



### Migration of Labour - A View after Corona

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#### Abstract:

*The world is witnessing an unprecedented disaster because of Covid-19, which has brought all humans imprisoned in their house and all industrial activities to a halt. The shutdown of the Industrial activities is unprecedented. The case in India is not much different as most of the industrial activities have come to a halt. The prolonged lockdowns, beginning March 25, led a reverse migration with workers leaving cities and going back to their home states or districts or villages. The industries activities were shut down and their wages were struck with the employers. So, it was a big challenge for them of paying house rent and taking care of their basic needs, apart from health concerns. A number of migrant workers who fled the big cities may possibly never return, preferring to eke out a living on their marginal farms or find work in nearby towns. Before the arrival of Britishers India was predominantly a confined agricultural economy. Village was the smallest self-sufficient unit in fulfilling the needs of the people. The rough British policies had started migration from rural to semi-urban and semi-urban to cities areas. After the Independence the rural to urban migration in the wake of fast growth of the industry in the country became widespread. There are many reasons for urban to rural migration that includes- tendency to look for jobs, improved transportation, urban oriented education, modernization, impact of vast malls and entertainment facilities. A large number of rural people have been forced to migrate to urban areas because of shortage of livelihood in rural areas and shortage of agricultural and related occupations. Poverty, lack of local options and the non- availability of work in elsewhere become the trigger and the pull for rural migration. In an unorganized and chaotic labour market, migrant workers regularly face struggles and disputes at worksites. We cannot conclude that migration is a bad phenomenon, but we have seen that during the disaster, the migrate labourers are most suffer. They lost their jobs and the question of their livelihood stand in front of them. In fact, migrants play a vital role in the development of Metro and big cities and industrialisation of our country depends on these workers. We have to sort out the problems of migrants labourer, so that in coming years, they have not to leave their work place in disaster like Corona.*

**Key Word:** Unprecedented disaster, Migrants labourer, Economy, lockdown.

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The world is witnessing an unprecedented disaster because of Covid-19, which has brought all humans imprisoned in their house and all industrial activities to a halt. The industrial sector is facing shutdown in many parts of the world. The shutdown of the Industrial activities is unprecedented. The case in India is not much different as most of the industrial activities have come to a halt. In our country, 90 percent of our workforce is in un-organised sector and they have lost their source of income as businesses have come to a halt. Their savings are meagre and the employers cannot step in to help as they have also been impacted. The prolonged lockdowns, beginning March 25, led a reverse migration with workers leaving cities and going back to their home states or districts or villages. The industries activities were shut and it was a big challenge for them of paying house rent and taking care of their basic needs, apart from health concerns. The sudden lockdown and the resulting shutdown of transport created a crisis in many states as these shocked migrant workers decided to walk on foot to reach their home. 5 to 6 lakhs of workers had gathered to walk through national or state highways to reach their hometown or village because public transport was not available to them. They travelled miles on foot to reach their villages. Indian Government intervened and kept these workers in shelter homes set up by various state governments, while thousands were kept under quarantine facility, if they reached their destination before allowing them to meet their families. This sudden displacement of migrant labour would have far-reaching negative impact on the Indian economy. A number of migrant workers who had bitter experience of this lockdown and left the big cities, may never return. They would prefer to earn their living on their marginal farms or find work in nearby towns.

Before the arrival of Britishers India was predominantly a confined agricultural economy. Migration of people from one part to another was restricted because people were used to engage in agro-based rural social economic operation within their own villages. Village was the smallest unit which was self-sufficient in fulfilling the needs of the people as the needs of the people were small. Modern transport and communication facilities are also not available and this also discouraged the residents to migrate from their native places. But the economic condition of our country has changed completely under the British colonial rule. After the Battle of Plassey, the British company had also captured the political power in Bengal and Bihar. In the next 50 years the control of British Company extends to whole of the country. The land revenue became an instrument of plundering the wealth of the country. This policy had serious repercussions on Indian agriculture and derelict the village economy completely. The Zamindari system introduced by Britishers under the permanent settlement system turnout to be quite exploitative. Furthermore, the blatant exploitation of the peasants made Indian villages vulnerable to famines. Britishers also systematically and deliberately destroyed the Indian cottage village industries by levying heavy import duty on Indian products and by keeping British goods imported to India duty free. Starting of Railways and other improved communication and transport facilitate the internal

migration from villages to cities and cities to big Cities. These British policies had started migration from rural to semi-urban and semi-urban to cities areas.

Later on, forest enclosures and India's rapid population growth enhanced the number of internal migrants. British capitalist established Jute mills, sugar mills and textile mills in various parts of the country and established large tea, coffee and rubber plantation farms. These developments had created enormous demand for labours and this demand was fulfilled by starved rural areas. It is estimated that nearly one million farmers from overcrowded lands in the Bengal had migrated to the Assam during the first three decades of 19th century. The eastern district of Uttar Pradesh, the eastern Madhya Pradesh and West Bihar were the out migrants' areas in India during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Migration affects the supply of skilled and unskilled labourers to the growing industries and changed in the employment structure and demography of the country. It also affects economic and social developments of our country. Migration is a demographic event which casts effects on the socio-economic and cultural development of any country.

*Migration is defined as a move from one migration defining area to another, usually crossing administrative boundaries made during a given migration interval and involving a change of residence.*<sup>2</sup> After the Independence the rural to urban migration due to fast growth of the industry in the country became widespread. The birth rate in India was increasing and the death rate was decreasing due to improved medical facilities. The land-man ratio increased adversely due to growing pressure of population on land. This growing population also resulted in subdivision and fragmentation of land holdings and on these fragmented holding there is not much scope for raising the farm productivity. The percentage increase in urban population has been constantly greater than the percentage increase in rural population for all decades since 1911 indicating swelling urbanization of the Indian Economy. The Urban population of India in 1901 was 25.9 million which was meagre 10.9% of total population of 238 million. By 1951, India's urban population has increased to 62.4 million and this urban population rose to 377 million in 2011 which was 31percent of total population of 1201 million. Migration of people from rural to urban was the main reason for this percentage increase of urban population despite the urban settlements have increased during the period. The results from 2011 census show a huge number of small towns which emerged in the last ten years (2001- 2011).

A little above 2,500 new towns cropped up during this period while it had taken India almost sixty years to develop only 1,362 census towns which is nearly double the number emerged in just ten years. These small towns are called census town whose population has attained urban characteristics and at least 75 per cent of the population is engaged in non-agriculture employment. These census towns have a minimum population of 5000 and a density of population of at least 4000 per square km. These

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<sup>2</sup> The United Nation's definition of migration in 1993.

towns are satellite towns growing in response to the spur of economic activities. Most of these small towns are concentrated in Kerala, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal. Our south states like Kerala, Karnataka and Tamilnadu have also shown incredible growth trend towards urbanization. Other states like, Haryana, Punjab, Uttrakhand and Delhi including NCR have also shown faster urbanization. The migration stream from 1981 to 2011 shows that population from Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, Punjab and Andhra Pradesh migrated mainly to Maharashtra, Bengal, Assam and Karnataka. Workers largely migrate to Delhi and other metropolitan cities because opportunities of employment, education and other facilities are available there. A large number of these migrants were educated. Bangalore, Mumbai, Hyderabad, Delhi including NCR became hub of these educated migrants.

*As per census 2011, the total number of workers (who have worked at least one day during the reference year) in India, is 481.7 million. The workers have registered a growth of 19.8%, which is marginally higher than the overall population growth rate of 17.7% during the decade. Out of these workers 348.6 million workers are in rural areas and 133.1 million are in the urban areas (census 2011). As per census, nearly 55% of the workers are engaged in agricultural activities compared to 58.2% in census 2001.*

#### Reasons for Migration of Rural-Urban Migrants, 2001, 2011

	Male					Female				
	Work	Study	Family	Other	Total	Work	Study	Family	Other	Total
Total in 2011	49.7%	4.1%	36.4%	9.9%	100%	5.1%	2.0%	86.5%	6.4%	100%
Total in 2001	55.2%	3.7%	27.8%	13.3%	100%	4.1%	1.2%	85.3%	9.3%	100%
Within districts 2011	42.2%	5.5%	35.2%	17.0%	100%	3.1%	1.6%	85.7%	9.6%	100%
Other districts (within State) 2011	54.7%	4.4%	28.3%	12.7%	100%	4.7%	1.2%	84.6%	9.5%	100%
Inter State 2011	66.6%	1.6%	21.1%	10.7%	100%	5.0%	0.6%	85.8%	8.6%	100%

**Source:** Census of India 2001, 2011

In India, more than 60 percent of internal migrants make intra-district moves. The second most common type of internal migrants are those who moves between districts. These are short distance migration. About 11% of migrants move between states. The factors influencing the rural-urban migration are varied and complex in nature. Economic as well as non-economic factors, such as social, physical, demographical, cultural and communication factor are responsible for rural-urban migration.

Climatic and metrological disasters like floods, draughts and earthquakes often compelled the people to leave their villages. Tendency to look for better jobs, improved and fast transportation, urban oriented education, modernization of cities, impact of vast malls and entertainment facilities have also induced migration of people from rural to urban areas. But, the main cause of the migration is economic. Half of India's population continues to depend on agriculture as its primary source of livelihood and 83 per cent of farmers operate holdings of less than 2 ha in size. The average holding size is meagre 1.23 ha. This is often in fragments and unirrigated. There are many who are entirely landless, although agriculture is their main source of livelihood. They have inadequate financial resources to invest in lumpy inputs such as irrigation, technology or machinery. They have limited access to formal credit. In some regions especially in hilly states absentee landlordism is high. In some states like Bihar and Orissa, with low wages and fewer employment opportunities, small and marginal farmers lease out their land and migrate to urban areas to take non-farm employment without any risk of losing their land. When their livelihoods become secure in the non-farm sector, they could sell their land. A large number of rural people have been forced to migrate to urban areas because of shortage of livelihood in rural areas and shortage of agricultural and related occupations. It is estimated that between 1991 to 2011, more than 7 million people left the farming and moved to urban and metro centers as labourers and self-employed.

Let's look at the employment elasticity. It is a measure of how employment varies with economic output. An employment elasticity of one indicates that with every one percentage point growth in GDP increases one percent employment opportunity. The employment elasticity in India is declining in the last decade and declined to as low as 0.01 in the latter half of 2004–05. It means that every one percentage point growth in GDP, employment increased by just point zero one per cent. The same tendencies have been witnessed at the sectoral level, namely agriculture and manufacturing sectors. Employment elasticity in both the sectors is negative. The negative employment elasticity in agriculture clearly indicates movement of people out of agriculture sector and to move to other sectors where wage rates are better. This is a good sign for a developing economy as migration of surplus workers to other sectors for productive employment is essential for inclusive growth. There has been a substantial departure in the directions of growth of labour force and workforce in rural and urban sectors. In terms of Sectoral shares in employment it appears that the agriculture shares in employment declined from 59.9 per cent at the beginning of decade to 53.2 per cent at the end of the decade. However, this is still very high compared with the share of agriculture in other countries in the region. *In fact, for the first time since the Census of 1921 within the last decade, that is, 2001 to 2011 Census, the increase in the urban population (91 million) has been greater than the increase in the rural population*

over the decade (90 million).<sup>3</sup> This may be due to workers migrate from rural to urban but only for temporary periods during the lean season for agriculture and move back during the peak season. Their migration reflects rural distress, driven by the fact that 84 per cent of India's farmers are small and marginal, ploughing less than 2.5 acres of land.

It is important to mention that just two states alone accounted for nearly half of the decline in agricultural employment in the latter half of the decade. Thus, in Bihar employment in agriculture fell from 21.2 million in 2004–05 to 17.2 million at the end of the decade. Similarly, in U.P. employment in agriculture fell from 43.3 million in the middle of the decade to nearly 39.7 million at its end. On the contrary, the state of Maharashtra witnessed an increase in the employment in agriculture 3.97 million in the latter half of the decade. Another state which saw an increase in agriculture in the latter half of the decade was Punjab, from 3.6 to 4.7 million. Seasonal migration for work is a pervasive reality in rural India. Poverty in rural areas, lack of local options of employment and the non-availability of work in elsewhere become the trigger and the pull for rural migration. Some states like UP and Bihar is known for rural migration for last many decades - however newer states like Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and recently even North East have become major supply regions of manual labour. **Among the biggest employers of migrant workers is the construction sector (40 million), domestic work (20 million), textile (11 million), brick kiln work (10 million), transportation, mines & quarries and agriculture. Managed in many cases by private labour contractors and fuelled by social networks there are well formed patterns in movement of labour across hundreds of miles within the country.**

Migration have many positive effects on rural economy. When people migrate from rural areas to urban areas/metros, it reduces the pressure on population on land and productivity on land increases and so does per capita income of the rural people. It is evident that those who migrate are mostly in the age group of 18 to 40 years. They used to remit their earnings to their home place. Such remittance further increases the rural income which is now utilized to make improvements on farms and to lift the living standard. Modern house hold gadgets like TV, fridge, motor cycle and android phones have entered in the most of the villages of UP, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Orissa, where large remittance flow from urban and metro cities. There are also some varied changes in socio-economic status of the migrated labourers in their home areas. Inequality of income reduces and some families emerged new richer compared to others. Caste, creed and religious restrictions have eased. Women also plays a greater role in the socio-economic set up in the rural life with men having migrated to big cities and metros. **The number of poor in rural areas in the country as a whole has declined from 2613 lakhs in 1973 to 2209 lakhs in 2004–05, i.e., by**

<sup>3</sup> Census 2011- Demographic change.

just 404 lakh people over a 31-year period. That means the rate of decline in the numbers of the poor has been 13 lakhs per year. But in urban areas the numbers of the poor have gone on increasing from 600.5 lakhs in 1973 to 810.0 lakhs in 2008–09 (India: Urban Poverty Report, 2009). The share of the urban population in India's total population has also gone on increasing leading to the phenomenon "Urbanisation of Poverty". This is mostly by rural urban migration. At the same time the numbers of the poor have declined in rural areas. In fact, the total number of migrant workers in India in 1999–2000 was 10.27 crore—a mind boggling number. Rural–rural migration (from comparatively poor to comparatively richer States and districts) and rural–urban migration are the main cause of poor urban population and some wealthy rural areas. Nevertheless, rural–urban migration will continue despite of that migrants in urban areas are not provided the basic social amenities that all citizens are entitled to.

It is only industrialization which broadens the gap between rural and urban areas, making a shift of the workforce towards industrializing areas. A large part of migration and urbanization in the developing like India, have historically been linked to stagnation and volatility of agriculture and lack of sectoral diversification within agrarian economy. Metros and mega cities, which have become the centre of trade and commerce, have to cope with their own problems along with persistent in-migration from small and medium towns and vast rural locality. Migrants are the largest part of India's massive unorganized work force. There are several prevalent disadvantages for the migrants labours such as, lacking of skills, lacking of bargaining power for which these migrant workers often get caught in unfair labour arrangements that forces them to work in low-pay, low-value and hazardous conditions. The hardships of migrant workers are especially exaggerated when they cross state boundaries and the distance between the "home" and "work" increases. Migrants can also become easy victims of local politics and provincialism. They are not provided good health services, which results in very poor occupational health. They cannot afford private hospitals and so they often go to un-registered medical practitioners once they fall sick. This affects their health and subsequent employment opportunities, resulting the loss of wages. A large number of migrants find work at a very early age and work as unskilled labourers. They have no experience of city life and therefore, remain unskilled, poorly paid and hazardous jobseeker for their whole work-life span. But these migrants play an important role in the labour market and as such India's growth story. The share of migrants in the work-force is quite high. In manufacturing in urban areas, 38% of the male workforce is composed of migrant workers, with a similar share in modern services. Women who moved for or after marriage constitute a large share of the female household workforce.

### Share of Migrants workers in Total workers by Major Sectors

Sector	Rural		Urban	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Primary	4%	75%	20%	65%
Manufacturing	13%	59%	38%	51%
Public Services	16%	69%	40%	56%
Construction	8%	73%	32%	67%
Traditional Services	10%	65%	29%	55%
Modern Services	16%	66%	40%	52%
<b>Total</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>73%</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>56%</b>

**Source:** NSS Report 2007-08

In an unorganized and chaotic labour market, migrant workers regularly face struggles and clashes at worksites. The common issues they face are non-payment of wages, physical abuse, accidents and even death. The existing legal machinery is not sensitive to the nature of legal disputes in this unorganized sector. A large number of informal sector disputes never moves to labour courts or if reaches the way of courts, they keep failing in courts for lack of proof. The large buildings, industries of the cities were built on the hard labour and exploitation of migrant workers, but they have no share of these successes; instead, they are considered part of the problem in cities. The political parties ignore them because they don't count the migrants as votes, especially in the case of long-distance inter-state migrants. Due to their mobile nature, they don't find any membership of trade unions. They spend their whole day on worksites and silently sneak into unsafe shelters at night, without the cities even noticing them.

The residential and infrastructural facilities in these towns are inadequate to keep pace with the new activities that are spilling over as a result of saturation of the large urban centres. The new towns do not have enough living space to accommodate the migrant workers who are supposed to move in with an increasing concentration of activities. As migration usually surpasses the actual number of job vacancies and so the surplus labour would get residually absorbed in low productivity jobs. The residential problem creates large slums for the outnumbered migratory workers. Though the very large cities /Metros also have had the similar problems, there have been several support mechanisms at the same time. The real earnings in the informal sector have been higher in the large cities/Metros than in small towns. The capacity of the small towns to provide employments for the population is highly limited even after discounting for the scale factor that the large cities enjoy. The mismatch between the demand for and supply of labour can be serious in these towns keeping in view the employability issue.

There is only one legislation known as Inter-State Migrant Workers Act, 1979, which aims to safeguard the migrants. However, it is obsolete and is hardly enforced anywhere. Hence India needs to



formulate such policies, strategies, and institutional mechanisms that ensure inclusive growth and development and reduce distress induced migration, thereby increasing India's prospects for poverty reduction and achieving Sustainable Development Goals. The government at Centre needs to provide amenities and social securities for the migrant population which is perforated with the issues of insufficient housing; low-paid, insecure or hazardous work; extreme weakness of women and children to trafficking human trade and sex exploitation. The migrant worker is a member of the workforce like any other, deserving of all the protections afforded to all workers and needing no more; while the migrant is similarly just like any other resident of the place. It is important to confront discrimination whenever it appears and strengthen the contributions that migrants make to their places of residence and reaffirm the rights of Indians to settle and work anywhere in India.

### **Conclusion:**

There is a continuous change in migration rate in some of the major states of the country but the out-migration rate of some states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Orissa and Jharkhand are very high. The main reason of out-migration is lack of employment opportunities and the poor condition of farmers in these states. We can not conclude that migration is a bad phenomenon, but we have seen that during the disaster, the immigrant labourers are most suffer. They lost their jobs and the question of their livelihood stand in front of them. In fact, migrants play a vital role in the development of Metro and big cities and industrialisation of our country depends on these workers. We have forgot to provide these workers safety, shelter and security of jobs. The out-migrants states should remember that these are the persons who remit large sums to their homes and help in modernization of the rural scenario.

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