



Migration and its impact on Socio-economic and Demographic Structure of Sundarban Region of South 24 Parganas, West Bengal, India

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Abstract

The Sundarban region is climatically and economically very vulnerable. Almost every year various climatic factors such as tidal surge, sea level rise, and cyclone badly affect this region. Most of the people depend on the primary sector especially mono-crop agricultural sector. Their per capita income is very low and uncertain. After 'Aila' a major chunk of male worker of age group (15-60) have migrated toward other parts of India as semi-skilled or unskilled labours. Women participation rate is very low or negligible due to various social customs or safety issues. They work as a full time or part time labour in agriculture and fishery sector during monsoons. Sometimes the school dropout teenagers are also engaged in this. The financial status of the migrant households has definitely improved but some of them have been infected with various contaminations. A sample survey has been done using survey and questionnaires methods in three CD Blocks during 2016 - 2018 to address these issues. The present article has made an attempt to investigate the causes of migration and its impact on socio-economic condition and demographic structure in the Sundarban region.

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Introduction

The Sundarban region is one of the backward and saline affected region of West Bengal (Dutta, 2018). Physiographically, it is a deltaic plain having an intricate network of creeks and is annually ravaged by natural hazards, e.g., Bay Depressions. The local inhabitants of Sundarban are primarily involved in agriculture (mono cropping due to increased salinity), aquaculture and collection of non-timber forest products and thus do not have adequate income to support their families (Das, 2017). Thus, a deep sense of despair overshadows lives in Sundarban.

Larg-scale exodus, in the form of migration especially of male working people has started (Rudra, 2010). People move from one operating environment to another operating environment of better quality (Dubey and Mallah, 2015). Often, it is one of the important paradigms of the changing socio-economic condition of a region, affecting socio-economic composition of population in both places of origin and destination (Banu, 2016). It determines the size of population, population growth and population redistribution in an area (Debnath and Ray, 2017). People living in rural areas often faces a higher risk of poverty and lower income compared to urban areas (Debnath and Nayak, 2018). It is also

an important strategy in reducing vulnerability to environmental and non-environmental stress (Mistri, 2013). Labour migration is a pervasive feature of economic development. Population mobility for temporary or permanent labour purposes is a routine part of agricultural and industrial activity (Ghosh and Mal, 2017). In rural areas, due to less employment opportunities, low wages, drought, lack of basic amenities, landlessness, and social customs, people migrate to urban areas to get more employment opportunities, higher income, better wages, and better facilities (Bala, 2017). Labour out-migration from rural areas leave a great impact on regional development including family welfare of migrant's household (Kundu, 2013). The academic status of migrant workers is very poor, often illiterate for which they work as semi-skilled or unskilled labour (Dutta, 2018).

Objectives

The objectives of the present research are:

1. To investigate the nature and pattern of migration in the study area.
2. To examine the impacts of migration on population composition, occupational pattern and local economy in



the study area.

The Study Area

Sundarban is a part of the Ganga delta, located in the south-eastern part of West Bengal between 21°N to 22°30'N parallels and 88°E to 88°29' E meridians with a total area of about 9630 sq.km. Administratively, it is divided into 19 CD Blocks of 6 belong to North 24 Parganas and 13 to South 24 Parganas districts. The CD Blocks of Patharpratima (Piprakhali), Namkhana (Debnagar), and Sagar (Harinbari) located in the southern part of the active Gangetic delta.

Database and Methodology

The current study is based on both primary and secondary data sources. District and Block level maps related to this study have been collected from N.A.T.M.O. and S.O.I. Toposheets. A lot of data and information has been collected from District Statistical Handbooks, and District Development Reports. Primary data have been collected by questionnaires survey methods using random stratified sampling design. Three village have been selected from the three CD Blocks and enumeration has been done randomly for 150 households. Of these about 68 families' members have migrated. Average family member of these households was 6.5 and total family member 442. Manipulation has been done through systemic data organization, analysis has been done using MS Excel and the results have been shown using conventional cartographic techniques in G.I.S. Software.

Discussion and Results

Impact on Age-sex Structure

Both male and female are working as migration labours but male percentage is very high compared to females. Female labour participation rate is very low and sometimes almost zero. Sex ratio increases due to huge migration of male population. Women and girls mainly work as household labourers in Kolkata and its surroundings. They work as daily migrant labourers and the railway network work as a lifeline for them. Kolkata, South India and Oman are their major destination. Working male and female labour (15 - 60 years) gradually decrease in rural areas of Sundarban region and their monthly income is comparatively high compared to the non-migrant families. Mainly the new generation is leaving their birth place for higher education and technical education either to Kolkata or other developed areas.

Seasonwise Distribution of Migrant Labours

In the peak season of paddy farming, mainly during monsoons (July-August), many migrant labours come back home for work in aquaculture or agriculture. During winter also, a large portion of unskilled migrant labour come back home for work in the harvest of paddy. Thus, season plays a vital role and creates various opportunity and jobs in this region. Most of the population earn a living with indigenous natural resources, but population pressure has been increasing rapidly. So, they have to depend on other sources of occupation and go to various parts of India as well as abroad for jobs (Fig- 2).

Types of Migration

i) Full family migration:

Sometimes, the entire family migrates for jobs settle there the whole year. Sometimes they sell their property and buy a new house or accommodations in their place of settlement.

ii) 1-member migration:

Only working members are migrated and remaining members stay back home. According to primary data, about 19% of the labourers migrated with full family.

iii) Temporary migration:

These are semi-skilled or unskilled labourers who work in shops, hotels, factories, etc for the whole year. Mainly landless farmers or daily labourers are part of this system. Mono-crop agriculture-based economy could not support their large families; so, they have to depend on other sources preferably in cities. Due to weak road and railway network, daily worker does not come back home every day from their work place easily, as a result they stay their permanently (Fig.2).

iv) Seasonal migration:

Normally, the temporary migrants come back during the sowing and harvesting season when the demand of labour rises to maximum (Fig.2).

Patterns of Migration

i) Rural to Rural Migration:

This type of migration is mainly seen during monsoon and winter season when labourers migrate to the agriculturally resourceful rural areas of Bardhaman, Hooghly, and North 24 Parganas districts to work as a daily labour in agricultural operations. Sometimes, child labourers (14-18 years) also take part with comparatively lower wages (Fig-1).

ii) Rural to Urban Migration:

Development and rapid urbanization play a vital role in labour migration. The urban areas work as growth points and pull factor for rural people. During lean season they migrate toward urban area and work as unskilled or semi skilled labour specially in construction, services and repairing (Fig-1).

Factors of Migration

Both pull and push factors play very vital role in labour migration in Sundarbans region. Most of the people depends on natural resource-based activities. Agriculture is the main job generation sector in this region, followed by aquaculture. As a result, working labourers are pushed to migrate for better occupational opportunity (Table-6). The soil and water have been saline after 2009 due to the "Aila effect". In fact, in many parts of the the coastal district of South 24 Parganas sea level rise, tidal wave, tidal surge, and cyclones have increased the level of salinity for which agricultural land has been degraded and labour migration rate increased.

Impact on Local Economy

Migration has both positive and negative impact on local economy of the study area. A large number of people of this



economically distressed region are engaged in forestry, fishing, agriculture, 'meen' collection etc though Govt rules and regulations control the access to the natural resources. Entering into the core zone of Sundarbans is very risky and is a punishable offence. This decreased the dependency on the local resource-based activities and gradually, they are being absorbed in the non-traditional secondary or tertiary economic activities (Table 8).

Migration has definitely improved the financial status of the migrant households. Their monthly income almost doubled and their family conditions improve rapidly. Their savings have increased and so also their household assets. Hence, migration is a great economic opportunity in the new generation as it creates a huge job opportunity for the people of this deltaic region (Table 8).

Migrant labourers earn more compared to the non-migrant families and they often buy cultivable lands with surplus income (Table -7). As a result, demand of land increased as also its value. Flow of extra money from outside work as a boost for local economy and also flourish other economic activities.

With more purchasing power and experience their awareness has increased. They now spend on child education, construction of new house, purchase household goods, and new shops for further income (Table - 7).

Out-migration also creates a negative impact on labour availability in the local areas and hence, labour wage rates have increased. In 2016, daily wage rate was INR 250 but in 2018 December, it has increased to INR 315.

Conclusion

Labour migration from rural Sundarbans region toward economically developed region is a serious problem and it has both positive and negative impacts in local economy as well as socio-economic structure. Per capita income of the daily labourer, "patta" holders, and small farmers very low and they have to migrate for their better livelihood. Migration is also very helpful to acquire various types of skills or techniques and also cultures. Job opportunity is not only low but uncertain in the absence of industry. Some household industries are found but they fail to generate adequate job opportunity.

After "Aila" soil salinity reached up to threshold level; as a result, a significantly large area have become too degraded to produce crops. Small farmer, marginal farmer, and "patta" holders suffered most; as a result, out migration happened and increased rapidly. The new generation is not interested in farming that again lowered agricultural return. Young generation believe that farming does not suit them and they are more interested to work as a labourer in cities. But, people of medium age group (45-60years) are involved in agriculture during monsoon and work as unskilled labourers in during the non-agricultural season. The migrant labourers often suffer from HIV contamination (Table-9).

The Sundarban region has a very poor transport connectivity and accessibility, poor education and health infrastructure. Therefore, it is the high time the Union and State Govts take special measures to improve the economic base of the region along with suitable projects to improve social and economic

infrastructures in order to enhance their quality of life.

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Table – 1: Destinations of the Migrants from the Study Area

Work place in India	Number of Persons	Percentage	Work place Outside India	Number of Person	Percentage
Kolkata surrounding area	42	22	Bhutan	2	1
Tamil Nadu	24	13	Saudi Arabia	3	2
Kerala	22	12	Bahrain	4	2
Madhya Pradesh	9	5	Qatar	3	2
Andhra Pradesh	15	8	U.E.A.	3	2
Others Place in India	51	27	Others Gulf Countries	9	5
Total	163	86	Total	24	14

Source: Primary Data collected and compiled by the author.

Table - 2: Educational Qualification of the Migrant Workers

Educational Qualification of Migrant Labourers	Number of Person	Percentage
Illiterate	21	11
Up to Class - VIII	29	15
Up to Madhayamik	38	20
Higher Secondary	31	16
Graduate	21	11
Post Graduate	11	6
Technical Education	08	4
Others	32	17
Total	187	100

Source: Primary Data collected and compiled by the author.

Table - 3: Primary Sources of Income of the Migrant Labourers in the study area

Category of Work	Number of Migrants	Percentage
Agriculture	64	39
Fisheries	47	29
Agriculture labour	13	8
Daily labour	09	6
Forestry	17	10
Others	12	8
Total	163	100

Source: Primary Data collected and compiled by the author.

Table – 4: Earning Members in Migrant Worker's Family in the study area

Number of Earning Member	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1	61	32
2	59	31
3	36	19
4+	31	18
Total	187	100

Source: Primary Data collected and compiled by the author.

Table – 5 : Monthly Income of the Migrant Labourers in the study area

Monthly Income (INR)	No of Respondents	Percentage
>2000	39	21
2000-4000	38	20
4000-6000	36	19
6000-8000	27	14
10000-1000	19	10
15000-12000	17	9
<12000	11	7
Total	187	100

Source: Primary Data collected and compiled by the author.



Table – 6: Push and Pull Factors of Migration in the study area

Push Factors	Percentage	Pull Factors	Percentage
Environmental Issues	6	Better Job Opportunity	32
Economic Issues	26	Better Income Opportunity	29
Social Issues	4	Others	3
Total	36	Total	64

Source: Primary Data collected and compiled by the author.

Table – 7: Expenses of the Migrant Labourers with Extra Income

Expenses on	% of Income	Expenses on	% of income
Children Education	4	Purchase land	9
Construction new house	14	Purchase agricultural land	5
Repair house	9	Saving in bank	10
Purchase household goods	14	Daily life	16
Purchase new shop	2	Others	17

Source: Primary Data collected and compiled by the author.

Table - 8: Trends of Dependency on Primary Resources in the study area

Primary Source of Income	2016 (September)		2018 (December)	
	No of Person	Percentage	No. of Person	Percentage
Agriculture	79	47	64	41
Fisheries	41	24	47	30
Forestry	19	11	17	11
Live hood stock	6	4	5	3
Agriculture labour	15	9	13	8
Others primary activities	9	5	10	7
Total	169	100	156	100

Source: Primary Data collected and compiled by the author.

Table – 9: No. of HIV Contaminations after “Aila”

Block Name	Before “Aila”	After “Aila”	Block Name	Before “Aila”	After “Aila”
Basanti	10	29	Kakdwip	8	24
Patharpratima	4	17	Mathurapur- II	8	14
Canning – I	25	51	Joynagar – I	6	27
Canning - II	14	34	Joynagar II	14	32
Kultali	6	16	Sagar	3	8
Namkhana	4	13	Gosaba	0	6

Source: People living with H.I.V. and A.I.D.S. Report (28.11.2013).

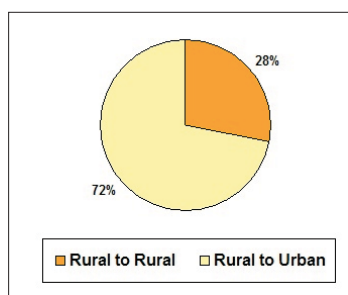


Fig. 1: Pattern of Migration

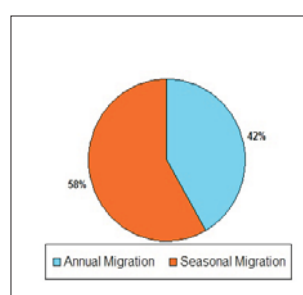


Fig. 2: Type of Migration

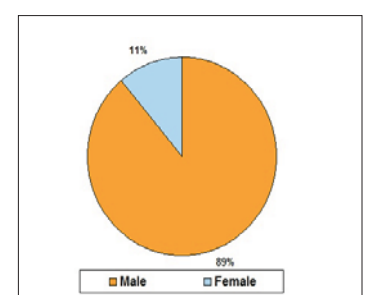


Fig. 3: Sex Composition of Migrants