International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research (IJFMR)
E-ISSN: 2582-2160 ● Website: www.ijfmr.com ● Email: editor@ijfmr.com

Labour Migration: A Theoretical Debate

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Abstract
This paper focuses on how migration theories can be categorised as micro, meso, and macro theories based on the focus. There has been a shift in focus in migration theory from purely mechanical models to more sophisticated models in the 1950s. Migration theories can be divided into micro, meso and macro-level depending on the focus of the theories. The focus of the micro-level theories is on individual migration decisions. Whereas macro-level theories explain the various migration trends. The meso- level migration theories are associated with the cause and perpetuation of migration and lie between micro and macro-level theories (Hagen-Zanker, 2008).

Keywords: Migration, Micro, Macro, Meso theories and supply of labour.

Introduction

Migration refers to a change in residence either permanent or semi-permanent. The movement of people from one place to another in search of a better environment is not a new phenomenon. Earlier people used to move from one place to another in search of a better place for hunting. This type of migration is known as primitive migration. During that time various tribes wanted to settle down as agriculturalists where a tribe as a whole migrated. The rise of nationalism in Europe also gave rise to a new kind of migration sometimes known as the refugee movement. An important feature of this kind of movement was that it was neither planned nor forced. Because the people belonging to Europe found it difficult to bear the political situation at that time (Kumar, 2016).

With time when civilisation started throwing light on human society, the way of living changed. This change has given rise to many needs of human beings and the movement continues to fulfil these needs. There is no limit on the distance of the movement. Migration can be national or international, voluntary or involuntary. Thus, a move from one place to another can be termed migration. However, not all geographical mobility is migration. For example, the movement of people to the mountain for the summer which is temporary is also excluded from migration. The act of migration whether long or short, difficult or easy always involves a place of origin, a place of destination and an intervening obstacle (Lee, 1966).

The concept of migration is interdisciplinary in nature. It is always a field of investigation by anthropologists, sociologists, demographers, political scientists, economists, historians and human geographers. So, there exist differences in the approaches in studying migration (Haq, 1974). Therefore, we can understand it from an interdisciplinary approach. Each discipline tries to define it from its perspective, thereby adding something new to the existing literature. Anthropologists have focused on

networks and transnational communities, while sociologists and economists have tried to give value to social and human capital and the problems of immigrants in terms of their settlement and incorporation. Geographers have focused on spatial dimensions of migration and settlement. Political scientists have drawn our attention to understanding how migration can impact on the institutions of sovereignty and citizenship. Historians have tried to understand the experiences of the migrants over time and also the hopes and ambitions behind their movement from one place to another. Demographers have shown how migration can impact the population both in the place of origin and in the destination (Brettel & Hollifield, 2015).

Migration theories are useful to understand why people move from one place to another. The movement of the people may be related to economic, political, social, legal, cultural, ethnic or other phenomena (Wickramasinghe & Wimalaratana, 2016). The main objective of this paper is to understand different theoretical perspective of labour Migration and how these theories have been evolved with time. The study is purely qualitative and descriptive in nature. At first macro-level theories will be discussed which will be followed by micro and meso-level theories.

Macro theories

The theoretical prediction about migration was first introduced in the neo-classical model of Lewis. Lewis introduced the dual-sector model explaining the push and pull factors of migration. The dual-sector consists of the rural subsistence sector and industrial sector. There is an unlimited supply of labour at a subsistence wage in the rural sector. However, this unlimited supply of labour will exist only in those countries where the population is more compared to capital and natural resources. This excess supply of labour is so large that the employer does not have to worry when they want to expand employment. Now if the industrialist sector wants to transfer this excess labour from the rural sector it will have to provide a wage rate more than the subsistence level. The reason behind the higher wage rate in the industrialist sector is that the cost of living in the urban sector is high compared to the rural sector. Besides it also involves the psychological cost of transferring from the easy-going way of life in the rural area to the urban environment. This labour supply will continue until the excess labour in the rural sector becomes zero. According to Lewis, it is also obvious that employers would be interested to look for cheap labour beyond the borders of their country. For this reason, they may bring cheap immigrant labour. Thus, cheap labour acts as a cornerstone in the theory of migration (Lewis, 1954).

Transfer of labour from rural subsistence sector to industrial sector can be seen as a development strategy. Because through this process the traditional sector can get rid of its surplus labour and engage them in the modern sector where the capital-output ratio is high that will pave the way for development. Lewis's model can be explained in terms of development mechanisms where the potential for growth can be exploited from regional disparities. In this way, both sending and receiving countries will be benefitted from it. So, Lewis's model can be seen as a model of development of which migration is a part (Arango, 2002). The dual-sector model enabled Lewis to suggest that competition among migrant workers results in a decline in wages in the modern sector. Finally, it leads to an increase in profit for the capitalist sector. But it failed to explain the determinants of migration (Abreu, 2012).

Harris and Todaro's (1970), model gave another important view on migration. According to them individuals always calculate the cost and benefit of migration. Such calculations include the availability of opportunities for new work, travelling costs and savings to be spent while searching for a new job. Todaro (1969), showed that positive rural-urban wage differences will continue to attract rural migrant workers despite urban unemployment. However, Abreu (2012), argued that the Harris Todaro model was not a full theoretical explanation of the migration process but, a theory of migrant agency. Critics showed that the principal weakness of this model is it states that migration rates will be highest for the poorest people and poorest countries. But empirical evidence does not confirm this prediction. The model also predicts that migration will decrease if the income difference between two countries decreases. But again, empirical evidence denies the prediction (Stahl, 1995). Shrestha (1988), argued that migration models like Lewis and Harris Todaro stated that migration decisions reflect the free choice and economic rationality of individuals. But these models ignored the real context of migration i.e. the interaction between capitalist development and social relations that produced migration.

Another theoretical approach under macro theories is labour market segmentation theory. The main focus of labour market segmentation theory is the stratification in the labour market. Dual labour market theory visualizes firms and their employees into two parts i.e., capital-intensive primary sector and labour-intensive secondary sectors. The owner of capital is bound to bear the cost of its unemployment because it is a fixed factor of production. On the other hand, labour is a variable factor of production which can be released when demand declines. So, the cost of unemployment is borne by the worker. Capital-intensive methods are used to meet the basic demands in the economy and seasonal or fluctuation in demand is met by the labour-intensive technique. This dualism creates stratification in the labour market. The primary sector jobs require skills and wages are high. Primary sector jobs develop stable working habits. Employers invest in the workers in the primary sector in the name of training and education. Because a job in the primary sector requires complicated skills and considerable knowledge. It becomes expensive for the employer to let the worker go because they become more like capital (Massey et.al, 1993). On the other hand, secondary sector jobs do not require skills and wages are lower compared to the primary sector. They do not develop stable working habits (Reich, Gordon & Edwards, 1973). Secondary jobs are also characterised by little mechanisation, low productivity, low value-added goods and high labour turnover (Weitzman, 1989). In this sector, the workers can be thrown at any time especially when demand falls. These features make this sector unattractive for the native workers. Most of the time, immigrants are seen to fill secondary sector jobs, especially when they expect to stay in the place of destination for a short time. Labour market segmentation can be seen as a strategy used by employers to attract immigrant labour for their work. Labour market segmentation has significance for unauthorized labour migrants. Because their migration status coupled with family situations may force them to accept the least desirable jobs (Massey et.al 1993; Brettel & Hollifield 2015).

Sharma (1997), in a study mentioned how immigrant workers are used as a key to attracting capital investment by lowering the cost of production. Immigrant workers are used in declining sectors of the economy but also in export promoting industries. She stated that a dual labour market is a strategy used by the capitalists where they take the advantage of the migration status of the immigrants. Especially, in the context of international migration how citizenship along with migration status plays an important role in the division of the labour market. The main focus of dual labour market theory lies in explaining the

demand for foreign labour which arises due to the structure of the economy. But this theory explains migration as demand-driven and ignores the other push factors responsible for migration. In advanced countries, most immigrants come with their own initiative and do not always fill the already existing jobs. Sometimes their supply creates its own demand and leads to the creation of new job opportunities. Apart from all these, this theory failed to explain differential immigration rates in advanced countries (Arango, 2002).

The system approach to rural-urban migration also provides a clear understanding of the important elements in the migration process. When villages are in isolation the process of migration is slow. The decline in isolation of the villages and their integrity with the urban areas play an important role in migration. Rural-urban integration increases the responsiveness of the rural people to changing prices and wages as well as the demand pattern. The decline in isolation makes the rural people aware of the variety of goods and services available in the urban markets. Now in order to avail those goods and services, they have to produce more or they can move to cities to sell their labour. Finally, this leads to the creation of an environment under which the rural-urban migration operates. This environment keeps on changing which affects the operation of the system (Mabogunje, 1970). Zelinsky (1971), through the hypothesis of mobility transition tried to show how migration is linked with the social and developmental changes involved in the process of modernisation. Migration pattern has a close link with demographic factors (example- birth rate) and the stages of modernisation (example, industrialisation). But Hagen-Zanker (2008), criticised mobility transition on the ground that it does not consider individual migration decisions and it also ignores the differentiation of different types of migration. Thus discussion on macro theories of migration shows the macro factors that are associated with migration. It provides a larger perspective of migration. But migration is also an individual phenomenon. So, understanding the micro factors is also important. Micro theories of migration look into different individual factors related to migration. It explains the individual causes behind migration and also how migration preferences are different for different individuals.

Micro-theories

The discussion on micro-theories of migration can be started with the push-pull factors of migration introduced by Lee (1966). He stated that there are positive and negative factors both at the place of origin as well as the place of destination. Positive factors at the place of destination act as the pull factor and negative factor at the place of origin acts as the push factor in migration. Between push and pull factors there are intervening factors which also influence the decision to migrate. But according to Zohry (2002), Lee's approach is a conceptual framework for classifying factors in making migration decisions. Hagen-Zanker (2008), criticised this theory by stating that the main focus of this theory is on the factors affecting migration rather than the exact casual mechanisms. Another theoretical approach in micro-theories of migration is a human capital approach which comes under the neo-classical approach. Sajaastad (1962), treated migration as an investment through which productivity of human resources can be increased. Migration involves both costs and returns. The cost of migration includes both money costs and non-money costs. Money costs are those costs related to expenditure on food, transportation, lodging of the migrants as well as their belongings. Non-money costs include the opportunity cost i.e., the income that is forgone while travelling, looking for a new job and also while learning a new job, psychic cost etc. Like costs migration involves both monetary and non-monetary returns. Monetary return can be seen as either

addition or subtraction to their income. Non-monetary return arises due to locational preferences and they represent consumption which has zero cost of production. He gave the example of Minnesota and California. He stated that some people may prefer to stay in California instead of low income because of its good climate compared to Minnesota. Now if this preference is shown by a large population, then California will have a locational advantage and this will result in the flow of more industries to take the benefit of cheap labour. But Hagen-Zanker (2008), expressed that though the human capital approach is useful in explaining the selectivity of migrants, it is very difficult to test it empirically. The importance of a theory lies in its empirical relevance. Migration is a dynamic aspect which keeps on changing with the passage of time.

Many micro and macro theories are part of neo-classical theories for example, Lewis Model, Haris and Todaro Model etc. Neoclassical theories explain the relationship between social attachment and the psychic cost of staying or leaving the place of destination. If the migrant has a social attachment with the people and institutions in the place of origin, then the psychic cost of staying at the place of destination will be more. The neo classical theory also states that the migrant should utilise the remittances at the place of destination rather than at the place of origin. That means the focus of this theory is permanent out-migration (Constant & Massey, 2002).

The assumption of neo-classical theory was challenged in the context of developing countries. In spite of unfavourable household conditions sometimes the non-migrants may stay at home because of the complexity involved in family relations, gender issues and kinship systems. Females may not prefer out migration because of the social norms and males sometimes are forced to stay at home because of security issues. Sometimes parents are not in favour of out-migration because of the mental health and education of their children (Wickramasinghe & Wimalaratana, 2016). The neoclassical approach was criticised not because it was poor in explaining or predicting where and when migration occurred, but it failed to explain where, when and why it did not occur (Abreu, 2012). Even Arango (2002), argued that neo-classical theory did not explain why despite differences in wage and income only a few people migrate. If the neo-classical model really works then the number of international migrants would be more than the real number. Another shortcoming of neo-classical theory is that it failed to explain differential migration. It did not explain why the number of out migrations in some countries is higher compared to other countries.

The focus of traditional migration approaches is either on aggregate migration movements or on individual migration decisions. According to these approaches migration decision is taken individually. The New Economics of Labour Migration (NELM) theory has shifted the focus on migration from individuals to households, families or other culturally defined units. New Economics of Labour Migration theory has added some important points to the theories of migration. It explains how migration decision is not always taken by the migrant itself and the involvement of migrants and non-migrants in making migration decision. Migration decisions can be seen as a contract between the family and the migrant where costs and returns of migration are shared between them. They also identify the conditions under which the contract is self-enforcing (Stark & Bloom, 1985). It emphasized how the migrants try to minimize risks along with those maximizing earnings. People in rural areas with low family incomes are afraid to take credit for agricultural development. For example, if a family wants to adopt new agricultural technology to increase production it may face two constraints. One such constraint in the name of high risk is their

dependency on a single source of livelihood and another is the capital constraint. Migration in this regard can act as a solution to this problem. On one hand, it can solve the problem of capital deficiency and on the other; it will also help to diversify the risk by diversifying the source of income (Lakshmanasamy, 1990). The risk may also arise when a household sows a cash crop with the expectation of earning profit in the future market. Because there may be fluctuation in the price of the crop in the future market. If the price declines below the expected level, then it may affect the family income. In developed countries, the risk of price fluctuation is managed through a future market mechanism where the farmer can sell whole or a part of the produce at a guaranteed price for future delivery. But in developing countries, there is a lack of well-developed future markets and in case if it exists also it becomes difficult for the poor households to access the market. Another problem faced by the poor household may be the problem of unemployment. Due to different problems in the local economy, the problem of unemployment may rise. Developed countries have different insurance schemes which provide protection for the workers and their families from the problem of unemployment as well as fall in wages. But developing countries lack this kind of insurance scheme (Massey et.al, 1993). So, the migrant's income acts as a supplement for the family. It is not always that the breadwinner migrates to support the dependents of their family or home. Sometimes the dependents are seen to migrate and their breadwinners stay at home reflecting the risk diversification strategy of the household (Chen, Chiang & Leung, 2003).

The New Economics of Labour Migration theory shows the importance of the family or household in making migration decisions. One of the important features of New Economics of Labour Migration theory is its integration of migration decision making with remittance behaviour and the use of remittance by the aspect of the households. If diversification of risk is associated with investment and overcoming constraints associated with local production then it will influence the decision to migrate and pattern or use of remittances (Massey et.al, 1993). Though New Economics of Labour Migration theory is best known for its shift of locus from individual to household actually it is information-theoretic in character. In a world characterised by incomplete markets and incomplete information, migration acts as hedging against unforeseen risks. Thus, New Economics of Labour Migration theory includes migrant remittances which were not covered in neoclassical theory (Abreu, 2012).

Meso theories

The meso level effects of migration can be understood in terms of the level of networks, communities and also the localities where the daily social interaction among migrants takes place (De Haas, 2010). The discussion on meso-level migration theory can be started with the network theory of migration. People cannot just move from one place to another in search of work. They require information about the place of destination. Here the importance of network theory comes. Network theory states the importance of connections among people that influence migration decisions. It shows that information provided by friends and relatives regarding the destination acts as social capital for the migrants. Besides migrants feel safe at their destination in the presence of their friends and relatives. So, migration network plays an important role in migration decisions (Jewell and Molina 2009). The network also plays an important role in the selection of a destination (Winters, Alain & Sadoulet, 2001). Marriage and friendship also play an important role in the expansion of migration networks (Wilson, 2012). These networks in the form of contacts with relatives, families, friends and employers provide an important means through which migrants are able to generate income and accumulate social capital that minimizes risk. But there are

pioneer migrants who establish themselves in the place of destination with little or no social support (Lindstrom & Ramirez, 2010). So, in the case of the pioneer migrant network has almost no role to initiate migration. The strong desire of the people to change their socio-economic position and to achieve a better life drives them to migrate.

Hagen-Zanker (2008), has given an analysis of migration theories based on micro meso and macro levels. Micro-level theories state that poverty and differences in income act as one of the important push and pull factors behind migration. Sometimes, dysfunctional credit markets and risks associated with investment also act as a major reason behind migration. Finally, household, as well as personal characteristics also influence the selectivity of migrants. Meso level migration theories lay stress on the fact that relative deprivation which leads to inequality in a community result in migration. More migration will take place if there are well-established migration networks. Macro-economic theories of migration throw light on the importance of globalisation in reducing migration costs (for example, transportation costs) and also changing the prospects of job all over the world.

Criticism of one theory has given birth to another theory. Though wage differential models were criticised, these models provide the very basis of migration. People migrate for different reasons, but major reasons are driven by economic motives. Again, the New Economic Theory of Labour Migration theories have provided a broader framework for the role of the family in making migration decision. It also shows the strategy of households in making a selection of family members for migration. Among the family members who will migrate, how many of them will migrate and for what period is decided with mutual understanding of the family members. Because, once one or more than one family member has migrated the role of the left-behind family members is important. Especially, in terms of utilisation of the remittances. Again, network theory shows how community networks can also influence migration decisions. Each theory has tried to cover important aspects of migration. So, the theories are interlinked.

Conclusion

From the above discussion it can be concluded that migration is dynamic in nature. Migration research is rich in empirical work but it lacks theoretical advancement. So, most of the time the empirical works are seen as either not connected with the theories or attempting to fit in with the existing theories. The empirical works are used to confirm rather than to question, test or challenge the existing theoretical propositions (Kurekova, 2011). Different theories have developed explaining migration. If we look at the theories it seems that the theories have evolved with time and changing situations. But still, these theories are so mechanised that sometimes it fails to reflect the true picture of migration. What is needed here is more research work on the theories of migration and the focus should be on the testing of the empirical work.

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