



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

INTER-STATE MIGRATION AMID LOCKDOWN: KEY CONCERN FOR ODISHA

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Abstract: Odisha has been witnessing about seven lakh inter-state migratory workers working in the destination states under the process of liberalization and industrialization. Inter-state migration is nothing new, but it has risen as a crucial issue recently after the hasty shutdown of the country. In the current scenario when COVID-19 is declared as epidemic in India, huge exodus at inter-state level is reached at its highest in Odisha with five lakh migrants returning to their parent/original state till June 2020. Huge inter-state migration has been triggering amid lockdown due to the anticipation of job loss, destabilisation of economies and worsened food security, which is overblown in backward state like Odisha, largely dependent on a migrant workforce. Now, the life of migrants is full of insecurity and uncertainty from the perspective of economic, food, employment, psychological, and health factors. It poses key concern for Odisha in various ways such as in terms of employment, policies, economic and health matters. The present paper aimed to find out inter-state migration in Odisha amid epidemic and shutdown and how our state, political leaders, planners and policy makers are concerned and prepared to look at the issue of great bulk of the amorphous informal workforce with gravity amid lockdown and the study is an effort of searching for certain measures to sort-out this issue.

Keywords: Lockdown, Health, Food, Security, Inter-State Migration, Shutdown, Covid-19

I. INTRODUCTION:

Rampant migration at inter-state, intra-state or within the states from rural to urban area is a regular practice in India and perhaps, India is identified as the major original/parent state from where people migrated to all over the world. The factors that influence exodus may be the social and economic aspects or the rational self-interest of the individual that determine one's decision to move outside the state. Internal migration in the country reaches at 450 million as per census 2011 which is increasing 45% of that of 2001 census.¹ Inter-state migration in developing countries like India is a key income generating strategy for low-income households.² Mostly, inter-state migrants are moving from the original/parent states such as UP, Bihar, Odisha, Rajasthan, West Bengal to seven popular destination states scored on the IMPEX Scale such as Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Haryana, Delhi, Maharashtra, Kerala and Punjab³. Odisha has been witnessing about seven lakh inter-state migration in 2020 under the process of liberalisation and industrialisation. Inter-state migration is nothing new for an economically poor state like Odisha, but it has raised up as a crucial issue recently, after the hasty shutdown of the country. Enormous inter-state migration is overdone and unrestrained amid lockdown in Odisha because of the migrant's anticipation of job loss, destabilisation of economies and worsened food security. It poses vital concern and alarm for Odisha in various ways such as in terms of economic, food, employment and health issue during Covid-19. The present paper aimed to find out how our state, political leaders, planners and policy makers are concerned and prepared to face the issue of great bulk of the amorphous informal workforce with gravity amid lockdown and the study is an effort of searching for certain measures to sort-out this issue.

II. INTER-STATE MIGRATION IN ODISHA:

Odisha is one of the major states for supply of migrant labour which is about 2.5 million.⁴ Migrant workers from Odisha to other states is rising steadily which is increasing about three times of 55,000 in 2007 to 1.46 lakh in 2015 within 10 years in Odisha⁵. In the year 2020 it is estimated to 7 lakhs from which already 5 lakhs migrants returned back to their homeland in parent state, Odisha. Maximum number of migrants are from Ganjam and Bolangir districts of Odisha. Besides these, Kalahandi, Nuapara, Sonapur, Gajapati, Koraput, Nabarangapur, Rayagada and Khurda district are enlisted as the migrant prone districts of Odisha. The destination states of Odisha migrants are Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Haryana, Delhi, Maharashtra which are industrially developed and economically urbanised states. For instance, report states that 72% of migratory workers of Surat are from Odisha state and rest 28% belong to other states. These migrant workers are called Dadan Labour in Odisha, they are recruited and transported to the destination states through various agents/middlemen/contractors for engagement in different works of diverse sectors. Most of the migrants do not get registered their names in government portal so it is hard to estimate the actual volume of migrants in the state. As most of migrant workers are engaged in unorganised informal sectors,

they have been facing problems like conflict in work place, exploitation, lot of hardships, no fixed working hour, non-payment of wage, compelled to work in adverse working condition, physical abuse, accident, death and high rate of vulnerability. In this situation labour laws are not properly adopted for their protection and to prevent the abuses done to inter-state workers. To regulate the employment of inter-state migratory workmen and deal with their service related matters, an act was introduced that is Inter-state Migrant Workmen (RE&CS) Act, 1979 and its Orissa Rules, 1980 which states about the procedure for getting Registration by the Principal Employer and Licenses by the Contractors under the Inter-state Migrant Workmen.⁶The employer of the 'Inter-state migrant workman' has to apply in a specified form to the district labour officer of the district and registered their name in prescribed form. After proper registration the workforce will disburse to the destination states safely.

III. INTER-STATE MIGRANTS AND THEIR PATTERN OF WORK:

Migrant workforces include skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled labours of various sectors. Some of them are short-term/seasonal migrants, and are usually returning to their native place during festive occasions, sowing and harvesting period, while others permanently settled there with family. Majority of the migrant workers in Odisha are from coastal region which accounts for 50 percent of the total migrants working in textile, cotton ginning, carpet, diamond polishing, and construction sectors.⁷Tribal migrants from north, south and western Odisha are employed in brick kiln, stone crusher, domestic work, plantation, construction, and agricultural sector, where as young migrants from other tribal rural areas are at work in hotel, restaurants, construction, manufacturing and other service sectors. Some of them registered their names and majority did not as a result of which they faced problems. The government of Odisha has framed an Action Plan to lessen the problems and susceptibility of migrant workers.

IV. INTER-STATE MIGRATION AND ITS POSITIVE IMPACT ON ODISHA:

Inter-state migration becomes the leading feature of labour work force in economically less developed state like Odisha. It contributed to state's economy in various ways such as, unemployment rate would be reduced in the original state and people get greater job opportunity outside Odisha which might lessen the rate of joblessness and poverty ratio of our state. Secondly, better standard of living with upgraded of living condition could be likely conceivable due to their better earning in the destination states. Thirdly, it would ultimately contribute greater remittance and supplement the economic growth of Odisha. Fourthly, due to population growth, scarcity of food, basic amenities and increasing criminal activities are some of the observed problems found in the state, but when people get engaged in various employment owing to migration, these problems naturally lowered down in the state. Fifthly, human labour force would be properly utilised and better engaged in various sectors to increase productivity. Lastly, in course of their movement, the migrants can have a greater exposure to better skill, technology, know-how, expertise and ideas in the destination states and these expand and advance his outlook. Sometimes, they gain and acquire these skill and technology and apply in their parent states for greater productivity.

V. REASONS BEHIND INTER-STATE MIGRATION IN ODISHA:

1. Increasing rural deprivation and disparity giving rise to large scale anguish among poor people that compel them to move towards cities and urban location for better wage and livelihood. Welfare and Employment generation programmes are not properly implemented in rural area, may be due to corruption or poor governance that led to miseries and exploitation among young mass as a result of which they are migrated to places to avail greater opportunities in matters of income and economy.
2. Sometimes people are migrated when they feel socially and economically insecure and unjust in their parent state, and excluded from basic amenities in their native due to the poor enforcement of policies by authorities. The poverty ratio of rural Odisha stood at 35.69% in 2011-12 as per Economic Survey and the Reserve Bank of India stated that 13.85 million people (32.59%) in Odisha are below poverty line, the second bigger state in BPL rank⁸. Unemployment rate in 2018-19 of Odisha stood at 7.1% against the all India average of 6.1 percent⁹ which reveal our grim economic status. Improper implementation of Labour Act, 1980 and MGNREGA in rural employment generation sector failed to resolve the self-employment issue of the state.
3. Majority people in rural Odisha earn their livelihoods from agriculture. But lower agricultural productivity, crop failure due to irregular monsoon and use of traditional technology in cultivation lead to inadequate production in rural Odisha which is not sufficient for their livelihood and meet the basics of family like education of their children, ailing parents and building houses. Sometimes these factors compel them to migrate and earn more in the destination states.
4. To get greater income opportunity and secure their economic development outside the state, they often, migrate somewhere else outside the original state. The process of national economic integration, perhaps induces massive exodus of workforce from one state to other.
5. Under the impact of industrialisation and liberalisation, free movement of human resources from one to other is obviously observed within and outside the state for the economic advancement of the state. These human resources in the form of migration may be better utilised to contribute the developmental process of Odisha and becomes the dominant feature of labour work force. Inter-state migrants in India contributes 46.8% of work force and Odisha contributes 44.9% of workforce, maximum number of people including ST move towards other states to participate in labour force.
6. Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) in Odisha is 48.3% mirroring the National rate of 49.8% and Worker Population Ratio (WPR) in the state is 44.9% compared to the national ratio of 46.8%¹⁰. This percentage is quite

encouraging and reveals that greater workforce in Odisha but not properly utilised in our state, may be due to lack of opportunity or improper guidance and implementation of schemes and programmes.

Before the outbreak of epidemic, the migrant workers have been facing myriad challenges in their destination states such as accessions of poor health service, sometimes carrier of HIV, AIDS and numerous chronic diseases, living in slum and unhygienic condition, social and political exclusion, engaged in perilous work, job insecurity, in case of sudden death or accident, there is no provision for insurance or rehabilitation as they are unregistered in government portal. As they are labouring in unorganised sectors, they experience lots of irregularities in service and lastly, human trafficking, exploitation and sexual harassment are sometimes, experienced by girl migrants by the factory managers and mediators.

VI. INTER-STATE MIGRATION IN ODISHA AMID EPIDEMIC COVID-19:

In the current scenario when COVID-19 is declared as epidemic and the country came under lockdown and shut down of economic activities throughout the country, mass exodus at inter-state level is reached at its highest throughout the country, Odisha is no exception of the effect of massive exodus amid epidemic. Purpose behind exodus is to secure themselves from Covid-19, job uncertainty, and hunger. Shut down of the entire economic and industrial activities in the destination states put them in to unwarranted economic strain and tension and they became panic by thinking about their livelihood, daily wage insecurity and the fear of Covid-19. The only worst alternative left to them is to return back to their parent states. As the movement of train, bus and vehicle are completely restricted due to lockdown all over the country, a great humanitarian crisis is created because of the mismanaged movement of the migrant labourers to Odisha. The most heart-breaking news was that the migrants in Odisha with their family, elders and bag and baggage were walking thousands of kilometres without any food in the hot sun. Some of them were found walking in barefoot or sitting on top of truck or inside the empty gas tanker towards their native. Thousands of migratory workers undergo untold miseries in their way to home in Odisha.

Immediately amid lockdown, the state government has run and sent buses in districts to transport the migrants from their destination states. For this purpose, Odisha government coordinated with neighbouring states and limited bus transit services were started on track to evacuate them from their destination states with the intention to mitigate the problem of movement of painful pedestrians. Sources of information displayed that some buses due to long route coverage faced accident with some casualties. Police personnel are also engaged to facilitate transport for migrant workers in different district borders of Odisha and arranged food, water and other basic requirements for them so that they would not suffer. Then, the Centre initiated Shramic special train services to take away the inter-state migrant workers to different destinations. Chaotic scene near railway station and bus stop with thousands of migrants gathered for transportation to their villages really created challenge to contain the contagious disease like Covid-19. Extension of lockdown from time to time also severely obstructed source of income of the taxi driver, rickshaw puller, house maid, construction worker and labourers migrated from rural to urban area of Odisha, they lose their livelihood temporarily. People in rural areas demonised them as the super spreader of the epidemic, but the fact is that as they were living in slum and sharing common bathroom, living and sourcing of water, it was difficult for them to maintain social distancing. Again, they had no provision for health screening to make sure about Corona infection and sometimes, lack of awareness created problem for them while coming home without any precaution.

VII. PROBLEMS DURING LOCKDOWN:

1. Thousands of migratory workers from Odisha are mostly employed in unorganised informal sectors in the destination states. These sectors involve lot of conflict, irregularities in payment of wage, physical abuse, at times accident, death due to lack of precautionary measures by the owners of factories. Therefore, high rate of vulnerability is experienced by the migratory workers during lockdown. If any perilous situation will rise, they cannot claim or entitle social service like subsidized food, fuel and health service meant for economically vulnerable section.
2. Due to unexpected shutdown for Covid-19, migratory workers became unwaged and hard-pressed to uncertainty as they earn their livelihood on day-to-day basis. No alternative source of income, or means of financial support to meet their livelihood are opened for daily wage labourer, unskilled, skilled and now, they are losing their daily bread and coming to the street with empty hands.
3. To contain the disease, complete lockdown situation in the whole country made them very difficult to find out any transportation to return back to native. They did not anticipate the severity of the situation and after few weeks, they feel the gravity and extension of shutdown. Thereafter, massive inter-state exodus with no precautionary measures and social distancing was started throughout India. Mass transportation of migrants in buses and trains with heavy rush may lead to increase in the risk of contagion among other migrants.
4. Huge migrant movement would be severely created huge labour dislocation in Odisha because the skilled workers of other states like West Bengal, UP and Bihar were working in Odisha in major construction works and workers from Odisha were working in Gujarat and Maharashtra in , but now they are returned back to their states and our workers may not be so skilled in this sphere.
5. Domestic violence and social disturbances may be increased in the parent areas when migrants return home in a massive scale with no work at their disposal. Due to loss of income and work, migrants may face food insecurity and sometimes psychologically unsecured in their states.
6. Migrants are found socially and politically excluded because they are deprived of ration or BPL card services as well as not privileged to exercise political rights in the destination state. Again, the political leaders are not listened to their problem as they are not contributing vote bank.

7. Scarcity of basic amenities in their area and standard of living would be affected due to loss of income and family burden which may deprive them from their human rights in the states.
8. Political leaders without political vision and courage to address this crisis may flare up various criminal and terrorist activities in the state. There may be the chance of misleading the unemployed migrants dangerously by the opponents within the state.
9. Migrants are found discriminated in their villages and demonised as the carrier of Covid-19 and found as living outside the village and top of the tree and restricted to enter into their houses, they may feel socially insecure in their area.

VIII. STEPS FOR SOLUTION:

Inter-state migration amid epidemic and lockdown is a vital issue for Odisha. Today, the Covid-19 entails the need for reformation of the existing labour policies and greater concern towards migration in Odisha. Essential services like health, basic necessities like food, shelter and work must be provided to them on priority basis during epidemic. The following measures may be noted for durable solution of this crucial issue in Odisha.

1. Existing Poverty Alleviation programmes and numerous welfare schemes implemented from time to time to uplift and assist the economically vulnerable sections of society, but not yet modified. Now its high time to revive, alter, supervise, monitor, and streamline in an eloquent and meaningful way for maximum benefit of the people. No further scheme or programmes are needed or suggested during the economic shutdown of Odisha. The prevailing schemes and programmes need to be revitalised in a proper direction.
2. One of the major objectives of rural development is the sustained agricultural growth along with the progress of allied sectors by applying modern skill and technology. In 2020 Odisha government has approved the Agricultural Policy 'Samridhi' for sustainable agricultural development for Odisha. 'Samridhi' puts emphasis on eight elements relating to sustainable agriculture such as science and technology, adoption to climate change, markets, domestic, global, physical and financial, resources like use efficiency ensuring higher productivity, creating appropriate infrastructure, diversification of production and human resource upgradation and skilling and strengthening institutions.¹¹ If it will be successfully implemented, thousands of labourers and farmers will be benefitted and engaged in work. Village development can be possible if workforce is better utilised in Odisha.
3. Training on skill development and work expertise must be upgraded among migrant workers and on that basis, they would be engaged in different sectors. It will definitely provide unique window of opportunity to get employment and engagement easily in different sectors of Odisha and there would be no need to go outside state for labour.
4. Regarding the current issue of massive inter-state migration, the Supreme Court of India formed a bench headed by Justice Ashok Bhushan and directed the state administration to collect all relevant information about migration who have come back, with specific details on the kinds of jobs to which they are earlier associated with. The bench asked the state and union territories to ensure registration of migrant workers at village and block levels, identify their employability and provide them jobs as per their suitability by mapping their skill and confirm the court about the schemes that provide jobs to migrants in their native¹⁰. It is really a commendable initiative of the court and now it's the responsibility of the state to do the needful sincerely to manage migration problem in a proper way.
5. Dishonesty and fraud in MGNREGA and other Poverty Alleviation programmes are to be properly investigated and steps to be taken to check it. 'Sambad' dated 9th June 2020¹², said during epidemic in the state, Odisha government has targeted to engage 20 lakh labourers on daily basis in MGNREGA scheme to develop rural areas. The labourers will be involved in digging ponds, plantation of trees, gardening and building construction for Anganwadi centres. Total 20 crore working days will be provided under this scheme in the current financial year and government gives emphasis on 20 blocks of four districts such as Kalahandi, Bolangir, Bargarh and Nuapara where maximum migrants will be participated in workforce. Government has instructed to the Panchayats to sanction immediately job card to the migrants so that they can be entered into labour. To facilitate this, the Labour union, NGOs and SHGs need to be engaged to carry out the process.
6. Inter-state Migration Workers Act of 1979 has to be modified in better way to help the migrants. Trafficking of Persons (Prevention, Protection and Rehabilitation) Bill, 2017 regarding labour trafficking and laws to protect migrant labourers are not found working properly in the state to deal with labour related problems in the state, these are needed to be refreshed and strengthened in a progressive manner so that these can really address their issues. Migrant-friendly policies of Kerala is eradicating challenges and barriers, framing suitable labour policies, providing social and economic welfare facilities to the migrants in its premise which should be followed in Odisha.
7. Civil Society organisations have optimistic role to play in this situation. Changing public attitude towards migration in the village and block levels and educating and generating awareness for safe migration, and suggesting meaningful and constructive policy for these workers may be the responsibility of civil society to overcome this situation.
8. NGOs in Panchayats also must play pro-active role, for instance, Ajeevika Bureau, NGO in Rajasthan and Gujarat is working and assisting migrant communities in matters of service delivery, research and technical support for their advancement. During epidemic NGOs have been entrusted with the work to register, screening, distribute food and facilitate smooth transportation in Odisha. NGOs have to take initiative by undertaking wide range of field-based

- project research on different aspects such as labour, skill and employment of vulnerable migrants. They will submit their project report and suggest policy measures to resolve the issue.
9. Tourism sectors in remote areas of Odisha is to be developed in a planned way along with the promotion of rural farming, tourism, displaying tribal art and handicraft, rich cultural heritage. That can engage rural youth in the local area and attract tourists outside the state. Though it is a long-term process, it will definitely work if properly managed by the government.
 10. Inter-state migration is impossible to halt in present globalised era, rather it should be encouraged in some ways for various reasons as discussed earlier. Free migration is guaranteed to all as per Article 19(1), we cannot restrict. Indifference towards them in states might restrict migration, it means is to hurt our growth. It is necessary to think and reduce the complications relating to inter-state migration so that future problems may not be created as today's epidemic. Most significant is the compulsory registration with issuing of 'One Nation, One Card' to all so that they can avail and access all facilities meant for them outside the state.
 11. During Covid-19 in Odisha, the stranded workers received groceries, food and drinking water and other assistance from the voluntary organisations who extended helping hands to them and carry out initiatives. Further, their assistance will be significantly needed to find out the problems of migrants and engage in doing social service activities.
 12. Lastly, a lack of the possibility of integration in the destination state might dissuade migrants from moving to another state.¹³ Government of Odisha has to discuss, do agreement and integrate with other states for the betterment of the migrant workers and sort out their problem, otherwise in future severe labour dislocation might be suffered by the destination states.

CONCLUSION:

Nowadays, inter-state migration appears to be a critical issue for Odisha amid epidemic. It is high time to think and act for durable solution of this matter regarding proper management, registration, states' integration, skill development, socio-economic and health security, provision of basics of life, revitalisation of existing plans and programmes, and involvement of NGOs, civil society and voluntary organisation. We all know about the numerous contributions of migrant workers towards the work force of our state as well as the country as discussed above. All the above actions and steps taken to resolve the migrant problems are not only operated for them but also will definitely act as a pathway for social and economic inclusion of migrants in the process of rural development as a whole.

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