



Male Worker Migration and Women Empowerment: A Case of Bihar, India

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ABSTRACT

Migration of population has been a recurrent phenomenon since the dawn of human history. Though its form has changed but it remains a dominant event in the global social system. In modern days also people migrate from underdeveloped areas to the developed ones in search of better opportunities. Several theories have been propounded to explain the occurrence of migration. A number of social, cultural, economic, spatial, climatic, demographic factors induce migration. Among them, the economic factors are considered as the primary reasons for inducing migration. Migration of male labour force from Bihar has increased during last two decades which prompted us to analyze the pattern of migration and its impact on the empowerment of women left behind at place of origin. The incidence of migration is comparatively high in rainfed ecosystem due to undeveloped agriculture. In Bihar, labour migration crossed the boundary of caste and class since migrants belonging to all castes and class are found migrating however short term migration seems to be the domain of lower caste and class whereas forward caste migrants prefer to migrate for long period. The short term migrants are employed mainly as agricultural labours, sales person and riksha puller at place of destination because they are less educated and belong to low socio-economic strata of rural society whereas long term migrants are employed as guard, construction worker(mason),waiter in hotels and contractual workers in small scale industries. Level of women employment has increased on migrant households, particularly on poor households; however, work load of women has also increased. It has been observed that role of women of migrant households changed from unpaid female labour to managers of the household, however, they face problem in management of fund, technology and input-output marketing. There is a need to launch a programme for their training to improve their knowledge in financial, technological and marketing management.

Keywords: Bihar, Labor migration, migration pattern, Women empowerment

INTRODUCTION

Migration of population has been a recurrent phenomenon since the dawn of human history. Though its form has changed but it remains a dominant event in the global social system. In modern days also people migrate from underdeveloped areas to the developed ones in search of better opportunities. Several theories have been propounded to explain the occurrence of migration. A number of social, cultural, economic, spatial, climatic, demographic factors induce migration. Among them, the economic factors are considered as

the primary reasons for inducing migration (DFID, 2007 and Kabeer, 2005). According to the two sectors growth model of Lewis and others, the surplus labour from low productive agriculture in rural areas is transferred to highly productive industrial sector in urban areas for providing needed manpower for the urban industrial growth. But this theory fails to explain an increasing rural migration which increased during last two decades in India, particularly from Bihar. The most effective theory for explaining migration is push and pull theory which states that the migration generally takes place when the positive pull factors at the place of destination are outnumbered by push factors at the place of origin (Bague, 1969). No matter what theory lies behind migration but the phenomenon is considered socially beneficial since the human resources were

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being shifted from areas where their social marginal products were assumed to be zero to places where their marginal products are not only positive but also rapidly growing as a result of capital accumulation and technological progress. The new economics of migration explains that the decision to migrate is taken by larger association of related people, household or families rather than autonomous individuals (Stark, 1991). It is rather a type of risk management, done in order to supplement income, through inter-sectoral movement, even in the absence of wage differentials. The relationship between migration and technological change and production can be viewed in context of two conflicting hypotheses. The first being that out migration stimulates development of the origin area through remittances and by inducing technological changes which ultimately results in higher output and income in the area. The migration seems to have helped in judicious use of human labour at native place due to migration of surplus labour force for gainful employment to destination of migration (Kumar *et al.*, 2015). Another hypothesis on the contrary states that it leads to labour shortages and decline in the average quality of labour which adversely affects output and productivity in native place. Research on migration becomes of outmost priority as its impact both to place of origin and destination has been undermined. The migration from an underdeveloped state like Bihar has increased tremendously in recent years, which are supposed to have far reaching implications on social and economic dimensions of the state. There is a need to study the migration pattern and its far reaching consequences on their place of origin. Keeping in view the anticipated consequences of migration in place of origin, this study has been undertaken to examine the incidence and pattern of male labour out-migration and its impact on women empowerment on migrant household in Bihar.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study is based on a survey of 400 households (200 migrants and 200 non-migrants) from two eco-systems that is; Rain fed and Partially Irrigated System. Madhubani district was selected from a list of rain fed districts where irrigated area was less than 35 percent and denoted as rainfed ecosystem. East Champaran district was selected from a list of districts where irrigated area was 40 to 50 per cent and denoted as partially irrigated system. A sample of eight villages; four from each ecosystem were selected randomly for detailed investigation. A sample of 25 migrant households and

matching sample of non-migrant households were selected from each sample village, making sample households of 400 were again randomly selected to examine the pattern of migration and a comparative analysis of differences women empowerment level. The survey was conducted in 2010-11 and detailed information on household characteristics, employment, and participation in decision making in farm and non farm activities for both categories of households were collected. An effort has been made to analyze the impact of male migration on participation of women in decision making process relating to management of agricultural operations, household management, their interaction with different sources of information, and participation in rural institutions. However, their strategies in coping with uncertainties in agriculture and their perceptions on rice and livestock production technology, and benefits from migration have also been examined. The women empowerment is measured by obtaining information through continuum of five score as given in Table 1.

Table1: Computation of women empowerment based on the decision making situation at household level for migrant and non-migrant households

Decision making situation	Score
Women taking decision in presence of male member of household	04
Women taking decision in absence of male family member	03
Women taking decision with consultation of women of household	02
Women taking decision with consultation with migrant family member	01
Male taking decision without consulting women of household	00

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Data collected from eight villages has been analyzed to study the pattern of migration from Bihar. The incidence of migration is worked out at 37 per cent from rainfed ecosystem and 29.50 per cent from partially irrigated system. It indicates that out of three male family members, one has migrated to get gainful employment (Table 2). However, the incidence of migration was comparatively high from rainfed ecosystem, mainly due to undeveloped agriculture. The high rate of migration from rainfed ecosystem was mainly due to

low level of agricultural production, poor infrastructure and recurrent flood in study villages which might have compelled young male family members for migration to earn for maintaining livelihood of their family.

Table 2: Incidence of Migration from Sample Villages

Particulars	Rainfed Ecosystem	Partially irrigated System
Number of male family members	428	417
Number of male migrants	159	123
Incidence of migration (%)	37.15	29.50

Cast wise break up of migrants revealed that incidence of short term and long term migration was comparatively high from backward caste category but about 60 per cent short term migrants belong to scheduled caste category in rain fed ecosystem because they might have faced scarcity of employment due to undeveloped agriculture however their proportion was 31 per cent in short term migrants in partially irrigated ecosystem since they might have get more employment in agriculture. Male worker of forward caste also migrated for long term from both ecosystems (Table 3). About two-thirds of migrants belong to sub marginal farm category (including land less) and about 5 per cent belong to medium & large farm category of farm households. In Bihar, labour migration crossed the boundary of caste and class since migrants belonging to all castes and class are found migrating however short term migration seems to be the domain of lower caste and class whereas forward caste migrants prefer to migrate for long period. It has been observed that family members of comparatively rich households of even area of improved agriculture have also started migrating in search of better opportunities of livelihood. The change in the pattern of destination of migrants has also been observed. Now their direction has been changing from rural – rural to rural – urban.

Table 3: Caste structure of migrants in Sample Villages (% respective category of migrants)

Particulars	Rainfed ecosystem		Partially Irrigated ecosystem	
	S. T.	L.T	S.T	L.T
Forward caste	-	9	11	13
Backward Caste	40	67	58	73
Scheduled Caste	60	24	31	13
All	100	100	100	100

S.T. denotes Short term migrants and L.T Long term migrants

An attempt has been made to examine the occupational pattern of migrants at destination place. About 36 per cent short term migrants and 8 per cent long term migrants got work as agricultural labour at destination place, indicating that the occupation of agricultural labour was common for short term migrants. The majority of short term migrants used to come back in peak agricultural season to their villages for performing sowing, transplanting and harvesting of principal crops. It is possible because the time of transplanting/sowing and harvesting of rice and wheat at destination place do not coincide to the period of these operations at the place of their origin. The majority of migrants had non – farm occupation at destination place (Table 4). It holds true for long term migrants. Salesmanship is the second important occupation of short term migrants whereas unskilled job is the second important occupation of long term migrants. Transport worker including *riksha* pulling is the third important occupation for short term migrants and 9 per cent long term migrants are also engaged as transport workers at destination place. About one – fifth of long term migrants are engaged in permanent and contractual jobs at destination place due high level of their education. Occupation in construction activities is also an important for short and long term migrants.

Table 4: Occupation of migrants at Destination Place (%)

Occupation	Type of migration	
	Short term	Long term
Agricultural labour	36	8
Sale's person	20	7
Construction worker	7	16
Trading/business	5	7
Service(including contractual)	6	19
Unskilled job	9	24
Transport worker	15	9
Others	2	10

Analysis of occupational pattern of migrants revealed that the short term migrants are employed mainly as agricultural labour, sales person and riksha puller because they are less educated and belong to low socio-economic strata of rural society whereas long term migrants are employed as guard, construction worker (mason), waiter in hotels and contractual workers in small scale industries.

Women Empowerment

Women empowerment has become popular in the development field since 1980s. It is vividly recognized

that women empowerment is essential for sustainable economic growth and reduction in poverty in developing countries (Klasen, 1999). Although women empowerment is not a sufficient condition, it is still a necessary condition for development process. In the World Bank Policy Research Report, it is unambiguously suggested that women empowerment is being progressively recognized as an important policy goal for improving not just the well-being of women themselves but also for its positive impact on the family (King and Mason, 2001). Economically empowered women play a more active role in household decision-making, with greater bargaining power to increase spending on education and health (DFID, 2007). Since women empowerment is an imperative part of development process, it also faces different challenges because of its specific regional and religious attributes in the country like India. Migration has opened a new opportunity to take decisions and responsibilities in household management in absence of male member. As migrants comprise of the most productive force of the population, those left behind are aged people, children and women folk (Jha, 2012). In the absence of active members it is the women who are required to take responsibility of households and take decision related to farming and domestic activities. The relevant information was obtained from women of migrant and non migrant households under study which are computed and average scores are presented in table 5. It has been observed that the women of migrant households are more empowered in taking agricultural and other household decisions than women of non migrant households.

Women of all the category of households have stake in decision making in post harvest operations but women of migrant households had more stake in taking decision in post-harvest operations. Livestock farming was the second important activity where women empowerment was higher on migrant households. Moreover, the majority of migrants (89%) belonged to backward and scheduled caste categories where women have been helping males in livestock management. They might have been more active in absence of their husbands/ sons who had migrated to other places. Women of non-migrant households are less empowered in taking decisions of livestock farming, mainly due to presence of males in the households who do not involve their women folk in activities out side home, particularly in decision making.

Table 5: Empowerment indices of women of migrant and non-migrant households, Bihar, India

Decision making issues	Migrant households	Non-migrant households
Agricultural decisions		
Choice of crops	02.59	02.00
Crop management	02.15	01.60
Purchase of inputs	02.14	01.66
Livestock rearing	02.18	01.71
Post-harvest operations	02.75	02.19
Other managerial decisions		
Cash management	02.09	01.76
Education of children	02.15	01.86
Voting in elections	01.94	01.52

Decision about choice of the crops/ varieties was the third important activity related to farming where women of migrant households had more stakes in decision making than women of non-migrant households. However, this is the second important farming activity for women of non-migrant households also with respect to their involvement in decision making. The main reason for participation of women in decision making for selecting crops/ varieties on all categories of households is their monopoly in cooking food for the family which probably empowers them to select crops/ varieties. Similar trend of women empowerment has been observed in crop management and purchase of inputs. Women of migrant households were also empowered to take decisions related to children's education and cash management than women of non-migrant households.

The higher score of empowerment indices supports this opinion that role of women has changed from a mere family worker to a manager. The change of women's role was more evident in nuclear family households where husband have migrated. In joint families, migration did not have much influence on role of women, because the head of the joint family generally takes the responsibility of decision-making. In case of migration of male members, other males of the family such as brothers or sons took the rein of household (Kabeer, 1999). Caste was found to be an important contributing factor for changing role of women in migrant households. In majority of lower caste households, the changes in women role from worker to manager were observed. Moreover, nuclear family system was common in lower caste households. This reflects the changes taking place in role of women

from family worker to manager in migrant households; but the process is more pronounced on nuclear families, lower caste, and weaker section households (King Elizabeth and Mason, 2001).

Problem of women in migrant households

Process of shifting role of women from worker to manager of the households due to migration has also been observed, but there are several thorns in the crown. Women face several managerial, economic, social and personal problems, due to absence of male members of family (Chaudhry and Farhana, 2009 and Singh *et al.*, 2012a). They have been facing more problems in day to day work. For example, in absence of male family members of the household, hiring of labour is routine work but necessary activity for cultivation. More than one-fourth of female respondents of migrant households felt problem in hiring labour for cultivation. The peak time scarcity of labour was common cause of hiring labour in villages where incidence of migration was at a large scale. Lower caste migrant households had problems because labours of the relatively high caste (medium castes) hesitate to work on farms of lower caste households. Whereas females of forward caste have poor rapport with laborers of the village since they do not go out from the home due to social taboos and faced problem in hiring labour, however, the majority of female respondents did not face any problem since other family members and neighbors helped them in hiring labour for cultivation purposes.

Changes in workload

Women work participation rate is low in Bihar (14%) but almost all the adult women are engaged in household activities that are not considered as work by the Census of India. Moreover women of backward caste and all the scheduled caste categories are engaged in crop production and livestock activities in study villages. Women are engaged for 8-16 hrs in a day in economic and household activities (Om Prakash, 1995). The migration of young and productive male members might have some influence on work load to women in study villages. This aspect has not attracted the attention of researchers hence there is no report regarding change of work load to women of household who are left behind at native place due to migration of their male family members. In present section, the changes in the workload on the basis of empirical evidences obtained from migrant households has been examined, particularly in rice production, however, the information generated through multiple questions

asked to female members of respondent households are also utilized to reach at meaningful conclusions. Since labour migration is predominantly male oriented phenomenon, female labour is likely to compensate the decline in male labour force at their native places; consequently the work load of female workforce may increase in villages with high incidence of migration. Moreover, the increase in female workload is more pronounced on migrant households. It has been observed that per hectare family female labour use in modern rice production was higher on migrant households than non-migrant households in villages under investigation (Table 6).

Table 6: Distribution of Migrants among different size of farm categories

Particulars	Rainfed ecosystem		Partially Irrigated ecosystem	
	S. T.	L. T	S. T.	L. T
Sub – marginal (Less than 0.5 ha.)	60	64	60	49
Marginal (less than 1 ha)	20	14	25	16
Small (1-2 ha.)	20	17	13	29
Medium & Large (2 ha & above)	--	4	2	7
All	100	100	100	100

Female workers of the family in migrant households worked more number of days than the male members of the family in rice production in study villages. This clearly indicates that the workload to females of migrant households increased enormously due to migration of male members in family. About one-third of women respondents reported that their workload increased, mainly due to migration of male members from the households (Singh *et al.*, 2012b). However, increased labour wage was also an important reason for increase in work load to women. It may therefore be inferred that the workload to female increased due to male migration, mainly for females of weaker section of society (Lewis, 1994). There is almost no affect of male migration on workload to women in comparatively rich households. The work load to children of the households also increased due to migration of male family members of the household. Children help mainly in transplanting, weeding and raising cattle. However, female child helped the adult female in household work since adult females were generally engaged in field work, due to absence of male members of the family. In Bihar, labour migration crossed the boundary of caste and class since migrants belonging to all castes and class are found migrating

however short term migration seems to be the domain of lower caste and class whereas forward caste migrants prefer to migrate for long period. It has been observed that family members of comparatively rich households of even area of improved agriculture have also started migrating in search of better opportunities of livelihood. The change in the pattern of destination of migrants has also been observed. Now their direction has been changing from rural – rural to rural – urban. Analysis of occupational pattern of migrants revealed that the short term migrants are employed mainly as agricultural labours, sales person and riksha puller because they less educated and belong to low socio- economic strata of rural society whereas long term migrants are employed as guard, construction worker(mason),waiter in hotels and contractual workers in small scale industries. There is an urgent need to impart training to young persons for increasing their skill so that they could be able to get remunerative employment at place of destination.

CONCLUSION

Migration of male labour force from Bihar has increased during last two decades which prompted us to analyze its pattern and its impact on the empowerment of women left behind at place of origin. The incidence of migration was comparatively high from rainfed ecosystem, mainly due to undeveloped agriculture. The high rate of migration from rainfed ecosystem was mainly due to low level of agricultural production, poor infrastructure and recurrent flood in study villages which might have compelled young male family members for migration to earn for maintaining livelihood of their family. Level of women employment has increased on migrant households, particularly on poor households; however, work load of women has also increased. It has been observed that role of women of migrant households changed from unpaid female labour to managers of the household, however, they face problem in management of fund, technology and input-output marketing. There is a need to launch a programme for their training to improve their knowledge in financial, technological and marketing management.

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