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Inclusive growth? Labour migration and poverty in India

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Abstract

This paper discusses the relationship between labour migration and poverty in India. This is placed against the on-going debates on changes in patterns of employment and job creation in India, during the periods of economic liberalization, under the Inclusive Growth policies since 2004, and under the impact of the global financial crisis, and growing inequalities. The paper focuses on the migration patterns of deprived social groups, analyse whether migration form a routes out of poverty, and what specific policies for these groups exist or should be recommended. The paper first discusses general findings on the links between poverty and internal labour migration. These stylized facts are used to structure the insights into the changes in migration patterns in India, highlighting the under-recording of migration of most vulnerable groups. The third section discusses the implications of these insights for a notion of Inclusive Growth, concluding there is a need to address the invisibility of migrants and to review common policy aspirations to reduce migration. The conclusion reflects on the analysis of migration and policies to enhance migrants' well-being and ability to participate in India's disequalising growth.

Keywords

Migration, inclusive growth, India, deprived groups, gender, social policies

Inclusive growth?

Labour migration and poverty in India ¹

1 Introduction

This paper, first presented at the 52nd Annual Conference of the Indian Society for Labour Economics, discusses the relationship between labour migration and poverty, in the context of the recent growth patterns and policies in India. The paper considers, to the extent that existing data allow, whether it is likely that patterns of migration and their links with poverty have changed since the turn of the century, and whether current social policies under the Congress-led government have become inclusive of poor labour migrants. Within this, it will focus on the migration patterns of deprived social groups, to analyse whether migration does form a route out of poverty, and whether specific policies for these groups exist or should be recommended.

This discussion on labour migration is placed against the on-going debates on changes in patterns of employment and job creation in India, during the period of economic liberalization,² under the 'Inclusive Growth' policies since 2004, and under the impact of the global financial crisis, with now around 93 per cent of India's work force in 'informal employment',³ and growing inequalities.⁴ Migration patterns to some extent mirror the changes in labour markets (and the dominance of informal employment) more generally, but not completely and too little attention tends to be placed to the study of migration, particularly its changes over time (the recent 2007-08 data facilitate new analysis in this respect). Too often, also, existing analysis is caught in simple two-sector models, which— this paper will argue—neglects the diversity of labour mobility within India as elsewhere.

The paper has four parts. First, it briefly discusses general and global findings on the links between poverty and labour migration, focusing on population movements that remain within national borders (as these are most relevant from a poverty perspective). These stylized facts are used in the second section, to structure the insights into the changes in migration patterns in India. The third section discusses the implications of these insights for the

¹ I am grateful to Alakh Sharma for encouraging me to write this paper. My work on social policies and marginalised groups has been supported by a NWO-ICSSR grant. Tiina Honkanen provided excellent bibliographical assistance for this paper, and I benefitted from comments by Thanh-Dam Truong, whose work on international migration (Truong 2010) also inspired me to take up the subject of migration again.

² While total employment grew by 2 per cent per annum between 1993/94 and 2004/05, formal employment declined by 1 per cent per year (Ghosh 2010). Chandrasekhar (2010) notes some employment growth over the last decade, but little in terms of growth in productive sectors and/or decent work.

³ NCEUIS (2009) highlighted the need for 'maximising employment'; the report describes the vulnerability of migrant workers, but appears to include little in terms of policies specific to migrants (Chapter 7).

⁴ Sarkar and Mehta (2010) conclude that in the post-reform period (1993/4-2004/5) the wages of regular workers up to the 50th percentile declined, while growing by 5 per cent in the highest quintile.

notion of Inclusive Growth, followed by a brief conclusion reflecting on the analysis of migration and possible policies to enhance migrants' well-being and ability to participate in India's 'disequalising growth'.

2 Migration and poverty: what do we know?

The subject of migration remains contested, for a variety of reasons. Politically, while there is generally a preference for or at least acceptance of people moving when there is a demand for labour, there are at least equally strong voices (strengthened in times of crises) for reducing the number of (im-)migrants.⁵ Academically, questions remain regarding causes and impacts of migration, and how mobility relates to inequality and poverty. Disciplinary differences regarding approaches to understanding migration continue to exist. My understanding based on the international literature of (labour) migration processes can be summed up as follows, highlighting that while there are general lessons regarding migration, links between migration and poverty are deeply context-specific.⁶

First, movement of people is much more common than is usually assumed, and has existed for much longer than often acknowledged – too much of the development literature (though much has changed in this respect over the last ten years) has a sedentary bias, fuelled by and reinforcing policy bias against migration. Moreover, recent international migration literature tends to neglect the fact that most migration remains within the Global South,⁷ and within national borders – much of that therefore remains unrecorded. Labour migration also takes many forms, of which the classic rural-urban transition is only one: movement of entire households is only one of them, and the (usually) more common form is the move of one member of the household who retains links with her or his origins, migrating for varying (and often a-priori unknown) periods of time.

Second, the question of who migrates does not have a simple answer. In different contexts, different socio-economic groups migrate, prompted by different capabilities, opportunities, and differentiated access. Different regions and countries have varying propensities for migration,⁸ to different types of

⁵ For example, in China, where migrants have been and are regarded as drivers of economic transformation, the hukou system continues to keep migrants excluded from many public services in urban areas. Immigration into Europe has shown an opposite reversal, where the labour migrants of the 1950s and 1960s have come to be defined as the main societal problem of the 2000s: “the economic question of facilitating mobility is subordinated by nation states to the political issue of migrants as new citizens or as invaders” (Harris 2010:8).

⁶ This builds on earlier overviews, and on the work of – amongst others – Skeldon (2002), Sorensen et al. (2002) regarding the migration-development linkages, *Human Development Report 2009* (UNDP 2009).

⁷ Hujo and Piper 2010. UNDP (2009) estimates that globally here are 4 times as many internal migrants than international migrants, and that there are twice as many migrants moving South-South than South-North.

⁸ International migrants are twice as likely to come from countries with a high human development level as with low human development (UNDP 2009).

destinations and opportunities: simple push-pull models tend to be inadequate to explain the complexity of segmented migration streams. But often the poorest people (or those lacking sufficient labour within households) may not be able to migrate, and the poorest areas do not necessarily have the largest numbers of migrants. The phenomenon of chain-migration leads to a great deal of path dependency – though not determinism – in terms of migration patterns.⁹ Globally, with technological change, migration has tended to become more selective; with fewer opportunities for unskilled workers (recent data appear to confirm this for India, too, as discussed below).

Third, gender and age are key to understanding migration processes.¹⁰ There are no generalities about whether men or women migrate – although a great deal of path dependency and gender stereotyping exists. While in most places young men might be over-represented amongst migrants, thus constituting particular gendered and household impacts, women have always been mobile as well (outside movement for marriage, a dominant reason for migration in India), moving for ‘traditional’ female occupations and newer ones (including unskilled and semi-skilled manufacturing and service sector jobs¹¹). Female migrants tend to be particularly vulnerable, and suffer from labour market discrimination and violence, but migration also has an impact on gender identity and relations.

Fourth, reasons for migrating are diverse, with ‘push-and-pull’ being differently configured for different types of migrants. Statistical data tend to record only one reason for migration, thus under-estimating the complexity of migration (notably, the category of migration for marriage, as discussed below). Migration often arises from desperation, lack of work, or indebtedness. Seasonal migration, rural-rural and rural-urban, for many households is part of regular household strategies. But much migration also is driven by the hope or idea of better opportunities, broadening horizons, or is part of rites of passage of young men and women.¹²

Fifth, as reasons and patterns of migration are diverse, impacts of migration are very diverse too. At household level, migration usually improves incomes and well-being, but often tends to maintain levels of living, for example illustrated by a common expression that remittances allow farmer households to plough their land (as opposed to losing land). Areas of origin usually show clear signs of migrant remittances,¹³ but there appear to be relatively few cases of transformation of areas, thus also suggesting that migration tends to be *part of regions’* economies rather than initiating economic

⁹ See de Haas (2008) for a critical review of theories of chain migration.

¹⁰ Chant and Radcliffe (1992), Wright (1995), Arya and Roy (2005); Yaqub (2009) and de Haan and Yaqub (2010) with reference to children.

¹¹ Gaetano and Yeoh (2010).

¹² De Haan, Brock and Coulibaly (2002 for Mali, Elmhirst (2002) for Indonesia.

¹³ International remittances have received a great deal of interest over the last decade, for example because they now far outstrip official ODA flows and many governments have become increasingly welcoming of remittances as a source of foreign earnings (see Kapur 2004 for a discussion of remittances as a new development mantra).

development, or causing severe brain drain.¹⁴ The question of impacts on areas of destination has received relatively much attention, but assessments tend to vary from migrants enhancing growth and well-being to being a drain on local economies (as well as upsetting local cultures).

3 Indian patterns of migration: are they changing?

Movement of workers across the Indian sub-continent is an age-old phenomenon. This depends on changing patterns of economic development, and is partly related to levels of poverty,¹⁵ but with little evidence that migration contributes to reducing regional disparities.¹⁶ Poorest states like Bihar and UP provide the largest numbers of migrants, who tend to move to richer areas like Delhi, and in Maharashtra and Gujarat.¹⁷ The patterns of movement are also prompted through chain migration: Kerala and Punjab being prime examples with respect to international migration (which is of relatively little importance for India's overall economy and labour force), but similar segmentation of migration streams exist within India. Patterns of labour migration in India can be described along the five characteristics mentioned above.

Trends in migration: trapped transition

It is important to emphasise that the speed of urbanization in Asia, India included, has not been as fast as often assumed and alarming projections of urbanisation suggest, and in comparison with other continents.¹⁸ Data on migrants confirm that the rural-urban transition is happening at moderate speed, and evidence suggests that this is associated with increased unaffordability of India's cities.¹⁹ According to the NSS 64th round of 2007-08, 3.3 per cent of urban households belonged to the migrant category

¹⁴ “[E]conomic and human development increases people’s capabilities and aspirations and therefore tends to coincide with an increase rather than a decrease in emigration” (De Haas 2007: 1; also Papademetriou and Martin 1991). A positive assessment of the impact of international remittances was provided by Adams and Page (2003).

¹⁵ Mitra (1992) using 1981 state-level data showed that migration is higher with higher levels of rural poverty; see also Singh (1993) for districts in Haryana.

¹⁶ For example, migration patterns in Andhra Pradesh were not in conformity with dominant migration theories, as people moved from relatively developed Godavari-Krishna region into districts where (tribal) land was available (James 2000, Vijay (2010).

¹⁷ Recent research on migration within and away from Bihar include Deshingkar *et al.* (2006), Rodgers (2010)

¹⁸ Kundu (2009), analysing urban growth rates, urban rural growth differences, and percentages of rural migrants in urban areas.

¹⁹ Slow urbanization and rural-urban migration in India, is related to increased unaffordability of (major) cities in terms of land and basic services, as well as regular slum clearances, processes leading to ‘exclusionary urban growth’ which he expects will be intensified (Kundu 2009). Kumar (2010) highlighted the low rates of migration to cities amongst low-income groups (discussed further below).

(households that had moved during the previous year); the corresponding figure for 1993 was 2.2 per cent,²⁰ thus suggesting a slightly upward trend. Out-migration rates in 2007-08 for males from rural areas was 9 percent, and for females 17 per cent (which includes a large proportion of marriage-related migration, which is discussed below).

These permanent shifts of labourers and population more generally reflect only part of total labour mobility. NSS data for 1999-2000 (in de Haan and Dubey 2006, excluding migration for marriage, see Table 1) showed that less than 10 per cent of the total population was classified as migrants, and this had changed little compared to 1987-88 data (a slightly downward trend). According to the NSS round of 2007-08, 35 per cent of the urban population and 26 per cent of the rural population were classified as migrants, with migrant being defined as a household member whose usual place of residence is different from present place of enumeration (thus including those who had migrated for marriage).²¹

TABLE 1
Proportion of migrants (excluding migration due to marriage) out of the total population

Year	Rural	Urban			Total	Total
		STR1	STR2	STR3		
1987-88	6.19	20.80	23.07	24.74	22.55	9.89
1999-2000	5.53	18.67	23.17	21.60	21.46	9.56

Notes: STR1=towns with population less than 50,000; STR2=towns with population between 50,000 to less than 10 lakhs; STR3=cities with population of 10 lakhs or more.

Source: De Haan and Dubey 2006, special tabulation using unit record data on employment and unemployment collected by the National Sample Survey Organisation during 1987-88 (43rd round) and 1999-2000 (55th round).

NSSO (2010) presents changes in migration between 1983 and 2007-08 (reproduced in Table 2 and Graph 1) showing a somewhat surprising trend. The proportion of migrants in both urban and rural areas has gone up (21 per cent to 26 per cent, and 32 per cent to 35 per cent respectively). But this is entirely due to increases in female migration. The proportion of male migrants *declined* in rural areas and stayed the same in urban areas. In both years, intra-rural migration was the most important form of migration (62 per cent), but it declined somewhat in relative importance for male migrants. The differences between trends for men and women clearly need further analysis, while the decline in male migration (in line with the analysis of labour migration in

²⁰ NSSO (2010: 16-17). In both years, 1 per cent of rural households were classified as migrant households.

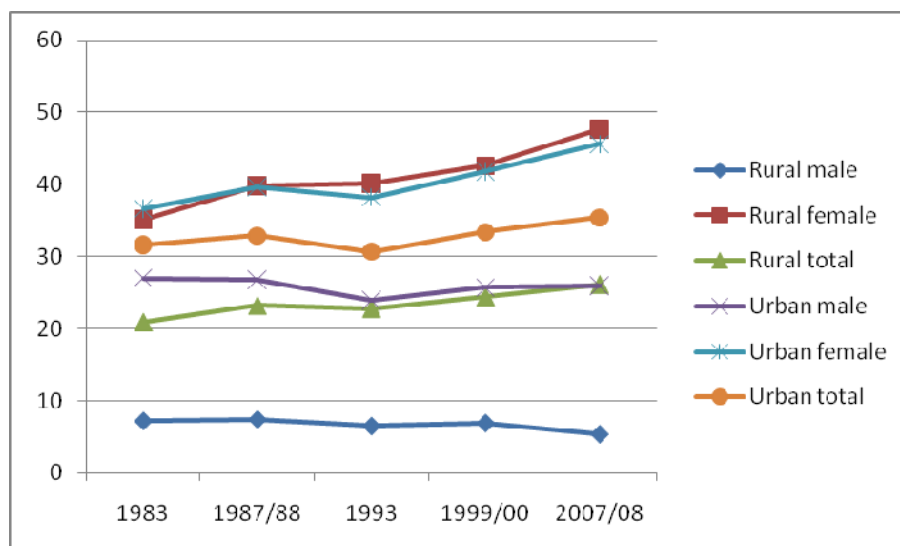
²¹ According to the 2001 Census, 309 million persons were migrants based on place of last residence (more than two-thirds being female), an increase of 27 per cent since 1991. 98 million persons moved during the decade 1991-2001. <http://community.eldis.org/.59b6a372/Internal%20Migration%20and%20Regional%20Disparities%20in%20India.pdf>.

TABLE 2
Migration rates in India 1983 – 2007/08

	Male	Female	Total
Rural			
38th (Jan - Dec, 1983)	7.2	35.1	20.9
43rd (July 1987 – June 88)	7.4	39.8	23.2
49th (Jan - June, 1993)	6.5	40.1	22.8
55th (July 1999 – June 2000)	6.9	42.6	24.4
64th (July07-Jun-08)	5.4	47.7	26.1
Urban			
38th (Jan - Dec, 1983)	27	36.6	31.6
43rd (July 1987 – June 88)	26.8	39.6	32.9
49th (Jan - June, 1993)	23.9	38.2	30.7
55th (July 1999 – June 2000)	25.7	41.8	33.4
64th (July07-Jun-08)	25.9	45.6	35.4

Source: NSSO 2010.

GRAPH 1
Migration rates in India 1983 – 2007/08



Source: see Table 2

De Haan and Dubey 2006) is in itself noteworthy, particularly in a context where 'jobless growth' has been a main academic and policy concern.

Much of movement of labour in India has remained circular. This is of course the case for migration for seasonal occupations, particularly in rural

areas,²² and with high concentration of out-migrants from India's poorest areas like western Orissa.²³ But workers in urban occupations also tend to maintain links with areas of origins, as casual observation regarding domestic workers in major cities indicate, my own research among industrial labourers in Calcutta showed (de Haan 1994), and as was recently documented for workers in the diamond industry in Surat, many of whom moved back temporarily to their villages after the economic decline of 2008 (Kapoor forthcoming). Within the NSS data, which recorded 12 per cent of the population as 'return migrant', the relatively small number of migrant *households* as compared to members of households migrating,²⁴ arguably confirms that migration by and large remains circular rather than constituting the classic rural-urban transition.

Migrants' characteristics: a macro-micro paradox

Second, many studies show the diversity of labour migrants involved. To illustrate how diverse movements of labour are, de Haan and Dubey (2006) estimated the Gini coefficient among migrants and non-migrants registered in the 1999-2000 NSS, which showed that the inequality is higher among migrants than among non-migrants (Table 3).

TABLE 3
Inequality among migrants and non-migrants (Gini coefficient)

	1999-2000		
	Rural	Urban	Total
Migrants	0.273	0.335	0.333
Non-migrants	0.248	0.325	0.295

Source: see Table 1

The recent NSSO report quoted above reporting 2007-08 data lists the incidence of migration among different income groups, showing a higher propensity of migration of households in the top income deciles than in the

²² Deshingkar and Start (2003) emphasises this under a concept of livelihoods; Epstein's (1973) South Indian research used a concept of a 'share families' focusing on units living separately while sharing responsibility for incomes and expenditure. Also Dehingkar and Akter (2009). See Jha (2008) for a study of more settled migrants.

²³ ActionAid estimates that approximately 2 million people migrate from the predominantly tribal districts of Western Orissa to brick in Andhra Pradesh (in: CREATE 2008: 11).

²⁴ The NSS 2007-08 recorded 1.7 per cent of the rural population and less than 1 per cent of the urban population as short-term migrant (defined as persons who had moved for employment between 1 and 6 months in the previous year). The latter category is likely to be a significant under-estimation of the frequent short-term movements of workers.

lower ones.²⁵ In line with this, we found for 1987-88 and 1999-2000 that poverty rates amongst migrants were much lower than amongst non-migrants,²⁶ and the average years of schooling of migrants was higher, in both years, and in both rural and urban areas (Tables 4 and 5). The Indian Village Studies project also showed that migrants were educationally better placed than non-migrants (Connell et al., 1976).

TABLE 4
Average years of schooling of migrants (excluding migration due to marriage) vis-à-vis non-migrants

Sector	1987–1988			Non-migrants	1999–2000			Non-migrants
	Rural	Urban	Total		Rural	Urban	Total	
Rural	2.75	4.58	3.10	1.89	3.92	5.62	4.32	2.78
Urban	4.63	6.65	5.50	3.77	5.70	8.14	6.71	5.03
Total	3.56	6.03	4.34	2.27	4.83	7.38	5.69	3.30

Source: see Table 1

TABLE 5
Poverty incidence (HCR) of migrants (excluding marriage migration) in urban areas

Number of years since migration	1987–88				1999–2000			
	STR1	STR2	STR3	Total	STR1	STR2	STR3	Total
0–5	26.46	21.54	20.88	23.19	21.16	15.21	12.83	16.34
5–10	30.43	26.32	20.55	26.53	26.45	14.69	19.85	18.61
>10	31.98	27.11	22.54	27.12	24.25	18.52	13.77	18.33
Total migrants	28.82	24.42	21.65	25.29	23.22	16.29	14.52	17.54
Non-migrants	53.51	43.97	30.86	44.81	43.30	32.64	22.71	33.03

Source: see Table 1

Patterns of migration change over time. Most recently, for example, international migration has become much more common from Uttar Pradesh, now surpassing Kerala in total numbers. A re-survey by Deshingkar et al. (2008) in Madhya Pradesh showed that circular migration had become more accumulative for the poor, with reduced uncertainty of finding work, increased wages and decreased dependence on contractors, but bringing greater returns to those with skills or strong social networks. Migration reduced borrowing for

²⁵ This was demonstrated also in a paper at the 52nd ILSE conference by Chinmay Tumbe (2010). For short-term migrants, this was the reverse (NSS 2010: 93) but the numbers of recorded short-term migrants is very low.

²⁶ De Haan's (1996) analysis of 1983–84 NSS data for urban migrants suggested that migrants have a higher average per capita consumption than non-migrants.

consumption, improved debt repayment capacity, and enhanced migrants' confidence.

Patterns of landownership amongst migrants, well-documented in a range of studies, also illustrate diversity. Connell et al. (1976) showed that the landless were least likely to migrate.²⁷ Yadava et al. (1996/97) found a positive relationship between landholding and migration in India (and that migrant households are socio-economically and educationally relatively better-off). In a comparative study in the 1980s, Oberai et al. (1989) showed that in Bihar the poor and landless were (slightly) more likely to migrate; in Kerala the middle peasantry migrated more often, and in Uttar Pradesh all landed groups except the largest cultivators migrated frequently. While there is some degree of path dependency, these patterns change over time, as Arvind Das (1985) narrated for a village in Bihar where sons of landowners were amongst the first to migrate, followed by less well-off. A similar pattern has been detected with respect to the international migration from Punjab, where better-off earlier migrants sponsored the less well-off (Pettigrew 1977).

Similarly, caste background of migrants has been well studied. Ben Rogaly (2002) stresses how caste is one of the important axes along which migration in rural West Bengal is segmented. Studies of indentured labour (Tinker 1974), representing India's early integration into a global labour market, indicated that migrants formed an average broad-middle sample of India's rural population, a pattern that seemed to be continued in the migration to the old colonial industries (de Haan 1996). Breman's (1985) seminal work in western India stressed the overrepresentation of lower castes and Harijans in circular migration. In the study of Mahabubnagar village in Andhra Pradesh, Korra (2010) observes that all Reddi (powerful caste) households has a migrant in urban areas, whereas migration to rural areas was much more common among for example Madiga (Dalit) and landless marginal farmer households.

With respect to caste, too, patterns can change over time. In Palanpur in western Uttar Pradesh, higher castes were more prominently represented among migrants in 1983/84, but in earlier years lower castes had secured outside jobs (Lanjouw and Stern 1989). The re-survey by Deshingkar et al. (2008) also showed increased participation by higher castes (and women) in migration as opportunities became more rewarding (also Rogaly and Coppard 2003, for Puruliya).

NSS data provide information about migration among different castes, though the earlier-mentioned problem of under-recording may be particularly pertinent here (as the types of migration of the most deprived groups may remain unrecorded more often than that of better-off). The joint publication with Amaresh Dubey exploring NSS data for 1987-88 and 1999-00 highlighted striking differences in mobility of social groups: proportion of recorded migrants among Dalits and Adivasis is on average lower than among other groups. The NSS data for 1993 and 2007-08 referring to migrant households suggests a slightly different picture, with a lower proportion of migrant

²⁷ The Village Studies emphasised the importance of village-level factors such as concentration of landholding and landlessness, literacy, commercialisation of agriculture (as cause and consequence), and proximity to urban areas and main roads.

households amongst Dalits but not amongst Adivasis. The data referring to migration of household members show somewhat lower proportion of migrants amongst Dalits, but higher proportions of migrants amongst Adivasis in urban areas – a fact that may be related to reservation (see Table 6, the fact that this includes female migration explains some of the difference).

TABLE 6
Proportion of migrants among different social groups

	RURAL			URBAN		
	male	female	total	male	female	total
55th round (1999-2000)						
scheduled tribe	5.6	35.7	20.4	28.2	41.1	34.5
scheduled caste	6.4	43.4	24.4	22.5	39.3	30.5
other backward class	6.5	42.8	24.2	23.7	41.7	32.3
others	8.1	44.3	25.9	27.6	42.6	34.7
all (incl. n.r.)	6.9	42.6	24.4	25.7	41.8	33.4
64th round (2007-08)						
scheduled tribe	4.7	44	23.8	28.8	43	35.6
scheduled caste	4.9	48.2	26	23.5	44.7	33.7
other backward class	5.1	46.8	25.5	23	43.7	33.1
others	6.8	50.6	28.1	29	47.7	37.9
all (incl. n.r.)	5.4	47.7	26.1	25.9	45.6	35.4

Source: 1999-2000 figures see Table 1; other NSSO 2010: 17.

There is thus somewhat of a macro-micro paradox that arises from this brief overview. On the one hand, national-level data highlight that migration is selective with opportunities biased against the poorer, a process that might be reinforced with technological change. On the other hand, micro studies often show very high rates of migration amongst poorest and socially marginalised groups, and over-representation of migrants – including bonded and child labour, with Adivasis and Dalits over-represented – amongst the bottom layer of the working class (NCEUIS 2009: 145-7). Much of the latter may go unrecorded, which may add to their vulnerability, as is discussed later.

Gender and age structure migration

Migration in India as elsewhere is strongly gendered, with regional and class differences, thus structuring the potential of migration to be an inclusive force. Census and NSSO data show very low rates of female labour migration: between 70 per cent (in Kerala) and 94 per cent (in Bihar) of women in migrant households moved because of marriage (as primary reason), and at

relatively young age.²⁸ However, Shanthi (2006: 25 ff) shows that labour force participation after migration increases steeply, as Table 7 shows.

TABLE 7
Female migration in NSSO 55th round (selected states)

	Reasons for female migration		Labour Force Participation women in migrant households	
	Employment	Marriage	Pre	Post
MP	1.8	88.8	17	42
UP	0.9	91.2	5	19
Haryana	1.1	85.5	2	8
Punjab	1.5	87.8	4	8
Rajasthan	1	87.2	20	34
Gujarat	1.6	82.1	25	33
Maharashtra	2.9	73.7	25	42
Bihar	1.3	94.1	3	19
Orissa	1.6	86.3	14	24
West Bengal	1.8	83.2	3	15
AP	3.6	71.1	37	48
Karnataka	3.4	79.9	17	43
Kerala	2.7	69.4	17	26
Tamil Nadu	3.3	73	28	42

Source: Shanthi 2006, refers to women in migrant households

Many studies have shown that young women do migrate but often face more barriers to mobility and access to opportunities, ending up in informal sector jobs (Mukherjee 2001; Mehra and Gammage, 1999), and receiving lower wages particularly in rural and casual urban occupations (but even in regular urban work, particularly for those with lowest levels of education).²⁹ They are highly represented in extremely exploitative occupations like sugarcane cutting (Teerink 1995), which are likely to go unrecorded in national statistics.

Internationally, and across the Indian sub-continent gendered patterns of migration differ. Singh (1984) concluded on the basis of macro- and micro-level studies that there were contrasting patterns of female rural-to-urban migration in northern and southern India, with the south having higher rates of

²⁸ Shanthi (2006: 22). Reasons for under-recording female migration in Census and NSSO include: respondents are required to give only one reason for migration, working women that move for marriage are not recorded as labour migrants, cultural inappropriateness to emphasise economic role, particularly vis-à-vis male interviewer, emphasis on primary and full-time work (Shanthi 2006: 5).

²⁹ Madeshwaran (2010: 467), who finds particularly high female/male differentials among Scheduled Caste regular rural workers.

female migration.³⁰ She emphasised the importance of cultural norms, in particular northern Indian practices relating to the seclusion of women that affected rates of female out-migration and employment.

Gendered patterns of labour migration change over time. For example, the (formal-sector) manufacturing industries had a substantial proportion of female workers in the early 20th century, which declined gradually (following decline in child labour), thus contributing to a very low percentage of female labour in India's formal employment category. Mirroring a global trends, in India since the 1980s there has been a gradual trend of increasing female employment, in new manufacturing and service-sector jobs, and into self-employment, a (slow) process that "signifies not only the growing economic empowerment of women but is also a harbinger of unprecedented social change in the hitherto tradition-dominated milieu in the country" (Rustagi 2010: 495). Apart from signalling gradual changes in gendered patterns of migration, this may also be reflecting the broader pattern of increasing disparities within the labour market, with better-educated usually benefiting more, while many remain trapped in poverty, and particularly women and many children confined to the unregulated informal sector.

Reasons for migration: beyond push and pull

Much research describes individual motives for migration, often trying to distinguish whether push or pull is the most important driving force (a question which was once compared to asking which pair of scissors does the cutting). These empirical questions are often posed in the context of a dualistic framework of migration, which insufficiently captures the circular nature that dominates labour migration in India.

As mentioned, NSS data highlight that amongst all recorded migrants, migration for marriage is—and has remained—the most important category (90 per cent of rural female migrants), with 'search for employment' the reason for migration of 18 per cent of migrants according to 1987-88 NSS data and 14 per cent in 1999/00 (de Haan and Dubey 2006; over 50 per cent of urban male migrants quoted 'employment related reasons'). 2007-08 data show that 61 per cent of *households* had migrated for employment related reasons, while only 10 per cent of *persons* had migrated for employment related reasons, 46 per cent among men, and 1 per cent among women. The pattern of circular migration is more adequately captured in the context of a family oriented migration model, such as advanced by Oded Stark and others (Parida 2010).

While obviously economic opportunities are key for labour migrants, field studies tend to reveal a variety of motivations for migration, shaped by conditions at origin and destination, and by the patterns of recruitment and migration networks (de Haan 1994). Family structure shapes both the urgency and limitations to migrate, as larger families tend to have a greater need to diversify resources, and the ability to maintain labour inputs when part of the family migrates. Age is key of course in terms of employment possibilities

³⁰ Shanti's (2006) analysis of the NSSO 55th round shows slightly higher incidences of female migrants who were 'never married' in southern states and West Bengal.

(young men having most opportunities) but also in terms of a rite of passage, and youngsters' drive to explore the world outside their immediate vicinity (and sometimes, away from parental control). Similarly, and as mentioned above, social-cultural factors structure migration patterns, exemplified in the higher rates of female migration and labour force participation in southern parts of India and amongst specific communities.

The nature of migration of the poorest workers has made many authors to argue that it is inappropriate to conceptualise this along the model of individual (or household) choices postulated by neo-classical and dualist models. Jan Breman (1985) has emphasized the forced nature of labour migration, particularly in western India where capitalist production and old exploitative socio-economic relations lead to extreme forms of deprivation. Conditions of bondage in migration processes amongst Adivasis in western India are described by David Mosse et al. (2002). These forms of migration are usually organized through labour contractors, who often are money-lenders in areas of origins.

Push-pull models, while having continued attraction for analysts in India and elsewhere and some predictive power, remain inadequate for understanding the complexity of migration patterns. Reasons for migration are very complex, and simple categories may lead to serious misreading of broader patterns, such as in the case of female migration 'for marriage', or regarding conclusions of impacts of migration, to which we turn next.

Impacts of migration

The question of impacts of migration remains difficult to answer, because of the diversity of migrants and selectivity of migration, because of the difficulty of calculating costs of migration, and because of the difficulty of isolating the impact of migration and remittances from broader household or livelihood strategies. Of course, impact on individuals and (different) communities vary.

Analysing the impact of migration using household survey data tends to be particularly limited. Joe *et al.* (2009) using 1999-00 NSSO data analyse the net gain of rural-urban migration based on the probability of migrant and non-migrant population in different income quintiles, showing that migrants have much lower probability to be in bottom quintiles than non-migrant population in areas of origin (though disadvantages caused by caste and education remain) – which as they acknowledge does not provide information about individual households' income.

There is increasing evidence about the amounts of remittances that migrants send home. NSSO data for 2007-08 show that international migrants on average sent back Rs.52,000,³¹ while migrants within India remitted on average Rs.13,000 – hence as 19 per cent of urban and 19 per cent of rural households reported an out-migrant this is a not insignificant contribution. Over 90 per cent of the income was spent on household consumption goods,

³¹ Particularly to Kerala and Punjab, with recently a rapid increase of international migrants from UP. The NSS estimate is far below the estimate of private transfers by the Reserve Bank of India.

confirming micro-study findings that show that remittances lead to limited investment. Debt repayment was a significant use—but much smaller—of remittances in rural areas, whereas savings and investment was more common in urban areas.

NSSO data – taking into account limitations – appear to confirm the hypothesis postulated by Lipton (1982) on the basis of among others the Indian Village Studies, that migration is likely to increase inequalities, as better off can afford to invest in migration opportunities that are likely to have higher returns. International migration has the highest returns, but few can afford the investment. Further, the average amount of remittances varies significantly across income groups: remittances for rural households in the lowest income decile were on average Rs.9,300 (Rs.14,600 for urban), while for the highest income group it was Rs.40,300 (Rs.85,000 for urban; NSS 2010: 109-10). While this may still be ‘progressive’ in the sense that other sources of income are even more unequally distributed, clearly migration on average reinforces ‘initial inequalities’.

This distribution of benefits of migration and use of remittances confirms the findings of Srivastava and Sasikumar (2003) who conclude that despite positive impacts on incomes and investment, internal migration from poorer areas are a form of ‘safety valve’. This is also in line with both historical studies and macro-perspectives (including Marxist and structuralist ones) which show little in terms of migration driving equalisation between regions of origins and destination. Again, at the bottom of the income hierarchy the benefits from migration are likely to be least, and in cases of bonded labour migration may actually reinforce conditions of bondage (Mosse *et al.* 2002).

Costs of migration are many. Data on remittances typically neglect the investment migrants and their families have to make before moving. Many migrant labourers have no option but to take children along: CREATE (2008: 5) estimate that under 14 year olds may constitute one-third of all migrants, thus potentially contributing to increased child labour, and gaps in education, and thus potentially further transmitting poverty across generations. Health of migrants is adversely affected by poor living and working conditions, increased exposure to infectious diseases, lack of access to health care, and emotional stress related to the movement.

The impacts of migration thus continue to constitute major questions, conceptually, empirically, and politically. The questions are increasingly important, as labour markets and migration patterns appear to become increasingly unequal. This poses a major challenge for the debate on inclusive growth.

4 Inclusive growth and migration

As yet, there is very limited evidence regarding changing patterns of migration over the last two decades. However, existing evidence seems to contradict expectations expressed in the 11th Five Year Plan that accelerated growth would lead to increased migration (Vol.1, p.21). NSS and Census data seem to confirm that proportions of migrants have not been increasing, and in some cases (notably rural male migration) the data even suggest declines in

migration. This would be in line with evidence regarding patterns of job-less growth (and perhaps with the growing regional inequalities in India).

At the same time, as much migration remains unrecorded, this may be under-estimating the continued importance of short-term and circular migration. While this bias in recording migration is significant, it does not seem to contradict a hypothesis (and paradox) that while at individual and household level migration is intended and usually does enhance livelihoods, at macro-level there are continued barriers against mobility that would lead to more inclusive growth.

While internal migration tends to remain invisible within much policy debate and (related) statistics, this section argues that policies are critically important for patterns of migration, and the likelihood that migration leads to better outcomes for migrants, thus pointing at some directions to enhance the inclusiveness of India's present development path.³² This has four aspects, related to the invisibility of migrants, the idea of desirability to reduce migration, existing social policies, and specific measures for most deprived groups.

Migrants' invisibility

First, the 'invisibility' in policies, law and statistics itself is important, as it can enhance the vulnerability of migrants, excluding them from social services and rights.³³ When migrants are visible, they tend to be portrayed as victims, of economic exploitation, sexual oppression (particularly of women), thus denying migrants' agency (Kapur 2010). While there is a wealth of empirical studies on migration in India, the insights from the complexity of migration does not sufficiently inform the large-scale data collection. As mentioned, NSS data may be under-recoding migration, but also and perhaps more importantly insufficiently recognises the complexity of migration processes, including with reference to female migration (which now tends to be recorded mainly as marriage migration). For example, we need a much better understanding of the changes in migration and employment that are now reflected in the 2007-08 data.

Much of the analysis of migration has departed from a dualistic model, with its emphasis on the gradual absorption of a labour surplus into a modern sector.³⁴ Some analysis uses net migration as evidence of labour mobility, thus

³² Inclusive growth is defined by the Planning Commission as a process which yields broad-based benefits and ensures equality of opportunity for all. NREGA is considered as a key instrument to development employment opportunities (11th Five Year Plan, Vol.1: 2; planningcommission.nic.in/plans/planrel/fiveyr/11th/11_v1/11v1_ch1.pdf).

³³ For example, the National Council for Rural Labour (NCRL) estimated the number of seasonal and circular migrants in rural areas to be 10 million; while other estimates suggest at least 30 million (CREATE 2008: 5).

³⁴ Lewis (1954), Todaro (1969), Harris and Todaro (1970), Hatton and Williamson (1992), Ranis (2003). This is also the perspective in the 11th 5 Year Plan (Vol.1, p.63).

largely missing complicated patterns of migration.³⁵ The recent World Bank report *Accelerating Growth and Job Creation in South Asia* (Ghani and Ahmed eds. 2009), which attributes great importance to labour legislation as cause of underutilization of labour, concludes that while labour mobility is “the natural mechanism for promoting faster and inclusive growth regionally and globally,” mobility within South Asia’s countries has remained low.³⁶

Despite decades in which this transition has not happened in India as forcefully as predicted and often assumed, and with recent evidence of continued stagnation and even some reversal of growth in the modern or organised sector (and as mentioned the slow rates of urbanization), many studies continue to depart from a theoretical framework that assumes a progressive transition, but in the process tend to ignore the multiple forms of labour mobility that happens with those two (or three; Bhattacharya 1998) sectors of the dual model. As within the concept of informal sector, so with migrants there is a risk that the assumption of transitional existence may hinder creative thinking about ways in which migrants can be supported.

These theoretical limitations matter even more as they may feed into public and policy debates. These discussions tend to have—or at least obtain at points of time—a strong anti-migrant bias. Policy makers around the world tend to regard migrants as vagrants, and perceive migration as a threat to stability, to social order, and/or to national or regional identity. We now turn the question whether from an inclusive growth perspective there are arguments to reduce migration, and by what means.

Should migration be reduced?

Where migration does appear in policy objectives, the attention tends to focus on reducing the numbers of migrants. For example, rural development programmes and the social protection schemes including NREGA (as MEGS earlier), often have as (secondary) objective to reduce numbers of out-migrants.³⁷ Emerging evidence from studies by Drèze and Khera and by the India School of Women’s Studies and Development highlights that NREGA leads to decreases in distress migration from villages, with workers stating preference to work in and around their villages, rather than bearing the social

³⁵ Purfield (2006:10) and Cashin and Sahay (1996) analyse the increasing regional disparities in India. Munshi and Rosenzweig’s (2009) emphasis on permanent migration also biases their perspective on who mobility in India is “so low”.

³⁶ The report notes that 96 per cent of the Indian population lives in the state in which they were born. Factors inhibiting labour mobility are distances, poor infrastructure, cultural factors, language, poor education, and location-specific safety net programmes such as rural employment guarantee schemes, which prevent migrant workers from using safety nets in states where they were not born (Ghani and Ahmed 2009: 26).

³⁷ According to the NREGA guidelines, its basic objective is to “enhance livelihood security in rural areas by providing at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment in a financial year to every household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work.” Other objectives include generating productive assets, protecting the environment, empowering rural women, reducing rural-urban migration (also referring to distress migration) and fostering social equity.

and other costs of migrating elsewhere in search of work (quoted in NCEUIS 2009: 220, 223). Indeed NCEUSI (2009: 251) is hopeful that “programmes have made a significant contribution in not only enhancing income levels of the poor but have been helpful in stemming the rural and urban migration of the poor also.”

While this seems to be socially desirable, this emphasis on reducing migration *per se* is problematic. In the first place, evidence shows that it is as likely that migration will continue or even increase with development (as enhanced resources become available and access improved) as decrease; patterns of migration will change, but mobility is clearly part of societies’ development paths. Second, it is critical to take into account that migration tends to be part of households’ established livelihood strategies, which they are unlikely to give up easily, and public policy should focus on supporting these strategies rather than trying to minimize this. This is not to argue that policies should take a *laissez-faire* approach and presume migration leads to optimal outcomes. Rather, policies that try to reduce exploitation of migrants should be based on an understanding of the complexity of migration patterns, motives and outcomes, and take into account migrants’ perspectives.

Social policies and migrants’ neglect

The 11th 5 Year Plan (Vol 1 para 4.48) is explicit in the recognition of a sever gap in policies vis-à-vis migrants: “migrant workers are the most vulnerable and exploited among the informal sector workers, and have not received any attention in the labour policy. In the States which are sources (origin) of supply of migrant workers ... effective and large-scale effort for vocational training in the labour intensive occupations is required ... amenable to the special needs of the entrants to informal labour markets. In the destination States, the focus of public policy (including Labour Policy) should be to improve the conditions under which the bulk of these in-migrants live and work.”³⁸

Much of the attention, however, has focused on the social protection schemes.³⁹ There is little in terms of legislation and policies to support labour (with NREGA seen as supporting employment, whereas it is primarily a cash transfer scheme). The NCEUIS recommendations that focused on support to the informal sector by and large have been shelved, as the dominant policy paradigm has been to improve the investment climate through which jobs would be generated, and support to the poorest through the flagship schemes.

³⁸ The Plan argues that if basic minimum conditions to the new migrants are not available, economic growth should be restrained. It argues for better implementation of legislations for migrants, though the Building and Other Construction Workers (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 1976; the Building and Other Construction Workers (Cess) Act, 1976; the Workmen’s Compensation Act, 1923, the Minimum Wages Act, 1948, and The Unorganized Workers’ Social Security Bill, 2007.

³⁹ In my work on social policy (de Haan 2010: Chapter 8) I analyse South Asian social policies as welfarist (contrasting it with the East Asian ‘productivist’ focus) with social security being perceived as residual, a strong emphasis on targeting, and surprisingly low social spending (particularly in health).

Improvement of employability of and conditions for migrants does not appear to be high on the agenda, as even support to the ‘informal sector’ appears unpopular amongst policy makers. The conclusion of Srivastava and Sasikumat that “legislation regarding migrants fails because regulatory authorities are over-stretched; the state sees migrants as a low priority” by and large seems to hold, while acts like the Inter State Migrant Workman Act remain by and large without teeth.

Many social protection schemes, moreover, tend to have a ‘sedentary bias’, i.e. focus on the ‘resident’ population, and tending to exclude migrants. Working mostly in the informal sector, migrants tend to lack work-related social security, and are seldom unionised. Migrants may not have access to PDS and housing schemes. Health care may not be accessible, either because of an absence of or large distance to health care centers and anganwadis, or because of discrimination against groups of migrants. Even immunization schemes may neglect the children of migrants.⁴⁰ Similarly, schooling may not be available to migrants, particularly if they move seasonally.

A range of initiatives shows that social policy does not need to exclude migrants and their families. Rural livelihoods programmes have experimented with support programmes for migrants. NGOs have worked with migrant groups to ensure they can avail of their basic rights and have the necessary identification and documentation. Janarth started a pilot project in sugar districts of Western Maharashtra Maharashtra in 2002 with schools for children of sugarcane migrants; after three years this included 30 factories and 12,000 children. SETU in Gujarat’s started education interventions to prevent migration of children to unsuitable worksites in Gujarat. Similarly, Vikalpa and Lok Drishti in Orissa have tried to retain children in villages in Bolangir and Nuapada districts. SSA has accepted those ideas, and has special schemes (EGS and AIE) out-of-school children, takes note of migrant children as a category, and encourages states to accept the support of NGOs in reaching difficult categories of children.⁴¹ Elsewhere, there has been much discussion about ‘portable’ rights for migrants, and this also is worth exploration within the Indian context.

Multiple deprivations

The macro-micro paradox highlighted is particularly relevant for the migration of most deprived groups, those who suffer from economic disadvantages as well as social discrimination. While micro-studies highlight the large numbers of people moving for casual work, often over short-distance, the macro data shows continued under-representation of the most deprived (possibly reinforced in 2007-087 data).

⁴⁰ Jayati Ghosh (pers. comm.). The NRHM recognizes the specific health needs of migrants as a group, but it is not clear whether separate initiatives for migrants are included.

⁴¹ CREATE (2008: Chapter 5, p.36) describes these initiatives in education, and the challenges they face.

Concern for socially disadvantaged groups are by no means new in India. A wide range of programmes have been in existence for decades to address the discrimination of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. While there have been some significant achievements notably through affirmative action (reservation), disparities between groups have not disappeared, and the political emancipation of (some) groups has not been accompanied by the social transformation that many progressive observers and policy makers expected after Independence. Programmes for excluded have by and large confirmed to the welfarist model of India's social policy, with targeting to specific groups having contributed to a reinforcement of social categories and categorisation in administrative apparatus. Significantly, as stressed by SK Thorat for example, the policies have not addressed some core aspects of discrimination, particularly in the sphere of labour (and product) markets.

The policy gaps vis-à-vis migrants are larger for these deprived groups than for other migrants. Over and above invisibility, they suffer from stereotypes and negation of basic rights, as it is unlikely that their social identity becomes irrelevant after they move (even though some of the worst forms of caste discrimination are less prominent in urban areas). Marginalised migrant groups suffer additional barriers for accessing health and education provisions. In the labour market, similarly, they are discriminated against as migrants as well as Dalit and Adivasi women and men.

5 Conclusion: migration and inclusive growth

While many micro-studies describe the often extreme vulnerability and exploitation of migrants in India, macro-studies have continued to struggle with the role of migration in economic transformation. These questions are now increasingly pertinent, as the policy objective of inclusive growth is an explicit response to the knowledge that India's economic model has produced high growth figures, but with increasing inequalities and without a transformation in terms of absorption of labour within a 'modern' or 'formal' sector. As much migration analysis has been formulated in terms of that classic transformation, it is even more important to consider the role of migration in the current pattern of inclusive growth.

A key insight into migration patterns globally and India is that while migration is critical in many households' livelihoods, it does not by itself produce structural change. People respond to opportunities, but these are structured by initial economic, political and even social-cultural conditions. In many cases, migration reinforces these: inequalities within areas of origin may be reinforced, substantial benefits go to the better off and well-connected regions, and extreme exploitation including bonded and child labour may be intensified through the grip of labour contractors and money lenders.

The main hypothesis put forward in this paper – needing much further data analysis and perhaps conceptual innovation – is that the changes in migration patterns reflect the uneven growth pattern India has been experiencing since the 1980s, with increasing inequalities, and limited creation of 'decent' jobs. Patterns have not been stagnant, with for example women taking an increasing role in the labour force and migration. But the data at

macro level clearly indicates that better-off are benefiting more from opportunities provided through migration than lower-income groups.

The Inclusive Growth policy can do more that at present to address the exploitation and exclusion of migrants. The new social protection schemes unquestionably enhance the well-being of the poor, particularly through NREGA. But more can be done to enhance the participation of migrants in the growth process. In my view, this needs to start from accepting the reality of labour outside the modern sector, among which migrants occupy a specific position. Economic growth has not and will not in the near future substantially change the structure of employment, with over 90 per cent in the so-called informal sector. Rather than waiting for an absorption into the modern sector, much more can be done to promote the rights of those (migrants) in the informal sector, to ensure that social policies are extended to migrants (and families left behind), that small-scale initiatives are being supported, and migrants' awareness of rights is strengthened. As highlighted by Srivastava and Sasikumar (2003), labour legislation can be enforced more strictly, with modification of laws where necessary. Advocacy campaigns can be mounted to address stereotypes about migrants. Migrants can be directly supported by providing skills training, and information about jobs and risks of migration.

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