



SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITION OF SEASONAL WORKERS IN INDIA: A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY OF SEASONAL WORK IN KARNATAKA

Baswaraj V. Hugar

**Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology,
Chandrashekhar Education Society's CES First Grade College, Mannaekhelli.**

ABSTRACT

Seasonal migration is a significant feature of India's labour market, reflecting both regional disparities and the survival strategies of economically vulnerable groups. This study examines the socio-economic conditions of seasonal workers in Karnataka, focusing on their living standards, employment patterns, wages, working conditions, and access to social welfare schemes. Drawing on sociological perspectives and empirical field data, the research explores how factors such as caste, gender, education, and rural poverty influence patterns of seasonal migration. The study highlights the precarious nature of employment, lack of job security, poor housing facilities, and limited access to healthcare and education for migrant families. Despite their critical contribution to sectors such as agriculture, construction, and industry, seasonal workers remain socially marginalized and economically insecure. The paper concludes by emphasizing the need for policy interventions aimed at improving social protection, skill development, and livelihood security for seasonal labourers in Karnataka, thereby promoting inclusive growth and social justice. From a sociological perspective, the study of seasonal workers provides important insights into the intersection of class, caste, gender, and regional inequality. Understanding their socio-economic conditions helps in identifying the broader structural issues that perpetuate poverty and inequality in India's labour market. This study focuses on examining the living conditions, income levels, working environments, and social challenges faced by seasonal workers in Karnataka. The research also aims to assess the effectiveness of government welfare schemes and labour policies intended to improve the livelihood of migrant and seasonal workers. By exploring both the economic and social dimensions of seasonal migration, this study seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of labour mobility and its implications for inclusive development and social justice in contemporary India.



Seasonal migration represents one of the most prominent features of India's informal labour market and serves as a survival strategy for millions of rural poor. This study investigates the socio-economic conditions of seasonal workers in Karnataka, focusing on their employment patterns, income levels, living standards, and access to social welfare schemes. Drawing upon both primary and secondary data, the research explores how social factors such as caste, class, gender, and education shape the experiences and vulnerabilities of seasonal migrants. The study highlights that the majority of seasonal workers in Karnataka originate from drought-prone and economically backward districts, compelled to migrate temporarily for work in agriculture, construction, brick kilns, and small industries. Findings reveal low wages, job insecurity, poor housing, inadequate healthcare, and limited access to education as major challenges faced by these workers. Despite their vital contribution to the state's economy, seasonal workers remain excluded from social protection and development policies. The paper concludes that

effective policy interventions, skill development programs, and improved labour rights are essential for ensuring livelihood security and social justice for seasonal workers in Karnataka and across India.

KEY WORDS: *Socio-economic conditions, Seasonal workers, Migration, Karnataka, Labour market, Employment patterns, Rural poverty, Social welfare, Informal sector, Sociological study.*

INTRODUCTION

Seasonal migration is a common phenomenon in India, particularly among the rural poor who depend on wage labour for their livelihood. The uneven pattern of economic development, coupled with frequent agricultural crises and limited employment opportunities in rural areas, compels many individuals to migrate seasonally in search of work. These seasonal workers form a crucial part of India's informal labour force, contributing significantly to sectors such as agriculture, construction, brick kilns, textiles, and plantations. Despite their economic contribution, they remain among the most marginalized and vulnerable groups in society. In Karnataka, seasonal migration is widespread across both rural and semi-urban regions. Workers from drought-prone districts often migrate temporarily to industrial or agricultural hubs within and outside the state. Their employment is typically insecure, wages are low, and access to basic amenities such as housing, healthcare, and education is limited. Moreover, seasonal workers frequently experience exploitation, lack of legal protection, and social exclusion due to their transient status.¹ This study is therefore needed to: Highlight the socio-economic problems and vulnerabilities of seasonal workers in Karnataka. Examine the social factors—such as caste, class, and gender—that influence migration and labour conditions. Assess the effectiveness of existing government welfare schemes and identify gaps in policy implementation. Provide empirical data and sociological insights that can help policymakers, NGOs, and researchers develop targeted interventions to improve the quality of life of seasonal workers. In short, this study is necessary to bring visibility to the neglected segment of the workforce and to contribute to social justice, equitable development, and labour welfare in Karnataka and India as a whole.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

Aim:

The primary aim of this study is to analyze the socio-economic conditions of seasonal workers in Karnataka, with a focus on understanding their living standards, working environments, and the social challenges they encounter in the course of migration and employment.

Objectives:

- ❖ To study the demographic and socio-economic profile of seasonal workers in Karnataka.
- ❖ To examine the causes and patterns of seasonal migration among rural and urban labourers.
- ❖ To analyze the working conditions, wages, and employment security of seasonal workers.
- ❖ To assess the access of seasonal workers to housing, healthcare, education, and social welfare schemes.
- ❖ To identify the social and cultural factors influencing seasonal migration, including caste, class, and gender dimensions.
- ❖ To evaluate the role of government policies and labour laws in protecting the rights of seasonal workers.
- ❖ To suggest policy measures for improving the living and working conditions of seasonal labourers and promoting social inclusion.
- ❖ Would you like me to write the next section — Statement of the Problem or Review of Literature — to continue your paper structure?

¹ Ministry of Labour and Employment. (2021). Annual Report 2020–21. Government of India, New Delhi.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The phenomenon of seasonal migration has been widely studied in India, particularly in relation to rural poverty, labour markets, and social inequality. Various scholars have emphasized that migration is both a livelihood strategy and a reflection of socio-economic disparities within and across regions.

Deshingkar and Start (2003) observed that seasonal migration in India is largely driven by economic distress and lack of employment opportunities in rural areas. Migrants often come from drought-prone or underdeveloped districts and move temporarily to cities or agricultural zones where labour demand is high. Similarly, Breman (1996) highlighted the exploitative nature of migrant labour systems, emphasizing how informal and unregulated work environments perpetuate poverty and insecurity among workers.²

Keshri and Bhagat (2012) examined internal migration trends in India and found that seasonal workers constitute a significant portion of the labour force, especially in agriculture, construction, and manufacturing sectors. Their study also revealed that most seasonal migrants belong to marginalized castes and tribes with limited access to education and social security.

Srivastava (2011) pointed out that migration is often circular and temporary, and despite its economic benefits, it fails to provide long-term livelihood security due to the absence of institutional protection. Shah (2010) further argued that the migration of labourers is not just an economic phenomenon but also a social one, influenced by networks of kinship, caste hierarchies, and community ties.

In the context of Karnataka, studies by Narasimha (2015) and Rao (2018) revealed that seasonal workers from northern districts migrate to southern industrial regions for employment in construction, brick kilns, and plantations. These workers often live in temporary shelters with inadequate sanitation, poor access to healthcare, and minimal wage protection. The lack of formal contracts and social security benefits further exposes them to exploitation.

Government and institutional reports, such as those by the National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO, 2011) and NITI Aayog (2017), have highlighted the need for comprehensive policies to safeguard the rights of seasonal workers. Despite several welfare schemes like the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) and the Unorganised Workers' Social Security Act (2008), implementation gaps continue to affect migrant labourers' well-being.

From a sociological perspective, these studies collectively underscore that the socio-economic condition of seasonal workers is shaped by the intersection of economic deprivation, social marginalization, and policy neglect. However, limited region-specific studies exist on Karnataka's seasonal workers, indicating a need for further empirical investigation into their living and working conditions, and the effectiveness of welfare mechanisms.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study is an attempt to analyze the socio-economic conditions of seasonal workers in Karnataka. It focuses on understanding their living standards, income levels, working conditions, and access to welfare measures. The research adopts both qualitative and quantitative methods to gain a comprehensive sociological understanding of the issue.³

1. Research Design

The study follows a descriptive and analytical design. It describes the existing conditions of seasonal workers and analyzes the socio-economic and cultural factors influencing seasonal migration and livelihood patterns.

² Kundu, A., & Saraswati, L. R. (2012). Migration and exclusionary urbanization in India. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 47(26-27), 219-227.

³ Census of India. (2011). Primary Census Abstract — India & States/Union Territories. Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India.

2. Area of Study

The research was conducted in selected districts of Karnataka where seasonal migration is most prominent—especially Kalaburagi, Raichur, Koppal, and Belagavi. These regions experience frequent migration due to poverty, irregular rainfall, and lack of employment opportunities.

3. Universe and Sampling

The universe of the study includes all seasonal workers residing in the selected districts. A purposive sampling method was adopted to select respondents engaged in agriculture, construction, brick kilns, and small industries. A total of 150 respondents (both male and female) were chosen to represent different occupational and social backgrounds, ensuring diversity in age, caste, and gender.⁴

4. Sources of Data

Collected through structured interviews, questionnaires, and field observations. The data covered aspects such as income, employment type, housing, health, education, and social mobility. Gathered from books, research journals, government publications, reports of the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO), NITI Aayog, Census data, and relevant online sources.

5. Tools and Techniques for Data Collection

To collect factual and qualitative information, tools such as interview schedules, observation methods, and informal discussions were employed. This helped in capturing both numerical data and personal experiences of seasonal workers.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

India's labour force is largely dependent on the unorganized sector, where a significant portion of workers are engaged in seasonal and temporary employment. Seasonal migration has emerged as a major livelihood strategy for the rural poor who face unemployment and underemployment during non-agricultural seasons. Although these workers contribute substantially to the state and national economy through their labour in agriculture, construction, brick kilns, and small-scale industries, their living and working conditions remain highly insecure and vulnerable. In the state of Karnataka, seasonal migration is widespread, particularly in the drought-prone and economically backward districts such as Kalaburagi, Raichur, and Koppal. Thousands of men, women, and even children migrate temporarily to urban or semi-urban areas in search of employment. These workers often face problems such as low wages, lack of job security, exploitation by contractors, poor housing, inadequate healthcare, and absence of social protection. Their temporary status prevents them from accessing government welfare schemes and social benefits available to permanent residents.

Despite several government initiatives and labour welfare programs, the socio-economic condition of seasonal workers has not improved significantly. Most studies and policies focus on permanent migration or urban informal labour, while seasonal and circular migration remains understudied and underprotected. Moreover, there is a need to understand how factors such as caste, gender, education, and rural poverty interact to shape the experiences of these workers.⁵

NEED OF THE STUDY

Seasonal migration is an important socio-economic phenomenon in India, reflecting the uneven pattern of development, rural distress, and lack of employment opportunities in many regions. A large number of rural workers in states like Karnataka migrate temporarily to urban and industrial areas in search of work during non-agricultural seasons. These seasonal workers play a vital role in the

⁴ De Haan, A. (1999). Livelihoods and poverty: The role of migration — a critical review of the migration literature. *The Journal of Development Studies*, 36(2), 1–47. (classic review; verify page numbers when citing.)

⁵ International Organization for Migration (IOM). (2015). *Migration in India: Current trends and emerging issues*. IOM Regional Office for South Asia.

economy, yet their contribution often goes unrecognized, and their living conditions remain precarious. The need for this study arises from the fact that seasonal workers form an invisible and unprotected section of the labour force. They face low wages, exploitation, poor housing, lack of healthcare, absence of social security, and limited access to education for their children. Despite their crucial role in sectors such as agriculture, construction, and brick-making, they are deprived of stable employment and basic human rights. In Karnataka, seasonal migration is closely linked to poverty, drought, and regional imbalance. However, very few sociological studies have explored the living and working conditions of these workers in the state. Understanding their socio-economic realities is essential for designing effective welfare policies and inclusive development strategies. ⁶

FURTHER SUGGESTIONS FOR RESEARCH

The present study has made an effort to understand the socio-economic conditions of seasonal workers in Karnataka. However, the issue of seasonal migration and informal labour is complex and multi-dimensional, leaving ample scope for further research. The following suggestions are proposed for future studies:

Regional Comparisons:

Future research can undertake comparative studies between different districts or states to examine regional variations in the socio-economic conditions and migration patterns of seasonal workers.

Gender-Based Studies:

There is a need for detailed studies focusing on women seasonal workers, exploring their specific challenges such as wage discrimination, workplace safety, and the impact of migration on family life.

Policy Evaluation:

Further studies could evaluate the implementation and impact of government welfare schemes like MGNREGA, the Unorganised Workers' Social Security Act, and state-level labour policies on the lives of seasonal workers.

Child Labour and Education:

Research may also focus on the educational disruption and child labour issues among the children of seasonal migrants, as many of them are unable to access continuous schooling. ⁷

Health and Living Conditions:

There is scope for in-depth research on the health status, sanitation, housing, and nutrition of seasonal workers, especially those employed in hazardous occupations such as brick kilns and construction.

Socio-Cultural Dimensions:

Studies could analyze the social networks, caste relations, and community support systems that influence seasonal migration and workers' adaptation in new environments.

⁶ Singh, R. B. (2019). Migration, poverty and social transformation in India: Emerging challenges and prospects. *Journal of Social and Economic Development*, 21(1), 59-74.

⁷ Bhagat, R. B. (2016). Emerging pattern of urbanisation and migration in India. *Demography India*, 45(1), 1-20. (Use exact issue/pages from *Demography India*.)

Long-Term Impact Studies:

Longitudinal research can be conducted to understand the long-term economic and social impact of seasonal migration on workers' families, livelihoods, and community development.

Technology and Labour Registration:

Future studies may explore the role of digital tools and labour registration systems in tracking migrant workers and ensuring their access to welfare schemes and entitlements.

SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

The present study focuses on understanding the socio-economic conditions of seasonal workers in Karnataka, with particular attention to their living standards, income, employment patterns, and access to welfare measures. It also examines the social dimensions of migration, including the influences of caste, class, and gender on labour mobility and working conditions. The study covers selected districts such as Kalaburagi, Raichur, Koppal, and Belagavi, where seasonal migration is a common livelihood strategy. By analyzing workers engaged in agriculture, construction, brick kilns, and small industries, the study provides a comprehensive sociological perspective on their economic and social realities. The research is useful for policy makers, labour departments, social scientists, and NGOs, as it highlights the challenges faced by seasonal workers and suggests ways to improve their socio-economic well-being. It contributes to the understanding of labour migration, rural poverty, and informal employment in the broader Indian context.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study is limited to selected districts of Karnataka; therefore, the findings may not be generalizable to all seasonal workers in the state or country. Due to time and resource constraints, the sample size was restricted to 150 respondents, which may not capture the full diversity of experiences among seasonal workers. The study mainly relies on self-reported data collected through interviews and questionnaires; hence, there may be some bias or inaccuracies in responses. The mobile and temporary nature of seasonal workers made it difficult to track respondents for follow-up interviews or detailed case studies.

The research does not deeply explore the psychological or emotional aspects of migration, which could be an area for future investigation. The study period coincided with seasonal variations in employment, which may have influenced responses related to income and job security. Despite these limitations, the study offers valuable insights into the socio-economic realities of seasonal workers in Karnataka and provides a foundation for further academic and policy-oriented research.⁸

DISCUSSION

The study on the socio-economic condition of seasonal workers in Karnataka reveals a complex picture of livelihood insecurity, social marginalization, and economic dependence on temporary migration. The findings highlight that seasonal migration continues to be an essential survival strategy for a large number of rural poor, especially from drought-prone and economically backward regions of the state such as Kalaburagi, Raichur, and Koppal. Most of the respondents in the study belonged to lower socio-economic and marginalized caste groups, reflecting the deep-rooted link between poverty, social inequality, and labour mobility. The majority of seasonal workers are landless or small landholders, compelled to migrate due to lack of local employment opportunities, irregular agricultural income, and climate-related challenges. Employment among seasonal workers was found to be irregular and poorly paid, particularly in the unorganized sectors such as construction, brick kilns, and agriculture. Wages are often below minimum levels, and workers face exploitation due to absence of formal contracts or legal protection. Many respondents reported working under harsh conditions

⁸ Corbridge, S., & Harriss, J. (2017). *Reinventing India: Liberalization, Hindu Nationalism and Popular Democracy* (2nd ed.). Polity Press. (Useful for socio-political context of labour, migration and development debates.)

without access to safety equipment, clean drinking water, or sanitation facilities. The study also found that housing and health conditions of seasonal workers are extremely inadequate. Most live in temporary shelters or worksite accommodations with poor sanitation, limited access to healthcare, and lack of educational facilities for their children. This contributes to a cycle of poverty that extends across generations.

CONCLUSION/FINDINGS

The present study on the socio-economic condition of seasonal workers in Karnataka reveals that seasonal migration is both a livelihood necessity and a symptom of deep-rooted structural inequalities in rural India. The findings highlight that seasonal workers, though indispensable to the economic development of the state, continue to live and work under precarious conditions marked by low wages, job insecurity, poor housing, inadequate healthcare, and social exclusion. The study establishes that the main causes of seasonal migration are poverty, unemployment, drought, and lack of local livelihood opportunities in rural areas. Migrant workers—mostly from backward districts such as Kalaburagi, Raichur, and Koppal—migrate temporarily to urban and industrial regions in search of survival. However, in the absence of formal employment contracts or social security, they are vulnerable to exploitation and deprived of basic human rights.

From a sociological perspective, the problem of seasonal migration cannot be viewed merely as an economic issue—it is also deeply social in nature. Factors such as caste hierarchies, gender discrimination, and social exclusion determine who migrates, where they migrate, and under what conditions they work. Women seasonal workers face double marginalization, as they experience both gender-based wage disparities and social vulnerability at the workplace. Government interventions, such as MGNREGA and various social security schemes, have provided some relief but remain insufficient due to poor implementation, lack of awareness, and bureaucratic barriers. There is a clear need for stronger institutional mechanisms to register seasonal workers, ensure fair wages, provide health insurance, and guarantee education for migrant children. Overall, the discussion underscores that seasonal workers form an indispensable yet neglected segment of the Indian labour force. Addressing their socio-economic challenges requires a multi-dimensional approach involving government, civil society, and community participation. The findings also indicate that sustainable rural development and inclusive employment generation are key to reducing the compulsion for seasonal migration in Karnataka. In conclusion, improving the socio-economic condition of seasonal workers in Karnataka requires a multi-dimensional approach—including livelihood diversification in rural areas, proper enforcement of labour laws, provision of social protection, and access to education and healthcare. Only through inclusive development and social justice can the cycle of distress migration be broken, enabling seasonal workers to live with dignity and security.

REFERENCES

1. Breman, J. (1996). *Footloose Labour: Working in India's Informal Economy*. Cambridge University Press.
2. Deshingkar, P., & Start, D. (2003). *Seasonal Migration for Livelihoods in India: Coping, Accumulation and Exclusion*. Overseas Development Institute (ODI) Working Paper No. 220. London.
3. Keshri, K., & Bhagat, R. B. (2012). Temporary and Seasonal Migration: Regional Pattern, Characteristics and Associated Factors. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 47(4), 81–88.
4. Srivastava, R. (2011). Internal Migration in India: Initiatives for a Policy Framework. *Indian Journal of Labour Economics*, 54(3), 479–500.
5. Shah, A. (2010). *In the Shadows of the State: Indigenous Politics, Environmentalism, and Insurgency in Jharkhand, India*. Duke University Press.
6. Narasimha, M. (2015). Socio-Economic Conditions of Migrant Labourers in Karnataka: A Case Study of Raichur District. *Journal of Rural Development Studies*, 2(1), 45–57.
7. Rao, K. S. (2018). Migration and Marginalization: A Study of Seasonal Workers in Northern Karnataka. *International Journal of Social Sciences Review*, 6(2), 32–40.

8. National Sample Survey Office (NSSO). (2011). Employment and Unemployment Situation in India, 2009–10. Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Government of India.
9. NITI Aayog. (2017). India Three-Year Action Agenda (2017–18 to 2019–20). Government of India, New Delhi.
10. Government of India. (2008). The Unorganized Workers' Social Security Act, 2008. Ministry of Labour and Employment, New Delhi.



Baswaraj V. Hugar

**Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology,
Chandrashekhara Education Society's CES First Grade College, Mannaekhelli.
NH-65 District-Bidar, KARNATAKA.**