

CHAPTER SEVEN

SUMMARY OF MAJOR FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

This dissertation has the objectives to explore the reasons for labour migration in Sikkim's informal sector from the neighbouring plain areas. It discusses the work environment, socio-economic status and the overall space of the migrant labourers in host regions. This dissertation also analyses the mechanisms and strategies adopted by the migrant people to adjust physically, culturally and socially in Sikkim.

To comprehend the reasons, trend and intensity of labour migration in a clearer way, it is very much essential to understand the geography of the place where people are willing to move. In recent time the geographical account has become an important approach for critical study to identify the reasons behind migration. This research paper starts with the important question why people (labour) are migrating towards a high altitude area (Sikkim) from low altitude areas, here (West Bengal and Bihar). The great Himalayan range always has always been an interesting area to explore in terms of its physiographic and demographic attractions and perceptions. Sikkim's demographic structure has been highly affected by the in-migration rate (43.42% according to the Indian Census, 2011) which calls for migration study on Sikkim. The towns of Rangpo (an industrial town in Sikkim) and Singtam (a commercial town in Sikkim) have acquired extraordinary geo-spatial importance in reconstructing its demographic and economic structure in the last decades.

This research starts with the significant research question on why people migrate or the reasons for migration. In order to understand the contemporary labour migration trends and to find out the reasons why people do migrate needs a thorough study. Different migration theories have revealed the fact that labour migration has been controlled by demand-supply nexus which is completely linked with the process of economic betterment and development. In this dissertation I have reviewed the theoretical approaches based on migration and observed that in case of labour (informal) migration 'considering migration' and 'actual behaviour' are important domains to discuss, because informal labour migration is not voluntary in character, rather enforced by geo-political economic factors in the contemporary neoliberal time frame. So, people (informal labour)

migrate when their opportunities, assets are limited in the native place, when they are not able to support their families, when they observe others in their social network who have already migrated and created ‘migration inequality syndrome’ in the source area.

The macro-level analysis of migration theories contributed to the classic macro level migration model that explain migration as a result of the geographical differences in the supply and demand of labour, mostly between from rural agriculture sector to urban manufacturaing sector. migrants are attracted to cities by higher wages, where labour is scarcer and migration continues until wages are equalized. Other theories place migration in a broader framework: for instance, Zelinsky’s hypothesis of Mobility Transition (1971) argue that migration is part of the demographic transition any area undergoes when mordernising, here Sikkim also acts as a case.

Various arguments are there on why do people migrate, but in this research, I prefer to consider the state of conjunction of different theories to establish the actual reasons to migrate. Labour migration is not a product by mono factor rather multiple reasons are controlling the volume, direction and intensity of the flow. Moreover, not all arguments/theories are related in all area (international, national) contexts. In the first part of my research work, while discussing different macro, meso, micro and other contemporary theories – it has been realised that these theories are not able to explain any philosophical perception of migration, nor are they well-demarkated as a complete theory of migration. This research is not able to depend on any specific migration literature like Marxist, *neo*-Marxist, Neoclassical, Neo-Malthusian, Neo-liberal etc. to find out the reasons for labour migration in my study area, rather attempted to discuss all possible theories and their perceptions to identify the reasons for labour migration in Sikkim. In this context, I have found that migration as a dynamic process is always assimilated and affected by multivariate concepts/arguments and cannot be implemented singly in any situation.

This research work investigates possible reasons for informal labour migration in two new-born towns in Sikkim - Rangpo and Singtam, which seems comparable on the surface: they are at the lead of post-liberal economic transition and structural transformation situation as border towns between the states of West Bengal and Sikkim. The reasons behind migration in these two towns converge – the urge for economic betterment being the obvious and leading cause. In a macro view, migration decision is influenced by the dualism of costs and benefits of migration. In Sikkim, the importance of wage differentials (income consideration) is the most important cause (neoclassical

approaches) to attract labour from different states. This study reveals that decision making process on a household level (in the case of my respondents) is also appropriate (NELM) because few people are isolated personalities who take the decision in a social vacuum. I could not consider any isolated structural factors to describe the reasons behind my respondent's movement because the individual actor creates a discrete and unique cause to migrate in Sikkim's labour force. So, it has become essential to consider the various levels of migration where this micro-study represents a microscopic view of structural macro factors. Pull factors (Dual-Labour Market theory), economic transformation (Marxist and neo-Marxist view), economic development (NELM, World Systems theory), great transformation (neoliberalisation) - all influence the migrant's decision making process. Hence, migration decision should not be considered cross-sectionally, because this is similar to the beads of a necklace where all reasons are interconnected to each other, however having their individual/own space.

So, to answer the question on why do people migrate, it has been mentioned and established that how most of mentioned theories can be linked and that they should best be treated in a complementary fashion. The different actors are not isolated but often affect one another at one point of time (through social capital) and over time (through cumulative causation). It is therefore important to consider the different levels (meso, micro and other) of migration. This research has studied two tiny towns in East district of Sikkim state that similar on surface as well as in economic activities as their evolution being a town was in same time (2010). Nevertheless, the motivation behind migration of these two towns and amongst different groups of migrants seem to diverge, because it is more valuable to consider migration theories in conjunction. Moreover, all theories are not applicable to all spatial circumstances. This research investigated two new born towns that are similar on the surface. They are in transition from a central to market economy and a bordering towns. Nevertheless, the motivations behind migration in these two towns and amongst different groups in terms of occupation, sex, level of poverty and bondage etc. seems to diverge. Therefore, it is impossible and undesirable to give a general answer to why people migrate and it is utmost importance to consider the specific migration motives in different areas or amongst distinct groups of migrants.

The great dogma of neoliberalism creates four superimposing trends which are coalesced together in the world economy - globalisation, free market, formal and informal dichotomy and migration. These are strongly linked with the restructuring process of economics as a tool of government, roll

back process of the emergence of business schools as the centers of political and social reproduction (Samers, 2010:180-238) as well as promoting an array of rural development opportunities (rural tourism). Sikkim as a state of North Eastern Region (NER) has been prioritised for different investments, especially for service and infrastructure development. Investment in urban or peri-urban infrastructural sectors are ubiquitously conceptualised in a geographical process, a form of governmentality, a political project of institutional change, a development policy paradigm and an economic ideology - seeking to promote 'free' trade and informal sector by a greater extent of market deregulation (Breman, 2013:139). Consequently, the Government of India requested Asian Development Bank to assist in the development in North Eastern Regions. NERUDP (North Eastern Region Urban Development Programme) is the prevalent result of this collaboration. Focusing on the existing political economic circumstances - Sikkimese dichotomy, JNNURM (Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission), pluralism and societal influences, the introduction of FDI (Foreign Direct Investment) is imperative to address an individual agency to play an important role in (re)producing, circulating and facilitating neoliberalism. Sikkim's economy clings to privatisation of tourism, health, education, transportation, construction, the opening of FDI business through eliminating trade barriers which determined the state as a quasi-form of neoliberal state. All these processes are opening the possibilities of various 'low-road' occupations and blue collar jobs in Sikkim's economy. The seeds of episodic movement of labourers from adjacent plain areas have bloomed due to enormous development and transformation processes in Rangpo and Singtam town. The rapid and steady rate of migration serves and acts as long term contributing factor to the ubiquitous phenomenon of urban labourers. It is also a result of rapid growth of ancillary industries in Rangpo and commercial development in Singtam as a by-product of various developmental (infrastructural) projects. I have observed that migration and job opportunities are inseparably intertwined and also supposed to be the symptoms vis-à-vis a factor contributing to the international and internal labour migration. This paradox of migration facilitates the pattern of increasing the urban informal sector in interstitial spaces in Sikkim. Therefore, it has become undesirable and difficult to consider the specific migration motives among various distinct groups of labour migrants.

The second section of this dissertation is purely based on an empirical and descriptive study. This part is intended to explore the changing fabric of migrant's socio-economic status after taking the decision of migration in Rangpo and Singtam town. The new-age of transformation has encouraged

this research to give emphasis on migrant's socio-economic conditions and also get into the facts of their livelihood conditions in the host areas. Different demographic, socio-economic parameters along with statistical and cartographic applications helped to determine the reality of migration-development discourse. Sikkim's informal migrant labourers are overwhelmingly precariat (French Sociologists, 1980) in nature since competitive market economy creates global precariat group of people and Sikkim is not beyond this. It has become an urgent need to address the rising context of precarious work in this 'flexible' labour market and also subsequently the urge to imply the overarching objective – moving towards decent work from precarious work – as a part of the present political-economic environment. Sikkim is experiencing multiple episodic visits of individual migrants (excluding construction labourers) which indicate adequate opportunities for employment in the informal sector of Rangpo and Singtam town, though the propensity of the informal job market has to accept the neo-classical economic fact that structural reform of the labour market (flexibility) ensures systematic employment insecurity. In the present work, the respondents are influenced by the demand-supply nexus. As De Hass (2010: 227-264) observes, the inter-link between development and migration is embedded in the context of economics, society and politics and cannot predict the effectiveness in terms of negative or positive sense. In Sikkim, labour migration is destined to maximise basic amenities and minimise negative impacts with a common objective of fostering labourer's daily life in the native place. Labourers are shifted from low-productive, labour-surplus and low-waged source regions to high-productivity, labour-scarce and high-wage destination. This research has considered the migrants' demographic structure, individual changes in terms of livelihood options, social status in the host areas and to what extent the migration process helped to provide a better life. It has been found that the socio-economic condition of the migrant labourers is similar in Rangpo and Singtam and significant positive economic development has been observed in both the towns.

Many theorists designate remittance as a major solution for various material and social complications in poor source areas. Migrant labourers from the adjacent plain areas have also adopted the means of remitting money to solve different livelihood problems in their native places. In this research there is a positive correlation between the income and amount of remittance among the respondents. It is difficult to ascertain the motivations to remit because these motivations are extremely dynamic in nature. This research has explored the motivations and mode of remittances by reviewing existing works of literature specifically considering the case of Rangpo and Singtam.

However, the current methodology to determine the motives to remit does not lead to a meaningful and strong result. It requires farther investigation.

In India participation rate of women in the informal sector is more but contrastingly in case of informal self-employed own-account worker¹⁵ the women's participation is very less. In this research, most of the respondents are self-employed own-account workers. There are large gender differentials in seasonal/temporary/circular migration rate between North Indian states and South Indian states due to the difference in the status of women. Normally, North Indian states' migrants leave behind their entire family members at their native place. In this research this disparity has been strongly noticed which is reflected on the sex composition of the respondents (absence of plains women migrant labourers) in both the towns. The obvious reason to remit is to provide succor or better livelihood status to the family members in native areas. It is not essential that migration will promote a better life, but in this empirical research, there is a positive association between income and remittance.

India is experiencing steady growth in informal employment. Nevertheless, an important part is to identify the work conditions of this employment. This thesis argues on different parameters related to decent work perceptions. Here, the work environment has been analysed for a particular occupation sector – namely the informal sector in Sikkim. There are different sets of constitutional rules and regulations to manage migration in Sikkim and this makes Sikkim a unique case – unparalleled compared to other states of Indian Union barring a few exceptions of some North East Indian states – for reviewing the concerns of migrant informal labourers. National citizens are free to migrate in Sikkim but citizens of Nepal and Bhutan need to register them and should possess the permission letter while entering Sikkim. Like other urban and peri-urban centres, Rangpo and Singtam have welcomed migrants. My study shows that maximum flow of informal labourers is from neighbouring states of West Bengal and Bihar – they flock in, often in slums, in small rented rooms, at workplace etc., to become a part of Sikkim's informal labour force. Migration in Rangpo and Singtam has boomed in recent years and seemingly negligent enforcement of migration control attracted people from outside Sikkim. Here migrants are not 'of' Sikkimese space rather being 'in' Sikkimese space. To identify work environment in Sikkim's informal sector, this research has taken

¹⁵ Self-employed own account worker: According to ILO Resolutions Concerning International Classification of Status in Employment Adopted by the 15th International Conference of Labour Statisticians, January 1993, para. 10. Own-account workers are those workers who hold self-employment jobs and do not engage 'employees' on a continuous basis.

a few indicators like minimum wage, job security, social security, working hours etc. The outcome of this analysis brings about the real space and situation of informal labourers in Sikkim and gives a microscopic view of migrant labourers' conditions.

The field survey and empirical data confirm that most of the migrants (excluding hotel workers) avail the standard minimum wage for informal occupation, while regular monthly or weekly salaries are obtained by the workers in manufacturing and food service activity – viz. tailoring and hotel work. Daily wage is highest in case of construction workers. There are other modes of payment for other activities, such as porters. Sikkim is providing the fundamental need of economic migrants by reinforcing revised minimum wage to unskilled, semi-skilled and skilled workers even in the informal sector. It transpires that Sikkim is neither promoting decent migration agenda in a true sense, nor demonstrating the new formula of neo-liberal economic format because low-skilled, semi-skilled migrant labourers are always accepted in terms of their labour power, but their social entitlements are strongly limited. Due to these reasons migrants are not entitled to claim or enjoy any other security options introduced by the state. In reality it has been observed that migrant informal labourers are accepted as a commodity (existing literature evidently separated labour market from other markets). Social security is a dynamic subject. There are various social security measures (PF/Pension, Gratuity etc.) which play an important role to secure worker's future wellbeing. This research unfolds the fact that migrant informal labourers are not allowed to avail the state's labour security options. The state is not taking any responsibilities for the migrant informal workers in terms of job security, protection facilities at the work place and other kinds of social securities. The presence of unions in informal sector could promote successful negotiations in the labour market but in Sikkim, the non-Sikkimese people are neither entitled to be a member of any existing labour union, nor eligible to form any labour union. Migrant workers' collective rights have been totally ignored and controlled by the state of Sikkim.

Dynamics of globalisation creates various economic arguments (poverty reduction, capital investment, labour reform etc.) related to labour wellbeing and policy implementation. On the other hand, in contemporary economic political experiments - promoted by policymakers between bureaucracy and people - will not be successful without considering the wellbeing of labour migrants. But in reality, this perception has become an irony/fallacy in the flexible economic world. Sikkim is enforcing domestic labour legislation only for Sikkimese people, but non-Sikkimese labourers are denied the existing labour legislation benefits. Unfortunately, there are no laws which

can cover the base of the social security system for the whole informal sector. The Unorganised Sector Workers (Employment and Welfare) Bill, 2003 has been enacted to create one-umbrella legislation for the welfare of informal labourers in India. This Bill is only the extended version of all existing Bills which can never be implemented in reality even under the labour reform protocol. The wellbeing concerns of informal labour have been depleted and Sikkim is not beyond the fact. The respondents of this research are greatly affected by this system. This research includes self-employed informal workers along with wage-based and casual worker, and only the self-employed people remain excluded from the purview of the Minimum Wage Act, 1948. So, the lives of the migrant labourers in Sikkim do not meet the decent work parameters.

Common marketisation process, move towards the neo-liberal state form free trade, harmony of political interest, etc. have become subsequent development blocks in Sikkim's economy which encourage neo-liberalisation, informalisation and bottom up labour market between Sikkimese and migrant informal (non-Sikkimese) people. Policy top-down dichotomy and rising inequality for the same group of people (labourers) have also been important features (Special Job Reservation for Sikkimese – The Telegraph, 08.03.2008). All these situations have created an individual zone or space for migrant informal labourers. Sikkim, like other Indian states with growing economics, has some sort of leniencies in regulating migrants to facilitate the mobility of informal labourers into their socio-economic paradigm. Though these economic migrants have a tag of non-Sikkimese people, most of them are citizens of India. The respondents in this study are economic migrants and not necessarily seek the permanent settlement. It may be mentioned that there is an absence of right to settle down in Sikkim territory as 'Sikkimese' and logistically they are not able to be a part of special citizenship called 'Sikkimese' (Sikkim Subject, COI and Residential Certificate).

Coming to the concluding remarks, first and foremost, the demographic structure of a potential labour migrant's family and needs influence a person to make the decision to migrate. There is always some invisible force which pushes people to leave the native place for better livelihood option. In this study, maximum respondents are individual migrants and so, the strength of family ties and social networks become a strong inspiration for migration decision.

The second major fact is, there are significant differences between pre and post-migration socio-economic status among the respondents. Per capita income has increased as an effect of migration and a larger fraction of respondents declare that the decision to migrate in Sikkim has given a

positive financial return in terms of remittance. This research highlights that short term, seasonal/circular migrants have a modest expectation and maximum retention strategy proves that migration is a practice for future investment.

There is no doubt that in Sikkim there is an existing as well as growing divide between economy, policy and form of common citizenship (Indian) which has impacts on the wellbeing process of migrant informal labourers in Sikkim. It is interesting to note that migration has been a highly politicised issue in Sikkim and due to Sikkim's special status in relation to the Union of India (Art. 371 F) many spheres of Sikkim's socio-economic opportunities are managed to keep in view the concerns of the insiders' vis-à-vis the outsiders. Populist-style politics is also popular in this state. Other unavoidable causes are also important, but due to unawareness and poor educational background coupled with their fragmented nature of work participation and mobility, the informal sector labourers fail to secure the advantages of whatever little statutory measures are there at native or host place. The situation is such that the working class population employed in the urban informal sector in Sikkim is susceptible to be more vulnerable if they are outsiders (i.e. non-Sikkimese unregistered informal labourers) and are not in possession of the administrative or official shields like labour union, and also not able to enjoy any benefit promoted by Sikkim Labour Protection Act 2005. This condition of migrant labourers' lives has challenged migrant integration and assimilation context with the host's social-cultural and modernist political systems. There are clear cut dichotomies of 'destination/host' and 'native/origin' which leads migrants towards second social living. Furthermore, in contemporary time maximum migrants are practicing circular migration, even in Sikkim. This study has observed that the nature of precarity controls the simultaneous commitment to host society. This research also noticed that migrants are welcome to sell their labour power in Sikkim's informal economy but excluded from civil, cultural and political society. Therefore, migrant labourers are more likely to adjust with the host areas rather than assimilate/adapt in the new society.

This research analyses the reasons for migration and livelihood situations of informal labourers, exclusively focusing on individual migrants living in the host areas. The term 'informal labour' is carrying its own unique characteristics in case of every economic practice. Labour migration in the microcosm of geopolitical scenario in Sikkim's state-of-affairs is to be managed humanely as a situation and not to be dealt with as a crisis or in other words a problem to solve. Sikkim's labour policy as an important argument over how to handle serial migration rattles the state. The state

policy should be accommodating, if not encouraging, for the dignified and safe stay in the destination towns for the migrant labourers.

On the other hand, overall space of the migrant labourers is still under the threat, especially in an informal economy. Construction of informal labour space starts from poverty, negotiations and sometimes through conflict. This study examines all possible processes which create important discourses on the economic and social space of informal migrant labourers at the phase of post-capitalist time. In the epoch of globalisation if the migrants are not considering their own rights then they may exist in their economic space but social space will become untouchable for them because:

“It isn’t that they can’t see the solution. It is that they can’t see the problem.”

G.K. Chesterton (Cohen & Cohen. 1975)

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