

Migration and Livelihood in the Context of Recurrent Flooding in Bahraich District of Eastern Uttar Pradesh

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ABSTRACT: People displaced due to disasters do not find clear-cut mechanisms that can protect their rights. Response of the state towards displaced people tend to be ad-hoc in nature and this opens up space for power and politics to negotiate with rights of these Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). In the context of India, recurrent disasters displace lakhs of people every year. In Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal and Orissa almost 10 million people get displaced due to floods every year. Migration is mostly dependent on the search of better alternatives of livelihood and survival. If we talk in the context of disasters, migration has taken place to a very large extent. The present paper discusses the issue of migration in the context of recurrent flooding in the district of Bahraich of Eastern Uttar Pradesh in India. The paper discusses various causes and consequences of migration due to floods and how this has an impact over the idea of sustainable livelihood of people.

INTRODUCTION

Migration and displacement due to disasters are widespread throughout the globe (Drabo and Mousley, 2011). If one wants to understand the difference between migration and displacement then one has to adopt a processual approach towards disasters. Especially in the context of disasters with slow-onset like floods, this approach helps in distinguishing between migration and displacement. As spaces are flooded, people are forced to leave their places of habitation and move to some safer places on embankments and other high-rise places. This is the process of displacement. Displacement in this case can be temporary and it can also be permanent. People might return to their original place of habitation after the water recedes. But it may also happen and it is quite frequent in the case of Bahraich that the entire village land and habitation sites are

wiped out due to flood water and resulting soil erosion. This leads to permanent displacement as people are forced to live on the embankments sine-di. If the question of immediate existence is associated with displacement, then migration is associated with long-term existential issues. Once the sources of livelihoods are damaged, in this case, agricultural lands and livestock, people are forced to move-out in search of new work and means of living this leads to out-migration (Holmes, 2008). Migration can also be voluntary in nature but displacement is always induced either by disasters or developmental activities. People's consent is not involved in displacement for most of the time.

People displaced due to disasters do not find clear-cut mechanisms that can protect their rights. Response of the state towards displaced people tend to be ad-hoc in nature and this opens up space for power and politics to negotiate with rights of these Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). In the context of

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India, recurrent disasters displace lakhs of people every year. In Assam around 40-50 lakh people are displaced yearly due to floods. In Bihar, this statistics reaches around one crore. In Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal and Orissa almost 10 million people get displaced due to floods every year. Even in Gujarat and Rajasthan around 2 lakh people are displaced due to floods every year. Similarly in Bangladesh people are displaced due to river-led erosion besides floods every year (Fernandes, 2013). Displacement due to floods and disasters is a vicious cycle that can be understood from figure 1.



Figure 1: Livelihood-Displacement-Disaster Cycle
Source: Fernandes, 2013

“It is because of this that present-day floods are more destructive than those of the past. People have no resources to fall back upon when they return to their homes and cannot begin life anew (Fernandes, 2013).”

Migration is mostly dependent on the search of better alternatives of livelihood and survival. In the history of the world we have seen how different groups have migrated. Aryans entered in the Indian subcontinent; similarly other races came in search of good source of livelihood and stayed here forever. In his article Myron Weiner wrote- *“The earliest known population flows consisted of the Aryans, a pastoral people who migrating from Iran through Afghanistan to north-west India starting around 1500_{BC} and eventually displaced the local Indus valley culture”*

(Weiner, 2012). It is observable that as Aryans migrated to India they displaced people and affected their social and economic structures.

Migration is a type of movement in which latent internal social change is involved. In migration there is intention of settlement on temporarily or permanent basis in a new location. It may be by the individual or a group of people. Disaster, political unrest and economic unrests cause migration; here it is notable that in this situation livelihood damage forms a major factor in migration. Livelihood is a very inclusive concept, it is not merely based on economic activities, but social and cultural aspects are the main dimension of livelihood. Livelihood emerges in a very distinct situation for a distinct community. Livelihood must be seen in the frame of ‘Cultural Relativism’. Opposing the conventional definition of livelihood (means of securing the basic necessities food, water, shelter and clothing of life) in 1991 Robert Chambers and Gordon Conway proposed a very humanistic and environmentalist definition of livelihood- *“A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (including both material and social resources) and activities required for a means of living. A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks and maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets both now and in the future, while not undermining the natural resource base”* (Chambers and Conway, 1991)

If we talk in the context of disasters, migration has taken place to a very large extent. Flood, cyclone, tsunami, fire damage the material and nonmaterial assets and particularly rural and tribal people are compelled to go to another places. Some developmental plan also damaged the rural livelihood in recent years such as establishment of factories and corporate greed for natural resources jeopardized the rural and tribal subsistence economy.

“We can live without power, but we can’t live without our land”, this is the slogan of the movement that is spreading in north east to oppose the making of a new dam Tipaimukh over Barak river in Manipur. “The indigenous Hmar tribe has many sites of great spiritual and religious significance located on its course and in small islands in the river. The river is not merely a lifeline, but is integral to their cultural history and sense of selfhood”. (Arora and Kipgen,

2012) Absences of any participatory mechanism in the implementation of this project will severely influence their livelihood and employment prospectes. Pauperization will make them migrate from their paternal place. In 2008, during an interview, a villager of Tipaimukh elaborated- “We have learned to live with the water and forests. We have maintained some of our traditions and customs, but we have survived because we have adapted. For the Hmar people, the land is part of us. We are sustained by what it provides. We can say that we are the land”(Arora and Kipgen, 2012).

Here question is why migration and displacement occur? After seeing in the light of these examples, there is no any contentious issue regarding the correlation between migration and livelihood.

MIGRATION AND DISASTER

Disaster makes a vulnerable situation and this feeling of vulnerability leads to migration among the community.

Consequences of Disaster

- a. The destruction of assets- human, material, physical, social, and financial.
- b. The loss of employment whether temporary or permanent.
- c. Reduction of income flow.

Sometimes disaster exterminates the whole social and economic structure of the community. As we know in the history of India that a great Indus Valley Civilization collapsed due to flood and other natural disasters. Disaster breaks the structure of society and changes the culture and way of life (Reddy, 2013). At the time of broken kinship, family, and livelihood they move towards the cities or other villages. The biggest migration of people in the history of the world was the partition between India and Pakistan, in that an estimated six to seven million Muslims moved from India to Pakistan and nearly eight million Hindus and Sikhs escaped from Pakistan to India (Das, 2012). This was the time of political unrest. Here the rationale behind giving the example is that it is pertinent to observe that how a community becomes subaltern community as before the partition it was in the centre of politics and power. In terms of Myron Weiner –

”Urdu speaking Muslims from Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Gujarat, were initially a powerful political force, forming the core leadership in the national government and in the governing Muslim League as the founders of the new state. Subsequently the mohajirs lost their national political power and were reduced in status to an ethnic minority in the province of Sind... .” (Weiner, 2012). Disaster particularly in rural areas leads to migration, since the British era villages have become the pawn of Chess. The famine of the time exterminated lacks of wretched peoples, they were dead or stranded to migrate in the country and today also this mishap has been repeated in different parts of India.

Natural resources play a central role in rural economy in many regions of the globe and it is to be noted that disasters damage natural ecosystem therefore people are forced to migrate. 2004 was the year that witnessed a devastating Tsunami in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Tsunami destroyed some of the parts of an island completely, and at least 10000 houses were estimated totally collapsed. Lacks of people were displaced from their birth place. 149 relief camps were started for the displaced and 38000 were accommodated but it was not sufficient in that terrible situation (Reddy, 2013). Recently occurred flood in Utrakhand and Hudhud cyclone in Odisha, Andhra Pradesh and some other parts of India are the examples by which the effects on livelihood and society can be seen. This vulnerability bends people for migration. The importance of MGNREGA regarding giving employment to people is not running according to its aim. Keeping this in mind Krishnmurty (2006) emphasizes on MGNREGA in the context of disaster. MGNREGA emerged as a poverty elevation and rural employment scheme, but Krishnmurty (2006) argued that it can play a crucial role to mitigate the crisis and disaster impacts. It focuses attention on rapid response mechanisms which need to be strengthened within the MGNREGA. He suggested making an emergency fund under the MGNREGA program, and to amend the law to ameliorate the sufferings of people, those who are affected by disaster. He gave his experience of visiting Tamil Nadu villages during the tsunami of 2004. According to him any new plan and policy to mitigate the disaster is less effective than a pre exist program, saying so he indicated about

the MGNREGA. It is important not only to mitigate the impacts of disaster but also curb the migration. Migration and disaster is interlinked with each other.

MIGRATION DUE TO FLOODS IN BAHRAICH

District Bahraich is situated in North eastern part of Devipatan Division. It is situated between the 28.24 & 27.4 latitude & 81.65 to 81.3 eastern longitude (Vikas Pustika, 2004-05. Bahraich). District Barabanki and Sitapur are in south, Lakhimpurkhiri in west and Gonda and Shrawasti are in eastern side of the district Bahraich. Northern part of the district is Tarai region which is covered by the dense natural resources. Ghaghra and Saryu are the major rivers of the district. Bahraich shares a national boundary with Nepal

therefore this region has very dense forests with wild animals and several rivers that make it rich in natural resources.

Due to its unique geographical location, closeness to hills and excessive rains, this district is flooded every year. According to the people of Bahraich, the history of flood is as old as the civilization, but they emphasize that there is a difference in intensity of floods each year and therefore in the resulting devastations. Within two decades there is a huge migration in this area. People went away from their villages and this process is continuing till date. Places and villages that were known for dense population are now sparsely populated and abandoned. The table 1 gives an idea of the abandoned villages in Bahraich.

TABLE 1
Abandoned villages in Bahraich

Development Blocks	Census 2001		Census 2011		Villages converted to Urban areas	
	No. of populated villaged	No. of abandoned villages	No. of Populated villages	No. of abandoned villages	2001	2011
Mihin-purva	110	5	110	5	0	0
Nawabganj	89	8	87	10	0	0
Balha	70	0	70	0	0	0
Shivpur	72	0	72	0	0	0
Risiya	88	1	88	1	0	0
Chitaura	132	1	132	1	0	0
Payagpur	87	0	87	0	0	0
Visheshwarganj	79	0	79	0	0	0
Mahsi	95	3	91	7	0	0
Tajwapur	87	0	87	0	0	0
Fakharpur	122	1	120	3	0	0
Hajurpur	110	1	110	1	0	0
Kaisarganj	109	1	110	0	0	0
Jarwal	120	1	117	4	0	0
Total	1370	22	1360	32	0	0

Source: DistrictStatisticalBulletin, Bahraich- http://updes.up.nic.in/spatrika/select_distt_yr.asp



Figure 2: A house destroyed by floods in Bahraich

The table 1 shows that people have migrated from villages. In a period of ten years, ten villages were abandoned and population moved to other villages and cities for sustaining themselves. Following the situation of Baundi and Jogapurwa, a reporter of a 'Daily News' said that Baundi was a big market but due to migration gradually the economic activities deteriorated in the village. Government never thinks that how people live here, they throw a morsel of bread and go in a deep slumber. He asserted "70% population of this place migrated due to lack of employment and alternatives of livelihoods". Flood displaced not only the people but also the traditional economy of rural areas, therefore a new tendency developed among the villagers that is migration. Usually the people of this region prefer to go to Punjab and Haryana. This has been in practice since 1970 that also happened to be the period of Green Revolution. It can very well be questioned that why people chose to go to Punjab and Haryana when they could have easily gone to nearby places in Uttar Pradesh. Villagers were not skilled and they were familiar only with agriculture and related works. In Baundi Gram Sabha there's a small village Pandeypur (totally Brhaman community) with a population of almost 3000. This village severely affected by flood and most of the people went to nearest towns and cities.

A villager Parasnath told- "*Pahle is gaanw me harfasaljaiseshama, marua, dhaan, genhu, makka, san, dalhan, tilahan aur alagalagkism ki shabjiyanhotithi par ab kewaldhaan aur genhu se santoshkarnapartahai, aur wo bhijis bar*

achhifasalugtihai to ham samajhjaatehain ki is baarbhibaadhaayegi aur sab nast ho jaayega". This statement says about the livelihood vulnerability in this area. It also shows the regular occurring flood and devastation. Parasnath said about some crops such as Shama, Marua, and San etc. Most of the urban people are unaware of these crops. Commercialization of agriculture damaged the subsistence economy and only commercial crops such as *Dhan* (Rice), *Genhu* (Wheat) are preferred and produced. If we peep in the British era Bengal famine, we come to the conclusion that the reason of famine was promotion of commercial agriculture (Chandra, 1989).

Vulnerable situation and uncertain agriculture oriented the people towards urban areas. A villager Sharif told- "*Mai Delhi me rahta hu aur wahinrashoiya ka kamkarta hu, pahlehamarebaap dada khetikate the par ab kheti khatam ho gyahai aur upar se baadhbhipareshankiyerahtahai*". When I asked "are you happy there"? He replied "nahi sahib jo majaapneghar par rahne me hai wo gharkebaaharkahan. Shahro me kai tarh ki dikkathai, jaiserahne ki, sone ki aur upar se pariwar se door bhirahnapadtahai." The last line of Sharif points out that migration is closely related to the mental agony. It also points towards the issue of adverse inclusion. The contemporary discourse in the developmental economics pertains to the ideas of inclusive growth. However, such examples make us to believe that we need to conceptualize the notion of 'inclusion' in the light of adverse circumstances that are produced as a result of migrations.



Figure 3: A villager leaving his house, taken from daily news 'Shree Times'

People of the villages are mostly dependent on agriculture or related works. Land is very important for agriculture while the incessant flood and perpetual erosion destroy their lands and agricultural products. Nankuyadav a villager of jogapurwa is anxious about the future of his child. He does not know how their child will get a good education when he has lost his assets and there are no option of better livelihood. He said - “10 rupyerojkekamainahi aa kharcha 100 rupyaroj. Bachba 9 class me padhathain aa aagekaise padhikuchnahimaloom . pahile 50 bigha jaminrahin ab 15 bigha hain, upajbaadh me mil jaathain”. He says that expenditure is more than what he is able to earn. Earlier he had around 8 hectares of land but is now left with only around 2 hectares. This is compounded by the fact that the agricultural produce is swept away by floods. Gangaram Kashyap has the same condition; he also lost his farm land. He reiterated- “15 bigha jaminthi ab ek bhi bigha nahi. Majduri karat hai nya pardesh jaake majduri jaise thela riksha chalawa thain, 3 bar baadh se visthapit hua hu”. Gangaram Kashyap reiterates that earlier he had around 2 hectares of land but now he is left with no land. He earns his livelihood by pulling rickshaw. He got displaced three time due to floods. In Jogapurwa the total number of families are almost 450, and at least 445 families are displaced in 2 decades, and it is the travesty of villagers that they are stranded in this tragic condition. It puts several questions over the administration. In 2014, the flood was devastating. A daily newspaper writes- “Flood situation remained grave in Uttarpradesh where the toll rose to 89 on Thursday with reports of seven more deaths in the state whose eastern parts were worse hit.....The flood affected districts include Bahraich, Gonda, Barabanki... (Upadhyay, 2014). Another news paper writes that displaced people are not given any assistance, sky is their shelter, the situation of villager is hand to mouth, and thousands of houses have collapsed. Agricultural land has been full of sand or spate of water enhanced the rate of erosion. The people are compelled to live in a very debilitating situation (Ramesh, 2014). A villager of Jogapurwa Kamlesh Kashyap was a land lord hardly 15 years ago. He was the honor of 40 bigha (6.4 hectares)

farmland. He had a big farmland and a well maintained brick made house, but now he is a small peasant. He works on share cropping. He contended that he has been displaced 5 times since 2000. In 2000 the river Ghaghra was 15 km far from their newly made shelter and probability of displacement cannot be ruled-out in the coming years. Kamlesh stated- “hamarmakan kata rahe tab kam se kamlaagat 4 lakh aawarahe, jeme sarkar ne hamka kewal 7500 rupya muwaja dihash. Tab se 5 baar ghar badal ehain par kauno muwaja ab nahi milal”. Almost same situation is of Rambhjan Kashyap, 4 times displaced since 2001. He had 6 acres (2.42 hectares) land but totally lost it, and now he works as a laborer. He told that now there is less probability of getting works outside the village. Last month he went to Lucknow but within a week he returned to village. The people of Silauta totally migrated and a very few at least 25 families are stranded at the dam of Baundi. When I visited Baundi Dam a teenage girl Neha asked me – What will be provided to us by the government? We have nothing to eat and live. A woman Sheela Devi of Ramghat shouted- “Chahe mar jaaun, chahe sad jaaun koi puchwaiyanaaihai. Bhaiya 15 saal se e bandha par padehain, lekinkaunodekhwaiyanaaahi” (no one comes to our rescue, whether we live or die.).

A villager Rambhajan travelled to Lucknow in search of employment and within a week he returned towards his home. He told that he could not get any job. He was suffering from depression and was anxious about the future of his child. He is failed to get job even in MGNREGA.

Migration compels people to confront new challenges and new neighbors, new society, new friends and in this situation there develops a new social formation, but the irony is that it happens regularly. These villages can hardly be seen as a social or cultural group or a holistic cultural unity but rather a vagrant crowd. The biggest crisis with them is the existential crisis. Near to Jogapurwa there was a village Nageshar Purwa. The village was inhabited by almost 25 families and was a part of Jogapurwa floods divided it into two different villages. This is now surrounded by water and villagers live a miserable life.



Figure 4: A scene of erosion, from 'Shree Times'

CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF MIGRATION: SUSTAINING LIVELIHOODS AND ASSERTING IDENTITIES

Majority of people took loans from the local moneylenders in order to compensate for the losses or for some other reasons. It has been documented that in Bahraich majority of the people who took loan were from the lower or the intermediate caste groups (Khattri, 2011; Akerkar, 2011). Brahmins and Thakurs also took loans whenever it was necessary. The following table shows the various purposes for which loans were taken:

TABLE 2

Showing purpose of loan and percentage of people taking loan

Purpose of Loan	Percentage of people who took loan
Health	46
Migration	10
House repair	00
Food	44

Source: Survey conducted under the ICSSR project

The table shows that health and food are top priorities for people and they have to address these issues by taking loans. Around 71.4 percent people could not pay-back the loans. This is largely due to the fact that interest rates on loans are very high and in the absence of agricultural activities due to flooding and erosion people are unable to pay-back the loans. These circumstances push them to migrate to places like Delhi and Panjab in search of alternative livelihood sources.

Akerkar (2011) while working in the flood affected regions of Bahraich identified two kinds of migrations that are prevalent in the region viz- a) migration to far-off places like Panjab for long durations of six months or one year and b) migration to closer locations like Lucknow for short-duration which cannot be defined but is intermitten which means that people move to and fro between places frequently. This kind of intermitten migration for short duration was mostly undertaken by men and women stayed back at home to look after their children. This kind of migration is also known as 'circular migration'.

Migration for livelihood is influenced by caste and gender categories (Deshingkar and Start, 2003). The larger social structure that defines caste and gender relations in the village, influence the decision making of the people in the context of migration. Economic dimensions of migration also play a significant role in the migration of males and females. It can be said that the larger social structure is legitimized by economizing the reason for not taking women along to cities for work. For example, the circular migration for short duration is largely done by men and women are not taken along because of the fear of loss of social prestige. Only in extreme cases women migrate along with men. In a patriarchal society, the *purusharta* of men comes into question in case his wife and children are supposed to work to earn livelihood. Women wanted to migrate with their men but were convinced by the family members not to do so because the cost of living in the city will increase if they migrate and there will not be

enough money that could be saved and used for other constructive purposes. In cities migrant people stay together in order to save some money and it is reiterated that if their wives and children will accompany them then they will have to take separate accommodation which will again amount to increase in expenses. It is also said that migration of women for work is an indication of extreme poverty conditions in the household which again leads to loss of socio-economic status in the village hierarchy. Such an association between migration of women and family status is found among all the caste groups (Akerkar, 2011).

It can be reiterated here that floods damage property and land without making a distinction between people on the basis of caste. It has been said earlier that floods eroded lands of people belonging to almost all caste groups. However, loss of land has different implications for livelihood sustainability across different caste groups. Akerkar (2011) points out that the upper caste groups, especially *Thakurs* in flood affected regions of Bahraich were reluctant to resort to migration for sustaining livelihoods. They feared that migrating for work will lower their socio-economic position in the caste hierarchy. They also feared that this will lead to a change in the dynamics of relationship within their own caste groups. People were of the view that if they migrate for work then other members of the caste group will evaluate their social and economic wealth based on such migrations and will not marry their daughters to the sons of people who migrated for work. Doing non-traditional physical labor was considered to be a loss in the caste honor. This deteriorates the situation of the household as there are no other alternative sources of livelihood. This results in the women of such households taking up jobs as *anganwadi* workers. “*Rita thakur, aged 32 and an anganwadi helper in the village, justifies her husband’s decision not to go for work when she asks “how can we work like Suds?”: thus, suggesting that doing physical labour like other castes in the village would be equivalent to them becoming Suds or “lower” castes in a metaphorical sense*” (Akerkar, 2011; 186).

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