



CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF SEASONAL RURAL LABOUR OUT-MIGRATION IN COOCH BEHAR DISTRICT- AN ANALYSIS ON SOCIO-RELIGIOUS LENS

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RESEARCH ARTICLE



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Abstract

Migration is inherently a phenomenon with complexity having significant social, cultural, economic, political and demographic inferences on human society. Seasonal Out- migration of labour for employment has become now one of the most durable trends of the livelihood strategies of people living in rural areas. Socio-Religious status has a significant impact on labour migration, influencing who migrates, where they go, and the types of jobs they pursue. Social stratification leads to considerable disparities in income and wealth, with those in higher strata earning more and constructing greater wealth. This income gap perpetuates social inequalities and it is evident by various studies that people from lower social classes migrate in search of better economic opportunities and a chance to improve their social status through higher earnings and improved living conditions. Cooch Behar district is a residence of multi religion. Social background of people contributes to migration decision making. So, this study tries to focus on contributing causes and consequences of seasonal rural labour out-migration from diverse socio-religious segments in this district.

Keywords: *Migration, Rural Labour, Coochbehar District, Socio-Religious Lens*

Introduction

Migration is inherently a phenomenon with complexity having significant social, cultural, economic, political and demographic inferences on human society. The study of migration becomes one of the important issues in third world countries like India. Migration is a continuous process that includes several interrelated issues and components. Labour migration is a growing trend in third world developing countries; and labour migration from rural areas is the very important factor of development, social transformation etc. In the developing economies structural transformation is characteristically related with a deteriorating share of agriculture in output and employment. Agricultural sector is predominantly rural while the non-agricultural sectors are typically urban, the process of structural alteration possibly dictates enormous transfers of factors and resources across both sectors and locations (Hnatkovska & Lahiri, 2015). Lewis (1954) describes labour migration under a dual economic system, where economies in development, particularly in the post-colonial period, feature a coexistence between a modern, externally connected economy and a traditional one reliant on agriculture for subsistence. In this model, the modern sector expands by drawing labour from the traditional sector. Migration, in this context, is seen as a developmental process. The unlimited labour supply to the modern sector facilitates its expansion and profitability by reducing wages. Meanwhile, out-migration from the traditional sector serves as a mechanism to relieve surplus labour, allowing the sector to maintain production while moving towards a higher capital-output ratio. However, in the post liberalized world labourer migration is not always seen as a developmental process. The globalization and subsequent alterations in the labour market brings changes in labour migration (Arango, 2020).

Being a developing country India is facing a massive internal labourer migration due to several factors. The consequences of globalization accelerated the process of labour out-migration and major numbers of these populations came under the pattern of seasonal migration. Seasonal Out- migration of labour for employment has become now one of the most durable trends of the livelihood strategies of people living in rural areas (Mamanshetty, 2018; Haan, 2011; Islam, Kashem, Morshed, Rahman, & Das, 2019). This labour mobility is often theorized as labour market equilibrium. Because, here migration performs as a balancing machinery for labour markets. Labours move from regions with surplus workforce (rural agrarian sector) to regions where labour is in demand (urban industrial sector). This mobility helps to equalize wage levels and employment rates between

different regions or sectors. Nevertheless, the earliest and arguably most influential theory of migration originates from neoclassical economics. This theory is grounded in well-established principles such as rational choice, anticipated net returns, utility maximization, factor mobility, and wage disparities (Arango, 2020). This theory supports the recognition that labour migration is mostly motivated by economic aspects. It emphasizes on the individual's decision-making process, where people consider the anticipated outcome of migration. The ultimate perception is that individuals choose to migrate to enhance their economic well-being by relocating from areas with lower wages and limited job opportunities to regions offering higher wages and better employment prospects. However, prominently labour migration encouraged by economic aspirations but few variables like age, sex, caste, education, religion etc. influences the migration on its scale and structure. The decision behind migration is stimulated by the culture, creed and migration network and information. Migration information flows from family members, Kinship, friend circle, peer groups etc. so several diaspora has been growing up at the destination places.

Studies have proved social status has a significant impact on labour migration, influencing who migrates, where they go, and the types of jobs they pursue. Social stratification leads to considerable disparities in income and wealth, with those in higher strata earning more and constructing greater wealth. This income gap perpetuates social inequalities and limits upward mobility for individuals in lower strata. It is evident by various studies that people from lower social classes migrate in search of better economic opportunities and a chance to improve their social status through higher earnings and improved living conditions. Migrants often send remittances back home, which contribute to enhancing their family's social status in their place of origin. Migration often alters an individual's social status in their home country, with successful migration often leading to an elevated status.

Religion plays a significant role in influencing labor migration by shaping decisions, migration patterns, and the overall experiences of migrants. Religious beliefs impact human behavior and decision-making, operating through social networks, ethical considerations, economic activities, and the integration process. Religious communities often offer support networks that facilitate migration, leading migrants to choose destinations where they can find social support, housing, and job opportunities. These factors influence decisions on whether to migrate, where to go, and what type of work to pursue, ultimately reducing the cost of migration.

Cooch Behar district of West Bengal shares a great legacy of royal dynasty rule. Before and during the British rule Cooch Behar was ruled by several kingdoms. After independence the king's rule was abolished and came under the government of India with joining West Bengal as a district. However, migration can be traced in the royal history of Cooch Behar district of West Bengal. Being the center and prosperous place, it attracted people from the surrounding areas. But after independence the specific nature and pattern of migration has changed in this district. Now each and every morning has a similar view that hundreds of rural labourers come to urban areas seeking work, mainly they are daily waged labour and construction labourers. Similarly a large section used to go to other states like Kerala, Karnataka, and New Delhi in search of work. However, another trend of international migration is also evident from this district. Bhutan is the immediate neighboring country with good relations allowing Indian labourers in their territory without any trouble. An established corridor of labourer migration has grown up from the last several decades. Similar to the country that in Cooch Behar district labour out-migration from rural areas is a prominent trend and very important issue. Rural people migrate seasonally from the district just for adequate employment due to the fall of the agricultural economy. Cooch Behar district is a residence of multi religion. Social background of people contributes to migration decision making. So this study tries to focus on contributing causes and consequences of seasonal rural labour out-migration from diverse socio-religious segments in this district.

Review of Literature

(Sarkar, 2013) stated causes of labour out-migration in Cooch Behar are population growth, agricultural labour growth, decline of traditional agro-products, and low wage rate. He also mention that for higher wage sometimes children are forced to work, and some social issues like social crime, sexual harassment etc. (Sharma & Upadhyay, 2013) made a study on issues, prospects and problems of out-migration in Cooch Behar district. In their study they find that the rural to urban migration rate is higher in this district. This study also reveals that out-migration increases school drop-outs of children.

Objectives: The objectives of present research work are:

- i. To study the causes of seasonal rural labour out-migration from different social communities.
- ii. To find the consequences of seasonal rural labour out-migration performed by different social communities.

Methodology

The present research work is an empirical study and mixed method strategy has been followed. Primary data has collected through the field survey. Secondary data has been collected from books, research articles and various online database. Samples have been collected from five sub-division of this district, total number of sample is 100. In the study, the data has been collected by using both structured and unstructured questionnaire, telephonic interviews and observation method also applied

by the researcher. Beside these interviews, few people who have the knowledge about sample area were consulted on various socio-culture issues of the area.

Data Interpretation

The 2011 census report shows that Cooch Behar district is the residence of mainly four communities i.e. Hindu, Muslim, Jain and Christian. Though the people who believe in Buddhist and Sikh religion also live here, but in a very small number. Hindus are the majority sharing 74.1 percent of population followed by Muslims about 25.5 percent.

Table-1.1: Social background of respondents.

	General	SC	OBC-A	OBC-B	Total
Male	11	24	35	7	77
Female	0	7	14	2	23
Percentage	11%	31%	49%	9%	100 %

Source: Field Survey

Above table-1.1 shows the social background of the responded out-migrated labour. It shows that out-migrating trend is higher among the OBC-A category who belong from Muslim community is 49 percent (OBC-A only for West Bengal); followed by scheduled caste 31 percent and 11 percent from the general category. On the other hand, from a religious point of view, out-migrant laborers belong to 51 percent of Hindu and 49 percent of Muslim community. According to the 2011 census data, among the total population of this district, 74.1 percent of the population belongs to the Hindu community and 25.5 percent from Muslim community. This study quantified that the migration trend is higher among the Muslims rather than Hindus.

Education helps people to deal with issues and problems regarding their life. Institutional education makes individuals disciplined and prudent; which is expressed through the decision making ability or handling the problems in day to day life of an individual. Generally, it is found that rural laborers are low educated; that affects their life very deeply.

Table-1.2: Community wise educational qualifications of respondents.

Category	No Schooling	I-IV	V-X	XI-XII	UG and above
General	1	2	5	1	2
SC	6	8	14	2	1
OBC-A	16	10	22	1	0
OBC-B	3	2	3	0	1
Total	26 (26%)	22(22%)	44 (44%)	4 (4%)	4(4%)

Source: Field Survey

From the above table- 1.2 has been found that 44 percent laborers have education from class V to X, and 26 percent labour did not go school. This table also shows that in no schooling category labourers of OBC-A community basically who are Muslims share the maximum rate. This is one of the causes of the high rate of out-migration in Muslim community.

Causes

It is obvious that factors behind contributing seasonal out-migration at different places and time have been different and various. It's also evident by various studies that economic causes are the main factor behind the migration (Radhakrishnan, Saxena, & Sharma, 2019; Islam, Kashem, Morshed, Rahman, & Das, 2019). This fact is also similar with the Cooch Behar that economy is one of the main causes of rural labour out- migration. The field survey data shows that 100 percent of out-migrated labour responded they migrate just for employment. Generally rural workers of this district are agricultural labour. These laborers lead their life working on others land as a waged labour. But nowadays traditional agriculture no longer remains a labour absorbing sector. Seasonal availability of work in agriculture at villages and massive use of machinery equipment in agricultural activities stimulates rural laborers to find alternative places for standard jobs. Moreover, the investment of monopoly capital on the agricultural market badly affects small and marginalized farmers. Due to miserable conditions, small and marginalized farmers of this district did not hire laborers for their work. So these uprooted agricultural labourers gradually lost their working opportunity at rural areas in this district.

However, this district is experiencing a decadal growth in workforce share. District census report shows that in the last five decades rural workforce has increased gradually in this district. It accounts 28.4 percent in 1971, 32.8 percent in 1981, 36.3 percent in 1991, 42.1 percent in 2001 and 42.6 percent in 2011. Significant increases were found between 1991-2001, due to globalization and its structural changes that opened new information, made available transport and communication opportunities and open market initiatives. Undoubtedly these increased workforces for uneven development become surplus in

the district; for lack of heavy industry or opportunity to employ these deteriorated agricultural labourers and workforce become surplus and migrate towards labour absorbing areas.

Poverty is another contributing factor behind seasonal out-migration (Mandal, Das, & Poddar, 2018). Generally rural laborers are economically poor; they have less or no choice other than working as a daily waged labour to arrange substance. Seasonal availability of work employs seasonality in earnings; and is not sufficient to cope with food, risk factors etc.

Table-1.4: Distribution of migrant households by having land.

Sl. No	Land owning	Household
1	Only homestead	61%
2	Less than 1 acre	27%
3	Above 1 acre	12%

N-100, Source: Field survey

The above data shows that 61 percent of households have just their homestead. Lack of adequate cultivable land in a society based on an agricultural economy, makes it harder to arrange substances. However, this small holding of land is one of the growing inherent features in agrarian society due to its custom and conventions. For these several contributing factors out-migration seems a compulsion. It is also evident from this table that with more land owning migration rate becomes low.

During interaction with respondents one important issue came rapidly, that every household has some kind of financial engagements with several microfinance organizations. Massive borrowing is one important factor for out-migration decision making of rural labourers. The growing presence of a number of microfinance companies has been seen in rural areas; which gives loans to the people in some easy condition. The tension of repaying these loans diverts the loan holders toward a stable earnings, at the origin places scarcity of stable earnings stimulate people to out-migrate for work and standard remuneration.

Consequences

Seasonal out-migration has incontestable impacts on individuals, families and communities in many ways. There are economic and non-economic benefits engaged with any migration. The consequences of seasonal rural labour out-migration in this district can be shown in various aspects of rural lifestyle. After opting out-migration the economic condition of migrant households has increased in comparison to previous economic conditions. The remittances sent by the migrant labour to their family at villages has been used for arranging the necessities of daily life. This consumption of money keeps the balance of the rural market.

However, the seasonal out-migration of labour from villages creates a scarcity of workforce at the time of peak season of cultivation in this district. It further affects the entire cultivating process, because till today agriculture of this district is not fully developed by modern technology. Different activities in cultivation have no alternation of manual labourers. Machines still can't replace human effort, but this opportunity is seasonal; so at the time of those works labourers are not staying at villages to opt for migration. The study shows that male labor migration rate is high; that's why children, aged persons are mentally affected deeply. Sometimes the absence of male members of the household faces various problems like security etc.

Migrants from rural areas learn various urban cultures and while returning back to their original place tried to lead an urban lifestyle. During the field survey it has observed among the Muslim community's labour, this trend is prominent that they build a house by concrete; even sometimes it is concrete roof and decorates the house with tiles or stones as like they seen in urban places, where they were migrated. Not only this, a change about decision making regarding children's education and future has been found.

Conclusion

By the above data and their critical analysis the study reveals that the main causes contributing to seasonal rural labour out-migration in this district remains same among all the socio-religious segment of people. It remains the same for all communities that unavailability of adequate employment is the cause of out-migration for labourers in this district. Decline of traditional agriculture as the income source and missing of alternative income sources rural labour migrate outside their villages. The study also stated that Push factor and Pull factor both play the decisive role for migration. Lack of adequate employment, standard wage pushes rural laborers out-migration. On the other hand standard wage, availability of work pulls laborers toward labour absorbing areas like, Mumbai, Haryana, and Punjab etc. However, different participation scales among religious found due to convenience information of migration and kinship factor. Migration information, relatives at the destination reduces the cost of migration, and motivates migration. Migration meets immediate benefits to the migrant households with remittances, which further helps to cope with risk factors. Migration brings changes in household level on life standard, decision making and skills etc.

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