Reverse Migration During Covid-19 pandemic: Challenges and Opportunities in Chatra District, Jharkhand

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

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Abstract

Since the existence of human being on the earth people used to move from one place to another in search of food, water and safety but today, it gets diversified. Migration is one of the biggest reasons under which migrant labourers are forced to move out from their native place in search of economic opportunities for the sustenance of their livelihood. However, the nationwide lockdown and sealing of State boundaries due to covid-19 pandemic hit hardest the informal migrant workers and they were compelled to return their birth places. This has led to the serious unemployment and economic vulnerability and affected the all-round development. According to Government official, there is around 10 lakh people returned to their home Village since March 2020. In this paper we have focused on the returnee migrant labourers of internal migration. The study tries to examine the challenges faced by returnee labourers and also the possible ways through which alternative livelihood can be created to engage them locally. Data is collected from the both primary and secondary sources. Study revealed that low income and job loss has significantly risen although Government has taken various welfare programmes but still rate of unemployment is high among returnees. The nature of the paper is descriptive and analytical.

Key Words

Migrant labourers, Economic vulnerability, Unemployment.

Introduction

Internal migration is the movement of people from one place to another within a defined administrative boundary of a country. According to 2011 census, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar were the largest source of inter-state migrants while Maharashtra and Delhi were the largest receiver states. In phase of Covid-19, masses of migrant labourers from different cities of India, migrated to their native place. This is known as reverse migration. There are 45.6 crore migrants, which account for 38 % of the total population of India. Among them, 99 % are internal migrants (Census 2011). The number of internal migrants in India was 450 million as per the 2011 census. This is an increase of 45% over the 309 million recorded in 2001. This far exceeds the population growth rate of 18% across 2001-2011. Internal migrants as percentage of population increased from 30% in

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2001 to 37% in 2011. Despite the significant increase in internal migration recorded in 2011, the nature of movement remains relatively unchanged since 2001. Bulk of the movement (62%) is within the same district. Another 26% is between districts within the same state. Only 12% of movement is inter-state. 99% of total migration was internal and immigrants (international migrants) comprised 1% (Census of India, 2011). The economy of the Chatra district mainly depends on cultivation or related work. More than 77% of the total workers are engaged in Primary sector. Main workers and Marginal workers are 18.75% and 19.39% respectively with total proportion of 38.14%. (District census handbook, 2011) Chatra being the backward area having higher proportion of un-skilled and skilled labourers are forced to move out in search of job for their livelihood. The skill mapping of 2.5 lakh migrant out of the five lakh migrant workers who returned to Jharkhand from different states has revealed that most are skilled. Around 70% reverse migrants are skilled according to the Jharkhand Government records, about 7 lakh workers stranded outside the state had registered with the Government to return home. Till now, over five lakh migrant workers have returned to Jharkhand since May 1. This is challenging for the Government to engage all those reverse migrant locally by creating job opportunities. (Hindustan Times, 2020). As the Covid-19 pandemic spread in the country, Government of India imposed sudden complete lockdown over whole country and requested them to stay where they were to break chain of contiguous corona virus but due to non-availability of basic services forced them to return at their native place. This pandemic has presented before us, multiple emerging issues. The most predominant one is that of reverse migration. Massive reverse migration will invariably lead to increase in poverty, inequity and discrimination. Immediate concerns faced by such migrant workers relate to food, shelter, healthcare, fear of getting infected or spreading the infection, loss of wages, concerns about the family, anxiety and fear. Sometimes, they also face harassment and negative reactions of the local community. All this calls for strong social protection. Among the vulnerable population, migrant workers had been the most exposed to unemployment and starvation as they suddenly lost their livelihood. Stranded in other States and Metro cities with no work and income, they suffered economic problems and psychological trauma.

Study Area

Chatra District ranks 15th in terms of population and 10th in terms of area (3718 sq.km.) in the state of Jharkhand. Chatra district lies between North latitudes 23°38'34"N to 24°27'48"N and 84°26'50" E to 85°23'41"E longitude. It is having average rainfall of 1234 mm. 60.40 % of area is covered by forest and net shown area is 12.54 % only. (District survey report Govt of Jharkhand, 2018). Total population of Chatra district is 1,042,886 which constitute 3.16 % population of Jharkhand. Average literacy rate of the district is 60.18%. Here numbers of literates are 510,061.93.96% of people are living in rural while 6.04 % people in urban areas. (Census of India, 2011)

Objective

1. To analyze the block wise returnee migrant labourers of Chatra district.
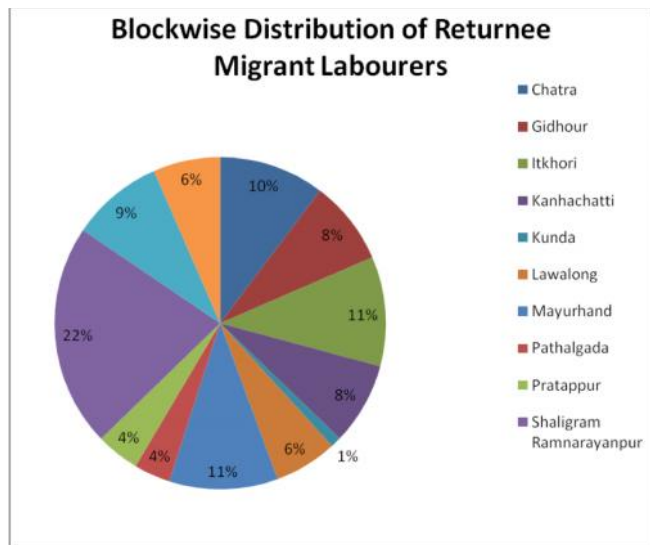2. To analyze the challenges and opportunities for the migrant labourers.

Database and Methodology

This research paper is based on Primary as well as secondary data. Primary data have been collected by interview method from migrant labourers of Tandwa, Simariya and chatra and Shalimgram Ramnarayanpur block. Secondary sources of data have been collected from the labour superintendent office Chatra, District Census Handbook, reports published by Government etc. The nature of the article is descriptive and analytical.

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Discussion and Findings

Table 1: Block Wise Reverse Migration in Chatra District

Block	Returnee migrant labourers	Percentage
Chatra	1350	10.29
Gidhour	1077	8.21
Itkhori	1400	10.67
Kanhachatti	1051	8.03
Kunda	135	1.02
Lawalong	806	6.14
Mayurhand	1392	10.61
Pathalgada	465	3.54
Pratappur	557	4.24
Shaligram Ramnarayanpur Hunterganj	2845	21.69
Simariya	1179	8.98
Tandwa	858	6.54
Total	13115	100.00

(Source: Labor Superintendent Office, Chatra)

Data shows that out of total 13115 returnee migrant labourers, the highest number of migrant labourers are from the Shaligram Ramnarayanpur Huntergaj block, which accounts for 21.69 % of total migrant labourers in Chatra district, which is followed by Itkhori and Chatra block and the least number of migrants worker are from kunda block which accounts only 1.02 %.
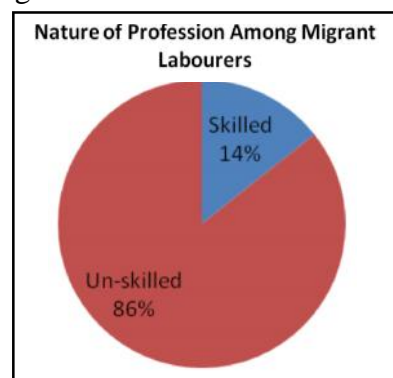
Challenges Faced by Migrant Labourers during Covid-19

Unskilled jobs usually do not require any formal education and specialized professional skill to carrying out work for example labourers employed at construction site, sweepers and domestic servants. These people are also known as "low wage worker" because they earn very less money whereas the skilled labour have specialized training for a particular profession and also have long practical experience, needed the formal education for example doctors, engineers etc. Similarly semi-skilled workers are who have only a part of a professional training of their trade but have sufficient experience in that field. They are paid less as compared to skilled workers. For example, goldsmith, carpenter etc.

Table 2: Nature of profession among migrant labourers

Nature of profession	Migrant labourer	Percentage
Skilled	1877	14.31
Un-skilled	11238	85.68
Total	13115	100.00

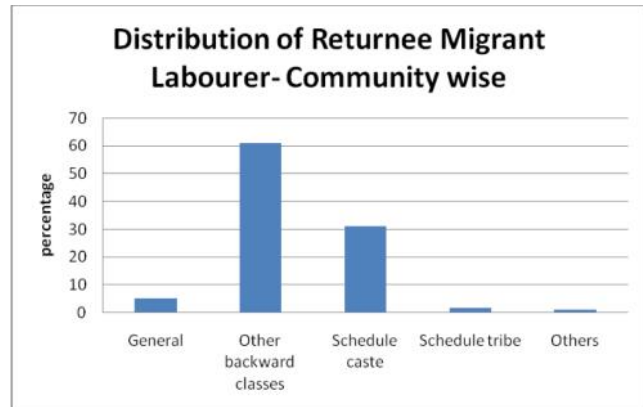*(Source: Labor Superintendent Office, Chatra)*

Above table shows that 86 % of total migrant labourers who returned back to their home were un-skilled working into Construction Work, Farm, Tailor, Carpenter, Hotel worker, Packaging, Cook, Welder, and Driving whereas the skilled labourers which accounts for 14% are working into Electrician, Fitter and Crane operator etc. One of the biggest challenges among these returnee migrants is that, suddenly they became unemployed and facing serious issue of no alternative works available at the native place, leaving

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many stomachs empty or half-filled for several days. One of the respondents, Munna kumar who returned from Delhi working into construction expressed that he was unpaid for longtime during lockdown by contractor and somehow, he managed to come back their home. Similarly, Upendra kumar, who is a JCB driver, earning handsome money in Uttar pradesh suddenly loosed his job and the whole family facing issues because of this.

Table 3: Distibution of Returnee Migrant Labourer (Community wise)

Community	Migrant Labourers	Percentage
General	576	5.12
Other backward classes	6838	60.89
Schedule caste	3477	30.96
Schedule tribe	205	1.82
Others	134	1.19
Total	11230	100.00

(Source: Labor Superintendent Office, Chatra)

It is very clear that most of the people belong to the backward and schedule caste which accounts 60.89% and 30.96% respectively among the returnee migrant workers whereas 5.12 % are from general category and 1.82% belongs to schedule tribe. Prevailing socio-economic factors are responsible for the maximum number of people to out-migrate due to inadequate knowledge and skills. Social and educational backwardness among communities is also a major reason behind this. Migrant labourers are the most marginalized class of the society who are dependent on daily wages are highly vulnerable among all returnee migrants.

Socio-Economic Challenges

Loss of jobs and unemployment which culminated into loss of income and wage theft, shortage of food, shelter, drinking water and access to other essential services. Mobility and transportation crisis due to lockdown and miserable health infrastructure as well as school closure and education losses putting children of migrant labourers to disadvantages. Apart from these anger and non-acceptance for migrants in their native societies (social isolation) loneliness, and anxiety due to corona fear.

Opportunities for the Returnee Migrant Labourers

Chatra is endowed with rich in resources with minerals, various tourist destinations as well as forest cover on larger areas. There is a mismatch between jobs available and skill required to get employment especially in the mining activities. Low literacy rate coupled with lack of skill among migrant labourers are left out with no proper employment and became marginalized section of the society with poor standard of living. This can be raised through skill india mission programme where requisite skill training is being provided to get suitable jobs. Here the local people and tribals are outstanding in handicrafts that could be popularized throughout the country so that it can be revived the old tradition with creating as a means of livelihood. This can be promoted under the scheme **vocal for local** to boost local economy. Apart from these, investment in MSME, especially in Agro and mineral based industry to place the worker. Huge influx of labor in rural economy can be absorbed by improving agriculture and allied activities such as poultry, horticulture and fisheries etc. Proper implementation of MGNREGA (The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005) can be successful in providing job opportunities to the unskilled labourers which guarantees at least 100 days of wage employment in a financial year. There is huge potential for the development of tourist destination by developing the logistics sector which can be the most appropriate and sustainable ways of generating means of income for the locals. New techniques, skills and ideas gained by skilled professional at their working place can be utilized at the native place.

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Conclusion

This paper examines the involuntary and forced reverse migrant labourers of Chatra district. Lack of preparedness hasty decision and planning among Government and careless behavior of the employers has worsened the condition of migrants. Many of the reverse migrants were left out of the benefits provided by Governments schemes due to lack of data availability and recognition at the grass root level. Migrant labourers have been severely affected during covid-19 nationwide lockdown due to loss of jobs and income. This led to huge reverse migration all over the country and, more particularly, in Chatra district of Jharkhand. After returning, those people are facing multiple issues, one of the important of them is lack of job opportunity. Those people's average monthly income has drastically declined, which is a matter of concern from the standard of living point of view. This crisis, therefore, should be used as an opportunity to bring positive measures and requires strong political will to implement them. The effective reintegration of the migrant labourers in the post-covid economy is an important policy issue which would entail collecting latest data, job creation which matches their skill set, inclusion in welfare schemes, portability of social security benefits taking into consideration the mobile nature of migrant communities.

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