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RESEARCH ARTICLE

MIGRATION AND EMPLOYMENT IN INDIA: A STUDY IN DHEMAJI DISTRICT OF ASSAM

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ABSTRACT

Migration is developing into a very significant issue to concern in Assam. Every year hundred of youth migrated to the states like Maharashtra, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Gujarat in search of occupation. Generally youths of Dhemaji, Lakhimpur and Majuli are migrated. The present paper attempted to investigate various factors which lead to migration particularly in Dhemaji District of Assam. Further this study explained how the social welfare schemes can play an important role in reducing migration in this particular district. This paper also discussed about the experiences of women of the families from which male members have migrated. The researcher has conducted this study on the villages of two blocks in Dhemaji and is based on primary data sources.

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INTRODUCTION

Migration is defined as the movement of person from one place to another and employment is one of the significant causes for migration. In addition to economic security, migration also occurs due to other factors like quest for independence, the desire to break away from traditional constraint of social organization, conflict among family members (Modi, 2010). Hazra (2010) views that in India migration mostly takes place not due to the so called pull forces of the destination place as usually happens in case of developed countries, but because of poverty, unemployment, natural calamities and underdevelopment at the origin place. About 70% of rural population earns their livelihood through agriculture in India. Modi (2010) says that because of population pressure, the agricultural sector becomes overcrowded and as a result the problem of disguised unemployment becomes very acute in this sector. Modi (2010) argues that frequent occurrence of droughts, lack of proper irrigation facilities are the factors responsible for the reduction of employment opportunities in this dominant sector. Deshingkar and Akter (2009) state that Delhi and the states of Gujarat and Maharashtra are top destinations for inter-state migrant labour. They further explain that the major sectors using migrant labour are textiles, construction, stone quarries and mines, brick-kilns, small scale industry (diamond cutting, leather accessories etc), crop transplanting and harvesting, sugarcane cutting, plantations, rickshaw pulling, food processing including fish and prawn processing, salt panning, domestic work, security services, sex work, small hotels and roadside restaurants or tea shops and street vending.

Various studies expose that migration is not desirable in developing countries like India where it occurs due to inequality in the regional development. In India migration is leading to the overcrowding of cities which further leads to the growth of slums areas. Census Data 2011 reveals that between 2001 and 2011, the number of people living in urban areas increased from 286 million to 377 million and migration of people from rural areas in search of employment and better resources is one of the reasons. Low developed states like Bihar, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, Odisha, and Madhya Pradesh have a high trend of rural urban migration mainly due to lack of better employment opportunities. From the last few years the youths of Assam also started to migrate other state like Maharashtra, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Delhi and Karnataka in search of better occupation. If this process will continue then Assam will also come under list of high out-migration states like Bihar, U.P etc. The need of the hour is to bring into focus this escalating migration of youth from Assam and to take specific measures to check this growing movement of youths. The purpose of this paper is to analyze the various factors which lead to the migration of youth in Dhemaji district of Assam and to find out the effectiveness of various social welfare schemes in checking migration in this district. Further this paper also explains the experiences of women of the families from which male members have migrated.

Rationale of the study

It is often seen that most of the youth belong to the villages of Dhemaji district used to migrate other states in search of occupation. In fact sometime children after passing 7th or 8th standard or maximum 10th standard also migrated to earn livelihoods. They usually migrated to Kerala, Maharashtra,

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Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka etc. and in general work as menial laborer in different industries for salary ranging from Rs.200 to 1000 per day.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted in the eight villages of two blocks- Dhemaji and Sissiborgaon in Dhemaji district of Assam. Qualitative Research Methodology has been used in this study and is based on primary data sources. The villages and the respondent were selected by adopting Purposive Sampling Approach. The villages which have high trend of migration of youth were selected. The researcher has taken eight (8) in depth interviews of prominent person of the villages like Teachers, Lecturers and Village Heads. Moreover the researcher has taken two (2) in depth interviews of the employees of Dhemaji Block Development Office and ten (10) household level interviews from each village. Snowball Sampling was used to identify the household from where the youths have migrated. A semi structured interview schedule was used by the researcher to collect data.

Analysis and Findings

Dhemaji is one of the backward districts located in the Northern part of Assam. Floods are common phenomena in this district and it has witnessed several major floods since 1950s. Flooding has a significant impact on the livelihoods and occupations of the people in this district. Flood has not only affected the livelihoods of the people but it has a great influence on the health, saving, hygiene, sanitation, food security of the people and make them more vulnerable. In the four selected villages- Pukia, Tokowbari, Hatula Chuk and Gormua of Sissiborgaon block, the people have adopted migration as coping strategy to reduce their vulnerability to floods. Most of the youths have resorted migration to earn their livelihood in these villages. Due to flood, people could not cultivate and rear animals like goat, hen, duck or pig and as a result the financial conditions of the people are degrading day by day. People also do not have enough assets to start another sort of business or activity. Consequently large numbers of youth are migrated to other states in search of occupation. It is very well understood that flood is one of the important causes of this migration of youths. These days the male child prepares himself to migrate to towns for work after passing 7th and 8th standard of school education. In fact most of the children of age around sixteen (16) or seventeen (17) have already migrated to other states basically like Bangalore, Hyderabad, Uttarkhand, Tamil Nadu and Kerala. They mainly work as menial labor in different industries like Coffee, Rubber, Fishing, Plywood, etc. Few youths also work in Pineapple Estates.

Table 1. No. of migrated youth in the selected villages of Sissiborgaon Block

Name of the Village	No. of Household	No. of migrated youth
Gormua	700	400
Hatula Chuk	180	90
Pukia	450	150
Tokowbari	650	90

Source: Field Survey

Their salary ranges from Rs. 250 to Rs. 800 per day depending on the number of hours they work. Usually for eight hours they are paid Rs. 250. The estimated number of youth migrated from the selected villages of Sissiborgaon Block are given in Table 1.

The educational level of the migrated youth varies from illiterate to graduate level. It is found from the interaction with parents and teachers that most of the migrated youth are Senior Secondary passed. Teachers are of the view that regular floods leads to the poor academic performance of the children and due to which they do not want to continue their studies and opted to work as menial labor. In fact it is often seen in the flood affected villages that children mainly boys aim to work as menial labor in different cities of the country instead of continuing their studies or work in agricultural field. The teachers also said that the youth have found this is easiest way to earn livelihoods. The causes of migration are different to some extent in the selected villages- Majgaon, Nogaon, Hahsora and Khajua of Dhemaji Block from the selected four villages of Sissiborgaon Block. These villages are not affected by floods. Poverty is one of the reasons according to few people. Many people also argue that urge to live a luxurious life i.e. to buy a motorbike, sophisticated mobile phone, Television, to build a good house etc. are some factors due to which youths want to migrate to other states to earn money which is not possible by doing cultivation only. Moreover with the increase of family members, the incidences of disguised unemployment are also increasing due to the small size of land holdings. Lack of employment opportunities for unskilled worker, small size of land holdings etc. are main factors for the migration of youth in the selected villages of Dhemaji Block. The estimated numbers of migrated youth in the selected villages of Dhemaji Block are provided in the following Table 2.

Table 2. No. of migrated youth in the selected villages of Dhemaji Block

Name of the Village	No. of Household	No. of Migrated Youth
Majgaon	180	75
Nogaon	42	25
Khajua	60	32
Hahsora	55	24

Source: Field Survey

With poverty and unemployment, shame to work as menial labor in the native place is another important causes of migration of youth in both the Blocks. Teachers, village head, parent and other prominent member of the selected villages state that many people feel awkward to do certain work like to sell vegetables, to pull rickshaw or to work as daily wage earner etc. in their native places and as a result they chose to work in other places where they will be unknown to others. Till one year back it was seen that only boys or male members of the family used to go other states and work in factories or industries as daily wage earner. But now women have also started to go and worked with their husbands in factories or industries. Those youth who have siblings, relatives or other members, who can take care of their families, are generally migrated to other states. Many youths also came back who could not adjust in other places. They find difficulty mainly in adjusting with food habits. It is found during field visit that people have different opinions regarding this issue of

migration. Many parents believe that instead of staying jobless, their children are at least earning something, though they have to go far places like Andhra Pradesh, Kerala etc. Though it is good that instead of staying jobless, youths are atleast engaged somewhere and help their families financially, but this sort of migration has brought negative impact to the society also. From the interaction with the village heads, lecturers and teachers it has been found that there is a shortage of workers now a days to work in agricultural fields or other activities in the villages. Moreover, due to the unavailability of youths, it becomes difficult to celebrate certain important cultural event like *bhauna*, *joymoti utsav* etc. in the villages. Furthermore teachers state that there are hardly any children generally boys in all the selected villages who want to pursue higher studies now a days. Children feel that after pursuing education also they will not get employment opportunities and as such they prefer to work as menial labor instead of spending money in their education.

The experiences of the women whose husbands or sons have migrated are not similar in the selected villages of both the Blocks. Different women have different opinions regarding the migration of their family members. The women of the villages – Gormua, Hatula Chuk, Pukia and Tokowbari find difficulties during flood time due to the absence of their husband. Many times after devastating floods people have to stay in the roads for several months and have to build their houses again. In the absence of their husband women have to face many difficulties in the recovery process after floods. Moreover it also becomes troublesome for the women to take care of their livestock and to carry out agricultural work in absence of male members. The majority of the women of the selected villages of Sissiborgaon Block state that because of the rampant poverty and regular occurrence of floods, the male members of the family have to migrate in order to earn money. However women of the selected village of Dhemaji Block opine that they have not found much difficulty in the absence of their husbands or other male members. Instead they said that their financial condition has increased after their husband, sons or other male members started to work in different states. They further said that now they are able to build concrete houses, buy other important things like television, motorbike, refrigerator etc.

Efficiency of the Social Welfare Schemes in Checking Migration

Poverty, lack of employment opportunities in the native areas and regular floods are the main reasons behind the migration of youth in Dhemaji district. Various research studies reveal that rural migration can be checked by successfully implementing the Social Welfare Schemes. Mostly Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) can play a significant role in checking migration. For example, Kumar and Haorei (2010) argue that migration has stopped in the five panchayats with the proper implementation of the MGNREGS in Dindigul district of Tamil Nadu. Apparently this district along with other three districts namely Sivagangai, Cuddalore and Tirunelveli of Tamil Nadu have received award for their best implementation of MGNREGS (Kumar and Haorei, 2010).

Like in Tamil Nadu, migration can be checked by successfully implementing MGNREGS in Dhemaji district also. From the interaction with the village heads, job card holders and the employees of Dhemaji Block Development Office it is found that MGNREGS is not implemented satisfactorily in the villages of this district. According to the employees of the Dhemaji Block Development Office, there are various obstacles in implementing this scheme. Full cooperation of the people is very essential for successful implementation of any scheme. It is found from the discussion with both job card holders and employees of Dhemaji Block Development Office that people are not much interested in implementing MGNREGS. One important reason for this is the low wage rate. The wage rate of MGNREGS scheme is Rs. 152 per day whereas Rs.250 to Rs.800 is paid per day who is working in different industries in Kerala, Andhra Pradesh etc. Because of this low wage rate of MGNREGS, youths prefer to migrate instead of working under this scheme. Lack of public support is another reason for the improper implementation of this scheme. For example it is very difficult to convince people to provide their land to construct roads in villages. People usually do not want to offer land for such activities. One more hindrance in the implementation is the feeling of awkwardness of the youths to work in native place as daily labor which researcher has already explained above.

Conclusion

From the above analysis it is clear that there is an urgent need to check this migration of youths. This type of migration is not at all beneficial to any society. Special measures should be taken to reduce the vulnerability of people to floods in order to check migration as flood is one of the significant factors of migration of youths in Dhemaji district. More employment opportunities can be create by establishing small scale industries like weaving. Women should be encouraged to form Self Help Groups in order to help their family financially. Additionally it is required to increase the wage rate of MGNREGS and most importantly it becomes very necessary to change the mind- set of the people i.e. to quit the feeling of embarrassment to work in their native place as menial labour.

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