

## **POWERLOOM SECTOR AND FLOW OF MIGRANTS IN MAHARASHTRA: A CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE**

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### **Abstract**

This paper casts light on the changing scenario of power loom industry which provides employment to a large section of informal sector. The researcher will also analyse the progress made and the crises faced by the power looms industries and the workers. The textile industry continues to be the second largest employment generating sector in India. It offers direct employment to over 35 million in the country. Presently, there are 2,500 textile weaving factories and 4,135 textile finishing factories in all of India. The Powerloom Industry is part of Textile Industry. The Indian Textile Industry has three main segments mill sector, handloom sector and decentralised Powerloom sector. The power loom also opened opportunities for women mill workers. A darker side of the power loom's impact was the growth of employment of children in power loom mills. Most workers here are migrants from Uttar Pradesh and Jharkhand; a few have moved here from the neighbouring Bihar and Odisha.

The present paper is an attempt to analyse the role of migrants in the industry in Maharashtra in general and Bhiwandi in particular.

**Keywords:** Migration, Power loom, Textile Industry, Social Accommodation

### **Introduction:**

Workers play a key role in the power loom units of Bhiwandi. These workers fall under the category of the unorganized sector of the Indian labour force. It is found that these workers have migrated from various states within and outside India. Around 91% of the workers are migrants from the states like Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, Tamilnadu, West Bengal, Gujarat, Karnataka, and Haryana, Maharashtra (Districts Sholapur, Nasik, Thane, Osmanabad, Ahmednagar, Aurangabad, Bid, Osmanabad, Dhule, Jalgaon, and Bhusawal). Some are also from neighbouring countries like Nepal. There are many reasons of their migration, as discussed. The growth of the Powerloom industry started with the losing of the ground by the textiles mills. The power looms were first introduced in India in the starting of the 20th century. During the great depression period (1929 to 1933) the mill sector started to discard the power looms. The labours of the textile mills refurbish the discarded power looms and started the small units as a small and cottage industry. It was the existence of the decentralised sector of Powerloom industry. The other reason for the growth of the Powerloom industry. The Powerloom industry is spread in all over India. The major states are Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Rajasthan, Karnataka, and Haryana. Maharashtra occupies a premier position in the textile map of the country. There are about 11.06 power looms in Maharashtra. The state of Maharashtra has the prominent textile centres such as Bhiwandi, Malegaon, Ichalkaranji, Solapur, Nagpur etc. Powerloom industry in Maharashtra is more rapidly growing industry

than in other states in India. The Powerloom industry is the biggest small-scale industry of Maharashtra.

Migration is defined as a process of movement of an individual from the place of birth or origin or normal residence to a new place of residence. Labour migration is an important factor affecting the course of socio-economic development in India. Accelerated movement of people mainly from the rural and backward areas in search of employment has been one of the most important features of the labour market scenario in India during the post-independence period. It has raised several concerns such as economic, social and political marginalization of migrant workers, especially of those unskilled people moving from relatively deprived and depressed areas in search of gainful employment and living. Migration is widely perceived as both induced by the extent vulnerability of social groups and results in increased vulnerability at the point of destination (ARUL-2009). Migrant labour makes enormous contributions to the Indian economy through major sectors such as construction, textiles, small industries, brickmaking, stone quarries, mines, fish and prawn processing and hospitality services. But migrants remain on the periphery of society, with few citizen rights and no political voice in shaping decisions that impact their lives (Kabeer 2005). Unlike countries in Southeast Asia and East Asia, the bulk of the migrant workforce in India has little or no education (Srivastava 2003). In fact, migrants are poorly endowed all-around: they come from poor families where access to physical, financial, and human capital is limited and where prospects for improving living standards are constrained by their inferior social and political status. States of the Powerloom workers of Bhiwandi:

**Major reasons for migration:**

- 1) Better employment opportunities and higher wages in economically developed regions attract labor, non-availability of employment opportunities and consequent hardships in the underdeveloped regions act as push factors in the migration process.
- 2) Economic necessity, inter-regional disparity in economic growth due to uneven development and disparity between different socio-economic classes has been identified by the National Commission on rural labor as the most important reason for causing migration.
- 3) Freedom of movement in any part of the territory of India and freedom to pursue any vocation of one's choice is a fundamental right guaranteed by Article 19 of the Constitution.

| State          | Frequency | Percent |
|----------------|-----------|---------|
| Uttar Pradesh  | 92        | 46.0    |
| Andhra Pradesh | 17        | 08.5    |
| Tamil Nadu     | 13        | 06.5    |
| Bihar          | 19        | 09.5    |
| Maharashtra    | 50        | 25.0    |
| Madhya Pradesh | 02        | 01.0    |
| Gujarat        | 02        | 01.0    |
| Karnataka      | 02        | 01.0    |
| Orissa         | 01        | 00.5    |

|              |            |              |
|--------------|------------|--------------|
| West Bengal  | 01         | 00.5         |
| Nepal        | 01         | 00.5         |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>200</b> | <b>100.0</b> |

“As always on this boulevard, the faces were young, coming annually in an endless migration from every state, every district, to alight here once in the long journey of their lives.” Jalaluddin Momina

In the Bhiwandi power loom industry, 100 % of the power loom labourers are migrants (see table 4 above). To get a better livelihood and provide for the family’s fundamental needs, these labourers migrate from rural areas. It is observed that the labourers that migrate often come alone and leave their families back in the village due to accommodation and financial constraints in the urban areas, but they send money back home to the village. It is found that in Bhiwandi, migrant workers had come from different states of the country like Uttar Pradesh (46%-- large numbers in Bhiwandi), Andhra Pradesh (8.05%), Tamilnadu (6.5%), Gujarat (01%), Bihar (09.5%), Madhya Pradesh (01.0%), Karnataka (01.0%), Orissa (0.5), West Bengal (0.5%), Nepal (0.5%) and Maharashtra (25%). It is also observed that migrants from different districts of Maharashtra are also in Bhiwandi. Table 6 below indicates the intrastate migration. The textile industry in India (including the garment industry) is the largest foreign exchange earner among all other industrial sectors and provides direct employment to around 35 million people. A large proportion of these workers are migrants, judging from micro-studies (Unni and Bali 2006) but it is difficult to put a precise figure on the numbers. The textile industry is extremely complex in its structure, with handlooms and home-based production at one end of the spectrum, to capital intensive, large mills at the other. Small, privately owned power looms now dominate the industry. According to labour statistics published by the Labour Bureau, 31% of the workers in the manmade textile industry were migrants. The conditions of textile workers are described in a study of Bhiwandi, the largest power loom site in Maharashtra “A visit to Bhiwandi reminds one of scenes usually associated with the beginning of the Industrial Revolution: thousands of persons sleeping in or next to numberless ramshackle sheds in which the deafening sound of the looms is heard 24 hours a day, with no ventilation, proper light, children doing tedious work for long hours, and dust and dirt everywhere.

### **Conclusion:**

Since Bhiwandi is a migrant town with a floating population; its local government is far less accountable and gets away with negligence. Workers live in shockingly unhygienic, cramped conditions. Some even live where they work. Many aren't voters and work too hard to have the time to demand basic facilities like water or sanitation. Diseases are rampant. 'Breathing in the lint makes around 80 per cent suffer from tuberculosis. Bhiwandi has always remained a neglected region. Even though it is just on the outskirts of Mumbai, it lacks basic amenities. Sanitation, local transport and health services are all ailing. Almost 80% of Bhiwandi’s population is made up of migrants. Most of them come from the lower caste Muslim (Pasmanda) communities like Momin or Qureshi. These workers, even after

spending several decades in the town are considered “outsiders” and the civic administration has largely neglected them. Power looms are a male-oriented workspace, where labourers from North India travel to Bhiwandi for work. They live in a group, in a very small room. Socio economic conditions of the workforce involved in the power loom industry is very poor and they are deprived of many the facilities from the employer like PF, overtime, bonus, leaves, housing, insurance, etc and not aware of any Govt Schemes. Public empathy towards the conditions facing migrant workers must be able to identify the migrant crisis as a direct result of the complete absence of labour governance architecture in the segments of the urban labour markets that employ them, fuelling impunity of employers to perpetuate extractive labour practices. The labour reforms process must bring the protection of migrant workers to the centre of its agenda by strengthening institutional mechanisms for holding employers liable for violations of their labour rights. Migrant labour makes enormous contributions to the Indian economy through major sectors such as construction, textiles, small industries, brickmaking, stone quarries, mines, fish and prawn processing and hospitality services. But migrants remain on the periphery of society, with few citizen rights and no political voice in shaping decisions that impact their lives (Kabeer 2005). Unlike countries in Southeast Asia and East Asia, the bulk of the migrant workforce in India has little or no education (Srivastava 2003). In fact, migrants are poorly endowed all-round: they come from poor families where access to physical, financial, and human capital is limited and where prospects for improving living standards are constrained by their inferior social and political status.

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