DETERMINANTS AND STRUCTURE OF FARM LABOUR MIGRATION IN SIND

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Definition

Human migration is relatively common activity among the communities and individuals of the World, which can be defined as a change of location of a person or a group of persons in physical space.[1] In its real sense, the human migration is explained as the permanent change of residence from one country, state or community to another[2] which also includes the seasonal movements of people in the search of an occupation.

The migratory farm labour, therefore, includes all those persons who either alone or along with their dependents leave their home base areas temporarily and who get themselves employed on the farms located in the irrigated farming zone, but return to their original places after certain period of time.

Migration of farm labour has become a topic of general concern. The economists and sociologists are specially interested in the study of this sort of migration because it creates equality in earning of homogeneous classes of people in various ecological regions and helps in the efficient allocation of resources through check on the imbalance between population and natural resources. Sociologists consider mobility of human population as a tool by which "the individual finds or attempts to find a better adjustment in the social and economic order."[3] The migration also creates social bonds and institutional ties of the individuals by influencing the socio-economic institutions operating in both labour exporting/importing areas.

The agricultural sector of Sind has been utilizing the services of migratory farm labour since ancient times, as a regular feature. But in recent years, the severity of migration has increased tremendously due to the high cost of living and other economic implications. This migration is largely motivated by the income maximization. Thus, the migrants attempt to stay more of their lives time in the areas, where they expect their net earnings to be higher. Economists argue that income differential and regional disparities are the main factors that compel people to leave their homes but sociologists consider human migration as an act of social behaviour reflecting internal cultural values.

Sind Scenario

This paper is confined to the interregional farm migration in Sind. The province has a variety of resources with disparities in level of living, economic activities and growth rates among its different regions. It has vast human resources of varying potentialities. It envelopes coastal area, mountainous region, lakes, flat farming land and desert as well. The desert and the mountainous regions of Sind originate farm labour to supply to the irrigated farming zone of Sind for seasonal farm work. Thus, Thar desert, mountainous regions and the northern desert are the main sources of supply of the migratory farm labour. Whereas, irrigated farming zone of Sind absorbs the load of employment of migratory farm labour during a part of the year. Therefore, it becomes important to review the chief characteristics of above mentioned zones, which have direct bearing on farming community and migratory farm labour families as well.

The Thar Desert

The Thar desert adjoins the irrigated farming zone of Sind from its eastern side. It comprises 5.72 million acres of land and accommodates 0.52 million souls in its 283 villages.[4] The population of Thar desert constitutes 3.72 percent of Sind's total population.[5] The entire desert area stretches over 11262 square miles.[6] It is the unique desert in the World which becomes lush green after rains. Major portion of the desert is productive and 56 percent of desert area is under forest and pastures, 28 percent comprises cultivable land, whereas, 16 percent is classified as waste land occupied by sand dunes.[7]

Thar desert possesses vast potentialities of crop production if there are rains or supply of irrigation water. The valleys between sand hills and plains around Nagarparkar offer excellent opportunities to grow rain-fed crops. Since rainfall is scanty and uncertain, the agricultural production is limited to summer crops. When precipitation exceeds 6 inches, about 0.5 million acres are grown under pearl millet, sorghum, sesamum, guar and moong.[8] Farmers neither apply fertilizers nor bother so much for various field operations. They have small traditional implements and plows. The yields are generally low but the farmers are contented with it because it involves little labour and capital inputs. The yields mainly depend on the level of precipitation.

The Mountainous Region

The mountainous region is situated in the extreme west direction of Sind province. It comprises areas of Dadu, Thatta and Karachi districts. The region is bounded by Indus River in the east and Baluchistan province in the west. The mountainous region of Sind province consists of hillocks

which are the loftiest in Baluchistan province and gradually merge into the Pabb hills in Sind. The western hillocks form a natural line of demarcation between Sind and Baluchistan province.

The entire mountainous region of Sind province is spread over 8500 square miles. It is 85 miles in breadth from east to west and 100 miles in length from north to south.[9] The mountainous area of Dadu district locally known as Mahal Kohistan has comparatively more human inhabitation than hilly tracts located in other districts of Sind province, which comprises of 53 villages well scattered over the space of 2204 square miles.[10] The region ranges from 1000 to 2000 feet above the sea level. Agriculture sector in the region has great scope to develop provided possible irrigation facilities are extended to farmers. Soil of the area is very fertile. The water of hill torrents have fertilized the soil by depositing and comprising ingredients for plant growth. At present agriculture is carried out on subsistence level. Traditional bullock power and antiquate implements are used for tillage operations, whereas, donkeys, camels, bullocks and horses do the transportation job. The farm implements and tools are locally made from wood and raw iron. Rainfed agriculture is carried out mostly in summer season. Crops like sorghum, millet, sesamum, guar, lentils, vegetables and fodders are grown. Some progressive farmers have installed diesel pumps to fetch underground water. Irrigation farming through wells and streams is also carried out on small scale.

Northern Desert

Northern desert of Sind is part of Bekanir desert, major portion of which situates in India. The range of desert stretches up to Bhawalpur district in north. Northern desert is quite different than the Thar desert in texture and physical features. Sand dunes full of sand could be seen for miles together. Vegetation is absent, the colour of sand is red whereas grey sand is found in Thar desert. Northern desert spreads over three sub-divisions of Khairpur district and part of Rohri sub-division. It is measured to 4500 square miles with the population of 28800 persons. Density of population is about 6 persons per square mile.[11]

The entire northern desert destitutes any means of irrigation system. Underground water is breakish whereas no canal flows within northern desert. The inhabitants have dug deep wells but narrow in circumference to obtain drinking water which dries up during acute drought conditions. The people earn their livelihood through livestock farming or through rainfed crops such as pearl millet, guar and sesamum which are grown if rainfall exceeds 90 millimeters.[12]

Irrigated farming zone of Sind

Irrigated farming zone of Sind presents a natural scenery of a flat and levelled land. It has been created and sustained as productive and fertile basin by River Indus without which it would be a desert. This region has an agrarian economy. The future of the region is tied with the prosperity of its agricultural and agro based industrial sectors. The region touches Bahawalpur division of Punjab province in the north whereas Arabian sea bounds it at the south. The hilly tract and desert areas of Sind province encircle the region from its western and eastern sides. The irrigated farming zone covers a land of area of 30145 square miles. The length of the zone is about 300 miles from north to south and its breadth which varies from east to west is about 70 miles in the centre. The zone covers 55 percent of total area of Sind province. [13] The cultivable area on average, constitutes 38 percent of total area of Sind province[14], whereas the vast area of Sind province is lying unutilized due to lack of water resources.

The irrigated farming zone of Sind is very rich agriculturally and is divided in three sub-zones, on the basis of their cropping patterns. The upper Sind which includes districts of Jaccobabad, Shikarpur, Larkana, and part of Sukkur and Dadu districts from rice zone. Coarse rice is largely cultivated in this area, where non-perennial canal irrigation facilities are provided in summer season. The farmers grow grams, peas and fodder in winter season after harvesting rice in the same rice fields which retain enough moisture to grow these crops. Diversified farming is practised in central Sind which includes the districts of Khairpur, Nawabshah, Sanghar, Hyderabad and part of Sukkur district. In this zone all cereals, fibre, fruit, vegetable and fodder crops are grown on commercial scale. The lower Sind is known for growing red rice, sugarcane, banana and papaya crops. It includes the districts of Thatta, Badin and part of Dadu district. The entire irrigated farming zone of Sind is canal fed area which also includes riverain areas located near both the banks of Indus River.

Determinants of Migration

The regional economic disparities are distinctive between arid zone (Thar desert, Northern desert and mountainous regions) and irrigated farm zone of Sind province. Lack of employment opportunities and economic activities compel the arid zone area people to opt for migration to irrigated farm zone, for earning there livelihood. It is main determining factor of labour migration from arid zone of Sind, which includes both push and pull factors.

Push Factors of Migration

The brief characteristics of various zones of Sind, as desrcibed earlier, clearly

indicate that push factors are more effective than pull factors in farm labour migration in Sind from arid zone to the irrigated farming zone. These push factors include partial or complete drought conditions, non-availability of work, low income and lesser source of earning means. Physical conditions such as shortage of water and scanty rainfall, sometimes create difficulties for survival of human life and their livestock in arid zone area of Sind.

Pull Factors of Migration

These refer all such incentives which invite human labour force. They include enough employment opportunities, higher wage rates, favourable climatic condition, more medical facilities and better law and order situation. These mentioned variables are playing important role in decision making for migration to a particular place. The characteristics of irrigated farming zone of Sind comprise relatively better conditions for above mentioned variables, thus, it creates a mechanism of migration from arid zone to the irrigated farming zone.

Fortunately, when drought conditions prevail in the arid zone, enough seasonal employment come up in irrigated farming zone of Sind, due to harvest time of summer crops, the local farm labour resources become sort of demand and thus, the services of migratory farm labour are essentially required to perform intensive farm harvesting. The demand for seasonal farm labour is there in irrigated farming zone of Sind during the period from April to June of each calendar year.

Conclusion

The income and employment are a meaningful set of variable for the migratory farm labour of the arid zone of Sind because subsistence of thousands of families is dependent on irrigated farming zone, either for long or short period. On the other hand, farm enterpreneurs of the irrigated farming zone are equally dependent on migratory farm labour for successful completion of crop cycles. The services of migratory farm labour are essential to performing intensive manual labour specially during harvesting periods. Thus, migration mechanism creates a systematic relationship between employers and employees on the farms of irrigated farming zone of Sind.

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