RURAL MIGRATION: DETERMINANTS, CONSEQUENCES AND IMPLICATIONS

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ABSTRACT

The process of rural out-migration in our country has been in existence on a large for over a century now. Economic degradation in rural areas caused by appalling lack of employment opportunities and the inability of the land to support the phenomenal increase in population has been pushing the able-bodied and young villagers to urban centres in search of livelihood. A number of problems are related to rural outmigration like overcrowding, the spread of slums, difficulty of waste disposal, poor water supply, etc. The growth in the rural population indicates that rural areas still have much more population than they need for efficient tillage, thus there are chances of a further increase in the rate of outmigration from rural areas. Therefore, in order to prevent erratic growth in the population of cities, it is important to study the process and pattern of rural outmigration, so that steps can be taken to slow down the pace of rural migration or to divert these streams to other small and medium-sized towns.
INTRODUCTION

Migration is entirely determined by the wishes of the persons involved, though in exceptional cases this may not hold true. Usually, each migratory movement is deliberately made and an element of human violation is involved in the decision to move. Migratory movements are, therefore, a product of the social, cultural, economic, political and/or physical circumstances in which individuals and societies find themselves. Economists are interested in the study of migration because it is related to business cycles, supply of skilled and unskilled workers, growth of industries and the occupational and employment status of the migrants. Planners and policymakers are concerned with migration because it is associated with the socio-economic development of the country. Sociologists are interested to study the sociological problems behind migration. Data on the age, sex, mother tongue, education and occupation of the migrants are useful to sociologists, for these data enable them to plan programs to solve or control the problems arising out of migration which is social in nature.

Determinants of Rural Migration: It is always not possible to identify one single factor that has been the cause of a person’s migration; very often migration is motivated by the combined operation of two or more factors. Some of the important factors are as follows: The important factors which cause migration may be classified into six broad groups, viz., (1) economic factors; (2) general economic conditions; (3) demographic factors; (4) socio-cultural and psychological factors; (5) political & institutional factors; and (6) miscellaneous factors.

Economic Factors: It is one of the important determinants of migration. Low agricultural incomes and agricultural unemployment are the major factors pushing migrants towards areas with greater job opportunities. Migrants are attracted to areas of new industrial development and regions of higher per capita income. The most important economic factors that motivate migration may be termed as (i) the push factors, (ii) the pull factors, and (iii) the general economic conditions.

(i) Push factors: The push factors or the impelling factors refer to the poor economic conditions and the resultant economic misery or lack of opportunities for advancement which push people out of the region in search of a livelihood or better opportunities. The push factors are, thus, the factors
which more or less compel people to leave the place. The ‘push theory’ is often used to explain the
cause of rural-urban migration. There are several factors that tend to push people out of rural areas.
All the migration caused by push factors is, however, not confined to the rural-urban stream. There
are large migration flows between rural areas, representing the movement of people out of
comparatively poor areas characterised by a lack of economic opportunities to areas with better
opportunities. Push factors are behind many international migration streams, though in many cases
migration is a combined effect of push and pull factors.

(ii) Pull factors: Pull factors refer to the factors which encourage migration to an area such as
employment and other economic opportunities, facilities, amenities, etc. Opportunities for better
employment, higher wages, facilities and amenities of modern life etc. attract people to certain
areas. The facilities, amenities and glamour of city life which lure migrants are termed as ‘city lights’.

“Migration from the countryside to the cities bears a close functional relation to the process of
industrialisation, technological advancement and other cultural changes which characterise the
evolution of modern society in almost all parts of the world.”

Thus, the city-ward migration is encouraged by the presence of a variety of occupations to choose from, the higher wage levels and
the possibility of attaining higher standards of living in the cities. Apart from the better economic
opportunities, there are a host of other attractions that the city holds out, like a variety of amenities
and facilities. In short, the rural population may be lured by the “bright lights of the city”. The 'pull'
factors operate not only in respect of rural-urban migration but also in respect of other types of
internal migration as well as international migration.

(iii) Pull or Push Factors: Whether the exodus of rural population to the cities is caused primarily by
pull or push is quite controversial. Many strongly argue that it is the push factor that is stronger, for
it is the rural problems rather than the urban attractions that play a crucial role in the urban ward
shift of population. On the one hand, there are problems created by the decreasing cultivable land
per capita and increasing rural unemployment and underemployment; and on the other hand, the
improvement in the rural educational levels and the communication and interactions between the
rural and urban worlds have made the rural folks more aware of their problems and given the hope that these are not perhaps inevitable and can be redressed by moving to the cities. It has been reported that "in a study on India it is found that areas which experience large rural to urban migration also have a high rate of unemployment. Thus, it seems that the rural population migrate to cities not so much to avail themselves of the employment opportunities and other facilities in urban areas, but more to avoid the problems in the rural areas."\(^2\) It may also be true that in countries like India, not only is there a push of landless labourers into the cities, but as the cities become overfilled with migrants, they, in turn, build up a countering measure which some writers like Ashish Bose refer to as "push back". Bose remarks: "In fact, there is a "push back" factor in urban areas. In India, for example, the urban labour force is sizable, the urban unemployment rates are high and there also exists pools of underemployed persons. All these factors act in combination as deterrents to the fresh flow of migration from rural to urban areas. We have called this the "push back" factor. If new employment opportunities are created in the urban areas, the first persons to offer themselves for employment are the marginally employed already residing in the urban areas, unless, of course, special skills are required. Thus, paradoxically enough, rapid population growth becomes a factor in slowing down the rate of migration from rural to urban areas. This is quite contrary to the push theory would have us believe."\(^3\) Thus, the population explosion in the urban areas in the absence of a substantial expansion of the economic activities and employment generation discourages rural-urban migration.

**General economic conditions:** During times of prosperity, the expansion of urban economic activities is likely to pull the rural population towards the city. On the other hand, during the depression, this cityward movement is checked and if the depression is very severe a net rural ward movement of the population may take place. Monsoon and crop failures may push large numbers of people from the agricultural sector to the cities, especially to the nearby ones. Another economic factor that facilitates migration is an elaborate and efficient network of transport and communications system.
Demographic factors: large population i.e., high man-land ratio, has been widely regarded as one of the important causes of rural out-migration. With a given mode of production, in many developing countries, particularly in India, only a part of the labour force can be absorbed by agriculture. Hence surplus population must move to the urban centres to be gainfully employed. The differences in the rates of population increase between the different areas of a country are a stimulant to internal migration. Fertility and the rate of natural increase in population are generally higher in rural areas. The reduction in the mortality rate and the concomitant high rates of population growth would drift the rural population towards the city.

Socio-cultural and psychological factors: Social and cultural factors also play their role in rural-urban migration. The quest for independence, the desire to break away from traditional constraints of social organisation, conflicts among the family members, exclusion from the community circles for one reason or other or a feeling of being isolated, etc., may cause migration, especially of those in the younger generation. Improved communication facilities such as transportation, the modernising impact of the radio, television and cinema, urban-oriented education, rural-urban interactions etc., and the resultant change in the social values and attitudes are also likely to promote rural-urban migration. Further, the allurement of what is called the ‘bright lights, i.e., the social facilities of the town, may also pull some of the rural folks. However, migration is considerably influenced by factors such as the closeness of cultural contracts, cultural diversity, etc. There are, thus, a number of socio-cultural and psychological determinants of migration.

Political and institutional factors: Political factors and institutional factors are becoming important for migration. People migrate to other countries when they find that the political systems and institutions of their country are not suited to them. Some people do not tolerate dictatorship and leave that country. The policies of the state also exercise a powerful influence on the migrants. As a result of such state policies, the income difference between the urban and rural sectors has been widening and has encouraged further areas. Institutional factors such as government policy towards migration may encourage or discourage the movement of the population.
**Miscellaneous factors**: Apart from the factors mentioned above, some other important factors affect migration such as geographical factors like distance, topographical features; weather and climatic factors including floods and droughts; etc. We have seen that there are a host of factors that may affect rural-urban migration. Sometimes migration may be affected by more than one factor though in most instances one factor may have a dominant influence.

**Consequences of Migration**: The migration process has tended to have a profound effect on both the areas from which the migrants come and the areas in which they finally settle. The effect of internal migration on the migrants and on the rural communities they leave behind vary according to the type of migrant, the volume of migration and the nature of places involved. The consequences/effects of migration at the place of origin can be conveniently divided into the following categories:

**Effect on population**: Outmigration from rural areas reduces its population and may be effective in alleviating overcrowding. The most demographic consequences due to migration are: migration augmented contacts with the more modernised sectors may influence the value system of the communities and rural inhabitants may internalise lower fertility norms, migration affects the level and distribution of income, distribution is considered to be a significant determinant of fertility and aggregate population growth, and outmigration from an area creates scarcity of labour supply with the consequence that marginal workers i.e. a number of the female workforce. This is a more marked phenomenon in labour-intensive agricultural areas.

**Economic effects**: The economic effects of migration can be seen on rural employment and income. If the migrant is unemployed before leaving the village, unemployment rates may fall; but if the migrant is a student or is not in the labour force, there would be no observable change in unemployment levels. And an important economic consequence of migration is the remittances sent by the migrants. Studies show that remittances can constitute a fairly large share of the income of the family in the migrant’s place of origin.
Social and cultural effects: When people leave a community, the social fabric of the community inevitably changes. The social impact of migration at the village of origin can be seen in terms of the breakdown of formal relationships even though the extended family is becoming more important. Outmigration tends to result in greater integration of the village with outside communities. The remaining villagers will know more about urban ways and will be more likely to adopt selected urban behaviours, especially the purchase of urban consumption goods and the desire for formal education.

Impact on urban areas: In urban areas migration changes the existing occupational structure, where industrial development is in progress such migration has a favourable impact as it provides cheap labour which, when absorbed in the industry changes the occupational structure. Migration will also affect population growth since fertility in urban areas is often lower than in rural areas due to a number of factors such as higher costs of rearing children, improved communications, greater access to improved child health care and family planning services.

Implications of rural-urban migration: Economic factors are the primary force behind rural-urban migration. Such migration broadly proceeds in response to the push of rural poverty and the pull of better urban income and employment prospects. The probability of migration is negatively related to rural income and positively related to rural-urban income inequality. The probability of migration is also directly related to education and outside contacts and inversely related to age. Todaro's hypothesis states that a migrant's expected urban income depends on both the urban wage rate and the probability of getting a modern sector job. The urban incomes of the migrants increase considerably with the length of time consistent with an increased possibility of having modern sector jobs. However, it cannot be concluded that the probability of obtaining formal sector employment enters the decision to migrate.

The significant positive effect of education indicates that in the wake of increasing access to educational opportunities, whereby an increasing number of students go in for high and higher education, future rural outmigration among young males may be considerably higher, other things
remaining constant. This implies that improving rural access to education unaccompanied by an expansion of rural earnings and job prospects relative to the urban situation would speed the townward migration.

Todaro’s model, suggests that efforts to increase urban job opportunities will induce rather than reduce migration due to a greater probability of securing urban employment. Whereas the urban solutions (such as increasing urban employment and wages) are not likely to tackle the problem, the rural solutions might help. The slowing down of rural-urban migration requires carefully designed and empirically tested policies to narrow the rural-urban economic disparities particularly by increasing the rural income and employment opportunities.

In the cultivating sector, the highly educated and dynamic farmers from better-off families (but with relatively low valued capital goods) are the likeliest to migrate. Relatively low individual income within the sector and higher destination incomes are the main factors influencing the decision to migrate. The fact that a greater proportion of migrants keep their families in the village and tend to return after obtaining or completing their jobs and remit a part of their incomes to their native village clearly shows their keen interest in rural households, land and agriculture and not in urban life. Such successful migration, which does not disproportionately contribute to the urban pool of the unemployed and underemployed and has a favourable impact on rural areas, need not be discouraged as it is economically rational and represents movement from low productive to high productive activities. Migration from the non-cultivating sector is primarily due to poverty and unemployment in rural areas. It is largely urban-based because due to little attraction left in the villages, a greater proportion of migrants decide to settle with their families in the city. Given the rural-urban inequality, rural out-migration of the rich cultivators and the poor non-cultivators can be mainly attributed to the intra rural inequality which tends to compel the rural poor and induces the better off to move. Land redistribution may be justified if migration is due to inequality within the agricultural sector, i.e., if both rich farmers, as well as poor farmers/landless labourers, tend to
migrate. But it is not the inequality within the agricultural sector but the inequality between the agricultural and non-agricultural sectors that seems to be the real cause of migration.

**Conclusion:** The important conclusion is that rural-urban migration seems to be responsive to economic incentives and compulsions. Both rural-urban and intra-rural economic inequalities cause people to migrate. Given the rural-urban inequality, both rich, highly qualified farmers, as well as poor non-cultivators, tend to migrate under different conditions; while the former is more influenced by the pull factors of better jobs and higher incomes in the urban areas, the latter are more compelled to leave the village due to low rural income or unemployment. While the successful migration mostly of well-off farmers is not likely to create many problems, the not-so-successful migration mainly from the non-cultivating sector should be discouraged through appropriate policy measures. However, restricting rural-urban migration should be considered only a short-term objective; movement from agricultural activities in the rural areas to the industrial sector in the urban areas has historically been a part of the development process.

In the light of the above analysis, it is required that the issue of rural-urban migration should not be dealt with in isolation, but in an integrated manner. The utilisation of physical and human resources results in economic development. Population growth unaccompanied by the non-agricultural sector must lead to rural out-migration. Because, when dairying, poultry, forestry or cottage and small-scale industries do not expand to absorb the surplus-labour, a mounting number of people must move to urban centres for employment. The development of the rural economy alone can solve our colossal problems of unemployment, under-employment, inequality, inflation, inadequate supply of basic necessities to the poor as well as the population explosion, when people can get employment in their villages, the labour out-migration and the resultant urban slums too could disappear. The strategy for rural development during half a century has not satisfied the aspirations of the people. Millions of rural inhabitants are greatly frustrated.
As we have seen that migration has both favourable and unfavourable effects. Therefore, steps are taken to regulate rural-urban migration. Today most countries regulate immigration and several countries regulate emigration too. The large influx of refugees has been a serious problem in recent times. Its sudden occurrence and the huge number involved often create numerous problems for the countries of asylum. Some countries have established colonies and settlement areas to settle the refugees. For example, the Government of India developed planned colonies and townships in various parts of the country where not only reasonably comfortable accommodation but also local employment in industry and trades were provided.

Uncontrolled internal migration, particularly, the exodus to the large cities and unbalanced regional distribution of population have been matters of serious concern in many countries. Several countries have, therefore, taken measures to regulate internal migration and population distribution.

It may be stated that in many cases there may not be a single weapon that can successfully deal with the complex and manifold problems that the large migration flows give rise to. Hence a judicious combination of these instruments will have to be made use of to tackle the multidimensional problems. Needless to say, the composition of the mix will depend on the nature of the problems and the peculiarities of the situation.

**Suggestive measures:** It is said that if capital intensive technology and large units go together, they are also said to lead to over-concentration of people in towns for better employment opportunities. This led to slums social breakdown and crime. It impoverishes the countryside, takes away gifted people aggravating the rural condition. It is, therefore, suggested that industry should be dispersed to villages or smaller towns. This line of argument goes to Gandhi and the idealization of the Indian village community in contrast to the corruption and misery of city life. Given the problems associated with urbanisation, steps should be taken to halt the trend of out-migration so that urban problems can be minimized. The rural-based strategy must inevitably begin with the structural reorganisation of the village economy which is dominated by agriculture and allied activities. This would require a package of measures which includes the transfer of land resources...
from the big (or absentee) landlords to the landlords to the actual tillers of the soil, provision of agricultural infrastructure for fuller exploitation of the land, reduction of social and economic inequalities in the villages and generation of increased employment opportunities for the village's folk, preferably within the periphery of the village itself.

To illustrate the point more elaborately, increased agricultural productivity can raise the level of income of agricultural labourers which in turn, can check the intensity of migration. But it should be noted that the growth of agricultural production is directly connected with the question of land reforms. Agricultural production is not only a problem of technology, such as good seeds, fertilizers, implements, water etc. These are certainly important but unless the question of feudal land relation and exploitation of the market are resolved, the application of technology must again have to be restricted and will enhance difficulties. The scope of introducing technical developments in agriculture becomes very limited if the land remains concentrated in the hands of a few people (other than the cultivators) and the majority of the peasants and agricultural labourers remain landless and destitute, and also if the big landlords have opportunities to exploit them cruelly. Moreover, the supremacy of the big owners prevails, whereas the economic conditions of the poor worsened.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

2 Urbanisation in South East Asia (Bombay: The Demographic Training Centre), p. 27.
