



## “A Study of the Situation of Sugarcane Workers in Shirol Taluka”

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DOI- 10.5281/zenodo.17810493

### Abstract

There is a large class of sugarcane workers in India. They are scattered in various states. During the sugarcane harvesting season, these people leave their villages and go to the factories to harvest sugarcane. These people migrate from various districts in Maharashtra during the sugarcane harvesting season. Among them, the amount of sugarcane is more in Kolhapur district. Therefore, the research paper is based on the problems of sugarcane harvesters in Shirol taluka. Sugarcane harvesters come under the unorganized labor class. Therefore, no one has much to do with their difficulties and problems. Therefore, an attempt has been made in the paper to understand their various problems and present them.

**Keywords:** sugarcane, workers, harvesting season, factories, labour , problems etc.

### Introduction

Sugarcane cutters cut sugarcane. The labor class who goes to where sugarcane is planted in large quantities and cuts it for the sugar factories is called sugarcane cutters. Fifty-two talukas in sixteen districts of the state are engaged in sugarcane cutting business. Sugarcane cultivation has flourished in Maharashtra in the last seventy years, along with the sugar factories. Sugarcane cutters who cut sugarcane from the fields and supply it to those factories are a large community of migrant laborers. It was formed in Maharashtra in the twentieth century. That community of laborers is scattered because it is in the sugar factory area. Therefore, they do not have a ‘class’. However, that community is such laborers who live in whatever place they get, such as food and drink, where they have to go to work, and whatever conditions they have. They do not have any land of their own, but they have to spend five to six months of the sugarcane cutting season on what they have. They would go to another village, work hard and bring the burden of debt/money on their shoulders and immediately, once again, get into debt, and start the same path of paying off the next year's debt! That was their way of life. If a thief came to their house, he would also feel like leaving something of his own there! They are known by different names like Gulkari, Uastodwale, Phadwale. These people live in poverty, enduring the bitter cold, pouring rain and scorching heat; yet they preserve the family institution and village culture. Their children also need education in the new era! Sugar industry is a key part of the economic and political sectors of Maharashtra. The politics and economy of the state were fed on it. Due to cooperative industry in the state of Maharashtra, ordinary farmers became planters, and industrialists

were created from them. Money came into agriculture. Agriculture progressed. Families improved. Western Maharashtra became even more prosperous. There are a total of two hundred factories in the state.

Operating Mills In the 2024-25 season (early 2025), there were about 170 to 177 mills operating in Maharashtra. In the 2024-25 sugar season, there were 200 to 208 sugar factories operating in Maharashtra, which was higher than the total number of established factories. However, the exact number of operating factories varies from year to year and throughout the season, so an exact figure for "2025" (referring to the entire year) is not available. In the 2024-25 sugar season, there were 200 sugar factories operating in Maharashtra, most of which had completed their operations by the end of May 2025 and six mills were still operating as per Chinimandi, as of March 2025. There are a total of 252 established sugar factories in the state, although not all are operational in a given season. Shirol taluka of Kolhapur district has been selected for the study. This paper is written on the basis of the total number of factories in this.

### Objectives

1. To study the financial condition of sugarcane workers.
2. To study of the social condition of sugarcane workers
3. To study the family condition of sugarcane workers.
4. To study the educational condition of sugarcane workers.

### Research Methodology

Primary and secondary data have been used for this research. There are two cooperative sugar factories in Shirol taluka. In these, Datta

Cooperative Sugar Factory and Gurudatta Sugar Factory, a total of 7466 and 5335 sugarcane crushing workers work. A total of 12,801 sugarcane crushing workers work in this factory. For this, the sampling technique has been used. A total of 400 workers have been selected and interviewed through questionnaires and the information has been collected and analyzed. The information has been collected from 240 workers of Datta Factory and 160 workers of Gurudatta. This study is only about the sugarcane factories in Shirol taluka. Sugarcane

### **Scope and Limitations of the Research**

This research is only about the sugarcane crushing factories in Shirol taluka. This includes a total of two sugarcane factories, namely Dutt Cooperative Sugar Factory and Gurudutt Cooperative Sugar Factory. This study is about the sugarcane crushing workers coming within the area of these factories. The research is based on a limited geographical area.

### **workers background**

Even a small factory has at least twenty-five villages under its jurisdiction. If it is a large factory, it can reach up to one and a half hundred. Therefore, four and a half to five thousand villages in the entire state are involved in sugarcane production. However, one major factor has been completely neglected in this entire system, that is the sugarcane harvester. The laborers who come to harvest sugarcane are brought through the mediation of the Mukadams. These Mukadams have been working in the belt of sugarcane harvester workers in Marathwada and to some extent in Khandesh for many years. Because the workers are from Marathwada. Mainly from Beed, Osmanabad, Jalna, Aurangabad, Latur, Parbhani; while the rest are from Nagar, Dhule, Nandurbar, Jalgaon districts. There is a system in which the worker takes the money for the sugarcane harvest season from the Mukadam in advance as Isar. In this, one worker is calculated as one reaper. The first season's rains would be sufficient to harvest the Kharipa crop, and when Diwali came, they would pack up their bullock carts and head to factories in western Maharashtra, wherever they wanted. As many as 12 to 15 lakh workers migrate from those districts every year. The workers who were on their own were also from Jat taluka of Sangli district in large numbers. But in some parts of that taluka, the number of workers there has reduced due to water supply!

Sugarcane harvesters are the owners of dry land, smallholders. Years of drought have been on their heads. Education is barely enough to read letters. The more harvesters needed for sugarcane harvesting in the family, the more money they get. Naturally, the more hands in the family that can be put to work, the better! With that money, the house runs for the whole year, the loans are paid off. The

family needs weddings. Festivals, celebrations, trips, clothes, everything comes from that. Therefore, there is little awareness that the child will learn something and do something in the future, and as a result, the life of the entire family will change. Naturally, the next sugarcane harvesters are prepared from those children. Nothing special has to be done for that. Those laborers do not belong to the farmers, nor to the factories. The factories provide land for the base, provide electricity, water, sometimes they conduct health camps; it is out of a sense of gratitude. There is not much sense of duty in them. Sometimes, there are examples of workers being held by the hands of the workers and going on strike etc. In it, they prioritize their own demands and list the workers' demands at the bottom.

Sugarcane cutting is a very hard job. There is no prestige or money in it. The farmer has to plant the sugarcane - the factories are responsible for cutting it. They cannot get local labourers, so they appointed Mukadams to collect labourers. Mukadams started the practice of bringing labourers from backward, drought-prone areas. Due to this, the method of 'collecting' labourers has fallen into disuse. Labourers are needy. Mukadams give them money in the form of 'Rakma' from time to time for their needs. That amount is called Isha, Isar, which means advance. It is deposited with each labourer. Diwali is over, the sugarcane is ready, the crushing process in the factory is completed, and the families in the villages who have been collected by Mukadams leave for the factories. One man is one reaper. The more harvesters in the family, the bigger the burden! If children are to harvest sugarcane in the field, then it is considered a 'half harvester'. The children come with their parents. They would leave their own village for six months and reach a factory in far western Maharashtra and set up camp near a sugarcane field outside the village. They would build huts for the sugarcane. They would tie up the cattle they brought with them and start working.

### **Review of Literature**

**Kumar and Gupta (2018)** : highlight the dependency of these workers on advance payments from contractors, which leads to a cycle of debt and economic vulnerability.

**Research by Narayana and Ribeiro (2018)** shows that women often earn less than men and are more vulnerable to exploitation. Their dual burden of domestic responsibilities and labor contributes to their marginalization in the labor market and society.

**Verma and Rao (2019)** have documented the prevalence of children working in the fields with their families, often leaving school. The combination of economic need and lack of awareness of legal rights perpetuates this cycle. The authors argue for targeted interventions that not only

provide financial support to families but also raise awareness of the importance of education.

**Ferreira-Secato, (2011)**, Panel study, with repeated measurements. Nasal mucociliary clearance in 45 sugarcane harvesters in the state of São Paulo, Brazil. Decreased saccharin transit time on the first day of harvest compared to the pre-harvest period.

**Garcia-Trabanino, (2015)** Cross-sectional study of heat stress, dehydration, biomarkers of renal function and their possible associations among 189 sugarcane harvesters in El Salvador. The average temperature during the workday was 34°C-36°C in the morning and 39°C-42°C in the afternoon. 14% of the workers had a decrease in glomerular filtration rate and an increase in serum creatinine, uric acid and urea.

**Santos, (2014)**, a longitudinal panel study with repeated measurements, assessed the effects of sugarcane harvesting on renal function in 28 workers in the State of São Paulo, Brazil. Glomerular filtration rate decreased at the end of the work shift in all patients evaluated, and in 18.5% of them, an increase in serum creatinine was consistent with acute kidney injury (AKI).

**Wesseling, (2016)**, Cross-sectional study assessing risk factors for CKD in sugarcane harvesters, construction workers, and smallholder farmers in Nicaragua. Heat stress, dehydration, and renal failure were the most common findings among sugarcane harvesters, and elevated uric acid was associated with decreased renal function.

**Priuli, (2014)**, Longitudinal study, stress levels and prevalence of physical and psychological symptoms among 114 sugarcane harvesters in the state of São Paulo, Brazil. The sugarcane harvester work process can cause stress, burnout symptoms, fatigue, physical and psychological symptoms after the harvest period.

### Study on The Condition Of Sugarcane Workers In Shirol Taluka

This research paper, considering the overall aspect of the sugarcane workers in Shirol taluka, information on economic, social, educational and family contexts has been collected through interviews and analyzed in the form of a table as follows. Through that, we can understand the situation of the sugarcane workers.

#### 1. Study of Demographic profile

SR.No	District	Datta sugar worker	Guru data workar	Total	Percentage
1	Beed	129	81	210	52.5
2	Jalana	15	12	27	6.75
3	Chha s nagar	11	03	14	3.5
4	Dharashiv	26	22	48	12.00
5	Latur	2	0	02	0.5
6	Solapur	28	21	51	12.75
7	Sangli	19	12	31	7.75
8	Other	10	09	19	4.75
	Total	240	160	400	100 %

#### Sources : field work 2024-25

In the above table, when the workers working as sugarcane cutters at Dutt Cooperative Sugar Factory and Gurudutta Cooperative Sugar Factory were interviewed and the proportion of workers from which district was studied, it was found that in both the factories, the majority of sugarcane cutters are from Beed district. In both the factories, about 52.5 percent are from Beed.

#### 2. Information according to caste and religion

Sr	Cast	Worker	Percentages
1	Hindu	227	56.75 %
2	Bodha	132	33%
3	Muslim	05	1.25 %
4	other	36	9.00%

#### Sources : field work 2024-25

According to religion and caste, the information shows that the largest number of people belonging to Hindu religion are sugarcane workers. Their proportion is 56.75%. This also includes a large number of people belonging to Vanjari, Banjara, Dhangar, Maratha, according to caste. The

proportion of people belonging to other religions is less.

#### 3. Educational information of sugarcane workers

Sr	Education	Worker	Percentage
1	0 to 4	222	55.5
2	5 to 8	78	19.5
3	9 to 10	38	9.5
4	11 to 12	42	10.5
5	13 to 15	15	3.75
6	15+	05	1.25
	Total	400	100

#### Sources : field work 2024-25

From the above table, it is seen that the proportion of illiterate and less educated is the highest, i.e. 55.50 percent, and they have studied only in 1st to 4th standard. Similarly, the proportion of those who have graduated but not graduated is also seen as 1.25 percent.

**4. Family information of sugarcane workers**

Sr	Number	Workers	Percentage
1	2 to 4	223	55.75
2	5 to 6	96	24.00 %
3	7 to 8	81	20.25 %
4	9+	0	-
	Total	400	100 %

Sources : field work 2024-25

**5. No of children's of family**

Sr	Numbers of children	Worker	Percentage
1	0	27	6.75
2	1	74	18.5
3	2	145	36.25
4	3	104	26.00 %
5	4	50	12.50
	Total	400	100%

Sources : field work 2024-25

The above tables 4 and 5 show the number of families and children of sugarcane workers. From the above table, it is seen that the number of families of sugarcane workers is about 55.75%. While the number of families of sugarcane workers is only 20.25%. Also, when asked about the number of children of sugarcane workers, it is seen that the proportion of those with 0 children is 6.75. While the number of those with two children is 36.25, it is seen from the above tables 4 and 5. Overall, it is seen that the number of families of these sugarcane workers is separate and to some extent joint families.

**6. Financial situation of sugarcane workers**

Sr	Income	Dutta Worker 60% (240)	Guru data 40% (160)	total
1	Below 1 lakh	142 (63.33)	87 (54.37)	229 (57.25)
2	1 to 3	48 (22.08)	39 (24.37)	87 (21.75)
3	3 to 5	38 (17.91)	18 (11.25)	56 (14.00)
4	5+	12 (5.00)	16 (10.00)	28 (7.00)
	Total	240 (60)	160 (40)	400 (100)

Sources : field work 2024-25

Above the table number 6, it can be seen that the income group of one lakh has the highest proportion of workers at 57.25%. That is, the number of people with income less than one lakh is more. From one to three lakh, 14 percent, three to five 21.75 percent and the proportion of those with income above five is only 7 percent.

**7. Does the income you receive completed your needs?**

Sr No	Need	Worker	Percentage
1	Yes	34	8.50
2	No	366	91.50
3	Total	400	100 %

Sources : field work 2024-25

Table No. 7 shows that when asked whether the income received by the sugarcane workers meets their needs, only 8.50% of the workers said yes. While 91.50% of the workers said that their income does not meet their needs.

**8. What is the largest portion of your income spent on?**

Sr No	Expenditure	Total workers	Percentage
1	Food	400	60 %
2	Education	400	05 %
3	Health	400	07 %
4	Other	400	38 %

Sources : field work 2024-25

From the above table, it can be seen that what percentage of the income of the sugarcane workers is spent on their daily needs. When asked, 60% of the total 400 workers are spent on food grains. If we say this, 5% is spent on education, 7% on health. Other expenses are said to be 38%. That is, it can be seen that 60% of the total income of the workers is spent on meeting their food grains and daily needs.

**9. How much of your income do you save?**

Sr No	Saving	Worker	Percentage
1	50 to 1 Lakh	250	62.5
2	1 lakh to 2 lakh	80	20.00
3	3 to 5 lakh	45	11.25
4	Above 5	25	6.25
	Total	400	100 %

Sources : field work 2024-25

When workers were asked how much they save from their income, 62.5% of workers in the 50 thousand to one lakh group said they save. 20% in the one lakh to two lakh group, 11.25% in the 3 to 5 lakh group, and 5% in the five lakh and above group, 6.25%, are seen to be in the same proportion.

**10. Sugarcane transportation equipment and harvesting equipment**

Sr. No	Transport	Dutta	Guru datta	Percentage
1	Tractor	423	192	25.92
2	Track	45	21	2.78
3	Bullock card	482	432	38.51
4	Agad	469	309	32.78
	Total	1419	954	2373

Sources : field work 2024-25

From the above table, it can be seen that the most common means of sugarcane transportation in factories is bullock cart. About 38.51% of sugarcane transportation is done through bullock cart. While 32.78% of sugarcane is transported by Agad and 25.92% by tractor.

**11. The loan you have and its nature**

Sr	Loan	Worker	Percentage
1	1 to 3	223	55.75
2	3 to 5	70	17.50
3	5 to 10	49	12.25
4	10 +	58	14.50
	Total	400	100 %

**Sources : field work 2024-25**

The above table asks how much debt you have taken. It shows that the debt ratio is 55.75% for the Rs 1 to 3 lakh group, 17.50% for the Rs 3 to 5 lakh group, 12.25% for the Rs 5 to 10 lakh group and 14.50% for the Rs 10 lakh and above group. Overall, the debt ratio is highest in the Rs 1 to 3 lakh group.

**12. The nature of the loan you have**

Sr	Nature	Worker	Percentage
1	Bank	148	37.00
2	Moneylender	162	40.50
3	Relative	40	10.00
4	Friends	21	5.25
5	Mukkadam	23	5.75
6	other	06	1.50
	Total	400	100 %

**Sources : field work 2024-25**

From the above table, it is seen that the sugarcane workers have taken loans from banks, borrowed money, relatives, friends, Mukadam and other sources. The proportion of loans taken from banks is 37%, loans from relatives is 40.5%, 10% from friends is 5.25%, 5.75% from Mukadam, and loans taken from other places is 1.50%. Overall, it is seen that every sugarcane worker has taken loans in some form.

**13. Do you participate in any public activities here?**

Sr	Activites	Worker	Percentages
1	Yes	95	23.75
2	No	305	76.25
3	Total	400	100 %

**Sources : field work 2024-25**

Sugarcane workers were asked, "Do you participate in any public activities here?" or "Do you celebrate public activities?" The highest number of respondents, 76.25%, said no, while 23.45% said yes.

**14. Do you face problems like caste discrimination?**

Sr	Discrimination	Worker	Percentages
1	Yes	65	16.25
2	No	335	83.75
3	Total	400	100

**Sources : field work 2024-25**

When we come together in this place, do you face any problems due to caste? Or do you face problems like discrimination among castes? In this place, 83.75 percent people said no, while 16.25 percent people said yes.

**15. Do you get any work exemptions or benefits during pregnancy or maternity?**

Sr	Benefits	Worker	Worker	Total
1	Exemption from work	76	37	113
2	Financial benefit	25	17	42
3	Health facilities	22	12	34
4	Total	123	66	189

**Sources : field work 2024-25****16. Are you provided with any comforts and facilities at work?**

Sr	Facilities	Datta Worker		Guru Datta Worker		Total
		Yes	No	Yes	No	
1	Water	25(240)	215(240)	30 (160)	130(160)	400 100%)
2	Light	25(240)	215(240)	30 (160)	130 (160)	400 100%)
3	Toilet	40(240)	200(240)	05 (160)	155 (160)	400(100)
4	Accommodation/ living facilities	60(240)	180(240)	80 (160)	80 (160)	400 100%)
5	Other	30(240)	190(240)	17(160)	143 (160)	400(100%)

**Sources : field work 2024-25****17. What illness do you face due to constant work?**

Sr no	Illness	Data (240)	Guru data (160)	Total
1	Spinal Diseases	60 (25 %)	37 (23.13)	97 (24.25)
2	Lower Back Pain	55 (22.91)	45 (28.13)	100 (25.00)
3	Neck Diseases	22 (9.16)	7 (4.38)	29 (7.25)
4	Knee Pain	35 (14.58)	12 (7.5)	47 (11.75)
5	Back Diseases	62 (25.83)	40 (25.00)	102 (25.2)
6	Stomach Disorders	18 (7.5)	13 (8.13)	31 (7.75)
7	Others	8 (3.33)	6 (3.75)	14 (3.5)
	Total	240 (60%)	160 (40 %)	400 (100 %)

**Sources : field work 2024-25**

**Recommendation / Suggestions**

1. Many government schemes have been started for sugarcane workers in Maharashtra. Organizations like 'Loknete Gopinath Munde Ustod Kamgar Mahamandal' work for their welfare.
2. It is necessary to provide educational opportunities to the children of the workers and provide skill training for alternative employment.
3. Coordinated efforts of government agencies, sugar factories and social organizations are needed to improve the lives of sugarcane workers.
3. To benefit from various government schemes, it is necessary to register all sugarcane workers and issue them identity cards. The Maharashtra government has established 'Loknete Gopinath Munde Ustod Kamgar Kalyan Mahamandal' for this.
4. To get the workers out of the vicious cycle of loans taken from the creditors, the government should provide loans at low interest rates or implement loan waiver schemes.
5. Provident Fund (EPF), health insurance and life insurance schemes should be started for the workers.
6. Special health camps should be organized to address the health problems of women workers and maternity related facilities should be provided to them.
7. To ensure that the children of the workers do not have to be deprived of education, the government should provide mobile schools (sugarcane schools) or hostels according to their migration.
8. A coordination committee of sugarcane workers, sugar factory representatives and government officials should be formed at the district level.
9. Improving water management in drought-affected areas of Marathwada and providing employment options to the locals will reduce the rate of migration

**Conclusion**

Above the information, it is evident that paying attention to the condition of sugarcane workers is not only for their welfare but also for the development of the sugar industry. Because efforts should be made to improve the condition of the workers, pay them fair wages, provide health, education facilities to children, protect the rights of workers, provide health facilities to women. Along with implementing rules and laws, the role of trade unions and advocacy groups is also important in this, which empowers the workers. It is necessary to create more justice and a working environment in the sugarcane industry. Which will benefit the sugarcane workers in the future.

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