

LOST IN TRANSITION

A STUDY OF RAJASTHANI MIGRANT LABOUR IN AHMEDABAD CITY

AJEEVIKA BUREAU





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1 Introduction

Aajeevika Bureau was established as a facility dedicated to provide services to rural migrants of Southern Rajasthan – a predominantly tribal region in western India. The populations of this hilly, semi-arid region traditionally depend on subsistence cultivation. Often faced with drought and crop failures, the livelihood of the region’s population is turning to seasonal wage labour opportunities away from the villages – mainly in cities, farms and factories of Gujarat where cheap labour is needed and migrants from across the country find economic refuge. The Bureau provides services to migrants who are joining or are at the threshold of joining the labour markets away from their home villages. These services include registration and photo ID, skill training and placement, communication and tracking, legal aid and counselling to Rajasthan migrants.

This report is a first narration of the status and problems of labour from Rajasthan in Ahmedabad city. The bustling economy of Ahmedabad serves as a magnet for hundreds and thousands of rural migrants, particularly from the not-too-distant districts of South Rajasthan. Ahmedabad has attracted migrants from across Rajasthan. However the Rajasthani labour continues to be amongst the poorer and more vulnerable participant in the Ahmedabad economic and urban life. Though there are communities of Rajasthani origins that have served and settled Ahmedabad for more than three generations, the largest number are those who come here for work on a seasonal basis and return to their villages with some hard earned (and barely saved) wages. They will come back to Ahmedabad in a few months or drift to another city, another location for work.

In its attempt to provide services to migrants, the Aajeevika Bureau has recently begun to work in Ahmedabad city. The Ahmedabad operation for the Bureau is an extremely important one since the city is amongst the most significant destination for those migrants that are registered by the Bureau at the source. In its present coverage of migrants at the source end, the Bureau has registered particularly large numbers from Gogunda, Kelwara and Railmagra block who report Ahmedabad as their first destination. The Bureau is also aware of many other locations (such as Salumbar block of Udaipur district or all of Dungarpur district) that have concentrations of seasonal migrants coming into Ahmedabad.



Cities like Ahmedabad offer opportunities for economic advancement to thousands. However these opportunities require skills, confidence and networks on the part of those who enter it in the hope of making a transition from poverty and deficit to a reasonable livelihood. This also requires the presence of many facilitating circumstances including a consistent growth of new jobs, favourable labour environment and a sensitive local administration that can view its migrants as a necessary and critical ingredient of their economic growth. These factors don’t necessarily exist and cause

the migrants to lead a life of hardship, risk and invisibility before they retire and return to their villages or move on to other locations.

Who are the Rajasthani migrants in Ahmedabad? What are the main sectors and occupations in which they work? What is their geographical spread? What do they earn and what are they able to save? How do they move and make progress? What are the problems they face in living, working and surviving in the city? And finally what should we – the Bureau - be focused on as a specialised agency providing services to rural migrants from Rajasthan? These are some of the questions attempted for an answer in this first report from the Bureau on Rajasthani migrants in Ahmedabad city.

2 Scope and Methodology

The overall labour arena in a city like Ahmedabad is vast and complex and this first study cannot aim to be all inclusive. Yet the study should provide an accurate first picture of what the Rajasthani migrants do in the city and of their main issues.

Though there are Rajasthani migrants of all variety in the city, our main concern has been to identify and map the seasonal, low-end, vulnerable category. This implies therefore Rajasthani migrants in relatively stable and secure segments of urban economic engagement are not covered in this study. Of course many of these also remain uncovered by services and face many difficulties in the city, yet their situation is better than the bottom-end workers.

To reiterate, the main objectives of this study were envisaged as follows:

- 1. To ascertain the approximate number, spread and location of main migrant groups from Rajasthan in Ahmedabad.**
- 2. To map the main occupational niches of migrants' work and livelihood.**
- 3. To profile the living conditions of migrants with reference to their access to basic services and facilities.**
- 4. To determine the nature and content of services and interventions relevant to migrants in Ahmedabad.**

The methodology for this rapid study has been deliberately kept simple and made to lean towards qualitative methods. The study was conducted in various locations of the city using a set of tools – a simple questionnaire, focus group discussions and participant observations. As a result the Bureau study team was able to interview nearly 185 migrants from Rajasthan who were at work in Ahmedabad.

A classification of these interviewed migrants based on occupation and source are tabulated on the next page

Classification of migrants interviewed

No.	Occupation	Number of Migrants interviewed	Area of origin in Rajasthan	Areas covered in Ahmedabad
1	Hotel/Restaurants/tea stalls/roadside food stalls	49	Udaipur, Dungarpur, Banswada, Bhilwada, Rajasamand	University road, Satellite road, Paldi, Kalupur
2	Factory worker / Labour / Statue makers	19	Udaipur, Dungarpur, Ganganagar, Banswada, Jodhpur, Pali	Naroda, Vatva, Rakhial, Odhav, Gotha chowkri, Vadaj
3	Headloaders and Cart-pushers	47	Udaipur, Sirohi, Jhalor, Jodhpur, Badmere	Jamalpur AMC MKT, Madhavpura market, Kalupur market, Vatva industrial area
4	Vegetable Vendors	16	Jhalor, Jaipur, Sirohi	University road, Satellite road, Paldi, Kalupur, Jamalpur AMC MKT
5	Scrap / Junk collectors	24	Bhilwara, Udaipur, Rajsamand	Memnagar, Kalupur
6	Domestic workers	15	Dungarpur	Satellite road
7	Diamond workers / Construction workers / Catering / Drivers	36	Udaipur, Dungarpur carpenter from Bar-mere, Pali	Bapunagar, Memco crossroads, Vadaj

3 At Work in Ahmedabad

Ahmedabad is a vast metropolitan city located in central Gujarat. The city sprawls to almost 220 sq kms and is home to some 5 million people. Ahmedabad has always been the economic capital of Gujarat. In 1960 when Gujarat state was bifurcated from the Bombay state, Ahmedabad was known as the "Manchester of India" for the reason of housing the largest number of cotton mills in India. In the years to come, a number of these cotton mills closed and Ahmedabad's manufacturing, trading and commercial base rapidly grew in other sectors. Ahmedabad is the best linked city in the state and the hub of intense commercial activity. It is the best endowed of all Gujarati cities in terms of educational and research infrastructure and resources and is the headquarter to hundreds of corporate organisations and media. It is also boasts of being amongst the most flourishing resources in Gujarat for urban living – malls, luxury apartment complexes and shopping areas and a vibrant sector for services. Its urban span is growing at an annual rate of 5%. Its proximity to Gandhinagar makes it the hotbed of power and politics in Gujarat and its central location, the major junction for populations in and out of Gujarat.

The following table shows the distribution of workers across different economic sectors and their incomes in the city.

Sector	Share of Employment (%)		Share of Income(%)	
	Total	Informal	Total	Informal
Agriculture	2.3	59.4	0.6	84.8
Manufacturing	35.4	67.4	36.4	43.1
Construction	9.3	100	3.6	100
Transport	12.7	91.5	11.7	80.5
Trade, Hotels and Restaurants	19.0	90.5	18.9	63.1
Communications, banking and insurance	3.9		12.5	
Services	16.4	81.5	11.6	48.9
Others				
Total	100	76.7	100	46.8

Source: Uma Rani and Unni (2000)

As expected the largest pool of workers in Ahmedabad are in the informal, unorganised sectors of the economy. Rough estimates put the total number of informal workers at 1.7 million. It is difficult to estimate how many amongst these are seasonal migrants though these are likely to be the largest number. Migrants to Ahmedabad come from all directions of North and Eastern India. Over the years they have come to be identified with specific sectors – tribal migrants from MP form the construction workforce, Biharis are head loaders and cart pushers and UP migrants are factory workers and drivers, Oriyas are plumbers and the diamond cutting industry is made up of people from Saurashtra. There are also large and ever growing numbers of migrant workers in Ahmedabad from the less developed parts of Gujarat, notably from Panchmahals.

4 Rajasthani Labour in Ahmedabad City

The study suggests that there are specific labour niches that Rajasthani migrants have come to overwhelmingly occupy in Ahmedabad. **Construction** is amongst the largest sector and there are Rajasthani migrants across all points of the construction labour chain including the more skilled areas of **carpentry, stone laying and polishing and fabrication**. Other sectors that Rajasthani workers occupy include **hotel, restaurant, canteen and catering work inclusive of running small, wayside eateries; junk and scrap recycling; head-loading and load-cart pulling, vegetable vending** and the most personalised of all urban services - **domestic work**. There are many other areas in which the Rajasthani migrant has come to be a growing workforce, for example in security services and transportation.

This section describes at some length a few of the major sectors in which Rajasthani migrants are engaged.¹ Within each of these the source areas of the Rajasthani migrants and their composition, their work and living conditions and their main issues have been described.

¹ Construction sector has been omitted from this study because its issues have been specially well captured in previous studies by the "Bandh Kam Mazdoor Sangathan".

4.1 Hotel, Restaurant and Catering Services

Amongst the most visible and easily accessed economic sector for Rajasthani workforce is that of hotel, restaurant and catering services across Ahmedabad. The range of establishments is huge – large hotels and restaurants, wayside eateries, *chai* and snack shops, *farsaan* stores, canteens of hostels and bus stands and mobile snack and meal facilities. Ahmedabad is well known as a haven for food lovers and the sheer numbers of food related facilities justify its reputation. Food establishments such as amongst the biggest chain of restaurants – **Honest** or **Rasmadhur** – are owned by Rajasthani proprietors and they employ an almost all-Rajasthan staff. The presence of Rajasthani migrant in this area is such that they now form nearly half of the total workforce engaged in hotels and restaurants.

4.1.1 Source and Composition



The largest number of workers in hotels and restaurants come from Rajasthan's **Udaipur, Rajsamand and Dungarpur** districts and its adjoining areas of Bhilwara and Chittorgarh. The study did not generally reveal a system of contractors and agents in the recruitment of workers from source villages but there are certainly senior, more experienced workers, like cooks and waiters, who round up young men from their villages and bring them over to Ahmedabad.²

Almost all caste groups are represented in this labour niche though the nature of jobs are differentiated according to the workers' caste and social background. Thus young boys from tribal and dalit background are likely to be found as low-end workers as cleaners, kitchen helpers and sweepers while others are likely to be waiters, cooks and service attendants.

Almost 50% of respondents were found to be between the ages of 15-25 years. The average age of first entry appears to be 15 years in this sector and the average duration of "survival" is 8-10 years. Child labour is most common in this sector and hundreds of young boys are found to be working on roadside tea and snack stalls. Typically the employer brings them to Ahmedabad from their village and payment is made directly to their parents back home.

4.1.2 Work and living conditions

The hotel and restaurant work has the longest and most difficult working hours starting from early morning till late into the night. Staff of these establishments is constantly under their employers' or supervisors' scrutiny and abusive behaviour is common. Many respondents reported on how their wages are deducted in case of accidental breakage of crockery or cutlery and because of the smallest absence. Typically the workers live together in the establishment itself. None of the respondents lived with their family.

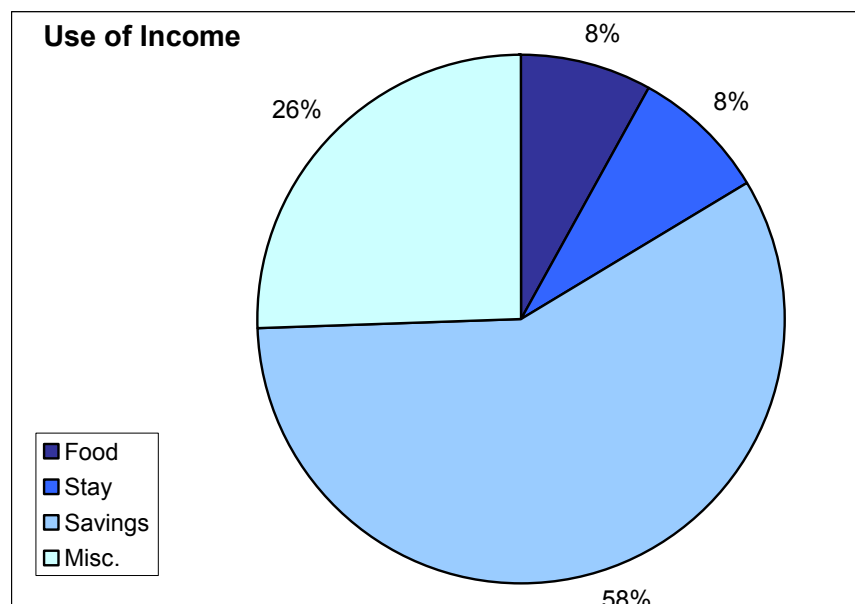
² In one medium sized hotel it was found that workers were recruited through a contractor from Rajasthan who is a known supplier of labour to restaurants and hotels.



The older ones rent rooms that may be shared with four - five men. Living conditions within establishments are very bad and overcrowding is common. There is little privacy, boys usually sleep on or under the tables and have no space for recreation and rest during the day. Men usually share one bathroom amongst themselves and in smaller establishments with no private toilets, they use the public toilets such as *sulabh shauchalay* if these at all exist in the vicinity. In many cases they just have no toilet access at all and are forced to use open spaces. There is no privacy and cases of sexual abuse and physical assault were reported. There is certainly no place to rest in case of ill health or accident. Perhaps the one advantage of working in eateries is the relative easy access to food though it might take some time before access become open and easy.

4.1.3 Wages and Incomes

The per day wage rate is sometimes as low as Rs. 20 a day with an average of Rs 78 for all respondents. None of the workers interviewed in this sector had a bank account. They certainly do not have any form of identification to be able to open an account. They keep their monthly payment with the employer or supervisor and withdraw the amount when they return home. Since most men working in establishments were from the same area or even village, each month one of them goes back home and carries funds for the families of others. Some time a small commission is paid to the carrier of funds for this transaction! In case of emergency the workers borrow from the employers or from friends.



As we can see from the chart, the expense on food and stay is minimal (Eight percent for each) as these are provided by the employers. 26% of their total expenditure classified as miscellaneous seems to be on health, communication and entertainment. As much as 58% of the total income can be saved and sent home.

There are quite a few men working for others who are ready to open their own food stalls but lack the resources. Even if they do have the resources, it is difficult for them to buy anything legally for lack of any local identity. They are referred to as “outsiders”. They do not have a ration card and cannot get a gas connection. The absence of a formal identity document is a major issue for workers in this sector. Many narrate incidents of police harassment in absence of a firm identity. For those who own roadside stalls one of most serious issue is that of hafta collection extorted by local goons who claim to be protecting them from police and authorities. The money extorted can be at least Rs 700 a month for a tea stall and in busy areas it is as high as Rs.1000 a day! One of the major part of their earnings is used to pay hafta. The practice is endemic and many officials in the police and local authorities are reported to be involved. Since the collection is illegal they can be asked to vacate the space anytime!

4.2 Loaders and Porters

Across the markets, factories and commercial areas hundreds of loaders and porters from Rajasthan are found to be working through the year. This category includes all kind of loaders - **hand cart pullers, pedal rickshaw drivers, and head loaders**. They can be found in all corners of Ahmedabad city - in Jamalpur vegetable market, Kalupur market, Madhavpura spice market, Odahav and Rakhial metal factories and in industrial estates like Vatva or Naroda. It appears that 95% of all headloading work is done by Rajasthanis though a small number of migrants from Madhya Pradesh and Bihar have also entered the loading arena.

4.2.1 Source and Composition



Loaders and porters are an important part of Rajasthani migrant population in Ahmedabad. They tend to be tribal and *dalits* who hail from Udaipur, Sirohi, Jalor, Jodhpur and Barmer. Unlike other sectors the entry into this sector is open and requires little social network. Most workers in this sector are therefore a floating population. Most of the respondents in this study stated that they live in Ahmedabad for 20 - 25 days a month and due to the strenuous nature of their jobs, they return to their village only to return in a few days' time. The largest number of loaders (68%) are in the age group of 26-35 with just a handful who are older than 45 years. The work is very physically demanding and requires high stamina and strength.

4.2.2 Work and Living Conditions

Loaders work amongst the toughest of settings. These are crowded, hot, noisy and extremely polluted market and factory spaces and they have to work almost without breaks whenever there's a loading/unloading task. None of the respondents had ever used helmets, gloves, hooks or other protective gear so they are exposed to high level of risk while lifting and transporting

goods.



The living conditions of loaders are amongst the most difficult. Most live in open, and those who have carts sleep on their carts. There are no toilets, no access to safe drinking water and often no place to even cook a meal. Most loaders live in open and eat in roadside stalls. Almost all the loaders interviewed in this study said that they paid for sanitary services - paid toilets and bathrooms that have come up in the neighbourhood of markets and yards. Many interviewees reported to being picked up by police in the event of a theft in the neighbouring area. The physically punishing nature of this work makes loaders easy prey to addictions like drinking and drug use that rule the street life of a large city.

4.2.3 Wages and Incomes

The Sardar Patel Vegetable Market

The biggest Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation wholesale vegetable market, farmers sell their vegetables here to stockiest/wholesalers and vegetable vendors buy from here. It works 24 hours a day. In the centre of this large market is a tin shed where the 150 wholesalers sit, and all four sides are lined by vegetable shops. Truck loads of vegetables are sold and bought. The farmers are from Gujarat, usually Patel farmers. The stockiest and wholesalers consist of Gujaratis, Muslims and Rajasthanis.

Majority of the labour that empties and fills these trucks is migrant Rajasthani population. The laborers are recruited by labour contractors - who are higher caste Rajasthanis.

According to rough estimates approximately 500 Rajasthanis work in this market. Per day earning is quite good compared to other loaders - minimum Rs 150. Most loaders stay in the market. The tin shed is cleaned at night and the space is then used for sleeping.

Though per day wage is rate is decent, expenses are equally high. For loaders living under the shed - they pay for the sanitary facilities available in the market - Rs 2 to use the toilet, Rs 5 to bathe and Rs 10 to wash clothes. They buy drinking water - Rs 1 per packet. In addition to this, at least Rs 50 is spent on food.

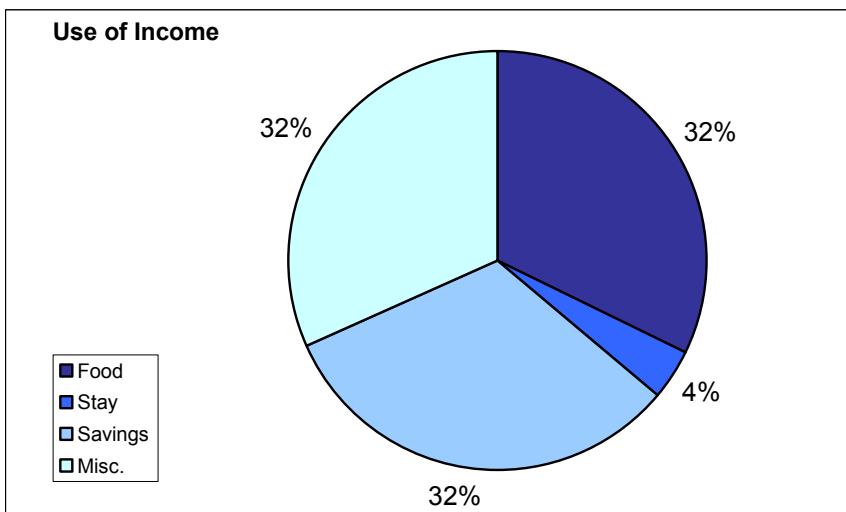
The vendors and farmers have made a cooperative samiti. On probing further it was found that the samiti would pay Rs 50,000 to a loader in case of accident (which is common) in the market. But no such payment has been made so far.

The market is a crowded place with loads of vegetables, vehicles and men! The air is extremely polluted. An informal discussion with the labors confirmed that quite a few of them suffered from TB and only a handful were on medication.

The loaders in this market have no identity card, health insurance and shelter. They do back breaking work for long hours. Savings are low since a lot of money is squandered on substance abuse.

The daily earning of head loaders are relatively higher than other migrant populations ranging from Rs 100 to Rs 250 depending on the location of their work. The loaders in Jamalpur market earn more as most of the work is that of head loading. In other markets, loaders work on a piece rate basis, per sack or ton rate. Some even get paid a daily wage. The hand carts or rickshaws are available on rent as well. Thus some loaders own their carts, while the majority rent them. The carts are rented at Rs 80 to Rs 125 a week, depending on its physical condition. If the cart breaks/over turns and the goods are damaged, the losses are the loader's responsibility.

In time of crisis, the loaders have to depend on their friends or relatives for financial support. Due to the uncertain nature of their jobs, it is difficult for them to get money from money lenders. In some cases it was found that they had borrowed money at extremely high interest rates. In cases when goods are damaged, a loader can be in dire need of financial help. If he is unable to repay it, he is expected to work for the same shopkeeper to repay the debt.



As seen in chart, as high as 32% of loaders' total income is

spent on food. They commonly have to buy food from wayside stalls that can be expensive. Most stay in semi covered or open spaces and thus have negligible expenses for lodging. Since most loaders do not stay with their families, their savings are high - almost 32%. Miscellaneous expenses, including communication services, payment to use the public toilets and substance abuse, account for an additional 32% of expenses.

4.3 Scrap/Junk Collectors



Known as 'pasti-bhangar' this sector is almost completely dominated by Rajasthanis in Ahmedabad. The work involves collection of household and institutional junk that is sold on for recycling purposes to factories and manufacturing units across the country through a large and complex hierarchy of shopkeepers, wholesalers and forwarding agents. At the very bottom end of this sector is the pasti-bhangar wallah who goes from door to door to collect old newspapers, bottles, scrap metal and used articles. The largest concentration of the scrap collectors exists in Memnagar where they reside as a community and have set up small godowns and collection centres. Across all major residential and commercial areas also the pasti-bhangar store is a common site.

4.3.1 Source and Composition

It is believed that there are about 10,000 migrant Rajasthanis in this sector. Amongst them, 70% of them are from Bhilwara district in Rajasthan and the rest from Udaipur and Chittorgarh. The trade appears dominated by the Kumawat caste and entry into this sector is not easy. Most of the scrap collectors come with their friends or are related to people who are already in this trade. In a few cases it was found that employer/shop keeper had brought a team of two or three men from his village. He has given them seed money to buy scrap and a cart. This sector, like the vegetable vendors' sector is difficult to enter without a link and it is in the hands of few relatively better off people.

4.3.2 Work and Living Conditions

The pasti-bhangar work requires the collector to set out with the cart and make rounds of selected neighbourhoods, societies and markets. Typically the rounds may be made from 7 AM to noon and then later after 3 pm through evening. In some of the markets the pasti-bhangar collection can only take place in late evenings. The collector returns to a specific shop and sell the goods to his earmarked trader. The difference of amount between what he buys and sells is the worker's earning. Some workers, who are slightly better off, venture into the market themselves. They hire the cart and are free to sell their collection to whoever gives them the best price. Some have even bought a cart. The shopkeeper has a worker employed for segregating different types of junk. For example, if an electric item is sold as junk the nickel is separated from iron and plastic and then each is sold separately to their indi-

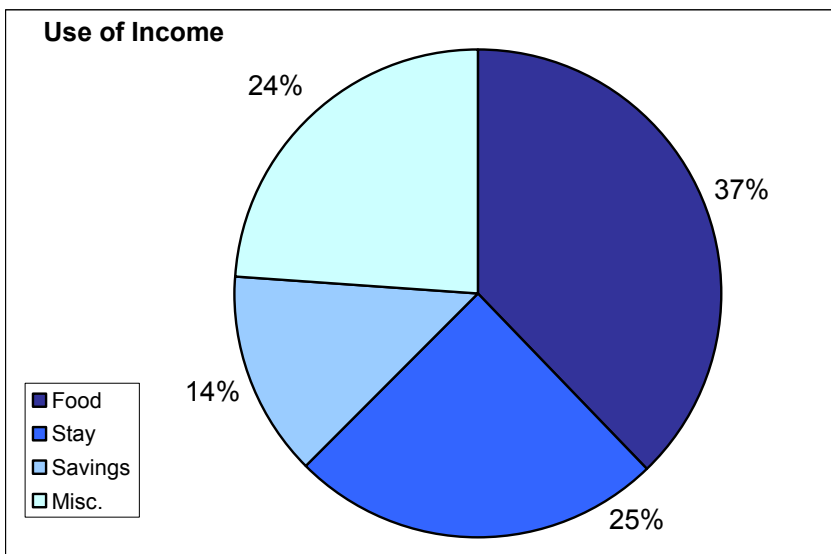
vidual wholesalers. The wholesalers trade of junk and scrap in Ahmedabad are Muslims.

4.3.3 Wages and Incomes

On an average, a junk collector earns about Rs 70 to Rs 80 a day and a small shopkeeper earns about Rs 150 - 200 a day. The earnings are more or less steady and most who have been around for 5 years or more are able to bring their families to the city. However the general opinion among the junk collectors is that there are too many people now in the trade. This is creating competition among them and generally pushing down collections hence earnings. This does appear to be correct.

Although migrants in this sector seem to be doing well, they have their own set of problems. A number of them have been here for more than 10 years but do not have any identity. They do not have a ration card and have constant difficulty in establishing themselves as residents of Ahmedabad. This results in difficulties all around - for school admission for their children, obtaining a gas connection and even opening a bank account. Shelter is a common issue for most scrap workers, especially new entrants. Typically, four to five men share a small, overcrowded room without a toilet facility.

Nearly all of those interviewed complained of police harassment. In the event of theft in any neighbourhood the junk and scrap collectors are the first to be targeted. They are asked to show their belongings and days' collections. The police often extort money from them and there are many reports of serious harassment. There is a strong mafia that collects hafta from most scrap collectors. One has to pay hafta to make any kind of establishment on the road, even if one want to stand in a particular corner with ones cart or even to enter a society, hafta is a must. Thus a sizeable amount of collectors' income is spent on paying hafta to local goons.



Over a third of the income of collectors is spent on food since many junk collectors ultimately bring their families. They live in very basic tenements rented in Memnagar area and expend a quarter of their incomes on lodging. Less is saved as compared to other groups, possibly associated with the fact that their families are now living with them.

4.4 Home Workers/Domestic Help

Rajasthani migrants have been working as domestic help in the city for at least 50 years ago. For long years upper caste Rajasthanis have been employed as cooks ("Maharaj") in affluent Gujarati households. The cooks would bring two or three young assistants from their villages who would perform domestic chores in same homes. This turned into a full scale inflow of domestic assistants as the urban requirements grew and networks of older domestic assistants expanded. Typically they stay with the employers or independently, work for four -five months at a stretch and then go back to their villages with savings for 15-20 days. By now large numbers of domestic helpers have become full time residents of Ahmedabad city, steadily losing touch with their home areas or returning to it only during festivals and marriages.

4.4.1 Source and Composition

By a recent estimate, approximately 40,000 Rajasthanis work in Ahmedabad as domestic help³. The largest number of these, hail from Dungarpur district and the general reference for domestic help in Ahmedabad has in fact become "*Dungarpuriya*". Out of the fifteen that were interviewed, three were women. Two thirds of those interviewed were in the age range of 26-35 and 33% in the age range of 15-25 years.

The study reveals three categories of domestic workers

1. **Live in household help** - Their stay and food arrangements are taken care by the family.
2. **Full day household help** who come in the morning and go back in the evening after dinner - food arrangements are taken care by the family.
3. **Part timers** who work in several homes and did specific chores like washing utensils/washing clothes – they take care of their own food.

Entry in this sector is strictly by reference only. All interviewees had references by existing domestic helpers. Even if they had no prior experience of domestic work, they were able to get jobs in homes because of a good reference. Domestic work is seen as a

³ Mr Ashok Punjabi an advocate has made a union of domestic workers and construction laborers. His association already has other 72 unions- that include hawkers, mill workers etc. He has promised to issue each of these domestic workers an identity card. His registration fees is Rs. 125/- per person. Within two months his union already has 8000 registered members - out of which about 6000 are domestic workers. Ashok Punjabi is the vice president of state congress. Phone no. #9825006530

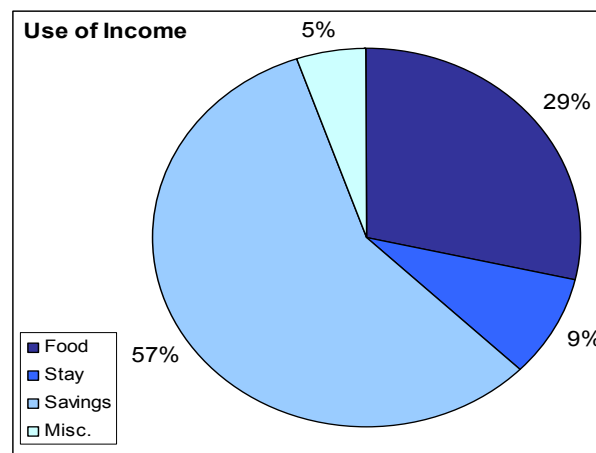
more privileged jobs because one is provided with food and lodging and there is the relative comfort of a home setting as opposed to a factory or a hotel. Yet working in homes requires a lot of responsibility and the worker is under constant scrutiny. There is no flexibility in terms of time. Yet many interviewees confirmed that they were treated as one of the family members and they felt a sense of belonging. In case of emergency most of them borrowed from their employers and those who had worked for long years confirmed that they were given attention if they or their families needed medical help.

4.4.2 Wage and Incomes

There is a remarkable range in what domestic workers earn in Ahmedabad. Obviously those experienced in a range of tasks including cooking, cleaning and child care are able to negotiate high initial salary.

All of the men interviewed requested training and placement assistance for hotel jobs. By the time the domestic helpers cross the age of 25 – 30 they start looking for more flexible jobs. Also by this time, they would have built contacts and references in different sectors and become well placed to take up other jobs.

The biggest problem faced by domestic helpers is harassment by police. In the recent times there have been quite a few burglaries and a few cases murders. The domestic helper is the first to be suspected of involvement directly or indirectly. In a few well-known cases the involvement of domestic help was in fact proven. Since then, the Municipal Corporation has issued a notice that all employers must get police clearance for their domestic help and identity cards should be issued to them. But as one domestic worker put it "even if a small thing from the master's house is misplaced, they would immediately suspect us and call the police. The police, without any investigation would blame us and detain us in jail. But 9 out of 10 times the stolen goods are recovered from the house itself or it is later proved that it had been stolen by some member of the family." The situation is so bad that even if there is robbery in the vicinity the domestic helps of that area are the first to be suspected and brought to the police station.



As high as 57% of the total income of this group is saved, in part because many of their requirements are provided for. Most of them use tobacco, but beyond that - could not smoke freely or drink alcohol, so have little expenditure

on these items compared to other groups.

4.5 Factory/Industrial Workers

Ahmedabad's industrial areas include Odhav, Naroda, Vatva, Gotha cross roads and Sanand and in each of these areas vast numbers of Rajasthani workers abound. They can be found in all kinds of factories such as chemical, steel manufacturing, rice mills and plastic making. Large numbers are also present in factories that need skills more pronounced in Rajasthan – statue making, tile manufacturing and marble cutting. These range from small, primitive units to relatively large and modernised ones. Rajasthani labour appears to be concentrated in the smaller and medium sized ones where the demands on skills is not high and the terms of employment are relatively informal.

4.5.1 Source and Composition

The migrant workers in factories appear to come from across Rajasthan including Udaipur, Dungarpur, Banswada, Jodhpur, Pali and even as far as from Ganganagar. Slightly more than 60% of the factory workers interviewed are between the age range of 15-25 years. It is seen that migrants start young and stay long in the same sector.

4.5.2 Work and Living Conditions

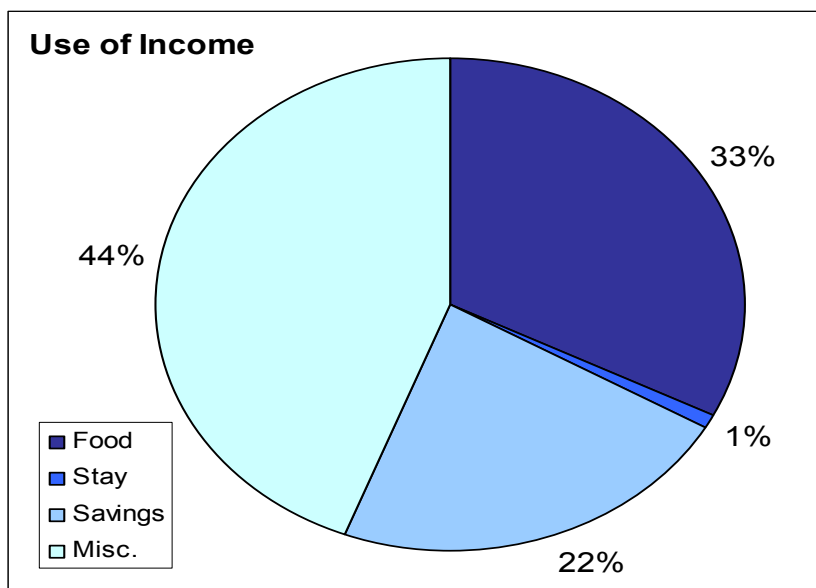
Soham

Soham, a young factory worker in the Zenith group of companies, works in one of their chemical factories. He has been working there since the last five years and has now made Ahmedabad his home. He earns Rs. 110/- a day and lives with his wife. On Moharram he had a fight with a Muslim group in his neighbourhood. They came to his house when he was away and threatened his wife of dire consequences. He went to the police but they would not lodge his complaint refusing to acknowledge him as a resident of Ahmedabad. He hid in a friend's house till things became cooler. He still lives in fear and refuses to travel late hours.

Typically factory workers are men who and have lived in Ahmedabad for long time but have rarely ventured beyond the four walls of their factories. Most live in their factories or in rented houses nearby. Some of them have settled in villages on the outskirts of industrial areas with their families. They get a fixed day wage rate and are paid extra for overtime. They are all contract labourers. None of them have facilities of PF or gratuity or even a bank account. They earn an average of Rs. 150/- per day.

Yet the work is steady and there are Rajasthani workers working in the same factory for as long as 40 years. In certain factories, like the rice mills in Sanand and the steel factories in Vatva, the labour is seasonal or intermittent. Migrant Rajasthani labourers work for a few months, go back to their villages and then come back in a month or two. In rice mills, they work at a stretch for four - five months during the season and then go back to their village.

The factory workers face complete social alienation and in spite of working in the same factory for long durations do not get any benefit of the organized sector. There is usually no skill up gradation in the kind of work they do and thus are unable to advance economically. In case of financial emergencies they borrow from friends and very few could get assistance from their employers.



A third of the income of this group is spent on food, since most do not cook themselves and eat out. Little is spent on lodging as they usually sleep inside factories or in the open. 22% of their total income is saved while 44% is spent on medical expenses and entertainment.

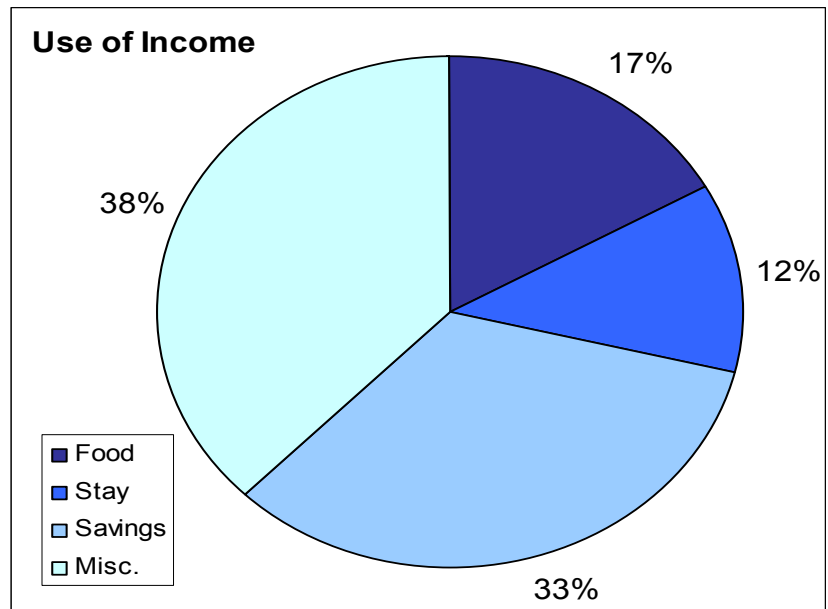
4.6 Vegetable Vending



Almost an omnipotent presence, the vegetable seller and vendor across the city of Ahmedabad is very likely to be a person of Rajasthani origin. The range is quite remarkable – he might have a smart retail shop on the Satellite road, or will push a cartload through societies, or just squat anywhere near junctions and markets. They are especially prevalent in Rajasthani slum areas like Vasna, where many Rajasthani women can be seen selling vegetables. They usually come from Jalor and Barmer districts of Rajasthan.

All the vegetable vendors that were interviewed have been in Ahmedabad for at least 10-15 years and are now settled in the city. Most vegetable vendors are doing better than other migrants, in terms of food and shelter. They live with their families; their children go to school and they only visit their homes in Rajasthan during festivals.

Their major issue was that in spite of being so long in the city they were not recognized as citizens of the state and had no documents like ration card/voter card to avail any benefits from the state programs. They were also amongst the many who faced oppression by hafta goons.



A vegetable vendor can earn anything between Rs. 100 to Rs. 500 a day, with the amount increasing according to the location of his shop. Since almost all of them cook themselves and the expense on food is less than 20%. They stay in rented homes with their families and their lodging expenses are about 12% of their incomes.

4.7 Other Sectors Frequented by Rajasthani Migrants

Ahmedabad has a growing number of diamond polishing factories and Rajasthani workers are found in this trade. One issue that is specific to diamond workers is that the wage rates are now going down. Most were being paid about Rs. 10 per diamond for cutting. Now due to an excess of supply of cutters and a shift in the diamond trade the rate has come down to Rs. 4. Many workers in the diamond sector are in search of new job options.

As noted earlier thousands of Rajasthani workers find employment in the booming construction sector of the city. These include workers engaged in unskilled, manual category of labour to the more skilled and remunerative niches such as carpenters, stone layers, painters and electricians.

5 Managing Adversity in Ahmedabad

Like every growing urban centre in the city Ahmedabad is a hub of growth and opportunity. It needs vast and ever-growing numbers of labour to keep its economy buzzing with success. This vast number finds its economic refuge in the city for short periods of time. Yet given the unstable nature of its engagement, its low

levels of skills and its lack of political influence they remain on the margins of this city – often finding themselves eased out of its bounds, to accommodate other waves of migrants who come in with hope and promise.

There are several common battles that the migrant labourers in the informal, unorganised economy of Ahmedabad have to fight on a daily basis, even as they get on with their hard work. This section attempts to bring these issues together as a precursor to reflect on what the Bureau and other organisations need to be doing in their Ahmedabad work.

The study across sectors has helped to establish that the entry of migrants into a city of Ahmedabad proportions is not a random act. In each of the sectors that have been reviewed, there are **well-entrenched systems of recruitment and sourcing** of labour. Younger migrants enter the city on the strength of their relatives, social networks or labour agents and contractors. This intermediary largely determines what they do for the first many years and in a way circumscribes their path for advancement and growth. Not surprisingly therefore there are specific migration streams from source areas to destinations such as Ahmedabad. Thus a socio-geographical cluster in Rajasthan will start providing labour for a specific trade or occupation at the destination and this will become a well established pattern of labour movement. Any long-term work with migrant labour in Ahmedabad therefore has to recognise this chain of intermediaries and networks and understand the relationship between source-identity and destination-profile. In a number of cases work is necessary with agents and intermediaries so that the quality of services and protection to migrant labour improves.

In terms of Aajeevika Bureau's own strategy it therefore becomes imperative to identify and dialogue with labour intermediaries in different sectors. Some of this dialogue can indeed happen in the city, but a fair bit will need to take place at source-ends from where these arrangements actually arise. The Bureau will need to **organise occupational groups** that can in turn look after the interests of those entering the market in their sectors. Also the intermediaries can be enlisted and motivated for ensuring better practices and ethical treatment in the market towards migrant labour.

Across all migrant groups from Rajasthan there is **real crisis of identity and legitimacy**. This is true of migrants who have just recently entered and also true of those who have been in the city for decades. Unable to establish their credentials as lawful residents of the city, they go without very basic services that all city residents take for granted – subsidised rations, bank accounts and credit, rental spaces, and gas connections. If at all these services are accessed, it is by paying hefty bribes or commissions. The lack of identity is a common deterrent for economic advancement. People are unable to take risks and undertake new ventures because of an overriding environment in which they remain unrecognised and invisible. Due to their 'invisibility' and lack of recognition by Government, particularly city authorities, attention is rarely paid to providing them services as a group. The city

plans and allocations do not take into account that there are large numbers of people who spend most of their living and working life in the city but are unable to claim any service spaces.

The **registration and photo ID service** of the Bureau becomes an almost urgent requirement in this context of such an identity crisis. The registration of the migrant in the city will create a new data base and information on migrants into Ahmedabad. The photo ID will give a strong sense of association and visibility to the migrant labour and also create new level of trust and confidence in the market towards the migrant labour.

Given the nature of economic activity and engagement that migrants are most likely to enter, the **work and occupation conditions often remain truly marginal**. The sectors are informal, unorganised and economic connection of the migrant is unstable, short term and marked by low return. Not surprisingly, attrition rates from these sectors are also quite high. As migrants become older and their needs for sustenance and remittance becomes higher, they find themselves easily replaced by younger entrants into the labour market from their own source areas. Besides, the informal nature of their work leaves them open to frequent exploitation and labour abuse with **no recourse to legal redressal**. Similarly, lack of **adequate information on new opportunities** and avenues within the city appears to be a paradoxical reality. This is because, migrant labour is so profoundly caught in the economic web at such a low end that new options and pathways do not immediately become obvious.

Given the highly diversified economy of the Ahmedabad city and many new opening vistas for employment, the **training and placement service** of the Bureau should be a much sought after service among the migrants populations of the city. Similarly a functioning legal aid and counselling cell is an essential service for migrants that the Bureau will need to start or set up in Ahmedabad.

Shelter and sanitation is clearly an all pervasive problem. Where shelter is available, there is a tendency to overcrowd and because shelter is often not available, large number of migrants are found in makeshift tenements and squatting clusters. In this scenario of deficit, sanitary facilities such as toilets and drainage appear too far fetched. Undoubtedly this has a major implication on the health and well-being of seasonal migrants. They remain highly susceptible to infectious diseases and psycho-social disorders.

Access to **financial services** such as savings, credit and in the case of migrants, remittances can act as a powerful boost to economic advantage. However, across all occupation categories, availability of formal services remains an issue. Earnings are not managed properly and large amount of their income remains unquantified. Bank accounts are rare and earnings are commonly with their employers/contractors. The migrant is often the loser – if the money is with him there is the danger of robbery and if the money is with his employer, he might unwittingly bind himself to the employer and become indentured. Most migrants are debt ridden and have difficulty paying off their one time debt. Those

with entrepreneurial inclinations are unable to start up due to unavailability of funds. There is an increasing felt need for financial services such as loans and savings as well some kind insurance cover to combat the nature of their jobs and the health hazards they face at the destination ends.

The day to day problems that migrants face across sectors extend well into their economic life. This study has repeatedly found cases of **extortion, police harassment and hafta collection** to which small vendors and labour service providers are subjected. Again, there is no political or bureaucratic patronage that can protect migrants from such extreme hardship and help them construct a dignified livelihood.

The discussions with city authorities in the course of this study showed the extent of apathy and **indifference to the existence and problems** of migrant labourers. In this context of denial, the task of providing protection and services to migrants at large scale becomes truly daunting.

The dispersed and unorganized nature of migrant labour is the most important underlying all problems. There are a number of basic areas that need to be addressed. Some of these are areas that can be most effectively addressed by government programs and policies, some by organisations such as Aajeevika Bureau and some by coordinated efforts by a number of organisations concerned about this important group of the rural and urban poor.