

**GENDER, POWER RELATIONS AND WELL-BEING AMONG LOCAL AND  
MIGRANT AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS IN HOSHIARPUR DISTRICT, PUNJAB**

*Thesis submitted to the Jawaharlal Nehru University  
for the partial fulfillment of the requirement for the award of the degree of*

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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**2019**



CENTRE OF SOCIAL MEDICINE & COMMUNITY HEALTH  
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**JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY**  
NEW DELHI - 110067

Dated: 03.01.2019

**DECLARATION**

I hereby declare that this thesis entitled "GENDER, POWER RELATIONS AND WELL-BEING AMONG LOCAL AND MIGRANT AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS IN HOSHIARPUR DISTRICT, PUNJAB" submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, is my original work. This thesis has not been previously submitted for the award of any other degree of this or any other university.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I wish to thank my thesis supervisor Prof. Ramila Bisht at the Centre of Social Medicine and Community Health (CSMCH), School of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), New Delhi. Prof. Bisht has always been supportive and helped immensely in shaping this work with her suggestions and critical feedback. I am indeed very grateful to her for her time, patience and kindness.

I am also thankful to all my teachers at CSMCH. I want to thank Prof. Sanghmitra Sheel Acharya, in particular, for always being supportive and encouraging to bring this work to the completion. I also wish to thank Prof. Shalina Mehta, Prof. Abhik Ghosh, - my teachers at Department of Anthropology, Panjab University, Chandigarh, who taught me Social Anthropology.

I have had the opportunity to meet Prof. V.K. Srivastava, Prof. Mary E. John, Prof. Meenakshi Thapan, Prof. Kuntala Lahiri-Dutt, and Dr Amit Mitra during various academic conferences. I thank them all for their time to discuss my research and their valuable inputs to my study.

I am thankful to the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) for Junior Research Fellowship (JRF) and timely release of funds. The administrative staff members at CSMCH made things easier with their unfailing support and assistance. Jeevan Madam towards the final months of submission often assured me that I was not far away from completion. I thank her for all the encouragement. Rawat Sir and Satish bhaiya also assisted all these years from locating misplaced office orders to providing countless documents.

I have used the collections of various libraries such as Documentation Unit, CSMCH, JNU; B.R.Ambedkar Central Library at JNU; Centre for Women's Development Studies (CWDS) Library; N. R. De Resource Centre on Labour Information at V.V. Giri National Labour Institute (VVGNI), Noida; A.C. Joshi Main Library at Panjab University, Chandigarh; and Bhai Gurdas Library at Guru Nanak Dev University (GNDU), Amritsar during the course of this research work. I am grateful to the staff for access as well as services. I wish to thank Dinesh Ji at the documentation unit, CSMCH for his prompt assistance in locating sources.

I have extensively used the reading hall of B.R.Ambedkar Central Library at JNU. I will always cherish time spent in the reading hall of the library. Reading and writing while at the library was indeed a luxury.

I am grateful to all my family members and friends who have always believed in me and supported me in every possible manner. I am extremely grateful to my mother for she has supported me in every possible manner throughout the completion of this work. Words cannot do justice to all her love, affection and support. Sanju stood besides me through thick and thin. I feel fortunate to have a sibling like him. I cannot thank him enough for his affection, encouragement and support. Philip bhaiya made a point to be in touch despite different time zones. I cherish sharing mundane routine activities and photographs with him during writing stage. I also wish to thank Kanhaiya for his patience and support. A little diary Mamma gifted me became the logbook for my thesis work. I have referred to it hundreds of times, for several minute

details a pre-occupied mind forgets. Papaji did not live to see this work completed. I wish he was with us as I write these words. I also fondly remember Biji and Daddy for all their love.

I am fortunate to be friends with Lakshmi, Anns and Eshita. All of them in their unique ways helped me stay sane during completion of the thesis. I absolutely adore our friendship and thankful for their love, care and support. I also wish to thank my friends Priya, Naveen, Neelam and Chakraverti with whom I could not keep touch over the years.

Last but not least, I am thankful to all my research participants who spared time as well as shared their experiences with me during the fieldwork. More than their houses, research participants opened their hearts, shared their happiness and despair with me, and above all trusted me. I am grateful that they not even shared their food and tea with me but also shared their lives. Without their whole-hearted support, this work would not have been possible.

*Sabina Singh*



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## List of Abbreviations

ASA	Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and Commonwealth
BSP	Bahujan Samaj Party
CA	Capability Approach
CBSE	Central Board of Secondary Education
CSDH	Commission on Social Determinants of Health
CSMCH	Centre of Social Medicine and Community Health
CSWI	Committee on the Status of Women in India
DCHB	District Census Handbook
ESRC	Economic and Social Research Council
HYVs	High Yielding Varieties
ICSE	Indian Certificate for Secondary Education
ILO	International Labour Organisation
ISI	Indian Statistical Institute
ISNA	Indian System of National Accounts
JNU	Jawaharlal Nehru University
LED	Light-Emitting Diode
LPG	Liquefied Petroleum Gas
MBBS	Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery
MGNREGS	Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme
MSD	Musculoskeletal disorders
MSP	Minimum Support Price
NEP	New Economic Policy
NSSO	National Sample Survey Office
OBC	Other Backward Class
PHC	Primary Health Centre
PSEB	Punjab School Education Board
SAP	Structural Adjustment Programs
SC	Scheduled Caste
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
ST	Scheduled Tribe
UN	United Nations
UNSNA	United Nations System of National Accounting
UP	Uttar Pradesh
USA	United States of America
WeD	Wellbeing in Developing Countries
WTO	World Trade Organization



## Glossary

<i>Aanganwadi</i>	Child care centre
<i>Achhi zindagi</i>	A good life
<i>Adh-Watai</i>	Sharecropping
<i>Agaeti Makki</i>	Summer maize
<i>Ajwain</i>	Carom seeds
<i>Andarli kamjori</i>	Weakness
<i>Angrezi Dawai</i>	Allopathy
<i>Basant</i>	Festival of spring season
<i>Bazaar</i>	Market
<i>Bhaiya log</i>	A derogatory term to address migrant workers
<i>Bhindi</i>	Ladies' fingers or Okra
<i>Biradari</i>	Sub-caste
<i>Chachi/Tayi</i>	A kinship term to address a paternal aunt
<i>Changa Jivan-</i>	A good life
<i>Changi/wadhiya zindagi</i>	A good life
<i>Chaulai</i>	Amaranth
<i>Choe</i>	A seasonal river that flows only in rainy season
<i>Chulha</i>	Earthen stove
<i>Daal</i>	Lentils
<i>Dassehra</i>	A major Hindu festival
<i>Dihadi</i>	Daily wage
<i>Diwali</i>	A major Hindu festival
<i>Dukh</i>	Suffering
<i>Dupatta</i>	A long scarf-like piece of cloth
<i>Durga Puja</i>	A major Hindu festival
<i>France Bean diyan phaliyan</i>	French beans
<i>Ghar ka Kaam</i>	Housework
<i>Ghee</i>	Clarified butter
<i>Gobar ka kaam-</i>	Dung-work
<i>Gur</i>	Jaggery
<i>Gurupurabs</i>	Anniversaries of Sikh Gurus
<i>Haajmola</i>	Ayurvedic digestive tablets
<i>Holi</i>	A major Hindu festival
<i>Jaade se taap aana</i>	Fever due to cold
<i>Jhona</i>	Rice
<i>Kaam</i>	work
<i>Kaam Nahi Milta</i>	No availability of work
<i>Kacchi Challi</i>	Corn
<i>Kaddu</i>	Pumpkin
<i>Kamaad</i>	Sugarcane
<i>Kamm</i>	Work
<i>Kanak</i>	Wheat
<i>Karele</i>	Bitter gourd
<i>Karha</i>	Concoction
<i>Kharif</i>	Autumn crops
<i>Khooh</i>	Well
<i>Vehda</i>	Courtyard
<i>Killa</i>	A unit to Measure land

<i>Kohlu da Bail</i>	A proverb indicating monotonous task
<i>Kulli</i>	Thatched Hut
<i>Kupp</i>	A triangular structure in the fields to store wheat
<i>Lahsun</i>	Garlic
<i>Lalla-lalle /Lalle</i>	A derogatory term to address migrant workers
<i>Langar</i>	Free community kitchen, a hallmark of Sikh faith
<i>Lohri</i>	Winter time Punjabi folk festival
<i>Loo Lagna</i>	Heat stroke
<i>Magh Purnima</i>	Day of full moon as per the Hindu calendar month of <i>Magh</i> (Gregorian calendar month January/February)
<i>Majdoori</i>	Labour
<i>Makki</i>	Maize
<i>Malik ki Thenh</i>	Master's land
<i>Mirchan</i>	Chillies
<i>Mooli</i>	Radish
<i>Nagar Kirtan</i>	A procession celebrating anniversaries of Sikh Gurus
<i>Pajamas</i>	Loose-fitted pants
<i>Pakoraa</i>	A fried snack
<i>Palak</i>	Spinach
<i>Panch</i>	Members of a Panchayat
<i>Pardes</i>	A foreign land
<i>Apana Des</i>	One's own country/ state
<i>Parna</i>	A short small turban
<i>Peepal</i>	Ficus tree
<i>Prashad</i>	Offerings to God
<i>Pucca</i>	Concrete
<i>Pudin Hara</i>	Ayurvedic digestive tablets
<i>Pyaz</i>	Onion
<i>Rakhdi</i>	An Indian festival to celebrate relationship between brothers and sisters
<i>Saag</i>	Brassica
<i>Sangat</i>	Devotees
<i>Sarpanch</i>	Head of Gram Panchayat
<i>Saunth</i>	Dried ginger
<i>Shadi Karni</i>	To arrange for marriages
<i>Tamatar</i>	Tomatoes
<i>Tar</i>	Armenian cucumber
<i>Thekedarni</i>	Headwoman
<i>Toodi</i>	Wheat straw



## **Introduction**

An ever-increasing number of people engaged in agriculture on the streets protesting for minimum support price (MSP), waiver of loans and implementation of Swaminathan Committee recommendations is enough of evidence of the simmering unrest, a consequence of agrarian distress in the country. Despite having been victims of state apathy and cruelty, the workforce engaged in agriculture from various parts of the country in the recent past has been attempting to display its discontent through peaceful protests on the streets of national capital as well as other parts of India. These protests not only pose questions to the policymakers but to the entire nation to rethink of the development course taken by our country, etched with contradictions, injustice and inequality. The complexity of the agrarian crisis in the country lies in the fact that the agrarian community is not only segmented by class, caste and gender but also regional contexts within and across various states. There is a wide variation in the issues that hamper the well-being of various classes within the agriculture sector and that not all classes in the sector are affected. There is a greater relevance of localised studies to have a thorough understanding of the issues at hand.

I have for the purpose of this thesis focused particularly on the interaction of gender with other relations of power that shape the experiences of women engaged as agricultural labourers in a village of Punjab as these women continue to struggle and survive the agrarian distress. Punjab holds a special status in agriculture in the country as one of the very first green revolution sites. Further, the state has witnessed shifts in caste-class dynamics in the farming sector in the aftermath of green revolution and economic reforms (Jodhka, 2006; Judge & Bal, 2008; Singh, 2000). The relevance of gender as a significant marker of inequality in agrarian relations in Punjab is not well-explored. I have attempted to understand how gender interacts with other relations of power, structural inequalities and individual differences in the broader context of agrarian change and migration through women's experiences of everyday life in a village of Punjab.

Various scholars in the recent past have drawn attention to the changing character of the rural economy, feminization of agriculture and labour migration from the perspective of women. Though there have been a few studies that address the issues of women engaged in agriculture from a more holistic perspective, most studies still take women's engagement in agriculture from a narrow perspective merely guided by the economic frameworks of demand and supply. Also, the existing debate on the feminization of agriculture amidst agrarian change is discussed along two broad theoretical stances, namely, Marxist and neo-liberal frameworks. It was acknowledged in the early eighties that women's work is not merely an economic or social issue but also political and cultural, thereby emphasising the need of a more holistic approach to understanding women's work. Drawing from the feminist discourse on women's work, the present thesis attempts to highlight the interaction of gender and other power relations in the lives of women who work as agricultural labourers in a village of Punjab. Further, the study also attempts to unravel the interaction of gender and migrant status along with other axes of inequality through the experiences of inter-state migrant women in the study village.

Lerche (2010: 69) identifies casual unprotected wage labourers in agriculture and bonded labourers as one of the most vulnerable categories in the occupational hierarchy regarding income and power. Drawing from Lerche, I argue that women within these two categories of workers constitute the most vulnerable section in the occupational hierarchy. I also propose that the migrant workers engaged in agriculture also lie low in the occupational hierarchy due to their lack of power in the agrarian system primarily because of their migrant status. Migrant women agricultural labourers perhaps lie at the bottom in the occupational hierarchy as their gendered identity interacts with their migrant status often leading to no income and/or power.

Another aspect that caught my attention to the present study is that despite the relevance of gender in almost every area of research, the studies on agrarian change continue to take rural labour as a homogenous category. I, however, argue that agrarian change and migration differentially affect men and women. In the present study, I thus attempted to understand as to how different processes and relations not only affect men and women but also how different women experience change

differently. Further, understanding the ways in which change affects women from their perspective is important for policy formulation.

The research inquiry is an extension of my earlier research conducted during M.Phil among the women agricultural labourers in a village of Punjab as the findings of earlier research prompted me to explore myriad ways in which women who work as agricultural labourers bear the brunt of the interaction of their gendered identities with various inequalities (Singh, 2010). Also, the relevance of specific context within which women's lives are rooted, and the differences in lived experiences of each of the women and their relationships with others around them pushed me as I undertook research not only as an academic endeavour but also as an ethical responsibility to bring forth the heterogeneity and complexity of women's lives.

In the present study, I have attempted to situate the subjective experience of women's work as agricultural labourers in their given context and its implications on their health and well-being. In this exercise, the interaction of gender relations with structural inequalities and individual differences among women is highlighted as I argue for the relevance of context and heterogeneity of everyday experiences of women in the given context. Ethnography as a method offers the epistemological advantage of bringing together specific context, socio-cultural relations and processes, as well as the lived experiences, and their interaction.

My disciplinary training in anthropology and public health, interest in gender studies as well as engagement with discourse in these disciplines have heavily shaped the conceptual choices and theoretical framework. The conceptual threads of holism and relativity, the two hallmarks of the discipline of anthropology, common to public health and gender studies respectively formed the foundation of the research problem whereby I attempted to understand the working of gender relations and their interaction with caste, class and regional identity in the selected context. Ethnography was used as a method and means to achieve a holistic understanding of the context, processes as well as relations between men and women as well as among women.

As regards the theoretical framework, the research draws on an eclectic mix of theories and approaches from various disciplines such as sociology, social

anthropology, feminist studies and public health. The use of interdisciplinary methods involves transcending boundaries across disciplines to understand the research problem creatively. The 'intellectual hybridity' thus achieved helps in overcoming the disciplinary short-sightedness (Price, 2012). The research inquiry is largely governed by doing gender and differences approach. Gender was understood as "not what one is but what one does and does recurrently in interaction with others" (West & Zimmerman, 1987: 140). Gender roles and relations were thus largely understood as performances in the given context wherein differences could be observed not only among and within women exhibiting different characteristics but also a particular woman at different points of time or life stage. Thus, gender roles and relations were understood as not static but dynamic. Ethnography though gave an opportunity to observe everyday gender performance, the meaning associated with various concepts and actions were understood from an emic perspective.

The study also draws from the feminist critical medical anthropological perspective, a fusion of feminist perspective and critical medical anthropology. The critical medical anthropology involves a critical theoretical framework emphasizing the role of social inequality and power as significant determinants of health and healthcare, thereby taking into account the causes and their interaction at various levels such as individual, micro-social, intermediate-social and macro-social (Baer, Singer, & Johnsen, 1986; Baer, Singer, & Susser, 2003). I have used feminist critical medical anthropology approach from differences perspective, as I attempt to give a holistic picture of processes and relations, depicting micro and macro levels of inequalities as well as the differences in the lived experiences of women. The interaction of gender with structural forces and inequalities, individual differences, multi-level processes, locations, and relations of power in influencing the health, life decisions and overall well-being is thus explored across different women who work as agricultural labourers. The research is thus necessarily based on the subjective experiences of women who worked as agricultural labourers and though I attempted to practice reflexivity as means to tackle issues of representation, my inadvertent bias and deliberate focus on experiences of women, albeit in relation to others might have shaped ethnography as a product.

A few scholars have though drawn attention to rising inequalities among the farmers, and certain other agricultural problems as a consequence of the green revolution, the perils of green revolution and its gendered dimensions in Punjab are seldom discussed. The period following the green revolution further accentuated the inequalities as the new economic order resulted in the growth of sectors other than agriculture. The scholarship on agrarian crisis in Punjab in the aftermath of economic reforms also does not sufficiently addresses gendered issues and concerns. Women are more often than not missing in most research on Punjab agriculture except for some notable exceptions reviewed in the next chapter. Punjab as a prosperous green revolution site was not untouched by the agrarian crisis as the suicides of farmers and agricultural labourers from various districts of Punjab garnered attention to the simmering agrarian distress in the state. Ranjana Padhi (2012) has been one among a few scholars who has drawn attention to the implications of agrarian distress on women in Punjab in her book titled '*Those who did not die: Impact of the agrarian crisis on women in Punjab.*' Padhi has focused on the left-behind women whose husbands or family members have resorted to suicide. The state apathy is evident from the fact that though suicides are now a yardstick to acknowledge distress in the agriculture sector, there is hardly any policy reform till date. There is a need to study the lives of women in Punjab who continue to engage in the agriculture sector and bear the burden of agrarian distress. The same may yield important insights to understand the strategies adopted by women to survive the agrarian distress.

The inter-state migration from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar to Punjab further adds to the complexity of the agrarian situation as the workforce in agriculture is not only segmented by caste, class and gender but also by regional identity. The existing studies on migrant workers in Punjab often suggest labour migration from other states as a threat to the welfare of the local agricultural labourers regarding reduced employment opportunities and the number of available days of employment. I, however, suggest that migrant agricultural labourers are important as well as most vulnerable constituent of the agricultural workforce in Punjab as they contribute immensely to the sector albeit through the exploitation of their labour. Further, the intersection of gender and migration in the agriculture sector warrant that the lives of migrant women agricultural labourers be explored and understood too. In this thesis, I attempt to bring forth the gender relations as they interact with other structural

inequalities such as caste and place of origin and shape the experiences of women who work as agricultural labourers in the selected setting amidst shifting the context of agrarian change and migration.

Most districts in Punjab still practice monocropping, a transition to vegetable cultivation is observed in certain pockets. The existing studies on agriculture in Punjab have been carried out in wheat and rice fields. The present study aimed to understand the changing role of men and women in agriculture in a village where vegetables are cultivated along with the cereal crops. The research thus attempted to understand the dynamics of gender and power relations in the backdrop of mechanization, shifting crop pattern, changing character of rural economy and labour migration. Agrarian relations among the landowning classes and local landless agricultural labourers and migrant agricultural labourers constituted one of the aspects of the study. Women's work and its linkages with their health and overall well-being in the overall context of agrarian change and migration were explored further.

The research is presented and discussed in a total of seven chapters. The very first chapter is based on the review of the literature. The next chapter deals with the research design and methodology. Chapters 3 and 4 broadly give the context of the study. Chapter 3 details the socio-economic profile of the study population as well as women research participants. Chapter 4 discusses characteristics of the migration stream as well as their reported reasons for migration. Agrarian structure and relations in the study village are also discussed in this chapter. Chapter 5 and 6 situate women's experiences of work, health and well-being in the given context. Chapter 7 discusses the key findings of the study and scope for future research.

Chapter 1 reviews earlier studies related to varied sub-fields of the research problem. The review of earlier studies guided the research not only in identifying the gaps in earlier research but also a comprehensive understanding of the research problem from various disciplines such as economics, anthropology, sociology, development studies and gender studies, to name a few. Existing studies helped in formulating the research problem as well as the decision regarding choosing an eclectic approach towards the collection of data for the research problem given its broad relation to various fields of study mentioned above.

Chapter 2 discusses the conceptualisation of the research problem as well as elaborates the research design for the present study. The conceptualisation based on a review of the literature as well as my disciplinary training guided the methodology and methods used for the data collection. The process of data collection and analysis are discussed in this chapter. The methodological challenges encountered during the fieldwork and plausible solutions are mentioned followed by the experiences and ethical dilemmas of fieldwork.

Chapter 3 discusses the findings of the census survey of the village. The household level data is discussed as it helped in identifying various socio-economic categories across the study population. The village is also described in terms of its people, places and their way of life as experienced during fieldwork. The caste and land-wise distribution of the population are also discussed in this chapter. Socio-economic profile of both local and migrant women agricultural labourers is also discussed in this chapter.

Chapter 4 sets the context in which we understand gender relations in the present study. It describes the migrant labourers in terms of their migration experience. It describes the pattern, nature and determinants of migration as narrated by the migrants themselves. It discusses the agrarian structure as well as agrarian relations. The relations of production and the continuities and changes in the agriculture are also discussed in this chapter.

Chapter 5 titled 'Women, work and gender relations within and beyond household' describes the meaning of work as perceived by women agricultural labourers. The whole exercise of how women make sense of the structural and cultural forces shaping the meaning attributed to work and the role of meanings in shaping the notions about work in return forms one aspect of this chapter. The gender relations that determine their work burden within the household are discussed. The chapter at the same time attempts to bring forth the plurality of experience of work among different women.

Chapter 6 discusses women's perceptions as well as experiences of health, illness and disease. It attempts to unravel the linkages women draw between their work and

health. The chapter is not only confined to exploring women's experiences of bodily illness. Rather, it attempts to understand various ways in which women attribute meaning to life. The same reflects the linkages of work, health and a life devoid of social and economic insecurities. Their narratives reflect the interrelationship between micro realities and macro environment.

Chapter 7 attempts to bring together various strands of the research together in light of earlier research. It also includes some reflections on the findings and indicates the potential for further research.



# **Chapter 1**

## **Review of Literature**



## **1. Review of Literature**

The present study inevitably builds upon the earlier research work carried by various scholars in the related areas of research. The review exercise carried out for the purpose of this research not only did offer an opportunity to engage with the research carried out by scholars from as varied disciplines as economics, anthropology, sociology, labour studies, gender studies, development studies, and public health, but also posed a challenge to integrate the contrasting disciplinary approaches.

An eclectic approach was though used for review to bring together the related areas of research, the theoretical approaches and methods of data collection and analysis largely follow from my disciplinary training in anthropology and public health. My interest in gender/feminist studies has also been instrumental in the selection of certain approaches and perspectives for this study. The same will be discussed at length in the next chapter.

Since we attempt to understand gender and power relations among agricultural labourers, it is important to understand the agrarian context. The evolution of agrarian studies in the country, as well as the class of agricultural labourers, is thus reviewed for the post-independence period followed by the issue of labour migration, specifically in the agriculture sector. We then discuss gender in agrarian studies and migration. The last section discusses issues and challenges related to understanding women's work and health.

### **1.1 An overview of the agrarian situation in India**

This section attempts to trace the trajectory of agrarian change in the country. It attempts to map the course taken for agricultural development in the first three five year plans in the country soon after independence. The role of international political economy, the discourse around green revolution as well as shifts in policy in the post-liberalisation period are significant factors responsible for the current state of agriculture in India. Akhil Gupta (1998) is one among some of the scholars to argue that the current state of agriculture in the country is a cumulative manifestation of

events and processes of past and present.<sup>1</sup> However, for the reasons of scope, we are not discussing the situation of Indian agriculture during the colonial period.<sup>2</sup>

The debate and discussion around priority to agriculture sector over industry and vice versa is not a recent development but is rooted in the Indian course of development and is visible from the very First Five-Year Plan (1951-56). It proposed measures to increase yields of grains and institutional changes to encourage the same through land reforms, cooperatives and community development. The Second Plan, on the contrary, strategised more on industrial development. However, the fall in production in the years 1957-58 compared to 1956-57 by 10 per cent, increase in food prices by 50 per cent and import of 6 million tons of food grains for these two years created a situation whereby India suffered extreme balance payment crisis. This crisis curtailed the industrialisation strategy. The Indian government during the year 1956 relied heavily on subsidised PL480 wheat. By the middle of the Third Plan, it was evident that the agricultural production was not up to the expectations of the planners (Frankel, 1978). The series of events in the sixties and later such as the war in 1965 with Pakistan under the leadership of Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri, his sudden death and the following Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's populist discourse around poverty and atrocities during family planning program, are not merely political and historical facts. Rather, several scholars draw the linkages of above mentioned events to the issues of nationalist discourse on self-sufficiency, hunger, poverty, population pressure, competition between 'developing' countries, and shifts in the structure of political leadership to authoritarianism. Some even note the role of Rockefeller Foundation and the ideology of United States of America (USA) to curb the spread of communism and interest in increasing food production in countries like Mexico, India and Philippines (Cullather, 2010; Frankel, 1978; Gupta, 1998; Patel, 2013). The Green Revolution was thus pushed to certain countries including India and was

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<sup>1</sup> In this context, the influence of colonialism, green revolution and neo liberal reforms have to be looked as a chain of events that manufactured, sustained and intensified the agrarian crisis.

<sup>2</sup> It is important to state that as suggested by Gupta (1998) colonialism should not be treated as a temporal phenomenon. Rather, the discourses of modernity, nationalism, agrarian development and self-sufficiency have to be looked as not devoid of political meanings and an expression of hegemony of the 'West', the so called 'developed' over the erstwhile colonies. The latter were believed to be still in the nascent stages of development and needed to mimic as well as follow the course of development decided for them by the former. This clearly implies that though we discuss the trajectory of agrarian change for the independent India, the linkages with colonialism and the domination and authority of the 'West' in charting the course of development in India cannot be negated.

propagated as a solution to all the complex political ecology problems these countries faced.

### **1.1.1 Green Revolution**

The advent of green revolution as a rural transformation program and the ideas that propagated this ideology, particularly the populist discourse around poverty alleviation and self-sufficiency, in the post-independence period, as mentioned above, is a major landmark in the agrarian history of India. The inherent contradictions in the theory and practice of green revolution are well captured by the scholars working across various parts of India. In the two decades that followed green revolution, the literature on the impact of green revolution also generated contradictory evidence whereby some studies showed an increase in agricultural productivity while several others pointed towards the widening of existing inequalities among small, marginal and large landholders as well as the landless labourers (Bardhan, 1970; Bhalla & Chadha, 1983; Deva, 1984; Jose, 1978; Pai, 1987).

Some of these scholars have pointed towards the widening gap between large farmers or landowners and small or marginal farmers as the increased production cost also pushed many small/marginal farmers to the status of agricultural labourers. Others have highlighted the effect of mechanisation on agricultural labourers in terms of declined wage rates and household income due to the increased flow of migrant labourers from various regions of the country to Green Revolution heartlands. For instance, Bardhan (1970) mentions that though the wheat fields of north-west India, i.e. Punjab, Haryana, and Western Uttar Pradesh have been the heartland of Green Revolution yet rural population below a minimum level of living quadrupled during 1960-61 and 1967-68 in many other states including these green revolution sites. Oommen highlights the impact of growing capitalism in the rural regions of the Green revolution sites. The process of 'de-peasantisation' caught up its pace and a large number of small and marginal farmers were pushed to the status of landless labourers (Oommen 1975 cited in Dhanagare 1987). The monopolisation of access over economic resources by rich landowners and Government's pro-rich farmer development policies further hampered the conditions of rural poor specifically agricultural labourers (Dhanagare, 1987).

The initial focus of studies around green revolution was largely about poverty, inequality and uneven development, as discussed above. A large body of literature on green revolution is from the perspective of economists. However, some scholars explored beyond the economic aspects and raised concern about the ecological implications. Vandana Shiva (1991), for instance, linked the conflict and violence in the then Punjab to the less talked about ecological and political demands of the Green Revolution. She has been one of the few scholars to have approached the communal conflict of Punjab from a broader perspective. She identifies the role of technology and state in controlling nature and people as key elements of the centralising strategy of Green Revolution. She also argues that contrary to the narrative of abundance associated with the Green Revolution widely disseminated by international agencies and the Government of India, Punjab witnessed new kinds of scarcities that found manifestation in the diseased soil, pest-infested crops, and indebted and discontented farmers.

Some scholars explored the politics of green revolution and agricultural development from an even broader perspective. A case in point is that of a study carried out by Akhil Gupta (1998). He undertook an ethnographic exploration of 'postcoloniality' by drawing attention to the 'interconnections between divergent discourses and structural forces' in a village of Uttar Pradesh. He argues that the processes must be seen in continuity and that the differences do not necessarily 'other' the system. It thus implies that there are considerably overlapping, impure and hybrid modes of thinking and their separation quite different. His argument reflects in the narratives of farmers in the study village. The study gives a thick description of agricultural practices and knowledge of farmers which is a fascinating mix of traditional knowledge and postcolonial agricultural development, and the two are quite inseparable.

Since its advent in Mexico, Green Revolution generated a lot of interest among the scholars. Frankel (1978) has critically analysed the political economy of the green revolution in India. Patel (2013) critically assesses what the Green Revolution was and how the 'New Green Revolution' with its bio-politics is different from the earlier one. He reinstates that to sell the 'New Green Revolution', the old one had to be propagated as a success. Thus, we find that the literature on Green Revolution is vast

and it continues to generate interest among scholars to date largely due to its wider repercussions.

### **1.1.2 Agrarian Change, Mode of Production Debate and Agrarian Relations**

As mentioned above, the Green Revolution was widely discussed for its impacts. It also triggered a lot of debate over the character of the mode of production in India. The debate was largely about the growth of capitalism in Indian agriculture. It would not be an exaggeration to state that the agrarian question in India for a long time was largely limited to the 'mode of production' debate. Some of the scholars, who actively participated in this debate, included Utsa Patnaik, Ashok Rudra, and Amit Bhaduri. Nadkarni (1991) states that the debate remained unsettled definitively and raised more questions than it answered. The issues such as land ownership, tenancy, credit, differentiation of peasantry class and 'depeasantisation', and agrarian transition were largely discussed in various issues of *Journal of Peasant Studies*, *Economic and Political Weekly*, and of late the *Journal of Agrarian Change*.

The agrarian structure and relations not only generated debate and discussion among economists. Several sociologists and anthropologists also took up studies in the late seventies and early eighties discussing the agrarian structure and relations in Southern India, particularly rural Tamil Nadu and Kerala (J. Harriss, 1982; Mencher, 1978). They conducted village studies and attempted to understand the dynamics of agrarian relations. It can, however, be stated with confidence that the studies tracking changes in agrarian relations owing to technology and shifting power equations with respect to class were largely situated in the political economy perspective. Jodhka (1998) refers to these studies as 'agrarian studies' and differentiates them from 'village studies'.<sup>3</sup> Bêteille's work *Caste, Class and Power* (1965) could be identified as instrumental as it brought to discussion Weberian categories of 'status' and 'power'. He also discussed the land question and agrarian change and mobilisation in *Studies in Agrarian Social Structure* (1974). Many scholars also attempted to understand the landholding pattern and power relations, impact of changes in land-control on caste, family and power politics, the emergence of new agrarian class formations and

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<sup>3</sup> The village studies came to be known as a hallmark of social anthropology. Soon after the independence, there was a widespread urgency to record the rural life as several volumes covering village life appeared within a decade after independence. See Dube (1955), Marriott & Beals (1955), Srinivas (1955).

changing production relations (Baboo, 1987; Karna, 1981; Mukherji & Chattopadhyay, 1981; Oommen, 1984; Pathy, 1981). The caste and class were largely the axes around which the agrarian relations were studied. The gender dimension hitherto rarely found mention except for a few studies that took into account women's role in agriculture (Mencher & Saradmoni, 1982; Sethi, 1989, 1991). One of the plausible reasons is that gender was not identified as a category of analysis by then. It was however in the mid-eighties that the term 'gender' was increasingly used. The scholars, by then, invested their energy in making women visible and acknowledge their contribution in agriculture and other sectors of the economy. The same is however discussed at length later in the chapter. Later, the role of caste and class in determining power relations in the village politics also constituted an important area of research, especially in the aftermath of BSP's victory in Uttar Pradesh (Lerche, 1999).

The review suggests that the research on agrarian change and agrarian relations in India is vast, complex and diverse. There are similarities as well as differences in agrarian structure and relations across regions. Most scholars have attempted to understand the changes in agrarian structure and relations through the analytical categories of caste and class. Gender was rarely used as an analytical category in making sense of agrarian structure and relations at least towards the end of the eighties. The questions related to gender in agriculture, however, found increased mention in the post-reform period as scholars questioned the changing character of the rural economy and its implication on both men and women. The same will be discussed later in the chapter.

### **1.1.3 Agrarian Crisis and Neoliberalism**

Though the narrative of 'successful green revolution' continues in the official documents, the state of distress in the agriculture sector is marked by increased farmer suicides across various states in India towards the end of the nineties and in the early years of 21<sup>st</sup> century. The shift in India's economic policies in the 90s severely affected the agriculture sector. Agriculture came to occupy a marginal position in the development discourse. Agrarian questions did not seem to generate any interest in academic events or popular media (Jodhka, 2012). Vasavi (2009) also notes that



amidst the State apathy, the popular media also played a role in making the agricultural issues invisible and often camouflaged the tragic incidences of farmer suicides with other insignificant reports.

Neoliberalism resulted in increased inequalities between rural and urban India.<sup>4</sup> Urban India got preferential treatment as a site that saw the development of information technology and business sectors of economy catering to the need of emerging middle class. The agriculture sector, on the other hand, is hit badly by the free trade promoting policies such as World Trade Organization (WTO)-mandated imports of cheap agricultural commodities, and an ‘internal colonization of the poor’ through which the Indian state has intervened in dispossession of land and resources of rural poor and transferred the same to both domestic and international capital. All these developments have resulted in an agrarian crisis resulting in stagnation in the agriculture sector. The same has affected the rural poor substantially not only in decreased food consumption but increased incidence of poverty (Walker, 2008).

Münster (2012) notes that the instances of farmer suicides coincided so well with the post-reform period that the farmer suicides are often situated within the neo-liberal regime, and the agrarian crisis is often understood as synonymous with farmer suicides in the aftermath of economic reforms. Vasavi (2009) however notes that the farmers’ suicides found new meaning from an individual act of desperation to political acts that highlighted the distress of agriculturalists.

Scholars have largely noted the plausible causes of agrarian distress in the structural issues such as economic reforms, the integration of Indian agriculture to the global food market, credit, and indebtedness (Patnaik, 2006; V. M. Rao & Gopalappa, 2004; Sarma, 2004; Shiva & Jafri, 1998). However, some scholars like Jodhka (2005, 2012) argue that the broader social structure including caste and class relations are often missing in the discourse on agrarian crisis in the reform period. Vasavi (2009) identifies ‘individualisation of agriculture’ and disintegrated social relations as a

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<sup>4</sup> “The process of neoliberalization has, however, entailed much ‘creative destruction’, not only of prior institutional frameworks and powers (even challenging traditional forms of state sovereignty) but also of divisions of labour, social relations, welfare provisions, technological mixes, ways of life and thought, reproductive activities, attachments to the land and habits of the heart.” (Harvey, 2007:3).

consequence of commercialisation of agriculture among other factors that manifested in distress leading to suicides by those engaged in agriculture.

This section on the agrarian crisis suggests that the agrarian crisis is not confined to the tragic instances of farmer suicides. Rather, it draws attention to the distressful conditions that push farmers and others involved in agriculture to take a step as extreme as a suicide. As discussed above, some scholars though associate the current agrarian situation of the country with the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAP), certain others argue that the economic reforms are not solely responsible for the agrarian distress in the country. Rather, the role of colonialism, green revolution and the shifts in the economic policy of the government, all have played a role in manufacturing and sustaining the agrarian crisis in the country.

## **1.2 Agricultural Labourers**

This section briefly discusses the historical origin of the class of agricultural labourers and their socio-economic situation. The impact of ‘new agricultural technology’ on agricultural labourers and their wages, the effect of economic reforms on agricultural labourers and the changing character of the rural economy is reviewed. The debate on freedom and unfreedom of labour is also discussed briefly.

### **1.2.1 Evolution of class of agricultural labourers in India**

Patnaik (1983) traces the evolution of a class of agricultural labourers in India through pre-colonial, colonial and the post-colonial period.<sup>5</sup> She argues that propertyless wage labourers were an integral part of pre-capitalist economy and society in India. Hereditary servitude to the landed families characterised these labourers. Those engaged in agricultural activities and other menial tasks for mere subsistence invariably belonged to the castes identified as ‘outcasts’ in the caste hierarchy. Due to their caste status, they were subject to discrimination of varied nature not only by

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<sup>5</sup> She has not necessarily used this terminology to identify periods. However, she analyses the production relations in the Mughal India (1526-1857), during the colonial period and the post-independence period.

their employers but also the cultivating peasantry. Further, they were prohibited from holding any land.<sup>6</sup>

The colonial invasion brought certain changes to the character of earlier hereditary servitude as the relations were monetised. Debt bondage thus replaced the hereditary servitude. The colonial policies led to the pauperisation of large sections of the indebted poor peasantry into landless labourers. The wage workers during the colonial period thus came from erstwhile hereditary labourers as well as the poor peasantry who was pushed to the state of landlessness. In the post-independence period, the land reforms, 'new agricultural technology' in the sixties and the subsequent inflation of food grain prices due to the expansion of the domestic market also enhanced inequalities (ibid.)

### **1.2.2 Socio-economic situation of agricultural labourers**

Agricultural labourers are "a class that is overworked, underprivileged, and underpaid"(Kuo-Chun, 1957:24). Many studies suggest that agricultural labourers belong to Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) (Bhatia, 1975; Kuo-Chun, 1957; Patnaik, 1983; Srivastava & Srivastava, 2010). It is though difficult to draw a correlation between caste and economic status in India; agricultural workers are often drawn from castes low in the local social hierarchy and, in some areas, from tribal populations. Thus, the combination of low social status with economic hardships poses additional problems for a large proportion of rural wage workers (Kuo-Chun, 1957). Bhattacharya (2004) argues that Dharma Kumar made an error in her study by restricting to certain 'lower castes' as constituting the most of the labour force. By doing so a whole lot of impoverished peasants other than lower castes were not included in the study. Sudha Pai argues from a Marxist perspective that the landlessness resulting from land eviction or proleterization leads to waged labour in agriculture (Pai, 1987).

As high as 92 per cent of the Indian workforce is employed in the unorganised sector while the entire farm sector falls under the informal category (Sakthivel & Joddar, 2006). The situation of agricultural labourers as unorganised workers is worse than

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<sup>6</sup> "All pre-capitalist economic formations are characterised by systems of hierarchy or ranking, since they are all based on 'direct' relations of appropriation of surplus, ultimately relying on extra-economic coercion (in contrast to capitalist system, where the formal equality of the marketplace is reflected in the legal equality of all individuals and classes)."(Patnaik, 1983: 5)

other workers in the agriculture sector. They are characterized by poor physical and human capital and poverty levels among them are very high (Datt, 2007). They usually get very low wages that are not even enough for subsistence. They and their families often live below the poverty line, and they form part of the core rural poor in many parts of the world. Their employment is often unstable and temporary. The agricultural labourers are often engaged in strenuous work and suffer from lack of alternative job opportunities and indebtedness (Hurst, Termine, & Karl, 2007; Kuo-Chun, 1957). The agricultural labourers - a large section of the rural population in India, constitute the weakest and poorest section in the rural hierarchy. They constitute the weakest section as they are unable to organise themselves and have low levels of education (Unni, 1988).

All the studies mentioned above suggest that the agricultural labourers are poor, landless, and quite often belong to Scheduled Castes. Thus, we find that the caste status along with certain other factors like landlessness is often associated with the work as an agricultural labourer. Vyas (2007) argues that agricultural labour is the main source of income for many poverty ridden households in rural India. Earnings from agriculture depend on the number of days of employment and the wages. Available studies suggest that the period of employment is shrinking, because of curtailment of the net cultivated area, the fast pace of mechanisation in states like Punjab and Haryana, or the changeover to less labour-intensive cropping patterns as in Kerala.

### **1.2.3 Impact of ‘New Agricultural Technology’ on Agricultural Labourers**

The literature on ‘new agricultural technology’ largely takes into account the impact of two components on agricultural labourers, namely, farm mechanisation, specifically tractorisation and the High Yielding Varieties (HYVs). Some studies argue that the impact of technology on agricultural labourers should be studied in light of demographic factors such as migration.

Rao (1972) suggests that though the farm mechanisation is often assumed to be leading to replace the human labour, the same does not hold for tractorisation. Using the secondary data available on Punjab from various sources, he concluded that tractorisation led to increased crop intensity and thus did not affect the demand for

labour. On the other hand, the use of combine in harvesting operations significantly replaced the human labour. Another study conducted in 26 villages of district Ludhiana in Punjab also showed that the tractor was found to be having neutral labour displacement effect. On the other hand, the use of thresher was found to be labour displacing. The demand for hired labour increased with the farm size, out-migration of family members, use of land improvement factors and improved farm practices and tractor use (Oberai & Ahmed, 1981).

The adoption of HYV technology encompassing improved farm practices increases labour demand in some ways. The shift in cropping pattern brought by irrigation facilities leads to more demand for labour. The use of improved farm practices in the form of input of more water, fertilisers and pesticides and various activities like transplanting and weeding necessitates more labour. The labour intensive operations such as harvesting and crop processing inevitably need more input of labour in case of higher yields resulting from new seeds. The new HYV seeds also have a short maturing period and thus permit planting of two or three crops a year. The increased crop intensity thus demands more labour (Basant, 1987).

Dasgupta, Laishley, Lucas, and Mitchell (1977) however asserted that while the total amount of labour time demanded generally increased in green revolution areas, the overall participation rate of women, children and old aged especially in harvesting and transplanting decreased and that they were replaced by migrant contract workers. The same implies that the volume of work has increased as an implication of new technology and correspondingly a smaller number of people are being employed for longer hours to undertake it.

A field survey of migrants in rural areas of Ludhiana district of Punjab proposed that the inflow of migrant labour to the green revolution sites since the early sixties is on the rise. It is also suggested that this inflow is not necessarily due to the change in production technology but another dimension which is often not given attention. This overlooked dimension is the shortage of labour on account of the higher rate of out-migration in the State. Thus, the role of mechanisation in increasing demand for labour in Punjab needs to be re-examined in the light of increased out-migration rate and thus consequent labour shortage (Oberai & Singh, 1980).

The studies mentioned above suggest that the mechanisation with reference to tractor though seems to have neutral or no displacement effect on agricultural labourers, the mechanisation in post-harvest operations such as threshers and combines seems to have displaced manual labourers in these operations. The HYVs, on the other hand, seem to have increased demand for manual labour in certain operations such as weeding.

#### **1.2.4 Impact of Green Revolution on agricultural wages**

The literature on agricultural labourers often highlights the poor situation of agricultural labour households. Much of the literature is confined to regional and temporal variation in agricultural wages across India. Many studies also deal with changes in agricultural wages pre- and post-Green Revolution. The debate during the seventies about conditions of agricultural labourers revolved around real wage rates and incomes. The predominant view was that the wages had declined and the situation of agricultural labourers deteriorated with the advent of the green revolution. Regional disparities also accentuated as a consequence of the green revolution (Bardhan, 1970, 1973; Jose, 1974; Krishnaji, 1971). Some studies, on the contrary, concluded that the situation of agricultural labour had improved. Lal (1976) used consumption levels of the poor rural households and indicated that there was a reduction in the percentage of households below the poverty line between 1956-57 and 1970-71 to argue that the condition of agricultural labourers improved during the same period. Many scholars, however, pointed out that the real wage rates and incomes alone were insufficient to reach any conclusion regarding conditions of agricultural labourers. Several other factors such as the agricultural wage rates, the availability of agricultural work days per year per worker, agricultural output, wage income from sources other than agriculture, to name a few, were important in assessing their economic situation (Jose, 1978; Laxminarayan, 1977; Unni, 1988). Some even used female work participation and the earner-population ratios by sex during these years to argue that women and children, who could otherwise be non-workers, are forced to enter the workforce under the adverse economic condition of the household (Unni, 1988).

### **1.2.5 Economic reforms, agricultural labourers and changing character of the rural economy**

The shift in economic policy in India in the early nineties as a result of liberalisation has generated a lot of interest among the scholarly community about their impact, specifically among the rural segment of the population. A lot of debate and discussion is centred on understanding the trends in poverty. Deaton and Dreze (2002) suggest that the debate on poverty has largely been inconclusive. One of the noteworthy reasons was the non-comparable nature of National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) 55<sup>th</sup> round, and certain earlier rounds of NSSO consumption expenditure survey referred to as ‘thin rounds’. Varying recall periods were noted as the main reason for the non-comparability across various rounds. Sen and Himanshu (2004a, 2004b) critiqued the claims of an increased rate of poverty decline in the post-reform period. They carefully adjusted the data and suggested that the rate of reduction in poverty decline, in fact, declined during the post-reform period. The same certainly refers to the implication of reforms among rural wage labourers.

It is widely acknowledged that neoliberalism has resulted in increased inequalities.<sup>7</sup> We have earlier noted the increased divide between rural and urban India as well as the neglect of the agriculture sector in the aftermath of reforms. The official statements and publications do not capture the reality of distress among agricultural labourers. Rather, the indicators of well-being among agricultural labourers suggest that the New Economic Policy (NEP) has worsened the situation of agricultural labourers. The increase in poverty estimates and underemployment in rural areas, reduction in rural non-farm employment, and almost a halt in real wages in agriculture, in the post-reform period, all point towards the distress among agricultural labourers (Jha, 1997; Srivastava & Singh, 2005). The contradictory claims of gradual implementation of reforms and the state’s sympathetic attitude toward poor rural workers in India come from the national survey data. There have been very few empirical studies that report what the reforms mean for rural poor (Garikipati & Pfaffenzeller, 2012). Some scholars, such as Deaton and Dreze (2002) have however suggested including not only economic indicators but certain other

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<sup>7</sup> “Redistributive effects and increasing social inequality have in fact been such a persistent feature of neoliberalization as to be regarded as structure to the whole project” (Harvey, 2007:16).

development indicators such as health and education to understand the implications of reforms for the poor.

Chand and Srivastava (2014) note that there have also been changes in the structure of rural employment. The share of non-farm sectors, specifically construction and industry sectors, in total rural employment is witnessing an increase while that of agriculture has declined by almost 10.47 percentage points between 1993-94 and 2009-10. Further, the movement of labour, specifically male labourers, from agriculture to other sectors often referred to as diversification of the rural labour market is subject to a set of complex factors such as wage differentials across sectors, the trajectory of economic growth, worker-productivity ratio, to name a few.<sup>8</sup> The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) is also often cited as one of the plausible reasons for the scarcity and non-availability of hired labourers. The level of employment under MGNREGS for the years 2009-10 suggests that only one-third of labour households found employment for an average of 37 days out of 100 days of work. However, the effect of MGNREGS on raising the real daily wages in the rural sector cannot be negated albeit in interaction with certain other factors.

The changes in the relationship between the agricultural labourers and their employers in the reforms period are also situated in the shifts in the character of the rural economy. Jodhka (2002, 2012) notes that the erstwhile dependence of labourers on their employers and the importance of patron-client relationship is diminishing as the rural population is becoming 'pluriactive'. Referring to his study in rural Punjab, he argues that despite being landless, the Dalits preferred not to engage themselves with the cultivating farmers in their respective villages due to certain social and political reasons. Instead, they sought employment in industries or informal sectors in nearby urban centres. Such alternatives were earlier not available. The instances of attached labour were thus more common. The attached labour and the issues of 'freedom' and 'unfreedom' have also been discussed at length among the anthropologists, economists and sociologists. The same is discussed in the following section.

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<sup>8</sup> The implications of the same on the women, and the debate on 'feminisation of agriculture' is discussed elsewhere in the chapter.



### 1.2.6 Hiring Arrangements

Another central theme that emerges in the literature on agricultural labourers is the type in which production relations are organised. As regards the terms and conditions of employment, there is no single pattern of agricultural wage work and there are various categories of agricultural labourers such as permanent (full time) agricultural workers; temporary or casual agricultural workers; seasonal agricultural workers; migrant agricultural workers, piece-rate workers; or workers receiving some form of 'in-kind' payment (Hurst et al., 2007). Kuo-Chun (1957) identified temporary, contractual, attached and bonded labour as forms of agricultural labour. He also stated that much of Indian agricultural wage employment is contractual. He is also of the view that attached labourers have some employment security when compared to the contractual labourers. Breman (1974) in a similar vein discusses in detail a form of bondage- referred to as *hali pratha* in South Gujarat. The *hali* mostly belonged to a tribal group called Dublas, historically known for bondage and hence even referred as *halpatis*. The attached farm servants were bound to their masters through credit and in return also had some form of security. As this practice does not continue any longer in the traditional form, referring to the process as 'de-patronisation', Breman argues that the condition of Dublas has deteriorated. He notes that the government has failed to provide assistance and security that was institutionalised in *hali* system.

Tom Brass (1990) critiques the conceptualisation of attached labour in the form of patron-client relations as noted by Breman and others. He suggests that there is an element of coercion and unfreedom in attached labour.<sup>9</sup> In Breman and Bardhan's conceptualisation, the relationship between employer and employee seems to be that of 'convenience to both parties'. Banaji (2003) on the other hand argues that the contracts are never voluntary<sup>10</sup>. He critiqued Brass for the dualistic conceptualisation of free and unfree labour.

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<sup>9</sup> "long- or short-term worker attachment is a form of unfreedom the object of which is to discipline (not habituate), control, and cheapen labour-power by preventing or curtailing both its commodification and the growth of a specifically proletarian consciousness" (Brass, 1990: 37).

<sup>10</sup> "Through contract (the general theory/classical law of), the nineteenth century sanitised wage-labour in the sanguine images of individual autonomy, private volition, free will, and free agency. There was, of course, a long pre-nineteenth-century tradition, going back to antiquity, that had seen wage-labour (contracts for the hiring of labour; 'service' in an earlier terminology) in terms of the subordination of the employee to the employer" (Banaji, 2003: 69).

The debate on free and unfree labour has also been linked with the development of capitalism whereby some scholars see the existence of such forms of labour as a continuation of pre-capitalist relations in agriculture. Others, such as Bernstein (2004) on the other hand, draw attention to the role of emerging forces of globalisation on the labour arrangements. Bernstein (ibid.) argues that the globalisation has led to the ‘intensification of fragmentation of labour’. He particularly notes the adverse and insecure wage employment conditions in the informal sector in India with unique differentiation along the intersecting lines of caste, class, gender, generation and ethnicity.<sup>11</sup> The inherent unfreedom in the informal sector is thus associated with globalisation.

This section gave a broad overview of conditions of agricultural labourers in India. The literature suggests that the agricultural labourers represent one of the weakest sections of the rural economy. In most cases, they are landless and belong to ‘lower castes’, and to tackle the abject poverty, they work as agricultural labourers. It is also evident from the review that increased inequality as a consequence of green revolution and economic reforms has affected adversely those at the lowermost tiers in the agriculture sector. The uneven development as a consequence of green revolution and economic reforms has also aggravated regional inequalities and triggered labour migration. The next section discusses some of the aspects of labour migration.

### **1.3 Labour Migration: Pattern, Causes and consequences**

This section discusses the significance of internal migration in India. It also reviews the literature to bring the plurality of experience inherent in labour migration as a coping strategy for some while leading to social and economic mobility for others. The literature showing migration as an economic as well as social process is also discussed. It also attempts to give an overview of conditions of work of migrant

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<sup>11</sup> Highlighting the ‘fragmentation of labour’ with specific reference to India, Bernstein (2004) states that many of those engaged in unorganized sector “pursue their means of reproduction across different sites of the social division of labour: urban and rural, agricultural and non-agricultural, wage employment and self-employment” (Bernstein, 2004: 205).

labourers. Their lack of social protection and the poor state of health is also briefly covered in this section.

### **1.3.1 Internal Migration in India and its significance**

The word migration is often understood as international migration. The internal migration, on the other hand, is often not given adequate attention. The number of internal migrants is far more when compared to the international migrants. Also, the internal migrants more often than not belong to poorer segments of the population. The studies dealing with internal migration have potential to give interesting insights for reducing poverty. Further, the studies on internal migration dealing with the dynamics at the sending and receiving regions as well as the impact of migration on migrants and their families can be of great help in public policy formulation (Deshingkar & Akter, 2009; Rogaly, 1998; R. Srivastava, 2013).

The data on internal migration in India is drawn primarily from two sources: namely, population Census and quinquennial migration surveys carried out by NSSO. Both Census and NSSO fail to take into account seasonal and/or short-term circular migration. It is widely acknowledged that both Census and NSSO data do not capture the true picture of migration trends and patterns in India. Context-specific micro studies are extremely useful to understand the dynamics inherent in internal migration (Deshingkar & Akter, 2009; R. Srivastava, 2013).

Although there are studies that indicate that labour migration increased with changes in the character of the economy in the nineties, historians like Bhattacharya (2004) indicate that labour mobility is not entirely a new phenomenon with its origin in the liberalisation process but was a characteristic feature among certain agrarian communities in the nineteenth century too. However, mobility has increased over the years. One could observe the movement of labour from dry, insecure tracts to wet or irrigated tracts, and from single to double-cropped areas in the late nineteenth century. Such areas marked higher intensity of cropping as well as labour demand. In Southern India, within the states Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, there are accounts of movement of workers who worked as daily wage labourers from dry to irrigated areas in their respective states. Within Eastern India, one often found that the demand of labour and wages increased as one moved towards more fertile lands of east. Similar

movement of labour was also observed during the nineteenth century in the Northern and Western states like Punjab and Maharashtra. Other than agricultural opportunities, drought, famine and certain other natural calamities often forced people to migrate in search of livelihoods and evolve certain coping mechanisms (Prasad & Rao, 1997).

### **1.3.2 Migration as a livelihood strategy**

De Haan (1999) suggests that most of the literature on migration suggests that it takes place usually in response to the economic, environmental or demographic crisis. Rather, it is a 'normal' course of action to most if not all societies as a livelihood strategy. Shah (2014) also argues that the survival of rural population depends on remittances or wages that are earned elsewhere and that migration is an integral component of village life in India.<sup>12</sup> Rogaly (1998) claims that the rural workforce is largely dependent on seasonal or temporary movements to various parts of the country in search of work to sustain their livelihoods. The seasonal movement of rural people in search of work, however, is an under-researched area (De Haan & Rogaly, 2002; Haberfeld, Menaria, Sahoo, & Vyas, 1999). De Haan (1999) also suggests that there is a need to integrate the discourse on migration to agrarian and rural development.

The rural-rural migration though accounted for approximately 62 per cent of all movements in 1999-2000 as per the NSSO data, the rural-urban migration also showed a sharp increase. The migration from rural to urban areas is not necessarily a manifestation of rural distress though the lack of work in rural areas can also not be negated. The rural-urban migration rather prevents people from highly exploitative 'patron-client' relationships at the level of the village.<sup>13</sup> Further, the earnings of certain disadvantaged communities increased with migration compared to that in their respective villages (Deshingkar, 2004).

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<sup>12</sup>Shah states that, "villages are the places from which people migrate, and the places they go, are part of a web of material parameters that landless people from rural areas navigate in order to support themselves, and others" (Shah, 2014: 32).

<sup>13</sup> It is however to be noted that migrant contracts are not any less exploitative in nature. The bargaining position of migrant labourers is relatively better in the areas with more demand of labour (Olsen & Ramana Murthy, 2000).

### **1.3.3 Determinants of migration: Economic and Social**

Regional inequalities are often identified as one of the major determinants of movement of labour. The movement of labour from states like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar to Green Revolution Areas in the states of Punjab and Haryana is often cited as an example of regional inequality. A study conducted in rural Punjab discusses that the migrant labourers from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar constituted about twenty-three per cent of the workforce engaged in agriculture sector activities in Punjab. The migrant labourers were found to be engaged during the peak season of agricultural operations (Singh, Singh, & Ghuman, 2009). Workers from certain 'backward' states like Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Orissa and Rajasthan regularly travelled to the developed green revolution states of Maharashtra, Punjab and Gujarat during the peak seasons of agriculture (Deshingkar, 2004).

The inflow of migrant labour, however, cannot always be explained by regional inequalities. De Haan and Rogaly (2002), to this effect, assert that migration is often assumed to be an economic process, but it is also a social process. The decision to migrate is taken at the household level and not at an individual level. Thus, who will migrate and who will stay back is all decided at the household level. Other than that, socio-cultural values also determine whether only male members of the household will migrate or will they be accompanied by women and/or children. Piore (1979), in a different context, also emphasised migration as a social process wherein the individual not merely functions to the demand and supply aspects of the market. Rather, the individual is located in a set of processes, relations and formal as well as informal social institutions. It thus implies that the individual circumstances, aspirations, motivations, as well as socio-cultural norms, shape the migration experience.

A study on the seasonal migration of workers in agriculture to the Barddhaman district of West Bengal identified four migration streams from four different neighbouring regions. Stream I had only Muslim men from Murshidabad district while migrants of Stream II, III and IV travelled in mixed-sex groups with children. The common reason for all the streams to migrate to Barddhaman district was increased demand of labour, higher and uniform wage rate throughout the district for

both men and women and, a higher degree of choice to choose the employers. Other than that each stream of migration had their respective social reasons to migrate (Rogaly et al., 2002).

Caste relations also play a significant role in the migration process. The caste pattern to migration is also evident in several studies. The East Godavari region in Andhra Pradesh has a reasonably large number of seasonal workers belonging to scheduled castes. Similarly, in the sugar industry in Maharashtra, many landless Scheduled castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST) and Other Backward Class (OBC) workers from Marathwada region migrate for the harvesting of sugarcane (Balakrishna, Rangacharyulu, & Rao, 1981; Deshingkar & Akter, 2009).

Gidwani and Sivaramakrishnan (2003) also draw attention towards the importance of social relations of production and reproduction and the meanings associated with a particular caste group in the migration process. They mentioned that the Patel and Rajput castes in Gujarat earlier preferred Vankars. Their preference for workers from this particular caste was not only due to their nimble fingers that facilitated relatively quick and precise paddy transplanting and weeding of fields but also because unlike other Dalit groups; they were docile.<sup>14</sup> The migration of Vankars altered the erstwhile caste relations that existed among them, Patels and Rajputs. The present-day Vankar families in the Shamli village situated in Central Gujarat are employed in various sectors outside the village. The migration has transformed the political consciousness of the young Venkars who refuse to follow the earlier norms of caste hierarchies.

### **1.3.4 Positive or Coping Migration Pathways**

The literature on migration suggests that the migration experience is context specific. Also, there are huge variations not only across regions but within too. Deshingkar and Start (2003) while highlighting the complexity in generalising consequences of migration suggest that it is difficult to draw associations between poor and well-endowed areas with positive or coping migration pathways. They substantiated their argument by giving an example of migrant sugarcane workers, and agricultural

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<sup>14</sup> Vankars are a Dalit community in Gujarat, traditionally known for weaving cotton. The Rajput and Patel caste employers preferred them over other castes as they were believed to 'know their place' (Gidwani & Sivaramakrishnan, 2003: 354).

labourers from rural and poverty struck villages of Andhra Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. The standard of living of these migrant workers improved significantly. Those, on the other hand, from well-to-do areas were found to be migrating for coping purposes. Haberfeld, Menaria, Sahoo, & Vyas (1999) similarly, in a study conducted in Dungarpur district, a hilly southern part of Rajasthan, found seasonal migration to be a coping mechanism for mere survival or subsistence. Some studies, on the other hand, note improvement in the conditions of migrant workers and argue that migration does not always lead to increased poverty (Balakrishna et al., 1981; Gidwani & Sivaramakrishnan, 2003; Rogaly et al., 2002). Mosse et al. (2002), on the contrary, note in case of migration of Bhils from villages of Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Rajasthan that they navigate through the relations of caste, gender, tribal and non-tribal relations at the level of their respective villages and often find themselves in relations of debt and dependency. It thus inevitably does not lead to any improvement in their incomes and security. However, migration still is a survival strategy among Bhils.

### **1.3.5 Labour Migration: A matter of ‘choice’/compulsion and role of migration in the segmentation of the labour market**

There is so much diversity across the country that it is difficult to predict whether labour migration is a matter of ‘choice’ or compulsion. For instance, in the Bardhaman district, due to increased demand for labour and the feeling of rivalry among the employers, labourers could exercise choice in selecting their employers. Employers mentioned that they found it extremely difficult to get the labour either from their source areas or labour markets (Rogaly et al., 2002). On the other hand, Khandeshi migrants from Maharashtra were forced to migrate to Gujarat due to collusion of landowner-employers whereby they could control the labour force (Teerink, 1995). The employers often devise context-specific strategies to exercise their power and control the labour market. Some employers prefer migrant labourers over the local labourers. They give various explanations for their preference and thereby control the labour market. For instance, the sugar industry in South Gujarat is dependent on the labour of migrant workers. Jan Breman (1978), in his study in South Gujarat, mentioned as to how the migrant labourers are hired for harvesting sugarcane over the local labourers by the sugar industry owners. The employers justify the hiring

of migrant labourers by various explanations such as they are more laborious and hard working when compared to the local labourers. Also, they assert that Khandeshi labourers are known to have worked with sugarcane harvesting for years and know their work well. The local workers may have lesser negotiating power in the presence of migrant workers. Thus, we find that migration also plays a role in the segmentation of the labour market.

### **1.3.6 Living and working conditions, poor health and access to social protection**

Several studies note that migrant workers work under extreme conditions. Their living and working conditions are reported to be extremely poor. Breman explains the toiling work that the labourers put in the sugarcane fields. He also points to their poor living conditions. He calls the process ‘Crushing of Cane and Labour by Sugar Factories’. He emphasises that migrant workers are subject to double exploitation by their recruiters and farmers as they are made to work for long hours in harsh work conditions and low wages. Referring to the poor living and working conditions of the migrant labourers, he contends that ‘even dogs are better off’ (Breman, 1978, 1990). Mosse et al. (2002) note that the migrant labourer work under harsh and difficult conditions. Their employers expect them to work harder and without wages for overtime. They work under hazardous conditions without any protection. Their employers do not provide any protection against any work-related injury or limited compensation in case of loss of life. The insufficient wages affect their access to food and healthcare services. Their living conditions are also poor. They often live in places without proper water and sanitation facilities.

The poor living and working conditions also affect the health status of migrant labourers. The infectious, as well as occupational health problems, are often rooted in their working lives and places they inhabit. Poor diet and nutrition levels negatively affect their health status. The vulnerabilities associated with their migrant status also affect their access to food and healthcare services. The migrant labourers are also found to have a low utilisation rate of health care services (Borhade, 2011, 2013; Chatterjee, 2006; Mosse et al., 2002).



The migrant labourers' vulnerability suggests that they represent a section in need of social protection. The migrant status, however, may challenge their access to certain state provisions. Several scholars have suggested that the registration and identity cards for migrant labourers may prove useful yet they could also lead to further exclusionary practices in access to services and schemes (Deshingkar & Grimm, 2005; Hopkins, 2016; Srivastava, 2013a).

#### **1.4 Women, work and gender relations: Drawing linkages with agricultural labour, migration and health**

This section draws linkages across the previously discussed sections and situates the gender question in the literature reviewed earlier. At the outset, it addresses the literature on gender relations and their relevance in understanding the agrarian transformation. Bringing focus to women's work, the evolution of research on women and work in India is traced. The role of women in agriculture is discussed followed by a sub-section on the association of caste and landlessness with women's work as agricultural labourers. The role of labour migration and its interaction with gender is also reviewed. Studies that deal with women's work and health along with women's productive and reproductive roles are also discussed.

##### **1.4.1 Gender relations and their relevance in the agrarian transformation**

The term 'gender' has evolved from being a merely grammatical and classificatory device indicating the masculinity or femininity of the sexes to a category that refers to the social organisation between the sexes. Gender, unlike sex, does not essentialise the biological difference. It also introduces a relational notion as well as a critical re-examination whereby both women and men can be defined and understood in relation to each other. Further, it suggests a kind of neutrality whereby it neither names any of the parties involved nor which is more aggrieved (Scott, 1986).

Gender relations are the power relations between men and women as well as between women of different ranks and social hierarchies. These set of relations often get reflected in everyday interaction, practices, ideas, roles, resources, and division of labour. They are often attributed to different abilities, behaviour and desires among men and women. Gender relations in interaction with other structural inequalities such

as caste, class and race shape all these attributes. They are, however, also shaped by these attributes (Agarwal, 1994). Politically inclusive scholars often identify gender, class and race as at least three axes of inequality around which histories of oppressed could be studied (Scott, 1986). Behrman, Meinzen-Dick, and Quisumbing, argue that “understanding gender relations encompasses additional aspects of well-being, status, self-esteem, empowerment (or disempowerment), vulnerability, issues of social differentiation, social norms, and, most important, self-perceptions by individuals and communities of what it means to be ‘male’ or ‘female’ in a given society” (2014: 38).

Gender relations vary across regions and at different point of time. It thus implies that they are neither uniform nor static. The gender roles, norms, behaviour and responsibilities are socio-culturally determined, and hence a particular society shapes its gender relations based on the accepted gender norms, values and tradition. All these together, in turn, determine the division of labour between men and women, as well as, access and distribution of resources (Agarwal, 1994, 1997; Banerjee, 2011b; Quisumbing et al., 2014). The social construction of gender inequalities is not adequately studied. One of the central questions is as to why certain gender inequalities persist while others change (Agarwal, 1997).

It is widely acknowledged that most societies exhibit patriarchal gender relations. The same suggests that women are not only considered subordinates to men but also exploited, humiliated and seldom have equal access to opportunities, resources and power to change the status quo. The patriarchal norms govern gender roles and responsibilities, resulting in control over women’s bodies, sexuality, and labour. Men may control women’s conduct in all these domains mentioned above either by a set of rules or/and through violence, and coercion. The magnitude and measures of control vary across societies. This domination of men over women is ingrained in both public and private spheres of life (Banerjee, 2011b; Bhasin, 1993).

The macro-structures such as patriarchy and mid-level concepts such as ‘participation’, ‘integration’, ‘exclusion’, ‘marginalisation’ and ‘segregation’ are useful to theorise gender relations. A broader framework comprising not only household, society and state but also paid work, culture, sexuality and differentiation

between these helps in understanding and analysis of gender relations (Walby, 1996). The role of specific historical context in shaping the culture and hence gender relations can also not be negated. Analysing historical processes from a gender perspective helps in understanding the gendered nature of institutions (“Why Gender and History?,” 1989). Thus, studying the macro-structures such as patriarchy along with institutions like family and marriage along with work and certain mid-level concepts from a historical perspective can be used to understand and analyse gender relations.

Some scholars situate the problem of unequal relations between men and women in unequal access to resources and decision-making. The land is a major source of inequality not only across classes but also between men and women. Bina Agarwal (1997) notes that access to land is important for rural livelihoods, it is crucial for women in the wake of the agrarian transformation. She argues that women’s dependence on agriculture has increased in recent years as men have moved to the non-agriculture sector while women have largely remained in the agriculture sector. Agarwal (2001) also suggests that women’s collective struggle, bypassing differences of caste and class, can lead to effective land claims for women. Rao (2005) on the other hand argues that in relatively homogenous tribal society, separation of women and men’s interest in land is problematic. She also suggests that “more than the gender identities, it is the cross-cutting identities of kinship relations and marital status, ethnicity and education, that both motivate women to stake their claims to land as well as oppose the claims of other women (and men)” (Rao, 2005: 356).

Women’s access to resources and decision-making within the household and beyond is studied from the perspective of their bargaining position determined by qualitative factors such as gender norms and gender differences as well as the effect of the interaction of external forces operating at the level of market, community and the state on the household. The norms regarding food allocation and contribution of income to the household in most South Asian countries favour men over women. It also affects women’s bargaining position. Similarly, social norms also restrict women’s mobility and ability to earn wages outside the household. The power relations between men and women not necessarily stem from economic inequalities but a mix of gender

asymmetries, social norms, economic and political factors, as well as, women's access to or lack over property (Agarwal, 1997).

Gender relations are studied largely for the forest or tribal societies in Asia/India. Many scholars have focused on understanding shifts in gender relations with the transformation of access, ownership, and management of natural resources across the tribal societies, while identifying the factors leading to these changes (Kelkar & Nathan, 2001; Mishra, 2007; Mishra & Upadhyay, 2012; N. Rao, 2001). Some of these scholars have been curious to know as to how in these forest-dwelling societies the male domination emerged as a norm while others draw attention towards the increased work burdens among women as a consequence of these changes.

Kelkar and Nathan (2001) carried out an extensive study covering villages and forest communities in four countries in Asia, namely, India, Nepal, Malaysia and China. They attempted to understand the changes in gender relations in these forest-dwelling societies at the level of household and community with the broader changes in the socio-cultural and economic changes and noted that prior to these changes the matrilineal societies had relatively equal gender relations. Forest management was an important source of power for women in matrilineal societies. The shifts in forest use as a consequence of state intrusion led to the loss of power and status among women. Their struggle against the state did not result in resuming their lost status and power. Rather, the collusion of state and patriarchy resulted in increasing the authority of men over women and change in social valuation of women's work.

Nongbri (2000), while citing the example of Khasi matrilineal kinship system, however, suggests that though women may have some security under matriliney, they are not necessarily free from subordination and subjugation. Not only women's subjugation is visible from the fact that they are kept away from decision-making within the family and society but also there are numerous gendered terms and phrases in the Khasi language that indicate men's superiority over women. Similarly, Prasad (2016) argues that not necessarily matrilineal and patrilineal societies have differential degrees of proletarianization or semi-proletarianization of women. She, however, suggests that the regional variations and patterns of landholding, as well as macro-economic processes, significantly affect tribal women. She even suggests that the

communitarian structures are not immune to the larger economic processes and that though these changes have affected both tribal men and women, women are at a more disadvantageous position compared to tribal men.

The gendered character of agrarian change and the increasing contribution of women in agriculture in production and reproduction activities demand that the agrarian change is studied by giving attention to gender relations in agriculture. The study of gender relations within and beyond household along with the interaction of class, kinship and other social relations in the agrarian context is helpful in developing a better understanding of agrarian change (“Gender Relations and the Changing Agrarian Political Economies in the South,” 2016). In most patriarchal societies, women’s work is neither acknowledged nor valued. Rather, the significant contribution of women in productive and reproductive activities is not even regarded as work. The relevance of gender relations and other power equations determined by the specific agrarian context can thus be observed in the work and lives of men and women. In the following section, we attempt to trace the development of women and work as a research area in India.

#### **1.4.2 An overview of the evolution of women and work as a research area in India**

In our day to day lives, we come across women as workers in most sectors of the economy. However, it is a different issue altogether that there is a wide gulf between a relatively small section of women who have the requisite education and skills that help them in obtaining employment in the organised sector, and, a considerably large segment of women who are bound to work in unorganised sector owing to lack of education, skill, location, class and other such structural constraints. The challenges today associated with the women’s work are relatively different from the seventies when women were not even considered as workers. Boserup’s (1970) seminal work challenged this assumption. She brought attention to the importance of women’s subsistence activities and how such activities were not included while calculating national estimates of income and production. The question raised by Boserup as regards women’s role in economic development gave women the much-sought visibility. The research during this period suggested that women’s integration into the development process was inadequate. In India, the report of the Committee on the

Status of Women in India (CSWI) gave impetus to this argument. The report suggested that the condition of women in India concerning certain indicators such as education, employment, health and political participation did not improve much (CSWI 1975). The same resulted in extensive research related to the nature and measurement of women's work, their role in demographic change and agriculture. A pertinent example of this increased interest in women's work is reflected in Krishnaraj (1985)'s article on women and work in the seventies.

Sen and Dhawan (2011) note that the other concurrent developments at the international level such as the declaration of the decade 1975-85 by United Nations (UN) as UN Decade for Women and the three international conferences in Mexico (1975), Copenhagen (1980) and Nairobi (1985) were instrumental to bring forth several issues that not only propelled global circulation of feminist ideas but also strengthened national women's movements. It was during this period that the structural issues such as poverty and patriarchy were identified as the causes of inequality between men and women as well as among women. The exploitation of women in the process of development specifically in developing economies was also acknowledged (Banerjee, Sen, & Dhawan, 2011). The increased interest in studies related to women and work and the sites of production also gets reflected in the international symposium and conference held at Indian Statistical Institute (ISI), Calcutta in the years 1982 and 1985.<sup>15</sup>

It is also during this period that the International Labour Organisation (ILO) commissioned several studies to assess the impact of the development process on women's economic activities in the developing countries. A case in point is Maria Mies's (1982) notable study on the lace-makers of Narsapur wherein she emphasised a qualitative analysis of production and reproduction relations and their effects on women. She argued that the non-separation of productive and non-productive spheres was responsible for the exploitation of the women lace-makers.

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<sup>15</sup> ISI, Calcutta has been an important institute to have hosted events related to women's studies in the eighties. Among the notable events included an international symposium on 'Women, Work and Society' in 1982 and the 'Asian Regional Conference on Women and Household' in 1985 (Kalpagam, 1987).

The work and family research in India also gained momentum during this period. The erstwhile perception regarding altruistic household was challenged. The household was now considered to be one of the sites of oppression and subjugation. A range of studies especially stemming from the branch of home economics studied household economics through various economic models, one of the noteworthy being bargaining models. These models brought the issues related to intra-household relations and the institution of marriage to the discussion (Agarwal, 1990, 1997; Banerjee, 2011b).

### **1.4.3 Capturing women's work: Methodological Challenges**

The research questions regarding women's work and employment in India have not changed much since mid-seventies. There have been many studies that address the challenges such as adequately capturing women's work, measurement of women's work, and inter-state variations in the female work participation rate (Agarwal, 1985; Chowdhry, 1993; Krishnaraj, 1983; Vepa, 2007). Scholars have also pointed out the inadequacies in the data collected by the Census of India due to varying definitions of work used over the years. Some have even identified 'respondent biases' and 'conceptual biases' in Census data on women workers as a manifestation of culture (Agarwal, 1985; Sen, 1985). The challenge in capturing women's work is also compounded by the narrow definitions of work that count only economically productive activity as work.

Further, the engagement of women with productive activities for the household is also not taken into consideration to calculate work participation for women (Rawal & Saha, 2015). The conventional measures thus used by Census and National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) are unable to give authentic estimates of women's work participation. NSSO data, when compared to Census, gives better estimates of women workforce participation rates. Siddiqui, Lahiri-Dutt, Lockie, and Pritchard (2017) however argue that NSSO is consistently excluding activities that may count as work when using certain other definitions. They suggest an alternative measure of calculating women work participation in rural and urban areas by using the definition of production boundary given by Indian System of National Accounts (ISNA) and United Nations System of National Accounting (UNSNA).

#### 1.4.4 Women in agriculture

It was towards the end of the 1980s that women in agriculture were identified as a significant area of research. Mencher and Saradmoni in the early eighties, however, argued that both landless, as well as women with marginal landowning households, contributed significantly to rice cultivation in certain rice-growing states such as Kerala, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal.<sup>16</sup> As mentioned earlier in the chapter, many scholars interested in women's issues strived to make visible women's contribution to economic activities. Some even attempted to break the myths and stereotypes associated with women's work. For instance, Saradmoni (1987) noted that gender division of labour in agricultural operations varies across regions and is often exploitative for women. She also indicated that women are not necessarily restricted to transplanting and harvesting activities in the cultivation of rice. Rather, they participated in most agricultural activities in rice cultivation.

Duvvury (1989) explicitly addressed the paradox that despite their significant contribution to agriculture historically and the importance of the sector for women, not many studies critically addressed women's situation in agriculture. She also identified several lacunae in the area. One such area, as she noted, was the impact of agricultural technology, specifically mechanisation, on women in agriculture. The impact of water-seed-fertiliser technology on women, however, has been studied by various scholars (Agarwal, 1984; Chand, Sidhu, & Kaul, 1985; Joshi & Alshi, 1985). Bina Agarwal's study of the impact of HYV rice on the involvement of men and women, published in 1984, is particularly useful as she emphasised the importance of gender relations not only in agricultural fields but also at the level of family and household to understand the impact of agricultural technology on women. She argues that the differential impact of agricultural technology on men and women cannot be understood unless we take into account the nature and involvement of men and women across different class households not only in agricultural activities but also in non-agricultural activities and, the access and control over earnings and consumption items. Mencher and Saradmoni (1982) also addressed some of these concerns in their research in some of the rice-cultivating states. As regards the impact of agricultural

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<sup>16</sup> Mencher and Saradmoni in their article mention that they had to justify their selection of women in the cultivation of rice and were often asked why they wanted to focus specifically on women (Mencher & Saradmoni, 1982: A150). This suggests that women's contribution in agriculture was not accepted as a subject of research in the early eighties.



technology on wages, most studies took into account the male wages as well as the deteriorating condition of agricultural households as mentioned earlier in the chapter. Unni (1988) however used female workforce participation to argue that the poor economic condition of the household forced women to enter the labour force. There has been a lot of interest and discussion about what forces women to enter the labour force.<sup>17</sup>

#### **1.4.5 Women in agriculture: Association with caste, tribe, landholding and other socio-demographic characteristics**

Women from certain marginalised sections are often found to be working as agricultural labourers. Various scholars draw linkages across caste, tribe, class and women's work in agriculture and suggest that women's participation in agriculture is highest among the ST followed by the SCs (Goyal & Bajwa, 1991; Srivastava & Srivastava, 2010). Sharma (1984), in a study based on agricultural production in a village called Arunpur in Uttar Pradesh, argues that female participation in production activities mirrors caste and class positions. She suggests that access to land and, other forms of wealth and power are highly concentrated in the hands of upper caste while the untouchables are landless and have no power. In a study conducted in the arid zone of Rajasthan, Purohit (1991) argues that the role of rural women varies according to caste and occupations. Those from 'lower' caste not only manage household operations and carry out field activities but also rear livestock. The higher caste women, on the other hand, mostly do domestic work and are not involved in any activities at the field.

Land ownership is also referred to as an important determinant of whether women work as agricultural labourers. Goyal and Bajwa (1991b), in a study conducted in four villages of Sangrur district of Punjab, suggested that women from low socio-economic status do not own farms and hence perform almost all the agricultural operations such as sowing of seed, transplanting, hoeing, harvesting, hand threshing at the farms of others. Moreover, they are also involved in activities demanding more physical labour like harvesting, chaffing and preparing the fodder and bringing it from farm to cattle-sheds. Another study carried out in three districts of Haryana also

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<sup>17</sup> The 'feminisation of labour' in agriculture has warranted a lot of attention recently, largely due to the changing character of rural economy and certain other factors. The same are discussed further in the chapter.

associated 'lower' caste and landlessness with women's work as agricultural labourers. The 'higher' caste women, on the other hand, seldom work as agricultural labourers (Punia, Kaur, & Punia, 1991). The size of landholding is inversely proportional to women's involvement in farm activities. As the size of land holding increases, the involvement of female family labour decreases (Bhat, Khan, & Kaul, 1991; Punia et al., 1991). The involvement of women in labour activities outside the home is also associated with the issues of status and prestige. The same is discussed further as to how patriarchal values control women's production and reproduction activities.

As per the NSSO data for the year 2004-05, the median age for male and female agricultural labourers is 35-39 years. The peak participation age group among women agricultural workers was 40-44 years while that among men was 55-59 years. The illiteracy level among women agricultural workers was also found to be as high as 70 per cent (Kanchi, 2011).

#### **1.4.6 Work conditions of women agricultural labourers**

The gender-segregated labour market determines the income generating activity for both sexes depending on their expected gender roles (Breman, 1996; Schenk-Sandbergen, 1995). Women agricultural labourers' work is often controlled by the gender norms and the gender division of labour in agricultural operations, specific to a particular region. It however invariably is the case that whatever task in agriculture women do is labelled as 'light' and 'easy'. Mencher and Saradmoni (1982) draw attention to this contradiction as they note that transplanting rice is by no means an easy task. This particular task requires women to work while bent over in knee-deep mud and rain for a couple of hours altogether.

Similarly, Teerink (1995) observed that the paid agricultural work in sugarcane harvesting was divided between husband and wife. While men cut, cleaned and threw the cane in a pile, women bundle 10-15 kilograms of cane single handed with thorny sharp-edged leaves of sugarcane and arrange the bundles neatly in a row. This back-breaking kind of work was considered to be easier when compared with the cutting of sugar cane by men.

Despite being engaged in arduous activities, women are paid fewer wages compared to their male counterparts. The unequal wages for men and women in agriculture, as well as in certain other informal sectors in India is a well-known fact. Chavan and Bedamatta (2006) analyse the trends in agricultural wages in India from 1964-65 to 1999-2000 and note that the wage gap between male and female agricultural labourers has widened over the years. Also, women agricultural labourers in most states get wages below the statutory minimum. Some scholars even argue that gender, caste and community segment the Indian labour market, not only regarding wages but also certain sectors and industries, exploitative and hazardous, specifically for women (Chen, 1995; Mazumdar, Neetha, & Agnihotri, 2013). Women's work in the agriculture sector also exhibits these characters.

#### **1.4.7 Women and Labour Migration**

As noted earlier, women's work in economic activities has remained invisible for a long time. Similarly, migration for women was till late considered to be a social phenomenon resulting from marriage and the data on migration for economic purposes for women hardly found mention in the government documents. Agnihotri and Mazumdar (2009) very rightly point that the data in government documents do not adequately capture features of women's labour migration. The qualitative dimensions of women's labour migration including the interaction of their social identities and work relations are missing. The data also does not take into account the short-term seasonal movement of women for work and survival. However, the census data shows that there is an increase in migration for work/employment of both men and women for the year 2001 compared to the year 1991.<sup>18</sup>

The recent developments in agriculture also have to an extent shaped the trends, experiences and forms of women's labour migration as there seems to be an increased demand for female labour in certain agricultural operations. Agriculture in rural India is an important sector to understand the features and social relations of women's labour migration, as this sector alone continues to employ 73 per cent of country's

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<sup>18</sup> We are here focusing on the internal migration of women. Of late, there has been an increase in international labour migration among women and they are increasingly identified as development agents, as noted by Dannecker and Sieveking (2009).

women workers as per the estimates of NSSO 61<sup>st</sup> round for the year 2004-05. Also, as high as 92 per cent of migrant women workers are employed in rural areas (ibid.).

The economic condition of the household is though one of the determinants of women's migration, Rogaly (1998) argues that social factors also play an important role in determining as to who migrates and the act of migration itself has a social and economic outcome. Similarly, Chant and Radcliffe (1992) note that a variety of factors ranging from individual household characteristics to gender relations at the level of household, society and labour market determine the course of migration.

Migrant women work under extremely exploitative work conditions. Their hiring arrangements often involve the collusion of patriarchy and capitalism to extract a surplus. The same is done by hiring a man and a woman as a pair of workers in agriculture as well as other sectors such as at brickfields (Agnihotri & Mazumdar, 2009; Mencher & Saradamoni, 1982; Teerink, 1995). Women though physically visible at such work sites do not get any wages in effect as the wages are given to their male partners, usually husbands. Migrant women workers are exposed more to the risk of sexual harassment by employers, contractors, and in the case of mixed migrant groups by male migrant workers (Saradamoni, 1995). The other forms of exploitation that migrant women workers face include low wages, long working hours and unpaid over-work, to name a few (Shanthi, 2006).

#### **1.4.8 Economic reforms, women's work and 'feminisation' of agriculture**

As mentioned earlier in the chapter, the effect of reforms has not been studied only about agriculture and other sectors of the economy, rural and urban divides but also the movement of male labour away from agriculture sector and the increasing participation of women in agriculture. The data suggest that women's participation in the agriculture sector has increased in the aftermath of reforms. The structural adjustment programs resulted in a drastic cutback of social sector expenditure. Some scholars have noted the implications of the same on rural households and specifically women. Benería (2011) sees women's increased labour force participation as a coping strategy to tackle the poverty of reforms. The wage earned by a single member of the household was not sufficient in the aftermath of reforms. Kanchi (2011) argues that there has been an increase in women's participation in agriculture since seventies and

that feminisation is not new. She, however, proposes that the decline in the growth of the agriculture sector and its implication on women is a matter of concern.

Benería (2011) notes that the reforms have largely been associated with the 'institutionalisation of informality' in the economy, increasing insecure and casual employment, and an increase in poverty. Also, as discussed earlier, the decline in the rate of growth of agriculture sector compared to other sectors of the economy, and the movement of men from agriculture to other sectors of the economy are all inter-related and inevitably have gendered implications.

The 'feminisation of agriculture' refers to the increased proportion of women in agriculture. It may also be understood as women's increased participation in agriculture compared to men. The same is measured by taking a ratio between women and men in agriculture (De Schutter, 2013; Deere, 2005). The feminisation of agricultural labour in India is situated in, the very same ideologies through which agrarian change in India is studied. The two polarised ideologies refer to Marxism and Neo-liberalism (Garikipati, 2009). The studies that fall in the former tradition suggest that poverty pushes women to work as agricultural labourers and hence their increased participation in the workforce as agricultural labourer does not necessarily enhance their status or indicate mobility (Agarwal, 1986; Duvvury, 1989; Unni, 1988). The studies driven by demand-driven neo-liberal ideology, on the other hand, suggest that the green revolution technology led to increase in demand for female labour (Chand et al., 1985; Gadre & Mahalle, 1985; Joshi & Alshi, 1985). An increase in demand for agricultural tasks that were exclusively or primarily women's work led to the feminisation of agricultural labour.

Krishnaraj (1985) suggests that though the type of agriculture or nature of the industry is important from the demand side, caste and historic sexual division of labour and the level of women's family income are important factors from the supply side. Some like, Srivastava and Srivastava (2010) argue that whether women work or not and also whether they work full time or part time is determined by a complex interplay of economic, cultural, social, and personal factors. Similarly, Mathew (2012) argues that women's work and labour force participation in developing countries is not merely a function of demand and supply equations. Rather, it is influenced by a variety of

socio-economic and demographic characteristics. It is thus clear that the demand-supply narrative alone cannot capture the complexity of women's work and that the socio-economic, as well as individual household/family characteristics, must also be taken into account.

Bennett (1992) argues that the migration of male members along with their increase in employment in non-farm sector led to an increase in economic opportunities for women of the poor households in agricultural operations who could overcome cultural barriers of working out and raise the living standard of their families. Da Corta and Venkateshwarlu (1999) note that poverty induced participation reduces the bargaining power of women forcing them to work under lower wages and poor working conditions. Thus, various studies show different impact of the feminisation of agriculture on women. We thus find that though some studies explore the reasons or cause of feminisation of agriculture and even relate it to women's empowerment, not many studies deal with the implications on women.

## **1.5 Women, work and health**

This section attempts to draw linkages between work and health of women who work in the agriculture sector by tracing the linkages between agriculture and health and reviewing the literature that takes into account women's work in agriculture and its health implications. Women's work in agriculture as well as myriad activities constituting housework in which women are engaged, are discussed. The sheer number of activities under the rubric of housework in which women are engaged on a day-to-day basis refers to the immense workload and uneven gender equations within the household. The reproductive role of women specifically about their physiology and its adverse effects on women are also discussed.

### **1.5.1 Agricultural work, women and health**

Agriculture and health are both inter-related and share bidirectional links. Agriculture, on the one hand, is essential for health and a source of livelihood for many in the developing world. At the same time, it poses equally hazardous and, at times, fatal

conditions of work. The linkages of agriculture with malnutrition, infectious and chronic diseases, resulting in poor health have been drawn for long.

Similarly, the poor health status may reduce productivity and income, thereby affecting the access to restore health resulting in a vicious cycle of ill-health (Cole, 2006; Hawkes & Ruel, 2006; Lipton & Kadt, 1988). Thus, we find that engaging in agriculture requires a fair amount of bodily labour and also poses a threat to the existing state of health. Still, the importance of the sector, for it provides livelihood to a large section of the population, cannot be negated.

Hurst, Termine, and Karl (2007) identify wage workers in agriculture as a vulnerable section largely due to the working conditions, lack of protection, and their poor socio-economic status. They note that wage workers in agriculture earn their living in an industry ranked as one of the three most hazardous along with mining and construction. The agriculture sector poses the risk of accidents related to the use of machinery. The intensive use of chemicals in agriculture is also hazardous to the workers. Despite all the risks inherent in agriculture, the workers hardly get any protection regarding access to health care. Neither do the workers get any compensation in case of disability, nor any survivors' benefits in the event of loss of life.

Shram Shakti Report mentions problems related to posture, exposure to dust and chemicals, unguarded implements and working barefoot as some of the causal factors leading to various health problems among agricultural workers (Government of India. National Commission on Self Employed Women and Women in the Informal Sector, 1988). It is widely acknowledged that the agricultural work by its very nature is physically demanding. The work requires standing, stooping and bending for long periods, also involving certain repetitive movements and uncomfortable body postures. Mencher and Saradmoni (1982) while taking note of the difficulties inherent in transplanting of rice mention that the task requires women to stand in a bent posture in knee-deep muddy water for prolonged periods. The same exposes them to leech bites as well as several parasitic and intestinal infections. The postural problems later lead to rheumatoid joints and arthritis.

The posture related problems usually occur due to the strain on a body part for a longer period. The manual harvesting of wheat requires women to sit in a squatting posture from morning till evening. The same often results in pain in lower back and knees (Rana, Rana, Singh, & Mehta, 2005). Davis and Kotowski (2007) argue that the posture-related problems and Musculoskeletal disorders (MSD) result from repeated exposure to a stressor.<sup>19</sup> They also note that there is less research on MSDs as compared to the injuries in farm work. Naidoo, Kromhout, London, Naidoo, and Burdorf (2009) studied the prevalence as well as factors associated with musculoskeletal pain among farm women in rural South Africa. The farm women in the study associated their musculoskeletal pain to their activities in agriculture such as working with hands above the shoulder level for a prolonged period during harvesting of cotton.

The very nature of agricultural operations as a seasonal activity has implications for the well-being of agricultural workers. The demand for agricultural work fluctuates with seasons. During peak season, hours of work tend to increase substantially. The intensity of work during peak seasons leaves the worker with no chance to take rest breaks and the long working hours leave them immensely tired at the end of the day (Mencher & Saradamoni, 1982).

Mittal, Kaur, and Vishwakarma (2014) studied the effect of pesticides on human health in the cotton growing Malwa region of Punjab. They argue that the excessive use of pesticides and careless treatment of pesticide containers has led to the presence of pesticide residues in the food chain. They also mention that the agriculture workers are at the higher risk due to their direct engagement with pesticides including handling as well as inhalation of harmful chemicals while spraying without any protective gear. London et al. (2002) very pertinently draw attention towards the gender bias in the use of pesticides whereby women in the developing countries are often perceived to be at relatively less risk of pesticide exposure. They argue that though the gender division of labour in agriculture might distance women from the

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<sup>19</sup> MSDs refer to “a group of injuries that affect the musculoskeletal system including the nerves, tendons, muscles, and supporting structures such as intervertebral discs. They are also referred to as overexertion/overuse injuries, cumulative trauma disorders, repetitive strain injuries, and sprains and strains” (Davis & Kotowski, 2007: 504).



direct application of pesticides in certain regions, their indirect exposure and risk is not acknowledged<sup>20</sup>. Women's engagement in weeding and certain other agricultural operations exposes them to hazardous chemicals. Women's domestic activities such as washing the clothes of men who have sprayed pesticides also put them at risk of pesticide exposure.

Thakur, Rao, Rajwanshi, Parwana, and Kumar (2008) in an epidemiological study conducted in two districts of Malwa region of Punjab found the prevalence of cancers of female reproductive system viz. breast, uterus/cervix and ovaries, in one of the districts. Pathak, Singh, and Subramanian (2010) have found an association between the presence of organochlorine pesticides in blood with the recurrent miscarriages. Other studies also indicate that women are at a differential risk to pesticide exposure that affects their reproductive organs as well as functions.<sup>21</sup> It is thus evident that the agricultural work affects men and women differentially depending on their engagement in various agricultural operations, often determined by the accepted gender division of labour. Gender thus shapes the risk and exposure to certain hazards in agriculture work.

### **1.5.2 Women and the burden of housework**

The studies that take into account women's role in agriculture and occupational hazards often overlook women's work off-the-farms, i.e. women's responsibilities at the household. Women's housework is often not accounted for as aggravating the exposure to certain hazards at the worksite (Habib, Hojeij, & Elzein, 2014). Messias et al. (1997) draw attention to the narrower perspective whereby women's work is often meant to imply paid work alone. Doyal (1999) also suggests that the impact of domestic work on women's health is not adequately studied. She argues that many rural women in developing countries engage themselves in arduous tasks to meet their family needs. The housework involving cooking, cleaning, washing, and their involvement in subsistence agriculture burden women physically as well as

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<sup>20</sup> London et al. (2002) have however also given several examples of certain crops especially fruits in developing countries, wherein women are engaged in spraying and mixing of pesticides, thereby drawing our attention to the regional variations in gender roles in agriculture.

<sup>21</sup> Studies, like the one carried out by Halder (2007), also identify the impact of pesticides on the male growth pattern such as the onset of puberty and adverse effects on reproductive system such as infertility. We are however emphasising the effect of pesticides on women as they are often overlooked, as noted by London et al. (2002).

psychologically. The physical hazards associated with housework include lifting heavy loads, a collection of fuel and exposure to serious pollutants of cooking stoves. The health effects of women's work burdens, both physical and psychological, are not adequately studied.

Some of the scholars have noted the health risks associated with the use of biofuels in rural households in developing countries especially for those actively involved in cooking. Based on their study in three north Indian states of Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh, Parikh, Biswas and Karmakar (2003) examined risk factors for respiratory symptoms for rural women. The data collected for the study included socioeconomic variables, smoking habits, characteristics of the kitchen, cooking practices, fuel used and health symptoms. The study showed that the use of biomass fuels in kitchen chores leads to respiratory problems among women. They drew attention towards the importance of proper ventilation in the cooking areas and concluded that not only was there a need to make available more efficient stoves and clean fuels, creating awareness on the issue was equally important.

Several studies draw attention to rural women's housework that includes not only activities like cooking and cleaning but also providing care to children, elderly and sick. Custer has also highlighted the household work as three 'C's – 'Cooking', 'Cleaning' and 'Children' – which burden women all over the world disproportionately (Custers, 2012). Certain post-harvest agricultural operations such as husking, cleaning and storage of grains also fall under women's work domain. The cattle rearing, fetching water and fuelwood collection also add to the work burdens of women. Several scholars note that animal husbandry to an extent has always been women's domain, the role played by men in traditional activities of grazing of animals, is also diminishing in the light of ecological and other changes (Bisht, 2014; Chowdhry, 1993; Mehra, 1992).

Some scholars also note the magnitude of work burden associated with rearing cattle at length. Jeffery, Jeffery, and Lyon (1989), in their study in two villages of Uttar Pradesh argue that the cattle dung though often treated as 'shit work' and demeaned as *gobar ka kaam* (dung-work), carried out only by women plays a crucial role in the rural life. The dung cakes are a major source of fuel in most cattle-owning

households. Calculating their monetary value, they argued that a woman who makes 50-60 dung cakes a day is almost providing a potential income of Rs. 1000, the same amount as almost five to six months of wages as a woman agricultural labourer. Further, women spend a considerable amount of their day in activities related to cattle including cleaning the cow-shed, bathing and feeding the animals, and, milking, all leading to an increase in their work burdens.

It is also important to note that the terrain or geographical location also indicates a variation in women's work burden. For instance, women residing in hilly terrains are known to work harder not only due to difficult climate conditions but also due to several other factors such as migration of male members and socio-cultural values attached to work. Even when present, men hardly perform any of the tasks labelled as 'women's work'. The activities that constitute 'women's work' are thus also a reflection of socio-cultural ethos (Bhati & Singh, 1987; Bisht, 2004; Shimray, 2004).

The changes in agricultural technology and certain socio-demographic factors such as migration of male members have also differentially affected rural agricultural women workers. Chowdhry (1993) discusses at length the impact of green revolution on women who work as agricultural labourers and those from landowning families in Haryana to suggest that women's participation in agriculture has increased with these changes. The changes resulted in an increased demand for labour due to multiple cropping, and also due to the requirement of greater care in sowing, transplanting and weeding.<sup>22</sup> Bisht (2014), in a study conducted in villages of Uttarakhand, draws attention to the role played by migration of male members on the women of such households. She argues that the same has resulted in the restructuring of the existing gender division of labour whereby women from the migrant households invariably perform all agricultural activities except for ploughing, resulting in an intensification of women's labour in agriculture along with their customary domestic duties. The narratives of women about their physical health suggested that intermeshing of their productive and reproductive activities in the larger context of migration of male

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<sup>22</sup> The increase in demand has also led to the maximum use of female family labour by landowning households in certain parts of Haryana. The relatively rich regions in Haryana however show different trends with respect to the use of female family labour. The erstwhile engagement of women from rich households in agriculture has decreased as farm servants are hired to take care of many agricultural operations (Chowdhry, 1993).

members and ecological degradation not necessarily led to any freedom from the patriarchal control. Rather, the interaction of patriarchy, capitalism, and other socio-demographic changes negatively affected women's physical and psychological health.

All these studies mentioned above clearly indicate that women in agriculture are under the immense burden of work. The linkages with their workload and health can be drawn by taking note of all their household as well as field activities, along with a keen observation of their individual as well as household characteristics. The gender division of labour both at household and at the fields reflects the role of gender and power relations in the society and their consequent repercussions on health status and health-seeking behaviour.

### **1.5.3 Work, Health and Socio-economic milieu**

One of the relatively recent developments in the field of health is the growing realisation of the importance of social factors in shaping the health of the population. However, long before the Commission on Social Determinants of Health (CSDH) report appeared in the year 2008, some of the Indian scholars suggested the relevance of interaction of structural inequalities, and socio-economic environment for the health and well-being of the population in general, and women and children, in specific. Banerji (1982), for instance, not only emphasised the importance of two square meals for the rural poor but also portrayed the interaction of socio-cultural factors and structural inequalities in access to health care and education. Sheila Zurbrigg (1984) illustrated the struggles of a poor woman agricultural labourer in accessing health care services to save her child in rural Tamil Nadu through Rakku's story.<sup>23</sup> Also, she discussed the inadequacies of the health care system in meeting the needs of a large segment of the poor population. The linkages between poverty, hunger, malnutrition, work burden, and ill-health along with caste, landlessness and gender indicate that a fragmented approach to understanding health is not a viable solution. Qadeer (1990) also noted the importance of socio-economic and political factors in shaping the environment which influences health. All these scholars suggest

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<sup>23</sup> Rakku's story is an excellent account of the productive and reproductive labour of rural women on a day-to-day basis. Patriarchy, gender relations and division of labour not only burden Rakku but also her five year old daughter. It not only vividly captures the work burden of women who work as agricultural labourers but also details the structural constraints within which they struggle accessing health care services for them or their children. Zurbrigg emphasizes the role of economic determinants of ill-health as she situates her analysis in the poverty of rural labour households. She however notes that the role of culture in burdening women is equally important in understanding the causes of ill-health among them.

that the socio-economic context is particularly relevant while understanding health issues of the population.

Women's reproductive role, specifically concerning their physiology, is often dissociated from their working and living conditions. The same approach does not give importance to the specific social context and rather leads to a reductionist focus on women's reproductive health, irrespective of the impact of socio-economic and other constraints. This narrow and deterministic emphasis on women's reproductive role cannot give a thorough understanding of the reproductive health of women. An integrated approach taking into account the specific context of women is necessary to understand the struggles and complexities of women's lives. It is within this framework that women's general, as well as reproductive health, should be situated (Qadeer, 1998).

Swaminathan (1997), in a similar vein, identifies several hazards for women's reproductive and general health in their socio-economic context. She argues that the structural nature of women's work in a society stratified by caste and class is hazardous to the overall health of women. The access and availability of healthcare services alone cannot alleviate the socio-economic hazards that severely affect women. Women's work in India that is very likely to be exploitative and a subject to regional as well as intra-community variation hardly indicate any improvement in women's status and autonomy regarding fertility or decision-making in general. Drawing linkages between household structure and, women's productive and reproductive work within as well as the outside house is crucial to develop any causality between work and health of women.

Women's work and health also need to be understood from the perspective of the interaction of capitalism, patriarchy and unequal gender relations. Although the 'left-behind' women in the case of male migration single-handedly take care of most agricultural and animal husbandry related activities yet the household, society, and state control women's productive and reproductive labour. The transformation of the earlier gender division of labour in the neo-liberal regime burdens women not only with the less profitable agricultural sector, so that cheap male labour is available for the urban labour market but also devalue their significant contribution (Bisht, 2014).

All these changes, as discussed earlier, have increased women's work burden and negatively affect women's physical as well as psychological health.

The review thus suggests that to understand the association between work and health, the conceptualisation of work itself is very important. Women's housework needs to be seen in a continuum with the agricultural work they perform. Further, the agricultural operations they perform need to be observed to assess their impact on health and well-being. The research area related to women and paid work is vast. Much of the literature on women in the unorganised sector, as noted by Banerjee (2011a), deals with working conditions, wage differences among men and women, ill-treatment, heavy physical work, sexual exploitation, to name a few. Kitts and Roberts (1996) note that mental health issues of women in both developed, as well as developing countries, are not studied adequately. Our understanding from the review suggests that stress and anxieties resulting from insecurities inherent in agricultural work, unpaid housework, as well as gender relations, along with the physical hazards of work are important to study as they have a direct impact on women's health and well-being. The next section briefly discusses what constitutes well-being.

#### **1.5.4 Well-being: A multi-dimensional and complex concept apt for capturing complexities of everyday life**

Well-being as a concept has been studied by scholars from as varied disciplines as psychology, economics, anthropology, sociology, epidemiology and public health, as well as philosophy. It is a complex and multi-dimensional concept. The complexity of the concept can be gauged from the fact that most scholars in their attempt to elaborate the concept, state about the inherent difficulty in identifying what exactly constitutes well-being, as McLeod and Wright note that the well-being “functions as a shorthand for a range of positive and measurable attributes, including health, happiness and prosperity. It also signifies a cluster of less tangible dimensions, including personal orientations, moods and outlooks that are seen to be beneficial for everyone but are difficult actually to pin down” (2016: 777).

Dodge, Daly, Huyton, and Sanders, (2012) argue that though most scholars realise the difficulty in defining well-being, yet in their attempt to define, they end up describing

the construct. They, however, argue that rather than the description, any new definition must give a lucid statement of the precise meaning of the term. In a similar vein, Pollard and Lee (2003) and, Morrow and Mayall (2009), note that the multidimensionality of the construct has led to a state of confusion and ‘conceptual muddiness’.

McAllister argues that well-being remains a contested concept. However, summing up some of the characteristics, she suggests that well-being “is more than the absence of illness or pathology; it has subjective (self-assessed) and objective (ascribed) dimensions; it can be measured at the level of individuals of society; it accounts for elements of life satisfaction that cannot be defined, explained or primarily influenced by economic growth” (McAllister, 2005: 1).

Gasper (2010) suggests that the terms well-being and quality of life are at times used interchangeably. Both well-being and quality of life as concepts signify a broad range of meaning and more or less refer to an evaluation of major aspects of life or some valued aspects quite often in their totality. The term well-being is often used if the concept is applied to the study of individuals while to understand the major aspects of the life of community, locality or society, the term quality of life is used. Both concepts despite having originated from different disciplines frequently overlap. The two concepts also share certain similarities like neither of these signifies what all they constitute. Both are abstract concepts and have an element of subjectivity inherent in them as they attempt to highlight what someone considers important.

Different scholars have addressed the issues related to human well-being from their respective vantage points. Capability approach of Sen and Nussbaum is a notable contribution as it widened the scope of human well-being in the development discourse from merely being equated to the economic situation to some other things such as dignity, control and emotional development; to name a few, that make life worth living. The Capability Approach (CA) by Amartya Sen (1993) is one of the human well-being approaches to development, whereby capability, functionings and entitlement determine how well one lives. Sen acknowledges that CA has generated much discussion and debate that led to not only its extension but also criticism by some. Clark (2002) and, Doyal and Gough (1991) argue that Sen does not provide an

extensive list or taxonomy of valuable functionings or capabilities (as cited in Clark, 2005). Some scholars even identify the open-endedness in Sen's list as a weak point while others criticise him for being overly individualistic.

The mention of capabilities approach by Martha Nussbaum (2000) is here more pertinent as her perspective acknowledges the dynamics of gender relations and she also factors in the 'threshold level of each capability', beneath which human functionality is not available to citizens.<sup>24</sup> She even suggests that the problems of poor women in both developed and developing countries should be focused. Nussbaum claims that the underlying philosophical principle to her capabilities approach is universal feminism that is not devoid of the cultural specificities, and a universal framework that takes into account human power and development is best suited to acknowledge differences. Nussbaum has also given a list of 'central human functional capabilities', which she suggests renders not only a life fully human but also serves as a political or ethical concern for the state to at least provide for circumstances that make life fully human. It thus appears that the list of 'central human functional capabilities' not only offers the examples of 'beings' and 'doings' that make life fully human but also at the same time strives to suggest political goals for the governments to provide an atmosphere for the fulfilment of human potential.

Katie Wright (2009, 2010, 2011) finds advantage in the human well-being approach for it provides an overarching framework spanning across a variety of disciplines such as economics, psychology and sociology and at the same time reflects the interplay between economic, perceptual and social relations. The very interplay across these scales also counter-arguments the critique of well-being as an overly individualistic concept. We agree with what Wright suggests and see an opportunity in the breadth and vastness the concept offers to capture the variety in human experience, inevitably situated in the structural constraints of poverty, patriarchy, and the interaction of all these in shaping gender relations.

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<sup>24</sup> Nussbaum, for that matter, does not use the expression gender relations in her work and often uses the term 'sex' over 'gender'. However, the narratives she has used, for instance those of Vasanti and Jayamma, to substantiate her arguments clearly show how gender relations collude with other inequalities and work against women.



Well-being and ill-being are entrenched in the social structure. Ill-being and well-being are not simply opposite experiences. Ill-being as a process or an outcome may refer to certain aspects of poverty, both a cause and an effect of structure (Billson, 2005; McGregor, 2004). Further, well-being is often experienced in relation to others.<sup>25</sup> Both social norms and the relative condition or position of others shape the experience of well-being/ill-being for an individual (Lora & Chaparro, 2009, McGregor, 2008). Gough, McGregor and Camfield (2007) argue that the poverty alone does not define the experiences of poor in developing countries and that it does not necessarily suggest that the suffering caused by poverty is the ultimate fate of poor, thereby ruling out the possibility of well-being among poor. The poor, on the other hand, may attempt to limit their suffering and ill-being in a number of ways. Understanding their experience of whatever element of well-being or good life and the multiple ways in which they make their lives bearable thus warrants attention.

One of the most extensive studies on the poor by Narayan, Chambers, Shah, and Petesch (2000) covered more than twenty thousand men, women, and children in twenty-three countries. Unlike other poverty studies, the study made use of qualitative and participatory research methods to understand the meaning and experience of well-being and ill-being among the poor. The study used the local words to understand the good and bad life signifying well-being and ill-being respectively among the poor across rural and urban sites in the selected countries. The study aimed to recognize the realities and experiences of poor people to understand how they define well-being and/or ill-being. It is thus clear that though poverty affects the capacity to meet basic needs, how poor perceive their situation and the strategies they use to make their life better may yield important insights. Empathetic understanding of how people perceive their situation, give meaning and value to their lives is extremely important. An over-emphasis on the material possession, poverty and deprivation alone cannot give a true picture of well-being among people. Rather, their perception, meaning and values give an authentic account of how they define their well-being (Gasper, 2010).

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<sup>25</sup> The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Research Group on Wellbeing in Developing Countries (WeD) also acknowledges that experience of well-being is often in relation to others. It defines wellbeing as “a state of being with others, where human needs are met, where one can meaningfully to pursue one’s goals and where one enjoys satisfactory quality of life” (McGregor, 2008: 1).

Well-being is affected by many factors, but the ‘most significant and under-studied factor’ is gender. The capability of women is severely restricted by the discrimination, prejudice, unequal treatment and exploitation that not only affect their physical but also mental states. Several other factors that shape well-being affect both men and women but they affect women disproportionately due to the gendered discrimination that is institutionalized in most societies. The unequal treatment and access to opportunities among women largely due to gender in interaction with other structural inequalities may seriously affect their well-being (Billson, 2005).

The gender norms and discrimination often get reflected in the poor sex ratios across developing countries. Amartya Sen notes that examining sex ratios in a population not only give an idea of the relative position of women in that society but also reflects a ‘history of inequalities in morbidity and unequal medical care’. The inequalities between men and women are often justified socially, and thus a closer examination of concepts of ‘justice’ and ‘injustice’, keeping in mind the prejudice as well as the need for reducing the inequalities in capabilities, in a particular context is required (Sen, 2006: 420).

Other than the matters of life and death, the prevalence of malnutrition and anaemia indicate the uneven access to food, resources and services at the household level, primarily owing to gender norms and attitudes. Neogy (2010) in a study conducted in rural Uttar Pradesh found that gender norms and attitudes governed women’s food intake during pregnancy and after the childbirth.<sup>26</sup> The gender norms ensured that women were often the last one to eat and did not eat at all even during pregnancy if the food finished by the time their turn came. No special foods were consumed during pregnancy despite having awareness about the role of a nutritious diet including milk and fruits during pregnancy. Further, the food intake among women was also affected by whether they gave birth to a son or a daughter. Women who gave birth to a daughter experienced stigma and discrimination as they were taunted, ignored and were not given proper food and attention. It affected not only their physical health but also emotional health. It is thus clear that gender relations at the level of household

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<sup>26</sup> Barbara Harriss (1990) gives an in-depth analysis of intra-household food distribution in South Asia. In her analysis, she not only draws link between gender, patriarchy, life cycle and nutrition, but also takes into account myriad factors including the cultural explanations that result in unequal distribution of food among men and women in household.

and gender norms determine women's well-being ranging from matters of life and death, and diseases to mental stress.

The chapter attempted to draw the linkages between agrarian change, migration and gender relations. Gender relations differentially affect women and their well-being. However, most studies, except for a few, see women's lives in a disaggregated manner, either focusing on their paid or unpaid work and its repercussions on their health and well-being. I, however, propose that women's work whether paid or unpaid has an effect on their health and well-being and that both productive and reproductive activity of women should be taken into account to understand the effect of their work on well-being. Further, it is important to understand what meaning, value and perceptions women have about their work and how they relate the same to their well-being. The differences in women's social position and their individual socio-economic characteristics along with the circumstances unique to them add to the complexity in women's lives. I have thus attempted to understand these differences by making women reflect on their lives in this study. The next chapter discusses the conceptualization and methodology used for the study.



# **Chapter 2**

## **Methodology and Methods**



## **2. Methodology and Methods**

The present chapter discusses the methodology and methods guiding the present study for understanding gender-power relations and well-being among the agricultural labourers. It inevitably builds on the conceptualisation drawn from the review of the literature and the formulation of research questions. It then discusses the study design followed by the selection of the study area and study population and the tools used for data collection. The data collection process is described taking into account when, where and how the data was collected and analysed. Further, the challenges encountered during the data collection process including entry to the field, rapport establishment and experiences during the data collection process are all discussed at length. The conceptual and methodological challenges encountered during the study as well as operational definitions are given. The research ethics practised during the data collection are also given in this chapter.

### **2.1 Conceptualisation**

Our understanding from the literature suggests that almost the entire farm sector falls under the informal category. Employment in the unorganised sector is often marked by irregularity and insecurity, long and unfixed working hours, poor wages and working conditions, and absence of any socio-economic protection benefits. In simpler words, employment in the unorganised sector implies poor living and working conditions which in turn have implications for health. International Labour Organization (ILO) identifies agriculture as one of the three most hazardous sectors of activity in the unorganised sector (along with mining and construction sector).<sup>27</sup> It refers to the vulnerability of agricultural workers to accidents and illnesses.

A large body of literature (Bardhan 1970, Mencher 1978, Pai 1987, Jose 1984, Deva 1984, Bhalla and Chadha 1983, Unni 1988) suggests that agricultural labourers are the most vulnerable section among all the workers in agriculture. Their vulnerability is often attributed to their low socio-economic status. The studies also suggest that a large number of agricultural labourers come from scheduled castes, scheduled tribes,

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<sup>27</sup> Agriculture: A hazardous work. (2009). Retrieved August 25, 2011, from [http://www.ilo.org/safework/areasofwork/hazardous-work/WCMS\\_110188/lang--en/index.html](http://www.ilo.org/safework/areasofwork/hazardous-work/WCMS_110188/lang--en/index.html)

and some other 'lower' castes and hence their poor socioeconomic status is often explained by their marginalised position in the society. Many scholars argue that the Green Revolution led to increased inequalities between large landowners and small/marginal farmers. Scholars like Dhanagare (1987), Oommen (1975), Bagchi(1982), Chadha and Bhalla (1983) argue that a process of 'depeasantisation' pushed many small/ marginal farmers to the status of landless agricultural labourers.

In the context of agrarian change and economic reforms in recent years, the shift of workers from agriculture to the non-agriculture sector has been observed at the all-India level. The Census of India shows that the share of agricultural workers in total rural main workers declined from 73.5 per cent in 1991 to 58.2 per cent in 2011. Inter-census data for the years 1971 to 2011 from Punjab shows that the percentage of cultivators declined from 42.6 per cent in 1971 to 23 per cent in 2011 while that of agricultural labourers increased from about 20 per cent in 1971 to approximately 24 per cent in 1991. The percentage of agricultural labourers, however, declined to about 16 per cent in 2001 and almost remained the same in 2011. At the same time, there has been an increase in the percentage of workers in sectors other than agriculture from 34 per cent in 1971 to 57 per cent in 2011. A significant increase in the percentage of workers in the non-agriculture sector took place between the years 1991 and 2011. The percentage of the workers in agriculture for the state of Punjab, on the other hand, declined from 55.26 per cent in 1991 to 38.9 per cent in 2011(**Table 2.1**). The shift of workers from agriculture to the non-agriculture sector could be due to the increased cost of cultivation and non-viability of small and marginal farms; reduced employment opportunities in the agriculture sector due to mechanisation and other such factors, as well as, the increased opportunities in the non-farm sector (Nair & Singh, 2016).

It thus follows that the movement of workers from agriculture to other sectors is although determined by the larger changes in the agrarian structure and economy, context-specific understanding of the agrarian change with specific reference to changes in agricultural technology, crop pattern and composition of labour force, migration and the implications of all these on agricultural labourers from their perspective is essential. Further, the agrarian change and migration need to be understood from the lens of gender relations as men and women differentially



experience these changes due to unequal power relations and position in the social structure.

**Table 2.1 Percentage distribution of workers in various economic activities in Punjab during 1971–2011 (%)**

Years	Cultivators (C)	Agricultural labourers (AL)	Agricultural workers (C+AL)	Workers in household industries	Other workers	Total
1971	42.6	20.1	62.7	3.2	34.2	100
1981	35.9	22.2	58.1	2.6	39.4	100
1991	31.4	23.8	55.2	1.3	43.4	100
2001	23	16.4	39.4	3.4	57.3	100
2011	22.62	16.32	38.94	3.65	57.39	100

Source: Census of India

The complexity inherent in understanding and analysis of gender relations requires a thorough understanding of the context. It also suggests that the processes and relations that shape feminisation of labour in agriculture are not merely reduced to existing theoretical frameworks, such as demand-driven neo-liberalism or the conventional Marxist approach. Rather, the complexity of the feminisation of labour in agriculture be understood by situating the processes and relations in the backdrop of shifting agrarian context and migration that includes crop diversification, technological change, the composition of the labour force and agrarian relations.

The review of the literature on the impact of mechanisation on agricultural labourers suggests that the technological changes and mechanisation process have gendered implications. My earlier research in a village of Punjab also suggests that mechanisation of certain agricultural operations in certain crops though led to reduced demand for manual labour, it had certain gendered implications. Some specific operations in agriculture such as weeding in certain other crops were exclusively carried out by women. Thus, we find that it is essential to understand the mechanisation and other technological changes from a gender perspective. More specifically, the gender division of labour in agricultural operations needs to be understood well. Further, while contextualising the mechanisation process, the demographic changes such as migration, and consequently the availability of migrant labourers and their role in the labour market should be keenly observed. The study of

the organisation of labour into family/ hired labour, as well as the segmentation of labour force by gender or their place of origin all, add to our understanding of the agrarian relations and various ways in which power relations play out in an agrarian context.

Labour migration also plays an important role in restructuring existing agrarian relations. It is often noted in the literature that labour migration not only affects the bargaining power of local labourers but also leads to increased exploitation of the migrant labourers. The agrarian relations in such a setting from anthropological perspective can give important insights. There are not many anthropological studies dealing with the inner working of agrarian relations and appreciating the perceptions of agricultural workers except for Breman (1974), Rogaly (1998, 2002) and Teerink (1998). Thus, an anthropological study of agrarian relations in a setting with local and migrant labourers is needed. Further, the gender relations among the local and migrant agricultural labourers need to be explored.

Various scholars such as Swaminathan (1997), Bardhan (1985), Krishanraj (1985), Chowdhry (1993) suggest that women represent a vulnerable group among agricultural labourers partly due to the burden of production- reproduction activities and also due to their overall position in the system due to the interaction of patriarchy and capitalism. Women are always in a disadvantageous position as their work is often devalued and underestimated. The devaluation of their work is often used as a justification for lower wages of women agricultural labourers compared to male agricultural labourers. There is a need to understand the interaction of various structural inequalities such as caste, class, patriarchy and capitalism, particularly in the context of agrarian change and migration, which leads to a devaluation of women's work and the consequent impact on women's health and well-being.

Women workers have to manage both household chores and the paid work. The gendered burden of unpaid domestic work and paid work in agricultural fields affects their health and well-being. The gendered burden of work also differs amongst women who work as agricultural labourers depending on their respective position in the household, certain individual characteristics such as age and marital status, as well as other socio-economic characteristics. There is ample possibility that the work

burden of a woman agricultural labourer who is not an original inhabitant of the village is of a different nature when compared to the native woman agricultural labourer. Further, there could be differences between these two broad categories of agricultural labourers as regards the nature and quantum of work. Thus, there is a need to explore the gender and power relations within and beyond household, while discussing women's work to understand the factors that shape women labourers' experiences of work, health and well-being.

Since the seventies, there has been a shift in the methodology of studies whereby household is also considered as an important unit of analysis in studies related to women's work.<sup>28</sup> However, there is a greater need to reflect on the differences and similarities among the experiences of women with different household and individual characteristics. Also, it is important to understand women's subjective experiences of work and the inner working of gender and power relations as they perceive them.

Most studies on agricultural labourers are confined to tracing regional and temporal variations in agricultural wages. Some studies also note the poor socio-economic situation of agricultural labourers and the hazardous nature of the occupation. There are very few studies that contextualise the vulnerability of agricultural labourers in the shifting agrarian context whereby those who continue to work as agricultural labourers are perhaps most susceptible to not only physical ailments but also poor health and well-being indicators due to the intersection of gender, caste, class and regional identities.

The literature on women, work and health suggests that several studies in the arena of women's work in unorganised or informal sectors identify the issues specific to women's labour force participation such as invisibility, wage differences, poor conditions of work, and higher degrees of insecurity of work, as inherent in women's work. Very few studies draw linkages between paid and unpaid work of women and their health. More often than not women's burden of housework is not associated with their physical and emotional well-being. Stress and anxieties resulting from

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<sup>28</sup> Some of the studies from the Centre of Social Medicine and Community Health (CSMCH), Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), have however taken household as a unit of analysis and implication of women's bargaining power within and beyond household on their well-being. For instance, Bisht (2004), (Thresia, 2000).

insecurities inherent in women's work and lives are essential to study as they have a direct impact on women's health and well-being. Many times, their working and living conditions are highlighted, but rarely any linkages are drawn concerning their health.<sup>29</sup>

In the present study, we aim to capture the complexities of women agricultural labourers' work and lives and their perceived implications of the same on their health and well-being. The intricacies of both paid and unpaid work along with their social roles and responsibilities shape their lives. We also aim to understand the role and interaction of caste, class, age and power relations in the everyday lives of women. All these factors when taken together can help in unravelling the complexities and linkages across women's work, lives, health and well-being.

Nevertheless, drawing from the above conceptualisation, the present study intends to understand and explore:

- (a) the changing nature of agricultural technology, cropping pattern and labour composition with respect to its implications on working and living conditions of agricultural labourers.
- (b) the inner working of agrarian relations among landowners, local and migrant labourers detailing the work conditions, wages, and the pattern of employment.
- (c) the gendered division of labour in agricultural operations across different labourer categories viz. local female labourers, migrant female labourers, and migrant male labourers.
- (d) the gender division of labour in unpaid domestic work across the agricultural labourer households and its implications for women's well-being.
- (e) women's experiences of work and its implications for health and well-being.

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<sup>29</sup> However, many scholars at the Centre of Social Medicine and Community Health (CSMCH) in their research draw linkages between gender, work and health among workers in unorganised sector or specifically women in agriculture (Bisht, 2004; Divakar, 1994; Sagar, 1999; Thresia, 2000).

Based on the above problematization, the following questions could be posed:

- What changes have been there in the use of agricultural technology, crop pattern and the labour composition over the years?
- What is the pattern of employment in work as an agricultural labourer? What are the conditions under which agricultural labourers work? What wages are given to agricultural labourers and if there are differences in wages across different categories of agricultural labourers?
- What is the gender division of labour in agricultural operations in the two contexts of local and migrant labour?
- What is the pattern of the gender division of labour across migrant and local agricultural labour households as regards unpaid household work?
- How do women relate their experience of the burden of housework and agricultural work with their health?

## **2.2 Objectives of the Study**

The broad objective of the study is to understand the agrarian context of the selected study area in Punjab and to locate the gender and power relations among the local and migrant agricultural labour households. The implications of work for the health and well-being of women agricultural labourers from their perspective is also to be studied.

The specific objectives of the study are:

- To document the changes in agricultural technology, crop pattern and the socio-economic composition of agricultural labourers in the agrarian system of the study area.
- To explore the differences in work conditions, the pattern of employment and payment of wages across different categories of agricultural labourers.

- To assess the burden of work regarding agricultural operations and household work among local and migrant women agricultural labourers.
- To describe the experiences of work and its implications on health and well-being as perceived by women agricultural labourers.

### **2.3 Study Design**

The selection of research design, as Creswell (2009) suggests depends on the nature of research problem as well as the personal experience of the researcher. It implies that the plan and procedures for research ranging from the guiding philosophy to the selection of methods are problem-specific as well as depend on the researcher's disciplinary orientation and focus. Since the present study aimed at understanding and exploring unequal gender relations and the meaning women ascribe to their agricultural and housework, as well as the implications of work on their well-being amidst the broader context of agrarian change and migration, a research design making use of qualitative methods was found to be most suitable. However, quantitative data was also used for supporting findings from qualitative data and also for the purpose of triangulation.

The complex task of understanding the variety in nature and quantum of women's work and its impact on their well-being as they perceive understandably poses the challenge of generalisation. The present research is thus situated in the theoretical tradition of post-structural feminism whereby we pay close attention to the differences within and across seemingly homogenous categories of women. Drawing from Geertz (1973), we have also tried to focus on understanding the 'meaning' attributed to work and the way of life. Further, we have also attempted to draw linkages between meaning and action. Ontologically, thus, the current research work is situated in the subjective tradition in its treatment of understanding phenomenon and processes from participants' perspective. Relativism, reflexivity and interpretation were however used frequently. A qualitative research design was apt not only for observing differences and abstractions but also presenting data on the complexities of women's lives.

The research questions and further questions emerging from the field are addressed in the subsequent chapters while the methods and tools used in the study are discussed at

length in the present chapter. The methodology and focus were carved out clearly by drawing conceptualisation through the review of the literature and by conducting the pilot study. The thematic interview guides were designed for various categories of respondents and pre-tested during the pilot study. The methods of data collection were kept loose and flexible given the unpredictable situations in the field.<sup>30</sup> The pilot study was carried out while keeping in mind the unforeseeable nature of field events. Tentative tools were developed for data collection. They were however used and modified as per the demand of the field setting and circumstances. It becomes important to acknowledge here that the questions emerging from the field in due course of the fieldwork also shaped and refined the methods used in this work.

## 2.4 Study Area

To understand the complex gender-power relations, a field-based study was conducted in a village of Punjab. Punjab is located in the North-Western part of India and covers an area of 50,362 sq. Km. The state extends between 29° 33' and 32° 31' north latitudes and 73° 53' to 76° 56' east latitudes. Surrounded by Jammu and Kashmir in the north, the state has in its east Himachal Pradesh. Haryana and Rajasthan are to its south. The international border with Pakistan makes its western boundary. As per Census 2011, there are 20 districts comprising of 77 tehsils, 217 towns and 12,581 villages (DCHB 2011:8). The percentage of workers including both main and marginal workers in the agriculture sector in Punjab is about 35.6 per cent. The total number of agricultural labourers in the state is 1,588,455 (16.05 per cent). The percentage of male and female agricultural labourers in the state, as per Census 2011, is 15.35 and 19.14 respectively (Census of India, 2011).

The district Hoshiarpur was chosen for the present study. It is located in the north-east part of the state. The district stretches from river Beas in the North-West to river Satluj in the South East. The district is fish shaped, i.e. broader in the North-West and narrower in the South-East. It falls in the Jalandhar Division and is situated in Bist Doab, Doaba region of the state. The district lies between north latitude 30° 57' and

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<sup>30</sup> The unpredictability in the field and helplessness of the fieldworker/researcher is vivid in these words “The situations arising in the field have their dynamics, and the fieldworker is more often their servant than master”(Srinivas, Ramaswamy, & Shah, 2004: 5).

32° 05' and east longitude 75° 35' and 76° 31'. It shares common boundaries with Kangra and Una districts of Himachal Pradesh in the north and north-east; Rupnagar district in the south-east; Jalandhar and Kapurthala districts (interspersed) in the south and south-west and Gurdaspur district in the north-west (Census of India, 2011).

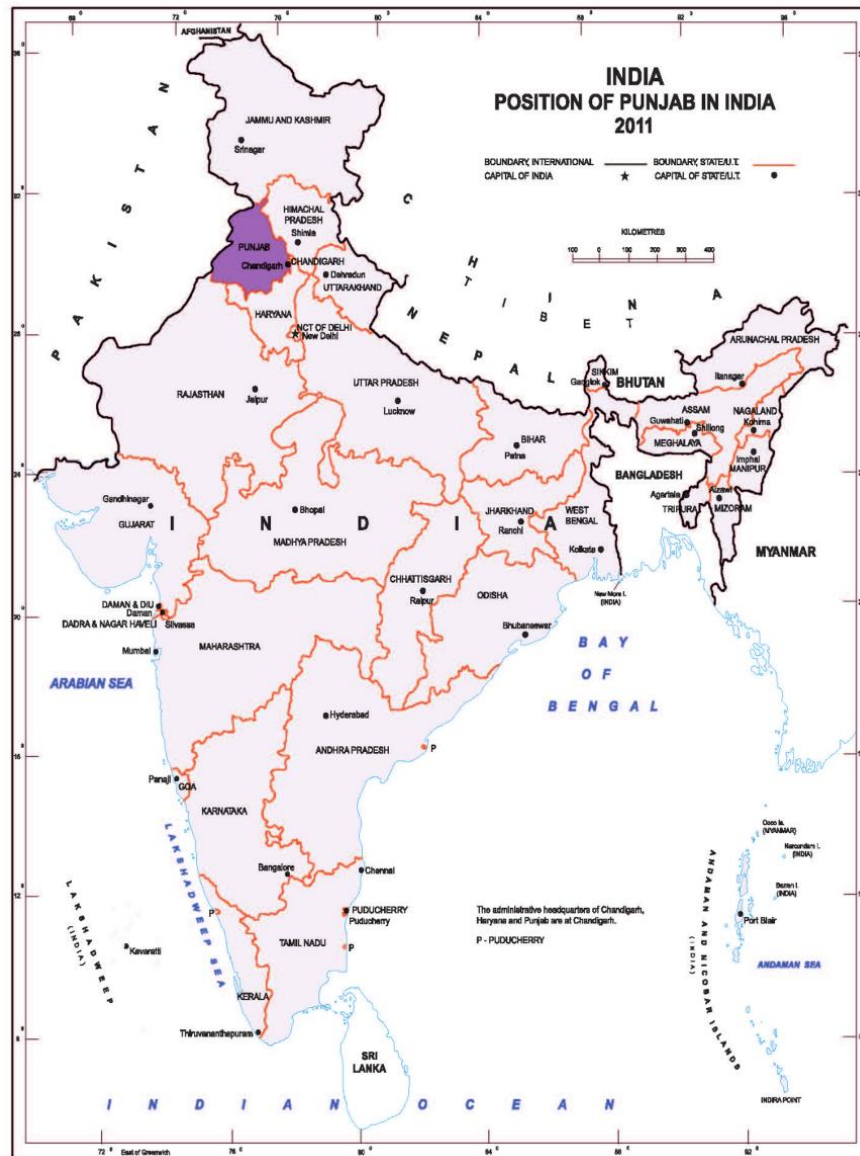
The district has four tahsils, namely Dasua, Mukerian, Hoshiarpur, and Garhshankar. The district has ten community development blocks namely Talwara, Hoshiarpur-I, Hoshiarpur-II, Tanda, Mukerian, Bhunga, Mahilpur, Garhshankar, Hajipur and Dasuya. A total of 1,416 villages fall under district Hoshiarpur, out of which, 1,385 villages are inhabited (ibid.).

As per Census 2011, the total population of the district is 15, 86,625. Out of the total population, the number of males is 8, 09,057 (50.99%) whereas the number of females is 7, 77,568 (49%). The district has a highest sex ratio of 961 in the state which is much higher than the state sex ratio of 895. Apart from having the highest sex ratio in the state, the district also ranks first in the area of education. The district has the highest literacy rate (84.6%) in the state (ibid.).

The rural population in the district constitutes about 78.9 per cent of the total population of the district. The percentage of scheduled castes population to the total population in the district is 35.1. The same is higher than the state percentage of 31.94. The percentage of main and marginal workers to the total population of the district is 25.9 and 5.6 per cent respectively. The Census data also shows that 17.96 per cent workers in the district fall under the category of cultivators while about 15 per cent of workers are agricultural labourers. The sex-wise distribution of workers shows that out of total workers in the district, 21.72 per cent are male cultivators while 9.94 per cent are female cultivators. The proportion of agricultural labourers to total workers for male and female workers is 14.32 and 17.52 per cent respectively (ibid.). It thus follows that the male and female workers engaged in the agriculture sector in the district constitute about 36 per cent and 27 per cent respectively of the total workers.



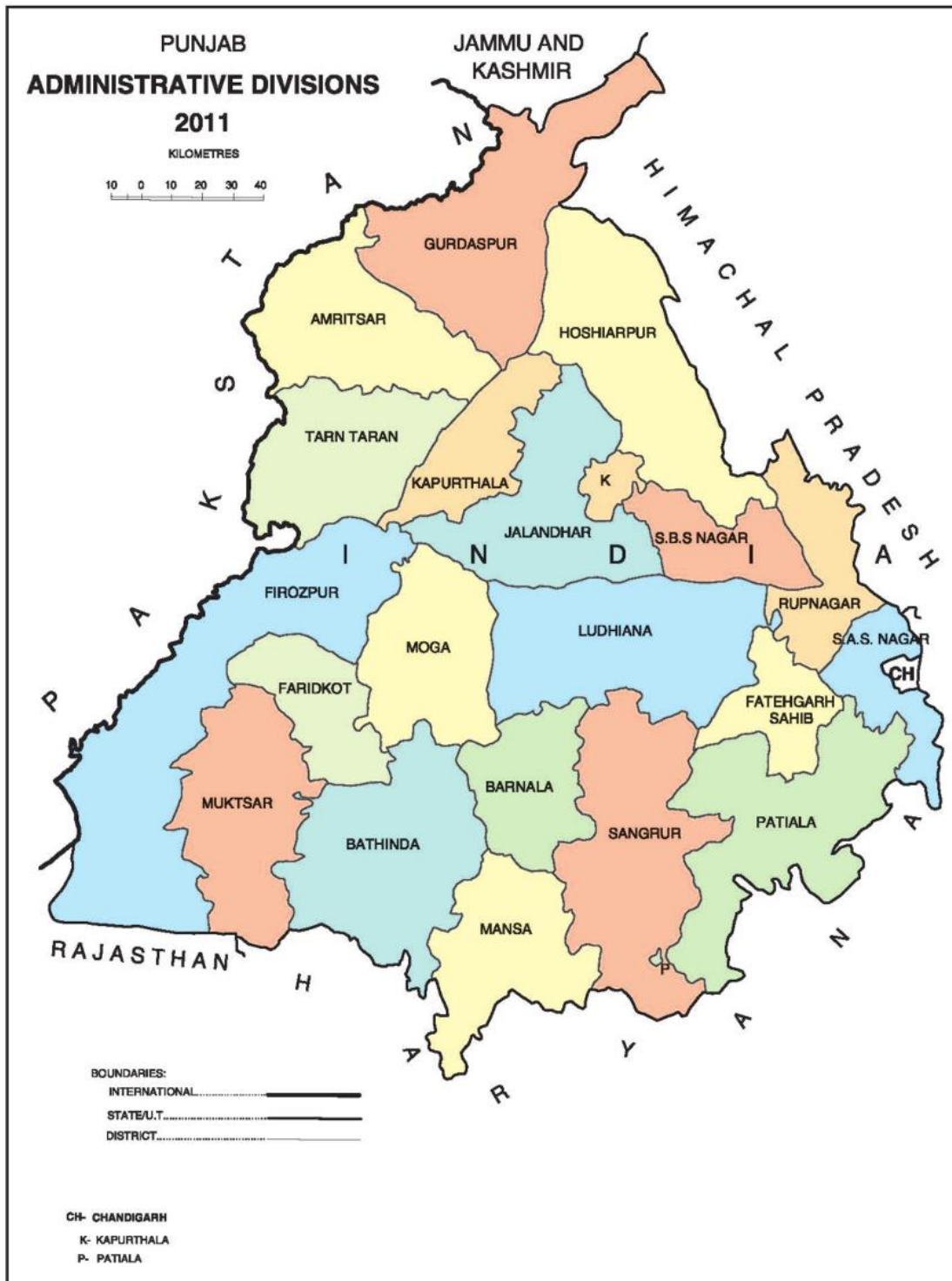
The district has the highest number of women agricultural labourers in the Doaba region of Punjab<sup>31</sup>. Other than that, the district has the highest number of cultivators and agricultural labourers in the State. The district also has the highest number of marginal and small farmers. Further, due to reasons of familiarity and convenience in communication with the research participants, district Hoshiarpur was chosen as the study area.



**Map 2.1 Position of Punjab in India**

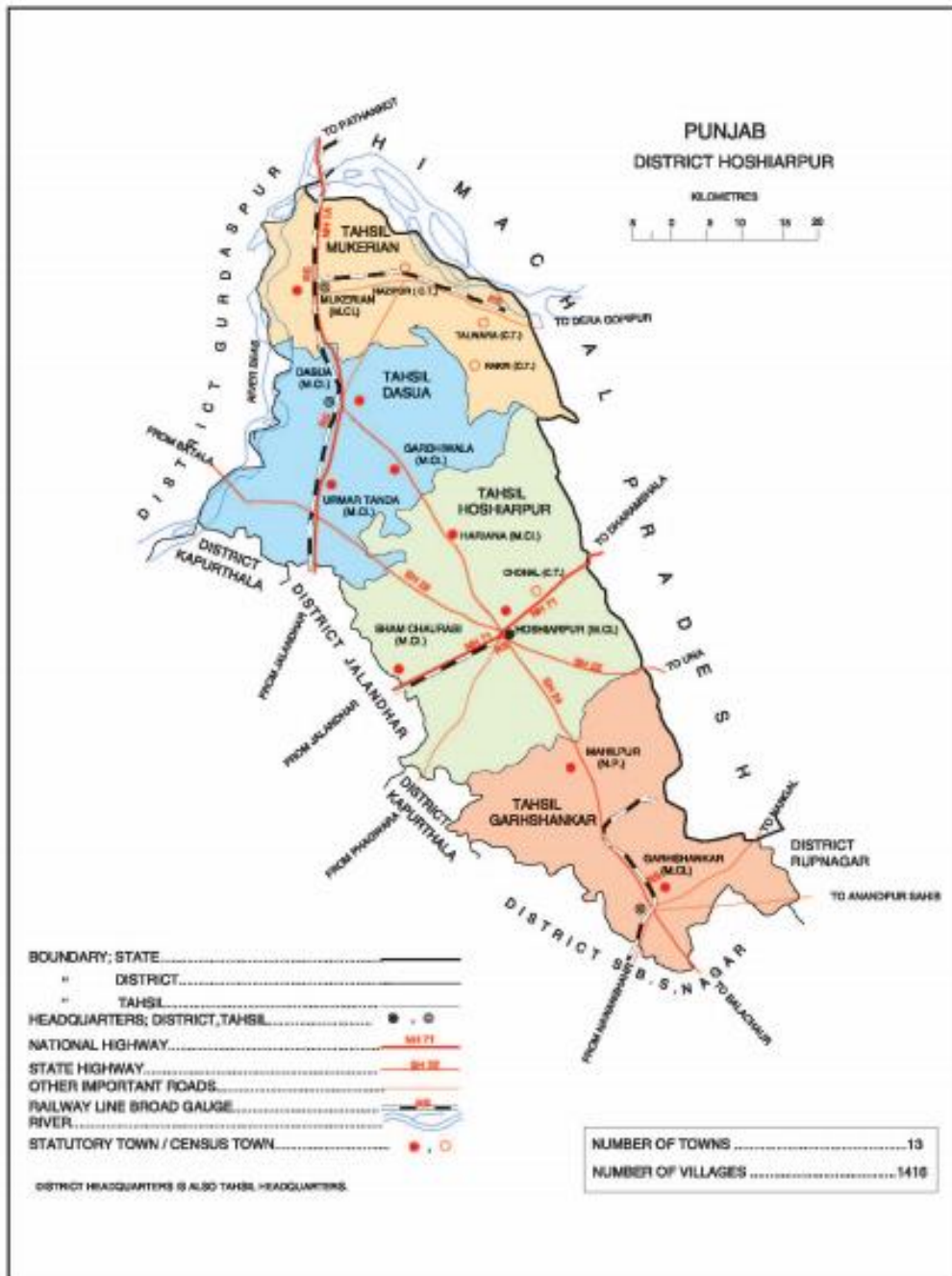
(Source: <http://www.censusindia.gov.in/2011census/maps/atlas/03part1.pdf>)

<sup>31</sup> Doaba- The region falling between the rivers Sutlej and Beas.

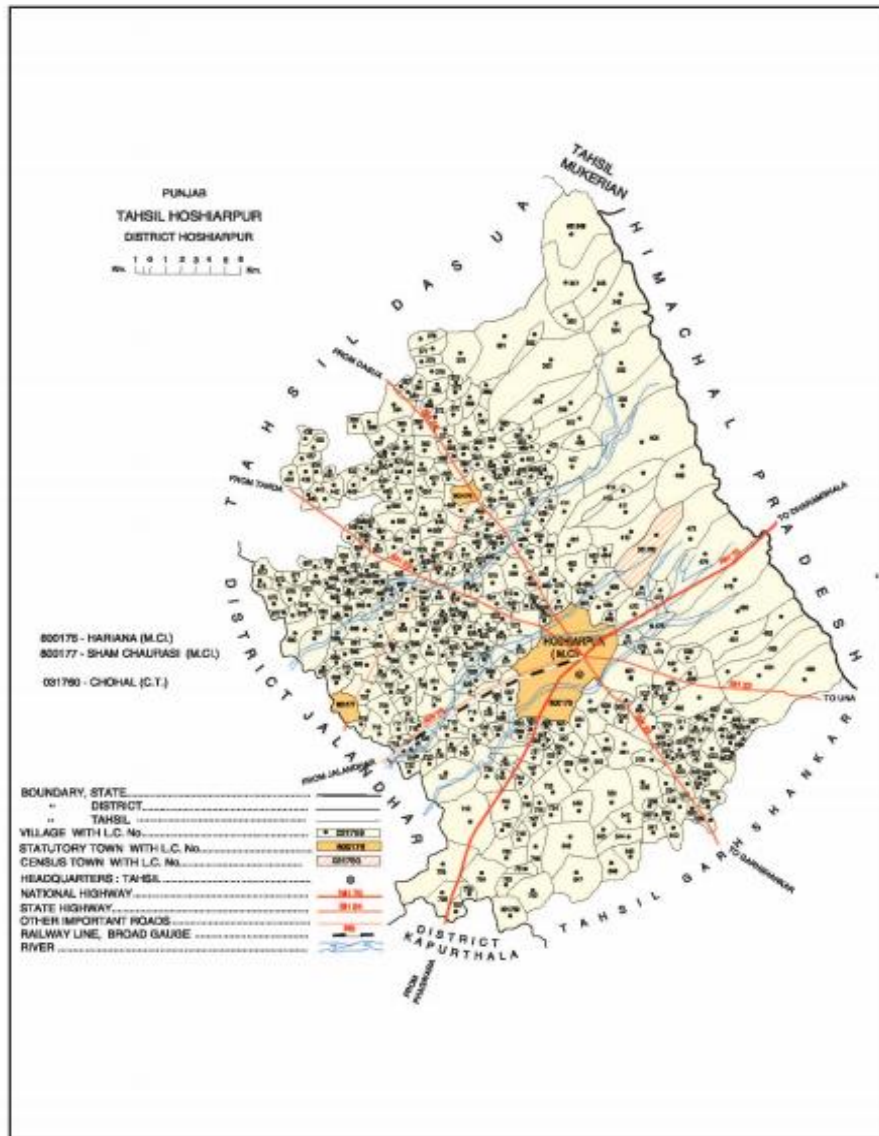


**Map- 2.2 Administrative Division of Punjab**

(Source: <http://www.censusindia.gov.in/2011census/maps/atlas/03part1.pdf>)



**Map- 2.3 Administrative Map of Hoshiarpur District**  
(Source: <http://www.censusindia.gov.in/2011census/maps/atlas/03part3.pdf>)



**Map 2.4 Tehsil map of Hoshiarpur District**

(Source: <http://www.censusindia.gov.in/2011census/maps/atlas/03part3.pdf>)

The study was carried out in a village called Rihana Kalan of district Hoshiarpur falling under the block Hoshiarpur-II.<sup>32</sup> As regards the selection of village, district census handbook was consulted for identifying villages with the greater area under cultivation and area under vegetable cultivation. Field visits were also made to various villages until Rihana Kalan was selected which met the requirements of our study. For instance, a large area of village land is under cultivation. Crop pattern shows a transition from cereal crops to vegetables, and there are considerable numbers of local and migrant agricultural labourers in the village.

<sup>32</sup> A pseudonym for the village is used to ensure anonymity of the identities of the research participants.

## **2.5 Study Population and Sample Population**

The entire population of the village comprising of households of both original inhabitants of the village as well as in-migrant labourer households constituted study population. A census survey of the village covering a total of 720 households, comprising of 679 original inhabitant households and 41 in-migrant labour households was carried out for the study. The households with agricultural labourers and agriculture as primary occupation were identified. As many as 106 original inhabitant households in the village reported being engaged in cultivation. A total of 81 original inhabitant households and 41 in-migrant households had at least one female member who worked as an agricultural labourer during a given point of time in the year. In some of the households, more than one female member also worked as agricultural labourers. The number of original inhabitant and in-migrant women who reported working as agricultural labourers was found to be 89 and 45 respectively. Thus, a total of 134 women reported working as agricultural labourers. The original inhabitant and the in-migrant women who worked as agricultural labourers in the study are referred to as 'local' and 'migrant' agricultural labourers respectively as they preferred these terms. A total of 47 women, comprising of 34 original inhabitants and 13 in-migrant women were purposively selected for in-depth interviews. However, I attempted to select women with as many different individual and household characteristics as possible to reflect the plurality of experience as well as to tackle the challenge of representation.

## **2.6 Tools of Data Collection**

The contextual information about the study village was collected using both primary and secondary data sources. The district census handbook, as well as village profile schedule, were used to obtain information about the study village. The key informant interviews also proved useful in giving a broad overview of the village. A household survey schedule was used to conduct a census survey of all the households in the village. The household schedule served the dual purpose of giving an overview of socio-economic indicators of all the households in the village as well as in identifying households with three broad categories of research participants. Three thematic interview guides were used to collect in-depth information from each of the three

categories of research participants, viz. local and migrant agricultural labourers and farmers. The three main tools of data collection for the present study thus comprised of a village profile schedule, household survey schedule and thematic interview guides for three categories of research participants (**Appendix-A**). Other than these, observation and field notes, group discussions, key informant interviews and informal conversations were used to gather qualitative data covering various dimensions of research. The case reports and narratives were also used to reflect the plurality of experience among research participants.

Since the study aimed at understanding the agrarian context and migration, gender-power relations and the lived experiences of women, who worked as agricultural labourers, quite often the qualitative data on a particular aspect of the study came from a variety of tools and techniques. The data on the working conditions and labour arrangements were drawn not only from in-depth interviews with the farmers and labourers but also through observation and inputs from the key respondents. Key informants proved of great help in sorting the challenges associated with the classification of farmers and also with the general details of the agricultural system of the village. Similarly, the qualitative data about gender relations and well-being was collected through in-depth interviews, case reports, life history and narrative methods.

The tools and techniques varied at times as per the situation and comfort level of the participants. For instance, to be able to understand the complexity of the lives of each of the women, the life history method was frequently deployed. Asking women to talk about various phases of life or any life event such as their childhood, marriage, childbirth or any event deemed important by women themselves not only reflected the complex gender relations but also the choice to narrate events they deemed important. In doing so, I also aimed at reducing the power relations between the researcher and the researched.

## **2.7 The process of Data Collection and Analysis**

The data for the present study were collected during various phases. A pilot study was carried out in the selected village to test the tools designed for data collection as well as to get a broad overview of the agrarian context and migration in the study village.

The pilot study thus not only ensured the feasibility of studying the research problem in the selected village but also proved useful in understanding the broader context essential for conducting the study. The thematic interview guides were designed and tested during the pilot study with various categories of research participants. To understand the proposed research problem, an intensive fieldwork, lasting over a year was carried out followed by a few short-term visits. The household census survey of the village followed the pilot study. The various categories of research participants were identified with the help of a household survey. In-depth interviews were carried out with purposively selected research participants in the final phase of research. The details of each of these phases are given below.

### **2.7.1 Pilot study**

The pilot study was carried out during June-August 2011 in numerous visits to the study village to ensure the feasibility of the research problem as well as for pre-testing the tools designed for data collection. During these visits, a sense of the village was gained regarding population, the number of households, caste composition, and, availability of civic amenities and social facilities, to name a few. Informal discussions with the landowners/farmers and the people of the village in general of different caste groups, age and varying socio-economic backgrounds yielded important information such as agricultural cycle, change in crop pattern over the years, change in the composition of the workforce in agriculture, challenges of pursuing agriculture, and out-migration from Punjab. Informal conversations with migrant agricultural labourers included talk about their area of origin, nature of work performed by them and the duration of their stay in the village.

The tentative tools were also designed and pre-tested with a few participants of the research during the pilot study. The tools were such designed that there was the provision of modification if the field setting so demanded. While keeping in mind, the nature of the research problem, thematic interview guides were developed for the plausible categories of research participants. The data collected during the pilot study on in-migrant labourers was later presented at one of the panels titled ‘ethnographic framing of the migrant subject’ at Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and Commonwealth (ASA) conference in April 2012 as research in progress paper. The presenters and participants in the conference gave constructive feedback and

drew attention towards the issue of representation and the importance of reflexivity in the ethnographic research. These early cautionary remarks proved extremely helpful during the research process.

### **2.7.2 Household Survey**

In order to understand the proposed research problem, an intensive fieldwork, lasting over a year was carried out starting from mid-April 2012 to mid-May 2013 followed by a few short-term visits in the year 2014 and 2015. The household census surveys of the village, as well as detailed interviews, were conducted during the stay in the village during 2012-13. The study started with what Fetterman (2010) refers to as a 'big-net' approach, most commonly used by ethnographers, whereby initial interaction with every available participant added some value to research followed by the focus on a subset of population or group under study. Keeping in mind, the utility of big picture in the overall analysis, the study aimed at carrying out the household survey of the village followed by the in-depth interviews.

The timing of the initiation of the field work coincided with one of the peak seasons of agriculture wherein wheat is harvested. It delayed my initial plan of carrying out household survey followed by the collection of qualitative data. Thus, all I could do during this period was visiting the agricultural farms and observe the nature of agricultural tasks being performed at various farms in the village. I, however, conversed casually with the farmers and labourers, to begin with. As the peak season of agriculture passed, I started a household survey in the village. On a typical day during the household data collection, I collected data on household variables and also casually conversed with some of the research participants including farmers and agricultural labourers. The household data collection proved to be tiresome and time-consuming as the village had over seven hundred households yet it was rewarding as it not only gave me a sense of the village in numbers but also gave me an opportunity to connect with research participants and convey my purpose and intent of carrying out the research. Also, the selection of participants for the next phase of data collection involving detailed interviews was based on their individual and household characteristics analysed from the household survey.



Thus, by the time I completed household data collection, I had simultaneously through observation, key informant interviews and discussions with farmers and villagers, ample information about the agricultural system of the village and the division of labour in agriculture in the form of field notes. Meanwhile, the household data was entered into excel sheets and analyzed. The enormous data, when entered in excel spreadsheets, indicated cues and evidence to initial hunches of the household data collection process. It also helped in identifying and selecting households with three broad categories of research participants. These three categories included farmers, local women agricultural labourers, and male and female migrant agricultural labourers. In-depth interviews were conducted with all these categories of participants.

### **2.7.3 In-Depth Study using Interviews, Observation and Field Notes**

The individual, as well as household characteristics of research participants obtained during household survey, were used in the selection of participants for in-depth interviews. An attempt was made during the research process to select research participants with varied individual and household features. Introspection and reflexivity also aided in the selection of research participants for in-depth interviews.

#### **2.7.3.1 In-depth Interviews**

Detailed interviews were carried out with a total of ten farmers in the study village to understand the continuities and changes in the agricultural practices of the village. As mentioned earlier, the data on this particular aspect was also corroborated with inputs from key informant interviews as well as discussions with male and female agricultural labourers and observation. A group discussion was also carried out among local male agricultural labourers who worked only for a specific agricultural operation in a particular crop.

The male in-migrants were interviewed to understand the migration experience of the in-migrant population in the study village. A male migrant labourer, each from all the five migrant settlements in the village, was asked to volunteer for an in-depth interview about the migration experience. Thus, a total of five male migrant labourers were interviewed to understand the migration process and agrarian relations in the study village. The data on these aspects was also triangulated with in-depth interviews conducted with other migrant agricultural labourers.

The migrant women agricultural labourers were selected based on their origin, duration of stay in the study village as well as the location in terms of the settlement in the study village. Their individual characteristics such as age, marital status and type of family were also taken into account while selection for detailed interviews. The selection of local women similarly included individual (age, marital status, education level, to name a few) and household characteristics (size and type of families, income and earning members, number of dependents). Characteristics related to their agricultural work (duration of engagement in agricultural work such as throughout the year or during a specific season, the type of farmers who hired them, working as agricultural labourer in the study village or adjoining villages) were also taken into account. In-depth interviews were conducted with these selected participants with the help of thematic interview guide. The broad themes covered during the interviews ranged from gender division of labour within and outside household, nature and quantum of agricultural and household work and its relation with women's physical health (work and health), perceptions about changes in the agricultural system of the village and perceptions about well-being.

The gender relations within the household as well as outside the boundaries of the household were observed and understood in the everyday reality and interpreted from the lived experiences shared by the research participants. The unequal gender and power relations were sometimes visible without much effort while in certain other instances, they were deeply entrenched in the everyday lives of women and unfolded as women narrated their unique circumstances and lived lives.

The varied perceptions of well-being were captured through the interviews with the selected women agricultural labourers. The data on physical ailments including illness and disease as reported by the research participants was collected using a recall period of six months for illnesses and that of a year for diseases. I also attempted to understand the preferred patterns of access to health care among both local and migrant research participants. The medical practitioners at the public health care access points such as government dispensary, Primary Health Centre (PHC), and the sub-centre catering to the study village were also interviewed. These interviews gave the details regarding ailments for which the study population accessed public health care services. I also visited some of the unqualified medical practitioners who ran

private clinics in the study village. They understandably were hesitant to disclose much about their qualification. However, on assuring anonymity, they gave information about the incidence and prevalence of diseases among the study population.

The interviews with the participants were carried out in Punjabi and Hindi languages. While interviewing, the setting, timing and circumstantial evidence were keenly observed to triangulate the participants' responses with whatever was visible. The tone of voice, pauses, emotions and gestures were noted for each of the interview. As mentioned earlier, spending time with participants and observing their daily lives other than the formal data collection techniques such as thematic interview guide were of great help to make sense of differences in what they told and their actions. The interviews generally were carried out in a natural and free-flowing manner whereby the questions inevitably emerged from the earlier answers. Sometimes a particular event of interest was subtly probed with clarifications or requesting the participant to provide more details.

While the interviews with the local women of the village were largely carried out in the confines of their homes, those with the migrant women were conducted in open spaces while sitting under a tree, on cots (sometimes) and also while sitting on the ground with other women. Though I made myself comfortable as per the circumstances, I was still offered special treatment in many instances. For instance, while we all sat on the ground, I was many a time offered a sac to sit over. Another contrasting feature was that among the local women, the interviews were largely one to one except for a member or two available at the household. On the other hand, at the migrant settlements, the individual interviewee often got surrounded by women from other households if approached on a non-work day. Thus, the interviews often digressed with interference by others who simultaneously participated. It was annoying sometimes but proved useful at other times where it encouraged other women to engage themselves 'look deep' in their individual lives. I often scribbled their inputs against their names, and when any of them was interviewed at a later point of time, I tried to recollect what they mentioned during others' interviews and delved further.

### **2.7.3.2. Observation and field notes**

As mentioned earlier, observation inevitably ended up being used at a variety of junctures during the data collection process. The importance of observational method lies in the fact that it “allows the researcher to record the mundane and unremarkable (to participants) features of everyday life that interviewees might not feel were worth commenting on and the context within which they occur” (Green and Thorogood, 2004:132). The gestures of people, their interactions, relationships, behaviour in the presence of certain people, actions, etc. were closely observed to name a few. The setting, context, and the then engagement of the participant in a particular activity, presence or absence of other people, etc., were also noted in detail during the interview process. These were largely jottings scribbled hurriedly amidst interviews. These jottings were later detailed at leisure. Other than that, the observations were many times recorded as field notes. The reflections on the ‘how’ aspect of a particular process or phenomenon were also written down taking cues from Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw’s (2011) advise on writing ethnographic field notes. They suggest that “attending to how question encourages and produce ‘luminous descriptions’. Interactionist perspective demands that the ethnographer pays attention to social and interactional processes through which members construct, maintain and alter their social worlds. The ‘why’ stymies and prematurely deflects full description of specific impressions, events, and interactions because determining ‘why’ is a complex and uncertain process requiring explanation and, hence, comparison with other instances or cases. The ‘how’ questions should be preferred and the temptation to ask ‘why’ questions be resisted” (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011: 27). Further, while in the field, whether surrounded by participants or not determined the fate of entries. Some of the entries were written then and there while others were detailed later based on recollection and reflections.

### **2.7.4 Data analysis**

The data analysis was not segregated as a distinct stage. As soon as the fieldwork started, some things were just visible on the surface while for many others, it required digging deeper. Thus, making sense of the data was mostly like peeling an onion wherein many times, the time peeled the consecutive layers. The quantitative data collected during the household survey was entered into Excel spreadsheets and

imported to SPSS. The data on various socio-demographic and economic attributes of the study population were organised under various tables. The analysis of quantitative data helped in selecting research participants for in-depth interviews. The qualitative data for the study came from in-depth interviews, key informant interviews, observation as well as field notes. The detailed interviews were transcribed and translated along with qualitative data from other supporting tools mentioned above.

Some of the themes identified during the analysis included: conceptualisation of work and well-being; gendered lives and well-being; gender division of labour in agriculture and housework; gender-power relations and work; factors and circumstances that promoted or hindered women's participation as agricultural labourers; life stages, circumstances, roles and responsibilities of women, and women's perception of well-being, agricultural work and well-being, to name a few. The recurring themes, sub-themes and patterns were identified, sorted, coded and classified for further analysis. The next section discusses some of my experiences and reflections during the fieldwork, such as the entry, rapport establishment and challenges encountered during the data collection.

## **2.8 Situating 'Self' in the Field: Issues of Access, (Mis) Trust and Reflexivity**

The initial visits to the village during the pilot study proved crucial in establishing rapport with a few households and this, in turn, formed the foundation of a long-term relationship with even fewer ones during fieldwork. During the pilot study itself, I developed a good rapport with one of the women members of one of the scheduled caste households in the village who offered me to stay in their house during fieldwork. I was little hesitant during the pilot study as I was still unsure of the power dynamics in the village as per how my stay with this particular family could shape my access to other research participants in the village. Eventually, however, I came to know that my stay at their house would not affect access to research participants as the women of the household shared cordial relations with many of the local women agricultural labourers in the village.

Further, the prior political engagement, as well as the social status of the elderly male member of the family, also ensured that it would not hinder my access to any of the

farmers in the village. One of the women members of this family, as well as the elderly male member, were also my key informants as we often shared detailed conversations about the agriculture and lives of men and women in the village. I thus decided to stay with the family during fieldwork. My stay in the study village, however, offered no advantage as regards access to research participants from migrant settlements. I struggled a lot to establish rapport with the participants at migrant settlements in the village. Frequent visits and spending extensive period of daytime during the slack season of agriculture at the migrant settlements proved particularly useful in establishing rapport with some of the migrant women who eventually supported me immensely during the research process.

The inhabitants of the village were familiar with the process of survey and data collection as there has been an unprecedented increase in the village based surveys collecting data of various nature ranging from general population survey such as Census survey to health surveys, economic, agricultural and education level surveys, to name a few, in the recent years. Still, it was very unusual for them to comprehend the process to be undertaken by a single individual and that too for a reasonably long period. Despite my declaration to every single household during the data collection as a research scholar/ student at a University in Delhi, they often mistook me to be belonging to some ministry or associated with the government. I thus frequently clarified that I was not an employee but a student working in the village with an aim to get a degree by writing a project report about the agriculture and way of life in the village. It was true as in the initial stages of the fieldwork, most of my efforts were aimed at understanding the agricultural context of the village and also at this stage I deliberately avoided bringing up the gender-power relations aspects of the study. The gender aspects were explicitly discussed once the participants were selected for the in-depth study. I communicated the gist and purpose of the research topic to each of the selected participants. Their response, however, would invariably be about questioning their worth in deciphering the research problem. Every time was I posed this question; I reassured them that with each of their individual experiences, I was closer to understanding the complex reality of everyday gendered lives.

Some of the local women agricultural labourers had earlier exchanged words with me at the agricultural fields while others already knew me from my stay with one of the

households in the village. I wrongly assumed that they understood well my purpose of being in the village. My assumption was challenged invariably at every household in the initial days of household data collection. Though they were very much aware of my presence in their village yet, there was an element of suspicion and curiosity in their queries about my purpose. This curiosity reduced considerably in the subsequent days perhaps owing to the spread of word of mouth in the village about me. Still, I faced queries largely of personal nature during the household data collection.

The households engaged in cultivation similarly had a fair sense of my presence in the village. The visits to the farmer households during the household survey would also invite questions about my identity and purpose. However, in the later stages of fieldwork, the questions I was posed were largely around the research project and the nature of the work I carried out in the village. Some of the village inhabitants worried if the project was delayed as it was way beyond their experience to come across someone who stayed for such a long period in the village. Some of the women in the village often shared a few words about my presence in a humorous way such as *Oh! You are still here! It seems like you have really liked our village.*

On the other hand, a few expressed surprise and concern about the work as one of the farmers expressed, *“you have chosen a very big village. Such an enormous work is undertaken by research teams. How are you managing it single-handed?”* It led me to know that the village had earlier been accessed by the research teams. Probing about the same, I came to know that the research teams he referred to collected data for the village handbook. I, however, explained that the task at hand was undertaken by a single researcher and one gets awarded a degree on successful completion. He could relate it to the projects his daughter carried out at a professional college. But he iterated that it lasted longer than any other project.

The household data collection in the village except for the challenges associated with land ownership and income estimates of each of the household (discussed later in the methodological challenges section) passed smooth. On the other hand, the household data collection at some of the migrant settlements in the village proved extremely challenging. Those at the migrant settlements during the initial stages of fieldwork almost denied co-operation. It was partly due to the fear of disclosing personal

credentials to a stranger in a distant land and also due to my identity as a Punjabi woman. However, in the later stages of the fieldwork, some of the women in the migrant settlements felt comfortable in my presence. I must confess here that the initial visits to the migrant settlements almost demoralized me as there was hardly anyone who was ready to talk to me even regarding the household details. I discussed the same with my supervisor who suggested me to be patient and persistent. It was also my first experience at studying 'other culture'. Margaret Mead writes "As the traveller who has once been from home is wiser than he who has never left his own doorstep, so a knowledge of one other culture should sharpen our ability to scrutinize more steadily, to appreciate more lovingly, our own"(1928: 13). Drawing from what Mead suggests, the encounter with the research participants of a different regional background certainly led to many revelations not only about the Punjabi society but also added to the overall understanding of the power dynamics in the field setting.

As I communicated with the research participants who did not originally belong to Punjab, I could well imagine how difficult it would have been for the anthropologists who did not even know the language and culture of the communities they studied. The language was not much a problem as we could communicate well in Hindi, but my identity as someone belonging to Punjab proved a greater challenge. It however also proved beneficial in the later stages of fieldwork as some of them confided in me as a person who despite belonging to Punjab was ready to hear the grievances against her own society.

In one of the migrant settlements, the household data collection was not less than a nightmare as they just did not respond in my several unsuccessful attempts. At times, a few women at the migrant settlements demanded money. I, for the obvious reasons, refused to pay and tried to convince them that I was myself a student with limited resources. My arguments did not help much. On one of the days, I went near the migrant settlements and approached an old lady in one of the migrant settlements. It happened to be sheer luck or serendipity in the field that this woman was supposedly the eldest among a few households with a shared kinship.<sup>33</sup> She asked me the reason for my daily visits to their settlement. I explained to her that I was a student and

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<sup>33</sup> Fetterman (2010) also refers to the importance of serendipity in the field whereby he suggests that "the ethnographic work is not always orderly. It involves serendipity, creativity, being in the right place at the right or wrong time, a lot of hard work, and old-fashioned luck." (Fetterman:2)



intended to write a book about the village and since they too inhabited the village, the study would be incomplete without attending to their information. She was still not convinced and asked how that would be of any use to them. I had no clear answer, but I explained that this might not directly address the problems that they face but the book in the near future might get published, and it might draw the attention of the policy makers towards the living conditions of migrants in villages of Punjab. I could see from her face that she was not content with this explanation yet she agreed to inform me about her household and also as a matter of her status in the settlement asked a few women to help me. In the later stages of the field work, I, however, realized that women primarily avoided interaction with strangers to avoid any plausible conflict. It did not just occur to me as at rest of the settlements as I incidentally came across male members and they informed about their household details without much efforts on my part. This realization and disclosure by migrant women participants in the later stages of fieldwork also pointed towards the subtle manners in which gender relations operate.

The initial experience with the participants at the migrant settlements also forced me to reflect on my identity and the basic character of Punjabi society. For instance, Punjabi people are generally known for their hospitality and friendly nature. This cliché sounded as true as my experience during the fieldwork had been really pleasant. It, however, made me wonder how different would have been the experience of a researcher in the same village that did not belong to Punjab but some other state. I also thought of the ease with which the participants from the migrant settlements would have shared their experiences with a researcher from their native state. These initial hunches, however, got resolved with time as I understood that human misery and pain is same everywhere. A patient listener and empathizer is valued anywhere. The persistence and patience proved useful as advised by my supervisor as I was well accepted by some of the migrant households. My presence did not bother them much as they continued their everyday lives while interacting with me at the same time. The women of a few households however paid special attention to me as they sat to talk sometimes leaving the tasks they were carrying out. I insisted that they could continue with their work while we talked. The relationship I shared with the women of the migrant households was woven around a casual conversation about everyday life and the problems inherent in it. Their conversations about their family, intra-household

relationships and everyday life, in general, revealed the underlying gender relations. A focused conversation on the gender relations, however, would lead to responses like “That’s the way it is!” On the other hand, when women talked freely about themselves, they could see for themselves and expressed what it meant to be a woman.

The participants at the migrant settlements also felt uncomfortable at the instance of recording the conversations except for a few. Their wish to not go on record was respected as I continued scribbling ‘scratch notes’ and sometimes making ‘head notes’ which were later detailed and faired out (Sanjek 1990 cited in Schensul & LeCompte, 2013: 60).<sup>34</sup> I also noticed that if asked to repeat something, they would hesitate and hardly utter anything despite my insistence. Thus, in such instances, specifically with the ‘migrant’ population, the language gap came to my rescue wherein I explained what I understood. I then asked if it was what they meant. If there was some gap in understanding, they happily explained it to me. This method proved useful in many instances and also encouraged them to express themselves. I realized that seeking their approval and giving them importance inculcated confidence amongst themselves to talk freely.

Similarly, with most of the village inhabitants, my naïve attitude towards most of the processes/phenomenon and insistence on their opinion engaged them with the research process with great enthusiasm. I could relate with what Srinivas, Shah and Ramaswamy (2002) suggested that an ignoramus fieldworker is often well taken by the people as they like feeling superior to the former. The acceptance of such role of fieldworker like a child by the people leads to a close bond between the fieldworker and them (Srinivas, Shah and Ramaswamy, 2002:6).

Among the migrant settlements, my interaction was largely confined to the women partly due to the issues of access and also as it served the research purpose. I, however, conducted five detailed interviews with male migrant labourers from each of the migrant settlements in the village to understand their experience of migration. The interest and enthusiasm with which they shared their migration experience was

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<sup>34</sup> Roger Sanjek classifies field notes into three broad categories as head notes, scratch notes and field notes. The head notes and scratch notes when turned into description become field notes.

noteworthy. On the other hand, when asked to share their initial experiences at the study village, they were often hesitant and reluctant. I realised however in due course of time that their lack of interest was partly due to the issues of trust and also due to the reason that they did not consider the experience worth sharing.

My interaction with the male migrant research participants was very formal while with women it was by and large extremely casual and informal. Spending time at the migrant settlements in the slack season of agriculture proved extremely useful in breaking the ice between us. Not only could I observe their activities on a non-work day but also talk about varied issues that give varied insights to understanding the research issue at hand in a better way. Also, I closely observed their world-view as the conversations often deviated to issues that were culturally important. Thus, though the casual conversations made it a bit difficult for me to sift data of relevance for the present study yet, I was glad that I could understand their way of life and underlying meanings to some extent. The next section discusses some of the challenges related to the application of concepts and operational definitions during the fieldwork.

## **2.9 Challenges encountered during the fieldwork and Way Forward**

There have been challenges of different nature during fieldwork other than the very natural establishing rapport with the research participants. These challenges included striking a balance between existing definitions of the concepts and terms, and their operationalisation in the field setting. This section, thus, details such challenges and plausible solutions.

### **2.9.1 Context**

Context is the very essence in which we situate our experience. It was important to understand the various demographic, technological and occupational changes amidst which we aimed to locate the experiences of women. One of the foremost challenges was to set a baseline year against which we could understand changes in the agricultural system of the village. A criterion to setting up such a baseline year was inquiring about as to when the carrot cultivation started in the study village, indicating a transition to change in the crop pattern in the study village. Another criterion

involved inquiring the onset of in-migration to the study village. In response to both these queries from landowners, farmers, men and women of the village, we could reach a timeline where both these incidents coincided. Thus, in tracing the changes in the agricultural system of the village, the years 1991-92 were considered to be baseline years. Thus, in most interviews that followed wherein I attempted to understand the agrarian context of the village regarding changes in technology, crop pattern and composition of the labour force, the years 1991-92 were taken as the baseline years.

### **2.9.2 Landownership**

One of the challenges during the fieldwork was to assess the distribution of land among various households in the village. Some of the research participants showed unease when asked about land ownership and income of the household. Their responses varied from ‘a clear-cut No’ to answers like ‘It is difficult’ or a cross-question like ‘why do you want to know’ or ‘what will you do with this information’. I learnt during fieldwork that people felt more comfortable reporting the land ownership of others. As a solution to the challenge regarding getting data on land ownership of households in the village, I asked the research participants of landowning households to give me a broad overview of landownership in the village and subsequently a vague or rough estimate of their landholdings. To my relief, this eased up their anxiety about sharing the details about land ownership. Also, I could cross check various responses and understand the land distribution in the village to categorise them into workable categories.

### **2.9.3 Agricultural Labourer**

The Census of India (2011) definition of the agricultural labourer as *a person who works in another person's land for wages in cash/kind or share crop* was taken as a standard. However, the field setting offered challenges of its own kind such as related to the engagement in sectors other than agriculture along with being engaged as an agricultural labourer for a part of the year. Such research participants irrespective of their engagement in other sectors were included as agricultural labourers even if they reported working as agricultural labourers for any period during the given year. Also, another challenge was the fluidity in local women’s occupation status as some of them reported not working as agricultural labourers during the household survey.

However, they were observed to be working as agricultural labourers at a later stage during the fieldwork. Such cases were accounted for as agricultural labourers in the in-depth interview stage to understand the dynamics of forces that shape women's occupation identity as agricultural labourers. Thus, for this study, any person residing in the study village who worked in another person's land for wages in cash/kind for any duration during an agricultural year was considered as an agricultural labourer.

#### **2.9.4 Gender-Power relations**

Understanding the complex gender-power relations in the field setting began with reducing the complex social relations to gender division of labour in agricultural fields and everyday life. Also, the subtle observations gave cues to probe further by framing relevant questions. However, the complexity inherent in making sense of gender-power relations necessitated the use of interpretative techniques many times.

#### **2.9.5 Well-Being**

The term well-being was translated to "achhi zindagi" and "changi/wadhiyazindagi" for the migrant and local agricultural labourers respectively. The understanding of well-being as perceived by various research participants involved complex interjection of health and stages of life. The responses thus obtained were not solely to do with physical health but also a state of being with mental and emotional turmoil (agony) and harmony. The verbatim responses of research participants reflect the essence and the myriad ways in which well-being was perceived by different individuals. Their detailed responses to such an abstract concept widened the horizon of present research as they pointed towards not only the absence of misery and difficult situations of everyday life but also their aspirations about a life worth living for them and their children. The stark differences in the aspirations of each of the two categories of agricultural labourers also depict the relative cultural constructs and meanings associated with well-being. Their narratives also depict their incomparable socio-economic conditions and consequent way of life.

#### **2.9.6 Representation**

Soon after I started collecting data on the qualitative aspects of the research problem at hand, I realized that I felt overwhelmed by the diversity of experiences in data which were at times similar yet unique and different in their own respect. The thought

of doing justice to individuals' 'voice' also haunted me during the writing-up stage. Thus, I tried to tackle with what is often referred to as 'crisis of representation' in the ethnographic research. There have been some aspects of the qualitative data collected over the period of research which could not find mention in this thesis. I hope and believe that they belong somewhere else and that I am able to put across them at their suitable places in the near future.

While writing up this research, I also struggled a lot with striking a balance in representing the participants' view and my position. Geertz argues that the concepts – 'experience-near' and 'experience-distant' used by the psychoanalyst Heinz Kohut for the participant and ethnographer or any other professional respectively represent very well the challenges inherent within each of them. "Confinement to experience-near concepts leaves an ethnographer awash in immediacies as well as entangled in vernacular. Confinement to experience-distant ones leaves him stranded in abstractions and smothered in jargon". He thus suggests that these two concepts should be deployed in moderation so that one does not overpower the other (Geertz, 1974: 29). Thus, following what Geertz suggests, I have attempted to give a balanced account of the participants' experience and my understanding. It has been challenging in more than one ways as I often questioned my understanding of their experiences. This uncertainty and unease with the representation of others is, however, a relatively new phenomenon not only in the discipline of anthropology but with most social science disciplines. Some of the literature discussing such issues however reassured that there is nothing wrong with this fear and introspection.<sup>35</sup>

In the recent past, there have been ethnographies wherein the ethnographers have explicitly presented their honest views about the participants of the research<sup>36</sup>. Malinowski's diary published posthumously, stirred a lot of controversy about what Malinowski felt during the fieldwork and his feelings towards the participants and others.<sup>37</sup> Geertz (1974) however argues that the ethnographer must certainly have sensitivity towards the participants whose lives he/she intrudes into but "seeing things from native's point of view in its simplest term implies how the anthropological

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<sup>35</sup>Rabinow, Paul. 1986. "Representations are Social Facts: Modernity and Post-Modernity in Anthropology". In *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, edited by James Clifford and George E. Marcus, 234-61. Berkeley: University of California Press.

<sup>36</sup> See Rabinow(1977)

<sup>37</sup> See Malinowski (1967).

analysis is to be conducted and its results framed, rather than what psychic condition anthropologists need to have” (Geertz 1974: 29, 43). Thus, we have chosen a stance whereby the feelings about the participants are not concealed. That to us is not a breach of trust or insensitivity towards the participants. Their identities are not revealed yet the character is not masked for honest representation.

It again brings us to the much-debated issue of ethnographic authority.<sup>38</sup> It is now a day acceptable that the most rigorously carried out research is also biased to some level as the researcher himself is a human being and tends to get biased. However, the challenge can be resolved by continuous introspection and engagement with the research problem. Thus, while we refer to the honest or true representation, it is still bound to be suffering from some kind of biases. An effort has been made during the research work to counter such biases by revisiting the data and continuous introspection followed by the mention of plausible biases, wherever encountered.

## **2.10 Ethical concerns**

The research participants’ consent was sought to be included in the study. The purpose of the study was announced clearly, and the participants were also assured of anonymity and confidentiality. Explicit permission to voice record the interviews was sought from all the research participants. The recorded interviews were transcribed and translated later. Some of the research participants did not give permission to voice record their interviews. Their consent was respected and quite often the quick jottings, headnotes and scratch notes were elaborated later. The events of grief and extreme emotional outburst were handled with great care so that the participant was left at ease once the interview concluded. In order to ensure anonymity, all names used in the study are pseudonyms.

To sum up, the present chapter largely detailed the conceptualisation and key objectives of the research problem, as well as the methods chosen for addressing the research problem. It covered various phases of research, tools used during the data collection as well as the experiences and challenges encountered during the research

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<sup>38</sup> See Clifford (1983), Rosaldo (1986), Stocking (1983).

process. The next chapter gives a broad overview of the study village along with the socio-demographic and economic composition of the study population.



## **Chapter 3**

# **Study Village and Sociodemographic Profile of Study Population**



### **3. Study Village and Sociodemographic Profile of Study Population**

The present chapter describes the study village regarding physical, socio-cultural, economic and demographic features. It delineates the physical location, amenities and facilities, population composition, activity status and occupation of the village population. All these attributes constitute the context in which we locate and try to explore gender and power relations among the agricultural labourers and the farmers or landowners. I thus attempt to give a detailed portrait of the village based on the data collected during the household survey, key informant interviews, village profile schedule as well as my observations and impressions about the village and its people as noted in field notes. I have also attempted to give the reader a sense of the village as described by the inhabitants of the village since that not only corroborates my description of the village but also gives the reader an insight into the lives and perspective of the inhabitants.

There were two broad categories of inhabitants in the study village- (a) those who belong to Punjab and have been residing in this village for a fairly long time, specifically, at least two to three generations or more, identifying village as their native place, and (b) those who belong to Uttar Pradesh and have migrated for an indefinite period to the study village for livelihood opportunities, maintaining social ties with their native villages in Uttar Pradesh as well as identifying their respective villages in Uttar Pradesh as their native place. These two broad categories of inhabitants are referred to as constituting 'local' and 'migrant' population. Since there are qualitative differences in the living and working conditions as well as houses and assets of the two sets of the population, the two require specific treatment, and hence the socio-demographic profile of these two broad categories of inhabitants are discussed under two broadheads in the chapter.

The first section of the chapter describes the village regarding its location, gives a broad overview of the village as described by its inhabitants followed by the description of the village in term of its location, people, civic amenities and social facilities. The religious and socio-cultural life of the people of the village is also

discussed briefly. In the next two sections, I discuss the household and population-level data of the original inhabitants of the village, i.e. local population as well as migrants collected during the household survey. The last section of the chapter deals with the household characteristics as well as a socio-demographic and economic profile of local and migrant women agricultural labourers.

### **3.1 Descriptive Profile of the Village**

The village household survey about its socio-demographic composition and various other features gave me a sense of the village regarding numbers. It was still important to obtain information about the village from its people as it gave the insights that numbers alone cannot give. The qualitative data about the village was collected through the village profile schedule. The process started during the pilot study and continued until the initial phases of the fieldwork. Casual conversations and interviews about the village with people of various age groups and castes gave me a broad overview of the village regarding what the inhabitants perceived their village to be like.<sup>39</sup> Thus, the description of the village in this section derives not only from my experience of the fieldwork but also through the narratives of the village inhabitants. I have also shared my observations and comments about the participants at times to give the reader an essence of the fieldwork process in terms of my impressions about the people. This section thus attempts to give a brief portrait of the village and its inhabitants.

The study village is situated at a distance of 8 km from district headquarters on Hoshiarpur-Chandigarh Road. The entrance of the village is marked by brick and cemented construction-the village gate<sup>40</sup> (Plate 1). Most houses in the village are situated approximately 2 km off the main road. However, there are a few houses near the main road before the village gate on either side of the road that leads to the village. Administratively, these houses also fall under the jurisdiction of the village.

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<sup>39</sup> All names of the individuals, places and institutions are pseudonyms. In certain cases, minor changes in details are made so as to ensure the anonymity of identities of research participants.

<sup>40</sup> Such a construction is common in villages of Doaba region of Punjab and often called village gate. Such village gates are at times memorials of a soldier or a contribution of an affluent Non Resident Indian and ex-resident of that village. These gates have some engravings indicating the name of the person associated and the village.

The road that leads to the village (before the village gate) has various shops such as grocery store, wine shop, and a pesticide store.

All original inhabitants of the village lived in houses in the village while the migrant population did not own any land or houses in the village. They lived in thatched huts built at five different sites in the village. The lands on which the huts were built belonged to five farmers in the village. The huts were clustered and there was barely any space between two huts. Since the migrants from a particular village in Uttar Pradesh migrated together, those belonging to same or neighbouring villages in Uttar Pradesh were found to be staying in close vicinity, and quite often at the same settlement. A single household usually shared the hut except for the rare occasions, when a newly migrated family stayed with their relatives/ friends in their hut at the existing settlements till they built their own.

The largest and smallest migrant settlements comprised of sixteen and four huts respectively. The other three settlements comprised of nine, seven and five huts. All these settlements lie at the periphery of the village, mostly at a corner of the agricultural farm, and hence, away from the centre of the village. The largest migrant settlement is situated on one side of the road that leads to the village, quite close to the village gate. The condition of the road that leads to the village is poor, and water gets logged during rains. There are agricultural farms on either side of the road. During fieldwork, a petrol pump also started its operation near one of the migrant settlements, quite close to the village gate.

### **3.1.1 Oral history of the village**

There are no written records about the history of the village. When I inquired about the history of the study village from the inhabitants, most responded that it is a relatively old village and their grandparents also lived here. In one of the very first conversations about the village during the pilot study, one of the elderly inhabitants of the village gave an overview of the village regarding its oral history. I met Banki Ram at one of the *khooh* in the village. Banki was 85 years old and belonged to Ad-dharmi caste. He told that their village is very old and that the reference of the village is also

there in the verses of a Sufi Saint, Baba Farid.<sup>41</sup> He cited the instance that Baba Farid spent twelve years in the village as he wandered in the forests during that time. While he passed through one of the farms in the village, he was mesmerised by the beauty of watermelons in the field. As he picked up one of the melons, he caught the farmer's attention who thought him to be a thief. He abused Baba Farid. Baba Farid then cursed him that all his melons get rotten and that melons grown in the village be tasteless. Banki with much animated expressions then shared that since then no one could grow good watermelons in the village. The watermelons would look great from outside but be tasteless<sup>42</sup>. The anecdote indicates that farming is closely linked to the village history.

### **3.1.2 Religion, caste identity and places of worship**

The village has diversity in terms of religion and caste groups. The original inhabitants of the village reported following Sikhism, Hinduism and Islam. During the household survey, I found that there are different caste groups in the village such as Ad-dharmi, Bazigar, Brahmin, Chhimbe, Gujjar, Jatt, Jheer, Nai, Rajput, Ravidasiye, Saini, Sarehde, Suniare, Tarkhan and Valmiki, to name a few.. Their proportion in the village population is discussed in another section of the chapter where I discuss the findings of the household survey. Some of the reported *gotras* include Rattu, Heer, Bhatoye, Saroye, Toore, Baddhan and Bhoon-Bhal. The migrant population residing in the village followed Hinduism and all migrant households reported belonging to the Rajput caste.

The different localities in the village are named based on the caste identities of residents. Anyone visiting the village for the first time could observe the stark differences in the structure of houses, and condition of streets and lanes across various localities in the village. The household survey also revealed that all households in a particular settlement belonged to a specific caste group. Quite often, the households in close vicinity to each other shared a common lineage and addressed each other to be

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<sup>41</sup> Shaikh Farid (1173-1265), a Sufi mystic and teacher, the first recorded poet in the Punjabi language was born at a place near Multan called Kotheval in Punjab region of Pakistan. ([punjabjudiciary.gov.in/district/faridkot/history/baba.pdf](http://punjabjudiciary.gov.in/district/faridkot/history/baba.pdf))

<sup>42</sup> I attempted to explore the story about Baba Farid narrated by Banki. I came across a similar version of the same story. However the reference of the village name was missing.

of same 'vehda'. The migrant settlements, as discussed earlier, were also segregated from the rest of the village. Caste-based segregation and regional identity-based differentiation were thus evident in the village settlement pattern.

There are separate religious places of various caste groups in the village. There are four Gurudwaras in the village- one each for Jatts and Saini caste groups and one for scheduled castes. The one for scheduled castes is called Dera Sant Bhupinder Das. There is another Gurudwara named Baba Farid Gurudwara in the village. One of the old respondents told me that earlier it was a Sufi shrine of Baba Farid. Jatts of the village reconstructed the holy place and rechristened it as Baba Farid Gurudwara. There is a Shiv temple in the village. Other than that there are several holy places, some in the agricultural fields and even in the localities of various caste groups. There is a huge *Peepal* (*Ficus*) tree in the middle of a very congested locality of Sarehde in the village. Inhabitants of the locality have tied bangles and red *dupattas* to its branches. A cemented circular platform is built around the tree. Idols and pictures of various Gods and Goddesses have been placed here.

People of Rihana Kalan celebrate various festivals and fairs. The festivals such as *Lohri*, *Basant*, *Holi*, *Rakhdi*, *Dussehra*, *Diwali* and *Gurupurabs*, to name a few, are celebrated with much enthusiasm. One of the festivals is the birth anniversary of Guru Ravidas commonly called Ravidas Jayanti.<sup>43</sup> Ravidas Jayanti is celebrated on *Magh Purnima* with great enthusiasm in the village by the Scheduled Caste community. During the celebrations of Ravidas Jayanti in the year 2013, I was amazed to see the zeal of the community. They actively participated and arranged function at the Bhupinder Das Gurudwara. The preparations for the event started well before the Jayanti, and people in the village showed great enthusiasm from the beginning of the year itself. *Nagar Kirtan* was taken out to the nearby villages a day before the Ravidas Jayanti. People of other villages where *Nagar Kirtan* was taken out welcomed the *Sangat* by showering flowers and serving eatables. Despite heavy rains on the day of *Nagar Kirtan*, people came up in huge numbers, and they sang verses in praise of Ravidas. Some of them were sitting/ standing in the slowly moving tractor trolleys

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<sup>43</sup> Ravidas was a saint-poet during the 15<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> century. India. He was born in a village near Banaras and worked as a cobbler. He is often associated with Bhakti movement in North. He is considered as the founder of 21<sup>st</sup> century Ravidassia religion.

while others walked along. On one of the tractor trolleys, a portrait of Ravidas full of marigold garlands was placed. A few people were sitting close to Ravidas's portrait, and they were distributing *Prashad* as the *Nagar Kirtan* was taken out to nearby villages. The *Nagar Kirtan* terminated at the Bhupinder Das Gurudwara. On the day of Ravidas Jayanti, people started visiting the gurudwara from early morning. They were dressed in their best clothes and sang songs and verses in Ravidas's honour. Tea and *Pakor*s were served in the morning as *Prashad*. After the *aradas* (prayer), the *langar* was served in one of the halls of gurudwara. There were different queues for men and women. We all sat on the mats and enjoyed *langar*. I believed from what I was told by the inhabitants of the village that people of all the castes participate in Ravidas Jayanti celebrations, but my key informant told me while we were having *langar* that only scheduled castes of the village observe this function.

The farmers belonging to Saini and Jatt castes, on the other hand, in addition to certain major festivals of the state, celebrate certain festivals marking sowing and harvesting of crops. Baisakhi is one such festival whereby the harvesting of wheat is celebrated. Other than that, there are certain local fairs to celebrate the harvest of crops like maize. During the fairs and festivals related to crops, the farmers offer the crops to gods, goddesses and deities for their blessings.

### **3.1.3 Civic amenities and social facilities**

In the earlier phase of fieldwork, a private local bus service connected the village to the main road and the nearby district. It used to come at noon at the village bus stand and in the evening around 4 pm. People often complained that it did not have fixed timings. Later, in due course of the field work, I did not see this bus much and people of the village also informed me that there was some change in the bus route and that it stopped coming to the village. It was particularly difficult for those who did not have any other means of transportation to commute to the city or even till the main road, more so during the summers.

There are four *Aanganwadi* in the village. The village also has an elementary school and a senior secondary school. One of the young respondents, named Parminder, aged



20 years belonged to Ad-dharmi caste. He studied till 12<sup>th</sup> standard at a convent school near the village and did not continue further education. Since Parminder belonged to one of the very few well-off Ad-dharmi households, he could study at a convent school. He himself was aware of his privileged status and narrated that there are wide inequalities across people of various castes and classes in the village, not only regarding houses and lifestyle but also whether they could educate their children or not. He, however, shared that those who can afford to educate their children in the private schools increasingly prefer to educate their children at ‘private English medium’ schools following the curriculum of Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) and ICSE (Indian Certificate for Secondary Education) over Punjab School Education Board (PSEB). During our conversation, I found Parminder to be well-informed, sensitive to the issues of inequality and aware of his privileges in relation to others.

As regards health facilities, there is a Primary Health Centre (PHC) situated at a distance of about 3 km from the village. Block PHC is situated at a distance of about 2 km in an adjacent village. Other than that, a charitable hospital named Sukhmani charitable hospital is located in a nearby village at a distance of about 3 km from the village. St. Xavier’s Hospital is also located near the charitable hospital. There were also four private medical practitioners in the village. However, only one practitioner among the four had a degree of Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery (MBBS). Rest of the private practitioners though had not acquired requisite medical qualification to be able to serve as medical practitioners; they continued to do so. One of the respondents shared that people engaged in manual labour of various kinds frequently visited these practitioners.

Though there were shops at various places in the village, the area near the Ad-dharmi households with shops was referred to as *bazaar*. The village almost had all the shops to meet everyday needs of the inhabitants. There are shops of sweets, tea, confectionary, stationary, grocery shop, cycle repair and air refill shop, mobile and television recharge coupon shops, to name a few. A shop of a chemist, hairdresser and a cobbler is also there in the village. Clothes and vegetable shops are located at a distance of almost 2 km on the main road leading to Chandigarh. There are three flour

mills in the village. I could, however, observe over some time that not all residents of the village purchased items of need from the shops located in the village. Those from economically well-off sections often bought necessary items from the nearby city. Not only could they access shops in the city as they owned personal means of transportation but also their consumption choices were different from the majority and were not available at the village shops. Amrik Saini represented one such case as he narrated that though nearly all facilities are available in the village, they are used to of buying items of daily use and necessity from the nearby town Hoshiarpur. He even shared that they go to Hoshiarpur now and then, sometimes more than once a day. Amrik is one of the affluent farmers of the village. He was aged 58 years and belonged to Saini caste. Other than the agricultural land, he owned a big mansion, a tractor, a car, a jeep, and a two-wheeler. I approached Amrik to get necessary details about the village, but his response was quite different from what I expected. He rather talked about achievements of his own and his family members and how frequently they visited the nearby town for buying necessary items. I got an impression that by referring to his daily visits to Hoshiarpur, he attempted to assert that though he lived in the village, he was not less than people of the city in terms of his consumption choices which could only be fulfilled in a nearby town. This particular case reflects the divide between rich and poor in the village. The rich in the village have means of transportation at their disposal to connect them to the city or towns nearby. The poor and those without means of transportation, on the other hand, often relied on public modes of transport and avoided any visits to the town unless their needs could be met in the village itself.

The village is electrified and has got a power supply. During the summers, there are frequent and long power cuts. One could often find the farmers waiting for electricity in the fields during summers. There is a water tank in the village, and the village also has piped water supply. Every house in the village has the availability of drinking water. Though there is no fixed timing for water supply, the water was available during early morning around 5 a.m. till 8 a.m., and from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. Many houses in the village have electric water pumps. Most households reported using firewood as fuel despite having Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) connections. Some households

reported their preference for *chulha* (earthen gas stove) with firewood or dung cakes as fuel due to a shortage of LPG supply and also due to personal preference.

Those living in the thatched huts had neither electricity nor piped water supply. People at the migrant settlements used diesel lamps as a source of light. They used firewood for cooking. They relied on the farmer for water as they could fill water from the tube well at the agricultural farm after due permission of the owner. The migrants also did not have access to sanitation facilities and used designated areas away from farms for defecation.

#### **3.1.4 Houses and roads**

The condition of houses in the village also varies from semi-*pucca* and old constructions to renovated, and newly constructed huge mansions. One could also assess the caste and class identity of inhabitants by looking at the condition of their respective houses. Some of the affluent Saini, Jatt, and Rajput caste households owned big mansions. Such houses in the village also had personal water storage tanks in a variety of forms such as a pair of oxen, aeroplane, football, and Punjabi woman figurine in traditional attire with a basket on its head, to mention a few. Most of the scheduled caste households did not have the provision of such water storage tanks. I also observed that the houses of scheduled castes and certain other caste groups with lower incomes were not at all comparable to the big mansions. Rather, these houses were poorly painted and often had timber roofs.

While conversing with one of the scheduled caste participant as well as during the household survey, I came to know that five scheduled caste households having attained some affluence had moved to the exterior of the village, towards the road leading to the adjacent village. I observed that the houses in this particular area were new constructions with good lighting and ventilation provision. On the other hand, the old constructions in the scheduled caste localities were semi *pucca*, dark and with poor ventilation. The houses in the scheduled caste localities were very closely packed, and a few had a small common courtyard. There were also old water wells in these localities. These wells contained no water and hence were covered with grills

for security reasons. There were three such wells in the village. Two of the wells were located near the households of Ad-dharmis and Sarehde caste groups each, while one was located near one of the ex-Sarpanch's households belonging to Saini caste group. These old water wells in each of the locality also indicate the segregation of caste groups in the past in terms of their source of water.

Various localities in the village are connected by lanes, streets and roads. The condition and width of the roads and streets across various localities is also different. I observed that the condition of streets and lanes too reflected a caste pattern. The streets and lanes in the localities inhabited by Saini, Rajputs and Jat caste groups were wider and in a better condition while those passing through and connecting Ad-dharimi, Sarehde and other scheduled caste groups were congested and in poor shape. It thus appeared that the condition of lanes and streets in the localities inhabited by various caste groups mirrored their socio-economic and political status in the village power structure.

The location and condition of migrant settlements, similarly, indicated the marginalized position of the migrant population in the study village. As discussed earlier, the migrant settlements were located at the periphery of the village. Each of the migrant family made a thatched hut called *kulli* at the land which they referred to as 'Malik ki thenh' (Master's land). A *kulli* was a hut made of wood and thatch. The structure stood on three rows of wooden sticks dug in the ground and supported with ropes on either side. The wooden sticks were tied together with cloth rags. The roof was made in the form of inverted 'V' so that the water could not get stranded. Further, it was often covered with tarpaulin to protect it from sunshine and rain. Some kind of weight was also put over the tarpaulin. The *kullis* also had a makeshift door made of ear of corns and thatch. The walls inside the *kullis* were plastered with mud. Inside the *kulli* there was no compartmentalisation as such. The earthen stove was often put near to the door so that the smoke could find its way out. Some of the households had a fixed earthen *chulha* while others made a portable earthen *chulha* which could be taken out if needed. The height of *kulli* was such that one could barely stand straight in it. There was barely any space between two *kullis*. At one of the largest migrant settlements, *kullis* were aligned in a shape that resembled English alphabet 'U'.

Various inhabitants of the village from different socio-economic strata and age group described village from their respective viewpoints. An elderly scheduled caste resident discussed the numerical strength, caste composition and the history of the village while a young resident emphasised the issue of migration as well as education facilities in the village. Some of the research participants also detailed the state of agriculture while describing the village while still others situated themselves in the present state of agriculture and expressed discontent with the agrarian change. The issues related to agrarian change and migration are discussed in another chapter while the current section gave a brief profile of the village and its people. The following sections discuss the findings of the household survey among the original inhabitants and the migrant population.

### **3.2 Sociodemographic and economic profile of the local population**

The household survey was of great help in getting a sense of the village regarding the composition of its population, socio-economic distribution as well as the level of education and the occupations of inhabitants. The village at the time of household survey comprised of 679 households of the original inhabitants. The village had a population of 2813. The total number of females in the village was found to be 1376 (48.9%) while the corresponding number of males was 1437 (51.1%). About 28 per cent households in the village reported being female-headed households. The sex-wise distribution of the population shows that the number of male and female children in the age group (0-6 years) was found to be 104 and 89 respectively. The sex ratio and child sex ratio in the village were found to be 957 and 855 females per 1000 males respectively.

#### **3.2.1 Caste and sex-wise distribution of population**

Various caste groups in the village were classified as falling under three broad categories as general category, Scheduled Castes (SC) and Other Backward Classes (OBC), as recognised by the State. The village also had five Muslim households. These households are classified under the general category. The general and OBC households constitute about 49 and 9 per cent respectively of total households with original inhabitants in the village. The village also had a considerable percentage

(almost 42 per cent) of SC households. The caste-wise distribution of original inhabitant households is given in Table 3.1. The table also details the sex-wise distribution of the local population in the study village.

**Table 3.1: Caste and Sex-wise distribution of the local population in the study village**

Social Category	Name of Caste	No. of HH	No. of Male Members	No. of Female Members	Total population	Average HH Size
General (G)	Brahmin	11 (1.6)	27	31	58 (2.05)	5.27
	Jatt	70 (10.3)	121	148	269 (9.56)	3.84
	Rajput	26 (3.82)	45	43	88 (3.12)	3.38
	Saini	221 (32.5)	476	472	948 (33.7)	4.29
	Muslim	05 (0.73)	10	12	22 (0.78)	4.4
<b>Total</b>		<b>333</b>	<b>679</b>	<b>706</b>	<b>1385</b>	<b>4.15</b>
Other Backward Class (OBC)	Chhimbe	05 (0.73)	10	08	18 (0.6)	3.6
	Gujjar	20 (2.94)	48	49	97 (3.4)	4.85
	Jheer	16 (2.35)	37	30	67 (2.38)	4.19
	Nai	05 (0.73)	09	12	21 (0.74)	4.2
	Suniare	05 (0.73)	11	09	20 (0.71)	4
	Tarkhan	12 (1.76)	24	21	45 (1.59)	3.75
<b>Total</b>		<b>63</b>	<b>139</b>	<b>129</b>	<b>268</b>	<b>4.25</b>
Scheduled Caste (SC)	Ad-Dharmi	182 (26.80)	395	342	737 (26.19)	4.05
	Bazigar	11 (1.62)	22	17	39 (1.38)	3.55
	Ravidasi ye	18 (2.65)	38	35	73 (2.59)	4.05
	Sarehde	52 (7.65)	100	105	205 (7.28)	3.94
	Valmiki	20 (2.94)	64	42	106 (3.76)	5.3
<b>Total</b>		<b>283</b>	<b>619</b>	<b>541</b>	<b>1160</b>	<b>4.09</b>
<b>Total (G+OBC+SC)</b>		<b>679</b>	<b>1437</b>	<b>1376</b>	<b>2813</b>	<b>4.14</b>

### 3.2.2 Land distribution in the study village

The range of land ownership among the village population varied from a minimum of 1 acre to 65 acres. The distribution of land ownership across various households in the village is analysed by classifying into various categories as Landless and in the range of a minimum of fewer than 2.5 acres to more than 25 acres as given in Table 3.2.

**Table 3.2: Distribution of land across various households in the village**

Land ownership (in Acres)	Number of households
Landless (no ownership, no operational holding)	573 (84.39)
Less than 2.5 acres	33 (4.86)
2.5-5 Acres	40 (5.89)
5-10 Acres	20 (2.94)
10-25 Acres	04 (0.58)
25 Acres and above	09 (1.32)
Total	679

The land distribution in the study area shows that as many as 573 households (about 84 per cent) did not own any land. A total of 106 (about 16 per cent) households in the village-owned land. A significant percentage (about 69 per cent) of all the landowning households owned less than 5 acres of land. As many as 19 per cents of all landowning households owned 5 acres or more but less than 10 acres of land. Those with at least ten acres but less than twenty-five acres constituted almost four per cent of the total households owning land. The households with twenty-five acres and above land comprised of almost 8 per cent of all the landowning households.

The caste-wise distribution of land ownership in the village (Table 3.3) suggests that the land was primarily owned by caste groups falling under the general category.

Almost all SC households except for two did not own land at large. Only one OBC household owned land in the village. Among the general category, households with two caste groups namely Jatt and Saini owned most of the land in the village as households from these two caste groups constituted almost 92 per cent of the total landowning households in the village. A few Rajput households (about 5 per cent) also owned land in the village. As many as 66 per cent Saini households owned land

in the village while the corresponding percentage for Jatt households was about 26 per cent.

**Table 3.3: Caste-wise distribution of land ownership in the village**

Social Group	Caste	Land ownership (in acres)					Total (N=106)
		<2.47	2.47-5	5-10	10-25	25 and above	
General	Saini	24 (34.3)	26 (37.1)	12 (17.1)	1 (1.4)	7 (10)	70
	Jatt	7 (25)	10 (35.7)	7 (25)	3 (10.7)	1 (3.6)	28
	Rajput	1 (20)	2 (40)	1 (20)	--	1 (20)	5
Total		32 (31.1)	38 (36.9)	20 (19.4)	4 (3.9)	9 (8.7)	103
OBC	Jheer	--	1	--	--	--	1
SC	Bazigar	1	--	--	--	--	1
	Sarehde	--	1	--	--	--	1
Total		33 (31.1)	40 (37.7)	20 (18.86)	4 (3.77)	9 (8.4)	106

### 3.2.3 The education level of the study population

At the time of the household survey, approximately 12 per cent population reported being illiterate. Near to 10 per cent population was literate but had not completed primary level education. The percentage of the population with the primary level of education was approximately 16 per cent. The percentage of those with middle, matriculation and intermediate level of education was found to be approximately 14, 27 and 13 per cent respectively. Very few studied till the level of Bachelors and further. A mere 3 per cent population completed Bachelors degree while those with professional qualification and Masters Level of education were very few (Table 3.4)

A little more than 30 per cent male population from General and Scheduled Caste category had attained education till 10<sup>th</sup> standard while the corresponding percentage of the male population in the OBC category was about 24 per cent. The percentage of female population having attained education till 10<sup>th</sup> standard was highest (25.6%) in the general category followed by SC (21.4%) and OBC (14.7%). It clearly shows that



the percentage of women who completed education till 10<sup>th</sup> standard across all the three categories was far less compared to the male population.

The difference in the level of education among men and women above 10<sup>th</sup> standard is also visible in General category wherein the percentage of men and women having attained education above 10<sup>th</sup> standard was 24 and 20 per cent respectively. However, a little more OBC and SC women (about 17 and 12 per cent respectively) attained education above 10<sup>th</sup> standard when compared to their male counterparts (about 15 and 11 per cent respectively).

The difference in the level of education could also be observed within women of different categories as the incidence of illiteracy among OBC women was almost double (32%) when compared to SC and General Category (16 per cent each). The pattern at the level of 10<sup>th</sup> standard among women as discussed above also shows that a less percentage of women from OBC category attained education till 10<sup>th</sup> standard when compared to women from General and Scheduled Caste categories. The gap in the level of education among women gets wider at the level of higher education as nine women from General category reported having attained education till Masters level while only one Scheduled Caste women secured Masters degree. Not even a single woman from OBC category had attained Masters level education.

**Table 3.4: Caste and sex-wise level of education of population in the study village**

Social category	Sex	Level of education										Total
		0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	
General	Male	22 (3.2)	30 (4.4)	65 (9.6)	79 (11.6)	94 (13.8)	226 (33.3)	118 (17.4)	10 (1.5)	29 (4.3)	06 (0.9)	679
	Female	28 (4)	111 (15.7)	55 (7.8)	125 (17.7)	61 (8.6)	181 (25.6)	103 (14.6)	03 (0.4)	30 (4.2)	09 (1.3)	706
Total		50 (3.6)	141 (10.2)	120 (8.7)	204 (14.7)	155 (11.2)	407 (29.4)	221 (16)	13 (0.9)	59 (4.3)	15 (1.1)	1385
OBC	Male	03 (2.2)	29 (20.9)	17 (12.2)	21 (15.1)	15 (10.8)	33 (23.7)	13 (9.4)	02 (1.4)	05 (3.6)	01 (0.7)	139
	Female	05 (3.9)	41 (31.8)	14 (10.9)	16 (12.4)	12 (9.3)	19 (14.7)	17 (13.2)	--	05 (3.9)	--	129
Total		08 (3)	70 (26.1)	31 (11.6)	37 (13.8)	27 (10.1)	52 (19.4)	30 (11.2)	02 (0.7)	10 (3.7)	01 (0.4)	268
SC	Male	26 (4.2)	42 (6.8)	63 (10.2)	90 (14.5)	141 (22.8)	191 (30.9)	48 (7.8)	01 (0.2)	16 (2.6)	01 (0.2)	619
	Female	19 (3.5)	89 (16.5)	65 (12)	116 (21.4)	73 (13.5)	116 (21.4)	56 (10.4)	01 (0.2)	05 (0.9)	01 (0.2)	541
Total		45 (3.9)	131 (11.3)	128 (11)	206 (17.8)	214 (18.4)	307 (26.5)	104 (9)	02 (0.2)	21 (1.8)	02 (0.2)	1160

0--Not attending school, 1- Illiterate, 2- Below Primary, 3- Primary, 4- Middle (8<sup>th</sup>), 5- Matriculation (10<sup>th</sup>), 6- Intermediate (10+2), 7- Professional Course, 8- Graduate (B.A), 9- Post Graduate (M.A)

### 3.2.4 Activity status and occupation of the study population

The respondent from each household reported the activity status as well as the nature of occupation of their respective family members. The reported data on the activity status of the original inhabitants of the village population was thus classified into various categories during the household survey as not working, working, seeking

work and housework. The NSS concept of activity status was used as a reference but with necessary modifications such as acknowledging domestic work and housework for own house as a separate category. Such a distinction was necessary as women contribute immensely by engaging in housework. The reporting of the same by the respondents included responses such as housewife / not working / housework. The category, however, does not include women who worked outside their house and not at all suggest that the women who worked outside did not engage in housework. Also, those who exclusively mentioned their work status as seeking work were classified separately under the same category. Some respondents within the 'not working' category however implied seeking work but did not state so, and hence have not been included in the category 'seeking work'.

According to the activity status, almost 36 per cent population of the village reported "working" at the time of household survey while 38 per cent of the population reported as "not working". A mere 1 per cent population explicitly reported "seeking work" while about 25 per cent population reported engagement in own housework. Not even a single man reported being engaged in housework. It refers to the gendered nature of activities wherein housework is perceived to be a domain of women alone.

The distribution of activity status among men and women as well as across various social categories suggests that only 6 per cent women from general category were found to be engaged in economic activity outside the house. The corresponding percentage of OBC and SC women was 10 and 19 per cent respectively. The percentage of "working" men across all social groups was way higher than the percentage of women varying from about 81 per cent among SCs to about 93 per cent in general category men. More than 50 per cent female population from the general category fell under the "not working" category. The corresponding percentage of male population among the SCs and OBCs falling under the "not-working" category was also found to be about 50 per cent.

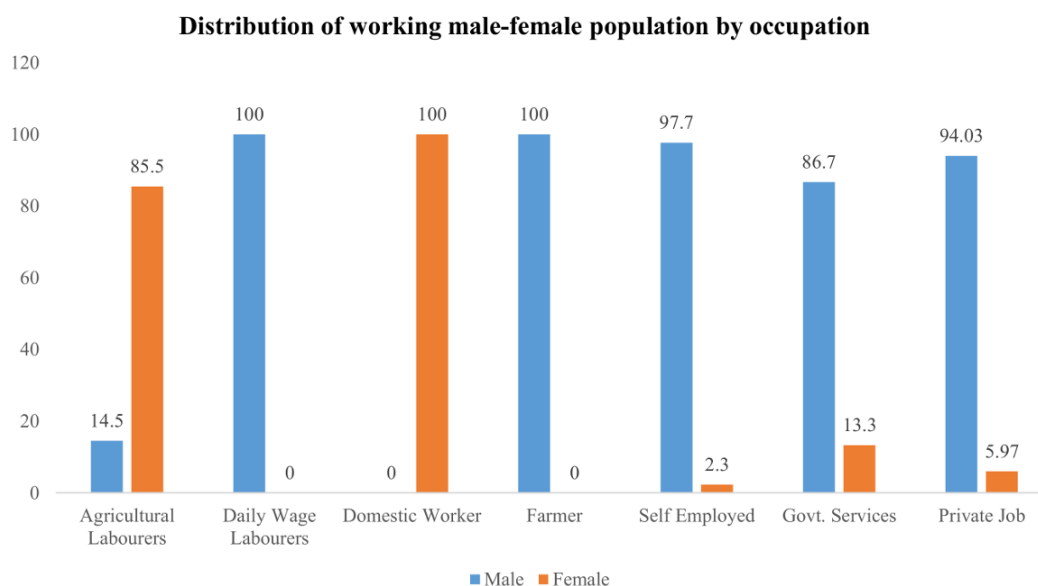
**Table 3.5: Reported activity status among males and females across various social groups**

Social Group	Activity Status											
	Not working			Working			Seeking work			Housework		
	P	M	F	P	M	F	P	M	F	P	M	F
General	507	235 (46.3)	272 (53.7)	446	417 (93.5)	29 (6.5)	27	27 (100)	--	405	--	405 (100)
OBC	116	60 (51.7)	56 (48.3)	86	77 (89.5)	09 (10.5)	02	02	--	64	--	64
SC	450	233 (51.8)	217 (48.2)	470	380 (80.8)	90 (19.2)	06	06	--	234	--	234
Total (N=2813)	1073 (38.14)	528	545	1002 (35.62)	874	128	35 (1.24)	35	--	703 (24.99)	--	703

P= Person, M= Male, F= Female

The study population within the “working” category was classified further as per their reported occupation type. People followed a range of occupations such as being employed in the government or private sector to daily wage labourers in the agriculture or non-agriculture sector. Some were self-employed as shopkeeper or carpenter, to name a few. Most men in the unorganised sector reported their engagement in various occupations throughout the year. It thus posed a challenge to classify them under a particular occupation category. The challenge was handled by identifying the primary occupation status, i.e. an occupation with which they engaged throughout the year. Thus, the occupation status discussed in this section suggests reported primary occupation of the study population in a given year. However, a few men in the study though for a large part of the year worked in non-agriculture sectors; they also reported being engaged as agricultural labourers for a short period during the year. As per the operational definition used in the present study, they are thus classified as agricultural labourers. Although agriculture labour is not the primary occupation of these respondents as they reported being engaged as daily wage labourers in the construction sector for a large part of the year, still they are included as the study focuses on understanding gender dynamics of agricultural labour in the study.

The distribution of occupation status across men and women reflects gendered nature of certain occupations as not even a single woman was found to be working as wage labourer in sectors other than agriculture (Fig. 3.1). Women were primarily engaged in agriculture sector as daily wage labourers. Also, only men reported cultivation as occupation and were classified as farmers while only women were found to be working as domestic workers at households other than their own for remuneration.



**Fig. 3.1 Distribution of working male and female population by occupation**

Further, the data on the type of occupation among “working” population across various social groups suggests that social identity quite often determined by caste and gender could also be linked with the type of occupation one engaged with (Table 3.6). A significant percentage of male (about 92 per cent) from general category were found to be employed in the private sector. The percentage of general category women (about 8 per cent) employed in the private sector was far less when compared to their male counterparts. No scheduled caste women found employment in public sector jobs while very few OBC women were found to be either self-employed or working in government or private sector.

Not even a single male from General category worked as an agricultural labourer while General category women constituted about 11 per cent of all the agricultural labourers in the study village. Further, the percentage of female scheduled caste

agricultural labourers (about 75 per cent) was higher compared to the scheduled caste men (about 14 per cent) engaged as agricultural labourers.

**Table 3.6: Reported occupation among working males and females across various social groups**

Type of Occupation	Social Group									Total (N=1002)
	General			OBC			SC			
	P	M	F	P	M	F	P	M	F	
AL	11	--	11	--	--	--	93	15 (14)	78 (75)	104
DWL	06	06	--	10	10	--	216	216	--	232
DW	--	--	--	--	--	--	11	--	11	11
Farmer	177	177	--	01	01	--	02	02	--	180
SE	74	74	--	51	48	03	49	48	01	174
Govt. Job	46	39	07	05	01	04	32	32	--	83
Pvt. Job	132	121 (91.66)	11 (8.33)	19	17 (89.5)	02 (10.5)	67	67	--	218

AL= Agricultural Labourer, DWL= Daily wage labourer in sectors other than Agriculture, DW= Domestic Worker, SE= Self Employed, Govt. Job = Government Job, Pvt. Job = Private Job  
P= Person, M= Male, F= Female

### 3.2.5 Distribution of Income across various households in the village

The data on the monthly income of the households as reported by the respondents during the household survey in the village shows that there were wide disparities in the reported income across various households ranging from as low as Rs. 3,000 to Rs. 45,000 per month. However, the data also shows that about 67 per cent of all households in the study village had a monthly income in the range of Rs. 5,000-15,000 (Table 3.7).

**Table 3.7: Reported household income across various caste groups**

Social Category	Caste	Reported Monthly Household Income (In thousands INR)							Total
		>5	5-10	10-15	15-20	20-25	25-30	30+	
General (G)	Brahmin	--	4 (36.4)	5 (45.5)	2 (18.2)	--	--	--	11 (3.3)
	Jatt	2 (2.9)	16 (22.9)	34 (48.6)	11 (15.7)	4 (5.7)	3 (4.3)	--	70 (21)
	Rajput	2 (7.7)	11 (42.3)	7 (26.9)	3 (11.5)	2 (7.7)	--	1 (3.8)	26 (7.8)
	Saini	10 (4.5)	77 (34.8)	78 (35.3)	36 (16.3)	12 (5.4)	5 (2.3)	3 (1.4)	221 (66.4)
	Muslim	1 (20)	3 (60)	1 (20)	0	0	0	0	5 (1.5)
<b>Total</b>		15 (4.5)	111 (33.3)	125 (37.5)	52 (15.6)	18 (5.4)	8 (2.4)	4 (1.2)	333 (100)
Other Backward Class (OBC)	Chhimbe	1 (20)	--	2 (40)	1 (20)	--	--	1 (20)	5 (7.9)
	Gujjar	12 (60)	6 (30)	2 (10)	--	--	--	--	20 (31.7)
	Jheer	--	5 (31.2)	6 (37.5)	2 (12.5)	2 (12.5)	1 (6.2)	--	16 (25.4)
	Nai	--	5 (100)	--	--	--	--	--	5 (7.9)
	Suniare	--	--	1 (20)	3 (60)	1 (20)	--	--	5 (7.9)
	Tarkhan	2 (16.7)	5 (41.7)	3 (25)	2 (16.7)	--	--	--	12 (19)
<b>Total</b>		15 (23.8)	21 (33.3)	14 (22.2)	8 (12.7)	3 (4.8)	1 (1.6)	1 (1.6)	63
Scheduled Caste (SC)	Ad-Dharmi	28 (15.4)	71 (39)	41 (22.5)	31 (17)	8 (4.4)	3 (1.6)	--	182 (64.3)
	Bazigar	3 (27.3)	7 (63.3)	1 (9.1)	--	--	--	--	11 (3.9)
	Ravidasiye	2 (11.1)	8 (44.4)	6 (33.3)	2 (11.1)	--	--	--	18 (6.4)
	Sarehde	6 (11.5)	22 (42.3)	19 (36.5)	5 (9.6)	--	--	--	52 (18.4)
	Valmiki	8 (40)	6 (30)	4 (20)	2 (10)	--	--	--	20 (7.1)
<b>Total</b>		47 (16.6)	114 (40.3)	71 (25.1)	40 (14.1)	8 (2.8)	3 (1.1)	--	283

The data on household income, when segregated by social groups, suggests that the highest concentration of general category households (about 37 per cent) fall under the range of Rs. 10,000-15,000. Similarly, the highest concentration of OBC (about 33 per cent) and SC households (about 40 per cent) was found to be in the range of Rs. 5,000-10,000. The caste-wise analysis of monthly household income suggests that Saini caste households constitute nearly more than 65-70 per cent of all the general category households in all the income ranges exceeding Rs. 15,000. Similarly, Ad-dharmi caste households among SC represented a caste group with as many as 77-100 per cents of all SC households with monthly income in the range of Rs. 15,000 and above. Gujjar caste households constituted nearly 80 per cent of all the OBC households with a monthly income less than Rs. 5,000.

### **3.3 Sociodemographic and economic profile of the migrant population**

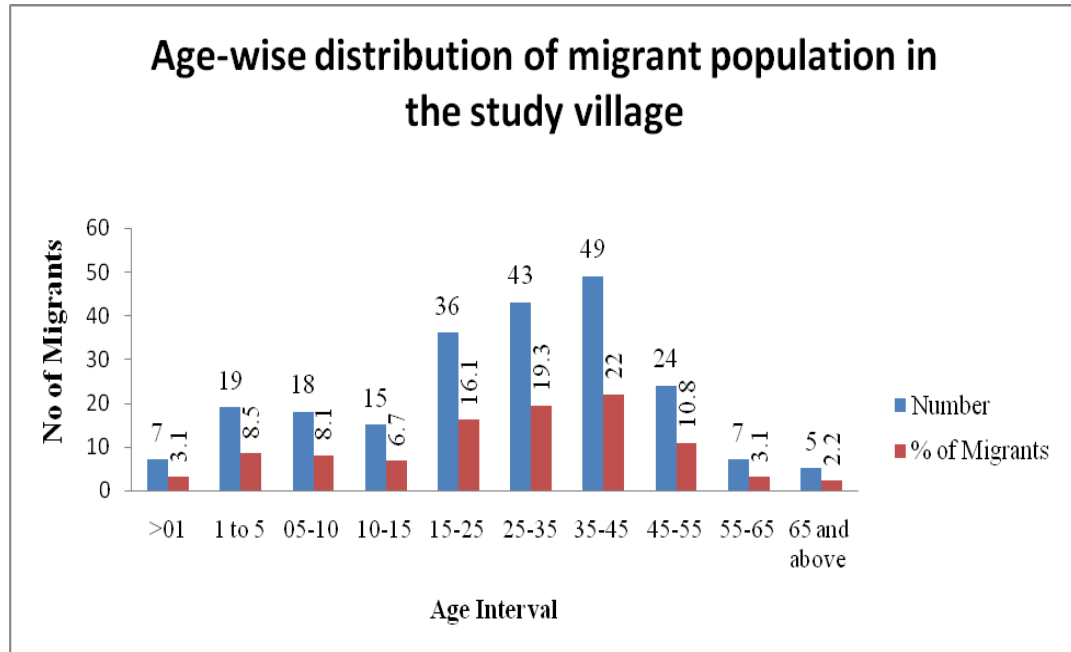
The migrant population in the study village belonged to various villages of Budaun and Bareilly districts in Uttar Pradesh. There were 41 households of in-migrants in the village at the time of completing the household survey. They all reported belonging to Rajput caste. As regards, the land ownership, almost thirty per cent households claimed to own land in their respective villages in Uttar Pradesh. The total migrant population residing in the study village was found to be 223. The average household size was found to be 5.28. A total of thirty-four households were male-headed (about 83 per cent) while seven (17 per cent) reported being headed by a female. The total number of males and females in the population was found to be 122 and 101 respectively. Thus, the sex ratio among the migrant population was 827. The number of children in the age group 0-6 was found to be 39. The respective number of male and female children in the age group 0-6 was found to be 25 and 14 respectively.

#### **3.3.1 Age-wise distribution of the migrant population**

The age-wise distribution shows that a little more than two third of the migrant population (about 68 per cent) was in the age group 15-44 years. The highest proportion of the population fell in the age group 35-44 years followed by those in the age group 25-34 and 15-24 years. It was found that almost 27 per cent population was



in the age group 0-15. The remaining five per cent of the population was in the age group 55 and above (Fig.3.2).



**Fig. 3.2 Age-wise distribution of the migrant population in the study village**

### 3.3.2 Activity status and occupation

At the time of the survey, about 60 per cent in-migrant population reported being “working”. The reported percentage of working males and females was found to be 66 and 34 per cent respectively. About 12 per cent of women also reported engaging in their respective housework alone. Contrary to the reported activity status during the household survey, I observed that possibly every single member of the household among the migrant population including children as well as elderly worked in the agricultural fields during the peak season of agriculture.

**Table 3.8: Distribution of migrant population by activity status**

<b>Activity status</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Total</b>
Working	89 (66.41)	45 (33.59)	134 (60.08)
Not working	33 (52.38)	30 (47.61)	63 (28.25)
Housework	00	26 (100)	26 (11.66)
Total	122	101	223

As regards the type of occupation, male migrants reported being engaged as agricultural labourers in the study village for the most of the year, they also acknowledged their engagement as daily wagers in the non-agriculture sector for a part of the year, specifically during the slack season of agriculture. Migrant women, on the other hand, reported working exclusively as agricultural labourers in the study village. It may, however, be noted that those reported as not working during the household survey were often found working in the agricultural fields during the peak agriculture season.

Both men and women who worked in the agriculture sector accounted for almost 84 per cent of the reported economically active population — the proportion of male migrants involved in agriculture sector as waged labourers was higher (almost 60 per cent) than that of those working in the non-agriculture sector while women worked only in the agriculture sector (Table 3.9). It was, however, difficult to segregate the work of migrant labourers falling into the agriculture and non-agriculture sector as all of them at some point of time worked in the non-agriculture sector owing to non-availability of work in the agriculture sector during the slack season. This classification was thus based on the duration of employment in either of the sector, i.e., based on those who reported themselves to be working for a major part of the year working in any of the two sectors.

**Table 3.9: Distribution of in-migrant population by occupation status**

Occupation status	Male	Female	Total
Agricultural Labourers	68 (60.17)	45 (39.83)	113 (84.32)
Daily Wage Labourers (Other than Agr.)	21 (23.6)	00	21 (15.68)
Total	89 (66.41)	45 (33.59)	134

**3.3.3 Marital status**

At the time of the household survey, about 58 per cent of the in-migrant population was married. The number of unmarried in-migrant males was higher than that of unmarried in-migrant females. It was found that the number of widows was considerably higher than those of widowers.

**3.3.4 Education**

As regards the education level, as high as 61 per cent in-migrant population was illiterate. A mere six per cent population was educated till 8<sup>th</sup> standard. Among those educated till 8<sup>th</sup> standard, the number of male in-migrants was considerably higher than the females. Not even a single woman in the in-migrant population was educated till 10<sup>th</sup> standard (Table 3.10).

**Table 3.10: Level of Education among the migrant population in the study village**

Level of education	Male	Female	Total
Not attending school	25 (62.63)	15 (39.07)	40 (17.94)
Illiterate	65 (48.14)	70 (51.85)	135 (60.54)
Primary	19 (59.37)	13 (40.62)	32 (14.35)
Middle	11 (78.57)	03 (21.43)	14 (6.27)
Matriculation	02 (100)	00	02 (0.90)
<b>Total</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>223</b>

### 3.3.5 Income

Of all the in-migrant households, almost 49 per cent reported their monthly household income to be less than Rs. 5000. Those who reported their income in the range of Rs. 5,000-10,000 were found to be almost 41 per cent while the households with monthly income more than Rs. Ten thousand but less than Rs. 15,000 attributed to almost 10 per cent of the total in-migrant households (Table 3.11)

**Table 3.11: Distribution of in-migrant households by income**

Monthly Income (in Rs.)	No. of HH
Less than 5000	20 (48.8)
5000-10000	17 (41.5)
10000-15000	04 (9.8)
<b>Total</b>	<b>41</b>

This section discussed findings of the household survey among the migrant population in the study village broadly. The analysis of the data on the household survey clearly shows that the migrant population is qualitatively different from the local population. As regards the caste background, all migrants reported belonging to Rajput caste while the local population belonged to various caste groups and hence could be classified into various social categories. As regards the occupation status, the local population is engaged in a variety of occupations while the migrant population is mostly engaged in manual labour with relatively higher percentage of the population being engaged in agriculture as agricultural labour. To sum up, it appears that the migrant population in the village is relatively less heterogeneous when compared to the local population. The next section details the socio-demographic and economic profile of both local and migrant women agricultural labourers. It is pertinent to note that both local and migrant women agricultural labourers are qualitatively different yet they have been merged in the following section as the quantitative indicators for both categories of women were the same.

### **3.4 Socio-demographic and economic profile of women agricultural labourers**

This section details the socioeconomic and demographic profile of both ‘local’ and ‘migrant’ women agricultural labourers in the study area. Their socio-demographic characteristics such as age, marital status and level of education as well as household characteristics such as the type of family, family size, household headship, monthly income, to name few, are discussed in this section.

At the time of the household survey, 89 original inhabitant or ‘local’ women from 81 households in the village worked as agricultural labourers. There were eight households wherein more than one woman who worked as agricultural labourers. Among these eight households, only one household had three women (woman and her two daughters) working as agricultural labourers while seven households had two women agricultural labourers.<sup>44</sup> Among these women, a total of 45 women from 42 households reported working as agricultural labourers as and when work was available throughout the year while 44 women from 39 households reported working only during the peak season of agriculture in the study village.

As regards the migrant agricultural labourer households, at least one woman from all the 41 migrant households worked as an agricultural labourer. There were two in-migrant households wherein three female members from each household reported to work as agricultural labourers. Thus, at the time of the survey, a total of 45 migrant women reported being working as agricultural labourers. However, I found that virtually every member of the migrant households worked as agricultural labourer given agricultural work was available.

#### **3.4.1 Caste**

The caste-wise distribution of women who worked as agricultural labourers in the study village suggests that about 88 per cent of all the local women who worked as agricultural labourers belonged to the scheduled castes. Women from Saini caste

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<sup>44</sup>Among seven households wherein more than one woman worked as agricultural labourers, two households had mother-in-law and daughter-in-laws working as agricultural labourers while four households had mother and daughter worked as agricultural labourers.

constituted about 12 per cent of all the local women agricultural labourers while all ‘migrant’ women agricultural labourers belonged to the Rajput caste (Table 3.12).

### 3.4.2 Age

The age-wise distribution of female agricultural labourers across both local and migrant categories suggests that about 60 per cent of all those in the age group 15-25 belonged to the migrant category. As many as 82 per cent Saini women who worked as agricultural labourers were in the age groups 35-65 years. Among the local Scheduled Castes and migrant Rajputs, women in the age group 65 and above also reported working as agricultural labourers. Their percentage in the age group 65 and above was, however, higher among the Scheduled Castes (about 86 per cent). Nearly 33 per cent women agricultural labourers were in the age group 45-55 years among the local scheduled castes. As many as about 38 per cent migrant women agricultural labourers were in the age group 35-45 years. Among the migrant agricultural labourers, about 67 per cent women were in the age group 25-45 years while those in the age group 45-55 years constituted about 25 per cent of all migrant women agricultural labourers.

**Table 3.12: Caste and age-wise distribution of women agricultural labourers**

Social Group	Caste	Age Group of WAL						Total
		15-25	25-35	35-45	45-55	55-65	65+	
General	Saini	2 (18.2)	--	6 (54.5)	1 (9.1)	2 (18.2)	--	11
SC	Ad-dharmi	--	9 (18.4)	14 (28.6)	17(34.7)	5 (10.2)	4 (8.2)	49
	Ravidasiya	--	--	3 (33.3)	4 (44.4)	--	2 (22.2)	09
	Sarehde	2	2	7	5	1	--	17
	Valmiki	--	1	1	--	1	--	03
Total		02 (2.6)	12 (15.4)	25 (32.1)	26(33.3)	7 (9)	6 (7.7)	78
Migrant	Rajput	06 (13.3)	13 (28.9)	17 (37.8)	6 (13.3)	2 (4.4)	1 (2.2)	45
Total		10 (7.4)	25 (18.6)	48 (35.8)	33 (24.6)	11 (8.2)	07 (5.22)	134

### 3.4.3 Marital status

As regards the marital status, the percentage of unmarried female and widows among agricultural labourers was about 7 and 16 per cent respectively. A vast majority of women among agricultural labourers (about 77 per cent) were married. The caste-wise segregation, however, suggests that among women belonging to Saini caste, the percentage of married women was relatively lower (about 54 per cent) compared to women belonging to other castes. The percentage of widows who worked as agricultural labourers was also highest among those belonging to Saini caste. The widow percentage among migrant agricultural labourers was 20 per cent.

**Table 3.13: Marital status of women agricultural labourer**

Social Identity	Marital Status			Total (N=134)
	Married	Unmarried	Widow	
Saini	06 (54.5)	02 (18.2)	03 (27.3)	11
Ad-dharmi	42 (85.7)	02 (4.1)	05 (10.2)	49
Ravidasiya	07 (77.8)	--	02 (22.2)	09
Sarehde	13 (76.5)	2 (11.8)	02 (11.8)	17
Valmiki	03 (100)	--	--	03
Rajput (Migrant)	32 (71.1)	04 (8.9)	09 (20)	45
Total	103 (76.8)	10 (7.5)	21 (15.7)	134

### 3.4.4 Education

The education level of women agricultural labourers suggests that a little less than half (about 47 per cent) of all agricultural labourers were illiterate while about 19 per cent had attained education till primary level. Very few women (about 2 per cent had attained education till 12<sup>th</sup> standard, and all of them belonged to Saini caste. The caste-wise analysis of education level of women agricultural labourers suggests that about 87 per cent migrant women belonging to the Rajput caste were illiterate. The percentage of women with primary (5<sup>th</sup>), as well as matriculation level (10<sup>th</sup>) of education, was highest among those belonging to Sarehde caste. The caste and age-wise distribution of women agricultural labourers and their level of education are given in **Appendix B**.

**Table 3.14: Level of education among women agricultural labourers across various caste groups**

Caste	Illiterate	Below Primary (5 <sup>th</sup> )	Primary (5 <sup>th</sup> )	Middle (8 <sup>th</sup> )	Matriculation (10 <sup>th</sup> )	Intermediate (10+2)	Total
Saini	3 (27.3)		3 (27.3)		2 (18.2)	3 (27.3)	11
Ad-dharmi	15 (30.6)	3 (6.1)	13 (26.5)	9 (18.4)	9 (18.4)		49
Ravidasiya	4 (44.4)	2 (22.2)	1 (11.1)	1 (11.1)	1 (11.1)		9
Sarehde	1 (5.9)		7 (41.1)	5 (29.4)	4 (23.5)		17
Valmiki	1 (33.3)	1 (33.3)	1 (33.3)				3
Rajput	39 (86.7)	06 (13.3)					45
Total	63 (47)	12 (8.9)	25 (18.9)	15 (11.1)	16 (11.9)	3 (2.2)	134

### 3.4.5 Family type and family size

It was found that about 84 per cent of all the households wherein women worked as agricultural labourers had nuclear families. Further, among all the households wherein women reported working only during the peak season of agriculture, about 82 per cent had nuclear families (**Appendix-C**). All Valmiki households wherein women worked as agricultural labourers had nuclear families while about 90 per cent Saini, Ravidasiya and Sarehde households had nuclear families. The Rajput migrant households had the highest percentage (about 24 per cent) of joint families among all castes.

The family size among migrant women agricultural labourer households varied from a minimum of 3 members to a maximum of 8 members. However, about 70 per cent migrant households had family size 4-7. The family size among the local agricultural labourer women households varied from a minimum of one member to seven members.



**Table 3.15: Caste-wise distribution of households with family type and family size**

Social group	Type of Family	Family Size								Total (N=122)
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
Saini	Joint	--	--	01	--	--	--	--		01
	Nuclear	--	1 (12.5)	3 (37.5)	2 (25)	2 (25)	--	--		08
Ad-dharmi	Joint	--	--	--	--	3 (50)	1 (16.7)	2 (33.3)		06
	Nuclear	1 (2.6)	4(10.3)	5 (12.8)	10 (25.6)	12 (30.8)	5 (12.8)	2 (5.1)		39
Ravidasiya	Joint						1			01
	Nuclear	--	1 (12.5)	1 (12.5)	2 (25)	3 (37.5)	1 (12.5)	--		08
Sarehde	Joint	--	--	--	1	--	--	--		01
	Nuclear	--	--	7 (50)	4 (28.6)	3 (21.4)	--	--		14
Valmiki	Joint	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
	Nuclear	--	--	--	--	3	--	--		03
Migrant	Joint	--	--	--	--	--	--	8	2	10
	Nuclear	0	0	2	11	7	11	--	--	31
Total	Joint			1	1	3	2	10	2	19
	Nuclear	1	6	18	29	30	17	2	0	103

### 3.4.6 Income

The reported individual monthly income of local women agricultural labourers varied in the range of Rs 2500-4500. The migrant women agricultural labourers did not receive any individual wages as they worked as a familial unit.<sup>45</sup> A little less than half (about 47 per cent) of local women who worked as agricultural labourers reported monthly income Rs 3000 while about 32 per cent reported their monthly income as Rs. 3500. Only one Ad-dharmi woman reported her monthly income as Rs. 4500.

<sup>45</sup> Their household male members however reported monthly household incomes.

**Table 3.16: Caste-wise distribution of type of work with reported monthly income**

Social Identity	Type of WAL	Monthly Income reported by WAL						Total
		2500	3000	3200	3500	4000	4500	
Saini	ALc	--	2 (33.3)	--	4 (66.7)	--	--	6
	ALo	2 (40)	2 (40)	--	1 (20)	--	--	5
Ad-dharmi	ALc	1 (4)	12 (48)	--	7 (28)	4 (16)	1 (4)	25
	ALo	--	15 (62.5)	--	6 (25)	3 (12.5)	--	24
Ravidasiya	ALc	--	3 (75)	--	--	1 (25)	--	4
	ALo	1 (20)	2 (40)	--	--	2 (40)	--	5
Sarehde	ALc	--	1 (14.3)	--	5 (71.4)	1 (14.3)	--	7
	ALo	--	5 (50)	--	4 (40)	1 (10)	--	10
Valmiki	ALc	--	--	1 (33.3)	2 (66.7)	--	--	3
	ALo							
Total	ALc	2	18	1	18	6	1	46
	ALo	2	24	--	11	6	--	43
Grand total	ALc + ALo	4	42	1	29	12	1	89

**Table 3.17: Distribution of women agricultural labourer household income across various caste groups**

Caste	Type of WAL	HH income (in INR )					Total
		<5000	5-10,000	10-15000	15-20,000	20-25,000	
Saini	ALc	--	5	1	--	--	06
	ALo	--	2	--	1	--	03
Ad-dharmi	ALc	1	7	10	2	2	22
	ALo	2	8	7	5	1	23
Ravidasiya	ALc	--	3	1	--	--	04
	ALo	--	2	2	1	--	05
Sarehde	ALc	--	05	02	--	--	07
	ALo	--	02	05	01	--	08
Valmiki	ALc	--	2	1	--	--	03
	ALo	--	--	--	--		
Total (Local)	ALc	03 (3.7)	36 (44.4)	29 (35.8)	10 (12.3)	03 (3.7)	81
Migrant	ALo	20	17	04	--	--	41
	ALc						
Total (Migrants)	ALc + ALo	20 (48.8)	17 (41.5)	04 (9.7)	--	--	41
Grand total	L+M	23 (18.8)	53 (43.4)	33 (27.2)	10 (8.2)	3 (2.4)	122

ALc and ALo represent women working throughout the year and peak season of agriculture respectively.

The monthly household income varied from a minimum of Rupees Two thousand five hundred to a maximum of Twenty-five thousand among local agricultural labourer households. As many as 84 per cent households with local women agricultural labourers earned a monthly income in the range of Rs. 5000-15000 while about 12 per cent had a monthly household income in the range of Rs. 15000-2000. Very few (almost 4 per cent) local agricultural labourer households earned a monthly income in the range of Rs. 20000-25000. The reported monthly household income among the migrants was lower compared to the local agricultural labourer households as the highest monthly household income among the migrants was Rs. 15000. Also, as high as 90 per cent migrant households reported monthly income below Rs.10, 000.

### **3.4.7 Number of earners**

The number of earners in each of the local agricultural labour households including women agricultural labourers varied from a single individual to a maximum of five family members engaged in various occupations. However, there were very few households (about 2.4 per cent) wherein five members worked. All these households with five working members belonged to the Ad-dharmi caste. The migrant agricultural labourers reported a maximum of four working members. As many as 50 per cent migrants as well as local households reported three and two working members respectively. Most local agricultural labourer households (nearly 83 per cent) reported 2 or 3 earners. On the other hand, very few (only three households, one among Sini and two among Ad-dharmis) had only one earning member, i.e. a woman working as an agricultural labourer.

Further, the number of local women agricultural labourer households when disaggregated into the categories of those working throughout the year and working only during the peak season shows that in most local households with two working members, the number of households with women working as agricultural labourers throughout the year (ALc) is higher. On the other hand, the households wherein three members are working, the number of women working during the peak season (ALo) is higher among all caste groups. It thus appears that as the number of earners in a

household increase, women's engagement as an agricultural labourer throughout the year decreases.

**Table 3.18: Distribution of women agricultural labourer households across various caste groups as per the number of earners per household**

Social Group	Type of WAL	No of Earners in women agricultural labour households					Total no. of households
		1	2	3	4	5	
Saini	ALc	1	5	--	--	--	6
	ALo	--	3	--	--	--	3
Ad- Darmi	ALc	1	9	8	2	2	22
	ALo	1	9	9	3	1	23
Ravidasiya	ALc	--	3	1	--	--	4
	ALo	--	1	3	1	--	5
Sarehde	ALc	--	6	1	--	--	7
	ALo	--	4	3	1	--	8
Valmiki	ALc	--	2	--	1	--	3
	ALo	--	--	--	--	--	--
Migrant	ALc	--	10	22	9	--	41
	ALo	--	--	--	--	--	--
Total		3 (2.4)	52 (42.6)	47 (38.5)	17 (13.9)	3 (2.4)	122

In the above section, I have discussed the socio-demographic and economic attributes of both local and migrant women agricultural labourers. As discussed in the methodology chapter, their individual and household characteristics were used for selection of women agricultural labourers for the detailed interviews. This chapter gave a broad overview of the village not only in terms of location, civic amenities and social facilities but also detailed the findings of the household census survey of the village in terms of the land distribution across various caste groups, composition of village population across caste and sex, economic activity, nature of occupation and household income. The household data of the village thus gave the overall socio-economic and other characteristics of the village population. The broader context of the village depicting migration and agrarian change within which we situate the lived experiences of women agricultural labourers is discussed in the next chapter.

## **Chapter 4**

# **Migration and Agrarian change: Context of the Study**



## **4. Migration and Agrarian change: Context of the Study**

The present chapter sets the broader context of the study as I discuss the two related processes of labour migration and agrarian change in the study village. The chapter, however, for the reasons of clarity, is divided into two broad sections wherein each of these is elaborated further. The section on migration details the migrant labourers' perspective of the migration process and is based on the in-depth interviews conducted with male migrant labourers from different migrant settlements in the village. It also reflects multiple motivation or reasons to migrate from their respective study villages, thereby emphasising the socio-cultural as well as economic aspects of migration. Their narratives of being migrants at the study village are also discussed. The second section attempts to discuss the agrarian change in terms of production process, crop cycle, and organisation of production, types of labour arrangements, work conditions and relations of production. The qualitative data discussed in this section is based on interviews conducted with farmers, men and women local and migrant agricultural labourers as well as key informants.

### **4.1 Labour Migration**

This section traces the commencement of in-migration to the study village through the interviews conducted with the in-migrants, key informants and the farmers of the study village. It also aims to describe what it means to be a 'migrant' labourer in the selected study village as experienced by the migrants themselves. Also, the pattern, nature and determinants of migration are discussed at length as the further subsections of this chapter. The problems and stress associated with migration specifically the psycho-social alienation experienced by the migrant labourers are also discussed. Thus, an attempt is made in this section to describe the experiences of migrant labourers as the same reflects the inner working of power relations in the study village.

#### **4.1.1 Roots and route of migration**

As regards tracing the origin of migration to the study village, a discussion with some of the migrant households revealed that their relatives/friends/ acquaintances from their district or nearby native villages who had migrated earlier to sites around the study village played an important role. It was through them that they got to know about the availability of work in the study village. The knowledge about the availability of work in the study village and familiarity with certain individuals working in the study village or nearby villages certainly attracted them to the study village. Thus, the role of migration networks cannot be overlooked.

During interviews with various inhabitants of the village, farmers and migrant agricultural labourers, I came to know that the in-migration to the study village started somewhere in the early nineties. This period marks the shift in crop pattern whereby farmers in the study village resorted to growing vegetables such as potatoes, peas, to name a few, along with cereal crops. The intensive crop cycle demanded more labour. The demand was met by the labour from other states, especially Uttar Pradesh. Eventually, the number of labourers from villages of UP increased to match the demand in the agriculture sector. It appears that the migration networks and the word of mouth as explained above also played an important role as evident in the narratives of migrant labourers. The carrot cultivation in the years following millennium increased the demand for labour manifolds. The influx of migrant labourers to the study village catered to this increased demand. Some of the migrant labourers at the largest migrant settlement in the village reported that they brought their families around 2003-04 and since then they have built their kulli (huts) at the land of the farmer with whom they work under certain conditions decided by the farmer (discussed later in the chapter).

The labourers from Uttar Pradesh typically travelled in a group comprising of individual families. They generally started in the evening and took a bus from their village to the nearest city or town railway station. One of the participants of research belonging to a village in Bareilly district, Uttar Pradesh, responded that they preferred Gorakhpur-Amritsar Jansadharan Express due to its convenient time. Another reason for preference of this train was that it does not require prior reservation. One could



simply buy the ticket and board the train. The train comprises of general coaches alone. The train would start at around 7 p.m. from the Bareilly junction and would arrive at Phagwara railway station at around 5 a.m. The Phagwara bus stand is situated at 5 minutes walking distance from the railway station. The labourers then would board a bus from Phagwara to reach Hoshiarpur Bus stand. After reaching Hoshiarpur, they would get on the local bus that dropped them on the Hoshiarpur-Chandigarh road close to the study village. They then walked on foot from the main road to the village under study. Given the train is on time, those from Bareilly reached the village around 9 a.m. It thus took them almost 16-18 hours from the source to the destination. Some however reached the destination via Una while boarding a train from Bareilly. The train till Una took almost 18-20 hours. The labourers then took a state transport bus and then a local bus to reach Hoshiarpur and the village respectively. While going back to their native villages, they preferred either of connections. The reported fare in reaching from their native villages to the study village ranged between Rs. 250 to Rs.350 per person.

Sometimes they borrowed money from friends or relatives to incur the expenses on travelling from their native village to the study village. Sheesh Pal, a 32years old migrant agricultural labourer residing in the study village with his family, reported that he had borrowed Rs. 1000 to meet the expenses of travelling to the village in Punjab. He later returned the money to his friend and sent it through his brother once he could arrange the amount by working as an agricultural labourer. He also reported that he does not prefer to borrow any amount from the relatives unless they extend the help themselves. Most migrant households reported an initial loan from a friend or relative specifically during the first visit to the study village. They generally attributed this loan to relieve the stress arising out of a sense of insecurity and helplessness of being in trouble in a distant land. Kalawati, a migrant woman agricultural labourer aged 35 years shared a similar sentiment as she narrated,

*Who knows when one may need the money at a distant land. One must carry some amount while being in a distant land. We keep some amount as well as carry some (wheat) grains with us.*

It thus follows from the above narrative that the migrant families brought some money as well as grain to counter initial insecurity emerging from any unforeseen circumstances. Some of those who came for the very first time reported carrying a few utensils as well.

#### **4.1.2 Reasons Cited for Migration**

The review of the literature suggests that migration cannot be simply reduced to the 'push' and 'pull' factors. Thus, to understand the nuances of migration as a social process, I attempted to understand the role of intrahousehold dynamics in migration as experienced by different individuals with varied circumstances. An attempt was made to understand the reasons for migration. This section thus discusses the narratives of selected migrants and the reasons that triggered migration. Quite often, the migrants responded reasons for migration in various phrases such as '*Gujara nahi hota (Not able to make ends meet)*', '*Ghar banana, theek karna (to build and repair the house)*', '*Shadi karni (to arrange for marriages)*', '*Kaam nahi milta (No availability of work)*', '*Gangaji aa jati hai (the Ganges hits the villages)*', to mention a few. Their narratives, on the other hand, reflected a great deal about their lives in their native villages and the individual circumstances that compelled them to migrate to the study village. I have, however, for the ease of presentation identified key triggers in the migration process as evident in their narratives as follows:

##### **4.1.2.1. Peer Pressure**

**Case 1.** Meshi Lal (29) belongs to a village in Budayun district. He is probably one of the migrants who have worked in the study village for close to 12 years. He and four of his brothers owned 3 acres of land in his native village. They lived along with their mother in their native village. Their father was dead long ago. Meshi Lal under the influence of a friend who migrated to one of the villages in Punjab wished to migrate, but his mother was not convinced. His mother and eldest brother (36, unmarried) stayed in the village to take care of their land and house. Meshi Lal assured her mother that they would be safe there as some of his friends already lived there. He came to Punjab with three of his brothers and two friends twelve years ago. They initially did not get full wage owing to their less age. But since they all lived together, they did not face much problem surviving in the study village. Eventually, they learnt the skill to negotiate with the landowner for the full wage and also started working on contract. Meshi reported that one of his brothers went missing some seven years ago

from the vegetable market in Hoshiarpur. He suspects that someone kidnapped him. Meshi Lal later got married and at the time of fieldwork lived with his wife and children. His brothers also lived with their respective families in the nearby huts. I met him a couple of times during the fieldwork as he liked to talk about his experience. Once during the interview, he very casually remarked that *Just like your men go abroad, in the same way, we come here to make money*. He also mentioned that his friends in the native village often talked about those who made their life better by migrating outside the village and that his friends played a great role in his decision to migrate. He also discussed the difficulties of being a migrant that are discussed later in the chapter.

The above narrative suggests that Meshi Lal migrated under the influence of friends and peers. This narrative also brings forth the inherent risk associated with migration. It also implies the pride in taking up a courageous decision to pursue migration as a livelihood strategy. At the same time, it implies that to most migrants, migration was an obvious and natural course of action to make ends meet. I got a similar response from many other migrant labourers who often talked about the migration of Punjabi men to various countries to draw parallels.

#### **4.1.2.2. Social values attached to work**

Ram Charan (21, single, working in the village for five years) lived with his parents and an elder brother who lives with his family in the adjacent hut responded,

*Anyone would work in a foreign land but not in their own country. Take the example of men from Punjab; they go to foreign lands to work. They won't work here (in Punjab), same is the case at our place. There is plenty of work in agriculture at our place. There they cultivate Wheat, pulses, sugarcane, etc., we, however, hesitate to work at our place. We could do any sort of work on the other hand in a foreign land. It is not considered prestigious to work on someone else's farm there. So, if someone works, it would be his own farm. Moreover, if someone goes to work at others' farm, they get very fewer wages. There is no work for labourers there. All the family members work in the field together. Sometimes, people work on a mutual basis. But none can get the work done by calling someone a labourer.*

The above narrative vividly brings forth a very important characteristic of the migrants wherein their social identity is rooted in the native village or society. Their selection or engagement with a particular kind of work at the native place was

determined by the perceptions shaped by social values at the native place. The work as agricultural labour is perceived to bring shame to the migrants at their native place. Thus, it appeared that the social values about the work as an agricultural labourer as well as fewer wages in agriculture at their native place also triggered migration. The corollary drawn by giving an example of out-migration from Punjab also seems to reflect migration as an obvious or normal course of action. Further, it follows that the work at the destination does not need to be guided by the local social values. Quite often it is work already shunned by the local labour force.

#### **4.1.2.3. Saving for Marriages and Repair of Houses in the native village**

Many migrant participants of the research often shared that they strive to make ends meet and save as much money as possible at the site of migration. The same surfaced in one of the interviews wherein the research participant (38, male, belonging to a village in Bareilly district) shared that

*(By migrating) Some earn to repair their houses in the native village while others earn to marry off their son or daughter. It is not easy to marry off children these days. The expenses turn out to be a minimum of one lac (emphasised). I have mentioned a minimum sum of Rs. One lac. Those who can afford even spend 2-3 lacs on the marriages of their children.*

It also leads us to understand the importance they give to the house and marriages at their native place. The expenses at the house and marriages thus seem to advance social status in the native village. Both of these factors also indicate their intention to return to their native villages. It also indicates the aspect of savings among migrant labourers. However, none of the migrant labourers ever talked of savings as they often reported that they barely earn to sustain themselves in *Pardes*. On the other hand, their narratives suggest that having spent longer duration in the study villages, they could arrange marriages which required a huge sum of money as well as repair houses in the native village, thereby indicating some savings on their part.

#### **4.1.2.4. To be able to pay the debt**

**Case 2.** Ram Pal is 26 years old and belongs to a village in District Budayun, Uttar Pradesh. He reported to be residing in the study village for 8-10 years. Ram Pal came to Hoshiarpur with one of his uncles for the first time after his father died in the year 2000. Ram Pal had a younger brother and an elder sister. Ram Pal mentioned that they were earlier under the debt his father owed in their native village. He also felt responsible for marrying off his sister. Since he was the elder male among his siblings and he had heard of the opportunities in Punjab, he asked his mother if he could also move to Punjab. His mother agreed and allowed him to go with his uncle to Punjab as they were struggling hard to survive in their native village after his father's death. He started working at a young age as an agricultural labourer in Punjab and got half the wages an adult got. He stayed in Machiwada with his uncle for close to two years.<sup>46</sup> Eventually, he got to know of the demand for labour in the study village and started working as an agricultural labourer in the study village. He also called his younger brother soon after. After working for almost five years in the study village, Ram Pal married off his sister in the native village. He also got married a year after in his native village and brought his wife to Punjab. Ram Pal at present lives with his wife, two daughters and his younger brother. His mother usually visits them when their native village is hit by floods. Ram Pal owns a semi *pucca* house in the native village but lives in a thatched hut in one of the migrant settlements in the village.

It appears from the above narrative that debt and sudden death of a family member prompted migration. Migration network played an important role in this case as support systems in the initial years of migration. Migration certainly is a livelihood strategy yet the decisions taken by the 'migrant' often reflect the social and cultural aspects wherein 'migrant' is a family member making decisions directed towards the welfare of family/ household.

#### **4.1.2.5. Not able to make ends meet at the native village**

Many participants of the research belonging to the villages in Uttar Pradesh often mentioned that they were not able to make ends meet at their native villages due to lack of availability of work and that they were compelled to migrate by their circumstances. Some of those who reported owning land mentioned that they found it almost impossible to sustain by working on their land. Neither had they found waged work in agricultural work all round the year in their native village nor the non-agricultural work such as Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee

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<sup>46</sup> Machiwada (Pseudonym) is a village near to study area and has a large squatter settlement of workers from states other than Punjab.

Act (MNREGA). On the other hand, they found continuous work as an agricultural labourer in Punjab during the peak season. During the slack season too, they found some form of agricultural work in the study village such as clearing the fields, planting eucalyptus or poplars, etc. Occasionally, in the absence of any agricultural work, they also worked in the construction sector as daily wage labourers.

Nonetheless, for the most part of the year, they worked as agricultural labourers and stayed along with their families in the temporary thatched hutments on the land of some of the farmers in the study village. In return, they were expected to work for that particular farmer during the peak season of agriculture. They could not work with any other farmers without the permission of the farmer who allowed them to build thatched huts on his land.

One of the migrant women (57, belonging to a village in Budauan district of Uttar Pradesh) once mentioned the economic compulsion as one of the reasons to migrate as,

*We came along with others as we got to know that the work was available in this village. We were not able to make ends meet. We were forced to come here out of our helplessness. No one leaves his country so easy.*

A similar response came up in other interviews wherein the migrant labourers mentioned that they were not able to make ends meet and hence ended up migrating to the study village. One of the migrant women (25) responded, *It is difficult to leave own country; it is the helplessness that makes us leave our country.*

Both these narratives highlight the emotional aspects related to the migration. The native place is often referred to as 'Apana Des', and the emotional difficulties and pain of leaving one's native place are thus clearly visible in these narratives. However, an elaborate account of the perceptions about their 'Des' as it emerged in their narratives is discussed in another section of this chapter.

All the above narratives discussed in this section thus suggest that the critical factors in understanding the migration process are not necessarily rooted in the destination but also at the source. Thus, it is equally important to understand the processes at the

source that shape the experiences of migrants. Further, the individual circumstances and decisions also play a very important role in the migration.

#### **4.1.3 Experiences of discrimination in day to day life at the destination**

The migrant labourers often expressed a feeling of ‘not belonging’ to the study village and yet strived to associate with the village under study through the use of Punjabi language. I often observed that while talking to the farmers or landowners, migrant men attempted to talk in Punjabi. Those who had inhabited the village for longer could speak the language to some extent while the relatively new migrants used some Punjabi words while conversing in their language. The children who were born here or those who spent most of their childhood in the village spoke Punjabi though they had a dialect different from that of the study village. Elderly women spoke part Hindi with certain regional words. The young and middle-aged women, on the other hand, spoke Hindi with many Punjabi words. I observed that many of them attempted to communicate with me in Punjabi despite my preference for Hindi while talking to them. My identity as belonging to the Punjabi community posed barriers and challenges of numerous sorts, yet they confided in me while sharing their complaints or grudges towards the inhabitants of the village. For instance, Ram Dulari, a woman aged 57 years shared how unhelpful was the attitude of the Punjabi household with whom her husband worked earlier prior having met an accident while cutting fodder at the very same household as *Your people do not listen to our requests.....Who listens to the poor and deprived? No one pities the poor and deprived.*

Meshi Lal (29) also shared that no one in the village cares about their existence. He shared the segregation that they experience in the village as *Those who have come from our State support us. People of the village discriminate against us a lot. They call us ‘Bhaiya log’ all the time. A migrant person is not valued anywhere. Punjabi people are only concerned about their work. They are not bothered for anyone else once their work is done.*

Leela, a 28-year-old woman, on the other hand, shared that they are living in the village as if they do not even exist. She told that no one in the village cared for them.

None bothered even to talk. She once said, *None has ever asked about us as you do. None from the village ever asked us the reason that led us to leave our state. They just come to get their (agricultural) work done.*

Radha (26) on the other hand narrated the discrimination experienced by their children at the school in the study village as

*Punjabi children even beat our children at the school. They think that a migrant's child should not come to school. The village children do not even sit with our children in the classroom. Some Punjabi children like our children while others are scared that our children are dirty. There are a variety of children at the school. We are labouring here and send our children to school hoping that they might learn something at school.*

Des Raj (29) also affirmed the existence of discrimination experienced by their children at school as;

*Punjabi children also discriminate against our (in-migrant) children in the school. Punjabi students at the school do not let in-migrant students sit along with them and call them bhaiya. At the school, Punjabi and in-migrant children sit separately.*

The above narratives thus show that migrant labourers get affected by the way landowners and people of the village discriminate against them. They felt disturbed at instances of discrimination and violence by children of the village against their children. Their attitude towards the landowner and the people of the village, in general, was docile. As it is evident in various narratives, they felt that their existence in the village social system did not matter much to anyone except for their labour. They were however proud of the labour they put in the agricultural farms. They considered their hard work as an asset and often felt proud about it. Many migrant labourers often mentioned that since they worked much more than the local labourers, farmers of the village preferred them over the local labourers. They perceived it as the main reason for the local labourer's infuriation towards them. This section thus largely discussed the experiences of migrant labourers as regards the lack of attention and concern by the study village population. It also helps in assessing their subordinate position specifically due to their migrant status in the village power



dynamics. The next section elaborates their negotiations and adjustments to daily struggles resulting from migration.

#### **4.1.4 Space and Place: Negotiations in everyday experience and Reconstruction of Meanings**

The experiences of migrants about their native place and the study village often get reflected in their narratives. The belonging and sense of attachment to their native place got clearer when they referred to their native place as 'Des' and the study village as 'Pardes'. The meanings attributed to the sites of origin surfaced up not only in their narratives but also actions. The native place was often associated with security arising from knowing the way of life and the social relations while the destination of migration was a site identified as insecure, unstable and conflict-ridden largely due to unequal power and social relations. However, it so appeared that the ones who have been living in the study village for a longer duration had developed a level of familiarity with the way of life of the village compared to the relatively new migrants. They were thus also able to associate meanings to the destination through everyday experiences and negotiations. The sense of familiarity thus developed also inculcated a kind of confidence to manage certain conflicts. The following narratives reflect what it means to be a migrant as perceived by the migrant agricultural labourers themselves. Their struggles to negotiate with the challenges posed by migration are also visible in these narratives.

Most migrant respondents often cited the sense of belonging to the native place in their narratives. I also observed that while sharing their everyday experiences, they often reverted to the past and compared or referred to their situation at the native place. The tone of voice, the silences and sometimes long pauses also exhibited their perceived vulnerability as migrants. One of the themes that emerged out of many narratives indicated towards the understandable aspect of anxiety resulting from insecurity and uncertainty at the destination. The insecurities, however, could be economic and/or social as observed in the following narratives.

*When we were at our native place, we used to think that life will get better. Now it seems that it was fine to be there than here. Here, we are*

*sometimes worried even about our meals. There we were not worried about our meals. We came here thinking that life will get easier, but now it seems that it was fine to stay back at the native place.*

Rekha Devi (34) is here referring to the uncertainties related to the two square meals at the site of migration during the slack season of agriculture. The uncertainty associated with getting work in the absence of agricultural work sometimes forces her to compare her present situation with the situation in her native village. The dichotomies of 'here' and 'there' emerge in this and most of the narratives depicting life as a migrant in the study village. This narrative also points towards the feeling of despair and unfulfilled expectations emerging out of the migration process. It, however, appeared to me that the lives of migrants oscillate between phases of hope and despair shaped by their everyday experiences at the site of migration.

It may also be noted here that since the migrants have been residing in the village along with their families, consanguine and people from the neighbouring villages of the same region, they also seemed to establish and assign new meanings to the place of migration and within this microcosm shared a feeling of community. This feeling was further reinforced by their work as they often worked together and thus needed each others' labour for their livelihood. I, however, observed that this sense of solidarity originating from belonging to the same region or village existed but frequently expressed among the respective migrant settlements in the village. The women of the different settlements hardly conversed. They were certainly confined to the limited space they inhabited in the study village. Further, the geographical separation of each settlement also prohibited their contact.

Those from different settlements in the village did not care much about each other except for any crisis when they all stood together for each other. They were hardly aware of who all lived in a settlement other than their own. However, they had a vague idea of which region or villages they belonged to at their native place. Those who have been staying in the study village for long had a fair idea about the village and its way of life. They never bothered to establish contact with the relatively new migrants.

On the other hand, the relatively new migrant labourers often approached the older ones in matters of various kinds. The difference seemed to be thus arising from the duration of stay in the study village. Thus, we find that the level of familiarity with the place owing to the restructuring of the existing meanings or construction of altogether new meanings also plays an important role in the migration process.

Those living in the village for long often unveiled their leadership qualities at various occasions, especially in the crisis. For instance, when Ram Dulari's husband met an accident while cutting fodder at one of the farmer's house, he was taken to the hospital by Hem Raj (one of the migrant labourers) from the older settlement. Later, he even negotiated with the farmer to reimburse the cost of treatment. The farmer was initially not ready to pay the compensation. Hem Raj then requested the landowner of their settlement to intervene. The landowner on Hem Raj's insistence convinced the farmer to compensate for the disability of Ram Dulari's husband. Thus, we find that some of those living in the village for long possessed some confidence and leadership qualities to tackle the crisis in a better way compared to the relatively new migrants.

The migrant settlements in the study village were the places at the site of migration within which migrants developed social relationships. Men and women engaged themselves in leisure activities with those living in the settlements itself. Thus, it appeared that the seemingly homogenous community of migrants was also segmented owing to their different geographical locations in the village as well as due to the time lag in migration. Men of the settlements often took out their cots from the huts and sat together in the evening while women of the households cooked. Men sometimes indulged themselves in drinking. The drinking was more rampant in the older settlements. The men who drank together also very often worked together. The migrant women also reported occasional quarrels among those who drank together. These quarrels were neither taken seriously nor did they affect their work. The relatively new settlements had, on the other hand, fewer instances of drinking. It, however, appeared that despite their association among each other at the migrant settlements, migrant labourers faced struggles of varied nature at the study village. They then situated their experiences by referring to their native village and study village as 'Des' and 'Pardes' respectively. These two words seemed to convey a lot in

understanding their challenges and struggles of being migrants. The next section of the chapter discusses the agrarian change and relations in the study village.

## **4.2 Agrarian Change**

This section describes the agrarian structure of the village. It includes a brief description of various socioeconomic categories and the relationships among them. To be able to understand the nuances of the structure, it is important to understand the relations of production. The understanding of relations of production becomes even more important as it not only helps in mapping the underlying continuities and change but also the complex power relations. It inevitably sets the context to understand the production process and division of labour in the same. Thus, the section aims to detail the agrarian structure as experienced during the fieldwork in terms of production process, crop cycle, organisation of production, types of labour arrangements, work conditions, and relations of production.

The analysis in this section inevitably brings forth the continuities and changes in technology, crop pattern and the shifting labour arrangements. The theme ‘continuity and change’ recurs throughout this section as I could observe during fieldwork that though there might have been changes in the mode and means of production, the relations of production seem to exhibit continuities and change. It is not to suggest that the relations of production have remained the same or that they have undergone a drastic change. It rather poses an important question as to what role has changing technology, shifting crop pattern and the changes in the labour force with the advent of labour migration and certain other factors played in shaping or reshaping the relations of production. The section thus addresses this question and attempts to understand the agrarian context of the study village broadly regarding agrarian structure as well as agrarian relations.

### **4.2.1.1. Agrarian Structure**

It was a difficult exercise to inquire about the landholding of each household. We have already discussed the details of challenges associated with collecting data on

land ownership in the chapter on methodology and methods. People were often very sensitive and cautious when asked about land, income and assets. Interestingly in the village, people had a very clear idea of landholding of others. The data thus obtained on landholding from each household was cross-checked with various respondents. The land holding estimates worked out by cross-checking with various respondents suggested that they could be classified into workable categories of small, medium, large and big landowners. It was further difficult to categorise them into watertight categories of landowners and tenants. Many times a person was landowner-cum-cultivator as well as a tenant as he happened to have land on lease. The complexity in classifying got even aggravated as such cultivators also often had leased in land in nearby villages other than the study village. Since the focus was on understanding the agricultural system of the village, the classification of landowners and cultivators is based on the ownership of land in the study village as well as tenancy arrangements in the study village alone. Certain small farmers leased out land to the large and big landowners for cultivation. It was also found that not even a single landless household leased in the land for cultivation. Most farmers during the interviews shared that agriculture was a highly unsustainable venture given the utmost investment of resources and minimal returns. Hence, the households which already owned reasonable size of land often took land on lease for cultivation. The agreements among the lessor and lessee households varied from the annual rent of the land leased out per acre to annual rent along with a share of produce. However, most of the lessor households preferred leasing out land on a contract yielding annual rent in cash. The farmers who leased in the land would often bear the cost of seeds, irrigation, machinery, electricity, pesticides, fertilisers, etc. At the time of harvest, they would pay the landowner in cash or shared the produce. It is difficult to say whether it was a matter of choice or necessity of the landowner yet it was found that those who leased out land largely preferred cash over the produce. The details of tenancy arrangements are discussed briefly as that was not the chief objective of the study.

Further, the area under cultivation, hereafter referred to as farm may not necessarily project the scale of production<sup>47</sup>. Thus, in order to identify various classes in the

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<sup>47</sup> Utsa Patnaik (1987) cautions about the excessive focus on acreage leading to an incomplete or partial understanding of the various classes in agriculture. See, Patnaik, Utsa (1987). Peasant Class

agricultural system of the village, not only did I rely on the conventional classification of the ownership of land, and worked out the net cultivated land (by taking into account the leased-in and leased out land) but also classified them in terms of the type of labour arrangement at the farm by assessing the scale of production<sup>48</sup>. It was done during visits to the farms while interviewing the farmers, and also with the help of key informants and other participants of research in the village. Thus, to be able to understand the nuances of various classes, it was important to first classify them into workable categories of small, medium, semi-medium and large landowners, and landless. The labour arrangements at respective farms and the intricacies of the scale of production were understood qualitatively in due course of fieldwork. The case reports in the following sections detail some of the characteristics of various classes of farmers identified in the study.

#### **4.2.1.2. Characteristics of Farmers by preferred labour arrangements and the scale of production**

As mentioned earlier, the land alone cannot be used as an indicator to identify various classes in the agrarian structure. To understand the nuances of various classes completely, the qualitative method can be of great use as one gets the insight about what it means to be a big or small farmer other than the mere ownership of land. I have thus attempted to look beyond numbers and yet again locate each of the farmers in the class ladder as I discuss the case reports of various classes of farmers.

*Case I:* Veerpal Saini is one of the large land owners of the village. He is 62 years old and belongs to the Saini caste. He lives with his wife (55) and a son (27). His son studied at Chandigarh and preferred to stay there. The elder son is a commercial pilot and has lost the job due to the recession. He is yet to renew his license and is living in the United States with his wife and children. Veerpal has been the *Sarpanch* of the village earlier before the current *Sarpanch*. He cultivates a total of 50 acres of land. He also owns some 8 acres of orchards. He has leased in 15 acres of land from an earlier inhabitant of the village now residing in the United States since the year 1992. The current annual rent of the leased in land per acre is Rs. 18000. The rent of the land is revised every year. There are no written contracts. The agreement is continued

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Differentiation: A Study in Method with reference to Haryana. Delhi: Oxford University Press. pp.19-50.

<sup>48</sup> We are not referring necessarily to the economics of scale of production. However, we will try to look into the scale of production anthropologically, i.e. as explained by farmers and key respondents.

as per mutual trust and by the value of the word. He owns a tractor and has five tube wells at his farms. He also takes services of five men who operate his tube wells and a driver for the tractor from nearby villages. He has started an Emu farm and is planning to take a break from agriculture. He merely supervises the work in his agricultural fields. He does not make use of family labour and primarily hires labourers for all agricultural operations. He makes use of machines and also hires the 'migrant' labourers for manual agricultural operations. The labourers clear fields, spread manure/fertilisers and pesticides, weed and participate in the harvest. The men at the tube wells look after the daily irrigation works. The sowing is largely done with the help of tractors. The driver ploughs the field with the help of a tractor. The tractor is also used for loading manure/fertilisers, pesticides, seeds and transporting the produce to the market.

*Case 2:* Bittoo *Sarpanch* is also one of the large farmers in the village belonging to Saini caste. He is nearly 38 years old. He lives with his mother (62) and wife (29). His elder brother lives in the United States along with his family. They, however, visit the village once in three to four years. Bittoo was also the *Sarpanch* of the village at the time of the fieldwork.<sup>49</sup> He owns and cultivates 60-70 acres of land. Other than that, he has not only leased in some land in the village but also nearby villages like Bilaspur, Boothgarh and Jattpur. As per one of the key respondents, Bittoo and his family did not originally belong to the study village. They had come to the village from Ganganagar in Rajasthan at the time of partition of India, and over the years, they have managed to not only purchase the land in the study village but also the neighbouring villages. It also refers to the changing land dynamics in the villages of Punjab. Bittoo makes huge profits from the crop of carrots. The market also has a huge demand for their carrots. In all these years, Bittoo has established a kind of brand image for his carrots. The carrots are packed in a sac with an alphabet indicating his nickname put on every sac that goes out of his fields in the market. These carrots also find the highest price in the market. Bittoo has five or six farm servants to take care of his farms.<sup>50</sup> Bittoo has to be on his toes all the day as he also has to visit the farms in other villages. All his farm servants are trustworthy and have been working with him for years altogether. However, Bittoo occasionally takes help of one of his Uncles in the village to supervise the work of his servants in his absence. Given the large area that he cultivates, Bittoo makes maximum use of the technology and machinery. He has four tube wells, three tractors, a combine machine and a carrot cleaning machine. He cultivates extensively and produces four crops in an agricultural season. He sows wheat, maize, carrots and seasonal vegetables like cauliflower and peas.

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<sup>49</sup> Throughout the initial stages of the fieldwork, in my numerous visits to his house, I could only meet him once in person. I could however talk to his mother and wife who informed me that he is extremely busy owing to agriculture and also due to his responsibilities as *Sarpanch*. The account hereby is largely based on information provided by key informants and personal observation based on visits to his fields.

<sup>50</sup> The farm servants differed from that of agricultural labourers as they rarely engaged in manual agricultural labour. The farm labourers in the study village included men in the age group of 20-40 years from nearby villages who largely carried out supervision activities or operated agricultural machinery. They took care of the most activities related to agricultural operations ranging from irrigation tasks to driving tractors and porting the seeds, fertilizers, etc, from the market to taking the produce to the market. Other than that, they also supervise the work of labourers in the farms.

**Case 3:** Mahinder Pal (59) is Jatt by caste and owns approximately 15 acres of land. Some of his land is affected by *choe*. He cultivates poplar trees in 3 acres of land. He has also leased in 5 acres of land. He owns tractor, tiller, thrasher, reaper and carrot cleaning machine. He also has three tube wells. He lives with his wife, son, daughter-in-law and three grandchildren. He and his son merely supervise the farms. They also have two farm servants to look after poplars and various other agricultural operations like irrigation. They hired combine to harvest wheat. For various other agricultural operations such as tilling, planting, weeding and harvesting, they hire migrant agricultural labourers. Mahinder Pal also owns a flour mill and a few shops in the village. He has however rented out the shops to people in the village. He has allowed some of the migrant labourers to live on his land. In return, they are supposed to work at his farm as a priority. He mentioned that growing poplars was a good investment. Also, the carrots and other vegetables yield good profit. He, however, did not share the details of his produce and profit in absolute numbers. He mentioned a rough estimate of his annual profit around one and a half to two lacs.

**Case 4:** Jogi is Saini by caste. He is 54 years old and lives with his wife and one of his married sons and his family. The elder son with his wife and children lives in the same house but on the first floor. Jogi has recently renovated his two-storeyed house. He cultivates almost 7 acres of land along with one of his sons. The elder son is employed in a factory. He is not engaged in agriculture. Jogi is one of the pioneer farmers who experimented with the crop of carrot. He lived in Phagwara earlier but moved to Hoshiarpur for a better future. He began cultivating vegetables like cauliflower followed by carrots. He shared that,

*The demand for carrot in the vegetable market of Hoshiarpur was not much when we initiated with the crop. Neither the production was up to the mark at that point in time. However, gradually there was demand from vegetable markets outside Hoshiarpur, for instance, vegetable markets in Chandigarh, Ludhiana and Jalandhar (They get a better price in these vegetable markets). Also, the production of the crop sped up with increasing mechanisation.*

He owns 5 acres of land and sows two crops (wheat and carrot) in an agricultural year and believes in leaving the land fallow for two to three months. He mentioned that he tends to get anywhere between 18 to 24 quintal of Wheat per acre. He, however, did not give many estimates about the carrot production as he believed giving estimates about the carrot production might invite evil eye. He, however, mentioned that the quantity of produce depends on a lot many factors including climate. Depending on the climatic factors and the amount of care put in by the farmer, one could get anywhere between 3.5 to 5 quintal carrots per acre. Jogi can often be seen in his farms along with his son. His son drives a tractor and also looks after the irrigation operations other than supervising the labourers in the farm. He owns a tractor, a thrasher and a carrot cleaning machine. Unlike the big farmers, he does not have any farm servant. He and his son both manage on their own the tasks performed by farm servants of big farmers. During the peak season of agriculture, it is very difficult to get sufficient labour. However, owing to good relations with the village women, Jogi hires women labourers of the village as well as a few in-migrant labourers. He prefers



local women labourers for many other manual operations in agriculture such as during the storage of carrot seeds and weeding operations. For cleaning the carrots, a group of 8-10 male labourers from a nearby village has been coming to his farms every year.

**Case 5:** Harkirat Singh is Saini by caste and is 35 years old. He lives with his wife, two daughters aged five and four years old respectively and mother. He is associated on a part-time basis with a company called Syngenta<sup>51</sup>. He mentioned that his father and ancestors were engaged in agriculture alone. He, however, was not interested in agriculture and tried many odd jobs. Since he could not succeed in anything else, he returned to agriculture and is now deriving his livelihood out of agriculture. He owns 3 acres of land and has a submersible tube well. He does not own a tractor but has a carrot cleaning machine. He mentioned that he cultivates wheat, maize, carrot and many other vegetables. Other than that, he also sows various vegetables such as corn (*Kacchi challi*), lady finger (*bhindi*), bitter gourd (*Karele*), French bean (France bean *diyan phaliyan*), Armenian cucumber (*tar*), Pumpkin (*kaddu*), chillies (*mirchan*), tomatoes (*tamatar*), garlic (*lahsun*), radish (*mooli*) and onion (*pyaz*). He sells all these vegetables through Commission Agent. He mentioned that although the vegetable markets of Chabbewal, Mahilpur and Hoshiarpur are nearby, they do not get the appropriate price in these markets. The vegetable markets of Ludhiana, Jalandhar and Chandigarh, on the other hand, yield good profit.

**Case 6:** Ranjit Singh (45) lives with his mother, wife and two sons. One of his sons (19) works with a private factory in Hoshiarpur. His younger brother (38) is unmarried and is not engaged in agriculture. He works in a paint factory in Hoshiarpur. He also lives with them. Ranjit owns 2 acres of land. He has been cultivating since past 8-9 years. He worked with a private factory earlier. He shifted to agriculture after his father expired. He owns a tractor and is planning to buy a carrot cleaning machine. He hires a thrasher during the harvesting of wheat. His sons and brother help him during harvesting season. His wife also works in the fields occasionally. He also hires local women labourers of the village. He grows wheat, corn and carrot. He also sows various vegetables such as cauliflower, peas, tomatoes, garlic, onion, etc. He mentioned that since he hires thrasher during harvesting of wheat, he is not left with much produce as the thrasher owner and the labourers also take the remuneration in kind. He however also told that whatever little profit he earns is through the cultivation of carrots and other vegetables.

#### **4.2.1.3. Patterns of mode and scale of production and hiring arrangements across various classes of farmers**

It was difficult to determine the individual preferences and practices of every farmer as regards the use of machines and hired labour. However, a broad pattern could be

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<sup>51</sup> Syngenta is a seed and crop improvement company that guides farmers to use their seeds and train them to increase the yield by altering their conventional methods. They promote their seeds and products by convincing the farmers to cultivate as per their methods by showing high yields (as narrated by Harkirat Singh)

observed across various classes of farmers as regards the use of technology and hired labour as discussed in the case reports mentioned above. The large and medium farmers in the study village extensively relied on machines and in-migrant labourers. They made use of machines and also hired labour on contract. They largely hired in-migrant labourers for their agricultural requirements. There was hardly any instance of a local agricultural labourer working for a big farmer. The big landowners also hired in-migrant labourers from nearby migrant settlements in Machiwada, as and when required. The medium farmers like the big farmers also hired migrant labourers for various agricultural operations. The semi-medium and small farmers made use of family labour as well as hired labour. The large farmers, on the other hand, never used family labour. They were engaged in agriculture as mere supervisors. Further, they had farm servants to occasionally work as supervisors for labourers. It also appeared that as the landholding size increased, the extent of family labour decreased. The small landowners made maximum use of family labour. On the other hand, large and medium landowners did not use family labour at all. Further, they were themselves not engaged in any manual work in agriculture. They merely supervised the labourers working in their fields. The semi-medium and small farmers preferred the local women labourers of the village over in-migrant labourers. At the time of peak season of agriculture, they relied on whosoever was available to them. The marginal farmers worked along with their family and hired a maximum of three to four local women labourers in their field as and when required. Undoubtedly, each of the landowners made use of machines. The extent of use of machines, however, varied across different classes of farmers.

One could also observe the differences among various classes of farmers by the clothes they wore. The big, medium and semi-medium farmers were often found dressed in tidy clothes while the small and marginal farmers were dressed up like labourers with their *pyjamas* often rolled till knees and heads covered with *parna* during the summer season. The stark differences visible from their dress were obviously on account of their active and manual engagement with agriculture.

Other than the use of technology and the preferred labour arrangement, there was also a great deal of variety in the number and types of crops sown by various classes of

farmers during the agricultural year as evident in the case reports. Further, the large farmers not only controlled the land in the study village but also nearby villages. Other than the above-mentioned indicators related to engagement in agriculture, and control over land, the political power also rested with them as they served as *Sarpanch* or *Panch* in the village panchayat. A graphic representation of the pattern is given in Table 4.1

**Table 4.1 Pattern of characteristics of various classes of farmers**

<b>Farming Households/ classes of farmers</b>	<b>Net Cultivated Land in study village (In Hectares)</b>	<b>Owns land outside the village</b>	<b>Level of Technology</b>	<b>Preferred Labour Arrangement</b>	<b>Family Labour</b>	<b>Farm Servant</b>
Small (Marha-Mota Kisaan)	1-2	No	Minimal (does not own machines but may hire machines)	Family Labour and 'Local' Women Agricultural Labourers	Yes	No
Semi-Medium (Chhota Kisan)	2-4	No	Minimal (may or may not own machines but hires machines)	Family Labour and Local' Women Agricultural Labourers	Yes	No
Medium (Thik-Thik/ Vichkarla/ Changa)	4-10	Some have/ Some do not	Moderate (Own some of the machinery and may hire if needed)	'Local' Women Agricultural Labourers and 'Migrant' Agricultural Labourers	No	Some have, some do not
Large (Wadda Kisan/ Jamindar)	More than 10	Yes	Maximum (Own most machinery required in agriculture)	'Migrant' Agricultural Labourers	No	Yes

#### **4.2.1 Technology, Crop Pattern and Composition of Labour force: Continuity and Change**

As mentioned earlier in Chapter 2, while tracing the changes in the agricultural system of the village, the years 1991-92 were considered to be baseline year against which we could compare the current agrarian situation. Thus, when we refer to the change, it is specifically compared to the years 1991-92. This section discusses the continuities and changes in the agricultural system of the village concerning technology, types of crops and agricultural labourers and is based largely on the interviews with farmers, key respondents and agricultural labourers. The observations also form an important component of this section. It thus builds upon the narratives of different classes of farmers, agricultural labourers and key informants. It thus also gives a sense of the various ways in which the population in the study area perceives the changes in agriculture in the study village.

##### **4.2.2.1. Technology**

Most of the participants informed that earlier very few people used machines and most of the agricultural operations were done with the help of manual labour. Machines are used these days extensively. For instance, during the wheat harvesting, combines and threshers are used. The practice of harvesting wheat using combines started some ten years ago. Combine owners bring combines to every village. They generally come from Patiala after harvesting the wheat. The wheat is harvested much earlier in their district. The Combine owners follow a specific route and harvest wheat in the villages on the way while following that route. The combine owners generally make contact with one of the landowners in the village and come to him every year. After that, the combine owner establishes contact with other farmers through the landowner or those who might be interested in getting wheat harvested using the combine would approach him.

One of the farmers in the study village suggested that it was economic to get wheat harvested using a combine compared to the manual labour as;

*While using combine, one does not need any manual labour as the grains are directly filled in the tractor trolley. Moreover, it is economical compared to hiring labourers for harvesting wheat. For instance, the harvesting using combine harvester costs almost Rs. 1000 per acre while the labourers seek anywhere between Rs. 3000-3,500 per acre. Adding other expenses to the remuneration, the cost reaches around seven to eight thousand per acres. The other advantage of harvesting with combine is that it saves time by harvesting an area as big as 20-25 acres in a day given the field area is continuous. However, manual harvesting of wheat yields more wheat chaff when threshed using a thrasher compared to the reaper.<sup>52</sup> {Rajvir Singh (47), Large Farmer}*

One of the sons of a medium farmer compared the carrot cultivation in nineties in terms of use of technology and output and shared:

*Earlier, we produced very small quantities of carrot and most of the activities related to the production were carried out manually. We started cultivating carrots around 1994. The carrots back then were washed with hands alone. And the production ranged from two to six sacks per day. The sacks would then be taken to vegetable markets on bicycles. Now almost 100 to 200 sacks (each weighing 50-60 kilograms of carrot) are taken out in a day. These days no less than two trucks full of carrots are sent to the vegetable markets in various cities during the peak season. Although mechanization has really been of great help in relieving farmers of the physical workload, it also results in wastage to some extent as the carrots also come under the tractor tyres. But it yields a lot of profit and saves a lot of time. Earlier, in order to harvest carrots in an area of one killa with the help of manual labour it took a minimum of ten days. These days, one can easily manage to harvest carrots in a killa with tractor. The produce is also washed with the help of machines and sent the very same day to the vegetable market. This saves a lot of time and one can also sow more crops. (Jeeta, 25)*

On the other hand, another farmer draws attention towards the increasing cost of cultivation due to the use of machine. He also pointed towards the increased prices of fertilisers and pesticides over the years. He seemed to convey that practicing agriculture was not sustainable be it by hiring manual labour or using machines as:

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<sup>52</sup> The reaper is used to make wheat chaff in the fields where harvesting of wheat is done using combine harvester.

*Machines have made the lives of farmers easier compared to earlier times. At the same time, not everyone can afford to purchase these machines. A combine harvester machine costs around twelve to thirteen lacs. It costed around 9 lacs four years back. Similarly, the tractor was priced around four and a half lac two years back and the current price is approximately Rs. 6, 25,000. The seeds, fertilizers and pesticides, etc. are also getting expensive day by day. Agriculture is becoming a pricey affair with every passing day. There is hardly any profit involved. The government is slowly and gradually pushing the burden onto the farmers by reducing subsidies on fertilisers. The dia<sup>53</sup> bag weighing 50 kilograms was priced Rs.560 six months back and now it costs approximately Rs.1300. Everything is getting costly day by day. A worker on daily wages a few years ago took Rs. 100 and now you do not get anyone for less than Rs. 250. The daily wages of an agricultural worker have also increased from Rs. 100 to Rs. 250. It is thus extremely difficult to sustain as a farmer these days. {Ravinder Singh (46), Small farmer}*

A local woman agricultural labourer in the village reported decreased days of work due to the increasing use of machines in the agriculture as:

*Most of the agricultural operations nowadays are carried out with machines. Carrot cleaning machine for instance saves a lot of time and effort. It used to be so time consuming and tedious to wash them with hands. We now get less work because for most of the agricultural operations there are machines. {Sukhvinder (39), Woman agricultural labourer}*

All the above narratives suggest the changes in technology largely in terms of increased use of machines and increased output. This is not to suggest that every farmer uses the available technology. As mentioned earlier, different classes of farmers made use of technology, hired manual labour and family labour in different proportion. There are still some small farmers in the village who hire manual labour for harvesting wheat. They however use the machines at various levels. For instance, the wheat stalks are cut by hired labourers while the grains are collected using thrasher.

Most farmers shared that the production of crops increased compared to the earlier years due to improved varieties of seeds, increased use of pesticides, fertilisers and

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<sup>53</sup> Ammonium *dia* phosphate in common parlance is called 'dia'

increased irrigation facilities along with the increased use of machines in agriculture. They, however, pointed that this demanded more investment regarding money and time. The crop cycle got shortened, but it required the intensive engagement of farmer in various crops and agricultural operations. They thus draw attention towards the decreasing profits in agriculture as mentioned in one of the narratives of a farmer. Some of the farmers related this very aspect to increasing disenchantment with agriculture among the youth and expressed that they did not see agriculture as an occupation with a secure future. The sons of farmers also lacked interest in agriculture. On more than one occasion, I observed the differences in appearances and interests across the generation of farmers. The sons of big and large farmers usually dressed up in tidy western clothes such as jeans and t-shirts. They carried smartphones and while being in the field were engrossed in their mobile phones. In my interaction with these young men, they shared the decreasing returns despite the excessive physical and emotional engagement as one of the main reason for their lack of interest. Most young respondents I came across at the agricultural fields shared that they wished to migrate abroad.

One of the elderly respondents also pointed towards the shifting land dynamics in the village. He noted that

*The land prices have also increased a lot in the years. The lease rates of land have increased exponentially. The price of land at lease was approximately Rs.3000 in the late seventies. In the early 90s, it hovered around Rs.7000-8000. These days it varies from Rs.15,000 to 25,000 per acre. As a result, the instances of big farmers leasing in the land have also increased. A small farmer cannot lease in land due to such high rent and further due to the increasing cost of cultivation. The lessors thus include the out-migrants of the village and people employed in various jobs. The phenomenon of leasing in the land has also changed in its pattern and arrangement. For instance, earlier it was largely sharecropping, but with the increasing cost of cultivation, the lessors prefer to lease in the land on contract whereby they could get an assured sum of money as rent. The Adh-watai system has almost disappeared due to various changes in the agricultural system. {Surinder Singh (78), Key Respondent}*

The above narrative very aptly captures the linkages between increasing cost of cultivation, out-migration and the shifting power dynamics in the village whereby

land is concentrated with a few households. He also mentioned that eventually, these big farmers end up buying the leased-in land.

As regards labourers, most local women agricultural labourers in the village viewed the changes in technology, especially increased use of machines in various agricultural operations in light of decreased days of work. Their descriptions of decreased days of agricultural work usually referred to a particular operation and their engagement in work regarding a number of days. One of the local woman agricultural labourers recalled that

*Earlier the picking [of carrots] was done manually. Once we got work at Bishan's farm for not less than 38-40 days. There were eight men and 10-12 women [hired for the picking of carrots]. These days, with machines [tractor] one may even clear a field [of carrots] as large as ten killa by evening. (Lakshmi, 50, Local woman agricultural labourer)*

In the above narrative, we find that Lakshmi points towards the decreased days of labour due to the increased use of machines. Thus, we find that different classes in the agricultural system of the village perceive and reflect the changes in technology in the study village from their respective vantage points. The agricultural labourers perceive the changes in terms of reduced availability of work while farmers point towards the increased output as well as increased cost of cultivation. Now we will discuss the changes in the composition of the labour force from the viewpoint of village residents, landowners and agricultural labourers.

#### **4.2.2.2. Crop pattern**

As per the Village Directory, the total area of the village is 731 hectares. The net and gross areas sown are 580 and 690 hectares respectively. Wheat (*Kanak*) and Maize (*Makki*) are two main cereals grown in the village. Based on the year 2011/12, the area under Wheat was 281 hectares while that under Maize was approximately 195 Hectares. A very few farmers grow Rice (*Jhona*), and it is largely for self-consumption. Same is the case with Sugarcane (*Kamaad*). Almost 28 hectares are used for various vegetables. A few big landlords own orchards. The area under various crops is given in the table.



We have mentioned earlier the various crops grown in the village and also the popularity of the village concerning carrots, it is important to understand the changes in crop pattern or sequence to understand the production process. The agricultural operations in the cultivation of crops that require manual labour are also discussed in this section. Wheat and maize are two important cereal crops grown in the study area. Maize is an intercrop between wheat and carrot. Some of the farmers, however, do not grow maize.

On the other hand, some grow various vegetables such as peas, cauliflower, cabbage, tomatoes, onion, garlic and turmeric in addition to the three major crops mentioned above. This section takes into account three major crops namely wheat, maize and carrot with respect to various agricultural operations in these crops and the level of mechanisation in each of these. Also, a distinction is made in terms of the use of various levels of agricultural technology and the extent of manual labour by different categories of farmers.

Among the cereals, wheat is planted in late October or early November. The big, medium and semi-medium farmers generally attach drills to the tractor and sow seeds. The small and marginal farmers may also use a drill or scatter seeds manually with the help of agricultural labourers. The first irrigation is needed around 20-25 days of sowing seeds. After that, it may require 3-4 rounds of irrigation. The pesticide is sprayed around the seed germination stage. The harvest begins around mid-April or later. The crop is harvested once the straw is dry and brittle. The big, semi-medium and medium farmers generally use combine harvester that reaps and threshes the crop all at once and is less time-consuming. The marginal and small harvesters on the other hand manually cut the stalks of the grain and bind them into bundles. The stalks are then put in a thrasher to get grains and *toodi*. The manual process is certainly tedious and time-consuming. The gender division of labour in the process is discussed at length in the further sub-section of the chapter. Once the wheat is harvested, it is taken to the Commission Agent for procurement. The price for wheat and rice is fixed by the Government. The minimum support price (MSP) for the wheat per quintal during the year 2013 was Rs.1350. The farmers, however, get the amount for their crop within a week or 10 days from the commission agent.

The *Kharif* maize is grown in the study area. The farmers in the study area preferred hybrid maize. The yield of this variety is greater and is primarily sown for harvesting green pods. The green pods are sent to the market in the monsoon season when there is great demand for the same. The seeds are sown right after the harvesting of wheat. The farmers referred to it as “*Agaeti Makki*” as it is sown a month in advance before conventional sowing of maize. Almost 4-5 kg of maize seed is sown per acre. The pesticide treated seeds are sown with proper spacing. It is again done mechanically or manually as per the available resources of respective farmers. The seeds require irrigation right after sowing. Two to three rounds of weeding by hand are required at an interval of 20 and 40 days after sowing accompanied by the application of manure and fertilisers. The crop is ready within 90 days depending on the climatic conditions. The green cobs are then plucked with hands and are sent to market. The farmers told that despite the great demand for maize in the market, they do not get much profit as the maize does not have a fixed price like wheat and rice. In the absence of MSP, they are often left with the vagaries of the market.

The carrots as a crop require intensive use of labour and care. One of the key respondents Randhir Singh mentioned that cultivation of carrot emerged as a successful alternative for many farmers in the village who were often troubled by the uncertain fate of potatoes. The further breakthrough was exploring the vegetable markets of big cities like Jalandhar, Ludhiana and Chandigarh. Due to greater demand of the vegetable in these markets, the farmers could get the desired profit. They were thus also able to overcome the monopoly of commission agents in the local market.

Some farmers reported having undergone a lot of loss growing potatoes before their experiment with the cultivation of carrots. Sometimes they were able to make a profit while on other instances there was an irrecoverable loss. One of the farmers named Jogi initially tried cultivating carrot almost 20 years back. Others got inspired observing his profits and started carrot cultivation. It has been more than ten years since many farmers in the village have started cultivating carrots. One of the farmers responded that carrots are ready in three months compared to crops like wheat which takes a minimum of six months. Other than that the farmer reported that it does not require as many pesticides or fertilisers as potatoes. Also, it does not lead to a drastic

loss. Another farmer shared that the cultivation of carrots requires intensive labour and at least two to three rounds of weeding. Though the farmer needs to be vigilant enough to take care of the crop, yet if someone is not able to take care even then it does not lead to a drastic loss. He also mentioned that some industrious small farmer households in the village earn very good profits given the utmost care they put into the crop.

The farmers of the village prefer to use the seeds produced in their farms. It is certainly economic compared to purchasing seeds from the market. Moreover, the farmer is assured of the quality of produce if the seeds are from his farms. It requires a lot of patience to collect seeds as the process is quite cumbersome. The carrot flowers in the form of umbels. These umbels are then manually cut apart from the stalk around May when they are dry. The flowers are then beaten with wooden sticks to obtain seeds. Some farmers roll the tractor wheels to get seeds. The seeds are then stored in dried bags and covered carefully to protect them from moisture till they are sown. Some farmers also sell the seeds to others in the village.

The seeds are sown around mid-August and harvested in the late October or early November. The crop gets ready in almost 70 days. The fields are prepared and the soil loosened. The carrot seed is then sown shallowly to the wet soil to ensure germination. The pesticides are also sprayed during this stage yet the crop requires almost two to three rounds of manual weeding. The first round of weeding is done after 30-35 days of sowing the seeds. The second round follows almost two weeks after the first round of weeding. In between, the crop may also require thinning. It is also done manually with great skill and care. It is one of the stages where farmers need manual labour. After 70 days, the carrots are plucked out. The big and medium farmers pluck the carrots with the help of tractors while many small farmers get it done manually by hiring labourers. The carrots are then cut apart from the leaves and filled in a sack. The cutting of carrots is also necessarily done manually. The carrots are later cleaned using a cleaning machine that uses water to rub off the soil. Most of the farmers use this machine. The cleaned carrots are then sorted based on the size and filled in the sacks. Each sack contains almost 50 kilograms of carrots. The sacks are then weighed and tied with a thread made of jute. These sacks are then loaded on

to the truck to send them to various vegetable markets in Jalandhar, Chandigarh and Ludhiana. A mini truck usually referred to as '407' carries almost 100 sacks of carrots. As reported by one of the farmers, the carrots yield anywhere between Rs.40,000 to Rs.1, 50,000 per acre depending upon the amount of time and care invested in the crop.

Some of the farmers also mentioned that *jhona* (rice) and *kamaad* (sugarcane) cultivation has also come to an end in the village. During the fieldwork, I did not come across anyone cultivating sugarcane and rice. I, however, come across a very few farmers cultivating sunflower and mustard. One of the key respondents also mentioned that earlier a variety of crops including coarse cereals such as barley and pulses of various kinds were also cultivated in the village. Their cultivation also seems to have diminished over the years. Many farmers reported that these days whatever profit a farmer can earn is out of the cultivation of vegetables such as carrot.

One of the farmers once explained the importance of experience gained by hit and trial method and the role of strategies in agriculture as well as inherent uncertainty in pursuing agriculture as:

*Agriculture is dependent on many factors such as quality of seeds, irrigation, and the climate, etc., Each of the farmers devises his strategy so that he can earn some profit. It includes sowing the seeds well in advance so that the crop could be sent to the market when a particular vegetable is not available in the market as yet. Some farmers prolong the sowing process so that the crop is ready at a time when a particular vegetable ceases to be there in plenty in the market. The availability of labour also affects their decisions related to the crops. In brief, the farmers devise different strategies to regulate the sale of their crops at a time when they could earn maximum profits. Not all are successful as their strategies do not prove beneficial all the time. Agriculture requires a lot of patience, intelligence and experience. Still, anything can go wrong anytime.*

Thus, it appeared that the cultivation of carrot as a successful alternative had been one such strategy to tackle the loss that involved much experimentation and hit and trial method adding to the experiences of the farmers.

#### **4.2.2.3. The labour force**

As mentioned earlier, the manual labour is required at every step in the cultivation no matter how mechanised the mode of production is. However, the extent of manual labour required in various agricultural operations varies from crop to crop. The carrot being a labour intensive crop requires much manual labour during weeding and harvesting operations. Particularly, during the time of harvesting, farmers need much manual labour to match the pace of tractors. The harvested carrots need to be picked fast. One of the farmers once mentioned that initially, the scale of production was also not that large as the farmers just began to explore this particular crop. The demand for labour was then met by the labourers from the village and also from other states who lived in a nearby village called Machiwada. Gradually, the success of the venture inspired many others to grow carrots. The labourers from villages of Uttar Pradesh catered to this increased demand in agricultural operations related to carrots. He also pointed towards the decreased involvement of local male agricultural labourers in the agriculture of the village over the years.

We also found in the household survey of the village that the majority of a male labour force of the village was involved in various sectors other than agriculture. One of the reasons reported for the same was the higher daily wages in the non-agriculture sector than that in agriculture. Some of the households which earlier worked as agricultural labourers reported that they sought work in private factories. A few even reported employment in the government sector. The women of the village, on the other hand, suggested that due to their limited mobility and lack of choice, they were bound to work as agricultural labourers. During the peak season of agriculture, specifically during the harvesting of carrots, many women of the village who otherwise do not work as agricultural labourers also work in the fields. Thus, in the event of the local male labourers' engagement in sectors other than agriculture, the demand for manual labour is primarily met by two categories of labourers (a) labourers that have their houses in the village, referred as local agricultural labourers and (b) those that have migrated to the village for work and belong to states other than Punjab. These labourers are referred to as migrant agricultural labourers. These migrant agricultural labourers include men and women of all ages as well as children.

On the other hand, among the local agricultural labourers, it was primarily women who reported working as agricultural labourers. Very few men reported working as agricultural labourers, as discussed in the previous chapter.

The next section discusses the nature of work, gender division of labour and wages of the local agricultural labourers followed by that of the migrant agricultural labourers. Various types of agrarian labour arrangements across the two categories of agricultural labourers that existed in the study village during the fieldwork are discussed. The wages, hiring conditions and terms of employment etc. for each category of labourers are also given. This section also describes various agricultural activities for which manual labour is required as well as the gender division of labour, if any, in various agricultural operations.

#### *Local Agricultural Labourers*

It was evident during the fieldwork that the male population of the village only work during the wheat harvesting season and their work is largely confined to making structures called *Kupp*. It is a conical structure for storing wheat straw. The women of the village largely belong to scheduled castes and certain other castes as identified in chapter 3 work as agricultural labourers in the field of some semi-medium or marginal farmers. Though each of the woman labourers gets their individual wage yet, they prefer to work with a specific set of women constituting a distinct group. These groups got formed over years depending upon their social relations and established a level of comfort in being able to work together. At the time of the fieldwork, there were three main groups of local women agricultural labourers in the village. Out of these, one group of women preferred to work in the field of farmers in the adjacent village Patti. The remaining two groups of women labourers generally worked in the field of selected farmers unless there is some difference of opinion. Each group had almost 12-15 women, and a head woman of the group referred to as *Thekedarni*. The landowners generally approached her and she, in turn, conveyed the message to fellow women of the group regarding the availability of agricultural work in the field of farmers.

Some of the semi-medium and marginal farmers hired local women labourers for most of their agricultural operations that required manual labour. The local women labourers worked in various labour arrangements such as daily wage labourers, casual labourers and at times worked to get wages in kind depending upon the crop they handled. For most agricultural operations other than the harvesting of wheat and maize, women got the wages in cash. At the time of fieldwork, women got a daily wage of Rs.120 for various agricultural operations in crops other than wheat. One of the women agricultural labourers reported that the wages are increased marginally every year after much persuasion and negotiation. I found that their wages were raised by Rs.10 the following year. In case of harvesting of wheat and maize, they worked for the grains. The various activities in other crops included sowing, transplanting, weeding, and harvesting. Women occasionally cleared the fields to post harvesting for preparation of the field for next crop.

In the case of wheat, most operations are mechanised other than the harvesting. Women find work during harvesting of wheat at the farms which do not use combine harvester. The farmers who use thresher require manual labour. While harvesting wheat, women sit in a squatting position. They hold every single stalk with one of their hands and cut it with a sickle in the other while collecting a few stalks in the hand as the capacity of fist allows. They then gather all the stalks on the ground alongside them while moving forward still on their toes. They, later on, collect all the stalks at one place in the form of a bundle. The bundle is then bound with a jute rope. The farmer or a male labourer hired for this specific task helps them in binding the bundle. The male labourer or farmer has the estimate of as to how many stalks are required to make a bundle. He accordingly guides the women labourers to add stalks to the next bundle and so on. The women cut the stalks and make bundles till the whole field is cleared. Once the crop is cut, the farmer hires a thrasher. The thrasher is operated by the owner (usually a man with a helper). Women lift and bring each of the bundles to the man operating thrasher. Each bundle weighs roughly around 35-40 kg. Women lift the bundles on their head to bring them to the person at the thrasher. They seek some help for the initial lifting of bundles off the ground which is offered either by the woman co-worker or the farmer/male labourer hired for this purpose.

Women then put off the bundles near to the thrasher. Two persons on either side of thrasher stand on the wooden platform attached to the thrasher. They unwind the bundle and put the wheat stalks into the thrasher. It separates grain and straw. The grains are collected in a tin container. A bundle of wheat stalks after going through thrasher yields anywhere between 13 to 15 kg grains. One of the women labourers informed that the grains are measured on the basis of the capacity of the tin container. They get almost one-tenth of the total produce which is then distributed amongst them. Thus, we find that the semi-medium and marginal farmers who cannot afford to get their wheat harvested using combine harvester often hire manual labour. The work in harvesting wheat requires skill, and certainly, it is tedious and time-consuming. As regards the harvesting of Maize pods, women were often hired for a couple of hours in the morning, say 4:30 am to 8:30 or 9:00 am. They were then given half of their daily wages on account of working a few hours in the morning. Women occasionally worked for some maize as well.

The carrot requires intensive manual labour at almost every stage in the life cycle of crop ranging from a collection of seeds to plucking the carrots. Women are often hired for weeding and also for thinning procedure required in this crop. The post-harvesting operations such as cleaning, sorting and packing also require manual labour. The local women find work in cutting the carrot umbels and collection of seeds. They are hired for the two or three rounds of weeding. The tractor is rolled over the fields with the tiller to facilitate plucking of carrots. Women then sit there in the field and cut apart the leaves from the carrots. At the time of fieldwork, they were paid mere Rs.100 per day for this particular task. The work was labelled an 'easy task' similar to cutting vegetables in the house. The dynamics and perpetuation regarding labelling of women's work during harvesting of carrots are discussed in the next chapter. Men were rarely hired for this task. If hired, they got as much as Rs. Two hundred fifty for the same task. Men usually take care of the post-harvest operations as it involves washing the carrots using a machine and later filling of carrots in the bag. The filled bags are then loaded in a truck. All these activities are taken up by men. During the fieldwork, I also found that the migrant labourers were also hired along with the local women labourers in the same farm at times. They did not interact with each other and continued work as two distinct units.



### *Migrant Agricultural Labourers*

As mentioned in the earlier chapter, the migrant labourers reside in the temporary thatched huts in various loci of the village. The land on which they have made their huts belongs to the farmers of the village. In return, they are expected to work with their respective landowners at the peak season of agriculture when there is a shortage of manual labour. The in-migrant labourers feel obliged towards the landowner for allowing them to stay at their land. In return, they prioritise and provide their labour to their respective landowners during the peak agricultural season over any other landowner in the village. The farmer may also use them for certain occasional agricultural tasks related to irrigation of the field or some animal husbandry task such as milking and/or feeding the cattle. Once they finish the work at the field of their respective landowners, only then can they work at the field of any other farmer in the village. It appeared that to be able to have control over the labour of in-migrant labourers; the landowners allow them to make thatched huts at their land. They are often addressed as *'Bhaiya/bhaiye'* (plural) in Punjab. The women agricultural labourers of the village referred them as *'Lalle'*<sup>54</sup>.

The large and medium farmers hire migrant labourers for certain tasks in agriculture that require manual labour. As reported by one of the farmers, the pace at which in-migrant agricultural labourers work in the field also favours big and medium farmers. It helps them to sell their produce at the right time. These labourers generally work on contract and work along with their family members. The family members quite often include husband-wife, mother and/or father, brother(s), and children. They get wages according to the area they cover or as per the task assigned. One of the migrant labourers informed that he works as agricultural labourer along with his entire family (including wife, mother, brother and two daughters) at the farmers' fields. He also mentioned that all those who have come from Uttar Pradesh work along with their families at the farmers' fields. They get the remuneration depending on the type of work and most of the times it is based on the area covered. For instance, they get Rs.

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<sup>54</sup> When inquired, the women responded that these labourers work along with their children on the field and often shout upon their male/female children as *'Lalla/Lalli'*. Eventually the local women of the village started calling these labourers as *'Lalle'* in order to refer to them.

250 for a canal<sup>55</sup>. They do not get remuneration on a daily basis and get it once the task assigned to them is finished. The nature of work varies from clearing the fields, sowing the seeds, thinning, weeding and harvesting, depending on the crop for which they are hired. Sometimes, the remuneration is based on the weight of produce. For instance, they get Rs. 25 to 35 for filling every sack of carrots (each sack containing 50-60 kilograms of carrots). The carrots are harvested using tractors. The labourers cut the leaves and fill them in a sack. When on contract, migrant labourers reach the field early in the morning and tend to work till late as they then try to fill as many sacks as possible in a day. This way they sometimes work almost twice as compared to those working on a daily wage basis. The crop of carrot requires intensive labour. During the season of carrot cultivation, many more migrant labourers residing in nearby area or villages come to the village to meet demand. As per one of the farmers of the village, the labourers of the village cannot match the pace with which the migrant labourers work. As regards the gender division of labour among the migrant agricultural labourers, it appeared that there is no particular task associated with men or women. Since men and women work together in the fields, they largely perform similar tasks. However, tasks involving lifting weights, etc. are performed by men on account of labelling them as 'heavy' work.

One of the key respondents informed that at the time of peak season of agriculture, the in-migrant labourers are given two bottles of liquor at the end of the day along with the remuneration. One of the in-migrant women labourers affirmed the existence of this kind of practice. She was however of the opinion that after a tiresome day, men get some alcohol to relax. At the same time, she shared that the landowners find it economical to give liquor over wages or cash amount. In any case, it is apparent that the in-migrant women labourers do not get any amount of money. The in-migrant male labourers keep the wages.

The male migrant labourers usually find work in non-agricultural operations such as the construction sector during the slack season. Other than that they sometimes work for their farmers such as milking the cattle, cutting fodder at times for miniscule

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<sup>55</sup> \*8 canal=1 Acre

remuneration or no remuneration at all. They sometimes also find work like clearing the fields, sowing poplars, etc.

This section thus briefly discussed the various levels of technology used by different categories of farmers in the study village. Their perceptions of the changes in technology are also discussed. It also highlighted the various operations which require manual labour in various crops. The two broad categories of labourers, their work conditions and wages were also discussed. It may, however, be noted that all these are interrelated and are segregated for the convenience of presentation.

#### **4.2.2 Agrarian relations: Continuities and Change**

Agrarian relations between and across various classes were understood as experienced by the respondents. The subtle observations and mental notes while observing the interaction of various classes aided in understanding the coveted aspects of the relationship among various classes. The description under this section is based on the narratives of respondents as well as quasi-participant observation. The two distinct classes of agricultural labourers, i.e. local and migrant agricultural labourers as identified during the fieldwork are juxtaposed with the various farming classes mentioned above. However, the relations within each of the class are also discussed. Thus, for convenience, the relationships among various classes are discussed under the following sub-sections as relations between farmers and local agricultural labourers; relations between farmers and migrant agricultural labourers; relations between local and migrant agricultural labourers; relations among various categories of farmers.

##### **4.2.3.1. Relations between Farmers and Local agricultural labourers**

The relations among various classes of farmers and local women agricultural labourers span from a great degree of indifference to traditional patron-client kind of relationships. It is however extremely difficult to identify a pattern of relations among the local women labourers and the farmers. For instance, as regards the large and medium landowners, women often showed indifference or feeling of hatred as these farmers preferred hiring migrant labourers over them.

One of the local woman agricultural labourer (*thekedarni*), aged 38, narrated;

*Big farmers only hire migrant labourers. They do not hire us. Who wants loss? They find it more profitable to get work done from them (migrant agricultural labourers). They do not prefer giving daily wages. Moreover, they can even beat the migrant labourers. But dare the landowner beat us; we'd smash him with our sickle..... (started laughing, she did not mean to kill the landowner, but that's the way she asserted their power of belonging to the village). Those migrant workers do not belong here. They are scared of the landowners. The big farmers can get off all their work done from them without even paying them.*

The above narrative suggests the power local agricultural labourers possess compared to the migrant agricultural labourers. It also reflects the conflict of interest whereby big farmers are perceived as profit-maximizing individuals who have the power to exploit labourers on account of their power and status in the village. It also indicates the fact she perceives herself as stronger and in a better position to not let them get exploited at the hands of big farmers.

Satya (59), a local agricultural labourer, however, pointed towards the changes in relations with one of the big farmers;

*My husband and I worked in the fields of Veerpal along with few others from the village. He was not that big a farmer and did not have much money at that time. (She is comparing his then financial condition with the current financial position and status). He also worked at his farm. He was a different person altogether at that time. He used to be kind and compassionate towards us. He even helped us financially at the time of my sister-in-law's marriage. He occasionally allowed us to take some vegetables from his farm. Now all he cares about is making a profit. If I happen to come across him sometimes, he'd reluctantly greet and exchange a word or two.*

Veerpal is one of the big farmers of the village. While I interviewed him, he also mentioned that he had come a far way owing to his hard work and knowledge of agriculture acquired by hit and trial methods over the years. Other women agricultural labourers of the village mentioned that the excessive wealth acquired by him over the years had affected the kind of relationship he shared with labourer households of the

village earlier. He is almost indifferent to them nowadays and only hires migrant agricultural labourers. Thus, it appears that the difference of interests among the big farmer and the local woman agricultural labourers has reshaped the relations that they once shared.

It appeared from the interviews with women agricultural labourers and key respondents that the social distance among the large as well as medium farmer households and agricultural labourer households has increased over the years owing to the widening class differences among them. The class differences among the farmer and labourer households are visible however without much effort in the kind of houses, assets and dresses. The large and medium farmers own big mansions, cars, and practically most of the conveniences characteristics of urban life such as air-conditioners, Light-emitting diode (LED) televisions, washing machines, to name a few. On the other hand, labourer households live in simple houses with minimal assets.

Among the semi-medium, marginal and small farmers, each women agricultural labourer has a varying degree of proximity with different classes of farming households. I observed that the semi-medium farmers maintain a varying degree of control over different women agricultural labourer households. The *thekedarnis* share more or less a patron-client kind of relationship with such farming households. The farmers provide them with certain items in kind at the time of the wedding of their daughters or in times of distress. One of the *thekedarnis* informed that one of the farmers helped her by lending money when her son met an accident. She also shared that the same farmer with whom they prefer to work supported her after her husband died. She mentioned that he treats them like sisters and daughters (*dhiyan bhainan wala vihar*). I, however, observed that the farmers do not maintain this kind of relationship with other women that work at their farms. It appeared to me that farmers continue to exploit women's labour by extending the healthy relationship with selected woman agricultural labourer households. In a demand-driven agricultural economy, wherein women sometimes have some bargaining power due to a shortage of labour during peak agricultural season; farmers make use of their healthy association with the *thekedarnis* to convince all other women to work at farmer's

desired wage rate. The deferential attitude of *thekedarnis* towards farmers ensures them the security and support in times of distress.

In the later stages of the fieldwork, a few women agricultural labourers shared their concern about low wage rate compared to other villages. They informed that there are rare instances when they have any power to bargain wages with the farmer. Even in such rare instances, there are certain women labourers (referring to the *thekedarnis* and certain others in dire need of work) who are ready to work at the existing wage rate. As a consequence of their decision of not to work given the low wage rate, they are at loss of not even getting that amount which the farmer is offering. On the other hand, the women who are ready to work under such circumstances get more days of work given less number of labourers in the field. I could observe that the semi-medium farmers obliging certain women labourer households by helping them with cash or kind items in the times of need ensured that those women could not raise voice against them to increase wages as well as convince other women of their group to work at existing wages. It is also understandable that the differential treatment of the farmers towards certain women agricultural labour households also led to a feeling of insecurity among women labourers who did not share that kind of relationship. At more than one instance, I witnessed such a situation when only two or three women attended the farmer's field while others demanded to increase the wages. Those who did not go to work felt betrayed by the ones who went for it. It also refers to the occasional rift among the local women agricultural labourers.

#### **4.2.3.2. Relations between Farmers and Migrant agricultural labourers**

Most migrant labourers informed that their relationship with farmers of the village revolves primarily around agricultural work. One of the migrant labourers shared that the landowners are only worried about their work. In general, they do not interact with in-migrant labourers and approach them only when they need their labour as;

*For instance, when the landowner needs our labour, he would come and ask, "Yes! How is it? Do some work for us as well!" They only come to us then. Otherwise, they have nothing to do with us. (Meshi Lal)*

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the in-migrant labourers are dependent on landowners in many ways. It is understandable that there is no facility of electricity in the thatched huts. One of the in-migrant labourers informed that they requested the landowner to let them use electricity and charge some amount for the same. But the landowner is not convinced. They use diesel lamps to light their huts. They also use handmade fans during summer. For their water requirements, they can only take water when the farmer turns on the tube well. So their bathing and all such activities related to water ranging from cleaning and storage of drinking water are all dependent on the farmer. From their narratives, it appeared that they share a feeling of resentment towards the landowner and also lacked the power to share their concern and feelings with the landowner.

I also observed that in their interaction with the landowners, they merely speak. The farmer, on the other hand, uses authoritative voice while conversing with them. In the initial phase of the fieldwork, when I approached the in-migrant labourer households, they only agreed to talk when the farmer/landowner asked them to do so. One of the landowners, when interviewed, ridiculed the standard of living of these in-migrant labourers and even suggested that they are better off than themselves as they hardly spend any money on living and/or on the education of their children. However, the landowner shared that it is very difficult to practice agriculture these days without the labour of these in-migrant labourers. In some of the interviews with other landowners, I found a similar response. The landowners depend on the in-migrant labourers during the peak agricultural season yet there is never such a situation whereby in-migrant labourers can assert any bargaining power over them. Rather it is the landowners who control the in-migrant labourers by offering work in their field and allow making thatched huts on their land. The landowners, however, can ask anytime to vacate their huts as was evident in one of the interviews. Bakshish Singh, a 26-year-old male migrant labourer, shared; *we reserve the right to have our hut here. We live here as we continue to work for Uncle. When Uncle will ask, we will have to vacate the place.*

Bakshish Singh thus referred to the fact that the thatched hut belongs to him and no one else other than his family members stays in the hut even in their absence particularly when they go to their native village in Uttar Pradesh. They can only

reside till the time they work for the landowner. He refers to the landowner as 'Uncle'. They will have to vacate if the landowner (Uncle) asks them to do so. This narrative reflects the power relations between landowners and migrant labourers.

#### **4.2.3.3. Relations between Migrant and Local agricultural labourers**

The two categories of labourers do not share healthy feelings towards each other. The local women agricultural labourers feel that their relationships with big and medium farmers have changed due to the influx of labourers from Uttar Pradesh to their village. They also mentioned that they get fewer days of work due to their presence. In addition to the rivalry shared by the two categories of labourers, women just like the landowners of the village ridicule the standard of living of migrant agricultural labourers. The dislike of migrant agricultural labourers often resulted in caustic remarks whenever two categories of workers worked together at a farm. The satire on migrant agricultural labourers often reflected the true feelings of women. However, women were cautious in sharing such conversations amongst themselves. For instance, one of the women working with her fellow labourer group in the farm along with migrant agricultural labourers said, *See that migrant woman. It seems that she is in such a hurry that she aims to uproot all the carrots today itself and complete the contract.*

On the other hand, one of the migrant male agricultural named Teek Ram, in one of the interviews, shared his reservations towards the caste status of local women agricultural labourers as;

*At our place (in Uttar Pradesh), we do not even take water served by a Chamar woman. These Jatts have lost their mind as they not only get agricultural work done by Chamar women but also make them cook their food (as domestic help). We, on the other hand, are from upper caste but they treat us like chamars.*

The above narrative suggests that Teek Ram locates himself in the study village hierarchy as per his native village whereby no contact with a scheduled caste woman is acceptable by the others located higher in the caste hierarchy. He perceives himself superior over the scheduled caste local woman agricultural labourer in terms of his



caste status. He, however, complained that he gets upset by the behaviour of farmers who get their food cooked by a scheduled caste woman but instead treat him like an outcaste.

In yet another narrative, one of the migrant agricultural labourers named Bakshish Singh shared that they do not share a cordial relationship with the local labourers of the village due to the rivalry they share in terms of availability of agricultural work as:

*Whenever the Punjabi labour is working along with us at the field, they discriminate against us a lot. The localities (villagers) do not get work. We have come from another land. But we do far more work than them. The landowners thus prefer us. They (Punjabi labourers) are annoyed with us since landowners preferred us over them. We, the UPites, get work because we don't shirk work. They (local labourers) prefer light tasks and are scared of the sun. We work even in the sun though we take a break to breathe. We have come to another State, and we are bound to work.*

The above narrative suggests the paradox whereby Bakshish Singh compares, on one hand, the strength of their bodies with that of local labourers but at the same time reflects on their vulnerability arising from their migrant status and the dire need of work to survive in the study village.

#### **4.2.3.4. Relations among various classes of farmers**

Throughout fieldwork, I observed that the big and medium farmers often aligned together as it helped them in securing political power at the village level. However, there was often a feeling of competition especially in agriculture to secure the labour at the time of peak season. Occasional miffs were also observed among the big and medium landowners during the intense agricultural season. Different strategies as mentioned above included allowing migrant agricultural labourers to live at their land and build thatched huts thereby ensuring the priority of their labour at their fields.

The status and prestige associated with big and medium farmers often surfaced during the interviews with semi-medium farmers. The semi-medium farmers often referred to the big and medium farmers with great respect. Some of the semi-medium farmers in

the village shared a cordial relationship with almost all the classes in the village. The big and medium farmers also praised the perseverance and efforts of some of the semi- medium farmers in agriculture. The small and marginal farmers on the other hand often shared resentment towards big and medium farmers during the interviews. They shared that big and medium farmers could make huge profits out of pursuing agriculture while they could hardly meet ends.

The field experience suggests that power, caste, gender, ethnicity and economic status often intersect in shaping the relationship within and across various classes. It is difficult to interpret and predict human behaviour and relations as it is guided by their location, circumstances and personal psycho-social traits yet we have attempted to give a pattern of relations across various classes in this section with the help of selected narratives. It is to be noted that the relationships across various classes are also not static and have undergone changes as also mentioned in one of the narratives.

The chapter thus gave a broad overview of the agrarian change and migration in the study village. It emphasised the need to understand migration as not solely an economic process but also a social process. The identification of various classes of farmers and labourers in the agrarian structure as well as an understanding of the agrarian relations across various classes of farmers and labourers reflect the unequal power relations in the agrarian structure. The agrarian context of the village in terms of the use of various levels of technology, changes in crop pattern and changing configuration of the labour force are also discussed in this chapter. It is difficult to ascertain as to which of these factors played a major role in the change in relations of production. It, however, appears that existing relations of production could be understood as a cumulative effect of the various changes in the socio-economic composition of the agrarian structure resulting from the changes in technology, crop pattern and labour force. The next chapter discusses the gender-power relations among women agricultural labourers, particularly concerning their work as agricultural labourers as well as housework.

## **Chapter 5**

# **Women, Work and Gender Relations within and beyond household**



## **5. Women, Work and Gender Relations within and beyond household**

This chapter deals with the performance of gender in the everyday lives of women agricultural labourers in the study village. It locates the experiences of women in the everyday activities performed at the level of the household as well as agricultural labourers. It necessarily entails the interactions and relations of women not only with their respective family members but also the farmers and/or landowners and their family members, and also amongst themselves. Their experiences, interactions, relations and reflections as evident in the interviews and observation helped in making sense of the gendered worldview within which women continuously negotiate, contest and at times resist or rebel against the oppression and exploitation. The group discussions on work, labour and gender division of labour among the two broad categories of local and migrant agricultural labourers also gave us an insight into the perspectives of women on these issues.

Women perform a large variety of work throughout their lives. It not only includes the unpaid housework but also their engagement in income-generating activities. During my interaction with women agricultural labourers through interviews, group discussions and otherwise, I tried to understand gender relations as well as the perceived notions about work and labour. I attempted to explore and understand as to what constitutes work in women's perception. It essentially posed the challenge of understanding and presenting the meanings attributed to a particular kind of work. The whole exercise of how women make sense of the structural and cultural forces shaping the meaning attributed to work and the role of meanings in shaping the notions about work, in turn, forms one aspect of this chapter. The same is done by drawing linkages with the macro environment beyond household to understand the shaping and reshaping of the meaning of work. Thus, one of the sections of the present chapter discusses as to what constitutes work in the given socio-cultural context.

The nature and quantum of work understandably differ across households. With the help of selected cases, we discuss the various factors that determine the range of

activities women perform during a typical day. The complexity of women's work can best be understood by taking into account the myriad activities in which women are engaged throughout the day and also the gender division of labour in those activities. Thus, when we discuss women's work, we are referring to both housework as well as the work they carry out in the agricultural field. However, for convenience, and to capture the complexity and nuances of women's work, the work is sometimes artificially discussed along two heads namely housework and agricultural work. I have attempted to delineate the work performed by women during the peak as well as slack seasons of agriculture in order to understand the difference in burden of work given the seasonality of agricultural work. Other than that, the work performed during various socio-cultural occasions of cultural importance also is discussed with the help of selected cases.

An attempt has also been made to explore the intra-household dynamics that result in the asymmetric distribution of resources and services that are often unaccounted for in women's perceptions. The access and control over resources, finances and, decision making, is also discussed using different cases. An attempt has also been made to bring forth somewhat covert power relations that operate at the level of the household.

Taking into account the individual characteristics of selected women, we attempted to locate each of them in terms of possessing some form of power or lack of it as guided by feminist discourse on power. They were thus categorised accordingly. While taking up this exercise, I am aware that women exhibit plural identities at the same time as well as at different moments in time. This attempt at categorisation is based partly on the characteristics of women as I perceived during my interactions as well as by women themselves about others at times to bring forth the varied dimensions of their identities.

The chapter is thus divided broadly into four sections. The first section details what constitutes work in women's perceptions followed by a discussion of the nature and variety of work across various women with different household characteristics. The next section discusses local women agricultural labourers' engagement with agricultural work and the various factors and circumstances that force women to take

up agricultural work followed by a section on intra-household dynamics and women's access and control over resources. The final section attempts to categorise women who possess or lack some form of power at any given point of time.

### **5.1 Understanding 'work': Constituents and Meaning**

The contrast between academic discourse and lay perceptions about what constitutes work is poles apart. The former is extremely narrow while the latter is incomprehensibly vast. Work in its most reductionist definition is largely a gainful economic activity. This explanation has been under much criticism for its narrow focus and the obvious limitations. On the other hand, when I attempted to understand what constitutes work for a woman unaffected and unaware of this existing discourse, I realised that it is anything and everything that forms the basis of life. It is something around which the everyday life is woven. It is a 'survival strategy', a 'means to make ends meet', and yet 'never-ending' itself. These are some of the phrases with the help of which women explained what they think work is. During our casual conversations about work in two group settings comprising of the local and migrant women respectively, it appeared that even concept as abstract as well-being, as discussed in the review of the literature, was not devoid of the human functionality perceived as work. I found that work and well-being are so closely related and interdependent in lay perceptions. However, for this chapter, I have focused on the perceived notions of work as those about well-being are discussed in the next chapter.

Colloquially the word 'work' means *Kaam* (in Hindi) and *Kamm* (in Punjabi). This single word, i.e., *Kaam* or *Kamm* signifies work within as well as outside the confines of the household. The qualifiers 'inside' and 'outside' determined the nature and locus of work. Thus, the lay perceptions about work were divided into two categories depending on the locus of work, i.e. within or outside the confines of the household. The 'outside' work was by nature paid and more often associated with a survival strategy.

On the other hand, the 'inside' work often referred to as 'housework' was perceived to be personal and an integral part of the everyday lives of women. The 'housework'

at times included activities that took place outside the confines of the household such as the purchase of grocery items, a collection of fuelwood, purchase of essential items for the family members. Thus, the boundaries 'inside' and 'outside' often got blurred as regards the housework. However, there was a consensus that most activities carried out within the household and beyond for the family members constituted 'housework'.

A further discussion about the nature of activities carried out in the confines of the household revealed that women's perceptions about the categories of work carried out within the household also had a distinction of whether the activity was paid or not. For instance, as pointed by one of the local women, if someone undertook stitching or tailoring activities for others except the family members within the confines of household and hence paid for the work, then despite being carried out in the confines of the household, it was not considered household work. The household work was understandably always unpaid while any activity other than the housework that earned some amount of money was considered a livelihood activity or a survival strategy. Further, women related themselves to the housework and called it 'their own work'. Performing housework for others had to be identified by the nature of economic or social relations involved. It thus became evident to me during fieldwork that the lay perceptions of work had innumerable meanings and it was a difficult exercise to capture the concept in its entirety owing to the inherent complexity.

Although both agricultural and housework involved physical labour and it was evident in women's narratives. The local women referred to the agricultural work as *Majdoori* and *Dihadi*. The word *Majdoori* implied the physical labour inherent in the activity while *Dihadi* referred to the nature of or mode of payment involved in such activities. Migrant women largely referred to the agricultural work as *Kaam* (as already mentioned), and at times they referred it to the *madad* (help) to their male counterparts. I also found some migrant women referring to the term *Dihadi* used by local women labourers as *Jihadi*. Also, since they largely worked on *theka* (contract), they referred to the word *Jihadi* and *Din* to signify the number of days they worked in agriculture. They referred to housework as *apana* (own/personal) or *ghar ka kaam* (housework).



Further, one of the migrant women mentioned that the housework did not require any special training and one learnt it while observing, doing and repeating. The time and experience made one perfect. The others in the group almost agreed to this aspect of housework. It indicates that migrant women did not consider housework as a skill but a natural act with which anyone could get engaged. This specific attribute of housework brought us to disagreement whereby I asserted that why this natural act was then not performed by men to which migrant women had various reservations. The work at the level of the household was so deeply entrenched in the socialization process as women's work that any mention of such deviation made me appear naïve. One of the migrant women responded to my assertion as; *Your men must be doing such work. Women alone do the housework. ....* (She continued as to complain that) *Our men do not even take water on their own.....Do men ever perform housework?*

On the other hand, one of the local women mentioned that housework should ideally be distributed equally among household members depending on their age and sex. She also asserted that women are disproportionately burdened with most of the housework. She brought attention to the arduous nature of housework carried out by women while referring to a proverb '*Kohlu da Bail*'. This analogy very well brings the monotonous and repetitive nature of housework. Except for very few local women (three women, all in the age group 25-35 years with two educated till matriculation level and one above primary level), most considered the housework no matter how tiresome it may be as a duty or responsibility and no feelings of shame were associated with it. Those who differed raised the issue of the irresponsibility of men and children with regard to housework. These women, possibly, on account of the difference in age group as well as the level of education compared to other women expressed that housework should be distributed equally among all the members of the household and not be treated as women's domain exclusively.

It also appeared in due course of time that while housework was devoid of any issues of shame associated with it, some of the local women agricultural labourers perceived outside work, especially working on someone else's agricultural field not very prestigious. It was evident as, during the household survey, some women who

reported that they did not engage in agricultural work happened to work as agricultural labourers. My initial impression suggested that they concealed the fact that they worked as agricultural labourers. On further probing during the encounters at the agricultural field, some of them discussed that they felt ashamed of sharing that they worked as agricultural workers. A few others explained that since they occasionally worked as agricultural workers and hence felt that they should not report themselves as agricultural labourers. One of these two reported explanations, particularly the former, broadly refers to the socio-cultural reason. I also accepted this explanation with much ease while giving due attention to the nuances of socio-cultural perceptions of work. The latter however constantly instigated me to understand what made them work or not at a given point in time. Thus, I was constantly looking for the varied reasons or factors that resulted in occasional work as agricultural labourers. Needless to say, each one of them had circumstances unique to them that led to occasional agricultural work during the course of fieldwork. It also refers to the fluidity inherent in work identities of local women agricultural labourers due to which their work is often not accounted in the short-term surveys. The various circumstances that forced women to work as agricultural labourers are discussed later in the chapter.

Among the migrant women, on the other hand, the descriptions of ‘outside’ work given by migrant women were devoid of any reference of prestige or shame. They often cited that they had migrated for work. Their overall explanation detailed work as a survival strategy. For instance, one of the migrant women while referring to the work at agricultural field mentioned, *Kaam nahin karenge to khayenge kya? (What shall we eat if we do not work?)*

Many migrant women themselves undervalued their work as agricultural labourers by referring themselves as mere helpers to their husbands. Sunita, a 22-year-old married woman, belonging to a village in Budaun district of Uttar Pradesh said, *Now that we (referring to migrant women as collective) are in a distant land, we go (to the agricultural field with our husbands) to help. We do not go alone (to work) anywhere.*

The above instance of referring their agricultural labour as mere help also indicates the perpetuation of deeply rooted undervaluation of women's work not only within but beyond the household as a manifestation of gender socialisation. On further probing, and while triangulating (confirming) the engagement of women in agricultural work in their respective villages with other women, I came to know that those who owned some land in their respective villages worked along with other members of the family at their land. Thus, we see that the meanings associated with work change with the change of place or one's geographic location. It also illustrates the role of labour migration in altering the meanings of work.

The similar instance of gender socialisation whereby women's work is often undervalued to the extent that women themselves do not acknowledge the worth of their work was observed among local women agricultural labourers as well. One of the medium farmers once equated local women's agricultural work with kitchen work that includes cutting vegetables. While referring to the local women that he had hired for harvesting carrots in his field, he said,

*They are hardly doing any work. While sitting in the sun, they engage themselves in gossip and just like they cut vegetables at home, they are cutting carrots here.*

The above narrative suggests as to how women's work in the agricultural field is grossly devalued and even not accepted as a work worth doing. Rather, it is projected that women are at leisure as they get a chance to sit together in the sun during the winters and indulge in gossip while doing almost nothing. This kind of explanation is often used to undermine worth of women's agriculture work and hence their negligible wages. It thus appears that this continuous undervaluation by the men deeply rooted in the socialisation process also makes women undermine their work. The similar meaning resonated in the narrative of a local agricultural woman,

*The days are shorter during the winters. Most of the women work during this season when the carrot is harvested. It is then that all women come out. What have they got to do at home? Moreover, they merely have to cut carrots.*

Another aspect that finds mention in the above narrative is that the particular task of cutting off the leaves is not referred to as much of a work. Further, many local women narrated that this particular activity is not different from the cutting of vegetables they do on a regular basis in their households. Thus, we also see as to how a typical production activity outside the confines of household is labelled as akin to the housework and hence devalued.

It was also found that the carrots were picked with the help of tractors. This process is understandably fast. One of the local women also narrated.

*They [the landowner] wish that as many as possible number of women may come [for work to their field]. They then have to pick with the help of machines according to the number of women they have in their fields [for clipping the leaves]. Otherwise, with machines [tractor] one may even clear a field as large as ten killa by evening. Earlier all this was done with the help of shovels, etc. These days, it is all done with machines. (Lakshmi, 50)*

It is important to note here that the lifted carrots cannot be left with leaves intact for a long time. As evident from the narrative, the farmers are in need of plenty of manual labour to match the pace of picking so as to cut off the leaves from carrots. Their need for manual labour is met by the cheap labour of local women and migrant labourers. The particular activity of pruning leaves of carrots is propagated strategically as a work similar to housework to get sufficient labour of local women. The result is that the otherwise not so prestigious work of agricultural labour is taken up by many women who otherwise would not work in the agricultural fields due to socio-cultural meanings attached to the agricultural work in others' fields. It implies as to how the farmers make use of the labour of women very strategically under the disguise of similarity with housework to earn a profit. Further, due to the mechanisation of many agricultural processes, farmers almost find it extremely difficult to wait for the manual operations. The farmers are also in a hurry to get all the work done as fast as possible.

It is thus evident that in the market-oriented production process, farmers exploit women's labour by reconfiguring the meaning of certain agricultural operations such

as cutting leaves of carrots at the time of harvest to make it socio-culturally acceptable. Also, it is pertinent to note that women sometimes take up agricultural work not only due to propagated socio-cultural perceptions of work but also as a result of economic necessity. I have dealt with the latter aspect at length further in the present chapter. I have thus very briefly discussed the perceptions and meaning associated with work among the women agricultural labourers. It, however, appeared from various responses that the socialisation shaped work.

This section thus largely brings forth the understanding of women about the work. They differentiate housework and agricultural work in terms of inside-outside dichotomies. Other than that, the housework was often associated with women, and thus the gendered nature of housework in the perceptions of women was evident specifically with respect to migrant women. It also appeared that women also devalue their work as a result of gender socialisation and migrant women specifically underestimated their economic contribution to the household by labelling the same as *madad*. I, however, could over some time observe and understand that the meaning associated with work kept on altering and was continuously negotiated as per the economic situation of the household. The economic necessities of local women many times weighed heavier than the socio-cultural perceptions of work and the waged labour was taken up not out of choice or availability of work but as an economic compulsion. Thus, we see that the meanings attributed to work are not static but change both spatially and temporally. The farmers however attempted to alter the meanings associated with agricultural work by propagating and differentiating certain agricultural operations such as cutting leaves of carrots as akin to kitchen work to get cheap labour of local women while some of the local women often struggled to negotiate with existing meaning attributed to work as discussed above.

### **5.1.1 Nature and Quantum of Work**

The data collected on women agricultural labourer households during the fieldwork discussed earlier (in Chapter 3) suggest that both local and migrant women agricultural labourers exhibit different household characteristics such as regarding the type of family (nuclear/joint), the number of family members. The type of family, age

and gender of family members, as well as their occupations, further seemed to burden women differently regarding their housework. In this section, I pay close attention to women's engagement in some activities that they classify as housework during a day. I have also attempted to reflect the differences in nature and burden of housework among different women with varying household characteristics.

The contribution of male members to the housework was almost non-existent among both local and migrant households. On the other hand, in most local households where women took up agricultural work, there existed some form of familial support from other female members. For instance, women were often relieved to a varying extent of most household responsibilities while other female members of the households engaged themselves in household chores at their place. However, there were some households where such adjustment by other female members did not exist. It could sometimes be explained by unequal power relations between women. At other instances, the age of female member (too young or too old) was also crucial. The differences in work burdens among women with different familial structure and stage of the lifecycle are discussed through case reports as follows:

**Case 1:** Reena is a local agricultural labourer. She is married and belongs to the scheduled caste. She is 28 years old. She studied till the fifth standard. She has been living in the study village since she got married thirteen years ago. She lives with her husband, mother-in-law and two children. They do not own any land. She has a nine years old son and a three years old daughter. Her husband works as a construction labourer while Reena works as an agricultural labourer as and when work is available. Her mother-in-law takes care of her daughter in her absence. Reena narrated that she started work in the agricultural field almost a year after her marriage. Her mother-in-law on the other hand never worked outside. It was her own decision to work as an agricultural labourer as her husband sometimes did not get continuous work. Since he was the only earning member in the household and also as his earnings were not sometimes sufficient to sustain the family, Reena sought his approval if she should work outside as agricultural labourer. After getting permission from the husband, she approached her mother-in-law. The mother-in-law also did not object to her working outside provided she managed household chores responsibly. She has been working all these years except for when her son was born. Her mother-in-law was extremely happy that she gave birth to a son that she did not allow her to do outside work for almost three months. However, she was not relieved of household chores ever except for a few days of relief nearing childbirth. When she gave birth to her daughter nearly three years ago, her mother-in-law almost kept quiet for a few days. She, however, was very affectionate towards both her children and often took care of them when Reena was away at work. Reena shared that she struggles hard to manage both

housework as well as work as an agricultural labourer. She even mentioned that she even envies some of her co-workers who get much familial support in the household work. Sharing her daily routine, Reena shared that she gets up around 5 in the morning. She brushes her teeth, and after freshening up, she cooks tea. Her mother-in-law is already awake and away to *gurudwara* for offering prayers. She serves tea to her mother-in-law as soon as she is back. After that, she cleans the house as well as sometimes unwashed dishes from the night. She mentioned that on certain days she is so tired by the dinner time that she leaves the unwashed dishes for the next morning. She sometimes has to face cruel remarks by her mother-in-law for this. It is already six by the time she finishes cleaning work. Then she hurriedly takes a bath, cooks breakfast and also packs lunch for her husband who gets up by 6:30. He goes out soon after he wakes up to meet friends where they read the newspaper and sip tea. He gets back around 7:30 and takes a bath. Meanwhile, Reena also wakes up her son and makes him ready to go to school. She then serves breakfast to her husband and son. Once her husband and son have left for work and school respectively, Reena also takes breakfast quickly and clears the dishes to be washed in the afternoon. She then leaves for agricultural work. Her mother-in-law takes breakfast later in the day after she is finished with bathing her granddaughter who often gets up late. Reena has to be in the agricultural field at 9. She also mentioned that sometimes they are asked to come at 8:30 depending upon the work in the agricultural fields. She goes along with one of her neighbours and friend. She works at the farm till 1.30 or 2 again depending upon the farmer's wish. It is then that they return for lunch. By the time Reena arrives home, her mother-in-law often complains about the difficulties with which she took care of her daughter. Reena washes her hand and feet and makes tea. She serves it to her mother-in-law. Meanwhile, she cleans utensils from the morning. Occasionally, she washes clothes during this short lunch break. She mentioned that she usually takes meals twice, once in the morning and later in the evening. So during this lunch break, she does not eat but tries to finish as much work as possible. Meanwhile, her son is back from school. She gives him food and rushes to the field yet again. Then they work in the field till 5:30 or 6 in the evening depending upon the task at hand. Sometimes she takes a bath after she returns from the field. Soon after she is back, she makes tea and serves to her mother-in-law. She also takes tea and gets busy with the preparation of dinner. Her husband returns around 7:30. He takes bath after he returns from work. The family takes dinner around 8 or 8.30. By this time, Reena is hardly left with any energy. Her husband engages with children for some time till they sleep. She mentioned that she falls asleep as soon as she lies on the bed. However, her little daughter sometimes does not fall asleep very easily. Consequently, she has to stay awake till her daughter falls asleep.

Reena's back-breaking routine shows that as reported by most women, her husband is not contributing towards any housework while mother-in-law though takes care of children in her absence (when she is away for agricultural work), also does not contribute much to housework. Her mother-in-law, however, takes care of her daughter while she is away to work. Even during my visits to Reena's house, I could see the role of power relations in her family. Her mother-in-law often passed comments that she should rather focus on her work instead of talking to me. On such

occasions Reena who rarely stopped working while conversing with me kept quiet. Moreover, her mother-in-law often stayed around while I visited them. She did not talk much and kept herself engaged with her grandchildren while I was around. Her behaviour towards me, however, was neither welcoming nor disregarding. It sometimes appeared to me that she was more concerned about any delay in dinner due to my presence as she often told Reena the same. Thus, we find that Reena represents one of the cases among the local agricultural labourers where other female family member does not contribute to cooking and cleaning aspects of housework.

**Case 2:** Kuljeet is 41 years old. She is educated till 8<sup>th</sup> standard. She lives with her husband and three children (son aged 17 years; two daughters aged 16 and 12 years). Her brother-in-law and his family also reside in the same house, but they have a separate kitchen. Her mother-in-law also lives with her brother-in-law. Kuljeet mentioned that though they generally have conflict over something or the other with her brother-in-law and his wife but they stand together in the crisis. She started working in the agricultural fields some 5-6 years ago. She owns a buffalo, a cow and a calf. Kuljeet's day starts earlier compared to Reena. She wakes up around 4 in the morning. After finishing her daily routine, she goes to the cattle shed situated at some distance from her house. She cleans the cattle shed and feeds the cattle. She then milks the cattle. The milk is not only used for household consumption but is also a source of income. One of her neighbours buys milk from her on a regular basis as long as the milk is available. Kuljeet returns home from the cowshed around 5 or 5:15. Her daughters are also awake by now. One of them separates the milk for their consumption, boils it and also makes tea while the other delivers it to the neighbour. Sometimes the neighbour comes on her own to take the milk. Kuljeet and her daughters take tea together. She then washes the clothes and also takes a bath. She mentioned that both her daughters wash their clothes and hence she washes her clothes and those of her son and husband. She then goes to kitchen and prepares for the breakfast. Her daughters also take bath and later help her in the kitchen with preparing breakfast and packing lunch for their father. The daughters take the breakfast quickly and leave for the school. Her husband and son often get up around 7:30 or 8. Kuljeet serves them breakfast and tea as soon as they are ready. Her son passed matriculation and discontinued studies. He is not working yet so he often stays home while her husband goes for work. She also takes breakfast and leaves for the field. She often instructs her son to visit the cattle shed in the afternoon and feed the cattle. But he does not do any work. So, while returning from the field during the lunch break, Kuljeet visits the cattle shed and gives water to the cattle. She then returns to house and after freshening up herself, lies down for some time. Her daughters are also back from their school. They too freshen up themselves, change their uniforms and serve food to their brother and mother. Kuljeet quickly takes lunch and goes back to the field. She then returns around 6 or 6:30. On her way back to home she also brings fodder for the cattle and goes to the cattle shed. She feeds the cattle and cleans the cattle shed before coming to the house. Her elder daughter milks the cattle in the evening. She reaches home around 7. After washing her hand and feet, Kuljeet starts to prepare dinner. Her husband also returns home by this time. Her



daughters study for some time before dinner. They take dinner around 8.30. Her daughters serve the dinner as well as clear the dishes after dinner. Kuljeet often felt thankful for her daughters helped her immensely in managing household chores along with their studies.

It is evident in the above case report too that the male members of the household did not do any housework. The female members of the household, on the other hand, divided work amongst themselves. It is evident that despite the cooperation of her daughters, Kuljeet hardly finds any leisure time. She is engaged in work from early morning till late evening. Though she had daughters who take care of most housework, the activities related to cattle were taken up by Kuljeet. In all the households with cattle, women reported taking care of cattle and carried out all the activities related to cattle single-handed. Thus, it appeared that cattle also added to the work burden among local women.

**Case 3:** Rani is a 47 years old Ad-dharmi woman. She has two daughters and a son. Her husband works as an auto driver. Rani also works outside as agricultural labourer as and when work is available. She shared that housework is mostly shared among female members of the household as; *Our men (collectively referring) do not engage themselves in the household work [laughed]. We [referring to the local women] do all the household work on our own. But my daughters manage all the household work. When they get married, it will be really difficult for me to manage. I can either take up housework or work outside. If I work at household, I will not be able to work outside. Since I work outside, I am not able to work at the house. How much strength do we have? We have to toil outside as well as exhaust ourselves in the house. How much work can one do? One can do either of the two.*

Some of the women, mostly in the age groups 45 and above, often expressed their inability to engage themselves in both agricultural work as well as housework due to the tedious nature of work. The housework was often shared only among the female members of the household as evident in the above narratives. Rani's case, however, suggests that since both of her daughters perform most housework, she is able to work outside. Her narrative clearly points towards the drudgery inherent in performing work at the house as well as in the agricultural field. Also, she mentioned of the feeble women bodies and hence their inability to engage in physically consuming activities at the household as well as outside. It thus also draws attention to the fact that women perceive housework to be not only time consuming but also physically exhausting. A similar division of labour was also observed in Nirmala's household.

**Case 4:** Nirmala is an illiterate, local widow about 57 years of age. While referring to her age, she recalled that she must be married for almost 40 years now and that she was married at the age of 16 or 17 years. Her husband passed away some eight years ago. She started working as agricultural labour after her husband's death. She lives with her son, daughter-in-law and three grandchildren (two grandsons and one granddaughter, the eldest being six years of age). Her son works as a painter in Hoshiarpur. She started working as agricultural labour after her husband's death as she felt that by working in the agricultural field she would be able to support herself and her son's family. She rather perceived it to be a help to her son as she shared, *(My) son is the only earner, (I am) contributing a bit. You know it all how difficult it is for a single earner, how expensive everything is, it is difficult to sustain that way.* Her daughter-in-law takes care of all the housework and children. Nirmala, on the other hand, works as an agricultural labourer. She mentioned that she sometimes even goes to the nearby village as the wages are higher compared to their village. She also drew attention towards the intense nature of agricultural work and her ageing body whereby she pointed that she is not in a condition to perform any housework once she is back from the field. She said that she only takes care of children when she is back from work in the evening and watches TV for some time. She mentioned that her daughter-in-law does all the housework.

The above case also reflects the difficulty in managing both household as well as agricultural work among the elderly women who primarily due to their age referred to their chronically fatigued bodies and expressed ability to manage either of the two. Also, the importance of intra-household relations among female members is evident as there are differences in power relations across different households. The above case also refers to the increasing prices of basic commodities and inflation in general in the past 10-12 years and hence the difficulty in supporting the family by a single earning member. The data on the number of earning members among local agricultural labourers (discussed in Chapter 3) also suggests that most households had 2-3 earning members. The reference of the inability of a sole breadwinner to sustain family often appeared in the narratives of women.

The importance of labour of the poor and the tedious nature of agricultural work done by agricultural labourers in sustaining a family is vivid in Nirmala's narrative as she shared,

*Labour is tough....How difficult is the work of labourers! Farmers are now at ease with the advent of machinery, in the earlier times, they were also performing difficult tasks such as cultivating with the help of oxen early in the morning. They are now at ease due to mechanisation*

*but we, the poor, are still the same. The poor can sustain their family only by their labour.*

The above narrative suggests that the physically demanding nature of activities is barely sufficient to sustain their families. One also finds that technology is referred to be biased towards a particular class. However, the woman, in this case, did not talk much of the technology being biased around the gendered lines or how the men manipulate technology in their favour but she certainly pointed towards the differences technology has made in the lives of farmers, comparing the situation of agricultural labourers.

**Case 5:** Sunita is 22 years old. She belongs to a village in Budayun district of Uttar Pradesh. She migrated to the study village in 2012. She lives in a thatched hut with her husband, children and mother-in-law. She has two daughters aged three and five years old. She also mentioned the activities performed on a typical day during the peak season. Her day starts at 4:30 or 5. Since they do not have a toilet, they are bound to defecate in the open. She and other women in their settlement thus wake up quite early in the morning to freshen up themselves when it is still dark. After returning from the field, she cleans the hut and the dishes from last evening. She also fills up water in plastic containers of various sizes if the tube well at the agricultural field is turned on. She wakes up children and helps them with the morning routine. She then cooks food and tea. Her mother-in-law buys milk from a farmer's house in the village. They buy 500 ml milk every day in the morning. Occasionally, they buy 500 ml milk in the evening as well. She then serves the breakfast to her husband and mother-in-law. She takes breakfast after her husband and mother-in-law are done. She then takes food along with her daughters and packs the food to take along to the field. She also carries milk in a bottle for her younger daughter who sometimes refuses to eat in the morning. They all usually leave as early as 7:30 to work. They return in the evening around 7 or 7:30. After washing her hands and feet, she cooks for the evening. Her mother-in-law takes food as soon as it is ready. Her children also sit near their grandmother and eat. Her husband is away to drink with his friends. When he returns around 8:30 or around 9, Sunita serves him food. After the husband has finished, she also takes food. She then clears the dishes to be washed in the morning. She then clears the cot for her husband. Her mother-in-law and children all lie down on the ground with her while they fall asleep.

The above case report yet again draws attention to the life stage as well as intrahousehold relations among the female members of the household that in turn to a large extent determine the nature and quantum of housework among both local as well as migrant women agricultural labourers. It was evident in narratives of most local women agricultural labourers that they found the support of varying magnitude in housework from the other female members of the household, the migrant women

largely managed housework on their own with occasional help from their children. The elderly women among the migrant labourers usually did not do any housework unless their son/(s) are single. It came up during a group discussion on women's work carried out among the migrant women agricultural labourers. One of the elderly migrant women said that the housework is exclusively the responsibility of the daughter-in-law. She also narrated that why would they marry their sons if they had to continue with the housework. It was often referred to as their native culture which relieved elderly women of their housework responsibility once the sons got married. However, elderly women could control the labour of their daughter-in-law, the elderly male members in the community and males, in general, had the ultimate authority over women's conduct in everyday life. This aspect is discussed later in one of the sections of the chapter. It thus refers that the socio-cultural and gender norms governing patriarchy operate differently among relatively younger migrant women who never get any support in housework from the elderly female member, usually mother-in-law.

As discussed above, among the migrant agricultural labourer households with joint families, mother-in-law did not contribute to housework, and the daughter-in-law carried out all the housework. However, the mother-in-law occasionally took care of the children in the house. On the other hand, I found that as among local women agricultural labourers, daughters among the migrant women labourers shared the burden of housework with their mothers. In most nuclear families, they also took care of their younger siblings. However, it was also found that even in some nuclear families, elder son also took care of younger siblings. Also, the caring of young among children was not confined to their own families. Many times I found the elder children at any of the migrant settlements taking care of the younger children who did not belong to their families but lived at same settlements.

### **5.1.2 Seasonality and Work**

The earlier section discussed different work burdens among women agricultural labourers as their characteristics such as age and intra-household relations and power dynamics determined the burden of housework. Here, in this section, I discuss that the

work burden among the women agricultural labourers is not static as the nature and amount of work vary during the peak and slack seasons of agriculture.

The agricultural workday, as shared by most local women agricultural labourers, is anywhere between 9-10 hours during the peak season of agriculture. On the other hand, the migrant agricultural labourers work as long as 12 to 13 hours for the same season. Other than the agricultural work, women's workday also includes housework which requires a lot of time and energy. As discussed earlier, the duration and workload are different across women depending on many household features and individual characteristics. During the slack season of agriculture, women spend a large amount of their time in housework. It is important to note here that rather than quantifying the number of hours spent in doing a variety of housework, it is important to understand the variety of work that women perform under the umbrella term housework. Further, this includes not only their physical engagement as bodies performing work but also their mental and emotional engagement.

The nature and burden of work not only varied across the two broad categories of women but within the same household across the year. It was however evident that most migrant women engaged themselves in a multitude of activities falling under the domain of housework during the slack season of agriculture, and much of the work burden resulting from these activities was related to their migrant status. During the peak season of agriculture, migrant women barely managed the necessary household work such as cooking and cleaning. On the other hand, during the slack season of agriculture, they could engage themselves in a variety of activities related to housework difficult to manage along with the agricultural work during the peak season of agriculture. The following cases reflect myriad activities that fall under the rubric of housework and burden migrant women differently compared to the local women agricultural labourers.

**Case 6:** Anita is 35 years old. She belongs to a village in Uttar Pradesh. She migrated to the study village some seven years ago during the *Durga Puja* of the year 2006. She lives with her husband and two sons aged 17 and 15 years. She mentioned that they do not even have time to breathe during the peak season of agriculture. During the slack season, however, they find time to collect fuelwood for the rest of the year. In events of non-availability of fuelwood, they buy fuelwood from the market. They

walk a large distance towards the periphery of the village to collect the fuelwood. They also collect straws and use for varied purposes such as making brooms. All these activities are thus carried out when not much agricultural work is available. During those days, male members of the household often work outside the village in the non-agriculture sector, largely construction sector.

**Case 7:** Sunita, a migrant agricultural labourer, mentioned that during the peak season of agriculture, they do not find time to wash clothes. Moreover, they do not have any supply of water and are dependent on the farmer who might turn up the tube well for watering his plants at a time of the day as per his own need. Thus, their bathing and washing activities do not have a fixed time.

**Case 8:** Amba also narrated the difficulty they face due to lack of bathing facilities. On one such day, I met Amba and almost spent the entire day at their settlement. Amba is 26 years old and lives with her husband, two daughters, mother-in-law and brother-in-law. Her mother-in-law was away with her brother-in-law to visit one of her relatives in a nearby town named Garhshankar while husband went to work as a construction worker in Hoshiarpur. Amba was sitting with other women from the settlement. They informed me that they were waiting for the landowner to turn on the tube well. It is then that they bathed and washed clothes. Amba told, *Our men have all gone to work. We are done with cooking for the day and all other tasks. We are only left with washing clothes. We will be able to wash clothes only when Uncle ji will get his tube well turned on. It is then that we along with our children be able to take a bath. .... Since we are bound to take a bath in the open, we often take a bath while wearing clothes; we do not feel that we took a bath.....but what can we do. We do not have any alternative.*

Cases 7 and 8 draw attention to the very fact that due to their migrant status, migrant women agricultural labourers do not have a fixed daily routine. They rather adjust and readjust their daily activities depending on the availability of water. The migrant women engaged themselves in several other activities such as grinding spices, making brooms from straws, drying up vegetables like cauliflower and potato for later use, to name a few. Some elderly women even paid visits to their relatives in the nearby villages for a day or two while their daughters-in-law and grandchildren stayed back. All such activities certainly burdened migrant women differently, and it is evident that their housework burden increased significantly during the slack season of agriculture.

The local women agricultural labourers also engaged themselves in a variety of activities such as making pickles for family consumption, grinding spices, clearing and drying grains and pulses, filling quilts, stitching and repairing clothes, to name a few. Some also visited the nearby town for fulfilling the requirements of children. For

instance, Kuljeet mentioned that she visited Hoshiarpur to buy the dress material for her daughter's school uniform. She shared that she could get the material from nearby shops too, but the dress material lacked quality and also turned out to be expensive compared to the shops in the city. Some also prepared for the upcoming weddings in their own house or close relatives. Thus, it was quite evident that local women were also engaged in various activities related to social reproduction during the slack season of agriculture. It was, however, evident that the work burdens of both local and migrant women were qualitatively different during the slack season of agriculture and that not only individual and household characteristics determined the work burden, but the work burden differed across the two broad categories of women during the peak and slack seasons of agriculture.

## **5.2 Women and agricultural work**

As mentioned before, specifically with respect to local women in the village, some of them worked all around the year in the agricultural fields depending upon as and when the work was available. However, there were some who worked in the agricultural fields only during the harvesting of carrots. Their engagement with the agricultural work was not only due to the social acceptance of work related to the cultivation of carrots but also due to many other factors specific to each of the household. It was thus not a simple exercise to decipher the factors that led women to work as agricultural labourers. The analysis suggests that both socio-cultural and economic factors played a major role in determining whether women worked outside the house or not. Further, it was not a matter of choice as regards women's engagement in agricultural work. Rather, the circumstances at the household forced them to enter the labour market. The local women who worked as agricultural labourers largely reported working outside to supplement household income. However, they attributed different reasons specific to their household that forced them to take up agricultural work as discussed further.

## **5.2.1 Factors that forced women to take up agricultural work**

Among the migrant women, most responded that they were bound to work as agricultural labourers as they were in *Pardes*. On the other hand, not all local women were engaged in agricultural labour. It was evident in the interviews of most of the local women agricultural labourers that it was largely economic constraints arising out of a different set of circumstances that required them to work outside the household. Among the various reasons mentioned as triggers to pursue agricultural work, education of children and the expenditure on marriages and specifically dowry were largely cited by most local women as the main reasons. Other than that the increased inflation was frequently cited as one of the factors that forced them to take up the agricultural work. Some women also reported that they needed to work in order to be able to meet the expenses for the out-migration of a male member of the household. We now elaborate upon these factors as reported by women in their narratives.

### **5.2.1.1. Inflation**

Many local women mentioned the issue of inflation in the past two decades. Local women agricultural labourers also detailed the consequent increased cost of living regarding basic food items. Many even asserted that they had to take up agricultural work as the amount earned by one member in the household was not sufficient to make ends meet. Though we cannot conclusively relate the mention of inflation and increased cost of living in the narratives of women to the structural adjustment programmes of the 1990s that seems to be an important factor in reconstituting the labour force composition. This finding from the field is thus in line with many studies that corroborated the increased feminisation of labour force as a result of structural adjustment programmes.

### **5.2.1.2. Out-migration of male members of the household**

Local women also worked as agricultural labourers to be able to pay the loan incurred to send any male member of the household to work outside the country. Thus, the transnational migration of male members seemed to push women to work as



agricultural labourers to meet the initial cost incurred. However, at the same time, women with male migrant members also had to go through the social pressure to withdraw from the labour market owing to perceived economic mobility caused by migration. A few women with migrant male members shared that they must work to sustain their household but ended up leaving agricultural work due to social pressure. A few, on the other hand, continued to work as agricultural labourers amidst the satire and humiliating remarks by the co-workers and farmers at times.

One of the woman with a migrant husband shared that the migration of a male member often required a large sum of initial expenditure and it is a woman who facilitates this process by working outside the household. A woman often continues working as agricultural labourers till there is no regular flow of remittances from the family member who migrated abroad. She, however, mentioned that it is extremely difficult for a woman to continue working as agricultural labourers once the family member migrates outside the country as the normative conceptions do not approve of a woman working outside household particularly when there is an out-migrant member in the household. She further reported that it is extremely difficult to survive without working as an agricultural labourer when they recently incurred huge expenditure on migration and in the absence of any remittances from the family member. She even shared the stress that one goes through to face public humiliation and continue work amidst the fact of belonging to a household with a male migrant member. Some are even forced to stop working as agricultural labourers despite the economic hardships aggravated by the migration of male member.

It came very clearly in the narrative that women's labour is often under the control of family and society. The macro-micro interactions often determined whether women continued to work as an agricultural labourer in the event of migration of male member of the household.

### **5.2.1.3. Education of children**

Referring to the expenditure on education of children, Meena (29, a local agricultural labourer) mentioned that educating children is a costly affair. She mentioned that it is

expenditure on school uniforms, books, stationery, tuitions and other such recurring expenditures that make education a costly affair. She also expressed that it is for their children that they toil in the agricultural fields. Many local women reported that they took up agricultural work to be able to meet the expenses on the education of children.

#### 5.2.1.4. Dowry

Most local women agricultural labourers with unmarried daughters mentioned that they started to work as agricultural labourers to be able to arrange for the dowry of their daughters. Rasjit (45 years old, Ad-dharmi agricultural labourer, works all around the year as an agricultural labourer, four children) lived with two of her daughters and a son. One of her daughters was married. Her husband died twelve years back. After the death of her husband, Rasjit started going for agricultural work. She also took the elder daughter to work. Her daughter was 13 years old and would get half the wages an adult gets. However, the daughter continued working with her mother till she got married last year. Rasjit mentioned that she worked not only to sustain the household but also in order to be able to marry her children. She also drew attention towards the practice of dowry system which burdens the poor households excessively. Rasjit continued as

*It is difficult for a daily wage earner to survive on a day to day basis. On top of that, one has also to bear the expenditure on the marriages of children. Dowry is given on marrying a daughter. My daughter (referring to her eldest daughter) stood beside me in my difficult times. She suffered a lot. I just wished that she gets married to someone nice and live happily. With God's grace, I could find a suitable match for her. Her in-laws did not demand any dowry, but I wished that she might not face any problem in the future because of not bringing any dowry. (I) Borrowed some amount (from one of the landowners). My relatives and people from the village also contributed. Now my daughter is happy at her house. It has been difficult, but I can never pay back to my daughter for she stood beside me after their father passed away.*

Some of the women labourers also mentioned that they continued to work as agricultural labourers to provide for the sustenance and health needs of the family. They often mentioned that the earnings of the male members of the household were

not sufficient in times of inflation and hence they worked as agricultural labourers to supplement the income of the household. It is important to note as evident in the narratives of the women that men did not contribute their entire income to the household while women spent their entire earnings for the welfare of the family.

#### **5.2.1.5. Ill-health of a family member**

Meena (29 years old, Ad-dharmi) lives with her husband and two children aged eight years and six years. Her husband worked as a painter in Hoshiarpur. She mentioned that she did not work earlier. She started working a year back as her husband fell sick. He suffered from Typhoid fever and could not go to work for two months. It is then that she started working as an agricultural labourer. She expressed that she was not able to go work as her children were small. She, however, stated that she started work primarily due to the ill health of her husband and that it was not only about the sustenance of the household but also the expenditure on his treatment. Understandably her wages were not sufficient to meet the household expenditure and the expenditure on medicines. Her husband then also borrowed some amount from a friend. Meena shared that since she did not work earlier, she found it difficult to manage with the agricultural work, housework as well as the care work.

*He was not keeping well and hence could not go to work. Daily wagers' lives go on with their daily wages only. It was a tough time as he could not go to work. He even borrowed some amount from his friend. But then I thought that if I go to work, no matter how small but I'd earn a small sum of money. He even suggested that he could manage, but I insisted that I'd be able to help a bit. But I realised once I started going to work that it was too much for me to manage housework and take care of him during his illness and also to take care of children. I never worked before this much of work, and it was difficult for me in the beginning. But now I am used to of it. He says many a time that I must quit working outside, but I insist that it is better to earn a little amount. Our expenses are going to rise anyway as the children are growing old.*

The above narrative suggests that the ill-health of a family member also at times trigger the women to work outside. We also find that in line with the normative conceptions about women working outside, women are often asked not to work. It

then depends on the intra-household dynamics and women's ability to negotiate and decide whether they take up agricultural work or not.

Many of the respondents mentioned that they could not do without working as agricultural labourers but also shared at the same time that if they did not face economic constraints, they would never work outside. However, their narratives emphasised more of the toll the physical labour takes on their bodies rather than the 'outside' and 'inside' work divide as evident in the following narrative:

*Referring to the agricultural labour) One goes for the waged work due to (economic) necessities. Who is mad enough to work while burning in the sun during summers and the body stiffening cold weather? (Referring to all the women who work as agricultural labourers), all those go out of economic compulsions. Why would we go to work If we could manage without it?*

(Lakshmi, 50, local agricultural labourer)

This section thus largely discussed that the local women work as agricultural labourers largely for subsistence and circumstances unique to each of them, ranging from education and marriage of children with economic burdens of dowry in case of daughters almost common to all of them. Other than that some go to pay for the costs incurred on the migration of any male member of the household or to meet the expenditure incurred on the disease of a family member. The next section attempts to understand the working of gender and power relations at the level of the household through intrahousehold dynamics and distribution of resources.

### **5.3 Intra household dynamics, distribution of resources and services, finances and decision making**

The gender dynamics at the level of household is often a manifestation of prevalent gender norms and socialisation. As I attempted to understand, gender and other relations of power among local and women agricultural labourers, I realised that most of the local women agricultural labourers were more vocal and opinionated compared to the migrant women agricultural labourers. They critically evaluated their situation

and worth in the family while citing the various forms of discrimination and subjugation they experienced. In one of the group discussions with women, one of the local women agricultural labourers, aged 24 years shared

*Noone celebrates Lohri when a daughter is born, None distributes sweets, neither the liquor is served. When a daughter is born, it is considered worrisome. Nobody celebrates as they do when a son is born.*

The above narrative very clearly reflects that the gender differences are embedded deep in the socio-cultural conceptions. Also, gender norms and conceptions play a great role in shaping the gender relations at the level of household amidst various members of the household regarding distribution of resources, services and decision making power.

### **5.3.1 Intra-household dynamics**

The interviews with local women agricultural labourers regarding working of gender relations at the level of the household were mostly centred around the attitude of the male members of the household, who quite frequently happened to be the ‘significant other’ to the woman in question. I could observe that it was more of matters of self-respect and disregard that troubled women compared to their excessive physical and emotional engagement with the household. As mentioned earlier, in one of the households where the male member did not work, the woman agricultural labourer in the household was not as agitated with the fact that she had to work as her husband did not work. She was, in fact, more furious at the attitude of her husband towards her. She expressed that rather than being grateful to her for sustaining the household, he shouted at her without any valid reason and often abused her verbally. She also shared that the incidences of violence by the husband reduced as the children grew old. However, she also felt that it was partly due to the reason that she started earning and her husband was ashamed of himself of resorting to the violence. In yet another case, the husband often resorted to violence as he objected to his wife working as an agricultural labourer, as follows:

**Case 9:** Tejvir, a local woman agricultural labourer belonging to Saini caste aged 49 years mentioned that she has been working as an agricultural labourer for the past six years. She lived with her husband, a son and a daughter. She did not work earlier. Her husband worked as a painter and occasionally worked as an agricultural labourer. He stopped working some seven years ago as he was not able to do any work due to excessive consumption of alcohol. He also did not allow Tejvir to work as an agricultural labourer for almost a year. Tejvir recollected that she and her children often slept hungry. The education of the children was also at stake. Her daughter had already stopped going to school. It was then that Tejvir decided to take up agricultural work against the wish of her husband. He would even beat her after consuming alcohol and demand wages that she earned. Initially, she handed him over the wages as she thought that her husband would start working after some time, but he did not work any further. She then stopped handing him over the wages and resist at times. Tejvir has been running the household for all these years now. All the members of the household except her husband work to sustain the household. Tejvir recollected that she lived a life of abject poverty even when her husband worked. Rather than reflecting on her struggles, she mentioned the troubled childhood of her children due to the poverty of the household.

The above case also suggests that women are not even allowed to exploit their labour at their own will. Their husbands often control their productive labour. It also draws attention to the fact of drawing boundaries between private and public whereby the mobility of women is restricted. Women often follow these restrictions put forth by the male or other elderly members of the household as the consequences of deviating could be as dire as violence against them. However, not every male member resorted to violence as observed in another case report mentioned earlier in one of the sections of this chapter. The husband in the said case also suggested that the wife could stop going to work but did not resort to violence. It thus appears that it is largely interpersonal relations and power equations which differ from one household to the other. There is however one common thread in most of the cases that work of women outside household is not approved of unless the economic situation of the household so demands. Women reported resorting to working outside due to economic difficulties.

Among the migrant women, the conduct of women in the presence of elderly men and women was not openly discussed or shared. It was largely a matter of observation. For instance, in the presence of elderly male members, women often covered their face with a veil, and the gestures themselves showed their submissive position. Further, women also kept quiet in the presence of elderly male and female members. They also

stood up and sometimes even went inside their huts on arrival of elderly male members. The same practice was followed whenever a farmer or his messenger came up to convey their male counterparts to come for agricultural work. Women passively received the message and conveyed it to their husbands. The migrant women agricultural labourers also kept quiet while they worked in the agricultural fields. It is in contrast to the local women agricultural labourers who did not follow any such practice and even conversed with the farmers and occasionally passed remarks against the migrant labourers.

During the slack season, migrant women often found time to sit together. I also joined them and engaged in informal conversations. During one such interaction, I casually asked them if they liked to recite any folk song. Almost all the women laughed at me, and one of the elderly women said that she did not intend to get scolded by her son for doing so. She further told me that at their native village, women sometimes sang folk songs when they sat together during marriages or local festivals. They were however not supposed to sing folk songs in a distant land. It points towards the authority of male member over women in the household and also refers to as to how the normative conceptions about the conduct of women change with a change in location.

### **5.3.2 Distribution of resources and services, and management of finances at the level of household**

The gender division of labour at the household revealed that local as well as migrant women were never at a receiving end as far as distribution of services within the household are concerned. Both local and migrant women perform all the household activities without any contribution from the male members. They, however, manage among themselves amidst varying intrahousehold support of other female members of the household. We have also discussed earlier that migrant women often get far less or negligible support from elderly female members of the household compared to their local counterparts. With respect to the distribution of resources within the household, most of local and all migrant women did not perceive any kind of discrimination. Rather, they always placed themselves at the bottom in terms of any requirement on their part except for a case or two. For instance, one of the local women agricultural labourers reported that she had kept a thousand rupees aside for

making a nutritious dish during the winters, but since her daughter was not receiving a fellowship from her college due to some discrepancy in her bank account, she used the saved amount to pay her tuition fee. In the narratives of women, it was evident that women always placed the requirements of family members above their requirements. This altruism was often cited as the basis of family and women were socialised in that very manner which taught them to keep themselves after everyone else in the family. However, there were some women who though questioned this practice yet accepted it unwillingly. These kinds of introspections often came up during group discussions about gendered roles and responsibilities within the household. Most of the women, however, experienced this unequal distribution of responsibilities on an everyday basis without lamenting it. It was only during group discussions that local women realised the unequal treatment within the household. Women also often accepted this unequal treatment without much complaint.

Migrant women, on the other hand, did not even comprehend the inequality within the household in their daily lives. Any mention of unequal gender roles and responsibilities during the interviews instigated them to question the cultural difference that we shared. They often questioned if Punjabi men and women were any different from them about gender roles and responsibility. One of the elderly migrant agricultural labourers even mentioned the role of class, education and location for any differences in gendered roles and responsibilities. She shared that educated, urban and rich people might practice different gendered roles and responsibilities. They, however, believed that it was for the welfare of women that they performed household chores while men toiled and faced unexpected situations outside the house.

It also came up during the interviews that the local women spent all their wages entirely on household, ranging from expenditure on education of children, treatment of an ill family member, dowry or gifts on marriages of close relatives, etc., to name a few. Many times, they had to spend on unexpected and unforeseen circumstances. Thus, the local women though were different from the migrant women as they received wages (unlike the migrant women who never received any wages in effect as they worked in familial units and the wages were handed over to the male head of the familial unit), yet they could not spend or utilize wages for themselves. The local



women agricultural labourers often reported spending their wages to meet the needs of the family. Local women, however, had the power to spend though entirely on household which the migrant women lacked totally. Despite their enormous contribution to the household, most local women agricultural labourers believed that their work as agricultural labourers merely supplemented their household incomes and they could barely sustain themselves as evident in one of the narratives as

*I never asked any money from my husband. I manage my expenses on my own. We sometimes wear old clothes of sisters or sisters-in-law. My husband does not spend anything on me. He is not happy doing so. He barely manages his expenses on motorcycle and mobile phone. He also does not spend on relatives.*

The above narrative suggests that Rajwant, a 47-year-old local woman manages her expenses on her own but also takes care of the expenses on other members of the household except for her husband. She also suggests that she alone manages the expenses on relatives as her husband does not spend any money on relatives. It also appeared that among local women agricultural labourers, other than handling their wages, women managed finances largely in times of distress. In the relatively comfortable times, it was the man who controlled and regulated the flow of finances. One of the women very aptly argued that women could better handle issues related to money but men hardly let them control the finances as they can then not spend on their drinks and other such activities.

### **5.3.3 Decision-making power**

As regards the decision making, I often found that migrant women hardly had any decision making power. Elderly women, on the other hand, at the most expressed their opinions yet their opinion was hardly taken into account. It was observed that elderly women, on the other hand, exercised power over their daughters-in-law regarding their food consumption, their day to day activities as well as in matters of reproduction. The local women, however, seemed to exercise their decision making power in everyday affairs as well as to the extent that they could spend the wages earned by them albeit on various household necessities. Some of these aspects are discussed in one of the later sections of this chapter. It is not to suggest that all local

women agricultural labourers had the decision making power. The same depended on the intrahousehold dynamics. For instance, Sushma, a 35-year-old local woman agricultural labourer mentioned that she shared with her husband the need of contraception to which he showed no interest. She then went on her own with one of the women from the village to get herself operated. When she later shared with her husband, he still did not show any interest. It seemed thus Sushma could at least decide for herself. It is in contrast with another local agricultural labourer aged 37 whose husband did not allow her to undergo treatment that required an ultrasound. It thus appeared that there were differences among local women agricultural labourers as regards the decision making. Quite often their position within the household determined whether they had any decision-making power. The next section discusses the selected women possessing various forms of power as identified in feminist discourse on power.

#### **5.4 Varied expressions of Power among women agricultural labourers**

We find that the dynamics of power relations within and beyond household largely suggest the subjugation of women. But the feminist discourse on power suggests that power need not be looked in terms of the mere duality of domination and subordination. Rather women exhibit different degrees and expressions of power at various stages in life and under varied circumstances. During the fieldwork, I also came across these varied expressions of power within the single woman and also across women. Though it is not possible to describe the manifestation of varied forms of power in all the women, I am attempting to reflect upon the selected women and their experiences of power as shared with me. It also includes the impressions I got about various facets of the same woman at different junctures. Thus, it is a description informed by observation, reflections and interaction with other women.

The very first form of power relations I came across in the field other than the domination/subordination relations was the 'power with'. As mentioned earlier, there were two distinct groups of local women who worked as agricultural labourers. It largely included women who worked all around the year as agricultural labourers. Out of these two groups, say Group I, worked within the village while the Group II

worked within as well as the adjoining village. Both these groups at some point of time exhibited the collective power whereby they attempted to negotiate with the farmers to raise their agricultural wages. It is, however, an altogether different issue that the collective power in Group I did not yield them the desired result as the interpersonal relations between certain women and the farmers overpowered the collective interests of the group. On the other hand, Group II asserted more collective power and chose to work in the adjoining village, if their struggle to raise wages did not yield the desired result.

Another aspect of power named 'power within' was expressed by at least one of the woman in the groups mentioned above. Both groups were headed by a woman who exhibited leadership qualities. But the sole leadership quality does not ensure the means to an end. The head woman of the group I shared a kind of patron-client relationship with the farmers and was somewhat submissive. On the other hand, the head woman of Group II was more assertive, confident and vocal. She shared with me with great enthusiasm and a sense of achievement as to how she refused to work for the farmer in the village when he did not agree to raise their wages. Also, that she along with other women of her group could go and work in the adjoining village for higher wages was a matter of achievement for her. I found that she could reflect upon her ability to decide and compare her relative advantage over the women of other group and thus possessed 'power within' as evident in the narrative that follows

Rupinder Kaur, a 43-year-old Ad-dharmi woman who happened to be a head woman of the Group II mentioned above shared with me how she tried negotiating with the farmers of the study village to raise wages of women labourers. Her narrative suggests her perceived power to raise voice against injustice and a bold move to work in the adjoining village when the farmers did not agree to raise wages. Rupinder narrated the instance when their demand to raise wages was not approved of; she even told the landowner

*Are we short of work? Have we taken any loan or borrowed money from you?.....Other women asked me that you are being arrogant. I told them that they are giving us less wage and on top of that they even dictate us.*

After that, they decided not to work on their farms and worked in the adjoining village. Rupinder shared that she told women to unionise as that will help them in getting work as well as get the wages that they demand. She mentioned that she then negotiated with the farmers in the adjoining village and managed to raise the wage by rupees 50 thereby making a daily wage of Rs. 150 for each of them. She was enthusiastic as well as proud while she narrated this instance. Thus, we find that women themselves have sporadic instances where they exhibit power against the structural and cultural forces. However, they are also prone to vulnerabilities associated with their very location in the system.

One day when I was at Rupinder's house, I found unusual stress on her face. I was not able to decipher the reason. I asked her if everything was fine. She then told that her married daughter would be coming to her home for a few days to deliver the child. At first, I thought that she is worried about the pregnancy of her daughter. But then she shared further that her daughter had married outside their *biradari* and she could thus not be at peace with this fact. She got emotional and while wiping her tears said that her daughter did not even care for her *izzat* in the village. She continued that her co-workers never passed any remarks on this issue as they know her anger. But they must be talking behind her back that despite being the head woman, she could not control her daughter (*Waddi thekedarni bani firidi hai, apani kudi te sambhi nahi gayi ihde ton*). Thus, we find that women have vulnerabilities of their own and there are different facets of their personalities. Here it is important to understand that even women who exhibit 'power within' have vulnerabilities very specific to their location and circumstances. On the one hand, Rupinder can fight for the rights of other women to raise wages, but at the same time, she is defeated by the patriarchal and brahminical ideas of restricting daughter's sexuality for the honour. It also appeared that the ideas of honour and caste-based arranged alliances have percolated to the so-called 'lower castes'.

Other than these two dimensions, there is a third aspect of power which relates to having decision making authority and 'power to' solve problems. Among the local women, many women shared at least a moment when they realised that they could change the course of life and felt a sense of achievement. Most women who otherwise

did not report them to be the head of household were de facto heads of the household. They often shared instances where they strategised to solve problems arising out of circumstances unique to them. Their decisions included taking up agricultural work, managing finances, sending children to school or higher education and above all refusing to hand over wages and earnings of the household to their husbands. Other than that a few women shared a sense of being self-dependent when they delivered their children in the past at their home on their own without going to any hospital or without any assistance. For some others, the marriage of children and to be specific daughters with spending more than they can afford to on their dowry was another instance of a sense of achievement as discussed later in the chapter. We will now discuss the narrative of a woman who recollected her experience of childbirth and shared a sense of achievement in delivering the children without anyone else's assistance and further also saving the family from any economic burden associated with the childbirth.

One of the elderly women, Nirmala, aged 57 shared that she delivered all her children at home and mentioned with great pride that she delivered children without anyone's assistance as;

*I delivered all my children at home. I continued work, and the child would be born in no time. When I would find that I am about to give birth, I would return from work. It would take 15-20 minutes to deliver a child. I never needed a Dai. It was just God's grace. Soon after I would start work, manage cattle. I never called anyone for help. I managed everything on my own and earned for myself*

The above narrative suggests that Nirmala perceived herself to have the power to manage all her deliveries on her own without anyone's assistance.

Kamaljeet is a 47-year-old landless Ad-dharmi widow who worked as an agricultural labourer. She had one son and four daughters. Her son was eldest among all the children and worked in a factory on a wage basis. At the time of the interview, one of her daughters was married who also worked with her in the agricultural field before getting married. After her marriage, the second daughter replaced her while the two younger daughters attended school.

Kamaljeet narrated how she managed to marry her eldest daughter as

*When I married my daughter, I did not ask anyone for help. Neither did I demand anything from my siblings and relatives. I thought that it was their good wish to contribute the way they liked. Meena (one of her distant relatives in the village who also worked as daily wage labourer) was also shocked to see the wholehearted support of my relatives. They supported as per their economic condition. Someone supported by giving Rs. 10,000 while others gave 1,000-5,000. The relatives also gifted clothes as per their economic condition. One of the landowners of the village gifted her daughter with Rs2000 and a suit. The adjacent village contributed by giving 1.5 quintal grains, 50 kilos gram flour and 100 kilo sugar. She attributed all this to her good behavior with the people and interpreted their contribution as a measure of the respect they had for her.*

In the above narrative, we find that Kamaljeet feels grateful towards the landowner and other relatives who helped her during the marriage of her daughter. At the same time, she feels that it is her conduct due to which she could receive all the help.

The above narrative is in contrast to that of the previous narratives; wherein women perceive their ability to negotiate and raise voice for their rights and labour power as the power inherent in them respectively. On the other hand, in this narrative, the woman perceives her politeness as power. Thus, different women perceive different aspects or traits of their personality as 'power to' overcome their circumstances.

Other than the issues of power, the narratives of women often reflect hope as well as despair. I also found that the co-existence of paradoxes such as power and vulnerability, hope and despair, was a routine affair in the lives of these women.

Amrit is a 42 year old Ad-dharmi woman, and her husband is a daily wage construction labourer. Amrit lived with her husband, son and youngest daughter. Her elder daughter got married a year before, and the eldest son had migrated to some country in the Middle East a few days back. When I interviewed her, she was already under the debt of near to one lac owing to the migration of her son as well as due to expenditure on marriage and dowry of her daughter. Yet in her narratives, I could feel a sense of accomplishment. Amrit told that she was able to marry her daughter by

taking a loan of Rs.50, 000 from the people in the village. Also, her relatives from paternal side gifted gold jewellery to her daughter and her in-laws. Other than that, she gave seven beddings, 101 utensils and wrist watch to her daughter and son-in-law at the time of marriage as dowry. I asked if they have repaid the loan amount to which she responded that they were not yet able to repay the entire amount. She further told that they also took a loan of Rs.75, 000 recently to send their eldest son to work outside the country. Amrit told me that she would have to work as daily wage labourer till she dies. She has to work not only to survive but also to repay the loan taken for her daughter's marriage and also to be in a position to marry the youngest daughter. She hoped that her son would earn enough to repay the amount they incurred for sending him abroad.

The above narrative suggests the co-existence of hope and despair in the lives of these women. Their perceived happiness lies in marrying the children by exhausting their labour power. I also found that the practice of spending more than one can afford on marriages and dowry was rampant. Women also realised the vulnerabilities associated with these practices, but the community and society appreciated their efforts and reinforced this practice.

Among the local women agricultural labourers we often found that they had a fair idea or clear estimates about how much money the farmers might be making. On the other hand, migrant women were hardly aware of any such matter. For instance, one of the local women talks of the amount of a quintal of wheat and hence estimates the amount farmer must be made. They thus estimate their worth in the production chain and often express their agitation regarding how fewer wages they receive and also that despite their numerous requests, the farmers do not raise their wages. Thus, it appeared that local women possessed some forms of power at a given point in time. Their migrant counterparts, on the other hand, experienced rampant subjugation by male family members as well as elderly female members. They consequently lacked the confidence to express their opinions and feelings. The socio-cultural norms and gendered conceptions of normative behaviour also seem to guide their behaviour.

This chapter thus largely discussed the meaning of work from the perspective of women agricultural labourers. The everyday performance of gender in their day to day activities concerning the variety of work they engage in is determined by their household characteristics as well as the larger structural and cultural forces resulting from poverty and migration which find manifestation in their life circumstances. It is important to acknowledge the struggle inherent in the life journey of each of the woman as some attempt to negotiate and devise coping strategies to tackle constraints of different nature. It appeared that the socio-cultural norms and the socio-cultural location of women regarding their caste, class, and regional identity posed challenges of various kinds.



## **Chapter 6**

# **Women Agricultural Labourers' Perceptions of Ill-health and Well-being**



## **6. Women Agricultural Labourers' Perceptions of Ill-health and Well-being**

The present chapter details health problems reported by both local and migrant women agricultural labourers. It also attempts to draw differences in the perceptions about illness and disease among local and migrant agricultural labourers. It also discusses women's perceptions of the causes of ill-health. The varied ways in which both local and migrant women attempt to cure illnesses and their experiences of accessing health care services to treat diseases is also discussed. It then discusses women's understanding of well-being, thereby widening the focus from physical health to bring forth the interaction of gender and other relations of power in the everyday lives of both local and migrant women. As mentioned earlier in the conceptualisation, the term well-being was chosen over health as it suggested the wider connotations beyond the physical health to understand the circumstances in which women situate their health and life in general.

The state of health of most women was visible in their pale faces and feeble bodies with migrant women exhibiting even shorter stature and relatively thinner bodies than their Punjabi counterparts. The perceptions about health among both sets of women were however pronounced towards the bodily function. The same also indicates a close association between work and health. Work and health share a bi-directional relationship as the two significantly shape each other. In the narratives of both local and migrant women agricultural labourers, such linkages were even sharper as the physicality inherent in the agricultural labour posed certain challenges or threats to women's health.

Their emphasis on bodily health with the ability to work pushed me to explore further how they perceive the linkages with the nature and conditions of work. Further, I attempted to investigate and understand their state of physical health by listing health problems classified as illness and diseases based on a recall period of six months and one year respectively. I also attempted to explore various ways in which women took certain initiatives to cure ill-health. It thus also involved exploring symptoms or causation of ill-health from women's perspective. The two broad sets of women,

namely local and migrant women agricultural labourers quite frequently identified causation of illness differently. It could be due to differences in their health beliefs that are often shaped by a particular culture.

### **6.1 Women's perception of illnesses, causes and cure**

As mentioned earlier, women often associated their state of health with the ability to work. They, however, corroborated their responses with the physical characteristics exhibited by one such as visibly healthy body, active and alert, full of energy, visibly happy and content. Some also indicated the importance of 'internal' health. However, still, some emphasised both outer and inner health of the body while such distinctions were altogether missing in the narratives of some women. Despite all these differences, the relationship between work and bodily health appeared quite direct and interdependent. They needed work to survive, and for being able to work, they needed to maintain good health. Also, they classified bodily discomfort based on their perceived severity of the health condition. Women often referred to any ailment as an illness that did not restrict them from managing housework and agricultural work. The local women often termed such condition as *marhi-moti bimari*. Migrant women also referred to such health condition as *takleef/chhoti-moti bimari/ thakavat/ thakan* signifying a similar meaning. Both local and migrant women also identified certain causes to conditions that they classified as illness.

Table 6.1 shows a listing of all reported illnesses among both local and migrant agricultural labourers. Most local and migrant women agricultural labourers identified pains in various body parts, backache and headache as illnesses. Pain in various body parts among women could be attributed to continuous engagement in arduous work for long hours and little or no rest. They often did not pay attention to such discomfort and continued working.

As high as about 71 per cent local women reported a backache. The high incidence of a backache could be attributed to shifting gender division of labour in agricultural operations. Most local women who worked during the harvesting of wheat lifted 35-40 kg of wheat bundles on their head. I could observe that the local women paid more

attention to the bodily discomfort or illness during the peak season of agriculture which they would otherwise ignore had it been any other part of the year. It refers to the increased significance of bodily health in ensuring the ability to work for longer hours during the peak season of agriculture.

Many migrant women (more than 60 per cent) reported instances of tiredness and weakness. Other illnesses among migrant women included fever, cough and cold, diarrhoea, vomiting, and fever. A very high percentage of interviewed migrant women (about 77 per cent) reported irregular menstruation. As high as about 69 per cent migrant women also reported anaemia. All these health problems among migrant women could be attributed to the interaction of their living conditions, poverty and malnutrition.

**Table 6.1: Listing of reported illnesses among local and migrant women agricultural labourers (based on a recall period of six months)**

<b>Reported Illness</b>	<b>Local women agricultural labourers (N=34)</b>	<b>Migrant women agricultural labourers (N=13)</b>
Leg and hand pains	29 (93.5)	08 (61.5)
Backache	24 (70.6)	02 (15.4)
Headache	17 (50)	03 (23)
Neck Pain	06 (17.64)	-
Weakness	12 (35.2)	09 (69.2)
Tiredness	18 (52.9)	08 (61.5)
Anaemia	06 (17.64)	9 (69.2)
Swelling	11 (32.3)	06 (46.1)
Vomiting	03 (8.8)	08 (61.5)
Fever	07 (20.6)	10 (76.9)
Cough and Cold	14 (41.1)	09 (69.2)
Diarrhoea	05 (14.7)	06 (46.1)
Skin Problems	08 (23.5)	03 (23)
Respiratory Problems	06 (17.64)	02 (15.38)

### 6.1.1 Perceived causes of Illness

Both local, as well as migrant women, frequently reported pains in various body parts. Most women draw an association between the causes of such discomfort or other illnesses in their work while other causes included seasonal changes and changes in the humoral constitution of the body due to ingestion of certain food items and the like. The perceived notions about the hot and cold nature of food items as well as the cure of such humoral disturbances in the body were different across the two sets of women belonging to two different socio-spatial and cultural systems. Some women also attributed pain and heavy bleeding during menstruation to anaemia and weakness. The perceived causes of various reported illnesses among both local and migrant agricultural labourers are given in Table 6.2.

Table 6.2 shows differences in perception about a particular illness among both local and migrant women agricultural labourers. Local women agricultural labourers mostly associated agricultural work to various illnesses such as pains in various body parts, tiredness, respiratory and skin problems. They also associated weakness and anaemia with heavy bleeding during menstruation. Local women perceived that certain illnesses like fever, cough and cold resulted from hot and cold weather. Migrant women agricultural labourers also located causes of certain illnesses like diarrhoea, vomiting and headache in agricultural work in the sun during hot weather. Among various causes of diarrhoea, they also noted ingestion of contaminated food and water, as well as open defecation as causes, drawing attention to the poor living conditions and lack of water and sanitation facilities. They also attributed agricultural work to pains in various body parts. A few migrant women reported housework as well as agricultural work leading to a backache. Some migrant women perceived childbirth, stillbirth, heavy bleeding during menstruation and delivery as leading to weakness and anaemia. Quite frequently, migrant women draw bi-directional relation between anaemia and weakness. They also located the causation of certain illnesses in hot and cold weather.

Both local and migrant women while responding to their perceptions about the causes of illnesses often located the cause within or outside the body. Also, in certain

instances, such distinction between outside and inside was blurred. Rather, in such cases, women perceived interaction of the two as a cause. The section thus discusses women's perceived causes of illnesses as per their respective locus.

**Table 6.2: Perceived causes of illnesses among local and migrant women agricultural labourers**

<b>Reported Illness</b>	<b>Perceived causes of illness reported by local women agricultural labourers</b>	<b>Perceived causes of illness reported by migrant women agricultural labourers</b>
Leg and hand pain	Agricultural work, Seasonal change	Agricultural work, Change in humoral composition of body
Backache	Agricultural work, Lifting the heavy head load	Agricultural work, Housework
Headache	Agricultural work, Stress, extreme hot or cold weather	Working under the sun during hot weather
Weakness	Lack of nutritious diet, heavy bleeding during menstruation, Poor diet	Childbirth, Stillbirth, Miscarriage, Tubectomy, Heavy bleeding during menstruation
Tiredness	Agricultural work, Housework	Anaemia, Lack of nutritious diet,
Anaemia	Poor diet, Heavy bleeding during menstruation, Miscarriage	Heavy bleeding during/ after childbirth, poor diet, heavy bleeding during menstruation
Swelling	Agricultural work during cold weather	Congestion of water inside the body
Vomiting	Agricultural work during hot weather, Indigestion due to the hot-cold combination of food	Working under the sun during hot weather, heat stroke, Ingestion of contaminated food/water
Fever	Exertion, Restlessness, Seasonal/ weather related	Due to extremely hot or cold weather
Cough and Cold	Due to cold weather	Due to cold weather
Diarrhoea	Indigestion due to a hot-cold combination of food, Ingestion of contaminated food/water	Working under the sun during hot weather, Ingestion of contaminated food/ water, heat stroke, open defecation
Skin Problems	Agricultural work, Pesticide exposure	Lack of time to grooming activities during the peak season of agriculture, Lack of water and bathing facilities
Respiratory Problems	Agricultural work, Dust, Pesticide exposure	Hereditary

### **6.1.1.1. Outside the body**

As mentioned above, the cause of illness, in certain cases, was attributed to be located outside the body. Women frequently identified causes of illness in the working conditions. While some women mentioned certain activities related to housework as causes of illness, the conditions inherent in agricultural work were predominantly cited as causes of illness. Women would often draw a connection between their ability to work with their state of health.

Conversely, they would also draw linkages between the health and work conditions. They perceived the cause of illnesses such as aches and pains of various kinds, body ache, backache, headache, pain in limbs rooted in their long working hours and work conditions. Among the two broad categories of local and migrant women, the local women often associated their work at agricultural fields to be causing illness. Most migrant women also talked of agricultural work as more exhausting and causing illnesses. Some migrant women also mentioned that filling water for cooking and cleaning was a tiresome job in addition to the agricultural work and that they had to fetch and fill water. Other than that, the respiratory and skin problems resulting from the agricultural work were also cited as falling under the work atmosphere.

#### *Problems of posture*

Many women mentioned postural problems arising from various agricultural operations as they worked in the agricultural field. The problems of posture resulted from long hours of sitting and moving in the squatting position during the sowing of seeds. Apart from that bending for an extended period as well as lifting heavy loads during the harvesting season also caused problems of posture.

Kuljeet, a 41-year-old woman belonging to the study village shared that she suffers from discomfort in her waist and back as they work while bending all through the day during harvesting of wheat. Rani, a 47-year-old Ad-dharmi woman, mentioned how tired she was after lifting the bundles of wheat during the harvesting of wheat,



*You saw us lifting bundles of wheat throughout the day. My neck was so stiff that I wish I could just cut it apart from my body. At night I asked my daughter to apply some balm since I had to go to work yet again the next day.*

The pain and extent of discomfort are visible in the narrative above. The way Rani expressed the problem with her neck clearly shows that she had lifted a heavyweight that day.

Amba, a migrant woman, aged 26 mentioned that she had developed some problem with her back not only caused by the agricultural work but also by lifting water pots. Since they do not have access to water for drinking/cooking and cleaning purposes, she fills and fetches water that leads to a backache as;

*You know it for yourself how painful is the agricultural work. I face a lot of problem in filling and lifting water throughout the day. At some of the households, daughters help in filling and carrying water as well as with the housework. But my daughters are too young to help me. I suffer a lot due to the problem in my back, could you suggest some cure? While working in the fields, I suffer a lot even if I have to bend from one side to the other*

It is evident that women get problems of posture by engaging in tiresome work which includes both agricultural as well as housework. As we find in the above narrative, Amba locates the cause of her discomfort in an activity related to housework. Each woman perceives the cause of illness differently and locates it accordingly in her perceived work domain. We could also state that perceived notions about the discomfort caused by the work vary as per their varying work burden and individual circumstances.

#### *Pains and Aches of various body parts*

Most elderly women often reported constant pain in various body parts such as back, limbs and even entire bodies. I found that relatively younger women did not report pain in body parts very frequently. They, however, mentioned that they too suffered from an occasional backache or pain in other parts of the bodies. The chronic fatigue of body as a result of bodily engagement in agricultural, housework and reproductive

work was often referred to as a cause of pains in various body parts by women in their early and late forties and above. It implies that the rising biological age accentuated the continuous wear and tear of the body over the years and constant pain in various parts of the body was its manifestation. The relatively younger women, however, seemed not to pay much attention to the pain resulting from strenuous work as we will find in the narratives below;

Sushma, 35 years old, a woman belonging to Sarehde caste belonging to the study village mentioned that

*When we work in the agricultural field, we are bound to experience pain in arms and legs. All I do is that I continue without bothering much about pain. I only think about the future of my children and tell myself to push a little few more years.*

In the above narrative, we find that Sushma too experiences pain in various body parts yet she acknowledges that she pushes herself beyond her physical limits for the sake of future of her children. The narrative also shows that women of relatively younger ages have more stamina and strength to go through arduous work compared to that of elderly women. Further, the hope and despair cycle in which women often find themselves caught up (as discussed later in the chapter) is also an important aspect that supposedly gives them strength to carry on despite the unfavourable situations and ignore the physical discomfort they might be experiencing

Nirmala, a 57-year-old Ad-dharmi woman who works as an agricultural labourer, shared about pain in her legs as

*The legs just do not work. (Touching and showing me the back of her lower leg, she said) From here, my calves pain a lot. I take medicines too. I get tired while I work in the agricultural fields. And then these legs start aching.*

Already in their old age, women who do not see any hope in the improvement of their condition, despite having broken their bodies in the difficult work conditions find it difficult to continue work in the absence of social support. Also, their already frail bodies affected by years of hard work inside as well as outside house do not support them any further.

### *Respiratory and Skin Problems*

Since agricultural work involves working amidst dust, sun and exposure to pesticides, a few local women reported respiratory problems. Some even reported skin allergies. One of the research participants named Lakshmi, once mentioned that she finds it difficult to work in the fields where the pesticides have been sprayed a few days earlier. She mentioned that her head starts aching as soon as she steps in such a field. Also, she starts sneezing profusely by mere spending a minute or two in such field. She also shared that she would often avoid working at such fields where the pesticide was sprayed lately.

Another woman mentioned that she finds it difficult to work during the harvesting of wheat. She finds difficulty in breathing when the wheat is thrashed as a lot of dust is there in the air at that time. Many other women, however, reported that though they did not face excessive breathing problem, yet, they would cover their faces and heads with their *dupattas* to avoid inhaling dust as well as to protect them of the sun. On the other hand, migrant women largely did not mention any respiratory or skin problems except for the rashes on the skin due to working in excessive heat. I also noticed that there was excessive dryness on their uncovered body parts such as arms and feet. Some even had white patches of dryness on their arms. When inquired, women perceived those patches to be resulting from a combination of dust and dryness. Rupa, 29 shared that in the peak season of agriculture, they do not find much time to take care of their bodies. However, in the slack season, they groomed their bodies and hair more often albeit not as well as they could at their native places owing to infrequent access to water in the study village.

One of the migrant women named Bhanmati shared that she suffers from cuts in her hand while she handles carrot foliage and carrots while working in the fields. She also mentioned that she continues even with the cuts in her hand as that is the only time when the agricultural work is in its full swing and that she could not afford by not going to work during that part of the year. Punjabi women agricultural labourers also mentioned that during the weeding and harvesting of carrot, the situation of their hands was pathetic. Their hands were continuously soiled, and some even got skin problems due to continuous contact with soil containing pesticides. Also, handling

carrot umbels caused a lot of skin irritation. While women cut apart the carrot umbels from their stalks using sickles, they inevitably ended up holding the umbel in their hands. It caused not only immense skin irritation but also blisters in some cases.

Other than the carrot, there are other vegetables such as ladyfinger which affect the hands of labourers. Women mentioned that it was very difficult to work while they plucked ladyfinger. The tiny spines were extremely painful. They wore socks in their hands to reduce the pain, yet some of the spines made their way through the socks. Rani mentioned that their hands would even bleed while they harvested ladyfinger. Similarly, harvesting maize also involved friction of medium while they separated the maize cobs.

### *Illness due to climatic conditions*

Agricultural labourers work in the adverse of weather conditions. However, not all have the strength to continue under adverse conditions and thus experience illnesses resulting from excessive hot and cold climatic conditions. Most of the women among both local as well as migrant agricultural labourers found hot weather conditions more difficult compared to the winters. A few perceived winters as well as rainy season to be tough for them. Migrant women also located some of their illness in weather conditions such as *loo lagna* (heat stroke), *Jaade se taap aana* (Fever due to cold), yet at the same time, they shared a sense of pride in working during all weather conditions. As mentioned earlier, migrant women were visibly feeble and thinner than their Punjabi counterparts, yet they perceived themselves to be physically stronger and hardworking than Punjabi women despite all the adversities. One of the migrant woman labourer, 34, mentioned,

*We do not shirk work. When we work (as agricultural labourers), we do not care about sun or shade. We are not like these local people (referring to Punjabi women agricultural labourers) that we would not work in the sun.*

Thus, in the above narrative, we find that the migrant women suggest that they work without caring much for the extreme weather conditions.

Debo, a Punjabi woman, aged 46 years mentioned that she finds it extremely difficult to work under the sun while they harvest wheat. She described her experience as follows;

*I find it extremely difficult to work during the harvesting of wheat. It is a tough task, but it gets even worse due to the sun. I find it difficult to breathe while I work in such a hot climate. I start sweating profusely. My head ached as if it would explode with heat. Sometimes, I find my eyes burning. But what to do, there is no other way to collect grains for the year. Despite such discomfort, I manage it somehow.*

The above narrative suggests that Debo locates the cause of discomfort she experiences in the hot weather conditions. Despite undergoing such discomfort, she continues to work as this ensures that she earns sufficient grains for her house.

In yet another narrative, Rani, a 47-year-old woman compared the extreme hot and cold weather conditions as;

*It is difficult to work in all weathers. But winters are relatively better. It is very difficult to work during hot weather. Due to excessive heat, one gets a fever, starts vomiting and even experiences diarrhoea. The body also gets dehydrated. While working in the agricultural fields, we do not even get time to drink water. If we feel extremely thirsty only then, we take water. Moreover, the sun burns us. We all then seek permission from the landowner to not work for 1-2 hours afternoon when it is extremely hot. Instead, we start early in the morning and work late till evening as long as he does not allow us to leave. He (referring to the landowner) also agrees as we finish all his work for that day. Moreover, I am ageing and do not feel the strength as before.*

In this narrative, we find that Rani locates the causes of certain illnesses resulting from the excessive heat while they work in the agricultural field. Though she mentions that all seasons are difficult in agricultural work, yet she suggests that she finds it more difficult to work in extremely hot weather.

Karamjit, a 40-year-old Saini woman mentioned how difficult she finds to work during the rainy season as;

*I somehow manage summer as well as winter somehow. I find it most difficult to work during the rainy season. The clothes are wet all time due to sweat in that season. The sweat also does not dry up. During that season, we harvest maize. The landowner demands that we harvest the maize while standing. It gets so very difficult to work as we drench in the sweat and the maize leaves pierce like spines. The arms and hands get affected severely while we harvest maize.*

Jagmeet, a 25-year-old Ad-dharmi woman mentioned that she finds it difficult to work during cold weather. She shared

*My hands and feet do not get warm easily during the winters. When we work in the agricultural field, touching leaves with dew drops almost freezes the hands. Socks in the feet also do not help much. I find it difficult to handle even housework that involves water. I somehow feel colder compared to others (started laughing). I even catch cold and congestion during winters very easily. I try every time to protect myself, but somehow I end up catching a cold.*

In the above narrative, Jagmeet shares how she finds herself more vulnerable to cold weather and attributes the reason for her cough and cold to the weather condition as well as her perceived weakness in combating cold.

Thus, we find that different women perceive their illness differently and attribute the reasons to their illness to different climatic conditions and hence locate the cause of their illness in the outer environment.

#### **6.1.1.2. Inside the body**

Women also perceived the causation of certain illnesses to be located within their bodies. One such example was illness resulting from menstruation. Other than that, some even referred to the weakness as a manifestation of the internal deterioration of the body. Interestingly, internal weakness was largely attributed to the female reproductive system. However, they also located the cause of such weakness in their socio-economic conditions leading to hunger and chronic nutritional deprivation. The same is albeit discussed under the interaction of outer-inner domains.

### *Discomfort resulting from Menstruation*

The discomfort resulting from menstruation was often identified as illness. Also, the degree of discomfort varied significantly across women. For some, it did not cause much difficulty while others were almost bedridden for a day or two. However, the ability to function normally for some was reduced yet it was not classified as disease due to the normalisation of menstruation in the perceptions of women as a normal body process. They perceived any disturbance in the menstrual cycle as a serious concern.

Chhindo is 36 years old. She belongs to Ad-dharmi caste. I incidentally visited her house on one such day and found that she could not go to work due to her periods. She was in extreme pain. As she lied in the cot, she had put hot water in a glass bottle and wrapped a cloth to transfer heat around her lower stomach area. She had not eaten anything for fear of throwing out since last evening. Chhindo shared that she is prone to vomiting on some of the days during her menstrual cycle. She feels sick all the time and hence tends to eat very less. Due to severe pain and heavy flow, she found it difficult even to move around and hence could not go to work.

Rekha, a migrant woman agricultural labourer, aged 26 years old lives with her husband and three children in the study village. She also shared that she suffers from heavy flow during menstruation and is not able to go to work. Since her children are also young, and there is no other female in the house, she manages housework on her own albeit with great difficulty. On the worst of days, she gets help from one of her neighbours who would cook food for her family and also carry drinking water for her. Rekha believed that the increased loss of blood during the menstruation leads to weakness.

Rajwant, a 45-year-old Ad-dharmi woman shared that one of her daughters aged 15 years was experiencing delayed periods or no periods altogether for past six months. She knew from a relative in Hoshiarpur who suffered from the same problem that it could be corrected with medicines. Rama was not convinced that one needed medication to make the cycle regular. Instead, Rama shared that she perceived the

irregularity in the menstrual cycle was responsible for her frail body. When I attempted to understand the perceived aetiology of the condition, Rekha shared that

*She neither sleeps nor eats well. She is not very good at studies. She also takes a lot of stress due to her exams. That's why she is experiencing delayed periods. I do not believe in these medicines. When her school is shut during the vacations, she never faces such a problem. I counsel her lot not to get tensed but to no avail. I do not get much tensed as she is young as yet. If this condition does not get well by the time she is of marriageable age, it would be of much more concern).*

Thus, Rajwant perceives menstrual cycle as a natural body condition and locates the cause of irregular cycle of her daughter in her eating and sleeping pattern as well as her stressed life due to education. However, she perceived this irregularity as an illness and a matter worth attention if it lasted long.

One of the migrant women (named Anita, aged 35) shared that she suffers a lot during her periods. She told that her body ached more during the cycle than it would on any other day. Also, she suffered from a severe backache during her cycle. While we discussed the discomfort resulting from menstruation, she even shared that she would at times experience a sharp and severe pain in her stomach as it would lead to death. When I asked her how she cures the pain and discomfort, she suggested that since it is a natural process, it would cure on its own and no medicine was needed for the same.

Thus, we find that both local, as well as migrant women, attributed certain illnesses like a backache, stomachache and general pain in the body to be resulting from menstruation. At the same time, menstruation was perceived as a natural process, but the discomfort resulting from the menstruation was identified as illness.

### *Internal Weakness*

Women's perceptions about the occurrence of various conditions were sometimes based on multiple causes. The certainty of a single factor leading to illness was thus at times beyond question, and the causation was believed to be rooted in a multitude of factors. As discussed above, pain in body, limbs and backache was at times referred to be resulting from engagement in work while at certain other times; they also believed



it to be resulting from menstruation. Yet again, women attributed at times the experience of tiredness and pain in various body parts to *Andarli kamjori* (internal weakness). Migrant women also attributed to some factors such as excessive loss of blood during menstruation, multiple pregnancies, and miscarriages as factors leading to weakness.

One of the local woman named Surjit aged 47 shared how she perceives the cause of pain in her body as a result of weakness caused by excessive loss of blood during menstruation and miscarriage as;

*Drawing attention towards her youngest daughter aged 15, she mentioned that I was of her age when my family married me off. I conceived almost two years after the marriage. I was not much mature and was not even aware of the conception. His (referring to her husband) maternal uncle had got his son engaged, and they visited us with sweets and dried dates. His maternal aunt also gave me one piece of dried date. I was excited to eat that. As they left and I was hungry already. Moreover, I had also not eaten such a thing before. I almost ate a handful of dried dates and drank water to my fill. By evening my stomach was swollen, and I suffered a sharp pain in my stomach. I felt like going to the washroom and lost my conscious. When I regained conscious, I was not able to understand anything. My mother-in-law was also very angry. Later my sister-in-law told me what had just happened. You cannot imagine how hurt I was. I later on realized that one must not consume dried dates while one is pregnant as dried dates are considered to be hot in nature. I could not conceive for 2-3 years and I remember that my mother-in-law had almost planned to marry my husband somewhere. It is then that I gave birth to Karamjit , my son. After his birth, I underwent the same thing again for 2-3 times, and later these two (referring to two of her daughters) were born. Because of all these things (recurrent miscarriages and repeated pregnancies), I turned weak. Also, I used to suffer a lot during my menstrual cycle. All these things over the years have made me weak internally. Now that I am ageing, it is even worse.)*

In this narrative, we find that Surjit attributes her weakness largely to the reproductive system. She also refers to her lack of knowledge about the reproductive affairs owing to her young age at marriage and at the time of the first conception. She refers collectively to repeated pregnancies, miscarriages and menstrual cycle as causing internal weakness.

In yet another case, one of the migrant agricultural labourers named Amba related the strength of women to the work they engaged in and located the cause of internal weakness to the female reproductive system as;

*How could women carry out heavy work when they do not have any strength left? They get weak with every passing cycle. It is not even easy to give birth to the children. Women are at a loss at being women. The difference between a man and a woman starts from here that a man does not get weak. That is why men do not undergo an operation (referring to vasectomy).*

The above narrative suggests that Amba perceives the main cause of women's weakness in the processes related to reproduction such as menstruation, pregnancies and childbirth. Moreover, she suggests that tubectomy in women leads to weakness. The narrative also reflects the working of gender relations and health belief whereby women are compelled to undergo tubectomy.

### **6.1.1.3. Interaction of factors outside-inside the body**

Not always did women locate the causation of a particular illness in an either/or fashion of being located in the outside or inside the body. They also suggested an interaction between the two. The intake of certain food items or liquids was often believed to interact with the internal humoral constitution of the body. On the other hand, some even referred to their socio-economic situation leading to hunger and chronic deprivation leading to weakness and tiredness.

#### *Disturbance in the humoral composition of the body*

Both local and migrant women perceived and classified the food items by their hot and cold nature depending on their belief system and worldview. Accordingly, certain combinations of food items were considered to be interfering with the internal body fluids. Also, the proportion of certain food items was crucial to the maintenance of the internal fluids of the body. Any over or under consumption of certain food items was thus regarded to cause illness.

Local women often suggested not eating curd and pickle simultaneously as they believed it to disturb the acidic level of internal body fluids. The excessive consumption of tea was also associated with the incidence of acidity. Further, the increased consumption of certain 'hot' food items (*garam taseer wali cheezein*) was believed to lead to increased blood loss during menstruation. Similarly, as mentioned earlier, excessive consumption of such foods during pregnancy was also believed to lead to miscarriage.

The migrant women believed that increased consumption of lentils (*daal*) led to aches in joints. They believed the consumption of curd at night could cause a cough and cold. The consumption of curd and curries made of curd was prohibited for dinner as they believed that it caused acidity. Some even believed that drinking extremely cold water while at work disturbed the equilibrium of the body. Similarly taking a bath immediately after work was supposed to interfere with the natural equilibrium of the body. Their belief system not only guided them to avoid certain food items but also to utilize the same to cure certain illnesses. The latter are discussed in the section on strategies to cure illnesses.

#### *Hunger and Nutritional Deprivation*

As mentioned above, women associated with the intake of certain food items to cause certain disturbances in the normal equilibrium of the body. They, however, also pointed towards the very unavailability of food items that they considered healthy as causing the deficiencies in their bodies. They situated the unavailability of certain food items in structural issues such as poverty. They thus point towards the larger structural differences and the chronic deprivation as causing weakness. One of the local women agricultural labourers belonging to Sarede caste shared;

*I have only seen poverty all through my life. My parents were also poor. When I came to this house after marriage, it was just the same. I toiled all through my life and raised my children. I ate less so that my children do not face any difficulty. Many times, I had to remain hungry. I was young at that time. Now I feel that all my starvation has served no purpose. I now feel weakness. But what can I do?*

The above narrative suggests the utter deprivation in which women raise their children at the cost of their health. They draw the linkages between their socio-economic situation and their health. It also reiterates the importance of the availability of basic food items to the very survival of the poor.

Some even located their state of health in the current context of inflation. One of the local agricultural labourers compared the availability of certain food items with the past as:

*Can any poor buy fruit these days? How expensive is the milk.....lentils (pulses), vegetables, sugar, tea, nothing is cheap... Earlier the poor could at least survive on pulses. Now that also only rich can afford.....Earlier, one could get some fruits or vegetables from some landowners. Milk was also not that expensive. Now a days poor can survive only with roti and salt. Now tell me from where will then we draw strength?*

One of the migrant agricultural labourers (Ram Dulari, 57) said;

*We never purchased grains in our village. Here we even have to buy wheat flour from the market many times. The vegetables are so expensive that many times, we end up making a chutney with tomatoes, salt and chillies. In our village, we could at least grow vegetables on our own land. Here in a foreign land, we barely managed to find a place to live with great difficulty, what to eat or grow here? We work so hard, but there is nothing in the food that can give us nourishment. The man will still get to eat. The woman some time starves while at other times shares her food with children. That is how it has been going on*

In this narrative, we find that the migration also adds up to the existing challenges of deprivation and poverty. The migrant women understandably are in a more vulnerable position as they have lesser control over the access to food items compared to the local women labourers. Undoubtedly, chronic hunger and nutritional deprivation in their perceptions are one of the major causes of weakness.

#### **6.1.1.4. Beyond the outer-inner dichotomy**

Having discussed the causes of illness as located within or outside the body and also as an interaction of factors located outside and inside the body, we will now discuss

the causation of illness beyond the outer-inner dichotomy — most elderly women identified ageing as an illness. It was very clear in their narratives that ageing itself was considered as a condition that aggravated the discomfort that they might have experienced earlier in their lives. Further, some still related their necessity to work despite the old age as evident in the narrative that follows;

*It is difficult to work at an old age, no matter which weather it is. In the winters, the body gets stiff. The legs and knees almost get jammed. It is difficult to get up once one sits. Ageing itself is an illness. One cannot do much and is tired all the time. One also does not feel like eating or doing anything. Despite all that one has to work as it is a necessity (Nirmala, 57)*

Another Ad-dharmi elderly woman (Kamla, aged 70) belonging to the study village mentioned that she works largely during the harvesting of carrots as she can then sit on the ground and cut the foliage apart. She is unable to work for the rest of the year as it demands much strength and she is now unable to perform due to her old age. She also mentioned her inability to work during hot weather.

*I have worked a lot all through my life. Now for past three-four years, my legs are absolutely not working. I find it too difficult to sit in the squatting position. Now I work only when the carrot is harvested. Daughter..... what to do, the body just does not supports me anymore. Otherwise, who does not need (agricultural) work? (Referring to her husband she said) Those who have left early are better off than those living long; their sufferings got lessened. People like us are toiling here)*

In this narrative, we find that the widow agricultural labourer finds herself in an awful condition. She narrates the misery of her life by mentioning that her husband who died earlier was better off than her as she toiled amidst the extreme physical discomfort. She even suggests that death is better than living long. Thus, we find the drudgeries one has to go through despite the old age in the absence of any support system.

### **6.1.2 Cure of Illnesses**

As discussed earlier, women perceived the bodily discomfort that did not affect much of their normal functioning as illness. Curing an illness thus mainly included home remedies and self-medication based on their prior experiences with a particular

illness. Also, some women reported just doing nothing, in particular, to cure illness as they engaged themselves in their never-ending work. However, depending on the responses, I have classified the variety of curing strategies under the following heads as:

#### **6.1.2.1. Home remedies**

I often found that the use of certain home remedies for curing certain illnesses was more prevalent among the migrant agricultural labourers. The migrant women suggested that they traced the cure in causation. For instance, if an illness was caused by the humoral disturbance in the body due to consumption of certain hot or cold foods, the reverse was often the most probable cure. One of the migrant women mentioned that in the instance of cold or a cough resulting from ingestion of certain cold items, hot food items were taken to cure the same.

Similarly, if they perceived that ingestion of a hot food item had caused an illness, they took up some soothing or cold food items. Other than that, certain condiments were also used in case of common illnesses like a headache, stomach-ache, bodyache. Among the reported home remedies, the ingestion of *Ajwain* with hot water was often cited as an effective remedy for stomach-ache. The use of ginger and cinnamon in tea was similarly reported to be effective in case of congestion and body pain. The *ghee* (clarified butter) was used for curing the internal dryness. However, they also reported that they could hardly afford to purchase *ghee* in the study village. On the other hand, at their respective villages, they had access to milk more frequently and could process it to make *ghee*. Among the local women agricultural labourers, the relatively elderly women mentioned the use of home remedies such as ingestion of *gur* (jaggery) and *saunth* (dried ginger) to cure aches in the body. Other than that, they suggested using *karha* (concoctions) of various kinds to cure cough and cold. Again, their beliefs regarding home remedies were guided by their perception and categorisation of certain foods into hot and cold categories. The women in their early and late thirties, however, expressed their increasing reliance on tablets and medicines over home remedies. Some even mentioned that they rarely used home remedies. It also refers to the transition in patterns of cure among local women agricultural labourers where the medicines were being frequently used compared to the home remedies.

### 6.1.2.2. Curing through diet

Other than tracing the cure from the perceived cause of a certain illness, migrant women also reported that they believed in preventing certain illnesses by ingestion of certain food items. As mentioned earlier, migrant women faced different constraints compared to the local women as regards access to many food items. Their different work conditions during the peak season of agriculture also did not leave them with much time in cooking food items. As a solution to this problem, migrant women also dried certain vegetables in the sun during the slack season of agriculture. These vegetables were then preserved to be used during the peak season of agriculture when they had relatively less time to themselves for cooking. This preservation of certain vegetables when they were in abundance and hence cheaper for the rest of the year was also a strategy to combat poverty and malnutrition.

The local women agricultural labourers also believed that the quality of diet played an important role in maintaining good health. Further, during an illness/ disease diet was considered to play a crucial role in recovery. The same, however, held for all other family members except for the woman. I often observed that during their illness or episodes of disease, women continued with their earlier patterns of diet. On the other hand, if any other family member suffered from illness or disease, women often tried to procure food items believed to promote health. Most local agricultural labourers considered winters as a season to restore health as they draw linkages with the ample availability of various affordable vegetables such as cauliflower, carrots, peas and other green leafy vegetables such as *Saag* (Brassica) and *Palak* (Spinach). They often mentioned that cooking vegetables with ginger ensured good health. Women also mentioned *Chaulai* (Amaranth) to cure pains and aches of various body parts. Thus, we find that women also attempted to cure illnesses by adding certain ingredients to their daily food items.

### **6.1.2.3. Curing by Self-medication and over the counter drugs**

Most women agricultural labourers seldom paid attention to bodily discomfort unless it affected their ability to work. However, the aged women were more sensitive to the bodily discomfort, and their narratives often mentioned the physical suffering aggravated by ageing. Some took up the biomedical route more often and almost took medicines on an everyday basis. The relatively younger women, however, avoided any medicine until they could not do work without it. It is not to suggest that the relatively younger women did not take medicines on a day to day basis. They also took medicines for curing certain illnesses. For instance, local women knew the names of certain medicines such as Crocin, Disprin and Brufen (Ibuprofen) and used the same in case of fever and bodypain. In case of no relief by taking these medicines, they approached various unqualified medical practitioner in the village who would often give them a combination of ayurvedic and modern medicine popularly known as *angrezi dawai*. The local women during the peak season of agriculture rarely relied on self medication and approached such non-qualified practitioners even for a perceived illness without much delay. In fact, they believed that *angrezi dawai* often gave quick results and they mentioned that they could hardly take chance with their health conditions during the peak season of agriculture. The migrant women agricultural labourers shared that they were not aware of the names of medicines except *Pudin Hara* and *Haajmola*. They also expressed their inability to read the names of medicines. In fact, they distinguished certain medicines by their color and shape. They resorted to access these medicines from the nearby chemist shop without any prescription by a medical practitioner. The male members would go to the chemist shops and would get medicines by describing the symptoms.

## **6.2 Women's perceptions about diseases, causes and course of treatment**

As discussed above, women identified a physical condition as an illness that caused discomfort yet did not impair their ability to work. On the other hand, the disease affected their ability to work. Their differentiation thus was largely based on the functional aspect and perceived the severity of the condition. The present section



largely discusses women's perceptions of diseases and strategies towards the course of treatment.

The disease thus was a condition that severely affected their body to the extent that it was difficult to manage everyday work including both housework and agricultural work. Migrant women reported suffering from malaria, typhoid, jaundice and low blood pressure. A case each of dengue and high blood pressure was also reported. Among the local women agricultural labourers reported diseases included typhoid, jaundice, gastric problems, high blood pressure and arthritis. One of the elderly local women agricultural labourers also reported seeking treatment of numbness in the body (Table 6.3)

**Table 6.3: Reported diseases among local and migrant women agricultural labourers (based on recall period of one year)**

<b>Disease</b>	<b>Local women agricultural labourers(N=34)</b>	<b>Migrant women agricultural labourers (N=13)</b>
Malaria	-	6 (46.1)
Dengue	-	1 (7.69)
Typhoid	05 (14.70)	08 (61.5)
Jaundice	01 (2.94)	03 (23)
High Blood Pressure/ BP (Hypertension)	03 (8.82)	1(7.69)
Low Blood Pressure (Hypotension)	-	6 (46.1)
Diabetes	06 (17.64)	1(7.69)
Arthritis	02 (5.88)	-
Numbness in body	01 (2.94)	-
Stomach problems/ Acidity	08(23.52)	-

Most women often shared uncertainty as regards causation of disease. A few local women shared their perceived causes of diseases such as stress, life circumstances and ingestion of contaminated food. Migrant women mostly referred to their living conditions such as lack of proper housing and sanitation facilities as sites of mosquito breeding and contamination of food and water as leading to diseases (Table 6.4).

**Table 6.4: Perceived causes of diseases among local and migrant women agricultural labourers**

<b>Disease</b>	<b>Perceived causes of the disease reported by local agricultural labourers</b>	<b>Perceived causes of the disease reported by migrant agricultural labourers</b>
Malaria	-	Mosquitoes, Lack of proper housing facilities,
Dengue	-	Mosquitoes, Lack of proper housing facilities,
Typhoid	Contaminated Water	Contaminated Water
Jaundice	Contaminated food and water	Contaminated Water
BP	Stress, consumption of crops grown with fertilisers and pesticides	Do not know, Weakness
Diabetes	Excessive consumption of sugar, Ageing	Do not know
Arthritis	Ageing	-
Numbness in body	Ageing	-
Gastric problems	Excessive consumption of Tea, Irregular timing of food consumption	-

### **6.2.1 Perceived Causes of Diseases**

Most women perceived disease as a serious condition that warranted medical attention. Some also suggested disease to be a domain of the medical practitioner who identified the cause of disease and would or would not share the diagnosis with them. Among the migrant women, the narratives largely suggested the same uncertainty

about the causation of disease and most participants conveyed that only doctors (the medical practitioner) would know better. However, when probed, they discussed largely the characteristics of diseases and some of the perceived causes of diseases as follows.

#### **6.2.1.1. The environment or living condition**

Most of the migrant women attributed the causes of disease in their environment or living condition. As they all lived in their respective settlements with no proper housing and sanitation facilities, they were understandably more vulnerable to diseases compared to the village population who had proper housing and sanitation facilities. The migrant women thus often identified the causes of disease in their immediate environment.

One of the migrant women (Sunita, 22 years) who suffered from Malaria mentioned that due to logging of water around their huts, there was enough breeding space for the mosquitoes and that no preventive measures were taken by the village panchayat as;

*No one comes here to spray. How should we protect ourselves from all this? During the summertime, we sometimes sleep outside the thatched hut. During the rainy season, there are so many mosquitoes that we are even scared to sleep outside. (She then satirically mentioned) here in the (study) village, we are scared of the people as well as mosquitoes..... (she also laughed)*

Many women reported the incidence of typhoid in the migrant settlements. Amba shared her experience of typhoid and perceived cause as:

*I used to have the recurrent fever. The head ached severely. The stomach also ached. At first, I sought treatment from Dr Raju (medically unqualified self-proclaimed doctor) in the village itself for a few days. I took the medicine he gave but to no relief. I was feeling extremely weak. I was not even able to move around. I was really in an awful condition. Then I sought treatment from government hospital (PHC) and took medicine from there. They even gave me an injection. Then after a few days, I got some relief, but the weakness lasted long. The doctor had told me to keep the surroundings clean and boil drinking water. All I could get was that it was waterborne disease.*

*Now you tell me the kind of situation we live in, where all should we keep clean and who has the time to boil water.*

The above narrative suggests that Amba tried to make sense of the disease (typhoid fever) in the doctor's advice. At the same time, we find that she is also aware of the poor environment in which they are bound to live primarily owing to their migrant status. Women's awareness and interest in cleanliness was although visible not only in their narratives but also actions. But living in a thatched hut and soiled conditions with almost no access to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation facilities worsened their health status.

#### **6.2.1.2. Communicable Nature**

One of the local women agricultural labourers characterised the disease in its communicable nature. She distinguished illness from disease and mentioned that illness is non-communicable while the disease is not. In her narrative she mentioned that once someone suffered from a fever, the other members of the house rarely remain unaffected as *Once the fever is home, then everyone has to have it eventually*. Another woman distinguished the disease further from this very point onward and suggested that not all diseases are communicable. She shared that

*Some diseases are contagious such as fevers of various kinds, cold, etc. On the other hand, certain diseases are non-contagious such as Blood pressure (Hyper/Hypotension) and Sugar (Diabetes), etc.*

One of the local women shared what she learnt from the doctor during the consultation that she suffered from a viral fever. She could thus characterise symptoms and course of the disease as told by the doctor;

*The Doctor told that it is viral. The medicine is to be taken, and still, it might take 3-4 days to get well. It is how I knew that some fevers are caused by viral.*

The above narrative suggests that women also seek to know the cause of health problem, sometimes from a doctor during diagnosis.

### **6.2.1.3. Pesticides**

Some of the local women agricultural labourers also identified the increased use of pesticides as a reason for increased incidence of diseases compared to the earlier times. They however also expressed their inability to draw an exact linkage between a particular disease and its causation. They suggested that they perceived pesticides as dangerous to human health as evident in the following narrative as:

*Earlier there existed no dreadful diseases like now. Rarely someone was diseased. Earlier people cherished good health as the earlier diet was pure. Now (they are) putting fertilisers and pesticides by tons. That is why all are diseased now. When we end up eating all this, then we are bound to harm our bodies. Now having eaten this kind of diets (laden with fertilisers and pesticides), everyone complains of increased urea (in their blood). All complain of aches in the legs and knees. Moreover, we hear about new diseases every day. Earlier did anyone hear of (heart) attacks? Nowadays (heart) attack is so common. We are neither educated much nor have we studied medicine. But we can tell from our experience that the excessive use of fertilisers and pesticides is certainly harmful to the health. (Satya, 59)*

The above narrative suggests that Satya traces linkages between excessive use of fertilisers and pesticides in crops with serious diseases. She continued that she was certain that crops sprayed with pesticides affected human health.

### **6.2.1.4. The stress of everyday life and suffering**

Many women also believed that everyday stress, however, made one prone to diseases. Though women did not conclusively draw any linkage between any specific diseases except for blood pressure, they often indicated that their struggles and everyday stress affect their bodies and mind negatively. The everyday matters of concern that caused stress to women in case of local women agricultural labourers included education of children, marriage and dowry-related affairs as well as financial matters related to the migration of any members of the household, etc. Among the migrant women, the causes of stress included matters related to everyday survival in the study village such as availability of food and drinking water, maintenance of their thatched huts, acquiring things needed for cooking such as fuelwood and most importantly the violence caused by husbands under the effect of alcohol. It is not to

suggest that the local women did not experience stress or apprehensions regarding violence. Some women among the local agricultural labourers also reported instances of violence by the husband. Their approach however towards this violence was more combative, and the same resulted in some form of relief from stress. On the other hand, migrant women largely could not give vent to their stress resulting from violence. In the following narratives, we find the causes of stress to various women and their perceptions about the stress leading to certain diseases.

Charan Kaur, a local woman agricultural labourer, shared that she is worried about the education and future of her children as:

*The education of children is a matter of stress many times. We have all our hopes on them. We toil our bodies for their sake so that they do not have to suffer as we did. When I do not see them studying at home, I got very angry and stressed about their future. Being in anger leads to loss of blood and calls for various diseases. (Charan Kaur, 42)*

Debo, a local woman agricultural labourer, aged 46 belonging to Ad-dharmi caste lived in the village with three of her daughters and two sons. Debo shared her stress of arranging marriages of her children as;

*It is not easy to get children married these days. Whether it is the marriage of a daughter or son, it needs money. But then daughters must also be given dowry. Her in-laws would ask her as to what all she brought. And here with God's grace, I have three daughters. They all have supported me a lot. I also wish that I may be able to send them to their respective homes with a dowry so that they do not have to listen to any sour words from their in-laws. But when I think about myself and the condition of my house, then I get much tensed as to how I will be able to do all this. Sometimes, my BP shoots up due to the tension. The doctor also tells me not to take tension. But how could I make him understand that the one who has to marry three daughters cannot live without tension? I just think all the time that I must send them all to their respective homes with whatever it requires and only then stop working on daily wages.*

In this narrative, we find that Debo cites the expenditure on marriage and dowry as a matter of tension. She also perceives that this tension affects her blood pressure. The narrative also highlights how the system of dowry is ingrained in the social perception as a guarantee to secure the respect and status for the daughters in their husbands' houses. Women who have marriageable daughters thus undergo a lot of stress to

arrange for their marriages as well as dowry and thus also cite the same as a source of tension and various diseases.

Other than the issue of dowry, a few women in the study village also reported that to secure the future of their sons, they often took a loan to send them to countries in the Middle East where they would work as carpenters, electricians or even construction workers as mentioned earlier in chapter 3. The women then struggled with the pressure from the community to stop working as agricultural labourers given that their sons or any other male member migrated outside. The women however mentioned that in the instance of having taken a loan, they were in need of working as agricultural labourers far more than before but under the pressure of peers and for the sake of their social prestige, they sometimes had to stop working as agricultural labourers. The stress caused by taking a loan and the fear of not being able to repay the loan and also the sheer survival sometimes posed a lot of stress. This stress was often perceived to be the root cause of many fatal diseases as one of the respondents mentioned that *the stress/worry is same as a pyre*.

Among the migrant women, however, the causes of stress were related to immediate survival. For instance, the continuous availability of work and hence food was a major concern for them. One of the migrant women once shared that during the slack season of agriculture, they are often worried about whether their husband would get work for a particular day. Thus, women used a lot of judgement in using the available ration to provide food to husband and children given the uncertainty associated with the availability of work in the slack season of agriculture. One of the migrant women mentioned that they usually got ration on day to day basis and their husband brought the ration themselves. The days when they did not get work and were not able to negotiate with the shopkeeper to borrow ration, they would expect women to arrange for the food. The women are expected to be managers of the everyday ration and also save for such days. Any negligence on their part in managing ration would often lead to abuse and violence. The same caused a lot of stress to women, but they did not relate the stress to any kind of disease.

*Referring to the men of their community collectively, she said that our men are not bothered about as to from where shall we get the ration on the days they could not find waged work. They are only concerned about their food. The woman must arrange for the food by any means, and that is her headache only. Many times he would get drunk despite not getting work for the day and trouble children. Then he would bother the woman too. The days when there is enough work available, he would not bother much and would simply fall off asleep after getting tired. The other days cause a lot of stress. (Sunita, 22)*

In the above narrative, it is clear that the not so steady availability of work affected the migrant women as they struggled to manage with the minimum or no resources. It also appears that the frustration of not getting work is also a factor leading to violence against women. In certain other narratives of women, it also appeared that men sought excuses to exercise violence. Even a few reported that sometimes the husbands got violent without any valid reason. Thus, we find that violence is deeply embedded in migrant women's lives and it also causes a lot of physical as well as mental stress to them. Rather, they perceived it to be the normal course of a woman's life and did not necessarily relate to any disease. Instead, they identified the same as a cause of *Dukh* (suffering).

One of the elderly woman migrant labourers (Ram Dulari, 57) almost summed up the sufferings of a woman during her life as:

*All the sufferings are with women alone. The pain of the monthly cycle, the pain of childbirth, (Women) takes pains to raise the children. If any child is somehow not able to survive, then none except the woman suffers and feels the pain. The father and mother-in-law and husband would immediately start thinking of the next child. Only a woman thinks about the one (referring to the child) who has already departed.*

The above narrative very aptly captures the sufferings associated with the lives of women. The burden of reproduction and care activities is very visible here. Also, one finds that women do not even have the power to decide for their bodies. The patriarchal pressure to reproduce and the stresses associated with that also lead to the misery of women. Women thus not only suffer physically but also it causes a lot of mental agony to them. Further, women also draw linkages in terms of everyday



stress leading to certain health problems. They however often expressed their inability to relate their mental stress to a certain disease conclusively.

This section discussed women's perceptions about the diseases among local and migrant agricultural labourers. Their respective belief systems also played an important role in shaping their perceptions about the causation of certain illnesses and diseases. Further, we find that the differences in perceptions of women about the causes of ill-health also vary across age, socio-spatial and cultural origin, to name a few. Also, most women inevitably located themselves in the system and accordingly responded to their perceived illnesses and diseases as well as their causation. Their respective stage of life cycle and their earlier experience of certain illness or disease also shaped their perceptions. The next section discusses the strategies of the resort to treatment for various diseases.

### **6.2.2 Strategies of the resort to the treatment of diseases**

As mentioned earlier, women usually seek treatment only if a bodily condition was perceived severe. Most women agricultural labourers relied on help from the medical practitioner in the village who would more often be unqualified. The route to treatment of disease was not necessarily linear regarding various systems of medicines. Both local and migrant women agricultural labourers usually took up multiple remedial measures ranging from Ayurveda, Homoeopathy, Allopathy and also home remedies. They sometimes relied simultaneously on more than one system of medicine. Also, their immediate reliance on unqualified medical practitioner was due to the issues of accessibility and affordability as discussed later in the chapter.

In this section, we discuss as to how women cope with economic consequences of ill-health. The strategies adopted also include adjustment at the level of the household as well as beyond the household depending upon the expenditure and severity of the disease. The economic adjustments in response to cure diseases and ill-health take up different shapes and burden the women differently given their different socio-economic status and circumstances.

Borrowing money for covering the cost of treatment was probably the most frequent economic adjustment as it was largely an informal practice and provided ample flexibility. Moreover, it was largely based in the interpersonal relations, friendships and relations of faith. Many women mentioned that borrowing and lending amount to each other was a test to their relationships. Also, borrowing amount from each other was free from any interest and worry. Also, one could help the other expecting that they might also need help at some point in their lives.

Most local women reported the instance of borrowing money from a relative or a friend in case of any financial emergency caused by an episode of ill-health in the family. The migrant women also reported borrowing to cover the cost of treatment of a disease. The migrant women largely denied any savings and also expressed that since money never came to women, they hardly had any chance to save. They, however, shared that men arranged for money in the times of need. They seldom discussed financial matters with women. Two of the local women agricultural labourers, however, reported using savings that they made for marriage and dowry of their daughters for the treatment. The case reports of two local women agricultural labourers reflecting their experiences and struggles to arrange for money for treatment of their family members are discussed below. The case reports not only the course of treatment but also the strategies that facilitated treatment.

**Case1.** Chhindo is 45 years old. She belongs to Tarkhan caste. She lives in the village with her husband, one daughter and two sons. Her husband earlier worked as a carpenter but later started working as a painter. Chhindo mentioned that since he would also face difficulty in getting continuous work, she started working as an agricultural labourer. Further, he spent all the money he earned on alcohol, so she was left with no choice but to work as an agricultural labourer. Chhindo shared the incidence of jaundice to one of her daughters and the course of treatment as:

*Inderjit once suffered from jaundice. She suffered from fever and would also vomit. At first, we approached the doctor in the village (referring to the unqualified medical practitioner) but to no relief. I also thought that this doctor cannot cure her condition. She turned so yellow that she almost looked like a frog. I somewhat sensed that she suffered from jaundice. Without any delay, I took her to the Civil hospital. They prescribed diagnostic tests and later the medicines. We even had to buy medicines from outside the hospital. The doctor also prescribed to avoid certain food items and also told her to take fruit juice daily. It is so difficult for the poor to buy fruits. But what to do?*

*With much difficulty and by borrowing money, we bought juice for her for ten days at a stretch. Then, there was some improvement in her condition. I almost followed whatever home remedies anyone shared. It took her almost three months to recover completely. Meanwhile, I lost a few days of agricultural wages as I took her to the hospital almost every week for a month. The cost of transportation and treatment, and expenditure on fruit juice turned out to be very expensive, but we toil for our children only.*

The above case indicates that the severity of disease determines the course of cure. Chhindo was also aware of the incompetency of the unqualified medical practitioner, but given her economic condition, she approached him first. On seeing no improvement in the condition of her daughter as well as after observing some of the symptoms of the disease owing to her prior knowledge based on personal experience, she immediately took her to the Civil Hospital in Hoshiarpur. She also followed doctor's advice of giving fruit juice to her daughter for a few days as per her judgement. For the same as well as her treatment, she had to borrow money from her friends in the village. It indicates borrowing money as an economic adjustment in the event of ill-health of a family member. At the same time, the narrative highlights that in addition to the expenditure on her daughter's treatment, Chhindo lost not only her wages for the days as she accompanied her daughter but also spent on the transportation as well as fruit juice as a special supplement prescribed by the doctor. This particular case not only highlights the course of treatment but also points towards the care and responsibility of children's treatment as a woman's responsibility. I also observed a similar pattern among local women agricultural labourers who visited health facility without a male member, albeit not on their own. A family member, female friend or neighbour accompanied some local women agricultural labourers. Some, however, took their children all by themselves as mentioned in the case above.

Among the migrant women agricultural labourers, women largely depended on the male members of the household for their treatment as well as the treatment of their children. Men kept accounts of all the money they earned as well as took decisions to spend the money thereof. In the case of financial exigencies arising from episodes of disease, men managed all the money matters on their own and seldom discussed the same with their wives as expressed by many women. One of the migrant women agricultural labourers aged 24 shared that during one of her pregnancies at age 22, she

underwent an operation (a caesarean section) in one of the private hospitals. She shared that she did not know till date as to how her husband managed to pay for the medicines, treatment and hospitalisation. She, however, felt that some of his friends from the village might have lent the amount. Another woman at the migrant settlement affirmed the same practice and shared that when they approached a private medical practitioner in Hoshiarpur for curing typhoid, her husband managed the cost of treatment by borrowing from his friends from the village. She also shared that *Pardes mein to apane log hi ek doosre ki madad karte hain* (In a distant land, only one's kin help each other). It indicates the importance of migration networks and social capital as a support mechanism and their role in managing the cost of treatment.

**Case 2.** Narinder, a local woman agricultural labourer, aged 48 narrated that she had saved some Rs.20, 000 for one of her daughter's marriage in the post office. Her husband died some six years ago. She has three daughters and one son. The eldest daughter is married. Her son worked in a factory in Hoshiarpur. The second daughter works along with her in the agriculture while the youngest attends school. Narinder recalled the day her son was returning after meeting a travel agent and handing him over 50,000 rupees to materialise his plans to move out of the country. While on his way back home, he met an accident and suffered a head injury and multiple fractures. He was brought to a private hospital in Hoshiarpur by a passerby. Hearing this, Narinder could not think of anything else but withdrew the amount from the post office that she saved for her daughter's marriage. Since the amount was still not sufficient for his treatment, Narinder approached one of the landowners and asked for a loan. She even shared that she is thankful to God that her son is saved. She is yet to repay the loan. She even mentioned that it took nearly six months for her son to recover completely. One of her sisters also helped her to cover the cost of treatment, and they ended up spending near to 70,000 for his treatment. Also, the travel agent also refused to return the money.

The above case report also implies that in case of an emergency and to save the life of her son, Narinder tried to arrange money by borrowing from her sister. She had to withdraw the amount saved for her daughter's marriage as well as take a loan from the landowner. It suggests that women arrange money from different sources and not necessarily they rely on any single source.

Migrant women, on the other hand, expressed their inability to indicate any savings as men did not discuss the financial matters with them. They also shared that it was difficult to save as they could hardly afford two square meals. One of the migrant women shared that she felt that there was no saving at all as men spent excessively on

alcohol and tobacco after a tiresome day. Women however mentioned that their assets and relatives in their *Des* acted as a buffer stock. Some migrant women mentioned that men worked out and managed money from their leased-in land and also borrowed the amount from the people in their native villages if needed. Nevertheless, they first attempted to manage money by asking friends and relatives in the study village. Thus, it appeared that a two-tier mechanism existed among the migrant agricultural labourers to cover the cost of treatment. The next section discusses the experiences of women agricultural labourers in accessing health care services.

### **6.3 Experiences of Women in Accessing Health Care Services**

This section discusses the experiences of women in accessing health care services. To bring the nuances and patterns of access to various health care services among the two broad categories of local and migrant agricultural labourers, their experiences and their perceived reasons for access to health care services were understood broadly under two heads: Experiences of health care services during reproduction and for other health problems.

#### **6.3.1 Experiences of access to health care services during reproduction**

Since most women experienced childbirth at some point of time in their lives, their narratives of childbirth and access to health care services before, during and after the childbirth helped in understanding their perceptions regarding childbirth as well as their experience of services that they accessed. It also highlighted the differences in access across various age-groups and hence intergenerational changes across the broad groups of local and migrant agricultural labourers. At the same time, shifts in work burdens across various age groups among the local and migrant agricultural labourers also draw attention to changes in gender relations over time.

The *Anganwadi* worker kept track of all the children in the village including those of migrant labourers. The ASHA worker and the ANM from the Sub Centre Patti visited the migrant settlement and provided the necessary care regarding Tetanus Toxoid injections as well as Iron and Folic Acid tablets. However, migrant women reported that some avoided injections as it sometimes caused fever, pain and swelling. They

reported knowing it from their own experiences or the experiences of others. One of the migrant women even reported that though she received the Iron and folic acid tablets, she could not take the capsules as it caused her loose motions. A few other women also reported the same.

Similarly, the preventive services of child immunisation were also carried out at the settlement. Thus, though the women reported that the services were available, they were not acceptable. It appeared to me that though the services were being provided, the most important aspect of counselling and concern was missing. One of the women even reported that she felt discriminated while she got the tetanus toxoid injection. She perceived that the nurse was hesitant to touch and hold her while giving the injection.

Among the migrant settlements, most of the women gave birth at home usually with the assistance of women from their community or with the help of a Dai from a neighbouring village who helped them with the childbirth. In fact, despite the ongoing Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY), women showed no interest in institutional delivery. During their interviews, it appeared that their disinterest in accessing institutional services for childbirth stemmed from their earlier experiences with the public health care system. Some even reported that the transportation often posed a problem. Other than that, they perceived that in the hospitals, they tended to do caesarean sections even when the normal birth would have been possible. The migrant women also perceived that a caesarean section would not only affect their ability to work post-delivery but also cost more than 'normal' childbirth. One of the migrant agricultural labourers shared her experience of accessing the Primary Health Centre for childbirth as:

**Case 3.** Bansuri Devi, aged 22, recalled the day she suffered from labour pains. She told that her husband called the ambulance by making a call from his mobile phone. She reached the Primary Health Centre in the ambulance. As soon as they reached, the doctor told them that she will have to undergo an operation (caesarean section) and that she needs to be referred to the Civil Hospital Hoshiarpur. When they refused, the doctor gave her two injections. Bansuri perceived that the doctor got agitated and gave her wrong injections out of anger. She stopped having labour pains. It was already midnight, and they brought her back home by borrowing a bike from a man in the village. She could not sleep that night as she was afraid of the injections doctor gave her. The next morning, her husband called off *Dai* from the nearby village.

Bansuri told that she gave her two injections for strength and one to induce labour pains. *Dai* told them that the child will be born a day after at 9 in the morning and that she would be around to assist childbirth. She arrived as she promised and assisted in childbirth. The child was already swollen. Bansuri perceived that it happened due to the wrong injections she received at the health care centre. *Dai* then suggested them to take the child to a paediatrician. They then took the child to a paediatrician in Hoshiarpur. They ended up spending near to two thousand rupees in restoring the health of the child. Bansuri shared that she had a very bitter experience of accessing health care centre and that she would not advise anyone to go there for childbirth.

While I talked to other migrant women labourers about the institutional deliveries, Bansuri's case was often referred to in most women's responses, and they suggested that it was safer to deliver at their home or in their native villages with the assistance of *Dai* or other women. It not only saved them from unnecessary harassment of arranging a to and fro conveyance for transportation but also from the excessive expenditure. Further, women were not at the risk of undergoing an operation (caesarean section) unnecessarily. The postnatal care was almost non-existent among the migrant agricultural labourers.

As mentioned earlier, there were four unqualified medical practitioners in the village. Usually, they were the first ones to be approached in case of an event of a disease which women perceived needed medical attention. The reasons cited often included accessibility, affordability and availability. The availability aspect corresponds to the availability of these practitioners beyond the working hours of labourers. It ensured that they did not lose their wages for treatment.

**Case 4.** Tishna is 25 years old. She is living in the study village for past 4-5 years. Her husband and mother-in-law had come to the village some 7-8 years ago. After Tishna's marriage, her mother-in-law moved to their native village. Tishna has three children, two daughters and a son. The eldest daughter is six years old and lives with her grandmother in their native village while the other two children aged 2 and one year respectively live with her. Tishna told that only her daughter aged two years was born in the study village. The eldest and youngest child was born at home in her native village. When I asked her, if she visited the health centre during the pregnancy, she told in a complaining manner that she had been to the health centre, but no one listened to her as *I had gone to the health centre twice. I sat there only; no one listened to me. After that I did not go again. If anyone listens, then one may go. Who can go again and again?* Sharing her experience of institutional delivery, she mentioned that they called for the ambulance, but it did not arrive. Her elder sister-in-law and her husband were there in the study village at that time. In the event of no means to take her to the hospital (health centre), they requested a man in the study village to take them to the hospital. The man agreed to drop them to the hospital by

charging rupees three hundred. Tishna recalled that she was given two injections and within 20 minutes, she delivered her daughter. She also mentioned that as soon as they reached, they were handed over a list of medicines to be purchased from outside. The cost of medicines, gloves, and other such items came to be rupees 1200. She mentioned that they had taken Rs. 1200 with them and ended up spending the whole amount. She said that delivering in the hospital was of no use as they ended up spending Rs 1500 at the hospital. *We did not get as much as we ended up spending. We later got Rs.500. But we had taken 1200 from home and ended up spending the entire amount as they wrote medicines to be bought from the store.*

While sharing her resentment of the benefits not reaching the poor, she mentioned that

*It is just the same everywhere. It is not about being in another state, In our own Des too they do not give the requisite amount. Where one is supposed to get Rupees 1500, one only gets Rupees 600. (Referring to the ASHA and doctors) They raise their salaries. The people employed in government sector make money by indulging in such practices..... The poor thus get the namesake amount. That too they get after spending from their pocket, and sometimes they do not even get anything).*

Thus, referring to her experience, she shared that *it seems that one would even touch an animal with more care than they do. They gave two injections, and within twenty minutes, the child was born.*

She even shared that she and her elder sister-in-law learnt a lesson not to deliver a child in the hospital. Thus, in her next pregnancy, she was sent to their native village near the time of delivery. She gave birth to her youngest child at her home in their native village.

Bhanmati, a 28-year-old migrant agricultural labourer shared that earlier her mother-in-law also worked here along with them. She worked almost all her life in agriculture albeit on their land in their native village. In the study village however, she worked till she was diagnosed with a problem in her uterus. She complained of excessive pain in her lower abdomen and legs. Since no one paid attention in the government hospital (referring to Mini primary health centre), they approached a private clinic in the Hoshiarpur and came to know that her uterus needed to be removed. While pointing towards the problem they face in communicating and understanding Punjabi, she mentioned that



*I do not know what all they said. We do not understand Punjabi very well. Whatever they said we did not get that. Had it been our state, we would understand something. All that we could understand was the expenditure (on operation).*

The doctor at the clinic told the cost of operation to be Rupees 50,000 which was beyond their reach. Her mother-in-law was thus taken to their native village where the cost of operation came to be Rupees 15000. Sunita shared that her mother-in-law felt less discomfort after she recovered. However, she found herself unable to work in the agricultural field. Since she could not work as agricultural labourer anymore, she stayed back in their native village.

The above narrative shows that in the lack of necessary health care facilities at public health care facilities and the apathy of health care providers, migrant labourers are not left with any choice but to approach the private clinics where also they face challenges associated with language. Other than that, the private clinics charge them a hefty sum of amount compared to the Punjabi people given their helplessness accessing health care facilities in a state different than their home state.

Among the local women agricultural labourers, the elderly women as well as women in the age groups 35-45 years largely reported having undergone no check-ups during pregnancy. They also reported deliveries in their respective homes. Among the women in the age group 35-45, most reported having delivered at home except for certain complications when *Dai* referred them to the hospital. Women in the age group 25-35 reported that they went for regular check-ups during pregnancy. Almost 50 per cent women reported having delivered at least one child in the hospital. Women also reported that they preferred birth at home over hospital due to reasons of convenience as well as financial reasons.

One of the women named Ranjit, aged 28 reported that she was having some complications since the seventh month of pregnancy. She had been going to the primary health centre for regular check-ups. *Dai* also came to see her twice or thrice. During her last visit, *Dai* told her to deliver at the hospital. She mentioned that most women in the village believed *Dai*.

*Since Dai had told me to visit the hospital, I could not take the chance of delivering at home. My husband and maternal aunt took me to a private nursing home in Hoshiarpur while my mother-in-law stayed back home to take care of my daughter. The doctors soon told my husband that an operation needs to be done and I was admitted to the hospital. Since he knew one of the staff members at the nursing home, we were relieved in 3 days from the hospital after the childbirth. The doctor, however, instructed me to take bed rest for a month and even be vigilant about the stitches. My maternal aunt supported me a lot with the housework. She would hardly let me do anything. She worked all through the day for my entire family but still my mother-in-law disliked her and would often comment that she worked herself all the time she delivered children.*

Beero, a woman aged 55, lived in the village with her husband and one of the sons. She had five daughters and three sons. All her children are married. Beero shared her experience of pregnancies and childbirth as;

*In our times, no one went for check-ups. We worked till we gave birth to a child. We never took any rest. Nowadays woman take rest before as well as after childbirth. No injections were given too. Dai would come and see if all was well. We would call her at the time of childbirth. Sometimes, the need to call her would not even arise as one gave birth to a child on one's own. After the childbirth, we would even cook food on our own.*

Thus, in this narrative, we find that Beero located her experience of pregnancy and childbirth in the present times where she compared the practices prevalent at that time with the facilities today. She appeared to suggest that amidst many facilities, women these days get more chance to rest during pregnancy and after childbirth compared to women of her age.

Channi, a 37-year-old local woman lived in the study village with her husband and two daughters. She studied till 10<sup>th</sup> standard. She mentioned that she was married to her husband on the pretext that he worked abroad and would return after marriage. She later realised that he did not go back after the marriage and thus she often felt cheated. She had not worked earlier, but after the marriage, she had to start working as an agricultural labourer. She shared that her elder daughter was born at home while the younger one was born in a hospital. She compared her experience of giving birth at home and hospital as:

*The elder one was born soon after the marriage. She was born at home only. The Dai was called for, and she assisted in such a manner that I did not suffer much, and she was born. After that three or four years passed like that, and I also started worrying if all will be fine. The mother-in-law would often tell that she wished to die after seeing the face of her grandson. I never thought about the boy or a girl. All I wanted was a healthy child. But I somehow felt that it would be a girl child. My mother-in-law would take me to the doctor now and then and ask the doctor about the sex of the child. The doctor used to get angry with my mother-in-law. My mother-in-law felt that I'd give birth to her grandson so she would give me a variety of things to eat. And when I started to undergo pains, my mother-in-law asked to take me to the hospital. There at the hospital, they carried out an operation to make more money. My mother-in-law got very upset at the birth of my daughter. I was satisfied with a healthy child and also felt that God does justice. Since they deceived me in getting married, the God deceived them. I was however sad thinking that I underwent an operation without any valid reason. If my mother-in-law would not have taken me to the hospital, Dai would have helped with delivery at home only.*

I found that most local women of relatively younger ages frequently accessed health care facilities during the pregnancy. Local women reported going to the primary health centre as well as private clinics for check-ups during pregnancy. Their access to public or private health centres during pregnancy was indeed a reflection of their economic situation. The same was also evident in one of the narratives as one of the key respondents shared, *It all depends on the affordability whether one accesses public hospital or private. Poor people go to a government hospital. Those with some money access private clinics. Further, it also depends on the circumstances.*

One of the local woman agricultural (Ranjit, aged 28) mentioned childbirth as an important phase of life and her preference for private clinics for childbirth as;

*These days, there are a few children in each family. There are hardly two or three children per family. One thinks that the child is born healthy. If one goes to a government hospital to save some money and ends up losing the child, there is hardly any benefit in that. In private (hospitals) one ends up paying more but they at least handle people with more responsibility. Moreover, they also take care of the patients.*

The above narrative suggests that childbirth is perceived as a crucial stage wherein women expect more care and concern. They perceive that they can get care and

concern required for this crucial stage at the private hospitals by paying money. The above narratives and local women agricultural labourers' experiences during the interviews seem to suggest that government hospitals were not deemed suitable for providing the required care and concern during childbirth.

### **6.3.2 Experiences of access to health care services for other health problems**

Satya, a 59-year-old local woman agricultural labourer, expressed her opinion about not accessing the public health services based on her prior experiences. She finds going to a public hospital mere waste of time as;

*See, the one who has got no task at hand can only go to a government hospital. Who is insane to sit there early in the morning? One does not get to see the doctor till evening. One also ends up losing wages for the day. Also, the chaos and crowd make one mad. If one tells sufferings to the doctor, then he reacts as if we are fond of bearing the torture. Compared to that, one could go to the doctors in the village (referring to unqualified medical practitioners) at any odd hour of the day. The doctor addresses Chachi/Tayi with respect and pays attention to our sufferings as well.*

The above narrative suggests that Satya is not in favour of accessing public health care facilities where the doctor pays no attention to her sufferings despite having waited for long and consequently losing wages for the day. She finds the doctors in the village more accessible as she could approach them beyond the work hours. Further, the respect and concern also is an incentive.

Another local woman agricultural labourer responded that

*Even if one goes to a government hospital, the medicine has to be purchased from outside (referring to the medical stores outside the hospital). Is then any point in losing wages and buying medicines)*

The above narrative highlights the unavailability of medicines at the government hospital and the resulting burden on the poor to purchase medicines from over the counter drug shops.

One of the migrant woman agricultural labourers (Parmeshwari, aged 38) mentioned that she is disgusted at the sight of the public hospital as;

*I just do not like the hospital. I cannot tolerate the smell there. Noone might have to go to a hospital ever. In the Government hospital, they just do not take care at all. Everyone talks to the one who has money.*

In yet another narrative, one of the migrant women (Amba) mentioned that *Didi Haspatal toh naam hi kharaab hai*. She suggested that the hospital was not a good place as she talked in the context of excessive monetary exploitation that takes place at the hospitals. She, however, did not differentiate between public or private hospitals, but in her narrative, she shared her experience of the primary health centre.

A few migrant women cited a preference for the unqualified medical practitioner in the village for they could even negotiate with the local practitioner in the village for delayed payments. The same could not be achieved at the public health care service institutions where the medicine would have to be purchased from a medial store nearby the health care facility. Another aspect was the loss of working hours. The working hours of out-patient care at public health services were limited. On the other hand, the private doctor or clinic could be accessed later in the evening beyond work hours.

Thus, we find that perceptions of women specifically concerning access to health care services were rooted in their individual experiences and circumstances. The migrant women largely reported apathy and discrimination towards them by health care providers due to their migrant status. The experiences of the local women also suggest that anyone who could afford approached private clinics or hospitals over public hospitals. Their reasons for access included hygiene, care and concern, and the respect and politeness of health care providers at private clinics and hospitals. Some of the reasons women mentioned during the interviews for not accessing public health services included poor interpersonal communication, indifferent/ rude behaviour by the medical professionals at the PHC, poor hygiene standards and ambience, and inadequacy of drugs. The next section attempts to understand the meaning women agricultural labourers attribute to well-being.

#### 6.4 Understanding women's perceptions about the well-being

The scope of well-being encompassing the physical and psychosocial realms of women's being got further expanded as women narrated their lives and what they perceived to be important episodes from their lives. This development in the scope of the term well-being was a result of translating the term to Hindi and Punjabi. I asked the participants to ponder over it. The simplest translation suggested that they had to reflect upon what a 'good life' is. It was not an easy question for them to respond. Neither was it an effortless exercise for me to comprehend the nuances of their varied responses. Together, however, we attempted to reduce it to understand the following: What constitutes a good life? What are the conditions that make life worth living? What anxieties, fears, and circumstances proved to be a barrier to attaining a good life? The responses to these questions inevitably draw attention towards the larger questions related to structural inequalities. Thus, the understanding of well-being from the perceptions of women reflects linkages with the relatively proximal as well as distal factors.

As mentioned above, the initial problems of the operationalisation of well-being as an exhaustive concept were mutually resolved to understand the meanings of 'good life' (Acchi Zindagi/ Changi Zindagi/ Changa Jivan) as regards the questions mentioned above. Still, the responses to these questions were numerous and hence, I ended up putting them under further themes and sub-themes. The varied responses to what constitutes 'good life' included are given as follows;

*Life is good if one keeps good health. If one is not healthy then what else is left in life? (Paramjit, 37, Female, Saini, Study Village)*

*When the waged work is available all around the year. How can life be good here? The life abroad is good. (Nisha, 37, Sarehde, Study Village)*

*That life is good when there is no helplessness as regards the day to day living and one gets continuous work (Rupa, 29, Female, Rajput, Sitapur, U.P)*

*Those who own land have a good life. (Suman, 37, Female, Ad-dharmi, Study Village)*

*One can work if one is healthy. If one is able to work only then can one lead a good life (Debi, 44, Female, Rajput, Rampur, U.P.)*

*You can see it for yourself what kind of life we are leading. There is security neither in the present nor in future. (Sunita, 22, Female, Bijnaur, U.P)*

*How can life be good for aged/ elderly? (Satya, 59, Female, Study Village)*

*When the wages are increased only then life is good (Lakshmi, 50, Female, Study Village)*

*How can life be good for the poor? Life is for riches, what have they got to worry for? They have nothing to worry about. We, the poor, keep on thinking what we will eat if there is no money. They have their things rolling.....They fill up their refrigerators with vegetables of all kind. Their cooks will then have to think of what to cook. (Karamjit, 40, Female, Saini, Study Village)*

*The life is good at a place where you belong to. No one must leave the place they belong to. (Ram Dulari, 57, Female, Rajput, Budayun, U.P)*

*The life will be good when there is a check on inflation. Food items, fruits, milk must be priced cheap. We engage in bodily labour and on top of that cannot purchase nutritious food items due to higher costs. (Rukmini, 39, Female, U.P.)*

*Life is good when there is nothing to worry about. One does not worry about food and work. (Tishna, Female, 25, Rajput, U.P)*

The above responses of participants indicate the depth and breadth of the perceptions about the good life. These varied responses, however, suggest that good life is largely associated with the ability to work and earn a living. Some emphasised the importance of the state of physical health while others draw attention to the larger issues of poverty, landlessness and inequality. Such issues reflecting the plurality and complexity of women's lives are discussed in detail in the following section. The 'Good Life':

#### **6.4.1 Exploring the meaning, constituents and barriers**

As discussed earlier, what constitutes 'good life' also subsumes as to what are the barriers to achieving a 'good life'. The narratives about the intricacies of 'good life'

were identified as falling under various themes. This thematic classification is chosen to draw attention towards various facets of 'good life'. The narratives thus have been classified under various themes such as economic/ material aspects, physical/physiological aspects, social aspects concerning status, dignity and discrimination, and others. It is also important to note here that in the narratives of women, there was often overlap across the above-mentioned aspects as they tend to be interrelated.

#### **6.4.1.1. Economic and Material Aspects**

Quite often, the participants of the research related good life to the presence of basic amenities and civic facilities. Other than that, their narratives also referred to the availability of work and better remuneration. The good housing and living conditions and education of children were often cited as constituents of the good life. Migration was often suggested to be a strategy to make life better. The following narratives reflect the economic aspects of a good life.

Nisha, a 37-year-old woman, belonging to Sarehde caste worked as an agricultural labourer as and when work was available. She lived with her husband, two daughters and a son. While discussing her perception of 'good life', she shared that

*Life is not good here. How much can one get by working as a wage labourer? Moreover, it (while referring to the agricultural work) is also not a regular work that lasts around the year. If we had money, why would we work as an agricultural labourer? (While referring to Seeto she shared that) Seeto's son has gone abroad and that she no longer works as an agricultural labourer. She is now leading a good life. I have heard that one can make a good deal of money abroad.*

Nisha does not perceive her life to be good due to being engaged in agricultural work and lack of money. The intricacies of work and life are starkly visible wherein certain characteristics of work determine the life outcomes. Work that is steady and gives enough remuneration for survival is sought after. The widespread notion about the international migration resulting in socio-economic mobility also found its way in this narrative. It also draws our attention to the very fact that women compare their lives with others who are around them as well as those who work with them.



In yet another narrative, Suman, a 37-year-old Ad-dharmi woman compared her life and work with those of Jats and Sainis and draws attention towards the issue of landlessness

*Life is good for those who belong to Saini or Jatt castes, those who own land, cars and big mansions. They have no dearth of things to eat. They eat as well as spend to their full. People like us are barely able to survive. We neither have land nor money. Look at the condition of (our) house. They have fewer people to feed and more money. We have less money and more people to feed. Who is there to care for us 'poor'? How can we have a good life?*

In the above narrative, we find that Suman draws attention towards the socio-economic inequalities. She compares her life with those belonging to Jat and Saini castes who own land and assets. She finds an association between caste and class whereby she refers to herself (collectively for Ad-dharmis) as poor and also questions if they could lead a good life in the absence of land and money.

Charan Kaur, on the other hand, emphasises the importance of education in life. Charan lived in the study village since she got married some twenty years ago to Kishan Lal. She is 42 years old and Ad-dharmi by caste. Her husband works as a painter sometimes. During the agricultural season, he drives tractor for the farmers. Charan lives with her husband, a son and a daughter aged 20 and 18 years respectively. Both her children are pursuing graduation in Science and Arts respectively in the colleges in Hoshiarpur. Her mother-in-law also lives with them. While discussing the importance of education as a means of making a 'good life', Charan mentioned that

*It is a matter of great loss if we do not educate our children. These days, it is difficult to survive without education. While seeking alliance for daughter, the first thing that a groom's family would inquire is the education of a girl. Seeking alliance for (less educated) boys is not that difficult. But my son is good at studies. Moreover, it is not that expensive to get educated at Government College. The daughter studies at D.A.V.College. She may find a better match that is why we send her for studying. We did not study and what work will we get? We are only worth working for wages in the village alone. It is very important to have money in the present times. Everything is costly now. Earlier, one could borrow from others in times of need. Now that also*

*does not work. If one is educated, one can at least survive on one's own.*

In the above narrative, we see that Charan stresses the importance of education in the current times. Also, the importance of education is perceived differently for boys and girls. Education enhanced the prospects for boys in the job market while for girls it served the purpose of enhancing their worth in the marriage market.

Debi was 44 years old. She belonged to a village in Uttar Pradesh and at the time of conducting the study, lived with her husband and children in the study village. When asked about the good life, Debi responded

*You could see for yourself what kind of life we are leading; We do not even have a permanent thatched structure. During the rainy season, it all gets flooded with water that there is not even place to sit. You can find all kinds of mosquitoes, flies and diseases here. Now see for yourself what a good life it is. No one comes here to spray for mosquitoes. They say that the area does not fall under the village area, who lives here?*

Debi draws attention to the living conditions of migrants in the study village. She not only draws attention to the material aspects of not having a house and filthy atmosphere but also suggests discrimination resulting from their migrant status.

Karamjit, a 40 years old woman belonged to Saini caste. Her husband did not work. She worked in the agricultural field as and when work was available. She responded to my query of her understanding of well-being as:

*How can we have a good life? The (material) condition was not good before marriage; It is even worse here. All I can say is that the Government must do something for the children so that their life is set. We work so that we can educate our children. I have no hope for a good life. I only look forward to my children.*

The above narrative suggests that Karamjit does not perceive her life to be good. She is hopeful of her children's future and expects that she will lead a good life. In most of the narratives, I found that the initial reaction to the perception about good life was

quite pessimistic. The prime reason for such a negative response lied in the material conditions of their lives. It draws our attention to the everyday lives of poor whose prime concern is to work for their survival. As we discussed further, some of the participants responded about their perceptions about good life of beyond economic condition. However, it would not be incorrect to state that the economic aspect was often predominant in perceptions of good life followed by various aspects given the circumstances of individual participants.

#### **6.4.1.2. Physical/Physiological Aspects**

Other than the economic aspects, most commonly cited prerequisite for a good life was the physical health. The bodily health, in turn, was often associated with the ability to work as mentioned earlier in the chapter. In certain narratives, women often cited their physically demanding agricultural work as detrimental to their health and life in general. However, they also suggested that this strenuous work was necessary for the survival of their families and they could not do away without it. Thus, it suggested that health was a means to an end. The linkages between work, health and good life get further clear in the narratives of women mentioned below as;

*If one is keeping good health, only then can one work. If one is sick, how could one work? If one did not work, how will one survive?  
(Nisha, 37, Sarehde)*

*Body is like a machine. It is like, the landowners have put us to work, in a similar fashion, we have also put our body to work. Yes....this body too demands maintenance from time to time. And you know very well that daily wagers like us pray all the time that the body must keep moving. It is good if it does not need any maintenance. We do not even earn that much as it takes to cure the body ( Satya, 59 ).*

In the above narrative, we find that Satya draws an interesting analogy with the body as a machine. She very metaphorically highlights that they exploit their bodies as landowners exploit them. She considers the body as a tool to be able to work and earn for the survival. Since the wear and tear of this machine require expenditure, she expresses her helplessness with the hope that she may not have to spend much on her health. In yet another narrative, however, the woman shared that she had to spend some amount to be able to work as;

*One must have energy to be able to work. If one works in such hot weather, it leads to blood loss. One can only work if one is healthy. I loaded a lot of weight (referring to bundles of wheat) yesterday, and I was extremely tired. I had to go to the doctor in the evening to get injections. When I have to work the next day, I cannot replenish the energy in a day. How will I work if my body does not support me? Thus, one has to invest a little to make bodywork. We will get wages only if we work (Davinder, 45).*

The above narrative highlights the hardships involved in agricultural work. At the same time, it draws attention towards the exhausted bodies weakened by lack of nutrition and hard labour. Even before they can recover from the hardships of the earlier day, they are set to work for their survival the very next day. To be able to work, they resort to strategies that prove effective to them as per their perceptions such as getting injections in this case.

Some women even distinguish the physicality involved in the work with the state of life. Balbir mentioned,

*See those who are less educated; they will only do this work (referring to the agricultural labour). People like us would have to break our bodies to earn wages. Educated children like you work in the offices. They would work while sitting in an air-conditioned room. Can we choose to work in the sun or shade? Now tell me whose life is good?*

In the above narrative, we find how Balbir perceives and compares the nature of work with regard to the level of education and also draws a distinction between the work environments corresponding to the skill and education of the person.

During the fieldwork, I also came across women who were engaged in agricultural work despite their old age. Satya is one of them. She has been living in the village since she got married. She could not exactly recall her age. She initiated by recalling the significant events in her life and told me that she must be around 59 years old. Satya is Ad-dharmi by caste and lives with her youngest son, daughter-in-law, and grandchildren aged 5 and eight years. When I asked her about what she thinks of a good life, she responded,

*How can life be good for aged (elderly)? We neither get a pension (while referring to old age pension scheme) nor the ration. None cares for even at home. As none cares for me at home, I am bound to work (as an agricultural labourer)*

Satya's narrative suggests that in the absence of any social security mechanism and familial support, she works as an agricultural labourer at 59 years of age. It also implies as to how engaging in a physically demanding work at an elderly age in the absence of social support is perceived as not leading to a good life. It also suggests that life is good if aged must not work to support them. Thus, in the above narrative, it gets clear that not only the state of health is associated with a good life but also the extent of physical labour as well as the age at which one engages in physically demanding work is also associated with a good life.

#### **6.4.1.3. Emotional Aspects**

Women who belonged to villages in U.P. expressed their attachment to their respective native places and culture. The mention of their native places and culture was a common feature in most of their narratives. They often compared their social life back in their 'Des' with that in 'Pardes'. The emotional attachment to their native places was common in the narratives of most women, who originally belonged to villages in U.P. Some even shared their reluctance in migrating to another state as evident in Ram Dulari's narrative.

Ram Dulari was 57 years old. She belonged to a village in Budayun district, Uttar Pradesh. She started working as an agricultural labourer after her husband met an accident and lost one of his hands. Ram Dulari got agitated when I asked of her perception about the good life. She shared that

*Life is not good at all. We left our village hoping that we will be able to repay the debt. Now his (referring to her husband) hand is cut. My daughter-in-law is expecting; there is some problem back home. My son has left to handle that. I never worked outside home till date. Now I even have to work outside. I never wished to leave my village. He (again referring to her husband) only insisted and is now sitting idle with his hand cut).*

The bitterness in Ram Dulari's narrative highlights not only the pain of leaving her village but also the plight of working at an old age in the agricultural field at a place that does not belong to her.

Asha Rani, 25, belonged to a village in UP. She lived in the study village with her husband and three children. Her mother-in-law also lived with them. They all worked as agricultural labourers.

*We came here (to the study village) for good life only. We were able to make ends meet at our place. We came here in the hope that we will be able to save some amount. We also do not get work here all around the year, but compared to our place, here we get more work. Had we found work there, we would not come here. None talks well with us. They call us by names like Lalla-lalle.*

The above narrative, as well as many others, suggest that migration is largely taken up as a livelihood strategy. The good life is often associated with the availability of work, and since the source cites of migration in the villages of UP offered less work and fewer wages, those who moved to the study village often sought continuous work. Amidst all these, their ties with their native villages were intact as they returned to their villages in U.P. nearing *Holi* as mentioned earlier in Chapter 4. Women often responded that had they been able to get continuous work and desired wages in their respective villages or nearby villages in their 'Des', they would never think of leaving their *Des*. It brings us to understand that in their perception, the social ties and life that they shared at their respective native places constituted an aspect of the good life for them. Thus, this unravels the emotional value attached to their native place which was often negotiated within the process of migration in the quest for a good life.

#### **6.4.1.4. Aspects Related Status, Dignity and Discrimination**

Women belonging to villages in U.P. also reported that as an outcome of migration, they often experienced discrimination at the hands of the local population in the study village. One of the migrant women once mentioned;

*They treat us as if we belong to lower castes. They look down upon us citing that we are untidy. It is when we are way above them (referring to scheduled castes) in the caste hierarchy.*

The above narrative suggests that practising caste hierarchy which has a stronghold in the villages of U.P came naturally to the migrants. It also draws our attention that women belonging to villages of U.P. perceived that they ranked higher than the scheduled caste agricultural labourers in the caste hierarchy in the study village, yet it agitated them as they received the kind of treatment a scheduled caste person would get in their native villages.

As discussed earlier as well in Chapter 4, the migrant workers experienced double discrimination at the hands of landowners who exploited their bodies and the native population of the study village who shared a feeling of rivalry or animosity with them. One of the participants (named Anita, 35, migrant) brought attention to this aspect

*Life is good when there is no discrimination of any kind. It makes me even sad that children discriminate against our children in the school. They do not let our children sit with them citing that you are untidy. In the class, children of the village (study village) and bhैया's children sit apart. Some children like our children while others express disgust.....very many types of children in the school. When people of the village (study village) pass by (near their settlements), some would stare at us with hatred while others would not even look this side as if we did not exist.....very many kinds of people. Who respects a Pardesi (migrant)?*

In the above narrative, we find that Anita perceives life to be good when there is no discrimination of any kind. The narrative very well reflects the apathy, neglect and discrimination those from the villages in UP experience in the study village on a day to day basis. The paradox in the above narrative is that though Anita herself expects that they might be treated as equals, she too has internalised their migrant status and question if a migrant gets respect at the site of migration.

Rukmini, a migrant woman, expressed her concern with working at other's field as an indication of helplessness and necessity.

*We work there as well as here. We work in the agriculture sector, work as labourers. There (referring to her native village in UP) we do work in our fields, here we work for others. We own some land and thus survive on that and do not go outside to work. Here we work for others. When we are not able to survive on our land, we then leave our village. Just like people from here (referring to Punjabi men) rush (to countries) abroad to earn money, in the same manner, we come from our Des (referring to her village) to make money.*

It is evident in the above narrative that migration is taken up as a strategy to make ends meet. The narrative also reflects the issue of dignity involved in working on one's field. Thus, it implies that though the migrants negotiate with their existing beliefs about dignity at the sites of migration, they still feel that they would not have to do the same.

#### **6.4.1.5. Psychosocial Aspects**

Some women responded regarding a healthy state of mind as a constituent of good life such as leading a carefree life and a life free of any anxieties or tensions. However, the number of such responses was quite less. Other than that, in a few responses, the participants compared their standard of lives with those who were located higher than them in the socio-economic ladder. Thus, the responses of both types find mention here.

Charan, 42, Ad-dharmi responded

*Life is good when there are no worries related to survival and sustenance. Children are all well, and there is no pain of any type. There is neither any suffering nor compulsions of any kind.*

In a similar narrative, Parmeshwari, 38, belonging to a village in UP mentioned that

*Life is good if one is happy. There is no pain of any kind. There is no disease of any kind and when there are happiness and comfort. One belongs to a well-off family, and there is no pain or disease. That is happiness. One's family is fine; children are all well.*



Deepi was 38 years old. She lived in the study village with her husband, three daughters and a son. She shared that her husband was an alcoholic and would beat her a lot. When I asked her perceptions about the good life, she shared

*If the husband is nice, then one can manage with fewer resources as well. Where there is no peace, there is neither any savings nor progress. Death is better than such a life. I toil all day in the fields and also have to take care of household responsibilities. In the evening he (referring to her husband) would get drunk and abuse me. No matter how hard I try, he would find some excuse to beat me. If my daughters intervene, he would not even spare them. When he is drunk, he is not in his senses and would not know anything. I tell my daughters not to intervene as it is my fate only.*

In the above narrative, we find that Deepi perceives that her life is pathetic due to the vices of her husband. She also suggests that due to his misconduct and violence, there is no peace or progress in his life. It implies that peace and progress are considered virtues of the good life. In certain other narratives, women lamented the instances of violence against them by their husbands. However, not many brought up an association with a good life. They, like Deepi, owed it to their fate but did not necessarily related it to their state of life.

Thus, in this section, I have attempted to understand what constitutes ‘good life’ as well as barriers that do not let one pursue a good life. The thematic classification of narratives does not necessarily entail an exercise of quantifying the responses or emphasising the importance of one facet over the other. All the facets collectively refer to what constitutes ‘good life’ as perceived by the participants of the research. It also reflects the plurality of experiences and complexity of women’s lives.

This chapter thus attempted at understanding women’s perceptions of nature, cause and cure of illnesses and diseases. Their circumstances, as well as experiences with health care services during childbirth and other health problems, were also explored. Women agricultural labourers’ varied perceptions of ‘good life’ not only reflect their struggles and disappointments but also indicate their needs and aspirations. The study suggests that in the broader context of agrarian change and migration, the interaction of gender relations with other relations of inequality, individual as well as household

characteristics of women agricultural labourers burdened each of them differently and affected their health and well-being. The study aimed at bringing together these varied experiences and perspectives of women who worked as agricultural labourers in the study village.

## **Chapter 7**

# **Discussion and Conclusion**



## **7. Discussion and Conclusion**

The study was carried out with the objective to explore gender and power relations within and across local and migrant agricultural labourers while understanding the agrarian structure and relations in the study village. The linkages with work, health and well-being as identified by women also formed an integral component of the study. The conceptualisation of well-being in the present study as experience entrenched in the social structure in relation to others reflects complexity and plurality of experiences of women who work as agricultural labourers due to differences across various women largely emanating from differential equations of gender and other relations of power.

The study is though not necessarily a comparative account of local and migrant agricultural labourers, the representation of both tiers of labourers could only give a holistic understanding of the working of labour relations in the agrarian structure in the study village. It attempts to reflect the differences in two broad tiers of labourers as migrant agricultural labourers are located lower in the class hierarchy primarily due to their migrant status. The unequal power relations between the two broad categories of labourers due to the same also suggest that these two classes be better not discussed from a comparative vantage point.

The research primarily attempted to highlight the gender asymmetries albeit in interaction with various relations of power, rooted in the structure as well as emanating from a particular woman's position in the structure or society. Doing gender and differences approach guided the present research inquiry, whereby the working of gender relations was understood from the perspective of performance. Gender division of labour, women's perceptions and their narratives more often than not revealed the complexity and differences in life circumstances of various women. The feminist critical medical anthropological framework informed by differences approach also facilitated linkages across individual differences and interaction of gender and social inequality at various levels to make sense of differential experiences of health and well-being among various women who work as agricultural labourers. Ethnography as a method offered the epistemological advantage of bringing together context, processes and relations in the selected setting.

The chapter attempts to bring together the key findings of the study in light of research questions formulated for the study. Other than that it addresses the key questions and themes that emerged from the field. It also situates the findings of the study in light of earlier studies thereby reflecting on the similarities and differences with existing literature. The chapter also links the data presented in the preceding chapters and draws connections wherever possible. The same is achieved by transcending boundaries of chapters set up earlier in the thesis for the sake of data presentation. Last but not least, the chapter attempts to highlight the research contribution as well as reflects on the scope of future research in the field.

## **7.1 Key Findings of the Study: Addressing Research Questions**

This section deals with the key findings of the study and attempts to address the research questions formulated in the earlier stages of the study. Also, it compares the findings of the study to reflect similarities and differences with existing literature. One of the key questions in the present research was to understand the continuities and change in the agrarian context of the study village within which the working of gender and power relations could be situated. Agrarian relations, gender division of labour in agriculture and conditions of work among both local and migrant agricultural labourers were also explored. Women's understanding of work and its implications on their health and overall well-being was also addressed.

### **7.1.1 Understanding the context of the study village**

The study was carried out in a village of Punjab, falling under the block Hoshiarpur-II of District Hoshiarpur. An ethnographic approach was followed for the study. Both quantitative, as well as qualitative data, were collected for the study. The census survey of the village was done to assess the socio-economic and demographic attributes of the village. The people of various castes engaged in a variety of occupations living in the village for at least two generations as well as the people from various villages in Uttar Pradesh who migrated from their respective villages to the study village for working as labourers constituted the study population. The village had a total of 679 local and 41 migrant households.

People belonging to various caste groups inhabited the village. Scheduled Caste households comprised of about 42 per cent of all local households. Almost all scheduled caste households (nearly 99 per cent) were landless. There is no dearth of literature on the issue of landlessness among the Scheduled groups (including both Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes). Scholars like Mohanty (2001) and Borooah (2005) have noted that landlessness remains a challenge among the scheduled groups. The distribution of non-land assets is also significantly lower among the scheduled groups compared to other caste groups. Caste-based inequality has deep roots in Indian social structure and landlessness among Scheduled castes is one of its manifestations. The present research also adds to the existing evidence on landholding status and caste-based inequalities in Indian society.

The linkages between caste identity and landholding status were clear as households belonging to two caste groups namely Saini and Jats owned most land in the village. These two caste groups have historically owned land. The inequality in landholding status was quite stark in the village as about 85 per cent local households did not own any land. Further, as many as about 69 per cent landowning households had less than 10 acres (about 4 hectares) of land. The disaggregation of these households into two categories as small (less than 5 acres) and semi-medium (less than 10 acres) farmers suggest that the percentage of semi-medium farming households was, however, more (37.7 per cent) compared to small farming households (31.1 per cent). Both classes of these households reported relying solely on agriculture. The medium and large farming households, on the other hand, were also engaged in other occupations. One of the large farmers reported practising Emu farming. Examples of other occupations among the large farmers included flour mill machine shop in the study village, the brick kiln in a nearby village, and running shops of various kinds in a nearby city.

As regards the local working male population, a very less percentage (a mere 1.7 per cent) reported being engaged in agriculture sector as labourers, while as many as about 27 per cent reported engagement in sectors other than agriculture as daily wage labourers. It was found that as many as about 19 per cent of men were self-employed working as shopkeepers, and carpenters. All these categories of occupation constituting about 48 per cent of total working male population refer to the reported primary occupation. There was, however, a kind of fluidity across these occupations

as some reported engagement in more than one occupation category throughout the year. All those engaged with various occupations mentioned above could be classified as what Breman (1996) and Bernstein (2010) refer to as ‘footloose labour’ and ‘classes of labour’ respectively. The engagement of almost half of the total working male population in the informal sector could also be associated with highly unequal distribution of land in the village. It was also found that about 21 and 23 per cent of the male population of the village worked as farmers and in a variety of private jobs respectively. A mere 8 per cent of the total working male population in the village reported employment in the government sector.

A peculiar caste and gender pattern could be observed among the local working population in the study village as regards engagement as a wage labourer. The local women (about 61 per cent of all working women) worked as wage labourers in agriculture. They did not work as wage labourers in other sectors such as the construction sector, unlike their male counterparts. The caste-wise analysis suggests that as many as 89 per cents of all local women agricultural labourers belonged to Scheduled Castes. This particular finding corroborates existing evidence of interaction of caste, gender and class in determining women’s work identities as agricultural labourers as reviewed in Chapter 1 (Goyal & Bajwa, 1991a, 1991b; Sharma, 1984; Srivastava & Srivastava, 2010).

The phenomenon of reduced engagement of landless scheduled caste and certain other backward class male population in agriculture as labourers as well as a conscious rejection of agricultural wage labour also finds mention in research conducted by Jodhka in certain villages of Punjab wherein this process is explained regarding reducing caste hierarchies in the village life (Jodhka 2002). In the study village, however, the male research participants would not necessarily respond regarding caste dissociation along occupation lines. Rather, they indicated towards the wage differences in agriculture and non-agriculture sector and hence their shift from agriculture to the non-agriculture sector. The higher wages in the non-agriculture sector was often reported as the prime reason for not taking agricultural work. Drawing from Jodhka (ibid.), the relevance of shifting caste hierarchies in village life cannot be negated. However, the present research indicates that there is a greater relevance of understanding interaction of caste and gender in the village life amidst



shifting occupation patterns of the male population. The above finding further led to exploring factors responsible for the engagement of local women as agricultural labourers in the study village and is discussed later in the chapter.

As the study aimed to understand the continuity and change in the agrarian structure and relations in the village as the larger context within which gender and other relations of power could be understood, it was found that there was also change in engagement with land across various categories of farmers. Large farmers in the study village earlier hired labourers from the village and were actively engaged with agriculture as they carried out certain activities like ploughing fields or sowing seeds with labourers. They now rarely engaged themselves in any manual activity in agriculture. Also, they now hired migrant labourers for various activities in agriculture and merely supervised their farms. Their engagement with agriculture was different when compared with small or semi-medium farmers who continued to work in the agricultural field along with hired labourers.

Further, intergenerational differences as regards engagement with land and agriculture were also observed among various classes of farmers. The younger population more often than not showed any interest in agriculture. Some studies have noted similar findings whereby they attributed education and aspirations of youth beyond the world of agriculture for their dislike of agriculture (Agarwal & Agrawal, 2017). The youth among small and semi-medium farmers despite their lack of interest helped their fathers in carrying out various agricultural activities. Their counterparts from the medium and large farmer households quite often stayed away from agriculture. Their occasional physical presence at the field did not necessarily imply their active engagement with any of the agriculture activities.

Some of the farmers shared their understanding of change in agriculture as an increasingly non-viable occupation. The middle-aged and elderly farmers often shared their concern over increased reliance on fertilisers and pesticides. They also acknowledged the harmful effects of these chemicals on health. They, however, expressed their helplessness to practice agriculture without fertilisers and pesticides as it directly affected yield and hence profit. Some of the small farmers even shared their discontent and grievance against the State policy whereby the reduced subsidies on these chemicals meant a further increased cost of input in agriculture. Some even

reported that despite excessive physical, emotional and mental engagement with agriculture, the output depended largely on the vagaries of market and weather. Agarwal and Agrawal (2017) have identified various factors leading to dislike for farming by farmers as low profitability, risk and low status. They also identified the cost of inputs and constraints in access to inputs as well as land ownership as important factors directing farmers' dislike for farming. One of the farmers in the present study reported that there was no sure shot formula for gaining profit in agriculture and quite often the cost of cultivation surpassed the returns. It thus appeared that the increased insecurity and lack of sustainable alternatives in agriculture over the years have resulted in a kind of disenchantment with agriculture. Various scholars suggest that the socio-economic and political crisis of the seventies and eighties followed by the liberalisation of nineties has manufactured and sustained this crisis in agriculture leading to utter hopelessness and anxiety among the rural population (Shiva 1991, Chopra 2012, Padhi 2012).

It is within this broader context that the younger male population also perceives agriculture to be a non-viable occupation and seeks recourse in transnational migration. The latter could also be owed to an increased exposure to the world facilitated by the increasing use of information and communication technology. The disinterest is probably a manifestation of their family's experiences with agriculture as well as exposure to a world that seems to offer more opportunities. It also appeared that irrespective of their respective education level and required skill for migration, most young men in the village aspired to migrate. Their aspirations to migrate to varied destinations often reflected their respective socio-economic status. It thus suggests that their choice of destination was often determined by the ability of their family to bear transaction costs of migration. The caste-class background thus determined the site of migration. Gill (2012) has discussed this process of transnational migration from the lens of masculinity whereby success in being able to migrate makes one 'man' and also achieve socio-economic mobility and respect. Taylor and Singh (2013) also argue that the primary reason attributed to the decision to migrate in their study was the perceived prestige (*izzat*) associated with migration. In a similar vein, in the study village, the socio-economic mobility achieved by one of the key respondents as a successful migrant earned him respect as well as established him as an ideal. It suggests how the Punjabi culture values a successful migrant, and

thus the aspirations of youth to migrate are not solely shaped by the ongoing agrarian crisis but also the socio-cultural perceptions about migration.

Those who lacked land and other means to migrate sought wage labour of various kinds. It, however, does not imply that they did not aspire to migrate. Most of the landless male population of the village except for a handful reported being engaged in sectors other than agriculture. The engagement of the male population of the village in the non-agriculture sector cannot be explained merely in terms of the economics of demand-supply equations in the agriculture sector. The phenomenon could be understood by taking into account the larger macroeconomic processes as well as the micro reality as observed in the study village. The mechanisation of most agricultural activities does not indicate the reduced demand for manual labour. Mechanization of certain agricultural activities and the use of High yielding varieties (HYV) of seeds have resulted in shortening the crop cycle of traditional wheat and maize crops. As a consequence, the farmers can grow other crops between these two cereal crops.

Further, as mentioned above, the farmers also informed that the larger economic processes have resulted in making agriculture a non-viable occupation. The yield of cereal crops does not result in much profit as an investment often surpasses the profit. The cultivation of vegetables especially carrot in this village brought the necessary shift whereby farmers reported earning some profit. It also appeared that the cultivation of carrots in this particular village and resultant success of those who pursued this venture reduced to some extent the disenchantment with agriculture.

The disenchantment with agriculture, on the other hand, at the very first place pushed the farmers to explore sustainable alternatives. Still, only those who own some land are touched by the charisma of this crop. The increased demand for manual labour in certain agricultural operations such as two to three rounds of weeding is thus not catered by the male population of the village. The labourers from other states are hired largely by the large and medium farmers while small and semi-medium farmers hire local women labourers for the same.

The onset of in-migration to the study village in the early nineties coincided with the shift in crop pattern in the study village as farmers resorted to growing various vegetables along with cereal crops. The migrant labourers, however, migrated to the

study village along with their families in the year 2003-04. It is difficult to predict as to what exactly led to increased in-migration to the study village. The present study, while drawing from De Haan and Rogaly (2002) also attempted to understand migration not only as an economic process but also as a social process as I attempted to reflect individual factors as well as factors at both source and destination that shaped experiences of migrants. It is within this broader context of agrarian change and migration that the present study attempted to situate working of gender and other relations of power in the lives of both local and migrant women agricultural labourers.

### **7.1.2 Gender Division of Labour in Agriculture, Wages and Conditions of Work**

It was thus found that the migrant labourers from other states living in the study village at five different settlements as well as the original inhabitants of the village referred as local women residing in the study village primarily worked as agricultural labourers. Their labour arrangement, gender division of labour, working conditions and wages are discussed along two heads namely migrant and local agricultural labourers.

#### **7.1.2.1. Migrant agricultural labourers**

The migrant agricultural labourers included men, women, children and the elderly. The male migrant labourers though for most of the year worked as agricultural labourers yet they engaged in the non-agriculture sector during the slack season of agriculture. The migrant women, on the other hand, worked exclusively as agricultural labourers along with other members of their family. It thus implies that the migrant families worked as a unit while being engaged in agricultural labour. Similar labour arrangements wherein a pair of man and a woman are hired in the agriculture sector, or brickfields have earlier been noted by various scholars (Agnihotri & Mazumdar, 2009; Mencher & Saradamoni, 1982; Teerink, 1995). As a consequence of such labour arrangements, migrant women in the study village ended up receiving no wages for their labour as the wages were handed over to their male partner. It thus refers that quite often migrant women's labour in the productive sphere does not get translated to wages as it is men who receive wages for women's labour.

It thus appeared that the dichotomies of paid and unpaid work were not apt for the migrant women agricultural labourers as women did not even receive wages for agricultural labour. The wages earned by women's work as agricultural labourer was kept by one of the male members of each familial unit. It also refers to the existing gender differences whereby despite working for an equal number of hours in the agricultural field, women did not get any remuneration in effect. Here, I am not necessarily arguing that wages are empowering or that those who receive wages necessarily have control over where the money is spent. Instead, I argue that their involvement or engagement in production related activities is subtly devalued thereby shaping their notions about the worth of their work. It thus appeared that in the perceptions of women, they often attributed their contribution as mere 'help' to their male counterparts. The same suggests the role of gender socialisation whereby women themselves do not acknowledge and also devalue their contribution. It suggests that the alliance of patriarchy and capitalism has perpetuated so deep in the social structure that women themselves underestimate the worth of their work. The invisibility of women's work has often been addressed as an issue of concern as the same leads to gross underestimation of women's contribution to the economy. Such labour arrangements wherein women do not get their due share despite their visibility perpetuate the devaluation of women's work.

Farmers in the study village preferred to hire migrant labourers on contract whereby their remuneration was determined by the amount of work performed. The calculation varied from crop to crop and would sometimes be based on the area of the field covered. At certain other times, the weight of produce handled by them determined their wages. The wages once received were then shared among the individual migrant familial units. Such an arrangement of labour ensured that the farmers needed not to supervise the labourers. Moreover, it ensured that labourers did not restrict themselves to eight hours of work. The migrant labourers often reached the farm at seven or earlier in the morning and worked till dusk. Thus, the work day for a migrant labourer was anywhere between twelve to fourteen hours depending upon the intensity of agricultural work.

The labour of migrant labourers was largely controlled by big and medium farmers by allowing them to make thatched huts at their land. It ensured a certainty to the farmer

of having a minimum number of labourers during the peak season of agriculture. The migrant labourers were thus not free to make use of their labour power. Also, they were not in a position to negotiate with the farmers regarding the wages and conditions of work. Their foremost obligation was towards the farmer who allowed them to live on their land. They could seek work elsewhere only once their patron farmer relieved them. It brings attention to an element of coercion in the work of migrant labourers as Banaji (2003) also points out that contracts are never voluntary.

Farmers who would need to hire migrant labourers came to migrant settlements and offered work to any of the representatives among migrant labourers. The one who received the message by consulting with others thus gave the estimate of a total number of labourers turning up to offer their labour. The person thus receiving the message usually would be a relatively mature man among the migrants who could commit by taking the responsibility of others. Women and young men often stayed away from this business. An instance of violence against a migrant man in the event of miscommunication and confusion during the peak season of agriculture regarding the commitment of providing labour was an untold code of conduct that ensured compliance. One of the migrant women mentioned this episode to me to clarify why women and young men stayed away from this.

Another aspect that found mention regards communication and negotiation with the landowners was the regional and gendered identity of the woman. Being a migrant woman, the onus of maintaining distance with the landowner lay with the woman who avoided communication to protect herself from any unwanted advances by the landowner. It thus suggests the manners in which fear, compliance and docility is perpetuated so that patriarchy and capitalism in a synchronic manner could extract surplus from the labour.

The instance of violence against migrants was also informed by one of the local women labourers who expressed that the landowners/farmers abuse or beat migrant labourers because they do not belong here. She also expressed that farmers could not treat them the way they treated migrant labourers. It refers to the unequal power relations between the landowners/farmers, local women and migrant agricultural labourers who primarily due to their migrant status as well as their socio-economic

status were vulnerable to the instances of violence against them and occupied the lowest position in the agrarian structure.

As regards the gender division of labour among migrant agricultural labourers in various agricultural operations, there was not much that was exclusively handled by either of the genders. Men, women, children and elderly all worked together. However, they made mutual adjustments among the group as and when required. At times, the lifting of weights was exclusively handled by men on account of labelling certain tasks as heavy work. But, largely, other than the lifting of heavyweights, most agricultural operations involved both men and women. The usual labelling of work was a rule, not exception whereby certain activities on account of being exclusively carried out by men were labelled difficult/heavy. In the same vein, the activities performed exclusively by women were labelled easy/light.

I found that children were exclusively women's responsibility. Some of the women even brought infants and toddlers who were left unattended on a piece of cloth or a *dupatta* while they worked in the agricultural fields. The male members of the unit solely focused on agricultural work. Though the elder siblings could provide little care to the young children at the fields, women intermittently looked after the children while engaging themselves in the agricultural labour. The same suggests a spatial blurring of the social and sectoral division of labour among women migrant agricultural labourers, the terms used by Custer (1997) to represent what is largely referred to as unpaid/domestic and the paid/sectors of the economy. The migrant women took care of their children not only in the house but also at agricultural farms while engaging in agricultural labour.

#### **7.1.2.2. Local agricultural labourers**

Among the local agricultural labourers, it was during the harvesting of wheat that one could find a few local male agricultural labourers in the agricultural fields. These men largely worked for making *Kupp*. Their involvement in other agricultural operations was very limited. Most of the big and medium farmers made use of machines to harvest wheat. It was small and medium farmers who hired local women agricultural labourers.

As regards the wages, at the time of fieldwork, the daily wage for a woman agricultural labourer was Rupees 120. The daily wage for a male labourer for the very same task was Rupees 200. The male labourers, when hired for various post-harvest operations in case of the crop of carrot, received as much as Rupees 250. On the other hand, for certain agricultural operations in the crop of carrot, women received a daily wage as low as Rupees 100. Thus, it is evident that wage differentials exist between men and women. The task that requires more manual labour, for instance, cutting the foliage apart from the carrot in this case, was often undervalued as the parallels were drawn with housework as discussed in Chapter 5. Thus, yet again we see the overlapping of the social and sectoral division of labour. It is also evident that patriarchal norms and capitalism collude to control women's labour and accordingly an attempt is made to devalue women's work on account of comparing and labelling their role in production activities with those in the reproductive sphere. It is important to note here that I am not referring to women's role in the reproductive sphere of bearing no value. Instead, I am drawing attention towards the devaluation of women's work irrespective of the realm of engagement.

At the time of fieldwork, there were three distinct groups of women who worked as agricultural labourers. These groups were formed over the years of working together, familiarity and by the level of comfort among various women. They thus preferred to work together in a group. One of these groups worked in the agricultural fields of adjoining village. During fieldwork, I realised that it was an outcome of everyday resistance on account of women labourers' struggle for increasing their daily wage. When the farmers of the study village did not agree to raise the wages, women negotiated with the farmers of the adjoining village who reportedly agreed on giving them their desired wage.

The other two groups of women continued to work at the existing wage rate in the agricultural fields of the farmers in the study village itself. It thus also appeared that these two groups of women were not able to organise themselves in the struggle for increasing wages. It also came up during fieldwork that the woman leaders of these two groups were controlled by the landowners and thus the overall struggle of labourers to get their wages increased never gained momentum.



The inadequacy of wages in the times of inflation to meet the everyday needs was frequently reported. It was due to this specific reason that women attempted to negotiate with farmers to increase the wages on an annual basis. However, their request was seldom considered, and the revised annual wages in the study village often included a mere rise by five or ten rupees. Women's repeated references of everyday struggle and their coping strategies due to larger shifts in the economy, specifically manifested in inflation are however addressed in the next sub-section of the chapter.

The reference of certain lower caste, specifically Chamar women, keeping their earnings with them has been noted as far back as in 1958 by Majumdar in a village in Uttar Pradesh. The same is however not mentioned in the context of gender relations. It is also because gender as a category of analysis was non-existent at that time. Rather, the caste background of women and their non-compliance to accepted rules of conduct with husbands is discussed. The linkages of caste and gender have however been important in studies on women and work as several scholars have noted as discussed in Chapter 1. The local women agricultural labourers, mostly belonging to Scheduled Castes in the study village though unlike their migrant counterparts received wages and kept their earnings with them yet they seldom spent the amount on their own. One of the local women agricultural labourers though mentioned keeping a part of her wages for the marriage of her daughters, most women draw attention to the insufficiency of wages in the times of inflation and that they could barely save any amount. Also, it was primarily spent on the needs and requirements of the family members.

### **7.1.3 Gender Division of Labour with respect to housework**

It was understandable that the work burdens among the local and migrant women agricultural labourers would vary considerably due to their respective location in the system. The work burdens within these two broad categories of women also varied considerably depending on the individual household characteristics. These characteristics included the type of family, family size and composition, the occupation of the family members, to name a few.

It was also found that women's perceptions about work also varied across the two broad categories of labourers. While some of the local women labourers pointed towards the lack of contribution by male members and certain other members of the household to housework, the migrant women labourers invariably perceived housework to be the sole responsibility of women. This difference can largely be attributed to the socio-cultural difference that exists between the local and migrant women agricultural labourers.

Further, among most local women agricultural labourers, the housework was shared amongst other women in the house. Quite frequently, it was daughters who contributed to housework along with their mothers. Nevertheless, adjustments between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law were also observed. It is, however, a different issue altogether that there were often disagreements, differences of opinion and small quarrels between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. In some households, mother-in-law even ridiculed the daughter-in-law for not fitting into the category of 'ideal' daughter-in-law. Amidst all this, the agricultural work when taken up by any of these two inevitably came up with adjustments on the part of two. It was also found that unlike earlier times, in a few households, mothers-in-law were in a more vulnerable position. Thus, the earlier argument of elderly women, usually mother-in-law, controlling the younger one, i.e. a daughter-in-law in this case, due to differential power relations between the two did not hold in some of the local households.

The continuation of the dominance of mother-in-law among the migrant agricultural labourers, on the other hand, was an everyday phenomenon. Not even in a single household did the daughter-in-law show any signs of resilience or resistance. It appeared to me that among migrant agricultural labourers, the daughter-in-laws lived a double life. They appeared silent, submissive and docile in the presence of mother-in-law. The traits of their personality and individual characteristics were, in fact, more visible in the absence of their mothers-in-law. Thus, the role of control, conflict and co-operation among mother-in-law and daughter-in-law found manifestation in the differential burden of housework across different women agricultural labourers as discussed in Chapter 5.

It is evident from the data discussed in Chapter 5 that by any means, the migrant women agricultural labourers are more burdened with both housework as well as

agricultural work. Though they acknowledge the variety of work that they perform from morning till late night yet in their perception, the housework is seen more like a 'duty' or responsibility specific to a woman while the agricultural work is referred to as 'help' to their male counterparts. Some of the local women agricultural labourers, on the other hand, questioned the housework to be the sole responsibility of women. They at the same time also acknowledged the worth of their labour in the agricultural fields regarding contributing to the household income. The differences discussed above among two categories of women thus can be explained by different socio-cultural as well as the differential location of the women in the system. Further, the differences within each of these two categories, corresponding to their household characteristics as well as their respective location within the household as regards access to resources and decision making, draw attention towards the heterogeneity within these two broad categories of labourers.

The findings concerning the burden of work are in line with what Kabeer (2005) argues that women's engagement in paid work not always leads to increased capacities but at times leads to increased work burdens among women. The division of labour as regards housework and care of children is rarely renegotiated between the sexes and that any adjustments, if found, are among the women members of the household. The migrant women's internalisation of their subordinate position and their behaviour as per their perceived position in the family or household also refers to the denial of choice or lack of power (ibid.).

#### **7.1.4 Women's experiences of burden of housework, agricultural work and their relationship with health and well-being**

As discussed in the previous chapter, the concept of well-being was chosen with the specific objective of not confining ourselves solely to the physical condition of women working as agricultural labourers. The study aimed to understand the larger socio-psychological aspects related to their work and its implications. The concept was operationalised by translating it to 'good life'. The responses of women to what they understood by a good life and impediments to achieving a good life led them to reflect upon their condition. Thus, an abstract concept was operationalised wherein women responded largely by giving the reference of their own lives and occasionally

comparing their lives with others whom they deemed better or worse than them. It refers to the relational aspect of well-being as discussed in Chapter 1.

As regards the physical well-being, local women agricultural labourers often associated their respective work burdens with their state of health. The vagaries of weather quite often aggravated the level of difficulty in agricultural work. The local women acknowledged sensitivity to the weather conditions. On the other hand, migrant women agricultural labourers often reported that though the agricultural work is difficult yet they work hard in all the seasons. The migrant workers, on the other hand, frequently reported health problems rooted in their immediate environment as they suffered from fevers of various kinds. They also located the cause of health problems in acute poverty, lack of nutrition and the brunt of their migrant status. The migrant women agricultural labourers not even identified their migrant status as a cause of certain health problems but they also believed that the same led to discrimination while they accessed public health care services.

The health care seeking pattern among both local, as well as migrant agricultural labourers, also indicated the failure of public health care services in meeting the felt needs of the rural population. As a consequence, most women agricultural labourers accessed regular or irregular private health care services. The quite often cited reasons included accessibility, affordability, and availability. Some of the narratives even showed that the dignity or respect accorded to them also mattered during treatment.

In response to questions on the good life, women often expressed a negative outlook towards their life condition given their vulnerabilities resulting from working as agricultural labourers. Most local women agricultural labourers indicated that if they had a choice, they would not work as agricultural labourers. This response suggests that women did not consider working as agricultural labourer leading to a good life. However, the paradox lies in the fact that in their responses they often wished that they could get continuous work as agricultural labourers. The same, on the other hand, suggests that continuous work ensured their survival.

Further, their responses were as varied as ranging from the availability of work as mentioned above to being in a state of health to be able to engage in labour and also

as a state of being where one did not worry about the availability of meals. Such responses thus reflect the close association of work, health and survival. The migrant women often shared migration as a coping strategy to better their economic condition. They often shared that life is good when one does not have to leave the place one belongs. All these responses indicate that each of the women responded to this question from their respective vantage point. Quite often in their responses, they oscillated between past and future while referring to their present condition. In such instances, the present situation often indicated their resilience and struggle to make life better when compared to the past while the references to the future indicated their aspirations. In their narratives, they also at times referred to the larger issues of poverty, landlessness and discrimination resulting from inequalities. Such issues wherein women relate their everyday realities and draw linkages with the macro issues is discussed in the next section of this chapter.

As regards agricultural labour, women often perceived agricultural labour to be physically demanding and strenuous. Other than that the seasonality inherent in the agricultural labour required labourers to put their bodies to work in the extremes of weather. Some found it difficult to work in the hot weather while others found the cold and humid conditions challenging. Moreover, women mentioned frequently that no season is easy for those involved in agricultural labour. The migrant labourers, on the other hand, despite being visibly weaker than their local counterparts shared that they were not afraid of the sun and could work in extreme weather conditions. The large and medium farmers and landowners also cited the same reason as their preference for migrant labourers over the local labourers. Working in the extremes of weather for both categories of labourers resulted in certain health problems due to change in the composition of bodily humour caused by excessive heat or cold. Other than that, labouring in the fields with the same posture for long hours resulted in pains and aches in various body parts of the labourers. Some also mentioned respiratory as well as skin problems. The women migrant agricultural labourers, on the other hand, despite reporting various health problems insisted that they could not do away without work because of their migrant status. Time and again, they emphasised that they had migrated for work and that they had to engage in the work whether or not the conditions were conducive.

Further, other than the physical labour inherent in agricultural work, every woman's respective location in the social system with circumstances unique to her posed challenges of various types that affected her differently. Thus, in addition to the physical hazards, woman agricultural labourers also struggled for educating their children. Some struggled to arrange for dowry and marriages of their daughters while others took up the challenge of running households in the event of migration of the male member of the household. The migration of male members of the household put not only the financial burden but also the social pressure to withdraw from work as agricultural labourers. Women found it challenging to work amidst the social satire and critique of being involved in agricultural labour despite the migration of male member of the household. Among the migrant women agricultural labourers, violence by husbands was a major cause of distress. Further, the stress among migrant women agricultural labourers included managing the household with meagre or no resources, specifically during the slack season of agriculture. The narratives discussed in the previous chapter highlight the lived realities and everyday struggles of women agricultural labourers.

As expected, the migrant women agricultural labourers are in a more vulnerable situation due to their respective location in the system. Being migrant, they did not have access to safe drinking water and sanitation facilities. The poor living conditions when compared to local women agricultural labourers made migrant agricultural labourers more vulnerable to certain diseases. Fevers of various kinds such as Typhoid and Malaria affected migrant population due to their poor living conditions. The lack of nutrition could also be adding to the disease burden among the migrant population. It is not to suggest that the local population was devoid of diseases.

Further, women's reproductive role also burdened them with activities related to childbirth and care. One of the participants of the research even shared the mental agony of women resulting from the loss of children during the pregnancy/soon after birth or in the early years of childhood. The loss of children thus affects women psychologically and emotionally. The access to and utilisation of health care services during pregnancy, childbirth and postnatal period were also explored to understand women's experiences with the health care system. It appeared that their respective socio-economic status determined their access to various services. Due to their past

experiences with the public health care systems, both local and migrant agricultural labourers accessed private health services frequently. The younger women in the age group of 25-35 years reportedly relied on private nursing homes for the childbirth. The women in the elderly age group who had earlier given birth reported that they largely delivered children at home with the help of *Dai*. Some of them also reported having accessed private nursing homes in case of complications during pregnancy. The migrant women largely relied on *Dai*. The narratives of experiences of migrant women in accessing public health care facilities for childbirth suggest the gap between the ongoing policy and felt need of the population. Some of the experiences of pregnant migrant women in the study village while they accessed public health care facilities were similar to the experiences of women elsewhere in the country as found in a review of maternal health care utilisation in India (Hunter et al. 2014).

Learning from their own as well as others' experiences, migrant women thus avoided accessing public health care facilities for childbirth. They preferred deliveries at home. Occasionally some of the migrant women also reported being sent to their maternal homes for childbirth. It thus appeared that childbirth was considered a natural process at the native place. At the site of migration, however, it transformed into a crucial phase that required strategising at the level of the household. The same also points towards the vulnerability of the migrant population and suggests that reproductive role of women also poses challenges of different nature including stress resulting from financial burden, the apathy of health care providers, the language barrier, etc. to name a few at the site of migration. The preference for private health care services for health conditions other than childbirth among both local as well as migrant population also points towards the failure of public health care services in meeting the felt need of the population.

Having addressed the research questions formulated at the beginning of the study, we will now discuss some of the key questions that emerged during fieldwork.

## **7.2 Research Questions from the field**

The research process led to certain questions related to earlier formulated research questions as a thorough understanding of the processes and relations in the given

context needed deliberation. The flexibility in the research design ensured that pertinent questions emerging in due course of research could be explored in detail along with the earlier formulated research questions. As mentioned earlier, the data collection and analysis stages were not distinct. Thus, the set of questions that emerged while experiencing the field could also be classified as a part of data analysis by some. I have however chosen to address them as questions following from disciplinary training in anthropology wherein the rigour of research is often determined by modification or complete rebuttal of existing research questions after having experienced the field. The research questions formulated for the study were, however, not contrastingly different from the questions that emerged from the field. They were rather closely related to the research statement and were addressed in due course of fieldwork.

An attempt is thus made to address these research questions here to have a holistic understanding of earlier research questions as well as understanding the gender-power dynamics of the study village. The broad concerns addressed here include engagement of local women as agricultural labourers and dynamics of the labour market, Labour migration patterns and understanding labour migration through the lens of gender and finally, Women's work, well-being and women's understanding of certain macro issues or constraints.

### **7.2.1 Local women as agricultural labourers and dynamics of the labour market**

All local women who worked as agricultural labourers were landless. Most local women who worked as agricultural labourers belonged to Scheduled Castes. Thus, it appears that the interaction of caste, class, regional identity and gender determine the location in the agrarian system amidst hierarchies of power. Some local women even reported lack of alternatives as the reason for taking agricultural labour. Their gendered location in the agrarian system seemed to be an important determinant of their engagement with agriculture as labourers.

One of the central questions that emerged from the field revolved around the engagement of women in agriculture. The key question was as to who all worked as agricultural labourers in the village. The men were not confined to agriculture as discussed earlier while women let it be local or migrant exclusively worked as



agricultural labourers. It appeared in due course of fieldwork that many factors ranging from those specific to the village setting to the larger questions related to differential development across the country shaped this trend. This trend of feminisation of agricultural labour could be understood from layers of unequal relations laden with caste, regional identity and essentially gender differences that constituted the everyday reality of women agricultural labourers in the study village.

At the village level, we could find that local male workers rarely engaged themselves in agriculture. Their involvement in the non-agriculture sector was reported to be due to significant wage differentials in the agriculture and non-agriculture sector as discussed earlier. Their disinterest in taking up work in the agriculture sector also seems to be shaped by the increasing disenchantment with agriculture in the larger public domain. In the instance of availability of work in the non-agriculture sector, they thus preferred to work in the non-agriculture sector. Their preference for non-agricultural work, however, does not necessarily indicate towards their deliberate attempt to negate their occupational identity associated with caste in the village as observed by Jodhka (2002) in some villages of Punjab as mentioned earlier. The inherent idea of shame associated with working on others' land propagated in the socialisation of the village population, however, can also not be negated.

On the other hand, the involvement of local women, largely belonging to scheduled caste and certain other backward classes in agriculture as agricultural labourers points towards the larger questions of landlessness and continuity of caste-based occupations among women. The importance of gender relations as a key player in shaping this phenomenon cannot be undermined. The gender differences in a range of activities performed indicate towards the limited mobility of women whereby women are bound to confine themselves to a fixed location while men go beyond the village boundaries in search for work.

Further women's role in household production and reproduction activities also restricts their access to labour in other sectors. Also, the preference for local women labourers by certain farmers or landowners also indicates the inherent benefit of hiring women labourers wherein the farmers can have better control and ensure the availability of docile and compliant labour force. Further, the labour is controlled and segmented by extending support to some of the women among local women

agricultural labourers. The same results in division among the local women labourers and hence they fail to unionise for raising wages and/other negotiations.

It was also found that the socio-cultural norms regarding agricultural labour as not so prestigious activity and the involvement of those from lower caste and class in the same has retained its essence over the years. However, the meanings regarding the agricultural labour were reshaped over a period of time. This reshaping, however, served the purpose of landowners/farmers who by drawing parallels with certain activities in carrot cultivation to the kitchen work, attempted to lessen the values of shame attached with agricultural labour for their need of cheap female labour. They were to some extent successful in reshaping the meanings attached to these activities in the cultivation of carrot. The same served a dual purpose. One that some of the women internalised those activities to be similar to kitchen work and thus supplied their labour irrespective of their caste/class identities. Secondly, the internalisation of work as similar to housework leading to the devaluation of their contribution decreased the wage thereby ensuring the cheap supply of labour to the landowners/farmers specifically at a time in the crop cycle when there is a great demand for manual labour.

It is, however, to be noted that the power relations operating at the level of the village not solely determine women's involvement in agricultural labour. The linkages with the larger structural forces such as internal and international migration as well as the failure of State in ensuring the access and utilisation of social welfare schemes aimed at poor also seem to force women to take up agricultural work. Women often shared that they could not get work in Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) due to the inherent corruption at the local level. Further, some of the elderly women mentioned that they were unable to avail old age pension scheme due to the same reason. Amidst minimum resources and lack of alternatives, women often took up agricultural work. The local women also shared that the increasing mechanisation in agriculture and farmer's reliance on the labour of migrants from other states decreased their work opportunities. It refers to the issue of underemployment among local women agricultural labourers. The migrant women also reported underemployment. However, it was largely on account of unavailability of work during the slack season of agriculture.

The migrant women, on the other hand, worked along with other family members as a unit. Their narratives often highlighted the differential development across various states in the country as one of the major reasons. They often responded that they were not able to make ends meet at their native villages in Uttar Pradesh. One of the most cited reasons was the unavailability of waged labour in agriculture and fewer wages in the agriculture sector in their native villages. However, during fieldwork, it also emerged that their decision to migrate was also shaped by the perceived notions associated with agricultural labour in their respective villages. As discussed in Chapter 5, the social values attached with agricultural labour as not a prestigious occupation hindered them from taking up agricultural work in their villages. They instead migrated to the study village in Punjab and here could even engage the entire family to work as agricultural labourers. It implies that the social identity and norms regarding engagement in certain labour activities guide as long as one lives in their native village. Having migrated, the migrant labourers could break free the notions that guided their choices of occupation in their native villages. Further, women, children and elderly all worked in the study village as agricultural labourers.

Thus, we find that social norms play a great role in determining who works as an agricultural labourer. Further, the socio-economic status of the household as an index of one's relative location in the village social structure also determines whether one works as an agricultural labourer. The inequalities along the axes of caste, class, gender and regional identity thus interact with each other and determine one's engagement in the agriculture sector as an agricultural labourer. Within the two broad categories of women agricultural labourers, viz. local and migrant agricultural labourers, we also find that each woman is differentially affected by the vulnerabilities created by the interactions of caste, class, gender and ethnicity coupled with unique household characteristics. Further, the structural constraints also affect women as they perceive them to be affecting their prospects of a 'good life' as discussed further in the chapter.

### **7.2.2 Understanding labour migration patterns through the lens of gender**

Another set of questions that emerged from the field were related to labour migration. The key questions related to the dynamics of labour migration were; a) Who migrates and where to? It referred to identifying the caste/regional identity of a person who

migrates. Further, where does the 'migrant' stand in the class ladder as regards land ownership or assets? Are there any caste/ethnicity, and class patterns to migration in terms of destination state/country? (b) What are the plausible factors that promote or hinder migration or under what circumstances a person migrates? Last but not the least, (c) What are the implications of migration on gender relations and how the dynamics of labour migration can be understood from the lens of gender and the resulting vulnerabilities of women. The findings related to the migration in the study village have largely been discussed in Chapter 4. It thus appears that among the in-migrants, despite belonging to a caste that appears higher in the Varna order and also ownership of land among some of them, migration was a livelihood strategy. Other than that, each of them had circumstances unique to them that triggered migration. Thus, migration was understood as a multi-layered process guided by social as well as economic reasons. De Haan and Rogaly (2002) have argued that migration should not necessarily be understood as an economic process alone. Rather, it needs to be studied as a social process. The case reports discussed in Chapter 4 indicate the relevance of understanding social as well as economic processes that guide migration.

As regards the migration of the local population from the study village, there exists a pattern to the destination country as regards the socio-economic status. The pattern pointed towards the caste and economic status of the given household. Those belonging to scheduled castes or certain other backward classes migrated or attempted to migrate to countries in the Middle East. This stream of migration was exclusively male, and they intended to return to the village after earning sufficient amount of money. The occupations taken up by them in the destination countries included working as an electrician, plumber, carpenter, etc. The main reason for the local population for the choice of Middle East countries was the low transaction costs. However, to meet this cost too, they often had to take a loan from landowner or relatives. It also burdened those who were left behind as for the initial months; there would be no remittances at all. Later, even if the remittances were received, they were not sufficient to be able to pay back the loan. Amidst all this, the pressure to withdraw from the labour force also burdened women psychologically and emotionally.

The emigration from Saini and Jat households, on the other hand, was not confined to labour migration but they migrated on a variety of grounds ranging from a family

reunion, migration by marriage or education purposes, to mention a few. The destination countries also varied from countries like US, Canada and certain European countries. The emigrants from these caste groups mentioned above did not necessarily intend to return. It could be explained on account of discontent with state whereby the agriculture was perceived to be a non-viable occupation. The wish to migrate to countries abroad was rampant among the youth. The same has been addressed earlier.

It thus followed that among the local population, the migration of men from lower castes as well as certain other backward classes was a livelihood strategy. On the other hand, the emigration of those belonging to Jats and other upper castes was largely a result of the increasing discontent and hopelessness regarding future of agriculture in the country and also a manifestation of socio-cultural perceptions regarding international migration as a venture involving prestige and prosperity. Among the Punjabi society, the migration of Sikhs to various countries has been a well-researched area. Studies like Helweg (1979) and Singh and Tatla (2006) take into account the history, dynamics and implications of migration of Sikhs from the Doaba region of Punjab, to countries like the United Kingdom. Radhika Chopra (2011) situates the migration of Sikhs from Punjab in the political and historical context of Punjab during the militancy period wherein migration was resorted to protect young Sikh men from being engaged in militancy and also to protect them from state violence. Taylor and Singh (2013) argue that international migration is perceived to enhance *izzat* (prestige).

The study village was also not free of such notions regarding international migration. It was for these notions that local women's involvement in agriculture as agricultural labourer was not considered prestigious in the event of transnational migration of male family members. Thus, the implications of male migration on women's work also warranted attention. The struggles and strategies of women to make ends meet in the absence of male member as well as the financial burden of loan or debt made them further vulnerable. The same has been addressed as a separate theme in this chapter.

The labour migration, on the other hand, when viewed from the lens of gender points towards the vulnerability associated with the same in case of two broad groups of women, viz. local and migrant women agricultural labourers. The vulnerability of migrant women agricultural labourers is obvious and understandable as has been

discussed earlier largely in the context of their self-perceived invisibility as mere ‘helpers’ and also about the fact that they never received wages for their labour. Some of the gendered vulnerabilities of migrant labourers have been discussed in the first section of this chapter. On the other hand, the local women agricultural labourer households wherein male labour migration took place posed challenges of a different nature. One, the financial burden of male labour migration, often managed by taking loans from the farmers in the village and/or relatives is initially borne by the women agricultural labourers. Women thus at the same time were not relieved of their responsibilities of managing households amidst this financial crisis. Since the flow of remittances would not start soon after the migration or irregular, women almost found it impossible to withdraw from the labour market. Secondly, the social pressure resulting from the migration of male members on women to stop working as agricultural labourers burdened them further. Thus, in such course of events, those who succumbed to the social pressure as well as those who continued to work amidst all these experienced challenges of a different nature. The study also found that women’s roles, responsibilities and burden change drastically in the event of male migration. This finding is similar to what Bisht (2005) addressed in the hill economy of Uttarakhand wherein she describes the challenges posed by women who are left behind in the event of male migration.

### **7.2.3 Women agricultural labourers’ work, well-being and understanding of certain macro issues or constraints**

Women’s work in agriculture exposed them to certain occupational hazards such as musculoskeletal disorders, exposure to dust and chemicals. Working in agricultural fields in one posture for prolonged duration affected their bones and joints. Most women, as discussed in Chapter 6 mentioned the pain in various parts of the body as a consequence of engagement with agricultural work while few women also attributed housework for bodily discomfort. Some women labourers also reported respiratory and skin problems while others also linked nutritional deprivation, poverty and engagement in agricultural work leading to fatigue and tiredness. Similar findings drawing linkages between occupational hazards resulting from agricultural work environment, and various illnesses and diseases among women have been noted for long as discussed in Chapter 1 (Government of India. National Commission on Self

Employed Women and Women in the Informal Sector, 1988; Lipton & Kadt, 1988; Mencher & Saradmoni, 1982). The present study though attempted to explore women's experiences of illness and disease and their perceived aetiology from their perspective, yet it also endeavoured to understand the implications of larger changes in agrarian structure and relations on women's workloads in agriculture.

Further, the study also aimed to move beyond women's experiences of physical discomfort and took into account the disadvantages quite often constituted by the interaction of gender and other structural inequalities. The linkages between women's work, health and well-being, as well as perceptions of the structural constraints, constituted an important component of the study. The macro issues thus often formed the parts of women's narratives in the form of repeated utterances of hopelessness arising from structural constraints. They also attributed the same as affecting their well-being. Chapter 6 addresses these concerns as women's narratives and their understanding of well-being not only reflect their disappointments but also needs and aspirations that are often overlooked. Kabeer (1994) notes that women are often regarded as not knowing what they need and the gender asymmetries often lead to subsuming women's needs with household needs. The present study thus through women's understanding of constraints and experiences reflect their expectations of a life worth living.

Amidst the given context, women draw linkages with their well-being by referring to structural constraints ranging from socio-cultural practices of dowry and migration. The practice of dowry seems not to discriminate between local and migrant agricultural labourers as regards the dispossession of hard-earned wages and assets built up over the innumerable years. This is not to deny the existence of violence of everyday life at both micro as well as macro levels. Women are while vulnerable to the violence of state policies; they invariably are also subject to violence at the level of household wherein the physical violence by the husband is the overt violence. The abuse and torment by elderly female members also bring attention to the unequal power relations between women of different age groups. Thus, the interaction of macro and microenvironments situate every woman differently in exposure to the violence of everyday life in the social system. The practice of dowry which is prevalent among all castes and classes as discussed above and earlier affects the

working classes disproportionately. It dispossesses women of their wages and women are further burdened by loans to arrange for dowry. Padhi (2012) suggests that dowry is not to be taken as a socio-cultural practice alone. Rather, the economics of dowry needs to be brought to the forefront to address the devaluation of women caused by it.

It is understandable from the narratives of women that their wages as agricultural labourers are not even sufficient to meet their everyday expenses. The same has also been observed in a study carried out by Padhi (2012) in villages of Punjab wherein she addresses the problem of abysmally low wages and rising costs of purchasing the bare essentials of life. In the given circumstances, to be able to marry their children, specifically daughters, they are thus not left with any choice but to take a loan. The instances of local women taking loans for marrying their daughters were a common phenomenon in the study village. The daughters were also observed to be guilty of having been a burden on their parents and thus seemingly offered themselves to work as agricultural labourers along with their mothers from a young age. The young girls learnt the same from their own experiences as they observed their elder sisters and how their marriages burdened the families further with loans. One such case has been discussed in Chapter 5.

It was evident in the narratives of women that they often started working to be able to educate their children and also to run their households. They were though aware that they needed money in the near future for marrying their daughters yet they were helpless as wages were not even sufficient for everyday sustenance. At the time of arranging marriages, they were thus not left with any option but to take loans. The practice of dowry thus points towards the nexus of patriarchy and capitalism whereby women are devalued at every phase of life and are thus caught in a vicious spiral of devaluation and exploitation. It is important to note here that the Brahminical origins of dowry system have paved their way to the lower strata of the society whereby the worth and status of a woman and her family is determined by the amount of dowry given at the time of marriage. The same found mention in the narrative of a woman agricultural labourer as discussed earlier in the chapter. Women often acknowledged that a married daughter was often a liability as the gifts and cash amount to the groom and his family was not a one-time affair to be given in the form of dowry at the time



of marriage. Rather, the bride's family was expected to give gifts and cash amount to their married daughter, her husband and in-laws at the time of various festivals, events and at the time of childbirth, etc., It refers to the cultural devaluation of women in general and also points towards the inhumane, unethical and illegal practice of sex-selective abortions. Thus, the interaction of micro and macro resulting in gendered violence is often manifested in the stages before birth. The explicit reference of gender-based discrimination in children was however never acknowledged. It was on the other hand visible in everyday practices as girl children took care of their siblings as well as contributed to housework. Their brothers more often than not hardly engaged in any housework or care activities. They also did not work as agricultural labourers. Thus, the everyday practices across gendered lines often reflected the inherent gender differences.

Further, it was also observed that the choice marriages by women are also not culturally acceptable as that result in loosening the control over women's sexuality and freedom. In one of the narratives, it also was evident that one of the women felt ashamed about the inter-caste choice marriage of her daughter. Thus, we find that the ideas that restricted women's mobility, sexuality and freedom that were once confined to certain upper castes in the society have also found acceptance in the lower strata only to further disadvantage women.

The vulnerability of migrant women agricultural labourers though lies in the interaction of their gender and migrant identities, the institutions like marriage and family along with the interaction of capitalism also exploit women's labour in both productive as well as reproductive sphere. One could, however, observe various ways in which migrant women's labour at both household and agricultural fields was crucial for the sustenance of household and the profit-making of farmers, yet their work was undervalued not only by men but by women themselves.

The repeated references of insufficient wages and increasing costs of living also draw attention towards the economic reforms that displaced a large section of the workforce from the agriculture sector. The interconnections between reforms and the increasing footloose labour in the economy are almost inevitable. The same seems to have led to the feminisation of labour force. In the rural sector, women due to their location as well as their gendered roles and responsibilities could only find work in the

agriculture sector. It was evident in women's narratives who often pointed toward insufficient wages of male members of the household working in the non-agriculture sector. Further, in the absence of efficient social security mechanisms, elderly women also were forced to take up agricultural work. The young girls and women in other age groups often in their narratives highlighted the structural constraints largely an outcome of the failure of state policies that forced them to take up work as agricultural labourers.

Thus, in the above section, we have discussed some of the research questions or concerns that came up during the fieldwork. These concerns or questions were intricately linked with the gender-power dynamics operating at the level of the village as well as at the macro level. The interaction of the two thus results in the manifestation of gendered inequalities and disadvantages. The differences resulting from the interaction of various inequalities have thus been explored across various women wherein their unique individual characteristics also place them differentially in the social system. The same has been discussed throughout this thesis. We shall now conclude this chapter by summing up the research contributions, concerns/limitations and scope for future research.

### **7.3 Research Contribution**

In one of the sections of this chapter, we addressed the findings of the study as per various research questions. We also brought forth a few research questions and concerns that emerged from the field itself. In this section, we attempt to sum up the significance of the study as regards its contribution to the existing field of knowledge in the research area. The research concerns, limitations and plausibility of further research are also discussed in this section.

#### **7.3.1 Understanding Gender relations and power dynamics by using the 'doing gender' and 'differences' approach**

The present research has attempted to bring forth the heterogeneity among women agricultural labourers with respect to their individual characteristics and hence their respective location within the social system. The study at the same time acknowledges the importance of gender as a manifestation of social situations. Drawing from West

and Zimmerman's (1995) doing gender approach, we have adopted gender as a lens to understand the various ways in which power is exercised and inequalities produced. Narratives in this study highlight the variety in women's circumstances and hence their respective vulnerabilities at a given point of time. The differential burden of housework, disparities quite often a result of their migrant status, or the psychological stress resulting from coping with the expenses on children's education, marriages, dowry, migration of male family members, to name a few, reflect varied experiences of women.

Further, the role of gender relations in producing ideologies and practices that shape the overall perceptions about differences between men and women with respect not only to work but also duties, responsibilities and resources also get reflected in some of the narratives. It was evident in the narratives of women that the interactions of caste, class, regional identity and location with gender help in making sense of the everyday lives of women wherein gender inequalities are quite often a manifestation of power dynamics resulting from the interaction of factors mentioned above operating at various levels. Thus, one of the contributions of the present research is that it brings forth the importance of gender relations in producing inequalities by taking into account both micro as well as macro factors. The inner working of power dynamics and interaction of macro-micro environment in producing inequalities is studied from women's perspective.

### **7.3.2 Exploring continuities and change in agriculture from the vantage point of participants of the research**

Duvvury (1989) notes that most studies in their analysis of technological change and employment do not take into account caste and class dimensions. The present study through census survey of the village identified caste and class identities of the study population and attempted to understand the agrarian structure and relations not only in the light of gender but also interaction of caste and class relations. The study also attempted to understand the continuities and changes with respect to the agrarian system from the vantage point of the village inhabitants. Agrarian change in existing studies in India is usually understood by revisits of research teams over the span of a few years in a selected setting (Himanshu, Jha, & Rodgers, 2016; Jodhka, 2016). I have, however, attempted to understand the continuities and changes as perceived by

those who practice agriculture as they recollected their experience of pursuing agriculture in the present context with that of earlier years. The present crisis in agriculture was often related to the increased use of fertilisers and pesticides post green revolution and thus increased dependence on these chemicals. The final blow to the agriculture sector was in the forms of economic reforms that resulted in reduced subsidies in the agriculture sector and increased cost of cultivation. The discontent and disenchantment with agriculture as an occupation that demands utmost physical and mental engagement but minimal or no returns at all has resulted in certain continuities and changes concerning technology, crop pattern and shifts in labour composition and arrangements. Thus, the data about this aspect reflects the context within which we explored the power dynamics from a gender perspective.

### **7.3.3 Exploring the micro-macro linkages in understanding well-being and everyday lives of women agricultural labourers'**

As mentioned above, the study attempted to understand and situate the everyday lives of women who work as agricultural labourers while taking into account their work and perceptions about well-being from an emic perspective. Thus, while doing so, I have attempted to draw linkages between micro and macro environments as identified by women themselves. Since one of the objectives of the study was to manoeuvre beyond the physical state of health and to capture the anxieties of varied nature inherent in the lives of women, well-being as a concept was chosen. The inherent difficulty in communicating the meaning of a concept as abstract as well-being was handled from a humanist perspective by simply translating it to lay term like 'good life'. There was an initial discomfort in settling to narrow down to a term as simple as a good life for a concept as complicated and abstract as well-being. The exercise, however, proved fruitful when women looked into their own lives and identified the constraints that restrict them to utilise their potential and achieve a life worth living. The same exercise also brought the bleak picture of the poor women in rural Punjab who struggle hard for everyday sustenance. It thus seemed that the lives of rural women often oscillate between hope and despair. On the other hand, some narratives also suggested the resilience of poor women despite all the constraints to make their situation better.

It was clear from the narratives of women that understanding the interaction of caste, class, regional identity and location with gender is crucial in making sense of the everyday lives of women. Gender inequalities are quite often a manifestation of power dynamics resulting from the interaction of the factors mentioned above operating at various levels and quite often serve as impediments or barriers towards a better life. Many times, however, a collective interaction of all these factors was missing in the perceptions of women as they identified a particular factor or two as impediments at a given time. On the other hand, when we take into account the various narratives of a woman at different phases or stages of life, it gets clear that understanding the interaction of all the factors is vital for understanding the life situations of women in a holistic manner. Thus, it follows that the emic perspective was undoubtedly essential for understanding the lives of women, the interpretation was equally important in presenting the various patches or phases of women's lives holistically and to bring forth the micro-macro linkages that affect women.

#### **7.4 Research Concerns and Scope for Further Research**

This section brings forth the research concerns and also reflects on the scope for further research. The same however may also be taken as an exercise to evaluate the usefulness of the present research for further research in the area and/or allied fields of research. Thus, though we attempt to wrap the present research at this juncture, we are also making a conscious effort towards loosening the threads of the research for further exploration by future scholars and researchers.

##### **7.4.1 The vulnerability of migrant agricultural labourers**

It is well-established that the migrant workers often live and work under the adverse conditions compared to the local labour force. The present research also suggests that the working and living conditions of migrant labourers warrant attention. The dichotomies of rural and urban often lead to a slanted approach towards the issue of human habitat. In urban studies, a slum is identified as a settlement unfit for human habitation. Amidst diminishing boundaries between rural and urban, the vulnerabilities of living in structure sub-standard for human habitation in an area that geographically falls under the boundaries of rural and the lack of a term thereof to

define such sub-standard structures in a rural area is a matter of concern. Further, the associated risk factors towards health status resulting from such sub-standard housing structure are not only important from the public health perspective but also warrant attention from the quality of life or human rights perspective.

The marginalisation of migrants is also evident in the current state or national policy wherein there is hardly any mention of in-migrants and their need for sanitation facilities in the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan. One could argue that the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan is for one and all. Given the vulnerability of migrants with reference to their living conditions and lack of proper housing facilities, there is a need for a discussion for sanitation facilities for migrants beyond the rural/urban divide. The unavailability of safe and clean drinking water to the migrant population is also important from a public health perspective. The gender-specific challenges of unavailability of water and sanitation facilities have already been discussed in one of the chapters.

The violence of State and its mechanisms towards the migrant population is not confined to the availability of water and sanitation facilities. The harassment and extortion by police officials for producing identity card also makes migrant labourers differentially vulnerable compared to the local population. The same leads to constant fear among the migrant population of being harassed by police at different junctures during their stay in the village.

As discussed earlier in Chapter 4, the children in migrant population more often than not did not attend the school. Their reasons for not attending the school varied from discrimination at the school to the reluctance of parents to send their children to school. These practices bring our attention to the challenges among children of attaining education among the migrant population. The level of education in the overall migrant population was also abysmally low. The same has however not been the focus of the study. The data related to health status and access to health care services among the migrant women also indicates the lack of affordable as well as approachable health care services. The issues of mistrust as regards approaching public health care services were evident and had been discussed in the previous chapter. Thus, from a development perspective, health status and education level among the migrant population also indicate the vulnerability of the migrant population.

#### **7.4.2 Exploitative work conditions and shifting labour arrangements**

As mentioned in the chapters earlier, the shifts in technology and crop pattern in the neoliberal regime have also led to shifts in existing labour arrangements. Though the gender aspect of the existing labour arrangements is discussed earlier, these labour arrangements can also be understood by taking into account the jajmani relations. Kumar (2016) draws our attention to the changes in jajmani relations and their relevance in the present context. The jajmani relations in our study village have also changed, and it appeared that the farmers control the labour of local women through the spectre of jajmani relations thereby causing segmentation of the labour force. However, farmers extended such relations with certain local women only who had power over other labourers as they could then help the farmers to negotiate with other women labourers to work at their desired wage rates.

The farmers also controlled migrant labourers by allowing them to build thatched huts at their land to ensure the supply of steady labour during the peak season of agriculture. It draws our attention yet again to the existing dualities of free and unfree labour in the literature. The same also can be understood from the above mentioned jajmani relations. The inherent exploitation of labourers in such relations however denies the existence of any symbiotic relationship between the two. Further, it is evident that the migrant labourers are in a kind of labour arrangement wherein they do not have any control over their labour power. The dualities of free and unfree labour can, however, be better understood from the relative freedom in the labour arrangements across two broad categories of local and migrant agricultural labourers.

A multi-sited ethnography taking into account the dynamics at the place of origin of the migrant population might yield more insight to understanding the experience of migration. The same was neither the objective of present research and also beyond the scope of this research given the paucity of time and funds. However, such research can yield insights of different nature and can further enhance our understanding about the gender and migration experience.

To sum up, the study attempted to understand gender and other relations of power among local and migrant women agricultural labourers, it reflects the plurality of experience, differences and complexities inherent in the lives of women that are not solely determined by gender but the way gender relations interact with other relations of power and inequalities at multiple levels. It thus attempted to understand multiple ways in which discrimination, subjugation and subordination of women agricultural labourers take place, at times by interaction of gender, caste and landlessness, to mention a few, across different women but also at different life stages of a woman as various levels of inequalities interacted with gender relations. Also, women's understanding of constraints at various levels reflects not only their struggles but also suggests the needs of women who work as agricultural labourers amidst the broader context of agrarian change and migration.

Thus, in this study, I have attempted to understand the meaning as well as varied perceptions about the well-being as expressed by women in their narratives. Women locate their life circumstances and their work as an important determinant of their well-being. Their repeated references to the agricultural work and its arduous nature often suggested that women related their state of health with the work they do. Though most women perceived housework and repeated pregnancies as their natural roles, still some of the local women questioned as well as expressed their resentment towards the burden of housework as women's responsibility. The same was nowhere to be observed among the migrant women. Such a difference between local and migrant women agricultural labourers could be attributed largely to the socio-cultural difference among them. Socio-cultural norms and perceptions play an important role not only in gender socialisation but also the way gender is performed in everyday life. The linkages across women agricultural labourers' work, health and life experiences are complex yet hard to miss. Experiences of women agricultural labourers in Punjab in the larger narrative of agrarian distress are often missing. The present study attempted to bring forth experiences of women in agriculture as they emphasised the relevance of micro-realities drawing attention to the intersecting boundaries of family, community and village life with caste, regional identity and gender in the selected village.



The study suggests that women agricultural labourers' problems need to be addressed using a holistic framework rather than a fragmentary approach. Well-being encompasses not merely physical health but a life worth living. Thus, a mere focus on improving women's physical health or reproductive health alone cannot enhance their well-being. Education, employment and health policies need to be restructured to ensure there are no gender gaps. Mere adding of the term 'gender' to the policies is no longer sufficient. It is important to understand the needs and expectations of women to design policies that are gender-just. As an example, one of the local women agricultural labourers in the study shared that if given a choice, she would never work as an agricultural labourer. One needs to understand the factors responsible for women's preferences and needs; whether it is the physical drudgery inherent in the occupation, fewer wages compared to male labourers, wages compared to any other sector, caste-class relations, or all of these that discourage women from working in agriculture sector. All such questions need to be explored. Alternative employment opportunities in rural areas that match women's education and interest may also be explored. Policy reforms alone, however, cannot change existing gender and power relations. Gender relations are deeply entrenched in the social structure. Social transformation and policy reforms together, however, have the potential to challenge existing asymmetry of gender and power relations.



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## **Appendices**

### **Appendix A: Tools for Data Collection**

- **Village Profile**
- **Household Survey Schedule**
- **Interview Guide for Landowners/ Farmers/ Farmer's wives/ Old men and women folk of the village/ Local Agricultural Labourers**
- **Interview Guide for Local Agricultural Labourers**
- **Interview Guide for Migrant Agricultural Labourers**

### **Appendix B: Level of Education of Women Agricultural Labourers by Age and Social Group**

### **Appendix C: Type of Family by Social Group among Women Agricultural Labourers**

## **Village Profile**

Distance from the district headquarters and adjoining villages

Oral History of the Village and its inhabitants (Gotra)

Religion, Caste groups and places of worship

### **Civic Amenities and Social facilities**

- Educational facilities
- Health facilities
- Transportation and communication
- Electricity, Water Supply and Fuel used
- Grocery Shop and Flour Mills, etc.
- Other Shops

Households and Settlement Pattern

House Types and Livestocks/ Cowsheds

**Gender, Power Relations and Well-being among Local  
and Migrant Agricultural Labourers in Hoshiarpur  
District, Punjab**

**Verbal Consent Form**

**Purpose of the Study:** To understand the context of the village in terms of agrarian change and migration and to understand relations among all those engaged in agriculture.

**Statement of Confidentiality:**

Your participation in this research is confidential. The collected data will be used strictly for the academic research purpose and your identity will remain undisclosed. In the event of any publication or result presentation from this research, no personally identifiable information will be shared.

Your decision to be in this research is voluntary. You can discontinue at any time. You may not answer any questions you do not want to answer. You may also withdraw your participation at any point of time from this study.

**Study area Profile**

Name of Village-	HH Interview Scheduled No-
Name of Ward/ Tola /Area-	Date-

## Household Interview Schedule

- General Information:**

[1] Name of Respondent-	[2] Age-
[3] Sex-	[4] Education-
[5] Marital Status-	[6] Religion-
[7] Caste-	[8] Sub-caste / Gotra-
[9] Occupation-	[10] Type of Family-
[10] Family Size (M/F)-	[11] Head of the Household-
Land	

- Household Information:**

S. N	Name of Family Member	Age	Sex	Marital Status	Education	Work Status	Occupation		Monthly Income
							Primary	Secondary	
1									
2									
3									
4									
5									
6									
7									
8									
9									
10									

**Sex:** Male-1, Female-2, Others-3, **Marital Status:** Married-1, Unmarried-2, Widow-3, Others-4, **Education:** Not Attending School-0, Illiterate-1, Below Primary-2, Primary-3, Middle-4, Matriculation-5, Intermediate-6, Professional/ Diploma (post 10+2)-7, B.A.-8, Higher Education- 9, others-10, **Work Status:** Not Working (Dependent -Child/Old)-1, Working-2, Seeking Work-3, Housework-4, others-5, **Occupation:** Agricultural Labourer-1, Domestic worker-2, Daily Wage Labourers-3, Farmer/Landowner-4, Self-Employed-5, Government Employed-6, Employed in Private Sector/ farm/ Factory, etc., Others-8, **Monthly Income (RS.):** <5000-1, 5000-10000-2, 10000-15000-3, 15000-20000-4, 20000-25000-5, 30000-6.

- **Monthly Income of the household**

[1] Primary Source of Income-	Land/Agriculture-1, Agricultural Labour-2, Others-3
[2] Secondary Sources of Income-	Cattle, Rent of land/house, etc.
[3] Primary Contributor to the Family Income:	

- **Land and Assets**

[1] Land owned: (Landless/_____Acres)	[2] Irrigated: _____Acres
[3] Dry land- _____Acres	[4] Land under cultivation- _____Acres
[5] Land Leased- _____Acres	[6] Leased in land- _____Acres
[7] Leased out land	[8] Livestock owned- Ox/Cow/Buffalo/Goat/Any other
[9] Cattle shed- Y/N	[10] Assets owned-
[11] Gas connection- Y/N	[12] Bank Account- Y/N
[13] Agricultural Implements owned and their years of purchase- Tractor/Thrasher/Combine/Harvester	

**Assets owned-** Mobile/ Computer/ Car- 1, Telephone/ Refrigerator/ Television/ Motorcycle/Scooter-2, Radio/Cycle-3

- **Housing and Sanitation**

[1] Ownership of House-	[2] Type of House-
[3] Number of Rooms-	[4] Separate Space for Cooking- Y/N
[5] Fuel used for cooking-	[6] Do you have toilet Facility- Y/N
[7] Do you have sewerage Facility- Y/N	[8] Source of Drinking Water-
[9] Distance from the source of drinking water-	[10] Any form of discrimination (by locals)

[1] - Owned/ Rented/Inherited, [2]- Pucca/ Kutcha/ Semi Pucca/Thatched

- **Benefits from Government Schemes and Problems faced in availing**

[1] Availing Ration card facility (PDS)-	[2] Type of card- APL/BPL
[3] If yes, since when?	[4] MNREGA card- Y/N
[5] If yes, How many working days and at what wages-	[6] Nature of work performed under MNREGA-
[7] Distance from the village or within village-	[8] RSBY card-
[9] If yes, ever used?	[10] ICDS scheme-
[11] MDM-	[12] JSY-
[13] ASHA and the facilities availed: TT/ANC/ Institutional delivery and amount received/ PNC/ NNC-	
[14] Others-	

- **Participation in Political/Social Affairs**

[1] How many Voters are there in this household? Did all of them vote in the recent elections?--
[2] If no, reasons for not being able to caste vote--
[3] Is anyone from your household a member of Panchayat?--
[4] Does any member of your household have affiliation with any Society/ Club/ <b>SHG</b> / Union? Gram Sabha meeting--

- **For Landowners/Farmers**

[1] Crops sown in the past one year--
[2] Subsistence and Household sufficiency of produce--
[3] Self Consumption and Sale-
[4] Surplus: Whether sold in the market or through middle men--

## **Interview Guide for Landowners/ Farmers/ Old men and women of the village**

### **What changes have you observed over the years in agricultural practices?**

- Landholding pattern and land leasing
- Crops (Detailed information about crop cycle and Seasonality)
- Understand the whole process from production to marketing.
- Technology (Machines, Irrigation facility, Seeds, Fertilizers/Pesticides, etc.)
- Labour Organisation (Self/ Hired/ Distinguish b/w men/women, young/old)
- Labour force (Men/women/ migrant, etc.)
- Wages (changes)
- Hiring pattern
- Changes in Profit/ Produce (Agricultural Production)
- Animal Husbandry

### **How do you perceive these changes?**

- Positives and
- Negatives

### **Could you talk of gender division of labour in agricultural operations?**

- Who does what? What role do men and women play in cultivation of various crops?
- What changes have been there in this gender division of labour over the years with the change in composition of labour force, for example, with increased migrant labourers?

### **Could you talk of gender division of labour in household operations?**

- Who does what? What role do men and women play in various household operations? What do you think is the basis of this gender division of labour? Elaborate upon this point.



## **Interview Guide for Local Agricultural Labourers**

### **Could you talk of gender division of labour in household operations?**

- Who does what? What role do men and women play in various household operations? What do you think is the basis of this gender division of labour? Elaborate upon this point.

### **What changes have you observed over the years in agricultural practices?**

- Landholding pattern and land leasing
- Crops (Detailed information about crop cycle)
- Technology (Machines, Irrigation facility, Seeds, Fertilizers/Pesticides, etc.)
- Labour force (Men/women/ migrant,etc.)
- Wages (changes)
- Hiring pattern
- Number of working days

### **How do you perceive these changes?**

- Positives and
- Negatives
- Relationship with the employer/ landowner, i.e. changes in moral economy
- Impact of migrant labourers

### **Could you talk of gender division of labour in agricultural operations?**

- Who does what? What role do men and women play in cultivation of various crops?
- What changes have been there in this gender division of labour over the years with the change in composition of labour force, for example, with increased migrant labourers?

### **What do you understand by well-being? Has there been any impact of various changes on to your well-being?**

- Elaborate upon your understanding of well-being? Who do you consider healthy?
- Do you consider yourself healthy?
- List any health problems you have suffered in the past one year.
- Try to find out connections between changes and their impact on well-being.
- How do you relate your work with well-being? Does that affect your well-being?

## **Interview Guide for Migrant Agricultural Labourers**

**(Duration of stay, Process/Transformation/ Old Migrant labourers and New Migrant labourers/ Pressures and Aspirations)**

### **How and when did you come to this village for the first time?**

- Elaborate upon the migration process in terms of who all accompanied and what situations instigated migration?
- Do you own any land in your own state?
- Try to trace the route of migration ( from which state/dist./village and through which modes of transportation, how much was the fare, total expenditure on travelling and how many days it took to reach the destination)
- Did you take any kind of loans to meet the travel or initial expenditure? Are you under debt at present?
- How did you find work in the village? (Role of middlemen etc.)
- Does anyone from your family also work as agricultural labourer?
- Is there any gender division of labour in agricultural operations?
- If the family members have not accompanied, issue of remittances else any SAVINGS

### **Gender Division of Labour in Household Operations**

- Who does what? What role do men and women play in various household operations? What do you think is the basis of this gender division of labour? Elaborate upon this point.

### **Housing Conditions**

- Do you have your own house in your state? If yes, who lives there in your absence? Have you rented out your house?
- Is there any difference in your house from the first time you came to village? Do you settle at the same place every time you return to the village? Do you pay any kind of rent for the place you live?
- Any problems faced in this kind of housing?
- Sanitation facilities
- Drinking Water Facilities- Problems faced etc.
- Fuel used for cooking

### **What changes have you observed in the agricultural practices in the village over the years?**

- Crops
- Technology
- Number of working days

**At what wage were you hired for the first time? What is the current wage rate? What changes have you observed over the years?**

**Did you think of finding employment under MGNREGA in your state? Reasons.**

**What do you understand by well-being? Has there been any impact of various changes on to your well-being?**

- Elaborate upon your understanding of well-being? Who do you consider healthy?
- Do you consider yourself healthy?
- List any health problems you have suffered in the past one year.
- Try to find out connections between changes and their impact on well-being.
- How do you relate your work and living conditions with well-being? Does that affect your well-being?

**Do you have any kind of residence proof in the present village? Ration Card/BPL card/etc. Have you availed any of Government schemes?**

## Appendix B: Level of Education of women agricultural Labourers by age and social group

Social Category	Age Group	Education					Total	
		Illiterate	Below Primary	Primary	Middle (8 <sup>th</sup> )	Matriculation (10 <sup>th</sup> )		Intermediate (10+2)
Saini	15-25	--	--	--	--	--	02	02
	35-45	02	--	02	--	01	1	06
	45-55	01	--	--	--	--	--	01
	55-65	--	--	01	--	01	--	02
Total		03	--	03	--	02	03	11 (8.2)
Ad-Darmi	25-35	--	1 (11.1)	3 (33.3)	1 (11.1)	4 (44.4)	--	9
	35-45	3 (21.4)	--	3 (21.4)	6 (42.9)	2 (14.3)	--	14
	45-55	6 (35.3)	1 (5.9)	5 (29.4)	2 (11.8)	3 (17.6)	--	17
	55-65	3 (60)	--	2 (40)	--	--	--	5
	65+	3 (75)	01 (25)	--	--	--	--	04
	Total		15 (30.6)	3 (6.1)	13 (26.5)	9 (18.4)	9 (18.4)	--
Ravi-dasiya	35-45	1 (33.3)	--	1 (33.3)	--	1 (33.3)	--	3
	45-55	1 (25)	2 (50)	--	1 (25)	--	--	4
	65+	02	--	--	--	--	--	02
Total		4	2	1	1	1	--	9 (6.7)
Sarehde	15-25	--	--	--	02	--	--	02
	25-35	--	--	--	01	01	--	02
	35-45	--	--	3	1	3	--	07
	45-55	1	--	3	1	--	--	5
	55-65	--	--	1	--	--	--	01
Total		01	--	07	05	04	--	17 (12.7)
Valmiki	25-35	--	--	1	--	--	--	01
	35-45	--	1	--	--	--	--	01
	55-65	1	--	--	--	--	--	01
Total		1	1	1	--	--	--	3 (2.23)

Migrants	15-25	04 (66.7)	02 (33.3)	--	--	--	--	06
	25-35	11 (84.6)	02 (15.4)	--	--	--	--	13
	35-45	15 (88.2)	02 (15.4)		--	--	--	17
	45-55	06	--	--	--	--	--	06
	55-65	02	--	--	--	--	--	02
	65+	01						01
Total		39 (86.7)	06 (13.3)	--	--	--	--	45 (33.6)

### **Appendix C: Type of Family by Social Group among Women Agricultural Labourers**

Social Identity	Nature of Work	Type of Family		Total
		Joint	Nuclear	
Saini (N=9)	AL (C)	01	05	06
	AL (O)	--	03	03
Ad-dharmi	AL (C)	01	21	22
	AL (O)	05	18	23
Ravidasiya	AL (C)	--	04	04
	AL (O)	01	04	05
Sarehde	AL (C)	--	07	07
	AL (O)	01	07	08
Valmiki	AL (C)	--	03	03
	AL (O)	--	--	--
Migrant (Rajput)	AL (C)	10	31	41
	AL (O)	--	--	--
Total AL (C+O)		19	103	122