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# Migration, Crises and Social Transformation in India Since the 1990s

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## **Migration, Crises and Social Transformation in India Since the 1990s**

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## **Migration, Crises and Social Transformation in India Since the 1990s**

### **Abstract**

Since liberalization, urban migration in India has increased in quantity, but also changed in quality, with permanent marriage migration and temporary, circular employment migration rising, even as permanent economic migration remains stagnant. We understand internal migration in India to be a re-ordering of productive and reproductive labor that signifies a deep transformation of society. We argue that this transformation is a response to three overlapping crises: an agrarian crisis, an employment crisis, and a crisis of social reproduction. These are not crises for capitalist accumulation, which they enable. Rather, they make it impossible for a majority of Indians to achieve stable, rooted livelihoods.

**Keywords:** Migration, India, Urbanization, Social Reproduction

## I. Introduction

This paper looks at the close tension/relationship in India between recent social transformations and migration *crises*<sup>1</sup>. We look at two specific transformations - accelerated urbanization, and deeper penetration of a neo-liberal kind of capitalism over the last 2-3 decades in rural and urban India. The current Indian urbanization, along with Chinese urbanization since 1980s, should be seen as a globe-transforming phenomenon, as about a tenth of the world's population are changing their status from rural to urban, primarily through internal migration (but also through extended urbanization). Simultaneously, these economies have increasingly come under the logic of neo-liberal capitalism, greatly increasing the spread of capitalism over the past 3-4 decades. In this paper, we argue that internal migration in India is mainly a re-ordering of productive and reproductive labor that signifies a deep transformation of society. It is accentuated by three overlapping crises (in practice) that we present below.

The first two of these three crises are widely acknowledged: an *agrarian crisis* marked by low agricultural growth rates, a livelihoods crisis for small farmers, and reduced wage employment in agriculture; and an *employment crisis* where non-agricultural employment (in urban and rural areas) is inadequate in quantity and quality to compensate for the decline in agricultural employment. The first crisis pushes large numbers of rural residents to seek employment outside of agriculture, which means moving to urban areas for jobs in construction and low skill services. The second (employment) crisis accentuates the phenomenon of urban precarity/informality, and makes migration transient, with migrants returning to rural homes once a particular spell of employment is completed, only to start a new journey later. The migration process in India thus challenges boundaries of urban/rural and raises the question of what this phenomenon of increased migration signifies, something that we explore in the subsequent sections.

The third overlapping crisis that shapes migration patterns is a social reproduction crisis in which a lack of social provisioning by the state, and declining access to the rural and urban commons have expanded rather than compressed the temporal and spatial disconnect between productive and reproductive work, making it more difficult for workers to bridge this divide. This background of social reproductive crisis helps explain why family migration is relatively common in India. Although there are significant streams of single, male migration, particularly in North-Central India, many temporary migrants move as couples, often with their children. This may be due to relatively rigid gender divisions of labor when it comes to productive labor in industries such as construction. However, studies of urban labor also point out the impossibility of ensuring basic biological reproduction on very low wages without substantial reliance upon unpaid labor, whether it is to generate food, access unreliable and distant sources of water, or to ensure that children are clothed and fed.

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<sup>1</sup> The crises we discuss here are those that induce migration and challenge the ability of Indian households to ensure stable, rooted, social reproduction. We do not use the term 'migration crises' to imply that migration itself is a crisis, nor do we think that what we are witnessing is a crisis for capitalist accumulation itself.

In presenting these overlapping crises we are talking about patterns that go back at least two decades now. The term crisis suggests something that is contained in time and space (and can alternate with moments and places of non-crisis), and neither of these appears to be the case in India today. These are also not crises that are bringing the system to a halt, or even causing political or economic upheaval. Instead, each of these elements appears to be accepted as part of the social fabric, to be worked around and within, to be *normal* in fact. We thus wish to theorize the *new normal* of Indian development as something that is defined by a state of continuous movement of labor (both of the productive and reproductive kinds) across the rural and urban divide, that is precarious and informal in nature, and that allows for capital to more easily extract surplus.

In this sense, the three inter-related crises are not crises for capital (they actually facilitate easier accumulation), but are crises for a sustained and rooted reproduction of the majority of working people. These crises transform themselves into transient movement/migration (not a paralysis of labor), with an ameliorating role (with respect to the crises) played by gender relations that ensure that reproductive labor absorbs the uncertainty and precarity of this movement. Therefore, migration can be understood as the transformation of the overall division of social labor, resulting from the three overlapping crises presented above.

## **II. Migration to Urban India**

The literature analyzes migration to urban India across two main temporal-spatial axes: permanent versus temporary, and rural-urban versus urban-urban, to which we add inter-state versus intra-state. The absence of reliable national level data on temporary migration means that the analyses of temporary migration are often qualitative rather than quantitative, with the reverse being true for permanent migration. Despite the data limitations however, two important trends emerge from these studies. First, migration to urban India has increased in quantity over the last two decades. Second, this increase is driven by both temporary, circular employment migration of the ‘footloose’ kind (Breman 2010) as well as permanent marriage migration, even as permanent economic migration remains stagnant. We argue that it is not a coincidence that these changes have occurred at the same time as the intensification of the three kinds of crises discussed in this paper. These crises have transformed the way that the majority of Indians earn a livelihood, forcing them to seek work wherever they can find it, including in the city. The burden of these crises is borne in gendered way, however, requiring an intensification of women’s work, without which even this extremely precarious means of existence would not be viable.

### ***a. Permanent versus Temporary***

#### **(i) Permanent migration**

Permanent migration in India is defined by the decennial Indian Census, as well as the Indian National Sample Survey (NSS) as a move to a new ‘usual place of residence’ for a year or more. According to the Census, the share of Indians engaged in permanent migration has been relatively stagnant, with about 30% of the population reporting themselves as permanent migrants over the last several decades. The NSS data indicates an increase from 23% to 28% between 1983 and 2007-08 (Table 1). While both the Census and the NSS provide us with data on migration, due to the greater degree of detail in the NSS, we focus on the latter.

According to the NSS data, the share of urban migrants within all permanent migrants has risen slightly after 1988, indicating an urbanization of permanent migration. The increase in the overall share of permanent migrants is, however, driven by the migration of women who move to their marital homes after marriage.

*Table 1 about here*

The NSS divides permanent migrants into migrants for “economic” reasons, migrants for studies, “follower” migrants (who accompany a primary earner) and marriage migrants. Amongst working age male migrants, the first category is the largest, but relatively unchanged. Amongst working age women, on the other hand, while the first and second categories are falling, the share of marriage migrants has grown. Between 1983 and 2008, marriage migration increased across most parts of India (Mazumdar et al 2013, Rao and Finnoff 2015). In almost every state in the northern, central, eastern and western regions, 60% or more of working age women reported being marriage migrants in 2008, with the highest concentration of marriage migrants in the relatively poor ‘Hindi heartland’ states. Thus female marriage migrants constitute the largest and fastest growing group of permanent migrants in India (Tables 1 and 2). Due to the ubiquity of patri-local marriage for women, Indian girls are effectively raised as migrants in the making, constantly reminded that their home will eventually be elsewhere.

*Table 2 about here*

The profile of male, mostly economic, permanent migrants and that of female, mostly marriage migrants, differs in one important way. Permanent male urban migrants tend to have higher levels of education and skill, and tend to experience upward mobility in the destination area, with urban-urban migrants being the best off. Thus male permanent migration tends to accentuate rural-urban inequality through a “brain drain” of sorts (Vakulabharanam and Thakurata 2014). Not surprisingly, female follower migrants share the relatively better off socio-economic profile of male permanent economic migrants (Rao 2017). However, female urban marriage migrants have education levels below the average for urban non-migrant women, and most rural-urban marriage migrants appear to enter the households of relatively poor urban men. Rao and Finnoff (2015) see this as a result of rising rural-urban inequality in combination with the employment crisis. They argue that even poorer urban households become desirable as marriage alliances for rural households, since the jobs crisis in urban India makes the marriage market a more feasible way to gain an urban foothold than the labor market. It is unclear whether the

women thus married into the urban precariat are left better off, but control over the bodies of women thus becomes one way that rural families are able to access an exclusionary urban economy.

### (ii) Temporary migration

The data on temporary and circular migrants is a great deal less reliable. Neither the Census nor the NSS able to capture these forms of migration with much accuracy, although the 2007-08 NSS survey does make a more serious attempt to do so. The NSS defines migration for durations of more than one month but less than 6 months as 'temporary'. As Table 3 shows, by this definition in 2007-08 almost 14 million Indians were engaged in temporary migration, double the number in 1999-00. However, this data also indicates a decrease in temporary migration to urban areas in this period (Vakulabharanam and Thakurata 2014). There is almost universal agreement that this is an underestimation. As squatters and pavement dwellers, temporary urban migrants do not have a fixed residence in urban areas and are therefore not captured by the Census or NSS surveyors (Roy 2007, Breman 2010).

*Table 3 about here*

Field studies from across the country (DeHaan 2002, Rogaly and Rafique 2003, Shah 2006, Mosse et al 2002, Guérin et al. 2007, Roy 2007, Garikipati 2008, Breman 2010, Pattenden 2016, Picherit 2016) show that temporary migration has become an integral part of the livelihood portfolio for most rural Indians. There is evidence from this literature that the scale of such temporary migration increased in the 2000s partly as a consequence of the agrarian crisis that began in the 1990s. Deshingkar and Start (2003) estimate that there might be up to 100 million temporary migrants in India today.

These field studies, as well as an analysis of the NSS data on temporary migration (Keshri and Bhagat 2012) show that temporary migration is a strategy pursued by those who are relatively poor, have little or no land, are low-skilled/semi-skilled, and lower caste. Temporary migrants also rely upon (and are drawn into relations of debt dependence upon) labor contractors and brokers in ways that permanent migrants are less likely to. The least well off of these migrants tend to move with at least some members of their families, so that the share of women temporary migrants, while hard to pin down exactly, does seem to be higher than the NSS estimate (Virk 2004, Lahiri-Dutt 2008, Pattenden 2012, Guérin et al 2015). However, not all of these women may perform paid work in the urban destination, for reasons discussed later.

Many of these migrants work in seasonal industries such as construction, the brick making industry, small and artisan mining, and assorted low skill services in urban areas (Agnihotri and Mazumdar 2009, Lahiri-Dutt 2008). Due to the sex-segregated nature of labor in both construction and brick making work in India, workers are hired as 'jodi's or couples, encouraging the migration of families, and providing employment to some low skill migrant women as well as men. For women, an additional important source of employment is domestic work in urban households, which has expanded with the

increase in the number of urban professional workers and double-earner households (Mazumdar et al 2013). Domestic workers labor alone, doing work that is highly stigmatized, in the “private” space of a home. They are therefore routinely subjected to economic exploitation, sexual abuse, and various kinds of social humiliation, but have little ability to protect themselves against such abuse or to seek recourse when abuse occurs (Coelho et al 2013). For both men and women who migrate, therefore, the employment opportunities that are available are ‘indecent’ along multiple axes.

What we know about the lives of urban migrants suggests that the term ‘temporary’ migration is misleading in two ways. The primary sources on this kind of migration show that while some temporary migrants do indeed move for less than a year, others do so for several years at a time, but to spaces that escape official efforts to enumerate them. Furthermore, as Breman (2010) famously argued in proposing the term ‘footloose labor’, temporary migrants engage in multiple moves across a migrant’s lifetime, not always to the same destination. They eventually return to homesteads in rural areas, in part because exclusionary urban development denies them the possibility of an urban space of their own. A particular migratory trip may thus be bounded by time, but migration is a much more permanent condition of existence for such migrants than for ‘permanent’, one-time migrants.

## ***b. Spatial categories***

### **(i) Rural-urban and Urban-urban migration**

The NSS data on urban permanent migrants summarized in Table 2 suggests that amongst both men and women, rural-urban migration is the larger stream (rural-rural remains the largest, but is not the subject of this paper) and, amongst male migrants, growing faster than urban-urban migration. As mentioned above, urban-urban migrants amongst both women and men also appear to be significantly better off than non-migrants both before and after migration (Vakulabharanam and Thakurata 2014).

Amongst temporary migrants as well, rural-urban may be the larger category and growing faster than urban-urban migration, contributing to the process of urbanization discussed below. However, empirical reality may have overtaken traditional classifications, with many temporary migrants being footloose labor: moving sometime from village to city, at others from one city to another, and at yet other times from one village to another (Breman 2010). While there are well established migratory paths in some parts of the country (Bihar to Delhi and Punjab, Mahbubnagar to Mumbai and Hyderabad), new ones appear to be rapidly emerging, and as we suggested earlier, rigid divisions between rural and urban destinations may no longer be as useful to understand this world of insecurity and impermanence.

### **(ii) Inter-state versus intra-state**



Substantial inequalities between Indian states have developed over time, with Indian states in the center and east falling behind others in the west, south and northwest. One question is thus whether inter-state migration has played a role in reducing or increasing these inequalities. As far as permanent migration goes, almost 85% of marriage migration is still intra-state as a result of cultural and linguistic commonalities. Inter-state migration accounted for 41% of all permanent economic migration in 2008, according to the NSS (Table 4). However, an early study by Cashin and Sahay(1996) argued that at least until 1990s, inter-state economic migration was unable to create convergence between regions. Although Table 4 shows an increase in the share of inter-state migration within the overall stagnant shares of permanent economic migration over the 2000s, the small numbers of relatively privileged migrants involved suggests that this stream is inequality reinforcing rather than inequality reducing (Vakulabharanam and Motiram 2016).

*Table 4 about here*

With temporary migration, in the absence of data we must once again rely upon micro studies. These do seem to suggest the expansion of inter-state migration routes. The growth of the southern cities of Bengaluru and Hyderabad mean that workers from Odisha, Bihar and the Northeast are now finding their way southward. The most documented streams of temporary migration are from relatively poor states such as Bihar, UP, Madhya Pradesh and Odisha to Delhi and the other metropolitan cities, for construction and brick kiln work. There is also evidence of temporary migration from and within states like Tamil Nadu and Gujarat, which have much higher living standards on average, but also have relatively high levels of inequality. Deshingkar et al (2008) trace the increasing rates of migration amongst villages in Madhya Pradesh, with villagers travelling to new destinations in Gujarat and Delhi. In this case the authors do see increases in “accumulative” migration than improves the economic conditions of migrants, thus possibly reducing inequality between origin and destination (see also Rodgers and Rodgers 2011). But this study is countered by several others that conclude that temporary migration remains distress migration that results in little long term improvement in living conditions (Mosse et al 2005, Roy 2007, Breman 2010). Most studies indicate that even when temporary migrants do bring back some savings are unable to invest them in assets in rural areas, usually spending them on health needs or the repayment of debt (Pattenden 2012). However, migration to urban areas may still enable challenges to caste-based hierarchies of power in the home village, even as it makes workers more vulnerable to capitalist exploitation (Guerin et al 2007, Picherit 2016).

The second interesting aspect of inter-state migration is the degree to which language, clothing, caste-composition and cultural norms vary between Indian states. One implication of this has been mentioned earlier - marriage migration remains mostly intra-state. The second implication is that inter-state migration is a risk-laden and potentially alienating experience in India in a way that is more than just a function of the greater distance travelled. Making the connections that lead to jobs, or housing, or a rich community life is much more complicated when language, clothes and food change.

Migrants from out of state are often cast as ‘outsiders’ in periodic political mobilizations that target their real or perceived economic gains as at the expense of ‘insiders’. Inter-state migration may thus create pools of migrant labor even easier to monitor and discipline.

### **III. The Three Overlapping Crises and Migration**

#### ***a. Agrarian Crisis***

Starting in the mid-1990s, Indian society/economy has witnessed an agrarian crisis that has spread unevenly across the country. One startling manifestation of this crisis is that more than 300,000 farmers have committed suicide, according to official estimates from National Crime Records Bureau in India (Sainath 2015). This suicide phenomenon started in the mid-1990s, when India embarked on a drive to liberalize its agriculture. Liberalization, in the Indian context, meant connecting the Indian agriculture to the larger world economy, as well as dismantling multiple support structures that Indian farmers had won from the Indian state through their movements. We describe the main features of this crisis below.

While the agrarian crisis in India coincides with the introduction of market-oriented reforms in agriculture, the reforms are not solely responsible for the crisis, although they constitute the most important causal factor (Vakulabharanam and Motiram 2011). The soil and groundwater-eroding effects of the Green Revolution experiment of the 1960s have been critically important to the slowdown of productivity improvements too across the country by the 1990s. While Green Revolution had been introduced in a few pockets of grain production in the late 1960s in India, its technologies spread to other parts of the country and to the cultivation of non-grain crops (a phenomenon termed as a 'Lagged Green Revolution') by the 1980s (Vakulabharanam 2004). In the last decade or so, there have been three additional explanations for the increasing agrarian distress. First, through processes of 'accumulation by dispossession' the advancing urban spaces as well as industry (through the creation of special economic zones) have begun to displace large numbers of farmers from their farmlands and livelihoods (Jenkins et. al. 2014). Second, it has been suggested in recent research that climate change may be closely linked to the distress and the suicide phenomenon (Carleton 2017). Third, there has also been an increase in the presence of corporate capital through arrangements like contract farming and corporate farming (Motiram and Vakulabharanam 2007). All these different factors have converged in creating and deepening a widespread and spatially uneven distress phenomenon in Indian agriculture (slowing agricultural growth rates is one of many manifestations of this).

Many researchers have identified agricultural liberalization as the main contributing cause for the agrarian crisis (for an edited volume that covers multiple aspects of the crisis, see Reddy and Mishra 2009). Especially in the period, 1995-2006, integrating Indian agriculture with the world markets coincided with a global agricultural recession pushing the Indian agricultural prices downward relative to other sectors in the

economy. Domestic liberalization measures such as reducing subsidies, and cutting down formal (relatively cheaper) state-supported agricultural credit meant that farmers faced higher costs. A lot of farmers were pushed to borrowing from informal moneylenders at astronomical interest rates (ranging from 24% per annum to 60% per annum). This created a "double squeeze" of the Indian farmers (Vakulabharanam 2004). Alongside other factors mentioned above (and the social reproductive crisis discussed below), this has created a sense of insecurity about deriving a stable livelihood from agriculture. Although agricultural growth rates at the national level have picked up after 2006, several pockets of Indian agriculture have remained distress-prone.

This has created a massive impetus to migrate over the last two decades in India. In the mid-1990s, about 70% of the Indian population was still directly or indirectly dependent on agriculture while the fastest growing sectors in India were services and manufacturing, mainly in urban spaces. Not all migration from rural areas is distress-induced. There is a class distinction in the way migration has progressed. On the one hand, the better-off farmers have tended to move their capital to urban areas or pursue the route of higher education in order to integrate into the higher echelons of the neoliberal class configuration (Damodaran 2008). On the other hand, the vast majority of farmers and agricultural workers (in those areas where the distress phenomenon has been rampant) have tended to integrate into the informal and precarious domains of the urban economy. However, as we describe in the next sub-section, the out-migration of the majority of the agricultural population has not been matched by growing organized employment in manufacturing (like it happened in the East Asian countries, including the recent experience of China). The impetus to migrate has been met with a deep employment crisis in the otherwise, fast-growing urban spaces. What this has meant is that migration remains transient, footloose and uncertain. The migrants have to choose from a portfolio of laboring options in agricultural and non-agricultural sectors to eke out a precarious livelihood.

### ***b. Employment Crisis***

We briefly present the main contours of the employment crisis over the last three decades in this section. If we divide the economy into two parts, agricultural and non-agricultural sectors, the main narrative of employment can be laid out clearly. The first point is about the volume of employment. According to the Indian national sample survey employment and unemployment rounds, between 1983 and 2011-12, the overall labor force has risen from 305 million people to about 473 millions. Of this increase of about 170 million jobs, only about 20 million new jobs have been created in agriculture, and about 150 millions in the non-agricultural sector. In 2011-12, agriculture contributed to about 225 million jobs and non-agricultural sector contributed the remaining 248 million jobs. However, if we look at the recent period (after 2004), there has been negative addition to the agricultural jobs (about -33 million), while non-agricultural employment has risen by about 50 million jobs. In terms of employment growth during this entire period, the fastest growth was experienced in the period, 1983-2005, while growth rates have slowed considerably after this period (Thomas 2014).

If we further analyze the growth in non-agricultural employment, several interesting features can be found. First, the major increases in non-agricultural employment are in the construction industry (Thomas 2014). These jobs are temporary, precarious and informal in nature. These jobs also require low skill, so they are suitable for a transient, migrant workforce (Shrivastava 2012). Second, urban males have largely captured the higher quality employment (a relatively small proportion of employment). This is in sectors such as Information Technology, Finance, Insurance and Real Estate (Thomas 2014). Third, according to these official data, both in rural as well as urban areas, women constitute a small proportion of the total employment in non-agricultural sector (about a fifth of the total employment).

In terms of the nature of employment, self-employment and casual labor dominate predominantly in rural areas (about 70% of the total) in 2004-05. In urban areas, self-employment and casual labor contribute about 60% of the total employment in 2004-05 (Shrivastava 2012). The informal sector contributes to about 92% of the total employment in the Indian economy in 2011-12 (ILO 2016).

We can infer several important things from the above statistics. First, agricultural is an overall shrinking sector in terms of employment, so there is a clear re-ordering of productive labor away from agriculture. Second, since high quality and regular formal jobs (with contracts) are not forthcoming, labor has moved into informal occupations, i.e., informal enterprises, self-employment, and informal jobs in formal corporations. In other words, labor has become increasingly flexible, even as workers have performed increasingly precarious and transient work. Third, in conjunction with the agrarian crisis described above and from various micro-studies on Indian labor, this signifies the proliferation of insecure labor, i.e. workers now perform highly seasonal and fragmented labor. It is labor that is constantly on the move between urban and rural, between agriculture and non-agriculture, and for women, it is also a more complex combination of productive and reproductive labor in multiple locations in any extended period. This latter phenomenon is what we turn to in the next sub-section.

### ***c. Crisis of Social Reproduction***

Social reproduction, or the production and maintenance of human life itself, requires not just the act of biological reproduction, but also the provisioning of basic needs (through the production of goods and services such as cooking, cleaning, fetching water), and care work (the care of children, the elderly, the sick etc.) (Razavi 2007). One important aspect of reproductive labor is that it serves as space-connecting and time-connecting labor (Massey 2013). And while time and space compression may be a hallmark of many capitalist processes in India, migration being one possible example of such compression, there are several ways in which the spatial and temporal disconnect between productive and reproductive labor has grown quite significantly in both rural and urban India.

First, the decline in agricultural employment, particularly agricultural wage employment for rural women, has meant a decline in work that is geographically closer to

home (Narain and Nischal 2007). Second, there has been a significant privatization of rural and urban common property resources, particularly in the post-liberalization era (Maringanti et al 2012, Gidwani and Baviskar 2011). This has meant an increase in the time needed to collect the basic raw materials of social reproduction. The lack of access to these raw materials could possibly serve as an additional “push” factor that leads to temporary migration. In Roy’s study of migrants in Kolkotta (Roy 2007), one woman interviewee reported commuting to the city to collect twigs and paper that she could use as firewood back in her village. In her village, she explained, she did not have access to even that much.

Third, the increase in temporary, circular migration destabilizes any existing patterns of access to these raw materials. With every move, sources of water and fuel must be sourced anew, and, as has now been widely documented, these basic elements of social reproduction are extremely difficult to access in the slums and squatter settlements, and on the city pavements where the majority of urban migrants live (Truelove 2011, Coelho et al 2013). As an example, Mosse et al (2005) cite data that urban migrants resort to burning plastic and tires as fuel for cooking. To the extent that urban migrants are also less likely to be part of social networks of other women who can share some of the burdens of care work, these contradictions only intensify further (Coelho et al 2013).

These pressures can be resolved by abandoning paid work when it cannot be easily combined with reproductive labor (Banerjee and Raju 2009). In India’s urban slums, the hours required to collect water alone can reduce women’s ability to engage in full time paid work (Truelove 2011, Coelho et al 2013). The pressures of social reproduction can also result in the abandonment of certain forms of reproductive labor, particularly the care of children or the elderly. In both urban and rural India, the very young, the very old, and the sick, are left to fend for themselves during the work day, or, in the case of some migrant families, for much longer periods of time as the spatial disconnect between productive and reproductive labor becomes impossible to bridge (Mosse et al 2002, Pattenden 2012).

Last but certainly not least, these pressures can be partially accommodated by increases in the work day of women who bear this double burden. There is a large literature that explores how increases in reproductive labor can help mitigate the effects of capitalist crises by acting as a “shock absorber” (Elson 2010). This is the crux of our argument. The intensification of women’s work and of women’s responsibilities props up this system of precarious and fragmented livelihoods as increases in unpaid labor are used to fulfill basic needs and allow workers to survive what would otherwise be an unsustainable destruction of livelihoods (Naidu and Rao 2017). As Roy (2007) vividly describes in the context of urban squatters in Calcutta, in conjunction with the employment crisis and rigid gender divisions of labor, this can lead to the phenomenon of underemployed men, living with, and off, overworked women. Thus capitalist crises get displaced into the sphere of social reproduction and on to the (malnourished) bodies of women and children.

This last dynamic is especially important since it does not appear that most migrants expect to solve their problems of lack of access to water, fuel or even lack of time for care work through migration. Other than in Roy's work (2007), we found no references to expectations amongst unskilled workers that the raw materials of social reproduction would be easier to find in the city (it may be a different matter for skilled migrants with access to taps and electricity). One possible implication is a decrease in the likelihood that women will migrate at all. Garikipati (2008) argues that awareness of the sub-standard living conditions and lack of sanitation at migration destinations, along with the inflexibility of women's care obligations toward children and the elderly, reduced their willingness and ability to migrate with their spouses, leading to majority male migrant streams in the villages she studied.

On the other hand, as discussed earlier, family migration is a significant form of temporary migration in India, and we argue that the fraught conditions of social reproduction at both origin and destination of temporary migrants help us to understand why. Mosse et al (2005) point out that family migration (including children) is more likely amongst poorer, unskilled distress migrants, and it is relatively skilled young men who can earn high wages who are able to "opportunistically" migrate alone. Pattenden (2012) found that family migration dominated amongst unskilled workers. Guérin et al (2007) found that family migration was more likely the greater the debt dependence of the migrants, and that family migration had increased amongst resurveyed migrants (Guérin et al 2015). For such migrants, the difficulty of securing the conditions of social reproduction even after migration makes the 'subsidy' provided by the unpaid reproductive labor of women critically important.

#### **IV. Migration as Social Transformation**

As discussed above, according to the Indian census, in 2016 (based on projections from the last census in 2011), the Indian urban population was about 33% of the total population. This is, most likely, a gross underestimation of the urban population in India. Urbanization in India is progressing rapidly in India along two lines. The first one is along the axis of extended urbanization, wherein urban areas envelop and annex villages in their growth. Second, there is increased migration from rural to urban areas. As mentioned above, this is both the permanent migration as well as short-term migration. Both these axes are not carefully captured in the Indian census. Several villages that now have lost their rural character (like the dominance of agricultural occupation) around cities are still governed by village panchayats (village-level administrative bodies) and much of the short-term migration is not counted as urban. In the latter case, because the migrants have one foot in rural areas, and another in the urban, they do not get counted in the urban. However, in this urban-rural sense, the boundaries have become much more fluid than what a clearly demarcated rural-urban axis would illuminate. We name the increasing dominance of the urban in the national economy and society as the first structural transformation in India, i.e. rapid urbanization.

Migration crises (of the three overlapping kinds discussed above) have played a key role in determining the character of this first transformation. Some of the permanent

migrants who have access to some land and wealth, have been able to use either capital or education to integrate into the upper echelons (professionals and skilled members) of the working class, while a vast majority either permanently or temporarily join the informal/precarious and low paying urban occupations. Spatially, many of these migrants are either housed in the inner-city slums or in the new squatter settlements that come up on the fringes of the Indian cities. Many villages that are integrating into urban areas also provide a temporary residential space for the migrants. Many of the migrants also engage in various occupations that are premised on self-employment given the employment crisis in the organized/formal sector. This produces city spaces that are highly unequal, and enclave-like (with the rich and the better off professionals) occupying certain preferred locations, while the low-skilled and temporary migrants live on the fringes or in densely populated slums. The logic of social reproduction (as described above) in cities plays a key role in the survival of these vast majorities of workers, who survive without decent work and housing.

The second major transformation that migration crises signify is the deeper penetration of Indian capitalism over the last 2-3 decades across the rural-urban divide. There have been two major processes at work in this second transformation. The first process involves the privatization of public properties (such as public sector units, and the capture of government lands for private use), privatization and erosion of commons, and the increased dispossession of the productive assets of petty commodity producers. These sub-processes heighten the agrarian and social reproductive crises. This, then, results in the strengthening of private capital but also in a releasing a lot of new labor into the precarious labor market that was not at the command of private capital in a direct way. The second process through which Indian capitalism has deepened is through the use of this newly available labor (on top of the previously available labor in urban spaces). We discuss below the ways in which this newly available labor is integrated into Indian capitalism.

One of the ways in which migrants are integrated into the labor market becomes clear by following the field studies of inter-state migrant communities. Inter-state migration is often associated with greater reliance on middlemen and debt dependence upon them. Mosse et al (2005) report that workers often do not know which employer they have worked for during the migratory stint, their relationship being entirely with the broker. While in some cases brokers merely facilitate migration, paying workers on a daily or weekly basis at the migration work site, in other cases brokers pay workers upfront, extending a loan that the worker pays off with his/her labor. Guérin et al (2015) point out that the forms of debt bondage that result from the latter practice are now widespread, if temporary, arguing that this is one example of the way that capitalism may effectively harness so-called non-capitalist relations of dependence.

The NSS employment-unemployment surveys show a perceptible increase in the phenomenon of self-employment and casual labor in urban areas, and more broadly non-agricultural work. A lot of this increase in self-employment is the result of the increased work in putting out systems that are characterized as sub-contracting processes (Shrivastava 2012). A significant part of the increase in self-employment is nothing but

the outsourcing of work that happened in larger organizations to the poorer migrant households that do not, therefore, have to be covered by labor legislation or any welfare legislations. The increase in casual labor is a much more direct integration into the labor market of the migrants and the previously poor urban residents. This integration is into realm of precarious/informal work built on the imagined infinite elasticity of women and children as shock-absorbers in this fast-paced transformation of the Indian economy into a rapidly growing capitalist one with multiple labor arrangements that involve different degrees of freedom and servitude.

What is the nature of this capitalism? It is clearly not a story of workers achieving "double freedom" in the sense Marx meant it. Workers may be largely free of their means of production but they do not always enter the institution of free wage labor. For women workers we may actually see falling shares of both self-employment as well as wage labor as burdens of reproductive labor intensify. However, whatever the nature of the labor arrangement and the servitude associated with it, capital has found a way to access the newly available labor through sub-contracting processes or through complicated debt peonage structures. The distinction Banaji (2013) makes between two levels of analysis, i.e. forms of labor exploitation, and the larger social relations is apposite in this context. Purely analyzing the labor exploitation modes, one would conclude that free wage labor as an arrangement is not as widely prevalent. However, if we take out the teleological implications of the expression "formal subsumption of labor", Indian economy has become more deeply capitalist (of a neoliberal kind) through this episode of massive migration that will only continue in the coming decades.

## **V. Conclusion**

The overall conclusion of this short paper is that Indian economy over the last 2-3 decades has been witnessing two inter-related phenomena. On the one hand, a majority of rural residents have been hit by an unevenly spread out agrarian crisis, an employment crisis, and a social reproductive crisis that creates the impetus to migrate to urban spaces. On the other hand, the absence of decent forthcoming employment in urban areas means that the workers migrate into low paying informal and precarious occupations once for all, or they live in a permanent state of movement and mobility between the rural and urban areas. These phenomena basically facilitate the yanking of labor (both of the productive and reproductive kinds) from its rooted locations, creating labor-in-general or abstract labor (in Marx's terminology) that is increasingly more available to capital to appropriate cheaply, and more directly. This manifests as a rapidly growing Indian economy with growth rates of over 7% since 1990s. Many observers see this growth process as driven by the urban growth engine, which in our view is a re-ordering of productive and reproductive labor on a massive spatial scale. While crises contribute to this migration phenomenon, they represent, in our view, the other side of the deep transformation of the overall society. It is a transformation that has already instituted new forms of inequality and precarity of livelihoods for the vast majority, while affording new opportunities of wealth making for the chosen few - the owners, managers and a small privileged group of the working class, the professionals.





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## Tables

Table 1: Permanent migrants as a share of the population

	1983	1988	1999	2008
All permanent migrants	23	25	26	28
Economic migrants	3	3	3	3
Marriage migrants	13	16	17	19
% of migrants who are women	74	76	78	81
% of migrants to urban areas	32	29	32	33

Source: Authors' calculations based on NSS survey data

Table 2: Characteristics of working age urban permanent migrants by gender (in percentages)

Women	1983	1988	1999	2008
Marriage migrants	58	61	64	65
Economic migrants	5	4	3	3
Follower migrants	31	27	26	26
Urban-urban migrants	40	40	41	41
Men	1983	1988	1999	2008
Marriage migrants	1	2	2	1
Economic migrants	63	63	61	64
Follower migrants	19	18	19	18
Urban-urban migrants	40	40	39	38

Source: Authors' calculations based on NSS survey data

Table 3: Temporary Migration: NSS data (in millions)

	1999		2008	
	Total	Urban	Total	Urban
Male	6.9	1.5	11.6	0.9
Female	4	0.9	2	0.2

Source: Vakulabharanam and Thakurata(2014)

Table 4: Inter-state permanent migration to urban areas

	1983	1988	1999	2008
As a share of urban economic migrants	32	31	31	41
As a share of urban marriage migrants	16	15	14	15

Source: Authors' calculations based on NSS survey data