

‘A Study on Migrant Labours as Sugarcane Cutters in Selected Sugar Factories in Satara District’

T.D.Mahanwar

Associate Professor, Karmaveer Bhaurao Patil University, Satara, MS, India

Abstract

Sugar industry in agricultural sector plays vital role in Maharashtra. It is an Argo -based industry. Most of the allied industries are depend on the sugar industry. The basic raw material of sugar industry is sugarcane. It is the extreme first of to the process of production of sugarcane.so sugarcane cutters and cane transporting labours have much value equal to the production in any field. Without this force the sugar factories will have not possible to run in proper manner. But most of the canecutters are illiterate, unorganised and belonging to socially and economically backward society. That’s why this area is neglected in all the aspects. So there is need of time to study their problems and highlight their critical situation in front of all the stakeholders of sugar industry. Sugarcane cutters in Maharashtra are the seasonal migrants who migrate from the drought prone area to sugar belt of Maharashtra. This paper highlights the basic labour issues of sugarcane cutter who are the seasonal migrants.

Keywords: Sugarcane cutters, unorganized labours, seasonal migration, sugar factories, exploitation, socio-economic backward,

1. Introduction:

Sugar industry is the backbone of the agricultural economy of Maharashtra. It is Argo -based industry and various allied industries are depending up on the sugar industry. The basic raw material of sugar industry is sugarcane. It is the extreme first of to the process of production of sugarcane.so sugarcane cutters and cane transporting labours have much value equal to the production in any field. Without this force the sugar factories will have possible to run in proper manner. But most of the canecutters are illiterate, unorganised and belonging to socially and economically

backward society. That's why this area is neglected in all the aspects so there is need of time to study their problems and highlight their critical situation in front of all the stakeholders of sugar industry.

This paper highlights the basic labour issues of sugarcane cutter who are the seasonal migrants. This paper probably gives the answers of questions related with the seasonal migration of sugar cane cutters, nature of contracts and roles of tolimukhiya (team leader) and tractor or truck owner (contractor), nature of work from the gender perspectives, working hours, work conditions and services provided by the sugar factories, livelihood conditions of these workers, wages and gender differences, and other issues etc.

3. Objectives of the study: The present study has the following objectives.

1. To overview sugar industry in Maharashtra state.
2. To identify the causes of Migration of canecutters in study area.
3. To study demographic and social profile of the cane-cutters in study area.
4. To identify problems of cane- cutter labours in the study area.
5. To suggest suitable measures for overcoming the problems

4. Methodology of the study:

A qualitative study has conducted by taking the in-depth interviews of 180 sugarcane cutters, Questionnaire and informal talks during the sugarcane harvesting season (October to March). The area where this study was conducted in a rural parts of Satara District of Pune region. The Migrant Labour as Sugarcane Cutters included in this study those are working in private as well as cooperative sugar factories. Conducted interviews of Canecuttersthrough semi-structured question set prepared for the same task. These questions were related to the process and reasons of migration, socioeconomic status, nature of contract with the sugar factories, role of Mukadam and tractor owner, nature of work, work and living conditions, wages, benefits and other services, facilities to these workers and their issues as a sugarcane worker and as a seasonal migrant. Data and information is analysed manually by making the themes as per the questions asked to the participants.

5. An overview of sugar industry in Maharashtra: Sugar industry is the most advanced processing industry in the agricultural sector in Maharashtra. In India near

about seven to nine percent of the farmers involved in sugarcane farming. Each sugar factory delas thousands of cane farmers.Total number of sugar mills in Maharashtra are 252 installed (operational as well as non-operational, private and co-operative) sugar factories in the Maharashtra State. Out of these only 156 sugar factories are members of Vasantdada sugar institute, Manjari. Membership of the Vasantdada sugar institute, Manjari is voluntary.

Table No-1.1

Sugar Industry in Maharashtra:

Sr.	Particulars	Crushing Season	
		2022-23	2021-22
01	Number of Sugar Mills		
	a) Installed	249	246
	b) In operation	211	200
02	Cane crushing capacity (million TCD)	0.9325	0.871 3
03	Sugarcane crushed (million tonnes)	105.391	132.23
04	Sugar production including diversion (million tonnes)	11.886	14.927
05	Sugar diverted for ethanol production (million tonnes)	1.346	1.207
06	Sugar Recovery % Cane	11.28	11.29
07	Pol % Cane	13.21	13.22
08	Yield of sugarcane (tonne/ha)	91.24	93.4

(Source: *Sugar Statistics, Maharashtra state 2021-22, 22-23*)

As per above table it indicates sugar mills in our state are increased by 5% within study period. Sugarcane cursing is decreased by 27 Millian tons due to famine and other causes. Within this period sugar recovery was maintained same.

6.Sample design of the study: Simple random sampling is a type of probability in which the researcher randomly selects a subset of participants from a population. Each member of the population has an equal chance of being selected. Data collection from (universe) largearea is possible by applying random sampling.so I have applied random sampling technique for this study.

Table No.1.2**Number of Samples**

Sr. No	Name of district	No of cane cutters		Total
		Cooperative	Private	
01	Parbhani	16	-	16
02	Jalana	14	12	26
03	Beed	32	18	50
04	Satara	16	12	28
05	Sangli	18	--	18
06	Nandurbar	---	16	16
07	Other State	14	22	36
Total		110	80	190

(Source: Primary Data Complied)

While selecting sample of this study it was realised that sugarcane cutters are belonging drought-prone area of Maharashtra and especially in Madhya Pradesh and Karnataka also. They migrated from the districts such Beed, Nandurbar, Jalana, Nandurbar and other state. Researcher has conducted survey from canecutters of selected cooperative and private sugar factories in Satara district. Structural questionnaire was used for collecting information and keen observations were noted while studying this project work.

7. Findings of the study:

7.1 Age group: In case of age group most of the canecutters are belonging to 16 to 50 age. All the participants married before the age of 18 since early marriage is the common practice among the sugarcane cutters. Lack of education has an influence on their cultural practice of early marriage.

7.2 Socio demographic features: It was concluded that migrated with their families from the drought prone areas of Maharashtra for the sugarcane cutting season. They migrated from the districts such Beed, Nandurbar, Jalgoan, and amaravathi. Among the 180 respondents belonging from socially backwards like Bhil tribe, Matang, Vanjari, and Wadar, Ramoshi and Dhangarand some other backward community

7.3 Seasonal migration and causes: Western Maharashtra is recognised as sugar belt of Maharashtra. Sugarcane cutters are migrating towards sugar belt of Maharashtra from the drought-prone districts. These peoples are poor, landless, problem of drought and not availability of work at their native place. Along with these reasons, people also migrate for the purpose of earn money to build houses, arrange marriage ceremony of sons and daughters, development of their farm or for any other execution of their aspiration.

7.4 Sugarcane cutting as a work: After migration, these people perform activities related to sugar cane harvesting. Those activities probably include cutting, collecting and binding the bundles, collecting the hoots, lifting and carrying the bundles of sugarcane. There are three types of groups/teams among the sugarcane cutters, i.e. head centric, bullock cart centric, and the personal group which probably involves pairs of relatives or husband-wife where they directly make a contract with sugar factory.

7.5 Sugarcane cutting hierarchy: In case of study area it was observed that top level is usually occupied by a "Sardar" or "Koyta" who leads a group of cutters (Toli), often from the same caste, and contracts with the landowner to harvest the cane; below them are individual cutters with minimal decision-making power, typically belonging to marginalized communities, often migrating seasonally to work in the sugarcane fields; there is usually no formal hierarchy within the Toli itself, but older or more experienced cutters might have some informal influence.

7.6 Role of Mukadam and tractor owners: It was realised that seasonal migration of cane cutters is going, most of the cane cutters are connect with the mukadam and tractor owners. And mukadams are connected with the people are getting involved in the activities of sugarcane cutting. While comprehending the issues of sugarcane cutters one has to understand the role of two middlemen, that is Mukadam and vehicle owner.

7.7 Practices for procuring Koyatas (Group): Before getting into the sugarcane cuttings there is need to forming of a group of pairs (toli). One group could be involved with 5 to 15 (koyatas) pairs of husband or wife. If there is a single person

without a partner then that person will be called as half pair and accordingly, people will be paid. Mukadam or contractor gives money in the bulk (50 thousand to one lakh) to each pair in advance.

7.8 Controlling agency upon canecutter (Toli): Before migrating towards the sugar belt, Mukadam forms a group and make deals with the tractor owner or with the sugar factory. Mukadam regulates and controls the whole sugarcane harvesting season. Even more, tractor owner and Mukadam decides rate to cut the tone of sugarcane.

7.9 Illiteracy is the basic cause of exploitation: In case of the study it realized that most of the cane cutters are illiterate and low literate so they are financially exploited by the Mukadam and vehicle owner. The most important fact is, workers are trusting on Mukadam and he is regulating the team and they follow what he says. But they are not aware of the kind of contract makes with the tractor or truck owner. High rate of illiteracy and limited literacy among these workers are also responsible for increasing their exploitation.

7.10 Citizenship status and experiences workers: Nobody considers that sugarcane cutters are also humans. Only they know that 'we are going through mukadam, no one is know whether sugarcane cutting is good or bad but it is just about escaping from their native place of drought condition. Some respondents stated that, 'Poverty has no shame and our stomach or hunger has no shame and we can't control it' From the above statement of respondents, it realizes that people blaming their biological needs such as food and water. Therefore, seasonal migration is putting the citizenship of these people at risk by restricting them from accessing the state resources and the services.

7.11 Living conditions: Living conditions of the sugar cane cutters could be understood by looking at the circumstances in which they are living. Few sugar factories have provided temporary houses to the few workers. Most of the workers have to live on the farm. They arrange shelter as tent of plastic sheet or roof of the sugarcane shoots, lack of electricity, lack of hygienic water. Lack of security like fetching it from the other private tap and then they face abuse over there. It was observed that there is no provision of constructed toilets for these workers.

7.12 Women workers as cane cutter: In study area, both men and women are working as cane cutter, though women are often underrepresented and exploited. Women and girls are also involved in cane cutting, it was observed that some pregnant and lactating women were working on the field. Women works long hours, with no fixed work hours or weekly offs. Most of the women are often poor, low dignity and without resources. Women face discrimination and exploitation from their family members.

7.13 Rates for sugarcane cutting: Cane cutters are paid between Rs 200–250 per ton of sugarcane. They work in pairs, called Jodi's, of a husband and wife for the purpose of earn the minimum daily wage of Rs 300, but they need to work 12–15 hours. As per the responses of participants and observations, it could be said that there is no separate salary for men and women.

7.14 Working conditions: They work in poor conditions with no proper housing and sanitation. They don't get social security benefits like provident funds or employee insurance. Cane cutting working women face barriers to accessing healthcare and face barriers to accessing social protection. However, women are the victims of extra work pressure since they have to perform the activities such as binding the bundles, collecting the shoots, lifting and carrying the bundles on the head toward the parked vehicle. All the women workers have dual responsibility like work of domestic and cane cutting work.

7.15 Drinking habits among the cane cutters: There is no provision for women to provide their salary separately. They are just working with their partners. The remuneration of pair is offered in the hand of male or husband. She will not be able to become the decision-maker of money that she earned. The situation becomes worse when the partner is an alcoholic. This situation of women sugarcane cutters demands that woman should get her share of money as she is equally working for the sugarcane harvesting.

7.16 Health facility: It was realised that most of the workers are required health services in critical situation but there is only one choice in front of them that is a private doctor suggested by the contractor. Tractor owner opens an account on the name of each pair in the private hospital in case of worker is unwell and needs health services. Indirectly, it is a kind of enforcement on the worker to approach the particular hospital. At the end of sugarcane season, tractor owner and Mutandum are reducing the amount of expenditure incurred on hospital for each worker from the salary of worker. It was observed that these people have no voice for are getting insurance or free health services. Concluded that all the workers are paying hospital charges from their own pockets.

7.17 Working hours and holidays: It was noted that there are no fixed hours and timing for the work. It could be more than 12 hours. Even more, it has been said that there is the provision of the weekly holiday for these workers but it is not strictly followed by the Mukadams and tractor owner. Therefore, workers are not getting time to access the health services. On the other hand, in very critical conditions even if a worker or the pair of worker decides to take leave Mukadam and tractor owners are taking advantage by cutting up to Rs. 500 to 600 for a person from their wages.

7.18 Children's education: It would be important to highlight that most of the sugarcane cutters are in the age group of 18 to 45 and they are migrating along with their children. This is the reason where sugar cane cutters are away from the education and the cycle continues in case of their children. For the purpose of reduce the school dropout rate of these children, Maharashtra government started the Shakharsala for such kind of children but this model has failed. Still, the children of sugarcane cutters are missing their school, or they have to leave the school because of the seasonal migration.

7.19 Ethical issues: All the participants were informed about the purpose of the research and consent was taken from every participant before conducting the interview. As almost all participants were illiterate, therefore well written consent was read out a loud in the local language of workers. Confidentiality and anonymity of the information was maintained by hiding the identities of the participants.

Conclusion: After overall study of canecutter labour, it is recognised that Study is linked with pull-push theory of migration and socio ecological theory. The exploitation of sugarcane cutters by the meddlers like Mutandum, Contractor, vehicle owner, and ultimately sugar factories is prevalent. The sufferings of these workers in terms of livelihoods, health, and education are sharply visible and could be understood by considering the socio-ecological circumstances under which their livelihoods are laid. Seasonal migration of sugarcane cutters is taking place because of Pull-push factors where drought conditions and the consequences of it are being the push factors and work availability at the sugar belt is the pull factor. After migration of these workers socio ecological factors at the destination are determining the status of sugar cane cutters in terms of economy, health, education. The exploitation sugarcane cutter by the meddlers like Mukadum, Contractor, Vehicle owner, and ultimately sugar factories is prevalent. More important thing is workers are not directly associated with the sugar factories therefore are liable to get exploited by the middlemen's like Mutandum and contractors.

The suffering of these workers sharply visible and could be understood by considering the circumstances under which their livelihoods are laid. If labours are not getting their share of money even after the toil or hardship then it falls under the violation of basic labour rights.

There is need to put regulations on such kinds of unfair acts of Mukadum or contractors. Women sugarcane cutters have organized conferences to demand their rights. A fact-finding committee was set up by the state government of Maharashtra to investigate forced hysterectomies. Therefore, labour issues of sugarcane cutters are needed to be solved by taking concerted endeavours at the policy level.

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