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RESEARCH ARTICLE

PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING OF THE MIGRANTS LIVING IN THE REHABILITATION CAMPS IN COOCH BEHAR DISTRICT, WEST BENGAL, INDIA: A GEOGRAPHICAL STUDY

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Abstract

An attempt has been made in this paper to evaluate the psychological well-being of the dwellers of rehabilitation camps in Cooch Behar district, West Bengal, India, who have been sheltered after exchange of enclaves between India and Bangladesh and subsequent migration. Since people commonly migrate for their need, primarily for economic reason, their movement is basically oriented to economic well-being. But, in many cases, well-being may not be achieved through economic satisfaction; rather migrants sometimes feel their lost world i.e. the place of living and its surroundings, which brings a psychological well being to them both positively and negatively. Results shows that rehabilitated people, although migrated as per their wish, have achieved economic satisfaction but psychologically a number of them are not happy and often remind their old memories.

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Introduction:-

Nowadays, migration exists almost everywhere, either it be an individual's migration or mass migration, may it be internal or international in nature (Walsh, 2012). Migrants are, in many cases are newer at the places of destination. The causes of migration is manifold, although people commonly migrate in order to economic purpose, sometimes it may be for education and social purpose also. But in all the cases, well-being matters. Therefore, migration takes place in order to achieve the motto of well-being, may it be in the form of economic satisfaction or by interacting with new surroundings. But, places, relationship, environment left behind by the migrants always matter to them and remain as memories in their mind, often uttered by them during expressing their life experience in the form of emotional dialogue (Rishbeth, & Powell, 2013). Remembering past is a form of nostalgic thought, and common people often feel passion, more in case of migrant people while communicating with others. It is because of the process of transformation of their lives involving a change in belongingness, identity and home. Thus, nostalgia is commonly evoked in response to loss and life crisis (Khorsandi & Saarikallio, 2013). It is psychological element sometimes controlled by geographical factors like long time attachment to a place and its surroundings. Becoming 'Nostalgic' is linked to one's remarkable events, closeness to people, childhood and unforgettable life experiences which is emotional in character (Muggeridge, & Doná, 2006).

The migrants often experience new types of psychological states at the new places that are hardly found consistent with the background, personal attributes and other conditions of the migrants (Coll, & Magnuson, 1997). Consequently, new environment and people make them to memorize autobiographical past to adjust the gap between new and old (Rowles, 1983). Therefore, migration may be considered as a factor of emotion in the form of entering

in the world of nostalgia, which is basically a narrative of previous life and by evaluating it, there is found spatio-temporal differences of two world where migrants used to live and are presently living (Boccagni, & Baldassar, 2015). Since, migration in geography usually refers to individual or mass movement of humans from one place to another, there is an obvious effect of space and time on the migrant people, involving a psychological change among them. (Bradley, & Van Willigen, 2010).

Along the Indo-Bangladesh border, 922 people migrated from erstwhile Indian enclave (inside in Bangladesh) to India after the enclave exchange (Gazette of India, 2015). Out of them, only 245 migrants were sheltered in temporary rehabilitation camp of Dinhata, and rest of the migrants i.e. 479 and 198 were sheltered in Haldibari and Mekhliganj rehabilitation camps of Cooch Behar district. But, they felt disturbed in the new environment because in reality, they were socially isolated from both side of the country i.e. India and Bangladesh (FGD). Almost all of them belonged to poor economic background and they migrated from rural part of Bangladesh to rural part of India during enclave exchange (Chowdhury, & Haider, 2019). They feel themselves away from their own places leaving their land, home, relatives, domestic pets and invisible relationship with neighbor. Even, there is found a social distance in the field of utilization of facilities available at their new place (FGD).

Objective:-

To assess the psychological status of the migrants of the rehabilitation camps after exchange of enclaves along Indo-Bangladesh border.

Database and Methods:-

The study is based both on primary and secondary data. Primary data has been collected through field survey from the temporary rehabilitation camps of Dinhata, Mekhliganj, and Haldibari of Cooch Behar district with the help of Focus Group Discussion (FGD) to know the perception of the respondents. The content analysis has resulted some important discourses that have been emerged through the interviews which has helped to assess temporal change of psychological well-being before and after enclave exchange. The secondary data has been collected from Office of the District Magistrate in Cooch Behar district.

Table 1:- Respondents Characteristics of the Rehabilitation camps of Cooch Behar District.

Demographic profile of the Respondents	Category	Frequency	Percent
Age-Group	20-30	8	13.56
	30-40	15	25.42
	40-50	11	18.64
	50-60	9	15.25
	60-70	16	27.12
	Total	59	100.00
Gender	Male	30	50.85
	Female	29	49.15
	Total	59	100.00
Religion	Muslim	35	59.32
	Hindu	24	40.68
	Total	59	100.00
Marital Status	Married	51	86.44
	Unmarried	8	13.56
	Total	59	100.00

Source: Field Survey

An Overview of the Migrants in Rehabilitation camps:

The rehabilitated people in Cooch Behar district migrated from various Indian enclaves (inside Bagladesh) located in northern district of Bangladesh particularly in Kurigram, Lalmonirhat, Panchagargh and Niliphamari. There are three rehabilitation camps e.g. Mekhliganj Haldibari and Dinhata rehabilitation in the district of Cooch Behar in India. The total number of migrants is 922 consisting of 201 families in the district according to the Gazette of India, 2015. The Hindu migrants are found higher than the Muslim migrants in the district which is 782 and 140 respectively (Table, 2). Like other factors of migration, emotion is considered as an important factor under the study.

The highest number of migrants is found in Haldibari block and the lowest number of migrants is found in Mekhliganj block in the district.

Table 2:- Migrants in rehabilitation camps in Cooch Behar District.

District	Sl No.	Rehabilitation Camps	Number of Families	No. of Migrants	Religion		Gender	
					Hindu	Muslim	Male	Female
Cooch Behar	1	Haldibari	96	479	479	0	270	209
	2	Mekhliganj	47	198	197	1	115	83
	3	Dinhata	58	245	106	139	130	115
Total Population			Σ201	Σ922	Σ782	Σ140	Σ515	Σ407

Source: Gazette of India, ministry of home affairs, Government of India, 12 October, 2015.

Psychological well-being of Rehabilitated people:

Before the exchange of enclaves along Indo-Bangladesh border, all the enclave dwellers were obsessed with darkness. The migrants of the temporary rehabilitation camps in Cooch Behar district came from erstwhile Indian enclaves inside Bangladesh. They used to face almost all difficulties before rehabilitation. After being sheltered in the rehabilitation camps they have got the luminous life after the exchange of enclaves. For instance, they got freedom and citizenship, administration and laws, right to vote, Governmental facilities, and so on (Sen & Roy, 2020). The study reveals that few migrants have become active members of the political parties where they have been sheltered. In this way, they have wider social contact and in many cases, they have attained higher social position. Actually they migrated to India with a hope of leading better life or standard way of living. In addition, there were socio-economic, religious, emotional causes of their migration also, although the economic and emotional factors played key pull factors of migration to the rehabilitated people of temporary rehabilitation camps of Cooch Behar district, India. But despite having better way of life than the past, they are not psychologically well being since they often remind their golden memories of the past and shared a deep pain of that lost world of happiness along with socio-cultural and economic difficulties at present.

Land is an integral part of life:

The rehabilitated people have a strong feeling on their inherited agricultural land that they have left behind. These lands have been feeding them since their birth. They have been taking rest when they feel tired in the shadow of trees and sleeping in their ancestral house at nights. They have been maintaining, preserving and nurturing their inherited lands and ancestral houses since time immemorial. One of the participants (Nimai, age-30) mentioned:

“We have a few agricultural lands and we cultivate the land throughout the year,. moreover, agriculture is our main source of livelihood”

Kinship ties:

The majority of the respondents expressed that they were connected with their neighbor as well as with the people of their place of origin by the social process like marriage and friendship since long time back. These kinds of social relations reshaped their emotions which brought mental strength to refuse the opportunities. One participant (Altab, age-55) described:

“Before the exchange of enclaves, my elder daughter has got married to the main part of India, naturally, it was very difficult to migrate for us when enclaves were exchanged”

Social and professional difficulties in the new society:

According to the experience of the participants, migrants of the rehabilitation camps have been suffering from a lot of difficulties after migration to India. The socio-cultural difficulties are painful for them in terms of social milieu of the place of destination. Most of the time, they are neglected by the local people of their surroundings. They even, feel discomfort to participate in social events thinking themselves as socially isolated. Not only that, they have left land, love, relation, from the erstwhile Indian enclave inside Bangladesh. Thus, they feel an emotional pain from both side of India and Bangladesh. One of the participants (Jitendra, age-38) described:

“Most of them work as daily labourer in different areas. But they get low wage as compared to other labourers of main land of the country”.

Loss of previous social capital:

Majority of the respondents in the rehabilitation camps have expressed concern about their relatives, neighbor and social ties. They left their closest relatives, friends when they migrated from their places of origin. After arrival to the destination, they have lost all the connections with their relatives and friend left behind, and could not attend societal functions as well. Two important factors viz. relationship and emotion are found as determining factors in the loss of their social capital. Almost all the participants have shared common feelings for their emotion about the places of origin they have left. Actually, they are emotionally attached to their places of origin particularly for socio-cultural bonds. One of the participants (Ramu, age-35) described:

"Since we have grown up in the enclave (inside Bangladesh) after birth we often remember all the things happened at that enclave."

Another added (Seuly, age- 41):

"My younger sister has got married in the main part of Bangladesh 20 years ago, and after our migration, we tried to contact them through phone, as did not see her since a long time."

Feelings of belongings:

Based on the participants' experience, the study reveals that all the migrants realize that they are emotionally attached to their place of birth. They feel about their physical landscape as well as socio-cultural setting which they left for migration like, ancestral house, neighbors and relatives, domestic pets, inherited agricultural land, graveyard of relatives etc.

One of the participants (Mizanur, age-55):

"I have lost my parents in my place of birth (enclave inside Bangladesh), but, now I feel more worried than the past because distance has killed the proximity of the graveyard"

Conclusion:-

As stated earlier, Geographical entity has significant contribution in emotion generation, migrants of the rehabilitation camps of Cooch Behar district after migration have been suffering from a lot of socio-economic, social-cultural and administrative difficulties. But, the social-cultural difficulties are too much painful for them in terms of social adaptation in new place. Most of the time, migrants of the rehabilitation camp are ignored by local Indian people. They are even, feel discomfort to participate in social events thinking themselves as socially isolated. Most of the migrants work as daily labourer in nearby areas, but, they get low wage in comparison to local Indian labourers. Consequently, they feel mentally disturbed. Not only that, they have left land, love, relation, from the erstwhile Indian enclave inside Bangladesh. Thus, they feel an emotional pain from both side of their present and past location.

Older respondents under the study have been suffering strong emotional pain in comparison to younger because, they could not adapt themselves with the new environment. But, younger generation feels neutral emotion as they can adapt themselves in easier way in comparison to the older. The emotional expressions of the majority of older respondents under the study are like *"king of the country is a slave of another country"*.

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