

Informal Networks And Emerging Trends In Gulf Migration From Bihar: A Sociological Study Of Bettiah City.

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Abstract

This study examines the contemporary dynamics of male migration from Bettiah, West Champaran, Bihar to Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, with particular attention to the role of informal recruitment networks and decision of this International migration particular Gulf region. Drawing on 2023–2025 fieldwork in Bettiah that combines semi-structured interviews, life-histories, and participant observation, the paper maps how local brokers, kinship chains, and digital platforms interact to shape migration.

Keywords: *Labor migration, Chain Migration, Informal Brokers, Formal and informal institution.*

Date of Submission: 02-12-2025

Date of Acceptance: 12-12-2025

I. Introduction

Bihar, one of India's poorest states, has long contributed to international labour markets, particularly in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. Traditional accounts of migration from Bihar have focused on remittances, poverty alleviation, and demographic trends. However, these narratives often overlook the critical role played by informal agents, returnee migrants, kinship networks, and religious institutions in sustaining and expanding migration flows (Boyd, 1989; Massey et al., 1993; Lindquist et al., 2012).

According to report by Business Standard 2023, a leading Gulf recruitment platform, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh together accounted for over 50% of new blue-collar visas issued by GCC countries in the first half of 2023, replacing Kerala as the leading source state (Business Standard, 2023). This marks a shift not only in geography but also in the socio-political economy of Indian labour migration.

II. Literature Review -

Field research and study by Deshingkar and Akter (2009), and Rahman (2001) highlight the dominance of informal agents or 'mediator' in migration pathways from Bihar. These brokers, often returnee migrants or community elders, manage travel logistics, visa procurement, and job placement without legal contracts or registration.

Anisur Rahman's seminal ethnographic studies in Siwan and Gopalganj districts (Rahman, 1993; 2001) reveal the layered structure of informal migration infrastructure, particularly among Muslim communities. He documented how entire local economies in these regions have become dependent on remittances, and how informal migration has become routinized through kinship, caste, and village-level networks. His work demonstrated that migration in these districts is not simply an economic strategy but a deeply cultural and socialized life cycle event, embedded in expectations of masculinity, community honour, and intergenerational continuity.

Chain migration is a prominent feature of Gulf-bound migration from Bihar. Studies by Massey et al. (1993), Rahman (2001) confirmed that family and neighbourhood ties are central to migration decisions. In West Champaran, around 60% of migrants had relatives or acquaintances already employed in the Gulf, indicating a strong community-led migration culture.

Anisur Rahman's findings from Gopalganj and Siwan reinforce this dynamic. He noted that the majority of new migrants relied on extended family and religious kin to finance initial costs and navigate the Gulf job market. These relationships ensured trust-based support systems, but also created dependency loops that were hard to escape, especially for lower caste and economically marginalized families.

Religious institutions, particularly mosques and madrasas, also act as crucial facilitators. Community leaders, especially in Muslim-dominated regions like Siwan and Bettiah, often serve as informal counselors and intermediaries (Van Hear et al., 2004; Gardner, 2012), helping young men prepare for migration and connecting them with trusted mediators.

The year 2023 marked a significant shift in labour migration patterns. A report from Moneycontrol (2023) noted a 50% increase in blue-collar worker migration to GCC nations. New data from Huntr suggests that construction, hospitality, and basic technical skills are in highest demand. Migrants aged 20–40, particularly from semi-urban and rural areas like Bettiah, dominate the migration flows.

While this rise offers economic opportunities, it also raises concerns about informalisation. According to IOM report (2023), less than 30% of Gulf-bound migrants from Bihar register on the eMigrate portal, leaving them exposed to legal and financial vulnerabilities.

Caste also influences migration. Lower caste groups often rely more on informal brokers due to social exclusion from state schemes. These groups are more likely to experience exploitation and have fewer opportunities to return or reintegrate effectively (Rahman, 2001). In his work in Siwan district Rahman showed how caste hierarchies determine access to migration pathways and the types of jobs available in the Gulf, with upper-caste migrants leveraging stronger networks and lower-caste migrants often trapped in exploitative roles.

Social Network Approach: It states that social network including ties of kin, caste, village, language are the most effective channels of information system which favors decision making in migration. Moreover, the friendship and kin networks that are mobilized for migration were formed before the migration and were developed as an integral part of group membership". As such, the primary tasks of networks are usually socialization, social support, and boundary maintenance. Levy and Wadycki (1972) in their study of the influence of family and friends concerning migration found that migration has been greatly influenced by the presence of friends and relatives at the place of destination who have been the major source of information about the potential job opportunities to the migrants.

III. Objectives

The main aim of this study is to examine contemporary dynamics of male migration from Bettiah (West Champaran, Bihar) to Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, with particular attention to the role of informal recruitment networks. This paper also explores the complex relationship between labor migration to the Gulf and uses of new communication platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram shaping the idea of Migration.

To understand labour migration and its recent trend and pattern from Bettiah city.

1. To examine the functioning and significance of informal recruitment networks in facilitating male migration from Bettiah (West Champaran, Bihar) to Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries.
2. To analyze how digital communication platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram shape migration imaginaries, decision-making processes, and transnational connections among Bettiah workforce to migrate in Gulf.
3. To investigate the socio-economic, cultural, and religion-based factors influencing participation in migration networks and the sustenance of transnational labor mobility.
4. To explore how Gulf migration reconfigures local social relations, gender dynamics, and family aspirations within Bettiah's migrant-sending communities.

IV. Methodologies / Method Of Data Collection

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative data to examine the dynamics of male migration from Bettiah (West Champaran, Bihar) to Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. The primary data will be derived from extensive fieldwork conducted in Bettiah city, involving interviews and observations among migrant households, returnees, and local agents engaged in informal recruitment networks. Secondary data will be gathered through a comprehensive review of existing literature, academic studies, and reports published by scholars, policy institutions, and social scientists. In addition, relevant national and international documents and reports from organizations such as ILO (International Labour Organization) report on labour migration and IOM (International Organization of Migration).

For collecting data I have used snowball sampling method in the Bettiah Champaran District of Bihar. I have used semi structural Interview with some pertaining questions regarding their socio-economic condition

and influences of migration towards gulf migration. I have taken 60 household to understand the condition and asked questions.

Field observations and findings

Primary ethnographic fieldwork conducted between August 2023 and July 2025 involved structured interviews with 60 households with international migrant (primarily in GCC countries). The study aimed to understand the role of informal networks, gender, and migration decision-making processes.

Table 1: Survey Findings from Bettiah (in %)

Factor	Respondent		Yes		No	
	Total	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Formal institutions e.g., Government agencies, Overseas Employment offices, etc.	60	100	20	33	40	66
Informal Institution e.g., local brokers, middlemen, community agents	60	100	40	66	24	40
Family kinship (Blood Relationship)	60	100	36	60	24	40
non-kin social contacts assisting migration	60	100	39	65	21	35
links with returnees or current migrants abroad	60	100	39	65	21	35

Figure 1: *Chart of Migration Indicators from Field Survey (2023–2025)*

The data reveals critical insights into the social organization of migration decision-making among respondents from Bihar. Migration is not an individual act but a socially embedded process, shaped by both formal structures and informal social networks.

Formal Institutions: Only 33% of respondents acknowledged the role of formal institutions (such as licensed recruitment agencies, government programs, or official migration portals). This limited engagement suggests a structural disconnection between the state apparatus and migrant aspirations. It reflects both institutional inadequacies and a lack of credibility or access in peripheral regions like West Champaran, Siwan, and Gopalganj.

Informal Institutions: In contrast, 66% of respondents relied on informal institutions—including unregistered brokers, religious elders, or community-based intermediaries. These actors form a parallel governance system of migration, often substituting for the absent or ineffective state. The reliance on informal channels underscores the vernacularization of migration systems, where local norms, patron-client ties, and non-state actors govern mobility.

Kinship Networks (Blood Relationships): 60% of respondents pointed to immediate family and kin-based support as a central migration enabler. Kinship operates as a primary unit of social capital, providing not only financial assistance but also normative legitimacy and emotional security in the migration process. This affirms classical sociological perspectives (e.g., Bourdieu’s concept of social capital and Durkheim’s emphasis on solidarity) in explaining migration as a family-mediated social institution.

Friends and Relatives (Extended Networks): A significant 65% of respondents attributed their migration decisions to the influence of friends and extended relatives. These lateral ties often facilitate access to information, job opportunities, and settlement assistance abroad. This form of chain migration illustrates the importance of horizontal diffusion mechanisms within closely knit community structures.

Social Relations with Other Migrants: Similarly, 65% noted the impact of prior migrants from their locality or community. These social fields, constituted by earlier waves of migrants, create translocal imaginaries and practical support systems. They serve as a form of “migration infrastructure” (Xiang & Lindquist, 2014), producing and sustaining mobility through informal mentorship, embedded trust, and shared experience.

V. Conclusion

The survey findings from Bettiah highlight a network-based migration system characterized by strong social and informal linkages rather than institutional support. The data demonstrates that migration from Bettiah

to Gulf countries is primarily network-driven, sustained by informal and interpersonal relationships rather than formal institutional mechanisms.

The findings indicate that informal institutions and kin-based networks collectively account for more than 60% of the influence in facilitating migration from Bettiah, underscoring the predominance of trust, reciprocity, and social obligation over formal or state-regulated mechanisms. This empirical pattern resonates with the social network theory of migration, which posits that once migration pathways are established, existing migrants lower the economic and social costs for subsequent migrants through interpersonal ties and shared experiences.

If represented visually, the data would position friends, relatives, and social ties with current migrants at the highest level of influence (65%), followed by informal institutions and family networks (60%), and formal agencies as the least influential (33%).

In Bettiah, over 65% of migrants surveyed during 2023–2025 reported reliance on informal social networks to secure overseas employment. These networks are not merely adaptive mechanisms but constitute a structural element of Bihar's migration infrastructure. While such networks enhance accessibility and reduce entry barriers, their informal nature also perpetuates vulnerabilities, precarity, and limited institutional protection for migrants. Consequently, policy frameworks must recognize and integrate these embedded informal systems within migration governance to ensure safer, more equitable, and context-sensitive mobility regimes.

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