

Overcoming Barriers: Women Migrant Workers in Western Odisha

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Abstract

Migration is generally the permanent or semi-permanent transformation of residents inside or outside of a country. There can be inter-state, intra-state, inter-district and intra-district migration. The movement of people from village areas to town areas is called rural-urban migration. The rural push factors such as decline in income from agriculture, lack of alternative job, poverty, unemployment, denied access to basic facilities, further encourage people to move to cities. Women and girls are migrating to cities in hopes of getting opportunities, finding greater financial independence, and gaining new lives for themselves and their families. In that condition, the informal sector provides employment opportunities for women in cities as street vendors, domestic workers, construction workers, etc. Migration is widespread in the area of western Odisha. There is a mass seasonal migration from rural to urban areas, including Sambalpur, Bargarh, and to cities in other neighbouring states. This paper begins with a discussion on female worker migration in Western Odisha, tracing the roots from perspectives of both push and pull factors. Next, it examines the challenges confronted by female migrants in the workplace and challenges related to basic infrastructure after migration. Finally, there will be discussion on policy and programmes for migrant workers.

Keywords: Migration, Female workers, Informal Sector, Employment, Odisha

Introduction:

The migration process has been one of the most dynamic human activities from the very beginning of human life. The migration of the people to big cities takes from all the corners of the country with different social and cultural backgrounds. It is a significant factor influencing the direction of socio-economic development in India (Patnaik, 2007). According to the Union Budget 2022 the overall workforce participation rate in India is 20.3% of which 18.2% is in urban India. In 2022 women employability rate is 51.44 percent. A variety of economic entities that are mostly owned and operated by individuals and employ people on a permanent basis might be categorised as belonging to the informal sector. A significant portion of the overall labour force participation in developing nations like India typically rely on the informal economy. The informal economy is credited with collecting large numbers of workers who would otherwise stay unemployed in the lack of possibilities in the official economy.

Migration in Western Odisha

The 64th round National Sample Survey data from 2007-2008 revealed that 28.3per cent of the workforce in India are migrants. In Odisha, 94,495 rural households and 25,590 urban households report themselves

as having migrated, according to a survey conducted by Aajeevika Bureau, Centre for Migration and Labour Solutions. In rural areas alone, the total number of migrants comes to 88 lakh persons. The rural push factors such as decline in income from agriculture, lack of alternative job, poverty, unemployment, denied access to basic facilities, further encourage people to move to cities. Migrant's women mostly work in the informal sector. The informal sector can be sometimes be significant to women living in urban centres, that allows to work and combine their income-generating activities with domestic household tasks. When it comes to Western Odisha only few cities like Sambalpur, Bargarh and other nearest cities generating employment for rural women's is a major challenge keeping in view insufficient opportunities in rural area and existing formal sector. In that critical situation migration one effective way to create job opportunities within the state and district. Migration is seasonal in nature in the rural areas of western Orissa. In Balangir District of Odisha, people migrate frequently to the cities for getting better employment and also because of failure in farming, underemployment, and also unemployment. As a construction labour, they have to migrate as they don't get work in a particular place. These people of Odisha are especially migrating to other district and Andhra Pradesh for brick-making (Singh, 2016). The migration prone districts of Odisha Includes, Balangir, Kalahandi, Nuapada, Sonepur, Ganjam, Gajapati, Koraput, Nowrangpur, Koraput & Khordha.

Challenges faced by the Female Migrant Workers

1. Working environment

It has gained attention for the seasonal migration of workers that occurs in the districts of Balangir, Nuapada, Sonepur, Kalahandi. Due to their lack of education and technical skills, migrant rural women frequently work in low-skill, unskilled jobs that are classified as part of the informal economy, which frequently excludes them from the protection of labour laws and social benefits like pensions, health insurance. In the unorganised sector where the majority of women workers are concentrated, no occupational safety and health safeguards are in place. The female labour force constituting one third of the urban workers in India "face serious problems and constraints related to work such as lack of continuity, insecurity, wage discrimination, unhealthy job relationship, absence of medical and accident care". The women migrant workers face the problem of poor working and living condition in the worksite. The children of the migrant workers suffered with mal-nutrition in the working places. Poor medical facility is another reason for violation of the rights of the women migrant workers. In the workplace the workers were not provided with the proper medical treatment and even no first aid centre is available for them. (Sarkar, 2019). Women migrant workers in brick manufacturing industries have been facing with violence, conflict due to getting daily wages, pressure for extra work due to heavy increasing demand for brick. They do not get training and safety equipment such as mask, boot, gloves when they carry backed bricks. They suffer lungs, stomach pain, skin problems, unhygienic open food and water.

Labourers by the thousands employed in head loading, stone breaking, cleaning and other forms of daily wage labour where they are entirely at the mercy of petty contractors and have absolutely no work safety or security. In the unorganised sector they are forced to work beyond work hours, even in advanced stages of pregnancy, have no leave facilities, and are always under threat of being thrown out. Women domestic workers and those who are working in construction sector, other factories faced numerous problems such as low wages, extra work, long working hour, lack of holidays, harassment at workplace, physical torture ill treatment. In small scale industries women faced different difficulties when they run their business after migrating to new environment such as lack of infrastructural facilities in order to operate cake baking

business, candle making, pickles, incense sticks, papad, fried snacks. They often have fewer opportunities than men to access finance, mainly for starting an enterprise. Construction workers are the backbone of the economy as they create the infrastructure necessary for industrial growth. The female employment in the construction industry is very high, even though they work only as helpers or unskilled workers. Women are almost unskilled labourers; they face serious problems related to work, viz., wage discrimination, gender and sexual harassment, lower wages (Devi, K. & Kiran, U.V., 2013). Women face discrimination on the job because even if they have the same skills as the men, they are not given the same work.

2. Female Migrant Workers during Covid-19 pandemic

In Odisha, migration is a more viable alternative for income and survival due to both push and pull factors, which cause individuals to leave their state in pursuit of employment and higher pay. However, COVID-19 was a heavy blow that caused a massive reverse migration to be seen in the state. After returning, those workers are dealing with a variety of issues, the most significant of which is a lack of employment options. Additionally, a large number of them are employed at low wages (Behera, Mishra & Behera, 2021). The pandemic has degraded the condition of migrant workers in an unprecedented manner, having long-term impacts on the regional, national, as well as global workforce, which has affected the lives and livelihood of migrant workers in Odisha. "Migrant women are considered to be one of the most vulnerable groups, in general, and especially in the pandemic situation" (Paltasingh & Bhue, 2021).

3. Challenges related to Basic infrastructure

There is a huge rural female population migrating short distance to local cities. These migrants' female workers are paid low wages in the informal sector, experience difficulties in finding affordable and adequate housing. Migrants' female workers are more vulnerable to discrimination and exploitation as many of them are poor, illiterate and live in slums and hazardous locations prone to disaster and natural calamities. Life of labourers is extremely grim, and they are forced to live on a short budget, consuming substandard food to save enough money to return home with (Biswal, 2019). There is a lack of urban policies and programmes for the delivery of shelter, water, sanitation and electricity which is critical for most informal migrant workers.

Welfare security and programmes

The female labour force plays an important role in Odisha's urban workforce, however they "experience major issues and limits associated to work, such as lack of continuity, instability, wage discrimination, poor work relationships, absence of medical care. Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana to financial assistance of building and other construction workers. Under e-SHRAM portal facilitate delivery of social security and welfare schemes to such unorganized workers. Special training programme under Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana in the districts having high concentration of returnee migrants.

There is no social protection for those who work as migrant labourers in the unorganized sector even though they should be beneficiaries under the Unorganized Workers Social Security Act, 2008, Factories Act, The Mines Act, The Employees' State Insurance Act and the Workmen's Compensation Act which provide health benefits and compensation to the workers in cases of ill-health and injuries. In order to safeguard the interests of the migrant workers, the Inter-state Migrant Workmen Act, 1979. This act provides protection from exploitation, enhancement of skills and social security to all categories of workers. This includes maternity benefit, pension and insurance. In the unorganised sector where the majority of women workers are concentrated, no occupational safety and health safeguards are in place.

Conclusion

The country's economy benefits significantly from the internal migration of women workers who work in manufacturing, small business, and construction. Odisha is one of the major places of origin for migrant workers in India. The trend of rural-to-urban migration of female workers is high in western Odisha, and they faced various challenges to find secure employment and housing facilities after migrating. Majority of female workers are engaged in the informal sector due to low skills and illiteracy, and this sector is full of difficulties like health issues in working conditions, mental and physical harassment, and low wages. Migrant female workers have not benefited from all the government schemes due to a lack of proper implementation and execution at the ground level. Also, they are not provided with social security under various government acts and policies.

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