

Reasons for the Deteriorating Relationship between the Local People of Mumbai and the Bihari Migrants

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Abstract

The paper deals with the 'reasons' behind the deteriorating relationship between the Bihari migrants and the local people of Mumbai from a larger project on the topic. The main sample comprised of 307 people (152 Bihari migrants and 155 local people of Mumbai). Additionally, 50 respondents participated into 8 focus group discussions and 17 were interviewed. Both the qualitative and quantitative methods were used for data collection. Two similar, but not identical versions of the main questionnaire were developed, one for each group whose Part III addressed the 'reasons' issue. Qualitative data were generated with the help of an open-ended question, focus group discussions and interviews. Content analysis of the qualitative data helped arrive at some thematic reason categories namely, reduced employment options for the locals; negative attributes of Bihari people; pressure on the basics amenities of the city; politics and political leaders, ethnocentric orientation of the migrants and culture pollution, *etc.* The forced choice answers against the given reasons presented very high percentage of endorsements and needs to be examined with caution.

Introduction

The study on 'Bihari migrants in Mumbai' was conceived in the backdrop of the 2008 attacks on the Bihari migrants in Mumbai and in some other cities of Maharashtra in the following years. The interest was in understanding what affected the relationship between the livelihood seeking poor migrants and their fellow countrymen of a financially viable metropolitan area and why?

The post-independence Bihar was a combination of poor planning and worse politics and couldn't keep pace with India's economic revolution. Moreover, Biharis who travelled to find work, were treated with 'snobbery and disdain' in a similar manner to how the British treated employment seeking England bound Indians in the 1950s (Sanghvi, 2008). In its own country, Bihar is seen as the land of 'unwanted' migrants and its people are recognized with the name of 'Biharis' (Mishra, 2012). Bihar's identity emerged from the images of these middle and lower class non-special, poor, unskilled and naïve people who leave their homes due to familial, social, political, economic and educational conditions (Singh, 2007). Singh (2007) argues, that the cultural superiority against the Bihari migrants is a peculiar manifestation of deep caste prejudices of the urban, upper classes and middle classes against the lower castes and classes in general and there is a 'class and caste' location of prejudice against the migrants.

Bihar has the second highest out migration population in India constituting 24.67% of the State's population. Based on migration by birth, there are 21.3 million migrants

in the state. Furthermore, though the proportion of the migrants has approximately doubled and the migration destinations have become widespread, migration has become long term and largely rural to urban (Mehta, 2009). The Bihar government has no up-to-date record of the migrants' number (Compendium 2000-2010), but according to one estimate, around 2.5 million Bihari migrants are working in Mumbai and around half that number in the state of Maharashtra (Malekar, 2008).

Method

The main *sample* comprised of 307 participants (152 Bihari migrants and 155 local people of Mumbai). Additionally, 50 people were distributed into 8 focus groups (4 for each regional group) and all together 17 people (8 Bihari migrants and 9 local Marathi persons) were interviewed. The migrants from the State of Bihar were a prototypical case of village based, poor, less educated and unskilled wage earners. However, the local people of Mumbai were relatively well-off, middle class, educated people, engaged in service and small businesses. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used for data collection.

Instruments

The instrument for each group comprised of a similar but not identical version of the main questionnaire with three parts. Part III was developed especially for understanding the reasons behind the 'deterioration in relationship' between the Bihari migrants and the local people of Mumbai. For this purpose two questions one 'open-ended' and the other with 'forced choice' answers were provided. For the open-ended question, the respondents were requested to tell what they think could be the reasons behind the local people's negative feelings toward the Bihari migrants who come to Mumbai looking for their livelihood?

In the 'forced choice' case, the respondents were requested to tell whether the given reasons (a) Harsh words spoken by the political parties and politicians, (b) Bihari people capturing the employment opportunities of the local people and (c) Bihari peoples' lifestyle' (which irritated the local people) were, 'Correct' or 'Incorrect' ? Besides the 'open-ended' and 'closed-ended' questions, data were collected by conducting 'focus group discussions' (FGD) and 'individual interviews', with the help of a list of guiding questions.

Process

The migrants were approached in their slum homes after work or when they agreed to talk in their free time. Usually, the migrants were contacted at construction sites and teashops. Some local people who knew the localities inhabited by the migrants were requested to help approach the migrants. The researcher filled up the forced choice answers for the migrants and took detailed notes of what they said while responding to the open-ended question.

The huge descriptive data generated with the help of different qualitative measures were content analyzed. For example, the participants' ideas and descriptions against the open-ended reason's question were carefully sorted out and similar ideas were put under the common theme they represented. The category thus created was given a thematic name. The forced choice responses against the three given reasons were put to descriptive analysis.

Observations

Observations are presented under the following heads for each respective group: (1) The content analysis based *categories of reasons*, (2) an impression of the *common reason categories* and (3) percentages for the *forced choice* answers for the given reasons.

The Content Analysis Based Thematic Categories

The names of eight reason categories and the percentage of ideas (in parentheses) behind them are presented beneath (see also Appendix. 1). The categories were derived from 178 descriptive responses of 155 local people of Mumbai against the 'open-ended question', which asked them to tell 'why the relationship between them and the Bihari migrants has been deteriorating.

- (1) Reduced Employment Options for the Local People (48.04%)
- (2) Politics, Political Parties and Media (19.55%)
- (3) Behaviour and Negative Personal Characteristics (9.50%)
- (4) Pressure on the Basic Amenities and Population Growth (8.94%)
- (5) Migration with Large Number of People (3.35%)
- (6) Being Dominant (3.35%)
- (7) Culture Pollution and Linguistic Conflicts (2.23%)
- (8) Continuing Bihari Culture (1.68%).

Reduced Employment Opportunities. The first category had the highest (*i.e.*, 48.04) percentage of descriptive ideas and gave the message that, *local people face problems in getting employment, Biharis have taken locals' job, created unemployment and competitiveness for livelihood, there is now less access to employment opportunities for the locals, the migrants were ready to work in low wages.*

According to the inputs from the focus group discussions (FGDs), it was generally believed that Bihari people grabbed the job opportunities of the local people (FGD1). However, the migrants were not fully at fault (FGD2) as the local people were not showing enough "preparedness for accepting any work" and were "not ready to put in hard work" (FGD1). It was heard that nobody can grab job opportunities and "only those who work hard get the employment" (FGD2). On the other extreme, Biharis were

blamed 100% as they "accepted each and every work", and were "available for cheap labour" (FGD4).

Five out of the eight interviewees blamed the migrants. Accordingly, "If you look for a job you don't get it as Biharis have spread over at all the places"; "they shouldn't have come here creating difficulty for the local people to find jobs", "migrants come, earn money and bully us". However, it was also voiced that Marathis don't take up any job that comes across, while the Biharis did, and therefore, cannot be blamed. It was heard that, "everyone comes for job and money so why to resent", "everyone has a right to income so why comment", and "we have no problem, so why feel bad and for what".

Politics, Political Leaders and Media. The second category comprised of nearly 20% of the descriptions. Besides blaming the 'politics and political leaders', a few believed that 'media' hyped the issue. In the focus group discussions it was heard that the local political leaders were 50% wrong and 50% right; and "95% of political leaders and 5% of Bihari peoples' casual, undisciplined behaviour created the problem (FGD4). The frequently heard view was that politicians promoted the conflict for selfish reasons (FGD1, 2 and 3), were displaying some kind of "political stunt" (FGD3) and were strengthening their vote bank (FGD2 and FGD4). Some argued that the "strategies of the politicians was 100% right as they were helping the common people raise their voice" (FGD3) while on the other extreme, politicians were considered "100 % wrong" (FGD2). As regards to the media, electronic media, newspapers and FM channels were mentioned for fanning the conflict between the two groups (FGD1). Three out of the 8 interviewees promptly blamed politicians, political parties and "political interference" for the relationship problem however, one said: "Biharis know that our leaders are good. Raj Thakre gave cheap food vending cart to many people".

Behaviour and Negative Personal Characteristics. The third category comprised of 9.5% of descriptive ideas suggesting that

'Behaviour and negative personal characteristics' of the Bihari people created difficulty in the relationship between *the migrants and the local people.* It was heard that *the migrants' behaviour was not good, they were selfish, not disciplined, don't talk properly, and their lifestyle was unacceptable.* Moreover, Biharis were perceived as *unclean who spread garbage and dirt.*

The contents from focus group 3 pointed out that Biharis were "selfish, "liars", "undisciplined", and "cheaters" who "didn't treat others as human beings". This group seemed to be particularly influenced by the negative views of the people around them and the anti-Bihari propaganda of the local political leaders. The interviewees however, did not think that Bihari people's lifestyle was responsible for the worsening relationship. One interviewee remarked, "Bihari migrants eat and drink nicely but don't loot others while our people sit idle".

Pressure on Amenities and Population Growth. The fourth category resulted from

9% of the descriptions suggesting that Biharis have grabbed the space of Mumbai and have become a burden on the city's amenities and infrastructure. Focus group discussions gave a glimpse of the resentment too. It was heard: "they sleep on the foot path" (FGD4) and have "spread at the public and private places" (FGD1). An interviewee remarked, "If Bihari population increases then Maharashtra will not stay here".

Migration. The 'Migration' category had the support of 3.35% of the ideas, which strongly conveyed the message that the practice of continuously bringing in more migrants from their native place was worsening the relationship between the two groups. One of the focus group participant remarked, "One Bihari brings 10 more people to Maharashtra and amplified the city's population" (FGD1), another one said, "they follow migration" (FGD2).

Dominance. With 3.35% of the descriptive ideas, sixth theme indicated that Biharis had the tendency to show 'Dominance'. It was argued that first, the local people had to tolerate their influx and then they try to dominate them. Similarly, it was heard: *They come here and show their rights, they try to dominate the local people and Biharis have criminal record.* The focus group discussion participants used expressions like "arrogant", "bully" and "dominant people" for the migrants (FDG3). It was said that Biharis believe that "Mumbai was surviving due to them" (FGD4) and also that "Bihari men are dominant; they don't allow their women to work outside" (FGD2).

Culture Pollution and Linguistic Conflicts. The 7th category was represented by 2.23% of descriptions and impressed that Biharis were causing culture pollution and linguistic conflicts.

Continuing One's Own Culture. Supported by a small percentage of ideas (1.68) the last category complemented the earlier theme. It was voiced that *Biharis celebrated their festivals* and believed in *continuing regionalism*. Focus group 2 data added some points on the Bihari life style, culture and social evils (*i.e., dowry system, girls being married young and Biharis not wanting to educate the girls*). It was heard: Biharis preserved, and continued their lifestyle; their culture was "rigid".

Reasons Given by the Bihari Migrants

Presented below are the names of the ten reason categories and the percentage of ideas (in parentheses) that helped develop these. The categories were derived from 271 descriptive ideas presented by 149 Bihari migrants against the same 'open-ended question' that was answered by the local people of Mumbai.

1. Biharis as Job Snatchers (18.45%)
2. Capture Mumbai and Bring Pressure on Basic Amenities (15.13%)
3. Negative Personal Attributes and Negative Mentality (10.70%)
4. Socially Unacceptable Behaviour (9.45%)
5. Ethnocentric Orientation and Insecurity for Local People (8.49%)

6. Language and Bad Communication Skills (8.49%)
7. Politically Inclined (7.75%)
8. Affect Maharashtra Culture, take Advantage of Marathi People (7.01%)
9. Politicians (6.64 %)
10. Antisocial Behaviour (5.54%)

Biharis as Job Snatchers. The reason that Biharis were 'Job snatchers' attracted the highest percentage (*i.e.*, 18.45) of total descriptions such as: *We are ready to take any job, locals don't get small jobs and have to face this, local people don't get even menial/laborers' job, due to us there is employment problem, etc.* Earlier the local people had mentioned this reason much more strongly than the Bihari migrants, but with little support for this reason in their focus group discussions.

Bihari focus group members however, defended their position by saying that "skill and capability" of the person (FGD1) and his "entrepreneurial skills" brings job opportunities anywhere (FGD3) and they were in Mumbai for their livelihood willing to work in "any kind of work environment" and "take up even low paid jobs" (FGD2). Moreover, "Marathis don't work hard" and "only Maharashtra women go out to work whereas men prefer to stay home" (FGD4). Though little was said by the interviewed migrants, it was still heard that the local people were "angered" and "irritated" because the migrants came to Mumbai seeking jobs. Someone argued, "let everyone compete rather than make a mess of the situation".

Capture Mumbai and Bring Pressure on Basic Amenities. The second thematic category was supported by 15% of descriptions of the following kind: Biharis come to Mumbai make both themselves and the local people helpless, they crowd roads and buses and are everywhere, *Biharis stay at one place for long making the local people homeless, if you give them a place to put a foot, they will sleep there, Biharis consider themselves "boss" of Mumbai, they want to drive away the locals from Mumbai and, Mumbai has many problems due to migrants' population, etc.* Earlier the local people had suggested 'Pressure on basic amenities, population growth' and 'Migration' as the reasons for the deteriorating relationship, but the migrants seemed to give this reason relatively more strongly.

Negative Personal Attributes and Mentality. The third, category entitled 'Negative personal attributes and negative mentality' comprised of 10.75% of ideas. One wondered why Biharis would point out to their own negative characteristics and blame these for causing problems in relationships. Some illustrative ideas from this category are: *There is no trust of Biharis, Biharis sell duplicate goods on the streets, Biharis have different teeth show and different to eat, Biharis sell stolen things; they eat from the Maharash-*

trians and blame them. The focus group discussions or the interviews did not add much here.

Socially Unacceptable Behavior. Supported by 9.45% of ideas, the fourth reason category had the following kind of descriptions: *Bihari people's behavior is not good with the residents, Biharis eat up the mind, they spread filth in public places, they wash utensils and bathe in the open, Biharis are not clean, Biharis keep on joking, etc.* In focus group 4, the elderly participants criticized some Bihari youth for getting involved into illegal practices and getting into non-serious relationship with the Marathi girls.

Ethnocentric Orientation and Insecurity for the Local People. With 8.49% of the descriptions, the 5th category was named 'Ethnocentric orientation and insecurity for the local people'. Some samples from the category are: *They don't leave their ways, behaviour and culture due to affinity with their own State, local people fear that Biharis will settle here, locals work less than Biharis and are jealous of Biharis, etc.*

Language and Bad Communication Skills. The 6th category with 8.49% of descriptions conveyed the message that incompatibility in language and bad communication skills was responsible for the failing relationship. It was said: *Biharis don't understand the local language, locals feel bad and get ill feelings due to the change in language, Biharis get beaten up due to language, they don't know how to talk, etc.* In the interviews, it was heard that local people cannot speak Hindi properly and the migrants could not understand the Marathi language.

Politically Inclined. The seventh reason category with 8% of ideas was about Biharis being 'Politically inclined' people. It was said: *They come from Bihar and get into Maharashtra's politics, they create political hindrances, the slogan of Biharis is "I come from Bihar and enter into Maharashtrian politics", they interfere in political work, political parties are drawn towards them.*

Affect Maharashtra Culture and Take Advantage of Marathi People. With 7% of ideas, the eighth thematic category gave the message that Bihari migrants negatively affect and even destroy the Marathi culture. An added angle was that Biharis took advantage of the local people. Some descriptions appeared as follows: *Biharis caused imbalance in the society, local people don't benefit anything from them, Biharis drive away women, Marathis have difficulty staying close to us, etc.* Apparently, the migrants appeared strongly critical of their own group in this instance.

Politicians. The ninth theme blamed 'Politicians' and their harsh words for the deteriorating relationship with the support of 6.64% of descriptions. The focus group participants also blamed the politicians for creating "tension" between the two groups and using the policy of "divide and rule" to meet their own selfish goals. It was said that the moves of the politicians was 100% true (FGD1) and "75% of the reality" (FGD4, FDG2). The general feeling was that "the aim of the leaders is to strengthen their vote banks" (FGD 4), and turning Marathi people against the Biharis by "negative remarks" in their speeches (FGD3).

The interviewed migrants generally believed that "interference of political leaders", their "harsh words" plus their vote bank politics created the problem. An interviewee said, "some political forces are setting the issue on fire, and brain washing the Marathis against the Biharis. True many Biharis are migrating to Mumbai for work, but so are people from other States, so why point finger only towards us"?

Anti-Social Behavior. The last category namely, 'Anti-social behavior' had support of 5.54% of descriptions. Here the migrants mentioned about the "police pressure" caused by their (*i.e.*, migrants) presence in the locality, which disturbed the local people. Some ideas allocated to this theme were: *Biharis threaten local people, Biharis spread trouble, Biharis force locals to sell the slum homes, Biharis start working in gangwar, have fights and brawls.* Biharis were 'law breakers' was heard on other occasions too.

(1) The Ungenerous Gestures of the Local People

Lastly, one may briefly note the migrants' observations regarding the ungenerous gestures of the local people. Accordingly, locals are "overpowering" and "influencing" and "Biharis have to struggle hard for everything from education to finding place to live". Biharis were addressed as "uneducated" and "unsophisticated" and "had to deal much in Mumbai". One interviewee observed: "When we go to take grocery they snatch things from us saying that they are Biharis". However, only 2.21% of the ideas substantiated such 'ungenerous gestures of the local people'.

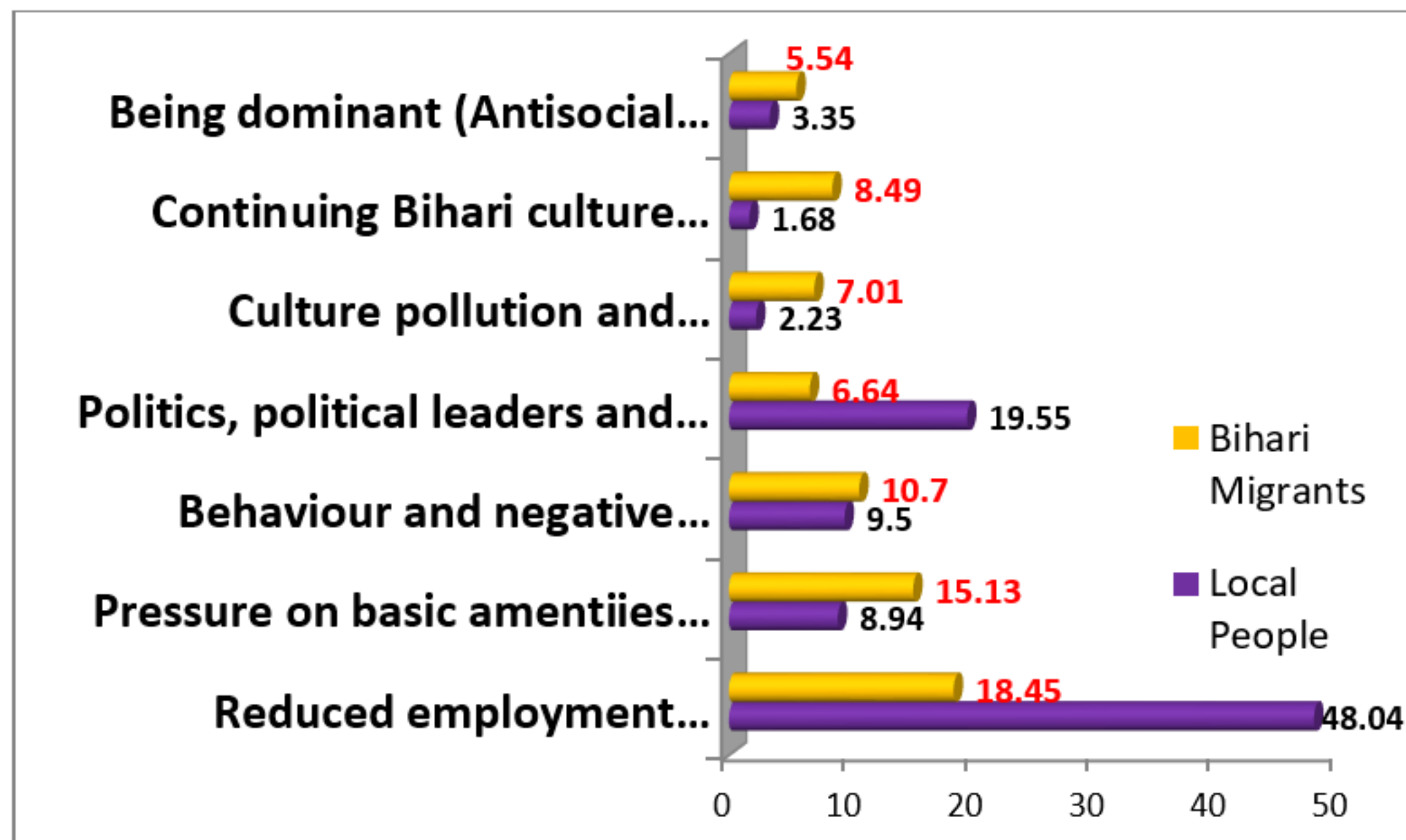


Figure 1
Common Reasons Suggested by Both the Groups Based on the Percentage of Responses from the Respective Groups

(2) An Impression of the Reasons Given by Both the Groups

Both the groups considered 'reduced employment options for the local people' as the most prominent reason behind the deterioration in the relationship between them. Other common reasons included 'negative attributes or behavioural characteristics' of the Bihari people, 'pressure created by the migrants on the basic amenities of the city', 'politics and political leaders' plus 'culture pollution and linguistic conflicts', *etc.* Interestingly both the groups considered 'ethnocentric orientation' of the Bihari people (or continuing Bihari culture) as one of the reasons, which was supported more strongly by the migrants themselves. Similarly, the Bihari respondents alleged the reason 'pressure created on the basic amenities of the city' much more strongly.

(3) Observations from the Forced Choice Answers on the Given Reasons

Figure 2 displays the percentage of 'yes' answers against the three reasons given by the migrants and the local people.

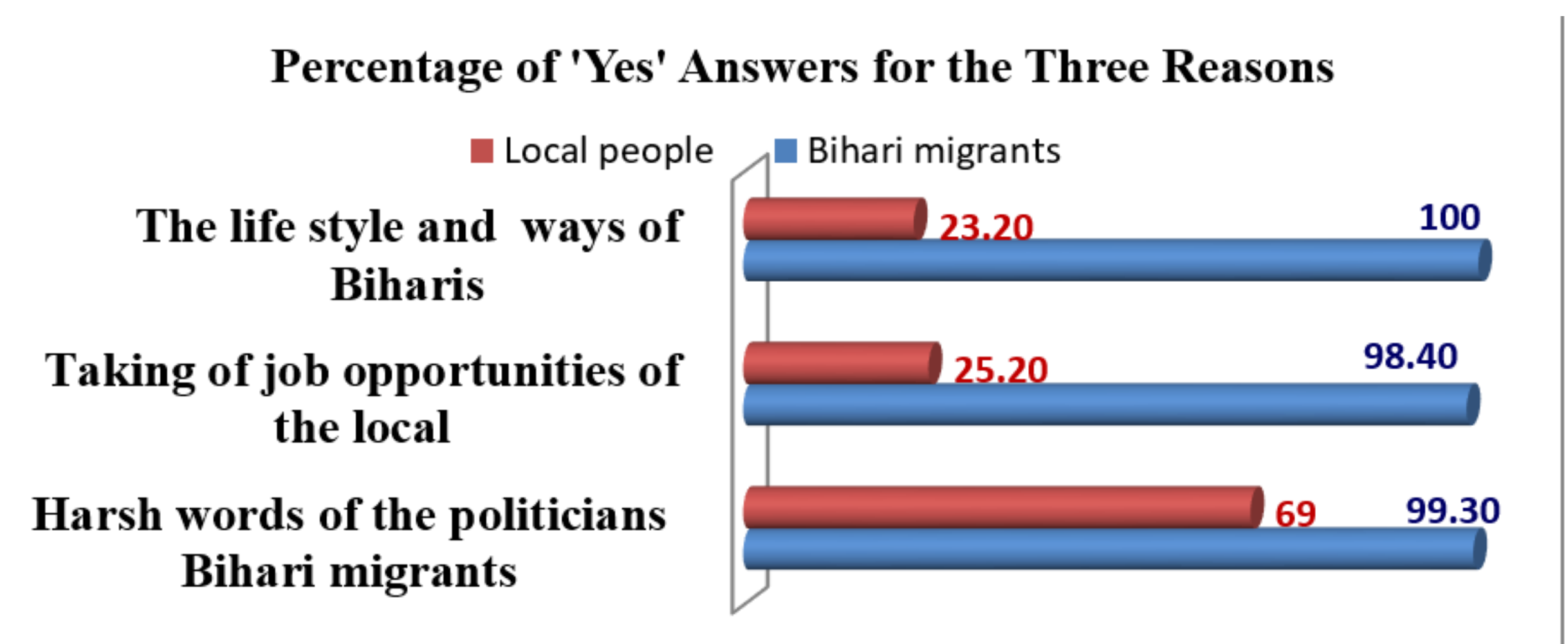


Figure 2

a. Harsh Words Spoken by the Politicians. The bar graph shows that 69% of the local respondents and a huge 99.3% of the Bihari migrants considered 'harsh words of the politicians' responsible for the worsening of the relationship. The percentages for the 'yes' option were much larger for both groups.

b. Capturing of the Employment Opportunities by the Bihari Migrants. It is evident that 25.2% of the Mumbai respondents believed that the 'employment problem' created by the migrants caused the relationship problem. In other words, almost 75% of them *did not agree* to this reason. Again the percentage of local peoples' 'yes' answers was far less than what they had submitted for the theme 'Reduced employment options for the local people' against the open-ended question.

Similarly, 99.3% of the Bihari migrants agreed that they were considered people who took away the local peoples' job opportunities. At this point the high percentage of 'no' answers (*i.e.* 74.8%) given by the Marathi respondents was particularly interesting and confirmed that the forced choice options led to more extreme answers.

c. Bihari People's Lifestyle/Ways. Only 23.20% of the Mumbai respondents but 100% of the Bihari migrants agreed that the migrants' ways and lifestyle caused corrosion in the relationships between the two groups. Perhaps the migrants were projecting what they believed was the local people's premise for analyzing the relationship problem.

Summary of the Main Findings

In a nutshell, reduced employment option for the local people appeared to be one of the main reasons behind the deterioration in the relationship between the two regional groups. Other common reasons for the relationship problem were negative behavioural characteristics of the Bihari people, pressure created by the migrants on the basic amenities of the city, politics and political leaders, plus culture pollution and linguistic conflicts, *etc.* Ethnocentric orientation of the Bihari people was also considered causing

difficulty in the relationship between the two groups. It may be added that the reasons given against the open-ended question, were generally supported by the qualitative data from the focus group discussions and the individual interviews.

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Appendix 1

Categories of Reasons behind the Deterioration in the Relationship between the Bihari Migrants and the Local People of Mumbai (N= 155 Local People of Mumbai)

Dimension	Per-cent	Example
1. Reduced employment options for the local people	48.04	<i>Biharis have created employment problem, taken locals' job, created unemployment and competitiveness in livelihood, there is less employment opportunities for the locals, they work in low wages</i>
2. Politics, Political leaders and media	19.55	<i>Politics and ruling party, political leaders, politicians, political parties are creating problems, political reasons, media</i>
4. Behaviour and negative personal characteristics	9.50	<i>Their behaviour is not good, are selfish, undisciplined, don't talk properly, have bad lifestyle, are dirty, spread garbage</i>
3. Pressure on basic amenities and population growth	8.94	<i>They are enhancing their population in Maharashtra, have grabbed the space of Maharashtrians, created pressure on basic amenities, water and space, encroached Maharashtra, captured Mumbai, have burdened the infrastructure, etc.</i>
6. Being dominant	3.35	<i>Biharis show dominance, come here and show their rights, have criminal records and dominate locals</i>
7. Culture pollution and linguistic conflicts	2.23	<i>Destroy others' culture, spoilt Marathi culture, created linguistic conflict</i>
8. Continuing Bihari culture	1.68	<i>They celebrate their festivals, believe in regionalism</i>

Appendix 2

Categories of Reasons behind the Deterioration in the Relationship between the Bihari Migrants and the Local People of Mumbai (N=149 Bihari Migrants)

Dimension	Per-cent	Example
1. Job takers & low wager worker	18.45	<i>Biharis snatch local people's jobs, they work for little money so even locals have to work for less, locals leave jobs to have higher paid jobs and Biharis take it for less</i>
2. Captured Mumbai & bring pressure on basic amenities	15.13	<i>Biharis make their house wherever they find place, they want to capture Mumbai, the city's health is disturbed, if one Bihari comes he brings 100 more, they live for free don't pay rent, electricity and water, want to capture the conveniences of the local people.</i>
3. Negative personnel attributes and negative mentality	10.70	<i>Biharis are untrustworthy; they are innocent to look but are clever, speak lie, when they will run away is not known, Biharis are very greedy, Biharis, are betrayers and don't remember obligations, Biharis are bad by mentality.</i>
4. Socially unacceptable behavior	9.59	<i>Biharis don't maintain good relation with others, keep fighting, Biharis' conduct is improper, Biharis argue, locals don't like them due to their uncleanliness.</i>
5. Ethnocentric orientation making local people feel insecure	8.49	<i>Biharis don't give respect to the locals, make fun of local women, Biharis bond with other Biharis and not with the locals, casteists, they get into Maharashtra politics, locals fear Biharis and feel insecure</i>
6. Bad language and communication skill	8.49	<i>Difficult to understand their language, As Bihari speak Hindi, Marathi language is not recognized, there is language barrier, Biharis have no manners to talk, use abusive, filthy language</i>
7. Politically inclined	.75	<i>Biharis mix with political parties and ensure their existence, Biharis take part in politics, create their own political parties, interfere in local politics and stand against the Maharashtrians as opposition candidate</i>
8. Affect Maharashtra culture and take advantage of Marathi people	7.01	<i>Maharashtrian culture is adversely affected, Biharis don't let the Maharashtra culture stay, do not accept Marathi language, Biharis take undue advantage of the goodness of the Maharashtra people</i>
9. Due to politicians	6.64	<i>Due to politicians, harsh words of politician, politicians' speech creating ill feelings</i>
10. Anti-social behavior	5.54	<i>Crime increases due to Biharis, Biharis labour in the day time in "gangwars" in the night, Biharis drink and create drama, there is police pressure</i>