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## **Causes and Impact of Labour Migration: A Case Study of Punjab Agriculture**

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### **Abstract**

In Punjab, the influx of migrant labour particularly in agriculture sector started with the green revolution and picked up subsequently. Due to monoculture in the cropping pattern, the state has become largely dependent on migrant labourers for various agricultural operations. The influx of seasonal as well as permanent labour from outside has led to various socio-economic problems in Punjab. In the wake of this, the present study was purposively conducted in the Central Zone of Punjab for the year 2011 to find the causes and impact of labour in-migration in Punjab. A total of 105 respondents belonging to the states of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh and Nepal constituted the sample frame. The results have revealed that better income and employment opportunities at the destination place were the major factors responsible for migration. About 64 per cent of the respondents earned less than ₹ 20000 per annum at their native places and 60 per cent of them had less than 200 days of employment in a year, whereas 23 per cent of the labourers were unemployed at their native place. However, after migration 63 per cent of the migrants could earn from ₹ 20000 to ₹ 50000 per annum and 34 per cent earned more than ₹ 50000 per annum in Punjab, leading to a major share (60% of total income) as remittances sent back to their native places. On the other hand, the flip side of the influx of migrants in the study area increased the drug menace by 37 per cent, social tension by 45 per cent and crime by 43 per cent. The state government should maintain a demographic balance by regulating the migrants and should help in verification of credentials of migrating labourers to Punjab.

**Key words:** Labour migration, Long-term migration, Short-term migration, Remittances, In-migration

**JEL Classification:** J61, J62, R23

### **Introduction**

Migration is shift from a place of residence to another place for some length of time or permanently including different types of voluntary movements. It has great impact on economic, social, cultural and psychological life of people, both at place of emigration as well as of migration (Kaur, 2003). In India the labour migration is mostly influenced by social structures and pattern of development. Uneven development is the main reason of migration along with factors like poverty, landholding system, fragmentations of land, lack of employment opportunities, large family-size and natural

calamities. The high-land man ratio, caste system, lawlessness and exploitation at native place speed up the breakdown of traditional socio-economic relations in the rural areas and people decide to migrate to relatively prosperous areas in search of better employment and income.

Diversification of economy and increased land productivity in certain areas, rapid improvement in transport and communication means, improvement in education, increase in population pressure and zeal for improving living added momentum to the mobility of population in India (Roy, 2011). Those who migrate to new areas experience certain socio-psychological problems of adjustments with the residents of place of migration.

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Punjab is one of the agriculturally most developed states of India. Since mid-1960s, with the evolution of high-yielding varieties of crops and the adoption of modern and improved farm practices, the agriculture in state has witnessed an unprecedented growth. With the increase in cropping intensity and farm output along with shift of cropping pattern towards labour-intensive crops like paddy during the late-1970s the state witnessed manifold increase in demand for farm labour. As sufficient local labour was not available, farmers of the state had to depend on the migratory labour for various agricultural operations, especially during peak seasons (Sidhu *et al.*, 1997). Consequently, the inflow of labour particularly from the states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal and Rajasthan to Punjab increased manifold. In the beginning, higher wages and almost assured employment were the major economic factors to attract the migration of farm labour to Punjab. But later, the social factors like network of the co-villagers and caste fellows started attracting the migration. Some other factors that compelled them to move to Punjab were incidence of floods, droughts, non-availability of jobs, poverty and indebtedness at their native place (Gupta, 1991; Gupta and Bhakoo, 1980).

In above context, the present study has identified the major constraints faced by the migratory labour at their native place which leads to migration and the impact thereof on income and employment pattern of migrants. The general perceptions of the farmers regarding the preference for local or migratory labour regarding various agricultural operations in Punjab agriculture were also studied.

### Database and Methodology

The study has been conducted in the Central Zone of Punjab for the year 2011, where paddy-wheat is the major crop rotation. The paddy-wheat belt was purposively chosen as the major agricultural operations like transplanting of paddy, harvesting of wheat and paddy, spraying of pesticides, etc. are performed mainly by migrant labourers.

From this zone, seven tehsils and from selected tehsils, seven villages, one from each tehsil, were selected using probability proportional to size (area) under wheat and paddy crops. From each selected village, 15 migrant labourers were interviewed making a total sample of 105 respondents. The data from selected respondents were collected by

personal interview method using a specially designed schedule.

All respondent migrants were classified into two groups, viz. short-term migrants and long-term migrants. Migration during peak agricultural season being a common feature in the state, all persons who come to Punjab only during peak periods and return to their native places within the same year, were considered as short-term migrants. Persons working permanently with farmers on a yearly contract or year-after-year contract and visit their native place occasionally for a few days, were considered as long-term migrants. Thus, the sample was comprised of 73 long-term and 32 short-term migrants.

In order to study the impact of migrant labourers vis-à-vis traditional labourers a separate schedule was designed and data of 35 farmers, 5 from each selected village were collected and general perceptions of the farmers regarding in-flux of migrants on the supply of agricultural labourers, their wage rates and impact on village community were recorded.

Simple statistical tools like averages, percentages, etc. were used in the study. Students t- test was used to find the existence of difference between the wage rates for various agricultural operations for local and migrated labourers.

### Results and Discussion

The results have been discussed under various sub-heads:

#### Socio-economic Profile of Respondents

The distribution of in-migrants according to their socio-economic background has been discussed under various heads:

**Age Group** — According to the socio-economic profile (Table 1) of the respondents, 58.9 per cent of the long-term migrants and 75 per cent of the short-term migrants were in the age group of 21-40 years, while 32.9 per cent and 15.6 per cent were in the age group of 0-20 years, respectively.

Thus, the number of migrants was more in 21-40 years age group because it is the preferred age-segment by employers because labourers in this group can undertake agricultural operations. Also, this age group has to shoulder majority of the social and domestic

**Table 1. Distribution of the in-migrants according to their social background, Punjab, 2011**

Variables	Long-term migration (N=73)	Short-term migration (N=32)	Overall (N=105)
<b>Age (years)</b>			
0-20	24 (32.9)	5 (15.6)	29 (27.6)
21-40	43 (58.9)	24 (75.0)	67 (63.8)
>40	6 (8.2)	3 (9.4)	9 (8.6)
<b>Caste</b>			
General castes	41 (56.2)	17 (53.1)	58 (55.2)
Backward castes	12 (16.4)	13 (40.6)	25 (23.8)
Scheduled castes	20 (27.4)	2 (6.3)	22 (21.0)
<b>Religion</b>			
Hindu	70 (95.9)	31 (96.9)	101 (96.2)
Muslim	3 (4.1)	1 (3.1)	4 (3.8)
<b>Education</b>			
Illiterate	49 (67.1)	25 (78.1)	74 (70.5)
Primary	19 (26.0)	5 (15.6)	24 (22.9)
Middle	4 (5.5)	0 (0.0)	4 (3.8)
Matric	1 (1.4)	2 (6.3)	3 (2.9)
<b>Period of migration</b>			
1980–1990	8 (11.0)	2 (6.3)	10 (9.5)
1991–2000	11 (15.1)	9 (28.1)	20 (19.0)
2001–2010	48 (65.8)	20 (62.5)	68 (64.8)
2011	6 (8.2)	1 (3.1)	7 (6.7)
<b>Income earned (₹/month)</b>			
<2000	1 (1.4)	0 (0.0)	1 (1.0)
2000-3000	7 (9.6)	5 (15.6)	12 (11.4)
3000-4000	23 (31.5)	9 (28.1)	32 (30.5)
4000-5000	23 (31.5)	10 (31.3)	33 (31.4)
5000-10000	19 (26.0)	8 (25.0)	27 (25.7)

*Note:* Figures within the brackets indicate percentage of the total respondents

responsibilities. The percentage of over-forty years labourers was small, only 8.6 per cent of the respondents.

**Caste and Religion** — The majority (55%) of the respondents were of general caste category in both long-term and short-term migrants. It was because of the social stigma attached with working as a labourer that they do not work as labourers at their native place but accept it at other place. As far as the religion of the

long-term and short-term migrants was concerned, nearly 96 per cent of the respondents belonged to the Hindu religion, while rest were Muslims.

**Educational Level** — The illiteracy of migrants was an important factor which gave impetus to migration, as revealed by the study. Among long-term migrants, 67.1 per cent were illiterate, 26.0 per cent had studied up to the primary level, 5.5 per cent up to middle standard and only 1.4 per cent up to matric level. There were 78.1 per cent illiterates among short-term migrants, while 15.6 per cent had studied up to the primary level and only 6.3 per cent were matriculates. Thus, the majority of migrants were illiterates and only a few had studied up to fifth standard.

**Period of Migration** — With the advent of green revolution in early-1970s there was considerable migration of labour to Punjab from other states of the country for better employment opportunities. In this study, it was the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century during which largest influx (64.8%) of the migration took place. Among them, the number of short-term migrants who visited Punjab to do agricultural-related work was more.

**Income of the respondents** — It is the low income in the native place which induces migration to the areas of better livelihood opportunities. In the present study, the monthly income of 31.5 per cent long-term migrants was in the range ₹ 3000-4000 and of equal number was in the range ₹ 4000-5000 while 26.0 per cent of respondents were earning ₹ 5000 to ₹ 10000. Among short-term migrants also, 31.3 per cent were earning income in the range of ₹ 4000-5000 and 28.1 per cent had income in the range ₹ 3000-4000. On overall basis, maximum income of ₹ 5000-10000 was being earned by 25.7 per cent respondents, followed by ₹ 4000-5000 by 31.4 per cent, ₹ 3000-4000 by 30.5 per cent and ₹ 2000-3000 by 11.4 per cent. So, nearly 87 per cent respondents had monthly income of ₹ 3000 to ₹ 10000.

### Factors Leading to Migration

Different economic, social and psychological factors which lead to migration have been depicted in Table 2.

**Economic** — The people migrate in order to attain a better economic status in life. It was observed that low wages at the native place was the major economic factor which contributed to the migration of 94.3 per cent migrants. Besides, rainfed agriculture (60.0%),

**Table 2. Factors associated with in-migration of agricultural labourers to Punjab: 2011**

(Multiple response)

Factors	Long-term migration (N=73)	Short-term migration (N=32)	Overall (N=105)
<b>Economic</b>			
Landlessness	37 (50.7)	16 (50.0)	53 (50.5)
Small holdings	42 (57.5)	13 (40.6)	55 (52.4)
Crop failure	21 (28.8)	11 (34.4)	32 (30.5)
Rain fed agriculture	43 (58.9)	20 (62.5)	63 (60.0)
Low wages	68 (93.2)	31 (96.9)	99 (94.3)
Unemployed	20 (27.4)	4 (12.5)	24 (22.9)
Indebtedness	24 (32.9)	17 (53.1)	41 (39.0)
<b>Social</b>			
Less civic amenities	60 (82.2)	23 (71.9)	83 (79.1)
Poverty	72 (98.6)	18 (56.3)	90 (85.7)
Unpleasant social relations	5 (6.9)	0 (0.0)	5 (4.8)
Political intimidation	3 (4.1)	0 (0.0)	3 (2.9)
<b>Psychological</b>			
High aspirations	58 (79.5)	23 (71.9)	81 (77.1)
Poor life	67 (91.8)	30 (93.8)	97 (92.4)
Demonstration effect	49 (67.1)	13 (40.6)	62 (59.0)

*Note:* Figures within the brackets indicate percentages to the total respondents.

small size of holding (52.4%), landlessness (50.5%), indebtedness (39.0%), crop failure (30.5%) and unemployment (22.9%) were other economic reasons which led to migration. Therefore, low wages accompanied by poverty were the major reasons of migration as revealed by the sample respondents.

**Social** — Social factors are more pronounced than economic and thereby induce migration tendency among people. Poverty (85.7%) and less civic amenities (79.1%) were reported as the major social reasons behind migration. Unpleasant social relations (6.9%) and political intimidation (4.1%) were the social factors leading to long-term migration by some of the respondents.

**Psychological** — The psychological factors inducing migration were leading a poor life (92.4%), high aspirations (77.1%) and demonstration effect (59.0%). Similar trends were seen for both long-term and short-term migrations.

### Change in Income of Migrants after Migration

There was a considerable change in the employment status and consequently income of the respondents after migration (Table 3). On overall basis, prior to migration 22.9 per cent of the migrants were unemployed, 42.8 per cent had employment for less than 150 days and merely 4.0 per cent had employment for 250-300 days in a year. After migration, the percentage of migrants who had employment for more than 300 days was maximum (41.0%), followed by those who got employment for 250-300 days (31.4%), for 200-250 days (19.1%) and for 150-200 days (7.6%) per annum. With this increase in employment days, the income of 34.3 per cent migrants increased to more than ₹ 50000 per annum after migration, while it was less than ₹ 10000 per annum for 48.6 per cent migrants before migration on overall basis.

The employment status of the majority, i.e. 65.7 per cent of the migrants was less than 150 labour days in a year before migration, while after migration 72.4 per cent had employment for more than 250 labour days in a year. After migration, short-term migrants got additional employment opportunities (150-250 days) during peak agricultural seasons and they returned to their places afterwards. This all resulted in change in income of 46.9 per cent short-term migrants from a meagre ₹ 10000 per annum to ₹ 40000-50000 per annum for 28.1 per cent migrants and to more than ₹ 50,000 per annum for 18.8 per cent people after migration. Thus, there was a net increase in the income of the majority of the migrants after migration.

### Remittances Sent to Native Places by Long-Term Migrants

The study has revealed that short-term migrants brought their earnings to their native places personally, whereas long-term migrants used postal money orders either monthly or quarterly for sending remittances to their families at native places. Most of the migrants (37.0 %) sent less than 50 per cent of their income as remittances, followed by 32.9 per cent sending 50-60 per cent, 24.7 per cent sending 60-70 per cent and 5.4 per cent sent more than 70 per cent of their income as remittance.



**Table 3. Distribution of migrant labourers according to their income group vis-à-vis employment days in Punjab: 2011**

Employment (days/year)	Income group (₹/annum)									
	Before migration (No.)					After migration (No.)				
	<10000	10000- 20000	20000- 30000	30000- 40000	Total	10000- 20000	20000- 30000	30000- 40000	40000- 50000	Total
<b>Long-term migration (N=73)</b>										
Unemployed	19	0	0	0	19(26.0)	0	0	0	0	0
<150	9	15	0	1	25(34.2)	0	0	0	0	0
150–200	6	6	1	0	13(17.8)	0	0	1	0	1(1.4)
200–250	2	7	1	3	13(17.8)	0	1	3	0	6(8.2)
250–300	0	1	0	2	3(4.1)	1	4	7	8	25(34.3)
>300	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	3	12	41(56.2)
Total	36(49.1)	29(39.7)	2(2.7)	6(8.2)	73(100)	1(1.4)	8(11.0)	14(19.2)	20(27.4)	73(100)
<b>Short-term migration (N=32)</b>										
Unemployed	5	0	0	0	5(15.6)	0	0	0	0	0
<150	10	6	2	2	20(62.5)	0	0	0	1	1(3.1)
150–200	0	4	1	0	5(15.6)	1	1	3	1	7(21.9)
200–250	0	1	0	0	1(3.1)	1	3	4	3	14(43.8)
250–300	0	0	0	1	1(3.1)	0	3	1	3	8(25.0)
>300	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2(6.3)
Total	15(46.9)	11(34.4)	3(9.4)	3(9.4)	32(100)	2(6.3)	7(21.9)	8(25.0)	9(28.1)	32(100)
<b>Overall migration (N=105)</b>										
Unemployed	24	0	0	0	24(22.9)	0	0	0	0	0
<150	19	21	2	3	45(42.9)	0	0	0	1	1(1.0)
150–200	6	10	2	0	18(17.1)	1	1	4	1	8(7.6)
200–250	2	8	1	3	14(13.3)	1	4	7	3	20(19.1)
250–300	0	1	0	3	4(3.8)	1	7	8	11	33(31.4)
>300	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	3	13	43(41.0)
Total	51(48.6)	40(38.1)	5(4.8)	9(8.6)	105(100)	3(2.9)	15(14.3)	22(21.0)	29(27.6)	105(100)

*Note:* Figures within the brackets indicate percentages of the total respondents

**Table 4. Perceptions of farmers regarding labour migration in Punjab, 2011**

(Multiple response)		
Particulars	Response	Percentage
<b>Supply of labour</b>		
Increase	30	85.7
No change	5	14.3
<b>Change in wage rate</b>		
Decrease	28	80.0
No change	7	20.0
<b>Social impact of migrant labour on village community</b>		
Increase in drug menace	13	37.1
Increase in social tension	16	45.7
Increase in crime	15	42.9
Cultural invasion	13	37.1
<b>Preference for labour</b>		
Migrant labour	25	71.4
Local labour	10	28.6
<b>Reasons for preferring migrants</b>		
Timely availability	11	31.4
Quality of work	10	28.6
Low wages	4	11.4
<b>Reasons for preferring local labour</b>		
Trust worthiness	8	22.9
To adjust advance payments	2	5.7

### Perception of Farmers Regarding Labour In-Migration

Farmers' views on in-migrant and local labourers were recorded to study the migration scenario in depth (Table 4). A separate schedule was designed to find the perception of farmers about the in-flux of migration

to Punjab. Regarding supply of labour, 87.7 per cent farmers revealed that due to the migration of labourers, there was increase in supply of labour for agricultural purposes, while 14.3 per cent opined no change in the supply of labour. Regarding wage rates, 80 per cent farmers reported a decline in the wage rate due to in-migration of labourers, while 20 per cent opined no change in the wage rate (Table 4).

Regarding the ill effects of in-migration which was mainly from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh in the study sample, increase in social tension was reported by 45.7 per cent farmers, increase in crime was reported by 42.9 per cent farmers and 37.1 per cent each complained about cultural invasion and drug menace. The increase in intake of gutkas, pan masalas, etc. was also reported. Despite these negative factors, 71.4 per cent farmers preferred migrant labourers to local labourers because of their timely availability, good quality of work and low wages. Some farmers reported preference for local labourers because of their better trust worthiness (22.9%) and repayment assurance of their advance payments (5.7%).

### Preference of Local Labour vis-à-vis Migrant Labour for Various Farm Operations

Across different farm operations, transplanting of paddy was the only operation in which 62.9 per cent farmers preferred migrant labour to local labour. It being a manual operation to be performed well in time to avoid loss in productivity, the demand for labour rises manifold and is met mostly by migrant labourers (Table 5). Several short-term migrants usually come in the months of April and June and go back to their native places by the end of August.

**Table 5. Preferences of farmers in engaging migrant and local labour in various agricultural operations in Punjab: 2011**  
(Multiple response)

Operation	Migrant labour		Local labour	
	Response (No.)	Percentage (%)	Response (No.)	Percentage (%)
Harvesting	16	45.7	19	54.3
Threshing	15	42.9	24	68.6
Cattle tending	13	37.1	26	74.3
Hoing	12	34.3	12	34.3
Spraying	16	45.7	23	65.7
Sowing	18	51.4	20	57.1
Transplanting of paddy	22	62.9	19	54.3
Tractor driving	4	11.4	16	45.7

**Table 6. Impact of labour migration on wage rate for different agricultural operations in Punjab: 2011**

Operation	Without migration	With migration	Change		t -value
			Amount (₹)	Per cent	
Harvesting of wheat (₹/ha)	6710	5407	1303	19	5.96*
Transplanting of paddy (₹/ha)	6321	4426	1896	30	7.65*
Rate of contract (₹/annum)	61000	44286	16714	27	7.44*

For various other farm activities such as cattle tending (74.3%), spraying (65.7%), sowing (57.1%) and tractor driving (45.7%), local labour was preferred by the sample farmers, while for transplanting of paddy, migrant labour was preferred.

### Impact on Wage Rates

The impact of labour migration on the wage rate was reflected in terms of decline in charges for various farm operations (Table 6). For paddy transplantation, there was a net saving of ₹ 1896 per hectare to the farmers due to inflow of short-term migrant labourers.

Thus, there was a significant decline of 30 per cent in transplanting charges for paddy crop, as revealed by the sample farmers. In the case of wheat, there was a decline of 19 per cent in harvesting charges which came out to be ₹ 1303/ ha. The annual rate of contract amount of permanent labour was declined by 27 per cent with a net saving of ₹ 16714 per annum. Thus, the inflow of migrant labourers was a profitable venture for Punjab farmers.

### Conclusions

The study has revealed that most of the migrants were in the age of thirties and forties, belonged to general castes with faith in Hindu religion, were mostly illiterates and migrated in the first decade of 21<sup>st</sup> century. Nearly 62 per cent of the migrants were earning a monthly income of ₹ 3000-5000. Low wages and rain-fed agriculture in the native place have been found the economic factors leading to migration, while poverty, poor civic amenities, leading a poor life, high aspirations and demonstration effect were social and psychological factors resulting to migration. Before migration, about 23 per cent persons were unemployed and 60 per cent were getting less than 250 days employment per year, but after migration, 41 per cent got more than 300 days of employment and 31 per cent got employment for 250-300 days.

As far as income is concerned, before migration 49 per cent migrants were earning less than ₹ 10000 per annum, while after migration 34 per cent could earn more than ₹ 50000 and 28 per cent could get between ₹ 40000 and ₹ 50000 per annum. Nearly 58 per cent long-term migrants sent 50-70 per cent of their income as remittances back home.

A general perception of the farmers regarding migration of labour was that it has resulted in increased supply of labour, decreased wage rates and increased social tension, crime, drug menace and cultural invasion. Despite this, Punjab farmers preferred migrant labour due to their timely availability, quality of work and low wages. Some farmers preferred local labourers due to their trust worthiness and adjustment for advance payments.

Among various farm operations, migrant labourers were preferred for transplanting of paddy, while for harvesting, threshing, cattle tending, sowing, spraying, hoeing and tractor driving local labourers were preferred by most of the farmers. Also, with migration of labour there was a significant decline in the harvesting charges of wheat, transplantation charges of paddy and annual rates of contract of a permanent labourer.

Thus, in an overall scenario, migration of labour for agricultural purposes has been found beneficial for the Punjab agriculture, with the exception of increase in crime rate, drug menace and cultural invasion. There is a need of government intervention to get the antecedents of migrant labour verified from their respective native states before employment by the Punjab farmers. The Government of Punjab should also maintain a demographic balance by regulating the inflow of migrants.

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