

2011 Census Snapshot Out-Migration from Bihar: Major Reasons and Destinations

Pinak Sarkar

Introduction

The overall development scenario in Bihar has always put the state in a spotlight in debates on regional imbalances, economic development, poverty etc. The backwardness of this eastern state can be attributed to various factors, such as very low agricultural output coupled with a high dependence on agriculture, a hugely skewed distribution of land with landlessness being widespread among peasants, lack of industrialisation, high population growth etc. The decades-long period of economic backwardness in the state has led to there being very few employment opportunities in the limited industrial sector. The scarce economic resources have also resulted in inadequate and poor educational and public health infrastructure, which in turn have resulted in poor health and educational outcomes in the state. This can be considered as the most prominent among the many factors contributing to heavy outmigration from the state, especially in the category of low-skilled labour.

Migration from Bihar in a Historical Context

The migration phenomenon from the state can be traced back to the colonial era and even further back to the times of the Mughals. Historically, the warrior communities and castes from western Bihar were recruited in the Mughal army. The recruitment of Bihari migrants in the army continued during the British rule.

As the British Raj established in India in the latter half of the 19th century, there was an improvement in trade and commerce along with development of roads and railways. During this time, the western part of India witnessed significant improvement in irrigation facilities and a specialisation of the cropping pattern; this attracted migrant labours from the eastern part of India, especially from regions with high populations, like Bihar, that did not experience

Pinak Sarkar (pinak.sarkar@tiss.edu) is Assistant Professor, Centre for Development Practice and Research, Tata Institute of Social Sciences.

such agricultural development (Kumar and Bhagat 2012). The available literature suggests that the period also witnessed eastward trends of migration, particularly towards Bengal and Assam, which happened because of factors such as the Zamindari system of land settlement that gave very little rights to the tenants, the higher rent of land, a large proportion of landless peasants and the decreased agricultural productivity of the land resulting from indigo cultivation (Davis 1951; Sharma 2005). This migration stream was mainly seasonal in nature, dominated by lower-caste landless labourers who were basically responding to the wage gap between Bihar and the rest of eastern India. The circular or seasonal migration during this time helped the marginal farmers and agricultural labourers to cover bare-minimum subsistence (Yang 1979; de Haan 2002).

In the post-independence period, the westward trend of labour migration from Bihar continued. It surged in the sixties as the green revolution in the north-western part of India created a high demand for agricultural laborers in Punjab. Soon the influx of migrants spilled over into the neighbouring state of Haryana (Bremner 1985). After the eighties, the demand for labour in the areas of green revolution was saturated due to changes in cropping pattern and mechanisation of agriculture. The recent trend of labour migration from Bihar is towards metropolitan cities such as Delhi, Bombay, Surat, Kolkata etc. (Karan 2003, Sharma 2005, Sarkar 2014). The volume of migration has also increased drastically since the eighties; now migration is witnessed in all sections of the state, across all castes, communities and economic groups. Previously, Bihari migrants mostly migrated to rural areas for agricultural wages, and their movement was more seasonal in nature. In recent times, however, the movement is more directed towards urban centres, and is more permanent in nature (Karan 2003; Singh et al. 2005). Migration and remittances are now viewed as a livelihood strategy for the people of Bihar (Dishankar et al. 2006; Sarkar 2019).

Between 1951 and 1961, about 4 percent of Bihar's population migrated. Between 1971 and 1981, around 2 percent of its population migrated. In 1981, the total number of migrants more than doubled at around 2.5 million (Sharma 1997). During the inter-censal period between 2001 and 2011, around 9.3 million Bihari people migrated (*Census 2011*).

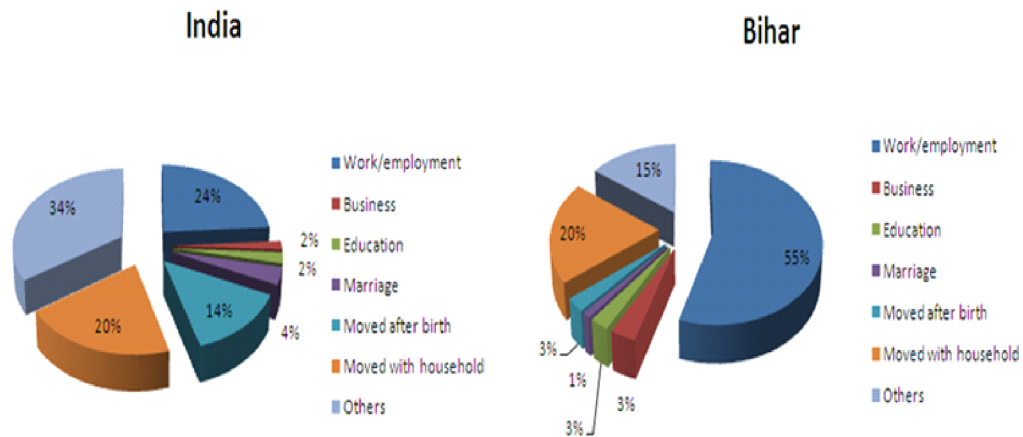
Reasons for Migration

The reason for migration is an important indicator reflecting the overall development scenario of a region. A much recent study by Sarkar (2014) using the NSSO (National Sample Survey Organisation) 64th round migration data, found that the odds or likelihood of outmigration for employment-related reasons are the highest for Bihar and other EAG (Empowered Action Group) states when compared to the odds for other Indian states. The recently published

D-series *Census* 2011 data also confirms the same pattern, suggesting that employment-related outmigration is more prevalent in Bihar compared to the rest of India.

In this section, the ‘reasons for migration’ for Biharis are compared with all-India figures. The comparison is done separately for male and female migrants, because male migration is mostly dominated by employment-related reasons, and female migration occurs mostly due to marriage; an aggregate analysis will therefore give biased results. Graph-1 shows that across India, on an average, 24 percent of male migrants migrate due to work/employment related reasons. On the other hand, when it comes to outmigration from Bihar, around 55 per cent of male migrants migrate for work/employment related reasons, which is more than double the India figure. In the case of migration for business-related reasons, the all-India average is around 2 percent, whereas for Bihar it is close to 4 percent.

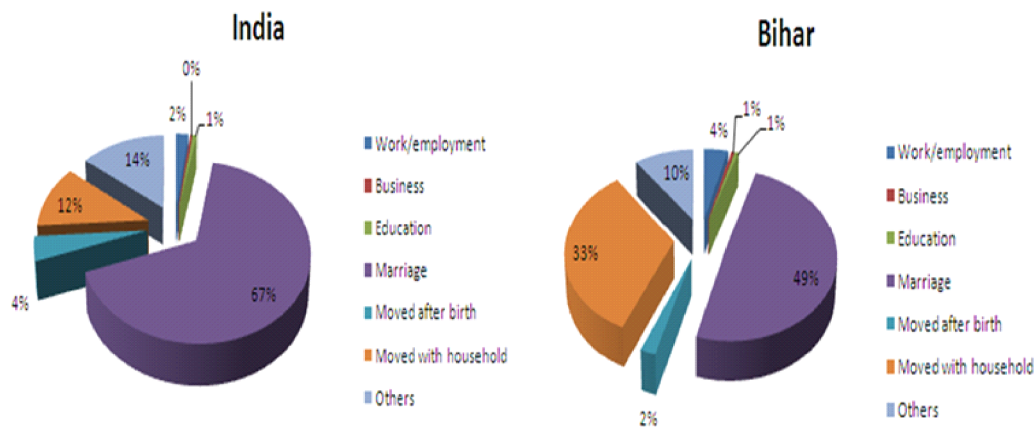
Graph-1: Reasons for Migration among Male Migrants



Source: Calculated using Census 2011, D-Series data on migration.

Graph-2 shows that across India, on an average, 2 percent of female migrants migrated due to work/employment-related reasons. On the other hand, outmigration of females from Bihar is more than 4 percent. The all-India average rate of migration for business-related reasons is around 0.29 percent, whereas for Bihar it is close to 0.48 percent.

Graph-2: Reasons for Migration among Female Migrants



Source: Calculated using Census 2011, D-Series data on migration.

Overall, it is observed that the propensity to migrate for work/employment and business-related reasons is more than double for migrants from Bihar compared to the all-India average. It is also interesting to note that while marriage is the biggest reason for female migrations across India, the rate of female migrations happening due to marriage is less in Bihar than the all-India average.

Outmigration from Bihar to Major Destination States

Interstate outmigration has always been very high in Bihar, and since most of the outmigration occurs due to economic reasons, it becomes pertinent to identify the major destination states that attract migrants from Bihar by offering better economic opportunities. However, as male migration is mainly attributed to employment or economic reasons, and female migration to marriage, an aggregated (male and female) trend will give inaccurate results in terms of reflecting economic destinations. Given this understanding of the migration trend, in this section the major destination states for migrants from Bihar are captured with reference to only the male migrants, in addition to the aggregated trend (male and female combined). Here, the analysis is based on the entire interstate outmigrant cohort from Bihar and captures the distribution of this cohort across other states of India.

Table-1: Distribution of Bihari Migrant Cohort (Male and Female Combined) across Indian States (Migration Duration Between 0 to 9 years)

Major Destination States for All Migrants from Bihar (distribution measured in percent)					
Migrants from Bihar		Migrants from Rural Bihar		Migrants from Urban Bihar	
Delhi	19.34	Delhi	20.05	Jharkhand	18.64
Jharkhand	14.12	West Bengal	13.81	Delhi	16.24
West Bengal	13.65	Jharkhand	13.1	West Bengal	12.97
Maharashtra	10.55	Uttar Pradesh	10.61	Maharashtra	12.38
Uttar Pradesh	10.24	Maharashtra	10.14	Uttar Pradesh	8.62
Haryana	7.06	Haryana	7.86	Gujarat	4.21
Punjab	6.89	Punjab	7.54	Punjab	4.02
Gujarat	4.79	Gujarat	4.92		
Rest of India	13.35	Rest of India	11.98	Rest of India	22.93
Total	100	Total	100	Total	100

Source: Calculated using Census 2011.

Table-2: Distribution of Bihari Migrant Cohort (Male) across Indian States (Migration Duration Between 0 to 9 years)

Major Destination States for Male Migrants from Bihar (distribution measured in percent)					
Migrants from Bihar		Migrants from Rural Bihar		Migrants from Urban Bihar	
Delhi	21.47	Delhi	22.17	Delhi	18.17
Maharashtra	13.18	Maharashtra	12.82	Jharkhand	15.36
West Bengal	12.39	West Bengal	12.48	Maharashtra	14.88
Jharkhand	9.94	Punjab	9.36	West Bengal	11.96
Punjab	8.51	Jharkhand	8.79	Uttar Pradesh	7.11
Haryana	7.8	Haryana	8.69	Gujarat	4.76
Uttar Pradesh	6.96	Uttar Pradesh	6.92	Punjab	4.54
Gujarat	5.94	Gujarat	6.19		
Rest of India	13.81	Rest of India	12.58	Rest of India	23.22
Total	100	Total	100	Total	100

Source: Calculated using Census 2011.

An assessment of table-1 and table-2 gives two very important information: firstly, a comparison of the aggregate and the male-migrant cohorts shows that although the most prominent or preferred destination is Delhi in both cases, the others destination states vary in terms of both positioning and distributional dominance. Secondly, a sectoral analysis shows that except for Delhi, the positioning of the other destination states varies considerably for both rural-origin and urban-origin migrants. The main reason for such a differential pattern is that migrants are not a homogenous group; they vary in terms of personal, household and origin-level characteristics. Migrants from rural areas may have a very different purpose or economic objective as compared to those from urban regions. Migrants from rural areas are mostly less educated, less professionally skilled, less informed compared to those from urban regions. It can therefore be argued that rural-origin migrants will mainly take up the less skill-oriented, casual jobs or jobs in the informal sector such as in manufacturing and agriculture. On the other hand, those from the urban areas are more likely to take up jobs not only in the formal sector but also, more importantly, in the regular-wage and salaried occupations, which offer better professional opportunities compared to their source region. Also, migration from urban areas does not happen only for economic reasons, though employment may be the main driving force – people also migrate for other reasons such as higher education, better business opportunities etc. Given this scenario, it is quite obvious that as the overall migration characteristics vary across the state, the choice of destination and the intensity of migration to move to certain states also vary a lot which is evident from table-1 and table-2.

District Level Analysis of Bihari Migrant Cohort in the Major Destination States

It is observed in the previous section that the major destination states for migrants from Bihar are Delhi (19.34 percent concentration of total interstate migrant cohort from Bihar), Jharkhand (14.12 percent), West Bengal (13.65 percent), Maharashtra (10.55 per cent), Uttar Pradesh (10.24 percent), Haryana (7.06 percent), Punjab (6.89 percent) and Gujarat (4.79 percent), with the remaining being spread over the rest of the Indian states. In this section, an attempt is made to study the distribution pattern of Bihari migrants in these states at the district level. The district-level categorisation is important for understanding the actual migrant concentration because migrants may be attracted to some particular districts in a given state and not to all districts. Also, this will help us understand which districts attract more migrants from Bihar and the possible reason for it.

While existing literature, and also the current analysis using *Census* 2011 data, identifies certain states such as Maharashtra, Gujarat, Delhi etc. as the major destination states for interstate outmigration from Bihar, there is a dearth of literature regarding migration dominance across the districts of the major destination states. In this section an attempt is made to fill that gap.

Table-3: Distribution of Bihari Migrants across Districts of Destination States (Migration Duration Between 0 to 9 years)

Concentration of Bihari Migrants across Districts of Major Destination States (in percent)								
Maharashtra								
<i>Thane</i>	<i>Mumbai Suburban</i>	<i>Pune</i>	<i>Mumbai</i>	<i>Nashik</i>	<i>Raigarh</i>	<i>Nagpur</i>	<i>Remaining Districts</i>	<i>Total</i>
31	22	14	11	5	5	4	8	100
Delhi								
<i>North West</i>	<i>South West</i>	<i>South</i>	<i>West</i>	<i>East</i>			<i>Remaining Districts</i>	<i>Total</i>
23	22	20	15	8			12	100
West Bengal								
<i>Kolkata</i>	<i>North 24 Parganas</i>	<i>Bardhaman</i>	<i>Hugli</i>	<i>Howrah</i>	<i>Uttar Dinajpur</i>		<i>Remaining Districts</i>	<i>Total</i>
15	14	13	12	11	8		27	100
Uttar Pradesh								
<i>Ghaziabad</i>	<i>GBN*</i>	<i>Kushinagar</i>	<i>Deoria</i>	<i>Lucknow</i>	<i>Varanasi</i>		<i>Remaining Districts</i>	<i>Total</i>
15	14	6	6	5	5		49	100
Punjab								
<i>Ludhiana</i>	<i>Jalandhar</i>	<i>SAS Nagar**</i>	<i>Bathinda</i>	<i>Hoshiarpur</i>	<i>Patiala</i>		<i>Remaining Districts</i>	<i>Total</i>
34	13	7	6	5	5		24	100
Jharkhand								
<i>Ranchi</i>	<i>Dhanbad</i>	<i>Purbi Singhbhum</i>	<i>Bokaro</i>	<i>Deogarh</i>	<i>Godda</i>	<i>Palamu</i>	<i>Remaining Districts</i>	<i>Total</i>
17	14	12	10	7	6	5	29	100
Haryana								
<i>Gurgaon</i>	<i>Faridabad</i>	<i>Panipat</i>	<i>Karnal</i>	<i>Sonipat</i>	<i>Kurukshetra</i>	<i>Yamuna Nagar</i>	<i>Remaining Districts</i>	<i>Total</i>
23	20	10	9	6	5	5	22	100
Gujarat								
<i>Surat</i>	<i>Valsad</i>	<i>Ahmadabad</i>	<i>Kachchh</i>	<i>Rajkot</i>	<i>Bharuch</i>		<i>Remaining Districts</i>	<i>Total</i>
56	10	8	8	4	3		11	100

Source: Calculated using Census 2011.

* Gautam Buddha Nagar

** Sahibzada Ajit Singh Nagar

Table-3 shows the concentration of Bihari migrants across districts of the major destination states. The table shows that just as the states in India vary in terms of economic development, natural resources etc., which makes one state a more favourable migration destination than the other, the districts within a state also vary in terms of economic opportunities, resulting in a varied concentration of migrant population. The intra-district level of development makes

one district more attractive for migrants than the others. From the table, it is observed that within the destination states, the Bihari migrant concentration is higher in the districts that are vibrant economic hubs and have a higher concentration of industries, along with a dense presence of MSME (Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises) sectors. For example, Thane and Mumbai Suburban districts in Maharashtra, Kolkata in West Bengal and Ludhiana in Punjab have the maximum concentration of migrants from Bihar. These districts in particular have a higher concentration of industrial units, thereby offering more employment opportunities to the migrants in the textile, manufacturing and construction sectors amongst others.

Summary

Outmigration from Bihar is a well-recognised phenomenon which finds a fair amount of mention in development and migration-centric literature in India. Migration from the state is not a recent phenomenon – from the times of the Mughals to the colonial era and the post-independence decades, the propensity towards migration has only been increasing. It has been observed over the years that while the magnitude and direction of migration has been changing along with its form, the phenomenon is finding more relevance with every passing decade. An important observation of this study is that for Bihar, the rate of out-migration for economic reasons such as work, employment and business is twice the all-India figures for both male and female migrants. The figures of *Census 2011* also show that the popular migration destinations are more towards the western Indian states and the neighboring states such as Delhi, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Punjab, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh and Jharkhand. Another important observation is that in the destination states, the concentration of Bihari migrants is not uniform across districts, i.e., the districts with greater economic opportunities receive more migrants from the state. This leads us to infer that the migration flow is mostly directed towards cities and towns which have a higher concentration of industrial units, thereby offering more employment opportunities in diverse sectors like construction, manufacturing, textile etc.

References

Breman, J. (1985). *Of peasants, migrants, and paupers: rural labour circulation and capitalist production in west India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Census of India. (2011). Migration Tables. Office of the Registrar General of India, New Delhi.

Davis, K. (1951). *The Population of India and Pakistan*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

- Deshingkar, P. et al. (2006). 'The Role of Migration and Remittances in Promoting Livelihoods in Bihar'. London: Overseas Development Institute.
- De Haan, A. (2002). 'Migration and livelihoods in historical perspective: A case study of Bihar, India'. *The Journal of Development Studies* 38, no. 5: 115–142.
- Karan, A. (2003). 'Patterns of Migration from Rural Bihar'. In *Migrant Labour and Human Rights in India*, edited by Iyer, G. 102–103, New Delhi: Kanishka Publishers.
- Kumar, N. & Bhagat, R.B. (2012). 'Out-migration from Bihar: causes and consequences'. *Journal of Social and Economic Studies* 22, no. 2: 134–143.
- Sarkar, P. (2019). 'Associated gains from migration'. In *Handbook of Internal Migration in India*, edited by Rajan, I.S. & Sumeetha, M., 273–286. India: Sage.
- Sarkar, P. (2014). 'An analysis of inter-state quantum migration in India: An empirical validation of the 'push-pull framework' and gains from migration'. *Indian Journal of Labor Economics* 57, no. 3: 267–281.
- Sharma, A.N. (2005). 'Agrarian Relations and Socio-Economic Change in Bihar'. *Economic and Political Weekly* 40, no. 10. 960–972.
- Yang, A. (1979). 'Peasants on the Move: A Study of Internal Migration in India'. *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 10, no. 1: 37–58.