

Dynamics of Migration in India: Causes, Patterns, Consequences and Policy Interventions

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ABSTRACT

Migration in India, formally recorded since the 1871 Census, has been a significant socio-economic phenomenon. The primary drivers of migration include push factors such as poverty, unemployment, and socio-political instability, and pull factors like better job opportunities, improved standards of living, and access to better healthcare and education. The 2011 Census reveals that internal migration is more prevalent than international migration, with intra-state migration comprising 84.19% and inter-state migration at 13.78%. A gendered pattern is evident, with males primarily migrating for work and females for marriage. Maharashtra, Delhi, West Bengal, Karnataka, Haryana, and Punjab are key migration destinations. Migration produces diverse consequences across economic, demographic, social, and environmental domains. Economically, migration supports both rural and urban areas through labour mobility and remittances. However, it also causes the loss of skilled labour in rural regions, exacerbating local unemployment. Demographically, migration contributes to rapid urban population growth, creating imbalances in the sex ratio and leading to a shortage of skilled labour in rural areas. Socially, migration promotes

cultural exchange but can result in social tensions, discrimination, and exclusion of migrants. Environmentally, urban areas face overcrowding, increased pressure on infrastructure, and environmental degradation, such as water scarcity and pollution. To address these challenges, policies should focus on enhancing rural livelihoods by improving agricultural productivity, promoting self-employment, and strengthening infrastructure. Extension services can play a pivotal role in implementing government schemes like NREGA and promoting off-season employment. Ultimately, creating local job opportunities and fostering rural development can reduce the need for migration and support balanced economic growth.

INTRODUCTION

Migration has long been a significant socio-economic process in India, formally recorded for the first time in the Census of 1871 (Census of India, 1871). Since then, two primary sources—the Population Census and the National Sample Survey (NSS) have served as the basis for examining migration patterns across the country (Census of India, 2011; NSSO, 2008). According to the United Nations (1993), migration is defined as "a move from one migration-defining area to another, usually crossing administrative boundaries, made during a given migration interval and involving a change of residence" (United Nations, 1993). The Census of India (2011) defines a migrant as any individual whose place of residence at the time of enumeration is different from their place of birth or last residence, indicating a change in the usual place of residence.

Historically, Indian migration in the 20th century included the movement of semi-skilled workers to nearby Asian countries—such as Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia as well as to several African nations, primarily in roles such as artisans, traders, and factory workers (Khadria, 2007). Migration has multidimensional effects both in places of origin and destination. While it may relieve labor market pressure and provide remittances in the source regions, it also results in the loss

of human capital. Conversely, receiving areas benefit economically from migrant labor but face challenges related to infrastructure, social integration, and services. The 2011 Census of India reports that over 5.1 million individuals from foreign countries migrated into India (Census of India, 2011). However, internal migration vastly overshadows this, with intra-state migrants comprising 84.19% of the total, and inter-state migrants at 13.78%, indicating a predominance of movement within state boundaries (Census of India, 2011). A gendered pattern emerges in migration data. Female migrants account for a significant share of intra-state migration (88.16%), primarily due to marriage, which is the reason behind 68% of female migration. In contrast, 38% of male migrants cite employment as their primary motive, compared to only 3% of females (Census of India, 2011). Inter-state migration is dominated by men (21.76%), indicating a gendered differentiation in long-distance migration patterns. States like Maharashtra, Delhi, West Bengal, Karnataka, Haryana, and Punjab have become preferred destinations due to better economic prospects. Among these, Maharashtra received the highest number of inter-state migrants at 7.9 million, followed by Delhi (5.6 million) and West Bengal (5.5 million) (Census of India, 2011). In contrast, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar report the largest outmigration rates, often due to lack of local employment opportunities.

The idea of livelihood is central to understanding migration. According to Chambers and Conway (1992), a livelihood comprises "the capabilities, assets (stores, resources, claims, and access), and activities required for a means of living." It involves the means by which people secure essentials such as food, water, shelter, and clothing. Migration, in this context, functions as a strategic mechanism for individuals and households to enhance or secure their livelihoods.

Reasons for Migration: Push and Pull Dynamics

Migration is driven by a variety of socio-economic and environmental factors that compel individuals to leave their places of birth and residence in search of better opportunities or safer conditions. These causes can broadly be classified into two categories: push factors and pull factors. This conceptual framework was first systematically presented by Everett S. Lee in 1966, who also emphasized the role of intervening obstacles—real or perceived barriers that affect the decision to migrate (Lee, 1966).

Push factors are the adverse conditions in the place of origin that force individuals or families to move out. These factors reflect structural deficiencies and hardships that make living conditions unsustainable. Key push factors include:

- ❖ Low agricultural productivity
- ❖ Population pressure
- ❖ Unemployment
- ❖ Landlessness
- ❖ Poverty
- ❖ Domestic and community conflicts

- ❖ War and political unrest
- ❖ Natural calamities
- ❖ Lack of essential infrastructure, such as healthcare, education, and basic public services.

On the other hand, **pull factors** are the positive attributes of the destination area that attract migrants. These are often associated with better economic prospects, higher quality of life, and improved access to services. Prominent pull factors include:

- ❖ Rapid urbanization
- ❖ Rapid industrialization
- ❖ Expanding transport and communication networks
- ❖ Employment opportunities in diverse sectors
- ❖ Regional disparities in income and job availability
- ❖ Access to better education
- ❖ Superior healthcare services
- ❖ Availability of entertainment and leisure options
- ❖ Higher wages and future economic prospects
- ❖ Improved overall standards of living

Major Motivations Behind Migration in India

Migration decisions are often influenced by specific individual or household circumstances. According to Census 2011 data, the primary reason for migration in India is work or employment, accounting for approximately 43.1 million migrants, which is

43.93% of the total migrant population. This highlights the strong economic motivation behind migration, particularly among male migrants. Marriage emerges as the second most significant reason, with 24.7 million individuals or 25.17%, and is predominantly the reason cited by female migrants, reflecting the cultural and social dimension of internal migration in India. Educational pursuits account for 13.2 million migrants or 13.45%, indicating a sizable population relocating in search of better academic opportunities. Additionally, 6.5 million people (6.62%) migrated due to changes in household structure, specifically after the birth of children, while 1.1 million (1.12%) cited business as the reason for their movement. A remaining 9.5 million migrants (9.68%) moved for other reasons, which may include displacement, housing, or accompanying family members. These figures collectively show that migration in India is driven by a complex interplay of economic, social, educational, and familial factors, reflecting diverse motivations across different segments of the population.

CONSEQUENCES OF MIGRATION

Migration produces a wide range of consequences that influence the economic, demographic, social, and environmental dimensions of both the source and destination regions. These impacts are multifaceted and can be both beneficial and challenging, depending on the context and the volume of migration involved.

Economically, migration contributes significantly to the development of both rural and urban regions. Internal migration within the country fosters labour mobility and helps meet the workforce demands of rapidly urbanizing areas. In the case of international migration, Indian migrants often receive higher remuneration abroad compared to those

working domestically. Remittances from international migrants have become a major source of foreign exchange for India, bolstering the national economy and supporting numerous households in their native regions. Demographically, migration plays a pivotal role in shaping the population patterns of both urban and rural areas. Rural-to-urban migration has accelerated the population growth of cities, often beyond their planned capacity. This has led to a demographic imbalance in urban areas and a shortage of skilled and working-age individuals in rural areas. Additionally, migration can disturb the sex ratio, especially when it is male-dominated, which may lead to further demographic challenges in both the source and destination areas. Socially, migration fosters the intermixing of diverse cultures and communities, contributing to pluralism and social change. Migrants often act as agents of transformation by transmitting new ideas, technologies, and practices—including awareness of family planning and modern living—from urban to rural areas. This exchange can gradually change traditional mindsets. However, migration also brings social tensions in certain contexts and may increase the risk of marginalization or involvement in anti-social activities, particularly when migrants face exclusion or inadequate integration into the host society. Environmentally, the consequences of migration are most visible in rapidly expanding urban centres. Overcrowding exerts immense pressure on existing physical and social infrastructure, including housing, transport, sanitation, and healthcare services. The emergence of slums and shanty colonies is a common outcome of unregulated urban migration. Additionally, the over-exploitation of natural resources such as groundwater and the rise in air pollution and unmanaged waste have significantly deteriorated the urban environment, posing serious sustainability concerns.

ROLE OF EXTENSION SERVICES IN MITIGATING MIGRATION:

1. Enhancing Agricultural Productivity:

- Policy measures should focus on improving agricultural productivity in rural areas to reduce the dependency on migration for better livelihood options.
- Introduction of modern farming techniques, irrigation systems, and high-yield crop varieties can help sustain the agricultural sector, thus reducing the need to migrate for employment.

2. Self-Employment Programs:

- Unemployment and poverty alleviation schemes must transition into self-employment initiatives to create sustainable livelihoods locally.
- Encouraging micro-enterprises, skill development, and entrepreneurship can empower rural populations and provide them with alternative sources of income.

3. Implementation of Government Employment Schemes:

- National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) and PURA (Providing Urban Amenities in Rural Areas) must be effectively implemented to create employment opportunities in rural areas.
- Extension services can help in promoting these schemes and ensuring that rural households benefit from them by directly engaging them in development work, leading to improved local infrastructure and livelihoods.

4. Off-Season Employment Generation:

- Off-season employment activities should be promoted through extension services to reduce migration during agricultural off-

seasons. Examples include horticulture, agro-processing, and craftsmanship.

- Training and skill-building programs should be implemented to equip the rural workforce with additional skills that can be utilized during non-peak agricultural seasons.

5. NGOs and Self-Help Groups (SHGs):

- NGOs, along with Self-Help Groups (SHGs), can help empower rural communities by providing training, financial assistance, and fostering social entrepreneurship.
- SHGs can also be platforms for collective entrepreneurship, enabling rural populations to address common needs and create sustainable local businesses, reducing the pressure for migration.

6. Promoting Digital Literacy and Skills:

- Digital literacy programs, like the Digital India Campaign, can improve rural access to information on education, employment, and government schemes.
- Extension services should integrate digital tools and platforms to offer online training and promote remote employment opportunities, thus reducing migration for educational or job-related reasons.

7. Strengthening Rural Infrastructure:

- Extension services must play a key role in improving rural infrastructure, including roads, electricity, healthcare, and education, making rural areas more self-sufficient and less reliant on migration.
- Initiatives like Smart Village Panchayats can be further supported to integrate sustainable infrastructure that enhances the quality of life in rural areas.

8. Skill Development and Vocational Training:

- Skill India and PMKVY (Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana) initiatives can be leveraged to provide rural youth with the necessary vocational skills that will help them find employment locally.
- Skill development should be tailored to local needs, such as agricultural skills, construction, and handicrafts, ensuring that individuals have the tools to contribute to local economies rather than migrating for work

Merits of Migration:

1. **Poverty Reduction:** Migration provides access to better job opportunities, leading to a reduction in poverty for individuals and their families.
2. **Increasing Share of Household Income:** Migrants often earn higher wages, increasing the overall income of their households.
3. **Improvement in Social Status:** Migration can improve an individual's social standing as they gain skills, education, and better employment opportunities.
4. **Skill Development:** Migrants often acquire new skills and expertise, which can benefit both the individual and the broader community.
5. **Empowerment of Women:** Migration, particularly to urban areas or abroad, provides women with greater financial independence, career opportunities, and empowerment.
6. **Improvement in Standard of Living:** Migration often leads to better living conditions, including access to better healthcare, education, and housing.

Limitations of Migration:

1. **Reduced Use of Potential in One's Native Area:** When individuals migrate, the potential of human capital in the home region is often underutilized, leading to a loss of talent and skills.
2. **Reduces Agricultural Production:** Migration from rural areas can lead to a shortage of labour, particularly in agriculture, reducing production and affecting food security.
3. **Scarcity of Labor:** As people leave for employment elsewhere, local labour shortages may arise, impacting industries, agriculture, and services.
4. **Split in Joint Families:** Migration often results in families being separated, especially in cases of long-term migration or international moves, leading to emotional and social challenges.
5. **Development of Prejudices:** Migration can lead to discrimination or stereotypes about migrant groups, fostering tensions between different communities.
6. **Loss of Harmony:** The influx or outflow of people can disrupt community dynamics, causing social tensions and a loss of cohesion in both origin and destination areas.

CONCLUSION

Migration is an essential socio-economic process, enabling societies to adapt and evolve in a dynamic world. In India, it often serves as a livelihood strategy, helping individuals and families access better opportunities, raise incomes, and improve living standards. However, when migration occurs under distress—driven by poverty, unemployment, or agricultural decline—it highlights deeper

developmental challenges. While migration can enhance household incomes and spread new ideas, it also leads to a significant loss of human capital in rural areas. This weakens agricultural productivity, causes labor shortages, and disrupts traditional social structures. Though beneficial at the individual level, distress migration reflects the failure to generate sustainable livelihoods in the place of origin. To address this, rural economies must be strengthened through policy support, improved agricultural practices, better infrastructure, and employment programs like MGNREGA and Skill India. Self-employment through SHGs and NGOs can also help retain talent locally. Migration should be seen as a development opportunity when voluntary, not as an escape from hardship. For this, rural prosperity must be prioritized, making migration a choice rather than a necessity.

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