

The Political Interest and Voting Preferences of Seasonal Migrants: A Case Study of the Cooch Behar District of West Bengal

Islam Uddin Miah

Ph.D. Research Scholar (JRF), Cooch Behar Panchanan Barma University

Email: uddinmiahislam@gmail.com

Abstract:

Seasonal migration played a crucial role in coping with the consequences of agrarian distress and leaving a landscape of rural economic despair. Less educated and less qualified males with lower socio-economic status from rural areas migrate seasonally in search of work/employment in urban informal sectors. Sometimes these migrants faced significant hurdles in exercising voting rights, which reduced their political relevance in their native region. Their constant mobility sometimes leads to political exclusion and reduces their ability to negotiate effectively with local representatives. According to ECI, in the 2024 general election, a substantial segment of the Indian electorate (280 million out of 834 million) was unable to cast their vote because they were absent from the registered constituencies. It has been assumed that internal migration is one of the prominent reasons for such 'lower voter turnout.' The study examines the intricate landscape of seasonal migrants in the Cooch Behar district of West Bengal in general and their profound impacts on the politics in general. It explores the socio-economic vulnerability of seasonal migrant workers and their participation in the democratic process using field survey method from five blocks in the Cooch Behar district of West Bengal.

Keywords: *seasonal migration, political participation, exclusion, democracy, voter turnout.*

Introduction:

Migration has a long history and goes generation by generation and is a popular livelihood strategy, particularly in rural India. Migration means the movement of people from one location to another. It is a complex phenomenon; rapid economic development and structural changes prompt different classes and social groups to migrate to different regions. India has a higher migration rate total of 28.9%, and in rural areas, it was 26.5%. Agrarian distress and a devastated rural economy push people to leave rural areas for urban areas in search of better employment opportunities and living standards (Korra, 2011). Agriculture is the backbone of the Indian economy. Decreasing share of agricultural GDP and expansion of the non-agricultural sphere drive people away from the agricultural sector to the urban informal sectors (Harris & Todaro, 1770; Breman, 1996; Gautam, 2012). According to the 2001 census, 52 million people migrated from rural areas to urban areas. This number increased by 51% in the following census, reaching 78 million. Sometimes migration can change the socio-economic and political conditions of a particular region. Migration is a double-edged sword; one side is positive, and the other is negative. Migration enhances the quality of life, progress, and prosperity by promising better wages and employment opportunities. On the other hand, it

creates an agricultural labour shortage in the migration-sending region. Sometimes, migration can hamper political participation because migrant labour constantly travels to different places in search of work. Interregional economic disparity among different social groups serves as a catalyst for rural-urban migration in India. Landlessness, as well as small and marginal farmers—often situated in the lower strata of the caste hierarchy and hailing from economically disadvantaged regions—frequently opt to migrate to urban informal sectors in pursuit of manual labour opportunities (Breman, 1996). The remittances sent by the migrant workers sometimes contribute to enhancing their families' upward mobility. The Cooch Behar district is recognised as a disadvantaged area within West Bengal, exhibiting various socio-economic challenges. Distress seasonal migration has become one of the most durable survival strategies of poor people residing in remote areas (Mitra, 2024). Seasonal migrants are largely associated with the lower strata of society. Those who migrate to different places for survival reasons are basically the members of SCs, STs and OBCs (IDEA). The collapse of rural employment during the 1990s increased the magnitude of distress migration (Alom, 2021). Cooch Behar is a district primarily dependent on agriculture, with a significant portion of the population belonging to the Scheduled Castes and Muslims. The flow of migration from this district is quite high, which also affects the active political participation at the grassroots level of politics.

Objectives:

1. To understand the socio-economic condition of seasonal migrant workers of the area under study.
2. To investigate the causes, nature, and trends in seasonal migration of the district.
3. To assess the impact of seasonal migration on political participation and voting behaviour in the Cooch Behar district.

Methodology:

The paper specifically attempts to study the causes, nature, and trends of seasonal migration and its impact on the electoral arena based on both primary and secondary data. The district has twelve community development blocks. For this study, five blocks were randomly selected, and 50 seasonal migrants were recruited from each block (a total of 250 migrant workers). Data were collected through closed-ended questionnaires and observation by using the purposive random sampling method. Secondary data were collected from various articles, journals, and books. All the data have been presented through data analysis and tabulation. Different statistical tools such as tabulation, diagrams, and charts, are used to achieve the study's desired objectives. For this paper, I have chosen samples from the field using stratified random sampling.

Area of study:

The district of Cooch Behar has a rich royal history; before independence, Cooch Behar was ruled by various kingdoms. After independence, the district was merged with the Indian state. Cooch Behar is one of the 23 districts of West Bengal, situated in the northeastern part of the state. It lies between 25°57'47" N and 26°36'20" N latitude and between 88°47'44" E and 89°54'35" E longitude. It has a total of 3387 sq km of land area, which constitutes 2.82% of

the landmass of West Bengal. It is surrounded by three districts: Jalpaiguri district in the north, Goalpara district of Assam in the east, and Rangpur district of Bangladesh in the southwest. The district shares a 549 km international border with Bangladesh. Cooch Behar is a backward district of West Bengal in terms of various socio-economic indicators. The demographic pattern shows that most of the people belong to the scheduled castes and the Muslim community. The district economy mainly depends on agriculture and agriculture-related activity. The district is characterized by distinct socio-cultural dynamics, which warrant in-depth examination and analysis of the area.

Theoretical framework:

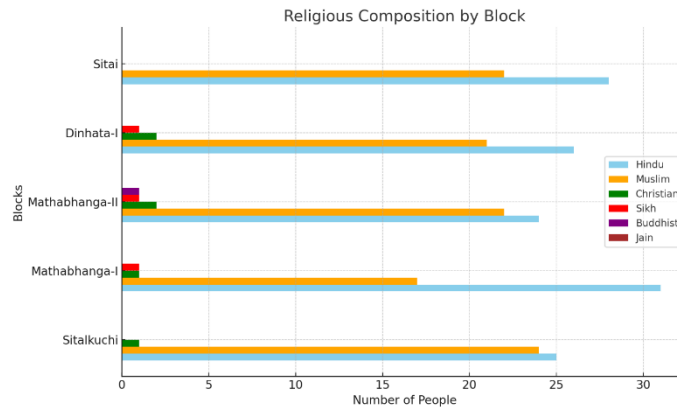
This study analyses the political attitudes and electoral behaviour of seasonal migrants in the Cooch Behar district, West Bengal. It has investigated the political culture and voting behaviour of seasonal migrant workers in the Cooch Behar district with the help of a unique conceptual framework and theoretical model. Almond and Verba, in their groundbreaking study *The Civic Culture* (1963), classified three distinct political cultures based on orientation: participant culture, subject culture, and parochial culture. The participant culture embodies certain characteristics: active political participation, constant observation and monitoring of government activities, and making decisions based on informed choices. The subject political culture reflects passive participation and obedience to the governance activity. In the parochial political culture, citizens have limited information and knowledge and are not interested in political activities. The development of this theory was centered on the most stable democracies to examine the relationship between citizens' participation and their attitudes toward the political system. Seasonal migrant workers often exhibit a disconnection from active political engagement due to factors such as poverty, illiteracy, and persistent mobility, resulting in a parochial orientation. At the same time, a large section of seasonal migrants actively participates in electoral campaigning. They consciously return to their origin area, actively participate in electoral politics, cast their votes, and secure a clientelist relationship with local representatives. These characteristics align with both the subject and participant political culture. The study integrated civic culture theory in different political contexts. India is a developing nation, and its democracy is in a transitional phase, where local dynamics, caste, religion, gender, and policy demand shape electoral choices and voting behaviour. So, the civic culture of these seasonal migrants lies between participant, subject, and parochial cultures. Thus, it implies a hybrid or heterogeneous nature of participation, which reflects that non-involvement, dependency, and engagement exist concurrently.

Table 1: Block-wise religious distribution of migrant workers:

Block name	Hindu	Muslim	Christian	Sikh	Buddhist	Jain
Sitalkuchi	25	24	1	00	00	00
Mathabhanga-I	31	17	1	1		00
Mathabhanga-II	24	22	2	1	1	00
Dinhata-I	26	21	2	1	00	00
Sitai	28	22	00	00	00	00

Total Number	134	106	6	3	1	
Percentage	53.6%	42.4%	2.4%	1.2%	0.4%	00

Source: Field survey, 2025

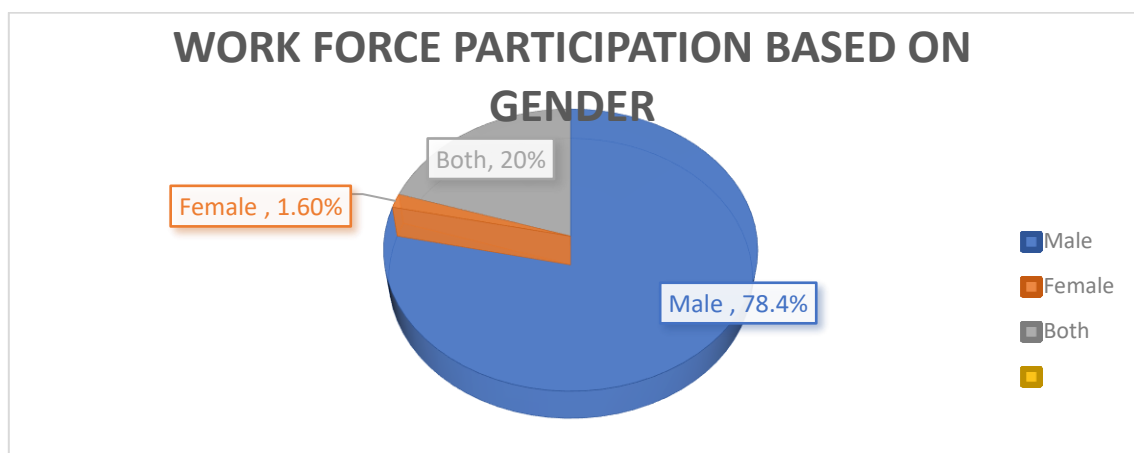


The above tables show the religious composition of seasonal migrant labourers across five blocks of the Cooch Behar district. Among 250 respondents, Hindus and Muslims are the major groups, and Christians, Sikhs, and Buddhists are very negligible, while no respondent reported from the Jain community across all blocks. Among 250 respondents, 53.6% are Hindu, 42.4% are Muslim, 2.4% are Christian, and 0.4% are Buddhist. The total number of Hindu respondents is 134; Mathabhanga-I has the highest number of Hindu respondents. The total number of Muslim respondents is 106, and the Sitalkuchi and Sitai block has the highest number of respondents, 24 and 22. The data clearly indicate that the study area is mainly a Hindu population with a substantial Muslim population and a marginal presence of other religious groups. According to the 2011 census data, 74.05% of the population in this district are Hindus and 25.54% are Muslims. However, field survey data indicate a different picture, showing that the seasonal migration trends of Muslims are higher than those of the Hindu community.

Table 2: Gender-wise distribution of seasonal migrant labourers:

Block name	Male	Percentage %	Female	Percentage %	Both	Percentage %
Sitalkuchi	36	72	00	00	14	28%
Mathabhanga-I	40	80	00	00	10	20%
Mathabhanga-II	46	92	00	00	4	8%
Dinhata-I	32	64	4	8	14	28%
Sitai	42	84	00	00	8	16%
Average	39.9	78.4%	0.8	1.6%	50	20%

Source: Field survey, 2025



The above table indicates the gender of seasonal migrant labour and their percentage among the five blocks. The data reveals a strong male dominance across all blocks. Female participation in seasonal labour migration is very low; only the Dinhata-I block has 8% respondents, and the other four blocks have no female respondents. Among the five blocks, Mathabhanga-I block has the highest male respondents (92%), and Dinhata-I block has the lowest number of male respondents (64%). Both categories represent family migration. In the case of both genders, Dinhata-I & Sitalkuchi have the highest respondents 28% and MTB-II has the lowest respondents.

Table 3: Block-wise educational qualification of seasonal migrant workers

Block name	Illiterate	Primary	Secondary	College	University
Sitalkuchi	8	25	13	4	00
Mathabhanga-I	5	27	18	00	00
Mathabhanga-II	8	22	19	1	00
Dinhata-I	14	23	12	1	00
Sitai	21	16	7	6	00
Total	56	113	69	12	

Source: Field survey, 2025

Table 3 shows the educational profile of seasonal migrant labourers of the Cooch Behar district of five blocks. Education is the most important parameter of social development, and the data reveal the low level of formal education among the migrant workers. The primary segment is the most popular form of education in all blocks, particularly in Sitalkuchi (25) & Mathabhanga-I (27). This reflects basic-level educational attainment at the grassroots level. However, in the Sitai & Dinhata-I block, there are substantial illiterate respondents (21 & 14). In the case of secondary education, Mathabhanga-II has the highest number of respondents (19), and Sitai block has the lowest (7). Only a few Sitalkuchi (4), MTB-II (1), Dinhata-I (1), and Sitai (6) migrant people attain college-level education. Among all five blocks, MTB-II has the most balanced educational distribution in the study area. University education is absent in

all blocks. The quantitative data for the district indicates that it possesses a semi-literate population, while also suggesting a gradual advancement in mid and higher-level education.

Table 4: Caste distribution of seasonal migrant laborers

Block name	General	SC	ST	OBC-A	OBC-B
Sitalkuchi	6	19	00	22	3
Mathabhanga-I	4	26	00	15	5
Mathabhanga-II	3	23	00	22	2
Dinhata-I	5	20	00	21	4
Sitai	7	20	00	21	2
Total	25	108	00	101	16

Source: Field survey, 2025

The above table reveals the social background of seasonal migrant workers among the five blocks of the study area. SCs have a significant presence in Mathabhanga-I (26) and Mathabhanga-II (23), thus indicating substantial representation of socially disadvantaged groups in these localities. The General category population, on the whole, remains low, ranging from 5 to 7. While Scheduled Tribes (ST) are totally absent in the sample, reflecting their marginal presence or non-participation in these blocks. The highest OBC-A respondents are present in the Sitalkuchi & MTB-II blocks. Out of 250 respondents, 25 were general, 108 were Scheduled Caste, 101 were OBC-A, and 16 were OBC-B. Although Cooch Behar is a highly scheduled caste-concentrated area, nearly half of the population in the district belongs to the Scheduled Caste community.

Table 5: Occupation before and after migration:

Before migration			After migration		
Profession	Number	Percentage	Profession	Number	Percentage
Day labour	109	43.6%	Day labour	8	3.2%
Agriculture	127	50.8%	Agriculture	4	1.6%
Plantation	2	0.8%	Plantation	2	0.8%
Construction	00	00%	Construction	155	62.00%
Industry	00	00%	Industry	15	6.00%
Household work	1	0.4%	Household work	6	2.4%
Brickwork	00	00%	Brickwork	22	8.8%
printing	00	00%	printing	17	6.8%
Other	11	4.4%	Other	21	8.4%

Source: Field survey, 2025

Table 5 reveals the occupational structure of migrant workers and their percentage before and after migration. The occupational pattern changes almost entirely after migration. Before migrating, respondents tended to be agrarian to an overwhelming extent, almost the entire sample composed of agriculture (50.8%), day labour (43.6%), and other (4.4%), with little to no active engagement in construction, industry or services. After migration, those agrarian

proportions collapse agriculture and day labour account for only 3.2% and employment is focused in construction (62%) with notable growth in informal urban/industrial occupations like bricklaying (8.8%), printing (6.8%), casual industry (6%), and a broad range of activities under "other" (8.4%). This shows that seasonal migrants are moving from land-based rural livelihoods into urban/industrial informal work; a clear diversifying of employment options but, at the same time, a shift towards precarious low-security jobs (construction and various informal occupations). These data underscore the importance of migration in changing the livelihood structure from agrarian dependency towards informal urban wage labour. Male unskilled seasonal migrants move to urban industrial sectors due to economic compulsion rather than voluntary mobility. This supports Bramen’s (1996) argument of “footloose labour” and the collapse of the traditional agricultural economy.

Table 6: Skill level before and after migration of seasonal migrant labourers:

Before migration			After migration		
Skill level	No	Percentage	Skill level	No	Percentage
unskilled	94	74.6%	unskilled	5	4%
Semi-skilled	29	23%	Semi-skilled	45	37.8%
Skilled	2	1.6%	Skilled	75	58.2%

Source: Field survey, 2025

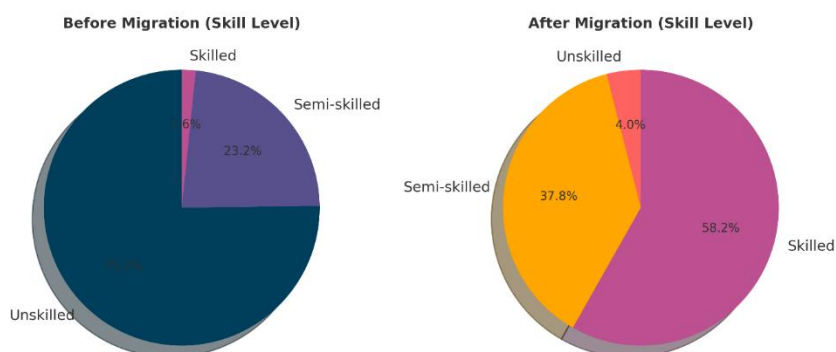


Table 6 shows the skill level of seasonal migrant workers before and after migration and their percentage. The survey data clearly indicate an overall transformation of the skill level of seasonal migrant workers after migration. Before migration, the majority of workers were unskilled (74.6%), 23% of workers were semi-skilled, and a very small number, 1.6%, had skills. After the migration, the scenario has changed drastically. The proportion of skilled workers increased sharply to 58.2%, and semi-skilled workers increased 23% to 37.8%. Only 4% of workers remain in the unskilled category. The above data reveal that migration plays a crucial role in skill acquisition and upward mobilisation of seasonal migrant labourers. Due to exposure to a diverse work environment, industrial training occurs in the urban informal sectors. Migration acts as a catalyst for the development of rural labourers' human capital.

Table 7: Income of seasonal migrants before and after migration:

Before migration			After migration		
Income	No of respondent	Percentage	No of respondent	Percentage	
Less than 3000	6	2.4%	00	00	
Less than 6000	149	59.6%	2	0.8%	
Less than 9000	82	32.8%	19	7.6%	
less than 12000	12	4.8%	112	44.8%	
less than 15000	1	0.4%	101	40.4%	
More than 15000	00	00%	16	6.4%	

Source: Field survey, 2025

The above table demonstrates the earnings of seasonal migration before and after migration and their percentage in various income levels. Before migration, out of 250 respondents, 59.6% earned below 6000 per month, and 32.8% earned below 9000 per month. After the migration, a clear and substantial improvement occurred; 44.8% of respondents come under 12000 per month and 40.4% come under 15000 per month. Additionally, 6.4% of migrants move into the higher income category, more than 15000 per month and not a single respondent remains in the lowest income groups, ranging from 3000 to 6000 per month. The upward income mobility reflects the positive effect of migration. This shift in income is attributable to individuals transitioning away from traditional agricultural livelihoods and joint industrial sectors while acquiring new skills. The data also reveal that migration has positively transformed rural livelihood patterns and enhanced their purchasing power and social security, which will help them to break the local patronage system occupied by the traditional elite.

Political participation and voting behaviour of seasonal migrant workers:

Democratic practice encompasses an understanding of the political arena, generally focusing on the demographics of voters and the motivations behind their electoral choices. India is the world's largest vibrant democracy, where people from all walks of life, regardless of education, social status, or ethnic identity, participate in electoral politics, which is not observed in any other full-fledged democracies in the world (Varshney, 2014). In the 2014 general election, the average voter turnout rate was the highest ever, 66.4%, of which 65.63% were female and 67.09% were male. A similar voter turnout rate was seen in the 2019 and 2024 general elections. Despite the historical success of electoral participation, a substantial segment of the Indian electorate does not exercise their voting rights: 280 million out of 834 million. Kumar (2009) argued that 40% of the Indian electorate do not cast their vote in national and state elections. This raises the pertinent question: who constitutes this electorate? According to the Election Commission of India, a major segment of internal migrants is notably absent from the voting

process. The State Election Study (SES) conducted in Delhi revealed that internal migrants often do not engage in the democratic process due to lower enrollment rates and reduced voter turnout. Akarca and Tansel (2015) demonstrated that internal mobility has an adverse impact on political participation in both the areas of origin and destination. Specifically, short-term migrants are less likely to exercise their voting rights, as noted by Kumar and Banerjee. Migrants who face social and political forms of exclusion due to their floating nature and invisibility. They are the poorest segment of society, face socio-economic vulnerability, and are employed in various sectors of the Indian economy, such as in brick kilns, construction, plantations, transportation, mines, street vending, and as housemates and are described as “footloose workers.”

Political participation is highly dependent on resources; in economically well-developed places, people actively participate in political spaces. Time, skill, and money are the necessary resources for active political participation (Brady, Verba, & Schlozman, 1995). The poor are structurally restricted in accessing those resources, which reflects their political action. The economic power elite dominate the power structure of society and the distribution system (Mills, 1956). Access to resources is highly uneven due to arbitrary control of local officials, unregulated allocation, and subject to discriminatory and administrative leakage. Local-level actors are delegated to make distributive decisions, and they often allocate resources based on political loyalty rather than eligibility. They employ a clientelist strategy, providing services to their patronage network and expecting them to reciprocate with electoral support and participation in rallies during election times (Bussell, 2019).

Cooch Behar is a border adjustment district in West Bengal that has experienced immigration-related issues since the country gained independence. Ethno-religious factors and the Rajbangshi identity heavily influence the political landscape of Cooch Behar. In the 2014 general elections, the right-wing political party Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) successfully consolidated its voter base by leveraging anti-immigrant sentiment and promoting Hindu identity. Conversely, certain demographics, particularly seasonal migrant labourers and their families, tend to gravitate toward political parties that advocate for welfare and the protection of their identity, as evidenced by their opposition to the National Register of Citizens (NRC).

Table 8: Willingness to participate in the electoral process:

	Block name						
Responses	Sitalkuchi	Mathabhan ga-I	Mathabhan ga-II	Dinhat a-I	Sita i	Total number	Total percentage
Yes	23	27	34	32	33	149	59.6%
No	25	9	6	16	15	71	28.4%
Not at all	2	14	10	2	2	30	12%

Source: Field survey, 2025

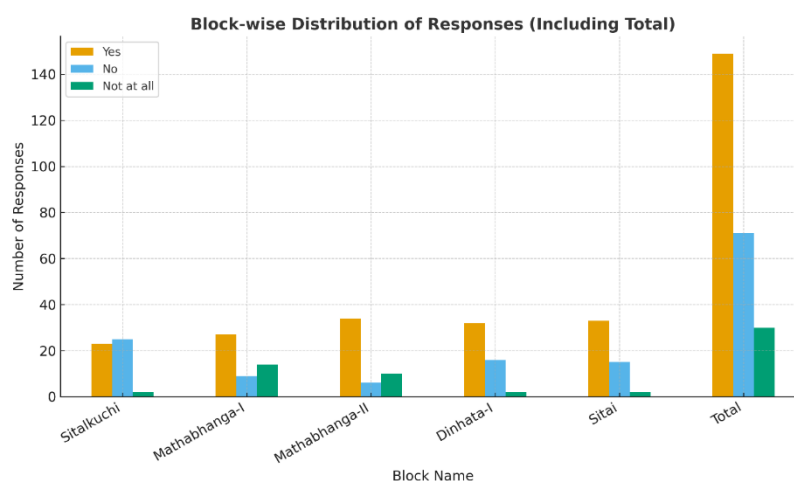
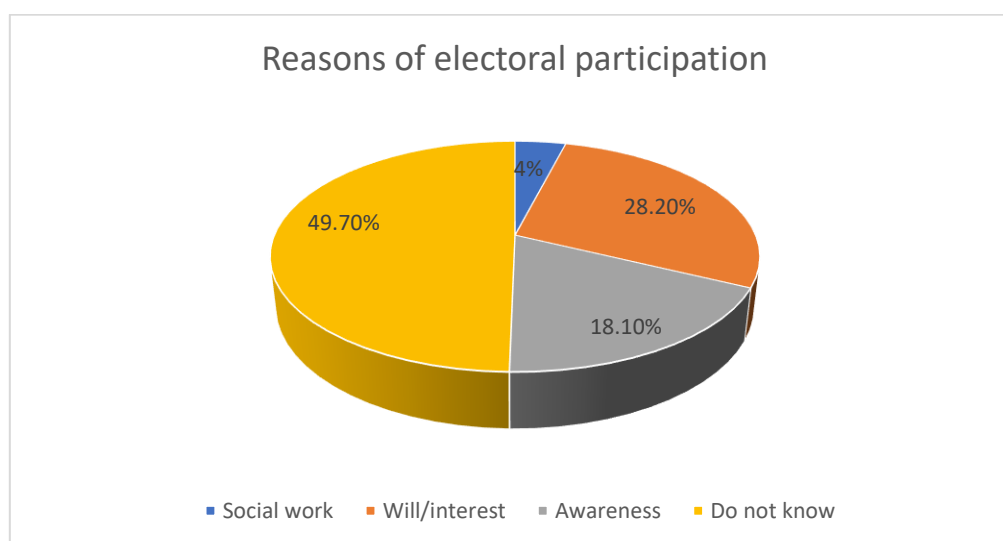


Table 8 reveals block-wise political participation of seasonal migrant workers in the electoral process and their total percentage. Among 250 respondents, 149 showed affirmative trends, and 101 respondents showed negative responses (71 responses in the No category & 30 responses in the Not at all category). Mathabhanga-ii and Sitai blocks recorded the highest positive responses (34 & 33). Negative responses are mostly concentrated in the 3 blocks: Sitalkuchi, Dinhat-I, and Sitai. The table shows 59.6% participate in the electoral process, and almost 40% of respondents show negative alignment towards electoral participation. The quantified data of the above table also support Almond's concept of Civic culture (1963).

Table 9: Reasons behind electoral participation for 149 respondents:

						Total No	Total percentage
Reasons	Sitalkuchi	Mathabhanga-I	Mathabhanga a-II	Dinhat a-i	Sitai		
Social work	1	00	00	2	3	6	4%
Will/interest	7	10	6	12	7	42	28.2%
Awareness	5	2	9	5	6	27	18.1%
Do not know	10	15	19	13	17	74	49.7%
Total	23	27	34	32	33	149	100%

Source: Field survey, 2025



The above table shows the reasons of political participation for the 149 respondents who said “yes” in Table 8. The table presents reasons behind political participation across five blocks of the Cooch Behar district. The survey data show that 49.7% of respondents are unaware of the reason why they participate in electoral politics, 18.1% of respondents say awareness, and 28% of respondents participate due to political interest and party affiliation. In terms of interest, Dinhata-I block has the highest number of respondents, and MTB-II block has the lowest number of respondents. The table reveals a low level of political awareness among seasonal migrant workers across all blocks. Here we can see a clear reflection of ‘parochial political culture.’

Table 10: Awareness of political rights among seasonal migrants:

	Sitalkuchi	Mathabhanga-I	Mathabhanga-II	Dinhata-I	Sitai	Total no.	Total percentage
Yes	11	11	20	8	8	58	23.2%
No	20	23	16	25	28	112	44.8%
To some extent	19	16	14	17	14	80	32.0%
Total	50	50	50	50	50	250	100%

Source: Field survey, 2025

The above table shows the block-wise distribution of political awareness among seasonal migrant workers. Most of the respondents (44.8%) were negative or said "no" while 32% agreed "to some extent," with just 23.2% responding "yes" clearly. This indicates that most respondents were unclear but exhibited a vague acceptance or awareness; even though "yes" responses were limited, the idea of acceptance was somewhat distant. The relatively low percentage of "yes" considerably indicates that there is a need for more engagement, communication, and awareness-building to increase positive perceptions and participation in the area of study. Table 8 revealed that nearly 60% of respondents are involved in electoral politics, despite the fact that only 23% of respondents are aware of their political rights.

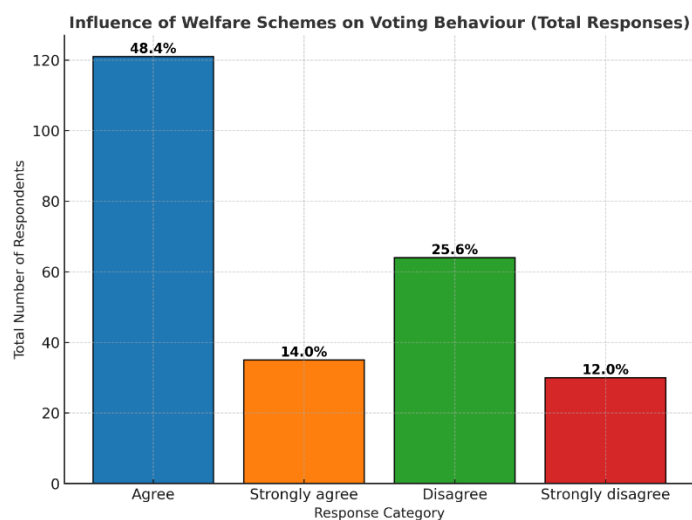


Table 11: The influence of welfare schemes on voting behaviour:

	Sitalkuchi	Mathabhang a-I	Mathabhang a-II	Dinhata a-I	Sitahi	Total No.	Percentage
Agree	29	23	18	27	24	121	48.4%
Strongly agree	7	5	12	3	8	35	14%
Disagree	9	15	15	14	11	64	25.6%
Strongly disagree	5	7	5	6	7	30	12%

Source: Field survey, 2025

Table 11 demonstrates the impact of government schemes on the electoral decision-making process of seasonal migrants across the district. Out of 250 respondents, 121 agreed and 35 strongly agreed; these two sections combined represent 62.4% of respondents. They acknowledge the importance of welfare schemes like housing, food security, employment, health security, etc. Those schemes shape their political preferences and develop a sense of loyalty towards a particular political party. But 37.6% of respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed. Probably, they make their voting preferences based on party affiliation, developmental parameters, caste affinity, and credibility of candidates. The table also shows the highest number of respondents in the Dinhata-I and Sitalkuchi blocks and the lowest number found in the MTB-II block. Here, we found a complex interplay between material benefits and political awareness, seasonal migrants prioritize material benefit over political consciousness.

Seasonal migrants are at a disadvantage in claiming their rightful share within the local distribution system because their prolonged absence from the village erodes kinship and political ties with local hegemonies that influence resource allocation. Clientelist systems reward loyalty and show of active participation, whereas migrants, for lack of presence during

the critical periods of decision-making, are unable to sustain those relations to benefit from them. Local elites and village leaders often exclude these migrants from benefiting, deeming them as useless voters in that an immediate electoral return cannot be offered at that point, rather choose to channel activities in support of readily available residents. This results in systematic neglect of their needs within local distribution networks dominated by patronage and clientelism.

Key findings:

- The field survey of households reveals that Muslim migration trends are more prevalent here in comparison to the Hindu community. Despite the fact that Muslims comprise 25.4% of the district's overall population, survey data showed 42.4% of Muslims from rural areas took seasonal migration as a livelihood strategy.
- The study showed that the educational qualification of migrant workers was very low. They acquired basic-level education, but their representation in higher education was negligible. It has also been observed that seasonal migration disrupts their children's education and sometimes increases the school dropout rate in migrant-sending regions.
- The study also demonstrated the fact that migration improved their skill level. Before migration day labour and agriculture were the main occupations. Seasonal migration drastically diversified their occupational preferences. They were moving to urban informal sectors instead of traditional agricultural work. This sometimes creates an agricultural labour crisis and increases the cost of farming.
- Agrarian distress in the study and high-income opportunity act as a driver of migration to the major cities in Kerala, Maharashtra, Chennai, Delhi, Andhra Pradesh, etc.
- Seasonal migration of the study area was mainly male-dominated; the percentage of female labourers was negligible. According to the study, women's involvement was evident in brick kiln operations when the whole family moved there for seasonal work.
- Various welfare schemes influence their electoral decision-making process. Nearly 63% of respondents agreed that government schemes motivate them to vote for a particular political party rather than its party ideology and political affiliation.
- The study also reveals that seasonal migrants participate in electoral politics but their political awareness level is low. It was observed that they participate in elections due to the fear from exclusion of government schemes and having their names scratched off from the voter list.

Conclusion:

The study examines the complex interconnection between the socio-economic conditions of seasonal migrant workers and their political awareness and voting behaviour in rural agrarian settings in some selected blocks of Coochbehar district. After observing the responses, we can conclude that migration is not merely a voluntary process; economic hardship is the main driver of seasonal migration. In many areas, it becomes an important livelihood for rural people. It has a paradoxical impact on marginalised communities, SC, OBC, and Muslims. Through the process of migration, they acquire new skills, improve their livelihood and also diversify their

occupation in an urban industrial setting, which gradually alters the traditional farm-based occupational pattern. Young male members migrate seasonally because of the standard wage and employment opportunity in migration-absorbing areas, which sometimes creates a scarcity of workforce at the peak cultivation time in the study area. The economic upward mobility does not automatically mean strong political awareness or active political participation. Although roughly 59.6% of respondents reported taking part in elections, a large portion remained poorly informed about their political rights and processes. In this sense, the study reflects Almond and Verba's (1963) notion of a "quasi-parochial" political culture, where participation is driven less by ideology and more by local patronage or fear of losing access to welfare benefits. They remain politically irrelevant and invisible in the democratic decision-making process. Thus, targeted intervention of policies is urgently needed to include internal migrants in electoral rolls, enhance political literacy and strengthen representation at local governance structures to ensure that economic mobility goes hand in hand with real inclusion into political life.

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