Migration and Development in India

The Bihar Experience

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Introduction

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1 Introduction

On 24 March 2020, the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi declared one of the harshest lockdowns in the world to tackle COVID-19.[1] In a speech broadcasted on national television at 8 pm, he announced that from midnight the very same day, the entire country—every state, union territory, district, municipality, village, street, and locality—would go under complete lockdown: like a curfew—a full ban was being imposed on people from stepping out of their homes.[2] The announcement of the lockdown was sudden, and it was instantly enforced barely four hours after the Prime Minister's speech. In the days that followed, migrant workers across the country lost their jobs, livelihoods, and incomes, and became stranded in distressing conditions, in destinations far away from their homes.[3] The lockdown forced an unprecedented exodus of workers from India's cities to its villages. In the absence of any mode of transport, they began to walk from the cities to their homes in faraway villages. The pictures of these migrations—of men, women, and children braving the harshest conditions and determinedly walking hundreds of kilometres—were hauntingly reminiscent of images from the Partition of India in 1947, the largest mass migration in history of the Indian subcontinent.[4]

How do we make sense of this crisis of migration—the mass exodus of workers from the cities? Why did migrant workers defy the national lockdown to undertake arduous journeys—of hundreds of kilometres to their villages—to their 'homes'? The economic shock of the global pandemic resulted in a massive contraction of India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP)—unprecedented in independent India. According to the National Statistical Office, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, in the first quarter of the financial year 2020–2021—between April and June 2020—the real GDP (that is, GDP at constant 2011–2012 prices) contracted by 23.9 per cent, as compared to a 5.2 per cent growth in the same quarter the previous year.[5] It entailed loss of livelihoods of millions of workers,[6] and meant that migrant workers were unable to work to earn their livelihood in the city. Migrants faced evictions from rental housing, and were left without the shelter of a home, work, or even food.[7] As social security worth the name eludes migrant workers at destination areas, they had little choice but

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to leave—at the risk of their health and lives—to their families and homes, in their native villages.

After nearly two months into the lockdown, on 1 May 2020, the government introduced '"Shramik Special" trains … to move migrant workers, pilgrims, tourists, students and other persons stranded at different places' (Government of India 2020d). This was a welcome move. But, the utter lack of planning and mismanagement by the railway authorities in catering to workers' mobility needs resulted in chaos and confusion around the *shramik* trains meant to take migrant workers home. The trains were woefully short in number, there was mismanagement of train routes, extraordinary delays, and lack of food and water en route. Migrants faced insurmountable odds—countless migrants were stranded mid-way, faced hunger, humiliation, and some even died en route[8]—making their experiences of returning to their homes a nightmare.[9] This management of internal migrants by the state was in stark contrast to its handling of international migrants who were evacuated and airlifted from all corners of the world to the safe havens of their homes. The treatment of internal migrants as second-class citizen highlighted long-standing social and economic cleavages in Indian society.

The global pandemic split wide open India's 'internal migration' problem. For several decades, particularly in the post-liberalisation period since the early 1990s, India's cities have grown, developed, and prospered, riding on cheap labour provided by rural migrants who predominantly work in the informal economy in urban areas. Across the country, migrants work in diverse sectors and occupations, and are the backbone of its urban economy. Thus, it is of little surprise that as lockdowns were lifted, and economic activity started picking up, rural migrants started trickling back to urban areas. A rapid action survey of 4,835 households in 11 states found that by July 2020, 29 per cent of migrants who had gone back to their villages due to COVID-19 lockdowns in destinations had already returned to cities, and another 45 per cent wished to return due to the absence of skilled employment in source villages (VikasAnvesh and Sambodhi 2020).[10]

Paradoxically, around the same time, grand announcements were being made by several source governments, claiming that return migrants would be provided employment in source regions.[11] Noteworthy here are the examples of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar—the two major migrant-sending states to the rest of the country. The state government of Uttar Pradesh announced the setting up of a Migration Commission to map the skills of workers for the provision of jobs, as well as social security for return migrants.[12] The Chief Minister of Bihar ordered the state government officials to conduct a survey to gather information on work undertaken by the migrants in their place of last employment, and the type of work that a return migrant would like to do in Bihar, 'so that he (the migrant) will not move out of the state.'[13] Despite assurances by source governments, rural areas failed to provide adequate or substantive employment, and migrants quickly returned to

urban centres—cities and towns—where they had long-term employment linkages and social networks. Rural migrants' movements back to the city can be understood in response to labour demand in urban areas. These mobilities are embedded in structural and spatial patterns of development in contemporary India where rapidly increasing migration for work is predominantly from poor to prosperous regions, and from backward to advanced states.

While India's service-oriented economy demands cheap labour from rural areas, its cities have been exclusionary for rural workers. Despite having worked in the city for most of their lives, migrants remain strangers in India's cities, and are subjected to multiple precarities, vulnerabilities, and exploitation. They live in the margins of the city, and are isolated from its social fabric. Rural migrant workers can hardly afford to bring their families to the city, and are forced to separate from their loved ones, who stay back in the village. Historically, there has been an urban bias in the state's development strategy. That most migration is circular—workers eventually return to the village after spending much of their lives in the city—suggests that it is the rural areas that bear the cost of the production and reproduction of this labour, and in the process subsidise India's urban development.

It is also evident that circular migration increases in times of uncertainty and crisis. When urban areas cannot provide adequate employment or long-term security, circular migration is viewed as a rational response by rural migrants. In the context of China, Fan (2008) argues that peasant migrants are able to obtain the best of origin and destination by adopting a 'split-household strategy', which most generally involves husbands doing migrant work and their wives staying on in the village. This is also noted by Graeme Hugo in one of the earliest works on circular migration. In the context of rural–urban migration in Indonesia, Hugo argues, 'a circulation strategy keeps the mover's options in the village completely open so that the risk of not being able to earn subsistence is reduced by spreading it between village and city income opportunities' (Hugo 1982: 70).

This circulation of migration somewhat explains India's urbanisation conundrum: at 31 per cent (as per the 2011 population Census), India's rate of urbanisation is one of the lowest in the world. Despite high and consistent economic growth for nearly three decades, India's pace of urbanisation remains alarmingly slow. This paradox is dissected in Chapter 2, where I emphasise the underlying disconnect between urbanisation and migration in the Indian state's discourse; while urbanisation is clearly desirable, often, the state's view on migration remains ambivalent. The state's rural and urban policies tend to be mutually exclusive, except that both predominantly frame migration as a 'problem'. It is this rural–urban dialectic and the segmentation of state actors in a federal structure that contributes to contradictory state narratives, and ultimately leads to the absence of a coherent discourse on rural–urban migration in India.

This incoherency has been amplified during the extraordinary crisis triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic. The imposition of the first lockdown in March 2020—at a four-hour notice—callously bypassed migrant workers and their vulnerable existence in urban destinations across India. That the announcement itself did not, even once, mention migration or migrant workers reflects the sheer ignorance of policymakers. The country was shocked to witness its vast number—the mass—of migrant workers on the roads, and outraged at their helplessness. For the first time in independent India the sheer existence and precarities of rural migrant workers became part of a national conversation. However, the state's response to the plight of migrant workers was brutal. The state's silence, born out of utter denial of the predicament and problems of migrant workers stems from a systemic failure—a lack of understanding of, and engagement with, the relationship between workers' mobility and development. It is of little surprise, therefore, that at a time of national outrage over the plight of migrant workers during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Minister of Home Affairs, Government of India, in response to a Parliament question in September 2020, in the lower house (Lok Sabha), said that the government simply had no information on how many migrant workers had died while trying to reach their home states![14] Earlier, in November 2019, in the upper house of the Parliament (Rajya Sabha), when asked about the total number of migrant labour workforce in the country, the Minister of Labour and Employment had argued that 'it is not feasible to keep record/data of migrant labour workforce'.[15]

Migrants are—indeed—India's invisible workforce. One of the reasons they remain invisible, particularly to policymakers, is that there are no accurate estimates of the extent of migration in India. The two main data sources on migration—the decennial population Census data, collected by the Office of the Registrar General of India, and labour market and migration data, collected by the National Sample Survey Office—massively underestimate the number internal migrants in India, and this is precisely the reason why literally no one in the corridors of power saw this migration crisis coming. It is against this backdrop of the COVID-19-induced crisis of migration that this book discusses—the magnitude, patterns, determinants, impacts, and processes of—migration from the eastern Indian state of Bihar. In doing so, it unravels and counters the dominant discourse of low internal migration in India.

The discourse of low internal migration in India

For long there has existed a dominant academic and policy discourse of low internal migration in India.[16] Davis (1951) has attributed this to factors such as predominance of agriculture, early marriage, the joint family system, and the caste system. More recently, Kaivan Munshi and Mark Rosenzweig

have found that by providing mutual insurance to its members, sub-caste or *jati* networks restrict mobility, and thus play an important role in explaining low levels of permanent migration from rural areas (Munshi and Rosenzweig 2016). In a similar vein, Kone et al. (2018) argue that interstate migration is constrained by political boundaries of state borders as state governments provide entitlements—such as subsidised food grains via the Public Distribution Systems (PDS) and preferential access to educational institutions and public employment—to their residents that are not available to migrants in destination regions. Thus, political boundaries *within* the country explain low rates of migration. India's official datasets such as the decennial population Census and National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) corroborate this low rural-to-urban migration, but on account of entirely different reasons.

The Census and NSSO are the two main sources of data on migration in India. While the Census is primarily designed to capture the distribution of population, the NSSO focuses on labour market attributes. As a result, worker mobility is not a primary area of enquiry for either agency, both of which define migration differently. The Census uses two distinct criteria to define migration: first, migration by place of birth, and second, migration by place of last residence. In the former, when 'a person is enumerated in Census at a place, i.e., village or town, different from her/his place of birth, she/he would be considered a migrant by place of birth'. In the latter case, 'a person would be considered a migrant … if she/he had last resided at a place other than her/his place of enumeration' (Census of India 2001). According to the NSSO, 'a household member whose last usual place of residence (UPR) was different from the present place of enumeration was considered as a migrant member in a household', the UPR of a person being the place where the person had stayed continuously for a period of six months or more (GOI 2010: 11). It is pertinent to note that the Census does not collect data on temporary and short-term migration, and the NSSO uses a cut-off point of six months to define short-term migration. Thus, the latter may not adequately capture seasonal and circular movements which are longer than six months. As a consequence, there is an underlying bias towards long-term and permanent migration in data collection, and these agencies tend to miss out on a significant proportion of short-term and circular migration. Thus, migration rates are depressed as official data sources underestimate migration and mobilities in the country.

On the other hand, micro-studies often tend to focus on temporary and precarious migration streams and thus report much higher incidence of migration than the official datasets. It is of little surprise, therefore, that estimates of internal migrants in India vary widely and are fraught with methodological and other concerns. It is in this context that the Government of India's Working Group on Migration in 2017 advised that differences

regarding the extent of migration need to be addressed carefully and institutionally if the issue of migration is to be addressed in an evidence-informed manner.[17]

That said, in recent decades there is increasing evidence of high levels of circular migration as reported in several micro-studies,[18] as well as large-scale survey exercises such as the India Human Development Survey. These studies also find that migration has become an important livelihood strategy among rural households.[19] The increase in the incidence of migration has also been somewhat captured in recently released results of the decennial population Census, wherein the growth of labour migrants in the decade 2001-2011 rose to 4.5 per cent, up from 2.4 per cent in the previous decade, 1991–2001. This 'surge in labour mobility' has been attributed to high growth and economic opportunities in urban areas.[20] In fact, in the post-reform period, urban growth has had rural spillovers and brought significant gains in rural living standards.[21]

Motivation and objectives

My interest in migration began while working on a long-term research project on social and economic change in rural Bihar at the Institute for Human Development, New Delhi. The project, concerned with challenges of inclusive development, studied labour market and employment, poverty and social exclusion, agriculture and rural development, public policies, and the dynamics of caste, class, landownership, and gender. This longitudinal study, more specifically, survey-based research, on which much of the analysis in this book is based, was my entry point to the study of Bihar migration. During fieldwork, and data collection in Bihar's villages, I was fascinated to see that migration was closely associated with literally every area of study listed above. The material gains of migration and remittances were amply evident in Bihar's villages. Migration was all-pervasive and persistent—a way of life—in rural Bihar. Yet, there were no accurate estimates of this migration (it was grossly underestimated by the state) or any substantive accounts of its ramifications on village production systems, livelihoods and incomes, gender relations, and family and household dynamics. Hardly any studies had seriously looked at rural Bihari migrants, and migration, from *both* source and destination perspectives.

It is against this backdrop of increasing mobility, and its rural–urban nexus, that I draw on longitudinal survey data, supplemented by village-level household case studies and migrant narratives in the city to study labour migration from Bihar. In Bihar—one of India's poorest and most populous states—migration is a fundamental feature of social and economic life. Given the importance of migration in its society, economy, and everyday lives of its people, it is surprising that there hardly exist any empirical studies that capture the magnitude, impacts, and processes of

Bihar migration. Little is known about its characteristics, patterns, and processes.

The objectives of this study are to:

1. Measure the magnitude of outmigration from rural Bihar and examine changes in migration over time.
2. Analyse key individual and household characteristics of outmigration such as age, sex, education status, work and occupation status, class, caste, and landownership from rural Bihar.
3. Study the determinants and impacts of outmigration from rural Bihar.
4. Analyse changes in sources of income in rural households over time and examine the role of remittances therein.
5. Explore a village-city migration stream, with a focus on migration processes, everyday lived experiences of migrant workers in the city, and their family members in the village.
6. Examine state discourses on internal migration in India, contrast these with the empirical evidence that emerges in this study, and in turn critically appraise state policies related to rural–urban migration in India.

In doing so, I address several specific questions and wide-ranging issues related to outmigration from contemporary Bihar.

These include: Who migrates? What are the individual, household, and village-level factors that explain migration? Have these factors changed over time? Why do individuals migrate? How is their migration organised? Where do migrant workers go, i.e., what are the main destinations of work for migrants? Have migrant destinations changed over time? What is the duration of their migration? How do migrants remain connected with their family members in the source regions? How much money do the migrants remit? What are remittances used for?

What about migrants' work at destination—what work do they do? What are their earnings? What about their living conditions, their social and political lives at destination? What do migrants think of their work and their employers? Do they desire to migrate permanently? Would they migrate at all if local jobs in source regions were available? What is the prevalence and scope of commuting among local workers? Can commuting be a substitute to long-distance migration? What are the reasons of return migration? What do migrants do upon their return to the village?

What are the main sources of income in migrant and non-migrant households in source regions? Are there differences in the level and composition of income in migrant and non-migrant households? What is the relationship between migration, income, and poverty? Is poverty a constraining factor in migration?

What are the village-level dynamics of migration? What are the motivations to migrate? Have these changed over time? What role do

social networks play in migration? What are the community, household, and gendered dynamics of this migration? What about its rural–urban linkages? What is the role of remittances in changing rural consumptions and aspirations? What is the future of this migration?

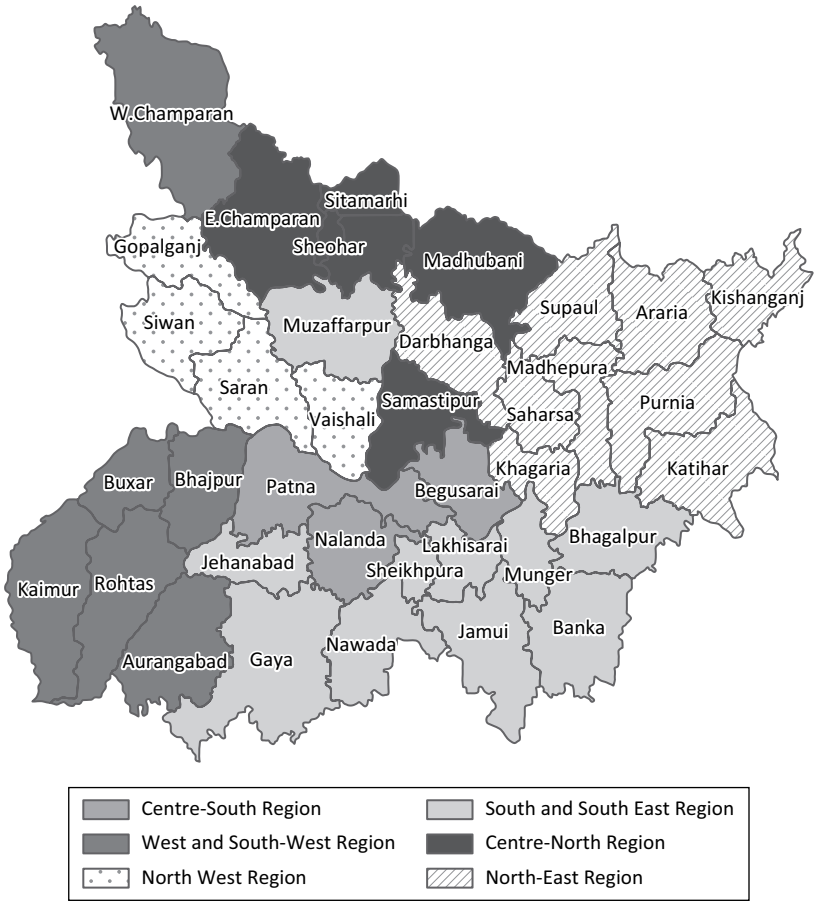
To this end, based on long-term research in rural Bihar, this study analyses dynamics of Bihar migration in the context of neoliberal economic development in India. The next section describes the data used in the book.

Data

This book uses quantitative data collected from household and village-level surveys conducted over the years 1998–2000, 2009–2011, and 2016, and a qualitative study undertaken in 2014, both archived under the Research Programme on Inclusive Development in Bihar—a long-term study of social and economic change in rural Bihar—at the Institute for Human Development in New Delhi. The household and village-level surveys were undertaken in 12 core villages located in seven (erstwhile six) districts of six distinct regions of the state (see Map 1.1), broadly representative of rural Bihar.[22] These data are rooted in an earlier research undertaken in 1981–1983 by the AN Sinha Institute of Social Studies, Patna, and the International Labour Organization, Geneva, to study the working of the agrarian systems, the persistence of poverty, labour market institutions, and demographic change.[23] The method of selection of regions, villages, and households from which the data have been collected is given in Appendix I.

Household and village surveys, 1998–1999, 2011, and 2016

The empirical analysis in the book is largely based on the data of household and village-level surveys undertaken in 1998–1999, 2011, and 2016. Table 1.1 presents the distribution of survey households by the districts. The surveys collected data on demographic characteristics, education, work, employment, and migration of household members; household income and its sources; caste, class, and land ownership details, among other things. Chapter 3 uses data collected from 1,588 households in the 12 core villages in 2016 to analyse patterns of outmigration from rural Bihar, focusing on the incidence and duration of migration and the individual and household characteristics of this migration, such as class, caste, landownership, age, sex, education status, primary work, and occupation status. Chapter 4 uses the household- level data from 891 households in 1999, 903 households in 2011, and 1,588 households in 2016 to study migration patterns, and examine remittances and changing sources of income in rural Bihar. And, Chapter 5 uses data of 3,003 individuals covered in the 1998 survey (of 891 households) and 3,415 individuals in the



Map 1.1 The regions of Bihar

Table 1.1 Distribution of survey households by district, 1999, 2011, and 2016

District	*1999*	*2011*	*2016*
Gaya	118	96	164
Gopalganj	79	92	145
Madhubani	235	231	483
Nalanda	106	104	170
Purnia/Araria	237	263	471
Rohtas	106	117	155
Total	891	903	1588

Source: IHD Bihar Survey, 1998–2000, Household sample; IHD Bihar Survey, 2009–2011 Household sample; IHD Bihar Migration Survey, 2016, Household sample.

2011 survey (of 903 households) to estimate the determinants of migration. In addition, Chapter 5 also uses a subset of household data—of the *same* 595 households—of 1999 and 2011 surveys to estimate the impacts of migration.

Migration module, 2016

The 2016 household survey included a specially designed migration module that collected information, specifically related to current migrant workers' lives at destination, focusing on the location of migration, work undertaken at destination, wages, income, employment contract, conditions of work, living conditions, housing, and access to basic facilities such as water and sanitation. Chapter 3 uses data of 906 migrant workers collected as part of this module.[24] In addition, the data on some aspects of return migration collected in this module are used in this chapter.

Studying a village-city migration stream

The qualitative research in this book—covered in Chapters 6 and 7—studies a village-city migration stream. The rationale for studying migrants from a single village was to shift the gaze to micro-level processes of rural–urban migration. The village selected was from the sampling frame of the 12 core villages. The criteria of village selection were that it had overall high levels of outmigration and was characterised by diverse migration experiences. On the basis of these criteria, of the 12 sample villages, Mahisham village in the district of Madhubani in North Bihar best fits the bill.[25] In 2011, 78 per cent of the households in the village had at least one member that had migrated for work in the preceding year, and insights from work gained in this village may be relevant for other high migration villages.

Delhi was selected as a research destination because the Bihar-Delhi migration circuit is among the densest migration circuits in India. The net rural-to-urban interstate migration from Bihar to Delhi between 2001 and 2011 was estimated to be the second largest such movement of migrants in the country.[26] Other studies as well as the IHD Bihar surveys have found the national capital region of Delhi to be the most preferred destination for Bihari migrant labourers; about a fourth of the total migrants from Bihar migrated for work here.[27] They were engaged in a variety of occupations as wage workers and self-employed workers. Thus, this region provided a rich sample of migrant workers.

I undertook fieldwork in Mahisham and Delhi, and conducted semi-structured interviews with 53 research participants—10 migrant workers in the city, their 22 family members in the village, and 21 key informants—in 2014. As the migrant research participants[28] were drawn from a pool of households on whom comprehensive information was available from earlier surveys, it was possible to locate the case studies of rural–urban migrants in

the rural household's trajectory over time, and read them in conjunction with the existing village data records and notes for 1998–1999 and 2009–2011. These longitudinal and bi-locational methodological components have been particularly useful in constructing migration and livelihood histories of individuals and households. They also acted as important validation tools and supplemented the urban migrants' narratives.[29] Having said that, the next section highlights conundrums related to the concepts of migration and the household, and elaborates the definition of migration used in this study.

Defining migration

Conventional definitions of a household often do not consider long-term migrants to be its members. However, a fundamental feature of migration from rural Bihar is that migrants' family members stay behind in the village, while migrants remain connected to the source household through revisits and remittances, and eventually return to rural areas. Given this context of connection and circularity—conceptually—it is important that migrants be treated as part of the rural household. Thus, we use alternative definitions of migration to better understand the nature and pattern of mobility. In the IHD surveys, the working definition of a household is a person or a group of persons who live in the same dwelling and eat food from a common kitchen. It also includes persons who are away from the village for work or other exigencies, but visited the village at least once in the year preceding the survey. This extended definition of the household allows us to include 'migrants' who share household resources when they are in the village and maintain a rural residence otherwise.[30] Some studies often use a cut-off point to define if someone lives in a community or not. In the context of rural Bihar, and perhaps in other developing countries too, this can be highly misleading and lead to conclusions that rural residents have 'permanently' migrated, which may not be the case. In fact, our study shows that permanent migration—of the kind that entails households completely moving out of the village for good—is quite low.[31]

Our surveys capture source households' connections with external labour markets mediated through migrant workers, and the remittances that they send. Migrants mostly move to labour markets which offer higher wages. They are able to earn much more than they would in the village. Therefore, households with migrants tend to have higher incomes than households without migrants. Remittances are near universal in migrant households and form a considerable portion of overall household incomes (see Chapter 4 for details). If these members are not included in the household, it will clearly lead to an underestimation of the rural household's income. It is pertinent to note here that we only include remittance income, and not full migrant incomes that they earn at destination, as part of household income.

Furthermore, migrants have been disaggregated into two categories: short-term migrants and long-term migrants, on the basis of the duration

of their migration. A short-term migrant is defined as someone who is away from the village for a period of less than eight months in a year; a long-term migrant is away for more than eight months in a year. The use of an eight-month cut-off period in a year to distinguish between short-term and long-term migrant is to capture two rather different migration streams. In case of the former, migrants tend to participate in labour markets, both within and outside the village, i.e. in both source and destination areas, while in case of the latter, they generally work only in destination areas. In the next section, we move to the theoretical and methodological underpinnings of this study.

Theoretical and methodological perspectives

In this section, I discuss theoretical perspectives employed in this study and elaborate upon its research methodology. In the theoretical literature in economics, individual-level characteristics are important drivers of migration. Everett Lee refers to them as 'personal factors' in his seminal work on internal migration (Lee 1966). These also attain importance in neoclassical models where costs of migration from rural to urban sector are high, and migration is an 'individual' decision based on wage differentials and expected income differentials between source and destination areas (Todaro 1969; Harris and Todaro 1970).

Subsequent theorisations of the New Economics of Labour Migration (NELM) are a shift from neoclassical economics—the unit of analysis here moves from an atomised individual to a dynamic household and migration is an income-enhancing and risk-sharing livelihood strategy adopted by the household (Stark and Bloom 1985; Stark and Lucas 1988).[32] NELM incorporates remittances, circular migration, and return migration in its framework; these had been beyond the scope of neoclassical theorisation.[33,34] This inclusion of remittances—monetary transfers by migrants to their families in the source area; circular migration, migrants' movements back and forth between source and destination areas; and return migration, migrants' eventual return to source areas—allows for the possibility of the study of different streams of migration (short-term and long-term, permanent and temporary). This theorisation is more attuned to the empirical context of migration from Bihar, where much of the migration is male-dominated and circular and most migrants eventually return to their families in rural areas.

While both neoclassical models and NELM have a distinct and differentiated understanding of migration and development, they co-exist within the disciplinary domain of economics. Empirical research, be it in the neoclassical or NELM framework, tends to place emphasis on the positive aspects of migration, both at the level of individual and at the level of the household, mediated by remittances. On the other hand, literature in the disciplines of anthropology, sociology, and human geography is more critical of the *same* migration as it tends to focus on structural and non-pecuniary aspects of migration. Thus, there exist disciplinary

overtones in the literature, with sociologists and anthropologists[35] being on the pessimistic end of the spectrum and economists (neoclassical or of the NELM school) being on the optimistic end (Portes 2007). In recent years, however, literature in migration and development in economics is moving beyond the objective frame of remittances and income (Clemens et al. 2014) to incorporate subjective measures of well-being such as happiness, and the costs of migration (Cortes 2015; Stillman et al. 2015).

Diversity and disagreement exist in the migration literature, and there is no single coherent theory of migration. At the same time, there is sufficient empirical literature which supports the idea that migration-development interactions are diverse and cannot be generalised. De Haas argues that the recent 'celebration' of the positive aspects of migration undermines the structural constraints in general and the role of the state and other institutions in particular in shaping favourable conditions for social and economic development. In this context, the current discourse on migration and development perhaps reflects a paradigm shift from dependency and state centricism, from grand structuralist and functionalism, to neoliberal and neoclassical views, and to more hybrid and pluralistic approaches (De Haas 2008).

Methodologically, this research is motivated by the aforementioned hybrid and pluralistic approaches. Migration is treated as both a project in its own right and a part of the broader processes of social change. To this end, I use mixed methods in social science research to address its key research questions. As explained by Creswell,

> A mixed methods design is useful to capture the best of both quantitative and qualitative approaches … researchers may first survey a large number of individuals, then follow up with a few of them to obtain their specific language and voices about the topic. In these situations, the advantages of collecting both closed ended quantitative data and open-ended qualitative data prove advantageous to best understand a research problem.
>
> (Creswell 2003: 22)

The study employs a sequential approach whereby quantitative data collected from household surveys in 1998–2000 and 2009–2011 are followed by qualitative data obtained from migrant narratives and household case studies in 2014.[36] This, again, is followed by survey data from 2016, and permits a long-term analysis of Bihar migration. In addition, state policy documents are critically examined to analyse state discourses on rural–urban migration. This 'methodological pluralism' enables the use of 'different techniques to get access to different facets of the same social phenomenon' (Olsen 2004: 6).

While quantitative data, overall, is appropriate in explaining the determinants and impacts of migration in source areas, qualitative data help in understanding village-level migration processes, and in particular migrant

experiences at destination. Together, a combination of qualitative and quantitative techniques is a 'pragmatic' approach as it 'opens the door to multiple methods, different worldviews, and different assumptions, as well as to different forms of data collection and analysis in the mixed methods study' (Creswell 2003: 12).

Disciplinarity

The research endeavour in this book is interdisciplinary. The chapters and analyses in this book can be located in the discipline of economics (rooted in its positivist framework and survey methods) and the disciplines of sociology and human geography (drawing on an interpretive approach and case study and narrative methods) under the umbrella of migration studies and development studies. As noted earlier, my entry point to the study of Bihar migration was through household and village-level surveys. These surveys were broadly rooted in the discipline of economics and adopted a positivist approach. This methodology made it possible to address important questions related to the magnitude of migration and its patterns, its determinants, and its impacts. At the same time, the surveys concealed as much as they revealed. As Des Gasper (2001) explains, disciplines are based on *ignoring* many things, self-enclosed around a set of concepts, methods, and questions. To my mind, several new questions emerged from the survey results—about the *problem* of migration—regarding its processes such as its village-level dynamics and urban-rural nexus, the lived experiences of migrants, and subjectivities and emotions around migration. To address these questions, I treaded to the literatures in the disciplines of sociology and human geography. Methodologically, I adopted an interpretive framework, and used the tools of case studies and narrative methods—best suited to answer the questions that had emerged.

Research questions are rooted in disciplines that, in turn, have their own epistemological underpinnings. In this book, we see how an economic framework asks certain kinds of questions about migration, while perspectives in sociology and human geography address other kinds of questions about the same migration. Thus, an interdisciplinary approach is imperative to make better sense of the phenomenon of migration. While at times there is convergence in results between different methods, rooted in different disciplines, at other times there is also a divergence. How do we make better sense of the diverse findings that emerge? Talking across disciplines (Brettell and Hollifield 2015) thus becomes important as often different disciplines offer fundamentally different perspectives of the *same* migration. This has implications for both knowledge and policy. For instance, in the course of this book, I use an economic framework to show that migration leads to significant gains in income. From a policy perspective, if increasing income and welfare of its population is a goal (it most often is), this would imply that the state should actively promote

migration from rural households. At the same time, sociological analysis and migrant narratives show that most migrants would choose not to migrate if decent work and employment opportunities—even at a lower wage—were locally available. The policy prescriptions here to improve welfare would be radically different. For instance, in such a case, policy would prioritise a thrust towards local employment creation and rural development. Thus, empirical evidence from different disciplines on the same migration can lead to very different—even opposing—policy prescriptions. In the course of the book, this is further emphasised. That said, the next section sets the context to the empirical research in the book by locating and anchoring it in the migration and development literature.

Migration-development nexus

Migration and development

In recent decades, there has been a surge in academic and policy research on migration, emphasising the nexus between migration and development. This literature, commonly known as the 'migration and development' literature, covers both internal and international migration. However, herein, there is a dominant focus on international migration, while scholarly work on internal migration remains both limited and at the margins of the 'migration and development' literature. This is surprising, as quantitatively internal migration is more prominent than international migration (Bastia and Skeldon 2020; King and Skeldon 2010). Globally, 763 million persons are estimated to be internal migrants, whereas the corresponding estimate of international migrants is 281 million.[37] In addition, the total volume of remittances generated by internal migration is estimated to be more than that of international migration.[38]

This book is on internal migration, and draws on the larger literature on international migration as both international and internal migration have more convergence than divergence, and are closely intertwined, both conceptually and theoretically (Hugo 2016). Empirically too, both types of migration are associated with common causes and consequences; they are driven by similar structural and demographic factors and lead to similar outcomes and impacts (DeWind and Holdaway 2005; Adepoju 2006; Ratha et al. 2011; Hickey and Yeoh 2016).

It also emerges from this literature that both internal and international migrants face similar issues at destination. There exists labour market segmentation between migrants and natives, and this is closely related to the nature of labour demand, where jobs undertaken by migrants are often considered too menial to be carried out by locals (Piore 1979; Hugo 2016). The othering of migrants extends beyond the occupational sphere well into other domains of life. Migrants tend to reside in enclaves and face challenges in social integration, including that of social and civic incorporation of second-generation migrants (DeWind and Holdaway 2005; Hugo 2016).

This book engages with diverse strands of the aforementioned migration and development literature. The first among these is the body of empirical literature that examines the economic impacts of migration. Studies herein have found that migration and remittances lead to increases in income and consumption (Haberfeld et al. 1999; Taylor et al. 2003) and contribute to poverty reduction in the source areas (Adams and Page 2005; Sabates-Wheeler et al. 2008; Lokshin et al. 2010; Murrugarra and Herrera 2011). Migrants' remittances have a large impact on educational expenditures (Quisumbing and McNiven 2010) and are directly linked with increase in school enrolment (Calero et al. 2008). This literature presents a body of micro-evidence on the development outcomes of remittances in source communities and thus posits that remittances contribute significantly to economic development.

A key contribution of this economic literature is that it establishes—quantitatively—the positive impacts of migration, particularly at the level of individuals and households in source regions. This literature goes hand in hand with parallel literatures in human geography and social anthropology that pay attention to migrants' subjectivities. While these two distinct literatures belong to different disciplines and policy spaces, they offer an interpretation of migration that is fundamentally different from earlier grand structural theorisations, such as modernisation and dependency.[39]

The second strand of literature that this book draws on is a set of critiques that emerged from the aforementioned migration and development paradigm. Foremost among these is that the narrow economistic focus of some migration and development studies leads to an oversight of social processes and their linkages with broader transformations (De Haan 2006; Rao and Woolcock 2007). Scholars have argued that this privileging the economic inhibits our understanding of the role of migration in broader social changes (Dannecker 2009).[40] This literature focuses on the developmental limits of remittances, acknowledging that while remittances can play a crucial role in development, particularly that of individuals and households, migration is no panacea for development (Taylor 1999; De Haas 2005; Phillips 2009). In particular, it questions the role of remittances in their effects on structural poverty and problematises the narrative of migration as a catalyst of economic development in source regions (Kapur 2004; Delgado Wise et al. 2013).

Scholars in critical development studies question the linear positive relationship between migration and development, and argue that migration does not automatically lead to development; it is both a part of development and an independent factor (De Haas 2005; Geiger and Pécoud 2013). It is argued that the economistic migration and development framework described earlier may overlook the diversity of actors, their development visions, and invisibilise particular forms of migration (Dannecker 2009; Raghuram 2009). It is argued that the construction of the migration and development paradigm of bringing a triple-win, i.e., of being beneficial for

source regions, destination regions, and migrants themselves, is naïve and simplistic. For such migration is embedded in unequal power relations, an asymmetry between sending and receiving regions, and is decontextualised from the processes of globalisation and unequal development (Delgado Wise et al. 2013; Geiger and Pécoud 2013).

Another theme that emerges in the migration and development literature is the complex interplay between structure and agency. Dependency and neomarxist theories paint migrants as victims of migration and development, negating migrants' agencies and overlooking their subjectivities.[41] As discussed earlier, these grand theorisations lack empirical validity, and they are unable to capture the diversity of migration experiences. However, discourses that hold migrants' agency alone for the development of source areas evade structural aspects of development (Skeldon 2008). Therefore, a simultaneous incorporation of structure and agency is important to understand diverse migration-development interactions (De Haas 2010). Migrants' subjectivities—valuable in their own right—have not been paid enough attention in the migration and development literature (Rodriguez and Schwenken 2013). More specifically, migrants' development visions—notions of what development is and ought to be—are constantly evolving, changing, and undergoing negotiations that may initiate broader processes of social transformation (Dannecker 2009).

History matters

At a first reading of this contemporary migration and development literature, it seems that the connection between migration and development is a novel phenomenon. However, for long internal migration has been an important component of theoretical models of development. Ravenstein's laws of migration and Lee's subsequent push-pull framework of migration were both theorisations of within-country migration (Ravenstein 1885; Lee 1966). Neoclassical macroeconomic models where wage and expected income differentials explained rural–urban migration (Todaro 1969; Harris and Todaro 1970), and new economics of labour migration where migration is viewed as a household decision (Stark and Bloom 1985) were both theorised in the context of labour mobility within the country.

Historically, in practice, ideas from modernisation theory have been embedded in national development projects in the Global South. Newly independent nation-states in the post-war era adopted ambitious industrialisation policies wherein large-scale rural–urban migration was an important prerequisite for the success of these national projects. In reality, however, these projects did not materialise as envisaged, and rural migrants were often absorbed in the urban informal sector in Third World cities (Hickey 2016). The relationship between migration and development policy is old, and indeed many of today's seemingly 'new' ideas draw heavily on older development models, grounded in modernisation theory, which

envisaged rapid internal rural-to-urban migration (Geiger and Pécoud 2013; Hickey 2016).

A critical analysis of state policies and their historical roots in development ideas and theories is thus crucial for a better understanding of the limitations as well as potentials of migration in broader development and spatial transformations. The recent 'triple-win' perspective about 'migration and development'—that migration is beneficial for source regions, destination regions, and migrants themselves—ignores these historical connections. In the context of this book, the research site of the eastern Indian state of Bihar has a long history of outmigration for work. Both economic and cultural factors explain this migration, as well as its patterns; we see that the incidence of migration from rural areas has substantially increased, as have overall remittances (Chapter 4). We find evidence that migration and remittances contribute significantly to gains in household income (Chapters 4 and 5). At the same time, remittances are contingent upon migrants' work in the city, which is grounded in exploitative conditions; yet, migrants 'choose to' engage in this work in order to sustain rural material conditions that have become structurally dependent on urban remittances (Chapter 6). In doing so, they experience economic success but social rejection in the city—simultaneous emotions of pride and shame (Chapter 7). These diverse empirical evidences do not fit neatly in the triple-win migration and development framework. It also emerges that state perspectives on migration (discussed in Chapter 2) are different from the perspectives of migrants and their families. State policies in both Bihar and India are characterised by a sedentary bias—an entrenched moral and normative judgement that rural people should remain in rural areas. This is contrary to the evidence that mobility has historically been embedded in the cultural ethos of its people and has increased in response to labour demand in urban areas.

Liberalisation, globalisation, and the surge in migration

Historically, migration has been a process with a certain degree of continuity, but it has undergone transformation under neoliberal globalisation (Delgado Wise et al. 2013). Both international and internal migration are embedded in global capitalism, and globalisation has been an important force in both the expansion and contraction of economic opportunities that drive this migration (Deshingkar and Grimm 2005). India is no exception.

In India, economic liberalisation since 1991 and the subsequent high-growth regime has been accompanied by increasing inequalities between advanced and backward regions. Dreze and Sen (2020) argue that the growth process is so biased that it makes the country look like islands of California in a sea of sub-Saharan Africa. It is in this context that a vast majority of rural–urban migration in India, including much of the migration stream discussed in this book, may be located. While rural–urban

migration may present new opportunities, it remains embedded in structural conditions of poverty in source regions. This is evident in Jan Breman's seminal work on seasonal and temporary circular migration in south Gujarat that emphasises the 'footloose proletariat'—an enormous mass of men and women, adults and children, who possess little if any means of production of their own and who lead a circulatory existence in the lowest rungs of the labour system (Breman 1996: 243).[42] This constrains the development potential of labour, and contributes to the curtailment of their basic freedoms and human capabilities at destination (Phillips 2009; Dreze and Sen 2020).

At the same time, scholars have argued that the structural logic of global capitalism is not a sufficient explanation of why and how migration occurs; migrants' own agency is central to the political economy of their migration (Phillips 2009). However, views of migration that focus solely on migrants' own agency or welfare miss out on the multidimensional and multi-spatial aspects of migration, as well as the interrelations between migrants as social agents and the local, regional, national, and global contexts in which their migration is located (Delgado Wise and Márquez Covarrubias 2009).

This aforementioned perspective motivated this book and led me to deploy multiple methods and disciplines to better understand different aspects of contemporary labour migration from rural Bihar, and analyse how they may be linked with one another. Multi-sited fieldwork led to findings, meanings, and narratives that came together, time and again, yet diverged at other times. One such divergence was in the framing of migrants as heroes at origin and victims at destination. In the source region where conditions of structural poverty prevail, most migrants leave their homes in search of better alternatives and almost all migrants send remittances to their families in the rural areas. This act of migration of young men to hitherto unknown destinations, their hard work, and remittances that follow for the survival and sustenance of their rural households is perceived to be a heroic act by their family members and communities in source regions (Chapters 6 and 7).

At the same time, abuse and exploitation of migrant workers goes hand in hand with their economic advancement (Wickramasekara 2008). This point is closely related with the earlier theme about globalisation and labour demand that drives this migration. Using Dreze and Sen's analogy, there exists a vast supply of labour from the 'seas of sub-Saharan Africa' to cater to the 'islands of California' in India (Dreze and Sen 2020). Developed nations and regions place cheap migrant labour—migrant workers—under conditions of increased vulnerability and high exploitation (Gabriel 2013). This explains the framing of migrants as victims that emerges from the fieldwork with Bihari migrant workers in Delhi, discussed in Chapters 6 and 7. In the next section, I present the context of Bihar—the geographical site of the research—with an emphasis on social and economic developments in the state, in the post-Independence period.

The context of Bihar

Bihar, with a population of 104.1 million is the third most populated state in India, after Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra (Census of India 2011). If Bihar were a country, it would be the 12th most populous in the world, preceded by Egypt, Philippines, and Ethiopia, and succeeded by Russia, Mexico, and Japan. It comprises 9 per cent of India's population and covers 3 per cent of its landmass, making it the most densely populated state in the country. Bihar's decadal growth of population from 2001 to 2011 was 25.1 per cent—the highest for any state in the country—as against an all-India average of 17.6 per cent. It is the least urbanised state in the country; just 11.3 per cent of its population lives in urban areas, and the increase in the rate of urbanisation has been very slow, 0.8 per cent between 2001 and 2011 (Census of India 2011).[43] A disproportionate share of India's poor live in Bihar, and of Bihar's total population, 33.8 per cent live below the poverty line (Government of India 2013a). In 2011, Bihar shared 9 per cent of the country's population as against 13 per cent of the country's poor. Bihar's poverty along with its high population density and severe stress on agricultural land[44] are considered as push factors in the outmigration from the state.

Bihar's backwardness is a result of myriad factors: its colonial history characterised by the Permanent Settlement land tenure system that entrenched the *zamindari* system; state policies such as freight equalisation in the post-Independence period (see below), and 'state incapacity by design', wherein in the 1990s and 2000s, the state was deliberately not governed for a decade and a half by the political regime in power (Mathew and Moore 2011). With the change in political regime in 2005, there was a 'resurgence' of Bihar, and a turnaround in its economy; yet, structural problems persisted. In this section, I briefly discuss milestones in Bihar's social and economic development trajectory to better understand the context of outmigration from the state.

In the post-Independence period despite its abolition, remnants of the *zamindari* system persisted. The failure in the implementation of land reforms ensured that the system still remained 'semi-feudal'—where, to a large extent, land, labour, and credit markets were interlocked. The rural landowning 'semi-feudal' class consisting largely of upper castes—the Brahmins, Bhumihars, Rajputs, and Kayasthas, along with a small section of Muslims and middle castes—controlled social, economic, and political power in the state. This system was not only exploitative, but it also hampered the process of agrarian transformation in the state (Prasad et al. 1988; Prasad 1989).

The Freight Equalisation Policy (1952) constrained Bihar's ability to reap the benefits of its natural resource base of rich minerals such as coal and iron ore. This policy subsidised freight to ensure availability of basic industrial inputs at the same price throughout India. Therefore, due to the already

existing industry and infrastructure, advanced regions of northern and western India were able to promote the growth of industries, while deprived regions such as Bihar that had a comparative advantage for industrialisation suffered (Ghosh and Gupta 2009). Corbridge, Harriss, and Jeffrey (2013) have called this suffering a version of resource curse in consequence. In the 1960s and 1970s, the Green Revolution bypassed the state as it was targeted at select agricultural regions in the country that had assured irrigation. Ironically, as agriculture at home remained backward and stagnant, Bihari labour traversed long distances to work in the agricultural fields of northwestern India where the Green Revolution brought material wealth and prosperity.[45]

Since the 1960s, the state experienced relative economic decline vis-à-vis the rest of India on account of widespread poverty, weak socio-economic infrastructure, and low investment (Rodgers et al. 2013). Bihar's 'semi-feudal' production relations contributed to the iniquitous and exploitative socio-economic structure, which in turn reinforced semi-feudalism. One ramification of this was the rise of a militant peasant movement that was accompanied by caste and class tensions (Sharma 1995, 2005). From 1990 until 2005, the state witnessed a near collapse of the administrative law and order machinery under the rule of Laloo Prasad Yadav. Yadav's rise to power was sustained by an electoral coalition of poorer and historically oppressed groups that he mobilised on the basis of continual confrontation with the historically oppressive elite. In doing so, he knowingly undermined the capacity of the state apparatus, and there was a rise in corruption and weakening of state institutions (Matthew and Moore 2011). This was accompanied by the ascendancy of the middle castes—the Kurmis, Koeris, and the Yadavs, as well as the Dalits and Muslims. The regime's emphasis on *izzat*—respect and dignity of the poor—translated into political empowerment without economic development in the state (Sharma 2005; Jha and Pushpendra 2014).

In 2005, Nitish Kumar became the Chief Minister, riding on the promise of law and order, economic growth, and development (Jha and Pushpendra 2014). Under the new government, law and order was restored, political and economic confidence increased, and Bihar became among the fastest growing state economies in India. The state's transformation was labelled as the 'Bihar miracle' (Matthew and Moore 2011); after several decades of economic stagnation, Bihar's Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) grew astonishingly, at more than 10 per cent per annum in real terms between 2005–2006 and 2014–2015. Much of this growth was concentrated in the secondary and tertiary sectors of construction, transport, storage and communication, trade, hotels and restaurants, and banking and insurance. At the same time, a majority of workers in the state remained concentrated in the agricultural sector dominated by small and marginal landholdings. Despite the high growth rate for about a decade until the mid-2010s, in 2018–2019, the per

capita income of Bihar remained the lowest for any state in the country at 33 per cent of the national average (GOB 2020).

The labour market in rural Bihar has changed significantly over the past 30 years. From a stagnant, semi-feudal environment in which much labour suffered from various degrees of bondage, it has moved towards a more open, market-driven system, in which labour migration to other parts of India has both reduced local relationships of dependency and provided new opportunities (Rodgers et al. 2013). According to official statistics, agriculture continued to be the primary employer of the population of Bihar; 49 per cent of its workers were employed in agriculture and allied activities (GOI 2020a). In recent years, against the backdrop of high economic growth in the state, the local non-farm sector has also grown in importance (Kumar and Sarkar 2012; Sabreen and Behera 2020).

At the same time, there is high outmigration for work from Bihar's villages; Bihar's economy is often referred to as a remittance economy (Indian Institute of Public Administration 2010). Be it when Bihar was the basket case of development in the 1990s or its poster child under Nitish Kumar's rule since 2005, outmigration for work from the state persists, and its incidence has increased in recent years, particularly in the time period under the study. Bihari workers have responded to labour demand elsewhere in India; consumption and the standard of living of the people of Bihar has improved largely with the access to employment opportunities in other states (Sharma 1997; Tsujita et al. 2010). Thus, migration has become a way of life, not only for migrant workers who leave the state, but also for their family members—women, children, and the elderly—who stay behind.[46] In the next section, I briefly trace the history of Bihar migration, and discuss changes in migration patterns.

Bihar migration

Bihar has a long history of migration. In the 1830s, a significant wave of migration began. Biharis were taken as indentured labour—*girmitiya*—to sugarcane and rubber plantations in the British colonies of the Caribbean—Guyana, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, Fiji, and Mauritius, and this migration lasted for almost a century. In the second half of the 19th century, there were two major migration streams from the state—to the tea gardens in Assam and to the urban labour markets in Calcutta, both of which were prominent for a century.

Historical accounts have challenged the conventional wisdom of immobility of India's rural population that we touched upon earlier in this chapter. Anand Yang's analysis of migration from Saran district in Bihar reveals high rates of internal migration through the late 19th and early 20th centuries—about 10 per cent of the overall population.[47,48] Using diverse historical sources, Yang (1979) finds that lower castes such as *Tanti*, *Ahir*, *Kurmi*, *Kahar*, *Kalwar*, *Bhar*, *Dusadh*, *Nonia*, *Bind*, and *Chamar* dominated

outmigration from Saran in the early 20th century.[49] Much of this migration was seasonal, and linked with the agricultural calendar. Yang explains,

> The "push" was felt particularly by persons of low economic and social status because "this class of population had little inducement to stay at home for agricultural wages are notoriously low, and [they] will be ready to go abroad in order to earn a fair wage." Such opportunities existed eastwards "in the mills, factories, docks and coal mines, or on the roads and railways, or in harvesting the crops of other districts."
>
> (Yang 1979: 48)

Chattopadhaya (1987) argues that this eastward movement—the large volume of migration from Bihar to Bengal in the decade of 1891–1901—was on account of push factors, 'indicative of Bihar's tremendous economic push and of the struggle for existence of the Biharis' (Chattopadhyaya 1987: 253). On the whole, these migrants belonged to all castes, were spread across the social hierarchy, and the sole objective of their migration was to earn a living and save so as to be able to send remittances to family members in the village (Chattopadhyaya 1987). The 'optimising peasant migrant' balanced risks and uncertainty to undertake temporary movements to maximise his income (Yang 1979). Thus, it appears that in the early 20th century peasant migration from Bihar, in terms of its linkages with the agricultural calendar and responding to both local and distant opportunities, has striking similarities with the livelihoods approach that gained traction in the 1980s and 1990s.

The stagnation of Bengal's industrial economy in the 1930s, coupled with a lack of demand for workers in the tea gardens of Assam, led to a decline in the eastward stream of migration from Bihar (Ghosh and Sharma 1995). In the late 1960s and 1970s, with the spread of the Green Revolution in northwestern India, there was a surge in the demand for agricultural labour. Bihar, mired in economic stagnation and poverty, saw a massive outflow of agricultural labourers to the states of Punjab and Haryana (Singh 1995; Rodgers and Rodgers 2001; Sharma 2005). Over time, there was a spillover of this rural-rural migration stream into the neighbouring industrial towns and urban areas. The national capital region of Delhi too became a favoured destination among migrant workers. By 2009, 28 per cent of all migrant workers from Bihar worked in Delhi (Rodgers et al. 2013). Over time, migrants steadily moved into non-agricultural work such as rickshaw-pulling, building and construction work, carpentry, masonry and, casual work in the informal sector (Karan 2003, Rodgers and Rodgers 2011).

Thus, with the decline of Bengal, eastward streams of migration shifted to new areas of prosperity in north India. There were shifts in the pattern of migration too, from predominantly short-term flows, linked with the agricultural calendar, migration became relatively longer term, and a

majority of migrants were delinked from agricultural production, and in consequence, from the labour market in source villages (Datta 2016b). In recent years, migrants have started going to the southern Indian states of Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Karnataka (Rodgers et al. 2013). The labour demand in urban destinations in these states, along with demographic variations between source and destination regions, drives this migration (Singh and Stern 2013).

Caste intersects with migration in several ways. On the whole, migration spans across caste and religion (De Haan 2002; Sharma 1997). At the same time, migration streams tend to be differentiated by caste, and caste networks help migrants to access distant labour markets. Of the early 20th century migration from Bihar, Chattopadhyaya (1987) notes,

> Those who migrated from Bihar belonged to different social compartments, high and low, but caste or social hierarchy seemed to impose very little restriction on the occupations they followed on their migration into Bengal. Rather, all sorts of employments were welcomed by the migrants from Bihar … employments which would have been looked down upon in the neighbourhood of their village homes. The Brahmin migrants, for instance, were found serving as peons, policemen, door-keepers, cooks and even as day-labourers.
>
> (Chattopadhyaya 1987: 278–9)

For upper castes, doing manual wage work in their home villages continues to be a taboo as it is against the ritual hierarchy of caste. Many people thus prefer to work outside their village to be able to undertake a variety of work and access diverse occupations (Karan 2003). At the same time, many lower castes are averse to work in the village on account of the history of feudal exploitation and subsequent caste tension, strife, and even violence in Bihar.[50] From their perspective, migration has provided a route to 'work with dignity and freedom' (Deshingkar et al. 2006), and increased migration may be an important agent of change in rural Bihar (Sharma 2005). However, this does not necessarily mean that villagers prefer to migrate than to stay in the village; based on ethnographic work in north Bihar, Indrajit Roy argues that migrants indeed want to live in the village if work that is in the domain of their dignity is available (Roy 2014).

Circularity has remained an enduring feature of migration from Bihar. On the whole, late19-th and early 20th-century migrants to Bengal had no intention of settling in Bengal permanently (Chattopadhyaya 1987). Migrants remained tied to their land and families in source villages, and migration was a household strategy. Even when relatively permanent employment was offered at destination, migration from Bihar to Bengal remained circular (De Haan 1996). Permanent migration was not preferred as it was looked as property lost in the village; seasonal migration persisted, as it was considered safe (Yang 1979). Interestingly, and not so surprisingly,

Chattopadhyaya notes that those at the lowest rung of the social hierarchy in the village were more likely to choose permanent migration. This may be explained by their outcaste status that defined dirty and menial jobs reserved for them in the village, coupled with the lack of land and other assets that did not tie them to the source village. In fact, social and economic conditions in the destination regions appealed to the lower castes much more than their circumstances in the villages of origin. Chattopadhyaya explains,

> Among the migrants, those most inclined towards permanent residence in Bengal were the sweepers and 'chamars' (dealers in hides) whose earnings and security of their jobs induced them to stay on in Bengal.
> (Chattopadhyaya 1987: 278).

This is a contrast from patterns of contemporary rural–urban migration from Bihar. Data on permanent migration from our Bihar surveys show that only those at the top of the economic hierarchy are most inclined and able to leave the village permanently.[51] Permanent migration from the village to the city is desired in a context where it offers better work and education opportunities. In particular, young people aspire to have a firm foothold in the city to access new opportunities in urban India. This is coveted even more in the context of decline of agriculture and lack of employment in rural areas. At the same time, permanent migration also requires substantial financial resources that only a few can afford. For temporary migrants on the other hand, migration becomes increasingly arduous with age. P.P. Ghosh and Alakh Sharma, based on a study undertaken in the early 1990s, note that 'difficult work and working conditions during their stay outside progressively reduce their capacity and desire to undertake such journeys' (Ghosh and Sharma 1995: 131). We will see in Chapter 3 that these attributes remain unchanged in contemporary labour migration from rural Bihar—migration streams continue to be youth-dominated, and as workers grow older, their migration tapers off.

On the whole, however, though migration streams have become longer term, and rural workers are increasingly embedded in the urban economy, their migration remains circular. This circularity is a fundamental characteristic of labour migration from rural Bihar. Men go out to work and ultimately return to their villages. It has clearly emerged from successive revisits and resurveys that over time, permanent migration of the kind that involves relocation of households from the village is very limited. Given that most of this migration is to urban labour markets across various locations in India, I have argued elsewhere that since the rural areas bear the cost of the production, maintenance, and reproduction of the labour force, they are subsidising economic growth and development in the urban areas (Datta et al. 2014). This is manifested time and again, be it in the context of the reverse migration, as a consequence of the successive lockdowns of the COVID-19 pandemic, or the sudden demonetisation of the Indian economy

in November 2016. I have briefly discussed the former in an earlier section. In the wake of demonetisation too, there were reports of disruption and contraction of economic activity in specific sectors, accompanied by job losses and migrants being pushed into precarious work, or migrant workers in urban areas having to return to their villages (Sharma 2016; Naik et al. 2017). This has been corroborated in my urban fieldwork site of Basai Darapur in Delhi where, in the weeks following demonetisation, there has been contraction of economic activity and exodus of migrant workers to their village in Mahisham, Bihar (Personal Communication, November 2016). Thus, the migrant's contact with the city can be long term, yet ephemeral. They may have been working in the city for decades, yet this association can abruptly end on account of an external shock, resulting them to take recourse to their rural residence.[52]

Organisation of the book

This book, *Continuity and Change*: *Migration and Development in India*, *The Bihar Experience*, *first* examines state discourses on rural–urban migration in India, spanning a period of about nine decades since the early 1930s, focusing on critical policy documents related to India's rural, urban, labour, and industrial policies. *Second*, the book uses survey data from a longitudinal study in rural Bihar to present characteristics of migration, and patterns of migration over time. In this context, it addresses three broad issues: (a) it examines changes in migration patterns, income, and remittances between 1999, 2011, and 2016; (b) it asks what the determinants of migration are, and studies if these have changed over time; (c) it explores if, over time, welfare outcomes of households that experience migration are different from those that don't. This quantitative research belongs to a small body of village-level studies of longitudinal change in the context of rural India (Badiani 2007; Mukopadhyay 2011; Dercon et al. 2012). *Third*, based on qualitative research of a particular rural–urban migration stream by undertaking fieldwork in the village and the city, this book focuses on the changing motivations to migrate, migrants' work in the city, their isolation, and the role of social networks. It then discusses rural–urban linkages—the intersecting community, household and gendered dynamics of this migration, and the role of remittances in changing rural consumptions and aspirations. Finally, based on migrant narratives, it explores emotional experiences of young male rural migrants located in the city of Delhi, India, and in doing so, contributes to the emerging scholarship on the emotional geographies of migration that prioritise young people's perspectives. This qualitative research is an addition to the small number of such studies that exist in the region (De Haan 1996; Rogaly et al. 2002). The multi-sited and longitudinal aspects of this study make it possible to present an in-depth account of a rural–urban migration stream in contemporary India.

This book speaks to diverse, and often disparate, literatures on rural–urban migration. The first among these is the small body of village studies—the ICRISAT and Palanpur studies—that deal with longitudinal change in rural India (Badiani 2007; Himanshu et al. 2018; Mukopadhyay 2011; Dercon et al. 2012). Second, it speaks to the economic literature on the determinants and impacts of migration (Taylor et al. 2003; Sabates-Wheeler et al. 2008; Murrugarra and Herrera 2011; Lokshin et al. 2010), and within this, a subset of longitudinal studies that use panel methods to explore the impact of migration (Funkhouser 2006; Beegle, De Weerdt and Dercon 2011). The third body of literature is that in sociology and human geography that locates everyday realities of migrant workers in the context of a global economy where migrants traverse rural and urban lives and livelihoods (Fan 2008; Rigg et al. 2014). This literature is closely intertwined with the larger literature on rural mobilities in Asia that draws attention to the movement away from agriculture and farming in rural areas (Croll and Ping 1997; Rigg 2006). Fourth, within the discipline of human geography, the book speaks to emerging scholarship on the emotional geographies of migration (Svašek 2010; Boccagni and Baldassar 2015), with a particular focus on young people's perspectives (Dobson 2009; Punch 2007; Beazley 2015; Hoang et al. 2015; Cheung Judge et al. 2020). These four strands in the literature on rural–urban labour migration intersect with the broader migration and development literature that covers both internal and international migration. This migration and development literature also highlights the complex interplay between structure and agency (Skeldon 2008; De Haas 2010) and suggests that social processes and their linkages with broader transformations should be at the forefront of migration studies (De Haan 2006; Castles 2017).

The key contribution of this book is empirical. The contents of the book—organised in eight chapters—are as follows: Chapters 1 and 2 set the context for the empirical analysis in Chapters 3-7. Chapter 1 has first discussed the broad theoretical and empirical literature within which this book is located, and delineated the framework of mixed methods research, describing the quantitative and qualitative data used therein. The chapter then traced social and economic developments in Bihar and the history of migration from Bihar.

Chapter 2 critically examines policy and programme documents of the Indian state to present state discourses on rural–urban migration in India since the 1930s. It emerges that while rural–urban migration was an important policy question in pre-independent India, state policy became increasingly silent about this migration in the post-Independence decades. There emerged a fundamental contradiction in the state's discourse—that industrialisation was necessary for development, but migration was not desirable. In the post-liberalisation period, however, there has been a growing recognition that migrants are clearly important actors in an economic sense. Yet, there remains an underlying disconnect between urbanisation and migration

in the state's discourse—while urbanisation is clearly desirable, often the state's view on migration remains ambivalent. Rural and urban policies tend to be mutually exclusive, except that both predominantly frame migration as a 'problem'. The chapter suggests that this rural–urban dialectic and the diversity and segmentation of state actors in a federal structure contribute to contradictory state narratives, and ultimately lead to the absence of a coherent discourse on rural–urban migration in India.

Chapter 3 presents key characteristics of outmigration from rural Bihar—the incidence and duration of migration, and the individual and household characteristics of this migration, such as class, caste, landownership, age, sex, education, primary work, and occupation status. It finds that nearly two-thirds (65 per cent) of households in rural Bihar have migrant member(s), and 18.8 per cent of sample individuals—that is, nearly one in five persons—are migrants. Notably, migration remains male- and youth-dominated. The chapter elucidates key aspects of the gendered and generational nature of migration, highlighting that for men migration is a pathway out of agriculture to access a diversified occupational profile in distant urban labour markets in India, while women remain largely confined to agricultural activities in the village. The chapter finds that migration from rural Bihar is predominantly to other states in the country, with Delhi, Punjab, Haryana, Maharashtra, and Gujarat being the most popular destinations. The chapter provides snapshots of Bihari migrant workers' lives in destination areas. Most migrants work in the informal economy, with little job security. Incomes from migration—though more stable and relatively higher than what may have been in source regions—are low, and do not offer the possibility to bring family members or settle down in destination areas. Despite having worked and lived in the destination for long periods, their identity documents are predominantly from the state in the source region, indicating a sense of permanence attached with their rural households. In turn, their return from migration destinations to the source areas is mostly associated with pulls from their families in the village. Interestingly, 98 per cent of return migrants report that migration is beneficial, and yet nine in ten of them do not desire to migrate permanently. This cannot be seen as a paradox, as material gains of migration come at the high cost of separation from family members. In such a context, can commuting be a viable alternative to migration? It is observed that a small but significant proportion (16 per cent) of resident workers are commuters and villages that have higher than average rates of commuting have lower than average rates of migration. Thus, there is some evidence that employment opportunities in nearby villages and towns may lower migration, and commuting and migration may be substitutes.

Chapter 4 examines changes in migration patterns and sources of income in rural Bihar from 1999 to 2011 to 2016. Over time, there has been a convergence of migration rates across the categories—class, caste, and district—and the data from the 2016 survey suggests that Bihar's high rates of

migration may be stabilising. It is also found that there appears to be no linear association between migration and poverty, and migration is the lowest among the poorest households. Poverty appears to be a constraining factor in the ability to migrate for those at the bottom-most quintile of income distribution. Next, based on household production and income data, the chapter presents the distribution of income sources in 2016, and then examines changes in income sources of rural households between 1999 and 2016. It finds that average income in households with migrants is higher than average income in households without migrants, and the composition of income in the two types of households is very different. Between 1999 and 2016, the share of remittances in total income had increased substantially, while that of local income, both from agriculture and non-agriculture, declined. At the same time, the share of income arising from government transfers in a wide range of goods and services increased. The decline of agricultural and non-farm incomes and the simultaneous increase in remittance incomes point towards a skewed livelihood diversification in rural areas. On the whole, as migration deepened, and remittances increased, agriculture suffered. In 2016, agriculture contributed to only about 20 per cent of total income in rural areas. The rural non-farm sector did grow but was constrained and unable to take-off due to the absence of appropriate forward and backward linkages in the local economy in a context where migration was both a cause and consequence of the lack of local development. More than 90 per cent of all migrants sent remittances, and remittances comprised 55 per cent of total income of households with migrants. Income from remittances rose as rural migrants participated in distant urban labour markets, and became increasingly delinked from village production networks.

Chapter 5, based on two cross-sections of survey data of 1998 and 2011, sets out to examine if the individual, household, and village-level factors that explain migration have changed over time in the context of changing patterns of migration from rural Bihar. It finds that effects of individual factors such as age, sex, and marital status in explaining migration have become stronger over time. It emerges that there has been a change in the pattern of migration by class, and there is evidence of increased propensity to migrate among the agricultural labouring class. On the whole, migration from rural Bihar has become more differentiated by education and caste, and there seems to be some shift towards pull factors, though push factors continue to remain important. The chapter then uses household panel data to explore if, over time, welfare outcomes—proxied by income—of households that experience migration are different from those that don't. The advantage of using panel data is that it enables us to control for unobserved time-invariant heterogeneity, something that is not possible with cross-section data that is used in most studies. The chapter uses a difference-in-differences model to estimate the effect of migration on welfare outcomes for four household typologies, based on their migration status in 1999 and 2011. Controlling for household and village-level variables, the

analysis finds that new migrant households experienced large and significant income gains, while households that slipped into non-migration experienced relative income losses. These results lend support to the theories of the new economics of labour migration, that migration is one of the many livelihood strategies used by rural households and is associated with increased income in source households in rural areas.

The empirical data points to a significant departure from dual sector migration and development models which suggest a linear transition of labour from rural to urban areas, and from subsistence to capitalist sectors. In our surveys in Bihar, migration is found to be one of the many livelihood strategies adopted by rural households, and migratory movements are circular; migrants, through their working lives, traverse back and forth between rural and urban areas, and most migrants eventually return to their families to retire in the village. The household production and income data indicate that migration and remittances are important in rural household livelihood strategies, and income gains from migration are significant.

If that is the case, then why do more households not participate in migration? To explore this and some related questions that emerge from the quantitative research, Chapter 6 studies a stream of rural–urban migrants from a village in north Bihar to India's national capital region of Delhi. The expansion of the research location to the city and undertaking qualitative research with migrant workers at an urban destination enables me to present a more nuanced account of their migration. Based on multi-sited fieldwork in the village and the city, it emerges that as migration has become widespread, motivations to migrate have become more complex, and migration is powerfully shaped by intersecting community, household, and gender dynamics. The chapter finds that migrants work in diverse sectors in the city's urban economy, and their work has local and global linkages. The qualitative research points out that the migrants value own account employment and prefer this over wage employment, in which most of the migrants are engaged. Access to wage employment is contingent upon social networks, weaved around a closely knit circle of kith and kin from the village ensconced in the city. At the same time, the same social networks that facilitate entry and employment in the city may impede prospects of better work. Rural migrants remain isolated from the social fabric of the city. They work hard and have few outlets of leisure. In this model of long-term male-dominated circular migration, separation from the family has become the norm, a way of life for millions of rural–urban migrants and their household members. Migrants spend much of their lives in city, they affirm their rural identity, and eventually see themselves returning to the village where their families are located. I argue that rural migrants experience disassociation from, and disaffect of the city, yet work in exploitative conditions in order to sustain rural material conditions that are structurally dependant on urban remittances.

Chapter 7 explores complex emotional experiences of young male rural migrants in India's national capital region of Delhi. Predominantly based on migrant narratives, it draws upon everyday lived experiences of migrants to present an in-depth account of their migration journey. In doing so, it captures gendered and familial emotions of migration, as well as young people's aspirations and anxieties, and contributes to the emotional geographies of migration that prioritise young people's perspectives. I find that while young migrants are active agents in their own migration, they are also subject to specific vulnerabilities and exploitation. They undertake challenging emotional labour in the city to create particular working identities that are both a source of pride and shame. I argue that an insertion of emotions in the analysis of migration helps in disentangling this dissonance between migrants' economic success and social rejection in the city. This research thus makes a case for the incorporation of emotions for a more comprehensive and nuanced analysis of young people's migration in academic and policy discourses. The chapter highlights that the subjective experiences of young migrants and views of their family members about their migration are different from perspectives of the market and state on migration. In particular, the dominance of economic discourses in migration policymaking has the danger of overstating the importance of income in migrant welfare and negating migrant experiences and subjectivities—a critical component of well-being. Given that most policies related to migration are primarily concerned with migrant safety and well-being, an incorporation of emotions is imperative in addressing questions related to how best to improve the lives of migrants—the supposed beneficiaries of these policies.

Chapter 8 concludes with a specific focus on the implications of this book for policy.

Notes

1 COVID-19 is an infectious respiratory illness caused by a coronavirus. In March 2020, the World Health Organization characterised COVID-19 as a pandemic. On the day of the Prime Minister's speech, the total number of COVID-19 cases in India were 564, and there had been 10 deaths.

2 See Government of India (2020e), the text of the Prime Minister's address to the nation. The full speech can be accessed at: https://pib.gov.in/PressReleseDetail.aspx?PRID=1607995.

3 The Stranded Workers Action Network (SWAN) reported that of the 11,159 migrants that reached out to the Network by 13 April, 50 per cent had rations left for less than one day, 78 per cent had less than 300 rupees left with them, and 89 per cent had not been paid by their employers at all during the lockdown (SWAN 2020).

4 According to migration expert Professor Irudaya Rajan, there are more than 150 million interstate migrant workers in India. He estimates that 30 per cent of the migrant workforce in India's cities returned to their native villages in the wake of COVID-19 lockdowns (Gupta 2020; Pullanoor 2020).

5 See Government of India (2020c), on GDP estimates. The note released by the Ministry can be accessed at: http://164.100.117.97/WriteReadData/userfiles/PRESS_NOTE-Q1_2020-21.pdf

6 Immediately after the imposition of the lockdown, the unemployment rate sharply increased—as per the CMIE-CPHS—from 7.6 per cent to 23.8 per cent in March 2020, and went up to 26.2 per cent in April 2020 (Vyas 2020). As a result of the lockdown, average household incomes declined by 9.2 per cent in March 2020 and 27.9 per cent in April 2020 (Vyas 2021).
7 Migrant workers disproportionately bore the brunt of the lockdown. According to a telephonic survey conducted by Azim Premji University, 81 per cent migrants lost employment in the lockdown and 31 per cent reported not being able to access rations. In comparison, the corresponding figures for non-migrants were 64 per cent and 15 per cent, respectively (Azim Premji University 2021).
8 On 21 September 2020, in response to a question in Lok Sabha, the Minister of Railways submitted to the upper house of the parliament that 97 persons had died onboard the Shramik Special Trains (Government of India 2020b). See http://loksabhaph.nic.in/Questions/QResult15.aspx?qref=17949&lsno=17 for details.
9 For instance, see *Times of India* (2020), an editorial outcry on the horror stories of the Shramik trains at https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/blogs/toi-editorials/run-railways-run-shramik-trains-have-seen-horror-stories-its-time-to-resume-normal-services/
10 The survey also found that more than 80 per cent of return migrants had to resort to labour work, and about a quarter were still in search for work after their return in source villages. For details, see: http://www.vikasanvesh.in/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Covid19-rural_hinterland_survey_CSO_June_July_20_webinar-presentation-4-8-20.pdf
11 Several economic packages announced by the Prime Minister and Finance Minister bypassed migrants' livelihood and mobility concerns.
12 See Singh (2020) for details; https://thewire.in/labour/uttar-pradesh-migration-commission
13 See Kumar (2020) for details; https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/patna/all-returned-workers-will-be-provided-employment-in-bihar-says-nitish-kumar/articleshow/75924967.cms
14 See Government of India (2020e) for the response to the Lok Sabha unstarred question #294 on financial assistance to migrants; accessed at: http://164.100.24.220/loksabhaquestions/annex/174/AU294.pdf
15 See Government of India (2019) for the answer to the Rajya Sabha unstarred question #434 on migrant labour workforce; accessed at: https://pqars.nic.in/annex/250/AU434.pdf
16 See Tumbe (2018) for a counter view.
17 The Working Group on Migration was set up by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation, Government of India, in July 2015 under the chairmanship of Professor Partha Mukopadhyay to assess the impact of migration on housing, infrastructure, and livelihoods. See GOI (2017b) for details.
18 For instance, see Haberfeld, Menaria, Sahoo, and Vyas (1999), Mosse, Gupta, Mehta, Shah, and Reese (2002), Deshingkar and Farrington (2009), Coffey, Papp, and Spears (2015), Dodd, Humphries, Patel, Majowicz, and Dewey (2016), and Rajan, D'Sami, and Raj (2017).
19 See Nayyar and Kim (2018).
20 See GOI (2017a)—the annual Economic Survey—published by the Ministry of Finance, which had a stand-alone chapter on internal migration in India. Sadly, this was the first and last time a separate chapter was devoted to internal migration in the Economic Survey.

21 See Datt and Ravallion (2010).
22 A description of the six regions can be found in Appendix Table A1.1.
23 See Prasad, Rodgers, Sharma, Gupta, and Sharma (1988) and Rodgers, Mishra, and Sharma (2016) for details.
24 As destination details were sought in a source area survey, we were only able to capture information of a subset of all migrant workers. The class-wise distribution of this sample of migrant workers can be found in Appendix Table A1.2.
25 Census statistics reveal that Madhubani district sends the maximum number of migrants from Bihar to Delhi. In fact, 1.95 per cent of all migrants in Delhi are from Madhubani (Census of India 2001).
26 See Indian Institute for Human Settlements (2012). The highest net rural to urban interstate migration stream is from Uttar Pradesh to Delhi.
27 For instance, see Indian Institute of Public Administration (2010) and Rodgers et al. (2013).
28 See Appendix Table A1.3 for details of the migrant research participants.
29 De Haan (1996), in his work on migrant workers in Kolkata has highlighted that the views of migrant workers in destination may well be different if studied from the rural side.
30 This definition of migration is attuned to the empirical context of the study. It is also close to other empirically grounded work such as the Indian Human Development Survey, where labour migrants are defined as 'non-resident household members who are identified through household response to: "Does any woman in the household have husband who lives outside the household"?' (Nayyar and Kim, 2018: 6). However, in addition to male labour migrants, our study also collected information on female migration. We are also able to identify households that permanently migrated from source areas.
31 In the period between 1998 and 2011, only 38 of the 891 original sample households had permanently migrated. This works out to a permanent migration rate of about 4 per cent.
32 In Chapter 5, the empirical work on the determinants of migration draws upon neoclassical and NELM theories, thus taking into account both individual and household level variables that may explain migration. In addition, I draw on models that hypothesise social networks as an important variable in the decisions related to migration.
33 In the NELM framework, Stark and Lucas (1988) attribute the importance of remittances in the development process to five factors, viz., the scale and pace of rural-urban migration, the magnitude of urban to rural remittances, its impact on the distribution of income, impact of remittances on the resource constraints in the sending economies, particularly in the agricultural sector, and impact on the next generation.
34 Interestingly, return migration was part of one of the earliest theorisations of migration; Ravenstein's fourth law of migration stated that 'each main current of migration produces a compensating counter-current' (Ravenstein 1885: 33).
35 For a review of the contributions of the discipline of geography, and its engagement with migration research, see King (2011).
36 On the other hand, a researcher may begin with a qualitative method, and follow it up by a large sample-based quantitative method (Creswell 2003).
37 See UNDESA (2020) and UNDESA (2013). Technical Paper No. 2013/1—Cross-national comparisons of internal migration: An update on global patterns and trends (http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/publications/pdf/technical/TP2013-1.pdf).
38 See McKay and Deshingkar (2014).

39 Modernisation theories derive from neoclassical economic models that conceptualise development as the movement of surplus labour from 'subsistence' to 'capitalist' sectors (Lewis 1954) in a linear 'set of stages of growth' (Rostow 1959). Dependency theories, on the other hand, located migration in the wider structures of the global capitalist economy, shaped by the 'dependency' between the 'core' and 'periphery', between the 'metropolis' and 'satellites'. Migration here was thus considered an inevitable part of global capitalism that contributed to the 'development of underdevelopment' (Frank 1966; Wallerstein 1974, 1980 in De Haas 2008).

40 This is also closely intertwined with the lack of interdisciplinarity within migration studies.

41 Subjectivities here refer to migrants' own experiences, ideas, and attitudes. Migrants' subjectivities about their migration tend to be different from perspectives of the market and the state on the same migration.

42 Breman argues that footloose labour is pushed out of the agrarian labour market to depend on casual work, and their 'urban employment in the informal sector is marked by a cyclicality that is usually associated with an agrarian-rural economic lifestyle' (Breman 1996: 70).

43 See Choithani, van Duijne, and Nijman (2021) for a counterview.

44 There has been a steady fragmentation of landholdings in Bihar. As per the Agricultural Census, by 2015-2016, small and marginal landholdings—i.e., landholdings less than two hectares—comprised nearly 97 per cent of the total landholdings, and operated about 76 per cent of the total area of operational holdings in the state (GOB 2020).

45 Capitalist agriculture reached only a small part in central Bihar that had a history of canal irrigation.

46 See Datta and Mishra (2011) for the impact of male outmigration on women in rural Bihar.

47 This is in contrast with official data sources such as colonial reports; Yang (1979) suggests that these sources underestimate seasonal migration.

48 In the current study, the share of migrants in total population in rural Bihar increased from 9.7 per cent in 1998 to 18.8 per cent in 2016.

49 He notes that the Bourdillon Report (1890) describes the migrants as 'the lower classes'.

50 In the late 1990s, Sharma (2005) notes the increase in commuters to nearby villages and towns. Many commuters were also seasonal migrants; they preferred to work outside the village to break away from the hardship of caste discrimination in the village.

51 The surveys also reveal that the highest incidence of migration is among the most educated.

52 As it happened with migrant workers from the source villages under study; a majority of migrants returned to their villages as an aftermath of the March 2020 COVID-19-induced lockdown across the country. See Datt, Dutta, and Mishra (2021) for details.