



What Youth Development Work in India Tells Us about the Gendered Nature of Labour Migration

Barkha Tanvir

ComMutiny – The Youth Collective, India

Abstract

The daily-wage manual labour in our country is migratory. People move from villages and smaller towns to big cities in search of higher wages and more work opportunities. This migration comprises not only of youth chasing livelihood, but also them chasing their dreams. Yet, we often forget how profoundly the gender dynamics of our societies shape these processes. This essay investigates how different expectations from men and women in tribal villages influences migration patterns, livelihood choices, and pursual of aspirations among the youth from these communities. It does this on the basis of seven years of fieldwork in Gond and Baiga tribal villages of Madhya Pradesh. The first section talks about the migration patterns of the young men – where they go, why they go, the migration statistics, and the social and familial pressures they experience. The second section turns the gaze towards the women of the tribal villages, in terms of what is expected of them and their migration patterns. The final section investigates what all happens to the community, the family, the individual, and other young women when some young women take the opportunity to break the barrier and move out of their village. This section reveals that when this happens, these young women are often able to create an independent identity for themselves, send money back home, and think about a career – something that might have been difficult for them to even imagine before stepping out. It is this final section that particularly complicates prevalent notions of labour migration, youth development, and livelihood generation in contemporary India. It also highlights the importance of development work with young people and their families of the country, as each success story that emerges becomes a role model for others to follow in the future.

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