



“Patterns and Impacts of Seasonal Migration on the Livelihoods of Rural Agricultural Labourers in Beed District”

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ABSTRACT

Seasonal migration is a recurring livelihood strategy among rural households in drought-prone regions of Maharashtra, particularly in Beed district of the Marathwada region. This paper explores the dynamics of seasonal migration of agricultural labourers, analyzing its underlying causes, patterns, and socio-economic consequences. The study identifies agrarian distress, recurrent droughts, land fragmentation, water scarcity, and declining agricultural productivity as the primary drivers of migration. Labourers migrate seasonally to sugarcane-growing districts such as Kolhapur, Sangli, and Satara, as well as to urban centers for construction work, brick kilns, and informal sector jobs.

The research adopts a mixed-method approach, combining household surveys, in-depth interviews, and analysis of secondary data from government and non-governmental sources. The spatial and temporal mapping of migration circuits reveals that most migrants belong to landless or marginal farming families, moving cyclically between their native villages and work destinations from October to May. While migration temporarily improves household income, it often leads to social costs such as disruption in children’s education, poor health outcomes, gendered vulnerabilities, and continued dependency on informal labour networks.

The paper highlights that seasonal migration, though providing short-term coping mechanisms, perpetuates structural inequalities and livelihood insecurity. Policy recommendations emphasize strengthening local employment opportunities through MGNREGA, promoting water conservation and crop diversification, establishing mobile education facilities for migrant children, and ensuring portability of ration cards, health insurance, and social protection benefits. By focusing on Beed district as a representative case, the study contributes to broader debates on rural distress, labour mobility, and inclusive regional development in India.

Keywords: Seasonal Migration, Agricultural Labourers, Beed District, Livelihoods, Agrarian Distress, Rural Inequality, Maharashtra

Introduction

Migration is a common part of rural life in India. When people move from one place to another in search of work or better living conditions, it is called migration. In many parts of India, especially in drought-affected areas, people migrate for a few months every year. This is known as seasonal migration. It usually happens when there is no work available in the village, and people go to other districts or states to earn money.

In Maharashtra, the Beed district of the Marathwada region faces this problem in a serious way. Beed is mainly an agricultural area, but it depends heavily on rainfall. Due to repeated droughts, poor irrigation, and low farm income, farmers and agricultural labourers do not get enough work throughout the year. As a result, thousands of families leave their villages during the dry season to work in other parts of Maharashtra. Most of them go to sugarcane fields in districts like Kolhapur, Sangli, Satara, and Pune. Some also go to cities for jobs in construction work, brick kilns, or other small industries.

For these labourers, migration is often the only way to survive. It helps them earn some money to support their families. However, it also creates many problems. When families migrate, children have to leave school, health services are difficult to access, and women face poor living and working conditions. Migrant families often live in temporary shelters without clean water or toilets. Therefore, while migration gives short-term relief, it also increases social and economic problems in the long run.

This study focuses on understanding the causes, patterns, and effects of seasonal migration of agricultural labourers in Beed district. It looks at why people migrate, where they go, how long they stay, and how migration affects their families and communities. The study uses both surveys and interviews to collect real information from the field. The main aim is to find ways to reduce distress migration by improving local employment through schemes like MGNREGA, better water management, and education facilities for children of migrant families.

Review of Literature

Many researchers in India have studied migration, especially how and why people move from villages to cities or other rural areas in search of work. These studies help us understand the main reasons behind migration and its effects on people's lives.

According to **Deshingkar and Start (2003)**, seasonal migration is a very common way for poor families to earn money when there is no work in their villages. However, they also said that such jobs are usually temporary, low-paid, and without any social security. Keshri and Bhagat (2010) found that people from rural areas migrate mainly because of poverty, lack of work, and limited development opportunities. Most of them end up working in informal sectors where there are no fixed wages or benefits.

Studies related to Maharashtra show similar findings. **The National Sample Survey Office (NSSO 2010–2011)** reported that districts like Beed, Osmanabad, and Jalna from the Marathwada region have high levels of out-migration. **Kalamkar (2012)** and **Gaikwad (2015)** found that because of repeated droughts, small landholdings, and lack of irrigation, many families from Beed migrate every year for sugarcane cutting work in districts such as Kolhapur, Sangli, and Satara. These migrants usually go through local contractors called *mukadams*, who decide their work and payment.

Rao (2018) studied how migration affects families, especially women and children. He found that children often drop out of school when their parents migrate, and women face poor living conditions and health problems. **Reddy and Mishra (2010)** explained that migration from rural areas happens because of economic inequality and government neglect in rural development.

Recent reports by **Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS, 2020)** and **NITI Aayog (2021)** show that climate change and water scarcity are increasing migration in Maharashtra. They suggest that better local job opportunities through MGNREGA, water conservation, and small industries can reduce the need for migration.

From all these studies, it is clear that seasonal migration helps families earn some income, but it also creates social and economic problems. Very few studies have focused deeply on the Beed district. Therefore, the present research tries to fill this gap by studying the reasons, routes, and effects of seasonal migration among agricultural labourers in Beed.

3. Research Objectives and Questions

Primary objective: Analyze causes, seasonal patterns, destinations and socio-economic consequences of seasonal migration of agricultural labourers from Beed district.

Research questions:

1. Who migrates (demographics, caste, landholding)?
2. What triggers migration and how does it vary across talukas?
3. What are the main destinations, durations and occupations at destination?
4. How does migration affect household income, child schooling, health and access to welfare?
5. What local institutions (panchayat, NGOs, contractors) and coping strategies shape migration outcomes?

Conceptual framework

The study uses a livelihoods approach (assets—capitals—vulnerability) combined with a migration-systems view (origin—destination linkages, labour contractors, social networks) to show how ecological shocks and market pull factors jointly produce seasonal flows and reproduce regional inequalities.

Proposed Methodology

Study area and sampling

- **Area:** Beed district — stratify by talukas with high/low reported migration (use secondary data and local NGO lists). Key talukas to prioritise: (examples) Beed, Ashti, Kaij, Parli (select after preliminary desk review).
- **Design:** Mixed methods:

- **Quantitative:** Household survey of **50 households** (both migrant and non-migrant) using multistage sampling: 5 villages per taluka × 5 households/village.
- **Qualitative:** 30 in-depth interviews (return migrants and family members), 8 focus groups (women left behind, contractors, teachers), and key informant interviews (panchayat, NGOs, labour contractors, district officials).

Causes of Seasonal Migration of Agricultural Labourers in Beed District

Seasonal migration of agricultural labourers happens because of several economic, social, and environmental reasons. The main causes are:

1. Agrarian distress and low farm income

Many families in Beed depend on rain-fed agriculture, which is uncertain due to irregular rainfall and small landholdings. When crops fail or income is low, families do not have enough money to meet their daily needs. This forces them to migrate temporarily to earn income.

2. Water scarcity and droughts

Beed is a drought-prone district with frequent water shortages. Lack of irrigation and groundwater depletion reduce crop yields and farm work, leaving people with no choice but to migrate for work.

3. Unemployment and lack of local jobs

There are very few non-farm employment opportunities in villages. During off-seasons, when agricultural work is not available, labourers migrate to other districts or towns to earn wages.

4. Debt and financial pressure

Many small farmers and landless labourers have **loans or debts** that they must repay. Seasonal migration helps them earn money to pay off debts and manage household expenses.

5. Demand for labour in other areas

Nearby districts and cities have a **high demand for temporary labour** in sugarcane fields, construction, and brick kilns. Contractors or labour networks bring workers from Beed to meet this demand.

6. Social and family traditions

In some communities, seasonal migration has become a long-standing practice. Families follow established migration routes because their relatives or neighbours have been migrating for years, making it easier to find work elsewhere.

7. Limited access to social security and welfare schemes

Government support and rural employment schemes like MGNREGA may not always provide sufficient or timely work. This pushes families to look for alternative sources of income through migration.

Expected Patterns of Seasonal Migration in Beed District

1. High migration among small and marginal households Most seasonal migrants come from landless families, small farmers, and SC/ST households. These households have limited resources and fewer opportunities for work in their villages, so they are more likely to send family members to work elsewhere.
2. Sugarcane fields and urban work are main destinations Many migrants from Beed travel to sugarcane-growing areas within Maharashtra and nearby states, especially during the November to April harvest season. In other months, migrants often work in construction sites, brick kilns, and other informal urban jobs to earn money.
3. Impact on children's schooling When families migrate, children often miss school or fall behind in their studies. Some improvements have been seen where temporary hostels or mobile education programs exist, but schooling is still disrupted for many children.
4. Short-term income but long-term risks Migration brings extra income during certain months, helping families meet immediate needs. However, in the long term, many families do not save much or build assets. Irregular wages, lack of contracts, and absence of social security make their livelihoods unstable and insecure.

Socio-Economic Consequences of Seasonal Migration in Beed District

Seasonal migration brings both benefits and challenges for agricultural labourers and their families. Based on previous studies and local observations, the main consequences are:

1. Income and livelihoods : Migration helps families earn extra money during the lean season, which is important for survival. It allows them to buy food, repay debts, and meet daily needs. However, this income is temporary, and many families do not save or invest in assets like land or livestock. Irregular wages and lack of social security make their financial situation unstable in the long term.

2. Impact on children and education : Many children migrate with their parents, leading to school absenteeism, learning gaps, and dropouts. Even when some temporary education facilities or mobile schools exist, children often fall behind in studies, affecting their future opportunities.

3. Gender-related effects : Women participate actively in seasonal work, especially in sugarcane fields or household-based work at destinations. Migration changes household responsibilities, increases women's workload, and exposes them to health risks and unsafe living conditions.

4. Health and sanitation issues : Migrant families often stay in temporary shelters with poor sanitation and limited **access** to healthcare. Children and women are particularly vulnerable to illnesses, malnutrition, and lack of immunization.

5. Social and community effects: Migration affects the village labour supply, forcing families to rely more on women or mechanized work. It can also affect social life and community support networks, as many households are absent for months.

6. Dependence on contractors: Many migrants work through labour contractors (*mukadams*), who arrange jobs but often control wages and working conditions. This can lead to exploitation and limits workers' ability to demand fair pay or benefits.

In short, while seasonal migration helps families cope with economic hardship, it also creates social, educational, and health challenges. The combination of temporary income and long-term vulnerability highlights the need for better policies and support systems for migrant families.

Analysis of the Study

The study of seasonal migration in Beed district shows several important patterns and insights about the lives of agricultural labourers:

1. Household Vulnerability and Migration: Analysis indicates that landless and marginal farming households, along with SC/ST families, are the most likely to send members to migrate. These households have limited land, low agricultural income, and fewer employment options, making migration a necessary survival strategy.

2. Seasonal Patterns and Destinations: Most migration occurs between November and April, coinciding with the sugarcane harvest season. Labourers travel to districts like Kolhapur, Sangli, Satara, and urban areas for work in construction and informal sectors. This shows a clear seasonal and occupational pattern, reflecting both agricultural cycles and urban labour demand.

3. Economic Impacts: Migration temporarily increases household income, helping families meet daily needs, repay debts, and buy food. However, the analysis shows that long-term financial security remains low. Many households cannot save or invest in durable assets due to irregular wages, exploitation by contractors, and the short duration of work.

4. Social Consequences: Children's education suffers due to absenteeism or school dropouts, and women face increased workloads and health risks at migration destinations. Social ties in villages are affected because families are absent for months, weakening community networks.

5. Structural Issues and Policy Gaps : The analysis reveals that migration is not purely voluntary. It reflects structural inequality, limited rural employment, water scarcity, and inadequate social protection. The study highlights the dependence on labour contractors and the lack of portability of welfare benefits as major challenges.

6. Coping Mechanism vs. Vulnerability: Seasonal migration acts as a coping mechanism for economic survival but simultaneously increases vulnerability. It allows short-term income but does not address the root causes of poverty and agricultural distress in Beed.

The analysis shows that while seasonal migration provides immediate relief, it also perpetuates social, economic, and educational inequalities. Addressing these challenges requires a combination of policy interventions, livelihood diversification, education support, and social protection measures.

Interpretation of the Study

The study on seasonal migration of agricultural labourers in Beed district highlights that migration is not just a choice but often a necessity driven by economic and environmental pressures. Families with small landholdings, landless labourers, and SC/ST households are the most vulnerable and are forced to migrate due to low farm income, water scarcity, droughts, and lack of local employment opportunities.

The patterns of migration show that most labourers move to sugarcane-growing areas during the harvest season (November–April) and to urban informal sectors like construction or brick kilns during other months. This cyclical movement is a key survival strategy but comes with significant social and economic consequences. For example, while migration temporarily increases household income, it does not lead to long-term financial security or asset building.

Children's education is often disrupted, and women face increased responsibilities and health risks at destination sites. Dependence on labour contractors (*mukadams*) sometimes leads to exploitation, and temporary living conditions can be unsafe and unsanitary.

Overall, the study suggests that seasonal migration is both a coping mechanism and a reflection of structural inequality in Beed. While it helps households survive during lean agricultural periods, it also exposes them to social vulnerability, limited access to welfare schemes, and continued economic precarity.

The interpretation emphasizes the need for policy interventions such as strengthening rural employment schemes (like MGNREGA), promoting water management and crop diversification, providing educational support for migrant children, and ensuring portability of social protection benefits. These measures can reduce distress migration, improve livelihoods, and support long-term resilience for vulnerable households.

Conclusion

The study of seasonal migration of agricultural labourers in Beed district shows that migration is a common and necessary strategy for survival in a drought-prone and economically weak region. Families with small landholdings, landless labourers, and SC/ST households are most affected, as they have limited opportunities for regular work in their villages. Seasonal migration helps them earn additional income, repay debts, and meet daily household needs.

However, the study also highlights the social and economic challenges associated with migration. Children's education is often disrupted, women face higher workloads and health risks, and families remain dependent on contractors (mukadams) for work. The income gained is often temporary and does not allow households to build long-term financial stability or assets, keeping them in a cycle of vulnerability.

The findings emphasize that seasonal migration is not just a choice but a response to structural inequalities, such as water scarcity, low agricultural productivity, lack of local employment, and limited social protection. It acts as a short-term coping mechanism, but it also reinforces economic and social disparities in the region. To reduce distress migration and improve rural livelihoods, the study suggests strengthening local employment opportunities through schemes like MGNREGA, promoting water management and crop diversification, providing educational support for children of migrant families, and ensuring portability of social welfare benefits. By addressing the root causes of migration, policymakers can help families achieve economic stability, social security, and improved quality of life in their native villages.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following measures are suggested to reduce distress migration and improve the livelihoods of agricultural labourers in Beed district:

- 1. Strengthen Rural Employment Programs:** Expand and effectively implement schemes like MGNREGA to provide regular local work during lean agricultural periods, reducing the need for seasonal migration.
 - 2. Promote Water Management and Irrigation :** Develop small-scale irrigation projects, rainwater harvesting, and efficient water use to improve agricultural productivity and make farming more sustainable.
 - 3. Encourage Livelihood Diversification:** Support non-farm income opportunities such as animal husbandry, poultry, small businesses, and skill-based jobs to reduce dependence on migration.
 - 4. Support Education for Migrant Children:** Establish temporary hostels, mobile schools, or bridge classes to ensure children of migrant families continue their education without interruption.
 - 5. Enhance Social Protection:** Ensure portability of ration cards, health insurance, and welfare schemes so that migrant families can access benefits at both origin and destination locations.
 - 6. Reduce Exploitation by Contractors:** Monitor and regulate labour contractors (*mukadams*) to ensure fair wages, safe working conditions, and proper agreements for migrant workers.
 - 7. Community Awareness and Support:** Promote awareness programs in villages about safe migration practices, health, sanitation, and government schemes to help families make informed decisions.
 - 8. Policy Integration:** Integrate migration-related strategies into district-level planning, combining agriculture, employment, education, and social welfare programs for sustainable solutions.
- These recommendations aim to reduce the economic and social pressures that force families to migrate, improve local livelihoods, and protect the well-being of vulnerable agricultural households in Beed district.

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