

SEASONAL WORKERS AND THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION OF THEIR CHILDREN IN THE SOCIAL PERSPECTIVE OF WEST BENGAL

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ABSTRACT

The Present study is an in-depth investigation of taking Bankura district in West Bengal, India, as a case for exploring the context of seasonal migration as a measure of livelihood and thereby compromising the educational rights of children. The researchers have employed qualitative inquiry for collecting data focused on the specific migrants of this district. From the qualitative analysis of the recorded data, it has been found that seasonal migration is a very common event in the socio-economically marginalized group, generally the SC and ST population of this district. They migrate to 'POOB' (the east) with all their family members. It is also found that regular school education of the children is seriously hampered by their livelihood. This study observes that the children are losing their formal education throughout the year at the cost of the livelihood of their parents. This study recommends some provisions like the introduction of farmers'/migrant workers' schools, mobile schools, college-going students' or trainee teachers' community service of teaching in local areas, provision of inducting migrant school-going children at particular classes in nearest schools, continuous vigilance of local committee for the education of those children, restricting the employers to involve the children as helping hand in homemaking and letting them provide education of workers' children etc. If these children are enthusiastically included in the education system and continue to participate in the education system, the 'inclusive education' as envisaged by our nation will proceed to its realization.

Keywords: Seasonal Migrant Children, Educational Rights, Ways of Inclusion.

INTRODUCTION

“Access to education still a dream for migrant children” - The Hindu Business line (23 Nov. 2018). Similarly, “UNESCO report highlights steps taken by India to combat effects of seasonal migration on education” - The Times of India (20 Nov. 2018). Before the said headlines of daily news in India, Rogaly et al. (2001) explained why seasonal migration happened in the border areas of Jharkhand and West Bengal and how they influence the social changes in the agrarian culture of West Bengal. Specifically, they mentioned the exploitations of migrants’ rights in terms of livelihood and education of the children. A big problem with educating children in India is seasonal migration - if kids of seasonal migrants cannot attend the same school for the whole year (Rajput & Verma, 2018). Very recently Pandey (19, April 2021) mentioned that the supreme court of India has already directed all the states to notify the court about the number and status of migrant children in India and directed to look after their fundamental rights. Sadhu (2015) a social worker of an NGO known as “Save the Children” explained how a large number of children are being deprived of school education due to seasonal migration from Jharkhand to West Bengal.

The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009 provides free and compulsory elementary education of equitable quality to all children, including the children of migrant workers, of 6-14 years of age. The RTE Act provides norms and standards for the opening of schools in neighbourhoods at the elementary level. Section six of the Act mentions that ‘the appropriate government and local authorities shall establish, within the area or limits of a neighbourhood, a school, where it is not already established, within three years from the commencement of the Act. Further, the Act places a compulsion on the state to ensure that no child from the weaker sections or disadvantaged groups is discriminated against in any manner or prevented from pursuing and completing elementary education. To address the issue of seasonal migration for varying periods, States are using various strategies which are supported by Govt. of India under Samagra Shiksha. All States and UTs are required to conduct household surveys/ update household surveys annually to identify out-of-school children. These surveys also collect information on children affected by the migration of their families. To ensure the provisions of elementary education to these children, various interventions are supported under Samagra Shiksha such as the provision of seasonal hostels/ residential camps in villages during the period of migrations of families, residential and non-residential special training centres for out-of-school, dropout and migrant children, besides provision of mid-day meal, free textbooks and free uniforms as per norms of the scheme (Bureau, 2019). The Wire (07 June 2019) reported that there is an urgent need to work on our educational provisions and make them flexible for the seasonal migrant population. There is not enough official data on seasonal migrants’ people. But it estimates that short-term migrants in India vary from 15 million to 100 million. The lack of adequate data makes

it difficult to even start a discussion on this issue. Seasonal migration causes a strange kind of drop-out, which is not captured by conventional ways of looking at the problem. It is possible for these children to be enrolled in schools and to attend for the first few months of the school session (i.e. July to October), but to then drop out for the remaining months to accompany their parents to migration sites. By the time they return the following April to May, the school session is already over. Thus these children have the strange, Predicament of having their names on school registers, but dropping out for part of the year. Over time, the learning deficit this causes gradually leads them to drop out of school completely.

Global Education Monitoring Report, 2019 of UNESCO mentioned that literacy levels in rural households of India dip with seasonal migration. UNESCO report also says that 80 per cent of seasonal migrant children in seven cities lacked access to education. It is clear from the report that, bringing out the educational challenges thrown up by migration. In our country, seasonal migration comprises a portion of the population moving from rural to urban and rural to rural areas for a duration of a minimum of four months annually. It is very high in both urban and rural areas due to the lack of employment opportunities at the residence place which forces families or individuals to move. The majority of those natives are either semi-skilled or unskilled. Generally, the family migrates as a full unit as parents do not want to leave the children behind in the villages due to their safety and security. As a result of this, the well-being of every migrant child gets highly compromised, because there is no effective system in the community or at the school level to maintain data on seasonal migrant children. States like Gujarat, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, Tamilnadu, and Karnataka already have taken initiatives to develop a method to track migrant children for interstate coordination to ensure continuity in education in India. On the other side, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and West Bengal (WB) are not attentive to the issues of education for children affected by seasonal migration.

OBJECTIVE

To study the context of the seasonal migration and violation of educational rights of children in Bankura District, West Bengal, India.

METHODOLOGY

The researchers have employed a Qualitative inquiry method for collecting data. The study focused on the specific migrants of the Bankura District. Data have been collected from different groups from three blocks (Khatra, Indpur, Ranibandh) of Bankura District. Simultaneously from each block two groups (8-10 labours, both male and female included) were involved as participants in this study. All of them were the migrant workers who use to engage themselves in the paddy and potato cultivation process of the different blocks of two districts Burdwan and Hooghly. The data were collected through an open-ended Interview schedule. The data have been collected by asking

questions and the responses have been recorded in an audio recorder. Along with the specific questions, members of different groups of migrants were also interviewed informally and recorded data were transcribed into text for analyses.

FINDINGS

The Present study is an in-depth investigation in Bankura district, one of the poorest districts in West Bengal, as a case for exploring the context of seasonal migration as a measure of livelihood. Generally, migration is of two types i.e. external and internal. Here, internal migration is the prime concern which is confined within the state of West Bengal in a specific time from Bankura to Burdwan and Hooghly districts. This seasonal migration is inter-district migration by its nature. This inter-district seasonal migration is too much purposive for the last two decades in our state. Migrants have been engaged as labour in paddy and potato cultivation neither construction nor industrial activity.

Bankura district is located in the western part of West Bengal. There are numerous groups of hills and isolated peaks in this area which form the eastern fringe of the Chotanagpur plateau and most of the district is known as 'Jungla Mahal' in the state WB. The district is in dry climatic conditions and a vast wasteland. This land is important for its natural beauty with an undulating surface, laterite soil, and mixed deciduous forest, water reservoirs are there because irrigation is the only source of water for agricultural activity. Due to the presence of dense and scattered deciduous vegetation, it is used as an elephant corridor between the Dalma region and Damodar Valley. As a whole, it is a place of interest for tourists, who prefer to spend in an offbeat location. The demographic feature is also a little bit different and interesting. The population proportion to the West Bengal population is 3.94 per cent only. As per the 2011 census, 91.67 % population of Bankura districts lives in villages. The sex ratio is 956 females per 1000 males. If child (0-6 Age) sex ratio data of Bankura district is considered, the figure is 947 girls per 1000 boys. The average literacy rate of this district in 2011 was 70.26 compared to 63.44 in 2001. If things are looked out at gender-wise, male and female literacy were 80.05 and 60.05 respectively.

From the qualitative analysis of the audio-recorded data, it has been found that seasonal migration is a very common event in the socio-economically marginalized group, generally the SC and ST population of the district. The study shows that around 74 per cent of migration is to meet the food crisis. In winter, for potato cultivation and in summer, for paddy (Boro) cultivation, they migrate to 'POOB' (the east) with all the family members. It has been found that the migration occurred in the following blocks of Bankura district – Bankura –I, Sarenga, Ranibandh, Khatra, Raipur, Indpur, Hirbandh, Saltora, and Chatna. The participants have been inquired for a depth understanding of the socio-economic background of the migrant workers. The most common reason is to meet the food deficit in families. But now the numbers of families are very small in number with respect to the last ten years, due to the several social schemes run by the Central

Government and State Government parallel. On the other hand, introduction of modern machines in the field of paddy and potato harvesting phase. Migration in this district is a painful deal of labour outside his/her place of living for a period of 15 days to 6 months in a year, which is influencing his/her family and social life also. Migration is mostly with family members, leaving behind one or two members to take care of the household, and domestic cattle. Employment is mostly in the unorganised sector as labourers with individual owners as providers of work. Wage is Rs. 200/- to Rs. 250/- in cash and 2 kgs. of rice per day. Besides the wage temporary shelter or shelter-construction materials (bamboo, straw etc) and fuel are provided by the employer. Sometimes one side fare is provided during kharif paddy transplantation by the employer. It is also found that regular school education of the children is seriously hampered. While responding to the issues allied with their seasonal shifting experiences, several interesting incidents have been reported through their words such as engaging children in their employers' (Manibor Babu) house as helping hand homemaking.

DISCUSSION

Agriculture in general also attracts huge numbers of migrant labour all over India (Smita, 2008). The District Human Development Report-Bankura (2007) stated that the most common reason was to meet the food deficit in the families. Sample survey showed (as reported in the DHDR-B, 2007) that around 84 per cent of migration is to meet the food crisis, 10 per cent migrate to meet other family needs, 4 per cent migrate as additional working hand in the families, 1-2 per cent has to migrate if there is a serious natural calamity and the most common calamity in the area is drought. This scenario has been changed due to the several schemes of central and state Govt. in those areas. According to Rajan and Rajput (5 June 2023), migrant children face unique challenges due to their migration pattern, spatial context and socio-economic conditions. They also stated that addressing their educational marginality and right to education is complex and challenging for our society. Children are forced to migrate with their families and therefore, they remain isolated from studies and schools (Maji & Sarkar, 2017). Roy et al. (2015) explored the impact of short-term labour migration of parents on regular school attendance of children between six to fourteen years and their dropping out from school through an analysis of the cases from both ends of migration flow in India. Ghosh & Mal (2017) reported that the child literacy rate is not good and the dropout rate is high due to the seasonal migration in the southern part of Bankura district. They also mentioned that seasonal migrant families are bound to promote child labour during their shifting period from their native place. Migrant children have less possibility to complete schooling and to advantage of government policies and programmes, found by Rahman (8 April 2023). Present researchers observed that the children are losing their formal education throughout the year at the cost of the livelihood of their parents.

RECOMMENDATION

Social Policy Research Foundation (17 July 2021) reported that a nationwide database on seasonal migration and its consequent effects needs to be created on an urgent basis. States should require to compose migrant portals about data on in-and-out migrants and their families. Rajput & Verma (2018) agreed that, due to the lack of an effective scheme both at the source and destination locations, the continuity in education for seasonal migrant children gets affected. Thus, these children do not gain the required skills and abilities at the right time. Keeping in view the present scenario of these educationally deprived children, the total solution cannot be prescribed, but at the same time, there should be several sorts of way-out of this regrettable condition. (i) Joint Steps by State Govt. and UNICEF - A strong database is required to realise the actual scenario of migrant children in both the location of immigrants and emigrants sites. There is no authentic data available, migration has been observed in several blocks of Bankura district – Bankura-I, Chhatna, Saltora, Indpur, Ranibandh, Hirbandh, Khatra, Raipur, Sarenga (Dist. Human Development Report- BANKURA, 2007). The Wire (2019) also stated that the Lack of adequate data makes it difficult to even start a discussion on this issue. Before doing a proper plan local authorities and Govt. should take into consideration their target group in those pockets of Burdwan & Hooghly dist. (ii) Migratory Hostel - According to Reed (2014) migratory hostel program in Rajasthan, run by SarvaShikshaAbhiyan is the most effective but simple strategy for universalizing elementary education in India. In this scheme, migratory children are allowed with their parents to stay in the primary school building for the sixth-month migration period. SSA provides wardens for those children hired from the nearest community. There is a provision for the establishment of migratory and seasonal hostels like in Rajasthan and Odisha respectively. (iii) Winter Camps - Like Summer Camp in our country, Winter Camps can also be organized, as the active season in seasonal migration is November to February. In these camps, mainly necessary and practical day-to-day education like arithmetic, science, health and hygiene etc. can be provided either by some organization or some wing of informal centres of Sarba Shiksha Abhiyan. (iv) Role of Teacher Education Institutions - All the teachers' training institutions in those areas of Burdwan and Hooghly districts can make a plan for their trainees to conduct community outreach activity and submit a project report on the education of those migrated children. The assignment will cover the teaching-learning activities, and assessment according to children's age group. This kind of initiative minimizes the educational crisis of migrated children in those areas. (v) Mobile school – If the child is not going to school, then we will bring the school to the child, which is named as mobile school. Presently there are 56 mobile schools in 29 countries. Such a type of Mobile School system can be adopted or may be introduced here to educate those children (Majumder, 2008). A beginning was made under the SSA through Mobile School. The provision of a mobile teacher along with the migrating families & children would have been a better solution but its operational viability is questionable (Deep, 2017). NGOs can go forward to those areas of Burdwan and

Hooghly districts on regular basis classes can be conducted there. There should not be any stipulated curriculum or time for the transaction, but a strong foundation of faith in one's ability, self-confidence and motivation may be easily generated through this endeavour. (vi) Flexible Education Provisions – In the field of paddy and potato are a seasonal job lasting from November to February, therefore, owing to migration, the wards are to drop out the major portion of the academic year. Moreover, even if the workers are keen on putting their wards in schools located in the neighbourhood of the shifted house in Burdwan & Hooghly, they could not do so because the transfer certificates would be hard to get. Hence, issuance of transfer certificates should be made available easily so that children can enter the classroom and take transfer whenever necessary for further admission to the schools of their native places of Bankura district. (vii) Night School - As most of the activity in the paddy and potato field are done within daylight and as the working parents and their children are not interested to attend school during their working hours, some sort of night schools can be organized by NGOs in the nearby cluster of the village areas, where both children and their parents can be specified minimum education for necessary hygiene and livelihood techniques.

CONCLUSION

In this prevailing socio-economical perspective, to make 'inclusive education' really 'inclusive' there is an urgent need to look into the settings of children of migrant workers who are economically weaker and marginalized in the society so that they must be included in the education system. To include these excluded children, several strategies ought to be adopted for providing opportunities and access to education to those excluded children and their right to education be ensured. To confirm the educational provision for all migratory children, the state government should have a detailed account of their number and an understanding of their location of presence.

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