

# Migration, remote rural areas and chronic poverty in India

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Priya Deshingkar

**ODI Working Paper 323**  
**CPRC Working Paper 163**

Results of ODI research presented  
in preliminary form for discussion  
and critical comment

ODI Working Paper 323  
CPRC Working Paper 163

# Migration, remote rural areas and chronic poverty in India

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December 2010



**Chronic Poverty**  
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## Acknowledgements

This paper is one of a series on spatial poverty traps that has been published jointly by the Overseas Development Institute and the Chronic Poverty Research Centre. The series has been edited by Kate Bird and Kate Higgins, with support from Tari Masamvu and Dan Harris. It draws largely on papers produced for an international workshop on Understanding and Addressing Spatial Poverty Traps, which took place on 29 March 2007 in Stellenbosch, South Africa. The workshop was co-hosted by the Overseas Development Institute and the Chronic Poverty Research Centre and jointly funded by the Overseas Development Institute, the Chronic Poverty Research Centre, Trocaire and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation.

The author would like to express her gratitude to the people in the study villages in Andhra Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh whose generosity and time made this exercise possible. She is grateful to Shaheen Akter for econometric analysis and to Laxman Rao, Pramod Sharma and Sushil Kumar for their hard work in data collection. She is also grateful to Kate Bird and anonymous reviewers from the Chronic Poverty Research Centre for reviewing earlier drafts of the paper.

ISBN 978 1 907288 06 7

Working Paper (Print) ISSN 1759 2909

ODI Working Papers (Online) ISSN 1759 2917

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This document is also an output from the Chronic Poverty Research Centre (CPRC) which is funded by UKaid from the UK Department for International Development (DFID) for the benefit of developing countries. The CPRC gratefully acknowledges DFID's support.

The analysis and views presented in this paper are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of ODI, CPRC, DFID or any other funders.

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## Acronyms

3D	Dirty, Degrading and Dangerous
ADB	Asian Development Bank
ADRI	Asian Development Research Institute
AP	Andhra Pradesh
BC	Backward Caste
BIMARU	Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh
BU	Bihar and Uttar Pradesh
CPRC	Chronic Poverty Research Centre
DFID	UK Department for International Development
EBC	Extremely Backward Caste
EJF	Environmental Justice Foundation
FC	Forward Caste
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GSDP	Gross State Domestic Product
ICRISAT	International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-arid Tropics
IDS	Institute of Development Studies
IT	Information Technology
KBK	Koraput-Bolangir-Kalahandi
LOP	Livelihood Options Project (DFID)
LPG	Liquefied Petroleum Gas
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MP	Madhya Pradesh
NCAER	National Council for Applied Economic Research
NFHS	National Family Health Survey
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
NSS	National Sample Survey
OBC	Other Backward Castes
OC	Open Category
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
PDS	Public Distribution System
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
RRA	Remote Rural Areas
Rs	Rupees
SC	Scheduled Caste
ST	Scheduled Tribe
STEP	Sustainable Tribal Development Project
UK	United Kingdom
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UP	Uttar Pradesh
WORLP	Western Orissa Rural Livelihoods Project

## **Glossary of local terms**

Gram panchayat	Village-level government bodies
Gram sabha	Village assembly
Kharif	Monsoon cropping season (July to October)
Mandal	Administrative tier between district and gram panchayat
Mestri	Contractor-cum-recruiting agent
Pucca	Made of bricks and concrete
Rabi	Winter cropping season (December to April)
Sarpanch	Head of local government
Tendu	A type of wild leaf used in the manufacture of local cigars
Vaddi	Stone cutter caste

## Executive summary

This paper explores the relationship between migration, remote rural areas (RRAs) and chronic poverty in India and is part of a series on spatial poverty traps. It argues through the analysis of three rounds (2001/02, 2003/04 and 2006/07) of qualitative and quantitative data from six villages in the Indian states of Andhra Pradesh (AP) and Madhya Pradesh (MP) that migration is higher among chronically poor groups living in RRAs and that it plays an important role in managing risk and improving standards of living and household wellbeing. Although it is impossible to say that the poor have become non-poor as a result of migration, because of the difficulties of measuring poverty and multiple deprivations, the overall impact of migration in terms of being able to repay debts faster, being able to eat more regularly, being able to spend on education, health, agriculture and housing and being able to borrow large sums when needed has been positive and has raised the social and economic status of migrant households. However, these positive impacts come at a cost, because migration increases the risk of injury and exposure to disease and noxious substances, as well as the negative impacts of long separation from ones family.

Migration rates vary across caste groups and villages, with the highest incidence among chronically poor people living in remote villages. Overall mobility levels have grown: in AP the number of households with at least one person working outside the village increased from 41% in 2003/04 to 54% in 2006/07. Corresponding figures were 42% and 52% in MP. Comparing figures on circular migration, commuting and permanent migration shows that circular migration is the main form of mobility across village and castes in MP, whereas commuting has emerged as the main form of mobility in AP, with growing prosperity and small town development. Regression analysis for both states shows that belonging to a well-connected village in a prosperous region increases the likelihood of commuting and belonging to a remote village in a poor region decreases it. The probability of migrating increases with remoteness.

In remote villages, migration involved all but the poorest (disabled, old and sick) and the richest i.e. the broad category of chronically poor and some slightly better-off households, in this case the landless, marginal and small farming households belonging to the scheduled caste (SC), scheduled tribe (ST) and backward caste (BC) categories, who are mainly illiterate or have primary schooling. This broad base of migration has resulted in its benefits accruing to a large number of households, challenging the notion that migration benefits only a privileged few with the right contacts, assets and education.

Circular migration earnings account for a higher proportion of household income among the lower castes and tribes, namely the SC, BC and ST (in households with one person working outside the village). Migration is critical to managing risk and smoothing consumption for a majority of chronically poor households living in remote rural areas. The extra income from migration has allowed the family to eat regularly and better, pay for health care when needed and spend on social events. Migration has improved the creditworthiness of the families left behind in the village who can now obtain large loans easily.

However, focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews show that, for many chronically poor households, migration provides a way of 'coping' without graduating out of poverty altogether. Such migrants are usually in the lowest paid 3D jobs (dirty, dangerous and degrading), characterised by poor employment conditions, debt bondage and recruiting agents, limited personal freedom, restricted access to information and violation of human rights. Women and children from SC and ST households are often employed on the worst terms and are the most vulnerable to exploitation.

Others with better social networks, skills and education have done better and found more remunerative work, which has resulted in the accumulation of assets. Case histories show how migration fits into the complex strategies employed by poor households to improve their standard of living. However, the



accounts given here show that it is difficult to define precisely at what level of accumulation this exit occurs because accumulation is of different kinds, ranging from not having to borrow any more, to being able to spend on marriages and health, eating better and investing in tubewells and irrigation.

Migration involves many costs and risks but this is more to do with the anti-migration policy environment rather than migration itself. Although migration is not an ideal or easy way of earning money and improving the living standard of the family, it is often the only option in places that have suffered from log jams of disadvantage such as remote rural villages in AP and MP.

Migration from RRAs needs to be recognised at the policy level as an important poverty interruptor for chronically poor people. Policy should aim to minimise the costs and risks of migration and maximise its returns. At present, migrants cannot access subsidised food through the Public Distribution System (PDS), which works on residence criteria; they cannot easily access state schools, cheap housing or government health care. There is an urgent need to reform policy in these critical areas. While investing in dryland areas should remain a priority for government, people's own efforts to access the benefits of growth in other regions should not be discouraged.

# 1. Introduction

This paper explores the relationship between migration, remoteness and chronic poverty in India. It addresses one of the key challenges for India, where growing levels of inequality and uneven growth have resulted in large sections of the population being excluded or adversely incorporated. Many of these people belong to remote rural areas and are chronically poor. They routinely migrate for work to smooth consumption, repay debts and invest in health and agriculture. Yet policy is poorly informed about migration and its relationship with chronic poverty. Furthermore, official datasets, which are the basis for policy formulation, do not capture circular and seasonal migration, both of which involve many more people than permanent migration do.<sup>1</sup> The dominant view at the policy level is that migration, whether seasonal or permanent, is an impoverishing process which worsens urban poverty and destroys families. As a result of this simplistic perception, migrants have to travel, live and work in a policy environment that aims to control migration and is reluctant to treat migrants as full citizens at their work destinations. Unless something is done urgently to address the needs of the millions of poor migrants, India's prospects for reaching the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) will be severely compromised.

The central question addressed by this paper is whether migration reduces (or exacerbates) chronic poverty in remote rural areas. Within this broad question, seven other questions are addressed by the paper. These are:

1. What is the relationship between migration from remote rural areas and chronic poverty – is migration simply a short-term coping response to near destitution and risk spreading or is it a means of accumulation and exit from poverty?
2. Where migration results in an exit from poverty, is this as a result of investment in farm and non-farm enterprises or in human capital and housing? Or is it as a result of other mechanisms?
3. Are some individuals and households in remote rural areas more likely to derive substantial benefits from migration than others – if so, what determines the differential outcomes?
4. Are some individuals and households in remote rural areas unable to migrate, if so who and why?
5. What impact does migration have on remote rural 'sending areas' – can it lead to the further impoverishment of remaining 'residual' populations? Does it lead to seasonal hardship and ill-being (e.g. with women and children having to take on drudgery-intensive agricultural tasks – the downside of improved, occasional, cash flow through remittances and investment on the migrant's return)?
6. Do chronically poor people face worse conditions of employment in 'receiving areas' (housing, pay, hours, treatment by employers and others) than others (power asymmetries, agency of the chronically poor, patronage-based relationships, adverse incorporation)?
7. What needs to be done at the policy level for poor migrants?

The paper uses empirical data to show that migration has prevented slides into extreme poverty for many households that belong to the broad category of the chronically poor. In a few cases, migration has led to the accumulation of assets, an improvement in wellbeing and a rise in social status in the community.

The paper is based on the analysis of qualitative and quantitative data from three surveys conducted in 2001-2002, 2003-2004 and 2006-2007 under the Livelihood Options Project (LOP) funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID)<sup>2</sup> and follow-up studies in 12 villages (six each) in Andhra Pradesh (AP) and Madhya Pradesh (MP). It also draws on secondary sources related to migration and poverty in India. The primary purpose of the LOP was to understand the livelihood

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<sup>1</sup> Here, circular migration is defined as a temporary move from, followed by return to, normal place of residence, for purposes of employment. Permanent migration is defined as migration of more than a year with only occasional short visits back to the village. Commuting is daily commuting for work.

<sup>2</sup> The project was led by John Farrington.

diversification strategies of the poor after economic liberalisation. Research on migration was not the primary purpose of the original study but it emerged as an important issue during its course.

Section 2 of the paper explores the relationship between migration and chronic poverty and migration and remote areas to establish that migration rates in remote rural areas (RRAs) are high, especially so among chronically poor social groups. Section 3 discusses the relationship between chronic poverty, RRAs and migration in AP and MP, the two states under study. It begins with a description of the socioeconomic context in AP and MP, which is followed by a description of the villages chosen for study. After a brief description of the methods used in data collection, the paper identifies the chronically poor in the study areas, using caste as a proxy. The paper outlines the broad characteristics of migration and how these have changed over the years. Migration data are analysed by caste and landholding to show that migration is important for the chronically poor. The uses of migration earnings and how these differ by social group are also analysed. The question of whether or not migration reduces chronic poverty is examined in detail through life histories and case studies. Section 4 contains the main conclusions and policy implications of the findings.

## **2. Relationship between migration, RRAs and chronic poverty**

This section provides an overview of existing thought and literature on the links between migration, RRAs and chronic poverty through a review of two separate but linked bodies of literature: that on RRAs and chronic poverty and that on migration and poverty.

### **2.1 What is chronic poverty?**

Much has been written about the characteristics, incidence and measurement of chronic poverty in terms of its severity and multidimensionality. The definition developed by the Chronic Poverty Research Centre (CPRC) (Hulme et al., 2001) emphasises the durational aspects of poverty, i.e. poverty that persists for at least five years, often passing from one generation to the next within a family. The chronically poor are a heterogeneous group and include those who are not able to support themselves as well as those who are economically active and remain poor. The definition of the chronically poor thus includes what others have termed as the extreme poor, destitute, ultra poor, the poorest or the poorest of the poor, while adding a time dimension.

Earlier studies on chronic poverty in India based on panel data from the village studies conducted by the International Crops Research Institute for Semi-arid Tropics (ICRISAT) in dryland areas (Gaiha, 1989; Gaiha and Imai, 2003) as well as studies based on two-period panel data (Bhide and Mehta, 2006; NCAER, 1986) used an income definition of chronic poverty rather than multiple deprivation. A recent study by Radhakrishna et al. (2007) adds nutrition to the analysis to define a household as chronically poor if its income is below the poverty line and if its children are malnourished for a prolonged period of time. The results are discussed in Section 2.2.2 below.

In this paper, we view chronic poverty in terms of multiple deprivations, such as inferior socioeconomic status and geographical location, a lack of choices and insecurity. We use qualitative assessments to gauge changing levels of poverty and vulnerability within the broad category of the chronically poor in terms of an improvement in food intake, ability to send children to school, improved housing, reduced dependency on moneylenders and investment in productive assets.

### **2.2 Remote rural areas and chronic poverty**

The chronically poor often live in RRAs, where physical isolation usually goes together with social exclusion. RRAs are spatial poverty traps that include areas rich in natural resources, such as forests, as well as low productivity areas, such as drought-prone and hilly zones. Although different types of RRAs suffer from different combinations of problems, they do share the common feature of being on the margins of political priorities and therefore merit attention as a separate geographical category. RRAs suffer from a range of governance, market and resource endowment failures that make them spatial poverty traps.

There is a rich literature on the chronic poverty and RRAs. Bird et al. (2002) summarise a number of country studies and datasets that show that the chronically poor are concentrated in RRAs. RRAs typically suffer from mutually reinforcing log jams of disadvantage (de Haan and Lipton, 1998), which constrain the development of both farm and non-farm employment opportunities. Poor agriculture, corruption, interlocked markets for labour, credit and commodities and poor service delivery characterise RRAs. Almost all social, political and economic transactions are controlled by the local elite and are weighed against the poor. Very often, the only option left for people living in RRAs is to find work outside the village.

#### **2.2.1 Remote rural areas and chronic poverty in India**

An estimated 130 million Indians live in chronic poverty (CPRC India and Braunholtz, 2007). India and China account for almost a half (49-51%) of chronic poverty worldwide and just over a half (55%) of

extreme poverty. India accounts for a higher share of global chronic poverty than China because of the higher probability of staying poor in India (McKay and Baulch, 2004).

Well-known pockets of chronic poverty in India are the central 'poverty square', comprising the contiguous forested area cutting across eastern Maharashtra, eastern Gujarat southern MP, northern AP, Orissa and Jharkhand. Large parts of the BIMARU<sup>3</sup> states are also chronically poor and there are large pockets of chronic poverty within prosperous states such as Tamil Nadu. Shah (2007) notes that, contrary to common perceptions, incidence of chronic poverty in dryland areas is lower than in higher-potential forested areas. There, transient poverty is more common. The reasons could be that people living in and around forests have limited access to natural resources which are heavily protected by the government. However, she warns that many of these areas are also heading towards chronic poverty as water tables drop and out-migration becomes difficult with worsening urban poverty.

### **2.2.2 Chronically poor people in India**

Scheduled castes (SCs) and scheduled tribes (STs) have been identified as chronically poor in Indian studies recently. Kumar (2003) suggests in a paper on poverty and politics that caste, tribe and class merge into each other in the domain of absolute as well as chronic poverty in India. He argues that, although there are numerous cases of caste-class and class-caste convergence, there is marginal difference in the caste status of the absolutely poor classes and there is very limited evidence of economic prosperity among the depressed castes and tribes, particularly in the rural domain of the Indian economy.

Analysing data from the National Family Health Surveys (NFHSs) and National Sample Surveys (NSSs), Radhakrishna et al. (2007) estimate that SC households constitute the core chronic poverty group in India because they constitute one-third of the rural chronically poor and one-fourth of the urban chronically poor; the relative size of this social group among the chronically poor is proportionally larger than its share among all households. Incidence of chronic poverty among STs using this method was unexpectedly lower than for SCs (14.0% [16.2%] in rural [urban] areas), owing to higher incidence of malnutrition among SCs. They further calculate that incidence of chronic poverty in rural regions is most prevalent among agricultural labourers (19%) and in urban areas among casual labourers (24%).

However, it is known that STs fare worst on a number of human development and economic development indicators, and are disproportionately represented among the poor. There are also other castes within the broad category of backward castes (BCs), such as those classified as extremely backward castes (EBCs) by the Bihar government. These have been poor for generations and together accounted for more than 250 million people in 2001 (167 million SCs, 86 million STs and other minorities). Official statistics show that SCs and STs are more deprived than other social groups. At the all-India level, poverty among STs was about two times higher than among non-SC/STs, the poverty gap ratio being 2.10 and 1.7 times higher among SCs compared with non-SC/ST groups. But there were variations across states. The disparity between SCs and non-SC/ST groups was particularly high in Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan, with poverty disparity ratios of 5.31, 3.98 and 3.72, respectively. Thus, poverty among SCs was about five times higher in Punjab, about four times higher in Haryana and about two and half times higher in Rajasthan than for non-SC/ST population (Thorat and Mahamallik, 2005). In certain locations, Muslims are also among the most socially and economically disadvantaged, as in Bihar (ADRI, 2006); poor Muslims could also be included among the chronically poor in India. Many RRAs are home to STs and SCs. It would therefore be safe to assume that many STs, SCs and poor minorities fall into the category of the chronically poor.

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<sup>3</sup> BIMARU is the term used for the erstwhile backward states of Bihar, MP, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. The literal translation of this term in Hindi is sick. In 2006, the Union Minister of State for Commerce, Jairam Ramesh, said that BIMARU was passé because of the progress of Rajasthan and MP on account of better governance. He coined BU, the new sobriquet for the backward states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar (The Hindu, 2006).

## **2.3 Circular migration and poverty in India**

### **2.3.1 Official statistics show low mobility, especially among the poor**

Official statistics show lower levels of mobility among SCs and STs and the poor. For instance, Dubey et al. (2006) argue on the basis of their analysis of the 1999-2000 round of the NSS that individuals from SCs and STs and those with little or no education are less likely to migrate to urban areas. In contrast, village studies of RRAs show high levels of out-migration among SCs and STs. Kundu, a leading analyst on migration and urbanisation in India, shows on the basis of NSS data that the probability of being poor is greater among non-migrants than it is among rural-urban migrants, both permanent and seasonal (Kundu, 2007). He states that:

Poverty is not the key factor behind seasonal migration in urban areas. Indeed, this mobility is not very high among the poor when compared to middle class households. The bottom 40% of the population account for only 29% of the total seasonal migrants ... Migration rates for SCs and STs are around 20.4% in rural areas in 1999-2000. The rate for the remaining segment of the population is about 25%. Among women, too, the migration rate for the non-backward classes is marginally above that of the others. One would infer that poverty and immiserisation, often linked with SC, ST and other backward castes, have not led to massive push factor migration.

### **2.3.2 Village-level studies show high levels of mobility among the chronically poor**

However, a growing number of village studies across the country, especially from RRAs, are showing the opposite: that migration rates among chronically poor groups are high.

Take the case of Bolangir district, which lies in the infamous KBK (Koraput-Bolangir-Kalahandi) zone of Orissa. This is one of the poorest regions in the country, where road connectivity is a major constraint. Rainfall is generally erratic and unevenly distributed. Irrigation facilities are inadequate. More than half of the forests of these districts are degraded and employment opportunities in the region are limited. Agriculture does not generate enough employment and nearly all young men and women in poor families migrate. Only the old and infirm are left behind. Estimates of the numbers of migrants vary but, according to one study (Wandschneider and Mishra, 2003), nearly 60,000 people migrated during the drought of 2001 from that district alone. Research conducted under the DFID-funded Western Orissa Rural Livelihoods Project (WORLP) in Nuapada and Bolangir shows a dominance of STs and SCs in migration streams from these poor districts. Household surveys were conducted in 18 villages (covering 1188 households) in Nuapada and 19 villages (covering 1086 households) in Bolangir. The poorest (i.e. those without even labour to sell) and the richest as well as the upper castes did not migrate seasonally.

Two blocks were studied in detail: Tureikela (Bolangir) and Khariar (Nuapada), which are known for their high migration rates. In Nuapada, migrants went mainly to work in construction sites or brick kilns within the state or in neighbouring AP. Rickshaw pulling and agricultural work were next in importance. But in Bolangir, more than 90% of migrants were going to work in brick kilns in AP. The WORLP research also shows that, although migration rates among women are lower than those among men, significant numbers of women do migrate. In Khariar block, for example, 60.56% of the migrants were male and 39.44% female. There were also many migrating children: boys (under the age of 14) constituted 14.89% of the total number of migrants and girls (under 14) constituted 13.47% of the total migrating individuals in sample households. A study of 60 households in Bhadrak district of Orissa by Mahapatra (1998) found that 90% of the landless households in the study sample had migrated for three to five months to Kolkata or destinations within the state. Migration was higher among the SCs and poorer households than among better-off upper castes. SCs migrated mainly to brick kilns.

Similarly, studies in the remote drought-prone and forested tribal areas of MP show high levels of out-migration among SCs and STs. The forested areas of MP have been identified as among the 15 pockets of chronic poverty in India by the NSS (Shah, 2007). An earlier study of migration in the villages studied by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) found that more than half of the households in four out of

six study villages in MP included migrant family members (Deshingkar and Start, 2003). The proportion was as high as 75% in the remotest and hilliest tribal village with infertile soils in Mandla district. Research by Mosse et al. (1997) in the tribal districts of southwest MP covered under the DFID-funded Western India Rainfed Farming Project revealed that 65% of households included migrants. A few years later, another study in the same area found that, in many villages, up to three-quarters of the population were absent between November and June (Virgo et al., 2003). A case study of a village in Betul district, also in southern MP shows high migration rates among its predominantly tribal population. Nearly all poor households with rainfed land migrated between November and June (Llewellyn, 2005). Migration to brick kilns represents the single largest contemporary migration stream originating in the study village.

Similarly high migration levels are seen in drought-prone and poorly connected villages in AP. Research on seasonal migration conducted under the AP Rural Livelihoods Project by Samal (2006) in two villages in Mahabubnagar district and two villages in Ananthapur found migration rates to be highest among SCs and STs. These two districts are among the most drought prone and poorest in the country. While the households in Mahabubnagar migrated to Mumbai and Hyderabad because of past connections and proximity to the state capital, the migrants from Ananthapur district migrated to Bangalore and Ananthapur town, which were the two nearest major urban centres. The village-level studies conducted by ICRISAT over the past three decades in two villages of Mahabubnagar district show that both seasonal and permanent migration have increased during the reference period (Deb et al., 2002).

Tribal districts in the forested parts of AP also show very high levels of migration as forest-based livelihoods become more insecure. A survey conducted under the Sustainable Tribal Development Project (STEP) project by CARE in the four tribal districts of Srikakulam, Vizianagaram, Vishakhapatnam and East Godavari shows that migration is an important livelihood strategy in the area (Murthy et al., 2004).

Although there are fewer studies on migration from Jharkhand, it features regularly in the news and in non-governmental organisation (NGO) discussions on migration and trafficking because of the high levels of mobility among its tribal population. Dayal and Karan (2003) studied 12 villages in Jharkhand, using household surveys and participatory rural appraisal (PRA) methods. They found that one-third of the households had at least one member migrating. Short-term migration was higher among poorer groups, involving over 80% of the landless and 88% of the illiterate. Furthermore, the study found that migration among SCs and STs was nearly twice the rate (15% of households) of upper castes (8%) and 3% of 'OBCs'. A recent and growing trend is the large-scale migration of tribal girls for domestic work to the capital city of New Delhi from the eastern tribal belt of Jharkhand and west Bengal.<sup>4</sup>

## **2.4 Chronic poverty and migration**

### **2.4.1 The orthodox view on poverty and migration**

The reasons underlying high mobility among the poor and the impacts on poverty have been the subjects of intense debate. A highly influential school of thought on migration and poverty in India stems from the work of Jan Breman, who traced the fate of poor migrant workers caught in the transition from pre-capitalist to capitalist modes of production. In his work on migrant sugarcane cutters from Maharashtra coming in to Gujarat (Breman, 1994), he describes long working hours in harsh conditions for low wages and the twofold exploitation that they were subjected to by recruiting agents and farmers. The exploitation of migrant workers by market intermediaries and their consequent inability to break out of poverty has been noted by many structuralist researchers (Olsen and Ramanamurthy, 2000; Reddy, 1990). They draw attention to the contracting, living and working arrangements of migrants as similar to bonded labour or trafficking (paying of advances, paying these advances back

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<sup>4</sup> Reported at the National Conference on Women and Migration organised by the Centre for Women's Development Studies and the National Commission for Women, New Delhi, 19-20 September 2007.

through work, confined movement, lack of personal freedom, often illegal work, violation of labour laws and risk of accidents, illness and sexual exploitation). This body of work has contributed important insights into the nature of exploitation in migrant markets and the areas for action at the policy level.

Neoclassical economists were equally negative in their assessment of the benefits of migration for the poor, arguing that migration contributed little to household budgets, was selective and favoured the better off and increased inequality in sending villages. An early and often quoted study by Connel et al. (1976) based on villages studied by the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) in India found that migration rates were lowest among the landless poor and remittances contributed only 2-7% of village incomes and less for poor labourers. Drawing on this work, Lipton (1980) asserted that rural–urban migration did not equalise incomes between or within regions for the following reasons (de Haan, 2000):

1. The selective nature of migration, providing higher returns to the better off and better educated, prevents equalisation within areas of origin.
2. There are costs and barriers associated with migration, including on access to information about opportunities, which tends to steer the gains of migration to the rich.
3. The absence of the most productive household members leads to a lowering of labour intensity, which is ‘socially maladaptive, especially in the medium run, while the rural work force is growing much faster than other, scarcer ... factors of production’.
4. The volume of net remittances is usually low.
5. Return migrants are likely to be the old, sick and unsuccessful, and skills brought back are unlikely to be of much help.

Indian scholars almost always emphasise the distress dimensions of migration by the poor (Murthy, 1991; Rao, 1994; Reddy, 1990; for example, write about migration for ‘survival’, identifying the main drivers as the worsening situation of dryland agriculture created by drought and crop failure). This has become the dominant school of thought in India now.

The literature on chronic poverty and migration has grown out of these research traditions. It views migration largely as a distress response to a poor agricultural base and a force that has depleted rural areas of labour, leaving behind impoverished residual populations with high dependency ratios and social stigma (see, for example, Kothari, 2002). Migration has also been viewed as a dimension of chronic poverty (Sen and Hulme, 2002), although it is not clear exactly what causality is implied (i.e. poverty drives migration or migration causes poverty or both).

#### **2.4.2 Migration as a livelihood strategy**

More recent studies have recognised migration as a routine livelihood strategy undertaken year after year and not just a response to shocks such as drought, floods and earthquakes (de Haan, 2000; Deshingkar and Start, 2003; Rogaly and Coppard, 2003). Migration can improve cash flows within households, which can be used to repay debt, purchase health care, finance marriages and other important social events and ultimately reduce poverty and vulnerability. In fact, circular migration is often linked to debt cycles and the need for money for repaying debts, covering deficits created by losses in agriculture or meeting expenditures of large magnitude on account of marriages, festivals, ceremonies, etc.

The earnings from migration can be substantial. A study by Narain et al. (2005) of Jhabua district in MP shows the importance of migration earnings for poor households. Data were collected from 550 households in 60 villages from June 2000 to May 2001. After income from agriculture, income from wage employment was found to be the largest source of income for households in all income quartiles. For the first three quartiles, the wage income came mostly from migration. Households in these quartiles earned about 65-70% of their total wage income from such seasonal migration. In contrast, households in the top quartile earned the largest share of total labour income (63%) from regular jobs in the private or public sector and only about 30% from off-village labour. In absolute terms, however, households in the top quartile still earned more from in-village employment than households in any



other quartile and more from off-village employment than households in the first and second income quartiles.

In the tribal districts of AP studied by Murthy et al. (2004), the average annual household income derived by tribals from migration (Rs1795) was comparable with earnings from cultivation (Rs1978) in 2002-2003. They found furthermore that migration contributed more to tribal household budgets than all drought relief programmes put together, including food-for-work programmes, which contributed Rs607, and also more than the collection of non-timber forest products, which contributed Rs395 (Murthy et al., 2004). In the 12 villages in Jharkhand studied by Dayal and Karan (2003), remittances accounted for 23% of the annual household income in sending households. In Mahapatra's 1998 study, on average 42% of annual household income was derived from migration. Regardless of income quintile, migrants saved around 60% of their income because they were provided with food and lodgings. For landless migrants, migration was the most important source of household income and they used the earnings to lease in land.

### **2.4.3 Migration and improved living standards**

Qualitative accounts of the impacts of migration on household and individual wellbeing and wealth vary. But on the whole, migration money can help the household to maintain or improve its food consumption and even lead to greater investment in health, education and productive assets. In Jharkhand, 98% of migrants reported an improvement in their lives because of migration (Dayal and Karan, 2003). Migrant households have a better diet and spend on average 15% more on food than non-migrating households. Roughly 13% of those owning five to 20 acres of land spent their additional income on productive uses.

Migration has enabled some poor households to preserve their wellbeing rank. Qualitative data collected by Shah and Sah (2004) in a village in Bhadwani district show that migration helped landless households to maintain their standard of living over a decade. The researchers assessed the change in wellbeing rank over 10 years and found that 55% of the original 180 households had retained their original wellbeing status (including those that were already poor), 7% had experienced an improvement and the remaining 38% had deteriorated in status. The analysis suggested that i) improvement was generally associated with access to irrigation through private sources or obtaining a salaried job; ii) deterioration owed largely to division of landholdings and, at times, to indebtedness and; iii) some households, especially the landless, could retain their wellbeing status in the better-off or medium categories owing to migration (Shah and Sah, 2004: 259).

## **2.5 Who accumulates and who copes?**

Whether or not saving and accumulation occur as a result of migration depends on the mode of recruitment, skill and wage levels and the ability to access remunerative work, which in turn depends on social networks, education and assets, location, caste and gender. In general, those who migrate through middlemen earn and save less than those who have good contacts and migrate independently. Such migrants are usually poor, uneducated and unskilled. Personal business acumen, entrepreneurial skills and confidence also matter a great deal. For example, research on seasonal migration conducted under the AP Rural Livelihoods Project by Samal (2006) in two villages in Mahabubnagar district and two villages in Ananthapur found that most households did not save much but some did accumulate wealth. One of the major factors leading to the accumulation of assets was the repetition of migration to the same destination. Long-term migration to places like Mumbai, Hyderabad and Bangalore enabled migrant households to accumulate because of the relatively higher wages and absence of middlemen. Migrants were predominantly from the lower social strata of SCs, STs and BCs (95%). They were mainly illiterate, landless labourers and marginal farmers.

The WORLP surveys found that skilled workers did particularly well in getting remunerative work in brick kilns and construction sites. While this did not mean that migration was viewed as the ideal form of employment, it was certainly seen as better paid and more secure than employment in the village.

However, many other studies emphasise the negative aspects of brick kiln work and construction labour, describing it as bonded labour, perpetuating debt and representing the worst form of distress migration. For example, Chakravorty (2004, in Srivastava, 2005) describes the process of recruitment and payment of brick kiln workers from Kalahandi, Bolangir, Koraput, Gajapati and other districts in Western Orissa who migrate to AP and other parts of Orissa through middlemen: 'The workers take advances, which are adjusted against a notional wage rate, such that when the workers return home (with small sums of cash), they are still in debt to the contractors or kiln owners, whom they have to repay the next season.' The differing accounts possibly owe to subjective assessments of the impacts on migrants and their families but also to the changing returns from migration, with wages having increased significantly recently. There have also been changes in recruitment, with the role of middlemen now much eroded.

Migration is regarded as an accumulative option by the tribals of Shivpuri district in the north of MP. A study by the Jain (2006) found that a majority of the 450,000 tribals in the area who used to be able to make a living from forests are now completely dependent on migration for their livelihoods. The tribals migrate with their families to towns and cities in Rajasthan. Only the children and the elderly are left behind. In a season, two adults from a family working together earn around Rs5700. Although expenses are very high, migration is still regarded as an accumulative option.

## **2.6 Migration and debt**

In some cases, migration reduces the need to borrow. In the village studied by Llewellyn (2005), migration to brick kilns reduced borrowing from moneylenders and reduced bonded labour. Migrant work appeals to villagers because it presents a chance to earn more money or a larger in-kind payment than they could earn in the village. Llewellyn states that: 'In a shock situation, people who previously would have had no choice but to submit to a year's bonded labour for Rs5000 can now weigh the option of soliciting an advance from a contractor and migrating instead.'

But the relationship between debt and migration is not straightforward. Some analysts have concluded that migration increases debt levels because of higher expenditures during transit and at the destination; others have argued that migration improves the creditworthiness of households and they are able to borrow more because of that (Ghate, 2005).

### 3. Migration, remoteness and chronic poverty in Andhra Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh

This section presents the primary evidence on migration, remoteness and chronic poverty based on analysis of the LOP datasets. It sets out the context within which migration occurs in the two states, followed by quantitative and qualitative analysis of migration patterns by landholding and caste, the ways in which migration money is spent and how migration has contributed to coping and accumulation strategies in poor households.

#### 3.1 Geographic and socioeconomic context

##### 3.1.1 Andhra Pradesh

AP is the poorest southern state but has a dynamic and growing information technology (IT) sector and receives a large flow of remittances from abroad, which fuel the economy. It is the fifth-largest state in India, both in terms of geographical area (276,814km<sup>2</sup>) and population (76 million), comprising 23 districts, 1105 revenue mandals,<sup>5</sup> 29,994 villages and 65,505 habitations. There is a great deal of diversity and disparity in terms of agro-ecology, irrigation, infrastructure and public and private investment. There are three broad regions which are culturally and historically distinct: Coastal Andhra, Telangana and Rayalaseema.<sup>6</sup>

Figure 1: Map of Andhra Pradesh



Source: [www.indiavisitinformation.com](http://www.indiavisitinformation.com).

AP ranks lowest among south Indian states on human development indicators as well as growth and per capita income. The state has succeeded in reducing income poverty substantially over the past 60 years, but approximately every third household still lives below the official poverty line.<sup>7</sup>

5 Mandal is an administrative tier between district and gram panchayat (village level).

6 The districts within each are: Coastal Andhra: Prakasam, Srikakulam, Vizianagaram, Krishna, West Godavari, East Godavari, Guntur, Vishakhapatnam and Nellore; Telangana: Mahabubnagar, Nalgonda, Karimnagar, Medak, Warangal, Nizamabad, Adilabad, Rangareddy, Khammam and Hyderabad; Rayalaseema: Anantapur, Kurnool, Chittoor and Cuddapah.

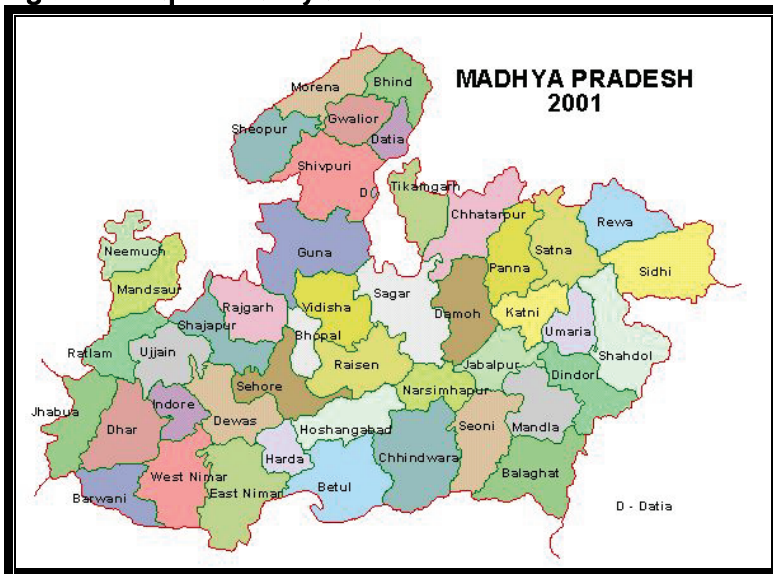
7 Planning Commission estimates show that rural poverty in AP declined from 15.92% in 1993-1994 (NSS 50th Round) to 11.05% in 1999-2000 (NSS 55th Round). However, Deaton and Drèze (2002) estimate the incidence of rural poverty in AP at 29.20% in 1993-1994 and 26.20% in 1999-2000.

Official statistics show that agriculture continues to sustain nearly 70% of the workforce. Over the years, the contribution of primary sector to the gross state domestic product (GSDP) declined from 60% in 1973-1974 to 27% in 2003-2004, which is higher than the primary sector's contribution to national gross domestic product (GDP). At the same time, the proportion of people dependent on agriculture has remained more or less at the same level. Agriculture is characterised by a large proportion of landless people as well as marginal and small farmers, who together account for 80% of operational holdings covering 43% of the cultivable land. Almost 60% of the holdings are below 1 hectare. Rural labour productivity is low and the growth of real wages has slowed down. As in the rest of India, SCs and STs are disproportionately represented among the poor.

### 3.1.2 Madhya Pradesh

After being classified as a lagging or BIMARU state for a number of years, rapid improvements have been noted recently in MP, especially in relation to agriculture and infrastructure.<sup>8</sup> The central part of MP is relatively more developed in terms of farming, mines, industries, business centres and urbanisation. This is where the non-tribal population is concentrated. MP has the largest population of STs of all states and a high proportion of SCs. Of the total 45 districts, 23 are predominantly tribal. Landlessness, nominal and unproductive landholdings and the inability to invest in farming continue to characterise the tribal population of the state. Southern parts of the state are in the list of the chronically poor regions of India (Shah, 2007). Data for 1995-1996 show that around 61% of landholdings in the state belong to marginal and small farmers.<sup>9</sup> The share of marginal and small farmers in the total landholding area and the number of holdings in the state increased from 9.6% in 1970-1971 to 21.5% in 1995-1996, an increase of 75% in terms of land under small and marginal farmers.

**Figure 2: Map of Madhya Pradesh**



Source: [www.indiavisitinformation.com](http://www.indiavisitinformation.com).

Official statistics suggest that employment in Madhya Pradesh is largely unorganised, rural and non-industrial in nature. According to the NSS, nearly 75% of rural workers depended on agriculture in 1999-2000. But agriculture accounts for only 35% of GDP. Casual labour forms a substantial part of the total labour force and has been growing: the proportion of workers who were casual increased from 32% for

<sup>8</sup> A recent India Today survey called The State of the States identifies MP, Uttar Pradesh and Orissa as the fastest movers, i.e. those where the most rapid improvement has been seen over the past year in certain areas. MP was the fastest mover in - agriculture (area under cash crops, farm GDP divided by rural population, per capita farm power consumption, farm loans, food grain productivity, % of irrigated area) and infrastructure (% of households with electricity, liquefied petroleum gas (LPG), % villages with pucca [concrete] roads, per capita road length, bank branches, density of post offices and television). Other states, such as Bihar, Assam and Jharkhand, have not performed that well. <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/>.  
<sup>9</sup> <http://www.empowerpoor.com/background.asp?report=166>.

males and 38% for females in 1993-1994 to 37% for males and 44% for females in 1999-2000. There has been an increase in the share of marginal and small farmers in area and number of holdings. Around 61% of landholdings belonged to marginal and small farmers in 1995-1996 (Government of MP, 2002) who are under-employed and work as labourers to supplement their incomes from farming. According to the 2001 Census, 28.7% of the workers in the state are agricultural labourers and most of them are concentrated in the southern tribal and forested districts. The Bundelkhand belt, which includes Jhabua, has fewer agricultural workers. The vast majority of the workforce (around 94% and including agricultural labour, construction labour and labour in traditional leather tanning, forestry, fishing, bidi rolling, household industry, village artisans and urban informal workers) is poor and in the unorganised sector.

### 3.2 Methodology

In the LOP, three districts were covered, representing three diverse regions in each state. In AP, these were Medak district in the Telangana region, Chittoor district in the Rayalseema region and Krishna district in Coastal AP. In MP, the districts and regions covered were Ujjain in Malwa, Tikamgarh in Bundelkhand and Mandla in Mahakoshal. Two villages were selected from each district, one relatively remote and the other well connected (see Table 1).

**Table 1: Study districts and villages**

<i>Andhra Pradesh</i>		
<i>Krishna (Coastal Andhra)</i>	<i>Chittoor (Rayalseema)</i>	<i>Medak (Telangana)</i>
<b>KO (well connected)</b> <b>KA (remote)</b>	<b>OP (well connected)</b> <b>VP (remote)</b>	<b>GU (well connected)</b> <b>MD (remote)</b>
Agricultural prosperous, canal irrigated, paddy, pulses, sugarcane <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mixed caste but forward caste dominated</li> <li>Polarised land distribution</li> </ul>	Semi-arid, tank and tubewell irrigated, well connected with large cities, groundnut, paddy, mulberry, tomato <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BCs emerged as powerful in remote village recently</li> <li>More equitable landholdings</li> </ul>	<i>Semi-arid, socially backward, mainly tank irrigated or rainfed agriculture, sorghum, paddy, cotton, maize</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Traditional caste hierarchy</i></li> <li><i>Land distribution still along feudal lines in remote village</i></li> </ul>
<i>Madhya Pradesh</i>		
<i>Ujjain (Malwa)</i>	<i>Tikamgarh (Bundelkhand)</i>	<i>Mandla (Mahakoshal)</i>
<b>PR (well connected)</b> <b>LJ (remote)</b>	<b>SM (well connected)</b> <b>MB (remote)</b>	<b>GG (well connected)</b> <b>PT (remote)</b>
<i>Agricultural prosperous. Deep black cotton soils, semi-arid, tubewell irrigated, soybean and wheat</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Mixed caste</i></li> <li><i>Polarised land distribution</i></li> </ul>	<i>Average agricultural development, medium to shallow black soils, well and tank irrigation, soybean, pulses, rice and wheat</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Caste hierarchies from feudal legacy</i></li> <li><i>Polarised land distribution</i></li> </ul>	<i>Hilly, forested, often infertile shallow black soils, limited irrigation and limited spread of intensive agriculture, rice and pulses</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Large number of tribals in remote village</i></li> <li><i>More equitable landholdings</i></li> </ul>

Each round involved more than one survey. The 2001/02 round began with a census covering all the households in all six villages (4647 households in AP and 1297 households in MP). The census collected data on basic household characteristics on the household structure, education, age, gender, occupations, asset ownership and whether or not the household had a migrant. This was followed by two seasonal surveys in the kharif (July-October monsoon) and rabi (December-April) seasons, where data on household income and expenditure for that season and debt levels were collected. Each seasonal survey covered a smaller stratified sample of 40-80 households (depending on the size of the village). Stratification was done by landholding and caste. The primary purpose of the 2001/02 round was to collect data on livelihood diversification and data on migration were minimal.

The next round, in 2003/04, was undertaken with the specific purpose of collecting more detailed data on patterns of migration, livestock keeping and land ownership and leasing. Three surveys with

different numbers of rounds and sample sizes. Another two resurveys were done in 2003/04 and 2006/07, respectively. While the 2003 resurvey covered all six villages as before, the last round covered only five because the richest villages, namely KA in Andhra Pradesh and PR in Madhya Pradesh, had very low migration rates.

During each round, key informant interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted at the same time as the questionnaire survey. Key informants included migrant labourers, their family members, sarpanch (head of local government), members of the gram panchayat, village- and mandal-level government officials, labour recruiting agents (mestris), district-level officials, donor-funded livelihood projects, the police and NGOs. FGDs were held with women and men in each village and each hamlet within the villages.

### **3.3 Chronic poverty and mobility**

#### **3.3.1 Who are the chronically poor in the study villages?**

The study villages in AP are numerically dominated by castes belonging to the broad category of BC. Next are castes within the forward castes (FC), also known as the open category (OC) or general category, which includes most upper castes. The SCs and STs are next in importance. The state-wide average for STs is roughly 6%, well below that for MP.

The Mala and Madiga (both SCs) together account for 23% of the landless population. It is notable that large farmers nearly always belong to the BC or FC castes (Reddy, Gowda, Yadava, Kshatriya, Brahman or Kamma). On the other hand, a number of SCs and STs have tended to remain poor or very poor (Datta and Sharma, 2000; Kozel and Parker, 2001; Lanjouw and Stern, 1991). A similar situation prevails in the study villages in MP. While FCs and BCs have diversified successfully into private enterprise, government jobs and the professions, SCs and STs have tended to remain poor. We therefore consider SC and ST as being synonymous with being chronically poor in the study villages.

Among the broad category of chronically poor people, those who face downward slides into extreme poverty are:

- Those with a chronically ill person in the family, where spending on health is constant and relatively high;
- Those who have had a health-related emergency (surgery, accident, major illness), which has required heavy spending and/or borrowing depleting savings and assets;
- Those who have spent beyond their means on daughters' marriages (dowry, wedding, travel);
- Those who have lost a breadwinner;
- Those who do not have an adult male in the household;
- Female-headed or female-maintained households;
- Traditional service providers, whose services are now obsolete and/or who are unable to modernise;
- Those who have lost access to an essential natural resource because of changes in state policy, deterioration of common property resources or displacement.

#### **3.3.2 Mobility and poverty: Migration is widespread and increasing**

The first survey (2001/02) found migrants in all villages studied but the magnitude of migration varied a great deal. In AP, the well-connected villages of GU and OP had only 4% and 9% of their households migrating, respectively (but had a larger number of commuters); less well-connected villages had a larger proportion of households with at least one migrant. In VP, the remote village in Chittoor, this proportion was 33%; in MD, the remote village in Medak district, it was 78% (Table 2). A comparison of the last two rounds shows that the number of households with at least one person working outside the village had increased from 41% in 2003/04 to 54% in 2006/07; the average annual increase is more than 3.3% (Table 3). Several households had more than one person migrating or commuting.

**Table 2: Incidence of migration in AP villages, 2001/02**

Village	Census		Sample	
	Total no. of households	% of households with at least one member migrating	Total no. of households	% of households with at least one member migrating
OP	214	9	40	10
VP*	553	33	60	29
KO	1429	10	80	6
KA*	464	15	60	17
GU	1560	4	80	4
MD*	427	78	40	75
Total	4647	17	360	19
		Chi <sup>2</sup> 5df =1433***		Chi <sup>2</sup> 5df =107***

Note: \* Poorly connected villages; other villages are well connected.

Source: Household Census, AP 2001/02.

**Table 3: Frequency and percentage distribution of households in AP with at least one person working outside the village (migrants and commuters)**

	Village	No.			%		
		Yes	No	Total	Yes	No	Total
<b>2006/07</b>	OP	25	15	40	62.5	37.5	100.0
	VP	33	27	60	55.0	45.0	100.0
	KO	38	42	80	47.5	52.5	100.0
	GU	38	42	80	47.5	52.5	100.0
	MD	29	11	40	72.5	27.5	100.0
	<b>Total AP</b>	<b>163</b>	<b>137</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>54.3</b>	<b>45.7</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>2003/04</b>	OP	15	25	40	37.5	62.5	100.0
	VP	21	39	60	35.0	65.0	100.0
	KO	26	54	80	32.5	67.5	100.0
	GU	28	52	80	35.0	65.0	100.0
	MD	33	7	40	82.5	17.5	100.0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>177</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>41.0</b>	<b>59.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Migration rates in MP have been consistently higher than in AP. The census from the first survey (2001/02) showed that more than half the households in four out of six study villages in MP had at least one person who was a temporary migrant (Table 4). The proportion was as high as 75% in the remotest and hilliest tribal village (PT) with infertile soils. Data for the next round consisted of 108 migrants and commuters drawn from a sample of 302 households, showing that the proportion of households with at least one person working outside the village was 36% in 2003/04. This included circular migrants, commuters and permanent migrants. The last round included only five villages and, comparing the situation in these five villages in 2003/04 and 2006/07 it is seen that the proportion of households with at least one person outside the village had increased to 52% by 2006/07 from 42% in 2003/04 (Table 5). Household-level data do not provide a complete picture of mobility. Data for individuals (see Table 6) show that, while the number of households with migrants and commuters had increased from 106 to 136 between the last two rounds, the total number of individuals had increased from 169 in 2003/04 to 232 in 2006/07.

**Table 4: Mobility patterns in MP in 2001/02**

District	Village	Temporary migration	Commuting	Permanent migration
Ujjain	PR semi-arid, tubewells (well connected)	59	16	5
	LJ semi-arid, dry (remote)	50	6	3
Mandla	GG	43	10	10
	PT forested (remote)	75	13	5
Tikamgarh	SM	21	8	12
	MB	64	10	5
	<b>Overall</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>7</b>

**Table 5: Frequency and percentage distribution of households in MP with at least one person working outside the village, 2003/04 and 2006/07**

		No.			%		
		Yes	No	Total	Yes	No	Total
2006/07	LJ (poorly connected)	51	13	64	79.7	20.3	100.0
	GG (well connected)	27	13	40	67.5	32.5	100.0
	PT (poorly connected)	23	17	40	57.5	42.5	100.0
	SM (well connected)	18	60	78	23.1	76.9	100.0
	MB (poorly connected)	17	25	42	40.5	59.5	100.0
	<b>Total</b>		<b>136</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>264</b>	<b>51.5</b>	<b>48.5</b>
2003/04	LJ (poorly connected)	18	46	64	28.1	71.9	100.0
	GG (well connected)	24	16	40	60.0	40.0	100.0
	PT (poorly connected)	22	18	40	55.0	45.0	100.0
	SM (well connected)	16	62	78	20.5	79.5	100.0
	MB (poorly connected)	26	16	42	61.9	38.1	100.0
	<b>Total</b>		<b>106</b>	<b>158</b>	<b>264</b>	<b>40.2</b>	<b>59.8</b>

### 3.3.3 Commuting is also on the rise

There was more than a doubling in the proportion of commuters in AP between the last two surveys (Table 7). This dramatic change can be explained by the growing road network, improved communications and rapid rate of urbanisation in AP, especially the growth of small towns. Data on the year of first migration and commuting (not shown in a table) corroborate the view that mobility has increased sharply over the past five years or so. The findings show that for 55.4% of commuters the year of first commuting/migration fell between 2000 and 2006 and for 40.3% of commuters the first year of commuting/migration fell between 2003 and 2006.

**Table 6: Frequency and percentage of different types of mobility in MP, 2003/04 and 2006/07**

	2003/04		2006/07	
	No.	%	No.	%
Commuters	44	26.0	53	22.8
Circular migrants	122	72.2	177	76.3
Permanent migrants	3	1.8	2	0.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>169</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>232</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table 7: Frequency and percentage of different types of mobility in AP, 2003/04 and 2006/07**

	2003/04		2006/07	
	No.	%	No.	%
Commuters	47	22.8	119	44.4
Circular migrants	100	48.5	83	31.0
Permanent migrants	59	28.6	66	24.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>206</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>268</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Commuting was undertaken for work of all kinds – formal sector as well as informal skilled and unskilled work, farm and non-farm work. Although the absolute number of commuters increased, their relative proportion fell because of a greater increase in the number of circular migrants. A significant proportion of commuters travelled to nearby towns. Permanent migration rates were lower than other kinds of mobility and there were just two cases in 2006/07. The explanation lies in the fact that MP is comparatively backward with a very poor road network (it is said that this was one of the reasons for the defeat of the previous government) and has relatively lower levels of urbanisation. Commuting is therefore difficult and people tend to migrate on a short-term basis to large cities within the state and outside.



### 3.3.4 Migration highest among the chronically poor

Simple cross tabulation of the data from the 2006/07 round shows the distribution of mobile workers by caste categories in AP (Table 8) and MP (Table 9). Circular migration is the most important option for the STs and this establishes a clear link between migration and chronically poor people. Interestingly, there are hardly any permanent migrants among the STs, probably because of their poorer levels of skills/education and also lack of social networks at destination. SCs in AP are marginally ahead of STs in this respect but they commute for low-paid agriculture labour work. The distribution of the mobility streams among the OBCs shows a more balanced spread, indicating their intermediate level in the rural hierarchy. In line with the broad state-level trend in AP, the largest proportion of mobile workers among the upper castes is of permanent migrants.

**Table 8: Distribution of commuters and migrants by caste and status of mobility in AP, 2006/07**

		Commuter	Circular migrant	Permanent migrant	Total
ST	No.	3	12	0	15
	Row %	20.0	80.0	.0	100.0
SC	No.	43	12	8	63
	Row %	68.3	19.0	12.7	100.0
BC	No.	57	52	32	141
	Row %	40.4	36.9	22.7	100.0
OC	No.	16	7	26	49
	Row %	32.7	14.3	53.1	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>119</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>268</b>
	<b>Row %</b>	<b>44.4</b>	<b>31.0</b>	<b>24.6</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table 9: Distribution of commuters and migrants by caste and status of mobility in MP, 2006/07**

		Commuter	Circular migrant	Permanent migrant	Total
ST	No.	4	35	1	40
	Row %	10.0	87.5	2.5	100.0
	Column %	7.5	19.8	50.0	17.2
SC	No.	15	45	1	61
	%	24.6	73.8	1.6	100.0
	Column %	28.3	25.4	50.0	26.3
BC	No.	31	94	0	125
	%	24.8	75.2	.0	100.0
	Column %	58.5	53.1	.0	53.9
OC	No.	3	3	0	6
	%	50.0	50.0	.0	100.0
	Column %	5.7	1.7	.0	2.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>177</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>232</b>
	<b>Row %</b>	<b>22.8</b>	<b>76.3</b>	<b>.9</b>	<b>100.0</b>
	<b>Column %</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Logistic regression analysis was carried out for commuters and circular migrants and permanent migrants with 2001/02 and 2003/04 data. In AP (Table 10), commuting from the villages KO (well connected) and MD (remote), circular migration from KO and permanent migration from MD were significant in the analysis; the probability of commuting was more than eight times higher for a person belonging to a household in KO than households in other villages, but the probability was about 90% less for a person in a household belonging to the village MD than other villages, on average. In other words, belonging to a well-connected village in a prosperous region increased the likelihood of commuting and belonging to a remote village in a poor region decreased it.<sup>10</sup> In MP, significant predictors are landholding, stock of livestock, caste and gender of commuters (Tables 11). Other predictors are not statistically significant. An odds ratio of greater than one means that the probability of daily commuting increases and less than one means that it decreases. The probability of commuting is thus seen to decrease significantly with the increase in land and livestock holding. Households with

<sup>10</sup> Permanent migration was almost absent in MP.

an additional acre of land per adult member have about 90% less probability of commuting than households with an average level of holding. Women's probability of commuting was more than four times higher than that of males. Village-specific effects were not significant for commuters<sup>11</sup> but PT had a significantly higher likelihood of migration.

**Table 10: Logistic regression analysis determining the effects of the factors associated with daily commuting decision, AP**

Dependent variable: daily commuters (yes= 1)	B (coefficient)	Sig.	Odds ratio =Exp(B)
<b>Independent variables</b>			
Own land (acres) per adult equivalent	-0.332	0.38	0.72
Number of adults in the household	0.137	0.39	1.15
Education of head: <i>Primary=1</i>	-0.267	0.63	0.77
<i>Secondary=1</i>	-0.583	0.40	0.56
Age of household head (yrs)	0.025	0.14	1.03
Log of average stock of livestock unit per adult equivalent	-0.261	0.10	0.77
Log of value of agricultural assets in household (Rs)	-0.058	0.39	0.94
Log of value of non-agricultural assets in household (Rs)	0.098	0.12	1.10
Village level income inequality between households	0.306	0.00	1.36
Dummy variable for head has off farm job: 1 for yes	0.357	0.53	1.43
Schedule caste = 1	-0.560	0.36	0.57
Backward caste = 1	-0.258	0.62	0.77
Household risks arisen from crop failure=1	-2.390	0.03	0.09
Female headed household=1	0.420	0.50	1.52
Gender of migrants in household: female=1	2.031	0.00	7.62
Village dummy, VP = 1	-0.628	0.50	0.53
Village dummy, KO = 1	2.083	0.01	8.03
Village dummy, MD=1	-2.442	0.03	0.09
Dummy variable: income quintile 2 = 1	0.777	0.22	2.18
Dummy variable: income quintile 3 = 1	0.872	0.16	2.39
Dummy variable: income quintile 4 = 1	-0.328	0.65	0.72
Dummy variable: income quintile 5 = 1	-0.205	0.79	0.81
Dummy variable: sub-marginal = 1	-1.077	0.28	0.34
Dummy variable: medium-marginal = 1	0.025	0.98	1.03
Dummy variable: marginal = 1	1.222	0.04	3.39
Dummy variable: small = 1	0.433	0.59	1.54
Dummy variable: semi-medium = 1	-1.602	0.23	0.20
Constant	-6.204	0.00	0.00

*Note:* Omnibus test Chi Square = 96.90, DF=27, Sig. = .000; Nagelkerke R<sup>2</sup> = 0.42; reference group for the head of the family is 'no education', for caste group is 'other caste', for village 'OP and GU', for income quintile is 'the poorest' and for landholding group is 'landless'.

<sup>11</sup> The significance level depended on the base village chosen. The villages GG and PT showed significantly higher probabilities of commuting when LJ was considered the base. GG was chosen as the base because this was the only village with no commuters in the general caste category and it was felt that it might pick up the effect of the OC, which is the base chose for the caste category.

**Table 11: Logistic regression analysis determining the effects of the factors associated with daily commuting decision, MP**

Dependent variable: Daily commuters (yes= 1)	B (coefficient)	Sig.	Odds ratio =Exp(B)
<b>Independent variables</b>			
Own land (acres) per adult equivalent	-4.488	0.01	0.01
Number of adults in the household	-0.274	0.22	0.76
Education of household (average years of schooling)	0.084	0.37	1.09
Age of household head (yrs)	0.014	0.46	1.01
Stock of livestock unit	-0.466	0.05	0.63
Log of value of agricultural assets in household (Rs)	-0.149	0.19	0.86
Log of value of non-agricultural assets in household (Rs)	0.011	0.89	1.01
Village level income inequality between households	-0.351	0.42	0.70
Dummy variable for head has off farm job: 1 for yes	-0.282	0.65	0.75
Schedule tribe (ST) = 1	4.271	0.00	71.62
Backward caste (BC) = 1	3.171	0.01	23.82
Female headed household=1	1.187	0.44	3.28
Gender of migrants in household: female=1	1.437	0.01	4.21
Village dummy, LJ = 1	0.558	0.47	1.75
Village dummy, PT = 1	0.614	0.59	1.85
Dummy variable: income quintile 2 = 1	0.848	0.27	2.33
Dummy variable: income quintile 3 = 1	-0.087	0.91	0.92
Dummy variable: income quintile 4 = 1	-0.432	0.64	0.65
Dummy variable: income quintile 5 = 1	0.208	0.82	1.23
Dummy variable: sub-marginal = 1	-0.916	0.29	0.40
Dummy variable: medium-marginal = 1	0.224	0.79	1.25
Dummy variable: marginal = 1	0.651	0.51	1.92
Dummy variable: small = 1	1.280	0.35	3.60
Dummy variable: medium = 1	6.360	0.02	577.96
Constant	-3.566	0.03	0.03

*Note:* Omnibus test Chi Square = 106.86, DF=24, Sig. = .000; Nagelkerke R<sup>2</sup> = 0.52; reference group for caste group is 'other caste', for village is 'GG', for income quintile is 'the poorest' and for landholding group is 'landless'.

### 3.4 Relationship between migration, assets and remoteness

The results for circular migration were the exact opposite, i.e. much higher in remote villages. The probability of circular migration was more than five times higher for a person in a household belonging to the remote village of MD compared with other villages and about 90% less for a person in households belonging to the well-connected village of KO than other villages (Table 12).

**Table 12: Logistic regression analysis determining the effects of the factors associated with circular migration decision, AP**

Dependent variable: Temporary migration (yes= 1)	B (coefficient)	Sig.	Odds ratio =Exp(B)
<b>Independent variables</b>			
Own land (acres) per adult equivalent	-0.106	0.77	0.90
Number of adults in the household	0.285	0.04	1.33
Education of head: <i>Primary=1</i>	0.364	0.49	1.44
<i>Secondary=1</i>	-0.055	0.93	0.95
Age of household head (yrs)	-0.015	0.36	0.99
Log of average stock of livestock unit per adult equivalent	-0.269	0.07	0.76
Log of value of agricultural assets in household (Rs)	-0.063	0.30	0.94
Log of value of non-agricultural assets in household (Rs)	-0.032	0.60	0.97
Village level income inequality between households	-0.695	0.00	0.50
Dummy variable for head has off farm job: 1 for yes	-0.649	0.23	0.52
Schedule tribe=1	4.532	0.00	92.93
Schedule caste = 1	1.961	0.02	7.11
Backward caste = 1	2.032	0.00	7.63
Household risks arisen from crop failure=1	0.389	0.45	1.48
Female headed household=1	-1.835	0.05	0.16
Gender of migrants in household: female=1	3.757	0.00	42.84
Village dummy, VP = 1	0.119	0.85	1.13
Village dummy, KO = 1	-2.420	0.02	0.09
Village dummy, KA = 1	-0.060	0.95	0.94
Village dummy, MD=1	0.368	0.58	1.45
Dummy variable: income quintile 2 = 1	0.341	0.57	1.41
Dummy variable: income quintile 3 = 1	0.191	0.76	1.21
Dummy variable: income quintile 4 = 1	0.772	0.28	2.16
Dummy variable: income quintile 5 = 1	0.324	0.71	1.38
Dummy variable: sub-marginal = 1	-0.466	0.53	0.63
Dummy variable: medium-marginal = 1	0.469	0.47	1.60
Dummy variable: marginal = 1	1.567	0.02	4.79
Dummy variable: small = 1	0.056	0.94	1.06
Dummy variable: semi-medium = 1	-0.306	0.78	0.74
Constant	-2.493	0.11	0.08

*Note:* Omnibus test Chi Square = 265.31, DF=29, Sig. .000; Nagelkerke R<sup>2</sup> = 0.70; reference group for the head of the family is 'no education', for caste group is 'other caste', for village 'OP and GU', for income quintile is 'the poorest' and for landholding group is 'landless'.

Owing to diversities in the pattern of daily commuting and circular migration in relation to landholding, caste, income quintile, etc., multivariate logistic regression analysis was carried out separately for these two different types of mobility. The variables included in the models were mostly household specific owing to absence of individual specific human capital variables such as education, age and occupation for non-migrant individuals. The estimates fit the data significantly for all models, as shown by the goodness-of-fit Chi-square test.

Land, livestock and agricultural assets are important factors reducing circular migration in MP (Table 13). Livestock reduces the probability of both commuting and circular migration. Village-level income inequality is associated negatively with the probability of seasonal migration. This may indicate availability of local employment. The probability of temporary migration of SCs is significantly higher than the general upper category (more than seven times higher). The probability of temporary migration by marginal to medium farms is higher than for the landless.

**Table 13: Logistic regression analysis determining the effects of the factors associated with circular migration decision, MP**

Dependent variable: Temporary migration (yes= 1)	B (coefficient)	Sig.	Odds ratio =Exp(B)
<b>Independent variables</b>			
Own land (acres) per adult equivalent	-0.856	0.08	0.42
Number of adults in the household	-0.044	0.77	0.96
Education of household (average years of schooling)	0.004	0.77	1.00
Age of household head (yrs)	-0.010	0.42	0.99
Stock of livestock unit	-0.272	0.02	0.76
Log of value of agricultural assets in household (Rs)	-0.114	0.06	0.89
Log of value of non-agricultural assets in household (Rs)	-0.086	0.16	0.92
Village level income inequality between households	-3.513	0.01	0.03
Dummy variable for head has off farm job: 1 for yes	0.147	0.72	1.16
Schedule tribe (ST) = 1	-0.557	0.32	0.57
Schedule caste (SC) = 1	2.002	0.00	7.40
Gender of migrants in household: female=1	1.099	0.02	3.00
Village dummy, GG = 1	1.288	0.12	3.63
Village dummy, PT = 1	10.399	0.00	32828.55
Village dummy, SM = 1	5.285	0.01	197.32
Village dummy, MB =1	0.381	0.68	1.46
Dummy variable: income quintile 2 = 1	-0.406	0.43	0.67
Dummy variable: income quintile 3 = 1	0.166	0.73	1.18
Dummy variable: income quintile 4 = 1	0.323	0.55	1.38
Dummy variable: income quintile 5 = 1	0.274	0.64	1.32
Dummy variable: sub-marginal = 1	1.865	0.01	6.45
Dummy variable: medium-marginal = 1	0.872	0.12	2.39
Dummy variable: marginal = 1	1.672	0.01	5.32
Dummy variable: small = 1	0.728	0.29	2.07
Dummy variable: semi-medium = 1	2.549	0.01	12.79
Dummy variable: medium = 1	3.461	0.01	31.84
Constant	2.484	0.16	11.99

*Note:* Omnibus test Chi Square = 141.61, DF=26, Sig. .000; Nagelkerke R<sup>2</sup> = 0.49; reference group for caste group is 'other caste', for village 'LJ', for income quintile is 'the poorest' and for landholding group is 'landless'.

It should be recognised that the data used for the analysis here are drawn from a sample of 302 households, which is not very large; commuters and circular migrants belonged to an even smaller number of households. The number of observations in some of the groups is very small. For example, there were only three commuters in the village PT, two of them SC and the other ST. Although the coefficients of logistic regression analysis except the constant term are not normally affected by unequal sampling proportions, group specific generalisation cannot be made with the use of such small numbers. Unfortunately, individual identities were not recorded in 2003/04 data to combine with 2006/07 data which has individual identities. A few more panels are necessary to increase the number of observations in each group longitudinally; this could allow us to make more accurate generalisations regarding groups based on caste, landholding, income group, etc. It is also necessary to record individual characteristics such as age, education, skill, occupation, etc., so that they are comparable.

### **3.5 How important is migration income for the chronically poor?**

Circular migration earnings account for a higher proportion of household income among the lower castes and tribes, namely the SC, BC and ST (in households with one person working outside the village). STs earned over 27% of their annual household income from migration in MP (74% in AP) (see Tables 14 and 15). For STs in MP, local labouring, either on farm or off-farm, was the second most important source of income; only 3% was derived from cultivation owing to their poorer asset base. However, they derived considerably more (8%) from forest products and common property resources,

thereby confirming dependence of the poor on the commons. In the case of SCs, migration accounted for almost 47% of household income in MP but SCs in AP were more heavily dependent on commuting, deriving as much as 38% from work in nearby towns and villages. The upper castes also get a large proportion of their income from commuting but, in contrast with the SCs, they are mostly into better-paying non-farm activities such as self-employment and white collar jobs. This suggests that STs in AP are more dependent on migration than commuting because they are not able to find employment in nearby towns and villages. The OCs derived the least income from circular migration (19%) in MP (22% in AP) as cultivation and commuting were more important for them.

Remittances from permanent migration accounted for 15% of the income of OCs and 9% in the case of SCs, but much less for other groups. Key informant interviews showed that many OC families in Coastal Andhra have migrants in big cities in the state and elsewhere in India, and even other countries such as the US. While salaried jobs accounted for a significant proportion of incomes in MP, these seemed to be less important in AP, accounting for only 2-3% among the SC, BC and OC. The OCs drew as much as 40% of their income from cultivation, much higher than any other group. For the STs, this accounted for only 7% of net annual income, and for SCs and BCs 12% and 18%, respectively. STs appear least diversified and heavily dependent on migration, whereas other groups are more diversified and earn from a variety of sources. The OCs appear to have a strong agricultural base and diversify through commuting to maximise their gains from options nearby. The OCs receive remittances mostly from skilled and/or white collar and self-employed migrants. By contrast, SC and BC families receive remittances mostly from unskilled or semi-skilled migrants.

**Table 14: Proportionate shares of household net income (gross income – enterprise cost) from migration and other sources by caste category, MP 2006/07 in households with one person working outside the village**

	% share of net annual income			
	ST	SC	BC	OC
Circular migration	27.3	46.8	27.8	19.1
Commuting	2.5	4.7	5.1	22.6
Remittance			0.3	
Local non-farm wage labour	19.9	2.5	13.9	
Local agricultural labour	19.2	9.8	3.0	13.5
Salary	13.8	8.2	12.3	12.4
Forest product related and common property resources	8.9		2.0	
Cultivation	3.1	4.7	21.7	25.5
Service, craft and trade related	2.9	2.8	6.3	6.9
Other elementary	1.7	17.7	5.0	
Unclassified work	0.4	0.7	0.3	
Livestock	0.3		1.1	
Sharecropping/leasing		2.1	0.9	
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 15: Proportionate shares of household net income (gross income – enterprise cost) from migration and other sources by caste category, AP 2006/07 in households with one person working outside the village**

	% share of net annual income			
	ST	SC	BC	OC
Commuting	11.0	37.7	22.8	26.7
Circular migration	74.1	13.4	28.5	3.4
Remittance		8.5	3.0	14.7
Salary		2.7	2.9	3.1
Service, craft and trade related		2.7	8.6	7.2
Cultivation	7.4	11.9	18.1	39.8
Agricultural labour	6.0	20.1	8.8	1.2
Livestock		3.1	4.0	1.6
Sharecropping/leasing			2.4	2.2
Forest product related and common property resources				
Construction work unskilled				
Non-farm wage labour			0.9	
Other elementary	1.5			
Unclassified work				
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

### 3.6 Migration for coping and accumulation

FGDs indicated that migration had increased over the years, especially after economic liberalisation in the early 1990s. However, the beginnings and historical evolution of migration streams and patterns varied a great deal. For example, migration to the sugar mills of AP began from MD (remote village in Medak) around 37 years ago when an agent came to the village looking for workers to cut the cane. Sugarcane harvesting work is not a major migration stream from MD. Migration from PT (remote village in Mandla district, MP) to the irrigated villages in neighbouring districts began much earlier, when agents of the farmers came looking for tribal workers. In both of these examples, migration happened mainly because there was little work in the villages and the people were poor and were prepared to work for very little in difficult conditions. This continues to be a major factor in migrant worker employment – employers will look for labourers who will make a pliable labour force and send their agents out scouting for them to known areas of chronic poverty such as remote tribal villages. However, other streams have evolved owing to specific skills of workers, as in the case of the stone workers from AP who belong to the caste of Vaddi.

Although there were fluctuations in the numbers migrating from year to year depending on the duration and severity of drought, the availability of work through public works programmes and watershed development programmes, the general trend was increasing mobility. Migration was undertaken year after year and had become a part of the livelihood strategies pursued by the poor. Families with migrants are usually large and migration is part of the labour allocation strategy, where one adult male remains in the village to look after the family farm or business. In households where there are grown-up sons, a kind of relay migration takes place, where the sons begin to migrate when they are around 18. The father may stop migrating at this point and stay at home to manage the farm and look after the son's children.

#### 3.6.1 Migration as a coping strategy

For many chronically poor people with few assets, education or social connection, migration has become an important way of coping with seasonal fluctuations in income. Where agents or middlemen (sometimes women) are involved, earnings can be limited and working and living conditions can be basic. Olsen and Ramanamurthy (2000) document the variety of insidious ways in which migrant construction workers are exploited by mestris or recruiting agents, ranging from trapping them in bonded labour by paying less than subsistence level, extracting overtime and child labour and using

caste-based and patriarchal modes of oppression to maintain exploitative labour relations. The system survives because mestris are seen as those who save the labourer in distress by offering work when otherwise they might starve. Some lower-caste people who serve the landlords and employers think they will be rewarded with patronage during crises. This patronage may consist only of loans, which further bind the worker and the worker's family (Box 1).

### **Box 1: Coping through seasonal migration for unskilled work**

Malti Bai Bairagi is a 31-year-old landless widow who combines local and migratory labouring to make a living. She migrates twice a year for harvesting work on irrigated farms in a neighbouring district. This has helped her to cope since the death of her husband, as she was thrown out of her in-laws house and had no means of survival. She lives in a one-room mud house with her school-going son. She is paid in kind (cooked food and grain) and comes home with roughly 100kg of wheat, 5kg gram and lentils and 80kg of paddy for two months of work. At other times, she works in stone quarries as an unskilled labourer. The quarries are about 80km from her village. She migrates for one to two months a year and earns Rs30 a day. She migrates in a group with other people from the village under a recruiting agent. The agent is well known and pays all the travelling expenses. She tries to do some farm work locally but it is not always available and it is not an important source of income for her. Apart from that, she earns around Rs1000 a year from tendu leaf collection in the forests near her village in the months of May and June. She says she has no hopes of a better future but manages to make ends meet and educate her son.

*Source:* Key informant interview, village PT.

This kind of migration rarely results in the accumulation of assets. Such migrants often migrate through an agent who takes a heavy cut of their earnings, and this is one of the reasons for them not being able to break out of poverty. However, the importance of such migration should not be underestimated, because in the absence of local opportunities for employment and enterprise, it provides earnings which prevent downward slides into poverty. Without this option, the poor would be dependent on local moneylenders and face starvation. In fact, this is what the poor say – migration is not easy or an ideal way of earning money but it saves them from starving to death and begging for food.

### **3.6.2 Migration as an accumulative strategy**

For those with better social networks, marketable skills and more education and/or assets, migration has become an accumulative strategy. Take the case of the Vaddi caste from AP. The Vaddi, also known as Vaddera, were traditionally skilled stonecutters and well diggers. They have adapted this skill to be able to dig trenches for telephone cables and graves, desilt tanks and carry out road works, and have now become well known all over south India. In rural areas, they have benefited from public works executed by gram panchayats and state agencies through schemes for rural water supply, housing, food for work, watershed development and the construction of schools, public buildings and offices. They work almost all year round but the nature of the job varies by agricultural season: desilting of tanks and forest department work is undertaken in the dry season and road works and trench digging are done in the rainy season. Both the poor and non-poor migrate and all landless households migrate. Groups of Vaddi relatives (15-30 persons) migrate together and go for 15-30 days at a time. They make 10 such trips in a year. Each group is headed by a mestri, usually a Vaddi, who bears all travelling and food expenses. The mestri may give an advance to the labourers to send remittances to their family. He later cuts this from the wages of the labourers. There are 12 mestris in the village. Earlier, mestris would be the main source of information about new jobs and wages but over time their power has eroded and they now play a more facilitating role rather than controlling and exploiting labourers. These days, most Vaddi do not have fixed mestris and work for the person who makes the best offer. It is evident that the Vaddi have done well for themselves out of migration, individually and collectively. Many have two-storey concrete houses with all kinds of durables (TV, fridge, LPG gas stove, motorcycle). Not only that, but they have invested their newly acquired wealth in building temples, community halls and schools in the village. Perhaps it is because of their economic power that they have also gained a strong presence in the gram sabha, despite being absent frequently and belonging to a lower caste.

The other example is of rickshaw pullers in MP. This migration is not associated with any caste and does not require any particular skills. But knowing the right people and being strong and fit are basic



requirements. Although it is not particularly well paid, rickshaw pulling work is more regular than local agricultural labouring and can bring in extra cash when needed. Over time, this can help the family to save enough to spend on marriages or repay debts that have been incurred for such events. This can reduce their vulnerability to slipping into extreme poverty (Box 2).

### Box 2: Accumulative strategies – tribals in Mandla, MP

Chander Singh Baiga is a tribal living in the remote village of PT in the forested district of Mandla in MP. He is 40 years old and owns 3 acres of dry land. He has two daughters. Chander Singh started migrating to the district capital of Jabalpur to work as a rickshaw puller about 17 years ago because he could not find enough work locally. He used to combine this with migration to irrigated areas for harvesting work with his wife and relatives.

As his economic position improved he was able to borrow more from local moneylenders for his daughter's marriage and for spending on his own health. He mortgaged his land to raise Rs150,000 and is now repaying the debt through migration. He makes several short trips to Jabalpur for rickshaw pulling of around 10 days each. He takes a week off after each trip. He does not migrate for months together because his economic situation has improved and also because he is not as strong as he used to be. He has also stopped migrating for harvesting work. In Jabalpur, he hires a rickshaw for Rs15-20 a day and earns Rs60-100 per day. He saves only Rs30-40/day because of the high living costs in Jabalpur but he still regards it as a good way of earning cash in the dry season. There are 20-25 people in PT like him who migrate for rickshaw pulling. They all regard it as an accumulative strategy.

Source: Key informant interview, PT village.

### 3.7 Does migration reduce poverty?

The survey data show that there are clear differences in spending priorities and needs by caste. Nearly 86% of STs in AP mentioned consumption as the most important use of migration and commuting earnings. For the STs in MP, the most important use of money was to repay debt.

**Table 16: Percentage distribution of households ranking the top use (or plan to use) of mobility earnings by purpose and caste category, AP 2006/07**

		Caste category				Total
		ST	SC	BC	OC	
Use group rank 1	Consumption	85.7	58.3	56.6	70.4	61.2
	Education and health		12.5	6.6	7.4	7.5
	Investment and savings	14.3	8.3	18.4	11.1	14.9
	Paying off debt		20.8	18.4	11.1	16.4
<b>Total</b>		<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table 17: Percentage distribution of households using (or plan to use) mobility earnings by purpose, rank and caste category, MP 2006/07**

		Caste category				Total
		ST	SC	BC	OC	
Use group rank 1	Consumption	26.3	70.4	56.0	50.0	54.5
	Health and education*	10.5	14.8	6.0	25.0	9.0
	Investment and savings	5.3		9.5		6.7
	Paying off debt	57.9	14.8	28.6	25.0	29.9
<b>Total</b>		<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Note: \* Only one household reported use on education as rank 1.

SCs too spend most of their earnings on consumption. However, paying off debt was mentioned by 21% of SCs in AP as the most important use of migration earnings. These are debts that are incurred for a variety of purposes, included medical emergencies, weddings, drilling tubewells and social obligations. SCs also mentioned spending on education as a priority more often than STs. The case studies below show how migration fits into the household's strategy for improving its standard of living and prospects for future generations.

### **Box 3: Drilling tubewells and spending on education –SCs and STs in Medak, AP**

Lingaiah (SC) is a 50-year-old illiterate labourer who lives in MD, a remote village in Medak district. He and his wife live with their two sons and the sons' families in the same house. Lingaiah's family was landless in the past but he was given an acre of dryland by the government during a land reform programme some years ago. The land yielded very little and both he and his wife continued their traditional occupation of working as agricultural labourers in the local landlord's field. About 10 years ago, his elder son began to migrate to Hyderabad for construction work. The village is only about four hours away from Hyderabad by bus and many other people migrate to the city. The son got married and took his wife with him a couple of years later. But when they had children they left them with Lingaiah and his wife in the village. The son and his wife come back to the village every two months and bring money, clothes and gifts for the parents, children and other relatives. They take rice back with them. The rice is obtained by the parents as wages for their labouring work in the fields. Even when they need to buy rice, it is cheaper in the village to buy from farmers rather than paying town prices in Hyderabad. The second son started migrating eight years ago. The family in the village was able to eat better and send the children to school because of the money brought back by the sons. This was a major step for a family where several generations have been illiterate. They have also managed to borrow Rs30,000 to dig a tubewell. They were able to borrow because their creditworthiness has improved in the eyes of the moneylenders who know that they have two migrant sons who can repay the debt. The tubewell has raised their status in the village and they are now able to grow two crops a year on their land. Both sons and their wives live in rented rooms in Hyderabad for around Rs500 a month.

Lingaiah says that all families like his are doing the same in the village. If the parents are relatively young and healthy, the sons leave their children in the village and they use migration money to eat better, educate their children, invest in tubewells or improve their houses.

Kishan Nayak is a 50-year-old Lambada (ST) living in the same village. He lives with his wife and five children. He owns 1.5 acres of dry and rocky land and has encroached on an acre of forest department land. He grows rainfed sorghum and paddy on his farm. Kishan has been migrating for sugarcane harvesting within the state for the past 20 years. At first it was just him and his wife migrating but later both of his sons started to accompany them and he now has four earning members in the house. He started migrating when recruiting agents from the sugarcane mill came to his village to find workers to harvest the cane. He bought a couple of bulls and a cart with borrowed money and started migrating. The recruiting agents gave workers an advance which they would use to buy essentials and repay some of the debt. The advance would be paid off through their earnings. In 2006, a team of three workers and a bullock cart can save Rs30,000 in a season of cane cutting. The first son migrates with Kishan and his wife. The second son goes to work with another person from the village who also owns a bullock cart. He earns Rs5000.

The family is no longer in debt and over the years they have improved their living standards considerably. Kishan spent on his eldest daughter's wedding and did not have to borrow. He has built a larger house with a separate kitchen/storage room and separate shed for the cattle. He now plans to dig a tubewell.

As a community, the Lambadas have done well through migration. They are now migrating on their own without recruiting agents because they know the market well. They are also investing in the education of their children and the younger generation is going into white collar jobs. There are now two police constables, two school teachers, one assistant engineer and one construction supervisor in the Lambada hamlet.

Source: Key informant interviews in MD.

But there are less clear cut cases than these, where the costs and risks of migration may outweigh the benefits. An example is the migration or trafficking of children for work where the extra income may help to feed the family but is at the cost of the child's education and carries the risk of perpetuating intergenerational poverty. The trafficking of tribal girls was mentioned during the fieldwork in MP (see Box 4). Autonomous child migration is also a growing phenomenon across India.

#### **Box 4: Group migration of tribal girls for domestic work**

Migration by tribal girls to cities for domestic work appears to be on the increase. Groups of girls led by an experienced migrant (someone who has either worked in the city before as a domestic worker herself or knows someone who is working as a domestic worker) travel by train from various tribal areas. Although there has never been a comprehensive survey, NGOs such as Chetanalaya, Nirmala Niketan and the Indian Social Institute, which are trying to organise domestic workers in New Delhi, estimate that their number could be anywhere between 80,000 and 100,000 in the capital. For girls migrating from MP, Mumbai and cities in western India are probable destinations. Some girls migrate through placement agencies. Their living and working conditions are highly exploitative as they are never paid their full salary and placement agencies often take half the migrant's salary.

*Source:* Key informant interview, PT.

Child labour is also widespread in cottonseed production in AP. AP is the second-largest cottonseed-producing state in the country after Gujarat. Many of these farms, located in the districts of Kurnool and Mahabubnagar, employ children who are migrants from nearby villages belonging to poor SC families. In 2003-2004, nearly 55,000 acres were under cottonseed production in the country, of which AP accounted for 14,000 acres (Venkateswarlu, 2004). Estimates of the numbers of children working in cottonseed farms vary. According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), cotton plantations in AP employ 200,000 children below the age of 14.<sup>12</sup> The vast majority are girls, as they are preferred over boys. The Environmental Justice Foundation puts the number at around 100,000.<sup>13</sup>

Children working in cottonseed farms are recruited by agents who pay their parents an advance. The children pay off this money by working long days from July to February. The children work 13 hours a day for around Rs30 (EJF). On average, 10-12 girls work per acre, mostly drawn from the traditionally oppressed and marginalised communities, whose families are heavily indebted and have pledged their child's labour to pay off the debt. Even if parents do not want to exploit their children, they are often compelled to do it because of desperate poverty and debt. Living and working conditions are basic and many children drop out of school. UNICEF found that 60% of children working in cottonseed fields had dropped out of school and 29% had never attended school. As about half of them began working before the age of 11, literacy levels are very low.

### **3.8 Costs, risks, discrimination and danger**

The surveys and interviews revealed that unskilled migrants usually work in occupations that are classified as '3D' (dirty, degrading and dangerous). The work is far from 'decent' because there are usually no contracts or social security. Those belonging to lower castes and tribes are often discriminated against in several ways (underpaid, treated with contempt, not provided basic amenities). Migrants travel, live and work in highly insecure conditions and women and girls are more burdened by extra work and also more vulnerable to sexual exploitation. Crèches are hardly ever provided by contractors, even though they are meant to do so by law, and migrants' children miss months of school or drop out altogether.

The research team found a few instances of families left behind in the sending village facing difficulties due to the absence of migrating members from their household. It was mainly widows whose sons had migrated and women in nuclear families whose husbands had migrated who faced the greatest problems in the village. But such cases were rare. The majority of migrants belonged to large households where there was sufficient surplus labour within the household to manage the family farm or business effectively in the absence of the migrant. It was also common for male relatives to help women whose husbands or sons had migrated.

While the relatives of the poorest migrants found it difficult to have their concerns heard at village council meetings, families of more powerful migrants such as the Vaddi from AP were able to retain a presence in village institutions.

<sup>12</sup> [www.unicef.org/india/child\\_protection\\_1739.htm](http://www.unicef.org/india/child_protection_1739.htm).

<sup>13</sup> [www.ejfoundation.org/page330.html](http://www.ejfoundation.org/page330.html).

## 4. Conclusions and policy implications

Both the empirical findings and the secondary material reviewed in this paper show that migration is higher in remote rural areas and, within those areas, among the chronically poor, who in this case are the SCs and STs. An important finding was that permanent migration constituted a small proportion of total movements for work and that circular migration was the most important form of mobility. This demonstrates powerfully the inadequacy of official statistics in capturing the mobility of the poor.

In remote villages, migration involved all but the poorest (disabled, old and sick) and the richest households. In the case of the poorest, this is because they do not even have labour to sell on account of being old, sick or disabled and therefore cannot undertake physical work. In the case of the richest, the reason for not migrating is that they can live comfortably from farming and/or other enterprise. The broad base of migration has resulted in its benefits accruing to a large number of households, challenging the notion that migration benefits only a privileged few with the right contacts, assets and education.

Circular migration earnings account for a higher proportion of household income among the lower castes and tribes, namely SC, BC and ST (in households with one person working outside the village). Migration is critical to managing risk and smoothing consumption for a majority of chronically poor households living in remote rural areas. The extra income from migration has allowed the family to eat regularly and better, pay for health care when needed and spend on social events. Migration has improved the creditworthiness of families left behind in the village, who can now obtain large loans easily.

For those who have few assets, education or social networks, migration provides a way of coping and survival, providing income for consumption and paying off debt. For people with more skills, social connections and assets, migration can bring in enough cash to set the household on an upward accumulative trajectory that can eventually lead to an exit from poverty. Migration from RRAs can thus become an important poverty interruptor. However, the accounts given here show that it is difficult to define precisely at what level of accumulation this exit occurs, because accumulation is of different kinds, ranging from not having to borrow any more, to being able to spend on marriages and health, eating better and investing in tubewells and irrigation.

FGDs and key informant interviews suggest that, although the purchasing power of migrating households has improved, this has not led to an increase in the price of essential commodities. This is because the poor in the village buy grain from government outlets that are supplied through a state-level network and also because migration is seasonal, so workers return during the peak agricultural seasons and the price of labour has not been affected.

The evidence so far suggests that sending areas benefit from migration first through an improvement in the lives of households with migrants and over time through knock-on effects on the entire village, through improved agricultural productivity and more economic activity. However, further resurveys would be needed to develop a more detailed picture of the impact of migration on sending villages.

The complexity of the migration process is such that its costs and benefits must be viewed against the overall social, political and institutional context of remote rural areas. While it is obvious that migration is not an ideal or easy way of earning money and improving the living standard of the family, it is often the only option in places that have suffered from log jams of disadvantage. The remote villages in AP and MP have indeed suffered from some combination of poor governance, leakage and corruption, social exclusion, physical isolation, restricted access to natural resources and low rainfall.

The costs and risks of migration are heavy, including the risk of disease, injury and not being able to send children to school. Given a choice, migrants would not sacrifice their children's future or their own

health, but they are compelled to do so because they cannot look after themselves or their children properly when they migrate. The fault lies with the institutional and policy environment and not with migration per se. The case histories also show that the distinction between employment, bondage and trafficking for chronically poor and socially excluded groups is blurred. Occupations at the destination are frequently in the 3D category and often border on illegality or are illegal. Policy responses need to be developed that can help the most vulnerable migrants, not only migrants who are working legally.

The emphasis of policy should be on minimising the costs and risks of migration and maximising its returns. At present, migrants cannot access subsidised food through the Public Distribution System (PDS), which works on residence criteria; they cannot easily access state schools, cheap housing or government health care. There is an urgent need to reform policy in these critical areas. While investing in dryland areas should remain a priority for government, people's own efforts to access the benefits of growth in other regions should not be discouraged.

At the same time, there is a need to provide migrants with access to information on jobs, wage rates and their rights. There is also a need to create awareness among the police and other government departments who view migration negatively. There are now a number of NGOs in India that are providing migrant support, but they operate on a small scale with limited funding.

Some lessons can be drawn from the recent experience of China, where the poverty-reducing effects of rural urban migration have now been officially recognised and efforts are being made to make migration a less painful and expensive experience. Employers are being put under pressure by government to pay migrants on time and schools and other urban amenities are being provided for migrant workers. The system of registration (the Hukou system) is being gradually reformed to give migrants access to housing and government services; donor-funded projects, such as the urban poverty reduction project of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) are putting migration concerns at the centre of their agendas.

The future of circular migration is uncertain. It will continue as long as regional inequalities persist, but the pace of development and urbanisation is now increasing in sending states, so it is very likely that commuting will increase rapidly. People may eventually be able to live in the village and work in nearby towns and farms. Until such a time, it is imperative for policy to recognise the importance of mobility and circular migration, in particular for sustaining the livelihoods of the poorest groups in India living in remote rural areas.


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Website: [www.odi.org.uk](http://www.odi.org.uk)

ISBN 978 1 907288 06 7  
Working Paper (Print) ISSN 1759 2909  
ODI Working Papers (Online) ISSN 1759 2917