

## Migrant agricultural labour in Punjab: A sociological analysis

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### ABSTRACT

In the wake of structural transformation of agrarian Punjab, labour has assumed a greater significance. In spite of the fast mechanization, demand for labour went up due to expansion of agriculture. To fill the vacuum, labour from other states migrated to Punjab. The increasing inflow of migrant workforce in Punjab has far reaching consequences. With the objective of analyzing the impact of agricultural migrant labour on rural social set up, three districts of the Punjab state namely Patiala, Sangrur and Hoshiarpur were selected randomly from districts with maximum, less and least concentration of migrant labour, respectively. 300 migrant labourers were personally interviewed. This paper examines the socio-economic and cultural factors that forced labour from other states to Punjab. As a result of long stay and employment in rural Punjab, a significant change in style and life chances of the migrants was also observed.

**KEY WORDS :** Labour, Migrant, Agriculture, Punjab

Sidhu, Simran and Sharma, Shalini (2010). Migrant agricultural labour in Punjab: A sociological analysis, *Adv. Res. J. Soc. Sci.*, 1 (2) : 69-76.

### INTRODUCTION

Agriculture in Punjab has undergone a significant structural change since the advent of green revolution in the mid sixties. Traditional agriculture had progressively given way to modern and commercial agriculture. It was the adoption of dwarf wheat varieties in the mid sixties and rice-varieties in the early seventies, which completely transformed the scene in the agriculture sector. Therefore, substantial increase in the production of these two crops was witnessed for over three decades. In the wake of structural transformation of agrarian Punjab, labour assumed a greater significance. In spite of fast mechanization demand for labour went up due to expansion of agriculture. To fill the vacuum, the labour from other states migrated to Punjab. Initially, it was only in the season of transplanting and harvesting of paddy crop but later on, they started setting with a small trickle to the rural areas of Punjab which soon took the form of a flood during the next decades. Estimated 37 lakh labourers (21 lakh main workers plus 16 lakh dependents) migrated into Punjab in 2001 accounted for 15 per cent of the State's population and about 22 per cent of total working force out of 91

lakh workers in Punjab. They migrated from Bihar (60 per cent), Uttar Pradesh (21 per cent), Nepal (9 per cent) and other States (10 per cent). The total annual earnings were estimated to Rs.3500 crores of which about Rs.2000 crores were transmitted back to their native place.

The literature on migration in developing countries has been extensively surveyed in recent past (Sjaastad, 1962; Myrdal, 1968; Todaro, 1976; Oberoi and Singh, 1980; Breman, 1985). Based on the insight provided by this literature, a general theoretical background of the factors of migration and impact of migration was formulated. In this context, a number of issues are raised, and these need empirical verification. Some of these are examined in the subsequent section of this paper.

All theories of migration concede that migration occurs when the region of origin lacks the opportunities which the destination promises. It is inherently a combination of pull and push factors. Variation in economic development across the regions is a primary motive for migration to greener pastures. The rural poor are concentrated in eastern India, and in the rainfall dependent parts of central and western India, which continue to have low agricultural productivity, while the bulk of the jobs are being created

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