

Digital India and Migration: The Impact of Digitalisation on Domestic Migrants in India

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Abstract: The idea of Digital India has been widely debated, discussed and written by Government Agencies and Social Thinkers. There have been numerous studies about Digital India and its impact on Society, Governance, Rural Development, Women Empowerment. However, these studies have given little importance to the role of digitalisation, and its impact on the migrant workers in India. This research study would fill this literature gap and addresses the link between digital India, digitalisation and domestic migrants in India. Specifically, this research explores how the digital innovations in recent times have helped them. This paper also investigates the challenges faced by them such as digital illiteracy, digital divide etc. Finally, the study ends with some suggestions, which would further enhance the link between digital India and Migration. The study's theoretic framework draws on the studies of Castells on Information society and Network Society, Dijk's concept of the network society and Drucker's idea of Knowledge society. The study pursues both qualitative and quantitative enquiry and uses both descriptive, and an exploratory research design. Data is collected from primary sources and through secondary literature. The data is drawn from Cluster Sampling Method by applying a two stage sampling process. Semi-Structured Interview Schedule and Direct Observations were employed to gather information. Hence, this study, by examining, sheds new light on the processes of digitalisation and its positive impact on the domestic migrants. The issues of digital divide and digital illiteracy are also reflected in the study. The dynamics of migration and challenges of digital India can effectively be resolved with corrective measures by all the stakeholders in the migration process.

Key Words: Digitalisation in India, Migration, Social Transformation, Digital Divide, Digital Society.

1. INTRODUCTION

The world is currently witnessing the unfolding of the Fourth Industrial Revolution and digital transformation which are fundamentally altering how people live, work, and connect with one another. As a result, digital society, digital relations, digital capital, and so on are emerging globally, which affect all aspects of people's life including migrants worldwide. This paradigm shift has become relevant to sociology just like any other societal aspect, social structures and social relations. The technological innovations and emerging digital tools are described using various terms such as Knowledge Society (Drucker, 1993) Information society (Dijk, 2006), Network Society (Dijk, 2006; Castells, 2010). These terms are used to denote the society that has emerged from the impact of information and communication technology (ICT). Drucker (1993), Dijk (2006) and Castells (2010) have used the terms "network society" "information society", "Knowledge Society" respectively to describe this type of society.

Digital India entails to digitally empower society by infusing digital technologies into the public service ecosystem to transform the country into a 'knowledge society and knowledge economy'. India's digital transformation journey started in the 1970s with the establishment of Department of Electronics and National informatics Center (NIC) in 1977. 1980s saw a few government computerisation efforts which had an impact on citizen services. The most notable of these was Indian Railways' computerisation of the passenger reservation system. All these shortcomings were addressed by the National e-Governance Plan (NeGP), initiated in 2006 with 31 Mission Mode Projects. In 2009, the Government of India setup Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) to issue "Aadhaar", to all residents of India based on their biometric and demographic data that serves as proof of identity and address, anywhere in India. To address the shortcomings in previous schemes, the e-Kranti program was launched in 2015. In the same year, Digital India, a flagship

program, with a vision to provide digital infrastructure as a source of utility to every citizen, governance and services on demand, and to connect rural areas with high-speed internet networks and improve digital literacy.

Migration implies the movement of people away from their usual place of residence, across either internal (within country) or international (across countries) borders. As per the Census data, India had 45.6 Crore migrants in 2011 (38% of the population) compared to 31.5 crore migrants in 2001 (31% of the population). In Census 2011, intra-state movement accounted for almost 88% of all internal migration (39.6 crore persons) and rest are inter-state migrants. The paper focusses on the inter-state migrants and as per census 2011, there were approximately 41.4 million of them. The stock of inter-state migrants is assessed to be over 25 to 30 lakh in Kerala (Narayana and Venkiteswaran, 2013). It is further estimated that migrant labourers in Kerala hover around 3.5 million to 4 million (Shebeen Mahaboob, 2023).

Digital India has witnessed numerous measures such as Unified Payments Interface (UPI) allowing millions of people to send and receive money instantly via mobile phones, Common Service Centres (CSC), public Wi-Fi hotspots etc. These digitalisation tools are particularly beneficial for the migrants, who are mobile in nature. Lee (1966) pointed out the Pull-Push theory as the major cause of migration. The 'Digital India' initiatives have deeply impacted the migrants in myriad ways. The paper analyses the functional and the dysfunctional aspects of it on the migrant workers. By addressing the research problem, the study seeks to provide actionable insights that can be helpful to all the stakeholders in migration process to ensure overall well being of domestic migrants in India.

In India, comparatively little research has been done on digital India, digitalisation and how it affects internal migration. Therefore, the choice, to investigate its functional and dysfunctional aspects, is grounded in the need to understand the dynamics of migration and its linkage with digital technologies. Furthermore, this research study is pertinent to all parties involved, including domestic migrants, social thinkers, and government agencies in both sending and receiving states etc. It would give an opportunity to them to make informed choices and take corrective measures. The research follows both quantitative and qualitative inquiry, pursuing an exploratory and descriptive research design. Both primary and secondary sources of data were used to gather information. This study is also based on the fieldwork that has been carried out in Pathanamthitta, Kerala.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Several social thinkers have explored the intersection of technology and society including migration, shedding light on how technological advancements have shaped the migration patterns and experiences. According to Drucker (1993) knowledge society is one which generates, shares and applies knowledge for the economic prosperity and well-being of its people. The concept of 'knowledge societies' includes a dimension of social, cultural, economical and institutional transformation, and a more pluralistic and developmental perspective. Whereas the concept of 'information society' is linked to the idea of 'technological innovation'. Castells (2010) describes network society as a society where the key social structures and activities are organised around electronically processed information networks. This is about social networks which process and manage information and are using micro-electronic based technologies. According to him, a number of major social, technological, economic and cultural transformations came together to give rise to a new form of society, which he termed as "Network Society".

McAuliffe (2017) has examined the role of technology, particularly 'Information and Communication Technology (ICT)' in facilitating both regular and irregular migration. She highlights several areas where technology impacts migration such as 'Decision Making' for their journeys, "Appification" of Migration-where migrants use apps to share real time information. She further highlighted how technology helps in the integration with the host communities as well as maintaining one's own identity.

Chaudhary and Lama (2019) have analysed the impact of Digital India on the Indian Society and how it transformed the lives and works of people. They concluded that a digitally connected India can help in improving social and economic condition of people through development of non-agricultural economic activities apart from providing access to education, health and financial services.

Andersson (2019) argued that migrant groups' daily lives now frequently involve the appropriation of new media environments and information and communication technologies (ICTs). By reviewing the body of research on migration and new media use, she has given a broad overview of the emerging field. She concluded that the frequency of new media use by migrant and diasporic populations defined the research agenda in the study of digital diaspora. The study also looked at issues including digital illiteracy, access to the new technology, and the digital divide.

Srivastava (2020) has recognised labour migration as major factor in the changing demographics in India with multi-faceted implications for the pace and pattern of development. However, he argued that there is no integrated policy framework addressing these implications. The study reviewed migration related initiatives in three Indian states viz. Kerala, Jharkhand, and Odisha. He concluded that myriad policies and programmes has come into place in states attempting to deal with specific types of migration but these are weak and have restricted impact. He further added that for migration policies to work, a coordination plan of action will be required between the Centre and States.

Harnoss et al. (2021) have emphasised how technology is essential to digital innovations brought out by global migration. They draw attention to the contributions made by immigrants and emigrants who worked for and started prosperous technology businesses. They cite the example of the Indian IT sector, which owes its success to the influx of return migrants from western countries. For instance, Fakir Chand Kohli contributed to the growth of Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) and Infosys co-founder Nandan Nilekani introduced the “Aadhaar” system. Thus, they highlighted the cyclic linkage between technology, migration and how talented migrants further ensures technological growth.

Chandrasekhar (2023) highlighted the deep-seated problems of the weak and the vulnerable migrant populations in the Global South due to a humanitarian crisis like COVID-19. Employing a stakeholder approach, this study explores the problems of migrants engaged in the construction sector in India, contextualising their engagement or dis-engagement with technology. The study found loopholes in implementation of the digital platforms and services which are indicative of poor governance that needs an overhaul to address the issues of informal migrant workers.

Laskar (2023) has pointed out how India has created opportunities for digitalisation. This led to a tremendous surge in service industries, the emergence of new sectors. However, this transformation also exposed the challenge of digital divide or digital inequalities. He pointed out that digital inequality is not limited to mere technological divide rather a complex issue shaped by prevailing socio-economic conditions and capability inequality. The existing digital divide is visible across rural and urban areas. Hence it affects access to digital education and economic opportunities.

Sindakis and Showkat (2024) investigates the factors that influence the adoption of digital technology in rural areas of India through ‘Digital India Program (DIP)’. By analysing the age distribution, education levels, technology adoption rates, and utilisation patterns among rural populations, this research highlights the effectiveness of the DIP in targeting specific demographics and promoting digital inclusion. The findings of the study reveal a predominantly young workforce in rural India with significant economic potential and a higher likelihood of embracing digital technologies.

Many studies have examined the impact of ICTs on the migration in the global context. Similarly, the impact of digital India on Indian society, women empowerment, rural development have been studied. However, there is inadequate research on how Digital India, Digitalisation and Digitisation have impacted the migrant workers in India. This research gap limits our understanding of how migrant workers in India deal with emerging digital technologies, how far it has been beneficial to them and what are the challenges. Therefore, this study aims to explore the impact of digitalisation on domestic migrants in India. This study also probes the corrective measures which can be appropriated by all the stakeholders to ensure digital inclusivity of migrant workers.

This study’s theoretical framework draws on the concepts of Knowledge Society (Drucker, 1993), Information Society (Dijk, 2006), Network Society (Dijk, 2006; Castells, 2010). These terms are used to denote the society that has emerged from the impact of information and communication technology (ICT). Drucker (1993), Dijk (2006) and Castells (2010) have used the terms “network society” “information society”, “Knowledge Society” respectively to describe this type of society. The study also relies on the works of Ravenstein (1885) and Lee (1966) to determine the pull and push factors of migration. Moreover, the Network theory proposed by Boyd (1989) and Boyd and Nowak (2012) has also been considered for this study.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study is a quantitative and qualitative inquiry, pursuing an exploratory and descriptive research design. The present study conducted a review and interpretation of published studies and also included an empirical study. This research paper is based on the field work done in Pathanamthitta (Kerala). The respondents were the migrant workers from other states into Kerala, hence forth, ‘Domestic migrants’, who became the unit of study. The sample focussed exclusively on ‘male migrants only’. The selection criteria for the sample unit was two fold; firstly domestic migrants should be greater or equal to 20 years of age and Secondly, they should have lived and worked in Kerala for minimum two years. Cluster sampling method was adopted to gather data regarding them. A two stage sampling procedure was employed to identify the clusters and the sample units within them. The Clusters and the Sample units were identified using random sampling method. The population within each cluster were heterogenous and reflected diversity. The sources of data collection for this study are both primary and secondary. The Semi-Structured interview schedule, with open-ended and close-ended questions, was used to collect data from the domestic migrants. additionally, direct observations were also employed with the migrant workers. The secondary sources like Census 2011, government reports, published studies and books, newspaper articles, journal articles etc. were utilised to gather secondary information about the linkage between technology and internal migration in India.

An introductory session was held at the start of the study to familiarise the participants with the goals of the investigation. All participants gave their informed consent to take their picture and record the interviews, guaranteeing their anonymity and confidentiality. Every participant was questioned independently, free from the influence of other migrants and other factors. The participants were informed that their participation was entirely voluntary and that they could leave at any time without facing any repercussions.

While this study offers valuable insights, it's essential to acknowledge its limitations. The small sample size limits the generalisability of the findings. The study is also limited in the sense, it excludes other types of migration streams. For example, the study focussed its attention on 'only male migrants' and excluded the migration of women. Despite these constraints, our results remain pertinent within the defined scope and specified objectives. This study sets the stage for future research by linking migration and technology particularly digital innovations as the focal point of our understanding of Indian society.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the study revealed that Digitalised society is a new techno-social sphere, which has emerged globally and India is not untouched from it. It is a social organisation in which its structures and daily exchanges are conditioned and shaped by Artificial Intelligences (AI), ICT tools, Internet of Things (IoT) devices etc. The digitalisation involves a movement of adaptation and integration of advanced technologies in all areas of society and culture. This transformative process influences the thinking, decisions and actions of the people who inhabit these information societies (Castells, 2010). This digitalisation has equally impacted the migratory processes worldwide as well as Internal migration in India, irrespective of the nature of it: seasonal, temporary, forced, irregular, regular, voluntary and involuntary. The digitalisation has been functional to the domestic migrants in India. It has facilitated the migration choices, decisions, journeys, integration in their destination places. However, the migrant workers also face the issues of digital divide and digital inequality due to existing poor socio-economic disparity. Therefore, with some corrective measures, digital technologies could empower the migrant community. A detailed discussion is made in the sections below.

The Process of Digitalisation and Digitisation

Digitalisation is the generic term for the digital transformation of society, community and the economy. It describes the transition from old machines and manual analogue technologies to an age of knowledge and creativity characterised by digital technologies. On the other hand, Digitisation is an inclusive technique of preservation and access by which all the institution's assets are transformed into digital and creating high-quality copies in digital format. It provides advanced opportunities for preservation and access to knowledge contents, also it changes the ways in which collections are used and accessed.

Who are the domestic Migrants in India?

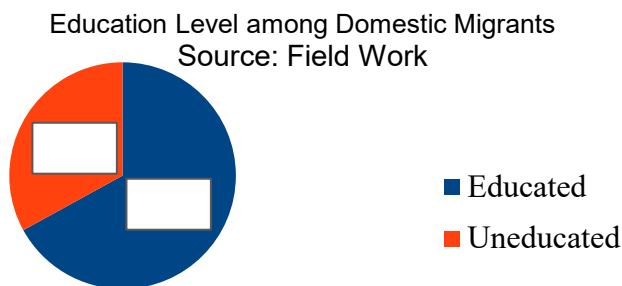
According to Census 2011, India had 45.6 Crore migrants in 2011 (38% of the population) compared to 31.5 crore migrants in 2001 (31% of the population). It is reported in the Census data that from 2001 to 2011, while population grew by 18%, the number of migrants increased by 45%. In 2011, 99% of total migration was internal and immigrants (international migrants) comprised only 1%. Domestic migrants in the study are nothing but the internal migrants in India and particularly inter-state labour migrants. There were approximately 4.14 crore (41.4 million) inter-state migrants in India, meaning people who migrated from one state to another within the country as per Census 2011.

Reasons for Internal Migration and Size of Internal Labour Force

Movement for work was higher among inter-state migrants- 50% of male and 5% of female inter-state migrants. Census 2011 showed there were 4.5 crore migrant workers in 2011. However, Economic Survey, 2016-17 finds that census data underestimates temporary migrant labour movement in India. In 2007-08, the NSSO estimated the size of India's migrant labour at seven crore (29% of the workforce). The Economic Survey, 2016-17, estimated six crore inter-state labour migrants between 2001-2011. It also estimated that in each year between 2011-2016, on average 90 lakh people travelled for work.

Functional aspects of Digitalisation on Migration

Digital India revolutions led India into a new age of information and connectivity. As per Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) report total internet subscribers increased from 251.59 million as on March 2014 to 954.40 million in March 2024. With over 950 million internet users, India has become the one of the most significant and rapidly expanding digital consumer marketplaces globally (Roy, 2024). The migrant community also make best use of this digital revolutions in India. It helps them in making informed choices and decisions about their journeys to potential destination states.

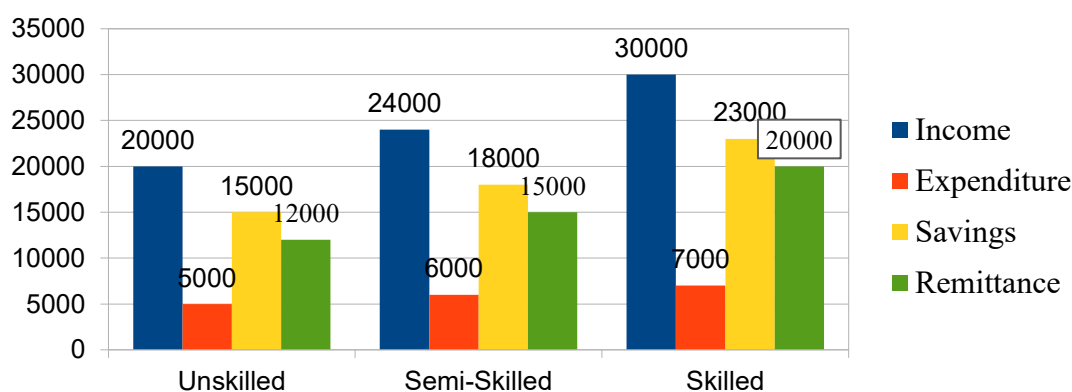


The study found that almost all the migrants were owning a Smart Phone¹, which had become a ubiquitous companion. The smart phone has become the major source of entertainment for them and medium of communication with their family back home. However, Some migrants are also using a non-smart phone, which shows their limited digital knowledge. The migrants, who are having digital gap and non-tech savvy behaviour, is also connected to their level of education. Thus, the level of education of migrants is linked to their

ability to use new age technology and emerging digital mediums. However, absence of formal and school education did not deter migrants from learning the usage of smart phones through trial and error methods. It shows their determination and capability to learn things despite no formal education and training. The idea of owning and usage of mobile phones-smart or non-smart is also connected with the age of migrants. For example, the young migrants aged between 20-40 years are having and using a smart phone without any difficulty despite not having high level of education. Likewise, migrants aged above 40 years are owning a non-smart phone despite knowing some “technical know-how”. Thus, it reflects generational gap and generational mobility among them. In fact, owning a costly smart phone has become a status symbol among migrants particularly young ones. When they go back their home, the mobile phones are flaunted by them to friends, relatives to show their higher economic status. In addition, the smart phone user migrant workers also have to pay for mobile recharges, which increases their non-food expenditure. Since, the smart phone has become an indispensable for them, this inevitable expenditure is borne by them.

The introduction of ICTs and emergence of social media has revolutionised the traditional way of job search and employment opportunities. ICTs do not only serve as channels of information that lead to migration, they may be the reason for migration. There exists a whole sector of highly skilled professionals that work to design and engineer the technologies that have permitted the information revolution (Hamel, 2009). Nowadays, the information about employment opportunities is available on their fingertips. Many Online job portals, websites² and Social Media platforms³ provide information regarding job opportunities. However, this digital tool is beneficial more to skilled workers or who are having jobs in formal sector. The semi-skilled and unskilled workers rely more traditional methods of social networking⁴ to find works. The study also suggests that unskilled and semi-skilled migrant workers find job opportunities mostly through their social networks be it formal or informal. However, in some cases, skilled and semi-skilled migrants create ‘WhatsApp groups’ relating to one particular profession, where messages are posted regarding the work available, wage amount and location of it. These WhatsApp groups are strictly controlled by the admins and have an all India presence. Digital technologies also enabled migrants to get online skills and educational training. It furthers their prospects of getting right employment with better payments. Likewise, migrants also take benefit of e-health facilities such as online consultations with doctors. It enables them to have access to affordable and quality medical advice on time of their choice. The linking of Aadhar with the Ration Card have enabled the migrants to take benefit of Public distribution System (PDS)⁵. Consequently, It has ensured food security for the migrants and also reduced their food expenditure.

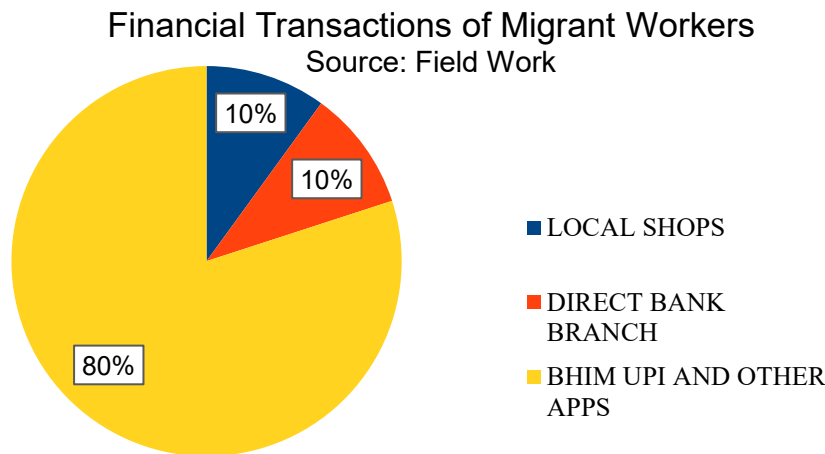
Average Financial Status of Migrants (Monthly)



Depending on the skill set and experience, the domestic migrants earn between ₹20000 to ₹40000 monthly. They also have monthly expenditure ranging between ₹5000 to ₹15000. The monthly financial status of migrants workers is based on the average number of days in a month they get work and get paid, which is twenty

days. This expenditure depends on lifestyle, food patterns of migrants. However, the majority of the expenditure goes into food and lodging of the migrants. Rest of the income, the migrants save and send as remittances to home.

They mostly send remittances weekly and sometimes monthly through local bank branch. The accounts are mostly in the name of migrants' wife and sometimes in mother's name. It reflects that the manifest authority of remittance lies with the family, however, the latent authority is still held by the migrants, who sends the remittances back home. They also use payment apps like BHIM UPI and related apps like Paytm, PhonePe to send remittances back home. Sometimes,



local shops are also used as medium to transfer remittances back home. Digital Payment platforms and mobile banking made it easier for domestic migrants to send money back home. The era of Money order has long gone, the digital platforms has also made the role of intermediaries in transferring the remittances obsolete. It not only saved the time and money of migrants, but also ensured transparency and openness. This is having a significant impact on the financial position and living standards of migrants and their families back home. The remittances are mostly used to pay back debt,

purchase basic household needs, to construct or renovate a house, ensure health and education for the family members particularly children. Since, the level of education and proficiency of digital technologies are linked, the migrants ensure their children get English medium education as much as possible. The digital technologies also play a prominent role in establishing the integration of migrants with the host communities. This becomes significant in the destination places, where there are visible differences in terms of Language, Cultural Values, Food habits, and so on. Migrant workers use ICTs like specific Mobile Apps, platforms like YouTube, websites etc. to learn about the destination places' culture, food habits, languages. In fact, government in collaboration with the civil society groups implement certain projects to help the migrants to integrate with host society and avoid social exclusion due to language constraints. For example, Changathi Project initiated by the Kerala Government, administered through the State Literacy Mission, aims at teaching Malayalam language and culture to inter-state migrant workers. This study reflects the migrants maintain their own native cultural identities, at the same time, adopt some elements of destination places. Portes (1999) also conveyed that migrants are inhabiting two worlds and living within two cultures. This may be true for immigrants globally, but in case of internal migration in India, this may not be entirely true. This is because many domestic migrants in India find cultural similarities with their native and host states. However, the issue of identity becomes problematic when migrants move to a place of different language and culture. For example, migrants from Bihar are working in Tamil Nadu, where the language, food habits and cultural values are different. Therefore, the digital technologies help in maintaining the identity of migrants through communication with their social networks. Levitt (1998:926) terms this exchange of information as 'Social Remittance' as ideas, behaviours, identities, and social capital also flow from receiving to sending communities. Wood and King (2001) had highlighted the visible impact of cinema and entertainment on the sustainability of cultural identities of diaspora communities around the world. The use of the Internet by members of diaspora can change the reality of living abroad. It allows migrants to maintain traditions while abroad, such as celebrating a cultural festival or religious ceremony and so on (Karim, 2003). This is also reflected in the study where the migrants prefer to watch freely available content on YouTube in their own mother tongue. However, Interestingly, the migrants watch more Hindi Cinema and Hindi dubbed South Indian Cinema. In a sense, ICTs are bringing the migrant home and bringing home to the migrant. These technologies allow them to feel synchronised and connected with their own identity in a distant land.

Dysfunctional aspects of Digitalisation on Migration

The digital divide is the disparity that exists in access to ICTs between, for example, countries or regions, communities, ethnicities, the sexes, or age groups. It can also manifest itself internationally and within communities and is shaped by the "economic, political, and sociological context in which it occurs" (Guillén and Suárez, 2005: 683). Similarly, digital illiteracy has limited the potentialities and capabilities of migrants particularly among rural-urban migrants. According to a 2021 IAMA report⁶, only 34% of India's population is digitally literate. The study also found a relation between

digital divide, digital illiteracy to the wider issues of socio-economic disparity and lower literacy rates. According to Indian Inequality Report 2022 approximately 70 percent of the Indian population has poor or no connectivity to digital services.

While digital innovation has enabled access to services for those who were previously hard to reach, the benefits of digital innovation are not equally distributed. Migrants who lack access to online connectivity, digital devices and skills have been further isolated. For example, The exodus of North-East migrants from Bengaluru in 2012 reflects the negative consequences of misuse of digital information (Chaudhary, 2012). This happened due to the conflict and mistrust between the migrant and host communities. The media and ICTs show images of pull factors of host communities such as wealth, opportunity etc. and push factors for migrants communities such as poverty, poor living conditions etc. These flashy images of prosperity attracts many migrants particularly young ones to move towards such areas. Appadurai (1996) suggests, media and images have a tremendous impact on the imagination of people who are both at the sending and receiving end of the migration experience.

The negative media reports and social media campaign also pose significant problems for migrants in this digital age. The print and electronic media reports crime related news of migrants such as theft, robbery, Murder, Rape etc. and most of time true. Debnath and Roy (2013) had explored the link between the internal migrants and crime. However, this imagery and negative visuals of migrants help in building the perceptions and prejudices among the host Communities. This affect the job prospects of migrants and develops a mistrust among them (AP, 2023). Similar concerns are visible in social media platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, where people create fake posts, promote hate mongering and racial discrimination. In fact, there have been cases of lynching of migrants based on rumours doing rounds on social media (Chakraborty, 2024). Although, ICTs and digitalisation have benefitted the migrants, the examples mentioned above reflects the flip side of digitalisation and misuse of social media in India.

The inadequacy of digital infrastructure further exacerbate the misery of migrants struggling in a place away from home. Sometimes, the failure of biometric data authentication creates problems for migrants due to false acceptance or high rejection rates. Incorrectly captured fingerprints, poor internet connectivity or a change in bio-metric details because of old age or wear and tear have already caused disruption in rural India (Krishna, 2018). Interoperability of Social security measures like NFSA, 2013⁷ and other PDS schemes also posing challenges to migrants. The scheme One Nation, One Ration Card⁸ has not been uniformly implemented across the nation. Thus, many inter-state migrants are left behind in availing benefits of PDS schemes which can lead to food insecurity to them.

Digitalisation, Migration and Corrective Measures

The research so far has highlighted the potential benefits and issues with the digitalisation. Since migrants belong the vulnerable section of society, all the stakeholders the policy makers, employers, civil society, migrants themselves etc. can take corrective measures to ensure a sustainable future for migrant community. The study finds that providing widespread internet access can help previously unconnected users to take advantage of economic and learning opportunities. By having strong knowledge of digital technologies, users can effectively engage with such technologies. The government has introduced various measures such as the BharatNet project⁹, National Digital Literacy Mission (NDLM), Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan (PMGDISHA) etc. to ensure last mile internet connectivity and digital literacy in India. It is equally important to develop content of digital technologies in the mother tongue of their users or at least in a common language which they can understand. This language constraints in the content of online websites, portals etc. creates hurdle particularly for the labour migrants as they often migrate to places of languages other than their mother tongues. Therefore, a digital solution is required to translate the content of migrants from an unknown language to their known language. There has also been a strong focus on “migrant tech”¹⁰, in recent times, including on how migrant workers use ICTs to adapt to new communities, new workplaces and new cultures, while maintaining links to their families and societies back home. This has involved apps developed by migrants themselves due to easy access to internet and low cost of it. (McAuliffe, 2021).

Tech innovators have recently developed a number of digital tech solutions to aid migrants, especially those working in the unorganized sector. The promise of digital technologies to support workers during these trying times is demonstrated by recent mobile apps in India such Bharat Shramik, MyRojgaar, and Mazdoor (Chandrasekhar, 2023). Bharat Shramik, for example, uses its matchmaking technology to assist companies in locating qualified workers in their area by searching their worker database. The long-standing monopoly of intermediaries, who have grown to be an essential component of the construction business, may be eliminated by such technologically driven portals, further adding to the informality of the sector. Digital platforms appear to have a bright future for workers provided they are used responsibly, effectively, and with full awareness of their predicament.

5. CONCLUSION

The migration patterns, directions, have been profoundly altered by the digitalisation process. The rise of digital India and the increasing focus on digital inventions and tools have altered how migrants maintain social networks, engage with their families, and conduct financial transactions. Digital revolutions have allowed them to be closer to their friends and family.

They can also use the digital technologies to find new employment prospects, e-health facilities, online education, and skill development. However, the migrants also have to deal with the problems of digital illiteracy, digital inequality, digital exclusion, and digital divide. Absence of technical knowledge does not always show problematic features of digitalization. It resonates with the larger issues of low literacy level, prevalent socio-economic disparity, inadequate digital infrastructure and improper implementation of policies. All stakeholders involved, including policymakers, civil society organisations, tech entrepreneurs, and migrants themselves, must take corrective action.

In a destination state, migrants, particularly seasonal and temporary labour migrants, have limited resources to support themselves after deducting their daily expenses and remittances back home. Therefore, policy makers at both centre and state level need to ensure adequate digital infrastructure, which is accessible and affordable to them. Moreover, the discrepancies with the Aadhar system and biometric authentication need to be fixed to ensure smooth operations. The governments both at receiving states and sending states should also focus on the digital literacy programs of the migrants which could digitally empower them. India has been witnessing digital innovations and advancements for quite sometime and Digital India has further accelerated it. The impact is already visible on numerous aspects of Indian society including migration. As a result, the domestic migrants in India are becoming as “Connected Migrants” and “Networked Migrants”.

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NOTES

1. A smartphone is a handheld electronic device that allows people to access the internet, play games, and send text messages in addition to making phone calls and sending emails. <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/s/smartphone.asp>
2. <https://www.naukri.com/>
3. <https://in.linkedin.com/>
4. Social Network plays a prominent role in shaping the choices, decisions and patterns of migration. (Boyd, 1989).
5. PDS or Public Distribution System is a government policy to manage food economy and food security of the nation through distribution of food grains at affordable prices. https://nfsa.gov.in/portal/PDS_page
6. IAMAI stands for Internet and Mobile Association of India. It is a not-for-profit industry body that represents the interests of the online and mobile value-added services industry in India, and promote digital economy. <https://www.iamai.in/about-us>
7. The National Food Security Act (NFSA) of 2013 aims to make food and nutrition affordable and accessible to two-thirds of Indian citizens.
8. One Nation, One Ration Card is a national Ration Card portability scheme. It enables migrant workers and their family members to access PDS benefits from any Fair Price Shop anywhere in the country, thus ensuring the food security.
9. BharatNet seeks to bring broadband internet connectivity to each of the more than 2.5 lakh gram panchayats across the country.
10. Migrant Tech refers to technology which is developed and used by the migrants themselves as well as to help others navigate migration and integration process. (McAuliffe, 2021).

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