

Social Inclusion of Migrant Labourers in the Unorganised Sector in Kerala

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Abstract

Migration is a process in which an individual or a group moves their residence from one place to another. Migrant workers consist of those working in the unorganised sector or households, excluding regular workers with social security benefits provided by the employers (Sathya, 2016). Migrants presently constitute an integral part of Kerala, but their acceptance in social life is a matter of concern. Inclusion and integration are important for the holistic development of migrants. Recently several health programmes were introduced for the migrants in Kerala by the National Health Mission, Atithi Devo Bhava and Bandhu mobile clinics for providing them with health care and the associated services. In Kerala there is a huge influx of migrants mostly from States such as West Bengal, Bihar, Assam, Odissa, Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. Migrants usually face issues with language, identification and above all social exclusion. When the poorest migrate, in the context of limited resources and choices, they often face conditions of vulnerability. Moreover, they face various problems such as social exclusion, inadequate social security measures, insufficient labour laws, exploitation, no guaranteed minimum wages, vulnerability to diseases and many others which make their lives miserable. This paper is based on five case studies conducted among migrant workers from the unorganised sector in Ernakulam, Kerala to assess the extent of their social inclusion in the society where they are working/living. Social inclusion is looked at as a process in which the members take part in dialogues to attain and establish peaceful relations of coexistence in a society. It does not mean forced assimilation. The problems of migrant labourers in relation to their social inclusion are identified for social work.

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Keywords

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Introduction

Social inclusion makes the necessary opportunities and resources needed by the citizens in the society affordable for their participation in economic, cultural and social life. This concept includes areas such as employment, education, housing, disability and rights of citizenship. The migrants' participation and social inclusion is a crucial factor for evoking a feeling of connectedness at work and a sense of belonging in the society. Social exclusion/inclusion based on broad community engagement and citizen participation are keys to a form of social integration that acknowledge the multiple identities that compose modern nation states and societies (Jenson, 1998, 2002; Kymlicka, 1998).

Migration is the movement of people away from their usual place of residence, across either internal (within country) or international (across countries) borders. In India, three out of ten are internal migrants (UNESCO, 2013). The internal migration growth was from 309 million in 2001 to 400 million in 2011. Internal migrant flows can be classified on the basis of origin and destination. In 2011, intra-state movement accounted for almost 88 per cent of all internal migration (390.6 million persons). Poverty has recently become a major factor for migration. Higher wages, better education, employment and economic opportunities cause migration. Other reasons include repayment of debts, financing education and marriage of dependents. The chances of abuse and exploitation increase when language barriers are high and workers are physically isolated from the surrounding population. Migrants are mostly employed in the informal economy, often working as construction workers, agricultural labourers, hawkers and vendors, domestic servants, rickshaw pullers, electricians, plumbers, masons and security personnel. Devoid of social security and legal protection, they work in poor conditions and face discrimination in the labour markets.

According to the State Government's Post Disaster Needs Assessment 2018, there are 34.85 million migrants in Kerala, with Ernakulam accounting for the highest number at 6.03 million. Sixty per cent work in the construction sector and those remaining work in the hotel, agriculture,

trade and manufacturing sectors. Better employment opportunities with higher wages and a shortage of labourers in the Kerala local market are the main reasons for attracting labourers. Participation and social inclusion refer to everyone's right to health, work, education, income, housing and social relationships.

Social inclusion is defined as the participation of an individual in a society's political, economic and societal processes. The degree to which individuals and groups face involuntary exclusion from these processes may affect their human security. The purpose of this study is to understand the attitudes and behaviour of the local people such as employers, house owners and medical stakeholders of Kerala towards unorganised migrant labourers who have come with aspirations for better opportunities in life.

Literature Review

Migrant workers are isolated from the local population, and are poorly positioned to secure information about local working conditions, wage levels, and the rights and benefits available to them while living in Kerala, especially if they are isolated from the surrounding community. When language barriers are high, or when the workers are physically isolated from the surrounding population, then the chances of abuse and exploitation increase. Women migrants face double discrimination, encountering difficulties peculiar to migrants, coupled with their specific vulnerability as victims of gender-based violence, and physical, sexual or psychological abuse, exploitation and trafficking.

One important measure of integration is the capacity to speak the local language. Migrant workers find it very difficult to establish contact with locals to learn about the prevailing wages and working regulations. Under these circumstances, it is expected that migrant workers are exposed to misinformation and exploitation by employers. Thirty-seven per cent are heavily dependent on their jobs for securing accommodation and food. (Moses and Rajan, 2012).

An independent study examining the economic contribution of circular migrants based on major migrant employing sectors in India revealed that they contribute 10 per cent to the national GDP (Deshingkar and Akter, 2009). Migrants bring back to source locations a variety of skills, innovations and knowledge known as 'social remittances', including changes in tastes,

perceptions and attitudes, such as a lack of acceptance of poor employment conditions, low wages and semi-feudal labour relationships and improved knowledge and awareness about workers' rights (Bhagat, 2011). Internal migrants, especially seasonal and circular migrants, constitute a "floating" population, as they alternate between living at their source and destination locations, and in turn lose access to social protection benefits linked to the place of residence. There remains no concerted strategy to ensure portability of entitlements for migrants (Deshingkar and Farrington, 2009).

According to Atkinson and Marlier (2010), social inclusion is the process by which societies combat poverty and social exclusion. Social exclusion is defined as the involuntary exclusion of individuals and groups from society's political, economic and societal processes, which prevents their full participation in the society in which they live.

Migrants are looked upon as 'outsiders' by the local host administration, and as a burden on systems and resources at the destination. In India, migrants' rights to the city are denied on the political defence of the 'sons of the soil' theory, which aims to create voter banks along ethnic, linguistic and religious lines. Exclusion and discrimination against migrants take place through political and administrative processes, market mechanisms and socio-economic processes, causing a gulf between migrants and locals. This leads to the marginalisation of migrants in the decision-making processes of the city, and exacerbates their vulnerabilities to the vagaries of the labour market, poverty traps, and risks of discrimination and violence (Bhagat, 2011).

Healthcare utilisation rates among migrants remain poor due to a number of factors such as expensive private health facilities, conflicting timing of work and the availability of medical practitioners, cost of missing hours or days of work, long distances to access services and the associated problems of transportation, perceived alienation from government health systems at the destination and language difficulties (Borhade, 2012). Deshingkar and Sandi (2012) are of the opinion that as the migrant children take up education at the destination, they face learning difficulties based on the differences in academic curriculum and language, especially in the case of inter-state migration.

Moses and Rajan (2012) found that migrant workers are largely isolated from the local community. Lacking local language skills and often confined

to the worksite, these workers face difficulties in learning about the rights afforded to them in Kerala, or about the level of prevailing wages and protection. This ignorance allows workers to be exploited, in that they can be kept unaware of the fact that local workers enjoy higher wages and more protections.

Migration is an important enabler of sustainable development and therefore has significant potential for contributing to both the social, economic and physical well-being of individual migrants and to their communities of origin and destination. For migration to indeed be beneficial in this way, migration governance actors must ensure that newcomers are successfully integrated into society (IOM, 2016).

Methodology

Migrants are often discriminated against in areas such as housing, education, health, work or social security. In the matter of civic engagement, cultural incorporation, socio-economic issues and attitudes towards unorganised migrants, they always experience non-acceptance from local people. There are instances when these workers felt excluded and rejected and thereby discriminated against in society. In the present scenario, social inclusion of these vulnerable people is one of the most important consequences of public policy and human rights challenges. Such discrimination is an obstacle in the path of sustainable development for a State, country or an entire nation. It affects their human security. According to the Sustainable Development Goals Agenda (IOM, 2018) social inclusion of migrants is an explicit point of analysis. It is essential for government stakeholders, NGOs and social workers to exterminate the barriers and establish a sense of affiliation for migrant workers who left their land and homes in expectation of a better life and opportunities.

Five detailed case studies of migrant labourers - three males and two females - who came from different parts of India to seek jobs in Ernakulam, Kerala were conducted with the objective of assessing the problems faced by them in terms of social inclusion. The male migrants were from West Bengal, Bihar and Assam respectively. The female respondents were from Bihar and Rajasthan respectively. In-depth interviews were conducted with the study population.

Case Study Analysis

Case Study 1

Sambhu (name changed), a 35 year old male, has been a construction worker in Ernakulam since May 2019. He is a daily wage labourer from West Bengal, residing with his friends in a rented house near his workplace in Ernakulam. For grocery items they regularly visit a local shop, accompanied by their co-workers who are locals. The local people make all their purchases on credit but Sambhu and his friends do not get this credit facility. Once Sambhu asked the shopkeeper whether the credit facility could be extended to him, but was denied this privilege on the basis that he is a migrant. Later the shopkeeper relaxed his condition and told Sambhu that if he is able to provide a guarantor, he will be eligible for the credit facility. Sambhu told, *“Didi mein ne apna voter card dukandaar ko diya gurantee ke liye usne mere muh pe phak diya.”* (Sister I gave my voter card as guarantee to the shopkeeper, but he refused to accept it and threw it on my face). Sambhu pleaded with the shopkeeper to keep his voter card as a guarantee and provide him with the credit facility, which the shopkeeper vehemently rejected and threw the voter card in his face. This is an example of the rejection and exclusion that happens due to the fact that they are migrants.

Discussion

Such behavioural attitudes of local people towards migrants leave a wrong impression about the community and Keralites. This discrimination is due to the fact that these people are migrants working in the unorganised sector, poor and unaccounted for. It refers to inappropriate and potentially unfair treatment of an individual or a whole community.

Result

Localities need to change their attitudes which have developed due to any negative experiences. Basically the roots are prejudicial towards a community based on stereotypical attitudes. Government has a role to take up the responsibility for the safety and welfare of these groups of migrant workers who are financially poor and do not have any guarantor to help them to access local facilities. Social workers need to work at the group and community levels as educators and facilitators for both migrants and local people.

Case Study 2

Aslam Bhai (name changed), a 46 year old male, has been a street vendor in Kochi since December 2018. He sells cleaning equipment such as brooms, mops, feather dusters and rags. He came to Ernakulam along with his son from Bihar. In the initial days he faced difficulties in finding a house due to his migrant status. There were negative responses to the extent of complete refusals to provide him with a house for rent. He said, “*Log humesha saq karte hain, gha rbhaade pe nahi dete, bohot din hum railway station par sote the.*” (People are sceptical and doubtful about their identity; he spent many nights at railway stations). Moreover, the rent was too high for them to afford a single room in Ernakulam. Later when he started to work, his contractor helped him to stay in a single room apartment along with 15 other migrants. Aslam Bhai also narrated an incident when there was a murder case in the locality and police came to their apartment and searched their documents and identity. After that incident neighbours complained to the house owner and wanted them to vacate the house. All such incidents were humiliating and insulting where Aslam and many others felt the pangs of social exclusion.

Discussion

This is a case of an act that reinforces disadvantages for a minority group. The discrimination experienced by Aslam and his son in seeking houses to rent is an example where an individual receives unequal treatment from people and society due to their personal characteristics. People are doubtful and lack confidence about migrants. Even when any criminal activities or problems occur, local people are prone to blame and file complaints against Muslim migrants. The prevalence of social exclusion and rejection is an obstacle in the way of sustainable development goals where innocent people are blamed and suspected due to prejudicial and stereotypical attitudes about a community. It is true that there are instances where migrants are involved in anti-social activities but blaming and suspecting the whole community should be avoided.

Result

Government, NGOs and social workers need to intervene and work to eradicate such discriminations and encourage social inclusion. Awareness

and policy interventions are required to enable equal access for the unorganised poor migrants to the rental market. The prevalence of caste and religion-based discrimination is more among poor migrants because they are not financially strong and do not have any guarantor. Thus, being denied housing on the grounds of religion or migrant status is an example of differential treatment and social exclusion.

Case Study 3

This case is about Komal Kumari (name changed), a 22 year old female, who working as a maid in Ernakulam. Komal is basically from Bihar but was married in West Bengal. She came to Ernakulam along with her husband in search for a job. Her husband is a painter with an irregular work pattern, so Komal decided to work to ease their financial crisis. Moreover, her husband is a drunkard and most days he does not go for work. Komal is working in two households and earns Rs.6,000 per month. Her problem started when her employer refused to pay her due salary. She also said that she is overburdened with her job, absence of leave and a fixed schedule. She shared with the research scholar, “*Didi mein yeh kaam nahi chod saq ti kyunki 5 mahine ka pagar baaki hai.*” (She is unable to quit the job since her five months’ salary is due.) She is staying in a house recommended by her employer. She complained many times to her employer but could not do anything as her husband is also ignoring her complaints and they cannot leave the house at this moment. She has been working as a maid for the last seven months, but due to her migrant status people are reluctant to employ her so she is scared to leave her present job. According to her, the employer is well aware of her condition, so he is exploiting her and not paying her salary on time. She hopes to get all her dues one day.

Discussion

This case is a clear example of economic-social exclusion, exploitation of the in-migrant worker especially the poor, unskilled, illiterate section. Due to their migratory status, labourers work for less remunerative pay and also suffer non-payment of salaries particularly when they are unskilled and working in the unorganised sectors. There is no fixed time and salary for Komal, she cannot even leave the job and complain to anyone because she lives in a house arranged by her employer.

Result

Paying less remuneration is exploitation as employees do not receive credit for their work. This is unfair treatment in the workplace, based on the grounds that the employee is from the migrant community. Employers take advantage of employees by exploiting them. Exploiting an employee, which includes making migrants work long shifts with few breaks, making them work continuously every day without days off, or not providing an adequate work environment, is against human rights and labour laws. Today the key obstacles to migrant integration and equal access to human rights in the host society are the attitudes and discriminatory practices.

Case Study 4

Sunita (name changed), a 13 year old girl, sells toys and books at traffic signals. We met the girl at Vytilla traffic signal. She came to Ernakulam in 2019 along with her parents. They live in tent houses near the national highway with other migrants from Rajasthan who do similar jobs. They are all engaged in street vending jobs, some selling jewellery, ayurvedic herbs and stationery. When she was asked about the reason behind not going to school, she replied her parents have asked her to sell and earn some money. Her parents sell herbs and medicines on the streets and being very poor cannot even afford meals three times a day. Sunita also shared an incident where she was molested by a truck driver and was injured badly while she was trying to save herself. There is no social security for people like her. She narrated incidents where her mother and other women in their community faced a lot of sexual harassment from the local people. There are instances when they come and threaten them to vacate the place. They are helpless poor migrants debarred from all economic-social opportunities or facilities.

Discussion

Migrants like Sunita and her family are completely excluded from any integration, being not entitled to the basic necessities of life. They do not get to exercise any political, social and economic rights. They are insecure, uneducated, engaged in low income jobs, live in vulnerable areas as nomads, and are deprived of housing facilities.

Result

The State Government, NGOs and social workers have a bigger role to play in terms of providing social security to these migrants and include them in the society by availing them of the basic necessities of life. There should be policies for their protection otherwise such exclusion will result in vulnerability to crime and consequent community tensions. Migrants' exclusion from the society can pose a threat to social stability.

Case Study 5

Sahidulla (name changed), a 26 year old male, works in a garment shop in Panampally Nagar as a salesman. He met with a road accident and suffered a partial coma and right-sided paralysis of his body. We met his father in the General Hospital Ernakulam. Sahidulla was admitted to palliative care because there was no neurological facility at the hospital, and due to his poor migrant status nobody took the responsibility of transferring him to a private hospital. As it was a hit and run motor accident case, no help was provided due to the legal complications involved. Because of the language barrier, his father was unable to communicate with the medical staff. Even the doctors were unable to make him understand the patient's requirements and difficulties. Later he was sent to Kottayam medical college for further treatment, where they refused him admission since there were some complications.

Discussion

This was a clear case of social exclusion due to the patient's communication barriers and migrant status. As it was a legal case, people were reluctant to get involved and help the youth. In the above case a translator's role is very important where proper guidance and instructions can be provided to the patient at the right time. Communication is central to patient-doctor encounters. Doctors need to be able to collect an accurate patient history in order to diagnose and explain treatment, and further care protocols are needed to be understood by care givers.

Result

In the present scenario with increased migration, health care providers in the host State need to learn and care more for patients from different States. Public Health Departments, government, NGOs and social workers have a greater role to play in establishing the concept of social inclusion in

spite of different economic, social and cultural differences. Such challenges of working with culturally and linguistically diverse groups lead to exclusion but we have to encourage participation and promote cross-cultural linkages between migrants and people from host States.

In the above mentioned case, a vital role was played by the social worker who took the initiative and acted as a mediator between the medical staff, family and public. Funds were raised from the public for the patient's treatment in private hospitals with neurological facilities. Legal steps were taken against the driver who hit Sahidulla and his case was filed under the Motor Vehicle's Act. This is an example of social work intervention in eradicating social exclusion and fighting for the migrants' legal rights in the society.

Discussion

In the above cases, due to their migrant status Sambhu was not trusted with credit facilities and Aslam suffered humiliation and housing difficulties. Aslam was interrogated by police when a crime took place in the locality, which shows that people are doubtful and sceptical about migrants, especially when they belong to another religion. Komal was exploited and not paid her salary because she is a woman migrant. Sunita could not join the mainstream education like other children. She became a victim of sexual harassment as her poor migrant parents and community are not aware of the facilities and legal rights available to them in the host society. Sahidulla was not given proper treatment due to his poor migratory status. Although it was a hit and run police case, nobody took the initiative to help the youth as it involved legal complications. They could not access medical facilities at the time due to poverty and communication difficulties where their parents could not understand the actual issue. All these examples are clear cases of social exclusion and discrimination.

In the host State, migrants face economic exclusion where there is a lack of access to labour markets and credits, and political exclusion where they are not allowed political participation and their rights to equal opportunities and freedoms of expression are denied. Cultural exclusion where migrants lack the sense of affiliation to diverse values, norms and different ways of living is also predominant. This paper sought to understand the social exclusion where migrants are discriminated against which reduces their easy access to social services, resources and limits their participation. Finally, the causes of all social exclusion practices are poverty, suffering,

insecurity and inequality which are against human rights and are the major reasons leading to an unstable society. There is a huge requirement for social work intervention or a mediator to bridge the gap. Social workers have to work on the eradication of all such social barriers and promote a culture of economic and social inclusion. Social workers can work as facilitators and mediators to bridge the gap between the government, stakeholders and migrant communities. It is important to connect the migrants with all the opportunities and resources available in the host State.

It is important for social workers to develop integrated intervention programmes for migrants at the grassroots level. To promote social inclusion, case work is important. This can help in building migrants' capacity and confidence at the individual level and educate them about the new culture, social norms, ethnicity and values of the host State. Group work and community work are also the best ways to support each other and address problems of housing, education and employment. Working with local leaders and neighbourhood social workers plays a vital role. It is important for the migrants to have access to local communities, for which mapping and recognising the local leadership structure, their ethnicity, religious, class divide, or base is essential.

Recommendations

Based on the study it is found that:

- Language barriers are a reason for social exclusion, and to minimise this the support of translators should be made available in the initial phases and gradually the State and employers along with social workers must educate the migrant community with the new language.
- Several channels of communication should be used to inform migrants about the State, its culture, support services, provisions, and facilities available in host societies which promote social inclusion to a great extent. Migrants should be connected with opportunities by employers for self-development.

There is a need for detailed studies on the integration and inclusion of migrants which address the issues related to the labour market, access to public services, poverty and the environment. Access to education and health care of the migrant workers and their families and the implementation of social security schemes for them have to be looked into in detail.

Conclusion

The majority of migrants work in informal sectors due to their low levels of education and limited skills. They form a vulnerable community who are exploited, rejected and excluded from the mainstream. Major challenges include restrictions of basic needs such as identity documentation, social inclusion, social entitlements, housing and financial services. Their contribution to the economic growth is immensely high but is hardly recognised. They are kept out of the reach of many opportunities, welfare measures and legal services. They are not trusted or easily invited into the society and hence suffer from insecurity and social discrimination. Government, NGOs and social workers jointly have to work for their upliftment and through inclusion make them a prime element in the society.

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