

Labour Migration: A Fear of the Local Population of Manipur

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Abstract: This paper aims to understand the influx of inter-state labour migration and the advantages and disadvantages of their presence in Manipur. Internal migration has become an important factor with considerable influence on socio-economic development in the state. People migrated throughout history because of diverse causes such as the labour crisis at origin. In the case of Manipur, most of the migrants are semi-skilled and unskilled labourers. The study will be focusing on migrants from other Indian states to Manipur particularly in Imphal East and West districts. In recent times the presence of these migrants is causing tensions among the local Manipuri. They fear that these migrants are dominating major business opportunities in the city depriving local people. Such type of migrant-local issues is also seen in other states of Northeast India.

Keywords: Internal Migration, Labour migrants, Manipur, Domination in markets, Advantages and Disadvantages.

Introduction

The movement of people from one place to another has been going on since the dawn of human history, migration is a natural phenomenon. Migration has complicated and has been associated with various socioeconomic, political, and demographic factors. Migration can be defined as “a form of spatial mobility from the place of the departure to the place of arrival”. Thus, migrants are the people who changed their residence at a certain period of time. Most of the migration theory is corresponding to the theory of pull and push factors. According to Everett Lee, a theory of migration defined migration as a permanent or semi-permanent change of residence involving the factors that determine the migration process with the area of origin, area of destination, intervening obstacles and personal factors.¹ Push and pull theory suggest negative and positives factors of migration. Pull factors include better education, health,

¹ Everett S. Lee, “A Theory of Migration,” in Robin Cohen (ed.), *Theories of Migration*, (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd., 1996), pp. 16.

transport, and employment facilities while push factors include poverty, war, and poor facilities in various sectors.²

Migrants have introduced new services which are later essential for the receiving society. For example, migrants in Manipur started introducing hair-cutting and shoe-repairing services which are later essential for the receiving society. At the same time, it results in many social, economic and political problems. It also led to an imbalanced population that gave rise to unemployment, reduce in the supply of primary needs, etc. Migrants also create competition with the original people and a heavy influx of population makes unhealthy markets. The present study will make an inter-state labour migration study in two districts of Manipur. It is not well known that the state is affected by migrants from other Indian states. The state of Manipur shares its borders with the state of Nagaland to the north, Mizoram to the south, Assam to the west and share international border with Myanmar to the east. The state is a unique mix of cultural, religious, ethnic and linguistic diversity. The Meitei, Meitei-Pangal (Muslim), Naga, Kuki and other communities who inhabited in the state. Covering a geographical area of 22,327 sq km with a population of 27.2 lakh (census 2011). Manipur is largely hilly which occupy ninety-one percent of the state which are protected for the tribal communities and the valley shared one-tenth of the state which can be settled by any community of Indian citizen and any migrant people. The capital of Manipur is Imphal situated in the plains and has been resided by a number of ethnic groups including migrants and indigenous peoples.

Understanding Migration in Manipur

In Manipur, we may consider two problems of migration. Firstly, irregular immigrants from neighbouring countries to the state and secondly, the influx of migrants from other parts of the country and the issue relating to their presence in the state of these two. The latter is focused on the objectives of the study. The migrants may be again divided into two types – those who arrived before merging the state to India and those who arrived after the merger.³ Those who arrived before merging in India are foreigners since they are covered under the Foreigner's Act. These people are mixed up with the later arrival who are considered internal migrants. Though the older migrants were able to integrate themselves into the local population and later arrived

² Sougajjam Priyokumar Meitei, 'Migration and Social Tensions in Manipur', in *International Journal of Science and Research*, Vol.5, No. 9, September, 2016, pp. 729.

³ S. Priyokumar and Prof. M.C. Arunkumar, 'Contemporary Migration Problems in Manipur', in *International Journal of Research in Social Sciences*, Vol. 7, No. 10, October, 2017, pp. 242.

after Independence, the large inflow of migrants over a short period of time gave rise to many social movements demanding the protection of the rights of the indigenous people. These migrants are assumed to be foreigners by the people of Manipur because they were under the Foreigners Act of Manipur. Even after the act has been removed, in the absence of an appropriate law to regulate the entry of outsiders into Manipur many migrants started pouring freely into the state.

Advantages and Disadvantages of the Presence of Migrants in Manipur

The present paper aims to understand the advantages and disadvantages of the presence of a considerable size of labour migrants in a small land area with a small indigenous population. Migrants have introduced new services which are later essential for the receiving society. For example, the migrants in Manipur started introducing hair-cutting and shoe-repairing services which are later essential for the receiving society. At the same time, migration may also result in many social, cultural, economic and political problems. It may also lead to an imbalanced population that gave rise to unemployment, reduce in the supply of primary needs, etc. Migrants also create competition with the original people and create unhealthy markets. Still, the state becomes one of the destinations for business hubs next to Assam and Tripura.

Most of the migrants such as Biharis, Marwaris, Punjabis, Telis, etc. are confined to Imphal city. According to their occupation, the migrants in Manipur can be categorised into two groups. Firstly, labour groups such as Bihar, U.P., etc involved mainly in both semi-skilled and unskilled sectors and engaged in various businesses such as cobblers, plumbers, hawkers, manual labourers, etc.⁴ Since the indigenous people are unwilling to hold blue-collar jobs as done by those migrants, this condition makes migrants to occupy a key position in the society. Secondly, the Marwari dominated the Manipur Chamber of Commerce and settle in and around the heart of the Imphal city and in other districts too.

The present paper is based on internal labour migration in the Imphal East and West district of Manipur. The capital of Manipur is inhabited by various ethnic communities and migrants. This city has two most important markets in the state which attracted the migrants and native's labourers for better living conditions.

The economic impact of an uncontrolled influx of migrants is disastrous. The basic objective of economic development is the enhancement of the standard of living of the people by

⁴ Bishwajit Singh Loitongbam, 'Influx of Immigrants in the North Eastern States of India: Exodus or Employment Evidence from Manipur', in *Kangla Lanjung*, Vol.XI, No. I, 2017, pp. 27

ensuring that the benefits of development are equitably distributed among the people. Generation of employment efficiently tackles both issues. It is in this context that inter-state migration becomes an important issue. People migrate for various reasons such as expected wage differential, high unemployment in the region of origin, failure of markets that threaten the material well-being of households, segmentation of labour markets etc. The migrant network is well established. Through their networks, the new migrants have ample opportunity at the place of destination to establish themselves. Though Manipur cannot be considered a prosperous region by any standard, migrant labourers have found Manipur to be an important destination.

Table 1: Dynamics of Decadal Population growth and Influx in Manipur

Decade (A to B) A is start year B is ending year of decade	Total Change in population (C) $C=B-A$	Migration (X)	Growth in Indigenous Population (Y) $Y=C-X$	Proportion of Influx (X% in C) $X\% \text{ in } C$ $= \frac{X}{C} \times 100\%$	Proportion of growth in Indigenous Population (Y% in C) $Y\% \text{ in } C$ $= \frac{Y}{C} \times 100\%$
1961-1971	2,92,716	1,43,132	1,49,584	48.9	51.1
1971-1991	3,48,200	96,665	2,51,535	27.8	72.2
1981-1991	4,16,196	1,38,886	2,77,310	33.4	66.6
1991-2001	4,56,747	1,60,204	2,96,543	35.1	64.9
2001-2011	5,61,898	NA	NA	Can't be estimated	Can't be estimated

Source: 1. Influx of Migrants into Manipur: A threat to the Indigenous Ethnic People, UCM 2005

2. *Statistical Handbook of Manipur, 2017*, Department of Economic and Statistics, Govt. of Manipur

Table 1 shows that the percentage of the influx (48.9%) and growth in the Indigenous population (51.1%) are different for only 2.2%. However, from 1971-1991 the percentage of the influx is 27.8% whereas the growth of the indigenous is 72.2% which shows that there is a difference of 44.4%. In the two decades 1981-1991 and 1991-2001, the growth of the influx is

33.4% and 35.1% respectively. Here it is clear that in 2001-2011, the growth of the total population is 5,61,898 which is the highest in the decades but the identification of the migrants is not available which clearly proved that there is a loophole in the state government to identify and dictating influx into the state.

The long-durable effects of migration on Manipur are directly related to the imbalance growth of the population, rise in unemployment and welfare benefits. The rapid growth of the population due to irregular migration may lead to overpopulation with falling living standards in the receiving society. For example, the state could face an acute housing shortage in Imphal City and another valley. It would not be possible to build more houses because of the limited space. Due to constitutional protection, valley people cannot own land in hill areas and only 10% of the total area of the state which is valley land could not accommodate any kind of unnatural rate of population. Unemployment is another important aspect of migration in Manipur. The migration is mobility of people that seems to be born of human necessity. From socio-economic point of view, man has a tendency to migrate at the time of dissatisfaction. One migrates to an area where life may be easy and better in terms of employment, education and other attractive factor.

The majority of the migrants coming to Manipur are uneducated and unskilled and they generally look for manual work which can cause unemployment in the semi-skilled and unskilled services markets. Initially, when the migrant workers arrive in the state in search of work opportunities, it was difficult to find work. Therefore, they readily agreed to work in any given condition with lower wages compared to the existing rate of the local labourer of the state. In return, they preferred over the local labourers due to the availability of getting their work done at a cheap rate. As a result, the unskilled and semi-skilled labour which were the main livelihood of the local labourer was now taken over by the migrant labourer living very less chances for the people of the state. Since the state has been lacking behind in any developmental work as compared to other mainland India, the common local labourer depends on the resources which are available in the state for their day-to-day survival. By the time, the migrant workers become skilled, the demand for their service in the market increased. They become professional over time and become the key position and the local people are not in a position to compete with migrants.⁵ In the case of the business group also, the migrants controlled the Chamber of Commerce of Manipur and they dominate the decision-making in

the business sector of the state.⁶ Ultimately, the migrants in Manipur become a part and parcel of the society. According to UCM (United Committee Manipur), the number of male migrants in the workforce who are in the 20 to 59 age group mostly belong to the unskilled and semi-skilled labourer group. These age groups help in the development of the economy of the state though they dominate most of the service sector.

It is well noted to the people that the state is receiving a considerable size of migrants from other parts of the country. The migrant people contributed skills and introduced new work culture which makes it difficult for the local common labourer to retain space for themselves in the market since it is based on skills and technology.

Despite migration being a way of better livelihood for many populations, the outnumbered and uncontrolled of them to land of small size population feels vulnerable to the indigenous people in terms of economic, job security, etc. Therefore, considering these realities, the concept of protection of the indigenous population appears to be a must. No authorities have ever attempted to quantify the migrants entering Manipur, the state is very small and home to over 33 indigenous sub-groups.

Conclusion:

Migration in India is mostly influenced by social structure and pattern of development. In Manipur, the migrants have now more or less become part of the society because of their skill in trade and commerce. The influx of migrants from outside had become a threat to the native of the state. Due to migration, the migrants compete with locals for jobs and other economic benefits. Over time, these migrant communities are far better off than the unemployed indigenous people. Migration has both positive and negative effects on development. In terms of wages also, migrants demand lesser and more advanced and professional than the unemployed people of the state which makes them more demand in the markets. Migrants in Manipur are of diverse communities and are prominently employed in varied sectors such as - construction and the textile sectors, in the domestic workforce, at private farms and in business sectors. They are also employed in many urban informal sectors, working as sellers, hawkers, rickshaw pullers and daily wage workers. The migrants in Manipur are termed as '*Mayang*', used by the local people of Manipur. This term generally sums up the people who came to

⁶ Ibid., pp. 27

Manipur or who are from outside of Manipur. They were once foreigners but now they are regarded as non-Manipuri Indians.

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