



ISSN: 0975-833X

Available online at <http://www.journalcra.com>

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL
OF CURRENT RESEARCH

International Journal of Current Research
Vol. 11, Issue, 06, pp. 4642-4647, June, 2019

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24941/ijcr.32355.06.2019>

REVIEW ARTICLE

PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES OF MIGRANT LABOURERS IN STONE QUARRIES IN INDIA – A CASE STUDY

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ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received 27th March, 2019
Received in revised form
03rd April, 2019
Accepted 22nd May, 2019
Published online 30th June, 2019

Key Words:

Migration - Migrant Labourers

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Citation: Dr. Chinnadurai, R. 2019. "Problems and Challenges of Migrant Labourers in Stone Quarries in India – A case Study.", *International Journal of Current Research*, 11, (06), 4642-4647.

ABSTRACT

There are many ways in which migration has been characterized. Cycles of migration may be permanent or longer term, they may be circular, following a particular pattern of movement to and from the home of origin, practiced over a number of years by the same individual or household, it may be seasonal with the movements following seasonal trends in resources and potential activities, and may be managed on long cycles or short cycles. The reasons for migrating and the relative benefits of this kind of life-style have been debated by academics. Some see migration as a way of managing livelihood risk and vulnerability, by diversifying the various income streams coming into the household and moving individuals into less risky income-generating activities at certain times of the year or according to changing economic circumstances

INTRODUCTION

There are many ways in which migration has been characterized. Cycles of migration may be permanent or longer term, they may be circular, following a particular pattern of movement to and from the home of origin, practiced over a number of years by the same individual or household, it may be seasonal with the movements following seasonal trends in resources and potential activities, and may be managed on long cycles or short cycles. The reasons for migrating and the relative benefits of this kind of life-style have been debated by academics. Some see migration as a way of managing livelihood risk and vulnerability, by diversifying the various income streams coming into the household and moving individuals into less risky income-generating activities at certain times of the year or according to changing economic circumstances.

Migrant Labour in the Quarry works in India: India is a leading producer and exporter of natural stone in the world. On average 10 percent of the natural stone traded on the world market comes from India. Dimensional stones like granite, marble, slate and sandstone constitute the bulk of India's export in natural stone. India accounts for over 20 percent of the world's granite resources. It is the second largest exporter of raw granite after China and ranks fifth in the export of processed granite products. Migrant stone workers occupied a large scale of professional community due to increasing number of stone quarries in India.

This business contributing a lot to meet the local demand of stone and stone products and exporting in abroad is under processed which will enable us to earn staggering amount of foreign currency. But the stone quarry activities are facing both challenges and opportunities having various negative impacts on the ecology and environment, especially on the human rights of the quarry workers. Even Children aged four years and more work up to 14 hours a day digging, breaking and loading stones, and doing other ore-processing activities, in toxic and hazardous environments, with no safety measures. Children working in quarries experience the constant risk of accidents, injury and chronic health hazards. There are rarely any opportunities for healthcare or education. It is estimated that there are over 12 000 stone crusher units in India.

Need of the Study: Employment creation is one of the government's main development interventions to reduce poverty considering agriculture as one of the strategies aimed to increase income levels of the rural poor. In this line, the government of India has introduced a number of strategies for creation of self as well as wage employments through its flagship programmes. However, in spite of the all these efforts, there is a concern on the growing non-agricultural unorganized activities as alternative sources of income in India, a country with high agricultural potential. Stone cutting and crushing work is one such important activity in the country engaged in producing different sizes of stones which are used as raw material for various construction activities namely construction of roads, bridges, buildings, canals, etc. India's

major quarries are spread across the states of Rajasthan, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh. Almost everywhere they are worked as migrant labour forced by poverty, drought, famine or failed crops to take up the hardest possible employment opportunities like quarry works. They are also extremely vulnerable to trafficking and sexual abuse. Escape is hardly ever possible. With this background, this study is aim to investigate how stone quarry workers are marginalized in terms of work opportunity, income and social amenities leading them to be vulnerable and why they continue to work years long with minimal facilities provided by owners. It is in this context therefore, this research study seeks to find out why individuals and rural households engage in cumbersome and dangerous employment activity like stone cutting in the quarries. What is the status of children of these quarry workers regarding their educational and also personal development. Further, this study seeks to identify the constraints and the vulnerabilities associated with quarrying activities and further assess the effects of laws, policies and institutions in enhancing or hindering these activities. This research study also endeavors to explore the different livelihood outcomes realized by the stone workers and as a result of stone quarrying activities.

Objectives of the Study

- To study the socio-economic and ethnographic background of the migrant stone quarry workers.
- To understand the health, nutritional problems and social insecurity faced by stone quarry workers.
- To explore the protective measures and awareness level on the rights of quarry workers.
- To identify the educational status and other issues of migrant worker's children.

Study Area Justification: This is an analytical cross-sectional study conducted in two states namely Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. These states were selected because, majority of the stone cutting quarries are located only in these states and interstate migration is very high among these states. The quarry owners prefer to employ labourers of other states to get continuous work without any break, more hours of work because other state people do not have any other functions or rituals like locals have. Labour issues and labour unions interference will not hurdle the works due to the temporary nature or short period of contract.

Methodology & Sampling: The study is mainly based on the analysis of primary data collected through field visits to 10 sample granite quarries in 5 districts namely Krishnagiri, Dharmapuri, Thiruvellore, Dindigul and Theni districts in Tamil Nadu. In Uttar Pradesh also 5 districts were selected namely Varanasi, Allahabad, Sonbhadra, Mirzapur and Chandauli. The main source of data for this study is worker interviews. In each quarry 15 to 20 workers were interviewed. The total number of workers interviewed in all the quarries together is 357 representing 184 from Tamil Nadu and 173 from Uttar Pradesh. Structured interview schedule was prepared and administered covering all the aspects related to the objectives of the study. The data on workers' profiles, labour arrangements, wages and working conditions, health status, accommodation, basic services access, income and expenditures, women exploitation, cultural deprivation, child labour condition, children education and entertainment, etc., were collected from workers through individual interviews. It

also covered socio-economic status, ethnographic background, and awareness level on the protective laws, security, economic compensatory measures and other welfare aspects pertaining to the dangerous labour work.

Limitations of the Study: The owners/representatives of the quarries in the study region were not interested to allow the research and investigating team to interact with the workers. Therefore it was very difficult to meet the workers in the work sites. The workers fear of eviction from the employment by the quarry owner also influenced the interview process. Whatever the data obtained for the study are the opinions of the study region only. Generalising the fact of the study may need exhaustive coverage of states, regions and more samples.

Findings on Respondents

- Sex wise representation of the sample population shows, the study covered 58.5% males and 41.5% females. Among them around 80% of workers were in the age group between 20-40 years and 92.3% were married and 83% illiterates. Only 17% attend of primary schooling. High percentages of children were not attending school.
- Majority of the sample population belongs to Hindu religion. The study sample has covered different types of caste groups from both study states. Labourers working in quarries of Tamil Nadu belong to Vaddy sub-caste migrated from Andhra Pradesh and Kalla Wadar from Karnataka. In Uttar Pradesh majority of the migrant stone quarry workers come from Bihar and they belong to Musahars and Patharkat sub castes.

Findings on living conditions and status on basic services

- Around 85% were living near the work site and far away from the people's settlements. It was reported by around 83 percent respondents that the houses are not suitable for living. The study found 61.3% people live in living sheds provided by the employer mainly in Tamil Nadu and 32.5% live in the houses created by them funded by the employers.
- More than 92 percent of the workers were not happy about their places of living, but they themselves responded for non-availability of alternative arrangements. The premises of living were not conducive for human life. The workers have to face and get affected by all types of natural disasters. Eighty four percent did not have toilets and go for open defecation.
- Majority population ,73.2 depends on hand pump for their household purposes as well as for bath. In majority of the worker's living areas drainage facility was not available; it was acknowledged by 92.4% respondents.

Income and Expenditure status findings

- Higher the annual income will lead to higher expenditure especially on buying of comfort needs to lead a better life. More number of respondents i.e. 36.7% earns annual income between Rs. 70001 - 90000. Further, around 21% have got annual income between Rs. 90001-110000, followed by another around 20.4% of respondents earned between Rs.50001-70000 and 15.4% earn more than Rs. 110000.
- Majority household's 31.4% annual expenditure was between Rs.70001-90000. There were 25.2% spent Rs.

50001-70000 per annum currently. Around 21% families were in the expenditure category of above Rs.110000.

- The expenditure of the quarry workers is mostly on food and alcohol. Quite surprising enough around 20% of their income was spent on intoxicants. It has resulted in premature deaths and in some cases they are incapacitated to do any work at all.

Land and assets Particulars related findings

- Almost 90 percent of the migrant families did not have land. Significant number of migrant workers had land in their native places before migration. Due to failure of monsoon and lack of money for investment, many people sold their land even homestead area for their survival and also for pay back of loans.
- Majority people eat non-vegetarian foods stuffs in alternate days to supplement higher energy requirement and also consume alcohol to get relief from the body pain. Therefore major portion of their earnings goes on consumption purposes. In this context, it is very difficult for them to save more money. Around 28% respondents saved in the form of cash, 13.6% purchased house sites in their native places followed by around 27% purchased less quantity of gold ornaments. Majority of the respondents (44.5%) paid their loans.
- Majority (63.9%) is unskilled. Only 14.3% reported they have professional skills. Around 22% is having semi-skills of only breaking and loading of stones and metals.

Findings on Loans and Repayment

- All the respondents have taken loans from different sources for different purposes. Around 43% have taken loan of Rs 10,000 – 20,000/- followed by 25% borrowed between Rs 20,001 – 30,000/-. Only 22% have taken loan of below Rs 10,000/-. Around 10% have taken higher loan amount of Rs 30,000 – 40,000/-.
- Different types of loans were taken by the quarry workers i.e short term loan to be paid within week or month. The long term loans are allowed to pay till the period working in the quarries. This long term loan is normally taken from quarry owner. The medium term loan taken every year and paid back at the end of the year while calculating the annual works and income earned. The short term loans are taken for consumption needs from local traders and also from neighbours. Almost 74% of people have taken cash loan.
- The sources of loans at the destination of migration reveals, 26% people took loans from quarry owners and 28.1% took from labour contractors. Another 22.5 percent households have taken household commodities from the nearby shops as short term loans.
- It is very interesting to know that, no household was mentioned about loans for education. The various purposes of loan, higher responses (39.2%) pointed on meeting the house hold consumption expenses, followed by marriage and ceremonial expenses (23.4%) and equally for medical expenses (22%). It is interesting to note that a significant percent (12.8%) of households reported loans taken for other purposes, almost all the respondents spent significant amount on alcohol and other drugs, even women and children having the habits of consuming tobacco products.

Findings on Labour Arrangements

- In the sample study region almost 95% of labourers were approached and contracted by the labour contractors. Majority of labour engaged in piece rate basis i.e based on the quantum of stones broken and the measurement of quantity is done based on number of truck of loads. All workers taken on contract with advance of payment.
- Around 50 percent of the people are not satisfied on the pattern, procedures, binding conditions and also type of payment prevailing in the study regions due to uncertainty of tenure of work, lack of freedom of choice of mobility and severity of working conditions.

Major Problems Experienced during Quarry Work

- Nature of works is very hard in the quarries working with heavy instruments and breaking solid stones either under earth or above peak of rocks. Quarry workers face weakness and body pain every day, which was accepted by all the sample population. There were 62.5% opined get injuries and wounds while breaking stones.
- Around 90 percent of sample population facing mental stress and loneliness, followed by around 33 percent reported for mental instability.
- Ninety percent of the families feel they are disintegrated from their society and all responded, they are distant from their relatives and feeling insecurity due to lack of people to share their feelings.
- High income leads to high expenditure agreed by majority of the respondents (78.4%) and addiction to drugs accepted by more than 90%. The expenditure on health (88.8%) is very high due to the nature of work and possibility of injuries during work hours. Since parents are addicted to such drug habits, the children also easily trapped in to such practices.
- Major problems faced by workers are quarry dust leading to blocking of respiratory system (94.1%), Skin rashes (89.6%), Mal nutrition (40.9%), Lack of immunity (41.3%), polluted environment lead Tuberculosis (37.0%) and vision problem (28.3%). There were around 10% also responded having conditions of morbidity in their families.
- Almost all the working members of the family consume local liquor and varieties of tobacco and marijuana products which are more harmful especially to the hard working people like stone quarry workers.
- Lack of adequate food and nutrition was lead to malnutrition, morbidity, anaemia to women and children. In addition to such specific problems, they also get common diseases like fever, cold, dysentery during rainy season and headache, vision problem, heart problem etc., during summer. They also get intestine problems due to heavy liquoring and teeth problems due to chewing of tobacco.
- In rural areas people give more importance to cultural practices like attending village and community festivals, communal rituals, attending marriages and family related ceremonies, visiting relatives and many other occasions. It leads to number of consequences like lack of peer group sharing for children as well as adolescents (65.3%), problem in finding life partner at the place of origin (41.5%).

- Around 91% reported miss their festivals, and 78.7 felt missing of family rituals and ceremonies. Those problems ultimately affect the mindset of workers especially women have feeling of isolated living.

Women Workers Problems

- Specific problems faced by women workers are, due to physic and ability of strength affects women and creates specific problems like back pain (93.8%), Incidences of abortion, unequal payment and sexual harassment reported by around 20%.
- More than 81% also expressed, the contractors and other male members' disturbance and urge to have illegal sexual relationship. Women are unable to report the situation either to family members or to anybody else with the fear of eviction from the work or disintegration from the family.

Push and Pull Factors for migration

- More than 98% responded lack of employment and 94.4% reported high poverty played as push factor for their migration. Especially poor people pushed from their native places to get better employment opportunities and to earn better income to support their survival. Around 88% reported failure of agriculture and fewer wage in the native places, 57.1% for indebtedness and 50.4% agreed lack of skills led them to move from their natives.
- Similarly responses on pull factors reported by 97.5% for regular employment, 83.8% towards payment of advance money, 82.6% attracted towards high earning possibility and around 41% for possibility of earning according to their capacity.

Working Conditions and Awareness on the Protective Laws

- Seventy Seven percent reported negatively on protection of the rights of inter-state migrant workers in real spirit by the existing laws. In addition, provisions of other labour laws are also applicable to the inter-state migrant workers with the intention of protecting them from any form of exploitation.
- Majority of the quarries in the study region do not follow provisions of the Inter State Migrant Workmen Act 1979 and not ready to disclose such provisions to the workers to avoid legal complication or prosecutions by the labours or supporting organizations.
- Other provisions like issuing of passbook to the workers, obtaining license for contractors, first aid provisions, punishment for offences at the worksite, facilities to be given at worksite and living places, minimum wage payment were not implemented according to the Act by the employers.
- There were 91% reflected negatively on employers attitude of implementing various constitutional provisions related to quarry activities and in majority cases the stone quarry workers were cheated or exploited by employers.
- In case of violations of legal provisions of the acts, 84% respondents reported positively, means penalty compensation been possible if legal complaints are made. But, in majority cases, issues are settled without allow to make complaints with legal system. Eighty four percent of workers among sample population were

not aware about the legal provisions of various constitutional acts protecting industrial labours or laws related to protecting the interest of the other state migrant workers.

- All the respondents expressed need of awareness creation about the rights and provisions of various laws pertaining to labour under the Indian Constitution, making adequate initiatives to implement the protective and welfare measures for the betterment of the working conditions.
- They also suggested improving better living conditions by providing basic provisions at living places as well as working sites. Moreover making appropriate measures and arrangements for education of their children.
- Around 92 percent respondents replied positively accepting to welfare measures provided by the employer. The workers are provided free accommodation of dormitory type of living places otherwise they are given a sum of amount to create small huts for their living. The health expenditure incurred on minor accidents and injuries were also paid by the owners.
- In connection with the sufficiency of various items or facilities, majority workers expressed on inadequacy of food materials by 73.4% workers, lack of better housing by 82.4%, lack of nutrition by around 70%, inadequacy of medical facilities by 66.1%, lack of access to transport and market facilities by 79.3%, non-availability of schools nearby working areas 89.1% and non-existence entertainment by 51.8%.
- Informal discussion on the healthy life of quarry workers disclosed occurrences of number of early deaths especially among men workers which totally disrupt the life of the families. Early deaths caused by habit of addict to liquor and drugs, inadequate nutrition, long hours of work on the scorching sun, injuries and accidents.
- All the respondents were very much interested in requesting government to create regular source of income through creating alternate safe employment avenues.

They also intended to request to ensure minimum basic services in the living places provided by the employers.

- Around 98% of the labourers interested to put humble request for creating educational access to their children either in the work places or arrangement of boarding accommodation in the form of priority in admission to the boarding schools.
- It is also suggested by 72% respondents to encourage victims families of accidents or offences to complain with the legal system and avail appropriate compensation.
- The nature of high mobility in changing of worksites and status of non-local labours were hardly unite for fight against or demand for their rights. It was reported by all the respondents for non-existence of labour organisation. The study respondents of 45.4 % reported on availability of Non-governmental organisation (NGO) in both the study states and working for welfare and legal support. But, majority 54.6% were not get any support of NGOs.
- Illiteracy, ignorance and lack of institutional support of migrant workers allow the employers to cheat them

without paying adequate compensation, and also eliminating the cases or forces behind the accidents or deaths.

- Regarding reaction towards 'no compensation attitude of the employers', around 41 percent reported for approaching local organisations for support to fight against the employer's injustices.

Suggestions

- The state government has to make adequate efforts to insist the quarry operators to issue 'Identity Pass' to the each individual workers and it should be monitored and reported to the district administration on the movement of labours in to different quarries. Total Working hours in a day and timings of the work also to be regulated as per the standard operating procedures and it is to be monitored by the Inspector of works appointed by the state government.
- Fundamental work related functional trainings to be imparted to the stone quarry workers on safetyness during work, application of 'First Aid' for accidental injuries and it is to be organised by the quarry licensees.
- Semi-mechanisation of stone cutting work to reduce the drudgery of the workers and initiatives to impart know-how and operating skills are to be given to the labourers.
- Creation of basic minimum facilities like safe places to hide people during the process of blasting, creation of shade nets to take rest in the premises of worksites, safe places for new born and babies while mother engaged in work, toilet facilities atleast for women, drinking water, etc. to be ensured by the employers.
- It is essential to supervise and coordinate the process of drilling and blasting of rocks under the guidance of appointed government officers for witnessing any unexpected incidents and accidents.
- Ensuring supply of protective equipments like shoes, clothes, eye glass and head protection instruments by the quarry owners and periodical checking for wearing such things by the labourers.
- Organise of training camps on disaster preparedness and actions to be taken on emergency situations during working hours and minimum knowledge on treating minor ailments. Conduct of awareness campaigns on the rights of labours in general and other state migrant workers to the quarry workers. Various provisions of the relevant laws and their provisions to be given to the stone quarry workers.
- Compulsory week breaks of work to be maintained to enable the workers to take rest to the body and soul. Provision of protected and sanitized living environment with protected decent house with minimum space and provisions of drinking water, toilet, electricity, shops for basic things.
- Creation of grievances redressal mechanism and periodical interaction with the workers by the worksite supervisors and reporting the appellate authorities for appropriate action protecting the interest of the workers are essential.
- It is also need to create or organise entertainment events and recreational facilities or at least provision of monetary incentives to organise such events periodically for break the nature of monotonous work.

- Severe punishment for involvement of child labour in disastrous works like stone breaking and related works to the owners as well as parents. Creation of educational access to the quarry workers children by establishing study centres, mobile schools or transport facilities to reach the schools and encourage every parent to send their children for studies.
- Imparting skills in alternative trades of employment may be for the workers or on priority to their children through government schemes or by NGOs and encourage them to search for safe employment and better living conditions.
- Maintaining transparency in obtaining and repayment of loans and advances and proper document entries are important to protect the labourers from financial discrepancies.
- Making labours understand the legal process, procedures for prosecution, possibility of seeking legal support, grounds and quantum of compensations to claim are important. Arrangement of free legal support and family counselling for stress free life for the workers in problem.
- Periodical health camps and visit of health workers to be organised by the employers and NGOs can be encouraged to work with the labourers to timely diagnose the problems and guidance to have nutrition food intake for maintaining better health.
- Creation of awareness on the harmful effects alcohol, drugs and organising counselling to the drug addicted individuals to help them to get away from the evil effects of drugs.
- Severe punishment to the offenders of sexual harassment and creation of better working and living environment for women workers.
- Exploring possibility of creating access to the workers with the local public distribution system and giving priority in availing benefits of development and welfare schemes of government in the native places of the workers and encourage to come back and live their natives.
- Enlighten them on the opportunities available at the places of their birth through MGNREGS, NRLM, DDUGKY, PDS, PMAY and many other social security schemes to help them find livelihoods in their native states.

Conclusion

Stone quarrying is one of the key extractive economic activities in India, supplying the bulk of stone of varying aggregates to the construction industry, roads and railways. The country also earns considerable income through exporting of semi-polished and full polished granite stones to a number of countries. Quarrying provides some levels of employment and generates some income to the people. Majority of the people who are engaged labour activities in stone quarries are low economic groups and also socially backward. With inadequate skills and high consumption expenditures quarrying does not generate returns to commensurate the efforts and problems faced. The quarrying operation in its current form is environmentally unsustainable. Land degradation is widespread posing serious threat to food security. Atmospheric dust concentration coupled with the physical nature of the quarrying process creates negative health consequences in

general and workers particular. The existing legislations and implementing agencies remain ineffective in comprehending the dynamics of socio-economic and cultural problems prevails in this industry. Therefore, there is an urgent need to evolve a comprehensive legislative mechanism, effective initiatives to strengthening the implementation of existing labour related laws and a special institutional set-up to liberate other state migrant stone quarry workers.

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