



‘Distressed Seasonal Migration’ In India: The ‘Problématique’ And Paving Towards Basic Rights Of Seasonal Migrants

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Abstract: *Migration has always been a ‘Problématique’ in the context of India policies for mainstreaming the disadvantaged viz ‘marginalized’. Though, somewhat it has been viewed as a pathway of economic growth and reducing chronic poverty, but in most cases it has been tracked as a dreadful social issue which poses severe social problems and marginalization of a particular group of people. This paper demonstrates the key findings from the national surveys on the magnitude of ‘distress seasonal migration’ (basically focused upon the short term interstate and short term rural to urban migration within India). Seasonal migration (mainly from rural to urban in a particular season) leads to rapid population increase in urban areas which affects the accessibility of basic lifestyle related amenities. Hypothesized this as a negative social phenomenon, the paper also trails Seasonal Migrants and their denial of basic rights. These migrants are being deprived from the basic social amenities provided by the host states (here Migrated areas), like Public Distribution system, Health care, housing, social security, cultural and sociological challenges and also ‘region based ethnic violence’ with the new neighborhood etc. Seasonal migration attribute with bad experiences for the poor people throughout the migratory ‘life cycle’, in areas of origin, journey and destination. There are several government schemes and innovative programmes, i.e. MGNREGA, PURA which were targeted to provide justice and prosperity and somehow meant for vulnerable population (here distress seasonal migrants) are not achieving its goal. Is it necessary to rethink or in what context proactive stances can be taken.*

Key words: *Distressed factors, Seasonal Migration, Rural to Urban migration, underdevelopment, marginalization, equipping urban facilities to rural areas.*

1.Introduction

Migration is a dreadful social problem in India. Though it is the most common feature of the human civilization, it reflects, human endeavor to survive in the most testing conditions both natural and manmade. Patterns of Migration have always been mesmerized by the demographers. It is important to perpetuate the study of migration arising out of various social, cultural, economic or political reasons. For a large developing country like India, the complexity of movement of population in different parts of the country helps in understanding the dynamics of the society and economy of the country. At this crucial juncture in economic development in our country, study on migration assumes special importance. But, amidst of the so called 'glossy' pictures of 'shining India' or 'Bharat Nirman' , migration sometimes shows a 'disgraceful factor' for the policy makers and the Government. 'Distress Seasonal Migration' is one of these crudest pictures from the ground level reality (Sen, 2007). The so called booming India 'canvass' seems to be like a fake one here when comes the issue of migration through the 'reality bites'. Millions of families especially from rural areas to urban area are being forced to leave their houses and respective villages for several months every year in search of livelihoods. The obvious reason for this pattern of migration is the lack of basic amenities or which we can 'classify' as 'livelihood, Food, housing and Medical care'. Though the phenomenon of distress seasonal migration is highly complex and previously more or less ignored by the governments, academia, the development sector, or the media, there are some trivial levels of efforts and theories for provisioning basic amenities i.e livelihood security, alternative livelihood options, food security, settlements and accessible health care, which can address this distress seasonal migration. Such as, since 2004 the concept PURA (provisioning urban amenities to rural areas; a concept given by Dr. A.P. J Abdul Kalam) had been coined and implemented at various districts of India through public private partnership model for addressing Migration and other issues related to 'underdevelopment', which seemed to become a 'ray of hope' for the distressed rural agrarian society. But the concept seemed to be a 'partially successful one'. With a new 'hope' in Feb 2012 a restructured model of PURA 2.0 is being launched by now Rural Development minister Mr. Jairam Ramesh. Similarly, MGNREGS was also 'assumed' as an important tool for addressing the migration issues, but policy related loopholes also made this effort as 'fractional win-win programme'. Only comprehensive participatory micro planning and restructuring these programmes according to the 'actual need' of the people can make these programmes successful.

Policy level changes are much required to institutionalize these 'positive' efforts and ensure universal coverage for migrant people.

2.Facets Of 'Distress Seasonal Migration': Glimpses From Literatures And Census Review

Migration in the third world viz India is mostly accounted by 'Rural to Urban Migration', which triggers the phenomenon 'Over Urbanization' resulting in the pressure over the social cost provided for a country's growing population. (Khanna & Chatuvedi, 2010; Gugler, 1988) Even though panel data on seasonal migration in India are lacking, a growing number of micro-studies have established that seasonal migration for employment is growing both in terms of absolute numbers but also in relation to the size of the working population as a whole (Breman, 1985; Breman, 1996). In NSS 64th round, information was collected regarding the '*short-term* movements' of the population i.e. Households/ Individuals, who had stayed away from the village/town for a period of 1 month or more but less than 6 months during the last 365 days for employment or in search of employment. Thus, by definition such persons/households have been referred to as *short-term migrants*, which can also be assumed as 'seasonal migration'. Most of the former literature on seasonal migration has been considerate with 'development-induced' economic migration which resulted from unequal development trails (McDowell and De Haan, 1997; Kothari, 2002). This supposedly led to one-way population movements from less- endowed areas to well-endowed prosperous areas through the 'push' or 'distress' created by poverty, underdevelopment and a lack of work and the 'pull' created by better wages in the destination (Lee, 1966). Theories of urban expansion were in agreement with this analysis of migration. Ideas of seasonal and circular labour migration were first articulated in the 1970s (Nelson, 1976; Rao, 1994) and defined as 'characteristically short term, repetitive or cyclical in nature, and adjusted to the annual agricultural cycle'. The term Distress Seasonal Migration has also been varied from 'circular' 'cyclical' to 'oscillatory' or even sometimes 'involuntary'(Chatterjee 2006) migration, but the basic factors and patterns of this particular kind of migration (which was the ill conditioned basic livelihood portfolio for the rural poor) were being same. Several researchers and scholars depicts that the issue distress seasonal migration as same as 'Development induced displacement' or 'forced migration', which is a 'negative social phenomenon' (Sen 2007, Smita 2007). Smita (2007) named this pattern of migration as 'distress seasonal migration' told that in rural

areas the 'push' factor are mostly seemed as negative social phenomenon, such as, lack of employment, frequent crop failure, indebtedness, inadequate credit facilities, lack of alternative opportunities, droughts and poverty level in rural areas has been increasing, thereby leading to despair or distress conditions in the rural sector.

The rural to urban migration, especially the 'distressed seasonal migration' has further added in the growing population in urban areas resulting in huge strain upon the urban amenities. The recent census of 2011 shows the most striking fact, ever since the census 1921, the urban population goes up more than its rural. The Census cites three likely causes for the rise of urban population than the rural: 'migration,' 'natural increase' and 'inclusion of new areas as 'urban.' But all these factors were present in earlier decades too, when additions to the rural population far outstripped those to the urban. Why then is the last decade so different? Is 'distress migration' on an enormous scale responsible for one of the most striking findings of Census 2011: that for the first time since 1921, urban India added more numbers to its population in a decade than rural India did? In spite of own validity, these factors cannot fully explain this huge urban increase. More so, in a census, in which the decadal growth percentage of population records "the sharpest decline since India's independence."

The 2001 Census showed that the rural population had grown by more than 113 million since 1991. On the other hand the urban growth was by over 68 million. So rural India had added 45 million people more than urban. In 2011, urban India's increase was greater than that of rural India's by nearly half a million, a huge change. (Sainath 2011) The last time the urban increase surpassed the rural was 90 years ago, in 1921. Then, the rural total actually fell by close to three million compared to the 1911 Census.

However, the 1921 Census was unique. The 1918 Influenza epidemic that killed 50-100 million people worldwide ravaged India. Studies of the 1921 Census data say it records between 11 and 22 million deaths more than would have been normal for that decade. There was also the smaller impact of World War I in which tens of thousands of Indian soldiers died as cannon fodder for Imperial Britain in Europe and elsewhere. If Influenza left its fatal imprint on the 1921 enumeration, the story behind the numbers of the 2011 Census speaks of another tragedy; it is the collapse of millions of livelihoods in agriculture and its related occupations, the ongoing, despair-driven exodus in the countryside.

The 2011 Census captures only the tip of an iceberg in terms of rural upheaval. The last time urban India added more numbers to its population than rural India was 90 years ago

and that followed giant calamities in public health and war. Yet, without such conditions, urban India added 91 million to its 2001 total, against rural India's 90.6 million.

The Census data, however, do not convey the harshness and pain of the millions trapped in “footloose” or ‘Distressed Seasonal’ migrations. That is, the desperate search for work driving poorer people in many directions without a clear final destination. Like, people from Odhisha Bihar, and Uttar Pradesh who work some weeks in their respective states during the cropping season. Then a couple of months at brick kilns in Andhra Pradesh or Construction Sites at Southern India especially Chennai. Then at construction sites in diverse towns in Maharashtra. Similarly people hailed from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh having similar patterned of mobile life. Frequently occurred political jeopardy, crop failure and lack of alterative livelihood generating sources in these states forced a massive amount of people to leave their home for a particular time being in other metro and non metro cities. (Sainath, 2011). In the 2001 Census, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar were “the two States with largest number of net migrants migrating out of the state.”

Neither the Census nor the National Sample Survey is geared to capture the complexity of India's migrations. A migrant in the Census is someone counted at a place other than his or her last place of residence. This records a single move — not multiple migrations. So it sees only the tip of the mobility iceberg, missing footloose migrations altogether. What we do know from Census 2001 is of the flight from agriculture. Between 1991 and 2001, over seven million people for whom cultivation was the main livelihood, quit farming. It suggests that, on average, close to 2,000 people a day abandon farming in the country. Where do they go? Nothing in employment data suggests they get absorbed in decent work in bustling cities. Their hunger, and contractor, drives them to any place where there is work, however brief. There are rural migrations to both metros and non-metro urban areas. To towns and smaller cities.

These migrants are uprooted for several months, the women and children suffer a lot from this particular migration pattern. They generally grow a great fright of ‘displacement’, ‘discontinuity and transition’ (Sharkshall & Soskolne, 2008), which results in several negative psychological consequences. Each Year, millions of poor labourers in India are in search for the ‘best and comfortable life’, whereas, policy continues to be ill-equipped to deal with this phenomenon, with the result that, outside their home areas, migrants have no entitlements to livelihood support systems or formal welfare schemes. Neither are they paid a full wage, because contractors deduct a part of that too. The additional burden posed by a lack of access to basic facilities is borne

mainly by women and children. (Deshingker and Start, 2003). Also the 'region based ethnic violence' is one of the threatening issues faced by these migrants. From recent news we got several pictures of region based violence at upon the labourers. On other hand several researchers shows that the migrants contribute a gigantic proportions among the National Income and Gross Domestic products, like, Deshingkar et al. (2010) also estimated that there are up to 100 million circular migrant workers, who contribute as much as 10% to the national Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in India. It was said that by and large, these migrants are unskilled and semi-skilled workers from lower income groups who could be able to improve their economic position or income scale after migration. A recent report by UNDP exposed the same that without migration a majority of the poor would not be able to spend on health, consumption and other basic needs, and would face the risk of sliding deeper into poverty (UNDP, 1998, 2009). No doubt it shows a pictogram of economic growth in the, but still the picture is not as 'prospective' as it seems. Seasonal migration for work by poor rural families is a phenomenon that is escalating as the agrarian crisis mounts. Poor families in India that migrate are compelled to take their children along, leaving school and a normal childhood behind. As the migrant labourers generally charges a lower wages than the local labourers, so, the employers prefer to employ migrant labour with a steady replacement of the local labourers (Breman, 1994). The mobile existence of the migrant labour further affects their sustainability in the urban industrial system in India (Breman, 1985; Sidhu et al., 1997.). Thus, the economic vulnerability of the migrant is kept alive by the informal work arrangement from the employers' end. Seasonal and annual migrant labourers from the rural areas working in the urban areas are denied voting power and are therefore not allowed to develop any stakes in the destination areas. They are not allowed to participate in the planning and governance processes thereby perpetuating political vulnerability. Social vulnerability is perpetrated by the experience of discrimination, social distance and feeling of alienation in the host area/destination Chatterjee (2006) showed that these migrants generally suffers from several risks or vulnerability, like, low socioeconomic status with no access to either health care or social service, mental and emotional vulnerability and low self-esteem, Lack of provision of social goods, education and health, fear from regional biasness or ethnical violence etc. They spend several months every year at work sites such as brick kilns, salt pans, plantations and stone quarries, labouring under extremely difficult conditions. Children of these migrant families also put to work from young ages. It is estimated that the number of such

children below the age of 14 years is 9 million. (Smita 2007). But the policy level changes are not that awakened about this reality. Korra (2010) showed that, Distress seasonal Migration pretenses great challenges when it comes to interventions – as the phenomenon is so multifaceted and fluctuates according to segment (However, the underlying common elements remain same) and also the innate instability in the lives of the migrants who generally do not stay in one place throughout the year but move on between villages to work sites (Smita, 2007). Breman (1996) argued that seasonal migration within India has often been misunderstood or ignored in public policy in spite of research demonstrating that it is important to the livelihood of large numbers of poor people in various regions. Since research shows that, the phenomenon is largely unsearched and more or less Provisioning basic amenities to the micro level especially in the rural areas, can progressively address this issue, that's why immediate policy level alteration is required.

3. Distress Seasonal Migration In India: The Dilemma

Migration in the Census of India is of two types – Migration by Birth place and Migration by place of last residence. A person is considered as migrant by place of birth if the place in which he is enumerated during the census is other than his place of birth. As a person could have migrated a number of times during his lifetime, migration by place of birth would not give a correct picture of the migration taking place currently. A person, on the other hand, is considered as migrant by place of last residence, if the place in which he is enumerated during the census is other than his place of immediate last residence. By capturing the latest of the migrations in cases where persons have migrated more than once, this concept would give a better picture of current migration scenario. At the time of enumeration in census, a person could have moved from another village or town in the same district, or from another district of the state, or another state in India or even from another country. Apart from these generic definitions, seasonal migration can be attributed as; persons who have gone to any other place for 60 days or more during the last six months from the date of survey and returned back may be termed as seasonal or short duration migrants. A large segment of them in urban areas could be those who are adopting coping strategies or making temporary shifts in lean seasons for livelihood and survival. Census provides migration data on all these migration streams by both the concepts to understand the dynamics in the movement of population and the broad reasons behind. But somehow the details data on 'seasonal migration' has not been

cleared yet. The proportion of rural to urban migration in India though seems not that huge as a figure in the census data (census 2001), but the problem is rather more complex than the international scenario. Distress seasonal migration can be viewed as a destabilizing factor, both economically and socially. Seasonal Migration of kind referred by Breman (1996) has been seen particularly of distressed in nature. Beside he also cited a 'harsh reality' where the seasonal migrants are forced to stay in an inhuman phenomenon of working and living. Generally the seasonal labourers depend on the mercy of contractors who never fail to extract their pound of flesh. Raising questions on the desirability of the condition Shylendra and Uma Rani (2005) on other hand the counter part of theory also says that, for many of the poor living in underdeveloped areas, seasonal migration and commuting are the only ways of accessing the benefits of growth in other locations. Migration has helped them in managing risk, smoothing consumption, and earning to invest in a better future (Deshingkar et al., 2009). Breman (1996) argued that seasonal migration within India has often been misunderstood or ignored in public policy in spite of research demonstrating that it is important to the livelihood of large numbers of poor people in various regions. The National Commission on Rural Labour (NCRL) puts the number of circular migrants in rural areas alone at around 10 million (including roughly 4.5 million inter-State migrants and 6 million intra-State migrants). But the departments of rural development, agriculture and labour are not geared to dealing with migrants and just regard them as external to the systems that they work with. According to the NCRL, the majority of seasonal migrants are employed in cultivation and plantations, brick-kilns, quarries, construction sites and fish processing. Further, large numbers of seasonal migrants work in urban informal manufacturing, construction, services or transport sectors, employed as casual labourers, head-loaders, rickshaw pullers and hawkers. According to the Second National Commission on Labour [2002] 369 million or 90.6% of the workers in India are in the unorganized sector, which mostly are consisted by seasonal migrants, but because both demand and supply are so powerful, these services and businesses persist and fuel rent seeking among petty officials and policemen that is of gargantuan proportions. Although millions of poor labourers are in circulation for the best part of the year, policy continues to be ill-equipped to deal with this phenomenon, with the result that, outside their home areas, migrants have no entitlements to livelihood support systems or formal welfare schemes. Neither are they paid a full wage, because contractors deduct a part of that too.

The additional burden posed by a lack of access to basic facilities is borne mainly by women and children. By identifying ways in which policy can enhance the positive outcomes of more accumulative migration and also provide support to reduce vulnerability in the case of the poor who migrate to survive in the cities.

4.Reasons Of Distress Seasonal Migration

In both rural and urban areas, majority of the households migrated for employment related reasons. Nearly 55 per cent of the households in rural areas and 67 per cent of the households in the urban areas had migrated for employment related reasons.

NSSO says that reasons of migration are search of employment social / political problems (riots, terrorism, political refugee, bad law and order, etc.), search of better employment, displacement by development project, business, acquisition of own house/ flat, take up employment / better employment, housing problems, transfer of service/ contract, health care, proximity to place of work, post retirement studies, marriage, natural disaster (drought, flood, tsunami, etc.) and migration of parent/ earning member of the family. Thus, it is clearly visible that reasons of distress migration can be attributed to search of employment/better employment, take up employment, limited period of contract, health care and natural disaster.

Seasonal migration has long been a practice for improving livelihoods in rural areas, with some male members of the family leaving the village for part of the year to look for paid work. In the last few decades, however, there has been growing incidence of 'distress seasonal migration'. This occurs due to the lack of livelihood options after the harvest of the monsoon crop (kharif) in most rain fed parts of the country, which gives rise to indebtedness and food insecurity. This forces the entire family to leave home in search of work in order to survive. Persistent drought and environmental degradation have led to the escalation of this trend. Children, who have no choice but to accompany their parents, drop out of schools and are forced into hard labour. There are also a number of pull factors for distress migration, including the high seasonal demand for manual labour in agriculturally rich areas and labour intensive industries.

Youth allured by lifestyles of the cities weave dream of their own to come in city to earn some income. Development has also put pressure on demand of quality educated manpower for jobs which has left less educated youth with choice to go to urban areas in search of employment.

5. Migration Sectors And Characteristics

The incidence of migrant labour is high in sectors such as brick making, salt manufacture, sugar cane harvesting, stone quarrying, construction, fisheries, plantations and rice mills. Agriculturally rich areas also attract a large number of migrant labourers for sowing, harvesting and other operations. While migration for industrial work often extends for long periods of between six to eight months once a year, migration for agricultural work tends to be of short duration and take place several times a year.

Construction, agriculture and manufacturing alone absorbed nearly 80% of male and 93% of female short term migrant workers from rural areas. Of all the rural male short-term migrant workers nearly 43 were engaged in construction while agriculture and manufacturing employed nearly 20 percent and 17 per cent of male short-term migrant workers, respectively. Nearly 45 per cent of female short-term migrant workers were engaged in agriculture, while construction and manufacturing employed 34 per cent and 14 per cent of female short-term migrant workers respectively.

Distress migration appears to be a reality in almost all states, although to varying degrees. Some states/regions attract labour, while others send it. The agriculturally and industrially sound states are likely to be the net receiving states for migrant labour whereas the less developed states are the net sending ones. Likewise, there is substantial migration taking place within states, from one district to another. There is also evidence of a complicated circulation of labour which defies the surplus-deficit argument: employers prefer to use migrant labour instead of local labour that comes cheaper and is more amenable to control.

6. The Seasonal Migration Cycle

Labour contractors provide cash advances to poor families in villages during the lean post-monsoon months, in return for which families pledge their labour for the coming season. Migrations begin around October–November with migrant families spending the next six to eight months at the work sites, and then returning to their villages before the next monsoon. Once the rains are over, they again prepare to leave their villages. This cycle is typical of the lives of hundreds of thousands of the poor rural families in many parts of India

6.1. Usual Activities Of Short Term Migrants

It was reported in by NSSO that majority of the *short-term migrants* among both the rural males and females were workers in the usual principal activity status: nearly 94 of rural male *short-term migrants* and nearly 75 per cent of the female *short-term migrants* were workers. Moreover, in the rural areas, for both males and females *short-term migrants*, more than half were *casual workers* in their usual principal activity status. The share of the rural *self-employed* males in total short-term male migration was also significant, nearly 32 per cent, and rural females who were *out of labour force* in the usual principal activity status, shared nearly 24 per cent of the total short-term female migration.

7. Few Suggestions: A Way Forward

Keeping the above reasons and consequences of migration in mind, Government of India is focusing on developing durable assets and creating livelihood opportunities. Some of the the programmes are showing a partially successful and optimistic scenario. Among these programmes MGNREGA and PURA got most critical acclamation by various social audits, scholarly reviews etc. The Indian Government is expectant about these programmes, but still there are some ambiguity which needed to be addressed. Here are few suggestions linked with MNREGA and PURA like programmes showing how these programme can address seasonal migration problem.

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act aims at enhancing the livelihood security of people in rural areas by guaranteeing hundred days of wage-employment in a financial year to a rural household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work. The scheme is intended to check out-migration from rural areas. However, it requires time to be fully or even substantially streamlined. Unfortunately, there is a sense of nervousness in the bureaucracy about increasing expenditure that has resulted in a narrow and parsimonious Scheme. The main characteristic of the scheme is sluggish and low spending rather than wastage and 'leakages'. The bureaucracy seems to be in the grips of some kind of fear and lethargy, or simply a resistance to disturbing the preexisting power equations at the local level. This stems from pessimism of the developmental outcomes of this programme, suspicion surrounding its empowerment spin-off and changing balance of power and an overall climate of fiscal tightening and low spending. This gets reflecting in low work days per household; low wages due to high productivity norms; low coverage and non recognition

of many eligible persons as right holders; reduced per capita entitlements through the definition of household on the basis of common kitchen, and absence of systems to engender application-driven implementation. While the additional income does to some extent reduce hunger and distress outmigration, it is unlikely to be adequate for pulling people out of poverty. The inability to effectively address poverty through the MNREGA arises from the following features: low productivity-linked wages, inadequate employment generation, permitting only casual manual work and the restrictions on permissible works. Barriers through the imposition of arbitrary and illegal eligibility conditions and bureaucratic procedures and the absence of a fair and simple system for claim-making under the Scheme further curtail overall expenditure.

One of the most promising programmes PURA (Provision of Urban Amenities in Rural Areas) was initiated by former president of India Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam on the eve of 54th Republic day. It was based on Cluster based approach to achieve uniform development for rural areas with the concept of IT connectivity for knowledge management. His vision was to promote agro based industries in rural areas. His thinking was absolutely praiseworthy but the Government agencies which were to transform the idea into reality proved out to be less capable and unequipped to meet the requirements of the electronic connectivity and trainings.

Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD), Government of India has re-launched the scheme as a Central Sector scheme during remaining period of the XI Plan. According to Shri Jairam Ramesh, Minister, Ministry of Rural Development, this time PURA will succeed as it will focus on physical infrastructure in those areas which are neither urban nor rural. He said that in the last 10 years 3600 such towns have emerged across the country. This is different from Kalam's knowledge connectivity concept. He said that the PURA project would expand in 500 such semi-urban towns in the 12th Five year plan.

If it is going to happen there will certainly be job opportunities which will check out migration from those areas. But who will guarantee that it will not be another 3G or coal block distribution since it is involving private partners in implementation.

8. Conclusion

To conclude the article, we must admit that development of indicators to measure various aspects of seasonal migration on regular basis is an utmost requirement. Also it is necessary for the policy makers to understand the intersection of health and human rights, which becomes even more complex when seasonal migration clashes with the interest of the area of destination. Cases of exploitation of migrants by employers, smugglers or traffickers in such cases never meet justice. In fast growing cities where these people come for livelihood opportunities, basic human rights of these seasonal poor migrants are often ignored. Policy level challenges and necessary amendments thriving towards the basic rights for the seasonal migrants in Indian legislature are required to address this problematic. Findings show that pseudo development or unequal developments in rural areas comparison to urban areas are the key reason of distress seasonal migration. Currently, we have Census and NSSO doing the task and both of these have differences up to a certain degree. On the other hand, knowing the fact that such migration exists and need to be taken care off; Government must ensure success of its schemes which specifically are meant to check the migration

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