

Gender and Migration: Negotiating Rights A Women's Movement Perspective

Summary of Key Findings

This Report presents a sketch of the key findings Gender and Migration project at the CWDS.¹ Some contextual issues, questions, and questioning that emerge from the macro-surveys by NSS have also been touched upon. The centerpiece of the report is the laying out of new primary level data that was generated by the meso-level survey conducted by the CWDS as part of the project. We believe that the key findings of the project will be a useful resource for bringing the neglected dimensions of gender into the debates on migration in India.

Gendering Labour Migration in the Macro-Data

The report engages with several gender insensitive methodological issues and assumptions in the macro-data as well as development discourses that have together resulted in a collective inability to have an accurate view of the patterns of women's employment and work based migration, let alone the developments influencing and shaping them. Such inability has led to the general practice of using only male migration as *the* indicator in development oriented analysis of migration and a complete evasion of gendered analysis. In this Report, an attempt has been made to concretely draw out the hitherto poorly delineated structure of female labour migration in India based on the macro-data provided by the latest NSS survey on Migration in India for 2007-08. While the NSSO's introduction of a separate category of employment oriented short term migrants in this particular survey, has played a critical role in making this possible, our identification of labour migrants includes both short term migrants and others identified as labour migrants from among the more longstanding category of migrants defined as those who have changed their usual place of residence (UPR). In locating labour migrants in the UPR data, we have

- a) maintained a separate focus on paid workers in contrast to the general practice of lumping paid and unpaid workers together in the employment/workforce statistics which has persistently given us a skewed picture of women's employment and economic status, and
- b) included all migrant workers (paid) who had given 'family movement', 'education' and 'other reasons' as their reason for migrating within the category of labour migrants along with those directly giving employment as their reason for migration.

¹ The support of the IDRC that made this project possible is gratefully acknowledged.

Unfortunately the nature of the NSS data is such that labour migrants could not be separated out from within the overwhelmingly large category of women who had given marriage as their reason for migration, although we presume that some labour migration is indeed camouflaged as marriage migration. Still, among marriage migrants, the majority of those who are workers would be so largely in their immobile and local capacity as wives/daughters in law of the village they married into and their inclusion would give a greatly distorted picture of female labour mobility. As such marriage migrants had to be excluded from the construction of the picture of labour migration. The estimated total number of labour migrants so identified, were 66.6 million in 2007-08, of which 15% (9.6 million) were female, although it is clear that the figure for women still remains an underestimate.

Nevertheless, on the basis of the above method, this Report presents for the first time, what we believe is an accurate macro-picture of the sectoral composition of female labour migration. It shows that in 2007-08, agriculture accounted for 34.3% of the female migrant workforce, industry for 30.8%, and services for 34.8%. The relatively higher share of agriculture differentiates the pattern of female labour migration from that of males, among whom services accounted for 43.6%, industry for 40.8% and agriculture for just 15.6%. Equally significant is the finding that labour migration is most heavily biased towards males in services and industry (less so in agriculture). In other words, the migration pattern is actually enhancing the overwhelming male bias in the labour market for industry and services. These findings have to be viewed within the most worrying context of a declining female work participation rate amidst volatility in employment, agrarian crisis, and an absolute fall in the numbers of women in the workforce by over 21 million between 2004-05 and 2009-10.

Types of Migration

At a general level, the findings of these primary surveys indicate the predominance of the temporary in contemporary economic/labour migration, including medium term and circular migration. The use of a socially grounded typology of labour migration delineating sub-categories of temporary migration, showed the temporary to be far more significant in internal migration in India, than is indicated in the macro-data for both men and women. The typology included *circulatory migration* (longer durations exceeding four months and shorter durations of less than four months in each spell), *short term seasonal migration* (distinguished from circular both in terms of duration as well as in spending the major part of the working year in their village/place of origin), *irregular short term migration* (i.e., outside any established pattern or occupation and driven by abnormal contingencies/desperation), *medium term migration* (i.e., for a broadly fixed period of up to a few years in any particular industry/occupation), *long distance commuting* (across distances outside the perimeter of normal movement for work around any village or within any town/city) and *migration for family care* (for unpaid care work separated from marriage migration with unspecified purposes), along with *long term*

migration (i.e., for settlement at destination). This typology, when applied across 4,885 households with migrants netted types of migration for a total of 16,156 household members who were economic/labour migrants, of which 7,398 were female and 8,758 were male when both village sites and sector sites were combined. The findings in relation to types of migration were as follows:

- Strikingly, only 42% of the women migrants and 36% of the males were long term migrants or in other words, 58% of female labour migration and even more of male labour migration appears to be of a temporary nature.² (In contrast, the picture that emerges from the NSS (2007-08) indicates temporary migration definitively for only one third of all labour migration in India, and perhaps a little more if return migrants are also added).³
- 20% of the migrating women and 23% of the migrating men were circular migrants, 9% were short term seasonal migrants for both males and females. 2% of the female and 3% of the male migrants were irregular short term migrants. Since all of the above are forms of short term migration, when taken together, the CWDS surveys suggest that the share of short term migration at around one third of labour migration is far greater than accounted for by the NSS.
- When only village sites constituted the universe, i.e., after excluding pre-selected female migrant intensive sectors, the share of short term migration was much higher at 41% among women migrants and 53% among male migrants, which highlights the reality of large scale migration from village India beyond just the urbanization paradigm and indeed a degree of pullback that is rarely touched upon in migration theories.⁴
- 6% of the women and 7% of the men were long distance commuters, 4% of the women migrants and 2% of the men were migrants for family care.

² It may be borne in mind, that while for women labour migrants, the combination of sector and village sites gives us a better picture of migratory patterns, such a combination does not provide a full picture since in the sector sites the male members were only of households of women migrant workers.

³ In NSS's 2007-08 survey, short term migrants constituted some 21 per cent of male labour migration and 22 per cent of female labour migration (see Table1 in this paper). Further, some 10 per cent of all UPR based female migrants and 7 per cent of male migrants reported that their migration was temporary. An acceleration in return migration is also observable between 1993 and 2007-08 from 12.2 to 16.1 per cent in the case of male migrants and from 4.4 to 10.6 per cent in the case of female migrants. Although the UPR figures here include workers and non-workers and paid and unpaid workers, the somewhat common trend between men and women in temporary and return migration does indicate a link to the employment pattern.

⁴ We would contend that the CWDS village surveys present a more accurate picture for male migratory patterns than the combined village and sector sites (of course specifically in relation to migration from rural areas).

- Medium term migration accounted for 16% of the women migrants and 18% among the men. It is interesting that when village sites alone constituted the universe, the proportions of medium term migrants dropped sharply to 9% for women, but increased to 21% for men. It appears then that the points of origin among women migrant workers of medium term, particularly in urban areas, are more thinly dispersed across both rural and urban areas, and/or they are drawn/recruited from particular catchment pockets, rather than the more generalized kind of medium term movement from village India that appears to be so significant in the pattern of male migration. Our sense from the field work was that the significance of medium term migration is increasing at the cost of long term migration for work, more so among male migrants, but also among female migrant workers in urban areas.

These findings arguably posit the need for re-orientation away from the present conceptual dominance of a permanent settlement paradigm in the official macro-surveys and greater recognition of different types of temporary migration in the concepts and definitions adopted. In our view, the macro-level underestimation of short term and circular labour migration is a significant factor in the longstanding failure to identify key macro-features of particularly women's labour migration in India that has so restricted analysis of its developmental implications. Similarly, without distinctions between medium term and long term migration, the temporary nature of the employment regime that is driving much of migration in contemporary times and its developmental implications remain hidden from view in the macro-data.

Gendered patterns of Labour Migration

Extensive field work and the combined use of separate household and individual migrant questionnaires/schedules by the surveys facilitated the eliciting of facets of social background as well as individual experience that we believe went a long way in enabling identification of gendered patterns of female labour migration. Some broad observations based primarily on analysis of the consolidated data generated by the household and individual questionnaires supplemented by field observations are outlined below:

- Types of migration are closely correlated with sectors and occupations - generally differentiated however along the fault lines of entrenched social hierarchies based on caste and community.
- Greater levels of medium term and long term migration among women workers from upper caste communities have accompanied relatively greater levels of diversification of their employment into various types of services, particularly in urban areas. 75% of women migrants of upper caste origin were long term and medium term migrants.

- At the other extreme, migrant women workers from the historically and socially disadvantaged communities of scheduled tribes and castes are more concentrated in short term and particularly circular migration – generally involving hard manual labour and more degraded working conditions. 59% of women migrants from ST backgrounds and 41% of SC background were short term and circulatory migrants in comparison to just 18% of migrant women workers of upper caste origin.
- 39% of women migrants from OBC backgrounds were also short term and circulatory migrants, although the majority (65%) were long term and medium term migrants in comparison to 43% of SC and 32% of ST women in these latter categories.
- In contrast to such a general caste differentiated picture, a distinctive movement towards concentration of women migrants in paid domestic work, particularly through rural-to-urban migration cut across all caste/tribe/community lines. The composition of women migrants in textile based factory production also appeared to have no caste specific bias.⁵
- In general, occupational shifts effected through migration showed a process of concentration of women in a relatively narrow band of occupations and less of diversification.⁶ After migration, 40% of the women workers were in more diversified industry and services in comparison to 51% of the male migrant workers.⁷
- **In rural areas, occupational shifts** through migration by women appear to be **concentrating in circular migration for brick-making (bhatta workers)** across the length and breadth of the country, even though agriculture is the most prominent destination for rural women migrants. Bhatta workers who constituted 8.7% in the pre-migration profile of individual women migrants with rural destinations increased to 21.1% post migration, while agriculture, including seasonal agricultural labourers, plantation workers and cultivating peasants, which accounted for 33.4% of rural female migrant workers after migration, had a larger share of the pre-migration profile of these rural migrants (48.3%).
- Nevertheless, it is also true that agriculture has seen increases in demand for female *migrants* in some areas for crops such as BT cotton and BT cotton seed production and one of the most concentrated form of female labour migration

⁵ The proportions for caste in types of migration given here are drawn from the universe of women migrants (numbering 7,398) drawn from the household questionnaire.

⁶ The universe for tracking occupational shifts and concentrations is the set of individual migrant questionnaire (female respondents numbering 3,073).

⁷ Diversified employment here excludes agriculture, construction, paid domestic work and brick manufacture, where concentration in low quality work/employment rather than diversification into better forms of employment would be a more appropriate description.

in rural areas is for sugarcane cutting in western and southern India (but not in the sugarcane belt of UP in the north).⁸ However, it also appears that the conditions in local agriculture, pushes a section of the agricultural workforce to migrate for non-agricultural employment in rural areas.

- Significantly, both the two concentrated streams of rural female migration, i.e., for cane cutting and brick manufacture both involve circular migration and onsite work/residence for a major part of the year. The laboring units in brick-making and cane cutting (where female labour is involved) largely comprises of male female pairs (*jodis*) or family units and generally a cycle of advances and debt-based tying of such labour. *Jodi* based wage labour combined with piece rated payment, leaves no scope for independent work/activity and income for women. Women's individual entitlements in such forms of labour have not even been conceptually recognized in the labour law regime. It was striking that 42% of the rural women migrant workers were involved in such pair, family or adhoc group based employment.
- The nature of annual circulation in both the above segments of migrant labour, its predominantly debt bonded nature, the degraded and harsh conditions of work, the disruption of children's education and the semi-feudal and patriarchal *jodi* system - all predicate that while survival may be ensured by such a form of migration, possibilities of social advance are simultaneously limited. Brick-making, although no longer artisanal in nature, is distributed across unorganized manufactories with mainly unincorporated individual or partnership based owners/employers. On the other hand, *Jodi* based cane cutters are, recruited not by the individual farmers on whose fields they labour, but by modern organized sector sugar mills, often having corporate style management systems. Yet, typically in both segments, workers continue to be recruited through a variety of unregulated labour contractors. The Inter-state Migrant Workmen's Act, 1979, (the only labour law that specifically addresses migrant workers), outlines some worker entitlements in precisely such contractor driven modes of migration (although only for those who cross state boundaries). It has remained the

⁸ Such migration for sugarcane cutting is of a more longstanding nature and has been well documented in several studies for Maharashtra and Gujarat (Teerink, Breman, etc.). Less well known is the operation of similar migration for sugarcane in Karnataka and Tamilnadu, drawing on catchment areas within these states as well that were covered by the CWDS surveys. Documentation of adolescent girls' migration for BT cotton seed farms in Gujarat from the tribal communities in the Dungarpur/Udaipur regions of Rajasthan by CLRI helped us identify some areas for field surveys. A comprehensive set of studies of child migration for cotton seed production covering Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Gujarat have also focused on BT cottonseed. In addition, our own field work showed women migrating from Godhra and Dahod to the Saurashtra region of Gujarat for BT cotton farms as well as from Rajasthan to parts of Punjab.

most ineffectual of all labour laws as has repeatedly been pointed out (2nd Labour Commission, 2002, NCEUS, 2007).

- **In urban areas**, close to one third of the migrant women workers (31%) were either unemployed or engaged in only family domestic duties before migration (in comparison to 15% of rural women migrants). Apparently they were able to effect entry into employment through urban wards migration. Interestingly, only a small proportion of the urban women migrants had a pre-migration background in agricultural work (13%) and many were in service sector or other diverse jobs even before migration (20% were in paid domestic work and 30% in diversified services before migration). The relatively high proportions of both the non-employed and those in service sector employment before migration correlates with the majority of the urban migrant workers being from upper caste and OBC backgrounds (together 54%) in contrast to the rural migrants, where women from SC and ST backgrounds were the majority (together 62%). Thus, women's urban-wards labour migration is hardly a primary force leading the shift of women workers out of agriculture.
- Some diversification and expansion of occupations was nonetheless clearly visible among urban migrants. New occupations such as sales workers, beauticians, hair dressers, call centre workers that were targeted by the surveys, were singularly absent in the pre-migration profiles of these urban women workers, but not insignificant in their post migration profile.
- However, the process of concentration in paid domestic work (whose proportions almost trebled from around 10% before migration to 28% post migration) was the most gender distinctive feature of urban wards labour migration by women.
- A little over half of the women migrant workers (rural and urban combined) identified poverty, debt, decline in income, lack of local employment or loss of such employment as their reason for migration. The majority however (62%), bore their migration costs out of household savings. Women migrated more with family members (43%) while men migrated more alone (43%). Nevertheless, it is significant that close to a quarter of the women (23%) reported having migrated alone and 7% in all female groups, although this is substantially less than the 43% of the men who migrated alone and the 19% who had gone in all male groups. Further, while 25% of the rural and 6% of the urban women migrants were dependent/mobilized by contractors, 81% of the urban and 63% of the rural women migrants said they migrated independently - whether with families or alone.
- In general, a larger proportion of women migrant workers tended to be young in comparison to male migrant workers, and older workers were

found to be in greater proportions in migration to rural destinations in comparison to urban destinations for both men and women. 72% of the female migrant workers with urban destinations were below 36 years of age in comparison to 63% of the male migrants to urban areas. Similarly 61% of the female migrant workers with rural destinations were below 36 in comparison to 56% of rural male migrants. Most striking was the higher proportion of women migrant workers in the age group 15-25. 34% of the urban female migrant workers were in the 15-25 age group in comparison to 22% of the urban male migrant workers and on a slightly lower scale of difference, 24% of the women with rural destinations were in this age group in comparison to 19% of the rural male migrant workers. The above 45 age group accounted for 14% of the women migrant workers in rural areas in comparison to 9% in urban, and similarly for 17% of the male migrant workers in rural areas in comparison to 11% in urban.

- While 5% of the female migrant workers and 9% of the male migrants reported having been targets of harassment by local people at destinations, 23% of the women and 20% of the men had experienced violence, threats and being forced to work in the course of migration. Interestingly, among male migrants, contractors were identified as the most common perpetrator, while more than half the women who had faced such harassment/violence identified the principal employer and the supervisor as the perpetrators.
- While most women migrant workers migrated with their minor children (67%), only around a quarter of the male migrants (26%) of the male migrant workers took their minor children with them.

Nature and Conditions of Work s among Women Migrant Workers

78% of rural and 59% of urban women migrant workers were working as unskilled manual labour; 16% and 18% were in skilled manual work in rural and urban areas respectively. 6% of the rural and 23% of the urban women migrants were in a combination of clerical, supervisory, managerial jobs, or work requiring high professional/educational skills (highly skilled). 10% of the urban women migrants were in the last category of the highly skilled in comparison to just 1% of the rural women migrants. This being the composition of the 3,073 individual women migrant workers covered by the surveys, the changes effected by migration in their status of employment and the conditions of work and wages at destination were as follows:

- Casual labour in the private sector was the most prominent form of pre migration employment among rural women migrants (41%), whose share also increased post migration (44%); but it was the share of contract labour that showed the most significant increase from pre to post migration rising from 13% before migration to 26% after. Of rural female labour migration

(i.e., after migration), 70% was for casual and contract work. Own account self employment, home-based piece rated work and unpaid helpers in production/sales all declined with migration to rural destinations, as also casual and regular work in public sector and casual labour for hire at labour mandis.

- An even sharper decline in the share of own account self employment, home-workers and unpaid helpers appeared with women's migration to urban areas, along with a small decline in casual and regular work in public sector. Among urban migrant women workers, the share of regular employment for *private* employers showed the most striking and maximum increase post migration (almost doubling from 21% before migration to reach 41% after), although the insecure nature of much of this 'regular' employment was evident with 85% of the surveyed urban women migrants reporting they had no maternity leave and 80% had no medical leave. The share of contract labour in public and private sectors and casual work for hire at labour mandis all increased post migration to urban areas.
- Across the board, the overwhelming majority of the workers – more than 93% in the case of rural women migrants and more than 84% in the case of urban had no provident fund and no health insurance. The worst situation was however, in relation to daycare/crèche facilities, to which only 3.4% of the rural women migrants and 4.4% of the urban had any access at all.
- In rural destinations, the majority of women workers (68%) worked for 8 hours and below per day, but in peak season the majority (68%) worked well over 8 hours with 41% working above 10 hours of which around half (20%) worked over 12 hours a day. In urban destinations, 78% worked 8 hours and below in normal periods, but this dropped to 57% in peak seasons, with 21% working up to 10 hours, 15% from 10 to 12 hours, and 6% above 12 hours.
- Own home as location or site of women's work saw the maximum decline after migration from 25% pre-migration to 8% post (rural + urban). The proportions of women workers working out in the open also declined but not substantially from 52% pre-migration to 46% post migration. The share of factories/workshops/work-sheds increased from 4% pre-migration to 11% post, and shops and offices from 3% to 11%, but mobile locations remained roughly the same before and after migration (2%).

Modes of Payment and Wages

- ❖ Around 20% of both rural and urban women migrants were on daily wages. The average daily wage/income for these women migrants in rural areas was Rs 136, and in urban areas, it was Rs 141. Prominent among women migrants with rural destinations who were daily wage/income earners were

agricultural workers (47%), brick kiln workers (28%)⁹ and manufacturing workers (8%). In urban areas, construction accounted for 67% of daily wagers, vendors/petty traders for 9% and manufacturing for 7%.

- ❖ In rural areas, 22% of the women migrant workers had monthly payment of wages - of an average amount of Rs. 4,778. In urban areas, 64% of the women migrants received wages on a monthly basis - of an average amount of Rs 6,729. Of the women migrants in rural areas, 29% received payment at the end of contracted work periods (mostly brick kiln and agricultural workers).¹⁰ Only 4% of the urban women migrants were so paid.
- ❖ Time rated wage payment systems accounted for a little over half of the rural women migrants (52%), but more than three quarters (78%) of the urban. Piece rates were thus more prominent among rural migrants (48%) in comparison to urban (22%). 57% of the rural and 41% of the urban women migrant workers had no weekly off day.
- ❖ Cash payments dominated rural and urban areas, with 90% of the rural and 98% of the urban women migrants being paid only in cash, the remaining receiving wages in cash and kind combined. 32% of the rural and 45 % of the urban women migrants were paid at minimum wage rates, and only 5% of the rural and 11% of the urban received wages above the statutory minimum. 64% of the rural and 44% of the urban women migrants received either below the minimum wage or didn't know about minimum wages.
- ❖ The individual migrant data revealed a gendered pattern of relatively greater proportions of migrant women daily wagers being located in the lowest wage categories in comparison to male migrant workers. Its reverse at the highest daily wage categories held true for rural migrants, but not for urban migrants. Among daily wager rural migrants - 13% of the women earned less than Rs 100 in comparison to just 3% of the men, while 23% of the men earned Rs 250 and above in comparison to a mere 0.2% of the women. The same pattern was visible among weekly earners in both rural and urban areas. However, among urban daily wagers, while 17% of the women migrants were earning less than Rs 100 in comparison to just 2% of the men, only 2% of the urban daily wager migrants - men and women - received wages/incomes of Rs 250 and above. 28% of the rural women migrants were paid on a weekly basis in comparison to 13% of the urban.

⁹ In brick kilns, while moulders (*patheras*) involved in family labour based output, generally received their payments at the end of the contract period, *beldars* and *nikasis* (those who carry bricks to and from the kiln), for both of whom output and wage calculations were individual based (even if recruited in pairs), were sometimes given daily wages.

¹⁰ Contract periods varied from a few weeks to six to eight months and for the longer periods, some interim maintenance was paid for some but not all, which was then deducted from the final payment. Of course workers also complained of instances of short-changing and non-payment of what they considered their full dues at the end of the contract period.

- ❖ Among migrants with monthly payments, such a gendered pattern of concentration at the low end was not so marked in rural destinations. In urban areas, however, gender disparity at the lower end was very prominent with 60% of the migrant women workers having monthly earnings of less than Rs 5,000 in comparison to 7% of the migrant men with monthly payments. In urban destinations, 57 % of the male migrants with monthly payments earned between Rs 5,000 to below Rs 10,000 in comparison to just 13% of women migrants with monthly payment of wages. In the category of monthly earners of above Rs 15,000 there was little gender disparity, although in the sample, the highest urban male monthly wage was Rs 50,000 in comparison to the highest urban female monthly wage of Rs 25,000.

Of Remittances and Civic Amenities

The individual migrant worker questionnaires were particularly useful in eliciting information from respondents on remittances, civic amenities at source and destination areas, and exercise of voting rights that would have been impossible to gain from only a household questionnaire. On these questions, the findings were as follows:

- 32% of the women migrants with rural destinations, and 33% of those with urban destinations sent or brought no remittances to their source areas. At the other extreme 9% with rural destinations and 11% with urban destinations remitted their entire incomes. Overall around 68% of them sent/brought remittances to their source area from rural and urban destinations, the majority of whom carried the money/goods themselves.
- At their destinations, 76% of all the women migrant workers (rural + urban) did not have any ration card, 16% had BPL cards, less than half a percent had Antyodaya cards and 7% had APL cards. In comparison in their source areas, 34% of these migrants had no ration cards, 40% had BPL cards, 6% had antyodaya cards and 20% had APL cards. Loss of PDS entitlements through migration was thus quite widespread. 91% of the women migrant workers had never availed of any public housing scheme, 79% had no NREGA job cards, and 96% had never been employed under any public employment programme or scheme.
- However, 75% of all the women migrant workers did have electoral cards, but again the majority of them (almost three quarters) had their voting rights at area of origin and only around 28% of those with electoral cards had voting rights at destination areas. 10% of the women migrants had voted in the last parliamentary elections at destination in comparison to 46% at area of origin. For State Assembly elections 13% had voted at destination in comparison to

47% at area of origin. For panchayat/municipality, again 13% had voted at destination, but 52% at area of origin.

- Among women migrant workers with **rural** destinations, access to regular safe **drinking water** at residence declined from 27% at source area to 22% at destination. Those having to fetch water from 'very far' increased from 7% at source to 11% at destination. The majority (66-67%) had of course to fetch water from public taps/pumps in both source and destination areas. While access to public **toilets** declined marginally from 8% at source area to 6% at destination, and use of shared toilets (with other households) from 8% to 4%, the proportion of those who had to use the open field increased from 64% to 71%.¹¹ Attached toilets with sewage/septic tank remained between 18-19% at both source and rural destination areas. Access to **electricity at residence** increased only marginally from 50% at source area to 53% at destination, although for **cooking fuel** the use of kerosene, gas, coal, etc increased from 11% to 26%. Nevertheless, at destination 48% of the rural women migrants were collecting firewood/dung cakes - much less than the 72% at source area - although some had shifted to buying firewood/dung cakes with migration. Those buying firewood/dung cakes increased from 10% at source area to 18% at rural destination.
- In contrast to rural destinations, among the women migrants with **urban** destinations, access to regular safe **drinking water** at residence increased from 36% at source area to 53% at destination and having to fetch water from public taps/pumps dropped from 48% at source to 41% at destination. The share of those having to fetch water from very far remained virtually the same at both source and destination (4-5%). Use of public **toilets** increased substantially from 3% at source to 18% at destination as did the use of shared toilets (with other households) from 3% to 20%. The increase in access to attached toilets with sewage/septic tank from 32% at source to 37% at destination was however, of a lesser order. The above increases mirrored the sharp decline in the use of open fields from 62% at source areas to 22% at destination, although the use of road sides/railway tracks increased marginally from less than half a percent at source to 4% at destination. Access to **electricity at residence** increased from 76% at source areas to 85% at destinations, but it is notable that 15% of the urban workers remained without any such access. For **cooking fuel**, usage of gas saw the maximum increase through urban wards migration, increasing from 7% at source area to 47% at destination, use of kerosene increased from 2% to 14%, while use of coal and mixed fuel increased relatively marginally from 9% to 11%. All these increases mirrored the fall in collection of firewood/dung cakes from 65% at

¹¹ The risks of using open fields by rural migrants, whose onsite residences are often far from populated settlements, was brought home during the survey, when it was found that two of the women who had migrated to Junagadh, Gujarat from Nandurbar, Maharashtra for cane cutting were killed by tigers.

source area to 17% at urban destination and buying of the same from 18% to 11%.

Consolidated view of Village sites: Comparing households with and without economic migrants

In the village sites, a household census had been conducted from which a stratified sample of households and their migrant workers were drawn for the detailed questionnaires. While most of the households covered by the detailed questionnaires had economic migrants, some 30% of the households covered by the household questionnaire had no such migrants enabling some comparison between the characteristics of households with and households without migrants in villages. The household census generated baseline information for 16,104 households in 43 villages across 17 states, and showed that, 56% of the households had economic migrants indicative of the significance of migration in the micro-management of a very large proportion of village households. A contextual consolidated profile of the villages covered by the CWDS surveys - their composition in terms of caste/social group, religion and perceived economic status is outlined below, along with a comparison between households with migrants and households without migrants:

- ✓ In the aggregated profile as per the consolidated village censuses of the 43 villages surveyed, - 64% of the village households reported themselves as poor (of which just over a quarter were further differentiated as poorest). 29% of the households were considered of middle level economic status and 7% were in the uppermost bracket. 78% of the households were Hindu, 15% Muslim, 3% Christian and 4% Sikh, Buddhist and other religions. 20% were from the upper caste/General category, 45% were OBC (including MBC), 22% were SC and 13% were ST.
- ✓ 57% of the upper caste/General households were considered of upper and middle level economic status (14% upper and 43% middle level), while the majority of the households of all other caste/tribe categories were considered poor. 85% of the SC, 64% of the ST, 58% of the OBC and 43% of the upper caste/General households were considered poor (including poorest). 30% of the SC, 28 % of the ST, 11% of the OBC and 8% of the upper caste/General households were in the poorest category.
- ✓ A slightly higher proportion of upper economic status households as well as the poor (excluding poorest) had economic migrants relative to their share in the overall village communities. Nevertheless, 64% of the households with migrants were poor (including poorest), of which around a quarter were among the poorest, while 28% were middle level, and 8% were from the uppermost economic status. At the same time, while SC/ST households together constituted 38% of those with economic migrants, 71% of ST and 57% of SC households had migrants in comparison to 51% of the upper caste/general and 54% of OBC households. Overall, the caste composition of

all households with economic migrants were around 18% from upper caste/General, 43% from OBC, 22% from SC and 16% from ST.

- ✓ Comparison of households with economic migrants with those without migrants at the village sites (from the detailed household questionnaires), surprisingly showed that the average annual income of households without migrants (Rs 61,763) was higher than the average income of households with migrants (Rs 44,522) even after including their remittance incomes (of an annual average of Rs 16,001). The separate components of incomes that were totaled to arrive at the annual income of a household included from cultivation, casual labour, business, regular wages/salaries, rent, remittances, and any other.
- ✓ 59% of the households with economic migrants resided in kuccha houses in the village in comparison to 40% of the households without such migrants.
- ✓ 66% of the households without migrants resided in ancestral homes in the village in comparison to 77% of the households with migrants. Conversely 7% of the households with migrants resided in bought houses in comparison to 15% of the households without migrants.
- ✓ 31% of the members of households with migrants were illiterate in comparison to 24% of the members of households without migrants (32% of the members of household with migrants had had no schooling in comparison to 22% of the households without migrants). Conversely, a little less than 4% of the members of households with migrants were graduates and above in comparison to over 6% in households without migrants.
- ✓ Unexpectedly, the proportions of independent nuclear families was slightly higher among households without migrants (61%) in comparison the households with migrants (58%). Conversely, full scale joint families were slightly more among households with migrants (15%) than households without (14%). Extended nuclear families (i.e., with the addition of a parent to the husband wife children nuclear unit) were again more prevalent among households with migrants (15%) in comparison to households without (12%). Again among households with migrants there was a lower proportion of single woman or all female (adults) households (2%) in comparison to households without any migrants among whom such all female households were 4%.
- ✓ A final point in relation to the gender composition of labour migration from village India. Women migrants constituted just short of 39% of the 7,288 labour migrants drawn from among members of households as per the detailed household questionnaires in the village surveys. Although some of these villages were located in known catchment areas for female labour

migration, not all were so located. As such, although 39% indeed appears to be a figure on the higher side, the CWDS survey does suggest that the numbers of women involved in labour migration are of a significantly higher order than the 10% as constructed from the NSS migration survey of 2007-08 in Table 1. Since the construction from the macro-data was based on exclusion of all marriage migrants, the findings of the CWDS survey also suggests that indeed a significant proportion of female labour migration remains camouflaged in official migration surveys - within the stated 'reason' of marriage.

Of Marriage, dowry and Migration: Macro-data puzzles and micro and meso-level clues

We would still however, not argue that all or even the majority of female marriage migrants are labour migrants. Thus when the NSS migration surveys from 1993 to 2007-08 show a sharp increase in female marriage migration rates (i.e., the ratio of migrants giving marriage as their reason for migration to population), its reasons merit some separate questioning. In fact, increase in female marriage migration rates is responsible for the general picture of increasing migration rates in India, since male migration rates (i.e., ratio of male migrants to total male population) actually fell in rural India between 1999-2000 and 2007-08 and increased by just 2% in urban areas and other reasons for female migration were relatively insignificant. Increased marriage related migration rates actually enhanced the share of women in migration to an all time high of 80% of all UPR migrants in 2007-08.

In rural India migration for marriage jumped from 24.7% of the rural female population in 1993 to 43.5% in 2007-08. Census figures for 1991 and 2001 also indicated that female marriage migration rates had indeed increased in rural India. For urban areas, a similar increase in female marriage migration rates in the NSS from 12.1% in 1993 to 27.7% in 2007-08 (of which the sharpest increase by 13% is shown between 1993 and 1999-2000) is however not supported by the Census which shows a decline in urban female marriage migration rates between 1991 and 2001. Thus while increasing rates of marriage migration in rural areas can be confidently asserted, the same is not yet possible for urban areas.

The puzzle of increasing marriage migration rates begins to unravel when it is placed side by side with female work participation rates. The rise in rural marriage migration rates has run parallel to the decline in rural female work participation rates (FWPR) from 33% in 1993 to 29% in 2007-08 (further dropping to 26% in 2009-10). In our view there are deep connections between women's work, marriage and migration that call for further and more detailed sociological exploration. Our field observations and case studies of cross regional marriages that were part of the CWDS project do however provide some preliminary clues.

Case studies of cross regional marriages between brides from Kerala and grooms from Mysore (popularly known in Kerala as Mysore marriages) indicated that escalating dowry in Kerala had compelled the search for grooms from Mysore who were ready to accept smaller dowries.¹² At the Mysore end grooms were prepared to accept less dowry from the Kerala brides (when compared to the dowry brought by brides from their own region/community) because it entailed less expenditure on the marriage and marriages could be quickly undertaken. Since village exogamy was neither a rigid rule, nor universal in southern states like Kerala, the search for marriage partners involving lesser marriage expenditures extending beyond village boundaries, may indeed be contributing some part of the increase in marriage migration.

Similarly, in the low sex ratio district of Badaun in western Uttar Pradesh, where brides are being brought from distant and culturally different regions of Bengal and eastern Bihar, it was found that 'the compulsions driving long distance/cross regional marriage migration at the source area included poverty, landlessness or marginal landholdings and the inability to meet the dowry demands of local men whether Hindu or Muslim' (Chaudhry & Mohan 2011). Compulsions of poverty and dowry were also found to be factors that had led to brides being sent from Bihar, Jharkhand and Bengal to the western Uttar Pradesh district of Baghpat for marriage, a district which is again defined by low sex ratios. However, here there were additional factors operating at the destination end. Some young male brick kiln (bhatta) workers for example felt that they had difficulty in finding brides because local families were reluctant to marry their daughters into a lifetime of the hard manual labour and migratory conditions of bhatta labour. In both Badaun and Baghpat, at least some of these cross-regional brides from the east come from regions where again village exogamy has not been a rigid rule. As such, the expansion of cross regional marriages may indeed be contributing to enhanced rates of marriage migration. We do not however, think that cross regional marriages alone can explain the phenomenal increase in rural marriage migration rates. Rather, we would approach the issues emerging from our investigation of cross regional marriages as symptomatic of a more general set of issues in relation to marriage arrangements - in which increases in village exogamous marriages and dowry are core questions requiring much more detailed investigation than was possible in the present study.

Nevertheless, the marriage details of 5,774 couples drawn from the household questionnaire of the CWDS survey are a useful resource in opening up such questions.

- Firstly, it was noticeable that village exogamous marriages were somewhat more prevalent for married women in younger age groups in comparison to older couples. 22% of the marriages of women above 50 years of age were

¹² These 'Mysore marriage' were mostly among poor Muslim families in both Kerala as well as Mysore.

within their villages (village endogamous). This dropped to below 19% among marriages of women aged 20 and below.

- More significant was the scale of expansion of dowry marriages. The marriage data from the CWDS household questionnaire showed that whereas 45% of the married women above 50 years of age had married without dowry, in the age group of 20 and below, the proportion of dowry less marriages had sharply reduced to 29%. The increases in dowry marriages were apparent among all caste groups.
- Interestingly, the majority (51%) of marriages for SC women above 50 years of age were without dowry. But among SC women aged 20 and below a far greater majority (72%) had dowry marriages. In OBC households also, the share of dowry marriages rose sharply from 55% for women above 50 years to 79% for women aged 20 and below, and in ST households too - from 52% to 69%.
- Among upper caste households, where the system of dowry has the most longstanding roots, the proportion of dowry marriages was highest among older women in comparison to all other caste/social groups but the gradient of increase over the years appeared less sharp. In upper caste households, 65% of the marriages for the above 50 age group had dowry, increasing to 78% in the 20 and below age group, i.e. the latter being marginally less than among OBCs.

Taken together, the NSS and Census data showing rising shares of marriage migrants and falling shares of workers in the rural female population, sundry field observations, case studies of cross regional marriages, and primary survey data showing expansion of village exogamous marriages and dowry - indicate a complex crisscrossing of inter-linkages between individual motivations, cultural reflections of changes in the significance of women's work in the agrarian economy, expansion of dowry/ marriage expenses and sex ratio imbalances, all feeding into an increase in rural marriage migration rates.

Concluding Remarks

The macro and meso level findings laid out in this paper challenge the common assumption of 'feminization of labour' and its presumed relationship with migration, and posit an alternate set of observations for approaching gender and migration in India. It is argued that the macro-picture of the composition of male and female migrant workers indicates that the pattern of labour migration is actually aggravating gender biases in the labour market, particularly for industry and services. The 2007-08 migration data of the NSS shows that within an overall multi-sectoral bias towards males in labour migration in India, female labour migration is particularly differentiated from male migration by the relatively greater weight of

agriculture in the sector profile of female migrant workers, and a far greater weight of services and industry among male migrant workers. It is suggested that these features are linked to a highly gendered employment crisis reflected in the declining female work participation rates in rural India and stagnation at extremely low levels of female employment rates in urban areas. Such a crisis has been sharply foregrounded by the absolute fall – by over 21 million – in the numbers of women workers between 2004-05 and 2009-10, which, although concentrated in agriculture, is also evident in industry and services.

The meso-level empirical findings laid out in the paper posit the need to look at migration, labour, and labour laws in India not only in terms of categories and experiences derived from developed capitalism, but rather to also specifically examine how agrarian caste and patriarchy based social relations are being incorporated into migration based wage employment even in more modern industries. Failure to do so results in a disconnect between concepts, entitlement regimes, and empirical realities. A case in point is the present labour law regime's conceptual effacement of women workers' individual entitlements where *Jodi* based migratory laboring units are combined with piece rate wages – as in brick kilns across the country and sugarcane harvesting in western and southern India. The significance of this issue, though noted in description, has been largely ignored in the literature on migration. The findings show that a larger proportion of women of SC and ST backgrounds are concentrated in rural based circular migration marked by contractor driven debt/advance based tying of male female *Jodi* labour. This in turn has inter-locked semi-feudal bondage and semi-feudal patriarchal practices into recruitment and employment practices of a section of the developing modern industries, highlighting the primitive basis of their mode of accumulation. The findings further suggest that the relatively greater weight of agriculture in the overall structure of the country's female workforce – despite the recent massive fall in their numbers – is also partly maintained because relatively smaller proportions of the female agricultural workforce are migrating for urban style employment. Instead a greater proportion of urban women migrant workers, particularly from the higher castes, had made a transition from domestic confinement to employment.

The indications are that migration in the contemporary period has led to relatively limited diversification of female occupations. A more marked process has been of concentration of women labour migrants in brick kiln work in rural areas and paid domestic work in urban areas. In rural areas, although agriculture remains the single largest occupation of women migrant workers, the proportions involved in agricultural work prior to migrating was higher, while the numbers involved in brick kiln work almost trebled after migration. A more sharply delineated trebling of numbers involved in paid domestic work after migration in comparison to before was the most significant feature of urban-wards migration, even as employment in new and other diverse service jobs also increased after migration among urban women migrant workers. The process of concentration in paid domestic work thus

emerged as the most distinctive trend of female labour migration to urban areas and cut across all caste and community lines.

Such findings raise several questions regarding the class, caste and gender differentials and inequalities that have fed into the patterns of female labour migration in India. The social outcome of much of female labour migration in contemporary India does not appear to be moving towards lessening of either such differentials or inequalities. Rather, even demand driven migration patterns appear to be reconfiguring and providing new foundations for such differentials and inequalities - with significantly higher proportions of women from historically oppressed caste groups being corralled and condemned to a cycle of advance/debt based circulation for hard manual labour and degraded working conditions at one end. Gender, on the other hand, emerges as the primary axis for expanded menialisation of women's employment at the other end. Harsh methods of extraction of absolute surplus value from primary production, eternal circulation for survival premised to a great extent on family based units of labour - that simultaneously limits the possibilities of social advance - are the defining characteristics of the former. The latter, on the other hand, is arguably associated with a partial reconfiguration of status hierarchies in the sphere of social reproduction premised on feminization of paid menial services in the domestic sphere, albeit clearly outside the family units of their employers. The family thus seems to be a major determinant in currents of female labour migration at both supply and demand ends. This is not to deny the existence and entry of women in individual/autonomous capacities into several occupations that are not so closely linked with the family structures of society, but rather to point out that such entry or expansion has not been of a sufficient order to challenge the centrality of the family order in shaping the most significant currents in women's work and migration.

On a less gender specific note, there can be little doubt that migration is playing an increasingly important role in management of household economies. Where the census of village sites showed that economic migrants are drawn from a majority of rural households, the more general finding of the predominantly temporary nature of labour migration among both men and women has several other implications. While it does draw attention to the unsettled and indeed disorganising features of the contemporary employment regime that is driving migration, in our view there is a need to further delve into the socio-historical and developmental implications in relation to class formations of what appears to be a permanent temporariness of transition from peasant/agricultural labour to industrial/service sector worker for a large section of migrant workers.

A striking finding was that when viewing migration from village sites, the average annual income of households with migrants was less than that of households without migrants; educational levels were also lower in the former, and even nuclear family units were of a slightly lesser proportion in comparison to village households without any economic migrants. This suggests that the standard

assumptions of development and economic growth led transition of labour from agriculture to industry/services through migration and expectations of attendant restructuring of families towards nuclear units are inadequate for understanding the role of migration and gender in India's development story. We would argue that despite the push towards migration from agrarian distress, a pullback also appears to be operating, linked to the predominantly temporary and unsettled nature of the developing employment regime.

Additionally, the findings that a very large proportion of male migrant workers and a not insignificant proportion of female migrant workers were leaving children behind in their villages suggests a widespread inability of the migrant workforce (male and female) circulating at the lower ends of the economy to sustain social reproduction without periodic retreat to the village, even as the village economy is not providing sufficient employment or income for survival. The findings related to wages confirm the view that a substantial section of migrant workers do not earn enough to support a family.

Further, the increasing rates of rural female marriage migration evident in the macro-data call for attention and explanation. Case studies of cross regional marriage migrants indicated that poverty, landlessness and inability to pay dowry were common factors in such marriages. The meso-level survey evidence showed some expansion of village exogamous marriages and an accelerated spread of dowry that is particularly sharp among OBC, SC and ST communities. Such findings combined with the macro-evidence of declining rural female work participation rates suggest interlinkages between increased rates of marriage migration, falling female work participation rates and the expanding burden of dowry. They need to be explored further.

The fact that all the above findings are for a period of high growth in India, raises several additional questions. Obviously such growth, characterized by a rapidly declining share of agriculture in the country's GDP, accelerated growth primarily in services and to a lesser extent also industry, has not generated commensurate demand in terms of employment, for which women have paid the main price of reduced employment. As such, the overall analysis, implicitly, draws attention to the need to bring into the debate questions related to structural limitations to the migration enterprise under the current growth path.

Nevertheless, the urge to change the conditions of their life and work for it is evident from the high proportion of women migrant workers declaring that they themselves decided to migrate, whether in families or independently. This, combined with a significant presence of autonomous migration by women, not all of which is contractor driven, does indeed indicate the makings of a wave of social assertion and aspirational motivation. Yet, the overall findings of the CWDS study show that constraints shaped by macro-processes under neo-liberal driven economic growth have narrowed the field of opportunity for women's work based migration,

sometimes reinforced entrenched patriarchies and indeed introduced new elements of concentrated inequality and degradation for many that are not compensated by the social advance of some. In the absence of a greater policy focus on redistributive growth, migration in India is less rather than more likely to offer a route towards social transformation of a more non-patriarchal and equalizing nature.

In this Report, only the Key Findings of the Project Survey have been laid out. The context and operation of the findings and their context, along with the modes, terms and legal regimes within which migration happens need more discussion with the purpose of evolving strategies to deal with them. Apart from the dislocation, deprivation, and dehumanization of men, women and children, there are social costs involved.

It is important to recognize the links and interconnections between socio-economic processes, unfolding developments, political power and the politics of contemporary policy regimes.

Interrogation of extant social reality and its structural roots is critical if any real meaning has to emerge from the discourse on gender, migration and social mobility. Behind such issues and questions there are the faces of a multitude of migrant women workers that need to be brought into the picture.

How does one, for instance, understand the story of Manju, a bhatta (brick kiln) worker whom the project team met in Parsagarh, Bihar. Manju, was pregnant. The irony of her life was that she herself was born on the same bhatta where her mother used to come as a migrant worker. A third generation was due to come in the remaining script of the story was still to be written when the team met Manju. While Manju is the citizen of free India, in the statistical records of this country, she represents one more generation caught between being an associational migrant being a wife, a non-worker in her own right. The public wealth she creates through her active years shall continue to be hidden behind the garb of the labour that she performs at the 'private' level. Issues of gender and migration need to be disentangled from within the well known official story of the double digit growth of India's economic success if rights and citizenship have to acquire a real meaning in the lives of the people who are at the centre of studies such as these.¹³

¹³ Bibliography is given separately. (See the main Report).