



SEASONAL MIGRATION AS LIVELIHOOD STRATEGY FOR MARGINALISED COMMUNITIES: CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES

Alpika Verma

Research Scholar

Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai

1. INTRODUCTION:

“Human Migration” is one of the most important aspects of social sciences. A closed relation of migration has always been maintained with mankind from its earliest stage. The complex human life and fast-changing socio-economic conditions have played an important role in human migration. The uneven distribution of population, inequitable utilization of resources, and variation in economic and cultural developments could be some basic factors that have influenced the movement of man from one region to another region. There were certain areas of habitation marked as "Centres of habitation" where people were attracted from various regions, countries, and continents. Different parts of the world, on the whole, have different types of mobility caused by various socio-economic conditions. And this mobility of man has either favorably or adversely influenced the socio-economic conditions of that area also. The historical background of developing and developed part of the world shows the unbalanced utilization of resources which ultimately lead to imbalanced distribution of population caused by the migration because of peoples who shifts from an underdeveloped region to a developing or developed region.

Migration flows have shaped some of India's key sectors, such as labor, foreign relations, and education. Large-scale internal migrations and labor mobility, in particular, have a historical association, which has been widely documented. While flows differ in duration, motives, and migrant profiles, their impact on households and communities also varies at places of destination and origin. Migration within the country,

according to the changing seasons, acts as a 'safety valve' among the poorest communities.¹, more often than not critical to the livelihoods of the most socially and economically vulnerable. Those belong in majority to tribal communities, Scheduled Castes, and Other Backward Class.

2. MEANING & DEFINITION:

The concept of migration has been defined by different scholars in different ways according to their approaches, as geographers have emphasized the significance of time and space in mobility. Social consequences of mobility have been stressed by sociologists, and economists have highlighted the economic aspect of migration.

In physiological terms, migration primarily means the movement of people from one place or location to another, which is not of a casual nature, as a visit or a tour. Migration is necessarily a pre-emptive move; it is the survival instinct that drives humans to seek better prospects. In Webster's dictionary, the term has been defined as "the act or an instance of moving from one country, region to settle in another . Secondly, it is defined as "an act of moving from one area to another in search of work."

There are different factors and explanations which drive people to migrate. At one extreme, there is 'involuntary' migration, which denotes extreme economic and often social hardships, and is undertaken mostly by landless, untrained, and illiterate poor laborers. Here people do not have any choice of the place to go or the type of work that they undertake. For example, there are three kinds of migration:

- Type 1 is the migration for coping and survival.
- Type 2 is defined as migration for additional work/income. It takes place when the work in the village is over, normally after harvesting all crops.
- Type 3 is the migration for better remuneration or a better work environment or opportunity to use skills or acquire new skills.²

According to many individuals, the simplest meaning of the word migration can be a simple shift in the physical space. But it would be interesting to note that the meaning of migration is changing simultaneously with the passage of time. Nowadays, both the scope and definition of migration have become more complicated, i.e., the concept of migration can not be limited to only mobility in the physical state.

¹ R. Srivastava & S.K Sasikumar, "An overview of migration in India, its impacts and key issues", *Regional Conference on Migration, Development and Pro-Poor Policy Choices in Asia*, (2003). Available at: www.livelihoods.org ; <http://www.shram.org/uploadFiles/20131014063711.pdf>.

² G. Bhaskara Rao, "Household Coping/ Survival Strategies in Drought-prone Regions: A Case Study of Anantapur District, Andhra Pradesh, India", *Society for Promotion of Wastelands Development*, (2001). Available at: https://www.academia.edu/5754484/Household_Coping_Survival_Strategies_in_Drought-prone_Regions_A_Case_Study_of_Anantapur_District_Andhra_Pradesh_India

3. TYPES OF MIGRATION:

- Internal Migration – Movement within a state, country, or continent.
- External Migration – Movement in a different state, country, or continent.
- Immigration – It is moving in from one country to a new one.
- Population Transfer – It is when a government forces a large group of people out of a country or region. This is usually based on ethnicity or religion. It is also otherwise known as forced migration or involuntary migration.
- Chain Migration – It is a series or connection of migration within a family or a defined group of people like ethnicity. It begins with one individual who brings in other family members after some time.
- Intercontinental – It is the movement of people between continents.
- Intra-continental -It is the movement of people between countries on a given continent.
- Interregional – It is the movement of people within countries. It is domestic in nature that is migration from rural to urban and vice versa. This is usually the movement of people from the countryside to cities in search of opportunities.
- Rural-Urban Migration: It is usually an interregional migration with a specific origin that is from the countryside or rural areas to a specific destination which is the urban areas of the country. The purpose is usually to find a greener pasture or to find better opportunities to make money. (ex. Argo to Cebu City)
- Seasonal Migration – This is usually due to climate or planting reasons—people in the past moved from one place to another for the purpose of crop planting and harvesting. At present, people move from one place to the other because of climate. Some retirees move from one place to the other during the winter season.
- Return Migration – Some people return to the country or place of origin after outliving the reasons for which they left in the first place. Many young Filipinos move to the United States to find a better place to earn a living. Ultimately as they retire, they sometimes tend to retire in the Philippines because of their attachments to family and friends perhaps.

4. SEASONAL MIGRATION: A COMMON UNDERSTANDING

Seasonal migration is a one-way movement from rural to urban areas; in this connection addressing the regional imbalance, reduction of the gap between rural to urban areas in terms of employment generation, health, education, and infrastructure facilities are need of the hour. Seasonal migration involves not only

physical and monetary costs but also mental costs; leaving home in search of temporary employment for two to six months is very challenging for rural laborers, especially when seasonal migration becomes the only way for sustenance or a must-do task in slack season.

To avoid the mental cost involved in seasonal migration, help desks should be set up at block levels in the source area and in the area of the destination. It is undertaken to improve the economic position of the household or accumulative migration, which is also being noted by recent research in India. Ideas of seasonal and circular migration were first articulated in the 1970s³ and defined as characteristically short-term, repetitive, or cyclical in nature which is usually adjusted according to the annual agricultural cycle.

This view of migration has challenged the linear model of migration as well as theories of urban expansion. Migration for survival is well documented in many books, and many studies have identified reasons such as the worsening situation of dryland agriculture created by drought, crop failure, and poor terms of trade to be the main causes of migration. In recent times, the idea of migration as a coping strategy is gaining acceptance.⁴ and it has become integral to people's coping, survival, and livelihood strategies and not just a response to emergencies.

This seasonal unemployment in agriculture causes an excess supply of unskilled or semi-skilled workers in the non-agricultural sector. Seasonal unemployment in agriculture further aggravates this situation, which eventually lowers the real wage of all the workers. Hoarding of crops in the normal time and selling them in the lean period at a high price is a common practice in this region, which also reduces the real wage of the workers in the lean period. As a result, it becomes very difficult to maintain the current living standards in the village, and a large number of people who are able and conform to some characteristics decide to migrate temporarily away from the village. The nature of such seasonal migration differs from that of permanent internal migration in many respects. People move for a short time period in the lean season because they are confronted by limited opportunities to maintain their current living conditions.

The migrants prefer temporary mobility to a permanent move because it offers a chance to combine a village-based existence with urban opportunities. In the face of increasing unemployment in the formal urban sector and lack of job security in the urban informal sector, many people find it worthwhile to keep rural options open because it helps them in spreading the risk. In most cases, seasonal migrants move without their families since supporting a family in the village is cheaper. The existence of family in the village provides an incentive to come back after a short stay in the town.

³ J.M Nelson "Sojourners versus New Urbanites: Causes and Consequences of Temporary versus Permanent Cityward Migration in Developing Countries", *The University of Chicago Press Journals*, (1976) Vol 24 No 4 , pp.721–757. Available at : <https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/abs/10.1086/450916>

⁴ S. Davies. "Adaptable Livelihoods: Coping with Food Insecurity in the Malian Sahel" (Macmillan Press Ltd., London, 1996) Available at: <https://agris.fao.org/agris-search/search.do?recordID=GB9617763>

5. CAUSES & CONSEQUENCES OF SEASONAL MIGRATION:

PUSH & PULL FACTORS:

Various studies have been conducted to analyze the internal migration behavior of a population. Urban centers provide vast scope for employment in industries, transport, trade, and other services. They also offer modern facilities of life. Thus, they act as 'magnets' for the migrant population and attract people from outside. In other words, cities pull people from other areas. This is known as the "pull factor".

The push-pull model⁵ is one of the most popular models in explaining the internal migration behavior in developing countries. While the push factors are predominant at the point of origin, where People migrate due to 'push factors' such as unemployment, hunger, and starvation. When they do not find means of livelihood in their home villages, they are 'pushed' out to the nearby or distant towns.

The pull factors are operative at the place of destination. Push factors are mainly poverty-led such as landlessness, shortage of year-round employment, low wage rates, ecological vulnerability, etc. The pull factors, on the other hand, include perceived job opportunities, expected higher wages in the urban centers, civic amenities, 'bright city lights' etc.

	<i>PUSH FACTORS</i>	<i>PULL FACTORS</i>
Economic and demographic	Poverty, Unemployment, Standard of living, Low wages. Development, High fertility rates, Lack of basic health And education.	Prospects of higher wages, Potential for improved, Personal and Professional
Political	Conflict, insecurity, Violence Poor governance, Corruption & Human right abuses	Safety and securities Political freedom
Social and cultural	Discrimination based on ethnicity religion and the like.	Family reunification, Ethnic (diaspora gender, migration) home land. Freedom from discrimination.

Seasonal migration is the result of numerous factors. It mainly takes place for six reasons, namely, drought, seasonal unemployment, low wage rate, indebtedness, poverty, single crop. In many areas, seasonal unemployment, indebtedness, and poverty have found main factors responsible for seasonal migration because, on the one hand, the agriculture sector has failed to generate enough income or source to the laborers with which they could survive during the offseason without migrating somewhere, on the other hand, there is no alternate area during the agricultural off-season.

In this way, seasonal migration at least shields rural laborers from sliding further into poverty if it could not help them to come out of poverty. The costs are offset against the benefits for each of the societies to establish the true impact of migration for each of the societies. The net effect of migration may differ for the receiving

⁵ Everett S. Lee, A Theory of Migration, Duke University Press, Vol 3, No. 1 (1966) pp. 47-57. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2060063>

and sending societies. If, for instance, the social & economic costs to the sending society are greater than the social & economic benefits, then the effect of migration is said to be negative for the sending society. The same sort of calculation can be done to establish the net effect of migration for the receiving society; often, when these calculations are done, the migration that has a positive impact on one society will have a negative impact on the other.

By separating and understanding the various types of impacts that result from migration, it is possible to assess the importance of migration in the short, medium, & longer terms for the societies which migrants leave and those in which they settle.

DEMOGRAPHIC CONSEQUENCES: seasonal migration may have profound effects on the size, structure, and growth patterns of populations. It has effects on both populations, on both of the places that people leave & on the populations of those in which they settle. These effects vary with the length of migrants' stay in places. The absence of a large number of either men or women may have a limited impact on the sending society in the short term, but if they are absent for a long time, their absence will have significant effects on population growth rates in the medium and longer terms.

Labour migration and unemployment have a serious impact on the situation of the urban landscape. If rural-urban migration continues for a substantially long period of time, the urban locality is bound to face the problem of population explosion. It has been observed that unplanned migration has resulted in the scarcity of basic facilities in the urban area. Slumps pop up here and there, thereby making the urban backdrop appear messy and unorganized.

SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES: Seasonal migration may have an important effect on cultures & societies. It has effects on the cultures of both the places that migrants leave and those in which they re-settle. These effects vary with the skills of the migrants & the lengths of time involved.

ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES: Seasonal migration can have a significant effect on economics. It has an impact on the economies that people leave and those in which they re-settle. These effects vary with different types of migration, the skills of the migration, and the length of time involved.

6. RECOGNIZING AND SUPPORTING MIGRATION AS A LIVELIHOOD STRATEGY

The term livelihood attempts to capture not just what people do in order to make a living, but the resources that provide them with the capability to build a satisfactory living, the risk factors that they must consider in managing their resources, and the institutional and policy context that either helps or hinders them in their pursuit of viable or improving living.⁶

⁶ F. Ellis. "A Livelihoods Approach to Migration and Poverty Reduction", Department of International Development, (2003). Available at: <https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.553.5678&rep=rep1&type=pdf>

Access to resources is the precondition for rural households to adopt certain livelihood strategies or a combination of livelihood strategies. Resources are broadly categorized into natural, financial, human, and social but not limited to other forms of resources people are associated with. Natural resources refer to land, water, and other natural stocks. Financial resources are related to credit needs, cash in hand, savings, and other economic assets. Peoples' personal skills, the physical ability of labor, education, and health are the human resources. Social resources are the association, social networks, relationships, and social structure people are involved with.⁷ Access to resources influences one another. For instance, access to land ownership may result in improved financial and social resources. In contrast, less access to natural resources may influence peoples' access to financial and social resources. Hence, rural livelihood strategies are heavily dependent upon natural resources.⁸

Livelihood strategy is defined as a 'strategic or deliberate choice of a combination of activities by households and their individual members to maintain, secure, and improve their livelihoods. Livelihood strategies are broadly categorized into agriculture intensification, livelihood diversification, and migration. Seasonal migration is sometimes considered as a livelihood diversification in response to seasonality.⁹ Rural households adopt seasonal migration with the combination of their primary livelihood. However, empirical shreds of evidence show that seasonal migration in India is becoming a normal livelihood.

The livelihoods approach recognized migration as a social process rather than a short-term economic calculation. The decision to migrate involves both migrants and non-migrants in the households and their relationship with a wider social network. Relationship within and outside the households is deeply rooted in society. Therefore, the livelihoods approach to migration 'depart from the narrow economics approaches to understand the importance of access to resources as well as the institutional and policy context within which migrants must function...¹⁰'.

Along with the primary livelihood, seasonal migration is a central livelihood strategy adopted by many poor rural households in low-income countries. Since migration is a social process and households have their deep root in society, it is argued that the household is the appropriate unit of analysis. A push factor created by unemployment, seasonality, and climatic failure in the source and a pull factor of employment in the destination is a common element of seasonal migration. The immediate connection between seasonal migration and the livelihoods approach is the response to seasonality. 'Seasonality means that continuous household consumption needs are mismatched with uneven flow observed that rural labor market is poorly developed and therefore migration is a common response to seasonal changes rather than searching wage employment in the locality. Seasonality is deeply rooted in agriculture-related employment, productivity,

⁷ I. Scoones, Sustainable rural livelihoods: A Framework for Analysis, Institute of Development Studies. (1998). Available at: <https://www.ids.ac.uk/publications/sustainable-rural-livelihoods-a-framework-for-analysis/>

⁸ Ibid

⁹ F. Ellis, 'The Determinants of Rural Livelihood Diversification in Developing Countries, Journal of Agricultural Economics, Vol 51 No.2 (2000). Available at:

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/23690437_The_Determinants_of_Rural_Livelihood_Diversification_in_Developing_Countries

¹⁰ P. Deshingkar, and D. Start, Seasonal migration for livelihoods in India: Coping, Accumulation and Exclusion, Overseas Development Institute, London UK. (2003). Available at:

<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57a08cfcd915d622c0016df/WP220web.pdf>

land ownership, and climatic conditions like drought and flood. Therefore, it explains 'differential access rights to land are often the key determinant of distinct livelihood strategies pursued by poor compared to better-off rural households.' The livelihoods approach looks at migration as a key livelihood strategy in many poor households of low-income countries. It connects the outcomes into two dimensions. First, households use human resources to reduce risk, seasonality, and vulnerability and finally improve their living conditions. Second, remittances transferred by the migrants increase assets, reduce poverty and improve households' living conditions.

7. GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TOWARDS MIGRATION

Government provisions in relation to migration are reflected in two forms; one is to generate employment in the locality and provide food security to the poorest. The second is to enact laws to protect the migrants from exploitation. However, both the attempts are failed to check migration because of the serious drawback in implementation, and indeed people feel better incentives to migrate. It can be observed that policy response in India was unable to promote or control migration.

MGNREGA is the main employment generation scheme running in the sample villages to provide job security to the poorest section. However, it is failed to provide jobs in these villages. The basic principle is to avoid machine work and encourage manual work. The objective is to target the BPL families who are mostly involved in wage labor activities. During the fieldwork, it was found that the participation of labor in this type of work is very less. Out of the total migrant respondent, 41.6% have not worked yet, and the rest, 58.4%, have worked with an average of 15 man-days annually. In the case of the non-migrant respondent, 25% have not worked yet, and the rest, 75%, worked with an average of 45 man-days annually. The non-migrants access more man-days because MGNREGA works are carried out during the dry season when migrants are absent.

However, the number of man-days generated in the dry season is insufficient to accommodate the large group of migrants. As per the data of the Panchayati Raj department (Orissa), until the financial year 2010-2011, a total of 253,549 households were registered, but 61,391 households were provided with employment. It was found that people are not interested in working in MGNREGA. There are various reasons behind it. As it is shown in table 10, the dominant reason is an irregularity of work and payment, followed by machine work in place of manual work. All respondents who have worked found irregularity in work and payment. These laborers are from the poor section of the villages, and they need payment at regular intervals to meet households' expenditures. Sometimes the payment takes more than one month, and people prefer not to work further. There is too much administrative work as well. In the UNDP discussion paper¹¹ On MGNREGA found that migration is reduced by the implementation of the scheme in various studies conducted by various organizations. However, in this case, migration is increased because of the poor implementation strategy.

¹¹ Sharma, A. (2010) 'Rights-based Legal Guarantee as Development Policy: The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, UNDP India. (2010). Available at:

https://www.undp.org/content/dam/india/docs/rights_based_legal_guarantee_as_development_policy_mgnrega.pdf

8. CONCLUSION

Seasonal migration is a routine practice in the study area, where less educated, unskilled, or partially skilled agricultural laborers migrate seasonally to urban areas for employment. Almost all of them join the urban informal sector as manual laborers and work for long hours at lower wage rates. In this respect, there is a need for pre-departure training for the laborers to improve their skills and awareness of their rights and privileges at destination areas so that they could save themselves from every form of exploitation at their place of destination. Seasonal migration is a one-way movement from rural to urban areas. In this connection addressing the regional imbalance, reduction of the gap between rural to urban areas in terms of employment generation, health, education, and infrastructure facilities are need of the hour. Seasonal migration involves not only physical and monetary costs but also mental costs.

Leaving home in search of temporary employment for two to six months is very challenging for rural laborers, especially when seasonal migration becomes the only way for sustenance or a must-do task in slack season. To avoid or reduce the mental cost involved in seasonal migration, help desks should be set up at block levels in the source area and in the area of destination. As has already been discussed in this paper, researchers and policymakers have a negative notion towards migration, and if the data is collected on outcome/benefits of internal migration in general and seasonal, circular migration in particular, it is sure that it will exceed the number of remittances being generated from international migration in our country.

The government though is capable of making rules and schemes regarding the employment, however it is well known fact that any scheme of benefit or rules are yet to be imposed in remote areas of many villages, where due to various factors whether economic, physical or social people migrates towards places where they can get the opportunity to work and sustain. What is needed, in this fast-running society is institutional implementation of such schemes under a law, governed by the government. A law for employment has to be multidisciplinary and inter-sectional and will encounter problem of every section of the society mainly those who wishes to migrate due to unsustainable living conditions. The government has keep an eagle view for development of all sections of the society.