iJRASET
International Journal For Research in Applied Science and Engineering Technology



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL FOR RESEARCH

IN APPLIED SCIENCE & ENGINEERING TECHNOLOGY

Volume: 11 **Issue:** X **Month of publication:** October 2023

DOI: https://doi.org/10.22214/ijraset.2023.56163

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International Journal for Research in Applied Science & Engineering Technology (IJRASET)
ISSN: 2321-9653; IC Value: 45.98; SJ Impact Factor: 7.538
Volume 11 Issue X Oct 2023- Available at www.ijraset.com

Socio-Economic Impacts on the Migrants due to COVID-19

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Abstract: ***India has a massive migrant population that accounts for 453.6 million. The migration at the state level varies from one state to another state depending on several reasons like employment availability, better living standard, marriage, education, etc. In India, it is prevalent that the flow of migration is from the state, which lacks employment opportunities for the people. This huge migrant population includes the labour migrants who mostly hail from poor backgrounds and lack formal education. These migrants work in multiple low wage works like street vending construction, stone query mines, etc. The maximum net outflow of migrants is directly from the low-income states to the high-income states. UP has the highest net outflow population, while Maharashtra occupies the highest net inflow of migrants. These migrants are the daily wage workers and constitute the informal sector. Due to the sudden outbreak, Covid-19 has impacted them the most in this pandemic. With the loss of their daily employment in the cities, these migrants started to walk back to their native villages. Also, lack of social security, social stigma, and loss of livelihood has further added to their misery. The government's initiatives at a much later stage have somehow helped them. But still, there is a long way to go before eradicating this disparity. These migrants form an indispensable part of our economy. Thus, their social and economic protection is of prime importance to us. There is a need for specific provisions and an inclusive framework for the overall security of the migrants. Access to health care, proper awareness, combating discrimination, food security, psychological support, and being connected to everyone are some of the necessary steps. Such provisions can ensure a sense of better living for these migrants.***

Keywords: Migration, COVID-19, Poverty, Government Programmes, Migrant Workers

I. INTRODUCTION

The movement of people from one place to another in search of better opportunities in terms of livelihood, health, education, and other reasons leads to migration[i]. The vast population of 1210.2 million constitutes a significant part of migrants in India. The total migrants account for 453.6 million out of the total population. There has been a considerable growth of migrants from 31% in 2001 to 38% in 2011. The gender trend of migration includes 312 million females and 140.9 million males. There has been a visible growth in the male-female population compared to the migration trend of the 2001 census. Earlier, where it was 17.54% male & 44.55% female as per the 2001 census, saw a significant expansion of 23.45% male and 52.7% female as per the census of 2011[ii].

II. PATTERN OF MIGRATION

There are two types of migration: internal (national) and international migration patterns. Internal migration is analysed based on inter-state and intra-state migration. The intra-state migration shows the highest migration rate in rural-to-rural flow, wherein the female population constitutes a significant part . It is followed by rural to urban and urban-to-urban migration, where also female comprises a prominent part than male. Compared with this trend, the inter-state migration shows a different picture where the rural-to-urban migration has the highest flow, with the male population comprising most of it. Further, in the case of urban-to-urban and rural-to-rural flow, the female migrant population is higher than the male migrant population.

III.REASONS FOR MIGRATION

The reason for the migration is always because of some particular need of the migrants. It could be in terms of work or employment purpose, marriage, education, or other relevant reasons. This migration trend analysed at the intra-state level reveals that the highest migration rate in males is because of work or employment aspects. Also, other reasons like moving with family, marriage, and education are part of large-scale migration. But in the case of females, it is highest for marriage purposes. Other reasons like moving with a family, work, and education further comprise this migration cycle. The scenario is slightly different at the inter-state level, where males mostly migrate for work purposes, followed by moving with family and other reasons. But in the case of females, the flow is highest for marriage purposes, followed by moving with family and other reasons.

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IV. MIGRATION AT THE STATE-LEVEL

The migration at the state level varies from one state to another state. It depends upon several reasons like employment availability, better living standards, marriage, education, and relevant purposes. In India, the flow of migration is most prevalent in the state, which lacks employment opportunities for the people. Indian movement designs cover more than one check. Uttar Pradesh and Bihar have an enormously large number of out-migrants, while migrants comprise more than 33% of the populace in Delhi and Mumbai. As indicated by the 2011 Census, 20.9 million individuals relocated external the state from the two states. It is 37% of the complete number of individuals who were migrants of the inter-state category, as indicated by that identification. Delhi and Mumbai act as powerful magnets for the migrant population, and the 2011 Census enumeration bears that out. As denoted by the census, enumeration travellers from different states in Delhi and Mumbai numbered 9.9 million, or just about 33% of the joined populace of 29.2 million in these two cities that year.

The Hindi belt region forms the primary wellspring of these migrants. The statistics mention that the four states represent around half of the country's absolute inter-state migrants. The noted four states are Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, and Madhya Pradesh . On the opposite side, Maharashtra, Delhi, Gujarat, and Haryana housed half of the nation's inter-state migrants.

Another report published by the world bank shows that between the distribution of Intra-district, Inter-district, and Inter-state internal migrants, the highest number of migrants constitutes the Intra-district migrants, followed by Inter-district and Inter-state ones[iii]. The percentage of rural migrants is high in the entire migrant population. For instance, the migration rate of Delhi is 43%, with a maximum population from rural areas. Around 63% of the total migration rate in Delhi is from rural areas. Similar cases are seen in Mumbai and Surat as well, where Mumbai's migration rate is 55%, out of which 52% are from rural areas, and in Surat's migration rate of 65%, 76% of them are from rural areas[iv].

V. POVERTY PROFILE

As per the report by World Bank, there are 270,000,000 (27 crores) Indians who are poor. It further implies that 1 out of 5 Indians is poor. The report mentions the name of seven low-income states that house around 62% of the poor population of India. This 62% of the population accounts for 45% of the Indian populace. Moreover, approximately 80% of these populations are from rural areas. The report also revealed Uttar Pradesh has the maximum number of poor, accounting for 60 million, followed by Bihar with 36 million, Madhya Pradesh with 24 million, Odisha with 14 million, Jharkhand with 13 million, and Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh with 10 million each[v]. It indicates a clear picture of the actual scenario of poverty in India. With the spread of Covid-19, the situation went even worse for the poor population[vi].

VI. PROFILE OF LABOUR MIGRANTS

Migrant workers are people who travel from their residential state or so-called from their domicile state to different states in the country, searching for jobs and other employment opportunities. Most of these migrant workers are everyday wage representatives and comprise the informal sector or the unorganized sector. This type of sector is known for low compensation, unfriendly and horrible working hours, and non-attendance of any work contract. Also, the non-appearance of prosperity, worker assistance plan, or labourer government collaboration is absent in such employment[vii]. Having little or no education and coming from poorer or helpless families, these migrants often get employment in various low-level jobs and positions. These migrant laborers contribute about 10% of the nation's gross domestic product. These labour migrants are involved in several activities like manufacturing and other small-scale jobs.

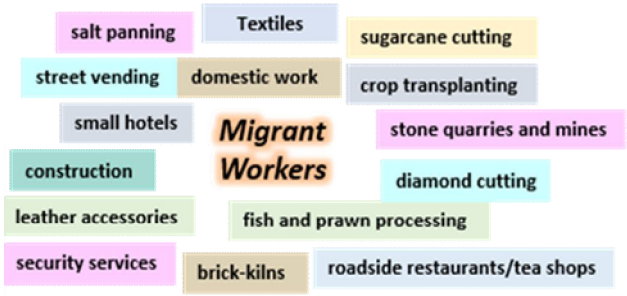


Fig. 1 Migrants Job Profile
Source: Author's Compilation

VII. COVID-19 OUTBREAK AND ITS IMPACT

The wreck of coronavirus has severely impacted the lives of every person in the world. As per the website of WHO, On the 30th of January, The Director-General of the World Health Organization declared the novel coronavirus outbreak a public health emergency of international concern.

The intensity of the virus was so strong that within a petite period, it spread out to many countries in the world. Among most affected countries, India became one of the worst affected countries apart from uniting states and Brazil at the global level. With the concern to preventing virus spread, the government took a significant step in the form of a lockdown[viii]. The Prime Minister of India declared a 21-day complete lockdown to stop the community's spread of the virus. The scenario of a complete shutdown in the entire country had many worse implications for the inhabitants. Around 1.3 billion individuals had to stay in their homes because of the shutdown.

The global pandemic has caused a profound disturbance to every other individual in society. This disturbance includes both social and economic aspects.

The sudden lockdown in the country revealed a very shocking and heart-wrenching situation. The complete shutdown also led to the sudden closure of industries and manufacturing units to limit the Covid-19 cases[ix]. The workers are forced out of their jobs, leaving them with a complete loss of livelihood.

Moreover, without any proper provision for transportation facilities, the migrant workers started to walk miles back to their native villages leading to reverse migration. Pictures showing the massive number of migrant workers, including men, women, and children walking back home are flashed everywhere through media.

With the further extension of lockdown, the picture became even worse. Uncertain deaths due to starvation and accidents while walking back on the journey depicted the pitiful condition of the migrant workers. Thus, the sudden lockdown in the country completely turned into a human tragedy for the internal rural migrants. The pandemic has hit everyone badly, but the question arises who are the most affected due to this pandemic? The answer to this question would be the rural labour migrants[x].

VIII. IMPACTS ON THE LABOUR MIGRANTS

The report by World Bank states that the nationwide lockdown in India has impacted nearly 40 million internal migrants. It also highlights the loss of employment and social distancing prompted a chaotic and painful process of mass return for internal migrants in India.

The sudden lockdown has impacted the migrants to their worst level[xi]. The shutdown of industries led to complete loss of livelihood, and with no backing for employment security, the migrants struggled for survival. However, they only faced the crisis of intense hunger and poverty. Cases of death due to accidents and poverty became very prominent.

The situation was more difficult because of the fear in people's minds due to the spread of the virus. Returning to their native places did not end their miseries. The fact that they came from outside locations (Intra-district, Inter-district, or state) and they might spread the virus led to social exclusion & stigma in society[xii].

IX. RESEARCH PROBLEM

The multiple issues the migrants went through during this covid outbreak impacted them in terms of social and economic aspects. Thus, it is vital to understand how these migrants experienced this COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, this study will provide essential insights for framing a better strategy in the case of such pandemics.

X. METHODOLOGY

Detailed research is considered in the study area through a primary survey to understand the issues faced by the migrant workers. The survey constitutes 30 people from the study area. A detailed discussion with the migrants through telephonic conversations and interviews revealed the on-ground scenario. The questions prepared for the survey have both social and economic aspects that the migrants faced due to the COVID-19 outbreak.

1) The basic profile of the participants (Age, Gender, Education and Places of the original residence)
2) Economic aspect (Occupation type, Asset ownership, Income aspects of the participants)
3) Social aspect (Issues faced due to lockdown, mode of travel due to lockdown, Type of accommodations after the outbreak, Discrimination faced due to covid, Impact on health, Assistance from the government and other organisations)

ISSN: 2321-9653; IC Value: 45.98; SJ Impact Factor: 7.538
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XI. BRIEF PROFILE OF THE STUDY AREA

Odisha has a significant contribution to the migrant population of the country. Among the state's total migrant population, the maximum is from the rural areas. They migrate to the metro cities in search of a better livelihood opportunity. Odisha accounts for 57.75% of intra-district migrants, 23.59% for out-migration to other states, and 18.33% for inter-district migration. The selected study area is the city of Rourkela in the Sundergarh district of Odisha. The government statistics show that a total of 3,58,401 migrants have returned after the covid outbreak, among which the majority are from Gujarat, Telangana, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Kerala. The city of Rourkela is also known as the steel city. History reveals that the selection of the city was for the establishment of the steel plant[xiii]. Krupp and Demag, the German-based private company, came forward for the provision of financial and technical assistance for the steel plant. The presence of the Rourkela steel plant and many other sponge iron factories provides more significant employment opportunities. The planning area of Rourkela consists of 1295 industrial and service units. The city constitutes a migrant population predominantly from the rural areas who work in the manufacturing units.

A. Profile of the Respondents

The people working in the sponge-iron factories before the pandemic outbreak are part of the survey. They are majorly inter-district migrants, followed by intra-district and inter-state migrants. Figure 3 shows the age-sex classification of the participants. Out of the total participants, 76.6% are male, and the rest, 23.3%, are females. Most of the participants were industrial workers, followed by a labourer in the factories. Some participants worked as a housekeeper, sweepers as well as helpers. These people do not earn a handsome amount of money, their monthly salary ranges from 5,000 to 15,000, and only a few earn more than 15,000. A maximum number of respondents did not have proper schooling belonging to a poor background. Few respondents have education up to the primary level. Also, among these participants, most of them do not own any personal vehicles. Talking about their living homes before the pandemic, they were either staying in a nearby slum, rented houses, or mess provided by the concerned company.

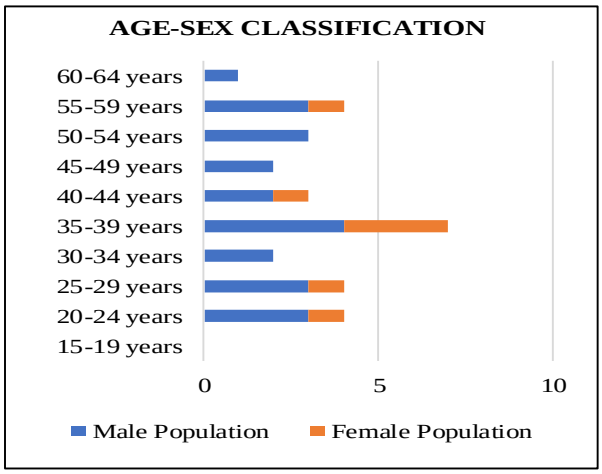


Fig. 2 Primary Data Collection by Author showing age-sex classifocation
Source: Author's Compilation

B. Surviving the Crisis of Covid-19

There was a complete shutdown of all the factories after the declaration of sudden lockdown. All the migrant workers had to return to their native places for survival. As per the record of the participants, migrants had to travel back either by walking or cycling as there were no other means of transportation. A massive barrier was the lack of knowledge and information related to Covid. Reaching their native locations became the only aim of these workers.

People faced many problems after reaching their villages. Firstly, as they had returned from a city, they had to stay in quarantine for 14-days. People stayed at medical camps in the villages, but it was a different scenario in some cases.

Due to the lack of beds at the quarantine centers, the 14-day stay became a tragedy for many people. People staying in tiny houses did not have separate rooms for quarantining. People felt like untouchables due to the pre-conceived notion of getting infected by the virus. Even though people stayed in their homes, the perception of getting infected by returned migrants was another crisis. Thus, left with no other option, they preferred open roads and other insecure accommodations for survival. There were even cases where people had to take lodging under trees in the villages.

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C. Social Stigma

The social stigma proved another major hurdle in this crisis. Most respondents mentioned being treated differently after returning to their villages. Various anti-social practices like name-calling and making feel isolated due to the stigma that they might spread the virus.

D. Impact on Health

Due to prolonged traveling, the migrant workers also faced several physical and mental issues. Fig 3 shows the detailed reasons for impact on mental health. Lack of accurate information about the virus was one of the major causes for not taking medical assistance. Many respondents also faced several mental problems due to the stress of the pandemic outbreak, loss of employment, and lack of house and food security. Despite some awareness about medical facilities, many migrants did not avail of its facilities. It is due to the fear covid the spread.

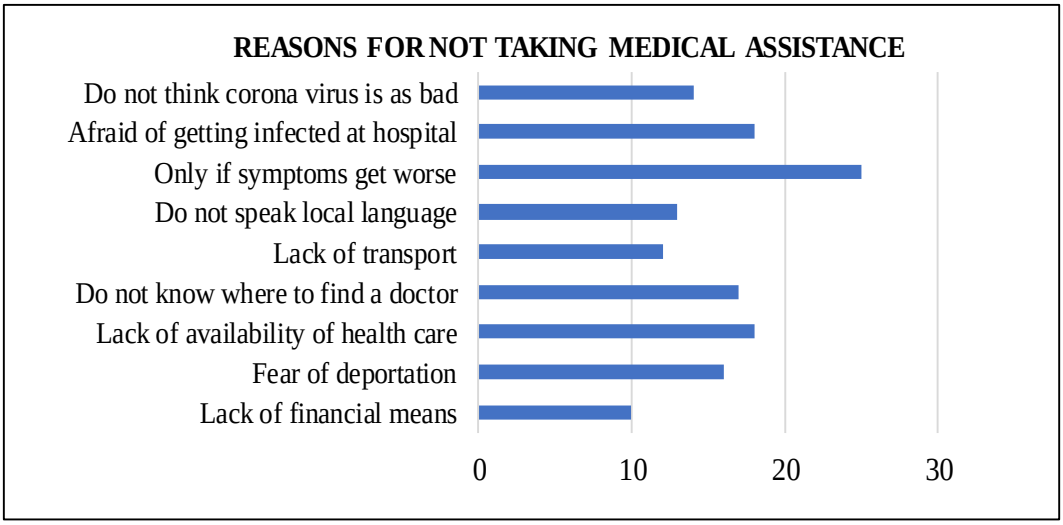


Fig. 3 Impact on Health
Source: Author's Compilation

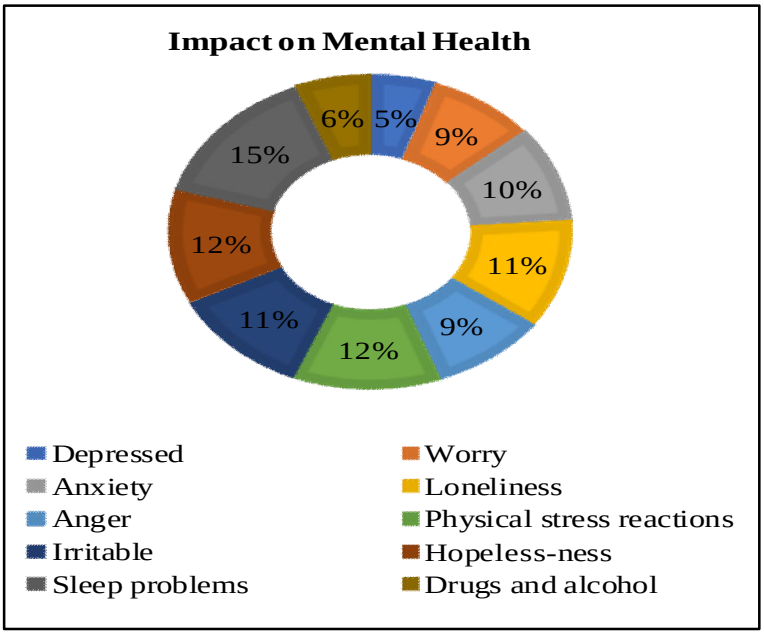


Fig. 4 Impact on Health
Source: Author's Compilation

E. Awareness about Government Programmes

In Order to help the migrant workers, the government initiated major relief packages for food security, health services, etc. Initiation of government initiatives; PM Garib Kalyan Yojana, One nation one ration card, and Ayushman Bharat. Record from the respondents reveals that a transfer of rupees 1500 to zero accounts through the PMGKY scheme was one of the benefits of government initiatives. Many of them could not avail of it due to bank account issues. One break-through initiative was the One Nation One Ration card, resulting in food assistance through one ration card. It acted as a boon to the migrant people. Irrespective of the place of registration, the migrant people can avail food benefits from any public distribution system all over the country.

Lack of awareness was a significant issue among people during the pandemic. Migrant workers did not know about multiple government schemes. It resulted in various scenarios where people struggled for their survival. However, Anganwadi and NGOs also played a prominent part in spreading awareness and other incentives to support the poor migrants.

XII. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Specific provisions and frameworks are the need of the hour for the overall protection of rural migrants. Reduction in the disparity in seeking healthcare that will ensure every migrant gets proper treatment and other health assistance. There is a need for society with a complete absence of social discrimination and societal stigmas. Awareness related to the pandemic should reach every individual to prevent such a crisis. Mental health support is another essential aspect that needs prior consideration. Stress due to the sudden outbreak is very severe and requires responsibility with support. There is a need to foster a sense of connectedness among people along with infrastructural development. This development includes access to food, housing, and health assistance in times of crisis. During the covid crisis, the plight of migrants and its crisis reveals the deep-rooted problems in the administration. A complete shortfall of readiness before the lockdown announcement brought many disparities for the migrants. Although the public authority initiatives came up, it was extremely late. It resulted in numerous migrants losing their lives while returning home. The rural migrants are a vital and indispensable part of our economy, without which both urban and rural zones will not survive.

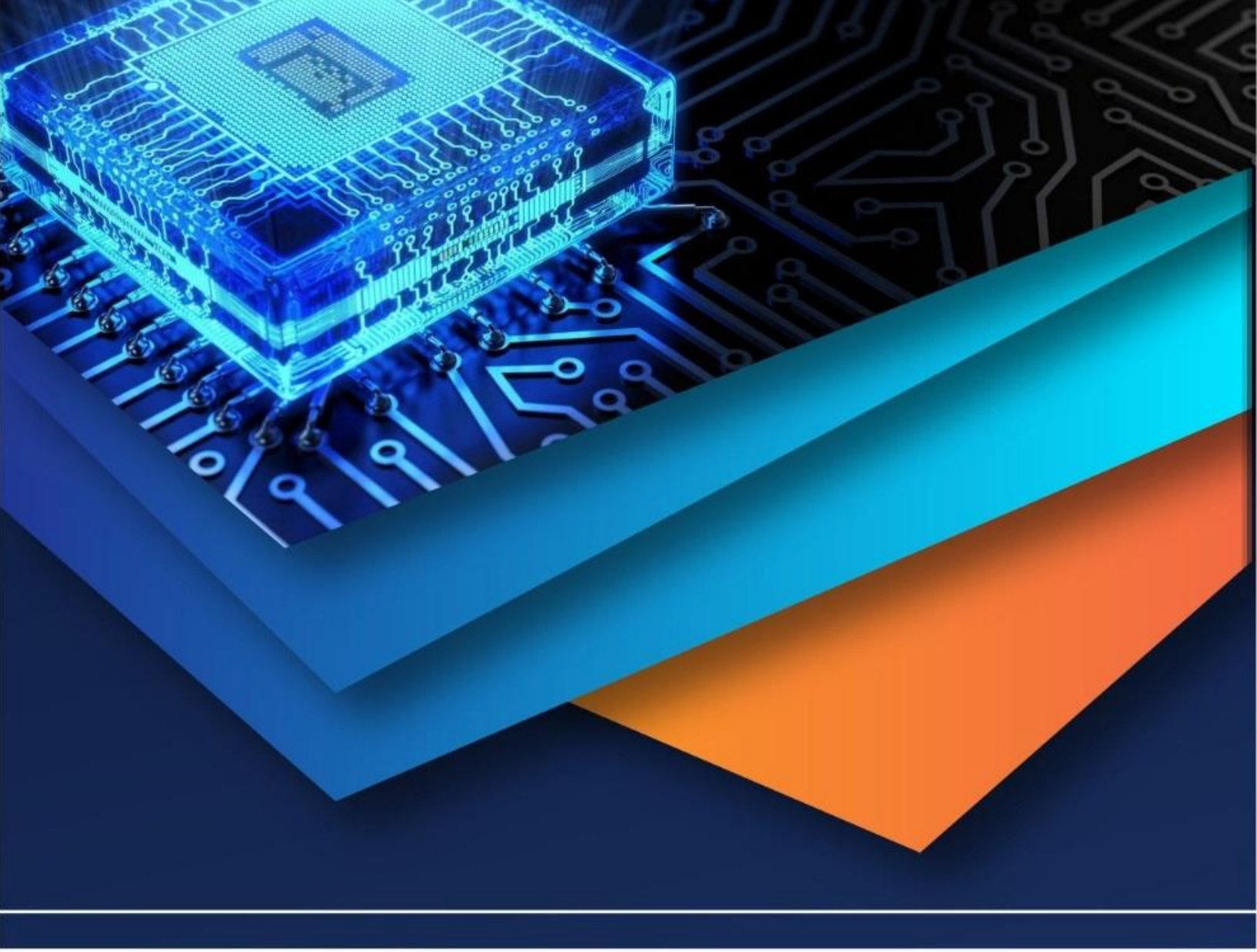
XIII. ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This research has been completed with the guidance of my mentors. A special thanks to my parents and brother for always supporting in my journey.

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