



Observational Research at Labour Chowk in Greater Noida, a Preliminary Study on Migrant Construction Workers

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Abstract: This Author has worked with migrant construction workers throughout his long career and has witnessed a variety of problems they face. The outcomes of earlier studies also supported his experience. Hence, after superannuation, he was compelled to study their situation in detail and continued his research on migrant construction workers. Before commencing fieldwork, he conducted observational (Covert and naturalist) research at Labour Chowk, Greater Noida, UP, as a preliminary study. It is felt that there is a need for a systematic sociological analysis of the situation and for its presentation to policymakers. Furthermore, this will serve as an additional input to the research study on migrant construction workers. The problems faced by migrant construction workers in general constitute a 21st-century crisis with social relevance and require the attention of all concerned. The methodology employed is covert and naturalistic observational research. Based on observations, their interpretation, and analysis, the author reached certain conclusions. As this is an informal, disorganised, temporary arrangement, there is no proper infrastructure, such as toilets, drinking water, or a closed shed for protection during the hot summer and on rainy days. There is no guaranteed minimum wage or minimum working hours, and workers are subject to employers' discretion. Semi-skilled workers, such as painters and masons, have a strong likelihood of selection and skill development, and their skills are in demand. The author also recommends that the current mechanism be formalised as a physical platform to address these problems.

Keywords: Migrant Construction Workers, Labour Chowk, Observational Research, Policy Intervention for Labour

Nomenclature:

PMJBY: Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana,
PMSBY: Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana,
PM-SYM: Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Man Dhan Pension Scheme
PMJAY: Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana
UDHR: Universal Declaration of Human Rights,
OSH Code: Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. Brief Introduction, Objectives, Significance/Relevance

This Author has associated with migrant construction workers throughout his long career and has witnessed a variety of problems they face such as health-related problems (Illness of self, family member, significant personnel injury, Health care facilities), Dis-satisfactory living conditions (no proper drinking water, No proper sanitary, etc.) dissatisfactory working condition at the workplace or job (Excessive hours of work, no adequate safety, no leisure time, Nonavailability of appropriate food), financial trouble & anxiety family trouble, Fear of moving out of their current residence, as well as uncertainty regarding their children's. and educational opportunities, the occurrence of job loss and subsequent employment opportunities, Nutrition for workers, Families, and Children, Abuse of alcohol or drugs to an unhealthy level by family members, financial issues, Problems of women migrant workers, Exploitation of workers & Unacceptability of local people (Social acceptance). The outcomes of earlier studies also supported his experience. Hence, he was compelled to study their problem in detail after superannuation and continued his research on migrant construction workers. Before commencing fieldwork, he conducted observational (Covert and naturalist) research at Labour Chowk, Greater Noida, UP, as a preliminary study. It is felt that there is a need for a systematic sociological analysis of the situation and for its presentation to policymakers. Furthermore, this will serve as an additional input to the research study on migrant construction workers. The problems faced by migrant construction workers in general constitute a 21st-century crisis with social relevance and require the attention of all concerned.

In view of the above, he was compelled to study their problem in detail and to pursue research on life events and human rights violations affecting construction migrant workers. Before the commencement of fieldwork at various locations of the five proposed districts, including Greater Noida (Gautam Buddha Nagar), he carried out observational Research (Covert & Naturalistic) as a preliminary study on migrant construction workers' issues at Block J Beta II Labour Chowk, Greater Noida.

Labour Chowk: 'Labour Chowks' are informal Labour hubs or hotspots in different cities. Semi-skilled labourers, such as carpenters, construction workers, painters, and helpers, as well as unskilled workers, gather here to find a day's



work. A large roundabout in which several streets enter at different angles and exit as per the allowable traffic rules. For example, Bangalore has many circles that lacked traffic lights or controls; all circles now have traffic controls due to population growth.

B. Definition of Migrant Construction Workers

According to the Occupational Safety, Health, and Working Conditions OSH Code [1] (formerly known as the Inter State Migrant Workmen Act 1979), a migrant worker is someone who works at a facility and who: (i) was employed by the employer in one State directly or via a contractor there to do work at a facility of that sort in another State; or (ii) has voluntarily relocated to an institution in another State (hence referred to as the destination State) and obtained employment there under a contract or other agreement for such employment, earning remuneration as may sometimes be declared by the Central Government.

Urbanisation has been a major driver of internal migration—urbanisation rates influence wage differences between rural and urban areas. An increase in labour demand in urban areas can raise urban wages and spur migration. The pull factors of better job opportunities, higher salaries, and improved medical and educational facilities are attracting people from rural areas to cities. Push factors, including a lack of job opportunities, low wages, drought, and limited access to medical and educational services, compel people to move to cities. Marriage: Marriage is a key social factor in migration. Every girl must migrate to her in-laws' residence. Thus, the entire female population of India has to migrate over short or long distances [2].

C. Official Data about Migrant Construction Workers

According to the 2017 Report of the Working Group on Migration, Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation, India was home to 454 million migrants. About 50 million of the 454 million people were migrant construction workers [3].

According to a press release [4], the Labour Bureau, Ministry of Labour & Employment, has begun a study of migrant workers at the All-India level as of April 1, 2021. The survey has already started.

On 26 August 2021, the Government of India launched the e-Shram portal with the primary goal of providing social security and other benefits to unorganised workers, including those employed in agriculture, construction, and other sectors. The employees also include domestic helpers and street sellers in addition to migrant, gig, and platform Labour. As of 06/12/2025, there were 313.958 million registered users, including 28.624 million construction employees. There is just State-level data available. A total of 3.60 million people, including 0.464 million construction workers, were enrolled in Delhi. 84.164 million people in total, including 5.986 million construction workers, were enrolled in Uttar Pradesh [5]. There isn't a specific day set aside for migrant construction workers. No district-wise data is available.

D. Different Interventions/Provisions Exist for the Safeguard of Migrated Construction Workers in India and at the International Level

Global: The "Universal Declaration of Human Rights" (UDHR) was adopted by the United Nations in 1948 [6]. The UN has further reinforced these principles through subsequent international human rights instruments focusing on economic, social, cultural, and migrant workers' rights [7,8].

India: The Indian constitutional framework reflects these international human rights commitments and continues to guide labour and social protection policies for migrant workers [9].

To safeguard the interests of migrant workers, the Central Government enacted the Inter-State Migrant Workmen (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 1979. This Act has now been subsumed in the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions (OSH) Code.

The Government of India has launched several social security and welfare schemes for workers, including migrant workers. Some of the prominent schemes are (i) Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana (PMJJBY) and Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana (PMSBY) launched in 2015 provide for life & disability cover due to natural or accidental death, (ii) Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Man Dhan Pension Scheme (PM-SYM) launched in 2019 provides for old age social security in the form of monthly pension, (iii) Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY) launched in 2018 provides Rs.5 lakh health coverage for secondary and tertiary health benefits to those migrant workers who are covered as eligible beneficiaries as per deprivation and occupation criteria,

Under the provisions of the Minimum Wages Act, 1948, both the Central and State Governments are the appropriate Governments to fix, review, and revise the minimum wages of employees in the Scheduled employments, including Migrant labourers, within their respective jurisdictions. The Central Government and the State Governments are mandated under section 3(1) (b) of the Act to revise the Minimum Rates of Wages payable to the employees engaged in the Scheduled employments, including Migrant, in their respective jurisdictions at intervals not exceeding five years. Accordingly, the minimum rates of wages in the Scheduled employments in the Central sphere were last revised by the Central Government in 2017 [4]. The following are the Safeguards/Provisions for Construction Migration workers covered in the UDHR and in the Indian Constitution: Right to work & Right to equal pay for equal work (Article 23 of the UDHR/Articles 19, 39, 42 of the Constitution).

- i. Everyone has the right to rest and leisure, including reasonable limitation of working hours and periodic holidays with pay. (Article 24 of UDHR/Art 42, 43 of the constitution)
- ii. Right to a standard of living (Article 25 of UDHR /Art 47, and other Provisions of Part IV of the Constitution)
- iii. Right to education. (Article 26 of UDHR/Art 45 of the constitution). Free





public education at the elementary and secondary levels is a must.

- iv. Right to freely participate in the cultural life of the community, (Article 27 of UDHR/Art 29, 30 of the Indian Constitution)
- v. Right to life, liberty, and security of person (Article 3 of UDHR) Art. 21 of the Indian Constitution “(Right to life with dignity, no extrajudicial executions). Art. 23 of the Indian Constitution (prohibition of traffic in human beings and forced Labour); Art. 24 of the Indian Constitution (prohibition of hazardous Labour by children under age 14);
- vi. All Human beings are free and equal in dignity and rights (Article 2 of UDHR) (Article 15 of the Indian Constitution)
- vii. Right to social security (Article 22 of UDHR/Art 29, 30, 43 of the Indian Constitution)

II. METHODOLOGY

The methodology employed is covert and naturalistic observational research. Based on observations, their interpretation, and analysis, the Author reached certain conclusions. It was a covert observation in which the Labourer at Labour Chowk was unaware that they were being observed. Additionally, it was a naturalistic observation, which takes place in the area where the phenomena occur. To be as discreet as possible, the Author avoids any direct interactions with the people during the observation. The Author visited the Labour Chowk for 60 days, recorded his observations in a diary, and summarised them in the subsequent chapter, Description of Activities, Interpretation, and Analysis, and in the Conclusion and Recommendations presented in the last chapter. The author has Visited Similar kinds of Labour Chowks in Delhi and Noida.

III. DESCRIPTION, INTERPRETATION AND ANALYSIS

Description: The Author visited the Labour Chowk for 60 days, with very short visits almost every day. He has noted his observations in a diary. Based on the authors' observations during the above visits in the observation period, the following are noted.

For reference, the following nomenclature is used.

Road 1: 6th Meridian Road connecting Labour Chowk and Gol Chakker, Kirti Stamb, which connects to Parichowk - Surajpur main road

Road 2: 6th Meridian Road, connecting Labour Chowk and Vinayal Tyagi Circle, and connecting to WIPRO, Knowledge Park 4, the Greater Noida Authority office, and an upcoming new residential project.

Road 3: Road connecting Labour Chowk and Delta Metro Gol Chakkar, which further connects to Parichowk, WIPRO, Knowledge Park 4, Greater Noida Authority office, and Villages having rented house arrangements to Labourers, etc.

Road 4: Road connecting Labour Chowk and Block H, Beta 2 Circle near OMAXE Mall, which connects to Surajpur, Dadri, etc.

Labour Chowk is an informal Labour hub where unemployed Labourers gather daily to find work. This Labour Chowk in Greater Noida is a large roundabout at the intersection of 4 Roads (Road 1, Road 2, Road 3, and Road 4). The corner outside space between the Roads is covered with trees, and the service roads end there. This creates an ideal situation for Labourers to reach, sit, and wait until they receive the job. It is an unofficial arrangement between Labourers and contractors/builders/house owners. The following are the types of construction works in progress and the possible labour requirements in Greater Noida.

Construction of new Residential flats by builders through established big contractors. Established contractors bring their skeleton manpower and execute the job through subcontractors. Subcontractors have their regular skilled, semi-skilled, and Labourers. However, hire the manpower as and when required from the Labour Chowk.

Extension and renovation of existing flats by owners through small contractors or by themselves, by hiring manpower on a day-to-day basis from Labour Chowk. Small contractors have their regular skilled and semi-skilled workers and Labour. However, employ the manpower as and when required from the Labour Chowk.

Construction/maintenance of roads and other infrastructure works by the Greater Noida Authority through established government-approved contractors. These contractors have their regular skilled and semi-skilled workers and Labour. However, hire the manpower as and when required from the Labour Chowk.

In addition to the above, existing homeowners and others hire manpower on a day-to-day basis for tasks such as cleaning, mowing, removal, and miscellaneous work.

Interpretation and Analysis: The Author never observed a job-giver requesting any form of identification from the selected Labour, and there was no accountability on either side. Labourers were not wearing proper safety shoes or proper attire. No record of the job-giver and the labourer. It is entirely at the mercy of the employer and the workers' fate during full-day job execution, including working conditions, accidents, safety provisions, human treatment, and payment transactions. There is no record of Labour coming to Labour Chowk, nor of job givers. Hence, implementation of the above acts is not possible. Most labourers arriving at Labour Chowk are migrant Labourers from other parts of the state, from outside the state, and from neighbouring villages. Mostly, they live in villages like Aiccher barondi, baronda, etc., on rent in tiny portions, with a few labourers from nearby villages coming daily—some reach by foot, and mostly by shared Auto Rickshaw. The author also visited their villages, i.e., Aiccher, Barondi, and Baronda. They live in highly congested and unhygienic conditions. These Labourers are not currently working with any builders or contractors, on a permanent or temporary basis, for any period. They are freelance Labourers who subsist primarily on day-to-day work at the mercy of builders, contractors, or homeowners. They may get one, two, or up to seven days. They lead a complicated life, i.e., they have to feed the family while staying with them, and

some need to send money to their families in their villages. They are in severe financial trouble and thereby stressed and ill. Labour is ready to work at a cost even below minimum wage. Most of them are not aware of the minimum wage. The Labourers who come early have a good chance of getting a job, but, for many reasons, like walking or taking a shared auto, they are sometimes delayed because the job giver tries to make the most of the time. Priority is always given to youngsters rather than older people. Semi-skilled Labourers, such as painters and masons, have a good chance of selection, but most are unskilled Labourers. Due to frequent job changes, unskilled Labourers are unable to acquire a trade and remain unskilled.

The Author observed no lone female Labour; the male member and the child always accompanied them. Most of the time, only 20-30% of the Labourers were female, and on a few days, around 50% were. It is understood that female workers' migration is due to marriage. The authors observed that some individuals wait until 1400 hours or even 1600 hours, after which they become very sad and cry. They wait to get at least some money to buy food for that day. This may lead to depression /sickness. Compared to working days, labourers are more likely to work on Sundays and holidays, anticipating more opportunities on those days. It is assumed that the additional manpower might be engaged in other work on weekdays. There are no toilets or drinking water facilities at Labour Chowk, which may lead to health problems, as women and children are also part of the group. During the rainy season, no work is conducted due to the unavailability of sheds or rooms, or of job givers.

IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Conclusion

- i. It is a totally unorganised arrangement without any registration of the Labour and without any accountability of the job givers
- ii. Because of the non-availability of any data and being an unofficial arrangement, Labourers are not enjoying any government provisions.
- iii. Since it is a temporary, unofficial arrangement, no proper infrastructure, like toilets, drinking water, and sheds for protection during the hot summer and rainy seasons, is available
- iv. It is totally at the mercy of the job giver and the fate of the workers for the whole day job execution regarding working conditions, accidents, safety provisions, humane treatment and payment transactions. No minimum wages and working hours are guaranteed, and the safety of the Labourers is also not guaranteed
- v. No daily income is guaranteed from this Labour Chowk.)
- vi. These Labourers are subjected to unsatisfactory living conditions (no proper drinking water, no proper sanitation, etc.), financial trouble & anxiety, family trouble, non-availability of adequate food, the incident of loss of job & re-employment, fear of vacating living place & uncertainty of children's

future and education. Nutrition for workers, financial issues, problems faced by migrant women workers, Exploitation of workers, etc.

B. Recommendation

- i. *Making this an Official Physical Platform:* Though there are organizations like Labour chowk.com, Chowk .in Digital Labour chowk, Local Labour Chowk & Labour Chowk Dot Online are online portals working for the easy accessibility of job givers/job takers covering limited areas, no official physical platform is available for the benefit of safety, easy access, ensuring minimum wages and to get benefits of social security schemes, an official platform is required. This will also hold the job giver accountable for the above. By making an official platform, the following can be achieved.
 - **Data/Registration:** Presently, no data is available. There should be data available upon registration for both the Labour and the job giver.
 - **Infrastructure:** Proper infrastructure, like drinking water, toilet facilities, and proper sheds/restrooms, should be established
 - **Official Responsible/Help Centre:** An officer to be posted at the site to take care of day-to-day activities like safety and health of the workers, and also to check the authenticity of the job giver
 - Surprise check of the officer at the work spot to check the safety and health of the workers, and also to check the authenticity of the job giver
- ii. *Labour Employment Exchange:* It will be beneficial to establish a Labour Employment Exchange for construction-migrant labourers.
- iii. *Skill Development:* As seen from the study, the number of unskilled Labourers is more, and the chances of their getting work are less. Mostly semi-skilled labourers, like painters and masons, are getting jobs. Hence, it is proposed to develop the skills of unskilled labour under free-pay conditions. Also, awareness of the social security program to labourers is essential to be given
- iv. *Generating Jobs at the Source Level:* A separate study is proposed for the specific reasons for the migration of Labourers in the Greater Noida area and suggests the generation of jobs at the source place
- v. *Health Camps/Hospital Accessibility:* It is proposed to arrange Health camps at the Labour Chowk itself for the benefit of the labourers.

DECLARATION STATEMENT

After aggregating input from all authors, I must verify the accuracy of the following information as the article's author.

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AUTHOR'S PROFILE



C Janarthan is basically an Engineer, retired from Power Utility (NTPC Limited) at the age of 60. Throughout his career, he worked very closely with Migrant construction workers and was aware of their problems. He wanted to do something for their wellness advocacy, policy modification, etc., etc. This article is one step forward toward finding a solution. He has completed a Master's degree in Human Rights and is presently pursuing his PhD in Sociology at Sharda University, Greater Noida, UP. He has completed data collection & data analysis, and the thesis will be submitted shortly for his PhD work (Life Events and Human Rights Violations of Migrant Construction Workers in NCR Delhi - A Sociological Approach).



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