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## Return Migrants and Economic Re-integration in Rural West Bengal, India

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### **Abstract**

*Return migration is relatively understudied. Return migrants are “the persons who are returning to their country of citizenship after having been international migrants in another country (both long-term and short-term migration) and who are intended to stay in their own country at least for a period of one year” (UNSD, 1998). We aim to understand how return migrants from different socio-economic backgrounds re-integrate into the economy of their society of origin. The study is based on a survey carried out in West Bengal, India. A drastic change has been noticed in the economic activities of the return migrants. At the destination, about 6 percent of the migrants used to work as casual labourers, which reduced to 2 percent after the return. Similarly, a rise in self-employment was clearly visible among the return migrants. Re-integration after their return was a major challenge for these returnees. Less than 3 percent of returnees could use the skills gained abroad. It was evident that the standard of living among the return migrants was higher when they were working at the destination compared to the present situation at their place of origin, even when they are doing the same job.*

**Keywords:** *Return migration; economic re-integration; skill development; occupation; socio-economic background*

### **Introduction**

Numerous works have been done to address the various issues of migration, like consequences, the status of the migrants or the status of the left behind families, and so on (Ali, 2018; Tigere and Ndlovu, 2018; Falkingham *et al.*, 2017), but return migration which is however, an important part of migration has received very less attention till now. Life after return from migration is scarcely represented and requires further exploration in migration literature. The phenomenon of return migration is difficult to capture pertaining of difficulties in obtaining the proper data due to defining and identifying the return migrants. Measurements of return migration are full of complexities that are both conceptual as well as operational. Often many return migrants re-migrate, raising questions if the returnee is returned to the home country or an attempt to recoup for a further move to the same country or to another (Zachariah *et al.*, 2006). According to the definition of the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD, 1998), return migrants are "the persons who are returning to their country of citizenship after having been international migrants in another country (both long-term and short-term migration) and who are intended to stay in their own country at least for a period of one year". Migrating and returning can be repeated several times. In some cases, the return may be considered the concluding stage of the migration (Ghosh, 2000). It has been revealed that during recent years the number of emigrants and return migrants increased

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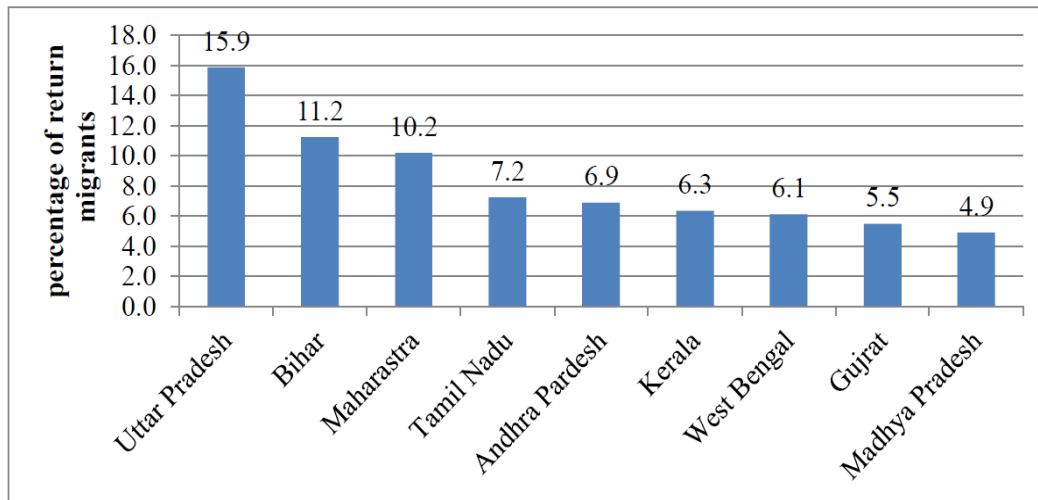
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drastically at the global level. The number of migrant workers, both internal and international, has multiplied to triple from 84 million in 1976 to 250 million in 2009 (ILO, 2010).

In India, an attempt has been made by the National Sample Survey (NSS) to capture return migration. It has captured the phenomenon of return migrants by asking the migrants "*whether the place of enumeration was their place of usual residence (UPR) at any point of the time in the past*". Those migrants reported that the present place of enumeration was UPR at any time in the past and was considered return migrants (NSS, 2007-08). In India, internal labour migration involves complex socio-economic issues, barring cross-border political issues. NSS captured return migration of the internal migrants.

**Figure 1.1.** Percentage Distribution of Return Migrants in Rural India, 2007-08



Source: NSSO 64<sup>th</sup> Round, 2007-08

According to the NSS, Uttar Pradesh (15.9%) received the highest percentage of returnees in 2007-2008, followed by Bihar (11.2%). West Bengal has accounted for around 6 percent of returnees. But NSS does not follow any time period to estimate return migrants, which is essential, as stated in the UN definition.

### Why West Bengal?

In the present study, the process of return migration in the state of West Bengal is studied as the state has experienced a drastic change in the migration pattern over the decades. The state has inherited in abundance from the longstanding resources and capital of the British Empire. As a result, West Bengal was known as one of the wealthiest states in the country, having a manufacturing hub and an abundance of social and physical infrastructure. In spite of having all the means to pave the way for development, the state experienced a severe fall due to low aggregate productivity and poorly functioning labour markets, and sectoral misallocation (Lahiri and Mu Yei, 2005). Over the decade, the scenario has changed in West Bengal. Now, more and more people migrate to other states and countries. The net migration in West Bengal has decreased over the decades, which indicates an increase in out-migration in the state (Das and Mistry, 2015). The majority of the population of West Bengal lives in rural areas (68.1%),



which is characterized by lower agricultural output, skewed distribution of land, higher incidence of landlessness, higher dependency on agriculture, lack of industrialization, and other socio-economic barriers (Rogaly and Rafique, 2003). All these factors significantly contribute to heavy out-migration from rural areas. Some districts in West Bengal, like Murshidabad, Malda, and North 24 Parganas, have a trend of Gulf migration (Ali, 2018). Most of the migrants are low-skilled and semi-skilled labourers, and they migrate on a contractual basis and return to their place of origin when the contract is over or due to the loss of jobs in case of international migration. Therefore, West Bengal has been decided as the study area of the research as heavy out-migration has led to an increase in return migration.

### **Re-integration of Return Migrants**

The process of integration is one of a kind of adaption in the migratory cycle. At the place of destination, this process occurs in the workplace and among the co-workers and in the place of origin, it's within those who have returned and who remained home during their absence. The degree of integration depends upon certain constantly changing factors, such as contingencies of the physical environment, climate, and pestilence, as well as social and economic circumstances (Preston, 1993). As per the given situation in Kerala, the state is not ready to take in return migrants to the labour market. The state is already overburdened with shrinking jobs and a global crisis. Migrants returning home mean more workers will be added to society. It will be a big challenge for the return migrants to find jobs in their home countries where unemployment is already on the increase (Rajan and Narayana, 2017). In spite of being backward in economic development, Kerala is ahead in terms of social and health indicators with a higher level of literacy, high life expectancy, and low level of infant and child mortality (Zachariah et al., 2003). Apart from unemployment, another re-integration problem that return migrants from Kerala has to deal with were debt problems. These debts are due to investments made for the migration project, such as tickets, visas, passports, and fees for recruitment agents, and become due to interest rates (Boere, 2010). For successful economic re-integration, the programme should be implemented by carefully analyzing the background characteristics of the returnees like age, sex, educational attainment, reasons for leaving the place of destination, type of work engagement at the place of destination, family characteristics, the access to the property, etc. These factors determine the individual's need for economic re-integration. Moreover, the absorptive capacity of the local economy must be placed against the potential demand by returnees for employment (Arowolo, 2000). There has been an instance when the demographic situation of the returnees has caused a barrier to social re-integration (Tapscott, 1993).

### **Research Gap**

The topic of migration itself is researched very loosely in India. Census collects data on migration, but it does not take into account the social and economic implications of migration. National Sample Survey conducted a survey on migration wherein certain information regarding remittances was addressed, but that survey was last conducted in 2007-08, and after that, no other large-scale national-level survey was conducted on migration. The lack of datasets makes it difficult to address the problems and prospects of migration. Similarly, the phenomenon of return migration has not received much attention in India, as major migration literature talks about internal migration only. Free mobility across the territory is the constitutional right of every citizen of India. Data on return migration is confined to Kerala,

and in the survey report, it has been found that during 1999 about 740,000 Keralites had returned home. This figure increased to about 900,000 in 2003 and to 1,160,000 in 2008 (CDS, 2011). Return migration throws up a number of problems that require the careful attention of social scientists, social workers, planners, and administrators. When rural areas are concerned, it is mainly the low-skilled labourers who migrate on a contractual basis and return due to the loss of a job or due to a lack of motivation to continue as migrant labourers. These labourers often return with relevant skills but do not know where to utilize them, and as a result, they become under-employed after their return to their native place. Therefore, to harness the potential benefits of the return migrants, an extensive approach is required for the integration of all categories of returnees into the socio-economic structure of the native place. Policies and programmes should aim to inspire them, and homecoming should no longer be felt like a nightmare.

In Indian context, the phenomena of return migration has included on the international returnees. Return migrants from the national destination has the potential to make positive contribution in the society. Moreover, these returnees also falls prey to economic and social discrimination after returning when they have stayed at the destination for long duration. Therefore, it importance to analyse the problems and prospect of both national and international return migrants for effective re-integration.

### **Objectives**

- To understand the motive that triggered return migration
- To appraise the economic activity involved at the place of destination and after the return
- To investigate the process of economic re-integration of the return migrants

### **Source and Methodology**

The study is based on primary data obtained from field investigation; as a result, a large-scale survey was conducted with the help of funding from Indian Council for Social Science and Research (ICSSR). The survey was conducted systematically and covered those districts where migration from rural areas is eminent, assuming that the districts where migration is high will also have a substantial number of return migrants. Rural areas are emphasized as the origin, as labour migration is prominent in this sector. Moreover, the rural economy is relatively more homogenous and based on primary activities where re-integration of the returnees would be interesting to explore. Currently, West Bengal has 23 districts, of which five districts recording high migration have been taken into account, namely, Cooch Behar, South Dinajpur, Malda, Birbhum, and Haora.

### **Selection of Sample**

The survey was conducted by collecting information from the household of the return migrants and the returnees themselves. Two types of returnees have been considered: worked outside the state and worked outside the country. According to the definition given by the UN, migrants who have stayed in the village for at least one year before the survey are considered return migrants. During the survey period, the country faced the most devastating COVID-19 pandemic, due to which numerous migrants returned home. To nullify the COVID-19 effect, the return period is increased to two years from one year. Therefore,



migrants who have returned in 2019 and before are considered return migrants. Apart from that who have worked for at least two years at the place of destination are considered respondents for the study purpose. The snowball sampling technique has been used for selecting the samples to identify the households of the return migrants.

Information from the local administrative bodies was collected to identify the villages with high migration. Further information has been collected from the local people and participants themselves. A total of 300 households were surveyed from these five districts, and among them, 311 return migrants were surveyed, which indicates in some households, there was more than one returnee. Villages were selected from all directions of the district, those near the urban centres and those away from the urban centres, to capture the influence of the urban centre in their re-integration, if any.

## Methods

The study is focused on both quantitative and qualitative analysis. Descriptive statistics are used to get an idea of the socio-economic background of the return migrants. The standard of living index (SLI) is used to measure the economic status of the household. The methodology is adopted from National Family Health Survey (IIPS, 2000). It is composed of 27 items, including consumer durables, agricultural machinery, housing conditions, and access to basic services (water, light, fuel, etc.). According to NFHS, weightage is given to each durable good and service available in the household and has summed up the weights to create the standard of living index. The standard livestock unit index (SLUI) is used to calculate the economic return to the household through livestock. It is prepared by country-specific co-efficient (weights) constructed by Food and Agriculture Association (Upton, 2011).

The formula for preparing the SLUI:

$$(\text{No. of cattle/buffalo} \times 0.50) + (\text{No. of pigs} \times 0.20) + (\text{No. of sheep or goat} \times 0.010) + (\text{No. of poultry} \times 0.01)$$

A combined variable is computed by adding up the values of SLI and SLUI to get the combined economic impact from household durables and services and livestock. Multinomial logistic regression has been used to examine the determinants influencing choices of economic activities after their return.

For qualitative analysis, in-depth interviews with key informants are analyzed thematically. Few case studies were conducted on returnees to understand certain aspects that are not adequately captured by quantitative analysis. Informal discussions with local leaders and village-level officers were also conducted to understand the changing socio-economic scenario of the village and the communities.

## Background characteristics

Table 6.1 shows the background characteristics of the returnees. It is evident that the proportion migrating towards the neighbouring states is less. It is interesting to see that a large majority are under the high SLI-SLUI category, probably indicating that return is possible when better livelihood is assured at the origin. Interestingly, the returnees also possess very less land, which is a common characteristic of the state where only 30 percent of the rural population possess any land (Socio-economic and Caste Census, 2011). Thus, they have

diversified their activities towards non-farm activities using acquired skill which is discussed in the following sections.



**Table 6.1.** Distribution of the returnees by their background characteristics

<b>Background characteristics</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Place of Last Migration</b>		
Northern States	90	28.9
Southern States	72	23.2
Western States	66	21.3
Other States	30	9.5
Different country	53	17.1
<b>Combined SLI and SLUI:</b>		
Low	10	3.2
Medium	114	36.0
High	187	60.8
<b>Educational Level:</b>		
Up to secondary	145	46.4
Up to higher secondary	141	45.5
Graduation and above	16	9.2
No education	9	2.8
<b>Land Ownership:</b>		
Less than 2 acres	188	60.4
2 to 6 acres	43	13.8
No Land	80	25.7
<b>Present Occupation:</b>		
Agricultural work	115	37.0
Casual labourers	68	21.9
Self-employed	71	22.8
Regular wage employee	44	14.1
Not working	13	4.2
<b>Skill Acquired:</b>		
Yes	262	84.2
No	49	15.7
<b>Duration of Return:</b>		
Less than 4 years	155	49.8
4 to 6 years	132	42.7
More than 6 years	24	7.6

*Source:* Primary survey, 2021-22

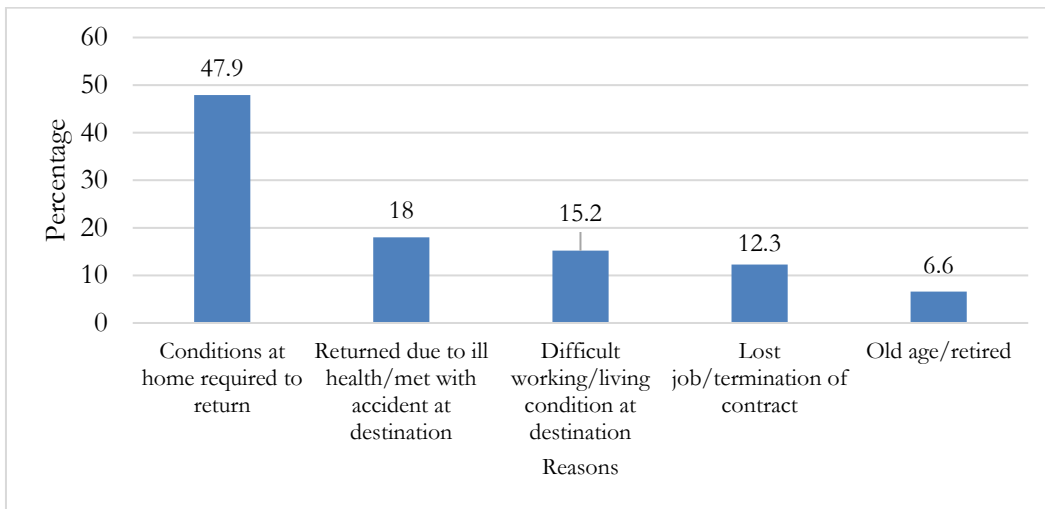
### **Reasons for Return Migration**

Research has revealed that economic resources play an important role in influencing the decision to return by the migrants, and usually, migrants who are less educated are most likely to return early as compared to those with high educational levels. These migrants are weakly attached to the labour force because of their low educational level. (Yahiran, 2009). On the other hand, those who are wealthier and better integrated economically with their hometown are more likely to return (Klinthall, 2006; Bolzman *et al.*, 2006).

Data from the field revealed that about 48 percent of the migrants returned due to familial reasons like the death of responsible family members, illness of family members, the problem with aged parents, own marriage, and sharing other responsibilities at home. Increasing responsibilities at home forced these migrants to return home and take up earning

opportunities available in their native place. This often results in a decrease in their standard of living as these returnees used to earn more at the destination. This is evident from other literature where a strand of researchers has argued that the motive of return is more strongly linked with family and lifestyle reasons than income opportunities (Gibson and McKenzie, 2009). Several other studies have shown that immigrants form the intention to return are more likely to return to their home countries and spend the rest of their life with their families (van Dalen *et al.*, 2005a, van Dalen *et al.*, 2005b). A similar observation has been found by analyzing the data on the return of guest workers in Germany from 1984 to 1997. The result suggests that a higher rate of employment and having a spouse in the home country increases the likelihood of return (Constant and Massey, 2002).

**Figure 7.1.** Percentage distribution of Return Migrants by Reason for Return



Source: Primary survey, 2021-22

Ill health or accident at the destination is another reason which has triggered return among the migrants in rural West Bengal. Among the returnees, about 18 percent have returned due to ill health or have returned as they have met with an accident at the destination. A migrant's health is linked to his lifestyle and surrounding health environment at the place of destination. If the returnees were earning sufficiently and were working in a decent environment, then they may enjoy good health upon return, and the accumulated wealth in the place of destination may contribute to their well-being. On the contrary, bad lifestyle and working conditions in the place of destination may result in poor health and also can be one of the major motives behind their return (Davies *et al.*, 2011; Razum, 2005; Clarke *et al.*, 2007; Sander, 2007). Unsafe working conditions in the destination or difficulty in accessing proper living arrangements have also influenced the migrants, and as a result, they have decided to return to their safe place, called *home*. It has been observed that 15 percent of the migrants have returned due to the same reason. Migrants who have gone on a contractual basis, especially to international destinations, have returned on termination of their contract. In rural areas, most labourers work on a contractual basis at the destination. For example, those who migrate as construction workers, mostly to the southern states, work on a contractual basis, and when their contract gets over, they return to their native place. International return migrants, mostly





returning from the Gulf countries, have all gone on a contractual basis and have worked there for quite a long time. In the villages surveyed in rural West Bengal, about 12 percent have returned due to the aforesaid reason. A similar situation has been faced by the returnees in Kerala who have returned from Gulf. Kerala Migration Survey (2009-10) have revealed that loss of jobs, expiry of the contract, harsh behaviour of the employers, racism, difficult working condition in the host country, illegal stay, and ill health have fuelled up return migration (Zachariah *et al.*, 2003). The remaining migrants, which constitute about 7 percent have returned due to old age or retirement. Migrants who are regular wage employees have returned after attaining their age of retirement. Other migrants who worked as casual labour have returned as they were unable to do heavy work due to their age. They have taken up light work after returning, like they help other family members with agricultural work or have opened a small shop with the accumulated wealth.

### **Economic Re-integration of the Return Migrants**

One of the most important questions that arise in the case of return migration is, "what happens after return?" Returning to their place of origin is often not a sinecure. It is often difficult for them to pick up their own living habits again, and establishing new ones will be tough. There can be chances of eroded family relations as a result of newly acquired identities or ideas of both the migrant and the family in their native place. Among the problems and prospects of re-integration, the fundamental impediment to re-integration for the return migrants is unable to acquire employment. The labour market at the place of origin is often very different from that at the destination, especially for those returning from international destinations and the acquired skills may not match opportunities that are available in their native place. Moreover, increasing the unemployment rate in the place of origin can further escalate the problem (Arowolo, 2000).

### **Changing Economic Activity**

Heavy out-migration from the state has resulted in heavy return migration, which is not accounted till now. After returning, these returnees experienced a change in their type of economic activities. Despite having a low output in the agricultural sector, these returnees have taken up agricultural work. The majority of the return migrants used to work as casual labour at the destination, and after returning, they have either started their own businesses with the accumulated wealth or are working on their own agricultural land. Very few of these returnees are involved in the same job as their destination.

Labour migration is concentrated among those who are less educated and with low skills. These labourers migrate seasonally or on a contractual basis, and their chances of return are quite high. This is evident from the study as about 61 percent of the return migrants in rural West Bengal used to work as casual labourers at the place of destination. Construction work, railway maintenance work, pipeline fitting and, flower decoration are several economic activities where the migrants were involved. After returning, the percentage of casual labourers decreased from 61 to 22 percent. About 37 percent of the returnees work on their agricultural land acquired from their ancestors or purchased from the wealth accumulated while working at the destination. This has resulted in a decrease in their income. Even a decrease in the percentage of regular-wage employees has been noticed. At the destination, about 36 percent of the returnees worked as regular wage employees, which decreased to

around 14 percent after their return to their place of origin, as many of them returned after the completion of their work tenure.

**Figure 8.1.** Percentage share of Return Migrants by Economic Activity at Destination and After Return



Source: Primary survey, 2021-22

In the case of those returnees who are self-employed, a drastic rise has been seen after their return. At the place of destination, only one percent of the return migrants were self-employed, which rose to 22 percent after returning to the place of origin. After returning to their village, quite a few numbers of returnees have started their own business with accumulated wealth. Setting up a poultry farm, small business pertaining to selling of fish, vegetables and decorative and other plants has been started by them. Some have bought commercial electrical rickshaw, which is called *toto* in the local language, and it is used to carry out a passenger for short distances within the village, neighbouring villages and towards the town. It has been observed that one percent of these returnees were not working at the destination. One percent of the non-working population are two young girls who followed their parents to the destination. Their father died at the destination, and then they stayed with their mother and continued their studies. After a few years, the mother returned with her children to their native place and opened a small tea stall which she runs with her elder daughter, who is an adult now. The percentage of non-working returnees has increased to 4.2 percent after return, and these comprise female returnees who left the labour force due to increasing family responsibilities. The remaining non-working returnees comprises those who left the labour force either due to old age or due to ill health (Fig 8.1).

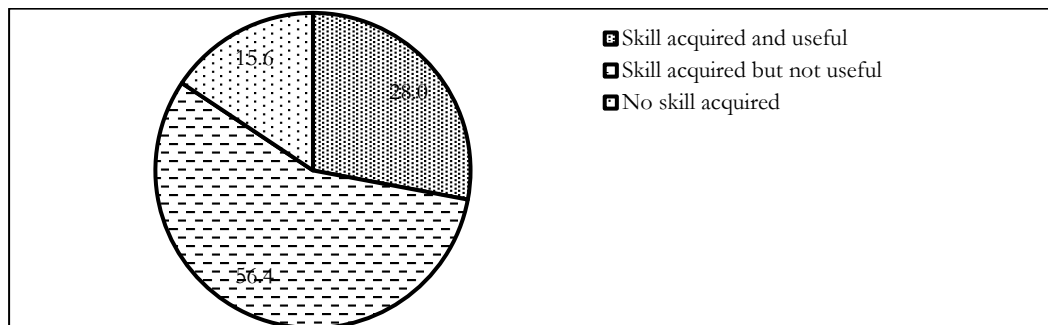
## Skill Development

The impact of return migration is analyzed with a view that migrants who return bring back valuable industrial work experience and skills as well as capital needed for the economic development of their homeland (Rose, 1969). While working at the destination, these migrants tend to develop certain skills which may be useful for them after returning. Returnees often use these skills to set up their own business, but in many poor developing countries, lack of access to credit is a severe constraint to entrepreneurship. Emigration enables credit-constrained individuals to acquire savings to set up businesses once they return (Mesnard,



2004). This is an important channel through which returnees contribute to investment and economic development in the home country. In particular, when unemployment in the home country is high, small and medium-sized enterprises can provide jobs and reduce poverty, making entrepreneurship an engine of growth (Wahba, 2015).

**Figure 8.2.** Percentage share of return migrants by skills acquired at the destination



Source: Primary survey, 2021-22

Migration has enabled most of the returnees to develop certain skills while working at the destination, which can be useful for acquiring gainful employment. But, more than half of the return migrants could not use those skills further. Among the return migrant, 28 percent have been enabled to use their acquired skill after returning. There have been instances of the return migrants who used to work as construction workers at the destination and started working as construction workers after returning to their villages. They even contributed their skills while renovating their own house with the acquired wealth. A perfect example of skill development due to migration came into light in Howrah district, situated in the south of West Bengal, where the male members of the household migrated to Gujarat and Maharashtra to work in the hand embroidery industry and mostly engaged in *Jari* work. After learning the art of *Jari*-craft, they returned to their native place to set up this household industry. The setup of the enterprise is completely an unorganized home-based industry. There are several home-based industries within the villages set up by the members of the households who have returned. Since it is a family enterprise, women of the household can easily learn the *Jari* embroidery and participate in the production process. Apart from that, unemployed youths of the villages are also engaged in the production process. Similarly, in Cooch Behar district situated in the north of West Bengal, males migrate to the north-eastern part of India, mostly to Sikkim and Bhutan, to work as carpenters. The majority of the male migrants learn carpentry work while working. Some returned after two to three years and started working in furniture shops. Several returnees even set up their own business of furniture making, and some have opened their own shop, which has become a source of employment for the local youths.

### **Influencing factors for Economic Re-integration**

An attempt has been made to examine the factors that influences the choices of economic activity of the return migrants by employing multinomial logistic regression, as there are more than two categories of dependent variables. In the present analysis, the type of economic activity is the dependent variable which has four categories, i.e., agricultural work (those who are working on their own agricultural land), Casual labourers, Self-employed and Regular wage

employees. Among these four categories of economic activities, the majority of the returnees are involved in agricultural work.

Multinomial regression analysis is attempted to understand the role of predictor variables in the selection of the type of economic activities after the return of the once migrant. The frequency and percentage distribution of the subcategories of the independent variable are already presented in Table 6.1. The results of the Multinomial regression analysis are represented in table 8.1. Agricultural work is considered the reference category of the model as the majority has joined in the agriculture sector. Values represented are the odds ratio that quantifies the strength of the association between the two variables.

**Table 8.1.** Odds ratio of Multinomial Regression showing net effect of predictor variables on the economic re-integration of the returned migrants

Factors	Casual laborer	Self-employed/ business	Regular wage employee
<b>Place of migration:</b>			
Northern States®			
Southern States	3.5***	0.6*	1.1
Western States	1.6**	1.3	1.0*
Other States	0.7	0.6**	6.4**
Different country	0.4*	2.7***	2.5**
<b>Combined SLI and SLUI:</b>			
Low	2.3***	0.2**	0.2**
Medium	1.6**	0.5***	0.5*
High®			
<b>Educational Level:</b>			
Up to secondary®			
Up to higher secondary	0.4**	0.4**	1.1
Graduation and above	0.2**	0.6**	2.6***
No education	3.2**	0.2**	0.3*
<b>Land Ownership:</b>			
Less than 2 acres®			
2 to 6 acres	0.3*	1.2*	0.5
No Land	1.4***	1.0	1.6*
<b>Duration of stay at the destination:</b>			
Less than 4 years	4.3*	0.3**	0.1
4 to 6 years	0.9	0.5**	0.5**
More than 6 years®			
<b>Skill Acquired:</b>			
Yes®			
No	0.6***	0.5*	1.2*
<b>Duration of Return:</b>			
Less than 4 years®			
4 to 6 years	0.3*	1.2**	1.3**
More than 6 years	0.6***	1.6**	1.4*

Reference category of Outcome Variable: Agricultural work (those who work in their own land as primary source of income)  
 $p < 0.001$ \*\*\*;  $p < 0.01$ \*\*;  $p < 0.05$ \* R= 0.623 and R<sup>2</sup>=0.388 The R value is 0.623 which represents that there is strong association between the predictor variable and outcome variable".



Almost all the factors significantly (though at various levels) impact the choices of economic activity of the returnees at their origin. It has been observed that returnees from western and southern states are more likely to work as casual labourers rather than working in the agricultural sector. Labourers migrating to the southern and western states mostly work as construction workers. About 87 percent of the migrants in the southern states work as construction labourers, and there they learn various skills related to construction work. The enhanced skills help these migrants to acquire jobs after their return. Returnees from international destinations are less likely to work as casual labourers compared to working in their own land. Those who return from international destinations acquire substantial wealth, which enables them to buy their own land. Returnees with a low standard of living, low educational level, no land, and short duration of stay at the destination again join as casual labourer than agricultural workers. Migrants who return with no skills are less likely to work as casual labourers. Returnees who are working as casual labourers are mostly in skilled-based jobs. They are involved in construction work, carpentry, jewellery making, embroidery work, and so on. These types of work require skills that they have acquired at the destination, and it has helped them in getting employment after the return. Return migrants whose return duration is more are less likely to choose casual labour than agricultural work compared to those whose return duration is short. After returning, their incomes were reduced as they used to earn much more at their destination from doing the same work. Unfortunately, due to unavoidable circumstances at home, they are forced to return and settle with reduced earnings and often a standard of living. Often the migrants come back when they feel too homesick. In those cases, returnees choose residual jobs available at their origin.

Returnees from southern states are less likely to be self-employed compared to those returning from northern states. On the other hand, returnees from international destinations choose to be self-employed rather than work in the agricultural sector. Returnees with a low standard of living, no acquired skills, low educational level, and short duration of stay at the destination are less likely to be self-employed rather than working in the agricultural sector. But returnees with large acres of land and long return duration are more likely to be self-employed. It is quite evident as a study conducted in two cities in the Jiangxi province have highlighted that longer duration of stay in the urban areas has enabled returnees not only to accumulate funds and gain experience but also to get business contracts in the cities (Murphy 2002). A similar study has revealed migration has led to the improvement of skills and abilities, which has facilitated occupational mobility from agriculture to non-agricultural activities (Ma, 2001).

Migrants returning from western states and other states in eastern and north-eastern India are more likely to work as regular wage employers. Returnees with a low standard of living, low educational level, and short duration of stay at the destination are less likely to work as regular-wage employees. In this sample, regular-wage employees are mostly engaged in low-paid, low-skill jobs like working as peons, guards, gardeners, cleaners, etc. Mostly the people who could not acquire sufficient skills to be self-employed or get skill-oriented casual work try their economic re-integration into these kinds of jobs. Finding a regular-wage job requires time; therefore, returnees who have a return duration of more than 6 years are 1.6 times more likely to work as regular-wage employees rather than doing agricultural work compared to those who have a return duration of less than 4 years. After returning, people opting for a regular wage have reduced compared to the time they were at the destination. This is because regular wage employment in West Bengal is very low-paying. In Birbhum district, returnees working

in the tourism industry has claimed they used to earn more as casual labourers while working in the southern states compared to what they earn now as regular wage worker. The finding from the survey replicates along the line of large-scale data, which observes that low payment in regular employment is a very common problem in West Bengal which has resulted in a decline in the percentage share of regular employment from 50.4 percent in 1993-94 to 37.5 percent in 2011-12 (NSS, 2011-12).

It is observed that initiatives from the government can make the process of re-integration easier and stress-free (Pekin, 1986). For instance, in Germany, the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees has established the "Support Return Informative Centre", which offers special training to return migrants. Likewise, the International Organisation of Migration has joined hands with several European countries, such as Denmark and Austria, to work on re-integration issues under Information on Return and Re-integration in Countries of Origin (IRRiCO) project (Dumont and Spielvogel, 2003). In the Indian context, at the national-level, policies and programmes with regard to return migration are very scarce. Much priority is given to the emigrants in the Indian migration policy than return migrants. The Ministry of External Affairs is the only Government body that looks after migration issues, but it gives little focus to the return migrants. Kerala is the only state in India that has formulated policies and programmes for return migrants as well as emigrants at the state-level. The Non-Resident Keralites Affairs (NORKA) and its field agents have helped the returnees significantly with re-integration process (Jabir, 2014). Under Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) West Bengal government has tried to improve the livelihood and standard of living of the rural population by providing gainful employment in different categories like agriculture, watershed, construction etc. Many villages of the state have been benefitted from the MNREGA, among them one of the prominent examples can be seen in villages of South Dinajpur where the agriculture department of Government of West Bengal has initiated a programme to help the marginal farmers to enhance their income. Farmers have started cultivation of dragon fruit with the help of the government. The state government provides the farmers with loans and subsidized products to initiate their farming. The idea of dragon fruit cultivation is provided by the return migrants who have migrated to Delhi, Mumbai, and Bangalore, as dragon fruit can yield substantial profit. Return migrants, as well as non-migrants, are benefitted from this programme, but this type of Government programme related to agriculture is not widely spread and is confined to very few villages in West Bengal. Moreover, this scheme is not specific towards reintegration of the return migrants, but enterprising returnees have reap benefit from the scheme. Such employment generation schemes widely help in the economic re-integration of the return migrants. Therefore, specific government schemes should be made more effective so that it benefits both return migrants and non-migrant household in a situation when migration is increasing and inevitable in near future.

## **Conclusion**

From the field investigation, it has been revealed people migrating from the rural areas of West Bengal are majorly due to economic distress. The migrants with low educational levels and socio-economic status migrate long distances for better wages and take up labour-intensive jobs like construction work, carpentry, and other petty casual labourer work.



The majority of the migrants have faced challenges in re-integrating into society after their return. Re-integration into the economic sphere is the most common problem faced by returnees across globe. It has been revealed that about 84 percent of migrants return with acquired skills while working at the destination, but among them, only 28 percent are able to accrue their skills in the economic sphere. More than half of the return migrants have claimed that their acquired skill was of no use after the return. Therefore, the acquired skills by these returnees are going to waste and cannot be used in the development of the state. After returning, they did not get any job immediately, even after acquiring some special skills at the destination. They return and work on ancestral agricultural land, which results in decreasing standard of living as income from agriculture in West Bengal is very poor compared to what they used to earn at the place of destination. One common thing which was reported by all the returnees is that the standard of living was high when they were at their place of destination, but their income was reduced as they returned to their native place, even when they were doing the same job.

However, there have been instances of positive contributions to society through return migration. In several villages, it has been noticed that the returnees have started poultry farming with the wealth accumulated while working away. Along with agriculture, the household is involved in poultry farming, which has enhanced their household income and also employed some casual labour. Return migrants from international destinations have accumulated substantial amounts of wealth while working away from home in another country which has enabled them to start their own enterprises in the village. They opened restaurants or stationery shops and employed local people of the village. This way, return migrants are able to make positive contributions to the economy by providing economic opportunities to the unemployed youths of the village. But these types of returnees are still small in number. Moreover, they faced difficulty in acquiring loans. Mostly they approach informal sources and when they approached the local money lenders for loans, they were charged high-interest rates as they had returned from international destinations. Recently, the West Bengal government has introduced various schemes like *Karmasathi Prakashpa*, *Banglasree* in which loans are given to the youths so that they can start something new and innovative on their own. Such schemes can be a great relief for these returnees to free themselves from the clutches of local money lenders. However, these initiatives are introduced very recently and thus, in the present sample no one reported to get the benefit of the scheme.

Now the question arises why do these people have to leave their homes when they can work in their own state? When they are satisfied with little steady income, then why will the state not step in for their help? These people have to leave their families behind to migrate to faraway destinations just because the state cannot provide them with gainful employment with which they can sustain their families. These migrants have the ability to learn and develop skills; their potential can be used to pave the way for the state's development. A little development-centric environment can utilize these young people to earn satisfactorily, if not more, and live with esteem and dignity.

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