



Society, Culture, Environment and Human Security

Rediscovering Northeast India



Department of Tribal Studies
Indira Gandhi National Tribal University- Regional Campus Manipur
(IGNTU-RCM)

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First Edition: 2020

Online: ISBN 978-93-85790-04-1

Print: ISBN 978-93-85790-05-8

Cover Art by Joyful Thiek

Book design by **indigeNE**

Published For

Department of Tribal Studies

Indira Gandhi National Tribal University- Regional Campus Manipur (IGNTU-RCM)

Makhan village, P.O. Awang Sekmai, Kangpokpi district, Manipur-795136, India

By

Centre for Organization Research and Education

Imphal, Manipur, India

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Pattern of Migration and Settlement among Migrants from Myanmar in Mizoram

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Abstract

Globalization and liberalization have accentuated people's mobility to a great extent that the traditional assumption of human beings as sedentary becomes impractical. Though people move under different guises and circumstances, beneath those movements lays the notion of permanency and temporary. It is on this assumption, the paper attempts to understand the pattern of migration and settlement among migrants from Myanmar in Mizoram. Using a quantitative approach and purposive sampling, a structured interview schedule was used to gather data from 73 respondents across four localities of Aizawl city, the state capital of Mizoram. The findings show the likelihood of migrants to have undergone migration with the intention to stay for a longer duration in the host country. Considering the duration of stay in Aizawl, frequency of visit to a native place, and sending of remittance, it pointed towards migrants' steady progression of making a permanent settlement in Mizoram.

Keywords: Migrants, Myanmar, Mizoram, Settlement.

Introduction

The question of migration has always been centered on the nature of movement. The guise under which people migrate may differ but beneath those movements lies the notion of permanency and temporary. According to their period of stay at destination, migrants have been identified as a sojourner, temporary worker, settlers, and trans-migrant (Cornelius, 1978; Massey, 1986). With the process of globalization, the contours of borders have undergone changes and with it people have become more mobile. Borders have tends to diminish and a set of migrants are on the rise in what is termed as transnational, who shuttle back and forth from one country to another. In today's context, the distinction along the line of temporary and permanent becomes increasingly problematic. As Massey (1986) explained, once migrants have entered into the social setting of a host country, they become associated with the surroundings and establish networks that further sustain migration. He further pointed out that migration cannot be devoid of social influences. Building on Piore's work on Integration and Settlement, Massey classified the integration process into three phases. The first phase is associated as the 'sojourner phase' where migrants see themselves as economic men and live in the confinement of their work with no real ties formed beyond their personal contact. The first phase is associated with the idea of returning back to home. With repeated visits migrants enter a 'transition phase' where migrants establish ties with the host society and have greater access to resources at disposal in terms of income, living standards and networks. In the last phase which he termed the 'settlement phase', migrants have identified themselves as a resident of the host country and have primarily been joined by family members. During this phase, earnings are spent mostly in the host community (1986:671). Based on the integration process, this paper intends to analyze the nature of settlement among Myanmararese migrants in Mizoram.

to Tibeto-Burman race. Both the countries were part of British India from 1886 till 1937 until the British decided to separate it into Burma province and British India. Even after the attainment of Independence by both the countries, being a close neighbours, there was a free flow of population from both sides especially between the Mizo District and Chin Special Division. Myanmar holds a place in the history and legacy among the tribes of Chin –Kuki- Mizo as their onwards abode of migration to India, having had their settlement in Chin Hills, Shan and Kabaw valley of Myanmar (Phukan, 2013; Pudiate, 1963). Whenever there exist better economic opportunities on either side, people would move freely (Sangkima, 2004). According to Sangkima, some of the kindred tribes of Chin -Kuki -Mizo from Mizoram migrated back to Myanmar for three specific purposes:

1. They found life to be difficult in Mizoram due to its topography and terrain
2. To improve their economic conditions by practicing wet rice cultivation in Myanmar, and
3. Due to Khampat legacy¹

In the words of late Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, the main reason for the flow was due to Mizos expectation of employment in Burmese Army and also due to the close ethnic linguistic affinity with the Chins (Pakem, 1992). India, as such, did not enforce passport rule to the Hills tribes of Myanmar borderlands and was allowed to enter India provided they do not proceed beyond 25 miles (ibid).

The military coup in 1962 ended the aspiration of ethnic minority groups of Myanmar enshrined under the Panglong Agreement². The consequence culminated in one of the longest civil wars between the ethnic minority groups such as Wa, Shan, Karen, Chin, Kachin, and the military junta. Myanmar was reeling under the military rule in a different guised and formed. The political economy of Myanmar with its closed-door policy and 'Burmese Way of Socialism' destabilized the country. The once rich resource country plunged into one of the least developed countries of the world, with reports of high incidents of human rights violation, and rampant poverty. These events eventually lead to the mass exodus of its people to other countries. Their migratory practices were exerted for a struggle to survive- from political persecution to relieving from the harsh socio-economic conditions. Considering the porousness of border and proximity with India's north east region, Mizoram, in particular, became a theatre ground for the inflows of migrants from Myanmar.

The difficulty of migrants (International) in India rest in identification. The problem persists in labelling and in accordance legal status to Myanmarese migrants since India is a non-signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its additional protocol of 1967(Ahmed, Dasgupta & Kerkhoff, 2004). However, it holds some provision for the protection of refugees on humanitarian grounds. In India, refugees are broadly categorized into three, primarily on the basis of the living conditions of each refugee (South Asia Human Rights Documentation Centre, 1997).

Category I - Refugee who receives full protection according to the standards set by the Government of India (GoI).

Category II - Refugee whose presence in Indian Territory is acknowledged only by the UNHCR and are protected under the principle of non-refoulement.

Category III - Refugees who have entered India and have assimilated into the host communities whose presence is neither acknowledged by the Indian Government nor by the UNHCR.

In most of the cases, Myanmarese migrants fall under the category of II and III. There are some migrants who could afford transportation cost to New Delhi and register with UNHCR and then

Waves of Myanmar Migrants in Mizoram.

Myanmar erstwhile Burma, which is a neighbouring country of India to the east, shares its boundary with Manipur, Mizoram, and Nagaland where its people exerted the same linguistic affinity there are some who have entered India but are yet to register with UNHCR. The limited reach of UNHCR acts as a wet blanket for migrants to access UNHCR assistance, especially in the remote parts of India. As a result, Myanmar migrants living in Mizoram lived as illegal immigrants or undocumented migrants (Sengupta, 2008; Human Rights Features, 2011).

The wave of Myanmar migrants arose in successive waves differing in nature and context. The earlier waves of migrants were the returnee migrants who migrated back to Mizoram to join with their families after their retirement from the Burmese Army. The employment opportunity in Myanmar and the tumultuous period in Mizoram on account of the 1958 famine followed shortly by Mizo uprising during the 1960s lead some of the Mizos to migrate and settle in Myanmar. However, in the turn of events following the military coup and subsequent political instability in Myanmar, some of them migrated back to Mizoram. The pro-democracy demonstrations of 1988, also known as the 8888 uprising which took place in the streets of Myanmar, resulted in a violent outbreak that gave rise to a more rigid military rule with the establishment of State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC). During these events, Mizoram on the hand after signing the Peace Accord in 1986 between the Government of India and the insurgent group Mizo National Front (MNF) has entered an era of peace. Since then, Mizoram has seen upward progress and is now accorded as one of the most peaceful states in India with a high literacy rate. This accentuates, on the other hand, the flow of migrants into Mizoram from its neighbouring country who at that time are reeling under the SLORC rule. Most of the migrants that moved toward Mizoram were mainly from the Chin State and Sagaing Division.

The booming handloom sector during the 1990s in Mizoram which required skilled labourers and the rise of the middle class in Mizoram opened up employment opportunities in domestic sectors. This favoured the inflows of not just the Chins but also the Bamars or Burmans mainly from in and around Monywa region under Sagaing Division. Besides, the opening of the Northeast corridor as part of Act East policy favoured the inflow of migrants. The establishment of border trade along Zokhawthar- Rih created a favourable space for migrants to engage as traders, suppliers, and vendors for products traded across the border trade zone. The establishment of Zokhawthar-Rih Border Trade zone further facilitates movement of people across the borders. Infrastructure and transport development further ease mobility.

On account of their migration status as undocumented and illegal, it is difficult to ascertain their numbers in Mizoram. Different estimates are projected which differ, however, it points to the direction that their numbers are huge in a small state like Mizoram. According to a report prepared by Human Rights Law Network 2005, their presence is seen in 6 districts of Mizoram with an average of 12,600 per district (2005:1).

On the other hand, as per the estimate provided by Rahman and Levesque (2010), there are approximately 70,000 to 1, 00,000 Myanmar migrants in Mizoram (2010:197). Apart from the border areas, it is seen that Aizawl city, the only urban agglomerate in Mizoram, hosts a large number of migrants from Myanmar.

Lalremsiama, (2004) gave an approximation of 50,000 Myanmar migrants living in and around Aizawl city. Though their exact numbers might be doubtful it indicates otherwise their large presence in Mizoram. And to go by the estimation provided by Lalremsiama, (2004), in Aizawl city

alone migrants accounted for 17 percent of the population. And this is a huge number considering the size of Aizawl city with an area of 129 square kilometre and a population of 293,416 (Census of India, 2011).

Methodology

A structured interview schedule was employed to elicit information from 73 respondents. Purposive sampling was used to identify the study area. Aizawl city was selected based on certain characteristics such as being the only urban agglomerate with a municipal council apart from hosting a large number of migrants. Key informant interviews with local leaders, NGOs, and field survey were conducted primarily to see the feasibility of the study and to locate their areas of concentration in different localities of Aizawl city. Four localities were selected for the study viz., Electric, Saron, Thuampui and Zuangtui. Lastly, snowball sampling was used to identify the respondents.

The limitation of the study pertains to the generalization of the findings across Mizoram as the findings of the study covered only four localities of Aizawl city. As such the study is limited to generalize for the whole migrant's population in the state.

Profile of Respondents

Table 1 represents a brief profile of migrants. In Aizawl, it is observed that the majority of Myanmar migrants belong to the Chin ethnic group constituting 71 percent followed by the Bamars, who belong to the dominant ethnic group of Myanmar and professing Buddhism, at 29 percent. Sagaing Division and Chin State are the two main senders of migrants into Mizoram. Majority of the respondents are at their prime age with a mean age of 40 years. Being at a prime age, migrants are less vulnerable as they have the age factor on their side to do any hard work required at destination. It is seen that 70 percent of the respondents are married and the existence of family ties cater to the needs of an individual and provide security and support. With 94 percent constituting a stable family, migrants exerted strong family ties and bonds, depicting the existence of a strong primary support system.

Table 1. Profile of Respondents

Characteristics	Total (N= 73)
1. Ethnic groups	
a) Chin	52 (71)
b) Bamar	21 (29)
2. Place of origin	
a) Sagaing Division	51(70)
b) Chin State	27 (37)
3. Mean age	40 ±13
4. Migrants who are married	51 (70)
5. Number of stable family	66 (90)

Source: Computed. Figures in parentheses are percentages

Pattern of Migration, Settlement, and Remittance

The pattern of migration indicates respondents hailed mostly from rural areas (see table 2). 36 percent said to have hailed from rural areas, 34 percent from semi-urban areas, and the rest hailed from urban areas such as Monwya, capital of Sagaing region and from Hakha, capital of Chin State. The result depicted that migrants from rural areas are more migratory in nature than

their urban counterparts. In this study, migrants who migrated alone is seen to be the most common pattern of migration figuring at 53 percent. Moving alone shows the potential to bring over a family in the near future or start a new family at the destination. Another common pattern among Myanmar migrants is the practice of migration along with family members which constituted 41 percent. The reason why family as a whole moved could be a strategy adopted in order to survive at a new place. Family members are seen not only as a provider of care and support but also as additional labour needed at a destination and this provides more scope for the family to either diversify or intensify their livelihood. This pattern also suggests migrants undergo migration with the intention to settle for a longer duration. Majority came directly to Aizawl indicating the existence of better opportunities in an urban setting; however, 19 percent stated they have settled in other parts of Mizoram before moving to Aizawl. While they settled in other parts of Mizoram, they mobilized resources to come to Aizawl and by the time they moved to Aizawl they had acquired almost all the necessary documents such as a residential certificate, Indian voter identity card, ration card, bank passbook, and other requirements.

Table 2. Pattern of Migration and Settlement

Sl No	Characteristics	Total (N=73)
I	Place of Birth	
	Rural	26 (36)
	Semi-Urban	25 (34)
	Urban	22 (30)
II	Typology of Migration	
	Returnee Migrant	4 (6)
	Individual Migrant	39 (53)
	Migrants who moved along with Family (Family Moved)	30 (41)
III	Settlement in other parts of Mizoram before coming to Aizawl	
	No	59 (81)
	Yes	14 (19)
IV	Frequency of Visit (Native Place)	
	Once in a Year	33 (45)
	Twice in a Year	1 (1)
	Rarely	39 (53)
V	Mean years of stay in Aizawl	13
VI	Do you intend to return in case the situation improves in Myanmar	
	Yes	22 (30)
	No	30 (41)
	Cannot say	21 (29)
VII	Percent of remittance to annual income	3

Source: Computed. Figures in parentheses are percentages

Noting the frequency of visit to their native place, 53 percent hardly paid a visit to Myanmar on a regular basis. 45 percent pay a visit to their native place only once in a year and only 1 percent visit twice in a year. This further suggests that more than half of the migrants have reallocated themselves

in Aizawl. Considering their duration of stay, on average migrants have settled in Aizawl for more than 13 years. Though 30 percent of the respondents intended to return back to Myanmar in case the situation improves, considering their duration of residence in Aizawl which comes to an average of 13 years, migrants may have registered a stronger bond and ties at destination. This pattern of settling down in a more or less permanent way is further calibrated when a majority (41 percent) doesn't intend to return back to Myanmar and only 3 percent of their income is remitted back to Myanmar. The low rate of remittance indicates that their income is primarily spent in the host country. These points to the direction that migrants from Myanmar are not just temporary migrants, but rather have steadily progressed into settling permanently in the host country.

Types of Accommodation at Destination

In terms of finding an accommodation, majority of the migrants settle along with their family (64%) in rented houses as 90 percent ascribed to rent a house while only few owned a house (3%). On the other hand 32 percent stayed in a group house along with other families which are attached to their workplace. In one house normally it accommodate four to five family or more depending on the size of the house. Those who stay in group housing type of accommodation are mostly handloom weavers. They work, stay and cook in the same roof along with others which is provided free of cost by their employers.

Table 3 Types of Accommodation Arrangement at destination
Total N =73

Sl. No		
I	Accommodation at Destination	
	Lived Alone	3 (4)
	Lived Along with Family	47 (64)
	Group Housing	23 (32)
II	Ownership of Housing	
	Owned	3 (4)
	Rented	70 (96)

Source: Computed Figures in parentheses are percentages

Conclusion

The pattern of Myanmar migration depicted characteristics akin to the settlement phase of identifying as resident and joined by family members. It can be drawn that migrants have established strong ties with the host country and have identified themselves more or less as a resident of the host country. The pattern of migration of moving along with family members into Mizoram and low rate of sending remittance to native place indicated otherwise their permanency in the host country. However, the findings cannot be generalized for the whole Mizoram as the study is limited to Aizawl only. There is a tendency among migrants to settle down in urban setting which calls for the need to deal at policy level especially among the urban planners and policymakers in order to prevent urban decay and contestation of resources.

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Notes

¹According to L. Keivom (2001), Khampat is a small village on the side of Myanmar known to occupy a predominant place in the heart of Zo people as their first sedentary settlement. Khampat legacy hovers around a Banyan tree planted by the Zo elders before they leave the town with the solemn oath that when its branches touch the earth, the descendants of Zo people will return to rebuild their settlement again at Khampat.

²Agreement signed in 1947 at Panglong with General Aung Sang and various ethnic minority groups in Myanmar. The provisions of the Agreement include the right to secede from the Union of Burma after 10 years and full autonomy in the internal administration of Frontiers (Ethnic) areas.