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Footprints of Covid-19 Pandemic on Reverse Migrant Workers to Their Native Places: A Case Study of 4 Selected Villages of Ranaghat Ii Block in Nadia District, West Bengal

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Abstract:

The unanticipated and unparalleled proportion of reversed migration of the massive migrant workers triggered by the covid-19 pandemic has been an excessive count to their native places. This paper is attempting to view the impacts of the pandemic on growing trends of the reverse migrants. So, a micro-level study has been conducted with the primary survey to the concerned areas where returned migrants are much present at this time. The study concentrates to bring out the socio-economic status of the reverse migrants, the pattern of their present engagements, and the disorder of their social environment during the pandemic phase. The study also deeply evaluates the conditions of the predicament-afflicted village economy which is overburdened by the arrivals of its returned children losing their jobs for the unexpected lockdown. The key concern of the study is to look at the immediate aftereffect of jobs cut-out, income loss and social stigmatization, and other facets of the labour migrants of the informal sectors. primary and secondary data both are the main sources of investigating the issues. Some simple statistical techniques have been used to visualize the problems. The study also focuses on the imbalance of economic dealings and the possible risks of the extra countless migrant labours and their respective families. Alternative livelihoods can be deliberate choices to earn minimum wages for restoring the village economy. This can be revived with the assistance of state bodies and self-ways which is also a matter of discussion of this paper.

Keywords: Reversed Migrant, Covid-19 Pandemic, Lockdown, Social-Stigmatization

1. Introduction: The encumbrance of a widespread lockdown in India in response to the Novel corona pandemic in March 2020 has been triggered a massive reverse migration in the country and becomes an empirical threat to mankind and their livelihood. The pandemic leads the second largest mass migration in India's history after the partition. (Inamdar and Thusoo, 2020). It is witnessed that hundreds of thousands of labourers going back to their

villages to survive more than anything else. This paper concentrates on the various impacts of pandemic lead the socio-economic conditions of the reverse migrants disastrously coming from mainly informal sectors to their native places where it faces the daunting challenges of absorbing these large number of returnees into the village economy. The study focuses on how to reverse migration from urban to rural areas drastically changes the pattern of need, availability of resources of their source region.

The available census data implies a wide reality about migration in India. According to 2011 census data, it is observed that the total number of internal migrant workers is near about 450 million which is 30 % higher than the scenario of the 2001 census. Field realities also give indications that Uttar Pradesh, Bihar followed by Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Rajasthan, and West Bengal are the biggest source states of migrants. West Bengal ranks 4th among the states from where people migrate. It is estimated that between 2001 and 2011, 5.8 lakh people had migrated from Bengal. (Census 2011)

So, Migration is a prominent option for earning and livelihood in most states of the country including west Bengal for which people move in search of better wages and work mostly single or with families. But during the pandemic we all have been witnessed nerve-wrenching images of an exodus of these migrants crossing inter-state or inter-district borders barefooted, being starved, and having no life security. This paper attempts to figure out the footprints of pandemic on the migrants back to their homes.

2. The Objective of the Study:

The present study focused on the subsequent objectives:

1. Looking at the varied psychosocial factors related to reverse labour migration among the migrant workers in informal sectors.
2. Researching the quantitative changes of labour migration.
3. Analysing the ways of how the pandemic put migrants in an unfavourable situation.
4. Gauging the impact of covid-19 on employment scenario, income status, and well-being of reverse migrants in selected villages.
5. Focussing on when and how the reverse of the reverse migrant would occur.

3. Rationale of the Study: The study of the Paper undergoes to a microlevel as fairly on attempt for understanding the growing trend of home coming workers from different states of the country. For understanding the viewpoint of the returnees who are already retreat to their destination and a few of whom are attempting to plan for going back to their Job destination are interacted. The pandemic has stop working the gate way of the incomes of varied level. The reverse labourers from mostly informal sectors are crowded to their origin without having any option. This enormously hits the village economy. So, the purpose of the study is to drag out the key reasons for such reverse migration trends and the future effect on village economy and environmental sustainability which is sinking more because the days passes on.

4. Literature Review: Migration is an integral part of the Indian Economy and constitutes a significant share of the country's GDP. Out of 482 million workers in India, about 194 million are permanent and semi-permanent migrant workers as per the 2011 census. The literature on migration economies emphasized push factors as to operate at the origin so as pull factors at the destination places. (Bhagat,2018)

According to Kohli (2010) it is stated that under-development, low wages, unemployment, and the increasing number of landless workers are mostly found in the native places which mainly create migration.

All sections of the economy get immense pressure due to the pandemic and had to cut out the jobs, and among them, poor migrants from the informal sections are the most vulnerable group. (Bhagat et al 2020, Thomas 2020)

Bhattacharya (1998) found that the informal sector is no longer the least attractive employment sector. Over time this sector comprises huge economic activities. He (2002) also highlighted the urbanization and rural-urban migration are co-related with positive consequences of economic development.

Srivastava (2009) found that remittances and profound salaries are a significant addition to migrant laborers' income. This brings changes in workers' lifestyles, tastes, perceptions, standards of living. The risk of the job loss is higher for those worked in disfranchised informal sectors. (Khanna,2020). (Damani et al, 2020) Now it is important for the government to facilitate adequate measure to mitigate the negative impact of unprecedented economic activity. Health issues of the workers are also the matter of concern as safety protocols are not taken care of widely.

It is also important to look after the marginalised risk prone community in this pandemic period (Qiu et al, 2020, Rajan et al, 2020) and give importance on how to overcome from depression and behavioural disorders of the returnees.

With the overviewed of the literature review the study is now focussing on the impact of Covid-19 pandemic on the Socio-economic status of reverse migrants in the study area and the effects on rural economy.

4. Selection of Study Area: From the census data, it's evident that out-migration usually happens in rural sectors. In west Bengal nevertheless shows the identical scenario too. While studying the raising pattern of covid-19 pandemic cases, the Nadia district shows positive trends of reverse migrants. So, a micro-level study has been done based upon the Jugal Kishore Gram panchayet having 10 no. of villages under Ranaghat II block in Nadia district, West Bengal. The census data provided within the further study gives a transparent view of the gap between the working group of population and total workers. Hence, it's significantly perceptible that a major number of populations is out migrated to other states for job opportunities. The study initiates with 120 such labour respondents in selected villages for establishing the perception of the objectives of the study.

5. Database and Methodology: This study is an analytical one based on both secondary and primary data. By reviewing the available published literature, articles, journals, reports, and District census Handbook the study has been done.

Primary data are being collected from reverse migrants who come to their native places. Sets of questionnaires have been prepared for the survey. So purposive sampling is taken in this context. A total number of 120 returnees and their families have been interviewed directly. Knowledge was gained from a database of springer, PubMed, Taylor and Francis, Sage journal, and google scholar.

To investigate the factors affecting dimensions of risk among the migrants simple statistical techniques and analysis have been done for data analysis.

6. Findings of The Study: In West Bengal, District Nadia is situated between 22°53" and 24°11" North latitude and 88°09" and 88°48" East longitude having 17 no of blocks with 51.68 lakh populations within 3927 sq. km contributes a literacy rate of 75.58%. Ranaghat II block is taken as the study area where a mixing of rural and urban populations is seen. Among 14 Gram panchayets under this block, Jugal Kishore Gram panchayet is chosen and 4 villages namely Basta, Goalsalua, Panchberia, Sabdalpur are taken as the study area. With 30 respondents from each villages togetherly 120 migrants are taken as target groups who had returned to their villages from various destination places. Purposive Random sampling is done with the sets of questionnaires to obtain the quantitative as well as qualitative data. The gram panchayet has 5074 no of households with 21,074 rural populations within an area of 1606.42 hectares (CENSUS, 2011). The primary survey was done from January to July 2021. The 4 villeges have total population of 13960 under 3410 no. of households. From the following table:1 it is visible that the total workers compared to working group of population is considerably less. So it is evident that a large group of population have to migrate from the state or within the state as the workers ratio varies from 32 to 40. The study randomly collects the samples from the migrants among these villages where workers ratio is much less compared to the other villages.

Table:1 showing population of selected villages under Jugal Kishore gram panchayet

Villages	Number of households	Total population (including institutional and houseless population)	working group of population	Total_workers	workers ratio
Basta	747	3074	2810	923	32.846975
Goalsalua	903	3717	3404	1218	35.781434
Panchbaria	611	2432	2211	832	37.630032
Sabdapur	1149	4737	4346	1755	40.38196

Source: census of India 2011

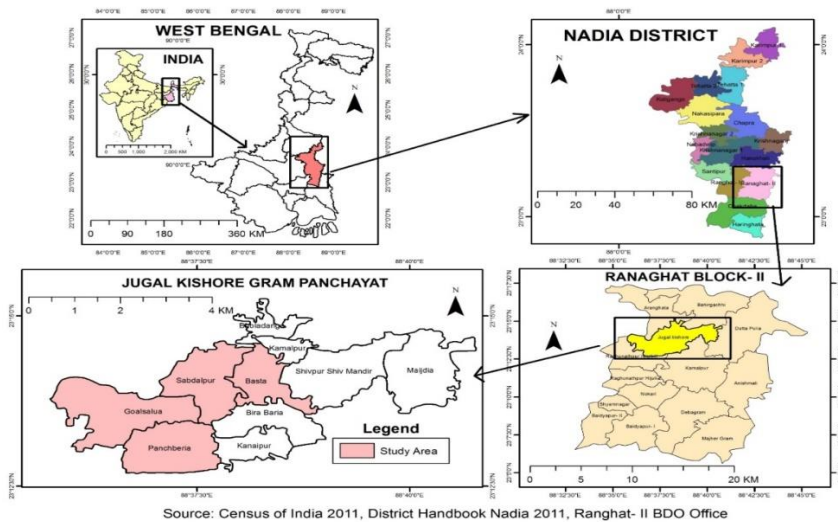


Fig:1 Locational Map of the Study Area

7.1 Demographic status of the reversed migrants: It is very important to mention that many migrants working in disfranchised informal sectors had no choice but to return their home due to various causes during the pandemic phase. While surveying the group of the migrant workers of the selected villages it is observed that the section of above 35 years aged workers mostly migrate when they were young (fig: 2). They reside there from many years.

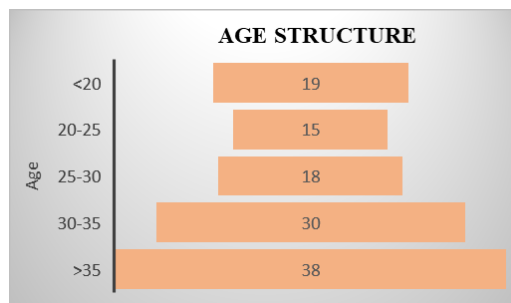


Fig:2 Source: primary data

The married ratio is higher than single status of the migrant workers. The dependant family members of the migrant workers in their native place is much higher. so, it is obvious that they migrate to the work place alone to deficit their expenses at there as well as they can earn more remittances through over times having no family work at there. (Table 2) The ratio of earning members of the migrant family is lowest in Goalsalua village 26.49 as the dependant member is highest here. The education level of the migrants is mostly belong to primary level and second highest group of migrants has no education. 12 migrants from the total respondents only have seceondary level of education which is also a push factor for migrating to other places in search of work.

Table:2 Showing the demographic status of the surveyed migrants of the selected villages in numbers.

Name of the villages	No. single	No. of mrrd	No_of depandant in family in native place	No of depandant in destination area	No. of family members	No of earning members in family	ratio of earning member	primary	upper primary	secondary	illrates
BASTA	8	22	74	4	109	35	32.11009	15	3	3	9
Goalsalua	10	20	86	1	117	31	26.49573	12	5	2	11
Panchbaria	5	25	80	0	113	33	29.20354	8	7	3	12
Sabdalpur	4	26	84	0	115	31	26.95652	11	6	4	9

Source: primary data

The another push factors that initiate them for migration is maximum is for searching a decent work with higher wages 96.4%.(fig: 3). Education and marriage secure lowest percentages respectively.

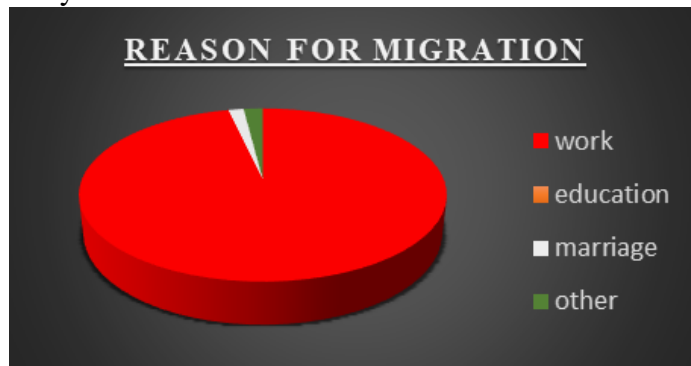


Fig: 3 Source: primary data

33.9% respondents stated that they are living their destinating place almost above 2 to 4 years and 2.7% of workers are just new to get the job and migrate to other place for meeting their basic needs. So, it is obvious that village economic burden led them to migrate and make them and their family to survive. Table:3 shows after lockdown 52.4% of returnees confirmed that they have stayed more than 18 months which is very tough for them without having proper earning. The sigma worked so deeply that they had to reverse to their home majorly second week of the first declared lockdown having no perception how to return back maintaining the minimum hygiene so that they can save themselves from the contiguous disease. In fig:4 it is clearly shown that 70% migrant labourers returned back in the midst of pandemic situation. So it can be beyond imagination how would be it difficult for them to leave their livelihood in sack of life.

Table:3 staying at destination and native places

Duration of stay to their destination place	% of respondants	Duration of stay to the native places after lockdown	% of respondants
<12 months	2.7	< 6 MONTHS	10.1
12-24 month	17.8	6-12 MONTHS	27.6
24-48 month	33.9	12-18 MONTHS	52.4
48-72 month	25.8	>18 MONTHS	9.9
>72 months	19.8		

Source: primary data

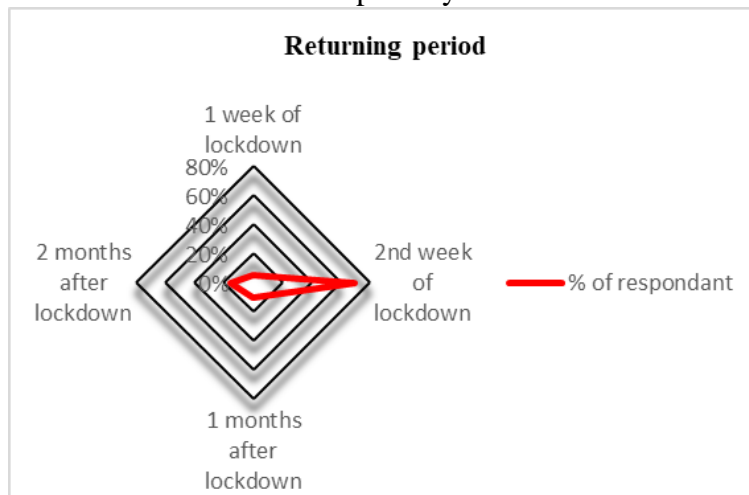


Figure:4 Source: primary data

6.2. Pandemic and its effect on Migrants:

Reasons of their reverse back to home came out in different aspects from the study. The Figure:5 has shown the distribution of the main factors that make them to get back to their hometown. 32% workers stated that they badly seek mental support to stay near to their families following 30% workers who said that they had no work due to the closure of sectors and 22% workers opined that due to sudden lockdown is the key factor to get back to their home. 7% of workers got sudden notice to leave their rent house or the shelter where they stay in their destination places for the fear of being contaminated or can be virus effected. Few stated that the landlords evacuated them forcefully.

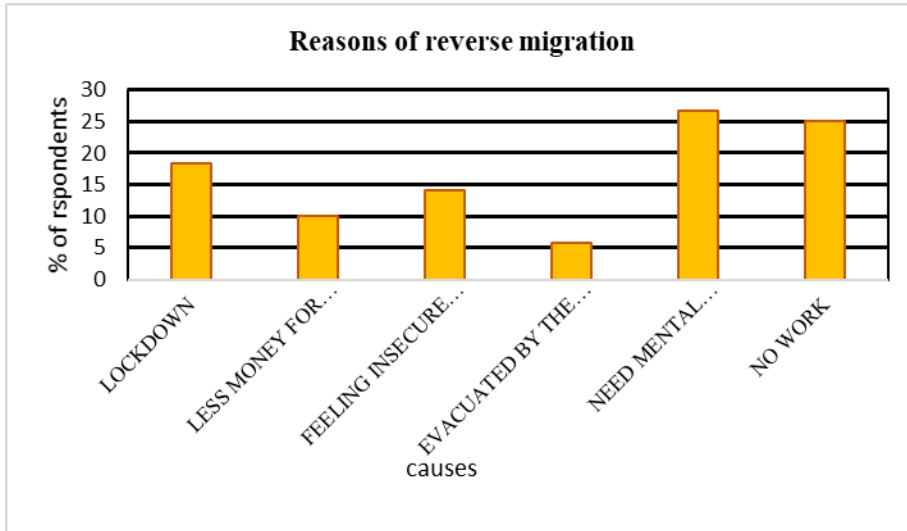


Figure:5 Source: primary data

As the study has been done at micro level, data of the returned migrants to their own villages from different parts of the country has been collected and plotted. In fig:6 the 30% workers confirmed that they reversed back from kerala, 21% from Maharashtra and 17% within the different parts of the state. Some sailed to Andaman also. So, it can be assumed that how much it would be difficult for them to get back at the time of pandemic situation.

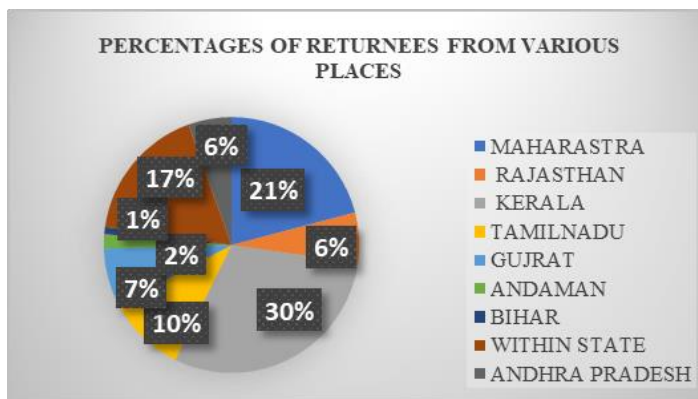


Figure:6 source: primary data

Fig:7 shows how it was arduous journey for them to get back home as the sudden lockdown had been declared. The diagram shows a view that people from different parts of the country attempted any means of transports either by bus, train (Sramik special) or by rent vehicles or trucks. Some of them are deliberately returned by barefoot or paddling cycle without having no option. Of them 57% of workers returned by train, 24% returned through truck, 18% returned through rented vehicles by hanging from the sides.

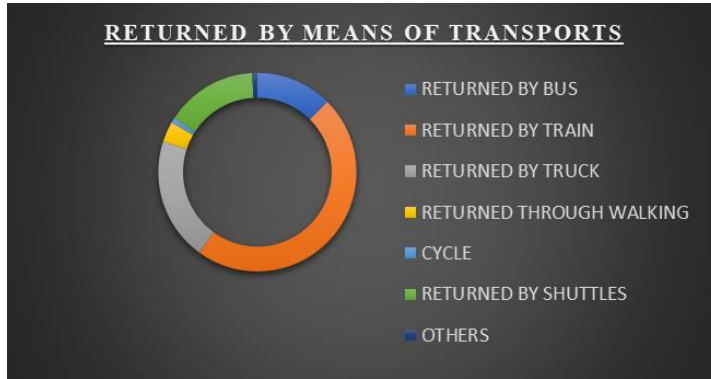


Figure:7 source:primary data

Some more episodes are still waiting for them when they reach to their native places being hungry, exhausted and extremely devastated condition both mentally and physically. They have been quarantined for a forth night. In the fig: 8 it shows maximum returnees to Basta village underwent to quarantine phase. In Fig:9 majority of the migrants suffered from having proper meal throughout this period though local bodies tried their level best to provide other basic amenities such as water, shelter, medicines.

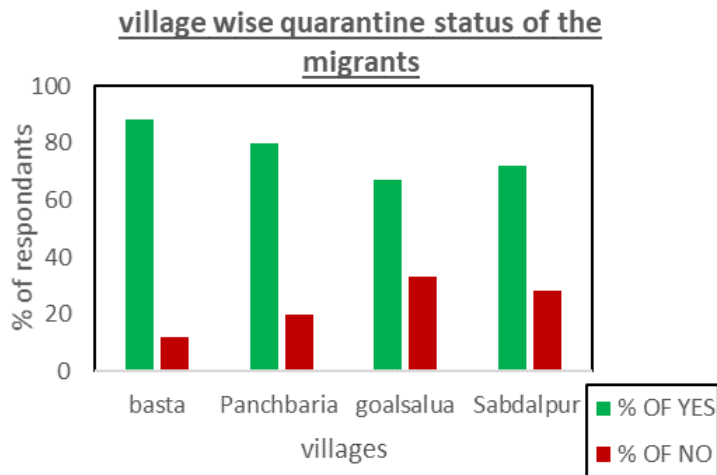


Fig:8

source:primary data

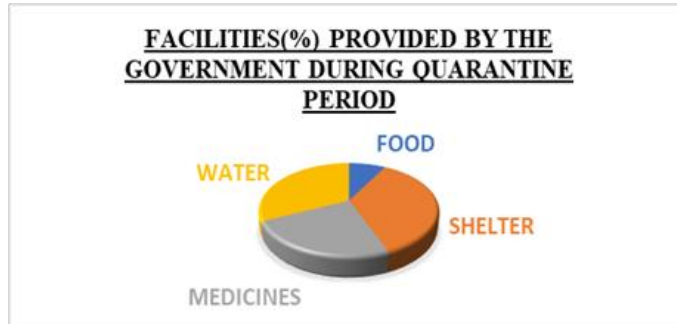


Figure: 9

Source: primary data

7.3. Present scenario of the socio-economic status: While losing job has been a main driver of reverse migration from destination place, lack of employment and work opportunities in the distressed rural economic sector is also a matter of concern for the returnees. Due to limited resource of rural economies to create the additional working sections and to absorb the labour force in current pandemic phase, it is evident from table: 4 that a large proportion of returnees are now workless, Basta village shows a clear view of unemployment. Few secure as casual labourers and 10 % workers engage themselves in poultry farming, contractual labourer and earn minimal wages. In India (Basu, 2020) the pandemic has highlighted the tendency of cumulative food uncertainty with high pricing of petrol and diesel, it also similar view to the respondent's family also. They starve with limited food resource. A comparative analysis has been done based on their monthly income before and after lockdown in fig: 10 and fig: 11 where it is clearly visible that their monthly income has been reduced to less than 2000rs, where as many of them earned nearly 8000 rs on an average.

Table:4 Present socio-economic status of the reverse migrants to their native place

Name of villages	Unemployed	Working in the same field	Working in the family farm	Casual workers	Poultry farm	Started new business	Contractual worker	Others	Total surveyed migrants
Goalsalua	3	3	3	8	4	2	3	4	30
basta	11	4	2	6	0	3	2	2	30
Panchbaria	3	4	4	5	1	4	2	7	30
Sabdalpur	0	2	6	6	2	4	5	5	30

Source: primary survey

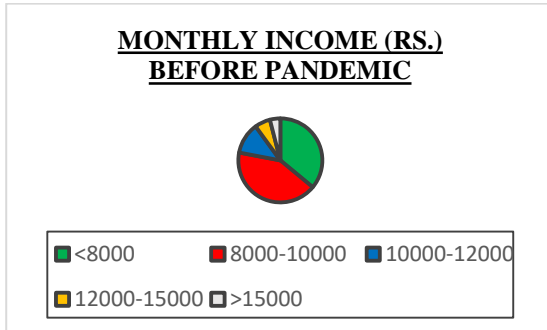


Figure: 10

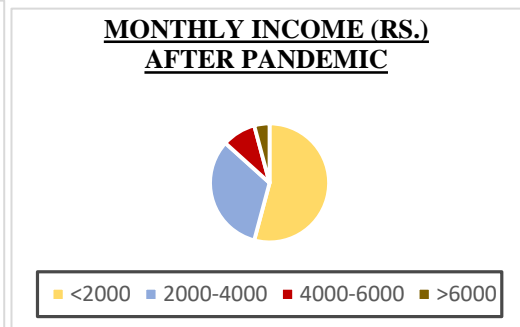


figure: 11 source: primary data

In some cases, returnees confront stigmatization and prejudice, as they are professed as potential importers of virus and as escalating the risk of contact to covid-19 (FAO, 2020a). For instance, stigmatization resulted in local communities isolating and even preventing them to return home and quarantine them without proper shelter and food which is discussed before.

Moreover, environmental shocks and stresses have exacerbated food insecurity and risk of rural populations in the pandemic context. (Ahmad,2020) in this study it is found that frequent cyclone and floods severely affect their livelihood losing crops, livestock fish capture. Thus, the return migrants can put pressure on natural resources and have long term implications for environmental sustainability.

7.4 Why they want to go back: The lack of decent work, the good income and moreover savings are the pulling factors for the workers to reverse back again as a matter of living. In fig: 12 it is shown that 78.2% workers are willing to go back to their previous place while 22% want to live with their families. Village wise distribution of work patterns of the labourers before lockdown period has been shown in fig:13, where it is seen that mostly workers work in domestic sectors in their destination places, Sabdalpur shows casual workers are mostly clustered in their workplaces. Apart from that industrial workers, agricultural workers are also seen. Now having many dependents they have expensed all their savings and as a result of the pandemic crisis, migration shapes have started to shift in instances. Overtime, savings and good income are the reason for getting back again. (fig:14)



Figure:12

Source: Primary data

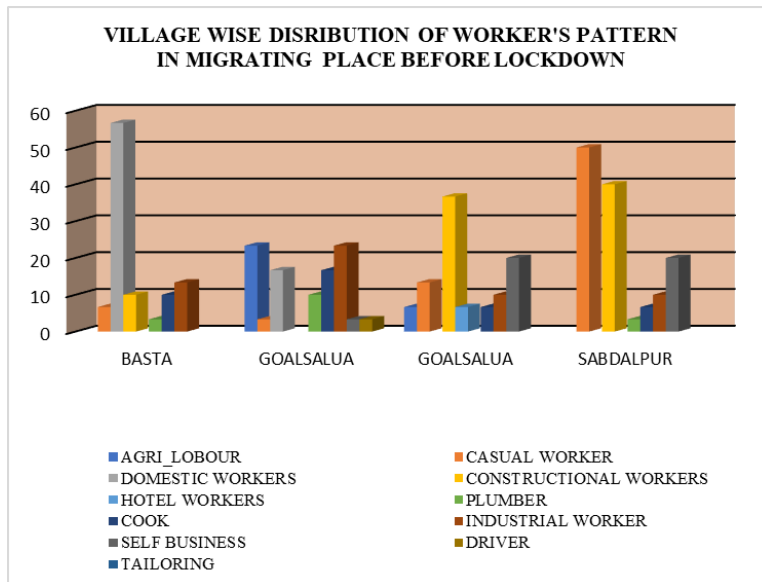


FIG:13

Source: Primary data

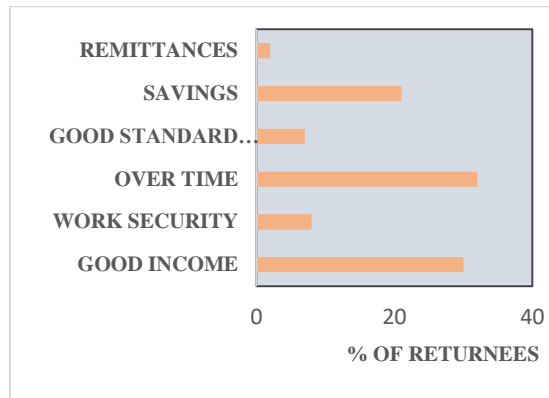


Figure:14

source: primary data

7.5. Survival Strategy: It is visible that many of the workers unable to move to their destination due to periodic lockdown. Neither they have been allowed to accommodate in their shelters of destination nor even they get their work back. The uncertainty, anxiety constantly works to their mind.

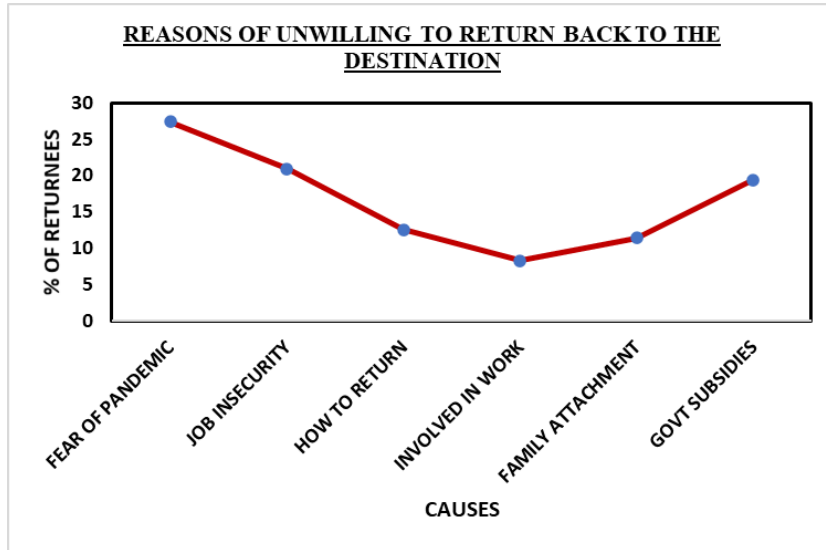


Figure:15

source: primary data

In this context figure: 15 shows 27.4 % workers don't get back to return in fear of pandemic, 19.7% workers already subsidize themselves under government policies. 8.3% workers replied with the satisfaction of getting low wages jobs which gives them basic standard of living, tastes, having minimum options to recreate themselves. Moreover, the attachment with the families are issues to those workers. They want to build up some small-scale businesses in their rural area by their own where money is a big matter for them.

7. Conclusion: The dilemma of the labour migrants on which they are going through is a tough phase undoubtedly. Their decision to reverse back to their destination would be more strenuous and expensive too or may be impossible due to lockdown implications or regional recession. Alternative options should be immediately provided to them. Effective policies should be henceforth implemented so that they can come under economic protection. As the covid-19 pandemic situation is still emerging at a rapid pace and springing socio-economic impact is anticipated to be enduring. It is important to take measures addressing the utmost needs of the returnees and their families and to promote the impact of reintegration efforts. So, it is urging after the detailed study not to overlook their situation rather implement sustainable works for them to cover up the potholes.

The insertion and contemplation of homecoming migrant worker's socio-economic needs like social protection and emergency services such as cash and food support, temporary employment opportunities, loan payment need to give priority.

Returning migrants should be involved in reunification programs that may consider focusing on the chances and potential for the survival of the rural economy. The stress should be given on setting up of the small-scale profitable businesses and incorporation should be done in govt schemes such as forestry and timber collection, sericulture, Garment

making, etc. for this agriculture and Non-agricultural loan must be initiated to the workers which are also under processing.

9. Limitation: As the survey was done in the phase of lockdown many obstructions were occurred such as accessibility to the survey area, presence of the migrants at home, their desirability to give the answer as they were not in such position or state of mind.

10. Acknowledgement: The Author conveys her sincere gratitude to them who worked on these vulnerable people of the society earlier, now and future and to the villegers of the studied area for their immense help and support. The author bows to the families of the migrant workers who constantly cooperated with the long conversations despite of having their own troubles. The author expresses her thanks to her teachers and friends who encourage her throughout the work.

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