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# **Male Labour Out-Migration and Its Impact on Left-Behind Women: A Study on Rural Cooch Behar District, West Bengal**

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### **Abstract:**

*The present article tries to highlight nature, causes and impact of male labour out-migration on of rural left-behind women of Coochbehar District, West Bengal. After doing intensive survey of 200 rural left behind women the data was arranged, classified and processed in SPSS 20 version software and categorized under several indicators such as: socio-demographic, migration destination, duration, remittances behavior. The impact of migration on left-behind women was analyzed by descriptive method of intensive interview. The results indicate that migration of male members has a strong impact on changes in economic behavior of left-behind women.*

***Key Words: Male out-migration, Left behind women, Remittance, Economic Well-being, Rural area.***

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**Introduction:** Migration as an element and factor of economic development plays a key role in temporary employment of the globalized world today (Kyi, 2018). Migration is a dynamic process which effectively manages the lifestyle and wellbeing of the migrants and their families. Thus, migration of labour force from their native rural place and engagement in any kind of work also has a strong impact on their socio economic status. The continuum engagement of rural male labours in migration not only individually changes their lives positively or negatively but also as family system and social element. In the present globalised world due to economic transformation and structural change of labour market the livelihood of rural poor is effected and leads to labour migration to developed regions (De Haan, 1997; Kundu, 1997; Srivastava & Bhattacharya, 2002; Mitra & Mauramya 2008; Mahapatro, 2013). At the destination place of the migrants they are engaged in short term casual work and marginalized and their families are unable to accompany them (Mahapatro, 2019). Thus it results to split families (Ye et al., 2016). The left behind families relies on remittances for subsistence. In India the informal sector economy is the major labour receiving sectors from rural areas (Mishra, 2016). According to an estimation made by The Economic Survey of India 2017 (Sharma, 2017) the internal migration in the country was about 139 million in 2011 which was close to 9 million per annum between 2011 and 2016.

Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, Jammu and Kashmir and West Bengal are the major source states; the major destination states are Delhi, Maharashtra, TamilNadu, Gujrat, Andhra Pradesh and Kerala. According to 2011 Census report, West Bengal is the third highest labour sending state in the country (3.34 crore) and only 23.81 lakh migrants were received by the state. Most of the migrants are rural and due to regional and economic disparity in the state the migration occurs.

Coochbehar, is a socio-economically depressed district with a large number of rural labour out migration. The district ranks 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> respectively in the terms of HDI and GDI (HDR, 2004) in West Bengal, indicating social, economic and gender discriminated backwardness. Among the total work force of the district 40.01%, 34.74% are agricultural laborers among whom 30.45% are male. These huge labour force are economically poor and backward. The agro-ecological setup of the study area has gone through a drastic change with this huge influx of rural labour out migration. Seasonal migration plays a very important role in migration studies which is neglected most of the times (Rao, 1986). This is very prominent in the study area. Migration improves the economic set up of rural area as well as it gives financial benefit to the migrants and their families (Mukherjee, 2103). A micro level intensive study reveals that along with financial benefit the well-being of the migrants left behind families are subject to question. Long term absence of male members in a family and keeping the powerbase in their hand keeps women away from taking broad major decisions in the family ; socially , economically and psychologically left behind women became depressed (Jetly,1987). The study identifies the economic behavioral change among these left-behind family members specially the women, may be wife, mother, daughter or sister. The extensive work load taken by these female members of these families led to physical and psychological problems and depression among them (Mahapatro, 2019). So, social, economic and psychological well-being of these rural left behind women has a strong indication of study to integrate the family system for a sustainable society.

**Background of the Study:** In rural India agriculture is monsoon dependent. But, monsoon is instable, so there is a seasonal unemployment among the agricultural labour force. Rural male agricultural labourers start working when first spell of rainfall occurs in the month of June through ploughing in the agricultural fields of their own or remain engaged as labourer of other lands. Till the end of September, they remain busy with different agricultural activities like ploughing, seeding, preparing the agricultural field cultivable etc. But, most of the workers who are economically poor and do not have any land of their own remain jobless or devoid of work throughout the year except the rainy season. The district Cooch Behar is economically backward and no industrial set up is there, thus the unemployment occurs in the non-monsoonal period. In this situation to mitigate the family basic needs the male members of the family compelled to migrate in different parts of the state or country for temporal period. The migration streams are divided in two directions; one towards North India and another towards South India. These males are mainly engaged in non-agricultural activities such as construction, tailoring, driving and others. In this situation their family

becomes 'Left-Behind' families. The temporary absence of male from the family suddenly changes the socio-economic status of the rural marginal females. They shift from orthodox "Secondary or Passive" agent to "Primary or Active" one with a *de-facto* headship in the family (Sarkar 2012). Because the other family members are either children or old who are themselves dependent. So the middle age women or wives take the liability of the family. Thus they participate actively in the family decision makings. The remittances whether sent or brought by the male members give women autonomy, liberty, and decision making power in the family. They move freely within or out the house to fulfill the family requirements. They took part in economic activities, especially agricultural, works actively in absence of male members. But in terms of socio-economic well-being, such as literacy, work participation, life satisfaction, health, remittances expenditure, socio-psychological aspects, and security these women are not in a very satisfactory or healthy stage. The freedom they enjoy in absence of male members is very relative and short term.

Coochbehar district of West Bengal ranks 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> respectively in the terms of HDI and GDI (HDR, 2004) indicating social, economic and gender discriminated backwardness of the district. The district is mainly rural and agrarian economy dominated. The rural society of the district is patriarchal. So, the women are engaged in household works, child bearing and rearing without any economical participation in the family. The male members are mainly agricultural labourers. Among the total work force of the district 40.01%, 34.74% are agricultural labourers among whom 30.45% are male. These huge labour force are economically poor and backward. Thus when agricultural season ends they became unemployed. As the district is economically backward and there is lack of industrial set up these agricultural unemployed labours starts circulating from their own place in search of alternate job within or out of the state? The left behind females who were always the passive agent in a family now avoiding all the haziness and phobia became the active agents in the family. They feel empowered and autonomous in economic activity (Hadi,2001; Yabiku et al, 2010). Their economic behavioral change is the prime objective of the study.

**Methodology:** A survey was conducted in the Blocks of Coochbehar district. At the village level as the list of migrant households is not available from any administrative offices, thus snowball sampling technique was used. A total 200 families were interviewed and included in analysis. Data were collected by face to face interview with the samples as literacy is a hinder in rural areas so structured questionnaire cannot be used. Schedule was applied and before applying it permissions were taken from gram panchayat officials. The schedule was validated by an expert panel and after that applied on a small sample of 50 for pilot survey and after that the final schedule was applied on the sampled population. Cronbach's Alpha value was considered for the schedule which was 0.741. Nature, causes, place and duration of migration, remittance behavior and impact of remittance on economic status of left-behind women were studied.

**Results and Discussions:**

**Socio- Demographic Characteristics of the households:** Among 200 samples most of the families are schedule caste (72.1%). Most of the left-behind women respondents belong to age group of 30-40 years and some 40+ years because majority of the migrants went out at their age-group of 25-50 years (67.12%) leaving their families behind. The age groups of the migrants are the working age group which indicates the huge labour draining from the study area. The literacy levels among the migrants are very low. Most of the migrants in the sample have achieved only primary and Madhyamik level education (73.9%). So the migrants are poor, less educated and mainly middle age group in character. Most the left behind women are illiterate (55%) or have achieved only primary level education. So the left behind women respondents are middle to old aged illiterate and leading a *de-facto* headship in their family. Most of the families admitted that the male members migrated because of unemployment and poverty. As there is no alternate source of employment in the area rather than agriculture so this limited livelihood acts as a push factor behind migration from the study area. (Table No.1)

**Table 1: Socio – Demographic Characteristics of Left behind women and Migrants**

Variables	Left-behind women (%)	Migrant labours(%)
<b>Age Group</b>		
<25	14.3	17.58
25-50	58.9	67.12
>50	26.8	15.30
<b>Caste group</b>		
General	10.8	10.8
SC	72.1	72.1
OBC B	17.1	17.1
<b>Level of Education</b>		
Illiterate	55	15.3
Upto Primary	39.6	58.6
Upto Madhyamik	5.4	15.3
Upto Higher Secondary		10.8

**Family Structure and Household Characteristics of the Migrants:** In terms of family structure, number of household members and dependents reflects the economic dependency of the families and also as a push factor of migration. Among the sample 74% are medium sized family (4-7 members) and 20% are small sized families (2-3 members). The study reveals almost 60% of the samples have 3-4 numbers of dependents in their family. About 80% of the migrants belong to nuclear family. So, medium sized nuclear families with 3-4

numbers of dependents are more vulnerable to migration compared to large families. This is because the number of eligible earning members are one in this kind of nuclear families.

The housing characteristics of the migrant's shows that 67.5% of the migrants have tiled or kutcha houses and only 31% have pucca or semi-pucca houses and mostly occupies small to medium sized houses i.e 5-10 cuttah (Table 2). The quality of houses including the infrastructure such as toilet, drinking water, use of fire wood and gas (LPG) for cooking has improved after migration.

**Table 2: Family structure and household characteristics of the migrants**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Percentage of migrants</b>
<b>Family Size</b>	
Small (3 members)	20.5
Medium Sized (4-7 members)	74.2
Large sized (>7 members)	4.5
<b>No. of Dependent in a family</b>	
1- 2	35.1
3-4	60.3
>4	4.5
<b>Type of Family</b>	
Nucleated	80.4
Joint	18.8
<b>Structure of Houses</b>	
Tiled	18.9
Kutcha	48.6
Pucca	10.8
Semi-pucca	21.6
<b>Size of Houses</b>	
Small (less than 5 cuttah)	36.9
Medium (5-10 cuttah)	28.8
Large(more than 10 cuttah)	34.2

### **Migration Characteristics:**

**Reasons of migration:** In the study area reason for migration can be designed based on push and pull factors. The most influential push factor in the region is poverty (73%), followed by the influence of the previous migrants of the area (26%) and unemployment (4.5%) etc. According to BPL survey report by RHS,2002 Cooch Behar is the most poverty infested district out of total households 55.6% was BPL , 59% was agricultural labourer , 53% landless and 25% inclined to migration (De *ed.*,2017). Cooch Behar has been regarded as the poorest district in the West Bengal and it stood 2<sup>nd</sup> in BPL, and first in two other parameters. The study says 20% of the migration occurs in the region by social networking and families and kinship with former migrants. The pulling factors are better living

condition and high income. The study area is mainly agriculture based so most of the migrants are landless or lack of farming resources and suffering from unemployment in non-agricultural period.

**Destination and Duration of Migration:** The study reveals that most of the migrants went to Kerala (39%), Punjab/Haryana (24%), Andhra Pradesh (20%), Karnataka (11.6%) and other states (4.5%) from the study area (Table 3). These unskilled laborers are mainly engaged in construction, driving etc kinds of work. 46% of the sampled migrants are engaged in construction works, followed by factory workers (29%) and Driving (24%) (Table 3). As the study area is a labour sending district most of the migrants are male and females are involved in domestic activities.

Most of the migrants stay in their migrated place for six months to one year or more at a single spell. About 39% stays less than 6 months at a time in their work place, 22.4% stays for 6-12 months and 28% more than a year (Table 3). In the study area there is a tendency to return at their native place in the time of agriculture and after ending the cultivable period they again return to their workplace. Some of the migrants work at different places each and every time like a circle i.e. from Rajasthan to Andhra Pradesh to Kerala etc. They stay connected with their family not only by returning to their home but an also by mobile phones. Almost all families answered that migration decision was made by the migrant himself.

**Table 3: Migration Characteristics**

<b>Reasons for male out-migration</b>	<b>Percentage of the migrants</b>
Poverty	73.2
Unemployment	4.5
Influence of earlier migrants	21.4
<b>Work place of the Migrants</b>	
Kerala	38.4
Punjab/Haryana	24.1
Andhra Pradesh	20.5
Karnataka	11.6
Others(Rajasthan, Delhi & North-Eastern states)	4.5
<b>Working Sector of the migrants</b>	
Construction	46
Factory workers	29
Drivers	24
Govt.or private organizations	1
<b>Duration of stay of the migrants at a single spell</b>	
>6 months	38.4
6-12 months	22.4
<12 months	28.0

### **Remittances Behavior:**

**Monthly Remittances:** Some studies have indicated that left behind families use remittances much more in non-productive investment and basic survival (Haas & Rooij, 2010). Most of the migrants (40%) send remittances to their family at 1-2 months interval, 19.20% send after 6 months interval and (24.8%) send whenever required ( Fig.1). Only 4% send money at every month. Most of the remittances come from the migrants who are engaged in Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Punjab or Rajasthan. The study shows there are two types of migration in the study area long term (6 months to 1 year) and short term (less than 6 months). Most of the migrants are long term migrants. The mean of monthly remittances send in short term migration is around 8000/- and long term migration it is around 6000/- which indicates that short term migrants remits more than long terms , so , economic status is better among by short term left-behind women compared to long term left-behind women.

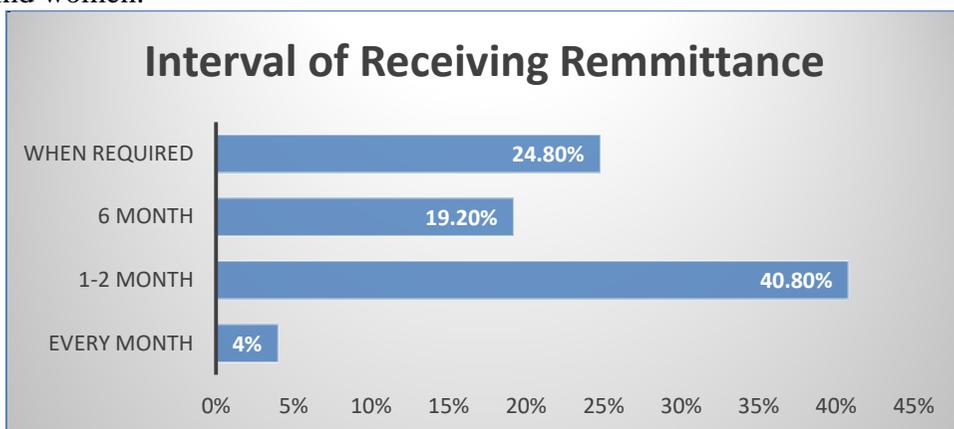
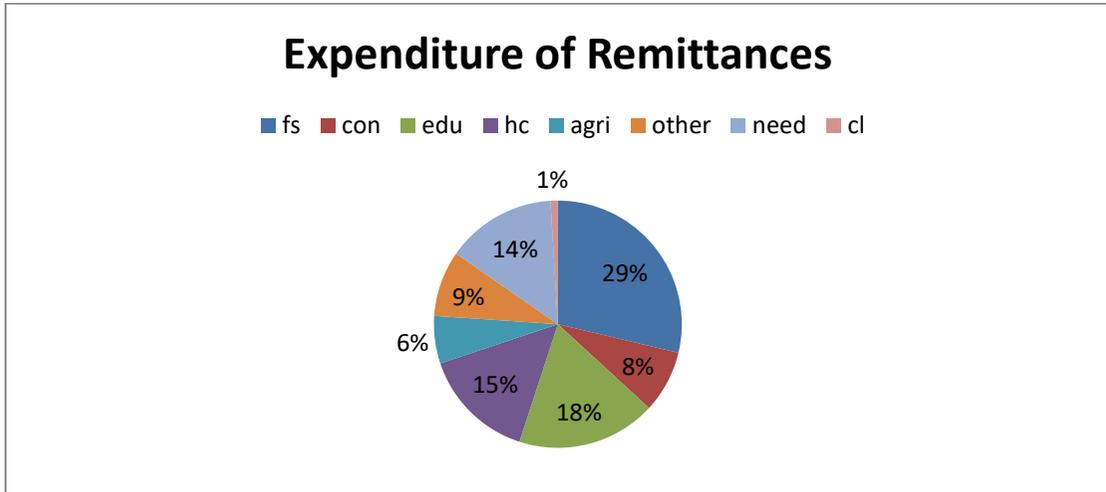


Fig.1: Interval of Receiving Remittances

**Expenditure of remittances:** In the study area most of the left behind women (50%) said that the remittances send are not sufficient to run the family and 29% said that to some extent sufficient. The remittances are mostly expended in food stuffs, construction of houses, education of children, health care, agricultural land purchase, to mitigate any crucial need , clothing's and other purposes. Most of the remittances are used for feeding of the family members (29%) followed by agriculture land purchase (18%), education (15%) and fulfill any crucial need of family (14%), 8% are used in construction of new house or renovation and repairing, 6 % is used for expenses in agriculture etc. (Fig. 2). The expense and use of remittance is not similar for all families. The pattern is different as per requirement. The use indicates that the remittances could not influence any future financial well-being of the migrants, could not improve their wealth or savings.



**Fig. 2 : Expenditure of remittances**

**Conclusion:** The whole study is concentrated on the impact of male labour out migration in the study area upon the left behind women. The aim of the study was not only to find out the impact of migration but also to find out the other factors which influence the well-being of left behind women along with migration. From the study it is clear that the study area is highly potential in labour sending. The majority of the migrants belong to working age-group, of low education and unemployed, poverty stricken, with a burden of huge dependency ratio and unskilled in the time of migration. The left behind women are also less educated or illiterate, unskilled, poverty stricken with a de-facto headship in a family with huge burden of responsibilities and household works. These women also suffer from lack of good and healthy well-being. The housing and environmental situation, due to kutcha housing structure, ill sanitation, lack of use of LPG as cooking fuel which also affects the health condition and influences their well-being. The psychological analysis of the left behind women was difficult and confidentiality was maintained. There were reflection and expression of a woman whose husband or son is away from them for a long time. The expressions suggest their loneliness, isolation, depression, worry, stress and psychological tensions. In this context some suggestions can be made to improve the well-being of left behind women in the study area:

- Literacy level has to be improved by discouraging school drop outs and encouraging and promoting education among the left behind women.
- Vocational training courses for both males and females should be introduced so that migration can be controlled and also after male migration the left behind women could have an alternate source of income.
- Government should take initiative to promote local agricultural products so that poor agricultural land holders could be benefitted.
- Strategies should be developed to promote ideas and plans to use the remittances expenses on a productive investment by promoting aids for entrepreneurs activities among the migrants and their families (Kyi, 2018).

- Community based behavioral interventions should be made to relieve psychological behavior of the left behind women.

As the study is conducted in a micro level but in the field of social science the findings are generalized and accepted all wide irrespective to region, ethnicity and socio-economic demographic background. This will set some of the limitations to the study as some peculiarities are strictly restricted in the region. The correlation or regression analysis is done in a sampled data which is very small in respect to original population and is homogenous in nature. So, to give the flavor of heterogeneity, diversity of the well-being in the study area a comparative study can be made with non-left behind women. The future probability is there to explore a new avenue in this direction.

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