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To stay put or migrate: Dynamics of migration in a village in Jharkhand, India

ABSTRACT

Through a study of a village in Jharkhand, India, the paper maps the migration process of workers due to the structural transformation of the rural area. The nature of transformation in Jharkhand has led to a process of migration as a temporary strategy. This paper illustrates the processes wherein the socio-economic dynamic of the village is reflected in different migration strategies which take the form of identity and assignment-based networks. The paper develops a rudimentary typology of migrant workers to map the differential effects of reverse migration. Reverse migration due to the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in lost skills, lost opportunities and increased competition which has affected workers in different networks and identity groups to varying extents. The breakdown of networks and their revival in the subsequent period led to the solidification of the identity-based networks, which is a reflection of the hierarchy in the village. The paper argues that reverse migration and the subsequent revival of the migration networks are taking on an exclusionary form that affect an already vulnerable population disproportionately.

KEYWORDS

COVID-19
temporary migration
structural transformation
reverse migration
assignment-based network and identity-based network
vulnerability

INTRODUCTION

India witnessed one of the most severe humanitarian crises since independence due to the sudden nationwide lockdown announced on the evening of 24 March 2020 with a notice period of four hours. It resulted in a large set of the working-class population, predominantly migrants, enduring sub-human conditions as they lost their jobs, earnings, access to food and shelter (Sen 2020). As a response to this historical humanitarian crisis, millions of migrant workers started marching back from various cities and urban destinations to their original rural homes (Bhagat et al. 2020; Dandekar and Ghai 2020).

The immediate effect of the nationwide lockdown was the shutdown of all economic activities and means of transport, except essential services. Millions of migrants at urban destinations lost their livelihoods overnight, while facing a severe health crisis due to anxiety and the fear of infection (Bhagat et al. 2020). The situation worsened when millions started returning to their homes in the hope of 'some warmth and empathy more than anything else' (Dandekar and Ghai 2020: 28). Countless migrants walking or cycling back home on empty highways for hundreds of kilometres, facing discrimination and inhuman treatment from various authorities, are by now well known due to the widespread circulation of narratives and images on national and international media (Priyadarshini and Chaudhury 2020; Shoaib Daniyal 2020).

An extensive set of scholarly literature during this pandemic period has focused on the challenges of migrants at urban destinations, their vulnerability while marching back to their homes and the failure of state authorities (Bhagat et al. 2020; Dandekar and Ghai 2020; Irudaya Rajan et al. 2020; Pal et al. 2021; Rajan and Bhagat 2021). Various consequences such as increased poverty, unemployment, inequality and so on, both at the urban destination and the rural source, have also been discussed (Guha et al. 2020; Kapoor 2020; Sengupta and Jha 2020; Singh 2020). Some, like Dandekar and Ghai, anticipated the crises at places of origin due to the reverse migration for which the rural economy is not yet ready (Dandekar and Ghai 2020). They noted that 'the source regions cannot be relied upon to take the additional load of the returning sons and daughters of the region' (Dandekar and Ghai 2020: 30). This article complements their speculation by providing an empirical insight into the migration dynamics and the impact of reverse migration on a place of origin. There is little understanding about how and why the vulnerability[1] of migrants has been increasing at the places of origin after the reverse migration.

To question this, the paper provides a detailed study of one village in Jharkhand to map the structural transformation leading to migration, socio-economic factors underpinning the village and ensuing migration strategies deployed by the migrants. The paper identifies three kinds of migration strategies: long-distance and intermediate-distance migrants and commuting workers. The paper maps the impact of reverse migration on long-distance and intermediate-distance migrants and the ensuing impact on commuting workers at the place of origin. It concludes with a note on the changing nature of migration networks since the pandemic and how they are solidifying around identity-based caste groups and the effect of this on those excluded from these networks.

It maps various processes through which the vulnerability of the migrants and the commuting workers has been increasing at the place of origin during the COVID-19 pandemic. It illustrates that the vulnerability of reverse migrant workers manifest in the form of earning and employment loss, skill loss,

1. The article borrows Vijay's (2005) definition of vulnerability.

opportunity cost in changing occupation and learning new skills, and in carrying out illegal activities for survival in the absence of any other livelihood options in the source place of migrants. Further, I argue, reverse migration has disrupted the assignment-based and identity-based migrant networks which reshaped the workers' networks at their place of origin. The new networks at place of origin negatively impacted the livelihood of commuting workers. The challenges and vulnerability of commuting workers was shown in the form of increased competition among workers to find employment amidst limited work opportunities available at the place of origin.

The paper is a result of a mixed-method study conducted from 2019 to 2021. The paper builds on data collected through surveys, interviews, informal conversations and observation at Kusumpali village[2] in Jharkhand, a state in eastern India. It also borrows secondary data from existing studies and the census of India. The first round of data was collected through ten months of extensive fieldwork carried out from May 2019 to March 2020 before the COVID-19 pandemic and ensuing lockdown in India. In the survey 269 households with a total population of 1262 individuals has been captured. A qualitative survey with a focus on the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on migrant and commuting workers was carried out for four months from September 2021 to December 2021, after the second wave of COVID-19 pandemic in India. During the second leg of the fieldwork, a qualitative survey, interviews, informal conversations and observations were deployed. This qualitative approach was used to capture the experience of temporary migrants who migrated back from various urban destinations to the village of origin during the pandemic, by incorporating the experience of the temporary migrant workers of different migrant networks originating from Kusumpali village. It captured the experience of the commuting workers and their struggle to find employment options after the retuning migrant workers crowded out both agricultural and non-agricultural activities at the place of origin and at local commuting-distance workplaces.

2. I have changed the village name and all personal names.

LITERATURE REVIEW: STRUCTURAL TRANSFORMATION AND TEMPORARY MIGRATION

Since the early years of India's independence, the country has witnessed a sustained structural change in agriculture with a significant share of workers moving away from agriculture to non-agricultural activities (see Figure 1). However, the scale of the transformation has altered drastically since 1983 when it was observed that the magnitude of the movement was 4.7 per cent during the initial three decades of independence, and has sharply shifted to 23.2 per cent since 1983 (Behera 2015: 198). The transformation can also be gleaned in the last census of India, conducted in 2011, when a 8.9 million self-cultivator farmers moved away from agriculture (Motkuri and Naik 2016: 63).

The movement of workers away from agriculture has not been accompanied by a declining share of income generated from agriculture, i.e., the share of agriculture to the total national income of India, nor has it been proportional with the declining trend of the rural population to the total population (Behera 2015; Chandramouli 2011; Mathur et al. 2006). Agriculture is of significant importance to growth (Khan et al. 2020; Pathak Neetu 2009); however, the dependence of workers on agriculture has been declining drastically. Similarly, people have been temporarily moving to non-agricultural

activities and not permanently leaving rural areas. The sharp decline in the percentage share of workers in the agricultural sector, the dramatic increase in the share of workers in non-agricultural sectors and the slower decline of the rural population indicates the process of temporary movement of workers away from agriculture and the rural areas to carrying out non-agricultural activities available in various urban areas.

In India, this phenomenon of temporary migration is seven times more prevalent than permanent migration. This migration strategy is largely adopted by rural people belonging to the lower socio-economic and educational strata migrating away from rural to urban areas (Keshri and Bhagat 2013). Temporary migration has been recognized as a diversification strategy to stimulate household income by spreading the family members across different occupations by migrating to various urban areas for a short period of time (Deshingkar and Farrington 2009; Keshri and Bhagat 2017). Workers have been moving to various non-agricultural sectors of work such as the construction sector, non-skilled industrial activities and the services sector (hotels, salons, restaurants, securities services, domestic services, transport, communications, etc.) (Dandekar and Ghai 2020; Reddy 2015). The construction sector has been noted to be an easy avenue for agricultural workers to carry out unskilled and semi-skilled work (Reddy 2015).

These non-agricultural activities are not located and distributed proportionally across the regions of India. This leads to some regions being the source place which supplies the workers, while others become the destinations for non-agricultural activities. States such as Bihar (Datta 2020), Jharkhand (Bhagat 2016; Rao and Mitra 2013; Shah 2006), Odisha (Mishra 2016), Madhya Pradesh (Deshingkar et al. 2008), Uttar Pradesh (Sarkar 2020), etc., act as source places while states and cities such as Kerala (Parida et al. 2020; Peter et al. 2020), Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana act as destinations for migrant workers (Chandrasekhar and Sharma 2014; Choithani 2021; Marchang 2017; Mukherjee and Dutta 2017;

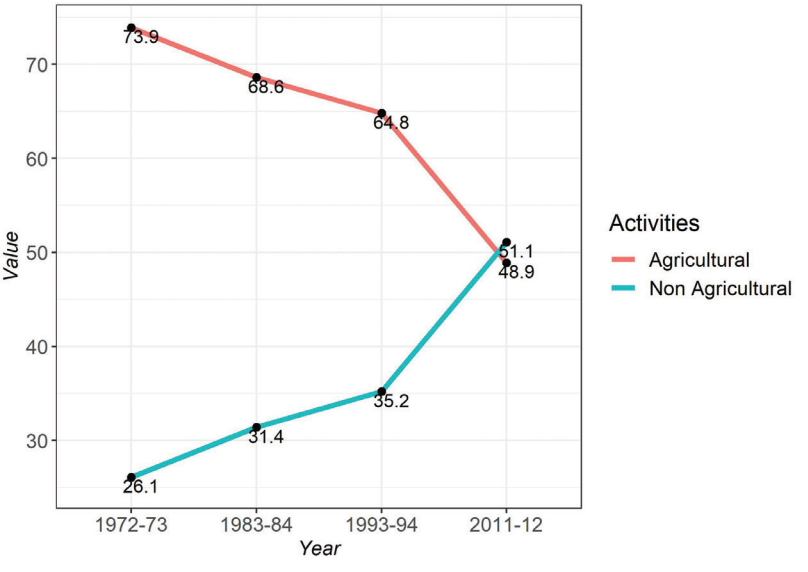

Figure 1: Percentage share of workers. Source: Reddy 2015.

Singh 2014). These regional disparities have been highlighted significantly in the post-liberalization era when cities grew unevenly across India and some regions emerged as the hub of growth which placed a demand for cheap labour stimulating internal migration within India (Rajan and M. 2019). The latest census (2011) and National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) (64th round 2007–08) macro-level data on migration have displayed drastic increases in internal migration within India (Kumari 2014).

The number of seasonal temporary migrants from Jharkhand is almost double the national average as the scale of seasonal temporary migrants per thousand of the working-age population (age bracket of 15–64 years) is 36 against 20 (Keshri and Bhagat 2012). Jharkhand also contributed to a larger share of women migrants for domestic work to the different big cities of India (Wadhawan 2013). Existing literature has noted Jharkhand to be a source place of temporary migrants, where they follow different strategies such as seasonal and short-term migration to urban destinations. Marginalized and socio-economically vulnerable communities such as Scheduled Caste (SC), Scheduled Tribe (ST), Muslims and so on form a large proportion of temporary migrants (Bhagat 2016; Shah 2006; Sucharita and Rout 2020). Migration has also been noted to affect the vulnerability of those left behind, such as the left-behind children and left-behind women (Mahapatro 2018; Roy et al. 2015).

It is amidst this context that the paper raises two questions vis-à-vis reverse migration during the pandemic: first, how and why the vulnerability of migrant workers has been increasing; second, what is the impact of reverse migration on commuting workers, i.e. those who did not migrate outside the district and struggled to find livelihood options at the place of origin?

METHODOLOGY

To investigate the challenges and vulnerabilities of migrants and commuting workers during the COVID-19 pandemic, a mixed-method approach was used. An extensive fourteen-month fieldwork was conducted in a source place of migrants, Kusumpali village of Jharkhand. Census data and other secondary data were used to establish the arguments related to the structural transformation in India, the movement of workers from agricultural to non-agricultural activities and the temporary nature of the process of migration of workers from the rural source to urban destination.

The methods deployed during the fieldwork included survey, interviews, informal conversations and observations. The field site was purposely selected as the migration data in the two main data sources in India – the census of India and NSSO – did not reflect the temporary movement of workers from one place to another (Bhagat 2008; Dandekar and Ghai 2020).

The fieldwork was conducted in two rounds, the first from May 2019 to March 2020 before COVID-19-related restrictions in India, and the second from September 2021 to December 2021 after the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in India. During the first round, a survey was conducted to collect data concerning basic social, economic, cultural and political details of households. It also included detailed profiles of individuals such as age, sex, years of education, occupation and so on. In total, 269 households and 1262 individual members were surveyed. During the first round qualitative methods were also used such as interviews, informal conversations and observations.

These methods were also used in the second round. The goal was to capture the impact of COVID-19 pandemic-related reverse migration and its

effect on the vulnerability of migrant workers and commuting workers at the place of origin of migrants. The trajectories of three groups of workers, one group working within the district at local workplaces, another working in the neighbouring districts and the third working at the far distant places outside the state were captured at the place of origin. The experiences of contractors and hosts of different migrant networks were captured through interviews and informal conversations.

PROFILE OF KUSUMPALI VILLAGE

Spatial dimension

Kusumpali village is situated in Ramgarh district at the heart of Jharkhand. The village is located in the Gola sub-district of Ramgarh at a distance of around 55 km from Ranchi, the capital city of Jharkhand, with frequent bus services available from Gola to both Ramgarh and Ranchi. The nearest railway stations are at Ramgarh and Gola. Birsa Munda Airport at Ranchi connects the region to the major cities of India.

Socio-economic and educational profile of the village

Kusumpali village is populated by a heterogenous group of people belonging to multiple religious and caste groups. The village has both Hindu and Muslim populations and multiple caste groups. The caste groups are the Ansari, Bediya, Goswami, Karmali, Kumhar, Mahto, Munda, Nai, Nayak, Rajput and Sahoo. The traditional castes of the village are Ansari, Kumhar, Mahto and Nayak. Caste groups like the Nai and Karmali etc. settled later in the village to provide caste-based services under the 'Jajmani system'.[3]

The village is numerically dominated by Mahto caste households followed by Ansari and Kumhar, further followed by the other caste groups, mainly by the SC and ST[4] groups (see Table 1). The Mahto caste occupies the leading position in the economic dimension of the village, whereas the SC and ST groups are at the bottom in two socio-economic factors: land-holding patterns and education (see Table 1). The Kumhar caste closely follows the Mahto caste in the indicators.

Structural transformation of Kusumpali village

It can be observed from Table 2 that the economy of Kusumpali village has been changing drastically during the last two census decades. The agricultural worker population has been changing disproportionally across decades as reflected in Table 2. Movement of workers towards rural non-agricultural economy[5] has been observed from 1991 to 2001 where a sharp increase is visible in the percentage of main non-agricultural workers to total main workers. However, it decreased in the next decade, 2001 to 2011. Similarly, a sharp increase in the marginal worker population can be perceived between 1991 and 2001 with a sharp decrease in 2001–11. This disproportional change indicates uncertainties associated with livelihood options available in both agricultural and non-agricultural activities in the village.

This has led to diversification of occupations of family members outside the village. The disproportional change in the share of workers both in agricultural and rural non-agricultural activities across decades indicates the process of temporary movement away from village. The disproportional change in the proportion of actual to expected total population indicates the

3. See Gough (1960).
4. Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes are one of the officially categorized socio-economically disadvantaged groups in India.
5. The rural non-agricultural economy here include those working in household industries and other workers. It is generally workers engaged in non-agricultural activities located in the village.

Table 1: Household survey conducted by the author.

Caste	Ansari	Bediya (ST)	Goswami	Karmali (ST)	Kumhar	Mahto	Munda (ST)	Nai	Nayak (SC)	Rajput	Sahoo	Grand total
Religion	Muslim	Hindu	Hindu	Hindu	Hindu	Hindu	Hindu	Hindu	Hindu	Hindu	Hindu	
No. of HHs	85	5	1	9	42	96	1	2	22	1	5	269
Asset index (%)[6]	30.42	0.75	0.66	1.46	18.55	44.83	0.01	1.30	1.20	0.01	0.79	
Percentage of land held by individual caste to the total land in the village	9.26	7.54	0	0	27.11	53.15	0	0.68	0.33	0	1.93	
Percentage of years of education attended by all members of a caste to the total years of education in the village	34.43	1.37	0.44	3.37	16.14	32.04	0.36	1.37	6.96	2.16	1.37	

Table 2: Author's calculation from Primary Census Abstract, Census of India 1991, 2001 and 2011.

Year	**1991**	**2001**	**2011**
Main agricultural workers to total main workers (%)	91.9	28.3	66.8
Main non-agricultural workers to total main workers (%)	8.1	71.6	32.9
Marginal workers to total workers (%)	20.7	81.1	32.9
Total population	799	1023	1200
Expected population (after adjusting with natural growth rate)	[1]	996	1242

[1] Not calculated as I have only analysed the structural transformation of Kusumpali village from 1991 not before 1991.

6. During the survey, every household was asked about a set of ten basic durable assets, ranging from cows to cars, that a household in the rural society generally possesses. The index is a compound weighted index that is calculated by adding the weighted values of all assets that a household owns. The weight was computed from the relative price of the asset in relation to the highest-priced asset – i.e., tractor in this case; see Pani (2020).

process of temporary movement away from the village and also the process of continuous interaction between the village and workplaces located outside the village.

Agricultural activities in the village

The above inference was confirmed during fieldwork. The survey data demonstrates that agriculture has been playing a minor role in providing livelihood options to the workers as only 8.4 per cent of the total working-age population were engaged in agricultural activities. This could be attributed to the village being dominated by landless households, constituting 52.04 per cent of the total number of households, against 47.96 per cent of landholding households. Even among the landholding households, 86.04 per cent of households have less than one acre of land.

The small land-holding pattern was one of the reasons for the minimum employability and dependency on the agricultural economy. The size of land in the village ranges from 0.02 acres to 2.5 acres. Households with more than one acre of land constitute around 14 per cent of the total landholding households. Thus, agriculture is not a viable option for the agricultural labourers as the relatively large cultivators hire agricultural labour for a short period of time, particularly during the harvesting season. Relatively large farmers prefer employing family members, extended family or members from their own caste group. In rare cases, large cultivators employed agricultural labour from outside their caste.

Non-agricultural activities in and around the village

Primary non-agricultural opportunities for those in the village are the dispersed industrial plants located in and around the village. The emergence of two large industries and the development of new educational and skills training centres led to the appearance of emerging markets around them. Local industrial economy is dominated by members of the landholding caste groups such as the Mahto and Kumhar castes. These two castes have dominated the local industrial economy by negotiating the exchange of their agricultural land for jobs in the industries. This has meant that the landless castes group, largely the SC and ST, have been excluded from the industrial economy. At the same time, industries are less interested in employing local workers. Industrialists considered hiring local workers a risk, instead preferring workers from different regions. Workers considered the nature of the work to be of low quality, with low wages and long working hours. Workers with formal education prefer not to work at local industries.

With the lack of options in the agricultural economy throughout the year for all the members of the family and across caste groups, and the lack of options in the local industrial non-farm economy, workers are compelled to find non-agricultural work options outside the village. The migration process has differed across groups as various sets of people developed alternative migration strategies based on the need and availability of migration options.

Contractors play an important role in building up migration networks outside the village. Moreover, the nature of migration networks is identity-based. Existing literature on chain migration has noted the process wherein one of the family members establishes initial contacts at the destination and the other family members and distant relatives follow the first mover (Banerjee 1983). However, in the case of Kusumpali, it was observed that

identity-based networks play a significant role in the process of migration. Following the first mover, and the migration of families and kins, the network is extended to the caste group. If and when demand for work increases at the destination, the network is further extended to other caste groups based on particular skills.

These networks can also be assignment-based wherein the host of the network, after establishing contacts at the destination, finds assignment-based work for workers in the place of origin as per demand. Such assignment-based migration is rationalized by the workers in order to reduce costs at the destination. This leads to temporary and continuous interaction between the place of origin and the destination location to maximize real gain.

THE PROCESS OF MIGRANT NETWORK FORMATION

A contractor, Amar Prajapati – the host of a network – who belongs to Kumhar caste, worked initially in Bengaluru and later in Hyderabad as a centring mason before the pandemic. He acquired skills in formwork in nearby places and then migrated to Bengaluru in the hope of earning more. His initial migration to Bengaluru was facilitated by a network developed by one of his co-workers who had contact with a local contractor in Bengaluru. While working in different construction sites in Bengaluru, over the course of a year Amar became an expert in formwork and also developed some networks which helped him to take independent contracts in Bengaluru. To take the independent contracts he took an informal loan from the Kumhar Samiti (Kumhar Committee[7]) functioning in the village. He mobilized certain workers from the village and from neighbouring places, initially from his own family, extended family and members of his caste, and later from different castes. This network functioned as an identity-based and assignment-based network where the demand in the destination location determined the magnitude of workers to be mobilized from the source location.

Similarly, another network of workers involved in welding-related work in Chennai was hosted by a person from the Ansari caste. The host, Aslam, previously worked as a tailor but migrated to Odisha to learn welding skills from one of his maternal uncles. Aslam stayed with his uncle and worked at different construction sites for one year and acquired welding-related skills. During that period, Aslam developed his network to get private independent contracts which later helped him to travel to other areas such as Bengaluru, Maharashtra, Goa, Chennai and so on to do welding-related work. Before the pandemic, for a period of six months, he was hosting a network of workers involved in welding-related work in Chennai. Through this network, he initially mobilized his younger brother and two of his cousins from the extended family as well as two of his neighbours. Later, he succeeded in developing a network of more than ten workers from the source place and neighbouring places.

The functioning of identity-based networks and assignment-based networks as demonstrated relies significantly on the identity of the host and the workers. This excludes a large set of workers, particularly the members of vulnerable caste groups such as the SC and ST, Nayaka, Karmali and so on. As mentioned before, the workers of these groups are already vulnerable because of lack of work in the agricultural and local industrial sectors due to being landless. Exclusion from migration networks such as those described above compound their vulnerability.

7. Kumhar Samiti is an informal committee of the Kumhar caste where every member of the committee pools a certain amount of money on a monthly basis and one person on the committee takes the sum at a given interest rate.

A TYPOLOGY OF MIGRATION STRATEGIES

There are three broad types of migration strategies which can be identified in the village. They are discussed in detail in the next three sub-sections. These include:

1. Commuting-distance workers (intra-district travel)
2. Out-of-district migration
   a. Intermediate-distance migrant workers (within the state)
   b. Long-distance migrant workers (outside the state).

Commuting-distance workers (intra-district travel)

The commuting workers travel daily to their workplace and have close contact with the village. I include them in this typology to distinguish them from local non-farm workers as well as local agricultural workers. They spend their whole day at the workplaces located within the district and spend a considerable amount of time in transit. The main focus of this cohort of workers is to maximize their earning from non-agricultural activities and minimize risk due to uncertainties in the non-agricultural sectors by keeping a close interaction with the source village.

The members of this cohort include people who remain unable to migrate outside the district due to lack of initial capital and/or exclusion from migration networks. These workers are relatively older than the other classified groups, with an average age of 36 years. They also tend to be less educated, with an average 6.1 years of education. They also prefer working close to the village as 83 per cent of them are married and have families. The workers in this group are engage in tailoring activities, as masons, JCB drviers, auto and bus drivers, plumbers, brick-making activities etc. The leading destinations of this group of workers are the nearby towns of Gola and Ramgarh. This cohort of workers includes those from all caste groups. The members of the SC and ST groups such as Nayak, Karmali and so on are compelled to work within the district as they have neither the migration capital nor migration networks to migrate to far-off places.

Out-of-district migration

There are significant overlaps between the experience of intermediate-distance migrants and long-distance migrants. One of the most important distinctions among the two groups is that the workers consider intermediate-distance places, which are inside the state but outside the district, as places of learning, acquiring new skills and building networks, that is, they consider it a stepping-stone before engaging in long-distance migration. Due to lack of space, I cannot delve into this distinction further, hence I have classified them as a sub-type.

Intermediate-distance migrant workers (within the state)

The workers in this group engage in occupations such as JCB drivers, welding masons, centring masons, plumbers, brick kiln workers etc. This set of workers are relatively younger than commuting workers, and largely includes workers belonging to Ansari and Mahto castes. These networks exclude workers belonging to lower social strata, for example, the SC and ST groups. Young workers with relatively higher formal education are able to access these

migration networks. The average formal years of education of this set of workers is more than the commuting workers, 8.7 years against 6.1 years. It also includes a substantial number of unmarried workers.

Long-distance migrant workers (outside the state)

The workers in this group engage in occupations such as heavy-vehicle driving, masonry, various other construction-related work, welding etc. These workers migrate to far-off places with the help of a contractor. The Ansari, Mahto and Kumhar castes dominate these networks. Like intermediate-distance migrant networks, they exclude workers belonging to the SC and ST groups, with minor exceptions. This group includes fairly young and unmarried workers, with the average age of 27.1 years, and includes workers with relatively more formal years of education, with an average of 9.1 years. Long-distance movement requires initial capital for migration, as is reflected by the fact that 71.6 per cent of these workers have land back in the village. Major cities of India such as Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Chennai and so on are the destination places for this set of long-distance migrants.

EFFECTS OF REVERSE MIGRATION

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing lockdown led to a complete shutdown of non-essential work in cities, resulting in the process of reverse migration from distant urban destination to the home village. With this process of reverse migration, migrant workers lost their livelihood and earnings, becoming unemployed, underemployed and disguised unemployed[8] in agriculture as well as in different non-agricultural activities available in the home village. Many of the skills they acquired in the cities lost their value in the villages, which made their skills redundant. The redundancy of their skills increased their vulnerability as it led to the loss of employment with an added cost of acquiring new skills. The following sub-sections will provide qualitative case studies to illustrate the challenges faced by different migrants following the reverse migration.

Skill loss and opportunity cost

A 21-year-old migrant worker, Raghu, from the Mahto caste, with ten years of formal education, was working in Hyderabad as a JCB driver before the pandemic. After returning to the village, he searched for work as per his skills as a driver but did not find any relevant job. JCB drivers in the local area generally get work in the summer season and are unemployed for more than six months a year. Later, he got an opportunity from one of his uncles who was working as a mason in the local area to work as a helper. He helped his uncle in various activities such as preparing concrete, bricklaying, bar-bending, etc. He did not have any prior experience with masonry work but was forced to change his occupation. This resulted in loss of a major portion of his earnings. While working in Hyderabad as a JCB driver he had been earning 9000 INR a month, which was reduced to 200 INR per day while working as a helper. The availability of construction work in the local area was also limited, which resulted in sporadic earning. The lack of options forced him to continue to work as a helper for his uncle and learn masonry skills to get a better market value for his labour. However, as someone from the Mahto caste he was able to mobilize his kin network, which is not possible for workers from marginalized castes.

8. 'Disguised unemployed' refers to the status of a person where he or she is perceived as employed but not in the actual sense as the person's contribution to the total output is very minimum, sometimes even no contribution to the total output. For example, a small piece of land of a household requires three workers for farming but when the entire household of five members is engaged in farming, the status of the additional two members can be referred to as disguised unemployed.

As we can see from the above case study, after returning to the place of origin, Raghu's skill became redundant. The market value of a skill is intrinsically tied to a time and place. By market value, I mean skills which have both use and exchange value (Gupta 1960). Reverse migrations changed the location of migrant workers, which limited the market value of the acquired skills; in some cases, the skills became redundant as they lost all of their market value once they had returned home. Due to skill loss, workers are forced to change their occupation, necessitating acquiring new skills, which pose their own challenges, as seen from Raghu's case. Raghu suddenly found himself at the bottom of the ladder, had to sacrifice a major portion of his wage and spent time to acquire new skills.

Increased competition faced by commuting-distance workers

Mahadev, a 19-year-old man belonging to Nayak caste, was working as a mason at Ramgarh before the pandemic, a commuting-distance place. After the pandemic, he lost his work due to a lack of availability of work opportunities and crowding out of the workplace due to reverse-migrant masons in the village. He was the only person from Nayak caste who had an opportunity through one of his mother's contacts from Kumhar caste to get access to local educational and vocational skill training centres that were under construction at that time. There he learnt masonry skills with the masons from other upper-caste groups.

Under difficult circumstances, he acquired masonry skills by working as a helper for more than a year. After learning the skills, he found work at a construction site in Ramgarh through his mother's networks; she was part of a self-help group in the village. After he lost his job at the construction site in Ramgarh, he tried finding other options in the village but was unsuccessful due to the excessive number of masons due to reverse migration during the pandemic. Due to this, he became involved in illegal coal mining in the region. When asked about his involvement in illegal activities, he noted:

> Brother who will give us work now, as the Prajapati[9] have now taken the contract in the local places. We can only get work from Ansari but that is very limited and as you know there are so many masons in Nayak caste also so we are getting work very rarely. One or two assignments in a week is a big thing for us. We are somehow surviving by this coal work but it is too risky nowadays as the local authority is strict and asks for money when we get caught. So, most of the time we lose the only asset we have, the cycle, in negotiation with the local police.

As already noted, the vulnerability of the migrant workers increased as reverse migration broke the work-related social network established at the distant urban places. The migrant networks collapsed when the local contractors, host of the identity and assignment-based networks,[10] returned to the village along with the other migrant workers. These migrant networks, mainly Kumhar, Ansari and Mahto, captured available work within commuting distance as their contractors took over the contracts. This allowed long-distance and intermediate-distance migrants to enter some of the local commuting workplaces, which increased competition for existing commuting-distance workers, as shown in the above case of Mahadev.

9. 'Prajapati' colloquially refers to the capital-owning castes.

10. By 'host of identity and assignment-based networks', I refer to the coordinator of identity and assignment-based networks. He is the one who establishes the initial contact and fixes the assignment at the destination places. He coordinates the migration of workers from the village to the cities based on the magnitude of demand for workers. He also manages the financing aspect of the whole process of migration of workers from the village to the city.

CONCLUSION: DOES THE REVIVAL OF NETWORKS INCREASE VULNERABILITY OR REMEDIATE IT?

The broken migration networks had started to recover after the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. Since then, the dynamics of the networks have transformed considerably. For example, Amar, a contractor, established contacts in Bengaluru and started mobilizing workers from the village to Bengaluru. The number of workers in his network at that time was few and confined largely to his own caste group from the village and from other castes belonging to neighbouring villages.

The number of workers in the network declined as the host of the network, Amar, was unable to provide initial capital covering travel costs and advanced payments to the family members of the migrant workers. He failed to settle his dues with the previous workers he had mobilized before the pandemic. These workers were demanding their dues from him, and it meant they were unwilling to join his network. Despite these apprehensions, workers from his own family, kin and caste networks showed willingness while other caste members were apprehensive of joining him in the city in a time of pandemic and uncertainty.

This can be seen in another case as well. A centring worker belonging to Mahto caste, who was previously in Amar's network, was excluded from the network during the revival. The loss of earnings, loss of the market value of his skills and irregularity of work related to his centring skills prompted him to take a loan from a local moneylender at a 10 per cent interest rate to manage the initial migration capital for his movement and to mobilize the workers belonging to his caste. He was able to raise this capital through his caste networks. In this process, the Mahto centring worker became the host of the network functioning in Hyderabad from February 2021 where he mobilized workers from his own family, kin and caste groups.

In situations where the host was not able to generate the initial capital in order to revive the network, the workers of that respective network struggled to migrate. Some of them incurred the cost of changing their occupation and learning new skills. The movement from one occupation to another also required access to learning spaces. Inability to access learning spaces and revived networks pushed workers towards illegal activities for their survival, which further increased their vulnerability.

A roof-centring mason belonging to the Mahto caste was working in Hyderabad with Amar. He had a specific skill related to roof-centring work which he had acquired at different workplaces outside Jharkhand. When he returned to the village during the pandemic, he was unemployed for eight to nine months. The acquired centring skill had no demand or market value in the village, and existing demand for masonry work in nearby urban places required skills such as concrete preparation, bricklaying and general masonry skills that are not as specialized as roof centring. These challenges in the village led him to follow illegal activities such as selling country liquor at home and becoming part of the illegal process of coal mining with his other family members.

As is evident from the above cases, the migration networks are showing signs of transformation after the pandemic. The identity-based nature of the networks is showing signs of solidification, which is worrying as they exclude the most vulnerable groups of population. The ways the networks coalesce around groups and individuals are dependent on various socio-economic factors which have themselves gone through transformation during the

pandemic. Dependent factors include the social and economic capital of the host and the workers in the networks.

Through a detailed study of migration from one village, Kusumpali village, in Jharkhand, the paper has traced and mapped the structural transformation leading to migration from place of origin to urban locations. The paper has also noted the nature of migration networks linked to the home village and how they take the shape of identity- and assignment-based networks. The effect of this is displayed in different migration strategies of various workers across different networks. The paper also noted the effect of reverse migration during the pandemic and how it increased the vulnerability of both the migrant workers as well as local commuting workers. The new shape that the networks are taking since the pandemic lean more towards identity-based networks by excluding other castes.

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