



8. Migrant Labour – Problems of the Invisible

There are two explanations for labour migration. The first centres on the rational decision of an individual. An individual makes a decision, based on free will, to migrate to centres where there is a demand for labour. Migration is thus associated with urbanisation and modernisation, as well as with development. However, rational individual choice is not the only factor which affects labour migration in India.

The second explanation emphasises the fact that capitalist development has always needed cheap labour. In this sense migration is analysed as a class phenomenon and uneven development is seen as the basic cause of labour migration.

There are two important reasons for rural labour migration: (1) migration for survival and (2) migration for subsistence. The first indicates the severe social and economic hardships faced by rural labourers, a situation where migration becomes necessary to stay alive. These communities are generally landless, illiterate and drawn largely from Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and other depressed castes. The second reason for migration is also rooted in subsistence and arises because of the need to supplement income in order to fill the gaps of seasonal employment. Such communities often migrate for shorter periods and do not ordinarily travel very far from their homes.

Migrants have been coming to Punjab ever since opportunities in agriculture were created by the state's agricultural leap forward. But even before the Green Revolution, the agricultural economy in areas of Malwa was a very dynamic one. The Green Revolution brought general prosperity and increased household incomes. The Punjabi farmer no longer had to labour on his own lands, was able to raise the level of mechanisation and hire labour. The new agriculture created a new demand for labour, which was met by states across northern and central India.

There also occurred a simultaneous growth in small manufacturing, especially in urban centres like Ludhiana. Large numbers of migrant labour poured in to meet the demand for factory hands, and to provide other services that were required in the growing and crowded industrial belt.

Over time, migrant labour became institutionalised in Punjab and regular, long-term relationships between job providers and migrant labourers were established. By now, systems of migration have become regularised and various types of contractual systems have emerged. Migrant labourers have not only become an integral part of Punjab's economy, but also important constituents of society.



The fact that the same communities of migrant workers repeatedly come to Punjab reveals that work and living conditions are perhaps a great deal better than conditions in their home states. Migrant labour may be attracted by local wage rates, labour contract systems and by the relations with employees that are in a peace in Punjab.

However, the labouring numbers who have come to play a major role in Punjab's economy, have found it relatively difficult to access the benefits of citizenship. In this chapter we look at who these migrants are and where they come from, as well as living conditions.

Since the migrant labourer is considered an 'outsider' in a cultural, linguistic and class sense, the focus is always on 'the migrant as a problem', rather than the 'problems of the migrant'. In a state from where pioneers and entrepreneurs have migrated, settled, and contributed to the economies of many countries, domestic migrant labourers deserve far better treatment.

Migration to Punjab occurs from almost all north western states, as well as from states in central and eastern India. Migration occurs from rural to

urban areas, as well as between rural areas. Nearly all sectors of Punjab's economy employ migrant labour. Migrant women are employed as domestic help in cities and children are employed as domestic help in both rural and urban areas. Migrant labourers are employed in both agriculture and industry. Table 8.1 gives an estimate of the number of migrant labour in each of the industries, as well as in the agricultural sector in Punjab.

Migration to the Agricultural Sector

Migration to Punjab began strongly in the early 1970s, gained momentum in the 1980s despite militancy and reached its pinnacle in the 1990s. The proportion of migrant labourers rose from 2.19 lakh, or 7.6 percent of the total agricultural labour force in 1978-79 to 3.86 lakh or 10 percent, in 1983-84. Their number was estimated at 3.27 lakh during the lean season and 6.56 lakh during the peak season. By the 1990s, their number during the peak season stood at nearly 7.74 lakh, or 11% of agricultural labour in the state (Sidhu and Rangil).

There was a phenomenal increase in migrant labour population after the Green Revolution, especially with the introduction of labour-intensive crops like potato, sugarcane and cotton. Wheat-

Table 8.1: Estimation of Inter-State Migrant Labour in Punjab in late 1990s

Activity	Migrant labour in Punjab
1. Agriculture	7 lakh
2. Brick kiln	2 lakh
3. Manufacturing Industries :	
(i) Textile/ Hosiery Workers	4 lakh
(ii) Sports & other industries	2 lakh
(iii) Sugarcane industry	15,000
4. Service industries:	
(i) Loading/ unloading workers in Mandis (Palledars)	7.5 lakh
(ii) Rickshaw pullers	1.5 lakh (7.5 lakh including local and migrant)
(iii) Domestic workers	1 lakh
5. Construction Industry:	
(i) Power, irrigation and multi-purpose projects	50000 (1 lakh including local and migrant)
(ii) House/ building construction	1.5 lakh
(iii) Stone construction/ Road construction	1.5 lakh
Total	21,65 lakh

Source: Estimates drawn from diverse sources and different studies.



Table 8.2: **Estimates of Total Migrant Workers in Punjab Agriculture**

S. No.	Source	Year	Estimated number
1	S.S. Johl	1974-75	1,34,590
2	Gurcharan Singh Rupal	1978-79	1,00,000
3	Time (U.S.A.)	1973-79	1,50,000
4	Sidhu and Grewal	1973-79	2,19,394
5	B.K.Chum	1983-84	4,00,000
			to
			5,00,000
6	Sidhu and Grewal	1983-84	4,29,000
7	Devinder Sharma	1985-86	6,00,000

Source: 1. S.S. Johl, "Gains of the Green Revolution – How they have been shared in Punjab, PAU, Ludhiana, April 1975. His estimates show that migrant labour was 5 percent of the total labour force in Punjab. 2. Gurcharan Singh Rupal, "Punjab, Canada for Bhaias", Punjabi Tribune, April 23, 1979. 3. Time, May 28, 1979. 4. M.S. Sidhu and S.S. Grewal, 'A Study on Migrant Agricultural Labour in Punjab', PAU, Ludhiana, October 1984. 5. B.K. Chum, "Violence Hits Farmers Economy", Indian Express, March 10, 1984. 6. M.S. Sidhu and S.S. Grewal, op.cit. 7. Devinder Sharma, "Migrant Labour Flow Unabated", Indian Express, April 13, 1986.

paddy rotation itself comprises 67.42 percent of the total cropped area in the state and consolidation of land holdings created conditions for capitalist development in agriculture and facilitated the use of farm machinery like tube-wells, tractors, threshers, cane crushers, combined harvesters and paddy planters. The demand for labour was met not only from local communities but there was also a massive influx from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. Punjab had earlier been characterised by the predominance of family labour on land, but family labour was rendered quite insufficient by the huge demands of the Green Revolution. Migrant labour was initially concentrated in just a few districts but later spread to others. The districts of high concentration were Ludhiana, Patiala and Jalandhar; medium concentration districts were Amritsar, Faridkot, Ferozpur and Sangrur; and the districts with low concentration were Rup Nagar, Hoshiarpur, Gurdaspur and Bathinda. In 1998, it was estimated that districts with high concentration had approximately 52 migrant labourers per village, those with moderate concentration had about 30, and villages with low concentration had about 15 labourers per village (Sidhu and Grewal).

Most migrant workers who migrate to Punjab come primarily from the states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar and also from Madhya Pradesh, and Orissa, which suffer from severe unemployment and under-employment, low wages, low earnings and an agricultural productivity that is much lower than that of Punjab (Sidhu and Rangji 1998). A large number of migrants migrate in order to repay debts they have incurred from village moneylenders, shopkeepers and others (Sidhu and Rangji, Manmohan Sharma, and Manjit Singh). Punjab is able to offer them a wage rate double of that offered in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.

Migrant labourers generally prefer to work in villages where they have worked earlier. Inter-village and inter-district migration in Punjab is comparatively low. Living conditions are not always satisfactory. Migrants live in small groups, in accommodation provided by the farmers near their tube wells, or in any other common village area. Over 90 percent of them do not have to pay any rent for accommodation. Migrants have not been registered as voters in Punjab, despite the fact that they have been living in the same area for many years and have returned repeatedly. They have therefore not been allowed to develop any stakes





Courtesy photo

Migrant labourers in Punjab's agriculture

in the area nor are they taken into consideration during planning and governance processes.

It may be mentioned here that there are different views on the conditions of migrant workers. Some argue that they are given fair treatment and full protection by the state and that in recruitment, wages and general treatment, the migrant labourer is on a par with the Punjabi labourer.

Migrant labourers in Punjab are both annual and seasonal. Among the total migrant labourers in agriculture, nearly one-sixth of them worked on a yearly contract i.e. on a permanent basis. Migrant labourers are now replacing local labourers who may have worked as attached or permanent labour. Of the majority of migrant labourers, nearly half of them work on a casual basis, one-third of them as seasonal migrant workers, and the rest as attached labourers. Labourers are also given food and tea in addition to cash wages. There has been considerable increase in the wage rates of migrant labourers over the last twenty years. The total annual earnings of migrant labourers range from Rs. 5, 000 to Rs.15,000 (Sidhu and Rangji).

The reasons for the influx of migrant labour can be summed up as:

- Wage rate offered by Punjab are almost double the rate offered in their native states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.
- Living conditions in native states are poor and migration provides better opportunities and an alternative source of employment.
- Large-scale debts also lead to migration to Punjab, although many incurred debts even in their new place of work.
- Large families (6-14 members) and few earning members also force migration.

Land owners prefer migrant populations for many reasons. These are:

- scarcity of agricultural labour during peak seasons;
- threat by local agricultural labourers to stop work during peak season unless wages are increased;
- higher wage rates demanded by local labourers;



- greater assertiveness of the local labour force;
- perception of migrant labour as honest, docile and obedient, reliable, simple and unaware of their rights.

In a study of the impact of migration, Alakh Naraina finds that agricultural practices and performance remain basically unchanged in spite of migrants.

Migration to the Industrial Sector

With increased mechanisation of agriculture, the Punjabi farmer no longer needed to work his own lands. After the Green Revolution, there was an accumulation of capital, which resulted in the development of small-scale industry. Major industries developed, all of which used migrant labour. These are the sugar industry and the textile industry. Ludhiana, as the hosiery centre of the state, attracts the largest numbers of migrant labourers after agriculture. In the early 1980s, nearly 40 percent of workers in the unorganised sector, primarily in the hosiery sector, were migrants. Migrant workers began to work in the hosiery industry at the start of the 1970s and their numbers have been increasing ever since.

Migrants are employed mostly in low-paid unskilled jobs that often carry greater health hazards than other jobs. Although there are arguments that there is little difference between local and migrant labour yet it can also be said that the daily and monthly earnings of migrants are undoubtedly lower than the earnings of local labour. Lower piece rates are fixed for migrant labourers and their average monthly earnings are almost 10-35 percent lower than that of the locals in such processes as knitting, tailoring, checking and packing and button stitching. The average number of working hours is higher when compared to the number of hours that local labourers work.

The preponderance of local labour in the more skilled processes can be attributed to the fact that they enter the trade as apprentices and are able to stay on for longer periods. They thus acquire the required expertise fairly quickly in their working lives. This is in contrast to the migrant, whose existence is mobile and who is not able to sustain a stable expertise-creating long-term career. The migrant is more linked to rural agricultural work than to urban industrial work.

The migrant labourer is also illiterate and is therefore not employed in tasks requiring skills such as the ability to handle complicated machinery. Obviously, these tasks also pay better.

The migrant labourer is at the very lowest level of the industrial class structure. They have been demarcated as a distinct and separate stratum within which they are able to stay and work. Migrant workers are often referred to as the rather derogatory `bhaiyas` in local parlance. Additionally, local workers tend to maintain a social distance from migrant workers at the places of work (Dr. Manjit Singh).

In certain parts such as Gobindgarh, the wages received by a worker, do not depend on the volume of work done by the person individually, but are based on the average level of work performed by a group. Work is allocated to a group attached to a *thekedar* and earnings are pooled, and distributed equally at the end of a working week. Thus risks are shared even by the lowest strata. The often methodical manner in which accounts of earnings are kept, wages are distributed and decisions taken on inclusion or exclusion of members is fairly impressive.¹

The Sugar Industry and Migrant Labour

There is a substantial presence of migrant

¹ Amitabh Kundu and Surender Bhatia, a study on "Industrial Growth in Small and Medium Towns and Their Vertical Integration: The Case of Gobindgarh, Punjab, India".





Sugar industry

labourers in Punjab's sugar industries. At present there are 22 sugar mills in Punjab, which employ 15,000 workers. Migrant labourers from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, constitute a substantial proportion of the labour employed in these sugarmills.² In fact migrant labour has become an essential component of the labour force of Punjab's sugar industry. A large proportion of these migrants were engaged in agriculture before they migrated to Punjab and were indebted to village moneylenders. Pressure of debts and low incomes meant that even when militancy was at its peak, they continued to migrate to the sugar mills of Punjab. Since work is seasonal in the sugar industry, only about half of the labour force is permanently employed. While skilled workers have permanent employment, a majority of semi-skilled and unskilled workers work on a seasonal basis. Most migrants to the sugar industry stay in Punjab for less than ten years, remit most of their earnings to families at home and maintain strong links with their native places. The majority belong to the age group of 30 to 40 years and are drawn from backward caste communities, invariably more dependent on work than local labour. In the sugar

industry, the level of education was higher among local labour compared to the migrants.

Migration to the Brick Kilns

Systems of migration often differ in different industries. Within the brick kiln industry, for example, there exists a system of bonded labour, a result of accumulated debt.³ In most cases workers decide to migrate in order to clear local debts. They do this with advance money, which is given to them by contractors in the form of *peshagi*. *Peshagi* exploits them further and traps them in further debt, this time in an alien environment. At the end of the season, the worker is allowed to return only if he/ she is able to repay the *peshagi*. If not, they are forced to stay back until they have repaid the entire amount. To do this, migrants might borrow more money, leading them into terrible and perpetual debt. Accumulated debt leads to perpetual bondage, one of the major afflictions of migrant workers in the brick-kiln industry of Punjab (Nasir, Ateeq, et al., March 2001). Labourers' debt advances can range from Rs. 20,000 to Rs. 40,000. Interest rates could range between 24 and 60 percent.

² This section is based entirely on study by Krishan Chand et al. (1998) on the Sugar Industry of Punjab

³ Nasir Ateeq in his study "Status of Migrant Labour in Brick Industry of Punjab"



In case work stops due to, say, rain, workers do not get any wages for the work they might have done before rainfall began. In such situations, they have to rely on loans from contractors or owners. Although the law provides for a system of compensation where the employer must pay a specified amount in case of stoppage of work, this is almost never followed.

Workers in brick kilns are employed for the whole season but their wages are paid in two parts. They are given a mere subsistence wage every fortnight and are paid the remaining amount at the end of the season. It might take employers a fortnight to settle their accounts during which time they keep borrowing money to survive. This increases their debts. They are also often cheated by *munshis* as a result of their illiteracy and inability to keep accounts. In addition, workers do not get paid for cleaning the land where brickwork is supposed to take place. This takes about fifteen days to finish and labourers are forced to borrow money to sustain themselves for this period as well.

Brick kilns hire workers on a piece rate basis. As a result of this they cannot afford to take leave from work. In case of sickness or even if they need to go to the market, they need to take leave and therefore lose out on their wages. Workers engaged in loading and unloading work do not get wages for overtime. Even monthly wage workers work under similar conditions. Employers do not provide the tools and implements such as *rehri*, shovel and spade. Workers have to buy these themselves when they begin work at a site. Remuneration does not alter according to working conditions, whether high heat or cold. Brick kiln workers in Punjab are thus impoverished.

Migrants are governed under the Inter-State Migration Workmen Act, 1979, which defines a migrant workman as one who is recruited by the contractor in the workman's home state. So far, however, no migrant worker has been registered



Migrant labourers in brick kilns

as a 'migrant workman'. It also clearly states that when workers migrate, employers should provide them equitable money for dependent family members. Employers are even required to pay travel expenses. However, these payments have been corrupted into the *peshagi* that the migrant has to repay over the next year. A combination of ignorance and helplessness prevents workers from demanding the rights given to them by the Workmen Act.

Nor is there a proper system of registering migrants either at source or destination. Harassment and extortion by police, other departments such as railways, post office and anti-social elements at the workplace, in 'workers' residential colonies and during the journey are





Box 8.1: Features of Bondage

1. Bonded labourers are forced to work without adequate pay in most cases.
2. They are given advances that carry interest rates ranging from 24 to 60 percent per annum. Thus they become indebted to the farmers till they return the debt.
3. They are neither paid any wages, nor any perquisites in the form of food, clothes, etc.
4. They are not free to leave their employers until they clear their loans.
5. They remain at the beck and call of their masters and have to work for 14 to 16 hours a day.
6. The recalcitrant are coerced and often severely beaten.
7. Most bonded labourers are male but there are also cases of some female domestic servants. The latter are sometimes subjected to sexual exploitation.
8. Nearly one-fourth are below 25 years; and the rest are mostly aged 26 to 50 years. There are a few above 50 years as well.
9. The duration of bondage, in an overwhelming number of cases is up to 5 years, and in a few cases, ranges from 6 to over 20 years
10. Cases of bondage include both local labourers and migrant labourers. There are also cases of women and child bonded labourers.
11. Labourers are not given any leave and in case of acute illness, fines are imposed on them @ Rs. 100 for absence. The amount of fine is added to the initial debt advance.



Box 8.2: Case Study: Bonded Labour, Hoshiarpur (Manjit Singh, 1995)

The presence of migrant labourers in Hoshiarpur was first noticed in the 1980s. While seasonal labourers migrated to Ludhiana voluntarily, the recruitment pattern of tribals in Hoshiarpur and its adjoining areas was regulated through intermediaries. Recruitment of tribals was made easier by the fact that there were many natives of Hoshiarpur employed in Ranchi. Agents in Punjab established contacts, and received assistance from others, who became intermediaries in the recruitment procedure. Once recruited, tribal labourers were transported to Punjab.

Tribal labourers are available at cheap rates and are reputed to be very hard working. In the early 1970s, only a few people were involved in this trade. Later, it became lucrative in the entire district. Contractors in Hoshiarpur had their agents at Ranchi, who operated through their sub-agents at the village level. Labourers were brought in from Ranchi and sold to farmers in Punjab for a sum, ranging from Rs. 200 to Rs. 400. The farmers who bought them, did not pay any wages for the initial 5-6 months and they were lodged in inhuman conditions. They were forced to go barefoot through the day, kept locked in small airless rooms to

prevent escape and were allowed out only for ablutions. Sometimes, owners would just keep a container in the room where tribal labourers were supposed to relieve themselves.

This practice continues unabated in some areas. Markets are held in the town of Garhshankar, where migrant labourers, particularly tribals are bought and sold. The price for these labourers has now increased to Rs. 1500 per person, with men attracting a higher price than women. Recruiting sub-agents who used to be Punjabis in the past are now Biharis. Also, the centre of the trade has shifted from Hoshiarpur to Gurdaspur. The number of women being traded has also increased.

Of a total of Rs. 1500 paid for a labourer, approximately one-third, or Rs. 500 goes towards travel expenses. The agent and the recruiter in Bihar share the remaining amount. As said earlier, tribal-labourers do not receive payment for the first few months. After this they get around Rs. 450 to Rs. 700 per month in case of males and Rs. 400 to 500 per month for females.

serious problems faced throughout the cycle of migration. The state has started making efforts to register migrants through the district administration and police department but cruelties still remain. However, attention is also being given to see that workers are not harassed during the process of registration.

Migration in Construction

The construction industry is another sector where migrant labour is employed in great numbers. Building and road construction is mainly done by migrant labour. Women are also employed in the construction sector in great numbers. They generally begin work at an early age, as early as between five and fourteen years and their wages remain lower than those of men. Some of the families have been living in the state for as long as three decades. Despite residence in Punjab, a majority of them are illiterate, live near construction sites or in slums, with minimum facilities. The peak period for construction is during January to June. For the rest of the year, construction labourers work as daily wage labourers. A large number of migrant labourers in the construction sector are drawn from Scheduled Caste or backward class communities.

Bondage

There is a massive number of cases of bonded labour in Punjab and Haryana, in agriculture, the brick kiln industry, stone quarries and the construction industry. Many are neither identified nor reported. Only a detailed study by independent research or academic institutions can estimate the overall incidence of bondage in the northwest region. The report by Jai Singh clearly reveals that his efforts to bring social justice to these communities through the district administration, Punjab State Human Rights Commission, including the Punjab and Haryana High Court, have not yielded substantial results. An overall review of the situation suggests that interventions by the Supreme Court and National Human Rights

Commission have rendered justice to bonded labourers in only a few cases. The findings of various studies suggest that the intervention by independent agencies like NHRC, Supreme Court, Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes Commission have been effective, but only to a limited extent.

Punjab has taken steps towards the eradication of this inhuman and barbaric labour system. Large numbers of bonded labourers have been released from the brick kilns. Since legal safeguards are obviously not enough, campaigns to release workers have been more effective. For women, there are double burdens. Those employed in brick kilns are often sexually abused by owners as well as other labourers. Children at brick kiln sites cannot access schools or health facilities and are invariably drawn into work at young ages. Their situation is made even worse by the fact that they often do not speak the language of the state and are isolated in colonies that are invariably located at a distance from other habitations. The fact that bonded labour still exists in Punjab means that the state need to act urgently and determinedly.

It may be pertinent at this stage to refer to the role of a voluntary organisation Volunteers for Social Justice, Phillaur, which has been working against the bonded labour system in Punjab and the north-west region. It has referred 137 cases to the district administration; 580 cases to the Punjab Human Rights Commission, 269 cases to the Punjab and Haryana High Court and 121 cases to the National Human Rights Commission and 85 cases to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Commission between 1998 and 2000. Most of these cases of bondage have been found in the agriculture and brick-kiln industry. An overwhelming proportion were located in the districts of Mansa, Bathinda, Jalandhar and a few cases were also identified from the districts of Faridkot, Patiala, Ferozpur, Ludhiana, Kapurthala and Sangrur. The highest incidence of bondage was noticed in the



Malwa region followed by the Doaba and Majha region.

Given the huge international attention that this system has received, the Government of India has formulated a new scheme for the identification, awareness and rehabilitation of bonded labour. The state of Punjab has already been sanctioned an amount of Rs. 10 lakh by the Central government for initiating identification and sensitisation programmes in bonded labour in five districts. The state is in the process of commissioning a survey on the incidence of bonded labour.

Labour Lok Adalats

On an average, Punjab receives 9000 cases for conciliation and although more than 50 percent cases are settled in conciliation, the number of pending cases is nevertheless increasing. In order to tackle this problem, the government of Punjab initiated exclusive Labour Lok Adalats in the beginning of 2001. In the four Lok Adalats that were held at Ludhiana, Patiala, Jalandhar and Amritsar, about 17, 994 cases were settled, out of which 6209 cases were at a pre-litigative stage. An amount of more than Rs. 13 crore was distributed to different categories of workers. The Government of India has in fact directed other states to replicate the Punjab experience. The experience of the Punjab labour Lok Adalats has also been applauded by the International Labour Organization (ILO).

Working Conditions of Migrant Workers

Industries in Punjab have not been able to provide higher wages to workers as agriculture has been able to do. There have been some efforts recently to organise migrant workers into trade unions. Different political parties have organised brick kiln workers, rickshaw pullers, contract workers, workers in *mandis*, or grain markets, and those in textile factories into unions. Living conditions for workers in industries are particularly gruesome. Eight or ten individuals are crammed into a tiny

room. Accommodation provided by employers is often totally lacking in ventilation or sanitary facilities. Trade unions have tried to campaign on these issues but the trade union movement remains weak in Punjab. One of the main reasons for this could be that workers are totally helpless and completely at the mercy of employers.

Workers in most of the industries, especially those who have become members of trade unions, are mostly young, aged 20 to 30 years. A majority are Hindus and belong to Scheduled Caste or other backward caste groups. As compared to workers in the agriculture or construction sector, industrial workers are relatively better educated. The chances of an individual being a member of a union are higher if she or he has her own house and has been living in the state for a while. Levels of participation also increase if workers have families in Punjab. Participation levels of educated workers are higher than that of illiterate workers. Yet, on the whole, participation of migrants as well as local workers in union activities is low even on issues like wages and bonus.

The fear of victimisation is perhaps the most important reason for worker passivity. Such fears decrease if families live in the state for longer periods, however the state government must ensure that employers meet basic legal criteria of employment and provide employees with basic social security along with job security.

The one sector where unions have been moderately successful in meeting the needs of migrant labourers is in the sugar industry. As mentioned above, work in the sugar mills is seasonal. Large numbers of migrant labourers are hired during the months when sugar is produced. Mills also retain a few employees throughout the year. These are generally skilled workers who have been trained to run machines. Though workers are generally locals there are also some migrants in this category. Interaction between migrant and



local labour during their duty time was found to be limited while interaction after duty hours was even lower. While workers do not feel that the management distinguishes between local and migrant workers and wages paid to both remains the same, yet there exists a feeling that the influx of migrant labour has had a depressing effect on the wages of local labour. Presently, the major demands of the trade unions in the sugar mills are 20 percent bonus at the start of the crushing season, increase in variable dearness allowance, adjustment of grades so that they are parallel to grades of Punjab government employees, and removal of disparity between the common cadre and the mill cadre. These demands have been more or less fulfilled.

While trade unions maintain that migrant labourers in Punjab are well represented in the trade union leadership, migrant workers feel that they are not given their due either in trade unions or in the political life of the state. There are grievances that the leadership usually favours local people and that the interests of migrant labourers are often sacrificed.

The State and Migrants

Migrant labour has contributed substantially to the growth of Punjab's agriculture as well as industry. Yet these groups continue to labour under many severe problems, which rise mainly from the nature and manner of employment and economic relations that dominate migrant labour markets. Not only are they burdened with their own indebtedness and poverty but their nutritional levels are low, their

bodies are weak and they are overwhelmingly illiterate. It is therefore imperative to ensure that the migrant is able to avail of the entitlements that Punjab provides for all its citizens.

The state could attempt to create awareness of migrants' rights and set up mechanisms of redressal by encouraging them to form trade unions and co-operative societies to enhance their bargaining power. They should be freed from harassment, perhaps issued temporary ration cards so that they can benefit from the public distribution system. Schools should be set up in areas where migrant workers are concentrated.

Ensuring decent working conditions and proper contract systems, providing basic health care for migrant families together with education opportunities should be primary concerns of the state.

The state of Punjab has framed elaborate rules called the Punjab Factory Rules, 1952, to further the purposes of the Factories Act of 1948. In addition to prevention and control of industrial accidents and injuries in work places, this legislation also provides for detection and control of diseases at work places. The state has also organised about 165 medical camps for industrial workers at various places in Punjab recently. Employers, trade union leaders, NGOs, and public figures have been actively involved in these camps and approximately 50,000 workers have been examined.



