

# CHAPTER I

## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

The Human Development Report 2009 published by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) states that the number of internal migrants is four times higher than that of the international migrants in the world. As per the report, internal migration<sup>1</sup> not only involves the poorer segments of the society, but also impacts more on the economy as a whole on sending and receiving regions, much more than that of the international migration (HDR 2009). Literally, internal migration can be viewed as an economic survival strategy, especially in the Asian countries, and it can help in poverty reduction to a great extent (Deshingkar 2006). In India, as per 2001 population census, internal migrants constitute of around 309 million or 30 percent of the country's total population. However, according to a recent estimate of the National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO), the number of internal migrants was around 326 million or 28.5 percent of the country's population in 2007-08 (NSSO 2007-08). While in 2011, the number of internal migrants exceeded much more than that of the international migrants, which was estimated at around 11.4 million out-migrants from India to other countries (World Bank 2011). In the country, the flows of skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled migrants from rural to urban areas have increased significantly since 1991, especially after the policy of liberalization, globalization and privatisation (Pattanaik 2005).

The internal migrants in India are basically categorised into two— one, the long-term migrants who have relocated individuals or households and are generally

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<sup>1</sup>In this study, internal migration refers to human migration within one geopolitical entity, usually a nation. Detail of it may be referred to Poston and Micklin (2006).

belonged to well-to-do category of the society, and two, the short-term migrants who generally move on circular or seasonal basis, temporarily for few years or periods. As per NSSO 2007-08 report, and a study by Deshingkar and Akter (2009), in India, short-term migrants vary from 15 million to 100 million, and most of them belong to the deprived sections of the society, with poor educational attainment, limited access to physical assets and resources. However, Weiner (1978) has categorised inter-state migrants into five categories— 1) the largest group consists of women, migrating after marriage with their husbands, 2) the students who are seeking education outside their home-states, 3) the members of middle class, often move from one urban centre to another, in search of better employment opportunities or are transferred of jobs, 4) entrepreneurs including traders, small merchants and money lenders doing business in other states, and 5) substantially low-income group and low-skilled labour force moving from country-side to the city or from one urban area to another place within the country. Apart from the above mentioned categories of migrants, majority of them stay for short-term, especially the seasonal or circular in nature. These migrants form a major part of the Indian casual labour market (Deshingkar and Farrington 2006). The participation of migrant labourers in the organised urban sector is extremely low because of their low educational qualification as the sector basically requires (Bino et al. 2008). However, informal sector, especially in the urban centres can easily absorb them. The unskilled/semiskilled, illiterate/semiliterate and seasonal migrants also find this sector the best option available to them vis-à-vis the opportunities available at their origin (Shrivastava and Sasikumar 2003).

In this regard, one of leading states in providing internal migrants in the country is Bihar (NSSO 2007-08), which is also happened to be one of populous states with a high density of population estimated at 1102 persons per sq. km vis-a-vis 382

persons per sq.km.in India (Population Census 2011). At present, majority of the population of the state (Bihar) live in the rural area and consequently 63.9 per cent of the state's population involve in the primary sector (Planning Commission 2014). The World Bank Report (2000) on 'Development Challenges and Poverty in Bihar also highlighted that in rural Bihar, the poor people and peasants have very limited means of livelihood due to flawed land ownership law, poor educational system and social discrimination. The rural populace of Bihar depend mainly on agriculture sector and the underemployment rate is quite high compared to national average<sup>2</sup>. Migration to other states is one of preferred options available to them, mainly for economic reasons. India's population census data 1991 reveal that Uttar Pradesh and Bihar alone constitute one-third of the total inter-state out-migration in the country (Mukherji 1995; Srivastava 1998). In this context, a study conducted by Malekar (2008) revealed that the first cohort of international emigrants from Bihar was found in 1834 when the British used migrant workers from Bihar to lay the first roads in Mauritius. Also, a large number of people migrated from Bihar as indentured labourer to British colonies around the world as well as to other parts of the country, mainly in the West Bengal and Assam during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (Ibid 2008).

At present, Bihar is one of the fastest growing states in terms of Net State Domestic Product (NSDP) in the country, growing at around 10 percent in the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plans till 2012. However, when it comes to per capita term, it stands at the lowest position with NSDP per capita of Rs 22589 at 2004-05 current prices, vis-a-vis Rs 61855 of the national average in 2011-12 (NSSO 2011-12). Few research studies and government official documents manifest that Bihar ranks at the

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<sup>2</sup> Agriculture labour and cultivation together accounted for around 64% in Bihar, as per NSS 66th round "Employment and Unemployment Survey".

lowest position with respect to many of the development parameters<sup>3</sup>. As Sharma (1995) discussed on the issue of economic diversification in rural Bihar, the state is found to have limited non-farm employment opportunities. Therefore, a large number of unemployed and underemployed labourers of the state are found to be vulnerable and compelled to out-migrate to other states in search of employment opportunities. According to 2011 population census, of the total 1.7 million of Bihari labour out-migrants 13.32 percent of them were found to be inter-state migrants, migrated to other states within the country. Another study conducted by Deshingkar, et al (2006) estimated that the Bihari migrants remitted around Rs 4.5 billion in 2006 through post office transfers alone.

Migration can also be seen as a process of mobility for achieving the goals of livelihood improvement, and the extent to which households succeed in achieving these goals depends on the destination and selectivity of migration (de Hass 2010). As of the causes, according to Lee (1966), there are many factors for people to out-migrate that include the push factors (from the origin), pull factors (from the destination), intervening obstacles (e. g. distance) and personal factors. Push and pull factors are the forces that can either induce people to move to a new location or obliged them to leave old residences. It may probably be due to economic, political, cultural and environment factors. In the context, according to Chand, et al. (1998), in Bihar, rural push and urban pull have been the driving forces for migration. Another study by McDowell and de Haan (1997) found that migration is a development-induced process that reflects uneven development of the regions. The Constitution of India also guarantees freedom of movement and allows people to settle down

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<sup>3</sup>The Indian Human Development Report (IHDR) states that Bihar ranks the lowest in term of Human development Index (HDI). Also, Suryanarayana et al. (2011) estimated the score of income dimension for Bihar and found to be 0.398 vis-a-vis all India score of 0.465.

anywhere within the territory of the country with certain exceptions, such as Scheduled Tribes (STs) areas and army cantonments<sup>4</sup>.

Bustamante (2011) discussed the vulnerabilities that migrants face from the time they leave home towards new place. He explained that a person is less vulnerable at his home than at any new destination where he is looked down as a migrant. At home, generally, he is socially rich in order to defend and protect himself from any kind of unfavourable situation or incidence. According to Derose et al. (2007), vulnerability is a multifaceted problem that includes the political and social marginalization, at the same time, lack of socioeconomic resources makes them prone to problems. The unfamiliarity with the local language, culture, legal and administrative system along with the detachment from family and traditional support that he/she enjoyed at home and exposure to a new society with different environments make them feel alienated at times and disturbed too (Varenes 2003). Though these aspects have already been discussed in the context of international migration, the situation is more or less the same in the case of inter-state (internal) migration in the large country like India. Studies done by the scholars (Weiner 1978; Hansen 2001) have uncovered the fact that migrants face several barriers in the destination areas like the access to civic amenities, housing and employment, linguistic differences as well as restrictions on their political and cultural rights. Migrants are all the more vulnerable to discrimination and exploitation, because many of them are poor, illiterate and live in slums and hazardous locations that are prone to disaster and natural calamities (Weiner 1978). Nevertheless, over the years, they slowly developed several coping strategies in order to adjust in the new destination.

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4 As per the Indian Constitution, Part III (Fundamental Rights), Article 19(1) d and 19(1)e, the outsiders are prohibited to buy lands or properties in the regions like Sikkim, Nagaland, Manipur, Jammu and Kashmir, etc., and their stay in these regions can only be temporary.

Besides economic resources, there are other qualities like— personal, social and cultural of the destination that a migrant requires to learn in order to cope with and survive at destinations. These resources help them to satisfy their needs, demands and goals. Therefore, livelihood sustainability has been the larger issue for the migrants.

## **1.2 BIHARI MIGRANTS IN INDIA'S NORTH EASTERN REGION**

With the growth of tea industry in Assam, since the 1901, a large number of Bihari labour migrants flocked into the state, Assam province at that time. According to Negi and Ganguly (nd, p. 11), in 1931, the migrants from Bihar and Orissa alone constituted around 34 percent of the total immigrants in Assam. This movement of the migrant population into the newly formed state of Assam continued in the post-independence era as well. Besides Bengali (both Hindu and Muslim) immigrants from Bangladesh and West Bengal state, Assam received the largest number of Bihari and Hindi speaking labourer migrants in the entire North-eastern Region (NER or simply region hereafter)<sup>5</sup>. On the other hand, the process of urbanisation and industrialisation in the Himalayan state of Sikkim has been very rapid in the recent decades. Consequently, the movement of the Bihari labourer migrants into this newly formed and fast developing state is also found to be equally large.

According to Wiener (1978), migrant labourers are attracted by the receiving states of NER due to two main factors— unwillingness of the majority of the local people to take up the blue collar jobs and employers of the newly created jobs prefer migrant labourers. The advancement in the sectors like industry, agriculture and urban

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<sup>5</sup> NER consists of eight states: Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura. While the Eastern Himalayan state of Sikkim, which was merged with the Indian union on 16th May 1975 is known for its peace and good governance. Considering its topographical condition and socio-cultural proximity, the state has been bracketed with the NER in 2003 and shares international borders with Tibet (Autonomous Region of China) to the north and northeast, Bhutan to the southeast, and Nepal to the west.

growth in many states of India as well has a large number of employment opportunities. In turn, it attracted large number of migrant workers in those states (Ibid 1978). Bihar is found to be one of the major suppliers of such casual workers in those states (Singh and Iyer 1985). Also Bihar is known for over population, poverty and unemployment problems, and more importantly, wage rate in Bihar is relatively low vis-a-vis other states of the country, probably due to weak labour law and over unemployed working population. Theoretically as well, wage rate differences and disparity in regional income, regional growth and educational disparities encourage movement of people from one cultural-linguistic region to another newly expanded region (Weiner 1978). Under the North Eastern Industrial and Investment Promotion Policy 2007(NEIIPP 2007), the region has been declared as special economic zone (SEZ). In the recent decades, states within the region/NER have taken up massive development initiatives in industrial sector and other various schemes under the central government. This has attracted investors in the region and created a huge demand for labourers (Indian Chamber of Commerce 2013). Of the states within the region, Assam created the major share of employment opportunities in the industrial and infrastructural sectors. Manufacturing sector witnessed varying degree of positive employment growth thereafter (Sahu 2012), while the state of Sikkim has witnessed a vast infrastructural and industrial development projects in the past few years. This attracted large number of migrant labourers from the states of Bihar, Bengal, Orissa and Uttar Pradesh (Rai 2013).

On the other hand, right after the country's independence, barring Sikkim, with the apprehension of losing social, economic and political opportunities in the hands of the migrants, the resentment and movement against the migrants started in the region (Singha 2017). In Assam, movements against the immigrants started in the

1980s with the rise of the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) (Singha 2018, p. 42), attacking Bangladeshis and other Hindi speaking people migrated to Assam from the states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh over the past quarter century. Demand for ordinance and legislation to restrict economic opportunities and cultural positions of these migrants emerged. Besides the movement against the outsiders and armed struggle for a complete secession from India, ethnicity-based autonomy movements or infightings intensified in the 1980s and 1990s. In the 2000s, the states of Assam and Manipur were the worst affected by the ethnicity-driven movements vis-à-vis other six sister states of the region (Singha 2017, p. 689). Of course, the Himalayan state of Sikkim is identified as the most peaceful state in the region, rated as zero crime rate in the country.

But, the bigger question is, whether have the migration policies enacted in the region and the movements against immigrants solved the issue? As observed in the region, the Assam's anti-immigration movements could not solve the problem, rather produced an adverse impact on the society and the polity (Singh 2012). Despite Assam Accord<sup>6</sup> signed in 1985, draft list of National Registry of Citizens (NRC) published in August 2018 found around four lakhs illegal immigrants in the state and this caused a political debate at the national level. Also, though the policy like Inner Line Permit (ILP), which aims at protecting indigenous people from the outsiders is in place, major business establishments blue colour jobs are controlled by the outsiders in the region, especially in Nagaland, Mizoram and Meghalaya. At the global level as well, internal conflicts or the movements of the locals against the outsiders has not made any dent in preventing immigration. For instance, despite ongoing war and general

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<sup>6</sup>The Assam Accord was signed between representatives of the Government of India and the leaders of the Assam Movement in New Delhi on 15 August 1985. As per the accord, the Bangladeshi immigrants, irrespective of their faith, who entered Assam after 24 March 1971, will be deported.

insecurity conditions, thousands of African, especially the Ethiopian migrants continued to make their journey to the war-torn Yemen in search of better economic opportunities. From where, they further move on to the Gulf countries with the hopes of better work (Schlein 2018). Therefore, a thorough understanding of the migrants' livelihood sustainability in different political environment becomes the interest of the policy makers and academia.

In this regard, most of the scholars (De Haan 1999; Russell, et al. 1990) claimed that the migration is a strategy to sustain livelihood for the poor people. It is also irreversibly an essential element in the rural livelihood strategies (Coffey et al. 2014; Mosse et al. 2002). Migration is a strategy to escape from poverty, and in this context, many other scholars (De Jainvry and Sadoulet 2000; Hoddinot et al. 2000) have emphasized over the need of assets that are the symptom and cause of poverty. Similarly, Ellis (2000) depicted the role of it and how do different assets play a very important role in sustaining their lives, wellbeing and livelihood. But a limited study has been done on livelihood sustainability of the migrant labourers at destination.

As of the functional definition, the term "livelihood sustainability" is well recognised as human's inherently developed and implement strategies to ensure their survival (UNDP 2002). Understandably, migrant labourers do generally live their life on the edges and can achieve livelihood sustainability if and only if they "can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks and maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets both now and in the future" (Carney 1998, p.13). For understanding coping strategy of these migrants properly, a systematic study on sustainability and quality of life of the migrant labourers in new destinations is needed.

### **1.3 RATIONALE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

Despite high intensity of social and political conflicts in the India's NER, the region has been a preferred destination for a large number of migrant labourers from Bihar for livelihood and employment opportunities. Majority of the Bihari migrants are basically unskilled and menial workers. It is plausible that the jobs taken up by them are the ones which the locals are either unwilling to take up or incapable of doing them (Piore 1979; Weiner 1978). Similar kind of notion was also stated by Singh and Iyer (1985) on livelihood sustainability of the migrants from Bihar. Possibly, these migrant labourers can get easy jobs at the destination, but there is limited scope for the same in their origin. Hence, they are driven towards NER despite the region's poor infrastructure, weak transport facilities and hostile law and order condition. It should also be noted that a significant number of migrant labourers from Bihar are found engaged in big industrial and commerce centres like Delhi, Mumbai, southern states like Bangalore, Chennai, etc. But, instead of joining them where they might have bigger opportunities they prefer to come in the NER, especially in the trouble-torn area like Assam, which draws our attention and justify the need for research. What has attracted the Bihari labourers to make Assam as their destination? At the same time, many Bihari labourers also make their destination to one of the most peaceful states in the country, Sikkim. As discussed above, Bihari labourers still continue to migrant not only to Sikkim, but also in the state of Assam.

The livelihood sustainability of the unskilled/casual labourers in the world of privatisation and modernisation, and also in the conflict-ridden zones is a researchable topic. This motivated to study the coping mechanism, or in other words, livelihood sustainability of the Bihari migrant labourers in Sikkim and Assam. Having

understood the backgrounds discussed above, an assessment has been made to understand the livelihood sustainability of the migrant labourers of Bihar in NER's urban informal sector<sup>7</sup>, especially in Assam and Sikkim. It is also understood that the Bihari labourer migrants are mostly absorbed in the region's informal sector, and they are also generally belonged to the lowest rung of the society.

With the backgrounds stated above, some of the broader research questions can be formulated as below:

- 1) What are the major factors that influenced labourers to migrate from Bihar to NER, especially in Assam and Sikkim?
- 2) What are the factors that enhanced livelihood sustainability of the Bihari migrant labourers in NER, and
- 3) Have the region's internal conflicts and violence against the migrants been the deterring factors for the Bihari migrant labourers?
- 4) Is quality of life higher in the peaceful state (Sikkim) vis-à-vis conflict-ridden state (Assam)?

#### **1.4 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The study centres on the migrant labourers of Bihar, especially the informal labourers, who have made their destination in the country's North-eastern region, especially in Assam and Sikkim. As discussed above, only the casual and unskilled migrants from

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<sup>7</sup> In 1993, The international Conference of Labour Statisticians, which is also adopted by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) broadly defined informal sector as "The informal sector includes all remunerative work – both and wage employment – that is not recognised, regulated, or protected by existing legal or regulatory frameworks ,and non-remunerative work undertaken in an income-producing enterprise."

Bihar working in the informal sector are included. The specific objectives of the study are given below:

- 1) To identify major factors that influenced informal labourers to migrate from Bihar to Assam and Sikkim.
- 2) To identify the major factors that enhanced livelihood sustainability of these migrant labourers in Assam and Sikkim.
- 3) To compare and contrast the livelihood condition (Quality of Life) of these migrant labourers between the conflict-ridden state– Assam and the relatively a peaceful state– Sikkim.