

Livelihood Patterns and Socio-Economic Conditions of Migrant Informal Workers: A Study of Bhiwani City Haryana

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Abstract

This study examines the livelihood patterns and socio-economic conditions of migrant informal workers in Bhiwani city, Haryana. The research is based on a descriptive design and includes a sample of 30 respondents selected from BTM Colony and Labour Colony in Bhiwani. The study focuses on identifying sources of livelihood in the informal sector, assessing socio-economic conditions, analyzing economic mobility after migration, and understanding the challenges and discrimination faced by migrant workers. The findings reveal that the majority of migrants are engaged in informal sector activities such as daily wage labor, construction work, and small-scale services. Most respondents have migrated from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar and have been residing in Bhiwani for more than 15 years. Despite long-term settlement, their economic condition shows limited improvement, indicating restricted upward mobility.

Bhiwani, as an urban center, provides employment opportunities that help migrants sustain their livelihoods. However, these opportunities are largely confined to low-paying and insecure informal jobs. While the basic needs of food and shelter are generally met, issues such as job insecurity, low wages, and social discrimination continue to affect their quality of life. The study highlights the need for policy interventions aimed at improving working conditions, ensuring social security, and promoting economic advancement for migrant informal workers.

Keywords: Migrant worker, informal sector, livelihood patterns, economic mobility, occupational structure, social inequality, informal employment.

Introduction

Migration has been historical phenomenon affecting not only population growth but also livelihood sources of human being. Various disciplines define migration in different ways – anthropologists deal with the how does migration affect cultural changes, demographers focuses on how does it affect the population growth, economists concentrate on economic factors associated with the migrants, geographers focus on spatial patterns of migration, sociologists explain social factors associated with migration, agricultural scientists focus on rural labour market and medical scientists deal with how does migration affect health of migrants. Also various approaches has been adopted to give theoretical perspective on migration.

Everett Lee gave four factors of migration that operate during migration.

1. What are problems at place of origin?

2. What are opportunities at place of destination?
3. What are various intervening obstacles?
4. Personal factors such as psychological aspect of migrants. Lee also explained various characteristics of migrants such as – migration is selective , plus factors at destination place tends to be positively selected and negative factors at place of origin tense to be negatively selected. Diversity of people impact volume of migration. Difficulty to overcome intervening obstacles and fluctuations in economy also impact volume of migration. Lee introduced the concepts of stream and counter- stream of migration which states that migration takes place within well defined streams and there is counter – stream for every major migration stream. Another proponent of migration theories is O.D Duncan, wrote in “The theory and consequences of mobility of farm population”. There is complex relationship between development and migration. Every country has its own policies regarding migration – first stay-at-home development strategies which aims at promoting development and reducing emigration (out -migration of people from place of origin). Second migration of population is considered as unintended result of development. For example infrastructural development projects that induce population displacement and resettlement (McDowell 1996b). Majority of people in India still reside in villages. Rural – urban migration is not voluntary but also distress driven. The reasons of migration may be various such as migration from place of origin to place of destination due to their wife social network having access to economic sources . The other reason is that when people migrate to other places due to lack of employment, failure of agriculture etc. For poor population migration is coping mechanism to reduce their poverty.

Theoretical Framework

Haryana, as a rapidly industrializing state in northern India, has emerged as an important destination for migrants from various parts of the country. The process of industrial growth, urban expansion, and the increasing demand for labour in both formal and informal sectors has significantly contributed to the inflow of migrant workers into the state.

According to the Census of India 2011, the total population of Haryana was approximately 25.4 million, out of which about 41.8 percent were classified as migrants. This indicates a substantial level of population mobility within and across state boundaries. The data further reveal a significant increase in the number of migrants over the decade, rising from 7.6 million in 2001 to 10.6 million in 2011. This growth reflects the expanding economic opportunities and employment prospects available in the state.

Migration to Haryana is largely driven by inter-state movements, particularly from economically less developed states such as Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. These migrants are primarily attracted by employment opportunities in industries, construction work, and various segments of the informal economy. The theoretical understanding of migration in this context can be linked to the push and pull framework, where factors such as poverty, unemployment, and lack of opportunities in the place of origin act as push factors, while better employment prospects, higher wages, and urban facilities in the destination areas act as pull factors.

Furthermore, migration can also be interpreted through the lens of labour market segmentation theory, which explains the concentration of migrant workers in low-paid, insecure, and informal sector jobs. Despite contributing significantly to the urban economy, migrant workers often experience limited upward mobility and continue to face socio-economic vulnerabilities.

The table presented below illustrates the distribution of inter-state migrants to Haryana based on their place of last residence, thereby providing a clearer understanding of migration patterns and regional linkages.

Distribution of Inter- state migrants to Haryana by Place of Last Residence

Districts	U.P	Rajasthan	Bihar	West Bengal	Delhi
Ambala	23.8	2.3	6.2	1.4	4.4
Bhiwani	14.2	65.0	3.2	1.2	5.9
Faridabad	44.2	5.4	16.0	1.7	19.4
Fatehabad	7.4	22.5	3.2	.6	1.4
Gurgaon	25.4	92.9	13.2	5.7	27.5
Hisar	21.2	37.7	10.2	1.8	4.5
Jhajhar	24.1	9.5	12.0	2.4	40.7
Jind	25.5	7.4	14.0	2.0	9.9
Kaithal	18.2	3.2	9.8	.9	3.2
Karnal	39.0	2.8	2.1	1.1	7.4
Kurukshetra	27.8	2.4	14.0	.8	4.8
Mahendragarh	3.6	87.6	.5	1.0	2.6
Mewat	20.6	64.0	3.6	2.5	3.9
Palwal	70.8	15.6	1.8	1.5	6.5
Panchkula	21.9	1.8	5.3	.9	3.4
Panipat	56.6	2.6	18.6	2.2	7.6
Rewari	16.2	58.9	6.8	2.0	7.0
Rohtak	31.0	6.9	10.4	1.9	31.2
Sirsa	5.9	40.7	2.4	.3	.8
Sonipat	40.2	2.2	14.4	2.0	29.2
Yamunanagar	50.0	1.3	10.8	2.0	3.3

Source – Census of India -2011

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the socio-economic profile of migrant informal workers in Bhiwani city.
2. To analyze livelihood patterns and sources of employment in the informal sector.
3. To assess changes in economic status after migration.
4. To study experiences of discrimination and social exclusion among migrant workers.

Review of Literature

Migration has been a central theme in sociological and economic research, particularly in understanding labour mobility, livelihood strategies, and socio-economic transformations among marginalized populations. Early studies primarily focused on patterns and determinants of migration, while later works examined its implications on livelihoods, poverty, and social exclusion.

One of the earliest systematic attempts to study migration in India was undertaken by George (1964), who

analyzed migration trends in Assam and West Bengal at the district level using census data from 1901 to 1961. The study provided a macro-level understanding of migration patterns and highlighted regional variations over time. Similarly, Vaid (1968) focused on industrial labour migration, emphasizing the role of industrialization in attracting migrant workers and shaping urban labour markets.

Building on economic explanations of migration, Richardson (1973) proposed that migration is largely driven by economic differentials, where individuals move from low-wage to high-wage regions and from labour-surplus to labour-deficit areas. This perspective aligns with classical economic theories and continues to inform migration studies.

Subsequent research shifted towards the lived experiences and challenges of migrant labourers. Kamble (1983) examined the problems faced by migrant workers in Kerala, including poor living conditions, lack of job security, and social marginalization. In a similar vein, Vidut Joshi (1987) investigated the working conditions of migrant labourers engaged in government projects in Uttarkashi, highlighting issues such as exploitation, inadequate wages, and absence of welfare measures.

The issue of adjustment at the destination was explored by B. R. K. Raju (1989) in Andhra Pradesh. The study emphasized the socio-cultural and economic challenges faced by migrants in adapting to new environments. Further, Gupta (1990) analyzed migration among agricultural labourers in Punjab, focusing on the factors influencing migration and the processes involved, such as seasonal mobility and labour demand in agriculture.

A significant contribution to the migration-poverty discourse was made by Arjan de Haan (1999), who examined the interrelationship between poverty and migration. The study argued that migration is both a survival strategy for the poor and a pathway to livelihood diversification, though it often fails to ensure long-term economic security. Similarly, L. Mishra (2000) documented various socio-economic problems faced by migrant labourers, including lack of housing, healthcare, and social protection.

Regional studies further enriched the literature. Gyanendra J. Srivastava (2003) examined migration patterns in Moradabad, Uttar Pradesh, highlighting rural-urban migration and its linkage with employment opportunities in small-scale industries. S. Prakasam (2009) conducted a comparative study of migrant labourers in northern and southern cities of India, identifying common issues such as informal employment, wage insecurity, and lack of social security.

More recent studies have focused on sector-specific migration and contemporary challenges. M. Rajeswaran (2015) provided a micro and macro-level analysis of inter-state migrant labourers in the construction sector in Chennai, emphasizing their precarious working conditions and lack of institutional support. Likewise, Shamlal B. (2021) examined the socio-economic conditions of construction workers in Karnataka, highlighting issues of occupational hazards, wage exploitation, and absence of welfare benefits.

Synthesis and Research Gap:

The existing literature clearly indicates that migration is driven by economic, social, and structural factors, and migrant labourers often face multiple vulnerabilities in destination areas. While earlier studies focused on macro-level patterns and determinants, later research has emphasized livelihood issues, poverty linkages, and working conditions. However, there remains a gap in localized, city-level studies that comprehensively examine livelihood patterns, economic mobility, and experiences of discrimination among migrant informal workers. Therefore, the present study on Bhiwani city seeks to address this gap by providing an in-depth sociological analysis of migrant workers' socio-economic conditions and lived experiences.

Research Methodology

Bhiwani is an important district headquarters in the state of Haryana, known for its historical background as well as its emerging urban character. The city is believed to have been founded by the Rajput ruler Maharaja Neem Singh, who named it after his wife, Bhaani. Over time, Bhiwani has developed into a significant administrative and commercial center in the region.

According to the *District Census Handbook (Series-7, Part-12)*, the total population of Bhiwani district is approximately 16,34,445, of which about 13,13,123 reside in rural areas and 3,21,322 in urban areas. The district covers a total geographical area of around 4,778 square kilometers, with nearly 4,719 square kilometers constituting rural areas and about 580 square kilometers categorized as urban. This distribution reflects the predominantly rural character of the district, alongside a gradually expanding urban base. Administratively, the city is divided into 31 municipal wards, comprising a mix of planned and unplanned residential colonies. Prominent localities include DC Colony, Patel Nagar, Jagat Colony, Vijay Nagar, BTM Colony, HUDA residential areas, Vidya Nagar, Housing Board Colony, Kirti Nagar, and various developed sectors. These neighborhoods represent diverse socio-economic groups and provide a suitable setting for studying migrant populations engaged in informal work.

In recent years, Bhiwani has witnessed noticeable urban development, marked by the emergence of modern commercial spaces such as Sun City Mall in the Housing Board Colony, Halwasia Mall near Halwasia Bal Vatika, Vishal Mega Mart, and Jio Mart near Hansi Gate. These developments contribute to the city's evolving urban landscape and indicate growing consumer markets and employment opportunities. Economically, Bhiwani hosts a mix of large-scale and medium-scale industries, particularly in the textile and manufacturing sectors. Notable establishments include the Technological Institute of Textile and Sciences, Bhiwani Textile Mills, Hindustan Oil & Chemical Limited, and Elegant Spinners. These industries, along with the expanding service sector, generate employment opportunities that attract migrant labourers, especially into informal and semi-formal occupations.

Thus, Bhiwani city presents a suitable and relevant setting for examining the livelihood patterns and socio-economic conditions of migrant informal workers, as it combines traditional rural linkages with increasing urbanization and industrial growth.

Sampling and Methods of Data Collection

For the present study, a combination of purposive and random sampling techniques was employed to ensure both relevance and representation. Initially, two localities BTM Colony and Labour Colony were selected purposively, as these areas have a relatively higher concentration of migrant informal workers and are therefore suitable for examining their livelihood patterns and socio-economic conditions.

From these selected areas, a sample of 30 respondents was drawn using the simple random sampling method. This approach was adopted to provide each eligible respondent an equal chance of selection and to minimize selection bias within the chosen localities. Primary data were collected through the use of a structured interview schedule. This method was considered appropriate in view of the varied educational backgrounds of respondents, as it allowed the researcher to directly interact with participants, clarify questions when needed, and obtain reliable and detailed responses. The interview schedule included questions related to socio-economic background, employment patterns, income levels, migration history, and experiences of discrimination.

Thus, the combined use of purposive and random sampling, along with the interview schedule method, ensured systematic data collection and enhanced the reliability and validity of the study.

Result and Discussion

Table -1.1 : Demographic profile

Variable		No.of respondents	Percentage
Age	20-25	1	3.33%
	25-30	5	16.68%
	30-35	1	3.33%
	35-40	8	26.67%
	40-45	11	36.67%
	45-50	1	3.33%
	50-55	1	3.33%
	55-60	0	0%
	60-65	1	3.33%
	65-70	1	3.33%
Marital status	Married	30	100%
	Unmarried	0	0%
Education	Illiterate	13	43.33%
	Primary	9	30%
	Middle	6	20%
	Secondary	2	6.67%
Yearly income	Below 25000	1	3.33%
	25000-30000	5	16.67%
	30000-40000	3	10%
	40000-50000	9	30%
	50000-60000	1	3.33%
	60000-70000	3	10%
	70000-80000	8	26.67%
Caste	General	3	10%
	OBC	15	50%
	SC	12	40%

The data shows that most respondents belong to the middle age groups, with the highest proportion in the 40–45 years category (36.67%) followed by 35–40 years (26.67%), indicating that migration is common among economically active individuals. A smaller percentage is found in younger and older age groups. All respondents are married (100%), which suggests that migration is largely driven by family responsibilities and the need to earn a stable income. The educational status of respondents is generally low, as 43.33% are illiterate, 30% have primary education, 20% have middle-level education, and only 6.67% have reached secondary level, reflecting limited access to formal education and skills. In terms of income, most respondents fall within low to moderate income categories, with the highest percentage (30%) earning between ₹40,000–50,000 annually, followed by 26.67% earning ₹70,000–80,000, while the rest are distributed across lower income brackets, indicating economic vulnerability. The caste composition reveals that the majority of respondents belong to socially disadvantaged groups, with 50% from OBC and 40% from SC categories, while only 10% are from the General category. Overall, the

findings suggest that migrant informal workers are primarily middle-aged, married individuals with low education, limited income, and a background of social disadvantage, which influences their dependence on informal sector employment.

Table -1.2 : Distribution of respondents by occupation

Occupation	No.of respondents	%age
Worker in B.T.M.mill	3	10%
Daily wages labour	16	53.33%
Old age pension	2	6.67%
Sweeper	2	6.67%
Rehri	4	13.33%
Shop owner	2	6.67%
Working in shop	1	3.33%
Total	30	100

The data shows that the majority of respondents are engaged in daily wage labour, accounting for 53.33% of the total sample, which indicates a high dependence on irregular and low-paid work in the informal sector. A smaller proportion of respondents (13.33%) are involved in rehri (street vending), reflecting self-employment as an alternative livelihood strategy. About 10% of respondents are working in B.T.M. mill, suggesting limited access to relatively stable industrial employment. The remaining respondents are distributed across occupations such as sweeper (6.67%), shop owners (6.67%), and those dependent on old age pension (6.67%), while only 3.33% are working in shops. Overall, the occupational pattern highlights that most migrant workers are concentrated in low-skilled, insecure, and informal jobs with limited stability and income security.

Table-1.3 : Distribution of respondents by place of origin

Place of origin	No.of respondents	%age
Bihar	18	60%
U.P	8	26.66%
Odisha	1	3.33%
Rajasthan	1	3.33%
Varanasi	2	6.68%
Total	30	100%

The data indicates that a majority of respondents originate from Bihar, accounting for 60% of the total sample, which shows that Bihar is the main source of migrant workers in the study area. A significant proportion (26.66%) comes from Uttar Pradesh, followed by a small percentage from Odisha (3.33%) and Rajasthan (3.33%). Additionally, 6.68% of respondents are from Varanasi. Overall, the findings suggest that most migrant workers come from economically less developed regions, particularly Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, indicating that migration is largely driven by the search for better livelihood opportunities and employment.

Table -1.4 : Distribution of respondents by duration of stay in Bhiwani

Duration of stay	No of respondents	%age
Below 1 year	3	10%
From 1 year to 5 years	2	6.68%
From 5 year to 10 years	7	23.33%
From 10 years to 15 years	4	13.33%
From 15 years to 20 years	7	23.33%
Above 20 years	7	23.33%
Total	30	100%

The data shows that a considerable proportion of respondents have been living in Bhiwani for a long period. About 23.33% of respondents fall in each of the categories—5 to 10 years, 15 to 20 years, and above 20 years—indicating that many migrants have settled for the long term rather than staying temporarily. A smaller proportion (13.33%) has been residing for 10 to 15 years. Only 10% of respondents have stayed for less than one year, and 6.68% for 1 to 5 years, showing that recent migration is relatively low. Overall, the findings suggest that most migrant workers have been living in the city for several years, reflecting a trend of permanent or semi-permanent settlement rather than short-term or seasonal migration.

Table -1.5 : Distribution of respondents by Causes of migration

Causes of migration	No.of respondents	%age
For earning money	30	100%
For other reason	0	0%
Total	30	100%

The data clearly shows that all respondents (100%) migrated for the purpose of earning money, while none reported any other reason for migration. This indicates that economic factors are the sole driving force behind migration in the study. The finding highlights that respondents moved to Bhiwani primarily in search of employment opportunities and better income, reflecting the importance of livelihood needs in shaping migration decisions.

Table -1.6 : Changes in economic status of respondents

Changes in economic status	No.of respondents	% age
Yes	6	20%
No	24	80%
Total	30	100%

The data shows that a large majority of respondents (80%) reported no change in their economic status after migration, while only 20% experienced some improvement. This indicates that migration to Bhiwani has not significantly enhanced the economic condition of most migrant workers. Although migration is primarily undertaken for better income opportunities, the findings suggest that many respondents continue to face low earnings and limited upward mobility, highlighting the persistent economic vulnerability within the informal sector.

Table -1.7 : Discrimination faced by respondents

Discrimination faced	No.of respondents	%age
Yes	13	43.33%
No	17	56.67%
Total	30	100%

The data shows that 43.33% of respondents reported experiencing discrimination, while a slightly higher proportion (56.67%) did not report such experiences. This indicates that although not all migrant workers face discrimination, a significant number still encounter unequal treatment in their daily lives. The findings suggest that in Bhiwani, issues of social exclusion and discrimination continue to affect a considerable section of migrant informal workers, likely linked to factors such as caste, class, and regional background.

Conclusion

The present study highlights that migration to Bhiwani is primarily driven by economic necessity, as all respondents migrated in search of better earning opportunities. However, the findings reveal that despite migration, a large proportion of workers continue to experience low income, job insecurity, and limited economic mobility. Most respondents are engaged in informal sector activities such as daily wage labour and street vending, which offer irregular employment and lack social security. The socio-economic profile further shows that migrant workers largely belong to disadvantaged caste groups, have low levels of education, and carry significant family responsibilities. Although a section of respondents has achieved some economic improvement, the majority has not witnessed substantial change in their living conditions. Additionally, a considerable proportion of workers reported experiences of discrimination, indicating the presence of social inequalities in the urban setting. Overall, the study suggests that migration serves as a survival strategy rather than a pathway for upward mobility for most informal workers.

Suggestions / Policy Implications

- There is a need to introduce skill development and vocational training programs to enhance the employability of migrant workers and help them access better-paying jobs.
- The government should ensure social security measures such as health insurance, pension schemes, and accident coverage for informal sector workers.
- Efforts should be made to improve working conditions and wage security, particularly for daily wage labourers, through proper regulation and monitoring.
- Provision of affordable housing and basic urban amenities is essential to improve the living standards of migrant workers.
- Awareness programs should be conducted to reduce social discrimination and promote inclusion, especially for marginalized caste groups.
- Strengthening the implementation of existing labour laws can help protect the rights and dignity of migrant workers.

Limitations of the Study

The study is based on a small sample size of 30 respondents and is limited to two selected colonies, which may not fully represent the entire migrant population of the city. Time and resource constraints also limited the depth of investigation.

Scope for Further Research

Future studies can be conducted on a larger sample size and in different urban areas to provide a more comprehensive understanding. Comparative studies across cities or states, as well as gender-based analysis of migrant workers, can further enrich the research in this field.

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