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### Examining the Socio-Economic and Demographic differentials in Rural Out-Migration and Employment Status of Migrant Workers in India

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#### Abstract

The present study attempted to shed light on the trend of interstate migration in rural India during the post-liberalisation period. The study also examined the socio-economic and demographic differences in rural out-migration and the employment status of migrant workers at different destinations of the country. For this purpose, different cross tabulation techniques are employed to analyse the different rounds of NSS and PLFS unit-level data on migration. The study found that the Eastern region of the country has lost its position and the Western Region, nowadays, has become the most preferred destination for rural migrant labourers. Under these circumstances, gender, age, education, religion, social class and economic status are found to be important predictors not only in the dimension of migration but also it reflects the employment pattern of rural migrants. The study shows that migration in the country is female-dominated even though males mostly migrated for employment-related reasons. Moreover, incidence of migration in rural India is biased towards the upper classes, whereas individuals from the lower classes are compelled to migrate for low-paying farm and non-farm activities. The study also found that skilled and educated rural individuals viewed interstate migration as an opportunity to improve household well-being, while the poor are more likely to engage in low-paying activities. Nonetheless, both push and pull factors are very much associated with the flow of rural interstate migration; the lack of employment, low income and the incidence of poverty push the rural poor for out-migration, while the availability of non-farm employment along with high-income pulls the educated people towards migration.

#### Keywords

Destinations, Education, Employment, Gender, Interstate migration, Out-Migration, Poverty

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## Introduction

Migration is an integral part of human life which is associated with social, cultural, economic, political and physical phenomena of the societies. As society develops migration has gained significant impetus (De Haan, 2011). It is believed that labour migration has a huge potential to improve economic wellbeing of a nation either by raising employment, human capital or through reducing poverty of the masses. Migration helps to fill the shortage of labour by efficiently allocating skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled labourers in various fields of economic activities of the country (Lewis, 1954; Harris & Todaro, 1970). In addition, migration is also a process of skill transformation where an individual migrant can learn lots from the co-worker at destination (Deshingkar and Akter, 2009; Ali et al., 2017). Therefore, it can be stated that migration has a significant impact on the economy as a whole despite the fact that it is the most challenging issue in today's life and India is no exception. History reveals that India has long tradition of migration. Even after the post-liberalisation period, this situation prevailed. Previously, a large portion of the labour force in the country migrated to get jobs in agricultural activities, but as the structural transformation take place, both skilled and unskilled labourers are moving to urban areas to participate in the high-paying service sector industries. This has undoubtedly increased the rural-to-urban migration of labourers. However, the resulting failure to absorb these labour forces in various urban activities has also raised great concern among policymakers. Therefore, the research which highlights the pattern of labour migration along with the employability of migrants could be useful to policymakers in identifying the challenges and opportunities faced by migrants within the country. In this dimension, various researchers argue that India has witnessed spatial heterogeneity in the process of development during post liberalisation period which ultimately enhances the migration from less developed region to more developed region of the country (Kundu, 2007; Bhagat, 2009). The regional disparity along with wage differences are one of the major reasons behind this mobility (Bhattacharjee, 2020). Simultaneously, skilled

and educated individuals started to migrate to the various part of the country (Chandrasekhar & Sharma, 2014). As a result, pattern of migration has begun to change. Decades ago, rural to rural migration was the dominant form of migration but after the introduction of new industrial policy there has been increasing flow of individual towards urban areas (Ali, et al., 2017). However, this mainly happened due to the existence of a large rural-urban wage differential coupled with attractive job opportunities in the urban areas that had pushed the rural individuals to other regions (Bhagat, 2009). The lack of rural employment opportunities is also one of the major reasons for such movement of people in the country (Parida, 2019). On the other hand, the low, unstable agricultural production along with mechanisation of agricultural activities (Himanshu 2011; Mehrotra et al. 2014) increases the volatility of rural people in the farm sector employment and forces them to join the non-farm employment (Mittra & Murayama, 2009). The significant income disparity between rural and urban areas also drives migration to urban areas (Bhalla, 1990). More often, the growing urban employment opportunities coupled with the cheap transport facilities during post-liberalisation period stimulate labourers for migration (Srivastava, 2011). In this context, it is also believed that the increasing flow of foreign investment along with technological upgradation raises the demand for labour in many destinations that might encourage labourers to migrate (Sengupta, 2013). On the other hand, the process of urbanisation and the development of social indicators have also stimulated the flow of migration (Kundu and Gupta, 1996), but relative poverty and deprivation are assumed to be the main reasons for the occurrence of rural labour migration (Stark and Bloom, 1985; Skeldon, 2002; Stark et al., 2009).

During post-liberalisation period, the employment scenario of rural India has changed dramatically. More individuals have migrated for the benefits of diversified employment opportunities across the nation. As a result, the country has witnessed large out-flow of rural individual towards urban destinations. Some of them joined high paying jobs while most of them

have compelled to join the low paying jobs in the unorganised sector with an expectation for improving wellbeing of the household (Sengupta, 2013). Further, these rural out-migrants do not return to their origin as well as their traditional job. The informal sector provides them a better livelihood as compared to traditional jobs (Mitra, 2006). Hence, the rural individuals have preferred out-migration due to the fact that the probability of being poor is low in the urban destination compared to their native place (Kundu and Sarangi, 2007). Usually, the perceived gap in potential income coupled with the perception of migration outcome at different destinations stimulates the decision of out-migration (Mendola, 2006). In addition, the pattern of out-migration in rural India is very much dependent on the people's access to resources, the household as well as social relation rather than the existence of the labour market (Desingkar and Start, 2003). The out-migration is high among rural extremely poor who may live in rural remote areas. It is believed that the lack of adequate employment opportunities forced them to migrate into an urban destination (Deshingkar, 2010). In this context, out-migration have played a crucial role in the reduction of poverty in relatively less developed regions (Desingkar, 2017; Desingkar and Farrington, 2006) as well as pushing the economy towards the path of development (Desingkar and Grimm, 2004). The rural people of lower strata through migration can be able to reduce the gap of income inequality by joining in the higher earning income activities in different regions of the country (Srivastava, 2011).

Thus, efficient allocation of labour and a reduction in income inequality are undoubtedly two important outcomes associated with rural labour out-migration. Hence, the role of migration in economic development cannot be denied, despite the fact that policy makers in India have shown less priority to migration. On the other hand, very few studies (Jayaraman, 1979; Anjomani, 2002; Rani & Shylendra, 2002; Ali, et al., 2017; Parida, 2019; Paul, 2019; Aggarwal, et al., 2020) have explored how different occupations influence interstate out-migration in rural India. Additionally, there is also a dearth of studies on how regional

variations of a country impact the flow of out-migration of labourers from rural areas; that can also be useful for policymakers to implement policies for the benefit of rural migrant labourers. In this context, the present study raises some important questions as follows; How does the magnitude of migration affect the trend of rural out-migration in the country? What are the socio-economic and demographic factors that affect the shape of rural interstate out-migration? How do the socio-economic differentials affect the employment status of rural interstate out-migrants at their destination? How do the regional variations affect the work participation of the rural out-migrant workers across the country? On the basis of the aforesaid questions, the present study sets the following objectives for analysis,

To study the trends of interstate migration in rural India during post-liberalisation period; To examine the factors that stimulates the rural people for interstate migration; To ascertain the impact of socio-economic differentials on the employment status of rural interstate out-migrants at different destinations. To examine the changes in employment patterns of rural migrants in different parts of the country over the past two decades.

This study is organised as follows; in the present section, the study discusses the analytical part along with objectives of the study. The data sources and methodological part of the study are discussed in the second section. The third section initially explores the trends of interstate migration in rural India during the post-liberalisation period. Furthermore, the factors that prompt rural people to migrate between states as well as the impact of socio-economic differentials on the employment status of rural interstate out-migrants at different destinations also discussed in the subsequent section of the study. In the last part of this section, the study has examined the impact of regional variations on the work participation of the rural out-migrant workers over the past two decades in the country. The final section summarises the major findings, policy recommendation and limitation of the study.

## Data and Methodology

The present study has used 49<sup>th</sup> (1993-94) and 64<sup>th</sup> (2007-08) rounds unit level data of National Sample Survey (NSS) as well as Periodic Labour Force Survey<sup>iii</sup> (PLFS) data (2020-21) for analysing interstate out-migration and employment characteristics of migrant workers at destination. National Sample Survey organisation (NSSO) has defined 'the internal migrants are those members of the household who had migrated any time in the past for staying outside the place of residence provided that the person was alive on the date of survey'. In addition, if the individuals had migrated any time in the past for staying outside their home state is termed as interstate out-migrants. However, as the country witnessed a large flow of interstate migration during post-liberalisation period, therefore the sample of both short term and long-term interstate out-migrants at the age of 15 and more was used in the study. In order to focus to interstate out-migration, the data of migrants were aggregated at the all-India level. For this purpose, NSS and PLFS unit-level migration data from the leading 14 states<sup>iv</sup> of the country were used to present socio-economic and demographic characteristics of interstate rural out-migrants, although these 14 states had contained 88% percent of rural population of India (Census 2011). However, state level disaggregated figure was not computed due to data constraint.

The present study is organised into four sections to address the above objectives; the first section analyses the trend of out-migration in both rural and all India levels, hence, both 49<sup>th</sup>, 64<sup>th</sup> rounds NSS unit level data along with PLFS data of 2020-21 have been used. Individuals who had moved to the different destinations of the country were

pulled for all India level analysis, similarly, the rural individuals who were moved to the different destinations were used to illustrate the trend of migration in rural India. The second section inculcates the impact of different socio-economic and demographic factors that influence the rural out-migration. It has been analysed in terms of individual and household characteristics such as the gender, religions, social class, level of education as well as economic status<sup>v</sup> of the migrant workers. Here, the out-migration rate is estimated by 'the number of interstate rural out-migrants in a particular category divided by per 1000 population of that category', hence;

$$\text{Out - migration rate} = \frac{\text{number of interstate out - migrants in a particular category}}{\text{Total population of that category}} \times 1000$$

In the third section, all the information of individual migrants who had moved from rural area of a particular state to another state for economic reasons has been aggregated for analysis. For understanding the characteristics of employment of migrant workers at the destination, all information regarding rural interstate migration was aggregated. Also, how socio-economic and demographic factors are affecting the nature of their work participation at the destination was also highlighted. As all these migrant labourers were employed in different activities elsewhere in the country, hence, all the economic activities are categorised into five segments viz., agricultural sector, manufacturing sector, construction sector, trade hotel & restaurants and other services<sup>vi</sup>. The percentage of migrants involved in different economic activities in different destinations are also analysed in the present study. In order to explain the last section of the study, all the major Indian

<sup>iii</sup>The NSSO publishes the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) data to provide frequent updates on labour force data from 2017-18. The NSSO has used a similar type of sampling design such as recall period, questionnaires etc. for the collection of data. This makes it easy to compare the PLFS data to different rounds of NSS data. However, to understand the magnitude of migration in rural India during post-liberalization period, 49<sup>th</sup>, 64<sup>th</sup> and PLFS (2020-21) data sets are very essential and, thus, used in the study.

<sup>iv</sup> Name of the states: Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Bihar, West Bengal, Odisha, Jharkhand, Madhya

Pradesh, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala.

<sup>v</sup> To define the economic status of the interstate out-migrants, five different classes of household, viz. poorer, poorest, middle, richer, and richest have been considered for the analysis. These economic classes have been estimated from the expenditure quintiles in which the household of bottom 20 percent categories as poorest and top 20 percent categories as richest.

<sup>vi</sup> Other services include transport, communication, postal services, banking, insurance, personal services, Govt. & non-govt. jobs, and other jobs related to services.

states and UTs are classified in to five regions<sup>vii</sup> to investigate the impact of regional variations on the work participation of the out-migrants. Simple statistical tools & techniques such as ratios, percentages etc. are used through cross-tabulation methods in the study. However, both 64<sup>th</sup> round NSS unit level data and PLFS data of 2020-21 have been used to analyse the last three sections of the study.

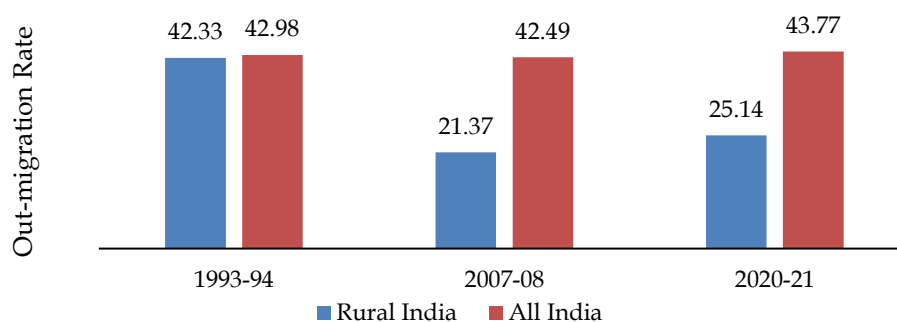
## Result and Discussion

### *Trend of interstate out-migration in India*

India has a long tradition of migration which linked the country with different cultures, languages and diversities. In the British colonial period, the labourers were indenture in nature, they were migrated for the plantation of agricultural goods like tea jute, rubber, cotton and indigo, similarly, people were migrated to the outside of the country for extension of British colonisation. In the post-Independence era, the Indian people were characterised as less mobile (Davis, 1951); only 17% percent were living in the urban area (Bhagat & Mohanty, 2009). The country has witnessed a similar trend of urbanisation in the next several decades. However, the new industrial policy of 1991 has played an important role in the dimension of migration. The immobile nature of the people has

changed as the structural transformation was taking place in the Indian economy; more individuals were shifted their job from the primary and secondary sectors to the tertiary sector (Kerswell & Pratap, 2019). The trends of migration in rural and all India levels during post liberalisation era have been illustrated in Figure 1.

To explore the trends of interstate migration, the study found that the migration rate has decreased from 42.98 per thousand populations to 42.49 per thousand populations between the year 1993-94 and 2007-08 and it has again increased to 43.77 per thousand populations in 2020-21 in the country (Figure 1). However, among these migrants, the rural interstate migration rate has decreased from 42.33 to 21.37 per thousand populations between 1993-94 to 2007-08 although it has reached to 25.14 per thousand populations in 2020-21 (Figure 1). The out-migration rate disaggregated by economic reasons increased marginally in 2020-21 compared to the previous year. In the light of these findings, economists concluded that liberalisation policies coupled with cheap communication and transport facilities promotes labour migration in the country (Srivastava, 2011; Ali et al., 2017).



Source: NSS 64th rounds (2007-08) and PLFS (2020-21) unit level data of migration

**Figure 1** Trends of interstate out-migration rate (per thousand populations) at the ages of 15 and in rural and all India level

<sup>vii</sup> Classification of regions: *Northern region* includes the states & UTs of Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Chandigarh, Uttarakhand, Haryana, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh; *Western region* includes the states & UTs of Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Daman & Diu, Dadar and Maharashtra; *Eastern region* includes the states of

Bihar, Jharkhand, Assam, West Bengal, Odisha; *Southern region* includes the states & UTs of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Goa, Lakshadweep, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Pondicherry, A & N land; *North-eastern region* includes the states of Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura, Meghalaya.



Consequently, it is also a fact that the benefits of liberalisation policy vary according to the socio-economic and demographic characteristics of the internal migrants (Kerswell & Pratap, 2019). Besides, the apparent inability to generate decent work to meet the demand of the growing labour force of most regions of the country, the flow of interstate migration has accelerated widely (Sharma & Rani, 2023). This will be clear when the study considers the flow of migration from the major Indian states. In this context, the more developed states such as Maharashtra, Punjab and Gujarat have witnessed a decreasing trend of interstate migration while Karnataka and West Bengal have shown a positive flow of migration between the years 2007-08 and 2020-21 (Appendix Table 1). In case of rural out-migration, a decreasing trend is registered by the state of Maharashtra followed by Punjab, Gujarat, Karnataka and Kerala during the periods of 1993-94 to 2020-21, importantly all these states are advanced states of the country. On the other hand, Odisha has recorded the highest positive rate of change in interstate migration followed by the state of West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh (Appendix Table 1). The resultant decline of productive employment in agriculture activities along with unstable agricultural production as well as increasing mechanisation of the farm sector forced these rural labourers for staying outside of their state of domicile (Kerswell & Pratap, 2019).

#### *The socio-economic and demographic correlates of out-migration in rural India*

It is overwhelming fact that the socio-economic and demographic factors are very much influencing the flow of interstate migration in the country. Hence, it has great significance to explore the changing pattern of interstate migration by different socio-economic and demographic factors during post-liberalisation period. Several researchers (Keshri & Bhagat, 2010) postulated that the changing pattern of interstate migration by gender is extremely significant in the dimension of a migration study. Table 1 illustrates that the male migration rate in all India levels has increased from 37.03 per thousand populations in

2007-08 to 43.73 per thousand population in 2020-21, while female migration rate reduced from 47.94 to 43.70 per thousand population between the same period of time. In addition, the gender gap in migration is enormous in rural India. The female out-migration rate is found to be higher in rural India than the male counterpart even though female migration rate has reduced from 28.06 to 27.07 per thousand populations between the year 2007-08 and 2020-21 whereas the male migration rate has increased from 14.6 per thousand populations to 23.37 per thousand population during same period of time (Table 1). It may be the fact that out-migration of working-age females is driven by non-economic factors such as marriage, while economic reason is one of the main reasons for the migration of working-age males in the country (Bhagat, 2009; Ali, et al. 2017). Actually, the widespread poverty in rural areas not only forces the women to contribute household income preferably by joining the low-paying primary activities but also enables them to migrate from their native place. In contrast, as development proceeds, the primary sectors begin to employ more capitalistic techniques in the process of production which ultimately reduces the demand for labour in the rural area. Of course, this has raised the unemployment among the rural labourers that ultimately compelled them to stay outside of their native place to get an employment elsewhere in the country (Kerswell & Pratap, 2019). To understand the pattern of age-specific out-migration rate in the country, Table 1 illustrates that the out-migration rate in all India levels increases with the increase of the age of the individuals reaching a maximum at the age class of 31-40 and then declines in both periods of 2007-08 and 2020-21. An almost similar pattern of migration is found to be existed in rural India, the only difference was that the out-migration rate reaches maximum level at the age class of 21-30. Indeed, the rural India experienced much smaller incidence of migration compared to all India level. However, the probability of migration of rural individuals is high in the age of 21-40 and in recent days, the importance of these productive ages has increased quite significantly.

**Table 1** Interstate out-migration rate per 1000 population (age 15 +) by different individual characteristics

Individual characteristics		Interstate out-migration rate (2007-08)		Interstate out-migration rate (2020-21)	
		Rural India	All India	Rural India	All India
Gender	Female	28.06	47.94	27.07	43.80
	Male	14.60	37.03	23.17	43.73
Age (Years)	15-20	11.23	22.35	9.96	19.82
	21-30	26.09	47.75	33.72	51.29
	31-40	25.98	52.34	31.51	51.79
	41-50	21.50	46.59	26.72	48.91
	51-60	19.98	40.86	22.79	43.72
	61 and above	21.04	42.07	21.56	42.40
Education	Illiterate	23.86	35.20	25.94	40.55
	Below primary	17.57	37.17	18.11	35.18
	Primary	20.22	39.36	28.14	47.00
	Upper primary	18.43	40.72	27.57	42.90
	Secondary	19.81	51.09	24.43	42.68
	HS and above	23.00	59.31	23.52	49.03
	Total	21.37	42.49	25.36	43.77

Source: NSS 64<sup>th</sup> rounds (2007-08) and PLFS (2020-21) unit level data of migration

A plausible explanation lies in the fact that low level of education and skills impulses the rural people to do low-paying manual jobs at an early age in their life. The imperfect information about different jobs along with easy access to primary and allied activities has also compelled them to join in such manual jobs. Undoubtedly, this type of job provides low income to the rural labour which ultimately obstructs them to meet their daily needs. Nonetheless, most of these jobs are irregular in nature, where they do not get regular employment and hence income. Thus, the poverty and unemployment have also forced them to migrate to earn an income which is above of their subsistence level, no matter about the type of work where they have been employed.

Indeed, it is also a fact that easy access to different activities does not encourage them to take risks related employment away from the native place. To understand how the level of education affects interstate migration in India, Table 1 shows that the out-migration rate varied considerably with the education of the individual from the periods of 2007-08 to 2020-21, even though education is the key determinant of the employment status of the interstate migrants. The result reveals that the propensity of migration is higher among the illiterate or less educated individuals in rural areas while comparatively better-educated people migrate to different destinations at the national levels during the same period.

The situation has altered in 2020-21, when the rural migration rate increased with the better educational status of the individuals. It is believed that the rural individuals were efficient in producing agricultural products and hence, they are less likely to go out of their native place. However, the situation has changed with the improvement of infrastructural facilities in the country; as a result, educated rural people have started to move for better level of living. Therefore, access to various employment opportunities for higher levels of earning during later period indisputably pulls educated individuals towards out-migration, while on the other hand, the lack of employment opportunities coupled with low income and poverty also pushes the less educated towards out-migration.

Table 2 indicates that out-migration rates among religious minorities have declined from 77.58 per thousand populations in 2007-08 to 41.53 per thousand populations in 2020-21, indicating that the out-migration rate of minorities is associated with the religious status of migrants. It is found that the interstate migration rate for the Muslim minority was substantially lower in both the point of time. A similar pattern of migration is also found in case of rural migrants as well.

The existence of such a pattern of migration is mostly responsible for large socio-economic differences across the religious communities in the country. Perhaps, lack of education among

the Muslim minority is one of the main reasons behind the lower incidence of out-migration. It is well-known fact that the demand for skilled and educated labourers have been growing over the period of post-economic reform. Hindu migrants are more likely to take advantage of migration consciously due to their higher educational status. On the other hand, the relative landlessness among all the religious minorities is one of the main reasons behind the high out-migration rate in the rural India.

The study also reveals that a significant change in interstate migration across social groups<sup>viii</sup> during the last two decades.

The out-migration rate of Schedule Castes (SCs) and Schedule Tribes (STs) was substantially lower in 2007-08 at national levels, but the number of STs migrated in 2020-21 has decreased over time. It is almost similar to rural India's migration pattern, with the exception that a smaller number of Other Backward Castes (OBCs) migrated in later period (Table 2). One can argue that the individuals belonging to higher social status are more likely to migrate from one state to another state compared to the other social classes. Actually, the rural vulnerable categories such as SCs and STs population are often deprived because of social and economic reasons. The majority of them were employed in primary and allied activities, but less absorption

of labourers in the primary activities coupled with low income in the later period have pushed them for migration. In this circumstance, the high labour absorption in the hard-manual jobs of the informal sector along with relatively higher income compared to the native place encourages them to leave their home state. Also, an attempt has been made to analyse how the level of economic status of the individual affects the pattern of out-migration in rural India. The economic status of a household is generally measured by the per capita monthly consumption expenditure. In 2007-08, the out-migration rate grew with improved economic conditions in migrant households (Table 2), but in 2020-21 a substantial number of people from the bottom and top quintiles migrated as well. As the richest quintile of the country can afford the costs of migration, government policies are not changed by their movement. However, a higher number of people from the poorest quintile migrate towards cities that are extremely significant in terms of policy perspectives (Harris & Todaro, 1970).

Undoubtedly, this would increase the population, unemployment and poverty ratio of the cities and hinder the process of development (Kundu, 2007). The study also highlights the incidence of rural migration.

**Table 2.** Interstate out-migration rate per 1000 population (age 15 +) by different household characteristics

Household characteristics		Interstate out-migration rate (2007-08)		Interstate out-migration rate (2020-21)	
		Rural India	All India	Rural India	All India
Religion	Hindu	20.57	42.06	25.48	45.60
	Muslim	21.24	38.00	22.09	31.66
	Others	34.92	77.58	24.76	41.53
Social group	Schedule tribe	16.75	23.02	25.22	31.95
	Schedule caste	17.86	30.69	25.35	36.04
	OBC	20.51	30.55	24.10	35.51
	Others	27.83	69.58	27.37	67.55
Expenditure quintile	Poorest	14.91	22.97	26.95	31.96
	Poorer	15.15	29.55	24.39	37.42
	Middle	20.23	39.47	24.40	41.24
	Rich	20.16	46.96	22.67	44.28
	Richest	33.00	65.55	27.41	64.55
Total		21.37	42.49	25.14	43.77

*Source:* NSS 64<sup>th</sup> rounds (2007-08) and PLFS (2020-21) unit level data of migration

<sup>viii</sup>In India, the social group of SCs and STs are the most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, the lack of access to various fields such as amenities as well as

economic activities make them live poorly in the country.



It is found that the rural migration rate among the poorest quintile has increased from 14.91 to 26.98 in per thousand populations between the year 2007-08 and 2020-21 whereas in case of the richest expenditure quintile, the rate of out-migration has decreased during the same period of time. Initially, the rural poorest quintile has shown a very lower incidence of out-migration compared to the rural richest quintile. Perhaps, easier access to primary and allied activities at origin, low literacy rate and low level of skills deter the rural poor from interstate out-migration, but the incidence of out-migration among the rural poorest quintile has increased significantly with the passage of time. It might be the fact that agricultural activities alone cannot meet the demands of small and marginal farmers in rural areas. The volatility of agriculture coupled with the riskiness of the market of the products forced the rural poor to shift their livelihoods from farm to non-farm activities (Ghosh, 1998; Chakraborty, 2016), although the lack of employment opportunities in non-farm activities at their native place ultimately pushed them toward interstate out-migration.

***Socio-economic and demographic correlates of employment status of rural Out-migrants at destination***

So far, the present study has focused on the changing pattern of interstate migration in India by different socio-economic and demographic factors. However, now the discussion turns to the changing employment status of rural migrants at different destinations. Therefore, the study considered only rural migrants who migrated for economic reasons. Undoubtedly, the employment and income of migrants have directly contributed to the growth and development of both the destination and native place. The migrants contribute to the productivity of the destination, while the native places benefit from their remittances. Further, poverty and unemployment are key determinants of the flow of rural out-migration; lack of employment opportunities coupled with poverty drives the rural individual to migrate, whereas the availability of employment, higher incomes and better living in the urban setting attract the individual to migrate.

There are marked regional differences in India, with the more developed regions having higher per capita incomes and large non-farm sector employment, while the less developed regions are characterised by low per capita incomes and large farm employment. A large number of rural individuals are migrating from less developed regions to more developed regions for decent employment, although very few of them have been employed in decent occupations and most of the remaining join in the informal sectors of the country (Kerswell & Pratap, 2019). Therefore, it is extremely important to assess the changing patterns of employment by the socio-economic and demographic characteristics of the rural out-migrants. Figure 2a and 2b shows how gender differences influence employment status of interstate migrant workers from 2007-08 to 2020-21. The results indicate that the proportion of rural female out-migrant workers engaged in farming activities has decreased from 78% in 2007-08 to 69% in 2020-21, while the participation of rural male out-migrant workers in agricultural activities has increased from 30% to 39% during the same period of time (Appendix Table 2). Thus, rural female out-migrants are more likely to participate in agricultural activities compared to their rural male counterparts (Figure 2 a). The service sector, on the other hand, accounted for 12% of rural employment for migrant workers in 2007-08 but has decreased to 7% in 2020-21, despite the fact that a higher proportion of female migrants have engaged the service sector for employment compared to male migrants (Appendix Table 2). Hence, a high percentage of female out-migrants have been engaged with primary economic activities as well as service sector for their livelihood.

The plausible fact is that the women who had previously taken care of household duties have joined primary activities as replacements for male members of the household because most male members have shifted their livelihood from farm to the nonfarm sector due to decline of farm income below the subsistence levels. However, this type of out-migration is mainly stimulated by push factors. Similarly, due to pull factors a decent percent of female migrates to join the service sector of the country. The higher investment in the tertiary sector is associated

with the explosion of the service sector that benefits the educated female migrants from rural areas. Hence, there are both push and pull factors that govern female out-migration, and due to stronger nature of these factors, more females are involved in primary activities, while it is expected that their participation in the service sector will be enhanced with the improvement of their educational status and skills. On the other hand, till now, a significant number of rural male out-migrants rely on the non-farm sector for their employment for earning higher income and for accessing better jobs opportunities at destinations compared to their native place. The agrarian distress and the resultant reduction of productive employment in the primary and allied activities forced them to find employment in the non-agriculture sector. Hence, the decision

of out-migration of males is also attributed to both push and pull factors; actually, these two factors are operating very aggressively in the economy (Figure 2 b).

To assess how the educational status of the individual influences the employment pattern of out-migration, several researchers (John et al., 1976) have shown that migration is selective among the highly educated and illiterate groups of people. In addition, education has a direct association with female migrants; the propensity for migration increases with the increase in education of females (Zachariah et al., 1999). Thus, in the current context of globalisation, education is the key in acquiring the benefits of migration.

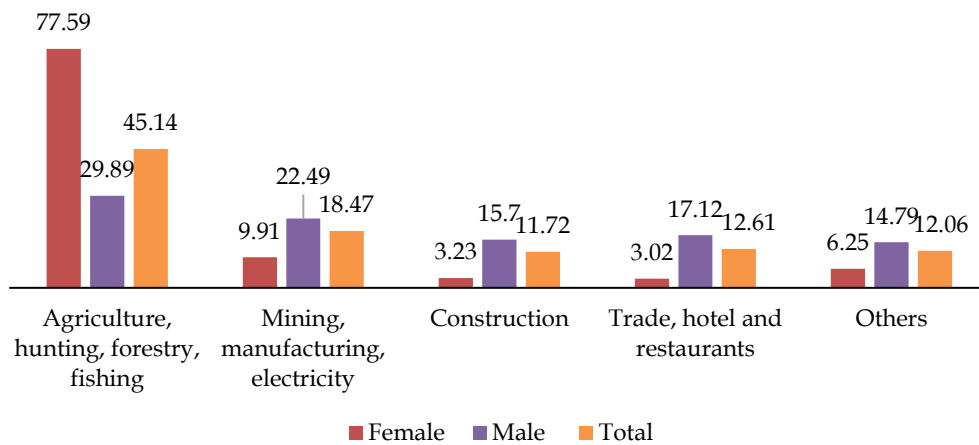
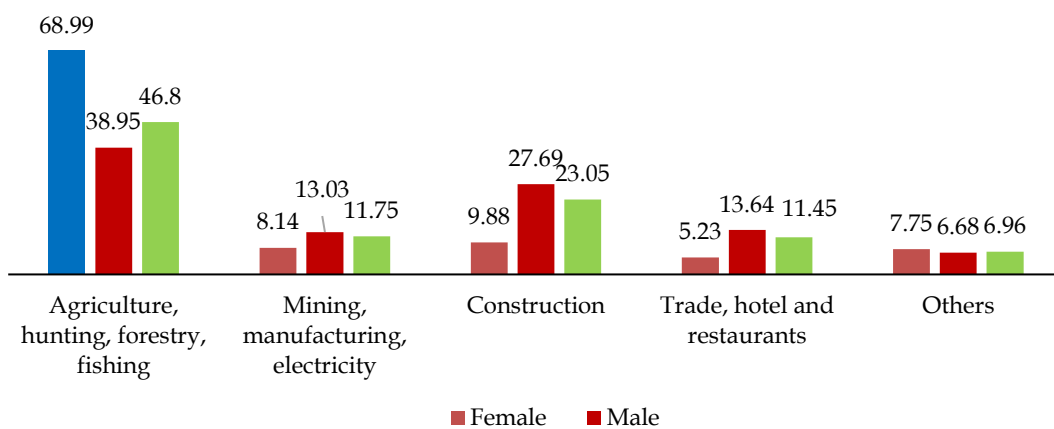


Figure 2a Distribution of out-migrant workers by occupation and gender (%) in Rural India, 2007-08



Source: NSS 64th rounds (2007-08) and PLFS (2020-21) unit level data of migration

Figure 2b Distribution of out-migrant workers by occupation and gender (%) in rural India, 2020-21

Moreover, the impact of education on the livelihood of the rural out-migrants is a leading national phenomenon as it is associated with different migration patterns of the country. Migrants benefit from higher education by enhancing their skills and gaining better employment opportunities in nonfarm activities. Table 3 illustrates the percentage of migrant workers in different activities by the level of education. The study found that the association of rural labour migration to agriculture activities has increased from 45% percent in 2007-08 to 47% percent in 2020-21, even though the migrants from the lower educational status have prioritised agriculture and construction activities for their employment. Consequently, the educated migrants mostly had involved in the service sector in 2007-08, but with the course of time, a large number of them shifted to agriculture and construction activities in later period. This has happened due to persist of vast poverty and unemployment in the rural India. Undoubtedly, the structural transformation has forced the rural people to change their livelihood, but due to lack of decent employment, they have joined in construction activities at different destinations. On the other hand, with the passage of time, the rural migrants have shown less

interest to join in the manufacturing industry, trade, hotels and restaurants for employment. Contrariwise, the demand for skilled and educated labour in the country has been increasing rapidly due to vast urbanisation, expansion of the private sector and growing need for the consumer, but unfortunately, the benefits of such expansion do not reach to the rural out-migrants. The lack of industrialisation and easy access to agricultural activities coupled with less educational status among the rural individuals are causes for higher incidence of migration in low paying activities. In contrast, a substantial percentage of non-farm employment is associated with high-income activities where the migrants with relatively higher educational status join in different occupations.

It is expected that there will be greater demand for skilled labour in non-farm activities, enabling the educated youth to gain employment on a larger scale. Thus, education plays a significant role in determining migrant livelihoods, but lack of industrialisation, higher unemployment and easy access to agricultural activities lead them to participate in low-income activities, regardless of their educational level.

**Table 3** Percentage of out-migrant worker in different activities by education in rural India

Education	Agriculture, hunting, forestry, fishing	Mining, manufacturing, electricity	Construction	Trade, hotel and restaurants	Other services
Rural India (2007-08)					
Illiterate	64.30	14.38	9.71	6.07	5.55
Below primary	46.10	19.48	14.29	12.99	7.14
Primary	34.35	20.87	17.83	18.26	8.70
Middle school	31.00	26.64	11.79	17.47	13.10
Secondary	27.61	15.67	10.45	20.90	25.37
HS & above	18.29	18.86	6.86	14.29	41.71
Total	45.14	18.47	11.72	12.61	12.06
Rural India (2020-21)					
Illiterate	66.11	7.48	18.09	5.41	2.91
Below primary	43.33	13.33	36.67	6.67	0.00
Primary	45.49	11.19	25.99	14.44	2.89
Middle school	42.02	14.34	28.28	13.13	2.22
Secondary	37.10	15.16	24.52	14.84	8.39
HS & above	36.97	10.91	14.85	13.33	23.94
Total	46.80	11.75	23.05	11.45	6.96

Source: NSS 64<sup>th</sup> rounds (2007-08) and PLFS (2020-21) unit level data of migration

In India, the incidence of migration is selective among the wealthier section of the society, while the opposite phenomenon has appeared among the economically vulnerable segment (Kundu, 2007; Bhagat, 2017). Table 4 illustrates the percentage distribution of out-migrant workers in different activities by the expenditure quintiles. It follows that the employment status of rural out-migrants changed significantly between 2007-08 and 2020-21, but the rich-poor gap widened. It is believed that the cost of migration determines the pattern of the flow of migration (Chau, 1997; Chandrasekhar & Mitra, 2019). Migrants who have the capacity to bear the cost of migration are more likely to prefer to migrate towards high-paying regions. Therefore, the out-migrants from the lowest expenditure quintile are found to have a relatively lower work participation rate in the service sector compared to the top expenditure quintile in both the point of time.

The study further shows that the migrants work participation rate was relatively much higher in the agricultural activities followed by mining, manufacturing, and electricity in 2007-08, but with the passage of time, significant numbers of migrant workers shifted towards the agricultural and construction activities as revealed by the Periodic Labour Force Survey conducted by NSS in the year 2020-21. Conversely, the majority of the out-migrants of the richest spending quintile have been heavily involved in the nonfarm sector

both in the year 2007-08 and 2020-21. The poorest quintile in rural areas has a strong desire to migrate to agriculture, whereas the upper quintiles have migrated to join the nonfarm sector, during the same time period. During peak farming seasons, people from rural areas migrate, but they return to their native places during the slack period.

Due to unemployment at the origin and low-income level, most of these agricultural workers migrate to other states. There are many differences between the pattern of migration of agricultural and industrial labour since industries require skilled and specialised labour force.

The migrants who are seeking employment in this sector are usually educated and skilled. Hence, the perception of migration among the richest and poorest quintiles determines the patterns of employment of the migrant workers. While poor migrants mainly engage in primary and allied activities to maintain a minimum level of living, skilled and educated migrants consider migration as an opportunity to improve their quality of life. To understand the factors associated with employment of the rural migrants, the social status of the migrants has a significant impact on their livelihood. In Indian social system, the individuals belonging to SC and ST categories in rural areas are often deprived and are marginalised due to caste discrimination.

**Table 4** Percentage of out-migrant worker in different activities by expenditure class in rural India

Expenditure Class	Agriculture, hunting, forestry, fishing	Mining, manufacturing electricity	Construction	Trade, hotel and restaurant	Other services
Rural India (2007-08)					
Poorest	57.78	18.89	16.11	5.00	2.22
Poorer	49.48	18.75	10.94	12.50	8.33
Middle	50.97	16.60	11.97	12.36	8.11
Rich	42.18	24.00	11.64	13.09	9.09
Richest	38.17	16.33	10.46	15.05	20.00
Total	45.14	18.47	11.72	12.61	12.06
Rural India (2020-21)					
Poorest	50.92	6.54	31.49	8.18	2.86
Poorer	48.41	11.49	26.16	9.54	4.40
Middle	47.40	12.76	24.48	10.68	4.69
Rich	42.48	15.34	18.29	14.75	9.14
Richest	42.82	14.64	11.05	15.75	15.75
Total	46.80	11.75	23.05	11.45	6.96

*Source:* NSS 64<sup>th</sup> rounds (2007-08) and PLFS (2020-21) unit level data of migration

The social segregation and barriers for accessing basic amenities plagued them to attach to different low-paying activities in the country (Chandrasekhar & Mitra, 2019). In addition, the landlessness, displacement, and loss of ownership of forest resources have forced them to migrate to other destinations. Indeed, these rural vulnerable groups are most disadvantaged in the labour market at their native place (Mitra, 2006). Most often, however, they are employed in manual jobs with extremely low wages. Therefore, the economic distress also forced them to migrate outside of their state of domicile to improve their household well-being. Table 5 illustrates that employment patterns of rural out-migrants are also influenced by their social status. The study revealed that those who belong to the upper caste are more likely to participate with high-paying jobs in the non-farm sector. On the other hand, the out-migrants from SC and ST communities are generally forced to work in the low-paying farm and construction sector. It follows that the engagement of ST migrants with agricultural activities has been significantly decreased from 73% to 53% whereas in case of SC migrants, the incidence of migration has been reduced from 47% to 44% between the periods of 2007-08 to 2020-21. Contrariwise, the rural migrants from OBCs and other social categories is found to have significantly inclined towards the non-agricultural activities in 2007-08, but with the course of time, they also preferred to participate in agricultural activities due to lack of demand for labour in the non-farm sector. Furthermore, the result revealed that a significant number of SC & ST migrants have joined in the

construction activities in 2020-21 as compared to the year 2007-08.

Perhaps, SC and ST migrants are unable to compete for high-paying jobs because they lack formal education and skills. On the other hand, out-migrants from the other categories have shown the reverse effect. Higher educational status and better skills enable them to find high-paying jobs in the non-firm sector (Chandrasekhar & Mitra, 2019). Another attempt is made to focus on how the religious status of individual is influencing the employment pattern of out-migration at the destination. Table 6 illustrates that rural out-migrants from other religious minorities work mostly in agricultural activities, while Muslim out-migrants mostly participate in non-farm activities in both the point of time. In rural areas, however, low literacy rate and extreme poverty ratio forced the Muslims to work hard in the non-farm sector. In contrast to Muslims, many rural individuals belonging to other religious minorities are employed in the high-paying service sector in both the time points. It is evident that individuals belonging to non-Muslim religious minorities such as Christians, Jains, and Sikhs are mostly benefited from the prevalence and widespread education that ultimately enables them in searching for employment elsewhere in the country. Individuals from the Sikh religion, for instance, have been induced to migrate outside of their native place due to their risk-taking behaviour and entrepreneurial abilities. In India, Jains are the most successful traders.

**Table 5** Percentage of out-migrant worker in different activities by social status in rural India

Ethnic groups	Agriculture, hunting, forestry, fishing	Mining, manufacturing, electricity	Construction	Trade, hotel and restaurant	Other services
Rural India (2007-08)					
Schedule tribe	72.59	7.41	11.85	2.22	5.93
Schedule caste	47.01	23.11	15.14	7.57	7.17
OBC	42.47	20.33	12.05	15.21	9.94
Others	39.15	16.21	8.98	14.96	20.70
Total	45.14	18.47	11.72	12.61	12.06
Rural India (2020-21)					
Schedule tribe	52.61	8.36	33.10	4.53	1.39
Schedule caste	43.36	9.75	29.88	11.00	6.02
OBC	47.45	12.60	21.34	12.60	6.02
Others	45.05	15.32	9.01	15.02	15.62
Total	46.80	11.75	23.05	11.45	6.96

Source: NSS 64<sup>th</sup> rounds (2007-08) and PLFS (2020-21) unit level data of migration



**Table 6** Percentage of out-migrant worker in different activities by religion

Religion	Agriculture, hunting, forestry, fishing	Mining, manufacturing, electricity	Construction	Trade, hotel and restaurants	Other services
Rural India (2007-08)					
Hindu	45.22	19.45	11.22	12.80	11.31
Muslim	34.17	19.17	20.00	16.67	10.00
Others	54.69	8.59	8.59	7.03	21.09
Total	45.14	18.47	11.72	12.61	12.06
Rural India (2020-21)					
Hindu	47.49	11.29	23.26	11.69	6.27
Muslim	34.67	20.00	27.33	10.00	8.00
Others	54.43	6.33	10.13	8.86	20.25
Total	46.80	11.75	23.05	11.45	6.96

*Source:* NSS 64<sup>th</sup> rounds (2007-08) and PLFS (2020-21) unit level data of migration

Their skills and wealth play an important role in their migration process. Therefore, the objectives of out-migration from the rural India also vary with the religious characteristics of the migrant workers. While some view migration as an opportunity for employment and income, others view migration as a source of improving economic well-being.

#### *Regional variations and employment status of out-migrants in Rural India*

The present study now turns to finding out how regional differences attract the rural interstate out-migrants for different employment. It is well-known fact that the labour would migrate to a destination where the probability of getting jobs is substantially higher. Indeed, the skilled and educated people would prefer to migrate to the big cities for high-paying jobs while agricultural labour prefers to migrate to the more developed rural areas. Table 7 postulates the preferred regions of destination for interstate out-migration according to the pattern of employment. It follows that the Eastern region of India seems to be the most preferred destination for rural migrants (26.9%) followed by the Northern region (26.8%) in 2007-08, but as per the PLFS (2020-21), the western (40.5%) and southern (27.7%) regions are found to be the most preferred destination for the rural migrants in India. The rural labour migrated for agricultural activities has reduced from 60% in 2007-08 to 47% in 2020-21. The Northern and the Eastern region of the country are no longer a preferred destination of rural migrants; the western and

southern regions became most preferred destination of them. The above change in the choice of destinations may be occurred due to the structural transformation and unbalanced regional development in India. The Northern region has an abundance of natural resources that offer simultaneous opportunities for development to several sectors of the economy. The high agricultural produce states such as Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh are using a large number of labourers for the development of the agro-processing industries while the states and UTs such as Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand needs labour for the production of several fruits as well as agro-processing manufacturing units like Jam, Jellies, etc.

Hence the influx of labour to these parts of the country is mainly due to the expansion of agro based industries while, the rural migrants have given more priority to the non-farm sector in recent time. As a result, the Northern region loses its importance as one of the best destinations for the rural migrants. Similarly, the rural migrants have given more priority to Western and Southern regions in ahead of Eastern region as a migration destination of the country despite the fact that the Eastern region is the largest producer of rice, jute as well as tea and many vegetables. The lower per capita income coupled with slow structural transformation in the eastern region may be one of the reasons that forced the labourers to migrate towards other regions.

**Table 7** Percentage of out-migrant workers migrated to different regions by economic activities

Economic activities	Northern region	Western region	Eastern region	North-eastern region	Southern region	Share of employment of the out-migrant
Rural India (2007-08)						
Agriculture, hunting, forestry, fishing	16.67	14.93	16.23	0.04	12.25	60.13
Mining, manufacturing, electricity	2.91	2.46	3.35	0.00	3.31	12.03
Construction	1.70	1.43	2.37	0.00	1.74	7.24
Trade, hotel and restaurants	2.32	3.22	2.41	0.04	2.59	10.59
Other services	3.22	1.30	2.55	0.13	2.82	10.01
Share of preferred destination of the rural out-migrants	26.82	23.33	26.91	0.22	22.71	100.00
Rural India (2020-21)						
Agriculture, hunting, forestry, fishing	11.35	19.62	4.24	0.50	11.09	46.80
Mining, manufacturing, electricity	2.67	4.94	1.01	0.10	3.03	11.75
Construction	4.64	9.53	0.91	0.10	7.87	23.05
Trade, hotel and restaurants	2.27	4.29	1.16	0.20	3.53	11.45
Other services	1.77	2.17	0.81	0.00	2.22	6.96
Share of preferred destination of the rural out-migrants	22.69	40.54	8.12	0.91	27.74	100.00

*Source: NSS 64<sup>th</sup> rounds (2007-08) and PLFS (2020-21) unit level data of migration*

On the other hand, the Western region became the prominent destination of the rural out-migrants followed by the southern region in the country in case of non-farm employment. As a result, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka are leading states in providing non-farm employment that effectively stimulates migration to these regions.

### Summary and concluding remarks

This study has attempted to bring out the patterns of interstate migration in rural India during the periods of 2007-08 to 2020-21. It is believed that new industrial policies not only opened up the Indian economy for steady flow of investment but it has also raised the industrialisation in many parts of the country. Undoubtedly, the higher industrialisation is the reason behind enhancement of the demand for labour, side by side it has increased rural-urban wage gap in the country. More often, this rural-urban wage differential is expected to stimulate the flow of migration in combination with an increased demand for labour in many well-developed destinations. Indeed, the migration pattern in rural India is, however, favoured by the upper classes of the country, despite the fact that many males migrate for employment in the non-farm sector during post reforms era, while, till now, most females have migrated for primary and allied activities. The plausible reason lies in

the fact that the agrarian distress and the resultant reduction of productive employment in the primary and allied activities forced the male individual to find an employment in the non-agriculture sector while the women previously engaged in domestic duties have migrated for joining in the primary and allied activities for earning subsistence level of income for their households.

On the other hand, the country has faced an abundant flow of unskilled interstate out-migration from rural areas. Mostly the households having less land pushed the individuals for interstate migration. Therefore, it is a big question about how these migrants can improve the wellbeing of the household left behind at their origin. However, it is argued by several researchers (Kothari, 2002; Sundari, 2005; Kundu, 2007) that migration is a survival strategy of poor households, but unplanned out-migration throws away the household from the economic benefit of migration. The lack of employment opportunities in the native place is the reason behind such unplanned migration. On the other hand, the skilled and educated rural individuals have considered interstate migration as an opportunity to improve wellbeing of the households. In terms of household expenditure quintiles, it is found that the top classes are mostly benefited by migration in the rural India.

In most cases, they have participated in the high paying jobs in the service sector, while poor out-migrants have hung up with low-paying jobs. The conditions of vulnerable categories of SC and ST are exceptionally poor; remarkably a very low percentage of individuals in this group engage in the service sector for their livelihood. The social exclusion and restriction in accessing the most basic services are forced them to associate with low paying activities. The conditions of Muslim out-migrants are almost same, due to low literacy and extreme poverty, they are mostly employed in the hard-manual jobs in the non-farm sector for their livelihood.

Thus, both push and pull factors are very much associated with the flow of rural out-migration in the country. The push factors such as lack of employment, low income and poverty are the reasons behind the migration of rural individuals while the availability of employment, high income, and the low probability of being poor in the urban destination pull the individual for out-migration. Indeed, both push and pull factors are influencing the rural out-migration very significantly in the country, contrariwise push factors are very much effective in promoting migration among the poor household.

### **Policy Recommendation**

Thus, the interstate rural out-migration has increased at an unprecedented rate during post-liberalisation period not only for better expected wage but also for maintaining a subsistence level of income. Hence, in order to improve the well-being of these rural migrants, the government should promote rural employment in the country. Simultaneously, special attention is required to promote education and vocational training among unskilled rural migrants that may help them to enlarge their employment choice in the country. The Govt. should also implement minimum basic security for all the migrants that can prevent the exploitation of rural labourers at different destinations. Furthermore, it is imperative to identify the challenges that migrants' families face at their native places. Under these circumstances, rural migrant households may benefit greatly from a well-implemented school education program, Public Distribution System (PDS), health care

system, and work in MGNREGA (MG National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005).

### **Limitation of the study**

This study is based on 49<sup>th</sup> (1993-94) and 64<sup>th</sup> (2007-08) rounds NSS and the PLFS (2020-21) unit level data of migration, and not beyond limitations. The present study is limited to rural India, while most migration study illustrates that interstate out-migration in India is urban-dominated. Hence, a significant part of the population, especially the urban population, is not part of the study. Additionally, the study does not cover reverse migration, even though reverse migration plays an important role in promoting labour migration in the country. On the other hand, this study has shown the socio-economic differentials in the employment of rural interstate out-migrants but does not analyse the factors that determine the employability of the rural migrant labourers. As a result, many factors that help the labourers find employment at different destinations are not included in the study. In this context, further study will help the policymakers to implement policies in favour of rural migrants.

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## Appendices

**Table 1** State wise distribution of rural and total out-migrants/1000 population at the ages of 15 and more

Name of the states	Interstate out-migration rate (1993-94)		Interstate out-migration rate (2007-08)		Interstate out-migration rate (2020-21)	
	Rural (a)	Total (b)	Rural (c)	Total (d)	Rural (e)	Total (f)
Andhra Pradesh <sup>ix</sup>	23.30	28.54	17.69	27.93	15.16	26.94
Bihar <sup>x</sup>	6.78	11.91	11.57	19.95	18.62	37.68
Gujarat	51.13	41.30	19.58	63.04	12.57	51.57
Karnataka	35.73	42.88	21.28	50.67	17.41	52.92
Kerala	14.18	23.10	41.31	45.39	34.83	41.32
Madhya Pradesh	41.86	44.78	18.96	32.23	28.57	45.07
Maharashtra	121.71	85.68	25.13	85.78	13.04	59.87
Orissa	14.49	21.25	13.10	23.96	30.44	34.98
Punjab	95.92	75.77	58.24	86.58	33.55	67.41
Rajasthan	46.82	51.59	42.46	54.03	35.96	44.42
Tamil Nadu	34.73	36.46	13.52	24.46	14.30	22.60
Uttar Pradesh	22.87	31.60	21.73	29.60	39.48	39.62
West Bengal	86.41	65.16	13.89	44.06	24.29	48.35
India	42.33	42.98	21.37	42.49	25.14	43.77

*Source:* NSS unit level data of 49<sup>th</sup> (1993-94) and 64<sup>th</sup> (2007-08) rounds of migration and PLFS data (2020-21)

**Table 2** Percentage of out-migrant workers in different activities by Gender

Gender	Agriculture, hunting, forestry, fishing	Mining, manufacturing, electricity	Construction	Trade, hotel and restaurants	Others
Rural India (2007-08)					
Female	77.59	9.91	3.23	3.02	6.25
Male	29.89	22.49	15.70	17.12	14.79
Total	45.14	18.47	11.72	12.61	12.06
Rural India (2020-21)					
Female	68.99	8.14	9.88	5.23	7.75
Male	38.95	13.03	27.69	13.64	6.68
Total	46.80	11.75	23.05	11.45	6.96

*Source:* NSS 64<sup>th</sup> rounds (2007-08) and PLFS (2020-21) unit level data of migration

<sup>ix</sup>The information of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana are summed up in 2020-21 for **comparing** the data.

<sup>x</sup>Migration data of Bihar and Jharkhand are summed up in the subsequent period of 2000 for presenting the pattern of migration of Bihar in the country.