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## **GHOST VILLAGES OF UTTARAKHAND: A STORY OF DEPOPULATION AND RURAL EXODUS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Migration is one of the major problems which the state of Uttarakhand is facing since its formation. It is the only state which has a dedicated migration commission named as Palayan Ayog formed in 2017. Mass migration from remote Hill areas of Uttarakhand have left many villages in abandoned condition. These villages, which have been totally abandoned, are commonly termed as ghost villages, haunted legends, etc. According to the report of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India 2018, there were around four nine hundred thirty-six villages which had households of less than 10. This number is bound to increase significantly in 2026. In 2011 census, there were around 1048 which were completely abandoned these figures are also bound to increase in current times. Making of ghost villages is not a one-day phenomenon but is result of continuous and gradual decline in population due to lack of basic communities in these villages. Basic facilities like health water, electricity Hospital, education, are scarce. Apart from it, continuous animal and wildlife conflict also adds to their misery. Hence inhabitants of these villages are forced to move to nearby cities in search of better livelihood and earning prospects. Many efforts on the part of government are being done, but they have failed to arrest this problem of mass exodus. It is the moral and legal duty of government to provide basic amenities to the people and failure on the part of government to provide these basic communities leads to violation of fundamental rights of these peoples also.

**Keywords:** Migration, Palayan Ayog, Ghost villages, haunted legends, rural exodus.

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## Introduction

When one thinks about the state of Uttarakhand mind is occupied by beautiful picturesque locations, serene lakes, pine trees, rich biodiversity and adventures. When people visit the state from touristic purposes they get to see only one Side of hills, where facilities are at fingertips. One gets nicely cooked food and cozy hotels with which they can spend their vacations with every ease and comfort. It may look like paradise from outside but there also exists harsh realities where people have to lineup in early mornings to fetch few liters of portable water for daily needs. Condition becomes worse in summers when natural springs and sources dry out and touristic activities surges. Apart from this the state is battling from many issues like climate change, uneven pattern of rainfall, deforestation, mass mobilization of people from villages to urban areas leaving the village population in two digits are some of the issues which are crippling the state. The mass migration of people from many villages has left them in condition of total dilapidation. These villages refer to uninhabited villages which are being abandoned by residents. According to 2011 census there are 1048 such villages which have been completely abandoned. These numbers are expected to have increased to 2000 in 2025. Migration from hill areas of Uttarakhand is a serious issue which the state is facing since its formation in 2000. People especially from hill areas are moving to other parts of state especially to plains and even in other states in search of better facilities. This remotely situated village's lacks even basic infrastructural facilities like primary healthcare centers, schools, roads, etc. The continuous moving of people from these villages has resulted in complete inhabitation of these villages which are being termed as ghost villages<sup>2</sup>.

Uttarakhand government formed rural development and migration prevention commission to arrest and address migration problem of the state in 2018, since then it has provided many reports, but the condition is not majorly sorted out. Since migration problem is not a one-day Philomena, hence it needs to be structurally and systematically addressed hitting at causal factors. Dr. SS Negi voice, chairman of rural development and migration prevents and commission opines that migration in the state is a serious problem which is continuously increasing which though showed some gradual decline during Covid times in 2019, but gained momentum again, when things backed to normal, reasons for this are varying. Since

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2. Asha Hans et al., *Migration, Workers, and Fundamental Freedoms: Pandemic Vulnerabilities and States of Exception in India* (Taylor & Francis, 2021).

anthropogenic activities are directly related to environment this movement of people from these villages, also environment degradation in these areas<sup>3</sup>.

These villages also show social economic crisis which the state facing. Limited economic prospects, inadequate infrastructure and natural calamities accelerated by climate change have driven large-scale migration from the hills to the plains in the state.

Young population aged between 25 to 35, have mostly moved in search of better livelihood nearby cities of plane areas, which have also impacted agriculture in this villages negatively since older people who are left behind, find themselves unable to perform routine agricultural activities which are mainly labour intensive in nature. Uneven pattern of rainfall is making things worse as majority of farming activities in the state is rainfed. Since there are fewer inhabitants, fear of wild animals is also increased pose threat to both inhabitants and crops.

Migration of people from these villages on the one hand, impacting these villages on the other hand, also stressing the areas of plains where infrastructure facilities are limited.

To hold people in their native places, at least basic human requirements needs to be fulfilled, which could enable them to live their life with dignity? Since villages in the hills are distantly located which worsens the problem? Basic requirements like of primary healthcare schools etc. Which people of plains often take for granted, also seems to be things of luxury to them as just to get a first aid, they have to travel for more than ten km. Since primary schools are also many times located on adjacent hills, one adult member has to accompany them as there is always a chance of attack of wild animals leaving his daily routine household works.

During Covid period, the state has seen some significant reversing of these migrant people which was a positive factor for the state, but the state is facing tough times in holding them back. Lack of infrastructural facilities, harsh environmental conditions coupled with uneven pattern of rainfall, search for better livelihood of children, social and economic marginalisation, apathy of officials are some of the conditions which force them to migrate urban areas. Migration of people in Uttarakhand is not new problem, but it's frequency in recent times have increased tremendously. The problem of these villages is multifaceted. There is no any single

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3. "migration continues in uttarakhand people are leaving their villages number of ghost villages is 1792 - उत्तराखंडमें जारी है पलायन का दौर, लोग छोड़ रहे गांव, घोटविलेज की संख्या है 1792," available at: <https://navbharattimes.indiatimes.com/state/uttarakhand/dehradun/migration-continues-in-uttarakhand-people-are-leaving-their-villages-number-of-ghost-villages-is-1792/articleshow/98536727.cms> (last visited on January 1, 2026)

issue which is causing mass mobilisation of people to urban areas. Hence, a more concerted collaborated and comprehensive approach needs to be adopted on the part of government and its agencies at the same time, members of civil societies members of non-governmental organisations and local village administration also needs to play their active roles in arresting this problem. Government being parent patria of people needs to be at forefront and to take active and efficient measures along with strict implementation of recommendations, if any of stakeholders. It is through active implementation of policies. Only this problem can be solved.

### **What is problem with ghost villages?**

Ghost villages are remotely situated villages which have been uninhabited by residents owing to various factors. Lack of infrastructural facilities and scarce of basic amenities required for living a normal life is forcing people to leave their homes. Lack of proper roads, hospitals, schools, job opportunities are some of the driving factors forcing inhabitants to leave their native places. Schools and hospitals if are present are situated in adjacent or nearby hills for which children have travel for a fair distance. Since there are chances of attacks of wild animals one adult member has to devote his day in making their journey possible safely. Climate change, uneven pattern of rainfall, lack of adequate focus of government on the hills, unplanned and ecologically unsustainable practices further worsen the existing misery.

### **Research Methodology**

For the research a mixed-methods research methodology is employed to capture both quantitative and qualitative dimensions of rural depopulation. The research involved archival analysis of census records; government reports. Field observations and photographic documentation were utilized to assess the current state of abandoned settlements and infrastructure.

### **BRIEF LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### ***Migration from Rural Areas: The Case of Hilly Region of Uttar Pradesh (V.S. Negi1994) -***

Author in this book examined know about the causes of people moving out of state in detail. Since at that time, state of Uttarakhand was not separated from state of Uttar Pradesh, hence title of book is titled as “the case of reasons of Uttar Pradesh”. In this book, author, gave a detailed overview of Push and pull factors forcing and attracting people to move out of their

native places. Author also highlighted about the impact which is caused by out migration of people on the areas, which are depopulated and on the areas where they will settle. Since every place has its carrying capacity, and if influx of people exceeds the carrying capacity, surely it will pose threats and inconveniences.

***Pahari Societies and Ecological Fragility (Negi, G.C.S. (1995)-***

Author in this book emphasised about the ecological and geographic constraints of hill regions. He pointed that poor infrastructure and poor living conditions are the indirect factors which are forcing people to move out. Although this book is not directly focus on migration of people but it set a foundation for understanding the push factors.

***Migration from Hill Regions: A Case of Garhwal Himalayas (Pant, M.C. (1999) -*** It is one of the earliest dedicated works which highlighted the problem of seasonal and permanent migration in the state. The causative factors according to author for the phenomenon are agricultural limitations, lack of industrialization, and harsh living conditions.

***Climate Change in Uttarakhand Current State of Knowledge (R Thadani -2015)***

Author in this book opines that mountain people who depend on natural ecosystems and ecosystem services for their day to day living are likely to be severely affected by climate change. Uttarakhand, which had a landscape characterised by scattered, inaccessible and independent settlements, has been transformed over the past few decades. Rapid urbanisation and road building has increased connectivity and a connection with markets, but has also increased vulnerability by moving away from the self-sufficiency that characterised the communities of this region. An increase in frequency of extreme climate events, likely a consequence of climate change, has led to large losses of life and property

***Climate Change in Uttarakhand: Current State of Knowledge and Way Forward (Bishen Singh Mahendra Pal Singh)***

In this report, the authors highlighted the impact of climate change on the forest and agriculture of Uttarakhand along with possible ramifications on glaciers. Authors pointed that due to movement of people agricultural activities are being hampered, which in turn leads to growth of evasive alien species, which are counter-productive for the net forests and Flora.

***Locked houses, follow lands climate change, and migration, Uttarakhand(Teri-2021)***

This report by the energy and resource Institute studied about the population dynamics of the state its climate variabilities , uneven pattern of rainfall extreme weather events, future climate outlook of state, elevation of migrant events in present and historical perspective, reasons for migration , destinations for migration, depopulated and uninhabited villages causes about these depopulation from perspective of climate, change, its cumulative impact of climate on these villages and agriculture

***Climate induced displacement and migration in India (Hridayesh Joshi-2021)***

In this report, author highlighted about climate in profile of Almora district along with migration profile. Author pointed about the drivers that impact migration of people along with suggesting some practical solutions. Along with state of Uttarakhand, some districts of different states were also studied in a comparative manner pointing out, how different areas of the nation are impacted by it.

***From Hills to Horizons: The Migration Journey of Uttarakhand's Villagers (M. Sagar Bhatt (2022)-***Author in this book explored the Multifaceted problem of migration in the state .The book is divided into six chapters in which author examined about historical and present context of migration and how it affects both sending and receiving communities. Author made in debt analysis of life of People, villages of Uttarakhand and the problems which are faced by them. Chapter one of the books highlights about socio economic factors which make people to come out of their native places. Including limited employment opportunities, access to education, and the pursuit of better living standards. Author in chapter two focussed on the traditional lifestyles, customs, and community dynamics in villages, emphasizing the challenges faced by them.

***The Living Traditions of Uttarakhand: Exploring the Cultural Tapestry of the Himalayan State(M. Sagar Bhatt 2023)-***Author through his book delves deep into the vibrant traditions, unique practices, and living cultural expressions that define the people of this state. In The first chapter titled ‘Roots of Tradition: History and Heritage’ provides an essential foundation for understanding how Uttarakhand’s culture has evolved over centuries. It also explores the early migrations, local dynasties, and spiritual heritage that have laid the groundwork for the region’s identity. Author stresses on the point that due to moment of people, cultural values rich

traditions and diverse mountain systems all are negatively impacted.

### **PALAYAN AYOOG - RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND MIGRATION COMMISSION**

The Palayan Ayog (Rural Development and Migration Commission) Report on Uttarakhand (2018) examines the causes, extent, and impact of rural-to-urban migration, especially from hill districts. Migration in Uttarakhand is a serious socio-economic issue, reflected in declining populations in districts like Almora and Pauri Garhwal between 2001 and 2011. While plains districts such as Dehradun and Haridwar show high population growth and urbanization, hill districts face stagnation and depopulation. This imbalance is largely due to unequal economic opportunities, with most employment and income-generating activities concentrated in the plains. Per capita income in several hill districts is less than half that of the plains, intensifying migration pressures.

The Commission was established in 2017 to assess migration patterns and recommend strategies for rural development. Its methodology included field surveys, stakeholder consultations, and analysis of primary and secondary data. Findings show that agriculture remains the primary occupation, though it contributes less to economic growth and is constrained by small landholdings and low productivity. Migration is predominantly long-term and employment-driven. Around 3.83 lakh people migrated semi-permanently and about 1.18 lakh permanently in the last decade. The major causes include lack of livelihood opportunities, inadequate education and health facilities, poor infrastructure, and low agricultural productivity. The report highlights broader trends consistent with national patterns, where migration is largely rural-to-urban and employment-oriented. In Uttarakhand, migrants are relatively better educated and often secure salaried jobs, sending remittances that support rural households. However, migration also leads to challenges such as abandoned villages, aging populations, and concerns in border areas. Overall, the report emphasizes the need for multi-sectoral rural development, including better infrastructure, education, healthcare, and livelihood opportunities, to reduce distress migration and promote balanced regional development.

### **APATHY OF RESIDENTS OF GHOST VILLAGES**

In a remote village of Pithoragarh, when an elderly woman passed away, there were simply not enough people left to carry her body for the last rites. Most of the younger population had

already migrated to cities in search of better jobs and living conditions, leaving behind only a few elderly residents. In this difficult situation, personnel from the Border security forces stepped forward and helped perform the funeral rites, ensuring the woman received a dignified farewell. This incident is not just a one-time story; it reflects a much deeper problem. Continuous migration has weakened the social fabric of these villages. Earlier, communities used to come together in times of need, but now, with fewer people around, even basic cultural and social responsibilities are becoming hard to fulfil. Villages are slowly turning into empty spaces with locked houses and aging populations. Chauni village in Bageshwar district of Uttarakhand presents another tragic example of migration driven abandonment. Once a lively settlement of 25 families, located just 23 km from the district headquarters, it has now become completely deserted<sup>4</sup>. Over the years, continuous out-migration reduced the population, leaving only 15 families by 2015. By January 2025, even the last remaining family left, bringing life in the village to an end. Former residents recall a time filled with children's laughter and daily activity, now replaced by complete silence, highlighting the deep social and emotional impact of rural depopulation in hill regions.

## KEY DRIVERS OF THE PROBLEM

### *Lack of employment opportunities*

Rural Uttarakhand offers very limited job options beyond agriculture, which itself is not very profitable. Young people migrate to cities in search of stable incomes, government jobs, or private sector opportunities.<sup>5</sup> If employment opportunities are there, these young people will not be forced to vacate or leave their houses where they have spent much of their time.<sup>6</sup> No one willingly leaves their houses unless they are being forced by situations beyond their control. Since after a point of time, one has to earn to make their living, hence finding scarce employment opportunities in and around these villages, they are forced to live their native places in search of

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4. "Chauni village in Uttarakhand becomes ghost town as residents migrate for better opportunities," available at: <https://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/2025/Nov/15/chauni-village-in-uttarakhand-becomes-ghost-town-as-residents-migrate-for-better-opportunities> (last visited January 2, 2026).

5. Migration leaves behind 'ghost villages' in Uttarakhand, available at: <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/migration-leaves-behind-ghost-villages-in-uttarakhand/article6580917.ece> (last visited on January 2, 2026)

6. Dr Seema Parveen et al., "A Study Of Government Efforts To Revitalize Ghost Villages Of The Himalayas For The Economic Development Of Uttarakhand," 11 *International Journal of Environmental Sciences* (2025).

better livelihood.<sup>7</sup> As one of the major working opportunity is in the agriculture, but that also rained as state is facing uneven rainfall in recent years, this sector itself struggling to contribute significantly.<sup>8</sup>

### **Poor infrastructure**

Infrastructure is very important for the development of any region. In remote areas of Uttarakhand, where these villages are there, it's true that infrastructural facilities are in dilapidated condition. There are no roads, no connectivity, poor water and electricity facilities. No schools no hospitals even if they are there, they are at significant distances. Without infrastructure development of any region is close to impossible. Similar thing is with these villages, since infrastructural facilities are less, so other things failed to reach, which in turn affects, both inhabitants and habitats.<sup>9</sup> If this region is to be developed basic facilities such as water, electricity, education, health, and roads needs to be provided by the government auto problem.

### **Limited education facilities**

Parents work day and night in order to make future of their children. They spent significantly on education with the hope to improve their future, but condition of education in these remote villages is very bad. Think of a situation where students of school take charge of their exams since school teacher fails to reach on time due to by the weather. As schools in these areas are remote one person has to accompany them to school leaving their regular work. As there is always chances of attacks of wild animals. It is hard for government also to sustain educational facilities in this remote areas. As in many of the schools, attendance is very low and expenses are significant so majority of the schools are merged or on the verge of closing. Since villages lack quality schools, colleges, and professional institutions. Parents are forced to send children to towns or cities for better education.<sup>10</sup> Over time, families permanently shift to urban areas

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7. 'Ghost villages' of the Himalayas foreshadow a changing India, available at: <https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2023/03/30/1166286835/ghost-villages-of-the-himalayas-foreshadow-a-changing-india> (visited on January 6, 2026).

8. Uttarakhand | What lies behind the ghost villages, available at: <https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/nation/story/20251222-uttarakhand-what-lies-behind-the-ghost-villages-2834908-2025-12-13> (visited on January 6, 2026).

9. Ghost Villages: 7 Urgent Reasons Why India's Himalayan Exodus Is a National Emergency available at: <https://himalayangeographic.com/ghost-villages/> (visited on January 6, 2026)

10. Archana Singh, "A ghost village in Uttarakhand has been transformed by tourism and new work opportunities" *Scroll.in*, 2022 available at: <https://scroll.in/article/1016650/a-ghost-village-in-uttarakhand-has-been-transformed-by-tourism-and-climate-resistant-work> (last visited January 14, 2026).

for their children's future, contributing to long-term migration and decline in village populations.

### ***Human animal conflict***

Since very few people are left behind in this villages, so number of farming activities are also very less. When there are few number of anthropogenic activities, it increases the risk of while animals like boars, tigers. Conflict with these wild animals is also one of the major problems which forces people to leav the places and move to cities as there is always a risk.

### ***Inadequate healthcare services***<sup>11</sup>

Healthcare facilities in remote areas are either absent or poorly equipped. In emergencies, reaching hospitals becomes extremely difficult due to distance and terrain. This creates insecurity among residents, especially the elderly, prompting families to relocate to areas with better medical access. Think of a situation where a lady dies and there are not enough persons to carry her to the burial grounds because younger population has already left the village and those who are left behind are not in a condition to carry the dead body to the foothills of the river bed, where cremation ceremony have to be performed. In the urgency, local inhabitants have to take help of body security forces who gratefully accept the request and help in this situation. During Covid times, also a person has to travel miles to get a paracetamol tablet with source the condition of healthcare facilities where people have to travel significant distance to get even a basic healthcare facility. In case of any specialised treatment, they have to travel either to District Hospital or any private hospital, which are generally situated in the district headquarters or areas of Plains and in Dehradun. Most of the villagers which are there in these villages are in dire needs of the services as most of them are in the upper age bracket. It is the moral and legal duty of the government to provide these basic healthcare facilities to them.

### ***Low agricultural productivity***

Agriculture in the Hills is widely dependent on the rainfall but in recent years, climate change and global warming has impacted productivity and agricultural activities adversely. Landholdings ae small where use of machines is nearly too impossible. Most of the activities

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11. Varsha Singh, “‘Ghost villages’ of Uttarakhand report mass migrations for the fear of leopard attacks” *Down To Earth*, 2022 available at: <https://www.downtoearth.org.in/wildlife-biodiversity/-ghost-villages-of-uttarakhand-report-mass-migrations-for-the-fear-of-leopard-attacks-84745> (last visited January 14, 2026).

are manually performed, which are quite demanding. Terrain is also difficult and crops are also frequently damaged by wild animals. Many times they are damaged to level where they are insufficient to sustain their families, which in turn forces them to abandon farming activities and migrate to urban areas for better livelihood opportunities. Uneven rainfall is the biggest culprit followed by governmental apathies as many times government schemes fail to reach these remote areas and provide timely solutions to their problems. If agriculture productivity is to be increased, young population needs to carry out such activities. But in these remote villages, majority of population which is left behind belongs to upper age, bracket and younger ones have already migrated to cities. If conditions are to be improved, efforts, needs to be made to call them and engage in activities which revolve around these villages. Unless and until young population is brought back, condition cannot be improved as, those who are there; either is pensioners or is leaving there out of their own free will because of emotional attachment to the place where they have spent most of their time. Since artificial fertilisers are not used in this regions it becomes important that farmers are provided alternative options with the support of government or community centres and farmers are educated to use organic manures.

### ***Better urban prospects***

It is true that cities offer, high wages, better job opportunities, modern lifestyle, and access to better facilities related to health, entertainment, or education. These opportunities significantly attract rural youth who see migration as an opportunity to avail these activities which in turn leads to steady decline of population in these villages. When migration activities are increased, they left vacant houses leading to ghost villages behind them. And since anthropogenic activities are directly related environment they in turn significantly impact these villages. No doubt urban cities like Dehradun, Nainital, Rudrapur etc. Provide better opportunities, but it is also needs to be kept in mind that every city has its own carrying capacity<sup>12</sup>. If people keep on rushing to these places at one point of time, infrastructure of these villages will also crumble, hence it should be priority of the government to provide and take measures to capture this influx at the earliest.

### ***Social factors and migration networks***

Migration often spreads through social networks, where relatives or villagers already settled in

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12. Ishwar Awasthi and Balwant Singh Mehta, "Forced Out-Migration from Hill Regions and Return Migration During the Pandemic: Evidence from Uttarakhand," 63 *The Indian Journal of Labour Economics* 1107–24 (2020).

cities help others relocate. This creates a chain migration effect. As more people leave, the remaining population also feels encouraged or compelled to migrate, accelerating village depopulation.<sup>13</sup>

**Harsh living conditions:** It is very true that life of hills is not easy. Life there is physically demanding due to rough terrains. Facilities are limited and remotely accessible. Daily activities like fetching water, travelling long distances becomes burdensome, especially for 60+ elderly people who are left in majority. These Harsh conditions make leaving more attractive and force people to live these places permanently.<sup>14</sup> It can only be improved when basic communities and facilities are provided within their reach and comfort and its duty of government and responsible ones to provide them.

## MIGRATION FROM UTTARAKHAND: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The problem of migration in Uttarakhand is not new. It has always existed even at the time of British rule. During colonial administration around 1815 it began predominantly. As during this time, new opportunities came out in army police for services, which encouraged young men to come forward from the Hills to move out for permanent jobs. But migration during this time was sustained in nature which also helped civilian expansion across different regions. People initially took up small or low paying jobs but, with time and experience, many improved their socio-economic conditions.

Community support systems also played a crucial role in the process. Migrants gradually formed associations and networks in cities, which helped new migrants to settle and find jobs, maintain their cultural identity. These networks also strengthened the migration cycle by making movement of people easier and more secure for others from the same region. Migration was not only driven by economic compulsion but also by aspiration, as people sought better education, improved livelihoods, and enhanced living standards but while migration historically contributed to individual and community progress, its long-term impact on the hill regions has become a matter of concern. Continuous out-migration has led to decline

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13“Impact of forced migration: No village for young men in Uttarakhand,” *Hindustan Times*, 2017 available at: <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/no-village-for-young-men-in-uttarakhand/story-hb7X0LaiyY8X7gISSZ7QXM.html> (last visited January 18, 2026).

14. Sanjeev Sharma, Kaushal Kumar Sharma and Shashank Patel, “Geographical Analysis of Internal Migration and Livelihood Options for Mountain Sustainability along Indo-China Border in Niti Valley of Uttarakhand, Western Himalaya,” 14 (2019).

populations, abandonment of villages, and weakening of traditional social structures. Therefore there is need for balanced development policies that create opportunities within Uttarakhand itself, so that migration becomes a choice rather than a compulsion.”

### **FAILURE ON THE CONSTITUTIONAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE FRONT**

The large-scale migration and abandonment of villages in Uttarakhand reflects a clear failure of both constitutional ideals and administrative machinery. Although the Article 21 of the Constitution of India guarantees a dignified life, the State has been unable to ensure basic necessities such as healthcare, education, employment, and infrastructure in remote hill areas. Similarly, the principle of equality under Article 14 of the Constitution of India is undermined by the persistent regional imbalance between developed urban plains and neglected rural hills. The Directive Principles of State Policy, which obligate the State to promote welfare and livelihood opportunities, have not been effectively implemented, resulting in distress-driven migration rather than voluntary mobility. From an administrative perspective, weak governance, poor policy execution, lack of accountability, and inadequate planning at the grassroots level have aggravated the situation. Despite the framework of decentralized governance under the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, local bodies often lack financial autonomy, capacity, and support to address local development challenges. This institutional gap has led to declining public services, erosion of community structures, and ultimately the depopulation of villages, highlighting the urgent need for stronger governance and targeted policy interventions. The problem should be given priority or personal comfort. For example, when government of Uttarakhand try to shift capital to Gairsain many member of legislative assembly try to back off, citing personal medical reasons due to altitude of the place.<sup>15</sup>

### **SOLUTIONS TO THE EXISTING PROBLEM**

These ghost villages have resulted when people are forced to move out of the villages because of lack of infrastructural and basic facilities related to health, education, or roads. If migration of this villages is to be tackled then in holistic approach needs to be adopted where infrastructural facilities such as health, water, roads, hospitals needs to be provided and at the same time, focus on rural tourism needs to be done because economy of the state is heavily dependent on tourism sector. When rural tourism facilities will be developed in far areas,

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15. “Gairsain: Summer Capital of Uttarakhand,” *Drishti IAS* available at: <https://www.drishtiiias.com/daily-news-analysis/gairsain-summer-capital-of-uttarakhand> (last visited January 20, 2026).

people will visit this place and when they will visit then simultaneously and ancillary facilities will also develop. Since majority of the tourism activities are limited to few cities and local ladies and tourists fail to reach remote areas because they are not on internet and facilities are also not there so the government needs to focus on developing infrastructural and tourism facilities in these remote areas.<sup>16</sup> A local needs to be incentivised. Focus should be made on reversing the population with an serious effort.<sup>17</sup>

## **EFFORTS MADE AT TACKLING THE PROBLEM**

The problem of migration in Uttarakhand can be addressed through a combination of livelihood generation, infrastructure development, and effective governance, supported by ongoing government initiatives. One key solution is promoting local employment through schemes like the MukhyamantriPalayan Roktham Yojana, which provides financial assistance and encourages self-employment in migration-affected villages, particularly in agriculture, horticulture, and animal husbandry. Similarly, the government has launched “PravasiPanchayats”, aimed at engaging migrants and motivating them to return by informing them about schemes, subsidies, and local opportunities. These efforts have shown some success, with over 6,000 people reportedly returning to their villages and taking up work in tourism and small-scale industries. Additionally, entrepreneurship-based initiatives such as the Swarozgar schemes have created thousands of local jobs and encouraged youth to become self-reliant<sup>18</sup>. Infrastructure improvement, better healthcare and education facilities, and strengthening of Panchayati Raj institutions are equally essential to make rural life viable. Moreover, examples of return migrants starting ventures in agriculture and eco-tourism demonstrate the potential of reverse migration when supported by proper policy measures. Thus, while the problem is deep-rooted, these initiatives indicate that with sustained and well-implemented efforts, migration can be reduced and rural areas can be revitalized.

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16 Pankaj and Ashish Pant, “Rural Tourism a Solution for Ghost Villages of Uttarakhand,” *2 International Journal of New Technology and Research* 263486 (2016).

17 Vineet Upadhyay, “Leaders should do reverse migration: Uttarakhand CM Trivendra Singh Rawat on buying land in Gairsain” *The New Indian Express*, 2020available at: <https://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/2020/Aug/17/leaders-should-do-reverse-migration-uttarakhand-cm-trivendra-singh-rawat-on-buying-land-in-gairsain-2184628.html> (last visited January 20 , 2026)

18 Swarajya Staff, “‘Ghost’ Villages Of Uttarakhand: More Than 700 Villages Deserted In The Last Seven Years Due To Migration” *Swarajyamag* available at: <https://swarajyamag.com/insta/ghost-villages-of-uttarakhand-more-than-700-villages-deserted-in-the-last-seven-years-due-to-migration> (last visited JJanuary 20 , 2026).

**CONCLUSION:**

The problem of migration in Uttarakhand is a serious issue, which needs to be taken seriously. If villages are left vacant, they not only, we have adverse impact on people living there, but on the whole environment. Many efforts are being taken on the part of government like establishment of migration commission in 2017 and floating schemes like Mukhi Mantri SwarojGar Yojana. Uttarakhand is the only state in India, which has dedicated migration commission. In spite of this, if people are being forced to leave their places in such of better livelihood opportunities, then there is something which lacks whether it be the part of implementation on the part of government, but since the issue has existed for more than 25 years when the state was carved out of Uttar Pradesh, on the ground, the development activities reaching to the peoples of hills. Mass exodus of people from remote truly areas is not a one day phenomena. It has existed from the time of Britishers, but in recent times, it's frequency has been increased manifold. Recently Member of Parliament ajay Bhatt raise the issue of migration in Uttarakhand in Parliament stating that more than 1700 villages have to ghost villages having limited facilities, forcing people to move out of their native places.

The solution about ghost villages lies in the concept of sustainability and stories of farmers like Nirmal Chander needs to be uploaded who has successfully stood against the words and developed sustainable model of farming in Sangura village of Uttarakhand. Constitutional demands like that of inclusion in fifth schedule need to be carefully, give a proactive thought.

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