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CHANGING CONTOURS OF INTERNAL MIGRATION IN INDIA: CENTRALITY OF POVERTY AND VULNERABILITY*

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses various dimensions of internal migration in India, with specific attention on the major drivers including rural distress; climate and development-induced displacement; and socio-political conflicts. It is argued that poverty and vulnerability are the core factors that shape the internal migration landscape in India. With dwindling public expenditure on redistributive measures and shifts in pro-poor policies, the State's protection for migrant workers has decreased considerably. The COVID-19 pandemic has ushered yet another set of challenges for migrant workers.

Keywords: Labour migration, Vulnerability of migrants, Internal migrants, Women and migration, COVID-related unemployment

1. Introduction

In India, a large number of citizens migrate within the country for various purposes such as education, employment, and marriage. These migrations are either voluntary or involuntary. Voluntary migrants generally relocate in

search for better employment, education, or improved standards of life, whereas involuntary or forced migrants are often the victims of trafficking, forced marriages, or displacements caused due to developmental projects, conflict situations, or natural disasters.

In forced or involuntary migration, varying degrees of the element of coerciveness and involuntariness are present in different cases. For instance, following a war, communal tensions, or a natural calamity, the resultant migration/refugee movement will be completely involuntary. However, when an unskilled worker from a rural area decides to move to an urban centre for employment, there may be both push factors (e.g., acute unemployment and poverty in rural area) and pull factors (e.g., the aspiration and willingness of the worker to earn more in the city). Nevertheless, in both cases, an underlying element of involuntariness and compulsion is present. These cases are not similar to the case of educated youths migrating to a city in their own country or another country for higher education or that of highly qualified professionals from a developing country moving to the USA for a job that would fetch them a salary higher than that in the native country.

Thus, migration can be broadly categorised as : the 'migration of the better-offs for betterment', where the people who are relatively resource-rich and with better human resource profiles(e.g., highly educated people) move from their native places in search of better living standards and for earning higher incomes; and 'the migrants', who are (partially or fully) pushed out of their places of origin due to adverse circumstances such as unemployment, poverty, resource-crunch in rural areas, social exclusion, violence, environmental hazards, or any other factor. While the first category of migration is more voluntary in nature, the second category is characterised by some degree of involuntariness and socio-economic coercions, as the migrants leave their homeland due to certain compelling reasons.

In addition to the binaries of push and pull factors, which have been guiding migration theorists for the last few decades, ease of migration is also recognised as a cause of contemporary migration because of improved transportation and communication, increased social networking, or the demography of a particular region. All these factors considerably influence internal as well as international migration in and from India. However, in this paper, we focus on internal migration only and on the centrality of poverty and vulnerability as the core determinants of internal migration in India.

Through detailed analyses of available research and information on internal migration in the Indian context, this paper discusses the core issues concerning distress migration of the poor within the country. The paper also underlines the perpetuating vulnerability of the migrating poor because of the inadequate welfare and social protection systems.

2. Internal Migration: An Overview

According to the Economic Survey (2016)based on a new Cohort-based Migration Metrics (CMM),the number of inter-state and inter-district migrants during 2001–2011 was approximately 60 million and 80 million, respectively, with an annual flow of inter-state migrants of ~5–6 million. Thesenumbersfurtherincreasedduring2011–2016, according to an estimation based on internal work-related migration data collected for the Economic Survey (using railway passenger traffic flows data). Consequently, on an average,9 million people migrate between various states of India annually.

A comparison of Census data on migration, which is considered a conservative estimate of migration, as pointed out by Economic Survey(2017[1]) shows that in India, the decadal annual growth of internal migration has nearly doubled. From 2.4% during 1991–2001, this figure increased to 4.5%during 2001–2011. Based on these figures, the annual growth rate of internal migration in India can be estimated to be close to 7%–8%.

Comparison of the Census data of various years shows that migration has increased tremendously from 2001 to 2011, with almost equal percentage of migrants from both rural and urban areas. In all the major routes of migration, namely rural–rural, rural–urban, urban–urban, and urban–rural, the number of women in the migrating population is higher than that of men. This dominance is mainly attributed to marriage, followed by various other reasons such as movement with household and education. As compared with Census 1999 and 2001, the 2011 census shows that the number of women migrating for education and business has increased slightly.

Regional disparity in development is another crucial factor that influences the internal migration of people for work. Based on the correlation between real income and migration, the Economic Survey (2017) shows that relatively less developed states have a high net out-migration, whereas states that are relatively more developed have net in-migration. As per Census 2011, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, and Madhya Pradesh together account for more than 50% of the total out-migrants in the country. Other major net out-migrating states were Jharkhand, Punjab, Uttarakhand, Jammu and Kashmir, and West Bengal.

Among various streams of internal migration, rural–urban is the most important in the context of India. In India, 40%–70% of rural households have at least one person working and living in an urban area (Rains et al., 2018). These migrants often end up engaging in informal sector activities in various industries, trade, and services (Bora, 2014). Quite often, these migrations

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1   As per Economic Survey, 2017, the Census data shows only ~3.3 million inter-state migrants in India annually, for 2001–2011, whereas, according to a new Cohort-based Migration Metric (CMM), this figure is 6 million per year for 2001-2011.

are seasonal. For instance, there are many streams of migrant workers from drought-prone regions of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and Maharashtra, who seasonally migrate to other parts of their states and neighbouring ones and work in activities such as construction, brick kiln work, and farm work. Some internal migrants move for harvest work across different regions, reaching back to their own villages, in a 'circular' manner (Keshri & Bhagat, 2010).

During the past few decades, many new streams of internal migration have gained momentum. The massive out-migration from India's north eastern states is an example. Till the end of the twentieth century, the northeast region was a predominantly migrant receiving region (Goswami, 2007). However, thousands of people from the north eastern states now live and work in far-off destinations, such as Delhi, Bangalore, Chandigarh, Mumbai, Kolkata, and many other small cities and towns (Remesh, 2012).

Apart from migration being contingent upon geographical factors, the mobility among people is also determined by the social status of the individual. Migration of people from underprivileged communities (STs and SCs) is often for escaping caste hierarchy and social exclusion/discrimination in their native places. However, the social baggage of caste remains with them, and in many cases, they face caste-based exploitation at the destination too (Bharathi et al., 2018).

3.   Drivers of Migration

All this movement of peoplefrom one place to another, irrespective of social categorisation, entails several push and pull factors. These are due to either natural factors such as demography or the geographical location of the Indian subcontinent, lopsided development of the region, lack of adequate intervention from the government, and/or the contemporary neo-liberal regime.

3.1. Urbanisation and Regional Disparities

In India, rural–urban migration is a major stream of internal migration. A crucial driver of rural–urban migration is the existence of wide regional disparities (Tripathi, 2013). Differences in urbanisation rates and the high employment availability in urban areas prompt rural–urban migration. As discussed by Harris and Todaro, expected higher wages/income is a major consideration of the migrants while taking the decision to migrate from the labour surplus rural areas towards urban centres. During the past few decades, the urban centres in India have witnessed a large-scale boom of infrastructure and construction. Consequently, job opportunities in the urban centres and peripheries in factories, shops and establishments, ancillary and support services, domestic services, street vending, security services, and restaurants were increasing (Tripathi, 2013). Migrant workers provided the continuous pool of labour required for these jobs in cities and towns, which in turn led to the development of urban

centres. Therefore, the initial skewed development of a region further led to lopsided development, enhancing the existing inequalities. Along with pull factors of these urban areas in terms of better jobs, higher wages, and other attractions of the urban life, push factors such as lack of employment, low income, natural calamities, and socio-political tensions also influence this 'urbanisation-driven' migration.

3.2. Rural Distress

Due to non-viability of agriculture, small peasants and landless labour in rural areas are finding the sustenance of their livelihoods increasingly difficult. This phenomenon of 'agrarian crisis' has been a persistent characteristic of rural India for the past few decades. The escalating cost of cultivation and price crashes for agricultural produce together make agriculture a nonviable source of income. Often, crop loss due to bad monsoons, droughts, and other natural reasons add to the rural distress. Another reason is the inefficacy of governmental interventions regarding implantation of minimum support prices, rural warehousing and marketing facilities, and provision of institutional credit, (Posani, 2009).This situation coupled with declining support systems in rural areas (e.g. PDS and MGNREGS) is argued to have deepened the rural economic distress. According to the National Crime Record Bureau, more than 2,40,000 farmers committed suicide between 1995 and 2009 (Centre for Human Rights and Global Justice, 2011).In 2009 alone, 17,638 farmers committed suicide, which accounts for suicide by one farmer every 30 minutes (ibid.).Often, such rural distress results in massive exodus of people to cities in search of better livelihood options. A report on the state of Indian farmers (CSDS, 2018) mentions that 76% of the farmers are willing to take up work other than farming and 61% among them are willing to move to cities for work because of better provisions of health, education, and employment prospects.

3.3. Climate-Induced Displacement

Owing to the geography of the Indian territory, several states are prone to natural disasters. The frequency of such natural disasters has also increased in recent years owing to environmental imbalances that have originated due to global warming and unplanned developments. Sinha (2003) mentions that approximately57%, 28%, 12%, and 8% of the Indian landmass is vulnerable to earthquakes, droughts, floods, and cyclones, respectively. An assessment report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) also points towards the migration potential of people, both domestic as well as international, due to climatic factors. Chakraborty and Joshi (2014) further mapped the sensitivity of different regions in India considering the population and ecological factors. As per the sensitivity index, the regions that are more sensitive owing to high population density and fragile environment include some districts of Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal.

Thousands of people leave their homes every year due to natural disasters such as floods, earthquakes, tsunamis, and other natural calamities such as river bank erosion. Many streams of such climate-induced migrants in India are from the states of Assam, Bihar, Odisha, and West Bengal (Kumar & Singh, 2018). According to a Greenpeace study, approximately 120 million people in India and Bangladesh will be homeless by 2100 (Lal, 2019).

3.4. Development-Induced Displacement

In India, every year, thousands of people have to leave their places of origin due to loss of land and livelihoods to development projects, such as dams, irrigation projects, roads, highways, canals, mines, power plants, and industrial development activities. Development projects have displaced approximately50 million people in our country, where approximately16.4 million, 2.55 million, 1.25 million, and 0.6 million people have been displaced due to the construction of dams, mining activities, industrial development projects, and for establishment of wildlife sanctuaries and national parks, respectively. These development projects have displaced approximately 40% of the tribal population and another 40% of people belonging to the Dalit communities and other rural poor (Lok Sabha Secretariat, 2013). These people are not displaced once and have to go through a series of multiple displacements. With the expansion of metro cities and large towns to suburbs, many of the erstwhile marginal and small farmers and agricultural labour are eventually pushed out of their villages and join the pool of 'transit labour' and 'footloose labour', who constitute increasingly larger segments of migrant labour in Indian urban spaces. India is also home to populations that are displaced by development projects in neighbouring countries. A classic example is that of Chakamas and Hajongs from Chittagong Hill Tracts in the erstwhile East Pakistan, who had migrated to North Eastern states of India in the 1960s, when their lands got submerged by the Kaptai dam construction project.

3.5. Demographic Factors

India is currently characterised by a certain 'demographic dividend', where a larger share of the population falls in the working age group. This aspect has mostly helped Indian labour to capture the international labour market. The demographic differences in the Indian population shape the internal migration patterns. Southern states, such as Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, and Andhra Pradesh, comprises mostly ageing population, whereas northern states, such as Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, and Odisha, comprises mostly young population (Ponnapalli et al., 2013). Population projection of UNFPA shows that most of the current and future demographic potential lies in the state of Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh. These five states account for more than half of the labour force in India (Singh, 2019). These demographic advantages of certain states promote migration from states

with a comparatively younger population towards states with a comparatively ageing population.

3.6. Socio-Political Conflicts

Another major reason for migration is the tensions based on factors such as identity, religion, ethnicity/social group, and language. To escape socio-political conflicts, a large number of people move to other destinations. India's north eastern states are representative of this category of migration. A growing body of literature on northeast migrants in India suggests that younger people have to migrate from states such as Manipur and Nagaland to escape socio-political tensions. Many of these people are youth migrants, who initially migrate for education and eventually enter the labour markets of their destinations for better employment prospects (Lalrampuii, 2016). Socio-political tensions also lead to reverse migration in certain cases. Many migrants from other states had to leave Maharashtra because of a strong move against migrants from other states (Sons of the Soil Movement). Similarly, in 2014, a massive exodus of migrants from northeastern states occurred in Bangalore, following a rumour-mongering episode.

3.7. Improved Connectivity and Communication Channels

Improved connectivity between source and destination regions is a factor that has boosted the rate of migration, especially when it involves long-distance movement. In case of increased internal migration due to improved rural–urban connectivity with improved transport facilities, roads, infrastructure, express ways, and connecting trains, new migration streams have emerged. For example, the long-distance migration of unskilled workers from northern and northeastern states to far-off destinations, even to southern states such as Kerala and Tamil Nadu. Social networking plays a crucial role in the process of migration. Social capital plays an important role in the chain migration of a certain group of people from the same geographical area or of groups having a certain common social identity. This social capital is a rich source of information that facilitates migration and assists migrants in getting settled in their destination region. These social ties have been strengthened through the development of effective channels of communication. Hence, improvement in telecommunication and information channels has played a major role in facilitating migration.

While the aforementioned reasons are central in necessitating migration, poverty and inequality are argued to be the core determinants that eventually shape the migration of poor. Irrespective of the reason, be it migration due to rural distress or one that is development- or climate-induced, the resource-poor are the ones who migrate due to compulsions such as better employment and livelihood options. The richest segments in the source regions often manage to cope with adverse circumstances because they have some back up options and resources to rely upon during adverse circumstances. A positive correlation was

observed between the migrant-sending states and the poverty index of these states (UNDP, 2018).Migration from Indian states with double-digit percentages of populations living under 'severe poverty' is abysmally high. These states include Assam (12.1%), Bihar (22.1%), Madhya Pradesh (12.8%), Jharkhand (15.1%), Meghalaya (11.1%), Rajasthan (11.1%), and Uttar Pradesh (13.8%). All these states are predominantly migrant-sending states.

Thus, while understanding the root causes, one can see that inequality at different levels has a considerable effect on migration of the poor. Those who are less-possessed and without any support systems are the first to move, and when these resource-poor migrants reach the destinations, their poverty forces them to participate in inferior-quality jobs, where terms and conditions of work are dubious. Thus, the deplorable plight of migrants in the destinations is a part of the vicious circle of poverty and inequality, where inequality perpetuates poverty (miserable plight of migrants), and vice versa.

4.   Women and Migration

Women have always been important participants in the process of migration. According to Census 2011, the proportion of women who are migrating is considerably higher than that of men. For more than 70% of these migrating women, marriage has been cited as one of the major reasons (Census, 2011). However, Krishnaraj (2005) pointed out methodological issues in the National Sample Survey (NSS) data, which inadequately captures the overlapping reason of female migration as both marriage and employment. The connection between marriage migration and labour markets must be explored. Reportedly, many women who move to new places following marriage eventually enter the labour markets in their spouses' native lands. In certain cases, they even migrate further from there to seek better jobs. This is a crucial aspect that accounts for the 'hidden labour migration' behind the stream of marriage migration. Often, economic migration to urban areas is guised under marriage migration because marriage is recorded as the reason for migration.

However, marriage as one of the major reasons for migration has been declining over time. In recent times, several women migrate alone or in groups for employment. In certain cases, women's migration is followed by migration of spouse and families, thereby reverting the conventional model of 'women-as follower migrant'. The large-scale feminisation of select occupations, such as domestic and care work, work in sectors such as garment and food processing, and work in special economic zones has considerably contributed to this reversal. Millions of tribal women who migrate from tribal belts of states such as Orissa, Jharkhand, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Assam, and Mizoram to urban areas work as domestic helps. There has also been a trend of single women migration to these urban centres, either through middlemen or in groups. Importantly, migrant women are not a homogenous group, and thus, the issues concerning

various streams of women migration vary considerably. Accordingly, capturing the specificities of distinct categories of women's migration, such as migration of tribal women to cities for domestic work and migration of rural women for work in factories and other informal sector jobs, is crucial.

Rural–rural and rural–urban streams of internal migration are mainly seasonal. However, beyond 'livelihood' being one of the important reasons of migration for women, such seasonal migration is accompanied by freedom from the problems at home, to move away from the clutches of parental and familial control, and explore opportunities at the new place.

In recent years, a large number of women who are affected by rural distress and agrarian crisis have migrated to other rural and urban areas as a coping strategy. Many of these women work in sectors such as construction, brick kilns, and factories, where the working conditions are extremely exploitative that involves unequal pay, long working hours, and sexual harassment. Often, these women get into debt bondages and have to go through different contractors, which bring in many layers of control and exploitative practices. Many of the women who migrate from rural to urban areas view migration as a strategy that helps them earn dowries or save enough money for settlement with the family. The widely discussed case of Sumangali System in Tamil Nadu is a classic example of this tradition (Menon, 2019).

At times, marriage migration can also be linked to trafficking, where women from weak socio-economic sections are brought to distant places through coercion or by deceitful practices. The trafficked women are also sold off as paro or molki to states, such as Haryana and Rajasthan, having a lower sex ratio. The sold bride is constantly under surveillance by people around her. The groom's family fear that she might run away if left alone. Moreover, because she has been purchased, the woman does not have any right at home. Even she has to cast her vote as per the choice of the husband. These women are expected to perform unpaid work in the home and in agricultural fields along with reproduction. In addition to the skewed sex ratio, other reasons for the practice of purchased bride are lack of land ownership, physical deformity, desertion or death of wife, and custom of *SattaBatta*[2](Singh et al., 2018).

Irrespective of the category of migration (internal or international), women migrants often face more discrimination in the labour market in terms of lower wages and adverse working conditions (e.g., longer work hours, absence of basic facilities, and confinement to menial work) than their male counterparts. In addition, sexual harassment at workplace is quite often a major problem.

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2   Satta Batta is a custom followed among few communities of Haryana, where exchange-marriages of a brother and a sister from two families are arranged. In such a scenario, if a family does not have daughter to be exchanged, they mostly have to look outside their caste and village.

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In some cases, women's migration is restricted by patriarchal and economic preferences at the workplace. The Jodi system that exists in informal labour markets in northern India (and in many other parts) is one such example. Here, the labour recruiters and employers consider employing women only if they are joining the work along with their husbands. Accordingly, in many factories and workplaces in north India, one can see married couples working together. Such arrangements sometimes lead to more complicated issues such as wage theft, rent seeking, and other pernicious practices by the fake husbands.

Single-woman migrants or women-along groups of migrants, who migrate through middlemen, are made to stay in extremely deplorable conditions with 15–20 people in a single room and poor hygienic conditions. Because of their dependence on middle men for employment and stay, they are left alone and vulnerable, both before being placed for work and even after placement. Their salaries are partially paid, their documents are withheld, and they are harassed by the middlemen. Many of these girls are even duped by middlemen and are later sold in the cities. Such cases are also attached with the notion of purity, and on the ground of breaking social norms, their families are boycotted back in villages.

5. COVID and Internal Migration

The onset of the COVID pandemic had varying impacts on different sections of the population. People from the vulnerable and underprivileged sections of the society had to deal with issues that were amplified due to their socio-economic circumstances. With the popular narrative of 'stay at home' and 'follow social distancing', the mass gathering of migrant workers on the road seeking transport to go back home brings out the clear picture of division of the society into the haves and the have nots, whereas such provision of 'stay at home' and 'follow social distancing' appears to be a luxury for some. With economic losses due to unemployment, cramped and overcrowded accommodation, lack of public provisions such as potable water and sanitation and inability to send money back home coupled with the atrocities faced from the police and other authorities, the migrant workers witnessed a literal survival crisis amidst the health crisis (Sengupta & Jha, 2020).

The first impact of COVID-19 on internal migrants was immediate unemployment and other labour market distortions, including lay-offs and pay cuts. The imposed curfews without adequate consultation from trade unions, confederate of industries, and other relevant associations prevented people from seeking and arranging alternatives for survival. In most cases, the employers and the sourcing agents got rid of the migrants without paying any relief or compensation. Not only the employers and contractors, the State machinery was also not prepared to provide basic necessities such as food and shelter. Consequently, the panic-stricken, resource-poor, and ill-informed migrant

workers decided to return home at the time when all transport facilities were closed. Thousands of migrants clustered around the Uttar Pradesh–Delhi border with the anticipation to get transport to return home, thereby breaking all the social distancing norms.

The non-availability of adequate transportation facilities forced thousands of migrant workers to cover the distance on foot, which resulted in one of the massive exoduses since the India–Pakistan partition in 1947. Several horrifying stories emerged from the media, including the one where the migrant workers were walking back home via railway tracks, assuming that none of the trains are running. They slept on the trackand exhausted by their journey they were run over by the trains. Soon, the electronic media and social media were flooded with horrifying images of railway tracks with blood-soaked clothes and scattered food items. In yet another incident, a pregnant woman had to deliver her baby on the street as she was walking back home.

Many of these people faced atrocious situations during their journeys, where they were looted, heavily charged for small distance travel, or stopped and beaten by the police (Meher & Nanda, 2020). Many workers even lost their lives to exertion, hunger, or accidents. Even when transportation services were later arranged for them, the services provided were in such a deplorable state that many of the workers died in the train due to non-availability of food and water and lack of any such provisions for the same on different railway stations on the way (Sarmin, 2020). At some places where food was available on the railway station, several media personnel reported that the migrant workers were looting these food packets. Such actions stem from lack of faith in the government authorities regarding equal distribution of the food packets to all the people aboard the train. Furthermore, information and assurance towards adequate provision of food was completely lacking throughout the way, even in cases where the trains were delayed by more than 12 hours.

The workers walked hundreds of kilometres to reach their villages; however, the denial of their entry into their native villages by the local authorities or the residents due to fear of the corona virus spread left them stranded on the outskirts. Various steps were adopted by natives of different villages to prevent these migrants from entering the village. In Tamil Nadu, a huge wall was built overnight; in Haryana, trenches were dug to prevent the passage of people; in some other places, people were tasked with the responsibility to guard the bordering neighbourhood to prevent the entry of the returning migrants. The Population Council Institute (2020) reiterated that the return migration has made the household more vulnerable, primarily due to three reasons, namely, low COVID risk perception, households having elderly or people with other medical conditions, and no separate room/space to follow quarantine. Those people who managed to enter the village were treated with suspicion as possible carriers of the disease. The stigma attached with the return migrants added to

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their vulnerability, where on one hand, they were forced to return, and on the other hand, they were not accepted by their own people.

All these episodes of hardship, including the misuse of power by the police to restrict migrants' movement and spraying of disinfectants on them, were condemned by several human right organisations as well as the Indian judiciary. At the forefront were the humiliation, insecurity, and lack of apathy from the government towards this section of the populace. There has been also a visible laxity in ensuring adequate healthcare provisions for the poor. In addition to the negligible availability of public healthcare services in of the most migrant neighbourhoods, labour camps, and urban slum, quarantine facilities were also visibly inadequate in these localities, where the migrant workers reside in bed-space accommodation, there were inadequate quarantine facilities.

The dualism in the labour market was apparent from the fact that when many relatively well-off segments of workers could possibly avail the benefit of work from home on relaxation of lockdown, the poor migrant workers had to be back on the streets for seeking work, thereby exposing themselves to possible contagion. In other scenarios, the migrant workers were forcibly retained in their residential colonies so that they could be readily available for work once the lockdown is relaxed. Such incidents were reported in places such as Surat, Hyderabad, and Mumbai, where conflicts emerged between the migrants and the contractors during the lockdown.

The return of migrant workers to their native villages along with health implications has certain other widespread economic and social implications. The return migrants must be absorbed into the labour market of the rural economy, where the employment capacity is highly limited. After relaxation of the lockdown, some of the migrant workers might return to urban areas, whereas many others have expressed their desire not to return to the cities for work. Thus, this return migration may escalate the rural distress, with increased disguised unemployment[3] and further decline of rural wages, due to the increased supply of workers. Loss of livelihood in urban areas will also affect the remittances sent back to the rural areas. The loss of rural income and the insecurity about the possibility of re-employment have highly constrained the spending capacity of the migrant households. Many reports have even warned that the country might further witness deaths due to starvation and suicides in the absence of implementation of effective demand-driven policies.

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3   Disguised unemployment is a situation where more than required numbers of people are employed in a production unit, making the productivity of additional individuals as zero. Therefore, even if s/he is removed from the production unit, the total productivity does not change.

6. Role of State in Migration Governance

With such massive volume of internal migration in the country, the role of the government becomes all pervasive to manage such migratory flow for ensuring that the migrants are not exploited, the human rights and labour laws concerning the migrants are not breached, and that migration gives them an opportunity to progress rather than being subsumed in fear and insecurity. However, the legal protection and welfare measures for migrants are rather inadequate in India. For instance, India has not yet ratified any of the ILO conventions related to migration. There is only one major law in India related to internal migration, the Inter-State Migrant Workmen (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 1979, which, in its essence, aims to provide fair working conditions to workers, regulate the contractors, and assure welfare of the migrant workers. By now, it is widely understood that this Act is not effective and that it is not sufficiently implemented. Further, it is also being considered to be repealed in the near future if the draft labour codes under consideration of the government are approved. The Trade Union Act is also currently being considered to be repealed. Overall, there is a possibility of reduction in wages, de-unionisation of workers, and promotion of unregulated labour markets, which is evident from the growth of precarious work in India during the past few decades—a phenomenon that has even penetrated secured zones such as organised private and government sectors.

The State's laxity on migration matters is also apparent in the case of inadequate availability of reliable data on various categories of migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. There is a dearth of systematic and consistent efforts and mechanisms for gathering data on various streams of migration and categories of migrants. In the case of data on internal migrants, the importance of data sources such as NSS reports has declined. All these factors together will surely emerge as a constraint for planning effective measures for the benefit of migrants. The increasing trends of homelessness, slum formations, and ghettoisation in urban areas are also, in a way, a result of the lack of availability of data to the development planning authorities.

Two facets of the changing role of the state are apparent. On one hand, the proportion of public expenditure earmarked for the welfare of the poor is reducing. On the other hand, the State is becoming friendlier towards privatisation and the growth of corporate capital. In such a situation, issues concerning the labouring poor and the marginalised groups are often neglected. The migration landscape of India provides ample evidence in support of this argument.

The Inter State Migration Policy Index, constructed for the major migrant receiving states by using scores from eight policy areas, namely labour market, education, child right, social benefit, political inclusion, housing, domicile and

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identity, and health and sanitation, reveals that despite the fact that states such as Gujarat and Delhi receive the highest number of migrants, the state policy framework does not take into consideration the inclusion of migrants (Agarwal et al., 2019). Other policy domains provide enough scope for the government to intervene and make the state policy frameworks inclusive for migrants. The complete absence of any government policy motivated towards integration of migrants in the state has left them more vulnerable.

7. Concluding Remarks

The prominence of internal migration in India is well established in the study of Census data of different years. The quantum of such migration, both inter-state and intra-state, has increased over the years. With rapid urbanisation and industrialisation, the intensity of such movement has increased not just for voluntary migration but also for forced migration. Displacement of people without adequate rehabilitation due to several infrastructural development projects and movement due to natural disasters, which are caused by rapid industrialisation and clearing of forest cover, are few such examples. Poverty is one of the reasons for all these migration scenarios whether it is voluntary or forced. Events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, natural disasters(earthquakes or floods), and development projects has a discriminatory effect on poor and vulnerable people. Along with poverty and inequality, the discernible shift in the role of the State towards the neo-liberal path is a crucial factor that shapes the migration landscape in India, especially in terms of migration of the poor and the deprived.

The neo-liberal state is the one which is moving more closely with the interests of capital, market, and privileged segments of the society. They are considered to be less interested in taking care of the issues of marginalised and underprivileged in the society. Other features of neo-liberal state include cutting down public expenditure on social heads and reducing the safety net for poor. Yet another aspect is the exclusionary tendency in governmental schemes, acts, and other interventions. Migrants are often excluded from many benefits that are available to the local community in the destination areas. These include denial of subsidised and free facilities (such as PDS, cooking gas) and health insurance schemes and/or welfare programmes (e.g. RSBY, welfare funds). In certain cases, the participation of migrants in democratic institutions are also restricted by denying them voter cards, licences, and other basic documents (e.g., bank accounts and Aadhar cards). Quite often, the exclusionary tendencies also include discriminatory practices in recognising and legalising migrants/ refugees.

Migrants in India do not have very concrete legal protection and welfare measures. For instance, none of the ILO conventions related to migration have been ratified by India so far. The Inter-State Migrant Workmen (Regulation of

Employment and Conditions of Service) Act,1979, is not very effective and is not properly implemented. Further, this Act, in addition to the Trade Union Act, is being considered to be repealed in the near future, if the draft labour codes under consideration of the government are approved. Overall, reduction of wages, de-unionisation of workers, and promotion of unregulated labour markets are expected, which is evident from the growth of precarious work in India over the past few decades and represents a phenomenon that has even penetrated the organised private and government sectors.

Many government interventions to combat agrarian distress and promote rural livelihood options, such as Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana-National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM), Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), and Attracting and Retaining of Youth in Agriculture(ARYA), have not been completely successful in providing employment and controlling distress migration. The ever-increasing quantum of rural–urban migration supports this argument. Some researchers have cited programmes, such as MGNREGA, as the difference between survival and starvation.

The State's laxity on migration matters is also apparent in the non-availability of reliable data on various categories of migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. There are no systemic and consistent efforts and mechanisms for gathering data on various streams of migration and categories of migrants. For data on internal migration, the importance of data sources such as NSS reports has decreased considerably. All these factors together will constraint effective planning of measures for the benefit of migrants. The growing trends of homelessness, slum formation, and ghettoisation in urban areas are one of the results of the non-availability of data to the development planning authorities. The inadequate management of issues concerning migrant workers during the COVID-19 pandemic, to a large extent, also stems from the lack of any reliable database that could be used to estimate the number of internal migrants in different states and various locations within the state, which could have facilitated supply of adequate food and safety kits to them.

Given the volume of internal migration in India and the urgent need to recognise and document the existence of internal migrants, the government must plan and prepare for ways and means to collect and collate an extensive database of internal migrants in India. The current structure in Census data cannot sufficiently capture some of the complexities of internal migration, such as multiple migration and multiple reasons of migration for a single individual. The need of the hour is to adopt a more comprehensive system of data collection to engage in effective planning and policy-making concerning migrants.

Furthermore, the widespread economic disparity and inequality must be levelled by initiating several new programmes at the ground level to

ensure employment generation. Additionally, existing programmes such as MGNREGA must be strengthened by rectifying the loopholes. Programmes similar to MGNREGA must be implemented in urban areas as well to cater to the need of providing employment to the increasing population in urban areas. In addition to strengthening laws concerning migrant workers to ensure compliance, there is an urgent need of portability of social security schemes for migrant workers. Thousands of migrant workers are unable to avail benefits of the public distribution system, banking system, and other provisions that require an individual to produce a proof of residency. They cannot avail even the basic democratic right of casting their vote. Therefore, given the presence of a large number of migrant workers in India, it is crucial to frame any nationwide policies with focus on their concerns.

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