

Review of Literature Relating to Migrant Workers in India: An Overview

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Abstract

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. In order to get a better insight into the problem of labour migration and protection available to migrant workers, in this paper, a brief review of available studies on migration has been presented.

Keywords: *Migration of Workers, Migrants, Socio- Economic Issues, Migration.*

Introduction

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.¹ Migration in India has largely been fueled by push and pull factors, the increasing regional disparities, ruralurban 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.²

In order to get a better insight into the problem of labour migration and protection available to migrant workers, a brief review of available studies on migration has been presented below. These scholars/researchers have explored the various dimensions of the problems. The available literature mostly

concentrate on some socio-economic issues of the problem, policy perspective and administrative process and legal aspects of migrant workers, etc. All this literature has been discussed in the present study.

Nijam Khan³ conducted a study in the State of Uttar Pradesh. It was based on the field data collected from twenty randomly selected villages of Uttar Pradesh. The study revealed that economic backwardness in rural areas caused by lack of better employment opportunities and small land holdings was pushing the rural population to other irrigated areas or urban centres in search of livelihood. Nijam Khan observed that migration was initially seasonal but has gradually converted into a permanent feature. This study concentrate only on the factors behind the migration, however, the problems faced by the migrant workers have not been discussed in this study.

Vidyut Joshi⁴ while outlying the causes of migration unhesitatingly says that in the post independent period as a result of planned industrial and technological development new types of casual and seasonal work have emerged. In this book Vidut Joshi talks about the conditions of migrant workmen employed in Government projects Uttar – Kashi, Uttar Pradesh (Tehri Garhwal Project). Labourers from Orissa, Bihar including women and children were employed in such project works violating all labour laws, like Inter-State

Migrant Workmen (Regulation of employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 1979. Most of such labourers especially from Orissa were Dadan labourers. In this study the social welfare schemes relating to migrant workers is nowhere discussed.

International Labour Organization in its report on *Safety and Health of Migrant Workers – International Symposium*,⁵ has examined indepth the problems of occupational safety and health of migrant workers throughout the globe. It examined the causes of occupational accidents of migrant workers and observed that the migrant workers have a higher incidence of occupational accidents.⁶ It also noticed the causes regarding the occupational diseases caused to the migrant workers due to particular sensitive nature of jobs.⁷

The National Commission on Rural Labour examined indepth the working of the inter-state migrant workmen legislation, plugging loopholes and suggesting remedial measures in improving the safety, living and working conditions of migrant labourers.⁸ The committee observed that inspite of the fact that migrant workmen who were covered by The Minimum Wages Act, Contract Labour Act, Bonded Labour Act, Inter-State Migrant Workmen Act, Workmen's Compensation Act, and some of the social security's Acts, used to work and live in dehumanisation conditions. The committee pointed out that the difficulties emanate from the weakness of the Acts, because those Acts are primarily directed towards organized labour. The committee in reports nowhere discussed the wage related problems faced by migrant workers.

S.N. Tripathy and C.R. Dash⁹ conducted a study in Ganjam district of Orissa regarding migrant workmen, their problems, socio-economic features of migrant households and the impacts of labour migration. The study reveals that problems of migrant workers are manifold. These problems may be classified into two categories; (1) the plight of migrant workmen at the time of recruitment and at the

work sites, and (2) the problems arising out of the difficulties experienced in administration and implementation of the Inter-State Migrant Workmen Act, 1979.¹⁰

This study does not discussed the discrimination done by the contractors and principal employers between male and female migrant workers regarding the granting of work and equal pay for equal work.

N. Ajith Kumar,¹¹ examined the dimensions of vulnerability of migrant labourers in a sub-national context viz., that of Kerala State in India. He analyzed that due to the limitations in portability of entitlements, the migrants are not able to enjoy some of the entitlements from Central Government and State Governments they had enjoyed before migration. Thus, even when the migrant workers are from the same country, the host State fails to extent them all the protection that is available to the local labour.

There has been no systematic study to assess the incidence and magnitude of bonded labour at all India level. The earliest attempt in this direction was the collaborative study of Gandhi Peace Foundation and National Labour Institute which estimated the number of bonded labourers at all India level as 2.6 million. This study was limited to Agriculture and did not include the States of North West India, Western India, and North-East. It was assumed that the phenomenon of debt-bondage is confined to areas with feudal stronghold and is practically nonexistent in States with advanced capitalist agriculture and industry.

There are very few studies which report of positive impact of migration on left behind female members. Leela Gulati reports in her study that wives are not only expected to perform family maintaining activities but also to train the children for future life. On the same line Mescarenhas Keyes (1990)¹² found that male overseas migration in Goa, has made the women as the exclusive rearers of their children, manage family finances, and in imbuing a spirit of success and achievement in their children. They assume a positive role in

decision-making of utilising the scarce resources.

Conclusion

In view of the above discussion it can be concluded that there is a dearth of literature on migrant workers. Only a few studies having been conducted in this section of the labour force. These studies have discussed the human rights perspective and some other aspects including the health problems, accommodation problems and sexual exploitation of women workers. Therefore, it is the need of the hour that there shall be a comprehensive study touching almost all the aspects of migrant workers. It will be beneficial for academicians, students and the policy makers.

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