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SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGES OF SEASONAL MIGRATION IN REMOTE HILLY REGIONS: A CASE STUDY OF WAN AND LOHAJUNG VILLAGE, UTTARAKHAND.

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Abstract

There has been a significant change in the social composition of population across hill and plain regions of many states. The significant changes in the social composition of population also indicate seasonal migration among people in order to get more scopes of livelihood and other facilities. In this regard the study intended to investigate into the phenomenon of seasonal migration among people in Wan and Lohajung village, Uttarakhand, with reference to socio-economic and educational challenges associated with seasonal migration. Case study research design was employed for conducting the study. Twenty migrants of the study area were studied mainly to assess the effects of seasonal migration on the family of migrants, particularly with reference to income, education and social relation. The study revealed that seasonal migration, although enhances financial strengths of the migrant households, brought a lot of hardships, including educational challenges, to the family members and children who are left behind.

Keywords: Seasonal migration, Socio-Economic, Educational, Challenges, Migrants, Hilly Regions.

BACKDROP:

Uttarakhand is at 20th position among Indian states; according to 2011 Population Census with nearly 70% of population lived in its remote, rural hilly areas. The state had witnessed significant changes in its demographic structure, particularly during the decade of 2001-2011. It was also registered that the hill districts of the state witnessed much lower

growth in population (0.70%) as compared to plain districts (2.82%) and hill districts with very low growth in their population were Tehri Garhwal, Bageshwar, Chamoli, Rudrapryag and Pithoragarh. Overall, the share of ten hill region in the population of Uttarakhand had declined substantially by about five percentage point from nearly 53 per cent in 2001 to about 48 per cent in 2011 as mentioned by Mamgain, R.P.

(2015). The economy of Uttarakhand is predominantly depends upon mountain activities and tourism performance. Unemployment, unfavourable weather, the non-application of modern technology in agriculture, dry season for tours and trekking had forced the village people to search for alternate sources of livelihood and People of the rural remote areas migrate to urban and plain areas within and outside their districts and also to the neighbouring States as stated by Umar and Awasthi in 2012.

Migration is a social, economic and universal phenomenon through which human being move from one place to another in pursuit of certain objectives like avenues of better employment, better wages, better working and living conditions, better quality of life and better livelihood. Seasonal migration happens during the dry season for 4-6 months when there are no tourists and no means and ways to support livelihood. Low agricultural productivity, degrading soil quality, increase in unwanted natural calamities and no or low employment opportunities force people to migrate in order eke out their livelihood as mentioned by Sati (2009). Basically people from remote villages situated at trekking base camps are forced to migrate in this unfavourable situation when they are having no alternative livelihood options than leaving their villages. In last 10 years, 3, 83,726 people from 6,338 gram panchayats shifted temporarily for these reasons and the associated consequences are resulting into social and educational difficulties for family members and children (Shekhawat, 2019).

SEASONAL MIGRATION IN WAN AND LOHAJUNG VILLAGE:

Wan village is situated at a height of 2,400 meters, in the Chamoli district of Uttarakhand. The village, though living in obscurity, became a well known stop-over destination for trekkers trekking towards Roopkund Lake as well as Bedni Bugyal. Since the village is famous for its natural

beauty, Latu Devta temple, trekkers hut and trekking activities majority of the villages are either engaged in organising trekking and tours, managing trekkers' huts or employed as drivers, porters, cooks, guides etc. In pick season there are ample sources of income but in dry seasons the people become jobless and they are forced to migrate to other areas in search of some good luck. Sometimes the entire family migrate with the head of the family and the impact of migration hits hard. This is caused by some inter-related factors like inadequate food security, lack of local work, low wages or late payment of wages, landlessness and displacement, deforestation, poor agricultural production, indebtedness, lack of transportation and educational facilities. Jangwan (2019) stated that the remote hilly regions are less developed in terms of infrastructure, employment scopes, electricity, road and irrigation which led people to migrate.

LOCATION OF THE STUDY AREA



Fig-1: Locating Wan and Lohajung village situated in Chamoli district, Uttarakhand as per the trekking route towards Roopkund.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

The phenomenon of seasonal migration, when analyzed from a socio-economic perspective, raises a number of questions that need to be answered through systematic investigation. This study seeks to find out the answers to the following questions particularly among the People of the study area:

- 1) What is the socio-economic status of the migrant households of the Wan and Lohajung village?
- 2) What are the major factors contributing to the seasonal migration of the people of Wan and Lohajung village?
- 3) How does seasonal migration of the study area affect the members of the migrant households?

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

The specific objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To study the socio-economic status of migrant households of the study area, i.e. Wan and Lohajung village.
2. To examine the factors associated with the seasonal migration of the villagers of the study area.
3. To investigate the impact of seasonal migration on migrant households of the study area in terms of socio-economic and educational challenges.

METHODOLOGY:

Case study research design is employed in carrying out the study. For the purpose of the present study, twenty migrants are selected purposively. The tools that are employed for the present research are structured questionnaires, unstructured interviews, observation, and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). In practice, data are collected by the investigator through personal visit to the field and personal contact with the respondents. Extensive field notes are made and photographs are taken for this purpose.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

In this section, the results of case studies of sixteen migrants who frequently migrate for a short period of time seasonally to the nearby districts are presented. The results

presented here are based on the data collected about the cases through questionnaires, unstructured interviews, observation, and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs).

1. Socio-economic status of migrant households of the study area, i.e. Wan and Lohajung village:

Socio-economic Profile of Respondents according to their socio-economic background has been discussed under various heads-

Age Group: According to the socio-economic profile of the respondents, 50% of the migrants belong to the age group of 26-50 years, while 31.25% and 18.75% are in the age group of 0-26 and >50 years, respectively. Thus, the number of migrants is more in 26-50 years age group because labourers in this group can undertake various operations. The percentage of over-fifty year's labourers is less. Devender Bisht, Rakesh Bisht, Mukesh Rawat belong to 26-50 age group have mentioned that because of family responsibilities and lesser scopes of employment during off-season they are forced to migrate Haridwar, Dehradun, Rudraprayag, Pauri, Srinagar etc nearby places.

Educational Level: The illiteracy of people is an important factor which leads to seasonal migration, as the study findings indicate. Among migrants, nearly 43.75% are illiterate, 31.25% have studied up to the primary level, and only 25% up to matriculation level. Thus, the majority of migrants are illiterates and only a few have studied up to matriculation level. Majority of the migrants have reported that lack of access to schools, colleges and lesser scopes of educational facilities are reasons behind their educational difficulties.

Income of the respondents: It is the low income in the village and surrounding areas which induces migration to the areas of better livelihood opportunities. In the pick season, the monthly incomes of 75 % migrants remain in the range of 14000-20000 while in off-season they earn less

than 5000 in a month. On overall basis, maximum income of more than 10000 is being earned by 31.25% respondents, followed by 5000-10000 by 50% and less than 5000 by 18.75% in per month throughout the year. Rajender Bisht and Dev Prakash have admitted that because of the tourist flow during trekking season there are many sources of income but that income is not enough to support their families for the whole year. Dev Prakash, who is a trekking guide and cook has stated that he has to migrate to Haridwar in search of some works during December to February season when very less number of trekkers take a visit in Uttarakhand and another villager named Hari, a driver has admitted that he has to move to Auli where many winter games, snow activities, ice skating are organized during December to February for tourist attractions and visits.

2. Major factors contributing to the seasonal migration of the people of Wan and Lohajung village:

There are different economic, social and psychological factors which lead to migration have been depicted in below:

a) The people migrate in order to attain a better economic status in life. It is observed that low wages and fewer scopes for employment at the native place was the major economic factor which contributed to the migration of 90% migrants. Therefore, unemployment and low wages accompanied by poverty were the major reasons of migration as revealed by the sample respondents.

b) Social factors also induced migration tendency among people. Poverty (75%) and less civic amenities (25%) were reported as the major social reasons behind migration.

c) The psychological factors inducing migration were leading a poor life (87.5%) and aspiration for getting good scopes (12.5%).

Discussion with Trivendra Singh Rawat regarding the causes of his seasonal migration to Uttarkashi for work reveals that he does not find work round the year;

and the daily wages here in the locality is quite less. He faces difficulties to manage his family with this income He gets more wages while he works outside of the village as a labour in construction factory.

3. The impact of seasonal migration in terms of socio-economic and educational challenges of migrant households of the study area:

Discussion with the migrants regarding the problems they and their family members face at the destination and/or source station (village) of migration has revealed the following facts:

a) Socio-economic challenges: There is a change in the income level as an impact of seasonal migration. Income of these migrants is more than other non migrant villagers. Because of the migration it becomes quite easy for them to manage their family expenditure throughout the year not depending on only tourism and agriculture. Nowadays, land productivity is decreasing because of forest fires and many trekking routes have been closed down because of environmental hazards, pollution and tourist pressure. Therefore, to increase the level of income and to get employed for maximum time in a year seasonal migration has become a trend for people staying at remote hilly villages in Uttarakhand. But here also they have to face hardships. Living and working conditions of migrants at work sites are of a poor standard in every respect, including shelter, nutrition, health and security. The work required from labourers is excessively high, and wages are well below the legal minimum. Women and children are also forced to take up exploitative work. Pawan Singh Negi, a labour in sement factory of Srinagar has stated that the contractor exploits him at the destination by paying less than the agreement done at the source. Women and girls have to cope up with home responsibilities as well as the psychological insecurity of living in unprotected environments in new place or

at their native place without guardians and heads.

b) Educational challenges: Due to the nature of migration, the education of every migrant child gets highly compromised. Migrant children face a life of hardship and insecurity from their infancy and 56.25% of children of seasonal migrants never accessed education in formal setting. These children do not gain the required skills and abilities at the right time from schools. Lack of access to school, poverty, gender biasness, seasonal migration with family, parental ignorance, early marriage and lesser scopes to avail educational facilities has established educational challenges for migrant children. Girls are mainly indulged in agricultural activities, stitching and sewing clothes, cooking, cutting grasses and livestock activities. There are only 12.5% enrolled in primary school among girl children of the migrants. It is also found that among the accompanying migrant children many remain out of school and many are forced to drop out and some of them become vulnerable to work as child labour due to seasonal mobility of their parents. Seasonal migration is an insidious promoter of child labour. Even where migrant children are moved with their parents there also they have lack of access to schooling, or educational facilities.

Poor education possibilities also push children further into migration by not letting them avail required level of education and skills to get better employment in future.

MAJOR FINDINGS:

- 1) The number of migrants is more in 26-50 years age group because labourers in this group can undertake various operations. The percentage of over-fifty year's labourers is less.
- 2) Among migrants, nearly 43.75% are illiterate, 31.25% have studied up to the primary level, and only 25% up to matriculation level.
- 3) In the pick season, the monthly incomes of 75 % migrants remain in the range of

14000-20000 while in off-season they earn less than 5000 in a month. On overall basis, maximum income of more than 10000 is being earned by 31.25% respondents, followed by 5000-10000 by 50% and less than 5000 by 18.75% in per month throughout the year.

4) Low wages and fewer scopes for employment at the native place was the major economic factor which contributed to the migration of 90% migrants.

5) Social factors also induced migration tendency among people. Poverty (75%) and less civic amenities (25%) were reported as the major social reasons behind migration.

6) The psychological factors inducing migration were leading a poor life (87.5%) and aspiration for getting good scopes (12.5%).

7) Though migration has enhanced the financial strengths of migrants' families but living and working conditions of migrants at work sites are of a poor standard in every respect, including shelter, nutrition, health and security and exploitation is prevalent at work place.

8) Migrant children face a life of hardship and insecurity from their infancy and 56.25% of children of seasonal migrants never accessed education in formal setting.

9) Lack of access to school, poverty, and gender biasness, seasonal migration with family, parental ignorance, early marriage and lesser scopes to avail educational facilities has established educational challenges for migrant children.

10) Among girl children of the migrants only 12.5% are enrolled in primary schools.

EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS:

1) School authorities, planners, administrators, government agencies could be able to track the movement and progress of migrant children and therefore relevant steps would be initiated in order to ensure universalisation of education at various level.

2) Many employment generation programmes and community development

programmes could be arranged keeping in mind the root causes behind seasonal migration.

3) Arrangement of environmental protection camps to prevent pollution, mass awareness generation campaigns regarding girls' education and empowerment, establishment of village level adult education centres and training centres for small scale industries would be taken into consideration while formulating policy and sanctioning rural development packages.

4) This case study would help researchers to carry out more intensive researches in related field so that people get benefitted in true sense by the research findings and suggestions.

CONCLUSION: Seasonal migration is widespread in remote hilly regions but is not well understood or documented and there is an urgent need to look at the wide range of issues associated with seasonal migration. Mapping of migration flows, in-depth investigation of root causes behind seasonal migration need more attention. Government and local agencies should generate alternative employment scopes and focus must be given on agricultural and local level industrial sectors. Schooling and educational facilities are needed to be accessible for all 6-14 years children irrespective of their economic, social and other backgrounds as mentioned in Right to Education Act in order to ensure universalisation of elementary education. Local government, agencies, NGO's should look at the issues like protection of human rights, labour security, women and children safety at work place. The seasonal migrants, whether they move along with families or move alone leaving their families behind, belong to vulnerable section of our society. Migration can provide them very few scopes to earn but these are not long term ways and there are loads of challenges associated with seasonal migration. Therefore, proper advocacy, planning and strategic village development programmes

including mainstreaming of migrants children, women empowerment, and environmental protection are necessary to be taken care of.

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