

**MIGRATION AND POVERTY  
IN INDIA:  
A MULTI-PATTERNED AND  
COMPLEX REALITY**

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# **MIGRATION AND POVERTY IN INDIA: A MULTI-PATTERNED AND COMPLEX REALITY**

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## *Abstract*

The recent discourse on internal migration has unfolded a number of new ground realities that influence its nature, pattern and outcomes, especially in the context of developing economies. Instead of treating migration decisions as dichotomous, static and individual centric, the contemporary discourse has sought to evolve a more nuanced understanding on migration where migration, particularly among the poorer households, is being seen as part of a dynamic and a multiple strategy for meeting their livelihood needs. Short duration migration assumes special significance in this context since this type of migration, unlike long term migration, is widely prevalent among the poor as compared to the non-poor. The contemporary discourse on migration-poverty linkages has laid a special emphasis on facilitating (as against containing) out-migration as an important livelihood strategy. It is however, not clear as to what extent the strategy may work as an exit route from poverty across different socio-economic, cultural and spatial characteristics within which the migration decisions are shaped. Also it is not clear whether all who need to migrate could actually find an opportunity to do so; it is likely that even if they do all of them may not like to migrate even for short duration owing to a range of socio-cultural-spatial factors. Understanding the diverse realities therefore, assumes critical importance for assessing desirability/feasibility of potential policy initiatives for supporting migration as an important exit route among the poor. The paper aims at examining the existing evidence on the link between migration and poverty with special focus on short duration migration. Since much of the existing evidence is based on individual/household attributes of the migrants, the paper tries to examine the impact of village/district level characteristics in influencing short duration migration by using large scale data set covering about 1500 villages across different parts of the country.

# Migration and Poverty in India: A Multi-patterned and Complex Reality

*Amita Shah*  
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## **1. Introduction**

### *The Emerging Perspective*

The recent discourse on migration in developing economies seeks to revisit the conventional binary approach where distress and development induced migratory movements were seen as dichotomous situations. The new paradigm looks at migration, for economic motive, as an important exit route from poverty, including for the chronically poor, irrespective of the initial characteristics of distress influencing mobility. Recognizing the complex, multi-patterned and dynamic nature of migration, especially among developing economies with a large proportion of the labour force residing in rural areas, the new perspective tends to re-emphasize the positive role of migration, as an integral part of the diversified strategies adopted by the poor (Haan, 1999; Srivatsava, 2011; Deshingkar, 2010; Shah, 2009).

This is at variance with the policies adopted till recently in a large number of developing economies, such as India where the emphasis was mainly on preventing, rather than supporting, migration. There is however, counter evidence from micro level situations in India, which demonstrate that migration does help many poor (though not all and the poorest) to help improve the living conditions at the place of destination and/or origin, to make productive investments, and also avert entry into poverty (Deshingkar and Farrington 2009; Shah 2009; Singh 2009; Shah and Sah 2005). This of course, intuitively confirms the basic economic rationale where shift of labour force from backward to developed economies is expected to improve the

economic status among migrants; in the absence of this they may not have migrated or continued to stay away from their place of destination for economic reasons.

The recent discourse on migration seems to have moved away from the conventional neo-economic theories on the one hand and the structural theories of exploitative processes on the other. In doing so it has taken a more nuanced, dynamic and context specific approach to unravel the situations that trigger responses to the changing environment, and shape the outcomes within the short and long term scenarios. An important feature characterizing the rich and growing literature on migration in the context of developing economies is the increasing focus on short-term or circular migration, as this stream of migration is particularly relevant from the view point of poverty reduction<sup>1</sup>.

Based on a comprehensive review of the diverse and multi-patterned migration in India Deshingkar and Farrington (*ibid*) highlight three important constraints that perpetuate poverty among migrants in the Indian situation. These are: poor education, discrimination, and a hostile policy environment (p. 25). This, by and large, is a correct depiction of what appears to be the proximate variables explaining the migration-poverty interface. The analysis however, seems to have overlooked the deeper issues or ultimate factors that shape the extent, nature and outcomes of migration. These, may refer to two major structural aspects concerning the Indian economy. The first is the more or less stagnant agricultural and rural economy combined with limited job expansion in non-farm activities in urban areas. And the second refers to socio-cultural barriers resulting in high non-economic costs and hence low revealed preference for migration among certain segments of population. This implies structural barriers operating on both the demand and the supply side.

Whereas the first may get manifested in terms of limited demand and over crowding, the later may get reflected in limited supply and/or high reservation price despite the labour surplus situation prevailing in most parts of the rural economy in the country. The scenario of over crowding has been reflected through a number of micro level

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<sup>1</sup>This has been deliberated at length in the emerging framework of New Economics of Labour Migration (NELM). For details see, Deshingkar and Farrington (2009).

studies where non-availability (different from accessibility) of the expected type of work opportunity at the place of destination has been reported as the main reason for the individual or household abstaining from migration (Shah 2009). Similarly there are situations where growing competition for the limited job opportunities has led to various forms of resistance - some times subtle but at times violent as recently found in the case of resistance against Bihari migrants in Mumbai. Moreover, the recent recession since 2008 has provided micro level evidence of return migration from a number of major urban-industrial centers. On the other hand migration, especially at the lower end of the income strata, is not *always* a preferred option, even if work opportunity is available on relatively moderate terms with respect to wages and other conditions of work owing to various non-economic factors. This suggests that even under an improved policy environment, migration as an option is likely to be: a) available to a section of the population including the poor; and b) preferred by some, but not all among those for whom the option is available.

It is therefore imperative to recognize the outer boundaries within which demand and supply side factors may operate. This is important because releasing the policy constraint, by making it migration friendly, may still be bound by the outer limits set by the two structural issues influencing demand and supply of migrant labour as noted above. The contemporary discourse on migration thus, needs to be located in the backdrop of some of these deeper processes that influence the mobility and the outcomes thereof; the policy framework needs to re-engage itself with the structural factors underlying the migration dynamics in developing economies like India.

Moving towards a comprehensive policy that addresses both the structural as well as intermediate constraints discussed above needs a nuanced understanding of the interface between migration and poverty in reality. The message that comes from some of the recent reviews of migration studies in India suggests that the reality is highly variable across time, space and socio-cultural settings. In turn, the outcomes also vary across these categories. Similarly, the large body of empirical research, based on evidence from both secondary as well as primary data, presents different scenarios, suggesting thereby that generalization is difficult.

How do we move from this complex cobweb of situations and outcomes? An important way out is through continued field level

investigations across different typologies of migration scenarios with special focus on poverty-linkages, and search for context specific solutions that may work intermittently and also in the long run for helping a large number of the poor. This search, of course has to cover newer grounds, not only in terms of the context specificity, but also in terms of raising relevant questions or redefining the questions already examined. This is particularly relevant in the light of the fact that a) the official data base provide limited leverage for addressing the issues of migration-poverty interface; b) micro studies are too scattered and have limited comparability; and c) a large proportion of the existing studies, especially at macro level, focus on the scenarios obtaining at the place of destination rather than that of origin (Mitra and Murayama, 2009).

### **The Focus**

The main objectives of the paper are to:

- a) Review the existing evidence on migration-poverty interface in the light of the macro and micro level studies in India.
- b) Discuss the extent, patterns, and correlates of short term migration with the help a large set of data collected from rural households in major states in the country.
- c) Discuss policy implications.

## **2. Migration and Poverty in India: Select Review of Evidence and Perspectives<sup>2</sup>**

The recent survey by NSSO brought home some important aspects of migration in India as shown in Table 1. Some of the important observations are: First, the proportion of migrants for the reason of employment is significantly higher among urban as compared to rural areas. Second, the rate of migration is higher among non-backward communities as compared to the average; the rate is fairly low among tribal communities. Third, return migration among males is fairly substantial i.e. 237 and 117 out of 1000 migrants in rural and urban areas respectively; among females the rate is fairly low as much of the female migration is on account of marriage. Fourth the average remittance sent by out-migrants located within India in the last year was Rs. 13,000 for those migrating from rural areas and residing in

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<sup>2</sup>This section draws upon a larger paper by Shah and Kumar, 2009.

**Table 1: Migration in India (2007-08): A Snap Shot**

Indicator	Person Level Characteristics					
	Rural			Urban		
	Male	Female	Person	Male	Female	Person
Migration Rate (per 1000 population)	54	477	261	259	456	354
Scheduled Tribe	47	440	238	288	430	356
Other (Non-backward) Communities	68	506	281	209	477	379
Proportion (per 1000) of migrants for employment related reasons	286	7	36	557	27	228
Return migration rate (per 1000 of migrants)	237	106	120	117	104	109
Number of remitter out-migrants during last 365 days (per 1000 out-migrants)	594	15	228	451	22	164
Average amount of remittance (Rs. 00) during the last 365 days by out migrants residing India	134	60	130	277	134	263
Temporary Migration	28	05	17	06	01	04

Source: NSSO (2010), Migration in India (2007-08), 64<sup>th</sup> Round, Report No. 533.

India as compared to Rs. 26,300 for those migrating from urban areas and residing in India; the proportion of migrants sending remittances accounted for only 58 and 41 per cent of the male migrants in rural and urban areas respectively. And fifth, the rate of temporary migration is fairly low, though these estimates are subject to fair amount of underestimation.

Moreover, the NSSO-estimates from the 64<sup>th</sup> round indicated that out-migration of a former member accounted for 30 per cent of the rural households and 19 per cent among urban households. Remittances are mainly used for subsistence; only 10 per cent reported use of remittances for debt repayment and 13 per cent reported using that for saving/investment. Together these observations suggest that migration is yet to emerge as a major driver of economic betterment and accumulation of wealth among a large segment of the society and that low mobility combined with low outcomes are rooted in a number of structural factors such as class, social hierarchies and rural-urban gap in availability of economic opportunities.

### Migration over Time

As per the estimates from 55<sup>th</sup> Round, 245 million people were reported as migrants during 1999-2000. Migration rate (per 1000 population) in rural areas showed an increase from 21 percent in 1983 (38<sup>th</sup> Round) to 26.1 percent in 2007-08. Male migrants, migrate mainly for economic reasons. Between 1983 and 2007-08 male migration declined in both rural and urban areas, while female migration registered an increase (Table 2).

**Table 2: Migration Rates by Categories, 1983-2007-08**

	Rural			Urban		
	Male	Female	Person	Male	Female	Person
1983	7.2	35.1	20.9	27.0	36.6	31.6
1987-88	7.4	39.8	23.2	26.8	39.6	32.9
1993	6.5	40.1	22.8	23.9	38.2	30.7
1999-00	6.9	42.6	24.4	25.7	41.8	33.4
2007-08	5.4	47.7	26.1	25.9	45.6	35.4

*Source:* National Sample Survey, Various Rounds

### Migration-Poverty Interface: Some Perspectives

The evidence for India till the late eighties indicated that migration, especially long term migration, was an important livelihood strategy among resource poor farmers especially landless and pastoralists in large tracts of dry land regions in the country. On the other hand

those having medium to large land holdings and/or with access to irrigation did not have to move out for seeking subsistence livelihood (NIRD, 2000). Migration from such relatively wealthy households was mainly for 'better prospects' rather than a 'distress move'. This was mainly due to the fact that most of the households with relatively better land holdings and access to irrigation had adopted cultivation of high-valued commercial crops like oilseeds, spices, horticulture, etc. Similarly, areas with moderately good soil and groundwater table in other parts of the country could also escape 'distress migration'.

By and large long term migration, especially into urban areas, has been associated mainly with better economic opportunities. Such opportunities are often obtained mainly by the relatively better-off population rather than the very rich or very poor in the rural areas. This has been borne out by a number of micro level studies examining out-migration from rural areas. For instance, way back in the late eighties Oberai (1989) had noted that in Kerala middle-level peasantry had migrated more as compared to the small farmers, while in Uttar Pradesh all landed farmers, except the highest size of landowners, have been found to have a higher propensity to migrate (Oberai et al.1989). Similarly, migrant labourers from Bihar working on farms in Punjab have been seen to be 'little above the lowest rungs' and not the poorest at source (Singh 1995). More recently, studies in Madhya Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh have also shown that incidence of migration was lower among poorer segments as compared to the better-off within rural communities in the study regions (Deshingkar 2003). A similar observation has been made by a study of out-migration from dry land regions in Gujarat (Shah 2009) indicating long term migration being confined mainly to the middle peasantry rather than landless and the rich farmers.

In terms of outcomes the evidence suggests that long term rural-urban migration has resulted in fairly positive outcomes. For instance Haan (1997) noted that the migrant population in cities is better-off than the original inhabitants. Similarly, Kundu and Sarangi (2007) observed that migrant population into urban areas is also found to be economically better off than the non-migrants in a given urban location. This, in a sense, is quite obvious. For, in the absence of economic gains, the migrants would have returned to the place of origin unless non-economic factors such as severe social

discrimination or political conflicts compelled them to stay away from where they belong. Beside these there could be other non-income motivations that may lead to rural-urban migration. These may refer to aspects like access to better amenities and services like health and education. Finally migration, especially from rural to urban areas may also be motivated by precautionary reasons where the idea is to take care of the future risks of income loss in the place of origin. This is likely to be fairly prevalent in the agrarian society where land holdings are getting smaller and farming is becoming increasingly uncertain and/or non-viable (Shah, 2009).

Based on a detailed analysis of the official statistics Singh (2009) notes that: *'The relationship between poverty and migration is not clearly observed as middle and higher income groups show higher propensity to migrate. The most successful group of migrants are the urban-urban migrants, where in terms of occupational category they are absorbed in higher paying jobs, on account of better education and skill. The influx of migrants towards metropolitan cities indicates that economic reforms have still not been able to provide employment opportunities in smaller and middle sized towns as well as in rural areas'* (pp.72-73).

The above phenomenon is further confirmed by the macro level estimates by the NSSO, indicating that propensity to migrate is generally higher among the households with higher levels of economic well-being represented by monthly per capita expenditure (MPCE) (See Table 3). For instance, migration rate among rural males was the lowest (26) in the bottom most decile of MPCE, and increased consistently across the MPCE groups. Similarly, for urban male the average rate was 96 percent which increased from 462 in the highest decile.

According to the estimates from the NSSO-64th Round, migration rate in rural areas was found to be the lowest among STs and was highest among the other social groups. Nearly 36 per cent of the rural male migrants were self-employed; this was 16 per cent at the turn of the century. The rate of short term migration was found to be nearly 17 percent among the rural population as already noted in Table 1 (NSSO, 2010).

The pattern of short term migration however, is just the opposite of what has been observed in the case of long term migration captured

**Table 3: Distribution of Migrants by MPCE Classes  
(per 1000 population)**

MPCE Decile Class	Migration Rate					
		Rural			Urban	
	Male	Female	Person	Male	Female	Person
0-10	26	388	209	96	357	229
10-20	31	423	227	142	414	277
20-30	34	437	235	160	412	284
30-40	34	445	237	175	429	298
40-50	37	472	250	238	455	342
50-60	45	482	257	267	478	368
60-70	41	481	252	301	478	385
70-80	53	522	279	347	500	419
80-90	70	540	294	373	501	432
90-100	166	592	366	462	555	505
All groups	54	477	261	259	456	354

*Source:* GoI (2010), National Sample Survey, 64<sup>th</sup> Round, Migration in India, 2007-08, NSSO Report No. 533

by the official statistics. Not only that short term migration is mainly concentrated among the resource-poor households like landless, marginal and small farmers, and at times, pastoralists, the outcomes at times, are not very encouraging as most of them continue to live under subsistence conditions even after having participated in short term migration. A recent study in Bihar by Rodgers and Rodgers (2011) observed that: 'In addition to the immediate effect on incomes, migration appears to have some developmental impacts but, less than one might expect' (p. 49).

What makes the migration-poverty interface more complex is that the divide between 'development and distress' induced (or push and pull factors) is increasingly getting blurred. The reality, as it obtains at present represents a mix of what could be described as development or distress driven migration. For instance, a number of micro level studies in rural areas have observed that there is often an element of

distress even among those who apparently migrate for income enhancement (Sah and Shah, 2005). This is so because, more than income differentials, the notion of distress is borne out of the social-cultural context within which the expected benefits from migration are shaped. When households find very bleak chances of actually realizing the expected benefits from migration, it leads to a perception of ‘distress’ among those who actually migrate as well as among those who consider migration as inevitable in future. Of course, these perceptions may vary across different socio-economic-cultural backgrounds of households within and across villages<sup>3</sup>.

All this evidence substantiates the observation made earlier that migration as a coping or income augmenting mechanism is too costly for the very poor and the marginalised. For the poorest, migration is preceded by availing credit within the village, i.e. the poor households meet urgent needs through cash advances on migrant labour. Debt, in extreme cases, requires advance sale of labour through one or the other form of attached labour or bondage (Mosse, et al. 2002).

The evidence presented above thus, reinstates the observation made earlier that long term migration, driven mainly by better economic opportunities, especially in urban areas, is often accessed by the relatively better-off segment of population. On the other hand, short term migration by the resource poor segment of the rural communities often fails to enable exit from poverty or subsistence living conditions. The world of migrants thus comprises duality in terms of duration, destination, initial poverty condition, and outcomes of migration. This duality is often characterised by high and low roads to the migration-development interface. It could therefore be argued that a dual pattern of mobility is likely to reinforce the existing socio-economic-spatial inequalities already existing within the country (Haan, ISS 2011), unless overall opportunities for work and migration improve in both rural as well as urban areas.

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<sup>3</sup>For instance, being able to get a semi-skilled job with a future prospect of moving up the ladder and/or starting a business of one’s own, with a decent place to live along with the family, and maintain social expenses/status back home is something that a migrant from a ‘better off’ household may expect. Compared to this, expectation of a landless poor household may be to find employment opportunities that are regular and predictable in nature. Falling short of these expectations may lead to perception of “distress” in the local setting of dry land region in Gujarat.

## **Counter Narratives**

Parallel to these not-so-encouraging realities, there is another body of literature that demonstrates that for many of the poor (if not the poorest) migration is an integral part of the strategy for livelihood support and labour allocation within households. Drawing upon a number of case studies Deshingkar and Farrington (2009) have highlighted that: a) migration, especially circular migration is increasing in most parts of the country; b) migration is least among the poorest but highest among the poor; c) the poorest are disproportionately represented in short term migration; d) social networks have helped overcome some of the costs and entry barriers; e) the income from migration has helped many of the poor in smoothening their consumption; and f) if structural as well as policy hurdles are mitigated, migration can help improve the outcomes, thereby enabling them to break out of poverty.

While there is no denial of the claim made by the authors that migration, as a coping and development mechanism, is not fully realized in countries that look at it as a necessary evil (at best), on balance it appears that the poverty reducing impact of migration may continue to remain limited till the overall scenarios with respect to increased productive employment opportunities is significantly improved.

### **3. Short Term Migration among States: Evidence from Selected Villages**

#### ***Short Term Migration***

In a major departure the 55th Round of the NSSO has tried to capture seasonal/circular migration by asking the non-migrants in rural households whether s/he had stayed away from the usual place of residence (and enumeration) for more than 60 days during the last 365 days for the reason of employment. Those responding positively were considered as 'temporarily staying away for employment' (TSAE). We have used these estimates to capture at least a part of the seasonal/circular migration - believed to be fairly large among rural males in India. Similar data have been collected in the 64<sup>th</sup> Round of NSSO for the year 2007-08. According to the estimates the rate of temporary migration per 1000 population was fairly low; 17 in rural and 4 in urban areas.

It may however, be noted that the extent of short duration migration captured through the official data system is an underestimate owing to a number of reasons - definitional as well as methodological (Srivatsava, 2011). According to Deshingkar and Farrington (2009) the number of such migrants is likely to be 10 times higher than what has been captured by the official surveys. The numbers, of course, are subject to variation over years; the variations are likely to be in terms of number of migrating persons within the households; duration; and the income earned.

Compared to long term migration, the pattern of temporary migration (TSAE) is quite different. A cross classification of the rate of temporary migration (in the age group of 15-64 years) by monthly per capita expenditure (MPCE) groups suggests that the rate of temporary migration is as high as 45 among the lowest MPCE-group in rural areas and that the rate is more or less inversely associated with the MPCE as observed by Keshri and Bhagat (2012). The detailed analysis of temporary migration by the authors substantiated the widely acknowledged phenomenon that the rate is found to be highest in the case of scheduled tribes and other social groups and also those with very small land holdings among rural areas. Temporary migration was also found to be inversely associated with the level of education. Moreover, the incidence of temporary migration is found to be higher than the national average in major states like Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, Rajasthan, and Gujarat. The state wise pattern could be influenced by both distress as well as job opportunities created in the states.

Another important difference that emerged from the recent data pertains to the sharp difference in the share of tribal communities in long term and short term migration. As per the NSSO data for the year 2007-08, the rate of temporary migration among tribals is 45.2 per cent as compared to 12.2 per cent among 'other' social groups. This suggests that short term migration is mainly concentrated among tribal communities, who also happen to coincide with those in the lowest MPCE category. Addressing this may therefore, call for a much more comprehensive approach to redress the sustained high incidence of poverty among these socially, economically and spatially marginalized communities; migration, especially short term migration, could hardly be seen as a solution for them to exit poverty.

The inverse relationship between rate of temporary migration and MPCE assumes special relevance in the context of migration-poverty interface. For, it suggests that whereas the poor are forced to undertake such temporary migration, their economic status may not have changed much since many of them continue to remain in the lower strata of MPCE. This, in turn, may suggest that the rural poor having to resort to temporary migration may still need support from the rural economies from which they migrate, as the poverty situation is hardly altered even after the low migration trajectory.

This brings us back to the point raised earlier that migration could be an important component of the livelihood strategy; it may nevertheless not work as an effective exit route from poverty. It is therefore imperative to see how the poor may find additional employment, possibly with higher level of productivity in the rural economies, which still holds the basis for obtaining livelihood support among a large proportion of the poor living in rural areas. In this context some of the region/village level indicators, may also play important role in influencing migration decisions among rural households in addition to household or individual characteristics. For instance, agronomic potential reflected through rainfall and access to irrigation, even in small quantity, could be an important factor driving short term migration. Similarly, social contacts matter a lot for short term migration, which often operates like chain of migrant workers with one pulling the other from the same village or vicinity. Labour contractors play a significant role in creating segmentation within the potential market of migrant labour. This is why we find that the migrants are often concentrated in certain pockets within the large configuration of less developed regions or economies. Connectivity also matters for the migrants or contractors to draw labour from specific areas. Unfortunately ascertaining these aspects are difficult as the official statistics on short term migration do not provide corresponding information of region/village specific indicators noted above.

Given this backdrop, in what follows we have tried to examine the impact of regional/village level indicators on short term migration by using data from a large survey conducted by the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) during 2005-06. The survey was spread over all the major states in India, 1501 villages across

289 districts in the country<sup>4</sup>. While the main focus of the survey was to get a comprehensive picture of human and other related dimensions of development, the survey also included a few questions on population mobility at the village and household levels. Village level data pertains to incidence of seasonal migration. This includes information on the number of households reporting such migration and number of persons taking up seasonal migration from the village. In what follows we present a brief picture of short term migration across the major states covered by the survey.

### **Impact of Regional/Village Level Indicators**

At the outset it may be noted that the survey results indicated a fairly clear divide with respect to the incidence of seasonal migration across villages covered by the study. For instance, relevant information was available for 1460 villages (out of 1501 villages) across all the 31 states in the country. Of this, nearly 58 per cent of the villages reported having seasonal migration during the year; the rest did not report such migration.

Data collected from 19 major states covered nearly 90 per cent of all the districts included in the survey. Together these districts covered 1427 villages. Information for the relevant variables was available for 1388 villages. It is observed that close to 60 (58.6%) of these 1388 villages reported seasonal migration. The proportion is found to be particularly high among the states with predominance of hilly regions and/or economic backwardness except Orissa where the incidence of migration at village level was more or less on par with the All India average (See Table 4).

### **Explaining Short Term Migration**

We tried to examine some of the important correlates of short term migration in the light of the village/district level indicators of development. Basically the idea was to identify some of the area specific factors that may have led to migration (or absence of that)

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<sup>4</sup>The survey was conducted jointly by National council for Applied Economic Research, New Delhi and University of Maryland, USA for preparing a detailed analysis on human development in India (for details see, Desai, et.al; 2010). The specific question asked is- 'Do any persons from the village leave for seasonal work during the year? If yes, How many?'

**Table 4: Incidence of Seasonal Migration across States**

Major States	No. of Districts Covered	Villages Surveyed	Households Surveyed	% of Villages Reporting Seasonal Migration	% of HHs Reporting Seasonal Migration
Himachal Pradesh	08	52	11142	71.1	67.3
Punjab	10	61	33756	6.9	6.6
Uttarakhand	05	20	5477	69.5	72.3
Haryana	13	79	48939	41.8	35.5
Rajasthan	15	88	37721	67.5	69.8
Uttar Pradesh	31	138	67603	74.4	74.8
Bihar	11	61	50001	96.3	91.8
Assam	04	38	10552	71.8	69.5
West Bengal	08	66	50674	58.5	61.0
Jharkhand	05	26	10304	66.2	53.9
Orissa	22	84	24435	47.3	47.0
Chhattisgarh	15	49	15709	83.3	72.4
Madhya Pradesh	23	121	35852	68.6	74.0
Gujarat	13	70	38027	22.7	28.2
Maharashtra	20	115	56427	49.9	53.5
Andhra Pradesh	12	94	100209	77.3	74.5
Karnataka	22	142	79908	53.9	57.1
Kerala	09	61	233635	28.9	30.0
Tamil Nadu	12	62	71737	68.3	59.9
Total	258	1427	982108	59.2	58.4
All States	289	1501	1964216		57.8

from the village. A binomial logit regression has been used to estimate the probability of a village having seasonal migration by considering six independent variables.

Specification of the logit model used for the estimation is given below.

$$V_{mi} = f(\text{BACKD}; \text{DISTANCE}; \text{EDU}; \text{VSIZE}; \text{GIA}; \text{PNCA}), \text{—————}1$$

where,

Vmi denotes seasonal migration from the village (no migration = 0, migration = 1)

BACKD – Village belonging to Backward District (backward district = 0; developed district =1)

DISTANCE – Distance from the village to Pucca (tarred) Road (<1 km.= 0; >3 kms.=1)

EDU – Level of Secondary Education captured by No. of secondary schools in the village (No or upto 3 secondary school =0; > 3 schools =1)

VISIZE – Size of the village captured though No. of households (up to 500 households =1; > 500 households =1)

GIA – Level of % Gross Irrigated Area to Gross Sown Area (up to 50 % =0; > 50 % =1)

PNCA – Level of net sown area per household (up to 10 acres =0; > 10 acres =1)

It is hypothesized that of the six independent variables four variables viz; BACKD, EDU, GIA, and PNCA have negative impact on probability of seasonal migration from the village; the remaining two viz; DISTANCE and VISIZE are expected to have positive impacts. The underlying rationale for the hypothesized negative impact rests on the widely prevalent perspective that: seasonal migration from rural areas is primarily a coping mechanism for subsistence livelihood, hence is driven mainly by distress related factors. The results of the regression model are presented in Table 5.

It is observed that three out of the six independent variables exert significant (@1 %) influence on village level seasonal migration. These are: district level backwardness (BACKD), distance from the pucca road (DISTANCE) and education (EDU). Besides these, two variables viz; irrigation (GIA) and size of the village (VSIZE) show somewhat limited impacts; the co-efficients have fairly low significance. (i.e. @ 20 %). Net sown area per household (PNCA) was not found have any impact on probability of seasonal migration at the village level. Overall the model is found to be highly significant.

It may be noted that all the variables in the model, except PNCA had the appropriate signs as hypothesized above. This implies that

**Table 5: Short Term Migration from the Sample Villages-Results of the Logit Model**

Independent Variables	B	Wald	Significance	Interpretation
BACKD	-0.643	19.158	0.000	Highly significant with higher probability of migration among backward districts
DISTANCE	0.328	13.436	0.000	Highly significant with higher probability of migration among remote villages
EDU	-0.161	3.369	0.066	Significant and inversely related to infrastructure of secondary school education
VSIZE	0.1	1.835	0.176	Low significance with higher probability among larger villages
GIA	-0.002	1.611	0.204	Low significance with lower probability among villages with better irrigation
PNCA	0.006	0.374	0.541	Not significant
Constant	1.062	11.039	0.001	Highly significant

### Omnibus Test of Model Coefficients

Step 1	Chi-square	df	Sign.
Model	52.627	6	0.000

the seasonal migration from the village is higher among those in backward districts; in more remote villages and those with poorer infrastructure for secondary education; having larger number of households; and lower proportion of land under irrigation.

These are of course, some tentative results as village wise information on indicators like proportion of irrigated area is often difficult to obtain from the village records, and information on important variables such as proportion of landless households was not available. The idea, given the data limitations, is to get broad sense of direction with respect to a sub-set of variables that are likely to influence short term migration across a cross section of villages in the country.

What is thus important is that: i) such migration is limited to a sub-set of villages across the states; and ii) economic backwardness continues to influence the larger pattern of short term migration from rural areas. The second observation is further substantiated by the fact that district level backwardness has the largest influence, followed by distance or physical remoteness.

We also tried to examine the factors that influenced extent of migration by looking into the sub-set of villages which had reported short term migration. This has been examined with the help of a linear regression model with the dependent variable being proportion of households with short term migration to total households in the village. Two important observations emerged from the analysis: First, backwardness of the district no more remained a significant variable explaining the extent of short term migration. This may imply that while being more or less concentrated in backward regions, the intensity of short term migration is found to be evenly spread across villages within the region. Second, the extent of short term migration is higher among larger villages, distant villages and also villages with better educational infrastructure. On the other hand the extent is lower among villages with better irrigation and higher net sown area per capita. This suggests that education facilitates migration if one is located within a backward region; however, favorable environment with respect to irrigation and land productivity would help contain short term migration - a widely acknowledged phenomenon in an agrarian society like India.

#### **4. Migration among Households in Select Villages: Understanding the Variations in a Micro Setting in Madhya Pradesh**

Given that the macro level scenario confirms the continued importance of the coping or distress related migration from relatively backward and remote regions, the analysis however, does not shed light on who among these less developed regions succeed in exercising the choice to migrate. Earlier we had noted that whereas short term migration is not particularly concentrated among the poorest, the poor by and large, constitute a significant majority among the migrants at the macro level. The evidence however, does help in gauging the perception as well as the preference for short term migration among the poor.

The initial perceptions regarding migration are largely governed by the observed outcomes and living as well as work conditions at the place of destination. However these perceptions are subject to change, often in a positive direction, in course of time if the conditions at the place of destination change for the better. Given this overarching scenario, it would be useful to understand how rural households from backward regions perceive short term migration.

This section tries to understand people's perceptions in the light of a recent survey conducted in six villages spread over four districts in Madhya Pradesh<sup>5</sup>. The districts are Dewas, Jhabua, Ratlam and Chhatarpur. The survey was conducted in two stages; the first was a census of households. This was followed by a detailed enquiry focusing on various indicators of the economic status of a household including migration. In all 1197 households were covered during the survey. Table 6 presents data regarding proportion of households reporting seasonal migration in these six villages.

In what follows we highlight important observations emerging from Table 6.

- a) While close to 40 per cent households report short term migration, the proportion of migrating households varied significantly across the villages.
- b) There was wide variation in the proportion of households reporting migration with estimates ranging from 2.2 percent in Dewas to about 81 per cent in Jhabua.
- c) Substantial variations in the proportion of migrating households were also found within a district. For instance, the incidence of migration across three villages within the district of Chhatarpur ranged from 23-50 per cent. This is despite the fact that these three villages are more or less adjacent to each other. The proportion of migrating households in the district varies from 23.4 per cent in Singrawan Kalan to 50.2 per cent in Madhopur, and 31.9 per cent in Manpur.

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<sup>5</sup>The survey is part of larger study focusing on water resources development, gender and poverty conducted by Gujarat Institute of Development Research. For details, see Shah, et.al; (2010).

Table 6: Proportion of Households Reporting Short Term Migration

Villages (District)/ Indicators	Panjaroya/ Sobaliya (Dewas)	Kalakhunt (Jhabua)	Singrawan Kalan (Chhatarpur)	Madhopur (Chhatarpur)	Mampur (Chhatarpur)	Gopalpura (Ratlam)	All
<b>a. Land Holding Size (acres)</b>							
Landless	-	80.6	<b>43.8</b>	<b>68.5</b>	<b>34.6</b>	50.0	44.3
<2.5	-	87.5	10.0	56.4	33.3	<b>58.8</b>	<b>55.6</b>
2.5-5.0	3.1	69.1	30.3	32.5	32.0	46.5	37.1
>5.0	3.1	<b>95.7</b>	15.9	34.5	30.8	37.5	28.3
<b>b. Access to Irrigation among Landed Households</b>							
No Irrigation	<b>4.4</b>	80.0	<b>21.7</b>	<b>55.2</b>	<b>53.8</b>	<b>53.6</b>	<b>48.1</b>
With Irrigation	1.7	82.6	19.6	36.2	28.4	41.1	31.7
All with Land							37.3
<b>c. Social Groups</b>							
SC			34.4	52.9	66.7		44.1
ST		80.9		88.0		47.3	<b>60.0</b>
OBC	2.2		8.5	32.1	26.9		14.0
Other			6.5	14.3	25.0	50.0	11.9
<b>d. All</b>	<b>2.2</b>	<b>80.9</b>	<b>23.4</b>	<b>50.2</b>	<b>31.9</b>	<b>47.3</b>	<b>38.8</b>

It may be noted that Jhabua in Madhya Pradesh has the highest incidence of short term out-migration, which is generally associated with the high level of economic backwardness and also with proximity to highly developed industrial centres in the neighboring states, especially Gujarat. The district has fairly high concentration of tribal population and very small size of land holdings. Chhatarpur is also a fairly backward district, but does not have proximity to developed industrial/urban centers. Most of the migrants from Chhatarpur go to the Delhi urban agglomerate. This implies relatively long distance as well as duration of migration involving higher financial costs as compared to that in the case of Jhabua. Villages in Dewas are irrigated and hence there is lower migration. Lastly Gopalpura village in Ratlam district reported moderate level of migration - mostly to the nearby urban town; much of this is likely to be related to availability of non-farm work in Ratlam.

The above observations draw attention to the importance of location specificity in determining migration flows at the village level.

## **Who Migrates?**

### **Households Characteristics**

An examination of the pattern of migration across households shows that:

- a) Whereas proportion of migrating households among the landless is relatively higher (44.3%) than among those with the land (37.3 %), the landless do not have the highest incidence of migration. In fact marginal farmers (with < 2.5 acres of land holdings) had the highest incidence of migration. However, in Chhatarpur the landless have the highest incidence of migration. The difference however, is not very significant.
- b) If we look at the pattern across landed farmers with and without irrigation, the difference is fairly large. For instance about 48 per cent of the farmers without irrigation have reported migration as compared to about 32 per cent farmers with irrigation.
- c) Migration is found to be higher among SCs (44.1%) and STs (60.6 %) households.

While these observations reinstate the findings from a number of other studies on short term migration conducted in the recent past, what is often missed is the phenomenon of intra-regional differences noted in the case of Chhatarpur district in Madhya Pradesh.

We tried to look into the probable reasons that may explain inter village differences in the incidence of short term migration across the three villages in the district. The results presented in Table 7 clearly suggest that the absence of land and irrigation are the major factors pushing poor households to find jobs through short term migration. The case of Singrawankalan with relatively larger proportion of irrigated land supports this phenomenon<sup>6</sup>.

**Table 7: Households with Short Term Migration in Three Villages in Chhatarpur**

Details	Singrawan- kalann	Madhopur	Manpura
1. % of Landless to Total HHs	<b>13.5</b>	<b>35.3</b>	<b>18.4</b>
2. % of BPL-HHs	<b>23.8</b>	<b>31.8</b>	<b>16.3</b>
3. % of SC/ST HHs	<b>59.5</b>	<b>57.5</b>	<b>12.7</b>
4. Owned Land per HHs (in acres)	4.17	2.66	5.57
4.1 Total Operated Land (441)*	4.04	2.67	5.65
4.2. Gross Irrigated Area (368)*	<b>3.79</b>	1.92	3.56
Irrigated in Kharif (71)*	0.53	0.32	0.76
Irrigated in Rabi (368)*	<b>3.26</b>	<b>1.60</b>	<b>2.80</b>
5. Change in Irrigated Areas since 5 years	<b>0.48</b>	<b>0.04</b>	<b>-0.36</b>

*Note:* \* Indicate number of household in each category; HHs refers to households.

*Source:* Primary Survey, 2009-10

<sup>6</sup>Incidentally, the increase in irrigated area in the village is associated with interventions by a local developmental agency with the financial support from the District Poverty Initiative Project (DPIP). The main focus of DPIP is to provide group grants (up to Rs. 20,000/ per member) for undertaking any activity that facilitates enhancement of income/employment for BPL households. Besides this, grant can be given to non-BPL households for enhancing drinking water and sanitation and other village development activities. The project involves participatory processes for planning and implementation.

On the other hand, Madhopur has a fairly large proportion of landless households (35.3%) and also below poverty line or BPL households (31.8 %). It is important to note that the two villages perform significantly differently in terms of economic indicators such as extent of migration and poverty (BPL) in spite of the fact that the proportion of SC/STs is more or less same in the two villages. In fact most of the households in this category belong to the SC category.

We tried to probe further into the question as to: why many more households, even from the non-poor (non-BPL) households do not opt for migration to Delhi, which may offer better prospects for improving their economic status? The answer, though complex, invariably pointed to the larger issues of a) over crowding, b) inability to find suitable jobs for a sustained period of time; and c) the hazards associated with informal work and living conditions at the place of destination.

The above depiction of short term migration within a micro-setting of villages in Chhatarpur district highlights the importance of development initiatives for water resources as a means to mitigate poverty and also short term migration from an otherwise very backward region of the country. At the same time the empirical enquiry once again vindicated the widely held notion of overcrowding of job seekers at the place of destination, thereby discouraging migration for income enhancement. This brings back the issue of balancing the two key approaches for supporting short term migrants from rural areas viz; promoting rural economy on the one hand and improving the conditions of migration on the other.

## **5. Summing Up and Way Forward**

Despite being a widely adopted and critical strategy for coping and accumulation among poor and not-so poor households, the existing literature on migration has not adequately explored the issue of migration-poverty interface and possibility of using migration as an exit route out of poverty. This is mainly because the macro-level data are not amenable to capturing the interface, and at the same time, micro level studies are too scattered to draw a larger picture across and within states in India. The limitations arise mainly because the official data do not provide adequate information regarding the extent, motivation and outcomes of migration. What is particularly serious is the data-gap on short term/seasonal migration, which has significant

bearing on the well being of the poor. Given this backdrop, the paper tries to review some of the existing evidence and examines the inter-relationships between migration and poverty in the light of the official statistics from the NSSO and a large scale village survey conducted by NCAER.

Evidence from a number of micro level studies suggests that those having land and irrigation generally do not undertake such migration. However those among the poor, who migrate for short duration, barely make a subsistence living in spite of migration. This pattern is further substantiated by the macro level data on long and short term migration in India. Data from the latest round of the NSSO clearly highlighted the dual pattern of poverty-migration interface. The estimates indicate that whereas incidence of migration is high among both rich and the poor, they often have fairly different trajectories. One of the most striking differences is with respect to the duration of migration across different expenditure strata. It is observed that while the rate of long term migration is higher among the higher expenditure classes, the rate of short term migration is higher among the poor. Hence, short and long term migration remains disconnected within the overall dual scenario obtaining in the economy and society.

Apparently the poor, especially very poor, often do not have the option of long term migration as they have very limited socio-economic-human resource base to build on for enhancing their economic well being. The scenario on the demand side is also not very encouraging especially when employment opportunities in urban destinations are neither very substantial, nor certain, or continuous. Changing the demand scenario is challenging as the problem is rooted in the very structure of the macro economy. At the same time, it is important to recognize that the flow of short term migration is likely to increase in the short and medium term, given the declining (land) resource base among the ever growing rural population. In this context, the two legged approach, often flagged by researchers and policy makers, viz; increasing access to irrigation and improving the conditions of migrants- may serve as a short/medium term remedy. Of course, this is not to deny the role that migration, even short term migration, plays in smoothening or retaining the given level of economic well-being among the poor migrants. Without support from income earned through migration, many of the poor households in rural areas would have suffered much more severe consequences in

the form of multiple deprivations. But the above approach cannot be viewed as a long term strategy whereby migration offers an effective route among the poor to exit severe or chronic poverty. For this to be realized, it is essential that the demand side scenario for non-farm work is improved dramatically. The need therefore is to address the very root cause of the existing dual structure of the economy while exploring the possibility of migration to work as an exit route out of poverty in general and chronic poverty in particular.

## **Way Forward**

### **Rights based Approach**

One of the perspectives that has gained ground in the recent period is – it is neither desirable nor feasible to check migration from rural areas. Hence, the best way is to facilitate migrants by improving their work as well as living conditions at the place of destination. This is particularly important in the light of the fact that majority of these migrants are seasonal workers and/or engaged in the informal sectors, often live in slums and pavements. Since they do not have voting rights they are not covered under any formal systems of state support and legal protection. It is therefore important to first establish their identities as workers in temporary residence in cities and towns and enable them to claim for their rightful stake in the economy and community.

It is imperative to note that in 1991 the National Commission on Rural Labour had recommended changes in the existing Interstate Migrant Workmen (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 1979. It suggested that the definition of migrant workmen should be expanded to cover all migrants – irrespective of the fact whether they came on their own or through contractors or changed their contractor (NCRL, 1991). The National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector has also recommended that the migrant workers should be treated at par with informal sector workers engaged in different activities in a region and recommended special provisions for these vulnerable sections of the unorganised sector (NCEUS, 2007).

A number of voluntary groups have undertaken such initiatives in different parts of the country. For instance, Ajivika Bureau is a voluntary initiative for providing support to rural migrants from Rajasthan into the neighbouring states. This includes a gamut of

activities such as registration of migrant workers; issuing identity cards; skill upgradation; saving-credit facilities; legal support and policy advocacy; and extending help to their families back home in difficult times.

Several other initiatives have been undertaken by various organisations that fight for the rights of migrant workers who often depend on labour contractors and hence face additional exploitation within the informal labour markets. These are of course most needed interventions that may improve outcomes of migration. Do they influence the future flow of migration? This is a complex issue and is not within the ambit of intervention by such voluntary organisations.

### **Redressing Urban Poverty and Promoting Urban Infrastructure**

Following from the rights based approach to protect the interests of migrant workers, a case has been made to improve living conditions for slum dwellers and homeless, many of whom are migrants. Similarly, a case has been made to extend employment guarantee scheme for the poor especially in the small towns who may not find adequate work/income in non-farm activities within urban areas. Public works in small towns could be linked to improvement in housing and other basic amenities in these towns and also in the urban areas.

In fact the policies for slum clearance/development followed over a long period of time are often characterised by the dilemma of regularising 'illegal' residents and thereby attracting more of them. At the same time, shifting the locus of residents away from potential places of work has always met with limited success.

Notwithstanding these dilemmas, there has been an increasing concern about designing special schemes for helping the rural poor through self-employment and also wage-employment. It is in this context that some of the new initiatives such as Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM) deserve special attention. The JNNURM is one of the several initiatives that have roots in the economic reforms-linked investments. This, inter alia, involves features of economic pricing, user fees, partnership with private sector, etc. The main focus of the Mission is to improve urban infrastructure and thereby directly influence the quality of life and human welfare. One of the important objectives is: 'provision of basic services to the urban poor including security of tenure at affordable prices, improved

housing, water supply and sanitation, and ensuring delivery of other existing universal services of the government for education, health and social security' (Government of India 2005, p.5).

While this opens up substantial scope for employment opportunities and welfare enhancement among the urban dwellers, the specific implications for the migrants who are poor and are already in the cities and/or likely to enter cities needs further elaboration. This would necessitate that migrants, especially among the poor households, are made an integral part of the perspective on urban development plan, and that the focus on poor households should assume special significance in designing and actual execution of the plan. The fact that JNNURM is a vehicle to take forward the processes of economic reforms, makes it imperative to ensure that the focus on poverty and welfare of the poor is not lost sight of in the guise of efficiency, pricing and privatisation.

It is likely that a more systemic response could be from the policies that address the issue of poverty and unemployment in both rural as well as urban economies. These approaches are discussed below.

### **Promoting Agricultural Growth**

Notwithstanding the continued and marginally increasing dependence on rural-urban migration, making migration a means of income enhancement and/or poverty reduction, would essentially hinge on improvement of labour productivity and wages in the rural economy in general and agriculture in particular. Healthy growth in agriculture sector may enhance employment and/or returns to labour; promote opportunities for rural non-farm work; and more importantly increasing bargain power of those who migrate outside the rural economies. Since agriculture growth has significant multiplier impact for boosting overall economic growth in the country (Ahluwalia, 2009), it may either enhance incidence of migration and/or improve the outcome thereof. Whereas the former (i.e. out migration) from rural areas may create labour shortage and additional demand for labour in agriculture, the latter (i.e. enhanced income) may help withdraw family labour from unskilled on-farm activities and thereby create space for those with lower reservation price. In both cases, the very poor who cannot manage to move out may stand to benefit.

This of course is too simplistic a description of the complex cobweb of highly segmented labour markets within which migration across sectors and space is shaped among workers from different socio-economic strata.

### **Rural Infrastructure and Employment Guarantee**

Enhancing rural infrastructure is an important strategy for generating employment and mitigating income poverty as well as distress migration from rural areas. The recent introduction of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) is expected to address these twin objectives by creating productive assets for agriculture and rural infrastructure on the one hand and providing supplementary income to rural households on the other.

While there is no systematic evidence on whether and to what extent NREGS has impacted the flow of migration, there have been many reports indicating shortage of labour in some of the traditional areas receiving migration from other states. For instance there have been reports about shortage of migrant labour from Bihar to Punjab during 2008. Similarly, there were expectations from migrant workers in Rajasthan who indicated that assured employment in rural areas could certainly reduce out-migration from otherwise highly migration prone regions in the state (Khera, 2006).

Apart from the direct impact on checking distress migration, NREGS seems to have created labour shortage in agriculture in certain pockets. This impact has been in response to increased earning from NREGS, which in turn, has also increased wage rates in several parts of the country (Mehrotra, 2008). The reported labour shortage, especially during the peak agricultural season, seems to have prompted the project implementing authorities to adhere to the prescription of undertaking rural works programmes during the lean period.

Investment in rural infrastructure may have significant positive impact on checking migration. This could be achieved by (a) increased demand for labour due to investment in productive assets; and (b) increasing ability to commute due to enhanced connectivity. While these are potential benefits from NREGS, it is not clear how far these benefits could be realised and for how long?

Meanwhile there have been some policy initiatives for accelerating provisioning of basic amenities in rural areas. This is important in

itself; also it may help to check part of the rural-urban migration which is driven mainly by considerations of getting better amenities such as electricity, drinking water, health services etc. even if employment/income opportunities do not improve in urban areas.

### **Strengthening Rural-Urban Linkages and Peri-Urban Areas**

Clearly the perspectives discussed above are divided into two sets of approaches; first focusing on supporting migrant workers to facilitate improvements in the outcomes of migration especially in urban areas; and the other focusing on checking distress related migration from rural areas. Whereas initiatives like JNNURM could help to enhance the welfare of the urban poor including migrants, NREGS may help to reduce out-migration and thereby reduce over crowding and congestion in urban areas.

Essentially the two perspectives seem to work in isolation without taking into consideration the continuum between rural and urban areas, economies and poverty. In fact migration is the most crucial link in this continuum. It is therefore important that the discussion on migration, with special focus on the poor, takes a dynamic view of the changing realities in both rural and urban areas. This in turn would help in resolving several of the dichotomies in the existing literature on migration, viz., migrants vs. non-migrants, distress vs. accumulation motives, life time vs. circular migration, rural vs. urban development, preventive vs. facilitating migration, and economic vs. human welfare etc. Evolving this would necessitate deeper understanding of the changing scenarios in both rural and urban areas and their influence on migration decisions and the outcomes thereof. In the absence of this, merely tracing the extent, pattern, and streams of migratory flows may not help in addressing the issue of migration and development in a dynamic context.

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