

Associated Gains from Migration: Evidences of Seasonal Tribal Women Migrants of Alirajpur

AMIT KUMAR VENKTESHWAR*
Sarojini Naidu Centre for the Women's Studies
Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi (India)

ABSTRACT

The objective of this research paper is to understand whether migration of these tribal women and adolescent girls from Alirajpur district of Madhya Pradesh has resulted into any constructive and transformative changes in the lives of these migrant tribal families or an important purpose of this migration has become limited only to the provisioning of basic needs of food and shelter. For analysing the above issue, as a methodological orientation, qualitative and quantitative methods has been used. Undoubtedly, migration has led some specific changes in their life such as it has helped them to get employment and received a better remuneration, there were development and growth in their social and economic life. It has provided a respite from the continuous dilapidated economic condition and endowed financial security, saving their money for their bad times, learning the importance of education and an opportunity to see the outside world; but these constructive and transformative changes have come at a cost. They became able to earn some sort of materialistic value but failed to gain social respect and honour. The migration has disrupted the education of their children and this process would lead the perpetuation of an intergenerational cycle of poverty, deprivation and illiteracy in their life and it has become a common phenomenon among the tribal migrants' households. Therefore, on a limited scale, they have been successful in finding solutions to their problems, but the migrating families have not been able to find a long-term way out to their problems.

Keywords: Tribal, Woman, Seasonal, Migration

INTRODUCTION

Migration has earlier been explained in dual terms of the push and pull factors. *i.e.*, the voluntarist perspective. It has also been understood from a structuralist perspective, whereby migration is mapped on dichotomous terms of centre-periphery, industrialised-peasant based, west and north-east and south. However, both perspectives have limitations since the former has understood it in simplistic terms of an individual's rationally calculated decision while the latter ended in economic determinism. In order to understand the phenomenon in

all its complexity, a more holistic approach is required. Any theory of migration must account for it in terms of race, religion, nationality, sense of belonging and nostalgia. More significantly, much of the early literature on migration has been silent on the issue of 'gender' and there is thus a need to analyse the migration process and the differential experience of women and men in the context of a gendered world. Undoubtedly, migration constitutes a complex subject of study, and an understanding based on the gender dimension serves to further enhance the complexity when we consider the multiple and heterogeneous backgrounds and experience

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of migrant women and the very complex category of 'women' herself.

Several studies, in the context of India, show that women migrate almost as much as men. As Kundu mentioned that one important fact has emerged clearly, notwithstanding the anomalies in the data that Indian women are migrating much more than they did in the past. Due to socio-cultural factors marriage mobility is still the dominant but the spurt in their migration must be attributed to economic factors. The growth in the number of women migrants for the employment perspective during 2001-11 is very high. Many of them are travelling as associated with their family but individual migration has also gone up (Kundu, in handbook 2020). However, while examining (women) migration and gender, it is essential to incorporate the social and cultural perspectives that is embedded on gender norms. Additionally, gendered analysis provides deep insight into the dynamics of gender relationships such as how gender affects access to resources; and discrepancies in power and equality in socio-economic and legal structures (Fleury¹, 2016). Majumdar rightly pointed that the experience of migration can be influenced by one's sexual identity, orientation and gender. Gender influences the full picture of migration such as various narratives of migration; why migrate? How and where to migrate? Who initiate to migrate? What are the networks for migration? Gender and community differences can also affect the risks and vulnerabilities associated with migration. Expectations, power dynamics, relationships and vitalities can vary depending on whether one is man, woman, boy, girl or identifies as a different sexual orientation. It also helps to analyze the inequalities underpinning differences shaped by the socio-cultural contexts of the individual. These factors can impact the migration process and can be affected by migration policies. So it is important to recognize the interrelatedness of gender and migration and to respond accordingly (Majumdar, 2021). Christou and Kofman argued that the gender aspects under migration studies should not be studied only because of this fact the percentage of women is almost fifty per cent² of the total international migration, but it is also necessary to study because gender is one of the key forms of differentiation within societies which usually

interacts with other social divisions such as age, caste, class, ethnicity, race, nationality, sexual orientation and disability. Men and women migrate distinctively, whether it be between rural and urban areas, intra-regionally or globally but the drivers of migration impact men and women differently (Christou and Kofman, 2022). The literature on migration has grown in volume and variety in responses, over the period of time, to the unfolding complexities of migratory processes. Undoubtedly, women's employment oriented migration is on the increase, however, few studies have discussed the movement of women in detail especially in relation to poverty. The work of Connell *et al.* (1976) the earliest of the studies in migration contains a detailed discussion on women's migration. Poverty and a search for employment have been the predominant propellants of the migration of people, which affords them the opportunity to explore their life chances. The decisions of women to migrate are informed by the twin forces of opportunities and constraints and are taken primarily by the family and, when taken independently, familial and cultural considerations have a great influence (Arya and Roy, 2006). There is a changing pattern of female migration flows has been observed. Now women are migrating for work, often without family rather than a mere increase in the number of women migrants. In recent literatures female migration is linked to gender specific patterns of labour demand in cities. It has been established that women are no longer mere passive movers who followed the household head (Fawcett *et al.*, 1984; Rao, 1986). In both South East Asian and Latin American cities plenty of opportunities are available to women in the services and industrial sectors especially with the rise of export processing in these regions. In fact single women and unmarried girls and daughters are sent to towns to work as domestic servants (Arizpe, 1981). From an early age girls become economically independent living on their own in the cities and sending remittances to their families. This kind of move has been characterised by Thadani and Todaro (1984) as "autonomous female migration" and has resulted in Thadani-Todaro model of migration. However studies indicate that the independent movement of young women in South Asia and Middle East as labour migrants is very rare and associated with derogatory connotations

1. Fleury, Anjali (2016). Understanding Women and Migration: A Literature Review, KNOMAD Working Paper (8).
2. As per a report published by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of Population Division of United Nations, in 2010, female migrants as a percentage of all international migrants was 49 percent. As per the International Labor Organization report, female migrants are estimated to be 164 million, accounting for almost half of the world's migrants in 2017.

(Connell *et al.*, 1976). But with the trade liberalization and new economic policies, gender specific labour demand has motivated many young Asian women to join the migration streams in groups or with their families to cash-in the available opportunities (Neetha, 2001).

METHODOLOGY

The objective of this research paper is to understand whether migration of these tribal women and adolescent girls from Alirajpur district of Madhya Pradesh has resulted into any constructive and transformative changes in the lives of these migrant tribal families or an important purpose of this migration has become limited only to the provisioning of basic needs of food and shelter. For analysing the above issue, as a methodological orientation, qualitative and quantitative methods have been used. So, purposively, one district from Jharkhand has been chosen, based on the highest concentration of the Scheduled tribes. Multistage sampling based on the criterion of highest concentration of them has been followed at every stage. At second stage, two villages were identified based on highest number of scheduled tribe's population in each five CD blocks and incidence of female migration found out from the village level officials like PRI members, aanganwadi and ASHA workers. At final stage, from each village either twenty household head or migrated female were identified purposively and interviewed. Using this process 200 sample have been collected.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Selected Villages and General Profile of Migrants:

Out of the total migrants; 48% were between 15 to

29 years; 42.25% were between 30-44 years; 7% were between 45 to 59 years. Only 2.75% were less than 15 years. Majority of migrants were young and middle age and fall into working age group. The education has been the true indicator of socio-economic status of the tribal households. Out of the selected respondents; 84% were illiterate; 10% were educated up to primary; 3% were educated up to middle; 2% were educated up to secondary and rest 1% have got higher level of education. As far as their marital status was concerned, out of the total migrants; 90% were married; 6% were unmarried; 4% were widow/separated and divorced (Table 1).

When we analysing the nature of migration it was found that the highest percentage belonged to the category of seasonal long-term migrants (6-9 months), accounting for 54.5% of the total. Followed by Seasonal short-term migrants (3-6 months) at 34%. While the proportion of short-term migrants (up to 3 months) were too less it stood only 6% of the total migrants followed by long-term migrants who stay around 9 to 12 months were only 5.5%.

The large-scale seasonal migration of the tribal migrants is a chronic and persistent feature of these tribal dominated district. This seasonality of migration was more prevalent as 88.5 per cent of migrants directed by the agriculture season. The cycle of seasonality was mainly winter which started from late September to October up to late February and starting weeks of March. In some cases they used to stay up to the summer till starting of the rainy season in late May or June which was farming season in their source areas. These are the important characteristics of the seasonal migration. Similarly, this is also the main time for the landless households to migrate during peak agricultural season to other states to do farm

Table 1 : Demographic details of the sampled villages

District	C D Block	Village	Total Households	Total population	Total ST population	% of ST to total population
Alirajpur	Bhavra	Barjhar	1465	7582	6102	80.48
		Ringol	1262	6498	6369	98.01
	Udaigarh	Udaigarh	739	4027	2923	72.58
		Thandla	321	2644	2643	99.96
	Alirajpur	Khandala	611	3722	3468	93.15
		Indersingkichoki	474	2969	2966	99.89
	Jobat	Badaguda	473	3081	3009	97.66
		Ublad	514	3029	2970	98.05
	Sondwa	Umralli	806	4727	4093	86.58
		Ojhad	548	3437	3429	99.76

Source: District Census Handbook (Alirajpur)-2011

labour work. It may be attributed that the rate of migration has increased as more number of people were migrating due to lack of employment opportunities at the local level. It was perceived that it was the landless and deprive people who used to migrate but nowadays even the households with landholding were also compelled to migrate. Erratic rainfall and frequent droughts, unavailability of irrigation facilities in the remote tribal areas and unable to improve land conditions and productivity might be attributed due to which households with even large acreage of land were found to migrate. Additionally, the role of middlemen and labour contractor has reduced and now with better and convenient means of communication and transportation facilities many a times they were migrating on their own. In some cases, migrants have emphasized their preferences in terms of job and better places and opted for better remuneration. This percentage was found to be as low as 8 per cent in the proposed district.

As per surveyed households, the inter-state migration was more prevalent among the migrants. Out of the total respondents, three out of four (97.5%) preferred to inter-state migration while rest (2.5%) preferred to intra-state migration. According to the Table 2, 62.5% of the total migrants make rural to rural migration outside the state, with 61% for agriculture-related activities, followed by construction (25%) and manufacturing (9.5%).

Since this type of crisis induced migration is first limited to meeting their basic needs like regular and better food and safe shelter, then the remaining part of earning

is related to investment for their future like providing good education to children, habit of savings, learning new social etiquettes, investment in scientific agricultural practices, etc. It will be important to note here that the trend of migration of these tribal women is mostly seasonal. The findings of various empirical researches illustrate that the motivation for short-term and seasonal migration is mainly driven by the persistence of large regional inequalities and the unavailability of the prospects at the local level such as lack of regular opportunities especially in the lean season, irregularities in payments, less wages, lack of industries, etc. and the challenges associated with it. So it could be assumed that the poverty and unemployment appeared to be the major causes of their migration. Actual urban-rural wage differences and availability of consistent employment have emerged as a significant pull factors for their out-migration and attracted the migrants to the developed areas.

Since migration, primarily among the lower socio-economic group, has played an important role to minimize their risks and improving their standard of living and wellbeing of the migrants' households as well. There are potentially positive impacts on the lives of the poor migrants. Although it would be exaggerated and too early to conclude that as a result of migration the poor migrants have come out from the scarcity and impoverishment because of the complications that are prevalent in the estimating poverty and multidimensional deprivations. However, migrating families have become able to repay their old debts earlier; being capable to spend on the education of their children and health care facilities when

Table 2 : Place of Out-Migration (Destinations) and Types of Work

Migration Destination		Madhya Pradesh	
		Frequency	Per cent
Outside State (Rural)	Agriculture	122	61.0
	Brick kiln	-	-
	Construction	3	1.5
Total		125	62.5
Outside State (Urban)	Construction	50	25.0
	Maid	1	0.5
	Manufacturing	19	9.5
Total		70	35.0
Same State but another district (Urban)	Construction	-	-
	Maid	5	2.5
	Manufacturing	-	-
	Others	-	-
Total	Grand Total	5	2.5
		200	100

Source: Primary Survey: 2023-24.

needed; being able to purchase some kind of luxurious products; being proficient to spend on agriculture and repair of their houses; and being competent to eat regularly and better especially in the lean seasons and spend on socio-cultural ceremonies. So migration has become critical to minimizing their risk and it has smoothen the consumption for a majority of poor households residing in the remote rural areas. It could be seen in a large number of villages and their hinterland as the villagers did not get work on a consistent basis. So, migration has become a predominant feature and provided a way of coping in their bad times and helped them to become strong economically and mentally alert. Undoubtedly, there were development and growth in their social and economic life. It has provided a respite from the continuous dilapidated economic condition and endowed financial security, saving their money for their bad times, learning the importance of education and an opportunity to see the outside world. The specific changes have been elaborated below:

- The migration provided a new avenue for their employment during lean season especially during the agricultural lean seasons and long summers, so instead of sitting idle at home, the migrants used to opt (willingly or circumstantially) migration to earn some money. So they could be able to feed their families.
- Since they received a better income from migration that has led towards positive changes. Most of them received a better value for their work and able to send money back home. They became more competent to furnish their desires, could save and deposit money in the bank and led a dignified life, became able to buy chemical fertilizers and better seeds for the agriculture or equipment for better agriculture and able to retrieve their mortgaged land. Most of the migrants used to move seasonally so money they saved during movement has helped in meeting their agricultural needs.
- The remuneration they received was more than what they earned at the local level has helped in early repayment of their debts. Some of them received advance payment from their employer as per their need that also without interest. It was completely a new thing for them which the migrants got nowhere else. Therefore, to some extent, they could avoid taking loans on interest

from the local money lenders, which was a very common practice earlier. In which they were mostly dependent on moneylenders even to meet their small needs.

- In most of the villages people transformed their mud and kutcha houses into pukka houses with concrete roofs. They became more able to earn well in a single movement and returned home with lump-sum cash money in hand. From their savings and accumulated money during the migration they became able to survive for the next few months especially when they had no work to do.
- Migration has created awareness and the migrants learnt to be practical and gained useful insights about the right and wrong. The migrants have become aware regarding opportunities and outside world. It has also changed their perception, behaviour, and helped them to realise real-world knowledge and got effective communication and social etiquettes. One of the migrant said that, “when one of the family members had fallen ill and requiring a large amount for medical emergencies such as hospitalization, surgery or required long treatment, we sent money and making the treatment possible.” With liquid cash in hand it seems that medical treatment became accessible for the tribal migrants and their families.
- As the change of place helped in changing their perception regarding the new kind of job, opportunities to work, utilization of idle time and handling the cash. Since these migrants learnt new things so it eliminated fear and shyness. However, some of them said that initially there were some kind of apprehensions and fear as to where and when would they would they get the work. However, when they went with the acquaintance working there, they were much at ease and did not face much trouble. However, women and adolescent who were migrating alone had faced some kind of issues in commuting and adjustment in a completely new environment.

However, these constructive and transformative changes have come at a cost. Since these migrants are employed in the lowest paid jobs on the worst terms and are the most vulnerable to exploitation. These jobs are dirty, degrading and dangerous too and characterized by

poor employment conditions such as limited personal freedom, violation of human rights, etc. As migration, undoubtedly, has increased several challenges and risks for these tribal women migrants such as risk of injuries, exposure to diseases related to the occupational health, as well as the negative consequences of being separated from their family for longer period.

As migration helped them to get employment and received a better remuneration but whatever saving they usually brought back was spent during lean season and again they had compelled to take up loan again during any emergency situation. On a limited scale, they have been successful to some extent in finding solutions to their problems, but the migrating families have not been able to find a long-term way out to their problems. Single women and unmarried girls who were working as maids in the metro cities had to work for a longer hours (some of them had to work continuously for 18 hours), leading to serious health issues and their exploitation. Hence, the process of migration is neither constructive nor transformative to them. In this situation they became able to earn some sort of materialistic value but failed to gain social respect and honour.

However, migration assisted them to earn better but there were many other problems which they used to face during the entire process of migration. Like they faced separation from the family and home, loneliness, falling sick and many others. At the migrating place, they found themselves helpless during any problem or in emergency situation. While working outside they feel alienated from the village culture and society. As they were working at a distant place and cut off with their well-wishers and close relatives so they always felt a possibility of loss of life and money.

In the entire process, the education of children were adversely affected. Migration of either one or both the parents adversely affected the education of their children. Children were often accompanying their families in the process of migration and in many cases they also were joining their mothers to work sites, depriving them of formal education system. Remarkably, among the surveyed households, 9 out of 10 women were migrating with their husband and small children. So, the children who were migrating with their parents were not in a position to continue their studies. Children were at a disadvantage as their studies were hampered for at least six months. All the beneficiary schemes and their scholarships were interrupted during the entire migrating

period. Children who were accompanying with their families at the destination stayed away from their studies as long as they were away from the source areas and joined their same classes after returning. Hence, dropout of school children was a direct impact of migration. Several studies (UNICEF and UIS, 2014; U-DISE Flash Statistics, 2016-17) and empirical findings (Smita, 2008; Sansristi, n.d.) have highlighted these facts that although the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) and Net Enrolment Ratio (NER) have improved for the tribal but the dropout rate was very high for tribal children and youth, for the elementary level and the secondary level of school education. On the other hand, there is a gender gap persisting for the tribal education as revealed by the findings of NSSO 75th Round of 2017-18, where girls are at a disadvantage as compared to boys. It may be attributed that migrants usually left their boys in the source areas for continuing studies whereas girls are taken to manage the households, cook food, etc. Safety of the girls without parents around in the village is also a matter of concern and hence the girls accompany the migrating parents. Therefore, migration was also disrupting the education of their children and this process would lead the perpetuation of an intergenerational cycle of poverty, deprivation and illiteracy in their life and it has become a common phenomenon among the tribal migrants' households.

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