

PATERNAL MIGRATION, CHILD LABOUR AND EDUCATION : A STUDY IN BRICKFIELD AREAS OF WEST BENGAL

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Children accompanying their migrant parents for seasonal employment are the most “at risk” group of all in terms of educational vulnerability and capability formation. They are deprived of basic education and therefore become bonded to the low-skill–low-wage trap that their parents are currently in. Proper understanding of the magnitude and severity of the problem and suggesting innovative policies for breaking this vicious cycle is of utmost importance. Using findings from a Field Survey in Brick Kilns of Bardhaman district of West Bengal, this paper attempts to explore issues related to parental migration and condition of the children. The socio-economic condition of the migrant workers and their children in the kilns, the problems faced by these migrant children in accessing educational facilities, and the incidence of child labour have been explored. Effectiveness of policies taken by Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan in ensuring education of these migrant children has also been examined. Children are observed to be growing up as replica of their parents and are inducted into the same low-skill profession from an early age. Contrary to neo-classical argument that labour migration in response to market forces will lead to equalisation of factor prices, no such trends are visible. Intervention programmes like mobile & residential schools are necessary to ensure not only basic learning of the children but also to teach them basic hygiene and livelihood techniques. Skill-formation among the children is urgent so that when they grow up they really have the freedom to choose their livelihood.

INTRODUCTION

Migration is a universal phenomenon. From time immemorial women and men have travelled in search of better living, independently or with their families. The river valley civilizations, the death of cities as natural resources were depleted, the setting up of newer civilizations in newer places, all bear testimony to the migratory tendencies of mankind. Though there are social and political factors also behind migration, economic reasons have been paramount for most of the human movements across the globe, both legal and illegal. For example, currently, Latin America has the highest emigration rate in the world, and Latin American cross-border migration is dominated by movements to Canada and USA where relatively higher wages prevail in the labour market, and movements to neighbouring low-wage Latin American countries are marginal. Thus labour migration is the dominant form of intra-country and inter-country migration across the globe, including India. Labour migration is also purported to be dependent on ‘Pull factors’ – demand for human resource in the destination region – and also on ‘Push factors’ – distress conditions in the source regions relative to the destination (Ravenstein, 1889). The most visible factors are low wages, high unemployment, heavy population pressure, etc. in the native places, and the lure of better earning opportunities in the destination region. Such movements have been viewed by the neo-classical economists as water seeking its own level – as long as differences exist in factor-endowments, there will be differences in factor returns (wages) provoking labour from surplus (and low wage) regions to move out to labour-scarce (and high wage) regions. Allowing for unemployment and lower probability of getting jobs in a labour surplus region, the gap between ‘expected wages’ in the two regions is still larger, providing additional impetus to labour movements. Such movements, in a neoclassical framework, would ultimately lead to equality of expected wages (Factor Price Equalisation) across regions, at which point labour migration process will stop. Thus, left to itself, labour migration is supposed to act as the great leveller, bringing socio-economic equality across the globe. While barriers against labour movement

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across international borders may be cited as reasons behind failure to achieve FPE in practice, there is no such obstacle preventing migration within national boundaries. But, in reality, it is seldom observed that migration has led to convergence of socio-economic or even labour market conditions between source and destination regions within a country. Contrary to the neo-classical view, several factors not only perpetuate the old socio-economic differences between source and destination regions in spite of labour migration (break down of FPE theorem) but also create new differences because of the migration process itself, leading to systematic and recurring migration between two regions. This is especially true when people with low skill, without economic opportunities at home, travel each year to regions where some work is available in particular seasons (e.g. agricultural workers at harvesting season). Estimates from the NSSO 64th Round Survey shows that of the 300 million migrants in India in 2007-08, more than 13 million were short-term or seasonal migrants. At least half of these seasonal migrants have education level below Primary level. For them, the continuity perhaps works through the Human Capital channel, as migrants pass on their low human capital status to the next generation, entrapping them in the migration-cycle forever. About 4-6 million children below 14 years of age who accompany their seasonally migrating parents are thus at risk (Smita, 2008). This makes it imperative to analyse the impact of parental migration on children, which, sadly, is lacking in the literature. The present paper argues that migrant children who move from one district to another district, within or between states, accompanying their parents on a quest for seasonal employment are the most vulnerable and “at risk” group of all, especially in terms of exclusion from education. Yet, many of these children are not identified for special education services in a timely manner. This restricts their accessibility of educational schemes and keeps them perennially illiterate or under-educated. Using Field Survey data from the Brick Kilns of Bardhaman district of West Bengal, we study the socio-economic and educational condition of children of the migrant families in these areas so as to come up with plans for capability formation of them.

REVIEW OF EXISTING RESEARCH

It has been argued by researchers that parental migration may have positive impact on children left behind because of remittances and higher household income than was possible locally (Edwards and Ureta, 2003; Bryant, 2005; Calero et al., 2009; Stark et al., 1997). On the other hand, negative effects of parental migration on children left behind, like psychological cost of parents’ absence, lower care of children left behind by guardians, lack of guidance and poor school performance, poor preventive health care, etc. have also been pointed out by researchers (Hildebrandt and McKenzie, 2005; Kiros and White, 2004; McKenzie and Rapoport, 2006; Ginther and Pollak, 2004; Antman, 2010). It has also been commented that the possible long-term effects of migration might cancel out the effects of a temporary improvement in household income through remittances from migrant parents (Giannelli and Mangiavacchi, 2010). The final outcome would depend on the magnitude of remittances, duration of migration, social support system at native place to look after children left behind, and institutional arrangements for education and health, and household specific characteristics, among others.

Contrary to children left behind, children accompanying migrant parents face a more arduous life due to factors like social and cultural isolation, participating in work alongside parents, extreme poverty, poor health conditions, language barriers, poor educational attainment etc. Children whose parents migrate seasonally are more vulnerable as they have to shift between two different social environments continuously and do not adjust anywhere.

While internal or domestic migration and issues related to it in the Indian context have been studied by various researchers [Zachariah, 1964; Bose, 1967; Rele, 1969; Divakara Rao, 1973; Singh et al, 1980; Nair and Narain, 1985; Ram, 1986; Singh, 1986; Skeldon, 1986; Biswas et al, 2001; Rafique and Rogaly, 2003; Srivastava and Sasikumar, 2003; Bhagat, 2005; Mosse et al, 2005], the issue of impact of migration

on child's education has however been neglected in both international and Indian research, resulting in inadequate attention of policy makers on these children. However, estimates show that seasonal migration is on the rise, especially distress seasonal migration, and it is time that the plight of these people and its trans-generational impact is brought to limelight.

BRICK KILNS – SOME STYLISTED FACTS

Brick Kiln Centres Across the Country

There are around 50,000 brick kilns in India, each employing on an average 100 workers each season, most of whom are migrant labourers, and belong to the Scheduled Castes and Tribes (data from All India Brick Kilns and Tile Manufacturer's Federation; and ActionAid, 2004, 2005). However, most often only the male heads of the family are registered on the payrolls and payment made to him on piece-rate basis depending on the number of bricks prepared by him. Since higher number of bricks would fetch a higher income, the families migrate as a unit and engage all the family members in brick making. A conservative estimate of five members per family provides an estimate of a staggering 25 million people dependent on the brick kilns for their livelihoods, roughly two-fifth of whom are children between 6-14 years of age.

Brick Kiln Centres in Bardhaman

Brickfields in Bardhaman district are one of the major manufacturing sectors in the region and there are around 260 Brickfields in the district. Presence of rich alluvial soil, sandy soil and clay helps the manufacturers to produce various types of bricks. Most bricks are used within the state, but often sent to neighbouring states as well. It is estimated that about 20 thousand workers are engaged in this sector in the district and almost two-third of them are migrants – coming from Nawada, Munger, Gaya, and Pakur (Rajmahal) districts of Bihar and Jharkhand. The system of labour contract is also specific to these centres. There is a chief contractor or manager who accepts advance sum from the brickfield owners and during the active season supplies workers. The advances are adjusted against the payments receivable by the workers. Payments are made through the managers only. The workers payments are on piecemeal basis - about one hundred and eighty rupees for every thousand bricks prepared by them. Under such a system the workers arrive with their families – the adult couple working officially on the brickfield while their children are playing around. As soon as the children reach 8-9 years of age, they are engaged by their parents in making bricks. This helps their parents prepare more number of bricks and thereby earn more. Thus incidence of child labour's quite predominant in the brickfields with almost all 8-14 years old children working with their parents. The girls also look after their siblings and prepare food while their mothers work under the sun.

This has led to serious lacunae as regards the educational condition of the children of those migrant workers. Since the active season is from November to May, the families stay here for that period only and go back to their native places for the remaining part of the year. The children are thus out of school for the whole year. They can not attend school at their native place due to their long absence, while they are unable to attend schools here too because of the same reason. In addition, their native language being Hindi (or some variety of it), it becomes impossible for them to attend local educational centres here. In this paper we have studied the socio-economic and educational condition of children living in the Brickfield areas and attempted to provide some suggestions regarding improvement of their conditions.

METHODOLOGY

We have collected a list of Brickfields in Bardhaman district from the Bardhaman District Brickfield Owners' Association. It was observed that there are about 260 Brickfields in the district, clustered around

6 centres – Raniganj-Durgapur, Galsi-Uchhagram, Burdwan-Gangpur, Katwa-Churpuni, Purbasthali, and Kalna. We have covered 65 Brickfields and surveyed 1500 children (Table 1). In addition, we have surveyed local children living in and around those Brickfield centres so as to bring out disparity between the local and the migrated children in terms of both economic and educational conditions. Region wise, Raniganj-Durgapur and Galsi-Uchhagram constitutes the Western region, Burdwan-Gangpur and Katwa-Churpuni constitutes the Central region, while Purbasthali and Kalna makes up the Eastern region of the district. This is noteworthy since the district has varied geography and socio-economic conditions prevalent in the three sub-regions are different.

Table 1 : Survey Coverage of Brick Field Areas in Bardhaman District

Indicators	Total Numbers	Numbers Surveyed
Brick Fields - District total	260	65
Eastern Region	105	26
Central Region	82	21
Western Region	73	18

Source: Bardhaman District Brickfield Owners' Association, Field Survey during 2008-09.

CONDITION OF THE CHILDREN

Conditions of the children are studied in terms of Age & Gender distribution, Family background, Parents education, Family income & Working status of the children, followed by examining the Educational level of the children.

Age & Gender Distribution

The age and gender distribution of the Children in the Brickfield areas reveal a greater number of girls compared to boys, mainly because of larger number of girls among the migrant families (Table 2). About 30 per cent of the children are in 6-9 age group, while the remaining are above 9 years of age. It is this latter group among the migrants that is engaged in working along with their parents.

Table 2 : Survey Findings – Age & Gender Distribution of Children in Brickfield Areas

Indicators	Migrant Children			Local Children		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of Children Interviewed -Total	700	990	1690	145	165	310
in 6-9 Age Group	340	180	520	45	25	70
in 9-10 Age Group	100	120	220	45	45	90
in 10-12 Age Group	120	300	420	30	65	95
in 12-14 Age Group	100	300	400	25	30	55
in 14+ Age Group	40	90	130	0	0	0

Source: Field Survey, 2008-09.

Family Structure

The migrant children are all from large families with family size greater than 4, while about 25 per cent of families are from family size greater than 6 (Table 3 & 4). The average family size is greater in Western region compared to the district average. On the other hand, 20 per cent of local children have family size less than 4 and only in 7 per cent of cases the family size is above 6. Thus, on an average, family sizes of migrated children are higher compared to the local children.

The migrated children therefore have a greater family burden and are pressurized to start earning from an early age. High birth rates among the migrated families are also a matter of concern. Childbirth at the site of brick kilns was observed to be common, and young kids were found to tend to the newborns while the parents were at work.

Table 3 : Survey Findings – Family Background of Children in Brick Field Areas

Percent of Children with		East	Central	West	Total
Migrant Children					
Family Size	less than 4	0	0	0	0
	5 – 6	80	78	73	74
	More than 6	20	22	27	25
No other Literate in Family		95	96	99	96
No other Schoolgoer in Family		99	100	100	99
Local Children					
Family Size	less than 4	27	34	24	29
	5 – 6	70	64	68	64
	More than 6	3	2	8	7
No other Literate in Family		18	18	37	20
No other Schoolgoer in Family		32	44	51	40

Source: Field Survey, 2008-09.

Parents' & Family Education

Not surprisingly parents of most of the migrated children are illiterate and none of the children have any other school-goer in the family (Table 3 & 4). Only for the Kalna cluster some of the children had attended the mobile school during 2005-06 but over the last two years they have de-learned every thing. Contrastingly, 80 per cent of local children living around those centres have some other literate member in the family and 60 percent have some other school goer in the family. This is really important as the atmosphere at home provides encouragement to children to attend school and once people get educated they understand its benefits and try to arrange for some education for the children.

Family Income

The monthly income distribution figures show that while all the migrant families earn more then ₹ 4000 per month, only about 27 per cent of the local families do so (Table 5). However this yields a false

impression regarding the living standard of the migrant families since the working season is of 7 months only and this earning has to sustain them throughout the year. Thus the per-family average annual incomes of these families are lower compared to the local families. In addition, with large family size, per capita income is still lower. It is estimated from field data that children contribute almost 20 per cent of the family income of the brick-kiln families.

Table 4 : Survey Findings – Family Income of Children in Brick Field Areas

Indicator	Migrant Children				Local Children			
	East	Central	West	Total	East	Central	West	Total
Monthly Income Distribution (₹)								
1000 – 2000	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	33.3	0.0	17.5	9.1
2001 – 4000	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	33.3	75.0	60.0	63.6
4001 – 6000	99.0	100.0	100.0	99.0	20.0	15.0	17.5	22.3
6000+	1.0	0.0	0.0	1.0	13.3	10.0	5.0	5.0
Average Annual Income per family ('000 ₹)	29.2	24.3	24.3	25.9	32.6	30.8	27.4	29.2
Average Annual Income per capita ('000 ₹)	4.9	4.1	4.1	4.3	6.5	6.2	5.5	5.8

Source: Field Survey, 2008-09.

Working Status of Children

The brick making process runs sequentially, similar to an assembly line in an automobile factory, and involves the following steps: Mixing clay, Making mud balls, Moulding them into bricks using wooden moulds, Drying wet bricks in sunlight and turning them over so that all sides are equally dry, Carrying dried bricks in head loads to the kiln, Arranging them inside for firing, Bringing out ready bricks from the kiln, and, Loading fired bricks on to trucks for transportation. The children are especially engaged in the steps of turning over, transportation, and bringing out bricks from kilns – all the while using their *nimble fingers* and *small physical size* to advantage. It was observed that among the migrant families more than 77 per cent of all children and more than 85 per cent of children aged 10-14 are working alongside their parents in the Brickfields (Table 5). They add number to their parents' job and enhance family income. Incidence of working is almost uniform in all the clusters. Contrary to this, for the local children, incidence of remunerative work is much less. Only about 27 per cent of local children are working to earn, and this incidence is still lower in the Eastern part of the district, which is agriculturally more developed. In addition to remunerative work, children are also engaged in domestic duties like looking after younger siblings, helping in cooking or directly cooking, looking after family livestock, etc. While most of the migrant children are engaged in such work, less than one-fifth of local children are working at home, less so in the Central region. Thus, incidence of work among the migrant children is substantially high. The system is beneficial to parents, who maximise their income, as well as to the employers, who are ensured of both current child labour and next-generation workers. This tacit understanding between workers and employers is further encouraged by the labour-contractor who profits most from ensuring the seasonal migration. For them perpetuation of the system depends crucially on non-formation of capability among the seasonal migrants and what better way to ensure that than encouraging child labour?

Table 5 : Survey Findings – Different Jobs Done by Children

Percent of Children Engaged in	Total	East	Central	West
Migrant Children				
Household Work	75.0	74.0	73.0	77.0
Working to Earn	77.0	76.0	77.0	78.0
Local Children				
Household Work	18.1	34.6	8.0	20.0
Working to Earn	26.7	23.1	24.0	32.5

Source: Field Survey, 2008-09.

Educational Level

Educational level of the migrant children is in a pathetic state with all the 17 hundred surveyed children being out of school. In contrast, only 10 per cent of the local children are out of formal school or informal educational centres.

More than 85 per cent of the migrant children have never been enrolled in school and those who were once enrolled have dropped out to accompany their parents as soon as they are old enough (Table 6).

Considering that we have surveyed only about 60 brickfield centres, it is estimated that at the District level, there are more than 8000 children, all of whom are migrants from the neighbouring states, staying here for 7 months of the year, but having no access to learning facilities.

Table 6 : Survey Findings – Family Income of Children in Brick Field Areas

Educational Status	Migrant Children				Local Children			
	East	Central	West	Total	East	Central	West	Total
Never Enrolled in Formal Schools	50.0	68.6	90.0	82.5	20.0	9.5	25.0	18.2
Dropped Out from Formal Schools	50.0	31.4	10.0	17.5	40.0	33.3	15.0	30.3
Attending Formal Schools	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	40.0	57.1	60.0	51.5
Attending Informal Centres under SSA	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	45.8	38.3	20.0	38.0
Out of School	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	14.2	4.6	20.0	10.5

Source: Field Survey, 2008-09.

Note: SSA – Sarva Shiksha Mission;

It can thus be seen that socio economic condition of these children is quite pathetic. They are from very poor families; do not have any educational motivation from their parents and starts working from a very early age.

The children are thus growing up as replica of their parents and are inducted into the same low-skill profession from an early age. Low education, low skill, low wage is thus persistent among these people, entrapping them in a vicious cycle of low level of human development as well. Their freedom is only

notional and not functional and the market force of migration is not ensuring the welfare of the repeated seasonal migrants, nor is it bringing about equality between the source and destination region.

It is extremely urgent to devise some mechanism so that these children complete at least their basic learning. How to do that is a big challenge. We propose some steps hereafter.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS & SUGGESTIONS

The condition of the migrant children can improve in the long run only through capability formation and education. These excluded children are to be brought within the ambit of educational system – at the destination as well as source areas. A beginning was made under the SSA through *Mobile Schools* in the Kalna region. It is observed from the field survey that the schools were moderately successful and children who had been going to those camps are interested in continuing. These camps are necessary to ensure not only basic learning of the children but also to teach them basic hygiene and livelihood techniques. They may also do away with age bar and run separate schools for boys and girls with the fathers and mothers joining respective gender groups. Simple arithmetic, some language training and general cleanliness along with some vocational training like sewing, carpentry, pottery, idol making may be taught in these camps. Since the Brickfields are mostly in clusters, a central position may be chosen for the camp where afternoon classes shall be held. Health check ups may also be arranged periodically for these children. Provision of a mobile teacher along with the migrating families & children would have been a better solution but its operational viability is questionable.

These Special Education Procedures may be totally foreign to migrant parents. And while families vary, educators will likely encounter particular challenges that are attributable to cultural and socio-economical differences between teaching personnel and migrant parents. It has to be kept in mind that migrant parents usually connect better with a person than an institution. In fact, personal contact brings extremely positive results. Therefore, the scheme must start by finding a person willing to be the regular liaison between the State and these families, who speaks the parents' language, and thereafter include this person in all meetings with parents. Trust among special educators, parents, and the liaison personnel must be established at the onset. The special education process can be very intimidating to parents as well as the children. The liaison person can explain the procedures in the parents' language, decreasing their fear, and stressing on the needs for continuing the education program.

These policies may uplift the socio-economic and educational conditions of the children living in the Brickfield areas by a large extent. In this regard the Migrant Education Program and Migrant Head Start Program running in the United States may be an example at the international level to start with. In the Indian context too, one can look at the successful operations of Seasonal community hostels with arrangement for boarding, lodging, coaching and care of children who stay back and continue in schools when the parents migrate (*Lok Jumbish Project* in Rajasthan, DPEP in Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra, Rajiv Gandhi Prathamik Shiksha Mission in Madhya Pradesh, etc). This system can be reversed to have seasonal boarding schools in the destination regions to retain the children when the parents move back to their native places for 5 months of the year. Setting up of cluster schools at the site of migration like Sugar-mill schools & Brick-kiln schools in Maharashtra and Salt-farm schools in Gujarat are also steps worth considering. Some such schools were operating in selected brick-kilns of the district but were discontinued due to various reasons. Organising condensed bridge courses for children on their return to their source villages during off-season to make up for the schooling time lost during the period of migration may also help, though the effectiveness of such action is questionable due to the long period of absence. Greater involvement of NGOs in running educational centres for these families at both source and destination areas in a coordinated way may also be attempted at (American India Foundation has attempted to address this at both ends of the cycle in eight centres).

It should be accepted that the administrative and academic bodies at the destination region have responsibilities towards these children as well – in spite they being seasonal migrants. A childhood spent among the brick-kilns and shanty dwellings do not augur well for the future of our nation and society. If they are unable to come to the educational centres, educational personnel have to go to them. We need earnestly to eradicate ignorance from the minds of these marginalized children. It is heartening to note that Sarva Shiksha Mission has recognized the children of seasonal migrants as those facing ‘most difficult circumstances’ and has tried to include them in Education Guarantee Scheme (EGS) and Alternative & Innovative Education (AIE) Scheme. Submission of a field report by the present author to the district administration has also resulted in opening of few cluster schools in brick kiln areas run by local NGOs. The performance and impact assessment of these experiments are eagerly awaited.

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- agriculturally lean period. Majority of migrants go as family to work in brick kiln. Substantial number of children (below 14 years) becomes the victim of such migration. They are subject to ghetto living, miss their education, work as extended family labour and deprive of any health facilities.
- This article reviews the reasons for continued brick kiln migration from Ranchi district and vulnerability of children. The article also explores the plausible strategies for reducing children’s vulnerability.