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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Working and Living Conditions of Interstate Migrant Workers during Pre- and Post-COVID-19

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ABSTRACT

The imposition of lockdowns in several nations has resulted in restricted movement of an individual, leading to a mobility crisis in India. As migrant labourers strived to make their way back home, it led to certain confrontations with relief policies, law enforcement, and transit policies being enforced. Interstate migrant workers in India have been facing a myriad of challenges in this accord and are predominantly engulfed with sociological, psychological, economic, political, and legal dimensions. This research article examines their pre- and post-COVID-19 living and working conditions, focusing on the diverse migrant population residing in Kelakottaiyur. The objective of this study is to understand the working and living conditions of the migrants in correspondence with the diversity prevailing within. It can be further validated in terms of employing a convenience sampling method in juxtaposing potential selection bias and self-reporting (or) recall bias. According to the findings of the study, the circumstances under which migrant labourers work have a significant impact on their overall quality of life. Specifically, their living conditions, job satisfaction, and socio-economic status are all prejudiced by the nature of their employment. This study aims to prove that Interstate migrant workers in India are vulnerable in terms of mobility, health, and well-being, by elucidating a comparative analysis between their respective professions and livelihood, during the Pre- and Post-COVID-19. Furthermore, it underscores the importance of creating fair and supportive working environments for all individuals, regardless of their background or status.

Keywords: Pre-COVID-19, mobility, living conditions, working conditions, Post-COVID-19

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1. Introduction

The term "Human Migration" refers to people moving from one place to another, either temporarily or permanently, for various reasons. India is a prominent example of a country shaped by migration dynamics, with internal and international migration. The term "migration" is ambiguous, with various definitions used worldwide¹⁸⁾. According to S.K. Das, migration is "a process of movement of an individual from his place of birth to a new place of residence"⁹⁾, while it can also refer to travelling for work or crossing specific boundaries. Social scientists have highlighted the social and cultural effects of migration. According to the United Nations Multilingual Demographic Dictionary (1958), migration is "a form of spatial or geographical movement between one geographical region and another," involving a change in residence from the place of origin or departure to the place of destination or arrival²²⁾. According to the International Labor Organization (ILO), a "migrant worker" is someone who moves from one country to another in search of employment with someone other than themselves²⁴⁾. This definition imbibed individuals who are regularly admitted as migrant workers. Migration for work has happened mostly for economic reasons, and in particular, male migrants in the majority, moved across states for the same. The Inter-State Migrant Workmen Act of 1979 defines an interstate migrant worker or labourer as "any person who is recruited by or through a contractor in any state under an agreement or other arrangement for employment in an establishment in another state, whether with or without the knowledge of the person being employed"¹³⁾. In modern times, labour migration has become a global phenomenon due to the growth of transportation and communication. The movement of workers into industrializing areas has widened the gap between rural and urban communities⁹⁾. This has resulted in the collapse of livelihoods in India's rural areas, forcing people to leave their hometowns in search of work.

According to the Indian Census of 2011, approximately 450 million people migrated domestically within India, which can be considered a 45% increase from the 2001 Census³⁾. Of these, there are approximately 60 million interstate migrants reckoned in India, and an average of 9 million migrants are expected to move across states each year between 2011 and 2019. Additionally, around 175 million migrants work in India's informal economy, according to the Economic Survey of India (2017). The major source states for these migrant workers are Assam, Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal, while the leading destination states are Delhi, Kerala, Maharashtra, Gujarat, and Tamil Nadu¹⁷⁾. According to the 2011 census, migration in India took place between rural and urban areas (47.4%), urban and rural areas (22.6%), rural and urban areas (22.1%), and urban to rural areas (7.9%). There has been an increase in rural-urban migration due to poverty in rural areas, rapid industrialization, a desire for upward economic mobility, and an attraction to urban culture.

There are two factors that influence people to migrate - push factors and pull factors. Push factors are the reasons that force someone to leave their area of origin and move to another location due to lack of work opportunities, unemployment, poor economic conditions, poverty, high population pressure on the land, low agricultural productivity, etc. Pull factors refer to the factors that entice individuals to relocate from one place to another, such as job opportunities, higher education prospects, better working conditions, access to consistent employment, and improved healthcare facilities. In India, individuals from Assam, Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh, and Madhya Pradesh migrate to Punjab, Haryana, and Western Uttar Pradesh for agricultural purposes. Employment is a major driving force behind rural-to-urban migration, as rural communities with an agricultural-based economy often lack employment opportunities⁹⁾. Conversely, urban areas offer diverse employment opportunities in industries such as transportation, services, and trade. The decision to migrate is influenced by a variety of factors that affect individual choices as it depends on both their living and working conditions. Living conditions refer to a person's access to basic necessities such as clean water, food, clothing, shelter, and safety. It is

crucial for a person's well-being and can also be referred to as "conditions for life," encompassing access to electricity, a suitable habitat, and other necessities. Quality of life and living conditions are interconnected concepts that affect how people live. Working conditions, on the other hand, include aspects of an employee's employment terms and conditions, as well as the environment in which they work. The physical, social, and psychological features of the workplace all contribute to work conditions, which can affect an employee's performance, health, safety, and work-life balance⁶⁾.

Migrant workers, especially those in low-paying jobs such as wage employees and casual labourers in the manufacturing and construction industries, often face poor living and working conditions. The challenges faced by migrant labourers begin with finding a place to live and extend to concerns about safety and health. To cut down on living expenses, these labourers often reside in cramped and unsanitary housing conditions⁹⁾. This can lead to poor eating habits and hygiene practices, placing them in precarious living situations as they attempt to minimize costs in the state they have migrated to. Migrant workers may also find themselves in vulnerable situations due to a range of factors, including the circumstances that forced them to return to their home state, difficulties encountered during travel or upon arrival, and personal characteristics such as age, gender identity, race, disability, or health status²³⁾. A closer look at migrant workers' occupations reveals that, apart from farmers and agricultural labourers, most men work in production-related activities. In the tertiary sector, male migrants are mostly employed in sales positions, followed by clerical and related professions. In a nutshell, migrant workers contribute significantly to India's economy in industries such as small-scale manufacturing, hospitality, textiles, fisheries, and construction⁴⁾.

On March 25, 2020, India imposed a strict national lockdown and sealed all borders immediately after the announcement. The impact on India's migrant workers as a result of the unexpected announcement of a statewide lockdown stunned both domestic and foreign migrant workers who were ready for this¹⁹⁾. This is one of the largest issues India has encountered in the current crisis and the country has been facing a growing crisis as a result of the abrupt announcement of a statewide lockdown⁴⁾. A sizable proportion of India's workforce has been employed in informal employment and constitutes migrant labourers. The majority of the workforce in India is made up of migrant labourers who work in the unorganized sector. The total number of domestic migrants in India in 2011 was expected to be a startling 139 million by taking inter- and intra-state travel into account. The mistreatment of the migrant situation during this lockdown might result in many starving deaths, destitution, and poverty for poor persons who are left stranded away from their families. The broken economy would cause long-term pain for the lower-middle and lowest-income groups. The present pandemic has highlighted the poor situation of migrant workers in public conversation. Therefore, a change in policy is urgently required to improve their circumstances¹⁴⁾.

As a part of this research study, we will be analysing previous research on migration, considering working and living conditions, as well as the pandemic. Using data from the Kerala Migration Survey of 2011, the author¹⁾ investigated the impact of the international diaspora on the occupational mobility of workers during three stages of labour migration: emigration, pre-emigration, and post-return. The study utilized a sample of 2913 return migrants and compared their sociodemographic traits and occupational profiles with those of emigrants. The majority of migrant workers in Kerala work in the informal construction industry, enduring long hours and poor working conditions with little legal protection. It is crucial to ensure that migrants and their families have good access to services and entitlements outlined in policies and laws, while also ensuring that urban areas are inclusive. The COVID-19 pandemic¹⁰⁾ has affected migrants, and international organizations have published reports on the impact of remittances and policy suggestions for the way forward.

The study highlights the problems faced by impoverished migrants due to mass unemployment and the unprotected, precarious jobs that define the labour market. The author suggests that cross-disciplinary researchers address issues by measuring migrant workers' rights violations and the use of business practices to circumvent those rights. Furthermore, an increase in short-term and return migrants calls for new approaches to estimating urban growth and migration¹¹⁾. This study¹²⁾ can be expanded in terms of focusing on the human dignity of marginalized people in a modern welfare state, with respect to female inter-state migrants. However, out-migration from Kerala is not included. The research based on 2011 can be regarded as appropriate for the succeeding stages because migrants and sending in both rounds share similar socioeconomic and demographic characteristics. The findings showed that migrants have returned back to their homes, because of unfavourable working conditions, bad health, or were forcibly sent home. The study also revealed that Kerala emigrants lacked access to good jobs and were extremely vulnerable.

Aishvarya (n.d.) analyzed the quality of life among respondents depending on their working conditions. Based on the 2016 Indian census, every third Indian was a migrant, and the migrant population of Tamil Nadu had increased by 98%. Results showed that respondents with better working conditions reported a moderate level of quality of life, education, and income²⁾. As the predicament of working conditions improved, the respondent's quality of life declined. Therefore, the state's growing migrant population, primarily from the north, had caused a slew of issues, including language barriers and inadequate housing. Migrant workers were underpaid and forced to live in poor conditions, experienced prejudice, and resided in substandard housing. The study collected data from 50 migrant workers in the Suler area, using a simple random sampling and probability sampling type. It intended to draw attention to the issues experienced by migrants who work in Tamil Nadu's manufacturing sectors, particularly in Suler, to improve their working conditions and the general welfare of people and societies. The United Nations estimated that there were more than 258 million immigrants globally, and the number is growing. India has been ranked 12th with 5.2 million immigrants.

An analysis of the Census of India, 2001 data³⁾ conducted in 13 Indian cities, including Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Jaipur, Lucknow, Vishakapatnam, Ludhiana, Nasik, Aligarh, Bhubaneshwar, and Imphal, revealed that the poorest states contributed significantly to migration flows in the Indian context. The study found that the highest number of people migrated to improve their livelihoods. However, migrant workers are still employed as casual slum labourers with low-paying and low-earning jobs in the informal sector. The informal and contractual nature of work exposes these vulnerable migrants to different deprivations and handicaps, which are related to the structure of municipal policy and the absence of employer support. Poor slum migrants have lower levels of educational achievement, lower social class affiliation, and lower economic position, all of which are interconnected. This study exposed the poor living conditions and lack of public services faced by migrant workers in Indian cities⁴⁾.

Furthermore, there's another study⁵⁾ which investigated moderate to severe depressive signs seen in rural-to-urban migration; it found no evidence of more depression indicators when compared to rural and urban inhabitants. The author⁷⁾ discovered that the rural economy of Odisha has been encountering an abrupt increase in labour supply on a significant scale. But the main issue faced by migrants is losing their jobs, followed by losing their money. It also implicated that the sort of job, household income without migrants, and migrant workers' income all significantly affect how vulnerable migrants are⁸⁾. The workers are employed in low-productivity positions with low salaries and pay their labour without job safety, medical health, or social safety benefits. All of this deteriorates the workers' living and working conditions. Even though they work and live in one of the most developed areas of the country, they are financially excluded and neglected.

The analysis in this study concludes that construction activities are integral to the development of any economy. These activities provide significant employment opportunities for unskilled labourers, particularly those from socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

The information¹⁶⁾ was gathered from slum inhabitants in three Indian states: the National Capital Territory of Delhi, as well as two towns in the National Capital Regions of Haryana and Uttar Pradesh. Low-skilled workers in Delhi's suburbs and Gurgaon were further interviewed, which results in highlighting their struggle to support their families in urban areas despite earning more than they would in rural areas, where employment opportunities are scarce. The paper concludes that labour migrants have a significant impact on contemporary Gurgaon's development. Another study was conducted¹⁷⁾ on the prevalence of depressive symptoms among rural to urban migrants within Kerala, and it was found that there was no significant difference compared to rural and urban residents. The study¹⁸⁾ used secondary information on interstate labour migration to Kerala and welfare initiatives implemented by the Kerala government to improve the social security, health, and living standards of migrant workers. It was discovered²⁰⁾ that severe psychological disorders such as anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, and psychotic disorders were more common among migrant workers due to factors such as discrimination, family separation, and loss of social standing. The research also identified developing disorders such as depressive syndrome, anxiety, alcohol or substance misuse, and poor sleep quality. These disorders are caused by poor living conditions, social exclusion, demanding work, and verbal or physical abuse. Furthermore, the author has also thoroughly examined the migrant labourers' conditions regarding gender, mental health, and social security provisions.

Occupational medicine must play a vital role in promoting the well-being of migrant workers. Another study²⁷⁾ scrutinizing the hygiene of migrant workers, also found that harmful alcohol and cigarette use was prevalent among young, single male migrant construction workers in Bangalore, who had poor physical, social, and psychological quality of life. It results in providing suggestive measures to enhance the physical, social, and psychological health of this vulnerable population with the help of stringent laws. Policymakers should consider factors such as documentation status, access to health insurance, safe working conditions, and labour union membership when determining access to and quality of healthcare services for labour migrants²¹⁾.

Research on migration has clarified different aspects of it, but there are still gaps in our knowledge. Previous studies have looked at areas like the kinds of jobs migrants have, how it affects their quality of life, and the difficulties they face. However, we need a more complete understanding of the experiences of Indian migrant workers as they are victimized on the basis of discrimination and exploitation on a daily basis²⁵⁾. Not only do they experience prejudice and exploitation in the state where they work, but they also face discrimination based on their social class and background in their own country. This situation raises concerns about human dignity and the mistreatment of fellow human beings. Despite international conventions and the Indian Constitution guaranteeing the rights of migrant workers to live with dignity and be considered citizens, they often do not receive the respect they deserve²⁶⁾. Therefore, there is still a void existing in researching the vulnerability and cruciality faced by migrant workers in India. Nonetheless, the unforeseen outbreak of the pandemic and its repercussions have illuminated a new perspective on the lives of India's migrant labourers. Furthermore, some have resorted to desperate measures to return home, leading to conflicts with law enforcement and the introduction of last-minute transportation solutions. Like how COVID-19 has spread, the Gulf economy also collapsed, trapping migrant workers without a means of support, making them anxious to return to India by providing them with secure accommodation or food²⁷⁾. A "crisis inside a crisis" resulted from an absence of government planning to safeguard the welfare of migrant labourers

both inside and outside of India¹⁴). So, this study examines the working and living conditions of interstate migrant workers, particularly those in the manufacturing and construction industries in Keelakottaiyur, Chengalpet, Tamil Nadu, both before and after COVID-19.

This research also aims to fill that gap by exploring the intricate dynamics of their lives, by examining everything from their reasons for migrating to the challenges they face in their living and working conditions. Our goal is to analyze the complex factors that influence migration, the difficulties migrants encounter, and the weaknesses in the system they face, to make a valuable contribution to the conversation about the experiences of migrant workers. Our study aims to provide a complete understanding of the obstacles and possibilities that come with migration, to inform policies that can improve the living and working conditions of migrant workers. In the following sections, we will explore the various aspects of migrant workers' experiences, including their motivations for migrating, the conditions they face, their vulnerabilities, and the difficulties presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. Our goal in this analysis is to offer a more nuanced understanding of the lives of migrant workers and to contribute to the ongoing conversation about social fairness and justice.

Understanding the reasons behind migration is essential, and a theoretical framework would serve as a valuable tool for this purpose. In this study, we use the 'Dual Labor Market Theory' to examine the disparities that arise in the working and living conditions of migrant workers who move between states. This theory highlights the existence of a segmented labour market where migrant workers often find themselves stuck in a secondary labour market with unstable employment, low wages, and inadequate access to necessary social protections. By using this theoretical perspective, our aim is not only to comprehend these inequalities but also to suggest policy solutions to address them. Specifically, this study delves into the complex phenomenon of human migration, focusing on the challenges, conditions, and vulnerabilities that migrant workers face in India's dynamic landscape.

1.1. Originality of the Study

This study is noteworthy due to its extensive analysis of interstate migrant workers in Kelakottaiyur (Tamil Nadu), focusing on the living and working conditions of the migrants, both before and after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. It also focuses on the challenges faced by migrant workers in India, with a particular emphasis on the impact of a worldwide health crisis on their daily lives. The study aims to hypothesize the factors of economical variances existing between the developed and the developing states in India, working and living conditions attributed for migrant workers, and the varied elements of migrant livelihoods. The lack of statutory protections and the ambiguity surrounding the post-pandemic era can be identified as the resultant manifestations of the investigation. The current analysis provides valuable insights that could potentially contribute to the development of policies and decision-making processes aimed at improving the welfare of migrant workers in India. The locus of this research study is bordered around the outskirts of Chennai, a city renowned for its heterogeneous migrant population. The objective of this study is to offer a comprehensive and pertinent examination of the obstacles encountered by migrant labourers who relocate inside the confines of this urban region.

The focal point on the particular geographical area enables a thorough and advanced understanding of the challenges individuals encounter within a specific socio-economic context, which is a crucial factor in identifying effective approaches to improve their conditions. Moreover, the primary objective of this study is to investigate the living and working conditions encountered by migrant workers prior to and subsequent to the initiation of the COVID-19 pandemic. This approach provides a valuable comparative examination of the effects experienced by people in response to unforeseen global

occurrences, such as a pandemic. Subsequently, this analysis offers valuable perspectives on the potential changes in their conditions, whether they have experienced improvement, decline, or stability in response to the given circumstances. The chosen study methodology exhibits a multidisciplinary approach, with the objective of addressing many societal, psychological, economic, political, and legal challenges commonly encountered by migrant workers. The comprehensive examination of the intricate and interconnected challenges encountered by migrant workers in this extensive study holds particular importance due to its departure from a simplistic viewpoint. The research findings suggest a lack of adequate legal protections for migrant workers who are not involved in formal employment. This study also addresses a notable gap in the current legal framework and provides unique perspectives on the consequences of the pandemic on the interstate migrant workforce. This study analyzes regulations and conditions for interstate migrant workers in India, specifically those in the construction and industrial sectors, including those in Keelakottaiyur. It explores living and working conditions and potential psychological trauma. The findings can offer policy suggestions to support these workers.

2. Objectives

Interstate migrant workers face several challenges, including sociological, psychological, economic, political, and legal concerns. These workers are distributed in a dispersed and unorganized manner with limited negotiating power. Migrant workers suffer the most because of their lack of organization and literacy, as they are unable to take advantage of the provisions of the several labor laws that apply to them. Another key issue is the lack of effective legal protection, an insufficient legal framework, and procedure. Migrant workers may not have a formal employer-employee relationship in their workplaces. In such cases, employment is the key motivator for interstate migration, and construction is India's second-largest employer after agriculture. Modernization, industrialization, and globalization have all helped the building industry²⁷). Chennai's diverse nature comes from its attraction to migrant groups from across India. Recently, there has been increasing interest in the hardships and challenges faced by migrant workers who move between states, as studied by researchers, social workers, and the media. As a result, the current study examines interstate migrant workers with a focus on their living and working environments during the pre-and post-COVID-19. The objectives of this research are as follows:

1. To understand the nature of work performed by migrant workers.
2. To analyze the living environment of migrant workers.

3. Methodology

This study employs both descriptive and analytical approaches and draws from a sample of 150 migrant workers in Keelakottaiyur through convenience sampling. Its focus is on working and living conditions as dependent variables, with socio-demographic, economic, religion, marital status, caste, age, gender, and education as independent variables. Frequency tables and cross-tabulations are utilized for data analysis, facilitated by SPSS version 25.0. However, the use of convenience sampling may introduce selection bias, and self-reporting and recall bias could affect the accuracy of the responses received. The data has been collected from January 2020 to October 2022 and provides valuable insights into the challenges faced by migrant workers. The Dual Labor Market Theory highlights significant disparities in the working and living conditions of interstate migrant workers who are limited to the secondary labour market, with precarious employment and low wages. The study has adapted a questionnaire to align with its research goals through interviews, observations, and discussions. The research aims to understand migrant workers' roles, conditions, wages, and challenges,

alongside assessing their living conditions, including housing, amenities, safety, and their impact on well-being. The results obtained can highlight migrant workers' contributions and areas for improvement while upholding their rights to safe living conditions. Ethical considerations were central to the study, with informed consent obtained from all participants, ensuring ethical integrity. The primary outcome of this study relies in obtaining a comprehensive understanding of the work performed by migrant workers. This would involve documenting their job roles, industries, working conditions, wages, and challenges faced in their work. The study also seeks to analyze the living conditions and environment in which migrant workers reside. This includes assessing housing quality, affordability, access to basic amenities, social infrastructure, safety, and how these conditions impact their well-being. The results of the study could provide insights into the contribution of migrant workers to various sectors, identify areas for improvement, and help ensure their rights to safe and decent living conditions are upheld.

4. Results

Table 1. SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS OF THE RESPONDENTS

Demographic Factors	No. of respondents	Percentage
Gender		
Male (%)	94	62.7
Female (%)	56	37.3
Education Level		
5-9 (%)	15	10.0
10-12 (%)	122	81.3
UG (%)	13	8.7
Occupation		
Carpenter (%)	12	8.0
Electrical (%)	6	4.0
Machine Operator (%)	58	38.7
Mason (%)	3	2.0
Packing (%)	35	23.3
Polishing (%)	36	24.0
Native Place of the Respondents		
Assam (%)	25	16.7
Bihar (%)	62	41.3
Jharkhand (%)	9	6.0
Odisha (%)	33	22.0
Uttar Pradesh (%)	9	6.0
West Bengal (%)	12	8.0
Religion		
Hindu (%)	120	80.0
Christian (%)	3	2.0
Muslim (%)	27	18.0
Caste		
OC (%)	9	6.0
BC (%)	72	48.0
SC (%)	69	46.0
Marital Status		
Married (%)	57	38.0
Unmarried (%)	93	62.0
Family Types		
Nuclear (%)	120	80.0
Joint (%)	30	20.0

4.1. Socio-Demographic Characteristics

According to Table 1, the majority (62.7%) of migrant workers were men while 37.3% were women, indicating a gender imbalance. The labour market favoured men, with 62.7% of male migrants occupying key positions due to cultural biases that cast men as the breadwinners. Meanwhile, women were relegated to secondary earning roles, despite their significance in migration. The COVID-19 pandemic affected both male and female migrant workers, causing a decline in wages and increased discrimination in terms of employment and care responsibilities. Salary reductions led to changes in employment, with men receiving more pay and benefits compared to women as migrant labourers. Additionally, men enjoyed better living conditions, which highlights an unequal resource allocation.

According to the data, it appears that a significant percentage of migrant workers, roughly 81.3%, have received education up to levels 10-12. Within this group, 10% had completed only primary education while 8.7% held degrees. Furthermore, 83% of migrant employees had completed only secondary education. This indicates that many migrant workers possess limited skills due to their inadequate education, which leads to lower-paying jobs. Consequently, a substantial number of these workers are compensated on a daily basis, given their lower levels of higher education.

The survey data showed that migrant workers were mainly employed in the construction and manufacturing industries. Within the manufacturing industry, the majority of respondents (38.7%) were machine operators. Workers in polishing sections accounted for 24% of the sample, while those in packing units made up 23.3%. Carpenters made up 8% of the construction labour force, while electricians and masons represented 4% and 2%, respectively. It was noted that some graduated migrants ended up recruiting themselves in manual labour jobs due to limited work prospects in their area. The study showed a clear link between workers' education and their job preferences.

It is conspicuous to note that a majority of the migrant labourers in various states of India, particularly from the northern part of the country, hail from Bihar (41.3%); Odisha and Assam account for 22% and 16.7% respectively, while Jharkhand and Uttar Pradesh make up 12% and West Bengal 8%. These labourers migrate in search of better job prospects and access to food resources. To navigate the metropolitan job market, they rely on a vast social media network that includes contractors, middlemen, family, and friends. Labour contractors play a critical role in helping them secure organized sector jobs by providing transportation, food, and compensation during the migration period. It's worth noting that 41.3% of migrant labourers in Chennai are from Bihar, and they are mostly concentrated in Keelakottaiyur. Hence, this study examines their living conditions, including their accommodation, residence types, access to amenities, and quality of healthcare (accounts for the majority of the migrants in Chennai).

Obviously, religion emerged as a major determinant in shaping social inequalities among migratory populations. The analysis of religious affiliation indicated that a significant majority, accounting for 80% of them, identified as respondents of Hinduism, while Muslims constituted 18% of the population. The presence of Hindu migrants in the research area's population was notably prominent.

Moreover, the demographics of the migrants showed obvious caste distinctions. The Other Backward Classes (OBC) accounted for a significant proportion of 48%, with the Scheduled Castes (SC) making up 46%. The remaining 6% were classified as belonging to the Open Category. The observed variation in caste distribution within the migrant labour force was of particular significance. Nevertheless, it is necessary to recognize that individuals from Other Backward Classes (OBC) and Scheduled Castes (SC) encountered significant obstacles characterized by socioeconomic disparities and elevated levels of unemployment among the migratory inhabitants.

It is noteworthy that the marital status of migrant respondents was examined to assess socioeconomic situations. According to the study, 62% of all respondents were single, while 38% were married.

Subsequently, in terms of family types among migrant workers, approximately 80% belonged to nuclear families, while the remaining 20% belonged to joint families. The working and living conditions of nuclear families, in comparison to joint families, presented distinct advantages and disadvantages. While nuclear families offered greater independence, they also posed potential challenges related to safety and homesickness.

Table 2. OCCUPATIONAL BASED SALARY OF MIGRANT WORKERS

Sectors	Occupation	Salary Before COVID			Salary Post COVID			Total No. of Respondents
		₹ 10001-15000	₹ 15001-20000	Above ₹ 20000	₹ 10001-15000	₹ 15001-20000	Above ₹ 20000	
Constr uction	Carpenter	5 (41.7%)	4(33.3%)	3(25.0%)	11 (91.7%)	0(0.0%)	1(8.3%)	12
	Electrical	3(50.0%)	0(0.0%)	3(50.0%)	4(66.7%)	1(16.7%)	1(16.7%)	6
	Mason	1(33.3%)	2(66.7%)	0(0.0%)	3(100.0%)	0(0.0%)	0(0.0%)	3
Manufact uring	Machine Operator	37(63.8%)	18(31.0%)	3(5.2%)	55(94.8%)	2(3.4%)	1(1.7%)	58
	Packing	30(85.7%)	5(14.3%)	0(0.0%)	33(94.3%)	1(2.9%)	1(2.9%)	35
	Polishing	29(80.6%)	4(11.1%)	3(8.3%)	33(91.7%)	1(2.8%)	2(5.6%)	36
	Total	105(70.0%)	33(22.0%)	12(8.0%)	139(92.7%)	5(3.3%)	6(4.0%)	150

4.2. Occupational based Salary of Migrant Workers

The results shown in Table 2, the salary range of migrant workers before and after COVID was highest in Packing (85.7%), followed by Polishing (80.6%), Machine Operator (63.8%), Carpenter (41.7%), Electrical (50.0%), and Mason (33.3%), all of which fell within the ₹10,001- ₹15,000 range before COVID. Machine Operator (94.8%), Packing (94.3%), Polishing (91.7%), Carpenter (91.7%), Electrical (55.0%), and Mason (100%) on the other hand, accounted for the ₹10,001- ₹15,000-range during the post-COVID.

It is evidently shown that the migrant employees were paid before and after the COVID-19 pandemic. The data was categorized by occupation and sector. Nevertheless, in the construction sector, 41.7% of those earning between ₹10,001 to ₹15,000 were carpenters and 50.0% were electrical workers. Masons made up (33.3%) of ₹10,001 to ₹15,000 people. Carpenters' incomes increased after the COVID-19 epidemic, with 91.7% earning between ₹10,001 -₹15,000. Electrical workers also had a large percentage (66.7%) in this pay group. Masons earned 100% between ₹10,001 and ₹15,000.

Whereas in the manufacturing industry, 63.8% of machine operators earned between ₹10,001 to ₹15,000. Additionally, 85.7% and 80.6% of packaging and polishing workers earned the same income group. After the COVID-19 epidemic, machine operators had a (94.8%) income distribution between ₹10,001 to ₹15,000. Packing workers had a 94.3% distribution and polishing workers (91.7%) within the same pay range. According to the data, the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the pay range of migrant workers, resulting in a significant increase in the proportion of people earning between ₹10,001 and ₹15,000 before the pandemic.

Table 3. RELATIONSHIP WITH THE EMPLOYER IN TERMS OF PRE- AND POST-COVID-19 (SATISFACTORY LEVEL)

Sectors	Occupation	Relationship with Employer Pre-COVID-19 Satisfactory level			Relationship with Employer Post-COVID -19 Satisfactory level			Total No. of Respondents
		Satisfied	Moderate	Poor	Satisfied	Moderate	Poor	
Construction	Carpenter	9(75.0%)	3(25.0%)	0	9(75.0%)	3(25.0%)	0	12
	Electrical	3(50.0%)	3(50.0%)	0	0	3(50.0%)	3(50.0%)	6
	Mason	0	3(100.0%)	0	3(100.0%)	0	0	3
Manufacturing	Machine Operator	36(62.1%)	22(37.9%)	0	25(43.1%)	21(36.2%)	12(20.7%)	58
	Packing	12(34.3%)	23(65.7%)	0	15(42.9%)	11(31.4%)	9(25.7%)	35
	Polishing	18(50.0%)	18(50.0%)	0	18(50.0%)	12(33.3%)	6(16.7%)	36
	Total	78(52.0%)	72(48.0%)	0	70(46.7%)	50(33.3%)	30(20.0%)	150

4.3. Relationship with the Employer in terms of Pre- and Post- COVID-19

Table 3 exhibits a complete illustration of the correlation between migrant workers and their employers, both prior to and subsequently to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. The data is organized based on several occupational groups.

It is obvious that prior to the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, especially in the case of the Construction Sector, Carpenters had a notably high level of job satisfaction in their relationships with employers, as seen by a significant (75%) of individuals reporting contentment. Electrical labourers exhibited a satisfaction rate of (50%). Interestingly, prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, individuals belonging to the Masons organization did not report any instances of being content with their employers. Subsequently after the COVID-19 pandemic, a notable and favourable transformation occurred in the dynamics between Masons and their employers, as evidenced by a unanimous 100% rating of satisfaction. The carpenters exhibited a consistent degree of satisfaction, as evidenced by their sustained rate of 75%. Regrettably, the level of satisfaction among electrical workers was found to be unsatisfactory since none of the respondents reported any level of satisfaction.

It is clear in the manufacturing sector, prior to COVID-19, the occupation of Machine Operators exhibited a satisfaction rate of 62.1%. The Polishing labourers exhibited a satisfaction rate of 50%. The packing workers indicated a reduced level of satisfaction, with a percentage of 34.3%. Likewise, after the COVID-19 pandemic, the group of polishing workers and machine operators indicated a satisfaction rate of 50%. The satisfaction rate among packing workers showed a little increase, as 42% of respondents reported being satisfied.

Table 4. MIGRANT WORKERS ACQUIRING FACILITIES DURING THE PRE- AND POST-COVID-19, RELATED TO OCCUPATION

Sectors	Occupation	Facilities acquired in Pre-COVID-19 Satisfactory level		Facilities acquired in Post-COVID-19 - Satisfactory level			Total No. of Respondents
		Yes	No	Satisfied	Moderate	Poor	
Construction	Carpenter	12(100.0%)	0(0.0%)	9(75.0%)	3(25.0%)	0	12
	Electrical	6(100.0%)	0(0.0%)	3(50.0%)	3(50.0%)	0	6
	Mason	0(0.0%)	3(100.0%)	3(100.0)	0	0	3
Manufacturing	Machine Operator	49(84.5%)	9(15.5%)	37(63.8%)	18(31.0%)	3(5.2%)	58
	Packing	29(82.9%)	6(17.1%)	17(48.6%)	12(34.3%)	6(17.1%)	35
	Polishing	33(91.7%)	3(8.3%)	12(33.3%)	21(58.3%)	3(8.3%)	36
	Total	78(52.0%)	72(48.0%)	81(54.0%)	57(38.0%)	12(8.0%)	150

4.4. Migrant Workers acquiring facilities during Pre- and Post-COVID-19

Table 4 illustrates the percentage distribution of migrant workers depending on their principal occupations, differentiating the periods before and after the COVID-19 epidemic. Notably, carpenters and electricians dominated both the building and manufacturing industries, accounting for 100% of the workers in each. Polishing employees were close behind at 91.7%, with machine operators, packing workers, and masons accounting for 84.5%, 82.9%, and 0% of facility access, respectively.

Prior to the pandemic, these percentages reflected the job circumstances. Nevertheless, there was a considerable shift in these values following the pandemic. Masons underwent a total overhaul, with 100% of employees getting access to facilities. Carpenters had a 75% rate of facility access, whereas machine operators, electrical employees, packing workers, and polishing workers had rates of 63.8%, 50%, 48.6%, and 33%, respectively.

Table 4 presents a clear picture of the percentage distribution of migrant workers across various principal occupations, comparing the periods before and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Several key points can be derived from this data: Carpenters and Electricians were the dominant occupational groups in both the construction and manufacturing sectors, each representing 100% of the workforce. This suggests that these two professions were vital and in high demand before the pandemic. Polishing workers were also significantly represented, with 91.7% access to facilities, indicating their prevalence in these industries. Machine operators and packing workers had moderate facility access percentages of 84.5% and 82.9%, respectively. However, it's noteworthy that masons had no access to facilities before the pandemic, suggesting a challenging work environment for this group.

In the ensuing pandemic, there was a substantial transformation in facility access percentages. Most notably, masons experienced a complete reversal, with 100% gaining access to facilities. This dramatic change suggests that the pandemic may have prompted positive changes in working conditions for masons. Carpenters, who initially had full access, maintained a 75% rate of facility access, indicating some changes in their situation post-pandemic but still a relatively favourable work environment. Machine operators, electrical employees, packing workers, and polishing workers all saw varying levels of facility access, ranging from 33% to 63.8%, post-pandemic. This suggests that the pandemic had a mixed impact on the facilities available to these occupational groups.

Overall, the data underscores the dynamic nature of employment conditions, particularly during and after significant

events like the COVID-19 pandemic. While some groups saw improvements in facility access, others experienced changes of varying degrees, highlighting the need for ongoing assessment and support to ensure the well-being of migrant workers across different occupational sectors.

5. Discussion

In this study, the 'Dual Labor Market Theory' has been employed to comprehensively assess the disparities in working and living conditions experienced by interstate migrant workers in India. This theoretical framework highlights the existence of a segmented labour market, wherein migrant workers often find themselves entrenched in a secondary labour market characterized by precarious employment, low wages, and inadequate access to crucial social protections. Our application of this theory not only aims to understand these disparities but also seeks to propose policy solutions to alleviate them. Specifically, this study delves into the intricate realm of human migration, with a focus on the myriad challenges, conditions, and vulnerabilities confronted by migrant workers within India's dynamic landscape.

5.1. Socio-Demographic Factors:

Living conditions for migrant workers, especially female workers facing unique challenges, emerge as a significant concern, and future dialogues should prioritize their improvement and support networks. The migration of men to different job sectors serves to expose the gender biases and societal norms that persist. According to the Dual-labour Market theory, the pervasive issue of gender inequality and stereotypes manifests in the form of occupational gender segregation, which refers to the phenomenon where men and women are disproportionately employed in different labour market segments. This segregation perpetuates and reinforces gender-based discrimination, limiting individuals' access to job opportunities and hindering their potential for professional growth and development. Although women migrants are a minority, they play a significant role in the migration process. It is crucial to acknowledge the contributions of women beyond their financial roles. Thus, strategies should be developed to recognize their efforts and promote their recognition. Migrant workers, regardless of their gender, are concerned about the effects of the pandemic. The discussion should focus on the ways to mitigate these effects, including closing the gender pay gap and providing more support for caregiving. The working conditions for male and female workers differ significantly, indicating gender inequality. Therefore, policies and strategies should be implemented to improve employment conditions and promote equal opportunities. The living conditions of migrant employees, particularly female workers facing unique challenges, are a significant concern. Thus, future dialogues should prioritize improving their living conditions and support networks.

Equal employment opportunities in rural areas depend on access to education. Migrant workers often have limited job options due to their secondary education, which tends to result in them being concentrated in lower-skilled occupations. Therefore, it is crucial to explore strategies that can improve education and its quality in their hometowns. From a critical perspective, the dual market labour theory can be applied to understand how educational opportunities and outcomes for migrants are influenced by their position within these labour markets, i.e., primary and secondary labour markets. Furthermore, in order to provide equal opportunities for employment in rural areas, access to education is crucial. The prevalence of migrant workers with only a secondary education suggests that this is a common issue. However, their limited education often results in them being employed in jobs that require lower skill levels. Migrants with limited access to quality education may have lower educational attainment, which can relegate them to the secondary labour market. As a

result, the labour force is concentrated in jobs with lower pay and limited room for growth. Moving to urban areas may have a negative impact on children's educational opportunities while changing attitudes towards education and increased prosperity may improve the quality of education in their hometowns.

Workers who migrate for employment often face difficult working conditions, including a lack of job opportunities and low pay, as well as instances of mistreatment in the workplace. From a theoretical perspective, this discussion can be explored by focusing on the challenging working conditions of migrant workers, especially those in the construction industry. Construction workers, in particular, are vulnerable in an unorganized labour market and often find themselves in deplorable situations. These workers often face precarious and exploitative situations, with low wages, long hours, and inadequate accommodations being prominent issues. They lack bargaining power, which makes it difficult for them to receive fair pay, and they often work long hours, exacerbating their already challenging circumstances. It's crucial to implement policies that safeguard labour rights and enhance their working conditions. Migrant workers and their families often live in poverty, and they may not fully understand the expenses of labour recruiting. The accommodations provided by their employers are often inadequate. Despite these challenges, migrant workers are often able to send money back to their families in their home countries, which can improve their overall standard of living. The impact of these remittances on regional growth is a topic of academic study.

In this discussion, we can analyze the noteworthy phenomenon of migration from states such as Bihar, Odisha, and Assam, including aspects such as economic prospects, causes that propel migration, and the role of social networks. Academic studies have explored the impact of remittances on regional growth, shedding light on the economic consequences of migration. This discussion can be expanded to examine the phenomenon of migration from specific Indian states, exploring economic prospects, migration drivers, and the role of social networks. The challenges faced by migrant workers in informal labour markets, as well as factors influencing recruiting and employment conditions, are also investigated theoretically. This study also investigated the difficulties encountered by migrant workers in informal labour marketplaces and explored the factors influencing recruiting and employment conditions. The concept of flexibility in migration might also be taken into consideration.

Migration patterns and socioeconomic circumstances are influenced by religion and caste, prompting further examination of their impact on opportunities, support systems, and economic achievements for migrants. The notable presence of Hindu migrants within the examined regions underscores the influence of religion as a determinant in both migration patterns and socioeconomic circumstances. This discourse has explored the factors behind the migration of specific caste groups, as well as the social and economic determinants that contribute to such phenomena. Moreover, it intrigues one to analyse the impact of caste prejudice and communal hierarchy on rural employment and urban migration.

According to statistical data, a significant number of individuals from Other Backward Classes (OBC) are employed in the manufacturing and construction sectors. Such discourse should perhaps delve deeper into this comprehension to gain a more comprehensive grasp of how caste impacts the vocational decisions and employment trends of migrant labourers. The examination of the intersectionality between caste and various aspects such as education, religion, and gender in the experiences and concerns of migrant workers can also be a subject of scholarly discourse. The application of a diverse methodology enables the comprehensive examination of the intricate dynamics associated with caste-based labour mobility.

It is conceivable that unmarried individuals are more likely to work in manufacturing than in construction, indicating an association between occupation and marital status. Young, unmarried high school graduates may find construction and

industrial work alluring due to its adaptability. According to the results of the survey, most respondents are unmarried and moved to urban areas to improve their quality of life. In turn, it highlights the significance of migration as an economic strategy, particularly for young unmarried individuals who seek better employment opportunities. This paper seeks to assess the degree to which the living conditions of unmarried migrant labourers correspond to the concept of bachelorhood. The difficulties of balancing work and family obligations in marital life can contribute to the relatively low representation of married individuals in certain occupational sectors. Understanding the marital status and the living situation could enlighten policies and assistance programmes for migrant labourers.

Furthermore, individuals who are not married tend to have more control over their work lives. When workers are separated from their families, they often work longer hours and earn higher wages, which can improve their living conditions. However, the traditional family structure is changing, especially for younger migrants, who are given more freedom. The well-being and job satisfaction of workers depend on the quality and adequacy of their housing. Studies show that people who live with family members, spouses, or children tend to have better overall health than those who live alone. Most employees prefer to live with their families, even if they are far away from their hometown. Many people form nuclear families because it is difficult to afford urban living and housing. Workers often share rental homes with their friends and family members. Migrating, whether alone or with family, is a complex and risky decision that can significantly affect the well-being of migrant workers.

5.2. Occupational based Salary of Migrant Workers

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant effect on the salary range of migrant workers, particularly in various sectors and occupations according to the primary and secondary labour markets in which they're respectively employed. Prior to the pandemic, the majority of migrant workers across different sectors and occupations earned salaries ranging from 10,000 to 15,000. Packing workers had the highest representation, followed by polishing workers. Machine operators, carpenters, electrical workers, and masons also had significant numbers falling within this salary range. However, after the pandemic, there was a remarkable shift in these salary distributions. In the Construction sector, carpenters and electrical workers saw significant increases in the number of individuals earning between 10,001 and 15,000. Masons achieved full representation within this salary range, indicating a substantial improvement in their income. In the Manufacturing sector, machine operators, packing workers, and polishing workers also experienced a notable increase in the number of individuals earning between 10,001 and 15,000. This shift in salary distribution is a clear indication that the COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the income of migrant workers. The data suggests that more workers fell within the 10,001-15,000-salary range after the pandemic, signifying an improvement in their earning potential. This could be attributed to various factors such as increased demand for certain job roles, changes in labour policies, or adjustments made by employers to attract and retain workers during the pandemic.

5.3. Relationship with the Employer in terms of Pre- and Post- COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic had varying impacts on the job satisfaction of migrant workers depending on their occupation. Carpenters reported continued contentment with their employment, whereas electrical labourers experienced a decline in satisfaction, indicating potential challenges in their work environment or with their employer. Initially, masons reported low job satisfaction, but their perceptions shifted throughout the pandemic. In the manufacturing sector, machine operators

expressed contentment, while polishing labourers consistently reported high levels of satisfaction. Packing workers experienced lower job satisfaction, but there was a slight improvement after the pandemic. These findings underscore the importance of considering different occupations when evaluating the effect of the pandemic on the labour market. While some groups were able to adapt and persevere, others faced difficulties in their work environment and relationships with their employers.

5.4. Migrant Workers acquiring facilities during Pre- and Post-COVID-19

Through a substantial data analysis, carpenters and electrical workers had consistent access to facilities both before and after the COVID-19 outbreak, with a rate of 100%. This indicates that these industries maintained a steady level of facility access that was not affected by the pandemic. On the other hand, masons experienced a significant increase in facility access, going from 0% before the pandemic to 100% after. This suggests that changes in legislation or working conditions, possibly due to the epidemic, benefited this particular group of workers.

Before the COVID-19 epidemic, construction and manufacturing migrant employees reported being satisfied with their facility access. However, their satisfaction levels decreased when the pandemic began. This decline implies that while certain facilities were available, they may not have met the needs or expectations of workers in the post-COVID era. Overall, the data shows that the pandemic had a varied impact on different groups of migrant workers across various occupational categories. While some, like masons, made significant progress, others faced challenges in accessing sufficient facilities, resulting in overall dissatisfaction with their working and housing situations post-COVID.

The implementation of dual market theory within this study revolved around several crucial themes. First, it unveils the gender biases and societal norms exposed by the migration of men into different job sectors. Recognizing the contributions of women beyond their financial roles is imperative, and strategies should be developed to acknowledge and promote their recognition in the migration process. This discussion also emphasized the universal concerns of migrant workers, regardless of their gender, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Mitigating these effects includes closing the gender pay gap and providing enhanced support for caregiving responsibilities. Furthermore, this theory has evidently spotlighted the disparities in working conditions between male and female workers, underscoring the presence of gender inequality; In terms of living conditions, the influence of marital status on occupation has also emphasized the significance of approaching migration as an economic strategy for young unmarried individuals to seek improved employment opportunities. To address this, policies and strategies should be implemented to enhance employment conditions and foster equal opportunities.

6. Conclusion

Migration in India is linked to regional development disparities, with people moving from less developed to more developed states. Some highly developed states have high migration rates such as Delhi, Kerala, Maharashtra, Gujarat, and Tamil Nadu, whereas underdeveloped states like Assam, Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal experience significant out-migration. Rural-urban migration is common, but migrant workers often lack knowledge of their labour rights and work in the unorganized sector. COVID-19 has left many jobless and struggles for interstate migrant workers to access basic necessities. Our study examined the conditions of interstate migrant workers in Keelakottaiyur, Chengalpet District before and after COVID-19, focusing on their working and living situations. Thus, the study revealed the complex challenges faced by migrant workers in India during both periods. In a way, it aimed to achieve two objectives

using ‘dual-labour market theory’: to understand the type of working conditions of the migrant workers and to analyze their living environment. Prior to the pandemic, migrant workers in our study encountered relatively few issues in their working and living environments as they weren’t able to adapt to their new surroundings. Through the applied theoretical framework, this study explored the inequalities faced by interstate migrant workers in India, taking into account various factors before and after the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic had a significant impact on their income potential and job satisfaction, with fluctuations observed in different occupations. Facility access also saw significant shifts, highlighting the need for adaptable policies to enhance the working and living conditions of migrant workers in the post-pandemic era. Socio-demographic factors such as gender norms and biases have a significant impact on the experiences of migrant workers. Our findings also emphasized the importance of recognizing women's contributions beyond financial provision in occupational choices. The experiences of migrant workers in Kelakottaiyur are influenced by factors such as caste, education, gender, marital status etc. Challenges faced include poor working conditions, limited education, and gender inequality. To address these challenges, policies should focus on bridging the wage gap, protecting labour rights, and improving working conditions. The pandemic has highlighted disparities in access to facilities for migrant workers. It is important to prioritize inclusive development and reduce disparities to reduce the need for migration.

7. Scope of the Study

The study focuses solely on the migrant workers of construction and manufacturing industries in Kelakottaiyur, Chengalpet District and is limited to the period of January 2020 (pre-COVID-19) and October 2022 (post-COVID-19). Eventually, it focused only on the interstate migrant workers, but the plight of intrastate migrant workers would provide a unique perspective to the working and living conditions that they’re embedded with and it provides scope for the significant differences between the two. By analyzing the shared living and working conditions of migrant workers (both intrastate and interstate), we can take an inclusive approach to improve their livelihoods.

Declaration of Interest

The authors report there are no competing interests to declare.

Data Availability

The authors confirm that the data supporting the findings of this study are available in the article.

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