

Exploring Economic and Social Realities: Daily Wage Workers in Mussoorie

Shalini Gupta

Associate Professor (Commerce)

M.P.G. College, Mussoorie

ABSTRACT

This research investigates the socio-economic conditions of daily wage earners, using a comprehensive approach to uncover the diverse factors influencing their livelihoods. Combining surveys and interviews forms the methodology, offering a detailed understanding of their experiences across varied socio-cultural and economic contexts.

The daily wage earners are workers who do not have a regular or fixed income, their earnings are based on daily contractual obligations. It may vary greatly from day to day. The survey has been done based on a survey of 75 such workers who mostly work as porters, in hotels, and as rickshaw pullers.

These findings contribute to the existing body of knowledge on the socio-economic conditions of daily wage earners, providing insights for policy decisions, social programs, and advocacy efforts.

INTRODUCTION

Uttarakhand, born out of the state of Uttar Pradesh, is a small state nestled in the lap of the Himalayan Mountain range. Like many other states in North India, it has agriculture as the dominant sector of its economy. It is also known for its amazing wildlife and religious destinations, making it an attractive tourist hotspot. This makes tourism a huge part of its economy.

Mussoorie is one of the several small hill stations in the state of Uttarakhand. It is also an extremely popular tourist spot during the summer, owing to its proximity to the capital, Dehradun, which makes access to the hill station easy.

One of the major industries contributing to the economy is that of tourism. It is not only able to create more job opportunities than any other sector but also has the potential to offer employment opportunities to a diverse range of individuals, from those with basic skills to specialized professionals, even in the most remote areas of the nation. This industry is one of the biggest generators of jobs for daily wage earners due to the fluctuation in the number of jobs according to the demand of the tourist season.

A daily wage earner is an individual who is employed and compensated based on the number of hours worked or tasks completed each day. Unlike salaried or monthly wage workers who receive a fixed amount of pay over a set period, daily wage earners typically receive compensation daily. This type of employment arrangement is common in various sectors, including construction, agriculture, casual labour, etc. Daily wage earners may not have a long-term contract with their employers, and their income is directly tied to the amount of work they complete or the number of hours they contribute each day.

Daily wage earners face a lot of prejudice due to their poor socio-economic conditions. At the heart of all their problems, lies income insecurity and variability. They are subject to irregular

work patterns, leaving them financially unstable. Another factor that contributes heavily towards their poor condition, is lack of access to social protection.

In Mussoorie, identifying them can prove to be difficult, as they occupy different types of employment all over the town. From rickshaw pullers to porters, tourist guides, hotel workers, etc. Mussoorie is a tourist place, where the amount of work opportunities changes according to seasonal importance. Work and earnings for surplus work are contracted for short periods. As soon as the tourist season is over, most of these workers return home to their villages.

SOCIO-ECONOMY OF UTTARAKHAND

Uttarakhand is one of the northern states of India. It is known for its natural beauty and religious importance, but the socio-economic condition of the state is not ideal. The state has a high poverty rate, high levels of unemployment, and a low rate of literacy.

This high poverty rate is a result of a combination of factors, including a lack of employment opportunities and a low level of education.

The unemployment rate in Uttarakhand is also high, with an estimated 34% of the state's working-age population being unemployed. This high unemployment rate is due to a lack of industries and investments in the state. There is also a lack of infrastructure, such as roads and transportation systems, which makes it difficult for people to access jobs.

The low levels of education in Uttarakhand are also a major issue. This lack of education can make it difficult for people to find employment and earn a steady income.

In addition to high poverty rates and unemployment, Uttarakhand also faces other socio-economic challenges. The state has a low per capita income, which can make it difficult for people to access necessities such as food, healthcare, and education. The state also has a high level of gender inequality, with women facing significant challenges in accessing education and employment opportunities.

Overall, the socio-economic condition of Uttarakhand is not ideal, and a significant amount of work needs to be done to improve the situation.

LOCAL ECONOMIC LANDSCAPE

The local economic landscape plays a pivotal role in shaping the opportunities and challenges faced by communities, businesses, and individuals. It encompasses various factors that influence economic activities within a specific region. For Mussoorie, tourism is the primary economic driver. The local economy is heavily dependent on jobs related to hospitality, accommodations, restaurants, traveling, recreational activities, etc.

These sectors of services provide a lot of opportunities for daily wage earners as tourist guides, porters, temporary waitstaff, rickshaw pullers, etc. The number of availabilities of these jobs depends on the density of tourists in the town. In the busy months of summer (May-July), the tourist season is at its peak, and so is the demand for temporary workers. During off-season months, the demand decreases and so does the earnings for these contractual workers.

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

A demographic profile of the town provides us with useful insights into the composition and characteristics of its population. As per the report released by the Census India 2011, the population of Mussoorie is 30,118. A total of 16,623 males and 13,495 female residents. Over 8% (2672) are children lying in the age group of 0-6 years. The literacy rate of the town is 89%, about 11% higher than that of the state. The female sex ratio is 852. The town has been divided

into 11 wards. Around 3,500 Nepalese are residing in the town. Most of the able men work as daily wage earners, while their spouses work as house helps. Over 10,000 of the population is working, of which around 10% do marginal work. Around 8,500 were male, while over 1,900 were female workers. Given below is the table for the distribution of the total population across all 11 wards.

S No.	Ward No.	Population
1	Mussoorie Ward No - 1	2621
2	Mussoorie Ward No - 2	2909
3	Mussoorie Ward No - 3	3267
4	Mussoorie Ward No - 4	1838
5	Mussoorie Ward No - 5	2389
6	Mussoorie Ward No - 6	2289
7	Mussoorie Ward No - 7	2847
8	Mussoorie Ward No - 8	4362
9	Mussoorie Ward No - 9	2781
10	Mussoorie Ward No - 10	2193
11	Mussoorie Ward No - 11	2622

Source: Census of India 2011

METHODOLOGY

A total of 75 random daily wage earners were interviewed for this survey. They were questioned about the availability of work, around the year. The type of work they were employed for, their working hours, their wages, and diving deeper, we also investigated their living conditions. Further inquiring about their education qualifications, social protection access, housing conditions, and any barriers to opportunities due to ethnicity or religion.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The following table delves into the classification of the workers in accordance to their ethnicity and gender

	Male	Female	
Nepalese	15	5	20
Garhwali	39	9	48
Others	5	2	7

The above distribution of the sample size shows that Garhwalis dominate the job market. The survey indicates that a significant number of Nepalese have also been working as daily wage earners. With the comparatively smaller number of females in each category, the table shows a notable disparity between male and female representation across different ethnicities.

If this sample is representative of the larger population, it might indicate areas where certain ethnicities or genders are underrepresented or overrepresented.

The following tables describe the jobs of these 75 people participating in the survey:

No of Jobs (per person)	No of People
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3	13
2	36
1	26

These numbers indicate that it is extremely common for these daily wage workers to have more than one regular job title. The same worker who has been working as a rickshaw puller would later at some other point be working as a porter or as a rickshaw puller. Therefore, classification based on the type of job may prove to be not as useful for the study.

But while conducting the study we were able to narrow down the top three businesses that provided the most fodder for the daily wage earner job market, namely- Living Accommodations (Hotels), Transportation (Mainly Rickshaw pullers), and Tourism Companies (Tourist Guides).

The following table describes the expected wages for one day in these fields of work.

Type of Work	Average Wages/day (Rs)
Living Accommodations (Hotels)	125
Transportation (Mainly Rickshaw pullers)	110
Tourism Companies (Tourist Guides)	100

Most of the work for daily wage earners in Living Accommodations (Hotels) was of temporary waitstaff or housekeeping. These types of hiring peaked in the tourist season (months of May to July). Similarly, in the case of rickshaw pullers, the owners of the rickshaws rent out their vehicles to these workers in exchange for a fixed amount of money per day. Businesses dealing with tourism-related activities also increased their employee number temporarily by hiring workers in surplus as tourist guides or drivers. Many also worked independently as porters.

The above-mentioned jobs were mostly male-exclusive, except for Living Accommodations (Hotels), which seemed to have employed both women and men.

During the interview process of the survey, we were able to unearth many facts about the socio-economic conditions of these workers. Most of their family's combined income put them below the poverty line. Yet, most of them neither had knowledge nor access to provisions that are provided for such families with poverty-stricken backgrounds.

Out of the 75 interviewed, only around 30 had had any kind of formal education. Out of these 30, only 9 had finished high school. Rest had dropped out either due to poor economic circumstances or a lack of motivation for further education. All these 30 workers were male, meaning none of the women had had an opportunity to receive any kind of education.

Most of the workers were not originally residents of Mussoorie but had immigrated to the town to find better opportunities and more regular work. The high number of Nepalese in the town is due to two reasons, geographical proximity and cultural similarity.

CONCLUSION

The study on the socio-economic conditions of daily wage earners in Mussoorie sheds light on the various factors influencing their lives. Through this paper, we try to understand the various prospects and divisions of the job market for daily wage earners. It also highlights the extent of gender-based discrimination, which seems to be more prominent for people under their

living circumstances. We also explored the lack of exposure among the workers to helpful government policies and social protection.

In conclusion, they are a valuable and important part of the work environment, especially in the busy months of tourist season, they seem to be mostly unaware of their rights or any kind of additional benefit that they might be eligible for under any government scheme.

It is important to note that they are indeed a major part of the town's economy and thus an effort should be made to educate them about their rights so that they can improve their living circumstances and escape the cycle of poverty.

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