

Migration

DIASPORA and
DEVELOPMENT:

**CRITICAL
PERSPECTIVES**



EDITORS

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Migration, Diaspora and Development:
CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES

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Editorial...

Increasing attention is being given among scholars and students to the issue of how migrant contributions impacts poverty, development, and equity in home countries. However, it is only within recent years that donor government departments, responsible for overseas assistance, and multilateral agencies, such as the World Bank, have started to think migrants, or diasporas as they are also referred to, into a development context. They do now have focus on the actual and potential contributions of these groups as a tool to reduce poverty, contribute to economic growth, trade or post-crisis recovery in their countries of origin. A large number of reports, conferences, consultations and policy recommendations have been developed within the last few years surrounding the positive relationship between diasporas and development. This has led to an increasing number of governments in origin and destination countries that has developed policies to engage diasporas in development plans. Reaching an estimated amount of USD 401 billion in 2012, three times as much as the total official development aid, remittances, sent to developing countries by diasporas, had tripled between 1995 and 2012.

During the past years recognition of the linkages between migration and development is increasing. More insight has become available how migration affects development and vice versa. That this relationship is not negative, is among others shown by the positive role migrants play in both their country of residence and in their country of origin. Their participation contributes to technological development, economic activities and cultural enrichment. Many migrants remain strongly connected to their country of origin. They send money back home, but also transfer skills, start up businesses and share their experiences. This issue of *Focus on Migration* provides some interesting examples of the engagement of the diaspora for development in their countries of origin through temporary return assignments, partnerships with institutions from both sides and other contributions. Attention is also given to the impact of this engagement on development efforts and how they make it sustainable in the longer term. Governments of countries of origin explain how to see the role of their diaspora and what they do to harness its potential.

Since the turn of the millennium, the relationship between migration and development has returned to the fore as a major development-policy issue. Although the debate has swung between optimism and pessimism since the 1950s, optimistic views began to dominate in the 1990s and 2000s. It is now widely acknowledged that, through transnational activities such as the sending of remittances and through temporary return, migrants make significant contributions to the development of their countries of origin.

An increased focus on the role of diasporas as new agents in the development arena was noticeable in the first decade of the new millennium, when enthusiasm about migrants' potential for complementing mainstream development efforts rose among key development actors. This came at a time of increased debate on aid effectiveness and growing interest in 'new development actors', including non-traditional donors and diasporas. This interest was further strengthened by the emerging diaspora investment trends and awareness, since the publication of the 2003 Global Financial report of the World Bank, that remittances far

outweigh official development assistance. Authorities in countries of origin and residence, international agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have since attempted to channel migrants' transfers of financial, social and human capital towards planned development.

According to some of the most authoritative efforts to provide a systematic definition of diasporas, they are transnational communities of a particular kind, characterized by having experienced movement from an original homeland; a collective myth of home and strong ethnic-group consciousness; a sustained network of social relationships with group members; and, in some definitions, expectations of return to the homeland. Such definitions can be applied to a vast range of communities, including the historic case of the Jewish diaspora, emigrant groups who are involved in homeland politics from a distance, and transnational ethnic communities formed by labour migrants who maintain ties with their home country. This ease with which 'diaspora' is used as a synonym for a range of phenomena makes the term at once powerful and exposed to conceptual problems.

There are few areas of public policy in which the idea of a diaspora has been applied more instrumentally and extensively than in the international development sector. The task of governments in the Global South is to get to know their diaspora, to mobilize it and to build the diaspora's capacity to contribute to homeland development. In some cases the task is even to construct a diaspora if none exists. In this policy-framing diasporas are a source of remittances to be leveraged, investment to be procured and human capital to be returned. From the global development industry's perspective, first generation migrants form the primary group of 'diasporas' with whom they attempt to engage, though any individual can be enrolled as long as they are or can be encouraged to be, sympathetic to the development of their ancestral homeland.

Critics have argued that the 'diaspora' concept is not so much useful as a descriptive and analytical academic category, but should rather be studied as a socially constituted formation. One of the main criticisms that inspired this viewpoint is that the concept suggests an actual community, whereas those who are considered to be part of a diaspora are, in fact, often heavily divided, do not act in unity and may have as much in common with people outside the group as inside. And yet, today, migrants who engage with their country of origin transnationally have appropriated the term and, as Kleist argues, make claims 'in the name of the diaspora'. Policymakers and practitioners similarly make claims on behalf of or addressing the diaspora and its role in development.

While there is an increasing recognition of the importance of understanding 'diaspora' as a concept for claims making and mobilizing, there is still very little research that explores these processes. A few studies have looked at how diasporas mobilize, and there are some works on the mobilizing efforts of countries of origin. But the attempts of Western governments, international agencies and NGOs to mobilize diasporas for development have so far been understudied.

Editors

Dr. Dipak Kumar Doley
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Inter-State Migrant Workers and Their Problems during the Lockdown in India

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Introduction

Covid-19 which led the governments to the announcement of sudden nationwide lockdown has harshly affected every section of society. It has mainly affected the poorer section of the society especially daily wage earners, migrant workers, homeless people, street vendors of towns and cities, people working in theatres and so on. It has also affected school children and the students studying in the college and education. It disrupts the academic year of the students perhaps reduces the quality of education. It has deprived the education of underprivileged children who could not afford smart phones and laptops. Most of the children of COVID affected developing countries, especially from rural areas, have been deprived of education on account of both lacking finance to buy smart phones and laptops and disrupting and uncovered network problems. The COVID pandemic has pulled back the growth rate of income and employment of many countries. India which is one of the emerging countries of the world is still suffering from the pandemic and the consequences of the nationwide lockdown. The COVID pandemic has weakened the economy to some extent. It has pauperized many people by stopping economic activities. The nationwide lockdown reduces employment and output in the economy as it has affected every sector of the economy. The shutting down of industrial production resulted in a sizable contraction in the index of industrial production (Gulati et al., 2021). It has raised the volume of unemployment on the one hand and raised the price level of goods and services on the other hand. The inter-state migrant workers were the victims of such worse socio-economic conditions. Indian migrant labourers are either small landholding farmers or landless labourers (Ranjan, 2021), the lockdown which snatched away their employment made their condition worse. The adequate data on the inter-state migrant workers are even though not available their conditions what we have seen through media, social media and other mediums is heart wrenching and traumatic. Inter-state migration mostly takes place from less developed states to more developed states and this migration is often rural to urban. The excess labour in rural areas of less developed states pushes these labours to the urban areas of other more developed states. The unavailability of job opportunities in the rural areas forces them to migrate to other states either to feed their family member or to economically sustain themselves in society. Generally, married men migrate to other states mainly to feed their family members

as well for their children education. The COVID pandemic has affected economically and psychologically the millions of migrant workers. The female migrant workers also suffered from the nationwide lockdown. Many migrant women faced declining incomes and were pushed to lower-paying jobs (Khasnabis & Chandna, 2021).

The Objective of the Study

Problems from the COVID pandemic have been faced by every individual in society. However, its impacts on the poorer section of society are greater than the richer section if we look at it from the economic point of view. The Pandemic has impoverished the poor, forced employers to cut or reduce employment. Millions of migrant workers became unemployed and faced the problems of food, water and shelter in the host states. This paper, therefore, will specifically analyze the problems faced by the migrant workers and the government's responses to tackle the problems during the COVID pandemic.

Methodology and Discussion

This study is explanatory and based on personal observation as well as on secondary sources. The practical scenarios which I have seen both on different mediums, like media, social media and the society, here I would analyze through my lenses on COVID's impacts on the migrant workers. In the analysis, the condition of the Indian economy of pre-COVID was also briefly taken into account.

Conditions of Migrant Workers in the Pre-COVID Pandemic Period

Indian economy started to slow down before striking COVID-19. The demand side deficiency compared to the supply side led many people to be unemployed. Many people who worked as daily wage earners and on a monthly contract basis became unemployed. The growth of Indian GDP was 4.7 per cent in 2019 which is the lowest since 2013 (Aneja & Ahuja, 2020). The automobile industry and construction activities were hit during the pre-COVID economic slowdown. "According to SIAM, 3,50,000 jobs have been lost and over a million of are at a risk due to plant slowdown and bankruptcy of dealers and component makers (Singh, 2019)." The unplanned demonetization hits the economic activities of the country. The inefficient supply of newly printed currency and the imposition of withdrawal limit from the ATM had harmed many ongoing and upcoming economic activities in the country. Many migrant workers were affected even before the COVID pandemic due to that economic slowdown. The COVID pandemic enforced lockdown has multiplied their worse condition.

The Problems They Faced During Pandemic and the Consequences

The announcement of lockdown to control the exponential growth of covid-19 cases has severely affected the inter-state migrant workers. The lockdown led to the stop of production of industries, agriculture as well as service sectors which led to huge unemployment in the nation. The lockdown has traumatized the migrant workers in the host states. The consecutive extension of lockdown after the first announcement has created chaos and outcry among the workers. *The financial burden and lack of alternative sources of income perhaps forced many to take extreme action.* The announcement of lockdown even led to suicide cases among the migrant workers. One person from Assam who was stranded in Tamil Nadu during lockdown had allegedly committed suicide (East Mojo, 2020). A 20-year-old migrant labourer from Assam allegedly committed suicide in Gujarat after losing his job due to COVID-19 enforced lockdown (Business Standard, 2020). Labour from UP allegedly committed suicide in Gujarat due to

extended lockdown (The Economic Times, 2020). Even though the government could not provide the actual data on suicides during the lockdown, the news floating through different mediums reflects the worse condition of the migrant workers. The highways emptied of most vehicles were lined with the poor pedestrian, carrying their worldly belongings walking back to their villages (Dandekar & Ghai, 2020). Migration takes place permanent, seasonal and temporary. The temporary and seasonal migrants who migrate especially for employment mainly belong to poor and lower socio-economic categories (Lele et al., 2020). Therefore, the people who stuck in the host states without any work during the lockdown have faced problems for both themselves as well as for their family members who depend financially on them. Most of the migrant workers were working on a contractual basis. Kalhan and the co-authors (2020) studied the trapped and abandoned migrant workers in Pune city found that 44 per cent of the workers worked as daily wage earners and 51.7 per cent workers as contractual monthly wages. In their studies, 67.2 per cent of workers worked in construction activities. The COVID enforced extended lockdown forced the workers to leave the places amidst the crisis of food, water and shelters. Thousands of migrant workers walked back to their homes on foot after the consecutive extension of lockdown. People belonging to the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes were badly affected during the lockdown as they constitute a substantial proportion of short term circular migrants and lack of foothold in the cities (Pandey, 2020). In Maharashtra, 16 migrant workers were run over by the goods train while they were sleeping on rail tracks (The Hindu, 2020). Pandemic enforced lockdown created huge unemployment in the nation. At the beginning of the pandemic, the unemployment rate stood at 23.5 per cent in India (Raj, 2021), but later its rate fell and the work from home had been started in many corporate.

Was the Government able to manage Migrant Workers?

The government both state and central governments have taken different initiatives to manage the migrant workers' crisis during the pandemic. The governments' arrangement starting from vaccinations to providing free food facilities to the workers, the facilities for quarantine, transportation, etc. has no doubt helped the workers. However, the way the government managed the migrant workers during pandemic enforced lockdown raised the eyebrows of many intellectuals and the leaders of opposition parties. The public outcry and chaos, workers including women workers with children on their backpacks walking back their home hundred miles, suicides of many migrant workers, the migrant workers who were run over by the goods train during the lockdown reflect its failure in management. The conditions of the workers during the crisis were due to ineffective and inadequate response on the part of the central and state governments, especially states of the origin, destination and their employers (Rajan, 2020).

The government of India had certainly taken different initiatives to resolve the problems of migrant workers. During the lockdown, the Ministry of Labour & Employment had set up 20 Control Rooms all over the country to resolve the grievance of migrant workers. The Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana with the financial package of 1.7 lakh crore was launched to help poor, needy and unorganized workers of the country. Moreover, per day wages under MGNREGA have been increased from Rs. 182 to Rs. 202 (Ministry of Labour and Employment, 2020). A per the Ministry of Labour & Employment, GoI, a twenty lakh crore financial package under Atma Nirbhar Bharat has been launched to create employment for migrant workers, workers of unorganized sector, strengthening of MSME sector and promoting the rural economy. We

cannot deny the role undertaken by the state governments during the pandemic. However, the pictures of helpless migrant workers during the initial phase of lockdown were saddening and heart wrenching.

Conclusion

A sudden mass departure from the working places to their respective native places led to a shakiness condition in the country during the initial phases of lockdown. The migrant workers who did not have any alternative sources of income after getting unemployed started to look back at their native villages. Most of the workers tried to come back by any means during the lockdown. They had been discriminated against and harassed in many places. Many migrant workers could not enter their native villages even after coming back miles from the working places. The discrimination against them perhaps worsened emotionally and psychologically. Even though the government had taken different initiatives to tackle the problems of migrant workers, the picture we had seen in the society reflects its failure in management. The government could not take an effective management strategy while mass exodus took place during the initial phases of lockdown.

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CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES

Editors' Bio Note:

Dr. Dipak Kumar Doley is currently working as an Assistant Professor in the Department of English, Dibrugarh University, Dibrugarh, since March, 2011. Prior to that, he had worked as an Assistant Professor in the Department of English, Digboi Mahila Mahavidyalaya, Digboi, from July 2006 to February, 2011. Moreover, he has completed his Ph.D. on the topic, "Representation of the Marginalized Female Voices in Select Partition Fiction from India and Pakistan" from Assam University in March, 2020. He has also so far edited eight books, namely, "Partition of India: Memory, Trauma and Representation", "Modernism and Postmodernism: Reflections and Speculations", "Gender and Women's Studies: Interdisciplinary Approaches and Perspectives", "Ethnic Culture, Identity and Conflict: Problems and Prospects", "Human Rights, Security and Justice: Recent Trends and Approaches", "Literature, Culture and Society: Multidisciplinary Perspectives", "Rethinking Ecology and Environment: 21st Century Perspectives" and "Realizing Children's Rights: Protection and Participation". His areas of interest include Partition Studies, Modern Poetry, Modern Drama, Post-colonial Literature, American Poetry, and Indian Drama.

Dr. Abul Foyes Md. Malik is currently working as an Assistant Professor in the Department of Bengali, Digboi Mahila Mahavidyalaya, Digboi since March, 2010. He has completed his Ph.D. on the topic, "The Novels of Samaresh Basu: A Study on their Social Perspectives" from Gauhati University in December, 2009. He has so far authored two books titled, "Samaresh Basu Uponnyase Nagarik Jiban and Samaresh Basu Uponnyase Gramin Jiban". He has also edited sixteen books, namely, "Violence Against Women in India", "Child Rights in India", "Human Rights and Gender Justice", "Endangered Ethnic Language and Culture in North East India", "Migration, Diaspora and Nation Building", "Partition of India: Memory, Trauma and Representation", "Modern Indian Drama: Theory, Practice and Criticism", "Modernism and Postmodernism: Reflections and Speculations", "Gender and Women's Studies: Interdisciplinary Approaches and Perspectives", "Translation Studies: History, Theory and Practice", "Ethnic Culture, Identity and Conflict: Problems and Prospects", "Human Rights, Security and Justice: Recent Trends and Approaches", "Women of North East India: Their Folklore and Folklife", "Literature, Culture and Society: Multidisciplinary Perspectives", "Rethinking Ecology and Environment: 21st Century Perspectives" and "Realizing Children's Rights: Protection and Participation".

