

SOCIALLY REPRESENTED IMAGE OF THE BIHARI MIGRANTS

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The present paper is based on the findings of an empirical study of the socially represented image of the Bihari migrants by the people of Mumbai (India). The study comprised 307 respondents, of which 152 were *Bihari migrants* and 155 were *local people of Mumbai*. Additionally, 26 respondents were selected for participation in four focus group discussions, and 8 respondents were interviewed individually. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used in the research. Content analysis of the descriptive data helped arrive at some shared themes that socially represented the migrants as ‘job takers and low wage workers,’ ‘pressure on the city’s amenities and resources,’ ‘not clean/dirty,’ ‘dominant,’ ‘people with bad life style,’ and ‘negative personal characteristics.’ The local respondents also perceived a few positive attributes of the migrants, such as ‘hard working’ and ‘relationship orientated.’ The overall socially constructed image of the Bihari migrants was, nevertheless, negative.

Keywords: Bihari migrants, social representation, migration experience, intergroup perception

The State of Bihar in India is known for the phenomenon of outmigration. Referring to the 2001 census of India, Kumar and Bhagat (2012) inform that 5.2 million people have migrated from Bihar to other states of India (the numbers became slightly higher – 5.5 million – when the place of birth is used for counting the numbers). This was nearly 6.3% of the total population of the state in the same census year. An Indian Institute of Public Administration study estimates that 4.4 to 5 million labor migrants from Bihar migrate to other parts of the country for work, and the trend appears to have risen sharply in the last few years (“Draft Policy,” 2017). Another source based on repeated surveys conducted in seven districts of Bihar shows that

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58% of households in the surveyed districts have sent at least one migrant worker. Furthermore, the proportion of migrant workers to total workers rose from 16% in 1998-99 to 25% in 2009-10, suggesting that 1 in 4 workers are migrants (Rodgers et al., 2013).

Taking the numbers from the Census of India, 2011 (“Census”, 2011, Tables D2 and D3), 74,53,803 persons out-migrated from the state of Bihar. Referring to the same source, Sarkar (2019), in his snapshot article entitled ‘Out-migration from Bihar: Major Reasons and Destinations’, summarizes that between 1951 and 1961, about 4% of Bihar’s population migrated, which came down to 2% between the years 1971 and 1981. However, in 1981, the number of migrants more than doubled at around 2.5 million (Sharma, 1997). In the late nineties, the migrants from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar continued to migrate in large proportion vis-à-vis the non-migrants and migrants from within the state of Maharashtra (Singh, 2005). It appears that during the intercensal period between 2001 and 2011, around 9.3 million Bihari people migrated (“Census,” 2011).

The data for the present research was collected in Mumbai, the financial capital of India and the migration hot spot for the Bihari migrants. Migration has played a major role in the economic and social transformation of Mumbai and the configuration of its demographic profile. During the initial years after India’s Independence (1951-61), migrants constituted about 50% of the total growth of the population of this metropolitan city, which, despite a subsequent decline in the rate of growth, still remains high (Singh, 2005).

Reporting the migration trend in Mumbai in the fifty years after Independence, Singh (2007) informs that after the highest (37.4%) percentage of migrants born within the State of Maharashtra, the next highest percentage of the migrant groups belonged to the States of Uttar Pradesh (24.3%) and Gujarat (9.6%). However, the percentage for the Bihari migrants remained within 4 percent. According to another estimate, there are around 2.5 million Bihari migrants working in Mumbai, and nearly half that number in other cities of Maharashtra (Malekar, 2008). The 2011 Census of India 2011 (Table D2) reveals that 5,68,667 persons migrated from Bihar to Maharashtra during 2001-2011. Furthermore, the distribution of male and female combined population out-migration share across the Indian states (migration duration

between 0 to 9 years), is 10.55% for Maharashtra. Unfortunately, it is very difficult to find the exact number of Bihari migrants in Mumbai in the records of the Government of Bihar. The researcher could not locate any updates on this data.

The Bihari migrants' employment pattern in Mumbai invites attention. As remittance plays a vital role in supporting the livelihood of the households in Bihar, migration is now seen as a fixed stage of the life-cycle of the people of Bihar. Accordingly, some male members are sent away to earn after approaching a certain age (Deshingkar et al., 2006). Therefore, the single largest reason for migration among men in the State is work and business though two-thirds of women migrate because of marriage and the latter's migration is skewed towards closer distances, unlike that of men.

It has been reported that migrants who have lived in Mumbai for long, dominate pharmaceuticals sectors, security services, real estate, and dairy. In the early 1980s, however, more migrants were found in production-related occupations such as industrial and manufacturing sectors in comparison to the non-migrants who were more in professional, technical, administrative, and clerical occupations in Mumbai. On the other hand, in the community social services and construction sectors, the migrants and the non-migrants were represented equally (Singh, 2005).

Sarkar (2019) reports that Bihari migrants are heavily concentrated in the districts that offer lively economic hubs with industries along with a solid presence of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprise (MSME) sectors. For example, Thane and Mumbai suburban districts in Maharashtra have the maximum number of migrants from Bihar due to the significant presence of industrial units, textile, manufacturing, and construction sectors that offer potential employment opportunities.

As laborers, Bihari migrants toil hard building bridges, flyovers, dams, and shopping malls in different states of India. Additionally, the laborers also work as security guards, rickshaw pullers, coolies, etc. (Sharma, 2005). It appears that over the last two decades, the occupational pattern for both migrants and non-migrants has remained largely the same (Singh, 2005). Unfortunately, Biharis, with problems of unemployment, poverty, and floods in their own State, face violence in Assam, Maharashtra, and Delhi as migrants. Living invariably in modest to very poor living conditions, the migrants often

feel insecure as they face threats from local political parties and sometimes from the local people. Deshingkar and Atker (2009) and Deshingkar et al. (2006) are some useful references to important concerns related to migrants in general.

In the backdrop of the outmigration scenario in Bihar and some impressions of the migration destination Mumbai, it is worth mentioning that the present paper is part of a major project on 'Bihari Migrants in Mumbai', supported by the Research in Aid Grant (2008-2010) of the Indian Council of Social Sciences Research (ICSSR), New Delhi. The project's primary interest was in the migration experiences, shared apprehensions, and activities that helped the migrants connect and identify as a collective, and the reasons behind the deteriorating relationship between the Bihari migrants and the local people of Mumbai in the context of the political scenario of the metropolitan city. This paper focuses exclusively on the socially represented image of the Bihari migrants, one of the major findings of the aforementioned research.

Conceptual Frame of Social Representations

Social representations are defined as elaborations of a social object by the community for the purpose of behaving and communicating (Moscovici, 1963; 1984). For accessing the socially constructed image of the Bihari migrants, Moscovici studied the perception, impression, opinion, and attitude of the local people of Mumbai concerning Bihari migrants. Under the conceptual frame of social representations, it is understood that the local people's perception, feelings, impressions, attitudes, and opinions (i.e., representations) regarding the migrant group would configure out of their conversation, interaction, discussion, and thought-sharing about the migrant group.

A few researches conducted under the framework of the social representations theory seem interesting in the context of the present study. The Bihari migrant project was inspired by the social representations approach at best and chose the qualitative method, which is the preferred way of pursuing research in the field of social representations. In their study, Hanson-Easey and Moloney (2009) sought out whether the place of origin (Africa) mediate understandings held about the African-origin refugees of a regional town of NSW Australia. Though the African-origin 'refugees' and not the 'migrants,'

were focused upon, the study's findings are relevant. Accordingly, it was observed that though the place of origin manifested nonessential or rather peripheral representational elements, they had an important role to play in differentiating, orientating, and linking specific refugee groups to particular socio-political contexts. Further, it was noted that the place of origin has relevance as a discursive resource deployed for rhetorical ends. In reference to the 'Bihari Migrants in Mumbai' project, perhaps the migrants' region of origin (Bihar) with an unsavoury identity tag could have influenced the local people's perception of the migrants and was relevant as a discursive resource.

Working within the framework of the social representations theory and using a quali-quantitative approach, Rochira et al. (2015) conducted their study in a town in South Italy. They attempted to capture the differences between the representations of the migrants experienced by the distinctive native residents and their relation to the sense of community and ethnic prejudice. The study's results indicate that the socially constructed image of the targeted migrants was consistent across diverse community groups. However, further analysis showed that the marginal contents of the representations contained inter-individual differences for the groups of residents who showed either positive or negative attitudes towards the community and the immigrants. The present study holding common themes that helped configure the image of the migrant group showed consistency in the local people's perception of the migrant group. On the other hand, some positive attributes that dotted the overall negative image of the migrant group suggest a few inter-individual differences in the local people's socially represented image of the migrant group.

In his working series paper, Coppola (2018) investigated on how social representation of migrant bodies affect the interaction among individuals of different origins living in the same territory. He sought to analyze the symbolic image of the 'body' of the migrants on the dimensions of gender and sexuality orientation (i.e., homosexuality) and explored if this was a relevant factor in social inclusion, exclusion, or rejection to some degree. Though the migrant 'body image' was not the focus of the Bihari migrants' project, Coppola's study has an indirect relevance. For instance, probably the Mumbai people have incorporated disagreeable 'personal habits' and 'lifestyle' of the Bihari

people in the constructed image of the migrant group, which might have caused some degree of dislike towards them.

From the studies cited above, it may be reiterated that, inspired by the conceptual framework of the social representations, the present study tried to study the socially assembled, elaborated, configured, and shared knowledge or the topographical notion of the Bihari migrant group, constituted by the local respondents of Mumbai.

Method & Sample

A qualitative method was chosen for pursuing the objective of the study, considering it most appropriate for accessing and identifying the attitude, beliefs, images, and even metaphors and symbols shared in a community towards another group. A sample of 307 respondents were drawn, out of which 152 were Bihari migrants, and 155 were local people of Mumbai. Additionally, 26 local participants were approached and selected for participating in four focus group discussions and eight respondents, for individual interviews.

Sample Description/Background

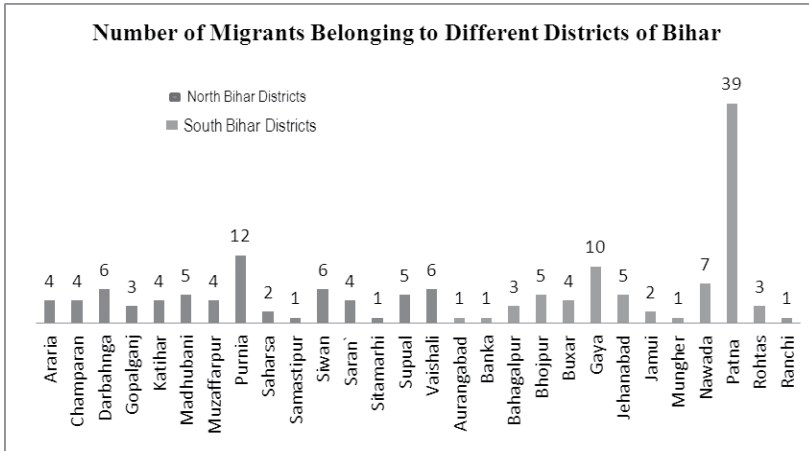
The Bihari Migrants

The sample description regarding the age, gender, and marital status of the Bihari migrants includes: (i) The migrants' age spanned between 18 to 60 years (mean age = 33.09 years, SD = 11 years) while the 8 individually-interviewed migrants were younger adults of 18 to 45 years of age. (ii) The focus group of adult participants belonged to the minority community (Muslims) with a rather spread out age range of 15 to 55 years. (iii) Close to 78% of the 152 migrants were married, and so were the seven out of eight individually interviewed males. (iv) Presenting an exception to the gender rule, two married women participated in the focus group discussions.

In terms of the educational status of the migrants, 75.7% were literate and had completed at least a certain level of education, while 24.3% were illiterate. Among the educated, the highest percentage (23.7%) were Secondary School Certificate holders, 18.4% were educated up to middle school level, 13.2% up to high school level, and 11.8% up to the primary school level. The exceptions

were 13 out of the 152 migrants who were graduates (11) and post graduates (2). *Figure 1* contains information about the native place of the migrants and depicts that out of the 38 Districts of Bihar, most of the migrants were from around 27 districts of the State.

Figure 1. The places of origin of the Bihari Migrants



[The orange colored data is from Ranchi, which was earlier part of South Bihar.]

In Mumbai, the migrants lived in some modest sections of Mumbai’s localities. Laborers were often provided joint accommodation by hiring contractors close to the work site. Those who have lived in Mumbai for long managed some establishment, but none of the migrants lived in comfort or luxury. The bulk of the sample was drawn from the areas of Andheri (29), Bandra (24), Malad (13), Churchgate (10), Mahaluxmi (9), Goregaon (8), Sion (8), Ghatkopar (7), Kandivili (7), Chembur (6), Dadar (5), Vasi (5), C.S.T. (4), Mahim (4), Tilaknagar (3), Kurla (2), Matunga (2), and 1 each from Mulund, Parel, Bhandup, Thane, and Deonar.

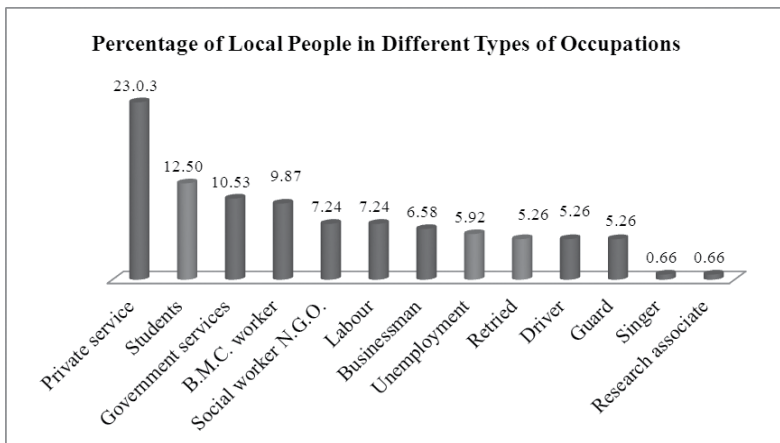
Regarding the migrants’ occupation in Mumbai, 50% were working as laborers, 27% were auto-rickshaw or taxi drivers, 6% were in business (shop keepers or shop owners) and in clerical jobs. Additionally, 5.26% were skilled workers such as plumbers, carpenters, tailors, courier agents, postmen, and supervisors, whereas very few (2.63%) of them could get into higher-level occupations (e.g., executives, finance officers or merchant navy officers). Only 1.32% (only 1 student sample) of the migrants worked as a peon.

The Local People of Mumbai

Unlike that of the Bihari migrants, only some selected background information is presented for the local people. In all, Marathi-speaking samples (i.e., 155 local Marathi respondents), 26 focus group participants, and eight individually interviewed persons were selected. The sample description regarding age and educational status is as follows: (i) The mean age of the Mumbai respondents was 33.18 years (SD = 12.06 years). All the focus group discussants and the individually interviewed persons were adults. Out of the 155 local respondents, 25.2% have completed their Secondary School Certificate level (SSC) of education. 29% of them were educated close to SSC though they did not complete that level. 18.7% and 13.5% were graduates and post graduates respectively; only 6.5 to 7% of them were educated up to primary level or less. Overall, the local Mumbai respondents were better educated than the Bihari migrants.

Flats, chawls, and slums were homes for 99.3% of the Marathi respondents. Only one respondent lived in his own house. *Figure 2* displays the frequency of local respondents from their respective localities.

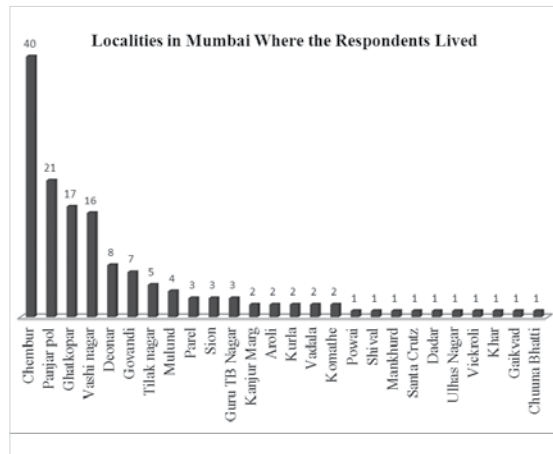
Figure 2. Localities in Mumbai of the Marathi Population (data from 147 respondents)



The percentages of the different monthly earning slots were based on the valid cases of 120 respondents since the sample included 35 non-earning students too. Accordingly, the majority of the local respondents (56%) earned between Rs.5,000 to Rs.10,000 per month; followed by 15% whose monthly

income was between Rs.11,000 and Rs. 15,000. Only 7.5% of the people earned between Rs.16,000 to Rs.25,000 monthly, whereas a small percentage (2.5%) comprising businessmen, merchant navy officers, and one municipal service person earned between Rs.54,000 to Rs.70,000. Notably, though the monthly average income of a local person appeared a little less than Rs.10,000, the extreme cases of earnings were spread widely (i.e., minimum as low as Rs.1,500 a month and the maximum around Rs.70,000). A large SD is self-explanatory in this case. *Figure 3* shows the percentage distribution of the locals in various types of occupations.

Figure 3. Percentage of the Local People in Different Types of Occupations (data from 152 respondents)



Instruments

The qualitative instruments for data collection included four open-ended questions, focus group discussions, and individual interviews. The open-ended questions were framed to explore the local people’s *impressions, perceptions, and opinions* (i.e., representations) about the Bihari migrants and were worded as (i) *What comes to your mind as soon as you hear the word ‘Bihari’?* (ii) *What is the Marathi people’s general opinion about the Bihari people?* (iii) *What are the ‘bad’ things that the local people perceive in Biharis?* (iv) *What are the ‘good’ things that the local people perceive in Biharis?* The leading questions for running the four focus groups were almost identical to the open-ended questions. Finally, the individual interviews were conducted with similar objectives as those of the open-ended questions and the focus group discussions. Nevertheless, a number of

opening questions were included for getting background information of the interviewees such as their age, educational level, marital status, the part of State of Maharashtra they belonged to, period of living in Mumbai and their locality (*basti*) and neighborhood, etc.

Though this paper would mainly present and discuss the qualitative data, it is worthwhile to incorporate the results of the ‘forced-choice’ questions to the qualitative observations. It was thought that bringing in the quantitative results too, shall help arrive at a comprehensive picture of the Marathi people’s opinion about the migrant group. Secondly, the forced-choice results were expected to clarify whether their findings were similar to the qualitative findings. For this purpose, a list of 17 forced-choice questions that could be answered by choosing ‘yes’ and ‘no’ options were prepared.

The closed-ended questions basically addressed four sets of concerns. Accordingly, the initial set of questions looked for the local people’s general impression, attitude, and opinion about the Bihari migrants who had arrived in Mumbai rather uninvited. The second set of questions focused on the local people’s opinion regarding the growing weight of the migrants on the infrastructure of the city. The third set of enquiry was meant to learn whether the migrants polluted the Maharashtrian culture; and lastly, a few questions tried to study any extreme negative views and opinions about the migrants.

Procedure

A senior professor from the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), Mumbai, coordinated the process of data collection and helped the Project Director (author) in hiring trained research assistants as well as in the analysis of quantitative data. The research assistants approached the prospective respondents from different localities of Mumbai after taking an appointment for data collection. Another practice was to reach particular vicinity where people often gathered in their free time and look for respondents who agreed to cooperate in data collection on the spot or later. New respondents were contacted with the help of the previous respondents. Data collection was not easy for more than one reason. The author (i.e., Project Director) had to depend on the collaboration with the TISS as she was located far away in Patna and could not fully dedicate her time in Mumbai during the period of data collection due to logistical constraints. Nevertheless, she travelled and stayed in Mumbai as much as feasible and monitored the procedure.

Analysis

As the data were primarily qualitative in nature, analysis consisted of a frequency count of the ideas generated against each of the respective open-ended questions. Effort was made to identify meaningful themes that surfaced from the analysis of the descriptive content. The frequency count was done separately by a doctoral scholar of psychology and the researcher (author) herself. Later on, both of them went through the frequency counts (once again) for checking anomalies (if any) between their analyses-based decisions.

The thematic name for each category was finalized after the doctoral student and the author agreed with the description and appropriateness of the sorted ideas for being placed under a particular category. Overall, the analysis of the qualitative data included computing the percentage of respondents who endorsed a particular theme, and the percentage of the total number of ideas that helped formulate the respective themes. The content analysis of the descriptive data drew attention towards some common themes that showed up consistently across the responses of all the open-ended questions. It was decided to discuss the findings through the common themes instead of presenting the observations of the respective open-ended questions separately and in sequence. It was further decided to begin with the theme receiving the highest percentage of endorsement and move in descending order. The inputs from the focus group (FG) discussions and the individual interviews were incorporated at the appropriate points with the observations of the common themes. The analysis for the forced-choice responses involved computing the percentage of 'yes' and 'no' responses given against the questions embedded in the four respective sets.

Results and Discussion

The Common Themes Observed in the Contents of the Open-Ended Questions

The common themes that were perceptible across the responses of the open-ended questions included: Job Takers/Job Snatchers and Low Wage Workers; Not Clean/Dirty; Life Style and Negative Personal Characteristics of the Bihari Migrants; Migrants who Bring Pressure on Amenities and Resources; Dominant (also suggesting: Law Breakers, Involved in Anti-Social Activities); Like Us/ Positive Representations of the Bihari Migrants.

Job Takers /Job Snatchers and Low Wage Workers

The highest percentage of endorsement and the highest total number of ideas were generated for the category ‘Job Takers/or Job Snatchers’ (38.71% and 34% respectively). The findings suggest that in the general opinion of the local people, *Biharis have grabbed their jobs, have reduced their job opportunities and have created competition for employment.* The second highest endorsement for this theme (18.06%, supported by 13.86% of the total number of ideas) surfaced against the question that asked for the ‘bad’ things perceived in the Bihari migrants. The Mumbai people considered it ‘bad’ that *Biharis worked a lot almost full time, took over local people’s work, were ready to do any work, and worked on low wages to the extent that it looked like slavery.* Further, it was ‘bad’ that “*a migrant sold his labor for less money leaving the locals with few options to work on their own terms*” (FG4). A relatively low percentage (8.59%) of the local people linked the word ‘Bihari’ with ‘Job Takers and Low Wage Workers.’ The theme was supported by 7.65% of the total number of ‘associations’ suggesting that *Biharis work on low wages and took local people’s work.* In this context, the focus group participants were heard saying that Biharis were “*grabbing the employment opportunities*” of the local people, “*worked for less money*” (FG2) and “*prefer to do any type of work*” (FG4).

Notably, while sharing their general opinion, the local respondents opted for significantly low endorsement (5.81%) and generated only 5% of the total number of ideas in support of the theme ‘Low Wage Workers.’ In fact, ‘Low Wage Workers’ could have been considered a separate theme emphasizing the migrants’ propensity to *work on low wages* or *do any work for less money.* However, often the opinion detained for the category ‘Low Wage Workers’ was fused with the opinion that the migrants were *job snatchers, left fewer job options and little scope for bargaining for higher wages for the local people.* Therefore, it was decided to present the themes together. The focus group discussions had enough support in this regard too (FG1, FG2, FG3).

Not Clean/Dirty

For a fairly large number of the local respondents (25.81%), the ‘bad’ thing about the Bihari migrants was that they were ‘Not Clean’, and this perception accounted for 19.80% of the overall responses. Apparently, the local respondents perceived the migrants as *indifferent to cleanliness, spreading*

garbage, and *dirty*. Similarly, when sharing their general opinion about the migrant group, 12.26% of the local people had almost identical things to say. Their ideas were complemented by 10.73% of the total number of generated opinions.

Likewise, while reporting their association with the word ‘Bihari,’ 7.10% of the local people linked the word with the theme ‘Not Clean’ with a backup of 6.47% of the total numbers of ‘associations’. At this point, associations such as *not clean, dirty, people who spread garbage*, etc., were the highlights of the local people’s perceptions. The theme found supportive inputs in the focus group discussions with remarks such as, “*Biharis spread filth in public and private places,*” “*they are seen spitting here and there after eating paan and tobacco*” (FG1), and “*Biharis don’t care about their own cleanliness and spread dirtiness*”(FG4). It may be mentioned that the migrants from Bihar have been accused of taking over urban areas and jobs, most recently in Mumbai. Similarly, Bihar is singled out as the cultural symbol of “backwardness”, “dirtiness”, and “trouble,” and is almost impervious to “development” (Kumar, 2009; Verma, 2019).

Negative Personal Characteristics and the Lifestyle of the Migrants

Responding to the general opinion question, 11% of the local respondents endorsed the theme showcasing the ‘Negative Personal Characteristics and Behavior’ of the Bihari migrants. The ideas behind this category accounted for 9.60% of the responses, and the descriptions behind the theme portrayed the migrants *as selfish, whose behavior is not good, who cheat a lot, not the right people, don’t live and work properly, unhelpful, bad mentality people, whose lifestyle and talk are not good*, etc. Notably, while responding to the question that looked for ‘bad’ things perceived in the Bihari migrants, the local respondents chose to comment on the migrants’ lifestyle, which they considered bad, *unorganized and competitive*. Apparently, 9.68% of the local people endorsed the theme which, accounted for 7.43% of the total number of responses. Interestingly, the focus group members found this ‘bad’ that “*Biharis use rai (mustard) oil,*” “*their culture is rigid,*” and “*Biharis’ way of living was bad/ dirty*” (*rahan sahan ganda hai*, FG4).

The lowest percentage of endorsement (7.10% along with the total count of 6.4% of responses behind the theme) was observed for the category ‘Life Style of the Biharis.’ The theme emerged from the associations elicited by the word ‘Bihari’ linking the word with the Bihari lifestyle, and Bihari migrants’

personal behavior and characteristics. The associations imply *dislike for Bihari people's language and straightforwardness, their inability to think about anything, plus the manner in which they talked and behaved*. Moreover, the word 'Bihari' is linked with *support for regionalism and adding to the population*. It may be mentioned that, occasionally, the word 'Bihari' elicited extremely negative associations for some focus group members such as, '*One Bihari is like hundred diseases*' ("*Ek Bihari sau bimari?*") and "*irritating people?*" (FG4) who "*made people angry?*" (FG3) and *Laloo Prasad Yadav* (refers to one of the major politicians of Bihar. FG 2, FG 4). A lone association for the word 'Bihari' from a female interviewee suggested that the presence of Bihari migrants left "*No value of Maharashtrians*".

Pressure on the Basic Amenities and Resources

Endorsed by 10.32% of the local respondents and represented by 9.04% of the total number of ideas, the local people considered the migrants responsible for *spoiling the basic system, encouraging encroachment of places, grabbing others' resources and adding to the population and crowding*. According to one focus group participant, "*Biharis slept on the footpath*" (FG3) while a couple of individually-interviewed housewives referred to the migrants as "*omnipresent bhaiyas*" (a derogatory expression for the migrants from the States of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar). To quote the interviewees: "*Even if you just go to buy vegetables, bhaiya is going to be there,*" "*bhaiya log have spread everywhere,*" and "*many people don't like this.*"

Interestingly, an identical percentage of endorsement (10.32%) is observed for the theme in response to the question concerning the 'bad' things perceived in the migrant group. In this case, however, the total number of ideas that complemented the theme was relatively small (7.92%). Accordingly, the local people considered this 'bad' that *the migrants created pressure on the basic amenities of the city and added population*. Additionally, it was said that *Biharis migrate, they want to settle here, they are others, they migrate to other places and do not stay and work in their own state, they come and bring more people, create pressure on basic amenities and grow population, etc*. The focus group members added that it was 'bad' that "*Biharis were bringing ten more people to Maharashtra and contributing to the increase in the city's population*" (FG1, FG2).

Associations elicited by the word 'Bihari' showed the lowest percentage of support for the theme 'Migrants who Bring Pressure on the Basic Resources'

(i.e., 9.68% endorsement and 8.82 % of the total number of associations behind the theme). Primarily, the word 'Bihari' is allied with *migrants, people who go to other states, not our people, people who migrate to other states for livelihood and outsiders*. On the other hand, the associations linked to the problems created by the migrants include *pressure on amenities, resources being captured, encroachment, and growing slums*. The ideas behind this theme were supported in one of the focus group discussions. (FG 4).

Dominant

The perception that Biharis showed 'Dominance' also emerged consistently. The highest endorsement for the theme (10.32%) showed up when the Mumbai people were talking about the 'bad' things they saw in the Bihari migrants. In this case, the count for the total number of ideas came close to 8%. Apparently, the migrants were perceived as 'Dominant' because they *had the ego of their state, looked at Maharashtra with inferiority, tried to show their Bihari identity, projected themselves as great, stayed in groups and showed supremacy, and enhanced the trend of dominance, etc.*

The second-highest percentage of endorsement (6.45%) is observed in the local people's general opinion. The theme is complemented by 5.65% of the total number of ideas and vented in opinions such as *migrants want to unite, show their dominance, they are forceful and dominating people, they dominate slowly, create problems by fighting with people, they like to project their greatness, do not obey law and order, break the rules and regulations, etc.* On the other hand, in the opinion of the focus group discussants, Biharis were "arrogant" and "dominant" people who were "contributing to the vote bank politics" (FG4). The lowest percentage of endorsement (4.52%) was observed when the local people were asked to report associations triggered by the word 'Bihari.' The theme generated 4.12% of the total number of associations such as *dominant, aggressive, and quarrelsome people*.

Positive Representations about the Bihari Migrants

Despite the fact that the Mumbai people generally represented the Bihari migrants in a negative light, they also held some positive representations about them. However, the percentages for such endorsements were not very high. The word 'Bihari' elicited positive associations and helped discern a

theme, which suggested that the migrants were not different but were people 'Like Us'. Accordingly, 5.81% of the people endorsed the theme, which accounted for 5.29% of the total number of spontaneous responses such as 'humans', 'citizens of India', and 'like us'. Similarly, a couple of male interviewees responded that "the migrants are good people; they talk and behave nicely with us", "Biharis are good and caring people," and "Biharis are cool minded, nice and friendly". A female respondent added, "We have no problem with them; we don't let one ear's listening go to the other ear" (*uis kan ki baat us kaan ko lagne nahi dete*).

Likewise, while responding to the general opinion question, a small percentage (4.25%) of the local respondents opined that the *Bihari migrants were Indian citizens, people same as everywhere, not different, hardworking, and locals had the wrong impression about the Biharis*. Overall, positive-sounding ideas appear close to 4%. Notably, the themes representing the migrants positively were endorsed in modest strength by the Mumbai people, but while answering a specific question on the 'good' things perceived in the migrants, the emerging themes appeared to be endorsed more strongly. The findings suggest that perhaps the local people did notice the strong strands of good qualities in the migrants and were aware of some of their finer personal characteristics. Nevertheless, contradiction also appeared when the local respondents were unable to perceive anything 'good' ('Nothing Good') in the migrant group despite being asked to tell about the 'good' things about them. This supported the premise that the socially constructed image of the migrants is largely negative.

Good Things About the Bihari Migrants: Answers to the Open-Ended Question no. 4

The descriptive data from the open-ended question 4 (*What are the 'good' things that the local people perceive in Biharis?*) help us understand in detail the specifically good things perceived in the Bihari migrants appreciated by the locals of Mumbai. The content analysis of the descriptive ideas led to five meaningful themes, and out of these, one ironically is named 'Nothing Good.' It may be mentioned that the most highly endorsed theme of 'good' things included the quality of 'Hardworking' in the migrants (55% endorsement and overall 41.87% of supportive ideas). The observations suggest that the migrants were not only *hard-working* but also *people who did any kind of work*,

were not lazy, worked more, worked well, were ready to work and did their work on time. Inputs from all the focus groups also support the idea that “*Biharis were hard-working*” and “*gave importance to work without giving preference to one work over the other*” (FG1, FG2, FG3). Moreover, it was considered ‘good’ that Biharis “*did not shy away from doing any type of work*” and were “*available in cheap money*” (FG4).

Some other ‘good’ things about the migrants include their ‘Positive Personal Attributes.’ Accounted for 20.69% of the total number of descriptions, this theme is endorsed by 27.10% of the local respondents. The ideas behind the theme suggest that the migrants were *kind, didn’t cheat, were humane, polite, competent, smart people, self-dependent, intelligent, ambitious, tolerant, patient, calm, clever, honest and soft talkers*, etc. As regards the focus group members, Biharis were of a “*helpful nature*” and “*cooperated without hesitation*” (FG1). A couple of focus group members liked the migrants’ “*way of speaking and talking*” (FG1, FG2) and found them “*speaking respectfully*” (FG1). A lone observation suggested that “*Biharis had tactics of doing business*” (FG1). Paradoxically, another theme of ‘Nothing Good’ was endorsed by a fairly large percentage of the people (25.19%) and complemented by 19.21% of the total number of responses. The descriptions under the theme impressed that the local people saw ‘Nothing Good’ in the Bihari migrants despite being asked to tell only about the ‘good’ things. Perhaps this paradox might need further focused research and analysis.

The theme ‘Relationship Oriented’ was endorsed by 18.06% of the local people and represented 13.79% of ideas. The Bihari migrants were perceived as *understanding, respectful, caring for others, helpful, cooperative, open to building and maintaining good relations, people who showed unity and brotherhood to others and to the Biharis with whom they mixed or lived.* Endorsed by 4.52% of the local people and supported by 3.45% of the total number of ideas, the next thematic category included ‘good’ things about the ‘Bihari People’s Culture.’ Accordingly, it reflected that Biharis *followed their culture, and their food and lifestyle were good.* According to one of the focus group members, “*Biharis respect the women*” (FG 1).

Not So Common Impressions About the Bihari Migrants

Besides the common themes, a couple of not-so-common themes such as ‘Involved in Anti-social Activities’ and ‘Conservative’ also drew attention

during the analysis. 6.45% of the Mumbai people alleged that the migrants were involved in anti-social activities and were *smugglers, robbers, quarrelsome and habituated to smoking and drinking*. The theme, however, accounted only for 5% of the total number of ideas. Some focus group members also opined that Biharis were involved in *robbery, kidnapping, cheating* (FG3) and even *rape* (FG2), and *showed dadagiri and bhaigiri* in Maharashtra (FG4, FG1).² A small percentage (3.23%) of the local people associated the word 'Bihari' with *cheaters, thieves and involvement in antisocial activities*. It may be recalled that earlier, the migrants were described as *lawbreakers* and people who *did not obey rules* under the theme 'Dominant.'

Another not-so-common theme, namely, 'Conservative', emerged from the answers given against the question that asked for the 'bad' things perceived in the migrants. The ideas behind the theme suggest that *Biharis put restrictions on the education of girls, believed in gender discrimination and followed rigid social customs*. The focus group participants commented on *the lack of social consciousness in Biharis, their inclination towards gender discrimination, (i.e., not sending girls to school and college)* (FG1, FG2, FG3), and *Biharis' role in enhancing the problem of child labor* (FG3). Also, "*Biharis had no family planning awareness*" (FG1), "*Biharis took education casually*" and despite having family's support, Bihari students did not concentrate on their studies and "*preferred enjoyment*" and some even "*chose to discontinue education*" (FG1). While sharing their general opinion, an identical number of local respondents (1.29%) perceived 'Nothing Good' in the migrants. The ideas behind the theme suggest that Biharis were 'conservative' people who followed certain social evil practices. "*Biharis have dowry system,*" "*girls are married at an early age,*" "*Biharis do not educate the girls*" (FG2), "*don't send their children to school*" and "*don't adopt proper family planning*" (FG3). Similarly, it was suggested that Biharis "*preserved and continued their lifestyle*" and "*their culture was rigid*" (FG3).

Conspicuously, some ideas appeared exclusively against one of the open-ended questions and not for the others. For example, the themes 'Feeling of Anger,' 'Backward,' and 'No Association' (endorsed by 28.39%; 15.48% and 9.68% of the local people, respectively), emerged as an instant reaction to the word 'Bihari'. However, for a couple of individually-interviewed persons, the

² "*Dadagiri*" refers to the use of muscle power for dubious purposes or the use of muscle power, money power and power acquired through one's position for selfish reasons. "*Bhaigiri*" is used for the operative culture of the underworld, but it is also about *dadagiri*. People who practice '*dadagiri*' and '*bhaigiri*' are goons and criminals.

word 'Bihari' could elicit only neutral associations such as "ok" or "neither good nor bad". The smallest percentage of endorsement (1.94%) was observed once only when the migrants were described as 'Illiterate and Poor' in the 'general opinion' of the local people.

Observations from the 'Forced-Choice' Questions

Observations from the first set of forced-choice questions gave an idea of the local people's opinion of the Bihari Migrants. It appeared that a fairly large percentage of the local people perceived the migrants as *bura adami* (meaning 'bad person') (75.5%), disliked them in their hearts (71 %), did not think that Biharis had a contribution to the development of their metropolis (67.7%), and wished to maintain a distance from them (68.4%). The only exception was the answer to the question, 'Do the majority of the local people consider Biharis to be quarrelsome or trouble makers' where 58.1% of the local people agreed and the remaining 41.9 % did not.

The second set of questions tried to examine the impact of the growing weight of the migrants on the city's infrastructure. The local respondents held the opinions that water, electricity, housing and transport, etc. had gone haywire due to the migrants (89.7%), it had become difficult to maintain the city's facilities due to the huge migrant population (88.4%), Biharis had added filth to the city (87.7%), the migrants had increased the housing problem many folds (86.5%), and considered Biharis a burden on the city (80%). While expressing their 'concern for culture pollution,' the local people did not seem to display extreme views. 62.6% of the people believed that by celebrating their festival such as 'Chhat', Biharis wanted to strongly establish themselves in Mumbai; 37.4% did not think so. In fact, more than 55% of the local respondents agreed that Biharis' enthusiastically participated in *Ganesh Chaturthi*, contrary to the huge 80% of the local people who did not care to participate in their *Chhat puja*. Apparently, the local people did not foresee any culture pollution threat due to Bihar's regional festivals being celebrated in Maharashtra.

The results of the last set of questions looking for 'extreme negative opinion against the Bihari migrants' suggest that a huge percentage (i.e., 89%) of the Mumbai respondents believed that *Biharis should limit themselves to their work and mind their own business only*. Almost 68% of them believed that *Biharis*

should be sent back as there is no need for them. A more balanced picture emerged when the question was, 'Do Biharis have full right to earn their livelihood in Maharashtra?' 52.9 % of the people showed their agreement with the idea, and 47.1% did not. In sum, the forced-choice responses confirmed that the local people held an overall negative opinion about the migrants.

Limitations of the Study

Even though the sample size was large enough to arrive at some definitive conclusions, random or stratified sampling could not be applied in the present study due to many logistical limitations. Data were collected with the help of local research assistants and a coordinator from the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS). Efforts to reach the local respondents were made with the help of some acquaintances that resulted in a slowed process for reaching the participants. The Project Director (author) could not be present in Mumbai during the entire data collection period. However, she was in constant touch with the research assistants and occasionally accompanied them during her visits. Respondents belong to different social and economic backgrounds, the varying effects of which on the opinions were not one of the objectives of the study. Some of the paradoxes in the responses require further exploration and analysis. Despite these limitations, the study contributed significant insights into the socially represented images of Bihari migrants in Mumbai, which should be of relevant for policymakers and social leaders.

Conclusion

Apparently, the local people's representation of the Bihari migrants was a gestalt that seems to have resulted from the resentment that the job-devouring migrants left lesser job opportunities for the local people and brought pressure on the basic amenities of the city. The locals perceived that the lifestyle of the migrants lacked social etiquette and displayed unacceptable streaks in their personality. Migrants were perceived to be 'dirty'/ 'not clean' and as having a proclivity for 'dominance' and getting 'involved into anti-social activities.' However, the positive patch in their image suggested that Biharis were basically 'hard working' and 'relationship orientated.' When asked to identify the 'good' things in the migrants, the local respondents found them in the migrants' 'lifestyle,' 'culture,' and 'personal characteristics.' Paradoxically, the results also showed conflicting opinions such as 'nothing

good' and 'nothing bad' in the locals' image of the migrants. We may conclude that, the predominantly negative impressions about the migrants of the study population are particularly noteworthy against the backdrop of a growing body of literature that documents migrants' contribution to destination areas and their challenges. The findings also call for further research into the quality of life of the migrants and policy interventions towards bettering the social interactional field of the migrants and the locals.

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