



SEASONAL MIGRATION IN WESTERN ORISSA: A STUDY

By Narayan Pruseth

Before I share my views about the topic, let me be frank about my involvement with such social problems for the last four decades. It started in the year 1965 when entire Western Orissa, barring Hirakud command area, was reeling under the near famine situation. During summer vacation of 1965 and 1966 I was a volunteer in an Anna-Chhatra (Free Kitchen) opened by the state government to distribute cooked food free of cost to the distressed and impoverished people of Khariar region of the then undivided district of Kalahandi. This unique experience on the part of a young teacher gave me inspiration to be socially aware and as an economist I became deeply concerned with the lots of the down trodden. I also experienced the great hiatus between teaching of economics and the social reality in remote areas. During the last two decades when ever opportunity came I traveled extensively in KBK areas and Western part of Orissa to know the problem of development and mass poverty in those areas.

Western part of the state of Orissa comprises of Sambalpur, Sundergarh, Jharsuguda, Deogarh, Bargarh, Balangir, Sonapur, Boudh, Kalahandi, Nuapada, and Athamallik subdivision of Anugul District. Out of these Sambalpur, Parts of Bargarh and Sonapur districts come under Hirakud command area. Mining and Industrial development have also taken place in Sundergarh and Jharsuguda

About the Writer



Prof. Narayan Pruseth Retired Principal of Bargarh Womens college For his immense involvement and stupendous contributions as an Educationist (Lecturer/ Reader in Economics) and as an Administrator (Principal Women's College, Bargarh) Senate / Syndicate / Academic Council of Sambalpur University.

Member of Board of Governors of Orissa State Bureau of Tex Book Preparation, which responsibilities enriched his teaching skills and augmented his administrative finesse. Author of a dozen books, he penned more than # 100 articles which were published in Magazines, Newspaper and Periodicals, , Visuba Awards (1967, 79, 84 and 87) for literacy excellence, Orissa Sahitya Academy Award (1998) – 2001. All India Ambedkar Award (1996) and district Journalists Honour Bolangir were some of the Awards/ Honours conferred on him. Received BEST ORATOR OF THE STATE AWARD (2006) and PROFESSIONAL EXCELLENCE AWARD (2007) for his contribution in the field of development journalism.

districts. 10% of total area of Kalahandi & Nuapada are irrigated. All other parts of the area have been severely affected by drought in every alternate year. Most endemic areas are Bolangir,



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❖ India is a large country with a great deal of internal migration of various types- seasonal/semi-permanent, rural-urban/ruralrural, intra-district/intra-state/inter-state, individual/in groups, sometimes whole villages migrating seasonally en masse, self propelled/organized through contractors, male/female, annual/skilled/ clerical/entrepreneurial, and with/without families. And the extent of internal migration is likely to grow with the emergence of high growth states and areas within states.

❖ The large metropolitan cities are growing very rapidly in India, unfortunately with slum growing many times faster. Poverty, agony, misery, exploitation, humiliation, insecurity, inequalities, and human unhappiness are also multiplying tremendously in the recent decades. These are indeed manifestations of our iniquitous society and faulty planning. These crucial problems will aggravate many times in the early part of the next century, specially when aided by population explosion and increasing migration. These crucial human problems need our urgent attention

Nuapada and parts of Kalahandi in which seasonal migration of laborers takes place.

The Western region continue to depict a picture of chronic under development. The tribal and scheduled caste population remain disadvantage social group in the region, In this region absolute poverty, food insecurity and malnutrition are fundamental form of deprivation. Western Orissa is prone to frequent droughts



which accentuate the poverty of the masses. Severe drought in these areas during 1965 resulted in agricultural crop failure. Drought in subsequent year led to the pauperization process of the small and marginal farmers. (These farmers Text of deliberation at Regional workshop on seasonal migrant workers organized by institute for Human Development, New Delhi at Ranchi on July 25, 2006) either mortgaged or sold their small plots of land to keep the body and soul together of their family members and subsequently adopted the age old method of fighting poverty i.e. migration both permanent

and temporary was found after 1965 in Bolangir, Nuapada and Kalahandi districts but reached alarming proportion after the drought of 1996. This practice has now spread to Bijepur, Jharbandh and Bhatali areas of Bargarh district, parts of Sonepur, Deogarh and Boudh district.

The reasons, the process and methods and human woes of migration of parts of Western Orissa can be understood by analyzing the actual situation in four block of Balangir district namely Kantabanji, Turekela, Bangomunda and Khaprakhol.

Balangir is one of the hundred poorest districts in this country. About 91.9 percent of the rural families in Balangir are below the poverty line, of this 41.13 percent are marginal farmers, 22.68 percent small farmers and 25.44 percent agricultural laborers. The district's rain factor percentage is second lowest is the state, Highlands percent potential is 40.51, groundwater recharge is 5th lowest in the state.

As per a survey report by 'VIKALPA' a non govt. organization 'recurring draught manifested in a cycle of almost alternate year since which poor vulnerable people, mainly from



❖ In India, there is no authentic data on home based workers. Official data sources such as Census of India, do not recognise these workers as an independent category but have included them in the broad category of those working in house-hold industries. As such, home based workers are not visible in national statistics. However, it has been estimated that over 3

crore workers in the country are home based workers. Among these, 45 lakh workers are employed in beedi rolling, 65 lakh in handloom weaving, 48 lakh rural artisans and craft persons. The other major occupations of the home based workers are agarbatti makers, zari workers, papad makers, cobblers, lady tailors, carpenters, etc.

the marginalized castes are exploited endlessly. These people moved out when they were denied alternative livelihood opportunities by the higher castes when opportunity in agriculture dwindled due to drought.

The landless and marginal farmers are most affected by the drought and 'non-absorption' capacity of the local agriculture sector forced large scale distress migration. They migrate to brick kilns of Andhra Pradesh, construction sites of



Dadan Sramik of Bargarh at Bangalore

Maharashtra, carpet industry in Uttar Pradesh and to Raipur of Chhatisgarh for rickshaw pulling. Laborers are away from their village for 6 to 8 months after Nuakhai (a popular mass festival of west Orissa) Preparation are on and they leave village from October and return during June next. What measure amount they save that is spent as part payment toward interest of the loan they had taken. They again depend on loan from local money lenders who usually charge extortionate rate of interest.

A former administrator of KBK and a senior bureaucrat of state government Dr. Hrushikesh Panda had reported 'the bulk of migration is push driven rather than pull of higher wages. the push factor being debt at higher rate of interest, inability to pay, money lender – Dadan – Agent nexus. Unless the circle of debt mortgage of land, bonded labor, migrant labor is broken unemployment, disease and misery will increase'.

The fact of large seasonal exodus was studied by National Human Right Commission. When the members visited the effected area in 1996 they enquired in to the alleged starvation death. As per the report of the Commission 'More than 2 lakes of people migrated from Balangir district alone. Such a large scale migration will have its short term impact in slowing down the asset building measures. It was further alleged that middle men were operating in the labour market for recruitment of cheap labour to work out side the state'. The commission also mentioned the adverse impact of migration on the old and infirm people left behind.

Why do people keep going ? During my field study I asked a migrant labour Ms. Dalimba Bag, 60, of Bandbahal village. Her replay was 'unless we go who will give us to eat ? Nobody wants to leave the village to work in inhuman condition at an alien place. Because work is not available to us after harvest of paddy from highland, we are forced to migrate.'

Collection of labourers from different village is a meticulously work out system and every one tries methodically to lure the needy lot into debt trap. The middle man appointed by the

Knowledge migration
The Netherlands and Europe want a top-class knowledge economy. Education and research are the pillars upon which the knowledge economy rests: education supplies the skills the knowledge economy runs on, and research provides it with new ideas and technologies. There is an urgent need for knowledge migrants, but the Dutch government's policy on immigration is restrictive and does not discriminate between highly-educated knowledge migrants and others. As a result knowledge migrants are discouraged on a large scale by cumbersome procedures and high charges.

According to Census, 2001 **there are about 10.7 crore agricultural labourers and 12.7 crore , medium and large farmers.** In spite of the fact that these agricultural workers have such numerical strength, they are extremely vulnerable to exploitation on account of their low level of literacy, low level of awareness, persistent social backwardness and absence of unionism and other forms of viable organization.



Contractor is known as Sardar who in turn appoints Dalals who identify potential targets for loan. Some time the poor villagers are forced to take loan and make promise to work under the threat of hired goons. The 'Pathurias' (Consisting of three members of a family) are paid advance at a vulnerable time of any thing between Rs. 6000/- to Rs. 20,000/- that will be paid back by the labourers. The pathurias actually make all the bricks necessary to pay off the advanced amount or loan. To quote a pathuria 'We labour hard to make as many as bricks we can to pay off the loan. We do bring some amount of money just to eat and to meet medical expenditures. The liquid loan also works as incentive to ask for new loan to meet the expenditure for marriage ceremony and other social obligations. The labourers paid by the owner of the bricks kiln for the ticket to and from the kiln. Once they reach the unknown destination of work they stay in unhygienic huts and work in unfavorable condition. The pathurias work for 16 to 18 hours a day. The amount of daily wage is less and pathurias often use water from the pool made by them to soak bricks. They can't afford rice of good quality and forced to live on 'kanki' (broken rice/used as chicken feed). I myself have seen these condition at Patancheru brick kiln of Hyderabad, Sikandrabad & Karimnagar. Even when sick migrants are forced to work. People have died, gone missing and been disabled due to grievous injury with out any compensation or legal action. This is rightly reported by Ms. Bhaswati Chakrabaty in her article 'The Shadow People'. 'Illness is normal too, and this expense is at first

borne by the kiln owner .Very ill people are sent home, but death is problem. One women belonging to Yuva Village was promised for a week, that she would be taken to see her husband in hospital. She was brought straight home, given money and told that her husband was dead and his body disposed of. A large no of deaths occur in the return journey in inhumanly over crowded



trains, out of suffocation, dehydration & sheer exhaustion. They try to hide the fact that the man they had been traveling with had turned in to a corpse in general compartment. when a labour died his wife and brother left his body on the train when they got off'. There are large numbers of cases of this type. Molestation and rape of young girls and women are often not reported for social stigma. After touring extensively in brick kiln of Andhra Pradesh noted journalist-cum-social activist Sudip Guru has published a first hand report in Times of India (Dt.8.7.06) that. 'There are at least 300 pregnant women, some in advanced stage of pregnancy toiling in the brick kilns in Andhra Pradesh to earn a living. The women not Only work in unhygienic condition,



As per National Sample Survey Organization in the year 1999-2000, the total employment in both organized and unorganized sector in the country was of the order of 39.7 crore i.e. around 2.8 crore in the organized sector and the balance 36.9 crore (about 93%) in the unorganized sector. Out of 36.9 crore workers in the unorganized sector, there are 23.7 crore workers employed in agricultural sector, about 1.7 crore in construction work, 4.1 crore in manufacturing, 3.7 crore in trade and 3.7 crore in transport, communication and services.



Migration is defined as a process of movement of an individual from the place of birth/origin or normal residence to a new place of residence. Labour migration is an important factor affecting the course of socio-economic development in India. Accelerated movement of people mainly from the rural and backward areas in search of employment has been one of the most important feature of the labour market scenario in India during the post independence period.



they are also deprived of the various government facilities for pregnant women. Kanti, 16yr.old married daughter of Manu Parabhue, a migrant labourer in Rangareddy district, worked in the kiln till she was seven months pregnant. On the day of the delivery the father some how managed to take her to the nearest primary health centre. The bricks kiln owner did not help them in any way. The lives of more than 20,000 children who also migrate along with their parents tell horrible tales. The children at the school going age move with their parents to the work place. The child in the pathuria unit is paid only a lump some amount of Rs. 1500 to 2000 for this work- piling mud flipping bricks for drying and carrying head loads of bricks. These children upon their return find it difficult to go back to school again. They become permanent drop outs. These children grow up illiterate and they also frustate many of the development initiatives of the government. One can imagine what happen of midday meals meant for them and free supply of books and study materials through Sarva Sikhya Abhiyan.

These unfortunate seasonal migrant labourers are denied of state welfare scheme like public health facilities, BPL cards, Voter ID cards and PDS cards. They are either deprived of availing PDS cards and those who have PDS cards are forced to forgo PDS facilities available in the village. This facilitates to produce Third Crop for different sections.

Another serious impact of the seasonal, absence of workers is on their right to participate in the functioning of democracy. Often they miss to exercise voting right as elections to Parliament,

State Assembly and Panchayats are mostly held during migration time ie from October to June. During the election of 2004 more than two lakhs of migrant workers could not exercise their voting right. One can expect the reduction in the number of migration after introduction of National Employment Guarantee Scheme in rural areas. But the ground reality is different. During last March when I interacted with three migrant labours in a rural market, 30 kms away from Hyderabad, they had no knowledge about the scheme. When explained to them their question was 'the schemes will provide work for 100 days. Here, we get work for six to eight months, and secondly how can we repay our loan by working for hundred days. Further works may not be available in large scale. Failure of confidence building in their mind NEGS has not yet helped, the migrant labourers. During last fort night when we visited Golmunda, Dangarpda, Belpadar and Haldi of Muribahal Block we got the impression that there is failure in utilizing of resources and in some areas tractors have been used for renovation of old tanks. We came across reports of delay in payment of wages to labourers in different work sites of other village and blocks.

In Orissa Inter State Migrant Workman's (Regulation of Employment and conditions of service) Act 1979, The Workman's Compensation Act 1923, the Minimum Wages Act 1984, The Contract Labour Act 1970, The bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act 1978 the child Labour (Prohibition and regulation Act



Navratna Info

❖ The agricultural workers constitute by far the largest segment of the workers in theunorganised sector. According to Census,2001 there are about 10.7 crore agricultural labourers and 12.7 crore , medium and large farmers. In spite of the fact that these agricultural workers have such numerical strength, they are extremely vulnerable to exploitation on account of their low level of literacy, low level of awareness, persistent social backwardness and absence of unionism and other forms of viable organization.



Human Development Index (HDI) is a summary measure of human development. It measures the average achievements in a country in three basic dimensions of human development:

- * A long and healthy life, as measured by life expectancy at birth
- * Knowledge, as measured by the adult literacy rate (with two-thirds weight) and the combined primary, secondary and tertiary gross enrolment ratio (with one-third weight)
- * A decent standard of living, as measured by GDP



1986 are in operation. But, studies have revealed that these Acts are violated by the contractors and the workers are not benefited from these Acts due to their Ignorance. There is clear indication of gross violation of Human Rights.

The solution to the problems of seasonal migrant workers in this area requires increasing livelihood opportunities so that even if migration takes place that is by choice and not of distress. Education to children must be ensured Irrigation facilities, social infrastructure development, assets creating works entitlement to land, drought preventing measures and strong, political will to eradicate in voluntary migration can help these unfortunate people. Right and concentrated action may increase the ergonomic of the labourers in his own area. Solution to the problems of unemployment and poverty should be sought within the system by following the policies which will lead to a significant increases in labour absorption agriculture by creating additional opportunity.

Dedicated NGOs like Vikalpa of Kantabanji, Lok Drusti of Khariar and others are doing commendable works to redress the distress migration through different projects.

When I see migrant labourers at Kantabanji Harishankar road, Titilagarh, Nuapada and Khariar Road Railway Stations in thousands I remember the great exodus of drought hit people from southern part of America to northern part in search of greener pasture as depicted by Noble Laureate Stenbeik's classic Novel Graphs of Wrath. Literature in Anthropology says migration has taken the shape of distress in more recent

times mainly for the poorest of the poor. Having migrated to an alien environment, it then become difficult and hazardous for them to adopt to it. Humans develop phenotypic adaptation to their local environments (immunity to disease etc) and these migration to a new environment may lead to psychological stress; so one would expect migration to have several impact upon the health of the migrants. Seasonal migrant labourers of Orissa are not exception to this. In



1995 world Summit for Social Development said the right to development which implies ultimate eradication of poverty is a 'fundamental right' None of these migrant labourers know their fundamental right. Still they are following the oldest action against poverty – migration of people who want to help themselves. Let the government, NGOs elites and members of civil society come forward sincerely to find permanent solution to this problem.

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THE INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT TARGETS

The International Development Targets are:

- A reduction by one half in the proportion of people living in extreme poverty by 2015.
- Universal primary education in all countries by 2015.
- Demonstrated progress towards gender equality and the empowerment of women by eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary education by 2005.
- A reduction by two-thirds in the mortality rates

- for infants and children under age 5 and a reduction by three-fourths in maternal mortality – all by 2015.
- Access through the primary healthcare system to reproductive health services for all individuals of appropriate ages as soon as possible, and no later than the year 2015.
- The implementation of national strategies for sustainable development in all countries by 2005, so as to ensure that current trends in the loss of environmental resources are effectively reversed at both global and national levels by 2015.