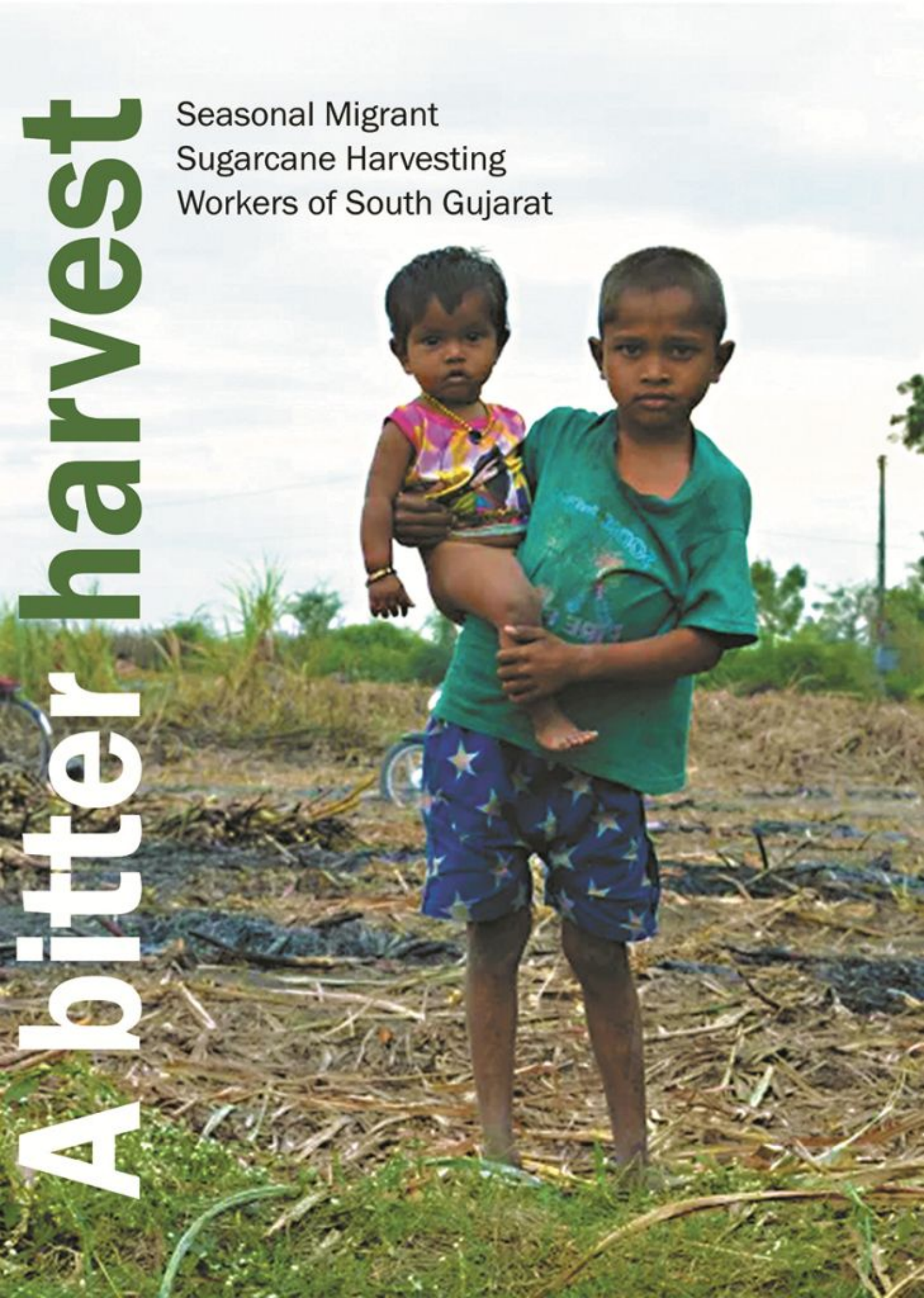
A bitter harvest

Seasonal Migrant
Sugarcane Harvesting
Workers of South Gujarat



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A Bitter Harvest

Seasonal Migrant Sugarcane Harvesting Workers of South Gujarat

Findings of a Research Study

December 2017

Study undertaken by

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PrayasCentre for Labour Research and Action (PCLRA)

Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung

FORWARD

Jan Breman

Sugarcane is the money spinning crop which has much added to the wealth of the main landowners in south Gujarat. The cutting of this crop is known as 'the campaign' and lasts for four to five months in between November and May. A huge labour army is annually recruited already for more than half a century by the management of mills set up and owned by co-operatives to harvest the cane which is cultivated in the fields of the farmers who are members and owners of these enterprises. "The crushing of cane and of labour" was how I wrote up my findings of the anthropological fieldwork in and around Bardoli. When I came back ten years later I reported the same story and the repeat study carried out now shows that nothing has changed in the running of this agro-industry since then. The farmers are happy with their fat profits and the workforce is as brutally exploited as before.

As is clarified, their earnings for a workday-cum-night which easily adds up to ten to fourteen hours is less than the legal minimum wage that the government of the state has fixed. One has to add that this prescribed wage in Gujarat is not only lower than in many other states but is also not enforced by the government. Moreover, as I have argued, the nature of the work regime is industrial and should therefore be settled at a higher rate than for agricultural labour. Nearly all *koytas* are engaged in debt and half of them are still in debt at the end of the campaign. Ongoing indebtedness is thus a major feature of the working class at the bottom of the rural economy and a cause of their immense deprivation. They are charged a usurious interest for the advance paid out to them at the moment of recruitment. What I have called neo-bondage is and remains the predicament for the duration of their working life.

Not only the work regime is horrendous but, as aptly narrated, life in the camps in the fields along the roadside and on the outskirts of villages demonstrates the treatment of these people as a commodity and not as human beings. In my second round of the same investigations I quoted a worker who had to courage to tell a panel of officials: 'even dogs are better off.' Such outbursts of anger are not rare but the mill management does not tolerate any protest or collective action against what should be addressed as a gross violation of human rights. Here I would like to signal that even more than men, girls and women suffer from extreme misery as well as abuse.

The army of harvesters are all migrants who are outsiders in the region where they trek around. Why are they brought from far away? Not because local labour is in short supply but because migrants are cheaper and also more pliable to employ then the land-poor and landless workforce which is abundantly available in all villages around, stuck in deep poverty. Their exploitation takes a different shape. No doubt capitalism is the main social force at work and the chief culprit for driving the accumulation-immiserisation syndrome. But governance and politics have teamed up with the owners and managers of capital to exclude a very substantial part of the population beyond the pale of decent work and a somewhat dignified life. An illustration of this collusion is the official letter which I found back in the office of the Labour Inspectorate in Surat instructing that the sugar mills should not be prosecuted for non-payment of the minimum wage of the harvesting workforce.

Amsterdam, end December 2017.

Acronyms and Abbreviations:

GSFCSFL: Gujarat State Federation of Cooperative Sugar Factories Ltd.

MGNREGP: Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme

MT: Metric Tonne

ST: Scheduled Tribe

Glossary:

Adivasis: the tribal people referred to as Scheduled Tribe in Indian constitution, the group of communities that generally reside in hilly tracts and are not a part of the caste society

Dhaniamas: Rich peasants

Halpatis: A tribe in plains of Gujarat

Halis: Bonded laborer

Kharchi: food expenses given at regular intervals in lieu of wages

Koyta: A sharp edged instrument used for cutting sugarcane. In the present context, also refers to the unit of labour deployed comprising of two persons, normally husband and wife.

Mukadam: labor contractor

Padav: the temporary camp where sugarcane harvesters stay at night in work areas

Tukdi: the unit of work comprising of 15 to 20 koytas that works together and shares the payment equally

Vigha: Unit of land

CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Co-operative sugar factories in south Gujarat region are considered indicators of the successful fructification of the agro-industry concept. The concept in it self is considered an elixir for a range of problems such as poverty and unemployment. It is supposed to clamp down on the resultant distress out-migration of the deprived and marginalised groups of people from rural to urban centres that have perennially plagued the rural landscape. The report delineates the Profile as well as Working and Living Conditions of Sugarcane-harvesters of south Gujarat region.

Based on an empirical study in which both quantitative and qualitative methods were used, the analysis and inferences are derived from four data-sets covering a set of related dimensions pertaining to work-force.

The expansion of agricultural land under sugarcane and establishment of sugar mills on cooperative basis in south Gujarat region, especially in and around Bardoli area has been a replica model of agro-industrial development adopted in neighbouring districts of Maharashtra. According to Gujarat State Federation of Cooperative Sugar Factories Limited (GSFCSFL) there are 24 such sugar mills in the state out of which 16 are in operational state at present in the south Gujarat region.

As per the official information, in all 4.50 lakh farmer families are cultivating sugarcane in a total area of 1.62 lakh hectares within the purview of GSFCSFL's sugar factories. Providing employment to 5.50 lakh individuals including those being employed in factories at various levels of works as well as sugarcane-harvesters. With an annual turnover of 2,000 crores and a daily crushing capacity of around 80,000 metric tonnes, the 24 sugar factories provide an annual income in the range of 250 crore rupees to Central and State Governments.

Harvesting of sugarcane is considered to be the major agricultural operation in the entire agriculture related process taking upto five months.

Despite abundant supply of local agricultural labourers in south Gujarat region, for harvesting operations, sugar factories utilise a vast army of seasonal, predominantly tribal migrant workers from Dhule and Nundarbar districts of western Maharashtra as well as neighbouring predominantly tribal districts of the Dangs as well as Tapi. As per the estimate of present research around 1.5 to 2 lakh migrant harvesters carried out sugarcane-cutting last year.

Around 80 per cent of the harvesters are in the age group of 21 to 45 years, many of them second or third generation harvesters. A huge proportion of them have been toiling as harvesters for a long time. Almost fifty per cent of them are doing this as a livelihood activity for more than 12 years whereas one-fifth of them for more than 17 years. 80 per cent of them are illiterate. 54 per cent of the migrant harvesters have come from Gujarat state whereas 43 per cent of harvesters are from Maharashtra. Almost the entire workforce comprises of tribal in terms of social identity.

Three-fourth of the harvesters belong to landless families whereas another 20 per cent own small or marginal land-holdings and that too of non-irrigated nature. So, in all, agriculture in their native regions is unproductive and hence, less rewarding and at the same time, other employment opportunities are almost non-existent.

So in a nutshell, in terms of social and economic conditions most of the harvesters have an extremely weak and hence, vulnerable status. They can be counted among the most deprived groups of the social-economic order.

The migrant sugarcane harvesters are recruited as teams through the institution of *mukadams* who are essentially brokers. Each unit of the team is termed as *koyta* which consists of two members usually belonging to the same household, i.e. husband and wife, but in some cases in place of wife young son, brother and other relative of male worker too is found to be the co-worker.

The institution of *mukadams* is an extremely crucial cog in the entire system of harvesting operation in terms of its role, location and impact. The institution can be considered as extremely critical in terms of providing a crucial link between capital and labour. As per one informed estimate there may be up to 2500 *mukadams* operating in south Gujarat region supplying harvesters to factories. Almost all *mukadams* are tribals by social identity and were toiling as sugarcane harvesters prior to upgrading themselves in terms of hierarchy and status in the same economic activity. In general, the *mukadams* recruit harvesters from their own village or nearby, neighboring villages, talukas and preferably from own districts.

The working conditions of the sugarcane harvesters are pathetic and oppressive. The harvesters have to toil for long hours without provisions of basic facilities and safety measures. Leaving them prone to hazards of injury and fatigue. The living sites are of equally appalling nature in terms of any human settlement, with total absence of basic amenities as well as infrastructural facilities. The harvesters and their family members are prone to various illnesses. The *koytas* are easy preys to physical injuries and ailments because of an extremely oppressive and strenuous work regime. Flying leaves of stripped canes and fire set to clean the fields add to their miseries. Dysentery, vomiting, cough and cold, fever especially malaria, eye burning and infection, lung infection, injuries caused by *koytas* or knife-edged leaves, pain in various parts of body, itching due to contact of leaves and canes, bites of insects and reptile are commonly found health related problems among harvesters and their family members. Schooling and care taking of their children are other major problems they face during harvesting season.

The payment is made to *koytas* at the end of the season. In lieu of fortnightly payment the system of providing 30 kilos of cereal and allowance of 30 rupees every fortnight was introduced in early eighties, which is still in vogue.

The payment is made by *mukadams* after deducting the amount of advance that includes interest as well as other expenses accrued during working season. Almost 50 per cent of the harvesters could not clear their debt and had a negative net income last year whereas those who received a positive net income still had to ask for an advance to sustain themselves. So in order to survive in non-harvesting period at native places they again have to borrow money from *mukadams* that becomes binding on their part to join the broker's team next season. It is a form of bondage and the relationship between the two is of 'Patronage and Exploitation', as Breman has stated.

Most of them do not have much space in terms of coping mechanisms. The *mukadam* is their only savior who supports them during the non-harvesting period and even on occasions of personal, social or familial problems.

The harvesters are trapped in a vortex of poverty and unemployment at their native places and hence, have become easy prey to inhuman exploitation in harvesting operations. They are maneuvered by the capitalistic machination of factory management through instrumentation of the intermediary institution of *mukadams.*

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The narration in the following text is based on empirical research and concerns a huge labour-force earning their livelihood in an unorganised sector activity in rural area. It focuses on South Gujarat region's most prosperous agricultural zone. The region as such consists of seven districts, namely; the Dangs, Valsad, Navsari, Tapi, Surat, Narmada and Bharuch and is predominantly a tribal zone. As table 1 suggests barring the district of Surat the other six districts have high proportions of tribal populations. Bhil, Chaudhari, Dhodia, Gamit, Halpati, Kukana, Kunbi, Naika, Warli and Tadvi are the major sub-tribes found inhabiting the South Gujarat region. As the following text would reveal this set of information has significant relevance for the subject under deliberation.

Table 1: Proportion of STs Population in South Gujarat Districts

District	Total Population	Tribal Population	Percentage
The Dangs	2,28,291	2,16,073	94.7
Valsad	17,05,676	9,02,794	53.0
Navsari	13,29,672	6,39,659	48.1
Tapi	8,07,022	6,79,320	84.2
Surat	60,81,322	8,56,952	14.1
Narmada	5,90,297	4,81,392	81.6
Bharuch	15,51,019	4,88,194	31.5

Source:http://trti.gujarat.gov.in/district-wise-population; Website of Tribal Development Department, Government of Gujarat.

The study area is a sub-region of South Gujarat and for the purpose of brevity is being named in this narration as 'Bardoli Zone'. Even otherwise this nomenclature is relevant as this prosperous town near Surat city is where the largest sugar mill is located with the region serving as the nerve centre of the sugar industry. Apart from immigration to USA and UK by significant proportion of its populace, cultivation of the cash crop of sugarcane and sugar production have played key roles in prosperity of the town, especially among sections of higher castes of Patidar and Anavil.

The concept of agro-industries is considered an elixir for the set of problems that have been perennially disconcerting rural areas around the country. Poverty and unemployment and the resultant distress out-migration of deprived and marginalised groups of people from rural to urban centres are the major issues. Co-operative sugar factories in south

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The introduction part narrates social and other processes and factors related with entire sugarcane harvesting operation in the study region. Apart from current data-base this part is largely based on pioneering research-work done by Dutch scholar Prof. Jan Breman (1994).

Table 2: List of Sugar Factories	
Sr.	**Name & Address of Sugar Factory**
01	Shree Khedut Sahakari Khand udyog Mandli Ltd., Baben-Bardoli, Dist.Surat
02	Sahakari Khand Udyog Mandal Ltd., Gandevi, Dist.Navsari
03	Shri Madhi Vibhag Khand Udyog Sahakari Mandli Ltd., Madhi, Ta.Bardoli, Surat
04	Shree Chalthan Vibhag Khand Udyog Sahakari Mandli Ltd., Chalthan,Palsana, Dist. Surat
05	Shri Maroli Vibhag Khand Udyog Sahakari Mandli Ltd., Kolasana, Jalalpor, Navsari
06	Shree Valsad Sahakari Khand Udyog Mandli Ltd., Parnera-Pardi, Dist.Valsad
07	Shree Sayan Vibhag Sahakari Khand Udyog Mandli Ltd., Sayan, Ta.Olpad, Surat
08	Shree Mahuva Pradesh Sahakari Khand Udyog Mandli Ltd., Bamania, Mahuva, Dist. Surat
09	Shree Ukai Pradesh Sahakari Khand Udyog Mandli Ltd., Khushalpura, Ta. Vyara, Dist. Tapi
10	Shree Ganesh Khand Udyog Sahakari Mandli Ltd., Vataria, Ta. Valia, Bharuch
11	Shree Kamrej Vibhag Sahakari Khand Udyog Mandli Ltd., Navi Pardi, Ta. Kamrej, Dist. Surat
12	Shree Khedut Sahakari Khand Udyog Mandli Ltd., Pandvai, Hansot, dist.Bharuch
13	Shree Narmada Khand Udyog Sahakari Mandli Ltd., Dharikheda, Valod, Narmada
14	Coper Co-operative Sugar Ltd.,Dadaria, Ta.Valod, Dist. Tapi.
15	Vadodara District Co-op. Sugarcane Growers Union Ltd., Gandhara, Karjan, Dist. Vadodara
16	Shree Mandvi Vibhag Sahakari Khand Udyog Mandli Ltd., Vadod, Mandvi, Surat.
17	Shree Kantha Vibhag Sahakari Khand Udyog Mandli Ltd., Saras, Ta. Olpad, Surat.
18	Shree Bileshwar Khedut Sahakari Khand Udyog Mandli Ltd., Kodinar, Junagadh
19	Shree Talala Taluka Sahakari Khand Udyog Mandli Ltd., Talala, Junagadh
20	Kaveri Vibhag Sahakari Khand Udyog Mandli Ltd., Chikhali, Navsari.
21	Shree Damanganga Sahakari Khand Udyog Mandli Ltd., Bhilad, Umargam, Valsad
22	Shree Mahi Panchamahal Sahakari Khand Udyog Mandli Ltd., Godhara.
23	Shree Ukai Asargrast Sahakari Khand Udyog Mandli Ltd., Gunsada, Songadh, Tapi
Source: http://gujsugarfed.com/html/sugar-factory-list.html. Website of Gujarat State Federation of Cooperative Sugar factories Ltd., accessed on 30 November 2017.	

Gujarat region indicate successful fructification of the concept as well as the ideology of cooperative movements which was being professed and preached widely after independence as a part of the nation building project.

Most of the south Gujarat region, especially of and around the Bardoli zone, has always been considered as an exceptionally prosperous agricultural bloc primarily because of its fertile black soil. Prior to being bestowed upon by irrigation facilities by the dams of Kakrapar and Ukai millet, cotton, groundnuts, rice and lentils were the main

Table 3: Details regarding Crushing capacities of South Gujarat Sugar factories

Gujarat Rajya Sahakari Khand Udyog Sangh Ltd., Gandhinagar.

Statement showing Cane crushed (MT), Sugar Produced (bag/Qtls.), Net Molasses Produced (MT) for the Season 2016-17 as per RT 80

Sr No.	Factory	Installed Capacity TCD	Date of start of season	Date of closure of season	Qty. of Cane Crushed (MT)	Qty. of Net Sugar Produced (bags/Qtls)	Recovery % Cane	Pol % Cane	Fibre % Cane	Hrs.Lost lost % available Hrs.	Working Hours	Net Molasses Produced (MT)	Molasses % Cane
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)	(14)
	SOUTH GUJARAT												
01	Bardoli	10000	I- 05.11.16 II-07.11.16	I- 27.03.17 II-27.03.17	1479985	1679050	11.345	13.369	12.77	7.385	I- 3186-55 II-3082-55	72960	4.930
02	Gandevi	5000	07.11.16	26.03.17	843237	1026889	12.178	13.828	13.18	3.30	3238-45	35329	4.190
03	Madhi	7000	I- 08.11.16 II-05.11.16	I- 18.02.17 II-22.02.17	765702	812063	10.61	12.398	13.11	3.124	I-2347-40 II-2567-40	36239	4.73
04	Chaldhan	5000	I- 05.11.16 II-09.11.16	I-18.03.17 II-18.03.17	687308	755729	11.00	13.02	13.22	5.76	I-3046-00 II-2908-00	31685	4.61
05	Maroli	2500	09.11.16	13.02.17	93286	79700	08.54	10.73	13.36	59.47	936-10	5715	6.13
06	Valsad	5000	11.11.16	02.02.17	125674	116527	9.272	11.174	12.502	29.219	(416-30)	6498	5.17
07	Sayan	5000	I-02.11.16 II-02.11.16	I-17.03.17 II-17.03.17	743616	804595	10.82	13.00	13.86	I-5.56 II-6.67	I-3056-00 II-3022-10	33606	4.52
08	Mahuva	3500	I- 05.11.16 II-07.11.16	I- 24.02.17 II-27.02.17	459019	485642	10.580	12.391	13.442	I-3.70 II-1.88	I-2575-15 II-2625-50	21926	4.777
09	Ganesh	4000	03.11.16	08.03.17	518604	511088	9.86	11.938	13.999	4.315	2883-00	25348	4.89
10	Kamrej	2500	05.11.16	28.02.17	322302	342007	10.611	12.74	12.64	5.74	2777-45	15196	4.715
11	Coper	2500	07.11.16	09.02.17	254936	253230	9.93	11.88	13.63	7.14	2269-42	12809	5.03
12	Pandvai	2500	05.11.16	23.03.17	502988	514473	10.23	12.08	14.80	7.95	3055-25	26445	5.26
13	Narmada	2500	05.11.16	09.03.17	567468	572122	10.08	12.20	13.01	0.85	2942-45	31672	5.58
14	Vadodara	2500	05.11.16	12.02.17	249366	200491	8.040	10.257	14.09	10.761	2123-00	14029	5.626
15	Kantha	2500	28.10.16	19.02.17	269127	267747	9.95	12.15	13.79	10.57	2448-00	14445	5.37
16	Mandvi	2500	02.11.16	21.02.17	139940	128040	9.150	11.394	14.306	46.51	1428-45	6678	4.472
	Total Gujar	64500			8022558	8549395	10.656					390580	4.868

*Ukai,Kodinar,Talala Sugar Factory was not in operation during the Season 2016-17

Ref.No.: NSK-6/(13)/ 50 /2017 Dt. 05-2017

For Gujarat State Federation of Co-op.Sugar Factories Ltd.,

Managing Director

Copy to :1 The Chairman/Managing Director of all member Co-op.Sugar Factories for information.
2 The Director of Sugar, Dr.Jeevraj Mehta Bhavan, Block No.8, 2nd floor, Gandhinagar
3 The Industries Commissioner, Udyog Bhavan, Sector 11, Gandhinagar.
4. The Joint Industries Commissioner, Udyog Bhavan, Sector 11, Gandhinagar.

crops grown in the region. But since the sixties, especially after construction of Ukai dam, sowing area under sugarcane has expanded rapidly and at the moment a huge swathe of the total agricultural land of Surat, Tapi, Navsari and Valsad districts is growing sugarcane. The tables A1 in appendix delineates cropping pattern in talukas of South Gujarat region indicating that wherever the area under the crop of sugarcane is significantly increased, the area under other crops diminish over the years. The talukas of Bardoli, Choraysi, Kamrej, Mahuva, Mandvi, Mangrol, Olpad, Palsana and Valod are clearly indicating this pattern.

The expansion of agricultural land under sugarcane and establishment of sugar mills on cooperative basis in south Gujarat has been a replica model of agro-industrial development adopted in neighbouring districts of Maharashtra. In neighbouring state mainly middle and large farmers belonging to dominant higher and intermediate castes have imposed or reaffirmed their political, social and economic hegemony and clout through the instrument of sugar cooperatives. The ideal and concept of cooperative which was being promulgated as systemic mechanism for elevating economic and social status of poor and deprived masses has been manipulated by dominant groups; both in the forms of castes and classes, to bolster their stranglehold over social order.

Harvesting of sugarcane is considered to be the major agricultural operation in the entire agriculture related process of prosperous South Gujarat region. It involves a highly intensive and gargantuan scale of harvesting. The entire process takes up a period of roughly five months –beginning at the end of November lasting till the middle of May. The one specific characteristic of the labourers who harvest sugarcanes during this stretch of period every year is that almost all of them do not belong to the agriculturally prosperous area, the central agricultural zone where sugarcane is cultivated and are migrants in nature (Breman, 1994). This huge migrant labour-force of sugarcane-harvesters is employed and utilized by cooperative sugar factories located in south Gujarat region. According to Gujarat State Federation of Cooperative Sugar Factories Limited (GSFCSFL) there are 23 such sugar mills in the state (see table 2) out of which 16are in operational state at present in the study-region(table 3).

As per the official information retrieve from

GSFCSFL's website, in all 4.50 lakh farmer families are cultivating sugarcanes in their farms, sowing sugarcanes in a total area of 1.62 lakh hectares within the purview of GSFCSFL's 23 sugar factories. These member factories provide employment to 5.50 lakh individuals that include those being employed in factories at various levels of works as well as sugarcane-harvesters. The annual turnover covering all members is rupees 2,000 crores with a daily crushing capacity of around 80,000 metric tonnes. The 23 sugar factories provide an annual income in the range of 250 crores rupees to Central and State Governments. The GSFCSF also takes up philanthropic activities such as running schools and hospitals.

What is unstated in the official website of the strong Federation is the political clout it enjoys in the power corridors of Governments at both the levels; state and central irrespective of political parties present. This drives political leaders of all parties to find seats in managing board of the federation in order to have steering power over the social order of the sugarcane growing zones as well as political economy of sugar production. And as studies of Breman and PRAYAS have uncovered and the present research too also elucidate, the state has never paid serious attention towards the pathetic working and living conditions and inhuman state of existence of sugarcane harvesters.

As table 3 shows the sugarcane crushed by the 16 factories during the year 2016-2017, starting from first week of November, 2016 and ending in the first week of May 2017 amounted to 80,22,558 MT which produced 85,49,395 quintals of sugar. With wages being paid to harvesters amounting to an approximate 190 crores.

Likewise Maharashtra, the South Gujarat region too has seen the big farmers of dominant especially Patidar and Anavil Brahmin castes take the lead in not only establishing sugar cooperatives but even other agricultural cooperative societies such as cotton, bananas and vegetables. Similarly, tribes such as Chaudhari and Dhodia who top tribal hierarchical order have taken advantage of the prevalent situation. The mentioned social groups have become dominant and hegemonic forces in each sphere of the social, economic and political life and have established a firm stranglehold over all kinds of institutions in districts of Surat, Tapi, Navsari as well as Valsad of south Gujarat region.

So in a nutshell, vast expanse of agricultural land under sugarcane cultivation and resultant increasing number of sugar cooperative mills have not only enhanced the affluence of these dominant groups but as a result of that their social status has been elevated and they have become politically dominating forces in mainstream politics not only in South Gujarat but in the entire state. We leave this deliberation here and shift to the crucial subject which this research proposal primarily tries to address; the sugarcane harvesters.

THE RESEARCH PROBLEM AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

As earlier studies reveal (Breman, 1994; Prayas, 2015) despite an abundant supply of local agricultural labour in south Gujarat region for harvesting operation sugar factories utilise vast armies of seasonal migrant workers from western Maharashtra as well as neighbouring areas, predominantly tribal districts of the Dangs as well as Tapi. The first sugar factory was established in Bardoli in 1955 and with foresight and slyness the kunbi patidars of the region had opted to recruit labourers from Maharashtra state who were accustomed to sugarcane harvesting. As a matter of fact, they reproduced the entire model of sugar production of Maharashtra; from organizational structure to recruitment. So the first manager of sugar mill was appointed from Maharashtra who was familiar with intricacies of labour recruitment and hence, could cope dexterously with seasonal migrant workers during various phases of harvesting operation.

Harvesters are not recruited directly by the factories but through institution of brokers or *mukadams* who employ workers from catchment areas of seasonal migrant labourers. Each factory has a specific group of brokers who recruit workers each season. In the month of July the factories send their recruitment agents to headquarters of catchment zones, who in turn contact brokers who have their teams of workers or *koytas,* as the workers are known. After assessing capacity and credibility of the *mukadams,* official contracts are signed between factory and broker and the latter is handed over an advance by the former to ensure his team/s of *koytas.* The amount of this advance is being worked out on the basis of number of harvesters the *mukadam* commands.

The *mukadams* usually employ workers from their own areas and villages. They opt to hire persons who are known to them, often relatives, neighbours, and members of their own community, tribe or social group. The migrant labourers belong to zones located in rain-shadow part; the land of their areas is of poor quality and has rain-fed agriculture with little or no irrigation facilities. They come from some of the poorest districts of tribal belt of Maharashtra and Gujarat that lack other employment opportunities.

The migrant sugarcane harvesters are recruited as teams; each unit of the team is termed as *koyta.* As has mentioned earlier, each unit is consisting of two

members usually belong to the same household.

The brokers are of two types: Ones who hire harvesters-teams with bullock-carts and those who employ them without carts. The members of the first team have to work not only as cane -cutters but also ferry the cut sugarcanes in the carts to factories.

As has been mentioned earlier working and living conditions of sugarcane harvesters or sugarcane-cutters have been studied more than once before, of which research carried by Dutch scholar Prof. Jan Breman was considered as pioneering as well as comprehensive. On the basis of his research *Lok Adhikar Sangh,* a human rights watchdog organization had filed a petition in Gujarat High Court for implementation and realization of legal rights of the sugarcane workers. Thereafter few other minor researches too have been carried. Breman's research was done almost three decades ago and at that time numbers of sugar mills were few.

In the present context, the political economy is experiencing remarkable changes in the wake of new economic policy, being introduced in early nineties of the last century. The globalization project especially has had a tumultuous impact on labour in almost every sector as various studies have suggested. The proposed research on Sugarcane harvesters thus on one hand, intends to re-examine or re-visit conditions of sugarcane-cutters after a prolonged period after the groundbreaking study by Breman which was carried out more than three decades ago. And on the other hand, the study will make an effort to investigate conditions of one of the major section of the labour-force earning livelihood in unorganised sector of rural economy especially in the circumstances emerging due to neo-liberal policy structure.

So this is an attempt of revisiting the conditions of sugarcane harvesters in the present backdrop or context of neo-liberalization or globalization project. In terms of nature and kind of the endeavour undertaken it is an 'Action Research'. However, in terms of academic pursuit as well as social concern it is a pursuit in line of capturing essential information on 'Working People' or 'Labouring people', encapsulating both industrial and non-industrial sub-sectors, especially of the unorganised sector. It is observed that of late, the mentioned segments are being neglected by government agencies as well as academic world.

As has been mentioned earlier according to official data of 'Gujarat State Federation of Co-op. Sugar factories Ltd.' there are 23 co-op. sugar mills in Gujarat, out of which 19 are located in South Gujarat region and of which 16 are operational. In all 34 sugar mills are registered in the state, which means 11 are run on a private basis. The study has covered 16 cooperative mills only.

The major purposes of the proposed study are to examine working and living conditions of the sugarcane-harvesters working in sugarcane fields of south Gujarat region. The research will address the following questions and aspects pertaining to sugarcane harvesters:

- The demographic and socio-economic profile of the sugarcane harvesters.
- The wage-structure, methods of their determination as well as payment. Total income of workers – procedural and real.
- System of Advances involving all the actors: Factory, Factory agent, broker or *mukadam* and harvesters or *koytas.*
- Mode and processes of recruitment. Details and issues pertaining to movement of labour from places of origins to various sites of work.

- Working and living conditions of workers at the places of destination.
- Indebtedness and other miseries, problems encountered by the harvesters and coping mechanism they have at hand, if any.
- Long term and short term impact on the families of migrant workers in terms of social and economic status as well as other indicators such as health, literacy etc.
- Is seasonal migration and harvesting work leading to reduction in poverty or perpetuating and intensifying it and even transferring it in inter-generational way? Is it reinforcing the vicious circle of poverty-helplessness-illiteracy-indebtedness-newer forms of bondage?
- Socio-economic profile of *mukadams* or brokers.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Given the scope of the enquiry, efforts are being made to carry out the research in an interdisciplinary manner drawing methodological insights from mainly the disciplines of sociology and economics. In order to gain an in-depth understanding of the various facets of the lives of sugarcane harvesters both quantitative as well as qualitative methods are deployed:

SURVEY

As per one guesstimate every year around 1,75,000 seasonal migrant workers come to rural areas of south Gujarat region for harvesting sugarcanes. They move in teams lead by brokers or *mukadams.* There are about 2,000 *mukadams* leading around 5000 such teams, which mean some of them are leading more than one team. As per one authentic estimate each team is consists of 15 *koytas* on an average, i.e. 30 grown-up workers. Taking the time frame of the research into consideration it is considered prudent and also feasible to cover 4 per cent of the workers, i.e. around 7,300 workers. Arithmetic suggests that in order to draw a sample of 7,300 sugarcane-harvesters, we have to draw a sample of 13 per cent from the list of 2,000 brokers. So in all, harvesters' teams of around 240 *mukadams* are covered under the survey component.

So after procuring a comprehensive list of *mukadams,* the sample of 240 brokers was drawn by using random sampling method. And then the primary and essential information of their teams' members, i.e. of harvesters were sought in survey part of research. This set of information is gathered from two locations: One, the source villages, the native places of harvesters, and second, the camp-sites, the destination villages where the harvesters migrate and camp to harvest sugarcanes. Apart from the above exercise, around 250 *koytas* are interviewed by applying tools of interview schedule. This group of workers were contacted through the snow-ball method.

These three sets of primary information; one, collected at source villages, the second, at camp-sites and third, gathered through interview schedule are more or less quantitative in nature, especially the former two sets of details which are gathered through survey method which have been utilized in the report as foundational information. But in order to get in-depth idea with regard to various dimensions on lives of sugarcane harvesters in particular and related other processes in general more qualitative information is needed. And for that purpose the instrument of interview schedule was implemented through which a third set of information was sought. Where questions seeking more profound and intensive details pertaining to harvesters' conditions as well as their views and perceptions on several issues were added. And to gather and add some more qualitative information methods of case study and long interview are

deployed. A word or two are required on these methods.

CASE STUDIES AND LONG INTERVIEWS

Structured questionnaires cannot provide us data on more than some of the measurable variables. In order to overcome this, few detailed representative case-studies and long interviews were conducted so as to enable the study catch a wide range of otherwise undetectable aspects and in-depth dimension/s of worker's life as well as nuances pertaining to their ways of perceiving their work and life.

Along with harvesters, basic information pertaining to *mukadams* or brokers was also sought through enumeration. And long interview was also held with few of them to get inner and comprehensive ideas on various dimensions related with the harvesting operation.

SECONDARY DATA SOURCE

All available secondary data sources such as brochures, reports and other records of various associations of different stake-holders as well as other published and printed studies, magazines and newspapers articles and news-items were examined carefully and extensively. This facilitates drawing of relevant data from them and their systematic analysis.

Prior to engaging with data-analysis and inferences thereon it is pertinent to provide information in brief on the data sets, which are being utilized:

1. In the first data set representative sugarcane harvesters are enumerated at their native places or source villages. The data covered 494 sugarcane *koytas* who did harvesting-work last season at different places. The major purpose to collect this set of information is to get idea on the advance received, the wages accumulated, and the net balance of amount they actually got at the end of the season.
2. The information of the second data set was gathered from the labour camps or *padavs* where workers live during the harvesting season. Each *padav* may comprise of one or more teams or *tukdis*. The data set noted mainly the advance received by *koytas* while joining teams of *mukadams*, as well as the native places of both; *koytas* and *mukadams*. In all 6596 representative harvesters and 388 *mukadams* (covering 14 factories) who are gathered at 432 camp sites in harvesting period are enumerated.
3. In the third data set a total of 1874 *mukadams* have been listed. Of these 1794 *mukadams* were engaged by the 16 cooperative factories functional in South Gujarat in the 2016-17 season. The rest supplied workers to factories in Maharashtra and jaggary manufacturing units. This data set contains information on their native talukas, number of teams they have and the names of sugar factories for which they are working.
4. The fourth data set provides information gathered through survey exercise by using instruments of interview schedule and mix of qualitative modes of long interview and case study.

The narration would use all four sets of details as and when necessary to illuminate and illustrate working and living life of sugarcane-harvesters.

Collecting quantitative data and qualitative information has taken between 4 to 5 months. To trace, track and contact workers who are spread out in the rural areas of south Gujarat region and to talk to them after their long hours of tiresome work has turned out to be a very time-consuming and arduous task. The final stage of processing of the data and information, and writing of the report has taken another three months. Thus a total time of approximately ten months was taken for accomplishing the present research.

APPENDIX						
Table A.1: Periodical Change in Cropping Pattern of South GujaratTalukas						
Taluka	1995-96 (Crop)					
	Sugarcane	Paddy	Jowar	Bajra	Maize	Wheat
Bardoli	22127	7009	360	14	60	0
Chauryasi	8006	2378	5525	91	0	28
Kamrej	25616	1662	13	8	18	6
Mahuva	12025	7142	73	0	14	2
Mandvi	12463	7759	10102	4	34	39
Mangrol	12378	8495	14477	62	832	128
Nizar	2259	1006	2453	66	629	792
Olpad	21861	11238	434	20	6	330
Palsana	12912	2141	20	0	0	3
Songadh	2791	14914	12429	23	98	501
Uchchhal	476	4816	1878	0	0	48
Umarpada	0	0	0	0	0	0
Valod	9630	4763	537	0	0	1
Vyara	9583	18148	14123	12	29	93
Surat	0	0	0	0	0	0
	2000-01 (Crop)					
Bardoli	10860	19504	15509	256	21	46
Chauryasi	10380	3315	60	3	0	13
Kamrej	28145	312	46	0	130	0
Mahuva	543	6	79	0	14	16
Mandvi	16799	8052	9498	13	25	0
Mangrol	22246	3059	6501	25	115	24
Nizar	740	1478	5478	63	0	512
Olpad	20099	12021	320	707	35	169
Palsana	20200	6726	1896	12	0	213
Songadh	1	7678	29635	3	0	0
Uchchhal	179	3038	4265	0	0	61
Umarpada	91	3026	4525	451	67	43
Valod	12356	10089	598	0	141	51
Vyara	10679	4424	724	15	10	0
Surat	7006	0	768	0	123	0

Continue table _____

Taluka	2005-06 (Crop)					
	Sugarcane	Paddy	Jowar	Bajra	Maize	Wheat
Bardoli	5649	4640	0	0	0	0
Chauryasi	4759	1274	906	13	0	13
Kamrej	26009	798	0	33	3	2
Mahuva	15202	8689	788	118	35	118
Mandvi	23587	7716	7054	3	14	3
Mangrol	23587	4950	5906	204	31	204
Nizar	2447	854	5316	19	10	234
Olpad	27420	9799	81	197	10	197
Palsana	10221	2520	103	0	0	0
Songadh	2077	16054	12338	284	0	263
Uchchhal	641	876	4136	0	0	146
Umarpada	1	14730	102	1	3	1
Valod	3810	10927	282	0	0	6
Vyara	9338	23535	9980	18	0	1411
Surat	1414	617	2336	10	0	0
	2010-11 (Crop)					
Bardoli	18399	3374	12	76	6	286
Chauryasi	2040	78	104	26	0	16
Kamrej	20477	149	34	0	27	58
Mahuva	13702	8356	639	47	7	351
Mandvi	21879	3337	5271	14	103	615
Mangrol	14960	4824	3647	54	115	1054
Nizar	1894	2833	5152	0	1008	558
Olpad	23573	7509	124	108	70	281
Palsana	10486	1539	29	8	0	24
Songadh	6939	15910	8372	0	0	3055
Uchchhal	2175	3843	1873	0	229	764
Umarpada	19	1	256	78	0	216
Valod	11443	3397	1174	0	111	392
Vyara	13885	17501	7690	0	195	638
Surat	1009	2151	2644	107	0	64

(**Source**: Agriculture census, www.agcensus.dacnet.nic.in)

CHAPTER 2

PROFILE OF HARVESTORS

A study conducted by PRAYAS indicates that every year around 1,25,000 migrant labourers, mainly tribals and land-poor in terms of social-economic identities move in to the prosperous sugarcane block of Bardoli, Gujarat for harvesting operations. They are primarily from the districts of Dhule and Nandurbar of neighbouring Maharashtra state as well as neighbouring districts of the Dangs and Tapi in Gujarat (PRAYAS, 2015). The guesstimate of present research states that around 1.5 to 2 lakhs migrant harvesters carried out sugarcane-cutting last year. As has been mentioned in the 'Introduction' by citing the study by Breman (1994) as well as research conducted by PRAYAS, most of the migrant workers move with nuclear family-units that include wife-husband and their small children and usually each unit of the sugarcane harvesters, known as *koyta* consists of a male harvester and his wife or his other relative. They move from their native places to the camp-sites or destination villages in teams. The first data-set of source villages estimates that an average number of *koytas* per every team is 18.8 whereas that of camp-sites' data-set derives this figure at 15.2. The qualitative information from the data-set IV of the present research indicates that each team consists of 20 *koytas.* So taking in to account all three data-sets, it can be deduced that on an average each team is made of 15 to 20 *koytas.*

Before moving on to deciphering the data with regard to data sets of present research one major limitation pertaining to survey part of data-set IV needs specific mention. The main respondents for seeking information in this research were *koytas.* And even though the unit usually consists of a female and male, a married pair, all the respondents were male members of the units. This drawback is not limited to this study in particular but is a common problem of our patriarchal social order. However, taking into account that most of the *koytas* in general are constituted of wife and husband teams, the proportions of females and males are almost equal among the harvesters. The second data set of campsites that has enumerated 432 teams of *koytas* suggests that the sex ratio among sugarcane-harvesters comes to around 928 females per 1000 male workers. The study conducted by Prayas observed an identical sex-ratio (PRAYAS, 2015).

AGE GROUP

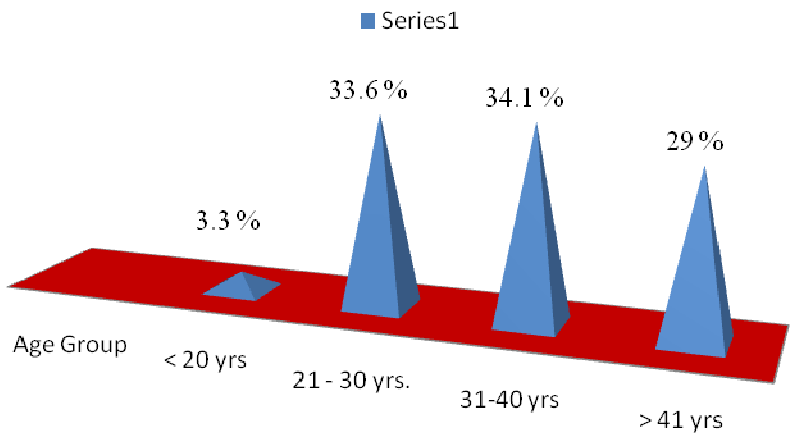
The survey part of the fourth data set clearly suggests that among the harvesters the proportion of two age-groups; one, too young, i.e. those below 20 years of age and two, too old, i.e. of more than 50 years of age, is very small (see chart 2.1). More than two-third of the workers are in the age group of 21-40 years. Probing further, statistical information reveals that more than 50 per cent of them are in the age group of 21-35 years whereas around 30 per cent are in the group of 36-45 years.

All the charts in the report are based on survey part of data-set IV.

The first data-set of source villages too confirms the pattern that emerges from the chart 2.1. It further indicates that slightly two-fifth of them are very young, i.e. below 30 years of age (see table 2.1). The second data-set of camp-sites which is larger in terms of coverage suggests a somewhat different pattern than the preceding charts. Though it too shows a very high proportion of young harvesters, it shows further that the proportion is very high in the youngest group of less than 25 years of age, i.e. two–fifth of total harvesters are in this age-group (see table 2.2). But all the three data-sets confirm that percentages of middle age workers, i.e. harvesters above the age of 45 years, are quite small. And this observable fact applies to all the livelihood activities that can be covered under the umbrella of unorganised sector as a series of studies show (Desai. K., 1994, Desai, K., 2013). Breman who has done extensive work on such informal sector livelihood activities has rightly observed that "....The labour process is so exhausting that very few are able to perform adequately after middle age" (Breman, 1996, p. 61).

All the data-sets even though do not show any presence of child-worker (below the age of 14 or even 18 years) attention should be drawn to the fact that a very large section had been engaged with one or the other livelihood activity since they were children. The qualitative part of the data-set IV has sharply brought

Chart 2.1: Age -group of harvesters



Source: Derived from survey part of Data-set IV.

Table 2.2: Age –group of the Harvesters

Age-group	Number	Per cent
18 - 20	1194	18.1
21-25	1551	23.5
26-30	1339	20.3
31-35	807	12.2
36-40	745	11.3
41-45	482	7.3
46-50	331	5.0
51 and above	147	2.2
Total	**6596**	**100.0**

Source: Derived from the Field data-set II of camp-sites.

Table 2.3: Age-group wise no. of years of working (In Percentage)

Years of Working / Age group	<5*	6-10	11-15	16-20	21 <	TOTAL
20 years and less	65.5	34.5	-	-	-	100.0
21-25 years	39.5	47.4	7.7	5.4		100.0
26-30 years	17.1	41.5	36.6	4.8		100.0
31-35 years	9.3	14.0	50.8	25.9		100.0
36-45 years	7.5	11.9	38.9	28.4	13.4	100.0
46 years and more	--------	10.3	17.8	30.8	41.1	100.0

Source: Derived from the field data-set IV.
*** Indicate years of working.**

out this piece of evidence. Let us cite a few case-studies to understate the point.

- Shiva Sonvani is a native of a village in Sakri taluka of Dhule district, state Maharashtra. This 52 year old harvester hailing from a landless family has never stepped into a school due to the extremely weak economic status of his parents. He does not remember the exact age at which he started working but he got engaged with livelihood activity beginning as a small child helping his parents by adding into the family's income. He recollected that poverty was so severe at times that often they could not feed themselves twice a day and sometimes had to remain hungry for a day or two. He started laboring-work of plucking vegetables, watering crops, spraying pesticides, sowing and reaping crops; whatever casual labor he could find at a tender age. As his family was (and still the status has not improved much) in a wretched state where unless all the members worked they could not have survived.

- Bhoidas is 25 years old and belongs to Dudhlibel village of Sagbara taluka of Narmada district, Gujarat state. He is a second generation sugarcane harvester. His village is located in hilly terrain and even though the family owns 2 vigha - around 4700 square meters or slightly more than 1 acre - of land due to hilly terrain agriculture is un-productive and no other employment opportunity is in sight, not even agricultural labor. He started accompanying his *koyta* parents in harvesting-work when he was a toddler and from the age of 11 years he became a member of *koyta* unit of his father getting half the wage-rate.

Table 2.3 delineates age-group wise number of years of working as sugarcane harvesters. Two significant points can be deduced from the figures. One, irrespective of age-group most harvesters have been in this livelihood option for a very long period. For instance, in the age group of 46 years and above more than 70 per cent of the harvesters have been doing this work for the last 16 years and out of them a large majority of 40 per cent are in this activity for the last 21 years. Similarly, in the age group of 31-35 years more than 75 per cent of harvesters have been working for more than 10 years. Conforming to qualitative details, the quantitative data of the table also indirectly but clearly suggests that a significant proportion of workers are engaged in harvesting operation from childhood, i.e. below 14 years of age. For instance, if nearly 50 per cent of the harvesters in the age group of 21 to 25 years have indicated that they have been working for the last 6 to 10 years then it can be assumed that a section of them had

As per the usual practice of social science writings the pseudonyms are used to protect respondents' identities.

started harvesting-work at an adolescent age.

In the second data set of camp-sites, the census of 432 such temporary make-shift habitats of harvesters has been carried out. Based on that data set the age-group wise distribution of entire population that includes all the *koytas* as well as their family members residing at camp-sites is given in table 2.4. As it clearly indicates huge majority of the population, i.e. 61 percent of those who are living at the camp-sites are comprising of adults, i.e. above 18 years of age whereas 10 percent of the population are at an adolescence age of between 15 to 18 years. On-site observation of the present research reveals that the adolescents participate fully in the labour process. The qualitative portion of the data-set IV has noted more than one such piece of evidence. The following is one such case-study:

- Ramu Thakre who is 30 years of age and is native from Nandurbar taluka of the district with same name (state-Maharashtra) and has been working as a harvester for the last 15 years. He became part of *koyta* team with his father at the age of 15 first and at present his *koyta* unit consists of him and his wife. Not only that but his nuclear family has one more unit of *koyta,* comprising of his 16 years of age daughter Bindu and 14 years of age son Ajay, both working independently of their parents as a *koyta* unit, staying at the same camp-site and harvesting for the same Gandevi sugar factory.

Table 2.4: Age group distribution of populace at camp-sites

Age group	Number	Percentage
Above 18 years	11531	61.2
15-18 years	1903	10.1
7 to 14 years	2123	11.3
0 to 6 years	3263	17.4
Total	**18820**	**100.0**

Source: Derives from field data-set II of camp-sites.

In all, as table 2.4 shows a little more than a quarter of the population comprised of children below 14 years of age at camp-sites and out of them toddlers with less than 6 years of age are the larger group. Based on this data-set it can be calculated that on an average, every team of 15 to 20 *koytas* has five children of school going age of 7 to 14 years and eight children below 6 years.

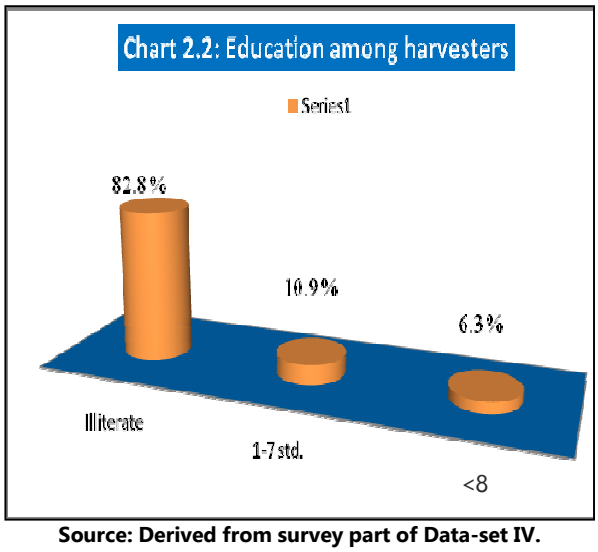
EDUCATION

Taking into account all the members of harvesters' households (of the sample), the earlier study of PRAYAS indicated the literacy rate at 21 % (PRAYAS, 2015). The survey part of the data-set IV of the present study suggests that three-fourth of the

Table 2.5: Education among Sugarcane-harvesters

Education	No.	Percent
Illiterate	269	54.5
Primary (1-4)	105	21.3
Pre-Secondary (5-7)	78	15.8
Secondary (8-10)	40	8.1
Higher Secondary (11-12)	2	0.4
Total	**494**	**100.0**

Source: Derived from the Source data-set I.



Source: Derived from survey part of Data-set IV.

harvesters are illiterate (chart 2.2), and 8 % out of them can read and write to some extent. As the chart suggests a small percentage of workers have studied above intermediate level, i.e. above 7th standard, out of them a tiny 2 per cent could go beyond 10th standard.

The statistical information gathered from source villages (data-set I) indicates the illiteracy level of a lower scale, i.e. around 55 % whereas more than one-third had reported education in the range of 1-7 standard (see table 2.5). Though the data set shows almost an identical percentage of those who have studied above the intermediate level with the data-set IV.

The deliberations in the above sub-section concerning age-group have hinted sharply at a set of reasons for very low level of education which are being reaffirmed by qualitative details. Mainly two factors denied education opportunity to the harvesters. One, a large section of them are second or even third generation of sugarcane harvesters with their own children moving with during harvesting season. Only during non-harvesting period when parent-harvesters return back to their native places do the children attend schools. Secondly, another sizeable proportion of them got engaged with one or the other kind of livelihood activity since childhood due to extremely weak economic status of their families. The following case-study starkly illustrates these points.

- Rambhai Nauri is 48 years old and along with his wife Savitaben has been engaged in harvesting-work for a long time. He belongs to Malegaon taluka of Nashik district, Maharashtra state and lives with his wife and young son along with his 78 year old father. Rambhai is illiterate. He could not study as his mother died when he was a toddler and his father who too was sugarcane-harvester took him along while migrating in harvesting season. As they are landless, during non-harvesting period too his father would toil as a casual labourer, doing whatever labouring work he could find; agricultural or non-agricultural. But even during that period he had to carry Rambhai with him. And Rambhai too started working from the age of 10 years assisting his father by adding to the scant family income.

- So in a nutshell, in most cases of harvesters, in their entire life cycle, schooling or education features only marginally or almost does not have space in terms of their life-priorities. As will be delineated in the following text of this chapter itself almost all of them have extremely weak and vulnerable economic status and belong to lowly placed communities in terms of social hierarchy. Getting their children educated is a luxury for them when mere survival is the core issue.

ORIGINS OF HARVESTERS

The research conducted by PRAYAS in 2015 revealed that out of the total labour force that migrated to harvest sugarcanes in south Gujarat region almost two-third had come from Maharashtra whereas the rest 40 per cent harvesters were natives of Gujarat state (Prayas, 2015).

The data-analysis of the first data-set of the present research that has covered 24 source villages divulges harvesters' places of origin in terms of taluka -district as the table 2.6 illustrates.

The second data-set of camp-sites is broader in terms of coverage pertaining to number of teams and *koytas* as well as number of sugar factories for which

Table 2.6: Places of origin of harvesters

Taluka-district	number	Percent
Sakri, Dhule (M)	318	64.4
Songadh, Tapi (G)	47	9.5
Uchchhal, Tapi (G)	91	18.4
Umarpada, Surat (G)	27	5.5
Sagbara, Narmada (G)	7	1.4
Dediapad, Narmada (G)	4	0.8
Total	**494**	**100.0**

Source: Derives from data-set I of source-villages.

harvesters are working for (see appendices for list of sugar factories and proportions of workers working for each of the mill covered as well as number of teams covered for each of the sugar mill). The mentioned dataset covers 15 factories of the all in south Gujarat region and 432 teams of *koytas* (see table A2 & A3).

Table 2.7 and 2.8 which are based on this huge data-set II that has enumerated 6596 harvesters show that 54 per cent of migrant harvesters have come from Gujarat state whereas 43 per cent of harvesters are from Maharashtra. A small section of them are migrating from Madhya Pradesh. As table 2.7 divulges of all the districts, inclusive of all the three states, the Dangs district of Gujarat are sending largest contingent of around two-fifth of the total migrant harvesters whereas Nandurbar district of Maharashtra is represented by 22 per cent of migrants.

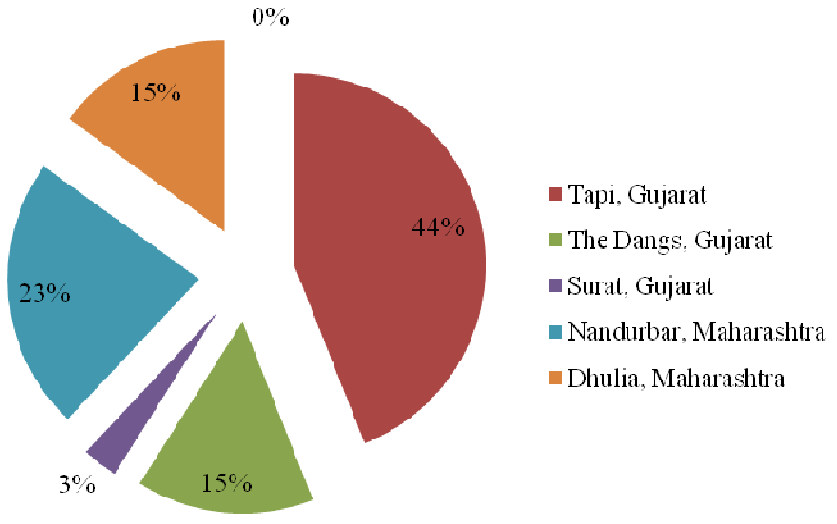
Among all the districts the proportion of harvesters from Navsari district of Gujarat is the lowest in comparative terms, followed by Bharuch of Gujarat and Aurangabad of Maharashtra. Table 2.8 provides taluka wise proportion of harvesters within each district. As it shows the largest contingent of harvesters migrate from Subir taluka of the Dangs district of Gujarat. Ahwa of the Dangs and Sakri taluka of Dhule district, Maharashtra too has significant representation. As has been mentioned in the 'Introduction' most of these districts are predominantly tribal districts and as following sub-section on 'Social Identity' delineates almost entire migrant work force is tribal.

Table 2.7: Native Districts of Harvesters

Native District of harvesters	Number	Percent
Subir, The Dangs (G)	1540	23.3
Ahwa&Vaghai, The Dangs (G)	1006	15.3
Tapi (G)	872	13.2
Surat (G)	038	0.6
Narmada(G)	111	1.7
Bharuch (G)	04	0.1
Navsari (G)	02	---
Sakri, Dhule(M)	904	13.7
Other Talukas of Dhule (M)	199	3.0
Nandurbar (M)	1453	22.0
Jalgaon(M)	110	1.7
Nashik(M)	107	1.6
Aurangabad(M)	012	0.2
Districts of Madhya Pradesh*	238	3.6
TOTAL	**6596**	**100.0**

Source: Derived from data-set II of Camp-sites.
*Khargao and Badvani are the two districts of Madhya Pradesh from where harvesters migrate.

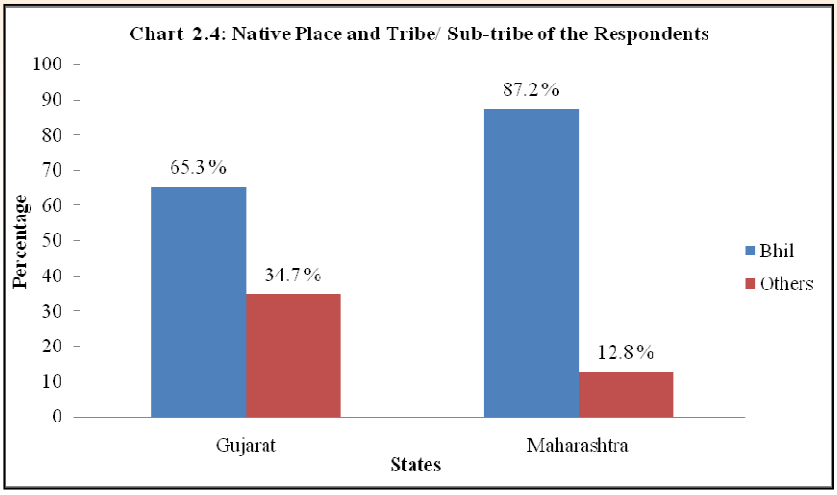
Chart 2.3: Native Places of the Harvesters



Source: Derived from survey part of Data-set IV.

Table 2.8: Native Talukas of Harvesters		
Name of Taluka	**Number**	**Percent**
SAKRI, DHULE (M)	904	13.7
SIRPUR,DHULE (M)	92	1.4
DHULE,DHULE (M)	82	1.2
SINDHKHEDA,DHULE(M)	25	0.4
NUNDARBAR,NUNDARBAR (M)	311	4.7
SHAHADA,NUNDARBAR (M)	97	1.5
DHADGAO,NUNDARBAR (M)	264	4.0
TALODA, NUNDARBAR (M)	340	5.2
AKALKUVA,NUNDARBAR (M)	299	4.5
NAVAPUR, NUNDARBAR (M)	142	2.2
PACHORA,JALGAON (M)	8	0.1
CHOPADAJALGOAON (M)	13	0.2
PARODA,JALGAON (M)	34	0.5
CHALISGAON, JALGAON (M)	10	0.2
EVAL,JALGAON (M)	15	0.2
NADGAV,NASIK (M)	3	0.0
SATANA,NASIK(M)	83	1.3
KADVAN,NASIK (M)	20	0.3
VAIJAPUR,AURANGABAD (M)	12	0.2
SENDHVA,BADVANI (MADHYA PRADESH)	139	2.1
RAJPUR, BADVANI (MADHYA PRADESH)	3	0.0
DIKRA, BADVANI (MADHYA PRADESH)	11	0.2
BHAGVANPUR, KHARGAON, (MADHYA PRADESH)	47	0.7
SONGADH TAPI (G)	406	6.2
UCHCHHAL TAPI (G)	284	4.3
KUKARMUNDAJAPI (G)	3	0.0
VYARA TAPI (G)	48	0.7
NIZARJAPI (G)	85	1.3
DOLVAN, TAPI (G)	46	0.7
UMARPADA,SURAT (G)	13	0.2
BARDOLI, SURAT (G)	04	0.1
SURAT (G)	4	0.1
VALOD,SURAT (G)	5	0.1
MAHUVA,SURAT (G)	12	0.2
MANDVI,SURAT (G)	4	0.1
SAGBARA,NARMADA (G)	102	1.5
DEDIAPADA,NARMADA (G)	9	0.1
NETRANG,BHARUCH (G)	4	0.1
VANSDA,NAVSARI (G)	2	0.0
SUBIR,THE DANGS (G)	1540	23.3
AHWA,THE DANGS (G)	924	14.0
VAGHAIJHE DANGS (G)	82	1.2
VARLA,BADWANI (MP)	33	0.5
AMALNERJALGAON (M)	4	0.1
ERONDOL,JALGAON (M)	15	0.2
JALGAON,JALGAON (M)	11	0.2
KHARGAO,KHARGAO (MP)	4	0.1
GARVA,BADVANI (MP)	1	0.0
NASIK,NASIK (M)	1	0.0
Total	**6596**	**100.0**
Source: Derives from Data-set II of Camp-sites.		

The survey part of data- set IV too confirms more or less with the findings of the data sets I and II. It suggests that in terms of regional background 6 out of every 10 harvesters are from Gujarat whereas the rest are from Maharashtra state. As is obvious that the proportions in terms of representation of harvesters from different districts vary in different data sets and hence, from the perspective of study purpose it is essential to clarify the logic for having more than one data set. First of all, the core idea and purpose of the present research is not to reach at exact estimate of the migrant harvesters considering the total population of them is huge, i.e. around 1.75 lakh to 2 lakh. The idea of having more than one data set is that by taking them together one may get a clearer idea of the larger picture in terms of major characteristics of the sugarcane-harvesters.



Source: Derived from survey part of Data-set IV.

SOCIAL IDENTITY AND ECONOMIC STATUS

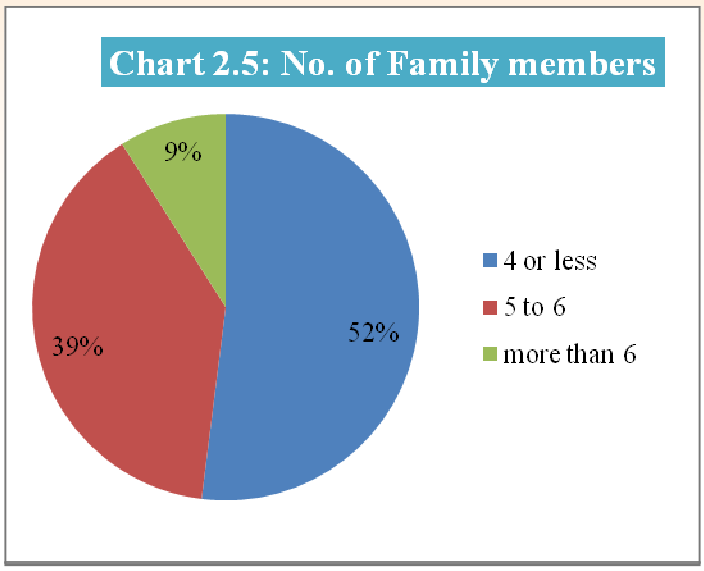
Quantitative information of all the data sets show that almost all the harvesters are adivasis or tribal in terms of social background. Disaggregating further in terms of sub-tribes data-set IV divulges that the Bhil sub-tribe has a huge majority among them with 7 out of every 10 harvesters belong to the sub-tribe. As chart 2.4 indicates amongst the migrant harvesters of Maharashtra the proportion of Bhils is higher than Gujarat in comparative terms. Kokana, Kotvadia, Vasava, Kathud, Gamit, Padvi, More, Thakre, Rawat, Vadvi are other sub-tribes found among them. Detailing further Kokani/Kokana, Kotvadia, Vasava, Kathud, Gamit and More sub-tribes are mainly natives of Gujarat whereas Thakre, Rawat and Vadvi belong to Maharashtra. Kokani migrants are inhabitants of the Dangs whereas Kotvadia, Vasava, Kathud, Gamit and More mainly belong to Tapi district. Kotvadia and Vasava are found in Surat district also. Bhils are inhabitants of both Tapi and the Dangs. In case of Maharashtra, harvesters belonging to Thakre, Rawat and Padvi sub-tribes migrating from Nandurbar district whereas among Bhils both the districts, Nandurbar and Dhule have almost equal representation.

Interestingly, 70 per cent of adivasi harvesters consider themselves as Hindu in terms of religious identity whereas another 18 per cent of them identifying as Christian. Only 3 per cent of them reported that they are adivasis and do not follow any religion. Though the issue is complex and sociologically quite vital, however it is beyond the purview of the present narration to deliberate on it and demands separate and intense churning. However, a note should be made of nature of religious inclination among tribal harvesters. The phenomenon of increasing proselytisation towards Christianity among tribals of Gujarat can be deciphered. The survey part of data-set IV clearly suggests a significant proportion of Christian harvesters (18 %). Let us refer to a case study pertaining to this trend.

- 37 year old Mahesh Kathud is a native of Amalgundi village of Songadh taluka of Tapi district and from the Kotvadia sub-tribe. Mahesh started work as a sugarcane harvester at the age of 18 years and after 10 years of harvesting work became a *mukadam* nine years ago. Maheshbhai adopted Christianity 20 years back when he was 17 years of age. Explaining the main reason for the decision he told the study team that his sub-tribe has been suffering from various ailments and for cure the people have been seeking help from traditional healers such as *bhuvas* and *bhagats* to no avail. A group of Christian missionaries had been visiting his village, professing to pray to the almighty. They were also advising people to get rid of a set of superstitions, which have been rampant among them. Maheshbhai was

touched deeply by their message and proselytised him along with many of his neighbours and friends to Christianity.

Similarly, those who denote their faith as Hinduism have been following religious practices devotedly. For instance, every year at the start of harvesting season when they begin their journey in a lorry from their native place towards their camp-sites, they perform the rite of breaking a coconut in front of vehicle which is the usual practice of Hinduism prior to commencement of any new work. The group that affirms that they do not belong to any mainstream faith and considers them as Adivasis worship their traditional tribal deities such as *Devmogrimata*. A good many of them believe in set of superstitions, black magic, in good and bad omens. One way of explaining the devotion to deities as well as 'holy' figures is lack of security and surety in their life with regard to livelihood as well as other support systems and resultant vulnerability pertaining to survival.



MARITAL STATUS

The quantitative information (survey part of data-set IV) suggests that nine out of every 10 harvesters are married. Qualitative details also indicate that most of them got married in their teenage, after crossing 16 or 17 years of age. In terms of marital practice, most of the sub-tribes practice endogamy. During long interviews a strong view emerged that marriage must take place within a sub-tribe and they will not sanction their children marrying outside community, i.e. sub-tribe. However, exceptions do exist. The study-team came across a Christian harvester who is a native from Subir taluka, the Dangs district and who in a long interview said that;

> "In our community marriage does not take place within sub-tribe as we consider ourselves as brethren, having blood relations and so knotting marital ties within sub-tribe is strongly prohibited."

FAMILY TYPES AND SIZE

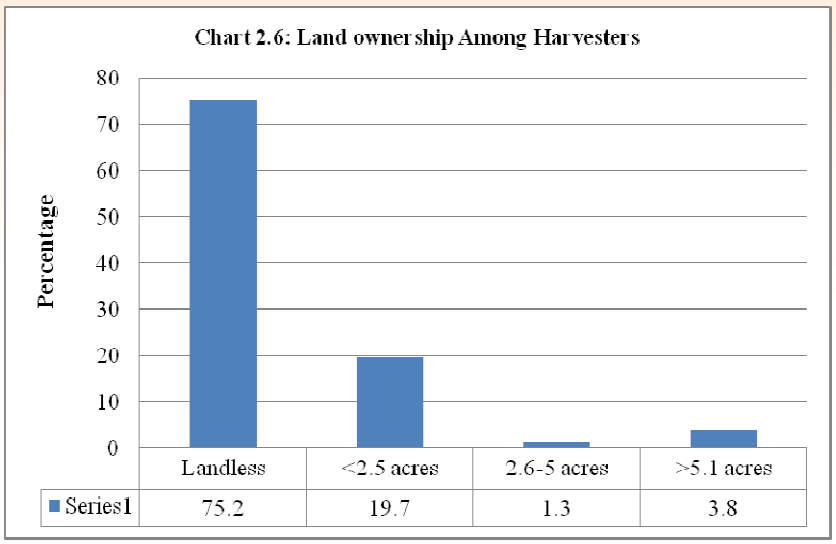
Statistical details of the data-set IV show that 85 percent of the harvesters are living in nuclear family units. Out of them a huge majority, 80 per cent of the total are living in family units consisting of a married couple and their unmarried children. A small section of 5 percent are unmarried harvesters who live with parents and unmarried siblings. During long interviews and even in case-studies it is divulged that in tribal society it is common practice that young sons separate from the parents immediately after getting married. Since most families are landless or land-poor, materialistic bindings keeping families together are non-existent. Those who have small plots of land till the land together by living in separate shelters. And as well be deliberated in next chapter on 'WORK', married sons form their own unit of *koyta* with their spouses immediately after marriage, often carrying debt, i.e., the money which was borrowed for the expenses related to marriage, from the *mukadam* with him.

However, on the other hand, the qualitative information of data-set IV does suggest that the joint family institution is still in vogue among Adivasis. While conducting case studies the study-team came across following case:

Manilal, 45 years of age is from the Sakri taluka of Dhule district, Maharashtra state. He is landless and has been working as a sugarcane harvester since he was 18 years of age, started cutting canes immediately after his marriage and is still working with her spouse in a *koyta* unit. His son who got married very recently has been living separately with his spouse and has also formed his own *koyta* with her, working in a team of the same *mukadam*. Manilal's father who is 61 years old is still laboring along with his mother who is 55 as a *koyta* unit again in a team of the same *mukadam.* They live as a joint family in their native place.

The preponderance of nuclear families among tribal harvesters is also evidently reflected in their

family size. As chart 2.5 indicates huge majority of the harvesters have less than 6 members in their family. The harvesters-couple on an average have 2 to 3 children. The earlier study of PRAYAS too concurred with this finding as it divulged, "Average family size was 4.3. This shows prevalence of nuclear families"(PRAYAS, 2015, p.4). As will be deliberated later in next chapter schooling or education of their children has been one of the major problems for the harvesters as they have to bring them at harvesting sites because there are no elder care-takers at places of origin. Here it is relevant to reproduce a segment from a preliminary draft of another on-going study signifying poignantly the issue from the perspective of the most vulnerable sections. The following passage delineates the issue under discussion with regard to another most deprived segment of urban unorganized sector; a group of tribal construction workers who too migrate seasonally from tribal belt of Gujarat to work in urban centers such as Surat.



Source: Derived from survey part of Data-set IV.

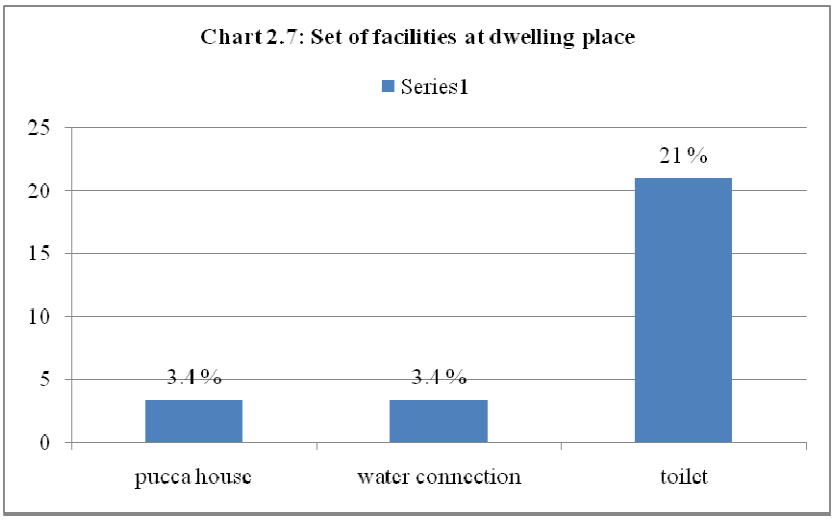
And as Indian social order is highly stratified, relationship of economic activities and status of family may be not the same for each stratum. One of the tribal construction workers, a member of social and economic group situated on the lowest echelon of socio-economic hierarchy was quoted in that (the earlier) study thus;

- "Family or parents do not matter much. Poverty and hunger drive our behaviour. Sometimes a couple rushes to the city-centre on the day of marriage, with marriage attire still on, as work is waiting for them over there. Our family of five, I, wife and three children are moving on round the year and though we go to our village in monsoon season often as construction activity is halted in rainy days, we never meet my parents and they too do not expect us to meet them. My son is growing up and after two years he would also follow the suit. I do not know what you (the researcher) are talking or asking about this nuclear and joint family. But in our tribe son and his wife move away from parents as soon as they get married in order to earn their own living".

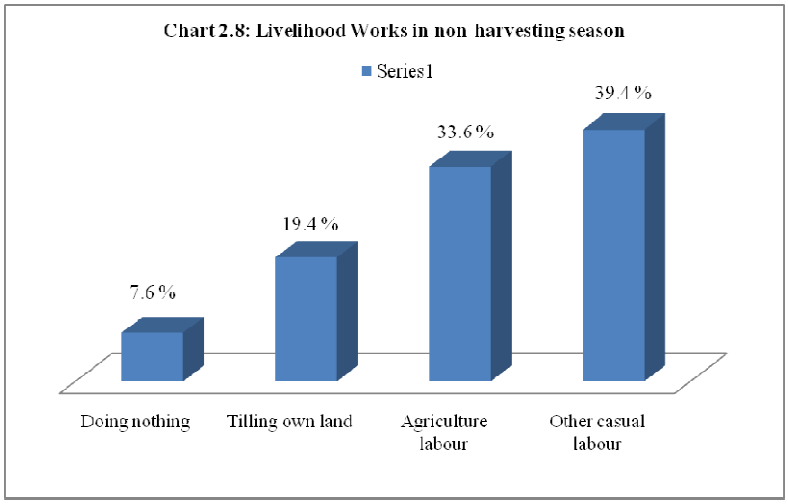
  As quoted in (Desai, K., 2013, P.60); Desai, K., 2017, from draft report}.

ECONOMIC STATUS

Breman in his seminal work has noted that "..the cane-cuttters are mainly small land-holders and landless labourers" (Breman, 1994, p.145). The finding of PRAYAS study too denoted that almost two-third of the households are landless and even those who



Source: Derived from survey part of Data-set IV.



Source: Derived from survey part of Data-set IV.

owned land were mostly marginal land-holders (PRAYAS, 2015). The survey portion of data-set IV of the present study reveals that three-fourths of the harvesters belong to landless families whereas another 20 per cent own small or marginal land-holdings and that too of non-irrigated nature (see chart 2.6). As per PRAYAS research 12 per cent of the landholders had irrigated land whereas in the present study only 2 per cent reported that they have irrigation facility.

Similarly, looking at the information set pertaining to other material possession; the same data set reveals that eight out of every ten harvesters' dwellings in their native place was *kutcha,* not made of RCC, a concrete type. But made out of raw materials such as stones, wood, cow-dung and mud. Most habitats do not have facilities of in-house water connection or separate bathing and toilet spaces (see chart 2.7).

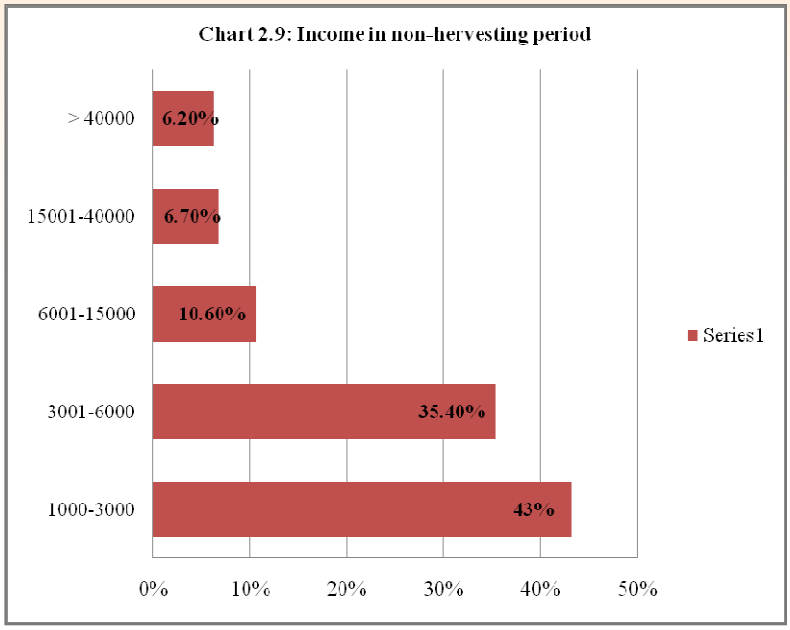
As has been mentioned earlier migrant harvesters from Dhule and Nandurbar districts of Maharashtra are natives of region which is situated in the rain-shadow part. And much of the land in this dry and arid area is of poor quality for agricultural purpose (see also Breman, 1994). Those who belong to districts of Gujarat, such as the Dangs and Tapi too do not have irrigation facilities in their villages. A very large section of harvesters belongs to the Dangs district, which is a hilly and forest track, where providing irrigation facilities is challenging due to the difficult geographical terrain. So they too have to rely on rain-fed agriculture. What do they do for living in non-harvesting period? This set of information would provide a complete picture pertaining to the economic status of sugarcane harvesters.

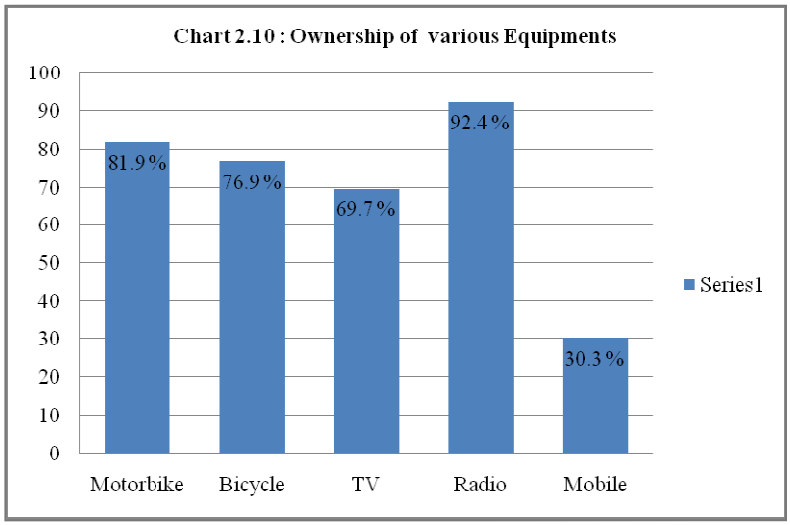
The data set IV of present research suggests that a large section among them (around 45 %) mainly seek agricultural labor-work of casual nature mostly in their own villages during non-harvesting periods (see chart 2.8). One-fifth of the harvesters who own small pieces of agricultural land take care of rain-fed crops whereas a tiny segment earns a livelihood by doing other miscellaneous activities such as casual labour at construction sites or any other economic activity, such as fishing, bamboo-work etc. Quantitative information shows that no one among harvesters has earned anything by getting work in any of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Programs (MGNREGP) even though one –fourth among them have reported

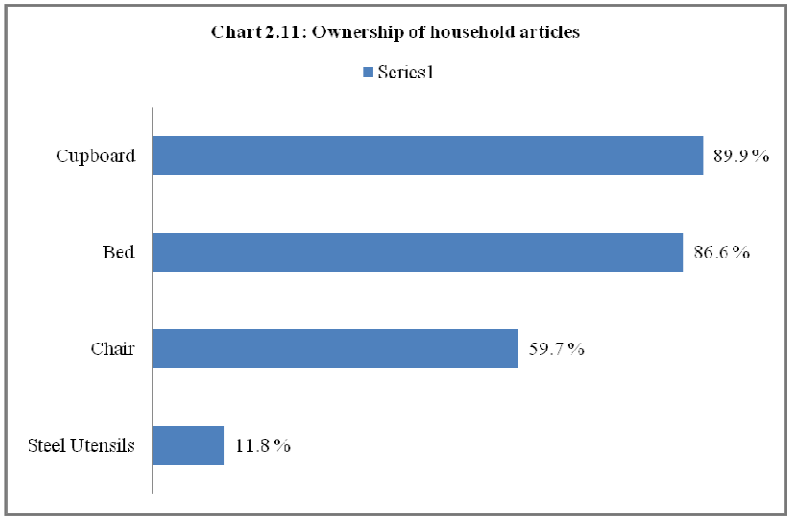
possessing scheme related cards. During the study-team's conversations with them some of them rued over the fact, that having stayed away for harvesting work for most part of the year, they could not avail benefits of various governmental schemes and programmes in their native places. Having become outcasts from their village communities.

The harvesters have to undergo extremely appalling and strenuous situation, have to face several problems during non-harvesting period in their native places. As mentioned above, as their native places are located in dry and arid zone or areas with a lack of irrigation facility getting regular agricultural related work, even of casual nature is extremely difficult. And knowing their vulnerability the local farmers exploit them by making them work at very low wages. Those who own lands are heavily dependent on the monsoon and when rains fail their livelihood suffers. In other words, earnings from the mentioned set of activities are not substantial. The qualitative details further inform that most of them have got employment of casual nature only for period of one to two months during entire non-harvesting time in their native places. As data reveals two-thirds among them earned less than 6000 rupees for the entire non-harvesting period last year
(see chart 2.9).

In order to get fair idea of the economic status of the harvesters the present investigation has also sought information on their other material possessions such as equipment and household articles. As chart 2.10 and 2.11 shows the scenario is somewhat better with regard to ownership of set of equipment such as motorbikes, bicycle, television and radio as well as household articles. The only exceptions are steel utensils and mobile phones; only 30 per cent of

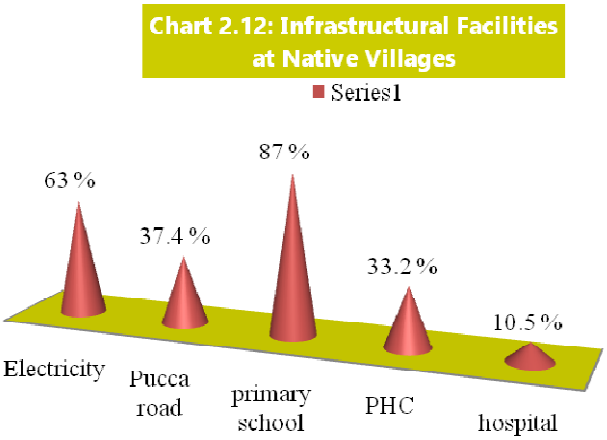






Graphs Source: Derived from survey part of Data-set IV.

APPENDICES



harvesters own the latter whereas steel utensils are owned by merely 12 per cent. However as will be deliberated in next chapter there are two sides to each reality. The qualitative information clearly indicates that they might be plunge further into the debt-trap trying to procure this set of articles. Consumerism and magnetism of luxurious articles has affected them too but to own them they have to borrow money, again from same source of *mukadams*. And which not only entraps them further in debt but tighten the clutches of bondage.

So observation made by Breman more than two decades back can still be considered very much relevant in terms of depicting harvesters' status succinctly,

- "The rural population for the most part consists of small and landless peasants for whom, after the harvest of the *kharif* crops at the end of the rainy season, there are hardly any possibilities for earning a living. Their poverty forces them to hire out their labour elsewhere for a large part of the year". (Breman, 1994, p.145).

The dismal scenario pertaining to the native places further seems grave if one looks at the information on accessibility of set of infrastructural facilities in these regions. As chart 2.12 shows only 11 per cent of the native villages have hospital facilities whereas the facility of primary health centre (PHC) has reached only 33 percentage of the villages. *Pucca* or tar roads are available in slightly less than two-fifth of the villages. Even though almost 8 out of every 10 villages have primary schools as has been revealed in the narration most of the children of harvesters remain deprived of them.

Table A2: Sugar factory wise Teams covered

Sl.	*District*	*Factory*	*No. of teams*
1	Surat	Bardoli	148
2	Surat	Chalthan	93
3	Navsari	Gandevi	74
4	Surat	Mahuva	25
5	Surat	Sayan	23
6	Surat	Madhi	19
7	Surat	Kamrej	13
8	Bharuch	Pandvai	13
9	Narmada	Vataria	7
10	Narmada	DhariKheda	5
11	Bharuch	Kantha	5
12	Surat	Mandvi	1
13	Navsari	Maroli	1
14	Valsad	Pardi	1
	Total		**427**

Source: Derived from the data-set II of camp-sites.

Table A 3: Factory for which harvesters are working

Name of the factory	Frequency	Percent
NO INFORMATION	49	.7
MADHI,SURAT	386	5.9
PANDVAI,HANSOT,BHARUCH	151	2.3
SAYAN,SURAT	385	5.8
DADARIYA,VALOD,TAPI	2	.0
MANDVI,SURAT	20	.3
VATARIA,VALIA,BHARUCH	106	1.6
PARDI,VALSAD	27	.4
MAHUVA,SURAT	363	5.5
MAROLI,NAVSARI	12	.2
BARDOLI,SURAT	2331	35.3
KAMREJ,SURAT	219	3.3
GANDEVI,NAVSARI	1017	15.4
KANTHA,OLPAD	47	.7
CHALTHAN,SURAT	1407	21.3
DHARI KHEDA,VALOD,NARMADA	74	1.1
Total	**6596**	**100.0**

Source: Derives from the data-set II of Camp-sites.

CHAPTER 3

ON WORKING AND LIVING CONDITIONS

The depiction in the present chapter will revolve around aspects related to harvesting work. The narration would primarily cover three components:

1. **Mode of Recruitment.**
2. **Working Conditions.**
3. **Living Conditions during Harvesting Season.**

REGARDING MODE OF RECRUITMENT

As mentioned in the last chapter, last season the total number of workers who were engaged in harvesting of sugarcane was between 1.75 to 2 lakhs. This estimation of total number of workers is based on two sources of information: 1. The mapping of '*mukadams'*, and 2. The installed capacity of factories.

In the exercise pertaining to mapping of *Mukadams,* in all 1874 of them are enumerated. But centring on the point being deliberated regarding estimation of harvesters, the enumeration has listed 1794 *mukadams* who are providing harvesters to 16 factories located in south Gujarat region. The mapping exercise has comprehensively covered all factories of Surat, Navsari, and Tapi districts. With the districts of Bharuch, Narmada, Vadodara, and Valsad being partially enveloped. If we assume that the mapping has covered 80 percent of the *mukadams* with all its limitation, then in all the total number of *mukadams* operating would come out to 2242. And if we assume further, on average the number of teams per *mukadam* comes out to 2.6 and if each team on an average consists of 18 *koytas*, then the total workforce is estimated to be around 209,851 harvesters.

From the reference point of installed capacity of factories, as per the figure of 'The Gujarat State Federation of Cooperative Sugar Factories Ltd.', the total installed capacity of the 16 cooperative factories of south Gujarat region is 64500 MT per day. However, the factories can work above their installed capacity. According to data from the same official source, the seven factories that were operational during the week of March 1 to 7, 2017, crushed 18 percent above their installed capacity of sugarcanes per day. If we assume that factories work 10 percent above their installed capacity, and it needs two harvesters to cut one MT of sugarcane in a day, then the total requirement of workers for harvesting sugarcanes of crushing capacity of factories works out to 148,350. And then, most of the time the factories are likely to requisition more workers than the calculated requirement taking in various contingencies. Thus, it can

be safely estimated that total number of workers who have harvested sugarcanes last season is anywhere between 1.5 to 2 lakh.

In this section of the chapter the narration will make an attempt to decipher by and large the anatomy and intricacy of the system that recruits and manages such a gigantic workforce. The workers are recruited through intermediaries known as *mukadams,* meaning contractors or brokers. The institution of *mukadams* is an extremely crucial cog in the entire system of harvesting operation in terms of its role, location and impact. The institution provides a crucial link between capital and labour. On one hand, a sugar factory operates its entire harvesting task through them and on the other hand, they not only hold the trust of workers but also provide them coping mechanisms. As per one informed estimate there may be up to 2500 *mukadams* operating in the south Gujarat region-supplying harvesters to factories. According to the same source, on an average each *mukadam* has 2.6 teams and supplies around a 100 workers. **All the *mukadams* are male.**

The depiction in this section is largely based on the data-set III regarding the *mukadams* that has mapped 1874 of them. For details pertaining to financial aspects, the information is gathered from 42 *mukadams*. That small data set will be referred to as III-A and will be used whenever and wherever required.

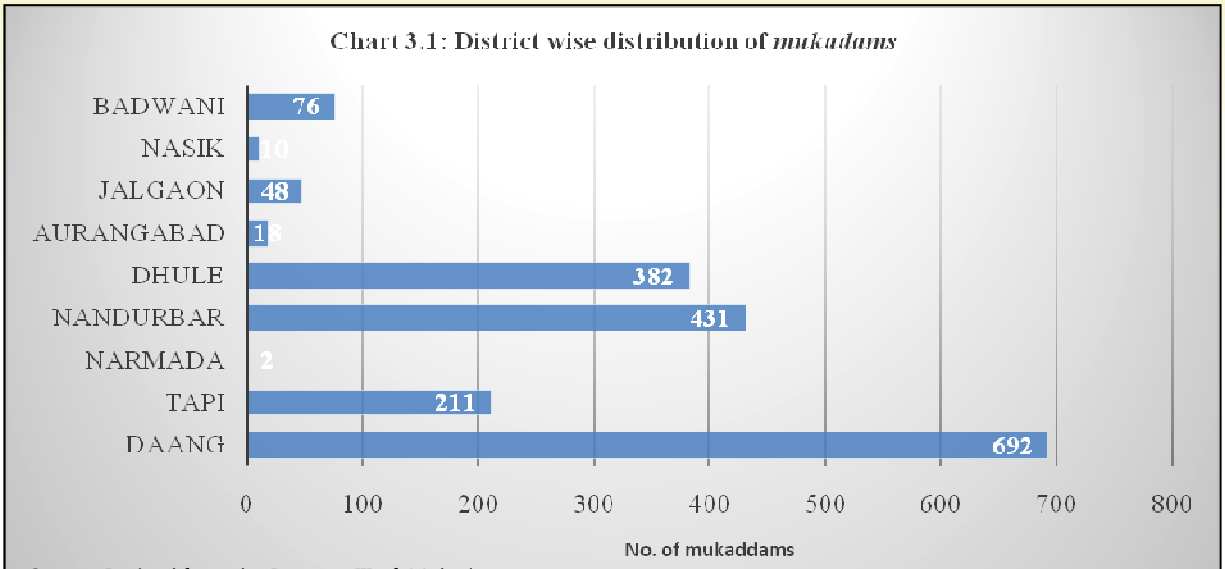
It needs to be mentioned that the study team has sought to undertake a complete enumeration of *mukadams*. This listing exercise has been undertaken at the *padavs,* i.e. at camp-sites, at harvesting worksites and at the native places when the harvesters return back after the season.

As is mentioned above a total of 1874 *mukadams* have been mapped in this exercise. And out of

Table 3.1: Factory wise Distribution of *Mukadams*

Sl. No.	***Factory***	***District***	***Crushing capacity in tpd****	***No. of mukadams mapped***
1	Bardoli	Surat	10000	471 (26.2)
2	Madhi	Surat	7000	154 (8.6)
3	Chalthan	Surat	5000	235 (13.1)
4	Sayan	Surat	5000	145 (8.1)
5	Mahuva	Surat	3500	134 (7.5)
6	Katha	Surat	2500	053 (3.0)
7	Kamrej	Surat	2500	117 (6.5)
8	Mandvi	Surat	2500	033 (1.8)
9	Gandevi	Navsari	5000	154 (8.6)
10	Maroli	Navsari	2500	049 (2.7)
11	Dadariya (Koper)	Tapi	2500	057 (3.2)
12	Vatariya (Ganesh)	Bharuch	4000	055 (3.1)
13	Pandvai	Bharuch	2500	006 (0.3)
14	Dharikheda (Narmada)	Narmada	2500	065 (3.6)
15	Gandhara (Vadodara)	Vadodara	2500	021 (1.2)
16	Valsad	Valsad	5000	045 (2.5)
	Total		**64500**	**1794 (100.0)**

Source: Derived from the Data-set III on *Mukadams.*
**Metric Tonnes per Day.*



Source: Derived from the Data-set III of *Mukadams.*

Table 3.2: State wise Distribution of *Mukadams'* places of origins

State	Number	Percent
Maharashtra	905	48.3
Gujarat	888	47.4
Madhya Pradesh	81	4.3
Total	**1874**	**100.0**

Source: Derived from the data-set III of *mukadams.*

Table 3.3: Places of Origin of *Mukadams*(Districts)

Sl.	*State*	*District*	*No. of mukadams*	*Percentage*
1	Gujarat	The Dangs	692	37
2	„	Tapi	211	11
3	„	Narmada	2	0
4	Maharashtra	Nandurbar	431	23
5	„	Dhule	382	20
6	„	Aurangabad	18	1
7	„	Jalgaon	48	3
8	„	Nasik	10	1
9	Madhya Pradesh	Badwani	76	4
		Total	**1870***	

Source: Derived from the Data-set III of *Mukadams.*
*The places of origin are not clearly mentioned in 4 cases.

this number, 1794 *mukadams* were found to be engaged by the 16 cooperative factories that are functional in South Gujarat region in the last, i.e. 2016-17 season. Table 3.1 provides broader distribution of *mukadams* in terms of specific factories of study region, i.e. south Gujarat, to which they have supplied harvesters last season. As it clearly suggests slightly more than one-fourth of them are supplying workers to Bardoli sugar factory, the largest mill in the region in terms of crushing capacity.

The source profiling of *mukadams* is a key set of information as it provides the source or catchment area of harvesters as illustrated in table 3.2.

And in terms of specific districts, they have come mainly from four districts; namely, the Dangs, Gujarat (36.8 %), Nandurbar, Maharashtra (23.3 %), Dhule,

The charts and tables in this section of narration are derived from field Data-set III and III-A

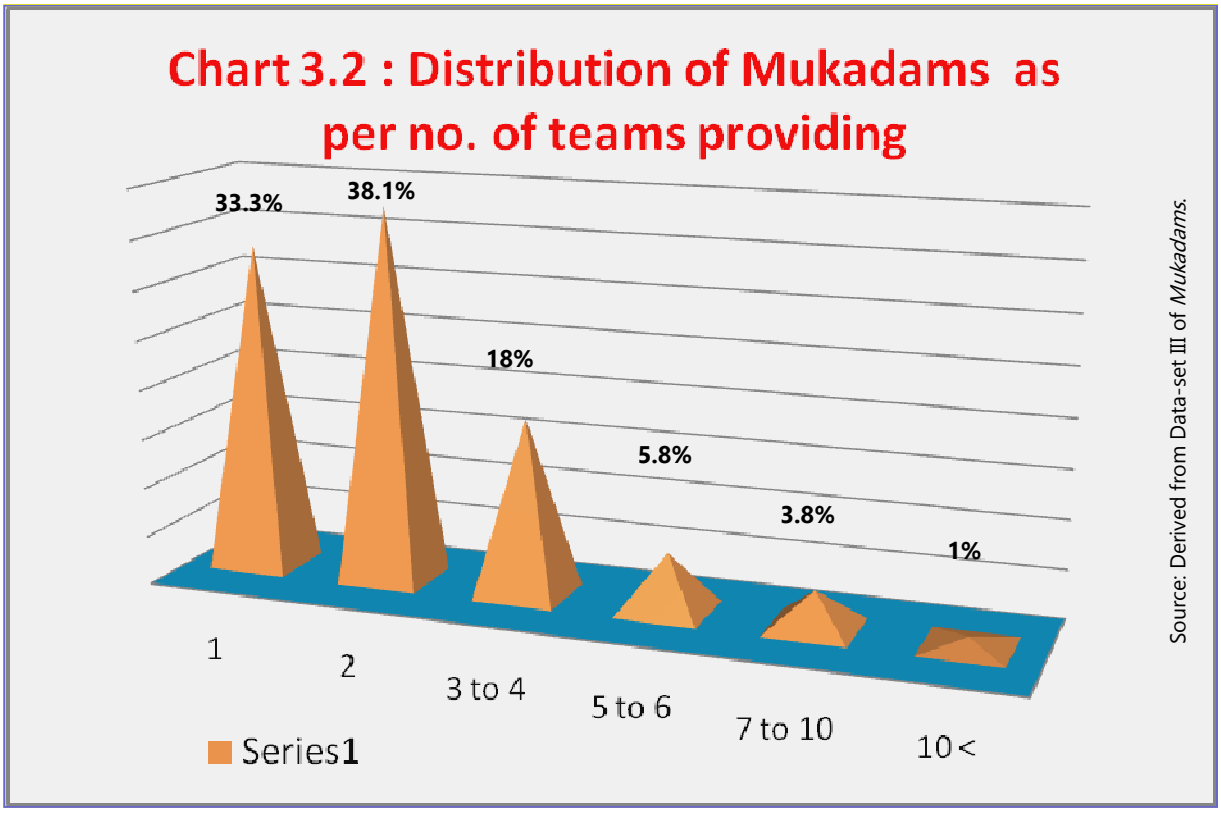
Maharashtra (19.4 %) and Tapi, Gujarat (11.3) (see table 3.3 and chart 3.1).

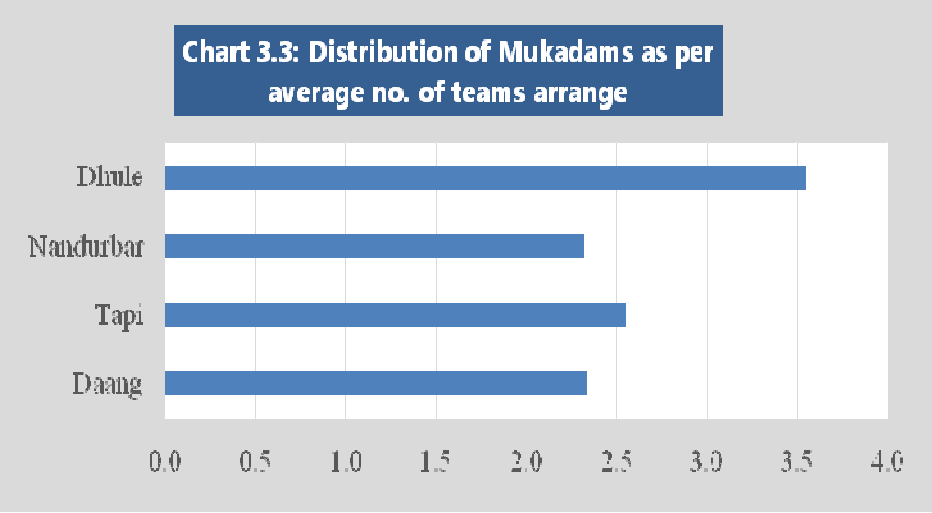
The qualitative details of data set IV reveals that almost all of the *mukadams* are tribals. Another distinguishing feature encompassing almost all *mukadams* that needs to be signified is they too were originally sugarcane harvesters prior to upgrading themselves in terms of hierarchy and status in the same economic activity. The circumstances of this change will be taken up in the following text.

In general, the *mukadams* recruit harvesters from their own or neighboring villages, talukas and preferably from their own districts. The workers are mainly recruited from the tribal hinterland in the Tapi valley, Ghats, and Satpura hills. Sakri taluka in Dhule district has been historically a hub of recruitment area for sugarcane harvesting workers. It has the oldest and also one of the biggest pockets of *mukadams* in terms of number of workers recruited. When sugarcane cultivation started in the seventies after the construction of Ukai dam, most of the harvesters came from Sakri.

DIFFERENTIATION AMONG MUKADAMS

All the *mukadams* are not of same category. Differentiation among them can be discerned in terms of number of teams they would deploy. This





teams. Out of that group, one - third of the *mukadams* supply only one can be considered as an indicator of the capacity of the *mukadam* in terms of not only number of workers he can organize but in turn size of capital he can deploy. Average number of teams being supplied by a *mukadam* is 2.6. This means that on an average each *mukadam* supplies 52 *koytas* or 104 harvesters.

As chart 3.2 and table 3.4 suggest a large majority of the *mukadams* are small brokers supplying 1 to 2 team whereas 38 percent supply two teams. A little less than one-fifth of them are middle level *mukadams* providing 3 to 4 teams. As data suggest only 10 percent *mukadams* supply five or more teams. And in all, only two percent supply 10 or more teams and can be considered as large *mukadams.* So in a nutshell, barring a small number of large *mukadams*, most of the *mukadams* are small. Qualitative details of data set IV signify that *mukadams* have a hierarchy among them. The large *mukadams* often have second-in-commands *mukadams* working under them.

Data-set III also divulges that there exists significant variation across the districts in terms of size of *mukadams* as per number of teams of *koytas* they could arrange. As chart 3.3 and table 3.5 show average number of teams per *mukadam* is significantly higher for Dhule district at 3.5 while it is more or

Table 3.4: Distribution of *mukadams* by No. Of Teams supplied by them

Sl.	*No. of* teams	*No of mukadams*	*Percentage*
1	1	624	33.3
2	2	714	38.1
3	3	151	8.1
4	4	186	9.9
5	5 - 6	109	5.8
6	7-10	071	3.8
7	More than 10	019	1.0
	Total	**1874**	**100.0**

Source: Derived from the Field Data-set III of *mukadams.*

Table 3.5: No. of teams deployed as per Source area of *mukadams*

Sl.	*State*	*District*	*No. of mukadam*	*No. of tukdis*	*No. of tukdi/ mukadam*
1	Gujarat	Daang	692	1618	2.3
2	,,	Tapi	211	539	2.6
4	Maharashtra	Nandurbar	431	999	2.3
5	,,	Dhule	382	1354	3.5
		Total	1870	4862	2.6

Source: Derived from the Data-set III of *Mukadams.*

	Table 3.6: Sugar factory wise Source districts of koytas&mukadams					
Sugar Factory	**Aurangabad**	**Badwani**	**Dang**	**Dhulia**	**Jalgav**	**Khargon**
Bardoli	0	6 (4.1)	106 (71.6)	11 (7.4)	2	3
Chalthan	0	1	28 (30.1)	17 (18.3)	2	0
DhariKheda	0	0	0	0	1	0
Gandevi	1	2	10 (13.3)	11 (14.7)	1	0
Kamrej	0	0	3 (23.1)	5 (38.5)	0	0
Kantha	0	0	4 (80.0)	1	0	0
Madhi	0	0	2	8 (42.0)	2	0
Mahuva	0	5	6 (24.0)	3 (12.0)	1	0
Mandvi	0	0	1	0	0	0
Maroli	0	0	0	0	0	0
Pandvai	0	0	1	6 (46.1)	0	0
Pardi	0	0	1	0	0	0
Sayan	0	0	8 (36.4)	5 (22.7)	1	0
Vataria	0	0	0	2 (28.6)	0	0
Total	**1**	**14**	**170**	**69**	**10**	**3**
Source: Derived from Field Data-set II of camp-sites.						

less similar for the other three districts. Statistical information further reveals that among the *mukadams* supplying more than 10 workers, almost half of them are natives of Sakri taluka of Dhule district. As mentioned above the place is the oldest labour catchment area for sugarcane harvesting workers.

Probing the statistical figures further, table 3.6 indicates a pattern that can be deduced pertaining to co-relationship of a sugar factory and source villages for recruiting *koytas* through *mukadams*. For instance, 7 out of every 10 *koytas* harvesting sugarcanes for Bardoli sugar factory belong to the Dangs district, especially from Subir taluka.. On the other hand, teams from Dhule (42 %) and Nandurbar

	Nandurbar	Narmada	Nasik	Surat	Tapi	Total
	5	0	2	0	13 (8.9)	148
	18 (19.4)	0	0	1	26 (28.0)	93
	4	0	0	0	0	5
	36 (48.0)	1	2	0	11 (14.7)	75
	4 (30.8)	1	0	0	0	13
	0	0	0	0	0	5
	5 (26.3)	0	0	0	2	19
	7 (28.0)	0	1	1	1	25
	0	0	0	0	0	1
	1	0	0	0	0	1
	6 (46.1)	0	0	0	0	13
	0	0	0	0	0	1
	4 (18.2)	2	1	0	1	22
	1	4 (57.1)	0	0	0	7
	91	**8**	**6**	**2**	**54**	**428**

(26 %) are found to be working for Madhi Sugar mill. In general, *mukadams* and their teams of *koytas* continue to work for the same mills every year. This is because *koytas* usually remain part of the same team constituted by the same *mukadam.*

Before deliberating on the core issue of 'Working and Living Conditions' at harvesting-sites, it is also pertinent to delve into the financial side of the entire harvesting system. Especially the central and crucial component of ADVANCE or *KHARCHI* as it is known in the local dialect, around which the system revolves and sustains. *Mukadams* play a vital role in it. The following narration would depict through qualitative details on how *mukadams* have come into their present livelihood option. The following case studies elaborately signify how a harvester not only

turns into a broker but also has made further progress in the same vocation and has elevated his economic wherewithal.

- Mahesh Kathud is 37 years old, a native of Amalgundi village of Songadh taluka in Tapi district, Gujarat state. He comes from the Kotvadia tribe, a lowly placed sub-group in the tribal hierarchical order and is a practicing Christian. Hailing from a very poor and landless family he started working as a sugarcane harvester at the age of 17 years by joining the workforce of a local *mukadam* supplying teams to Gandevi sugar factory. Maheshbhai had an ambitious streak in his personality and after working for 5 to 6 years as a harvester he started thinking and planning accordingly to move up in work hierarchy by becoming a *mukadam*. Slowly he established an intimate relationship with his supervisors. Meanwhile, he understood the intricacies of *mukadam*'s job; the financial aspect attached to it, the nature of work it involves, the personal traits it required by interacting with his *mukadam* who was friendly with him being from own village. Maheshbhai also started exploring financial resources required for the new job. So after 10 years of harvesting work for Gandevi sugar mill he plunged into a new adventure and became a mukadam. Thus, slowly but surely he has uplifting his economic status and at present supplies 5 teams of *koytas as a mukadam* to the Gandevi sugar factory.

- Motibhai Bhil is 33 and belongs to a small village of Songadh taluka of Tapi district, Gujarat state. His father Maganbhai has been working as *Mukadam* since long and so Motibhai and his siblings, a brother and two sisters could afford to pursue their education in a local school. But the vagaries in his father's occupation struck a heavy blow when two of his assistant-*mukadams* who had taken two lakh rupees to form teams did not turn up with the harvesters as promised. Maganbhai had to suffer heavy losses but more than that his credit as a *mukadam* was at stake, as he had to arrange for *koytas* anyhow that year. So apart from asking some relatives and friends he also compelled his four children, including Motibhai to give up their education and join the harvesters team immediately. Motibhai was 14 years old at the time studying in 8th standard. After working as harvester for five years, he too became *mukadam* at the age of 19 years. As his father has already been in the same vocation he did not face many problems with regard to establishing proper contacts with factory supervisors as well as raising finance.

And he has prospered since then; started with 1 team he has been taking 4 teams for the last six years.

THE BUSINESS OF LABOUR SUPPLY: CAPITAL REQUIRED AND ITS SOURCES

The recruitment of the *koytas* takes place on the intricate and integral system of advance. Almost all the workers join up the team only after receiving an amount of advance, which is not the same for all and varies depending on multiple factors. As this advance is extended by *mukadams*. they need a large amount of finance to recruit harvesters. As per an estimate of the present research, the average amount of advance given per *koyta* was stated to be Rs. 14,415/- for the 2016-17 season. And this means that to recruit a team of 20 *koytas*, a *mukadam* should have financial wherewithal of Rs. Three lakhs at the start of the season. As table 3.5 denotes on an average each *mukadam* has been supplying 2.6 teams of *koytas.* This means that on an average each *mukadam* requires Rs. 7.5 lakhs. This amount increases to 30 lakh rupees for *mukadams* supplying 10 teams and henceforth.

Recruitment of workers through payment of advance is a very common practice prevalent in several economic activities of the unorganised or informal sector, especially in sub-sectors where economic activities are seasonal and requires committed workforce for the season. As will be deliberated in the present case of sugarcane-harvesters their entire life sustains and revolves around advance due to their extremely weak and vulnerable economic status. However, it should be noted that in most cases being mentioned, the main employers give the advances. So the striking difference in the sugarcane-harvesting sub-sector in comparison to other examples is that in this case the intermediary, the *mukadams*, gives the advance. This denotes the nature of capitalistic machination being deployed in case of sugarcane harvesting especially pertaining to labour practice. Amounts being exchanged take extremely huge shape as they involve exorbitant rates of interest. As the following text would unfold not only do the harvesters have to pay 50 percent interest on the advance amount taken by them to the *mukadams* but the latter party too has to pay the same rate of interest to the sources from which they raise, if not for entire but part of the amount, to be given to *koytas*.

SOURCE OF CAPITAL

The research team could muster this crucial information pertaining to finance from only 38 *mukadams* due to their uneasiness on being questioned about the source/s of the capital they require in their vocation, especially to raise the sum to extend advance The analytical outcomes are shown in the table 3.7. Though taking in to account that around 2500 *mukadams* are operating in the region the sample cannot be considered

representative enough to give a comprehensive picture on financial scenario, it does provide hints at the probable pattern that exists.

Mainly Five sources were listed by the respondent-*mukadams* for raising the financial sum. The factory, the factory employees, own capital of *mukadams*, local moneylenders, and other sources. Table 3.7 and chart 3.4 show the amount being raised through different sources. The factories pay a fixed rate of Rs. 400 per *koyta* as the recruitment advance amount. Another significant source of capital is factory employees who are in charge of the recruitment of workers. Almost half of the respondent *mukadams* reported receiving funds from them. The table shows that *mukadams* are also investing their own capital in the business. Almost four-fifth of the *mukadams* reported investing their funds to give advance to the workers. The biggest source for raising finance for extending advance to harvesters is private moneylenders, as it constitutes two - third of the total amount of capital raised. Almost one- tenth of the total amount was attributed to factory employees. Needless to mention that they too are financing money in order to gain hefty returns as the rate of interest is enormously high. And that is why; it seems that reported contribution of this group as well as the source being mentioned, as 'others' could be an underestimate. Because, both the *mukadams* as well as the factory employees are quite aware that advancing money at such usurious rates of interest is in contravention of legal liabilities. All the money given as advance is recovered one and a half times after the end of the season when the harvesters receive their payment.

The data-set III-A suggests that a *mukadam* on an average gives out an advance of 14115 rupees to each *koyta* that comes out to 240938 rupees per team.

The *mukadams* received Rs. 45 per metric tonne

Table 3.7: Sources of finance to raise capital for advance

Source of funds	***Percentage incidence***	***Amount raised (Rs.)***	***% of Total Amount raised***
Factory	100	892400	2.8
Factory employee	45	2725000	8.6
Own capital	79	5495000	17.3
Sahukar	84	20810000	65.5
Other	24	1830000	5.8
	TOTAL	**31752400**	

Source: Derived from Field data-set III-A.

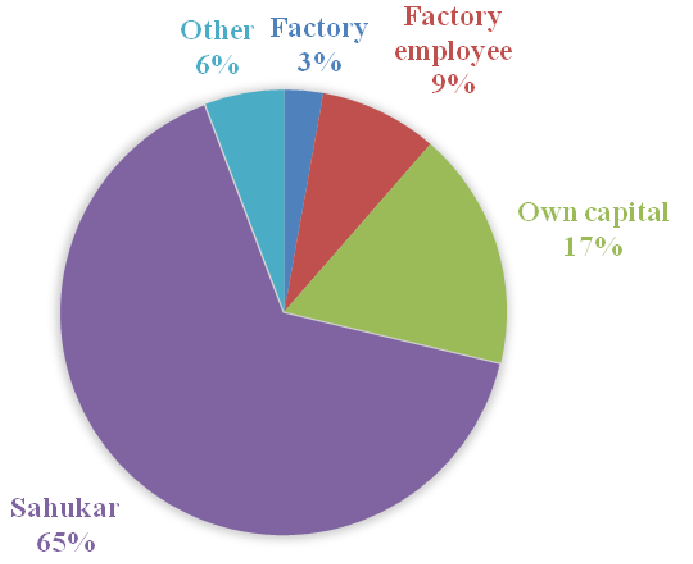
(MT) of sugarcane harvested as their commission during the 2016-17 season, whereas the wages being paid were Rs. 238 per MT. In other words, the commission of *mukadam* was almost one - fifth of the workers' wages. On an average the daily output per one unit of *koyta* is one MT. Which means that a team of 20 *koytas* will harvest 20 MT in a day. Assuming 120 workdays in a season, the total output for one team will be 2400 MT. Calculating further, this will amount to Rs. 108,000/- of profit over one team in a season for *mukadams*. To earn this profit, the *mukadam* has to invest a total sum of approximately 300,000 rupees, i.e. taking into consideration on an average advance sum of Rs. 15,000 per each *koyta*. And he would get additional amount by way of 50 per cent interest on this total sum. Which means he will get additional Rs. 150,000 on a total advance of 3,00,000 rupees. Even if we take into account the money being raised from other sources, such as money-lenders, factory employees and others, for which *mukadams* have to pay rate of interest of same order, the *mukadam* does get an additional profit apart from the amount of total commission which is around Rs. 25,000/-. Which is miserly compared to what other brokers make in similar vocations.

In the qualitative part of the investigation the issue of change in economic status after getting into the vocation of *mukadam* has been inquired. Certainly, some positive effects can be discerned. First of all, in comparison to harvesters, their children have been studying without any hindrance and educational standard among them is definitely higher and better than the children of *koytas*. Similarly, by their own admission their economic condition has improved after taking up the profession, which is reflected in progress in their living standards.

- Sudalku Sonvane is 54 years old and a native of Sakri taluka of Dhule district. Though he has a small piece of land, he and family could not sustain on it. Struggling to make ends meet by working as a harvester and casual agricultural labourer in non-harvesting periods he eventually became a *mukadam* by establishing contacts with factory supervisor/ s. And he has progressed in his changed vocation, starting with sending one team to Madhi sugar factory and at present supplying four teams. His standard of living has been uplifted. His daughters could complete their graduation. He has constructed a half-*pucca* dwelling and possesses a set of luxurious articles and equipments such as TV, refrigerator, motorbike and some costly household articles.

But alongside, this positive gain due to profit and resultant increase in income, the job of mukadams involves various risks too. The main occupational hazard faced perennially by the *mukadams* is that the workers may not turn up after taking the advance. And as has been stated the effects of such incidences by narrating a specific case -study above, due to such negative occurrences, they not only have to face financial loss but it also jeopardises their occupational credibility. Of course, they may survive such bad experiences due to financial wherewithal and local standing. However, in some cases this may not happen immediately and it may take some time to get back to their feet and there is possibility they could never regain prior strength. The data-set III-A reveals that in cases of the sample of 38 *mukadams*, in all 13 percent of *koytas* were reported to not have turned up in spite of avowing commitment and having received advance. Another risk is pertaining to uncertainty related with crushing operation of sugar factories as due to certain factors the number of work days may get constricted; for instance, in 2016-17, 9 of the 16 factories did

Chart 3.4: Sources of capital for mukadam



Source: Derived from Data-set III A of *Mukadams*.

not operate for 120 days, with one factory operating for just 81 days.

ON WORKING LIFE AND LIVING CONDITIONS AT CAMP-SITES

Reasons for Migration and Opting for Harvesting Work

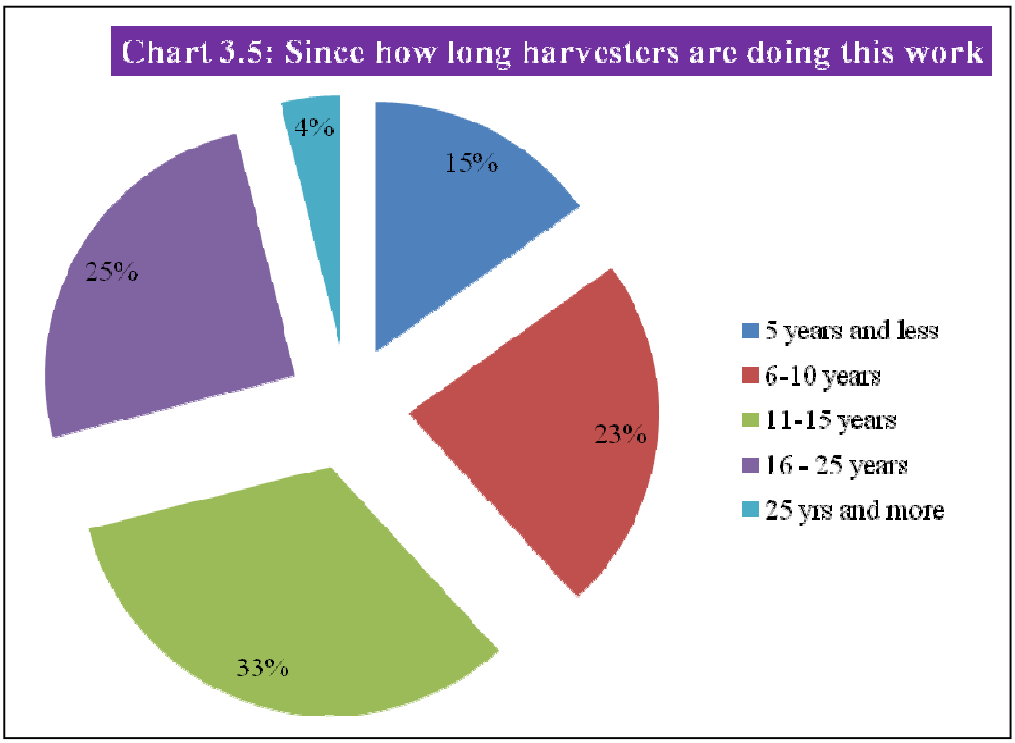
The survey segment of data-set IV signifies that a huge proportion have been working as harvesters for a long time. Almost fifty per cent of them are doing this as a livelihood activity for more than 12 years whereas a fifth of them lasting more than 17 years (see chart 3.5). The qualitative portion of the same data set clearly indicates that quite a significant proportion among them are second or even third generation sugarcane harvesters.

- Raghu Thakre belongs to Vagoda village of Nandurbar taluka with the same district name, Maharashtra state. The 30-year-old harvester could not pursue his studies as he and his siblings accompanied their parents harvesting sugarcanes in south Gujarat region. He too became member of his father's *koyta* unit at the age of 15. He said in a forthright way that he has got this work as inheritance from his father and his father too inherited it from his grandfather. And added without sarcasm but a tone of realism that his own children too will do the same work ensuring the continuity of the vicious cycle.

In the last chapter on 'Profile of Harvesters' citing the Qualitative details of data -set IV it has been indicated that most of the harvesters have been toiling for their livelihood since their childhood, and sugarcane harvesting might not be their first livelihood related activity.

The data-set of camp-sites of the present study indicates the average size of a *koyta* unit as 2.5, and thereby indirectly suggesting that children not only are accompanying their parents in harvesters' team but also joining in as helpers in the sugarcane harvesting operation. Breman's intensive pioneering research too has mentioned participation of children, mainly doing work of binding stalks into bundles and other related work (Breman, 1994).

The above set of information has reaffirmed the inference being made in the last chapter about the extremely weak and vulnerable economic status of the harvesters. The chart 3.6 divulges reasons for which the harvesters have to migrate every year to south Gujarat region. A majority of them clearly state that their native places did not provide any sort of substantial livelihood options for the whole year. The miseries of this huge population with landless and land-poor background are aggravated due to the extremely weak status of agriculture in their native regions. Either due to infertile land with only rain-fed cultivation because of

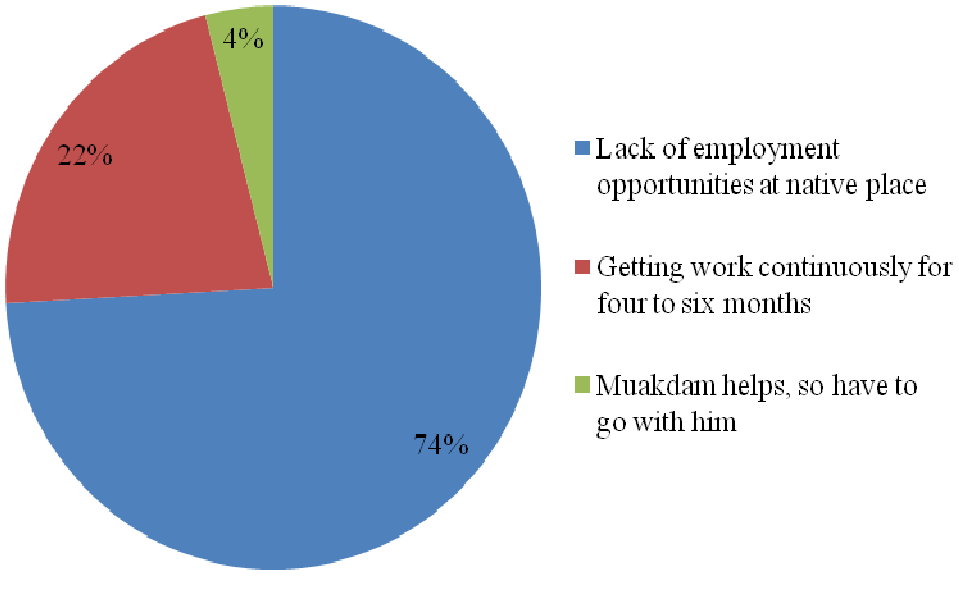


Source: Derived from survey-part of Data-set IV.

lack of irrigation facilities or hilly and forest terrain where cultivation as such is very difficult. So for a majority of the harvesters it is a case of 'distress migration', which is perennial and never-ending as the chart 3.5 based on quantitative information of data-set IV pertaining to the time since when they have been migrating suggests. The case studies narrated before provide a stark narrative of multigenerational plight the harvesters and their families face.

As chart 3.6, which is based on the survey, part of data-set IV clearly indicates almost three -fourth of the harvesters mentioned lack of livelihood options at their native places as main reason for migrating year after year to south Gujarat region for harvesting-work. Another group of slightly more than one-fifth of the respondent-harvesters have also indicated the same reason in a different way; opting for cutting work as it is provides continuous employment for 5 to 6 months. Very small portions of respondents have mentioned that since *mukadams* provide support and assistance to them, they are bound to join their teams when they ask them to. Perhaps this is a soft understatement and requires further elaboration on the place and role of *mukadams* as well as the system of advance associated with this institution that has played a key role in entire process. The crucial point will be deliberated shortly. But to sum up, all the three factors being mentioned; lack of employment opportunities, seeking continuous work and

Chart 3.6: Reasons for Opting harvesting work



Source: Derived from the data-set IV.

mukadams' support are inter-connected and interwoven that construct a trap from which harvesters cannot escape and compels them to migrate as labor in harvesting season.

WAGES AND WORKING CONDITIONS

As mentioned earlier teams of koytas carry out harvesting work with each unit of *koyta* consisting of 2 members. Quantitative data-set IV indicates that in most cases (70 %), a male harvester is teamed up with his spouse to complete the *koyta* unit. In other cases a different member of the family is paired with the male harvester. In case of no close relative to be found to work along with the male harvester, the unit must be completed by taking help of any other person; friend, acquaintance etc.

The female member of the *koyta* unit, usually wife of the male harvester, performs the task of helper or assistant while the cutting task is performed by the male-cutter. However, she often takes up the harvesting task when the male needs rest. Breman has vividly described female-harvester's arduous tasks:

- "The cleaning, breaking and bundling of cane-stalks, all very demanding tasks, are handled by the women. While the men drink some water or lie down exhausted during the short break, the women have to attend to infants they may have brought to the field with them, the youngest not yet weaned. On returning to the camp at the end of the day, it is the women again who carry a bundle of wood for the cooking fire on their head, and back in the camp they still have many chores to attend to". (Breman, 1994, p.259).

Breman in his seminal work based on intensive research has illuminated working conditions of sugarcane harvesters poignantly (Breman, 1994). He has minutely detailed how factory management as well as *mukadams* in terms of remunerations exploited these poor and illiterate masses. In the case of institution of *mukadams* though their relationship with harvesters is rather complex which will be dealt with in due course. However, they too are instrumental in entire process of exploitation of harvesters.

While deliberating with harvesters and *mukadams* as a part of the study's qualitative data-collection methods of case-study and long interview

it was revealed that on an average a single unit of *koyta* harvests 1 ton of sugarcane per day. Which means that the daily wages of harvesters is 238 rupees per day per *koyta* as that is the current wage rate for cutting one metric ton. Taking into consideration the current daily minimum wage rate for agricultural labourers in Gujarat, which is 178 rupees a day, wage rates of harvesters can be considered very low. As one *koyta* unit consists of two persons-a male and a female, as per state's minimum wage rate they should get 356 rupees for day's work. In other words, wages are appallingly low signifying the highly exploitative nature of work.

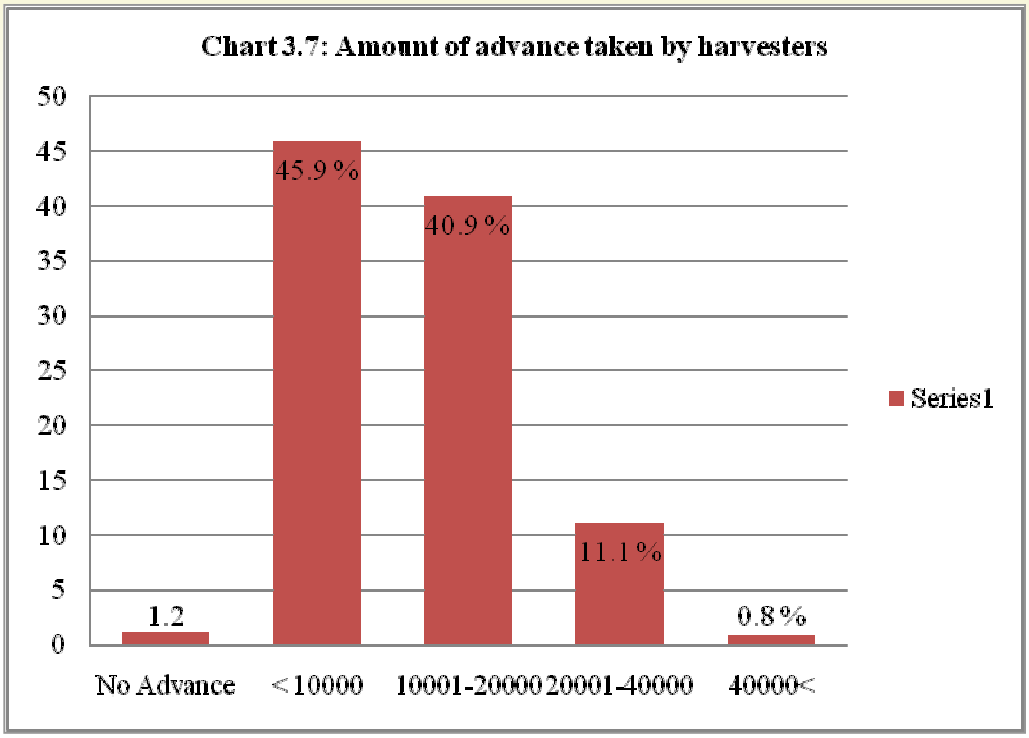
The practice in harvesting activity is to pay the harvesters at the end of the season, which is based on the quantity of sugarcanes cut. The payment is made to the team through *mukadam* who then distributes the amount among harvesters on equal basis. To make it clearer, suppose team 'A', comprising of 15 *koytas* cuts 'X' tons of sugarcanes and based on wage rate needs to pay 'Y' rupees. This amount will then be distributed by *mukadam* to each of the *koyta* by dividing it on equal basis. So the quantity of harvested sugarcanes is not measured as per each unit of *koyta* but as per entire team. While getting to know about total wages being received by the harvesters, entire system pertaining to it needs to be looked at. But prior to that a line on changing payment method over a period of time is in order.

Since early seventies (of last century) wages were paid on a fortnightly basis and advance too was deducted in an installment basis every fortnight. On the pretext of inculcating the habit of saving money and not expending it on gambling and liquor consumption among harvesters, the factory management introduced method of wage payment at the end of the season in the early eighties. And after withholding payment for an entire season the system of provision of 30 kilos of cereal and allowance of 30 rupees every fortnight was introduced which is still in vogue. It is not difficult to note that the allowance amount remains the same almost forty years since, which strikingly points towards the attitude of management towards poor harvesters. As Breman (1994) has commented even at that time the pretext of saving money of harvesters so that they could carry a large, substantial sum at the end of the season was utterly deceptive and phony. The introduced system of payment has been more advantageous to the factories; it reduces administrative hassles considerably and also gives financial gain in the form of bank interest on withheld amount of wages. And more significantly, this mechanism has tightened the control of the capital on the labor, as the latter would remain subjugated, annulling probability of their resistance or abandoning the team.

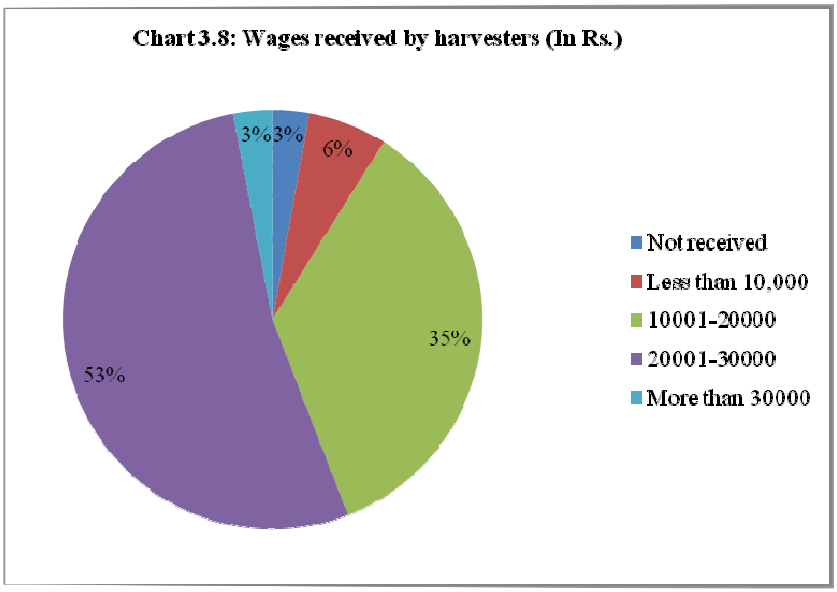
As the wages are paid at the end of the season based on total metric tons of sugarcane harvested by *koytas,* the poor harvesters who don't have savings to sustain during harvesting season at destination villages are extended advances by *mukadams* while recruiting them. And this amount of advance is not necessarily extended just prior to joining a team but it might be an outstanding debt being taken on other occasions, during non-harvesting period. The narration will take up the point later on.

As the chart 3.7 indicates slightly more than two -fifth of the harvesters have taken advance in the range of 10001 to 20000 rupees whereas for majority of 46 per cent cutters the amount of advance is less than 10,000 rupees and out of them more than one-third have borrowed between 5001 to 10000 rupees. The amount is in the range of 20001-30000 rupees for one-tenth *koytas.* Very tiny proportions of the *koytas* have reported not taking any advance. They all are from villages of Maharashtra. As the qualitative information suggests the amount of advance is not fixed and would vary from harvester to harvester as it depends on specific requirement of workers. It may go much higher as the chart too indicates. Often to meet expenses pertaining to social occasions such as marriage and death rituals or health problem the harvesters borrow bigger amounts.

The data indicates that the average amount of advance per *koyta* in the season of 2016-17 was Rs. 14,415/-. And while repaying they have to pay one and a half times of the advance taken. In other words, the interest rate is 50 %. As has delineated in the initial section of the chapter, the *mukadams* have to raise own funds to extend advance to *koytas.* It is estimated that a *mukadam* recruiting 50 *koytas* needs around 7.5 lakh rupees by the beginning of the season for advance. While they raise a small proportion of this amount from their own savings and other sources, they have to get the major portion, almost two-third of the required amount from the market, mainly moneylenders at the interest rate of 50 %, the same they charge to *koytas.* The employees of the factories and persons with healthy financial status too impart their money to *mukadams* charging identical interest from them. Harvesting operation thus offers a section of people with sound economic condition earning opportunities.



The Chart 3.8 indicates the wages earned by *koytas* for the year 2016-17 based on metric tons of sugarcane harvested by them in the season. As it shows more than half of the *koytas* could have (the underlined expressions are deliberately made) earned wages in the range of 20001 to 30000 rupees whereas another 35 percent could have received 10001 to 20000 rupees.

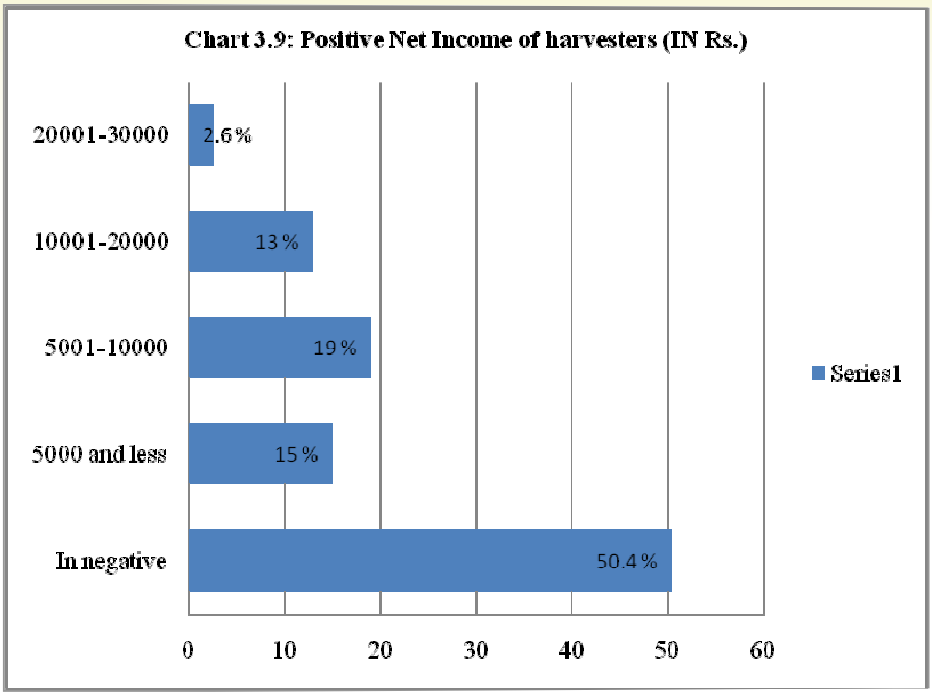


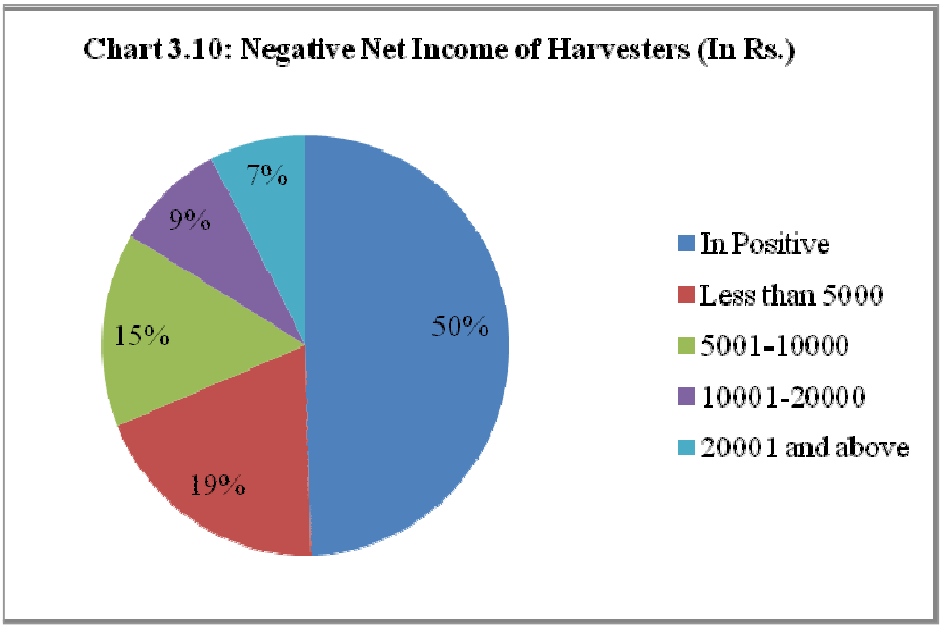
But when wages are paid to the harvesters by the *mukadams* outstanding debt in the form of advance given (with 50 % interest) is subtracted. Add into that costs of cereals in the form of *juvar* and millet-*bajri* as well as of materials such as *tadpatri* and plastic to erect makeshift habitat, which were given by the factories at the start of the season, were also deducted. So in real terms, the net income of the harvesters is the amount they get after deduction of advance taken at the start of the season and also subtraction of other costs from the wages being earned based on harvesting work carried out.

As the data suggest almost half of the workers had negative balance in terms of amount received, i.e., they are in indebted state even after four to five months of tireless labour. The rest 50 % of the workers could earn positive net amount in the range of 1000 to 30000 rupees after subtracting outstanding advance and other amount. Deciphering the data further it is revealed that around one-third of harvesters had earned in the range of rupees 10000 and less whereas the rest 15 % could earn more than that and up to 30000 rupees (see chart 3.9).

The chart 3.10 shows measure of continuing indebtedness for 50 % workers after the harvesting season is over. For one-third of the workers the amount of indebtedness is below 10000 rupees whereas among the rest 16 per cent, almost 7 per cent indicate negative net income in the range of rupees 20000 and above.

In a nutshell, as per quantitative information of data set I of the source-villages the average wages per *koyta* unit was 21350 rupees for the season of





2016-17. This amount is almost identical to the average debt amount per *koyta* unit at the end of the season, which includes advance plus 50 per cent interest on advance amount, which came to 21712 rupees. The average net payment for the section of workers who received a positive amount was Rs. 8,621/-. While those with negative net balances had an average indebtedness of 10,810 rupees.

This amount of indebtedness is carried forward in the advance amount to be given next year. But it does not end with that. The issue for this large section of indebted harvesters who have returned back without a penny is how to sustain themselves in non-harvesting periods. As has been narrated in the last chapter livelihood opportunities at home are scarce and do not provide substantial income to survive for the rest of the year. Data divulges that two-thirds among them could have earned less than 6000 rupees last year in the entire non-harvesting period. So how do they survive? A *mukadam* whom the study team met during the course of fieldwork and had long interview with recounted the state of affairs in very succinctly:

- Motibhai Bhil is a native of Amalkundi village of Songadh taluka of Tapi district, Gujarat state. Working as a harvester before becoming *mukadam*, Motibhai who at present is 33 years of age has been in this profession for the last six years and at present is provides four teams to Gandevi sugar factory. He described lack of employment opportunities in his native region and resultant poverty and wretched conditions of people. The majority of poor adivasis have no meaningful employment other than sugarcane harvesting work. Motibhai then provided details on advance system. The *koytas* are recruited by extending an advance payment, the amount being as per requirement of each harvester. Factory provides 500 rupees per *koyta* for advance while the rest is raised by him mainly from moneylenders and others

charging 50 % interest rate the same he charges the koytas. When the season ends, some of them remain in debt as after deducting advance their net income comes to negative. For some it is a zero sum game as the advance amount and income are almost equal whereas another group can repay the advance and also earn a net positive income. But subsequently as they all reach their native places, both groups of harvesters come back to us asking for advances just to sustain themselves in the non-harvesting period. Even those who have earned in positive too come seeking advance as net income is not sufficient enough to sustain their families for long. The entire period of 5 to 6 months they have to seek financial support mainly from us. This way we get their bindings for next season.

-

The above depiction pertains to a specific case study but provides a wider picture regarding the prevailing situation. A large majority of harvesters are trapped perpetually in this indebtedness that has resulted in a state of bondage labor. The case-studies earlier that have narrated incidences of generation after generation joining as *koytas* starkly signify interplay of these factors that have trapped poor harvesters in a bonded situation. Due to lack of employment and earning opportunities they opt for harvesting work, which provides them livelihood for 5 to 6 months. The advance also allures them as it keeps them afloat in extremely adverse situations. But becomes entrapment for a large section of harvesters. Entire families are compelled to join as *koytas* due to indebtedness. During the course of research while meeting harvesters for case study and long interviews the research team came across more than one respondent who have taken advances to marry sons or daughters but could not repay the outstanding sum. So the debt is passed on to sons who too become harvesters by forming own *koytas* with spouses and joining with the same *mukadams* and start repaying borrowed advances.

WORKING CONDITIONS

Breman also delineated in detail the work regime; how from dawn to dusk they toiled in cane-fields, how work was distributed in a team or gang, as he termed it, how the *koytas* had to work tirelessly to finish quota of work given in extremely harsh conditions, how work distribution takes place within *koyta* unit-sharing by men, women and children in terms of different tasks, i.e. who does what, nature of strenuous work etc. Following is a snippet from his vivid narration:

> The work of cutting sugarcane is extremely strenuous. .....Though the harvesting is done in groups there is little communication among them; there is little conversation even between the cutters and their helpers. Everyone concentrates on his own job and the various cutting-teams try to keep up with one another as much as possible. As the harvest progresses the heat during the day increases and this makes the day even more tiring. When there is no breakdown in the processing at the factory the fieldwork goes on for between eight and ten hours at a stretch, each day. Apart from individual breathing spells of a few minutes there are few real pauses in between."
>
> (Breman, 1994, p. 163).

And it can inferred from the details gathered the working conditions have remained as pathetic and oppressive as they were observed and noted more than 30 years ago by Breman.

One chief indicator pertaining to harsh working conditions is working hours. Almost 50 % of the harvesters reported that they have to toil for 12-14 hours and worse another 30 per cent even mentioned more than 14 hours of daily labor. In general, they work from dawn to dusk, starting work from early

morning and ending late evening around six o'clock. In the afternoon, they take break for meals; otherwise they work continuously round the clock. Often they have to go late night, at odd hours for loading harvested canes to lorries or carts.
In terms of months the harvesting season lasts for four to six months. Often, they reach at camp-sites early and as harvesting-work is yet to begin they work as casual agricultural labor in the agricultural farms of camp-sites villages. They receive 2000 rupees and 2500 rupees per *vigha* for sowing seeds and harvesting crops respectively. These wages are for entire team of 30 to 40 harvesters. During informal conversations with local farmers it was revealed that the factories deliberately ask *mukadams* to bring their teams early to serve their twin purposes. Local farmers govern factories, and so their representatives are members of governing bodies of factories. The farmers want cheap labor for their agricultural-works. While the local *halpatis* agricultural laborers demand higher wages the migrant laborers provide a cheaper alternative. So one purpose of bringing the *koytas* much before harvesting season begins is to accomplish other agricultural works at a cheaper labour-cost. Another reason is stiff inner competition among factories with regards to snatching harvesters-gangs from each other through brokers. Harvesters who are perennially trapped in indebtedness as mentioned above have a tendency to change teams. For instance, if *mukadam* of present team refuses to grant more money as advance the harvester would approach another broker working for a different mill with a request to extend advance. This is also one reason for the management of factory to call teams much earlier.

The fact being delineated above draws attention towards the state of sheer vulnerability of harvesters. They are used at destination villages to counter another deprived group who too earn their livelihood from unorganized sector activity of rural area. The management has seized the opportunity of getting cheap labor that is easy to exploit due to its vulnerability. And as an offshoot they also have tamed the local marginalized groups. This is a case of capitalist maneuvering at its worst in terms of human exploitation

LIVING CONDITIONS

Harvesters and their families' suffering begin with their travelling from their native places to destination villages, their camp-sites. The factory provides one truck for one team of 15 to 20 *koytas.* So each vehicle carries up to 40 to 50 grown individuals with an almost equal number of children and their belongings. It makes the long journey extremely inconvenient. At camp-sites they use bicycles and motorbikes to travel to work-sites as well as moving around villages and going to nearby towns in the evening hours.

The camp-sites in harvesting season present a fittingly worst scenario in terms of human settlement. The temporary habitats are on the outskirts, on barren, unused land of villages where harvesting operation takes place. The tiny makeshift dwellings are made of *tadpatri,* sticks and plastics provided by factories. The size of this tiny shelter is so small that a family of four can hardly sit or sleep together in it. Most of the camp-sites are situated near water-bodies and land full of bushes where mosquito inbreeding is common.

The 'dwellings' are of fragile nature that cannot sustain high wind or heavy rain. All the basic facilities are conspicuous by their absence. For water, both potable and for other uses, they have to depend on natural resources such as streams and rivers of the camp-sites villages, often have to walk long distance to fetch it. In some villages, they are allowed to use public taps and hand-pumps for potable water, but for bathing they have to go to the stream or river. Similarly, other infrastructural facilities such as roads and electricity connection are non-existent. For defecation they have been using open space, mainly farms. And often, local people take objection over the

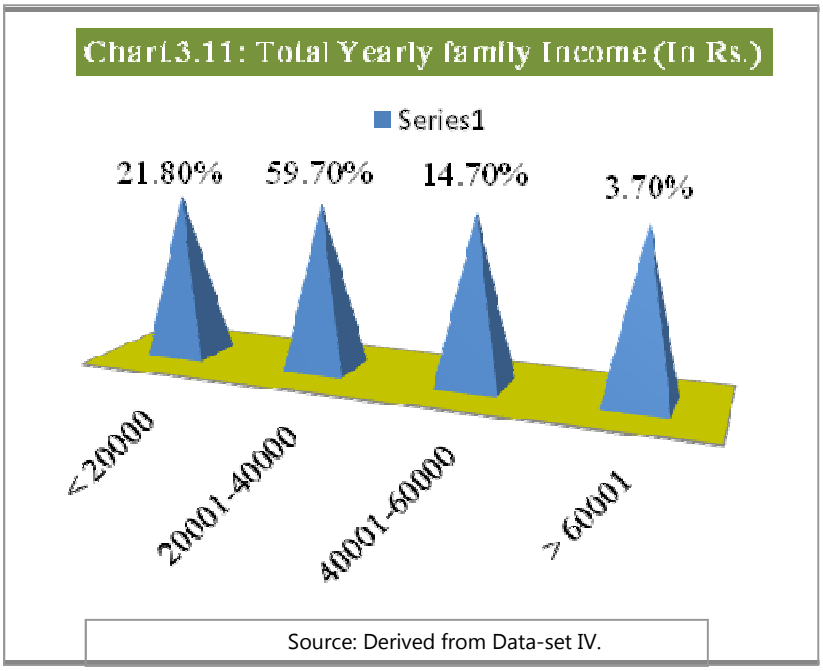
issue leading to quarrels. The harvesters and their family members are prone to various illnesses. Even otherwise due to inadequate food with almost zero nutritional values they are susceptible to health hazards. And add into that absence of uncontaminated drinking water, lack of sanitary facilities and washing space has increased their vulnerability towards set of infections. The *koytas* are easy preys to physical injuries and ailments because of extremely oppressive and strenuous work regime. Dysentery, vomiting, cough and cold, fever especially malaria, eye burning and infection, lung infection, pain in various parts of body, itching due to contact of leaves and canes, bites of insects and reptile are commonly found health related problems among harvesters and their family members.

Another major problem is regarding schooling as well as taking care of their children. As per data-set II of camp-sites every team of 15 *koytas* has on an average 5 children of school-going age- group of 7-

Table 3.8: Enrolment of Children at Native Places

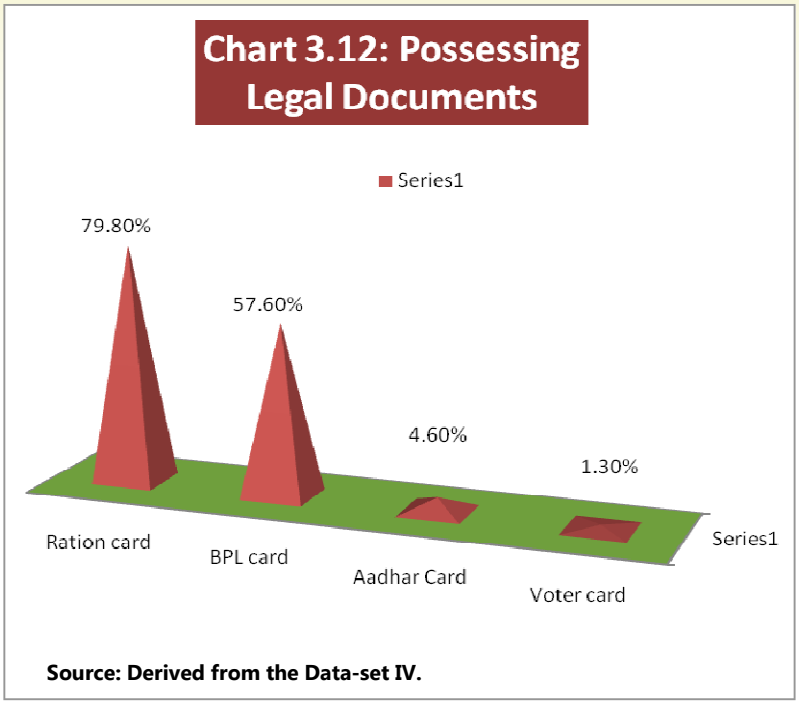
Standard	Number	Percentage
1-4	105	37.6
5-7	69	24.7
8-10	38	13.6
Not enrolled	67	24.1
TOTAL	279	100.0

Source: Derived from Data-set IV.



Source: Derived from Data-set IV.

14 years and 8 children below 6 years of age. The table 3.7 based on survey part of data-set IV indicates status of enrolment of children (who are at camp-sites) at their native places. As it suggests one-fourth of them are not enrolled, though some of them may be toddlers. But as is mentioned in the earlier study's qualitative details, even though majority of them are enrolled in schools in native villages their studies suffer tremendously as they can attend schools for only few months, which in turn, affects their overall education graph detrimentally. Similarly, the children cannot be left on their own at camp-sites when the elders go for harvesting. So they have to be taken along and often they too join their parents in harvesting related labour.



Source: Derived from the Data-set IV.

They have to live miserly at camp-sites. Their food-intake consists of *rotla* made out of *bajri* –millet provided by factory and rice, *dal*, pulses and a cheaper variety of prawns. Very rarely green vegetables are cooked. But certainly in comparison to harvesters' food in-take of yesteryears being described in Breman's work (1994), the present -day meals of sugarcane workers have improved quality wise.

The narration so far on the Working and Living conditions under which sugarcane harvesters carry out their livelihood activity starkly indicates the worst form of exploitative and inhuman labour practices prevalent even amongst the unorganized sector.

vOne may have fair idea about the overall economic status of harvesters' families from chart 3.11. As it shows three-fifth of them reported their annual income in the range of 20001 to 40000 rupees, whereas another one fifth of the families have yearly income of even less than 20000 rupees. This means that 80 per cent of the harvesters' families are living below poverty line.

ON CITIZENSHIP RIGHTS

As chart 3.12 shows in terms of possessing citizenship related legal documents, 80 per cent of the harvesters possess ration-cards, 60 % have BPL cards but only 2 per cent reported having a voter-card (though almost 90 % harvesters claimed to have names in voters-lists) and merely 5 % of the workers have Aadhar-cards. Barring 16% who have taken the benefit of government's housing scheme, the rest a whopping 84 % do not avail of any government assistance. During interaction with them while conducting case-studies and long interviews a view has emerged that they have become 'nowhere people'. At their destination villages, the camp-sites are usually located away from the main village settlements where they live isolated lives and are often seen as 'pariahs'. While in their native places as they remain away for most part of the year they become 'outcasts'. They are bereft of advantages being offered under any governmental scheme or project. Very few had bank accounts. However, it was learnt that of late sugar factories have initiated a system whereby wages are deposited in harvesters' back accounts mandatorily. But it's still in early stage and informal report clearly suggests that the old system of wage-payment is still very much prevalent. In fact, taking into consideration the entire transaction system and the vested interests of dominant groups, whether this new initiative of banking would ever fructify is a matter of conjecture.

The critical issue is how people of this deprived and marginalised section keep themselves afloat in extremely adverse conditions. Do they possess any coping mechanisms? How do they perceive their conditions?

This set of questions will be deliberated upon in the final chapter.

CHAPTER 4

IN LIEU OF CONCLUSION

Perceptions of Harvesters and Coping Mechanism

To reiterate, from the objective perspective of an external observer or researcher and those advocating human rights and values, constitutional rights, norms and rights pertaining to fair labor practice which are legally enshrined as well binding, sugarcane harvesters are one of the most exploited and oppressed social groups even amongst unorganized sector workers. They languish at the absolute bottom of the social and economic hierarchy.

The previous chapters, II and III clearly elucidate the harvesters' socio-economic backgrounds as well as regional backdrops of their native places. In terms of educational status not only is illiteracy widely prevalent but also more worryingly due to their deprived status and state of extreme poverty, education often has no space or scope in their lives. Most of them are landless or land-poor with small pieces of unproductive land. Coupled with a lack of employment opportunities and livelihood options in their native regions, sugarcane harvesting is the safest bet, providing them with steady work for five to six months in a year.

Exploitation and oppression pervades all aspects of life for them. Wages are abysmally low considering the quantum and nature of work. The work is not only harshly arduous but also involves hazards of injury. Neither basic primary facilities such as potable water or toilets nor safety apparel such as protective shoes are provided at work-sites. They work for 12 to 14 hours without much rest.

The living conditions are equally tough as well as unhygienic. Their makeshift tiny habitats are erected on barren land on village outskirts lacking primary as well as infrastructural facilities. They are susceptible to the perils of infectious and poisonous bites of mosquitoes, reptiles and other insects. Coupled with their utterly wretched working and living conditions, their food-intake is deficient in terms of nutritional content making them vulnerable to several ailments.

Even after toiling hard for 5 to 6 months not only do most of them return back without substantial earnings but a majority them come back in a state of indebtedness. In fact, most of them sustain themselves on a system of advance, the borrowings they take mainly from their *mukadams* leads them into a state of bondage forcing them to join the team season after season till debt remains. The money is borrowed not only for expenses on specific occasions such as a marriage, death or purchases that require large sums but even for daily expenditures pertaining to food and other essential items.

How do the harvesters perceive their situation? And what sort of coping mechanisms have they devised or possess in order to survive? In this last part of the chapter an attempt is made to view the situation from their perspective.

Two factors have to be taken into account in order to comprehend their perspective: firstly; as harvesters they have been completely isolated and subjugated by design. In terms of their working-living conditions and their overall socio-economic locations they are one of the worst victims of capitalistic machination. And second, because of their bottom position in the socio-economic pyramid, survival is their core concern and hence, one can clearly see elements of subjectivity in their outlook and perspective (which again is obviously from researcher's vantage point).

For almost all the workers sugarcane harvesting is their dominant livelihood activity. As has been mentioned in the chapter on 'Profile' and elsewhere in the third chapter, the livelihood options in their native villages are scarce and not very rewarding in terms of remuneration. So harvesting work of 4 to 6 months is the only regular source of income for this poor and deprived group of people. Other works during non-harvesting period are subsidiary in nature as they are irregular and casual in nature fetching unsubstantially thin wages.

The harvesters as a team work in complete isolation from a larger community or other social groups. Their living camps are located on the outskirts of the destination villages where they don't have scope for interacting with local people. In fact, by and large, they have no contact with the larger society including the state apparatus. Even with reference to their native places, they feel alienated as they remain away for most parts of the year. They are deprived of benefits of various government schemes and regular mechanisms of growth and progress as citizens such as schooling for children. In other words, the harvesters are as a social group 'an invisible community'. At the same time, even though they work in a team, each *koyta* unit of wife-husband works as a single economic unit - applying the terminology of neo-classical economics not in a rigid definitional way - and not as a member of a labor-team. Harvesting work has premium importance for their mere survival and that dependence determines harvesters' perceptions. Most among them are not in a position to delve on their pathetic conditions or at the most believe it as one's own fate or as what the almighty has fixed upon. And thus, their isolation along with their positioning in a larger system renders their perceptions highly subjective.

It is ironical that their major support plank or coping mechanism rests with the *mukadams,* the very agency instrumental in their exploitation. *Mukadams* help them not only during harvesting season but also during non-harvesting periods. They are their main source of monetary and social support. In terms of social identity, *mukadams* having started as harvesters themselves have identical social origins. Breman in his study pertaining to the same Bardoli region looked into agrarian relations between big farmers belonging to higher castes and local

agricultural labourers who were mostly *Halpatis,* a tribe mostly found living in plain areas of south Gujarat region. And like adivasi harvesters' near total reliance on *mukadams,* the poor and landless Halpati laborers who were colloquially known as *Halis,* too completely depended on their agrarian masters, the big farmers, known in local dialect as *Dhaniamas,* for survival. The latter extended monetary assistance for all the requirements of *Halis,* which would not be repaid by them as wages were low and hence, they and their family-members had to labor and serve their masters for generations. Breman termed this bondage as 'Patronage and Exploitation' (Breman, 1974). A similar relationship exists between *Koytas* and *Mukadams.* The vital difference between the two relationships; i.e. the earlier one of *Halis* and *Dhaniamas* and the one between *Koytas* and *Mukadams* is pertaining to class as well as social characteristics. In the case of the former there was a wide gap between *Halis* and *Dhaniamas* in terms of social and economic status. *Halis* were not only poor and marginalized in terms of economic wherewithal but in terms of social hierarchy too were at the bottom whereas *Dhaniamas* were affluent and dominant in terms of class standing. *Mukadams* though economically better off in comparison to *Koytas*, hold a similar position in the social hierarchy. They certainly are not one of the stratums amongst capitalists. Albeit the group is instrumental in machination of capitalistic exploitation, their standing in capitalist hierarchy is unclear. It requires further intensive sociological probing pertaining to this specific social group. But in terms of social identity *Koytas* and *Mukadams* fall in the same group or category. But that does not obliterate the new form of relationship of 'Patronage and Exploitation' between the two which in turn gives shape to 'Neo-Bondage'.

While interacting with some of the *mukadams* during long interviews they admitted that harvesters are exploited by factories and wages are too low. They have raised the matter along with issues pertaining to providing safety gears and basic facilities to *koytas* with factory management. The latter's response is as followed as informed by a *mukadam,*

- "Some of us have raised issues regarding low wages of *koytas* and lack of facilities being provided to them at working and living sites with factory management. But we were rather flatly and rudely reprimanded by them. And told that if we are not interested, not keen to bring harvesters we are free to leave as the management has others to do the job. Obviously we felt insecure as the ruthless and powerful management might keep their word rendering us jobless. So we backtracked and have never raised the issue again".

The experience of another *mukadam* also indicates how the balance is skewed unequally towards the management. And how the helpless *mukadams* eventually become docile against the might of the management, especially with the means they have at their command.

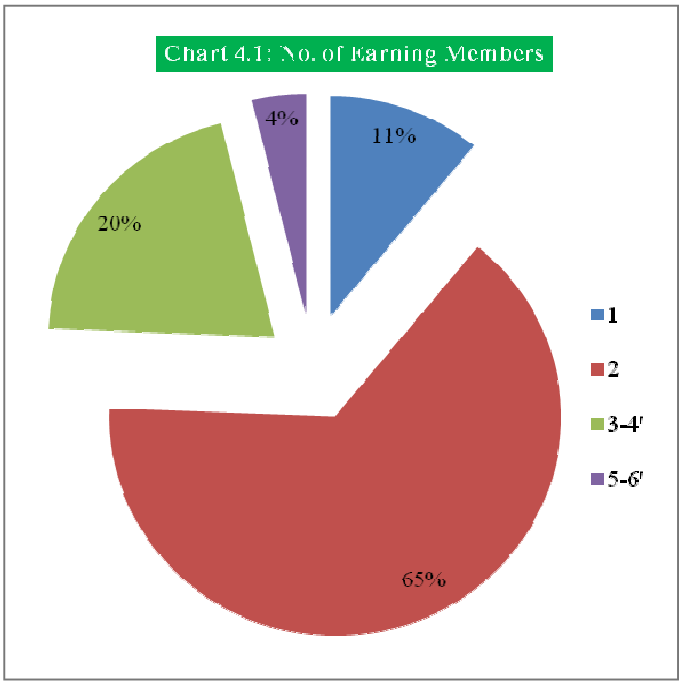
- Maheshbhai Kathud is 37 years old and has been providing *koytas* to Gandevi sugar factory for the last ten years. Like most other *mukadams,* he too was harvester when he started earning at the very young age of 17 years, immediately after getting married and forming a *koyta* with his wife. But by establishing networks with factory supervisors he has upgraded himself in terms of the nature of work within same activity; he became a *mukadam* ten years ago after toiling as a harvester for roughly the same period of time. He began by arranging one team of *koytas* slowly progressing into a big broker and even investing in small grocery shops at living-sites and thus elevating his economic status. At present he provides 5 teams to the Gandevi factory. He told the research team that he often has quarreled with factory supervisors especially over loading the trucks with harvested sugarcanes pertaining to two issues. One, often times the management asks to load during late night hours when harvesters refuse as they are tired after working the entire day supporting them by denying bringing his team; secondly due to wet field-conditions because of rain even he himself refused to carry loading as the harvesters might get injured as work becomes even more strenuous for them. On one occasion, harvesters declined to go for up loading at late night and he too supported his team. The factory management responded by punishing them and not allowing them to carry out harvesting operation for three to four days. Only after Maheshbhai's continuous parleying over the issue and pleading with management to restart were allowed at work.

Some of the harvesters are aware about the prevailing situation. They see the existing class differences between them and the big farmers. Moving on bikes in nearby towns like Bardoli or even

in destination villages they see sprawling bungalows, big cars and other forms of affluence of the landed gentry. Some of them do realise the importance of organization. But they feel helpless and succumb to the belief that their fate is in labouring forever.

However, a feeling of antagonism against *mukadams* is not palpably found among harvesters for obvious reasons. Mainly, the brokers are their saviours in the perennially tight situation they live in and also, they are one of them socially, belonging to the larger adivasi community and more often than not, members of same sub-tribe. And moreover, the *mukadams* are natives of the same regions and most significantly, were toiling as *koytas* in the past. So the harvesters identify with *mukadams* in more ways than one. Some of them may have quarrels over issues with *mukadams*, a few of them have changed teams due to uneasy relations but it does not go beyond that. But essentially, these large masses being economically and socially marginalised are not expected to have consciousness pertaining to class divisions and intricacies of class relations. Their subjugated and marginalised status has made them completely dependent on various agencies for mere survival and *mukadams* being the central one, antagonism towards them is highly unlikely.

As previous works (Desai, K; 2014, Desai, K., 2017) too indicate, another way of mitigating hardships and miseries is to employ as many members of the household or family as possible in one or the other earning activities to inflate total income. The chart 4.1 below indicates that 9 out of every 10 harvesters have more than one earning members in the households/families. However, as has been highlighted in the previous text, taking into account the dismal scenario pertaining to employment opportunities in their native regions this mechanism would hardly yield the desired purpose. The data pertaining to total family income being mentioned in last chapter does signify that.



Source: Derived from the survey part of Data-set IV.

Lastly, do they have any aspirations or plans for the future? Most of them are realistic about their conditions. However, mainly two wishes are usually expressed. Number one is related to generating employment opportunities, mainly in the form of industrial development or of any other nature in their native places so that they do not have to migrate every year for long periods. Secondly, some of them have realized the importance of education for their children and hope for its implementation. However, a large majority expresses despair and indifference as they feel that they are doomed to toil in harvesting operations for their lifetimes and so will their children too completing a vicious cycle.

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Tables, Charts, and References:

Prayas Centre for Labour Research and Action

PrayasCentre for Labour Research and Action (PCLRA) promotes workers' rights in the vast informal sector economy of India. It undertakes research to document work conditions in the informal sector followed by policy advocacy with the state so that workers receive their due entitlements. The Centre has done pioneering work in documenting the seasonal migration streams that feed labour to labour intensive industries like agriculture, brick kilns, and construction. Its work has facilitated development of an alternative paradigm of organizing workers that factors in the constant movement of workers, the critical role of middlemen, the nature of production process, and the socio-economic profile of workers.

Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung

The Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung (RLS) is a German-based foundation working in South Asia and other parts of the world on the subjects of critical social analysis and civic education. It promotes a sovereign, socialist, secular, and democratic social order, and aims to present members of society and decision-makers with alternative approaches to such an order. Research organisations, groups working for social emancipation, and social activists are supported in their initiatives to develop models that have the potential to deliver social and economic justice.