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Studies on General Status of Migratory Sugarcane Harvest Workers of Ahmednagar District in Maharashtra

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Abstract: ***Since the establishment of several sugar factories in Ahmednagar district of Maharashtra, the highly labor intensive cutting of sugar cane has become one of the major agricultural activities in the district. This activity pulls lakhs of workers from the neighboring regions like Marathwada, Khandesh and westernmost part of Vidarbha. Though, these migratory workers play an important role in the process of sugar manufacturing, their living conditions are very pitiable even after sixty years of independence. With this background, an attempt has been made in this paper to know the general status of migratory sugar cane harvest workers of Ahmednagar district in Maharashtra and some remedies have been suggested to surmount the problems of these workers. The objective of the study is to study the general status of migratory sugarcane harvest workers of Ahmednagar district in Maharashtra.***

Keywords: Ahmednagar**,** Migration, Sugarcane, Harvest, Workers

1. Introduction

The sugarcane industry in India is an important contributor to the national economy through the production of multiple products for national and international consumption as well its contribution to recent regulatory requirements for bio-ethanol to be included as a constituent of petroleum-based fuels. The production and processing of sugarcane is a major source of employment in India (Gore, H., et. al. 2013). The Nation's wealth and strength is located in its human resources. However, it is observed that since immemorial time our planners, economists, administrators, scientists of various technologies, educators and social scientists have given proportionately more attention to mobilize financial resources and improve the land rather than training the manpower for improving their skills and livelihood status which is one of the major parameters of the agricultural development (Gaikwad, J, et.al. 2011).

Seasonal migration of sugarcane cutting workers in Maharashtra is the common phenomena during post-independent period. Ahmednagar district located in mid-western part of the state, with its seventeen cooperative and four private sugar factories is not an exception to this fact. In search of wages, thousands of sugarcane cutting workers seasonally move to the district from neighboring regions, particularly from *Marathwada*, *Khandesh* and westernmost part of *Vidarbha*. This seasonal migration of sugar cane harvest workers encompasses a smash in their steady life and brings them in a new environment of insecurity, instability and uncertainty. Thus, the present study has been conducted to understand the status of sugarcane harvest workers in the district.

2. Study Area

Ahmednagar district in Maharashtra is the largest district of the State. Geographically, it covers an area of 17,418 sq. k.m. which is about 5.66% of the total area of Maharashtra. The district extends from 18^0 19' N to19^0 59' N latitudes and 73^0 37' E to 75^0 32' E longitudes, Where climate is characterized by hot summer and general dryness throughout the year except during the period of southwest monsoon. The mean minimum temperature of the district is 12.3^0 C while, the mean maximum temperature is 39.1^0 C (Parchure et.al. 2010). The annual average rainfall of the district is 565 mm. being located in rain shadow area of the Western Ghats, the district normally suffers from frequently occurring droughts. On the basis of its physiographic characteristics, the district may be divided into hilly, ghats, foothill and plateau regions. It may also be divided into two major river basins viz. Godavari basin in the north and Bhima basin in the south. Soils of the district are mainly derived from Deccan Traps. Provision of irrigational facilities offers favorable conditions for sugarcane plantation in the district.

3. Materials and Methods

The present study is based on the primary data collected through questionnaires, empirical information and personal discussions held with the sugar cane harvest workers, waged in the command areas of seventeen cooperative and four private sugar factories of the district. In all 600 family heads or their representatives were interviewed and requested to fill the questionnaire in the sugar cane harvest season 2013-14.

4. Major findings and Discussion

The obtained information was analyzed and the findings are divided into eight categories reflecting socio-economic status of the migrants. Further, all the findings are discussed briefly.

4.1 Food and Health

It is because of the wide spread illiteracy, the workers are not food and health cautious. Poverty does not allow them to

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spend necessary money on food. Lack of knowledge about nutritional requirement and negligence towards personal fitness are the reasons behind poor health conditions of these people. Low calorie food viz. *Bhakari, the* roasted preparation of jowar, wheat or *bajra* with chili paste and onion or rarely with some curry is the staple diet of these people. Frequent drinking of tea is the common habit seen in both men and women. This monotonous consumption of food with low nutritional value results into malnutrition. Low level of blood hemoglobin and worsen body-mass index are commonly found in children and women. Only 2% of the workers know their blood group. It is because of the uncertain scheduling of work, both men and women are not particular in taking regular bath. During illness, workers do not take complete rest due to their target oriented heavy load of routine work. Parents found casual about immunization of their children.

4.2 Water

The work of sugar cane harvesting is characterized by constant migration within the command area of a particular sugar factory. This type of work creates difficulties in getting water from a particular source.Thus, one has to fetch water from nearby sources like irrigation canals, percolation tanks, tube wells, open wells, farm ponds etc. Water available in these sources is not potable. Availability of insufficient water for washing leads to wear dirty clothes. Thus, the workers suffer from different water borne and skin diseases.

4.3 Housing

Though, shelter is the basic need of man, the sugarcane harvest workers cannot fulfill their need of housing. They use to stay in the temporary hut cum tent like structure. It is because of the continuously changing work place and poor economic condition; workers may not get good housing facility. As the size of this temporarily built tent like structure is very small, it can accommodate only two to three persons, preferably couples and remaining members of the family have to stay in open field. Workers either stay in the vicinity of sugar factory or sugar cane field, where the environmental conditions are unhygienic. Absence of toilets and bathrooms further worsen the living conditions.

4.4 Population Structure

The sugar cane harvesting activity needs physically sound group of workers. By recognizing this fact, majority of the workers (64%) were found in young age. About 24% were children and 12% were old age people. Sex ratio of the population was 813, while average family size of the workers is of 4 members. Most of the families were of nuclear type.

4.5 Financial Position

Sugarcane cutting workers always change the sugar factories where they work. Most of them are illiterate and they have no strong labor union for raising their demands to the concerned authorities. Consequently, they get inadequate wages i.e. up to Rs. 300 per ton. This meager income does not meet their daily needs. As the job of these workers is purely temporary, they do not get dearness, travelling, medical, house rent or any such type of allowance and regular increment in payment. They do not get incentives in any form like bonus. Thus, the financial position of these people is not sound.

4.6 Education

The educational condition of the workers was found very pathetic. About 73% of them were not even enrolled in the school, while only 10% had completed their education up to standard 4 and 7% were educated up to 7^{th} standard. It was found that, hardly two percent women were literate. The frightening fact is that, Most of the children of these workers are not enrolled in the school.

4.7 Habits

A processed mixture of stimulating ingredients, locally called *gutka* and tobacco chewing; smoking and consumption of alcohol are the common habits of these workers. Children prefer *gutka*, women are fond of *gutkha* and tobacco, while most of the men smoke local cigarette called *bidi*. Alcohol consumption was found in 43% of the male workers. While women are not addict to liquor consumption. Restless physical work with hectic schedule, insufficient sleeping hours and lack of entertainment facilities leads to the development of single or multiple bad habits among both men and women.

4.8 Energy consumption

As, per capita energy consumption is one of the criterion adapted in various studies to know the living standard, an attempt has also been made to understand the status of energy intake which reveals low level of energy consumption in the workers. Almost zero use of electricity, rare use of auto vehicles, no use of LPG (Liquefied Petroleum Gas) and no hot water for bath are some of the signs of low level energy consumption found in the workers.

5. Conclusion

The migratory sugar cane harvest workers of Ahmednagar district in Maharashtra is a group of socio-economically neglected people of the society. The present study on general status of these workers reveals several characteristics of their backwardness. The workers consume low calorie food with keeping bad habits like *gutkha* and tobacco chewing, smoking and liquor consumption. The health conditions of these people are very poor and most of them are malnourished. They are deprived of many basic facilities like access to health center, electricity, potable water, housing and educational facilities. Low level energy consumption found among these workers reflects their substandard living conditions.

6. Suggestions

The migratory sugar cane harvest workers play an important role in the economic development of Ahmednagar district. However, unfortunately, these workers are deprived of the

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benefits of this development. They deserve to be taken care by the existing system. Proper health and educational services should be made available to them. Provisions of potable water, housing facility with electric supply are the other infrastructural facilities should be provided. The workers must learn about the effects of bad habits. Health insurance, financial incentives, transport facilities, subsidized food and clothing material should be made available to them. A time bound and inclusive welfare program should be rigorously implemented for the upliftment of migratory sugarcane harvest workers of the district.

7. Future Scope for Research

The present study on general status of migratory sugarcane harvest workers provide a base line and suggests the measures to be taken in view of meeting the problems of these workers in Ahmednagar District of Maharashtra. However, with this knowledge, it is just possible to understand, what exactly the nature of their problem is. Thus, the in-depth study of these workers should be carried out in the future research work.

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