



SOCIAL ADAPTATION OF INTERSTATE CONSTRUCTION MIGRANT WORKERS IN GRANTLINE, CHENNAI, TAMIL NADU

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ABSTRACT

Migration is not a new phenomenon. Since ages, people migrate from one place to another for so many reasons like better opportunity, climate change, drought, displacement, employment etc. Regional imbalances in development within the country have led people to migrate from a few states of India more often and high in number. Tamil Nadu receives more such migrants on a daily basis and employs them in almost all the fields. As TN is in its development phase, the construction field gives more opportunity to the migrant workers. It's evident that migrant workers are major contributors to economic and social development. Once the migrants hail to the new land, it may get harder for them to adjust to live in accordance with interpersonal, social and cultural norms. Social adaptation of the migrants will increase communities' resilience and support economic development. Meanwhile they adapt to the migrated place, survive and contribute back to their family and home state, their struggle is huge. This article constitutes an empirical view of social adaptation analysis based on a field study among construction migrant workers at Grantline, Chennai. The main aim of this study was to examine how migrant workers from other States adapt to the new work environment with less basic facilities and not knowing the language of the workplace. The method of data collection used for this study was case study. Based on the observation, the article throws light on the living conditions of the migrant workers and recommends the policy makers to take necessary measures to protect the human rights of the migrant workers.

Key words: Migrants, Interstate Migrants, labourers, unorganised workforce, construction workers, social adaptation, Tamil Nadu.



INTRODUCTION

Chennai as one of the oldest cities in India had witnessed the migration in the colonial era. Since the time of east India Company, people from other province and districts have migrated to Chennai for the purpose of doing trade, as bonded labour, film industry and many others. Migration is an inevitable process; which is very common from early days. The migration that is happening in recent days is mainly focusing on their livelihood and betterment. Due to increase in job opportunities across the states and upgradation in the science and technology, it is by force or pressure we could see few states are having high migrant workers population. Tamil Nadu is evident in encouraging inter-state migrant workers because of its speedy industrialization and governing policies towards foreign investments.

The essence of the old Tamil adage “*Vandharai Vazha Vaikkum Tamizhagam*” (Tamil Nadu provides livelihood to anyone who enters the state) Chennai is one of the main hubs for migrant workers involved in the infrastructure sector (i.e. Construction). Chair of International Institute of Migration and Development S Irudaya Rajan said migration is unstoppable once the wheel sets motion. The influx of migrants from northern states to Tamil Nadu and Kerala has been happening in large numbers for over a period of time.

ADAPTATION

In the literary language it is perceived as accommodation and adjustment. In biology it expresses the accommodation of organisms to environmental conditions for existence. adaptation is interpreted as the accommodation of the individual to the social environment. It is noteworthy that the concept is being studied in various fields of science, with both natural and humanitarian subjects. Theories of Charles Darwin and J.B. Lamarck had also argued that any living creature will survive only by adaptation. Adaptation is the key for growth and development.

SOCIAL ADAPTATION

Social Adaptation is a system of measures aimed at adapting a citizen, who is in a difficult life situation, to the rules and norms of behaviour accepted in society, and to his environment of life. The adjustment of individual and group behaviour to conform with the prevailing system of norms and values in a given society, class, or social group.



Adaptation of man is the reflection about the stages of development in sociological thought. In order to understand and describe the social processes, sociologists use the most significant achievements of biology, including adaptation category. Sociologist H. Spenser represented society as “social organism”.

“Theory of equilibrium” sees adaptation as a sustainable balance of the an individual with the society. Adaptation leads to complicated structure and increase functionality. Adaptation is a combination of several aspects like moral, political, legal, socio-psychological, economic and professional. An individual will attribute these aspects of social adaptation in different aspects of public life, by which the individual seeks himself in the sense of existence. Social adaptability leads to a conflict-free social development of the individual, and stabilization of the social community. The degree of social adaptability determines the degree of active involvement of the individual in the day today life of the social community.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Urbanisation is the process which includes both positive and negative sides. The city gets expanded by its size and population. This process includes change of population identity, adaptation of new life style and gradual change of ideology. The migrants in construction area are the main contributors for this process but still find it difficult to be part of the city. They find it difficult to cope up with unfamiliar city, nil experience of city life, no knowledge about the new environment, unknown language, unfamiliar food and culture, lack of cognition about the dynamics of the new society etc.

Thus, in the process of living and settlement in the hosting land, their economic life, social life, interpersonal relationships, cultural value are challenges for them to adapt the social life. Migrants experience stress and anxiety to face the complex urban life. They sometimes feel helpless being secularised, rationalised and diversified in the host land. They tend to miss their life back in their homeland, their family etc. Once adapt to the new land, their perceptions, life style and psychological wellbeing will change.

In this study, the researcher has observed the social adaptation process among the migrants through case study method. Case Study method is used to understand the depth of the problem and get detailed information. There are 10 case studies presented here to



understand whether migrants adapted to the life in Chennai? Whether the level of social adaptation has helped the migrants to live at ease in Chennai?

CASE STUDIES

CASE 1-Muksed SK -Mason, 38-year-old from Uthadinajpur, West Bengal

He is working in Chennai for the past 2 years. He doesn't know the native language of the workplace. For all the requirements he completely depends on the agent. He lives, along with 10 roommates in single room. He is married and having 3 girl children, studying 8th class and 4th class and 1st standard respectively in native government school. He believes his illiteracy led him to this job, so he wants to make sure the good education opportunity for his children.

He has developed habit of pan masala when he was in his village. Every day he consumes one pack pan masala, which he considers as relaxation at work. He works 5 months in Chennai and stays in his village for one month and comes back for work again. He is able to send home 18000 per month average.

CASE 2- Birhom, helper 18 year, old from Uthadinajpur, West Bengal

Birhom is an active and studious boy, who landed in Chennai just a month ago. He has completed 10th standard. He is the only boy in the family and his father is having agricultural land. All his friends from neighbourhood had come to Chennai for work. Whenever they go home for holidays, they spoke about the fun and freedom they experienced here. This peer influence led him to drop his studies and come to Chennai. Here he was working as, helper to the Masan. He expressed his difficulty to sleep in a small room with 14 of his roommates. Birhom says that 'he will get back to his place in one or two months and get enrolled his education further and he will never again come for this work'

Case 3- Rehman helper 18-year-old from Uthadinajpur, West bengal

This youngster from Uthadinajpurdistrict had come to Chennai 3 months before. His average income is Rs.12000 per month. He is happy being in Chennai along with his friends. All he aims currently is to purchase a particular brand of smart phone. He is a drop out from 10th standard. He says that 'I am not interested in studies, here no teacher is going to scold me or ask me do this or that. That is the biggest relief'.



CASE 4- Ajay Agent 36-year-old from Kolkata, West Bengal

He has studied 12th standard. 15 years of his life he vows to Chennai and grew professionally as agent. He is fluent in Tamil and knows the dynamics of this place. He is married and having 2 daughters. He says that in his community women are not allowed to go to work, so bring family to Chennai and maintaining will be costly for him. He earns Rs.30,000-40,000 every month.

CASE 5- Humayan Shek Agent 34-year-old Murshidabad, West Bengal

Humayanis in Chennai for the past 18 years, he knows the Tamil language and culture. Under him there are about 35 migrants are working. He states that only based on reference and from known circle he will bring people to work here. If accident happens, or any other emergencies are then only he is aware of the local resources. He agreed that the police personnels, building owners, local counsellor and panchayat president are always ready help him. He recalled the critical situation he handled in a recent accident death near Moolakadai. Money was mobilised and 1.5 lakh rupees spent to send the body to home land. He added that association helps to collect money from unpaid owners and also regulates the migrant workers.

CASE 6- Takim Sk Masan 36 year old Murshidabad, West Bengal

His education qualification is 4th standard. He is a married man migrated to Chennai before 11 years, leaving his 3 kids back in village. His son is in 10th class, first daughter in 8th class, 2nd daughter in 5th class respectively. He shuffles between Chennai and Murshidabad on and off. He has developed smoking habit when he started working. In his native his wage is Rs.750 and the payment may not be on time. He prefers to work in Chennai because of the assured weekly payment. He is able to send Rs. 22000 in a month. He often remembered his village Subhrnamirigi during the conversation in longing note. He is residing in the hut next to the construction area, thus he was not happy about the neighbouring building owners come and scold the migrants for the water logs that they have created.

CASE 7 Sahb SK-35-year-old helper, Murshidabad, West Bengal

He is married and having 2 kids. He preferred to be in his native, but when he is left with no scope to meet the livelihood, he travels to different states. He had come to Chennai a month ago, his migration pattern is not continuous.



CASE 8-Abadul -36-year-old, Murshidabad West Bengal

This family man with 4 kids came to Chennai 2 months before. This is the 2nd time he had come to Chennai. Mostly he goes to Kerala for work. He recalled a worst experience recently faced. Due to food poison, he got dysentery. He could not avoid work and did not have toilet facility. He added that every day morning before sun rise, we go with a water bottle for open defecation.

CASE 9 - Tusar- Masan- 21year old Uthadinajpur, West Bengal

He is married and living as joint family. This is the first time he had come to Chennai. He aspires to construct a house in village and get his siblings married. He smiled saying ‘discomforts are not to be considered for survival’s sake’.

Case 10-Masidoor – agent – 25-year-oldMurshidabad, West Bengal

This unmarried youngster is working in Chennai for the past 7 years. He caught hold of the language and work techniques. Back in his native he went to graduation degree but discontinued and came to work. He told that ‘I had to leave my native because of agricultural failed us. My father was investing every penny in the land but at the end nothing will come as return. So, it was loss after loss. Also, to get a decent job I will have to pay huge amount as bribe.’ He was happy that he was able to give his father 2 lakh rupees to pay the debts.

OBSERVATIONS AND FINDINGS

Living Condition

All the migrant workers are living in congested residents with many numbers of inmates. If the worker is staying in rented house are rooms, the room mates are generally more than 10. All the inmates share single bathroom and toilet. In some cases, there is no toilet or bathing facilities. Those who are staying in construction area are residing in temporary hut which is made to protect construction materials until the building work is over. These labourers keep their belonging in the hut, and sleep in the building which is under construction. They take bath in open place using the water pipes in the construction area and go for open defecation. In due course of time water logs near the tents becomes residence for mosquitos; need not emphasis on the impact of open defecation.



Food Habits

Every one contributes hundred rupees from their wage daily for the food expenses. They cook food on turns. Those who are living in tents near construction site are using fire wood for cooking and those who are residing in rented houses are using LPG stove. Every day, one dish is prepared for morning and afternoon; as they all eat breakfast and pack lunch to work. Generally, this dish is 'subji' vegetable curry made out of different vegetables and rice. Night every day they prepare chicken and in some days its egg curry. They get their tea or refreshments from the employer during work hours. On nutrition aspect, the menu they eat every day is better comparing to their home in native. Due to time constrain, all the three meals in a day they eat rice, instead of roti.

RELIGIOUS AND POLITICAL ADAPTATION

Most of the migrant labourers in this location are Muslims. Every day they make sure to find time for regular prayer. During season of fasting, they maintain it on every day work schedule.

The agent is connected with the local political leaders in Chennai for social assistance; and he is also connected with the political leaders back in West Bengal. The migrant labourers are having association, which regulates the do's and don'ts for the migrants, safeguard their wellbeing. It also works as an advocacy body for the migrant workers. This association is connected with the political party in West Bengal. During election, by all means they get back to their home land to cast their vote.

ECONOMIC ASPECT

The migrant workers are paid weekly by their contractors or employers. Masan gets about Rs.1000-1100 per day and helper is paid Rs.800. Out of which, they have to pay to the agent Rs.100 for identifying the work for them. On daily basis, Rs. 100 should be given for food. On an average, Masan will be able to send home every month Rs. 18000 to 20000 depending upon the number work available days. And helper will be able to send Rs.12000 to 15000 for a month. Migrant who are staying in rented place will be taken care by agent. Major accidents and medical emergencies also will be shared by the agent.

RECREATION AND ENTERTAINMENT

Sunday is the holiday for the migrant workers. Whether they stay back in the residence or go for outing to nearby places. As everyone is having phone, that is the major



recreation. In today's digital scenario maintaining social relationship is easy because of gadgets. Social, economic and political activities and information helps individuals to stay connected to their social network. Maintaining social relationship has positive impact on the psychological wellbeing.

MEDICAL CARE

No migrant has insurance. Most of the migrants do not know the ambulance number and hospital nearby. Only the agent knows the hospital details. Even if they know the details, for many reasons they avoid to go to hospital. Waiting time, long distance, language barrier, fear of judgement, inhibitions to approach the medical personal are some of them. So, mostly they go to the pharmacy nearby and get medicines directly. For construction workers, regular work is not assured, so even during sickness they go to work without taking rest.

Migration can be a complex and challenging process for the migrants. They will have to face cultural and language barriers. It might be difficult for them to even access basic services and social opportunities. Economic challenges like no work days, low wages, and lack of access to affordable housing and healthcare will put them at risk. Migrants may face discrimination and xenophobia in their new communities. Migrant are left alone in the new land with no familiar faces can lead to social isolation. Legal and administrative hurdles: Migrants may face legal and administrative hurdles in the hosting place. Separation from the loved ones can lead to Experiencing trauma and psychological distress. In spite of all the challenges, migrants show their resilience and adapt to the new social norms and culture. This adaptation helps them to earn the livelihood with harmony.

SUGGESTIONS

- ❖ The government should take necessary steps to implement the existing legislations
- ❖ The government should formulate a comprehensive social security policy for these workers that should include food security, health security and security in old age.
- ❖ Migrant workers must be registered and be given identity cards



- ❖ Mobile toilets can be placed by local authorities where these type works are in progress
- ❖ Events like 'happy streets' can be organised where these population located in order to encourage inter cultural exchange

CONCLUSION

Migration plays an important role in improving the economic and social conditions of people. The Indian Constitution assures its people the basic freedom to move to any part of the country, and the right to reside and earn a livelihood of their choice. but number of economic, social, cultural, political factors influence to move on. It is every one's role to give a comfortable stay for the migrants in the host land.

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