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**Peasants on the Move: A Socio-economic Perspective on Internal Migration in India**

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**Abstract:**

This article examines the phenomenon of internal migration in India, with a specific focus on the socio-economic conditions and experiences of peasants. It is a proven fact that internal migration plays a vital role in shaping the socio-economic fabric of the country as peasants seek better economic opportunities and improved living conditions. The article attempts to explore the push and pull factors driving internal migration, the challenges faced by migrants, and potential solutions to address their needs. Through a comprehensive analysis of existing literature, surveys, and case studies, this study sheds light on the complexities and dynamics of internal migration among peasants in India.

**Keywords:** internal migration, peasants, India, socio-economic, push factors, pull factors, challenges, solutions.

**Introduction:**

International migration plays an important role in the global socio-political set up and at the same time exercises its influence on the economic development at both local and global levels. Likewise, the internal migration also constitutes a significant aspect of any country's socio-economic landscape. In case of a country like India, with her tremendous environmental and geographical diversity, a sizable population, primarily engaged in agricultural activities, migrate from rural to urban areas or between rural regions within the country in search of better livelihood opportunities and improved living conditions. Rural peasants comprise a substantial proportion of these migrants. The phenomenon of internal migration among peasants in India has attracted increasing attention due to its profound impact on the social and economic dynamics of both the origin and destination regions.

A combination of different push and pull factors has shaped internal migration in India. Push factors, such as poverty, landlessness, and limited employment opportunities in rural areas, propel peasants to migrate in search of economic advancement (Desai & Dubey, 2020). Additionally, factors such as agrarian distress, small and fragmented landholdings, and a lack of access to credit and resources contribute to the push for migration (Chandrasekhar & Ghosh, 2019).

On the other hand, there are some pull factors that entice peasants to migrate to urban areas or regions with better economic prospects. Rapid urbanisation, industrial growth, and the expansion of the service sector have created employment opportunities that attract peasants seeking better livelihoods (Deshingkar & Akter, 2009). The allure of higher wages, improved access to education and healthcare facilities, and the potential for social mobility also act as pull factors (Chandrasekhar & Ghosh, 2019).

The migration of peasants within India, besides its benefits, is not without its challenges. Migrants often face difficulties in accessing affordable housing, basic amenities such as clean water and sanitation, and adequate healthcare services (Bardhan et al., 2020). The informal sector, where many migrants find employment, is characterised by low wages, exploitative working conditions, and a lack of social security benefits (Kundu & Sircar, 2020). Discrimination based on ethnicity, language, and caste can further compound the challenges faced by peasant migrants (Kundu & Sircar, 2020). Understanding the complexities and dynamics of internal migration among peasants in India is crucial for devising effective policies and interventions to address their needs. By examining the push and pull factors, challenges faced by migrants, and potential solutions, this study aims to contribute to a comprehensive understanding of internal migration in India and its implications for socioeconomic development.

### **Internal Migration in India:**

Internal migration in India has been a significant phenomenon, with a substantial number of internal migrants seeking better economic opportunities and improved living conditions. According to the World Bank (2020), in 2020, India was estimated to have approximately 139 million internal migrants, highlighting the scale and importance of this movement within the country. The drivers for internal migration in India are multifaceted. Economic disparities and a lack of employment opportunities in rural areas act as significant push factors, compelling peasants to migrate in search of better livelihood prospects (Desai & Dubey,

2020). Poverty, often intertwined with these disparities, is a crucial motivating factor that motivates individuals and families to seek economic improvement through migration.

Moreover, natural disasters and social conflicts also contribute to the push for internal migration among peasants in India. Disasters such as droughts and floods can devastate agricultural productivity, making it difficult for peasants to sustain their livelihoods in rural areas and forcing them to migrate to more secure regions (World Bank, 2020). Social conflicts, including caste-based discrimination and land disputes, can further exacerbate the need for migration as peasants seek safer and more inclusive communities.

Conversely, various pull factors attract peasants to urban and peri-urban areas in India. Urbanisation and industrial growth have created employment opportunities in sectors such as manufacturing, construction, and services, which offer higher wages and better prospects for economic advancement (Desai & Dubey, 2020). The allure of wage differentials between rural and urban areas acts as a strong incentive for peasants to migrate as they seek to improve their income and standard of living.

In addition to economic opportunities, access to better education and healthcare facilities is another significant factor driving internal migration. Urban and peri-urban areas often provide improved infrastructure and services, including schools and healthcare centres, which are crucial for the well-being and future prospects of migrant families (Desai & Dubey, 2020).

Understanding the push and pull factors behind internal migration in India is essential for formulating effective policies and interventions that address the needs of peasant migrants and facilitate sustainable development. By considering these factors, policymakers can design strategies that tackle the root causes of migration, promote inclusive growth in rural areas, and ensure equitable access to opportunities and services across the country.

### **Push Factors for Internal Migration:**

Push factors play a crucial role in driving internal migration among peasants in India. These factors encompass a range of economic, environmental, and social conditions that prompt individuals and families to leave their rural areas of origin and seek opportunities elsewhere. Poverty and a lack of employment opportunities in rural areas act as significant push factors for internal migration. The limited availability of viable livelihood options in agriculture, coupled with the prevalence of poverty in rural communities, pushes peasants to migrate in search of better economic prospects (Chandrasekhar & Ghosh, 2019). The need to escape

persistent poverty and improve their living standards drives many peasants to move to urban and peri-urban areas.

Another contributing factor to internal migration is the issue of small and fragmented landholdings. In India, landholdings often become increasingly fragmented over generations due to inheritance laws and population growth, resulting in diminishing returns from agriculture (Chandrasekhar & Ghosh, 2019). This fragmentation reduces the income potential of agricultural activities and creates a push for peasants to seek alternative sources of income in urban areas.

Agrarian distress is another significant push factor driving internal migration among peasants. Factors such as declining agricultural productivity, water scarcity, and rising input costs contribute to the overall distress in rural areas (Chandrasekhar & Ghosh, 2019). These challenges make it increasingly difficult for peasants to sustain their livelihoods solely through agriculture, prompting them to migrate in search of more stable and diversified economic opportunities. Limited access to credit and resources also serves as a push factor for internal migration. Peasants facing financial constraints find it challenging to invest in their agricultural activities or start alternative income-generating ventures. The lack of access to credit and resources further restricts their ability to improve their living conditions, pushing them towards migration in pursuit of better opportunities (Chandrasekhar & Ghosh, 2019).

Moreover, natural disasters, such as droughts and floods, often devastate rural communities and agricultural productivity, forcing peasants to migrate as a means of survival. These disasters can destroy crops, damage infrastructure, and disrupt the local economy, leaving peasants with no option but to seek more secure and resilient regions (Unnikrishnan, 2017). In addition to environmental factors, social conflicts and caste-based discrimination contribute to the push for internal migration among peasants. Social tensions, land disputes, and discriminatory practises create an inhospitable environment for marginalised communities, compelling them to migrate to escape oppression and seek better social integration (Unnikrishnan, 2017).

Understanding these push factors is essential for policymakers and stakeholders to develop targeted interventions that address the underlying causes of migration and create opportunities for sustainable development in rural areas.

### **Challenges Faced by Peasant Migrants:**

External migration poses significant challenges for peasant migrants, encompassing various aspects such as housing, access to basic amenities, working conditions, social integration, discrimination, and limited access to education and social security benefits.

One of the primary challenges faced by peasant migrants is the lack of affordable housing and inadequate access to basic amenities. Bardhan et al. (2020) have highlighted that many migrant workers struggle to find suitable and affordable housing options in urban areas. This often leads to overcrowding, substandard living conditions, and a lack of access to clean water, sanitation facilities, and healthcare services. These challenges not only affect the migrants' quality of life but also pose health risks and increase their vulnerability to diseases. Peasant migrants frequently face issues like exploitation, low pay and unfavourable working conditions in the informal sector. Kundu and Sircar (2020) emphasise that migrant workers often encounter exploitation by employers who take advantage of their vulnerable status. This exploitation can manifest in the form of long working hours, meagre wages, a lack of job security, and unsafe working environments. These factors contribute to the perpetuation of poverty and prevent upward mobility for peasant migrants.

Social integration and discrimination based on factors such as ethnicity, language, and caste further compound the challenges faced by peasant migrants. Kundu and Sircar (2020) noted that migrants often face social exclusion and marginalisation, which hinders their integration into local communities. Discrimination can lead to limited access to social networks, reduced job opportunities, and exclusion from essential services. These factors perpetuate a cycle of inequality and hinder the social and economic advancement of peasant migrants.

Limited access to education and social security benefits also exacerbates the vulnerability of peasant migrants. Without adequate access to education, migrant children face barriers to quality schooling and suffer from interrupted education due to frequent mobility (Kundu & Sircar, 2020). This limits their opportunities for skill development and future employment prospects. Moreover, the absence of social security benefits, such as health insurance, pension plans, and unemployment benefits, leaves peasant migrants financially exposed during emergencies and old age.

Peasant migrants face multiple challenges when migrating internally. The lack of affordable housing, inadequate access to basic amenities, and exploitation in the informal sector, social integration issues, discrimination, and limited access to education and social security benefits contribute to their vulnerability and hinder their socio-economic progress. Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive policies and interventions that prioritise affordable

housing, improved access to basic amenities, fair working conditions, social integration, and equal opportunities for education and social security.

Potential Solutions and Policy Interventions: Addressing the challenges faced by peasant migrants necessitates a comprehensive approach that includes government policies, institutional mechanisms, and grassroots initiatives. Several potential solutions and policy interventions can be implemented to alleviate the hardships experienced by migrant populations.

One crucial aspect is the strengthening of rural infrastructure and the promotion of sustainable agriculture. By investing in rural infrastructure development, such as roads, electricity, irrigation facilities, and market linkages, the government can create employment opportunities in rural areas (Government of India, 2017). This approach aims to reduce migration pressure by improving living conditions and providing income-generating activities in rural communities. Additionally, promoting sustainable agricultural practises, such as organic farming and agro-ecology, can enhance productivity and income levels in rural areas, making them more attractive for potential migrants.

Enhancing social protection measures is another vital strategy to mitigate the vulnerabilities faced by migrant populations. Srivastava and Sasikumar (2019) emphasise the importance of providing comprehensive social protection, including access to healthcare and education, for migrant workers. Establishing mobile health clinics, facilitating health insurance schemes, and ensuring affordable and quality education for migrant children can help address their specific needs. These measures contribute to improving the overall well-being and socio-economic status of peasant migrants.

Initiatives to promote skill development, vocational training, and entrepreneurship can play a significant role in empowering migrant workers and enhancing their employability. Government programmes and collaborations with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) can provide training opportunities in various sectors, including construction, manufacturing, hospitality, and service industries. Such initiatives enable migrant workers to acquire new skills, improve their earning potential, and gain access to better job opportunities both in their home regions and at their destination locations.

Furthermore, fostering partnerships between government bodies, civil society organisations, and private enterprises can facilitate the implementation of comprehensive solutions. Collaboration among these stakeholders can lead to the development of integrated programmes that address the specific needs and challenges of peasant migrants. These

initiatives may include providing counselling and legal support services, establishing helplines and grievance redressal mechanisms, and organising awareness campaigns to combat discrimination and promote social integration. It is important to note that the effectiveness of these potential solutions and policy interventions depends on their implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. Continuous assessment and feedback mechanisms can help identify gaps and refine strategies to ensure their long-term sustainability and positive impact on peasant migrants.

### **Conclusion:**

In conclusion, a combination of push and pull factors influence internal migration among Indian peasants, reflecting their aspirations for better living standards and livelihoods. However, the journey of peasant migrants is fraught with challenges across various domains, including housing, access to basic amenities, working conditions, and social integration.

To tackle these challenges effectively, a multi-faceted approach is necessary, combining policy interventions and grassroots initiatives. Strengthening rural infrastructure, such as roads, electricity, irrigation, and market linkages, can create employment opportunities in rural areas, reducing the pressure for migration. Concurrently, implementing social protection measures is crucial to mitigating the vulnerabilities faced by migrant populations. This includes ensuring access to healthcare and education, which address their specific needs and contribute to their overall well-being and socio-economic status.

Moreover, promoting skill development, vocational training, and entrepreneurship empowers peasant migrants by enhancing their employability and expanding job opportunities. Collaboration among government bodies, civil society organisations, and private enterprises is essential to implementing comprehensive solutions tailored to the unique challenges faced by peasant migrants. It is crucial to continuously assess and refine these initiatives through monitoring and evaluation to ensure their long-term sustainability and positive impact.

By understanding and addressing the needs of peasant migrants, India can harness the potential of internal migration as a driver for inclusive and sustainable development. By creating an enabling environment that provides opportunities for improved livelihoods, access to basic amenities, and social integration, India can maximise the benefits of internal migration while ensuring the well-being and socio-economic advancement of its peasant migrant population.

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