

LABOUR MIGRATION and REMITTANCE DYNAMICS: IMPACTS on the AUTONOMY of MIGRANT WIVES in RURAL WEST BENGAL

Dr Md Selim Reja

1.Assistant Professor, University B.T. & Evening College, Cooch Behar, West Bengal, India

Rationality for the study, Database and Methodology:

India is also home to a large domestic remittances market because of the large number of internal migrants. According to India's latest Census Report (2011), India is home to about 40.5 million internal migrant labour workforces. These vast numbers of labour migrants create substantial domestic remittances. However, there is a dearth of official data about domestic remittances in India, and various micro-level studies have tried to shed light on the volume and importance of remittances from time to time. According to Tumbe (2011), the estimated internal remittances in India were worth US\$10 billion in 2007–2008, with 60 per cent of the flows being Inter-State transfers and 80 per cent directed towards rural households. According to Shukla and Manikandan (2020), the estimated internal remittance size is around `2 trillion annually. More importantly, domestic migration has been significant in sustaining local economies across the globe (Das & Singh,2020). It is more valid for India as it has many internal migrants and a substantial domestic remittance. This present case study tries to shed light on the various aspects of domestic remittances and would add a new dimension to remittance literature.

As a case study of West Bengal is concerned, the reason is that this eastern state of India has experienced considerable outmigration over recent years and received significant remittances from interstate migrants. According to the Census of India, in 1991, the total number of out-migrants was 11.39 lakhs, rising to 22.74 lakhs in 2011. More notably, male out-migrants increased from 4.34 in 1991 to 9.10 lakhs in 2011, and 55 percent of male migration was working/employment-related. In the rural-urban migration stream, the percentage of male out-migrants to the total interstate migrants from rural Bengal to urban areas of other states was 22.56 per cent in 1991 and 31.75 per cent in 2011, registering an increase of almost ten percentage points during 191-2011. Ghosh (2013) observed that West Bengal was once a migrant-receiving state since the late nineteenth century, but it became a source of male outmigration. According to a recent study by the Gulati Institute of Finance and Taxation (GIFT) in 2013, funded by the Government of Kerala, Kerala has a migrant labour population of 2.5

million, and West Bengal holds the largest share of total interstate in-migrants, i.e. 20 per cent. The presence of Bengali labour migrants in large numbers in other states results in the flow of remittances in West Bengal.

This article is mainly based on a primary survey from December to March 2021 in the Murshidabad district of West Bengal. Murshidabad district has five subdivisions and 26 blocks. At first, fifty villages were selected as sampled villages by random sampling method across all the blocks, almost two villages from each block. It was done to include variability in the sample size regarding background characteristics, occupational diversity, and the variability of choice of destination states of the migrants. Then, forty migrant households were drawn into the sample from each selected village through purposive sampling. All these sampling procedures yielded a sample of 2,000 migrant households. The data was collected from individual migrants through a structured, pre-coded questionnaire schedule. In-depth interviews with the migrants and five focused group discussions were also conducted during the field survey to assess the situation. In addition, 1710 migrant wives were also interviewed to understand their role in the intra-household matter and, more specifically, in managing remittances.

Results and Discussion:

The high labour wage rate in other states like Maharashtra, Delhi, Gujarat, and Kerala enabled the Bengali interstate migrants to remit significant amounts to their homes. The remittance sizes are detailed in the first part of Table 3. The monthly remittance size varied between ₹2,000 and ₹20,000, and the average amount was nearly ₹11,000. More than one-fourth of the sampled migrant households received monthly remittances between ₹2,000 to ₹8000. The majority of the migrant households, i.e. about 45 per cent of the sampled households, received remittance sizes ranging between ₹8001 to ₹14000. About 27 per cent of the sampled migrant families received more than ₹14000, a substantial amount in the context of internal labour migration.

Table1: Distribution of Bengali migrant households by size, periodicity and mode of sending remittances

Remittances	Migrant Households	
	<i>No. of Cases</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Size of Remittance per Month (in INR)		
₹2001-5000	160	8.0
₹5001-8000	396	19.8
₹8001-11000	498	24.9

₹11001-14000	406	20.3
₹14001-17000	335	16.7
₹17001-20000	205	10.3
	2000	100.0
Periodicity of remittance		
Bi-weekly	382	19.1
Monthly	1510	75.5
Bi-monthly	78	3.9
Quarterly	30	1.5
Total	200	100.0
Mode of Sending Remittance		
Banks	1330	66.5
Mobile apps such as Paytm, PhonePe and Google Pay	426	21.3
Friends/Relatives	74	3.7
By own self when visits home	170	8.5
Total	2000	100.0

Source: Field survey, 2021

To examine the variations in the remittance size and how the various socio-economic factors influence it, a Multiple Classification Analysis (MCA) has been carried out. Table 2 provides the unadjusted and adjusted mean remittance size, different socio-economic variables, the deviation of remittance size from the grand mean, and the beta value adjusted for factors.

The R squared value of the model defines the total variation in the dependent variable explained by all the predictors. The R-squared value of this model is 0.799, which indicates that all the independent variables together explain 79 per cent of the variation. After controlling all other factors, the beta value measures the relationship between a predictor and a dependent variable. Among the predictors, the migrant's income is the most significant factor (having the highest beta value) in deciding remittance size, followed by possession of landholdings, education level, family size and age of the migrants. The marital status of the migrants has not shown any significant impact on the remittance size.

Table2: Factors Affecting Remittance among Migrant Workers: Result from MCA analysis

Factors	Categories	N	Predicted Mean		Deviation		Beta value Adjusted for factor
			Unadjusted	Adjusted for Factors	Unadjusted	Adjusted for Factors	
Education	Non-literate	310	7653.23	10838.17	-3896.024	-711.078	.074*
	Primary	625	11042.40	11453.49	-506.850	-95.755	
	Upper Primary	554	12986.46	11878.10	1437.212	328.846	
	Secondary and above	511	12974.56	11741.23	1425.310	191.977	
Age	16-25	439	10326.88	11459.23	-1222.371	-90.023	.039*
	26-35	1142	11985.11	11697.04	435.864	147.790	
	36 and above	419	11642.00	11240.76	92.755	-308.486	
Marital Status	Married	1783	11487.94	11528.32	-61.308	-20.929	.013
	Unmarried	217	12053.00	11721.22	503.745	171.968	
Possession of landholding	Landless	662	9659.37	10951.27	-1889.884	-597.979	.089*
	Having some Land	1338	12484.30	11845.11	935.055	295.861	
Family Size	2-4	1321	11992.81	11680.52	443.558	131.270	.065*

Monthly Income	5-6	510	11212.75	11533.77	-336.505	-15.479	
	>=7	169	9097.63	10569.88	-2451.617	-979.370	
	7000-13000	664	6737.20	7125.89	-4812.051	-4423.355	.826*
	13001-21000	819	11582.42	11484.91	33.168	-64.343	
	21001-39000	517	17676.98	17332.24	6127.733	5782.988	

Impact of remittances on Left behind women:

This paper investigates if the husband's migration empowers the wife who is left behind by giving her more freedom and authority to make decisions. Four areas of women's empowerment are examined in this research: access to economic resources (receiving, controlling, and managing remittances), decision-making in important family affairs (food, farming, health, education, and so on), family finances during difficult times and physical mobility (market, medical, natal, and relatives' houses outside the village).

(i) Access to economic resources:

It is important to note that, while surveying, it was found that there is a bank account in the name of the migrant's wife. About 93 per cent of migrants' wives said they have a bank account. Owning a bank account is beneficial for various reasons, including providing access to the outside world and providing a rationale for leaving one usually's culturally conservative society. It offers a sense of personal financial security that would not have been feasible otherwise—money held out of the reach of other family members. Therefore, migrant wives' obtaining bank accounts has broader effects on their financial and physical independence (Rahman, 2013).

(ii) Decision-making in family matters:

Examining who receives, manages, and makes remittance decisions is essential to assessing women's contributions to household remittance management (IOM, 2007). The

table shows that a little over 67 per cent of recipients of remittances are migrants' wives, and the remaining 33 are different family members, such as the migrant's father, the migrant's mother and other family members. As in most cases, the primary recipients of the remittances were migrant wives; they also had control over and managed the use of remittances. Table 3 shows that about 48 per cent of migrant wives claimed that they alone made decisions on how to spend remittances, while 6.3 per cent said they made decisions after discussions with their husbands. In their words, 'men only sent money, but they have to manage all the household matters with these remittances'. In about one-fourth of the migrants' households, migrants exclusively decided on how to use the remittances. It needs to be mentioned that with the aid of mobile phones, communication between migrants and household members was easy and often undertaken. The migrants often directed their wives and other household members through telephone conversations about using remittances for different purposes. Wives of the migrants frequently also consulted their husbands on the phone about various decisions to be taken in the household. In 18 per cent of cases, the migrant's father was involved in the decision-making of the remittance utilisation, which happened mainly in the joint/extended family.

Table3: Distribution of Recipients and Decision-makers Regarding Utilization of Remittances in Migrant Households

Recipients of remittances	No. of Cases	Percentage
Migrant's mother	258	12.9
Migrant's father	373	18.65
Migrant's wife	1342	67.1
Other members	27	1.35
Decision-makers about the Utilization of Remittances		
Migrant	493	24.7
Migrant's Wife	964	48.2
Jointly	125	6.3

Migrant Father	344	17.2
Migrant's mother	74	3.7

Source: Field Survey, 2021

(iii) **Family finances during difficult times:**

During hardship, women without husbands are left to oversee and handle the family's expenses. Thus, migrant wives were asked how they managed household expenses when their husbands could not remit, and their responses are accommodated in Table 4. Nearly 40 per cent of the migrants' wives said they borrowed money from their neighbours. One-fourth of the migrant's wives said they borrowed money from their relatives, and the rest said they borrowed from their husband's friends in origin. Thus, the women single-handedly managed the household matter for a large part of the year without husbands.

Table4: Source of financial help obtained by the migrant wife in managing household affairs in the absence of remittances

Source of financial help taken by Migrant wife	No of cases	Percentage
From own gainful economic activities	461	26.96
Money borrowed from relatives	427	24.97
Money borrowed from Neighbours	530	30.99
From domestic livestock	222	12.98
Others	70	4.09

Source: Field Survey, 2021

(iv) **Physical mobility (market, medical, natal, and relatives' houses outside the village).**

In India, particularly in rural areas, most women stay back at home owing to the presence of the stronghold of patriarchy in rural society. The 'Ghunghat' or purdah, representing norms of female

seclusion, is significant in Indian society. If they go outside, they go with their husbands or with kith and kin. In other cases, they seek permission from their husbands or elderly family members to visit markets or friends. Table 5 shows an index with scores ranging from 1 to 3: 1 means they have to ask for permission, 2 means they have to accompany a family member, and 3 means they don't need permission to go outside. Overall, the mobility index shows higher freedom among migrant wife to go to the bank and visit their children's school.

Table5: Physical mobility across migrant wives (Mobility Score)

Nature of Movement	No Need Permission (%)	At least go with one member of the family (%)	Need of Permission (%)	Mean score
Market	77.0	21.8	1.2	2.3
Bank	94.2	3.5	2.4	2.82
School	94.2	3.5	2.4	2.82
Hospital/Primary Health Clinic	76.1	17.4	6.5	2.2
Relative house/Natal house	52.0	6.0	42.0	1.55

Source: Field Survey, 2021