

Social, economic and environmental dimensions of migration in the study areas of the Sundarbans and the district of Purulia, West Bengal

Dr. Indrila Guha

Dr. Atrayee Banerjee

Abstract

Human mobility, in recent years, has increasingly been recognised as a positive driving force for development, because migration is characterised by transfer of knowledge and work force in the form of migrants to both receiving and origin countries. This statement holds true, when the migration is carefully managed; but in most of the cases the promises of economic linkages and business opportunities give way to poverty and identity crisis. Internal migration (movement within the borders of the country) is mainly driven by social, economic and environmental factors individually or all of them acting together in that particular time-space. The complex relationships between environment and migration along with other socio-economic factors have influenced people to move either voluntarily or by necessity. It is to be mentioned in this context that temporary or floating migration is common among poorer section who tend to migrate short distance in search of livelihood and secured habitation. This phenomenon was analysed and inferred by Ravenstein's migration model based in England. The history of migration in India is a long drawn process, especially across the eastern border. It is to be mentioned in this context that West Bengal not only witnessed people coming from East but also influx of people moving out of West Bengal to other states like Assam in what is known as internal migration in India. Given this backdrop, the present paper will deal with the history of migration in West Bengal and then take two study areas- the Indian Sundarbans (the poor local communities) and the district of Purulia (the Santals) as the case to understand the present situation of intrastate migration and the resulting job/livelihood pattern change. These two places are two of the most backward regions of West Bengal with high incidence of poverty, hunger and malnutrition. Data have been collected using pre-tested schedules. In-depth interviews, case studies, focus group discussion (only in the Sundarbans) and observation were also taken into consideration. The secondary research primarily included the relevant works and scholarly articles. Although these two areas exhibit contrasting geographical features, still it was revealed through the study that the pattern of insecurity and deprivation confluence at a certain point. The paper will also try to understand socio-economic vulnerability of the local communities and try to find a solution to address the distress and rights violation. The main question that pertains is 'does India need a migration policy?'

Key words: migration, identity crisis, socio-economic vulnerability, livelihood pattern change.