

A study on issues of inter - state migrant labourers in India

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Abstract—In a developing country like India with exploding population, increasing urbanization rate & regional disparities in development, the availability of adequate housing has been of great concern in the past few decades. Various housing policies, schemes & programmes were formulated in the past, but these policies & programmes never addressed housing issues of floating population who has a short period of stay at their destination, which worsened their situation creating unhygienic living conditions. Every individual has the right to adequate housing which is a basic requirement for one's survival, hence issues regarding rising housing demands in the country is a matter to ponder on. The floating population as mentioned refers to the migrant labourers belonging to Low Income Group (LIG) or Economically Weaker Section (EWS) of the society who migrate from one state to the other in search of better jobs, facilities & better quality of life. The following paper discusses on socio- economic background & housing issues faced by low income Inter- State Migrant (ISM) labourers working in construction sector in India.

Keywords -

I. INTRODUCTION

India, a collaboration of 29 states and 7 union territories is known for its great *unity in diversity*. But that unity bears certain loop holes in maintaining the same in reality. Each state in India has a uniqueness of its own whether it is in culture, geographic pattern, community settlements, economic or natural resources. There is indeed a wide disparity in development which makes rich more rich & poor becomes poorer. As such, people living in rural part (poor regions) of India often transit between places either for a social or an economic cause. Migration between states is an outcome of social, economic and cultural diversity in India. Migration is a “process of movement of an individual from his place of birth to a new place of residence”- S.K Das [2]. The Inter-State Migrant Workmen Act, 1979 defines an inter-state migrant workman/ labour as “any person who is recruited by or through a contractor in any state under an agreement or other

arrangement for employment in an establishment in another state, whether with or without the knowledge of the principal employer of such establishment.” [2]

For this technical paper Inter- State Migrant (ISM) labourers have been defined as „those people who belong to Lower Income Group and move from their state of origin to another state, within the boundaries of India, in search of jobs which give them high wages, better quality of life, better facilities & other push & pull factors that contribute to the reasons of their migration’. Since they are in continuous movement they are called as *floating population*.

From reports and studies it is understood that majority of migrant labourers are engaged in building construction, agriculture, brick kilns, stone quarries, carpet weaving, street vendors, waiters in hotels etc. In recent years huge unplanned squatter settlements of ISM workers are seen in the areas where construction works are prominent. Hence housing is a major issue regarding the floating population. Due to influx of migrants to a particular state, under-estimation of demands and lack of planning of resources & infrastructure, there is overburdening of infrastructure, formation of unhygienic conditions, outbreak of epidemics like cholera, tuberculosis, viral fever etc, as such an intervention is found necessary to curb the situation. The following technical paper highlights on housing, environmental & socio- economic issues of inter-state migrant labourers working in construction sector and belonging to Economically Weaker Section (EWS) or Lower Income Group (LIG) in India. The issues are understood through collection of literature & statistical data, understanding welfare schemes & programs for ISM, and analyzing case studies.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Push & Pull factors for migration

The factors in the origin state that form the basis for people to migrate to another state are known as *Push factors* while the factors in destination state that attract people to the it are known as *Pull factors*. The increasing urbanization trends in

the past show that there is larger migration from rural to urban parts of India. Various push & pull factors are the reason for rural to urban migration of these ISM labourers, which arise due to regional disparities among the states in India [2]. The major push factors for migration in villages are low daily wages, lack of job opportunities, water scarcity, family problems, migration of spouses etc. While the pull factors in cities or urban areas are high wages, immense job opportunities, access to basic amenities & water, comfort & convenience, high quality of life.

B. Population & statistics

The migration studies conducted in National Workshop on Internal Migration and Human Development in India by Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) shows that both in rural and urban areas, a much higher percentage of the migrant population is in the higher quintiles. In urban areas, 49.2 per cent of the migrant population was in the top two quintiles (4 & 5) compared with 34.8 per cent of the non-migrant population. There is an even sharper concentration of migrants for economic reasons in the top quintiles, which is expected since these migrants had self-selected themselves for migration [6]. Table 1 compares the quintile-wise distribution of migrants and non-migrants and table 2 state wise out migration statistics during 2007-2008.

TABLE 1 COMPARISON OF QUINTILE WISE DISTRIBUTION OF MIGRANTS & NON MIGRANTS IN RURAL – URBAN AREAS IN INDIA, 2007-2008

MPCE quintile	Rural			Urban		
	Migrant	Economic migrant	Non-migrant	Migrant	Economic migrant	Non-migrant
1	16.7	7.5	21.1	14.3	7.1	23.1
2	18.1	11.0	20.7	16.4	11.9	21.9
3	19.4	11.5	20.2	20.1	18.6	19.9
4	20.4	17.0	19.9	22.7	26.7	18.4
5	25.3	53.0	18.1	26.5	35.7	16.4

TABLE 2 STATE WISE SHORT DURATION OUT MIGRATION PER 1000, 2007- 2008

States	Male (M)	Female (F)	M+F
Andhra Pradesh	20	8	14
Assam	20	2	12
Bihar	57	1	30
Chhattisgarh	23	9	17
Gujarat	43	24	34
Haryana	6	2	4
Himachal Pradesh	10	0	5
Jammu	26	1	13
Jharkhand	46	6	26
Karnataka	17	6	11
Kerala	9	1	5
Madhya Pradesh	39	11	26
Maharashtra	16	8	12
Orissa	22	5	13
Punjab	7	8	7
Rajasthan	25	5	15
Tamilnadu	18	5	11
Uttarakhand	8	0	4
Uttar Pradesh	25	1	14
West Bengal	44	4	24
All-India	28	5	17

Source: Internal Migration in India Initiative, 2011

From table 2 it's clear that most out – migration of male population to other states occur in states like Bihar, Jharkhand & West Bengal. Moreover through literature data it was revealed that states like Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala and Karnataka experienced more number of in- migration, mostly because of higher job opportunities, high daily wages, better quality of life and other economic and social reasons [2]. For example the city of Mumbai in Maharashtra is a large dwelling of urban slums and these slums were formed as a result of extensive in - migration over the decades. Similar conditions are possible in other rising cities in India if migration and unplanned settlements are not taken in as a major issue. It was also understood that a large number of migrants were working in construction sector as helpers & masons, as it is one of the major industries that require large labour force. Apart from construction sector, a large number of these migrants also worked in brick factory, textile industries, restaurants, as house maids, hospitality sector etc [3].

C. Existing welfare schemes, laws, Acts & programmes for ISM labourers in India

Government of India had put forth welfare and infrastructure programs for urban poor in its 11th and 12th five year plans like BSUP under JNNURM, RAY, VAMBAY etc [6]. These programs were developed to provide basic amenities to urban poor like shelter, water, sanitation, toilets, access roads and infrastructure facilities. The Government of India had also provided acts like the Inter-State Migrant Workmen (Regulation of employment & conditions of service) Act, 1979 (ISMW Act 1979) to protect ISM labourers from exploitation and protection of their rights [2]. In rural areas like Chhattisgarh, Orissa states under NREGA employment programmes and special aids in agriculture sector were created to reduce out migration of people from state. During 2012-13, the labour ministry in Kerala had put forward certain welfare schemes, acts & programmes for ISM labourers in Kerala. The following are some of them:-

- Rs.25,000 as health-care assistance
- Rs.25,000 as terminal benefit if ISM labourer had worked in Kerala for a minimum period
- up to Rs.3,000 every year as education allowance for their children
- Rs.50,000 as compensation to the next of kin if the labourer dies in an accident
- Rs.10,000 in case of natural death and up to Rs.15,000 for transporting the body to their hometown
- Kerala Compulsory Registration of Migrant Workers Act 2012

- Kerala Academy for Skills Excellence (KASE) for skill development of ISM labourers
- Rehabilitation Project for ISM labourers
- Night Shelter Project by Kerala State Housing Board for ISM labourers

But these programs and welfare schemes hardly addressed the issues of migrants due to lack in mediators to pass on the information and communication gaps. Hence the initiatives taken do not create any effective impact on them.

D. Facts and revelations of ISM labourers

The local newspapers reveal some facts on the ISM labourers and their problems. The labourers live in rented rooms, shabby dwellings and tents which are having insufficient sanitation and infrastructure facilities. A large number of cases are reported on suicide, murder, accidents, forcing severely injured persons to work, food poisoning, heart ailments, insufficient treatment etc [7]. Due to lack of privacy in housing accommodation and lack of toilet facilities, families with women and children are at discomfort.

Women ISM labourers are often subjected to sexual harassment, abuse from recruiting agents, mental harassments from contractors which leads to mental disturbances among the labourers. On the other hand, studies by health departments show that ISM labourers often visit hospitals to treat diseases like Jaundice, malaria, viral fever, AIDS and cholera. Often criminal cases are registered against these ISM labourers with regard to murder, physical clashes, sexual assault, supplying fake currency notes, smuggling of brown sugar & banned drugs, theft cases etc [7]. Voting is a problem as there is loss of votes to parties in state of origin. Their presence creates a sense of fear, threat and mental dilemma to local people. To understand facts and realities of these distressed ISM labourers in current scenario a case study of Kerala has been discussed in detail in the following section.

III. CASE STUDY - KERALA

A. In general

Kerala popularly known as „God“s Own Country“ is a state located in the south west region of India on the Malabar Coast. Kerala has a unique pattern of development of urban – rural continuum i.e. there is no clear distinction between urban and rural areas. The state has a rich cultural heritage and high value in social development indicators which are comparable to the developed nations.

About 8% of Kerala“s population is migrant population which is constituted by ISM labourers working in various industries like construction, brick & kiln factories, restaurants, hospitality, agriculture, house maids/ servants, etc.

This tremendous influx of migrants is due to three major factors namely literacy of the state, attitude of people towards 3D (dirty, degrading & dangerous) kind of jobs and high daily wages. High literacy rate of population in Kerala contribute to negligence and disinterest towards daily wage jobs in Kerala [7]. This creates shortage of labour in construction industry and thereby invites ISM labourers in large number to Kerala. About 60% of the ISM labourers in Kerala are working in construction [3] & its allied sectors because it requires a large labour force which can work for 3D kind of jobs.

Migration is always associated with housing and in turn depends on one“s economic stability & social scenario persisting in the area. To understand the socio-economic, environmental & housing conditions of the ISM labourers, details of the study report on “An Inclusive Planning for Distressed Inter-State Migrant labourers in Kerala” [7]., is taken as an example. According to the report, the primary surveys were conducted at Thiruvananthapuram, Ernakulam and Kozhikode districts in Kerala by the author, highlights of which are given in the following sections. Direct and in- direct interviews were conducted to understand the various factors behind their migration and the situation of their living conditions during their stay in Kerala. The major objectives of the survey were to:

- Understand the socio-economic, housing and environmental conditions
- Infer the positive and negative impacts of migration
- Identify major issues faced by ISM labourers as well as the local community

Sample size was 90 individuals out of 369 population in total of the selected sites. The selection of settlements were based on a set of criteria like total population of the settlement, type of sector in which the labourers worked, type of labourers etc [7]. The observations in the following sections were based on primary surveys conducted by the author.

B. Socio- Economic conditions

Male population is predominant in this sector and aged between 18- 36 yrs in majority [7]. The major states from where these migrants migrated to Kerala were West Bengal, Bihar, Assam, Orissa and north eastern states of India. The major push factors for migration of these migrant labourers were less daily wages, poverty, indebtedness and joblessness at origin state.

These migrant workers have their basic occupation as agriculture in their native place, but they are employed in construction sector in destination place, which makes them unskilled & unprofessional on site. They are paid Rs 500/ day which is high compared to their native state but less when compared to what Malayalee labourers receive in Kerala, which is a huge profit for the employer in Kerala [7]. And out of Rs 12000/ month (considering working 6 days a week), Rs 8000 is sent to native place as remittance [7]., which leaves back hardly any money for the labourer to survive in Kerala with such high cost of living. With such an economic background the quality of living is put at stake.

They are floating community moving in search of jobs from one place to another, hence their instability paves way for their lack of identity. Some of them are working under contractors and some under non contract basis. As such, the labourers who are not under any contract receive no benefits or incentives and are deprived from all social welfare programs for their upliftment. Being an individual of outside Kerala these ISM labourers also face social exclusion and racial discrimination which create a sense of non acceptance in the society.

C. Housing & environmental conditions

Poverty and weak economic background force ISM labourers to live in rented shabby dwellings or tents with poor infrastructure with no access to water & sanitation facilities in the destination place. Tents and temporary shelters are often found in areas where people settle at their work place i.e., on-site settlement, which is having poor infrastructure facility. While, people who reside far away from work place live in pucca or semi-pucca rooms with minimum or no basic amenities. Most of them live in congestion with 7-8 persons living in one room with 23 sq.m area on an average [7]. Also majority are illiterate, 75% of them received below primary level education, because of which they lack knowledge in cleanliness and hygiene [7].

It has therefore created overburdening of infrastructure, degradation of land, slum like settlements leading to unaesthetic appearance of the surroundings. These conditions have created outbreak of epidemics like Malaria, cholera, viral fever among them. These observations form the basis of concern over facilitating access to basic services for the ISM labourers in urban areas and introduce programmes that would enhance their socio- economic conditions.

IV. CONCLUSION

A large number of people migrate from rural areas to urban areas in India and they are considered as floating population. Through case studies and primary survey we realize that these labourers face social & economic discrimination. They are forced to live in polluted environment and poor housing conditions during their stay at destination place. But there is also another side to the reality that they also carry out anti-social activities during their stay at destination place and they also lack identity of who they are, where they are from and what they exactly do. But, no state can restrict any Indian Citizen from entering a state/ region/ place in India, because

“the right to freedom of movement” laid down in the Indian constitution allows any Indian to move freely anywhere within the Indian Territory. Similarly the migrants have rights to enjoy all the human & fundamental rights laid down in the Indian constitution. Government has put forth enough acts, schemes and programmes for them but these initiatives hardly or never reach the ISM labourers, mainly due to loop holes in medium of communication & administration set up.

There is a concern over unplanned settlements of these ISM labourers, leading to various issues like poor housing conditions, over burdening of infrastructure, degradation of land, pollution of river streams etc. There lacks inclusion of the migrants into society, hence certain inclusive policies and schemes could be put forward such that it would help in bringing ISM labourers into mainstream & also create a management system that can solve the issues regarding their identity. It could create a database for implementing other schemes for them related to their socio- economic, environmental & housing issues, without hindering the activities of local community.

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