



## Rural Exodus: Understanding Labour Migration in Jharkhand

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### Abstract:

*The study had examined the multi-dimensional causes of labour migration in the backward districts of Jharkhand, focusing on economic, agricultural, social, healthcare, and educational determinants. Field surveys and interviews had been conducted across fifteen villages in Palamu, Garhwa, and Latehar districts, using a stratified random sampling method to include both migrant and non-migrant households. Quantitative data had been analyzed through descriptive statistics and regression models, while qualitative data had been examined thematically. The findings had revealed that unemployment, income disparities, and indebtedness had been major economic push factors, while land fragmentation, declining agricultural productivity, and seasonal work patterns had reinforced migration. Social barriers, including caste-based discrimination and limited upward mobility, had further influenced migration decisions. Additionally, inadequate healthcare facilities, high malnutrition rates, poor educational infrastructure, and high dropout rates had emerged as significant service-related drivers. Migration had provided short-term economic benefits through remittances but had also resulted in rural labour shortages and dependence on external income. The study had emphasized the need for integrated rural development policies targeting livelihood creation, agricultural modernization, and service infrastructure improvement to reduce distress migration.*

**Keywords:** Labour Migration, Jharkhand, Rural Development, Agricultural Productivity, Social Exclusion, Healthcare Access, Educational Infrastructure.

### Introduction:

Jharkhand had been recognized as one of India's resource-rich yet socio-economically underdeveloped states, with a substantial portion of its population dependent on agriculture and informal labour (Planning Commission, 2013). The state had comprised predominantly rural areas, with over 75% of its population residing in villages, many of which had been characterized by low income, poor infrastructure, and limited access to healthcare and education (Census of India, 2011). Despite having significant mineral reserves and industrial potential, backward districts such as Palamu, Garhwa, and Latehar had lagged in development indicators, leading to persistent poverty and employment scarcity (Singh & Kumar, 2019). Migration trends in these districts had been significant, as labourers had moved to urban centers both within and outside the state in search of better livelihood opportunities. These migration flows had reflected both distress-driven mobility and aspirational relocation, influencing household incomes, agricultural labour availability, and rural socio-economic structures. The present research had aimed to examine the multi-dimensional causes of

labour migration—economic, agricultural, social, healthcare, and educational—while assessing its implications for rural development and policy formulation in Jharkhand.

### **Research Methodology:**

The study area had been selected from the backward districts of Jharkhand, namely Palamu, Garhwa, and Latehar, which had been identified by the Government of India as economically and socially lagging regions based on poverty, literacy, and health indicators (NITI Aayog, 2018). Within these districts, fifteen villages had been purposively chosen based on their high recorded outmigration rates as reported by local administration records and previous migration surveys (ILO, 2018).

A stratified random sampling strategy had been employed to ensure representation of both migrant and non-migrant households. A total of 500 households had been surveyed, with approximately equal representation from each district. The classification between migrant and non-migrant households had been based on whether at least one member of the household had been engaged in labour migration during the past five years (Deshingkar & Akter, 2009).

Data collection had been carried out using both primary and secondary sources. Primary data had been obtained through structured questionnaires focusing on demographic profiles, economic conditions, agricultural engagement, healthcare access, and educational status. Semi-structured interviews had been conducted with key informants, including village leaders, returned migrants, and local government officials, to capture qualitative insights. Secondary data had been gathered from census reports, government development plans, and migration-focused research publications (Census of India, 2011; Ministry of Rural Development, 2017).

The analysis had followed a mixed-method approach. Quantitative data had been analyzed using descriptive statistics and regression analysis to identify key factors influencing migration. Qualitative responses had been examined through thematic analysis to interpret recurring patterns and narratives related to migration drivers and impacts (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This methodological combination had allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the structural, economic, and social dimensions of labour migration in the selected districts.

### **Results:**

The findings of the study had revealed that labour migration from the backward districts of Jharkhand had been influenced by a complex interplay of economic, agricultural, social, healthcare, and educational factors.

**Economic Causes:** Unemployment had emerged as the most cited reason for migration, with over 60% of surveyed households reporting that local job opportunities had been scarce. Significant income disparities had been observed between rural and urban labour markets, with urban wages being nearly double those available locally (ILO, 2018). Debt burdens had also been common, as over 40% of migrant households had reported borrowing money to meet basic needs or agricultural expenses, which had acted as a push factor for migration (Deshingkar & Akter, 2009).

**Agricultural Causes:** Agricultural instability had been another major driver. Nearly 70% of respondents had reported land fragmentation, which had reduced farming viability. Low agricultural productivity, attributed to poor irrigation and outdated farming techniques, had been reported by 65% of households. Seasonal agricultural work had left many labourers unemployed during the lean months, prompting them to seek employment elsewhere (Patel et al., 2020).

**Social Causes:** Social barriers had played a significant role in migration decisions. Marginalized caste groups (SC/ST) had reported higher migration rates, citing discrimination and limited local employment opportunities. Established migrant networks had facilitated migration by providing information, accommodation, and job referrals in destination areas. Younger respondents had cited aspirations for better lifestyles and modern amenities as additional motivations for migration (Sharma & Singh, 2019).

**Healthcare Causes:** Healthcare infrastructure in the surveyed villages had been severely inadequate. More than 80% of respondents had indicated that they lacked access to primary healthcare facilities within a 5 km radius. Malnutrition had been prevalent among 35% of households, while the prevalence of untreated illnesses had been reported at 25%. Many respondents had stated that migration had been partly motivated by the need to access better healthcare services in urban areas (Gupta et al., 2021).

**Educational Causes:** Educational limitations had been another push factor. Poor school infrastructure, a shortage of qualified teachers, and lack of higher education facilities had been widely reported. Dropout rates among school-going children had reached nearly 50% in certain villages, with many families citing the need for migration to access better educational opportunities for their children. Perceived quality gaps between rural and urban education had reinforced the decision to migrate (Planning Commission, 2013).

## **Discussion:**

The findings of this study had demonstrated that labour migration in the backward districts of Jharkhand had been shaped by interlinked economic, agricultural, and social factors rather than isolated causes. Economic deprivation, reflected in unemployment, income disparities, and indebtedness, had been closely tied to agricultural underperformance, as most households had relied on subsistence farming for income generation. Declining agricultural productivity, exacerbated by land fragmentation and seasonal employment, had reduced the viability of farming as a sustainable livelihood, thereby intensifying the push toward migration. Social factors, particularly caste-based discrimination and limited upward mobility, had further reinforced this process by constraining local employment options for marginalized communities, thereby making migration an attractive or necessary alternative (Deshingkar & Akter, 2009; Sharma & Singh, 2019).

When compared with national migration patterns, the migration dynamics in Jharkhand had mirrored trends observed in other underdeveloped rural states such as Bihar and Odisha, where agricultural stagnation, rural poverty, and inadequate infrastructure had similarly driven large-scale rural-to-urban migration (ILO, 2018). At the international level, the migration push factors identified in Jharkhand had paralleled rural exodus patterns in parts of Sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia, where land scarcity, low agricultural yields, and limited access to social services had been primary motivators for mobility (FAO, 2017). However, a distinguishing feature of Jharkhand's migration had been the strong influence of social networks in shaping destination choices, reflecting a community-driven migration model that had facilitated relatively smoother adaptation in urban labour markets.

The impacts of migration on rural communities had been mixed. On one hand, remittances sent by migrants had contributed significantly to household incomes, enabling expenditure on education, healthcare, and housing improvements (Gupta et al., 2021). On the other hand, prolonged outmigration had led to labour shortages in agriculture, increased dependence on migrant earnings, and a gradual weakening of traditional rural social structures. The absence of working-age male members had often resulted in increased workloads for women and elderly family members, particularly in agricultural labour. Furthermore, while remittances had improved household consumption patterns, they had not necessarily translated into long-term investments in local economic development, leaving the structural causes of migration unaddressed (Patel et al., 2020). Overall, the interconnections between economic instability, agricultural decline, and social

exclusion in Jharkhand had underscored the necessity for integrated rural development policies that addressed the root causes rather than merely the symptoms of migration.

### **Conclusion:**

The study had revealed that labour migration from the backward districts of Jharkhand had been driven by a complex combination of economic deprivation, agricultural instability, social exclusion, inadequate healthcare, and poor educational infrastructure. Unemployment, income disparities, and indebtedness had been identified as the most critical economic push factors. Agricultural challenges, including land fragmentation, declining productivity, and seasonal work patterns, had reduced farming viability, forcing households to seek income opportunities elsewhere. Social determinants such as caste barriers, discrimination, and aspirations for upward mobility had further reinforced the decision to migrate. Additionally, the absence of adequate healthcare facilities and poor educational infrastructure had compelled families to move to urban areas to secure better services and opportunities for their children.

The policy implications of these findings had been substantial. Rural development strategies needed to address the root causes of distress migration by integrating employment generation, agricultural modernization, and social service improvements. Employment-oriented rural industrialization, skill development programs, and promotion of micro-enterprises had been crucial for reducing economic vulnerability (NITI Aayog, 2018). Agricultural reforms, including improved irrigation infrastructure, access to modern farming technologies, and land consolidation initiatives, had been essential for enhancing productivity and stabilizing rural livelihoods. Strengthening rural healthcare systems and upgrading educational infrastructure had been necessary to reduce service-based migration drivers.

Based on the findings, the study had recommended the following measures for reducing distress migration in Jharkhand:

**Economic Development** – Establishment of agro-based industries, vocational training centres, and rural employment schemes tailored to local resources and skills.

**Agricultural Revitalization** – Investments in irrigation, soil fertility management, and promotion of climate-resilient crops to ensure year-round agricultural employment.

**Social Inclusion** – Implementation of anti-discrimination policies and community development programs to improve access to opportunities for marginalized groups.

**Healthcare Expansion** – Setting up fully functional primary healthcare centres within accessible distances, along with mobile medical units for remote villages.

**Educational Reforms** – Improving school infrastructure, teacher training, and introducing scholarship programs to encourage retention and reduce dropout rates.

In conclusion, while migration had provided temporary relief to households through remittances, it had not addressed the underlying structural causes of rural poverty and underdevelopment in Jharkhand. A multi-sectoral and integrated approach, combining economic, agricultural, and social policy interventions, had been necessary to create sustainable livelihood opportunities within rural areas and thereby reduce the need for distress-driven migration.

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