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Study On Wages And Work Transition Of Migrants In India

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ABSTRACT

In some regions of India, three out of four households include a migrant. The effects of migration on individuals, households and regions add up to a significant impact on the national economy and society. Despite the numbers, not much is written on migration within or from India and its considerable costs and returns remain outside of the public policy realm. This paper reviews key issues relating to wage and work migration in India. It analyses the patterns, trends and nature of labour migration, reviews existing government and non-governmental policies and programmes, and briefly examines key policy issues and options. Since the spatial distribution of jobs is an important determinant of the decision of migrate we compute the location quotient to identify whether a district has a higher concentration of workers in agriculture, manufacturing, construction and services sector. After controlling for household and individual characteristics, we find that an individual is more likely to be a short term migrant if the individual is from a district with a higher concentration of workers in the construction industry. Using instrumental variable model, we find that short term migrants earn low wages compared to non-short term migrant. Following this we model the transition of short term migrant workers across industries drawing on the literature on transition measures developed to measure income and occupational mobility.

Key Words: Health, Migration, Causes and Impact

Introduction

Migration is shift from a place of residence to another place for some length of time or permanently including different types of voluntary movements. It has great impact on economic, social, cultural and psychological life of people, both at place of emigration as well as of migration (Kaur, 2003). In India the labour migration is mostly influenced by social structures and pattern of development. Uneven development is the main reason of migration along with factors like poverty, landholding system, and fragmentations of land, lack of employment opportunities, large family-size and natural calamities. The high-land man ratio, caste system, lawlessness and exploitation at native place speed up the breakdown of traditional socio-economic relations in the rural areas and people decide to migrate to relatively prosperous areas in search of better employment and income.

Diversification of economy and increased land productivity in certain areas, rapid improvement in transport and communication means, improvement in education, increase in population pressure and zeal for improving living added momentum to the mobility of population in India (Roy, 2011). Those who migrate to new areas experience certain socio-psychological problems of adjustments with the residents of place of migration.

Literature Review

A reading of the empirical literature on migration clearly brings out three strands. The first strand looks at the characteristics of households with a seasonal migrant or return migrant or the individual characteristics of such migrants. The second strand looks at how certain indicators of household well-being (consumption expenditure, food expenditure or nutrition outcomes) vary across households with and without migrants. The third strand looks at occupational mobility of migrants.

We now turn to a brief description of the findings from three strands of the literature. Haberfeld et al. (1999) examine the characteristics of rural Indian households with at least one seasonal migrant. They find that households with more educated members or households with fewer working members or households with higher income from agriculture or livestock are less likely to have an individual seasonal migrant. They also find that households living in less developed regions are more likely to have a short term migrant as a household member. Other studies in the Indian context find that households from socially disadvantaged communities are more likely to have short term migrants (Deshingkar, 2008). In the context of Bangladesh, Khandker et al. (2012) find that the probability of a seasonal migrant being a household member is higher for households with more dependents, or not possessing land, and dependent on wage employment in agriculture. Among other studies on similar lines in the context of other countries is the work by Görlich and Trebesch (2008) who seek to understand the determinants of migration and in particular the determinants of seasonal migrants in Moldova. They find that household size, presence of educated adults and the household's perception of poverty are important correlates of presence of a migrant in a household.

The second strand of the literature identifies the role of seasonal migration on living standards. De Haan (1999) provides a review of literature on the role of migration on livelihoods and poverty from a policy perspective. He argues that migration of workers, between and within urban and rural areas, has to be seen as a critical element in the livelihoods of many households in developing countries, poor as well as rich. A study for rural Vietnam by De Brauw and Harigaya (2007) find that in Vietnam seasonal migration plays an important role in improving a household's per capita expenditure. Their study also suggests that seasonal migration reduces poverty without affecting inequality within rural areas. In another study, De Brauw (2010) examines the effects of seasonal migration on agricultural production and finds that migrant households move out of rice production and shift into more land-intensive crops. In a recent paper, Nguyen and Winters (2011) find that short term migration has a positive effect on overall per capita food expenditures, per capita calorie consumption and food diversity in Vietnam.

Trends and patterns in internal migration

The two main secondary sources of data on population mobility in India are the Census and the National Sample Survey (NSS). These surveys may underestimate some migration flows, such as temporary, seasonal and circulatory migration, both due to empirical and conceptual difficulties. Since such migration and commuting is predominantly employment oriented, the data underestimate the extent of labour mobility. Furthermore, migration data relate to population mobility and not worker mobility, although economic theories of migration are primarily about worker migration. It is not easy to disentangle these, firstly because definitions of migrants used in both surveys (change from birthplace and change in last usual place of residence), are not employment related. Secondly, migration surveys give only the main reason for migration and that only at the time of migration.

Secondary economic reasons could be masked, as in the case of married women, who would cite other reasons for movement. Another problem is that migration data relate to stocks of migrants and not to flows, although different policy concerns relate to stocks (of different ages) and flows. Many of these concerns can be handled only by micro surveys, which have their own problems.

Causes of migration

Given the diversity in the nature of migration in India, the causes are also bound to vary. Migration is influenced both by the pattern of development (NCRL, 1991), and the social structure (Mosse et al, 2002). The National Commission on Rural Labour, focusing on seasonal migration, concluded that uneven development was the main cause of seasonal migration. Along with inter regional

disparity, disparity between different socioeconomic classes and the development policy adopted since independence has accelerated the process of seasonal migration.

Most migration literature makes a distinction between 'pull' and 'push' factors, which, however, do not operate in isolation of one another. Mobility occurs when workers in source areas lack suitable options for employment/livelihood, and there is some expectation of improvement in circumstances through migration. The improvement sought may be better employment or higher wages/incomes, but also maximisation of family employment or smoothing of employment/income/consumption over the year.

At one end of the migration spectrum, workers could be locked into a debt-migration cycle, where earnings from migration are used to repay debts incurred at home or in the destination areas, thereby cementing the migration cycle. At the other end, migration is largely voluntary, although shaped by their limited choices. The NCRL has recognised the existence of this continuum for poor migrants by distinguishing between rural labour migration for survival and for subsistence. The landless poor, who mostly belong to lower caste, indigenous communities, from economically backward regions, migrate for survival and constitute a significant proportion of seasonal labour flow (Study Group on Migrant Labour, 1990).

The growth of intensive agriculture and commercialization of agriculture since the late 1960s has led to peak periods of labour demand, often also coinciding with a decline in local labour deployment. In the case of labour flows to the riceproducing belt of West Bengal, wage differentials between the source and destination have been considered as the main reason for migration. Moreover, absence of non-farm employment, low agricultural production has resulted in a growth of seasonal migration (Rogaly et al, 2001). Migration decisions are influenced by both individual and household characteristics as well as the social matrix, which is best captured in social-anthropological studies.

The impact of migration

On migrants and their families

Poorer migrant workers, crowded into the lower ends of the labour market, have few entitlements vis a vis their employers or the public authorities in the destination areas. They have meagre personal assets and suffer a range of deprivations in the destination areas. In the source areas, migration has both negative and positive consequences for migrants and their families.

Living conditions

Migrant labourers, whether agricultural or non-agricultural, live in deplorable conditions. There is no provision of safe drinking water or hygienic sanitation. Most live in open spaces or makeshift shelters in spite of the Contract Labour Act which stipulates that the contractor or employer should provide suitable accommodation (NCRL, 1991; GVT, 2002; Rani and Shylendra, 2001). Apart from seasonal workers, workers who migrate to the cities for job live in parks and pavements. Slum dwellers, who are mostly migrants, stay in deplorable conditions, with inadequate water and bad drainage. Food costs more for migrant workers who are not able to obtain temporary ration cards.

Health and Education

labourers working in harsh circumstances and living in unhygienic conditions suffer from serious occupational health problems and are vulnerable to disease. Those working in quarries, construction sites and mines suffer from various health hazards, mostly lung diseases. As the employer does not follow safety measures, accidents are quite frequent. Migrants cannot access various health and family care programmes due to their temporary status. Free public health care facilities and programmes are not accessible to them. For women workers, there is no provision of maternity leave, forcing them to resume work almost immediately after childbirth. Workers, particularly those working in tile factories and brick kilns suffer from occupational health hazards such as body ache, sunstroke and skin irritation (NCRL, 1991).

As there are no crèche facilities, children often accompany their families to the workplace to be exposed to health hazards. They are also deprived of education: the schooling system at home does not take into account their migration pattern and their temporary status in the destination areas does not make

them eligible for schooling there (Rogaly et al, 2001; 2002). In the case of male-only migration, the impact on family relations and on women, children and the elderly left behind can be quite significant.

Policy issues and recommendations

The nature of labour migration in India is linked, on the one hand, to the pattern of (uneven) development accentuated by several dimensions of policy, and, on the other, to a pattern of capitalist growth, which has implied continued and growing informalisation of the rural and urban economy. We have argued earlier in this paper that this pattern of development, apart from being inimical to the poor regions, is consistent with a 'low road' to capitalist development, constraining the possibility of more rapid growth and technical change. In the light of this, as was rightly observed by the National Commission on Rural Labour (1991), migration policy has to be concerned not only with supporting migrants, but also with the mutual links between migration and development. Some of the major issues in this context are summarised below.

Pro-poor development in backward areas

One major set of policy initiatives has to address a more vigorous pro-poor development strategy in backward areas. This could take the form of land and water management through the watershed approach and public investment in the source area. These strategies need to be accompanied by changes that improve the poor's access to land, to common property resources, social and physical infrastructure, and to governance institutions. The latter set of changes will require strong organisational intervention by, and on behalf of, the poor (cf. NCRL 1991 for a similar set of recommendations). In rain-fed areas, the scope for an Employment Guarantee type of scheme, which dovetails with the need for the building of physical and social infrastructure, should be explored.

Food and Credit based interventions.

Development in poor regions may ameliorate some of the highly negative features of labour migration. Further steps can be taken to strengthen the position of the poor who resort to survival migration. This involves helping the poor overcome two major constraints that they face; food and credit. Access to food can be improved through a more effective public distribution system, through grain bank schemes, or through 'food for work' schemes. Organising the poor into self-help or savings groups, specifically tailored to the requirements of migrants, could help increase access to credit.

Ensuring basic entitlements in other schemes

A major policy focus has to be on ensuring that migrant households are able to access benefits of public programmes meant for poor households. A special focus has to be ensuring access of migrant labourers' children to schooling (and that they are not pushed into labour). There is scope for learning from the experiences of community based interventions (MV Foundation, GVT) as well as government programmes (Lok Jumbish, DPEP).

Improving the information base and bargaining strength of migrant workers

As described earlier, poor migrant workers lack bargaining strength. Further, their sense of vulnerability and social isolation is exacerbated by their ignorance, illiteracy and the alien environment in which they have to work. NGOs and governmental authorities have taken various routes to improve the information base and bargaining strength of migrant workers. Some of the NGO strategies have been discussed in the preceding section.

Role of Panchayats

Panchayats should emerge as the focus of the resource pool for migrant workers residing in their area. They should maintain a register of migrant workers and issue identity cards and pass books to them. Further, it should be mandatory for recruiters to deposit with the panchayats a list of the labourers recruited by them along with other employment details. With growing IT based communication, it may become possible for panchayats or NGOs to maintain a record of potential employers and employees.

Enforcement of labour laws

At the work place, stricter enforcement of labour laws is essential. It must be mandatory on employers to maintain the record of payments and advances in workers' passbooks, and to provide them with the basic facilities laid down by law. This may, however, also call for a scrutiny and simplification of some of these laws. The subjection of contractors and employers to the rule of law requires commitment on the part of the government. The Inter-State Migrant Workmen Act is one of the important pieces of legislation affecting inter-state migrant workers, who are often employed under very poor conditions. The Act requires both modifications and more rigorous implementation. In particular, the filing of complaints by third parties and trade unions and the constitution of an inter-state coordination mechanism should be taken up as proposed by the Tenth Plan Working Group on Migrant Labour.

Socio-economic Profile of Respondents

The distribution of in-migrants according to their socio-economic background has been discussed under various heads:

Age Group - According to the socio-economic profile of the respondents, 58.9 per cent of the long-term migrants and 75 per cent of the short-term migrants were in the age group of 21-40 years, while 32.9 per cent and 15.6 per cent were in the age group of 0-20 years, respectively. Thus, the number of migrants was more in 21-40 years age group because it is the preferred age-segment by employers because labourers in this group can undertake agricultural operations.

Caste and Religion - The majority (55%) of the respondents were of general caste category in both long-term and short-term migrants. It was because of the social stigma attached with working as a labourer that they do not work as labourers at their native place but accept it at other place. As far as the religion of the long-term and short-term migrants was concerned, nearly 96 per cent of the respondents belonged to the Hindu religion, while rest was Muslims.

Educational Level - The illiteracy of migrants was an important factor which gave impetus to migration, as revealed by the study. Among long-term migrants, 67.1 per cent were illiterate, 26.0 per cent had studied up to the primary level, 5.5 per cent up to middle standard and only 1.4 per cent up to matric level. There were 78.1 per cent illiterates among short-term migrants, while 15.6 per cent had studied up to the primary level and only 6.3 per cent were matriculates. Thus, the majority of migrants were illiterates and only a few had studied up to fifth standard.

Period of Migration - With the advent of green revolution in early-1970s there was considerable migration of labour to Punjab from other states of the country for better employment opportunities. In this study, it was the first decade of the 21st century during which largest influx (64.8%) of the migration took place. Among them, the number of short-term migrants who visited Punjab to do agricultural-related work was more.

Income of the respondents - It is the low income in the native place which induces migration to the areas of better livelihood opportunities. In the present study, the monthly income of 31.5 per cent long-term migrants was in the range 3000-4000 and of equal number was in the range 4000-5000 while 26.0 per cent of respondents were earning 5000 to 10000. Among short-term migrants also, 31.3 per cent were earning income in the range of 4000-5000 and 28.1 per cent had income in the range 3000-4000. On overall basis, maximum income of 5000-10000 was being earned by 25.7 per cent respondents, followed by 4000-5000 by 31.4 per cent, 3000-4000 by 30.5 per cent and 2000-3000 by 11.4 per cent. So, nearly 87 per cent respondents had monthly income of 3000 to 10000.

Factors Leading to Migration

The people migrate in order to attain a better economic status in life. It was observed that low wages at the native place was the major economic factor which contributed to the migration of 94.3 per cent migrants. Besides, rainfed agriculture (60.0%), small size of holding (52.4%), landlessness (50.5%), indebtedness (39.0%), crop failure (30.5%) and unemployment (22.9%) were other economic reasons which led to migration. Therefore, low wages accompanied by poverty were the major reasons of migration as revealed by the sample respondents.

Social factors are more pronounced than economic and thereby induce migration tendency among people. Poverty (85.7%) and less civic amenities (79.1%) were reported as the major social reasons behind migration. Unpleasant social relations (6.9%) and political intimidation (4.1%) were the social factors leading to long-term migration by some of the respondents.

The psychological factors inducing migration were leading a poor life (92.4%), high aspirations (77.1%) and demonstration effect (59.0%). Similar trends were seen for both long-term and short-term migrations.

Conclusions

The study has revealed that most of the migrants were in the age of thirties and forties, belonged to general castes with faith in Hindu religion, were mostly illiterates and migrated in the first decade of 21st century. Nearly 62 per cent of the migrants were earning a monthly income of 3000-5000. Low wages and rain-fed agriculture in the native place have been found the economic factors leading to migration, while poverty, poor civic amenities, leading a poor life, high aspirations and demonstration effect were social and psychological factors resulting to migration. Before migration, about 23 per cent persons were unemployed and 60 per cent were getting less than 250 days employment per year, but after migration, 41 per cent got more than 300 days of employment and 31 per cent got employment for 250-300 days.

As far as income is concerned, before migration 49 per cent migrants were earning less than 10000 per annum, while after migration 34 per cent could earn more than 50000 and 28 per cent could get between 40000 and 50000 per annum. Nearly 58 per cent long-term migrants sent 50-70 per cent of their income as remittances back home. A general perception of the farmers regarding migration of labour was that it has resulted in increased supply of labour, decreased wage rates and increased social tension, crime, drug menace and cultural invasion.

Despite this, Punjab farmers preferred migrant labour due to their timely availability, quality of work and low wages. Some farmers preferred local labourers due to their trust worthiness and adjustment for advance payments. Among various farm operations, migrant labourers were preferred for transplanting of paddy, while for harvesting, threshing, cattle tending, sowing, spraying, hoeing and tractor driving local labourers was preferred by most of the farmers.

Thus, in an overall scenario, migration of labour for agricultural purposes has been found beneficial for the agriculture, with the exception of increase in crime rate, drug menace and cultural invasion. There is a need of government intervention to get the antecedents of migrant labour verified from their respective native states before employment by the Punjab farmers. The Government should also maintain a demographic balance by regulating the inflow of migrants.

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