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Migration and Reverse Migration in Uttarakhand

*Dr. Indu Malik
Asst. Professor
Deptt. of English
Government Degree College
Kavaghati Kotdwar (Pauri Garhwal)
Uttarakhand*

Abstract: The desire for better livelihood or employment is everyone's craving in this world and for this an individual chooses different paths to accomplish fortune. Migration is also one of these paths. While there is absolutely nothing wrong in that, the migration trend increasingly puts the indigenous languages and cultures at risk. Unfortunately many things are destroying the fundamental roots of Uttarakhand. As a land of devas, it is known for its flora and fauna, local traditions and pilgrimages in the whole world. However, we are suffering the disease of migration in Uttarakhand where the youth in desire of achieving more and more is losing its local recognition. Migration is due to many reasons, as lack of good education, jobs, medical facilities and depredations of wild animals and so on. On the other hand, we cannot ignore the fact that reverse migration is also one of the major change in other direction as it is one of the fruitful condition for Uttarakhand for future purposes.

Migration is not only in Uttarakhand since the earliest times, we are facing this in the whole world. It has mattered through history, and continues to matter today. There are different types of migration as temporary, permanent, seasonal, unseasonal or continuous. Some people migrate in search of work while others move to escape from physical or social calamities or violations. Many move out of choice or necessity. After the Second World War, decolonization was having a migration impact in many parts of the world. The same was the Partition time of Hindu and Muslims in India in 1947. Some 14 million people fled in one direction or another during the partition. In recent times, migration from rural areas to urban areas has increased in past few years in India. On 18th Dec, an International migrant Day is proclaimed by the UN General Assembly in December 2000, for the protection of the Rights of All Migrants workers and members of their families.

Migration in Uttarakhand especially from its remote hill areas has been a major cause of concern. Migration is not new to Uttarakhand. It reached a peak in the 1980s and fuelled the demand for a separate state, which everyone hoped would lead to economic growth and check migration. But census data and other recent reports show that the rate of migration from the hilly areas of the state has increased after it was formed in 2000. Migration crisis is as about eight percent of the hill population having moved to towns in the plains. There is no proper deployment of doctors in

the hospitals of hill areas. There is an acute shortage of doctors. The healthcare centers that have opened are blighted by a severe lack of medical professionals and serve, more often than not, as referral centers to hospitals in cities such as Dehradun and Nainital. The remote villages lack of basic amenities like roadways, health centers and schools. The result is mass exodus and empty villages due to this disconnectivity. The rising heights, steep slopes and climate impose severe restrictions on the productivity and carrying capacity of natural resources. The worst thing though is hillside cutting for roads and these stretches are not at all safe to drive on, especially during monsoon. The far more feared conflict is the one with leopard. As farming and the number of livestock in the hills have reduced, leopards have started descending the slopes and wandering into human settlements in search of food. Although a large sum of money is allocated every year to repair roads, there is no improvement. Especially in remote hilly areas, as there is no monitoring and accountability.

In recent years, 1, 18,981 people from 3,946 gram panchayats migrated permanently, and 3, 83,726 people from 6,338 gram panchayats shifted temporarily. The higher education infrastructure in the hills does not help much in building skills of the youth. There is a socio-economic pressure to migrate on the community. The already migrated people also help the others to settle in other cities by helping them for employment and temporary accommodation. In the case of Almora and Pauri Garhwal the largest percentage of migrants, 47 and 34 respectively, have gone outside the state. One possible reason for this may be that these two districts have a fairly long history of migration, longer than other districts. As such people have been venturing out to different places spread across the northern region as well as metros like Delhi and Mumbai. Consequently, networks of relatives, friends and acquaintances would have been created in these places which may be tapped to facilitate the entry of new migrants.

At this time when we are facing this situation it is necessary that we must give more concern to traditional and ethnical background of Uttarakhand as it is the backbone of the existence of this devbhoomi. The older generation is adept in traditional knowledge, but they are reluctant in disclosing this knowledge to others. An alternative law is necessary to protect traditional knowledge. It can improve their financial needs and requirements. It is necessary to preserve the cultural heritage of them, their values and ethics so that the upcoming generation could be grateful to them. Young generation is running and migrating from their culture. It is important to preserve and promote our cultures and heritage in order to uplift the quality of people living in remote areas. An alternative law is necessary to protect traditional knowledge. It can improve their financial needs and requirements. By tradition and necessity, in the remote area people are forest dwellers and they maintain a close relationship with flora and fauna of the forest. The general problem they have to face as poverty, illiteracy, unemployment and exploitation. Many claim that only education can reduce inequalities, others view about educational failure in removing inequalities due to unequal distribution of cultural capital by caste.

It is rightly said the globally, the local people are bearing the costs of a conservation model that

is simply not working. We need a radical transformation. It is the time when we have to listen their own real problem. In fact migration is also the touched theme with this.

Unfortunately when one community depends on another for necessities, it loses own language as they have to continuously communicate in the language of the dominant community. Another problem is of social strata. They do not want to speak their traditional language because they want from their children to speak English and to maintain social status in the higher society. They feel ashamed to talk in their language. Astonishingly the teachers in primary schools don't motivate them to speak in their mother tongue as they call it 'jungle bhasha'. So the younger generation feel inferior and less inclined to speak it. It is not with their language which is dying, even their knowledge of medicinal plants is also declining day by day. Their close attachment to flora and fauna helped the community to discover the medicinal properties of plants and herbs in forests. Every ailment was treated with plants and herbs. Various studies have presented initial Documentations of medicinal plants and their utilization by indigenous tribes on the region. This precious knowledge is also diminishing with the coming of hospitals and medical stores in recent times. The same case is with their carpentry skills as the government banned tree falling. Their knowledge was passed on from generation to generation by oral tradition, and much of the traditional knowledge has been kept secret from outsider's world. With the passage of time, the traditional knowledge is vanishing day by day due to lack of documentation, and loss of interest in the younger generations. The small scale enterprise based on special skills and local knowledge should be encouraged. NGO's can be assigned the duty of training for self-employment. We can boost the local's income and curb forced migration by all these measures.

On the other hand, there has also been reverse migration in around 850 villages spread over the 13 districts of the state. We cannot ignore the fact that encouraged by the increased tourist traffic, locals have got into the trekking business, applying for loans to buy tents, sleeping bags and horses. Villagers who had abandoned their ancestral homes decades ago in search of livelihood have now started returning to their roots. Tourism has also had an impact on farming. The state government efforts to promote Home stays and guesthouses are creating demand for locally grown vegetables and rice. There are enough natural attractions to draw people from cities and bring the villages back to life. The new tourism policy has also facilitated reverse migration. These efforts for reverse migration created entrepreneurship avenues for the local youth in the tourism sector for the fast emptying out hills. Land policy has also been changed to provide sufficient land in the hills to set up hotels. We should implement these policies to promote the mountain state as a hub of wellness.

The reverse migration can preserve their heritage and culture as a breath of fresh air at a time when people are quick to cut off their roots completely and never look back in search of newer pastures.

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