

# Examining Migrants Perspectives and Prospects for Reverse Migration

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**Abstract :** Throughout history, people from rural areas have migrated to areas with a higher standard of living in search of a better life. This trend has been exacerbated by different administrations' uneven use of development programs. In Uttarakhand, significant out-migration from hilly districts has led to a noticeable population decline, particularly in Pauri Garhwal and Almora. Pauri District has the highest migration rate, according to the Census and Migration Commission report, with 12 of its 15 development blocks recording negative population growth over the last 10 years. Specifically, Dwarikhal has had a 9.46% decrease. This study aims to investigate the causes of migration, explore migrants' views on their reverse migration, and identify conditions necessary for such returns. It also aims to gauge public sentiment on different government initiatives to combat out-migration. The data were gathered quantitatively via purposive sampling and a closed-ended questionnaire. Eighty migrants in all were surveyed from two randomly chosen villages in the Dwarikhal area. According to research, a lack of employment possibilities that match their talents and subpar healthcare facilities make many migrants reluctant to return. Those who want to return frequently intend to resume farming after retirement, but they encounter difficulties due to the dispersed nature of agricultural land. To increase agricultural viability and improve infrastructure for healthcare and education, the report suggests government initiatives, such as land redistribution (Chakbandi). The growth of tourism in the area also appears to be hampered by inadequate infrastructure.

**IndexTerms -** Out-Migration, Reverse Migration, Infrastructure Development, Agricultural Land Reforms, Bhoo-Kanoon, Intra-migration, Inter-migration.

## Introduction

Migration is a common phenomenon throughout human history to the present day (Jangwan & Upreti, 2019). It is the transfer of people from their place of origin to an area with relatively greater opportunities for employment and other opportunities. Due to a variety of economic, social, political, and environmental circumstances, migration has always been a prominent part of human history (Khan & Arokkiaraj, 2021).

Historically, in India, migration has been defined by people moving from rural to urban areas in search of better jobs, better living circumstances, and easier access to services (Tiwari & Majumdar, 2024). However, a tendency known as reverse migration has surfaced in recent years, in which migrants are going back to their home countries (Sood & Bala, 2022).

Migration from one's native place for livelihood is a common process, but in the mountainous, resource-less, disaster-prone areas of the country, migration remains the most appropriate means of survival. In Uttarakhand, the nature of migration from the Muslim invasion to the arrival of the British was mainly in-migration. Out-migration from the hilly areas of the state started gradually for the recruitment in the British army, and this process continued after independence, with the pace reaching a concerning level after the formation of the state. (Kumar & Sati, 2022). Therefore, migration has emerged as a crisis of depopulation of a large geographical area of the state rather than a common process. The development programmes being run in the hilly areas of the state have not yet achieved significant success in stopping migration from the region (Bora). Among the various reasons, the main reason for migration from the Himalayan region is the lack of means of livelihood at the local level (Yadav et al., 2018). The remaining rural people do farming to a great extent for their livelihood and are completely dependent on the climatic conditions. If the climatic conditions are not suitable for them, it is difficult to earn a livelihood in such harsh conditions. In such a situation, Geographical conditions, lack of livelihood, and basic necessities act as push factors for migration from the mountains to the plains. There are many other socio-economic, political, and cultural environmental factors that act as push and pull factors leading to migration.

Uttarakhand is one of the top states in terms of per capita income among the hilly states of the country, whose per capita income is more than the national average (PIB, 2023), but on the other hand, there is a huge gap in the district-wise per capita income within the state. The per capita income of the plain districts in the state, such as Haridwar, Dehradun, and Udham Singh Nagar, is 254050, 195925, and 187313, respectively. In contrast, the per capita income of the remaining hill districts is below the average per capita income of the state. On one hand, the plains of the state are progressing towards rapid development, while the hill districts are worried about their existence and representation as a result of migration because the difficult conditions of the Himalayan region of the state and the inability of the native place to provide suitable employment to the people with less developed employment education and skills make this migration permanent. This unequal distribution of economic resources and economic development in the state plays an important role in accelerating the problem of migration. During 2001 to 2011, out of the 13 districts of the state, the 10 hill districts were the most affected by migration. As a result, in recent years, many villages in the hill districts have become completely deserted, and others are moving in this direction. The 2011 census data throws detailed light on the situation of migration in the state. According to this, out of 16793 villages in the state, 1048 have become completely uninhabited, and 405 villages have a population of less than 10. The state government's efforts are limited to stopping migration. The objective of most schemes seems

to be to enable local people to fulfil only their basic needs. There is a need to ensure that skilled residents migrating to their native place are employed according to their skills.

An interesting case for examining the dynamics of reverse migration is the Dwarikhal Block in Pauri Garhwal district. The region, known for its untamed scenery and limited economic opportunities, has experienced a significant exodus over time (Indian Express, 2020). However, some sources suggest that migrants are returning to their Native villages, driven by strong family ties, modern employment opportunities, and good environmental conditions (Indian Express, 2020). For this study, questionnaires were administered to two villages, Khamna and Jaspur, located in Dwarikhal block in Pauri district, who had come to their native villages to participate in social events. The findings from these questionnaires were used as the basis for analysis.

The goal was to examine migrants' views on reverse migration, the government's policies, and the ideas they have for improving the region. This research will offer policymakers and stakeholders useful insights into the realities of reverse migration in rural areas.

### Theory relevant for the study:

To understand and study the various aspects of an interdisciplinary problem like migration, several classical, Neoclassical, Historical-structural, new economics of labour migration, and other approaches are used to analyse its social, political, and economic dimensions. This process begins with Ravenstein's 1885 seven laws of migration, which state that migration is primarily driven by economic factors, **that its rate decreases with increasing distance, and that it occurs stepwise**. Building on Ravenstein's laws, neoclassical theories attempted to conceptualize migration in greater detail, positing that migration occurs primarily from low-income areas to high-income areas due to income inequality between the two locations. Micro-level explanations of this theory focus on migration at the individual level, while macro-level explanations focus on migration at the regional or national level. Historical structural explanations of migration view it as a consequence of global economic inequality, leading to the flow of workers from the periphery to core nations. The new economics of migration views migration not only as an individual decision but also as a family's plan to cope with income displacement.

Migration studies have inherited several fundamental dilemmas from the social sciences, particularly sociology. Three key dilemmas are central to the study of migration. Two of these mirror sociology's foundational challenges: the structure-versus-agency dilemma and the macro-versus-micro level of analysis. The contrast between voluntary and involuntary migration, which is sometimes presented as a conflict between "pull-push" variables and those influenced by international political and economic systems, is the third conundrum exclusive to migration studies. In migration studies, the structure-agency issue concerns whether it is general structural forces or individual agency that drives movement. Conventional theories of migration emphasise agency and hold that people migrate because they rationally choose to do so in search of better socioeconomic opportunities (Schmoll & Weber, 2023; Piguet, 2013). However, according to the structuralist interpretation, migration is determined by the influence of larger economic forces that compel people to migrate from economically backward areas and ultimately perpetuate inequalities within and between source and destination. (de Haas et al., 2019).

By acknowledging migration as a crucial component of larger societal development processes, the Aspirations–Capabilities Framework (Haas, 2011) provides a nuanced view on human mobility and is the theory pertinent to our investigation. According to this theory, people's goals and their capacity to move interact to form migration decisions, which are not just influenced by economic considerations. While capabilities indicate the actual means or resources accessible to them for achieving these objectives, aspirations represent people's wants or dreams for a better life. According to this perspective, individuals move because they want to improve their lives and have the resources to do so, not only because they are drawn to better chances or forced by unfavorable circumstances. Aspirations and capacities are influenced by social, economic, political, and cultural variables, which makes migration a dynamic and context-dependent process. With this paradigm, the emphasis is shifted from oversimplified push-pull models to a more thorough comprehension of migration as a result of structural factors and human action.

Although they are fundamentally different, aspirations and capabilities are intimately related. Aspirations are what people want or hope for, while capabilities are the possibilities and resources they really have to realize those goals. Rural education is a great illustration of this difference. In addition to improving knowledge and abilities, education broadens people's perceptions of what a "good life" may be by exposing them to different lifestyles, whether they be urban, consumerist, or even global. Even if their material circumstances at home don't alter, this newfound understanding may drive them to migrate. Moreover, education can also increase aspirations by fostering a sense of possibility. As young people become more aware of new cultural and material lifestyles, they may begin to see these as within their reach—a concept that is described as the "capacity to aspire" (Appadurai, 2004). This idea is further supported by highlighting how education can transform mere dreams into achievable goals (Czaika & Vothknecht, 2012).

### Reason for the relevance:

Hein de Haas's (2011) Aspirations–Capabilities Framework, which offers a nuanced understanding of migration as a dynamic process shaped by the interaction of individual desires and available opportunities rather than just as a binary decision between staying and leaving, provides a compelling theoretical foundation for this study. This theory is especially well-suited for examining migration trends in the resource-constrained, rural Dwarikhal block of Uttarakhand, where a variety of social, cultural, economic, and infrastructure variables impact movement. This paradigm defines aspirations as a person's desire for a higher standard of living, including social mobility, economic progress, education, health, and personal security.

The real means—financial resources, social networks, knowledge, education, and infrastructure support—that allow people to fulfill their goals are known as capabilities. Therefore, migration occurs when people have the potential to change their situations and want to do so

This theoretical approach is in line with the study's findings, which indicate that migration decisions are highly influenced by educational attainment, especially technical education. People with technical education frequently have the networks, credentials, and talents that enable them to pursue possibilities outside of their state and realise their goals. At the same time, those with lower

education or limited resources may have similar aspirations but lack the structural means to migrate effectively, often resulting in distress-driven, informal-sector migration or being forced to stay despite a desire to leave.

Moreover, the study finds that cultural and emotional attachment to the native place remains strong, even among migrants. This resonates with the theory's emphasis on non-economic dimensions of aspirations, such as identity, belonging, and cultural continuity, which influence the nature of migration (e.g., temporary vs. permanent) and the desire for return migration. Many respondents indicated that their connection to native places is sustained through emotional and cultural bonds, even as they pursue opportunities elsewhere, illustrating how aspirations are not exclusively economic but also shaped by cultural and social values. The Aspirations–Capabilities Framework also helps interpret the finding that policies like Skill India, while recognised by a portion of respondents as promising, require more effective implementation and awareness to translate into real capability enhancement. For many residents of Dwarikhal, aspirations for skill development and entrepreneurship exist, but the infrastructural and institutional support to realise these remains weak or inaccessible. Thus, the gap between aspiration and capability becomes a key area for policy intervention.

Finally, the framework moves beyond static push-pull models, which tend to oversimplify migration as a linear response to economic disparities. Instead, it situates migration within the broader processes of social transformation, highlighting how education, cultural norms, social expectations, and evolving livelihoods all interact to shape both the desire and the ability to migrate. This theoretical stance is well-suited to the Uttarakhand context, where migration is often a response not only to lack of opportunity but also to changing aspirations in an increasingly mobile and interconnected world.

#### **Conceptual Understanding of the related terms:**

**Immigration:** Refers to the movement of people into a country from another country with the intention of settling there.

**Emigration:** Refers to the act of leaving one's own country to settle permanently in another.

**In-migration:** Refers to the movement of people into a particular region within the same country. For instance, when someone moves from a rural area to an urban area within the country.

**Out-migration:** Refers to the movement of people out of a specific region or area, whether within a country (domestic) or across international borders. It is a broader term that can describe both internal (within the same country) and external (international) migration, depending on the context.

**Reverse Migration:** Refers to the movement of individuals returning to their place of origin after having migrated elsewhere, either within the same country (domestic) or to another country (international). It is essentially a "return migration" where individuals who had previously moved for better opportunities, education, or other reasons decide to go back to their home region.

**Bhoo Kanoon (□□ □□□□□□):** Refers to the land laws in Uttarakhand that govern land ownership, acquisition, and use, with a focus on protecting the rights of local residents and preserving the state's cultural and ecological integrity. These laws have been a subject of significant public discourse, especially concerning their impact on local communities and the regulation of land transactions involving non-residents.

#### **Review of literature:**

**Shikha Nagalia, 2017**, in the work titled "*OUT MIGRATION FROM UTTARAKHAND HILLS: MAGNITUDE AND CAUSES*", studied the status and extent of migration from the mountainous region of Uttarakhand and its causes, which include low agricultural production, lack of education and health facilities, employment opportunities, continuous natural disasters, and social and religious evils.

**Saurav Kumar and Vishwambhar Prashad Sati, 2020** in the work entitled "*Out-Migration from the Hills of Garhwal Himalaya: a Case study*" - While studying the extent of migration from the Garhwal Himalaya, its type and pattern, causes and consequences, it was found that with the increasing level of education, the number of migrants increases. Their destination is outside the state (28%) and towards the state capital (24%). The main reason for this is the lack of education facilities (49%) and employment (19.51%).

**Jangwan Ashutosh and Upreti Pallavi, 2019** in the work "*Status of migration in Uttarakhand: A case study of Rudrapur District*" mention that most of the migration is annual in nature; that is, the migrants come to their native village only once a year.

**Lahar Rana, Neha Barodia, 2024** in the work "*The issue of out-migration in Uttarakhand*" After the formation of the state, its overall development status is impressive, but this development is uneven in different regions of the state. There has still been no effective change in the development of remunerative agricultural activities in the hilly regions. Access to trade, tourism, and government jobs is limited to only a few people.

In his work **Sati 2021**, titled "*Out-migration in Uttarakhand Himalaya its types, reasons, and consequences*", found that the highest percentage (42.25%) of the migrants is in the age group of 25-35 years, as a result, the population of many villages has declined by more than 50%, with the maximum number of villages (about 300) in Pauri district.

**Amita Yadav, Gyanendra Sharma, Renu Gangwar, 2018** in their work entitled "*Determining factors for migration in Uttarakhand*", says that according to the women's view on the reasons for migration, apart from low agricultural yield and lack of means of employment, the main reason is also the conflict of caste and social prestige. Most of the families do not want their children to stay in the village and do tedious and non-profitable agriculture.

**Prashant Kandari 2013**, in his work entitled "*Migration pattern and the increasing participation of females in the Economy of Hill Rural Areas: A Study of Pauri district in Uttarakhand*" mention that the highest number of people migrating from the hilly areas are men, as a result of which the basis of the economy of the hilly region is the responsibility of difficult and less profitable agriculture and related works, which falls on women. They are engaged in low-income jobs like MANREGA, while most men are engaged in higher-salaried labour work; despite being engaged in low-income generating work, the contribution of women in the economy of the hills is the highest.

**Bijaya Laxmi Thapliyal, Vinay Devrani, Rakesh Chandra Bhadula, 2020** in the work entitled "*Incessant Migration from hill regions of Uttarakhand: an escalating problem*" say that the development of opportunities like horticulture, tourism, agriculture-based small industries, rain water harvesting, skill-based training of local people, etc., by the government in the hilly areas of the state will prove effective in stopping migration.

**Objectives of the study:**

1. To investigate the relationship between migrants' educational attainment, occupational engagement, and the cause of migration, thereby identifying key determinants influencing migration patterns (intra-state or interstate migration).
2. To examine the social implications of migration on migrant communities and analyse the extent and nature of their continued engagement and connection with their native regions.

**Area of the study:**

Dwarikhal is one of the 15 Development blocks in the Pauri Garhwal district of Uttarakhand and is a significant area for understanding migration patterns and the potential for reverse migration in the Hill area of Uttarakhand. This block encompasses a diverse range of geographical, demographic, and socio-economic characteristics that influence the migration dynamics of its inhabitants.

**Geographical Overview:**

Dwarikhal Block spans approximately 427.01 square kilometres in the hilly terrains of the Garhwal Himalayas. The region is characterised by its mountainous landscape, dense forests, and a network of rivers and streams. The challenging topography and limited arable land have historically influenced the livelihood options available to the local population.

**Demographics:**

According to recent data, Dwarikhal Block has a total population of 41,556 individuals, comprising 19,324 males and 22,232 females. The block comprises 234 villages and 9,706 households. The literacy rate stands at 81.13%, reflecting a relatively educated populace. However, the region has witnessed significant out-migration, leading to a 5.37% decline in the rural population between 2001 and 2011 (Migration Commission Report, 2019).

**Socio-Economic Context:**

The economy of Dwarikhal Block is predominantly agrarian, with a significant portion of the population engaged in agriculture and allied activities. However, the lack of irrigation facilities, fragmented landholdings, and limited access to markets have hindered agricultural productivity. Additionally, the menace of wild animals and inadequate infrastructure has further exacerbated the challenges faced by the farming community.

Employment opportunities within the block are scarce, leading to a reliance on seasonal and marginal work. Out of the total working population of 15,113, only 6,611 are main workers, while 8,502 are marginal workers. A significant number of individuals are engaged in cultivation, either full-time or for less than six months a year.

**Migration Patterns:**

The combination of limited livelihood options, inadequate infrastructure, and socio-economic challenges has led to a significant out-migration from Dwarikhal Block. Residents, particularly the youth, migrate to urban centers such as Delhi, Dehradun, and Haridwar in search of better employment and educational opportunities. This migration trend has resulted in the depopulation of villages, with some areas experiencing a decline in population to single digits.

**Relevance to the Study of the area:**

Dwarikhal Block's unique combination of geographical challenges, socio-economic constraints, and significant out-migration makes it an ideal case for studying the perspectives of migrants and the prospects for reverse migration. Understanding the factors influencing migration decisions in this block can provide valuable insights into developing targeted policies and interventions aimed at promoting sustainable development and encouraging the return of migrants to their native villages.

**Methodology:**

The study is based on both primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected through a questionnaire to understand migrants' perspectives and the possibilities of their reverse migration. Pauri District is the most affected district in the hill region of Uttaranchal due to migration from 15 community development blocks, 13 of which have experienced negative decadal growth in the past decade. One block, Dwarikhal, and its two villages, Jaspur and Khamana, were randomly selected for the study. Primary data were collected through questionnaires from migrants, a total of 80 (50 from Jaspur village and 30 from Khamana village), in May and June 2024, respectively. Both surveys were conducted with a series of questions on the causes of migration, the nature of the job in the city, the nature of their migration, and the possibility of reverse migration. On that condition, they will try to reverse migration, share their views on the government's policies to tackle migration from hilly areas, and discuss the status of their links with native villages. To support primary data, various reports from government and private sources, census 2011 data, and other published sources can be taken as secondary sources. Data were analysed using SPSS and MS Excel.

**Research Findings:**

The objective of the paper is to analyze how education, occupation, and the lack of infrastructural facilities influence patterns of migration. This pattern of migration has been categorised under two forms: (i) place of migration and (ii) nature of migration, and for the analysis, is selected as the dependent variable (DVs). The former three, whose influence has to be analysed, are selected as the independent variables (IVs).

On analysing the data for establishing a relationship between education and the place of migration (intra or interstate), it was observed that the correlation between the two is negatively significant (Table 1). Thus, establishing that the level of education (intermediate or higher education) of the people affects their destination of migration, people with higher education mostly look out for only intrastate migration. This mild relationship between the two establishes that higher education is positively associated with intra-migration (migration within the state of Uttarakhand), which in turn can possibly be related to employment or better professional opportunities. The level of lower education can be linked to inter-state migration (migration outside the state of Uttarakhand), likely driven by the search for work in the non-organized sector, especially in the metropolitan cities, or these people migrate out of the state to cities with industrial zones in search of basic jobs.

**Table 1: Relation between level of education and inter- or intra-state migration**

		Place of migration	
		IN	OUT
Q.3	Illiterate	0	2
	Primary	1	4
	Highschool	5	9
	Intermediate	11	8
	Higher Education	21	18
Total		38	41

We ran a correlation exercise in which we employed the place of migration as the dependent variable and Q.3 (level of education) as the independent variable. This gave a conclusion that the trend followed in Table 1 is significant, with a significance level of 0.035. On further observation of the trend in migration of people with higher education, the two categories were classified as follows: (i) people with higher education in a technical field, and (ii) people with higher education in a non-technical field. In Table 2, we did a layered cross-tabulation for education level, higher education, and place of migration, which brought us to the conclusion that people with higher education in technical fields prefer interstate migration for better opportunities serving their skill areas. It is mainly the people with higher education in a non-technical field who stay within the state, opting for intra-state migration, possibly because they are involved in government sector jobs.

**Table 2: Layered cross-tabulation for education level, higher education, and place of migration**

Place of migration			Higher education	
			Technical	Non-Technical
Intra-State	Education Level	Higher Education	47.6%	52.4%
Inter-state	Education Level	Higher Education	61.1%	38.9%

While education as an independent variable affects the migrational pattern in the form of intra or inter migration, the other two independent variables, occupational engagement and the cause of migration, show an insignificant relation with it. On the other hand, the other dependent variable, the migration pattern in terms of its nature (permanent or non-permanent), with similar independent variables, shows a significant relation (significance level of 0.042) with only the cause of migration.

**Table 3: Cross-tabulation between cause of migration and nature of migration.**

		Nature of migration	
		PERMANENT	NON-PERMANENT
CAUSE OF MIGRATION	Education	25	12
	Health	12	6
	Jobs according to skill	17	3
	chakbandi	4	0
Total		58	21

Another objective of the paper was to examine the social implications of migration on migrant communities and analyze the extent and nature of their continued engagement and connection with their native regions. Age, education level, and place of migration are playing a role in this connectivity and the level of it, to analyse this causes of connection, and status of connection have been selected as the Independent Variable (IVs), while the formers have been selected as the Dependent Variable (DVs). Some specific questions were included in the questionnaire with this regard.

The questions were as follows:

- Are you still in some way or the other connected to your village (native place)? (Yes/ No)
- Do you know about the ancestral religious practices, cultural rites, and rituals? (a) Complete Knowledge (b) Some knowledge (c) very little knowledge (d) no knowledge

- Do you celebrate the local or regional festivals of your native place at your place of migration? (a) Yes (b) No
- We created 2 dummy variables for social connections to the native place: people connected are coded as 0, and people who are not connected (encompassing within it the less connected people) are coded as 1.
- For creating another Independent Variable (IV), the causes of these connections we computed two questions:
- What contributed the most to keeping up and still maintaining the connectivity with this place? (a) Emotional, Social, and religious attachment (b) Land & Property (c) Other reasons.
  - After determining the frequency of their visit and the time duration between these visits, the question framed was: The reason behind their visits to their native village? (a) Family Programmes (b) Community religious functions (c) Holiday visits (d) any other reasons.

The social, religious, emotional, and cultural reasons were coded as 0, and land, property, and holiday visits were coded as 1, while the other reasons were excluded because of no responses on them.

On analysing the relationship between the selected DVs and IVs, it was established that the relationship between them is not significant. Cross-tabulation between the status of connection, the reason for connection, and the age range (Table 4) concludes that the reason for connection to their native village remains mainly the social, emotional, and religious connectivity to their roots. It remains the only hook clinging to them and pulling them back to at least pay a visit to their native place; this pattern has been observed to be common for all age ranges.

Table 4: Cross-tabulation between status of connection, reason for connection, and age range.

ARE YOU CONNECTED WITH YOUR NATIVE PLACE			Age Range			Total
			18-35	36-50	50+	
YES	Reason for connection	Social, Emotional	14	22	21	57
		land and property	5	3	0	8
	Total		19	25	21	65
No	Reason for connection (based on their visits)	Social, Emotional	3	1	3	7
		land and property	1	0	1	2
	Total		4	1	4	9
Total			23	26	25	74

**RECOMMENDATION:**

The findings from the Dwarikhal block of Pauri Garhwal underscore the critical importance of adopting a multidimensional approach to migration policy—one that attends not only to structural economic factors but also to the affective, cultural, and social dimensions that shape migratory experiences and decisions. In particular, two thematic areas emerge as central to any effective intervention: first, the need to preserve and institutionalise religious, social, and cultural linkages; and second, the imperative to align technical education with local employment opportunities.

The data clearly shows that despite physical mobility, migrants across age groups maintain strong emotional, religious, and cultural attachments to their native villages. These enduring connections manifest in the observance of regional festivals, participation in family and community rituals, and knowledge of ancestral traditions. Such findings suggest that migration does not inherently sever cultural ties; rather, it reconfigures them across spatial scales. To preserve and strengthen these linkages, it is recommended that state and local governments institutionalise cultural continuity through the establishment of village-level cultural centres, community archives, and regular heritage festivals. These initiatives can function not only as platforms for the intergenerational transmission of traditions but also as symbolic spaces that reinforce identity and belonging. Additionally, integrating local cultural history into the school curriculum in rural areas can help anchor youth more deeply to their heritage, potentially mitigating the cultural detachment that often accompanies long-term migration. The need stands to understand and acknowledge development more not than just economic growth, it needs to have a comprehensive meaning to include the processes such as of social transformation and cultural change (Hass, 2024: p.87).

The creation of digital platforms—through which live-streamed events, newsletters, and cultural content can reach migrants—will further enable dispersed communities to remain virtually connected to their roots. Simultaneously, the study highlights a significant correlation between technical education and interstate migration, indicating that individuals with higher technical qualifications often leave the state due to the lack of adequate local employment opportunities. This pattern reflects a structural disjuncture between the state's educational outputs and its labour market absorptive capacity. Addressing this mismatch requires a robust, locally grounded skill development strategy. It is recommended that district-level administrations conduct periodic skill mapping exercises to assess the existing educational profiles and identify growth sectors that can be nurtured within the region, such as renewable energy, agro-processing, eco-tourism, and IT-enabled services. Based on this mapping, skill development centres and technical institutions should be incentivised to offer context-specific training programmes that align with regional economic potentials.

Moreover, the promotion of rural entrepreneurship and self-employment is essential for harnessing the potential of technically skilled youth. Establishing Rural Start-up Hubs, equipped with incubation facilities, microfinance support, and market linkages, can enable return migrants or youth still residing in the region to develop sustainable livelihoods without migrating. Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) should be encouraged to attract investments in rural enterprise zones, with the government offering fiscal and infrastructural incentives to businesses that generate local employment. In addition, ongoing skill upgradation for already migrated individuals—through online platforms and mobile training modules—should be supported to facilitate potential reverse migration. The creation of a Reverse Migration Registry at the district level can further assist in tracking returnees' qualifications, skills, and aspirations, allowing for more targeted policy delivery and employment matchmaking.

Scattered agricultural land has become a significant issue for most of the population, making chakbandi a key recommendation. Individuals interested in reverse migration have shown a particular interest in agriculture, especially in cash crop cultivation, which is hindered by fragmented land. Policymakers should focus not only on laws related to chakbandi but also on strengthening the promotion of cash crop cultivation in the area. Among the migrated population sample, 28.8% believe that Skill India's mission is crucial for promoting reverse migration. They suggest that the government should concentrate on developing skills that encompass a wide range of areas, from agriculture to startups. In addition to skill development, it is essential to create job opportunities for skilled individuals to prevent migration for employment reasons. While policies are being developed and investments are made, significant efforts are still needed to raise awareness among people about the initiatives implemented by the government.

### Conclusion:

This study set out to examine the multidimensional relationship between education, occupational engagement, and infrastructural inadequacies in shaping migration patterns, using the Dwarikhal block in the Pauri Garhwal district of Uttarakhand as its empirical base. Located in the middle Himalayan zone, Dwarikhal represents a region that typifies the broader socio-economic and demographic challenges of Uttarakhand's hilly districts, characterised by steep terrain, declining agricultural viability, and increasingly mobile populations. By situating the study in this specific locality and drawing on a combination of quantitative and qualitative data, the research adopts an inductive methodology, beginning with micro-level evidence to construct broader analytical insights into rural migration trends within the state.

The data reveal that education is a key driver of migration patterns, significantly influencing the place of migration, whether intra-state or inter-state. The study found that individuals with higher levels of education, particularly in non-technical disciplines, often prefer intra-state migration. These individuals are more likely to seek employment within Uttarakhand, particularly in administrative, teaching, or service-oriented sectors—possibly due to their familiarity with local bureaucratic structures, cultural comfort, and existing social capital. Conversely, those with technical education are more inclined to migrate interstate, in pursuit of employment opportunities that better align with their specialised skills. These opportunities tend to be concentrated in larger urban centres, industrial corridors, or tech hubs—spaces where Uttarakhand's limited labour market cannot absorb such talent. On the other end of the educational spectrum, those with lower educational attainment or no formal education at all tend to migrate out of the state, often seeking work in the unorganised or informal sectors of metropolitan cities. These migrations are less about aspiration and more about survival, motivated by a lack of local employment, declining agricultural returns, and minimal infrastructural support. The migration, in these cases, is often forced rather than voluntary, reflecting structural inequalities and long-standing regional disparities.

Interestingly, while education was shown to have a statistically significant correlation with the destination of migration, other variables such as occupation and stated cause of migration did not demonstrate a strong association with place. However, when analysing the nature of migration—whether permanent or non-permanent—the cause of migration did emerge as a significant variable. Permanent migrants tended to cite structural and long-term motivations—such as better educational opportunities, access to healthcare, and employment matching their skills—while non-permanent migrants were more likely to be engaged in seasonal, circular, or temporary labour patterns. This dichotomy reflects the complex layering of push and pull factors that shape migration beyond purely economic rationales. A third and equally significant objective of the study was to analyse the social implications of migration, particularly in terms of migrants' continued engagement with their native communities. Despite the spatial dislocation, the study found that emotional, cultural, and religious bonds to the native village remain strong among most migrants, regardless of age or distance. A majority of respondents expressed sustained involvement in the life of their native villages through regular visits, knowledge of ancestral customs and rituals, and participation in regional festivals. These ties often serve as intangible but powerful anchors that maintain a sense of identity and belonging, despite the physical rupture of migration. Importantly, these connections are not predominantly driven by material interests such as landholding or property rights. Rather, they are sustained through symbolic, affective, and cultural ties, such as emotional attachment to ancestral land, participation in religious ceremonies, or a sense of duty toward one's lineage. This finding challenges the dominant perception that migration necessarily leads to social alienation or disconnection from one's roots. In the case of Dwarikhal, and arguably other similar regions in Uttarakhand, migration coexists with memory, tradition, and periodic return, producing a form of mobility that is not linear but oscillatory and relational.

These insights have several critical policy implications. One of the most pressing concerns is the fragmentation of agricultural land, which has made farming increasingly unviable and unattractive, especially for those considering reverse migration. Many respondents interested in returning to their native place expressed enthusiasm for engaging in agriculture, particularly cash crop cultivation, but highlighted land fragmentation (absence of chakbandi) as a major obstacle. Thus, implementing effective land consolidation policies is a necessary precondition for making reverse migration a viable and sustainable option. Secondly, the findings affirm the importance of targeted skill development, particularly in alignment with local resource economies. While national schemes like Skill India were recognised by 28.8% of respondents as a potential game changer, concerns were raised about their limited outreach and contextual mismatch. Migrants and returnees expressed a need for locally relevant, diversified skill training, spanning from sustainable agriculture to digital entrepreneurship and eco-tourism. Crucially, such skill development must be linked with local employment generation so that trained individuals are not compelled to leave in search of work elsewhere. Furthermore, the study emphasises the importance of awareness generation and last-mile delivery. Many government initiatives, while well-intentioned, remain underutilised due to gaps in communication, trust, and bureaucratic efficiency. Addressing this requires not just administrative reform but community-level engagement, civil society partnerships, and culturally sensitive outreach strategies that resonate with the aspirations of both migrants and non-migrants. In conclusion, this study—grounded in the specific context of Dwarikhal block—offers a window into the larger socio-economic and emotional dynamics of migration in Uttarakhand's hill regions. It demonstrates that migration is not merely a response to economic necessity but a deeply layered social process shaped by aspiration, constraint, identity, and rootedness. The findings suggest that any policy framework aimed at addressing migration—whether by arresting out-migration or encouraging reverse migration—must go beyond infrastructure or employment generation. It must adopt a holistic, human-centred approach that recognises the plural motivations behind mobility and integrates emotional, cultural, and structural realities into the development discourse.

Such an approach would not only support the aspirations of the current generation of migrants but also ensure that the connection to their Himalayan homeland remains strong, both as a place of origin and as a potential site of return, renewal, and sustainable development.

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