

Kurushetra Vol. 59 No. 2 December 2010

MIGRATION TRENDS AND IMPACT ON INDIA: GENDERED ASPECTS AND DIMENSIONS

Subhashree Sanjay

When one talks about the gendered perspective to migration, it does not essentially mean that we are negating the presence of the large working force of "male labourers" but bringing to light the inadequate attention towards the importance of women labourers who form an essential part of the migrant population and also their relevant contribution. Often it is seen that studies on migration is "Gender Neutral" which rules out the essential components of women's contribution to this work force and hence theories on migration seems largely skewed. This paper highlights migration in India and importance and impact of gendered component in migration.

Key Words: Rural-Urban Migration, Migration, Gender, Women, Female Migrants

Urbanization in India is a result of economic development. This escalating forward leap especially in big cities and metropolitans in India has played an essential pull factor towards rural-urban migration. Rural-urban migration means movement of working population from the countryside to the city. Two predominant causes can be attached to this, one would be mainly urban growth which indicates towns and cities are

expanding, covering a greater area of land and the second very much following the first would be urbanisation meaning an increasing proportion of people living in towns and mega cities with over 10 million people. It can also be deduced that bulk of the working population in rural areas are attracted to this pull force as the majority mindset thinks that working and living opportunities would be much better compared to what position they are in at present.



18 Kurushetra, December 2010

It may be interesting to note that rural-urban migration in India is also leading to rural depopulation. Rural depopulation is when a large number of working age/workforce people migrates from the rural villages and small towns to earn more money in the city. They leave behind the old and the young. This is also impacting adversely the agriculturally forward states in the country. Culling down from this let us see the trends and impacts of female migration in India.

Female Migration trends in India

If one looks at census data of various states we see a different trend in rural-rural and rural-urban migration in different states of India. One can largely conclude seeing the NSSO data that woman migrants are more in count in rural migration in the least developed states while they are more in number in southern region both in rural and urban migration. However when we look at rural-urban migration of males and females, we can see a large percentage movement in more developed states. Similarly proximity to different metropolitans also encourages urban-urban migration. On the it can be seen that low developed states like Orissa, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh has a high trend of rural-urban migration due to better opportunities for livelihood elsewhere.

Studies done in the past by Shanthi et al, (1993) highlight the fact that it is the males who were "associational migrants" and not women. However what can be noted is that recent trends show that families had migrated in retort to female economic prospect (as domestic servants, as vegetable vendors, flower vendors in front of the temple etc) and they are the primary or equal earners. Male employment often being unbalanced and uncertain, and entry barriers are many in male jobs and the waiting period is quite long, it is not so in the case of female jobs where they have easy entry and exit in domestic and personalized services. Their earnings may be low but vital for family endurance. They get paid in 'kind' often, which help them fight malnutrition particularly of infants.

However what makes up stop and think is that all national surveys and data collection methods and devices are designed in such a way that they have systematically keep the role of woman as primary earners impacting migration quite invisible and hence consequently no national policies, schemes and directives are made for their benefit. It is a pity that this workforce has been regarded as secondary, often attaching their migration primarily to the reasons of

Table: Urbanization in India: Decadal Trend and Growth

Census Year	Percentage of Urban population to total population	Urban Population (millions)	Difference over the previous decade	Decadal urban growth rate (%)	No of towns
1901	10.85	25.8			1827
1911	10.29	25.9	0.1	0.4	1815
1921	11.18	28.1	2.2	8.3	1949
1931	11.99	33.5	5.4	19.1	2072
1941	13.86	44.1	10.6	32	2250
1951	17.29	62.4	18.3	41.4	2843
1961	17.97	78.9	16.5	26.4	2365
1971	19.91	109.1	30.2	38.2	2590
1981	23.34	159.4	50.3	46.1	3378
1991	25.71	217.6	58.2	36.4	3768
2001	27.78	285.4	67.8	—	—

Source: Urban Statistics Handbook 2000 National Institute of Urban Affairs, New Delhi.

19 Kurushetra, December 2010

Written by Administrator

Saturday, 11 December 2010 06:56 - Last Updated Saturday, 11 December 2010 07:02

marriage. Domestic jobs are often not regarded as important enough and often ignored being listed in surveys. Somehow relevant questions like who migrated first, associational migration of males and acknowledgement of female as a workforce member and contributor has been systematically absent. However the 55th round of NSSO data published in August 2001 highlights an increase in migrant female workforce and females who sought work post migration. We can therefore account that both the "push" and "pull" factors play an important role on female migration and participation in workforce.

Female migration and impacts

While talking about the impact of migration linking it to gendered perspectives we can say that migration has impacted a few Millennium Development goals (MDG). The third MDG speaks about promoting gender equality and empowerment of women. Even the UNFPA [United Nations Population Fund] stresses and highlights the importance of migration and how this can bring about empowerment of women by providing opportunities for female migrants and women whose husbands have migrated with certain income and greater status, autonomy and self-esteem.

Here one thing may be noted carefully that migration to the type of workforce is also an essential component. If women migrants are greater absorbed in domestic jobs they might lose out on social security measures and be more vulnerable in certain aspects. This can also put a big question on empowerment issue. Goal five which talks of reducing maternal mortality can be impacted by migration. Rural-urban migration could provide increased opportunity for migrants female to have safe institutional delivery in government hospitals of different metropolitans in India. However the accessibility and affordability issue can again be questioned on these grounds. Migrant female force can also have greater access to different government schemes and programmes and gain greater awareness through

different and large civil society organizations working as supportive government satellites in different metropolitan and urban towns

Commentary:

While looking at the trends and impacts of migration we can say that though migration gives a greater push to women empowerment and economic independence it brings with it issues of unorganized labour impacting social security of women. Being a part of the domestic job sector women largely are subject to exploitation increasing their vulnerabilities. While recognition of them as workforce is neglected, women are often underpaid in the same job profile as men in urban metropolis. This can be seen in a boom for the construction industry where female and male workers hired for the same job profile and same working hours are differently paid. Questions can be raised on the security of female migrants, be it vulnerability from employers, economic and often sexual exploitation. In addition, sexual harassment at workplace is another grave issue that can be seen.

Little do we realise that this migrant force play a key role in the development process of a country. The biggest question is "Whose Development" and at "Whose cost". The marginalisation of migrant workers has been a common trend and female migrant workers face the most of it. Policies and schemes have also started treating the female labour force as invisible; therefore though migration impacts positively different aspects of Millennium Development Goals, one can really question the true benefits for women when it comes to evaluation of gendered impacts and benefits in the biggest democracy of the world where we speak of rights for the fairer sex.

[The author is Assistant Professor, Department of Social Work, Assam (Central) University, Silchar, Assam. email: subhashreesanyal@gmail.com/sanyal.subhashree@yahoo.in]