HABITS AMONG MIGRANT LABOUR: A CASE ALANG SHIP YARD
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ABSTRACT
A study on migrant labour or migration is not a new phenomenon. Migrants are moving from one place to another in search of opportunities. During the process of movement these migrants face various problems. Migrants settle in a new area face several difficulties during initial adjustment process. There is assimilation of issues sometimes complete, sometimes partial. The aim of the paper is to focus on the nativity and their habits are important in the process of migration. The result shows that majority of Oriya labours are facing problem due to language barrier. The study also focuses on their food habits while they stay at Alang Ship Breaking Yard.

Key words: Nativity, Migration and Ship breaking.
INTRODUCTION

Ship breaking is the process of dismantling of old ships to recover steel scrap and other materials. Ships breaking industry is a recycling industry which recover steel from the ship which is expected to constitute 90 percent in terms of value. The other materials constitute the remaining 10 percent and consist of machines and equipment, furniture and fittings, asbestos, wood panels, oil, chemicals, electrical fittings etc. These items can at best be considered as by-products of this industrial activity. Ship breaking is a challenging process involving a complexity of issues like ecology environment, labour health and safety. Thus it has been recognized as one of the hazardous industries and this activity is mainly concentrated in developing countries of Asia.

The ship breaking activity shifted gradually from high-income countries to middle income countries and then to low income countries due to growing environmental concern and stringent regulations in developed countries. During this process the ship breaking industry has transformed from being a capital-intensive industry to labour intensive industry. Although Ship breaking industries produce the potentiality for economic growth, it also brings with it dangers of environmental imbalances. Until the 1970’s ship breaking activities were concentrated in developed countries. But after 1980, due to availability of cheap labour, a shift of these activities from the developed countries to developing countries is witnessed. Countries like India, Bangladesh, China and Pakistan have less stringent norms or legislation pertaining to environment and also the availability of huge labour force.

It is estimated that on an average 700 ships are taken for decommissioning every year world over. Out of these 350-450 ships are scrapped in India. The ship breaking activities are carried out at various places in India along the sea coast of the country Viz, Alang in Gujarat, Sachana in Gujarat, Dharukhana near Bombay, Tadri in Karnataka, Maipe in Karnataka, Baypore in Kerala, Vishakhapatnam in Andhra Pradesh, Valinokan in Tamil Nadu and at Tuticorin in Tamil Nadu. However, the main ship breaking centre is located
on the west coast at Alang, Gujarat. The ship breaking activity at Alang began in 1982 and currently, 141 plots are in operation and Alang is considered to be the largest ship breaking yard in world. India has the world’s largest ship breaking facility in terms of volume. According to Basel convention report of 2003, 38 percent of ship breaking activities are concentrated in India, followed by China 25 percent, Bangladesh 19 percent and Pakistan 7 percent.

India is a labour surplus country wherein labour is available at competitive wage rates. The ship breaking industry in India is labour intensive unlike its capital intensive character in developed countries. Alang ship breaking yard provides employment opportunities to skilled and unskilled labours to the tune of 30,000. The labour employed at Alang consist largely migrants from the states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand and Orissa. But few Gujarati labours are also employed who hail from Bhavnagar and surrounding districts. The reasons stated for the less number of local labour employed are low wages, manual work, poor working and living conditions. There are many activities and industries which directly and indirectly depend on Alang ship breaking yard. The total number of people directly and indirectly employed by Alang ship breaking industry is estimated between 1.5 to 1.6 lakhs (FIDH 2002, p. 56). It includes the downstream industries generated by the ship breaking industry such as re-rolling mills, foundries, oxygen plants, local scrap store, transportation companies and other small local business and a number of upstream. Ship breaking industry is the starting point of the chain of industrial link in the region. This industry has wide range of linkages to the other industries. The products of ship breaking industry are used by various small, medium and large scale industries which convert them into various final products. Thus the ship breaking industry in its very nature is linked to various industries in the region.

The demand for workers at Alang ship breaking yard is met with inter-state and intra-state migration of labour. Labour migration in India is highly unregulated and replete with the abuses and violation of rights. Migrant workers find jobs in agriculture, construction sector, plantations, rice mills, fisheries and ship breaking industry. The proportion of rural people involved in the migration flow is rapidly increasing. It is said
to represent more than half of the migrant population worldwide. Normally, lack of employment opportunities and conditions of poverty are attributed to be the cause of migration. Thousands of rural labours migrate from their hinterlands in rural areas to other places mainly in search of employment. They are new to the place of destination and find it difficult to make adjustment with the changed situation and environment. They have to face a number of problems at the place of destination. Moreover, they are exploited both physically as well as mentally by the employers or contractors at the place of migration.

The ship breaking industry of Alang has some unique characteristics, which differentiate it from other industries. The industry after functioning for more than 20 years and despite its great economic importance, the industry retains some informal characteristics. The migrant labours are unorganised and none of the trade unions operating at national level have any presence at Alang. Another unique feature of the industry is that most of the labours are male living alone and have migrated from different backward and underdeveloped regions of the country. Ship breaking activity is one of the hazardous industries falling under the category of Hazardous Waste Management and is not always covered by normal labour and social protection laws. The ship breaking industry presents a dangerous work environment with high risk of injury and accidents. Labours are also exposed to a large number of chemicals and asbestos. The implementation of labour rights at Alang yards is inadequate. The atmosphere of fear and intimidation prevails thereby ensuring that workers remain obedient and submissive.

DATA SOURCES AND METHODOLOGY

The study is based on the data collected by the researcher personally from the workers using a structured questionnaire. Out of 30,000† unskilled and skilled labours working inside yards, a stratified random sample of 300 respondents which accounts for about 1 percent of the population is selected for the survey. These 300 respondents are from different states viz, U.P, Orissa, Bihar, Jharkhand and Gujarat. The researcher directly

* Figures are collected from GMB reports on ASSBY.
contacted the respondents at site and at their living place in Alang to collect the information.

Besides primary data the researcher has also made use a secondary data such as reports, studies and information available at Gujarat Maritime Board and Gujarat Ship Breakers Association. A number of reports and surveys containing information of ships dismantled and environment conditions are available. These studies have been conducted both at individual and Government levels but comparison of the results of these studies is difficult and results have to be treated with certain amount of caution due to variation in the data and definitional differences.

**NATIVITY AND HABITS AMONG MIGRANTS**

When migrants settle in a new area they may face several difficulties during initial adjustment process. There is assimilation of issues sometimes complete, sometimes partial. In the present study workers are facing various adjustment problems. Before discussing the concept of nativity, it is important to define the word adjustment and which types of adjustment problems are faced by the workers at Alang ship breaking yard.

According Beijer in a Multilingual Demography, the adjustment refers to “the process by which migrants adjust themselves to the place of migration. The problem of adjustment is now a central problem for sociologist. But in recent times the problem of assimilation of migrants received comparatively little attention. The adjustment to place of migration, often in unfamiliar environment is indeed a problematic task for the rural newcomers who come from an environment which is different in many respects from the environment in the place of migration (Beijer, 1963: 180-181).

The unfamiliar environment creates problems of adjustment. The process of becoming assimilated into place of migration and industrial environment, into a new social climate, can lead to many adjustment difficulties. Many migrants feel lonely because they miss
their houses and their neighborhoods because of the changed environment to which they were not used to earlier (Beijer, 1963: 182).

In the changed and new society, several problems of adjustment are bound to take place. Rural migrants often remain alienated from place of migration, outside the scope of their immediate economic interests and fail to fully utilize public facilities such as banks, school and public health centers. They do not feel that they are entirely at home in the place of migration and this insecurity is liable to be expressed in the form of anxiety regarding new customs. On the other hand, the economic, social and ritual reciprocity are frequently maintained with rural kin and in some cases geographical mobility may be inhabited by kinship obligations or regional attachments (Anderi, 1973: 11-14).

Rural migrants at Alang ship breaking yard face several problems of adjustment. Their problems are of a varied nature: the problem of language, customs, problem of housing, recreational and social ceremonies etc. The problem of language is particularly among the Oriya labours who come directly from village. But other migrant labours from Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Jharkhand do not face the problem of language because they use Hindi language in their day-to-day life. In the beginning, Oriya labours speak their mother tongue. This is the reason that they live in dormitories and in clusters. Gradually, they start speaking local language or Hindi and mix up with non-Oriya labours. Thus this problem is short lived. The customs and various festival occasions of their place of origin bring into their mind the memories of their homeland. But gradually the intensity of their feeling decreases with the increase in the period of their stay at the Alang. The migrant labours do not have great contact with the local people and do not follow local customs. Alang is like an island of migrant labour whose main purpose is to earn for themselves and their families located at far off places waiting for monthly remittances. This fact alienates them from the city culture and compels them to establish their own sub-culture entity and their own cultural associations at Alang itself.

Another important thing is that most of the migrants from the rural regions do not bring their families with them. This is so because of two important reasons. Firstly, most of the
migrants at Alang ship breaking yard are not in economically sound position to keep their families with them. Secondly, the migrants own some property in the village and for the care and maintenance of the property; it becomes necessary for them to keep their families in the village. Alang itself being a small village does not have proper infrastructure such as housing, schools, hospitals and none of these have developed on sufficient scale so that migrants can bring their families. Only 5 out of 300 respondents in the current study, stay with their families. This family separation creates several of problems, for example, a single individual finds it difficult to get a house, and he suffers from emotional strain. The frequency of his visits to native place which increase expenses and in some cases leads them to debt.

As pointed out earlier that the respondents who migrate to Alang ship breaking yard from a different environment face the problem of adjustment. Though this is an individual and personal phenomenon and which varies from person to person, the problem of adaptability to place of migration is greater for the newcomers and less educated. However there are several factors which unite and bind them together which create nativism among the migrants.

Various authors, academicians and researchers have defined the term nativity in different ways. According to Dictionary of the Social Science, the movement of societies toward the reaffirmation of native culture in reaction to the stress of acculturation (Gould and Kalb, 1964: 45) whereas International Encyclopedia defines the term nativism as not the social movements but the attitude in a society of rejection of alien persons or culture (Sills, 1968: 75).

Nativism is aggressive or non-aggressive effort of members of the society to produce for its own use a synthesis of some of its own cultural features and those of the organized effort of a people to revive or perpetuate selected aspects of their culture (Reading, 1977: 137-138). Many sociologists have defined the concept of nativity in terms of caste, state, tradition and culture. A sociological study conducted by Upreti on migrant labours defines the nativity in terms of marriage. It was found that marriages of Kumaonis take
place with the people from the Kumoan region, wherever they are living (Upreti, 1981: 64-71).

After discussing the term nativity, which is an important aspect in the present study. Workers at Alang have unity in diversity which binds them together. Besides, differences of regional background, religion and caste the common dialects, customs and practices and common culture motivate them to keep themselves closer to each other at Alang. Labours from each state and region try to maintain their identity and individuality. Most of the Oriya migrants develop a general tendency to unite themselves into a group or an association. They live in dormitories, which are shared between 50 to 100 labours from the same state. These migrants organize some of their own cultural activities under the auspices of their associations. The new entrant to Alang, who generally suffer from language problems and feels home sickness, get some relief and begin to realize that in their new environment they can retain something of their own culture.

Another significant thing is that most of the respondents from Uttar Pradesh and Jharkhand live together in rented houses. Workers from the same states or from the same village tend to live together. Living together makes it easy to keep the same social contact and also keep alive the traditions of the village.

Close contacts of the migrants among themselves in Alang keep them in constant touch with their native place and keep them informed about the happenings in the native village. Thus, a migrant who returns from their native place is surrounded by other migrants, mostly those who come from adjoining areas of their villages. Majority of the respondents have some cultivable land at their native place. Hence are interested in the climate and conditions at their native towns and villages.

On the other hand, their customs, traditions and other sub-cultural characteristics motivate them to unite and form a separate identity and try to maintenance of separate sub-cultural traits by the migrant at Alang ship breaking yard. The maintenance of sub-culture groups is automatic and inevitable, but their coming in conflict with the culture of
the place of migration would naturally result in a situation which will prevent their integration and problems of adjustment would be much more complex. Therefore, in short it is found that respondents at Alang retain their culture and traditions and they continue to be migrants even after a stay of a decade or more at Alang.

**Food Habits**

In this section an attempt is made to analyse the various habits of the respondents after migrating to Alang ship breaking yard. The important variables analysed in this section are food habits and dress pattern. Rural people are much more attached to their tradition and culture than urban people. Majority of the migrants are from rural backgrounds, which influence their habits. With regard to food habits the daily meal of the respondents consisted of two items, usually roti (bread) and shak (vegetable), roti and dal or rice or dal. Migrants from different regions have different food habits. For instance, migrants from Orissa who live together in dormitories and take their meal in common mess have daily meal which consists of rice and dalma (lentil pulses). These migrants are from the eastern part of the country and they are rice eaters. Another group of migrants from Uttar Pradesh take their daily meal which consists of roti and shak because they prefer chappatis. These migrants are from northern part of the country. In the present study it is found that most of the gujarati families are vegetarian and they prefer to live with the migrant who are vegetarian. But many of the migrants from eastern states of India are non-vegetarians, hence live with their natives or like mined groups. After migrating to Alang food habits of the respondents changed but not significantly. For instance a study conducted on Mahadeokolis in Poona city found that rural people after migrating to Poona changed their food habits. There daily meals in village consist of rice and cooked split pulses or dal with chuntney. The proportion of meat, fish and eggs in the diet of these people had increased (Gala, 1976: 114-115). But in Alang after migration of rural people the proportion of meat, fish and eggs declined day-by-day due to high cost of living. Most of the migrant labour take food in common mess which itself leads to common food habits.
Tea was the common beverage and tea drinking had become a regular habit among the rural migrants in Alang. They consumed two or three cups of tea every day and much more on some occasions. Workers while working in yards they get 15 minutes break and they consumed nearly two cups of tea at the same time. A cup of tea as a sign of hospitality was highly appreciated by them at residence. Majority of the rural migrant were fond of liquor, but they do not report due to fear. If liquor was difficult to obtain, they consumed bad quality of local liquor. Thus the consumption of tea, liquor and also tobacco had increased which is contrary to their traditional life.

Out of 300 migrant labours majority of them still cling to their old dress and language. Only the young have changed their dressing pattern. The fact, that new style dresses are popular among the younger or new entrant to Alang ship breaking yard. Generally, the eastern part of the country wears dhoti or lungi which suggests that they are wrapping their body with piece of cloth whereas the migrants from northern part wears pyjama. But after arriving in Alang their dressing style has not changed much but has changed to some extent. Workers wear trousers and shirt so that they can work comfortably in the yard. But some old migrants are still wearing dhoti or lungi or pyjama while working like at the place of living.

**Conclusion**

Rural migrants at Alang ship breaking yard face several problems of adjustment. Their problems are of a varied nature: the problem of language, customs, problem of housing, recreational and social ceremonies etc. The problem of language is particularly among the Oriya labours who come directly from village.

Another important thing is that most of the migrants from the rural regions do not bring their families with them. This is so because of two important reasons. Firstly, most of the migrants at Alang ship breaking yard are not in economically sound position to keep their families with them. Secondly, the migrants own some property in the village and for the
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It is concluded from the discussion on food habits of the migrant labours at Alang ship breaking yard that these migrants follow their traditional culture to a great extent in terms of food and dressing style. There are some changes in their habits, but that is only limited to few young or new migrants.


Reference


