

# **‘Document’ and North-Indian Labour Migrants: Governing Labour Mobility in Manipur**

**Author:** Ajeet Kumar Pankaj<sup>1</sup> Manish K Jha<sup>2</sup>, Saima Farhad<sup>3</sup>, and Ibrahim Wani<sup>4</sup>

## **Abstract**

Like any ordinary citizen in India, labour migrants also possess various documents such as Aadhar card, pan card, bank passbook, driving license, health card, ration card, electoral card etc., which serve various purposes during their migration. Besides the specific purpose of these documents, they use these to prove their identity and citizenship in the various span of their mobile life. They carry these documents with them because it provides them a sense of security during their migration. Though documents are meant to serve a specific purpose – identity proof, disbursement of welfare schemes, and entitlement, these often become a contested site of sharing the power dynamics between state and labour migrants at various locations of destination. Such power dynamics are visible in migratory governance policies like Inner Line Permit (ILP) in Manipur. The state and its agents use documents as a medium of surveillance and to check the legal status of labour migrants to govern their ‘conduct’. Therefore, drawing upon in-depth interviews with labour migrants in Manipur and the use of Foucault’s ‘governmentality’, we argue that ‘conduct’ of labour migrants in Manipur is being governed by ILP and state surveillance – regular documents checked to ensure their legal status, which results into labour migrant’s social, economic, and psychological insecurity. Police and security personnel often conduct search operations in various localities of Manipur. Though this is the regular practice of government to ensure security, but this regular practice of the state became means to harass, exclude, detain, and extort money from labour migrants if they fail to prove their legal status. Besides this, police personnel randomly check documents of labour migrants with motives to extort money which is an additional financial burden.

---

<sup>1</sup> Corresponding Author and Assistant Professor at the Department of Social Work, Indira Gandhi National Tribal University, Regional Campus Manipur

<sup>2</sup> Professor at the Centre for Community Organization and Development Practice, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai.

<sup>3</sup> Assistant Professor at the Department of Social Work, University of Kashmir

<sup>4</sup> Assistant Professor at the Institute of Kashmir Studies, University of Kashmir

**Note:** The proposed paper is based on the completed research project titled ‘Migrant Workers and Urbanization in Politically Sensitive Areas: A Study in Kashmir and Manipur’, funded by ICSSR, New Delhi.

We intend to examine the history, trajectory, and significance of documents for labour migrants in the existing literature. Further, we explore the power dynamics between state and labour migrants in Manipur to govern the 'conduct' of labour mobility through ILP and their legal status. Besides, we shall highlight the negotiation and navigation strategy of labour migrants to overcome from regular state surveillance, detention, and police harassment.

**Keywords:** Labour, ILP, State, Migrants, and governmentality