

Role Of Agriculture:- Absorbing Reverse-Migration And Food Security Challenges In The Pandemic**Dr. Devidas Sakpal****Educational Activist****Email: drdevidassakpal@gmail.com****(Received:15May2023/Revised:29May2023/Accepted:15June2023/Published:29June2023)****Abstract**

Agriculture is the backbone of India It acts as a major source of Income, employment and food security and recent reports confirm that more than 50 per cent of the India's population is dependent on agriculture. Agriculture contributes to more than 15 per cent of India GDP. The importance of agriculture in Indian can be judged mainly from its contribution to national income, employment and food security to a vast majority of (about 65 per cent) people in India. Official estimates of national income and its components are available on a regular basis in India since 1948-49. It is also evident that there is a close interdependence between agriculture and Industry. The unseen exodus of migrants was one of the major cataclysms that arose during the pandemic. Most of these reverse migrants had been engaged in the informal sector without access to social protection and little money.

The significant decline in incomes among migrant labourers is evident and majority of them had to resort to dissaving and borrowing, which was mostly, taken from informal sources. Agriculture and employment Schemes such as MGNREGA proved to be a cushion amidst this gloominess. Over a year and a half in to the pandemic, aspiration and hope for better opportunities remain prevalent with the majority 55 per cent of the reverse migrants as recent data sources revealed and it confirms that migrants expressed desire to go backs, while a significant chunk 20 per cent were unable to make up their mind. The migrant catastrophe should be a lesson and viewed as an opportunity to rethink the whole aspect of migration. Most of the reverse migrants (72 per cent) were circular migrants. Circular migration is a move made for a short period with the intention of returning to the place of usual residence. In this context, the paper examines two specific issues - livelihoods and income patterns of migrant families. The selected field villages are from the district of Kamareddy of Telangana state. It was observed that there is uncertain about livelihoods among migrant workers and incomes patterns which were further aggravated the lives of these sections. However, agriculture, especially farming activities emerged as prominent sources of livelihood.

Key words: Agriculture, National income, Reverse-Migration, Pandemic, Employment, Food Security, Industry, Borrowing, Covid-19, lockdown, Exodus, Cataclysms

Introduction

COVID-19 is an existential threat to the health and livelihood of millions of people around the world as well as in India. The coronavirus pandemic has triggered massive reverse migration in the country. The COVID-19-led migration is the second largest mass migration in India's history after the country's partition, when 14 million people were displaced (Inamdar&Thusoo, 2020). Every year, a substantial number of people migrate to larger cities of different states to seek employment opportunities to earn bread and butter for their families.

The Periodic Labor Force Survey (PLFS) 2017–2018 shows the estimated number of Indian workers in 2018 was 471.5 million, out of an estimated 1,358 million. There were 115.0 million casual workers and 242.3 million remaining self-employed. Migration is an integral part of the Indian economy and constitutes a significant share of the country's GDP.

Out of 482 million workers in India, about 194 million are permanent and semipermanent migrant workers as per the 2011 Census. The pattern of India's migration is much skewed. Uttar Pradesh and Bihar constitute the highest out-migrants in India, while most of the migrated people moved to Maharashtra and Delhi (Acharya&Acharya, 2020).

Millions of Telanganapeople depart from their residence to cities with the aim of a better job, greater work prospects and better quality of life each year. Pull factors like the expectation of employment with higher wages facilities in a better working condition in cities or urban areas in one hand and on the other hand, push factors like poverty, massive unemployment, lack of opportunities, depletion of natural resources, natural disasters and overcrowding of agriculture in rural areas are significant reasons for which rural–urban migration of workers take place in India. The literature on migration economics gave due emphasis to the 'push' factors as operated at the place of origin and 'pull' factors of the destination for the processes and outcomes of migration (Bhagat, 2018).

The social disparities in rural areas belonging to particular class and caste generally are landless agricultural labourers, and to meet the increasing household's expenditures, they prefer to move to cities (Choudhary, 1991) in comparison to those who are economically well-off. With a large number of reasons, the main reasons for migration are seasonality and low employment, small landholdings, low incomes and indebtedness in villages (Saha et al., 2018).

COVID-19 And Migration

Globally more than 25 million jobs would be threatened due to the spread of the coronavirus as estimated by ILO. It has been seen that many employers are terminating the employment of their workers without any prior notice or have stopped the salary of their existing employees (ILO, 2020).

According to the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy, over 122 million people in India lost their jobs in April 2020, a vast majority of them being small traders and wage-labourers. In a study by AzimPremji University's Centre for sustainable employment, 80% of urban workers have lost employment, while farmers and self-employees in the non-farm field have been significantly reduced in their incomes. The revenue wasted by marginalised sections of India's labour force during the 2 months of the lockout will be as high as ₹4 lakh crores, or approximately 2% of the country's annual gross domestic product (Thomas, 2020).

So the country is witnessing a huge number of job losses in the informal sector due to COVID-19. Due to no work and income source, migrants are facing many difficulties in access to food, nutrition insecurity and other necessary items. Migrant workers are more in the form of seasonal and cyclical. Thus, the local authorities' improper identification of these workers makes difficulties in access to city services such as ration card, relief benefit etc.

Thus, they are often deprived of government initiatives to curb the negative impact of the lockdown of poor people. The break in the functioning of economic activities and restriction in movement are hindering the supply chain management of goods and services (Rapone, 2020). The health issue of migrant workers also is highly concerned due to the lack of safety nets and suitable residential (Damani et al., 2020).

COVID-19 pandemic has given rise to a sequence of harmful emotional responses and emotions in the community at risk. The COVID-19 pandemic has the potential to cause chronic psychological manifestations like depression, anxiety, panic disorder and psychosomatic manifestations (Qiu et al., 2020; Rajan et al., 2020).

The COVID-19 lockdown in India has created an anomalous humanitarian crisis for internal migrants (Srivastava, 2020). With the aforementioned studies, some questions arising to a general mind are as follows.

Data And Methods

The study is an analytical one. Both secondary and primary data are used in the study. Secondary sources of data and information are used to explore and answer the research questions of this study. The secondary data are collected from the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, World Health Organization, National Sample Survey reports, Odisha

Economic Survey, etc. Further, this study's major findings have been analysed by drawing the ideas and arguments from various books, articles, reports, journals, etc. Primary data are collected from returned migrants to Odisha.

So purposively, the study considered returned migrants to Telangana villages during COVID-19 through the snowball sampling technique. A total of 115 returned migrants come under the purview of the study from selected villages of Kamareddy.

The information about loss of income, current occupation and employment opportunities is collected from respondents through the direct personal interview method. Descriptive statistics such as percentage, frequency, average and a regression model are used in the study.

Reverse Migration And Challenges

It is worth mentioning here that many migrant workers employed in the unorganised informal sector had returned to their home state due to different reasons during this COVID-19 pandemic. Loss of job, fear of coronavirus spreading and non-accessibility to general services were the important reasons for reverse migration all over the country. People flooded to their villages from the urban part in huge numbers. As a result, working population in the rural economy jumped all of a sudden. An instantaneous rise in labour supply took place in the rural economy of the country. As it was difficult for migrants to live a normal life with the loss of job and income and inaccessibility to general services during COVID-19 lockdown, they were forced to return to their home state by any means. So many of them started to walk or cycle towards their native place. A significant part of migrants also returned from Hyderabad (Telangana) and Maharashtra.

With the existing or worsened economic condition of the state due to lockdown, a large working group from outside returned all of a sudden and are available for work. These workers were more eager for work due to a sudden decline in income and financial crisis faced by them. This indicates an increase in the labour supply in the state, more particularly in the rural parts. The study has considered ground-level microdata of returned migrants to villages from different parts of the country to investigate the problems they faced during the COVID-19 spreading and lockdown period.

The socio-economic details and problems they face during the time period are given in the following table and figures. The demographic details of the respondents are shown in Table 2. It is clear from the data that migrants from general, OBC and SC categories are 39%, 38% and 23%, respectively. As per the religion, percentages of migrant respondents are nearly to

the state picture. Male migrant's percentage is very higher than the female. Another important characteristic of respondents is that majority of them (61.7%) are unmarried.

As we can see, a higher portion of returned migrants (47%) are educated at the secondary level. The second-highest group of migrants (33%) has a higher educational qualification.

This indicates that those who are being migrated have either a relatable lower level of educational qualification or higher education level. Some of those people were engaged in a different activity, while 43% of respondents were not employed before migration. There are different push factor or pull factors responsible for migration. The study found that pull factors like a better job, high wage and better life were important reasons for migration into another state. While other 16.5% of respondents mentioned that push factors like lack of employment opportunity and low wage in the home state were the reasons for migration. Due to different reasons, respondents migrated to other states. While some of them were satisfied others were not.

It is clear that that 80% of migrants were satisfied with their job. And a good amount of income was the single most important reason for their job satisfaction. The security of work and lack of having other jobs were some other causes behind respondents' job satisfaction. About 20% of the migrant respondents were not satisfied with their jobs. The reasons behind the non-satisfaction of the job were hard work, more work and low income. The coronavirus pandemic emerged as a devastating force on the economic, social aspects of the world. One of the highly affected groups during the period are the migrants. The situation forced them to go back to their native place due to different reasons. Migrants reversed from the destination state to home state on a huge scale for different reasons.

Reasons For Reverse Migration

The field data reveals job loss was the most important reason for the reverse migration of respondents. About 51% of reversed migrants stated that job loss was the reason for return in this period. The second most important (28%) reason for reverse migration is the fear of spreading of the coronavirus.

Likewise, some other reasons like loss of income, non-availability of basic items, family insisting to get back and availability of work from home opportunities were responsible for reverse migration in the state. But during the return time, many migrants faced different difficulties to reach home. The non-availability of transportation facilities was an important issue for those migrants.

Economic Activities After Reverse Migration

After reverse migration, some people engaged themselves in different economic activities while some have been still unemployed for many days. It is observed that after return to the native place due to COVID-19, 39% of the people are not engaged in any remunerative work. The study found that 22% of migrants are still working with the same institution either by work from home or have not lose the job due to the contract. Some of the reversed migrants are working in a family business or farm.

About 17% of the returned migrants are working as a daily wage earner in the current scenario. It can be noticed here some of the reverse migrants have started to own new businesses in their area. Lack of job is the most important challenge (59%) faced by returned migrants in the home state. Some of the respondents (19%) have said that they are getting low wages in the home state compared to the state where they were staying. Some other challenges like inaccessibility to transportation, health institutions and daily used products are different issues faced by those returned migrants.

Table 2. Socio-Economic Characteristics Of Migrants

Caste	Frequency	Percentage
General	45	39
OBC	44	38
SC	26	23
TOTAL	115	100

Religion

Hindu	95	82.6
Muslim	18	15.7
Christian	2	1.7
Total	115	100

Sex

Male	107	93.04
Female	8	6.96
Total	115	100

Marital Status

Married	44	38.3
Unmarried	71	61.7
Total	115	100

Education

Primary	12	10
Secondary	54	47
Higher Secondary	11	10
Total	115	100

Job Satisfaction At Destination With Reasons (In Percentage)

Good Income	6.47
Security of Work	6.1
Do not have other Jobs	10.43
Hard Work	9.56
More time of work	6.1
Low Income	2.60
Not a good Environment	1.74

Conclusion

Migrants have been severely affected by COVID-19 spreading and lockdown due to loss of jobs and income. As a result of this, a huge reverse migration is being noticed all over the country and, more particularly in these villages. The workable population has increased due to huge reverse migration in these villages, for which labour supply has increased in the rural economy. After returning, those people are facing many problems, one of the important of them is lack of job opportunity. And many of them are working at a low-level wage rate.

The dimension of the vulnerability of returned migrants is numerous. Those people's average monthly income has drastically declined, which is a matter of concern from the standard of living point of view. Migrants having less income by own or by family persons suffered the most in this unpleasant period. Many returned migrants also remain excluded from government benefits for 'neither here, not there' status.

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