



# Changing Employment Trends of Migrant Workers : A Multidimensional Study

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**Abstract :** *This paper explores the character and profile of migrant workers after the pandemic. News media reported the great reverse migration of migrant workers during the pandemic. Subsequently, in the primary catchment areas of migrant workers, such as construction sites, we investigate the workers who returned and how they are faring now. This initial step, along with an overarching emphasis on context and divergent lived experiences, is critical for an adequate action-oriented understanding of migrant workers that does not romanticize their plight. We delve deep into the composition and experience of working as migrant workers near Chennai, India, post the pandemic in our mixed methods study and find that there have been substantial changes. This study was revelatory on multiple fronts. Women have yet to return to the urban sites. Employment relationships are being renegotiated when migrant labour is much in demand. Unlike the earlier herd mentality, many migrant workers we interacted with are thinking carefully about the costs and possibilities of the place they want to migrate which is often not far from their homes. These are fundamental shifts and new learnings about migrant workers and their attempts to rearticulate their voices amidst their many constraints.*

**Key words:** *Migrant workers, Precarity, Voice, COVID-19, stakeholders, context, vulnerability, insecurity.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION :

The International Organization for Migration defines a migrant as any person moving or moving across an international border or within a state away from their habitual residence (IOM.int). Migration (See Rajan and Bhagat, 2022, pp.6-20) has historically been a route to success for millions of Indian workers. It is also the country of origin for most international migrants. According to a 2020 International Labour Organization report, migrant workers contribute 10% of India's GDP and serve as the backbone of several sectors. The presence of an aging populace and shrinking national labour forces in numerous highly developed nations and various significant emerging economies postulate a compelling need for migrant labourers to sustain labour supply and address labour shortages (ILO,2017). Migrant workers (are often subjected to unregulated and hazardous work conditions, low wages, and inadequate social protection. Internal labour mobility within the nation has been more substantial for those who belong to the lower echelons of society and continue to be ostracised. According to (Krishnan & Poorani,2022), the approaching pandemic has halted economic growth, causing unheard-of losses and negatively impacting the lives of millions of people around the globe. Using the pandemic as an analytic launch pad, this study understands and interprets the direction and character of migrant worker flow from villages to cities, including their potential return to old workplaces and reemployment after the pandemic. Examining the migration shifts in scale, direction, demography, and frequency can lead to effective policies, programs, and operational responses on the ground. Migration presents both opportunities and difficulties, varying according to each migrant's lived experiences and socio-economic status.

Economic globalization has increased the number of such workers, with 73% engaged in labour activities. Globally, migrant workers make up 3.3% of the population, totaling about 244 million individuals, as the International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates. However, this vulnerable group faces insufficient social protection, exploitation, and even



human trafficking, thereby necessitating the establishment of migration standards by the ILO to regulate migration flows and protect the rights of migrant workers (ILO, 2023). India's reliance on internal migration, especially in the informal (p5-7, Agarwala, 2018) economy, became glaringly evident during the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2019, the ILO advocated for inclusive national development planning and decent work promotion for migrant workers in a report. Significantly, a collaborative approach involving governments, trade unions, and the UN is critical to achieving these objectives. Further research into migrant workers' vulnerability to human rights abuse (Jane, 2016), health risks (Abhishek & Kanuri, 2023), and economic struggles (Kaur et al., 2023) during and after the pandemic is essential to understanding global labour dynamics. The coronavirus pandemic has highlighted India's reliance on internal migration, particularly in the informal economy. These workers face precarious conditions, including underpayment and unsafe workplaces. Longitudinally studying migrant workers during and after the COVID-19 pandemic is crucial to understanding their vulnerability to human rights (Jane, 2016), health risks (Abhishek & Kanuri, 2023), and economic hardships (Kaur et al., 2023). It provides insights into global labour dynamics, informs policy responses, and offers lessons for future preparedness, ultimately promoting social inclusion and resilience. The coronavirus epidemic had brought on a severe economic catastrophe. Global economic activity has halted due to social isolation standards and the ensuing lockdown to flatten the curve of this virus. Workers began to move in large numbers from India's big cities to their home villages. This was brought on by the mental, financial, and emotional suffering brought on by lost employment chances and other sources of income. The result has been the explosion of a severe macroeconomic catastrophe for the nation. Research indicated that during the first wave of COVID-19-led lockdowns, 43.3 million interstate migrants returned to their homes; 35 million walked or took other unconventional forms of transit (Nizam et al., 2022).

Given the above pandemic context, explore how the character and composition of the migrant workforce have changed the pandemic until now by making the following contributions.

#### **Contributions**

Our research delves into the demographic profile of this workforce, highlighting through our results the gendered structure and the significant number of adult women who chose to remain in their villages rather than return during the pandemic. This finding underscores the precarious nature of the migrant workforce, particularly in the pandemic's aftermath more fundamentally, within and beyond the workplace, which explains women workers' decisions to stay back. In addition, we examine the effect of the pandemic on working conditions and wage effort bargaining among migrant workers. We find that workers with essential skills could negotiate for better payment terms and amenities, a trend previously unseen in Indian employment relations concerning migrant workers. (Krishnan et al., 2022) states that workers in the clothing sector usually face precarious working conditions, such as low pay, excessive and frequently forced overtime, hazardous working conditions, and restrictions on their ability to organize unions and engage in collective bargaining. (Poorani & Krishnan, 2023). States collective bargaining is essential to closing the gap between labourers and factory owners. Furthermore, our study points to a shift from rural to urban migration towards rural to semi-urban migration, driven by the demand for enhanced social security. The earlier middlemen-driven migration model has partially given way to direct negotiations between workers, labour contractors, or principal employers. We see a significant shift in workers negotiating their employment terms, considering their experience and hardship during the pandemic.

#### **Research question**

We ask one simple question in this paper- Where are the migrant workers located now, and how are they experiencing precarity post-COVID-19 by focusing our attention on one substantial catchment area near Chennai, India?

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW :**

### **Who are Migrant workers in the Informal Economy**

Migrant workers are vital to India's informal economy and support the formal economic superstructure in many ways. They play a crucial role in the Indian economy, often migrating internally to secure employment opportunities in the informal sector, the gig economy, and the formal sector. Breman (2023, 1996) defined the informal sector as a disparate, irregular, and fluid labour system functioning in the lower ranks of the economy. Evidence of such a sector can be found mainly in the urban agglomerations, and the formation is closely related to urbanization and migration. The migrant workers operate either in the informal sector or at the intersectional grey areas of the formal and informal sectors. The informal sector could be segmented into two parts: "the informal sector that is attached to the legal, organized sector and the autonomous, self-employed informal sector" (Mukhopadhyay, 2023, p.11). Migrant workers exist in the margins and yet silently power the growing Indian economy, employed in construction, households, services, factories,



restaurants, and as gig workers without any social or income security. Work is characterized by informality, sporadicity, transience, and reliance on cash transactions. It is intricately intertwined with the regulated market segment governed by the state and the informal sector. However, labour and commodities remain closely linked to the formal sector (Mezzadri, 2021, p145).

The long-term and more short-term migrants (see Rajan and Bhagat, 2023, p.74, citing NSSO,2010) comprise “work across several categories of informal employment, as daily wage, casual, or contractual basis working in formal sector enterprises, public and corporate enterprises, and state agencies as well as unregistered enterprises. Additionally, it includes the vast army of millions of semi-skilled and unskilled workers making ends meet as self-employed street vendors, cab drivers, rickshaw drivers, hawkers, loaders, security guards, petty shopkeepers, delivery personnel, manual or domestic labour, etc. (Naregal, 2021).

Mukhopadhyay (2023, p.23) argues that the informal sector, where migrant workers primarily work, has grown in developing countries at the expense of formal sector employment, leading to casualization and pauperization of the labour force. Migration is triggered by an intricate network of causal mechanisms, such as rural distress, familial issues, aspirations for upward economic mobility, social discrimination, financial crises, or unanticipated tragedies (Bellampalli and Yadava, 2022). Some push factors compel a person to leave a place of origin (out-migration) and migrate to some other site, such as economic reasons, social reasons, or lack of development in a particular location. As per Lee’s theory of Migration, “The pull factors for the migrant workers indicated that job opportunities, better living conditions, availability of basic facilities or better working conditions are essential for migration” (Kulwinder 2023). Typically, they depend on village-level brokers or intermediaries at the start of their migration journey. Their willingness to continue at the exact location depends firstly on the prevalence of a resilient network of friends and relatives and secondly on how deeply they have been able to entrench themselves in the new workplace to give some measure of transactional voice. They harbor some detachment from geographical sites, searching for better economic prospects and, if possible, trying to reproduce the social world of their village (Datta, 2023, p.153). While labour economics literature and ILO reports on their migration global and Indian trajectories exist, ethnographic research (Kasmir and Gill (2022) delves into their overarching contextual issues instead of interweaving the diverse individual journeys and their immediate and extended relational linkages is absent.

### **The absence of individual agential and collective voices amongst migrant workers**

Migrant workers are not merely constituents of an unstable working class but rather constitute a multifarious category shaped by the structural sources of exploitation and inequality inherent in all capitalist production, be it petty or grand, informal or formal. This multifaceted classification encompasses the diverse subdivisions that arise from these intrinsic inequalities.

As Bernstein (2007:7, 2010:115) points out, Class relations may be universal ‘determinations’ of social practices in capitalism. However, they are far from exclusive since they ‘intersect and combine with’ other ‘sources of inequality and oppression,’ such as gender, caste, race, and ethnicity (cited by Pattenden, 2016, p. 22 and see p. 35).

Their surplus labour time is appropriated, and their labour cost is left to socially necessary levels by various owners and intermediaries they work for in the cities (Pattenden, 2016, p18). These marginalized workers, especially from the lower castes (Rajan et al.,2023, p.105), lack clarity in stable employment, an ability to look to the future, and representation insecurity (i.e., lack of a collective voice in the labour market). Unpredictable pay, inadequate ration access, and the PDS have characterized their condition before COVID-19. Locally, the web of entanglement within subcontracted employment has only been exacerbated, leading to a breakdown of conventional understandings of employment relationships. To quote Bhattacharjee again from her fieldwork in Delhi, how the political and economic superstructure is already against the migrant workers. “Mobility among transient worker populations, furthermore, allows multiple jurisdictions to evade responsibility for their needs by claiming it is the responsibility of another authority (Dharia, 2022). In this regard, the withdrawal of regulatory power in Delhi-NCR is a feature of power, creating what Roy describes as a “logic of resource allocation, accumulation, and authority” (2009: 83) that is calculated to undergird the territorial practices of the state and extract migrant labour from this industrial base of vast global production networks.” (Bhattacharjee,2023, p.8).

Migrant workers continue to muzzle their discontent because, despite their challenges, they are aspirational and would like their children to be better off than their current economic conditions. They send money remittances while enduring enormous discomfort in alien-away urban cities and struggle with little voice in their circumstances or economic subsistence.



To quote Datta (2023, p77)- “Migrants are compelled to stay away from their families—in harsh urban. Environments—for the greater part of the year and the larger part of their working lives to provide for their rural households. They regularly send remittances, which are used for daily consumption, children’s education, medical treatment, debt repayment, home repairs, and housebuilding. If they are lucky, they can buy some land. Thus, it is unsurprising that return migrants considered their migration beneficial due to its material gains, but at the same time not desirable due to the painful separation from family members.”

**ILO:** The International Labour Conference of the ILO has adopted several international labour standards over the years, such as Convention Number 143 and Convention Number 97. These conventions play a crucial role in protecting the dignity and rights of migrant workers. By default, migrant workers are subject to all international labour standards unless explicitly exempted. These standards include the eight fundamental rights conventions of the ILO identified in the 1998 ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work (ILO.Org, 2023), which are yet to see effective ground-level execution.

Migration today is directly or indirectly linked to the quest for decent work opportunities. Even if employment is not the primary driver for the initial movement, it is usually featured in the migration process at some point. Family members joining migrant workers abroad may also take up work as employees or in self-employment.

The absence of labour safeguards for migrant labourers weakens protection for all workers. The numerous international labour standards established by the International Labour Conference of the ILO throughout the years are crucial for upholding the respect and entitlement of migrant workers. As a rule, migrant workers are typically subject to all international labour standards unless specified otherwise (ILO.org, 2023).

Notwithstanding the ILO’s decent work and advocacy for social dialogue, many countries have yet to bridge the gap between theory and practice. The ILO places social dialogue at the core of its mandate and regards it as crucial for establishing labour migration policies and legislation grounded in rights, transparency, and coherence and considering labour market needs (ILO.org). Article 1 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) postulates that ‘All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.’ Human dignity, thus, is a fundamental assumption in the modern-day human rights concept. A person could be stripped of dignity mainly in four ways: humiliation, instrumentalization, degradation, and dehumanization (Kaufmann et al., 2011).

Their discrimination in employment, including the intersectionality of race, ethnicity, and religion, is a common plight that migrant workers are also subject to. Interestingly, research(www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/PMC/) suggests that women migrant workers are particularly prone to discrimination, specifically related to their gender, nationality, and migrant status, along with other statutory bases of discrimination. Distinctively, occupational injuries tend to impact migrant workers disproportionately relative to non-migrant populations. A primary challenge that confronts migrant labour concerning social protection, such as adequate healthcare and social welfare benefits, is accessibility. Therefore, implementing labour inspection mechanisms and responsive grievance systems is crucially indispensable. Labour inspection frameworks, which systematically conduct inspections, offer guidance and advice to employers and workers, including migrant labour, and enforce compliance effectively, are pivotal in managing decent work deficits. Although temporary and circular labour migration frameworks can offer an adaptable strategy for addressing temporary labour and skills shortages, they require meticulous consideration with relevant labour ministries and workers' and employers' organizations to ensure they accomplish their intended objective and are not exploited for filling long-term or permanent positions. Labourers who migrate under such arrangements are not treated unequally regarding trade union rights, payments, working conditions, and social protection. The reality is that these workers lack social, economic, and discursive voice and are considered a natural part of the urban Indian metropolis.

### **The Ambiguous positioning of Migrant workers**

Management, society, and the state contribute to perpetuating disparities, which ultimately individualize the sense of insecurity and vulnerability. Migrant workers are solely liable for taking care of themselves in this context. The normative structural perpetuation of inequalities by governance, culture, and the state “occurs, in part at least, through how exploiters, by their exclusionary rights and powers over resources, can appropriate [the] labour effort of the exploited” (Hanman and Bertels, 2018 citing Wright, p396) and mobilizing a system of sanctions and punishments. These are taken for granted, and the state is equally complicit in weak enforcement. In Marxist literature, migrant workers are considered a surplus army of labour, vulnerable to economic expansion and contraction (Jonna and Foster, 2016, p. 26). The urban development and political-spatial of cities such as Bangalore and Gurgaon go hand in hand with their capacity to receive migrant labour and commodify them as disposable resources (Cowan, 2022, p.258) as they are concurrently included and othered (Cowan, 2022, p.268).



Suppose one draws from critical realism and assesses the literature. In that case, we note that the plight of migrant workers is not limited to individual interactions at their places of employment but encompasses multiple levels of generative causal mechanisms impacting their worlds of life. At the operational level, this exploitation manifests in the asymmetrical power dynamics that characterize migrant labour in industries such as construction (Sandoval, 2016), where they are part of an interdependent workflow like construction labour. At the systemic level, the inadequate enforcement of labour laws perpetuates this mistreatment. In contrast, at the structural level, social norms dictate the expected behavior and position of migrant workers. A key takeaway from the literature is the urgent need for a multifaceted sociologically informed approach to addressing the world of work of migrant workers that encompasses overlapping operational, systemic, and structural dimensions. Any perceived noncompliance from the workers would exclude them from future employment or selection through the brokers that got them the job (Herman and Bertels, 2017). The vulnerability of migrant workers was exacerbated during COVID-19 when the lack of any support from employers or the state came to the forefront in conjunction with broader societal apathy for their plight (Bhattacharjee, 2023). Automation is another threat migrant workers face in industries like construction, which lowers workers' bargaining power.

### **COVID and the migrant worker**

The coronavirus pandemic has brought about a severe economic catastrophe, causing a halt in global economic activity due to social isolation standards and ensuing lockdowns to flatten the curve. As a result, workers began to move in large numbers from India's big cities to their home villages, leading to mental, financial, and emotional suffering brought on by lost employment opportunities and other sources of income. During the first wave of COVID-19-led lockdowns, research showed that 43.3 million interstate migrants returned home, of whom 35 million walked or took other unconventional forms of transit. State governments provided food and shelter but often failed to reach migrant workers due to historical exclusion, resulting in evictions, overcrowding, and forced journeys on foot. The mass migration also led to violence, police charges, harassment, and physical abuse of protesting migrant workers. Discrimination and stigma were also evident in some states, where workers were denied entry due to barricades. To understand migrant workers' vulnerability to human rights, health risks, and economic hardships, conducting longitudinal studies during and after the pandemic is crucial. Such research provides insights into global labour dynamics, informs policy responses, and offers lessons for future preparedness, ultimately promoting social inclusion and resilience. The pandemic-induced lockdowns underscored the sudden upheaval in migrant workers' lives, leading to a humongous loss of livelihood, forced reverse migration, and health risks that highlighted the multifaceted challenges faced. The second wave of the pandemic in 2021 further exacerbated the difficulties faced by migrant workers. Studies exploring the well-being and recognitional justice of migrant workers in Kerala, India, during the COVID-19 lockdown highlighted the unique challenges these workers face.

Migrant workers were disproportionately at risk of contracting COVID due to the lack of access to water and sanitation facilities, crowded living conditions with limited room for physical distance and other COVID-appropriate behaviors, and their primary residency in slums or work sites because finding roofed shelter continues to be problematic during and after COVID19 (See Pisarevskaya and Scholten, 2022, p.245). The pandemic-induced lockdowns underscore the sudden upheaval in migrant workers' lives. There was a humongous loss of livelihood, forced reverse migration, and health risks, highlighting the multifaceted challenges faced. State governments provided food and shelter to stranded migrant workers in cities, but these benefits often failed to reach them due to their historical exclusion. Many faced evictions, overcrowding, and forced journeys on foot. The mass migration, involving around 11.4 million individuals, led to 971 non-COVID-related deaths (Khan, Arokkiaraj, 2021). Protesting migrant workers faced violence, police charges, harassment, and physical abuse. In some states, workers were denied entry due to barricades, causing discrimination and stigma. The second wave of the pandemic in 2021 further exacerbated the challenges faced by migrants. Studies explore the well-being and recognitional justice of migrant workers in Kerala, India, during the COVID-19 lockdown, highlighting the unique challenges these workers face (Mathews et al., 2023; Paul et al., 2021).

A key takeaway from the COVID-19 literature on the experiences of migrant workers is that it is more taxonomical and statistical. More longitudinal studies of migrant workers during and after the COVID-19 pandemic are required to shed light on these workers' challenges and inform policy changes to alleviate their hardships.



## **A legal analysis of migrant workers from the Indian context**

The constitution of India under Chapter 3, within the scope of Articles 12-35 dealing with a fundamental right, guarantees various freedoms within the broad framework and exceptions safeguarding migrant labour. The directive principles of state policy as articulated in Chapter 4 Articles 38, 39, 42, 43 further enhance the cause of Migrant workers in their pursuit of decent work and better living conditions as citizens of India having an equal right in the share of the progress in the country (Bakshi, 2018, p510). Although the labour codes have been enacted, they are yet to be ratified in many states. Until now, the State migrant workers regulation of Empowerment and Conditions of Service Act 1979 was the law governing migrant workers.

This Act regulates the employment of Inter-State migrant workers and provides for their conditions of service and matters connected. It establishes a framework for deploying migrant labour and prohibits the employment of Interstate migrant workers without registration. It prescribes requirements for the registration of contractors employed by migrant workers. It clearly articulates the wages, welfare, and other facilities and compliance. Payment of journey and displacement allowance to migrant workers and ensuring they comply with are highlights of the statute. The Act puts the onus on the principal employer for compliance, and as prescribed by the Act, the inspector is responsible for adherence and audit (Indiacode.nic.in, 2023).

While the Government of India introduced the new labour codes, their implementation is still pending in a considerable measure across the country. The inter-state migrants have not been secured despite the various protections envisaged. The MNREGA scheme guarantees 100 days of employment in their respective villages or panchayats in a year for two adult households in the family. Still, more is needed to ensure a respectful and decent living. Nonetheless, there is a massive vacuum in the employment process and compliance as regards migrant workers and their victimization and discrimination. We need to see a political will to ensure their protection. Instead, they are treated as pawns in the whole vote-gathering process, and by offering freebies during election time, they are tamed for the rest of the time till the next elections surface. In the entire bargain, migrant workers remain primarily unprotected in terms of employment guarantee, security, health, welfare, and social security and remain engaged in the unorganized sector. Hence, the struggle for life and livelihood continues.

### **Shortcomings of the literature**

The literature we have reviewed on migrant workers either romanticizes the migrant worker or overlooks that the diversity of Indian migrant workers' lived experiences is structured by their contextual labour process and their asymmetric and relational power dynamics within the workplace and the socio-economic milieu of their workplace. Each of them works within and across diverse sectors.

Although they all urgently need social security (De Bercegol and Gowdai, 2020, p.207), how such schemes could cater to their context needs to be included in the literature. COVID-19 highlighted a vital phenomenon of reverse migration and the inability of migrants to relocate to their old employment locations. According to (Krishnan & Sumathi, 2021), to uplift the rural poor and migrant labour, it is urgently necessary to ensure that the Social Security Act is implemented, that fair wages are provided and that workers are protected from child labour, self-labour, bonded labour, and that women are not exploited. Focusing on unorganized labour would ultimately guarantee social justice, equity, and fairness.

Migration in many parts of India is male-driven, and migration patterns highlight the critical role of critical familial dynamics and decision-making tensions of women left behind at home (Das and Prasad, 2023, p.229). COVID-19 brought these patriarchal tensions to the forefront. The migration literature needs to capture the depth and diversity of these gendered tensions more adequately.

Mainstream trade unions have yet to engage with these disparate floating populations actively, and the efforts of organizing such workers have been few and far between (Ness and Hammer, 2023, p.341), unlike voluntary organization against all odds (Agarwala, 2019, p.52). The attempts of organizations and informal workers to organize themselves have met with enormous resistance, in addition to the reluctance of women to actively resist their exploitation for many intersectional reasons (Agarwala, 2013).

Migrant labour is an unavoidable, necessary evil in the context of social and economic transformation in the country, with urban spaces expanding their footprint and providing enormous unskilled and semi-skilled employment opportunities to migrant labour from rural settings deserting agriculture work. Rural India still operates in marginal or small farming with seasonal, part-time, and victimized as serf, bonded, or contract labour with low wages and poor working conditions. While the country's economy has been growing in leaps and bounds over the last two decades, the



services economy has made steadfast progress, and manufacturing is making its mark. Still, the bulk of the migrant workers are occupying unorganized employment at construction sites, the garment industry, hotels, domestic help, vegetables, food, and other forms of work (Venkataraman & Krishnan,2023). The Western literature on Indian migrant labour needs to engage with the political, economic, sociological, and legal contextual aspects of Indian migrant labour concurrently.

The tables below map the recent migration trajectory, including the demographic profile and causes.

Table 1 depicts the migrant workers state-wise as per the 2011 census. These figures have undergone drastic changes over the last decade, and some southern states such as Karnataka, Telangana, AP, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu have a large population of migrant workers as established on the ground.

**Table 1. Indian Migrant workers' statistics**

<b>State-wise Number of persons who moved in for work and employment as per</b>		
<b>Census - 2011 (Migrant Workers)</b>		
<b>S. No.</b>	<b>States/UTs</b>	<b>Persons</b>
1	ANDAMAN & NICOBAR ISLANDS	52,129
2	ANDHRA PRADESH	3,737,316
3	ARUNACHAL PRADESH	119,244
4	ASSAM	572,064
5	BIHAR	706,557
6	CHANDIGARH	206,642
7	CHHATTISGARH	1,021,077
8	DADRA & NAGAR HAVELI	63,779
9	DAMAN & DIU	73,782
10	GOA	115,870
11	GUJARAT	3,041,779
12	HARYANA	1,333,644
13	HIMACHAL PRADESH	296,268
14	JAMMU & KASHMIR	122,587
15	JHARKHAND	824,259
16	KARNATAKA	2,887,216
17	KERALA	713,934
18	LAKSHADWEEP	6,135
19	MADHYA PRADESH	2,415,635
20	MAHARASHTRA	7,901,819
21	MANIPUR	22,750
22	MEGHALAYA	52,797
23	MIZORAM	62,828
24	NAGALAND	110,779
25	NCT OF DELHI	2,029,489
26	ODISHA	851,363
27	PUDUCHERRY	70,721
28	PUNJAB	1,244,056
29	RAJASTHAN	1,709,602
30	SIKKIM	46,554
31	TAMIL NADU	3,487,974
32	TRIPURA	92,097
33	UTTAR PRADESH	3,156,125
34	UTTARAKHAND	617,094
35	WEST BENGAL	1,656,952
	<b>INDIA</b>	<b>41,422,917</b>



Source - RAJYA SABHA SESSION - 258 UNSTARRED QUESTION No 1857. ANSWERED ON 22TH DECEMBER 2022. Data Figures are in Numbers—source- Census 2011.

Table 2 depicts the gender-wise population of migrant workers as established in the 2011 census. There is undoubtedly a drastic change in the numbers that can be endorsed once the revised numbers for 2024 are out.

**Table 2. Gender -wise**

The migration rate (percentage of migrants in the population) in India is 28.9%

Rural: 26.5%	Urban: 34.9%
Male: 5.9%	Male: 22.5%
Female: 48.0%	Female: 47.8%

Source Mospi.gov

**Table 3 Industry or sector-wise migration trajectory**

Sector	Percentage of Male Migrants	Percentage of Female Migrants	Reason for Migration
<b>Rural</b>			
Primary Sector	75	4	Shortage of local labour, rural location
Manufacturing	13	59	Low-skilled, low-paying jobs attractive to migrants
Public Services	16	8	Rural location, shortage of local labour
Construction	73	69	Dangerous, physically demanding jobs, attractive to migrants
<b>Urban</b>			
Traditional Service	20	32	Low-skilled, low-paying jobs attractive to migrants
Modern Services	65	51	High-skilled, high-paying jobs attractive to migrants

Source: Report of The Working Group on Migration Working Group on Migration, 2017 by Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation

**Table 4 Sectoral Training: Source Rajya Sabha Session 258, Figures as per Census 2011**

Sector Name	Short Term Training (STT)			Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)	
	Trained	Certified	Reported Placed	Oriented	Certified
Aerospace and Aviation	120	118	-	-	-
Agriculture	618	505	158	1,062	701
Apparel	19,060	17,334	9,230	10,053	8,887
Automotive	1,650	1,375	523	1,565	1,377
Beauty and Wellness	2,189	1,493	579	220	114
Capital Goods	1,985	1,148	626	316	160
Construction	11,945	10,812	4,679	9,843	7,669
Domestic Workers	210	129	79	1,111	888
Electronics and Hardware	16,173	13,858	6,799	2,641	1,888
Food Processing	565	434	21	703	620
Furniture and Fittings	180	176	91	860	621





Green Jobs	360	348	151	-	-
Handicrafts and Carpet	360	335	271	-	-
Healthcare	1,750	1,343	106	420	260
Infrastructure Equipment	180	174	-	-	-
Iron and Steel	150	123	-	94	89
IT-ITeS	4,792	3,758	2,024	777	514
Life Sciences	964	754	619	-	-
Logistics	4,939	4,104	1,960	810	757
Management	650	521	249	264	134
Media and Entertainment	750	713	324	300	276
Mining	360	227	-	-	-
Plumbing	1,672	1,296	689	357	311
Power	1,200	1,142	884	257	197
Retail	7,555	5,464	3,105	3,240	2,369
Telecom	4,992	4,042	1,784	747	571
Tourism & Hospitality	2,403	1,592	674	2,394	1,789
<b>Total</b>	<b>87,772</b>	<b>73,318</b>	<b>35,625</b>	<b>38,034</b>	<b>30,192</b>

### 3. METHODOLOGY :

This is a mixed methods paper in an ongoing study of migrant workers. This paper asks the simple question: where and what is the character of migrant workers in India? Workers from six locations in Chennai, India, were interviewed randomly on a need-to-know basis based on access and openness to participate. In all, 149 migrant workers were interviewed and shadowed over five months, and the table depicts the number of workers interviewed and their responses to the open-ended questions. It draws upon extensive fieldwork data, participant observation, and quantitative analysis. The thrust of this paper is taxonomic genealogical as much as it is to unravel the demographic spread and character of migrant workers post-COVID-19. Each table delineated below was arrived at through extensive questionnaires and unstructured dialogue with male and female respondents.

### 4. DISCUSSION AND RESULTS :

The data was processed through SPSS, and the desired tests were performed to arrive at the necessary conclusions. The inter-item correlation matrix established the correlation between the various elements.

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
0.843	0.843	10

Table 5 Internal consistency for the variable can be measured using reliability statistics. It is an essential statistical indicator in research because it guarantees the consistency and dependability of the data, which is required for significant inferences and future projections. With a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.843, the result is quite dependable. Other examinations pertinent to assessing the primary questions were then conducted.

**Table-6 Inter-Item Correlation Matrix**

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10
Q1	1	0.612	0.354	0.633	0.536	0.593	0.578	0.432	0.609	0.742
Q2	0.516	1	0.339	0.776	0.544	0.691	0.566	0.336	0.729	0.533
Q3	0.349	0.339	1	0.521	7.09	0.345	0.388	0.565	0.289	0.662



Q4	0.533	0.706	0.621	1	0.444	0.805	0.753	0.575	-0.018	0.437
Q5	-0.036	0.644	0.509	-0.044	1	0.175	0.164	0.167	0.305	0.632
Q6	0.593	0.691	0.745	0.805	0.775	1	0.549	-0.194	0.001	0.572
Q7	0.478	0.616	0.388	0.53	0.164	0.549	1	0.752	0.436	0.522
Q8	-0.07	0.036	0.421	0.075	0.667	-0.094	0.752	1	0.325	0.451
Q9	0.709	0.429	0.589	-0.028	0.205	0.501	0.336	0.325	1	0.319
Q10	0.242	0.523	0.362	0.37	0.232	0.672	0.522	0.451	0.319	1

Table 6 The inter-term correlation matrix clearly shows the connectivity and connection between the many components, the survey questions, and the correlation between the many study topics. A score more excellent than 0.5 suggests a high correlation between the items. We conveyed the degree of link between the inquiry and the values that arrived. That is to say, the socioeconomic status of their job impacts the workers' quality of life and work life.

Table 7 - Migrant Workers State wise spilt: Source Field Survey

	Builde rs	No s	Beng al	Oriss a	Biha r	U P	M P	J H	C G	A P	T N	Other s
Chennai, Kancheepuram and Chengalpattu District	Site 1	38	3	3	5	5	2	0	0	2	2	16
	Site 2	32	2	2	9	10	1	1	1	1	1	3
	Site 3	33	11	1	3	2	0	0	0	5	10	1
	Site 4	22	3	2	5	5	0	0	0	4	3	0
	Site 5	12	1	1	4	4	1	1	0	0	0	0
	Site 6	12	0	0	4	2	0	0	0	2	4	0
Total		149										

The questionnaire and interviews covered a wide range of questions to solicit the responses of migrant labourers working in organized and unorganized segments. Most employers were corporate, small, and medium entrepreneurs, managing medium to small businesses. The workers were mainly migrants and came from north India or adjoining states. A minimal number of them moved from within the same condition. The migrant workers interviewed moved for work owing to poverty and compulsions. They had no option but to move as a herd and seek jobs for livelihood. Most of them were either school dropouts or never went to school and predominantly engaged in agriculture activities or animal husbandry before migrating for work.

Questions	Bengal	Orissa	Bihar	UP	MP	JH	KTK	AP	TN	Others
Do you get paid a fair wage	MW	MW	MW	MW	MW	MW	MW	MW	MW	MW
Age group	28-45	28-45	28-45	28-45	28-45	28-45	28-45	28-45	28-45	28-45
Life span at work	2yrs	3yrs	1yrs	1yrs	3yrs	3yrs	3yrs	1 yr	6 months	18months
Children educ	14%	8%	22%	31%	46%	51%	33%	76%	84%	92%
Spouse workin	5%	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	10	10
Annual Leave	NO	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Married with	8	6	5	5	5	5	5	30	45	34
Unmarried	45	43	35	34	28	22	23	20	12	14
Leave or Rest	4Days	4Days	4Days	4Days	4Days	4Days	4Days	4Days	4Days	4Days
Hours of work	12HRS	12HRS	12HRS	12HRS	12HRS	12HRS	12HRS	12HRS	12HRS	12HRS
Are you provided housing facilities	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Is your job secure	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Are you provided with welfare, health and hygiene support	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO
Working conditions	Poor	Poor	Poor	Poor	Poor	Poor	Poor	Poor	Poor	Poor
Harassment at	Often	Often	Often	Often	Often	Often	Often	Often	Often	often
Reasons for m	poverty	Poverty	poverty	poverty	poverty	poverty	poverty	poverty	poverty	poverty
Prefer to stay	No option but	No options	No options	No option but	No options	No options	Will Return at	Will Return at	Will Return at	Will Return at
Social Security Benefits	Not provided	Not provided	Not provided	Not provided	Not provided	Not provided	Not provided	Not provided	Not provided	Not provided
Bonded labour and contractor	High	High	High	High	High	High	High	High	High	High
QOL	poor	Poor	poor	poor	poor	poor	poor	poor	poor	poor
QWL	average	Average	average	average	average	average	average	average	average	average
Interactions w	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No

Table 8 Interview feedback from workers: Source Field Survey



Table 8 Responses have been tabulated on broad parameters, and the trends are similar across all migrant groups with little or no differentiation. Migrant workers can be easily identified in groups representing villages and states.

## 5. CONCLUSION:

This study establishes the possible beginning of a new discursive and structural reconfiguration of employment relationships with migrant workers. Workers can now negotiate a better bargain post-COVID after their lived experiences during difficult times. Women workers have settled for jobs closer to home and no longer travel long distances, preferring smaller or petty jobs to the higher wages in urban areas. The pandemic realigned the priorities of the migrant workers, and their choices between life and livelihood have been taken in the family's interest.

## 6. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY:

The study was conducted across six work locations scattered in Chennai, Kancheepuram, and Chengalpattu districts of Tamil Nadu, all within a radius of 15 km. It involved places where a large migrant workforce was employed, and the researchers had access to workers in the open spaces. It did not capture inputs across a broader spectrum to correlate the feedback captured. Since almost all the labourers were uneducated or had primary education, the responses were similar and had stereotypes. Respondent quotes and further insights gleaned after analysis will be added in a subsequent version of this paper. This paper is evolving, and the work is still emergent and exciting. It tries to counterbalance affect and cognition in its endeavor to unpack the world of work of the post-pandemic migrant worker.

## 7. AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH:

Future studies could look at smaller groups from similar backgrounds, different cultural and ethnic backgrounds, and multiple industry segments besides unorganized labour. Research could be undertaken to identify the causes for migration in specific cultural elements, ethnic backgrounds, and lack of amenities or employment opportunities in rural areas. We also believe the current study is restricted to a cross-section of migrants in a small jurisdiction and might not provide the larger picture; hence, a more comprehensive analysis could throw multiple dimensions on migrant labour and their challenges.

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