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## **Internal Migration in India: Are the Underclass More Mobile?**

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### **Abstract:**

India has seen an upsurge in economic growth since 1991. The 2001 census shows that internal migration has picked up rapidly during the 1990s. Compared to intra-state (short distance) movement, inter-state (long distance) migration has grown faster. The states with higher per capita income and larger dominance of non-agricultural sector show not only high in-migration but also high out-migration rates. Poverty ratio is not found related with out-migration rates at the state level. On the contrary, migration rates are higher in households with higher monthly per capita expenditure. Also, the socially disadvantaged groups like Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes do not show higher mobility compared to other population categories. Thus the increased mobility of India's population in recent times is more confined to better off sections.

## **Introduction**

India has embarked upon the new economic policy in the year 1991-popularly known as liberalization of the Indian economy. The basic features of new economic policy are to reduce governmental expenditure in order to reduce fiscal deficit, opening up of the economy for export oriented growth, removal of governmental control and licensing and encouraging private participation for competition and efficiency. Both the supporters and critiques of new economic policy believed that economic reforms would increase internal migration. The proponents believed that the new impetus would boost economy and job opportunities leading to increased pull factors conducive for accelerated rural to urban migration. On the other hand, the opponents held that economic reforms would adversely affect the village and cottage industries and impoverish rural population leading to increased rural-urban migration (Kundu 1997). Although there was considerable success in achieving economic growth from 2 to 3 per cent of growth in GDP in the pre reform era to over 6 per cent during 1991-2001, its impact on internal migration has not been assessed. The latest census of 2001 throws several interesting results in respect to the internal migration, its regional pattern and the contribution of rural to urban migration in urban growth (Bhagat and Mohanty 2008). This paper argues that it is not the poor and disadvantaged who are migrating more, but migrants belong largely to better off sections of Indian society.

Although migration is emerging an important phenomenon from economic, political and public health points of views (Bhagat 2008), migration research finds low priority among Indian Demographers. This is partly because since the early 1990s with a paradigm shift in the demographic research tilting to the issues of reproductive health, the interest in migration research in general and internal migration in particular has dwindled considerably among Indian demographers. This is also reflected in the new datasets namely Demographic Health Surveys- known as National Family Health Surveys (NFHS – An Indian version of DHS), and District Level Health Surveys (DLHS). However, these datasets did not consider migration as an important variable affecting the health status in general and reproductive health in particular<sup>1</sup>. On the other hand, the wealth of data available in Indian censuses on migration is grossly neglected by Indian demographers who are busy with data collection exercises funded by external agencies (Bose 2003). Thus we find very few recent

demographic studies on India's internal migration and its causes and consequences. This study presents the trends and patterns of internal migration during the last three decades and argues that people belonging to the lowest socio-economic categories are less migratory than otherwise.

### **Data**

Since the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century, data on migration based on place of birth has been collected by Indian census. However, since 1971 migration data were also collected on the basis of place of last residence and duration of migration. Thus, it is possible to study the period migration since 1971 compared to the study of lifetime migration of earlier decades. The criterion of place of last residence gives the migration information related to the last move of the migrants. It is also helpful to capture the return migration. This study is based on the place of last residence criterion of defining migrants by the Indian census. The village and towns are lowest units for determining the place of last residence. Any residence change within the village or administrative town/city is not considered migration. Data on migration were provided as change in residence elsewhere in the district (within district), from one district to another within the state (inter-district), and from one state to another state (inter-state). Within district and between districts are clubbed in this study, which represents intra-state migration. Administratively, India is divided into 28 states, 7 Union Territories and 585 districts. Districts are the lowest unit for which migration data are available. Inter-state migrations are generally long distance migration compared to short distance of intra-state migrations. Migration data based on place of last residence are also available by rural and urban areas. International migrants (immigrants) are also enumerated, but this study is confined to internal migration only. Moreover, Indian census does not provide information on Indians migrated abroad (emigration). Thus, it is not possible to study net international migration from census data; however it is possible to study net inter-state migration within India. Also, since 1981 census, reasons of migration are also added in the census questionnaire. Apart from the census, the National Sample Survey (NSS) - a wing of Ministry of Planning and Programme Implementation also sometimes included a question on migration based on place of last residence as a part of their employment and unemployment survey. In its latest round (55<sup>th</sup> round) pertaining to the year 1999-2000 gave information on migration by monthly per capita consumer expenditure (MPCE), and migration of the

socially disadvantaged ethnic groups known as a Scheduled Castes<sup>2</sup> and Scheduled Tribes. Both census and NSS data have been used in this study.

### **Method**

Proportion of migrants to total population, distribution of migrants by location and streams of migration and their sex-ratio are used as indicators to study the trend and pattern of internal migration. In-and out-migration rates at the state level with duration 0-9 years are correlated with per capita income, literacy rates, poverty ratio, and infant mortality rate etc. Migration rates by monthly per capita expenditure and social background of migrants are also estimated.

### **Trend and Pattern**

It may be pointed out that migration in the Indian sub-continent has been historically low. Researchers like Kingsley Davis have attributed this to the prevalence of caste system, joint families, traditional values, diversity of language and culture, lack of education and predominance of agriculture and semi-feudal land relations (Davis 1951). But the rapid transformation of Indian economy, improvement in the levels of education and that of transport and communication facilities, shift of workforce from agriculture to industry and tertiary activities etc. are the new impetus influencing mobility pattern of Indian people in recent times.

As per 2001 census, the total number of internal migrants was 309 million based on place of last residence that constituted nearly 30 per cent of total population. Although number of internal migrants has doubled since 1971 (from 159 million in 1971 to 309 million in 2001), but the proportion continues to be around 30 per cent since 1971 except 1991 census when it has declined to 27 per cent to the total population. It is generally accepted that migration has slowed down during the decade 1981-91 as a result of increased unemployment and sluggish growth in the Indian economy. On the other hand, the proportion of immigrants constitute only 5 per cent of India's population in 2001- a decline of 3 percentage points was observed from the level of 1971 (see Table 1).

**Table 1: Size of Internal and International Migrants Based on Place of Last Residence, India, 1971-2001 (in million).**

Census	Total population	Internal migrants	% Internal migrants	International migrants	% of International migrants to total	% of Total migrants to total population
1971	548.1	159.6	29.1	8.1	1.4	30.6
1981	659.3	200.5	30.4	6.0	0.9	31.3
1991	814.3	220.7	27.1	5.9	0.7	27.83
2001	991.8 (1028.6)	300.9 (309.3)	30.3 (30.0)	5.0 (5.1)	0.5 (0.4)	30.8 (30.4)

Note: 1) The census was not held in Assam in 1981 and in Jammu and Kashmir in 1991. The figures for India from 1981 to 2001 exclude these two states. The figures for 2001 census including Assam and Jammu and Kashmir are given in parenthesis.

Source: Census of India 1971, Series 1, Part II- D(i) Migration Tables; Census of India 1981, Series 1, India, Part VA& B (i), Migration Tables (Table D1 and D2); Census of India 1991, Series 1, India, Part V, D series, Migration Tables, Vol. 2, Part 1, (Table D2); Census of India 2001, Tables D2, Compact Diskette, Registrar General and Census Commissioner, India, New Delhi.

**Table 2: Percentage Distribution of Internal Migrants by Sex and Duration of Residence at the Place of Enumeration, 1981 to 2001**

Duration	1981		1991		2001	
	male	female	male	female	male	female
Less than 1 year	8.5	3.7	5.0	2.2	4.5	2.1
1-4	26.1	17.0	21.5	15.3	18.0	13.9
5-9	16.6	14.7	15.3	14.9	13.2	13.6
10-19	20.9	23.6	20.6	24.8	18.0	23.9
20 +	20.9	37.2	23.3	36.4	20.0	36.4
Duration not stated	6.7	3.6	14.1	6.3	26.1	9.9
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: same as in Table 1

Most of the immigrants are the displaced persons who opted for India during the partition of the country at the time of independence in 1947. Also many came to India at the time of the

formation of Bangladesh in 1971. The declining proportion of immigrants shows that many older immigrants have died who came to India half a century ago.

Table 2 presents percentage distribution of internal migrants by sex and duration of residence. Nearly one-third of males and one-fourth of females have reported duration of residence 0-9 years in 2001 compared to half of the male migrants and one-third of female migrants in 1981. The decline in the share of migrants with 0-9 year duration is accompanied by a large proportion of male (26 per cent) and female (10 per cent) migrants not reporting duration of migration in 2001 census. Out of the 309 million internal migrants, about 44 million did not report duration and majority of them (77 per cent) were short distance migrants (intra district migrants). It is possible that many of these migrants might be temporary and circular migration who might be simultaneously holding their residences at the place of origin and place of destination and as such they have considerable difficulty in reporting the duration of residence at the place of enumeration.

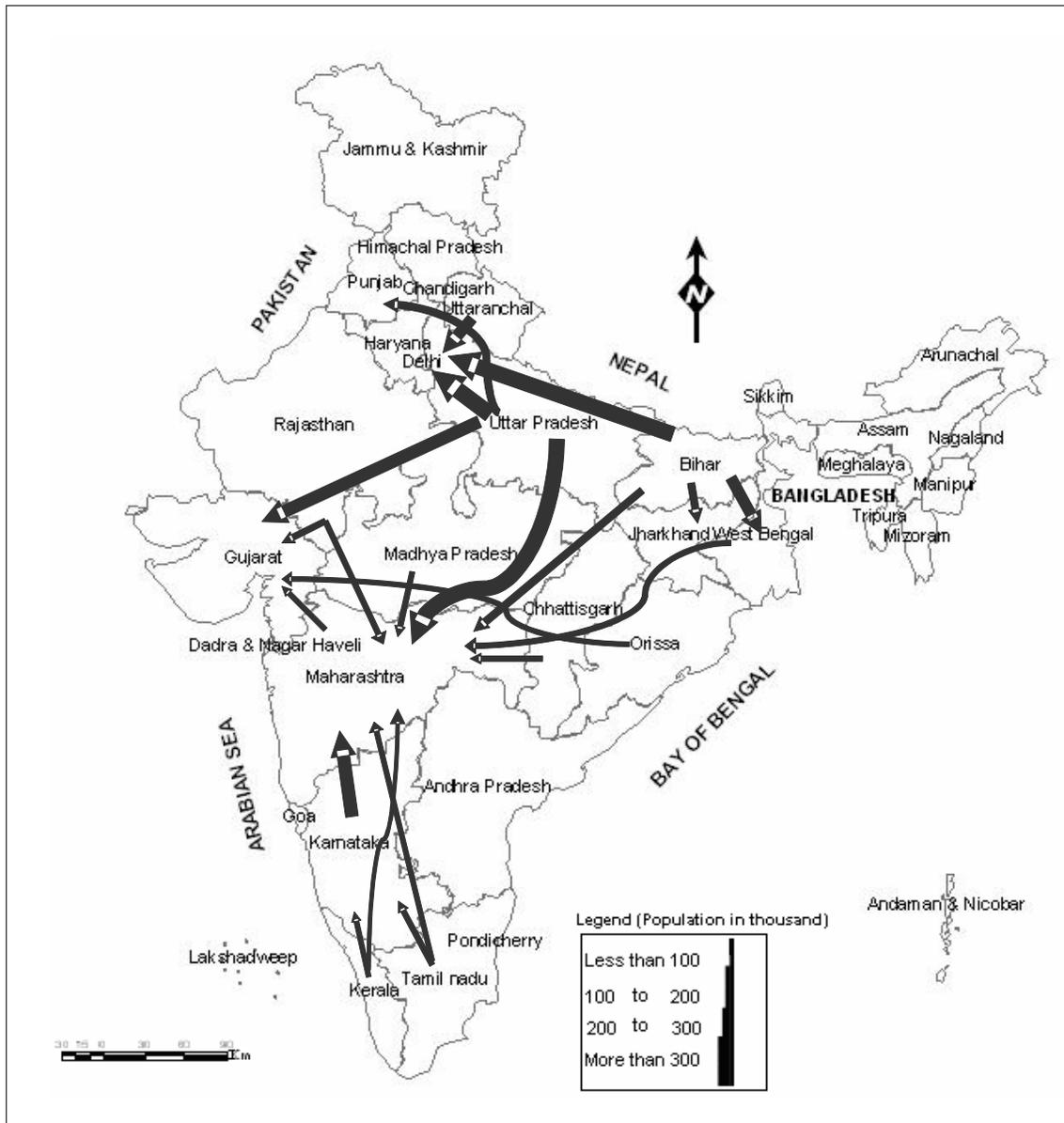
Table 3 shows that majority of migrants are intra-district migrants (62 per cent). Most of the intra-district migrants are females who customarily change their parental households and join their husband's households after marriage (Srivastava and Sasikumar 2003). The share of inter-district and inter-state migrants is 24 and 13 per cent respectively. However, it may be noted that the growth rate of inter-state migrants has been very high (54 per cent) during 1991-2001 compared to previous decades. There is no doubt that the inter-state mobility has considerably increased during 1991-2001 coinciding with India's economic liberalization programme initiated in 1991. Figure 1 shows the net migration flow at the state level with duration 0-9 years based on place of last residence in 2001 census. The net in-migration is mainly found in the developed states like Punjab, Haryana, Maharashtra, Gujarat and Delhi where pull factor is stronger. These states attract population from almost all states. On the other hand, most of the remaining states are net out-migrating but not all of them are poor states. The notable example is the state of Kerala that is socially and educationally the most developed state of India. A large population from Kerala is also migrating to the Gulf countries (Zachariah, Kannan and Rajan 2002).

**Table 3: Size and Growth Rates of Migrants by Migration Type, India, 1971-2001.**

Migration Type	Size 2001(in million)	Percentage distribution 2001	Growth Rate %		
			1971-81*	1981-91*	1991-2001**
Intra-district	193.5	61.6	24.9	8.3	37.0
Inter-district	74.6	23.7	44.3	13.7	26.3
Inter-state	41.1	13.1	28.1	11.7	53.6
International Migrants	5.1	1.6	-9.1	-6.1	-13.4
All Migrants	314.3	100.0	27.0	9.8	34.7
Total Population	1028.6	-	24.7	23.7	21.4

\* Excluding Assam and Jammu and Kashmir; \*\* Excluding Jammu and Kashmir; There were 633, 3, and 297 thousand in 1971, 1981 and 1991 respectively who do not belong to any of the type of movement. In 2001, the unclassifiable migrants were only 418. Source: Census of India 1971, Migration Tables, Part II-D (i); Census of India 1981, Migration Tables, Part V-A and B (i); Census of India 1991, Migration Tables, Volume 2, Part 2; Census of India 2001, D2 Tables, Compact Disk; Census Commissioner and Registrar General, India, New Delhi.

**Fig 1: Major Net Migration Flow (duration 0-9 years) in India, 2001**



### **Male vs Female Migration**

In both short distance (intra and inter-district) and long distance (inter-state) migration, women dominate the migration pattern. Table 4 shows that sex-ratio (male/female) has been declining from 1971 to 1991 in all types of internal migration which indicates increasing participation of women in the internal migration in India. This is also found true when sex-ratios are calculated by streams of migrations which are presented in Table 5. It is observed that In India, women primarily migrate due to marriages or move with the earning member of the households unlike Southeast and East Asia where female migration has resulted through the pull factors generated by labour intensive industrialization and expansion of urban based services (Skeldon 1986). However, the sex-ratios derived from the 2001 Census shows the reversal of the trend of the increasing participation of females indicating higher participation of males in all streams of migration in recent times.

**Table 4: Sex-Ratio of Migrants by Migration Types, 1981-2001  
(Males per 1000 females)**

<b>Migrant Type</b>	<b>1971</b>	<b>1981</b>	<b>1991</b>	<b>2001</b>
Intra-district	336	312	281	323
Inter-district	604	530	456	481
Inter-state	1059	914	802	865
International Migrants	1151	1143	1073	1085
All Migrants	473	430	383	422
Total Population	1075	1070	1078	1072

Source: Same as in Table 3

**Table 5: Sex-ratio by Rural and Urban Streams, 1971-2001  
(Males per 1000 Females)**

Streams	1971	1981	1991	2001
<b>Intra-State</b>				
Rural to Rural	285	246	214	166
Rural to Urban	920	849	748	750
Urban to Rural	600	542	481	506
Urban to Urban	913	819	716	783
<b>Inter-State</b>				
Rural to Rural	592	476	393	391
Rural to Urban	1719	1478	1278	1392
Urban to Rural	1074	920	708	747
Urban to Urban	1189	1025	912	923

Source: Same as in Table 3

### **Reasons of Migration**

It is possible to know the broad reasons of migration from the census since 1981 census. The same list of reasons continued in 1991 and 2001 census as well except that the reason 'Business' was added in 1991 and the reason 'Natural Calamities' was dropped from the list in 2001. An additional reason of 'moved after birth' was added in 2001 census after it was felt that a large number of mothers moved to either their natal residence or to a place with better medical facility for delivery. Whereas the women are not treated as migrants at these temporary place or residence, the children born are treated as migrants when they accompany their parents to their place of normal residence. Though technically, this is migration, the place of birth being different from the place of enumeration for the children born, it was useful to separate this from other categories.

Table 6 provides details of reasons for migration in case of migrants by last residence with duration of last residence as 0-9 years. It may be seen that the reasons for migration in case of males and females vary significantly. Work or employment was the most important reason

for migration among males (37.3 per cent, whereas marriage was the most important reason for female migration (64.8 per cent). About 7 per cent migrants (6.5 million) were reported 'moved after birth' as the reason for their migration. A comparison with earlier censuses reveals increasing importance of employment or work as reason of migration in case of both males and females. Number of male migrants with duration 0-9 years reporting employment or work a reason of migration increased by 49 per cent compared to 24 per cent increase among female migrants. This shows that the increase in female migration for employment is just half that of the male migration. This is consistent with rising sex-ratio of migrants in recent times as discussed in the previous section.

**Table 6: Reasons for Migration with Duration 0-9 years, India, 2001**

Reason for migration	Number of migrants (in million)			Percentage to total migrants		
	Persons	Males	Females	Persons	Males	Females
Total migrants	98.3	32.9	65.4	100.0	100.0	100.0
Work/Employment	14.4	12.3	2.1	14.6	37.3	3.2
Business	1.1	0.9	0.2	1.2	2.7	0.3
Education	2.9	2.0	0.9	3.0	6.0	1.3
Marriage	43.1	0.7	42.4	43.8	2.1	64.8
Moved after birth	6.5	3.4	3.1	6.6	10.4	4.7
Moved with households	20.0	8.3	12.3	20.9	25.2	18.8
Other	9.5	5.2	4.3	9.6	15.8	6.6

Source: Census of India 2001, Tables D3, Compact Diskette

### **Migration, Development and Poverty**

In order to assess the role of economic factors in influencing migration, an attempt is made to see if any correlation exists between the various indicators of poverty and development with that of in and out migration rates at the state level. Due to limited availability of data the analysis is confined to 32 States and Union territories (India has 35 States and Union Territories). The states Punjab and Maharashtra are the most developed states in terms of per

capita income followed by Haryana, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka (see Fig 1 for the names of states). On the other hand, states of Bihar, Orissa, Uttar Pradesh, Assam, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan show per capita income below the national level. In these low-income states, the low economic growth persisted in the 1990s, as a result inter-state disparity in income levels has widened. Also, except Punjab and Haryana, the low-income states derive larger share of their state's income from agriculture (EPW Research Foundation 2003). Table 7 presents correlation matrix between measures of in and out migration rates with that of the per capita income, literacy rates, percentage of non-agricultural workforce, share of non-agricultural sector in gross state domestic product, proportion of population below poverty line (estimated by Planning Commission based on calories intake of 2400 in rural and 2200 in urban areas), and infant mortality rate. The per capita income is very strongly correlated with in migration rate and also moderately with out-migration rate. This means that with higher level of income, the states not only show higher in migration but also higher out migration rates. For example, it is generally believed that Bihar and Uttar Pradesh are two most out-migrating states show out migration rates close to 30 per thousand as per 2001 census similar to the level of out migration from Haryana which has been an in-migrating state. Similarly, high in-migrating states/UT like Delhi, Chandigarh, Mizoram Goa and Punjab also show high out-migration rates. Also, the share of non-agricultural sector in gross state domestic product as well as in workforce is also having positive relationship with both in and out migration rates. It may be seen that literacy rates, rural and urban poverty and IMR are not significantly related with either in or our migration rates but a significant negative association exists between rural poverty and in-migration rate. It must be admitted that the relationship between poverty and migration is complex (Skeldon 2002), but insignificant relationship between rural poverty ratios with out-migration indicates that push factors are not effective. There are several reasons why push factors are not effective in accelerating out-migration from rural areas. The low level of education and skill of rural population is one of the most important reasons combined with high cost of living in cities, lack of squatting places where poor can encroach, hostile city government including judiciary towards the poor migrants who seek roof over their heads in slums. Earlier studies also point out that it is not the poor who move out from the rural areas but those with some education and capital (Oberai and Singh 1983; Skeldon 1986).

**Table 7: Correlation Matrix Showing Relationship Between Migration, Poverty and Development Variables at State Level (N= 32), around 2001**

Variables	In-migration rate (inter-state) <sup>1</sup>	Out-migration rate (inter-state) <sup>2</sup>
% Urban literacy rate	.084	0.009
% Rural literacy rate	0.257	0.237
Urban IMR	-0.287	-0.169
Rural IMR	-0.260	-0.304
Per capita income	0.827**	0.589**
% Share of non-agricultural sector to GSDP	0.690**	0.441**
% Urban poverty	-0.274	-0.209
% Rural poverty	-0.454**	-0.274
% of Non-agricultural workforce	0.640**	0.491**

Note: IMR- infant mortality rate; GSDP- gross state domestic product.

\*- Significant at 5 per cent level; \*\*- significant at 1 per cent level.

$$1. \text{ In-migration rate} = \frac{\text{In- migrants during 1991-2001}}{\text{Total Population 1991}} \times 100$$

$$2. \text{ Out-migration rate} = \frac{\text{Out- migrants during 1991-2001}}{\text{Total Population 1991}} \times 100$$

The national sample survey provides information on migrants by monthly consumer expenditure of the households (NSSO 2001:37). The migration rate was as high as 23.3 per cent in the highest monthly per capita expenditure (MPCE) category in rural areas in 1999-00. This goes down systematically with rate being as low as 4.3 in the lowest MPCE category (see Figure 2). The same is true for urban areas as well, and the corresponding percentages were 43.3 and 10.5 per cent respectively (see Figure 3). This shows that migration rates are higher in higher expenditure/income groups and vice-versa. It is also possible that some of migrant households have improved their income level after migration, but for majority of the households it seems to be very unlikely situation. NSSO study further reports that the

socially disadvantaged groups like Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes are not more migratory than the rest of the population (see Figure 4; NSSO 2001: 30).

As per 2001 census, about 14 million people had migrated citing work/employment as a reason of migration during 1991-2001. The literacy rate among rural to urban migrants who reported work/employment as a reason of migration was much higher compared to the rural literacy level. For example, the literacy rate was about 85 per cent among intra-state and 75 per cent among inter-state rural to urban migrants compared to rural literacy rate of 58 per cent at the national level. The level of education of migrants was also found higher than the non-migrants. For example, among migrants moving from rural areas, the percentage of migrants with 10 years and more education was 41 per cent among intra-state and 30 per cent among inter-state migrants compared to 18 per cent among non-migrants in the rural areas in 2001. This indicates that the migrants belong to higher educational status categories compared to their non-migrant counter parts. This is also because those who have higher levels of education or economic assets find it easier to establish linkages with urban economy through socio-cultural channels, put their foothold in the city and avail the opportunity offered through migration (Kundu 2007).

Figure 2

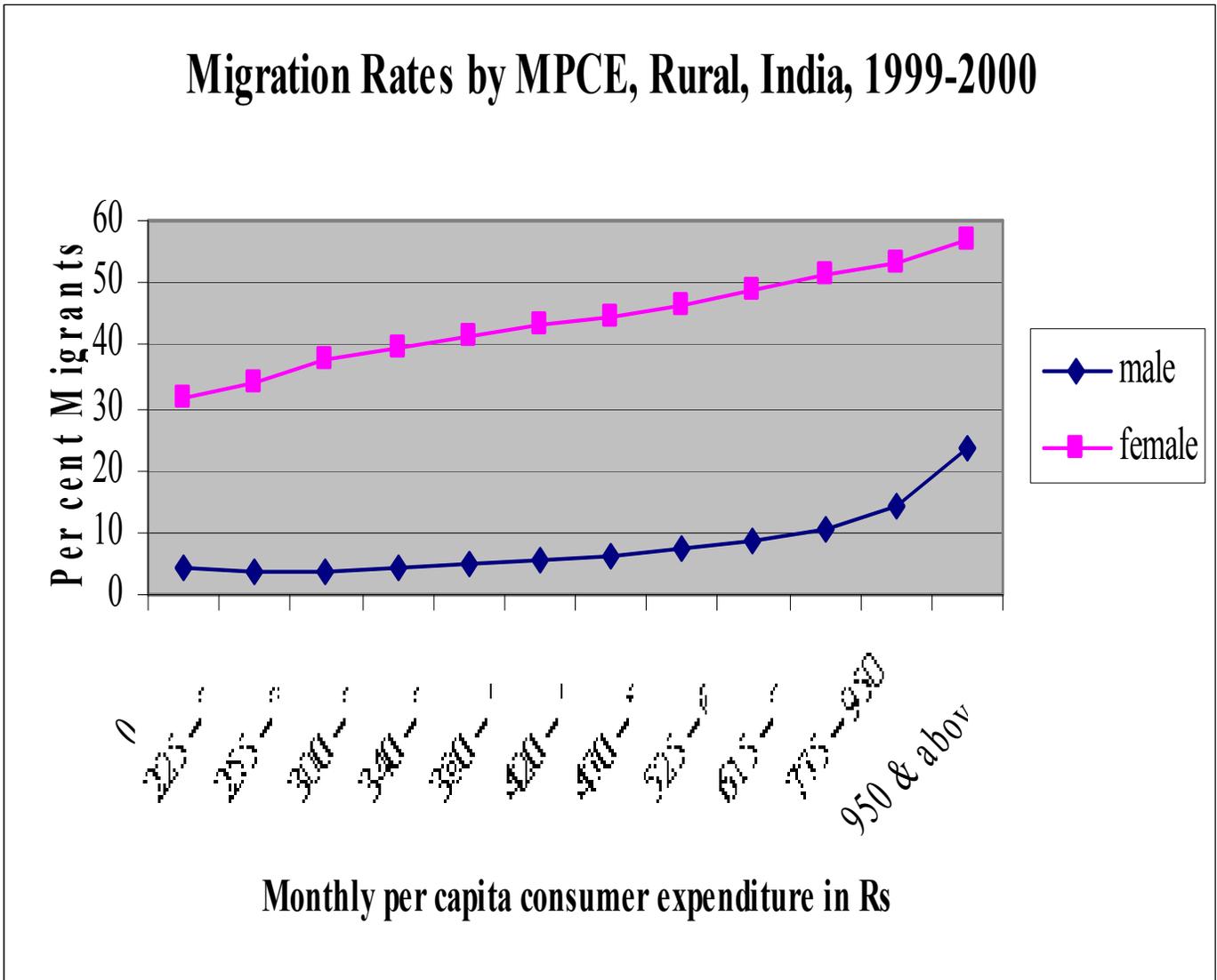


Figure 3

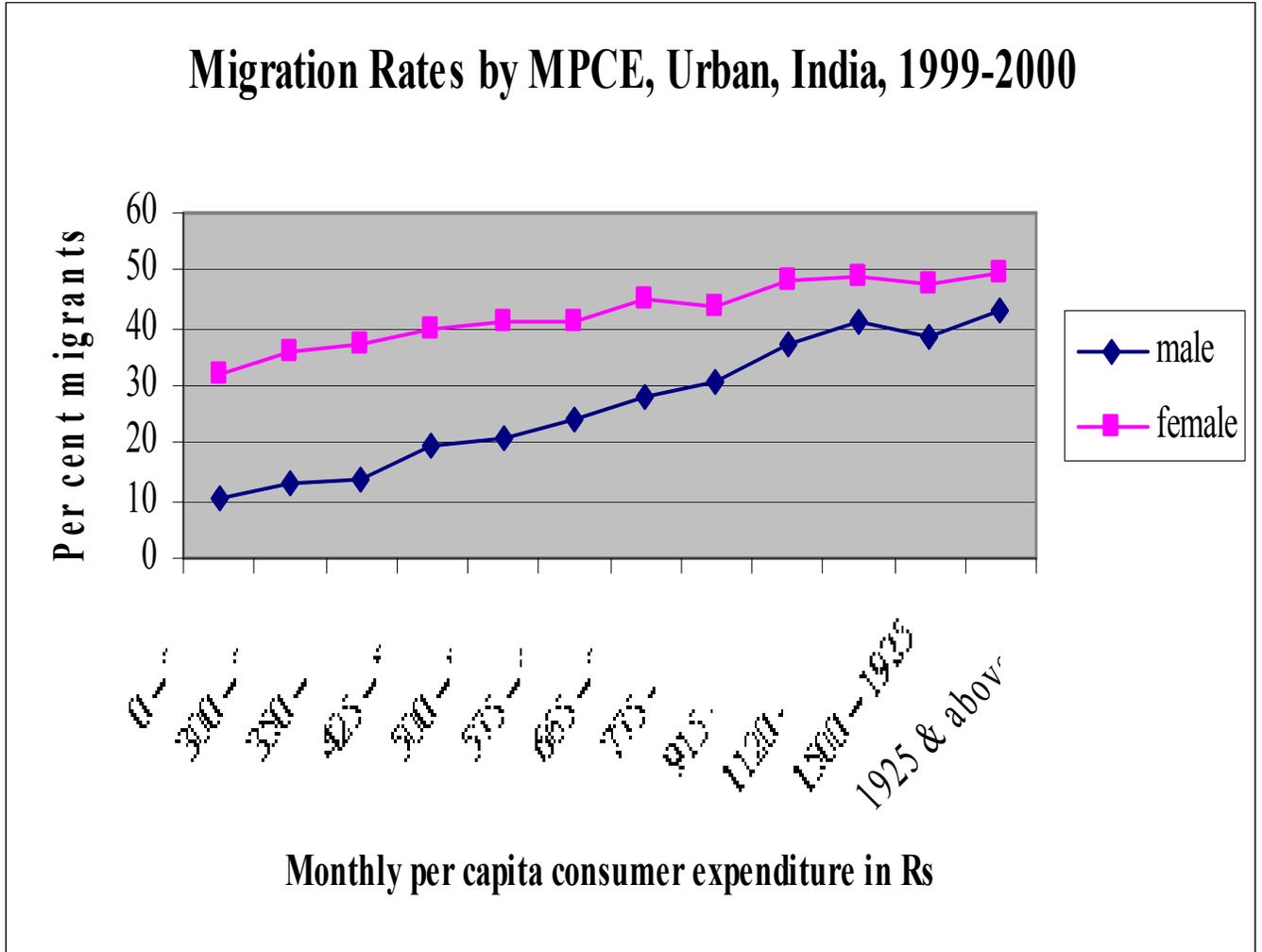
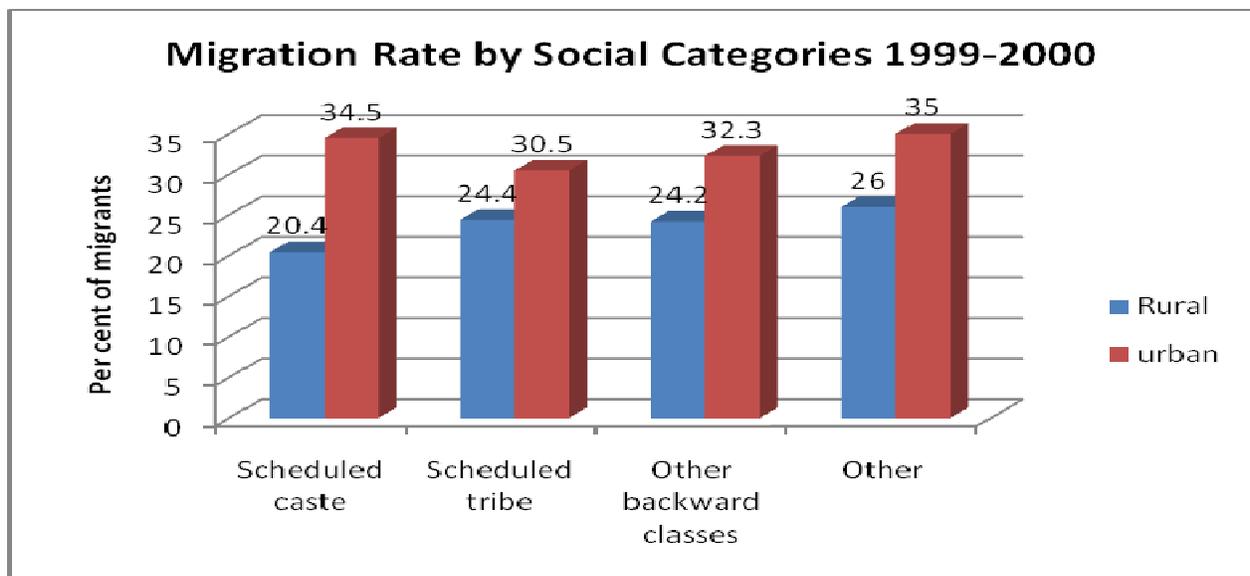


Figure 4



## Conclusion

The push and pull factors have dominated much of the understanding of migration. Push factors like low income, low literacy, dependence on agriculture and high poverty are cited as some examples associated with place of origin. On the other hand, high income, high literacy, dominance of industries and services, are the pull factors associated with place of destination. It has been found in this study that both in and out-migration rates have significant positive association with per capita income, percentage of workforce and share of GSDP in the non-agricultural sector. This means that higher income and sectoral transformation of economy from agricultural to non-agricultural sector is associated both with higher in-migration as well as out-migration rates. In other words, the areas which are experiencing higher in-migration are also the areas characterised with high out-migration rates. On the other hand, poverty is not found related with increased out-migration at the state level. Neither per capita monthly expenditure nor social categories of households indicates that migrants largely come from disadvantaged sections of Indian society. It appears that push factors are not effective in influencing migration as it is generally believed. On the other hand, increased mobility of India's population after liberalization of the economy in 1991 is confined to relatively better off sections who can better fit into the emerging areas of job opportunities.

## **End Note**

1. In three rounds of NFHS surveys started in the early 1990s, the third round of NFHS (2005-06) incorporated a question on migration such as 'how long have you been living continuously in the current place of residence. If some body said 'always', the person would be classified as non-migrant otherwise a migrant (National Family Health Survey 2005-06). However, this is an important development and hope this would spur migration research focusing on migrant and non-migrant differentials in fertility, reproductive health, HIV/AIDS and child mortality etc in coming days.

2. Scheduled castes are a group of castes declared by the President of India under the constitutional provision for Government supports like reservation in jobs, admission in educational institutions and development programmes. The Scheduled Castes constitute 16 per cent of India's population. Similarly, Scheduled Tribes are a group of indigenous people declared by the President of India under the constitutional provision for Government supports like reservation in jobs, admission in educational institutions and development programmes. The Scheduled Tribes constitute 8 per cent of India's population.

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