

Chapter 7

Curbing Seasonal Migration and Debt Bondage Post COVID–19 Pandemic in Western Odisha, India

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic has delivered a global economic shock of enormous magnitude. Provision of livelihoods to the returned migrants is the important challenge faced by various state governments in India. Western Odisha continues to depict a picture of chronic underdevelopment. In this region, the type of migration that dominates is seasonal or circular migration. The aim of the present analysis is to investigate the factors responsible for the seasonal migration of debt bondage (Dadan) from the Western Odisha. The specific objectives of the study are to know the factors responsible for distress migration and to explore how debt-bondage is operating in the economic system. The present study has observed that seasonal migrants of Western Odisha are more likely to be from those households who are poor, socially disadvantaged, less educated, indebted, and landless.

INTRODUCTION

The covid-19 pandemic has resulted in income and employment loss in many states in India. Migrants are returning home by walking, by cycling, by sitting on the top of the trucks which are already loaded with goods in the hot summer of May without food is really painful. More than five lakh migrants have returned home in the state of Odisha. The government as well as the officials are trying their best to manage the unprecedented situation. They have returned from Surat, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, and West Bengal and so on. Now the entire nation is seeing the real picture of distress migration.

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Migration can be thought as one form of the household investment under uncertainty. In the works of Harris and Todaro (1970), Simon Kuznets (1955), Lewis (1954) and Hicks (1932), the most basic model of migration was originally developed to explain the role of migration in the process of economic development. These studies have explained that wage differentials across markets are responsible for migration. The migration decisions of the individuals are influenced by the known or expected income between the origin from which the migrant is moving and that of the destination. Their path breaking work emphasised on economic growth with the gradual shifts of workers from the lower-paying segments into the higher paying segments. The Human Capital Theory is of the view that when improvements to lifetime earnings are exceeding the costs involved in migration then an individual migrates. (Sjaastad, 1962). Similarly, the families are taking the decision to migrate whenever the total gains out of the migration outweigh the costs involved in migration to the household. (Mincer, 1978, Sandell, 1977). Migration is an investment in human capital (Da Vanzo, J., 1983). Migration can reduce poverty among migrants. (Housen, Hopkins & Earnest. 2013; Lokshin, Bontch-Osmolovski, & Glinskaya, 2010).

Increased wages in the origin, investment of remittances, and an expansion of economic activities in the local economy due to consumption of remittances are the indirect benefits of out-migration (Housen et al., 2013; Mendola, 2012; Zhu et al., 2013). Seema Sangita (2017) investigated the interlinkages between rural to urban migration in India and income and ownership of assets. In the rural India short-term migration plays a very important role in the livelihoods of the migrant households (Bremar, 1996; Banerjee & Duflo, 2007). Many authors have also discussed about the child labour problem in the case of children of migrant labourers. The undocumented migrants are most likely to face abuse, discrimination and exclusion in the process of migration (GMG, 2010). When they are children or female, there lies greater risks such as trafficking and being deprived of healthcare facilities and education. In India short term migration among the poor tribal households is common. From Jharkhand poor ST households migrate to work in brick kilns (Shah, 2006). Migrants go to other states to work in the agricultural sector from West Bengal (Rogaly and Rafique, 2003). Migration is expected to have women empowerment in terms of economic independence. But as the study (Krishnaraj, 2005) shows that women migrants have to spend long hours in the work place with very low income. Sometimes the working conditions are also dangerous. The migration rates are very high in the drought prone areas of Bihar, Odisha, West Bengal and Gujarat. An estimated 60,000 people of Bolangir district of Odisha migrated out during the 2001 drought (Wandshneider and Mishra 2003) alone and informal estimates were about 300,000 in this region (Deshingkar, 2003).

Migration and Western Odisha

Migration does not represent the type of usual investment like investment in fixed assets. The migrants make a sacrifice in the present time in the expectation of future rewards. Migration is not costless. When individuals are migrating it involves costs, which cannot be recovered. The migrants are rational, and these costs are critical as well as consistent with the rational behaviour of the migrants. The migrant's decision to migrate must consider the expected value of the wage differentials of the future and the level of these costs. When the migrant's expected wage differential is more than the level of these costs, he decides to migrate. A person migrates because he expects the benefits to outweigh the costs.

Apart from this cost, the expectation about future and the perception of the migrant regarding the future earnings and the appropriate time for migration plays an important role. In certain circumstances during the lean season of agricultural production, as there is unavailability of job in the agricultural

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