

Social Problems among Children of Seasonal Migrant Tribal in Dangs District, Gujarat

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Abstract- Indigenous tribes are forest dwellers and depend on the forest for their livelihood. Over decades with development the government has tried to nationally integrate these tribes. Development has also had negative socio-economic effect on the tribes. These tribes being the minority have been the victims of development. Their socio-economic condition has led to seasonally migrate for 4 to 8 months for alternative employment due to dissemination of forest (their livelihood). The Researchers has attempted to describe the social problem of seasonal migrant tribal children of Dangs district, Gujarat in detail. It describes the vulnerability of children of seasonal migrant and the social problems they face due to seasonal migration along with their families.

The study reveals that the seasonal migrant workers and their children should not be treated merely as economic units but as human beings. They need to provide proper child care and educational facilities for the children and protect them from exploitation.

Index Terms- social problem, vulnerable children, migrating tribes, seasonal migration, Indian tribes

I. INTRODUCTION

"We migrate as a family... we camp near river or stream for water. We use that water for everything. A hut made of tarpaulin for shelter both for us and our children... The living condition and the environment are congested and bad..."

- Voice of seasonal migrant, Dangs district, Gujarat

An estimated 214 million persons worldwide – or 3.1 % of the world's population - are international migrants. About a third of the migrant flow from all developing countries is in the age range of 12 to 24 (World Bank: World Development Report 2007)

Globally, most child migrants move with their families. While migration serves as a common economic coping or survival strategy for households in many parts of the world, and can provide families and their children with new opportunities, it can also make them more vulnerable. Children of seasonal migrants often migrate with their parents, and they are particularly vulnerable to child labour.

There are still many categories of children in India for whom adequate and appropriate strategies are not in place for their effective education. One such substantive category is children of seasonal migrants. Distress seasonal migration is a growing

phenomenon in almost all arid parts of India. Drought and lack of work in villages forces entire families to migrate for several months every year in search of work merely to survive. Children accompany their parents, and as a result drop-out rates go up. Migrants comprise the most vulnerable sections of society, and especially those that also belong to Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe groups.

The deprivation of tribal households is a result of a complex interaction of forces of change. Each development initiative in these areas – whether it is cropping pattern change, mechanization of agriculture, etc... it has had an impact on the society and the local economy (Poverty of Ideas, 2004).

The researchers look to understand the problems faced by the children of seasonal migrant tribes. It looks at the education facilities for the children of these migrants, the health conditions and the environment in which these migrant children – (who go along with their parents).

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A. Study Design

This is a descriptive study on seasonal migrant tribals. The Researchers has attempted to describe the social problems faced by children of seasonal migrant tribal of Dangs district, Gujarat in detail. It describes the reason for migrating and the exploitation the children of the tribal face as they migrate to sugar cane plantations for harvesting. Further, the social, economic and living condition at the place of migration is also described.

B. Population

The families of the seasonal migrant tribal comprises the population size for the purpose of the study.

C. Unit of Analysis

The children of tribal who seasonally migrate in Dangs district, Gujarat comprises the unit of analysis for the study.

D. Sample procedure and Size

Purposive sampling was adopted. The primary consideration for purposive sampling is that, the Researchers only go to those people who are likely to have required information and

were willing to share it. The size of the sample is 50 seasonal migrant families.

E. Analysis Design

The Researchers used descriptive narration to analyse the data. Diagrammatic presentations are also used.

F. Methods of Data Collection

Primary and secondary data were gathered. The main tool used to collect the primary data was Interview guide. The interview guide enabled the respondents to share the life condition and experiences and was not strictly restricted to the questions. The data collected was qualitative data. The Researchers spent time with the migrants and their children for a couple of weeks to understand the problem in detail.

III. MAJOR FINDING

a. Seasonal Migrants of Dangs

Seasonal family migration is widespread, but is not well understood or documented. Any attempt to grasp the reality of this phenomenon leads to a complicated set of inter-related issues, making it impossible to focus on children alone. This occurs due to the lack of livelihood options after the harvest of the monsoon crop (*khari*) in most rain fed parts of the country, which gives rise to indebtedness and food insecurity. This forces the entire family to leave home in search of work in order to survive. Persistent drought and environmental degradation have led to the escalation of this trend. Children, who have no choice but to accompany their parents, drop out of schools and are forced into hard labour. Among them a few voiced that they migrated for food, family care and to support their children.

b. Women & Children

The seasonal migrant women and children are also forced to take up physically arduous and exploitative work. Children get drawn into labour from the early age of 6 to 7 years old, and are usually full-fledged labourers by the age of 11 or 12. Women and girls must additionally cope with home responsibilities as well as the psychological insecurity of living in unprotected environments.

Children from all ages are drawn into the labour process by contractors and employers and by parents. The children are not officially 'employed' and the employers do not acknowledge their presence at work sites, but the employers benefit from this free labour, which is significant but is subsumed under the category of 'family labour'. (i.e. In the sugar-cane plantation, the waste or leftover shoots of sugarcane in the field are sold by women and their children. By selling these shoots they buy vegetables and thus cook their food).

Migrant children face a life of hardship and insecurity from their infancy. Many of these migrant children are born at work sites to overworked, undernourished mothers, in dingy, unhygienic dwellings with no medical assistance. Mothers are forced back into work soon after childbirth, and have little opportunity to rest

or care for their infants. Babies are often left by themselves or in the care of an older sibling. A distressing lack of nutrition, clean water, mother's care, hygiene, medical assistance, basic comfort and security characterize the lives of children at work sites. Babies and toddlers frequently use their parents' work implements as playthings. Crawling close to furnaces, cutting themselves on sickles, and getting bitten by insects are everyday occurrences for these children. They receive no immunization, and their illnesses remain untreated. As they grow older, children are subjected to hazardous travel between villages and work sites each year. At work sites they are rapidly 'apprenticed' to conduct adult tasks. Children with physical and mental disabilities are also often brought along by parents due to a lack of support in their home villages, and they are often simply left by themselves at the settlements all day while their parents work (Smita 2006). In almost every sector, sets of tasks are specifically delineated for children to perform. Additionally, girls must often manage household chores and mind younger siblings, in order to release their parents for paid work. Many parents make their older daughters accompany them simply for this purpose.

c. Education:

Living and working conditions of migrant labour at work sites are of a poor standard in every respect, including shelter, nutrition, health and security. Labour contractors provide cash advances to poor families in villages during the lean post-monsoon months, in return for which families pledge their labour for the coming season. Migrations begin around October–November with migrant families spending the next six to eight months at the work sites, and then returning to their villages before the next monsoon. Once the rains are over, they again prepare to leave their villages. This seasonal migration cycle overlaps with six to seven months of the school calendar, which means that children who are enrolled can go to school only from June until November, after which point they usually drop out (Smita, 2006).

Small children who migrate with the parents are left in the tents on their own or play around the fields where the parents work. Sometimes young children drop out of school and migrate along with the parents to take care of the little ones. Young boys over the age of 12 or 13 drop out of school and migrate with their parents to have fun and roam around in place of migration and take up small jobs like collecting shoots and selling them and do the work same as the elders. But the majority of the parents leave their children in their village to attend school and then migrate.

d. Health

During migration the common illness faced are diarrhoea, viral infections, stomach-aches, flu and back-aches. The sugarcane contractors provide a private health clinic where the migrants could avail medical facilities. The migrants need to travel 1-10 kms to avail an urban hospital for their illness. Deaths also occur in the sugarcane plantations because of snake-bites and other accidents. No nutritious diet was available and so many children were mal-nourished. Therefore the children and adults were prone to illness.

The children were the most vulnerable in this situation. The living conditions are very bad with no proper drainage and cramped. The land is terrain and uncomfortable to construct tents. Therefore there is a need for improved living condition and proper health facility for the migrants.

IV. Conclusion

The basic clauses of all legal acts related to labour and child rights are flouted, raising exploitation levels to the extreme. There are, for example, no mechanisms to address grievances. Employers try to maximize their profits by keeping producers at barely survival level. These vulnerable seasonal migrant do not have a voice.

There are a few NGOs and individuals lobbying and advocating to offer decent working conditions and comprehensive social protection measures which are vital to guarantee a standard of rights which is common to all workers, including seasonal workers and their children.

Government need to generate work, where these migrant tribes are not exploited and provide schemes to improve their agriculture in their respective village, so that they don't migrate. They need to provide childcare and educational facilities for the

children who migrate along, so that they can cope with mingle with the main stream.

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