Original Article

Place Attachment and Decisions to Move: A Study of Indian Migrants during Covid-19 Pandemic and Directions to Future Research

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ABSTRACT

The relation between attachment to places and human mobility are not straightforward or linear, but is frequently indirect and mediated by social, cultural and economic drivers. Migration affects people positively, but most migratory movement are due to economic issue, financial problem, unemployment, vulnerability, stress or shocks. This migratory movement has a place attachment angle that is now becoming increasingly noticed for several times. Place attachments are based on interpersonal interaction and can alter a person's perception of risk and coping techniques in areas prone to natural disasters. The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on migrants. The interplay of COVID-19 and the decline in economic activity have led to both domestic and international instability. Due to environmental change, migration explains complex interactions, hazards and unpredictability. This study examines the problems and opportunities in terms of place for the immobile population that undergo environmental degradation and clarifies its significance in the pandemic situation in Indian context.

GRAPHICAL ABSTRACT
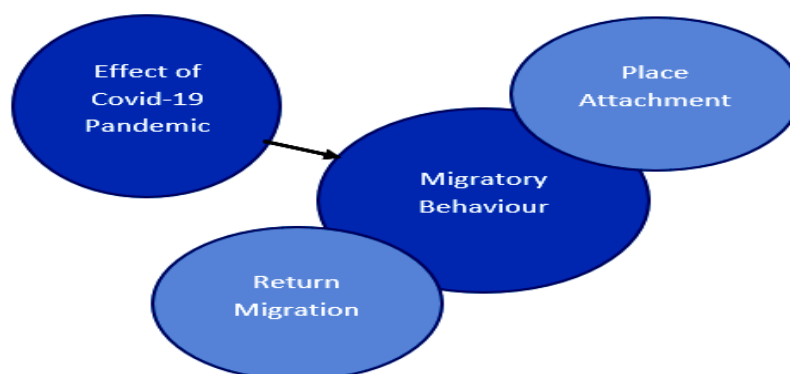
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Introduction

This paper discusses the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on internal migrants, and identifies that place attachment has a role to play on migratory behaviour during nationwide lockdown. In the early days, migrants across India's major cities began to witness a panic, which triggered concerted attempts to return to the rural hometowns of the countries of origin [10]. With the timeline of the migration attempt, it is apparent that the administration did not take into account the huge scale of domestic migrants in India, with a four-hour notice before the first lockdown by surprising migrant workers [5]. The closure of business activities effectively cut off many of these working migrants' main income, leaving them with little or no resources to travel which was probably the first in a series of consecutive domestic lockdown. The pandemic of COVID-19 has already penetrated the labour market and caused extensive global disruption [16]. The supply chain and demand have both been affected by the reduction of labour markets. The production disorder leads to waves in the lower part of the workforce which created deeper shocks and weakness [20]. Every business, regardless of its business volume, was forced to stop and led to job losses in most sectors. This labour shock has had a profound impact on domestic migrants [31]. The objective of the study is to find out the role of place attachment in migratory behaviour during COVID-19 pandemic.
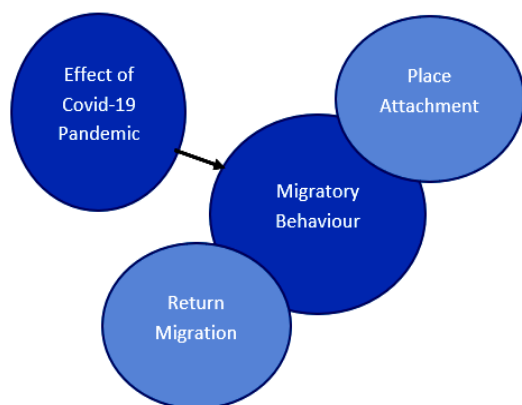
Figure 1: Impact of Covid-19 pandemic on migratory behaviour of the migrants

Material and methods

This paper is qualitative in nature. The authors have reviewed the literature associated with place attachment and migratory behaviour and tried to find out the gaps for future research by developing a conceptual model.

Literature Review

Migratory Behaviour

Migration is defined as the geographic movement of individuals beyond a defined boundary in order to establish a new permanent or semi-permanent habitation. Migration, like fertility and mortality, is a component of population change [2]. A country's economic well-being is determined by the overall growth of each segment and each group of people living in the country. Human movement concept is theoretically referred to as migration [9]. While the reasons for migration may vary from country to region, the existing socio-economic conditions at the migrants' place of origin play a vital role in deciding to migrate. Various migration literatures show people move for better living conditions, better jobs or for better health conditions [19]. Migrants sometimes move individually or move with members of the family if things allow. Thus, migration is a selective process, involving families' role as well. There exist favourable and unfavourable effects on the decision on migration as well. Moving individuals from one location to another for greater economic possibilities may result in a workforce shortage, which may harm general prosperity in the place of origin [11]. The real success of the migration process will therefore be seen if the movement can bring prosperity in both sectors. In theory, the ideal situation would be for the migration to have a positive influence when there is a labour shortage, and for migrants to learn technical competence during their stay that they can apply when they return home [24]. If this condition is violated, there is a chance that the movement will not produce the desired result. A decision on migration can be motivated by health, but such relocations can have a health effect in turn [11]. There has been a fundamental distinction between migration patterns in developing

countries and those in developed countries. In developing countries such as India, migration occurs mostly as a result of poverty, unemployment, natural disasters, and underdevelopment in the origin location, rather than the so-called pull forces of the destination location, as is common in developed countries. Migration and development are becoming increasingly popular topics of discussion [11; 24]. There has been a lot of discussion on the negative effects of migration on development and vice versa. In one hand, lack of development is believed to be a cause of migration, while on the other hand, prosperity is argued to be a cause of movement [19]. Migration is more common as a result of regional disparities in development. People migrate from backward, underdeveloped places to developed, prosperous ones in order to enhance their living situations [15]. This is found to be true in both international and domestic migration. Inter-state migration should be examined in the perspective of regional disparity and inequality in development in developing nations in general, and India in particular [6].

The dynamic movement component, as well as the structure of Indian urban and rural population, are expected to intensify the country's Covid-19 outbreak. There may be a sizable number of vulnerable migrants who come from rural areas and work in cities [23]. With constant reports of the disease's fatality, the Corona Virus outbreak caused consternation among workers who remained thousands of miles away from their loved ones [5]. Another source of concern was the unprecedented imposition of lockdown and halt on food security [5]. Migration and health are discovered to have a multifaceted and bidirectional link [24]. A person's health can affect their decision to relocate, but moving can also have an impact on their health [9]. Circular migration has also been linked to the spread of health disorders or behaviour between destination and origin communities, potentially harming the health of others. The structure of India's urban and rural populations, as well as the dynamic component of migration, are anticipated to intensify the country's COVID-19 outbreak [23]. The start of

the lockdown caused widespread terror among migrants in India's main cities and states of destination, launching off determined efforts to return mostly to rural hometowns in the states of origin [12].

Place Attachment

The term "place attachment" refers to people's emotional ties or links to specific places, including their neighborhood. In general, people and neighborhoods are thought to benefit from place attachment. Individuals benefit from it in terms of security, social networking, and/or a sense of identity [1, 28]. It is associated with stable, cohesive areas for people to live in. Regeneration measures for the environment, as well as the creation of social networks or social capital in poor communities, may result in enhanced attachment [3, 18]. Attachment and regeneration in deprived areas may be jeopardized by high business due to extensional efforts. In contrast to instability in poor regions, high population turnover in these areas can have more negative consequences [4]. The attachment to a place indicates the existence of strong relationships between individuals and the places with which they interact, most often through their current or previous residents or through their behaviour patterns [8]. It is therefore critical to remember that the place of attachment is not always the same as the place of residence. Place attachment is a word used to explain the emotional link or connection between people and certain locations [18]. The majority of tourism researchers agree that places include identity and place reliance [18, 34]. According to Manzo (2005), we need to broaden our understanding of place attachment and stop treating it as a uniform and static concept because we have both a positive and negative attitude toward meaningful places [26]. According to this argument, the goal of this qualitative study is to thoroughly understand the shades of migrants' place attachment to their dynamic and diverse characteristics. On the basis of the different literatures, it can be stressed that the connection between place and migratory behaviour, place attachment is a key factor in deciding whether migration takes place or not [13]. Attachment to

the place and return migration has a positive impact on the labour market as it increases the number of experienced and skilled labour in that place [22]. In the paper of Florek (2016), discussion and emphasis are placed on the necessity of attitudinal loyalty to show that cities cannot rely solely on patronage, but must also take into account those who feel strongly about their hometown. Town and municipal administrators must promote this sense of affective attachment by developing meaningful ties with a city [22]. If the conditions are favourable, migration chances will be lower [14]. The current research focused on these areas in order to understand the impact of migration decisions on the place attachment variables and also understand the effect of pandemic [17].

Effect of COVID-19 on migrants
The spread of the Corona virus from its epicenter in Wuhan, China, to the rest of the world is attributed to human migration and mobility [27]. Medical professionals, on the other hand, feel that this infectious disease control is attainable through immobility, confinement and social separation. The lockdown is likely to result in an unprecedented breakdown of our economic and social systems in a globalized society. Migrants are especially exposed to natural catastrophes and epidemics in cities [30]. The first case of COVID-19 was discovered in India on January 30, 2020, and the country was placed on lockdown for 21 days following the outbreak on March 24, 2020. Borders were blocked, shipments were ceased, plants, stores, restaurants, and all economic operations were halted, with the exception of fundamental necessities [25]. This proved to be a wake-up call for hundreds of thousands of migrants who lost their jobs and became homeless overnight. These migratory workers faced urgent problems such as food, shelter, loss of pay, illness concern, and worry. As a result, thousands of them fled to their hometowns from various cities. Many migrants died as a result of poverty, hunger, accidents, disease, and even suicide. According to a telephone study conducted by Jan Sahas (2020) of over 3,000 migrants from Northern Central

India, the bulk of the workers were wage earners, 42 percent were locked up, one-third were detained in towns with no food, water, or money, and 94 percent had no work [21]. Many migrants were stranded in various places across the country as a result of the unexpected closure. Those who have travelled have become stranded at the borders of stations, states, or districts. Many people had to walk hundreds of kilometers to their hometowns since there was no public transit. Those who returned to their hometowns were unfairly treated by the authorities and local population because they were perceived as potential disease carriers. In one example, a group of returning citizens were sprayed with chemicals, for which the local authorities apologized [21]. This is one of the country's major influxes of people. The effort to halt the pandemic has become one of India's most sad human tragedies in modern history. As a result of the economic slump, migrant workers in large cities are being compelled to either remain in risky conditions in the city or return to their places of origin—villages or smaller towns. Many of these migrant workers come from the country's poorest and most backward regions, where possibilities for employment and education are few [25]. Another significant issue that the pandemic may pose is food safety and nutrition. The COVID-19 has the potential to starve millions of people all over the world. One of the primary causes of job loss and relocation is insecurity.

Place Attachment and Behaviour of the Migrant during Pandemic
As all public and private travel during the lockdown was suspended, migrant workers were held for more than two months in the city. The specter of poor migrants returning home symbolized class inequalities and government insecurity without money or food, expelled from families and endangered by violence from workers and the state [30]. The state planned special trains for stranded workers on 1st May 2020 [22] but could not inform whether fares were payable either by state or migrant workers [10]. They all knew about quarantine as they came home and went to facilities but without

food, masks or sanitation, they had not been equipped properly. They could not deal with quarantine. Public finances in local governments were scarce. Meanwhile, in introducing on 13th May the Second Tranche of "Aatmanirbhar," the Minister of Finance identified migrant workers as a separate group and highlighted three steps in response to their needs. The MGNREGA scheme provided additional workers to make up for income loss in rural areas at a slightly higher rate of pay [30]. During the lockdown, the process was carried out to legitimize migrant workers as an electorate that had various demands and challenges regarding its content. But in the third step, there was a gap between speech and practice. The protection plan recognizes fundamental conditions of survival and livelihood of migrant workers, the right to food, shelter and employment) [31].

There was discussion of satisfaction as an attachment measure. It is seen either as an intrinsic measure of location or as a measure by itself. Fried (1984) emphasized the different approaches to satisfaction of the different studies. The link between a community and the well-being can sometimes be used as a separate predictor for well-being studies [23] but often those studies are confused with a variety of place attachments as a result if they can be included in their attachment itself, as previously indicated. Several migrants did not leave their places because of this minimal pleasure. Many migrants were concerned that they would come back to their former jobs in town if they were laid off during the shutdown. In mid-April, firms began reporting labour shortfalls because most firms did not return [7, 23]. Despite the fact that the migrants began to return five months after they had left working cities due to a shortage of work. Migrants cannot be ignored as a stakeholder in development for a long period. The integration of migrants into development is urgently needed. The government should thoroughly consider the suggestions of UNESCO-UNICEF and the Working Group on Migration and put them into action as soon as possible [25, 22].

Research Gap

During the time, much attention was given to the scale of intra and interstate migration in India, as well as on some questions, such as working conditions and wages of migrants, problems in living quarters, household facilities and benefit portability across state lines, that need to be dealt with as soon as possible. Most migrants were vulnerable before they left and remain vulnerable when coming to another state in their fragmented state of existence. The COVID-19 pandemic has presented a wide range of challenges, the consequences of which are emerging in research into its effects on spiritual and psychological well-being [30, 32]. Given the extensive and ongoing disruptions to place attachment caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, it may be worthwhile to explore creative techniques for individuals to manage disconnection, loss, and future recovery of place-based attachment. There is a need of study on the basis of these issues. From the literature reviews discussed above the authors have framed a framework for the future research based on hypothetical constructs where covid-19 pandemic has considered as shock which will act as moderating variable which is shown in Figure 2 below.
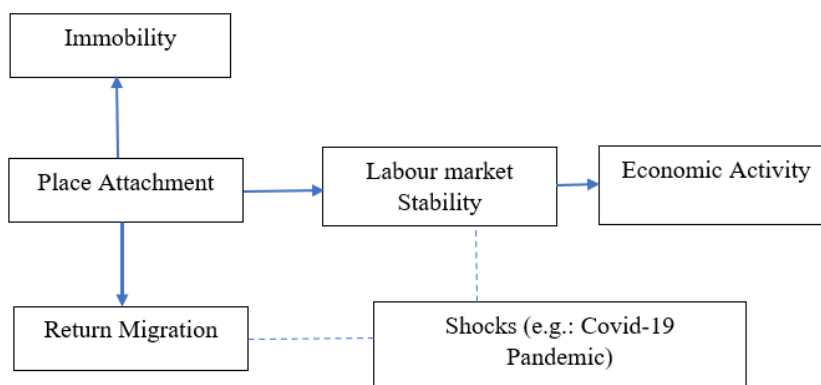

Figure 2: Conceptual Model

Result and Dissection

The current study is centered on place attachment and migratory behavior; it is necessary to identify the factors that influence place attachment. Place attachment research is regarded as bridging the disciplines of geography and environmental psychology [13]. According to the wide literature study, the subject of how people build attachments to places is part of the larger theme of how place meanings are established. Place attachment research is concerned with the dynamic relationships that exist between humans and their surroundings, and it includes investigations into the essence of psychological processes, the function of place attributes, and the temporal and spatial structure of people-place interactions [8]. Place attachment is depicted positively in research. The prevailing opinion holds that connection to location offers stability, produces assets, and assists society in taking on and completing long-term initiatives. Due to the pandemic, the migrants got the chance to return back to their place of origin. COVID-19 and its effects on migrants were discussed in this article. Low-income households are particularly affected by these effects, since they are less prepared to deal with earnings losses during a recession, have no other sources of income, and do not have access to social security. When they lose their jobs, most of these people earn nothing more than a subsistence salary, and they have no other way of protecting their income. The study also reveals that there can be a significant relationship between place attachment and workforce mobility; staying at place of origin or return back to the place of origin. This paper discussed the principles of place attachment and migration, which are based on immobility and return migration [25]. In this study, strong attachments to places were viewed as inhibiting factors in assessing the likelihood of a person migrating, significantly reducing the chance of migration as the strength of attachment to a place increase. In the previous studies, it can be found that the relation between immobility and return migration on labour market stability is also positive and significant [14]. This pattern can usually be attributed to an increase in migration or displacement of the population. The spread of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), and the consequent nationwide blockage to limit their future outbreak, has caused chaos in the lives of millions of individuals largely involved in the non-informal sector [23]. The Government of India announced on 26th March 2020, under Pradhan Mantri Gareeb Kalyan Yojana, a Rs. 1,70-lakh-crore package, to mitigate the effects of the lockdown on vulnerable groups [25]. Although the lack of proper strategic guidelines presented state governments several challenges in the form of a lack of preparedness, in accordance with Central Government orders, most States developed their own strategies and took significant steps to preserve the lives and rights of migrants in this context.

Conclusion

To summarize, the COVID-19 pandemic has altered people's perceptions of places they had previously associated with prior to the Corona outbreak, raising concerns about deific presence and protection. Fear of contracting the virus and disruption of place attachment can cut the roots of a person's conviction, leaving them vulnerable to anxiety and problems. During the Corona outbreak, at least, the early months of the pandemic were widely observed as a result of migrant workers' negligence. It is critical to investigate the numerous techniques, strategies, and campaigns that can help migrant workers overcome the significant inequalities. National migration policies must also be reviewed in order to accommodate the support and protection of migrants arriving or facing the prospect of returning in health-crisis-affected areas. Building resilient food systems has the potential to reduce food insecurity and the pressure on migrants to return to their home countries. Since the majority of migrants work in the informal sector, movement does not significantly improve the socio-economic conditions unless there is added value in terms of skills at the destination. As mentioned, the workforce in the place of origin is being scarce. The migration choice always has a sense of belonging to the place of birth. Politicians must therefore try to visualize what factors attract employees but generate

opportunities to create revenues. A genuine database for trapped migrants at destination, in highway camps, and returning migrants in villages is urgently needed. Data on the number and characteristics of migrants, in camps, at home quarantine, are needed today and in the future to transfer the advantages of social welfare systems. The question arises with severe disruption as to whether reverse migrants return to work in cities or stay in their villages. How do they cope with economic stress in the destination areas when they do not come back? Further research is necessary to correctly analyse the process of place attachments affecting the subjective adaptive capacity and examine elements to enhance the attachment in return migration communities.

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Authors' contributions

All authors contributed toward data analysis, drafting and revising the paper and agreed to be responsible for all the aspects of this work.

Conflict of Interest

We have no conflicts of interest to disclose.

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