, eagerness and helplessness, of many of the migrants, to earn money as they were working even when given a work not of their choice. The table further shows the distribution of industrial migrant labourers according to nature of work, i.e., whether their job was permanent or temporary in nature. On the whole, 77.40 per cent of the industrial migrant labourers from total small and medium/large scale industrial units were permanent labourers. The percentages of temporary migrant labourers from total, small and medium/large scale industrial units were 22.60, 23.59 and 19.09 per cent respectively. The fact that not all the migrants in these units were permanent, speaks low about the nature of employment, working conditions, behaviour of employer, facilities in the industrial units and thus, low job satisfaction of all the labourers put together working in these industrial units.

The distribution of industrial migrant labourers according to assignment of work as per their skill is also shown in the table which reflects the capability of these labourers to do work they were assigned to do. The association between size of industrial units

Table 1. Distribution of Industrial Migrant Labourers according to Daily Working Hours

Daily working hours	Small		Medium/large		Total		Chi-square value
	No.	Percentage	No.	Percentage	No.	Percentage	Small v/s Medium/large
8 hrs.	319	81.79	90	81.82	409	81.80	0.01
More than 8 hrs.	71	18.21	20	18.18	91	18.20	

Source: Field Survey, 2008-09

Table 2. Distribution of Industrial Migrant Labourers according to Particulars of Work

Status	Small		Medium/large		Total		Chi-square value
	No.	Percentage	No.	Percentage	No.	Percentage	Small v/s Medium/large
(i) Choice of work							
C. Total							0.29
Yes	277	71.03	81	73.64	358	71.60	
No	113	28.97	29	26.36	142	28.40	
(ii) Nature of work							
Permanent	298	76.41	89	80.91	387	77.40	0.99
Temporary	92	23.59	21	19.09	113	22.60	
(iii) Work according to skill							
Yes	374	95.90	110	100.00	484	96.80	4.66**
No	16	4.10	0	0.00	16	3.20	

Source: Field Survey, 2008-09

Note: ** Significant at 5 per cent

and working of industrial migrant labourers according to their skills was significant as indicated by chi-square value of 4.66. It was of higher significance in the case of medium/large scale industrial units as all the labourers working in them expressed to have been assigned work according to their skills as compared to 95.90 per cent of these labourers from the small scale industrial units.

The fact that majority of the labourers were working according to the skills they possessed exhibits good capability of these labourers to find a job according to their skills and personal satisfaction thereof. However, a small percentage of industrial migrant labourers felt that they were not working according to their skills and were dissatisfied as they believed to have better and more skills as required for the job. The 100.00 per cent response in favour of medium/large scale units shows better human resource management and better understanding of the migrant labourers which also leads to job satisfaction and contentment.

(iii) Particulars of Overtime Work

Poor migrants have very little bargaining power. Also, most migrant labourers are employed in the unorganized sector, where the lack of regulation compounds their vulnerability. The motivation to do anything or to exert more to achieve the set target comes from the fact that an individual gets a suitable reward or return according to the work he does. A very common way of earning more money by the

industrial migrant labourers is to work overtime. Also, another source of motivation apart from earning more money is the extra benefits they get like tea, snacks, meals, etc. during the overtime hours.

Table 3 shows that 27.69 per cent and 51.82 per cent of the industrial migrant labourers from small scale and medium/large scale industrial units respectively, were working overtime. There was a significant difference between the size of industrial units and overtime work undertaken as shown by the chi-square value of 22.59. The percentages of industrial migrant labourers from small scale industrial units that were working for less than 2 hours, 2 to 4 hours and more than 4 hours of overtime were 16.67, 7.69 and 3.33 respectively. The percentages of these labourers from the medium/large scale industrial units were 18.18, 31.82 and 1.82 respectively. The distribution of industrial migrant labourers according to wages they get for overtime hours of work is also presented in the table. It was observed that on the whole, all the industrial migrant labourers from small scales industrial units got wages for the overtime work as compared to 64.91 per cent of these labourers from medium/large scale industrial units. The association between size of industrial units and payment of wages for overtime work was significant as indicated by the chi-square value of 43.12. The study exhibits better remunerating environment in the small scale industrial units as all the industrial migrant labourers working in them were paid wages for overtime.

Table 3. Distribution of Industrial Migrant Labourers according to Particulars of Overtime Work

Status	Small		Medium/large		Total		Chi-square value
	No.	Percentage	No.	Percentage	No.	Percentage	Small v/s Large/ Medium
(i) Working overtime							
Yes	108	27.69	57	51.82	165	33.00	22.59***
No	282	72.31	53	48.18	335	67.00	
(ii) No. of hours of overtime							
Nil	282	72.31	53	48.18	335	67.00	
Less than 2 hrs	65	16.67	20	18.18	85	17.00	
2-4 hrs	30	7.69	35	31.82	65	13.00	
More than 4 hrs	13	3.33	2	1.82	15	3.00	
(iii) Wages for overtime							
Yes	108	100.00	37	64.91	145	87.88	43.12***
No	0	0.00	20	35.09	20	12.12	

Source: Field Survey, 2008-09

Note: *** Significant at 1 per cent

(iv) Health and Safety Measures

Monetary factors attract labourers for a particular work. However, in the long run monetary factors are not the sole determinants of employment, but there are other factors which influence the same. One of these factors is health and safety of the labourers at the work place. If the working conditions pose a threat to their health or safety then monetary factors become secondary. However, the degree of threat varies and so does the decision to stay or leave a particular job. As much as 25.13 and 23.64 per cent of these labourers from small scale and medium/large scale industrial units respectively, reported that their health was being affected by working at the respective

industrial units (Table 4). However, the association between size of industrial units and effect on health of the industrial migrant labourers by working in the respective industrial units was not significant. More of the industrial migrant labourers from total small scale industrial units felt that their health was being affected as compared to industrial migrant labourers from total medium/large scale units. This shows that working conditions in the small scale industrial units were in a worse state as compared to medium/large scale units. It also reflects the poor condition of industrial migrant labourers who were working in the respective industrial units despite of their health being affected.

Table 4. Distribution of Industrial Migrant Labourers according to Effect on Health and Safety Measures thereof

Status	Small		Medium/large		Total		Chi-square value
	No.	Percentage	No.	Percentage	No.	Percentage	Small v/s Medium/large
(i) Health being affected at work place							
Yes	98	25.13	26	23.64	124	24.80	0.10
No	292	74.87	84	76.36	376	75.20	
(ii) Safety measures at work place							
Yes	217	55.64	80	72.73	297	59.40	10.39***
No	173	44.36	30	27.27	203	40.60	

Source: Field Survey, 2008-09

Note: *** Significant at 1 per cent

Further, Table 4 shows provision of safety measures in factory premises available for labourers. It was found that 55.64 per cent and 72.73 per cent of the industrial migrant labourers from the total small scale and medium/large scale industrial units reported that they were provided with safety measures and also explained the way to make use of them, while 44.36 per cent and 27.27 per cent respectively did not have any safety provisions at work. The chi-square value of 10.39 indicates a significant relationship between size of industrial units and provision of safety measures. This indicates that the working conditions in the medium/large scale industrial units were better than the small scale industrial units.

(v) Provisions of Facilities in Factory Premises

Apart from the remuneration, extra benefits and facilities in real terms make working comfortable and thus, create a likeable work environment. The study shows that as many as 27.27 per cent of the industrial migrant labourers from medium/large scale industrial units reported that there was a canteen/mess facility in factory premises whereas, there was no canteen or mess facility in any of the small scale industrial unit (Table 5). The overall association between size of industrial units and availability of canteen/mess facility was significant as indicated by the chi-square value of 13.15. The foregoing analysis shows that the infrastructure and facilities for the labourers were better in some of the medium/large scale as compared to small scale industrial units.

Further Table 5 also shows the availability of free of cost refreshment to the labourers in the premises of the respective industrial units. It was reported that none of the small scale industrial units had such a provision, while only 10.91 per cent of these labourers from medium/large scale industrial units expressed to have been receiving free of cost refreshment during overtime hours within the premises of the industrial units. The association between size of industrial units and availability of refreshment free of cost was significant as shown by the chi-square value of 43.59.

(vi) Overall Working Conditions

The loyalty, motivation and eagerness to work at the place of work and regular attendance depend a lot upon the working conditions at the industrial unit. The study highlights that from the total small scale industrial units, 52.82 per cent of the labourers reported that the working conditions were satisfactory, while 41.82 per cent reported it to be bad and only 5.90 per cent reported it to be good. The percentages of the same from medium/large scale industrial units were 83.64, 10.91 and 5.45 respectively. The association between the size of industrial units and conditions of work was significant as shown by chi-square value of 49.72.

The easy availability of labourers in the industrial units speaks a lot about the overall effort made by respective industrial units to make the labourers comfortable at place of work. Table 6 also exhibits the distribution of industrial migrant labourers according to their comfort level at place of work.

Table 5. Distribution of Industrial Migrant Labourers according to Provision of Facilities

Status	Small		Medium/large		Total		Chi-square value
	No.	Percentage	No.	Percentage	No.	Percentage	Small v/s Medium/large
(i) Canteen/Mess							
Yes	0	0.00	30	27.27	30	6.00	13.15***
No	390	100.00	80	72.73	470	94.00	
(ii) Refreshment free of cost							
Yes	0	0.00	12	10.91	12	2.40	43.59***
No	390	100.00	98	89.09	488	97.60	

Source: Field Survey, 2008-09

Note: *** Significant at 1 per cent

Table 6. Distribution of Industrial Migrant Labourers according to Overall Working Conditions

Status	Small		Medium/large		Total		Chi-square value
	No.	percentage	No.	percentage	No.	percentage	Small v/s Medium/large
(i) Working conditions							
Good	23	5.90	12	10.91	35	7.00	49.72***
Satisfactory	206	52.82	92	83.64	298	59.60	
Bad	161	41.82	6	5.45	167	33.40	
(ii) Comfort level at work place							
Comfortable	257	65.90	80	72.73	337	67.40	1.82
Not comfortable	133	34.10	30	27.27	163	32.60	

Source: Field Survey, 2008-09

Note: *** Significant at 1 per cent

Table 7. Distribution of Industrial Migrant Labourers according to Preference to Work with other Industrial Migrant Labourers

Status	Small		Medium/large		Total		Chi-square value Small v/s Medium/large
	No.	Percentage	No.	Percentage	No.	Percentage	
Yes	207	53.08	52	47.27	259	51.80	1.16
No	183	46.92	58	52.73	241	48.20	

Source: Field Survey, 2008-09

As much as 65.90 per cent and 72.73 per cent of the migrant labourers from total small scale and medium/large scale units felt comfortable at the place of work.

(vii) Preference to Work with other Migrant Labourers

Often it is felt that an individual feels comfortable with his compatriots. It helps in improving feeling of belongingness and creates a comforting and likeable environment. Table 7 shows distribution of industrial migrant labourers according to preference of migrant labourers to work with other industrial migrant labourers. As much as 53.08 per cent and 47.27 per cent of the total industrial migrant labourers from small scale and medium/large scale industrial units respectively, preferred working with other migrant labourers. The overall association between size of industrial units and preference to work with other industrial migrant labourers was non-significant as shown by the chi-square value of 1.16. In other words majority of these labourers preferred to work with migrant labourer which explains the need to be respected and liked by the labourers they worked with. Also, since majority of them lived together in

rented places, it gave them the benefit to work with labour that they put up with.

(viii) Preference to Work with Same Employer during Next Visit

Whether or not an industrial migrant labourer is happy and satisfied with the work culture and environment, can be explained by the fact whether he would want to return to the same industrial unit during his next visit or not. Many of the industrial migrant labourers migrate during the agricultural off-season. Also, many of the labourers, after a long break are not given the surety of getting employed again. In such a case, the labourers have to start afresh every time after the visit to his/her home town. Table 8 shows that 71.03 per cent of the total industrial migrant labourers from total small scale units preferred to work at the same place of work, while 6.41 per cent did not and 22.56 per cent were not sure. On the other hand, 81.82 per cent of the industrial migrant labourers from total medium/large scale industrial units preferred to work in the same industrial unit, while 1.82 per cent did not. The foregoing analysis shows that majority of the industrial migrant labourers were satisfied

Table 8. Distribution of Industrial Migrant Labourers according to Preference of Same Industrial Units during Next Visit

Status	Small		Medium/large		Total	
	No.	Percentage	No.	Percentage	No.	Percentage
Yes	277	71.03	90	81.82	367	73.40
No	25	6.41	2	1.82	27	5.40
Cant' Say	88	22.56	18	16.36	106	21.20

Source: Field Survey, 2008-09

by working at the present place of work hints about the satisfactory conditions of work and behaviour of employer with the industrial migrant labourers. However, as reported in the paragraphs above, majority reported the environment to be not good but still the expression of satisfaction exhibits their poor situation wherein they did not have the confidence to experiment working or looking for a job at a new industrial unit.

(ix) Work Related Discrimination

The industrial migrant labourers often complain of being discriminated and exploited. The more the level of discrimination, more is the unrest, dissatisfaction and inefficiency amongst the industrial migrant labourers which leads to loss of trust and loyalty on the part of these labourers. Table 9 shows distribution of industrial migrant labourers according to discrimination faced at the time of recruitment, routine work

and payment of wages for not being local but migrant labourers. As many as 15.13 and 11.82 per cent of migrant labourers from total small scale and medium/large scale industrial units respectively, expressed that they were discriminated against the locals at the time of recruitment.

The table further illustrates distribution of industrial migrant labourers regarding discrimination during routine work. The percentages of industrial migrant labourers from total small and medium/large scale units that experienced discrimination during day to day work at the industrial unit were 17.69 and 14.55, respectively. The industrial migrant labourers also faced discrimination at the time of payment of wages. On the whole, the chi-square value of 2.93 indicates a significant relationship between size of total industrial units and discrimination at the time of payment of wages. It was highly significant for industrial migrant labourers from total medium/large scale industrial units as 60.00 per cent of them were being discriminated at the time of payment of wages as compared to 50.77 per cent of them from small scale industrial units. The analysis shows that relatively a smaller percentage of the industrial migrant labourers from both small scale and medium/large scale units were discriminated at the time of recruitment as compared to other types of discrimination. The industrial migrant labourers felt that their local counterparts were supported, encouraged, appreciated more by the employer and also, that local labourers were given more of

Table 9. Distribution of Industrial Migrant Labourers according to Work Related Discrimination

Type of discrimination	Small		Medium/large		Total		Chi-square value
	No.	Percentage	No.	Percentage	No.	Percentage	Small v/s Large/ Medium
(i) At the time of recruitment							
Yes	59	15.13	13	11.82	72	14.40	0.76
No	331	84.87	97	88.18	428	85.60	
(ii) During routine work							
Yes	69	17.69	16	14.55	85	17.00	0.60
No	321	82.31	94	85.45	415	83.00	
(iii) At the time of payment of wages							
Yes	198	50.77	66	60.00	264	62.80	2.93*
No	192	49.23	44	40.00	236	47.20	

Source: Field Survey, 2008-09

Note: * Significant at 10 per cent

supervisory jobs as compared to migrant labourers.

Summary

Migration has become a way of life of individuals whose native places are unable to satisfy their socio-economic needs. Migrants migrate for varied reasons but not all are able to attain the desired objectives hands down. They are met with new, often an inhospitable, social and work environment which further confirms their fate at the place of destination. Other than being just financially challenged, migrants are disadvantaged labourers as labour laws dealing with them are weakly implemented which lead them to have very little bargaining power. To top it up, most migrant labourers get employed in the unorganized sector, where the lack of regulations compounds their vulnerability. The current paper makes an attempt to present a picture of the work environment experienced by the migrants working in the industries of Ludhiana city.

The study reveals that some of the industrial migrant labourers were being exploited to the extent that they were made to work for more than 8 hours without being paid for, not given work according to their choice and skill, employed as temporary labour and thus did not enjoy benefits of a permanent labour, faced health issues due to the kind of work they did at the industrial unit, were not working in safe working conditions, and faced exploitation and discrimination at the time of recruitment, routine work and payment of wages. This clearly indicates that the native places they came from had worse conditions as they chose to work at the place of destination despite the negative work environment. Despite being a vital organ for the economic health of any economy, as they pump in the much required labour, they are subjected to inhospitable environment to which they wilfully accept and exhibit their helplessness and desperation to earn money. The plight of these labourers is pitiable and needs much attention for acknowledging their role of fuelling in the engine of growth.

To safeguard the interests of the labourers, especially the migrants, should be the prime concern of any economy. They should be respected and liked by not only their migrant counterparts but also by the locals so as to make them feel secure both mentally and physically. Unfortunately, migrant workers do not receive adequate attention from formal workers' organizations like trade unions which are generally confined to more formal work settings like registered factories and establishments and neglect the vast informal sector. Though various NGOs and other organisations are working for the cause of migrants, there is a need to implement some firm migration-friendly policies and migrant labour law both at the centre and the state level so as to keep this crucial source of labour running and also for the socio-economic betterment of these migrants. There is a need to understand their issues so as to bring about the much awaited change to improve the status of the migrants whose role as the backbone of an economic society is unquestionable.

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