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A Bihar away from Bihar

Haryana Villagers Worried As They Are Outnumbered 3:1 By Migrants

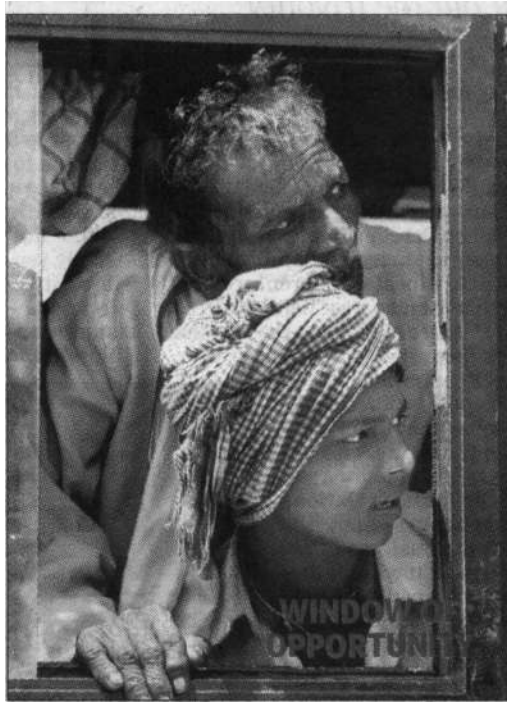
Deepender Deswal | TNN

Sonepat: They trickled into Haryana in small numbers in search of work but slowly struck roots in the land that gave them opportunities. Over the years, migrants from Bihar, mostly employed as farm and manual labour, have outnumbered the local populace in this prospering district. In fact, so heavy has been their influx that Haryanvis in the villages of Badmalik, Rai and Kundli are outnumbered at a ratio of 3:1.

Industrialisation in their own state of Bihar and land acquisition by the state government or private builders for commercial purposes has forced Biharis in tens of thousands to greener pastures far away from home. In the process, they have come to numerically dominate farming, the main occupation of people in Haryana's rural districts, which is beginning to worry the locals.

Not only that, the arrival of migrant labourers has also changed the local environment, with an absence of cleanliness and a sense of hygiene among them being of utmost concern. Heaps of garbage at almost every street corner and plastic strewn around indeed tell a sordid tale.

Rai village sarpanch Ram Kumar is worried about this sudden swell of migrants. Not only has the population in the village increased exponentially, its entire periphery has turned into a human settlement with hardly any open space left. "The native population* of our village was



Apart from the demographic pattern, the arrival of migrant labourers has changed the local environment. The migrants' lack of cleanliness and a sense of hygiene have emerged as a major cause of concern among the local people

around 9,000 some years ago. But now about 25,000-odd labourers have made it their home," said the sarpanch, who recently did a headcount of 'outsiders' living in the village. He had opposed the migrants' efforts to get voters I-card and ration cards.

The situation is trickier in Badmalik and Kundli. A large number of migrants have become permanent residents in these villages and nearly a dozen new colonies have come up to meet their burgeoning need for accommodation.

Former sarpanch of Badmalik Swaroop Singh said, "There were seven wards in the village. But after the 2001 census we have 18 wards. Now you can make your own calculations. If the village has a total of 6,000 voters, 4,500 voters are migrants."

It's the same story in Kundli, which has about 2,500 Haryanvi voters and about 4,500 migrant ones. In fact, the trend of migrant settlers began with Kundli about 20-25 years ago and extended to other neighbouring villages over the last 5 odd years. "Earlier, only labourers from Uttar Pradesh used to come. Now, workers from Bihar form 75 % of the total migrant population," said Balwan Singh, a villager.

On the upside, the local residents now find that renting out their premises is a lucrative option. "You visit any house and you will find at least one Bihari migrant living as a tenant. Being poor, they don't mind living in crowded accommodations and as many as 10 people stay in one room," he added.