



# Mapping Migration of Different Social Groups: Learnings from Rural Bihar

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**Abstract :** Migration plays an important livelihood strategy for households in rural Bihar. High density of population, extremely skewed pattern of income distribution among different social groups, seasonal nature of employment available in agriculture and limited local non-farm opportunity in rural areas push a large number of workforce out of their home in search of work in the far flung areas of different parts of the country as well as abroad. The field survey from three different villages demonstrate that caste, class and the development status of the village play significant role in deciding where the migrants will go, duration of the migration and the nature of occupation in their place of destination. The paper particularly focuses on the nature of migration among different social groups from the state of Bihar. The paper also highlights the strong function of social capital in deciding the nature and character of the job that the migrants undertake.

Keywords: migration, scheduled castes, other backward classes, migrant worker

## 1.0 Introduction

Production relations in rural Bihar are not only confined to the geographical boundaries of the village and its immediate neighbourhoods. It transcends the confines of the village, district, state and sometimes even country, where the migrants work and repatriate their income back home, which in turn helps build and sustain exchange relationships. Datta (2014, 2020) has written extensively about the migration pattern from rural Bihar based on the observation from longitudinal surveys conducted under the aegis of the Institute of Human Development (IHD) (IHD)<sup>1</sup>. As argued by her, the findings of the survey also point out that different regions, social groups and villages adopt different strategies of migration due to their different development

<sup>1</sup> Datta, Amrita. "Circular migration and Precarity: Perspectives from rural Bihar." *The Indian Journal of Labour Economics* 63, no. 4 (2020): 1143-1163; Datta, Amrita, Gerry Rodgers, Janine Rodgers, and B. K. N. Singh. "Contrasts in development in Bihar: A tale of two villages." *The Journal of Development Studies* 50, no. 9 (2014): 1197-1208.

trajectories. The following sections will analyse the pattern of migration of the three surveyed villages. The analysis observes the characteristics and features of migration among different social groups<sup>2</sup> of the state of Bihar.

The present paper derives its findings from the survey conducted in three villages<sup>3</sup> of the state of Bihar- Belabadan from Purnia district, Mohiuddinpur from Nalanda district, and Paharpur Deyal from Gopalganj district. These villages fall into three different agro-climatic zones of the state. These three villages are situated in almost three corners of the state; one is situated in its northeastern part, the second in its northwestern part and the third is situated in the southern part of the state.

The work status of the migrants has been divided broadly into the following categories- casual wage work, regular wage work/salaried, homemaking, self-employed and student. It must be noted here that each of the above work status categories in itself can be further subdivided into many categories for further clarification, and sometimes the difference is very stark within the boundary of sub-categorisation also. For example, a casual wage worker working in an agricultural field or grain market in a north-Indian state of Punjab or Haryana and an electrician working in a construction sector in a west-Indian state of Maharashtra or Gujrat fall under the same category under the present study. But, their condition of work, the amount of wage, physical and mental labour involved, the security and duration of the job, and the skill required to perform these works vary in different works, and more importantly, they imply varying degrees and nature of exploitation by their employer and the market where they work. Clubbing them under one head, though, is necessary under the present study because the data from three villages is very huge, and it would be difficult to process these data minutely if the sub-categories under each head are also counted. To somewhat overcome this limitation, I have presented a detailed analysis of work status wherever found necessary.

As we shall see later, the predominant work status of migrants of all the villages combined is casual wage work in their place of destination. But, as said earlier, the nature of work is different for the three villages and among different social groups. Three villages lie in the different trajectories of development. Paharpur Deyal, being more developed and offering favourable social capital for its migrants, sends its working population in semi-skilled/skilled and high-paying jobs in the construction sector in western India and some foreign countries like Saudi Arabia, Maldives, and UAE. They have strong social networks in these sectors and countries and prepare the prospective migrants for these jobs from an early age.

Mohiuddinpur presents a completely stark picture compared to Paharpur Deyal. Most of the migrants from here are unskilled and do manual labour in sectors like brick kiln, garbage collection, grain market, and other industries where they are mainly employed as manual labourers on a non-regular basis. In Belabadan, there are mainly two set of migrants. One, some migrants, particularly Muslims and increasingly workers

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<sup>2</sup> The different social groups taken here broadly follow the categorisation done by the Government of Bihar for different purposes, except for three castes- Yadav, Koeri and Kurmi. These three castes have been the major beneficiaries of the land reform in the state and, after the 1970s, have exerted considerable influence on the state polity. The castes/social groups present in the survey are- Scheduled Caste (SC), Other backward Classes I (OBC I), Yadav, Koeri, Kurmi, Rajput, Brahmin and Kayastha, Muslims, and other OBC II (OBC II group except Yadav, Koeri and Kurmi).

<sup>3</sup> These three villages have also been part of a longitudinal study conducted by A N Sinha Institute of Social Studies (ANSISS) and Institute of Human Development (IHD) during different time period.

from other community<sup>4</sup> go to Ludhiana and Samrala in Punjab and its nearby places to work in construction sector as painters, and tile and marble work. Another set of workers go to Punjab, NCR and Haryana, and Chhattisgarh to work in foodgrain mandi, brick kilns, hotels and restaurants, and manual labourers in construction sites. This is mainly done by SCs and OBC I migrants. Some other OBC II members have small businesses in NCR and Haryana, and they also employ outside helpers from their social group. Thus, it can be observed from the above examples that the sub-categorisation within casual wage work is also very exhaustive, and the following analysis should be construed taking into account this heterogeneity in works also.

This study classifies the migrants according to different parameters like age, duration of migration, caste, class, etc. While classifying them with respect to the duration of migration three categories have been proposed-

- a. Short-term migrants, who migrate for less than three months in a year
- b. Medium-term migrants, who migrate for more than three months but less than eight months in a year; and
- c. Long-term migrants who migrate for eight or more than eight months in a year.

## 2.0 Migration among different caste/social groups

Apart from some handful of migrants from Mohiuddinpur who migrate to nearby urban centres of Bihar Sharif and Patna, all others migrate to other states and some to other countries for work. Some migrants also reported working in different locations during different periods of the time in a year. For example, in Mohiuddinpur, some of them reported working in the southern states of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. They switched between the thread-making industry in Chennai and as daily wage labourers in construction sites in Bengaluru. There was no report of rural-to-rural migration in the study villages, though in Paharpur Deyal, the respondents informed about migrants from other districts of Bihar coming to this village for agricultural wage work during some agricultural seasons, particularly for transplanting of rice seedlings, and some others coming from the state of Rajasthan for operating agricultural machineries during the harvesting period. The following section will analyse the nature and features of migration from the surveyed villages for each caste/social group.

### *SC Households*

SCs, along with OBC I, constitute the most marginalized and oppressed sections of the study. They possess the lowest level of assets, including agricultural land, engage in low-paying manual work, have low social and human capital, and are the most vulnerable groups in rural Bihar. The migration among these groups is mainly distress migration, whereby they are pushed out of their place due to a lack of productive employment opportunities in the state. Though, in the post-reform period, this precarity has spread among other groups as well, which has been pointed out in many studies, including the ANSISS and IHD longitudinal

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<sup>4</sup> Some respondents from each social group reported working here in this sector. In fact, Ludhiana and Samrala were the favourite destinations of migrant workers, where they are spread out in different sectors of the economy like construction, hotels and restaurants, petrol pumps, business establishments, etc.

surveys. Kumar (2009, p126) views the migration from the state as a mix of both push and pull factors<sup>5</sup>. He says that due to low wages in major sectors and the total lack of productive employment in the state, the migrant wage labourers are forced to move out and seek employment elsewhere, even in the hope of marginally increasing their income.

A large number of migrants from SC households migrate from their villages in search of livelihood, mainly to remote places like Punjab, Haryana, Tamil Nadu, and NCR where agricultural and non-agricultural wage work is easily available, and the wage rates are also higher compared to those in Bihar. The age profile of the migrants from SC households indicates that they are spread across all age groups, including senior citizens. In fact, all the migrants in the study villages from the age group of sixty-five years and above, numbering seven, are SCs. Six are males, and one is female among those. Forty-one percent of the total migrants are in the age group of 30-49 years, whereas forty-four percent of them are in the age group of 15-29 years. The rest are above the age of fifty years. It can be observed from above that the migrants from SC households start migration for work at a very early age compared to others. This is also true for the OBC I group of migrants, as we shall see later. The literacy level among the SC migrants is very low. Fifty-six percent of the SC migrants are illiterate. There is only thirty-three percent of the literates have passed the secondary level. All the migrants reported income generation as the primary objective for migration except three female migrants who migrated for homemaking.

Eighty-two percent of all the migrants from this group are medium-term migrants, which includes all the female migrants. Thirteen percent are long-term migrants and the rest five percent are short-term migrants. This indicates that they remain outside their village for quite a significant duration and earn a significant proportion of their income from work which is located outside their village. Among the male migrants, around ninety percent reported engaged in casual wage work in their place of destination, whereas seven percent reported regular jobs and around three percent self-employment. Fifty-seven percent of female migrants were engaged in casual wage work apart from doing homemaking, whereas the rest reported only doing the homemaking in their place of destination. Those migrants who reported working in their villages back home, were mainly engaged in casual wage work, and a few reported being self-employed.

### *OBC I Households*

All of the migrants from this group reported migration for livelihood purpose. They are spread out across all working age groups. Though, compared to others their proportion below the age of 30 years is highest among them. More than fifty-two percent of them are below the age of 30 years, and forty-three percent in the age group of 30-49 years. Rest five percent were in the age group of 50-59 years. There are also female migrants in this group constituting eleven percent of the total migrants. The literacy rate among the migrants of this group is very low at fifty-two percent, and among the literates, only six percent have read beyond the secondary level. All the female migrants from this group are illiterate.

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<sup>5</sup> Kumar, Awanish. "A Class Analysis of the 'Bihari Menace'." *Economic and Political Weekly* (2009): 124-127.

The medium-term migrants from this group constitute fifty-nine percent of the total, whereas long-term and short-term migrants constitute twenty-eight and thirteen percent respectively. Among the male migrants, eighty-nine percent reported engaged in casual wage work and eleven percent regular jobs in their place of destination. All the female migrants reported doing casual wage work in addition to homemaking in their place of destination.

#### *Other OBC II Households*

There was no migrant from other OBC II in the age group of 15-19 years. They are mainly concentrated in the age group of 25-49 years, comprising seventy-three percent of the total migrants. When we look at their presence separately in the analytical age-categories, the highest proportion is observed amongst those falling in the age group of 30-49 years at forty-six percent, followed by those in the age group of 25-29, 50-59 and 20-24 years at twenty-seven, fifteen, and twelve percent respectively. No female migrants were recorded in this group. The literacy rate among them was eighty-one percent, and twenty-four percent among the literates reported education beyond the secondary level.

The proportion of long-term migrants among them was quite high at forty-two percent of the total, whereas fifty-eight percent were medium-term migrants. There was no reporting of short-term migration from these households. The majority of migrants from this group were working as casual wage workers in their place of destination. Sixty-one percent were working as casual wage workers, thirty-one percent were self-employed, and eight percent were employed in regular jobs. Among the migrants who reported working in their villages, the highest proportion was for the self-employed, comprising fifty-seven percent of the total and the rest forty-three percent reported casual wage work as their primary activity.

#### *Koeri Households*

No female migrants were reported from the Koeri households. The majority of migrants from this caste group were from the age group of 30-49 years forming fifty-six percent of the total. Six percent were in the age group of 50-59 years and the rest were evenly found in the age groups of 15-19, 20-24 and 25-29 years. The literacy rate among them was ninety-four percent, and among the literates, forty-four percent had passed at least secondary level.

Majority of the migrants amongst them were medium-term, comprising sixty-one percent of the total. Long-term migrants and short-term migrants accounted for twenty-two and seventeen percent, respectively. Casual wage work was reported by the highest proportion of migrants in their place of destination, comprising seventy-two percent of the total, followed by those reporting regular jobs and self-employment by twenty-two and six percent respectively. The migrants of this caste followed the same work pattern which is generally followed in the village that has been illustrated earlier. In the age group of 15-29 years, the migrants from this caste mainly worked in the construction sector as casual wage workers in different parts of the country like Chhattisgarh, Gujrat, Karnataka, NCR etc. Many of them had left education early and started to learn the required skills for working. In their respective village also, the work profile of the migrants follows the same pattern, as eighty-six percent of those reporting work were engaged in casual wage work.

*Kurmi Households*

All the migrants from Kurmi households were literate, and among the literates, eighty-five percent had passed at least the secondary level of education. There was no female migrants from Kurmi households. Forty-six percent of all migrants were from the age group of 30-49 years, followed by twenty-three percent from 24-29 years age group, and fifteen percent each from 15-19 years and 20-24 years age group.

Fifty-four percent of migrants migrated for medium-term, and the rest forty-six percent migrated for long-term periods from their village. There was no reporting of the migrant moving for less than three months from this social group. Of all the migrants, eighty-five percent reported engaged in casual wage work, and fifteen percent in regular employment in their place of destination. All migrants in the age group of 15-29 years had left their studies after higher secondary, except one who had left after secondary, mid-way and started working. They were working mainly in the construction sector, such as electric fitters and welders, sanitary fitters, etc. Most of them were working in Maharashtra in different towns. One of them was working in Dubai in construction sector. In their own villages, all of them who reported to work were engaged as casual wage workers in different sectors.

*Yadav Households*

The literacy rate among the Yadav migrants was only fifty-six percent. They were mostly concentrated in the age group of 30-49 years, comprising seventy-six percent of the total migrants among them. Sixteen percent were in the age group of 24-29 years and the rest four percent each were in the age groups of 20-24 years, and 60-64 years.

Most of the migrants from this social group migrated for medium-term, constituting eighty percent of the total. Twelve percent migrated for long-term and eight percent reported the short-term migration. All the Yadav migrants were reported to be engaged in casual wage work in their place of destination. None of them reported either self-employment or regular jobs. All the migrants except one were working in Punjab in the cities of Pathankot, Samrala, and Ludhiana. One was working in NCR as a painter. In Punjab, they were mainly engaged in manual labour in foodgrain mandi and other casual wage work, and some had started learning painting and started working in this sector. Back home, all of them who reported some work were mainly engaged in agricultural wage work. None of them were working in any other sector as casual wage workers except in agriculture.

*Rajput Households and Brahmin and Kayastha (BRKY) households*

Eighty-two percent of migrants from Rajput households are concentrated in the age group of 30-49 years. The remaining eighteen percent are equally distributed in the 20-24 years and 50-59 years age group. All of them are literate, though none of them are educated beyond the secondary level. Eighty-two percent of them are long-term migrants whereas eighteen percent are medium-term migrants. There is no female migrant from this caste.

The proportion of long-term migrants is highest among them compared to other castes/groups. More than forty-five percent of migrants are engaged in regular salaried jobs and casual wage work, and nine percent of them are employers. Majority of them work in Gulf countries as regular salaried employees. The casual wage workers are mainly engaged in the construction sector as welders, electric fitters, etc in Maharashtra. Only one migrant reported working in the village as self-employed.

There is only one migrant from a Brahmin household from Mohiuddinpur village. He has studied up to the secondary level and is a short-term migrant. He generally works as a casual wage worker in and around the village and migrates for the short term to NCR to do some casual work.

### *Muslim Households*

Age-wise they are spread across all categories. Their highest concentration is in the age group of 30-49 years. Twenty percent of them are in the age group of 20-24 years, and twelve percent each are spread across the age groups of 15-19 years, 24-29 years, and 50-59 years. Four percent of migrants are in the age group of 60-64 years. The literacy rate among Muslim migrants is very low. Only forty-eight percent of those are literate, and among literates only sixteen percent had passed the secondary level of education.

After Rajputs, Muslims have the largest proportion of the population working as long-term migrants. Seventy-six percent of those migrate for the long term compared to twenty-four percent for the medium-term. In their place of destination, seventy-six percent are engaged in casual wage work, twenty percent are self-employed, and four percent have regular jobs. Most of these migrants are concentrated in a small town of Punjab called Samrala, where they work mainly as painters and some work in marble and tiles. The migrants in the age group of 15-24 years are mostly educated up to primary level, and they started learning work at a very early age. Many children below the age of fourteen years and in the age group of 15-19 years reported learning the painting work along with their parents in Samrala. In their place of origin, one-fourth of all migrants reported working, sixty-two percent of those as casual wage workers, twenty-five percent as self-employed and thirteen percent as an employer.

### **Conclusion**

The migration pattern of the study demonstrates that the incidence of migration is highest among the SCs and OBC I communities, and it is spread out in all the age groups, including those below the age of fourteen years and above the age of sixty years. These two social groups demonstrate the most precarious and vulnerable job profile in their place of destination compared to other groups. The extreme poverty at the village level forces them to migrate to different parts of the country, mostly in the informal sector. The upper caste and upper-class migration patterns are more stable, with much better job profiles in their place of destination. Three villages also present different pictures- the migration from Paharpur Deyal is more long term and includes mostly skilled work, and the destination is country as well as abroad; migration from Belabadan is more diverse and involves both semi-skilled and unskilled work for the migrants. Migration from Mohiuddinpur, on the other hand, is completely different involving extremely low-paying and menial

jobs which includes working in brick kilns and garbage management. Overall, the nature of migration is strongly co-related with caste, class and the village in this study.

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