

## Gender, Work and Migration: A Brief Perspective Paper on Orissa (With special reference to Sundergarh district)

Meera Pillai and Ratna M. Sudarshan

Institute of Social Studies Trust, Bangalore and New Delhi

### **Introduction:**

S.K. Sasikumar and Ravi Srivastava, in their overview of migration in India, hold that in some regions of India, as many as three out of four households include a migrant. The rural workforce in India has been steadily declining, from 79.3% in 1981 to 73.3% in 2001. However, the corresponding increase in the urban population has been much higher. Between 1951 and 2001, the urban population in India has almost doubled from 17.3% to 32.8% of the total population.<sup>1,2</sup> Orissa is one of the areas in the country with more women than men migrants out of the state.

While contribution of agriculture to the GDP has fallen over the years, the percentage of workers dependent on agriculture has not fallen correspondingly, and percentage of women in agriculture is now 85 % of all women workers. With limited agricultural growth and few non-farm opportunities available, migration is a coping strategy that many have to resort to. Short term and short distance migration has different implications for families, children's education, care of the elderly, cattle and houses, than longer duration and longer distance migration. There is some suggestion from our findings that in case of women migrants from Orissa, several forces are acting together to cause a shift towards the latter type.

In this paper, we look at the eastern state of Orissa. We first briefly consider what the literature says about socio-economic factors that make up the landscape of economic vulnerability in Orissa, which in turn may have an impact on movement of labour within or outside the state. Data from a study conducted by the Institute of Social Studies Trust, in collaboration with THREAD on gender, work and migration with special reference to Sundergarh district is presented. In the concluding section, an attempt is made to interpret the Orissa migration experience in relation to the major theories of migration.

---

<sup>1</sup>S.K. Sasikumar and Ravi Srivastava, *An overview of migration in India, its impacts and key issues*, Migration Development and Pro-Poor Policy Choices In Asia, [www.livelihoods.org](http://www.livelihoods.org)

<sup>2</sup> In spite of the occurrence of such population movements, scholars like Myron Weiner maintain that presently only a small proportion of people in India live outside their own place of birth or that of their spouses. Weiner points out that between 1981 and 1991; only 13 million rural dwellers migrated to India's cities and towns, a little more than 2% of India's rural populace. For details see: Myron Weiner, *Migration*, The Oxford India companion to sociology and social anthropology, Vol. 1, Ed. by Veena Das, Oxford University Press, 2003

### **Socio-economic distress in Orissa**

This general picture of migration in India is perhaps even more true for the eastern state of Orissa, whose performance on many development indicators has been highlighted repeatedly by scholars, and acknowledged by the state government. In 1999, Lárusdóttir noted “Orissa has a total population of nearly 35 million people. In normal times, of these, 60% live below the poverty level. Almost 90% of the populations live in rural areas. More than 50% of the children below the age of 4 are suffering from malnutrition. Nearly 90% have access to safe water, but only 4% have sanitation. Health statistics are reported to be incomplete. However, under 5 mortality and maternal mortality is reported to be high and measles vaccination coverage around 60%. Cholera and Malaria are endemic.”<sup>3</sup> Income poverty is significantly high in Orissa compared to the rest of India, and data sources indicate that the gap in incomes and between Orissa, and the rest of India has been rapidly widening over the last twenty years. According to Mahapatra, ‘Whereas in 1980 per capita income in Orissa was 27% lower than in the rest of India, in 1997 it was 70% lower. The proportion of people below the poverty line is estimated at 47.13% compared with 26.1% in the whole of India’<sup>4</sup>.

The Orissa Development Report (2004) highlighted other areas for apprehension. “The relative per capita income of Orissa ...declined vis-à-vis all other low-income states during the second half of the 1990s. When compared to all-India values, Orissa’s per capita income was three-fourths of that of all-India at the beginning of 1980s and became half by the end of 1990s.”<sup>5</sup> Further, speaking generally for India, indigenous communities constitute less than 8% of India's population but account for more than 40% of India's displaced. The First Peoples of Orissa are significantly disadvantaged. According to the Human Development Report for Orissa, “In the case of the rural ST population, the incidence of poverty in Orissa, at 71.51 per cent (1993–94), was the highest among the 16 major states of India.” This is much higher than the All-India figure of 51.9 percent. When we consider that indigenous populations of Orissa tend to live in the hilly interior districts like Sundergarh, the implication of such poverty on migration needs to be taken into account even more. Another reason for concern is the state’s susceptibility to natural and man-made disasters. According to the Human Development Report 2004, “Since 1965, Orissa has experienced floods for 17 years, droughts for 19 years, and cyclone for seven years.”<sup>6</sup> As people with low incomes are likely to suffer the most ill-effects of such disasters, Orissa’s increasing income poverty renders its population even more vulnerable, and liable to migrate.

### **Impact of socio-economic distress on migration in Orissa**

The socio-economic distress reflected in the data above has had its inevitable impact on migration in the state. The National Commission on Rural Labour(1991) found there were ‘more than 10 million circular migrants in the rural areas alone. These include an estimated 4.5 million inter-State migrants and six million intra-State migrants.’<sup>7</sup> Since

---

<sup>3</sup> *Cyclones in Orissa India*, October 1999, Mission Report by Dr Jóhanna Lárusdóttir TO-EHA WHO, SEARO 5<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup> November 1999, Executive summary, Orissa\WHO Orissa Report.htm

<sup>4</sup> [Devi Prasad Mahapatra](http://EzineArticles.com/?expert=Devi_Prasad_Mahapatra), *Labour Migration: A Shadow of Poverty in Orissa*, [http://EzineArticles.com/?expert=Devi\\_Prasad\\_Mahapatra](http://EzineArticles.com/?expert=Devi_Prasad_Mahapatra)

<sup>5</sup> Government of Orissa. (2004). *Orissa Human Development Report*. Chapter 2, p. 4. <http://orissagov.nic.in/p&c/humandevlopment/hdr/chap02.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Government of Orissa. (2004). *Orissa Human Development Report*. Chapter 7, p. 3-4. <http://orissagov.nic.in/p&c/humandevlopment/hdr/chap07.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> P. Sainath, *The Millions Who Cannot Vote*, *The Hindu*, 15 March, 2004

then, scholars like Mahapatra suggest, the numbers have gone up even more significantly. The Census of India figures for Orissa show a migration rate of 0.7 (per 100) in 1991-2001.<sup>8</sup>

Table 1: Showing the number of persons migrated per 1000 persons of each category in Orissa

Period since migrated	Female	Male
0 years rural persons	5	3
0 years urban persons	12	12
1-4 years rural persons	56	27
1-4 years urban persons	82	89
5-9 years rural persons	64	12
5-9 years urban persons	73	53
10 & above rural persons	275	27
10 & above urban persons	256	143
Total migrants	823	366

(Adapted from the National Sample Survey 55<sup>th</sup> Round 1999-2000)

The Orissa Human Development Report states, "It is a matter of concern that growth in agriculture and animal husbandry slowed down in the 1990s to about 2 per cent."<sup>9</sup> The crisis of agriculture in the last decade in Orissa has particularly contributed to the swelling of what development journalist Sainath (2004) termed the 'footloose army'<sup>10</sup>. Seasonal migration is an important livelihood strategy for many Oriyas. A *Frontline* cover story in 2004 recorded that lakhs of poor tribal people and Dalits were migrating to distant towns in the State's coastal belt or outside to scrape a living<sup>11</sup>. Chart1, along with Figure 1, clearly highlights an increasing number of migrants undertaking migration due to compulsions induced by work and marriage. Moreover, this is further marked by a predominance of women migrants over men.

### Gender, Work and Migration: A Study by ISST

Information from the literature survey corresponds to the data from a small study undertaken by ISST in April 2007 after the introduction of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) in 2006. An attempt was made to document the nature of migration as it exists at present, to understand if there is any observed immediate impact of EGS works on migration. The study was carried out with the help of a partner organization, Team for Human Resource Education and Action for Development (THREAD), a community development organization with an extensive field presence in Orissa. It was carried out in Sundergarh district, where traditionally

<sup>8</sup> *Census of India 2001*, Data Highlights, MIGRATION TABLES, (D1, D1 (Appendix), D2 and D3 Tables), p 14

<sup>9</sup> Government of Orissa. (2004). *Orissa Human Development Report*. Chapter 2, p.5. <http://orissagov.nic.in/p&c/humandevlopment/hdr/chap02.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> P. Sainath, *The Millions Who Cannot Vote*, The Hindu, 15 March, 2004, <http://www.hindu.com/2004>

<sup>11</sup> Prafulla Das, *Backwardness and a mood of cynicism: Cover Story*, *Frontline*, 21(9), April24-May07,2004

marginalized sections of the population, scheduled castes (8.78%) and scheduled tribes (50.74%), make up about 60 % of the population.

The census of 2001 provides some information about the employment situation in Sundergarh district.

Table 1: Population and total workers in Orissa State and Sundergarh District (2001).

Categories	Total Population (Orissa)	Total Population (Sundergarh)	Total Workers (Orissa)	Total Workers (Sundergarh)
Total Persons	3,68,04,660	18,29,412	1,42,76,488	7,40,291
Males	1,86,60,570	9,34,902	98,02,006	4,81,487
Females	1,81,44,090	8,94,510	44,74,482	2,58,804
Rural Persons	3,12,87,422	12,00,520	1,25,86,969	5,60,906
Males	1,57,48,970	6,02,043	83,73,695	3,25,549
Females	1,55,38,452	5,98,477	42,13,274	2,35,357
Urban Persons	55,17,238	6,28,892	16,89,519	1,79,385
Males	29,11,600	3,32,859	14,28,311	1,55,938
Females	26,05,638	2,96,033	2,61,208	23,447

(Source: Census 2001)

Table 1 reveals that the percentage of workers in Sundergarh district, at 40.46%, is higher than the state average of 38.78%. Female workers in the district (28.3%) are higher than the state average of 24.6%. However, Table 2 shows that rural women form only 22.72% of the labour force of main workers in the rural areas of the district. Further, 66.96% of the marginal workers in the villages are women as against 33% men. This clearly indicates that there is significant underemployment of women.

Table 2: Main workers, marginal workers, and non-workers - Orissa State and Sundergarh District 2001.

Categories	Main Workers (Orissa)	Main Workers (Sundergarh)	Marginal Workers (Orissa)	Marginal Workers (Sundergarh)	Non – Workers (Orissa)	Non – Workers (Sundergarh)
Total Persons	95,89,269	4,80,247	46,87,219	260,044	2,25,28,172	10,89,121
Males	80,04,740	3,90,093	17,97,266	91,394	88,58,564	4,53,415
Females	15,84,529	90,154	28,89,953	168,650	1,36,69,608	6,35,706
Rural Persons	80,71,999	3,17,047	45,14,970	2,43,859	1,87,00,453	6,39,614
Males	66,77,417	2,44,994	16,96,278	80,555	73,75,275	2,76,494
Females	13,94,582	72,053	28,18,692	1,63,304	1,13,25,178	3,25,549
Urban	15,17,27	1,63,200	1,72,249	16,185	38,27,719	4,49,507

Persons	0					
Males	13,27,323	1,45,099	1,00,988	10,839	1483289	176921
Females	189947	18101	71261	5346	2344430	272586

(Source: Census 2001)

ISST's study, which attempts to reveal some of the details and complexities of the situation reflected in the larger census figures, was carried out by a survey of 1412 households in 59 hamlets of 14 villages in six gram panchayats of Badgaon block and 42 hamlets of 19 villages in five gram panchayats in Hemgir block in April 2007. Data from the survey was further supplemented through information from focus group discussions carried out in both blocks.

### **Nature of work available for men and women**

The survey showed that work on land (either own land or as wage labour) and collection of forest produce are the two main sources of livelihood. There is very clear seasonality in the work available. A higher percentage of men than women is engaged in regular work and also in self employment. The focus group discussions that supplemented the survey showed that typically women's work at home consisted of cleaning the house, caring for children, cooking and other household chores. When the government or joint forest management committees permit the community to collect forest produce, women collect forest produce. These may be fruit like mahua and char, or kendu leaves. If they collect 100 bundles of 25 leaves each, they can earn Rs. 25. To collect sufficient leaves for this, they leave for the forest as early as 3 or 4 in the morning (while it is still dark) and return at about 11:30 a.m. They may also then spread the leaves for drying, and make them into plates or cups, in which case the return is slightly higher.

For an average of about 10 days a month, they may receive agricultural wage labour. Such labour is paid for in cash (Rs 25 per day) or in kind (5-6 kgs of paddy). There is also a system of sharing and exchanging labour within the community, by which families work on each other's land in turn during the agricultural season. Occasionally women received construction work locally. They were paid Rs. 30 per day for construction work; for construction of a concrete roof, they received Rs. 100 per day. There are some differences in income earned from block to block. While in Hemgir block too, a work day from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. in agricultural wage labour brought them Rs. 25 a day, women here reported higher earnings from the collection of forest produce, earning as much as Rs. 50 a day from this. Occasionally, they also got work in road construction, for which they earned Rs. 50 a day.

The evidence for work at home for men is less complex: for about six months of the year, men report receiving agricultural wage labour at Rs. 40 per day, or work on their own land. Men may also collect forest produce to some extent. The range of work for men is more evident when they migrate.

### **Land Holdings and Irrigation**

The crisis in employment in Orissa, and the consequent reliance on migration is clear from the evidence related to agriculture. Only about 11 per cent of the sample showed no landholdings at all. However, the major sub-section, about 37 per cent, cultivated holdings between 1 and 2 acres (0.4 to 0.8 ha) in size. Only 4 per cent of the sample cultivated holdings of more than five acres (i.e., more than 2.02 hectares). Thus, farming was largely subsistence or marginal farming. Further, nearly 21 per cent of the sample

did not cultivate any land: this implies that about ten per cent of the sample which possessed land holdings too did not cultivate them.

One of the major reasons for this could be lack of sufficient irrigation facilities. 91 % of the households in Badgaon and 87 % in Hemgir reported no irrigation facilities. Of the few who had access to irrigation, the major sources were tanks and wells without electricity. Only 2 persons in the entire sample of 1412 respondents reported access to a tubewell with electricity, and only 15 respondents had access to a government irrigation canal.

### **Decreasing yields due to environmental pollution**

Another reason for agriculture becoming increasingly unattractive in Sundergarh was revealed during the field visits and the focus group discussions with residents of the villages as well as with members of a number of community-based organizations in the state. Sundergarh is mineral rich, with resources like iron ore, manganese and lead. The abundant iron ore, and the significant profits from converting iron ore into the more convenient metallic form of sponge iron has led to the establishment of about fifty sponge iron factories in the district in the past few years.

The visual evidence indicates that any state pollution control laws are employed more in the breach than the observance, as the electro-static precipitators which can check stack pollution, cause about Rs. 1 crore to install, and between Rs.1-2 lakhs in power costs every month. Consequently, the factories spew thick black smoke into the air, which deposits soot and other particulate matter in an area of a three to five kilometer radius around each factory. In addition to this, there are fugitive emissions from dumps. A drive through the district shows that the slag from the sponge iron factories is being indiscriminately dumped by factory owners, usually at night, wherever they can, by the side of the road, in fields, etc. Rainwater leaches through these mounds and hillocks of slag and into the ground, seriously affecting the quality of the land.

The seriously damaging effects of pollution by the sponge iron industry have been noted by the ILO as well as local studies. Pollutants include various oxides of sulphur, nitrogen dioxide, carbon monoxide, iron oxides in particulate matter, as well as heavy metals like cadmium, chromium, nickel, lead, manganese and zinc. These have been recorded as causing a range of health problems, in addition to being carcinogenic<sup>12</sup>. There are important ill-effects to plants as well. According to a study funded by the National Centre for Advocacy Studies in October 2006, "Plants are known to sustain injury at relatively low SO<sub>2</sub> concentrations, particularly when other pollutants are also present. The importance of NO<sub>x</sub> as a pollutant is primarily because of its participation in photochemical reactions. Coal dust is quite harmful to vegetation...yield reduction in sensitive plant species [is] greater – up to 50% than in hardy species."<sup>13</sup> The range of reduction for rice, a sensitive species and of the most important crops in Sundergarh, is between 30 and 40 per cent.

Community representatives report that agricultural yields have gone down significantly. One of the major indigenous tribes in the area is the *kisan* tribe, who were so named

---

<sup>12</sup> ILO. *Encyclopaedia of Occupational Health and Safety*. 4<sup>th</sup> Edition. Retrieved at <http://www.ilocis.org/en/contilo.html>

<sup>13</sup> National Centre for Advocacy Studies. (2006). *Risk Appraisal Study: Sponge Iron Plants, Raigarh District*. [http://www.ncasindia.org/Public/Whatnew/sponge\\_iron/jindal\\_sponge\\_iron\\_plant.pdf](http://www.ncasindia.org/Public/Whatnew/sponge_iron/jindal_sponge_iron_plant.pdf)

because traditionally, they have been recognized as extremely skilled farmers, capable of coaxing the land into very high yields. However, the damage wrought by the sponge iron factories on agriculture has been so significant that, in many areas, families have had to abandon their traditional occupation of farming, which yielded them some kind of living, and employment for about six months in the year. The sponge iron factories do not employ locals, and the lack of any other significant employment in the area means that more and more people are having to migrate.

### **Nature of Migration**

The sample shows a higher level of illiteracy among females (32%) than males (17 %); however the higher education levels of males reflects a basic education up to secondary and not beyond. The comparative lack of higher, vocational and technical education implies that migrants largely look for opportunities as unskilled wage labourers. Migration is a means of supplementing incomes earned within the village and from the land or forest. Overall, 21 % of the households reported receiving remittances from migrants. The number of persons living away from home was roughly 3% of the women and 9 % of the men. 83 % of those who migrated sent back remittances (74 % of women and 85 % of men). Women migrants made up 23 % of all migrants. However, there are significant regional variations in the duration and destination of migration, even from block to block. The survey found that most of the people who were living away from home for Badgaon were outside the block but within the district, while of those from Hemgir a majority was outside the village but within the block.

Both female and male migrants are away mainly for work: this was true of 77 % of women and 86 % of men. The second most important reason is study (15 % and 13 % respectively for women and men), and marriage accounts only for 8 % of female and 1 % of male migration. When the reasons for choosing to migrate for work were probed more deeply in the survey, the largest proportion (37 per cent) referred to the availability of work as the reason, followed by higher wages (36 per cent). In comparison, only 21 per cent referred to the availability of preferred work, and less than five per cent suggested that there was a better chance of saving money. This suggests that a lot of the migration is for subsistence reasons, rather than for substantial economic advantage. Respondents were unequivocal that by far the most significant reason for any changes in the incidence of migration is the availability of work, and its converse, the lack of work. If work is not available locally, people will migrate. This was confirmed by the focus group discussions at which both men and women said that they would prefer to stay in their villages, and if work was available locally at the NREGS wages, they would not consider migrating.

Information about the nature of the work done by migrants, as generated by the survey, showed that construction and earth work claim the most migrant labour, followed by agricultural labour, brick-making and road work. While the numbers in the table are too low to make broad generalizations, these findings were confirmed by the focus group discussions, which provided a more detailed and layered picture related to migration for work. Residents of villages in Sundergarh, as well as representatives of community-based organizations in the district reported that when women traveled for work, it would be outside the panchayat but within the district for the most part. This was largely in the winter and early summer, when teams of three worked for about 21/2 days on average to make 1000 bricks, for which they were paid Rs. 150. Men migrated to the Punjab to work as agricultural wage labour, to Mangalore, Goa and the Andamans to work in the hotel industry, and to other places like Delhi, Gujarat, Rajasthan and the southern states

to work in construction and in factories, and also in the service sector as security guards. Groups of men also migrated with *dalals*, agents, to work in power plants in Andhra Pradesh, where a 12 hour workday earned them Rs. 70 per day. To work at brickmaking, men from the district traveled as far as Azamgarh in UP and Itanagar in the North-East.

Migrants were also asked in the survey about their perceptions of the extent of migration among men and women, as compared to three years ago. Of the responses related to the migration of men, nearly 42 per cent felt that the extent of migration among men had decreased, while 30 per cent felt it had remained the same, and 28 per cent thought it had increased. For the women, nearly 49 per cent of the responses felt migration among women had decreased, nearly 31 per cent felt it had remained the same, and about 20 per cent felt that it had increased.

### **The Migration Experience**

This part of the survey was canvassed only to returned migrants, the figures involved are very small, and do not warrant broad generalizations. However, some points of interest include:

**Issues related to middlemen/contractors:** Frequently, the migration experience is mediated by middlemen or contractors. This was borne out by the study in Sundergarh, as 67 per cent of the respondents from Badgaon and 58 per cent of those from Hemgir said that there was usually a contractor or middleman for the working group. Fewer respondents in general were willing to answer the question about whether the middleman was a local; of those who did, nearly 68 per cent of those in Badgaon said that the middleman was not a local. In contrast, 60 per cent of respondents in Hemgir said the middleman was a local.

**Quality of Basic Living Conditions:** The survey also sought opinions about the quality of basic living conditions as experienced by migrant workers. About 63 per cent of those who addressed the issue of living quarters felt that they were reasonable, while about 37 per cent did not. Nearly 71 per cent felt that they could obtain safe drinking water. 54 per cent felt that conditions were safe for women. However, sanitation was an issue, with nearly 71 per cent saying that toilet facilities were unavailable. Of the 18 respondents who said that toilet facilities were available, nearly 59 per cent said that these were free. About 47 per cent said that health facilities were available. 89 per cent of those who addressed the issue of safety said they felt safe both in the place of work and at the residence.

**Effects on children:** The part of the questionnaire related to migration was canvassed only if there was a returned migrant in the household during the survey to such persons. Even given that this restricted the number of responses, it became very evident that parents were reluctant to speak of effects of migration on children, with the highest number of responses from across both gram panchayats on a question being only 10. However, probing during the focus group discussions revealed that if there were family members or responsible neighbours with whom the children could be left behind, children could be left behind several months at a time while the adult members of the family went on brickmaking assignments, and in such cases, if the children were in school, schooling was not interrupted. More typically, children, especially younger children, traveled to the worksites of their parents. Older children helped with childcare of their younger siblings, or with the actual work, younger children played near the worksite, with only limited supervision and protection, while their parents worked.

### **In-Migration**



The picture of “lack of work” and consequent migration in Orissa is complicated by a significant amount of in-migration into Sundergarh district from “the Hindi speaking states” – Bihar, UP, etc. The perception among the indigenous community is that, historically, whenever industries have been set up in Sundergarh, ostensibly for the development of the district and its largely tribal population, the latter have derived only negligible benefits from it. The ratio of local Adivasi employees to outsiders in the Rourkela Steel Plant is about 1:3. The pattern has since worsened. The community accepts that there may not be suitably qualified or experienced engineers and other technical professionals from the local community in sufficient numbers. However, in the 12 sponge iron factories that have been set up in Kuarmunda block, even unskilled labour that the locals can do is given to migrant labourers from Bihar, UP, MP, etc. Thus, regardless of whether the discussion is of employment in big or small industries, the locals feel discriminated against.

The hotel and allied service industry in the district, including bars and liquor stores are also owned and serviced by migrants into the state. Locals also report significant in-migration of Bangladeshi immigrants. Most of the migrants are men. Once they have established themselves, some of them bring their families. Others marry local women and settle in the area. Few leave the district once they have found work.

### **Migration of Women for Domestic Work/Trafficking of Women and Girl Children for Commercial Sexual Exploitation**

Unlike the picture presented in the village and block-level discussions in Chamunda, Jhantalburh and Hemgir, where the perception largely was that women, when they traveled for work only did so to other blocks within the district, or at the most to adjoining districts like Jharsuguda and Sambalpur, representatives of community-based organizations, representatives of local governments and NGOs said that there was a significant amount of out-migration of women too from the district. Women largely migrated ostensibly for domestic work in the big cities of Delhi, Mumbai and Kolkata. At the village level discussions, only one old man in Jhantalburh was willing to talk about this (“*Bahut si ladkiyaan ja rahe hain. Kahte hain ki ghar ka kaam karne ke liye ja rahe hain, lekin kisko pata kahaan ja rahe hain or kya kar rahe hain.*”) The women at the discussion looked embarrassed and quickly said that no one from Jhantalburh had gone for domestic work, but that a few girls from the adjoining hamlet had left their villages for this purpose.

Some of the non-governmental and community-based organizations in the Tribal Organisations Network of Sundergarh (TONS) had carried out fact-finding missions after hearing that recruitment for domestic work was actually a front for trafficking for commercial sex work. According to Anil, a volunteer activist with Gangpur Adivasi Forum for Socio-Cultural Awakening (GAFSCA), a local tribal rights organization, who participated in the discussion:

*I was sent on a fact-finding mission, accompanying the father of a girl from our village who had gone to do domestic work in Delhi. We were told by others who had been on similar missions earlier to inquire with the placement agencies. We went to the Punjabi Bagh area. There are almost 350 to 400 of these placement agencies in that area. We went to one of two of these with the parents of the girl we were trying to locate. This discussion is happening in a training centre owned by the church, but I am telling you, when you go to one of the offices of these placement agencies you will see more crosses, more pictures of Jesus and Mary than you can find even in places like this centre or even our churches. The*

*purpose is to create a sense of familiarity and trust in the girls who go there. ("Yeh dikhaane ke liye ki ham aapke aadmi hain, yahaan aap theek rahenge") When we went there, they asked us, "Kya chahiye saab?" and showed us photograph albums of dozens of girls. The father of the girl about whom we had gone to enquire got very agitated and so we left. But we went back later without him. We were led into the next room. It was a very small room, about 8 feet by 10 feet. There were about ten girls there. They were in their underclothes. Their things were also in the room – their boxes and clothes, and that is where they slept. They said that once they had come into this line of work, they could not go back. However, the employers also keep them under their thumb. One of the girls said that her brother had died in the village about ten days earlier, and she had received information about this. But the employers were refusing to send her home, even though she wanted to go back and visit her family. After the girls have been there for about a year, they are allowed to go back and visit their families for a month. However, they are paid only half their annual wages when they go back. The employers are afraid that if they pay them their full wages, the girls will not come back.*

On an earlier field visit, one of the activists, a retired headmaster, had said that when they tried to raise awareness about the trafficking issue in the villages, they had found that there was a difference in the situations between hamlets comprising tribals of a Christian religious persuasion, and those not of this persuasion. "When I was doing this work, and I went to non-Christian hamlets, people would say, why are you telling us? Our girls are all here. It is only your Christian girls who go for this work. You should be talking to them! When I checked this out, I found it was true. 99 per cent of the girls getting trafficked are from Christian hamlets. I did not know what to say." As the earlier narrative suggests, traffickers/dalals appear to play up the religious angle to suggest legitimacy and build a degree of confidence among both parents and the young women that they are headed towards decent and respectable employment.

During the focus group discussion, when this issue was raised to try and identify what might be push-pull factors involved in the migration for domestic work/trafficking, participants were reluctant to address the issue of the community angle raised by the former headmaster. However, the three reasons identified by the participants for girls being attracted by this notion of going for domestic work were poverty, friction within the household, and the glamour of leaving the village and going to work in a big city. According to a nun from the indigenous community, who worked closely with residents of these villages on education and awareness building, "When these girls come back to the village for their annual visit they bring boxes with them with gifts for family and friends. They wear jewellery, speak some English and fluent Hindi, and to the girls who are in the village, appear very sophisticated. When they go back after a month, they take one or two more girls from the village with them."

At the focus group discussions, we were also able to obtain a perspective on the commercial sexual exploitation of indigenous girls from the district from a young man who had played a part in this process:

*I had just got married when I received a letter from one of my friends from the village who was now living in Delhi. He invited me to come to Delhi and offered me a job. He said the job would be office management. He and I had played hockey together here, and he said that we could play hockey there too. I was very attracted. A job as an office manager sounded good, and I liked the idea of*

*playing hockey. So I went to Delhi. He met me at the Nizamuddin station. When I went to the placement agency, I discovered what the job really involved. There would be phone calls, asking for a girl to be dropped to Defence Colony or picked up from GK-II. I would take the girl in an auto, or pick her up and bring her back. I know I am exposing myself in front of you, but I think it is important that we all know this. Once when I went to pick up a girl, the man there shouted and pulled a knife on me. He said I don't like this girl. But you can't take her until you bring me another one. Bring me a girl and then you can take this one back, because I have already paid. I saw many girls from our villages there. (At this point in the narrative, Vijay began pointing at various members of the group, and saying things like 'There was a girl from your panchayat, X chacha's brother's daughter' and 'I met a girl from your village, she said she had been there for four months'. It had the unnerving effect of making this entire discussion much more real, immediate and personal.) One Sunday, when I went to church I had the unexpected experience of meeting my wife's first cousin, who said she was working there. Many of the Adivasi girls who come to Delhi change their names. This girl's name was Sushma, but she had changed her name to Seema. When I wrote to my wife, I told her that I had met Sushma and asked her if she knew what had brought her to Delhi. After I wrote, her family came to look for her in Delhi. But where is one to look, especially when they change their names? Sushma came back to the village, and her family did not allow her to go back.*

She was probably one of the lucky ones. Another participant in the discussion recounted the instance of a girl who had been trafficked by her own older sister. The family had since been trying to trace her, but the sister had no idea where she was. Also, several young women had returned to the district after living in Delhi for a while and died of the "Delhi disease", as AIDS is referred to locally.

Migration for domestic work requires more intensive study. There are a number of forces acting simultaneously: an increased demand for domestic workers with the growth of towns and increasing income levels; the mushrooming of employment agencies in towns which are able to link up with local contractors whose own outreach to towns and cities may be limited; increasing aspirations and promises of wealth dangled before young girls, creating a strong pull effect; acceptance of single women migrating for domestic work in tribal communities, in contrast to the attitude in some other communities.

Since domestic work is unregulated and a number of the mediating agencies do not provide enough protection to the women, only a small percentage of women may be able to use this opportunity as a way of moving to a better life. Domestic workers are part of the informal economy, and suffer from the vulnerabilities of this group – no legal minimum wage or assured benefits, no social security, limited bargaining power regarding conditions of work, vulnerability to exploitation of various kinds including sexual exploitation.

Thus the agencies and contractors form an institutional framework which mediates the behaviour of this particular market and this group of migrant workers.

### **Migration in other districts**

While the ISST study focused on gender, work and migration primarily in Sundergarh district, interviews with representatives of chapters of the Orissa Nari Samaj and of THREAD in other districts suggests that the pattern of in-migration and out-migration

seen in Sundergarh holds for other districts as well. Mayurbhanj district appears to attract migrants from Jharkhand, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh and Bihar to work in construction, road-laying, hotels, mines and factories, and sends its own people to the cities and mining districts of Orissa, Southern Indian cities like Bangalore and Chennai, and to Gujarat in the west. The north-western districts of Sundergarh, Jharsuguda, Sambalpur, Deogarh, Baragarh, and Bolangir attract largely male wage labourers from Bihar, Chattisgarh and Jharkhand to work in mines and sponge iron factories. Out migration is to big cities like Hyderabad, Mumbai, Surat and Delhi, and primarily for wage labour. In the south, the Koraput, Malkangiri, Nabarangpur, Rayagarha and Kalahandi districts attract labourers from Andhra Pradesh and Chattisgarh, as well as from other districts in Orissa for farming and contract wage labour and migrate to the southern states, especially the big cities as wage labourers, largely in construction, and to Gujarat to work in the textile industry. Work for male migrants include wage labour in construction, road work and factories, brickmaking, bamboo cutting, hotel work, mining and work as drivers, security guards and masons. Migrant work for females includes brickmaking, agricultural wage labour, domestic wage labour, earthwork, road construction, and fish processing and packing in coastal districts. The trafficking of young women for domestic labour/commercial sex work was also reported from other districts like Bolangir and Mayurbhanj.

### **Conclusion**

Ravenstein, in his classic 1889 essay put down the principal reason for migration as being overpopulation in one part of a country and undeveloped resources providing opportunities for higher wages in another.<sup>14</sup> The Orissa experience, described briefly in this paper, shows that the story is much more complex. The Harris-Todaro model assumes that people will make rational economic decisions to migrate from rural to urban areas based on expected higher income differentials.<sup>15</sup> However, in propounding this theory of people as making sound, rational economic decisions, Harris and Todaro assume a competitive agricultural wage and that potential migrants will have full and accurate information about employment opportunities and expected income in urban and rural contexts. Orissa shows that all too often, there are insufficient agricultural wage labour opportunities available locally and hence, wages are exploitative rather than competitive. Further, migrants often do not have such information, especially when their information is mediated by agents and middlemen. Only in the case of seasonal migration to known places is such information available, and then, the migration usually occurs not because wages are higher at the destination, but because enough work is simply not available in the place of origin.

Arthur Lewis proposed a two-sector theory of migration, with labour flowing from an increasingly stagnating agricultural sector to an expanding, dynamic commercialized and industrial sector.<sup>16</sup> While Lewis' theory has fallen out of fashion with many Western economists, it continues to be relevant in countries like India. His recognition that such a movement would cause a worsening of conditions for labour in the initial stages, and a

---

<sup>14</sup> E.G. Ravenstein, *The laws of migration*, Journal of Royal Statistical Society, Vol. 52, No. 2, June 1889

<sup>15</sup> Harris J. and M. Todaro (1970). *Migration, Unemployment & Development: A Two-Sector Analysis*. American Economic Review, March 1970; 60(1):126-42.

<sup>16</sup> Lewis, W. Arthur. 1954. "Economic Development with Unlimited Supplies of Labor." *Manchester School of Economic and Social Studies* 22: 139-91.

search for jobs in the informal economy is also borne out by the patterns observed in the case of Orissa. Oded Stark's New Economics of Labour Migration (NELM) which emphasizes not individual independence in making the decision to migrate, but mutual interdependence within the family which influences the decision to migrate, either as an individual or a family, and which then links the migrant with family members left behind through a pattern of remittances is also evident in the Orissa migration experience<sup>17</sup>. This can be further linked with Douglas Massey's observation that in the absence of social security benefits (not to mention lack of employment opportunities) families tend to "self-insure against risk" by sending out one or more members as migrants<sup>18</sup>.

All the above theories, however, draw on the classical model which draws on factor mobility as a response to differences in relative real wages in different areas. Michael Piore, in his study of unskilled immigrant workers in the US labour market in the 1960s and '70s suggested that there was a duality in the labour market itself, with migrant workers operating out of a different frame of reference as compared to workers born and raised locally, especially when it came to working in unskilled jobs characterized by instability or uncertainty, low social status and low wages, (or what are commonly referred to as the '3D' jobs – dirty, dangerous and difficult). This was because many of them viewed their situation as temporary, "divorced from a social setting, operating outside the constraints and inhibitions that it imposes, working totally and exclusively for money."<sup>19</sup>

However, while Piore's theory suggests that these different frames of reference of migrant workers drives such labour mobility, it is also important to reiterate that these very qualities are deliberately and systematically exploited by the capitalist system in which labour laws for the unorganized sector are weak and almost never enforced. Hence, while unskilled labour under difficult conditions which pose a health hazard is locally available for labourers in Sundergarh district, they are not provided with this work. Such work is provided to other migrants from nearby states like Jharkhand, Chattisgarh and West Bengal, while local workers look for low-paid work of exactly the same nature far from their homes. This suggests a deliberate attempt to ensure that labourers can be exploited and oppressed in hazardous working conditions without access to the social and economic support network that would be available to local workers to keep wages low and demands for better working conditions non-existent or weak. Thus, the data from Orissa is in keeping with other structuralist explanations of how decisions about forms of production, investment and keeping returns high structure the migration experience, and how the actions arising from these decisions constrain and shape migration decisions and labour flow. Alejandro Portes, Director of the Center for Migration and Development at Princeton, made a valuable contribution when he emphasized the importance of the informal economy, not as a transitional stage in development, but as a means of deliberately organizing production and marketing while accumulating capital in an area<sup>20</sup>. The Sundergarh sponge iron industry, with its impact

---

<sup>17</sup> Stark, O. 1991. *The Migration of Labor*. Cambridge: Basil Blackwell.

<sup>18</sup> Massey, D. S. 2003. *Patterns and processes of international migration in the 21<sup>st</sup> century*. Paper presented at Conference on African Migration in Comparative Perspective, Johannesburg, South Africa, 4-7 June, 2003.

<sup>19</sup> Piore, M. 1979. *Birds of Passage: Migrant Labour and Industrial Societies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p. 55

<sup>20</sup> Portes, A. & Schauffler, R. 1993. Competing perspectives on the Latin American informal sector. *Population and Development Review*. 19(March): 33-60.

on both in and out-migration, seems to clearly reflect this aspect. The Orissa migration experiences also seem to bear out Massey's extension of Myrdal's theory of cumulative causation to migration: "each act of migration creates social infrastructure capable of promoting additional movement"<sup>21</sup>.

In Orissa, gender roles and values were sufficiently well defined that people in the villages were primarily willing to talk of women's migration only with the family or in groups formed from within the local community, and not far away, either outside the village but within the block, outside the block and within the district, or at most, in adjoining districts. People within the villages themselves were reluctant to talk of women migrating alone, or with agents, and a person who did was viewed as engaging in some degree of letting down of the community. Representatives of community-based organizations and local NGOs were concerned about the widespread trafficking of young women for domestic labour and commercial sex work. There is significant pressure on men to migrate for 3D work, and this in turn puts pressure on women and older girl children in terms of both wage labour and care giving responsibilities. According to Jolly and Reeves (2005), "Gender roles, relations and inequalities affect who migrates and why, how the decision is made, the impacts on migrants themselves, on sending areas and on receiving areas. Experience shows that migration can provide new opportunities to improve women's lives and change oppressive gender relations – even displacement as a result of conflict can lead to shifts in gendered roles and responsibilities to women's benefit. However, migration can also entrench traditional roles and inequalities and expose women to new vulnerabilities as the result of precarious legal status, exclusion and isolation."<sup>22</sup> In Orissa, the socio-economic circumstances, the increased emphasis on the mining sector, deforestation and degradation of agricultural land, create conditions for the supply of migrant labour. The lack of effective labour laws and their implementation, and lacunae in registering migrants, encourages their movement into informal work, through 'irregular and risky migration channels'. The NREGA if properly implemented certainly has the potential to bring down short distance migration for wage work of both men and women. Its impact on the more complex migration patterns of domestic work which are longer distance and mediated by various institutions is more difficult to anticipate.

To devise protective and effective policies and practices, more research, advocacy and intervention is urgently needed.

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:** This paper draws on an ISST study that was undertaken with support from the ILO, Delhi. We would like to acknowledge the inputs of Wasudha Bhatt, who contributed a paper on 'The culture of Indian migration' to the study, which has been drawn upon in the introductory and background review parts of this paper.

---

<sup>21</sup> Massey, D. S. 2003. *Patterns and processes of international migration in the 21<sup>st</sup> century*. Paper presented at Conference on African Migration in Comparative Perspective, Johannesburg, South Africa, 4-7 June, 2003. p. 17.

<sup>22</sup> Jolly, S. & Reeves, H. (2005). *Gender and Migration: An Overview Paper*. Sussex: BRIDGE, Institute of Development Studies.