

# **A Study on the Causes and Consequences Inter-State Migration and Reverse Migration in Tamil Nadu, India.**

## **Abstract**

In a huge populous country like India, migration is an acceptable reality and inevitable. It is a most effective tool for balancing between shortage of workers at one place and excess population at another area. In the present VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity) business environment, Inter-state migration has socio-economic and political consequences in both donor and recipient states. Migrants do not always relocate willingly or voluntarily. Most of the migrations occur for economic reasons. If continuous employment and consistent income is guaranteed to everyone who are willing to work at all states, there is no need to migrate at all. The state of Tamil Nadu has been forerunner for inter-state migration; presently there is huge number of migrants working in the state. Places like Tirupur, Erode, Coimbatore, Chennai, Thiruvallur and Chengalpattu are having huge number in-migrants. While excessive inflow of migrants is economically advantageous to source states, it has mix of benefits and challenges to destination states. Long working hours, payment of low wages (about 70% of what the local workers get), poor living conditions, stagnated garbage and waste water, lack of sanitation facilities makes the lives of the migrants vulnerable. Reverse migration is an act of migrants getting back to home places. In extreme cases, migrants could not tolerate and decide to relocate to their native places. The decision made is not based on luxury or added quality of life at their places, but issues faced is migrated state It is a logical mechanism available to the migrant labourers when the whole economy is severely hit by a thunderstorm like covid-19. Migrants' lives are badly affected to the standstill business environment which could not provide livelihood, shelter and any other social security this labour force. Migration is a constitutional right stronger implementation of labour and migration laws and More concrete measures to curb exploitation and harassment of in-migrants will only solve challenges in such a sensitive issue. The present study attempts to find out the impact of inter-state labour in-migration in Tamil and also the effect of reverse migration from the state.

**Key Words:** Reverse migration, Labour migration, In-migration, out-migration, Assimilation, Acceptable reality, Constitutional right.

## **Introduction:**

Labour migration is an act of movement workers from one area to another for want a job and income. Migration takes place from rural place to an urban area in the same state, from one state to another, even from one country to another country. It is the fundamental aspect of human history- people across the World have been migrating from informal sectors to formal sectors and from agricultural to industrial sectors. However in recent times informal and service sectors

occupied a lot of importance and attract large number of internal and international migrants. Even though the level and number of International migrants differs vastly between countries, in 2020 there are about 281 million people migrated to another country from their country of birth. According to a United Nations report in 2020, one in every thirty people is an international migrant. Estimated as 3.6 % of global population, this is an increase of 128 million to the number international migrants in 1990. Migration plays a crucial role in changing the standard of living of the migrant and his/her family and it also has negative and positive consequences on migrants. In the present VUCA business environment, Inter-state migration has socio-economic and political consequences in both donor and recipient states. The scope of labour migration is very wide covering intra- state, inter -state and international migration in different sectors. The state of Tamil Nadu has been forerunner for inter-state migration; presently there are about 19 lakhs inter-state migrants working in the state. Places like Tirupur, Erode, Coimbatore, Chennai, Thiruvallur and Chengalpattu are having huge number in-migrants. Reverse migration is an act of migrants getting back to home places. It is a logical mechanism available to the migrant labourers when the whole economy is severely hit by a thunderstorm like covid-19. Migrants' lives become vulnerable to standstill business environment which could not provide livelihood, shelter and any other social security this labour force. The present study attempts to find out the impact of inter-state labour in-migration in Tamil and also the effect of reverse migration from the state.

### **Objectives of the Study:**

The study is carried out with the following specific objectives:

1. To ascertain the causes of inter- state migration and reverse migration.
2. To divulge the consequences of inter- state migration and reverse migration.
3. To assess the working conditions and problems of migrant workers in Tamil Nadu.
4. To offer few suggestions to overcome the problems faced by migrant workers.

### **Scope of the study:**

The present study encompasses the causes and consequences of migration as well as reverse migration in Tamil Nadu. Even though migrant workers can be seen in almost all major cities and towns in the state, Coimbatore, Tiruppur, Chennai, Sivakasi and Kancheepuram are the places where huge number of migrants is working. Similarly, migrant labourers are employed in almost all industries including agriculture, Construction, textiles and hospitality (Restaurants and lodging houses) are using the services of migrant workforce extensively. Hence the present study covers these industries in the towns and cities mentioned above.

### **Methodology and data collection:**

The study is descriptive and analytical in nature. Both primary data and secondary data are collected for the study. Primary data is collected from the employers, contractors and in-migrant employees. Random sampling method is used to select respondents consisting 10 employers and contractors and also 68 migrants from other states. The sample respondents were selected from places like Tiruppur, Erode, Coimbatore, Chennai, Thiruvallur and Chengalpattu where sizable number of in-migrants found. Secondary data is collected from newspapers, journals and websites.

### **Review of literature:**

**Puneet Kumar Shrivastav and Tareef Husain** (2022) the returned migrants are those who moved to their earlier UPR (where they have resided any time in the past) from their last UPR. However, this reverse migration found to be as high as 53 per cent after the cut-off point 'March 2020'. The main reasons for Covid-induced migration after 'March 2020' is loss of job/closure of unit/lack of employment opportunities (19.35 per cent), health (14 per cent), and migration of parent/earning member of the family, etc. Such reverse migration has manifold implications for Indian primary and secondary sectors, the rural-urban areas and overall economy. In the near future, migration could slow as the PLFS unit level data reveal that 60 per cent of returned migrants are not interested in moving out to their last UPR or any other place.

**Sudhan Suranjan Das** (2021) Covid-19 has forced lakhs of migrant workers who take an arduous journey home after losing their daily wage, food, and shelters in the urban centres. During the lockdown, it is an impossible task to manage 104 million urban workers; out of which 80% are migrants. Though the labour scarcity will hit hard the urban sectors, the reverse migration would also prevent the city's natural capital and the basic amenities from crumbling under the population pressure. A large number of migrants travel nearly 2000 kilometer from UP, North East states, Bihar, Bengal and Odisha to work in Maharashtra, Punjab and Kerala for an average income of Rs 500 per day. Respective state government should create income opportunities for people based on available potential. Every state has specific economic potential which can be tapped to create employment for the migrants who return from far off cities. Covid-19 has forced migrant workers to walk hundreds of kilometer to reach homes without food, money, and safety. Some migrants have lost their lives on the way due to hunger, diseases, and accidents.

**Varun Agarwal, Priyansha Singh and RohiniMitra** (2019) divulged that the Interstate Migrant Policy Index 2019 measures whether a state has equitable policies for residents and migrants in terms of labour policies, child welfare, housing, social welfare, education, health, sanitation and political participation. It also measures whether a state has additional and ad-hoc policy initiatives wherever needed for migrants to have equality with state residents. The results of the Interstate Migrant Policy Index evaluation revealed widespread apathy and discrimination towards migrants by state-level policymakers. Of all the states evaluated, Kerala's policies are relatively more considerate towards internal migrants and their needs than other major migrant-receiving states. Overall, Maharashtra, Punjab and Haryana have a slightly better policy scenario for migrants as compared to Tamil Nadu, Delhi and Gujarat.

**TilakSanyal and KingsukMaity** (2018) observed that uneven development has been the predominant driving force behind labour migration. Besides, disparities in socio-economic conditions, wage differentials and disparities in the development policies also induce individuals to migrate. We conclude that migration has miserable impact on the living standard of migrants, their family members and they are deprived of health, education and other essential public services and basic amenities like hygiene, drinking water and so on. The remittances sent by the migrant back home is often used to repay outstanding debts and support increased consumption.

**Krishnavatar Sharma** (2017) opined that Seasonal migrants dominate the low-paying, hazardous and informal market jobs in key sectors in urban destinations, such as construction, hotel, textile, manufacturing, transportation, services, domestic work etc. They have poor access

to health services, which results in very poor occupational health. Since they cannot afford private hospitals, they often go back to their villages once they fall sick. This affects their employment opportunities, as well as the loss of wages. A large number of migrants find work as unskilled labourers since they enter the job market at a very early age, experience no upward mobility and remain stuck in the most unskilled, poorly paid and hazardous jobs for their whole work-life span. As depicted in the graphic below detailing the economic lifestyle of migrant workers in south Rajasthan, this has severe inter-generational implications, transferring vulnerability, poor health and low level of skills from the parents to children.

**Shruthi Ashok and NeenaThomas** (2014) concluded that a large number people migrate from rural areas to urban areas in India and they are considered as floating population. Through case studies and primary survey we realize that these labourers face social and economic discrimination. They are forced to live in polluted environment and poor housing conditions during their stay at destination place. Indian constitution allows any Indian to move freely anywhere within the Indian Territory. Similarly, the migrants have the rights to enjoy all the human and fundamental rights laid down in the Indian Constitution. Government has put forth enough Acts, schemes and programmes for them but these initiatives hardly or never reach the ISM labourers mainly due to loop holes in medium of communication and administrative set up.

### **Causes of inter-state migration with special reference to Tamil Nadu:**

Labourer migration is the relatively permanent movement workers away from their place of origin. Migration of workers is inevitable in a vast country like India due to imbalanced regional growth. While The Economic Survey of India 2017 estimated the number of inter and intra state migrants at a staggering 139 million, the annual inter-state migrants number was calculated at 9 million. At that point of time, the major source states of out-migration were Uttarpradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, Uttarkhand and Madhyapradesh. Now the list is expanded including Westbengal, Jharkhand etc. The major destination states were Delhi, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra and Kerala. As per an estimate of The National Sample Survey, there are about 179 million internal migrants in India which is roughly 28.3 of workers in the country. The current net migration rate in India is -0.329 at 3.8 per cent decline from 2022. It is a matter of common observation that labour migration plays crucial role in the economic development and social conditions of both origin and destination areas. In India, a vast majority of rural population are depending on wage labour in agriculture and allied activities. Because of advent and application of technology in almost all agricultural activities, absence of adequate power and water for cultivation and hesitation on the part of land owners to invest more in agriculture, increasing tendency of converting even cultivating land into construction plots have made farming a less remunerative and unsustainable. Opportunities for income in villages are scarce and people move out of their places in search of livelihood.

Most of the migrations occur for economic reasons; ‘Poverty and ugliness are difficult to hide’ says a Chinese proverb. If continuous employment and consistent income is guaranteed to everyone who are willing to work at all states, there is no need to migrate at all. “In Chennai, we are paid Rs 400 to Rs 600 for a day’s work, compared to Rs 75 to Rs 100 in Bihar\*. We are also treated with some respect by the employers here. They are not cruel or intimidating like our employers back home,” said a worker from Bihar. Inter- state migration is a major life changing

event like marriage. The circumstances leading to migration are very difficult-displacement from the place of birth and making other state with other language as a place of residence is not easy to an individual. Undeniably, even after 75 years of independence, welfare schemes of governments did not reach needy people equally. Still, there are huge disparities between states; some are most developed and few are under-developed without basic infrastructure in healthcare, education, industrial growth, etc. “Migration is an expression of the human aspiration for dignity, safety and a better future. It is part of the social fabric, part of our very make –up as a human family”, said Ban Ki -Moon. Tamil Nadu has been one of the most preferred states for north Indian migrants. As per 2011 census on migration, there were about 18.85 lakhs inter-state migrants in Tamil Nadu. But, migration could have accelerated considerably in recent years and the latest figures may project even more number of migrants to the state. Migrants do not always relocate willingly or voluntarily; the reasons behind such an endeavor is varied from personal to social and economical to political. “All big things come from small beginnings. The seed for every habit is single, tiny decision” stressed James Clear in his best seller ‘Atomic Habits’. Even individually, the causes of migration are not the same to all. They change depending on an individual’s age, gender, marital status, health, education etc. The discussion with migrant employees disclosed the major factors causing state –to-state migration which can be divided into Push and Pull, are listed below:

#### **Push Factors (Pushing people to leave their place of origin)**

- ✚ Lack of adequate employment opportunities in few (out -migrating) states
- ✚ Lack of sufficient income for livelihood, stagnant wage rates and increased cost of living,
- ✚ Over exposure environmental disasters- flood, cyclone, drought etc in home places,
- ✚ Low agriculture productivity and poor income from agriculture,
- ✚ Famine-Shortage of food and shelter over a period of time,
- ✚ Non availability of clean water and power- cuts,
- ✚ Poor infrastructure and least amenities in education, healthcare and transportation,
- ✚ Excessive political and administrative corruption,
- ✚ Reservation policies,
- ✚ Prevalence of high rates of crime in home states,

#### **Pull factors (Attracting workers from own places to destination for settling)**

- ✚ Fastest growing economic centres like Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Bangalore etc.
- ✚ Better job opportunities and guaranteed income,
- ✚ Availability of regular and secured jobs,
- ✚ Availability of better standard of living to unskilled and semi- skilled labourers,
- ✚ Better working climate,
- ✚ Congenial work environment and comfortable work schedules,
- ✚ High education opportunities to children and healthcare to the family.

#### **Consequences of inter-state migration:**

Migration is a double sided coin- one with big benefits and another with a lot of challenges. It leads to new set of issues in economic conditions, population redistribution, social set up and environmental factors. One can see hundreds of migrant people with big baggage sitting for long hours in the platforms of Dr. M.G.R Chennai central railway station everyday expecting building contractors to pick up them. Majority of migrant labourers are youngsters about 20 years of age and some of them are migrating as families. They are illiterates or school dropouts and problem in expressing and understanding the local language. While excessive inflow of migrants is economically advantageous to source states with increased household's socio-economic status, it has mix of benefits and challenges to destination states. Discussion with contractors of labour migrants and in- migrants from other states discloses the following effects of inter-state migration:

- ✚ Increased income levels in source states through remittances from out-migrants resulting in higher living standards,
- ✚ Increased labour force and productive capacity of the nation,
- ✚ Stronger economic growth with higher tax collections,
- ✚ Filling up of vacancies which the local avoids- on prestige and low-income
- ✚ Creation of a flexible labour market with better/affordable workforce,
- ✚ Intermixing of diverse culture resulting in cultural clash in in-migrating states: example Tamil Nadu and Kerala got influences of Bihar and UP.
- ✚ Assimilation- in-migrant issues in integration with locals,
- ✚ Changes in the demographic profile of source and destination states- youngsters are leaving their own places keeping children and aged in their states,
- ✚ Larger migration to particular states makes them short of drinking water, electricity and other basic amenities.
- ✚ Affects productivity and development out-migration states,
- ✚ Exploitation of migrants by locals- high prices for products and low wages,
- ✚ Segregation of migrants and discrimination,
- ✚ Overcrowding of migrants creates slums and the issues in sanitation and pollution –puts extra pressures in the use of physical infrastructure.

### **Prevalent Working conditions and problems of migrants:**

Long working hours, payment of low wages (about 70% of what the local workers get) and poor housing in huts with no basic facilities like toilets and doors are common occurrences to inter-state migrants. Good health does not always come from treatment and medicine only; often it comes from healthy lifestyles. Poor living conditions, stagnated garbage and waste water, lack of sanitation facilities makes the lives of the migrants vulnerable. As a matter of fact, their employment and incomes do not provide nutrient food and healthy lives which force them to consume poor quality alcohol and other drugs. Majority of them are highly susceptible to serious diseases like tuberculosis and diarrhea. Setting aside all social values and diminishing humanity, women migrants face even more problems and all types of harassments. Few of these women migrant labourers are suffering from serious health issues like HIV; they are subjected to sexual assault not only by the employers and contractors but also from the local people as they are living in work sites, pavements and slums. Lack of basic health care at affordable prices affects the migrant workers seriously and they are developing health issues such as anemic, respiratory problems and Jaundice. Majority of them resort to 'self medication' or 'treatment at medical

shops' or 'one doctor prescription for life time' without even trying to diagnose the real health issues present in their bodies. It can be seen that average life span of migrant labourers is 10 to 20 years less than that of others.

Views expressed by selected north Indian in-migrants of Tamil Nadu about the challenges faced by them ; can be broadly grouped into two categories social problems and economic problems. They are listed below:

### **Social Problems:**

- ✚ Communication barriers with local contractors, shops, neighbors etc.
- ✚ Poor living conditions and difficulties in getting proper accommodation for rent
- ✚ Shabby dwellings and inadequate sanitation
- ✚ Children education issues
- ✚ Contract violations/ no proper contract
- ✚ Discrimination by employers
- ✚ Perception of local community and prejudice- become easy suspects of any crime
- ✚ Getting ration card or other Government identity documents
- ✚ Cultural differences- social exclusion from local festivals
- ✚ Slavery to contractors
- ✚ Exploitation and abuse by contractors
- ✚ Unsafe working conditions and workplace injuries
- ✚ Unavailability of trade union or labour association for grievance redressal
- ✚ Access to health care services

### **Economic problems:**

- ✚ Poor wage levels & lack of standardized wage rate
- ✚ Lack of other monetary benefits – PF, ESI etc.,
- ✚ Opening bank account and transferring earned amount to family members at native places
- ✚ Getting loans
- ✚ Seasonal unemployment- lack of job and wage during rainy season
- ✚ Domination of agents and placement agencies

### **Reverse migration- A recent trend emerging:**

Reverse migration is an act of workers 'getting back to their places of origin 'in home states. Movement of labourers from the place of employment to native place is referred as reverse migration. It is opposite of migration. Reverse migration is rare and unique. The decision of remigration is influenced by a number of factors. It occurs mainly due to lack of job opportunities and non –availability of safer livelihood in the state that workers migrated out. Also the growth of out-migration states and enhanced infrastructure there encourage the decisions on return to home. It is obvious that the recent reverse migration from Tamil Nadu has affected the economy in the state and created a panic in major migration- centric cities.

Reverse migration cannot be justified on financial aspects only; it has far -reaching consequences in the in-migration states and out-migration states. There are social concerns attributed to the phenomenon. For want of food and survival, People migrate from place of birth to other states leaving their homes and dear ones. Contrary to common belief that migration increases the income level and standard of living of migrants, socio-economic conditions of

migrant labourers are well below the standards. The problems faced by those who migrate anticipating qualitative changes in lives at the destination place, are plenty and much higher than those of native workers. In extreme cases, migrants could not tolerate and decide to relocate to their native places. The decision made is not based on luxury or added quality of life at their places, but issues faced is migrated state. As per a report of Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, 0.7 per cent of India's population is temporary visitors between July 2020 and June 2021. At all India level, 48.9 per cent of temporary visitors shifted to home towns to see family members between July 2020 and June 2021, 15.7 per cent of such temporary visitors returned on health-related reasons and 12.2 per cent due to loss of job and closure of unit\*\*, the report highlighted..

For instance, the most recent pandemic; COVID-19 has created serious hardships among migrated labourers all over the state. The Government has announced lockdown and extended the period of completion of construction work by few more months. The real estate owners stopped all the construction activities and textile manufacturers in Tiruppur and Coimbatore stopped production. Hotels and other commercial establishments with large migrant population suspended their business activities. It forced migrated labourers to return their place of origin opting for indigenous occupations thus making maximum use of unproductive land and finding newer alternate source of income. "Choices are easy when you have nothing to lose" said Barbara Delinsky. Lakhs of migrant people rushed to Chennai railway stations and Mofusil bus terminus on the day of proclamation of lockdown. Given their financial condition and lack of all forms of transport, it is almost impossible to reach their places. Few workers from neighboring states moved to their places by bare foot and some others in goods vehicles.

The most recent case of reverse migration has taken place in Tamil Nadu during the first week of March 2023. The migrant workers from were panicked social media rumours that they are targeted in the state. Both Governor and the Chief Minister urged the migrants that there is no need to fear and feel insecure as there are no real abnormal incidents against them. Countering the allegations of assault and attack on Hindi-speaking migrants, the state labour department issued a statement refuting the unwarranted claims. The statement acknowledged the contributions of migrant workers in the development of the state. The administration warned stringent actions against those who spread false and malicious news disturbing peaceful business environment prevailing in the state.

In the second week of March 2023, there was a delay in the distribution of Aavin milk products in some parts of Chennai city. The reason quoted for the delay is non-return of migrant workers to workplaces. Few Television channels broadcasted that the migrant employees went for Holy festival did not return creating shortage of labour. As per Government data, presently there are over 10 lakhs migrant workers in Tamil Nadu. Industrial associations and small manufacturers fears potential exodus of north Indian workers from the state. "The entire industrial and manufacturing sector in Tamil Nadu will come to a halt if these rumors [of attacks on north Indian workers] continue to escalate. Without the workforce from north India, we cannot not operate in Tamil Nadu. We are waiting to see how many of these workers return after Holi," said Jaya Vijayan, secretary of the Chennai District Small Scale Industries Association\*\*\*. It is obvious that reverse migration has impacted major industries in Tamil Nadu adversely. "Ride the horse in the direction that it's going" said Werner Erhard. It remains to be seen how things change in organizations as situation continues to unfold and improves.

### **Few suggestions to the problems faced in migration and reverse-migration:**

The discussion with in- migrants brought out numerous problems faced by them. It is not easy to offer solutions to migration issues in one go. “Don’t fear failure- Not failure, but low aim, is the crime. In great attempts it is glorious even to fail”, said Bruce Lee. Various studies conducted on inter-state migration touched only one aspect of overall issues like education, health etc., and offered suggestions concerned with that area alone. Here are few suggestions- even implementation of some of them will go a long way in the lives of migrants:

- + Stronger implementation of Inter-State Migrant Workmen(Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service)Act,1979
- + Starting and Strengthening Trade Union movement among migrant construction workers
- + Arranging banking services and government financial support available to migrants
- + Issuance of ration cards, aadhar and other government identity proof documents to eligible migrants
- + Providing Adequate medical insurance coverage to migrant labourers
- + Making educational facilities available to migrants’ children
- + Providing affordable medical care to the family members of migrants
- + Stringent laws for Transparent and uniform wage fixation
- + Strict actions against people spreading rumours on migrants
- + More concrete measures to curb exploitation and harassment of in-migrants
- + Conducting counseling and Stimulating awareness suiting illiterate in-migrants
- + Arranging cultural events and social gathering to mingle local people with in-migrants

### **Conclusion:**

In a huge populous country like India, migration is an acceptable reality and inevitable. It is a most effective tool for balancing between shortage of workers at one place and excess population at another area. Migration is a constitutional right which is enshrined in article 19(1) of the Indian Constitution. It provides all the fundamental right to move freely and settle all over the country. Laws relating to migrant workers are there in table; the issues rise in their implementation. In a multilingual country like ours, many states disenfranchise inter-state migrants. Issues in inter-state migration are complex and multifold; they can be handled only if there is change of overall perspective on such a phenomenon. If Tamil-speaking people can work in Maharashtra, Delhi and Karnataka what prevents migrants from other states to work in Tamil Nadu. Recently, developed states started to look at the issue differently- migration snatches the employment chances of locals. But the fact remains that migrants are employed in tasks and places where locals are not willing to work for reasons of poor wage and hazardous/ hard working conditions. Official agencies tend to underestimate migration movements, which account for the bulk numbers in recent years. The challenges relating to inter-state migration issues are still need to be fully addressed. It is good that the state government realises seriousness of the situation and attempts to control any possible adversity. Unless there is a change in the perception of society towards migrant workers and government addresses their problems with stronger implementation of laws, it is very tough to overcome migration related issues in coming years.

\* Arun Janardhanan, (2023, March 7) Worry for Tamil Nadu manufacturers: Waiting to see how many migrant workers return after Holi, Epaper, The Indian Express.

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