



Cultural Journey Of Migrant Labourers: An Observation Of Various Industries

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ABSTRACT

The paper discusses proportion of continuity and change in a person's socio-cultural life after migrating to a socially and culturally different surrounding. The selection of topic for the project has an emotional and important aspect of our journey as students of undergraduate course at Delhi University, who belong to different geographical locations in India and have not yet adjusted to the socio-cultural environment of Delhi, thus the selection of topic comes from the heart. When migration in general is talked about, we tend to focus only on the socio-economic aspect while the socio-cultural part is ignored. Culture plays a very important role in a persons' life emotionally and affects dressing sense, language, mind-set, food habits, fairs and festivals, social mobilization, psychological adaptation. Therefore, it is an important area which needs to be paid attention. The mode used for collecting data is a questionnaire filled through personal interviews with each migrant worker. For analysis various pictographic tools like bar-graphs, pie-charts and so on have been used to make the data easily comprehensible. The study helped the team to gain knowledge about the lives of the labourers of different places. There was interaction with a number of labourers in the Fertilizer & Leather Industry in Kanpur and Diamond Industry in Surat, to whom various questions about their personal, economic and cultural aspects of life were asked. The labourers we surveyed were both skilled and unskilled. Last but not the least, working on this topic was not only Educational but very Inspirational indeed.

Key Words: Migrant labourers, industry, cultural journey, migration

INTRODUCTION

The paper focuses on understanding the cultural journey of a labourer who has migrated from his native place to a whole new area in search of better livelihood. It attempts to understand the proportion of continuity and change that comes in a person's life after migration, i.e., how much does he retain and how much does he adopts from the new place. It also seeks to explore the effect of migration on the personal and family ties of the migrants which have some reflection on the generations to follow. The person who has migrated experiences certain changes in his tastes

and preferences. The second generation generally adapts to such changes and the following generation has a totally new view with regards to their lifestyle.

Culture has many different meanings. It is also associated with 'Sanskar' i.e. the activities, the rituals, the beliefs, the faiths, the behaviour and the nature of a particular person that he/she practice. On the whole, culture is the shadow of whatever we do in our everyday life. Something we learn from others and something we share with others, in fact, the whole living kind i.e. animals, humans, birds; but the difference is that we humans, while practicing culture also give a sense to it and can talk about it. Culture also changes due to the adaptation patterns. This can be better understood with the example of human evolution. Great English scientist Charles Darwin (1809-1882) stated in his book 'Descent Of Man ' 1871, that humans have evolved from primary living organisms called 'Primates'.

So, what could have happened that today we are so advanced? Obviously we all have adapted to the given conditions and sustained the culture and built ourselves into the present form. In the same way is the process of continuity and change in the culture that we humans have been adopting since beginning of our emergence.

Migration

It is defined as to settle down in a new place in search of job, better livelihood and better education for children, from their native or birth place. Why people migrate from their birth place? Probably the answer is in search of better food, more job opportunities, shelter, and more facilities and so on.

When people migrate from one place to another many things change, like food habits, dressing style, language and sometimes their thoughts too. They accept some changes and might continue fractionally with their own culture. We can say that migration always brings some amendments in culture along with the continuation of their own as from their native place.

This change is due to the demand of the time and society. There are some positive and negative impacts of such changes. Positive impact - they are able to adapt to new situations and learn new things, and negative impact -a separation creates between the old and new culture. Till now we have discussed about culture and about migration. That was the primary understanding with which we took our study further. The following sections will discuss the conclusions of our study and the methodology and sources used to arrive at the same.

Cultural Migration

The study broadly focuses on the 'cultural journey of migrant labourers'. So what do we mean by it? The shift in the cultural patterns, these poor, helpless people when get displaced from their native place to the exotic ones always find difficulties in adaptations as compared to the better off sections of the society. They don't have enough money for accommodation and in a city life, in fact in all cases they come with empty hands to earn livelihood. So this shift always brings continuation of certain cultural activities, adoption of new ones; hand in hand also goes the process of exchanging and sharing, leading to the fusion which ultimately produces multicultural society.

We cannot think of improvisation without understanding the cultural journey of a particular migrant labour, as it is related to their emotions and feelings. The ‘migrant labour’ of our study is part of the fertilizer and leather industries of Kanpur; the diamond industry of Surat and local vendors’ stalls at Sarnath, Surat, Bhopal.

METHODOLOGY

One of the basic strategies used was to conduct a small survey on our own college’s construction labourers which proved to be a great help in setting the pattern of our questionnaire. Their answers enabled the team to think about further questions that need to be asked.

For getting the required information, tools like oral conversation, audios and videos of interviews, data observation and analysis etc. were used.

For making an effective proposal, the DU website was consulted for information on the destinations, targeted industries and monuments. All these things helped the team to achieve our set target.

Besides these, the team observed the processes of industries closely, personally interacted with the labourers, supervisors, manager, engineer etc. For analysis, various pictographic tools like bar graphs, pie charts etc have been used to make the data easily understandable.

RESULTS

The overall analysis of the project on the cultural aspect of migrant labourers is as follows:

Number of surveys done

The team conducted surveys and interviewed 49 labourers. Not all of them were migrants, we talked with all kind of labourers but as per the demands of our study, migrant labourers remained the focus.

Intrastate/Interstate

From the total data collected only 20% labourers were from different states. Rest 80% was intrastate migrant labourers.

Interdependent or Indentured

Here leaving the Diamond Institute analysis, as that was basically an institute where all the members had come to educate or specialize themselves, we have only 20% of migrant labourers who were indentured while 80% were independent.

Continuity and change in culture

People generally after migration continue their old culture with slight changes with regards to language, festival, food habits etc.

Family occupation, Background and Future Developments

Generally this group of migrant labour belongs to poor background, the first generation mainly belonged to worker or labour group, and the second generation were coming out with some better developments and improvements in their economic and social condition having employed in jobs other than their family business.

India being an agrarian country as its background, all the members surveyed had agriculture production as their family occupation while some related to leather were hereditarily engaged in that and people in Surat were engaged in textile or jewellery designing majorly.

Our interaction with them left us with the result that the future generations of these groups would definitely come out with complete changes in their lifestyles, with far better improvements and developments-economically, socially, culturally and psychologically.

Drug abuse

40% of the labourers surveyed consume or smoked tobacco as their old habit; no one did it due to their job. Generally people in small areas get abused to such things at a very tender age due to lack of education, awareness and also due to the imitating their seniors.

Earning members

Generally we observe that these migrant labourers maintain a big family size, but the sample group that was surveyed included labourers who had normal family size and 29% families had more than one earning members.

Social mobility and identity

Almost 70% people surveyed, feel comfortable sharing their problems, happiness and other matters with their neighbours and colleagues after migration. This shows that people try to relate themselves with others after departing their own family. The identity through which they are identified in the community or society is majorly by work, approx. 43% or sometimes both by work, name and in minor cases by name 10% approx.

Work done

This study attempts to study two different cultures - one which is the default culture, the dominating one and another which is totally new for a migrated person. It focuses on the causes of migration, the changes that take place in the life of migrants and all other cultural aspect of their life. For this the team interviewed both interstate and intrastate migrant labourers including vendors, shopkeepers and industrial workers, and also focused on the problems that they face like health problems, accommodations etc. The team also focused on their salary, whether it is sufficient for them or not, how much they save for their family and their future, and their marriage pattern.

For collecting the required information the team framed a questionnaire and divided into 3 domains. First one purely concentrated on their personal information, which consisted questions

related to their name, age, gender, native place, occupation, family etc. main motive of this one is to analyze the number of migrant labour on the basis of age gender etc. to find out from which state migration is maximum. Next one concentrates on their economic aspects. It requires information related to their income, mode of income, side business, other earning family members, their expenditure, their savings, etc. from this one can get to know if migration can really improve their living standard or not. Last questionnaire is on their cultural aspect. It relates them with changes in the festivals they celebrate, their marriage pattern at present; whether any changes in social mobility according to new place or not. Also the culture they bring from their native place. So, the team fully tried to bring out all their cultural change to understand them better.

Through the educational trip Gyanodaya IV, the team visited fertilizer industry & leather industry of Kanpur, and diamond industry of Surat. The consequent study attempted to show the psychological, social and cultural changes that a migrant person goes through during his journey of life and what all changes are seen through the generations i.e. the first, the second and the third. The data for first and second generations is collected one or the hands on but for third is basically the hypothesis that can be easily make out from the collected one.

Skilled Laborers and Cultural Migration

Definition

Skilled labourers are the ones who have mechanical knowledge to produce goods. These are generally trained workers for their specific jobs. This lot generally contains workers supervisors, engineers etc. Here we will analyze the data collected in fertilizer, leather and diamond industry.

This industry uses garbage and waste material as a source to produce electricity. It is basically a waste material recycling industry situated in Kanpur. Here the labour group consists of workers, supervisors and engineers working all together in their respective fields to give final finish to the recycled material and making it suitable for reuse. Here most of the work is mechanical, workers just have to operate the machines and load material from one place to another; while the supervisors look after the work of these workers and engineers here work in the plant i.e. the working of the machine, take measures to repair their malfunction and the technological work.

Fertilizer is an organic or inorganic material of natural or synthetic origin that is added to soil to supply nutrients essential for growth of plants.

Working procedure of fertilizer industry is as follows:-

- First of all household garbage is collected and stored at a place.
- Then it gets refined
- After the second step, it is left with bacteria for 28 days so that decomposition can take place. Then it again has to be refined.
- At last the household garbage gets transformed into urea, and acts as a fertilizer.

OBSERVATIONS

The conditions were not good in the fertilizer industry. The labourers were not satisfied as there was irregularity in their salary pattern. Some labourers disclosed the fact that they have not been paid since four months and there is nothing that they can do regarding this due to absence of any trade union. Moreover, health facilities are not so good. Labourers need to sit on the sacks for having their meals and there are no washrooms for labourers. No hygienic environment has been maintained for the labourers.

Leather Industry

Super Tannery Ltd.

Kanpur is the most popular city in the Indian State of Uttar Pradesh and is one of the largest industrial cities in India. It is the administrative headquarters of Kanpur Nagar District or Kanpur Division and is known as leather city. It contains some of the largest & finest tanneries in the country.

Kanpur is situated on the banks of the Ganges River and has been an important place in the history of modern India. It is known as Manchester of the East.

The super tannery industry was started in 1953. It is situated on the Ghats of Ganges. The leather in the industry goes through various processes. The 6 step process involves:

- Cleaning of raw material
- Boiling
- Pressing
- Cutting
- Selection
- Sale

The labourers in the industry are working in bad conditions with foul odour, filthy environment and poor lighting.

The various observations were as follows:

- Maximum numbers of workers were Muslims, some were Hindus and there were very rarely Christians.
- They worked for around 8 hours a day.
- For some working in the leather industry was like a family occupation. While many others are the first generation in the industry.
- All, the workers were males. Female workers could only be found in the production areas as they are better in designing and shaping the final product. Moreover, it is considered that they are physically weak and therefore cannot work on the heavy machines in the main industrial area.
- All the workers have become a labourer independently i.e. they were not forced to do their work.
- Most of them work on monthly contract basis and very few on daily wages.
- Their relations with the superiors are good while one of the Hindu labourers consider his relation as average.

- There is no trade union. The labourers enjoy good relations with the superiors so the requirement for unions is not felt.
 - Because of the minimal amount earned only around 43% labourers are able to save money. Generally, the amount earned is totally consumed in meeting the day to day needs.
 - Even if people are having a side business, it is in terms of leather itself.
 - 71% of the workers have learned their work informally.i.e.by watching their father's work. Only 29% have taken formal training.
 - Only 15% of the workers take drugs. Other does not have any bad habits. Hence, it is not necessarily true that a person working in leather industry is drug addicted.
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- Around 70% speak the same language as used at their home. There has not been much change with respect to language.
 - People are continuing their festivals and have also started enjoying the festivals celebrated at the migrated place.
 - 5/7th of the workers prefer to get married according to the rituals & traditions of their birth place rather than the migrated place.
 - The workers are bound to wear the uniform provided to them by the industry. But around 43% have also changed their dressing style at home after migration.
 - Only 30% have changed their food habits after migration others continue to eat the same food as liked at their birth place.
 - According to the survey most of the workers do not have any diseases. Only 15% have skin diseases due to the toxicity in the production process.
 - Around 86% of people feel that there is social mobility at their work place and neighbourhood.
 - They have brought their food habits, rituals, language and tradition with them and have adopted dressing style of the migrated place.
 - Most of them are known by their name or by their work or both ways.

Diamond Industry

This is a distinguished institute in Surat that provides a degree course in designing, grading and diamond specialization to the people.

Time duration of this course is 1 year and comprises following fields of specializations

- Caret weight analysis
- Cutting methods
- Clarity
- Colour analysis

The good thing about this course is no requirement of any kind of graduation but the person should be 10 or +2 level passed.

The course teaches one the specifications of hands, eyes and mind while working on the piece of diamond. One needs to have the will to work and make best out of it for itself.

Here in this institute the team interacted, conducted survey on faculty members and students. The reader may be thinking that how an institute could be a beneficial part of our project, but it would be pertinent to inform that teachers and students both work here as labourers. Teachers on one hand teach the methods to the students on the other hand they also work on diamond pieces and similarly students while learning the techniques hand in hand work on these diamond pieces and these pieces are then taken to the market for sale.

While interacting with one of the faculty members we asked whether they employ unskilled labourers for minute hand works and other services and he denied it. He said this course or job generally requires the specialization of hands which anybody can learn and apply and need not require any kind of education and can earn a better living for him.

The point is at present this industry or institute does not employ such labourers but yes if sometime in future anybody approaches for job they would recruit on daily wages and train unlike others who pay fees learn things and get degrees.

The visit to this institute brought about a different understanding of the cultural migration. The team's interaction with Shimoni amused it. Though she is training from that institute but her family does not want her to work or get herself involved on any kind of economic activity. Her family is involved in jewellery designing i.e. their family business.

This show in our country well oriented families still thinks that girls should not work or earn. But good thing is that she is allowed to educate herself which in other places of India is still an unaccomplished desire. This was the case of some other girls training there.

Another girl Lata who comes from rural area nearby is not exposed to western culture. She follows her own folk culture i.e. wears salwar kameez.

Another cultural aspect which is known from the analysis of this institute is that people here mainly follow their hierarchical profession such as textile business and jewellery designing.

Another case was that of a teacher Anuj Gupta who earlier worked in Mumbai in some diamond industry but he shifted back to Surat due to family problems which he did not want to discuss.

What could be the reason behind this?

According to him it is the attachment with the family, the emotions that pulled him back to his own city.

So this one is the different case where a migrant person shifts back to his native place. This thing can be associated with the other meaning of culture SANSKAR, may be his sanskar don't allow him to stay away from family.

Unskilled Laborers and Cultural Migration

Definition

Unskilled labourers are the ones who might or might not be educated but they don't have any specifications in their job or no such use of machinery or skills. They are basically the daily

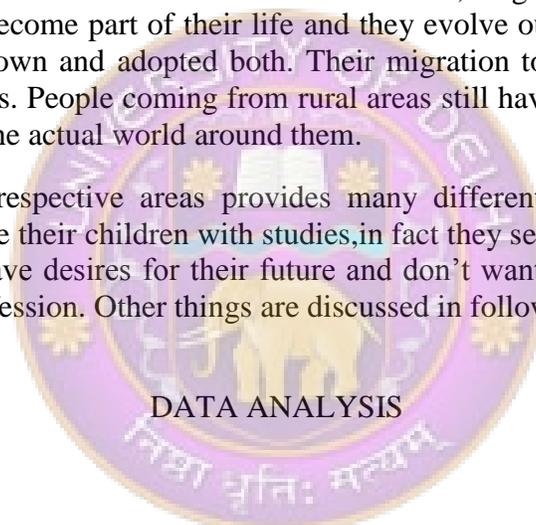
wagers or earn on the basis of their daily service they provide, there is no salary or incentives. This lot comprises rickshaw pullers, drivers, vendors, hawkers, guards etc.

Here the data collected from different places of unskilled labourers that are Surat, Sarnath and Bhopal was combined. Due to the time constraints the team was not able to interact with large number of unskilled labourers of particular place and sometimes these labourers also did not show interest in sharing their problems and sufferings. So under this large domain a sample group covering labourers of all the 3 places was framed.

In Sarnath we interacted with 2-3 vendors (road side) while departing from Jain Digamber temple. These people were interested in talking to us. Then in Surat as we had mentioned before one team of our group went to the institute while the other team interacted with workers, hawkers working in nearby or roadside areas. In Bhopal we interacted with vendors outside Bharat Bhawan and at the lanes of Bhopal Lake.

Cultural changes are very much profound in the daily life of these people. Being vendors, drivers etc. these people have to succumb themselves to the local taste, language of the particular region. Gradually these changes become part of their life and they evolve out with a new culture which has the glimpses of their own and adopted both. Their migration to city also brings change in their mindsets and thoughts. People coming from rural areas still have no idea about their rights, importance of education, the actual world around them.

But the survey in these respective areas provides many different positive outcomes. These migrant people do not force their children with studies, in fact they send them to school according to their suitability, they have desires for their future and don't want them to continue with any kind of labour as their profession. Other things are discussed in following sections on the basis of analysis.



Personal Information

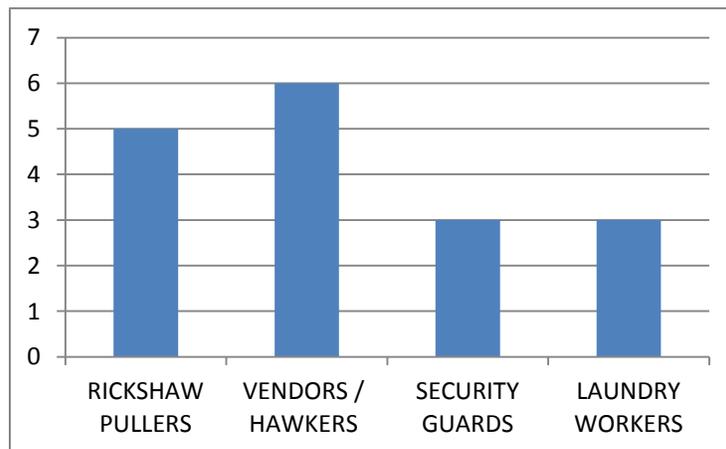


Figure 1: Different category of Migrant Labourers:

Through the analysis of figure 1, the team tried to cover the whole lot of migrant labourers who are not part of formal industry rather they belong to the group of those workers who largely either runs their own small business or works with the non-formal industry. It was attempted to get information from vendors/hawkers, rickshaw-pullers, security guards and washer men. This sample contains maximum number of vendors and rickshaw –pullers who largely belonged to the migrant group rather than the security guards and washer men who were largely from the non-migrant group.

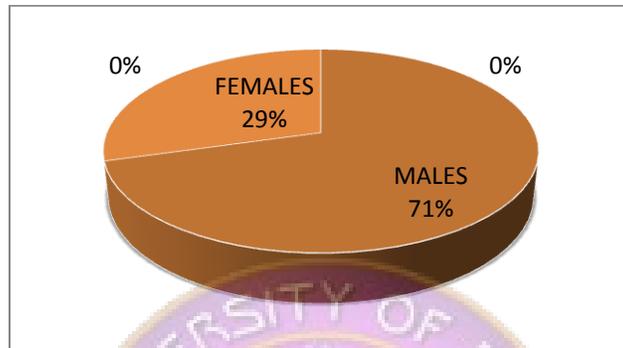


Figure 2: Gender of migrant labourers working in the industries

While analyzing the data of figure 2 it was found that sample the most number of migrant people are males because they migrate due to job opportunities and further they don't have the requisite amount of money to call their family to the city of their work.

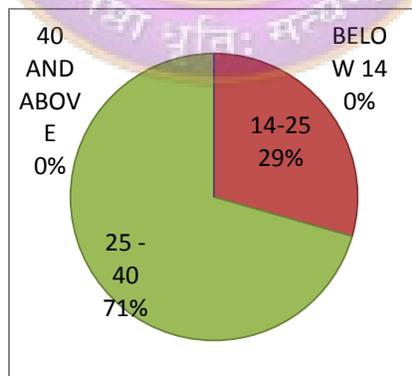


Figure 3: Age group of labourers

According to figure 3 most of the migrant are the mid-aged people because they have come to the city for work at the early age and hence working there since many years.

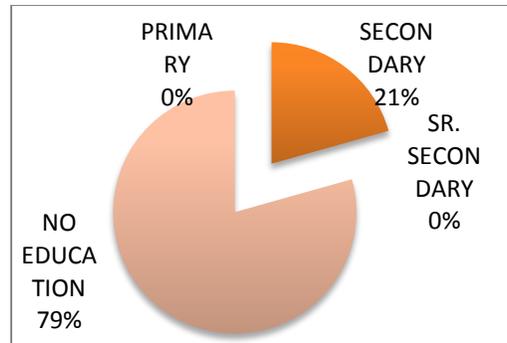


Figure 4: Educational qualification of labourers

According to figure 4 about 50% of the migrants are illiterate whereas 13% have even completed senior secondary. This shows that even after being educated they still have to perform unskilled work due to lower job availability.

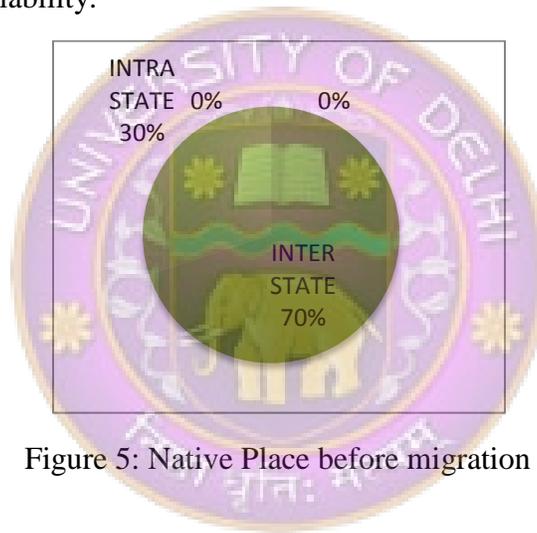


Figure 5: Native Place before migration

The data shown in the figure 5 analyzes that the maximum number of people has migrated from a different state because of job possibilities and there are only 30% intra-state migrants.

Introduction of Work:

Many of the migrants are introduced to this job either by their friend or by themselves.

Type of Work:

All are daily wagers.

Family Business:

Here according to our survey equal fractions of the sample families of the migrant labourers are engaged in family business.

Socio-cultural aspects

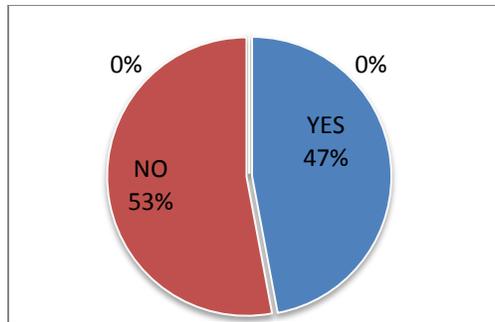


Figure 6: Difference in Language at Work Place and Home:

The data shown in the figure 6 reveals that almost more than 50% of the people speak a different language at work-place and at home. We have found that many people speak their native language at home at the same time they have also adopted the language of the migrated city which is also the place of their work.



Figure 7: Changes in the festivals before and after migration:

The data shown in the figure 7 refers that maximum number of the migrant labourers are continuing with their native fairs and festivals, only few have adopted changes. But none have completely left the festivals celebrated at their native places.

Marriage patterns:

Almost all the migrant labourers are following the marriage pattern of their birth place.

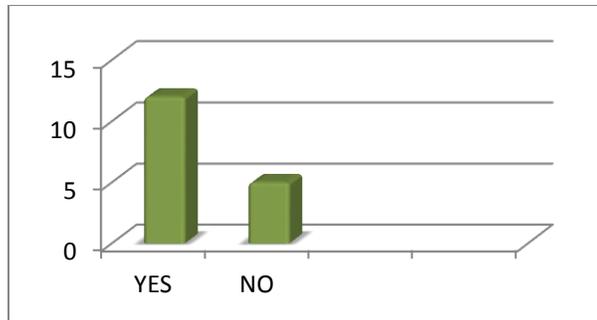


Figure 8: Difference in dressing Style after migration

While analyzing the data of figure 8 it was found that the large numbers of migrants are experiencing a change in their dressing style after migration cause of the need of the time and work.



Figure 9: Difference in food habits after migration

While analyzing the data of figure 9 it was concluded that for 70% of the migrant labourers there is no change in their tastes for food because most of them continued with the food habits of their native places. But at the same time they have also adopted the food culture of the place of work.

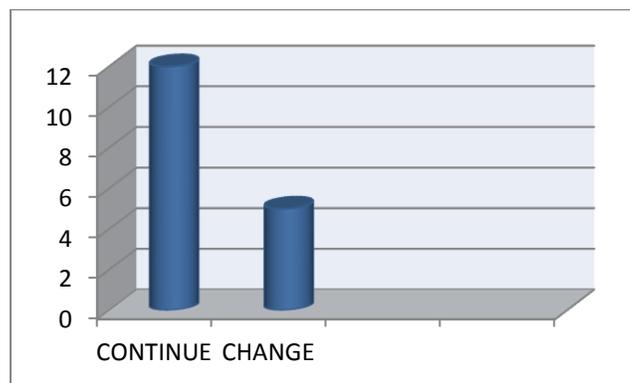


Figure 10: Change regarding social mobility after migration

According to figure 10 many of the migrant labourers continued to experience the same love and affection with respect to the social mobility.

Have they brought any culture with them?

Of the 10 people surveyed only 8 have brought their culture and only 20% of them are continuing with the new one. Very few of them have no connection with the traditional culture of their own.

What culture have they adopted?

Majorly migrant people have adopted the language of the place of working because without the means of communication settling the new environment is not possible as compared to the food habits, dressing style etc.

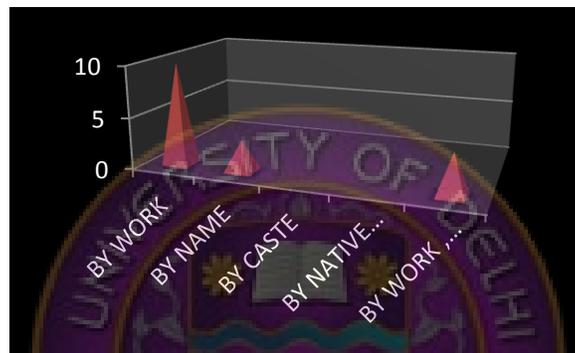


Figure 11: How are they identified in the society?

According to the data of figure 11, the migrant labourers are mainly identified by their work but some of them are also known by their work, name and their native place.

Socio-economic aspects

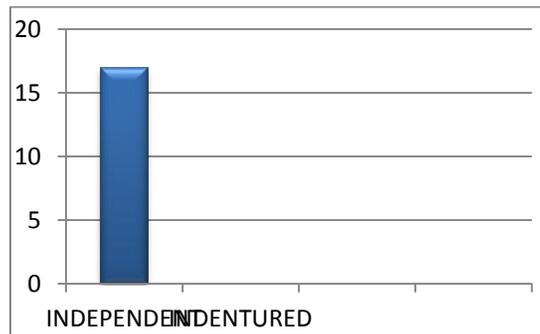


Figure 12: How did they become labourers?

The data of Figure 12 infers that all the workers were independent and chose to do their respective jobs by their own will rather under any compulsion.

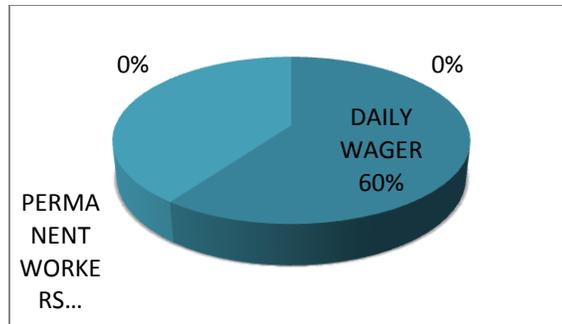


Figure 13: Income patterns of migrant labourers

Figure 13 shows that this sample group mainly covers migrant labourers who work as daily wagers and only 40% of them are permanent workers.

Relations with superiors:

As this group mainly covers unskilled labourers who work independently so they generally have no superiors working over them like rickshaw-pullers and vendors while the security guards and laundry workers have good relations with their superiors.

Do they form trade unions?

This group being unskilled does not form any kind of trade union. They independently work for their own welfare.

Is there any kind of drug abuse?

From the data collected only 2 or 3 labourers were abused to drugs such as tobacco and smoking and that too were the rickshaw-pullers. Others were not abused to such drug addiction.

Expenditure:

Generally these people being daily wagers earn very less and on our interaction with them came to know that their earnings are equal to their expenditure and they hardly save from their income. In fact according to them if their daily expenditures are met with the given income that is more than enough for them.

Earning members in the family:

There were 70% labourers who had maximum 2 or 3 members working to earn livelihood and only 30% were there who had only one person earning in their family.

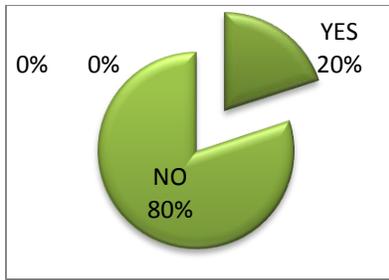


Figure 14: Were they engaged in side business also apart from their natural occupation?

Figure 14 shows that if we are talking of unskilled labourers then we have idea in our mind that these migrant labours belong to poor family background and thus they migrate to cities in search of work. This is very much clear from this data showing only 20% of migrant labourers engaged in family business others don't as they don't have any specific business back home.

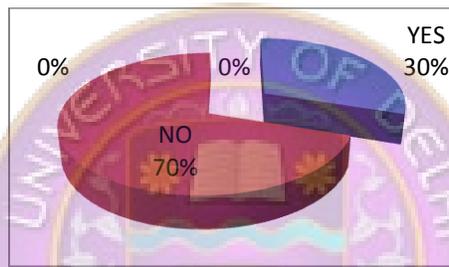


Figure 15: Job training:

Figure 15 shows that unskilled jobs hardly require any prior training leaving exceptions, thus according to this data 70% people did not receive training for their work they learned informally and the ones who got i.e. 'yes' fraction, had it from their fathers or other seniors.

CONCLUSION

To summarise, it was felt that if a labourer migrated from his/her native place, then he must carry his/her own culture and after a course of time he/she also adapt to the new environment they are in for their survival.

From the time the team undertook the journey to conduct the above-mentioned surveys, it was observed that there must be some changes that occurs in migrant people through the passage of the time. It was observed in the Gyanodaya Express train itself that all staff belonged to different parts of country some of them were from Haryana while others were from UP. As the languages of this region are totally different from each other, but they are living together since a long time and have also visited the different parts of the country, a lot of difference came in their language and communication patterns.

Then, as the team visited various cities i.e. Kanpur and Surat and interacted with the labourers, it was observed that most of the labourers were following the culture of their native place i.e. the

place from where they trace their origin. There is no change in language, dressing style, food habits, social mobility etc. On the other hand, some migrants also have adapted to the culture of the migrated place and it is also because of the time span or may be the demand of the work or the societal considerations they were forced to adapt. For example, the team met a person in Gujarat who has migrated from Maharashtra but still he didn't know Marathi because it is the case of cultural migration of various generations i.e. his father and forefather also migrated to Gujarat in their time.

In conclusion, migration is a long and continues process which always has scope of continuity and change. On the basis of work done one can say that migration not only affects the socio-economic and cultural background of the person but there are so many changes in the form of psychological, mental, emotional and so on taking place in the lives of the migrants. The impact of migration could be seen not only in the lives of the person who migrates from one place to another for better livelihood but also the successive generations if not directly then indirectly definitely.

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REFERENCES

For getting our required information, we used oral conversation, interviews, data observation and analysis etc. Firstly for making our proposal we used Delhi University website for knowing about the destinations, targeted industries and monuments. After that our mentor helped us with making effective questionnaires. Apart from these we observed the processes of industries closely, personally interacted with the labourers, supervisors, managers and engineers.