

## Seasonal Migration in India

Puja Rawat  
Department of Economics  
H.N.B. Garhwal University, Srinagar, Uttarakhand, India  
Email: pujarawat107@gmail.com

### Abstract

Seasonal and circular migration of labour for employment has become one of the most durable components of the livelihood strategies of people living in rural areas. Migration is not just by the very poor during times of crisis for survival and coping but has increasingly become an accumulative option for the poor and non-poor alike. Going beyond the labour economics principles migration patterns are determined by people's access to resources, the institutional, market, policy environment, intra-household relations, wider social relations and not just by the productivity and demand for labour in an area

**Keywords:** Seasonal migration, remittances, internal migration, rural distress

### Introduction

The mobility of labour, as one of the factors of production, which arises due to inequality in economic development, is often hindered by laws and legislations passed by the government. These restrictions are more in case of international migration. According to UN estimates, from 1970 to 2005, the stock of international migrants in the world increased from nearly 82 million to just over 190 million. Indeed, as a fraction of world population, the number of international migrants rose only slightly, from 2.5% in 1960 to 2.9% by 2005. However, when it comes to interval migration within India, the figures are highly underestimated and temporary or circular migration unaccounted for.

A large number of village studies from different forests of the country conducted in the past five years shows show a marked increase in temporary migration for work. This includes seasonal migration, circular migration and other forms of short term migration. Many academicians and policy makers have taken a rather negative view of migration Breman (1985) on migration in Gujarat and Reddy (1990) on migration in Andhra Pradesh). They viewed migration as a symptom of rural distress which is largely

linked to the poor agricultural for employment or better employment or in search of employment.” In 1991, over 39 million people migrated in rural-urban patterns of which 54 percent were female. Seasonal urban migration is also evident throughout India in cities where many migrants move into the city during periods of hardship and return to their native villages for events such as harvest (Inspite of all these facts, an organized study in this regard is not possible as the census data does not cover seasonal migration among workers). Inspite of there being excessive pressure on the resources of some of our major cities due to rapid urbanization on a result of migration, no concrete step or policy has been made to this effect. Infact the NSS data of 1999-2000 is the only official source on the phenomenon of temporary migration, and no such survey has been done in the past ten years. The overpopulated cities, lack of safe drinking water, discrimination against migrants at work places, poor sanitation facilities, etc. prevalent in the cities have not been enough to attract the attention of the policy makers resulting in no laws for the protection of migrant’s rights in the destination areas which even dipped down to negative in the past few years – 1.6% fall in overall agricultural GDP in 2008-09 (Economic Survey 2009-10). Largely dependent on monsoon rains for irrigation, the agricultural or primary sector attracts less investment and hence less growth. Also, agriculture in India is highly unregulated and unorganised, providing employment to around 52% of the workforce. Thus a dip in agriculture is reflected in more farmer distress and mass movement of rural population to urban areas in search of employment or better employment.

### **Types of Labour Migration**

Labour migration is broadly classified into internal and international migration within internal migration there can inter-state. inter-sector, rural urban migration. Depending on the duration of the stay of the migrant in the most country, migration is further divided into permanent and temporary or “circular migration”, which can be defined as “a temporary move from, followed by return to the normal place of residence.”

Internal migration has now become a key factor in influencing social and economic development, especially in developing countries. Rural-urban migration is

most common in India, after rural rural migration. Within the rural regions as well, people choose to move to places which provide turn better economic facilities.

### **Watershed Development in India**

Currently, US \$ 1000 million in invested yearly in watershed development programme (WSD) that are implemented by a range of Departments at the centre and state level. The goal of most watershed projects is to increase agricultural productivity through soil and water conservation and rainwater harvesting at the micro-watershed scale. In addition to the above objectives, watershed development aims to increase employment through labour intensive soil and water conservation. Besides the short-term effects of watershed development on rural employment (there is a widespread belief that if WSD programmes succeed then they will reduce the flow of migration. WSD implementation can affect migration two year an increase in short term employment as well as long term productivity gains. The evidences indicates that many WSD programmes do succeed in reducing migration rates at least during the implementation phase. For example, a study by the central Research Institute of Dryland Agriculture (CRIDA) of 37 watersheds located across different agro-ecological zones showed that migration rates had been reduced is nearly all of them and the reduction ranged from 22% in Ministry of Rural Development (MORD) implemented watershed to 42% in non-governmental organization (NGO) implemented ones.

Policy needs to recognize that migration is an integral and regular part of livelihood strategies and production systems; that migration is also undertaken for high-return employment and not only because of shocks and stresses such as drought i.e. migration can be accumulative or coping. The problem of migration can b e curbed only by combined efforts of the states government, NGOs, labour unions and employer. It is also important to realise that migration has social, cultural and traditional impacts as well. Important among there is the social exclusion of migrants and depriving them of the labour rights Rogaly et.al (2001) advocate public action to address the exclusion of migrants from health sector and other social protection.

## Labour Migration: Causes and Consequences

With the advent of industrialization, employment oriented migration gained pace as demanded by capitalistic growth. Even since, internal as well as international migration has led to large demographic changes throughout the world: It has been widely realised, today, that migration of any type and at any level has long lasting social, cultural economic and psychological impacts on both source and destination society. Hence, in this era of new localism, environmental feminisms and populism – all of which have welfare of the masses as the focus, the plight of these migrants cannot go unnoticed. Surveys, researches and seminars are organised at international, national as well as local level to get accurate statistics about their economic and social conditions. But knowing is not enough, appropriate methods and procedures in the form of schemes and policies should be devised which could ultimately prove beneficial to those migrated in search employment. Any study done without practical applicability might get applauded due to its sound theoretical base. To what extent it is able to directly or indirectly help in making life easier for people, is the real test of its success.

Labour migration takes place primarily because of three factors: push factors, pull factors and cultural or family ties. Push factors include all those problem – societal, economic, cultural which the people face at their native places which force them to leave their homelands. These include lack of employment opportunities, sudden natural calamity drought **famine**, earthquake, floods, etc. social discrimination on the basis of caste, class, or gender, excess population, search for better employment opportunities which basically leads to accumulative economic migration) development etc. There are other reasons which facilitate the migration of people including their social networks, intermediaries or private agents; transportation and communication costs.

Pull factors inducing migration include – higher employment opportunities in destination regions, economic disparity between developed and developing region, better political environment, more suitable social conditions, etc. Besides these push and pull factors which are both economic as well as non-economic in nature, there can also be a specifically market driven labour migration which arises due to the mismatch between demand and supply of labour. But this analysis of migration is rooted in economic theory

(Todaro, 1976) focusing on the rational behaviour of individuals. More recently, economic theories have been broadened to accommodate transaction costs, imperfect information as well as imperfections in rural capital markets. These 'new' economics of labour migration also recognized the household as the unit of decision making according to the incentives and constraints it faces. The New Economics of Labour Migration (NELM) framework of analysis (Taylor 1991) addresses the multiplicity of factors which underlie the decision to migrate and the possible effects of migration on both migrant origin and destination economics.

### **Analysis**

Labour, as a factor of production, can be regarded as a relatively mobile one. Like all other markets in economics, labour market also works on the principle of demand and supply with (wages being determined where demand of labour coincides with the supply of labour). Assuming that there are no rules and legislation to control labour movements and there is minimal or no transportation costs, it would render the supply curve of labour as perfectly elastic. In such a case, a single wage rate will prevail throughout the system – state, region or country, whatever the case may be. But, for any given sector, this is a hypothetical situation (In any case, such a full migration induced elasticity in supply of labour, though an ideal economic model, is neither desirable nor possible).

Since the first instances of large scale migration known, the economic question of facilitating mobility of labour is subordinated by nation states to the political issue of migrants as new citizen or invades. But migration of labour does take place across borders, within the country or between rural and urban sectors of a country. Labour moves from where it is in excess to the region where it is scarce. It moves in an expectation to get higher wages or better employment. This relieves off the burden of the sending region and leads to economic development of the receiving region. Mostly, workers get higher wages and their standard of living increases. Thus, studying the economic model of migration, isolation reveals all positive effects of migration.

In case of India, large scale migration takes place from traditional sector to industrialized sector. In this way, the agricultural sector is relieved off those labourers

who are disguisedly unemployed. These labourers or migrant workers are illiterate and unskilled and hence there is low demand of such workers in the industrialized sector of the urban areas. Thus, they end up getting subsumed in the unorganised sector of the urban sector. These labourers hardly prove beneficial to the destination where they migrated. They tend to overburdening of the urban areas, pressure on civic amenities, expansion of slum areas in the outskirts of the cities, environmental degradation and other such harmful effects.

The above example of India is a good example of migration proving harmful to the people which was earlier conceived simply as a phenomenon necessary for capitalistic growth. It shows that an ecological approach is necessary while undertaking migration studies as it has different impacts on different regions depending on the stage of development, demographic scenario and nature of migration.

### **A Model**

The entire process of migration from rural to urban areas or from less developed to more developed rural areas for the sake of employment, which effects the maximum number of households in India can be understood in the form of a model. We have already taken into consideration the factors effecting labour migration in Indian and the consequences it has. Though the model given below is applicable to any form of migration, it basically aims at carving out ways and methodologies which the government can adopt to manage labour migration in India.

**Assumptions:** There are three levels – Level 1 (Low), Level 2 (medium) and Level 3 (high) of pressure exerted by incoming migrants on civic amenities in urban areas. These levels can be calculated by using per capita availability of civic amenities in the urban areas. Secondly, there are again three levels low, medium and high of the expected per capita increase in income by the migrants as compared to their income or wages in the villages.

This can be further depicted in the form of a table :-

**Level or pressure on civic amenities**

**in urban areas**

		1	2	3
<b>Expected per capita increase in income by migration</b>	1	√	X	X
	2	√	-	X
	3	√	√	X

### Understanding Labour Migration

UN Convention 2003 defines a migrant worker as ‘A person who is to be engaged, is engaged or has been engaged in a remunerated activity in a state of which he or she is not a national. There are basically two kinds of labour migration.

1. Temporary labour migration – is the relocation of a worker to a place of work outside of his home country, state or region for a limited period of time as stated in the terms of a labour contract.
2. Permanent Labour migration – is the resettlement of a worker in place outside his own country or state or village in perpetuity.

### The Case of Interval Migration in India

A major problem to undertake migration studies in case of India is the lack of reliable and authentic records which could serve as the secondary data for research. This is despite the fact that 10 million people or roughly 1% of Indian population migrated temporarily in 1999-2000, according to the 55<sup>th</sup> round of the National Sample Survey. It defined “migrated temporarily” as “stayed away from their usual place of residence for 60 days or more retain their position as top recipients of migrant remittance among developing countries. But, the remittances flow to South Asia and East Asia has not been much effected in 2009 due to the fact that Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) Countries, a major destination for Asian migrants, have not significantly reduced hiring migrants.

## **International Labour Migration**

International labour migration – forced or free is not a new phenomenon. In the modern period large scale migration of slave labour took place from Africa to America. Huge number of migrants left their places of birth in search of better employment in the second half of both 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, especially to the Americas, Africa and Antipodes.

Current international migration flows can be attributed to basically two reasons:-

- (i) Demographic pattern of developed countries is such that there is a decline seen in the total national labour force available. Thus either they set up their industries where there are only 6.1 million migrants from abroad (97% of them from eight neighbouring countries) as compared to 42.3 million inter-state migrants. Hence, the focus of the study will be tilted towards international migration.
- (ii) Excessive emphasis on raising the skills has left hardly any individually ready to undertake unskilled work in developed countries. Again, the need arises for an unskilled labour force which is willing to work at cheaper rates.

There are several “push” and “pull factors” involved when an individual or a household decides to leave his homeland to a distant land in search of employment or better employment. This might adversely or positively impact the labour markets of the sending and receiving regions. If unregulated, migration can lead to unsustainable migration can lead to unsustainable development in the host countries/states. This will put undue pressure on the civic amenities leading to haphazard growth. On the other hand, mobility of labour – movement wherever work is created is necessary for rapid economic development. Thus, the policy makers should sought out an “optional migration level” which can lead the region to a higher growth trajectory without causing unbalance development.

## **Impact of Global Recession on Migrant Remittances**

Migrant remittances have been a major source of balance of payments support in many of the emerging economies including India. This flow also helps in poverty alleviation, as a significant part of the remittances is in the nature of transfers for family maintenance. According to the World Bank estimates (July 2009), remittances flow to developing countries which increased to US \$ 328 billion in 2008 from US \$ 285 billion in 2007, are projected to decline by 7.3% in 2009. India, China and Mexico labour is available (cheap labour) or they readily recruit foreign nationals in order to keep their output intact. This demand for labour is fulfilled by the migrants mostly from developing countries.

In this fact globalizing world, which has often been accused of increasing the economic inequality between the rich and the poor countries, around 190 million people are migrating every year (UN, 2005 figures). This type of global migration has the capacity to maintain and stimulate an accelerated and sustainable economic development which in turn can be channelised to decrease world poverty. Warnsky and Winters (2003) estimate that a 3 percent expansion of global migration could generate a larger increase in world incomes than a complete liberalization of trade flows in India migrate from rural to urban areas as compared to a much higher 53.3 millions migrating from rural to rural sector. Uttar Pradesh (-2.6 million) and Bihar (-1.7 million) were the two states with largest number of net migrants migrating out of the state.

The global economic and financial crisis of 2008 led to economic slowdown and massive job loss throughout the world. This naturally affected the interests of the migrants who become most vulnerable in such global slowdown. The effect on the worker depends on the destination country he had migrated to and to what extent the sector in which he works has been affected by the recession. Since it was the industrialized countries (including US, UK, Europe) who were most adversely affected by the recession, migrants here had a hard time. Traces of this global financial crisis is still visible in the form of the Euro Zone Debate in the EU.

Migrant workers are particularly high in sectors like construction, manufacturing, hotels and restaurants. These, unfortunately, are also among the worst hit by the

economic crisis. In the United States, Ireland, Spain and UAE, unemployment increased significantly between 2007 and 2009. In comparison to the total labour force, the unemployment rate for migrant workers is particularly high in case of Spain – 17% Vs. 13.4% in the third quarter of 2008 while in Ireland, it was 9.5% Vs. 7.4% in the fourth quarter of 2008.

In a research paper named ‘The global economic crisis and migrant workers. Impacts and response; International Labour organisation assesses the impact of economic crisis on international labour migration as it is constitutionally entrusted with the task of safeguarding the interests of the migrant workers. According to the report, the break labour market conditions due to the increased number of unemployed as a result of job losses will particularly effect the interests of women, migrant workers and youth.

### **Conclusion**

According to ILO, international migrants in 2010, estimated at 214 million, represent only 3 per cent of the global population. Economically active migrant workers out of this number around 105 million in 2010. Women make up almost 50 percent of international migrants. Migration today is for work and migrant workers and their families account for about 90 percent of total international migrants. These developments pose important challenges for the four pillars of labour migration policy : governance, protection, development and co-operation. The challenge is to govern migration so that it creates growth and prosperity in both origin and destination countries, while protecting and benefiting migrant workers themselves.

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