

## Financial Crunch of the Migrant Workers of West Bengal In Cobid Corona Virus Lockdown

Soumya Sourav Basu

Flat No. 4D, Indira Tower, IC-9, Post-Aswininagar, Baguiati, Kolkata-700159

### Abstract:

**Background:** India has been in lockdown since March 25, 2020. Indian migrant workers during the COVID-19 pandemic have faced multiple hardships. But their cries for help have gone largely unheard. Employment opportunities remain the main cause of out-migration. Due to large concentration of population, inequality and poverty etc. in West Bengal state has experienced large scale out-migration.

**Materials and Methods:** In recent years, 2019-2020, there has been an increase in the outflow of people from backward districts of the state of West Bengal. The state ranks fourth among the states of India from where people migrate for work and employment, the Census 2011 data reveals. Between 2001 and 2011, nearly 5.8 lakh people migrated from West Bengal looking for work. The number of migrants is now over 11 lakh, according to the state government. Some of the returning migrants in lock down cause flow of Covid-19 cases in rural Bengal. The study is based entirely on primary sources the out migrants back home. Their accounts of work and earning in comparison to native country has studied in details.

**Results:** Migrant workers earn double, even more than double, wages in return for labour or services from the developed states, which is an absolute privilege to them to go outwards. A mason earned Rs 300 and his assistant earned Rs 200 as daily wages in West Bengal have got Rs 800 and 420 respectively as daily wages in developed states. Reasonable amount they spend for themselves. Most part of income send home for family maintenance. Thus crores of money has dropped by outward migrant workers of West Bengal to their state.

**Conclusion:** The study argues that migration and remittance is one of the solution to structural development constraint. Poor long-distance migrants need to be integrated in poverty alleviation program.

**Key Word:** Migrant workers, Corona virus, Unemployment, Poverty

Date of Submission: 05-09-2020

Date of Acceptance: 20-09-2020

### I. Introduction

Financial crunch is a critical situation that arises because of shortage of money or resources. Financial constraints are specific and objective obstacles rather than being general or subjective in nature. A financial crisis is a disturbance to financial market, disrupting the market capacity to allocate capital. Migrant workers usually do not have intention to stay permanently in the country or region in which they work. A migrant is a person who makes a conscious choice to leave their country to seek a better life elsewhere. Before they decide to leave their country, migrants can seek information about their new home and explore employment opportunities. Uttar Pradesh in the north, Jharkhand, Odisha, Bihar and West Bengal in the east and Assam in the northeast India are the major states of origin of migrant workers. Indian migrant workers during the COVID-19 pandemic have faced multiple hardships. With factories and workplaces shut down due to lockdown imposed in the country, millions of migrant workers had to deal with the loss of income, food shortages and uncertainty about their future (Slater and Mashi 2020; Singh 2020). Following this, many of them and their families went hungry. Thousands of them then began walking back home, with no means of transport due to the lockdown (Rashid et al., 2020). In response, the Central and State Governments took various measures to help them. "More than 21,000 camps set up for over 6, 60,000 migrants: State governments" (Ganguli 2020); and later arranged transport for them (Bhargava 2020). Due to Coronavirus lockdown Railways run 'Shramik Special' trains to move migrant workers. More than 300 migrant workers died due to the lockdown, with reasons ranging from starvation, suicides, exhaustion, road and rail accidents, police brutality and denial of timely medical care. Nearly 4,500 migrant workers from West Bengal, stranded since the lockdown was announced, are likely to return from three states (Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Punjab) in the next couple of days within May 11, 2020. 8.5 lakh migrant workers brought back to West Bengal so far: CM Mamata Banerjee. By June 10 the state would be bringing back around 10.5 lakh migrants, Banerjee further informed at a review meeting (PTI 2020).

### **Previous Studies**

Mitra (2002) has given a Micro-Level Evidence from Delhi Slums on Rural Migrants. "Kerala, a 'Dubai' for Bengali migrants" reported by Menon (2011) in *Business Standard*. Mukherjee et al. (2019) studied the Changing Pattern of Migration in West Bengal. In a reputed Newspaper *The Hindu*, on 1 May 2020 Bhargava reported Coronavirus lockdown Railway to run 'Shramik Special' trains; on 18 May 2020 Rashid et al. reported Migrant workers and their long march to uncertainty; and on 4 June 2020 Singh reported Over a million migrants workers have returned to Bengal, says Mamata. In *Hindustan Times*, Bhattacharya on 27 May 2020 reported Returning migrants cause surge of Covid-19 cases in rural Bengal; and Chatterjee on 18 Aug 2020 reported Migrant workers from Murshidabad leave home again. Datta edited 5 most industrialised states in India in *Business Today* on 27 August 2020. Ganguli edited on 1 April 2020 in *The Economic Times* that More than 21,000 camps set up for over 6, 60,000 migrants. Ghosh 1 Sept 2020 reported in *Anandabazar Patrika* that Migrant workers from West Bengal leave home again. PTI 3 June 2020 reported in *The New Indian Express* that 8.5 lakh migrant workers brought back to Bengal so far. West Bengal 4th in outbound migration for employment updated by Sen in *The Times of India City*, 3 Nov 2019. Coronavirus outbreak: Ensuring water, hygiene facilities for migrant labourers retrieved by Singh 16 May 2020 in *First post*. In India, the world's biggest lockdown has forced migrants to walk hundreds of miles home retrieved 13 May 2020 in *The Washington Post* by Slatter and Masih. Latest Census report (2020) of National Statistical Office and Reserve Bank of India were also studied. Yet all these reporting are not enough to fulfil demand of this paper.

### **Objective to Study**

The Supreme Court of India, recognising the problems faced by migrants stranded in different parts of the country, reviewed transportation and relief arrangements made by the government. Some have died of exhaustion from walking hundreds of kilometres to return to their villages, others have died by suicide from the fear of coronavirus and livelihood loss, and many more are on the brink of starvation. But their cries for help have gone largely unheard. The primary objective of this paper is to analyse the causes and patterns of out-migration in West Bengal.

### **Justification of Study**

"Skilled people who work in the construction, textiles or the jewellery industry will not find jobs that pay as well as employers in other states. Jobs that our government provide for 100 days under the Mahatma Gandhi Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA) are not enough for these people," Apurba Sarkar, the spokesperson of the TMC in Murshidabad district, said. The heavy inflow of people to the developed states like Gujarat, Haryana, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Punjab and Delhi territory from the state of West Bengal can be explained in terms of industrialization, availability of employment opportunities and the level of social development of these states. On the contrary, due to large concentration of population, inequality and poverty etc. in West Bengal state has experienced large scale out-migration. Therefore observation from various micro level studies is justified to analyse the causes and patterns of out-migration in West Bengal.

## **II. Material and Methods**

### **Area of Study**

West Bengal is 4th in outbound migration for employment. The minor construction sector had absorbed a lot of them. A large proportion of the migrants from West Bengal were Muslims. A mason who earned Rs 300 and his assistant earned Rs 200 as daily wages in Malda and Murshidabad got Rs 800 and 420 respectively as daily wages in Karnataka and Kerala (Ghosh 2020). The study finds that the flow of migrants from different districts of West Bengal like Alipurduar, Birbhum, Coohbhar, Hooghly, Howrah, Jalpaiguri, Malda, Murshidabad, N-24 parganas, Uttar and Dakshin Dinajpur, West Medinipur to other states is directed to the relatively developed states and territories like Andhra Pradesh, Delhi, Gujarat, Haryana, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Punjab in search of work/employment. Flow of outer migrants from drought prone districts of Bankura and Purulia are not so uncommon.

### **Material**

India has been in lockdown since March 25, 2020. During this time, production and supply of essential services were completely or partially suspended. Passenger trains and flights were halted. The lockdown has severely impacted migrants, several of whom lost their jobs due to shutting of industries and were stranded outside their native places wanting to get back. Since then, the government has announced relief measures for migrants, and made arrangements for migrants to return to their native place. The Indian government has started special trains to ferry migrants home but thousands remain on the road, on arduous journeys to return home. The footloose labourers, not attached to any particular employer, constitute a large proportion of the workers. These workers are free to choose their vocation, the location of employment, and have a reasonable negotiation power

over their wages. The daily wages of men for any unskilled job range from Rs 400 to Rs 700. The informal employees, the most common category of workers employed in the industrial sectors, are either attached to an enterprise or a contractor, but without any formal agreement. These workers will not be on the official rolls of the company and do not enjoy most of the social security benefits. But they have steady employment. Free accommodation is generally provided by the employer. Migrants are also often absent from government documents; contracts between migrants and their employers are usually informal and unofficial (Menon 2011). Returning migrants cause surge of Covid-19 cases in rural Bengal. The coronavirus disease (Covid-19) has spread to West Bengal's rural areas with nearly 200 migrant workers who recently returned from other states testing positive for the infection, and the numbers likely to rise as more arrive. A large number of migrant workers have returned from more affluent states such as Gujarat, Karnataka, Maharashtra and Punjab. According to a senior official of the West Bengal health department, 76 people tested positive for Covid-19 in rural areas of Howrah district; 67 in the rural areas of Malda; 46 in Hooghly district and 30 in Uttar Dinajpur over the past three days. Several cases have been reported from the rural areas of Birbhum, Murshidabad and North 24-Parganas district as well, he said, requesting anonymity. In Malda, nearly three dozen people have tested positive for Covid-19 in the remote Kaliachak area, bordering Bangladesh. All of them recently returned from other states, including Maharashtra. In Hooghly district, 22 migrant workers tested positive for Covid-19 in the remote rural areas of Khanakul. Others are from Singur, Tarakeshwar, Jangipara, Chanditala and Dadpur – all rural areas in the Hooghly district. They returned from Maharashtra, Punjab and Rajasthan, officials said (Bhattacharya 2020). Therefore, all the migrant workers of the state of West Bengal are the primary resource material for this project.

**Methodology**

The study is based entirely on primary sources the out migrants back home. Their accounts of work and earning in comparison to native country has studied in details. Secondary sources of data like NSDP (Net state domestic product) per Capita of some States and Territory, NMR (Net Migration Rate), which have gathered from the official site of the Census of India. Out-migration rate may be defined as the number of persons who have migrated out of the state to other state of the country, per hundred enumerated population of the origin state.

Out-migration rate = Volume of out migration from the state / Total enumerated mid-year population of the state × 100

Per Capita Income = National Income of a country / Population of this country

The net migration rate (NMR) is calculated by using the formula NMR = (In-migrants – Out-migrants) / Total Population.

**III. Result**

**Table I:** List of some Indian states and union territories by NSDP (Net state domestic product) per capita at current prices in Indian rupees.

Rank	State/Union Territory	NSDP Per Capita (Nominal)2017-18	NSDP Per Capita (Nominal)2018-19	NSDP Per Capita (Nominal)2019-20
2	Delhi	3,28,985	3,65,529	3,89,143
5	Haryana	2,11,526	2,36,147	2,64,207
7	Karnataka	1,87,649	2,10,887	2,31,246
9	Kerala	1,83,435	2,04,105	2,25,484
11	Gujarat	1,73,079	1,97,447	N/A
13	Maharashtra	1,76,102	1,91,736	2,07,727
16	Punjab	1,42,477	1,54,996	N/A
23	West Bengal	93,711	1,09,491	N/A
—	India	—	1,26,406	1,34,432

[Source: RBI Statistics 2020 and National Statistical Office 2020]

The latest available nominal NSDP per capita figures for the State of West Bengal at current prices in Indian rupees on 2018-19: Rs. 1, 09,491, Goa has the highest Rs. 4,58,304, Bihar has the lowest Rs. 43,822. NSDP per Capita on 2019-20 have the same for these three states. Whereas, in India NSDP has an average of Rs.1, 26,406 (2018-19) and Rs. 1, 34,432 (2019-2020).

**Table II:** In-migrants, Out-migrants, Net Migrants and Net Migration Rate in West Bengal (2001)

Place of Enumeration	In Migrants	Out Migrants	Net Migrants	Population	NMR
West Bengal	24,57,162	16,87,690	769472	80176197	0.96%

Source: Census of India, 2001

It is to be noted that the study of out-migration of West Bengal has been based on the years 2001 only because the data on out-migration was not available for the year 2011. It is also observed that the movement of people from West Bengal to other states due to work/ employment has increased over the decade. The Table II shows the number of in-migrants and out-migrants in the state.

**TABLE III:** These top 5 states own 53 per cent of India's total factories:

Rank	State	(1990-91)	2012-13	2013-14
1	Tamil Nadu	14,617	36,869	37,378
2	Maharashtra	15,595	28,949	29,123
3	Gujarat	10,943	22,587	22,876
4	Uttar Pradesh	10,417	12,911	14,463
5	Andhra Pradesh	15,205	15,358	15,719
—	West Bengal	5,679	8,607	8,859

India's Manufacturing Industries: Number of Factories data was reported at 237,684.000 Unit in 2018. This records an increase from the previous number of 234,865.000 Unit for 2017 (*Business today* 2020).

Name of Work 1	Type of Work 2	Earned on Day basis 3	Working place 4	Extra Payment 5	Average earn / Month 6
Infrastructure companies	Unskilled labour	400-500	Andhra	For Skilled	12,000-15000
Factories and Companies	Skilled and unskilled	600-800	Delhi	Available	18000-24000
Textile and Diamond	Textile-unskilled; Diamond-skilled	450-650	Gujarat	If Necessary	13500-19500
Agriculture and construction	Unskilled labour	500-700	Haryana	Overtime available	15000-21000
Firms and Industries	Skilled and unskilled	450-700	Karnataka	Overtime available	13500-21000
Agriculture and Industries	Unskilled jobs	400-700	Kerala	Available	12000-21000
Garment, Jewellery, Industry, Farming	Skilled and unskilled	500-800	Maharashtra	If Necessary	15000-24000
Agriculture, Farming	Unskilled labour	400-600	Punjab	On skills and talents	12000-18000

**Table IV.** Accounts of Work

**Table V.** Earning in comparison to native country (West Bengal)

S. N.	Type of Work	Place of Work	Average Daily Wages	Income on 300 days annum	Daily Wages at native place	Income on 300 days/annum
1	Agricultural labourer	Haryana, Kerala, Punjab	500	150,000	250	75,000
2	Bakery and Confectionary	Delhi, Gujarat	450	135,000	200	60,000
3	Colouring, Printing, Tailoring	Delhi, Maharashtra	500	150,000	300	90,000
4	Dairy and Poultry farming	Gujarat, Haryana, Maharashtra, Punjab	450	135,000	200	60,000
5	Garments and Clothing	Delhi, Maharashtra, Punjab	450	135,000	200	60,000
6	Gold and Jewellery	Gujarat, Maharashtra	700	210,000	300	90,000
7	Industrial labourer	Andhra, Delhi, Karnataka, Kerala	450	135,000	200	60,000
8	Manufacturing	Delhi, Karnataka, Kerala	450	135,000	200	60,000
9	Mason work	Andhra, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra	800	210,000	300	90,000
10	Mason labourer	Andhra, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra	450	135,000	200	60,000

Resultant factum of work accounts and earnings of migrant workers in comparison to their native land it reveals that they earn double, even more than double, wages in return for labour or services from the developed state, which is an absolute privilege to them to go outwards. Nearly 15 lakh non-registered people are worked in developed states of the country as migrant workers of West Bengal. Their hardy, laborious, well-disciplined and punctual nature have allured the contractor or supervisor to provide them as job worker. What they earn, reasonable amount spent for themselves. Most part of income they send home for maintenance of food, clothes, shelter, medicine, education of children and so on. Therefore, we can assume that an average large amount of money has dropped by outward migrant workers to their state.

#### **IV. Discussion**

The heavy inflow of migrant people to the developed states like Andhra, Gujarat, Haryana, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Punjab and Delhi territory can be explained in terms of industrialization, availability of employment opportunities and the level of social development of these states. On the contrary, due to large concentration of population, inequality and poverty etc. state like West Bengal experienced large scale out-migration. West Bengal has 9.03 crores of population. Between 2001 and 2011, nearly 5.8 lakh people are migrated from West Bengal looking for work. As many as 45.3% of those who migrated to Maharashtra and 34% of those who migrated to Delhi's NCT region went for work. Work also brought a significant number from West Bengal to Gujarat (36% of 89,040 people) and in slightly lesser numbers to Haryana, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. This also has to do with a significant number of outbound migration among unskilled labourers from West Bengal's districts (Sen 2020).

Refuting allegations that the State is not facilitating the return of migrants. West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said that almost 1 million migrants had already returned to the state. "If we did not allow migrants to return, then how come only by train 2.4 lakh people have returned so far. Another 1.5 lakh will return within 10<sup>th</sup> June, 2020 and around 6.5 lakh have returned by road. If we are not allowing migrants to return, then how come 10.5 lakh will have entered West Bengal by June 10?" the Chief Minister asked while addressing a video conference with district and State officials (Singh 2020).

This influx of migrant workers contributes to growth of slums and urban poverty. Some of these unskilled workers living in slums suffer from unemployment and make a living in the informal sector (Mitra 2002). The number of migrants is now over 11 lakh, according to the state government. Murshidabad accounts for the most migration among all districts. With no jobs in West Bengal, migrant workers from Murshidabad leave home again (Chatterjee 2020). As unemployment hits migrant workers who returned home to West Bengal over the past five months, a non-government welfare organisation is helping people in Murshidabad district return to the states they left in a hurry because of the Covid-19 pandemic. Some even want to go to Delhi, where there is a demand for skilled construction workers. The major urban, administrative and business centres of developed states attract the migrants from the rural agricultural areas of backward states. Maharashtra, Delhi, Gujarat, Haryana, Karnataka and Punjab are the main states where share of in-migration is much higher than other states. Maharashtra and Delhi are the two main states where the largest in migration during the last ten years occurred. Maharashtra received 19 percent and Delhi received 13 percent share of total in-migrants for various states.

In terms of the development of West Bengal, it can be said that it is very much centred on Kolkata. As a result, the city has reached a saturation level in terms of congestion and associated phenomena while other parts of the state still remained unattractive for business investment. Inter-state migration has further accentuated this problem. So other parts of the state need to be developed to act as new nodes of migration (Mukherjee et al. 2019).

#### **V. Conclusion**

Population living below poverty line is an important indicator of development in India. There is great variation among states in percent of BPL i.e. Punjab (6), Haryana (7) and HP (8) have very low level of BPL. On the other hand, state like Orissa (48), Bihar (44), Assam (40) and West Bengal (34) have higher per cent under BPL. This describes the wide regional disparities in development within the country.

Per capita income (2019-20) is another important indicator which reflects the level of development condition. Here, it can be observed that per capita income in West Bengal is very much low (1, 09,491) compared to other states/territory like Delhi (3, 89,143), Haryana (2, 64,207), Karnataka (2, 31,246), Kerala (2, 25,484), Gujarat (1, 97,447), Maharashtra (2, 07,727), Punjab (1, 54,996). Public and Private Investment can create more industries as well as job opportunities.

Regional disparity in development influences flow of inter-state migration streams. In India the inter-state migration pattern reflects that there is an inequality in the regional development. Some states which have higher investment and resources for development experience high in migration. At the same time, the backward states like U.P, Bihar, M.P, West Bengal etc are experiencing heavy out-migration. Hence, there is a need for balanced regional development. More focus for development and investment should be given to those states which are lagging behind in development parameters.

#### **References**

- [1]. Bhargava, Y. 2020. "Coronavirus lockdown Railway to run 'Shramik Special' trains to move migrant workers, other standard persons". The Hindu. ISSN 0971-751X. (1 May 2020), Retrieved 9 May 2020.
- [2]. Bhattacharya, S. 2020. Returning migrants cause surge of Covid-19 cases in rural Bengal. Hindustan Times; Updated: May 27, 2020 02:51 IST Kolkata.
- [3]. Chatterjee, T. 2020. Migrant workers from Murshidabad leave home again. Hindustan Times, Updated: Aug 18, 2020 11:10 IST Kolkata.

- [4]. Datta, P. 2020 (Ed.). These are the 5 most industrialised states in India. *Business Today*, Thursday, August 27, 2020 | Updated 22:00 IST: Publ. Living Media India Limited.
- [5]. Ganguli, B. 2020 (Ed.). "More than 21,000 camps set up for over 6, 60,000 migrants: State governments". *The Economic Times*. 1 April 2020.
- [6]. Ghosh, S. 2020. Migrant workers from West Bengal leave home again. *AnandabazarPatrika*, 1<sup>st</sup> September, 2020, p.12.
- [7]. Menon, S. 2011. "Kerala, a 'Dubai' for Bengali migrants". *Business Standard*. Retrieved 13 June 2017.
- [8]. Mitra, A. 2002. "Rural Migrants and Labour Segmentation: Micro-Level Evidence from Delhi Slums". *Economic and Political Weekly*. 37(2).
- [9]. Mukherjee, A., Saha, A., Mukherjee, S. 2019. Changing Pattern of Migration in West Bengal. *Int. J. Res. Anal. Rev.*, 6(2):287. 2019.
- [10]. National Statistical Office 2020. Second Advance Estimates of National Income, 2019-20. Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation. Retrieved 7 April 2020.
- [11]. PTI 2020. 8.5 lakh migrant workers brought back to Bengal so far: CM Mamata Banerjee. *The New Indian Express*. Last Updated: 03rd June 2020, 08:34 PM.
- [12]. Rashid, O.; Anand, J.; Mahale, A. 2020. "India coronavirus lockdown| Migrant workers and their long march to uncertainty". *The Hindu*. Retrieved 18 May 2020.
- [13]. Reserve Bank of India 2020. Handbook of Statistics on Indian Economy; RBI Publications, www.rbi.org.in. Retrieved 7 April 2020.
- [14]. Sen, S. 2020. West Bengal 4th in outbound migration for employment. *The Times of India City, TNN*. Updated: Nov 3, 2019, 07:12. IST
- [15]. Singh, K. 2020. "Coronavirus outbreak: Ensuring water, hygiene facilities for migrant labourers can safeguard millions stranded during shutdown". *First post*. 6 April, Retrieved 16 May 2020.
- [16]. Singh, S. S. 2020. Over a million migrants workers have returned to Bengal, says Mamata. *The Hindu*, Kolkata, Jun 04, 2020 03:46 IST
- [17]. Slatter, J.; Masih, N. 2020. "In India, the world's biggest lockdown has forced migrants to walk hundreds of miles home". *The Washington Post*. Retrieved 13 May 2020.

### **Acknowledgement**

The author is indebted to the migrant workers of different districts of the state of West Bengal who are extended help and sharing experiences during the course of investigation.

Soumya Sourav Basu. "Financial Crunch of the Migrant Workers of West Bengal In Cobid Corona Virus Lockdown." *IOSR Journal of Business and Management (IOSR-JBM)*, 22(9), 2020, pp. 58-63.