

# Displaced by Policy, Driven by Necessity: Understanding Katkari Migration through Macro, Meso, and Micro Lenses

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## Abstract

*Migration has been a significant aspect of human history in pursuit of improved livelihood opportunities. These long-term migratory movements have resulted in unequal development and distribution. This article has used in-depth interviews and observations to explore factors influencing the Katkari community to migrate, specifically in two blocks of Nashik and Trimbakeshwar in the state of Maharashtra. Through a comprehensive macro-meso-micro level analysis, the article demonstrates how- development policies, migration networks, disguised bondage, increased digital exposure and youth aspirations together influence and shape decisions and add depth to migratory reality.*

**Keywords:** *Katkari Community, Seasonal Migration, Distress Migration, Forest Rights Act (FRA).*

## 1 Introduction

In a globalised world, migration as a phenomenon is becoming rampant and the factors influencing and being influenced by migration are taking different forms making it difficult to categorise them into any one kind of category. Often there is no linear process or steps directing migration but a series of factors including macro level changes grounded on the concepts of structural penetration. The imbalance of peripheral areas can generate conditions that lead to mass displacement. (Portes and Walton, 1981, pp. 30-32).

The Katkari community has a rich history rooted in forest based traditions. They were traditionally hunter-gatherers and catechu makers. Their livelihoods declined

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due to restrictive environmental policies, leading to displacement and a shift toward seasonal migration for work. This transition led to challenges such as poverty, illiteracy and social inclusion (Sinha, 2017). Presently, this community with a population of around 0.29 million (Census of India, 2011), is predominantly found in Kolaba and Thane districts and some areas of Pune, Satara, Nashik and Ratnagiri districts.

This article explores how macro, meso and micro level factors influence migration among the Katkari community in Maharashtra. Based on in-depth interviews and field observations in Nashik- Peth and Trimbakeshwar, home to a significant Katkari population, the study highlights the often overlooked meso- level factors. While the traditional literature has focussed more on macro and micro level factors as determinants of migration, we have also emphasized on meso-level factors to comprehensively understand the migration processes.

## **2 Macro-level determinants**

Determinants at this level are embedded within the broader processes of social, political, and economic transformation that shapes migration.

### **2.1 Displacement**

Historically residing in forest regions, Katkari community's forest based activities declined post-independence as bans on tree felling and shifting cultivation were imposed, pushing them to the margins. (Dalvi, Bokil, 2000; Grove, Damodaran, Sangwan, 2013). They had to seasonally migrate in search of employment for survival and were displaced from sites of state-led developmental works such as dam construction, etc.

Elderly members of the Katkari community in both Trimbakeshwar and Peth blocks shared that their ancestors came from the forests of Mokhada and Raigad region of Maharashtra. About 80 years ago, their ancestors came to the present region and started looking for ways to survive. Major Scheduled Tribes (STs) in the region such as Kokna and Warli including other land owning communities provided them space to settle and in return they toiled for them. Lately, about two to three decades ago, the government has started providing 8A certificates to those households who pay ghar patti (house tax) and paani patti (water tax). Consequently, we observed that only a small proportion of Katkari families owned homesteads but hardly any

agricultural land during our visit. With limited commercial agricultural skills and their alienation from forest regions, they now face significant transitions and struggle to sustain themselves through physically demanding work, such as stone cutting and construction labour.

## **2.2 Forest Rights Act (FRA)**

Forest areas closely overlap with land that tribal communities have been living on, and been dependent on, for generations. This dependency and protection of the forests was not based on any legal right. The absence of formal rights and mobility of tribal people from one place to another within the forest enabled the state to exercise control over forests without recognising forest use by the tribal communities.

In Gonde village of Peth block, members of the Katkari community migrate annually for seven-eight months. This is because they don't own any resources such as land, except 30 families owning homestead land under the Forest Rights Act in 2017-2018 with the help of a 7/12 record of rights. Post 2018, no Individual Forest Rights (IFRs) claims were sanctioned and were pending with the Divisional Level Committee. With forest land coming under the control of the forest department, accessibility to forest resources have been strictly reduced for them. Forest resources and their diversity have declined considerably as the majority of forest land is now managed by the forest department.

## **2.3 MGNREGA**

Until the previous year, MGNREGA had not served as a source of income for the Katkari community in these two blocks of Nashik. This scenario has changed as their houses are being constructed under the Union government's housing scheme Pradhan Mantri JANMAN in convergence with MGNREGA. Through this convergence, sanctioned houses under the JANMAN yojana can demand work under MGNREGA to construct the houses. Apart from that, they haven't had an opportunity to work under MGNREGA.

A few families during our visit did possess a job card but shared they could not get any work through the scheme. A local resource person shared with us that most of them lack awareness as they are not aware of wage rates or how to raise demand

for work. Many households don't even possess a job card as they lack the required documents due to families splitting into nuclear units post marriage.

### **3 Meso level determinants**

According to Kuhnt (2019) the meso-level factors “have been shown to impact strongly on an individual's migration aspiration and decision”, and they include migration culture, networks, and information, technology, migrant smugglers, geography and infrastructure.

Human mobility is motivated not only by economic factors but is also driven by many cultural, psychological, social, and emotional factors which may be hard to generalise or can offer little external reasoning (Haas, 2021).

#### **3.1 Migration Networks**

Migrants from the Katkari community travel in groups to work. In most cases, either the couple travels with their young children or children above the age of 17 migrate to earn a living. Instances were also observed during the visit when the elderly couple was living in the village while their children had migrated to other districts. Middlemen facilitating migration from the villages will either be an experienced community member from their village who further has contact with the contractors. A member shares, “Going as a group is better as in cases of emergency we are a helping hand to each other.”

#### **3.2 Disguised Bonded labourers**

Contractors from outside come to their village and offer them a lucrative amount for any of their urgent needs such as marriage or for medical treatment, in return they offer their labour which has no working hours limit, thus this shows a true picture of acquiring ‘absolute surplus’ from workers by the contractors. They work for long hours, often spending the meagre amount they earn after paying back the loan. Women members shared separately that their husbands tend to take their share of wages for alcohol purposes as well, leaving them hand to mouth in some cases. Until they don't pay back the loan through their hard labour, they are left with no option but to work on the contractor's terms and conditions, predominantly working as disguised bonded labourers.

### **3.3 Youth Networks & Digital Exposure**

The young generation from the Katkari community migrates in groups and tends to have contacts in the destination city whether they be contractors, migrants or members of the community. The presence of social networking among them and exposure to multimedia also lure them to stay connected and distances them from their own community and well-being. Members of the community shared that they return to their villages either during Holi or Diwali for a brief period of two-three days, only to return to work immediately. They further shared that the youth are spendthrifts and contribute little to the family expenses.

While their living and working conditions in the destination cities may not be decent, the exposure to a world which is more individualistic and glamorous with the help of multimedia has connected them to the global trends, which draws them towards the metropolis.

## **4 Micro level determinants**

Determinants at this level draw attention to the specific aspects of the Katkari migrants with respect to their culture, age, skills, education, local conditions etc. that influence their migration.

### **4.1 Poor living conditions and discrimination**

In Peth block, the Katkari community resides in compact semi-pucca and kutcha houses with poor drainage. A few pucca houses constructed under Indira Awaas Yojana (IAY) are now dilapidated. They lack both homestead and cultivable land, with a few families residing in makeshift shelters. Most children study in Ashram Schools alongside Kokna children. However, the elders of the Katkari community report instances of discrimination, prompting children to drop out and migrate with their families.

Access to drinking water varies by location. In places where their settlements are located in the interior hilly terrain, they face water shortages due to shallow groundwater tables. The primary source of water is open wells, as hand pumps are ineffective, with some in need of repairs. While we observed infrastructure installed under the Jal Jeevan Mission, community members shared their struggles, noting that the taps are dysfunctional.

## **4.2 Low wages/irregular work**

A significant proportion of working members from the community engages as agricultural wage labourers during the Kharif season on the farmlands of Kokna. One of the family members shared migration as the only alternative for their livelihood in the absence of education and professional skills. Consequently, due to limited work opportunities they face survival issues for almost 5-6 months.

With limited agricultural skills and work opportunities in their region, they are left with no alternative than to migrate to nearby districts such as Beed, Jalna, Pune, Satara, Solapur and Konkan region through contractors where they work as casual farm and non-farm labourers. One of the members shared that they work for more than 14 hours a day. A majority of Katkari members prefer staying in the destination city for 7-8 months despite indecent living and working conditions.

## **4.3 Youth Aspirations**

The aspirational youth of the community prefer staying in the destination city. Community members in a group discussion shared their views towards the youth. “They are young and have different aspirations in contrast to the adult population”. One of the community members shared how her grandson bought a smartphone and a bike immediately after a month. The newer generation lacks the concept of saving, instead, they fall prey to conspicuous consumption as they immediately spend the income earned on non-durable assets. On further inquiry, it was learnt in the aforementioned case that they bought it by taking advance from the contractor.

## **5 In lieu of conclusion**

This paper attempts to highlight myriad factors contributing to migration among the Katkari community, factors which go beyond mere economic necessity and instead reflects a complex interplay of marginalisation and evolving socio-cultural dynamics. Through a comprehensive analysis, the article demonstrates how state-led development policies at the macro level suffer from poor implementation and further forces the community into perpetual cyclical, distress-driven migration. This complex picture of migrants from the Katkari community further throws light on the vulnerable condition of the Katkari community who are

suffering from 'There Is No Alternative' (TINA) syndrome, which explains migration as the only alternative for their livelihood.

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