

A Study of Indian Migrant Labours and Migration

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Abstract

Human migration has become a vital issue of many developed and developing countries in the recent past. It is stressful, demands emotional, social, cultural, educational, and economical adjustments. Migration means voluntary or involuntary movement of individuals from their native lands with the basic motive of earning a livelihood. The people who migrate are called emigrants or immigrants or migrants. Human migration experienced an upward trend after World War-II as the people were forced to deport or evacuate and thus, were displaced from their native lands. This trend further got a boost after globalization and liberalization of the world economy (Ellerman, 2005). The three main components of population change are fertility, mortality and migration, of which fertility and mortality work in biological framework, while migration depends upon economic, political, social and demographic forces in environment.

The objective behind writing this paper was to understand about the scenario of Indian Migrant labours and what are the reasons of migration.

This paper is based on the review of most relevant information regarding migration and migrant labours and aims to highlight the different types, causes and a framework to understand it in a better perspective by adopting an explorative research design mainly based on secondary data.

Trade unions and non-governmental organizations though very small in number make sincere efforts to alleviate the problems of migrant workers. IMF initiated an effort to organize the migrant workers at the ship-breaking yard at Mumbai and along through Steel, Metal & Engineering Workers' Federation of India (SMEFI). These migrant workers were organized in the existing union Mumbai, Port Trust, Dock and General Employees' Union (MPTDGEU) by amending the constitution and reducing the rates of subscription. Non-economic demands like civic amenities, occupational health and safety (OHS) and social problems were taken up, were some of the finding of the research paper.

Keywords: Migration, Migrant Labours, Organization

Introduction

A labourer or a worker is a person who puts his physical labour to gain some money or thing in return. The careful perusal of the Indian history reveals that primarily agricultural and domestic workers existed in ancient and medieval India. But in the 18th and 19th century when industrial revolution took place in Europe, a new class of factory workers was also emerged in the world economy. Migration is not new to the human race. Migration has been contributing to economic and social development by enabling man to overcome the tyranny of space.

Migration in India has largely been fueled by push and pull factors, the increasing regional disparities, rural urban disparities and urban bias in economic planning. Urbanization is one of the key dimensions in the modernization process of a society. Several studies have shown that small cultivators and landless migrate to urban centers for work.

Labour migration has been an integral and vital part of human development. Infact, the history of population migration is as old as man itself. Labour migration may be defined as a form of labour mobility towards districts or States or outside where industry and employment are expanding. In other words migration may be phenomenon of the flow of people over shorter or longer distances from one origin to a destination either for temporary or permanent settlement.³ The rapid industrialization has attracted a major chunk of labourers from rural to urban, and thus not only causing the problems for urban growth as well as development, but also for the labourers.

The word migrant workers came into picture in the 19th century. This was the time when land revenue was assessed in India at high rates by the British rulers. It created a new class of landless labourers. These landless poor labourers began to migrate to various British colonies. Because at that time there was acute shortage of labour in the British colonies. During 1870s, more than half a million labourers – men, women and children collected from various parts of India were exported to British colonies. In the 1830s and 1840s, the recruiting ground was mainly the tribal areas. Most of the emigrants were so called "hill coolies" who were recruited from Chotanagpur division, Shahabad, Bankura, Birbhum and Bardhman districts of Bengal Presidency.⁴ The bulk of the rural population in our country has to depend on the agriculture for the main source of their Livelihood. Failure of rain and consequent failure of agriculture hits the main source of income of this large segment of population. In India droughts occur once in every five years in some parts of India viz., West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Kerala, Costal parts of Andhra Pradesh, some parts of Maharashtra state, like Marathwada, east and west parts of Maharashtra, inferior of south Karnataka, Bihar, Orissa, Rajasthan and other parts of India.⁵ The drought of 2012 in Maharashtra is the latest example which affected a large number

of cultivators, small and marginal farmers, agricultural labourers, landless labourers in rural areas. Thousands of people from these extents were enforced to migrate towards city in search of work. Besides drought there are some other factors also which play a major role in the seasonal migration of this class. It is a fact that India does not have short of land quantitatively but qualitatively, that is to say, arable lands are not fertile and productive which ultimately leads to the result that, people move from these poor soil areas to the urban and agro-based industrial areas.

The other factor is that the majority of the agricultural labourers, small and marginal farmers do not get enough work during the off season, consequently, they migrate from insufficient food and limited sources of geographical areas to job opportunities areas.⁶ Other various causes of migration of labour are agricultural poverty, the decline of village and cottage industries, poverty of the people, drought disturbed villages in which absconder of work for about six months per annum, and the existence of a large size of small cultivators whose holdings are extremely inadequate and landless labour in economically weaker sections of the community and lower caste people.⁷ So, there are two important reasons for rural labour migration: (i) migration for survival (ii) migration for subsistence. The primary reason indicates the severe social and economic hardships faced by rural labourers, a situation where migration becomes necessary to stay alive. These communities are generally landless, illiterate and drawn largely from Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and other depressed castes. The secondary reason for migration is also rooted in continuation and arises because of the need to extra revenue in order to fill the gaps of periodic employment. Such communities often migrate for shorter periods and don't ordinarily travel very far from their homes. Now, system of migration has become regularized and various types of contractual systems have emerged.

Migrant labourers have not only become an integral part of India's economy, but also important constituents of society. For the migrant workers many terms are used keeping in view the duration of their stay and their wish to move. The labourers can be termed as 'migratory labourers' most suitably to the permanent workers. The circular migrants are known as 'turnover migrants' or 'pendular migrants' or 'largest migrants' or 'short term' migrants. Under such migration process, a move is made for a short period with the intention of returning to the place of usual residence.⁸ Potential migrants could be identified as those wishing to move, if the circumstances allowed or the opportunities arose. Active migrants are those who act as pioneer movers, and whose location behaviour is not coordinated with other migrants. A passive migrant is one who in selecting a destination is dependent on earlier migrants.⁹

Migrant labour can broadly be divided into two categories, i.e., rural farm labour and industrial labour. Punjab and Haryana are the pioneer states in the field of agriculture after the ushering in of the Green revolution since the mid-sixties. There is not only an influx of a large number of seasonal migrant workers in agriculture but

it is widespread in other fields also, such as brick kiln, stone quarries, the construction industry and household industries (other than organized ones).¹⁰ The main driving force behind migration is a better standard of living away from home. In the recent decades migration has been taking place amidst increasing global economic, political and social integration which has been accompanied by greater speed and ease of transportation. Migration carries human capital to regions of destination, entails investment in the employment of migrants, permits acquisition of new skills and accentuates economic cycle.

Contemporary migration often involves short-term, temporary sojourns in the host region. The direction of people's movement has always been guided by the specific needs of the time. In the pre-transitional stage of development, migratory movements assume a definite and regular path and migration of people takes place from rural to rural area. As the country enters early transitional stage of development, the movement of people is directed from rural to urban areas. The urban ward migration is in response to the creation of new employment opportunities in secondary and service sectors which tend to be spatially located in cities and towns and it is also fueled by improvements in agriculture.¹² In the later transitional stage of development, the rapid growth of industrialization, transport and communication and other economic and social overheads in urban areas encourage people to migrate in large number from smaller towns to big and specialized metropolitan cities in search of better employment opportunities. In super advanced stage of development, the migration is mostly from urban to rural areas. The reverse migration is also due to congestion of industries and pollution in urban areas which induces industrialists to set their projects in sub-urban areas where the initial costs of setting new industries is tremendously low. The rising cost of living in mega cities also forces people to undertake reverse migration.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

To understand and study:

- a) Categorization of Indian Migrant Labours
- b) Causes of Migration
- c) Conditions and Magnitude of Migration

Categorisation of Indian Migrant Labours

The total population of India according to GOI, 2011 is 1.21 billion. India's participation in human migration of all types is acknowledgeable. According to GOI 2001, the total population of the country involved is approximately 1.02 billion. Following are the details of migration on different basis.

A) Migrants by Place of Birth and Sex

As shown in Table 1.1 the total population number of migrants born in India, about 307 million (29.9 per cent)) were the migrants born outside the village / town of their enumeration. Of this population 216.7 million were females outnumbering their male counterparts (90.4 million), mostly due to change of their residence due to marriage. The number of those who had migrated from within the district and the state was to the place of enumeration 181.7 million and 76.8 million respectively; and 42.3 million migrants migrated from other states or union territories, while approximately 6.1 million migrated from abroad.

Table 1.1
In-Migration by Place of Birth and Sex

Category	Persons	Males	Females
(a) Total Population	1,028,610,328	532,156,772	496,453,556
(b) Born in India	1,022,442,977	528,981,861	493,461,116
(c) Born in the place of enumeration	721,460,171	441,746,082	279,714,089
(d) Total migrants (a-c)	307,149,736	90,410,496	216,739,240
(e) Born within the state of Enumeration	980,101,274	509,306,087	470,795,187
(i) Born elsewhere in the district of Enumeration	181,799,637	42,781,678	139,017,959
(ii) Born in other districts of the State	76,841,466	24,778,327	52,063,139
(f) Born in other States in India beyond the state of enumeration	42,341,703	19,675,774	22,665,929
(g) Born abroad	6,166,930	3,174,717	2,992,213
(h) Unclassified	421	194	227

Source: Census of India 2001

B) Migrants by Place of Birth

The Table 1.2 below presents the ten most common states to which the individuals migrated and also, those which reported in-migrants (more than one million in number) by place of birth, from outside the state and from other countries. Maharashtra recorded the highest number of in-migrants with 7.9 million in-migrant populations, followed by Delhi and West Bengal with 5.6 million and 5.5 million populations respectively. The percentage of in-migrants to the total population in these three states was 8.2, 40.8 and 7.0 respectively. The total number of in-migrants in Punjab was approximately 2.1 million which was 8.7 per cent of the total population.

Table 1.2
Total Inter-state Migrants by Place of Birth in Major States

States	Total Population	Total In-migrants (Inter-state & from Abroad)	Percentage of In-migrants to Total Population	Share of Total Migrants
INDIA	1,028,610,328	48,508,633	4.7	100.0
Maharashtra	96,878,627	7,954,038	8.2	16.4
Delhi	13,850,507	5,646,277	40.8	11.6
West Bengal	80,176,197	5,582,325	7.0	11.5
Uttar Pradesh	166,197,921	2,972,111	1.8	6.1
Haryana	21,144,564	2,951,752	14.0	6.1
Gujarat	50,671,017	2,602,631	5.1	5.4
Madhya Pradesh	60,348,023	2,305,999	3.8	4.8
Karnataka	52,850,562	2,152,096	4.1	4.4
Punjab	24,358,999	2,130,662	8.7	4.4
Rajasthan	56,507,188	1,845,782	3.3	3.8
Jharkhand	26,945,829	1,798,037	6.7	3.7
Bihar	82,998,509	1,794,219	2.2	
Andhra Pradesh	76,210,007	1,052,165	1.4	2.2
Chhattisgarh	20,833,803	1,020,337	4.9	2.1
Rest	198,638,575	6,700,202	3.4	13.8

Source: Census of India 2001

C) Duration of Residence by Last Place of Residence

The Table 1.3 below helps in understanding the pattern of migration. The data on migration by last residence in India as per 2001 Census, shows that the total number of migrants were 314 million which is more than the number of total migrants by place of birth which was 307 million which thus, explains that the migrants migrated for various reasons but then returned to the place of birth at the time of enumeration and were regarded as migrants by place of last residence. Of the total 314 million migrants by last residence, 268 million migrants (85.00 per cent) migrated within the state and the number of those who migrated from outside the state was 41.1 million (13.5 per cent).

Table 1.3
Migrants by Last Residence and Classified by Duration of Residence: INDIA 2001

Duration of Residen	Total Migrants			Within the State		
	Persons	Males	Females	Persons	Males	Females
All duration	314,541,350	93,361,809	221,179,541	268,219,260	71,579,630	196,639,630
Less than 1 year	8,885,724	4,173,469	4,712,255	6,793,724	2,979,450	3,814,274
1 to 4 years	47,281,223	16,587,389	30,693,834	38,675,322	12,159,989	26,515,333
5 to 9 years	42,134,395	12,136,128	29,998,267	35,264,395	8,858,844	26,405,551
10 to 19 years	69,471,092	16,731,962	52,739,130	58,923,599	12,095,574	46,828,025
20 years and above	101,092,520	19,875,240	81,217,280	86,178,093	13,325,406	72,852,687
Not stated	45,676,396	23,857,621	21,818,775	42,384,127	22,160,367	20,223,760

Source: Census of India 2001

Causes of Migration

The main causes of migration are divided into five groups i.e. economic, social, psychological, political and natural causes. An attempt has been made to bring out the important push and pull factors of migration of the migrant respondents. It was found that poverty, low employment at native place and more employment and higher wages in Punjab and Maharastra, Delhi etc. were the prime factors for their migration. Other equally important economic causes of migration were indebtedness, smaller land holdings and low incomes in village. So, to escape from economic hardships in their native villager, the respondents migrated to the urban areas in many states.

Economic Causes

The causes, which are related to the money, wealth etc. are considered in the category of economic causes. Actually money is the basic necessity of every human being. The economy differs from person to person as well as country-to-country and place-to-place. The people migrate from one place to another place to earn money. There are various reasons for migration of labours as follows:-

- a) Poverty
- b) Indebtedness
- c) Lower wages

- d) Small land holdings
- e) Meager employment opportunities f) Low income in village

Social Causes

The man is social creature. He cannot survive without society. He is always in the thinking of making his status high in the society. So, he leaves his native place and migrates to a society of better quality of life. The reasons, which are responsible for the migration of the labours, are as give below:

- a) Relatives settled in various states
- b) Friends settled in various states
- c) Urge to earn more respect in family
- d) For better quality of life
- e) For better housing facilities
- f) Freedom to enjoy life

Psychological Causes

There are some Psychological reasons too which are concerned with mentality of human beings. Though the labours are hard working by nature yet some of them fail to fulfill their daily needs such as food, clothing etc. As a result they became poor to very poor. They have developed a mentality that this place is not better for them. They considered this place is ill-omen. Consequently they leave their birth place and settled another place. Apart from this other psychological reasons are as follows-

- a) Fed up with poor life
- b) Feeling of being away from family
- c) Feeling of being away from friends
- d) Attraction to see new place

Political Causes

The political party frames the government. The government is responsible to provide better facilities to the labours. Sometimes it happens, the political parties creates hindrance at particular place for his own interest. As a result the people belongs to lower categories of society are compel to migrate from that place. So there are additional reasons for migration on due to political causes are as follows:

- a) Political instability
- b) Low governmental facilities

Natural Causes

Nature is the creature of all the things. The nature has bad effect in the form of hail, storm, land sliding, earthquake and so on. When the natural disaster takes place again and again at a particular place/area, the

people of that place are compelled to migrate from that place and settled at a distant place. Actually, they fed up with these natural calamities and finally takes decision to leave the place. There are so many reasons of migration by nature some of them are being mentioned below:

- a) Earthquake
- b) Floods
- c) Drought
- d) Crop failure

Magnitude of Migration

Migration in India is mostly small distance with around 60% of immigrants changing their dwellings inside their district of birth and 20% inside their State (province), while the rest interchange across the state borders. The total numbers of immigrants as per the survey of 1971 are 167 million persons, as per the 1981 census; 213 million were reported, as per 1991 census 232 million and by the year 2001, it reached to 315 million. As per the count of the year 1991, nearly 20 million people migrated to other states looking for employment. Within a period of 10 years, the number of national migrants doubled to 41,166,265 persons as per the count (census) of 2001. It is likely that there are at current around 80 million wanderers of which, 40 million are in the structure and building industry, 20 million are household workers, 2 million are sex workers, 5 million are call girls and somewhere from half a million to 12 million work in illegal mines otherwise called “small scale mines”. It is projected that at present around five and a half million Indians are working in the oil exporting nations of the Middle East and another 2 million are working in the advanced world. 92% of the household workers are women, girls and children and 20% of these females are under 14 years of age, as per a study conducted by the organization “Social Alert”. There is a noticeable phenomenon in this migration, that is, the fantastic increase of female workers migrating either alone or in groups to find employment. They are moving very long distances even for short-term employment, in the nonappearance of any prospect or potential of employment, still they are migrating. This is a disturbing trend, as in the event of not getting employment; they end up as victims of sexual abuse. Even if they get work, they have to do job under weird conditions.

Conditions of Migrant Labour

In terms of employment, construction is the largest employment sector in India after agriculture. Most of the employees in construction are migrants. The operational hours are from sunrise to sunset. The working day for females often sweeps from 14 to 16 hours, combining housework and job on site where women are paid Rs. 60-70 a day while men are paid Rs.100-175. Masons earn up to Rs.175-250 a day. Work places are unsafe. Workers have no communal security, reimbursement for injuries, approach to drinking water and health care. India has the world's maximum accident rate among construction workers. A recent study by the International Labour Organization shows that 165 out of every 1,000 workers are injured on the job.

There are 20 million domestic labors mostly refugees from rural India. Regular streams of new migrants leave behind scorched fields and emaciated families in the tribal belts of Bihar, Orissa, Chattisgarh, Jharkhand, Assam, Mizoram. And Telangana, they move to Mumbai and Delhi and other Metros. They are anxious to join the crowd of household laborers. They are willing to work for much less than those who are already working. They are victims of constant verbal and sexual abuse and work without any grievance mechanisms. Their situation is made worse by local governments' brutal eviction drives – dislocating and destabilizing the lives of the very people without whom the cities would come to a crippling halt. Further, they have to live in makeshift tents with plastic covers. They are enforced to wash and excrete out in the open. As they are migrant workers, they do not possess Public Distribution System (PDS) Cards and hence are forced to buy food grains and kerosene at higher than market prices. The ruling elite, which considers child labour a menace little, realizes that it is a natural consequence of migrations.

Gender discrimination

Females form beyond half of the regional migrant workforce. As stated above, 92% of the 20 million domestic workers are women and children and 20% of these females are under 14 years of age. Women constitute more than one third in the construction industry. Yet the division of labour is gendered. Masonry is a male-dominated skill as are carpentry and other skilled jobs. Women carry head-loads of brick, sand, stone, cement and water to the masons. Their earnings are very less than those salaried to men. In the mining area, females do unskillful jobs above ground. They fail to get their wages and also lose employment for taking leaves. They are subjected to sexual harassment. By conservative estimates only 15% of the cases of sexual assault are reported. Women are not provided with any extra facilities to take care of their children while they are working. Notwithstanding, women migration is the highest in the period from 1991 to 2000 due to the agrarian crisis. 73% of these seasonal women workforce are from rural areas.

Legal Provisions

The Government of India made an enactment in 1979 of the "Inter-state Migrant Workmen (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act 1979". Though the act covers only interstate migrants, it lays down that contractors must pay timely wages equal or higher than the minimum wage, provide suitable residential accommodation, prescribed medical amenities, protecting wardrobe, inform coincidences and causalities to specified authorities and kin. The Act delivers for the right to raise industrial disputes in the regional prerogative where they do their job or in their home province. The act sets penalties including imprisonment for non-compliance. At the similar time the act delivers a getaway route to main employers if they can show that crimes were committed without their information. Pointless to say, the Act endures only on paper and not in truth. The proof of trials or dispute settlement is almost nil. The migrant laborers face additional problems and constraints, as they are both labourers and migrants. Hence, there is no improvement

in the working and living conditions for migrant workers. There are no arrangements to effectively talk the basic issues regarding migrant labour relations, leave aside, tackling the whole range of labour relations. The reasons are obvious. The Indian Judiciary occasionally comes to the rescue of migrant labour and makes pronouncements and observations to fill the gap in the justice delivery system. It seems regulatory mechanisms are over stretched, inadequately structured, manpower deficient and resource crunched.

One noteworthy enactment to address seasonal migration is the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA), which guarantees 100 days of employment in a year. The rate of daily wages is, as per the minimum wage applicable to that territory. It is executed successfully only in a very few places which is a microscopic response. In most cases the funds are directed to conferred interests.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The idea about this paper was generated on the basis of exploratory research carried using the secondary data. Extensive literature review was done in order to understand the concept of migrant labours, migration, its causes and factors. Several papers were reviewed to get an idea regarding this phenomenon popular mostly in developing countries.

FINDINGS

The study reveals the following points:

- Migration can be categorised by place of birth ,gender and their duration of residence.
- The main causes of migration are economic, social, psychological, political and natural causes.
- Migration in India is predominantly short distance with around 60% of migrants changing their residences within their district of birth and 20% within their State (province), while the rest move across the state boundaries.
- In terms of employment, construction is the largest employment sector in India after agriculture. Most of the employees in construction are migrants or migrant labours.
- Women form more than half of the interstate migrant workforce with respect to construction industry

CONCLUSION

Individuals migrate for different reasons but the goals are not equally attainable by all. People who are more competitive, more educated and possess better skills tend to achieve their goals and improve their economic conditions. People who migrate from rural areas do better economically than their

non-migrant counterparts and thus, migrants migrate to economically well-off areas (Long and Heltman, 1995).

Migration provides a base for development as it leads to expansion of ideas and information, cultural diffusion and social integration (Yadav et al., 1996). Rural-urban migration helps in making available cheap labour for industries and changes occupational structure for household in villages (Singh and Yadav, 1991). Migration benefits an individual through various ways like: brain gains, equalization of factor endowments of different economies, life long earning differential, professional advancement, rise in occupational status and aversion of immediate unemployment or underemployment. Migration is a result of uneven distribution of opportunities. People migrate from areas with less opportunities and safety to areas with more opportunities and safety. Migration of individuals has both pros and cons for both the areas, before and after migration.

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