

# Education of the Left-behind Children of Migrant Labourers of Balangir

## An Overview

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### Abstract

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*Seasonal migration of labourers in search of livelihood is a common phenomenon in western Odisha. Kalahandi, Balangir, Bargarh and Nuapada are the major migration prone districts of western Odisha. Each year these districts witness millions of labourers who migrate. They migrate every year from October to May for working in brick kilns across different states. The district of Balangir alone sends more than one lakh migrant labourers each year, which includes approximately 35% children. They usually take their children of school-going age with them as they have no one to look after if left behind. This seriously affects the education of the children, resulting in low achievements and dropouts. To sort this out, seasonal hostels are in operation in all the migration prone blocks of Balangir district. They provide the basic facilities like food and lodging to children of migrant labourers for the time they are working as migrant labourers. This study is an attempt to identify the lacunae in these facilities and the administration related problems faced by the seasonal hostels.*

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### INTRODUCTION

Seasonal and circular migration of rural labourers for employment is a major aspect of their livelihood strategies in India and other developing nations of Asia (Deshingkar and Start, 2003). The Census of India 2011

report reveals that 139 million people migrate internally for employment each year in India. The major migrant sending states are Odisha, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand, whereas the major destination states are

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Delhi, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Telengana (Abbas and Verma, 2014). The problem of migration is more prevalent in backward states like Odisha with a rural male unemployment rate of 8.8% (National Sample Survey, 2014). However, in Odisha, all the districts are not prone to migration; only the southwest regions including the K-B-K (Kalahandi-Balangir-Koraput) districts have higher migrating population (Samantaray, 2016).

The district of Balangir is situated in the western part of Odisha bearing a population of 16, 48,997 (Census of India, 2011). The areas with high hills are situated in the north western, western and south eastern parts of the district (CGWB, 2013). Inhabitants of this region are chiefly dependent on agriculture and forest products for their livelihood. Due to unavailability of proper irrigation system, the crop production solely depends on rain water. Severe droughts often occur in this district. The year by year meager production in agriculture due to drought compels people to migrate to different states like Andhra Pradesh, Telengana, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Goa in search of a source of income to support their families (Staff Reporter, 2014). These migrant labourers are locally termed as the 'Dadan labourers'. Most of them migrate to Hyderabad to work in brick kilns (Panda, 2015). *Dadan* labourers generally starts migrating during October and return back in May.

Despite a number of initiatives, distress migration from Balangir and western Odisha districts continues on a large scale. More than one lakh people migrate from Balangir to work in brick kilns across the country and 35 % among these are children (*The New Indian Express*, 2018). Most of these labourers prefer to take their children of school-going age with them as they have no one to look after the children if they are left behind. The children aged beyond 11 or 12 years are employed as child labourers at the brick kiln along with their parents. Parents prefer this to schooling as it gives additional income. The education of these children is adversely affected because of such cyclic migration.

Realising the vulnerability of the migrant children, a few activists and social workers of Balangir demanded to open some community managed Residential Care Centres (RCC) in the migration prone villages of Balangir in 2001-02. The then district collector approved the demand for RCC centres with an aim to enable migrating parents leave their children at such centres thereby preventing child migration and child labour (Ghosh, 2018). Although, the migrating parents were reluctant to leave their children at RCC at first; they were convinced gradually by organising awareness camps in the migration prone villages. The migrant children got an opportunity to continue their studies as free lodging and food facilities were provided to them at RCC. The RCC model was a success which paved the way for launching

seasonal hostels by the School and Mass Education Department of Odisha in four migration prone districts, namely Balangir, Nuapada, Kalahandi and Bargarh.

### **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The objectives of the study are to

- explore the available facilities for the children at the seasonal hostels.
- find the problems related to lodging, food and education of the children at seasonal hostels.
- explore the administration related problems in the operation of seasonal hostels.

### **DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

Due to limited resources and time this study has been delimited on the following grounds.

1. The study is confined to the six migration prone blocks of Balangir district. These blocks are Belpada, Patnagarh, Khaprakhol, Muribahal, Tureikela and Bangomunda.
2. The study is conducted only on the left-behind children staying in the seasonal hostels.

### **METHOD OF THE STUDY**

Mixed method (Creswell and Clark, 2007) has been used for this study. Embedded design has been followed where the quantitative data is providing a supportive role for the primary qualitative data. The quantitative part consists of

collecting information about different facilities available at the seasonal hostels through checklist. The qualitative part consists of interviews from the hostellers, caretakers, headmasters and Additional Block Education Officers (ABEO) cum Block Resource Centre Coordinators (BRCC) on issues related to facilities and administration of seasonal hostels.

### **Sample and Sampling**

Multilevel sampling technique (Johnson and Christensen, 2008) has been used to select the sample. The detail information about the number of children migrated was collected from the office of District Project Coordinator (DPC), Balangir. Six migration prone blocks were identified and two among these blocks were selected randomly for data collection. The schools in which seasonal hostels were running were identified and three such schools were randomly selected from each block. The facilities available for the children in the seasonal hostels of these schools were observed and recorded by the researcher. Three hostellers from each hostel were interviewed along with the headmaster and the caretaker to know about the problems related to the food, lodging and education. BRCCS of the concerned blocks were also approached and interviewed in order to know the administration related problems in running the seasonal hostels.

## Tools

Semi-structured interview schedules were developed by the researcher for students, headmasters, caretakers and BRCCs. A checklist was also developed to record the facilities available at the seasonal hostels.

## FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

### Strength of Hostellers in Different Seasonal Hostels

Six different seasonal hostels have been observed by the researcher.

Three of these hostels belong to schools in Belpada block and other three belong to schools in Muribahal block. The name of these schools and the strength of hostellers in the register of their seasonal hostels are shown in Table 1. However, the actual numbers of hostellers present in during observation were less than the registered numbers in all the six hostels. The researcher tried to inquire in this regard from the caretakers and teachers but received an ambiguous response.

**Table 1**  
**Class-wise Number of Students in Seasonal Hostels (Session 2017-18)**

Name of School	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV	Class V	Class VI	Class VII	Class VIII	Total
Government Upper Primary School, Chalki, Muribahal	3	5	6	5	8	3	3	2	35
Government Primary School, Babejuri, Muribahal	4	7	11	9	9	-	-	-	40
Government Upper Primary School, Gudighat, Muribahal	2	7	3	5	4	6	4	3	34
Government Project Upper Primary School, Debripali, Belpada	3	5	8	6	7	5	3	3	40

Government Nodal Upper Primary School, Sulekela, Belpada	4	6	11	8	12	5	4	4	54
Govt Primary School, Kanut, Belpada	5	4	12	11	8	-	-	-	40

### Facilities Available at the Seasonal Hostels in Different Schools

There are provisions for the seasonal hostels to provide different facilities keeping the day- to- day requirements of the hostellers in mind. Table 2 shows a list of the different amenities provided by these seasonal hostels.

**Table 2**  
**Facilities provided at different seasonal hostels**

Name of Schools	*U.P.S., Chalki	**P.S., Babejuri	U.P.S., Gudighat	#P.U.P.S., Debripali	##N.U.P.S., Sulekela	P.S., Kanut
Amenities						
Mattress	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Bed	No	No	No	No	Yes	No
Drinking Water	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Water Purifier	No	No	No	No	No	No
Cupboard/ Locker	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No
Working Toilet	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
Bathroom	No	No	No	No	No	No
First-aid Kit	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Fan/Cooler	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Entertainment (Television, indoor games, etc.)	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Playground	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No
Library	No	No	No	No	No	No

\*U.P.S. — Upper Primary School

\*\*P.S. — Primary School

#P.U.P.S. — Project Upper Primary School

## N.U.P.S. — Nodal Upper Primary School

## Food

A common food chart for all the seasonal hostels across the district has been decided by the district education authority consisting of the District Collector, District Education Officer (DEO), District Project Coordinator (DPC) and the Block Resource Centre Coordinators (BRCCs). The chart includes four meals per day, namely breakfast, lunch, evening snacks and dinner.

Apart from these meals the students also enjoy the Mid-day Meal (MDM), which is provided to every elementary student during the lunch break of the school. On Sunday, the hostellers consume one additional meal in substitute for the MDM. Meals consist of locally produced grains and vegetables. Chicken, mutton or cottage cheese curry is generally served on Sundays.

**Table 3**  
**Food Chart for the Seasonal Hostels (Session 2017-18)**

<b>Days</b>	<b>Breakfast time 6.30 A.M. to 7.30 A.M.</b>	<b>Lunch time 9.00 A.M. to 9.30 A.M.</b>	<b>Evening snacks time 5.00 P.M. to 5.30 P.M.</b>	<b>Dinner time 9.00 P.M. onwards</b>
Monday	Boiled green peas, onions, tomatoes, etc.	Rice, <i>dalma</i> , leafy vegetables	Flattened rice with banana and sugar	Rice, red lentil stew, mixed curry
Tuesday	Biscuits and tea	Rice, <i>dalma</i> , Tomato curry	Semolina upma	Rice, lentil stew, Vegetable curry (for vegetarian Boarders)
Wednesday	Puffed rice and mixture	Rice, <i>dalma</i> , leafy vegetables	Flattened rice upma	Rice, red lentil stew, vegetable curry mixed with chickpeas
Thursday	Boiled green peas, onions, tomatoes, etc.	Rice, <i>dalma</i> , leafy vegetables	Flattened rice with banana and sugar	Rice, red lentil stew, mixed curry
Friday	Biscuits and tea	Rice, <i>dalma</i> , Tomato curry	Semolina upma	Rice, lentil stew, Vegetable curry (for vegetarian boarders)

Saturday	Puffed rice and mixture		Rice, <i>dalma</i> , leafy vegetables	Flattened rice upma	Rice, red lentil stew, vegetable curry mixed with chickpeas
Sunday	6.30 A.M. to 7.00 A.M.	9.00 A.M. to 9.30 A.M.	1.00 P.M. to 1.30 P.M.	Puffed rice and mixture	Rice, lentil stew, mixed fries
	Seasonal fruits/ biscuits and tea	<i>Puri</i> , Potato with green peas curry	Rice, mixed lentil stew, chicken/ mutton/ cottage cheese curry		

**LIVING SPACE**

Seasonal hostels lack special infrastructure. Being a temporary arrangement, hostels run in the same classrooms of the schools meant for the teaching learning activities. Beds are arranged in these classrooms to transform them into seasonal hostels. Regular classrooms serve these dual purposes from November to May every year.

Electricity is available and fans are arranged in all hostels. A few hostels also provide coolers during the months from March to May to beat the scorching heat of western Odisha during summer.

Cupboards are not provided in 65% of the hostels and students are compelled to hang their bags on nails beaten on walls and keep their book and other study materials on the floor near their beddings. Books are often used as pillow at night. Some students

use trunks on their own expenses to keep their belongings secure.



Figure 1. A Typical Hostel Room During School Hours

**DRINKING WATER FACILITIES**

Water from hand pumps in the school premises is used for cooking and drinking purposes. No water filtration equipment are provided to ensure the purity of the water the students are drinking. Hostellers are compelled to arrange water from outside whenever these hand pumps go out of order. During summer, earthen pots are arranged by the caretakers to keep the drinking water cool.



### **MEDICAL FACILITIES**

Health check-up programmes for hostellers are organised once or twice in a session. For minor health issues they consult the nearby primary health centre with the help of the caretakers. These caretakers are responsible for firstaid assistance and the first aid box of the school is generally used if needed. In case of major health problems they are taken to the district headquarter hospital at Balangir with the help of the incharge teacher.

### **GENERAL SANITATION**

It is the duty of the caretakers to ensure the general cleanliness of these hostels. Kitchen area is kept clean and dry to avoid flies and other insects. However, in most hostels, the storerooms where the rations have been stored are mice affected, which is a threat towards the health of the hostellers. Proper drainage system is essentially required in these hostels to control mosquitoes which are quite a number due to water logging.

### **TOILET FACILITIES**

Toilets are available in all the hostels but are not in working condition. In 84% of hostels the toilets are in collapsed condition and without any water supply. Hostellers prefer to go to the nearby ponds for open defecation. Bathrooms are non-functional, although present in some hostels. Hand pumps are used for bathing purpose, where both boys and girls take bath in the open space.



*Figure 2. Toilets in Dilapidated Condition*

### **RECREATION**

Carrom boards are provided in 50% of these hostels and in 16% of the hostels television is also provided for recreation. However, the televisions are damaged and not in working condition. Hostellers engage themselves in group chat after school time. They also play cricket, football, kabbadi and *kho-kho* in the school premise. As the school gate is locked after four o'clock, they cannot go to the playground for physical activities.



*Figure 3. Children Playing Carrom as a Part of their Recreational Activity*

### **TUITION/SELF STUDY**

The two caretakers (one male, one female) are responsible for engaging the hostellers in studies during the spare time before and after school hours. As these caretakers are only educated up to the secondary level, they have their own limitations in guiding these students.



### **AVAILABILITY OF CARETAKERS AND ADDRESSING THE GRIEVANCES OF HOSTELLERS**

During school hours, the headmaster and other teachers listen to the problems of the hostellers. But after school hours, caretakers are the only person responsible for dealing with any problem related to the food and lodging of these students. In case of critical health conditions or any emergency, the headmaster and the teacher incharge of hostel are immediately intimated by caretakers to do the needful.

### **MISCELLANEOUS PROBLEMS RELATED TO FACILITIES IN HOSTELS**

Although the headmasters and BRCCs claim that the facilities provided at the seasonal hostels are adequate and satisfactory, the interviews with the hostellers narrated revealing contrasts.

The accommodation facilities in seasonal hostels are far below the level of satisfaction for many hostellers as well as for their parents. Although such hostels are in operation for the last 15 years, no effort has been made by the authority to develop permanent infrastructure.

The small-sized classrooms have insufficient space for arranging beds for all the hostellers. In 85% of the hostels located in remote villages the beds are still not supplied, compelling children to sleep on floors.



*Figure 4. Living Room of Seasonal Hostel without Beds and Cupboards*

Separate rooms are allotted for boys and girls, but in the interior villages where seasonal hostels operate, only a single room is allotted for both the gender providing *Dadan* labourers another reason for not putting their girl child into such hostels.

Hostellers go for open defecation regularly because toilets are not well maintained making them vulnerable to many diseases. No authority is concerned about the regular health check-ups of these children.

Library facilities are not available for hostellers, where they can study peacefully after the school hours.

No co-curricular or extracurricular activities like debate, song competition, essay writing competition, drawing competition, excursion and picnic are ever organised specially for the hostellers. These students, however, participate in such activities organised by the school.

### **ADMINISTRATION RELATED PROBLEMS IN THE MAINTENANCE OF SEASONAL HOSTELS**

Lack of enthusiasm among the headmasters to run seasonal hostels is the prime reason why targeted

number of hostels are not in operation in the district. Headmasters perceive them as an additional responsibility without any complementary remuneration. Apart from it, any mishap with any hosteller may lead to serious punishment or suspension from duty for the headmasters. According to them, there is no point in taking additional responsibility as they are already burdened with many non-academic duties.

Moreover, every year headmasters as well as other teachers find it tough to convince the *Dadan* labourers for admitting their children in seasonal hostels. Lack of parental awareness plays a crucial role in low enrolment of children in seasonal hostels across the district. They generally do not prefer to leave behind the children aged below six or seven years and the girl child due to security concerns. On the other hand, children above eleven or twelve years old are always taken along with the parents during migration. They provide a helping hand in earning by getting employment alongside their parents in the brick kilns. In many instances, the children from the hostels are forcefully withdrawn by their parents at midnight for migration. *Dadan* labourers solely blame the state administration for their unemployment and miserable condition. Poor parents find an earning child in the present more reliable than an educated child in the future.

Several other administration related problems were also revealed by the headmasters, such as scanty and

irregular payment of remuneration for the caretakers, delay in fund transfer from district education authority towards various expenditures in seasonal hostel, delay in the supply of necessary materials for the hostellers like beddings, cupboards, lockers, etc. Such lacuna and irregularities in the system are some of the reasons why headmasters are reluctant to run seasonal hostel in their schools.

### **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

A peep into the condition of the children staying in seasonal hostels may give us some insight about the various difficulties of their lives there. All those factors which directly or indirectly influence their education, such as the environment of the hostel, availability of study materials, quality of food, health care facilities and socialisation among the hostellers, safety and security can be assessed and corrective measures can be adopted if needed. The seasonal hostel should not be perceived only as a temporary shelter for these children. It is the centre which can nourish their future by developing their potential to the fullest by taking care of their intellectual, physical, mental, emotional and social needs. Any lacuna in the operation of seasonal hostels may seriously affect their education. However, in this study it was observed that providing four meals a day was only the major focus of the hostel authority keeping all other needs aside.

The reason behind the unwillingness among the parents need be explored and proper endeavours can be made towards enhancing their awareness so that an alteration in their mindset can be induced resulting in maximum enrolment of children in seasonal hostels. Separate dedicated buildings are essentially needed with better facilities and proper security arrangements for girls, such as a compulsory separate room, separate toilets and bathrooms, proper

boundary wall around the hostel may attract parents to leave behind their children before migration.

Rewarding schemes like stipend for the hostellers can also be initiated to encourage *Dadan* labourers towards education of their children. Such financial assistance may motivate them for educating their children instead of using them as child labourers, leading to a promising future for these children.

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