

## Rethinking the Notion of ‘Place and Placelessness’ in the Experience of Migrant Workers in West Bengal During Covid-19 Pandemic

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### Abstract

*This study examines the concept of "Placelessness" in relation to migrant workers in India, drawing on the theoretical framework of Edward Relph. While the home state represents "Place," destination states such as Gujarat, Maharashtra, and Delhi—are often perceived as "Placeless" due to socio-economic and cultural alienation. Migration in India is primarily driven by regional economic disparities, unemployment, and the search for improved livelihood opportunities. However, the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns disrupted informal migratory patterns, forcing many migrant workers to return to their home states. In contemporary India, migrant workers frequently work under precarious conditions characterised by informal employment, limited social protection, and economic insecurity. These vulnerabilities became particularly visible during the nationwide lockdown, when millions of migrant workers were left without employment, shelter, or adequate state support. Using a phenomenological approach, the study investigates two key questions: first, what characteristics contribute to migrant workers perceiving their destination as placeless? Second, how do these destinations evolve into placeless landscapes over time? The study conceptualises destination states as mediated spaces, shaped by both economic opportunities and socio-cultural displacement. It argues that placelessness is not merely an absence of place but a dynamic interplay of human aspirations and structural transformations. By highlighting the lived experiences of migrant workers from West Bengal, the study contributes to contemporary debates on place and placelessness by demonstrating how migration produces complex spatial experiences shaped by economic opportunity and socio-cultural displacement.*

### Introduction

On January 30, 2020, the first coronavirus (COVID-19) case was reported in India. Due to its contagious nature, limited medical preparedness, and large population size,

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the Government of India imposed a nationwide lockdown on March 25, 2020. Initially announced for 21 days, the lockdown extended to May 31st, 2020 through several phases. Although it helped the Government control the disease's spread and reduce transmission in the community, it had an impact on the economy and caused severe economic disruptions across multiple sectors and social groups.

Economically marginalised populations have suffered, particularly migrant workers employed in different parts of the country. According to the World Bank (2020), lockdowns, job losses, and social isolation "prompted a chaotic and traumatic process of mass return for internal migrants in India and many countries." On March 28, 2020, when the entire country saw hundreds of migrant workers stranded at bus terminals, railway stations, and other public locations. Over time, more distressing images and accounts of migrant workers travelling long distances to get home across states were shared with the public.

Many migrant workers have suffered, particularly those who are uneducated and work in informal sector. During the lockdown, both the Central and State Governments faced significant challenges in providing adequate support to these vulnerable workers. There is nobody to fall back on for the group of migrant workers, who depend heavily on daily wages. Even the Central and State Governments currently lack accurate information about migrant workers. In response to a starred question in the Lok Sabha, the Ministry of Labour and Employment was unable to provide a satisfactory response to the following questions:

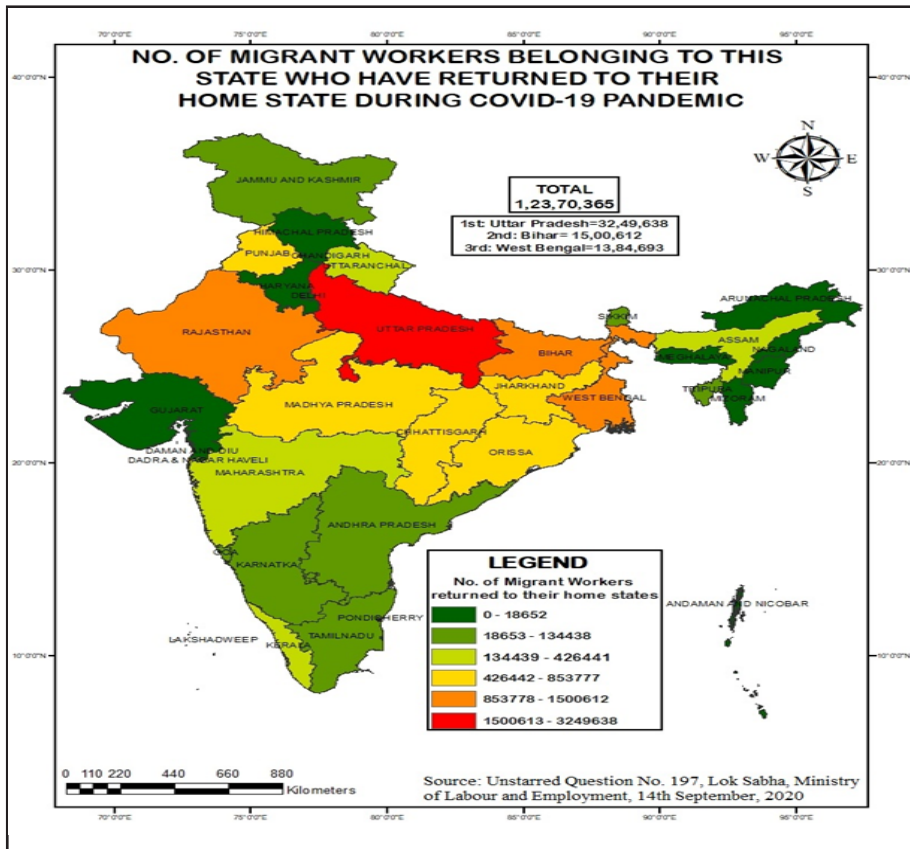
1. Whether the Government of India is worried about the loss of employment, in particular for migrant workers throughout the country;
2. If so, whether or not the Government has conducted any study in order to determine the number of workers who were lost their employment due to the Covid-19 pandemic;
3. If so, what are the details of it and all the policy measures the Government has made to help the affected workers?

The then Union Minister of Labour and Employment, Mr. Santosh Kumar Gangwar, provided preliminary information regarding the number of migrant workers who returned to their home states in response to an unstarred question no.-197 that was raised in the Lok Sabha (Lower House of the Indian Parliament) on September 14, 2020. Figure 1 was created using data showed the proportion of migrant workers from the state who returned to their home states during the pandemic.

Figure 1 makes it clear that Uttar Pradesh (3249638) has the largest number of migrant workers. Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and the North Eastern States record the lowest numbers. However, in terms of the number of migrant workers, Bihar (1500612), West Bengal (1384693), and Rajasthan (1308130) are in second, third, and fourth place, respectively. Against this background, the present study examines migrant labour mobility through the conceptual lens of place and placelessness. It argues that

while economically developed destination states such as Delhi, Maharashtra, Gujarat, and Karnataka attract migrant workers because of better livelihood opportunities, these locations are often experienced as socially and culturally alienating spaces. Consequently, migrant workers frequently experience destination regions simultaneously as sites of economic opportunity and landscapes of placelessness.

**Figure 1: Number of migrant workers belonging to this state who have returned to their home state during Covid-19 Pandemic**



In the Indian migration context, economically developed states such as Delhi, Maharashtra, Gujarat, and Karnataka function as major destination regions, while states such as Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and West Bengal continue to act as major source regions of migrant labour. In a nation like India, there is a persistent and severe regional disparities between the various states, especially between the Eastern and Western States. These states attract a large number of migrant labourers seeking improved economic opportunities in pursuit of improved livelihood opportunities. These migrant workers may exhibit a number of placeless characteristics, but they seem to view their destination regions as economically desirable. What is it about these locations and the experiences they offer, then, that attract migrant workers in large numbers?

The current study provides important new insights into Relph's idea of "Place and Placelessness" to address this question. He maintained that places cannot be understood independently of human experience and must instead be investigated in terms of how people perceive them (Relph, 1976, p.43) and conceptualised places as "the significant centers of our immediate perceptions of the world". His theories are fundamental to migration studies because they situate the experience of migration as a difficult process of meaning-making that transforms a location into one that has particular significance for the person experiencing it. In light of this, the purpose of the research is to comprehend the perceptions and interpretations migrants attach to their migration experiences to the states of their destination. This study is guided by three specific research questions: first, what is the trend of out-migration from West Bengal and what causes this outmigration from West Bengal? Second, what adverse experiences do West Bengali migrant workers have when they return to their home state after working there? Third, despite experiences of placelessness, why do these destination regions continue to attract migrant workers over time?

### **Place in Geography**

Geographers have long emphasised the importance of place as the defining characteristic that sets geography apart from other academic fields. Space is a concept addressed across several disciplines, including Astronomy, Geography and History. Geographers must now consider the issue, "What is the nature of place? Does it merely describe a location, or does it describe a special synthesis of culture and nature, or could it be referring to something quite different?"

Beginning in the early 1970s, geographers expressed discontent with what they regarded to be a philosophically and experientially deficient understanding of place, notably Yi-Fu Tuan (1975), Anne Buttimer (1976), and Edward Relph (1976). These scholars, often known as "Humanistic Geographers," examined the significance of place in human experience. One notable result of this new theoretical approach was Edward Relph's 1976 book "Place and Placelessness," which has had a considerable theoretical and practical impact both inside and outside of geography. As his project progressed, he became dissatisfied with the concept of place's lack of conceptual depth. Relph thought that this stated conceptual underpinning of the field was shallow and deficient in light of the importance of place in ordinary human life. How could scholars examine place attachment, a sense of place, or identity in a place without having a deep understanding of the richness and complexity of place as it is experienced and generated by actual individuals in real places?

### **Place and Placelessness**

Edward Relph's 1976 book "Place and Placelessness" is a foundational scholarly work. His methodological approach is "a phenomenology of location," as he emphasises at the book's introduction (Relph, 1976, pp.5-7). Phenomenology is the philosophical and methodological study of lived human experience. The objective is to examine and clarify human situations, events, meanings, and experiences as they are known in

daily life but below the level of conscious awareness (Seamon, 2000). One of the most powerful tools of phenomenology is the ability to identify taken-for-granted aspects of lived experience and then confront it. To reveal these implicit structures of experience, we must dissociate from any assumed attitudes and presumptions, whether they relate to actual experience or to conceptual viewpoints and explanations, including scientific ones. In "Place and Placelessness," Relph critically examines on the commonly held notion that place is a crucial aspect of human experience and life. Relph presents Place and Placelessness by going over space and its relationship to place. He argues that space is not an abstract spatial void, an isometric plane, or a certain kind of container that holds places. Instead, he contends that in order to evaluate the relationship between space and a more experientially oriented understanding of place, space must also be investigated in terms of how individuals perceive and experience it. Although Relph claims that there are many different forms and intensities of spatial experience, he also proposes a heuristic continuum based on "a continuum with direct experience at one extreme and abstract reasoning at the other" (Relph, 1976, p. 9). He identifies immediate, perceptual and embodied forms of spatial experience such as pragmatic space, perceptual space, and existential space on the one hand. Additionally, he makes a distinction between more abstract and conceptualised, abstract, and intellectual types of spatial experience like planning space and cognitive space. According to Relph, each of these spatial modalities has a range of intensities in daily life. Existential space can be felt in a very self-conscious way when individuals experience profound emotional and symbolic engagement of a Gothic church, for example. It can also be felt subtly and unconsciously when one occupies routine everyday environments and pays minimal attention to his or her surroundings. Existential space is the implicit spatial structure of everyday life of a person's daily environment, rooted in their culture and social milieu.

While each of the recognised spatial modes serve distinct experiential functions, Relph emphasises that in reality, these modes are all essential components of human spatial experience as a lived, indivisible whole. He analyses, for instance, how cognitive concepts of space learned via maps may aid in the development of our sensory knowledge, which in turn may affect how individuals interact with spatial environments during everyday spatial movement. When scholars talk about spatial modes like hallowed space, gendered space, commodified space, and the like, they now widely accept Relph's proposition.

One of the book's key theoretical contributions is Relph's conceptual engagement with place and space. Although these concepts are discussed frequently by geographers, they are either treated as separate concepts, or their intellectual and existential linkages is provided. Relph claims that a place's ability to geographically arrange and concentrate human intentions, sensations, and actions is what constitutes its distinctiveness. Relph argues that space and place have a dialectically organised connection in human experiences of nature because our sense of space is tied to the places we live in, that in turn derive meaning from their physical surroundings.

**Place**

Relph's in-depth exploration of place was largely inspired by his theoretical position that it could contribute to the preservation and creation of new places as well as the maintenance and repair of ones that already exist (Relph, 1976). He argues that without a thorough grasp of place and its significance to people, it would be difficult to explain why a specific location is significant and impossible to know how to restore degraded places. When Relph explores location in depth, he focuses on how individuals relate to and identify with it. Having a "permanent sameness and unity that permits that place to be distinguished from others" is how he describes a place as having an identity (Relph, 1976, p.45). This persistent identity is broken down by Relph into three components: 1) the physical environment, 2) the actions, situations, and events that occur there, and 3) the personal and societal meanings that are formed from those experiences and intentions.

However, Relph emphasises that places are "important centers of our immediate experiences of the world," therefore this three-fold description of a place is insufficiently pivotal or profound existentially. To understand places more thoroughly, we need a language that enables us to express specific place experiences in terms of the degree of meaning and intention that a person and a place possess for one another. The foundation of this experienced intensity, according to Relph, is the degree of attachment, participation, and worry that a person or group has for a specific area.

**Placelessness**

Relph looks into how a place could be truly experienced. An authentic feeling of place is defined as a direct and genuine encounter with the entire complex of a place's identity, not altered and deformed by means of a series of somewhat arbitrary social and cerebral fashions about how the experience ought to be, nor adhering to stereotyped conventions (Relph, 1976, pp. 46-48). A sense of place can be actively or accidentally created by both individuals and groups. This means that a simple urban neighborhood can be legitimate as Gothic cathedrals or Hellenic Athens, each of which, for Relph, are examples of places that were purposely made. Relph asserted that in our contemporary era, a true sense of location is progressively being supplanted by a less true attitude that he dubbed Placelessness. This is what he refers to as "the casual eradication of distinctive places and the making of standardised landscapes that results from insensitivity to the significance of place" (Relph, 1976, p.90).

Relph contends that the primary factors of Placelessness as a whole are "Technique" and "Kitsch," or the uncritical adoption of popular values. The combined impact of these two pressures is described as "undermining place for both individuals and cultures, and casually replacing the diverse and significant places of the world with anonymous spaces and exchangeable environments" (Relph, 1976, pp.91-92).

## Materials and Methods

The current study is primarily based on secondary data. As previously indicated, the current study, which is based on Relph's concept of "Place and Placelessness," offers unique insight about the experience and conditions of migrant workers in West Bengal during the Covivirus-19 Pandemic. Relph's theoretical framework was largely founded on migration studies since he believed that migration is a challenging process that transforms a region into one that has special value for the individual experiencing it. So, this study was totally based on the migration data and socio-economic data that triggered the process of migration from time to time. The analysis has been carried out with secondary data from Census of India. Migration data from the census has been used since 1991, 2001, and 2011, or for three decades. The 2011 Census data is used to obtain socio-economic factors such population density, literacy rate, and the proportion of workers in the agricultural and non-agricultural sectors. The Human Development Report from 2021 served as the source for the Human Development Index's values. Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) in Indian Rupees for the year 2019-20 and Net State Domestic Product (NSDP) at current prices for the year 2018-19 both has been taken from Economic Survey Statistical Appendix 2022-23. Unemployment rate for September, 2022 has been taken from Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) data and National Multidimensional Poverty Index has been collected from NITI Aayog, 2021 Report which is based on the National Family Health Survey-4 (2015-16).

First, the research has calculated the in-migration rate and out-migration rate from West Bengal. GIS technology has been used to project the gender distribution of migrants, the flow of inbound and outbound migration to and from West Bengal, respectively. After all, the economic drivers of migration are used to explore the concepts of "Place and Placelessness".

The In-Migration and Out-Migration Rates are calculated by:

In-Migration Rate = (Volume of in migration to the state / Enumerated population of the destination state)  $\times$  100

Out-Migration Rate = (Volume of out migration from state / Enumerated population of the origin state)  $\times$  100

Apart from these, Karl Pearson Correlation has been employed to determine the relationship between out migration and some development indicators for the state of West Bengal. For correlation analysis, two migration variables have been considered as dependent variables. They are: a) The rate of Out-migration from West Bengal and b) Proportion of people out-migrated due to economic reasons like work or business from West Bengal. To establish the relationship between development and migration, nine development variables have been considered as independent variables. They are: 1) Population Density in Sq. Km (2011), 2) HDI (2021) by UNDP method, 3) GSDP in Indian Rupees (Lakh) (2019-20), 4) Unemployment Rate (CMIE Data) Sep, 2022, 5) Literacy Rate (%) (2011) 6) Multidimensional Poverty Index 7) Net State

Domestic Product at current prices (2018-19), 8) Percentage of workers engaged in the agricultural sector (2011) and 9) Percentage of workers engaged in the non-agricultural sector (2011).

After all, after analysing the experience of migrant workers of West Bengal available from various newspaper article a keyword analysis has been calculated and drawn, from which the psychological understanding of the migrant labourers can be gauged out.

### **Migration Scenario of West Bengal**

West Bengal functioned as a net in-migration region before independence, but subsequently transitioned into a net out-migration region. Data from three Census decades' in-migration, out-migration, and net migration rates have been examined here.

The in-migration rate to West Bengal has fallen over the past ten years, from 31.1 in 2001 to 26.74 in 2011, but female in-migrants remain significantly higher than male migrants, primarily due to short-distance marital migration. Between 2001 and 2011, there has been a significant decline in in-migration from the northern region. Bihar (12.59%), Jharkhand (5.08%), Uttar Pradesh (2.74%), and Odisha (1.59%) attracted the most in-migrants from the northern area in 2011. There have been relatively low levels of in-migration were recorded from the western and southern regions.

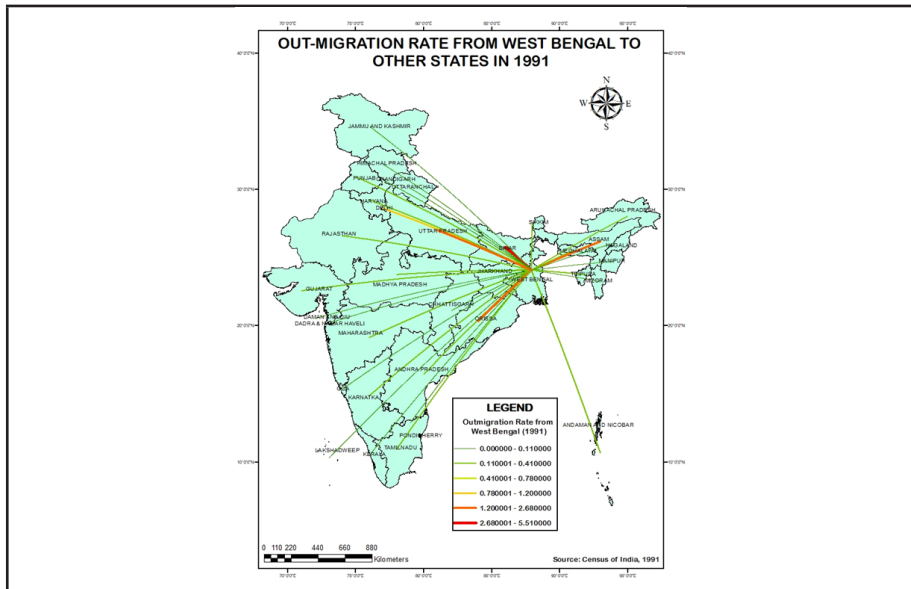
The total number of migrants departing West Bengal divided by the state's population of 1000 is the out-migration rate. From 1991 to 2011, the out-migration rate significantly increased, from 1.66 to 27.73, with a concentration in the northern and western regions. Figures 2, 3, and 4 show that the out-migration rate increased rapidly, with Maharashtra (3.75%), Delhi (2.08%), and Uttar Pradesh (2.68%) experiencing substantial out-migration flows in 2011 (Figure 4). In 2011, the eastern area of Jharkhand (5.51%) and Bihar (2.46%) saw the greatest female outmigration rates (Figure 4). This is primarily attributable to marriage-related migration of females to nearby states to nearby states. Between 1991 and 2011, a noticeable rise in emigration was also observed towards the southern region. In the early stages of the liberalisation process, southern states adopted liberalisation policies earlier and benefited from expanded employment opportunities, while West Bengal experienced comparatively slower employment growth (Banerjee and Das, 2021).

West Bengal's net migration rate significantly dropped from 1.86 in 1991 to 1.44 in 2001 and then to -1.02 in 2011. In 1991, there was a noticeable positive net migration rate from the northern (2.05) and southern (0.05) regions, indicating higher in-migration to West Bengal to West Bengal from the north and south. Later, starting in 2001, net migration turned negative, indicating an increased net out-migration from West Bengal to the north and south (Banerjee and Das, 2021).

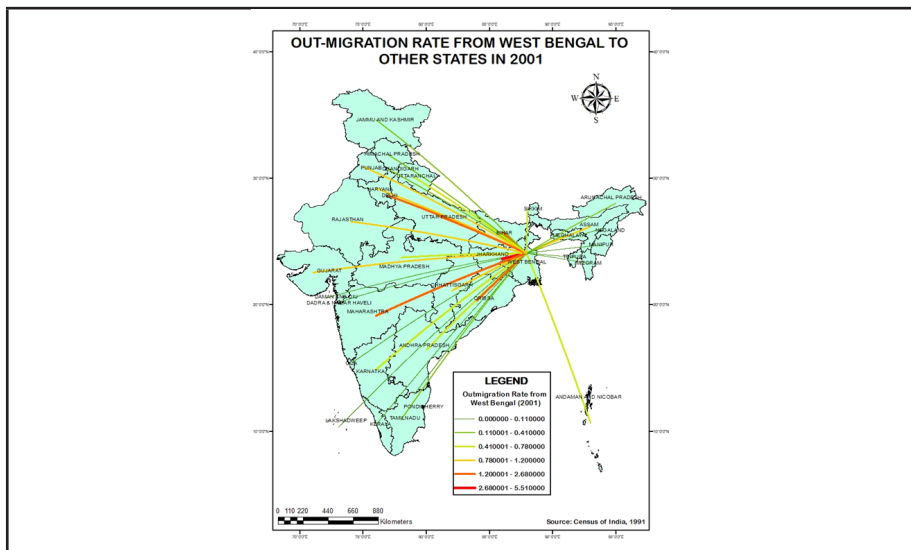
With respect to migration motivations, there is a pronounced gender difference- male migration is predominantly driven by economic factors, while female migration is primarily driven by marriage. Following marriage, the majority of women migrate to the

east because of prevalent patterns of cross-border marital migration with neighbouring countries. Male migrants from West Bengal are predominantly concentrated in western regions for economic reasons. The second most common reason for both male and female migrants to migrate is due to associational factors, such as accompanying parents or other family members. Most migrants from West Bengal with their families have settled in the eastern and central regions.

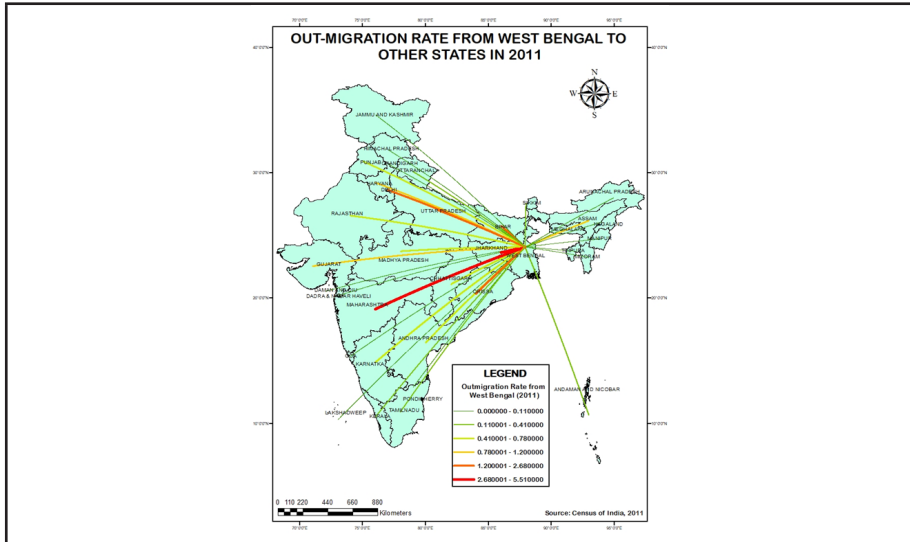
**Figure 2: Out-Migration Rate from West Bengal to other states in 1991**



**Figure 3: Out-Migration Rate from West Bengal to other states in 2001**



**Figure 4: Out-Migration Rate from West Bengal to other states in 2011**

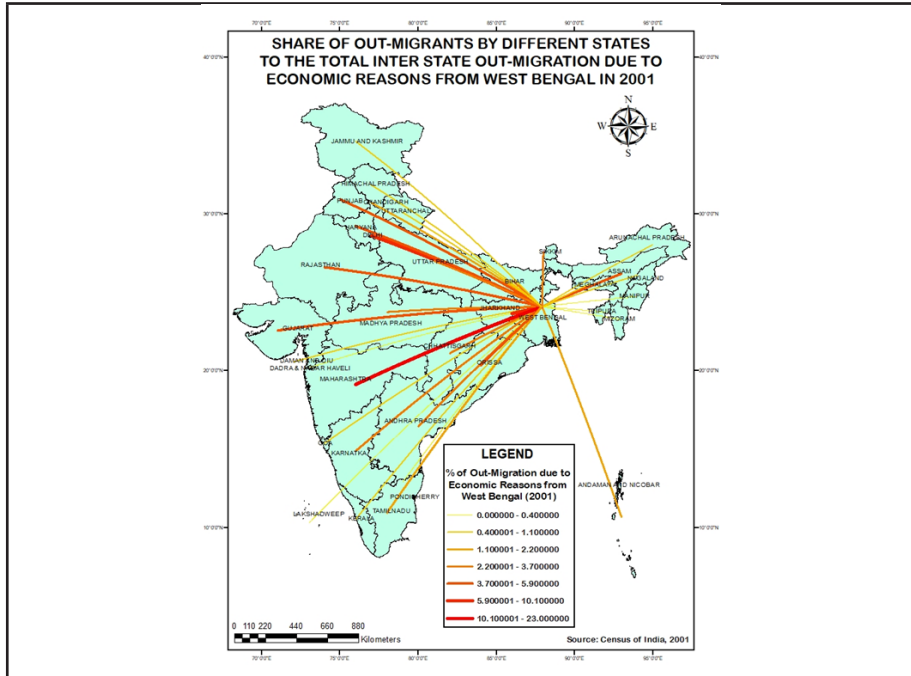


**Out-migration Due to Economic Reasons**

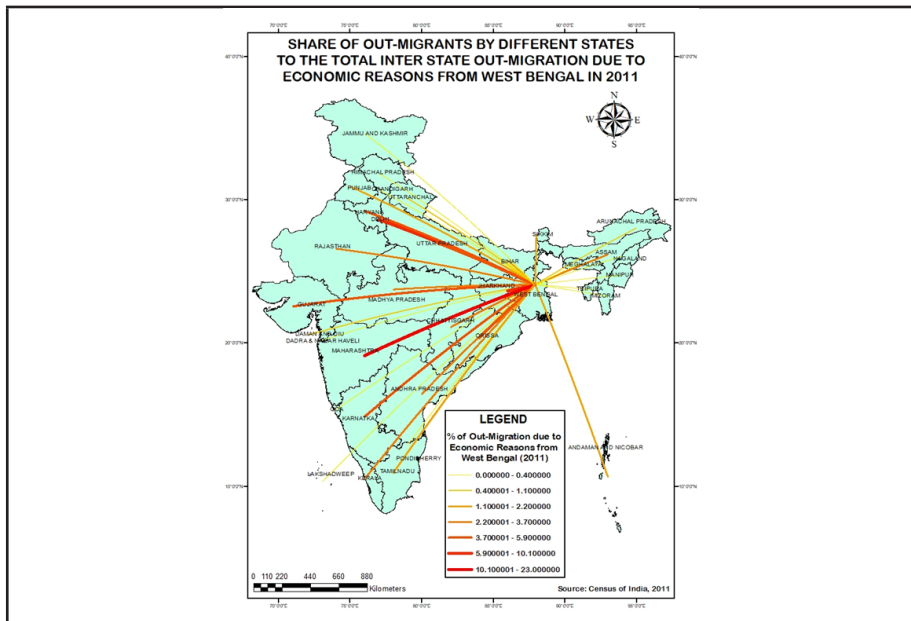
The 1981 Census was the first to collect data on migration causes based on last place of residence. In 1991, the causes of migration were categorised into seven main groups: business, education, marriage, family relocation, work/employment, and natural disasters. As many women returned to their parental homes or to locations with better medical facilities during childbirth, natural disasters were eliminated in 2001 and a new category, ‘moved after birth’ was created.

The primary variable in the study is out-migration from West Bengal driven by economic factors such as employment and business opportunities. The out-migration flow from West Bengal to other states for economic reasons has been illustrated in Figures 5 and 6, which show that the migration flow is increasingly significantly from 2001 to 2011. In 2011, Delhi (10.1%) and Maharashtra (23.0%), received the highest proportion of migrants from West Bengal for economic reasons. It has been observed that that the out-migration rate due to economic reasons has been significantly decreasing in Delhi from 15.2% (2001) to 10.1% (2011) and Jharkhand from 11.1% (2001) to 9.1% (2011) mainly due to employment constrains. Over that decade, there was a significant increase in the number of migrants from West Bengal for economic reasons to the western and southern regions.

**Figure 5: Total Out-Migration Rate due to Economic Reasons from West Bengal to other states in 2001**



**Figure 6: Total Out-Migration Rate due to Economic Reasons from West Bengal to other states in 2011**



To understand the effect of regional development disparities on migration some variables have been identified on the basis of literature reviewed in this study.

1. Population density (Sq. Km)- It is an excellent indicator of both natural growth and growth driven by net inward migration; therefore, it can be used as an indicator. Bihar has the greatest population density among the states (1102 people per square kilometre), followed by West Bengal (1028 people per square kilometre) and Kerala (859 people per square kilometre). Among the union territories, Delhi (11297 people per sq. km) has the highest density, followed by Chandigarh (9252 people per sq. km), Puducherry (2598 people per sq. km), and Daman and Diu (2169 people per sq. km).
2. Human Development Index (2021)- It is a composite indicator of average performance in the three main areas of human development—living a long, healthy life, educational attainment, and enjoying a fair level of living. It is the average of the normalised indices of the three dimensions. (UNDP). Kerala (0.752) and Chandigarh (0.744) are the two UTs with the highest HDIs. Bihar (0.571) ranks lowest in terms of development.
3. Gross state domestic product (GSDP) at a constant price (2019-20)- It serves as a crucial economic development indicator. It is determined by adding together the total value added by all economic sectors. According to the Directorate of Economics, GSDP at constant prices is used because it captures the actual change in output. In comparison to all other regions, north-eastern states of India have a lower GSDP. The greatest GSDP among the states was reported in Maharashtra (281855457), whereas the highest GSDP among the UTs was registered in Delhi (83087249).
4. Unemployment Rate (CMIE) (Sep., 2022)- It is another important indicator of development. In India, there is a significant regional variance in the unemployment rate. Rajasthan has the greatest rate of unemployment among the states (23.8%), whereas Delhi has the highest rate among the UTs (9.6%).
5. Literacy rate (2011)- To understand the socio-economic development of the area, it is crucial to take this measurement. The number of literates is calculated by dividing it by the state's total population, which is multiplied by 100 to obtain the percentage. Lakshadweep (81.5%), Kerala (84.2%), and Karnataka (79.9%) are the states and UTs with the highest rates of literacy. In comparison to the other parts of the state, the southern region has a greater literacy rate. The lowest overall literacy percentage was found in Bihar (50.4%).
6. Multidimensional Poverty Index (2021)- Similar to HDI, it is also a composite measurement of key dimensions like Nutrition, Child and Adolescent Mortality, Maternal Health, Years of Schooling, School Attendance, Cooking fuel, Sanitation, drinking water, electricity, housing, assets, and bank accounts. Bihar (0.265) has recorded the highest MPI among the states and Dadra and Nagar Havelli (0.122) among the UTs.
7. Net State Domestic Product (NSDP) at current price (2018-19)-The average income of the population in a state is represented by the NSDP at constant price.

The greatest NSDP among the states and UTs is held by Delhi (665808), followed by Maharashtra (2264092).

8. Percentage Workers in Agricultural Sector (2011)- Although agriculture is the nation's primary sector, its gross value added is just 14.65%, compared to 30.19% and 55.17% in the industrial and service sectors, respectively (MOSPI). As a result, workers in the agricultural industry (Census, 2011) typically earn low incomes, which constrains overall economic development. The majority of workers employed in the agriculture sector are in Bihar (70%) in India.
9. Percentage of Workers in Non-Agricultural Sector (2011)- According to the 2011 Census, the majority of the UTs and states in southern India have considerably greater percentages of workers employed in non-agricultural industries. The two states with the highest percentages were Karnataka (91.7%) and Delhi (98.6%), respectively. To comprehend the impact of the development indicators on out-migration from West Bengal, the current analysis considers two outcome variables. The out-migration rate is the first variable, while the proportion of migrants leaving West Bengal for economic reasons is the second. The result of the Karl Pearson correlation analysis has been presented in Table 1.

The relationship between the rate of out-migration from West Bengal and the development indicators of other states has been studied using the Karl Pearson correlation. Table 1 demonstrates that there is a substantial positive correlation between GSDP (1.000\*\*) and the rate of out-migration from West Bengal, indicating that out-migration from West Bengal will be higher in those states or UTs where the GSDP is high. Similarly, there is a substantial positive relationship between the out-migration rate and the literacy rate (0.693\*\*), the HDI (0.628\*\*), and the population density (0.614\*\*). There is a substantial inverse relationship between the percentage of workers in the agricultural sector (-0.992\*\*), the HDI (-0.877\*\*\*), and the literacy rate (-0.783\*\*\*), the out-migration rate. A negative correlation suggests that if development indicators decline, more migrant workers from West Bengal will move to those states. On the other hand, the percentage of out-migrants who left West Bengal for economic reasons is strongly positively correlated with population density (0.376\*), HDI (0.556\*\*), and NSDP at current prices (0.120). This suggests that more migrant workers from West Bengal are drawn to states with high development indicator ratings. The percentages of workers employed in non-agricultural sectors (-0.992\*\*) and MPI (-0.627\*\*) significantly correlate negatively with West Bengal's out-migration rate. The negative association shows that fewer migrants will migrate to these areas in search of employment the higher the levels of development indices.

**Table 1: Karl Pearson Correlation Matrix of Socio-Economic Variables**

	VA	VB	VC	VD	VE	VF	VG	VH	VI	VJ	VK
VA	1										
VB	.766**	1									
VC	0.064	0.132	1								
VD	-.428**	-0.097	.376*	1							
VE	.487**	.752**	-0.047	-0.173	1						
VF	0.190	0.105	-0.022	0.031	0.080	1					
VG	-.334*	-0.005	.308*	.628**	-0.005	-.293*	1				
VH	.496**	0.116	-0.264	-.877**	0.087	0.056	-.783**	1			
VI	.488**	.747**	-0.050	-0.176	1.000**	0.080	-0.007	0.090	1		
VJ	0.210	0.060	-.571**	-.559**	0.121	0.081	-.712**	.640**	0.120	1	
VK	-0.179	-0.030	.614**	.556**	-0.093	-0.069	.693**	-.627**	-0.092	-.992**	1

\*  $P < 0.05$ , \*\*  $P < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $< 0.001$

VA= Total Out-migration Rate (2011) to West Bengal from other states, VB= Total Inter-State Out-Migration Rate (2011) to West Bengal due to Economic Reasons, VC= Population Density in sq. Km (2011), VD= HDI (2021) by UNDP Method, VE= GSDP in Indian Rupees (Lakh) (2019-20), VF= Unemployment Rate (CMIE Data) (Sep, 2022), VG= Literacy Rate(%) (2011), VH= Multidimensional Poverty Index, VI=Net State Domestic Product at Current Prices (2018-19), VJ= % Workers in Agricultural Sector (2011) and VK=% Workers in Non-Agricultural Sector (2011)

A number of experiences of migrant workers have been discussed in this section. From these, we selected a number of keywords (Table 2) and from which, keyword analysis was conducted (Figure 7).

1. Mohammad Alauddin is cramped in a 150 square foot room with 12 other migrant workers and is unable to move around much. Alauddin, a resident of West Bengal's Malda area, returned from Bihar last week. He had been working there. He thought it would be best to return home once the 21-day lockdown was declared. Alauddin and the others were placed under a two-week quarantine after arriving in West Bengal. Only after the quarantine period is finished will they be permitted to return home. Nearly 125 persons are involved in the group. They are all migrant workers returning to their home states, some of them with families. "There are 125 people living at the school, and there is not much room for us all to move around in. Due to a lack of room, safety precautions including social distancing are not being upheld. The entire goal of keeping us here in quarantine has been defeated" claims Alauddin (Loiwal, 2020). Another migrant worker at this school, Mohammad Rizwan, claims that the designated quarantine facility actually poses a greater health risk. "We were in a relatively safer situation in Patna because we had all the protection we needed. There are 125 of us present. Neither gloves nor adequate masks are present. We have to divide up the four bathrooms. The disease will spread faster in this situation." according to Rizwan (Loiwal, 2020).

2. Another migrant worker at this school, Mohammad Rizwan, claims that the designated quarantine facility actually poses a greater health risk. “We were in a relatively safer situation in Patna because we had all the protection we needed. There are 125 of us present. Neither gloves nor adequate masks are present. We have to divide up the four bathrooms. The disease will spread faster in this situation.” according to Rizawan (Loiwal, 2020).
3. Twelve years ago, Rafizul visited Mumbai for the first time. He was now employed as a labour contractor. He now hires people from his village based on need. To conserve money and send the majority of their earnings back to their home, they stayed together in a labour colony. At the end of May 2020, Rafizul was able to go home. Rafizul claimed, "It was July. Our tolerance levels were pushed when 50 people shared that area day and night. The West Bengal government only provided us with a train from Maharashtra" (Bhattacharya, 2024).
4. Akhtar Hossain, 38, left his home in the Haldibari neighbourhood of the district with his wife and three children when the second wave of the epidemic began ravaging Delhi. "I am employed with a steel mill in the Rithala neighbourhood of Delhi. I spent 53 days in lockdown last year. I called the heads of numerous political parties and filled out a lot of paperwork. Nobody came to my aid. Finally, I took a truck back to my house. I was there in a very helpless situation, almost without nourishment. I was unable to take any chances this year (Mitra, 2021).
5. Amalesh Bhuiyan, 21-When Amalesh was 18 years old, he moved to another state for the first time to work. He worked as a centering worker for a private enterprise prior to the lockdown. The contractor used to collect a fee of 20–25 percent of the salary in addition to the daily wage of 350 rupees. The lodging was provided free of cost. Amalesh resided in a so-called labour "colony" at the construction site that was actually just rows of tin shelters with uneven brick floors. For sleeping, the labourers spread out papers, sacks, or bedsheets on the ground. Amalesh left Telangana for home on March 21. On March 23, after an arduous journey, he arrived at his home. The train terminal was crowded. Despite having purchased a general compartment ticket, he was unable to board the train. He then entered a reserved (sleeper) compartment, which was less crowded but still full. For that, the TT penalised him Rs 100. He carried luggage to Kharagpur while standing on one leg. Although the contractor handed him 1,000 rupees for the travel expenses and other travel costs, he did not get his pay for the month of March (Bhattacharya, 2024).
6. On June 9, Ashok Mondal, 27, of South 24 Parganas, arrived at his residence. On June 7, he boarded the Shramik Special. His name was on file with the local police authorities, which gave these employees the paperwork they needed to use the train. Ashok brought snacks and biscuits for consumption on the train but was unable to do so because there was a lack of water to drink (Bhattacharya, 2024).
7. Sekh Nazbul Hassan, 30, Howrah- On June 13, Nazbul boarded a train, but it wasn't

a Shramik Special. Twenty pairs of special trains started operating in May, and it's possible that more have since June 1st. Through a third party, he learned that train services had resumed despite the lockdown. The cost of the ticket was 725 rupees, as opposed to 453 rupees for the equivalent ticket for the general compartment. Nazbul boarded the train with another 34 people. The train was completely full. They managed to locate a spot to stand (Mitra, 2021).

In total, we gathered 47 lived experiences of migrant workers of West Bengal of returning home from their destination states. Some of them can be illustrated. From that we gathered some main keywords which repeatedly appear, from this frequency of keywords can be found which is in Table 2. From this a keyword Analysis was conducted.

**Table 2: Keyword Analysis of the Experience of Returning Home of Migrant Workers of West Bengal during Covid-19 Pandemic**

Serial No.	Keywords	Frequency
1	State	48
2	Lockdown	44
3	Wage	24
4	Accommodation	2
5	Migrant Workers	54
6	Home	76
7	Food	42
8	Space	19
9	Journey	5
10	Labour	7
11	Rent	28
12	Government	19
13	West Bengal	13
14	Return	35
15	Job	34
16	Railway	3
17	Bus	38
18	Road	7
19	Place	24
20	Ration	5
21	Social media	4
22	Income	3
23	Quarantine	34
24	Human Rights	2
25	Citizenship	7
26	Covid-19	22



to set up temporary housing and food supplies and requiring all employers to pay their employees their full wages on the due date regardless of whether their establishments are closed during the lockdown period to fight the coronavirus infection (S. S. Singh, 2025).

4. Insurance coverage for all individuals assisting in this health crisis has been enhanced from Rs 5 lakh to Rs 10 lakh, including employees at private, government, and transit centres, including doctors, nurses, police, and support service personnel (Singhal, 2026).
5. The cost of migrant workers returning to the State via Shramik special trains will be covered entirely by the West Bengal government (Chattopadhyay, 2020).

### **A Universalized Food Distribution System**

Since there is no comprehensive record of internal migrants, and not all migrants possess a valid form of identity or are enrolled under a particular programme, it is difficult to provide resources to the targeted population, as was already indicated. Ration cards are not intended to be transferable between states. In this situation, the central government can provide food to people who are still stranded in urban areas, such as food grains, pulses, and other essential commodities, until the lockdown is entirely lifted and the workers are able to resume their jobs. By self-attesting and self-identifying, anyone can use the scheme, regardless of their domicile-based identity.

### **Financial Support**

Under the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana, individuals who are still stranded in urban areas and have bank accounts may receive minimum wage transfers for the subsequent three months. It would help migrant workers meet their basic needs. Additionally, those who have returned to their homes but are unemployed may receive their pay under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA).

### **Continuation of Shelters in the City**

Since individuals without employment or money cannot continue residing in rental housing, it is important to keep the public shelters open that provide employees with hot meals and a place to sleep. They would be unable to prepare food adequately as a result.

### **Long Term Solution**

#### **Registration of the Migrant Workers**

Whether they are migrating independently or with a contractor, migrant workers must be registered as soon as they arrive in a new state and given the Universally Valid Shramik Card/Number. The introduction of the card will make it easier for migrant workers to receive federal benefits and will help the federal and state governments keep track of the number of migrant workers entering each state.

### **Eradicating the Duality and Segregation of the Labour Market**

The Government should progressively do away with the distinction between the formal and informal sectors. Unorganised sector employees are typically more vulnerable to exploitation. Therefore, a united employment market must be promoted in the long run. A direct connection between the employer and the employee is also preferred above any contractual intermediaries. The role of middlemen in industries where they are required must be carefully scrutinised by the relevant authorities.

### **Incorporating the Migrant Workers into Mainstream.**

Giving migrant workers social, legal, and occupational security as well as including them as beneficiaries in the healthcare system can accomplish this. To do this, though, you must properly register and get a registration number or card that is recognised across states. Last but not least, the government can help small enterprises, especially in rural areas, by providing funding, which will increase employment opportunities for locals and keep people from feeling compelled to migrate to urban areas for employment. Even though widely recognised, this strategy is too important to overlook.

### **Conclusion**

The target states serve as a preferred location for migrant workers. However, destination states and the experiences they offer are so economically attractive to migrant labourers for a number of reasons, including better livelihood, free food and accommodation, and improved salaries. This study investigated the meanings and experiences that migrant workers ascribed to their travels to different states in light of this. The theoretical goal is to support the assertion that, despite widespread notions to the contrary, destination states and the experiences that they offer matter increasingly to those who migrate to them. According to this study, the COVID-19 Pandemic serves as a structural catalyst for the present dynamics that contribute to a feeling of Placelessness. These destination states might be thought of as a compromise between the factors that give locations a sense of Placelessness and the factors that increase their allure. Therefore, rather than dismissing Placelessness as being acceptable, the current study affirms that experiencing Placelessness is symbiotic with experiencing place. This study emphasises that space is a product of human volition and a setting for social and cultural transformation. As there are so many different social spheres in the modern metropolis, the forces of globalisation have caused social realms that were once distinct to merge.

A range of migrant labourers must be incorporated into policy framework in order to create and promote industrialisation and employment opportunities. Therefore, the placeness of migration destinations should take into account all aspects of work prospects and better salaries, whether they are rooted in place or changed by outside dynamics. Destination States serve as example of how to create modern employability, which differs from the objective employability of a space and has wide appeal to migratory workers from many states.

Second, the most sought-after locations for employment create their own distinctive environments and facilities. Destination States like Delhi, Maharashtra, and Gujarat cater to labourers seeking higher wages for the same job than they can find in their home states. This phenomenon is not entirely consistent with Relph's concept of Placelessness because the border between authenticity and inauthenticity, or between location and Placelessness, has become increasingly blurred, if not totally collapsed, in the age of simulation. The research on migrant workers' experiences in the modern labour market should embrace the idea that metropolitan settings are commodities to be consumed through expanded economic opportunities rather than strictly adhering to the idea of authenticity. Sometimes, a person's perspective of a place develops from their family members and neighbors, who are more influential than the well-known location due to its work opportunities, openness, greater scope, or unique heritage, values, and traditions.

Finally, the present study contains a number of shortcomings. The fact that the current study only focuses on industrialised metropolitan areas as a final destination means that it is limited in its ability to thoroughly explore the various facets of the phenomena of labour migration in other nations, particularly in those in Europe. It is also said that the study's primary focus was the situation of migrant workers during the pandemic breakout. As a result, it has prompted more in-depth inquiry about the lives of migrant workers and their experiences in the post-pandemic period. Another limitation is the inherent subjectivity of the phenomenological analysis of the interview data, which is necessarily impacted by the socio-demographic status, philosophical beliefs, and cultural background of the author. In a populous nation like India, the current study aimed to identify the dimensions of the phenomenon of labour migration. As a result, more empirical research on migration using quantitative and interpretive methods is required to address the many unresolved issues surrounding the phenomenon of labour movement in India and other South Asian countries.

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