POLITICAL ISSUES OF INTERNAL LABOUR MIGRATION: INDIAN PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

The primary drivers of internal migration in India are employment and marriage. These factors, along with others, help shape the economic, social, and political life of both the sending and receiving regions. Approximately twenty percent of India's population comprises people who have relocated within the country and changed their district or state. This percentage is significant when considering the sheer number of people who migrate within a country with a total population that exceeds one billion and a half. Even though marriage is one of the most popular reasons for internal migration in India, particularly for women, long-distance and male-dominated labour migration accounts for a large portion of the country's population's mobility within the country. There are three possible types of continuity for these flows: permanent, semi-permanent, and seasonal. Seasonal or circular migrants in particular have markedly different experiences on the labour market and integration challenges than more permanent migrants, but precise data on seasonal migration flows and a systematic accounting of the experiences of these migrants are major gaps in the existing body of knowledge.

Introduction

No matter how long they plan to remain in the country, labour migrants will always encounter a plethora of difficulties when they arrive at their destinations because the United States is so linguistically and culturally diverse. Restricted access to fundamental needs such as identity papers, social entitlements, housing, and banking services is one of the obstacles. There are also other challenges. Many migrants, particularly those who relocate to a place where the local language and culture is different from that of their region of origin, also face harassment and political exclusion. This is especially true for those who move to a place where the local language and culture is different from that of their region of origin.

The responses of the Indian government to the substantial amount of internal migration are extremely limited. The few pieces of legislation that do exist with protections for worker rights are almost never put into practise. The response of India's numerous civil-society organisations has been more active, with the nongovernmental sector frequently stepping in to fill the gaps in welfare services, education, and labour rights that are left by the government. These gaps can be found in areas like India's labour rights, education, and education. This article focuses on internal labour migration, discussing the political, economic, and social barriers to integration that labour migrants encounter, and detailing the policy context that surrounds the difficulties that labour migrants experience in integrating into society.

Migration Flows within India and India's Internal Migrants

According to the Census of India carried out in 2011, more than two-thirds, or 69 percent, of India's 1.21 billion inhabitants reside in rural areas. Despite this, the country is rapidly urbanising. India is home to 25 of the world's 100 cities with the highest population

AIJRRLSJM   VOLUME 6, ISSUE 10 (2021, OCT)   (ISSN-2455-6602)ONLINE

Anveshana's International Journal of Research in Regional Studies, Law, Social Sciences, Journalism and Management Practices

growth, and the metropolitan areas of Mumbai, Delhi, and Kolkata are all in the top ten most populous urban areas in the world. Migration from rural to urban areas is a big contributor to this expansion. An increasing number of individuals are finding that the economic prospects available in rural areas are insufficient, so they choose to relocate to towns and cities instead. The provisional statistics from the 2011 census show that, since the time of the previous census, India's urban population has risen at a faster rate than its rural population for the very first time.

The percentage of people living in urban areas in India has increased from roughly 28 percent in 2001 to the current level of 31%. According to data collected by the National Sample Survey in 2007-2008, the migration rate in urban areas (also known as the proportion of migrants among the population) was found to be 35 per cent. Some of this urban growth can be attributed to migration, as well as natural population growth and the inclusion in census data of newly-defined urban areas, both of which occur independently of movement. Despite the fact that India's economy has grown at astonishing rates over the course of the past three decades, a significant portion of the country's population is still unable to secure a substantial means of subsistence. According to data provided by the World Bank, in the year 2010, 29.8 per cent of the total population of India lived below the national poverty line, while 33.8 per cent of the population of rural India lived below the national rural poverty line. Rural India is still plagued by agrarian distress, a chronic lack of work, and farmer suicides, despite the fact that the pay and education differences between rural and urban Indians are narrowing. As a result, the split between rural and urban areas has been one of the key drivers of labour mobility in India.

Although migration data from the country is not as comprehensive or as recent as is required to see the whole picture (see Box 1), the 2001 Census counted approximately 191 million people or 19 per cent of the total Indian population at the time as internal migrants who had moved long distances to other districts or other Indian states. These people were considered to be internal migrants because they had moved to other districts or other Indian states. Marriage is the predominant reason for female movement, accounting for 91 per cent of rural female migrations and 61 per cent of urban female migrations. Roughly 70 per cent of all internal movers are women, and marriage is the primary reason for female migration. On the other hand, males relocate for reasons primarily related to their employment. The pursuit of job is the primary motivation for migration for 56 per cent of urban males. In addition, family, business, and education are frequently cited as the primary motivations for migration among Indian men (sometimes accompanied by other members of the household).

Internal migrants have vastly diverse levels of education, income levels, and skills, as well as varying profiles in terms of caste, religion, family composition, age, and other characteristics. Internal migrants also come from families with varying compositions. There are no statistics available at the national level that can determine trends in these characteristics. Micro-surveys, on the other hand, indicate that the majority of migrants are between the ages of 16 and 40. This is especially true with semi-permanent and temporary migrants, the period of whose stay might range anywhere from sixty days to one year. Over-representation of Scheduled Tribes and Castes in Short-Term Migration Flows Scheduled tribes and castes are the tribal and caste groups that are explicitly protected in India's constitution because of their historic social and economic inequality. This inequality is a

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result of centuries of discrimination. In addition, the majority of labour migrants find work in a few of important subsectors, such as agriculture, construction, domestic work, production of bricks and textiles, transportation, mining and quarrying, and mining.

Important Currents of Migration

According to the results of the Census taken in 2011, the states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar in Northern India have the greatest percentages of people living in rural areas, with 18.6 per cent and 11.1 per cent of people living in villages, respectively. These states are also the ones that send the most immigrants to other states. Significant numbers of labour migrants leave Uttar Pradesh for other states in northern and central India, including Maharashtra, Delhi, West Bengal, Haryana, and Gujarat, amongst others. These migrants are looking for work.

The majority of migrants from Bihar move to the same locations, with the largest numbers relocating to Delhi and West Bengal respectively. The states of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, and Jharkhand, as well as Orissa, are also significant contributors of migrants. Predictably, all of the major sending states are characterised by very low social and economic development indices, and the major urban destinations (enumerated below) are the growing economic magnets in an increasingly liberalised Indian economy. This is the case despite the fact that the major sending states are characterised by very low social and economic development indices. Internal migrants in India tend to congregate in the country's three most populous cities, which are Mumbai, Delhi, and Kolkata. The rural regions of Maharashtra and West Bengal supply a significant number of the people who relocate to these cities, making up a large portion of the migrant population. In addition, substantial numbers of people move into these three cities from various states located around India.

Problems associated with measuring

It is difficult to get an accurate count of India's internal migration flows despite the fact that they are substantial. The data on migration from the 2011 Census have been compiled, but they have not yet been made public. The 2001 Census and the 2007-08 National Sample Survey (NSS) both provide broad information on internal migration, but miss important aspects of India's internal migration patterns. The 2001 Census lists 307 million internal migrants, but defines as a migrant anyone who lives in a place that is different than their place of birth or place of last residence. This definition casts too wide a net because it includes many people who move over very short distances, within the same district. On the other hand, it likely misses a significant number of seasonal migrants, who have as much of a chance of being counted in their place of birth or last residence as they do at their new destination.

The Census does differentiate internal migration within districts, between districts in the same state, and across states. In 2001, inter district migrants accounted for 76.8 million migrants, and there were 42.3 million interstate migrants. Therefore, about 191 million people or 19 percent of the total Indian population were migrants from other districts or other states. These numbers reflect the numbers of permanent and semi-permanent migrants, but the Census does not provide information on circular, seasonal, or temporary flows. The National Sample Survey, conducted by the Ministry of Statistics and Program Information, asks people their "usual place of residence," counting migrants as those who have stayed for

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six months or longer in a place that is different from their prior "usual place of residence." As with the Census, temporary, seasonal, and circular migrants are difficult to estimate through the NSS data, and the survey's estimates of seasonal migration are far below those of other analysts. The NSS counted 15 million short-term migrants, but other estimates have placed the number at about 100 million.

Plight of migrants at destination

Proving their identity is one of the core issues impoverished migrants face when they arrive in a new place, a problem that can persist for years or even decades after they migrate. Identity documentation that is authenticated by the state is indispensable for ensuring that a person has a secure citizenship status and can benefit from the rights and protections that the state provides. A birth certificate is the primary proof of citizenship in India, and is the primary document that can be used to acquire other documentation, such as ration cards and election cards. However, there are several variations across the country on how such documentation is issued and used.

In India, many citizens are born at home or in rural or remote areas, not in places such as hospitals or clinics where birth certificates are issued. The overall birth registration rate in the country is 34.7 per cent, but there are significant regional differences. Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, the home states of many labour migrants, have birth registration rates of 6.5 per cent and 1.6 per cent, respectively. This means that many labour migrants are undocumented when they arrive in the receiving community. The Aadhar project seeks to remedy this problem by issuing a 16-digit identity number to everyone on the National Population Register. Eventually, the government intends to issue an identification card to all citizens over 18. Until then, a ration card often stands in for a birth certificate as a person's primary identity document. Issued by state governments, it is used to buy food, cooking oil, and kerosene at ration shops. The document lists the head of household, names and ages of dependent family members, and the family's address. Each household has one ration card (although some states do issue the card to individuals). Across India, the ration card is the de facto necessary proof of identity that is essential for access to public services such as hospital care and education. It is often requested as a proof of identity and address for initiating telephone service or opening a bank account, and often used for casting a vote. Legally, however, it is only one of several documents that a person can choose to offer to verify their identity.

Though national policy entitles migrants to a new ration card as long as they remove their names from their ration cards at home, in practise they find it difficult to do this. Many do not know the correct procedure for obtaining a new ration card, and others face obstacles if they have never previously held a card because they were absent from their home states when identification documents (such as voter ID cards) were issued. Additionally, officials are often unwilling to accept the documentation provided by some migrants (for varied reasons, including seeking bribes or discrimination). For this reason, many migrants do not want to risk removing their names from a ration card in their home state because they are uncertain of obtaining a new ration card at their destination. Overall, their migrant status makes it difficult for them to obtain identity documents in both the sending and receiving places.

The basic problem of establishing identity results in a loss of access to entitlements and social services. Lack of identification means migrants are not able to access provisions

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such as subsidised food, fuel, health services, or education that are meant for the economically vulnerable sections of the population. The issue of lack of access to education for children of migrants further aggravates the intergenerational transmission of poverty. Overall, discrimination in the provision of rights and entitlements combined with internal migrants' identity as outsiders in the receiving society often perpetuate the economic and political exclusion of many groups, and suggest that there are deeply exclusionary trends in India's democracy.

Migration and slums are inextricably linked, as labour demand in cities and the resulting rural-to-urban migration creates greater pressures to accommodate more people. In 2011, 68 million Indians lived in slums, comprising one-quarter of the population of India's 19 cities with more than 1 million residents. Across the country, the experiences of slum dwellers are characterised by sudden evictions without adequate rehabilitation and local governments that do not provide low-cost housing for the urban poor. Slum dwellers who are migrants sometimes face the added challenge of establishing tenure the right to remain on a particular piece of urban land, and the right to compensation if the dwelling on that land is seized by the government for redevelopment. However, many seasonal migrants are not even able to "make it" to the slums. Unaffordable rents in slums force them to live at their workplaces (such as construction sites and hotel dining rooms), shop pavements, or in open areas in the city. This further perpetuates their vulnerability to harassment by the police and other local authorities.

Political Exclusion

In a state of continuous drift, migrant workers are deprived of many opportunities to exercise their political rights. Because migrants are not entitled to vote outside of their place of origin, some are simply unable to cast their votes. A 2011 study on the political inclusion of seasonal migrant workers by Amrita Sharma and her co-authors found that 22 per cent of seasonal migrant workers in India did not possess voter IDs or have their names in the voter list. The study noted that "any migrants leave their home at an age as early as 13-14. The voter ID is issued at an age of 18 or more. When they become eligible to get a voter ID, their work life is at its peak and their trips to home short in duration. Many migrants reported to not have the time to get their voter IDs made and a staggering 83 percent of long distance migrants reported missing voting in elections at least once because they were away from home seeking livelihood options." Because of this, migrant workers are often left unable to make political demands for entitlements or seek reforms.

Local politics also have major implications for internal migrants. The intersection of local identity politics and migration creates political volatility in many cities and regions across India, including in Assam in the Northeast, Andhra Pradesh in the South, as well as cities across Northern India. The politics of Mumbai, the capital of Maharashtra, are an important example of the clash between migration and local identity politics. About 42 per cent of Mumbai is Maharashtra, and in 2001, migrants from other states accounted for 26 per cent of the population in the Mumbai Urban Agglomeration. Mumbai is known both for its diversity of linguistic and cultural communities, as well as its decades-long history of anti-migrant politics. Since the 1960s, native's political parties have claimed that migrants threaten Marathi culture and usurp job opportunities, residential space, and amenities that

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rightfully belong to the local Maharashtrian population. Historically, the Shiv Sena political party has been the anti-migrant voice in Mumbai's politics. In the late 1960s, the Sena demanded that jobs be reserved for locals and was especially hostile to the Tamil migrant population that occupied middle-class jobs in Mumbai in the 1970s. Pressure from the Shiv Sena led to concessions from the Congress party, such as measures that gave preference to Maharashtrians for state government jobs.

Today's virulent anti migrant party in Mumbai's politics is an offshoot of the Shiv Sena the Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS; translated as the Maharashtra Renaissance Army). The MNS accuses North Indian migrants of taking jobs that they claim rightfully belong to local Maharashtrians. In 2008, after a fiercely anti-migrant speech by MNS leader Raj Thackeray in which he accused migrants of swamping Maharashtra, MNS supporters attacked North Indian migrants in Mumbai and other cities. Hundreds of thousands of migrants fled the state as a result. Orchestrated riots and violent political campaigns routinely target these migrants and protest their presence in the city. Mumbai is a particularly stark example of local identity politics that marginalise internal migrant populations, but it also reflects a basic reality of the Indian states system, which is organised by language and cultural groups: since most Indian states are, by design, the local homelands of India's different ethnic and linguistic groups, migration between states often creates competitive politics between migrants and locals. It is also important to note, however, that some migrant destinations do not have a local backlash. Bihari migrants in Kolkata, for example, form a majority of that city's labour migrants, but there is no substantial natives strain in Kolkata's politics.

State Responses

The inflows of migrants from rural areas and small towns into big cities has contributed to urban congestion and housing shortages in cities across India. Mumbai, Delhi, and Kolkata in particular are all known for the proliferation of slums and pavement dwellings, and generally intense housing pressures. In addition, city residents often perceive that migrants increase the Competition for jobs and compete for basic amenities and city services such as water and sanitation. One of the policy conclusions that national policymakers have drawn from these outcomes is that the state should undertake efforts to prevent internal migration, through schemes such as rural employment programs. Such policy positions have persisted despite building evidence that migration can have positive outcomes for the poor. For example, remittances from migration are applied to health care or to repay debt. Despite increasing research along these lines, urban development projects often seek to keep migrants out, local authorities continue to treat migration as a problem, and migrants are often harassed by the police because they are considered to be closer to illegal residents rather than legal migrants. Migrants are particularly susceptible to police harassment including violence and exhortation for bribes because of their precarious position in the receiving society. Their basic needs, such as their access to housing, can depend on the cooperation of local police. Other aspects of internal migration in India, outcomes can vary greatly by local context.

Conclusion

In a scenario where the responses from the state and market have not contributed much to the welfare of migrant workers, civil society organisations have been able to come

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up with solutions that have helped enhance returns from migration. While historically NGOs have sided with the anti-migration sentiment, recent thinking and innovations in migration practise have helped transform work opportunities for migrants into more stable livelihood options. This linkage from source to destination is an important part of the organization's operational strategy. Service provided to migrants include registration and photo ID cards; skills training and placement services for jobs at urban destinations; legal aid and literacy programs; organisation of worker collectives at destination; assistance accessing banking and social security; and strengthening support systems for women and families affected by male migration.

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