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Rural livelihood & dynamics of migration: A case study of Beed district

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Abstract

In Maharashtra, agriculture is crippled by water scarcity, crop failures, and meagre returns. Beed, a rural stronghold, relies on rainfed farming and sporadic wage labour due to its semi-arid landscape and inadequate irrigation. During the dry season (November-May), villages face rampant unemployment, propelling droves to seek work in distant districts or states, mainly in sugar mills and brick factories. Migration offers a lifeline amidst rural distress, yet it entangles families in an endless cycle of poverty, its impact differential across class, caste, and gender lines. This narrative illuminates how migration, while a survival strategy, perpetuates Beed's economic and social plight.

Keywords: Rural livelihood, dynamics, migration

Introduction

Maharashtra, spanning an area of 307,713 square kilometres, ranks as the third-largest state by land area and the second largest by population in India. Its administrative framework is structured into six divisions: Amravati, Aurangabad, Konkan, Nagpur, Nashik, and Pune. These divisions further break down into 36 districts governed by a Zilla Parishad (ZP).

At the grassroots level, Maharashtra's rural areas are governed by 351 Panchayat Samities (PS) and an extensive network of 27,873 Gram Panchayats (GP). In urban areas, governance is overseen by 26 Municipal Corporations, 226 Municipal Councils, 13 Nagar Panchayats, and 7 Cantonment Boards. Maharashtra witnesses both inter-state and intra-state migration as individuals seek job opportunities. Six out of ten tribal study participants reported inter-district migration, while others migrated interstate. Despite Maharashtra's provision of year-round employment through the MNERGA scheme since 1975, a lack of awareness and planning for sustainable local jobs deter its uptake. Factors such as higher wages, daily payment at destination locations, and limited local employment opportunities drive individuals to prefer seasonal migration to nearby towns or states like Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh (MoTA, 2016)^[3].

The Economic Survey of Maharashtra in 2013 indicates a significant trend of inter-state migration in India, with an estimated annual influx of nearly 9 million migrants between 2011 and 2016. While Mumbai stands as the primary destination for rural-urban migrants, other cities in Maharashtra, including Nasik, Pune, Nanded, Nagpur, and Thane, have also witnessed substantial migration flows from both within the state and neighbouring regions like Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Rajasthan, and Jharkhand. This migration pattern underscores the role of Maharashtra as a magnet for job seekers and individuals seeking better economic opportunities, contributing to the state's demographic and socio-economic dynamics.

This elaborate administrative structure ensures efficient governance and service delivery across the state, catering to the diverse needs of its vast population. Seasonal migration, a coping mechanism entrenched in rural livelihoods, is often hailed for bolstering the security of the impoverished (de Haan, 2002; Rogaly *et al.*, 2001)^[2, 4]. This practice thrives in Maharashtra's rainfed agricultural landscape, particularly in the Beed district. Post-Rabi crop sowing, villages brace for prolonged unemployment spells, prompting thousands of marginal households to seek labour in distant sugar factories within and beyond state lines.

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Nestled in Maharashtra's Aurangabad division, Beed has been marred by drought and agrarian woes. Its semi-arid terrain and erratic rainfall render rainfed farming precarious, compelling residents to supplement their income through wage labour. Our fieldwork revealed a shifting climate pattern marked by delayed and truncated monsoons, exacerbating already dire economic conditions. With dwindling agricultural prospects post-monsoon, households grapple with acute unemployment, prompting a cocktail of short-term coping mechanisms and long-term adaptations, including seasonal migration.

Review of Literature

A literature review is vital for research, offering insights and streamlining the process. It identifies gaps, justifies studies, and illuminates its forms and significance in migration research. Understanding existing research aids systematic and informed approaches.

Prof Tripathy (2005, 2006, 2012, 2015 and 2019) [5, 6, 7, 8, 9], based on his migration studies in the tribal-dominated districts of KBK and sugar cane migrants of Maharashtra, synthesized that:

1. Many pushing and pulling factors interplay in rural-urban migration, reflecting a rural-urban gap in terms of the level of development. Pushing factors portray rural vulnerability, caused by the lack of generic individual and system-level capacities, rural-urban gap regarding income, level of health care, education, poor human development, and lack of essential services.
2. Besides, capability deprivation, such as multi-dimensional poverty, was prevalent in the tribal-dominated study villages due to risk and vulnerability. The origin of risk includes expensive illness, death of a breadwinner, natural calamities like drought, flood, failure of crops, the need to meet customary obligations like weddings, funerals, and market shocks, etc. The coping mechanism against such a crisis leads the rural poor into further debt from the money lenders, deteriorating economic conditions, and, consequently, impoverishment.
3. Due to factors like inadequate supply of credit, demand-supply gap, improper identification of welfare-oriented programs of the Government and unhealthy competition from informal credit agencies, cumbersome and time-consuming banking procedure, failure to supply credit at the time of need and rigid collateral requirement are the major stumbling blocks causing poor access to formal credit institutions. The crop loss due to natural calamities and unproductive utilization of borrowed funds resulted in rising default rates and delayed loan payments. These problems are of larger dimensions, pervasive in the tribal belt of Odisha and Jharkhand, and continue to be unabated.
4. The inferences drawn from the aforesaid studies made by Prof Tripathy brought to light that factors like demographic pressure, low land men ratio, uncertain monsoon, poverty of the farmers, low infrastructure, and global competition, etc., have resulted in deterioration in the agricultural income of the rural farm households. As far as absorbing any agrarian shocks such as drought, over the years, these rural households put in place coping mechanisms that include migration in search of non-farm employment in the distant urban

land as an efficient adaptation method for multiple socio-ecological deficiencies in rural villages.

5. It was revealed that tribal women carried the burden of household maintenance and, in addition to fetching water from far away sources and collecting fuel woods from nearby forests. The tribal households made up their meagre incomes from farms by collecting and selling non-timber forest produce (NTFP) such as lac, Nassar cocoons, bamboo poles, kendu leaves, tamarind, Mahua, honey, tubers, etc. On average, a tribal household spent about 120 days in a year in such activities at baseline. Tribal farmers customarily plant fruit-bearing trees such as custard apple, jackfruit, mango, orange, banana, lemon, etc., and a few seasonal vegetables for consumption. Due to their frequent borrowing from traditional moneylenders during natural hazards or customary ceremonial requirements, the moneylenders dominate the credit market in the tribal pockets of Odisha.
6. Prevailing regional inequalities and uneven development in many underdeveloped tribal regions impel temporary internal migration from agriculturally backwards and poor rural areas. There has been a substantial increase in temporary migration from backward regions that have a higher propensity to migrate seasonally, which is mostly distress-driven. Seasonal migration has long been a source of income for rural households unable to support themselves through agriculture.
7. Households diversify their economic activities outside the traditional agricultural sphere by sending out rural labourers, who are usually skilled and well-known in their field of work, to work in urban areas in the lean period. The return migrants of rural villages usually release their mortgaged land from the money lenders and improve their living conditions enormously by investing the newly acquired wealth in buying land or constructing their houses, etc.
8. As mentioned earlier, migration broadly refers to the movement of people from one country or region and settlement to another, which may also include a periodic location change, especially by moving seasonally from one region to another. Accepted as a coping mechanism, migration is a highly well-paid alternative to rural agricultural labourers. It usually results in the transfer of a larger number of households capable of mobilizing the necessary contacts and resources for the purpose of migration. Social contacts and networks are very significant in such a kind of migration.
9. The interlocking of credit and labour markets provides the employer with a guaranteed workforce at a pre-determined rate. The place of origin usually has strong links with the urban centres. The interplay of different generic and specific abilities and the lack thereof reflect individual and system-level rural and urban conditions that push people to migrate. Thus, on the other hand, migrants are forced to settle in informal areas.
10. Migration to urban centres might function as an adaptation method against socio-economic and environmental deprivation in rural areas. However, in India, many rural people looking for better life prospects end up in poor and vulnerable urban areas. The sustainability of rural-urban migration as an

adaptation pathway depends on the combination of generic and specific capacities rooted in the system.

11. Capability deprivation, such as education, poor health facilities, and poor human development, are other dimensions of poverty prevalent in KBK districts. Most of the villages in KBK districts need to be developed in terms of finance facilities; actual access to health and education facilities is much poorer than recorded in official statistics. Indebtedness leads to bondage, a type of contractual labour agreement between the labour contractor or agents. Bondage, in turn, reinforces exploitation and distressed payment of wages.

Tripathy's (2023) ^[10] study conducted in Gujarat sheds light on the significant health challenges tribal populations face, particularly sugar cane harvesters. These individuals are not only subjected to exploitation and neglect but also endure a multitude of health hazards associated with their labour-intensive work. Respiratory, cardiac, and heat-related illnesses, along with physical and mental strain, top the list of concerns for these workers due to repetitive movements, exposure to pollutants, and accidents in the field.

Tripathy's research (2023) ^[10] reveals alarming statistics regarding the prevalence of health issues among a sample of 416 migrants studied. A staggering 30.28% reported problems related to repetitive motions, physical strain, and joint pain, while 23.07% suffered injuries such as palm cracks. Moreover, 20.67% experienced respiratory and cardiac ailments, with 7.22% sustaining injuries during the sugar cane harvesting process. Despite these adversities, a notable 18.75% claimed not to have encountered any health issues.

However, while Tripathy's study sheds light on the health challenges faced by migrant tribes, there remains a significant gap in the literature concerning their experiences in the migration process, particularly in poverty-stricken districts of Maharashtra. Breman (2013) ^[11] highlights migration leading to debt bondage and subsequent "unfreedom" among migrants, yet recent studies exploring this issue in Maharashtra are lacking.

Thus, while existing research highlights the hardships faced by tribal out-migrants, further studies focusing on the specific dynamics of poverty-stricken Breed districts in Maharashtra are warranted. Such research could provide valuable insights into the underlying causes of exploitation and vulnerability within tribal communities, contributing to more targeted interventions and policy measures aimed at improving their socio-economic conditions.

Objectives of the study

1. To assess the socio-economic characteristics of seasonal migrant households in the Beed district: This objective aims to understand the demographic composition, economic activities, and household food security status. By analyzing factors such as religion, caste/tribe, possession of ration cards, principal economic engagement, and food security status, the study seeks to paint a comprehensive picture of these households' socio-economic landscape.
2. To examine the patterns and causes of seasonal migration in Beed district: This objective focuses on understanding the motivations behind seasonal migration, particularly among socially and economically disadvantaged communities. By exploring

the reasons driving households to migrate, such as insufficient earnings in their villages and the prevalence of economic hardship, the study aims to shed light on the underlying factors contributing to seasonal migration as a survival strategy.

3. To evaluate the health status and consequences of seasonal migration among women in Beed district: This objective aims to assess the health outcomes and challenges women are engaged in. By analyzing the prevalence of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) among migrant women and examining the social and economic burdens associated with migration, such as musculoskeletal disorders and educational deprivation for children, the study seeks to highlight the multifaceted consequences of seasonal migration on women's health and well-being.

Methodology

This study adopted a mixed methods approach, incorporating a literature review, secondary data analysis, and qualitative interviews. It aimed to investigate the intricacies of tribal livelihood migration in India, examining existing policies and evaluating their successes and challenges in implementation, particularly concerning migration and social security.

Through a comprehensive literature review, the study synthesized existing research and theoretical frameworks relevant to tribal livelihood migration. Secondary data analysis provided quantitative insights into trends and patterns, offering a broader understanding of the phenomenon.

Complementing these quantitative findings, qualitative interviews were conducted to capture the nuanced perspectives and experiences of tribal communities directly affected by migration policies. These interviews offered rich insights into the lived realities, aspirations, and challenges tribal populations face in accessing social security measures amidst their migratory journeys.

By employing a mixed-methods approach, this study aimed to provide a holistic understanding of tribal livelihood migration dynamics, shedding light on the effectiveness and gaps in existing policies and their implementation in India. Our study, conducted in November 2022, explored the dynamics of seasonal migration in Beed. Thus, to collect data, 170 sampled seasonal migrant households were chosen using simple random sampling from the Beed block of the Beed district followed by Focus group discussions (FGDs) and supplemented by secondary sources of data collected from books, published reports and research papers.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Beed District

Parameters	Beed
Population	2,585,049
Sex Ratio	916
Literacy (%)	77
Male Literacy (%)	86
Female Literacy (%)	68
Child Sex Ratio	796
Scheduled Caste Population (%)	14
Scheduled Tribe Population (%)	1

Source: Census of India, 2011

Beed boasts a substantial population of 2,585,049, with a sex ratio of 916 females per 1000 males, indicating a gender

imbalance. The district's overall literacy rate stands at 77%, with males leading at 86% and females slightly behind at 68%. A child sex ratio of 796 females per 1000 males suggests a preference for male offspring. Beed exhibits diversity with 14% Scheduled Caste and 1% Scheduled Tribe populations. Despite decent literacy rates, gender disparities persist, highlighting the need for targeted interventions to resolve these issues and promote inclusivity (Table-1).

Characteristics of Seasonal Migrant Households

Table 2: Socio-economic Characteristics of Sampled Seasonal Migrant Households

Household Characteristics	% (n)
Religion of the head of household	
Hindu	84.1 (143)
Buddhist	12.9 (22)
Islam	3.0 (5)
Caste/Tribe of the head of household	
Scheduled Tribe/Nomadic Tribe	50.7 (86)
Scheduled Caste	33.3 (56)
OBC and Others	16.0 (27)
Ration card	
No ration card	25.1 (43)
Below Poverty Line card/other entitlement card	52.2 (89)
Above Poverty Line card	22.7 (38)
Principal economic engagement in village	
Cultivation	38.7 (66)
Wage labour	55.3 (94)
Others	6.0 (10)
Household food security status	
Food secure	8.3 (14)
Food insecure without hunger	59.0 (100)
Food insecure with hunger	32.7 (56)
Total	100 (170)

Source: Based on the primary data collected from Beed District of Maharashtra state during November 2022

Table-2 reveals that most sampled households are Hindu (84.1%), with Buddhist households comprising a smaller proportion (12.9%), and Islamic households being a minority (3.0%). Scheduled Tribes/Nomadic Tribes constitute the most significant portion of households (50.7%), followed by Scheduled Castes (33.3%), Other Backward Classes (OBC) and other groups (16.0%). More than half of the households possess below-poverty line cards or other entitlement cards (52.2%), while a significant portion don't possess any ration card (25.1%). Most households are engaged in wage labour (55.3%), followed by cultivation (38.7%), with a small percentage involved in other economic activities (6.0%). A significant portion of households experiences food insecurity, either with or without hunger, highlighting a concerning aspect of livelihood vulnerability among the sampled population.

Pattern and Causes of Seasonal Migration

Therefore, seasonal migration is a fundamental component of the rural poor's survival strategy. Predominantly, households cite insufficient earnings in their villages to meet basic needs as the primary impetus for migration, reflecting the pervasive economic hardship driving them to seek wage labor elsewhere. This underscores the precarious nature of livelihood opportunities, particularly for Dalit and tribal households in the district. Consequently, seasonal migration

is predominantly distress-driven, highlighting the profound socio-economic challenges vulnerable communities face in sustaining their livelihoods.

The sugar factories in Maharashtra and Karnataka kickstart their operations in November and run until April or May each year. Once the factories are up and running, ensuring a steady supply of sugarcane is crucial. To achieve this, the factories establish daily supply targets for contractors, who recruit laborers to meet these goals.

Understanding the prevalent poverty and unemployment during the dry seasons, labor contractors, locally known as mukhadams, from sugar factories actively seek out workers from the Beed district. They offer them employment opportunities in the sugar factories, initiating a seasonal migration pattern.

This migration hinges on the provision of advances to prospective labourers. Many impoverished households in the Beed district accept these offers, relying on the advance payments provided by the labour contractors. Typically, this advance is extended to a work unit known as koita, which usually consists of a husband, wife, and one or two children. Accepting the advance effectively commits the recipients to seasonal work in the sugarcane harvest, creating a form of bonded labor with the contractor. Despite the potential for exploitation, this advance serves as a lifeline for these households during lean periods, offering them a means of survival.

Consequences of Seasonal Migration

Seasonal migration serves as a vital source of income for rural households, with migrants often provided work and housing at their destinations, albeit under gruelling conditions, working up to 12/13 hours daily. However, despite their labour, a significant portion struggles to repay advance payments taken from contractors, perpetuating a cycle of debt bondage. This dependence deprives migrants of negotiating power and perpetuates their economic vulnerability. Moreover, migration takes a toll on various aspects of migrants' lives, including education for children, health risks due to strenuous labour, and the fear and insecurity experienced by women in destination areas.

Focus group discussions (FGDs) and interviews reveal that while the state government has implemented various livelihood schemes for tribals like MNREGA and NRLM, many migrants struggle to access these benefits due to a lack of awareness, limited access to government offices, and bureaucratic hurdles. Housing remains a pressing issue at destinations, with migrants often forced to live in overcrowded and unhygienic conditions without proper sanitation or access to potable water.

Safety concerns arise due to a lack of security measures at workplaces, leading to higher accident rates and inadequate medical care. Moreover, migrants face exploitation by contractors, with high-interest debts and long working hours being common grievances. Political and social exclusion further marginalize migrants, depriving them of opportunities and access to essential services like healthcare and education. Discriminatory wage practices exacerbate economic hardships, while children accompanying migrant families experience high dropout rates despite initiatives like 'Bhonga Shala' mobile schools not being available in all migration-affected areas of Maharashtra.

Consequently, seasonal migration exacerbates existing socio-economic disparities and perpetuates a cycle of deprivation among migrant communities.

Table 3: Current Health Status of the Seasonal Migrant Women.

Prevalence of NCDs	% (n)
Any NCD	36.5 (62)
Back pain	23.2 (39)
Joint pain	18.5 (31)
Hypertension	2.4 (4)
Depression	2.1 (4)
Stroke	1.8 (3)
Lung disease	1.5 (3)
Cholesterol	1.2 (2)
Cataract	1.2 (2)
Heart disease	0.6 (1)
Total	100 (170)

Source: Based on the primary data collected from Beed District of Maharashtra state during November 2022

Table 3 illustrates the prevalence of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) among a sample of 170 individuals. The prevalence of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) among the sampled population is notable, with 36.5% of individuals affected by at least one NCD. Back pain emerges as the most prevalent NCD, affecting 23.2% of individuals, followed by joint pain at 18.5%. However, more severe conditions such as hypertension, depression, stroke, and lung disease are less prevalent, each affecting less than 3% of the population. Moreover, conditions like cholesterol, cataracts, and heart disease are rare, affecting less than 2% of individuals. These findings underscore the significant burden of NCDs within the sampled population, highlighting the importance of targeted healthcare interventions and preventative measures.

In the arid regions of the Beed district, seasonal migration serves as a crucial lifeline for thousands of small and marginal peasant households during the dry season. Predominantly hailing from socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds, these migrants face profound challenges, with limited access to basic amenities and a high prevalence of food insecurity. The differential impact of distress highlights the vulnerability of the socially and economically marginalized, compelling them to resort to low-cost, short-term solutions like seasonal migration.

However, this migration comes at a significant social and economic cost. Despite enduring long working hours under challenging conditions, only half of the migrant households gain a surplus after six months of labour, perpetuating a cycle of debt and economic vulnerability. Furthermore, the burden falls disproportionately on women and children, who endure additional hardships and insecurity.

The consequences extend beyond economic hardship, with a high prevalence of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) among migrants, particularly musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs), posing significant health risks. Moreover, the inability to send children to school deprives them of educational opportunities, perpetuating the cycle of social and economic backwardness.

The challenges faced by migrants include poverty, powerlessness, and language barriers, leading to alienation and discrimination. Lack of identity and access to basic entitlements like education, health, and housing exacerbate their plight. They struggle to access government programs, face unreliable remittance facilities, and endure poor living

conditions without amenities. Unsafe working conditions and limited legal protection compound their hardships, with inadequate information about rights and safety concerns further adding to their vulnerability. Overall, migrants grapple with a myriad of obstacles, ranging from socio-economic disparities to systemic barriers, as they navigate unfamiliar environments in search of better opportunities.

While seasonal migration provides a means of survival in the short term, it exacerbates long-term disadvantages for migrant households. Policy interventions are urgently needed to address the plight of seasonal migrants, including regular monitoring of wages and working conditions, health insurance coverage, and prioritized water conservation efforts in arid regions.

In conclusion, seasonal migration from the Beed district represents a compromise for households, where they endure social costs to meet immediate material needs. However, concerted efforts are necessary to alleviate the systemic challenges seasonal migrants face and break the cycle of poverty and vulnerability. Thus, seasonal migration in Beed district epitomizes the intricate interplay between environmental precarity, economic distress, and familial resilience, offering a lens into the adaptive strategies of rural communities in the face of adversity.

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