

Role of Community and its Impact on Migration of Scheduled Cast Communities of West Bengal

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Abstract

Even in circumstances of poverty, migration responses are not simply driven by economic incentives but informed by ideas of appropriate actions in a particular context. A researcher focusing on migrant networks has played a very important role in helping to see the movement of people as part, not only of traditions of migration and interpreted in a cumulative migration theory, but also of wider processes of social and economic development. In this study carried on an ancient, backward, and deprived Koch community people of Koch Behar district, we are straining to detect, how their relationship with any other member of the same community helps them to obtain a job outside the district. As our objective is to look at the association/ network in the process of migration, here we try to ensure that the whole society should get an equal opportunity to get selected for our study. So 500 households had been visited across the district comprising at least 50 percent should have at least one member residing outside. FGD and in-depth interviews were also carried out in each selected village. The outcome indicates that the present scenario of migration is not the only reason for impoverishment. As the residential district is historically deprived basically in the economic front, but the masses are going to move outside for such a chore is a late phenomenon. The close relationship of the same community people is one of the primary causes of their migration. Education plays a crucial role to achieve their aspirations.

Keywords: Migration, Community, Koch Rajbanshi

Introduction

Man is a social animal. He learns everything from the environment. He lives in communities. When a child starts growing, first he starts learning communication. We always find it easy to communicate if the person opposite to us is speaking the same language. The basic component of a primitive community is the same language. In every aspect of life we are always influenced by our community, i.e the people living around us and our family. Based on communication our network grows. Our association with various groups also helps to expand the scope of networks. Our involvement with the society, association with various peoples, organization also increases our reach to people and their networks.

Today we have various sources of information. People are now getting an overwhelming amount of information every day. It helps them to take the right decision in their live. Their decision making process is influenced by various factors. Among these, factors that can influence the decision making process for migration, their association with the same community members and their networks plays crucial role.

Objectives of the Study

- To study the role of community in the process of out migration of scheduled cast Communities of West Bengal

Data and Methodology

For this study we chose to one of the poorest district of West Bengal i.e Koch Behar district. The Koch Behar district is located at the Himalayan foothill in the northern region of West Bengal. It is well featured by different natural and cultural diversities. This district historically belongs to the Koch Rajbanshi community. The size of this district has not changed since 1773 A.D. Koch Behar is one of the poorest districts of West Bengal, predominantly having a scheduled caste population (50.1%). Most of the scheduled castes belong to Koch community. It is also a highly out migrating district of West Bengal. The district is primarily rural with more than 91% population living in villages.

A total of 430 sample household members were surveyed. The role of community and its impact was measured primarily based of two variables i.e. source of information and channel through out-migration takes place.

Bivariate and multivariate analysis has been done to analyze the variables.

The literature

The network theory of migration does not look at the determinants which initiate migration but rather at what perpetuates migration in time and space (Massey et al. 1989). Migrant networks which often evolve into institutional frameworks help to explain why migration continues even when wage differentials or recruitment policies cease to exist. The existence of Diasporas or networks is likely to influence the decisions of migrants when they choose their destinations (Vertovec et al 2002,). Network theory is closely affiliated to another approach known as migration systems theory, pioneered by Magobunje (1970). This theory's main assumption points that migration alters the social, cultural, economic, and institutional conditions at both the sending and receiving ends and that it forms an entire developmental space within which migration processes operate (de Haas 2009). While migration systems theory has its roots in geography, migration network theory is of sociological and anthropological origin (Castles and Miller 1998). Whereas network theory mainly focuses on the vital role of personal relations between migrants and non-migrants, migration systems theory goes further and stresses that migration restructures the entire societal or developmental context of the concrete spaces in which it takes place, both at the receiving and at the sending end (de Haas 2009). It suggests that migratory movements arise in response to prior existence of links between sending and receiving states, such as colonial ties, trade or investment flows (Castles and Miller 1998).

Conceptually similar to migration systems theory is the concept of cumulative causation put forth by Myrdal (1957) and further developed by Massey (1990). It argues that migration is a self-perpetuating and self-sustaining phenomenon and identifies factors that contribute to this dynamic. The most important factors are networks but also a culture of migration, a perverse distribution of human capital and the stigmatization of jobs generally performed by migrants (Massey 1990). While these theories can explain why migration perpetuates, they offer few insights into migration undermining mechanisms and the decline of migration systems overtime (de Haas 2009).

Rather than explaining the causes of migration, transnational migration research describes a new reality in the *modus* of migrating and integrating into host societies by proposing an emergence of dense networks across political borders created by migrants in search of economic and social advancement. The concepts of transnational migration have important implications for understanding forms of adaptation among ‘transnational’ migrants as well as the effects of migration on sending and receiving countries.

A systems approach has been widely hailed as a fruitful and comprehensive framework for studying migration, largely because of its multiple analytical focuses on structure, linkage and process.

The attraction of a system approach is that it enables the conceptualization of migration to move beyond a linear, unidirectional, push-pull movement to an emphasis on migration as circular, multi causal and interdependent, with the effects of change in one part of the system being traceable through the rest of the system (Faist 2004). Hence systems can be run themselves like chain migration, can regulate themselves and correcting themselves in response to a problem in this system. It can modify as it needed. In this model destination can be changed.

Borjas (1994), who is otherwise critical of the weak and fragmented theorization of international migration, is enthusiastic about networks and writes, ‘The importance of networks for migration can hardly be overstated and they rank amongst the most important explanatory factors for migration’. Massey et al. 1989 in their study found migrant networks are sets of interpersonal ties that connect migrants, non-migrants and former migrants in webs of kinship, friendship and shared origin. They can be considered a form of social capital stretched across migrant space, and therefore facilitate the likelihood of international movement because they provide information which lowers the costs and risks of migration.

According to Messy et al (1989), there are three main types of migrant networks: family and personal networks, labour networks, and illegal migrant networks. These authors also highlight the gendered nature of all networks, and the often active role of women in developing and sustaining personal networks. However, like social capital, networks can also be exclusionary; moreover, they must, sooner or later, decline in strength and extent, since they cannot go on expanding indefinitely. Little research has been done on how networks dissolve.

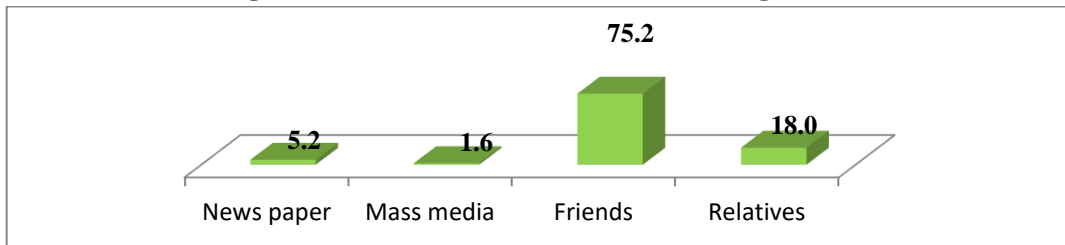
Source of Information for Migration

Source of information is one of the important factors of migration. It directly influences people in their decision making process to migrate. It can be observed that non-economic factors such as adverse conditions at home, favorable conditions abroad, demonstration effects, inducement by an agent, family or friends; escaping an abusive spouse, and illness or sudden death of a principal member of family have a signification impact upon migration decisions.

However, given the process of migration that they choose and the limited access to other resources/information required for migration the safe migration makes the reality often different from

their expectation. The migrants are more vulnerable to exploitation and are heavily dependent on the agents who channel them to migrate.

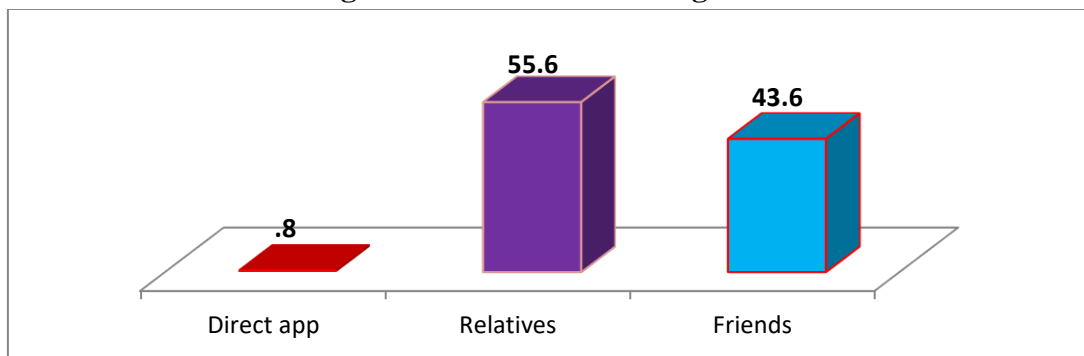
Figure 1: Sources of information for migration.



Three fourth migrant get information about migration from their friends. Only 5.3 percent got their information from newspaper followed by 1.6 percent from mass media (T.V, internet etc.). The other major source of information is relatives (18.0 percent). From the above analysis it is clear that most of the Koch Rajbanshi people migrate to other state through their friends or relatives.

Channel of Out-migration

Figure 2: Channel of out migration



It is found that 55.6 percent Koch Beharis out-migrated with their relatives followed by 43.6 percent with friends. They rarely migrate with the other religious and caste group of people. May be the close community relationship help them in their decision making process.

Related Factors with Source of Information and Channel through Migration

In this table (Table1) we study the source of information regarding migration and their relationship with the background characteristics of the migrant household. We also test its relationships by using chi square statistics. Although most of the variables are not statistically significant except the wealth quintiles, we can get a rough idea from migration process. Most of them are getting migration related information from their friends. The scenario does not change when different socio-economic variables are considered.

Table 1: Sources of information about migration by background characteristics of migrant households

Background characteristics	Friends	Relatives	Total
Age			
16-25	76.1	23.9	46
	87.5	12.5	88

26-35	81.4	18.6	70
36-45			
46+	78.3	21.7	46
Education			
Illiterate	86.7	13.3	15
Up to Primary	78.8	21.2	33
Up to Middle	83.3	16.7	150
Up to Secondary	76.3	23.7	37
Above Secondary	86.7	13.3	15
Household size	78.9	21.1	90
Less than 4			
4 and above	83.8	16.3	160
Duration of migration	81.1	18.9	143
0-5 years			
6 and more years	84.0	16.0	107
Economic status***	73.4	26.6	64
1st quintile	95.2	4.8	21
2nd quintile	88.1	11.9	118
3rd quintile			
4th quintile	72.3	27.7	47

χ^2 Significant level, *** at the 0.01 level

Table 2: Channel of out migration by background characteristics of migrant households of Koch Rajbanshi community

Households background characteristics	Friends	Relatives	Total
Age	43.5	56.5	46
16-25	42.0	58.0	88
26-35	44.3	55.7	70
36-45			
46+	50.0	50.0	46
Education	40.0	60.0	15
Illiterate	36.4	63.6	33
Up to Primary	48.7	51.3	150
Up to Middle	39.5	60.5	38
Up to Secondary			
Above Secondary	40.0	60.0	15
Household size	47.8	52.2	90
Nuclear			
Joint	42.5	57.5	160
Duration of migration	44.3	55.7	106
0-5 years	57.8	42.2	64

6 and more years			
Economic status**	57.8	42.2	64
1st quintile	42.9	57.1	21
2nd quintile	33.9	66.1	118
3rd quintile			
4th quintile	53.2	46.8	47

χ^2 Significant level, ** at the 0.10 level

From the table 2 we can understand that most of the migrations take place with their relatives. But here we found some mixed report about migration. Chi square test shows that economic status is significantly related with the channel of migration. In case of first wealth quintiles 57.8 percent migrated with their friends, followed by fourth wealth quintiles by 53.2 percent. In the second and third wealth quintiles 57.1 and 66.1 percent migrated with their relatives. On considering migration duration, the recent migrants working outside for less than five years, 55.7 percent migrated with their relatives but among those working for more than six years 57.8 percent migrated with their friends. If we look at the type of family and their sources of out migration, we found that both the nuclear and joint family members migrate with their relatives. The cross tabulation with the age and education of migrants also shows that they prefer to migrate with their relatives only. The result is exclusively important in the case of illiterate migrants having no education as 60.6 percent migrate with their relatives. Among those educated up to secondary and above many prefer to migrate with their relatives (60.4 percent).

Findings and Conclusions

Communication is one of the important factors for migration. Networking helps people to connect with more people and opens the door of opportunities. Basically there are two types of network theories (network theory by Messy et al and migration system theory). Both the theories are discussing the same thing i.e migration but in little different contexts. Network theory depends on the personal relations between the migrants and non -migrants, the system theory discusses about the migration as a result of development. Migration systems theory stressed that migration can develop both destination and origin.

We have considered community as an indicator, as this community’s people have been inter connected by family ties and social functions. They also have little socio-economic disparity. Common social events help them to strengthen trust, interpersonal and family ties and also and expand their networks. Massey hypothesized that large scale out migration of the most productive members of the household often leads to less intensive farming and overall disruption of agrarian organization reducing the dependency on agriculture. Koch Rajbanshi community also observed same type of problems. Migration also reduces the number agrarian labor substantially.

Migrant networks tend to invariably be seen as an unmixed blessing, facilitating more migration. However, if access to migration networks is for instance based on ties of kinship or ethnicity, this implies that although current migrants may indeed play crucial role for prospective migrants within the same group, they may also act as link man, who are unwilling to assist outsiders. This also highlights the importance of relationships. Three fourth migrant get information about migration from their friends. Only 5.3 percent got their information from newspaper followed by 1.6 percent from mass media (T.V,

internet etc.). More than half out-migrated with their relatives followed by 43.6 percent with friends. Although most of the variables are not statistically significant except the wealth quintiles, we can get a rough idea from migration process. Similarly, most of the migrations take place through the relatives. We found that migration is mostly related only with the channel of migration.

Limitation of the study

The study is based on a small sample size of a particular community.

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