The Culture of Indian Migration:
A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis of
Orissa and Rajasthan (1803-2003)

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Abstract
A significant segment of internal migration in India at large, and in the states of Rajasthan and Orissa in particular, continues to be distress-led. Colossal collapse of rural employment generation, the economic setbacks at cultivation, and, the largely deficient employment opportunities in urban centres among others, are believed to be the driving force behind the rise of a more insecure type of movement now. Paradoxically however, this movement occurs in a world supplemented by a renewed belief in sanctioning equality of opportunity as a way of life, propagating fuller economic growth, and endorsing greater social cohesion (Aldridge 2001), across the socio-political spectrum. As a result, migratory processes and their subsequent impacts thereof, attains critical significance in the present times. It is in the above context that the proposed paper contextualizes migration debates within historiography, polity and economy of the states of Orissa and Rajasthan in India, and seeks to elucidate the formidable challenges it represents for the Indian social fabric.

Keywords
India; migration; Rajasthan; Orissa

I. Introduction

‘A man and his wife and his brother who had gone to work in the brick-kilns of Andhra Pradesh were forced to return within a few months, weak from lack of food and with no money at all. The man fell ill and died in the train on the way back. The wife and brother were too terrified to remove the body off the train, as they knew they would be questioned by the police and feared

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extortion by exploitative elements. The body had to be abandoned in the train. When Suna went to Hyderabad on the trail of local migrants to lodge a complaint about ill treatment and exploitative conditions, he was told by the Labour Commissionner’s office that they had no jurisdiction over migrant workers from other States’. Period.

This tragic incident of an Oriya migrant family, narrated by Jagdish Suna, a young Oriya journalist to *The Hindu*, 13 May 2001 appeared in the national daily only a few years back. Profoundly reflecting the agonizing plight of poor migrants in India, this incident fervently reflects their easily expendable lives. More so, the situation of poor migrants in India has rapidly deteriorated since then. As a result, a substantial segment of internal migration in India at large, and within the states of Orissa and Rajasthan in particular, remains distressed. Colossal collapse of rural employment generation, the economic setbacks at cultivation, and, the largely deficient employment opportunities in urban centres among others, are believed to be the driving force behind the rise of a more insecure type of movement now. Ironically however, this movement is taking place in a world which is marked by a far more profound belief in endorsing equality of opportunity as a way of life, disseminating fuller economic growth, and promoting greater social cohesion (Aldridge 2001), across the socio-political divide.

As a result, migratory processes and their subsequent impacts thereof, attains critical significance in the present times. This study seeks to map the incidence and nature of migration in India at large, and the states of Orissa and Rajasthan in particular, by foregrounding it within the historical backdrop of migratory movements characterizing the respective regions. For a large country like India, the complexity of movement of population in different parts of the country helps in understanding the dynamics of the socio-economic organization of the state. Moreover, it aims to gain a deeper insight into the migratory routes in Rajasthan and Orissa by studying the interactions between local economic development, decent work elements, ecological stresses and migration. By capturing the latest of the migrations in cases where persons have migrated more than once, this study thus would give a better picture of current migration scenario.

It is in the above context that the proposed paper seeks to undertake a theoretical and empirical analysis of the nature and pattern of migration in the states of Orissa and Rajasthan in India. The following paper is divided into six broad sections. This introduction defines my main objectives and the issues examined in the paper. The second section undertakes a conceptual analysis of ‘distress migration’, construed essentially as a ‘means of survival’, as opposed to being induced by better opportunities, when contextualized within the eco-