DOI: 10.21088/ijra.2454.9118.12126.1

Indian Journal of Research in Anthropology
Volume 12, Number 1, January-June 2026

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

At the Crossroads of Development and Migration: Border Village Realities in Nadia District, West Bengal, India

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HOW TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Sovan Chakraborty. At the Crossroads of Development and Migration: Border Village Realities in Nadia District, West Bengal, India. Ind J Res Anthropol 2026; 12(1): 07-18.

ABSTRACT

Migration is the movement of the people from one place to another. It has both positive and negative impact to the society. Development is the change of livelihood and growth that often related with migration. In border region villages always marked by inconsistencies of development and deprivation, shaped by state policies, cross-border mobility, and socio-economic transformations. This study examines the interrelationship between development initiatives and patterns of migration in the border villages of Nadia District, West Bengal, India. It is an area contiguous with Bangladesh and marked by historical, cultural, and economic interconnectedness. The central hypothesis posits that uneven development and limited livelihood diversification drive cyclical and seasonal migration, which in turn reshapes local economies and social structures. Drawing on a mixed-method approach combines household surveys, ethnographic fieldwork, and participatory observation in selected border villages, the study tests the hypothesis by mapping development indicators against migration intensity. The findings reveal that despite infrastructural improvements and state welfare interventions, persistent livelihood insecurity, land fragmentation, and border-related restrictions continue to propel migration, both internal and transnational, as a coping and aspirational strategy. Migration has generated new income streams and remittance-based development but has also deepened social differentiation and gendered vulnerabilities. The paper concludes that borderland development must be reconceptualized beyond physical infrastructure and to include inclusive livelihood planning and frame rural development policies. Anthropologically, the article highlights how border villages function as dynamic socio-economic spaces, where people tactically negotiate state interventions and mobility opportunities.

KEYWORDS

• Migration • Development • Ethnography • Border Villages • Livelihood

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➢ **Received:** 31-10-2025 ➢ **Accepted:** 02-01-2026

INTRODUCTION

Migration, at its core, is the movement of people from one place to another but such a definition barely captures its complexity. Movement may be temporary or permanent, voluntary or forced, shaped by necessity or aspiration. People migrate to seek work, escape insecurity, respond to ecological change, or pursue uncertain opportunities elsewhere. Economic pressures merge with social obligations, political exclusions intersect with environmental decline. Migration, then, is less a single event than a process that unfolds through time, memory, and hope.

According to the report of Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, (OECD, 2023) the number of new permanent migrants to OECD countries rose by 26 percent in 2022, reaching a record high. Yet global figures tell only part of the story. Beneath these large-scale flows lie quieter mobilities such as seasonal, circular, and rural–urban movements that rarely make headlines but sustain millions of households. Across India, especially in its border regions, migration remains a crucial survival strategy amid recurring uncertainties. In places like Nadia district in West Bengal close to the India–Bangladesh border, mobility becomes both a necessity and an act of endurance in the face of crop failures, shrinking landholdings, and volatile border economies.

Development, by contrast, is often imagined as a destination of a point reached through growth, infrastructure, and investment. But this view may be too narrow. When understood purely in economic terms that income levels, production, consumption, it risks neglecting the social and cultural dimensions that shape human well-being. Vidyarthi (1980) argued that development entails not only material progress but also human transformation: changes in values, relationships, and organization. Similarly, Schumacher (1977:157) emphasized that "development does not start with goods, it starts with people and their education, organisation and discipline." These insights remind us that development without human context becomes hollow.

The migration–development nexus, however, remains fraught with contradictions. Migration may ease local unemployment and generate remittances that stimulate rural economies, yet it can also deepen dependency and inequality. The celebration of remittances as symbols of "grassroots development" often shifts responsibility from governments to individuals. What appears as empowerment can, under closer scrutiny, reproduce vulnerability. Migrants' associations frequently fund schools, roads, or welfare projects in their home villages, but such initiatives sometimes serve as substitutes for state-led development, not supplements to it. The line between state withdrawal and community initiative is often blurred.

In border districts like Nadia, these tensions become especially pronounced. Borderlands occupy a paradoxical position in the national imagination, strategically important yet socially marginalized. Despite their proximity to Kolkata, many of Nadia's villages experience chronic underdevelopment: poor infrastructure, insecure livelihoods, and limited access to welfare. State interventions, filtered through security concerns, often fail to address long-term livelihood issues. Here, migration emerges as an everyday strategy for survival and aspiration that is a means to stabilize life amid unpredictability.

Nadia district has historically been a space of mobility. Its border villages witness continuous flows of people to urban centers in search of work, education, and dignity. Such migration stems from structural underdevelopment like low agricultural productivity, limited non-farm employment, and inadequate public services. While remittances provide financial relief, they also reshape social relations and gender roles, particularly as women and the elderly manage households in the absence of male migrants. Migration, then, becomes both an outcome of uneven development and a creative response to it.

Despite numerous government schemes from rural employment programs to infrastructure projects the border villages often remain at the margins of policy implementation. Development initiatives rarely capture the layered vulnerabilities of these communities, where livelihood insecurity intersects with geographic isolation and administrative neglect. This gap between policy intent and lived experience pushes households to rely on migration as a form of adaptation and resilience.

This study examines the intersection of socio-economic conditions and access to basic amenities in the selected border villages. It also examines the patterns, causes, and consequences of migration as part of household livelihood strategies and explore developmental programmes and local aspirations. Rather than treating migration as either a problem or a solution, the analysis views it as a social process through which people interpret what development means, what it promises, and how it fails to reach them. Ultimately, the border villages of Nadia district illustrate the entangled realities of migration and development in India's margins, where movement is not just an escape from underdevelopment but also a negotiation with it.

CONCEPTUAL DIMENSIONS

Migration and development are not new concerns, yet the recent resurgence of scholarly and policy interest in their interconnections may suggest a renewed effort to understand old dynamics in a changing global context (Kapur 2003; Ratha 2003). The developmental factors that influence migration are, in many ways, the same forces that shape development outcomes in migrant-sending regions (Taylor 1999). Attempts to produce a single, comprehensive theory of migration have remained elusive (Lee 1966; Massey *et al.* 1998), largely because migration is deeply entangled with broader socio-economic and political processes that resist neat generalization (Salt 1987; Van Amersfoort 1998).

Early theoretical efforts, such as Ravenstein's nineteenth-century "laws of migration" (1885), conceptualized movement as a predictable response to distance, density, and opportunity. Neo-classical economic models later reframed migration as a rational, individual decision: a process of maximizing income through labour mobility between regions with differing wage levels (Lewis 1954; Todaro 1969; Harris & Todaro 1970). In contrast, historical-structural perspectives which rooted in Marxist political economy and world-systems theory that situate migration within global inequalities and capitalist expansion (Castles & Miller 2003). Yet this approach, while illuminating macro-level constraints, risks underestimating individual and collective agency within those very structures (Sen 1999). Lee's (1966) analytical reformulation of Ravenstein's ideas introduced the now-familiar "push-pull" framework which linking migration decisions to conditions at the origin and destination, intervening obstacles, and personal characteristics. Although this model remains conceptually useful, its simplicity often fails to capture the complexity and non-linearity of real migration flows, which rarely conform to the clean symmetry of "push" and "pull."

Theoretical developments since the 1980s have gradually moved away from such rigid dichotomies. Drawing on Giddens' (1984) structuration theory, scholars began integrating structure and agency in more dynamic ways. The New Economics of Labour Migration (NELM) emerged as an important intervention, shifting attention from individuals to households (Skeldon 1997). Migration, in this view, is not merely a response to wage differentials but a deliberate household strategy to diversify income, reduce risk, and secure economic stability (McDowell & de Haan 1997). This perspective aligns with livelihood approaches, which emphasize how families sustain themselves through a combination of local work, remittances, and social networks.

These theoretical shifts provide a valuable lens through which to interpret the experiences of border villages in Nadia District. Development in these spaces may be described as occurring "at the margins," where infrastructural deficits, irregular state interventions, and informal livelihoods converge. Migration thus appears as both a coping mechanism and a form of aspiration—an attempt by households to manage structural vulnerability while seeking social mobility. Gender and age introduce further complexity. Young men often engage in seasonal or long-distance migration, while women manage households, remittances, and community ties. Their agency becomes central to sustaining both local livelihoods and the emotional economies of migration. The older population, meanwhile, negotiates gradual dislocation and the erosion of traditional support systems, underscoring how migration reshapes generational relations and community cohesion. In conceptual terms, then, migration and development are best understood as reciprocally linked processes shaped by both structural conditions and human agency. The border villages of Nadia exemplify how mobility, marginality, and adaptation intersect—revealing that migration is not merely a symptom of underdevelopment but also an expression of resilience and the search for dignity within uneven developmental landscapes.

Area, Population, and Methodology

The study was conducted in two villages *i.e.,* Banpur and Matiari under the Matiari–Banpur Gram Panchayat in Krishnaganj Block of Nadia district, West Bengal, India. Nadia lies between 22º53′ and 24º11′ N latitudes and 88º09′ and 88º48′ E longitudes, covering around 3,900 sq. km. The district, divided by the Tropic of Cancer, borders Bangladesh to the east, Murshidabad to the north, Bardhaman and Hooghly to the west, and North 24 Parganas to the south. It is well connected by National Highway 34 and the Sealdah-Gede railway line, which links Kolkata with Bangladesh through the international rail checkpoint at Gede.

Banpur and Matiari villages, located about 75 km from Krishnanagar town, represent typical rural border settlements. Matiari has 1,516 households with a population of 7,235 (3,731 males and 3,522 females), while Banpur has 1,112 households and 5,236 people (2,659 males and 2,577 females). Both villages are multi-caste and multi-religious. In Matiari, 1,066 families belong to the general caste, 130 to OBC, 220 to SC, and 100 to ST groups. Banpur shows a different pattern: 450 general, 160 OBC, 500 SC, and only 2 ST families. Hindus form the majority, alongside a notable Muslim minority.

The research followed a mixed-methods design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches. A sample of 200 households, 100 from each village was selected purposively to balance caste, class, and religion. Household surveys provided demographic and migration data, while in-depth interviews, life histories, and participant observation offered insights into everyday livelihood strategies. Following an anthropological perspective, the study emphasizes how migration operates as both an economic necessity and a social process shaped by development policies, kinship ties, and the uncertainties of borderland life.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

I. Socio-Economic Profile of the Studied Villages

The studied villages, Banpur and Matiari, are revenue villages located about 26 km from the block headquarters and 75 km from the district town. Situated near the Bangladesh border, they are surrounded by paddy fields, an international railway line, and neighbouring hamlets. Connected by mud roads to all-weather routes, the villages have scattered settlements. Among the 200 surveyed families, most depend on agriculture and daily wage labour, often combining both to sustain their livelihoods. The socio-economic condition of the surveyed villages reflects gradual progress amid persistent infrastructural gaps. Despite inclusion in Krishnaganj Block, access to safe drinking water, sanitation, and health services remains inadequate. Most households depend on hand pumps and tube wells, while unmetalled roads and poor transport connectivity restrict mobility and access to markets. These deficits reinforce villagers' sense of marginality within development processes.

Table 1: Basic Amenities of the Studied Families

Categories	Types with Percentage of Families		
Source of Drinking Water		n=200 (100%)	
	Well	River/Pond	Tube Well
	14.00	2.00	84.00
Method of Purification		n=200 (100%)	
	Strain by Cloths	Others	No Purification
	43.56	5.06	51.38
Types of Houses		n=200 (100%)	
	Kaccha	Pucca	
	82.25	17.75	
Type of Fuel Using for Cooking		n=200 (100%)	
	Wood	Crop Residuces	Others
	26.00	34.00	40.00

Cooking Place	n=200 (100%)	
	Inside the house	Outside the house
	36.32	63.68
Electrification	n=200 (100%)	
	Present	Absent
	75.00	25.00

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

Table 1 depicts a concise picture into the everyday realities of 200 surveyed households. About 84% depend on tube wells for drinking water which is a sign of growing reliance on groundwater. Yet 14% still use wells and 2% draw from rivers or ponds, reflecting both habit and necessity. Water purification practices are even more telling. Over half (51.38%) of households do not purify their water, and 43.56% rely only on cloth filtration, a method offering little protection from pathogens but requiring no cost or technology. A mere 5.06% use safer methods such as boiling or filtering. These figures suggest that awareness alone does not guarantee behavioural change; affordability and access remain decisive. Housing patterns echo these inequalities: 82.25% live in kaccha houses, compared to 17.75% in pucca ones. The latter often belong to families benefiting from government housing schemes or stable incomes. Such contrasts mark the uneven geography of rural well-being. Energy and cooking arrangements add further complexity. Many still rely on biomass fuels, and 63.68% cook outdoors, indicating space constraints and health risks from smoke exposure. Electrification reaches 75% of households, but erratic supply undermines its promise. Overall, these numbers portray a slow, uneven transition. Material improvements coexist with persistent vulnerabilities, reminding us that rural development unfolds not in leaps but through fragile, negotiated steps shaped by class, gender, and access.

The age-sex structure of the surveyed population reveals a distinctly youthful demographic profile, with a large proportion belonging to the working-age group. This indicates a strong potential labour force, though much of it is engaged in seasonal or long-term migration in search of employment. The sex ratio appears relatively balanced overall, yet male out-migration significantly alters household dynamics. Many families are effectively female-headed, as women assume primary responsibility for household management, childcare, and elder care in the absence of men. This demographic pattern highlights the interplay between migration, gender roles, and rural livelihoods, where economic necessity drives mobility but also reshapes social and familial structures within the villages.

Table 2: Age sex wise classification

Age Group	Sex				Total	
	Male	%	Female	%	No	%
0-4	39	4.23	28	3.04	67	7.27
5-9	45	4.89	44	4.78	89	9.66
10-14	62	6.73	50	5.43	112	12.16
15-19	59	6.41	43	4.67	102	11.07
20-24	44	4.78	39	4.23	83	9.01
25-29	34	3.69	38	4.13	72	7.82
30-34	33	3.58	40	4.34	73	7.93
35-39	41	4.45	48	5.21	89	9.66
40-44	38	4.13	30	3.26	68	7.38
45-49	30	3.26	29	3.15	59	6.41
50-54	22	2.39	14	1.52	36	3.91
55-59	22	2.39	10	1.09	32	3.47
60-64	10	1.09	8	0.87	18	1.95
65-69	9	0.98	5	0.54	14	1.52
70-74	1	0.11	3	0.33	4	0.43
75+	1	0.11	2	0.22	3	0.33
Total	490	53.20	431	46.80	921	100.00

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

The demographic profile shows in Table-2 of the surveyed villages, based on 921 individuals, reveals a youthful and slightly male-leaning population. Males account for 53.20% (490) and females 46.80% (431), yielding a sex ratio of 880 females per 1,000 males, below the national average. This mild imbalance may reflect male predominance due to cultural, migratory, or reporting factors. Age distribution indicates a broad base, with the 0–14 years group comprising 29.09%, highlighting high fertility and a substantial dependent population. The 15–24 age group (20.08%) represents emerging labour potential, though whether this translates into productive employment depends on local opportunities and skills. The 25–39 years cohort (25.41%) forms the core economically active segment, often engaged in agriculture, wage labour, or seasonal migration. Gender representation in this bracket suggests women participate in productive work, albeit often unrecorded. From 40 years onward, population gradually declines, with those 60 years and above constituting only 4.23%, indicating low longevity or possible outmigration of elderly dependents. Overall, the population exhibits an expansive base and constricted top, typical of developing rural areas. The structure underscores high dependency ratios, youthful labour potential, and the critical need for investments in child health, education, and livelihood opportunities, while highlighting how migration reshapes household composition and gender roles.

The villages show modest literacy levels, with primary education widely accessed but secondary and higher education limited due to scarce institutions and financial constraints. Thus, education both reflects and shapes migration patterns, linking aspirations with household livelihood strategies and highlighting the role of educational access in rural development.

Table 3: Educational status

Categories	Sex				Total	
	Male	%	Female	%	No	%
Can Not Sign	103	11.18	124	13.46	227	24.65
Can Sign	1	0.11	2	0.22	3	0.33
Below Primary	10	1.09	5	0.54	15	1.63
Class 1 to 5	173	18.78	175	19.00	348	37.79
Class 6 to 10	134	14.55	89	9.66	223	24.21
Class 11-12	28	3.04	9	0.98	37	4.02
Graduation and Above	9	0.98	1	0.11	10	1.09
Not Applicable	32	3.47	26	2.82	58	6.30
Total	**490**	**53.20**	**431**	**46.80**	**921**	**100.00**

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

The educational profile of the surveyed population highlights limited attainment and persistent gender gaps. Out of 921 individuals, 24.65% are illiterate, with females (13.46%) slightly outnumbering males (11.18%) among them. A negligible 0.33% can merely sign their names, while 1.63% fall below primary level. The largest group, 37.79%, completed Class 1–5, showing broad access to primary education, but progression beyond this remains constrained. About 24.21% reached Class 6–10, with males (14.55%) more likely to continue than females (9.66%), reflecting household responsibilities, early marriage, and limited local secondary schools. Higher education is rare: only 4.02% completed Class 11–12, and 1.09% attained graduation or above, almost exclusively men. The 6.3% 'Not Applicable' group likely includes very young children and the elderly. These figures suggest that while basic literacy and primary schooling are widespread, secondary and tertiary education remain largely inaccessible. The gendered dropout pattern points to structural and cultural barriers, highlighting that education, though present, is not yet fully transformative, limiting opportunities for empowerment and upward mobility.

Table 4: Marital Status

Types	Sex				Total	
	Male	%	Female	%	No	%
Married	219	23.78	220	23.89	439	47.67
Unmarried	260	28.23	181	19.65	441	47.88
Widow	1	0.11	29	3.15	30	3.26
Widower	10	1.09	0	0.00	10	1.09
Separated	0	0.00	1	0.11	1	0.11
Total	**490**	**53.20**	**431**	**46.80**	**921**	**100.00**

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

Table-4 outlines the marital composition of the studied population and offers insight into both gender roles and demographic tendencies. Out of 921 individuals, 47.88% are unmarried, while 47.67% are married, a nearly equal division that suggests a relatively young population where a large share has not yet entered marriageable age. Among males, 28.23% are unmarried compared to 19.65% females, while 23.78% of males and 23.89% of females are married. The category of widowhood is notably gendered: 3.15% of females are widows, while only 1.09% of males are widowers. This contrast likely reflects higher male mortality rates and the cultural norm of women not remarrying after the husband's death, whereas widowers may enter new unions more readily. The presence of a small separated category (0.11%) suggests that marital breakdown remains rare or underreported, possibly due to the social stigma surrounding separation in rural settings.

Table 5: Occupational Status

Types	Sex				Total	
	Male	**%**	**Female**	**%**	**No**	**%**
Agriculture	40	4.34	3	0.33	43	4.67
Unemployed	20	2.17	9	0.98	29	3.15
Not Applicable	32	3.47	25	2.71	57	6.19
Others	37	4.02	13	1.41	50	5.43
Old Age Pension	1	0.11	3	0.33	4	0.43
Aged	5	0.54	10	1.09	15	1.63
Agricultural Labour	17	1.85	50	5.43	67	7.27
Day Labour	126	13.68	76	8.25	202	21.93
Business	41	4.45	4	0.43	45	4.89
Housework	0	0.00	123	13.36	123	13.36
Service	23	2.50	1	0.11	24	2.61
Student	148	16.07	114	12.38	262	28.45
Total	490	53.20	431	46.80	921	100.00

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

The occupational distribution in Table 5 paints a picture of a community where manual and informal labour still dominates economic life. The largest group identified themselves as students (28.45%), which aligns with the youthful age structure observed earlier. A substantial 21.93% are engaged as day labourers, suggesting dependence on irregular and low-paying work. This category includes 13.68% males and 8.25% females, highlighting men's greater participation in wage-based outdoor employment. Agricultural labour follows with 7.27% (1.85% males and 5.43% females), showing that women remain significantly involved in agricultural activities, often as low-paid or seasonal workers rather than landowners.

Only 4.67% report direct involvement in agriculture as cultivators, pointing to declining or fragmented landholdings. The presence of 4.89% in business and 2.61% in service suggests small but emerging engagement in non-agricultural livelihoods—mostly men, as women's participation in these sectors remains minimal. The housework category, at 13.36%, is exclusively female, reflecting traditional gender divisions where domestic labour is unpaid and socially undervalued. Men dominate wage labour and small-scale economic activities, while women's work remains concentrated in agriculture and household domains. The large proportion of students hints at a population in transition, yet the limited scope of formal employment suggests that educational gains have not yet translated into substantial occupational mobility.

Table 6: Annual Income

Income Range in Rupees (Annual)	No of Families	%
Below 25000	3	1.50
25001-40000	15	7.50
40001-60000	68	34.00
60001-80000	40	20.00
80001-100000	34	17.00
Above 100000	40	20.00
Total	200	100.00

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

The income distribution in Table-6 highlights the modest economic standing of the surveyed families. The majority (34.00%) fall within the ₹40,001–60,000 annual income range, indicating that most families subsist on a very limited cash flow. This level of income, when broken down monthly, suggests a hand-to-mouth existence with little room for savings or emergencies. A further 20.00% of families report earnings between ₹60,001–80,000, and another 17.00% fall within the ₹80,001–1,00,000 range. Together, these middle-income brackets make up over a third of the sample and may represent families with slightly more stable sources of livelihood perhaps small cultivators, skilled labourers, or those engaged in petty trade. At both extremes, the contrast is clear. Only 1.50% of households earn below ₹25,000, suggesting that absolute poverty, while present, is relatively limited in proportion. The small share of high-income families points to modest upward mobility, while the majority remain within subsistence or near-subsistence levels. The figures collectively suggest a community that is neither destitute nor prosperous, but rather caught in the slow, uneven process of economic improvement typical of rural India today.

II. Migration Dynamics and Consequences

Migration in the studied villages emerges as both a livelihood necessity and a social strategy. Limited employment opportunities, declining agricultural productivity, and uneven development drive many particularly young men to migrate seasonally or long-term to urban centres such as Kolkata, Mumbai, or Delhi. The data and field observations suggest that migration is largely economically motivated, though social aspirations, education, and marriage also play a role. The social consequences of migration are equally layered. Returning migrants bring new ideas, aspirations, and consumption patterns that gradually reshape local lifestyles and values. Yet, the absence of adequate institutional support for returnees such as skill recognition or reintegration programmes limits the developmental potential of migration. In essence, migration here functions as both an adaptation to underdevelopment and a contributor to social change, producing a complex mix of economic relief, social transformation, and emotional cost.

Table 7: Migration Profile of the Studied Population

Year of Migration	No. of Families Migrated	Causes of Migration	No. of Persons Migrated	Place of Migration	% of Total Persons (n=83)
1947	1	War	1	Within 100 km	1.20%
1950	3	War	4	201–300 km	4.82%
1961	3	War	5	101–200 km	6.02%
1965	2	Economic	3	301–400 km	3.61%
1967	1	Other	1	401–500 km	1.20%
1971	30	War	54	Within 100 km	65.06%
1975	1	Riot	2	More than 500 km	2.41%
1980	1	Other	3	More than 500 km	3.61%
Total	42	–	83	–	100.00%

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

Migration among the studied population (Table-7) occurred in distinct waves rather than continuously. Out of 200 households, 42 families reported migration between 1947 and 1980, with a marked spike in 1971 (30 families, 3.26%), corresponding to the Bangladesh Liberation War. Early migrations were minimal, typically involving one to three families per year, likely due to minor local disturbances, individual household decisions, or routine mobility. The age profile of migrants shows that migration was predominantly youth-centered. Out of 83 persons migrated, 65.06% were aged 13–20 years, and 28.92% were aged 21–30 years, while older adults (31+) accounted for only 6% of migrants. This indicates that adolescents and young adults were the most mobile, taking on responsibilities for relocation, adaptation, and livelihood in new settlements. Migration was spatially heterogeneous. Most individuals (31.33%) moved within 100 km, preferring nearby locations likely to retain social networks and access familiar resources. Another significant share (27.71%) migrated more than 500 km, including a small number (3.61%) relocating outside India, reflecting forced cross-border displacement. Medium-distance migration (101–500 km) accounted for the remainder, showing that migration was not limited to local or short-range movement.

Migration in the studied villages appears to be shaped more by external compulsion than voluntary choice. The primary drivers were conflict and insecurity (Table 7), which affected 35 families (3.80%), forcing them to relocate in search of safety and stability. Economic distress, reported by 4 families (0.43%), was another important factor—closely tied to shrinking agricultural returns, land fragmentation, and limited rural employment opportunities. A smaller share of households migrated due to riots, marriage, or kinship ties, reflecting the social and personal dimensions that often accompany mobility decisions. For most families, migration functioned simultaneously as a survival mechanism and a development pathway. It provided immediate relief from conflict or livelihood stress while also opening possibilities for income diversification, risk reduction, and access to better services. Yet, this movement also underscores the uneven geography of opportunity—where leaving home becomes a necessary strategy to sustain it.

Table 8: Gendered Dimensions of Migration among the Studied Households

Gender Role	Migration Status / Role	Key Responsibilities	Indicators of Agency / Impact	Overall Implication
Men	Predominantly out-migrants (seasonal or long-term)	Wage labour, construction, transport, service sector jobs in urban centres	Main income earners; send remittances to sustain families	Male migration leads to household economic dependence on external income sources
Women	Left-behind population, managing household in absence of men	Agricultural work, domestic labour, care of children and elders, managing remittances	Increased decision-making in household expenditure; active participation in SHGs (Self-Help Groups) and local institutions	Women's roles expand in economic and social domains, though often without recognition or reduction in workload
Joint / Household Level	Shared coping strategy under economic and social stress	Redistribution of tasks among members; reliance on community networks	Strengthened solidarity among women; emergence of informal support groups	Migration transforms family structure and gender relations, producing both empowerment and added burdens for women.

The gendered nature of migration in the studied villages reveals a distinct reorganization of labour and responsibility within households. Men constitute the majority of migrants, seeking wage work in distant cities to supplement rural incomes. Their absence, however, fundamentally reshapes the gender dynamics at home. Women, often left behind, shoulder expanded roles—managing agriculture, caring for dependents, and overseeing the use of remittances. This shift has brought about a paradoxical form of empowerment: women gain greater involvement in financial decisions and participate more actively in self-help groups (SHGs) and community networks, yet their workload increases significantly. While these changes enhance women's agency in household and community affairs, they rarely translate into structural empowerment, as decision-making authority often remains bounded by patriarchal norms. Migration thus acts as a double-edged process—opening avenues for female participation and leadership while reinforcing traditional expectations of care and domestic responsibility.

Migration generated both positive and negative outcomes for the community:

Positive impacts:

- Income diversification, reducing reliance on subsistence farming.
- Improved consumption, including food, clothing, and household necessities.
- Access to urban networks, facilitating employment, education, and healthcare.
- Investment in children's education, supported by remittances.

Negative impacts:

- Family separation, affecting children, elderly, and women emotionally and socially.
- Insecurity for women and elderly, particularly in long-distance or cross-border migration.
- Cultural shifts, as exposure to urban lifestyles influences local practices.
- Irregular remittance flow, creating uncertainty in household budgeting.

- Vulnerability at destinations, including precarious employment and social marginalization.

Migration also reshapes social hierarchies, distinguishing migrant and non-migrant households in terms of resources, influence, and opportunities. Drawing on the data presented in the preceding tables, migration emerges as a complex response to structural and economic limitations within the studied villages. Most households depend on agriculture and daily wage labour as their primary livelihoods, with over 21.93% engaged as day labourers and 7.27% as agricultural labourers. Yet, limited and irregular income, where nearly 42% of families earn below ₹80,000 annually, creates persistent financial insecurity. In such conditions, migration becomes less of a choice and more of a compulsion, a coping mechanism to supplement inadequate rural earnings. The connection with urban centres has also expanded access to services and exposure to new opportunities. However, these advantages are not evenly shared. Families without regular remittances continue to struggle, reinforcing intra-village inequalities and creating subtle hierarchies between migrant and non-migrant households.

The social cost is equally striking. Male-dominated migration patterns leave women with increased workloads, farming, caregiving, and managing household finances—all while contending with emotional strain and social insecurity. Elderly members, too, face neglect in the absence of younger kin. Moreover, irregular remittance flows and the unpredictability of urban employment often destabilize household budgets. Cultural influences from towns, carried back by returning migrants, are gradually reshaping local values, especially among the youth. Taken together, the data suggest that migration functions simultaneously as an economic lifeline and a source of social dislocation. It may alleviate short-term poverty but appears to deepen long-term dependency and inequality, reflecting the paradox of development in many rural economies of West Bengal.

III) Developmental Programmes and Aspirations

In the studied villages of Krishnaganj Block, development initiatives have gradually woven into the fabric of everyday life. Most families rely on state-led schemes for employment, food security, and basic welfare, reflecting both economic need and growing awareness of government support. Programmes like MGNREGA, Mid-Day Meal, and Swasthya Sathi are widely accessed, while newer schemes such as Lakshmir Bhandar and Kanyashree Prakalpa have created fresh aspirations, especially among women. Yet, despite visible progress, uneven implementation and bureaucratic hurdles continue to shape who benefits and who remains at the margins.

Table 9: Developmental Programmes and Beneficiaries

Types of Scheme/Programme	No. of Families Benefited (n=200)	%
MGNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act)	130	65.0
Indira Awas Yojana / PM Awas Yojana (Gramin)	13	6.5
Swarna Jayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana / NRLM (Self-Help Group Support)	12	6.0
Below Poverty Line (BPL) Card	84	42.0
Widow Pension (Social Security Scheme)	6	3.0
Old Age Pension (NSAP / State Pension)	8	4.0
Handicapped Allowance	1	0.5
Unemployment Allowance	2	1.0
Kanyashree Prakalpa (Girls' Education Support)	18	9.0
Rupashree Prakalpa (Marriage Assistance for Women)	6	3.0
Janani Suraksha Yojana	28	14.0
Mid-Day Meal Scheme	108	54.0
Smart Card / Swasthya Sathi (Health Insurance)	49	24.5
Antyodaya Anna Yojana (Food Security)	3	1.5
Patta (Land Distribution)	52	26.0
PM-KISAN Samman Nidhi (Direct Income Support to Farmers)	32	16.0
Lakshmir Bhandar (Women's Basic Income Support Scheme)	74	37.0
Bangla Awas Yojana (State Housing Scheme)	15	7.5
Jal Jeevan Mission (Rural Drinking Water Scheme)	21	10.5

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

The data presented in Table-9 provides an insightful overview of the reach and nature of state-led and central government developmental programmes in the studied villages. The figures indicate that while the presence of welfare schemes is extensive, access remains uneven and often mediated by local networks. Employment-oriented schemes like MGNREGA show the widest reach, benefitting 65% of households, which underscores the continuing dependence on public employment as a livelihood safety net in rural areas. Similarly, the Mid-Day Meal Scheme and BPL entitlements have significant coverage, reflecting the state's emphasis on food security and child nutrition.

Recent state initiatives such as Lakshmir Bhandar (37%) and Kanyashree Prakalpa (9%) reveal a growing orientation toward women-centric welfare, suggesting an emerging recognition of women's economic roles and social empowerment. However, relatively lower access to housing schemes like PM Awas Yojana (6.5%) and Bangla Awas Yojana (7.5%) hints at infrastructural and administrative constraints. Similarly, limited participation in income-support programmes like PM-KISAN (16%) indicates that small and marginal farmers may still face barriers in eligibility or documentation.

Overall, the data suggest that welfare penetration has expanded significantly, yet its benefits are not evenly distributed. The dependence on political patronage, bureaucratic hurdles, and fluctuating awareness levels among villagers continue to shape who actually gains from these programmes.

CONCLUSION

The field realities from the border villages of Nadia district offer no simple narrative—development and migration appear less as separate processes and more as intertwined strategies of survival and aspiration. The data show a youthful population caught between declining agricultural opportunities and the pull of urban labour markets. Migration, then, is not merely an outcome of poverty or conflict; it has become a way of imagining progress when the state's promises reach only halfway. Families send sons to Delhi or Mumbai, not always out of desperation, but with quiet hope that remittances might build a concrete house, fund a daughter's schooling, or secure a future slightly better than the present. Yet this mobility has costs that rarely make it into policy documents. The absence of men stretches women's responsibilities thin—they manage fields, finances, and children while negotiating a society that still sees them as dependents. The emotional weight of migration—loneliness, uncertainty, the slow erosion of family cohesion—is hard to quantify but deeply felt. Children's education suffers, elders are left untended, and everyday decisions become heavier without the familiar presence of a male figure.

Anthropologically, the villages illustrate what scholars describe as "embedded migration"—a process woven into local structures of kinship, gender, and class. Migration is not resistance to underdevelopment but a way of participating in it, a means of compensating for the uneven reach of state welfare. Programmes like MGNREGA, Lakshmir Bhandar, and Swasthya Sathi provide a lifeline, yet their uneven implementation reminds people that access still depends on who one knows, not only what one needs.

From a policy lens, these findings suggest that rural development cannot be meaningfully planned without acknowledging migration as part of the economic ecosystem. Strengthening local livelihoods, ensuring timely wage payments, and improving gender-sensitive welfare delivery could slow distress migration—but perhaps not eliminate it. After all, the desire to move, to seek something more, seems as much emotional as economic. Standing at the porous border, where language, festivals, and families flow freely across the line, it becomes clear that these communities live in a constant negotiation—between two nations, two economies, and two kinds of belonging. Their stories remind us that development here is not just about infrastructure or income. It is about dignity, stability, and the fragile hope that movement—whether across a field or a frontier—might still lead home.

Funding: Not available.

Conflicts of interest: The author declare no potential conflict of interest.

Ethical declaration: For this research ethical approval was not required.

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