

Migrant Cycle Rickshaw Pullers of Delhi:

Pedalling for survival and livelihood

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Abstract

Despite of all modern means of transportation including Metro trains, cycle rickshaws continue to be indispensable to commuters in Delhi. In fact, these cycle rickshaws provide direct employment to more than a million migrant workers. This study is conducted to learn the realities and concerns of these migrant rickshaw pullers of Delhi. It is looking at reasons for their migration to Delhi and the economic impacts of their migration. The study found these rickshaw pullers as seasonal migrants due to unemployment, underemployment and low wages in rural India. There is a correlation between level of stress in source areas of migration and pattern of migration. They are pedalling cycle rickshaws with passengers for their livelihood in Delhi and for the survival of their families in rural India. Most of them have improved their living standards by sending money home, educating their children and by fulfilling basic needs such as food and clothing. Therefore, this study recommends safeguarding the dignity, safety, human rights and fundamental rights of these rickshaw pullers. It calls for enhancing migration as an opportunity for the rural poor for their livelihood and survival.

Keywords: Migrants, Migration, Cycle rickshaw pullers, Economic impacts, Enhancing migration, Xenophobia, Survival.

1. Introduction and Research Methodology

During the last few decades, Delhi has been witnessing a huge influx of migrant workers. A vast majority of these migrant workers get absorbed into various unorganised sectors and work as domestic workers, hawkers, sweepers, drivers, pavement vendors, auto rickshaw drivers, cycle rickshaw pullers and so on. An estimated 600,000 cycle rickshaws ply the roads of Delhi providing direct employment to more than a million migrant workers (George, 2013). The non-polluting and environment-friendly cycle rickshaws play a pivotal role in providing point-to-point short distance connectivity in Delhi. In fact, these

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cycle rickshaws have become indispensable feeder service providers for Metro and Bus stations in Delhi.

Vidyajyoti, College of theology has been involved in organising cycle rickshaw pullers since 2006. Every Sunday the students gather them and provide space for interaction among the workersthrough listening to their issues and concerns and accompany them through guidance and motivational sessions. The Labour & Migration Unit of Indian Social Institute, Bangalore as part of their services to reach out to migrant workers decided to conduct this survey to learn the realities and concerns of rickshaw pullers in Delhi in association with the students of Vidyajyoti.

Sample size: 100 migrant cycle rickshaw pullers in Delhi

Locality of the study: Major points close to Vidyajyoti, namely Raj Niwas Marg, Civil Lines, Kashmiri Gate, ISBT and Old Delhi.

Sampling: Of the 170-cycle rickshaw pullers gathered for the one-day awareness programme at Vidyajyoti, College of Theology on 25 November 2018, 100 people were randomly selected, excluding the permanent settlers and recent migrants.

Objectives of the study:

- i. To know the profile of the migrant cycle rickshaw pullers in Old Delhi
- ii. To analyse their origin and reasons for migration.
- iii. To understand the work profile of the rickshaw pullers
- iv. To study the economic impacts of migration.

2. Profile of the migrant rickshaw pullers

2.1 Age, Marital status and Educational status

The study found that most (87%) of the cycle rickshaw pullers in Old Delhi are aged above 30 years and the average (Mean) age is 42.3 years.

Among the respondents, 97 per cent of the cycle rickshaw pullers were married, 2 per cent widowers and 1 per cent unmarried. Therefore, it can be said that generally migration of men for the rickshaw pulling job takes place around the age of 25, especially after marriage.

The study found that 60 per cent of the cycle rickshaw pullers have not entered into the portals of an educational institution and 12 per cent of them have not even completed their primary school. This trend clearly shows that mostly non-literate and less educated men choose this profession.

2.2 Religion and Social Category

80 per cent of the respondents are Hindus and 20 per cent of them are Muslims. Across the social category, 45 per cent are of Scheduled Castes (Dalits), 3 per cent of Scheduled Tribes, 26 per cent are of Other Backward Classes and 26 per cent are from General category. Further, among the Hindu respondents, 55 per cent are SCs. Muslims were mainly from OBC and General category.

Religion	Social Category				Total
	SC	ST	OBC	General	
Hindu	44	3	17	16	80
	55.0%	3.8%	21.3%	20.0%	100.0%
Muslim	1	0	9	10	20
	5.0%	0.0%	45.0%	50.0%	100.0%
Total	45	3	26	26	100
	45.0%	3.0%	26.0%	26.0%	100.0%

2.3 Relationship between social categories and education

Across social categories, except STs, non-literates are a majority. However, among the SCs it is strikingly as high as 71.1 per cent. Rickshaw pulling seems to be a preferred option for the non-literate migrants irrespective of their caste status, as non-literates are around 50 per cent and above among the OBCs and the General caste.

Social Category	Education					Total
	Non-literate	Primary School	Middle School	High School	H S School	
SC	32	4	3	5	1	45
	71.1%	8.9%	6.7%	11.1%	2.2%	100.0%
ST	1	0	0	2	0	3
	33.3%	0.0%	0.0%	66.7%	0.0%	100.0%
OBC	13	6	5	2	0	26
	50.0%	23.1%	19.2%	7.7%	0.0%	100.0%
General	14	2	6	3	1	26
	53.8%	7.7%	23.1%	11.5%	3.8%	100.0%
Total	60	12	14	12	2	100
	60.0%	12.0%	14.0%	12.0%	2.0%	100.0%

Among the respondents between the age of 25 - 30, eleven out of thirteen were from SCs and 62.2 per cent of the SC respondents were in the age group of 31 – 50.

3. Origin and reasons for migration

3.1 States and Districts

A vast majority (81%) of the respondents living around old Delhi were from the state of Bihar, one of the poorest regions in South Asia and the state with lowest GDP per capita in India. The data indicates the fact that Bihar has the lowest per capita income in the country at Rs 5,772 against the national average of Rs 22,946. The state also has the highest density of population of over 1,000 persons per sq km and with the literacy rate of 63.82 per cent, ranking lowest among all the states of India.

Among the various districts for the origin of migration of rickshaw pullers, Banka district of Bihar tops with 53 per cent and Bhagalpur comes second with 9 per cent. In 2006, the Indian government named Banka one of the country's 250 most backward districts and it is one of the districts in Bihar currently receiving funds from the Backward Regions Grant Fund Programme. Banka district has one of the lowest literacy rate of 60.12 per cent. The main occupation of the people of Banka District is agriculture and it depends mainly on the availability of water in proper time and in proper quantity.

However, the reason for a high per cent of respondents from Bihar state and Banka district could be due to the locality from where the data was collected, since rickshaw pullers from the same state and the same district club together in a locality in Delhi.

3.2 Nature of work engaged in their native places

Among the respondents 45 per cent worked as daily labourers and 22 per cent as agricultural labourers in their native places before migrating to Delhi to cycle rickshaws. Among the respondents only 3 per cent were cycling rickshaws in their native places. 14 per cent of the respondents were engaged in cultivation in their own land in their native places.

3.3 Reasons for migration

Reasons for leaving native place	Responses	
	N	%
Lack of Work	49	36.6
Low wages	52	38.8
Loans/Debt	2	1.5
Family Pressure	29	21.6
Attraction of City	1	.7
Agriculture not profitable	1	.7
Total	134	100.0

The data indicates that rural distress in India is due to lack of work and low wages forcing men to migrate to cities so as to fulfil the basic needs of their families. For the multiple choice questions on reasons for migration, 34 respondents gave more than one reason. Among those 34 respondents, 28 belong to SCs. The study has found that the major reasons for migration to Delhi to cycle rickshaws were the low wages, lack of work and family pressure in their native places. Among the OBCs, low wage was the main reason for migration. For the General castes, lack of work was the main reason for migration. For the SCs, all the three – low wage, lack of work and family pressure – were reasons for migration. This clearly indicates that Scheduled Castes compared to other social categories face multiple causative factors for migration.

3.4 Nature of migration

The study found that 57 per cent of the cycle rickshaw pullers in old Delhi are seasonal migrants, migrated to Delhi to cycle rickshaws for three to six months per year. 42 per cent of the cycle rickshaw pullers are long term migrants, cycling rickshaws in Delhi for more than six months in a year. However, among the Schedule Caste rickshaw pullers, 64.4 per cent were seasonal migrants. Thus, generally Schedule Caste migrants are more seasonal than long term. The findings indicate correlation between extent of stress experienced by the SCs locally and the migration pattern.

Social Category	Nature of Migration			Total
	Short Term	Seasonal	Long Term	
SC	0	29	16	45
	0.0%	64.4%	35.6%	100.0%
ST	0	1	2	3
	0.0%	33.3%	66.7%	100.0%
OBC	0	13	13	26
	0.0%	50.0%	50.0%	100.0%
General	1	14	11	26
	3.8%	53.8%	42.3%	100.0%
Total	1	57	42	100
	1.0%	57.0%	42.0%	100.0%

3.5 Individual Vs Family migration

Among the total respondents 81 per cent are individual migrants to Delhi, who include 3 respondents who are either unmarried or widowers. Only 19 per cent of the migrants are living with their families in Delhi. Understandably, among the seasonal migrants 91.2 per cent are not living with their families in Delhi. However, it is astonishing to note that even among the long term migrants about 60 per cent do not live with their families. This clearly indicates that one of the major negative impacts made in the lives of migrants is to live away from the members of their family. It is important to make them live together and to strengthen their family bond. Lack of bonding in a family set-up often leads them to many other family-related complications. The top reason for this phenomenon seems to be the high cost of living in Delhi and the added reasons are difficulties in adjusting to Delhi environment and the accessibility and affordability of education of children.

Nature of Migration	Living with Wife in Delhi			Total
	Yes	No	NA	
Short Term	0	1	0	1
	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Seasonal	3	52	2	57
	5.3%	91.2%	3.5%	100.0%
Long Term	16	25	1	42
	38.1%	59.5%	2.4%	100.0%
Total	19	78	3	100
	19.0%	78.0%	3.0%	100.0%

4. Work profile of rickshaw pullers

4.1 Number of years of working in Delhi

The study found that the majority (71%) of the cycle rickshaw pullers are working in Delhi for more than 10 years, including 51 per cent for 11-20 years and 20 per cent for 21-50 years. Among the 20 respondents who are working for 21-50 years in Delhi, 50 per cent are from the general category and 25 per cent each from the SCs and OBCs. This trend clearly indicates that the phenomenon of migration is a protracted one, probably with no substantial development in their native places.

4.2 Types of rickshaw used

Till recently, most of the cycle rickshaws in Delhi were physically pedalled ones, relying mostly on human labour. However, the findings of this study indicate that cycle rickshaws in Delhi are getting a makeover, with batteries and front wheel like that of e-rickshaws to make them even faster and much less back-breaking to ply. In this sample study, the majority (53%) of the respondents use cycle rickshaws with batteries and 47 per cent with the traditional physical pedalling rickshaws.

4.3 Rickshaws on 'Rent'

A vast majority (85%) of the respondents do not own the rickshaws, they cycle and use rickshaws on rent in Delhi. This finding also corresponds to the fact that most of the cycle rickshaw pullers in Delhi are seasonal migrants and so they prefer to use rickshaws on rent rather than owning a rickshaw in Delhi. From the social categories, among the SCs only 11.1 per cent and among the OBCs only 7.7 per cent own rickshaws in Delhi.

Social Category	Owning of Rickshaw		Total
	Yes	No	
SC	5	40	45
	11.1%	88.9%	100.0%
ST	1	2	3
	33.3%	66.7%	100.0%
OBC	2	24	26
	7.7%	92.3%	100.0%
General	7	19	26
	26.9%	73.1%	100.0%
Total	15	85	100
	15.0%	85.0%	100.0%

4.4 Rent paid

There is a vast difference in the rent paid for the rickshaws with batteries and the rickshaws that are physically pedalled. Among the 85 per cent cycle rickshaw pullers who hire the rickshaws on a daily rental basis, 49.4 per cent pay Rs. 50 as daily rent for pedalling rickshaws, in which the cost of the rickshaw is between Rs. 25,000 to Rs. 35,000. 48.2 per cent pay Rs. 350 as daily rent for rickshaws with batteries as their prices begin at Rs. 65,000 and can go up to Rs. 1 lakh (Roy, 2015). Hiring of pedal or battery rickshaws has impact on the level of income and savings.

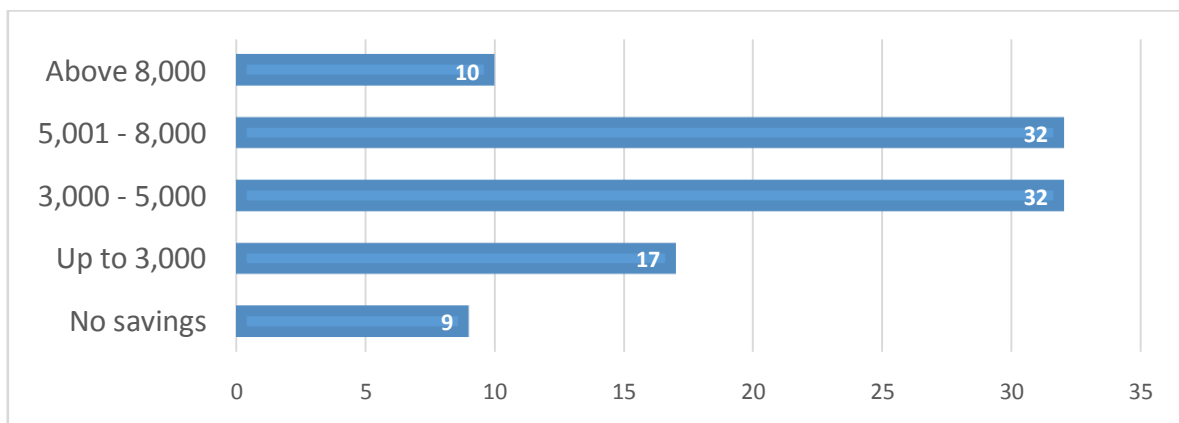
4.5 Working days in a month

The study reveals that almost all (96%) of the cycle rickshaw pullers in Delhi work for more than 20 days in a month and the Mean (average) of working days per month is 26. This corresponds to the mostly seasonal nature of their migration and the fact that their income was just sufficient for the survival of the respondents and their families.

4.6 Monthly savings

On monthly savings after deducting the expenses on rickshaw rent, maintenance of rickshaw, food, room rent, etc., nine rickshaw pullers said that they had no savings after defraying expenses, and among those nine, five were SCs. However, 74 per cent of the rickshaw pullers had monthly savings above Rs. 3,000 and among them 10 per cent had savings above Rs. 8,000 per month. Though across all social categories, rickshaw pullers work for an average of 26 days per month, the Mean savings per month was the highest among the SCs at Rs. 5400. This finding indicates that SCs were mostly individual migrants and were able to save more and send more cash home compared to other social categories.

Monthly savings



Type of Rickshaw	Average savings per month					Total
	No savings	Up to 3,000	3,000 - 5,000	5,001 - 8,000	Above 8,000	
Pedalling/Cycle	6	12	18	9	2	47
	12.8%	25.5%	38.3%	19.1%	4.3%	100.0%
With Battery	3	5	14	23	8	53
	5.7%	9.4%	26.4%	43.4%	15.1%	100.0%
Total	9	17	32	32	10	100
	9.0%	17.0%	32.0%	32.0%	10.0%	100.0%

The table indicates higher average savings per month among those who use rickshaws with batteries compared to those who use physically pedalling rickshaws. 58.5 per cent of those who use rickshaws with batteries have average savings per month above Rs. 5000 compared to 23.4 per cent of respondents who use pedalling rickshaws. Further, among the ten respondents who have average monthly savings above Rs. 8000, eight are from those who use rickshaws with batteries. This finding also reveals that physical fatigue involved in pedalling a rickshaw is resulting in lesser speed, lesser trips and so lesser income.

5. Economic impacts of migration

5.1 Improvement in living standard

A vast majority (72%) of the rickshaw pullers acknowledged that the living standard of their families had improved after migrating to Delhi to cycle rickshaws. However, 28 per cent said that hardly any substantial improvement had taken place. Among the SCs, an improved living standard due to migration is experienced by 80 per cent and among the General caste it is 88.5 per cent. This phenomenon correlates with the higher level of monthly savings by these two social categories in comparison with STs and OBCs.

Social Category	Improved living standard		Total
	Yes	No	
SC	36	9	45
	80.0%	20.0%	100.0%
ST	2	1	3
	66.7%	33.3%	100.0%
OBC	11	15	26
	42.3%	57.7%	100.0%
General	23	3	26
	88.5%	11.5%	100.0%
Total	72	28	100
	72.0%	28.0%	100.0%

5.2 What has changed due to migration?

Six indicators were suggested to identify the specific ways the living standard had improved along with one open choice. There were 144 responses, which indicate that on an average 72 of respondents perceive an improvement in their lives in more than one indicator. Among the six indicators, three indicators, ranked high: able to send money back home (62.5 per cent of cases), educational support for children with 58.3 per cent of cases, and improved food intake with 55.6 per cent of cases. The other three indicators ranked much low. It is also interesting to note that only 4.2 per cent of cases have said that their loans have been settled. This table also clearly brings out the primary concerns of the migrant workers, namely, the dire need to address basic needs such as food and education of children.

Indicators for living standard improvement	Responses	
	N	%
Better Housing	9	6.3
Better education of Children	42	29.2
Better Food	40	27.8
Able to send money back home	45	31.3
Loans are nearly settled	3	2.1
Better medication	5	3.5
Total	144	100.0

5.3 We are still struggling

Reasons for living standards not being improved	Responses	
	N	%
Higher living costs in Delhi	3	7.9%
Sickness	6	15.8%
Earning just enough for food and living	22	57.9%
Exploitation by middlemen	1	2.6%
Rent & maintenance of Rickshaw high	4	10.5%
Handicapped	2	5.3%
Total	38	100.0%

The study revealed that 28 per cent of the rickshaw pullers in Delhi are still struggling to make both ends meet despite pedalling rickshaws in Delhi. Among them, the majority (57.9%) said that their earning was just enough for their food and living. This is the reason given by 7.9 per cent as the higher cost of living. This reveals that 28 per cent of the rickshaw pullers in Delhi are just pedalling rickshaws for their mere survival.

6. Summary of findings

1. Mostly non-literate Scheduled Caste men are undergoing multiple pressures due to distress in rural areas and trying then chance as the rickshaw pullers of Delhi.
2. Mostly married (99%) and middle aged (31-50 years 70%) men from poverty stricken rural areas find an opportunity to improve their living standards through cycling rickshaw in Delhi.
3. Rural distress due to low wages and lack of work are the major push factors for their migration to Delhi as only 14% of the cycle rickshaw pullers in Delhi owned cultivable land in their native villages and the majority (67%) of them worked as either daily labourers or agricultural labourers in their native places before migrating to Delhi.
4. There is a correlation between the level of stress in source areas of migration and the pattern of migration. The majority (57%) of the cycle rickshaw pullers in Delhi are seasonal migrants, migrated for 3-6 months in a year, and among SCs 64.4 per cent are seasonal migrants.
5. Possible family disintegration is a negative social impact of migration since individual migrants, migrated without families, are very high (78%) among the cycle rickshaw pullers in Delhi.
6. 71 per cent of the cycle rickshaw pullers have migrated to Delhi for more than ten years and yet most (85%) of them do not own rickshaws.
7. The majority (53%) of the migrants are using rickshaws with batteries and their average monthly savings are higher compared to those using physically pedalling rickshaws.
8. Most (72%) of the cycle rickshaw pullers in Delhi, including 80 per cent of the respondents among the SCs, have improved their living standards by sending money home, to educate their children and to fulfil basic needs such as food and clothing.

9. 28 per cent of the cycle rickshaw pullers in Delhi are still struggling as their earnings are just sufficient for their food and living.

7. Reflections and questions for the future

The non-polluting and environment-friendly cycle rickshaws have become an indispensable feeder service for the Metro, railway and bus stations in Delhi. However, the civic agencies and policy makers often neglect the much-needed services provided by the cycle rickshaw pullers. Some only look at cycle rickshaws as a nuisance in the congested roads of Delhi and others consider pulling cycle rickshaws is inhumane. As most of the cycle rickshaw pullers of Delhi are seasonal migrants and do not have important identity documents in Delhi, they are excluded from the social security benefits, including subsidised food grains. They have no insurance cover either. The study unravelled the fact that the cycle rickshaw pullers of Delhi are victims of forced migration due to unemployment and low wages in rural India. They are pedalling cycle rickshaws with passengers for their livelihood in Delhi and for the survival of their families in rural India.

For long, migration was viewed by sociologists as due to push and pull factors. However, this study shows that without minimising push and pull factors there seems to be another dimension, namely, 'Enhancing' migration. If 80 per cent of the respondents among the SCs feel that migration has improved their living standards, then should one discourage them, stating migration as bad phenomenon? Clearly, as this small study brings out migration is emerging as a more complex phenomenon.

Enhancing migration is a strategy proposed by the Migration Policy Institute, Washington (Migration Data Portal, 11 September, 2018). It could be achieved through Global Compact for safe, orderly and regular Migration (GCM). For this purpose, the Migration Policy Institute proposes further strategies of increasing and strengthening regular migration pathways through assisting migrants throughout their journey: Pre-migration, during migration and post-migration. Further, the migrants' safety, dignity, human rights and fundamental rights are to be safeguarded. The state should combat xenophobia and racial discrimination faced by the migrants.

In the post liberalisation era in India, labour migration has become nearly inevitable. It has increasingly become a means of livelihood and survival, especially for the rural poor. It calls for Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) to pressurise the central and state governments to formulate policies to enhance labour migration in India. In the case of

cycle rickshaw pullers of Delhi, it is a greater challenge for civic authorities to recognise the contributions of migrant cycle rickshaw pullers, and formulate affirmative policies to facilitate and integrate them to the larger society.

8. Recommendations

Locating this study on rickshaw pullers of Old Delhi in the broader context of migration the following recommendations are made:

1. Accept cycle rickshaw pullers as valued citizens of India and treat them humanely.
2. Civic authorities of Delhi must recognize the contributions of cycle rickshaw pullers, and facilitate their integration into larger society and provide them with insurance coverage.
3. Ensure portability of entitlements for seasonal rickshaw pullers to avail themselves of rights to food, health and shelter, and special provisions for rickshaw pullers with families for housing and education of children in Delhi.
4. Ensure cycle rickshaw pullers' freedom from xenophobia, exploitation and harassment by the police and the civic authorities.
5. Enhance migration through safeguarding safety, dignity, human rights and fundamental rights of rickshaw pullers

9. Conclusion

Though this is a small sample study, it gives us some insights to understand the realities, opportunities and challenges of the cycle rickshaw pullers in Delhi. Based on the objectives the study concludes firstly, mostly non-literate Scheduled Caste men undergoing multiple pressures due to distress situations in rural India are migrating to cycle rickshaw in Delhi. Secondly, due to low wages and lack of work, young men from rural areas are seeking an opportunity to improve their living standards and migrating to cycle rickshaws in Delhi. There is a correlation between the level of distress in source areas of migration and the pattern of migration. Thirdly, most of them are seasonal migrants and almost all of them work for more than 25 days in a month. Finally, most of them are able to improve their living standards, though some of them are still struggling. Therefore, this study calls for enhancing migration as an opportunity for the rural poor for their livelihood and survival.

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