
Panchayati Raj System to tackle rural-urban migration in Sunderban, Wet Bengal: An empirical study to know the present and future under local governance

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Abstract

In India, the government is continuously working towards an improved nation since independence. Panchayati Raj system is one of those since 1959 the federal nation got a taste of rural local governance through participatory decision making. Especially with the 73rd Amendment (1992) of Indian Constitution, the rural people are ensured that there is an authority to improve their life and locality. The rural development ministry is also using the three tiers of Panchayat to reach to the villagers for implementing different schemes and programs. If the Indian Sunderban is considered as a rural demographic set-up then it is seen that the people are migration prone because of the resource scarcity & in this case they select urban localities to migrate. And the migration caused several tragedies because the persons are easily be cheated, health hazards may occur, women and elderly persons may be in trap during absence of their guardians. In this connection this research will seek how much progress has happened in the lives of the residents through the Panchayat system and what more facilities can be made for them. It is an empirical research with a mixed type of data analysis.

Keywords: *Government, Panchayati Raj, Amendment of Indian Constitution, Sunderban*

Introduction

The demography of Sunderban is completely rural so rural development of West Bengal state must touch this locality. The objective of rural development is to provide better prospects of life and facilitate economic prosperity in an aspect of castelessness which will give everyone the chance to be equally developed. In this case Panchayati Raj institution can act as the driving force (Mohanty, 2014).

As a public policy the government of West Bengal has accepted the role of Panchayati Raj for rural development since the very period it was initiated by the government of India. In a research publication of Sarin and Baginska, 2010 it was postulated that India possess at an around twenty-three per cent area under forest and 200 million people were depending on the forest areas for their livelihood which can best be realized under this locality. In recent years the effect of dispossession and relocation along with the touch of education is compelling the community to think about other possible ways to get a standardized life style and in this background AILA, the super cyclone of 2009 has increased the soil salinity as

per different theoretical and practical analysis which has declined the soil capacity for agricultural production.

It is not all but the climatic hazards have made the situation more badly; the people of Sunderban are losing their land under the rise of water level which has taken even their lands in absence of proper 'bandh'. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) on 2007 warns that the climatic variability causes reduction of agricultural production which has become a great reason behind the seasonal, temporary or permanent migration by influencing the people for taking the avenues through which they can at least survive.

Local institution from village level to district level is good public governance because the residents under the governed area may approach to the authorities for mitigate their problems for preventive and protective measures. The residents of Sunderban are the primary stakeholders of the rural welfare initiatives of South 24 Parganas and North 24 Parganas districts of West Bengal, India so they are the most approachable to know how much satisfaction the people are getting under Panchayati Raj system. The empirical study has got to know that the local panchayats are providing various facilities to them including item distribution under SGSY and income generation facilities under MGNREGA. In the days of AILA, the panchayats contacted and requested for help. Though the local residents were not much happy to express about the system which was very same to a previous study by Mondal et. Al. (2016) and

they were very sound to inform that the panchayats are not giving enough opportunity to be trained, lazy in distribution of agricultural necessities, panchayats are not initiating any awareness camp in recent period and the panchayats are not even good to warn before calamities. A biased view over all was understood by the researcher with their answers so in this research Participatory Rural Appraisal also was initiated by him.

The aim of this paper is to examine the current situation of Sunderban economy and the overall migration scenario in which it will also be seen if there is any significant help has been provided by the local governance system under the banner of Panchayati Raj. Sunderban was selected for this study because the landscape is a fragile and vulnerable one in South Asia and the habitants are very migration prone according to some previous studies as well. This will also include volume of migration, loss of assets of migrant families, cost of migration, present living standards of the migrant families, adaptation strategies with a focus on panchayati system. Lastly it will be a dimension of the study to discuss some further strategic implementation of different rural development plans towards a good health of living.

Review of Literature

There was 31.4 crore migrants according to the census 2001 and as per census 2001 it can also be seen that in 1991-2001, about 5.3 crore persons migrated from one village to another while the number of migrants from villages to towns was

about 2.1 crore. The percentage of urban population in India which was only 17% of the total population in 1951 is expected to jump to around 42.5% of the total population by 2025, all this will happen because large numbers of people will leave rural areas for urban areas in search of better opportunities (ShahinRazi, 2014). Rural migration takes place under two compelling circumstances which can be termed as 'growth pull' (demand pull) or 'crowding out (supply push)' effects (Singh et al., 2011). The 'growth pull' effects occur due to economic prosperity of a particular place and 'crowding out' effects happen in an economy where a labour surplus persists.

In India, still a large section of people (near about 70%) are habitant of different villages who can be willing to be in city as it is still not possible to create or provide all the facilities in rural areas which are easily accessible in cities especially in the major ones as Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Mangalore, Hyderabad or else alike so some people will always tend to show the migration proneness. It can also be seen that the migration is done by not the poorest of the poor as it needs capital (Rogally et al., 2003) or the marginalised social groups as they hardly posses any knowledge about the possible opportunities in another location (Skeldon, 2003) and the facts can be evidenced by the migration rate in rural areas was lowest among the scheduled tribes (STs) nearly 24% (NSSO, 64th round, 2007-08).

It is a very general idea that in absence of proper employment opportunities or pseudo unemployment a labour takes effort to trace out a

job in another location with which he/she previously was unaware or unrelated though there is some major theoretical ground to explain the nature of labour migration- first, 'the Dual economy model' that sees labour mobility as a voluntary and rational choice made against economic opportunities (Mosse et al., 2002); second, the Marxist interpretation expounding which indicates the class exploitation (of migrants by dominant classes) (de Haan and Rogaly, 2002) and third one is the 'Neo-Malthusian' variant using pluralistic explanations such as ecological refugee, declining agricultural opportunities, debt cycle, demographic pressure, depletion of natural resources (Deshingkar, 2008). But the main and simplest reason behind any migration is the remittance earning to help own family but in long run the remittance earned man can make some positive as development of local or regional level and negative impacts as labour loss in the sending areas and its disruptive impact on the local economy (Turkhade, 2012). And a rural-urban migration depends according to three theoretical basis, as-1) Lewis Dual Sector Model, which states that migration occurs between an industrial and an agricultural sector; 2) Family/Household Migration Model, which presents rural-urban migration as a family based migration where the head of the household decides to migrate to the city based on whether or not the over-all family income will be higher; 3) The Todaro Model which provides a theoretical argument that migration is an economical decision where the individual or the household decides to move if

there is a higher expected income in the urban areas (McCatty, 2004).

Rural-urban migration is the commonest form of all the migrations all across the globe compelling under- the ‘growth pull’ and ‘crowding out’ effects. In case of ‘growth pull’ the changed location will possess a certain level of higher growth and prosperity which is directly related to the fact of wage differentials and ‘crowding out’ occurs if in the originated place the saturation of labour supply happens without having sufficient local opportunities (Deshingkar, 2004). Gender as a social construction that organizes relations between males and females can greatly differentiate the causes, processes and impacts of migration between the two sexes when there are almost 50% of the 190 million or so migrants over the globe to contribute major portion of \$ 160 billion remittance in among the developing countries in 2004 (World Bank). In this scenario, gender differentiated population movements deserve particular attention because they act like a mirror for the way in which gender divisions of labour are incorporated into spatially uneven process of economic development (Nicola Piper, 2005).

In case of India, nearly 60% of urban male migrants and 59% of urban female migrants had migrated from rural areas and 61% of the urban female migrants along with 91% rural female migrants due to marriage have migrated whereas the counter part of the gender has migrated for employment related reasons in per cent age which is understood from the fact that is 56% of urban

male migrants and 29% of rural male migrants are migrated for employment (NSSO 64th round, 2007-08). While Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Bihar, Odisha, Rajasthan, West Bengal, Jharkhand, with laggard economies and surplus labour are the primary suppliers of labour; Maharashtra, Gujarat, Haryana, Punjab and Tamil Nadu known for their flourishing economies attract large numbers of migrant workers (Kalkoti, 2014). Radical changes in the institutional set up and occupational pattern got about by the industrial revolution was the starting point of several streams of migration of the people. In the modern period large number of people use to flock from neighbouring villages of Bihar to the growing towns of Assam and West Bengal where commercial and agro-based industries have absorbed unskilled rural labourers (Amarendra, 2014). Though from the NSSO sample survey of 2007-08, the migrants preferred to stay in own state due to various reasons as 72% of migrant households in urban areas and 78% in rural areas have migrated within the same state.

In present day scenario, the Indo-gangetic plain and the deltaic region show a high rate of migration due to loss in agricultural production and high opportunity of employment in different non-agricultural services in urban localities. In case of rural-urban migration males are going to the urban areas for wage employment or to be employed as daily labour as the jobs need more physical strength and they perceive that women are not enough able to get jobs with them in township. In this case, the women consists the workforce for food procurement in household and

for this situation they sometimes in need to be on the agricultural field for food or agricultural production- a phenomenon termed as feminization of agriculture (Guery, 1995).

Sundarban is a part of West Bengal in the districts of South 24 Pargans and North 24 Parganas, situated near of Kolkata metropolitan with remarkable challenged and fragile eco-system which is hindering the agricultural production where non-agricultural sector is also very limited to make hindrance in economic wellbeing of this region. Ecological diversity in Sundarban is at the threshold of decline. The fragile land here is being swallowed every day by gradual sea level rise, coastal erosion and tropical cyclones; sea level rise due to thermal activity creates problem in the anthropogenic life and the land is used up faster than replenished (Ananya Roy, 2010). Especially after the AILA in 2009, all the lands when flooded under the saline water which add extra burden by making more vulnerable groups who living below poverty line and dependent on agriculture (Bera, 2013). In this perspective rural-urban migration is very much relevant in the socio-economic backdrop as they perceive that in urban areas they will be absorbed in any type of jobs or daily wage earning process as in the developing countries, migration is an inevitable component on the development process.

The migration especially which occurs in Sundarban is caused by low rate of income generation possibility from agriculture and from engaged in collection of forest or aqua products. There the cultivation of crops, mainly paddy, is

mostly for self consumption and this applies even for vegetables. The remoteness of island blocks and absence of any urban market within a viable distance (Human Development Report, 2009) make migration as an interlinking force in economic perspective of Sundarban. According to Sujaya (2006) 'casualisation' of work, unprofitable crop production and distress migration of men make 'feminization of agriculture' possible. And, like many other developing countries Indian Sundarban shows the 'gender' engaging in agricultural fields as the male can hardly take any part in agriculture for their long time stay in urban areas which are far away from the remote countryside so it is taken feminization of agriculture (a term by Guery, 1995) granted to describe the position of women relating to agricultural works. There is a study by Sujata Sen (2012) that says if income is controlled by women chances are higher that it will be spend in the maintenance of the household in comparison to income controlled by men so the households are now ready to send the women members for the agriculture. After the year of 1991 the liberalization of economy makes the country as open as well as market driven economy so rural-urban migration has now become one of the crucial issues for socio-economic progress. In this perspective the mangrove islands in Sundarban region is persisting as migration prone zone in the state of West Bengal due to its multiple vulnerabilities. According to its position a multi-dimensional impact on the labour force is there as it is replacing the employment location of rural people who are guessing that in urban

location they will be preferred to be employed with a good earning and the youth males are coming to the city areas by leaving their households and family members in the villages behind which in opposite is making a labour gap for the agricultural market in this situation ‘feminization of agriculture’ is happening rapidly.

Gandhiji aptly commented on 1946 that the independence must begin at the bottom and every village ought to be a Republic or Panchayat having powers. To gain a livelihood is certainly an activity which in absence of proper facilities or resources may be seen as a burden. It makes people migration prone so the liberty from this burden can be assured by the Panchayati Raj as it ensures local good governance for governmental project implementation to facilitate rural people to be motivated for earning by keeping themselves in own home.

Though there are many things which have made migration a benefit but it has some points of negative social impacts as well which may trigger the evils of society and make the community mostly vulnerable. The present study has examined the factors influencing labour migration from rural to urban, its impact on family welfare to explore the situation and impact of this changing gender role in community level to find out more possible ways to understand the gender aspect in the labour force due to the out migration

and then the points are merged with panchyati raj because the rural administration is totally depending on this local authority which is providing livelihood securities to local area development initiatives.

Objectives

It defines the different needs of writing a research work after data collection and analysis. It states where the study is directed and for what reason a trivial job of research was undertaken.

Broad Objectives

Today’s developmental policies and governance always try to relate the people with the designated schemes and approaches of governmental authorities otherwise no sustainable development of man being is ever possible. For doing the research it was thought that a migration is multi-faceted and multi-dimensional and in a clear view it has some positive effects in the sea of evil affects. A Panchayat is a governing body to work for the people and with the people so it can easily motivate the people for taking a good way for being developed. Sunderban is an acclaimed vulnerable place therefore the people have to migrate so Panchayat’s effect can be discussed in consideration this locality.

Specific Objectives

- A. To know the reasons and causes behind rural-urban migration in Sunderban.

- B. To get some view about the possible true impacts of migration.
- C. To get an understanding of the standing situation of the migrant family in respectively who are non-migrant.
- D. To be familiar with the status of local Panchayats as governing authority to provide governance to the rural inhabitants.
- E. To be aware if the Panchayats are taking any initiative those are practical as well as feasible to mitigate the need & impact of migration in the locality.

Methodology

Locale of the research

Sunderban is one of the most discussed research locality on Human Welfare. It is basically a delta just in the verge of river Ganga and very near to Bay of Bengal, a much exemplified delta region and full of silt and sand. It consists around 6800



square kilometre to place 102 islands among them only 54 are with human residence. And these 54 islands are distributed among 19

community development blocks (13 under South 24 Parganas and 6 in North 24 Parganas districts).

Extremely poor communication makes it hard to reach so they have some specific cultural difference with the nearest city, Kolkata. So Panchayats have some basic jobs like-employment generation, social conflict mitigation, poverty reduction, embankments maintenance and help in cultural functions with Gram Sabha.

The field research randomly selected three community development blocks, which are-Basanti (Chunakhali gram Panchayat), Gosaba (Gosaba Bazar area) and Namkhana (Mousuni gram Panchayat). Most of the blocks of those 19 are migration prone in absence of easy access to financial resources. According to the study of Das et al. (2013) it is seen that the community rear various livestock among which Goat, Pig and Cow can be prominently seen but they cannot provide good nourishment with the straw after cutting the agricultural crops therefore it can be understood that this also does not provide much help for income generation.

Total 75 sample households were taken for research and they were consisting purposively the migrant.

Field Study

Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) is a social science technique, very useful for cultural or anthropological researches. In this study this approach was undertaken for making some case study based data collection through listing, topical interview, oral trend and ranking methods. In this

way it was a beneficial way to know the thinking of the rural residents themselves.

Case Study method

Case Study method is an approachable way to collection of data of a social unit which may be an individual, a family, a group, a section or over all a society (Young, 2000). Yin, 1993 has described this method as an realistic one which can retain the meaningful life events. It is more useful for qualitative data collection rather quantative so it can make a sense with the mind-set of the people on which a research is made. A case study in participatory mode with the principles of PRA is called a Participatory Case Study (Mukherjee, 1993).

Listing

With a listing made by the primary stakeholders of a research work always depict with their remembrance of previously happened activities to highlight a plethora of items or criteria (Kumar, 2002).

Topical interview

An interview is an in-depth study of an anthropological phenomenon. It should possess an objective to generate focused information on a pertinent topic at a greater length (Mukherjee, 2002).

Oral trend

It is a way for comparison with the principles of Participatory Appraisal. In this case a group of fixed questions are set to ask towards different

section by dividing under the criteria of age or gender.

Rankings

The above mentioned ways are enriched if they can get a touch of ranking procedure through which the people can make to standardised of some criteria or items or issues. It clearly indicates what the important things to the persons are and similarly which are not. It also take care to make an understanding with possible explanations (Mukherjee, 1993).

Result discussion

Not all but some common phenomena make a locality with some possible characteristics and based on these a research makes it complete. Here in this paper the researcher has decided to go on with two hypotheses, which are- migration has no way impacted by Panchyati Raj and another one hypothesis is Panchayati Raj is curbing the need for migration so it has an high impact over migration.

But first of all, the need of migration and extent of it has to be discussed without that not much progress can be made towards this discussion by mixing it with Panchayati Raj. So some noteworthy points are analysed before taking the direction to mixing up migration and Panchayati Raj.

- Age group & Gender identity

Age has a very clear and compact relation with migration because at the time of migration, the migrants must be ready to drudgery at the

migrated place. Here it was seen that maximum number of people in the age group of 18 -35. Below this table is showing this demographic profile.

Though it is very uncommon that the women are migrating by breaking the social stigma but still they are migrating because of education or marriage.

Table 1: Age distribution of Migrants

Age Group	Percentage of Migrants (%)	Gender profile	Migrant Division
18-35	58	Male:Female	15:14
35-45	34	Male:Female	10:7
45-50	6	Male:Female	5:1
More than 50	2	Male:Female	2:0

- Reasons behind migration

Components for migration	Percentage distribution of migrants (%)
Money	63
Livelihood	15
Social networking	20
Others	2

A social happening may happen due to various reasons and at the time of making a profile of migrants, those reasons must be enlisted to take a look to know why the people are migrating especially when migration has to take in a declined status. In the study area the reasons and causes must be seen in light of resource scarcity and income generation. Most prominent ones are tabulated below.

Table 2: Reasons of Migration

- Impact of migration

Migration is an impact of several other social phenomena so its impact is very critical to realise in words of positive or negative. Henceforth the researcher has tried to see the impact under several grounds which were related over all livelihood stability to women empowerment. And in this direction it is very clear facts that an empowerment is not sufficient present it without drudgery but here the research was participatory & qualitative so only per cent age based on the local people’s view is recorded to draw this table.

Table 3: Impact of Migration

Impact components	Yes (% - wise)	No (% - wise)
Income increase	67	33
Savings increase	54	46
Farm requirements are purchased with ease	72	28
Children are more going to school	42	58
Girls are getting hygienic components	35	65
Capability of medicine purchasing & elderly care	63	37
Women are making decisions	52	48
Women are more laborious	55	45
Social respect is increased	34	66

- View about migration

Migration has many impacts; some of them are positive and some of them are vehemently negative but it can be only reduced when a stable and good income source is available in own locality otherwise if need persists then the group of people are compelled to migrated. But based on their experience, they should whether migration is

good or not so here the researcher has collected the information about their purview on migration index. It is simply tabulated here below.

View about migration	Yes	No	Maybe
Migration is compulsory	73	22	5
Migration has more positive effects than negative	65	22	13
Change of the place of migration of last year is needed	40	37	23
Migration is not suitable than village level works	75	17	18

Table 4: View about Migration

- Works possible in absence of migration

Due to several reasons like health degradation, need to stay in home or any other if the migration is not possible then naturally the migrants have to think some other ways to income generation. They are generally not much educated and there is no much scope to gather employment with second sector (manufacturing) and there is obviously no way to go for service sector in Sunderban so they have to depend on primary sector (agriculture) but now-a-days it is not much economical. In this ground some aspects were discussed with them and they set their mind to do some jobs. The below table is made with this information.

Ideas of income generation	Yes (%-wise)	No (%-wise)	Maybe (%-wise)
Garment stitching	34	50	16
Bidi binding	75	10	15
Making of some pottery items	40	17	43
Making of some household items	25	30	55

(like- papad or pickle procurement)			
Supply of forest products to different organisations	46	47	7

Table 5: Possibility of jobs in absence of Migration

- Idea of the villagers about Panchayats

Panchayat is a governing body so it has to be attached with many jobs but some are much discussed and some of them are not. A rural resident is generally not much aware what the benefits they are entitled to but they know what Panchayat is doing in their locality so if a research wants to know the effectiveness of local Panchayats must seek the information to get a view what Panchayat authority is doing in that locality. So some tabulated points were discussed with the villagers to know a better about the transparency, credentialed position of the body and effectiveness in local life.

Components under Panchayat to measure its effectiveness	Yes*(%-wise)	No**(%-wise)
Sanitation	56	44
Good health	42	58
Infrastructure	63	37
Education	54	46
Poverty eradication	78	22
Organising village meetings	49	51
Benefit distribution	67	33
Social security improvisation	65	35
Helping in marketing of village products	76	24
Hearing the rural people's	43	57

voice		
Providing Panchayat help line and providing TathyaMitras	68	32

Table 6: Idea of villagers about Panchayat

*= providing by Panchyats ; **= not providing by Panchayats

- More possible role of Panchayats

It was evaluated that Panchayats are working for the better health but the villagers may seek some more so those points are also to be discussed so the research has asked the requirement or the expectations of the rural habitants and their answers are tabulated here below.

Points were asked	Positive (% -wise)	Negative (% - wise)
Over-all activities to be communicated at Gram Sabha	68	32
Monthly meeting with elected members	70	30
Samity level meeting in presence of village representative	36	64
Timely collection of taxes or revenues	42	58
All the activities should be notified in black & white	65	35
Awareness generation on sanitation & healthy practices	79	21
Control over governmental ration depots	67	33
Prepare and pass welfare schemes at local level	72	28
Gram Pradhan should inspect on resource	55	45

utilization		
Public grievances should get proper attention	69	31

Table 7: More Possible role of Panchayats

- Further role of Panchayat

Men migrate especially for economic benefits if it is not distressed. Therefore Panchayats can work for the villagers to mitigate migration by providing some more avenues for income generation but the programs under Ministry of Rural Development only can facilitate the Panchayats to provide employment facilities of the villagers. There is some specific financial programs to help the Panchyats and most of them are very discussed, like- MGNREGA or SGSY. A study conducted in Anantpur, Andhra Pradesh observed that the scheme brought down the migration levels from about 27 per cent to 7 per cent in the sample villages due to availability of work (Kurukshetra, September 2014). It was a participatory research appraisal so here also the researcher got to know how much the villagers are satisfied with the governmental plans-programs & schemes. Five programs were evaluated by the villagers and the researcher took an attention if they are good enough to decline migration rate in lone run as because the Panchayats are the implementing agency in each case so it will highly show the success of Panchayats. In this research due to some constrictions the idea of villagers were asked for last two years only.

Table 8: Further role of Panchayats to curb Migration

Employment generating programs	If satisfaction level has arisen	If satisfaction level has not arisen
MGNREGA	78	22
SGSY	63	37
Aajeevika	35	65
IWDP	52	48
NSAP	57	43

Conclusion

Migration is inevitable under the several threats of life and livelihood in the Sunderban region. Male out migration is most prominent because there is a gender basis and the community dwellers are thinking that women are not enough capable to go out for migration. Migration is not a phenomenon in itself rather an effect of different pushes and pulls factors. So it is an induced result not a cause to derivate a flock of other happenings. Out Migration is very common to see as an economy based incident rather non-economy based like education or marriage therefore it is easy to conclude with a fact that less income generation is playing a role in this rural-urban migration. Henceforth employment can reduce the likeness to migrate and Panchayat can easily make it by employing the residents in money related activities because of the easy access to local people and resources. The state or country government has designed several methods as well as schemes to take a control over migration. The plans can best be implemented with the help of the local governance authority because the authority is best known about the nerves of the region.

Here in this study it is seen that the people are in a believe that political identities are helping to availing of the governmental helps, Panchayats are not serving properly, Panchayat authorities show a bossing attitude and more income could be generated if the said authorities took proper planning of implementation. The people are reluctant to migrate but they want some more income to keep themselves happy enough and according to them the Panchyat officials can help more in this regard.

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