

Record Of Those Barely Known: The Migrants

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I. INTRODUCTION

Modern India is one of the most diverse countries globally, a subcontinent that is home to over 100 languages and some of the world's largest cities and remote regions. In addition to its diversity, the demography of India is also appreciable. Having the world's largest population of young people, India is on the verge of accelerating crucial developmental processes in favor of its people to rise in global significance. However, India comes with its bitter truths and harsh realities, leaving some voices unheard.

Many were without food or any form of shelter.

While walking, some carried hungry children on their shoulders, And a few doughty daughters peddled their sick fathers home, Time didn't matter.

This excerpt reveals the haunting cries of impoverished migrants and the grim realities faced by them during the pandemic. Ever since the lockdown began, stories of migrant workers have been exposed to the country. Their hardships and sufferings have awakened the citizens, institutions, and the government. Opportunities are complex in conditions of inequalities and assertion of power, India should therefore do better in terms of inclusive urbanism and public policy reforms based on the ethics of labor care.

THE REVEALING NUMBERS

Migrants are present in every nook or corner of the world. Today more people worldwide live outside their countries of birth than ever before.

The current global estimate is that there were around 281 million international migrants in the world in 2020, which equates to 3.6 percent of the global population. Overall, the estimated number of international migrants has increased over the past five decades.

The total estimated 281 million people living in a country other than their countries of birth in 2020 was 128 million more than in 1990 and over three times the estimated number in 1970.

There is currently a larger number of male than female international migrants worldwide, and the gap has increased over the past 20 years. The share of female migrants has been decreasing since 2000, while the share of male migrants has increased by 1.4 percent.

The above data is just a mere representation of the number of people who have relocated, voluntarily or forcefully. Now is the time to dig deeper and know more about the fact, about why people look for work outside their immediate geography.

THE DRIVING FORCE: FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR MIGRATION

Domestic workers who work as rickshaw pullers in Delhi, drivers working for taxi companies in Gurgaon, the construction worker in Kerala, and the agricultural laborer in Punjab in all probability have one thing in common – they are migrants. Nearly one-third of India's population is a migrant population. Half of this population has migrated from rural areas to cities in search of work.

POPULATION EXPLOSION AND URBANIZATION

The ever-increasing numbers of the population have further aggravated the situation. It has become difficult to accommodate such large numbers in rural areas. As a result, people migrate to urban areas in search of alternate livelihoods and better living conditions.

ENVIRONMENTAL MIGRATION

It is now almost universally accepted that the climate is becoming warmer and warmer at an increasing speed, causing health inequalities across the world. It has been suggested that the environment may impact migration flows by directly affecting the hazardousness of a place but also indirectly changing the economic, political, social, and demographic context.

INADEQUATE DEVELOPMENT

When we talk about development, we refer to both- human and economic. Poor health services, poverty, and an uneducated workforce are some factors promoting individual migration. Migration and development are strictly

linked and influence each other. Paradoxically enough, migration may be driven by both a lack of development and increasing socio-economic development in a specific country.

The reasons for migration which we have listed above are quite generic and cover the overall idea, but the stories of different people vary to a huge extent.

THE GREAT DISRUPTER: COVID-19

During the early days of the lockdown, some people noticed children living near the construction site. They asked for nothing but there was hunger and curiosity in their eyes. They were the children of Ranju, a migrant worker from Bihar, who worked at the construction site. The pandemic had brought work to a standstill for her and 15 other Bihari workers — no wages, little food, and no cooking gas.

The pandemic highlighted the pervasive inequalities deeply rooted in modern-day societies around the world. One of the major consequences of the lockdown was the large influx of migrants from their hometowns to cities for better opportunities, when everything including transport- roadways and railways were shut down, and people had no other option but to travel back to their villages as they had no source of income. All of them had somewhat similar worries ranging from lack of basic amenities to lack of security to protect themselves, inability to provide education to their children, and fear of being thrown out.

Despite this, migrant workers are the backbone of several sectors in the country and their contributions are significant in infrastructure development, food processing, manufacturing, textiles, security forces, and domestic services. However, the process of migration entails a lot of challenges for both male and female workers. At times, most of the migrants are unaware of their rights as ‘workers’ which often leads to exploitation. Most migrants including both men and women end up getting deceived, leading to trafficking. Debt traps have become common and they often find themselves in the vicious circle of poverty. Despite such negative outcomes, the migrants still choose to work in such horrifying conditions.

Sumit Kumar, a construction worker for more than a decade, explained: “We live in small worker sheds which neither can provide quarantine spaces for the infected, nor has sufficient toilet facilities. Getting quarantined in such spaces will be more sickening. Food is a major concern. Hence, we cannot survive without a job.”

Ranju and Sumit are two of many such examples and stories whose life had been disrupted due to the pandemic. The extraordinary migrant crisis during the COVID- 19 has left a lasting mark on the future of India, forcing people, governments, and international institutions to finally acknowledge the migrant.

THE WAY FORWARD: ROAD TO WORK

It is almost imperative that steps are taken to improve the standards of living of migrant workers. This can be achieved through a three-level approach. Remedial measures should be introduced or followed by all three levels namely- individuals or citizens, government, and global agencies.

INDIVIDUAL-LEVEL (CITIZENS)

It is the responsibility of the individuals to recognize the migrant workers and change their attitude towards them. Degrading them or making them feel like they do not belong here should be stopped immediately. The foremost duty of every citizen should be to sensitize themselves to their situation and spread awareness about government portals like e-SHRAM. Such portals are used for the collection of data and the registration of unorganized workers. Donations in money or kind can help them stand on their own feet and boost their morale. Volunteering with specific non-profit organizations and arranging special meetups with them surely are the best possible ways to interact, which helps to get to know them and their problems better.

NATIONAL LEVEL (GOVERNMENT)

Since internal migration in India is very large, it needs to be given high priority with specific policy interventions. Governments and policymakers can play a vital role in ensuring that migrant workers undertake safe migration, have decent working and living conditions in destination areas, are aware of their rights, and have access to social security and welfare schemes.

-Improvement in the working of state and district level of management and strengthening rural administration to effectively work towards successful registrations of migrant workers on portals like e-SHRAM.

-Reducing red tape and making the documentation process easier, so that they can have access to identity documents which can help them in opening bank accounts and availing themselves welfare schemes, some social security schemes like public distribution systems, and subsidized ration.

-Arrange training programs or boot camps for the young migrant workers to advance their skillset and engage them in fruitful activities.

INTERNATIONAL LEVEL (GLOBALLY)

Such organizations play an important role in optimizing social causes, one such working towards the development of migrant workers is International Organization for Migration (IOM). IOM works to help ensure the orderly and humane management of migration, promote international cooperation on migration issues, assist in the search for practical solutions to migration problems, and provide humanitarian assistance to migrants in need, including refugees and internally displaced people. Some measures include-Taking proper actions toward the strengthening of universal labor laws. -Establishing a universal helpline for migrant workers so that they are able to approach easily.

-Universal registration of migrant workers on national as well as international platforms to create a comprehensive database.

-Extending support to the developing countries to improve their economic status so that they are able to cater to the needs of migrant workers.

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