

Labour Migration Patterns: A Study of the Northern Region of Murshidabad District, West Bengal, India

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Abstract

Murshidabad district, West Bengal, is identified as a backwards region in the 2014 HDI Report, leading to a prevalent out-migration trend from areas like the northern region of Murshidabad district. Impoverished locals, facing limited job opportunities, are compelled to seek work elsewhere to support their families. This paper investigates the systematic migration patterns utilised by these migrants, tracing their specific routes between origins and destinations. It particularly focuses on the connections and intermediaries that facilitate this ongoing movement. Furthermore, the study thoroughly examines the impact of remittances. The entire region is considered a continuous source of out-migration, and this paper aims to shed light on various aspects of this phenomenon from Jangipur Sub-Division. This study is based on both primary and secondary data.

Keywords: Migration Pattern, HDI, Out-migration, Domestic and International destination.

1. Introduction

Migration significantly shapes the socioeconomic landscape of rural India, primarily driven by individuals moving from economically underdeveloped to more developed areas, which subtly helps to negate regional economic imbalances (**Hazra, 2012**). This phenomenon is particularly pronounced among rural Indian males who frequently emigrate for economic reasons (**Basu, 2019**). Murshidabad district, West Bengal, is identified as a significant source of migrant labour. Studies by the Centre for Migration and Inclusive Development (CMID) reveal that Kerala, other parts of India, and the Gulf nations are major pull factors for migrant workers from Murshidabad (**Peter and Narendran, 2017**). The district's low Human Development Index (HDI) of 0.46 in 2004, as reported by the West Bengal Human Development Report (2004), further highlights its status as the least developed among West Bengal's districts, thereby underlining the persistent push factors for out-migration. **Ali (2018)** has also contributed to understanding the roots and outcomes of migratory labour in the region. Despite various studies exploring migration levels, corridors, and characteristics in Murshidabad district (**Kundu, 2012 & 2013a, b; Basu, 2019**), a notable research gap persists. None of these studies has specifically focused on Farakka, located within the Jangipur Sub-Division. This oversight is critical given Farakka's role as one of the most significant migration corridors for low-skilled workers from Murshidabad to both domestic and international marketplaces. This paper aims to address this lacuna by providing a comprehensive theoretical and empirical analysis of this particular migration pattern. It seeks to

investigate the complex and often contradictory nature of its operation, particularly its ability to sustain continuous, high-volume out-migration over extended periods.

It is important to note that this study's scope is strictly limited to examining the economic factors influencing migration decisions in Murshidabad district. Other potential drivers, such as riverbank erosion, NRC-related riots, ethno-religious conflict, political views, and international trafficking, have been deliberately excluded from this research.

To achieve its objectives, the study utilises both primary and secondary data. Secondary data sources include the 2011 Census, NSS 64th cycle, and various UNDP Human Development Reports (2004, 2011 & 2015). For primary data collection, a stratified sampling method was employed. The survey encompassed 200 villages across seven Community Development (CD) blocks within the Jangipur sub-divisions of Murshidabad District, with a substantial sample size of 5,000 respondents. These samples offer an extensive framework for investigating the local realities of the migratory issue in the northern region of Murshidabad.

Using an independently designed schedule, personal interviews were used to collect data from the individuals who were selected. In this paper, Farakka is considered a migration corridor under the following criteria –

- Long-term migratory operations in nature.
- The travel distance between the origin and destination is more than 500 kilometres.
- The entire migration procedure is informally organised.
- There is no difficulty in connecting the origin and the destination.
- Migrant's travel along desired paths is mostly set in various waves.

2. Objectives

- To identify the major destination of migrant labour from the northern region of Murshidabad district.
- To show the causes of migration and the migration profile of migrant labour.

3. Study Area

The study focuses on the **Jangipur Sub-Division**, located in the northernmost part of Murshidabad district, West Bengal (24°13'20"N to 24°53'15"N and 87°47'25"E to 88°14'39"E). Covering an area of 1097.82 sq. km (2011 Census), it is strategically positioned near the Indo-Bangladesh border. Administratively, Jangipur sub-division comprises 7 C.D. blocks, 2 municipalities, 254-gram panchayats, and 2,210 mouzas (Fig.1). Physiographically, it shares characteristics with the wider Murshidabad district, divided by the Bhagirathi River. The western part is the 'Rarh' region, an undulating terrain with reddish-grey lateritic clay soil, rich in lime and iron oxide, and slopes ranging from **0 to 61 degrees**. The climate is hot and humid year-round, with rainfall from June to September due to the southwest monsoon. Economically, the area is predominantly agricultural, with limited industrial presence (Murshidabad District Statistical Handbook, 2010-2011), contributing to the prevalence of out-migration from this region.

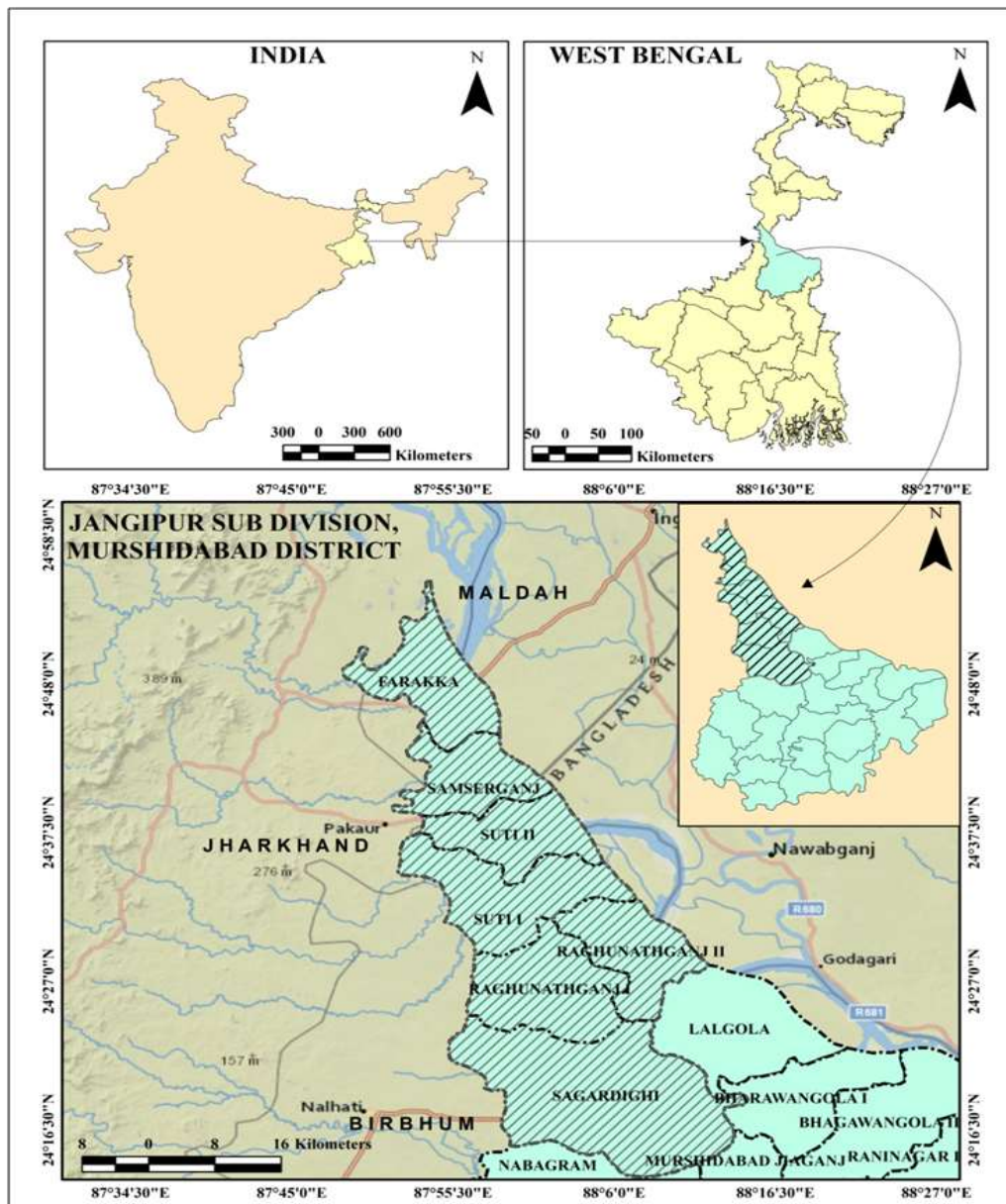


Figure 1: Location map of the study area

4. Destination of Migrant Labour

Nearly 7% of male out-migrants from rural regions, as reported by the NSSO (64th round, 2007-08), have been settled abroad. The primary field survey data show that Saudi Arabia is the main country to which migrants travel from Murshidabad. The Human Development Report (2011) by the UNDP estimates that 28.1 million people are living in Saudi Arabia. Because of a smaller population size with a high source of natural oil resources, the standard of living is relatively high (Kundu, 2019). Therefore, Saudi Arabian citizens are unwilling to perform as low-skilled physical labour by themselves, but rather depend on hiring personnel for this job. Emigrants from countries like India are forced to work in some informal industries, such as cleaning, maintenance, and labourers in construction work, due to the lack of local labour. According to primary data, the majority of migrants are found in Riyadh and Jeddah. Kerala is another important place for the migrant labour of Murshidabad. High wages in this state are the pull factor for the migrants. The areas of concern by immigration include Ernakulum, Malappuram

and Idukki, etc. Another big portion of the migrants from other States also go to Gujarat due to the high concentration of industries and the construction sector. Maharashtra is another important hub of India for low-skilled or unskilled migrant labour from Murshidabad district. There is no doubt that migration has played a significant role in Mumbai's economic growth and development. Mumbai, the 'financial capital' of India, is a major source of immigration from around the nation as there are huge job opportunities for all skilled, including low-skilled labourers. An additional factor in the hosting of migrants is the growth of Delhi's conurbations and the emergence of large industrial towns (NCR priority towns) like Gurgaon, Faridabad, Sonipat, Noida, Ghaziabad, and Meerut, among others. In absolute terms, the number of migrants was expected to be 1.31 lakh, whereas the natural increase in Delhi's population was anticipated to be 2.31 lakh (Kundu, 2019). Major destinations of migrant labour from Jangipur sub-division (Farakka Corridor) cover all over India and also throughout the World (Fig.2). Diagrammatic representation (Fig.3) shows the percentage shares of migrant labour from the study area to other parts of India. From this primary data, it is very clearly observed that nearly 18 % of migrant labour is recorded in Kerala, which is the highest and inter-district 4% of migrant labour is recorded in Bardhaman- Asansol region under *Purba and Paschim Bardhaman* district.

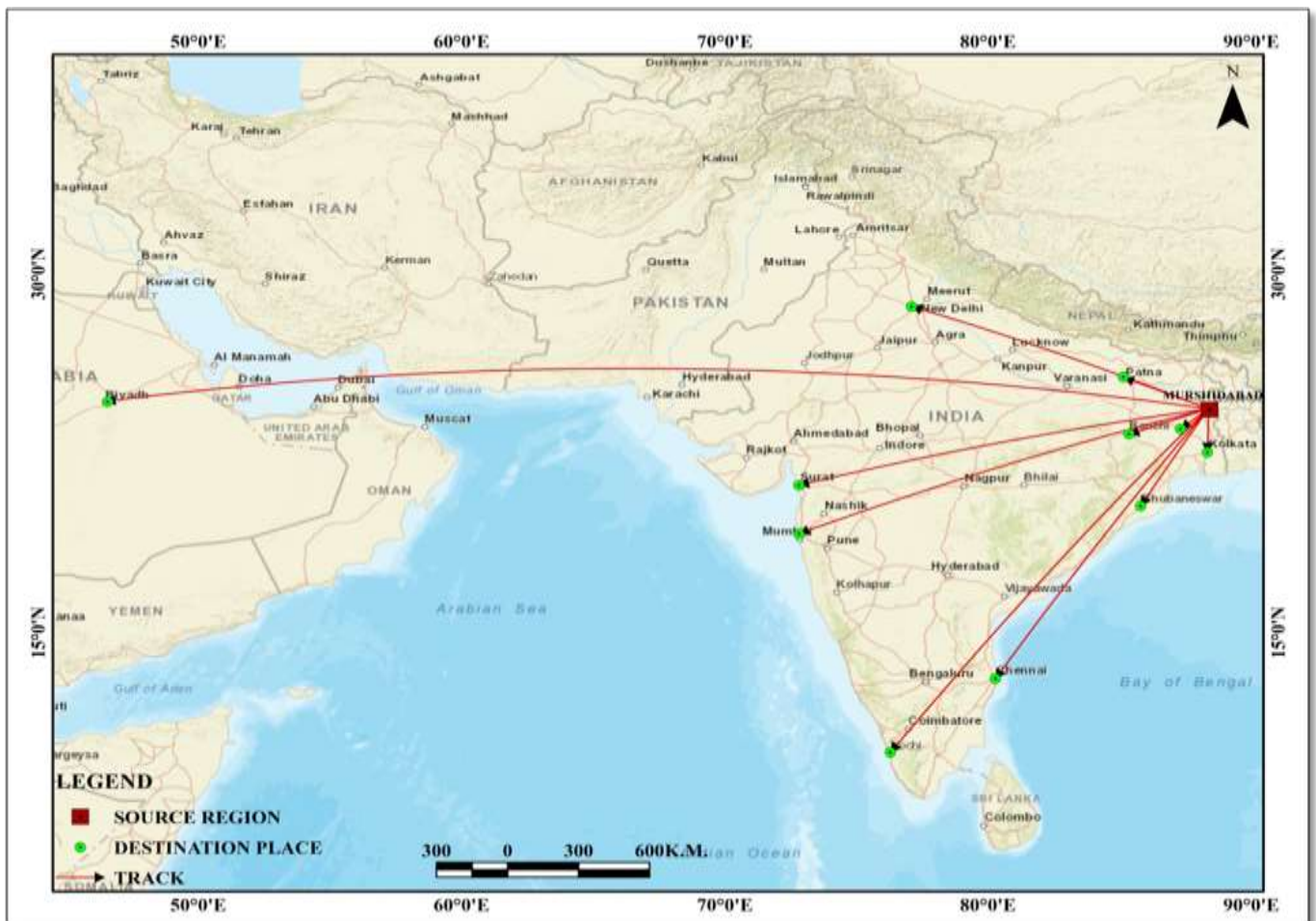


Figure 2: Main destination of Migrant Labour from Jangipur Sub-division

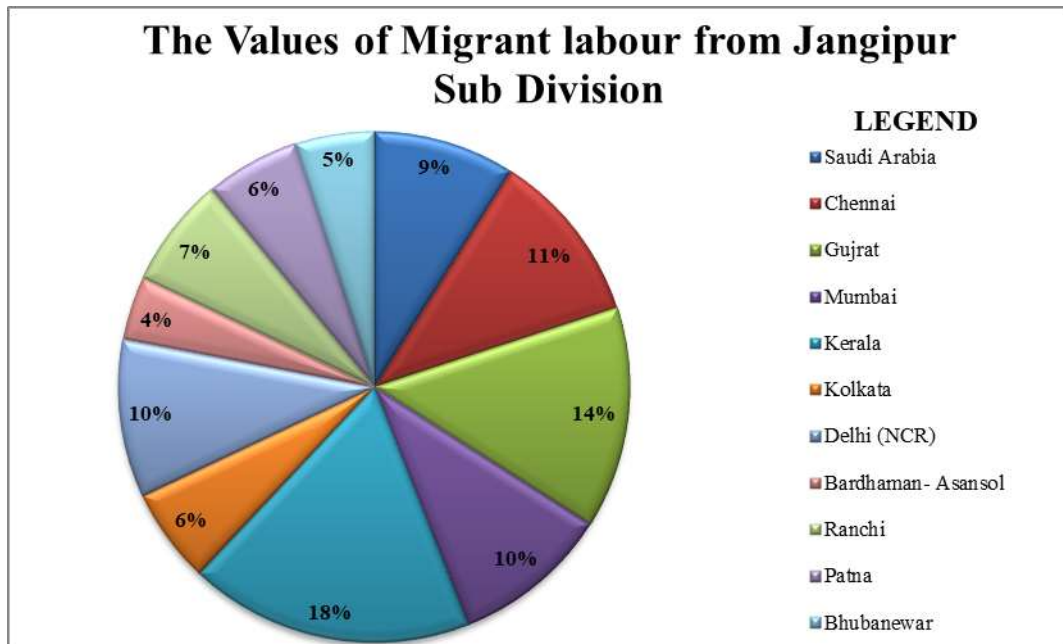


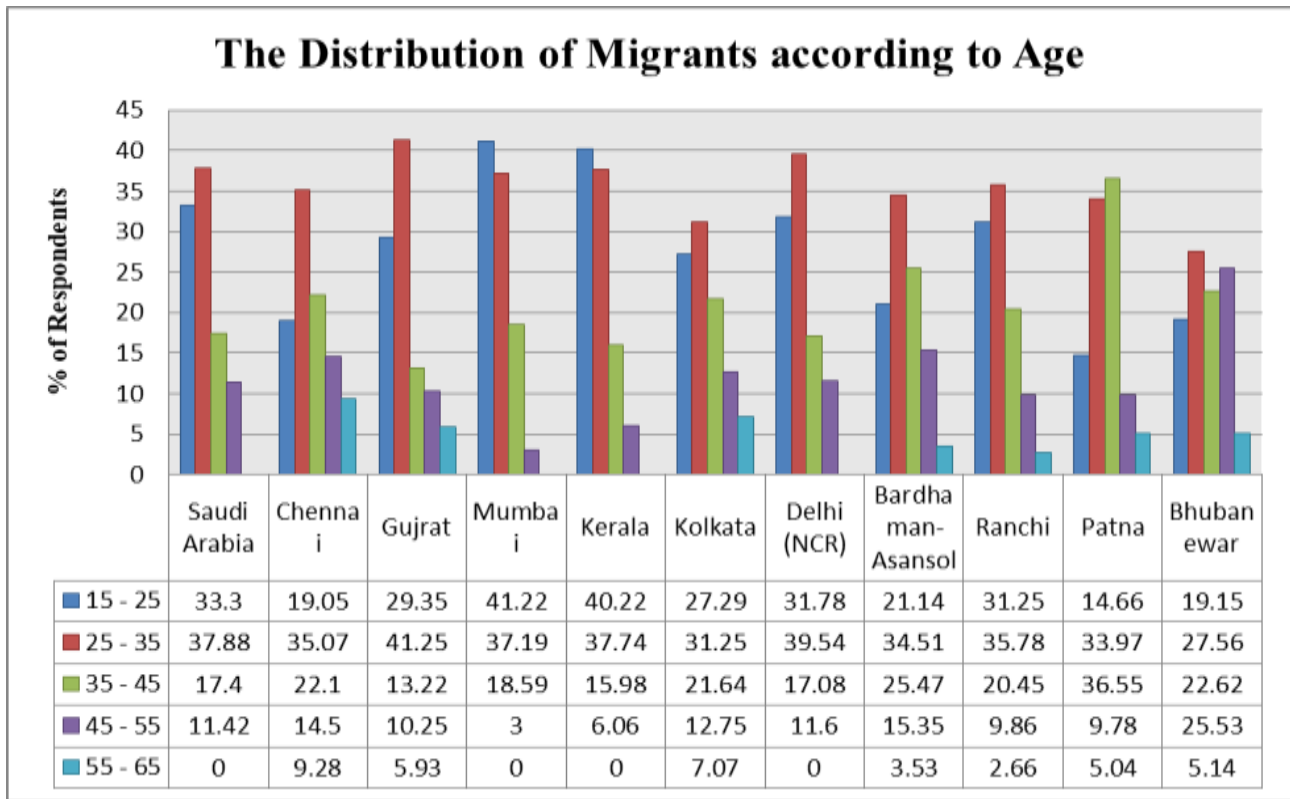
Figure 3: The Percentage of Migrant Labour from Jangipur Sub-division

5. Socio-Economic Profile of Migrant People

1) Age

According to Census data from 2011, the majority of the population of Murshidabad belongs to the Muslim community, making up 66.3% of the entire population. Here, the share of young migratory people in this area eventually consists of huge young Muslim men who have learned the artisanship from the predecessors of their family amidst the huge unemployment in the place of origin of the migratory wave. As a district, Murshidabad provides minimal opportunity for employment to the potential working force in infrastructure and construction due to a lack of significant industry in this area. Jangipur sub-divisions also suffer from river course shifting and frequent river bank erosion, which is another issue of migration. The Muslims have migrated to various regions of the country because of their ancestors' artisanship (masonry work), which has helped them find better nourishment and employment. In addition, preceding migrants created the path for next generations to take advantage of these corridors by discovering various routes along which their abilities may be more lucrative. For this reason, the present generation naturally finds these passageways to be approachable and becomes familiar with them in newer destinations. It is obvious from our analysis that individuals falling in the age group of 15–30 are more likely to migrate than other age groups (Fig.4). It is undeniably true that humans stay at their most productive and nimble within the aforementioned age ranges.

In general, employers desire to gain lower-wage employees and higher productivity. In addition, men of this age are often quite daring, able to make reckless decisions, suffer the hardships of travel, and have the flexibility to adjust to even the most difficult situations. Our results, therefore, match a typical pattern of human behaviour and an inclination to face unknown challenges ahead in this way.



Source: Personal Survey, 2022-23

Figure 4: The distribution of Migrants by Age

2) Earning

Traditional or ancestral talents are often gained by those who earn more than others. Minimal-skilled or unskilled migrants who lack connections and are employed as common labour receive minimal wages. Generally, migrants in Maharashtra and Delhi earn approximately ten thousand to twenty-eight thousand rupees per month (Table no.-1). Most masons make more money than workers the worker of the other field. However, a phenomenal change has been observed that migrants from Mushidabad have very recently signed an initial contract for a job in Saudi Arabia for more than three years. The bulk of them reside in tenements or workers' camps, and depending on the size of the room, there are often four to six (rarely eight) people who share a mutual room. Although some of these tenements are deteriorating, almost all of them are permanent buildings. Most of the *Murshidabadi* migrants (domestic and foreign) put in 8 to 12 hours of labour every day. Some of them received overtime compensation for additional work, but there is now an excess of labour, which limits the possibility for those who are prepared to work to make more money.

Table 1: The Distribution of Migrants by Earnings, 2022-23

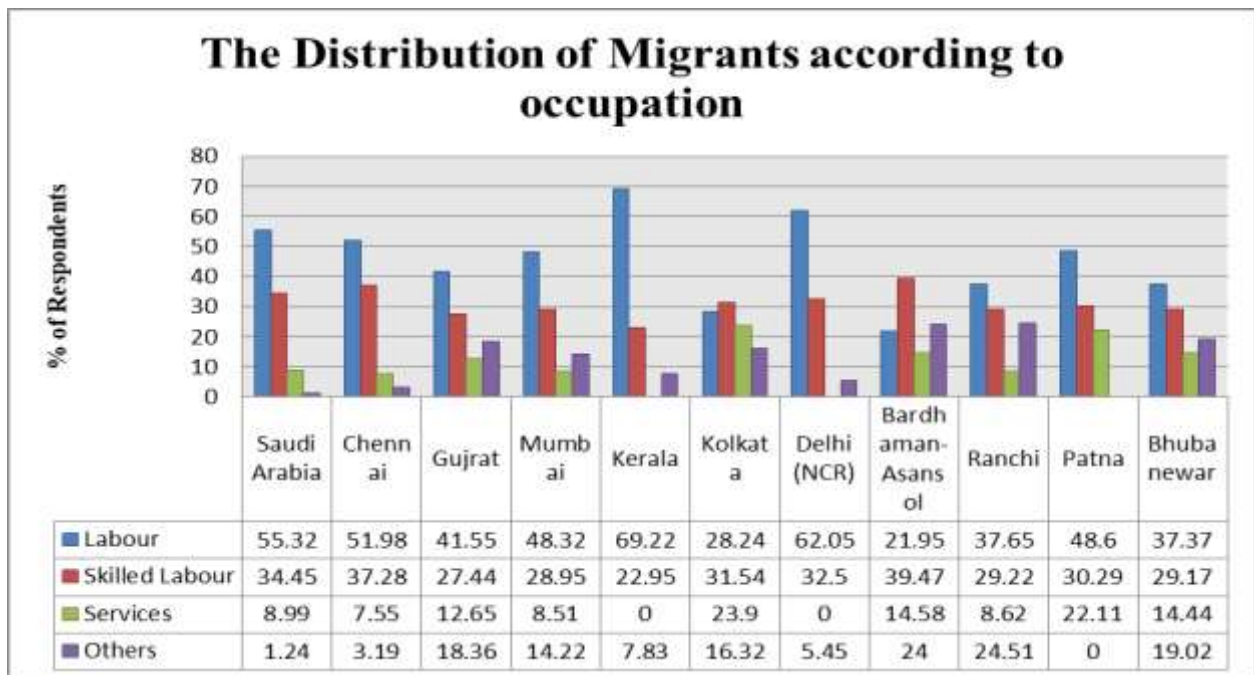
The Distribution of Migrants by Earnings, 2022-23	
Destination	Average Salary (INR)
Saudi Arabia	30000 - 40000
Chennai	25000 - 30000
Gujrat	15000 - 25000
Mumbai	10000 - 28000

Kerala	11000 - 40000
Kolkata	10000 - 20000
Delhi (NCR)	25000 - 30000
Bardhaman - Asansol	10000 - 18000
Ranchi	12000 - 25000
Patna	11000 - 26000
Bhubaneswar	10000 - 25000

Source: Personal Survey, 2022-23.

3) Occupation

According to the primary data survey, it is observed that the majority of Murshidabad migrants work as manual labour (69.22%) and masons (22.95%) in Kerala. In addition to this, individuals work in a variety of skilled crafts (7.83%), including mosaic and tile artists, colour and paint artisans, electricians, carpenters, embroiderers, etc. The majority of immigrants earn Rupees ten to forty thousand per month. The majorities of these roving employees never settle down in one region or hold to one type of employment. They find newer opportunities by wandering throughout the year in major and several minor construction works. In the non-agricultural sector, manual workers and masons made the great bulk of Murshidabad immigrants' job share in Saudi Arabia (81.45%). It is pretty evident that agricultural or farm operations here are minute in scale in a place like Saudi Arabia, where greenery is practically nonexistent. The majorities of the migrant's work in unskilled or semi-skilled jobs and earn nearly Rupees Thirty to forty thousand per month (Fig.5). People work mostly in numerous menial professions, such as cleaning tasks, mosque servicing, job duties in shopping malls, working as a liftman, etc., besides masonry or as labour.



Source: Personal Survey, 2022-23

Figure 5: The Distribution of Migrants by Occupation, 2022-23

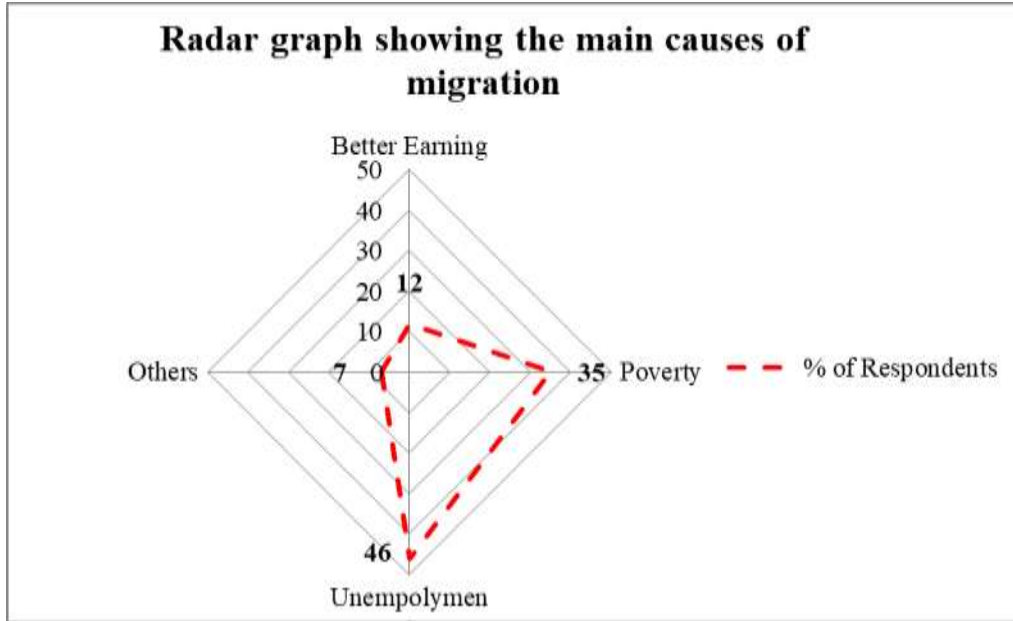
6. Causes of Migration

In this part, the causative factor of labour migration has been classified into four categories, such as better earnings, poverty, unemployment and others. Unemployment and poverty jointly recorded as the highest responses during the field survey, nearly 81% of total responses (Fig. 6). Other values are recorded based on property loss due to riverbank erosion, school dropout, etc. The lack of employment is the main cause of this massive outflow, as the prime factor of migration. Better wages account for 91.22 per cent of the respondents who opined in favour of migration from Murshidabad to Saudi Arabia in our study area. A minor portion of migration occurs due to poverty and unemployment, which are nearly 3.78% and 5% respectively. But on the other hand, unemployment is the main reason for migration from the study region to Kerala that has been accounts for nearly 60.47 per cent. Unemployment is the main reason for migration, which finds employment in Mumbai, Delhi, Gujarat, Chennai and Bhubaneswar. Our core statistics also support the claim that poverty is the fundamental push factor for people to leave their hearth and home in search of better opportunities. But on the other hand, poverty is the main reason for migration to Kolkata, Patna, Ranchi and Bardhaman–Asansol. The actual case of migration from a source location to a destination is for specified reasons (Fig. 7). Short-distance migration occurs basically based on poverty, but long-distance migration is basically based on unemployment.

It has been demonstrated that the networks and linkages in a given area have a significant impact on migration to that area. When a given agency or contractor operates in that location, many eager migrants will move with them. Additionally, because of specific linkages, if a certain group of migrant workers relocates from a village to a city, its other ordinary residents may be tempted to follow suit. In light of this, the new immigrants found it reassuring to travel with some known faces (Hirway et al. 2014). As we've seen, the majority of people in the case of Saudi Arabia likely left with the aid of contractors or agents by following the pre-established migration routes. A lot of people who have just moved out do it in groups with contractors or agents. Great deals of the time, according to our primary data, the migrants themselves are responsible for covering the costs of travel, meals, and lodging. The contractors and a tiny group of persons who made the trip payments are quite few in number. The aforementioned migrants often do not have the opportunity to obtain a "formal loan" to pay for the upfront expenditures of travel, lodging, and boarding while they are away from home until they find a job and a payoff. Therefore, they are compelled to borrow money from their loved ones or from others who have their best interests in mind to pay the initially inevitable bills. When they borrow money from moneylenders, who often demand exorbitant interest rates, things get even worse. As an example, the costs of migrating from Murshidabad to Saudi Arabia are unquestionably high, and the first out-migrants' outlay ranges from nearly one lakh to one lakh twenty thousand rupees, depending on the length of the travel and the destination they intend to move to. On average, more than a thousand migrant labourers leave India each day in search of employment in Saudi Arabia. They send back to India annually over 500 billion INR (Kundu, 2019). According to our analysis as well, a significant portion of emigrants have sent money back to their families back home. A common frequency for migrants to send remittances is five to six times annually.

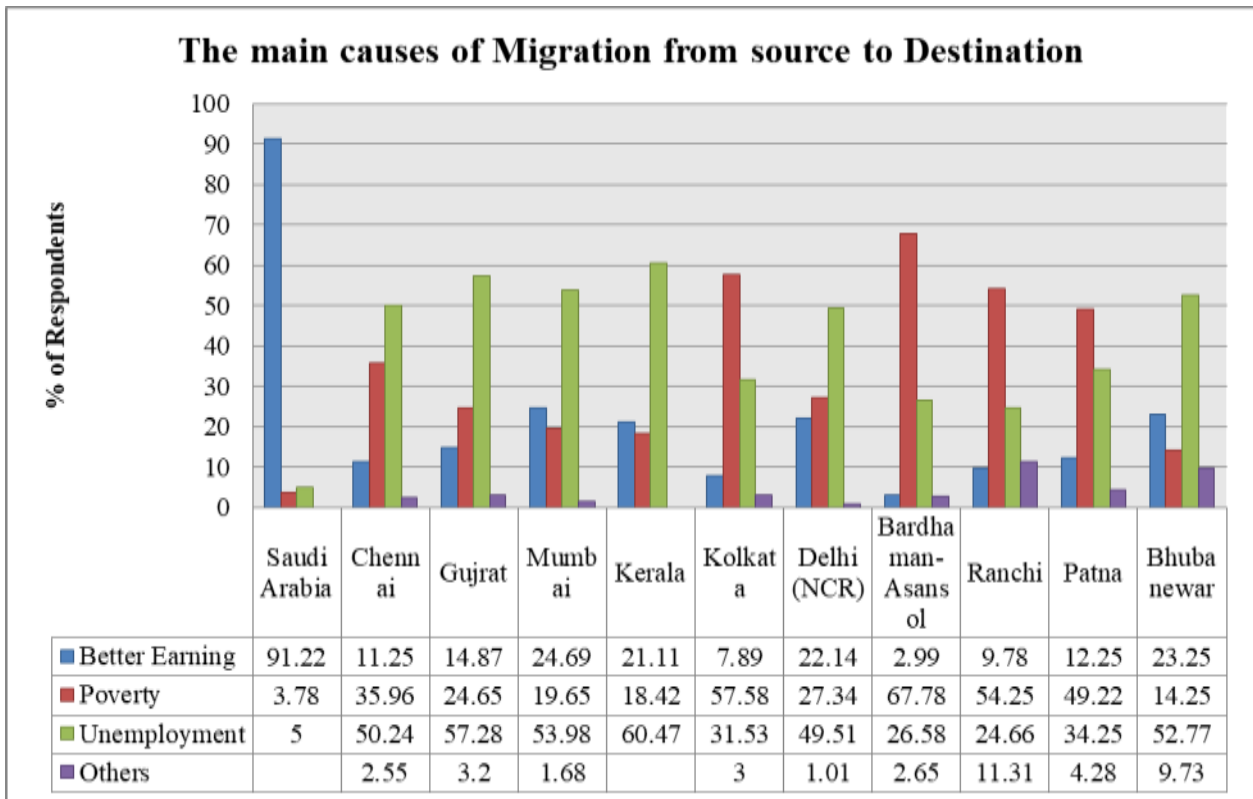
According to our research, the majority of migrant families use the remittances for basic living expenses. In other cases, they use them to sell their livestock or, at the cost of education expenses and accumulated money, to repair their homes. If they move from one state in India to another state, they will have to

come to the festival once a year. At present, due to a highly connected cellular network, migrant labourers are also connected with their families through voice calls or video calls.



Source: Personal Survey, 2022-23

Figure 6: Radar Graph showing the main causes of migration



Source: Personal Survey, 2022-23

Figure 7: The Main causes of Migration from Source to Destination

7. Conclusion

This study reveals the unique features of emigration from the Jangipur sub-division under Murshidabad district, West Bengal. In the framework of our research, I looked into the causes of migration as well as the many factors that affect people's choices. We have given careful consideration to the reasons behind the migrants' choice of various locations as their final destination. Our analysis demonstrates that migration from Murshidabad occurs not only in large numbers, but also with a significant number of regular and casual labourers often travel over known paths that connect their places of origin and destinations, creating a migration corridor. We have made an effort to investigate the migratory corridors from both an intra-border and a cross-border perspective. According to our findings, Saudi Arabia, Kerala, Gujarat, Maharashtra, and Delhi (NCR) are the most popular long-distance destinations for migrants leaving Murshidabad, while Bardhaman-Asansol, Kolkata, and Jharkhand are the leading short-distance destinations. One point that supports our findings must be made here, namely that migrants are frequently the target of apathy. At neither the origin nor the destination, the local government adequately looks after them. This is seen during the lockdown phase of the COVID pandemic.

Although some migration-related works have identified a few anomalies regarding the migrants' obvious deprivation and made some recommendations regarding their ease of communication and stay, at least within the country, as well as for resolving some key issues for the improvement of migrants' conditions generally, there is still much to be done on this front. To solve it, we still have a long way to go.

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