

Income Inequality among Males in Rural Uttar Pradesh: The Role of Caste and Religion in Mirzapur

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Abstract

Introduction: In India, minority social positions based on caste and religious group affiliations are typically viewed as a separate aspect of inequality. Income inequality is a persistent issue in rural India, where socio-economic disparities are deeply influenced by caste and religion. This study examines income inequality among migrant men in Mirzapur district, Uttar Pradesh, focusing on caste and religious inequalities.

Data and Methods: The study assesses income distribution across social groups using primary survey data from 300 respondents (2023–24) and the Gini ratio.

Results: Findings reveal that most migrants are Hindu (91.7%), with 62% belonging to the Other Backward Classes (OBC). Income inequality is stark, with General caste migrants having the highest income concentration (Net Gini = 0.8142), while Scheduled Tribes (ST) migrants have the lowest (Net Gini = 0.2616). Muslim migrants exhibit a higher income concentration than Hindus, likely due to trade and self-employment. Migration patterns indicate that lower-income groups migrate for labour-intensive work while higher-income groups seek skilled jobs.

Conclusion: Despite some decline in caste-based disparities, the study underscores the persistent influence of caste and religion on economic mobility. These findings contribute to discussions on reducing income inequality and promoting inclusive growth in rural India. Further research is needed to explore long-term economic mobility among migrant communities.

Keywords: Income inequality, Caste, Religion, India, Rural

Introduction

In India, minority social position based on caste and religious group affiliations is typically viewed as a

separate aspect of inequality (Chatterjee et al., 2023). Income inequality is a persistent issue in rural India, where socio-economic disparities are deeply influenced by caste and religion (Roy et al., 2024). In rural India, inequality is a complicated problem, including differences in opportunities, income, and access to resources. It is frequently made worse by caste, gender, and land ownership, which results in long-term poverty and little social mobility (Bharti, 2018; Chandra & Chong, 2024). Significant income gaps exist in rural areas, where the wealthiest households frequently have access to opportunities and resources that the poorest cannot (Ranganathan, Tripathi & Rajoriya, 2015; Mondal, 2016).

In Uttar Pradesh, one of India's most populous and socioeconomically diverse states, these factors play a crucial role in determining income levels, employment opportunities, and overall economic mobility. With its diversified demographic mix, Mirzapur district presents a compelling case to study the influence of caste and religion in shaping income distribution among migrant men. Caste-based stratification continues to impact economic opportunities, with marginalized communities such as Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) often engaged in low-paying, unskilled labor, whereas the General caste enjoys greater access to education, employment, and wealth accumulation (Mondal, 2016; Chandra & Chong 2024). However, a previous study suggests that the impact of caste on income has reduced over time, and lower-caste individuals' income is still lower than that of their upper-caste counterparts (Thorat & Khan, 2023; Chandra & Chong, 2024). Similarly, religious affiliation also affects income distribution, as Muslim households tend to rely on trade and self-employment, while Hindu households exhibit a more diverse economic structure influenced by caste-based hierarchy (Elgin et al., 2013; Mondal, 2016).

Based on this backdrop, this study aims to explore the extent of income inequality among migrant men in rural Mirzapur, highlighting the disparities based on caste and religion. Examining these socio-economic patterns provides insights into how historical and structural inequalities continue to shape income distribution. The findings of this study will contribute to a broader understanding of rural income disparities and offer valuable implications for policy measures aimed at reducing inequality and fostering inclusive economic growth.

Methods & Materials

Study Area: The study area of Mirzapur has a population of around 25 lakhs, with around 3.5 lakh urban and 21.5 lakh rural. The district has a total literacy rate of 68.48%, with 79.0% of male literacy and 57% of female literacy.

Data source

This study is based on the primary survey collected in 2023-24. This primary survey collects data from the district of Mirzapur, Uttar Pradesh. Gadauli, Bajaha, Semeri, and Majhawa villages were selected for the sample of the women with a sampling procedure Population Proportion to Size (PPS), and further random selection of respondents took place from the identified migrated respondents of the selected villages in Mirzapur district. A total of 300 samples of male respondents have been collected for this study.

Methods

The Gini ratio is estimated by Julka and Sharma (1989) in their study. For the computation of the family-size Gini ratio, households are classified into classes according to the number of household members, i.e., 1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 7-8, 9 & above. Later, these family size classes are rearranged by the increasing mean land area operated and not in the increasing order of the family size itself. With the help of the corresponding cumulative percentage of area operated, the family size Gini ratio is calculated. The net Gini ratio is

estimated by subtracting the family size Gini ratio from the conventional Lorenz Gini ratio. The Gini ratio is estimated as follows:

$$Gini\ ratio = 1 - \left\{ \frac{\sum_{i=1}^N (u_i - v_{i-1})(u_i + v_{i-1})}{100000} \right\}$$

Where,

u_i = cumulative percentage of households including the i th class,

v_i = cumulative percentage of income own corresponding to v_i ,

N = Total number of classes in analysis.

Further,

$$Net\ Gini = Lorenz\ Gini - Family\ Size\ Gini$$

Outcome Variable: The outcome variable of this study is the income of the migrated male. The outcome variable categories are based on their monthly income level. Furthermore, it was categorized into five categories using the 'xtile' command to convert into five categories with their income level.

Exposure variable: The exposure variable for this study is the social factors, including the caste and religion of the migrated male from the selected villages of the setting area. The caste has been defined into four categories: Scheduled Caste (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST) and Other Backward Classes (OBC), and General. For the religion, mainly two religions have been found in the study area: Hindu and Muslim.

Results

Results of Table 1 suggest the profile of a suggestive subgroup of male migrants used in this study for estimating the income inequality stratified by caste and religion of the male migrants in the Mirzapur district in India. The results suggest that most migrants were from the Hindu religion (91.7%), followed by Muslims (8.3%). The case of the social group of women suggests that more than two-thirds (62%) of migrants were from the OBC caste, followed by Scheduled Caste and General with an equal proportion of 18%, and the lowest proportion of migrants were from Scheduled Tribes with only 2% of migrants. Considering the income level of the migrants, the results reveal that about one-third (32.7%) of migrants were from the lowest income group, followed by the second quintile with 21.3%, and 20.3% were from the middle quintile of the migrants. Additionally, the highest quintile income groups migrated only with 15.3% of the proportion. In the case of a source of drinking water, the majority of migrant households used their hand pump (63.3%) followed by public hand pumps (12.3%), and an interesting result has been found that about 12% of migrant households still use well as a primary source of drinking water. Regarding the source of light, we found that over 90% of migrant households were electrified, and 7.3% of migrant's households had inverters and electricity. Regarding the source of cooking fuel, the results suggest that 71.3% of migrant's households had LPG gas, followed by LPG + cow dung + wood (10.7%), whereas only 2% of households used only wood.

The Results of Table 2 depict the Lorenz Gini, Family Gini Size, and Net Gini for the selected subgroups of the male migrants in Mirzapur district in India. The results for caste suggest that higher income group of migrants mainly concentrated in general categories with higher Lorenz Gini (0.9375), Family Size Gini (0.1233), and Net Gini (0.8142) followed by males from other backward classes with Lorenz Gini (0.7489), Family Size Gini (0.1355), and Net Gini (0.6134). In contrast, the lower income group of migrants was concentrated in scheduled tribes with Lorenz Gini (0.3228), Family Size Gini (0.0612), and Net Gini (0.2616). The results for religion reveal that higher income concentration was found among Muslim religious migrants with Lorenz Gini (0.7982) and Net Gini (0.6949). However, for the family size

Gini, the higher concentration was found among the Hindu religion migrants with a family size Gini (0.1478) vs Muslim religion migrants with a family size Gini (0.1033).

Figure 1 shows the income inequality stratified by caste of the male migrants in Mirzapur district, India. The Lorenz curve shows that the higher income group of migrants mainly concentrated in general categories followed by OBC, whereas the lower income group of migrants was concentrated in SC and ST. This figure primarily showed that variations in income among general and OBC were almost equal over the income group. However, the SC and ST groups had increased income inequality after the middle wealth quintile of general and OBC migrants, which suggests that SC/ST migrants with different wealth quintiles had higher income differences with higher wealth quintile OBC and general categories migrants. Figure 2 presents the income inequality by religion among male migrants in Mirzapur district, 2023-24, India. Figure 2 depicts a higher income concentration among Muslim religious migrants than Hindu religious migrants. This suggests that Muslim migrants had higher incomes, and the difference is slightly more expansive with the increase in revenue.

Discussion

In this study, we have estimated the income inequality within the different social groups of migrant males in the Mirzapur district in India. This study highlights that the majority of the respondents were Hindu (91.7%), more than two-thirds (62%) of respondents were from OBC caste, and more than half (54%) of the respondents were from the lowest and second wealth quintile. More than two-thirds (63%) of respondents accessed water mainly by hand pump, about 92% of respondents' households were electrifying, and more than 71% of respondents used LPG/Bio gas as a leading source of cooking fuel.

The findings of this study reveal that as the income of the respondents increases, the difference is seen to be wider over the income strata. The caste-wise findings showed that general respondents have the highest concentration of income, whereas ST group respondents have the lowest concentration of income. This finding suggests that migrants from the lower economic condition group of caste, i.e., ST and SC group, own lower income, and migrants from the higher economic status group of caste, i.e., general group of people, own higher income (Bharti, 2018). This finding, supported by a study conducted during 2014-15 in Uttar Pradesh, suggests that general castes have wealth accumulation, lower poverty, and lesser exclusion from formal financial services than SC/STs (Tiwari et al., 2022). Another study from Bihar also suggests that Scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, and the laboring class are the least fortunate at their destination; they belong to the most vulnerable short-term migratory streams and have the lowest wages (Datta, 2020). According to a study based on caste stratification and wealth inequality, the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, two social groups in India that are typically viewed as disadvantaged, have, predictably, significantly less wealth than the "forward" caste groups, while the Other Backward Classes and non-Hindus hold positions in the middle (Zacharias & Vakulabharanam, 2011).

Furthermore, findings related to the religion subgroup suggest that Muslim migrants have a higher concentration of income than Hindu religious migrants from the Mirzapur district. Generally, it has been found that Hindu migrants from all over India have a higher concentration of income, but here, an interesting finding suggests that Muslim groups with migration status have higher income resources at the place of migration. Studies indicate that Muslims were longer long-term migrants than Hindus, leading to lower wages than long-term term migrants (Agrawal & Chandrasekhar 2015), and migrants with higher duration and urban-rural streams are more likely to have higher economic conditions (Ahamad et al., 2024).

This study suggests that migration mainly occurs from the lower social and income group of males rather than the higher social and income group of males (Chatterjee et al., 2023). This study's findings suggest that the lower group mainly migrated to labor work in an economic cities like Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata, and other places. In contrast, higher social group respondents migrated to better job opportunities and skilled job work in different parts of India. Regarding religious groups, the study supports the findings that due to larger family size and including trade-related work, Muslim migrants have multiple resources of income rather than Hindu migrants (Mondal, 2016). But in the case of family size, the findings of this study also support that Muslims had a lower family size Gini the Hindu migrants. This study can determine the income inequality for the rural Mirzapur district among the different social groups of migrants.

Conclusion

This study highlights significant income disparities among different social groups of migrant males in Mirzapur district, India. It reveals that income inequality widens across economic strata, with General caste migrants having the highest income concentration while ST and SC migrants earn the least. Interestingly, Muslim migrants exhibit higher income levels than Hindu migrants, possibly due to trade-related occupations and multiple income sources. The study underscores that migration primarily occurs among lower-income groups for labour work, whereas higher social groups migrate for skilled jobs. These findings provide valuable insights into income inequality among rural migrants in Mirzapur.

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Statements and Declarations

Competing Interests

The author declares no competing interests.

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Data Availability

The data are available from the NFHS-5 (<https://dhsprogram.com/data/>).

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Table 1: Profile of the study population subgroups of male migrants in Mirzapur district, 2023-24, India

Characteristics	Sample (n)	Percentage (%)
Religion		
Hindu	274	91.7
Muslim	24	8.3
Other	1	
Caste		
Scheduled Caste	54	18.0
Scheduled Tribe	6	2.0
Other Backward Classes	186	62.0
General	54	18.0
Income		
Lowest quintile	98	32.7
Second quintile	64	21.3
Middle quintile	61	20.3

Fourth Quintile	31	10.3
Highest quintile	46	15.3
Source of drinking water		
Well	35	11.7
Own tap/ Standpipe	22	7.3
Public tap/ Standpipe	5	1.7
Own hand pump	190	63.3
Public hands pump	37	12.3
Well, and own hand pump	11	3.7
Sources of light		
Kerosene/oil lamp	1	0.3
Electricity	275	91.7
Battery/inverter	2	0.7
Inverter and electricity	22	7.3
Source of used cooking fuel		
Electricity and gas	8	2.7
LPG/biogas	214	71.3
Wood	6	2.0
Cow Dung	24	8.0
Wood and Dung	15	5.0
LPG, Dung, and Wood	32	10.7
LPG and Dung	1	0.3
Total	N=300	100.0

Table 2: Lorenz Gini, Family Gini Size and Net Gini for the selected subgroups of male migrants in Mirzapur district, 2023-24, India

Characteristics	Lorenz Gini	Family Gini Size	Net Gini
Caste			
Scheduled Caste	0.5662	0.0916	0.47461
Scheduled Tribe	0.3228	0.0612	0.2616
Other Backward Classes	0.7489	0.1355	0.6134
General	0.9375	0.1233	0.8142
Religion			
Hindu	0.5065	0.1478	0.3587
Muslim	0.7982	0.1033	0.6949
Total	0.7197	0.1233	0.5964

Figure 1: Income inequality by castes among male migrants in Mirzapur district, 2023-24, India

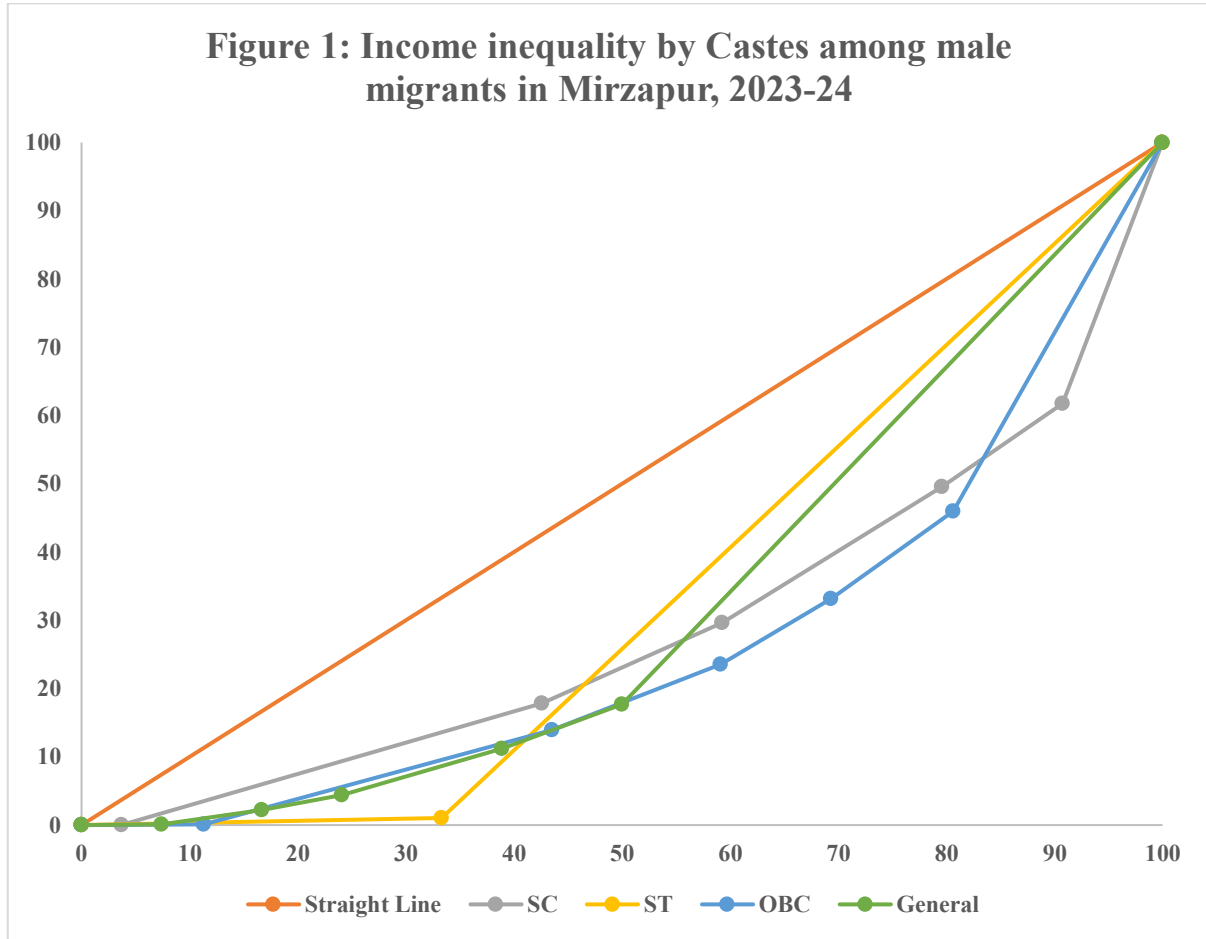


Figure 2: Income inequality by religion among male migrants in Mirzapur district, 2023-24, India

