

RESEARCH PAPER

Exploring the Pattern of Male Migration in Western Odisha, India

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ABSTRACT

While most of the short-term migration from low-income states occurs to metropolitan centres in high-income states and the important points of reference are the seasonal migrations from western and southern Odisha. This study aimed to find the pattern of migration, reasons and nature of job performed by the migrants in the destination from the Western Odisha region. The study was conducted in Kalahandi and Balangir districts and a sample size of 200 migrant was studied using simple random sampling. It followed exploratory research design. The findings of the study revealed that the mean age of the migrants was about 34 years and the Schedule Tribes (STs), and Schedule Castes (SCs) were overly represented in the migration stream. Majority (70.5%) of the migrant sending households belonged to BPL category and most of them (49.0%) reported daily wage as their primary occupation before migration. Kerala (45.0%) and Tamil Nadu (40.0%) were the most favoured destinations for Migrants in Kalahandi and Balangir district respectively. Lack of employment at home (44.0%) was the most reported reason for migration. Most of the respondents performed casual labour in industries (25.5%). Destinations like Maharashtra and Gujarat are strongly linked to high wages as a reason for migration, whereas absence of work in the migrants' home, on the other hand, seems to be the main driver of migration to Kerala, suggesting a push-factor dominated flow. From a policy perspective, the study emphasized how urgently context-specific interventions are needed. Some of the risks connected to distress migration can be reduced by boosting rural employment through public works initiatives, increasing farm profitability, and making sure that migration routes are safer.

HIGHLIGHTS

- ❶ Marginalized section of the society that belonged to STs and SCs caste are overly represented in the migration sector.
- ❷ Migrants from Western Odisha are moving to high income states with Kerala and Tamil Nadu being the most preferred destinations.
- ❸ Lack of employment prospect at home is the major reason for migration.
- ❹ At the destination the migrants are employed in low-skill and low paying jobs such as casual labour, construction sector etc.

Keywords: Seasonal migration, agrarian distress, Caste, Push-pull factors, correspondence analysis

Migration is a multifaceted issue that plays a major role in rural households' livelihood plans, which emphasize risk reduction and income diversification (Le De *et al.* 2013). The rate of rural-to-urban migration is mostly determined by agriculture and rural development (Deotti *et al.* 2016). The past two decades have seen a pattern of growth that

has increasingly concentrated in a small number of states and areas, widening the divide between

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rural and urban areas as well as between agriculture and non-agriculture. India has experienced slow and uneven structural change. The urgency and pattern of migration have been impacted by the widening regional disparities in economic prospects. Historically, migration has helped close the disparity in living standards between regions and sectors and has fuelled development in the more dynamic sectors (Srivastava, 2011; Arya & Vasantha, 2018). Due to the fragmentation of migration channels, there are now numerous non-linear movements occurring both domestically and abroad. Domestic migration is particularly prevalent among developing nations in Asia, South America, and Africa. This mobility pattern is frequently seasonal in nature and is caused by occasional demands for workers in sectors like construction, industry, and agriculture. However, due to limited access to education, social capital, or formal job markets, many of these seasonal migrants may end up in low-skilled, low-paying positions that are necessary to solve the divided labour market but are short-lived (Triandafyllidou, 2022; Attah-Otu *et al.* 2024).

Mass labour migration is frequently a gendered phenomenon. In many regions of the world, particularly in southern Africa, Mexico, and South Asia, these migrant streams are overwhelmingly male (Tumbe, 2015, Nanda & Ghosh, 2025). In India there has been a noticeable gender disparity. There are only 10 females per 1000 working aged people, compared to 35 males per 1000 working age group leave their home in search of job (Ali *et al.* 2017). Social and cultural norms that limit women's mobility across numerous rural societies mean that men typically migrate (Choithani, 2020).

Over 450 million people are internal migrants in India, making up more than one-third of the country's 1.4 billion population. Of these migrants, between 100 and 200 million works in seasonal and circular jobs for brief periods of time (Kumar & Dhar, 2024). Nearly two-thirds of India's short-term circular movement occurs in urban regions, with the remaining portion occurring in rural areas. While the majority of short-term migration from low-income states occurs to metropolitan centres in other (high-income) states, important points of reference are the seasonal migrations from western and southern Odisha, as well as from Odisha in

general. They are among the poor migrants, and the receiving states do not make any investments to improve their quality of life. Their conditions in the host location remain extremely precarious, and they constitute surplus labour in urban centres where hiring costs are kept low (Dash, 2023). Keeping this in mind this paper attempts to find the pattern of migration, reasons and nature of job performed by the migrants in the destination from the Western Odisha region.

METHODOLOGY

The western part of Odisha extends from the Kalahandi district in the south to the Sundargarh district in the north. A majority of the region's population lack the purchasing power to buy sufficient food. More than 60% of people live below poverty line in several districts like Sonepur, Boudh, Balangir, Nuapada and Kalahandi. Drought and inadequate irrigation weaken western Odisha's foundation. Odisha's high rainfall variability causes people to experience periods of food scarcity, droughts and dry spells every two years and major droughts every five to six years in western Odisha (Mishra, 2017). The region's issues are unemployment and migration (Sahoo *et al.* 2023). According to a survey by the Ajeevika Bureau in Odisha, which included information from 99,523 homes across 103 Panchayats, 30.83 percent of households in the state indicated seasonal migration. The study indicates that Odisha sends over 1.5 million seasonal migrants, of whom 0.58 million are from Western Odisha and migrate under distress (Mohanty, 2024). Out of 10 districts in Western Odisha, two districts Balangir and Kalahandi were selected randomly for the present study. Two blocks namely, Bhawanipatna and Thuamul Rampur from Kalahandi district and Loisingha and Puintala blocks from Balangir districts were selected randomly. A sample size of 200 male migrants was taken, consisting of 50 male migrants from each block using simple random sampling and conducted during April-July, 2023. An exploratory research design was followed for the study.

The primary data was collected using a structured interview schedule. Preferred destination of migration, reasons for migration, Nature of job performed at the destination and income were captured using frequency and percentage. Two-

dimensional correspondence analysis was employed to explore the relationship between nature of job and destination of migration also reason of migration and destination of migration. Correspondence analysis is a multivariate statistical method for illustrating and characterizing the relationships between two or more variables. It works well with a table that has categorical data. Its primary goal is to depict the rows and columns of a data matrix as points in a spatial representation known as a map or biplot. The points' locations imply and make it easier to interpret the data content (Greenacre, 2017).

RESULTS

Table 1 reveals the characteristics of the respondents in both the districts. The overall average age of the respondents was found to be around 34 years. Migrants in Balangir are slightly older on average (35 years) than those in Kalahandi (33.69 years). The migrants in the Balangir district had slightly more average years of education (around 9 years) than the migrants of Kalahandi district having an average 7 years of schooling. The largest group is made up of Scheduled Tribes (STs), who are particularly well-represented in Kalahandi (45%). The percentage of Scheduled Castes (SCs) in the sample is 30%, and their distribution is fairly even throughout the two districts. Other Backward Classes (OBCs) make up 28.33% of the migrants overall, with a lower representation in Kalahandi (14%), but a higher prevalence in Balangir (34%). Prior to migration, the most common occupation was daily wage work (49%), which was higher in Kalahandi (54%) than Balangir (44%). The second most prevalent sector (25.5%) was farming, with Kalahandi having a larger share (29%). Less people moved right after finishing school (14.5%) or had other jobs (11%), with Balangir accounting for a higher percentage of these occurrences. High economic vulnerability is indicated by the fact that the vast majority of migrants come from homes that are below the poverty line (BPL) (70.5%), particularly in Kalahandi (85%). Balangir has a higher percentage of households above the poverty line (APL) (37%) than Kalahandi (12%). Only 2.5% fall within the ANTODAYA or Other groups. Compared to migrants from Kalahandi (₹ 35,230), individuals from Balangir report a greater

mean annual agricultural income (₹ 42,580). The significant variation (high SD) and overall average of ₹ 38,905 indicate disparities among farming households.

Table 1: Socio-economic profile of migrants

Particulars	Percentage		
	Kalahandi	Balangir	Overall
	Migrant (n _{m1} =100)	Migrant (n _{m2} =100)	Migrant (n _m =200)
Age in Yrs. Mean (SD)	33.69 (7.88)	35.00 (8.10)	34.35 (8.00)
No. of years of education Mean (SD)	7.04 (3.31)	8.72 (3.06)	7.88 (3.28)
Caste:			
OBC	14	34	28.33
ST	45	27	41.67
SC	41	39	30.00
Occupation before migration:			
Farming	29	22	25.50
Daily wage	54	44	49.00
Migrated after schooling	10	19	14.50
Other	7	15	11.00
Economic Status			
ANTODAYA	2	3	2.5
BPL	85	56	70.50
APL	12	37	24.50
Other	1	4	2.50
Farm annual income Mean (SD)	35230.00 (27066.64)	42580.00 (21761.42)	38905.00 (24771.44)
Mean land holding (SD) (in aces)	1.68 (0.96)	1.09 (0.71)	1.39 (0.86)

Table 2 gives analysis of the migratory patterns of respondents from the districts of Kalahandi and Balangir, which shows both regional convergences and notable differences in the destination, cause, nature of work, duration, and income of migrants. There are clear trends in the destinations chosen by migrants from the two districts. Kerala is the most popular destination for migrants from Kalahandi (45%), whereas Tamil Nadu is the most common destination in Balangir (40%). Further prominent destinations are Andhra Pradesh (10.5%), Gujarat (13.5%), and Maharashtra (14.0%), while a minor percentage migrates within the state (8.5%) or to other places (4.5%). In both districts 44.0% of respondents stated that the lack of local job prospects was the most common reason for migrating. The

search for better wages at the destination (31.0%) and the unprofitability of farming (14.5%) come next.

Table 2: Migration related information

Particulars	Kalahandi	Balangir	Overall
	Migrant (n _{m1} =100)	Migrant (n _{m2} =100)	Migrant (n _m =200)
Destination of migration:			
Tamil Nadu	11	40	25.50
Gujrat	9	18	13.50
Maharashtra	19	9	14.00
Kerala	45	2	23.50
Andhra Pradesh	7	14	10.50
Within state	3	14	8.50
Other	6	3	4.50
Reason for migration:			
Farming not profitable	14	15	14.50
Can not find work at home	50	38	44.00
High wage at destination	32	30	31.00
Indebtedness	4	17	10.50
Duration of stay at destination:			
Short (up to 4 months)	19	34	26.50
Medium (5-8 months)	59	44	51.50
Long (more than 8 months)	22	22	22.00
Nature of job at destination:			
Mason	18	9	13.50
Concrete labour	26	14	20.00
Brick factory	5	7	6.00
Waitering	10	2	6.00
Stone crusher operator	8	0	4.00
Casual labour at factories	18	39	28.50
Shrimp farm	0	14	7.00
Other	15	7	15.00
Income of the migrant	13090	9396	11230
Mean (SD)	(3285)	(2497)	(3456)

Significantly, debt is a stronger factor in Balangir (17%) than Kalahandi (4%), suggesting regional financial weaknesses. These results align with wider patterns of distressed migration in rural economies impacted by unstable agriculture yields and underemployment. With 51.5% of migrants reporting a stay of five to eight months in their destination, migration is primarily temporary in

nature. The prevalence of short-duration migration (up to four months) is higher in Balangir (34%) than in Kalahandi (19%). Both districts have a comparatively constant rate of long-term migration lasting more than eight months (22.0%). Informal, labor-intensive, low-skilled work is the norm for employment at migration destinations.

In industries, casual work is the most popular vocation (28.5%), especially for Balangir migrants (39%). Additional common jobs include masonry (13.5%), concrete labor (20.0%), and other categories like waitering, brick kiln work, and stone crusher operations. Work on shrimp farms is only found in Balangir (14%), whereas stone crushers are only seen among Kalahandi migrants (8%). These occupational groups are clearly distinct. Both destination-specific employment niches and labour market segmentation are reflected in this distinction. There is a noticeable variation in average migration income between districts. Compared to migrants from Balangir (₹ 9,396; SD = ₹ 2,497), Kalahandi migrants report a higher mean monthly income (₹ 13,090; SD = ₹ 3,285). The average income for the entire population is ₹ 11,230 (SD = ₹ 3,456).

To investigate the relationship between the migrants' employment destinations and the types of jobs they performed, a correspondence analysis was carried out. The results of the chi-square test showed that the two variables were not independent, with $\chi^2(42) = 171.576$, $p < .001$, showing a statistically significant connection. Table 3 shows that the first two dimensions accounting for 40.2% and 36.2% of the total inertia, respectively, the total inertia was 0.858. Dimensions 1 and 2 together explained 76.4% of the variation, which was determined to be adequate for reliable two-dimensional map interpretation. Later dimensions were not kept for interpretation and only slightly increased the explanatory capacity.

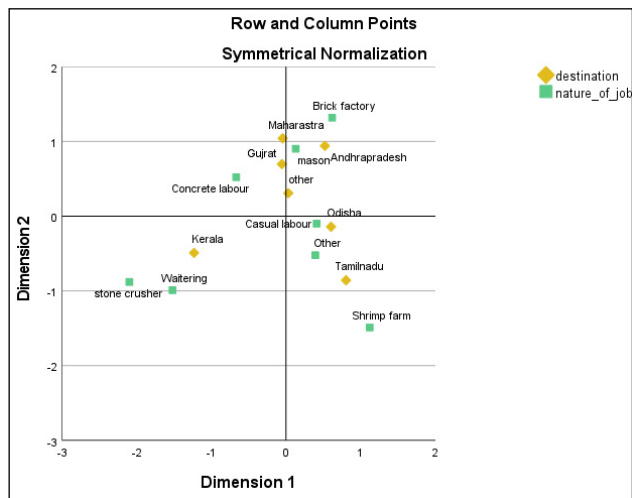
Fig 1. shows the outcome of a Correspondence Analysis (CA) utilizing symmetrical normalization between two categorical variables: the destination (yellow diamonds) and the nature of the job (green squares). The biplot shows that migration to states like Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh is strongly linked to construction-related occupations like mason and brick factory workers. Kerala seems to be related with stone crusher job and waitering, whereas Gujarat is mainly involved with concrete labour. Tamil Nadu is exclusively associated with

Table 3: Summary of correspondence analysis of destination of migration and nature of job performed by the migrants

Dimension	Singular Value	Inertia	Chi Square	Sig.	Proportion of Inertia		Confidence Singular Value	
					Accounted for	Cumulative	Standard Deviation	Correlation
1	.587	.345			.402	.402	.056	.048
2	.558	.311			.362	.764	.048	
3	.335	.112			.131	.895		
4	.291	.085			.099	.994		
5	.071	.005			.006	1.000		
6	.017	.000			.000	1.000		
Total		.858	171.576	.000 ^a	1.000	1.000		

a. 42 degrees of freedom

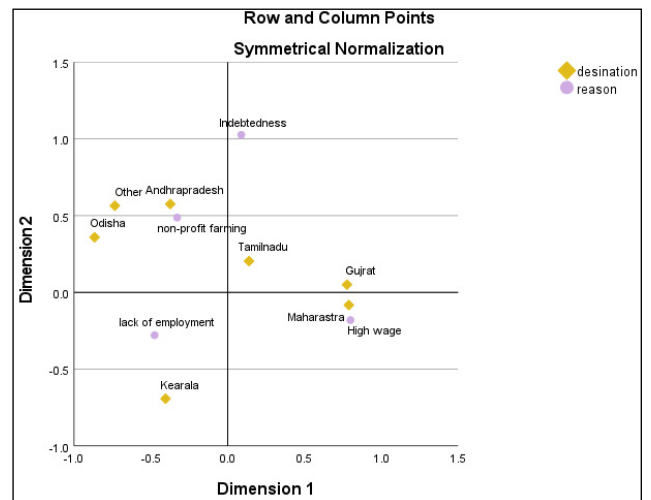
shrimp aquaculture, a sign of regional labour specialization. The centrally located state of Odisha exhibits a widespread relationship with informal work. These spatial relationships draw attention to the occupational segmentation of migrant labour as well as the distinct labour absorption patterns of destination states.

**Fig. 1:** Two-dimensional correspondence analysis of destination of migration and nature of job performed by the migrants

The correspondence analysis summary, which was done to investigate the relationship between migration destination and migration causes, is shown in Table 4. With 18 degrees of freedom, the analysis produced a chi-square value of 31.280 and a p-value of 0.027, suggesting a statistically significant association at the 5% level. This demonstrates that the distribution of reasons for migration is not destination-independent and that there are significant correlations between migration destinations and reasons for migration. Together,

the three dimensions account for 100% of the variation, with the first two measuring 85.9% of the total inertia. This suggests that most of the relationship between the two variables is captured by a two-dimensional solution, which is appropriate for a correspondence map.

Fig. 2 shows a symmetrical normalization plot that maps both migration destinations and reasons for migration.

**Fig. 2:** Two-dimensional correspondence analysis of destination of migration and reasons for migration

The first dimension distinguishes between migration that is driven by compulsion or distress and movement that is driven by economic motivation. Destinations like Maharashtra and Gujarat are strongly linked to high wages as a reason for migration, indicating that these areas are thought to have more economic prospects. The absence of work in the migrants' home, on the other hand, seems to

Table 4: Summary of correspondence analysis of destination of migration and reasons of migration

Dimension	Singular Value	Inertia	Chi Square	Sig.	Proportion of Inertia		Confidence Singular Value	
					Accounted for	Cumulative	Standard Deviation	Correlation
1	.314	.098			.630	.630	.064	-.050
2	.189	.036			.229	.859	.060	
3	.149	.022			.141	1.000		
Total		.156	31.280	.027 ^a	1.000	1.000		

a.18 degrees of freedom

be the main driver of migration to Kerala, suggesting a push-factor dominated flow. Migration motivated by agricultural distress is further distinguished by the second dimension. Notably, Andhra Pradesh and the Other destinations and migration within Odisha is located near non-profit farming and debt, indicating that migrants frequently migrate to these regions in reaction to persistent rural debt and declining agricultural profitability. Non-profit farming is also somewhat associated with Tamil Nadu showing similar pattern. A destination like Kerala, which is far from most of the reasons, can represent a more varied or complicated set of incentives, such as social networks or seasonal opportunities that aren't fully covered in the primary list. According to the analysis, economic aspirations (toward Maharashtra and Gujarat) and rural and agrarian distress (intra-state, Andhra Pradesh, and others) are the two main drivers of migration. These results provide important fresh details about how local livelihoods and regional inequities influence migratory patterns.

DISCUSSION

The findings of the research show that the migration trajectories of rural households in the districts of Balangir and Kalahandi are shaped by a complex interaction between structural vulnerability, socioeconomic stratification, and regional labour market segmentation. The correspondence analysis and descriptive statistics highlight the localized character of push and pull factors as well as the diversity of migratory experiences. Internal migration in India, particularly for employment, is dominated by working age population, often between the ages of 15 and 45. This age group constitutes the bulk of temporary and seasonal labour migrants (Srivastava, 2011). Particularly in rural areas, caste and education play a significant

role in the labour migration (Keshri & Bhagat, 2013). Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes make up most migrants, especially in Kalahandi, which is a sign of long-standing caste-based exclusion from local economic prospects. This resonates with the study of Datta and Rajan (2024) that impoverished, vulnerable, and historically marginalized Dalit and Adivasi communities are overrepresented in the stream of temporary and short-term migration. They are represented in the most unstable short-term migration streams, have the lowest incomes, the worst working conditions, and the most difficult living conditions. The sample is dominated by households below the poverty line (BPL), particularly in Kalahandi (85%), indicating that migration is primarily an act of survival rather than a means of accumulating wealth. Although remittances are frequently presented as a developmental outcome, data from Western Odisha indicates that they really act more as temporary survival buffers than as a means of facilitating transformative mobility (Biswal, 2024). The disparities in income between destination states and districts provide more evidence of the unequal advantages of migration.

By illustrating clear connections between occupations and destinations, the Correspondence Analysis supports this finding even more. In addition to highlighting the varying capacities of labour markets to absorb workers across states, these regional job linkages also demonstrate how migration frequently occurs in response to regionally concentrated economic opportunities or informal recruitment practices (Mitze & Schmidt, 2015). A lack of local job prospects and agrarian distress are the main causes of seasonal and short-term migration in eastern India. This type of migration is frequently a coping strategy brought on by distress, especially for underprivileged populations and households

with limited land (Tripathi *et al.* 2018; Singh & Basu, 2020). Thapa and Yadav (2015) with analysis of the Census and the National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) emphasizes that short-term migration exhibits distinct characteristics compared to long-term migration. It is frequently fuelled by distressing reasons like financial difficulties or the absence of local job opportunities. When choosing a destination, pull factors including greater pay prospects, stable employment, and established migration networks are crucial (Maurya *et al.* 2022). In addition to their potential for greater wages, states like Gujarat and Maharashtra, with their significant industrial and construction sectors, draw workers because of their long-standing labour corridors, which are reinforced by family networks and contractors (Srivastava, 2020).

When combined, these findings suggest that India has two distinct migratory regimes: one motivated by distress and other is economic incentives. Both systems coexist and are influenced by systemic disparities in social security, education, credit, and access to assets. For equitable development, it is crucial to address the root causes of distress migration while simultaneously guaranteeing migrant workers' rights and decent working conditions.

CONCLUSION

The reported migration trends in Kalahandi and Balangir are indicative of more profound structural limitations present in both the broader informal labour market in India and the agrarian economy of Odisha. These results provide a more comprehensive picture of spatial inequality and livelihood uncertainty. They demonstrate the ways in which structural disadvantages—like a lack of jobs in the area, a reduction in agriculture, and incessant debt cycle interact with outside labour demands to influence migratory patterns. From a policy perspective, the study emphasizes how urgently context-specific interventions are needed. Some of the risks connected to distress migration can be reduced by boosting rural employment through public works initiatives, increasing farm profitability, and making sure that migration routes are safer. Effective social protection and labour mobility frameworks must also consider the distinct demands and motivations of migrants, regardless of their gender, caste, region, or economic standing.

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