

The Story of Migrants in Delhi

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Introduction

According to the 2011 Census, internal migrants make up one-third of India's population, with a figure close to 400 million. Employment and marriage are the two main drivers of migration. The widening rural-urban divide, with a lack of employment opportunities and social services, has led to acceleration in the movement of people in search for livelihood. According to studies, Delhi is one of the leading destination states for internal migration, with most migrants coming in from Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Haryana and Punjab.

Migration impacts the labour markets, expenditure patterns and relations on a household and community levels in the places of origin and destination. The phenomenon is an essential and inevitable part of the economic and social life of India and has potential to contribute to economic prosperity, social cohesion and cultural diversity of the destination. However, due to the absence of a coherent policy framework and strategy, migration has taken the form of issues like urban

congestion, considerable costs in terms of human development of the migrants like poor working conditions, lack of social security and limited access to services like health and education.

Despite the large number of internal migrants and India's history of labour mobility, internal migration streams have not been studied extensively. The State has also failed to accord due importance to this invisible 'floating' population of millions.

Theoretical background

Theories on the initiation of migration generally make distinction between 'push' and 'pull' factors—the 'push' from the rural areas and the 'pull' of the urban areas. However, these forces seldom operate in isolation. Migration occurs when workers are unable to find suitable employment at their source ('push') and expect to achieve an improvement in living by migrating ('pull').

Neoclassical Economics focuses on differentials in wages and employment conditions between regions, and on migration costs. It generally conceives movement as an individual decision for income maximization. However, according to the New Economics of Migration (proposed by Stark et al), wage differential is not the necessary condition for any

migration to occur; households may have strong incentives to diversify risks through migration even in the absence of wage differentials. This is certainly true in the context of rural-urban migration in India, where high risks involved in agriculture force rural labour to migrate in search of alternative employment.

An important factor in the initiation of migration is the demand for low-skill labour generated in urban regions as they become increasingly industrialised and modernised. This is a crucial aspect of the Dual Labour Market theory, which links immigration to the structural requirements of modern industrial economies (Piore, 1979). In the case of large, urbanised cities such as Delhi, this is observed in the acceleration in the inflow of low-skilled migrants particularly in areas of rickshaw-pulling, construction, cleaning and vending. In this research, we choose to focus on this particular class of migrant labour as they are the ones facing the highest uncertainties and are the most vulnerable. Moreover, several conditions associated with their migration are also found in the case of other types of migrants.

Description of sample

For this research, primary data has been used—collected with the use of a formal, structured questionnaire. The questionnaire includes (but is not restricted to) questions about family background, motivations for migrating, incomes (both before and after migration), savings, remittances, health, education, living conditions, et cetera. For this survey, a migrant has been defined as **a person who has moved to Delhi from their place of birth or place of previous**

residence on a temporary, semi-permanent or permanent basis. A migrant household is one survey unit. A household was selected as the appropriate unit of analysis for migration research because of two reasons: one, in all these cases, the decision to migrate was not an individual one even in cases where only one person in the household had migrated, and two, the income earned through migration was consumed by the household and not by the migrant alone. The survey was conducted on 96 migrant households across Timarpur, Majnu ka Tila and the north campus of University of Delhi in North Delhi, and Chanakyapuri and Okhla in South Delhi.

The target migrants of the survey were those employed in low-skill jobs like those of rickshaw-pulling, manual labour, construction, vending et al. The migrants surveyed were found to hail predominantly from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, with a few from Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Haryana and Orissa. In the sample, the oldest migrant came to Delhi in 1979, and the most recent in 2016.

Problems with the study

While the overall objective of the study, which was to analyse the lives of migrant workers in Delhi, was achieved to a considerable degree, there were several issues during the survey process due to which analyses of certain nature were not possible:

- During surveys, we largely encountered females of the migrant households available as responders due to the males being out for

work. In most cases, women were not able to provide us with accurate figures for household incomes, remittances sent, and monthly savings, because this was information the men of the household did not share with them.

- While construction workers form a considerable proportion of the migrant population in Delhi, there were logistical issues with surveying them. They work on hazardous construction sites under strict supervisors who would not allow them to be surveyed while working, and it was difficult to survey them at their residences since most of them live in temporary tents near or at the construction sites and work from dawn till dusk.
- Figures on the amount of loans taken and the proportion of income used to pay off debts were not recorded because most respondents were uncomfortable with discussing debt.
- One of the initial objectives was to compare the standards of living of the migrant households in origin and destination states in terms of their nominal incomes and access to basic facilities like health and education. However, this comparative analysis could not materialise since a number of respondents came to Delhi as adolescents and did not have reliable information on their family incomes and access to facilities in their origin states.

Findings and analysis

1. Income

Incomes recorded have been segregated into income classes of width INR 5000 for analysis, to yield the following results:

The lowest monthly income recorded was Rs. 3,000 while the highest was Rs. 45,000 – both of which were earned by food vendors. The highest proportion of respondents falls in the income-category of Rs. 5,000 to 10,000.

While 79.56% of surveyed households are living above poverty line, only 35.48% of the earning members in these households earn at least the official minimum wage.¹

- **Consumption expenditure**

In our study, per capita consumption expenditure has been calculated as a residual—first, remittances and savings were subtracted from total monthly income, then this amount was divided by the number of members of the household residing in Delhi. The average per capita consumption expenditure of our sample worked out to Rs. 3619, a little under the Delhi average.² However, this average value is not a representative value due to several outliers: while there are a couple of households with per capita consumption expenditure as high as Rs. 9000, there are also

many others where this value is below 1000.

- **Savings and Remittances:**

30.1% of respondents in the sample were able to save from their monthly incomes, with the average saving being 8% of monthly income. However, only 50.54% of such households put their savings in bank accounts.

65.59% respondents send back remittances on a regular basis to their hometown or village as the case may be. Of these, only 63% migrants earn at least the monthly minimum wage. While a majority of the respondents reported that agriculture is carried out by their families in their village, in all but 3 cases the crop grown is for self-consumption only and rarely sold in the market. Thus, such families depend heavily on the remittances they receive. Coupled with the fact that these migrants have dependents living with them in Delhi—school-going children and unemployed spouses, for instance—remittances are a large drain on their incomes, resulting in very low disposable incomes per capita. On the average, the respondents send home 27% of their income—and in some cases this proportion is greater than 80%.

2. Educational attainment

The educational attainment of the earning member with the highest level of education in the household was recorded. Of the respondents, 25.7% had never had any kind of formal education. 20.3% of the respondents were educated up to the

primary school level, 21.6% were educated up to middle school, and 31.1% of them were educated up to secondary school or high school. Only 1.4% of the respondents were educated beyond class 12. Level of education of migrant workers showed no correlation with the level of income in this study.

3. Nutrition

Respondents were asked about their consumption of various food items in order to ascertain the nutrients they receive through their typical weekly diet. All households consumed sufficient levels of carbohydrates through potatoes and cereal. Main sources of protein in a typical diet were pulses, which respondents consumed 4.07 times a week on the average. 67.4% of the respondents ate non-vegetarian food, and consumed it 2.27 times a week on the average. Respondents consumed milk, a source of vitamin D and calcium, 4.7 times a week on the average. 95.7% of the respondents consumed vegetables, with potatoes, cauliflower, and spinach being the most accessible items. Only 51.6% respondents could regularly consume fruits. Most respondents and their families had a fairly varied weekly diet. However, due to lack of ration card in most cases (elaborated in the following section), this also means that expenditure on food erodes a large part of their monthly incomes.

4. Documentation and Social Integration

A major issue faced by migrants is the lack of documentation in the destination states, which deprives them of social services they would otherwise be eligible to avail of.

While the reach of the *Aadhaar* Card in the sample was 86%, only 39.13% of respondents had a ration card. 35.86% respondents had other forms of identity proofs, like a PAN card, voter ID card, and in one lone case, a passport.

Voter ID cards are specific to the constituencies in which the voter has to cast his/her vote. When migrating from one state to another, the eligible voters encounter a change in their current address, whereas permanent address remains the same, i.e., the state they have migrated from. After migration, they are required to apply for a new voter ID card, as they have moved into a new constituency. Now, the application form requires proof of current residence through:

- a) Bank / Kisaan / Post Office current Pass Book, or
- b) Applicant's Ration Card / Passport / Driving license / Income Tax Return filed or Assessment Order, or
- c) Latest Water / Telephone / Electricity / Gas Connection Bill for that address, either in the name of the applicant or that of his / her immediate relation like parents etc. or
- d) Postal department's post received / delivered in the applicant's name at the given address.

In case the applicant does not have any proof of residence in his name, the verifying officer may take witnesses from neighbourhood about the factum of residence and identity of the applicant. However, most respondents without a ration card reported that their landlords were not willing to vouch for them on paper. Since India does not yet have an absentee ballot system for all citizens,

most of such migrants are unable to cast their votes. Travelling to their village to cast a vote can prove costly in terms of both time and money, as most of these unskilled migrants are daily wage earners. Therefore, despite being on electoral rolls, these citizens inadvertently drop out of the electorate.

As far as ration cards are concerned, they serve no purpose other than providing access to public distribution system (PDS). They are two types of ration cards: red for BPL, and blue for APL. There are several issues with ration cards as well:

- a) Since December 2013, ration cards have been issued in the name of the oldest woman (above the age of 18 years) in the family, as the head of the family. Other families with women who are not of voting age yet, with only men, cannot apply for or successfully obtain ration cards.
- b) While moving from one state to another, the family needs to apply for a new ration card, which requires proof of current residence in the form of bills or other identity cards. These proofs are difficult to acquire.
- c) Ration card requires proof of Indian nationality, which is usually guaranteed by the voter ID card. Aadhar is taking over as the new proof of Indian citizenship, although, it has not been mandated by the Government of India yet.

A majority of the low-skilled workers, who migrate to Delhi in search of employment, are thus left without any proof of identity. Without a ration card, they cannot avail of the benefits of the

PDS. Sugar, oil, wheat, rice, kerosene are some of the most important things that are needed by them in their day-to-day lives.

It was also found that possession of a ration card was in no way related to the number of years the migrant had lived in Delhi. Most of the respondents who had been living in Delhi for two more decades did not have ration cards. A probable reason for this, as reported by a large number of respondents, was that proof of current residence was difficult to obtain because their landlords refused to vouch for them. Obtaining a ration card does not require a permanent address, but it does require a No Objection Certificate from the landlord of the applicant. Another reason mentioned by several respondents was that application and receipt of ration card requires them to spend long hours in queues, which they cannot afford to do, due to the nature of their jobs. There were also cases where the (male) migrant had lived in Delhi for decades, yet had not been able to acquire a ration card because there was no woman in the household (because the rest of his family lived in his native place).

Aadhar card is a big success in terms of the number of people who have it. The Government of India is putting tremendous effort to ensure that all citizens of India have Aadhar and to make everyone's lives simpler by linking all the identity proofs. The Government is also attempting to link Aadhar to the PDS, and if successful, this move will render the ration card redundant.

Opening and maintaining bank accounts is another issue for these migrants. Jan Dhan Yojana (JDY) launched in 2015 was done so as to enable those without access to

banking to open bank accounts. A minimum of eleven rupees is all it takes to open an account, and so, millions of people now have JDY accounts. However, mere possession of JDY accounts has done little for the intended beneficiaries. Many of the respondents reported that they barely save money at the end of the month, and when they do, it is too little an amount to be put into the bank. Therefore, the mere existence of an economical banking scheme is not sufficient to ensure financial inclusion for low-skill, low-income workers like the targets of this study; supplementary schemes for social security, food security and affordable housing are required to raise their real incomes.

5. Other services

Respondents of this survey were satisfied with the supply of electricity, which was regular in most cases. The water supply available to respondents was through a variety of sources, which included private boring, government taps, and government tankers. However, wherever households could afford it, they preferred bottled water for drinking.

Sanitation, however, was a major issue. Even though most of the migrants in our sample lived in *pucca jhuggis*, only 43.95% could afford to have toilets built inside their homes. Among the rest, 43.95% used public toilets while the remaining 12.10% defecated in the open.

Those who used public toilets on the regular basis reported that despite paying Rs. 5 per day to use these facilities, maintenance in these toilets was very poor. Although we did not inspect the aforementioned toilets ourselves, the fact that migrants who are used to defecating in

the open found sanitation in these toilets unsatisfactory might be insightful commentary on the efficacy of the *Swachh Bharat Abhiyaan*.

6. Perception of migration and other issues

On being asked about their motivation for migrating to Delhi, nearly all respondents said that there was little or no scope for gainful employment in their village—for most, it was a choice between migrating and remaining practically unemployed.

Respondents were also asked questions to gauge their personal assessment of their migration experience. Of all the respondents, 77% reported that they had mingled with the local community and 82.2% were satisfied with the people in their neighbourhood. While 79.1% reported to be happy with their lot, only 62.64% said that their expectations from migration had been met. When asked about their intentions of remaining in Delhi in the foreseeable future, 41.1% said that they wanted to return to their villages, 36.67% said that they wished to continue living in Delhi, and 22.2% said that they did not really have a choice because either they had no avenues for employment in their hometowns or their children were studying in Delhi, or both.

We also asked the migrants about other problems that they faced in their day-to-day lives since they migrated—such as harassment by the police and municipal officials. Even though most respondents reported to having faced no such issues, further enquiry revealed that most vendors and rickshaw-pullers in fact made informal

monthly payments to the police or Municipal Corporation or both for being allowed to conduct their business. For these migrants, these payments are the rent that they pay for being allowed to earn a living in the city, and they do not see the imposition of these fines as “harassment” in the first place, despite them often being extremely arbitrary. However, it must be noted that these fines are not small amounts. In the case of one cigarette vendor in the Okhla area, these fines combined amounted to Rs. 2000. Since his entire monthly income was Rs. 10,000 and he paid Rs. 3000 in rent to live in Delhi, he was left with Rs. 5000 from which to spend on himself and send as remittances to support a family of eleven.

Migration in India – the latest numbers

According to data cited in the Economic Survey of 2017, Delhi is the largest recipient of migrants in the country, accounting for more than half the number in 2015-16. In the five years ended 2016, an average of nine million people migrated between states every year for either education or work. This is almost double the inter-state migration recorded in 2001-2011. The study based on the analyses of new data sources and new methodologies also shows that the migration is accelerating and was particularly pronounced for females. However, policies and institutions required to ensure maximum (or even minimum) welfare gains from migration have not kept pace. “Portability of food security benefits, healthcare, and a basic social security framework for the migrant are crucial,” states the Economic Survey of 2017.

Internal Migration – policy challenges

Due to the low priority accorded to internal migration by the State, policies have also failed to provide any sort of relief in terms of social benefits or legal protection to the already vulnerable population of migrant workers. While certain policies and schemes do exist to ensure migrant welfare, there are various shortcomings in the existing policy framework.

Under the existing structure for policy implementation concerning migrant workers, the Ministry of Labour at the central level, and Departments of Labour at the state levels are responsible for implementing protection measures. Certain existing labour laws are applicable to migrant workers in general, among which the important ones are:

- the Inter State Migrant Workmen (Regulation and Conditions of Service) Act, 1979
- the Minimum Wages Act, 1948
- the Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act, 1970
- the Equal Remuneration Act, 1976, and
- the Building and Other Construction Workers (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 1996

However, the nature of the employment situations of most low-skill migrant workers practically ensures that they fall out of the ambit of these labour laws and most other policies enacted for welfare and security of workers. For example, the Inter State Migrant Workmen Act, 1979, defines an 'inter-State migrant workman' as "any person who is recruited by or through a

contractor in one State under an agreement or other arrangement for employment in an establishment in another State, whether with or without the knowledge of the principal employer in relation to such establishment", due to which the law isn't applicable for most low-skill migrant workers, such as the ones in this study, since they mostly migrate independently and not through contractors or similar agencies. The 2011 amendment made the act gender neutral by amending its title and replacing the word 'workman and workmen' by the words 'worker and workers' respectively but did not add any other provisions to ensure coverage of more migrant workers or improve the implementation of the act. The act, which could prove to be tremendously beneficial to inter-state migrant workers with some revision, currently suffers from several shortcomings:

- It excludes a considerable number of migrants from its ambit because the act is only applicable to migrants crossing state boundaries
- It does not monitor unregistered contractors
- It does not cover migrants who migrate independently and not under contractors
- It includes no guidelines for inter-state cooperation
- It does not address social protection of migrants
- Important provisions such as minimum wages, displacement allowances etc remain unenforced

Similarly, the other listed acts also exclude low-skill migrant workers from the benefits and protection they aim to offer by being applicable to only particular

kinds of jobs or their limited definitions of the term ‘migrant’.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to get an insight into the living and working conditions of low-skilled migrant workers in Delhi, and to analyse this in light of their own perception of their migration experience.

We found that the motivation for migration for most of the respondents was the lack of gainful employment in their villages or hometowns. The decision to migrate was made for them since it essentially came down to migrating or being unemployed. All the respondents of the study are employed in low-skill jobs like those of rickshaw-pulling, manual labour, construction and vending, and the most number of respondents earn a monthly income between Rs. 5000 and Rs. 10,000. Moreover, jobs like manual labour and construction often involve working long hours in hazardous conditions. While 79.56% of surveyed households are living above poverty line, only 35.48% of the earning members in these households earn at least the official minimum wage. Water and electricity supply were satisfactory for most respondents while sanitation, in terms of access to toilets and their cleanliness, was an issue.

While the households’ decision to migrate has accorded them with some form of employment enough for their sustenance, it is evident that in most cases it has done very little beyond that. In fact, migration comes with costs of its own for households surveyed. The incomes earned by workers in Delhi were sent back to their villages or hometowns in 65.59% of the cases in the study because their families back home are dependent on this income. These

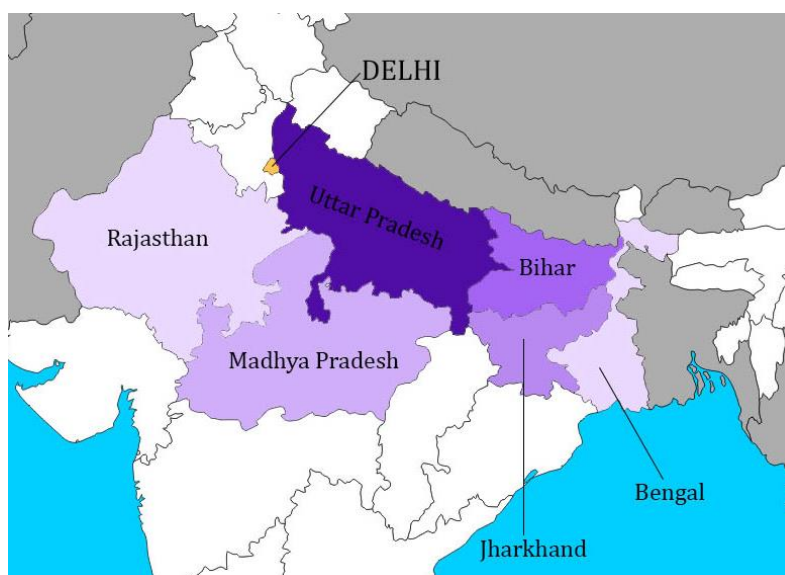
remittances are a considerable drain on the incomes of the households in Delhi and leave them with very little disposable income for self-consumption, let alone saving. In fact, only 30.1% of the respondents were able to save from their monthly incomes—on an average of 8% of their monthly income.

Migration also brought along issues of documentation and identification for most respondents, which excluded them from various social benefits that they would be eligible to avail of otherwise. While Aadhar Cards had a considerable reach within the sample of our study, only 39.13% of the respondents had ration cards and even few still had voter ID cards. Many respondents were unavailable to get ration cards due to requirements of proof of current address, which are hard to get for them, and the restrictions of the card being issued only in the name of the oldest woman. The lack of voter ID cards amongst respondents also signalled to a political exclusion of this already vulnerable group from the electorate. This political exclusion is especially relevant given the low priority accorded to internal migration by the State. Most low-skill migrant workers fall out of the ambit of the existing policy framework due to the nature of their work, leaving them without any binding social benefits or legal protection, almost making them second class citizens in their own countries.

The constitution of India guarantees all citizens the right to move freely throughout the territory of the country, and the quasi-federal structure of India allows for easier coordination of policies aimed at internal migrants. With the large number of internal migrants in India and India’s

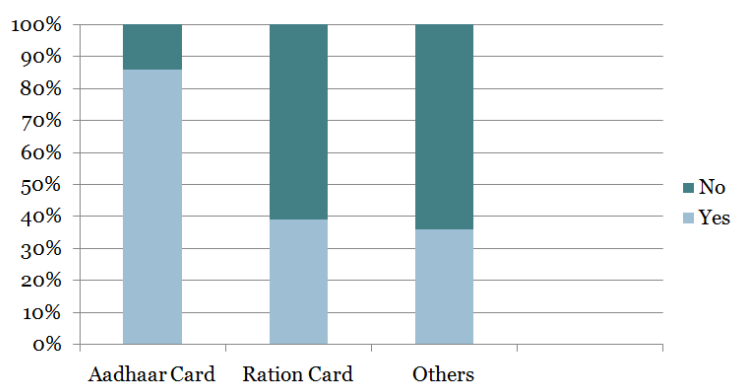
history of labour migration, it is imperative that the policy framework integrate this portion of the population so as to reduce the heavy costs on human development brought on by poor working and living conditions. The issues of political

exclusion and social and legal vulnerability may be remedied with a show of political will for more inclusive policies, and more stringent and implementation of existing policies.



Monthly household income (rupees)	% of surveyed households
< 5000	2.17
5000 to 10000	45.65
10000 to 15000	27.17
15000 to 20000	16.30
20000 to 25000	5.43
25000 to 30000	0.00
30000 to 35000	1.09
35000 to 40000	1.09
> 40000	1.09

Educational attainment	%
None	20.4
Primary school	20.4
Middle school	25.8
Secondary/HS	32.3
Graduate	1.1



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